

## The Thomas Site: A Late Prehistoric Village in Ontario County

*by*

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### INTRODUCTION

During an archaeological survey of Reach Township, Ontario County, in the spring of 1955, the author discovered several sites whose surface material indicated a relationship to contact sites being reported from Huronia. As these sites lay well south-east of that area, a more intensive study seemed warranted. Accordingly, a large, relatively untouched site on Lot 18, Concession 14, was selected. Permission was obtained from the owner<sup>1</sup> and several test squares excavated.

The sketch (Plate I) illustrates the site and excavated area. Prior to 1924, the wooded area on the east extended over the entire site. In that year this stand was reduced to its present size and the cleared area used as pasture. Only a small portion of the western edge has been under cultivation, and much of Mr. Thomas' material is from this area. The small stream bordering the southern edge of the site joins the Layton River a third of a mile to the east and has its source in the high land less than a mile to the north-west. Though the spring and summer of 1955 were unusually dry, this stream never failed.

### THE EXCAVATION

A five-foot grid was laid out and test squares excavated by trowel and brush. The soil was screened to ensure recovery of small items that might be missed by trowelling. Three-inch levels were maintained and all material bagged accordingly. Digging was concentrated in ash area "A", (refer to map) where 75 square feet were excavated. The cultural deposit here varied from fifteen inches to three feet in depth. Additional test holes were sunk throughout the site. Though most of these were less than a foot square, all were plotted on the grid for future reference. One, in unit 61P2, revealed a small hearth; another, in unit 59R2, contained a post mould 4½ inches in diameter. Unfortunately, time did not allow further investigation of these features.

No stratification or stylistic change was encountered and sherds several levels apart were often found to match.

### CULTURAL MATERIAL:

#### FOOD REMAINS

These were numerous throughout the excavated area. Charred corn and fish bone predominated, though many deer bones and clam shells were recovered. An analysis of the faunal remains by Dr. H.

1. The author is indebted to Mr. Russel Thomas, owner of this site, who not only granted permission to excavate, but assisted in this work himself.

