

INDIAN HILLS (33W04): A PROTOHISTORIC ASSISTAERONON VILLAGE
IN THE MAUMEE RIVER VALLEY OF NORTHWESTERN OHIO

David M. Stothers

ABSTRACT

The Indian Hills site is a very late protohistoric village, radiocarbon dated to A.D. 1610, that is the type site for the Indian Hills phase of the Sandusky Tradition. It is suggested, in part on the basis of similarities of the shell tempered ceramic assemblages at Indian Hills and the Hamilton site in the Niagara peninsula of Ontario, that the Indian Hills phase may represent the enigmatic Assistaeronon who are reported to have been at war with the Neutral Indians during the protohistoric period.

The Sandusky Tradition connects the prehistoric and later protohistoric archaeological assemblages of the region and indicates a developing cultural continuum into early historic times.

The integration of the archaeological data from the west ends of Lake Erie and Ontario with the ethnohistoric information derived from early maps and documentation strongly suggests that the Indian Hills site, and the other components of this phase, represents the historic Assistaeronon (Mascouten), while the Whittlesey tradition, in the region of the south central Lake Erie shore, probably represents the Ontarraronon (Kickapoo), two very closely associated central Algonquian groups of the early historic period.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Hills site (33W04) is a large (ca. 10 acre) late protohistoric village which has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places for the State of Ohio. This site (which is still in the process of being excavated, mapped, and evaluated) is on the east side of the Maumee River in northwestern Ohio and connects the historic and prehistoric time periods for one of the two known cultural traditions in the region of the western Lake Erie drainage basin—an unprecedented discovery. In fact, until recently one of the few certainties of archaeological research in northern Ohio and Michigan has been that the direct historical approach (Steward 1942), a standard method for deriving prehistoric-historic continuity, seemingly could not be used (Brose 1971:59).

This paper will present research information which pertains to: (1) a description of the Indian Hills site location, and a history of the excavation research undertaken there, (2) the placement and interpretation of this village and its cultural remains within a cultural-historical reconstruction of the prehistoric-historic continuum for the region of northcentral Ohio and the western Lake Erie basin, and (3) the ethnic identity of the population who inhabited this village.

Stothers, David M.

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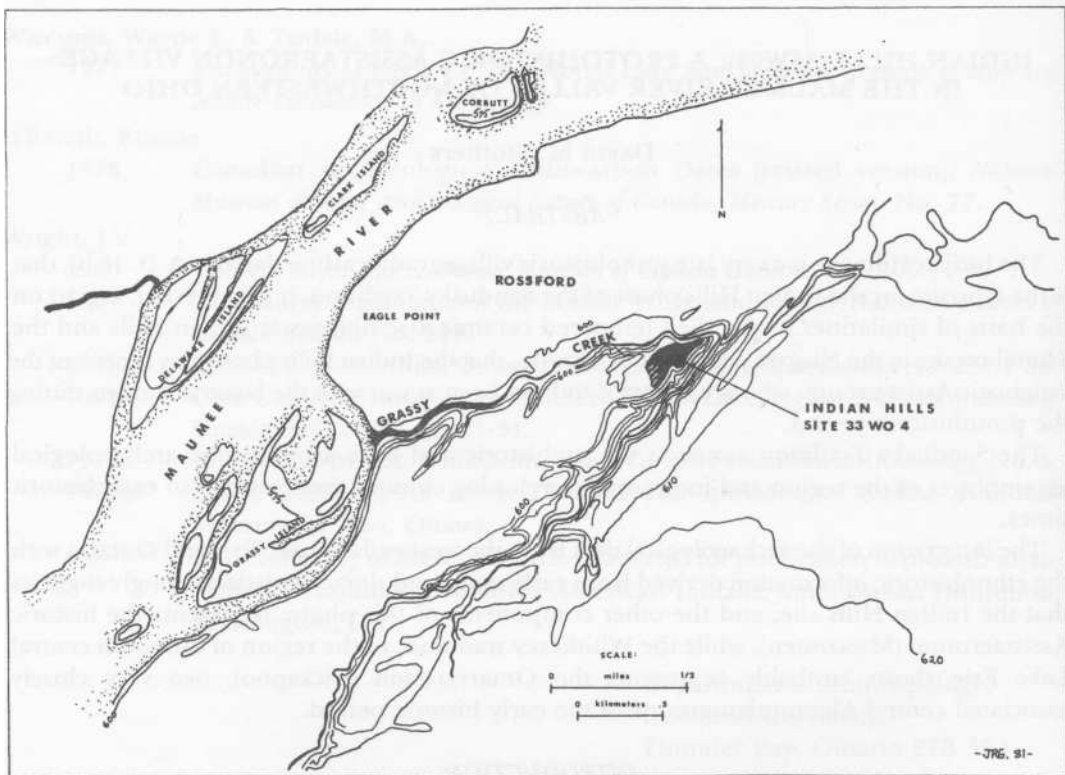


