

A LATE 18TH CENTURY AMERICAN INDIAN CAMPSITE ON APPLE ISLAND, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN

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Archaeology adopts geological, chemical, biological and physical science to recover and analyze the remains of past human activities. With statistical caution and inductive reasoning, these data are integrated with patterns drawn from the social and behavioral sciences, and relevant historical documents, where those exist. The overall goal is to understand what happened in some location at some time in the past. The past, itself, is gone, and the explanations that result from archaeological excavation, analysis and interpretation are always subject to new interpretation in the light of additional evidence or new technologies. But while acknowledging these limitations, archaeology is our only working time machine.

Archaeology on Apple Island began in the early 1900s at the centrally located Campbell farm when the family plowed up and then reburied a skeleton with a pewter bowl filled with white shell beads¹.

A Century later, in 2000 and 2003 Dr. Michael Stafford of the Cranbrook Institute of Science directed local middle school students excavating a checker-board array of shallow

¹ The bowl, without the beads, was donated to the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

archaeological squares on a slight plateau just west of the early 20th century “water road” from the farm down to the boat landing. Stafford assigned the quantities of animal bone and the few scattered 18th Century French and British trade goods found in those excavations to a “Fur Trade” site (20 OK 476).

Circumstances prevented Stafford from fully reporting on the excavations or the artifacts².

In 2008 excavations supported by the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society and the University of Detroit - Mercy, were conducted by West Bloomfield School science teachers, directed by Dr. David Brose. The stratigraphic and geological soil analyses indicated there had been several short-term uses of the site. The 18th century remains Stafford had encountered, along with some discarded 20th century summer vacation trash, had been found in the upper 20 centimeters of soils washed down from the island’s higher interior through the years. The 2008 excavations revealed that the washed soils partially buried the actual ground surfaces on which the 18th century people had lived³. But there were places below those washed-in soils where

² Numerous historic and archaeological studies have documented the various types and frequencies of French and British and later Federal American military weapons and hardware, personal ornaments and jewelry and household equipment, and the specific years during which these were available in the Great Lakes region and traded to the local American Indians. These studies are listed in the Reference Appendix to the Imprints from the Imprints From the Past technical report, *Archaeological Investigations of 20 OK 476: A Late Eighteenth Century Native American Site on Apple Island , Oakland County Michigan*.

³ Two distinct kinds of soils developed on the differing landforms and elevations of Apple Island after the melting of glacial ice some 14,000 years ago. Measurements of mineralogy, grain sizes and particle orientation and compaction can reveal when these soils are disturbed or wash over one another.

undisturbed fire-reddened hearths and hard-packed activity areas were preserved.

Additional support in 2013 came from the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society and the consulting firm, *Imprints From The Past*, as part of a larger Western Michigan University Anthropology Department project. Brose conducted limited test excavations and, later, undertook analysis of all of the soils, animal bones and artifacts that had been collected over several decades. Analyses of those collections discovered previously overlooked flint chips and broken shards of pottery from prehistoric American Indians who had visited the island during the Late Woodland Period, *ca. 1000 - 1500 AD*⁴.

The detailed study of the historic French and British gunflints, clay pipestems, brass, lead and silver hardware, religious ornaments and personal jewelry, and glass beads, revealed they were the exactly the same types of artifacts that had been used by American Indian warriors at French and British forts and villages across the upper Great Lakes between 1755 and the early 1760s. But quite unlike some of those other locations, on Apple Island there were none of the artifacts typically used by native women or children.

⁴ Several good compilations of Michigan Prehistory exist. The 1999 volume, *Recovering Michigan's Buried Past*, edited by Halsey and Stafford, is available at the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

Statistical analyses⁵ of hearth areas found in 2008 and 2013 were matched with the recorded 2003 find-spots of different kinds and amounts of fish and animal bone, most of which had skeletal evidence of having been killed during the summer or early fall. And a few of these areas were places where different types of military equipment (represented by the discarded gunflints) were found, and where there had been found the kinds of glass beads and silver ornaments historically recorded as indications of social distinction among the 18th century American Indian of the Great Lakes⁶. Nearly all of the artifact types that could be closely dated were objects or styles that were unavailable much before 1750 and which had gone out of favor before the late 1760s.⁷

This suggests that the occupation took place during a few summer months in the early 1760s by perhaps three groups of three or four related males⁸ and that the animals eaten were not

⁵ The types of nearest-neighbor and cluster statistical the Imprints From the Past technical report, *Archaeological Investigations of 20 OK 476: A Late Eighteenth Century Native American Site on Apple Island, Oakland County Michigan*. The study indicates that the combined probability of the associations noted would be expected to occur by chance less than 20% of the time.

⁶ A good reference to these observations are the many relevant articles in the 1978 *Smithsonian Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 15 The Northeast*.

⁷ See the Artifact Appendix to the Imprints From the Past technical report, *Archaeological Investigations of 20 OK 476: A Late Eighteenth Century Native American Site on Apple Island, Oakland County Michigan* for the details of the ages and sexes of the animals and the artifacts recovered from Apple Island and the dated sites across the midwestern US and Canada at which they are also found.

⁸ Historical records by both French and British military and civilian authors who fought with or against these same Great Lakes American Indians indicate that most war parties were composed of several sets of related males, usually under the overall guidance of an older male relative.

the same kinds or ages of animals usually hunted or trapped for furs that would be exchanged with European traders.

Who were these American Indians and what were they doing on Apple Island?

