

**EXCAVATIONS AT SPOKANE HOUSE—
FORT SPOKANE HISTORIC SITE**

1962-1963

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1964

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the North West Company, a Canadian firm, started exploration of the Rocky Mountains and areas west with interest in exploitation of the fur resources of these areas. David Thompson, explorer-geographer with the North West Company, made his way across the Rocky Mountains in 1807. As a result of these explorations, the trading posts of Kootenai House, Kullyspell House, and Saleesh House were established (Kingston 1948: 181). In 1810, Thompson established at the confluence of the Little Spokane and Spokane Rivers a post which was called Spokane House. Information is wanting regarding the size, types, and numbers of buildings erected which made up this early trading post.

In 1811, John Jacob Astor, realizing the profits that could be made in the fur trading business, organized the Pacific Fur Company. This action resulted ultimately in the erection, in 1812, of Fort Spokane near the North West Company's Spokane House. News of the outbreak of the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, as well as other disappointing events, led the Astorians to sell out to the North West Company; thus the North West Company came into possession of Fort Spokane, which was occupied immediately.

In 1821, by an act of Parliament, the Canadian North West Company was absorbed by the British Hudson Bay Company. Finally, in 1826, it was realized that the Spokane area was not an ideal location for fur trading, and by April of 1826, a move to Kettle Falls was completed, thus ending almost 16 years of continuous occupation of the Spokane area by the early fur traders (see Table 1).

The remaining piece, quite different than any of the above, is thin and glazed black with very small flecks of brown. Its origin is, at this time, unknown.

Glass

Eighty glass fragments were recovered. Thickness of these pieces ranges from 1/16 to 6/16 of an inch. No identifiable marks were present on any of these pieces; some are certainly from bottles, but most are thought to be window glass. Fifteen pieces (clearly from bottles) are dark green, ten have a slight green tint, two are amber in color, and the remaining fragments are clear.

Metal Objects

Fifty-seven unidentified pieces of iron, 14 tin fragments, and 18 brass and copper pieces were cataloged. The iron includes a variety of sizes and shapes and, in most cases, is very badly oxidized. At least nine of the iron fragments and three of the brass pieces possess evidence of having been cut by hammer and chisel. This could have been done by the occupants of the fort, but may have been done by Indians. Such trimming is a crude but effective method of cutting out metal projectile points, two of which were recovered. One of the brass fragments also has a piece cut out of it which roughly resembles a point (Figure 25; n).

One brass fragment possessed a rolled edge which may be part of a cup. There were also two rather curiously incised shafts of brass (Figure 25; k, l).

The tin fragments may have been from some early containers which could easily fall within the time period of interest.

The iron-handled portion of a large butcher knife was found measuring 2-3/8 inches in length and 1-5/16 inches in width with a thickness of 3/32 of an inch. This knife fragment possesses two 5/32 of an inch perforations with which the handle was secured (Figure 21; r).

Trade Beads

The excavations of 1962 did not recover many beads, probably because the work was not in the fort area itself, and were not in the area of intensive Indian occupation. Approximately 20 trade beads were retrieved. Eighteen are blue of which 14 are translucent, roughly spherical in shape, and range in size around a dimension of 5 by 7 mm (Figure 27; b); 1 is opaque, tubular, and 2 by 2 mm in size. The two that are not blue are large, spherical white beads measuring 12 by 10 mm (Figure 27; c).

One of the most interesting specimens recovered during the 1963 excavations is a handmade door lock (Figure 23). It consists of a hand-wrought face plate with keyhole and cover, and with a two-tumbler action. When found, the lock was badly oxidized, but when treated in an electrolytic bath, all moving parts were freed. It is a remarkable specimen, and should be of particular interest for interpretive use.

Two keys were uncovered (Fig. 21; e, l). One was an incomplete handmade specimen consisting of the loop and part of the stem. The other was a machine-made key of unknown origin which is comparable to the modern-day "skeleton key" and is probably recent.

An interesting item of unknown use, measuring 4-1/2 inches long, made of a square shaft 1/4-inch on a side, tapered to a point on one end, also was found. The end opposite the point has a 3/8-inch piece perpendicular to the main shaft, with a half circle-shaped piece hinged to it. It may be some kind of an extracting tool, or perhaps was used in the maintenance or repair of firearms (Fig. 21; n).

Sheet copper and brass fragments account for 148 items. These materials range in thickness from 1/32 of an inch to 1/16 of an inch, and appear to consist chiefly of trimmings.

Trade Beads ✓

Glass trade beads account for 116 items, most of them blue. For lack of a usable classificatory scheme they will be presented here by size, color, and form (see Table 9).

Clay Pipes

Clay pipes similar to those recovered previously were found in 1963. Eighty-nine stem pieces, 36 bowl fragments, 3 bowl bases with spur, and 2 bowl bases without spur, were collected for a total of 130. No complete specimens were recovered, nor could any be reconstructed (Fig. 25; b-d).

