

**THE BALL SITE: A PRELIMINARY STATEMENT****Dean Knight***ABSTRACT*

Ten weeks of excavation at the Ball Site, near Warminster, Ontario, have produced evidence of a large, permanently occupied proto-historic Huron village. The majority of the work has been directed toward understanding the settlement patterns of the site and includes partial or complete excavation of nine houses from three different areas indicating a homogenous rather than a heterogeneous occupation of the site. Rim sherd and pipe analysis suggest ca. A.D. 1600 as the date of occupation. The work has brought to light a number of problems, including the noticeable lack of bone material, the small number of pipe fragments, and only one deep midden deposit.

The Ball Site (BdGv-3) is a proto-historic Huron site located on Lots 9 and 10, Concession 13, Medonte Township, Simcoe County. As the crow flies, the site is about 1/2 mile south and west of the site of Warminster, now known as Cahiague. It is situated on a high sandy ridge which overlooks a broad flat valley (Fig. 1).

The soil is predominantly sandy loam; however as one moves south on the site away from the ridge, the soil becomes increasingly more clayey. Part of the site has been ploughed by a tractor for the first time in the last two years, having been in pasture for at least the past 60 years. Presently part of the land is in corn, part is in bush and part is in pasture.

In 1911, Hunter recorded a site on the west half of Lot 9, but from his description it would appear that his site was much closer to the 12th concession road than the present site. In addition, the artifacts which he describes would seem to be later in time than those found at Ball.

Conrad Heidenreich recorded a Lalonde site in the east half of Lot 9 (just to the east of the Ball site) while conducting a survey for a large site within three leagues of the narrows between Lake Couchiching and Lake Simcoe. His survey in 1966 apparently did not locate the Ball site.

I found the Ball site while looking at Heidenreich's Lalonde site as a possible location to begin research in Huronia. My own interest in this area first started with an interest in culture change related to the contact situation. I felt that some pertinent questions such as the amount and types of change introduced by the French might be answered by good comparisons between late prehistoric, proto-historic, and historic sites. Unfortunately there is little published data concerning the archaeology of the Huron area, other than a handful of houses from scattered sites and descriptions of artifacts mostly from midden deposits. Therefore, it seemed desirable to spend some period of time excavating as much of an single village as possible.

My interest in Huronia was furthered by the request of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Wilfrid Laurier University for me to teach a class in archaeological field methods and laboratory analysis through their Continuing Education Programme in Orillia. Although perhaps not ideal for conducting research, the forum of the extension class has proven to be an effective method not only of conducting research, but also for instructing people in fundamentals of archaeology as well as giving a brief introduction to the prehistory of Ontario.

