

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT THE SITE
OF A NORTH WEST AND XY COMPANY
WINTER POST (47-Bt-26):
A PROGRESS REPORT**

by

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ABSTRACT

The following is a progress report of the continuing archaeological investigations at the site of the North West and XY Company wintering posts located on the Yellow River in Burnett County, Wisconsin. These contiguous British-era fur trade posts were occupied 1802-1803. The goals of the investigation are to document early 19th century fur trade activities in northwestern Wisconsin and to reconstruct the posts for popular interpretation. Reconstruction is slated to begin in 1984. This report details the work completed during the first three years of investigation: 1970, 1978 and 1979. Architectural features, as well as recovered artifactual, faunal, and floral remains are described and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the late summer of 1802 canoes loaded with European goods to supply the "Folle avoine" departed the north shore of Lake Superior. They proceeded south across the lake, up the Brule River, down the St. Croix, and up the Yellow until they reached a suitable spot to spend the winter. At this spot the traders of the XY Company constructed their fortified trading house adjacent to the fortified post of the North West Company traders who had proceeded them into the interior. During the early spring of 1803, after exchanging their goods for pelts, these traders departed the interior and returned to the north shore of Lake Superior.

After repeated this sequence of events the following year, the site of these two rival wintering posts was abandoned. Shortly after the traders departed, the structures of the two companies burned, and were gradually covered by vegetation. Forgotten for 165 years, this site on the Yellow River, in Burnett County, Wisconsin was rediscovered by Harris Palmer in 1969.

ORDINANCE

Musketballs (21 Specimens)

Fourteen musketballs (Figure 23b) were recovered from the North West Company. One of these specimens was .54 caliber, five were .55 caliber, two were .57 caliber, and six could not be measured.

Of the seven musketballs recovered from the XY Company, four were .53 caliber, one was .56 caliber, and two could not be measured.

Lead Shot (163 Specimens)

A total of 163 pieces of lead shot (Figure 23a) were recovered from 47-Bt-26. Excavations at the North West Company produced 147 examples, while 16 specimens were recovered from the XY Company. The recovered shot from the North West Company ranges in size from .095 caliber to .35 caliber, with 66% of the shot clustering between .20 caliber and .22 caliber. Ranging from .20 caliber to .24 caliber, the lead shot from the XY Company clusters at .21 caliber.

Over 75% of the lead shot recovered from both companies were not true spheres. They were D-shaped with one side exhibiting a small circular cavity. As pointed out by Birk (1975:80), this cavity in the shot was formed in the mold during the cooling process.

Lead Sprue (1 Specimen)

One lead sprue, or spill, (Figure 23c) was recovered from the North West Company. This specimen is the overflow from a single bullet mold.

Lead Waste (43 Specimens)

Forty three pieces of lead waste (Figure 23d) resulting from bullet molding were recovered from 47-Bt-26. Thirty five pieces were recovered from the North West Company and eight pieces from the XY Company. This offers strong evidence that both companies were manufacturing at least part of the musketballs and lead shot needed for their own use, and for trade.

CLOTHING & ORNAMENTATION

Beads

Glass trade beads represent the second largest category of artifacts

from 47-Bt-26. Numerous archaeologists have dealt with the problem of classifying beads (Bass 1971; Kidd 1970; Stone 1971 and 1974). Kidd's scheme is the best as far as formal taxonomy goes, but Stone's work presents the best study for comparative purposes. Conn (1972) deals with a problem related to sizing of what he calls "embroidery beads." He defines these as beads which are made from sections of glass tubing, range in diameter from about 1 to 5 mm. and usually have a monochromatic surface. Further, he breaks these beads into a continuous series of graduated sizes: seed beads <2 mm.; intermediate beads 2 mm. to 3 mm.; and onyx beads >3 mm.

A class/series/type/variety scheme has been used to classify these beads. "Class" designates the mode of manufacture: Class A are drawn beads and Class B are wound beads. "Series" divides each class according to the number of structural elements. Series A beads are simple, having one layer of glass. Series B beads are compound, having two layers of glass. And, series C beads are complex, with three or more layers of glass. "Type" of beads depends on shape. Type 1 beads are subcylindrical, or more aptly, doughnut shaped. Type 2 beads are barrel shaped. Type 3 are convex. And, Type 4 are round. "Variety" is based on color.

