

Background Sheet: Native American Tools (Late Archaic Period)

Because stone persists longer in the soil than other tool material such as bone, shell and wood, archeologists are heavily dependent on interpreting the uses of stone tools to reconstruct lifeways of the past. Tools are dated through their association with remains of fires or other organic material (e.g., shell) from which carbon may be extracted to obtain a radio-carbon date. Interpretations of their use are derived from associations within a site, and from ethnographic analogies. For example, if spearpoints are found in soil containing minerals from fish that has decomposed, they may be fish-spearpoints; similar fish-spears used by

modern peoples reinforce the interpretation. Such associations are destroyed by careless digging of sites.

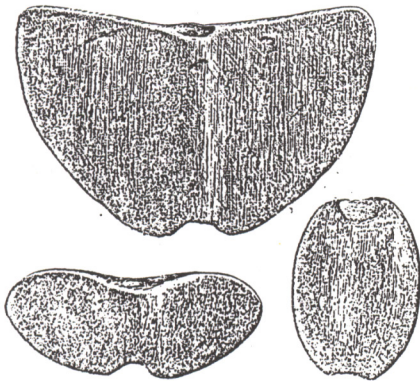
Tools will be described in terms of their use in meeting basic needs: 1. Food Acquisition: hunting, fishing, gathering, and horticulture; 2. Food Preparation: cooking and grinding; 3. Skin-working: making clothes; and 4. Woodworking: clearing trees, making wigwams and canoes.

Tools from one specific period of time, the Late Archaic Period (Late Settlers), approximately 5,000 years ago, are described here. The basic needs approach could be used similarly for other periods.

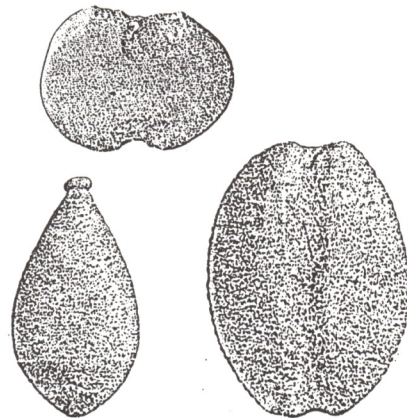
1. Food Acquisition: Spearpoints, spearthrower weights (atlatls) and plummets.



Spearpoints: All points were spear points until about 1,500 years ago when the bow and arrow were introduced. Large points were for game animals, small ones for birds and fish.



Spearthrower weights were used to increase the accuracy of a throw. They were wing-shaped or cylindrical, with a hole through the middle to be tied to the shaft of the



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Plummets were used in fishing and bird hunting to weight lines and nets.

Archeologists infer that hunting and fishing were men's activities, gathering and horticulture probably women's (from what is known of Native culture in Massachusetts in the 17th century). Men hunted deer, moose, bear, elk and many smaller animals. Women gathered green plants and tubers for both food and medicine. Hard-rind squash and gourds probably began to be grown in the Late Archaic time as containers, the seeds being planted with digging sticks. (We know they were grown in this period on the Ohio