

## AMONG MARSHES AND GNEISS MOUNDS: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LA VASE ISLAND

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*In 1995, Archaeological Services Inc. carried out limited test excavations at the mouth of the La Vase River, on the eastern shore of Lake Nipissing in the City of North Bay. The primary objective of these investigations was to locate the remains of a small, circa 1800-1820 trade post operated by Eustache LaRonde at the terminus of a portage route, while at the same time providing hands-on volunteer opportunities in archaeology for the public. These investigations not only confirmed the presence of a late eighteenth to early nineteenth century habitation, but also yielded evidence for along sequence of activity at the river mouth, one which began at least as early as circa A.D. 600.*

### INTRODUCTION: LAKE NIPISSING'S PLACE IN EARLY TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

While the La Vase River, or Riviere des Vases, is a relatively minor watercourse, it assumed considerable importance in precontact and historic travel between the Ottawa River watershed and the Great Lakes drainage (Figure 1). From Lake Nipissing, travellers could proceed down the French River to Georgian Bay on Lake Huron and thence to the rest of the Great Lakes. By going up the Sturgeon River, on the other hand, they could strike out for the northern interior, ultimately reaching James Bay. From Montreal, the Ottawa - Mattawa - Nipissing - French River route to the upper Great Lakes was both shorter and less hazardous than travel via Lake Simcoe and the Severn River, or via lakes Ontario and Erie.

The pivotal location of Lake Nipissing with respect to these travel routes ensured that the Algonquian-speaking Nipissing (*Nipihsirini*) who inhabited its shores and hinterlands would play an important role in the extensive Great Lakes trade networks upon which the fur trade depended. By the early seventeenth

century, the exchange systems between the Nipissing, the Odawa of the Georgian Bay and Lake Huron coasts, the Ottawa Valley Algonquin, the Ojibwa bands along the north shore of Lake Superior, and the Cree of northcentral and northeastern Ontario, as well as the Huron and Petun in Simcoe County, were already well-established (e.g., Fox 1990b; Smith 1996:92-97 Trigger 1976:62-66). In the European-oriented fur trade that was to develop subsequently, the Nipissing continued to play an important intermediary role between the Huron and the more northerly groups. The French trader Jean Nicollet de Belleborne found the Nipissing's position within this network sufficiently advantageous that he remained based in one of their settlements from 1620 to 1629 (Thwaites 1896-1901:18: 229-231). The pressures exerted upon the Huron and their Algonquian allies by the League Iroquois incursions of the 1640s and 1650s, however, forced the Nipissing to flee northwest to Lake Nipigon. Although many ultimately returned to their homelands, they remained a comparatively dispersed people, whose settlement patterns became increasingly oriented towards the Ottawa Valley and the Montreal area (Day 1978:789). During the eighteenth century the Lake Nipissing region was also occupied by Ojibwa groups (the ancestors of today's Dokis and Nipissing First Nations), which had begun to expand south and east from the Upper Great Lakes.

Despite the disruptions caused by the conflicts between the French, British and the various Aboriginal nations, the existence of the fur trade continued to depend upon the communication and exchange networks that had evolved prior to the contact period, although the importance of specific travel routes waxed and waned according to circumstances. While Lake Nipissing was an important link in many of these routes, the presence of European traders in the region remained comparatively limited, since the government of New France,

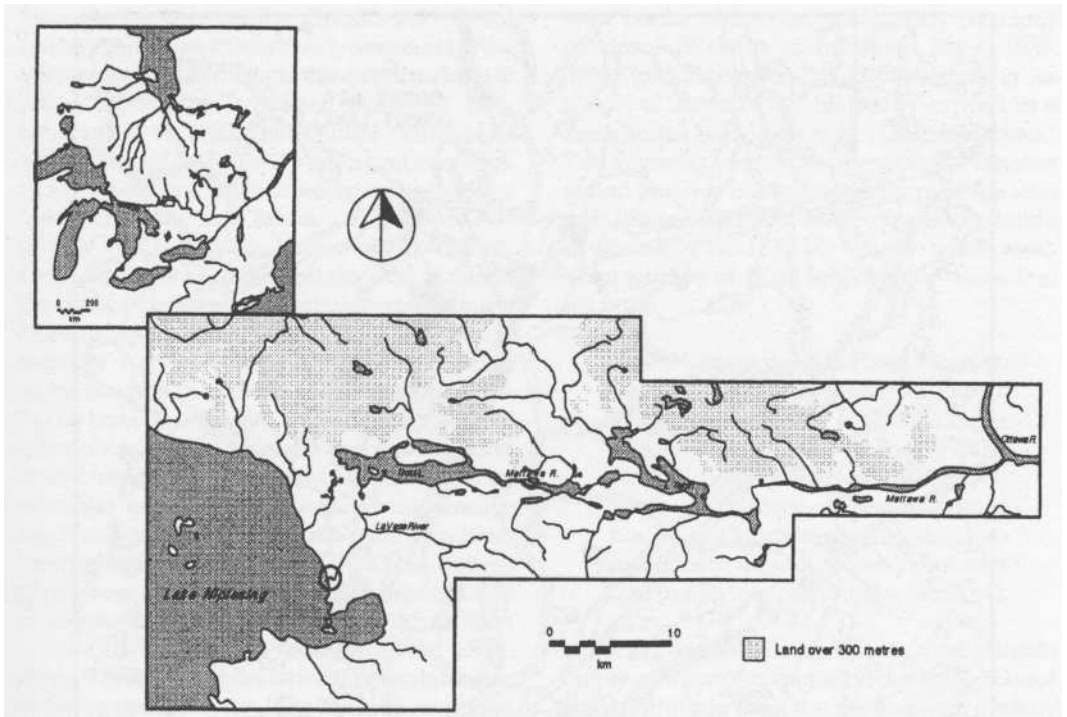


Figure 1. The Location of the **La Vase Island Site**, Relative to Lake Nipissing, and the Mattawa and **Ottawa** Rivers

under pressure from the Montreal merchants, seldom granted licences to inland traders for the Terniskarning, Nipissing and Ottawa areas, not that this necessarily prevented unlicensed trading activities on the part of independent "pedlars" or even the agents of the very same Montreal merchants. Rather, it was expected that the furs would be brought directly to Montreal by the Nipissing and Algonquin themselves, an arrangement that both the Montreal merchants and the Nipissing generally seem to have regarded as advantageous (Morrison 1992:17-19).

With the end of the French regime following the British conquest of New France, the monopolies of the established Montreal merchants began to crumble. Inland trading could be undertaken by any British subject, provided that they obtained a licence. In 1777, Alexander Henry and John Chinn received a licence for Lake Nipissing, which entitled them to outfit five men with one canoe, three "battoes," £800 worth of trade goods, 80 gallons of rum or brandy and 40 gallons of wine. Ten years later, Francois Dumoulin and Silvain Laurent were permitted to dispatch three canoes loaded with

£700 in goods to Lake Nipissing (Morrison 1992:19-20). It was also in the late eighteenth century that the name of LaRonde became increasingly associated with independent trading activities in the Lake Nipissing area.

### THE LA VASE PORTAGES AND EUSTACHE LARONDE'S POST ON LAKE NIPISSING

Traversing the La Vase route required negotiating three difficult portages (Figure 2). The very name of the river serves to emphasize the challenges it presented. Vase may be translated from French as "mire," while Joschkeewanicamingue, the mid-nineteenth century Ojibway name for the river, and for one of the three portages (Stewart and Shanley 1858), loosely translates as "place where the earth is slippery." From its northern terminus at Trout Lake (the headwaters of the Mattawa River), the La Vase route passes through bare rock ridges and shallow till characteristic of the Precambrian Shield via a series of small ponds. Crossing the rather modest height of

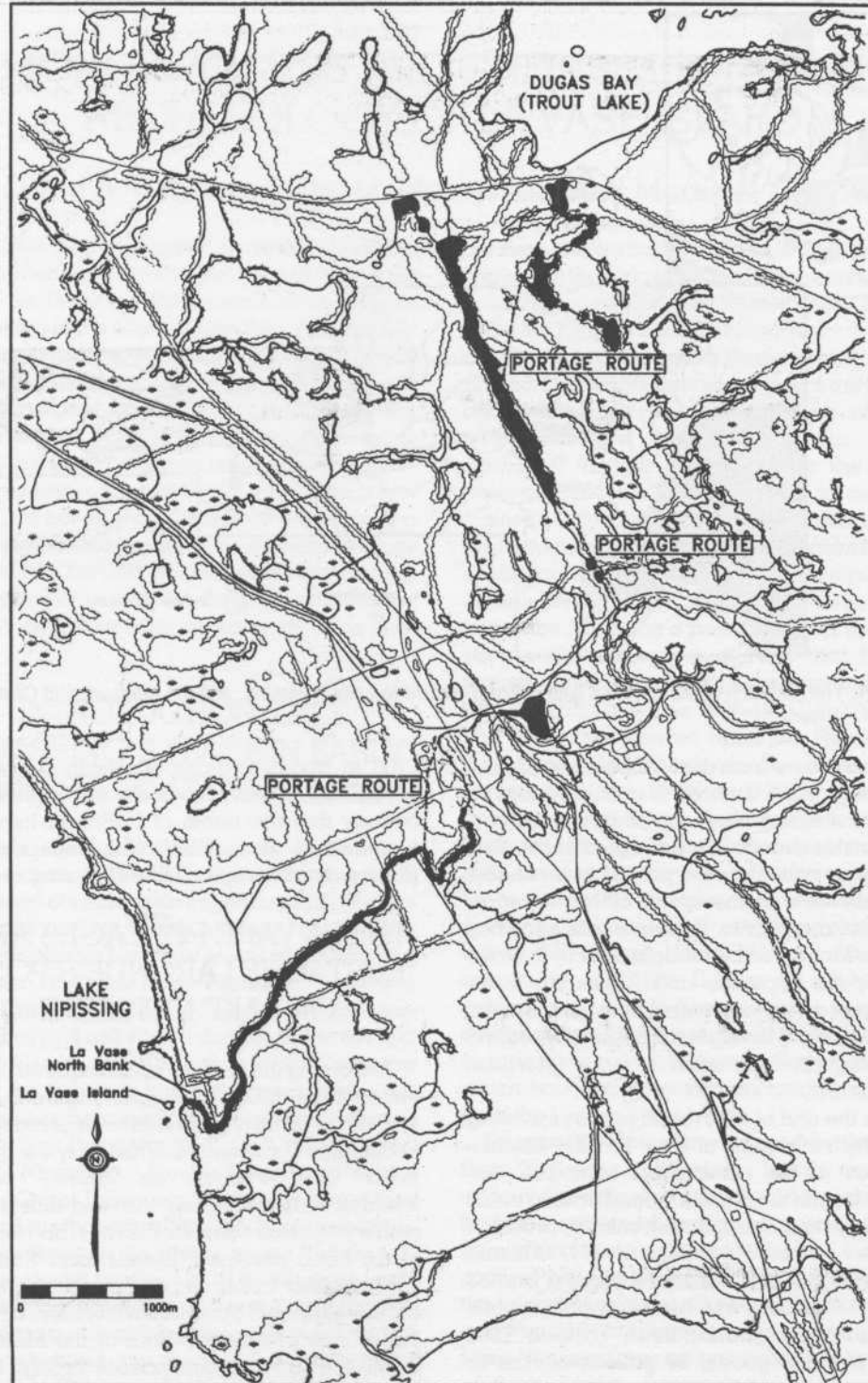


Figure 2. La Vase River Portage Route Between Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing (adapted from 1:20,000 scale Ontario base mapping)

land that separates the Ottawa and Great Lakes drainages, it then slowly descends to the sand plain that surrounds the eastern shore of Lake Nipissing. Travellers such as John MacDonell, in 1793, and Daniel Harmon, in 1800, referred to the river mouth and shoreline area, which was dominated by an open burr oak and white pine forest, as a "meadow" (Gates [ed.] 1965:82; Haskel [ed.] 1922:8). Further upriver lay a dynamic mosaic of mixed deciduous-coniferous forests, marshes, slough forests, and beaver ponds. The activities of beavers appear to have greatly facilitated travel through the portages. Of his journey via the La Vase in 1761, Alexander Henry the Elder noted that "we saw many beaver houses and dams; and by breaking one of the dams we let off water enough to float our canoe down a small stream which would not otherwise have been navigable" (Quaife [ed.] 1923:30). Subsequent descriptions of the route, such as those of Alexander Mackenzie, in 1801, and Ross Cox, in 1817, further suggest that some of the dams were, in fact, deliberately maintained in order to minimize the length of the portages (Garvin [ed.] 1927:42; Stewart and Stewart [ed.s] 1957:295). It would also appear that some dams were tended by resident damkeepers (Stewart and Shanley 1858).