Fig. 1. Topography of the Area Surrounding the Indian Hills Site.

*THE INDIAN HILLS SITE:
LOCATION, SETTLEMENT PATTERN, AND EXCAVATION HISTORY*

The Indian Hills site is located on a high plateau promontory overlooking the juncture of Grassy Creek and the Maumee River in northwestern Ohio (Prahl 1969:33; Tucker 1980:2-5). This site consists of a village area of about 10 acres enclosed by a double and sometimes triple palisade (Graves 1981), beyond which the topography drops precipitously for some 25 feet to the creek bed below (Fig. 1). The site topography is similar to that of many Whittlesey "forts" (Whittlesey 1877), as well as to several Ontario Iroquois sites (Emerson 1954; Wright 1966). As in several Whittlesey sites, the Indian Hills site exhibits four parallel earthen embankments in the only area which provides easy access to the site area on the promontory. Excavation has revealed that the palisade meets the eastern and western ends of these earthen embankments. Recent investigation could find no evidence of palisade posts, either on top of or between these embankments, although several lines of evidence indicate that these structures (Fig. 2) served the purpose of defense by directing and restricting access into the village interior (Stothers 1980:4). Within the village, circular habitation structures (ca. 4.5-7.5 metre diameter) associated with daub fragments seem to be arranged around the inside perimeter of the stockade (Stothers and Pratt 1980:12; Graves 1981), while there is some evidence of an unoccupied, plaza-like area in the central portion of the village enclosure (Stothers and Pratt 1980:12, Graves 1981:152). As of this date, four ossuaries, each containing 25-35 individuals (Becker 1972; Prahl 1969) have been recovered. Three of these ossuaries were located outside the palisade on the narrowest and eastern-most end of the site promontory (Figs 1 and 2) while the fourth was located in the south central portion of the village just inside the palisade.

