

A CREE BURIAL, MOOSE FACTORY, ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

In 1967 a skeleton, part of another skeleton, and trade goods were uncovered by a bulldozer on Moose Factory Island, Ontario. This, to the authors' knowledge, is the first such burial found and reported from the Eastern Subarctic. Through the kindness of Mr. Billie Faries, then Chief of the Moose Factory Band, and Dr. Ian Gilchrist, Head of the Moose Factory Hospital, the burial was sent to the Royal Ontario Museum for study. The trade goods were analyzed by Mr. Donald Webster and the Osteological material by Dr. James Anderson.

It was concluded that the skeleton represented an Indian woman who had died at about the age of 30. The trade goods recovered, although it cannot be proven that they were directly associated with the burial, indicate that this internment took place in the early part of the 18th century. Furthermore, it can be suggested, because of the trade goods, that this young woman was an important person closely connected with the trading post and had probably been given a Christian burial. It is felt that more work should be undertaken on this site.

PART I

The Moose Factory Burial: E. S. Rogers

During the summer of 1967, a road was being improved on Moose Factory Island, Ontario, when a bulldozer disturbed a cemetery by excavating deeper than usual. A skeleton of an Indian woman, presumably Cree, was uncovered, together with parts of another skeleton and associated goods.

The work on the road was halted immediately. While a decision was being reached as to what was to be done, the local Euro-Canadian residents took away many of the grave goods.

Dr. Ian Gilchrist, in charge of the Moose Factory Hospital, recognizing the importance of the discovery contacted the Royal Ontario Museum. He was asked to send the material to the Museum for examination. Dr. Gilchrist kindly agreed to undertake this task. The grave goods were recovered from the residents and permission was given by the Chief, Mr. Billie Faries, of the Moose Factory Band to send the grave goods and the skeleton material to the Royal Ontario Museum. We are grateful to Mr. Faries for allowing this to be done and to Dr. Gilchrist for making all the necessary arrangements.

Mr. Donald Webster, Curator of Canadiana, Royal Ontario Museum and Dr. James Anderson,

Faculty of Medicine, McMaster University, kindly undertook to analyze the finds, the former on the trade goods and the latter on the osteological remains. Their reports follow.

The burial is of importance since it is the first, to our knowledge, to have been found and reported upon from the eastern Subarctic of Canada. In the acidic podsollic soil of the Subarctic, bone material usually disintegrates rapidly. Apparently, however, certain conditions exist on Moose Factory Island to have allowed this skeleton to be preserved for perhaps more than two hundred years.

European contact with the James Bay Cree only began in 1668, when the English established a trading post at Fort Rupert, Quebec. Two years later, the Hudson's Bay Company was formed and in 1672, a post was started upstream from the mouth of the Moose River, perhaps on Moose Factory Island.

The Indian woman whose bones were discovered in 1967, could have been born about the time trading posts were first being established at the south end of James Bay. The placing of personal property with the dead was a common culture trait lasting until after 1900 in inland areas. Nevertheless, it is of interest that iron trade goods were buried with a young female, when presumably at this early date, iron was at a premium. By 1733, however, a wide variety of trade goods were being supplied to the

handle, the knife blade is also English in form, and of a type of table knife common in great variation from the 17th through the early 19th century (Peterson 1958:117-120; Cotter and Hudson 1957:33-34; Hume 1966:58-59). It was a manufactured rather than individually made piece with integral tang and bone or wooden handle; the blade is corroded beyond hope of resurrecting possible markings.

Nonferrous artifacts included one complete and reconstructable white clay pipe and two separate stem fragments, none marked (Fig. 2). Bore diameters of the pipe and one fragment are 5/64 in.; the other fragment is 6/64 in. The Harrington system would thus suggest a rough dating within a period from the late 17th century to the first half of the 18th. This was all that was possible to discover from the three samples (Harrington 1954, Walker 1967:90-101). Application of the Binford formula, intended for large samples, was not used, as it seemed pointless to do so (Binford 1962:19-21; Maxwell and Binford 1961:107-109).

Glass beads recovered included 31 opaque white elongated-spheroidal necklace beads, 3/8 to 5/8 in. long and 1/4 to 3/8 in. wide, of a type excavated from several sites, and certainly most common to the first half of the 18th century, though possibly in use earlier (Quimby 1966:85-87, 186, 190, 193-194; Maxwell and Binford 1961:89-90, 117). Seed beads, intended as clothing ornamentation, included 143 white opaque types, 2 of translucent blue, 11 of the Cornaline d'Aleppo type of coral red surrounding a colorless interior, and one bead 9/32 in. long, of coral red over a colorless core, with three longitudinal white and deeper red stripes (Fig. 3). The opaque white beads are undatable as many of them have been excavated in contexts extending from the mid-17th to early 19th century. The blue, the tubular, and the Cornaline d'Aleppo types, however, from excavation context, are considered to be 17th century forms (Quimby 1966:81-87, 183-196; Maxwell and Binford 1961:89-90, 117).

Given this mixture of artifacts, some perhaps intrusive, and none precisely datable either individually or in association, I can but attempt an assessment based only on the nature of the material taken as a whole. This would suggest dating the burial in the first quarter of the 18th century, though this could easily vary either way by twenty-five years.

PART III

The Skeleton from the Moose Factory Burial: James Anderson

The following tabulation presents the information derived from an analysis of the skeletal remains of an Indian uncovered on Moose Factory Island:

Inventory

The material consists of an adult skeleton which is complete except for parts of the hand and foot, the left radius, the body of the sternum, and parts of the scapulae. In addition there is the lower limb skeleton of another adult individual represented by the tibia, fibula, tarsals and foot bones of both sides and a right patella. All the bone is well preserved.