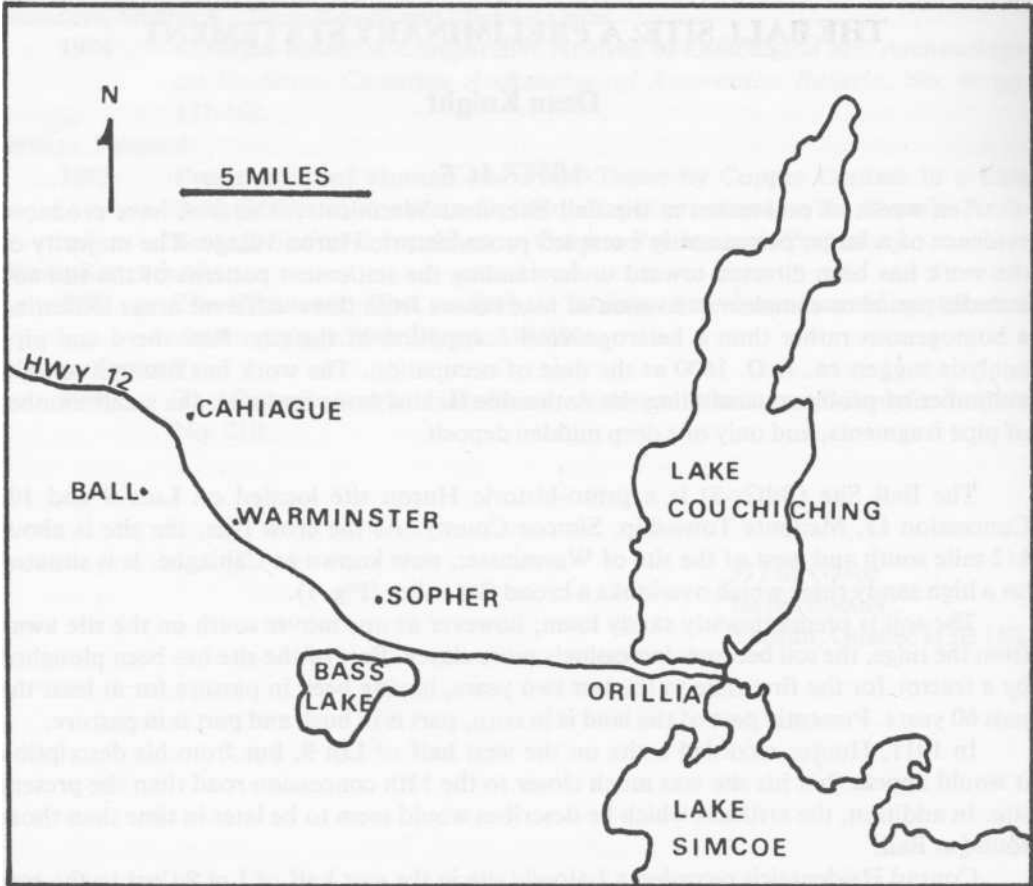


Fig. 1 Ball Site area.

After two summers at Ball, a total of ten weeks have been spent testing and excavating and we now have some idea about the make-up of that village. The purpose of this paper is to report our findings to date.

Testing and excavation have uncovered parts of nine houses from three different areas of the site. The resulting village pattern is seen in Fig. 2. Our first summer revealed two complete houses and parts of three others. The houses themselves are fairly consistent in construction, being on the average 7 metres wide and 20 metres long. The walls have been constructed with single alternating posts, with the average depth of 22 cm below the plough zone and an average diameter of 4 cm. The walls are straight while the corners are slightly curved or tapered. House 2, seen in Fig. 3, is an example of the basic house structure at Ball.

An addition has been found on only the south end of one house. The north end of this house has not yet been excavated.

One house has a "wind break" at its north end. This break is constructed of single alternating rows of posts which were apparently not attached to the house as the two structures are separated by approximately 1 metre.

All but one of the houses located thus far are oriented in a northwest — southeast direction which points the smallest end of the house into the prevailing winds.

Doorways were not easily identifiable in any of the houses which may suggest some amount of reconstruction taking place.

Storage pits, garbage pits and hearths are all generally located along the centre line of the house. There is a wide range of variation in pit shapes, sizes and depths as well as artifact content.

Hearth sizes and shapes also show a similar lack of consistency. Large interior support posts are generally lacking as are posts indicating sleeping platforms. Noble (1968) points out that this lack of sleeping platforms is characteristic of the eastern Rock clan of the Hurons.

Presently our knowledge of house placement is limited not only by the number but also by distribution. The original five houses excavated show a very close-packed arrangement with two almost touching. Four are parallel to each other while the fifth house is different in orientation and some other attributes which will be discussed later.

North of these houses is a midden; the only midden which has thus far been located. It seems a logical dumping area for these five houses.

