

THE EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD (1540-1670) ON THE UPPER COOSA RIVER  
DRAINAGE OF ALABAMA AND GEORGIA

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Ten years ago in a paper "Archaeology as a Key to the Colonial Fur Trade," John Witthoft stated, "Sixteenth Century sites of the Gulf drainage basin are even less known (than N.E. U.S.). In the coastal plains and piedmont of the Southeast, major Indian villages which probably date from the late 1500's have not yet produced European objects" (1966: 205). Since that time, archaeologists have added little new data to the problem of the early historic period in the southeast. Notable exceptions are the recent works by Brain and others on the route of DeSoto (Brain et al 1974; Brain 1975), and the work on the King Site in Floyd County, Georgia (Garrow and Smith 1973; Hally 1975; Hally, Garrow, and Trotti 1975; M. Smith 1975). It is now known that a long sequence of historic sites exists in this area, similar to the Iroquois and Susquehannock sequences of the Northeast. This paper will attempt to characterize this Early Historic Period (1540-1670) along the upper Coosa drainage, stressing key European artifact types and discussing the processes of culture change. This statement should be considered preliminary in nature, since only limited professional excavation has been conducted on sites of this period. This paper is based largely on grave lot data from private collections.

The Early Historic Period has been broken down into four subperiods: 1540-1570, 1570-1600, 1600-1630, and 1630-1670. While these divisions are largely arbitrary, they are also based on comparisons with other historic sites in Eastern North America, and on some historic events: 1540 is the year of the DeSoto expedition through this area, 1570 allows some time for influences out of Florida after the founding of St. Augustine in 1565, and 1670 ends

the period with the founding of Charles Town. Shortly after the founding of Charles Town, English trade goods flooded the southeast and the aboriginal economy was drastically altered. The 1670 date also has precedence with Quimby's work (1966) in the Great Lakes area.

#### 1540-1570

The 1540-1570 subperiod marks the introduction of European artifacts, chiefly in the form of iron celts, spikes, and knife blades, into the area. It is possible that a few such artifacts may have entered the area slightly earlier. Glass beads and brass beads are extremely rare. The King Site is the best known site of this subperiod, and should therefore be considered the "type site." The European materials from this site have been described and discussed elsewhere (M. Smith 1975). European materials during this time period occur chiefly as grave goods, and are quite scarce. Only 2.4% of the 210 burials at the King Site contained European grave goods.

During this subperiod, there is virtually no disruption of the aboriginal economy. Iron artifacts are rare, and appear to become status or wealth items in burials, perhaps replacing native copper items. Traditional aboriginal grave goods, such as shell gorgets, pottery vessels, projectile points, etc., continue to be interred. Mound building apparently ceases. The major changes in the aboriginal culture during this time appear to be brought about by the effects of European disease. Multiple burials are common, and an unusual mortality rate has been noted for the King Site (Tally 1975: 74-75).

Six sites of this period have been recognized in the Upper Coosa

drainage (Figure 1). The King Site material has been previously described (M. Smith 1975). Ross Morrell (1964: 75) reports one Nueva Cadiz Plain glass bead found on an aboriginal structure floor at the Ogeltree Island site and suggests that this bead is attributable to DeSoto. Lewis Larson (personal communication) has excavated a Lamar village burial at the Etowah site that contained an iron celt. At the Little Egypt site, Warren K. Moorehead excavated six fragments of iron that he tentatively identified as sword fragments and pike points from a burial that contained a large stone celt and a few (shell?) beads. His illustration (Moorehead 1932: Figure 97) suggests that three of the iron fragments could be celts and two could be spikes. Moorehead had these artifacts analyzed by personnel of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and reported that "They were old, and not of the American Colonial period" (Moorehead 1932:154).

