

FORT PROVIDENCE, N.W.T.

A Preliminary Report of Excavations carried out

July 1969

by

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and

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PREFACE

The conception of the Fort Providence project properly begins back in February 1969, with the accidental discovery of a passage in a book which purported to give the location of the post. Since the fort itself was unknown, the discovery of what could be an interesting chapter in Canadian history spurred immediate research into the location and history of Fort Providence.

From the historic material available the location of the post was narrowed down to an area of Great Slave Lake, at the mouth of the Yellowknife River, near Wool Bay (Fig. 1). Consulting the journals of Sir John Franklin, it was found that his observations placed Fort Providence in latitude $62^{\circ} 17' 19''$ north and longitude $114^{\circ} 09' 28''$ west (Franklin 1823:208) (Fig. 2). Subsequent research found Franklin to be in error, as his observations were approximately two miles too far west and one-half mile too far north.

Letters from Bill McDonald and Gerry Clayton were in agreement as to the exact location of the post as being between two small creeks, east of Wool Bay, at latitude $62^{\circ} 17'$ north and longitude $114^{\circ} 06'$ west (Fig. 2).

With the location of Fort Providence firmly established, plans were drawn up for a preliminary excavation to be conducted sometime in the summer. Through the kind assistance of Prof. R. G. Williamson, these plans were presented to the Centennial Committee of the Northwest Territories with the idea that this work be designated as a Centennial project.

Upon acceptance of the plan as a Centennial project in the spring of 1969, preparations were begun for the excavation. A trip was made to Yellowknife on July 3rd, and with Bill McDonald as a guide, the actual site was viewed.

On July 20th the crew, consisting of Dale Perry, Dean Clark and Carl Ryhorchuk, arrived at the site by plane. By 3:30 p.m. the same day surveying and excavation had begun.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Giving the proper credit to everyone who contributed to the success of the Fort Providence project is a most pleasant task, as so many have contributed freely of their time, with no regard for compensation except the furthering of our knowledge of the history of the Northwest Territories.

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We would like, first of all, to thank most heartily the Centennial Committee of the Northwest Territories, without whose financial support the project would have died in its infancy. Special mention must be given to Mr. Jim Whelly, General Manager of the Centennial Center, whose enthusiasm and determination made the financial support for the field work possible. Special thanks must also go to Miss Joanne Holmes and Miss Marion Hooze, who assisted us in making hotel reservations and other arrangements necessary to the project.

Secondly, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the Institute for Northern Studies, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The Institute, under the directorship of Dr. W. O. Kupsch, generously loaned the camping equipment used during the field excavation, supplied space and material during the library research phase of the project and gave the money necessary to produce the original report.

Professor R. G. Williamson, Associate of the Institute for Northern Studies and former elected member of the Northwest Territories Council, deserves special thanks. His encouragement and valuable assistance during the planning stages of this project are much appreciated.

It is difficult to adequately express our appreciation and gratitude for the assistance freely given by Mr. Carl Ryhorchuk of Saskatoon. Carl doubled as a field cook without peer, and as an untiring excavator during the field work phase. It is impossible to imagine the successful completion of the project without the valuable assistance rendered by Carl.

We would also like to thank Mr. Roger Trottier, an art teacher in Saskatoon, for the artist's reconstruction of Fort Providence, appearing as the frontispiece to this issue. This drawing represents the culmination of numerous preliminary sketches and untold hours of research and discussion, in an attempt to portray the past as accurately as possible within the confines of a rather meager amount of data. Roger's great artistic talents have added a great deal to this report and to our own understanding of the archaeological data recovered.

A sincere vote of thanks is extended to Mr. A. M. Seivewright, Supervisor of the Historic Sites Branch in Regina, Saskatchewan, for giving Dean Clark a leave of absence in order to participate in the project.

A number of people at the University of Saskatchewan assisted in artifact analysis. Dr. G. Wobeser, Department of Veterinary Pathology, did the faunal analysis; Dr. J. S. Rowe, Department of Plant Ecology, analyzed the wood samples; the plaster and chinking were examined by Mr. E. C. Bailey of the Chemistry Department; and Miss M. Guilford and Miss S. Mousa of the Home Economics Department examined the

PLATE II

- a Copper disc
- b Copper dangler
- c Silver ring — note "RC" touchmark
- d-e Copper rings
- f Cowrie shell
- g-l Beads
- m-o Brass buckles

