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I Declare War on Typology: Breaking the Silence of Borderland Peoples through Case Study Archaeology at the Fall Zone

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I Declare War on Typology:
Breaking the Silence of Borderland Peoples through Case Study Archaeology at the Fall Zone

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for Honors in Anthropology from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Williamsburg, VA
May 4, 2009
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Introduction

Captain John Smith’s 1624 Map of Virginia, the first cohesive map of the Chesapeake region, lays out surprisingly accurate information about the geography and rivers of Virginia and its peoples.\(^1\) Smith enumerates the different villages of the polities present in the Chesapeake, and demarcates the territories of the various Native American polities interacting with the English during the time period: the Powhatans, Monacans, Massawomecks, and the Mannahoacks. Smith and others recorded the lives of the Powhatan people, but their western neighbors remain silent.\(^i\) The area of the map between the Monacan confederacy and the Powhatan Empire was left conspicuously blank by Smith, only inked hills and trees marking a vague boundary between the two powerful groups. This blank slate leaves several questions about boundary relations between the territorially hostile Monacans and Powhatans—who, if anyone, lived at the border, and how did they adapt to life on a shifting boundary? My goal is to save the answer to this question from overgeneralization, and put boundary people and their lifeway choices in the spotlight as a display of agency. Archaeology, perhaps through case studies like this one, fills lacunae marked and symbolized by a geographical boundary: the Virginia Fall Line.\(^ii\)

The Virginia Fall Line represented a complex social and cultural interface for its prehistoric inhabitants marked by complications of language, military action, politics and trade. The fall line stretches geographically through Virginia at the boundary between the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont. Geographically, the fall line represents the boundary

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\(^1\) Smith, John. 1624. *Map of Virginia.*
between the unconsolidated sands and silts of the coastal Plain and the hard bedrock that lies near the surface of Virginia’s interior. At the fall line rivers experience an abrupt drop in elevation, creating a series of falls that are most dramatic along the James, Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers. These falls represented a barrier to riverine navigation for Native peoples. The fall-line locations of Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Washington DC speak to the continued importance of this navigation barrier in the configuration of the social landscape even today. There are some indications in the archaeological record that on the eve of the colonial era the fill line was prehistorically marked by twenty-five to fifty kilometers of unoccupied land.\(^2\)

On either side several distinctive groups of people lived their lives. I will concentrate specifically on interaction between the two groups mentioned in early colonial accounts (e.g., Smith and Archer): the Monacans (Piedmont Siouan people) and the Powhatan (Coastal Plain Algonquian). As a means of evaluating the social and cultural relationships between these groups prior to the advent of written records in the region, I also chose to focus specifically on stylistic features of ceramics, presumably the domain of women, to discuss open expression through “rule-breaking” at the fall line. The Comstock site (44CF20) will serve as a case study to discuss not only cultural interaction but to critique dependence on the diagnostic artifacts and seriation dating in a prehistoric context.

Demographically, Siouan and Algonquian speakers with subgroups of several mutually unintelligible dialects migrated separately southward and created settlements

\(^2\) Mouer, 1983.
along the fall line.⁴ The two groups differed politically: the Monacans, or the polity on the Piedmont side during the protohistoric period, most likely existed in a loose confederacy of smaller groups, while the Powhatan existed as a centralized political chiefdom.⁵ According to the ethnographies from the Jamestown settlers, Monacans subsisted through both foraging and horticultural means, while the Powhatan people were mostly sedentary and subsisted from an agriculturally-based food supply.⁵ Later challenges to colonial accounts and archaeological evidence postulate that subsistence patterns of both groups were more alike than different, citing similar dependence on seasonal agriculture.iii Theorist John Edwards postulates that affinity to language also means adherence to a common “symbolic ethnicity,” and that this causes an “us versus them” relationship with another people identifiable through a different language.⁶ This may be a root reason that the relationship between these two remarkably different groups was reportedly strained, and control of the border between them—the fall line—swung back and forth like a pendulum as hundreds of years of regularized warfare passed.⁷

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⁵ Smith, 1612.


**Brief Foray into Ethnography**

The foundation for the information we know about (and the interest many historians have in) traditions of both the Algonquians and Sioux peoples are based on ethnographies written by the English during the early 1600s. However, because the Monacans lived in the Piedmont region, very little contact occurred between settlers and Siouan people, and accounts of their lifeways were instead based on Monacan interactions with the Powhatan, that the Coastal Plain people in turn related to the settlers like Captains John Smith and Gabriel Archer. Jeffrey Hantman, who works to dismiss these ethnographies in favor of archaeological evidence, recounts a few mentions of Monacan life, all barely a few sentences long. Two are listed below. In the first, John

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Smith writes as an introduction to the different polities west of the Powhatan for his *Map of Virginia* in 1624,

“Upon the head of the Powhatans are the Monacans, whose chief habitation is at Russawmeake, unto whome the Mouhemenchughes, the Massinnacacks, the Monahassanuggs, and other na-tions pay tributs. Upon the head of the river of Toppahannock is a people called Mannahoacks. To these are contributers the Tauxsnitanias, the Shackaconias, the Outponcas, the Tegoneaes, the Whonkentyaes, the Stegarakes, the Hassinnungas, and diverse others, all confederats with the Monacans though many different in language, and be very barbarous living for the most part of wild beests and fruits....”

An Algonquian named Patawah agreed to become a guide into the Piedmont for Captain Gabriel Archer, but left the English before the journey with the following words, which Archer later recounted in 1612:

“He began to tell us of the tedyous travell we should have if wee proceeded any further, that it was a Daye and a halfe Iorney to Monanacah, and if we went to Quirank, we should get no vittailes and be tyred, and sought by all means to disswade our Captayne from going any further: Also he tolde vs yt the Monanacah was his Enimye, and that he came Downe at the fall of the leafe and invaded his Countrye.”

These accounts of Monacan life are vague at best, the first describing the Monacans’ subsistence patterns relative to the Powhatans’ horticultural system, and the second touching upon some kind of “invasion,” not even necessarily warfare. Seen from a more generous perspective however, these accounts do communicate that differences in lifeways exist between the two groups, as seen in the distinction made in the first passage of an especially “barbarous” society with distinct foraging patterns, different from the Coastal Plain peoples. Calling out at least this interpretation of protohistoric lifeways, we know from Comstock alone that subsistence patterns included agriculture. More

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9 Ibid., 679.
10 Ibid., 679.
importantly, the second passage relates a long-standing and expected tension based on territoriality (i.e., “his Countrye”) between the Monacan and Powhatan polities.\footnote{Ibid., 681.} Challenges to the uniformity and persistence of these hostilities over the course of the Late Woodland period have fore grounded the last few decades, such as through Debra Gold’s or Jeffrey Hantman’s work. Either way, we do not understand from these accounts the nature of these tensions, or their uniformity across the member groups of the Powhatan chiefdom and the Monacan confederacy. Many historians like Helen Rountree and David Bushnell, have nonetheless based research and analysis on the factual content of these narratives.

**Archaeology as the Main Event**

Several questions remain regarding social relations across the fall line. How did these two competing polities influence one another socially, clash, or exert power over the cultural identities of other peoples? Is there evidence of a degree of autonomy in and around the fall line or for the creation of a regionally distinctive lifeway at the crossroads? To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to archaeology of the fall zone to study the silent borderland as an entity of its own and as the ligament that ties together Monacan and Powhatan histories.