Upon achieving the southern terminus of the La Vase portage route, the traveller reached Lake Nipissing. Because it is shallow relative to its size, Lake Nipissing can be extremely unpredictable and treacherous for navigation. Given the rigours of the portages on the one hand, and the temperament of the lake on the other, the river mouth served as a natural stopping point for travellers through the ages. One individual, the fur trader Eustache LaRonde, appears to have settled at the mouth of the La Vase for more than a brief respite.

The search for LaRonde's post on the La Vase has long been a matter of local interest (e.g., Leatherdale 1975), although there are only a few references to his establishment in the primary sources (see Balmer and Campbell 1996; Morrison 1992; and Wright and Saunders 1980 for comprehensive reviews of travellers' accounts of the La Vase). The first description of the post was provided by Ross Cox who reported that while travelling eastward on the French River, in 1817, he had encountered "a free trader named LaRonde, on his way to Montreal, in a canoe with four-

teen packs of beaver, and nearly as many children" (Stewart and Stewart [ed.s] 1957:295). Cox further noted that upon reaching the mouth of the La Vase, his party "arrived at a snug house belonging to Mr. LaRonde's son." The following year, Father Joseph Provencher stated that this house on the shore of the lake was the residence of Mr. Eustache LaRonde (Nute [ed.] 1942:113-114). Finally, of his westward journey of 1819, John Bigsby wrote that his party:

embarked on the Vaz River, circulating slowly among rushes, reeds, cedars and hemlocks. After a six miles pull we entered Lake Nipissing at La Ronde, a post of the North West Company, a decent ordinary-looking house, not stockaded, with a potato - ground close to it, among marshes and gneiss mounds [Bigsby 1969:164].

Recent detailed research into the LaRonde family — which was active in the Upper Great Lakes fur trade from the seventeenth century onwards — suggests that Eustache LaRonde was the "country-born" son of Louis Denis de LaRonde et Thibaudière and Neouatjikijikoué, a woman from Lake Nipissing (Morrison 1992:21). Louis Denis, and his brother Charles Francois Denis, appear to have been active in the French River, Lake Temiskaming, Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing, and Lake Abitibi regions from the early 1780s onwards. The brothers were almost certainly operating a post on Lake Nipissing between 1790 and 1820, although its whereabouts prior to 1817 remain unknown (Mitchell 1977:38, 62; Morrison 1992:26). Cox's free trader on the French River, whom he identified as Eustache's father, is most likely to have been his uncle, Charles, who seems to have been based on Georgian Bay at the time (Morrison 1992:21).

Although Bigsby suggested that Eustache LaRonde's post belonged to the North West Company, it is perhaps more likely that LaRonde acted as an agent for the firm, rather than as one of its employees. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, members of the LaRonde family appear to have entered into business arrangements opportunistically, allying themselves with, and subsequently competing against, the North West and Hudson's Bay companies and other

independent business concerns.

By 1821, the accounts of travellers over the La Vase portage no longer mention the presence of the LaRonde post at the mouth of the river. The fact that 1821 also marked the amalgamation of the North West and Hudson's Bay companies may not be coincidental. The joint operations of the two companies on Lake Nipissing were managed by Toussaint de LaRonde (possibly a 'legitimate' son of Louis Denis, hence a half-brother to Eustache) from 1821 to 1824 (Morrison 1992:24, 27). It would appear that the post itself was moved to an island on the north shore of the lake — most probably Garden Island near the mouth of the Sturgeon River from whence it was relocated further upriver in 1848 (Balmer and Campbell 1996:30; Dibb and Sweetman 1995:6).

## THE 1995 EXCAVATIONS AT THE LA VASE ISLAND SITE

Along the sandy eastern shore of Lake Nipissing, the bedrock outcrop on the west side of a small island at the mouth of the La Vase stands out as a distinctive feature, marking the La Vase Island site as the most likely location of Eustache LaRonde's post set among 'gneiss mounds' (Figure 3). Today, the La Vase Island site (CbGu-5) lies 60 metres offshore, measures approximately one-third of a hectare in size and is occupied by a small cottage. Originally, however, the island formed a small point of land on the north side of the river mouth (Figure 4). Since the early twentieth century, Lake Nipissing's waters have been maintained at about 1.5 metres above their natural level between April and November, resulting in the seasonal inundation of much of the original site area and its burial beneath substantial quantities of lacustrine sands that are continually reworked by wave action. Artifacts have frequently been recovered from submerged deposits lying off the beach on the inland side of the island, to the northwest of the river channel. On the basis of cores extracted from this area, it would appear that this material is derived from primary deposits buried by the shifting sands (Patrick Julig, personal communication 1996).

Archaeological deposits are also present on the modern mainland, at the La Vase North Bank site (CbGu-1). While twentieth century landscaping has severely damaged much of

this portion of the site, 22 one-metre square units excavated in this area, in 1995, yielded precontact aboriginal material, mid to late nineteenth century artifacts, a possible hearth, and some structural debris, in the form of burnt daub (Cooper and Robertson 1996). The significance of this latter material is further explored below.

Together, the island, mainland and submerged archaeological deposits represent the vestiges of a series of short term occupations at the river mouth. The artifacts recovered from the island and mainland indicate that these occupations occurred over a 1,500 year period, beginning at least as early as the fifth or sixth century A.D. Investigations of the sites completed since 1995 by the City of North Bay, Laurentian University and Settlement Surveys Limited may reveal an even more lengthy history.

The 1995 investigations entailed the complete excavation of the A-horizon within 14 one-metre square test units and its partial excavation in one other case (Unit 309-400) on the level central part of the La Vase Island site to the east of the exposed bedrock outcrop (Figure 5 and 6). These excavations resulted in the documentation of 11 subsurface settlement features (five of which were not excavated due to their limited exposure) and the recovery of over 5,000 artifacts (Robertson 1996a).

In terms of site structure, the majority of the excavation units revealed the presence of a 15-30 cm thick stratum of homogeneous, refuse-laden soil, which has accumulated as a result of repeated use of the site. The soil profiles of the majority of the units consisted of a black organic A-horizon underlain by a B-horizon of sand or silt, or by bedrock (e.g., Figure 7a-b). As no significant stratigraphic distinctions were visually apparent within the A-horizon, this deposit was trowel-excavated at arbitrary five centimetre intervals and all finds were horizontally and vertically plotted on floor plans. The vertical distribution of prehistoric versus historic artifacts within the A-horizon indicates that this layer has undergone a fair degree of mixing over time. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the intensive and long-term use of the site.

Two units exhibited more complex stratigraphy. In one case (Unit 315-395), a deeply buried A-horizon, representing a former ground surface, was encountered (Figure 7c). The



Figure 3. Bedrock Along the Northwest Shore of La Vase Island: the only Significant Exposure in the Vicinity of the River Mouth

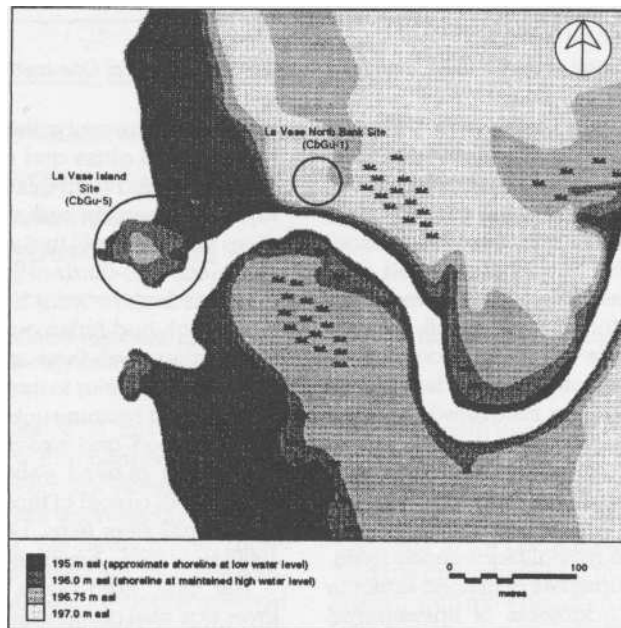
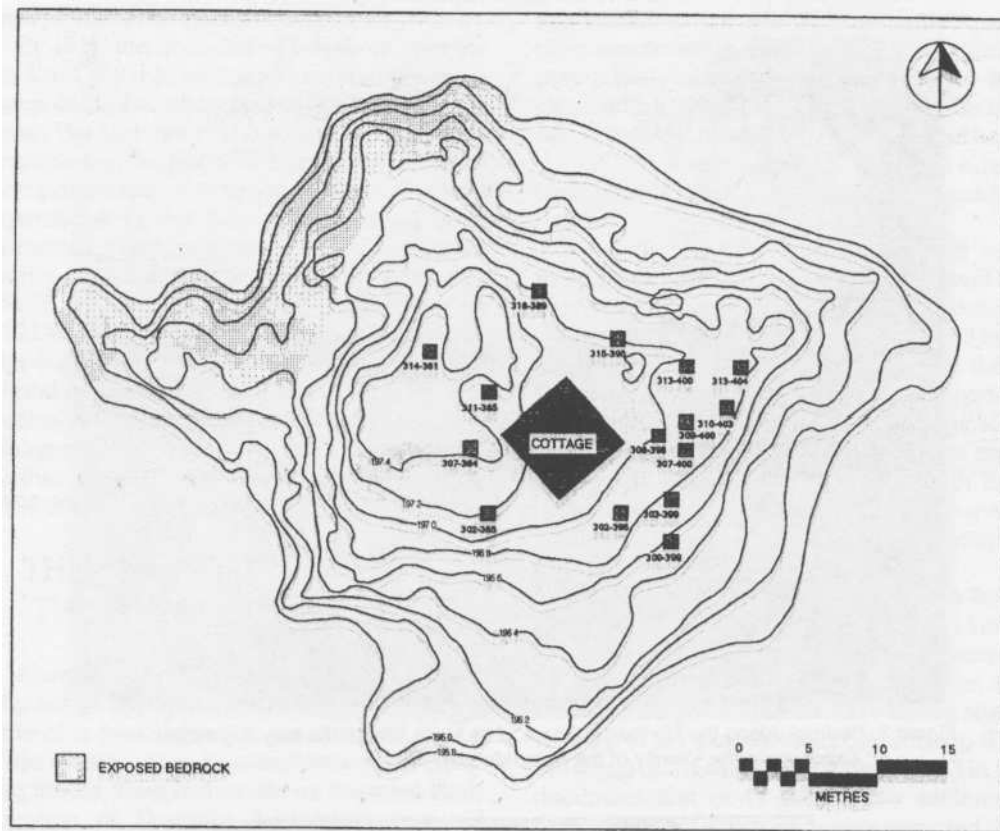


Figure 4. The Changing Appearance of the River Mouth Resulting From Modern Fluctuations in Water Levels. Adapted from Stewart and Shanley (1858), Clarke (1860) and Canadian Hydrographic Service (1987)



**Figure 5. The Topography of the La Vase Island Site and the Distribution of One-metre Test Units**

artifacts recovered from this paleosol, included the remains of a ceramic vessel dating to the late Middle Woodland period, circa A.D. 400 to 600. This vessel represents the earliest diagnostic material found during the 1995 season. A small pit (Feature 5) and associated post encountered at the interface between the paleosol and the underlying subsoil, may be related to the Middle Woodland occupation, however, no material other than a few pieces of fire-cracked rock was recovered from the feature.

