

WILLAMETTE MISSION PROJECT: PHASE II

PRELIMINARY  
SITE ASSESSMENT

BY

JUDITH A. SANDERS AND MARY K. WEBER

REPORT PREPARED FOR THE  
OREGON STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY  
CORVALLIS, OREGON 97330

## INTRODUCTION

Existing literature pertaining to the Willamette Station of the Methodist Mission in Oregon (1834-1841) was compiled in 1979 in order to eliminate controversies about the identification and location of the mission site (Sanders and Brauner 1979). This information was requested by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office in order to verify the relationship of the site to Willamette Mission State Park.

The Phase I literature search did not provide researchers with factual information indicating the precise site location. Probable site locations were restricted to the eastern margin of Mission Lake, a former Willamette River channel however (Figure 1).

Identification of the Willamette Mission site was finally accomplished only after a review of topographic maps and aerial photographs followed by a surface reconnaissance of the study area. The archaeological reconnaissance team was operating on the assumption that the missionaries would have built their structures on high ground above the level of seasonal flooding. Several high areas were noted east of Mission Lake on aerial photographs of the 1964 flood (Figure 2). As documented in the following pages, an intensive surface reconnaissance followed by subsurface testing quickly verified the fact that the missionaries had selected this high ground for settlement.

The archaeological reconnaissance and testing program at the Willamette Mission site was accomplished by archaeologists from the Department of Anthropology, Oregon State University, through contractual agreement with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

The Willamette Mission site is located in Marion County, Oregon, approximately ten miles north of Salem in the  $W\frac{1}{2}$  of the  $NW\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 67, T6S, R3W, on the east side of Mission Lake (Figure 1). The site, designated 35MA5001, is situated on a gently undulating alluvial floodplain, commonly referred to as Mission Bottom.

The western portion of the site borders Mission Lake. Riparian vegetation and deciduous trees are the dominant vegetation cover. The eastern two-thirds of the site are presently used for agricultural purposes, specifically wheat production.

Mission Bottoms soils are generally classified within Ingram unit soils (Balster and Parsons 1968:14). Chehalis, McBee, Wapato and Cloquato series are assumed under Ingram soils. The general soil map of the Willamette drainage basin, produced by the Oregon State Water Resources Board (1969), places Mission Bottoms within the Cloquato series.

The Cloquato series is described as a "very deep, well drained soil formed in recent silty flood plain alluvium. Cloquato soils typically have dark brown, friable, silt loam surface layers and dark brown, friable silt loam subsoils" (Oregon State Water Resources Board 1969:74-75).

The soil encountered during archaeological testing of the Willamette Mission site did not conform to the above description. The soil (confined to high ground within Mission Bottoms) closely approximates the Chehalis series:

### Beads

Three glass beads (Figure 7A, B) were recovered from test units E and F.

Test Unit	Color	Shape	Number of Facets	Manufacturing Technique	Max. Diam.	Length
F	Translucent Yellow (5Y 7/8)	Spherical	---	Wound	9.6 mm (0.381")	9.0 mm (0.358")
F	Clear to Milky	Faceted	6	Cut and Ground	8.0 mm (0.345")	6.0 mm (0.244")
E	Clear to Milky	Faceted	7	Cut and Ground	8.2 mm (0.348")	7.0 mm (0.300")

As noted by Hume (1978), glass beads are extremely hard to date. There are few distinguishing characteristics, yet there is a wide range of variation possible between individual beads of the same manufacture and style. In general, beads as an item of trade are common artifacts in contact sites. Hume (1978:54) further notes that the most common beads of the first half of the nineteenth century were glass faceted beads, often having an average of seven facets.

### CERAMICS

A wide variety of ceramic sherds was recovered. Although fragmentary, analysis and identification of diagnostic sherds indicates these ceramic types would have been available during the period of mission occupation. The largest number of ceramics are classed as earthenwares. This classification incorporates the so-called improved earthenwares such as ironstone. Examples of stoneware and porcelain are infrequent.

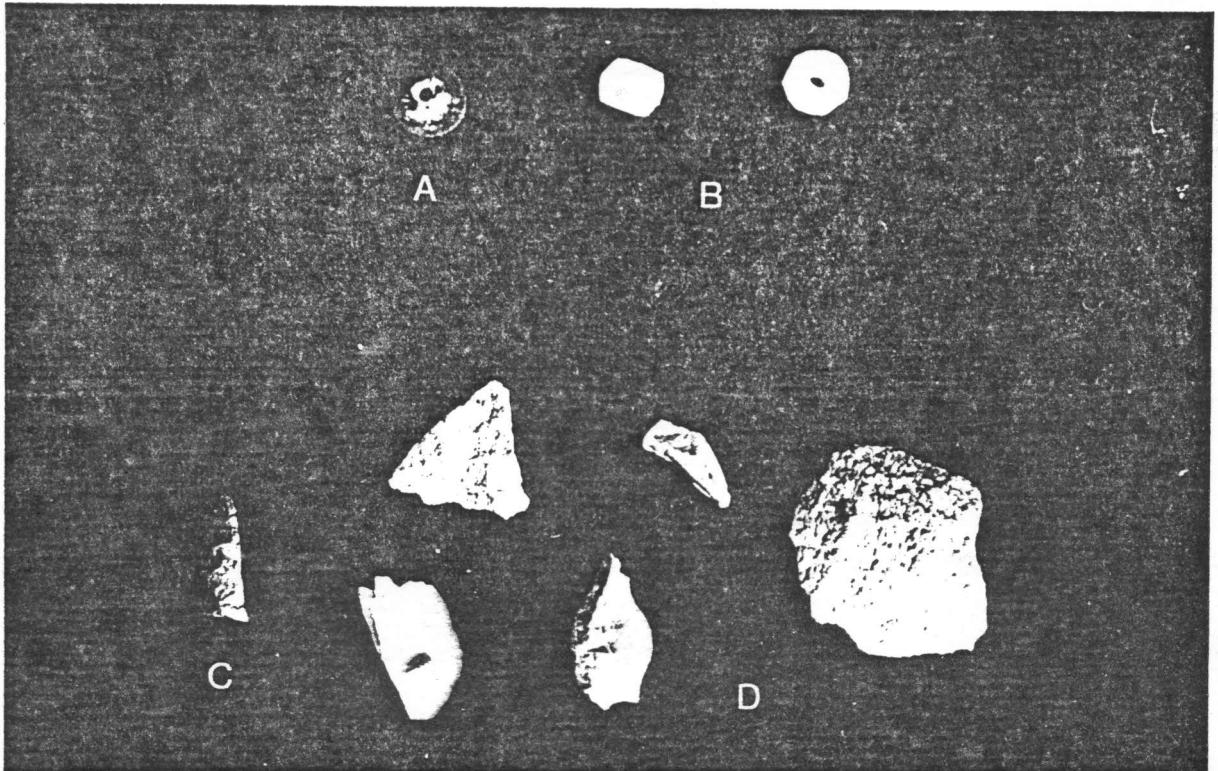


Figure 7.

- A. Wound Bead
- B. Faceted Beads
- C. Projectile Point Tip Fragment
- D. Lithic Flakes