The archaeology of Monacan and pre-Monacan life and Algonquian, Coastal Plain culture occupies two distinct academic spheres. Researchers have considered specific aspects of Algonquian life, including household patterns, residential structure,
trade and interaction, burial practices and bioarchaeology and ceramic production. Identifying a basic chronology of change has a basis in the archaeological record: an identifiable tradition of pottery appears around 200 A.D., the Coastal Plain population increases during the early Late Woodland period. According to Gallivan, this population increase causes the advent of maize agriculture, in adverse climate conditions, between 800 and 1000 A.D. Contemporaneously, settlement patterns shifted from seasonal to agriculturally-dependent sedentarism around three hundred years later.

While the term Powhatan is used loosely here, the huge, consolidating chiefdom which exists under Wahunsenacah did not materialize until the decades before the protohistoric period. Before this point, the Algonquians were “a series of local groups, each with lineages of greater or lesser proportion, competitive in a hierarchal setting.” With a more densely populated environment like the Coastal Plain, these “hierarchical” groups were able to consolidate and stand in solidarity against ephemeral, unfriendly forces, like their Monacan neighbors. Woodard postulates that this created a political disposition to morph and unite smaller, more kin-ship oriented components into permanent cells of the Powhatan chiefdom.

The history of Monacan and pre-Monacan Piedmont people is decidedly more opaque. While the famous mounds on the landscape of the early Republic storied in Notes on the State of Virginia are often referenced as the beginnings of American archaeology, interest that moved beyond the monumental ossuaries has been inconsistent.

13 Ibid., 47
15 Ibid., 104.
at best. This is probably connected to the lack of ethnohistoric sources, where they are voiced primarily as enemies of Powhatan. The earliest archaeological surveys of actual settlements were surveyed in relation to Gabriel Archer’s and John Smith’s list of Monacan villages.\textsuperscript{16} Efforts to interpret Monacan history as its own object began with University of Virginia’s Monacan history program in the 1980s encompassed research on settlement patterns, trade, ritual, and technology, and efforts beyond this program relate the Monacans to neighboring polities.\textsuperscript{vi} Additionally, Michael Klein’s 1994 M.A. thesis on ceramics was exceptionally important to understanding technological chronology and became indispensable to seriation dating in the Piedmont.\textsuperscript{17}

Gallivan retold a succinct narrative of landmark technological and social progress in the Piedmont. Siouan people at first evenly distributed themselves in sparsely populated floodplain and upland environments, gradually occupying floodplain areas with increasing density as farming increased around 900 A.D.\textsuperscript{18} While Gallivan suggests a fall zone boundary exists as early as 200 A.D., as seen from differences in pottery production techniques across that geological barrier. However, Gold and Gallivan both agree that a unified, ideological “Monacan-ness” appears around 1000 A.D., with the advent of burial mounds combined with already developing agricultural subsistence patterns and a semi-sedentary settlement lifeway.\textsuperscript{19} Gold argues that the use of maize remained unique due to the relative autonomy and self-determination of village peoples,

\textsuperscript{16} Bushnell, 1930.
\textsuperscript{18} Gallivan, 2003. 34.
\textsuperscript{19} Gold, 2004. 20.
and probably did not increase during the Late Woodland period as it did contemporaneously in the influential Coastal Plain milieu.

While ideologically similar, not all Piedmont peoples practiced mound burials, and those that did most likely organized themselves through lineage systems of self-definition similar to that described by Woodard of the pre-Powhatan Algonquians.\textsuperscript{20} These organizations were slightly different: while previous scholars, such as Jeffrey Hantman, argue otherwise, Gold classifies pre-Monacan Piedmont peoples a part of a “middle range society,” functioning on a smaller scale with flexible notions of egalitarianism and inequality.\textsuperscript{21} Because of the relative autonomy of settlements and differences in hierarchy and internal competition at any given time, Monacan peoples were less likely to organize and crystallize into a strict hierarchical structure like the Powhatan chiefdom. Thus, a confederacy at a “lower” level of complexity forms. Confederacies are useful in addressing a limited number of concerns, like warfare and trade. The voluntary nature of these groups allowed for several different kinds of governments to stand in solidarity with one another briefly, while maintaining peaceful relations with one another when no need for action presents itself. During the protohistoric period branded with Wahunsenacah’s “empire,” the Monacan Confederacy was a viable and reputedly “lethal” polity, united perhaps against increasing pressures from their Powhatan neighbors.\textsuperscript{22}

Archaeological research of fall zone interaction between these two peoples is spotty at best. Results and discussions from Turner, Mouer and MacCord are discussed in

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{22} Rountree, 1990. 12.
Aside from truly thorough CRM reports of the northern area of the fall line and previous work done by WMCAR in 2000, little analysis of the area has been completed in recent decades. Much of the research that has been conducted, like that by Mouer and Turner, focuses not on the fall zone itself but on the tensions surrounding it. The dichotomy created between the two political entities and the extrapolation of their “lethal” hostilities is fascinating but historiographically difficult to escape, like the legendary dichotomy between the CSA and the United States. Sites on the fall zone are often not seen as entities of their own, but as extensions of this dynamic clash of territoriality. In the context of ethnicity, too, we in one group feel the need to label others in another. We understand that with the titles “Monacan” or “Powhatan” come corresponding trait lists of ideology, language, and lifeway. To summarize Fredrik Barth in his description of the limitations of ethnic differentiations: “it is one, but not the other.”

Mouer, however, created a chronology of cultural interaction which he believes is true of the Virginia fall line generally: the beginning and height of the Middle Woodland period are marked by mostly thick, grainy, undecorated pottery with a cord-marked surface treatment and large lithic temper, indicative of a Piedmont tradition. Similar pottery is often found in the Piedmont region into the Late Woodland period, implying a primarily Piedmont influence until the Middle Woodland II period. Middle Woodland II and Late Woodland I pottery become increasingly diverse, incorporating shell tempers and fabric impression surface treatments typical of the Coastal Plain alongside the

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previously used Piedmont pottery. Also, as seen in the Comstock assemblage, the percentage of rim incising and punctuating—forms of decoration—increases with this diversity. This decoration often corresponds to smaller vessels used for ceremonial feasting. This complex, which spread during the Late Woodland I period (800-1000 AD) and continued into the protohistoric period also affected sites along the fall line like the Potomac Creek, Kiser, Irwin (see below), and Comstock sites, and is found in the outer Piedmont.24

According to Mouer, after the Late Woodland I period, a sudden increase in Coastal Plain fabric-impressed and shell-tempered ceramics accompanies a dramatic decrease in the Piedmont tradition. While radiocarbon dates speak to the contrary, according to the Klein seriation dating computed for features with the pattern this tradition may extend into the protohistoric period (1450 AD). Some features in this study, for example, are comprised of as much as ninety-percent Townsend and other Coastal Plain types of vessels. Decoration decreases as the Piedmont tradition fades out, and the vessels appear to be of a uniform shape and size. This clearly reflects a Coastal Plain people’s “thrust” into the west and increased incorporation of the peoples at the fall line. However, because this change was not sudden, a gradual acculturation is implied that allowed people to mix the two strong influences in different ways.

At the fall line, the periods before and during the adoption of the ubiquitous Coastal Plain wares produce captivating examples of the results of Coastal Plain and Piedmont cultural influences in one pot. Style, within the context of anthropology, is defined as a surface embellishment or address of function in an object that contains the dual role as an open system of expression, communication, and information transfer within a culture. Keeping this open system in mind, the Comstock site seems to beg the question, “what of competing influences?” How do rules of style apply, or break, when individuals are confronted with conflicting sets of rules?