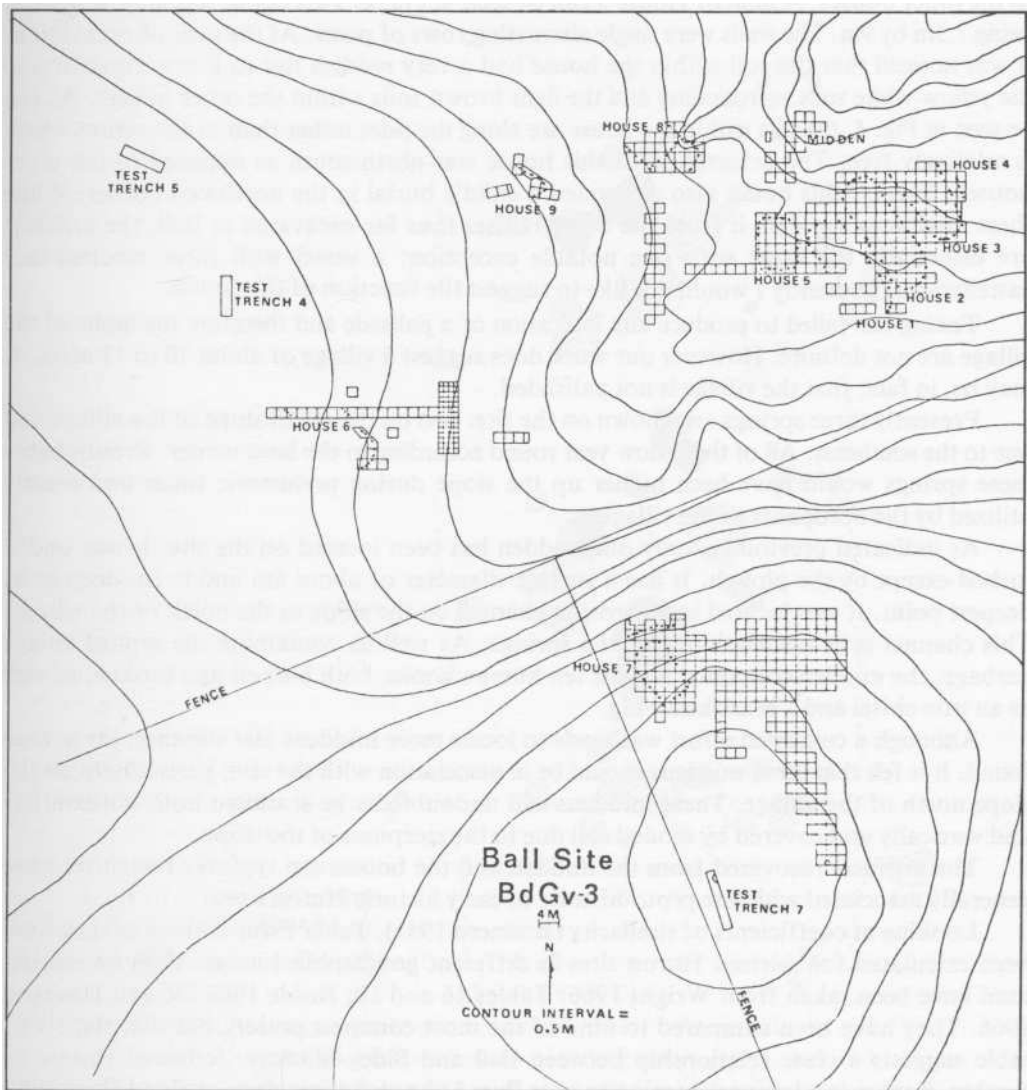


Fig. 2 The Ball Site.

The four houses located last summer are scattered and little is known about the areas surrounding them. Two of these are west of midden No. 1 and perhaps made use of this dump. As only sections of these houses have been excavated, no features can be described from the interiors. From their placement it would seem that there will undoubtedly be houses very close to the edge of the steep ridge. As this area is presently in bush, some good data may be located as excavation proceeds.

One house is located in what appears to be the south end of the site. It is the house with the windbreak and it is associated with a large open area about 16 m by 24 m. This open area contained only a few scattered pits and post moulds and may have functioned as a work area, due to the large concentrations of chert cobbles recovered there. Similar open areas have been recorded at Cahiaque, however they do not seem to have been as large, nor did they contain chert concentrations.

House 5 is unique on the site for a number of reasons and is described here in contrast to the other houses. A plan of House 5 can be seen in Fig. 4. This house was almost square, being 7.5m by 9m. The walls were single alternating rows of posts. At the time of excavation, it was noticed that the soil within the house had a very reddish tint to it in comparison to the yellow-white soils surrounding and the light brown soils within the other houses. As can be seen in Fig. 4, the pits within the house are along the sides rather than in the centre which is relatively free. The orientation of this house was north-south as opposed to the other houses. Finally, this house also contained a child's burial in the northwest corner. While these attributes separate it from the other houses thus far excavated at Ball, the artifacts are essentially the same with one notable exception: a vessel with three pinched-face castellations. Presently I would not like to suggest the function of this house.

Testing has failed to produce any indication of a palisade and therefore the limits of the village are not definite. However our work does suggest a village of about 10 to 12 acres. It may be, in fact, that the village is not palisaded.