Finally, the Johnstone Farm site and an unnamed site on the Coosawattee River just north of Calhoun, Georgia have been intensively investigated by amateurs. Two burials at Johnstone Farm contained European artifacts: one burial contained two rolled copper or brass beads, and another burial contained a large iron "chisel", a small iron pin, and an iron celt. The Coosawattee River Site also produced two burials with European artifacts: one contained an iron pin and an iron celt, while the other contained an unidentified piece of badly corroded iron. Aboriginal traits at these sites show that they were closely related to the King Site.

#### 1570-1600

During the 1570-1600 subperiod, an increase in the quantity and types of European goods is noted. Iron goods are still extremely rare

(see below), but brass ornaments such as circular gorgets (Figure 2), bangles (Figure 3), and beads, as well as glass beads, become relatively common.

Glass bead types include star or chevron beads in blue and green, flushey beads of three types, gooseberry beads, compound layered beads, beads with compound stripes, and numerous translucent and opaque beads in blue, green, and other colors. One Nueva Cadiz Plain bead (Fairbanks 1968) has also been recovered. The more diagnostic beads are comparable to types from several sites in other areas of the Eastern United States. These sites include the Seneca sites Cameron 1575-1600, Factory Hollow 1590-1615, and Tram 1565-1590 in New York (Wray 1973; Wray and Schoff 1953); the Susquehannock Blue Rock Site 1575-1595 in Pennsylvania (Heisey and Witmer 1962); the Oneida Wayland-Smith Site 1570-1595 in New York (Pratt 1961); and the Philip Mound in Florida (Benson 1967; Karklins 1974). More specific data on these bead types are presented in Appendix A.

Brass gorgets begin to replace shell gorgets and glass beads begin to replace shell beads during this subperiod. Glass beads have been found in direct association with Citico Style rattlesnake gorgets (Muller 1966), and shell, brass, and glass beads are often found strung together. Pottery vessels and ground stone artifacts, including axes, are still placed in burials. European goods appear to be more common than in the preceeding period, but specific frequencies are not available. Child burials most often contain the European goods.

Only one site has been assigned to this subperiod. A large site located at the confluence of Terrapin Creek with the Coosa

River in Cherokee County, Alabama, has produced approximately sixteen burials with European artifacts during amateur investigation (Figure 1). This site has not produced any iron artifacts at this time.

#### 1600-1630

The description of this subperiod is based on the Bradford Ferry Site (DeJarnette et al 1973), the type site for this period. During this subperiod, European trade goods are on the increase, and occur in a high percentage of burials. Glass seed beads appear in limited quantities. Glass necklace bead types show an overlap from the earlier period, but chevron beads and some eye bead types are on the decrease. Beads with compound stripes, Nueva Cadiz Plain, and many of the compound layered beads disappear. Brass ornaments include the circular gorget, wide sheet armbands, rolled bracelets, bangles, and Clarkesdale bells, previously believed to be DeSoto period artifacts (Identified by Ian Brown; see Brain 1975). The Clarkesdale bells were in direct association with early 17th. century glass bead types, and thus the temporal range of this artifact must be extended. Iron celt-form axes are present.

Glass bead types (Figure 4) that are present (See Appendix B for detailed descriptions) have been found at the Seneca sites Dutch Hollow 1600-1625, Warren 1615-1635, and Factory Hollow 1590-1615 (Wray 1973), the Oneida sites Wayland-Smith 1570-1595 and Thurston 1625-1637 (Pratt 1961); the Philip Mound in Florida (Benson 1967; Karklins 1974); and the Trigg Site in Virginia, 1610-1620 (MacCord 1975). John Witthoft examined a type collection of beads from the Bradford Ferry site, and concluded that it probably represented an occupation of circa 1600-1630. Kenneth E. Kidd (Personal communication)

studied a list of the beads based on his typology (Kidd and Kidd 1970), and a photograph of a few of the beads and concurred with Witthoft's date. This site is thus probably the most securely dated in this sequence.

