THE PORTAGE SITE AT LEWISTON, NEW YORK

Excavated by the Ondiara Archeological Chapter,
Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society

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AN ANALYSIS OF A POTTERY SAMPLE FROM THE PORTAGE SITE, LEWISTON, N.Y.

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This pottery sample was submitted for analysis by Richard L. McCarthy in May, 1959. He requested that the pottery types be identified, if possible.

Method of Procedure:

The rim sherds were separated in terms of decoration techniques. These were: cord on cord, punctate, incised lines, cord-wrapped stick impressions, plain, dentate stamp. Each group was then described in terms of paste characteristics, design, surface finish and form. It was evident that each group possessed many characteristics already recognized as attributes of pottery types in New York State. (Ritchie and Mac Neish, 1949, Mac Neish, 1952). Therefore an attempt was made to establish the presence of types previously described. This was done through the comparison of the published descriptions and in the case of pre-Iroquoian types, a comparison with the type specimens in the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences collection.

The pottery indicates the site was occupied during several cultural periods. The (ceramic) range of occupation is from Early Woodland II (Point Peninsula 1) through prehistoric Iroquois. Although this range is extensive (approximately 3,000 years in length), the majority of the pottery indicates that the principal components can be ascribed to two cultures.

The earlier of the two is Point Peninsula 4, or Middle Woodland III (Ritchie, 1951, p. 132). A comparison of the Point Peninsula series pottery type percentages from the Portage Site with Figure 24 (Ritchie and Mac Neish, 1949, p. 118) indicates that this component would have been occupied later than Jack's Reef Site. This is based upon the assumption that pottery making and its decoration followed a general trend of increasing popularity followed by a gradual decrease in popularity. It is interesting to note that the Point Peninsula Rocker-Stamped type is not represented in the Portage Site sample while it constitutes 48% of the sample from Jack's Reef. On the other hand, 19.7% of the pottery sample (Point Peninsula Series) from the Portage Site is Wickham Punctate, a type absent from the Jack's Reef sample. Since the rocker-stamped decoration technique was increasing in popularity during the later Point Peninsula occupation in the Finger Lakes region (Ritchie and Mac Neish, 1949, p. 120), and the punctate types were increasing in the western part of the state, it indicates that the two decoration techniques have different histories. This possibility was suggested by Ritchie and Mac Neish (1949, p. 120). The punctate type of decoration is shared with cultures to the west in southern Ontario and Michigan (Guthe, 1948). The occurrence of Wickham Punctate in the Portage Site sample does mean that it is distributed over a greater area than was recognized in 1949. The later culture represented in the Portage Site is that of a prehistoric Iroquois group. The pottery sample (142 sherds) indicates an early stage of Neutral-Wenro Iroquois culture (Mac Neish, 1952, pp. 10- 21). Two pottery types are not considered Neutral-Wenro. One is Ripley Corded, an Erie type. The other is Sidey Notched listed as a Huron type. The significance of these exceptions is not great since

Mac Neish postulates that the Huron, Erie and Neutral-Wenro developed from the same early Iroquois culture complex. The Portage Site Iroquois sample indicates an occupation between the Uren and Middleport stages, thus bolstering the Mac Neish hypothesis that the Neutral expansion eastward across the Niagara River occurred at the time they had a Middleport stage of culture (Mac Neish, 1952, p. 11).

As a caution, I feel it should be added that I do not necessarily agree with the procedure followed in "forcing" pottery into previously defined types. The differences noted, especially in paste, and slight variations in definiteness of decoration (deeply impressed) as well as embellishment of designs (more rows, lines, etc. of impressions) may indicate a slightly different time of production. But it also may represent only a different social group.

