

## THE HOOD SITE: LONGHOUSE BURIALS IN AN HISTORIC NEUTRAL VILLAGE

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### ABSTRACT

Excavations at the historic Neutral Hood Site produced the first discovery of burials within Neutral longhouses, and despite a relatively small sample size, certain inhumation patterns have been interpreted. A dichotomy between temporary and permanent burials has been proposed, based on the location within the longhouse, the presence or absence of grave goods, and the performance of sacrifice and associated ceremonialism.

It has been suggested that certain age groups may have been permanently interred within the longhouse reflecting the belief that the souls of both the very young and old remained near the village after death instead of proceeding to the land of the souls. To this group I have added the chronically ill, through the examination of the osteological and archaeological data.

### INTRODUCTION

While substantial archaeological and ethnohistorical information has been accumulated concerning the ossuary method of burial among the Neutral branch of the Ontario Iroquois (Butters 1933, Ridley 1961, Stothers 1972, Wright 1963, Wright 1977). There has been no publication with respect to burials within the longhouse. This may be attributable to the fact that no burials have been found or, more likely, recognized inside a Neutral longhouse.

However, during the summer of 1977, extensive excavations by Mr. Paul Lennox at the Hood Site, and historic Neutral village near Freelon (Fig. 1) dating to circa 1640-1641 (Lennox, personal communication 1977), unearthed six burial features, containing seven individuals.

A study of the nature of these interments, their provenience, and associated cultural materials, in the light of the ethnohistorical information will, despite the small sample size, increase our knowledge of the longhouse burial ritual of the Neutrals.

### ETHNOHISTORIC INFORMATION

The *Jesuit Relations* (JR) contain abundant information concerning the lifeways of the historic Iroquois, although as Gruber states "The occurrence of death...for the ethnographer, is...relatively rare in his experience..." (Gruber 1971:64-65), and the Jesuits were seemingly not exposed to the mortuary ritual as frequently as they were to other aspects of the native culture. This is in part revealed by the lack of mention of burial within the longhouse.

It is the purpose of this section to examine the Jesuit Relations for information on the beliefs and conceptions of the Ontario Iroquois concerning death, the soul, and the afterlife. The

The third respect in which they seem different from our Hurons, is in the multitude and sort of lunatics" (JR XXI:199).

Considering that during the period of the late 1630's there was a major outbreak of smallpox in the region, the description of the greater attachment of the Neutral to their dead may be explained by the suggestion that such a devastating epidemic could have possibly, and likely did, disrupt their traditional burial practices (Noble, personal communication 1977). Perhaps the widespread illness and high mortality did not allow them to keep up with the increased amounts of casualties, and as a result changes, like the storage of corpses in the longhouses, were necessitated.

Futhermore, Brébeuf and Chaumonot visited the Neutrals during the winter when burial would have been difficult even under normal circumstances.

I have assumed therefore, that Neutral interment practices and rituals were basically similar to those of the Hurons despite the fact that Huron ceremonies themselves are not dealt with in any great detail. The various features of the Hood interments will then be interpreted in the light of the belief systems and practices of both Amerindians in general and Hurons in more specific cases.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

The 1977 excavations at the Hood Site uncovered midden deposits, palisade, and 14 longhouses, which were excavated to various degrees (Fig. 2). Extensive areas between the longhouses were also examined. In all but one instance, when conditions permitted such action, the structures were completely excavated (Lennox, personal communication 1977), producing a very representative picture of the internal morphology of the longhouses. The six burial features which were identified would thus tend to reflect quite accurately the nature and distribution of interments within the longhouses.

This section should be prefaced with a short description of the arrangement of the interior of the Neutral longhouse in that differing burial types are found in the various sections. The basic division of the longhouse is between the living and the storage spaces which are located at either end. The boundary between these areas are marked by a set of linear features approximately two metres in from the end wall. Within the storage area, pits of considerable depth and diameter are occasionally found. Regularly spaced elliposoid features, referred to as slash pits (Noble 1972), run the length of the living portion of the longhouse, about one metre in from each side wall, and their function must have been similar to that of the posts which make up the bunkline in the Huron longhouse.