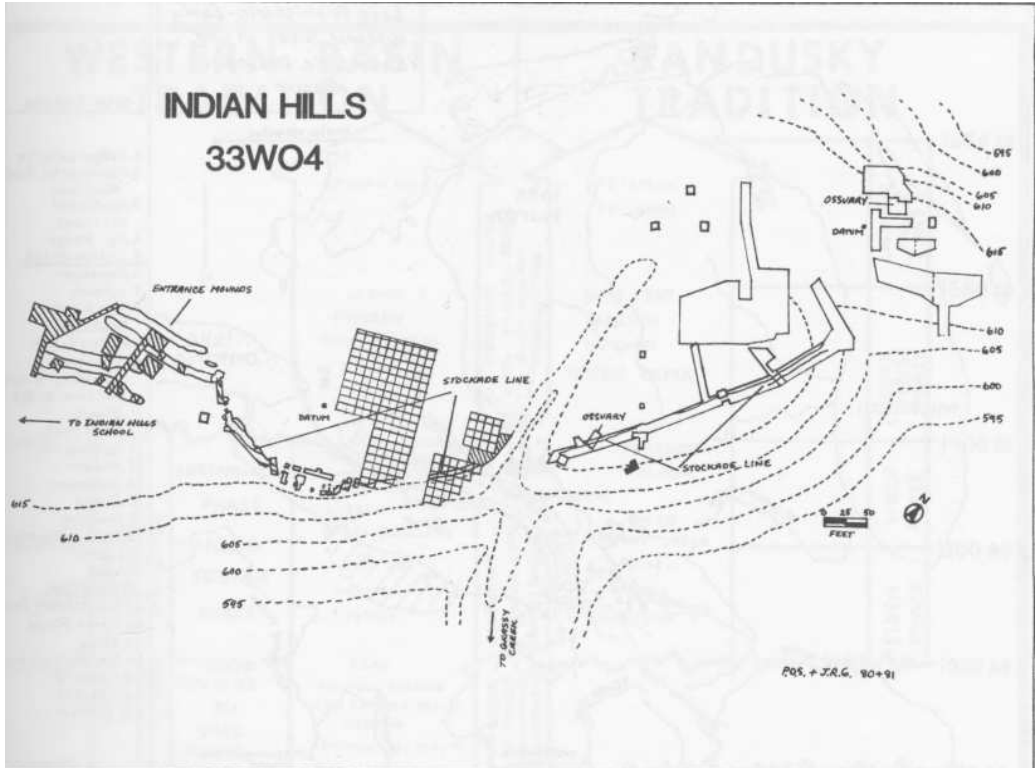


Fig. 2. Excavation Plan Overview.

Although this site has been known for many years by local residents of northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan (Tucker 1980:14-16), it was not until 1963 that any serious interest was exhibited in this site. That year some young boys discovered an ossuary, which Stanley R. Walters (the founding president of the Toledo Area Aboriginal Research Society, Inc.) learned of and tried to rescue by notifying The University of Toledo and the Ohio Historical Society. Unfortunately, Mr. Walters and local police officials were unable to control local residents who scavenged and looted this ossuary before a professional excavation could be undertaken. However, despite this drawback, most of the skeletal material from this ossuary was recovered and a report published (Becker 1972).

It was not until 1967 when the first extensive and professional excavations were undertaken at Indian Hills. Under the direction of Earl J. Prahl (staff archaeologist at The University of Toledo) a total of 47,190 square feet were excavated in 1967 and 1968. During this time, some 800 ft. of palisade were uncovered along the southern boundary of the site which bordered Grassy Creek (Figs 1 and 2). This was to be the first professional excavation ever undertaken in northwestern Ohio.

With no background information about the culture history of northwestern Ohio (because of total lack of previous excavation research), Earl Prahl had no cultural-historical framework or comparative cultural assemblages with which to evaluate the Indian Hills cultural assemblage and/or place this site in a relative, historical time framework. His uncertainty about the cultural-historical placement of the Indian Hills site is reflected in his only published statement about Indian Hills (Prahl 1969) before he left northwestern Ohio (c.f. Tucker 1980: 145-146).

