

Marian E. White: *A Reexamination of the Historic Iroquois Van Son Cemetery on Grand Island*

The Van Son Site located on Grand Island in the Niagara River, Erie County, New York, has been the subject of many references and much disagreement since its excavation in 1909 (Houghton 1909b). The focus of the attention (Houghton 1909a: 316; 1909b; 1920: 36; Parker 1922: 551; Silver 1923; Kraus 1944: 314; MacNeish 1952: 11; White 1961: 29; Wright 1963: 68) has been the ethnic identity of the Early Historic Iroquois inhabitants because tribal affiliation in this case has an important bearing on the eastern extent of the Neutral Iroquois occupation before their defeat by the League of the Iroquois in 1651. Many of these same references also point out that no village site in the Niagara Frontier of New York and Ontario can be identified with confidence from ethnohistorical information now available on the Early Historic Period, prior to 1655. Therefore, any sound conclusions on the location of these tribal villages must come from typological comparisons with sites elsewhere in adjoining regions where the ethnic group is known from the historical literature.

Houghton stated the problem clearly in 1920, when he said that historic sites in the Niagara Frontier might be attributable to any of the following: Seneca, Neutral, Wenro, or Erie. Indeed, many of his researches both in the Niagara Frontier and in surrounding areas were conducted with an eye to elucidating this problem. Thus, he studied the Seneca in the Genesee, Neutral in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, and supposed Erie in southwestern New York and northern Ohio. He concluded in 1909, and expressed a similar view in 1920, that the Van Son cemetery on Grand Island was Neutral Iroquois. This conclusion was based on differences between the material from Van Son and that from the Genesee Valley and southwestern New York and similarities between it and Neutral objects from Ontario. Houghton's recognition of Neutral culture came from excavations and examination of collections of 4 groups of Ontario Neutral sites: 1. post-European group near Waterdown, Ontario, 2. post-European group at Brantford, Ontario, 3. post-European St. Davids ossuary, and 4. pre-European sites on the Grand River, and in Bertie Township, Welland County, Ontario (Houghton 1920: 33). The comparisons themselves are not given, but they led to his recognition of 4 distinctive Neutral characteristics: extensive use of conch shell, serrated scraper-like saws, large bone tubes, and perforated antlers. Presumably there were other similarities, since Houghton declared the site Neutral from the time of its discovery, whereas he did not set forth the Neutral diagnostics until over a decade later. Subsequent work, however, has shown that these 4 characteristics are not limited to the Neutral area.

is circular and is 10.8 mm. in diameter. The design is quite indistinct but appears to be a monogram VM. A row of raised dots encircles the disc.

Comparison of this ring with those from Seneca sites shows that numerous rings of this general style come from the Boughton Hill Site, 1675 - 1687. No identical designs were observed, but the plain finger loop, circle of dots, and size are highly similar. At the earlier Dann Site, 1650 - 1675, there was only 1 ring of this general style. The rings from Power House, 1630 - 1650, have larger discs, notched finger loops, and lack the circle of dots. A number of rings shown by Beauchamp (1903: Plates 29, 30, 33) from Pompey, the Indian Hill Site, are of the same style as Van Son. The Indian Hill Site is regarded as one of the Onondaga mission sites begun by the French in 1654 (Beauchamp 1900: 123). The comparative data suggest a date of 1650, at least, for the Van Son burials on the basis of the ring. This date should be accepted with some reservation, since Jesuit rings more than other European goods had restricted sources of distribution. Jesuit material appears on Seneca sites after 1630 and Mohawk sites after 1640 (Information from Lenig). Certainly it must appear earlier in Huronia, where the Jesuits themselves were distributing these goods.

Beads

Twenty-one strings of beads from 16 graves were reported in the accession records. Four additional ones are listed in the report for a total of 25 strings with 19 skeletons. Ten strings were located for study, and 2 more now missing were examined at an earlier time. One of the 10 had no grave provenience. The bead loss represents one of the most serious in the entire collection, since 48% could not be taken into account. A few of the missing can be identified from the catalog and will be listed. Ten of the 11 strings of known provenience came from flexed burials, and the absence with bundles is suggestive, although not significant at the 5% level. It probably indicates that most were ornaments worn by the deceased at the time of primary burial, but missing by the time of secondary burial.

