

On the Nature of Archaeology in the Ottawa Area and Archaeological Mysteries

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Scientific discourse usually takes place within the pages of journals published by scholarly societies. The goal is to create a corpus of information that can be referred to and added to by later research. A recently rediscovered, unsigned newspaper article published days following the 1843 excavation of the Ottawa Ossuary by Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt shares some points with Dr. Van Cortlandt's own account published in the Canadian Journal of 1853. While there are clear similarities between the two documents, there are also important differences that are not easily reconciled. This instance reminds us of the importance of publications of record published by learned societies. It also cautions us against the uncritical acceptance of unverifiable information.

Résumé à la fin de l'article.

Beginning in the spring of 2002, a number of articles dealing with the archaeology in and around the city of Ottawa appeared in local newspapers (Boswell 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Indeed, there has not been so much attention drawn to the ancient history of the area surrounding the Chaudière Falls since nearly a century ago when T.W. Edwin Sowter was actively researching and publishing his discoveries as a member of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (Jamieson 1999; Pilon 2004; Sowter 1895, 1900, 1901, 1909, 1915, 1917).

The current round of interest in archaeology stems, however, from a much different source. In the spring of 2002, work finally began on the construction of a new Canadian War Museum building, to be located within Lebreton Flats just beside the Chaudière Falls on the south side of the Ottawa River. The museum construction project in particular, and the overall redevelopment plans proposed by the National Capital Commission in general, directed much public attention to this hilly, park-like area at the end of Wellington Street, overlooked by the Library and Archives of Canada. This area had been the stage for important chapters in the history of Bytown/Ottawa, including the first settlers landing there in the early 1800s, the first tavern, vast lumber yards, lumber barons, senators, etc. (Jenkins 1997; MacAdam 2002). Continuous human occupation

of the Flats came to an abrupt end in the mid-1960s when the National Capital Commission expropriated and demolished an entire community and covered it over with landfill, some of it toxic. Much is at stake with the redevelopment of Lebreton Flats and many elements combine to make it a volatile subject to discuss in some quarters, especially in the media (MacAdam 2002).

A number of newspaper articles, as well as radio and television reports, have discussed the potential threats posed to the heritage resources of the Flats that any construction there could represent. In particular, some of these articles identified, among other concerns, issues dealing with the potential of discovering Native archaeological remains (see Boswell 2002c). The latter possibility was put forward based, in large part, on very clear and unambiguous statements made by the avocational archaeologist T.W. Edwin Sowter in articles he published in 1909 and in 1915, and again in a 1917 map of site distributions in the general Ottawa area. In all instances, Sowter was very adamant that the ossuary discovered by Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt (Figure 1) in 1843 and reported in 1853, was "in Ottawa, on the spot that now occupies the north-west angle formed by the intersection of Wellington and Bay Streets" (Sowter 1909:98). In his 1915 article, he further added that the location was "on the spot now occupied by the Capital brewery" (1915:50). In



Figure 1. *Photographic portrait of Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt, September 1870, by William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (copy negative number E002505151). Van Cortlandt served as military medical attendant for the military hospital on Barracks Hill (today Parliament Hill) in Ottawa (Moffat 1973).*

both accounts, Sowter cited Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt's 1853 publication to substantiate his own statements.

This strong assertion was repeated by Lucien Brault (1946:37-38), a much respected authority on the history of Ottawa, who appeared to be citing "Dr. Van Cortlandt" (*sic*), but who obviously was familiar with Sowter's writings, as he referred to the existence of other archaeological discoveries in the Ottawa region only presented by Sowter, although he did not cite him directly.

More recent investigative work by Randy Boswell, a reporter with the *Ottawa Citizen*, led to the discovery of a brief note published in the *Bytown Gazette* of June 15, 1843 (Anonymous

1843). This note is unsigned and its content, while much abridged, bears some interesting resemblances to the article published by Dr. Van Cortlandt ten years later (Van Cortlandt 1853). Boswell appears to have accepted all of the information contained in that 1843 story at face value; in fact he chides scholars for not having discovered this valuable record before him. At least, this is a conclusion that might be gathered from the following headline:

How Ottawa's history took a wrong turn. The Citizen reveals how an Indian burying ground 'about a half-mile below the Chaudière' was discovered and then lost for a century—all because generations of scholars overlooked a simple newspaper story. It's equal parts tragedy, farce and epic (Boswell 2002a).