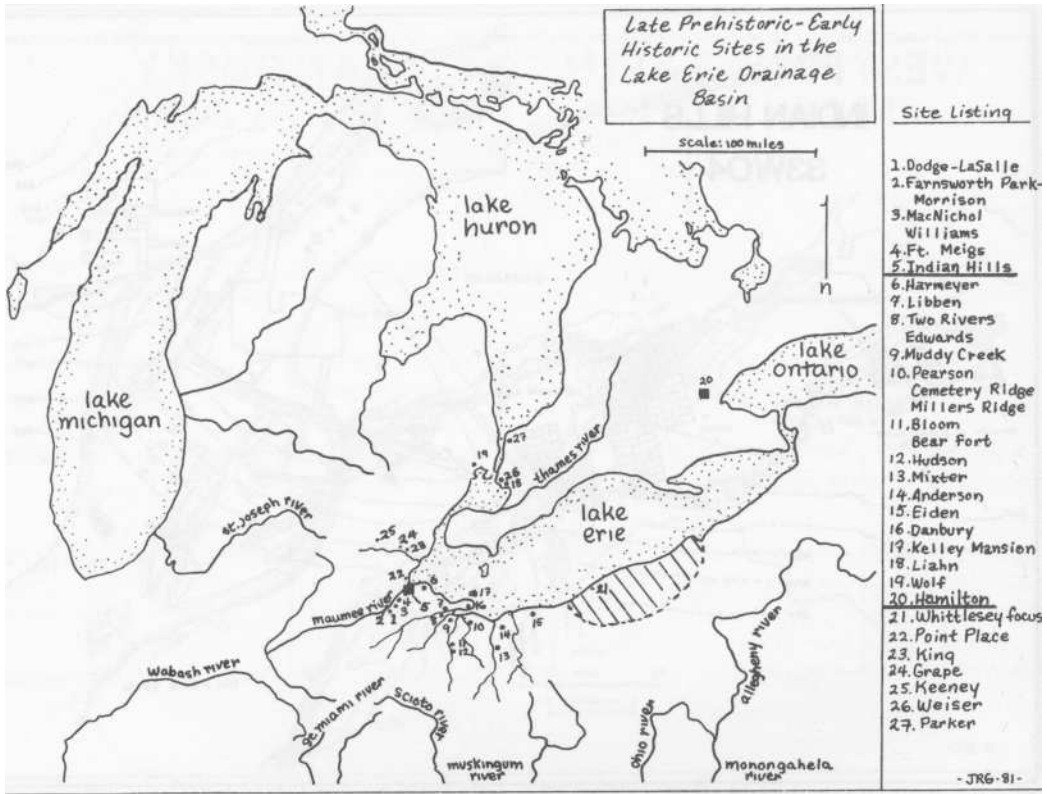


Fig. 3. Late Prehistoric-Early Historic Sites in the Lake Erie. Drainage Basin.

Prahl assumed that the Indian Hills site was prehistoric and dated to about 1100 A.D. (Prahl 1969:35), and while both grit and shell tempered ceramic sherds were recovered in a mixed context, he did not recognize that all of the grit tempered ceramics came from a single area of the site (the east end of the site promontory; the area where three of the ossuaries have been located; c.f. Tucker 1980:54-68). It was this area which produced radiocarbon dates of A.D. 710, 890 and 1110 (Stothers 1973). The remainder of the site produced shell tempered ceramics which displayed motifs and techniques which were radically different from the grit tempered Woodland ceramics which are now understood to represent earlier components of the Riviere au Vase, and Younge-Springwells phases of the Late Woodland Younge sequence (Fitting 1965) of the Western Basin Tradition (Stothers 1975a, 1979; Tucker 1980:54-68). The historic trade goods and the date of A.D. 1610 \pm 100 (M-2268) which were derived from a sealed feature (Stothers 1973:33; Stothers and Pratt 1980:12; Tucker 1980:152-163; Pratt 1981:153) were believed by Prahl to represent a small scattering of historic trade materials which had no connection to the main Indian Hills occupation.

It was not until later, when in 1979 G. Michael Pratt and David M. Stothers began to reconsider the relationships of radiocarbon dated sites which produced shell tempered ceramics in the Maumee River Valley and their relationship to similar sites in the region of Sandusky Bay (Fig. 3), that the cultural and temporal placement of the Indian Hills site began to become better understood. After reviewing numerous private and institutional collections; after undertaking cooperative and integrated research work with Orrin C. Shane and Jonathan Bowen, who have contributed significantly (Shane 1967a 1967b, 1976; Stothers, Pratt and Shane 1979; Bowen 1978, 1979, 1980) to the understanding of northcentral Ohio's prehistory;

