

2

COMPONENT I AT WAWAWAI (45WT39):  
THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PERIOD OCCUPATION

By

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RODERICK SPRAGUE

## INTRODUCTION

Wawawai (45WT39) is located on the east side of the Snake River about one-half mile downstream from the former townsite of Wawawai, Whitman County, Washington (Fig. 1). The site is located between the confluences of two small streams, and rests on the surface of the bar about two meters above the active floodplain. The site is at the west end of Wawawai Bar in the NE 1/4, NE 1/4, Sec. 3, T13N, R43E. The name of the locality, Wawawai, is a Nez Perce place name which may mean either fish-hook place, mosquito place or, if the root is Chirook jargon, talking place.

The first historic reference to the locality is from the journals of Lewis and Clark, where they note that on October 11, 1805, they stopped and purchased food for lunch (Thwaites 1904:107). During the period from the 1850's to perhaps 1877 a Palus village was located in the Wawawai locality, in the later portion under the leadership of HusishusisKute (Crithfield 1964:3; Josephy 1965:501). The area was available for white settlement after the Treaty of 1863. However, the first settlers did not arrive at Wawawai until after about 1875 (Crithfield 1964:7). Orchards were planted soon thereafter. From the early 1880's until 1920, Nez Perce (and probably Palus also) came from the reservation at Lapwai to Wawawai to pick fruit in the orchards (Crithfield 1964:35). The site itself was not utilized as an orchard by white settlers but may have been a harvest camp used by the Indians.

The site was discovered during the 1966 Lower Granite Reservoir Survey, at which time three areas of the site were recorded: Areas A, B, and C. Area A was tested in 1968. Area B was first tested in 1970 and excavated in 1971. Area C was tested by David G. Rice of the University of Idaho with a small weekend excavation during the summer of 1971.

Earlier tests in Area B indicated that the site should yield data concerning the late Harder Phase (? AD 500-1300) and the Piquin Phase (? AD 1300-1700 ?) (Leonhardy and Rice 1970:1). The tests did not reveal a historic component in the site. Thus, it came as a complete

surprise when an aboriginal occupation containing Euro-American material was discovered immediately below the surface. It might be added that this was a pleasant surprise, for little is known about historic occupation sites on the Lower Snake River. The information available is primarily from burial sites (Sprague 1959, 1965, 1967; Combes 1968; Rodeffer and Rodeffer 1972; Rodeffer 1972), although Sprague and Combes (1966) report a historic component at Thorn Thicket (45WT35). In addition, the Palus Village (45FR36) was tested in 1968 (Rice, personal communication) and the terminal occupation at Wexpúsnime (45GA61) may date very early in the Ethnographic Period (Leonhardy et al 1971:15; Leonhardy and Rice 1970:20).

The site contained good evidence for three levels of features and two structures which can be assigned to the Ethnographic Period. The upper two levels were clearly historic in age and contained assemblages of aboriginal and Euro-American artifacts. The lower level contained very little Euro-American material. Everything below these three levels is definitely prehistoric. The earlier structure (Structure 2) was made from planks and dates ca. 1800. The later structure (Structure 1) was a conical lodge and dates ca. 1860.

Full time excavations were conducted from June 23 to August 28, 1971, with a crew of ten to twelve students and volunteers. The excavations recovered assemblages referable to the Numípu Phase, Piqúnin Phase, late Harder Phase, and Tucannon Phases (Leonhardy and Rice 1970) (Table 1). This paper deals only with the material that is clearly historic in age, therefore within the Ethnographic Period. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and describe the assemblage which contained the Euro-American materials, and to characterize a component that is referable to the Numípu Phase which Leonhardy and Rice (1970) proposed as the archaeological manifestation of known peoples, the Nez Perce and Palus, in the Lower Snake River Region.

### Structure 2

The lower structure lies within Stratum IB. Unfortunately, there is not enough information about it to attempt a reconstruction at this time. The evidence for this structure consists of casts which are often well-defined and form a series of parallel lines running both north-south and east-west (Fig. 5). They are filled with a light, almost ashy, mixed material and intrude into a dark mottled soil in the area north of 58N and into a more uniform light brown soil to the south. It is suggested that these are the casts of planks; they are not a result of plow, root or rodent activity.