The beads will be described by string, even though the original arrangement of beads on the string is not known. There is some reason to think that an intact string might show types of a shorter period of time than the entire collection would. A string would be assembled from what beads were available at that moment, whereas the entire lot of strings might include some which were new acquisitions and some which were heirlooms.

Three strings of beads are composed entirely of shell or bone with glass beads absent. One was a string (C3002) from Grave 6 which could not be relocated for precise measurements, but which had previously been noted as being composed of about 64 large discoidal beads. It also contained pendants at one time. A second string of about 203 discoidal beads (C3028) from Grave 8, shows considerable variation. Both shell and bone beads are present, but shell greatly predominates. The diameters range from 7.0 - 9.0 mm. and

the thickness from 1.0 - 6.0 mm. with 3.0 mm. most common. The diameters of the holes are variable. The third string (C3038) from Grave 19, together with a pendant to be described in the next section, is one of 57 discoidal beads from 6.0 - 9.0 mm. in diameter. They vary from 2.0 - 5.0 mm. in thickness, and most are about 2.5 mm. The beads from these last two necklaces are not what I would consider large, nor are they so designated in the accession record in contrast to the one first described. The size of the beads is important, since large ones are most abundant at the Power House Site, 1630 - 1650, according to information from Wray.

The remaining strings of beads all have some shell mixed with glass beads, ranging all the way from one string containing only a shell pendant to another containing only 7 glass beads.

Grave 2 produced a string of beads predominantly of glass (C3024). Thirty-two blue pea beads, the majority of the string, range from 4.0 - 6.5 mm. in diameter with the smaller ones predominating. Of the 21 red pea beads, 14 are plain red with diameters between 3.0 - 4.0 mm. Six more red have white weathered exteriors and are uniformly 4.0 mm. in diameter. The final red pea bead has a dark core. One tubular bead is 29.0 mm. long and 4.5 mm. in diameter. Six shell beads were mixed in with the glass. One is a discoidal, and 4 are short thick tubular forms. The thickness gives them an appearance quite different from wampum. None of these types is known to be a precise temporal marker.

A string of beads from Grave 4 (C2998) is composed of glass and discoidal shell beads forming about equal proportions of the string. A segment of pipe stem 14.0 mm. long and flattened at both ends is part of the necklace. There are approximately 146 discoidal shell beads with unusually uniform diameters of 7.8 mm. and with large holes. Many are thin or short, falling between 2.0 - 3.0 mm. There are 27 blue pea beads averaging 6.5 mm. and ranging from light to dark blue and turquoise. One tiny blue oblong bead 3.5 mm. long and 2.0 mm. wide is the only one of its kind from the site. Four red tubular beads range between 20.0 - 22.0 mm. in length and have a diameter of 4.8 mm. Tubular beads with this size diameter, in contrast to those with a narrow diameter which appear later, are like ones regarded as early at the Power House Site. Two other tubular beads are made of glass which has longitudinal striations, and which weathers and fractures easily. Beads of this manufacture occur in several colors on Seneca sites. At Van Son, the 3 specimens are a light faded translucent blue on the exterior and a turquoise on the interior. Identical beads first appear on the Seneca Power House Site and are more numerous on the Dann Site. The entire string with its high proportion of blue beads resembles strings from the Warren Site, where there seems to have been a shortage of colors and varieties with the blue pea bead in great abundance. This was also the case to a lesser extent with the string from Grave 2 previously described.

From Grave 12 came a string of short tubular beads and wampum mixed

with several pea beads (C3009). The 9 red tubular beads are short sections with the wide diameter. They range in length from 7.0 mm. - 13.5 mm. and in width from 3.0 - 4.0 mm. There are 3 black tubular beads, each about 7.5 mm. in length and 4.0 mm. in diameter. Five red pea beads range in diameter from 6.0 - 8.5 mm. There are 25 wampum beads, 18 purple, and 7 white. They range from 5.0 - 6.2 mm. in length and 3.0 - 4.0 mm. in thickness. The remaining bead is a long tubular shell bead, 17.0 mm. by 4.0 mm. This string looks especially like strings from the Dann Site. The black beads in particular are popular there.

A short string of glass beads (C3020) from Grave 22 contains a shell pendant. The 5 beads are broken in sections ranging from 11.0 - 42.9 mm. They have comparatively wide diameters, averaging 3.68 mm. Two other beads were once similar to these. One has become purplish red in color, apparently from fire discoloration, and is of the same general size. The second has been flattened on opposite surfaces which appear darker as a result. This has a diameter of 5.7 mm. Another is a twisted red tubular bead 5.7 mm. wide. This last is of red stone, either slate or catlinite with flattening on the opposite surfaces.

