

# ROTUNDA

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Crew member Peter Hall and archaeologist Walter Kenyon excavate a Neutral Indian burial site at Grimsby. See page 4. (Photo: Jim Chambers)

**W.A. Kenyon**

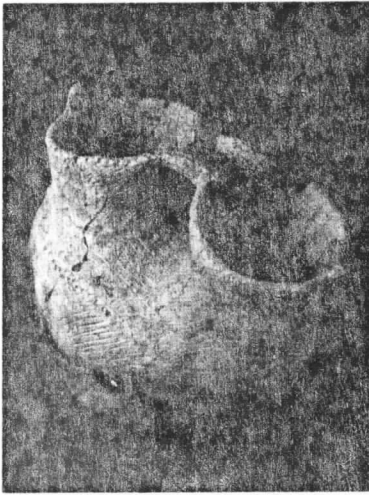
The town of Grimsby, Ontario is well known for the hospitality that it extends to visitors. This tradition, apparently, can be traced back to about 1625 A.D., the year that Étienne Brûlé visited there. Brûlé, so near as we know, was the first European to visit the area and to be entertained by the Neutral Indians who lived there at the time. Although the details of Brûlé's visit were never recorded, relationships must have been reasonably cordial, for shortly after his visit, one of the local damsels bore him a daughter. By the time she reached her early 20s the girl had attained some prominence in the community. She had become what a less strident age would have called a medicine man; and at her early death, when she was buried in the village cemetery just west of what is now Centennial

Park in Grimsby, the tools of her profession were buried with her. Three of the sucking-tubes which she used in the curing ceremonies were carefully placed in the grave, just above her left shoulder.

A few years later, in 1650, the Neutrals were wiped out by the Iroquois of New York State. Many of them were slaughtered, while the remainder were dispersed, to be absorbed, finally, by neighbouring tribes. And so they were forgotten. There was no one left to remember their passing but a few historians and archaeologists, and the Iroquois people themselves. Their abandoned settlements were soon reduced to the humus from which they had sprung, while the slowly encroaching forest finally wiped out all traces of their villages, their corn fields, and their cemeteries.

For over 300 years, the Neutrals lay shrouded in silence, while European settlers moved into their ancient homeland, to carve out farms and hamlets from what they believed to be the primeval forest. Traces of the old Neutral villages were turned up from time to time by the settler's plough, and on rare occasions human bones were also unearthed as the plough cut into one of the forgotten cemeteries.

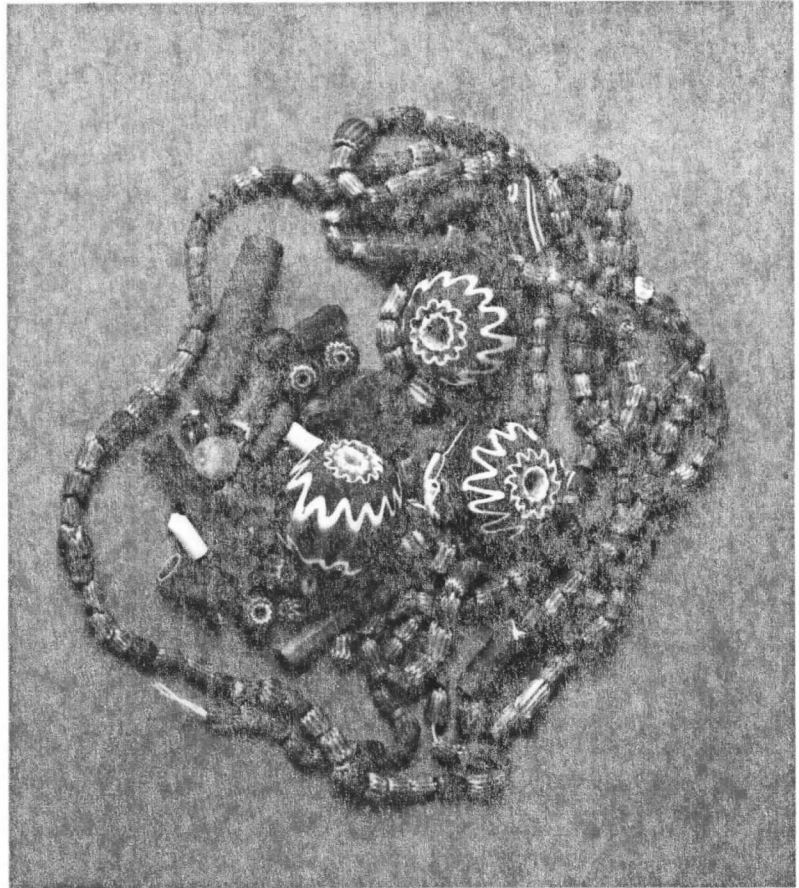
It is perhaps a sad commentary on the human condition, but whenever one of the Neutral cemeteries was located, it was invariably looted by curio-hunters. I can find no instance in which a priest or minister suggested that the unearthed bones should be treated with the same dignity that would have been accorded to European remains. Nor can I find



Above: An unusual double-mouthed vessel from Grave No. 1. Note the salamanders at the rim.

