

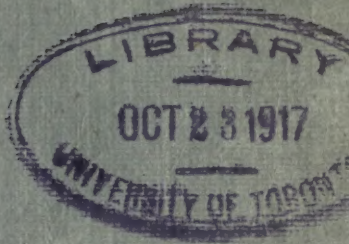
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# Culture of a Prehistoric Iroquoian Site in Eastern Ontario

By

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## CULTURE OF A PREHISTORIC IROQUOIAN SITE IN EASTERN ONTARIO

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THE Roebuck site, a prehistoric village of Iroquoian culture in Grenville county, Ontario, about eight miles north of the River St Lawrence, was explored for the Geological Survey, Canada, in 1912 and 1915. It is one of the largest of seven similar sites in the same county.

Here were found large quantities of clam-shells and animal bones. Carbonized corn-cobs, corn, beans, sunflower seeds, vetch seeds, squash seeds, hazelnuts, beechnuts, and butternuts were also found. The people of the site seem to have had the domestic dog, several skulls and lower jaws being found which seem to be too small to be those of the wolf.

Only six chipped stone points for arrows were found. Two of these are triangular and another may have served as the point of a knife. What may have been a point for a spear is chipped from slate.

As compared with chipped stone arrowpoints there was no scarcity of those made from hollow bones and antler tines. Some of both kinds are barbed by hollowing or indenting the base. One of the antler points has four barbs.

Two points for arrows are made of flat pieces of antler and have a slot on both sides for insertion in the cleft end of the arrowshaft, reminding one very much in this particular feature of the Eskimo slate points for toggle-head harpoons. Two other pointed and notched pieces of bone may also have been points for arrows.

The points for harpoons found here were made of bone and antler. All but four are bilaterally barbed, and the majority of these, like most of the points found elsewhere in Ontario and in New York State, have the basal ends broken off.

Bone fish-hooks were found in all stages of manufacture, from the rough blank cut from an animal bone to the completed hook with barb and grooved end for the attachment of the line. One has the shank perforated. The method of manufacture differed from that in Ohio as described by Mills, only one hook being made from each piece of bone.

Large, heavy, curved, and sometimes double-pointed mattock-like objects made from a section of the beam of an antler, some of them with the points slightly polished, may have been used as hoes. One of them is perforated, and another has a narrow groove around the middle. They may also have seen service as bark peelers. Several sharpened antler tines with convenient hand-hold may have been corn-husking pins. Some of the lower jaws of the deer with the coronoid process and condyle removed were probably used to scrape corn from the cobs.

Active grinding stones, both perfect and in a broken condition, were numerous. Some of them were pitted on the flat or rubbed side, showing that they had previously, or perhaps subsequently, been used as hammerstones. A few are bi-pitted. Several roughly spherical hammerstones were also found.

Stone mortars, many of them with hollows on both sides, were found mostly in a broken condition.



Pottery fragments were more numerous than anything else. The only pots at all complete were the very small vessels. All were round-bottomed; some with flaring mouths or everted rims, but most of them with overhanging, cornice-like rims. One has the rim inverted at a sharp angle. Some had octagonal rims and others appear to have been almost square. One was either divided into two compartments or had a handle on the inside. Pottery vessels in Ontario seldom have handles, but more pots with handles were found on this site than anywhere else in the Province. Most of the pots were decorated. Many fragments bear impressed checker marks left by the carved surface of the malleating tool. No shell tempering was used, and there was no coiled ware. A few pieces are perforated for repairing a break.

A small ladle made of pottery, if it was not a mere toy, may have served some useful purpose.

Pieces of carbonized rope or cord and of carbonized coarse fabric were the only textiles recovered. The cord appears to be made of corn-husk, and the fabric may be of basswood bark or hemp nettle.

A bent piece of birch-bark, which looks as if it had been a round box, was found in the muck surrounding a spring. As is suggested by the stitch holes, the ends were probably overlapped and sewed together, and the bottom may have been fastened in the same manner.

Several nuggets of iron pyrites, which may have been used for fire-making, were found. A perforated, slightly concavo-convex wooden disc, found in the muck surrounding a spring, may have been part of a fire-drill.

The chisels, adzes, and celts found here were made of stone. A few chisels were made of antler. One of the adzes is grooved across the front. The adzes and celts were not so plentiful as on Attiwandaron sites in western Ontario, nor even on Algonquian sites in eastern Ontario. Several small stone tools, sometimes with a cutting edge at one or both ends, and sharpened along one side, may have been used as scrapers or knives. They are like some found on Attiwandaron sites.