A string of white wampum beads (C3053) with just a few glass beads intermixed came from Grave 27. There are 353 shell beads of uniform size. The length ranges from 3.5 - 5.0 mm., and the diameter from 3.5 - 4.5 mm. There are 7 blue or turquoise beads. One is a pea bead 5.0 mm. in diameter. Five are oblong, ranging from 4.0 - 5.5 mm. in length and 3.0 - 3.5 mm. in width. The remaining bead is the same iridescent blue described from Burial 4. The holes are generally large. This attribute has usually disappeared from wampum by the time of the Dann Site. There are a few small bore wampum which are almost the exclusive type at Dann.

A short necklace of 10 beads (C3065) was found with the skeleton in Grave 32. Each of the 3 shell beads is different. One is a discoidal 7.7 mm. in diameter and 2.5 mm. thick. The second is a short tubular bead, 6.0 mm. long and 7.6 mm. in diameter. The third is a tubular shell bead 37.5 mm. in length and 7.6 mm. in width. The remainder are red tubular beads. Four are like those previously described as large tubular beads, with lengths from 20.0 - 49.8 mm. and diameters from 4.0 - 5.5 mm. Two more are similar but have a more highly glazed exterior. The last is a twisted red tubular, 12.0 mm. in length and 5.3 mm. in width. Most of these glass beads could be duplicated on the Warren Site. The shell beads are like those from the Power House Site.

The only polychrome pea beads came from a string in Grave 35 (C3071). There are 6 blue melon beads with inlaid white stripes and 3 with inlaid centers. Two of them have white stripes closely spaced while the others have only 4 stripes. These range from 5.0 - 7.0 mm. in diameter. These polychromes are similar in size and color to 40 plain blue pea beads which range from 4.0 - 9.0 mm. in diameter. One other glass bead is probably like the iridescent tubular blue noted in Burial 4. These occur with 10 large white discoidal beads about 17.0 mm. in diameter and 5.0 mm. thick with large holes about 3.0 mm. There

are also wampum beads, 1 of the usual size, and 5 of the short thick type. One thin discoidal bead is included. The polychrome beads are the most useful time marker for this string and are most plentiful in the Seneca sequence during the early part of the occupation of the Power House Site.

A string of beads from Grave 47 (C3083) originally had shell beads and may not be from the Van Son Site. It was predominantly made up of narrow tubular beads with finished ends. These are about 7.0 mm. in length and 2.5 mm. in width. Four are black; one is black with red stripes and another black with white stripes enclosing a red line. Nineteen are red. Black beads of this type are very popular at the Dann Site.

The last string of beads is one without provenience, which could no longer be located at the time of writing. It was composed of 9 tubular red beads including some with both wide and narrow diameters. There was one twisted red tubular and one massive shell bead. The size of the wide tubular beads is like that of most of the beads at Power House. After that, narrow diameters become popular. This string of beads is one of these in the following list of missing specimens:

- 2 strings of discoidal shell beads
- 2 strings of unspecified shell beads
- 2 strings of wampum
- 2 strings of glass and shell beads
- 1 string of brass beads
- 1 string of glass beads
- 1 string of blue beads
- 1 string of three catlinite beads
- 1 red glass bead.

The beads from the Van Son burials were compared to those in the Wray collection which had been recovered from Seneca Sites of 1615-1675. The following sites and dates are pertinent: Warren, 1615 - 1630; Power House, 1630 - 1650; Dann, 1650 - 1675.

The general impression of the beads as a group is that they are closest to beads from the Power House Site. To quote Wray (Personal Conversation), the bead complex looks like "an early Power House." This impression is supported by the preponderance of shell in discoidal, tubular, and wampum beads, gorgets, and pendants. More specific similarities are the large discoidal beads, the wide holes in wampum, and the polychrome beads. Two bead types, the black tubular and the faded translucent blue tubular, have greater popularity at the succeeding Dann Site, but are present in low numbers at Power House. The contemporaneity with the early part of the Power House occupation is suggested by the absence of certain bead types which appeared late at the Power House Site, based on their continued presence at Dann. Further substantiation comes from the diameter of the tubular beads which is wider and more nearly like the earlier Warren Site. During the Power House occupation, tubular beads of narrower

diameter came in and were numerous at Dann. The high proportion of blue beads is like that at Warren also.

