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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
AT A LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY
NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE POST
FORT WALSH, SASKATCHEWAN
1973-74 FIELD SEASONS

by

JAMES V. SCISCENTI

ANITA CAMPBELL

BOUGHDAN HROMADIUK

SHELAGH MACLEOD

JEFFREY S. MURRAY

M. ALISON WYLIE

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PARKS CANADA
DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN
AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

PARCS CANADA
MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES
INDIENNES ET DU NORD

Buttons

Buttons from Fort Walsh were analysed in terms of material, decoration, manufacturer's name, number of holes, and colour; a limited number of specimens could be identified as the type of clothes to which attached. A total of 347 buttons were recovered from 12 excavated structures or features at the site (Table 41). As is expectable, the majority of buttons are associated with living quarters, including the 1875-83, 1877-83, and 1880-83 barracks. A slightly lesser number occurs within the Division Stores room and even fewer within the Officers' Quarters. Interestingly, no brass buttons were recovered from this latter structure, possibly indicating better care or better grade of equipment than among enlistees; possibly because of pay scale differences the officers were able to lay out cash for uniform refurbishing with some regularity.

Dominant categories consist of brass (22.8 percent), approximately half of which are Northwest Mounted Police Crown or Crown/Bison embossed coat or jacket buttons, or iron (36.6 percent), all of which are slightly concave (a type called "trouser") but lack a definite rim. The iron buttons could have been used on trousers or shirts. Other materials include glass and porcelain (24.2 percent), shell (5.2 percent), rubber (0.9 percent), bone (7.2 percent). A single modern plastic specimen occurs.

Beads

Bead analyses follow the classification system for glass beads devised by Kidd & Kidd (1970: 45). Beads are classified by size, colour and type of manufacture. The size categories are: VS - very small, under 2 mm

S - small, 2-3 mm

M - medium, 4-6 mm

L - large, 6-10 mm

VL - very large, over 10 mm

There are two general types of bead manufacture. The most common is the tube-type from mass production which may be modified through reshaping and grinding. The other is the wire-wound type which involved individual manufacturing of each bead.

All the beads found at the fort are manufactured from glass with the exception of one hollow, plate metal bead. All but one are tube-type. Some very small, circular beads, commonly known as seed beads, occur in various muted shades of red, green, blue and white. There are four large faceted beads and three rounded beads, all tube beads and monochrome. The wire wound type is represented by a single, large, oval bead.

Most of the beads (87.5 percent) were found in the 1875 barracks, the majority of these being seed beads, probably representing one broken string of beads or articles of clothing once decorated with beads. The rest are scattered through the 1877 and 1880 Barracks, and the veterinary office principally suggesting a random and gradual loss of beads during the period of occupation.

It is perhaps significant that concentration occurs in the oldest barracks and in the veterinary office. The beads were originally brought to the area as trade items and were subsequently employed in the decoration of Indian products such as hand and foot wear. Turner (1950) notes on one occasion in the first year of occupation, Superintendent Walsh purchased Indian gloves and moccasins for his men. The beads found in the 1875 Barracks may be from items of clothing such as these, used by the police before regular NWMP winter wear was established or issued. The veterinary office provided services which might have been extended to occupants of the area other than the NWMP alone. Metis or

civilians in the areas whose clothing may have been decorated with beads might more reasonably have visited the veterinary office than other buildings at the fort. The NWMP were not themselves likely to have worn beads except on Indian-made products which were most prevalent during the early period of occupation. Beads found in the fort were probably associated with this type of product or with outsiders coming into the fort.

The sample from excavation is extremely small when compared with the number and variety of beads found in the limited test excavations carried out on the townsite (132 to 1059 respectively). This perhaps verifies documentary references to the exclusion of civilians, especially Indians, from the fort enclosure and the use by the police of issue clothing or strictly European clothing lacking any bead decoration.

Toiletries

A limited number of toiletry items were recovered from floor context situations within the officers' stores, 1875-83 barracks room, 1880 barracks, and officers' quarters. The sample includes three types of toothbrushes, shaving brush handles, rubber combs, and leather-backed brushes used possibly as clothes, shoe, or hair brushes. A piece of a straight razor handle and a vaseline can occurs as well. The Gosnell Cherry toothpaste and bear-grease pomade ceramic jars, described in the ceramic section of this manuscript, would appear to complete the collection of personal toiletry objects. The amount of material is clearly not representative of the quantities which must have been employed during occupation of the Fort. However, the variety, within any single category of object, may be representative.

Table 43. Distribution of glass and metal beads at Fort Walsh, by type and structure. Counts record the number of beads.

		PROVENIENCE			1875	1875	1875	1877	1877	1875	
		1875	1875	1880	1875	1875	1877	1877	1875		TOTALS
		Barracks	Barracks/ Mess	Barracks	Barracks/ Officers' Stores	Barracks/ Division Stores	Barracks/ Baths	Vet's Office	South Palisade		
GLASS											
DRAWN											
Tubular Monochrome (IIa)											
v.s., cr., cl., scarlet	38										38
v.s., cr., op., lt. cherry rose	5	1						1	1		8
v.s., cr., op., aqua	1	2			1			2			6
v.s., cr., op., cerulean blue	9										9
v.s., cl., op., dark palm green	23										23
v.s., cr., op., white	71	1							1		73
v.s., cr., op., robin egg blue								2			2
s., cr., op., white		1									1
m., t., op., white							1				1
Tubular Polychrome (IVa)											
v.s., r., cl., scarlet (ext.), op., white (ext.)								1			1
WIRE WOUND											
Simple Class Monochrome (WI)											
l., r., tr., maple	1										1
l., r., op., robin egg blue			1								1
v.l., 4., op., robin egg blue						1					1
MOULD PRESSED											
Monochrome											
l., r., op., 6 pentagonal polished facets at each end, tapering bore, lt. aqua blue			1								1
l., r., op., 7 pentagonal polished facets at each end, tapering bore, lt. aqua blue		1									1
v.l., r., op., 8 pentagonal polished facets at each end, 8 diamond shaped facets around centre, tapering bore, lt. aqua blue		1									1
METAL											
HOLLOW PLATE METAL											
l., r., copper alloy		1									1
TOTALS	148	8	2	1	1	1	1	6	2		169