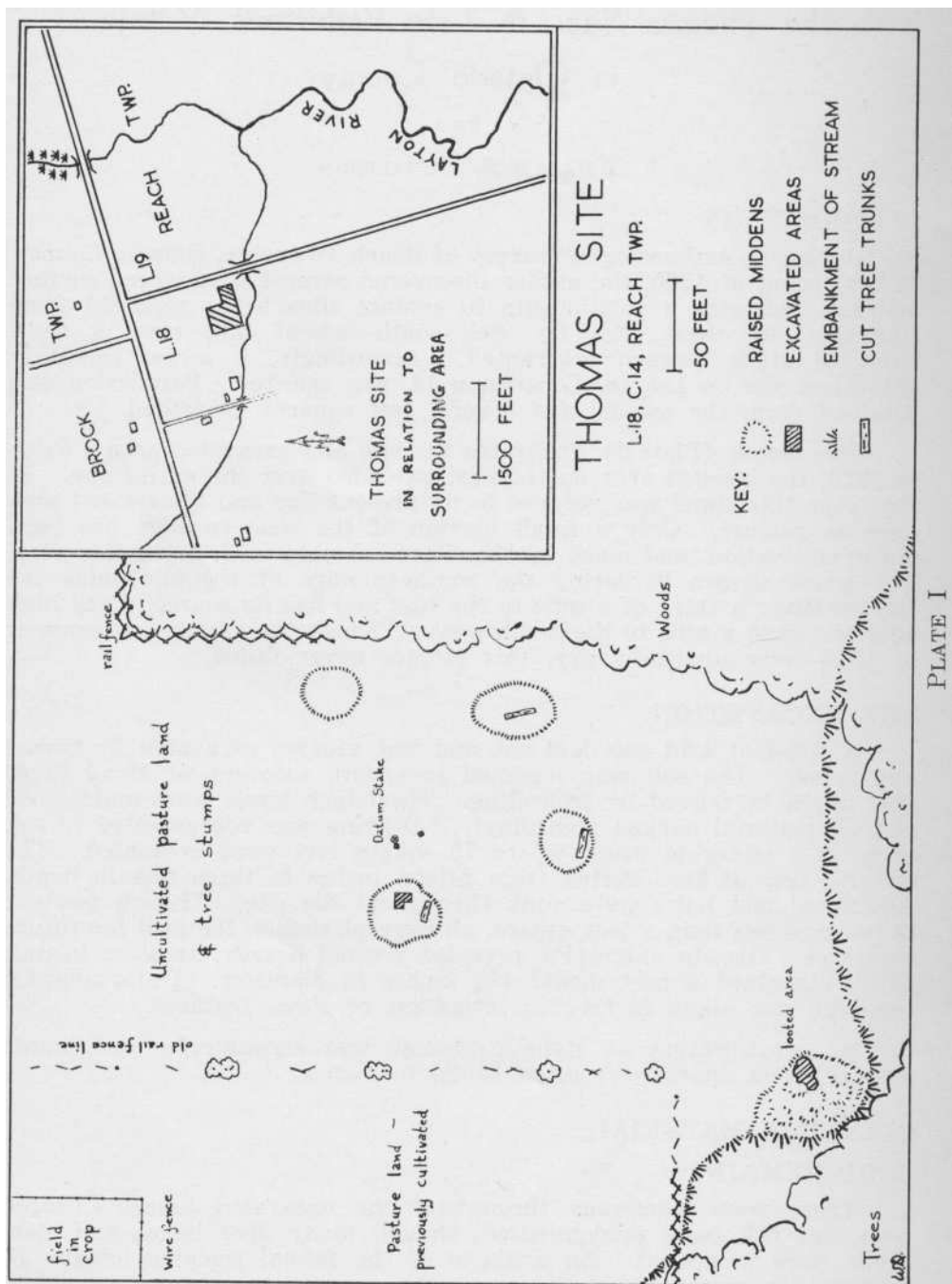


PLATE I

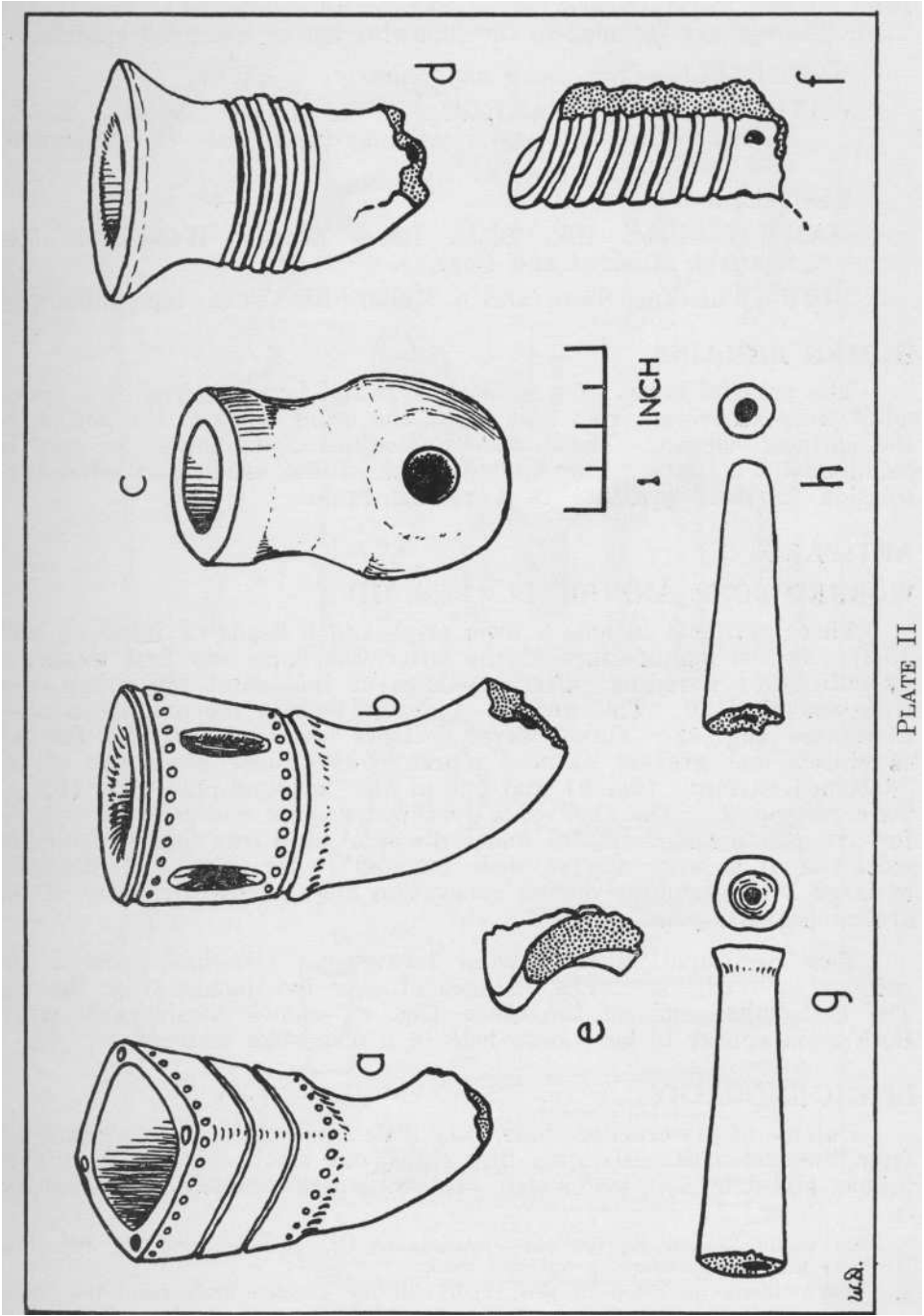


PLATE II

G. Lumsden of the Department of Lands and Forests, and Dr. W. B. Scott of the Royal Ontario Museum revealed a somewhat varied diet. Their findings are included in the following list of identified specimens<sup>2</sup>.

VEGETABLE—Corn, bean and plum.

WATER-DWELLING ANIMALS—Pike (*Esox lucius*), Brown Bullhead (*A. nebulosus*), a spiny-rayed fish (sp. unknown) and clam.

REPTILIA—Painted Turtle.

MAMMAL—Deer, Elk, Black Bear, Beaver, Woodchuck, Red Squirrel, Muskrat and Dog.

BIRD—Whistling Swan and a Mallard-like Duck (sp. unknown). HUMAN

#### REMAINS

The parietal bones of a human skull and left humerus of a young adult were recovered from unit 60H2, the latter lying at the bottom of the cultural deposit. These were unmodified and showed no sign of cannibalistic activity. The limited scope of the excavation offered no solution to their presence in a refuse dump.

#### ARTIFACTS<sup>3</sup>

##### WORKED BONE AND SHELL (Plate III)

These artifacts include 6 awls (e-j) and 6 beads or tubes of bone (o-s). In the manufacture of the latter, the bone was first weakened by cutting or abrading; after breakage at this point the rough ends were smoothed off. This process is clearly seen in the unfinished piece illustrated (fig. s). Three beaver incisors had been modified for use as chisels and gravers (k-m). Three worked deer phalanges of the "flattened variant" (fig. u) and one of the "cup-and-pin" type (fig. t) were recovered<sup>4</sup>. The shell of a freshwater snail had been perforated for use as a pendant (fig. c) and a discoidal bead was formed from the columella of a large marine shell (crinoid?) (fig. b). The discovery of large Pike vertebrae during excavation might explain the use of the broken harpoon point (fig. d).

Two problematical tools were recovered. Use has polished the point of one (fig. a) for a distance of over five inches from the tip. The chisel-like edge on the other (fig. n) shows considerable wear. Both tools appear to have been held in a pistol-like manner.

#### LITHIC INDUSTRY

Outside of fire-cracked stone, very little lithic material was recovered from the test area. Six grey flint chips, one small scraper, a polished pebble, and a broken, perforated, sandstone disc complete the inventory.

2. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Lumsden and Dr. Scott for their kindness in carrying out this work.
3. The artifacts discussed in this report include surface finds from the initial survey, salvage from looted areas, and specimens now in the collections of Mr. Thomas and Terry Anderson of Whitby, Ontario.
4. Wintemberg, 1936, has dealt at length with these objects and their possible use.

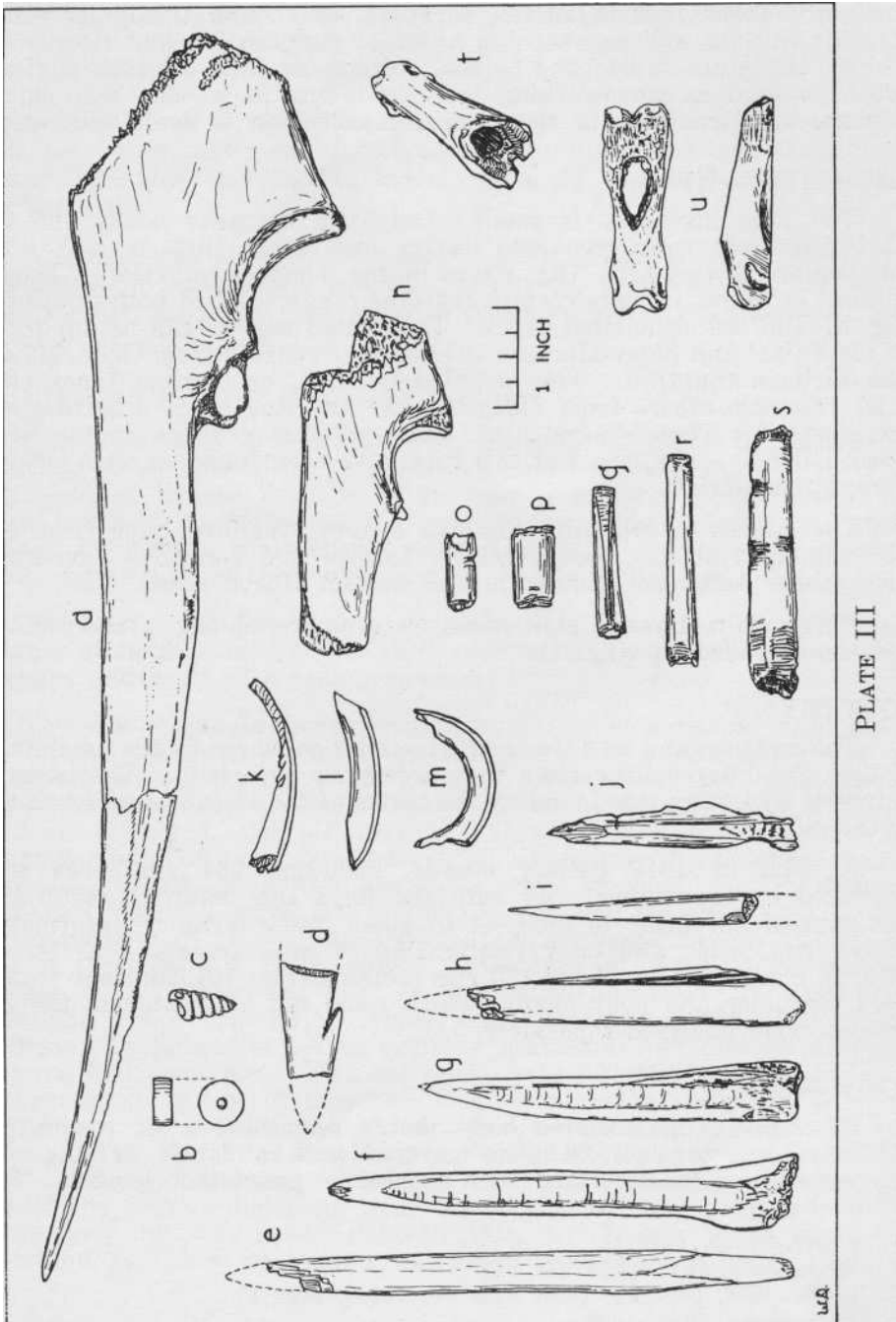


PLATE III

The paucity of stone artifacts in the test area is misleading, for the Thomas and Anderson collections contain numerous items in this medium. These include knives, scrapers, and small triangular points of grey flint, as well as axes and adzes of Amphibolite and Hornblende schist. Miniature "axes" and "pikes" were made from the same material (perhaps used as woodworking tools or points in wooden war clubs). A stone vasiform pipe in the Anderson collection is dealt with below.

#### PIPES (Plate II)

The pipe inventory is small. Only two complete bowls and two bowl fragments were recovered during excavation (figs. b, d-f). The rare square-bowled type (fig. a) is in the Thomas collection. Though unusual in shape, it bears certain features reminiscent of both the slotted (fig. b) and the castellated types. The slotted variety can be duplicated on the Fallis<sup>5</sup> and Sidey-Mackay<sup>6</sup> sites and is reported from *Grey*, Simcoe, and Victoria counties<sup>7</sup>. The modified trumpet, or blossom types (figs. c, d) resemble others from Sidey-Mackay and Roebuck<sup>8</sup>. Figure e is a fragment of a ringed-barrel pipe. Though most common in the Black Creek-Lalonde series, pipes of this type have been found on sites yielding European material<sup>9</sup>.

The Anderson collection contains a stone vasiform pipe from this site (fig. c). It has been carefully formed and compares favourably with others found on prehistoric and contact Huron sites.

Three plain, tapered pipe stems were recovered (fig. g), two others had an expanded tip (fig. f) .

#### POTTERY:

The material and manufacturing methods employed by the inhabitants of this site differed little from that previously reported<sup>10</sup>. The probable source of their clay was found on the banks of the stream, just south-east of the site.

A total of 1516 pottery sherds, including 234 rimsherds were recovered by the author. As with the Boyd site material, restoration was carried out prior to analysis to glean every scrap of information on the rim, neck, and body relationship of each vessel. This left us with an analysible sample of 173 rim sections from 151 different vessels. Neck, shoulder and body sherds which could not be related to the rim sections were analysed separately.