#### House 2 Feature 9

This burial was located in the living portion of the house, toward the east end, just outside of the slash pit line (Fig. 2 and 8 Table 2).

The infant, approximately one month of age (Table 2), was placed on its right side facing northeast, and oriented to the southeast (Table 2), in a flexed position, with its head in the deeper part of the sloping burial pit.

Included with the infant were various grave offerings. A strand of 30 red beads: 14 tubular glass, 15 round glass, and one tubular catlinite bead, was located around the neck of the infant. Located on the chest area was an articulated portion of tubular shell bead work (Fig. 3), which was either incorporated with the clothing or was itself a separate article, perhaps a breastplate or necklace of some sort.

The anterior ends of the ribs showed evidence of having been burnt, as did some of the shell

TABLE 2  
CORRELATION OF DIRECTION: HOUSE AND  
BURIAL OR BURIAL FEATURE

Burial	Orientation of House	Orientation of Feature	Orientation of Burial (Head)
House 2 Feature 9	ENE-WSW	NNE-SSW	NW-SE (SE)
House 2 Feature 23	ENE-WSW	NW-SE	NNW-SSE (SSE)
House 6 Feature 38A	NNW-SSE (N-S)	NNW-SSE	E-W (W)
House 6 Feature 38B	NNW-SSE (N-S)	NNW-SSE	E-W (W)
House 8 Feature 50	NW-SE	NW-SE	NW-SE (SE)
House 10 feature 36	N-S	NNW-SSE	N-S (N)
House 12 Feature 7	ENE-WSW (E-W)	ENE-WSW	ENE-WSW



Fig. 3. Hood site, House 2, Feature 9, frontal view; note shell beads beneath ribs.

Artifactual material found with Burial A, and southernmost infant (Fig. 4), consisted of a set of earrings constructed of red tubular glass beads; the left consisting of five strands, and the right of four. As mentioned in the Jesuit Relations, earrings were not uncommonly found on children, and were found as frequently on men as women (JR I:281, XLIV:289). Also found with this infant were six rolled brass beads situated in the area of the left side of the cranium. Three of these beads were left undisturbed, in a shape comparable to the radiating spokes of a

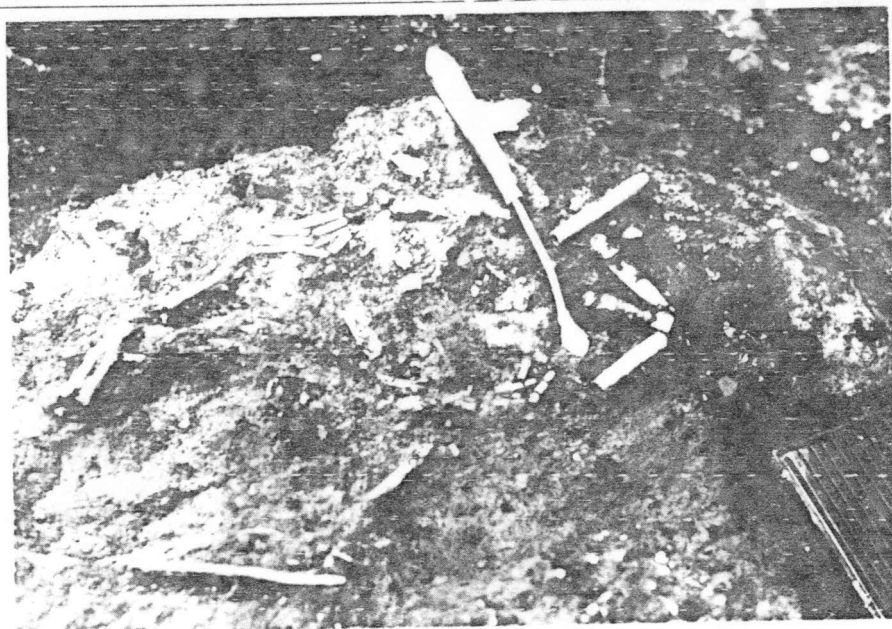


Fig. 4. Hood site, House 6, Feature 38, upper portion of Burial A.