There were no chipped stone points for drills, although the more slender chipped stone arrowpoints may have been used for the purpose. Drill points, however, are common on some Attiwandaron sites in western Ontario, and nearly every Algonquian site yields some. Most of the holes in stone objects were biconical and such as could be made with a chipped drill-point, but the usual striæ left by such points are absent. A few objects were probably drilled with a solid wooden drill. Holes in bone and antler specimens were nearly all gouged out from both sides until the excavations met in the middle, forming an irregular hole more often oval than round.

Whetstones were made from limestone and sandstone. One large rubbing or grinding stone made of granite had evidently been used in the manufacture of chisels, adzes, and celts.

Artificially rubbed and sharpened incisor teeth of the beaver, which appear to have been used as knives and chisels, were common.

Sharpened canine teeth of the bear also seem to have been used as knife blades. The teeth in some instances were split lengthwise, the broken surfaces smoothed, and the enameled end sharpened. Other knife-like bone objects found may have been knives.

Several handles made of antler were found. One has a curved slot in the side



apparently for the reception of one of the curved beaver-tooth chisels or knives. Another has the slot in a different position, probably requiring a different method of attachment of perhaps a similar beaver-tooth chisel, the curve of the tooth being in the same direction as the curve of the handle. Other handles have deep clefts and holes for securing the blade. One handle has a deep, narrow groove at one end like the grooves in the handles of Eskimo crooked knives.

Some freshwater clam shells were used in a way that wore down the edge and flattened the sides, sometimes until a hole appeared. These were probably used for smoothing the inside of pottery vessels while in the plastic state.

Only two objects could have been spindle whorls, and one of these is the wooden disc already mentioned as having been found in the muck surrounding a spring. The other is a small modeled pottery disc with a hole through the center and an incised circle on the sides. We have no evidence that the Iroquois used such a device as a spindle, but the Cherokee, according to Adair, spun the wild hemp "off the distaffs, with wooden machines, having some clay on the middle of them, to hasten the motion."

Awls made of fish, bird, and mammal bones were more plentiful than any other artifact made of this material, more than a thousand being found. They are of all lengths and sizes, many of them retaining the articular ends of the bones from which they are derived. Two specimens were made from human ulnæ by sharpening the distal end. A few are made of antler.

Perforated bone needles were common.

One well made and polished paddle-shaped object of bone is similar to some found in New York state. Its use is problematical.

Chipped stone scrapers were scarce, only five being found. They are much more plentiful on Attiwandaron sites in western Ontario and on Algonquian sites of the immediate St Lawrence valley.

Radial bones of the ~~wolf~~, polished on the outer curved surface, may have been used in tanning, as may also lower jaws of the deer.

Some sharp antler tines with the blunt end worked into a handle, and the objects made from human ulnæ considered as awls, may have been daggers. A long bone or antler object with a hole through one end may also be a dagger. The large antler tools referred to as probably being hoes may have been used as heads for war-clubs.

Discoïdal beads found here are made of limestone, sandstone, slate, and soapstone. Discoïdal and spherical pottery beads were modeled around pieces of grass stem, reeds, or twigs, which were withdrawn or burnt out during the process of firing, leaving a hole for suspension. The bone beads are mostly cylindrical sections cut from bird and mammal bones. None of them is decorated in any way. One bead seems to have been made from a section of a human fibula; another was made by grinding both ends of the canine tooth of a dog or wolf until the natural longitudinal hollow was exposed. Beads made from the columellæ of large ocean shells were scarce, although common on a site of a similar culture only a few miles away. Several pieces of the stems of pottery pipes rubbed smooth on the fractured ends may also have been beads.

Pendant ornaments were made by perforating the root of the canine tooth of the bear. A canine tooth of a fisher or raccoon and one of a bear have the root notched for suspension. A perforated elk-tooth was also found. Another



kind of pendant was made from a common pond snail (*Campeloma decisa*) by breaking or drilling a suspension hole through the lip.

A few fragments of gorgets made of stone, and several fragments and two whole ones made from pieces of human skull, were found.

Of materials used for making face paint, there were rubbed nuggets of hematite, ochre, and pieces of graphite. A clam-shell had been used as a receptacle for red paint. Fragments of a small pottery vessel also show red paint on the inside. A pitted hammerstone, a broken celt, and a rubbing stone appear to have been used as paint grinders.

An unfinished comb made of antler was the only object of this kind found, although another piece of antler with three rectangular holes may have been the top of a comb.

The small pottery vessels of which a few were found whole may have been toys. Some of the smaller ones appear to have been formed on the end of the finger. A small broken image and a broken head made of pottery may also have been toys. The wooden disc may have been part of a top, although we have no evidence that the Iroquois had this game even in historic times. Two curious pottery objects which look as if they had been lumps of pottery clay wrapped in corn leaves and tied and then baked may have been made in play by children in imitation of their elders, who, perhaps, like the Mohawks described in the *Journal Notes* of David Pietersz de Vries, made cakes of cornmeal and baked them in the ashes, first wrapping a vine or maize leaf around them.