To answer this question, recent forays into topics with themes of cultural contact studies, hybridity, and pluralism (terminology dependent on the cultural milieu) have taken a turn away from “cultural gradualism” and essentialized notions of both style and

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ethnicity.\textsuperscript{i}x The “contextual approach” has gained footing in its stead.\textsuperscript{26} Lightfoot and Martinez, in a refinement of practice theory, call for a “microscale” approach which measures “individual intentionality and social action” instead of just halting at an analysis of “macroscale world systems.” Our construction of daily life is, quintessentially, how we make sense of our world.\textsuperscript{27} Individuals do not always respond to outside influences in a uniform manner, which is why typologies can be limiting, downplaying the power of the human creativity that makes itself apparent in “pluralistic contexts” where it would not in an isolated setting. Ceramics, plain before, now become vested with meaning, opening to the archaeologist the common mind of a previously silent people.

To acknowledge and study a blend is a more difficult task. Perhaps for this reason, the fall zone simply falls off the map when protohistoric discussions of the Powhatan and Monacan deathmatch began. While Mouer states that no permanent settlement occurred after 1450 A.D., study of earlier fall zone sites like Comstock assist in mapping the development of tensions on both sides of the fall line, as well as gain an understanding of diverse lifeway at the borderland.

**Traits and Dates**

As well as stimulating a discussion of interaction, studies of cultural boundaries allow for the reexamination of the usefulness of typologies and diagnostic artifacts in unique contexts like Comstock. These typologies, most prolifi-cally studied in areas of interaction by Egloff and Potter in 1989 and Egloff in 1985, include categories of lithics,


\textsuperscript{27} Lightfoot and Martinez, 1998. 200.
specifically projectile points, mortuary practices, housing styles, and ceramic styles. Diagnostic ceramics are studied most in this context and are based on a specific combination of thickness, temper type, surface treatment, and decoration used to identify and date ceramics in prehistoric Piedmont and Coastal Plain sites.

In this context, the attributes of Piedmont ceramic-making traditions include a crushed lithic (quartz or quartzite) temper. Other types of temper include feldspar, rounded pebbles, and grit. As time passes, finely crushed lithic tempers were preferred by pot makers over larger or uncut lithics. Piedmont wares, however, contain primarily shell temper (as seen in Mockley wares). In the Comstock collection as well as at other sites, Piedmont wares are not or moderately compact, and Coastal Plain wares, such as in the Townsend tradition, are compact. Much like in Piedmont wares, the temper size of shell decreased in Coastal Plain wares as pottery-making technologies became better over time. Both the average thickness and the average temper size became important dating tools in calculating seriation dates for both Coastal Plain and Piedmont equations.

A progression of ceramic technologies during the Woodland period was followed by prehistoric people in Virginia. In a (very) general way, Early Woodland experimentation with pottery tempers and surface treatment included sand and lithic temper, combined with cord-marked, net-impressed, or smoothed surface treatments.

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Around 200 AD, Mockley ware became important as a shell-tempered pottery type. On the Coastal Plain side of the fall line, “roughened” or net-impressed ceramics were replaced by cord-marked ceramics and smoothed pottery, which was in turn left for fabric-pressed and finally simple-stamped surface treatments. While not always the case (as in the Piedmont), lithic forms of temper, like steatite, feldspar, rounded and crushed quartz and quartzite were replaced by shell tempers beginning with the Mockley typology. Thickness and weight also decreased over time.

The creation of typologies for prehistoric sites is founded on the assumption that the individual women used the same types of technology to create pottery cross-generationally. The ceramic types distinguished by Egloff and Potter in 1989 are used not only in “describing the patterned ceramic variability of the Coastal Plain of Virginia,” but are used in the identification of a culture itself. The identity of a culture- in this case, the Monacans, Siouans, Coastal Plain peoples, etc.) became entwined with the arbitrary definition of the artifact: finding one means the presence of the other.

However, unlike with historic, mass-produced ceramics like Pearlware or Rhenish Stoneware, there is much more room for creativity for the Algonquian or Sioux woman, the primary producers of ceramics. To imply a similarity between the mass production of ceramics from industrialized Europe and pottery made individually by Native Americans is to compare (wo)man to machine.

32 Ibid.
Typologies are used to identify settled groups at a given site through the ceramics present, and used to produce an accurate date for a feature. This dating can be done through the Michael Klein’s Piedmont and Coastal Plain seriation models. Again, these equations are designed for aggregate ceramic assemblages in a given feature, and quantities such as thickness, temper size, and percentage decorated produce an accurate date.\(^\text{34}\)

However, these seriations imply cultural uniformity, isolation, and the progression of a single technology, and do not account for cultural mixing from other populations or the creation of different traditions on-site. For this reason, the Klein seriation models are unpredictable in the fall zone context: both formulas were used experimentally below, with results as far apart as three hundred and seventy-five years. Cultural mixing calls for the disposal of essentialist analysis in favor of a narrative focused specifically on the site at hand.

**Comstock**

The Comstock collection offers an ideal case study for evaluating fall zone interaction within its own context as a cultural boundary, as well as a setting for reevaluating the use of typologies and seriation dating. The Comstock site (44CF20) is located on the wooded property owned by James Comstock in the city of Colonial Heights, Chesterfield County, Virginia. It is on the west bank of the Appomattox River, five and a half miles from the James River intersection. Leverette Gregory of the College

\(^{34}\) Klein, 1994.
of William and Mary Anthropology Department led a group of volunteers on weekend excursions in 1967 and 1968. Because this was a salvage archaeological endeavor, only the areas that the owner wished to terrace were examined.

FIGURE 3
Figure 2 is a map placing Comstock (44CF20) on both the James River and the modern landscape (Deitrick et al 2000, pg. 175)
The site was excavated in five foot squares in an area of about two hundred and sixty by four hundred and forty feet. Thirty-one units were excavated, including twenty-four features. Operation number, unit letter, and context number were used to record provenience information; i.e., 115Y2 represents operation 115, unit Y, and level 2. Features were further organized numerically and mapped on individual context sheets. However, feature records are incomplete, and the maps of features are often contradictory or incompletely labeled. No soil samples, floatation, or pollen samples were taken, although unidentified and unlabelled residue was placed by someone in plastic tubes for several features. Ray Sasser, for his 1971 master’s thesis concerning the ceramics at Comstock, added changes of his own to context forms and maps and catalogued and
analyzed the artifacts in his own effort to catalogue the ceramic assemblage. Further, during a 1996 analysis, the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research assigned each provenience a separate lot number, as seen in the context form attached, in an attempt to add order and differentiate between units and features. Results included osteological, faunal, and ceramic analysis that place artifacts from the Paleoindian period (10,000-12,000 B.P.) into historic occupation in the nineteenth century. Based on the preponderance of Townsend in the ceramic assemblage, WMCAR concluded that settlers at Comstock occupied the site most intensively during the Late Woodland period, corroborating with Sasser’s work. Further, Deitrick and Johnson completed a comparative study of cordage-twist impressions on ceramics at the Comstock and Irwin sites in an effort to map population continuity and replacement. This study concluded that a population replacement took place at the beginning of the Late Woodland period, and that the new settlers came from south of the James estuary, carrying the ubiquitous Townsend tradition with them to the site.

As stated earlier, the Comstock site contains evidence of some historic occupation (a colonial-era structure sits nearby on the same property), but the most intensive occupation occurred during the Middle (500 BC – AD 900) and Late Woodland (AD 900 – 1600) periods, with evidence of a transitional period between the two present in many features. The site includes large features containing substantial amounts of fire-cracked

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36 Deitrick et al, 1996.  
37 Ibid.  
38 Deitrick and Johnson, 1996.
rock which denotes hearths, and smaller, conically-shaped features may represent storage pits. Three interments of human remains and one dog burial are also present.