#### BODY SHERDS

Of the 712 unassociated body sherds remaining after restoration, 644 were undecorated, 28 were covered with a fabric or fine cord impression, and 38 decorated with incised or punctated elements. This

5. Ridley, 1952b, page 11.

3. Wintemberg, 1946, page 172.

7. Boyle, 1889, page 24; 1891, page 30; 1898a, page 17.

8. Wintemberg, 1936, 1939.

9. Wintemberg, 1946, page 172; Ridley, 1952a, fig. 69.

10. Donaldson, 1962.

sherd count is a bit misleading, for the fabric impressed sherds came from no more than 3 vessels while at least 34 are involved in the body decoration count. Six of the latter may actually be the lower portion of shoulder decorations, but in 8 cases the typical body carination described by Ridley is present at the base of the incised zone<sup>11</sup>.

An additional 2 sherds are from a small, globular, ribbed-paddle malleated vessel, not more than 5 inches through the bilge. Two rows of fine punctates encircle the vessel, probably just below the missing shoulder area.

Where it was possible to restore enough of the vessel to reveal its body shape, it was usually squatly globular or, in the case of the body zoned vessels, carinated. An unusual exception is described below in the rim analysis.

#### SHOULDER SHERDS (Plate IV)

Out of a total of 139 shoulder sherds<sup>12</sup>, 34 carry no design or texturing at all and 15 are undecorated below a neck which is covered with complex incised designs. Two have a textured body element of fabric impression, ending at the base of an undecorated neck, while another 4 otherwise plain sherds show signs of a smoothed-over cord or fabric impression on the lower portion of the neck area.

The rest of the sherds have a wide variety of incised and punctated designs, often in combination. For convenience, we divided these into 2 groups and dealt with each separately.

The first group is from vessels having an undecorated neck area. By far, the most popular motif in this group was an encircling row of punctates, present on 41 of the sample. This motif was particularly favoured on the larger vessels from this site. The design on 6 of the shoulders consisted solely of incising. Three of these take the form of an annular band of 3 or more lines. Two others have this band broken by diagonally incised areas, and one has a series of short, deep, horizontal incisions forming a series of vertical plats around the shoulder (fig. b). The remainder of this group combine the elements already described. Two of these have a single row of punctates surmounting the platted incising. Two have the row of punctates underlain by hatchured triangular areas (fig. h). Another two have these triangular areas outlined with punctates. Two combine horizontal and oblique incising, bordered with punctates. Two specimens have a band of annular incising surmounted by a row of punctates, while on another two the situation is reversed. In 2 cases, the incised band is bordered by the punctates (fig. i). The remaining specimen is a large shoulder and body section from a small, body-zoned vessel. A row of circular punctates at the base of the neck is underlain by a row of oblique gashes and a band of 4 annularly incised lines. Beneath this, and extending to the body carination, is a zone of incised, hatchured triangles (fig. g).

