

924.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SEAFORT BURIAL SITE (FcPr100)

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE, ALBERTA

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

From evidence presented in this thesis it is suggested that the Seafort Burial Site (FcPr100) was primarily or entirely associated with the Rocky Mountain House Trading Post dating from 1835 - 1861, of which the precise location is unknown. A possible location for this trading post is suggested. The burial site contained a racially and sub-racially heterogeneous population of White and Indian derivation. Excavations were made of eleven coffin burials containing the complete or partial remains of thirteen individuals representative of both sexes and having an age range from foetal to old age. A detailed analysis of the skeletal and cultural materials is presented.

♀ Indian 14 yrs. old

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(INDIVIDUAL NUMBER 1)

longitudinally on the grave floor. A transverse section of wood at the extreme foot or south end of the coffin would perhaps suggest that it was placed there to fill a deficiency left by the longitudinal pieces contributing to the coffin floor. The foot end (south) is formed by a number (?3) of split logs each with an approximate height of 10 cm., which rested on the coffin floor. The coffin sides abutted against the foot end and, consequently, were probably somewhat shorter in their longitudinal dimension than the full length of the coffin floor. Within the coffin were two uprights, square in cross-section, which were snugly fitted into each corner at the foot end. I can only presume these were for support.

The method of fastening (if such existed) the split logs together could not be determined. Were it not for the uprights, I would have little hesitation in suggesting that probably the split logs were simply wedged into the grave, with no fastening device at all, as seems to have been the case in coffins number 3 and 10. Perhaps the uprights, too, were wedged into a supportive position in the corners.

3. The Beads

All the beads from this burial and the other Seafort burials which contained beads (number 2 and 3) are common

trade bead types which had a long temporal range from the late Eighteenth Century throughout most of the Nineteenth. All were formed from drawn glass tubing and were secondarily heat treated to produce rounded edges. Conn's external size diameter classification will be used here; where seed beads have an external diameter less than 1.99 mm; intermediate, 2.00 - 2.99 mm; and pony, 3.00 mm. and greater. Three types of beads (FcPr100/1/140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145) were recovered from burial number 1:

- A. Seed beads, opaque white throughout (not counted)
- B. Seed beads, opaque white externally; opaque white core of slightly chalky composition.
- C. (Corresponds with type 19 of Nicks (1969: 182-183). Intermediate beads, patina, translucent yellow (more than 700).

- 4. From the presence of a large number of beads in the region of the feet of individual number 1, it is presumed that she was buried in beaded moccasins. There was a further concentration of beads in the vicinity of the shaft of the right tibia, a location which would suggest that she was buried also in a beaded (? leather) garment.
- 5. In the region of the digastric groove of the right mastoid process of the skull of this individual was a slight degree of green staining, suggestive of copper salt staining. Probably, this young Indian girl wore,

D. Thickness of Wood (cm.)

This was estimated from the changing direction of the wood fibres rusted onto the nails. The following thicknesses were obtained:

? Top - FcPr100/2/17e ₁	- 1.80
19f	- 2.59
24k	- 1.70
28o	- 1.64
32s	- 2.18
? West side	
12a	- 2.15
13b	- 2.23
14c	- 2.23
22c	- 2.42

Thus both the top and west side had thicknesses near 3/4 inch although the top was probably slightly thinner than the sides.

E. Type of Wood - Spruce (Picea sp.) (Kennedy, pers. comm., 1970)

F. Land Snails (5), Zonatoides arboreus, were recovered from the coffin wood.

3. The Beads

A large number of beads were retained in situ; consequently an exact count was not possible. All beads from burial #2 were drawn tubular beads which had been secondarily heat treated. 8 types of beads were recovered:

- A. (FcPr100/2/3) intermediate, opaque white throughout (there was a corresponding seed bead type in Burial #1)
- B. (FcPr100/2/3) intermediate, opaque white externally, opaque white core of slightly chalky composition (not

counted). (There was a corresponding seed bead type in Burial #1)

- C. (FcPr100/2/2) pony, opaque white throughout (there was a corresponding seed bead type in Burial #1 and a corresponding intermediate bead type in this burial (see above).)
- D. FcPr100/2/2) pony, opaque white externally, opaque white core of slightly chalky composition (not counted), (there was a corresponding seed bead type in Burial #1 and a corresponding intermediate bead type in this burial (see above)).
- E. (FcPr100/2/5) intermediate, opaque, pinkish mauve, patina (N = more than 52)
- F. (FcPr100/2/4) intermediate primarily, some pony, translucent, cherry red, slightly friable, (N = more than 300) (corresponds to bead type 12 of Nicks (1969: 182-183)).
- G. (FcPr100/2/6) Cornaline d'Allepo, intermediate, clear inner core, dark red and lustrous externally, (N = more than 7) (corresponds to bead type 21 of Nicks (1969: 182-183)).
- H. FcPr100/2/7) intermediate, almost pony, opaque black, patina, (N = more than 8), (corresponds to bead type 20 of Nicks (1969: 182-183). There were corresponding intermediate and pony beads in Burial #3.

