# THE 1989-90 EXCAVATIONS AT THE PARSONS SITE: INTRODUCTION AND RETROSPECT

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## INTRODUCTION

The Late Iroquoian Parsons site (AkGv-8) is situated on a broad promontory formed by a meander spur overlooking Black Creek, a tributary of the Humber River (Figure 2). Most of the site lies within Lot 21, Concession 4, York Township, which today is located to the northwest of the intersection of Finch Avenue and Keele Street in the City of North York, Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. The site area currently extends across a level to gently rolling short grass meadow, in the midst of considerable residential and commercial development. The bulk of the lands encompassing the site are owned by Ontario *Hydro* and the *Metropolitan Toronto and* Region Conservation Authority. Several utilities, the most visible of which is an *Ontario Hydro* transmission complex of lines and towers, traverse the site.

In 1988, the proposed installation of a watermain, consisting of an 18 m wide corridor extending across the site, necessitated the completion of full scale salvage excavations within the southern sector of the Ontario Hydro corridor (Figure 3). In order to provide an interpretive context for the results of the analysis of the data recovered from these excavations, it is first necessary to provide a review of previous research at this and other sites in the immediate vicinity, and the various interpretations that such studies have generated.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### The Parsons Site

The Parsons site has been known to both local avocational and professional archaeologists for many years, and has long played an important role in the development of cultural-historical schemes seeking to interpret and explain the archaeological record of the late pre-contact to early contact Iroquoian populations of southern Ontario. Although test excavations conducted at the site from the 1950s to the 1970s yielded substantial artifact samples, the present research represents the first large scale investigation of the village's settlement patterns. The 1989-90 excavations have afforded an opportunity not only to examine an extensive settlement occupied during a period of socio-political change or restructuring, but also, to some extent, to re-examine previous interpretations of the site and its more general cultural and historical context.

The first excavations were conducted at the Parsons site in the fall of 1952 as part of a field school conducted by J. Norman Emerson of the *University* of Toronto. A second field school was conducted during the fall of 1953. Together, these two excavations produced both settlement pattern data and a large artifact assemblage. Portions of multirow palisading were documented in a midden area on the west side of the site (Areas A and H), to the north and south of the Hydro corridor (Emerson 1952; Kapches 1982:2-15). Portions of several longhouses and at least seven other middens were also recorded.

Emerson returned to the site in 1972 and 1973, again to conduct *University* of Toronto archaeological field schools (Kapches 1982:13-18). The 1972 excavations resulted in the recovery of limited portions of two additional longhouses, one of which exhibited a portion of a wall trench. Few details are available concerning the results of the 1973 activities (Kapches 1982:18).

From 1956 through to the 1970s, John Morrison, an avocational archaeologist, carried out sporadic but extensive excavations on the site, concentrating in various midden areas. He also uncovered settlement patterns in numerous areas, which he interpreted as the remains of seven longhouses oriented along east-west axes.

In the early 1980s, Mima Kapches attempted to synthesize the surviving records of Emerson's investigations in order to map the locations of the various excavation areas and to provide an estimate of the possible locations

