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## Mystery Hill

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**B**Y the beginning of May 1975, several signs began to warn us that there was a faint but real possibility that we might be on the verge of solving the most baffling problem of American archeology, namely the identity of the builders of the mysterious "root cellars" of the northeastern states and the date of their occupation. These signs were:

- (1) The so-called "root-cellars" appeared to be the work of megalithic people; that is, they resembled corresponding structures in Europe dating from the Bronze Age and known to have been in use by the Celts in classical times.
- (2) We now knew that Celtic inscriptions occur in Spain and Portugal, associated with Iberian Punic inscriptions, and in the vicinity of megalithic structures.
- (3) Iberian Punic inscriptions were identified by me at sites near Boston to which I was taken by James Whittall. These inscriptions (see page 89) appeared to be the work of casual voyagers visiting America during the era of about 500-300 B.C.

Although my researches up to this time had been related to inscriptions of Europe and the Far East, Jim Whittall perceived that the parallels between the archeological settings in New England and in western Europe were now much clearer than had previously been realized. He now began to show me the files of photographs taken by Malcolm B. Pearson over the previous 35 years, illustrating the principal features of the so-called "root cellars" and other apparently megalithic structures. In company with Professor Norman Totten, Chairman of the Department of History at Bentley College, we studied these and pored over every detail we could make out, searching for traces of Ogam or other lettering that might disclose if any Celtic occupation had occurred. None could be detected. Re-

luctantly I had to tell Jim that unless there were inscriptions I could throw no light on the problem.

Nonetheless, despite these discouraging results Jim Whittall and I visited the best-known of the sites on June 14. This is Mystery Hill, New Hampshire, a complex of stone-slab chambers and associated henge stones oriented so that the sun sets behind particular standing stones on the days of the equinox and the summer and winter solstices (see chapter 7). The site covers approximately 20 acres, mostly occupied by second-growth woodland through which run peculiarly constructed dry-stone walls with tall, pointed, triangular stones occurring at regular intervals in the walls. It includes an area of about one acre covered by a maze of massive stone chambers with various other striking but puzzling features, such as the so-called Table of Sacrifice (page 84).

Some of the slab chambers reminded me of the *dunans* ("little fortresses") of the ancient Goidelic Celts that I had studied in Scotland many years before. I was struck by the occurrence all over the site of flat flagstones of triangular outline, and these reminded me of the triangular slabs I had seen set above the lintels of *dunans* in northern Scotland. Although the things that I was shown that day by Robert Stone, the present owner and devoted protector of the site, made a profound impression on me, the one feature for which I was particularly alerted was, of course, whether or not any inscriptions had been found at Mystery Hill. It now turned out that such had indeed been found, and fortunately preserved in the museum on the site, but it had not been realized that the strangely marked stones carried anything that could be read as writing. Writing it certainly was that I saw before me, not the Celtic script I had hoped for, but severely weathered Iberian Punic script. Before I refer further to these, I should here interpolate some short outline of the history of the site as an archeological object.

When the first colonial settlers came to New England they found numerous stone buildings of one storey, circular or rectangular in form, up to 30 feet in length (usually half that) and up to 10 feet wide and 8 feet high or more. Some were completely sunken beneath the ground and were only discovered years later when a roof caved in or a plow or pick-axe penetrated the chamber. Others were partly buried or had mounds of earth covering them and trees growing from the top of such a size as to indicate an age of at least 250 years. Still others were wholly above ground or excavated into the side of a hill. All were made of large stones and included roof slabs weighing several tons. Many had elaborate "smoke holes" and other recesses built into the walls.

The colonists, asking no questions apparently, accepted these structures as the work of vanished Indian tribesmen and put them to use as





The so-called Table of Sacrifice at Mystery Hill, New Hampshire, is a large rectangular rock slab bordered by runnels that drain into a former receptacle placed at the front right corner. Although its function is still uncertain, James Whittall on his 1975 expedition to Portugal learned that some thirty similar grooved tables have now been discovered on ancient sites in that country, some of them known to be associated with burial grounds. *Norman Totten*

storage cellars for their root crops. Some were used as secret hide-outs by escaped slaves and others were made to serve as illicit whiskey distilleries. Most were referred to guardedly if at all as "root cellars," and in the course of time large numbers of them were dismantled and their stones used for making dry-stone walls. This latter fact is abundantly attested by the number of temple dedications we have since found in stone walls together with much other evidence as to the origin of the large stones in the walls.