Glass beads had completely replaced shell beads, and brass gorgets had completely replaced shell gorgets by this subperiod. Ground stone celts are virtually absent, but iron celts are still rare. There is an abundance of European grave goods with children and adults. 82% of the burials at the Bradford Ferry site which contained grave goods, contained European grave goods, compared with 6% at the earlier King Site (Figure obtained from 28 burials - 8 described in DeJarnette et al 1973; and data obtained from collectors). At the Bradford Ferry Site, only 53% of the burials containing grave goods contained native goods, thus European goods had become more common as burial offerings. Although the total number of burials excavated at the Bradford Ferry Site is not known due to poor bone preservation and the complicating presence of storage pits, it appears that a higher percentage of burials have grave goods than in previous periods. This may indicate a disruption of the social order with the flood of cheap trade goods. While previously only the "elite" were buried with grave goods, virtually everyone at this time period appears to have grave goods.

Other effects on the aboriginal culture are minimal. There is no decline in the ceramic arts. Indeed, while many previous researchers have stated that brass ornaments were cut from kettles, it should be noted that no evidence of kettles in the form of rim sherds or bail hinges or fragments have been noted. The brass



ornaments may well be imported already in the form that they are found, or they may have been manufactured on the site from sheet stock; scraps being used for beads and bangles.

The Bradford Ferry site 1-Ce-73 (DeJarnette et al 1973: 17-25) should be considered the type site for this period. In addition to the published data, this author has been able to study a collection of 22 grave lots recovered by amateurs. Comparison with other published sites, as well as comments on the beads by Witthoft and Kidd firmly date this site to the early 17th. century.

The nearby Seven Springs site, 1-Ce-101, was probably occupied at the same time as noted by DeJarnette et al (1973: 25), but only a careful study of the glass beads can place this site in its proper chronological position.<sup>1</sup>

The Mohman Site (Garrow 1975: 81), located near Coosa, Georgia, has recently produced a burial interred with a short string of glass beads of types found on the Bradford Ferry site. Since this site has been extensively looted in the past, it appears that the historic occupation must be quite small.

#### 1630-1670

During this subperiod, compound and complex bead types virtually disappear; the majority of the bead types are monochrome (Appendix C). Wray and Schoff (1953: 57) also note the disappearance of polychrome

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1. During the Tuscaloosa meetings, I was able to spend a short time viewing the University of Alabama collections from the Seven Springs Site. Most of the glass beads were the monochrome "early blue" type, but one five layer tumbled blue chevron bead was noted. The bell illustrated by DeJarnette et al (1973: Figure 29) was located and identified by Jeffrey Brain and Ian Brown as a Clarkesdale Bell. Finally the axe mentioned by DeJarnette et al in Burial 6, X4, was found to be an eyed axe. This axe is similar to one illustrated by Kinsey from the Albert Ibaugh site in Pennsylvania, ca. 1600-1625 (1960: Figure 7). None of the artifacts observed negate the 1600-1630 occupation estimate.



beads in Seneca sites of the 1630-1650 period. The circular brass gorget, brass armbands, bangles, and rolled tubular beads are still present. Iron celts are replaced by eyed axes, and iron "spikes" disappear. Other distinctive new artifact types include large brass collars, brass animal effigy pendants, cast brass bells (Figure 5), and iron wire bracelets. "Turquoise blue" seed beads become numerous.

The basic aboriginal economy is still intact during this subperiod. The ceramic art continues unaffected, and pottery vessels still occur in burials. Chipped stone projectile points are still in common use, and the absence of firearms probably indicated that hunting and warfare practices had changed little. Shell artifacts, including earpins and beads again occur in burials. A sample of 13 burials having grave goods from the Cooper Farm Site (Lindsey 1964; Battles 1969) shows that 84.6% contained native grave goods, while 77% contained European grave goods. The variation from the trend seen previously of increasing percentage of European goods could be explained by the small sample size, a nativistic movement (unlikely), or a geographical cultural difference, since this site is somewhat further south than sites previously discussed. Sites of this period are differentiated from post Charles Town English contact sites by the absence of guns and gun parts, glass bottle fragments, kaolin pipe fragments, swords, bone handled knives, buttons, and other artifacts.

