

J. W. SHROPSHIRE (*Accepted February, 1970*)

A BURIAL AT WASAGA BEACH, ONTARIO

INTRODUCTION

The accidental discovery in September 1969 of a human burial by Mr. C. Hill on his property on the east bank of the Nottawasaga River at Wasaga Beach, Sunnidale Township, Simcoe County was reported to the writer, whose inspection revealed that the burial had partly underlain a tree on a sand ridge. During removal of the ridge, the skull, cervical vertebrae, scapulae, ribs, right radius, right ulna and all humeral and hand bones had been disturbed. Excavation and salvage of the portion of the burial *in situ* was carried out at once.

THE EXCAVATION

As the southern side of the burial was already exposed and the north blocked by a tree, trenches were opened on the east and west sides 4 feet apart. The upper 24 inches of sand was removed in 6 inch horizontal planes and screened. Brush and trowel were used below the 24 inch level as the burial was known to be at the 31 inch level. No stratification, buried sod levels, evidence of original excavation for the grave, grave lining or artifacts were found. No conclusion was reached concerning the original depth of the burial. The wind-blown sands of the area, with their constantly shifting surface levels, preclude such measurements.

The burial had been placed horizontally, on the right side, flexed, lying north/south with the head to the south. The right foot was twisted vertically upward, but the left lay horizontally. The metacarpal bones of the left hand were found behind the sacrum, suggesting the position illustrated in the accompanying sketch (Figure 1).

The burial was primary and articulated, unaccompanied by grave goods or other artifacts. There was no evidence of cremation or visible cause of death. The apparent contortion of the body and deformation of the skull seemed to justify closer osteological examination.

OSTEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

All recovered teeth have considerable wear with flattened cusps and some exposure of dentine. Some teeth show evidence of periodontal disease, thinning of the alveolar bone, and root exposure. No caries is present.

Although the bones are somewhat deteriorated, enough articular surfaces are present and normal, except those of the atlas and axis, which are disproportionate and asymmetrical, to conclude the general absence of arthritis or other deforming disease. Dr. Howard Savage kindly examined the bones and suggested the small femoral heads and the angle of the sciatic notch in the context of the total remains were consistent with those of a female of middle age and somewhat slight in build.

The skull, in contrast, shows visible abnormality (Plate 1). The left zygoma and maxilla project, so that the face slants to the right. Viewed inferiorly, the left occipital condyle is seen to be larger and more developed than the right, the left occipitomastoid suture being open 1/8th inch, contrasting with the firmly closed right. The suture through the centre of the palate, if extended, would pass well to the left of the centre of the foramen magnum. It was concluded this cranial distortion may have been due to torticollis, (wry-neck), caused by a congenital shortening and atrophy of the left sternomastoid muscle. As mentioned, the atlas and axis show evidence in confirmation with this suggestion, but no evidence of trauma, infection or disease could be seen in the other skeletal remains.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The absence of datable grave goods or a nearby village site prevents the determination of temporal or cultural affiliations. While flexed, primary interments generally without accompanying grave goods are characteristic of sites of the Ontario Iroquois (Noble, 1969:23), the condition of the teeth is more in keeping with a hunting and gathering subsistence pattern than that of the agricultural Iroquoian. No cause of death is known. The subject presumably sickened and died while travelling, and was hastily interred by her companions. The wry-neck was probably due to an accident of birth or soon after.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the writer's gratitude to the following:
Mr. C. Hill, owner of the property, for donating the material accidentally disturbed, and permitting the recovery of the remainder; Dr. Howard Savage, M.D., C.R.C.P. (Paed.), for kindly examining the skeletal material; Reeve E. D. Langevin and officers of the Wasaga Beach detachment, Ontario Provincial Police, for assistance and cooperation; Mr. J. Allan Blair, Mr. R. Pearson, and Mr. J. T. MacMurchy Sr., for advice and assistance at the excavation; Mr. Chas. Garrad, for providing the photographs and other contributions to this text.

LITERATURE CITED

- Anderson, J. E., (1962). *The Human Skeleton*. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. Boots,
C.O., (1948). *Graphic Aids to Osteology*. San Diego.
Noble, W. C., (1969). "Some Social Implications of the Iroquois *In Situ* Theory". *Ontario
Archaeology*. 13:16-28.
Wells, C., (1964). *Bones, Bodies and Disease*. Thames & Hudson, London.