The large complex of slab buildings now called Mystery Hill became the property of a settler named Pattee, who arrived in North Salem, New Hampshire, in 1823. In the following twenty-five years about 40 percent of the stone structures were destroyed or damaged severely by building contractors who visited the area to obtain stone for dams and bridges.

Until 1893 no one seems to have stopped to think whether these New England structures might have a remote origin. Almost everyone by this time supposed that their own forebears had built the "root cellars," and this became the accepted belief of archeologists, who began to speak of them as colonial in date. This is despite the fact that Professor Hugh

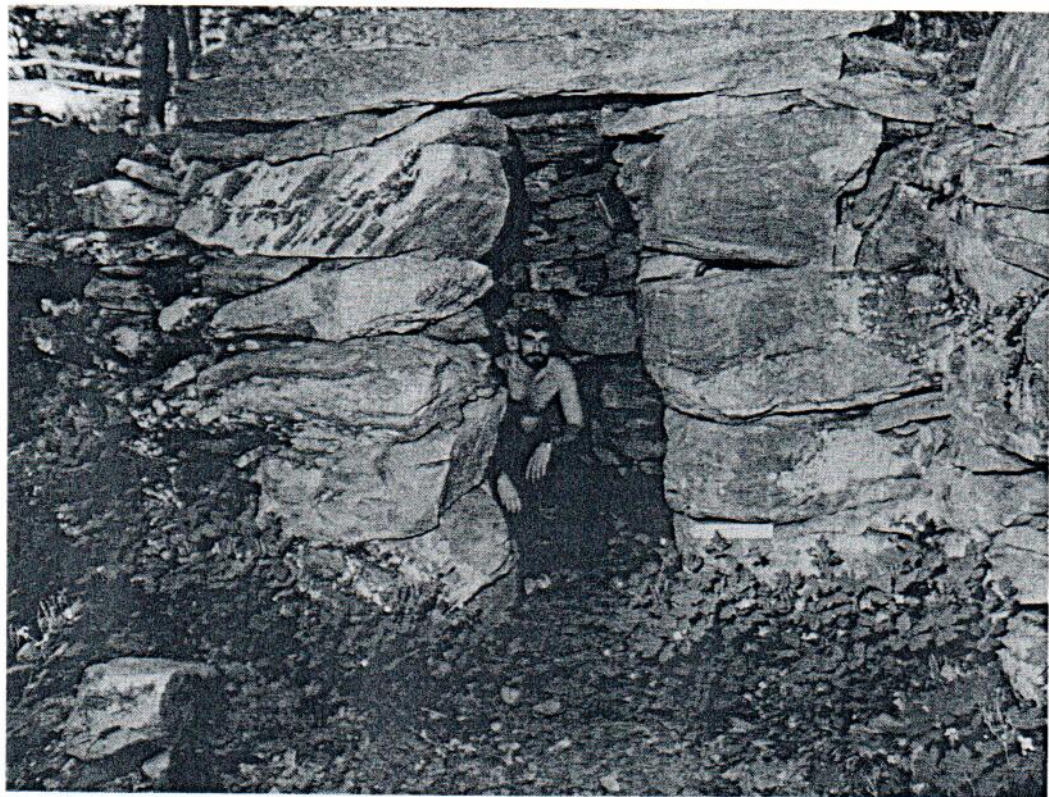
Morrison, Chairman of the Department of Architecture at Dartmouth College and a leading authority on colonial architecture, declined to accept this interpretation. The *Milford Journal* of April 26, 1893, carried an article by Daniel Fiske in which he drew attention to peculiar unexplained features of what is now known as the Upton Chamber, Massachusetts.

In 1928 the parents of Malcolm Pearson purchased the Upton property, not knowing that it contained the mysterious chamber. This, when noticed, engaged the interest of Malcolm, then a young man; and on learning of Olaf Strandwold's interest in Norse relics, Malcolm Pearson drew the former's attention to the structure in 1935. Meantime an article by a clergyman of Methuen appeared in the *Boston Globe* in 1936, making reference to unexplained "stoneworks" at North Salem. This proved to be the Pattee property, now called Mystery Hill. Shortly after, William Goodwin was directed to Pearson by Strandwold, and Malcolm took him to North Salem. Goodwin purchased the property and erected a protective fence about it. Soon after he began to restore and study the ruins.