I. Cl, SA, Tl, Va

Class 1	Drawn	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	1.3mm - 1.75mm
Type 1	Subcylindrical	Length:	1.05mm - 1.45mm
Variety a	White	Bore:	all are .8mm

All beads in this category may be classified as seed beads according to Conn's system, that is, all are less than 2 mm. in diameter. These beads are all opaque white. Also, all the beads in this category were recovered from the heavy fraction of soil samples.

II. Cl, SA, Tl, Vb

Class 1	Drawn	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	2.5mm
Type 1	Subcylindrical	Length:	1.95mm
Variety b	Green	Bore:	1.1mm

Sample Size: 1 NW Co. (Figure 24a)

III. Cl, SA, Tl, Vc

Class 1	Drawn	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	3.2 mm - 3.9 mm
Type 1	Subcylindrical	Length:	3.25mm - 3.15mm
Variety c	Blue	Bore:	1.8 mm - 1.1 mm

II a

Sample Size: 2 NW Co.
3 XY Co. (Figure 24b)

IV. Cl, SB, Tl, Va

Class 1	Drawn	Size Range:	
Series B	Compound	Diameter:	2.3 mm - 4.0 mm
Type L	Subcylindrical	Length:	1.7 mm - 3.85mm
Variety a	White	Bore:	0.8 mm - 1.1 mm

II a 12

Sample Size: 265 NW Co.
56 XY Co. (Figure 24c)
321

	NW Co.	XY Co.
Intermediate	55	11
Pony	227	50

Beads in this class are composed of two layers of glass. The inner layer is usually opaque and frequently appears yellowed. The outer layer is transparent. The two layers are very distinct and can be observed either by the yellower core, the ridge formed between the two layers, or by the sharp contrast when light is shown through it. The surface may be either dull or glossy. Size range includes both intermediate and pony, but pony sized beads appear 4 times more frequently than intermediate sized.

V. Cl, SC, Tl, Va

Class 1	Drawn	Size Range:	
Series C	Complex	Diameter:	3.35mm - 3.55mm
Type 1	Subcylindrical	Length:	2.3 mm - 2.5 mm
Variety a	White	Bore:	all are 1.1 mm

Sample Size: 3 XY Co.

This complex bead is composed of three layers: an inner layer of transparent green, a middle layer of red (opaque), and an outer veneer of clear glass. This bead is refereed to as *Coraline d'Aleppo*.

VI. C2, SA, T2, Va

Class 1	Wound	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	5.05mm - 5.5 mm
Type 2	Barrel	Length:	5.4 mm - 5.9 mm
Variety a	White		

Sample Size: 5 (Figure 24d)

These white opaque beads are all barrel shaped, that is a little longer than wide and only slightly decreased in diameter at the ends. They appear to be wound, as one example exhibits winding striations. The