Only one site has been assigned to this period. This is the Cooper Farm site near Gadsden, Alabama (Lindsey 1964; Battles 1969). The nearby Sims Farm site may also have an occupation during this period.

### Conclusions

Several conclusions can be made from the above observations. The

first is that there was in reality very little culture change in the Early Historic Period. John R. White (1975) has set up a number of categories of artifacts to show various stages of acculturation. All artifacts found on Early Historic Period sites in the Coosa River drainage fall into his A.1. Category "New Types of Artifacts Received for Which There is a Native Counterpart" or his B.1. Category "Old Types of Artifacts Where There is a Substitution of an Imported Material for a Local One." Glass beads, iron knives, and iron axes would fall into the first category, while brass gorgets and other brass ornaments would fall into the latter category if they were locally made. According to White, these categories imply the least amount of acculturation.

It is the opinion of this author that the European artifacts discussed in this paper reached the native population through the Spanish in Florida. Previous work has compared the King Site iron artifacts with Florida examples (M. Smith 1975). The glass bead assemblage present at the Bradford Ferry Site has its closest counterpart at the Philip Mound in Florida. John Witthoft (Personal Communication) stated that the Bradford Ferry beads are not like beads from Virginia sites of the same period, apparently ruling out English trade. It thus appears that the materials discussed are all Spanish trade goods. They probably came into the interior via aboriginal trade routes (M. Smith 1975); however, it is possible that Spanish expeditions subsequent to DeSoto (1540) and Pardo (1568) brought goods into the area, but there is no historic documentation of such expeditions.

If we can assume that the number of Early Historic Period sites recognized in this area approaches a reasonable sample of all the

sites that existed, a number of statements can be made. There appears to be a decrease in the number of sites over time. There are six sites of the 1540-1570 period, but only one or two sites of each of the succeeding periods. This may imply a consolidation of the population into one or a few villages after the early effects of European disease. Furthermore, with the exception of the Mohman site, located near Alabama, no sites producing 16th or early 17th century glass beads are known for North Georgia, certainly one of the most thoroughly surveyed areas in the Southeast. This either indicates a movement of the population down river to be closer to the Spanish sources of goods, or it indicates that this area was isolated from the trade of this period; perhaps indicating a political boundary of some sort.

Since the people were not dependent of firearms and the necessary supplies (gunflints, powder, shot), and since kettles did not replace ceramic vessels as they did in the Northeast, it seems apparent that the day to day economy changed little. All imported goods are basically luxury goods, except for iron knives and axes.

European materials never completely replaced aboriginal materials as burial offerings, but there was a huge increase in the quantities of grave goods. After 1600, most burials appear to have grave goods, whereas in the early King Site, which appears to closely duplicate the pre-"contact" situation, only 43% of the burials contained artifacts. This change indicates a possible breakdown of wealth and status categories. It would probably be more accurate to assume that these categories did not change in relation to each other, but that there

was a general increase in the "standard of living" reflected by grave goods.