The second unit (313-400) provided some of the most intriguing indications of the LaRonde occupation (Figure 7d). The uppermost layer of soil consisted of the typical black sandy loam, containing small quantities of historic artifacts and hundreds of fragments of untempered fired clay (Figure 8). This layer sat above a stratum of dense brown clay containing large quantities of fired clay, and large granite rocks. In excess of 12 litres of burnt clay frag

ments were present in this deposit. A few small fragments of glass and corroded metal were also recovered from this layer. The lowermost layer had been cut by the excavation of a large deep pit (Feature 6) that was partially exposed in the unit. Two-thirds of the artifacts recovered from this feature were hand wrought nails, a type which had fallen out of use by the 1830s, suggesting that they were derived from a structure built prior to that date. The function of this large pit remains unknown since it was not fully exposed and excavated, but it may be part of an in-filled cellar or large subfloor storage pit, typical of those found on many fur trade post sites (e.g., Dawson 1969; Arthurs 1980; Reid 1980; Karklins 1983).

The clay, fired daub, and granite rubble layer was also present as a substantial deposit in Unit 313-404, while daub fragments were recovered in secondary contexts in several other units (302-395, 308-398, and 310-403), as well as on the mainland at the La Vase North

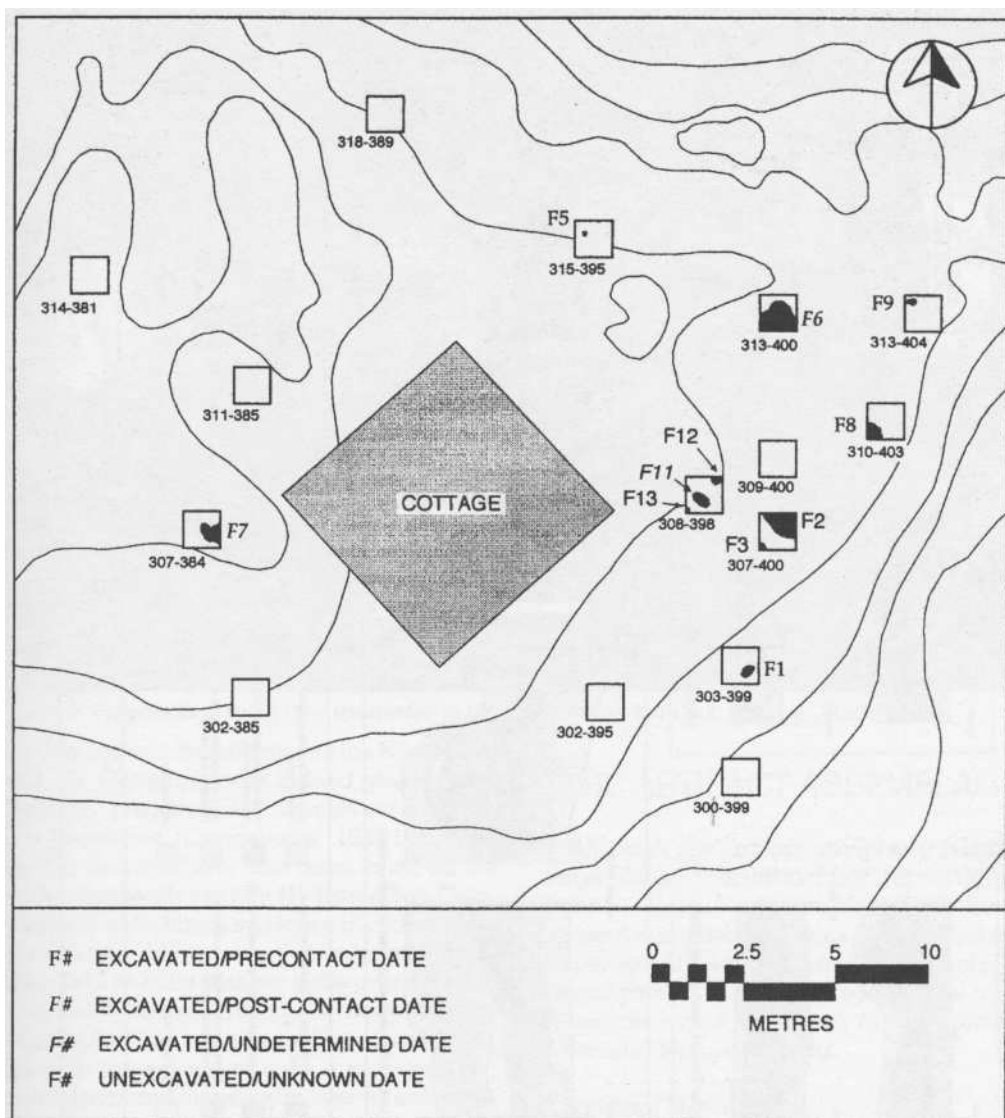


Figure 6. Settlement Patterns Revealed by the Test **Excavations**. Note that the A-horizon of Unit 309-400 was not completely excavated.

Bank site. This presence of this material is likely to be the result of the collapse and decay of a substantial architectural feature. Much of the fired clay preserves impressions of grass-like fibres and twigs. On many of the larger fragments, the impressions left by more sizeable branches or saplings are clearly oriented at right angles to one another, forming an interlaced or woven pattern. This strongly suggests the presence on the site of a structure made from a framework of wooden poles

plastered with mud. The construction of chimneys using this "wattle and daub" method was relatively common on early nineteenth century fur trade sites. In general, these were not intended to be permanent features, but they had the advantage that they could be erected quickly with materials that were ready to hand. The explorer David Thompson left an account of building a similar type of chimney at Bedford House in the Northwest territories during the winter of 1810-1811:





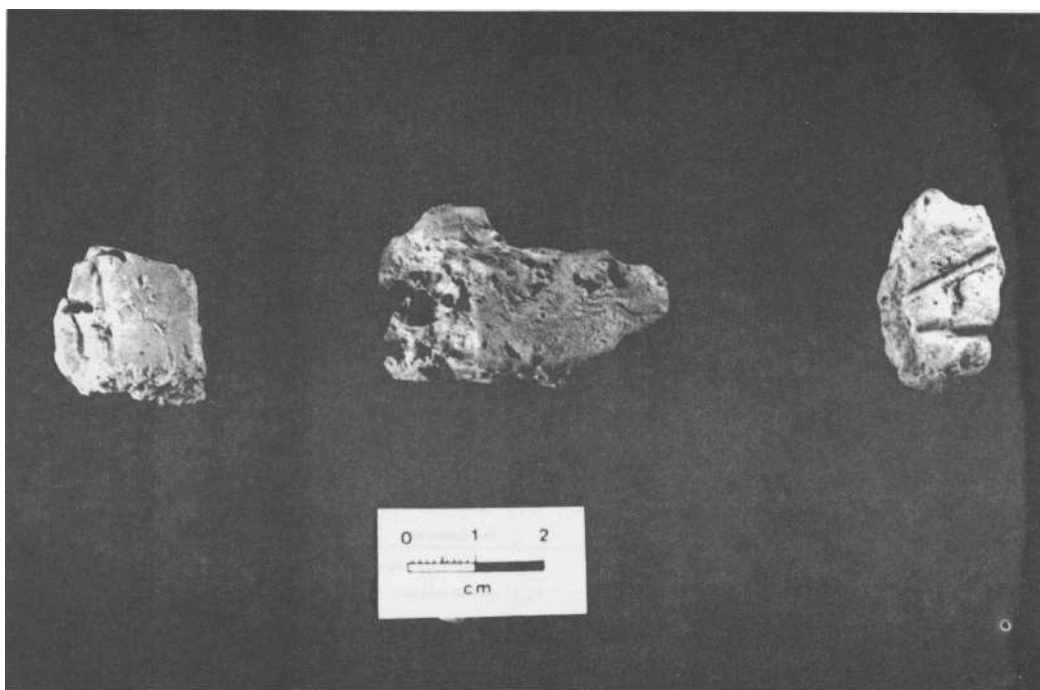


Figure 8. Fragments of Burnt Clay Interpreted to be from a Wattle and Daub Chimney Stack

archaeological investigation of the North West and XY Company post indeed yielded evidence for prepared clay mantles surrounding two fireplaces (Oerichbauer 1982:174, 180). Similar remains have also been found on the early nineteenth century Hudson's Bay Company site at Nottingham House (Karklins 1983: 41). Comparable construction techniques were also used to build exterior bake ovens (Noble 1984:92-94; Kenyon 1995:2, 3), however, it is unlikely that the decay of such a feature would result in the spread of such a massive clay, burnt daub and stone layer over as extensive an area as is indicated by Units 313-400 and 313-404.

Nine other subsurface settlement features were documented during the test excavations (Figure 6). In general, however, only those features that were fully exposed within a one-metre unit, or which were deemed to have exceptional interpretive value for the test excavations were excavated. Those features that were excavated include two Late Woodland refuse pits (Feature 1, Unit 303-399; Feature 8, Unit 310-403), a hearth of probable postcontact date (Feature 7, Unit 307-384), a refuse pit of undetermined date (Feature 11, Unit 308-398), and a small pit of presumed precontact date (Feature 9, Unit 313-404).

## THE ARTIFACT ASSEMBLAGE

Although the artifact sample is relatively large (Tables 1-2), the fact that it is not derived from contiguous units prohibits more than a general discussion, as does the fact that over 98 percent of the artifacts and 96 percent of the faunal sample was recovered from the mixed A-horizon rather than from more potentially "discrete" feature contexts.

### *Aboriginal Material*

**Ceramic Vessels.** The aboriginal ceramic vessel sample, consisting of a total of 1,058 sherds (Robertson 1996c), includes the late Middle Woodland vessel recovered from the buried paleosol in Unit 315-395. This collarless vessel (Figure 9b) has an outflaring rim with cord-roughened exterior and interior surfaces and lip motifs of cord-wrapped stick impressed obliques. Portions of a single transitional Middle-Late Woodland vessel (Figure 9c), dating between circa A.D. 700 and 900 (Fox 1990a) were also recovered from Unit 307-384. This collarless vessel has combed interior and exterior surfaces, and is decorated with exterior punctates and linear stamped obliques on

Table 1. Summary Data on the Precontact Period Artifact Assemblage.

