

ARCH NOTES

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INVESTIGATIONS AT MOHAWK VILLAGE, 1983

by Ian Kenyon and Neal Ferris

Introduction

As Ontario prepares to celebrate the bicentennial of the migration of some 5000 loyalists who arrived here from the United States in 1784, our attention was recently directed to the former village of some equally prestigious loyalists who also ended a long migration two hundred years ago. We refer to the village of the Mohawks, one tribe of the Iroquois Confederacy that settled along the Grand River in 1784.

An Historical Sketch of Mohawk Village

The story of the Six Nations emigration to Canada is, or at least should be, too well known to repeat here (see, for example, Johnston, 1964). In recognition of the Six Nations support of the British during the American Revolution as well as in compensation for their losses suffered after 1776, the Crown granted a large tract of land along the Grand River to the Iroquois in 1784. At this time some 1800 people, led by the charismatic Joseph Brant, settled along the river. Although all six tribes were represented, the most populous were the Mohawk and Cayuga.

By the late 18th century a chain of Six Nation villages had been established along the Grand River, extending from near the mouth of the river 70 km northwest to the vicinity of the present-day city of Brantford. These villages differed from the traditional Iroquois form: rather than consisting of tightly packed rows of bark longhouses encircled by palisades, they were loose agglomerations of log houses, built in European fashion. The principal locational determinant for these villages seems to have been access to the fertile silt soils of the river flood plain, on which these farmers grew most of their crops. In this respect Mohawk Village (also known as Brant's Village and New Oswego) was well situated, for it was centred on the most extensive flood plain of the Grand River (fig. 1).

Unlike the majority of the Cayugas, the Mohawk were largely Christians, and an Anglican chapel was soon built at Mohawk Village, a structure which still stands today. An 1790's painting by Mrs. Simcoe shows the thriving village as consisting of this church and at least a dozen houses, most of which appear to have been located south of the present-day Henry house. Early visitors to Mohawk Village admired both its attractive setting and its air of civilization. Major Littlehales wrote in 1793:

This place is particularly striking when seen from the high land above it, extensive meadows, the Grand River next it, with a termination of Forests. Here is a well built wooden church with a steeple, a school house, and an excellent house of Captain Brant's...While we were at the Mohawk Village, we heard Divine Service performed by an Indian. The devout behaviour of the women..., the melody of their voices, and the excellent time they kept in singing Hymns is worthy of observation. (Cruikshank, 1923-31:289)

former village there are now several standing structures, principally Mohawk Chapel, dating to the 1780's, and the Henry house, whose date has yet to be determined. Except for the land around the Chapel and the Henry house, much of Mohawk Village in recent years has been under cultivation. So far, six discrete archaeological areas (labelled A-F on fig. 2) have been identified: future investigations will undoubtedly reveal additional areas, particularly under the lawn east of the Mohawk Chapel and the lawn south of the Henry house.

Area A. Area A has been surface collected for years, and was finally excavated during August of 1983. The Conservation Authority's work had stripped the topsoil from approximately 0.4 hectares of the northern part of the village site ridge: however, only a small portion of the stripped area contained any archaeological features. The extent of our excavation therefore was only 303 square metres, in which the cellars and associated pits and postholes of two houses, evidently log cabins, were exposed (see fig. 3).

During the excavation it became apparent that the south half of Area A -- representing the first house -- dates to the period of c. 1800-1840, while the north half -- the second house -- dates to c. 1840-1860; that is, the two houses were likely sequential rather than contemporaneous. Features 2 and 12 are the cellars to the two houses, each surrounded by associated features. Below we will therefore treat the two house areas of the site separately.

The early half of the site is dominated by feature 2, the cellar, which measured 3.3 by 1.8 meters, and had a depth of 0.8 meters (see fig. 4). A lobe in the southwestern corner of the feature indicated the location of steps leading down into the cellar. The feature was excavated in quadrants, the fill being screened through quarter-inch mesh. As well, soil samples were taken for the purpose of flotation. Artifacts were prolific and represented both items dropped into the cellar during its use, as well as materials lying in and around the house, being shoved in as part of the fill when the structure was abandoned. It is no surprise therefore that these materials are for the most part domestic artifacts.

A significant feature associated with the early house is a refuse pit (feature 11 in fig. 3). This feature was 2.8 by 1.8 meters in size, and had a depth of 0.5 meters. The fill was made up of many layers of ash and charcoal, containing much refuse animal bone. In the northern portion of this feature the layers of ash were built up and became thicker, forming a band that was visible in the plan of the feature. As the northern portion of the feature is the closest to the house, this build-up of ash would appear to say something about how the pit was filled. The individual carrying the refuse from the house would stop at the closest edge of the pit (the northern edge of feature 11) and toss the ash in. The majority of the fill would fall in close to where the individual was standing, archaeologically reflected by the thicker ash layers in the northern portion of the feature.