11. Ridley, 1957.

12. Where vessels were represented by more than one shoulder sherd, they were counted as one.

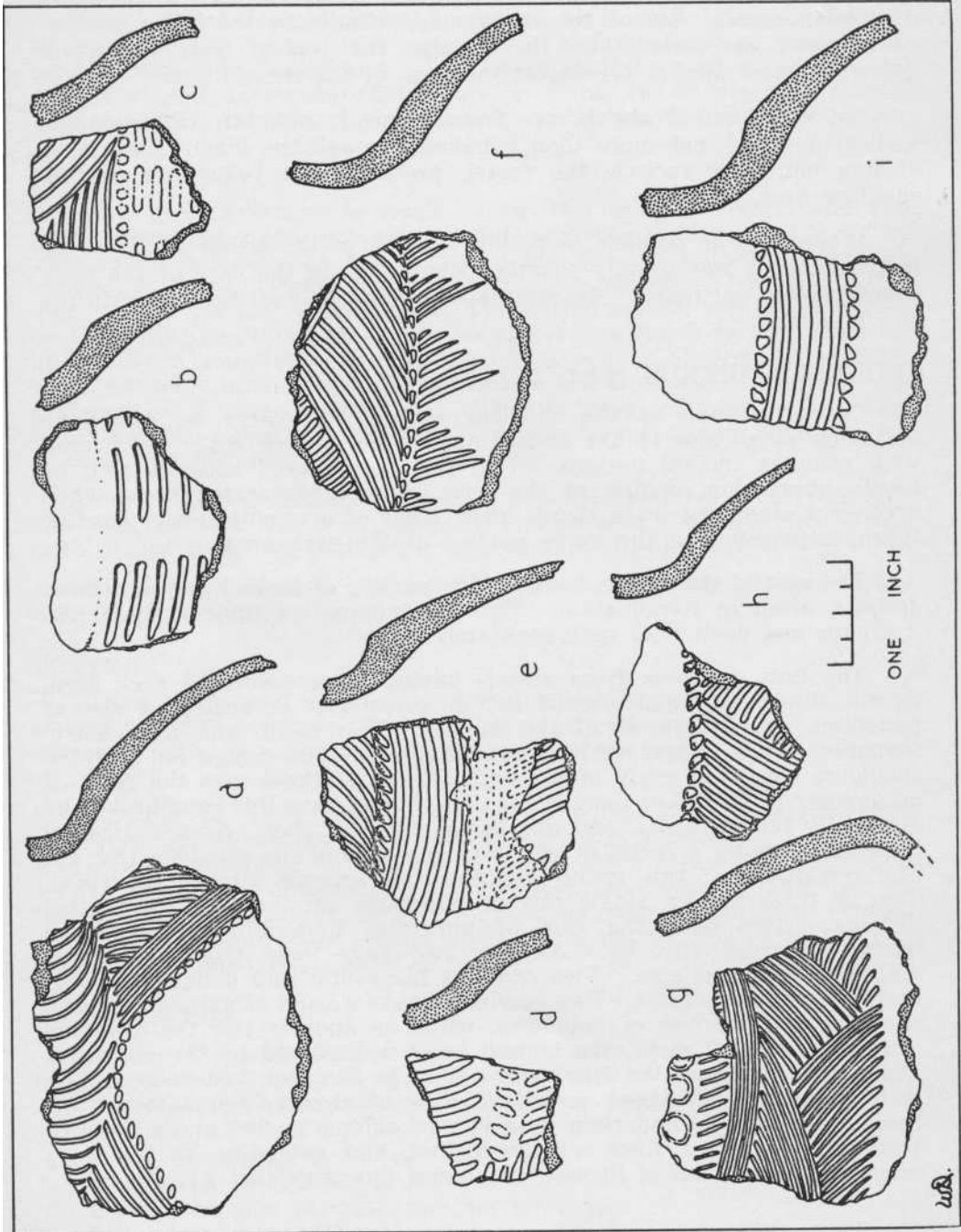


PLATE IV



The second group is formed of shoulder sections from neck decorated vessels. Here again there is a wide variety of designs. Only 1 of the 22 sherds in this group lacks any sort of decoration below the neck area. On 4 sherds this is confined to a single row of punctates at the base of the neck decoration. Four others have a band of incised or stamped plats below this element (fig. c), while on another this sequence is reversed. Two more omit the punctation altogether. Three sherds have a band of 3 or more annularly incised lines below the punctates. One of these has a basal row of punctates and another, a series of diagonally incised elements outlined by punctates (fig. e). Four vessels have a series of hatchured triangles below the punctates (fig. f), in one case themselves outlined by punctates (fig. a). Two of the sherds have the complex neck design carried down the body (fig. d). The remaining sherd has a row of oblique gashes, underlain by horizontally incised lines.

#### NECK SHERDS

Out of the 57 sherds in this category, 20 were incised. In some cases this incising formed areas of parallel, oblique lines, and in others, opposed, hatchured triangles. Because of the obvious pitfall when dealing with smaller sherds, no attempt was made to separate these styles. The rest of the sherds were undecorated.

#### RIM SHERDS

Using MacNeish's classification as a guide<sup>13</sup>, we were able to identify most of the rim sections recovered. Since considerable individualism was displayed within each type, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the variants of one type from those of another. For this reason, most of the pottery types listed below are followed by a description of the various shapes and decorations encountered.

#### LAWSON INCISED (2 vessels)

One of these vessels has a single row of shoulder punctation above a smoothed-surface body. The other, a rare variant, has lip incising (Plate V, fig. a).

#### LAWSON OPPOSED (2 ' vessels)

Both these vessels measure at least ten inches across the rim. One has a notched castellation<sup>14</sup>.

#### HURON INCISED (44 vessels)

This is the most popular type on the site. In cross section, the rims cover the entire range set by MacNeish, but the majority have only a moderately defined collar and a straight to slightly convex interior.

At least 12 of these vessels were castellated, and six have that feature present. One is an incipient nubbin, formed by pinching up the collar, one is pointed, three are bluntly pointed, and one is a notched turret type<sup>15</sup>.

13. MacNeish, 1952.

14. Emerson, 1955.

15. Ibid.

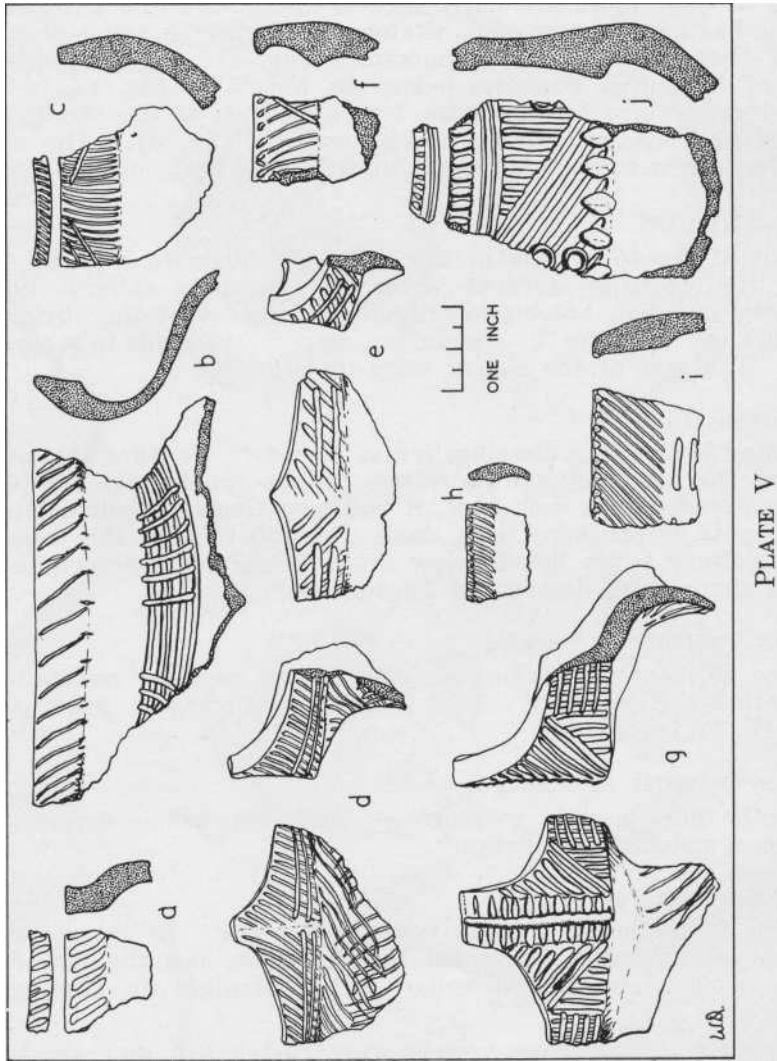


PLATE V

Where restoration has revealed the body shape, it is smooth surfaced and squatly globular; in one case extremely so (Plate V, fig. b). This vessel has a band of 5 incised lines encircling the shoulder. These are interrupted at intervals by half a dozen or so vertical elements to form a grid effect. The shoulder area of 2 other vessels is undecorated, but a third has an encircling row of punctates. One vessel has 3 rows of short horizontal lines forming a series of plats around the shoulder.