Since Ritchie and Mac Neish state the purpose of their study was to disclose chronological progression over a short time span (1947, p. 97), I do not believe these types should be considered as pan-Northeastern in distribution. In the 1949 study it was noted that they may represent local specializations or varieties of more widely distributed pottery types. There is no doubt but what the criteria for type differentiation was based upon rim form, pot form, design and decoration techniques (p. 98). The exactness of definition was necessary for their purpose.

If all pottery types to be recognized in the northeast were defined in terms of equal detail, there would be a large number of types. Later students trying to establish the temporal position of their material could be misled since the center of development for a pottery type may not be the area in which it was first recognized and defined by the archeologist. It takes time for culture traits to diffuse. Thus it is possible

that a pottery type may be used in one locality prior to its use in another. The point is we should recognize that the definition of a pottery is not an end in itself. It is an attempt to organize cultural data so that the occupation of an area can be better understood (Guthe, 1954, p. 9).

The Ritchie and Mac Neish analysis was based principally on the pottery representing 12 components located on 9 sites. These sites are located within 180 miles of Brewerton, New York, where 5 of the 12 components were located. They sought to obtain a more minute time distinction of Owasco and Point Peninsula cultures in order to clarify their possible relationships (Ritchie and Mac Neish, 1949, p. 97). They also recognized that new sites might change their interpretations. Therefore, "forcing" pottery into the types defined in 1949 may tend to obscure rather than clarify the situation.

If the description of a published type does not conform in all details to that of your pottery, especially in paste characteristics, is it significant? Local clays and available tempering materials may account for these differences, but this does not negate the possibility of temporal differences. (In this connection, one observation made which may be significant was the presence of iron pyrites in the paste of many sherds of several types. Inclusions of iron pyrites in the paste of pottery appears to be a characteristic of southeastern Ontario pottery. This can be explained in two ways. Either the pyrites was selected as a temper and mixed with the clay, or it occurs in the clay naturally. In either event, the cultural affinity is therefore indicated as being with the area west of the site.) The decoration techniques and design elements may be very similar, but if so, should be considered only as indications of similar culture stages. Thus, the pottery of the Point

Peninsula Series occurring at the Portage site may be on the time level of the early Owasco types in Central New York. Two of the Owasco types recognized in the Portage sample could represent early Owasco contacts, while the third (Canandaigua Plain) is held to be only a Middle Owasco type. The small number of Owasco sherds does not indicate an extensive Owasco occupation. They could have been contemporary with the Point Peninsula occupation, if this was later than that in the Central New York area.

(Pottery recovered in 1958 was analysed by Dr. Alfred Guthe, that found in 1959 was analysed and added to the types already analysed by Dr. Guthe. This did not make a great change in the percentage, as to types and as a result the second year work was not re-submitted to Dr. Guthe.)

IROQUOIS

	1958		1959	
	Sherds	%	Sherds	%
Lawson Opposed	5	9.6	9	6.3
Lawson Incised	1	1.9	9	6.3
Pound Necked	1	1.9	14	9.9
Ontario Horizontal	12	23.0	29	20.4
Middleport Oblique	3	5.7	4	2.8
Middleport Criss-Cross	1	1.9	6	4.2
Ontario Oblique	10	19.2	27	19.0
Uren Dentate	1	1.9	2	1.4
Uren Noded	1	1.9	4	2.8
Ripley Corded	2	3.6	5	3.5
Impressed Oblique Ridley 1958 P29	5	9.6	7	4.9
Sidey Notched	2	3.6	8	5.6
Unclassified	8	15.3	18	12,7
	52	99.1	142	99.8

LATE WOODLAND

	1958		1959	
	Sherds	%	Sherds	%
Owasco Corded Horizontal	4	30.7	10	25.6
Owasco Herringbone	2	15.3	9	23.0
Canandaigua Plain	3	23.0	16	41.0
Krieger Incised	1	7.6	1	2.5
Krieger Stamped (or Vinette Dentate)	3	23.0	3	7.7
	13	99.6	39	99.8