Historical documents indicate the Indians who participated in Pontiac's military uprising had quickly captured every British fort and post in the Great Lakes/Ohio Valley except Detroit and Pittsburgh. Because their initial attacks at these posts failed, the strategy adopted by Pontiac was to starve them out by cutting off all access to the surrounding resources⁹. But by the late summer of 1763 British General Henri Bouquet had retaken most of the Ohio country and was marching toward Detroit. Detroit's garrison had resisted the siege because they received fresh food and gunpowder by boat from Sandusky. But while Fort Detroit held out, Pontiac's Ottawa and Potawatomi allies were starving and were forced to break into small family camps along the interior rivers¹⁰.

These studies strongly suggest that one of those small campsites up-river from the Detroit area was on Apple Island. That camp

⁹ Francis Parkman and Howard Peckham who wrote from intensive study of available historical documents, describe several disastrous attempts by the British forces in Detroit to secure food and gunpowder from the nearby French *habitants* who tried to remain neutral through the summer of 1763. First person accounts by Francois Navarre and British Lt. John Hay document this as well.

¹⁰ While Pontiac and his warriors in the upper Great Lakes were Adawa [Ottawa], his "confederacy" was usually composed of the local American Indian tribes: Robert Rodgers, who relieved Detroit in 1765 reported that those who had been fighting with Pontiac at Fort St. Joseph and Detroit were drawn from the local Pottawatomi and/or closely related Ottawa bands although affiliation among these "Tribes" was fluid during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

could have been occupied by a war party of Pottawatomi or Ottawa, temporarily associated with Pontiac's siege of Fort Detroit during the summer of 1763. But by the end of the year those warriors had dispersed back to their homes along the mouths of the Clinton, the Rouge and the Huron Rivers and Pontiac, himself, surrendered to Bouquet early the next year.

While the historical documents reveal that in 1769 Pontiac was killed during an ignominious drunken brawl at in Kaskaskia, Illinois, it is rumored that he may have visited Apple Island to exhort his wavering troops or to bid them farewell before leaving this region. It is certainly possible, but 2008 excavations at the promontory called "Pontiac's Mound" have found nothing to support that local legend¹¹. But then, such a brief visit would not be expected to leave way of much in the way of archaeological evidence.

A detailed report of the 2008 and 2013 excavations and analyses, *Archaeological Investigations of 20 OK 476: A Late Eighteenth Century Native American Site on Apple Island , Oakland County Michigan*, is on file at the Greater West Bloomfield Historical society and is available on-line as an archaeological report of the Department of Anthropology Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, Michigan.

scholarworks.wmich.edu/archaeological_reports/16/

¹¹ Excavations in 2008 revealed the "mound" is a natural erosional promontory overlooking the narrow land between Orchard and Cass lakes.



WEST BLOOMFIELD TEACHERS AND THADEUS [TED] GISH, UNIVERSITY DETROIT - MERCY, SCREENING LOWER SOIL LEVEL IN 2008



2008 EXCAVATION REVEALS OCCUPATIONAL FLOOR (LEVEL 2) BELOW COLLUVIAL SOILS AT SITE 20 OK 476



TOP: ENGLISH AND FRENCH MUSKET GUNFLINTS
 BELOW: SMALL FUSIL OR PISTOL GUNFLINTS
 ENGLISH GUNFLINT RE-WORKED INTO ABORIGINAL DRILL FROM 2000 AND 2003
 EXCAVATIONS IN UPPER SOILS



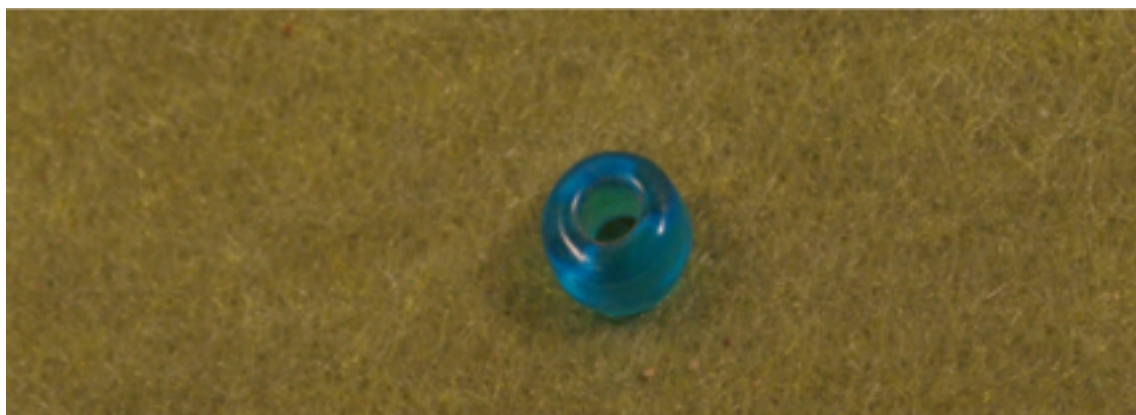
ABORIGINALLY REWORKED SCRAP BRASS FROM EUROPEAN KETTLE 1755-1765



KAOLIN PIPE-STEMS FROM 2003, 2008 AND 2013 EXCAVATIONS



IRON SLEEVE BUTTON, 1750s FRENCH MILITARY UNIFORM
FROM 2003 EXCAVATIONS IN UPPER SLOPE-WASH SOILS



TOP: ABORIGINALLY FLATTENED AND DRILLED 50 CAL MUSKET BALL. BOTTOM: 1760 BLUE GLASS BEAD
BOTH FROM 2013 EXCAVATION OF LEVEL BENEATH SLOPE-WASH SOILS



TOP: BULBAR ARM SILVER CROSS
BOTTOM: SILVER BALL AND CONE "EAR BOBS" WITH WIRE
LOOPS BOTH FROM 2003 EXCAVATIONS IN UPPER SLOPE-
WASH SOIL LEVELS



"THE SIEGE OF FORT DETROIT 1763" BY FREDRICK REMMINGTON.

COURTESY GOOGLE IMAGES