

The Fairport Harbor Site, (33-La-5), Lake County, Ohio

By James L. Murphy*

ABSTRACT

The Fairport Harbor Site, 33-La-5, was partially excavated during the summer of 1967. The site represents a single component believed to date *circa* 1300 A.D. Ceramics indicate that the site is very closely related to the Reeve Site and less closely related to the Tuttle Hill and South Park sites. The Fairport Harbor Site is definitely prehistoric and cannot be considered protohistoric Erie as has been suggested previously.

THE Fairport Harbor village site is located within the town of Fairport Harbor, 300 feet southeast of the East Street crossing of the Fairport, Painesville, and Erie Railroad (Fig. 1). The site lies on a slight knoll on the west bank of a former channel of the Grand River. As late as 1937, when Morgan and Ellis (1943) excavated part of the site for the Ohio State Museum, the Grand River flowed close to the edge of the bluff. The river channel has since been relocated over half a mile west of the site. It is estimated that the site stood upon a bluff approximately thirty feet above the level of the Grand River at the time of occupation.

Morgan and Ellis' report is readily available. Reasons for further excavation at the site included land-fill operations which threatened to obscure or destroy the site, plans by the Fairport Board of Education to

turn the site into an athletic field, and recent doubts (Fitting 1964) that the site represents a Contact occupation. The site was partially excavated by a small crew employed by the Cleveland Natural Science Museum in July and August, 1967.

No trace of Morgan and Ellis' original excavations was found. No datum is given in their report, and it proved impossible to locate the area of their excavation with any precision. The stump of the tree which they note as the sole tree along the edge of the bluff was located; but, since they did not locate this tree on their map, its precise location in regard to their excavation remains undeterminable. Presence of the tree stump does disprove the contention of local residents that thirty feet of the site has been eroded since Morgan and Ellis' work.

It is estimated that the pipeline indicated on Morgan and Ellis' map lay about forty feet west of a pipeline removed just prior to the

Excavation was sponsored by the Cleveland Natural Science Museum. Dave Rusnik, Fairport Harbor, Peter Hoover, of the Museum staff, Mrs. Vivien Marshall and Mrs. Thelma Murphy, Salem, Ohio, Richard Mitchell, Rogers, Ohio, and Elwood Walpert, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, were volunteer workers. Permission to excavate was granted by the Fairport Harbor Board of Education. David Brose, Case Western Reserve University, has read the manuscript and offered numerous suggestions. Bruce Frumker of the Museum staff provided photographs of the artifacts.

Historic Remains

The presence of historic material, particularly kaolin pipe fragments, led Morgan and Ellis to conclude that the site dated between 1600 and 1650 A.D. Fitting (1964) concluded that this historic material is all 19th century. Dan Caister, University of Michigan, examined some of the china from the 1967 excavation and concluded that it dates from the 1820's and 1830's. The assemblage compares very well with material examined by the author from a tavern site of this period excavated by the Kinzua Chapter of the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology. Varieties of recovered earthenware (Fig. 14) are listed in Table 3.

A brass button from Square 7-A can be rather precisely dated. It was manufactured by Benedict and Coe, Waterbury, Connecticut. The company operated under this name only from 1829 to 1834.

A musket gunflint (Square 10-A) is made of translucent light brown flint but is probably of British manufacture. Such gunflints date no earlier than 1800 (Witthoft 1966).

CONCLUSIONS

Without a reliable radiocarbon date for the Fairport Harbor Site, reliance must be placed upon the similarity of the artifact assemblage to those from other sites. The pre-historic ceramics indicate a very close relationship with the Reeve Site, ten miles west, on the Chagrin River. That site yields relatively more Reeve Opposed ware and notably less Fairport Filleted, suggesting a slightly later date than the Fairport Harbor Site. The Reeve Site is believed to be earlier than the Lyman Site, a Monongahela component six miles southeast of Fairport. The Lyman Site has been guesstimated at 1450-1550 A.D., yield-

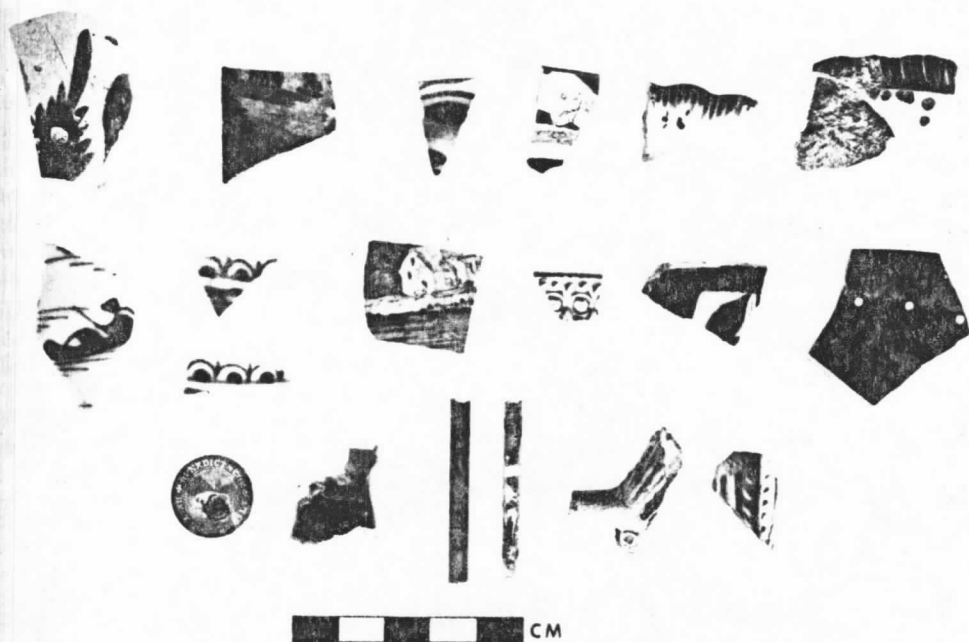


Fig. 14. Historic ceramics: top and middle rows—brass button, gunflint, glass portiere beads; bottom row—kaolin pipe fragments.