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The Cover: Ancient glass beads from Egypt and eastern Mediterranean area, c. 1300 B.C.-300 A.D. Cover photograph by Phil Shima.

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GLASS TRADE BEADS FROM AN EARLY EASTERN NORTH AMERICAN SITE

Robert K. Liu, Ph.D.

The glass beads discussed and illustrated in this report belong to Gerald B. Fenstermaker, a noted long-time collector and serious amateur researcher (editor of the now defunct *National Archaeological News*). These beads are arranged as a chart, published as a full-color postcard by Fenstermaker, as a supplement to his earlier bead chart and accompanying descriptions.¹ Most of the beads have been excavated in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, by the collector. He estimates they date from 1550 to 1575, and are from sites occupied by the Susquehannock Indians.

Beads from historic American sites have been and are the subject of active research (see Karklins and Sprague²). Since much of the material on which this research is based come from non-scientifically excavated sites, and much of the research is conducted by amateur archaeologists, there is considerable controversy as to its validity, especially with regards to dating.³

However, one must balance this criticism by the fact that even if these dates (whether specific or bracketed) for the sites and presumably the beads contained therein may err by up to one hundred years, such datings are probably still the most precise available for beads anywhere. Thus it is worthwhile to make known such findings so as to stir discussion and commentary which may possibly aid in attribution, and to enable others to compare published material with that found in other U.S. and foreign sites of early trade contact. In addition, illustrations of beads, such as the excellent color photographs by Good⁴ and by Pratt⁵, are invaluable for identification and comparison of bead specimens.

Given these conditions, is it possible to confirm the dates of the beads in the accompanying photograph (Fig. 1) by comparison with the literature? Although I have had the advantage of being able to examine the Fenstermaker beads when I photographed them in the summer of 1974, I have had otherwise fairly limited experience with early American trade beads. While making comparisons, one should keep in mind two factors which confound accurate dating of beads, i.e., many specific bead types or styles are made for a long period and others were kept as heirlooms, so that often dating would have to be limited to a specific example and not to the entire type of a particular bead.

The most obvious and striking beads in Fig. 1 are the two star chevron beads in row 14 (measuring 21 x 28 mm., and 18 x 34 mm.). These are markedly different in color and construction from modern Venetian chevrons. Haldeman⁶ found a star chevron on the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania around 1830 and mentions other specimens from elsewhere in that state. Mr. Fenstermaker's specimens differ from those illustrated in the 1878 report, and are different from any other illustrated examples in the literature, except one shown by Orchard⁷, from Ontario, Canada (specimen in middle of Pl. XII). Van der Sleen⁸ figured Dutch chevrons; a glass factory existed in Amsterdam from 1608 to 1680. Quimby⁹ indicates that chevrons are diagnostic of trade beads of the Early Historic period (1610-1670) in the western Great Lakes region. Therefore for these chevron beads, the estimated dates are at most in error by 100 years, although there is the possibility the estimates are closer, since other Pennsylvania Susquehannock (Susquehanna) sites are almost contemporaneous (Blue Rock Cemetery, 1575-1595; Washington Borough burial site, ca. 1575-1640; Strickler site, 1629-1675)^{10,11}. Another well-known type is the compound cane bead in row 11, specifically a Nueva Cadiz Twisted bead, which dates from the 16th to early 17th century¹² or 1610-1670.⁹ "Flusheye" beads, similar to the last 4 beads in row 8 (Fig. 1), have also been found at Blue Rock, which was dated 1575-1595.¹⁰ Here again, there is fairly good congruence between the estimated dates (1550-1575) and the literature.

The monochrome beads, including the bilobed specimens which are reminiscent of corralles beads (*Bead Journal* 1 (1): 17, Fig. 18), rows 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, as well as the striped beads in rows 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 are comparable to similar beads figured in Pratt,⁵ as well as van der Sleen⁸ (striped beads only). Such similarity would place them in the late 1500's to the mid-1600's. Beads in the above mentioned rows are dissimilar to those of Quimby's Middle (1670-1760) or Late (1760-1820) Historic periods.⁹ There is limited or no concurrence with beads found in other 17th to 18th century sites⁴ and 19th century sites.^{13,14}

Thus, in general, it is possible to substantiate the estimated dates with some degree of accuracy, even though my knowledge of early American trade beads is limited, as was my brief survey of the literature.