In the present article I will attempt to compare the two published statements relating to the Ottawa Ossuary in order to assess the degree of confidence that can be placed in one or the other, especially as this bears on the location of this ancient burial ground. Further, the implications of the uncritical acceptance of the 1843 note in the whole discussion of the Ottawa region's archaeological past will be reviewed.

Some Background on Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt

Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt (also spelled van Cortlandt, Van Courtland) was one of Bytown's first citizens and a very colourful individual. In addition to being a medical doctor, he had a great interest in a wide range of natural phenomena. In an unpublished biography, Margaret Moffat relates how Van Cortlandt's home at the intersection of Bay and Wellington Streets once housed "the best private archaeological museum in Canada of that day" (Moffat 1973:15).

Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt was a very active member of the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum. His name first appears in the surviving records of the Bytown Mechanics' Institute (founded in 1847) in the spring of 1849 when he

assumed the role of a trustee. Between 1849 and 1852, the organization suffered greatly from a lack of interest. Van Cortlandt would continue to serve the Institute as a trustee on several occasions (the last time was in 1863) or as the Institute's Honorary Librarian. An 1858 passage in the Institute's annual report shows that he was also involved in the management of the Institute's museum: "Report of Dr. Van Cortlandt dated 6 April 1858 was read referring to the very imperfect state of the Museum" (Anonymous 1869).

In 1853, the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum was reorganized and on March 19, 1853 (for a more detailed history of the Bytown Mechanics Institute and Athenaeum, see Hirsch 1992), Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt presented the new Institute's first lecture: "the Phenomena of Vegetation." In 1865 he is named a life member of the Institute.

The Institute maintained both a library and a newsroom. They were, along with the public lectures, central to the Institute's activities, allowing members to stay abreast of current affairs from across the country and a broad range of topics relating to the natural world (which included archaeology) (see Kapches [1994] for a discussion of the place of learned societies in the nineteenth century world and Dyck [2001] for a sense of their impact in Canada, in particular). Additionally, the Institute maintained a museum that appeared to gather mostly geological and biological specimens but also antiquities of various types including, of course, native artifacts. Indeed, the published annual reports of the Institute often contain tantalizing clues of the richness and diversity of artifacts held in this Museum; everything from Egyptian idols, coins, stone gouges and chisels, an old French sword and an "Indian scalping knife." Clearly, artifacts were coming in to their collection from near and far. Several donations were noted over the years from the Renfrew area but there were also native artifacts given by a Dr. J. Newton of Sault Ste-Marie. One can only imagine the task that the storage and display of a collection such as this must have represented.

By 1869, the situation had deteriorated to such a point that "No addition has been made during the past year to the Museum; it remains as it was,

exceedingly valuable, but almost perfectly useless, owing to the confined space in which so many specimens are huddled together without order or classification" (Anonymous 1869).

While Van Cortlandt's formal participation in the Institute dropped off in the early to mid 1860s, his interest in intellectual pursuits did not. His obvious thirst for knowledge about the natural world appears as strong as ever because in 1863 the Natural History Society was founded:

We the undersigned being desirous to develop the Natural History of the Ottawa, and general resources of the surrounding country; Subscribe our names with a view to organize some association; whereby the different specimens in the various departments of natural history may be collected preserved and classed by some competent person and placed in a suitable room for exhibition. Oct. 3, 1863.

Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt's name appears at the top of this list and his signature is the first one appended to the document.

In October 1869, a joint committee of representatives from the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum and the Natural History Society recommended amalgamating the two societies and by January, 1870 the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum was no more. From this union was born the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society that would eventually be replaced by the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club in 1879 (formally incorporated as such in 1884). Interestingly, many artifacts from the Ottawa area (currently in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization) were donated to the Geological Survey of Canada's museum in the early 1880s (Figure 2). The period labels, which still adhere to many of these pieces, indicate that the gifts were made by the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society.