To the north and east of the early cellar are several smaller features (1, 7, 8, 38). The artifacts recovered from these would suggest that the pits were used for only short periods of time. These features then can offer us even greater temporal control for interpreting site activity,

since together they appear to span the entire period of occupation of the early house. Located to the south of the early cellar is a row of three postholes, possibly representing the posts of a veranda.

The size of the house cannot be estimated since there were no features marking the wall or corners of the structure. Here it should be borne in mind that log cabins usually had no foundations, perhaps just a boulder or wooden block to level the corners. Even if this cabin did have such corner stones, they would not have survived the many years of cultivation. Owing to the ploughing and stripping of Area A we were, of course, not excavating down from the ground surface as it existed in the 19th century but from about a foot below this. For the same reason the hearth area of the house could not be located, although the quantity of bricks recovered from the cellar implies the presence of a brick fireplace or chimney.

The north half of Area A is marked by the later cellar, feature 12 (see fig. 3). This cellar measured 3.7 by 2.9 meters and was 1 meter deep. As with feature 2, this cellar exhibited a 'stairwell' lobe (fig. 4). The cellar was also excavated in quadrants and screened through quarter-inch mesh; as well, soil samples were taken. The skeleton of a colt was found close to the surface in the cellar, in amongst the rubble of the destruction layer. The cellar is surrounded by associated features, including feature 39, a thin hillside midden, which is located 25 m to the east of the cellar on the slope of the plateau. Immediately to the east of the cellar is a 4m by 5m rectangle of postholes, which may represent a framed house extension or porch. As with the earlier house, the size of the later one cannot be estimated with confidence. If, however, the rectangle of postholes does represent an attachment to the log building, then the house's width may have been in the vicinity of 5m (16'), the modal width for 19th century log cabins (Rempel, 1967).

Area A has yielded something in the vicinity of 20,000 artifacts. Many artifact categories are well represented in the collection: a number of ceramic vessels can be restored for both cellars; faunal remains are abundant; domestic, technological and personal artifact types have been recovered in such quantities that a much larger picture can be drawn of the material culture of this site than is usually the case.

The southern or earlier portion of the site yielded many early nineteenth century ceramic types such as Chinese export porcelain; mocha bowls; several early patterns of printed, dipt, edged, and painted wares, and a surprisingly small amount of creamware. Metal artifacts were abundant and included bone handled forks and knives; a tanged iron spear point; a fish hook; two fire steels (strike-a-lights); metal buttons, including some which were gold plated; a Brock and a Wellington half-penny, both dated 1816; thimbles and a number of silver ornamental items, including a dozen silver 'ring' brooches.

Other artifact types recovered included an abundance of pipe bowls and stems; wine glass and decanter sherds; several bone combs and buttons, as well as an excellent sample of faunal remains. Hunting gear was well represented: a gun 'worm', several English gun flints, lead ball and shot, and a lead strip, the residue from the home manufacturing of ball. As well, there are ink wells and blacking bottles, writing slates, and lead pencils. Beads include a purple shell wampum from feature 11 and a white

glass tubular bead (imitation wampum) from feature 2. There were ten white seed beads, all but one recovered from the soil samples.

The features of the northern or later period of Area A proved to be even more prolific. As with the early part of the site, this area yielded an abundance of ceramic types and patterns, including a one depicting the Crystal Palace at the Great Exhibition in London, held in the year 1851. As well, most artifact classes mentioned for the early area were also well represented in the later area, with the exception of silver ornaments (only one ring brooch was found), apparently replaced by gold-plated, rhinestone-studded jewellery. This area also differed in that more children's toys were recovered, including several glass and clay marbles, a doll's head, a toy thimble, and a child's cup, as well as several sherds of an alphabet or 'motto' plate. Also found in feature 12 were some pre-historic artifacts, including a ceramic Neutral pipe bowl, presumably belonging to someone's 'curio' collection. Historic white clay pipes appeared to be more abundant in this part of the site, with many complete bowls including one of porcelain, being recovered. Also found was a Chinese porcelain ink well, spectacle glasses, ceramic stove pipe, and iron stove fragments. Coins include Bank of Upper Canada half-penny tokens dated 1850 and 1852, a Bank of Montreal half-penny token of 1842, a British shilling of 1845 and a worn silver American three-cent piece of an 1851 to 1853 style. Perhaps one of the most striking differences between the two house areas was seen in the soil samples taken from feature 12. Over one hundred glass seed beads were recovered from the heavy fraction of the flotation samples, these beads ranging in size between 1mm and 3mm and coming in every basic colour. Several dozen necklace-sized glass beads, including both cut-faceted and round wire-wound types, were found in the later cellar; in contrast only two, both blue faceted, were recovered from the earlier cellar.

