

Appendix J:

Archaeological Sites in the Former Fort Devens Area



Catecunemaug Brook. Photo: MA RIFLS Program.

As of 2013, there were 20 recorded pre-contact Native American archaeological sites within the former Fort Devens section of the Nashua River drainage. All of these sites were identified as a result of local collector activities going back to the early 1940s and Cultural Resource Management (CRM) investigations conducted within the former Fort Devens lands in the past two decades. These sites include five areas along the Catacunemaug Brook near its confluence with the Nashua River, which represent probable short-term, task-specific occupations, and two sites along Nonacoicus Brook near its confluence with the Nashua River, which may be larger year-round base camps.

Based on the data collected through avocational activities, academic archaeological studies, and CRM surveys, generalizations about site types and distribution within the Nashua River drainage can be made. Archaeological and documentary evidence of pre-contact settlement patterns and land use in the Nashua River valley spans the earliest human

occupations during the PaleoIndian Period (ca. 10,000 years before present [B.P.]) through the Late Woodland (ca. 1000 B.P.) and contact (ca. 400 B.P.) periods. Native American populations appear to have exploited the diverse natural resources of the Nashua River valley. Settlement/land use patterns associated with temporal periods or specific cultural groups consisted of sites of varying internal complexity and size. These include large base camps, as well as less complex sites of various sizes used temporarily during hunting or other foraging and resource collection activities and lithic manufacture.

Also, as of 2013, there were 89 recorded post-contact Euro-American archaeological sites within the former Fort Devens section of the Nashua River in the towns of Ayer, Harvard, Shirley, and Lancaster. Most of these sites appear on eighteenth and nineteenth century town maps and consist of residential home-farmsteads related to former villages and neighborhoods. For example, the lands on the east side of the Nashua River on the former Fort Devens

Main Post were formed from lands situated in the northwestern portion of the town of Harvard, historically known as the Shabikin District. This historic neighborhood was on the periphery of the principal civic-institutional and manufacturing village centers in the town and attempted to secede to the town of Shirley in the mid-1700s. It contained scattered home-farmsteads during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, most of which were still standing at the time of military acquisition for the formation of Camp Devens in 1917.

In addition to recorded residential and small-scale industrial (mill) sites, expected types of

undocumented early Euro-American sites in this same general area could include scattered farmsteads, garrison houses, fur trading posts (locally known as truck houses), and saw/gristmill features. The archaeological remains of such sites would typically consist of cellar holes and dry-laid fieldstone foundations related to wood-frame structures, privies, wells, animal pens, dams, wheel pits, tail and head races, and associated artifact assemblages (domestic, architectural, and/or trade-good items).

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