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A REPORT ON THE ADA SITE, KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Ruth Herrick, M. D.

Part I

Surface indications and excavations

This report concerns signs of Indian occupancy of a small parcel of land at the junction of the Thornapple and Grand Rivers, Ada township, Kent County, Michigan. Ottawa Indians were encamped there on the arrival of the first fur traders and continued their occupancy within the memory of living men.

Native Indian Evidences.

Most reports on Indian trade items neglect evidences of earlier occupancy of the land, but here, due to soil removal, fire hearths, bone pits and such were also observed. E. F. Greenman (15-1956), in a recent report called attention to the presence of fire stones as a clue to Indian camps.

Fire stones, that is, heat-fractured rocks of fist to head size, were prevalent in these fields. Most of them were of granite. In some places fire hearths were evident as circles, three or four feet in diameter, of a color different from the adjacent soil due to ashes and charcoal. They were lined with hard rocks, whole or broken, quite charred (Fig. 1). On digging into the ashes, occasional animal bones, many potsherds and now and then a projectile point were encountered. There did not appear to be any orderly grouping of these hearths; sometimes there was only one and again three close together but not arranged in a circular formation.

Certain portions of the field explored had many bone pits, evidently refuse pits for animal remains. These were not close to the

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Mary Per Lee (Mrs. William T. Per Lee) from Grandville, Michigan, July 15, 1844, to the families of Edmund G. Per Lee and Abraham Per Lee of North Norwich, New York. Submitted by Mr. E. P. Gibson, her great grandson.

After crossing Lake Michigan by boat, "at five o'clock landed at Grand Haven, as the settlement at the mouth of the river is called. . . . Everything so wild and new as to startle, but rather pleasant than otherwise. Here we saw the Potawatamas tribe of Indians with their chief and his Son. Many of them were handsomely dressed in the finest of broadcloth, embroidered as usual with beads and Porcupine quills of various colours. The old chief had a plate of silver on his breast, as large as a good sized breakfast plate with the figure of a wolf engraved upon it. There was a great deal of Silver about their persons, some dangle the plate tied to their hair between the shoulders, others had their coat capes ornamented with pieces as large as a dollar sewed closely together on the edge."

Beads.

Twenty varieties of trade and embroidery beads were found in the burials at the Ada site.

The most distinctive were tubular shell artifacts made from the New England clam or quahog (*Venus Mercenaria*). These measured from 7 by 3 mm. to 3 by 2 mm. and varied from opaque chalky white to lavender. None was deep purple. Much has been written on the origin of this wampum and it is the consensus that this type of tubular shell bead was first made by the Dutch in New Jersey and later may have been made by the Indians themselves, but only after metal awls became available for drilling the slender holes (26).

These shell beads are usually called "true Indian wampum" and rightly so if it be understood that they were used for verifying treaties or pledges of loyalty from group to group. The use of wampum as money or an article of exchange was the white man's idea added later to the Indian's philosophy (18).

It is characteristic of the Indian's trading proclivities that so many of these beads were found far inland from the source of the marine shells.

Catalogue Nos. 57, 80, represent two chains strung by me from these small artifacts which were scattered over an area some 30 feet square. (Fig. 36, Plate 5). It seems curious that wampum beads have not previously been reported in Michigan burial sites. The University of Michigan has portions of two wampum belts, one from Cross Village, the other from Walpole Island, Canada, but these were not burial finds.

Another distinctive bead, my catalogue number 52 (Fig. 37), consists of 236 beads of white opaque glass plus three black ones,

roughly oval, all very smooth, wire wound small beads, about 7 mm. by 3 mm. One such white bead (University of Michigan Museum of Anthropology catalogue number P1704) is shown in Greenman's study of Old Birch Island (15-1951).

Other bead collections loaned me for comparison do not contain this type, but Mr. John Witthoft, (36), wrote me thus: "the oval beads made in wire wound technique (are known to me only from the material which Charles Wray has, from very late Seneca sites. This specific type of little oval bead is the characteristic type of his graves of the late reservation 1790-1812 A. D." Glenn A. Black, (4), adds that this type was largely traded by the French. My No. 92 is a single translucent pink wire wound bead of the same size and shape. A similar one was seen in a collection obtained near Fort St. Joseph, Michigan, loaned me by Black. A third pink bead of this odd shade was seen in a collection of burial goods recovered from a grave at Cross Village, Michigan, about 1880. A fourth, also an isolated specimen, appears in a collection from the sands around Old Fort Michillimackinac, (my catalogue No. 3).

