

THE GROS CAP CEMETERY SITE IN MACKINAC COUNTY, MICH.

by

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Indian sites of the Middle Historic Period, 1670 to 1760, are rare in the upper Great Lakes region. Therefore, in the summer of 1962, I was both surprised and pleased when informed of such a site by the late Emerson Smith of St. Ignace, Michigan who was then president of the Michilimackinac Historical Society. This site was primarily a burial ground. It is located in Mackinac County, Michigan, on West Moran Bay about a mile east of Gros Cap and 5 miles west of St. Ignace. Much of the site is within the boundaries of the modern Gros Cap Cemetery, and part of the site is west of the present Gros Cap Cemetery in what, prior to 1899, was called the Western Cemetery, thus some portions of the site have functioned as a burying ground for more than two hundred and fifty years. The site also extends eastward into the property formerly owned by Orr and Eva Greenlees, deceased, and now occupied by their daughter Mrs. Ford Huyck and her husband. Through this part of the site runs the Moran River, a small stream flowing into Lake Michigan.

There has not been any scientific excavation of the Gros Cap Cemetery site by trained archaeologists, nonetheless there exists a considerable body of information and artifacts that can be used for analysis and interpretation. Over a period of many years the Gros Cap Cemetery personnel, when digging grave pits, would encounter unregistered Indian burials accompanied by artifacts and trade goods. Also when the registered burials were moved from the old western part of the cemetery to the new grounds, Indian burials were encountered in both areas. The Indian skeletons and some of the artifacts were reburied, but a great deal of information about the burials as well as a representative collection of trade objects and native artifacts were acquired and preserved by Orr Greenlees who owned the property adjacent to the Gros Cap Cemetery. Further excavation by Greenlees on the part of the site he owned enlarged this collection and provided additional information on burial practices and dwelling areas. Prior to the death of Orr Greenlees in 1959, the late Mr. Emerson Smith of the Michilimackinac Historical Society made a general inventory of his collection which he kindly allowed me to copy in 1962. In the summer and autumn of 1962 Mrs. Ford Huyck, the daughter of Orr Greenlees and the present owner of the collection, graciously allowed me to photograph the collection and to study the native artifacts and trade objects preparatory to analysis and interpretation.

The Indians who made use of the Gros Cap Cemetery site in the Middle Historic Period often buried their dead in an extended position on their backs

with hands on the chest. Some sort of cremation was also practiced. One such instance is illustrated by the recovery of a small chest or ornamented box containing burned human bones. This chest, in a fragmentary condition when found, originally must have been impressively ornate. It measured about 24 inches long, 15 inches wide, and 10 inches high; was made of wood covered with leather, bound with brass straps, and fitted with an iron handle, lock, and key. The leather covering of the box was studded with brass nails that had ornamental heads and were arranged in a curvilinear pattern which in part consisted of groups of adjoining circles joined by curved lines. Those Indians who were buried in the flesh (not cremated) were accompanied by various kinds of artifacts of native and European manufacture. With one burial, for instance, there were the following objects: 1 stylized animal effigy of bone three and one half inches long (fig. I-B); 19 hawk-bells of brass, four of which were attached to a fragmentary string of 10 spheroidal beads of blue glass; 9 egg-shaped (wire-wound type) beads of milk glass; 14 decahedral blue glass beads, slightly rounded at the intersections of the planes or facets; 4 tubular beads of blue glass three quarters of an inch to one and one half inches long; 30 elongate spheroidal beads of white opaque glass; 3 similar beads but marked with spiral stripes in blue and brown; 2 elongate spheroidal polychrome beads of white opaque glass with two opposing bands of three closely spaced spiral stripes of blue; 1 square pendant made of marine shell; and 1 small, fine-toothed comb (of tortoise shell) that would have been ideal for head lice. The comb, the hawk bells, and the glass beads were trade objects of European manufacture. The shell pendant and the animal effigy of carved bone were probably artifacts of native manufacture. The types of glass beads indicate that the burial dates from 1700 or later and the lack of any silver ornaments suggests that this particular burial is earlier than 1760.

Another burial, the skeleton of an adult Indian, was accompanied by 2 bone needles for weaving mats; 4 brass hawk bells that likely were attached to clothing; and 10 Jesuit finger rings of brass. The 10 rings were all associated with one hand and apparently were worn as a group, but on which hand, or how many per finger unfortunately is unrecorded. Presumably this particular burial was that of a Christian convert. And although brass Jesuit rings have been found at other Historic Period sites, this is the only instance, in my experience, where a number of rings were found on one hand. The presence of these rings in this specific context suggests a date some time between 1670 and 1760. A burial of an Indian mother and child in one grave was associated with the following native artifacts and trade objects: a bone wristband with an engraved rectilinear design consisting of parallel lines and hatchured rectangles (fig. I-J); a pointed bone tool 6-1/2 inches long (fig. I-H); 4 opaque white glass beads of elongated spheroidal form; 6 round beads of opaque white glass; 1 round bead of blue glass; 2 round beads of dull red glass; and 5 very small (seed) beads of blue glass. A C-shaped bracelet of thick brass wire was found in association with the skeletal remains of the child.