Shell Ornaments

Problems of terminology and differences in records make it impossible to be definite about the total number of shell gorgets and pendants. A single shell gorget seems most likely, although Houghton (1909a: 359) in a publication other than the Van Son report claims that 2 were recovered. This gorget (C3088) lay over the lumbar vertebrae of the extended adult of Grave 54. It has a concave exterior surface recessed an estimated 25.0 mm. The diameter is estimated to be about 125.0 mm. There are 2 sets of paired holes about 4.0 mm. in diameter and 5.0 mm. between the members. The pairs are separated by about 75.0 mm. The holes are placed to one side of the midpoint. This specimen is illustrated in Houghton (1909a: 358, Plate 3, Fig. 135).

One shell pendant is reported as having been found without beads in association. This one can no longer be located. Two other pendants were parts of strings of beads according to the accession records. These are not listed in the site report, nor can they be located. One string of beads with pendant according to both the site report and accession record no longer has a pendant with the string, although the label indicates that it was once present. Two pendants were found as parts of 2 strings of beads, but these were not recorded in either the accession records or the published report. These last 2 plus the one where the label indicates that a pendant had been present represent a minimum number of 3 pendants of which 2 were available for study.

One pendant (C3038) is part of a string of discoidal shell beads previously described from Grave 19, a flexed adult. It is a rough square about 30.0 mm. in diameter with rounded corners. The thickness is about 7.5 mm. A hole is drilled through longitudinally just off center.

The second pendant (C3020) came from Grave 22, a flexed adult. It was made from a section of shell 29.0 mm. long and 23.0 mm. thick. It has a small hole about 2.0 mm. in diameter drilled longitudinally from both ends. In cross-section it is asymmetrical, forming an ellipse which has a bump or swelling on one long surface. The exterior of the shell has considerable of the original brown surface remaining. The pendant is part of a string of 9 tubular beads previously described.

The shell gorget differs from those described by Ridley (1961: 52) for Neutral sites in Ontario. Similar ones do occur on Seneca and other Iroquois sites to the east. Shell gorgets and pendants reached their peak of popularity on Seneca sites of the 1630 - 1650 period, and their frequency here at Van Son would suggest near contemporaneity on the basis of these kinds of artifacts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Dates assigned to the Van Son Site due to either the presence or absence or the frequencies of various artifact types in the burials cover a range from A.D. 1615 - 1675. Our knowledge of Iroquois settlement pattern indicates that the village would not have been occupied throughout this span. This is borne out by the clustering of assigned dates within this span and necessitates an estimate of the length of occupation. There is reason to conclude that the 59 individuals buried in the cemetery, plus a few more which may have been around the trees, represent the total dead for the village. This number compares with several hundred burials for contemporary Seneca villages and indicates either a much smaller population, a shorter occupation, or both. There is no basis for postulating major differences in population size. Assuming that the population of the Van Son village was roughly comparable to other Early Historic villages, the length of occupation may be more nearly a decade than the 20-year span estimated for contemporary Seneca culture. Nevertheless, it is necessary to use the spans of Seneca sites, 1615 - 1630, 1630 - 1650, 1650 - 1675, for comparative purposes.

The first span has little evidence to support it and is too early as a date for Van Son. There is a great deal of evidence for the next, 1630 - 1650. The beads, pendants, and gorgets show the most resemblance to the Seneca Power House specimens of this period. The evidence for more precise placement within this span is difficult to assess. The beads on the whole look like an early Power House complex which might date 1630 - 1640. A few beads appear a little later in the Seneca sequence. The clasp knife and hawk bell would place the site after 1640. The absence of guns, gunflints, and kaolin trade pipes suggests that 1640 might be too late. On the other hand, some evidence argues for a date later in the span, such as 1640 - 1650. The bowl form of the ring bowl pipes has its ties to later rather than earlier sites. Both the combs and the Jesuit ring would place the site at 1650 or slightly later.

A date around A.D. 1640 for some part of the occupation would seem to accommodate the greatest part of the evidence. If this is fitted to the decade of occupation postulated, the site was in existence from about 1635 - 1645.