Jewelry

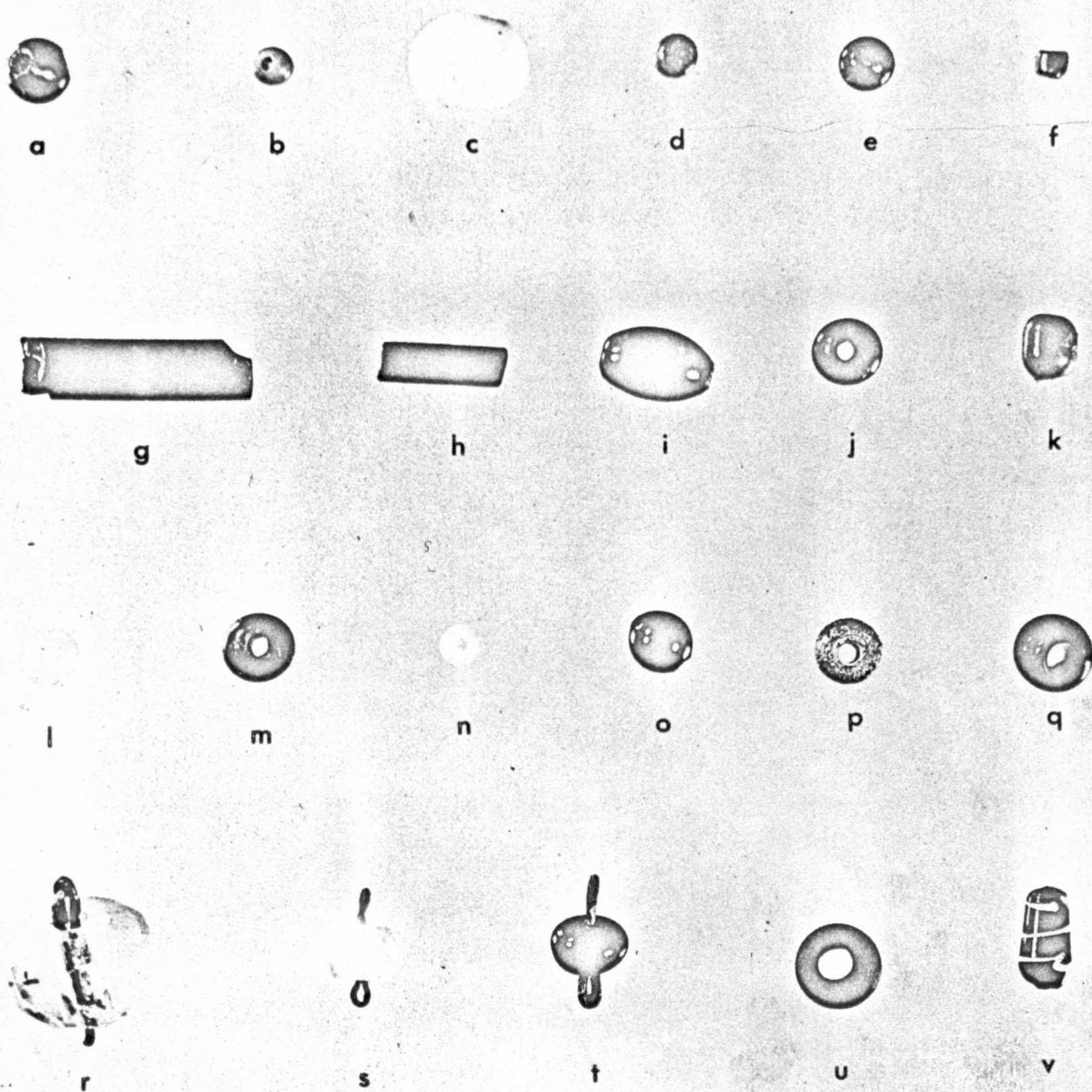
Three simple brass band finger rings were retrieved: two had a diameter of 6/8 of an inch from a band 3/16 of an inch wide; one had a diameter of 11/16 of an inch, and a band slightly less than 3/16 of an inch wide (Fig. 26; e-q). Two rather ornate ring fragments, which at one time had sets, also were located (Fig. 26; h).

A brass object thought to be part of an earring fastening device (Fig. 26; j), and an amber stone setting (faceted glass), conclude the items of personal adornment (Fig. 26; k).

TABLE 9

TRADE BEADS RECOVERED DURING 1963 EXCAVATIONS AT FORT SPOKANE

Description	Number of Specimens	Diameter (mm)	Length (mm)	Illustration
Light blue, opaque	44	6	4	Fig. 27; d
Medium blue, translucent, round	18	6		Fig. 27; e
Light blue, translucent	12	2	3	Fig. 27; f
Dark blue, translucent, tubular	1	6	23	Fig. 27; g
Dark blue, translucent, tubular	1	4	12	Fig. 27; h
Light blue, translucent, elliptical	1	6	11	Fig. 27; i
Light blue, opaque	4	5	7	Fig. 27; j
Medium blue, opaque	3	6	7	Fig. 27; k
Pink, opaque	1	6	4	Fig. 27; l
Red, translucent	2	7	5	Fig. 27; m
Extra large coarse seed, yellow translucent (fragmentary)	1	?	7	Fig. 27;
Very large necklace, dark blue opaque (fragmentary)	1	11	10	Fig. 27;
Coarse seed, white, opaque	3	4	3	Fig. 27; n
Blue green, translucent, spherical	1	6		Fig. 27; o
Medium very wide Cornaline d'Aleppo	2	5	7	Fig. 27; p
Purple, translucent, ovoid	1	8	9	Fig. 27; q
Royal blue, opaque	1	8	7	
Medium white paste, spherical	1	10		
Royal blue, opaque	2	5	4.5	
Clear glass, multifaceted (40) with copper wire through hole	1	15	12	Fig. 27; r
Clear glass, tubular, faceted (25) with wire strung through hole	1	6	6	Fig. 27; s
Dark blue, translucent with wire strong through hole	1	6	8	Fig. 27; t
Hollow brass	1	8.5	7	Fig. 27; u
Black paste, white line around each end with yellow line around center perpendicular to stringing axis	1	10	5	Fig. 27; v
Light blue, opaque, spherical fragments	9	6-9		



Centimeters



Fig. 27.--Glass, porcelain, and brass trade beads.