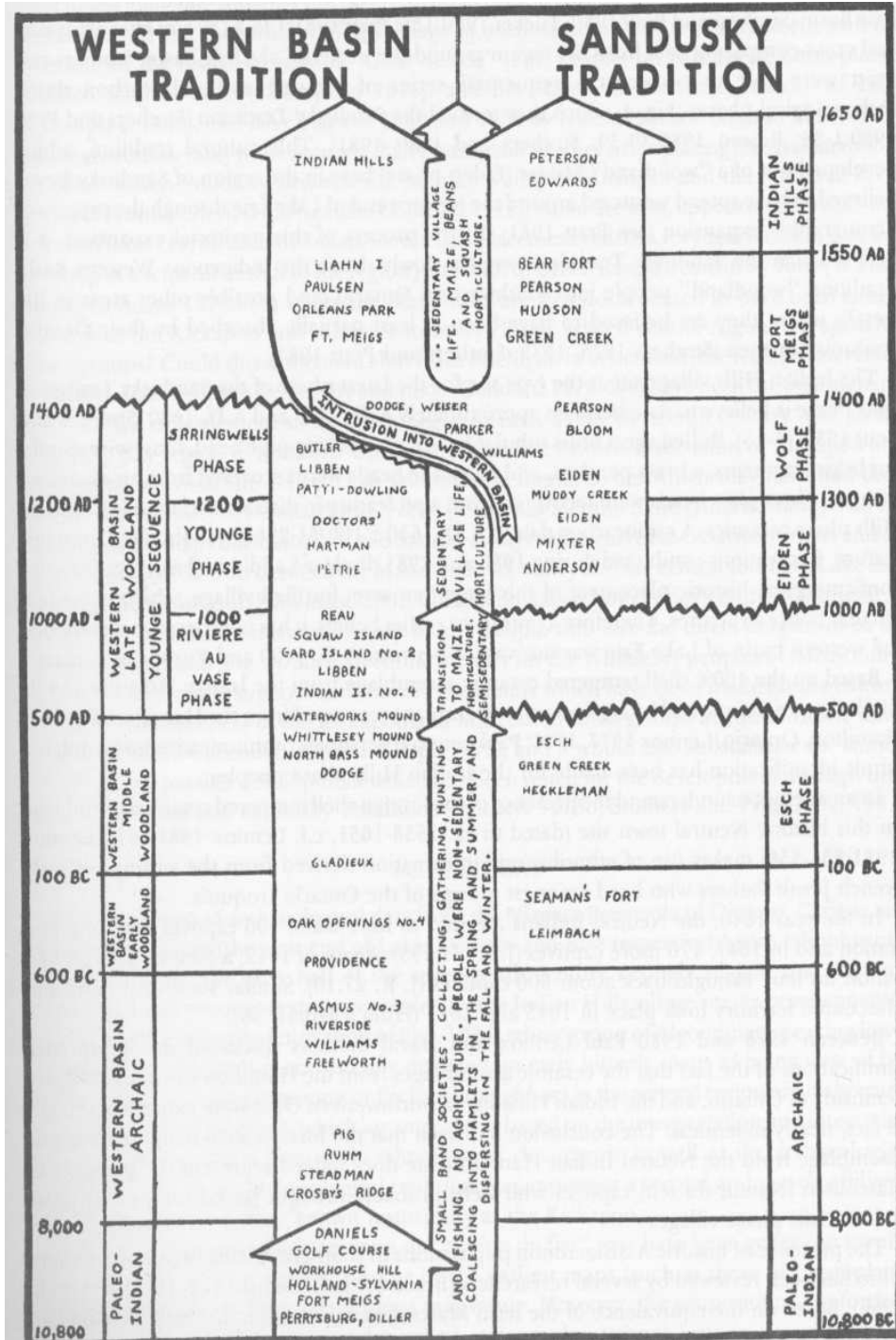


Fig. 4 Culture Chronology of the Western Lake Erie Region.

