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THE PIC RIVER SITE¹

A STRATIFIED LATE WOODLAND SITE ON THE NORTH SHORE OF LAKE SUPERIOR

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RÉSUMÉ

Le gisement stratifié de la rivière du Pic, sur la rive nord du lac Supérieur, renferme trois éléments qui s'échelonnent depuis les temps historiques jusqu'en l'an 950 après J.-C. Les spécimens ethnohistoriques recueillis indiquent que l'élément historique provient peut-être des Ojibways. Pendant toute cette période d'environ 800 ans, il semble s'être produit une évolution relativement lente de la culture. Les poteries du dernier et du premier élément constituent un mélange de traditions céramiques différentes qui témoigne qu'elles ont subi des influences en provenance tant de l'Ouest que du Sud-Est. De fait, le nombre de poteries par rapport aux objets façonnés d'autres catégories et le mélange de diverses traditions céramiques dans un seul élément laissent supposer que l'art de la poterie constitue à cet endroit un trait d'emprunt. Les résultats relativement abondants des fouilles archéologiques effectuées au gisement de la rivière du Pic en font l'un des plus importants pour approfondir l'histoire culturelle des Ojibways qui vivaient sur la rive nord du lac Supérieur.

SUMMARY

The stratified Pic River site on the north shore of Lake Superior contains three components ranging in time from the historic period to A.D. 950. Ethnohistoric evidence suggests that the historic component may be attributed to the Ojibwa. Throughout this time span of approximately 800 years, a condition of relatively slow culture change is apparent. Ceramics from the latest and the earliest components represent a mixture of different ceramic traditions, an indication that influences were being derived from both the west and the southeast. Indeed, the frequency of ceramics relative to other artifact categories and the mixture of ceramic traditions within a single component suggest that ceramics at the site represent a borrowed trait. The relatively rich archaeological record from the Pic River site makes it one of the most important stations from which to acquire an understanding of Ojibwa culture history along the north shore of Lake Superior.

The Pic River site was first recorded during an archaeological survey of the Lake Superior basin in 1957 by James B. Griffin and George L. Quimby (Quimby, 1958; 1961). In 1959, J. Norman Emerson of the University of Toronto examined the site, and during the field seasons of 1960 and 1961 he carried out extensive excavations. Dr. Emerson, with the permission of the

¹ This paper was originally submitted in November 1963 to be included in a proposed publication honouring the late Professor T. F. Meilwraith. Because of various circumstances, the publication of the volume was not realized.

is separated from Stratum I by a thick deposit of sterile to semi-sterile sand. This second stratum is dark to light brown in colour and lacks European trade items. The artifact content was sparse relative to strata I and III and appears to reflect a much shorter period of occupation. Stratum III is separated from Stratum II by a thick sterile to semi-sterile layer of sand, as was the case with strata I and II. And, as with Stratum I, this deposit is of a dense black colour and represents a major occupation level. A charcoal sample collected by Dr. J. N. Emerson from Stratum III and submitted by the writer gave a reading of A.D. 962 ± 80 (GSC-85).

The Upper Beach area was excavated by removing the thick overburden and laying out a 5-foot grid over the exposed first stratum. Each stratum was excavated as a single level. Despite the separating lens of sand, a small amount of admixture between the strata is apparent. This is particularly true for the northern portion of the excavation where the three strata pinch together. Recognition of mixture in the sample has been limited to a small number of rim sherds found in Stratum I, which belong to the same vessels as do sherds found in Stratum III. Stratigraphic information and radiocarbon dates from other sites will be presented as evidence for the assignment of these sherds to the earliest occupation layer.

STRATUM I

There is a possibility that some of the white trade goods attributed to this stratum are actually later in time than the associated aboriginal complex. A highly organic and fibrous mat, approximately one-quarter inch in thickness, covered the top of the deposit. A number of trade items were found in or on the surface of this old duff line, whereas the aboriginal materials occurred directly below it in the black sand. Most of the trade goods, however, were in direct association with artifacts of native manufacture. As has been suggested by Quimby (1961: 88-89), this stratum is probably attributable to a historic Ojibwa group who occupied the mouth of the Pic River at approximately A.D. 1700. Definite correlations between an archaeological assemblage and the historic Algonkian speakers of the Northeast are extremely rare, although the Pic River site appears to represent a fortunate exception. Quimby's statement (1961: 89), however, that "The Chippewa are such a vast group it is likely that significant cultural differences will be found among the tribal components," should be heeded.

TRADE GOODS

An abundance and wide variety of white trade items, of both English and French manufacture, were recovered from Stratum I. Table 1 presents the occurrence and varieties of trade goods.