		No	Comments
Middle Woodland Ceramic	Vessel Sherds		single vessel: collarless plain cord roughened interior & exterior, cord-wrapped stick impressed lip
	Rim Sherds	2	
	Rim Sherd Fragment	3	
	Shoulder Sherds	1	
	Body Sherds	14	
Transitional Woodland Ceramics	Vessel/ Sherds		single vessel: collarless, exterior punctates, combed interior & exterior, linear stamped lip
	Rim Sherds	2	
	Body Sherds	2	
Late Woodland Ceramics	Vessel Sherds		
	Rim Sherds	12	represent 9 analyzable vessels: 3 Sibley Notched 1 Warminster Crossed 1 High Collar 1 Pound Necked 1 Middleport Oblique (variant) 1 untyped 1 juvenile
	Rim Sherd Fragments	17	all from collared vessels
	Castellation Fragments	1	unanalyzable form
	Neck Shads	22	19 plain; 1 cord-roughened; 1 combed; 1 Incised horizontal decoration
	Neck/Shoulder Sherds	1	punctate decoration
	Shoulder Sherds	10	1 plain, 9 decorated: 4 have a single row of linear punctates; 1 has a band of incised obliques over a row of punctates; 1 has an incised horizontal over a row of punctates, 1 has multiple rows of incised horizontals; 1 has a band of incised verticals; 1 has a band of linear stamped oblique.
	Body Sherds	201	all plain
	Smoking Pipe Fragment		
	Bowl Fragments	2	1 coronet type; 1 trumpet type
	Stem Fragment	5	all plain, smoothed; 1 heavily ground & ochre encrusted
Unanalyzable Precontact Ceramics	Vessel/ Sherds		
	Fragmentary/Exfoliated	772	
Late Woodland Chipped Stone Tools	Complete Projectile Point	2	*1 projectile point expanding stem; blunt tip; shoulder tangs; basal thinning with straight base & rounded corners; bi-convex profile: convex blade; Balsam Lake Chert *1 projectile point; unifacially worked flake; contracting stem; base of stem is thinned and rounded; plano-convex profile: convex blade; unidentified chert
	Fragmentary Projectile Points	2	*1 side-notched projectile point base and medial section: bi-convex profile: crudely fashioned; Kettle Point chert *1 projectile point tip; Hudson Bay Lowland chert
Non-Diagnostic Chipped Stone Tools	Scrapers	3	*1 end scraper, steep unifacial retouch; Hudson Bay Lowland chert; thermally altered *1 end scraper, conc. on proximal end; Hudson Bay Lowland chert *1 side scraper, retouch on lateral edges; use wear on distal edge; formed on secondary knapping flake of Knife River flint
	Bifaces	2	*1 biface tip fragment unidentified chert *1 biface fragment portion unidentified; unidentified chert
Non-Diagnostic Chipped Stone Debitage	Bipolar Cores	3	
	Bipolar Flakes	4	
	Secondary Knapping Flakes	5	
	Secondary Retouch Flakes	11	
	Debitage/Shatter	117	
Late Woodland Ground Stone Pipe Fragments	Bowl Fragments	3	1 bulbous type; 2 unanalyzable lip fragments

Table 2. Summary Data on Selected Past-Contact Period Material

Artifact Type/Class	No	Comments
Architectural		
Window Glass Fragments	58	
Identifiable Nails	63	*13 hand-wrought (head forms incl. round & square flat, irregular L-shaped, & four-faceted varieties)* *38 machine-cut (c. 1630-1910) *34 wire (post c. 1910)
Plaster, Brick, Shingle Fragments	36	majority relate to existing cottage on site
Household		
Ceramic Sherds	69	*1 tin glazed coarse earthenware* *5 dark blue underglaze transfer-printed sherds (possible pearlware)* *56 mid-19th century refined white earthenware sherds (incl., hand-painted, stamped, coarse sponged, straight edge, red-purple, & blue underglaze transfer-printed) *3 late 19th century ware sherds (plain semi-porcelain & turquoise underglaze transfer-printed)
Bottle Glass Fragments	40	various colours; no analyzable fragments predate late 19th century
Bottle Closure Devices	13	all post-date c. 1890
Lamp Chimney Fragments	3	post c. 1880
Glass Tablewares	1	tumbler base fragment reworked into a scraper
Unanalyzable Glass Fragments	46	
Flowerpot Fragments	11	unglazed coarse buff or red earthenware
Tin Can Fragments	2	
Smoking Pipes		
Plain Bowl Fragments	36	
Unmarked Stem Fragments	111	
Marked Bowl and/or Spur Fragments	25	incl. 'TD', 'WG', & 'CW' with crown'
Furniture		
Cast Iron Swinging-Bale Type Handle Fragments*	2	from portable trunk (7)
Arms & Activities		
Glass Beads	61	see Table 4
Metal Ornaments	4	*1 openwork brooch fragment (punched or cut from thin silver sheet)* *1 flat silver fastening pin from annular brooch* *1 rolled & soldered tinkling cone (pewter or tinned brass)* *1 ear bob fragment (hollow silver sphere)*
Copper Scrap*	13	cut from kettles
Tin Scrap*	2	cut from kettles
Firearms	58	*52 lead shot *2 musket balls* *2 brass bullet cases (post c. 1880) *1 gunflint (dark grey English flint: prismatic blade: used as fire flint or strike-a-light)* *1 shotgun shell (modern)
Other		*1 pocket knife bolster* *1 cast brass Jew's Harp* *1 scissors blade fragment*

\*denotes items interpreted as related to the seventeenth to early nineteenth century occupations at the site, based on technological or stylistic attributes and/or stratigraphic provenience

Although the decorative motifs on the Late Woodland vessels have traditionally been regarded as most characteristic of the Iroquoian-speaking populations of southern Ontario, it is more likely that these pots were manufactured, used and discarded by the Algonquian-speaking Nipissing and their ancestors. The presence of these "Iroquoian" ceramics at the La Vase Island site, within an area recognized as having been inhabited by Algonquian-speaking peoples, highlights the need to re-evaluate assumptions concerning a direct link between ethnicity and material culture (von Gernet 1992:122-123, 1993:77). This is particularly so since the occurrence of such 'Iroquoian' material in northern Ontario is

comparatively common. Other ceramic assemblages from Lake Nipissing, such as those from the Frank Bay, Campbell Bay, and Frank Ridley sites, have proved to be predominantly "Iroquoian" (Ridley 1954:45-49; Brizinski 1980:52-62, 91-98, 151-168). Similar patterns have been found in many portions of the Canadian Shield — particularly in the Ottawa River Valley-Algonquin Park region, along the north shores of Lakes Huron and Superior, and on Lake Nipigon — as well as on sites scattered throughout the southern Hudson Bay Lowlands in Ontario and Quebec (Dawson 1979:14-21; Fox 1990b:463). Despite the abundant evidence of interaction and exchange between Algonquians and Iroquoians (Tooker 1991:25; Trigger

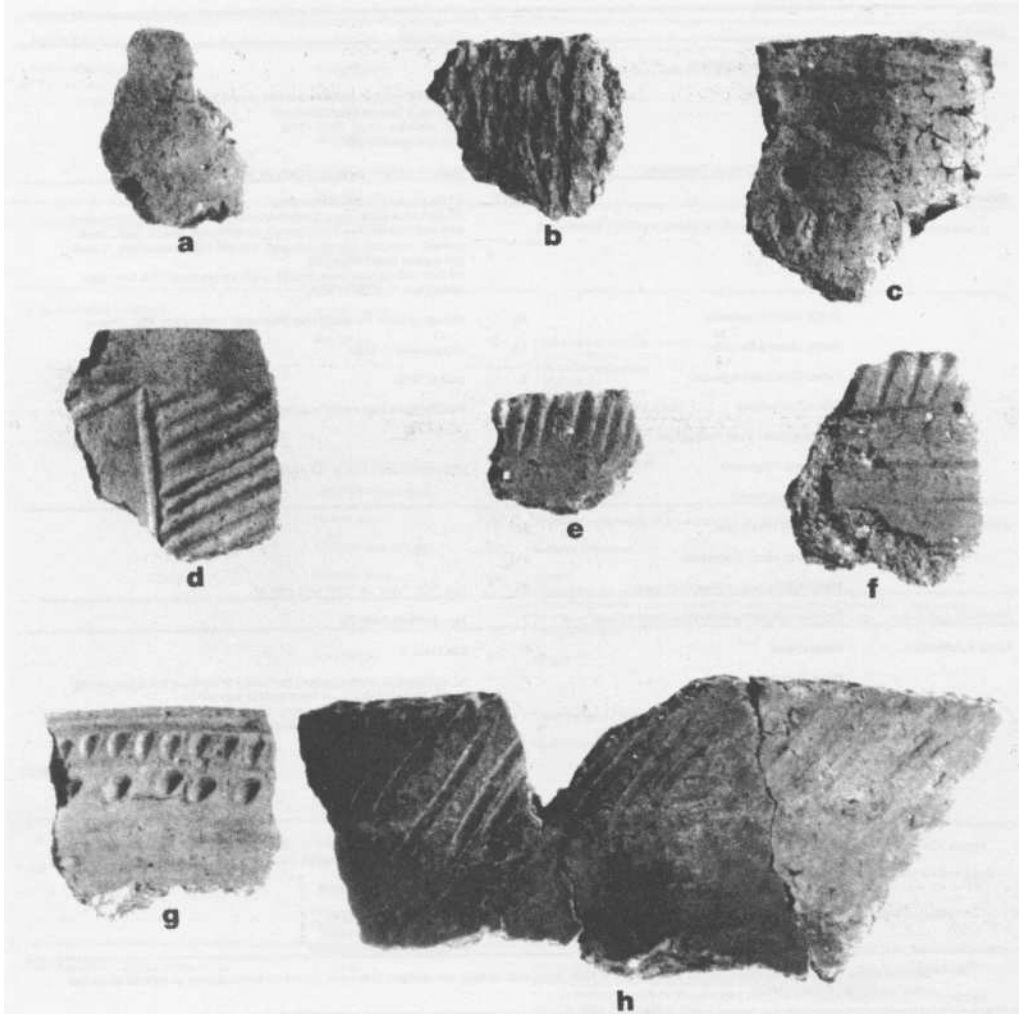


Figure 9. Precontact Period Ceramic Vessel Rim Sherds: Probable Late Woodland Juvenile Vessel (a), Middle Woodland Period Vessel (b), Transitional Middle to Late Woodland Period Vessel (c), High Collar Type Vessel (d), Sidey Notched Type Vessels (e, h), Middleport Oblique Type Variant Vessel (f), **Untyped** Vessel (g)

1976: 166-171), the occurrence of 'Iroquoian' ceramics on sites throughout much of northern Ontario cannot be explained simply on the basis of intermarriage, trade, or as a result of the movements of Iroquoian hunting parties (Dawson 1979:27). Rather, it underscores the fact that Iroquoians and Algonquians alike participated in a tradition of ceramic vessel manufacture that enjoyed comparatively widespread currency throughout much of the Northeast (e.g., Moreau et al. 1991:58; von Gernet 1992:122-123, 1993:77).

*Smoking Pipes.* Nine fragments of Late Woodland smoking pipes, made from ceramic and stone, were recovered. These include portions of a finely made and highly burnished ceramic coronet bowl decorated with incised horizontal and vertical motifs (Unit 303-399, Feature 1; Figure 10a) and a trumpet pipe decorated with incised horizontal elements (Figure 10b) that was recovered from the submerged portion of the site. The most interesting specimens, however, include one of the five ceramic stem fragments and one of the

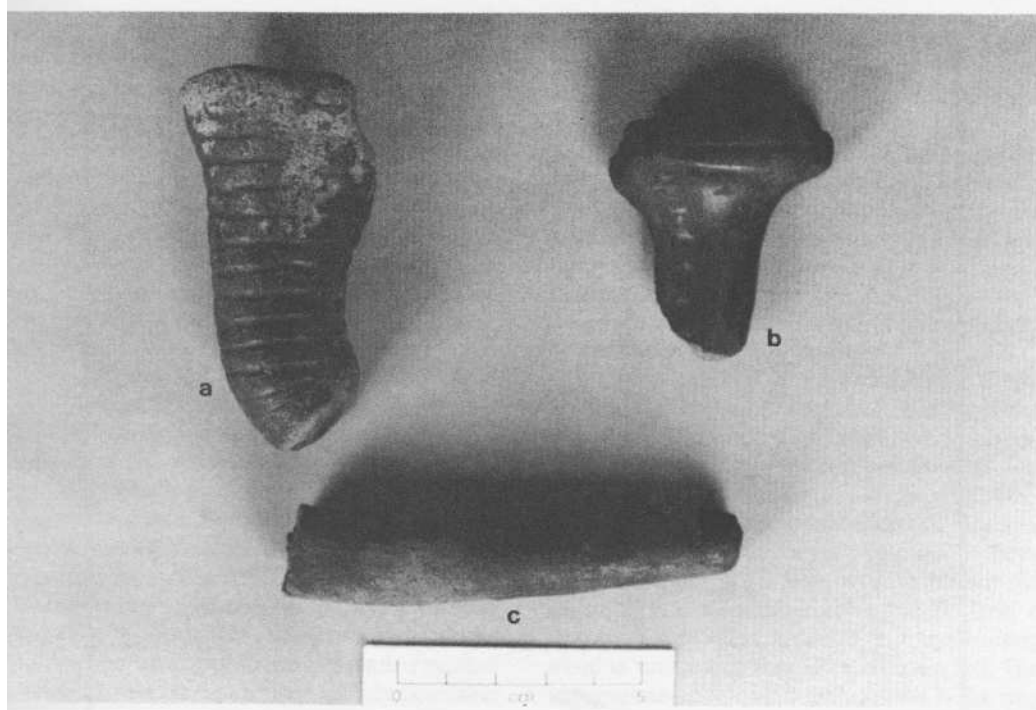


Figure 10. Late Woodland Ceramic Smoking Pipes: Coronet Pipe Bowl Fragment (a), Trumpet Pipe Bowl (b), Pipe Stem Encrusted With Red Ochre (c)

three ground stone bowl fragments.