Age

In this adult, all 32 teeth had erupted and epiphyses of vertebrae and long bones were fused. The appearance of the symphysis pubis indicates an age range of 30-35 years. The incomplete fusion of the bodies of the first two sacral vertebrae suggests that the age was at the lower end of that range.

Sex

The usual skeletal criteria agree that this is a female skeleton: relatively delicate muscle markings, small mastoid processes, weak supraorbital ridges, a wide subpubic angle and sciatic notch and female proportions and shape of the sacrum. The femoral head diameter is 46 mm.

Cranial Morphology

As may be seen in the photograph (Fig. 4), the skull was badly damaged with loss of parts of the vault posteriorly and some areas of the base. During reconstruction it was not possible to correct completely the oblique gap between the two fragments of the frontal bone. Cranial measurements and indices are presented in tabular form in Table 1. The skull vault is relatively round (brachycranic) and low in relation to its breadth (tapeinocranic) (Fig. 5).

The vault sutures are complicated with a few tiny ossicles included in the coronal and lambdoid sutures. There are no true Wormian bones, Os Inca or epipteric bones. The occipital pole of the skull is prominent because of a torus-like mound.

The orbits are rather low and rectangular with a supraorbital notch on the right and a foramen on the left.

The nasal region is mesorrhine. There is a prominent anterior nasal spine and a sharp infranasal margin. The nasal bones are large and hourglass in shape.

There is no prominent zygomaxillary tubercle or malar tuberosity, but a huge marginal tubercle projects upwards and backwards from the frontal process of the zygoma.

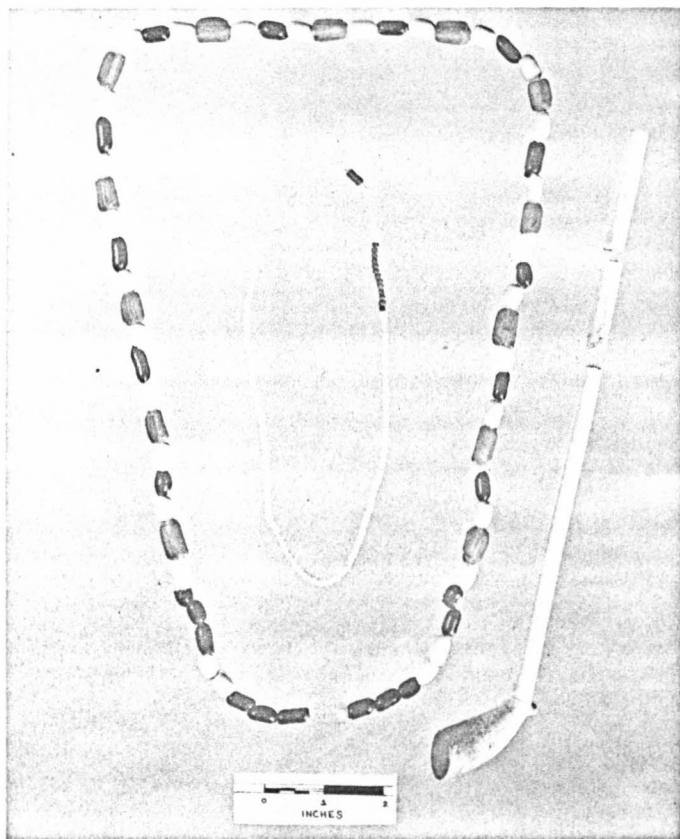


Fig. 3. (a) A string of glass beads; (b) A string of seed beads; (c) A white clay pipe.

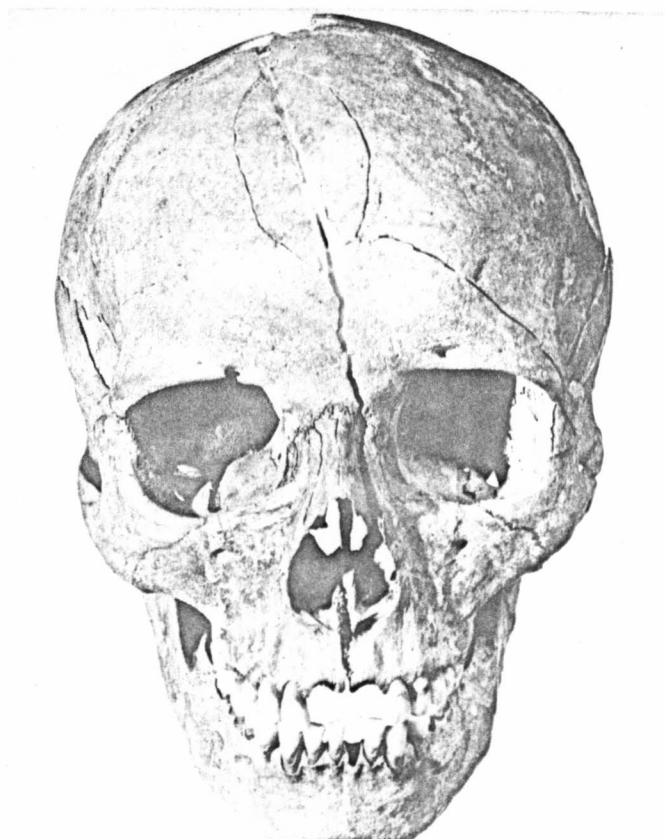


Fig. 4. Frontal view of the skull.