TABLE 1
OCCURRENCE OF HISTORIC TRADE GOODS

Items	f	%
Beads	1,156	86.6
Lead shot	70	5.2
Cut-up copper kettle fragments	24	1.8
Metal bangles	17	1.2
Gunflints	9	.7
Kaolin pipe fragments	6	.4
Metal triangles	5	.3
Lead strips	5	.3
Metal triangular pendants	4	.3
Iron strips	4	.3
Musket balls	3	.2
Ferrules for ramrods (?)	3	.2
Glass fragments	3	.2
Metal wire	3	.2
Buttons	3	.2
Brass tacks	3	.2
China fragments	2	.2
Iron fishhooks	2	.2
Metal finger rings	2	.2
Handwrought iron nails	2	.2
Clasp knife	1	.1
Projectile point made from trade kettle	1	.1
Iron needle with eye-hole	1	.1
Metal bell	1	.1
Iron strike-a-light	1	.1
Iron awl	1	.1
Woven copper fabric	1	.1
Iron chisel	1	.1
Ivory comb	1	.1
TOTALS	1,335	100.0

Beads (Plate II, fig. 27)

Five form classes of trade beads were encountered in the Upper Beach excavation. Most common were the small seed beads, which are fairly consistently 3 mm in diameter and range from 2 mm to 3 mm in length. Several larger seed beads, 4 mm in diameter and from 3 mm to 5 mm in length were found. Cylindrical beads were consistently 3 mm in diameter but ranged from 5 mm to 10 mm in length with a mean of 9.0 mm. Elliptical or football-shaped beads were fairly common. Diameters ranged from 4 mm to 7 mm with a mean of 5.1 mm; length ranged from 7 mm to 11 mm with a mean of 8.6 mm. Large ovate beads, of which only four specimens were recovered, comprise the final class of beads. These specimens ranged from 8 mm to 10 mm in diameter and from 6 mm to 10 mm in length with respective means of 9.0 mm and 8.0 mm.

Table 2 gives the frequencies of the five classes of beads as well as the frequency of colour varieties found. Generally, the colour category was quite homogenous, although occasional variations were noted. This was particularly true for the colour 'blue.' The frequencies of the other historic items are given in Table 1.

TABLE 2
TRADE BEADS

Class	Colour	f	%
Small Seed	White	711	61.5
	Blue	303	26.2
	Red	35	3.0
	Green	17	1.5
	Black	9	.8
	Yellow	1	.1
Large Seed	White with red stripes	1	.1
	White	2	.2
	Blue	1	.1
Cylindrical	White	41	3.5
	Blue	2	.2
	Green	1	.1
Elliptical	White	16	1.4
	Black	4	.3
	White with brown stripes	4	.3
	Yellow	3	.3
	Red	1	.1
Large Ovate	Black	3	.3
	White	1	.1
TOTALS		1,156	100.1

Lead Shot (Plate II, fig. 15)

Lead shot ranged from 3 mm to 6 mm in diameter with a mean of 3.8 mm. Most of the shot was either 3 mm or 5 mm in diameter.

Cut-up Copper Kettle Fragments

Numerous fragments cut from copper kettles were found in the stratum. The fragments tend to be rectangular in shape, and it would appear that such strips represent the waste product from the manufacture of bangles, arrowheads, and other such items.

Metal Bangles (Plate II, figs. 34-36)

Metal bangles, which probably decorated clothing, were fairly common. Thirteen specimens were manufactured from copper kettle strips, and the remainder were made from strips of iron. One of the copper specimens possessed a wooden plug, and when this was removed, a blue bead was found at the apex of the cone. All the bangles were markedly conical in shape and ranged from 13 mm to 58 mm in length with a mean of 26.5 mm, and basal diameters ranged from 3 mm to 17 mm with a mean of 5.6 mm.

Kaolin Pipe Fragments (Plate II, fig. 23)

Three stem fragments and two bowl fragments of kaolin pipes were recovered. No markings were visible on any of the fragments.

Metal Triangles (Plate II, fig. 33)

Five triangular objects, cut from trade kettle copper, were found. In every case the apex of the triangle had been cut off, suggesting that they did not function as arrowheads. They may have been attached to clothing as decoration.

PLATE II

STRATUM I

Fig.

- 1-4 —Blackduck rims
- 5, 7 —Michigan rims
- 6 —Selkirk rim
- 8 —Triangular projectile point
- 9 —Notched projectile point
- 10 —End scraper
- 11 —Side scraper
- 12, 13 —Small tools
- 14 —Pottery gaming disc
- 15 —Lead shot
- 16 —Lead musket balls
- 17 —Tubular bone bead
- 18 —Etched bone tool
- 19 —English gunflint
- 20 —French gunflint

Fig.

- 21 —Native copper fishhook
- 22 —Iron fishhook
- 23 —Kaolin pipe stem
- 24 —Bone bangle
- 25 —Native copper knife
- 26 —Iron strike-a-light
- 27 —Trade beads
- 28 —Silver button or buckle
- 29 —Projectile point made from copper kettle
- 30 —Ramrod ferrule (?)
- 31 —French clasp knife
- 32 —Silver alloy triangular pendant
- 33 —Triangle made from copper kettle
- 34-36 —Bangles made from copper kettle