The ceramic assemblage of Comstock is the most useful material for developing a chronological narrative of a community on the fall line. Published in 1982, Egloff and Potter’s ceramic typology for the Virginia Coastal Plain remains the most influential taxonomy for classifying pottery in the region. While Egloff and Potter’s typology and those used in the Piedmont assist in providing phase-based and defining influences on a group of people, the assemblage of Comstock does not follow the typological categories of wares and improvements in technology as gracefully as their Coastal Plain or Piedmont neighbors. Instead, there are indications in ceramic style that this settlement, located on a cultural boundary, allowed for creative negotiation of new styles or compilations and compromises between old ones. Hand-built, low-fired and locally-produced ceramics may be useful in understanding the practices and structures of life within a community because there is so much one can do with them. The shape, size, temper, surface treatment, and decoration of vessels at Comstock speak to the influences of neighbors, a sense of style, and individual agency in the creation of an object of both art and function.

**Methodology**

The recent history of Comstock is marked by significant interpretive dissonance in site reports, feature and context, and the numbers of artifacts by feature between the various parties that assessed and reassessed it. The lithics and ceramics (all non-faunal objects) were determined to need an entirely new assessment, conducted independently of
previous reports. For this new effort, we left some features (Features 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 14) out of the study entirely due to irreconcilable discrepancies in provenience information or missing information or artifacts. Ceramics were classified according to standard attributes, such as length, height, width, temper type, temper size, surface treatment, decoration, and S-twist/Z-twist cord-markings. Additional data sets were created to synthesize the context and feature numbers given to features from previous researchers, and another data set was created called “Temper Lump,” to classify the diversity of tempers under one primary or most common material found in a given sherd (i.e., a sherd with multiple tempers which contained more lithic temper than mica, sand, or shell would be classified under ‘lithic.’) Lithics and projectile points were analyzed with similarly standardized measurements, with special interest taken in fire-cracked rock counts as indicators of feasting. I also completed a separate projectile point study with the hope that form technologies could provide help in dating features.

Once analysis was complete, the features were studied individually, and classified as Middle, transitional, or Late Woodland based on an application of the existing ceramic typologies. Pot sherds containing substantial interior residues were sent off for starch grain analysis, designed to detect residues from the processing and cooking of tubers such as Tuckahoe, which may have played a role in fall zone sites. Through this information, we hoped develop a better understanding of the foodways at Comstock. However, the starches were unextractable, and in its place radiocarbon dating proceeded on faunal remains from those same features. Of those three, two samples were datable and a final, third date is forthcoming. The results are discussed below.
As an alternative and a comparison to radiocarbon dating results, the Klein seriation formulas for the Piedmont and Coastal Plain were applied to all features studied for this project. The seriation formula for each region is based on distinguishing attributes that define the chronological progression of ceramic technology in that general area. Klein developed the seriation equations by developing regression equations that accurately predicted the results of radiocarbon assays from a suite of dated features. We drew upon two separate seriation formulas because ceramics associated with both Piedmont typologies (such as lithic-tempered Albemarle ware) and Coastal Plain typologies (such as shell-tempered Townsend ware) were present in all but one feature (Feature 24).

The Klein seriation formula for the Piedmont ceramics is based on the average size of lithic temper, average width of sherds, and amount of cord-marking, while the Coastal Plain formula is based on a percentage of fabric-impressed sherds, shell-tempered sherds, and width. The resulting “absolute” date improves on the “relative” dating that results from the use of typological approaches in several ways. Most immediately, the more detailed chronology possible with absolute dating avoids the lumping of several different deposits into a single, generic phase or period. In the process, absolute dating can help avoid the impression of a homogenized modal pattern when there is, in fact, considerable variation across time.

For each feature, the two dates were often disparate and were thus averaged together to create a general chronology (see figure.) This chronology was then used in creating a general narrative of competing Piedmont and Coastal Plain influences over
time. This numeric chronology is free-standing, created at least partially independent of typology and the histories of the surrounding polities.

**Creativity and Different Traditions: Results**

At Comstock, two different patterns of evidence of cultural mixing emerge in the ceramics collection and, while by no means entirely inclusive, can account for almost all of the features with a significant sample size. One pattern, observable in over 50% of features with a good sample size which were preliminarily identified as Middle/Late Woodland features, combines wares that are typologically similar to Coastal Plain and Piedmont-produced ceramics. For example, feature nine contains almost equal parts Townsend identical to those found in Coastal Plain sites (n = 29), and gritty lithic-tempered, cord-marked ceramics produced at the time in the Piedmont (n = 33). The two types of pottery are not only tempered and marked differently, but made in two entirely different traditions. The average cord-marked, lithic-tempered pot is has much thicker walls (approximately 7.85 mm for crushed-lithic tempered pots, versus approximately 7.1 mm for non-crushed-lithic tempered pots), and sherds leave a gritty residue on whatever they touch. The clay is often of a darker, more reddish color, perhaps indicating a different source of clay or different firing patterns The Coastal-Plain influenced pottery is much thinner, neutrally or darker colored, smooth and even, and admittedly less likely to fall apart. At Comstock, the two types of influenced pottery have certain features in common: they are unlikely to be decorated, and the arc measurements of the walls of most sherds indicate large vessels.
Viewing Comstock as a place of interaction, it is not surprising to see predominant wares in surrounding regions present. As stated above, many features have evidence of both traditions, but the Coastal Plain tradition usually dominates.

The other pattern is found within the sherd itself through the temper type and size—instead of two separate wares, two temper influences are combined to produce a unique ware with multiple influences. This production is evidenced particularly in features 5, 12, 15, and 22. If Coastal Plain wares are usually shell or sand-tempered, while Piedmont wares contain lithic inclusions, ceramics from Comstock frequently have both types of temper in one pot. Further, as mentioned above in the context of Kiser, micaceous sand, unique in quantity to the fall zone region, is also included as a temper.
These sherds, unlike within the first pattern, have little uniformity. For example, one sherd from Comstock may have shell fragments, rounded lithic, crushed lithic, sand, and mica all in one sherd, but another sherd in the same feature may have shell, crushed lithic, and mica, without the shell or sand. While most are clearly utilitarian, these pots are also more likely to be smaller, indicating specialization for ceramics and ceremony.

To corroborate further, this second pattern is often seen with the lithic inclusion of large amounts of fire-cracked rock: evidence of feasting, or celebration. In contrast, Feature 9, used as a prime example of the first pattern, has ceremonial vessels or fire-cracked rock at all. Many features in this tradition also have high percentages of decoration (as high as 18%), and a generally higher percentage than features that follow the first pattern (In Feature 9, 3.5% of sherds are decorated). Types of decoration include primarily punctuation, dowelling, and incising, but also combinations of both. Rarer forms, like cord-marking on the interior of the pot and others, are also present. It is important to note that every pot is unique in features which follow this pattern. The combinations for decoration and function are endless and unusual.
The figures below are a demonstration of the remarkable diversity of decoration. Most Coastal Plain decoration is limited to incising on the rim and base, while the Coastal Plain-influenced pottery below (Figures 11) has decoration on the body. In several cases, decoration is also found on the interior of the pot through incising and cord-marked dowelling. On the other hand, small pot fragments without decoration, as seen in Figure 7, are smoothed and finished on the interior (therefore, functional) but left unsmoothed on the exterior. Their small size denotes a symbolic and ceremonial significance. Also important to note (with the exception of Figure 7) is the similar thickness, arc, and color, even though these examples are from several different features. From this we can conclude that the mode of production was for pottery was probably contemporaneous for the features of the second pattern.
FIGURE 7
FIGURE 12

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**FIGURE 13**
**Figure 14**

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**Legend:**
- **HB**: Hafted Biface
- **RF**: Retouched Flake
- **PF**: Preform
- **PDF**: Primary Decoration Flake
- **S**: Shatter
- **US**: Unmodified Stone
- **IT**: Informal Tool
- **FCR**: Fire Cracked Rock
- **SDF**: Secondary Decoration Flake
- **TDF**: Tertiary Decoration Flake
- **UF**: Uniface
From this information, and the aid of radiocarbon dates, we can piece together a basic narrative of life along the border (discussed below). While the two patterns fundamentally use the same technologies, these are manipulated in ways that reveal much about identity.