The finely tempered ceramic pipe stem (Unit 303-399; Figure 10c), was originally highly burnished. Subsequently, however, the distal portion of the stem was heavily ground, resulting in the removal of the burnished surface from approximately two-thirds of its surviving length. This modification gives the piece a markedly asymmetrical appearance and seems to have occurred prior to the fracture at the elbow, as the edges of the break are neither chipped nor abraded. A thick, dark reddish-brown encrustation covers the burnished surface close to the mouth and extends over most of the stem's circumference. This encrustation, which appears to be red ochre mixed with an organic medium, is clearly not decorative. It is not a diluted slip or wash, which is a treatment that appears in minor frequencies on some Iroquoian sites in Simcoe County (e.g., Ridley 1952:209; Latta 1976:80; MacDonald 1996a:81), as well as along the north shore of lakes Ontario and Erie (e.g., von Gernet 1982:Tables 3.8 and 3.27; MacDonald 1995; Wright 1986:Figure 31), nor does it seem to represent the remains of a more extensive application of paint similar to that noted on a

specimen recovered from a mid-fifteenth century context at the Michipicoten site on the north shore of Lake Superior (Wright 1969:27, Plate 11). Rather, this encrustation is more likely to indicate use of the pipe stem as a tool, either to prepare a substance containing red ochre, or to apply it to another surface. The latter explanation is perhaps more likely, as the mouth of the pipe stem does not exhibit any of the wear that would be expected to result from grinding the mineral into a fine powder. Given the location of the site between a river that contained three difficult portages and the notoriously treacherous waters of Lake Nipissing, perhaps the most likely use of this artifact would be in the repair of a canoe (Robertson 1996b). Melted spruce gum, tempered with animal fat and finely powdered charcoal, was the most common means by which the seams of the birch bark canoes were waterproofed, although red ochre was occasionally added to this sealing agent as well (Adney and Chapelle 1983:25).

The ground stone specimen is a fragment of a bulbous-shaped pipe bowl (Unit 302-395; Figure 11a), a form that occurs in greatest frequency during the late sixteenth and early

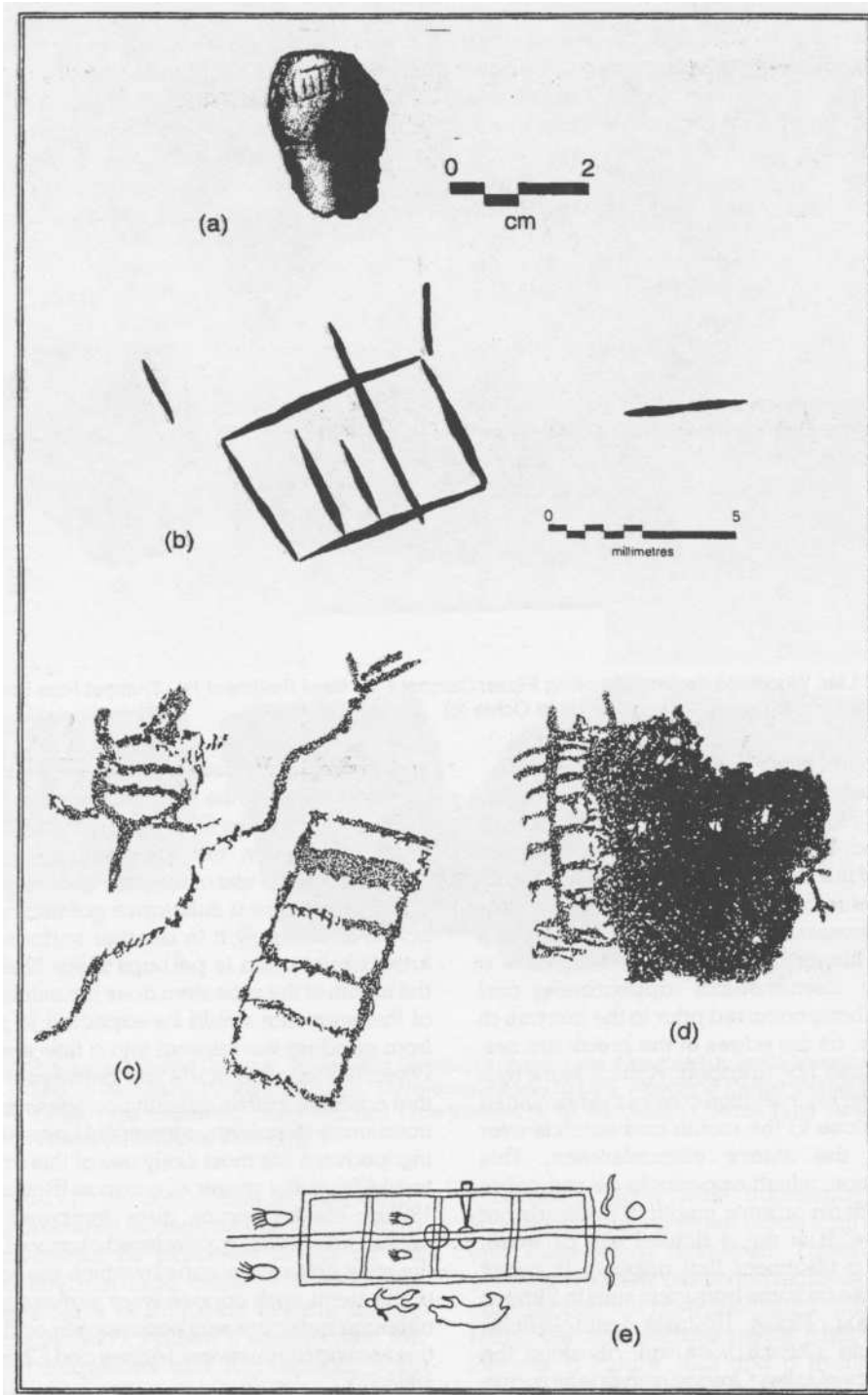


Figure 11. Bulbous-shaped Stone Pipe Bowl Fragment (a), Detail of Inscribed Decorative Motif on the Bowl (b), Painted Lattice Figures from Whitefish Bay, Lake of the Woods (c) and Keso Point, French River (d), Representation of *Midewiwin* Lodge on a *Mide* Scroll from Northern Minnesota (e). Rock Art Images Adapted from Rajnovich (1994)

seventeenth centuries (Lennox and Fitzgerald 1990:419; Ramsden 1990:369). Made from black steatite, argillite or a similar material, the bowl is decorated with an inscribed rectilinear motif (Figure 1 lb). While it is possible that this device is part of a larger image, it is strikingly similar to a lattice figure that occurs in rock paintings throughout the Canadian Shield region (Rajnovich 1994:28-32; Arsenault 1995: 37, Figure 16), including an example from the French River to the west of the La Vase (Figure 10c-d).

The fact that the same motif is also present on a number of birch bark scrolls (Figure 1 le) has led to the suggestion that this image is a symbol of the *Midewiwin*, representing the lodges in which the *Mide* carried out many of their ceremonies (Rajnovich 1994:29-32). Members of the *Midewiwin* (the Society of Good Hearted Ones) were important religious figures among many Algonquian groups, as they possessed great medicinal power and spiritual knowledge. The appearance of such a symbol on a Late Woodland artifact should occasion little surprise. While it has been asserted that the *Midewiwin* represents the development of a religious movement only in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, one which arose directly as a result of contact and conflict with European ideologies (e.g., Hickerson 1970:52-63; Vastokas and Vastokas 1973:37-38), it is clear that many aspects of *Miele* ritual and belief were firmly rooted in longstanding Algonquian symbolic, mythological and iconographic traditions (Vecsey 1984:445, 464-465; Cleland 1985:131, 139). It is also equally likely that the institution itself is one that has a much longer history than ethnohistorians such as Hickerson (1970) have allowed. This view is based upon various lines of evidence. In the first place, a sample of birch bark, from the remains of numerous scrolls found in a cave on Burntside Lake in Quetico Provincial Park (Kidd 1965), has been radiocarbon dated to 390±70 B.P. (GaK-1489) (Kidd 1981:41), yielding a calibrated date of A.D. 1441-1530. The similarity of the symbols found on Jununten phase (circa A.D. 1250-1400) slate discs (Cleland 1985; Cleland et al. 1984) and those of the scrolls must also be taken into account. Finally, it has been suggested that the Nipissing "Feast of the Dead" held on the shore of Georgian Bay in 1641 and witnessed by Jerome Lalemant, the first Jesuit missionary to reach north-

ern Algonquian territory, more closely corresponds to the *Midewiwin* funeral ceremony known as the "Ghost Lodge" than to the Huron Feast of the Dead (Rajnovich 1994:52).

**Lithics.** The chipped stone assemblage, consisting of a total of 149 items, includes nine tools: two complete Late Woodland projectile points, two point fragments, three formal scrapers and two crude biface fragments (Austin and Robertson 1996:129). No ground stone tools were recovered, but one fragment of red ochre was collected.

One complete projectile point (Unit 307-400; Figure 12a), manufactured from Balsam Lake chert, has an expanding stem and thinned stem base with rounded corners. The blade is convex, with a bi-convex profile and a blunt tip. The second complete specimen (Unit 311-385; Figure 12b) is a unifacially retouched flake point manufactured from a dark brown-red chert. It has a plano-convex profile and a convex blade. The base of the contracting stem is unifacially thinned and rounded. The incomplete specimens include the base and medial section of a crudely fashioned side-notched point made from Kettle Point chert (Unit 302-395) and the tip of a point manufactured from Hudson Bay Lowland chert (Unit 310-403).

The two formal end scrapers in the sample, which were recovered from a test pit and from Unit 315-395 respectively, are both made from Hudson Bay Lowland chert. Both exhibit steep unifacial retouch and one is thermally altered. A side scraper made from a secondary knapping flake of Knife River flint was recovered as well. This specimen (Unit 300-399; Figure 12c) bears steep unifacial retouch along both lateral edges and use wear along its distal edge. The remaining formal tools consist of three crude biface fragments, two made from unidentified cherts and one from Hudson Bay Lowland chert.

The remainder of the lithic sample is comprised of three exhausted bipolar cores (two of quartz and one of an unidentified chert), five secondary knapping flakes (one of which has been utilized), 11 secondary retouch flakes (one of which has been utilized), four bipolar flakes, 100 chert, quartz or quartzite flake or shatter fragments (seven of which were utilized), as well as 17 fragmentary slate flakes (one of which is retouched).