Presently three springs are known on the site: two on the north slope of the village and one to the southeast. All of these flow year round according to the land owner. Presumably these springs would have been higher up the slope during prehistoric times and readily utilized by the occupants of the village.

As indicated previously, only one midden has been located on the site. It was undisturbed except by the plough. It has a surface diameter of about 6m and is 1m deep at its deepest point. It was located in an erosion channel on the slope to the north of the village. This channel is in association with the springs. As well as containing the typical village garbage, the midden contained at least ten human bones, both burned and broken, as well as an iron chisel and a brass kettle lug.

Although a concerted effort was made to locate more middens last summer, none were found. It is felt that other middens should be in association with the site, particularly on the slope north of the village. These middens will undoubtedly be scattered both horizontally and vertically and covered by eroded soil due to the steepness of the slope.

The artifacts recovered from the midden and the houses are typical of what we have generally associated with late proto-historic to early historic Huron sites.

Looking at coefficients of similarity (Brainerd 1951), Table 1 shows these as they have been calculated for thirteen Huron sites in different geographical areas. The percentages used have been taken from Wright 1966: Tables 16 and 19; Noble 1968:79; and Emerson 1966. They have been compared to nine of the most common pottery types at Ball. This table suggests a close relationship between Ball and Sidey-Mackay, followed closely by Sopher. Sopher is a late prehistoric site near Bass Lake and about four or five miles south-east of Ball. Both share high percentages of Huron Incised and Sidey Notched types, but

also have similarities in the presences of scalloped sherds and plain sherds. Sidey-Mackay, on the other hand, is in the area of the Nottawasaga River nearer the Petun area, but there is a very close similarity in pottery type percentages to Ball. This case is true particularly in the high percentage of Huron Incised and Sidey Notched sherds. A difference is found in the fact that neck decorated and high collar sherds are in higher percentages at Sidey-Mackey than at Ball which probably indicates a later date for Ball.