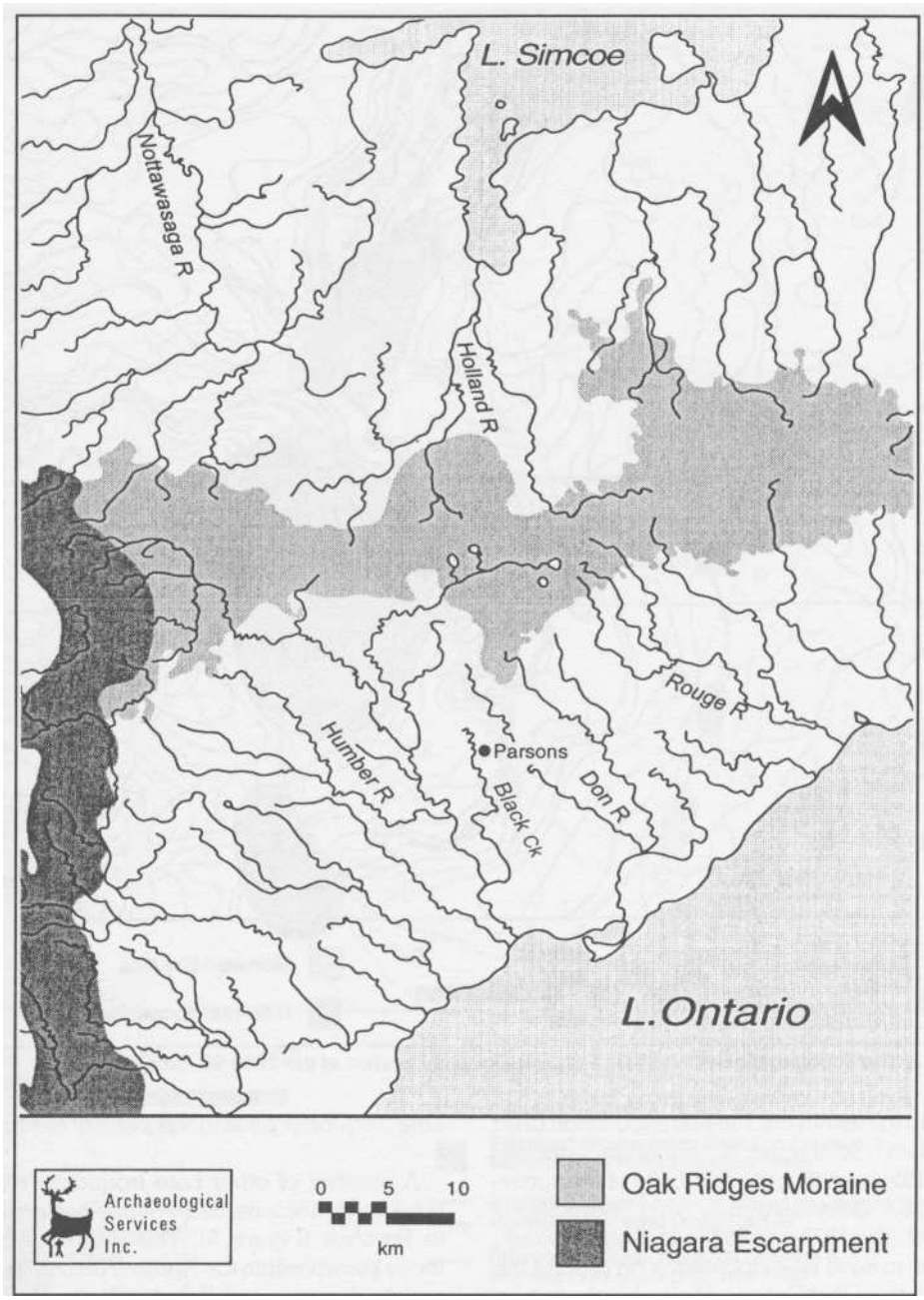



**Figure 2. The Location of the Parsons Site on Black Creek.**

of various settlement features and the overall extent of the site (Figure 4). She similarly attempted to locate Morrison's excavation areas. Many uncertainties remain concerning the locations of the various excavation units. Although Kapches' mapping of the 1952 excavations (Kapches 1982:Figure 4) places Emerson's Areas J and D very close to, or within, the area of the 1989-90 trench, a field map of this work compiled by Peter Pratt (Kapches 1982: Figure 1) would seem to suggest that these areas were located further to the north. Similarly, the 1953 excavations, which appear to have encountered two parallel houses, also

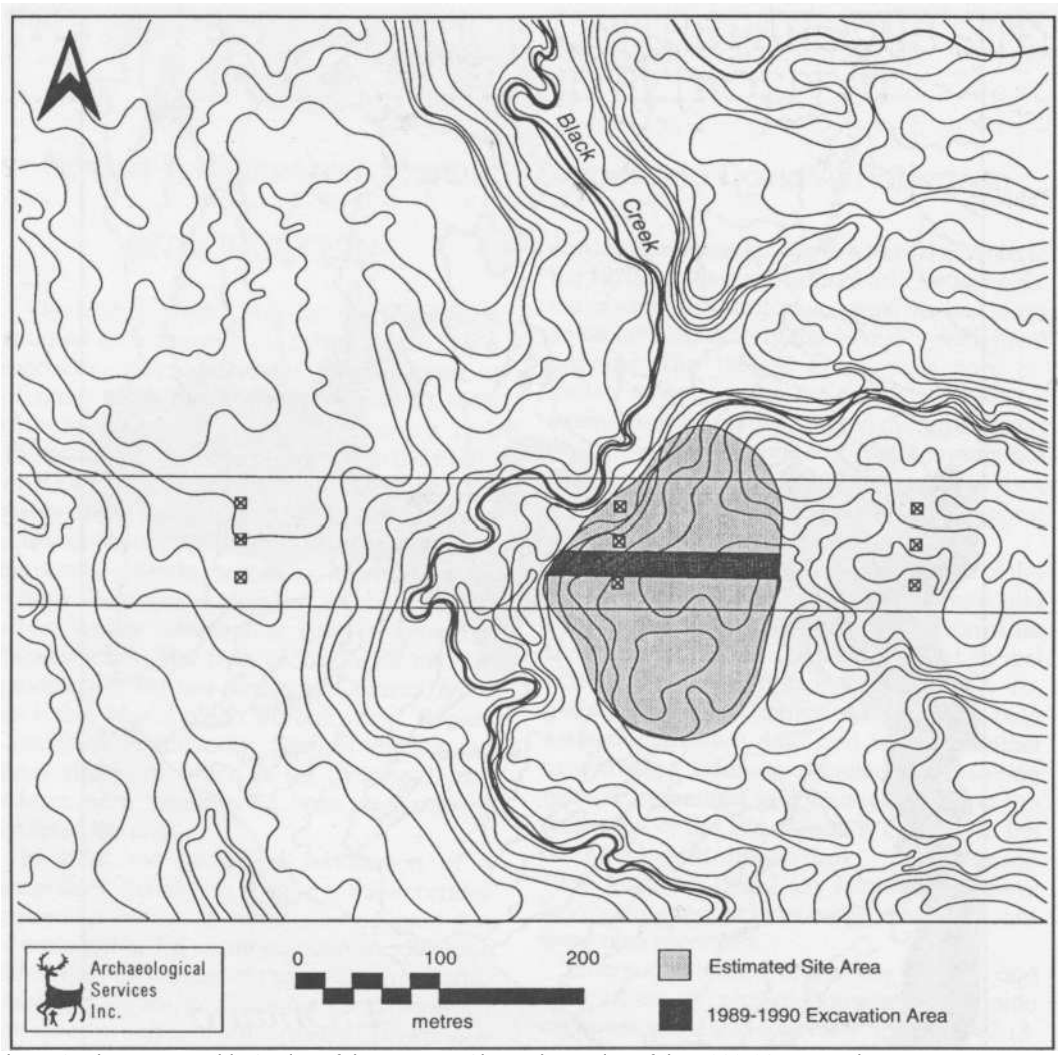



Figure 3. The Topographic Setting of the Parsons Site and Location of the 1989-90 Excavations.

seem to fall within the 1989-90 excavation area (Kapches 1982:Figure 6), although Kapches (1982:13) noted that the reliability of the surviving 1953 documentation was particularly suspect. The 1972 and 1973 excavations would appear to have been located in an area of the site south of the Ontario Hydro lands, but no more specific locational information has survived (Kapches 1982:13, 18). Although certain areas investigated in 1989 and 1990 did appear to have been disturbed by previous excavation(s), it has not proven possible to attribute any of these activities conclusively to either the University of Toronto field schools or to the work of John Morrison.

### *Late* Iroquoian Sites *in* the *Vicinity of Parsons*

A number of other Late Iroquoian villages have been documented within close proximity to Parsons (Figure 5). The southernmost of those known within the Humber drainage is the poorly documented Roseland site (AkGu-6), located over 10 km downstream from Parsons. The site is situated atop a bluff overlooking the Humber River and associated wetland flats. Although the size of the site has not been determined, it is believed to have survived largely intact under the grounds of a public school (Garner et al. 1991:12).