The Euro-American artifacts associated with Structure 2 include an offset awl, a wine bottle fragment, one tinkler, one forged nail, and a wood screw.

### Chronology of the Structures

Structure 1, the conical house, is dated on the basis of the Euro-American artifacts (Table 3) to the period 1840 to 1860, although it may well date as late as 1870 (Roderick Sprague, personal communication). I intuitively feel that it dates slightly after 1860. The date is primarily based on bead types.

TABLE 3

#### DATEABLE ARTIFACTS ASSOCIATED WITH STRUCTURE 1

| Date      | Artifacts                        | Source                                           |
|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1760-1785 | Brass Button (Cat. 70)           | Olsen 1963:552                                   |
| 1785-1800 | Brass Button (Cat. 69)           | Olsen 1963:552                                   |
| 1800-1860 | Trouser Button (Cat. 71)         | Olsen 1963:552                                   |
| 1830-1870 | Cut Square Nails<br>(Cat. 73-79) | Fontana and Green-<br>leaf 1962:54-55            |
| 1840-1860 | Glass Beads (Cat. 47-49)         | Roderick Sprague,<br>personal com-<br>munication |

It should be noted that of the artifacts in Table 3 the dates given are manufacturing dates, with the exception of the dates for the beads. Sprague regards the beads as representative of the period 1840 to 1860 based on his experience with burials of that period.

Structure 2 contained no dateable artifacts so it has been assigned a date based largely upon intuition. Since it is stratigraphically below Structure 1, it obviously predates it; hence it is at least prior to 1840. Because of the discontinuity, which represents a period of nondeposition, it is assumed that it dates several decades before 1840. It does belong in the Ethnographic Period since it contained Euro-American material; therefore, at least part of its use was after about 1770 (Weatherford 1971: 51), though its construction could conceivably predate that. Thus, it dates in the period 1770 to 1840, although more likely 1770 to 1810. An intuitive date of ca. 1800 is given for Structure 2.

## ACTIVITY AREAS

### Areas A and B

Two activity areas are associated with Structure 1. These areas are in the south end of the excavation (Fig. 4). Area A is located about two meters to the east of the house. Area B is around the southern and western perimeter of the house.

Area A has a disproportionate number of knives, flake knives, flake scrapers, and, particularly, utilized cobble spalls. In an area of 16 square meters were five utilized spalls, an iron knife, twelve flake knives, five flake scrapers, and an iron canoe (?) patch. Six more flake tools, a knife, and a pounding stone were found in the contiguous squares. Clearly this was a work area. While it is possible that this density was caused by the area being an old housepit, there is no evidence that such was the case.

Area B is to the south and west of the house. It may have extended to the southeast as well, but that area was disturbed by a large pothole. If it did indeed extend that far then this may actually be an extension of

### Ornaments and Clothing

Personal ornaments of aboriginal origin include an incisor pendant, a bone bead, 23 shell disc beads (Fig. 10), and 11 iron tinklers (Fig. 8). The iron tinklers were classed as large and small, though there was considerable variation within each category. These tinklers, or conical clapperless bells, are thought to have been manufactured at this site since the assemblage includes two trapezoidal pieces of flat iron identical in form to that of an unrolled tinkler. One of these pieces articulated with a fragment of a canister, possibly a powder can. Thus, we have the raw material, a tinkler blank, and the finished tinklers. This seems sufficient evidence that they were making their own tinklers at Wawawai.

Personal ornaments and parts of clothing that are of Euro-American origin include glass beads, a perforated thimble tinkler, and buttons. The glass beads are of three basic forms of manufacture: tubular drawn faceted beads, tubular drawn tumbled beads, and mandrel wound beads (Fig. 10). While finer distinctions could be made, the four major forms of faceted beads are: a long milky white cylindrical bead, large dark green beads, large and small dark blue so-called Russian Trade beads. The problem in designating the latter as such is recognized; however, such a description conveys the general idea of its form. The tubular drawn tumbled beads, often called seed beads, are small, opaque, robin-egg blue doughnut shaped beads. The mandrel wound beads are of two types: a large opaque white glass often referred to as porcelain, and two pea-sized blue-green transparent spherical beads. According to Sprague (personal communication) these should date Assemblage IA sometime in the period 1840 to 1860 although feasibly as early as 1830 and as late as 1870. The dates are suggested because of the absence of both earlier and later varieties of beads.