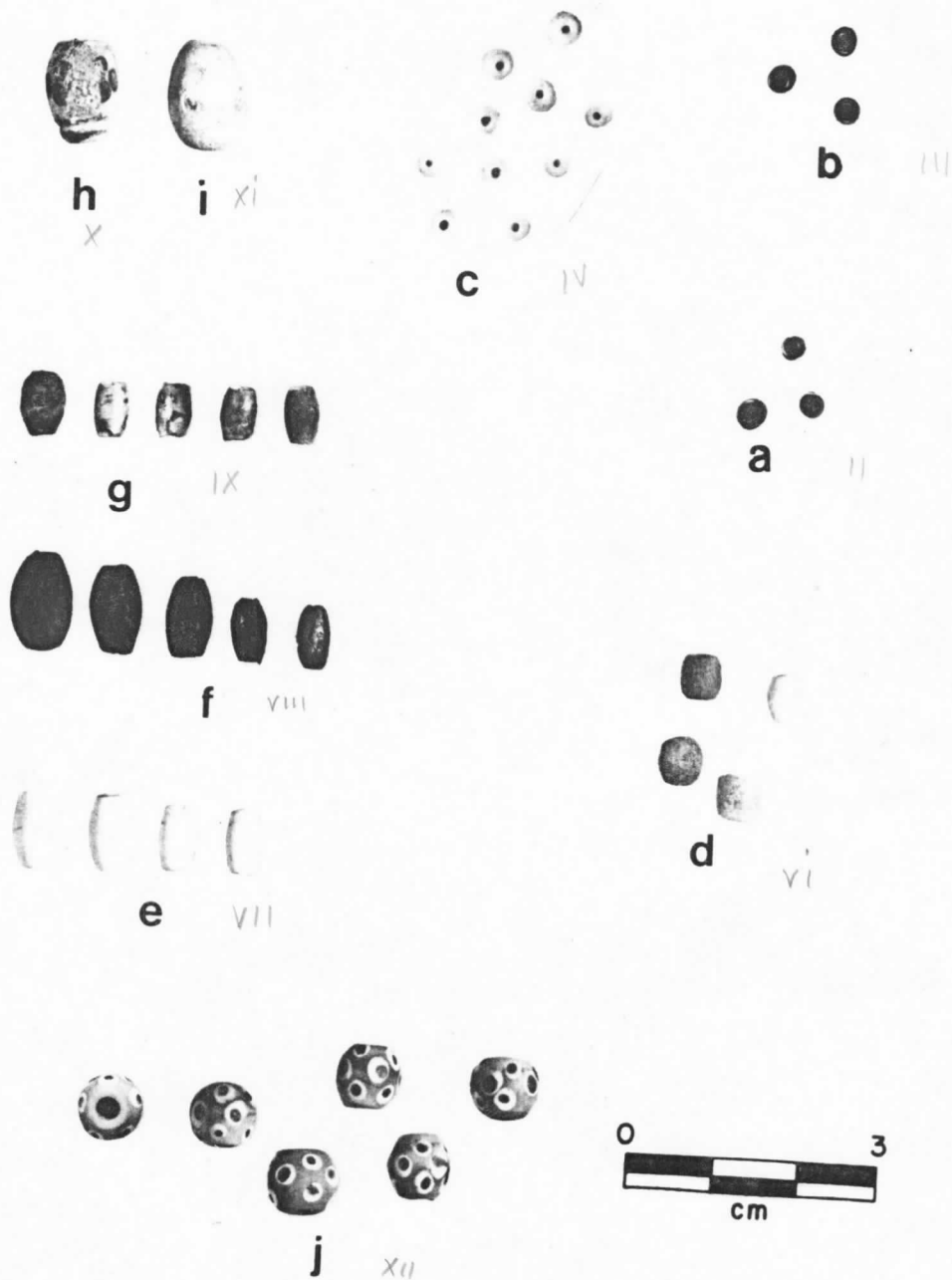


FIGURE 24

surfaces of the other beads are all deteriorated and no manufacturing marks are evident. One bead when observed under a strong light shows a line which bisects the bead longitudinally, one side being markedly darker in color than the other. There does not appear to be any mold line or other structural evidence of manufacturing. Perhaps differential leaching of the bead as it lay buried caused this phenomena.

VII. C2, SA, T3, Va

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	4.1 mm - 5.65mm
Type 3	Convex	Length:	7.95mm - 9.2 mm
Variety a	White		

WIC

Sample Size: 8 NW Co. (Figure 24e)

These white beads are all opaque. Two have worn surfaces, but the other six are all smooth and glossy.

VIII. C2, SA, T3, Vb

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	4.3mm - 7.6 mm
Type 3	Convex	Length:	7.6mm - 11.25mm
Variety b	Black		

WIC * 6

Sample Size: 5 (Figure 24f)

These beads vary more among themselves than do those in Variety a. Also, while they appear black, some may in fact be a dark blue or purple. ?

IX. C2, SA, T3, Vc

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series A	Simple	Diameter:	4.05mm - 5.45mm
Type 3	Convex	Length:	6.45mm - 7.5mm
Variety c	Purple-Pink		

WIC

Sample Size: 5 XY Co. (Figure 24g)

These beads are a purple-pink color. Four of the five are quite worn, one however is well preserved and exhibits striations made in the manufacturing process.