The earliest village in the Humber valley sequence appears to be the now destroyed

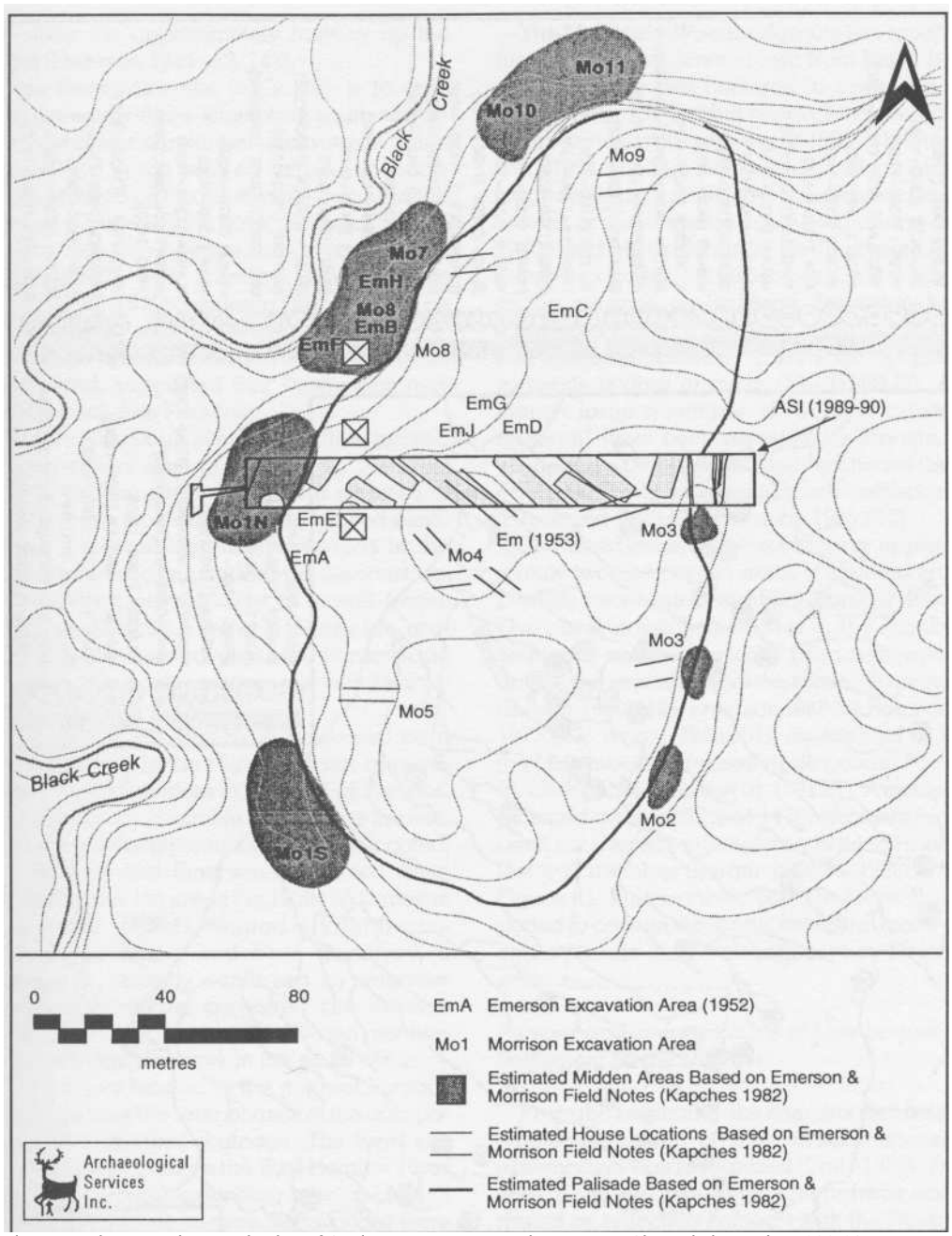
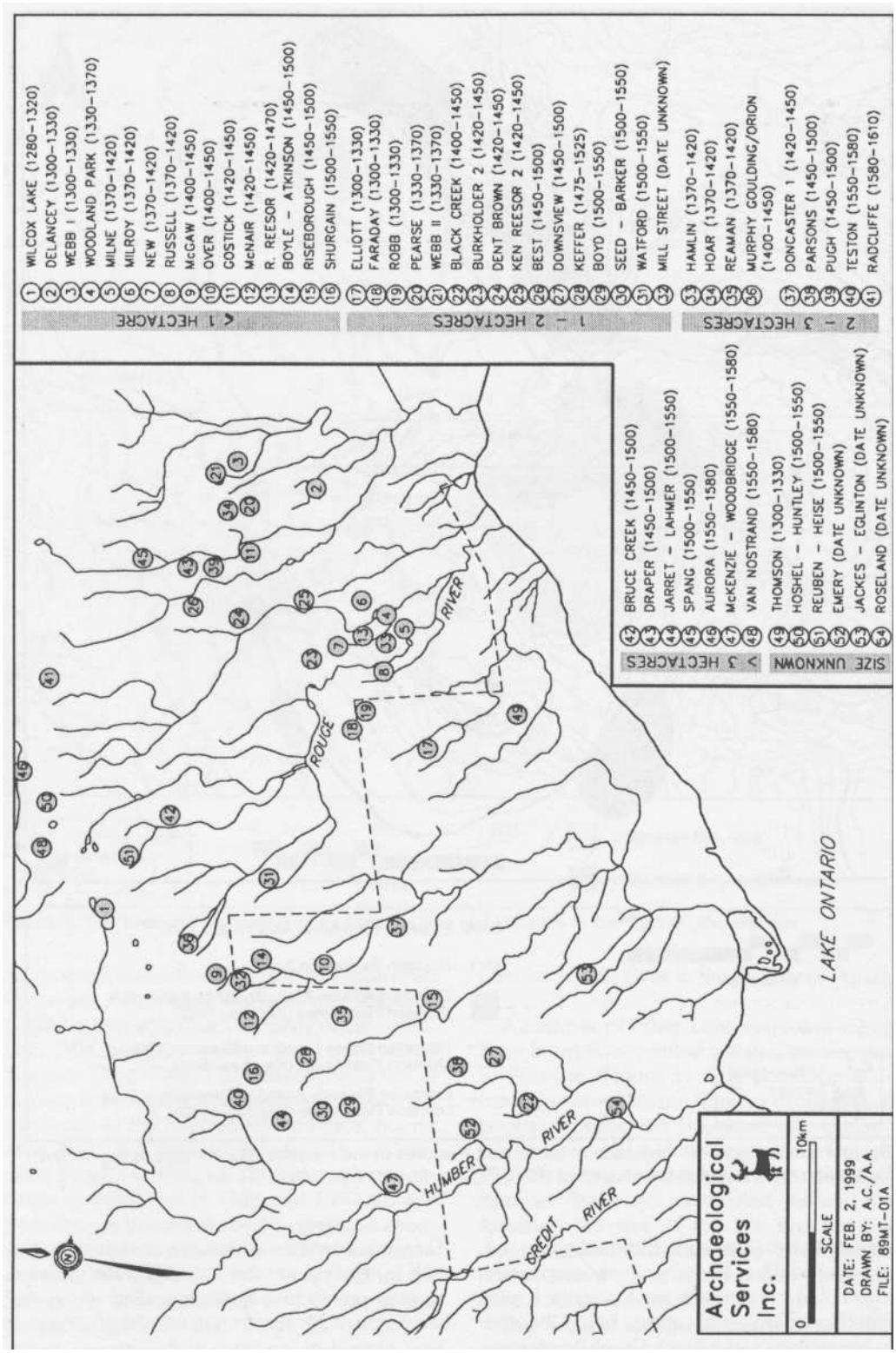