Of objects probably used in games there were discs rubbed from stone and broken pieces of pottery and a few of modeled pottery. Many of those made of potsherds retain the original decorative pattern on one side. One of the potsherd discs has a faintly marked cross on the concave side.

The most numerous objects, perhaps used in a game like dice, are the middle and proximal phalanx bones of the deer rubbed flat on the front and back until the marrow cavity was exposed. Others were rubbed until they were triangular in cross-section. Some are flattened on the back, and the front is rubbed down at an angle at each end, making it look like an unequal sided triangle as viewed from the side. Many bear transverse bars, notches, and incised lines on the front surface. A few have a small round hollow on the front near the distal end. They have been found in other parts of Ontario and in New York State.

Some phalanx bones have a large hole through the proximal end and a smaller one through the distal extremity. A few of these have holes drilled through the sides at the proximal end. Another kind, of which, however, only a few were found, had the proximal half cut off and the distal end perforated. These were all probably used in a game similar to the familiar "ring and pin", some of the notched bone awls, of which a few were found, perhaps being used as the pins.

Pipes for smoking were made of bone, stone, and pottery. The bone pipes, most of which were in process of manufacture, were made from the scapula of the deer by breaking off the thin plates, spine, and acromion, and smoothing the fractured edges. The glenoid fossa was hollowed by burning and scooping out the burnt portion until the bowl cavity was sufficiently deep. The stem hole was made through the cancellated interior of the thick outer or axillary border. The coracoid process may have been left on for a handle. These pipes



are almost unique so far as Iroquoian bone artifacts are concerned, only one other having been found, and that in Brant county, Ontario, in the old Atti-wandaron region. Stone pipes were represented by only two broken stems and an unfinished bowl. The majority of the pottery pipes are of the cornet type. Some had square stems. A few stems were painted with red pigment.

We found a perforated portion of the plastron of a turtle which may have been part of a rattle. Some middle phalanx bones of the deer with a hole cut into the front may have been whistles, although they cannot be made to produce a note.

Art was confined principally to the form and decoration of most of the pottery vessels and pottery pipes. The form of many of the pots, especially those with handles, was very graceful. The patterns on the potsherds vary greatly in detail, but on the whole resemble designs on Iroquoian pottery from other places. Some are decorated with the roulette. A triangle of three impressed circles is the most distinctive decorative motive and probably represents a human face, the resemblance being sometimes made more realistic by putting round or lenticular depressions in the middle of the circles. One piece, in addition to the three circles, has a prominent nose. Sometimes the triangle of circles is inverted. A few pieces, instead of the circles, have oblique ellipses for the eyes and a horizontal ellipse for the mouth. The impressed circles are also arranged in one or two vertical groups of from one to five at intervals around the rim or collar, and some are in an oblique row. Some also surround the necks and shoulders of the vessels. The neck of one pot was decorated with a very unusual design consisting of a row or band of small separate triangles filled with oblique and vertical hatching. Some have triangular ornamentation in relief on the rims and shoulders. What Sir J. W. Dawson styled the "corn-ear" pattern is one of the common designs. A fragment of a rim bears a crudely modeled representation of a human face.

The simpler forms of pottery pipes bear very little elaborate decoration, the pattern mainly consisting of impressed encircling lines varied with round or oval impressions at intervals. The typical form of pipe of the trumpet type has from three to five horizontal or oblique bars on the back of the bowl. A few are decorated with a simple chevron design. One fragment shows two triangular pendant ornaments in relief, with impressed lines, ending in two crudely modeled human faces. A very crude face is on the side of an equally crude pipe bowl. Other faces are very well modeled. One is almost negroid in appearance. Some have the ears pierced as if for suspending ornaments. The heads usually faced the smoker. A badly mutilated pottery pipe, found near the site, represents a child riding pickaback. The heads of both figures are missing. There is only one head that can be taken to represent a mammal and that probably a bear. Several heads may represent the great horned owl; one of these has the eyes represented by a round hollow surrounded with impressed radiating lines. Two snake heads from pottery pipes were also found, and several other fragments represent the snake coiled round the bowl with the scales indicated by cross-hatching. An expansion at the end of the tail of one of these evidently represents the rattle of a rattlesnake. One pipe is modeled in the shape of a fish, the tail end forming the mouthpiece and the open mouth the bowl. The most peculiar pipes are those having a raised semicircular design,



with six rectangular slots, on the front of the bowl. One also has slots on the edges. The most perfect one has five faces across the front. Similar pipes have been found on other Iroquoian sites in eastern Ontario, and on the site of ancient Hochelaga. Beauchamp figures one from Jefferson county, New York.