Goodwin became convinced that the Mystery Hill chambers must be the work of Irish Culdee monks, and devoted the rest of his life to endeavours to prove this hypothesis. The discouragement he received from archeologists whom he consulted never led him to give up his views, but he was unable to convince any reputable authority that the structures were ancient. In 1950, after Goodwin's death, Malcolm Pearson inherited the property at Mystery Hill. He was not able to leave his professional work in order to live on the site, which accordingly became subject to vandalism. To avoid further destruction he was glad to lease it to Robert Stone, the present site director, in 1950, and in 1965 Bob Stone purchased the property, which he had already opened to the public and protected from further vandalism. Since that time archeological work has proceeded, though much hampered by lack of funds, for no professional archeologists could be found to support the theory of the antiquity of the site.

From 1967 onwards Geochron Laboratories, Cambridge, Massachusetts, made a series of radiocarbon determinations on samples of charcoal obtained by James Whittall at specified levels in Mystery Hill. Copies of the letters exchanged by Robert E. Stone and Harold W. Krueger on these determinations (see Bibliography) have been deposited in the Widener Library archives at Harvard University. These carbon analyses point to periods of occupation of the Mystery Hill site extending back to the second millennium B.C. Dr. Krueger, in a report dated September 18, 1967, stresses that one of the buildings that professional archeologists have claimed to be the work of Pattee in the nineteenth century is in fact penetrated by the roots of a tree whose carbon age is determined to be