Right: An assortment of beads and shells from a number of graves.

Left: Grave No. 62 was a mass burial containing 104 bodies.



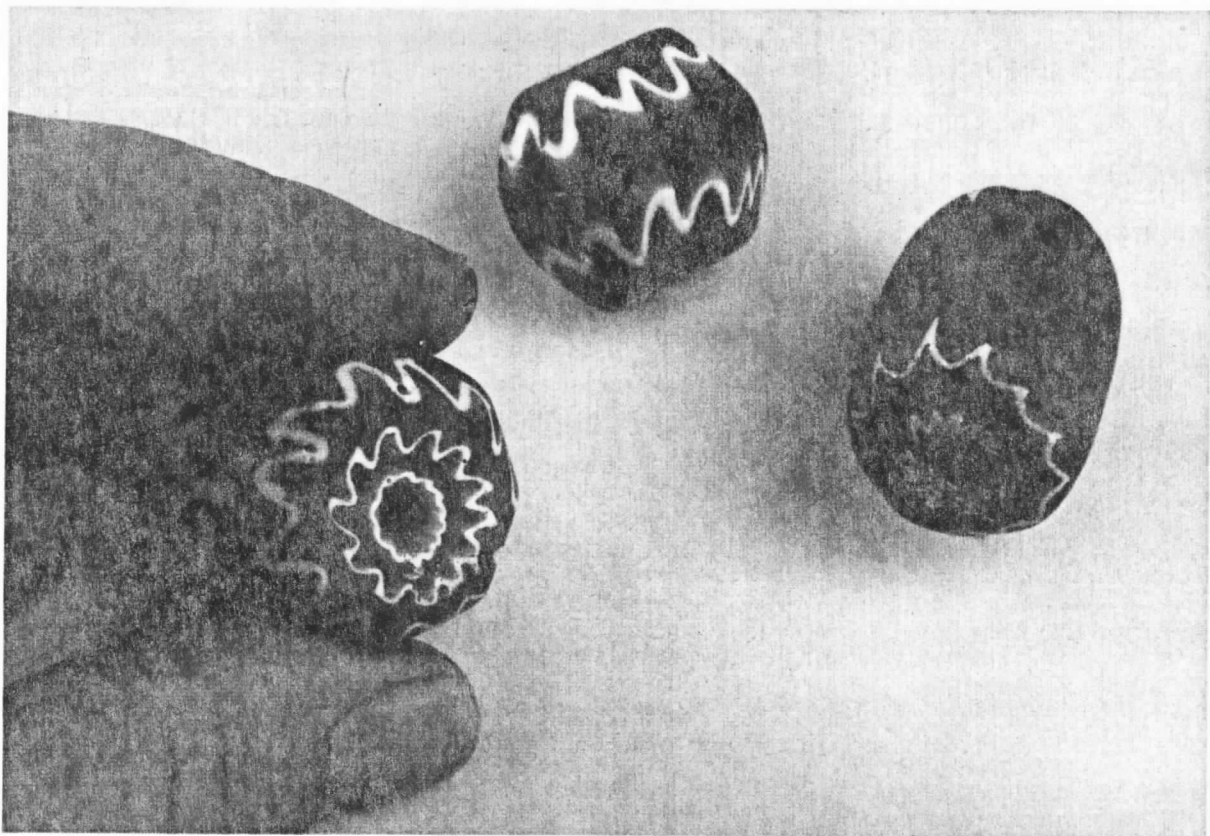
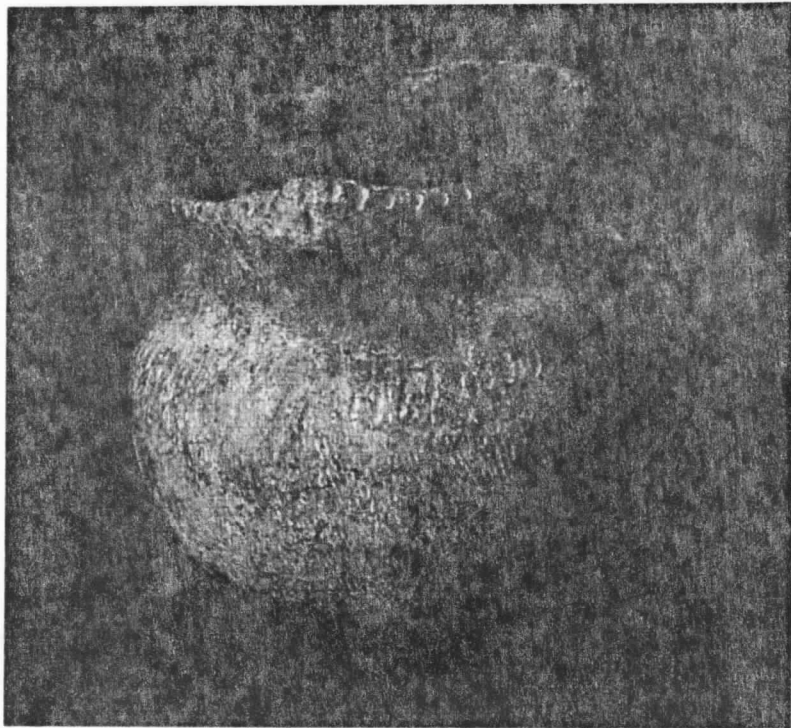
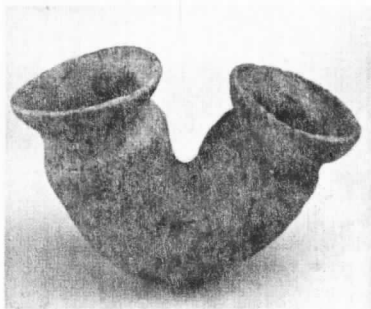
Photographs by Jim Chambers  
Drawings by Nancy Tousley

