

## ANCIENT LAKE ALBANY BEACHES IN ROTTERDAM

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Photos by Don Rittner

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### CROSS SECTION OF ANCIENT LAKE ALBANY SAND



East of the intersection of Burdeck St. and Campbell Rd. there is a large area where sand has been excavated and is occupied by a materials shed, an appliance store and storage of yard debris. Before any excavations were contemplated, the sandy bluff area was a wide open plain. Until the 1970s it was a flat sandy surface virtually free of trees, shrubs and grassy vegetation. The 1866 map of Rotterdam show this

little plain was used as a training track for horses. We know that in the mid-1800s Colonel David D. Campbell raised thoroughbred horses on his property below the sand bluff along the Poentickill (now Via Port Mall).

### Race Track Sketched on the 1866 Map of Rotterdam



It was on that sandy “race course” plain in 1914 that my father, the late Vincent J Schaefer (1906-1993) found his first arrowhead. My aunt Gertrude (age 4) and my uncle Paul Schaefer (age 6), who were with him, recalled that when Dad found the beautiful arrowhead he gave a shout and ran a half mile home to Arthur Ave. to show his mother, Rose Schaefer! He preserved that first arrowhead by mounting it on a board with a sand spike, reminiscent of the way he found it on the surface. Such a find lends credence to the many temporary campsites of Indigenous People who occupied the hills and flats along the Mohawk River 3500+ years or so ago.

The excavation of this sand deposit of Ancient Lake Albany started in the 1970s. A huge volume of sand was removed for various projects around the Town of Rotterdam and Schenectady County. The steep grassy slopes on West Campbell Road, at the edge of the excavation shows the top of the deposit of sand where the Mohawk River met Lake Albany some 15,000 years ago. A cataclysmic break in an ice and debris dam near Little Falls gave the primitive Mohawk Valley its general shape. The sandy bottom Lake Albany is evident here as well in the pine plains toward Albany, including the Pine Bush Preserve.

During 2020-2023 thousands more yards of sand were removed from the sand bluff. In the fall of 2023 a warehouse building required more excavation which uncovered some interesting layering in the sand — perhaps beaches left behind by the ebb and flow of waters of Ancient Lake Albany. We know that lake covered our region before it was occupied by the Dutch settlers in the mid 1600s, and before them Indigenous People hunting and foraging in small groups, leaving behind stone implements near their temporary encampments.....including an occasional arrowhead!

Union College Professor Emeritus of Geological Sciences, George Shaw was asked to comment on the striking sand layers seen on the top of the bluff. He described them as cross-bedded sand layers associated with the deltaic deposits of Ancient Lake Albany. He pointed out that several miles upstream, near Lock Nine of the Barge Canal, deposits of gravel can be observed. He pointed out that the deposits were all connected to the glacial meltwater of Ancient Lake Iroquois (Lake Ontario) that was held behind an ice & debris dam at Little Falls. As mentioned, when the dam broke, tons of boulders, gravels, and sand were transported here and deposited along the edge of Lake Albany that covered our area.

The State Geologist was notified about the exposed sand bluff site and he implemented a sampling strategy to try to “date” the 50-75 foot sand bank. Samples were taken from the base, middle and top of the excavated area. He plans to measure chemical changes in ion composition of the sandy quartz grains that change with exposure to sunlight. Results of this dating method will be shared when they become available.

**PANORAMA PHOTO OF LAKE ALBANY “SHORE-LINE” SHOWING A REMNANT SAND DUNE (Rittner)**