TABLE 3  
AGING OF INDIVIDUALS<sup>1</sup>

House 2 Feature 9

pars lateralis <sup>2</sup>	23.3mm	late fetal, 1 month
pars basilaris	16.5mm	8-9 months fetal
radius <sup>3</sup>	55.7mm	NB-6 months closer to
humerus	66.6mm	NB-6 months 6months
ulna	69.9mm	approx. 6 months
breadth fo sciatic notch <sup>4</sup>	10.1mm	NB-1 month closer to
ilium length	33.8mm	NB-1 month NB
ilium breadth	30.7mm	3 months

House 2 Feature 23

pars lateralis	21.9mm	approx. 9 months fetal
pars basilaris	14.9mm	approx. 8 months fetal
humerus	58.7mm	late fetal
femur	68.6mm	late fetal
tibia	60.8mm	late fetal
breadth of sciatic notch	9.5mm	approx. NB
ilium length	32.7mm	approx. NB
ilum breadth	28.6mm	approx. 3 months

House 10 Feature 36

pars laterlis	24.4mm	aapprox. NB
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House 10 Feature 36

suture closure <sup>5</sup>	coronal, sagittal, and lambdoid sutures closed endocranially range 50-80 years	
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## Table 3 Continued:

House 12 Feature 7

radius  
 ramus of ischium and  
 pubic bone<sup>6</sup>

127.0mm 4½-5½ years

not fused less than 7-8 years

Age DeterminationHouse 2 Feature 23

extreme late fetal to new born

House 8 Feature 50

new born (based on comparison)

House 2 Feature 9

late fetal to 6 months (closer to 1 month)

House 6 Feature 38A, B

new born to 6 months (slightly older than H2 F9)

House 12 Feature 7

5½-7 years

House 10 Feature 36

50-80 years with a mean age of 65.4 years

1. The fragmentary nature of the skeletal material prevented a standardized method of aging the remains, such as the use of a single bone. As many elements as possible were utilized to determine an accurate age for the individuals.
2. Redfield 1970.
3. Johnston 1962.
4. Reynolds 1945.
5. Acasdi and Nemeskeri 1970.
6. Bass 1971.
7. To assign relative order to the infants a visual comparison of size and robusticity was employed with the results of the measurements to aid in the final decision.

Clutched in the left hand was a broken raccoon baculum (Deborah Pihl, personal communication 1977) directed with the distal end towards the pelvic region, and it would not seem unreasonable that this represented a symbol of fertility, especially when considering their beliefs regarding the souls of the very young. An infant at the Middleport Perry site also had a baculum included with it, one which belonged to an otter (Kapches 1976:33).

Grave goods included with Burial B consisted of two strands of glass beads. One consisted of six long red tubular glass beads, and the other of at least 196 white, black, and transparent burgundy small round glass beads. Preserved in the area of the brass beads of Burial A was some organic material, presumably bark, which may have been part of a bark lining or covering which enveloped the infants. This practice of bundling infants in bark is reported ethnographically (JR VI:129).

There were several areas of concentrated charred wood over each of the individuals, however, evidence of burning occurring directly on the infants was not present, suggesting the sacrifice was performed on top of the bundle. The extensive adornment of the infants, and their position within the same pit, can only lead to the conclusion that these infants were twins. The extremely fragmentary nature of the skeletal material did not permit a comparison of ages, so it is not possible to determine whether they died simultaneously.

Two other sets of twins have been reported from Iroquoian sites in Ontario (Kapches 1976:33), however, in comparison with the Cahiaque and Steward twins, the Hood twins were afforded a much more elaborate burial. The fact that the other sets of twins were fetal must be considered when making comparisons. Grave goods included with the House 6 burials were more extensive and varied, in type and notably colour, than the other Hood interments, and