A Comparison of Two Articles

For years, archaeologists (Keatley and Desjardins 1991:14-17; Swayze 2002:9-12), including the present writer (Pilon and Marois 2001:22), have

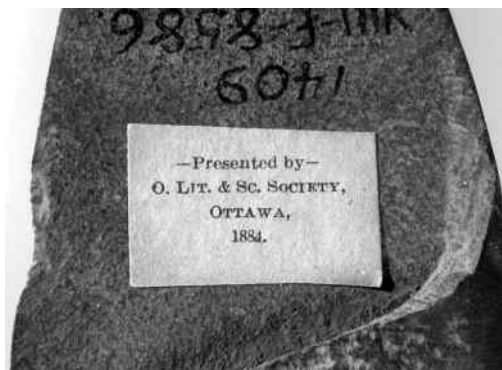


Figure 2. Paper label affixed to a ground stone artifact (VIII-F-8586) in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau. The item was originally donated to the Geological Survey of Canada by the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society (later, Ottawa Fields Naturalists Club) in 1884.

repeated T.W.E. Sowter's very clear and unambiguous assertion that an ossuary burial had been located in the northwest angle of Bay and Wellington Streets in the city of Ottawa. The northwest angle of this intersection lies somewhere within Lebreton Flats (Figure 3).

In spite of Sowter's unequivocal statements about the location of Van Cortlandt's Ottawa Ossuary burial, many archaeologists had nonetheless expressed discomfort with the poor fit of the Lebreton Flats area with Van Cortlandt's physical description of the location (Table 1). It was tacitly

accepted, however, that the shore area below the Library and Archives of Canada on Wellington Street had been so changed by modern activities as to have probably obliterated the original features of the landscape in which Van Cortlandt had lived and worked.

The recently rediscovered *Bytown Gazette* article yields new data concerning the exact location of the ossuary. Thus, it is appropriate to review in detail the information contained in both the short 1843 article, and also in the more complete 1853 statements, in order to attempt to identify similarities and differences.

A careful comparison of the two articles, presented in Table 1, suggests that there is perfect agreement on only a small number of points. Moreover, there are disturbing discordances between the articles. Divergences must be analyzed before credibility can be assessed for each of these accounts and the history of the area surrounding the Chaudière Falls can be told.

In both accounts, it is clear that the ossuary was discovered by workmen extracting sand but only the 1853 article provides the reason for its extraction—the construction of a bridge over the Ottawa River. Another point where the two accounts coincide perfectly is the number of individuals represented in the ossuary—about 20. Even then, however, the actual words used in the

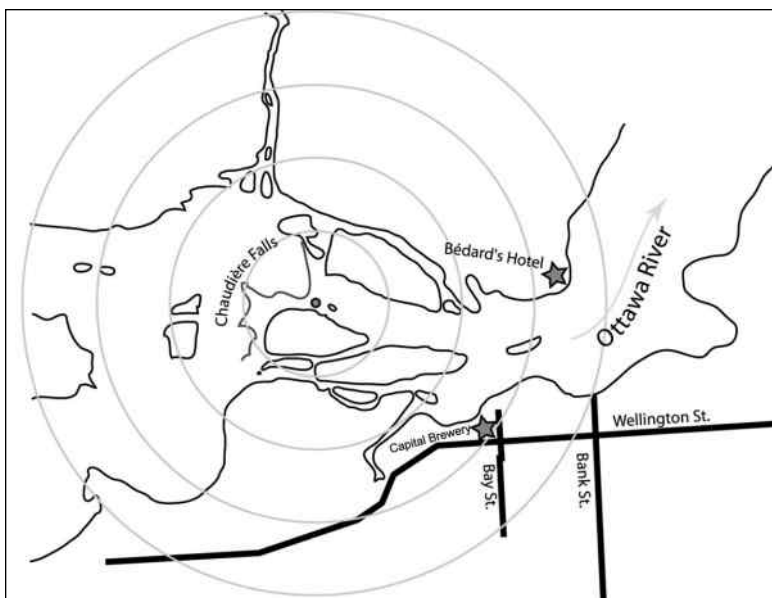


Figure 3. Map of the immediate area around Chaudière Falls. Map adapted from W.A. Austin & Co: "Plan of the City of Ottawa shewing the position of the buildings available for legislative & departmental accommodation," 1858. This adaptation shows the approximate locations of Bédard's Landing and the Capital Brewery relative to the intersection of Bay and Wellington Streets in Ottawa. The map is overlain with concentric quarter mile radius circles centered on a point well below the foot of the Chaudière Falls.

