

# Bellamy: A Late Historic Ojibwa Habitation

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*By the end of the 18th century southwestern Ontario was occupied mainly by a large Native population, along with a few British military posts and a scattering of recently settled Loyalists. One Native group settled in the area at that time was the Ojibwa. Bellamy, occupied by an Ojibwa community around 1790, is the first late historic habitation site of this group to have been purposefully excavated in the Great Lakes region. Data recovered reflects a material culture consisting largely of European goods that both historical and archaeological evidence suggests had been incorporated into a traditional way of life characterized by a highly variable seasonal round. However, by 1830 massive changes, caused by large-scale European immigration and changing British administration policies, were to radically alter this lifestyle. Thus the Bellamy site documents a period of Ojibwa history just prior to drastic cultural changes.*

## Historical Sketch

When the French first came to the Great Lakes in the 17th century, they encountered bands of Algonquian-speaking peoples surrounding the great fishing place of Sault Sainte Marie. In historical sources, various of these bands have been called the Mississauga, Saulteaux, and Chippewa; Ojibwa is the collective name preferred by modern ethnographers. These Ojibwa bands, who subsisted largely through hunting, gathering and fishing, occupied the Canadian Shield to the north of Lakes Superior and Huron. Their precise range in late prehistoric times, however, has been a matter of controversy among archaeologists and anthropologists, some believing ethnicity can be deduced from potsherds, others trusting the maps of Frenchmen who never left their easy chairs in Paris. Fortunately, this debate need not concern us here.

During the first half of the 17th century, southern Ontario was inhabited by the Huron, Neutral and Petun tribes, who, unlike the Ojibwa, derived a large part of their subsistence from corn horticulture and lived in semi-permanent villages. By the 1650s, however, these tribes had been dispersed through warfare and disease. Southern Ontario then became something of a no man's land, save for about a half-dozen villages established by the Five Nations Iroquois along the north shore of Lake Ontario.

In the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the Ojibwa of central northern Ontario began a remarkable expansion, ultimately pushing west to

Lake of the Woods and northern Minnesota, and to the southeast where they spread over much of southern Ontario. Ojibwa bands, typically consisting of several hundred persons, established themselves by the lakes of southeastern Ontario, along the Lake Huron shore, and in the St. Clair River delta (Rogers 1978; Ritzenthaler 1978).

Archaeology has shown that the land around Lake St. Clair was heavily occupied in late prehistoric times by people of the "Younge tradition," variously identified as being Central Algonquian or Iroquoian. Before AD 1600, however, this area was largely abandoned, and it was not reoccupied until the 1700s. French visitors of the 1670s and 80s, such as Hennepin, Tonti, Galinee and Lahontan who passed through Lake St. Clair, reported no Native villages, although they remarked on the attractiveness of the country for settlement (Lajeunesse 1960).

That picture changed in 1701 when the French built Fort Pontchartrain at Detroit. Several tribes, including the Potawatomi, Wyandot and Ottawa, quickly established separate villages near the fort. Presumably these tribes were attracted by the protection a nearby French fort could offer, as well as by a ready access to European trade goods.

In 1703 Antoine Lamothe Cadillac, commander of the fort, reported that a new group had arrived:

"... the Sauteurs and Mississaguez (came this year) forming another village on this river. These two tribes have united and incorporated (themselves) with one another..." (Lajeunesse 1960: 23).

It is not clear exactly where this composite Ojibwa group was first established, but according to a report of 1718 they were then living at the St. Clair delta:

"Twelve leagues from Fort Detroit, always going up the river, you will find the Misisague Indians, who occupy a beautiful Island where they raise their crops. They are about 60 or 80 men. Their language resembles that of the (Ottawa); there is very little difference between them. Their customs are the same, and they are very industrious" (Lajeunesse 1960: 25-26).

The location of this settlement was likely on or very near Walpole Island since Charlevoix's account of 1721 indicates that it was on the eastern side of the delta:

Britain for the manufacture of trade goods is a policy that has also been documented for the 1820s from both military sites and Native domestic sites in southern Ontario (Kenyon and Ferris 1984: 39). This knowledge can be useful in identifying other Ojibwa sites that have only meagre surface collections since white pipe fragments are one of the few visible artifacts on such sites. The third T.D. spur is unusual in that the bottom is cross-hatched (Fig.