X. C2, SC, T3, Va

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series C	Compound	Diameter:	8.7mm

WIII 6 *

Type 3	Convex	Length:	12.35mm
Variety a	White with purple and green dots		

Sample Size: 1 NW Co. (Figure 24h)

This one bead is very worn and appears distorted from its original shape. It is opaque white with four alternating purple and green dots around the middle circumference of the bead.

XI. C2, SC, T3, Vb

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series C	Compound	Diameter:	9.05mm
Type 3	Convex	Length:	12.7mm
Variety b	White with green, yellow, blue dots		

Sample Size: 1 (Fig. 24i)

This white opaque bead is broken, with about half remaining. It exhibits striations from the winding process and also appears to have a groove engraved in one end. There are green with yellow center dots around the middle, and possibly blue dots between them.

W III b * (k) -

XII. C2, SC, T4, Va

Class 2	Wound	Size Range:	
Series C	Compound	Diameter:	7.3 mm - 8.45mm
Type 4	Round	Length:	6.65mm - 8.8mm
Variety a	Blue dotted		

W III b * (t)

Sample Size: 15 whole

14 frags.

29 NW Co. (Figure 24j)

These turquoise blue beads, decorated with polychrome dots, are known as *Venetian Fancy* or eye beads. The dotted design is the same on all the beads, consisting of three rows of dots, one around the center of the bead which has five evenly spaced white dots with red centers. On either side of this row, set parallel to one another but offset from the center row, are five white dots with dark blue centers.

There are two additional beads which are unique and warrant individual discussion. First is a non-glass artifact which has been tentatively identified as a bead. It is a dull, white chalky piece 6.45mm in diameter and 17.7mm long, with a bore of about 1.5 mm. At first it was thought to be a pipestem, but the soft shell or clay material seems to preclude this idea. The bead tapers slightly to one end. The surface exhibits close parallel striations similar to the surface of a shell.

?

The other bead is circular with a 9.3mm diameter, a 1.35mm width, and a bore of about 1.2mm. It appears to be made of a hard shell. The

edges seem to be slightly beveled from both sides towards the center. There are two slight engraved lines running parallel on either side of the bore across the bead on both sides.

Buttons (27 Specimens)

A total of 27 buttons (Figure 25a) were recovered from 47-Bt-26 18 from the North West Company and 6 from the XY Company. Using Olsens's (1963) typology, 5 are not classifiable, one of which is stamped "Gill" and has a decorative band on the back (see Nicks 1969:171). Eleven are of type "G," that is, flat with an eye soldered on but no foot. Of these, two are stamped "Plated" and one "Gilt." Eight are type "D," that is, with the eye placed in a boss on the back and squeezed to reduce the thickness of the button. Two are concave-convex and do not fit into Olsen's scheme. One of these has a highly decorated crown.

Cufflinks (1 Specimen)

One pewter example (Figure 25b) was recovered from the North West Company. The crown and back seem to be composed of one piece of pressed metal. The obverse face has a plain, narrow band around the circumference, and is cross-hatched with narrow lines to form a diamond design within the band. The reverse face is plain. The eye is rectangular with a hole in the center. The two pieces are linked with a piece of wire (rounded and rectangular in shape) which passes through both eyes. The diameter of the individual buttons is 1.8 cm. Their thickness is 1.1 cm.

Buckles (2 Specimens)

Two complete examples were recovered from the North West Company. The larger buckle (Figure 25c) has a single frame with a pin post and a three toothed fork. It has four attachment rivets along the back face. This brass buckle is 4.5 cm. wide and 2.5 cm. in length. The second buckle (Figure 25d) is silver metal and polished on the front surface. The obverse side has striations running parallel to the long axis. It has a single frame with a pin post and a two toothed fork. This buckle is 2.2 cm. in width and 1.5 cm. in length.

SEWING OBJECTS

Straight Pins (4 Specimens)

Four straight pins were recovered from the North West Company. These pins are round in cross-section and taper to a pointed tip. All are plated brass. Two specimens (Figure 26a & b) have wound wire

DISCUSSION

Although the number of artifacts found at 47-Bt-26 to date is relatively small, the assemblage consists of a wide variety of items. These artifacts, with a few exceptions, correspond nicely to those found at other sites of the same relative time period. More importantly, as a result of the preliminary analysis, we are able to identify two groups of artifacts that were found exclusively at the North West Company, and two groups that were only found at the XY Company.