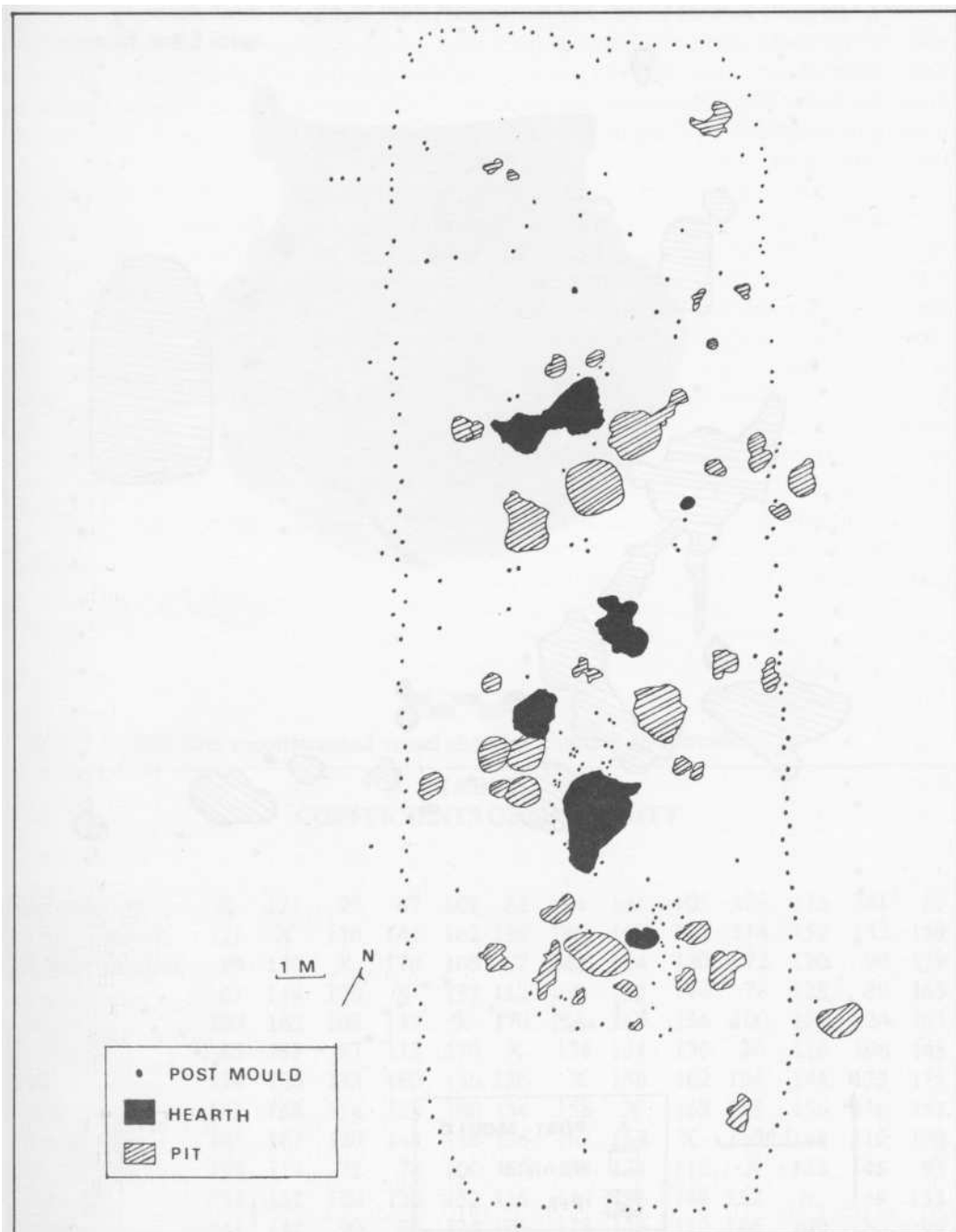


Fig. 3. Ball Site, house 2.

Ramsden (1977) places Sopher, MacMurchy, Graham-Rogers and Sidey-Mackay together as a ceramic group based on a number of traits. All these sites have produced European trade goods. Ball will fit into this group of sites, not only because of its geographical location, but also because of shared traits among the sites suggesting a close cultural connection among them.