The establishment of this date is important for a consideration of the ethnic identity of the Van Son people. This date as well as the cultural material eliminates the Seneca tribe whose main villages have been archaeologically and historically established to have been on the Genesee and whose westward expansion had just begun. Both documentary and cartographic evidence places the Erie, Wenro, and Neutral in the Niagara Frontier at this time, and my interpretation of their locations has been stated in detail elsewhere (White 1961).

Before examining the evidence for identifying the Van Son Site as Erie, Neutral, or Wenro, the burial practices at the Van Son Site must be considered in comparison with those from surrounding sites. Recently (White 1966) 3 different classes of burial practices were recognized to describe the diversity

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found at different sites in the Niagara Frontier. The classes were ossuary, mixed, and cemetery. These refer to the total burial practices followed by the inhabitants of a community in and around their village. The first class, ossuary burial, has 2 tentative subclasses. Subclass A consists of 1 or 2 ossuaries with a large number of individuals. Single burials are absent, except where there is evidence of removal for mass burial. Subclass B consists of multiple ossuaries, usually containing a small number of individuals. A few single burials are nearby. Class 2 includes those sites where single primary burials outnumber graves containing bundles of one or few individuals. Class 3 is characterized by cemeteries where primary interments usually of a single individual occur exclusively.

Burial practices at the Van Son Site belong to the second class. This is in contrast to a nearly contemporary group from the Kleis Site (White 1967) which are class 3. Although the latter site has had only 12 primary burials excavated, this much difference between the frequencies of primary compared to secondary burials at the 2 sites would occur less than 5 out of 100 times due to sampling error, according to *chi square* tests. Clearly there is a great divergence between these groups in their burial practices.

The Kleis Site is one of a group of Niagara Frontier villages south of Buffalo in the area where the Erie were located. I have concluded previously (White 1961:90) that some Erie villages were located near the east end of Lake Erie, south of Buffalo. This preference was based on the opinion that the Sanson Maps of 1650 and 1656 are the best sources for locating the Erie. These maps support the documentary evidence that prior to 1645, the Erie were south of Lake Erie. Sometime before this date also, they were forced to move because of fear of their enemies to the west. Several Niagara Frontier Iroquois archaeological sites have been identified with these Erie villages. A group of Late Prehistoric and Early Historic sites south of Buffalo represent the locations of a pair of contemporary communities moving systematically from north to south in a parallel course, between c. 1535 and 1625 A.D. This group included the following Niagara Frontier villages: Buffam Street, Eaton, Newton-Hopper, Good-year, Green Lake, Simmons, and Kleis. The Kleis Site, dating around 1625, is the latest known village of the western community. While the search has not been exhaustive, there are no candidates for a systematic move following Kleis. This may represent the time of Erie removal inland referred to above. This identification of Erie does not apply to all Niagara Frontier Iroquois villages nor is it limited to sites in the Niagara Frontier. Certainly there are other Erie villages besides these sites which are the most easterly. Erie villages extended an unknown distance west along the southern shore of Lake Erie.

Since neither Neutral or Wenro sites have been convincingly documented in the Niagara Regions of New York or Ontario, identification of Van Son as Neutral or Wenro must rest on the most convincing case which can be made from the scanty ethnohistorical information in the light of archaeological evidence which appears to be in the correct geographical location for Neutral or Wenro. There are 3 other sites which are also of the Early Historic Period.

These are the Kienuka Site, the Kelly Site, and the St. Davids Site. The Kienuka ossuary near Lewiston opened by Porter (1914: 7) and reopened by McCarthy contained a large number of individuals as secondary burials (White 1961: 54-6; Wright 1963: 61-6). Trade materials place it sometime between 1625 - 1650. Other burials and ossuaries of small size are reported from Kienuka, but, since the site had at least 3 occupations, it is unclear whether practices other than ossuary are attributable to the early 17th century occupation. The Kelly Site (Wright 1963: 70) also near Lewiston was a small ossuary of 30 individuals with trade goods of the first half of the 17th century. Village material of the Kienuka Site has not been segregated from that of other occupations. These and the village for the Kelly ossuary are unknown. The proximity and near contemporaneity of these sites to Van Son necessitates a specific relationship, but the data are insufficient to reach a conclusion on its precise nature. These sites could be the 3 or 4 Neutral Sites referred to in 1640 as east of the Niagara (Thwaites 1896: Vol. 21, 191).