Still another burial, presumably an adult, had associated with it the following artifacts. Those of native manufacture were 1 small effigy of an eagle made of marine shell; 2 large tubular beads also of marine shell; 1 rectanguloid pendant made of marine shell and perforated for suspension; 1 bone harpoon head (fig. I-M), 3 inches long with six barbs on one side and a wedge-like base with a line hole in it; and a larger harpoon head of bone. (fig. I-Q), 4-3/4 inches long, with 3 barbs all on one side, and a wedge-shaped base with a line hole. There were also some 60 brass tinkling cones about three quarters of an inch long and 12 larger cones about 1-1/2 inches in length. Many of these tinkling cones of both sizes were filled with tufts of hair at the open end and had twisted cord or leather fragments at their apexes indicating that they once had been attached to something. There were also three small round (seed) beads of blue glass; a fragment of European cloth stained green by metal salts; and a triangular arrowhead of brass with slit-like side notches. A fragment of human skin with hair attached may have been a scalp but also may have been an ordinary part of the original burial particularly well preserved by metal salts.

Elsewhere in the Gros Cap Cemetery site there was unearthed a skull with the ear openings plugged with molten lead. Many other burials have been found in this site but unfortunately specific data about the position of the skeletons and their grave associations are lacking. There are, however, in the Greenlees collection a number of trade objects and artifacts that were found with such burials and which collectively may be considered a sample of the burial furniture from the Gros Cap Cemetery site. The materials which I have examined are as follows.

Native artifacts made of bone consisted of two flat mat needles 7 and 8 inches long (fig. I-1); a spoon 4 inches long with an ornamental handle (fig. I-C); a human effigy about 3-1/2 inches long (fig. I-A); a polished tube 4 inches long; a fragmentary pin or peg about 3-1/2 inches long with knobbed head; an awl made from a deer metapodial; a flat, narrow fragment of bone with a hole drilled into it; a large antler chipping tool; five small antler awls or chipping tools; two unilaterally barbed harpoon heads, each 6-1/2 inches long with 4 barbs and wedge-shaped base (figs. I-E & F); one unilaterally barbed harpoon head with two barbs (probably three barbs originally) with a wedge-shaped base and a line hole drilled with a metal drill (fig. I-G); a fragment of a unilaterally barbed harpoon head; two arrowheads with bifurcated bases (fig. I-L); one arrowhead with leaf-shaped blade and long narrow tang (fig. I-K); three antler drifts; two socketted conical points of antler; two double-pointed bodkins or gorges 2-1/2 to 3 inches long, each with a drilled hole at the mid point (fig. I-P); and a hollow object shaped like a truncated cone with two drilled holes near the base and a knotted piece of leather inserted through the hollow portion. This may have been part of a headdress or perhaps some kind of a swivel.

An interesting item of apparel was a fragmentary belt or band of leather about 1 inch wide and 12 inches long upon which were fastened small tubular beads of brass or copper about 1/8 of an inch long. The beads were closely spaced and arranged in 5 parallel, closely spaced rows that produced the illusion of a solid mass of metal beads.

Artifacts presumably of native origin and made of catlinite consisted of a human effigy face or miniature mask-like object 1-1/4 inches long (fig. II-E); two beaver effigy pendants, each about 1 inch long; nine beads or pendants of trianguloid or rectanguloid form ranging from 1/2 to 1 inch in length; three V-shaped beads about 1/2 of an inch long; one wheel-shaped bead or pendant 3/4 of an inch in diameter (fig. II-K); one square pendant with large round center removed (fig. II-L); and a heart-shaped ornament 1-1/4 inches long with 3 small holes drilled through it, one at each extremity (fig. II-J). A pendant 1-1/2 inches long, shaped like a turtle on a necklace of eight V-shaped beads in alternate sequence with seven slightly biconoidal or tubular beads (fig. II-F) complete the inventory of catlinite objects from the general part of the Gros Cap Cemetery site collection.

A unique artifact made from a pig tusk about 4 inches long is a carving of the representation of an arm and right hand with a heart in the palm (fig. I-D). The concept expressed is non-Indian and European. It could be the product of an acculturated Indian or it could have been acquired by an Indian from a French voyageur. It also raises the possibility that on cultural grounds alone the archaeologist dealing with the historic period cannot always distinguish between burials of acculturated Indians and those of voyageurs who died in the region.