Rings recovered from the North West Company (Figure 37a) are larger in size (both diameter and width) than those found at the XY Company (Figure 37b). Furthermore, the rings recovered from the North West Company are generally D-shaped, as opposed to the more nearly circular shape of those from the XY Company.

Two bead types also segregate by company. The turquoise blue beads, decorated with polychrome dots (Figure 37c) have only been recovered from the North West Company, while the purple-pink beads (Figure 37d) have only been unearthed at the XY Company.

Information of this nature is crucial if we expect to learn more about British trading patterns from the types of artifacts that the traders brought into northern Wisconsin. It will help explain what kinds of interaction took place between the Indians and the traders. Furthermore, it will aid in the identification of the surrounding areas that the two groups were exploiting.

FAUNAL REMAINS

During the 1970, 1978 and 1979 archaeological excavations at 47-Bt-26, a total of 15,164 bone and bone fragments were recovered. A preliminary analysis of this material has been completed. A total of 1,317 unidentified large mammal bones have been tabulated from the 1970 excavation area, and 11,895 large mammal bones from the 1978 excavations. As a result of this analysis, the remains of 21 different species have been identified at the site:

Species	Number of Elements	Number of Individuals
Deer	257	10
Lynx	1	1
Otter	6	1
Mink	1	1
Fisher	10	3

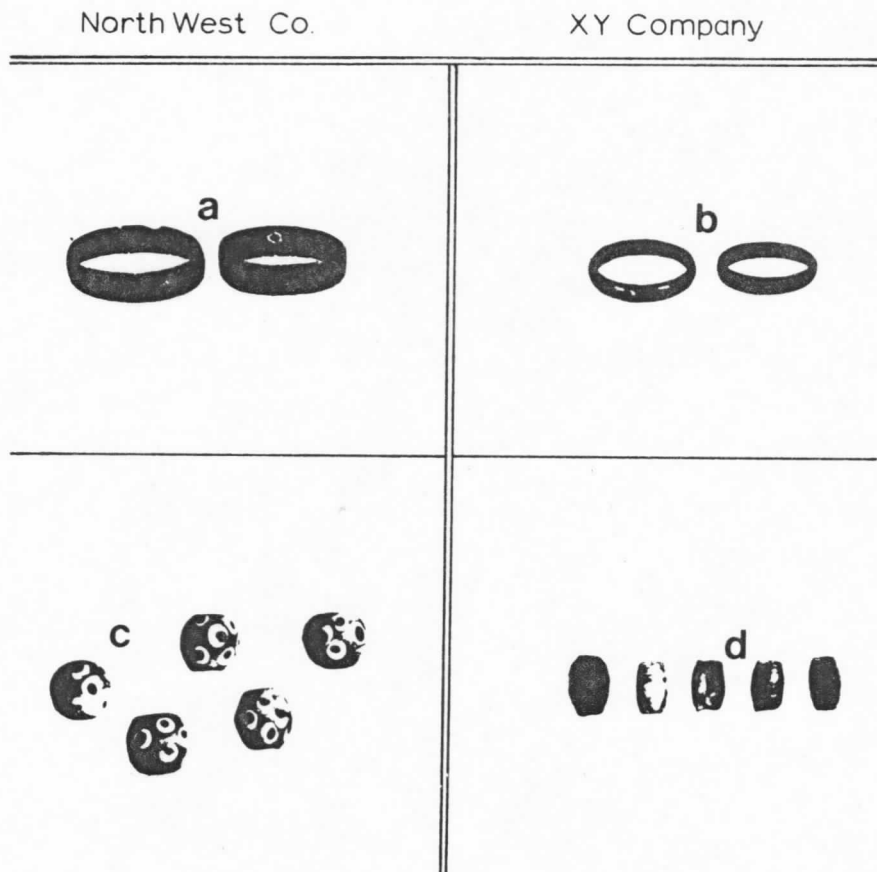


FIGURE 37