The third site at St. Davids near Stamford, Ontario, 10 miles distant, is known only from its burials. A comparison between this and Van Son was made by Bryant (1912: 469) who was familiar with both sites at the time of their excavation. He grouped the 2 together because each "contained one or more small pits with a few bundle burials packed in them, surrounded by a large number of separate graves." This site has always been considered Historic Neutral because it is west of the Niagara River.

Bryant (1912: 469) contrasted the Van Son and St. Davids Sites with ones at Point Abino, Port Colborne, and Cayuga, Ontario, also considered Historic Neutral. These last 3 "all contained bone pits as nuclei, all had separate graves in the vicinity and all contained burial presents, largely of European manufacture." He might have added that all are located along the southern margin of the Ontario Peninsula. These may be evidence of local differences in the Niagara Peninsula among various Neutral groups. One additional Neutral burial complex has been studied in the Brantford, Ontario, area which is regarded as the heartland of Neutral country. Here, too, there seems to have been considerable variation of practices on a single site, most of which have been excavated in such a way that they will probably never be clarified. To give one example, the Historic Seeley Site had single primary burials, 4 graves containing multiple bundles, and an ossuary (Ridley 1961: 11). Some if not all of these sites probably were Neutral.

Two points stand out clearly after examining the burial practices at several so-called Neutral sites in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario. Ossuary burial is not the only burial practice associated with the Neutral in historic times, and therefore its absence at Van Son does not preclude identification of the latter as Neutral. Secondly, burial practices at the Van Son Site, irrespective of the inhabitants' identity, are intermediate between cemetery and true ossuary burial. The Van Son customs represent a melding of Ontario and Genesee Valley practices, whereas the slightly earlier Kleis Site, whose ancestors were in the Niagara

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Frontier from Late Prehistoric times, followed the cemetery burial customs of the Genesee Valley. Therefore, the Van Son Site shows closer connections to sites in Ontario than it does to the Seneca or Erie.

The conclusion that Early Historic sites in the northern part of the Niagara Frontier of both the United States and Canada are more closely related to Van Son than the Erie Kleis Site and others to the south leads to the further consideration of whether Van Son is Neutral or Wenro.

The Wenro remain an enigmatic group, discussed at length by the Jesuits and subsequent writers without effecting much clarification. No good candidate for a Wenro site has been located in the area between the Neutral and Seneca where the Jesuits placed them (Thwaites 1896: Vol. 17: 25-7). Such a site or group of sites must be of early historic times and have trade material of the period prior to 1638 when the Wenro moved out of the Niagara Frontier. Six hundred survivors suggest 1 or 2 contemporary villages, but presumably antecedent villages should be in the same vicinity. The area where the Wenro lived is indicated in the Jesuit Relations by unrelated references. Those references which involve distances can be interpreted so that they are in agreement.

The village of Ouaroronon which I have interpreted as Wenro (White 1961: 38) was located one day's journey from the Seneca. A location about 30 miles west of the Seneca villages of this period would be around Batavia or Leroy. The Wenro area can be located from Huronia (Ossossane) by going "over eighty leagues" south and east (Thwaites 1896 Vol. 17: 25-7). A literal interpretation of this as 240 miles places the location in or east of the Seneca area. Since the Jesuits' estimates of distance were presumably based on trail distance and travel time, a literal interpretation is probably meaningless. Here the Jesuits' own estimates can be employed to advantage. They state that the distance from the southernmost Huron villages to the closest Neutral village was about 40 leagues (Thwaites 1896 Vol. 21: 189-91). This is known to be about 90 miles (Ridley 1961: 1). If this is doubled to arrive at a distance of 80 leagues, the location coincides with the Batavia-Leroy area. No historic sites have been located here although vague early accounts mention some with trade goods. Both the Shelby and Leroy Fort sites are prehistoric Iroquois villages in that area, but neither has ancestral or descendant villages known at present.

One reason for rejecting the identification of Van Son as Wenro is that it seems to be in the wrong place for the location which I favor. Van Son cannot be dismissed as Wenro on typological grounds because Wenro culture would be expected to show high similarities to Neutral. The date of the Van Son Site must be taken into account also. No Wenro village could date later than 1638 A.D. A terminal date of 1638 seems slightly early for the Van Son material. Admittedly the suggested date of 1640 A.D. for the midpoint of the Van Son occupation is not far off, and perhaps this degree of precision is not supportable. Nevertheless, some of the artifact types at Van Son would not be found on a site which preceded 1638, according to Seneca evidence.