after constructing a radiocarbon dated cultural chronology for the region of the western Lake Erie Basin (Stothers and Pratt 1980; Tucker 1980:156; Pratt 1981:125-173); and after analyzing and cross-comparing data from the region around the western Lake Erie basin, Stothers and Pratt were able to construct a sequential series of seriated and radiocarbon dated archaeological phases (Fig. 4) which they termed the Sandusky Tradition (Stothers and Pratt 1980:1-38; Bowen 1980:39-59; Stothers and Pratt 1981). This cultural tradition, which developed out of a "woodland" Mixer (Eiden phase) base in the region of Sandusky Bay is believed to have spread westward around the western end of Lake Erie through the process of demographic expansion (see Pratt 1981). In the process of this territorial expansion, it is believed that the Sandusky Tradition peoples slowly drove the indigenous Western Basin Tradition "woodland" people into southwestern Ontario (and possibly other areas to the west?), where they are believed to have been at least partially absorbed by their Ontario Iroquois kinsmen (Stothers 1975, 1979; Stothers and Pratt 1981).

The Indian Hills village site is the type site for the latest phase of the Sandusky Tradition. This phase is believed to date between approximately A.D. 1550 and A.D. 1650 (Stothers and Pratt 1980:11-13). Rolled sheet brass tubular beads, a brass hair-pipe bead, brass wire spirals, cut brass fragments, a brass pendant, and five trade beads were recovered from an excavated context. Three glass beads were recovered from a pit feature in direct association with Indian Hills phase ceramics. A radiocarbon date of A.D. 1610 \pm 100 (M-2268) was obtained from this feature. Excavations conducted during 1980 and 1981 disclosed additional early trade items, confirming the historic placement of this large (ten-acre) fortified village, which contained circular house structures. Therefore, contrary to earlier beliefs, it has now become evident that the western basin of Lake Erie was not vacant between A.D. 1400 and European contact.

Based on the 100% shell tempered ceramic assemblage from the Indian Hills site and its similarity to a unique and foreign ceramic assemblage recovered from the Hamilton site, near Hamilton, Ontario (Lennox 1977, 1981; Paul Lennox, personal communication), a postulated ethnic identification has been made for the Indian Hills phase peoples.

In an attempt to understand the presence of the foreign shell tempered ceramic assemblage on this historic Neutral town site (dated to ca. 1638-1651, c.f. Lennox 1981:361), Lennox (1981:351-358) makes use of ethnohistoric information derived from the writings of early French Jesuit Fathers who lived amongst groups of the Ontario Iroquois.

In the year 1640, the Neutral Indians are said to have taken 100 captives from the Fire Nation and in 1641, 170 more captives (J. R. 21:195). Again in 1642, a Neutral raid on "La nation du feu" brought back about 800 captives (J. R. 27:10). Similar successful raids into Mascouten territory took place in 1643 and 1644 (Hunt 1940:51, 96).

Between 1978 and 1980 Paul Lennox and David Stothers discussed the interpretive ramifications of the fact that the ceramic assemblages from the Hamilton site in the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, and the Indian Hills site in northwestern Ohio were extremely similar, in fact, nearly identical. The conclusion has been that the foreign shell tempered ceramic assemblage from the Neutral Indian Hamilton site does indeed represent the presence of Mascouten (Nation du feu) captives who were probably brought back from one or more Indian Hills phase villages.

The presence of historic Assistaeronon populations in southern Michigan or northwestern Ohio has been reviewed by several researchers (Brose 1971; Goddard 1972, 1978; Wakefield 1966). Based on the equivalence of the term Mascouten for "Nation du feu" (see Goddard 1978:671) and Assistaeronon in Father Potier's Huron grammar (Potier 1920), and by utilizing locations on several early historic maps of the lower Great Lakes (Champlain 1616, 1632; Sanson 1650, 1656) pertaining to the Assistaeronon/Mascouten or "Fire Nation," I have