A group, Nos. 44, 45, 50 and 56, consists of irregularly round or pear shape, transparent types in medium blue, clear glass, pale amber, deeper less transparent amber and deep green in sizes from 8 by 7 mm., to 9 x 6 mm. Two of the blue and three of the deeper amber are faceted pressed glass. Black suggests that these are probably the earliest in my collection, being used between 1690 and 1750 A. D. These, I feel, would likely have been furnished by the French traders in Michigan. All of this group look hand made. (Figs. 38-42). Kidd, (20), does not give these amber beads such an early date, but estimates their use as both before and after 1775 to 1825.

Nos. 51-A, 58 and 213 are thin tubular beads, called by present day Indians "cut beads" as the ends are sharp. The colors are translucent white, two only, opaque black and light transparent blue, respectively. (Fig. 43). They vary in size from 4 by 2 mm. to 8 by 3 mm. Similar beads have been found in the St. Joseph, Michigan area. They are late in origin, 1800 A. D. and after.

My next group, Nos. 51, 53, 59 and 93 are embroidery beads. The colors are respectively, opaque white, (fairly large), deep russet round, deep russet faceted, and a round dull translucent Delft blue. This latter set, blue No. 93, is of two sizes, very small, called seed beads, (Fig. 44), and somewhat larger, (Fig. 45), (like the other numbers) which the Indians call pony beads. These blue seed beads correspond to color 19, size 5, on a sample card from V. The given me by Black. The russet beads, round or faceted, are pony beads and are unlike any seen in other collections. They remained one of the beads used on passementeries of the 1890's. All of these are found in abundance. It is worth noting that there are no green, black, nor

PLATE 5.

- Fig. 36. Quahog wampum. No's. 54 and 80. $\times 1/3$.
- Fig. 37. White, and three black wire wound beads. No's. 52 and 52-A. $\times 1/3$.
- Fig. 38. Transparent irregularly round blue glass beads. No. 44. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 39. Transparent, round clear glass beads. No. 45. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 40. Transparent round, light amber beads. No. 50. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 41. Transparent round dark amber beads. No. 50. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 42. Transparent round deep green beads. No. 56. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 43. Tubular opaque black and light transparent blue cut beads. No's. 58 and 213. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 44. Delft blue transparent seed beads. No. 93. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 45. Delft blue transparent pony beads. No. 93. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 46. Heavy round opaque polka-dot enamel. No. 48. Full size.
- Fig. 47. Oval wire wound transparent green beads, with yellow enamel. No. 138. Full size.
- Fig. 48. Two shades of transparent blue cut glass oval beads. No. 47. Full size.
- Fig. 49. Light, slightly translucent, cobalt cut glass beads. No. 137. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 50. Light, slightly translucent, cobalt and opal with translucent core, cut glass beads. No's. 137 and 46. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 51. Deeper translucent cobalt cut glass beads from Skagway, Alaska. No. 11. $\times 1/2$.
- Fig. 52. Transparent deep cobalt Russian burial beads from Washington. No. 183. $\times 1/2$.

red beads of this small size. In fact, there are no red beads in the whole collection. Only the blue beads can be matched up to a sample bead card from Venice, Italy.

Several other bead types are represented by a few of each kind. No. 135 has 6 round deep cobalt blue. No. 116 has 14 small opaque green, larger than pony beads. No. 82 consists of 8 small opaque Deift blue beads. No. 47 consists of 2 beads only, one light and one dark blue, each a long oval with cut glass facets parallel to the long axis, (Fig. 48). This is a related type to my 137, cut glass of universal distribution. None of these beads seem significant. In comparison with other collections, it is interesting that the only type correlation noted, is with beads found at and near the Old Fort St. Joseph, Michigan site. The following numbers in my collection had quite similar representatives there: No's. 44, 50, 52-A, 54, 58, 92, 137 and 213.

The most spectacular glass beads are numbers 48 and 138. No. 48 beads, (Fig. 46), of about a dozen, are heavy, roughly round 6 by 8 to 9 x 8 mm., some opaque black, others opaque dark blue and all spectacularly dotted by polka dot enamel. Some have white dots partially superimposed by opaque yellow dots, the others have white dots with alternating blue and red superimposed. The effect is that of fine cameo glass, but it is achieved entirely by the application of enamel. This is a Venetian bead commonly found among the Plains Indians dating about 1800 A. D. Plate 98, "Indians of the Plains", (20), shows such a bead as part of a ceremonial offering. R. W. Force, of the Chicago Natural History Museum and Kenneth Kidd both comment that beads similar to these have been found in Africa and areas of the Eastern Mediterranean which have trade relations with Africa.