Only 2 vessels substitute hatchured triangles for the oblique incising on the collar, but 9 employ notching as an added decorative feature. In 2 cases this is at the base of the collar. The other 7, which we consider to be variants, have a row of neatly executed notches at, or just below, the exterior edge of the rim lip (Plate V, fig. h). One of these has an additional row below the inner lip, and another, vertical rows of horizontal bar stamping on the neck (Plate V, fig. i). These vessels show a close relationship to Sidey Notched, for it is a small matter to shift the notching from the edge of the lip to the lip itself.

A number of aberrant sherds, described below, are related to this group but the notching has become such a dominant feature on the rim that, pending clarification of their status, we have classified them as a separate type and suggest a tentative name of "Ontario Notched".

#### ONTARIO NOTCHED (16 vessels)

**PASTE:** Fairly well knit, with grit tempering 1 to 2 mm. in diameter. A few sherds are slightly laminated. Exterior surfaces are light orange-buff to greyish-brown in colour, often with a grey or black core.

**SHAPE:** An outflaring rim with an ill-defined to moderately pronounced collar and protruding lip. Collar interiors are straight or convex. Bodies are globular and the constricted necks are roughly three times the collar height.

**DECORATION :** Bluntly incised oblique or vertical lines on the collar, in a few cases interrupted by widely spaced opposed elements. Deep notches cut the outer edge of the rim lip, in some cases nearly reaching the inner edge. Necks and bodies are undecorated, but an encircling row of punctates is a common shoulder decoration.

**GEOGRAPHICAL AND TEMPORAL RANGE:** Unknown.

**RELATIONSHIP:** These vessels are very close in shape and decoration to Huron Incised, Sidey Notched, and Seed Incised, and are probably related to all three.

The large rim, neck and body section illustrated in Plate VII, fig. h, is typical of this group.

#### BLACK NECKED (30 vessels)

Three of these vessels are sufficiently restored to reveal a squatly globular, undecorated body. A single row of punctates is present at the base of the neck decoration on two of these. Eight of the sample have at least one castellation on the rim. Most of these are pointed or bluntly pointed (Plate V, fig. d), but 2 are a grooved variety which approaches

the shape of the turret form (Plate V, fig. g)<sup>16</sup>. The neck decoration associated with this latter form is sparse and almost random, as if added as an afterthought. Most of the various collar decorations described by MacNeish are present here, as well as 3 variants which have deep notching on the lip. One of these seems to be a typical "Ontario Notched" vessel with neck decoration added (Plate VII, fig. g).

#### SIDEY CROSSED (4 vessels)

All the vessels in this group could be called variants, for they use 2 horizontal lines to interrupt the oblique incising on the collar. Two vessels are castellated and a third indicates the presence of this feature. One of the castellations is pointed (Plate V, fig. e), but the other one, probably bluntly pointed, has the peak missing. This latter vessel has a single row of punctates around the shoulder.

#### SIDEY NOTCHED (3 vessels)

Both the vertical and oblique collar incising are represented, as well as the rare filled triangle decoration (Plate V, fig. c).

#### SIDEY INCISED (3 vessels)

#### WARMINSTER CROSSED (4 vessels)

One of the rim sections in this group indicates the presence of a castellation. Another has an extremely concave collar face (Plate V, fig. f).

#### RICHMOND INCISED (1 vessel)

#### DURFEE UNDERLINED (1 vessel)

The photograph (Plate VII, fig. b) illustrates this vessel to better advantage than a written description.

#### ONONDAGA TRIANGULAR (10 vessels)

The collar decorations in this group cover most of the range described by MacNeish, in some cases bordering on the requirements of Otstungo and Cayadutta Incised vessels. At least 8 in this group were castellated. Five of these are low, bluntly pointed types, but one is sharply pointed and boasts a lug or handle beneath this feature. In 2 instances, bone or reed punctates decorate the collar beneath the castellation, and notching or incising is present beneath the inner lip on 5 vessels. One of the latter has a longitudinally incised line on the lip itself (Plate V, fig. j).

#### OTSTUNGO INCISED (2 vessels)

Both of these have bluntly pointed castellations, one underlain by "ladder" decorations and the other, reed punctates. This latter vessel carries a fabric or corded paddle impression on the neck area (Plate VI, fig. a).