The best identification of the site is Neutral. Van Son may be one of the 3 or 4 Neutral villages reported east of the Niagara in 1640 (Thwaites 1896 Vol. 21: 191). I have concluded previously that the evidence suggested to me that a few Neutral sites were east of, but in the vicinity of the Niagara River for a very short period beginning about 1630 and terminating about 1645 (White 1961: 30). These were probably Niagara Neutrals, and one of their villages was called Onguiahra, also a referent for Niagara Falls and Niagara River. It is not unlikely that the Van Son Site was this village, since it was on the river's bank and within sight of the spray from the Falls. In 1647, the Seneca attacked a Neutral village. By this time, if not before, the Neutral villages on the Seneca frontier probably moved back west of the river. A hasty removal from Van Son might account for the absence of an ossuary because there was not time for the Feast of the Dead. The Feast of the Dead sometimes coincided with the abandonment of the old village among the Hurons, when there was a planned relocation (Tooker 1964: 135).

Such an interpretation of the Van Son as a Neutral Frontier village possibly occupied up to about 1645 A.D. accommodates many of the scant facts of the Early Historic documents on this area. The following speculations are based on both ethno-historical and archaeological data.

In Late Prehistoric and Early Historic times, there were two Erie villages moving in a general southerly direction. Within the Niagara Frontier their villages have been identified from south Buffalo to near East Aurora and Hamburg within a span of about 8 miles north-south and 10 miles east-west.

The latest settlement which belonged to the west village, the Kleis Site, was occupied about 1625 A.D. No later station has been located, and it seems that this community may have moved from the Kleis location out of the Niagara Frontier. According to the documents (White 1961: 40), the Erie made a move worthy of note prior to 1645 to escape their enemies to the west. While these enemies are unidentified, the Erie villages in the Niagara Frontier were probably being squeezed by both the eastern Neutral and Seneca in the 1630's. At the same time that the Erie were moving south in an orderly fashion, some Neutral villages were moving east across the Ontario Peninsula. The time and place of their beginning is unknown, and their pattern is only vaguely discernible in Early Historic times near the Niagara Escarpment which they followed toward the east where the latest villages occur. Several of these Niagara Neutral villages were in the vicinity of the Niagara River in the 1630's. Several references around 1640 refer to the Niagara as a marker of Neutral territory. It seems clear that the Niagara Neutral were pushing their territory to the east, as they built a few villages beyond the river. This push may account for the breach between the Neutral and Wenro, former associates, and for the latter moving to the Huron rather than the Neutral, when they abandoned their homeland.

For an unknown number of years in the 1630's the Seneca were trying to push west. This expansion is generally regarded as the quest for new trapping grounds, when the beaver supply in their own territory was exhausted. The

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Wenro lands on their west were the immediate target, and an attack on them would not have been disruptive to League relationships. At this time European traders were still coming to trade directly with the Wenro and the upper tribes of the League. An increasing proportion of the trade, however, was with the Dutch through the Mohawks acting as middlemen. Perhaps the Wenro were not full participants in this trade and, therefore, had beaver after those of the Seneca were extinct. Perhaps they may have had exceptional trapping grounds, if they were situated near Tonawanda Creek and the Oak Orchard swamp and if they had access to the former Erie lands around the Buffalo River. Also, the Wenro stood between the Seneca and the Niagara River. By 1638, the Seneca had eradicated the Wenro and extended their territory to the west. Although the main villages remained east of the Genesee and continued to move systematically north, the Seneca began to use the lands to the west for hunting and trapping and to locate frontier villages even before the Neutral. As early as 1640, "the Seneca are but a day's journey from the last village of the Neutral Nation on the side of the East which is named Onguiahra" (Thwaites 1896 Vol. 21: 209). This statement indicates that the Seneca were a day's journey from the Niagara which would place them in the former Wenro territory. During the 1640's the Seneca directed their major efforts to harassing the Huron, but in 1647 made an attack on a Neutral village. Either this aggression or more likely earlier unrecorded threats contained the Neutral's expansion and led to withdrawal of their villages to the west side of the Niagara again. Even here the Seneca dominated them for the former made free use of Neutral territory to send war parties against the Huron and to control the west end of Lake Ontario, the Niagara River, and the east end of Lake Erie. Seneca hunting and war parties made use of the Niagara Frontier and lived there in frontier villages. The final defeat of the Neutral took place in Ontario in 1651.