concluded that the Indian Hills site represents the terminal expression of the Sandusky Tradition and that the location of this village in northwestern Ohio is in agreement with the location for the Assistaeronon or "Gens de feu" (Fire People) on Samuel de Champlain's untitled map of 1616 (Champlain 1616), and his "Carte de Nouvelle France" of 1632 (Champlain 1632). The later maps of 1650 and 1656 by Nicolas Sanson (Sanson 1650, 1656) which are considerably more accurate than Champlain's earlier maps placing the Assistaeronons or "Fire Nation" midway between the Saginaw Valley of Michigan and the Maumee River Valley of Northwestern Ohio (see also Goddard 1972), but to the west, approximately mid-way between lakes Huron and Michigan. Could this placement reflect a very real location that was one step in a settlement shift to the region just south of Green Bay, Wisconsin by 1666 (W.H .C. 16:41; Goddard 1978:668) where the Mascouten are well documented to have been closely allied with the Kickapoo and Miami, two other closely related central Algonquin speaking tribal groups? Could this settlement shift from Michigan to Wisconsin (the result of increased New York State Iroquois bellicosity and raids: Goddard 1978:668) have been the final step in a long process of settlement shifts which began as early as the thirteenth century A.D. in the Sandusky Bay region of northern Ohio? Does that late historic association of Kickapoo and Mascouten in Wisconsin reflect close cultural and linguistic ties which may have had their origins in prehistory? Presumably so. Potier (1920) has identified the Ontarraronon, who are located on the maps of Champlain and Sanson always to the east of the Assistaeronons and on the 1656 map of Sanson between the Maumee River Valley and the central southern Lake Erie shore, as the Kickapoo. If this association/translation, taken from Potier's Huron Grammar, is correct, the historic Ontarraronon may be the people who are the direct outgrowth of the Whittlesey tradition (Fig. 3). Such an ethnic identity for the Whittlesey peoples of northcentral Ohio would certainly support and confirm the claims which have been made for the cultural and linguistic closeness of the Kickapoo and Mascouten tribal groups in ethnohistoric times (Goddard 1978: Callender, Pope and Pope 1978), and it would also substantiate the similar closeness and parallel development which has been noted for the development through time of the Whittlesey and Sandusky Traditions (Stothers 1975b; Stothers and Pratt 1980, 1981).

CONCLUSIONS

The integration of archaeological data from the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, Canada and northwestern Ohio (the west end of Lakes Ontario and Erie respectively) with ethnohistoric documents from the early half of the seventeenth century strongly suggest that terminal Sandusky Tradition peoples (as represented by the Indian Hills village site) may very possibly represent the "Nation du feu/Nation of Fire." This ethnic group of Algonquian speaking lower Great Lakes aboriginals is consistently depicted on early historic maps as being west of but contiguous to their Ontarraronon or Kickapoo neighbors in the general region of northcentral Ohio. For reasons put forth (which are once again based on the interpretation and integration of information derived from early ethnohistoric documents as well as the archaeological record) the Whittlesey archaeological tradition may represent a second and closely affiliated Algonquian speaking tribe known historically as the Kickapoo.

While the appellation Assistaeronon or "Nation du feu" may have been generic in nature, and given the distorted nature of some of the earliest maps (such as those of Champlain), skepticism concerning these conclusions may ensue. However, the propositions put forth in this treatise are based on interpretations of cartography, (ethno) historic documents and accounts, and an integration of information from recent archaeological investigations at nearly contemporaneous proto-contact and contact aboriginal Indian town sites located at the western

ends of Lakes Erie and Ontario. When the conjunctive approach (Taylor 1948) is undertaken with regard to these independent bodies of data, a conclusion can be arrived at which is the most probable alternative among other possibilities. However, given the ongoing and incomplete research in both areas, the conclusions and propositions advanced herein should be viewed as hypotheses to be tested by future research.

Through the use of the "direct historical approach" (Steward 1942) and the "conjunctive approach" (Taylor 1948), archaeological and ethnohistoric information are found to be mutually supporting and enhancing, thus lending credibility to historic and prehistoric interpretations of aboriginal culture history.

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Laboratory of Ethnoarchaeology
The University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio 4306