Native artifacts made of imported marine shell were 5 tubular beads about 1-1/4 inches long; a trianguloid pendant about 1-1/4 inches long; a rectanguloid section of shell about 1-1/2 inches long; an effigy of a fish 4-1/2 inches long (fig. II-M); and another fish effigy (fig. II-N) somewhat smaller. These effigies probably were used as fish lures.

Tobacco pipes of native manufacture seem to represent Iroquoian styles and probably are Huron in origin. It is likely that the Huron at nearby Michilimackinac made pipes for trade with their neighbors. It is also possible that other Indians were copying Huron styles. The pipes from the Gros Cap Cemetery site include an elbow form of fired clay (fig. II-O) with a castellated bowl the upper part of which is ornamented with a single incised line and two rows of punctate impressions; a polished stone elbow pipe 4 inches long with a bowl pentagonal in section and the stem hexagonal in section (fig. II-B); a trumpet-shaped pipe of fired clay with a simple line and punctate decoration around the upper part of the bowl (fig. II-H); and a similar but fragmentary pipe with oblique parallel incised lines in a band around the bowl (fig. II-C). There are also two or three large portions of stems from fired clay pipes of the style last described. Of two other pipes

from the Gros Cap Cemetery site one is a modified micmac form (fig. II-1) of soft stone and the other, also of stone, is vase-like (fig. II-A). These pipes required wooden or reed stems for their use.

Some aboriginal pottery has been found at the site. In the collection examined by me there were 11 body sherds of a ware characterized by smooth vessel surfaces and a clay mixed with small particles of shell before firing as well as 9 similar body sherds made of a clay that had been mixed with small particles of granitic stone before firing. One large rim sherd with a smooth, undecorated surface was tempered with small particles of both shell and granitic rock. This sherd manifests a vessel with a straight rim and a slightly rounded lip that is ornamented with shallow notches somewhat widely spaced. A smaller rim sherd that is grit tempered has a rounded lip upon which are somewhat closely spaced punctate impressions. There was one slightly flaring rim, grit tempered, with narrowed and rounded lip, that had a notched fillet or narrow collar midway between neck and lip. Two additional grit tempered rim sherds manifest vessels with smooth exteriors, slightly flaring rims and rounded lips. One of these sherds is ornamented with somewhat closely spaced notches along the outer edge of the lip. A similarly ornamented rim sherd, grit-tempered, and slightly flaring, has a loop handle extending from the lip to the neck area.

There were two whole vessels in the collection I examined. One was a miniature jar about 1-1/2 inches in height. It is a shell-tempered vessel with rounded bottom, short body, slightly flaring rim, and broad orifice. The outer edge of the lip is ornamented with notches somewhat closely spaced. Such a miniature jar may have been a toy or more likely a part of the burial furniture placed with a deceased child.

One nearly complete jar about 8 inches high (fig. II-D) has a round bottom, a relatively short body, a constriction of the upper shoulder or neck and a flaring rim. It is made of fired clay tempered with particles of shell and grit. The rim area is smooth but the body of the jar shows the imprint of a fabric or a cord-wrapped paddle. The lip is rounded and about 3/4 inch beneath it there is a notched fillet encircling the vessel. Four strap handles, equally spaced around the rim, extend from this fillet to the neck of the jar. The vessel mouth is quite broad. This jar is similar to unclassified pottery found at an early eighteenth century Fox village site in Wisconsin and to pottery found at a late seventeenth century village near Starved Rock in Illinois.

A few arrowheads of chipped flint have been found at the Gros Cap Cemetery site. There are about a half dozen small triangular points from 1/2 to 1 inch in length (fig. I-N). Some of these are neatly chipped on both faces, whereas others have minimal chipping that is used to modify the flake only where necessary to produce the desired triangular form. These

two variants of triangular points are found frequently in protohistoric and Early Historic period sites of the Upper Great Lakes region. There were also about a dozen small corner notched arrowheads of trianguloid outline. The chipping was similar to that of the triangular forms. The corner notched points (fig. 1-O) ranged from about 3/4 inch to 1-1/4 inches.

The trade objects from the Gros Cap Cemetery site which have to be considered collectively because they are lacking specific proveniences within the site probably were placed with burials originally. This probability is suggested by the few clusters of burial furniture of known association within the site plus experience with similar sites elsewhere. However, there may be a few trade objects that were part of the camp debris at the site. An inventory of those trade objects from the site, but without specific locations is as follows: There was a barbed spearpoint of iron 4-1/2 inches long with a "rat tail" shank; 3 French clasp knife blades of the hawk bill variety about 4-1/4 inches long; several fragments of such blades; two iron awls; a dozen wrought-iron nails of various sizes; 4 butcher knives, two of which still have wooden handles; a broken fire steel or strike-a-light; a barbed arrowhead of iron; a fragmentary pewter disk possibly a porringer about 4-1/2 inches in diameter; some fragments of cloth; and some masses of powdered vermilion.