Figure 4. Mima Kapches' Projection of Settlement Features at the Parsons Site Relative to the 1989-90 Excavation Area. Adapted from Kapches (1982:Figures 11-12).

Black Creek site (AkGv-11). Situated about five kilometres south of Parsons, it encompassed an area of approximately two hectares. It was situated in an atypical setting, being located on a low terrace of the Black Creek floodplain. Emerson carried out limited excavations at the site in 1948 (Emerson 1954:123). An unusual double palisade was documented along the west side of the site, facing the creek. One row was placed at the base of the terrace, while


< 1 HECTACRE
(1) WILCOX LAKE (1280–1320)
(2) DELANCEY (1300–1330)
(3) WEBB I (1300–1330)
(4) WOODLAND PARK (1330–1370)
(5) MILNE (1370–1420)
(6) MILROY (1370–1420)
(7) NEW (1370–1420)
(8) RUSSELL (1370–1420)
(9) McGAW (1400–1450)
(10) OVER (1400–1450)
(11) GOSTICK (1420–1450)
(12) McNAIR (1420–1450)
(13) R. REESOR (1420–1470)
(14) BOYLE – ATKINSON (1450–1500)
(15) RISEBOROUGH (1450–1500)
(16) SHURGAIN (1500–1550)
1 – 2 HECTACRES
(17) ELLIOTT (1300–1330)
(18) FARADAY (1300–1330)
(19) ROBB (1300–1330)
(20) PEARSE (1330–1370)
(21) WEBB II (1330–1370)
(22) BLACK CREEK (1400–1450)
(23) BURKHOLDER 2 (1420–1450)
(24) DENT BROWN (1420–1450)
(25) KEN REESOR 2 (1420–1450)
(26) BEST (1450–1500)
(27) DOWNSVIEW (1450–1500)
(28) KEFFER (1475–1525)
(29) BOYD (1500–1550)
(30) SEED – BARKER (1500–1550)
(31) WATFORD (1500–1550)
(32) MILL STREET (DATE UNKNOWN)
2 – 3 HECTACRES
(33) HAMLIN (1370–1420)
(34) HOAR (1370–1420)
(35) REAMAN (1370–1420)
(36) MURPHY GOULDING/ORION (1400–1450)
(37) DONCASTER 1 (1420–1450)
(38) PARSONS (1450–1500)
(39) PUGH (1450–1500)
(40) TESTON (1550–1580)
(41) RADCLIFFE (1580–1610)
> 3 HECTACRES
(42) BRUCE CREEK (1450–1500)
(43) DRAPER (1450–1500)
(44) JARRET – LAHMER (1500–1550)
(45) SPANG (1500–1550)
(46) AURORA (1550–1580)
(47) McKENZIE – WOODBRIDGE (1550–1580)
(48) VAN NOSTRAND (1550–1580)
SIZE UNKNOWN
(49) THOMSON (1300–1330)
(50) HOSHEL – HUNTLEY (1500–1550)
(51) REUBEN – HEISE (1500–1550)
(52) EMERY (DATE UNKNOWN)
(53) JACKES – EGLINTON (DATE UNKNOWN)
(54) ROSELAND (DATE UNKNOWN)
ROUGE RIVER
HUMBER RIVER
CREDIT RIVER
LAKE ONTARIO
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the other lay approximately halfway up the slope (Emerson 1954:123, 142).

The Downsview site (AkGu-13), is located approximately three kilometres south of Parsons. Emerson conducted excavations at the site in 1950. It too is in an unusual location, being situated on the flat summit and terraced flank of a hill along the bank of Black Creek. It is less than two hectares in area (Emerson 1954:101-102). Both Emerson (1954:259) and Wright (1966:101) considered Downsview to be comparatively early in the Humber sequence, predating Parsons. Ramsden (1977:255), on the other hand, suggested that Downsview may slightly post-date Parsons.

The Riseborough site (AkGu-10) is located two kilometres east of Parsons on the West Don River. The site extends over an area of slightly more than one hectare. Limited excavation of two midden areas resulted in the identification of a longhouse wall, the construction of which entailed use of a wall trench (Kapches 1980:98, Figure 2). Ramsden suggested that it was occupied after Parsons and was possibly contemporaneous with Downs-view (Ramsden 1977:255).

The Emery site (AkGv-12) is located on a small tributary of the Humber River, approximately four kilometres to the west of Parsons. Few details are available concerning the site. Although no documentation has been located, it is thought that Emerson conducted some excavations at the site in the 1950s (Williamson and Austin 1989:1). Konrad (1973:74) concluded that Emery had been destroyed, a suggestion recently confirmed by intensive investigation of the purported site location (Williamson and Austin 1989:13) and monitoring of construction work in the same area.

Three sites located to the north of Parsons may represent the later phases of the occupation of the Humber drainage. The Boyd site (AkGv-3) is situated on the East Humber River near Woodbridge, extending over an area of approximately one hectare. Excavations were first conducted at the site by Paul Sweetman (1958), who was followed by William Donaldson (1962). Several field schools were also conducted at the site during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Burgar 1990a:15). Ramsden (1977:216) believes the Boyd site to be ancestral to the Seed-Barker site (AkGv-l) and contemporaneous with the McKenzie-Woodbridge site (AkGv-2).

