

THE BAY VIEW CANNERY - SKAMOKAWA VILLAGE SITE

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ABSTRACT

Bay View, near Skamokawa, Washington, is the site of a ca. 1870-1915 salmon cannery on the Columbia River. Prior to that time a saltery was located there. Even earlier, it was an occupation site for American Indians prior to and during the early contact period. Lewis and Clark described it as a village of seven houses. Later writers indicate it to be the village of Skamokawa, a head-man of minor historical note. The present investigation was limited in the field to surface collection and excavation of a single test pit. Artifacts recovered included ground and flaked stone; Hudson's Bay-type trade goods including beads, metal, and ceramic wares; the residue of an early semi-permanent Euroamerican settlement; and artifacts specific to the cannery operation. Cut and wrought nails of many types were the outstanding artifacts from the component representing the trade period; and blown glass beads, reported now at four other Northwest sites, were present in two varieties. Fragments of ceramic wares were also associated with the trade period component, but the majority of such fragments were found on the surface and can be related to Chinese cannery labor.

Historical Background

The present study began as a simple survey of a largely washed out Amerindian site on the lower Columbia River. It ultimately grew far beyond that to the point that a fairly good picture of the history of the site could be synthesized from artifacts and from the historical record.

Bay View is located on the north bank of the Columbia River, slightly more than a mile west of the town of Skamokawa, Washington (Fig. 1a). The name Bay View was given by Robert D. Hume, a pioneer salmon canner on the Columbia River, who built a home and later a cannery at the site. While Hume's designation will be used throughout this paper for the site name, its history does not begin with him.

Lewis and Clark were probably the first Euroamericans to stop at Bay View and record its existence. They described it in their downstream log of 6 November 1805 as a ". . . village at the foot of the high hills on the Star^d. Side back of two small Islands it contains seven indifferent houses built in the same form as those above [entirely above ground]" (Thwaites 1959: Vol. 3, 209).

The next mention of Bay View is not in chronological order and was made by Hume in his autobiography. After landing his boat on a point about seven miles below Cathlamet he ". . . went ashore and found an old man living there by the name of L. S. Meyers...; the place...was where old Chief Skomockaway had lived with his tribe and in the early days the firm of Leonard and Green had conducted a saltery there, the old building was still standing." (Hume 1905:Chap. 11). Hume purchased the land and had built a cottage there for

in which both square and wire nails were used in the superstructure (1971: 159). Regrettably the true answer has yet to be found.

Ceramic Wares

With the exception of the one Spode pattern already mentioned, only one other identifiable fragment of personal ceramic was found in the test pit. This was a hand painted British blue leaf pattern (Fort Vancouver Variety 6001). Almost all of the ceramic wares were picked up on the surface or among the beach gravel. Table 2 lists ceramic dinnerware that has been identified by either pattern or trade mark. In addition to these materials, there are two as yet unidentified patterns of transfer printed and one of hand painted earthenware, eight of transfer printed vitreous china, one of white ironstone, and three of porcelain. One fragment of mocha ware and several of blue, feather-edged ware were found. Unpatterned fragments, particularly of white ironstone were very common.

Other ceramic items included conventional American crockery, stone ale bottle fragments, and pieces of both common clay and vitreous china pipes.

Chinese ceramics formed a large percentage of all those found. By far the most common ceramic items from the site were fragments of hand painted vitreous china bowls (Fig. 8b). In total, 92 fragments apparently representing 90 different bowls were collected. Similar or identical bowls, known variously as Chinese export ware or Canton ware, are found in many locations of the world where there has been Chinese occupancy (Spoehr 1973: 214-15, Fig. 136 lower right, Fig. 137a and d). The Japanese conical bowl of Fig. 8c was well represented at Bay View as it is at other sites of Chinese occupancy along this part of the Columbia. Most often only the sturdy basal portion will survive.

If a geological term may be borrowed, the export ware bowls and the crude reddish to dark brown glazed stoneware bottles seem to be index artifacts of Chinese occupancy. The best stoneware specimens found were rice wine bottles as shown in Fig. 8a. Fragments of soy sauce bottles and much larger containers were very common (Kendrick 1966:20-21).

Glass Bottles

Bottles and fragments of many types and ages were collected from among the river gravel and in the hill base (Figs. 4-6). Handmade bottles produced before the invention of the Owens process in 1903 were in a distinct majority. The latter type are so common today that they did not seem to merit illustration. There is little to be said about the bottles that is not shown in the figures, except that they represent a total time span that could begin early in the nineteenth century. Among the tall bottles, those made by the turn molding process were most common (Kendrick 1966).

Beads

Over the years collectors have removed many yards of beads from Bay View. The present investigation did not fare as well but did find about 50 of which 6 were from the test pit. One, however, was a new type of blown bead previously unreported (Fig. 7c) (Ross 1973). Those beads found

were classified as well as possible by the method of the Kidds (1970). The following types were found: Ia6, If, IIa12, IIa13, IIa39 in two sizes, IIa40 in two sizes, IIIf2, W1b13 and a 7-8 mm spherical blue on blue wire wound bead (unclassified).

The type Ia6 bead is a yellow tube 2.1 x 0.65 cm and because it seemed unusually heavy, the density was measured and found to be 5.3. This density corresponds to lead glass which may account for the heavily etched surface.

Since the time of the note by Ross (1973), blown beads have been reported in Washington from sites at Sullivan's Island, Memaloose Island, Fort Vancouver, and HBC Bellevue Farm (on San Juan Island), as well as two in a private collection from Bay View. These beads are very fragile and may have been originally made for some purpose entirely different than personal adornment. Almost every one found to date represents a different variety. Beyond this, nothing more is known about them.

Cannery Associated Artifacts

A number of artifacts were specific to the cannery. These included such unattractive items as iron pipe, chain, and rusted stacks of sheet metal from can-making operations. A few ca. 3 x 4 cm squares of copper cut with cold chisels are attributed to the cannery although their use is unknown. Some small strips of sheet lead or solder and accumulations up to ca. 1 kg of splashed lead or solder probably have the same origin. Conventional lead-line net weights leave little question as to period. The most attractive artifacts were four heavy soldering coppers (or irons), one of which had the head mounted 90° to the forged iron handle.

Burial

The western edge of the Bay View site is defined by a cliffy point of rock which borders the stream fan. The top of this rocky point and the area just to the west of it had been pointed out by two local informants as an "Indian burying ground." Another informant told of finding a cliff side burial many years ago between Skamokawa and Bay View.

During logging operations about 1962, a bulldozer operator was piling dirt and rock from the small stream fan in an attempt to build a ramp over the rock marking the west boundary. He uncovered a grave described as containing two adults, one with a flattened skull, and two children. Among the rich grave goods were 5-6 yd of beads, three brass and three iron pistols, a gold embellished sword, an unusual eagle medal, Phoenix buttons, brass earrings and bracelets, a Marian medal, Harrison presidential campaign tokens dated 1841, and jewelry. The latter included three brooches and a bracelet that would be considered exquisite even by today's standards (Fig. 9a-k). Two pale blue blown beads and one faceted ruby-colored seed bead were also noteworthy (Fig. 7a-d).

It is appealing to think that such a rich burial might be no less than Skamokawa himself. Unfortunately, not a shred of evidence to support this has been found.