16. Ibid.

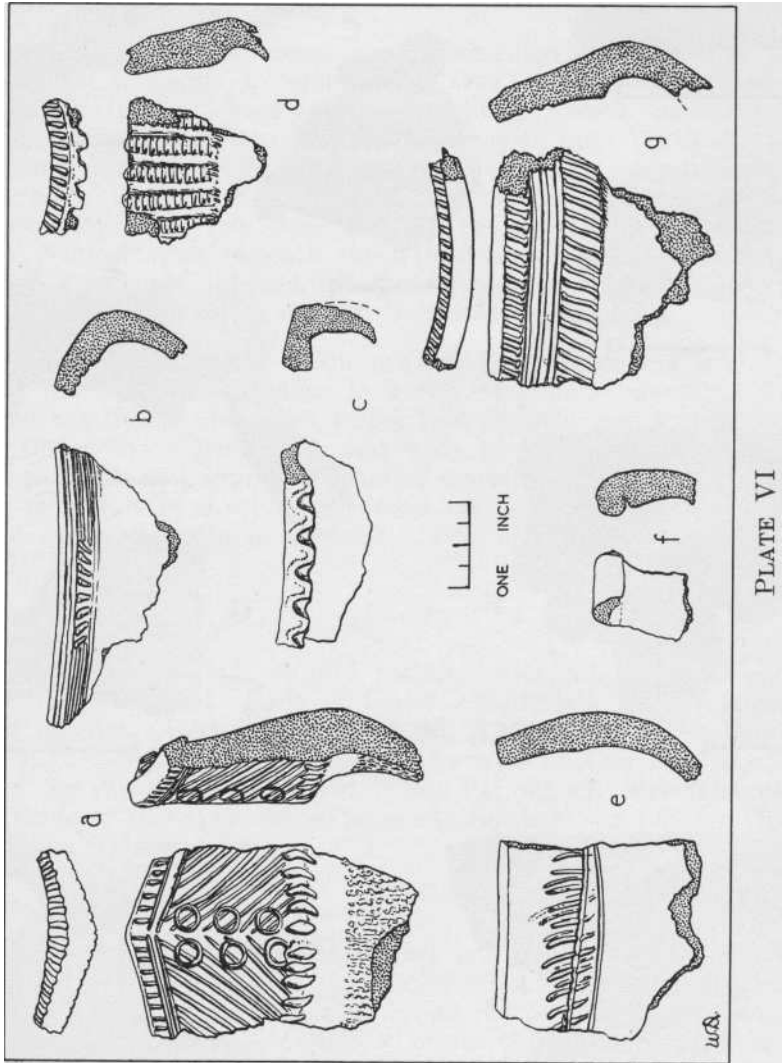


PLATE VI

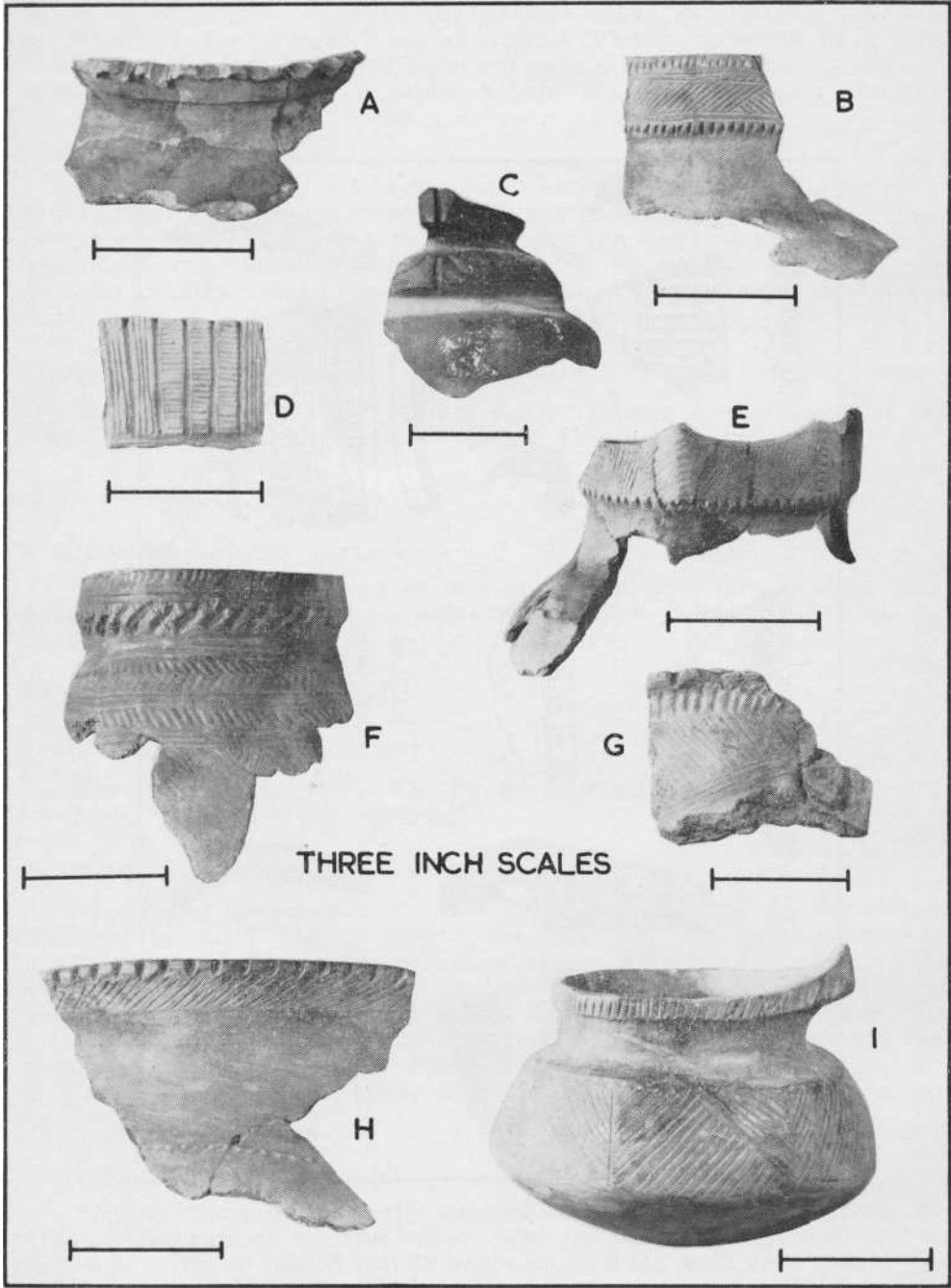


PLATE VII

## THURSTON HORIZONTAL (2 vessels)

One of these vessels carries a bluntly pointed castellation. Both are incised on the inner lip (Plate VI, fig. g).

## NIAGARA COLLARED (3 vessels) BODY

## ZONED POTTERY (3 vessels)

Though each of these vessels has a decorated and carinated body<sup>17</sup>, their relationship seems to end here. One could be classified as a typical "Huron Incised" vessel with a slightly grooved, incipient turret castellation, if considered only from the shoulder up. Vertically incised lines beneath the shoulder punctation divide the squatly globular, carinated body into zones filled with incised hatchuring (Plate VII, fig. i). Considered in the same fashion, the second could be classified as "Black Necked", but beneath the 4 horizontally incised lines on the shoulder are a series of opposed, hatchured triangles without the vertically incised lines. This motif is carried half way to the body carination.

The third vessel has a much coarser grit tempering and thicker walls. At the base of the collar is a row of psuedo-punctates, formed by pressing the thumb and index finger into the wet clay with a pinching motion. Down the collar, neck and body are bluntly incised, oblique and horizontal lines forming a banded herringbone pattern. This is underlain by a row of inverted chevrons just above the body carination. The inner lip of the rim is decorated with a row of oblique notching (Plate VII, fig. f) .