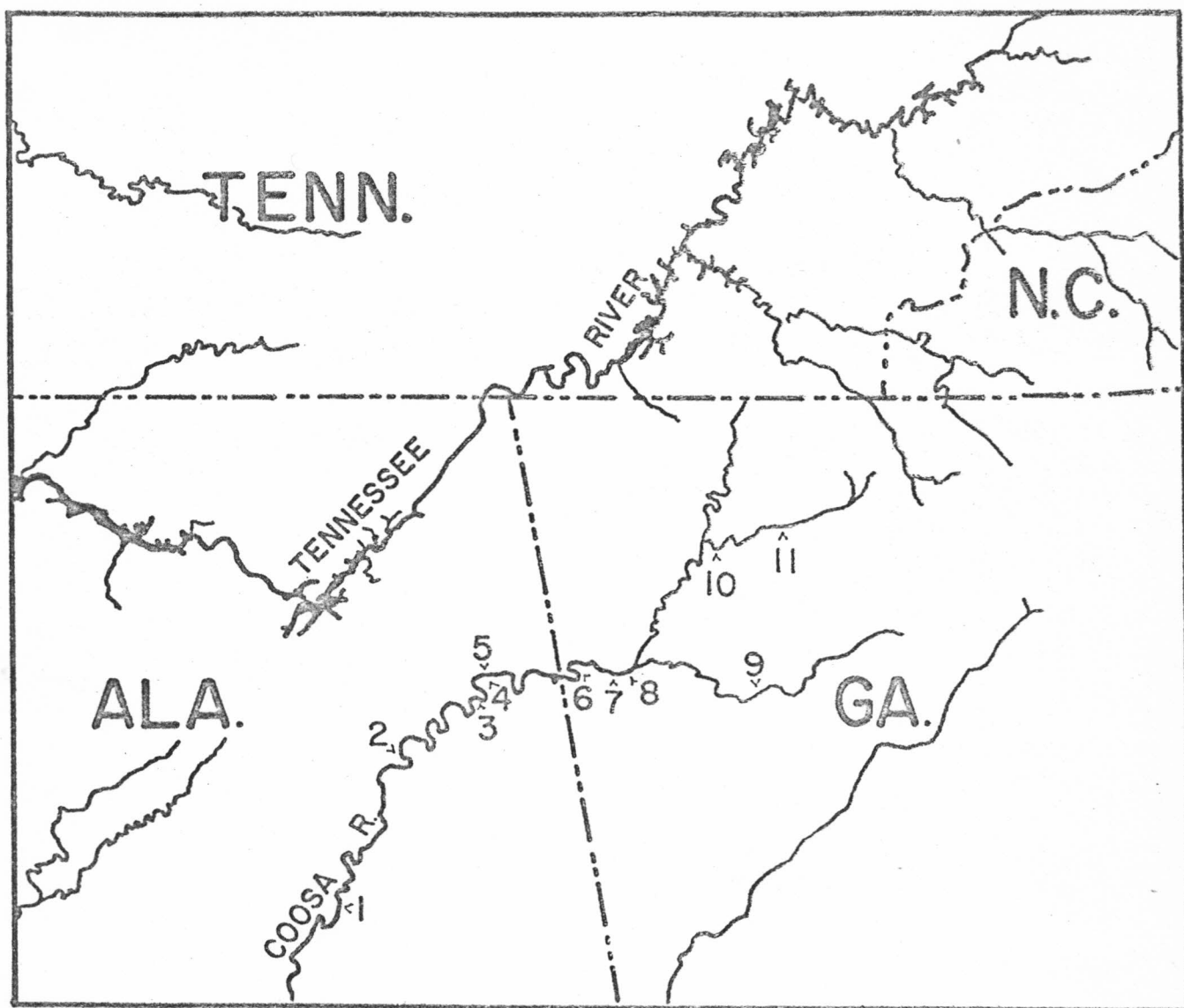
While I have concentrated on the Coosa River drainage, it should not be implied that this area alone received these Spanish trade goods. Sites in Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina have also produced similar materials, and continuing research will shed more light on these areas. If the chronology developed here is accepted, then future research could examine stylistic change in aboriginal crafts, such as ceramics, with tight chronological control.

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Mr. Charles F. Wray provided data on his Iroquois work which was extensively utilized. Ian Brown and Jeffrey P. Brain identified the Clarkesdale bells from the Bradford Ferry site and the Seven Springs site. Kenneth Kidd and John Witthoft provided comments on the trade beads from the Bradford Ferry site.

Patrick H. Garrow and David J. Hally read early drafts of this paper and provided useful suggestions. The photographs were made by Gordon L. Hight.



EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD SITES ON THE UPPER COOSA RIVER

- |                    |                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Ogeltree Island | 7. Mohman                  |
| 2. Cooper Farm     | 8. Johnstone               |
| 3. Terrapin Creek  | 9. Etowah                  |
| 4. Bradford Ferry  | 10. Coosawattee River Site |
| 5. Seven Springs   | 11. Little Egypt           |
| 6. King            |                            |

## FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Map of Sites

Figure 2. Brass Gorgets, Terrapin Creek Site.

Figure 3. Brass bangles, ca. 1570 and later. Illustrated examples are from the Bradford Ferry Site.

Figure 4. Glass Beads, Bradford Ferry Site.

### Row 1

- A. Opaque "Turquoise blue"
- B. As above, but slightly darker and with shiny surface.
- C.-F. Various shades of translucent blue.
- G. Opaque White.
- H. Translucent Green.

### Row 2

- A. Translucent "Root Beer" with four white stripes.
- B. Translucent blue with 8-10 white stripes.
- C. Translucent blue with 5 white stripes.
- D. Opaque "Turquoise blue" with four white stripes.
- E. Translucent blue with two red and two white alternating stripes.
- F. Clear with white stripes (Gooseberry).
- G. Opaque white with three sets of triple, wavy blue lines.

### Row 3

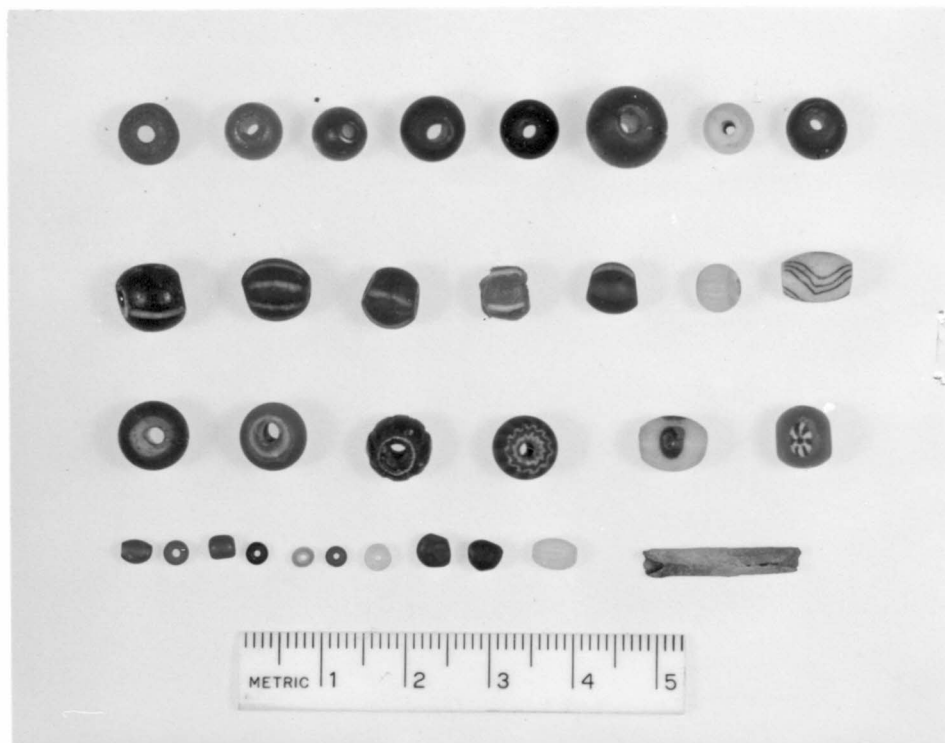
- A. Translucent Purple/translucent blue core.
- B. Translucent blue/white/translucent blue core.
- C. Blue/White/Blue core with eight eroded stripes.
- D. Green Chevron (Green /white/red/white/clear core)
- E. Opaque white with circular blue and white eyes.
- F. Opaque "turquoise blue" with red and white star eyes.