The McKenzie-Woodbridge site lies roughly three kilometres downstream from Boyd. It is approximately two hectares in area and is situated on a high bluff overlooking the East Humber river valley (Johnson 1980:78). Emerson (1954:142-143) excavated portions of 17 longhouses and a palisade. Subsequent excavations at the site were conducted during the 1970s and 1980s (Johnson 1980), revealing a number of additional structures. On the basis of the ceramic assemblage, Ramsden has suggested that the site was occupied in the mid-sixteenth century (1977:255). Johnson suggests a date of *circa* 1520 (1980:77). Although large quantities of "European trade material" have been reported for the site, it would seem that both the identification of their origin and their provenience are conjectural (Fitzgerald 1990:106; Fox et al. 1995:282).

The Seed-Barker site, measuring approximately two hectares in area, is situated on a plateau overlooking the East Humber River. The site is possibly the latest in the Humber sequence and has typically been assigned a date in the second half of the sixteenth century (Burgar 1990b:121; Emerson 1968:59; Ramsden 1977:263; Wright 1966:101), as attested to by the presence of European trade goods ( Fox et al. 1995:282; Hancock et al. 1991:81). A multiple palisade and portions of 14 longhouses have been uncovered to date, many of which manifest wall trenches (Burgar 1988:13, 1990b:120, Figure 1). Furthermore, one structure is reported to contain slash pits, structural features characteristic of seventeenth century Neutral sites.

### *Parsons and Interpretations of Late Iroquoian Settlement on the Humber*

From the beginning, the complex and heterogeneous nature of the Parsons ceramic assemblage was recognized (Daily 1953). The variety of vessel types encountered was interpreted as reflecting contacts with the Neutral and Erie to the west, with the Seneca to the south, as well as with "Roebuck groups" to the east (Daily 1953:15). These eastern or Roebuck influences in the ceramic assemblage were initially equated with the Onondaga-Oneida. Today, these eastern ceramics would be considered to be derived from types attributed to the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, who developed

*in* situ in the St. Lawrence River valley (Pendergast 1966; 1975).

Emerson (1956) provided the first contextual ordering of the Parsons rims, based on typological seriation and the application of the Brainerd-Robinson coefficient of similarity. He placed the site within a northward sequence of settlement relocations that eventually culminated in the seventeenth century Huron sites of Warminster and Orr Lake in Simcoe County. He believed that Parsons succeeded the Black Creek site, and that it was closely related to and possibly contemporaneous with the McKenzie site (Emerson 1961:189). Emerson emphasized that Parsons had a cosmopolitan character, derived from both eastern (Roebuck) and western (Lawson and Pound) influences (Emerson 1956). He further suggested that Parsons, with its 47 percent Neutral ceramic types, could be considered a Neutral site (Emerson 1956; 1961:190). However, he concluded that while the site probably represented the arrival of a migrant population from southwestern Ontario and showed evidence of widespread influence from the south and east, it was, nevertheless, part of the developmental sequence of the Huron (Emerson 1968b:55).

J.V. Wright (1966), using Emerson's ceramic data from Parsons, also placed the site in the Huron line. He further provided a broad temporal ordering of villages from across southern Ontario. From earliest to latest, this sequence included the Doncaster, Draper, Black Creek, McDonald-Payne, Parsons, McKenzie-Woodbridge and Seed-Barker sites (Wright 1966:71). This chronological ordering of the Humber valley sites was the same as that suggested by Emerson, with the addition of the Seed site as the latest village in the sequence. Parsons was assigned an approximate date of A.D. 1550 (Wright 1961:101). It should be noted that in his later publications, Emerson (1967:176-177; 1968b:58-59) also recognized a strong connection between Black Creek, Parsons and McDonald-Payne within the Huron developmental sequence. The McDonald-Payne site is located along the lower reaches of the Trent River in Prince Edward County.

Peter Ramsden (1977) re-examined the Parsons ceramic rim sherds from the 1952 excavations and submitted them to an attribute analysis. Again using the Brainerd-Robinson coefficient of similarity, he proposed a model that took into consideration tempora[1] and spatial parameters, and compared these relationships with the apparent distribution of ceramic attributes among and between the sites. On the basis of its ceramics, Parsons was placed within the Benson Group, a cluster including sites located in the upper Trent River valley (Benson), Lake Simcoe (Bosomworth), the Humber valley (Black Creek and Parsons) and the headwater area of the Nottawasaga River just north of the Humber watershed (Beeton) (Ramsden 1977:167-171). The Benson site, like Parsons, exhibits significant St. Lawrence Iroquoian influence in its ceramic assemblage. Ramsden believed these two sites to be lineally related, since Benson was occupied subsequent to Parsons. He continued, however, to support the notion that Black Creek was ancestral to Parsons (Ramsden 1977:229). The similarity of Parsons to the Beeton and Lite sites was also noted, a fact that Ramsden attributed to their contemporaneity and contact with one another. Beeton is situated in the Albion Hills, at the western end of the Oak Ridge moraine (Latta 1980), while Lite is located near Belleville (Pendergast 1972).

In addition to rim sherd data, Ramsden also considered other components of the artifact assemblage. While the ceramic assemblage was seen as having both St. Lawrence Iroquoian and Neutral elements, the profuse lithic industry at Parsons was noted to be absent on other prehistoric Huron sites, leading Ramsden to suggest that this constituted evidence of Neutral influence (Ramsden 1977:281-282). The close ceramic relationship to Benson and Black Creek contrasted with a lack of similarity with the rest of the artifacts assemblages. This led Ramsden to propose that there was "some continuity" between the women at the sites, but not the men (Ramsden 1977:283). This assumed, of course, that women made the pots and the non-ceramic artifact assemblage was produced by the men. Ramsden's speculations concerning the variability in the archaeological record was set forth as follows:

> It appears that men from the Neutral area were marrying into an indigenous population of women descended from the Black Creek population. The references to plentiful human remains in

> middens at Par-sons (Wright 1966), and the selection, for the first time, of an easily defensible village location, suggests that these men may have introduced themselves through conquest. The presence of an elaborate palisade at Black Creek may suggest that this conquest was the culmination of a continuing state of hostility.
>
> Why should a group of men from the Neutral area [wish] to establish themselves in the Humber valley? Three observations suggest that the motivation was European trade. The Parsons site is striking in the variety and quantity of its scraper assemblage and is the first site in the sequence to show evidence of European trade goods. Parsons also has a high (for the area) incidence of St. Lawrence Iroquois pot sherds, which may represent trade sherds or the handiwork of adopted or captive St. Lawrence women. I am suggesting that the invading men moved into the Humber to be in a better position to procure and prepare beaver pelts for trade with the St. Lawrence Iroquois who were presumably acting as middlemen to the European purchasers in the St. Lawrence Gulf region [Ramsden 1977:284].