Results also show huge disparities between radiocarbon dates and the Klein seriation dates based on typology. Feature 11, absolutely dated to 740 AD was dated by the Klein seriation to an average of 1273 AD. The second feature dated, Feature 22, was found to date to 930 AD but the Klein seriation dates the same to 1329 AD. While immediately there seems to be no pattern, the difference between the two radiocarbon dates is 190 years (excluding the standard deviation of +/- 40) and the difference between the two Klein seriation dates is 56 years. While these two numbers are admittedly different, it is striking that the chronology proceeds forward in the same direction and with some likeness. In the context of Comstock, it may be possible to use the limited number of absolute dates to infer a chronology with Klein’s seriation formula. The chronology and radiocarbon dates are depicted in the chart below.
FIGURE 15 Radiocarbon Dates vs. Seriation Dates (by Feature)

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FEATURE 16: Chronology of Comstock Features

Based on Klein Seriation

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Boundaries and Ethnicities

In a field which applauds the discovery of cultural and historical patterns, Fall Zone archaeology is deplorably complicated. While barely touched upon in recent works, such as Woodard’s 2008 thesis, it has much to offer the exploratory efforts of prehistoric boundary relations. Evidence of both pluralism and a sort of pre-colonial hybridity (hereafter called cultural mixing) offer fascinating paths towards types of interaction that boundary peoples may choose to take.

In “The Plural Society” MG Smith defines pluralism as “a condition in which members of a common society are internally distinguished by fundamental differences in their institutional practice.” In 1997, Lightfoot et al. aptly apply this concept to multicultural colonial studies. Hybridity is defined in the colonial context as the product of two cultures as a single unit. I argue that Comstock is both, therefore neither completely.

A study of any boundary requires the use of labels to account for the dissonance in group identity which often exists across a demarcated boundary. Rountree is quick to label the Powhatans and Moncans as ethnic groups, while Gallivan argues more within the framework of differing forms of political organization. Woodard takes a blended, abstract approach to cultural identity of Algonquian life, focusing on the roles of cosmology and kinship. In this effort ironically aimed at identifying groups of people in their own contexts, I chose the alternate terms “ethnicity” to refer to identity and “polity” to refer to larger political structures.

40 Woodard, 2008.
For a discussion of the framework of ethnicity, and therefore, its differentiation from a community or polity, I turned to Fredrik Barth’s foundational work “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries.” Barth defines an ethnicity as a population that is

(1) Biologically self-perpetuating
(2) Shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
(3) Makes up a field of communication and interaction
(4) Has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order\(^4\)

If we accept Barth’s definition as stated, it is clear that neither the Monacan nor the Powhatan polities fit Rountree’s label of “ethnic group.” While, as we can gather from Smith’s account, the Powhatan may refer to the Monacans as Monacans, mounds comprise the main evidence that there was a united “Monacan” identity, which may have existed independently of any political group.\(^{4iv}\) However, as permanent an institution as mound-building was, there is no proof of uniformity in Piedmont people’s adherence to this practice over time.

Further, as seen through the variety of egalitarian and hierarchical social systems, it is not necessary for them to share the same values. Even at the height of the Powhatan’s expansionist period when material and arguably, cosmological cultural uniformity was necessary in forming a “governed” village, Smith in his explorations could still list groups inside the chiefdom, forms of self-definition that divided the united Powhatan into small units. Effectively calling into question the veracity of Barth’s fourth pillar of ethnicity in both cases (far more so in the Piedmont case), we can infer that while polities

certainly influenced the formation of self-definition and ethnicity, the polities themselves
to not also encompass an ethnic group.

If “ethnicity” defines neither group that, at the very least, influences the tangible
nature and population composite of occupation at the fall line, is it even possible to label
people at Comstock? The question becomes not “who were they?” but instead, “what
were they?” John Edwards, as mentioned earlier, explores the dichotomous relationships
people develop with their ethnic identities while learning multiple languages, but he gives
a softer edge to Barth’s theory. He proposes instead that there can be a combination of
“persistence” and “gradual absorption;” the announced retention of an “ethnic core,” a
singular identity while adhering to multiple forms of identity through language.42 (This
analysis becomes especially valuable in interpreting the first ceramics pattern in the
Comstock assemblage, listed below.)

In 1922, Max Weber in “The Origins of Ethnic Groups” wrote that ethnicity and
group cohesion more like an arbitrary belief system, calling into question the barely-there
biological tenet of Barth’s argument. Weber argued that groups create the beliefs that
defined a common ethnicity, moving gradually towards a more sharply-defined identity.
In a political sense, these common beliefs arose from the desire for power and status;
Weber uses “white America’s” opposition to and formation around “Negroes” [sic] as an
example.43 While the term “ethnicity” may be in dispute, the concept of the accumulation
of cultural solidarity based on the quest for power and status could be helpful in discourse
concerning groups along, and on, the fall line. Certainly, the creation of the Powhatan

42 Barth, 17.
identity spread along with expansionist motives, while we can conjecture that what
Rountree postulates is a “limited-purpose” Monacan confederacy came together at least
in pursuit of ritualized displays of power against the Powhatan (as read in Gabriel
Archer). Ultimately, worth gathering from a discourse on ethnic theory is the blending,
complications, and abstraction of the definition of ethnicity itself: alternating motives and
causes, different effects and results. It is also not a system that exists on its own, but as a
response to other stimuli and in the context of larger social networks and systems.

“Cross-cultural” comparisons?
To better understand the unique everyday practices at Comstock, a comparison to
other sites and sets of practices along the Fall Zone first becomes necessary. From
Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina and continuing into Maryland, Late and Middle
Woodland communities contemporary to Comstock also display a similar diversity,
primarily in ware types. As a sample, I chose to examine two sites: Kiser, immediately
adjacent to Comstock in Chesterfield County, and the Potomac Creek site in Stafford
County, approximately one hundred miles directly north of Comstock. These two sites,
however, are not representative: Indian Point, the T. Gray Haddon site, Falling Creek
Ironworks, and the Gaston, Pontic, and Irwin sites, among others, all offer Late
Woodland and protohistoric records of life at the Fall Line as well.44

Patawomeke, or the Potomac Creek site (44ST2) is best known as the “Indian
village” John Smith visited in 1608, and today it is considered the most densely
populated site in the tidewater section on the Potomac. At the time of Comstock, the
Potomac Creek site is represented by a series of seven double-palisaded settlements,

indicating a village rebuilt six times, each time with defense in mind, over the course of Late Woodland chronology. Migration to the Potomac Creek site, however, is the accepted explanation for shifts in cultural interaction.\footnote{MacCord, 1985.} MacCord cites traditions here as reflective of a northern Piedmont people that migrated to the site.\footnote{Ibid., 8.}