Table 1. Comparison of the 1843 Bytown Gazette article and the 1853 Van Corlandt Canadian Journal article.

| | 1843 Account | 1853 Account | Agreement |
|--|--|---|-----------|
| Initial Discovery | "whilst some workmen were engaged in digging sand from a pit" | "whilst workmen were engaged in digging sand for the mortar used in the construction of the piers of the wire suspension bridge at Bytown" | 3 |
| Location | "immediately in the rear of Bedard's Hotel, at Hull" | "on a projecting point of land directly in rear of their encampment, at a carrying place, and about half a mile below the mighty cataract of the Chaudière...the sand, forming a superstratum of many feet thickness at its upper part, and gradually ending in a feathery edge over the fossiliferous limestone which constitutes the bed of the river." | 1 |
| Number of Individuals | "amounting in all to about twenty, of both Sexes, and some few Children" | "about twenty bodies, of various ages, a goodly share of them being children" | 3 |
| Use of Red Ochre | no mention | "In every instance the bones were deeply coloured from the Red Hematite which the aborigines used in painting, or rather bedaubing their bodies" | 1 |
| Condition of Skulls | "One skull alone bears any marks of apparent violence, having a distinct fracture and depression on one side, and a fissure on the other." | "nothing, however, could be detected on the skulls, to indicate that they fell by the tomahawk...six perfect skulls" | 1 |
| Condition of Other Bones | no mention | "the remainder crumbled into dust on exposure to the air" | 1 |
| Dentition | "teeth in all of them are perfect and entire" | "the teeth were perfect, and not one unsound one was to be detected, at the same time they were all well worn down by trituration" | 2 |
| Associated Artifacts | "a War Club, now perfectly petrified; a small stone instrument, resembling a gouge, and a stone chisel...now in the possession of Dr. V. Corlandt, Bytown" | "1st, a piece of Gneiss about two feet long, tapering and evidently intended as a sort of war club...2nd, a stone gouge...3rd, a stone hatchet...4th, a sandstone boulder weighing about four pounds" | 2 |
| Presence of Dog Remains | "Together with a few dog heads" | "portions of the remains of two dogs heads" | 2 |
| Separate Burials | no mention | "a sandstone boulder...found lying on the sternum of a Chief of gigantic stature, who was buried apart from the others, and who had been walled round with great care" | 1 |
| Features of Location | "in a small barrow of the rudest description" | no mention | 1 |
| Proposed Causes of Deaths | "victims to some pestilence, not improbably small Pox" | "having fallen victims to some epidemic, or beneath the hands of some other hostile tribe" | 2 |
| Manner of Burial | no mention | "the confused state in which the bones were found, shewed that no care whatever had been taken in burying the original owners" | 1 |
| Agreement: 1=complete disagreement 2=general agreement but significant differences in details 3=complete agreement | | | |

1843 article (Table 1) could be read to suggest that the remains of children (no number given) were in addition to the roughly 20 adults, and thus there could well have been more than 20 individuals represented.

Of the remaining points brought out in the articles, there is partial or fair agreement for four of these points and complete disagreement on seven. Some of these disagreements can be easily disregarded but most of them serve as a basis on which to question the authorship of the 1843 article.

For example, when the dentition of the individuals is discussed, both articles indicate that the teeth were in good condition. However, the later article adds that they were worn from use ("trituration"). It could easily be accepted that such a detail was not essential to the main point that there were no caries in these teeth. Similarly, in 1853 it was noted that the remains of two dogs' heads were included in the burial while earlier a precise number was not given. Clearly, the number is not important. In 1843, a guess was advanced about the cause of death of the individuals found in the burial (smallpox). While the theory of disease is again put forth in 1853, the possibility of violent death in armed conflict was not entirely dismissed.