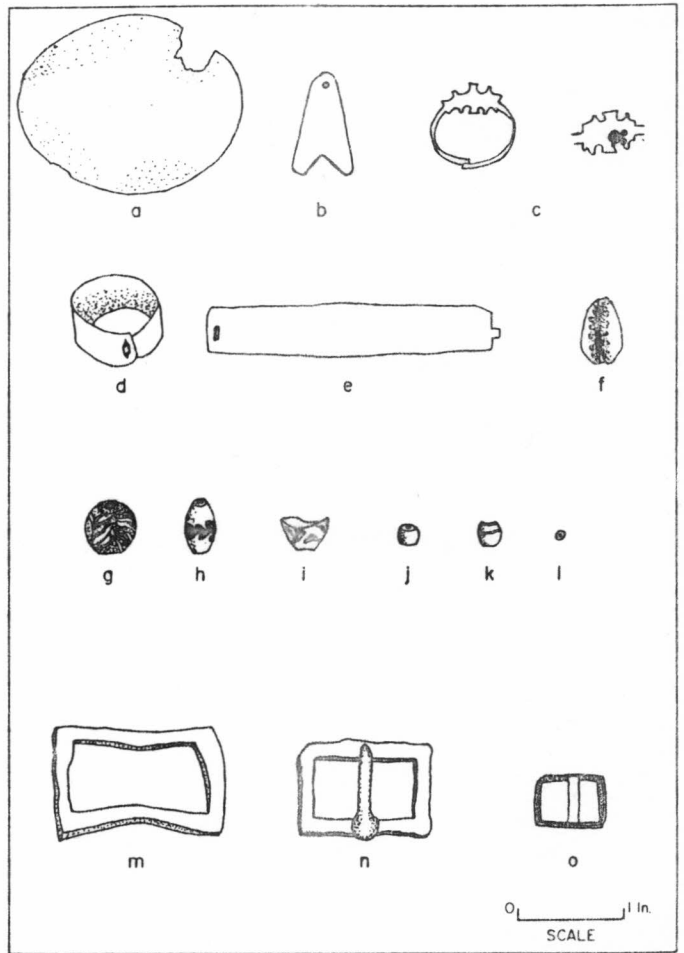


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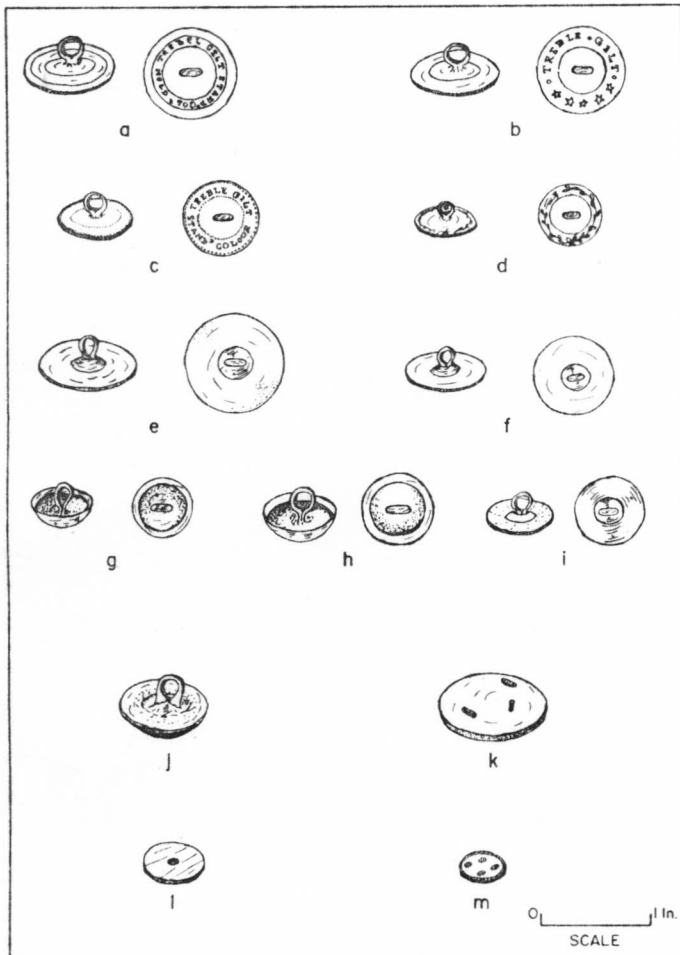


PLATE III

- a-i Brass buttons
- j Iron button
- k Leather button
- l Bone button
- m Mother-of-pearl button