Intriguingly, in many ways, there are many similarities between the Potomac Creek practices, with a clear cultural lineage from the North, and Comstock practices. For example, the faunal assemblage, with the exception of the inclusion of predator remains at Patowomeke, is virtually identical. Deer comprise approximately the same amount of biomass, and sturgeon, turtle, raccoon, turkey and small fish indicate a like seasonal residential pattern. While people continued to live at the Potomac Creek site into the historic period judging by trade goods such as copper, bells, and glass beads, that fact does not reflect in the faunal record, indicating no historic species. This is also true at Comstock, with the exception of cow and pig remains that probably represent a much later historic period. Fundamentally, despite the possibly large distance separating the roots of these practices, faunal patterns for both sites show a remarkably similar bent towards a combined marine and woodland diet, with a preference for particular spring and summer species. Specifically found in proliferation were freshwater mussels and box turtles, which are harvested during the warmer months. The affinity here reflects the environmental similarities between the two sites, which served to create similar subsistence and settlement patterns.
Considering the common ecological requirements fulfilled at both sites, it is remarkable how much they differ through contemporaneous material cultures. The lithics assemblage, contains a far greater preference for white quartz in projectile points and tools (quartz = 1660 flakes, quartzite = 906), relatively rare compared to quartzite tools at Comstock. Interestingly, however, there appears to be a chronology involved: stemmed points, generally considered much older, are primarily made of quartzite, but triangular points, dating to the later period of the Late Woodland, are flaked from white quartz. Because of the preponderance of quartzite at Comstock, a similar chronology is difficult to trace, but all quartz projectile points in the Comstock collection are Late Woodland triangles. This implies an increasing preference for the finer, and therefore more durable, white quartz as time continues, possibly at both sites. This may be reflective of a larger Piedmont tradition. Other interesting tools not found at Comstock are included in the Potomac Creek assemblage, including bone pins, pipes, antler drills and perforators, and according to MacCord, possibly a stylized human effigy made of clay.47

Within the context of ceramics, Patawomeke has a clear and strong Piedmont tradition. Cord-marked and plain wares dominate, and fine grit is consistently the temper of choice. Older pottery, before the typology “Potomac Creek Ware” came into existence, had more shell-tempered representation, standing in stark contrast to Comstock’s chronology, which is characterized by shell-tempered, fabric-impressed pottery replacing cord-marked, grit-tempered vessels. The assemblage diversifies from cord-marked/ grit tempered to include more, albeit still a small amount of, fabric-impressed/shell-tempered

pots. Consistently, however, the Potomac Creek people exercised their own decorating traditions: rim incising combined with rim scalloping grace many ceramic vessels.

This last, small inclusion of shell-tempered pottery possibly reflects an increase in influence from the Coastal Plain people. MacCord also cites the possibility of forced adoption of women or migration of small groups into the fall zone. However, to suddenly begin creating higher-quality (less gritty, more consolidated) fabric-impressed and shell-tempered wares from insular community decisions, and with no previous reference, seems equally unlikely. It seems that either adoption of women or a gradual, increased interaction with the Coastal Plain people created these differences. The fact that overwhelming Piedmont traditions at the Potomac Creek site contrasts sharply with ubiquitous Coastal Plain-influenced pottery may speak to the less frequent contact that powerful Coastal Plain people had with their northern neighbors, allowing Piedmont peoples to expand their influence (see Rountree map).

Kiser (44CF14) is a much larger site, just a few miles away from Comstock in the city of Colonial Heights. It contains over one hundred and fifty features, occupied ephemerally since the Paleolithic period and into historic times. This settlement, it seems, has never been palisaded, unlike others in the region that used palisades for defense. It is possible that this meant friendlier connections with the neighbors. Its collection is very similar to that of Comstock, unsurprisingly more so than the Potomac Creek site. To start, the raw materials for lithic tools are similar: quartzite projectile points greatly outnumber other types, especially in earlier representations such as Madison and Savannah River.
points. Sandstone and greenstone points are not found at Comstock and appear to be unique to Kiser.

The ceramic assemblage is also intriguing. Shell-tempered and fabric-impressed (Townsend) wares are 43.7% of the assemblage (n = 2083), and appear to increase over time. Cord-marked and crushed-lithic pottery also occupies a similar range of importance, with 9.6% of the ceramics from Kiser. However, unlike at Comstock, that vital diversity in temper appears to be missing: an overwhelming 45.4% of pottery is fine sand-tempered, a temper not seen consistently at Comstock. Mica, a beautiful, bright and reflective temper, is accounted for in a captivating way: a pegmatite dike, where mica is found, was a resource that women had access to in lieu of fine sand temper. Because of Kiser’s immediate proximity to Comstock, it is likely that women at both sites had relatively similar access to the same temper source. The decision to include mica may have been a community difference between Comstock, which has many mica inclusions, and Kiser, which had relatively few. Kiser inhabitants also decorated their pottery far less than at Comstock: 3% of the total sherd count is decorated at Kiser, perhaps indicating less need for special pottery associated with cultural interaction.

FIGURE 17
Figure represents an example of micaceous sand-tempered pottery from Comstock. This is sherd is from a large, fabric-impressed vessel with thin walls, denoting a Coastal Plain influence. From Feature 9.
Another remarkable difference between the two sites was the treatment of the dead. Kiser offers a remarkably diverse mortuary practice. Comstock is very uniform; in situ the burials contained rigidly flexed individuals, at relatively uniform distances from one another, all facing the same direction, devoid of burial goods and mostly devoid of trash, probably indicating cuts in the soil intended for burial. The Kiser collection includes only one flexed interment with red ochre and antler inclusions, one cremation (possibly dating to the Archaic period), and several reinterrments elsewhere, possibly in the ossuaries so characteristic of Coastal Plain people. Also included are two child burials laid straight with the arms folded across the chest and tubular fossil-shell beads found in the neck area. Included with an oyster spoon was the top of a younger human crania made into a pendant. This shows a remarkable array of regional influences, at least both Coastal Plain and Piedmont, for one of the most important spiritual and socially cohesive cultural rites.

This exhaustive list clearly reflects a variety of traditions, perhaps varying often over time, or varying as influences of the Coastal Plain and Piedmont regions fluctuate. This brief comparison of three sites serves to focus on Comstock not as literally a representation of life on the boundary, but as a representation of the lack of uniformity revealed through examining these sites in context. It would seem, however, that there is no “other,” no one “ethnicity” that juxtaposes another. Not only does this imply that cultural solidarity cannot be found through typologies used along the fall line, but instead that doing a site-by-site analysis can help map these tensions in a more specific fashion.
Other Ideas

Past explanations seeking to account for dissonance in mortuary practices and in the creation of pottery and community structure which are similarly diverse, ironically often seem to seek an aggregate explanation for the different assemblages at each of these sites. Instead, as seen from the inter-site comparisons above, I’d like to argue that fall zone archaeologists should seek alternatives to typological aggregation. As stated above, MacCord postulates that ordinary trade between the two ethnic groups—whether in families, wives, or goods—created room for creativity and diverging social practices.\footnote{MacCord, 1985.}