This last point regarding cause of death is even more curious when we consider that in 1853 Van Cortlandt states quite emphatically that there was nothing to suggest "that they fell by the tomahawk," seemingly contradicting his earlier suggestion (in the same article) of possible violence. Similarly, the 1843 article interprets damage to one skull as indicative of violence, yet elsewhere in this article the unknown author only gives "pestilence" as a possible cause of death.

Major points not raised in the 1843 article involve elements that should have warranted some kind of mention. For example, the 1843 article fails to mention that, in addition to 20 or so individuals, there was a single individual buried "apart from the others." This individual also stands out for having had a large sandstone boulder placed on his chest, surely an unusual and noteworthy feature.

In 1853, Van Cortlandt informs us that, with the exception of the skulls, the other skeletal elements

"crumbled into dust on exposure to the air." This must have been very disturbing for the excavator hoping to recover these mute witnesses to an ancient burial pattern. Yet no mention is made of this fact in 1843. Similarly, in 1853 we are informed that the bones were covered in red ochre but no such mention is found in the 1843 article.

Even more fundamental traits of this burial are not found in both accounts. For example, in 1843 we are told that the burial was in a small "barrow" or mound. This is not an insignificant feature, yet in the more elaborate and signed 1853 article no mention whatsoever is made of it.

Finding the remains of 20 or more people together in a large burial feature must be quite unusual, especially if the remains are all mixed together and possibly fractured, in addition to being disarticulated. This is in fact mentioned by Van Cortlandt in 1853, but not even hinted at in 1843.

Two final observations must be made before considering the whole question of the location of the site. The first observation is the mention of "Dr. V. Cortlandt" (*sic*) in the 1843 article. As mentioned above, this article is unsigned and this reference to Dr. Van Cortlandt is in the third person. Could this be a literary device? Possibly. Secondly, Van Cortlandt, as we know, was an avid student of natural history. When comparing the list of artifacts included with the human remains in the two articles (lists which generally compare well), a significant difference relates to the long club-like item. In 1843, it is suggested that this artifact is made of wood that had since petrified, while in 1853, it is indicated that the elongated piece of gneiss was "intended" to be used as a war club. In addition to the question of whether it was intentionally shaped or simply a convenient natural form, the incorrect identification of the raw material is quite remarkable (of course, we cannot be certain which is correct!).

Finally, regarding the location of the mass burial, Van Cortlandt only provides a general description of the physical location and a vague indication of the distance from the Chaudière Falls, about a half mile. The 1843 article, however, gives very precise information about the location,

namely behind Bedard's Hotel in Hull, which was actually situated between three-quarters and a full mile from the falls (Figure 3). Why would this precise location not have been included by Van Cortlandt in his 1853 article, especially when writing for a scientific audience where precision and detail are paramount? Moreover, how do we account for the significant difference in the estimation of the distance between the site, if it was at Bédard's Landing, and the falls?

Taken together, there are many reasons to suggest that the original sources of information for the two articles were not the same. Significant points were either omitted from one or the other that cannot be explained by space restrictions in the newspaper alone. These points were sensational and one would presume that they would have been worthy of inclusion in an article, the purpose of which was to attract attention as well as to inform the readers.

The Burden of Proof

The question now becomes one of whom to believe. Was all of the information in Van Cortlandt's article accurate? Did he estimate properly the distance between the falls and the ossuary? Who wrote the 1843 article if not Van Cortlandt? How well did they pay attention to detail? Did they make some assumptions about location?

In the final analysis, we have no choice but to place the greatest amount of trust in the information provided by Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt himself. It was, after all, he who excavated and kept this unique collection of human remains (which have long since been lost to us). His account, while published ten years after the fact, must be accepted as best reflecting the circumstances and the nature of the discovery. Further, when he wrote his short article for the *Canadian Journal*, he most likely still had in his possession the human remains and so the 1853 description must be considered accurate. While we might allow for details of the initial discovery to have faded with time, it is difficult to imagine new elements being added to the collection itself—such as red ochre, when first there was no mention of

it; perfect skulls, when earlier one was a severely fractured skull; or a separate individual's burial with a four pound boulder on his chest, thought to have been used as armour! Still, there are significant points in common, which suggests that the anonymous 1843 author did have access to first-hand information, but erred in some details. One of several possibilities may explain points of discrepancy and agreement: (a) the writer of the 1843 article more than likely received his or her information from Van Cortlandt but incompletely reported his findings; (b) the 1843 writer was given incorrect information for unknown reasons (such as the need to meet the expectations of an editor); and (c) the writer simply made mistakes in reporting the observations that were supplied by Dr. Van Cortlandt.