### Row 4

- A.-C. blue seed beads.
- D. Black seed.
- E. Blue/clear core seed.
- F. Translucent purple seed.
- G. Clear/white/clear core seed.
- H. Translucent blue with pressed facets.
- I. Translucent purple with pressed facets.
- J. Clear with white stripes (Gooseberry).
- K. Rolled sheet brass.

Figure 5. Brass bell from Cooper Farm.







# APPENDIX A

## Glass Beads from Terrapin Creek

Based on a collection of 522 beads from 10 burials.

Kidd No.	Description of Necklace Beads	No.	%	Comp. Sites
II a 6	Opaque black	1	0.2	6
II a 13	Opaque white	7	1.3	3,6,10
II a 28	Translucent Green	6	1.1	6,9
II a 40	Opaque-translucent "turquoise blue"	226	43.3	3,4,6,8,9,10
II a 44	Translucent blue	183	35.0	6,10
II a 55	Dark Translucent Blue	28	5.4	---
II a --	Translucent wine-purple	7	1.3	---
II a --	Translucent Amber	3	0.6	6
II b 18	Gooseberry (clear with white stripes)	12	2.3	3,5,6,7,
II b --	Translucent blue with 5 white stripes	5	1.0	---
II b --	Transl. Blue with 8-10 white stripes	4	0.8	6
II b --	Transl. Blue with 3 red and 3 white alternating stripes	4	0.8	6
II b --	Transl. Blue with 4 red and 4 white alternating stripes	2	0.4	---
II b --	Dark translucent blue with 3 red and 1 white stripes	1	0.2	---
IIbb 27	Dark translucent blue with 3 sets of white/red/white stripes	7	1.3	---
IIbb --	Translucent gunmetal blue-gray with 3 sets of white/red/white stripes	1	0.2	--
IIbb --	Translucent gunmetal blue-gray with 4 sets of white/red/white stripes	1	0.2	6*
II g 4	White with 3 circular blue and white eyes	3	0.6	2,4,
II g -	"Turquoise blue" with 3 red and white star eyes	7	1.3	6
III c 2*	Light blue/thin white/clear (Nueva Cadiz Plain)	1	0.2	1*

# APPENDIX A, Continued.

III-m 1*	Faceted Blue 7 layer chevron with clear core	1	0.2	---
IV a 16	Blue/thin white/blue core	1	0.2	6*
IV a --	Translucent purple/Translucent blue	1	0.2	6*
IV a --	Translucent amber/translucent blue	1	0.2	---
IV b 29	Blue/white/blue with 3 white stripes	1	0.2	---
IV b --	Blue/white/blue with 2 red and 2 white alternating stripes	1	0.2	---
IV b --	Blue/white/blue with 3 double red and 3 double white alt. stripes	1	0.2	---
IV g 1	Blue/white/blue with 3 red and white star eyes	1	0.2	3,4*,5*
IV k 6	Green 5 layer chevron	5	1.0	3*,4,6*

\* indicates bead with similar structure but some color variation.

Comparative Sites	Date	Reference
1. Tram	1565-1590	Wray 1973
2. Cameron	1575-1600	Wray 1973
3. Factory Hollow	1590-1615	Wray 1973
4. Blue Rock	1575-1595	Heisey and Witmer 1962
5. Wayland-Smith	1570-1595	Pratt 1961
6. Philip Mound	ca. 1580-1700	Benson 1967; Karklins 1974
7. Dutch Hollow	1600-1625	Wray 1973
8. Warren	1615-1635	Wray 1973
9. Thurston	1625-1637	Pratt 1961
10. Trigg	1610-1620	MacCord 1975
11. Andrews	1595-1625	Pratt 1961
12. Marshall	1637-1642	Pratt 1961
13. Clark	1642-1660	Pratt 1961

# APPENDIX B

## Glass Beads from the Bradford Ferry Site, 1-Ce-73

Based on a collection of 405 beads from 9 burials.

