

RECOGNIZING INTACT IROQUOIAN DOMESTIC REFUSE: THE DRAPER CASE

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ABSTRACT

Questions about validity of the interpretations at the Draper site have been raised on the grounds of possible contamination of deposits within structures. In this article criteria are set out which allow analysts to determine whether significant "contamination" has occurred. These criteria include: relative artifact densities in relation to potential contaminant features; the location of refuse concentrations in relation to walls and corners; the clustering of artifacts around hearths; and the clustering of "high-status" artifacts and their association with unusually intense feature remains. Using these criteria, the Structure 2 artifacts at Draper are shown to be relatively uncontaminated, and conclusions based on their analysis are vindicated.

INTRODUCTION

In a research report directed to specialists, Finlayson and Pearce (1978) raised "questions about the validity" of my interpretations concerning the Draper site and the nature of Late Ontario Iroquois society. Although their scepticism first appeared some while ago, it was not until recently that I realized their misgivings had begun to be noticed by the general archaeological community (Trigger 1981:12). I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

BACKGROUND

Finlayson and Pearce's (1978:10-13) basic argument is that because the west end of Structure 2 at Draper had been built over a pre-existing palisade, that refuse dumped inside the palisade wall probably contaminated refuse later left by the inhabitants of Structure 2, thereby throwing into doubt interpretations I and my co-workers had made about the economic and social organizations of that structure. This can be called the "palisade postulate."

It is true that we did not recognize remains of a palisade crossing the west end of Structure 2 during excavation due to the limited area that could properly be excavated with limited funding. However, this situation is not unusual in Iroquoian archaeology. For example, Finlayson and Pearce (1978:11) also indicate that it is difficult to positively identify evidence for such palisades in limited excavations of single houses. It is also true that the artifact density is comparatively high at the west end of Structure 2, "inside" the palisade, and that some palisade-associated refuse may in fact be mixed in with the refuse left by the occupants of Structure 2, thereby blurring the spatial patterning in artifact distributions. However, to conclude from this that all or even some of our conclusions are erroneous is an unwarranted induction.

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THE DATA

The following points support my own and other project members's conclusions based on the analyses of artifacts and features associated with Structure 2 at Draper:

1. The vast majority of Structure 2 and of the refuse associated with it is "outside" the palisade and displays no evidence of mixing with palisade refuse in terms of increased artifact density.

2. Apart from the "contaminated" extreme western end of the structure, the areas of densest refuse within the structure tend to be strongly associated with the largest hearth areas where the most numerous small and medium sized postholes are also found. This is highly indicative of unmixed house refuse.

3. Most artifact categories, with the possible exception of rim sherds, display a very pronounced patterning within Structure 2. They tend to occur predominantly along the walls and in the end corners. This is true of: most bone (including cut bone), the higher frequencies of bones affected by dogs, fur-bearer and deer phalanges, bear, beaver, woodchuck, turkey, the higher frequencies of bird and deer, adze fragments, larger sherds, and pipe fragments. As Hayden and Nelson (1981) and Hayden and Cannon (n.d.) have pointed out using ethno-archaeological data, areas near walls and in corners of structures are precisely those areas in structures where residential refuse should tend to accumulate the most. The fact that this patterning shows up so strongly in Structure 2 at Draper is one of the strongest possible indications that the refuse deposits recovered throughout most of Structure 2 are relatively unmixed, and that contamination from palisade refuse may not preclude useful analysis even in the west end of the structure. Those interested in reviewing these data are referred to the following figures of the original report on Structure 2: Fig. 3 (Hayden 1979b); Figs. 2, 3, 5, 6 (bones over 5 per sq.), 8 (bones over 2 per sq.), 9-13, 15, 17, 18 (bones over 9 per sq.) in Burns (1979); Figs. 13, 15 (Arthurs 1979); and Fig. 12 (Ferguson 1979).

4. It was also operationally possible to identify concentrations of refuse associated with each of the hearths located in the structure.

5. In the analysis of worked artifacts, significant clustering of objects into clear activity sets occurred along both side walls, including areas well removed from and outside the palisade (Ferguson 1979; Fig. 12). Of particular interest is the area containing an unusually high density of adze fragments and unfinished adzes. This concentration formed a relatively coherent activity area stretching along the house wall from one side of the former palisade wall over to the other side—a situation not explicable in terms of palisade-associated refuse dumping. Relatively numerous pipe stems, cut bone, and bear phalanges (presumably from furs) were also recovered from this same area. Given the relative scarceness of all these items and the fact that they are immediately adjacent to the densest concentrations of interior post holes and are associated with the most intensively and extensively used hearth in the structure, there seems to be only the very remotest chance that these artifacts and features would all be associated due to processes extraneous to the socio-economic fabric of Structure 2. The positioning, contents and associations of this area make it highly unlikely that prior midden dumping had any effect on this part of the assemblage especially since the core of this area is "outside" the former palisade line.

SUMMARY

Even if some mixing of refuse from Structure 2 did occur with refuse deposited near former palisades near the west end of Structure 2, this did not affect the artifact patterning in the rest of the structure. Using a number of different indicators of disturbance and contamination, it was

shown that the artifact patterning present in most of Structure 2 is entirely consistent with an undisturbed deposit of residential debris within the structure. The indicators used were: relative artifact densities in relation to former palisade walls; the position of refuse in relation to walls and corners; the clustering of artifacts around hearths; and the clustering "high-status" artifacts together with each other and with interior post holes and large hearths. The conclusions expressed in the various analyses of Structure 2 (Hayden 1979a), as well as the interpretations derived from these (Hayden 1977, 1978), can therefore still be viewed as justified, even if Finlayson and Pearce's archaeological cautionary tale has some validity. There is no need to raise "questions about the validity" of my interpretations, or to cast doubt on other project analyses, by invoking their palisade postulate.

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