In terms of assigning a date to Parsons, Ramsden suggested that Parsons and Beeton dated to *circa* A.D. 1550 — on the basis of two pieces of copper in the University of Toronto collections, and a further report of metal recovered from Beeton since he believed that this was the earliest possible date for European trade goods (Ramsden 1977:68, 73, 256). This dating relied on the assumption that the Parsons copper is of European origin. Several recent examinations of the early evidence for European contact and trade in southern Ontario, have involved re-assessment of the origin of the metals recovered from Humber Valley sites. William Fitzgerald, for example, has recently appraised those metal items recovered from, or attributed to, the Black Creek, McKenzie-Woodbridge and Beeton sites. With the exception of four brass artifacts from Beeton, all the material was judged to be of Native rather than European origin (Fitzgerald 1990:103-107). Similarly, another series of tests conducted on six metal items from Parsons determined that all were of Native origin (Fox et al. 1995:273). This same study also examined material from the late sixteenth century Seed-Barker site, resulting in the identification of six Native and three European items, while another specimen from the mid-sixteenth century McKenzie-Woodbridge site proved to be Native (Fox et al. 1995:282; Hancock et al. 1991:81). As Fitzgerald (1990:133-140) has concluded that European metal is unlikely to have arrived in southern Ontario in significant quantities prior to 1580, the Beeton and Seed-Barker sites are likely to have been occupied at a later time than Black Creek, McKenzie-Woodbridge, and Parsons. Likewise, it should be noted that the copper artifacts from the Draper site (Finlayson and Pihl 1980), in light of the mid-fifteenth century radiocarbon dates obtained for the site, are no longer considered to be of European origin (Finlayson 1985:437; Fitzgerald 1990:103).

The results of these metallurgical studies have considerable implications with respect to the manner in which the first appearance of very extensive village sites has been interpreted. Based on the large size of the Parsons and Draper sites and the alleged presence of European trade materials, Ramsden (1978:102-105) proposed that they represented an amalgamation of populations at strategic locations for the purpose of taking advantage of the early European trade network. Ultimately, the origins of this hypothesis may be traced to the historical importance of the eastern and western arms of the "Toronto Carrying Place" (Robinson 1965:5-10). Following Ramsden, Ronald Mason took this notion to its ultimate extreme, suggesting that the Parsons and Draper sites commanded "access to the north and the waterways leading to the Upper Great

Lakes" and occupied "facilitating and blocking positions in any trade traversing their districts" (Mason 1981:375). Aside from the chronological problems, this hypothesis also tends to ignore the fact that Parsons is rather insularly located on the upper reaches of a secondary creek.

Although the development of trade networks focussed upon European goods can now be effectively discounted as an explanation for the emergence of large centres such as Parsons, it would still appear that relatively complex and large scale communication or exchange systems were in existence, possibly augmented by considerable population movement. The Parsons site is not unique among Humber Valley villages in exhibiting significant quantities of "foreign" ceramics. The McKenzie-Woodbridge ceramic assemblage contains St. Lawrence Iroquoian type vessels that appear to have been manufactured locally (Johnson 1980:85; Trigger et al. 1980:132). In addition, a minority of ceramics appear to have been derived from northwestern Pennsylvania or northern Ohio (Johnson 1980:85). Likewise, the Seed-Barker site appears to display considerable Neutral and Seneca influence in its ceramic assemblage, as well as ceramics derived from the Ohio Valley (Burgar 1990b:120). The St. Lawrence Iroquoian ceramics at the site, which represent a small percentage of the overall assemblage are poorly made and consist almost entirely of the corn ear type (Burgar 1988:Table 23).

A sample of the St. Lawrence Iroquoian ceramics from southcentral Ontario Iroquoian sites such as Parsons, which have generally been attributed to trade or to the presence of captive females from the St. Lawrence valley (Finlayson 1985:439; Pendergast 1975:49;1985:340; Ramsden 1977:293; Wright 1972:90) has been examined by Trigger et al. (1980). Through trace element analysis of 40 sherds from the Parsons, they determined that the ceramics were either made locally, or were obtained through trade from one or more of the Iroquoian sites within the nearby Duffin drain-age. Such diversity in ceramics would, there-fore, appear to be the rule rather than the exception, and should accordingly be considered a general feature of Late Iroquoian ceramic assemblages in this region.

## MODELS OF HURON-PETUN CULTURE HISTORY: ESTABLISHING AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PARSONS

As outlined above, the Parsons site has long played an important role in the formulation of the prevailing models of the late prehistoric developments leading to the emergence of the tribes and confederacies of the late pre-contact and contact periods. It has long been generally accepted that the Humber communities, together with those represented by numerous other Late Iroquoian sites in the Toronto area (e.g., Doncaster [Wright 1966:69], Jackes-Eglinton [Noble 1974], Keffer [Finlayson et al. 1987], Draper [Finlayson 1985]), as well as those in the Balsam Lake (e.g., Kirche [Nasmith Ramsden 1989], Coulter [Djamkar 1990], and Kingston [e.g., Payne [Emerson 1967; Pendergast 1964a], Lite [Pendergast 1972], and Waupoos [Pendergast 1964b]) regions gradually shifted northward into Simcoe County, joining with groups who had established themselves in the area during Middle Iroquoian times. Together, these groups formed the large confederacies identified in the historic and ethnographic records as the Huron and Petun. This basic scheme has continued to inform much of the subsequent research concerning Huron-Petun origins.

J.V. Wright (1966) subsequently established a generalized framework of Iroquoian prehistory that remains in use, at least as a taxonomic tool, to the present day (Smith 1990:284-285). In his outline of the "Ontario Iroquois Tradition," Wright proposed three stages of development, the first of which consisted of a western branch (Glen Meyer) and an eastern branch (Pickering), both thought to be evolving in relative isolation from one another. The second stage, the "Middle Ontario Iroquois," was thought to represent the fusion of these two branches, resulting from the military conquest of the Glen Meyer by the Pickering, although this hypothesis has generally been abandoned (Williamson 1990:311-312; Ferris and Spence 1995:110). The final stage, the "Late Ontario Iroquois," was thought to be a divergence from the middle stage culminating

in the historical tribal groupings of the Huron, Petun, Neutral, and Erie.