Kidd No.	Description of Necklace beads	No.	%	Comp. Sites
II a 13	Opaque white	4	1.0	3,6,10
II a 28	Translucent green	8	2.0	6,9
II a 40	Opaque "Turquoise blue"	219	54.0	3,4,6,8,9,10
II a 44	Translucent blue (several shades)	117	28.9	6,10
II a 55	Dark Translucent blue	5	1.2	---
II a --	Opaque white with metallic lustre	1	0.2	---
II b 18	Gooseberry (Clear with white stripes)	4	1.0	3,5,6,7
II b 53	Translucent Green with 7 white stripes	1	0.2	---
II b 57	Opaque "Turquoise blue" with 4 white str.	1	0.2	7?,10
II b 71	Translucent blue with 2 red and 2 white alternating stripes	15	3.7	---
II b --	Translucent blue with 8-10 white str.	6	1.5	6
II b --	Translucent blue with 5 white stripes	7	1.7	---
II b --	Translucent blue with 3 red and 3 white alternating stripes	1	0.2	6
II b --	Translucent blue with 2 white stripes	1	0.2	---
-----	Fluted Green "Mellon" bead with 3 white stripes	1	0.2	---
II g --	Opaque "turquoise blue" with 3 red and white star eyes	8	2.0	6
II g 4	Opaque white with 3 circular blue and white eyes	1	0.2	2,4
IV a 15?	Green/thin white/clear (green?) core	2	0.5	6
IV a 18	Blue/clear core (pony bead size)	1	0.2	---
IV a --	Blue/white/clear core (seed size)	1	0.2	6
IV bb -	Amber/white/ blue core with 3 sets of white-red-white stripes	1	0.2	---

# APPENDIX B, Continued

Additional beads not in above sample			Comp. Sites
II a --	Translucent amber		6
II b --	Translucent "Root beer" with 4 white stripes	rare	-
II b 19	Small olive shaped gooseberry (Clear with white stripes)	rare	-
II b' -	Oval white with 3 sets of triple wavy blue stripes	1 known	-
IV a 11	Clear/thin white/clear seed		10
IV a 16	Blue/thin white/blue	rare	6*
IV a --	Translucent purple/translucent blue	rare	6*
IV b --	Blue/thin white/blue with 8 eroded stripes	1 known	--
IV k 6	Green 5 layer chevron (Green/white/red/white/clear)	2 known	4, 3*, 6*
-----	Pressed faceted pony size beads in translucent blue and purple	numerous	---

\* Indicates bead with similar structure but some color variation.

See Appendix A for list of comparative sites.

# APPENDIX C

## Glass Beads from the Cooper Farm Site

Based on an examination of approximately 6 "strings"

Kidd No.	Bead description	Quantity	Comp. Sites
Necklace Beads			
II a 9	Transparent clear	rare	---
II a 13	Opaque white	rare	3,6,10
II a 28	Translucent Green	rare	6,9
II a 40	Opaque "Turquoise blue"	most common	3,4,6,8,9,10
II a 44	Translucent blue		6,10
II a 55	Dark Translucent blue	common	---
II a --	Translucent blue with approx. 2 pressed facets		---
II b 56	Opaque "Turquoise blue" with 3 white stripes	2	8,9,10,11,12,13
II b 68	Dark Translucent blue with 4-5 white stripes	4	6
"Pony bead" size			
II a 40	Opaque "Turquoise blue"		---
II a --	Translucent amber		---
"Seed bead" size			
II a 28	Translucent green		6
II a 36?	Medium opaque blue		---
II a 40	Opaque turquoise blue	common	---
II a 55	Dark Translucent blue		---
II a --	Opaque green		---
II b 18	Gooseberry (Clear with white stripes)	rare	---
II b 71	Translucent blue with 2 red and 2 white alternating stripes	common	----
IV a --	Thin clear/white core		---

See Appendix A for list of comparative sites.

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