Area B. Area B is located east of the Mohawk Chapel (see fig. 2). This area is presently covered by a lawn; however in 1971 the soil was ploughed and at that time a surface collection was made by Thomas Kenyon. From this, a moderate sample of artifacts has been recovered, consisting primarily of ceramics. From the analysis of these ceramics, it would appear that Area B dates from about the 1790's to the 1850's.

Area C. When we arrived at Mohawk Village in August, the future course of the dyke had already been stripped in the southern portion of the site, the former Henry property. The stripping here involved a ten metre wide swath which paralleled the crest of the river bank. No exposed features were observed on the dyke right-of-way; however, near the very crest of the river bank ashes, brick fragments and ceramics were observed in the soil attached to an uprooted tree. Since this area was to be cleaned out and covered by the toe of the dyke, we returned for 3 days in September to rescue the feature. After trowelling down an approximately 2.5 by 2.5 m area, the feature (Area C, Feature 1) was revealed to be an oval pit measuring 224 cm by 190 cm, with a layer of ash lining its north and west margins. The feature was dug in quadrants, screened with a quarter-inch mesh, and bulk soil samples were taken. Upon excavation the feature proved to be a privy which had been subsequently used as a trash pit (fig. 5). The upper portion had a basin-shaped profile, lined with ashes which were covered with a pocket of subsoil fill. Most of the artifacts recovered from this feature derived from the ash layer. Below the ash was a 153 by 114 cm rectangular pit, dug with military-like precision, at the bottom of

important industrial centre. Finds from the later house include cast iron stove fragments, likely made locally, stoneware crockery manufactured by Morton & Co. of Brantford, and also a beer bottle from Wm. Spencer's nearby brewery.

Some idea of the range of goods being offered by local merchants can be seen in an 1832 invoice book (housed with an accompanying ledger at Doon Pioneer Village) for the short-lived Douglass general store, Brantford. Douglass' store offered a wide variety of ceramics: blue and green edged plates, printed plates and teaware in "all sorts patterns", painted cups and saucers. Also there were glass tumblers, wine glasses, and wine bottles; assorted cutlery; scissors and pocket knives; gilt, shell and horn buttons; hooks and eyes; combs of a number of styles; a good selection of nail sizes; and bottled shoe blacking. The wide variety of goods stocked by merchants such as Douglass was available to not just the white settlers -- all of the goods just listed were recovered at Mohawk Village. Incidentally, none of the goods ordered by Douglass were of a type specifically used for the Indian trade, but, as we have seen, most of the commodities required by the Mohawks were the same ones being demanded by the whites. As far as we can tell, only one of the credit customers listed in Douglass' ledger was an Iroquois; however, this entry is revealing. As with his white customers, Douglass had allowed Moses Carpenter (a Mohawk who lived 2 km east of Mohawk Village) to make some credit purchases in Dec. 1832 and Feb. 1833. When the Douglass store was being closed out early in 1833, Carpenter, unlike some of the white patrons, paid his debt in full, settling not in cash but with moccasins (these were hot selling items with Douglass' white customers).

✓ Clothing and Adornment

In looking at the clothing and personal adornment artifacts excavated from Mohawk Village certain trends through time can be identified. The abundance and variety of beads found in the later cellar of Area A is in sharp contrast to the few, plain white beads recovered from the early cellar. Speck (1955:54) noted that early nineteenth century Iroquois beadwork featured simple beaded borders, composed primarily of white seed beads. With this simple pattern few beads were needed, and perhaps this is reflected in the early cellars by the density of beads in the soil samples, which is about 0.3 beads per litre, much lower than that found in later features in Area A. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Iroquois beadwork underwent a revolution, a more naturalistic style coming into fashion, with very elaborate floral patterns executed in a variety of bead colours (Speck, 1955:64). This is nicely supported by the archaeological findings in the later cellar of Area A. Not only is there a wide variety of embroidery bead sizes and colours, but also the density of beads in the soil samples taken from feature 12 increases to about 2 per litre. Possibly some of this later beadwork was being sold to Europeans as part of the growing cottage industry in Native crafts.

Changes in other types of ornamentation are also worthy of some discussion. The early cellar exhibits a sizable collection of silver jewellery, including simple ring brooches and silver ear-bobs. From various paintings and engravings depicting the Iroquois of the early nineteenth century, it is clear that these silver goods were common items of personal adornment. However, only one silver ring brooch was recovered for the later cellar.