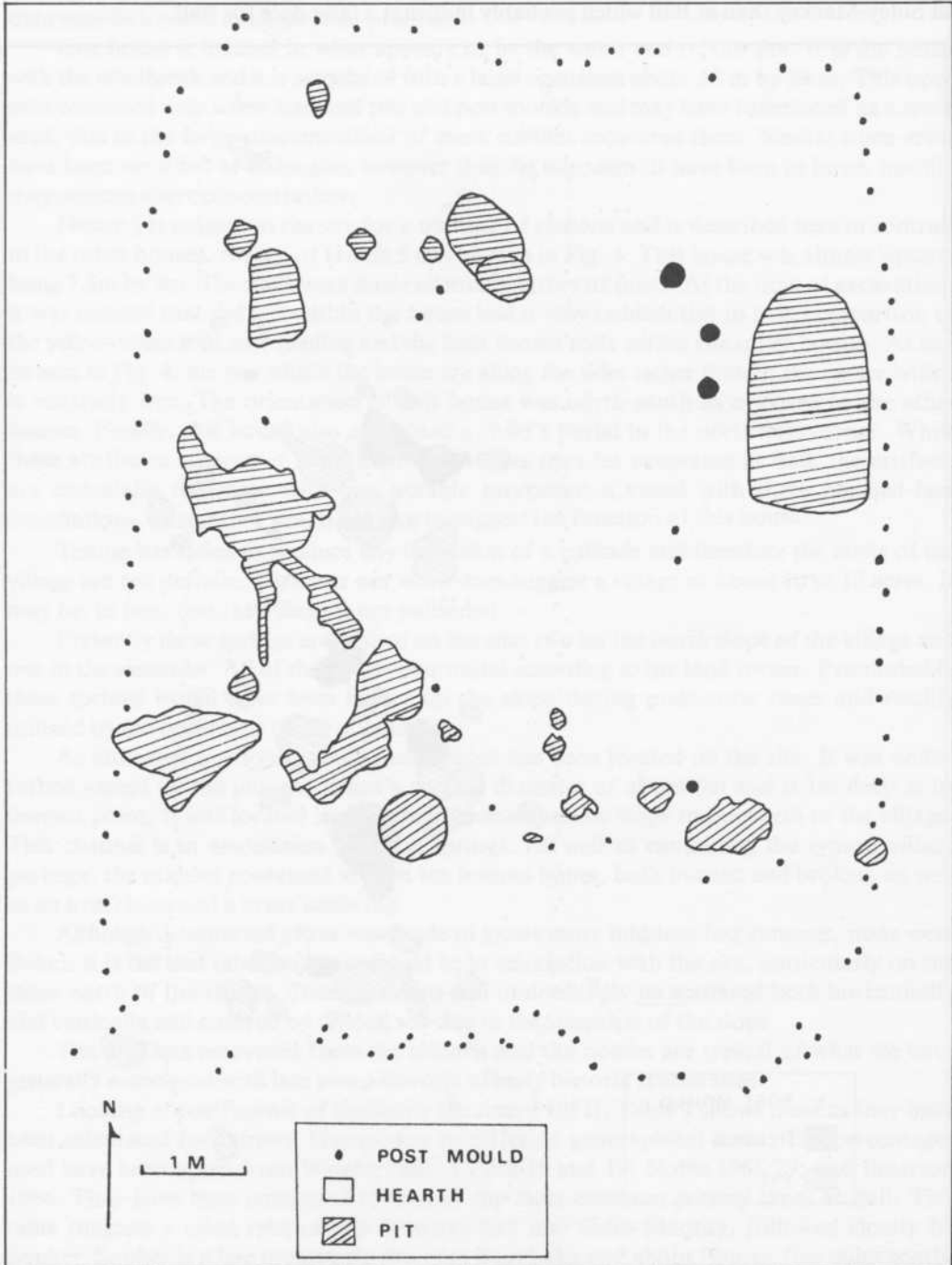


Fig. 4 Ball Site, house 5.

Even though Huron Incised and Sidey Notched are the most prevalent rim sherds on the site, there are other rather unique sherds which may be of help in understanding culture change and/or culture contact. These sherds include scalloped rims, applique decoration, and deeply notched rims as well as four vessels which possess shoulders with one or two encircling channels (Fig. 5). Such traits are found at Roebuck (Wintenburg 1936) and suggest eastern contact from the St. Lawrence Valley. Also, there is a noticeable lack of large vessels from the site, as most reconstructable vessels seem to have had a volume of between 1 and 3 litres.



Fig. 5. Ball Site, reconstructed vessel showing channel on shoulder.

TABLE 1  
COEFFICIENTS OF SIMILARITY

Bosomworth	X	121	79	67	109	83	134	141	105	129	135	141	80
Sidey-MacKay	121	X	130	144	162	138	186	168	167	114	152	132	159
Graham-Rogers	79	130	X	170	108	87	148	114	120	72	120	90	139
MacMurchy	67	144	170	X	133	112	160	132	148	78	128	80	165
Orr Lake	109	162	108	133	X	170	156	160	156	100	152	124	163
Cahiague	83	138	87	112	170	X	136	134	136	80	116	106	145
Ball	134	186	148	160	156	136	X	158	162	104	144	123	175
Seed	141	168	114	132	160	134	158	X	168	133	156	136	151
Woodbridge	105	167	120	148	156	136	162	168	X	116	148	112	170
Black Creek	129	114	72	78	100	80	104	133	116	X	152	146	93
Copland	135	152	120	120	152	116	144	156	148	152	X	149	133
Draper	141	132	90	80	124	106	123	136	112	146	149	X	99
Sopher	80	159	139	165	163	145	175	151	170	93	133	99	X



Fig. 6. Ball Site, pipe fragments.