Most of the raw material represented in the



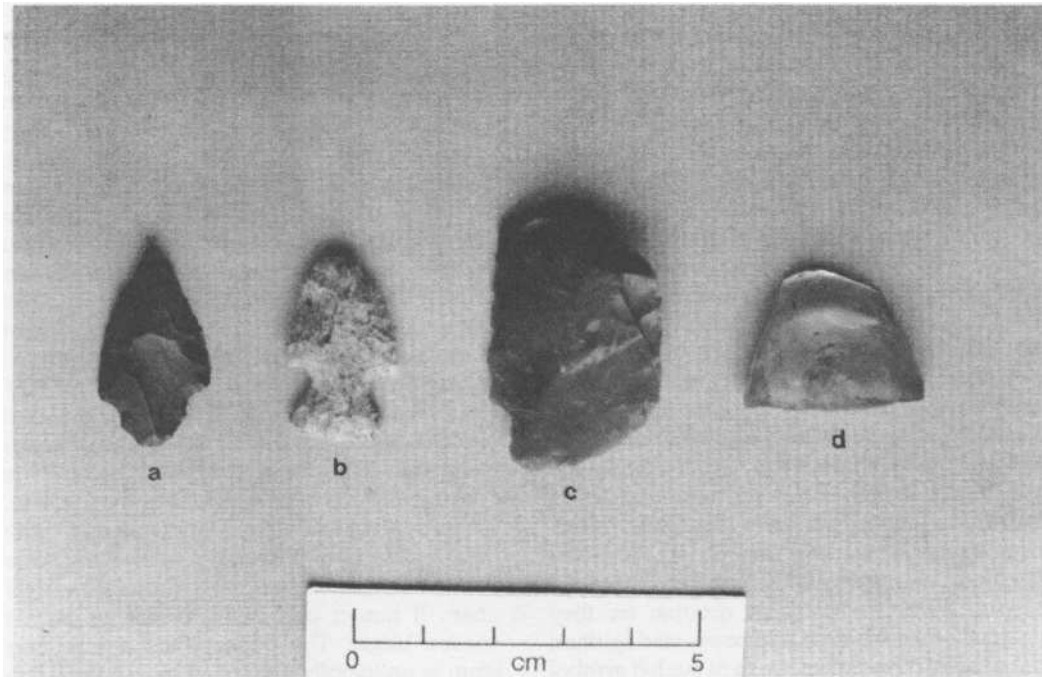


Figure 12. Projectile Points Made From an Unidentified Chert (a), and Balsam Lake Chert (b), Side Scraper Made from Knife River Flint (c), Scraper Made from Base of a Glass Tumbler (d).

sample (Table 3) was probably obtained locally. Nevertheless, the higher quality materials in the assemblage, such as the Knife River flint and the Onondaga and Kettle Point cherts, suggest ties to both the upper and lower Great Lakes. In general, however, the overall character of the remainder of the assemblage suggests that great care was taken to conserve scarce raw materials. The difficulty in procuring suitable stone for tool manufacture also continued into the post-contact period, as is demonstrated by the recovery of a fragment from the base of a glass tumbler that has been made into a scraping tool (Unit 311-385; Figure 12d). This item is discussed in greater detail below.

#### Post-Contact *Material*

One thousand and five Euro-Canadian artifacts were recovered from the site (MacDonald 1996b). Their description is organized according to the functional classes defined by Stanley South (1977).

**Architectural Class.** The most frequent artifacts within the assemblage are from the architectural class (32.4 percent), including 58 window glass fragments, 223 nails, eight mis-

cellaneous hardware, and 36 plaster, shingle or brick fragments. As a cottage has stood on the site for several generations, it is not surprising that the architectural class should comprise almost one third of the total assemblage.

It is possible, however, to associate a small portion of this artifact class with the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century occupation. Eight hand forged nails were recovered from Unit 313-400 (including four from Feature 6), while an additional four were found in Unit 307-384. One of the Feature 6 nails has an L-shaped head, and may be of a type used to tie the corners of log-built structures (e.g., Kenyon 1986:32; Oerichbauer 1982:188).

**Household Class.** The next most common artifacts are from the household class (20.4 percent), including 69 ceramic sherds, 40 bottle glass fragments, 13 bottle closure devices, 49 lamp chimney and other glass fragments, 11 flowerpot fragments, two tin can fragments and 20 pieces of coal slag.

The majority of ceramics in the assemblage are decorated refined white earthenwares characteristic of domestic sites dated to the mid-nineteenth century (e.g., Figure 13c-d), including four stamped, one coarse sponged, two straight edge, and 35 sherds of a red-

Table 3. Raw Materials Used in Chipped Stone Tool Manufacture.

RAW MATERIAL	FORMAL TOOLS	BIPOLAR CORES/FLAKES	SECONDARY RETOUCH FLAKES	SECONDARY KNAPPING FLAKES	DEBITAGE/SHATTER	TOTAL
Hudson Bay Lowland	3	4	7	1	12	27
Onondaga			1	1	9	11
Knife River	1	1	1		2	5
Kettle Point	1					1
Gordon Lake				1		1
Balsam Lake	1					1
Unidentified Chert	3		2	2	16	23
Quartz		2			51	53
Quartzite					10	10
Slate					17	17
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>149</b>

purple underglaze transfer-printed ware that have been reconstructed into several portions of a bowl. One example of a brown stamped ware is of the same pattern as a specimen recovered from the La Vase North Bank site. Two turquoise underglaze transfer-printed sherds and one semi-porcelain teacup rim that were recovered are more characteristic of the late nineteenth century.

Five dark blue underglaze transfer-printed sherds (Figure 13b) found in Unit 302-395 may be examples of early nineteenth century wares as they were found in the same level as nine glass trade beads, however, the sherds are too small and exfoliated to identify the patterns or ware types conclusively. As ceramics comprised only a small percentage of the artifacts recovered from the circa 1802 North West and XY Company Post in Wisconsin (Oerichbauer 1982:213), the dearth of early refined white earthenware ceramics may not be surprising.

A thermally altered tin glazed earthenware sherd with a short everted rim (Figure 13a), which was recovered from the 15-20 cm level of Unit 314-381, appears to be from a small vessel with a globular form, perhaps an apothecary's jar. A number of similar containers were found at the seventeenth century Hudson's Bay Company post of Fort Albany (Kenyon 1986:55). The present specimen was found in association with a Dutch smoking pipe fragment that is also tentatively dated to the late seventeenth century (see below).

The bottle glass is comprised of 40 body fragments of various colours; no finishes or bases with attributes that pre-date the late nineteenth century were recovered. The closure devices include five metal bottle caps, post-dating 1892 (Jones and Sullivan 1985:79), and one plastic and four metal screw tops with internal threads.

Glass tablewares include one clear tumbler fragment (Figure 12d) with a shallow concave base and an unfinished pontil mark that was recovered from the 10-15 cm level of Unit 311-385. In glass bottle manufacture, the presence of the pontil mark is a datable attribute, as these features precede the 1850-1870 change-over to machine made bottles. Whether this terminus ante quem date applies equally to table glass, however, is largely undocumented (Jones and Sullivan 1985:129). This specimen is of interest because it has been made into a scraper. It exhibits steep retouch at the proxi-

mal edge and has been intentionally dulled by grinding at the distal end. This grinding may have been done to allow the artifact to be hand-held, or may have resulted from being placed in a handle. Abrasion on the dorsal surface may also be related to hafting. A glass scraper was also documented at the Garden Island Trading Post site (CbGx-9), dated to between 1820 and 1850 (Dibb and Sweetman 1995:27, 32), and which may be the successor to the La Vase post.

Three thin glass lamp chimney fragments and forty glass fragments too small to identify have also been included in the household class. Glass lamp chimney fragments are typically associated with kerosene lighting which was not widespread in North America until the 1860s (Woodhead et al. 1984:58).

**Smoking Pipe Class.** White ball clay smoking pipe fragments constitute a major portion of the total site assemblage (17.1 percent) as 172 fragments were recovered. Thirty-six fragments are from bowls, 111 fragments are unmarked stems, and 25 fragments are portions of marked pipe bowls and/or spurs.

The most common type is the TD pipe, originally attributed to Thomas Dormer of London, England (1748-1770), but widely copied in the nineteenth century (Walker 1983:37). The TD pipe was also the most common type at the North West and XY Company Post excavated in Wisconsin (Oerichbauer 1982:220). The TD pipes are represented by five complete heel fragments with the letters "T" and "D" placed horizontally on opposite sides of the flat heel and one upper bowl fragment (Units 302-395, 307-384 [two specimens], 308-398, 311-385; e.g., Figure 14b-c). Unfortunately, the upper portion of the bowls are missing, and it is not possible to distinguish whether the overall form is characteristic of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, pipe bowls with broad, flat heels, such as those in the La Vase Island assemblage, were discontinued after 1830 (Herold 1992:126). In addition, the style of impressed cartouche on the upper portion of the bowl fragment (Figure 14b) has been identified as the earliest version of the TD mark and is, in fact, attributable to the eponymous Thomas Dormer. One of the specimens has a modified stem that has been whittled to make a new mouthpiece after the original had been broken. This is an interesting example of recycling, considering that it was found in the

same stratigraphic level and unit as the glass scraper.

The second most common marked pipe identified in the assemblage is the WG pipe, represented by one flat heel marked with these letters, and two partially reconstructed bowls with flat heels and cartouches similar to the TD pipes (Units 303-399, 307-384 and 308-398; Figure 14d-f). On one of the specimens, the letters have been placed upside down on the bowl. Tentatively identified with William Golding of London, England, WG pipes first appear on mid- to late eighteenth century sites (Herold 1992:130; Walker 1983:37), and the two La Vase bowls exhibit the form characteristic of this time period.

The third marked pipe bowl fragment (Unit 314-381; Figure 14a) is identified as being of Dutch origin based on a number of attributes, including its highly polished surface, and the placement of the maker's initials (CW) below a crown mark on the base of the wide, round heel (Walker 1983:29-30). Although the specific maker of this pipe is not known, examples of this mark have been recovered from an Onondaga site in New York State dated to 1682-1696 (Bradley and DeAngelo 1981:129), and from Place Royale in Québec City (Savard and Drovin 1990:88-89), where it has been dated to circa 1680-1720. While it is not known how long this mark was in existence, this specimen, like the apothecary jar recovered from the same stratigraphic level of the unit, together with a few of the glass beads discussed below, may provide evidence of continuity in use of the site from the Late Woodland/early contact period through to the late eighteenth century.

**Furniture Class Artifacts.** The furniture class is limited to two cast iron swinging-bale type handle fragments found in the bottom of Feature 6. It is possible that they are from a portable trunk.

**Arms and Activity Class Artifacts.** The arms and activity class is primarily represented by items associated with the fur trade, as determined by the analysis of goods mentioned specifically on trading post requisition lists from the 1780s to 1819 in the Great Lakes region (Ferris et al. 1985:Table 2).

The 61 glass beads recovered from the site are perhaps the most important means of establishing the presence of an early nineteenth century component at the site, although the sample is comparatively small and, in fact,

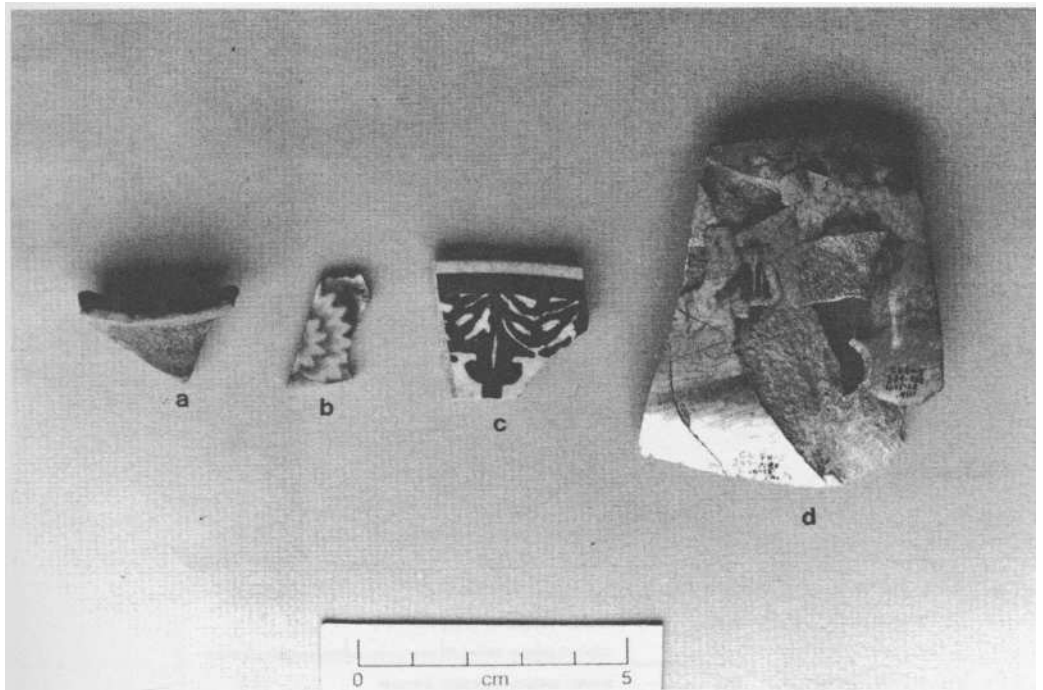


Figure 13. contact Period ceramics: Probable Late Seventeenth century Earthenware Apothecary Jar (a), Possible Tin Glazed Sherd (b), Mid-nineteenth Century Refined White Earthenware Sherds with Underglaze Transfer Prints (c-d).