While not directly proposing an initiating factor, E. Randolph Turner posits that the creation of an uninhabited area along the fall line, sustained through ritual interaction and warfare, allowed for a stable supply of deer proteins.\footnote{Turner, E. Randolph. 1978. An intertribal deer exploitation buffer zone for the Virginia Coastal Plain-Piedmont regions,” Archeological Society of Virginia, \textit{Quarterly Bulletin} 32,3.} Turner bases his argument on ethnographic accounts of Midwestern Native Americans who created a similar buffer, albeit unintentionally, with similar results as between the Algonquian and Siouan speakers. This uninhabited area at the Virginia Fall Line, by Smith’s ethnographic accounts, held a denser population of larger deer than in the Coastal Plain or into the Piedmont. Turner also postulates that the people on both sides of the fall line had begun overexploitation of the deer population by the Late Archaic period (as seen in faunal remains of young deer). This area between the two people therefore grew as an adaptive function of competition as both populations grew.
L. Daniel Mouer, of Virginia Commonwealth University, predicts an entirely different scenario. In his article “DMZ or Deer Park? Buffer Zones as Boundary Systems,” Mouer sees boundary relations between tribal communities as inherently hostile and competitive. He responds to Turner’s argument by defining the uninhabited zone as retaining the adaptive function of a “deer park,” but created as a byproduct of warfare, a factor not discussed in detail in Turner’s article. Within the context of the Virginia Fall Zone, Mouer notes that the borders of this uninhabited zone have swayed like a pendulum, implying a fight for power over this stretch of land. He cites prime fishing spots and a stable population of deer as desirable resources worth fighting for. Mouer believes that with the advent of agriculture into the region at the end of the Late Woodland I period, competition intensified for fertile land. Increasing populations created by agriculture serve as yet another pressure into aggression. Instead of a game preserve, Mouer sees evidence of an environmentally determinist de-militarized zone in which a space unoccupied after AD 1400 is bordered on both sides by palisaded and strategically placed villages, much like the DMZ between North and South Korea. Much like in Korea, this uninhabited area proves that one side of a conflict cannot gain clear advantage over the other side through warfare. Instead, “thrusts” from one cultural group across the fall line are evidenced by a sudden proliferation of Piedmont wares (such as the Shockoe or Potomac Creek Complexes) into inner Coastal Plain areas, or Coastal Plain wares (such as Townsend and Gaston) in outer Piedmont areas. Mouer considers the penetration of Piedmont wares, such as Shockoe, into the inner coastal plain at around

51 Ibid.
900-1000 A.D. a signal of the beginning of this political, expansionist aggression between the two cultures and the beginning of a defined, uninhabited fall line. Mouer further accounts for an exchange of spouses and goods as a ritualized way of maintaining ties with a neighbor, but keeping status quo and maintaining cultural influence over an enemy.

The final outcome, after several short periods of exchange (some listed above) appears to have been Coastal Plain domination of the Fall Zone, and an Algonquian influence on Monacan ceramic styles in what Mouer deems “a cold war.”52 As also evident in the Comstock assemblage, a sudden change from a diverse ceramic complex to one of almost exclusively Townsend is noted in the sites that Mouer references. Also much like Comstock, these ceramic assemblages included idiosyncrasies that implied a subversively continued Piedmont tradition, such as temper modifications to the Townsend traditions and changes in design. Reached during the Late Woodland II and protohistoric periods, this “stasis” is attributed by Mouer to the Powhatan chieftom’s unification of the Coastal Plain peoples and his influence on the inner Coastal Plain. The Siouan people similarly united (although perhaps more loosely) under the Monacan people in a less powerful confederacy, perhaps explaining their loss in influence in the Fall Zone. Mouer interprets John Smith’s ethnographic account of Powhatan’s unwillingness to attack the Monacans as a sign that Powhatan wished to not upset the status quo between the two groups, unsure of his own advantage.

52 Mouer, 1986.
Mouer’s qualification of Turner’s “deer park” function is apt in pointing out a
post hoc ergo prompter hoc fallacy on the part of Turner. If, as Mouer suggests, this
uninhabited area had existed for over six hundred years (from AD 1000 into the 1600s),
the existence of a cooperative, expansive, and organized movement like this for such a
long period of time becomes difficult to explain, especially between supposedly hostile
neighbors. Similar, beneficial ecological side effects have been observed in modern
demilitarized zones without being the impetus for creating one. In the de-militarized zone
between North and South Korea, for example, environmentalists happily note that these
dangerous tensions have birthed the unlikely comeback of the endangered white-naped
 crane population.\footnote{White-Naped Crane. International Crane Foundation.
http://www.savingcranes.org/whitenapedcrane.html. Accessed 13 January 2009.} However, this circumstance is an unlikely impetus for the creation of
a DMZ. Mouer also points out fault in Turner’s citation of a historic Midwestern people
that have adapted to limited resources in this way and his transposition onto Algonquian
and Siouan people who maintained their own border for a millennium. Mouer replies,
rightly, that Turner’s argument portrays both sides as “static,” and quips, “of human
ecosystems preserve themselves so well from the destructive propensities of human
exploitation, then organizations like the Sierra Club and EPA hardly seem necessary.”\footnote{Mouer, 1986.}

Mouer’s article, on the other hand, provides a completely polarized view of
prehistoric Algonquian and Siouan people, concentrating on aggression and polarization
along the fall line similar to that seen in modern warfare (hence the term, “DMZ”). He begins his thesis:
“At the time [of the Age of Enlightenment] it may have been more easy to view boundaries simply as the phenomena of civilized statecraft, negotiated by reasonable men for the purpose of ensuring tranquility. However, “clarity and precision” rarely characterize boundaries between tribal societies.”

Because of this assumption, the role of aggression and competition in ecologically pressed societies becomes the rule in Mouer’s thesis, not a choice that individual communities, or later, lineages inside of confederacies and chiefdoms may choose to make. Mouer is still guilty of retrospective determinism whether or not these communities were aggregately “culturally consumed” or influenced by one another—he does not provide evidence of “military” standoffs, or even violence between the two groups, but assumes instead that they must have happened in order to create an uninhabited zone between the two. Defensive signs like palisaded villages, according to MacCord’s survey of fall zone sites, were far from a rule—the Potomac Creek site, which also bordered northern neighbors, was palisaded but there is no evidence of palisades at the Irwin, Comstock, or Kiser sites. While ethnographic accounts from John Smith suggest tensions at that time, there were no citations of previous raiding or open warfare. Further, the Piedmont and Coastal Plain seriation dating completed for the Comstock assemblage dates the settlement at AD 1510 at its latest. This date may question Mouer’s conjecture that villages inside of the fall zone were abandoned at around AD 1400 due to increasing tensions and unification on both sides of the Fall Line.

Both Turner and Mouer, in their in-depth discussions of the fall line as an irreparable boundary between two irreparably distinct groups, did not (other than linguistically) differentiate specifically between Algonquian and Siouan groups, or

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55 Ibid., 1986.
56 See Piedmont seriation dates, above.
Powhatan and Monacan societies. The fall line and the relations that define it were
instead considered aggregately, lumping in hundreds of years of relationship-building
between hundreds of ephemerally defined communities within two linguistically distinct
groups. Fall Zone communities are only the manifestations of competing influences
instead of groups with their own identities. This relationship building takes place in a
“setting” spanning over thousands of environmentally diverse square miles in central and
eastern Virginia. While it would be too much to ask of anyone to consider all of the
scenes of life at every occupied site touched by these boundary relations, most troubling
is the lack of consideration of the Fall Zone as an environment of its own, rather than the
sum of Algonquian and Siouan interaction. The tension in this relationship, based on
John Smith’s ethnography, is taken for granted as unchanging, “static” and formalized.
Would not the distinct qualities of the Fall Zone better and more conclusively determine
the relationship at the Virginia fall zone boundary? Both Mouer and Turner used the
same evidence and came to completely different conclusions. In essence, both use
aggregates much like Egloff and Potter use typologies. And, as argued earlier, typologies
may not be fitting for a description of a cultural boundary.