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "A" (1 vessel)

This vessel carries six bluntly pointed castellations on its medium high, well-defined collar. Each of these is underlain by a vertical row of shallow notches. Between these are finely incised, opposed, hatchured triangles, bordered at the base of the collar with another row of notches. The rest of the vessel is undecorated (Plate VII, fig. e). Previous mention has been made of this type, which seems to fall between Lawson Opposed and Onondaga Triangular<sup>18</sup>.

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "B" (2 vessels)

This is the most unusual shape ever encountered by the author on an Iroquoian site. An additional constriction below the shoulder of these vessels has produced a double bulge in the body area. The sole decoration on the smaller vessel is a crude oblique incising below the outer lip of the rim. The larger vessel has a deep vertical groove down the face of its flat-topped castellation and upper bulge of the body, where the ends of an equally deep encircling line rise diagonally to terminate beside the top of the vertical element (Plate VII, fig. c).

17. Ridley, 1957.

18. Donaldson, 1962.

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "C" (2 vessels)

Though not classified by MacNeish, this type has been referred to by Wintemberg<sup>19</sup> and Emerson<sup>20</sup> as the "corn ear" design. The collar was deeply grooved vertically and then, to a lesser degree, horizontally to produce a pattern reminiscent of kernels of corn on the cob. The smaller of the two specimens, which has a row of oblique incising on the inner lip of the rim, is typical of this type (Plate VI, fig. d). The larger vessel, which measures some 10 inches across the rim, has an alternating pattern of horizontally and vertically incised lines, each covering three of the plats formed by the deep vertical grooving. Rows of short horizontal lines form a series of vertical plats on the neck (Plate VII, fig. d).

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "D" (1 vessel)

This vessel might be classified as a variant in several of MacNeish's series. Crude oblique incising near the base of the vestigial collar is underlain by two horizontally incised lines. The neck area is undecorated (Plate VI, fig. e).

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "E" (4 vessels)

MacNeish fails to mention this type in his classification but these vessels seem to satisfy the requirements of Ridley's "trait 17A"<sup>21</sup>. They have flattened, overhanging lips that, with one exception, are notched (Plate VI, fig. c). The exception is incised along the center of the lip and has an additional three rows down the face of the collar. These are interrupted in at least one place by 8 vertical elements (Plate VI, fig. b).

## MISCELLANEOUS TYPE "F" (4 vessels)

These are squatly globular, collared vessels whose sole decoration has been achieved by pressing a notched tool down and outward on the lip to form a crenellated or "pie crust" effect (Plate VII, fig. a).

## "SEED POTS" (7 vessels)

This group includes all vessels less than three inches across the rim. Three of these are undecorated, three have simple oblique incising on the rim, and one is covered with a random pattern of incised lines.

Four fragmentary rim sections not included in the above classification are worthy of mention here because they carry useful diagnostic features. Three of these are castellations: 1 turret type, 1 grooved type, and 1 developed multiple type<sup>22</sup>. The remaining fragment appears to be from an undecorated vessel that had its lip rolled outward to form a sort of piped rim (Plate VI, fig. f).

19. Wintemberg, 1936.

20. Emerson, 1956.

21. Ridley, 1952a.

22. Emerson, 1956.



Potsherd discs of varying sizes were recovered from this site, two of them during the author's excavations. The Thomas and Anderson collections contain another half dozen, varying in size between a fifty cent piece and a silver dollar.

#### PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Though this site lies outside the historical boundaries of any of the Iroquoian tribes, its cultural remains identify it as part of that group. The absence of European trade goods establishes it as pre-contact, while the coefficient of similarity, based upon pottery comparison, suggests a later temporal position than most of Emerson's sites in York County<sup>23</sup>. The uncertain status of the "Ontario Notched" vessels in the Thomas series makes it difficult to achieve precise comparisons, but it would appear to be most closely related to the McKenzie site in this group.

In Simcoe County, the Sidey-Mackay<sup>24</sup> and upper level Fallis<sup>25</sup> specimens compare most favourably with the Thomas material. In particular, they all share the distinctive slotted pipe. A similar relationship can be found in a series of sites reported by Laidlaw from Victoria County<sup>26</sup>.

As with the Sidey-Mackay material, a strong Roebuck influence is evident, but its spatial and temporal separation from this source is reflected in a pottery coefficient of 33.

This exploratory excavation has produced sufficient evidence to support a classification of the Thomas site as a Late Prehistoric Iroquoian village with a relatively stable economy; but any statement on its historic affiliation must await further field work to raise it above the level of conjecture.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is indebted to The Ontario Archaeological Society for providing the necessary training and contacts, too numerous to mention, without which this report could not have been written. A special note of thanks must go to Mr. W. E. Renison for the excellent photographs used in Plate VII of this report.

#### APPENDIX

Incomplete evidence available to the author seems to indicate a more or less stable occupation of the southern half of Ontario and York Counties from the early Iroquoian period until the close of the Black Creek - Lalonde stage of development. Victoria County and the northern half of Ontario County seem to have been heavily populated from this point to just prior to the contact period. Material from the Baird-Short site, less than a mile south of the Thomas, duplicates that from the unpublished Draper site in The Ontario Archaeological Society collection.

23. Emerson, 1956.
24. Wintemberg, 1946.
25. Ridley, 1952b.
26. Laidlaw, 1898, pages 196-202.

The latter is a terminal Black Creek - Lalonde station just southwest of Claremont, in Ontario County. This would indicate some relationship between the two areas, and poses the problem of what happened to these eastern groups.

A still untested theory would have Iroquoian groups covering the entire south-central portion of the province until the end of the Black Creek - Lalonde stage of development when, for some unknown reason, possibly war, disease, or depletion of the land, a large portion of this area was abandoned. The eastern groups then concentrated in Victoria and the northern portion of Ontario counties until a second movement, prior to the arrival of contact material, saw their absorption by that tribe known to us historically as the Hurons.

This would account for the relationship of the very late Black Creek-Lalonde sites in York and Ontario counties, the development of the distinctive traits in Victoria and northern Ontario counties in Late Prehistoric times, and the appearance of these traits on very late prehistoric and early contact sites in Simcoe County.

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