MIDDLEWOODLAND

	1958		1959	
	Sherds	%	Sherds	%
Jack's Reef Corded Collar	3	4.0	18	11.4
Jack's Reef Corded Punctate	6	8.0	15	9.5
Jack's Reef Corded	4	5.3	17	10,8
Jack's Reef Dentate Collar	7	9.3	7	4.4
Wickham Punctate	17	22.6	31	19.7
Pt. Peninsula Plain	6	8.0	13	8.2
Pt. Peninsula Corded	19	25.3	31	19.7
Vinette Dentate	1	1.3	3	1.9
Vinette Complex Dentate	1	1.3	3	1.9
Unclassified	11	14.6	19	12.1
	75	99.7	157	99.9

	1958		1959	
	Sherds	%	Sherds	%
Vinette 1	1		1	
Geneseo Cordmarked	1		2	
			3	

CHIPPED STONE ARTIFACTS FROM THE PORTAGE SITE, LEWISTON, N.Y.

(An analysis of material submitted for study by Richard L. McCarthy)

The chipped stone artifacts include projectile points, cache blades, flake knives, scrapers, drill fragments and a strike-a-light. Projectile points and cache blades provide an indication of the cultural periods represented on the site because a certain form, or forms, tends to dominate the chipped stone inventory of each period.

Method of Procedure

The entire sample (111 specimens) was sorted in terms of gross features, especially form, or silhouette. Attention was then given to secondary features, such as basal grinding, thinness of blade, relative position of flake scars and the like. Thus sub-groups were recognized.

The description of projectile point forms poses problems of terminology. Many attempts to establish descriptive terms have been published, but general agreement as to terminology is lacking. My system is probably a combination of several and no doubt will prove unacceptable to some students. However, I have recognized the following categories:

1. Stemmed
    - A. Corner-notched
    - B. Tapered shoulders
    - C. Horizontal shoulders
    - D. Unclassified

II. Unstemmed, or triangles.

A. Isosceles

1. Simple, unmodified forms

a. Small, thin blades

b. Bunts, thick blade due to convexity of one surface.

c. Small, thick blades

d. Large

2. Side-notched blade

a. Definite notches with squared-off basal corners.

b. Definite notches with no special basal treatment.

c. Thick blades, eared.

d. Shallow, indefinite notches.

B. Equilateral

C. Worked flakes

In recognizing these forms, I was guided, in part, by the characteristics known to be significant period markers. The categories therefore represent both formal and cultural groupings. This combination of criteria may not be analytically sound. Cache blades were also grouped in a similar fashion. (See Appendix A).

It was concluded from the specimens of stone tools examined that the range of cultures represented on the Portage Site was from Late Archaic (Laurentian) to Late Woodland (Owasco and Iroquois). There are indications of Early Woodland III (Hopewellian) and a Middle Woodland occupations. These findings coincide with that indicated by the pottery sample. Since the Late Archaic people produced no pottery, the occurrence of Laurentian

projectile points only indicates a greater antiquity for the site's occupation.

The following is a summary of the cultural periods indicated by the chipped stone artifacts:

Late Archaic - Laurentian

Projectile Points

1.	Stemmed		
	A.	Corner-notched	
		1. Large	1
		2. Small	3
II.	Unstemmed		
	A.	Isosceles	
		1. Unmodified	2
		2. Side-notched	
		a. Broad-blade	4
		b. Eared	1

Blades

2.	Pentaganoid	1
	Leaf-shaped	1
		13

Early Woodland 1 - 11

Projectile Points

1.	Stemmed		
	B.	Tapered shoulder, expanding stem	1
	C.	Horizontal shoulder, expanding stem	2
II.	Unstemmed		
	C.	Worked flakes	3
			6