The Huron-Petun branch was further subdivided into Southern and Northern divisions, the latter of which included Ridley's (1952) "Lalonde Culture." Both divisions were conceived as having evolved along basically parallel trajectories, a result of their having emerged from a common Middle Iroquoian base and having maintained some degree of continued contact. Beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, the gradual movement of the Southern division groups away from the shore of Lake Ontario resulted in the "fusion" of the two divisions shortly before European contact (Wright 1966:68-83).

More recently, Peter Ramsden (1977; 1990b) attempted to address the shortcomings of such an overly generalized model of Huron development. His was an effort to identify the complex and dynamic interplay of socio-political interaction (e.g., alliance, conflict, population movement, etc.), primarily occurring at the local level, which led to the formation of the large polities concentrated in Huronia during the seventeenth century. Ramsden (1990b) has defined three major chronological periods within the overall development of the Huron, distinguished on the basis of changes in material culture and socio-political structure. The first of these periods, the "Black Creek-Lalonde period" (circa 1400-1500) is one of marked regional differences between groups, reflecting the existence of distinct "local or 'tribal' groups" in the Toronto, Kawartha Lakes, Kingston, and Simcoe regions (Ramsden 1990b:381). Ramsden described the following "Realignment period" (circa 1500-1600) as a time of considerable change brought about by the "re-structuring of traditional tribal groupings, population migrations, and the coalescence of small villages into large cosmopolitan ones" (1990b:382). Much of this upheaval was originally attributed to competition, between the populations of central and eastern Ontario, for access to exchange networks through which European trade goods were beginning to flow (Ramsden 1977:291-293; 1978). More recently, however, Ramsden has become less inclined to believe that competition for European material could have been the only, or indeed, even the primary cause for these developments (Ramsden 1990b:382; 1990c:91-92). The end of the Realignment period, and the succeeding "French period" (circa 1600-1650), witnessed the shift of populations into Huronia, as well as stabilization and consolidation of communities into the socio-political groups subsequently encountered by the European explorers and missionaries (Ramsden 1990b:282-283).

It is not clear, however, that the marked regional differences between groups apparent in the archaeological record of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century can be explained in the context of "tribal" groups or ""nations", as they are understood from the historic record. Nor is it clear that realignments of pre-contact period communities occurred only in the sixteenth century. Prior to the mid-fifteenth century, the autonomous, multi-lineage village likely represented the maximal political unit (Figure 6), although many neighbouring villages may have participated in loosely-formed social and political networks. It is at the level of such networks, between regional clusters of villages, that the processes which ultimately led to the emergence of larger tribal or national groupings probably operated (Renfrew 1986:7). Thus, it would appear that the consolidation of many smaller, autonomous multi-lineage communities in the early to mid-fifteenth century does mark the initial stages in the emergence of fully formed tribal social systems (cf. Service 1971). These were among the first systems to be integrated by cross-cutting pan-residential institutions and to be involved in long distance, large scale politics, warfare and exchange (Niemczycki 1984:80-84; Timmins 1997:227-229; Williamson and Robert-son 1994:34).

This consolidation of larger tribal or national groupings is most evident in the archaeological record of Ontario beginning in the mid-fifteenth century with the appearance of very large (≥3 ha) well-planned and heavily palisaded villages that represent not only population growth, but the amalgamation of two or more neighbouring villages that may have previously participated in a more loosely-formed trade or military alliance. To a certain degree, the consolidation of military alliances at this time may be both a cause and a consequence of an overall increase in hostilities that appear to have arisen between disparate communities.

Three developments during the later Middle and Late Iroquoian periods increasingly

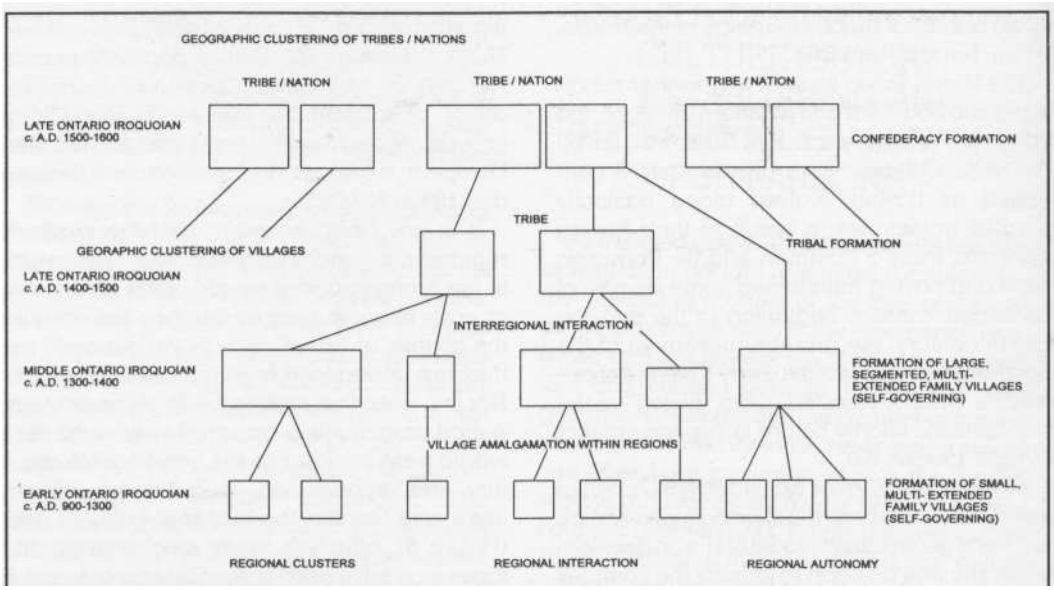

Figure 6. A Model of Iroquoian Socio-Political Development. Adapted from Timmins (1997:Figure 8.6).

elaborate fortifications, the occurrence of scattered human bone within settlements and a greater frequency of "foreign" or "exotic" ceramics on sites — have been cited as evidence of such an increase in conflict. While there can be little doubt that hostile relations between groups was a feature of the period, the scale of this violence and the degree to which it contributed to the general process of village amalgamation is not as easy to assess as is often implied.