6, No. 4). No other site or historic pipe collection reviewed so far contain similar specimens. It is possible that this hatching is particular to a limited firm and period, which may help to tightly date the site.

A total of 193 beads were found at Bellamy (Table 4). Except for the 36 beads recovered during the hands-and-knees survey — all but two of which are white — all beads were recovered through flota-

TABLE 3  
Silver Artifacts  
(measurements in cms)

	Length	Width	Diameter	Context
Ear Bob	2.90 (bob: 1.23)	.48 (ball)	1.48 (wire)	Fea 2
Ear Bob (no bob)	—	.57 (ball)	1.42 (wire)	"
Ring	1.29	.76	2.04	"
Ring brooch & Pin	1.28 (pin)	—	1.30	Fea 1
Ring brooch	Fragment	—	—	Fea 2
Ring brooch	—	—	1.26	"
Pin from Ring brooch	1.16	—	—	"
Pin from Ring brooch	1.21	—	—	"
Moulding	1.20	—	—	Fea 1

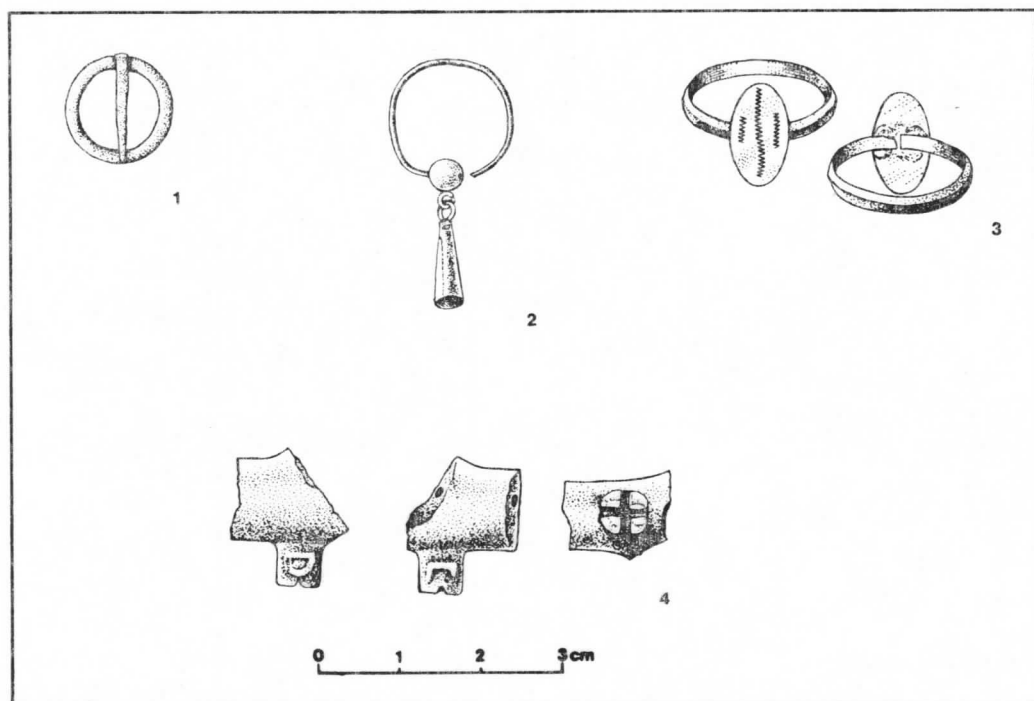


Fig. 6

Silver Artifacts and T.D. Pipe Spur. 1. Silver brooch. 2. Silver ear bob. 3. Silver ring (front and back view). 4. T.D. pipe fragment with spur (view of two sides and bottom, showing cross-hatching).

tion. Exactly 160 of the beads were manufactured from glass, while the other 33 were machine-cut wampum. The dominant glass bead form was sub-cylindrical in shape and white in colour, measuring 1.5 to 3.5 mm in diameter. Beads of this size were normally used in embroidery work; examples of which can be seen in several late 18th and early 19th century ethnographic collections (cf Phillips 1984). A few black glass beads of similar shape and size were also recovered. In addition to the shell wampum, there was "imitation" wampum of white, blue and black glass. These beads are similar in size and colour to shell wampum, typically measuring 2.5 to 3 mm in diameter and 5 to 7 mm in length. All the shell wampum, and a great deal of the glass imitations, were found in Feature 2 (Table 4), which suggests that these beads are related to a single deposit. Finally, a few wire-wound ovoid beads (i.e. "barleycorns") of white, dark green and turquoise coloured glass were recovered which measured from 3.2 to 3.8 mm in width and from 5.4 and 7 mm in length.