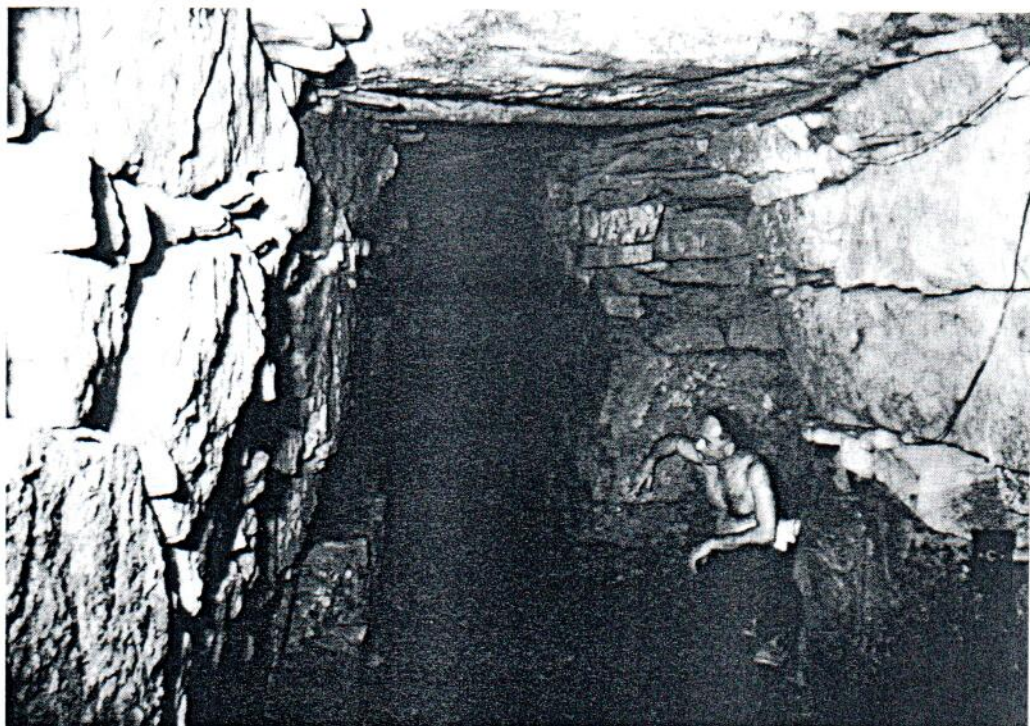




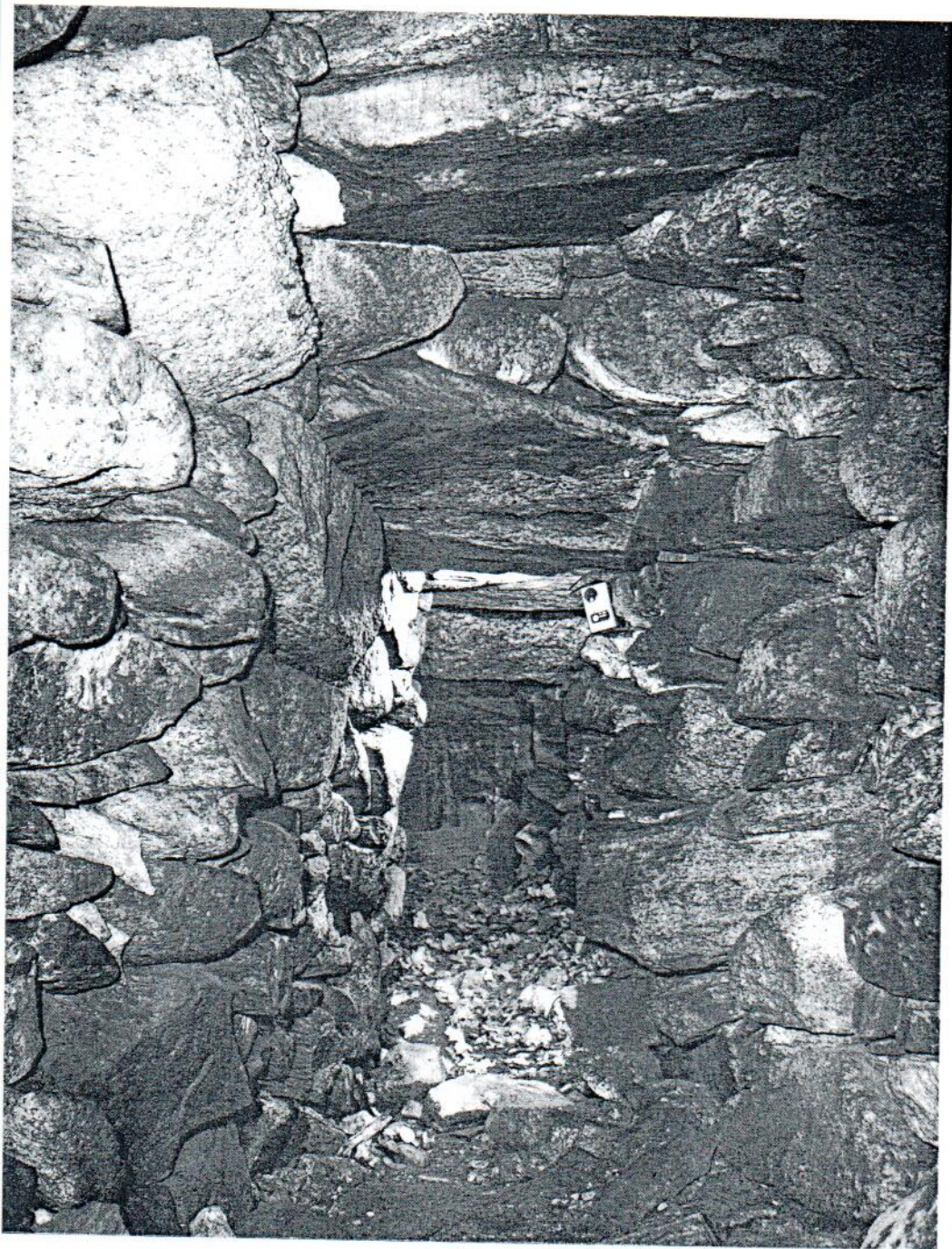
Small megalithic chamber at Mystery Hill, North Salem, New Hampshire. The entrance faces south, and the proportions of the chamber suggest its possible use in connection with observation of the midwinter solstice by means of the sun's noon shadow. *Peter J. Garfall*

Two methods of roof construction employed at Mystery Hill, New Hampshire. Above, corbelling, using small slabs progressively overlapped toward the center and topped by small capstones. Below, lintels spanning the entire chamber, used where large flat slabs are available, leveling adjusted by wedges at left of ceiling. *Peter J. Garfall, Joseph D. Germano*









Subterranean chamber at Upton, Massachusetts. It was Pearson's interest in this unexplained building that led him to Mystery Hill, and hence to Goodwin's eventual purchase and protection of that important site. *Malcolm D. Pearson*





Archeologist James P. Whittall II with the Mill River stele, near Boston. The inscription in ancient Iberian letters warns passersby not to loiter as the site is a burial ground. Recently a stele with a similar inscription was excavated from an ancient cemetery near Hudade do Pêgo, in Portugal.



1690 A.D.  $\pm$  90 years. In 1975 the ruins are still considered by many to lack archeological context, despite the radio-carbon dating.