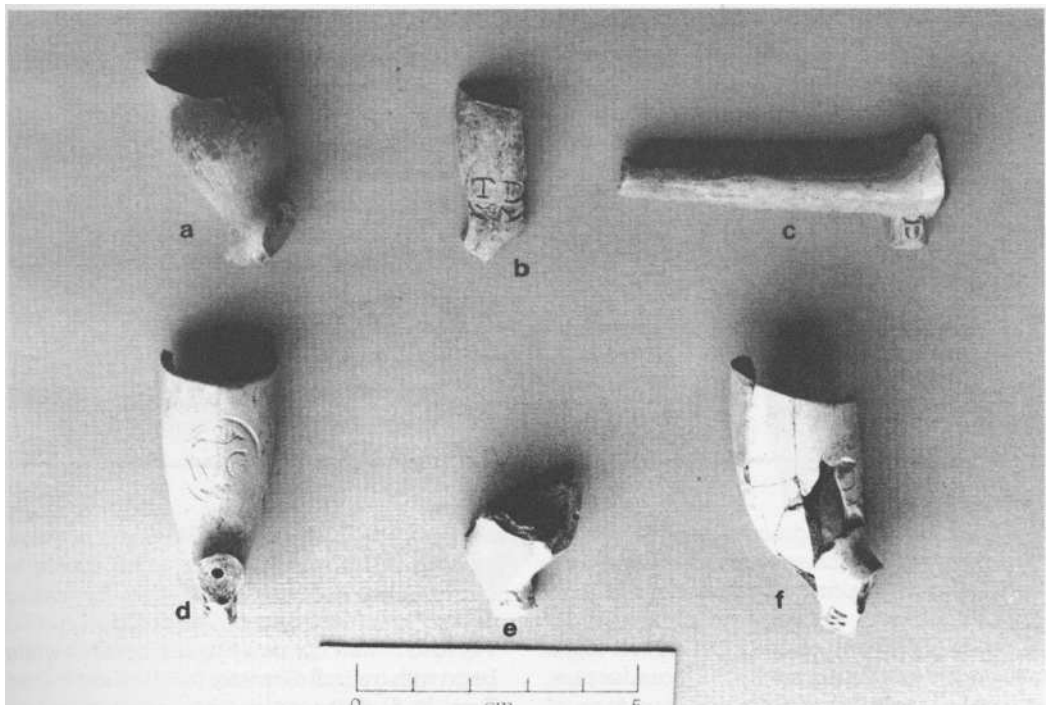


Figure 14. Contact Period Smoking Pipe Fragments: Possible Late Seventeenth Century Dutch Bowl Fragment (a), Late Eighteenth Century TD **Bowl** Fragment and Stem (b-c), Late Eighteenth Century WG **Bowl** Fragments (d-f).

Table 4. The Glass Trade Bead Assemblage.

Quantity	Provenience	Kidd & Kidd	Description
1	Test Unit B (offshore)	Ila "long"	tubular, translucent, bright turquoise, 8 mm long, small diameter, hot tumbled finish
1	300-399 10-15cm	Ila "long"	barrel, opaque, white, 10 mm long, split in half, projected diameter 8 mm, hot tumbled finish
2	302-39 10-15cm	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter
5	302-395 15-20cm	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter
1	302-395 15-20cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter, 4 mm long
1	302-395 15-20cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white, small diameter, 13 mm long
1	302-395 15-20cm	Ila Type	circular, translucent, dark turquoise, small diameter
1	302-395 15-20cm	Ila Type	circular, opaque, neon orange-red, small diameter
1	302-395 wetscreen	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter, 5.5 mm long
1	302-395 wetscreen	IVa 3	circular, opaque, redwood outside/clear light grey core, small diameter
1	302-395 wetscreen	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white, very small diameter
11	302-395 wetscreen	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter
1	302-395 wetscreen	Ila Type	circular, opaque, grey-blue, very small diameter
1	302-395 wetscreen	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter, 2 mm long
1	308-398 10-15cm	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter
1	310-403 15-20cm	Willb	barrel, translucent, cobalt blue, combed loop inlay has fallen out, 8 mm long, split in half
1	311-385 10-15cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter, 11 mm long
1	311-385 10-15cm	Ila 6	elliptical, opaque, black, large diameter
4	311-385 10-15cm	Ila 13	elliptical, opaque, white with clear glass coating, medium diameter
1	311-385 wetscreen	Ila 7	circular, opaque, black, large diameter
2	311-385 wetscreen	Ila Type	circular, translucent, bright turquoise, small diameter
2	311-385 wetscreen	Ia 19	tubular, clear, bright navy, small diameter, 4 mm long
1	311-385 wetscreen	Ila long"	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, 4 mm long, small diameter, hot tumbled finish
1	311-385 wetscreen	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white, small diameter
1	314-381 5-10cm	IVa 3	circular, opaque, redwood outside/clear light grey core, small diameter
1	314-381 5-10cm	Ila Type	circular, opaque, bright mint green, small diameter
1	314-381 5-10cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter, 2.5 mm long
1	314-381 5-10cm	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter
1	314-381 10-15cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white, small diameter, 2.5 mm long
1	314-381 10-15cm	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white, small diameter, 4 mm long
1	314-381 wetscreen	Ila 7	circular, opaque, black, large diameter
2	314-381 wetscreen	Ia 5	tubular, opaque, white, small diameter, 3-4 mm long
2	314-381 wetscreen	IVa 3	circular, opaque, redwood outside/clear light grey core, small diameter
1	314-381 wetscreen	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white, small diameter
1	314-381 wetscreen	Ila Type	circular, translucent, bright turquoise, small diameter
1	314-381 wetscreen	Ila Type	circular, translucent, dark turquoise, small diameter
3	314-381 wetscreen	Ila 14	circular, opaque, white with clear glass coating, small diameter

61

contains material representative of several time periods. The assemblage has been classified using an expanded version of the Kidd and Kidd (1970) typology as presented by Karklins (1981) and Ross (1990), which takes into consideration the method of manufacture, opacity of the glass, colour, size and form of the bead (Table 4). Sixty of the beads were manufactured from drawn glass. The most

frequent type identified (n=25) was a circular, opaque white bead with a small diameter between two and four millimetres, frequently coated with clear glass (Kidd & Kidd Type Ila 14). Also common was a tubular, opaque white bead with a small diameter (n= 10; Kidd & Kidd Type Ia 5) that was cut into short cylinders ranging in length between 2.5 and 13 mm. Two tubular, clear glass, bright navy blue beads

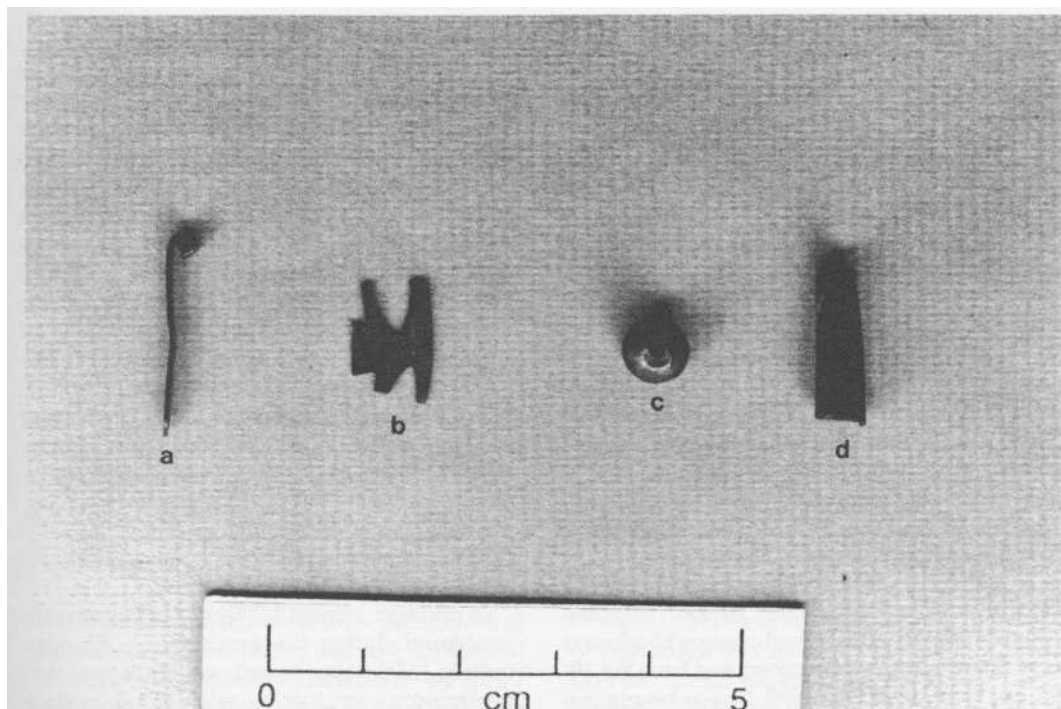


Figure 15. Decorative Metal Items: Brooch Pin (a), Brooch Fragment (b), Ear Bob Piece (c), Tinkling Cone (d).

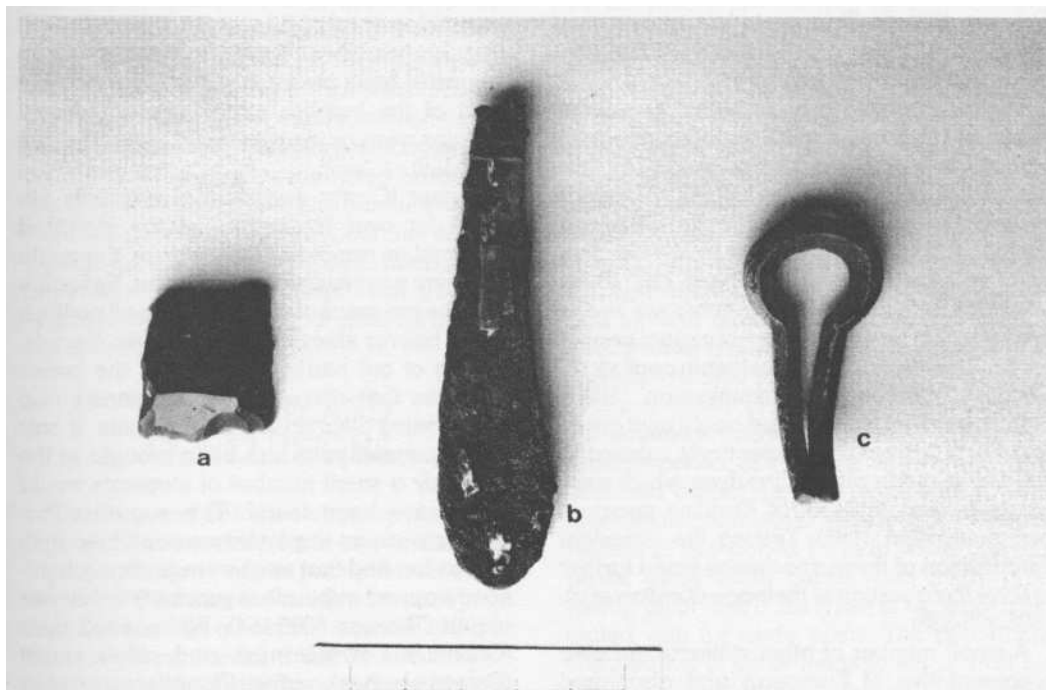


Figure 16. Prismatic English Gunflint (a), Clasp Knife Handle (b), Jew's Harp (c).