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Right: This typical Neutral clay vessel was found in Grave No. 3.

Below: An intact double-mouthed vessel.

Bottom: Three star beads of Venetian glass. The one at the right has had the blue and white layers removed to show the red, a colour with rich symbolic associations for the Neutral.



COLOUR

medicine woman mentioned above, whom we suspect might be the daughter of Etienne Brulé. All that we really know, of course, is that the timing is right, and that she is half European. For the gross morphology of her skull — that is, its general appearance — is distinctly European, while her dentition, with equal assurance, is Indian. Grave furniture for No. 9 consisted of seven sucking-tubes, four turtle shell rattles, four clay vessels, one antler comb, two lumps of red ochre, some animal bones which probably had some ritual significance, 20 copper beads, 274 shell beads and 421 glass beads.

We completed the excavation at 5:15 p.m., on April 4, 1977, almost six months after we started. During that period, we removed 374 bodies from 55 graves. To record the location of the bones and grave furniture within the 55 graves, we drew 110 maps, and have already made 627 entries in the field catalogue. Totals are not yet available, but some of the major categories of grave goods include: 35 ceramic vessels, 28 stone and ceramic pipes, 16 copper kettles, 14 iron axes, 43 flint arrow points, and well over 14,000 shell, stone, and glass beads.

This is admittedly an impressive collection of specimens, and it will be invaluable in illustrating the way of life of a people who are long since gone. But even more impressive, in my opinion, are some of the subtle clues that are scattered throughout the body of data. For example, one of the most spectacular items that the Neutrals were getting from the French was the large star bead such as the ones illustrated on page 8. These were built up of six successive layers of different coloured glass, and then the ends were bevelled to bring out the characteristic patterning that gave them their name. The outer layer was a deep, royal blue. Beneath this was a thin, white layer, and beneath that again was a thicker layer of brick-red glass. To us, with our European background, the blue outer layer conjures up visions of empire, and the pomp and

circumstances of royalty. The Neutral Indian, on the other hand, was equally steeped in tradition, but the symbolism was different because it related to his own past and to his own system of values. In his experience, the "royal" colour, so to speak, was a brick red. He valued red ochre as the ancient symbol of life, and almost certainly placed an equally high symbolic value on Catlinite, a brick-red stone that was quarried in what is now western Minnesota. The Indian certainly appreciated the large star beads, for they are very striking objects. But he did not like the fact that the highly valued brick-red layer was obscured by a thin layer of blue glass which he felt was in rather poor taste. So he sat down with a slab of sandstone and carefully ground off the offending outer layer. He was quite prepared — even anxious — to accept European items in trade. But he would modify them till they could be fitted more or less comfortably into his own system of values, a vision of the full and dignified life that had not yet been seriously distorted by alien forces.

The excavation of the Neutral cemetery in Grimsby was one of the most difficult exercises in political archaeology that I have ever been involved with. But in spite of all the noise, confusion, and silliness that obscured the basic issues, it was also one of the most rewarding. Prominent among such rewards was the following letter:

Dear Dr. Kenyon

Will you tell me how you got to be an archaeologist because I want to be one too.

Yours truly

John Davis  
Grade 1  
St. Denis School  
Carlton Street  
St. Catharines, Ontario



Walter A. Kenyon, with the Royal Ontario Museum since 1956, is Curator of Canadian Archaeology in the Office of the Chief Archaeologist. Although research has led him from the central and eastern Arctic to the West Indies and Central America, most of his work has been devoted to the pre-history and early history of Ontario. For the past few years, he has also been doing underwater archaeology on the old canoe routes of the fur traders. He is the author of two books on northern exploration, *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Capt. James*, and *Tokens of Possession*.