The beads were exposed very carefully in order to try to determine the original pattern. Unfortunately, little patterning was evident. Generally speaking, however, the arrangement of the beads appears geometrical, which is the traditional type of bead patterning amongst many groups of Plains Indians, rather than the floral type of patterning adopted from European bead work (Doll, 1971, pers. comm.).

4. From the number of beads and their obvious patterning we must conclude that the beads were sewn to a substance. There are indications that the substance was probably a cloth rather than leather. Firstly, as there were several layers of patterned beads, one under the other, in a number of areas, we might conclude that the supportive substance was very flexible so as to allow its folding into several layers. Cloth would assume this folding more readily than leather. Secondly, there is evident on the left parietal boss of skull #2a a small stained area of wavy black lines crossing another similar area of lines at right angles. The lines are 0.1 mm. thick and 0.5 mm. apart. I can think of no organic cause for this phenomenon, and must conclude therefore that the staining is from the woven cloth backing of the beads.
5. The question now arises as to whether the skulls were contained in a bag of some sort or were merely wrapped. The multiple folding of the material, suggested by the

several layers of beads, would not occur to such an extent if a bag, presumably of a size sufficient to contain only two skulls, were used. Therefore, I would tentatively suggest that the skulls were wrapped in a beaded cloth and not contained in a bag.

A very small fragment of string-like material (FcPr100/2/8) was recovered from the matrix in the coffin. This may possibly represent a portion of a draw string from a bag.

6. I have concluded from evidence given below that an appreciable and perhaps lengthy period of time passed between the death of these individuals and their interment in the coffin found at the Seafort Burial Site. The evidence is as follows:

- A. Empty pupae were found inside the cranium of Individual #2a. These were identified as the larvae from the ordinary house fly (or a close relative) which has a total 'hatching' time from egg to the winged stage of 15 days (Bruce Stewart, Department of Entomology, University of Alberta, 1971, pers. comm.). As the pupae husks (FcPr100/2a/5) were empty, we may presume that the adult flies had had time to escape their host before the head was sealed into the coffin and buried. Thus at least 15 days had passed between the laying of the eggs on the presumably dead body and its subsequent interment. On the other hand fertile flies have

♀? Indian 6 yrs. old

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(INDIVIDUAL NUMBER 3)

placed ends. Thus the split logs forming the ends probably had lengths (25 and 32 cm) less than the width of the split-log floor while the sides had lengths equal to the floor's length. The top, formed of split logs, would have to have had a length and width exceeding the internal dimensions of the coffin and probably therefore was at least 36 - 29 X 130 cm.

With the collapse of the top and initial compression of the sides, combined with the decay and further splitting of the split logs, it was impossible to determine the number of pieces of wood that went into the construction of the coffin.

3. The Beads

All the beads (FcPr100/3/149) from burial #3 came from a necklace of glass trade beads which were somewhat disturbed, presumably due to the decay of the string or gut. The bead pattern appeared to consist of several series of cored and uncored intermediate opaque white beads; each series separated by a bead of a different size or colour. The distribution of the beads around the neck of the child was arbitrarily divided into the following areas (with frequencies of bead types in each area indicated below).

A. Region of right clavicle

Types 1 and 2 - 3
Type 3 - 1
Type 4 - 6

B. Loose beads from right shoulder region

Types 1 and 2 - 3
Type 4 - 12
Type 5 - 1

C. Loose beads from left shoulder region

Types 1 and 2 - 27
Type 3 - 2
Type 4 - 59
Type 5 - 2
Type 6 - 1

D. Beads from area under neck

Types 1 and 2 - 24
Type 3 - 4
Type 4 - 67
Type 5 - 1

All beads from this burial were drawn tubular glass beads that had been secondarily heat treated to round the edges. The following types of beads from burial #3 were distinguished:

1. Intermediate, opaque white throughout (there was an identical bead type from burial #2; a corresponding pony bead type in burial #2 (see below), and a corresponding seed bead type from burial #1).
2. Intermediate, opaque white externally with opaque white core of chalky composition. (There was an identical bead type from burial #2; and a corresponding seed bead type in burial #1.)

The combined frequency of bead types 1 and 2 from the necklace is 59.

3. Pony, opaque white with faint green tinge externally, with opaque white core of chalky composition (N = 7).
(This may correspond to bead type 5 of Nicks (1969: 182-183.)

4. Intermediate, translucent aqua blue (N = 143) (corresponds to bead type 1 of Nicks (1969: 182)).
5. Intermediate and pony, opaque black metallic blue and purple patina (N = 11). (There was a corresponding intermediate bead type in burial #2) (corresponds to bead type 21 of Nicks (1969: 183)).
6. Intermediate, translucent, dark blue (N = 1) (corresponds to bead type 4 of Nicks (1969: 182)).