PLATE I

Inferior and superior views of skull. The damage was caused during the accidental exhumation. The asymmetry is noticeable.

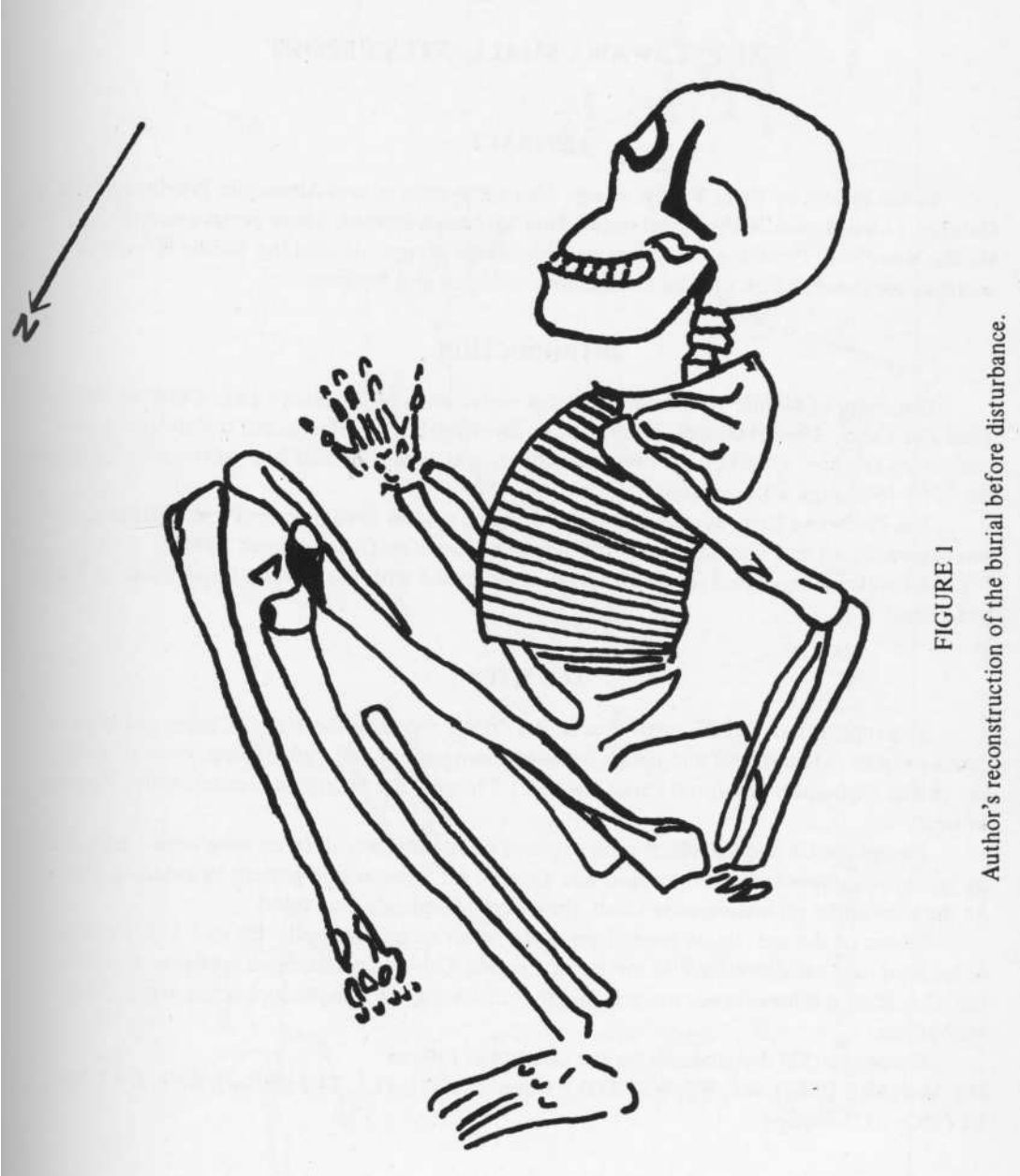


FIGURE 1
Author's reconstruction of the burial before disturbance.