On this basis, can we doubt the precise locational information provided in 1843? Put differently, can we accept it uncritically? Can we use the 1843 locational information as a basis for questioning the veracity of later statements made by Sowter regarding the Ottawa Ossuary's location?

In Defense of the Bédard's Landing

The grounds of the Canadian Museum of Civilization straddle a portion of Bédard's Landing that is shared with a parking lot of the Scott Paper plant in Gatineau (Hull sector), directly across from Parliament Hill (Brousseau 1984:36). The embayment lying between the point on which the former ferry landing was located and the Alexandra Bridge (i.e., where the museum buildings are currently situated) is known to have yielded archaeological remains in the mid to late nineteenth century. Such a reference is found in Sowter's (1909:94) writings:

One may observe, on approaching Hull by the Alexandra bridge, an extensive cut bank of sand and gravel, between the E. B. Eddy Co.'s sulphide Mill and the end of the bridge, and between Laurier Ave., and the river. This is the place from which the late Edward Haycock procured sand for building purposes on the Eastern and Western Blocks of the Departmental buildings, at

Ottawa. During the excavation of this bank, a great many Indian relics were discovered, such as womens' (*sic*) knives, arrow-heads, tomahawks and pottery, but no description of this pottery is, obtainable. Here, according to white and red tradition, many bloody encounters took place between parties ascending or descending the river.

Additionally, there is a series of bone implements in the collections of the McCord Museum in Montréal that are reported to have been recovered from "Redard's (*sic*) Landing, Hull" and to have been in the "Van Cortlandt" collection (these and other items attributed to the Van Cortlandt collection were accessioned in October of 1937 into the collections of the Ethnological Museum of McGill University, some 62 years after his passing; however, with the exception of a list of objects, there is no further information associated with Van Cortlandt) (Barbara Lawson, Redpath Museum, personal communication, 28 September 2004).

Clearly, this was an area of sustained use by Native people for many centuries, and all indications are that it was one end of a portage leading over the Chaudière Falls as well as a temporary camping place. It would, therefore, not be entirely surprising to learn that a burial place had also been located nearby.

T.W. Edwin Sowter and a Possible Basis for his Certainty

Given that the above comparison shows significant discrepancies between the two accounts on a number of important points, caution must be exercised. We can now review the great certainty exhibited by T.W. Edwin Sowter (Figure 4) in his articles and attempt to understand what the possible source of that confidence might have been.

T.W. Edwin Sowter began working at the age of 22 years for the Topographical Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior and he spent the next four decades in its employ. He almost certainly came into contact with members of the Geological Survey of Canada (who fell under the



Figure 4. *Photographic portrait of T.W. Edwin Sowter, private collection; electronic copy in the Archives, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau.*

same Department until 1890) who may have directed or channeled his keen interests in both paleontology and archaeology (Pilon 2004).

Sowter was also an active member of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club (OFNC), joining in 1881¹. There, he would have met, if he did not already know him, the eminent paleontologist and archaeologist Henri-Marc Ami (1858-1931) (Figure 5), who was also a member of the Geological Survey of Canada from 1882 until 1911. Together, Sowter and Ami would become the archaeological specialists of the OFNC, leading that group's first official archaeological excursion to Aylmer, Québec, about ten miles upriver from the Chaudière Falls (where Sowter had lived all of his life), in 1899. From that particular outing, a collection of human remains was gathered from Aylmer Island (then also known as Lighthouse Island). In fact, Sowter had already published on the occurrence of human remains on that island near Aylmer, Québec, in his 1895 article. Two hand-written labels that accompanied



Figure 5. Photographic portrait of Henri-Marc Ami in 1891, by William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (copy negative number E002505156).

remains reported to be from Aylmer Island in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization² appear to have been written by Ami and are dated to the same day as the OFNC excursion. Similarly, two labels that accompany fossils donated to the GSC by Sowter in 1908

appear to be of Ami's hand when compared to samples of his hand-writing in the Archives of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Figure 6). Clearly, the two individuals were frequent collaborators.