**Final Narrative**

Mouer’s narrative of life on the border is largely supported by Comstock’s
ceramic collection. Dietick et al. suggest, Piedmont peoples lived at the area of Comstock
into the early stages of the Late Woodland period, but were soon joined by people
moving westward from the Coastal Plain as early as 1000 or 1100 AD (see Figure 12),
but because of radiocarbon dating we know of a much earlier Coastal Plain influence that
began in the Middle Woodland period. Because prior technological knowledge was needed about the two regional traditions in order to combine them, I argue that at first the traditions existed separately from one another, as seen in the “first pattern” above. Then, I postulate that as the people became not just Algonquians or Siouan but settlers at Comstock, the wares began to blend technologically and artistically. The people at Comstock now had choices to make, allowing for greater expression. Additionally, settlement from diverse points meant greater interaction at Comstock and visitors, possibly suggesting feasting (as seen through fire-cracked rock and small, decorated vessels) and celebration. Motifs on rims, such as fingernail and shell impressions, were unique to Comstock and unique in each pot, and women chose to incorporate localized tempers as cited by MacCord’s 1985 article (mica and micaceous sand) to create a distinct and truly individual vessel. While the incorporation of mica as a temper clearly passed on cross-generationally (as seen in Townsend sherds dating to the mid-1400s), the other types of temper seen as viable were a woman’s choice, as was a distinct motif. However, as seen in Comstock’s chronology, the continuation of a Piedmont culture grew faint over time at Comstock, as Coastal Plains people centralized, consolidated their power into a chiefdom polity, and began to spread north and west. I postulate that the Piedmont people may have finally left to avoid incoming Coastal Plain settlers; Mouer states that it is unlikely Piedmont groups occupied the fall zone after 1450 AD.

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58 Unfortunately, I did not see decorated vessels from Irwin, Kiser, or Potomac Creek to judge similarities through an inter-site comparison.
59 Mouer 1983.
During the time of Comstock’s occupation, the peoples that settled there did not “belong” completely to either ethnicity, or either developing political entity. Throughout the entire archaeological record, feature by feature, there is evidence of both groups and of constant negotiation. While clearly larger cultural and political forces penetrated this “porous barrier,” Comstock settlers are independent of one ethnic and one political label. This is by no means limiting; it rather leaves space to think of settlers here as politically savvy peoples negotiating their own agenda and capitalizing on a “dead zone” through interaction with both groups.

The “microscale” will ultimately be how future researchers will battle forms of analysis which operate on pillars of essentialist assumptions. Without this, borderland sites like Comstock become lost in both space and time as historians and archaeologists like Mouer and Turner search for a pigeonhole. The typology is at the center of this storm as a symbol of essentialist analysis: they are operating on the assumption of uniformity where there simply is none. But the battle for agency moves beyond ceramics. Within the study of history, the study of the polities surrounding the fall line have created a false dichotomy between the Algonquian and Siouan peoples, leaving no room, culturally or politically, for in-between groups. As stated above, the assumption provided by Turner and Mouer was that these fall zone sites “belonged” to one group or another, depending on their temporal contexts. From contrasting several of MacCord’s sites and the Comstock assemblage, we can postulate that individual and localized negotiation was just as important of an influence as larger, more cohesive groups that existed.
contemporaneously, and that these localized negotiations extended into the realm of political self-definition.

Reconsidering perspectives on style and political savvy is necessary, as is a reconsideration of dating. Very reminiscent of the temporal demarcations listed off in Lewis Henry Morgan’s “Ethnical Periods,” the use of Woodland periods marked by “achievements” such as the evolution of pottery may also be in some cases presumptuous. Through the assumption of gradual change in material culture by region, the “early” “middle” and “late” Woodland categories are difficult to pin on Comstock without a clear technological chronology. Accordingly, “absolute seriation dating,” like in the case of Klein’s formula, may also be truly relative, leading to incorrect results. For these reasons, a new approach is discussed below.

**Free Dating Tips: Suggestions for the Future**

The unique character of every sherd, the singularity of every feature, and the differences at every fall zone site necessitate an individual and independent narrative for each cultural milieu. That does not mean, however, that patterns are impossible to find. As seen in the case studies by MacCord and Mouer above, patterns can be extrapolated from other sites to create generalities. We can also infer from the historical work of Rountree that the political hurricanes formulating the Monacan and Powhatan polities also shook up life at Comstock. Through considering this and through selecting helpful information from the seriation dating and typologies, the dates of Comstock are clarified.
While the Klein seriation dates differed from the radiocarbon dates by 250 to 600 years, their use in dating features at Comstock is not altogether lost. Preliminarily, a pattern can be ascertained. The space in time between the two radiocarbon dates roughly matches that same space between the two seriation dates for those features. (See the discussion of Klein, above, for specific example of Feature 11.) For example, the increase in both dates has in common an increase in shell-tempered and fabric-impressed wares and a decrease in the overall cord-marked wares. Therefore we can look to overall patterns like this to date features in a relative fashion. The narrative created, in turn, reflects an increase in Coastal Plain peoples’ influence in a relatively succinct amount of time (see chart for proposed feature dates).

Creating a chronology may also be possible due to general traits that Comstock people share in common with Piedmont and Coastal Plain peoples: the limits of technology, a helpful pillar of typologies. While completing primary research, I was struck by the lack of simple-stamped pottery typical of Late Woodland Townsend tradition. Only 8 identifiable sherds in the entire ceramic collection are classified as simple-stamped, and WMCAR’s study produced like results.\(^{60}\) This is because the technology of simple-stamping, which is the process of beating a vessel with a paddle wrapped in leather strips, had not yet been developed in prehistoric Virginia. These Late Woodland “Gaston wares” are not included in the archaeological record until 1200 AD, which, according to the seriation dates, was after the height of Comstock’s occupation.\(^{61}\)

If we can rely on the seriation dates for a chronology skeleton, the presence of the shell-

\(^{60}\) Dietrick, 1996.
tempered and fabric-impressed wares that became influential and ubiquitous at Comstock came roughly 100 to 200 years after the technology to create such a thin-walled, well-made vessel came to be in 900 AD. Establishing a timeframe between 900 and 1200 AD is in this way effortless, and seriation dates can be used to adjust around the radiocarbon dates accordingly.

Conclusion

This exploration of one fall line site has been less about the importance of Comstock in the Chesapeake World than the possibilities of individual creativity and expression at a cultural boundary. Archaeology, instead of ethnography and the age-worn English account, has the capability to accurately capture that expression. I would emphasize that the venue through which the individuals at Comstock negotiated competing influences is only one of many possible; others include the burial rituals at Kiser and community structure at Potomac Creek. Focusing on the ceramic vessel at Comstock allows for a direct perspective on pottery as a form of art, both functional and dynamic. The difference between Comstock and other sites like Kiser and Irwin, though in relatively the same space and political situation, proves that hostilities and friendships were not uniform and, more generally, that the chronological narrative for each site is far from static. I have attempted to both paint Comstock in its own unique light but place it in the larger web of tensions that invariably affected life on the borderland. While the Klein seriation formula was used experimentally for dating, the dynamic chronology of

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62 Ibid., 177.
Comstock is not lost without diagnostic artifact dating—it is made richer and more interesting through the human action required create the distinct and new at a dynamic and changing crossroads.
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Endnote

i Sources include contemporaries such as Captain Gabriel Archer (Hantman, 2001).

ii Previous scholarship includes surveys by Howard MacCord (1985), analysis by Daniel L. Mouer and E. Randolph Turner.

iii These arguments are seen in Gold (2004) and Hantman (1990)

iv The human remains found at Comstock included repetitive joint wear, about which the analyst concluded were caused by motions due to regular farming.


vi As discussed in Gold, 2000, and Dunham, 1990.


viii Barth, Fredrik. 1967. “Ethnicities and Boundaries.”

ix As seen in Gallivan and Moretti-Langholtz 2007; and Lightfoot and Martinez 1998.

x Discussions of Formulas in Klein, 1994.

xi An amount of mica and crushed-lithic sherds that were fabric-impressed were removed from this sum, as they exhibit evidence of both.

xii Because the Klein seriation dates are uncalibrated, the uncalibrated absolute dates are used here to create an effective comparison.

xiii Discussion of these ideas is found in Gallivan, 2003, and Rountree, 1990.

xiv The specific political formation of the Monacan peoples is discussed here and in Gold, 2004, but is also debated (Rountree 1990, Hantman 1990.)