Four buttons were recovered: two plain military brass, one cast white-metal button, and one shell button (Fig. 8). The large brass military button, known as a "Tombac" button, was made between 1760 and 1785



## APPENDIX 1

Component I: Artifact Description

All material is cryptocrystalline silica unless otherwise indicated.

Category 1: Base notched projectile points

Blade triangular; tip acute; base straight to convex; edges slightly concave to convex; triangular notches removed from base form prominent barbs and straight to expanding stem; tip of barbs generally anterior to base; butt of stem straight to convex; four specimens have distinct notch removed from butt of stem; maximum width at tip of barbs.

Category 2: Corner notched projectile points, group 1

Blade triangular; tip acute; base straight to convex; edges slightly concave to slightly convex; triangular notches removed from corners forming short barbs and straight to expanding stem; tip of barbs generally anterior to base.

Category 3: Corner notched projectile points, group 2

Blade triangular; tip acute; straight sides; base convex; triangular notches removed from corner forming shoulders and expanding stem.

Category 4: Small side notched projectile point, group 1

Blade triangular; tip acute; edges straight; base straight; triangular notches removed laterally from edge form straight shoulders and prominent expanding stem; maximum width at the base.

Category 5: Small side notched projectile point, group 2

Blade triangular; tip acute; sides slightly concave to slightly convex; base prominently concave; prominent notches removed laterally; maximum width posterior to notch. One is obsidian.

Comment: similar to forms usually called Desert Side Notched.

Category 42: Bone cylinder

Slightly tapered cylinder of worked bone; end blunt; edges smoothed; polished; parallel cut marks on some of surface; broken.

Category 43: Bone awl

Split end fragment of deer long bone sharpened to a point.

Category 44: Incisor pendant

Wapiti (?) incisor; enamel end broken off; hole drilled biconically; hole 5 mm from proximal end of tooth.

Category 45: Bone bead

Cylindrical; drilled biconically; edges at right angle; sharp.

Category 46: Shell beads

Flat; doughnut shaped; between 1 and 3 mm thick hole drilled in center; made from river mussel.

Component II: Artifacts of Euro-American MaterialCategory 47: Tubular drawn beads, faceted

Group A: Cylindrical; ends slightly tapered; clear; transparent; complex, having three or more elements, in this specimen: clear, then milky white, then clear elements; facets form parallelogram.

Group B: Cylindrical; dark blue; transparent; simple, only one element; facets hexagonal. Munsell 7.5 PB 2/8.

Group C: Same as Group B except for compound elements, light blue inner layer, dark blue outer layer. Munsell 7.5 PB 4/12.

Group D: Same as Group B except for overall size being smaller. Munsell 7.5 PB 2/8.



Category 47: continued

Group E: Same as Group D, except that these are compound, with light blue inner layer. Munsell 7.5 PB 4/12.

Group F: Same as Groups D and E, except that this has two light blue and two dark blue elements alternating, complex. Munsell 7.5 PB 4/12.

Group G: Same as Group B, except in color: dark green instead of dark blue.

Group H: Same as Group G, except that the diameter of the hole is relatively larger forming a thin walled bead.

Category 48: Tubular drawn beads, rounded

Group A: Fragment; cylindrical; red; edges worn almost smooth.

Group B: Torus shaped; deep blue; translucent; simple; Munsell 10B 5/10 two specimens; 5 PB 5/12 one specimen.

Category 49: Mandrel wound, rounded

Group A: Spherical; medium blue; transparent; simple; Munsell 10 BG 3/6.

Group B: Spherical; white; opaque; simple.

Category 50: Window glass fragment

Fragment of a transparent flat sheet of glass.

Category 51: Bottle glass fragments

Thick; green; transparent; fragment; concavo-convex cross section transversally; tapering thickness longitudinally; the small chips removed along some edges not intentional.

Category 52: Iron tinklers, small

Small conical clapperless bells made from flat sheets of iron; probably made from can in Category 87, 88 or 89.