Number 138 of this Ada collection consists of a few very elegant Venetian beads, (Fig. 47). This oval transparent green bead is made by the spindle winding technique. Around the equator is a wreath of leaves of yellow enamel. Such a bead is shown in blue on Plate XIII of polychrome beads in Orchard, (26). Dr. R. P. Burke, (7), lists a similar bead found in Alabama, which has an inlay of metal instead of enamel. A bead of opaque white was examined in the collection of Mississippi beads of late 17th and early 18th centuries loaned me by Black, but the leafy inlay on this bead had fallen out.

Numbers 46, (Fig. 50), of opal glass and 137, (Fig. 49), of a pale cobalt color are similar to each other in shape, and run from 5 by 5 mm. to 3 by 4 mm. in size. Each is made from a section of a hollow glass tube, which has been cut in facets on the external surface. The opal beads are consistently larger and slightly better made than are the blue. All the opal show a concentration of almost opaque glass at the lumen, but it is not a plated nor overlay glass. It is presumed that these opal-tinged beads are late trade material, about 1800 A. D. or after. There are no opal cut glass beads in collections of early beads loaned to me, but similar ones are in my possession from graves

in California, along with other late types.

My 137 beads are similarly made, but utilize angular tubing surfaces, thus there is less hand cutting on these light cobalt than on the opal. Many, but not all of these beads present the light zone at the lumen. This bead is an almost universal member of late trade collections.

The following comparisons from sources other than Michigan, accentuate this universal finding. The author bought similar slightly darker cut beads in Skagway, Alaska, in 1924, (Fig. 51). These were brought to the local drug store by the Indians and were termed Russian trade beads. Thus, they could have been traded to the Indians any time before 1867. They also show a light zone on the inside surface. (Cat. No. 11).

A chain of decorative beads and coins from Guatamala, my number 10, with coins dating from 1900 to 1910, has three of these carefully faceted blues. Chippewa Indians in Michigan still call them burial beads.

Similar, but larger deep cobalt cut glass beads, No's. 133, 148, 183 in my collection, have been known on the Pacific coast as Russian burial beads and accompanied the tree burials of the Indians. These have a large lumen with no opaque inside zone. (Fig. 52).

These beads are particularly interesting, as several students of trade materials consider that they were all made in Italy. Let me theorize that they could very likely be of Bohemian origin. First, they are found in graves which are dated fairly late, usually after 1800 A. D. Also, they are of a type which is more characteristic in color and glass cutting of Bohemian craftsmen than Venetian, as witnessed by museum collections of cut cobalt Bohemian glass. No such cut glass is found in the Venetian antiques. Likewise, Bohemia was favorably situated in Central Europe and carried on extensive trade in glass with neighboring countries, including Russia. Thus one may speculate, but this particular point will not be decided until some scholarly student of glass craftsmanship, or perhaps a trained archeologist investigates the countries in question.

Part III

Summary

Two previously unknown burial groups and an adjacent camp site are described as they occurred near Ada Village, Kent County, Michigan. All were close to the mouth of the Thornapple river as it emptied into the Grand river. The Thornapple river has now been moved and the areas covered by dirt fill for a new bridge.

Artifacts and pottery from the camp site indicate its occupancy before the advent of the white man. Both burial places, however, show the impression made upon the Ottawa Indians by trade materials of great variety and from many sources.

Due to the absence of decorative silver and the presence of a crucifix of base metal, the burial at the fishing site, Conservation Point, may be tentatively dated as during the trade period of the French trappers and clergy, thus pre-1760 A. D.

The larger burial site bears evidence of the British influence as seen in the clay pipe stems from Glasgow and Montreal, the gun flints and strike-a-light black flints from Brandon, England and the considerable variety of silver from Montreal sources. The small Turrington and peppermint bottles are impressed with a London mark. These all suggest a burial date of 1820-1850.

The beads presumably came over the ocean to fur traders like La Framboise, Rix Robinson and De Marsac, whose sources could have been southern and central Europe and England. These beads have been sent to several archeologists and all have termed them "late trade material" or from 1800 to 1850.

The Indian teeth bear evidences of milled flour, sugar and probably alcoholic diet, again indicating considerable contact with white settlers.

My hypothesis that the larger group might have been buried at the time of a serious small pox epidemic, places this date at 1835. This may be twenty years too early, but we have no way of verifying this. It is true that the oldest inhabitants of this neighborhood, one of whom was 90 years old, had never heard of burials in these areas.

Finally, it is appropriate to express my genuine appreciation of the many busy but enthusiastic archeologists who have freely given of their time to encourage the efforts of a rank amateur.