There was a roughcast button of brass with a hole drilled in the shank, a style in vogue from 1700 to 1765; at least 11 tinkling cones made of sheet brass from broken kettles; 4 fragments of brass kettles including 1 riveted lug section with upper corners bent over and pounded flat; several brass hawk bells; 5 brass coils that may have been ear ornaments or broken sections of a spring type hair-puller; and 3 Jesuit finger rings of brass. There was also an oval religious medal of brass or bronze.

There were several blond gunflints with round heels one of which was altered as if it had been used with a strike-a-light for making fire; 3 runtees of marine shell, one of which was decorated with a cross and dot design; and several fragments of kaolin pipe stems, one of which had GLASCOW stamped on it. One bulldog effigy pipe of white kaolin was made by GAMBIER A PARIS according to the legend stamped upon its base.

The glass beads from the general site collection seem to duplicate most of those found in specific burial associations at the Gros Cap Cemetery site. There were 19 large, spheroidal milk glass beads (of wire-wound type) about 3/4 of an inch in length; 30 similar but smaller beads 3/8 inch long; 60 decahedral beads of blue glass rounded at the intersections of the facets; 19 elongated spheroidal beads of opaque white glass 3/8 to 1/2 inch in length; 2 round beads of blue glass; a dozen football-shaped beads of green glass 3/8 inch long; a large mulberry-shaped bead of clear glass; a lopsided tear drop bead of clear glass; 2 spheroidal beads 3/8 inch long of

blue glass with vertical white stripes; and an elongated spheroidal bead of blue glass with 3 inlaid vertical bars of white with a red stripe centered in each white bar.

Some additional beads from the Gros Cap Cemetery site were on display in the historical museum at Escanaba, Michigan where I examined them in the summer of 1963. There was a spheroidal bead of white glass with black spiral lines; 5 elongated spheroidal beads of opaque white glass; a spheroidal bead (wire-wound type) of milk glass about 1/2 inch long; 9 spheroidal beads of blue glass; 2 elongated spheroidal beads of blue glass, each inlaid with 3 white spirals which had red center stripes; a green glass spheroidal bead with spiral stripes of white; and a small white tubular bead with vertical red stripes. Also in this collection from the Gros Cap Cemetery site there were 9 tinkling cones of brass and a shell runtee (fig. II-G).

Faunal remains were not abundant. I was able to identify remains of sturgeon, turtle, deer, bear, beaver, hawk or eagle, canid, and pig. Items such as hawk or eagle claws, bear canines, beaver incisors and beaver jaws, turtle shell, and jaws of dog or wolf probably were charms, parts of medicine bags, or ornaments. Sections of hollow bird bone likely served some utilitarian need. Arrowheads and awls were made of deer bone and one ornament or religious object was made of a pig tusk. About the only remains that could be considered absolutely indicative of food were those of sturgeon and other large fish.

The cultural picture that emerges from a study of the artifacts and their context is that of a group of somewhat acculturated Indians living at Gros Cap on the shore of Lake Michigan and burying their dead on an old beach terrace some distance back of the shore. Although some or perhaps all of these Indians were converts to Christianity, they had not abandoned the old ways, but had merely altered them in varying degrees.

In lieu of documentary evidence the clue to the age of the Gros Cap Cemetery site lies in the use of the trade objects as chronological indicators. This particular assemblage of trade objects is representative of the Middle Historic Period, A.D. 1670 to 1760. This assemblage definitely does not fit the Early Historic Period prior to 1670 nor does it fit the Late Historic Period that began in 1760. The specific varieties of glass beads suggest a date later than 1700, thus I would conclude that the proper chronological position of the Gros Cap Cemetery site is in the latter part of the Middle Historic Period, say from 1710 to 1760.

*Nern + Cleland 1974;
ca. 1675-1700*

Who were the Indians who lived at Gros Cap between 1710 and 1760? Without historical records what clues to their identity are available? For one thing the native pipes from the site are of Huron styles, yet the aboriginal pottery is non-Huron. This pottery, limited as it is, suggests

tribal relations in the direction of Sauk, Fox, Miami, Shawnee, and Illinois. The arrowheads of chipped flint suggest these tribes but also Potawatomi, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Huron. Historical evidence indicates that Ottawa and Huron were the principal native residents of nearby Michilimackinac (St. Ignace) at about 1700 but there were also representatives of all of the above named tribes in the area from time to time. I would guess that the Indians who lived at Gros Cap in the first half of the eighteenth century were mainly Ottawa and that there was a smattering of female slaves or wives from such tribes as the Illinois, Miami, Sauk, Fox, and Potawatomi. Since there were Huron pipes but no Huron pottery, I do not believe that there were Huron women in this community. The Huron pipe styles were either copied by the Ottawa or else the pipes were obtained from French traders or directly from the Huron.