As indicated in the previous section, this is due primarily to cutbacks in provisioning items on the part of the British government, although rhinestone jewellery appears to fill the gap left by the unavailability of silver items. These rhinestone pieces, which are mainly rings, pendants, and brooches, tend to have gaudy goldplated settings, holding anywhere from one to several stones of various shapes and sizes; that is, they are standard early Victorian jewellery, probably obtained from a local general store. This change of adornment through time perhaps reflects a 'forced' acculturation: the British Government stopped the influx of silver jewellery, thus initiating the switch to more 'Euro-Canadian' forms of personal adornment.

Finally, we should briefly mention what is known about clothing styles for the inhabitants of Mohawk Village. Many historical accounts and several paintings and engravings exist that record the daily and formal dress of the Grand River Iroquois. One such engraving done by James Peachey shows a classroom in 1786, where a native school-teacher, possibly Paulus Sahonwadi, is instructing a group of Mohawk children. This teacher, although depicted as wearing silver ear bobs, as are his pupils, is seen wearing a European style of coat and boots (Johnston, 1964: plate 1). Archaeologically, this mixture of Native ornamentation and European garb is evidenced in the early cellar by the number of silver items, as well as several portions of blacking bottles, used to black standard European-style boots, and perhaps the wide selection of button styles -- shell, bone, gilt brass and cloth-covered. Instances in the historical documents of people like Joseph Brant appearing in full Native regalia occur when describing some formal event in which Natives and Europeans are involved. Therefore it would appear that daily dress of the inhabitants of Mohawk Village was in line with standard European styles of the time, modified to accommodate certain Iroquois preferences, while the more elaborate Native dress was worn primarily for formal occasions, probably used to impress upon Europeans Native identity and status.

Foodways

An abundance of animal bone was recovered from our excavations this past summer. No detailed analysis of the bone has yet been done; however an initial sort has revealed some interesting trends among domestic animal groups represented in the collection. A "grab bag" sample from features 2 and 11 reveals that pig represents 85% of the count for domestic mammals, while in feature 12 it represents 76%. Cow represents 15 and 10 percent respectively, while sheep remains are not even present in features 2 and 11, and in feature 12 constitute only 12 percent of the domestic mammals. This preference for pig appears to be confirmed through historical documents. For example, the 1843 property census for the Six Nations, which lists livestock holdings for all of the tribes along the Grand River, states that some 2070 hogs were owned by the natives of Six Nations, as opposed to only 790 cattle and a very low 83 sheep (Johnston, 1964:307).

It is worth a moment to digress here and compare the faunal findings at Mohawk Village to rural European domestic sites of the 19th century that have been excavated in southwestern Ontario. Fig. 11 illustrates the relationship of sheep, pig and cow as seen in the faunal collections of eight sites.

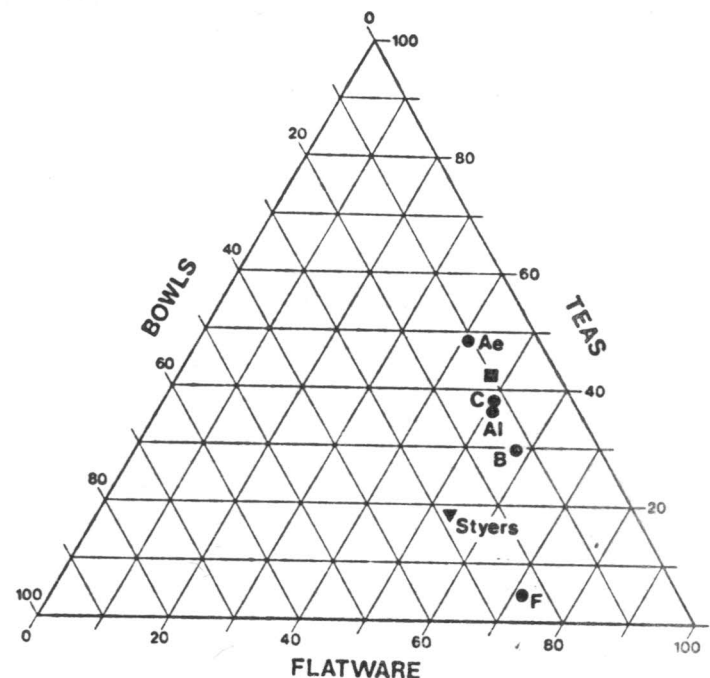


Figure 12: TRIANGULAR GRAPH SHOWING THE PERCENTAGES OF PLATES & DISHES (FLATWARE), SAUCERS (TEAS) AND BOWLS.

Letters denote areas within Mohawk Village (Ae = "early" house, Area A; A1 = "late" house). Asterisk gives mean of 22 European sites taken from Kenyon and Kenyon, 1982 and Ferris and Kenyon, 1983.