Two societies have been established by interested people who believe the stone chambers of New England are ancient structures. One, the New England Antiquities Research Association, is particularly linked with Mystery Hill and was founded by Robert Stone. The other, the Early Sites Research Society, is the outcome of reviving an earlier society with a similar name established in Vermont and New Hampshire by Dr. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Dr. Hugh Morrison, and other professional archeologists; this group is interested in all so-called "root cellars" and related structures. The Bibliography lists some documents relative to the Society's origins. Associated with Robert Stone in his work of exploring and protecting the Mystery Hill site are his wife Dorothy, their son Dennis and cousin Osborn Stone, and various local residents. A small museum and refreshment center has been established on the site for the convenience of visitors, and thus the work of protecting the site has proceeded, fortified by the enthusiasm of the group and the belief that they are custodians to a part of America's remote past.

In this belief they are certainly correct. The inscribed stones that I was permitted to study after my first visit to the site disclosed that one of the chambers on the site was dedicated to the Phoenician god *Baal*. The triangular tablet carrying this information in Iberian Punic script was found some years ago by James Whittall. The probability is that other chambers on Mystery Hill were dedicated to other divinities, and that the whole complex was a religious center and astronomical observatory. I alerted Bob Stone as to the probable importance of triangular stones as likely inscribed objects, and he forthwith began a search for them.

On July 9, 1975, I obtained Bob Stone's permission to bring Professor George Carter to inspect the site, together with a party including Rene, George's wife Alberta, Os Stone, and some of Bob's assistants. George, like me, was deeply impressed by what he saw, and although he did not feel competent to judge such objects as the peculiar sacrificial table, he did sense the same antiquity as I had when confronted with the inscribed dedication in Iberian Punic to the sun god *Baal*.

And it was while we were examining the chamber where Jim Whittall had discovered the *Baal* tablet that the most important find up to that time took place. A shout from Bob Stone told us he had found another tablet in the adjacent dry-stone wall. As he brushed away the adhering dirt there came into clear view a line of Ogam script that read B-B-L. I could only conclude that this is in the same vowelless style as the Punic script and the same as the Portuguese and Spanish Ogam, and the reading was therefore to be taken as *Bi Bel*, that is, "Dedicated to Bel." *Bel* is the





One of Whittall's most important finds was this triangular dedication tablet, found in the ruins of a small rectangular stone chamber at Mystery Hill, New Hampshire, now recognized as a winter solstice noon transit temple-observatory. The inscription in Iberian characters reads, from right to left, "To Baal of the Canaanites (Phoenicians), this in dedication." Subsequently an Ogam dedication was also found by Robert Stone, showing that Bel (the sun god of the Celts) was identified with Baal of the Semitic peoples. *Peter J. Garfall*

Celtic sun god, long suspected (but until now never proven) to be the same god as the Phoenician Baal. One swallow does not a summer make, so we were still cautious, for Ogam-like markings can be produced occasionally by fortuitous means, though this inscription was very clearly and neatly cut.

As events quickly showed, we had the solution in our hands. Within ten days we were seeing dozens of Ogam inscriptions on another less-damaged but more remote site in central Vermont. It became clear that ancient Celts had built the New England megalithic chambers and that Phoenician mariners were welcome visitors, permitted to worship at the Celtic sanctuaries and allowed to make dedications in their own language.



The antiquity of Mystery Hill inscriptions could now be confidently set at about 800-600 B.C. (to judge by the writing style of the associated Phoenician inscriptions) and it was clear that Goidelic Celts were the occupants at that date, and in all probability the builders too. We all knew there would be a tough fight ahead to obtain a means of publication of our finds; and that indeed proved to be the case.

The full significance of the Mystery Hill complex did not at first appear clear, and for a while I thought there had been an initial Celtic occupation followed by a Punic phase. These problems were cleared up once we began work in the Vermont area. There were also additional inscriptions found soon afterwards at Mystery Hill, one of them showing that Celts still occupied the site as late as the century following the introduction of the reformed calendar of Julius Caesar in 45 B.C. Of this more is said later in this book. Before continuing the account of our Celtic inquiries I must turn to consider parallel studies that led us to realize that Celts were by no means the only visitors or colonists who came to the Atlantic shores of America. As has already been made clear, Phoenicians were certainly visitors to the Celtic sites, and in all likelihood were conducting affairs of their own over here. To this matter some attention must now be given.