Therefore, in lieu of first-hand examination and comparison of bead specimens, photographs are of demonstrated utility in study of otherwise inaccessible material. In many ways, good photographs are superior to drawings in conveying subtle characteristics such as shape,

texture and color. It would be worthwhile to obtain photographs for comparison of early glass trade beads from areas like Malaysia¹⁵ and Taiwan¹⁶, where there are beads similar in appearance to those from eastern North America.

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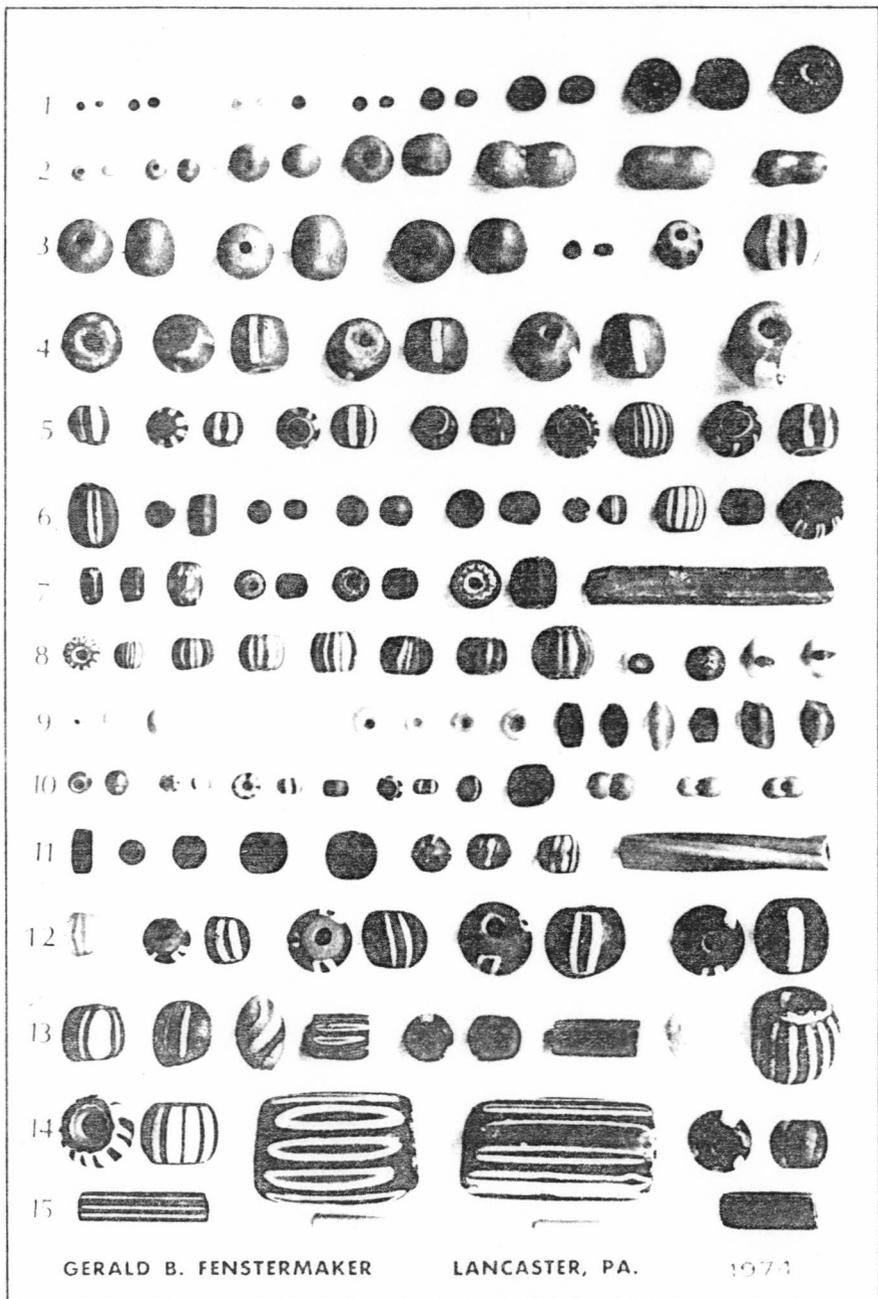


Fig. 1. Early glass trade beads from a Susquehannock Indian site in Lancaster, Pa. G.B. Fenstermaker Collection.