The relationship between the imposing defences on many of these sites and the level of hostilities between developing tribal groups is likely to have been a complex one, making it difficult to simply "read off" the scale of conflict from the archaeological evidence. The role of these defences as symbolic statements of social identity — embodying the distinction between those who were members of the community and those who were not — must also be considered. Indeed, as community membership became increasingly structured through time, so too may this type of symbolic community boundary have become more formalized and imposingly expressive (e.g., Ramsden 1990a:170-172). Avoidance of the potentially disastrous consequences of internal dispute within a densely populated and only recently amalgamated community may have lead to an effort to "externalize" these im pulses. These hostilities could well have resulted in an increase in the chronic, but comparatively low-level conflicts that are known to be a traditional aspect of Iroquoian society (Trigger 1969:42-53; Warrick 1984:33). Yet, it is also possible that increased conflicts between groups could also have been played out through exaggerated, even competitive expressions of community solidarity (Renfrew 1986:8) in the form of defensive constructions, which may not be in direct proportion to the actual frequency or intensity of violent confrontations.

The other development traditionally inferred to indicate greater levels of conflict is the increased quantities of scattered human bone found on many Late Iroquoian sites. These remains are generally attributed to prisoner sacrifice and cannibalism (e.g., Finlayson 1985:438-439; Warrick 1984:63; Wright 1966:91, 99). Such practices, however, are not the only possible explanations for the dispersal of human remains throughout a settlement, given the variety of burial treatments documented for Iroquoian groups. Exposure of corpses on scaffolds, primary interments within shallow graves that may have been subsequently disturbed, either by the occupants of the site or by subsequent agricultural activities may have resulted in the scattering of human skeletal elements. The former process would be partic-

ularly likely to occur on major Late Iroquoian villages such as Draper and Parsons that appear to have had lengthy, dynamic and intensive settlement histories. Such disturbed remains would be subject to a variety of taphonomic factors that could result in their having been further dispersed, broken or burnt, rather than deliberately "brutalized." Primary interments from which not all remains were collected for subsequent ossuary burial may also result in the impression of scattered human remains within a settlement. Furthermore, certain individuals who were not eligible for burial in the village cemetery or ossuary may have been treated in such a way that their bones would eventually be dispersed over a wide area. By the contact period,for instance, drowning or freezing victims, were taken to the cemetery, where their bodies were disarticulated, the flesh burned, and the skeletal remains thrown into a ditch, where they apparently remained exposed to the elements (Tooker 1964:132).

Those who died a violent death were also accorded exclusive funereal treatment, in that their bodies were burned or buried immediately and were not subsequently disinterred (Tooker 1964:132). These remains could also be subsequently scattered throughout a settlement, yet in the absence of diagnostic evidence for trauma in the form of projectile wounds, or the skull fractures and broken forearms that maybe expected from the use of warclubs (as opposed to the results of defleshing and disarticulation during normal funeral rites) their identification as victims of violence remains problematic. Even in those cases in which such indicators are found (e.g., Williamson 1978:119), the identity of the combatants cannot be determined. It is usually assumed that the enemies would be from other groups, yet within the context of villages with greater populations densities, drawn from more than one source, the potential for stress, factionalism and internal conflict must also have been significant.

Finally, the presence of exotic ceramics on a site has generally been interpreted as the result of conflict, the notion being that women seized in raids would be brought back to their captors' village where they would continue to make their own ethnically distinct ceramics. On the other hand it might be argued that adopted captives would have preferred to conform to local ceramic conventions and that foreign ceramics are more likely to be indicative of exchange rather than conflict (cf. Cooper and Robertson 1992:57; Jamieson 1990b:82; Latta 1991; Ramsden 1990c:92-94). Furthermore, the assumption that ceramic attributes necessarily reflect ethnic identity, which underlies such hypotheses, no longer does justice to the complexity of the socio-political and economic relationships and transactions that must have existed during the Late Iroquoian period.

The cosmopolitan character of these large communities, particularly with respect to their ceramic traditions, may derive from the fact that people from more distant villages also decided to merge with the local populations. These developed tribes, therefore, would have incorporated a much larger number of residential segments that were increasingly defined by clan affiliation rather than lineage membership, thereby heightening the role of socially integrative mechanisms in order to maintain their cohesion within a system that continued to be essentially egalitarian. Such institutions may have included formalized feasting and gaming, as well as curing societies (e.g., Trigger 1969:90-101). Of course, the intensification of such systems, involving larger village populations, would have depended on a substantial food base, suggesting that agricultural production had already reached its zenith (Schwarz et al. 1985; Katzenberg et al. 1995). Likewise, it would have been necessary to refine systems of government that included representatives from each of the constituent clan segments. It is likely that the social ties that resulted from the exchange of marriage partners among the formerly autonomous communities would have proven very helpful in addressing the social and political tensions inherent in the new larger residential populations. Such social relationships may also have facilitated negotiations for new tribal political structures.

In summary, it appears that there may have been two tribal systems evolving in the Humber valley during Late Iroquoian times, one in the middle Humber-Black Creek area and the second in the headwaters of the Humber River. The earliest of the sites in the first area is Black Creek which may have been occupied in the early fifteenth century. The Black Creek population may have then relocated to the Downsview site and eventually to the Parsons site.

Since Parsons is almost twice the size of the earlier villages, it is possible that the nearby Riseborough site on the Don River was one of the contributing villages. Parsons may, therefore, represent the amalgamation of people from two or more of these earlier communities and relate to the initial formation of a tribal system.

It is also possible that a similar but later coalescence of local villages in the upper reaches of the Humber Valley resulted in the establishment of the McKenzie-Woodbridge site. Confirmed European metal goods from well-documented archaeological contexts further indicate that the site might be the latest in the sequence. It is suggested that the Boyd and Seed-Barker sites contributed to the formation of the McKenzie-Woodbridge community. While Parsons and other sites such as Draper (Finlayson 1985) appear to have formed in the mid-to-late fifteenth century, the emergence of McKenzie-Woodbridge in the mid-to-late sixteenth century is consistent with Ramsden's arguments concerning the "Realignment Period." Clearly there is no need for these developments in social and political structures among regional communities to have occurred simultaneously across all Iroquoia. Indeed, change of this nature in one local group may have effected change in neighbouring regions, especially if feuding among various regional networks was escalating.

What remains is to refine these interpretations, through detailed investigations of the archaeological data from these villages, in the context of an examination of the formation of tribal social systems. That will only be possible, however, if researchers abandon the prevailing model of cultural evolution and instead examine the archaeological record in search of the actual level of socio-political integration among the prehistoric communities of southern Ontario (Williamson and Robertson 1994).

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