Similar assemblages of glass beads have been excavated from numerous late 18th and early 19th century sites throughout the Great Lakes. Such sites include two 1802-03 trading posts in Wisconsin (Oerichbauer 1982); the Fletcher cemetery in Michigan (Mainfort 1979); Mohawk Village on the Grand River, Ontario (Kenyon and Ferris 1984); and from Wray's "Early Reservation Era"

(1779-1820) Seneca sites in western New York (Wray 1983).

Other personal item artifacts from Bellamy include three metal buttons, two of which were gilt-made. The third button was a "cut-out," made from sheet metal. This manufacturing practise was largely discontinued in Europe shortly after 1800 (Ferris 1984: 3). Half of a hawk bell, as well as brass and metal (tinned?) tinkling cones were also recovered (Fig. 7, Nos. 1-3; Table 5). The latter were used as bangles on everything from leggings to pouches to headbands (Phillips 1984). Finally, a jew's harp was recovered from Feature 1 (Fig. 7, No. 4). These musical instruments were quite popular with both Natives and Europeans throughout most of the historic period.

Utilitarian items recovered include metal wrought nails ("rose-heads"), wire-topped pins, two pairs of scissors, and a fire-steel (Fig. 7, Table 5). Also found was a portion of a whetstone. Specimens related to firearms included lead artifacts such as 31 pieces of shot and two musketballs, and small strips of lead waste (Table 6). Lead wasting is a sure indication of musketball manufacture and this was probably done in an activity area around Feature 2 considering the concentration of wasting in that feature. A brass gun ferrule, used to hold a musket's ramrod, also was found on the site (Fig. 7, No. 7).

Six gunflints were found (not including four from

TABLE 4  
Glass Beads and Wampum  
(Bead types based on the Kidd and Kidd 1970)

	F.1	Feature 2			F.8	Sur.	Total
		PZ	2A	2B			
Drawn Glass:							
White cylindrical (Ia5)	1	—	—	1	—	2	4
Blue cylindrical (Ia18)	—	—	1	2	—	1	4
Black cylindrical (Ia2)	2	1	1	12	—	—	16
White subcyl. (IIa13/14)	13	13	29	34	3	32	124
Blue round (IIa52)	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Black round (IIa6)	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Subtotal	17	14	31	50	3	35	150
Wound Glass:							
White ovoid (WIc1)	—	1	1	2	—	—	4
Turquoise ovoid (WIc8)	—	—	—	1	—	1	2
Dark Green ovoid (WIc*)	—	1	2	1	—	—	4
Subtotal	—	2	3	4	—	1	10
Shell (Wampum):							
Purple cylindrical	—	2	3	28	—	—	33
Total:	17	18	37	82	3	36	193

period of occupation appears to be late spring-early summer. Bellamy's function was as a late spring base camp, the inhabitants arriving there to clear and plant their corn fields, while at the same time exploiting resources in the vicinity. The poor representation of mid-summer plant resources, such as raspberry and blueberry seeds, suggests that these people, for the most part, abandoned the site during the summer. Presumably the site was occupied once again during autumn to harvest the crop. This is not inconsistent with the ethnohistoric pattern presented earlier. It is quite possible that a few individuals remained at the site over the summer period, or even that it was visited briefly during the winter months. If this is the case however, their presence on the site during these "off periods" has yet to be detected.

## Conclusions

It is readily apparent from the site findings that European goods had been fully integrated into an Ojibwa way of life — accepted as more efficient tools in the practice of a traditional subsistence strategy. However, at the time Bellamy was occupied, circa 1790, the ethnohistoric and archaeological data suggest that these items were not altering an Ojibwa world view or way of life. Resources exploited and the related seasonal cycle maintained indicate a pattern of behaviour not unlike that seen for prehistoric groups in this area. While the Ojibwa of southwestern Ontario were no less reliant on European goods than any European living in the region at that time, traditional hunting practices and weaponry were still well known amongst the Ojibwa by 1796 (Weld 1799). The significance of the Bellamy site is that no more than half a century after its occupation the way of life reflected there was largely given up for European agricultural practises. Future, larger-scale investigations at the Bellamy site should provide even further insight into this complex and challenging period of Ontario historic Native domestic site archaeology.

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