(Kidd & Kidd Type Ia 19) have small diameters and have been cut into four millimetre lengths. Four circular beads with small diameters have a clear grey glass core and a redwood coloured glass exterior (Kidd & Kidd Type IVa 3). The circular beads, sometimes called seed beads, were used in embroidery work while the short tubes were fashioned into necklaces or were used in place of the white and purple shell wampum (Ferris et al. 1985:13; Wray 1983:47). This portion of the sample is largely consistent with trade bead assemblages from early nineteenth century sites (Ian Kenyon, personal communication 1996), such as Old Birch Island Cemetery near Manitoulin Island (Greenman 1951:48-53), the Bellamy site in southwestern Ontario (Ferris et al. 1985:13), and the North West and XY Company post in Wisconsin (Oerichbauer 1982:202).

A period of trade that pre-dates the La Ronde post is represented by four elliptical opaque white, one elliptical opaque black, and one opaque white tube excavated from the 10-15 cm level in Unit 311-385. These beads are typical of George Quimby's Middle Historic Period (1670-1760) in the Upper Great Lakes (Karlis Karklins, personal communication 1996; Quimby 1966:7). This period is also represented within the ceramic and smoking pipe assemblages as noted above.

The only wirewound bead in the assemblage is half of a barrel-shaped, translucent cobalt blue glass bead (Kidd & Kidd Type Willb) that is missing its combed loop inlay. A similar specimen is reported from Fort Vancouver, a Hudson's Bay Company post in Washington State occupied between 1829 and 1860 (Ross 1990:Plate 4k). Similarly, four turquoise beads are typical of those used by aboriginal people on the Plains in the mid-nineteenth century (K. Karklins, personal communication 1996). Finally, two beads, which are bright mint green and neon orange-red respectively, appear to have been made with aniline dyes, which were not developed until 1880 (K. Karklins, personal communication 1996). Testing the chemical composition of these specimens could further resolve the question of their age (Kenyon et al. 1995:335-336).

A small number of other artifacts are also representative of European and aboriginal trade. These include portions of two silver brooches (Figure 15a-b), one a fragment of an open work disk (Unit 303-399), and the other a

fastening pin (Unit 311-385); part of a silver ear bob (Unit 303-399; Figure 15c); a pewter or tinned brass tinkling cone (Unit 303-399; Figure 15d), a type of item commonly used to decorate clothing, pouches and headbands; a cast brass Jew's harp (Unit 315-385; Figure 16b), a metal pocket knife bolster with a silver handle ornament (Unit 311-385; Figure 16c); the bevelled tip of a scissors blade (Unit 307-384); 13 pieces of copper and two pieces of tin scrap cut from kettles; as well as lead shot, musket balls and a prismatic English gunflint (Unit 308-398; Figure 16a) of the type common after 1800 (Gilman 1982:12; Ferris et al. 1985:15). Judging by the wear pattern on the heel of the blade, this latter item was probably used as a strike-a-light (Kenyon 1982).

#### *Faunal Remains*

In addition, almost 2,300 animal bones were recovered during the excavations. Approximately 1,900 items have been subjected to a preliminary examination, while a full analysis has been made of material sampled from two of the most productive units (309-400 and 313-400) (Thomas 1996:145-154). The majority of the assemblage probably relates to the nineteenth century component, based on the overall high degree of bone preservation and the fact that most of the butcher marks present on the remains were made with metal tools (Thomas 1996:148).

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) elements account for over 60 percent of the identified mammalian remains. At first glance, this might not seem surprising for a trade post. Nevertheless, the presence of elements from all portions of the beaver skeleton, together with the patterning of cut marks on many of the bones indicates that carcasses were skinned, and their bodies disarticulated on the site. If only the processed pelts had been brought to the site, only a small number of elements would likely have been found. This suggests that beaver were an important source of meat as well as fur, and that most were probably hunted or trapped within close proximity to the river mouth (Thomas 1996:154). White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), and either wapiti (*Cervus elephas*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) or moose (*Alces alces*), were also important subsistence resources. The fact that all portions of the bodies are represented in the

analyzed sample suggests, as was the case for beaver, that the majority of the animals were taken locally and butchered at the site (Thomas 1996:152-154).

Not surprisingly, fishing was also an important activity. Lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) and northern pike (*Esox lucius*) were the most commonly identified species (Thomas 1996:152). Only one element from a European domesticate was identified: the tooth of a pig, which was recovered from the 21-25 cm level of Unit 310-403 (Thomas 1996:148). Swine would have been the most suitable domesticate to introduce into the wilderness given their ability to forage among the mast-producing oaks that would have predominated along the shores of the lake.

#### Plant Remains

While soil samples were collected from all of the excavated features, as well as from several A-horizon contexts, only those from Features 7 and 11 have been examined to date. In terms of subsistence remains, however, neither analyzed sample yielded more than a few bramble (*Rubus* sp.) seeds (Monckton 1996:144). Favouring disturbed soils at forest edges, bramble plants would have flourished on the margins of the clearing established around a trade post cabin, or for that matter, on the site of a precontact campsite that was repeatedly occupied. Tree species identified among the wood charcoal include white pine (*Pinus strobus*), oak (probably red oak [*Quercus rubra*] or bur oak [*Q. macrocarpa*]), paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), maple (*Acer* sp.), ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), and ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*) (Monckton 1996:144-145).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The lives and activities of many of the protagonists in the early fur trade in the Lake Nipissing region remain poorly documented; the life of Eustache LaRonde is no exception. That he operated a post at the mouth of the La Vase is certain, even if this fact is only recorded anecdotally in the accounts of three travellers who passed through the area between 1817 and 1819. That the long sequence of settlement activity at the river mouth, as revealed by the archaeological investigations,

includes an early nineteenth century component is also clear. In the absence of reliable and unambiguous cartographic evidence, however, the suggestion that a specific archaeological site may be identified as the precise location of a specific historically-attested site should not be made lightly. Any attempt to make such a correlation must first take into account three classes of evidence (cf. Trigger 1969):

*Site Form:* the topographical position and size of the candidate site;

*Temporal Placement:* the estimated date for the occupation of the candidate site, and the nature of the evidence upon which this date is based; and

*Site Content:* the constituent artifact assemblage of the candidate site, and its assumed or demonstrated associations with other site(s).

With respect to site form, the location of the La Vase Island site and its immediate environment closely match Bigsby's description of the LaRonde post, in 1819, as being situated amongst gneiss mounds and marshes. Despite the alterations that the river mouth has undergone in the twentieth century, the bedrock outcrop forming the western portion of the site continues to stand out as a distinctive physiographic feature along the sandy shore of Lake Nipissing.

Temporal placement and site content are largely overlapping criteria, and may be considered jointly. Although an apothecary's jar and a Dutch-manufactured pipe may relate to a late seventeenth century presence at the site, and several glass beads may indicate late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century activity (perhaps related to an aboriginal occupation, or the activities of clandestine or merely undocumented traders), the most substantial historic period occupation appears to have occurred during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Diagnostic artifacts related to this period include white ball clay pipes, glass trade beads, and metal ornaments, all of which are types of material associated with fur trade posts. The percentage contribution of these items to the overall historic period artifact assemblage is impressive, considering both the limited scale of the excavations, and the fact that, in comparison to textiles and clothing, such material makes up



a comparatively small proportion of the trade goods that typically appear in requisition lists and invoices (e.g., White 1987; Anderson 1994).

Further evidence of a late eighteenth to early nineteenth century structure is provided by the dense clay layer and large quantity of untempered fired clay, which was likely used in the construction of a hearth and chimney. This type of construction is associated with structures contemporary with the LaRonde post and was often used in the absence of bricks or stone. Further excavations are likely to provide additional structural evidence, possibly footings or a foundation. The structure itself was probably moved to Garden Island when the Lake Nipissing operations were transferred to the Sturgeon River area in the early 1820s. The practice of dismantling structures for relocation has been documented for other contemporary fur trade posts (Balmer and Campbell 1996:29; Oerichbauer 1982:184). The relocation of the cabin might explain the lack of any reference to a structure at the mouth of the La Vase River after 1821, although the chimney stack or its ruins may have remained visible at the centre of the clearing established around the site.

Based on metallic cut marks on many of the animal bones and the overall high degree of bone preservation, the majority of the faunal remains from the site probably relate to the nineteenth century occupation and may be associated with the LaRonde establishment. The large amounts of beaver bone in the faunal assemblage is certainly indicative of fur-trade related activity. A single domestic pig element may indicate that the early nineteenth century inhabitants kept a least one farm animal. Bigsby's description of the LaRonde household suggests that some vegetables were cultivated, so they may also have kept some livestock, as was often the case at such establishments (cf. Moodie 1980:272).

Thus, the archaeological excavations at the La Vase Island site appear to confirm the presence of Eustache LaRonde's post in this precise locale at the mouth of the river. Although testing this possibility was the primary objective of the project, the archaeological evidence has demonstrated that the aboriginal occupation of the site began at least as early as A.D. 500 or 600 and continued through to the 1600s. While the limited quantity of diagnostic Middle and transitional Middle to Late Wood-

land material recovered is suggestive of transitory occupations between roughly A.D. 600 and 1000, the predominance of Late Woodland material may be indicative of more substantial use of the site. The majority of Late Woodland ceramics can be associated with the A.D. 1200-1600 period. Similar to many other Late Woodland sites in northeastern Ontario, the La Vase Island ceramics may be placed in the 'Ontario Iroquoian' ceramic tradition. It should not be assumed, however, that the manufacturers of these ceramics were Iroquoians. While some vessels may have been obtained through trade with Huron, they were most likely used and deposited by resident Algonquian-speaking Nipissing and their ancestors.

Sites such as La Vase Island, which demonstrate both considerable antiquity and virtually continuous reuse, are extremely important elements of the settlement-subsistence systems of the Canadian Shield. Their investigation is crucial if we are to achieve a more complete understanding of the peoples who occupied them, whether locally-based Algonquian bands, pursuing a traditional seasonal round, small parties of travellers crossing the Ottawa River-Great Lakes divide, or a single independent fur trader and his family.

Despite the fact that these sites are fundamental to our understanding of the past, however, they are also extremely fragile. Their comparatively shallow soils preserve the remains of centuries of human activity, evidence that can be irrevocably lost as a result of even small-scale disturbance. Given that the majority of sites such as La Vase Island are located in areas that continue to be the most favourable locations for development today, many have been lost. An equally significant threat is the damage brought about by changing water levels over the past 100 years. Large scale engineering projects have resulted in the seasonal or permanent flooding of many sites, while others that have escaped inundation have nevertheless felt the effects of erosion.

The La Vase Island site, formerly attached to the mainland, and undoubtedly related to the archaeological deposits found there, is a mere fraction of its former size. The burial and inundation of the expanse between the island and the mainland has considerably reduced the area of the river mouth accessible for investigation. It is also likely that erosion, past efforts

at shoreline stabilization, and dredging of the river channel have also resulted in the loss of archaeological deposits. Like many similar sites, the La Vase Island and North Bank sites represent the remains of repeated small-scale occupations over the course of many centuries, but in the past 100 years they have become much smaller. As sites such as these shrink, so do our chances of recognizing and understanding the complexity of the history of Lake Nipissing.

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