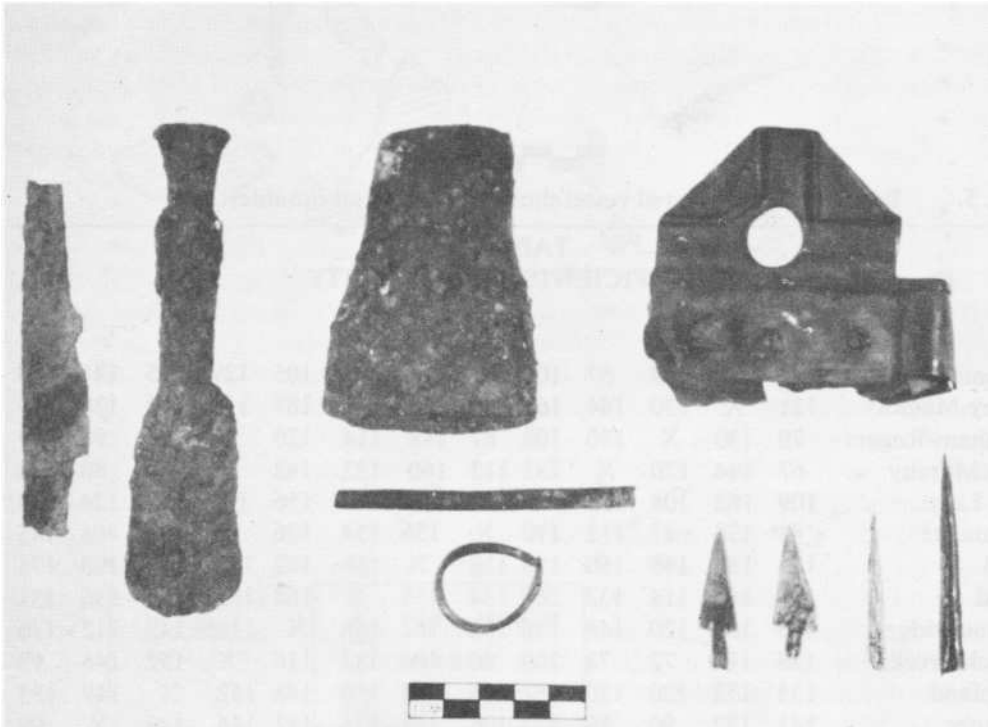


Fig. 7. Ball Site, historic trade items of brass and iron.





Fig. 8. Ball Site, lithic tools.

Castellations are of several typical types including rounded, incipient pointed, squared, and turret. At least four castellations are associated with intact or broken handles. Pipes are not numerous, 25 fragments having been recovered as well as two complete bowls. They are typical, however, of the northern Huron with collared ring, ring bowl, plain bowl, and trumpet being most numerous. Three effigy forms have also been recovered (Fig. 6).

Historic items are predominantly of brass. Seventy-five fragments were recovered and appear to be from kettles which have been cut and altered by rolling and formed into beads and projectile points. Four pieces of iron are definitely associated with the aboriginal occupation. One of these is a celt similar to the Sopher celt. Only five trade beads have been recovered, attesting to the early nature of the site (Fig. 7).

Lithics are poorly represented at Ball with only 93 chipped pieces being recovered. The remainder are rough stone which has been polished by use or hammerstones which have been roughened by use (Fig. 8).

Two burials have been recovered thus far. Burial No. 1 was a child under six years of age that had been interred in the northwest corner of House 5 in a flexed position. No artifacts were found with the burial.

Burial No. 2 was an adult in a flexed position located in what is believed to be the south end of the site. This burial was located on the west side of a long trench which had been opened for us by a tractor. Garbage was over the top of the burial pit but was separate from it. Nothing was found in association with this burial and it did not seem to be in association with any other features on the site.

Faunal analysis of the limited bone material recovered suggests that the site was occupied year round with cottontail rabbit, beaver, dog, and deer the most prevalent

mammals; sucker and perch the most common fish. There is a noticeable lack of bird species (3) as well as reptile remains which raises some interesting questions. The only bone artifacts recovered to date have been six bone beads.

We have then, at Ball, the beginnings of an understanding of a Huron village dating to ca. A.D. 1600-1610. There are some obvious problems which need to be solved by further work:

- (1) Why is there so little bone material, both in the house and midden deposits?
- (2) What is the significance of House 5? Why is it different and what is its relationship to the other houses?
- (3) Where are the other middens?
- (4) Why have so few pipes been recovered?
- (5) What is the purpose of the open area east of House 7, and what is its relationship to the rest of the village?
- (6) Is there a palisade around any part of the village?

It is toward the solving of these problems that our work will be modified and directed in the future. At present, the overall impression of the Ball site is one of relative homogeneity in house and artifact forms, however House 5 and House 6 seem to be somewhat different and may indicate that certain areas of the site are different and need to be examined further.

Our original problem dealing with culture change still needs refinement by the addition of new data and comparison with other sites. It is hoped that all of these questions will be answered in the next few years.

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