Sowter was born in 1860 and Edward Van Cortlandt died in 1875 (Moffat 1973:30). It would appear unlikely that Sowter acquired first-hand knowledge of the location of the Ottawa Ossuary from Van Cortlandt himself. Instead, he would more probably have received this information from a contemporary or associate of Van Cortlandt, or even third-hand from someone who had known such an individual. It is highly likely that such a person would have been a member of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club since individuals interested in the "natural world" gravitated to this organization, as they had to its precursors, the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society and the earlier Natural History Society and the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum (see above). Given Sowter's association with Ami, and Ami's obvious interest in archaeological matters, it is quite possible that the information concerning the location of the Ottawa Ossuary had come from Ami or some unidentified but otherwise reputable source, at least in Sowter's eyes.

One last perplexing point lies in the firm assertion by Sowter that the Ossuary had been found



Figure 6. Labels which accompany palaeontological fossils in the collections of the Geological Survey of Canada (left), and artifact labels found with human remains in the collections of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (right). Note the similarities in the way the word "Aylmer" is written among all four specimens. Lastly, a sample of Henri-Marc Ami's signature (centre) taken from a letter he wrote in 1926.

within the northwest angle of the intersection of Bay and Wellington Streets in Ottawa. Dr. Van Cortlandt's home for much of his life in Ottawa was on the southeast corner of that same intersection (394 Wellington) (Moffat 1973:15), where today Veterans' Affairs Canada have large and imposing buildings. Could the site of Van Cortlandt's home somehow have been confused with proximity to the site of the ossuary?

Final Considerations

Ultimately, the story of Edward Van Cortlandt's Ottawa Ossuary, as presented here, is not so much an archaeological story as it is a useful reminder about one of the fundamental *raison d'être* of scholarly associations and scientific publications. While the 1843 article may, in fact, provide a seemingly accurate location for the ossuary, other details differ from information given in the one attributed source, the 1853 Van Cortlandt article. The 1853 article, written by the excavator of the ossuary, must stand as the publication of record. The 1843 article will always remain tantalizing but, without knowledge of its author, one that is impossible to subject to any kind of essential and critical scrutiny. Essentially, it has the weight of hearsay evidence, as in a court of law. We do not know the experience of the writer or the rigor of the reporter. It must be rejected, or at the very least, considered as unsubstantiated and suspect.

This instance reminds us of the reason why scientific societies publish the findings of their members in journals. It is not to sell subscriptions, or advertising, nor to instigate controversies in an otherwise curious but ill-informed readership. Rather, it is to serve as an exchange of scientific information among readers who share methods and goals, and by openly and fully sharing their findings, acknowledging and documenting their sources, knowledge remains democratic and broadly owned and, most importantly, accessible, verifiable and cumulative, allowing future investigators to build upon earlier discoveries and further our collective quest for knowledge.

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Notes

¹Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club fonds. R5475-0-0-E (formerly MG28-I31).

²Repatriated to the Algonquin Nation and reburied during the summer of 2005.

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La discussion scientifique a normalement lieu entre les pages de publications émises par des sociétés savantes. L'objectif de ces publications est de créer un corpus de données auquel les recherches futures peuvent ajouter. On a dernièrement identifié un article anonyme publié quelques jours suivant la fouille d'un ossuaire à Ottawa en 1843 par le Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt. Cet article partage plusieurs points en commun avec un article publié en 1853 par le Dr. Van Cortlandt dans le *Canadian Journal*. En plus de similitudes évidentes, on note aussi des différences significatives qu'on a de la peine à expliquer. Ce cas nous rappelle l'importance des publications de sociétés savantes et nous enjoint d'exercer beaucoup de précautions avant d'accepter des données qui ne peuvent pas être vérifiées.

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