

THE STONE AGE AT MOUNT VERNON.

BY OTIS T. MASON.

The estate of General George Washington comprised 6,000 acres of land, lying along the Potomac River 14 miles south of Washington, and bounded on the south by Dogue or Ipsawasson Creek and the land of Lord Fairfax.

John Smith, in his exploration of the Potomac River, mentions the Indians living in this neighborhood, and a few of their occupations. Having spent my youth upon this estate I am able to recall the resources of the region as they existed in the seventeenth century.

In the winter the inlets and water courses of Mount Vernon were thronged with wild fowl, white rabbits, squirrels, quails, and deer abounded in the woods. On the approach of spring the numbers of shad and herring that thronged the waters were simply incredible to one who never saw them in the early days. Later on the sturgeon and other fishes took the place of the migratory shoals, while the woods abounded in fruits of all kinds known in this region. Add to all this the fact that these Indians were corn-planters and had some knowledge of rude agriculture, and we are ready to study the stone implements found on the estate.

Those who have examined the region carefully are not wholly agreed about the continuance of man on this area. We have along all the water courses excellent stone implements, with soapstone vessels and fragments of pottery. On the hills back from the waters the pottery disappears and the stone artefacts are decidedly ruder.

On the western side of the Mount Vernon estate, upon a high hill two miles back from the Potomac River, lies the Woodlawn mansion, the home of Nellie Custis, Washington's favorite granddaughter. Here is found what may almost be called the Woodlawn type of ax, so rude is it, a flattish oval pebble, barely chipped at one end for an edge, and having the least possible working at the hafting place. No pottery or arrow-heads or other finely flaked implements occur here. All the pieces are coarse and many types are wanting.

The two theories that confront us are these:

First. There were two waves of population that swept over this area, the later being that of the John Smith Indians, the former running back, some say, into paleolithic times.

Second. The shore collections stand for the dwelling places of the Indians, while the pebble-abounding hills farther back were the workshops of the same people where they fabricated their implements and where they abandoned chips, spalls, cores, broken artefacts, and such as could not be satisfactorily finished.