

An Indian Canoe, Perhaps 1,000 Years Old, Unearthed by Dredge in Witteck Lake, N. J.

Cedar bottoms, centuries old, from sunken canoes attributed to the ancient Ramapo Indians have been unearthed by dredgers from the bottom of Witteck Lake near Butler, N. J., it was learned yesterday.

Foster H. Saville, of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, accepted their authenticity pending further research on resumption of dredging there next Spring. He said the parts he had examined were typical of two complete Ramapo dugouts, one of which was on exhibition at the Broadway and 155th Street museum and the other at Hackensack. He was unable to determine as yet whether the relics were of a Colonial period or dated back 700 to 1,000 years, as might easily be.

Only one of the three canoe bottoms was intact, the other two being incomplete. On all three the sides and inner structure had disappeared save for suggestion of attachments. Prof. Saville commented upon the excellent preservation of the cedar used by the boat builders and believed that the fragments had been virtually embalmed in hermetic

peat ever since submersion. Witteck Lake, he described, had originally been about fifty acres in size but had been flooded to much greater expanse upon construction of a dam. Pressure of the augmented volume of water had seemed to "bring up" the old lake bottom, forming a "floating island," he said. It was this freak formation that had proved to be the sarcophagus yielding the all but forgotten story of the vanished Ramapos. The lake is in the New Jersey peat belt.

Prof. Saville added that the cedar of which the canoe bottoms were made was now an extinct variety, not having appeared in New Jersey flora since long before the time of the white man.

The Ramapos, a branch of the Hackensack Indians, who in turn were of the councils of the Delawares, according to the ethnologist, flourished in the earlier cycles of the redmen. They were natural boatmen, it was believed, and the quiet waters of Witteck Lake might have been one of many waters they frequented in the circuit of their portages. Their crude craft furnished them with facilities for fishing, hunting and transportation.