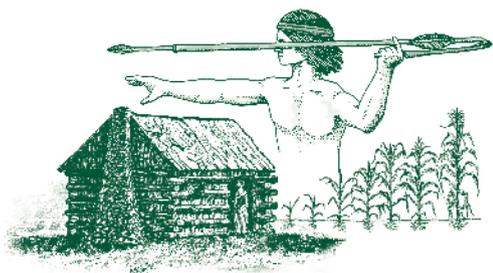


# UP FRONT



## MEADOWCROFT

By David Scofield, Meadowcroft Director

### The Peopling of America

As autumn's crisp, cool air collaborates with shortening days, our hillsides will soon become awash with color. Based on evidence at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter, people have witnessed the changing leaves and anticipated winter's approach in Western Pennsylvania for at least 16,000 years. As anthropologists unearthed evidence of early human presence, they also began to wonder exactly how many people there were. Two new *Peopling of America* kiosk exhibits at Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Pittsburgh International Airport explore events in American history that affected the country's population.

Understanding when people first arrived on the North American continent has been the subject of scholarly debate since at least the late 19th century.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, this frequently passionate (and occasionally heated) discourse has been shaped by the discovery and subsequent archaeological excavation of sites like the Meadowcroft Rockshelter, first excavated in 1973. The discovery of other early sites such as Cactus Hill in Virginia and Monte Verde in South America has also contributed to the body of evidence that demonstrates a much earlier human presence in America than previously thought.

In addition to the question of when people arrived on the continent, there is an equally difficult question: How many were there? Although precise population figures of prehistoric people will never be known, anthropologists have made many

attempts to estimate their numbers. According to noted Smithsonian anthropologist Douglas H. Ubelaker, "There is no perfect approach to estimating population size; all available databases are flawed to some extent and require assumptions and interpretations to generate estimates."<sup>2</sup> Ubelaker's best estimate is that prior to Christopher Columbus's arrival in 1492, more than 1.8 million American Indians inhabited the continent. That population declined to its nadir of 500,000 by 1900 and, according to U.S. census data, has now climbed to more than 2.9 million people who identified themselves in 2010 as American Indian or Alaska Native.

The new *Peopling of America* kiosk exhibit at Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village looks at some of the key factors that have affected our population over the last 16,000 years. A companion kiosk in Pittsburgh International Airport features an animated map of America that illustrates the dramatic population growth from perhaps less than 50,000 people circa 14,000 BC to more than 310 million Americans today.

These new kiosks also feature seven high-definition videos that explore significant events that affected population growth: the arrival of the first groups of hunter-gatherers on the continent; the establishment of permanent villages made possible



A behind-the-scenes look at Meadowcroft's 16th century Indian village during the video shoot for *The Peopling of America*, funded by the Colcom Foundation.

Photos by David Scofield.

The video envisions prehistoric people traveling along Cross Creek and camping at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter as early as 16,000 years ago.



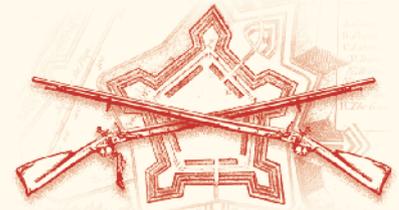
by the advent of agriculture; the arrival of Europeans in the 18th century; the importation of enslaved Africans; the great wave of immigration in late the 19th and early 20th centuries; the worldwide flu epidemic of 1918; and current immigration to America. The Meadowcroft version of the kiosk also contains an interactive time line that explores other significant events affecting the population in America from prehistory to the present.

So as you enjoy the change of seasons, consider that you are but the latest of the hundreds of generations of people to experience this brilliant color display in Western Pennsylvania. 

Visit Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village to learn more about the *Peopling of America*. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday through Labor Day. In September and October Meadowcroft is open Saturdays and Sundays only, before concluding the 2011 season Sunday, October 30.

<sup>1</sup> For a more complete discussion of the early exploits of American archaeology see J.M. Adovasio and Jake Page, *The First Americans, In Pursuit of Archaeology's Greatest Mystery* (New York: Random House, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker, eds., *Disease and Demography in the Americas* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 169.



## FORT PITT MUSEUM

The *New-York Journal* ran a short piece on Western Pennsylvania on June 2, 1792. The column, "American Occurrences," described the public ceremonies at the official commissioning of Fort Fayette, constructed by the United States to replace the aging Fort Pitt as its military post in Pittsburgh.

The fort begun last winter at this place stands on the Allegheny river, within 100 yards of the bank, on a beautiful rising ground, about one quarter of a mile higher up than the old garrison of Fort Pitt. It is completely stockaded in... Capt. Hughes, of the 2nd United States regiment, commands the fort, which, last Saturday, the 12th of May, was named "Fort Fayette." The ceremonial was as follows: About two o'clock, the American flag of fifteen stripes was hoisted on a staff of 92 feet in height. The company assembled, consisting of the principal gentlemen of the town, were invited to a cold collation and a glass of wine: At the first toast, two pieces of ordnance were discharged ... at these discharges the fort received its name—then a treble discharge in honor of the President of the United States, and fifteen rounds for the fifteen states. 