

Keywords: Popes Creek, Mockley, Settlement Patterns, Projectile Points, Shell Middens, Resource Procurement, Chronology (Calvert, Fox Creek, Undiagnostic Rhyolite Points, Potomac River, Maryland, Virginia)

McNett, Charles and William Gardner
1975 Archaeology of the Lower and Middle Potomac, n.p.

In the Middle Woodland section of this unfinished document, the authors detail both the Popes Creek and the Mockley phases of the period. More emphasis is placed on the Popes Creek phase, probably due to the heavy concentration of these archaeological materials recovered from the upper tidewater region of the Potomac River. Details of Popes Creek ceramics recovered from sites on the Potomac River are provided (most net-impressed, some with incised rims and finger trailings), along with information on any lithic or faunal artifacts recovered in context. Calvert projectile points predominate these collections, and six rectanguloid, side notched, chipped maul axes were recovered from the Spring Branch site, located below Chain Bridge. The middle Potomac River sites discussed include Loyola Retreat, Popes Creek, Accokeek Creek, Farmington Landing, and Spring Branch, but the authors go on to summarize sites with Popes Creek-like wares recovered from sites ranging from Virginia to New York.

The authors conclude that the Popes Creek people, who lived in the region from 500 B.C. to 1 B.C., were essentially a riverine culture who utilized the wide-ranging “edge” environments spread over a relatively small geographic area. They subsume that the Popes Creek site, with its massive shell middens, was the base camp for these peoples, and was partially occupied year-round. In the spring, some parties would move upriver to catch anadromous fish and forage in the Piedmont. Summer would bring a move to Accokeek and Piscataway Creeks for harvesting mussels and hunting in nearby swamps, and in the fall and winter, populations would head back to Popes Creek to harvest oysters and hunt deer and waterfowl.

The Mockley phase of the Middle Woodland period, dated here from A.D. 1 – A.D. 600, is seen as a continuation of the Middle Atlantic coast net-marking tradition. Artifact assemblages from a number of middle Potomac and Chesapeake-region sites are discussed, and it is noted that Fox Creek [Selby Bay] projectile points, along with “crudely side-notched rhyolite points” are typical of the phase. A decline in the quality and quantity of oyster shells is noted for middens relative to the Popes Creek phase, and the authors postulate that this could be due to increased gathering pressure or possibly partial dependence on horticulture which would make shellfish less important. The presence of horticulture would also explain why some Mockley phase middens possess darker, more organic soil, as was seen at the Loyola Retreat site (p. 31).