Finds of bone and stone artifacts bearing engraved designs were scanty. A deer phalanx and a few bone awls have a simple chevron design incised on one side. One of the bone awls bears a reticulate design. Some artifacts have notches on their edges which were probably for decorative purposes, but they may also have been enumerative tallies.

Only two pieces of carving in the round were found: one an antler handle in the shape of a phallus, and the end of a deer antler carved into three rounded knobs.

Of objects of superstition and religion very few can be definitely regarded as such. Some of the quartz crystals found may have been hunting and divining fetishes like those of the Cherokee, and they may also have been medicine-men's charms as among the Eskimo. The small pottery image may have had some significance. The semicircular or crescent design on two of the pottery pipes probably had some symbolic meaning. The gorgets or breastplates made of human skull may have been amuletic or invested with mystic powers, as they were all probably derived from the skulls of enemies killed in battle or of victims consumed in ceremonial cannibalism.

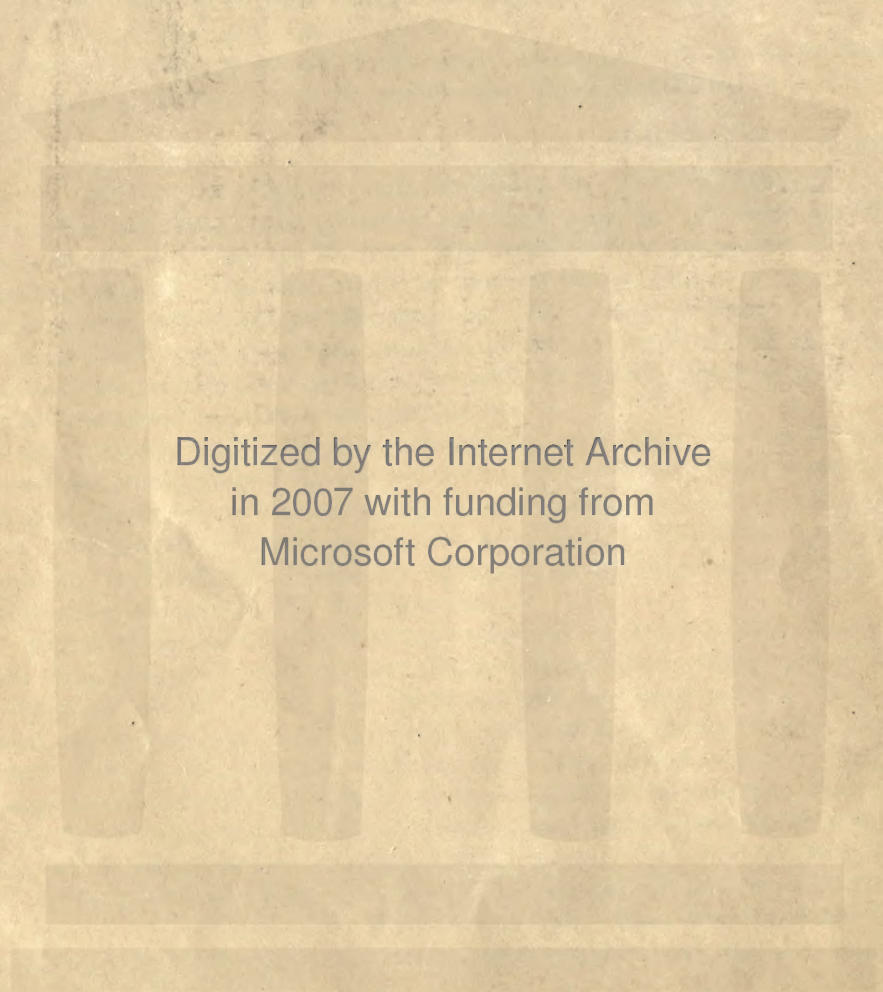
The palisade which originally surrounded the village was readily traced around the greater part of the site by excavating and finding small round spots, the molds of the post-holes, occurring at nearly regular intervals in the yellow sand. Other molds of post-holes may be referable to such structures as lodges, corn-cribs, and scaffolds. These are all shown on the map accompanying the forthcoming memoir on the Roebuck site.

Eighty-three human skeletons were exhumed, of which a large proportion were those of women and children. There were very few young men or those in the prime of life. There were six double and two triple burials. Only one burial was accompanied with an artifact, and that a gracefully formed pottery vessel. One of the skeletons seems to have been buried within a small inclosure, as was indicated by molds of post-holes surrounding it in the yellow sand. A few burnt human bones and many broken ones which appear as if they had been boiled, were found in the refuse heaps. Some of the stray jaw-bones have the coronoid process and the articular condyle hacked off, and the broken ends of some of the long-bones have also been hacked. They were probably those of captives, and this would suggest that the inhabitants of the site practised ceremonial cannibalism.









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