Early Woodland III - Hopewellian

Blades

1. Ovate 6

3. Trianguloid, of Flint Ridge chalcedony 1

Prismatic flakeknife of Flint Ridge chalcedony 1

Flake of Flint Ridge chalcedony 1

9

Middle Woodland - Pt. Peninsula

Projectile Points

1. Stemmed

A. Corner-notched, possibly Raccoon Notched 2

11. Unstemmed

A.2.a. Side-notched, possibly Raccoon Notched 10

b. Side-notched, no special basal treatment 2

Strike-a-Light? 1

Cache blade fragments 7

22

Late Woodland

Projectile Points

11. Unstemmed

A. Isosceles

1.a small - Iroquois 18

b. Bunts 3

c Large - Monongahela Woodland? 2

B. Equilateral - Owasco 2

25

Summary:

Late Archaic	13	specimens
Early Woodland 1 - 11	6	"
Early Woodland 111	9	"
Middle Woodland	22	"
Late Woodland	25	"
Unassigned culturally	36	"
	111	

The nature of the eastern Archaic culture stage is being reassessed. It is now generally agreed that a number of flint-working traditions have been identified as of the Late Archaic cultures. This suggests that a number of small groups of hunters were moving about and sharing a common site or combining forces at times in various geographic locations. Since types of specimens resembling those on sites called Laurentian appear in this sample, we can specify a Late Archaic occupation. The relationship of the people using this material to those in Central New York is conjectural. There is no reason to hold that these people came from the east; i.e., Central New York. Similar material occurs to the west of the Niagara area.

Similar qualifications could be made for each of the other lithic forms represented in this collection. The total cultural assemblage with which these forms are associated would provide a more accurate indication of cultural relationships.

But certain interesting relationships are suggested. One of these is found in the point forms listed as corner-notched and side-notched, a total of 12 points, noted as resembling the Raccoon Notched forms.

Similar forms were recovered at Port Maitland, Ontario and classified as Point Peninsula in cultural association (Ritchie, 1944, Plate 84, p.179). The notation of a similarity to the Raccoon Notched type identified by Mayer-Oakes in the Upper Ohio Valley indicates my feeling that their cultural association is more accurately identified with that area. These are Middle Woodland in association and are found chiefly in the Ohio Valley and Beaver Valley of Northwestern Pennsylvania. Mayer-Oakes wrote: "Material is almost always a fine-grained exotic or brightly colored chert which has been carefully flaked by pressure from a thin cache blade. The notches are most often square side notches, though one variety is corner notched. The base is very square, either straight or concave, and not ground smooth." (p. 87) This type appears on what appear to be Middle Woodland camp sites and there is little direct association of the type with mounds.

If you consider the suggestion of Monongahela Woodland projectile points from the Portage Site, it is evident that contacts with or people from, the western Pennsylvania area were there. Elsewhere I have discussed a north-south orientation of the Late Prehistoric culture in southwestern New York (Guthe, 1958, pp. 66-68). The findings on this site confirm my hypothesis. They even suggest it was a factor in the cultural development of an earlier period.

In summary, this Portage Site sample indicates that the archeological findings of western New York are to be best understood in terms of the information from Pennsylvania and Ontario, not those from central New York.

(Stone samples submitted were for the years 1958-59)

CHIPPED STONE

1. Stemmed Projectile Points

A. Corner-notched (barbed shoulders, expanding base)

1. Dark grey flint with quartzite(?) inclusion. Possibly of Flint Ridge, Ohio, origin. Blade edges convex, possibly pentaganoid. Slightly convex base. Possibly Laurentian, or Early Woodland.

2. Onondaga chert. Concave basal edge. 2 specimens. Possibly Raccoon Notched Type (Middle Woodland).
Measurements: 1 1/16" x 13/16".

3. Small, could be Laurentian - 3 specimens

B. Tapered shoulders, narrow, expanding stem
Measurement: 1 7/8" x 1"
Possibly Early Woodland

C. Horizontal shoulders, expanding stem.
(2 specimens). Thick blades with convex edges, straight bases.
Measurements: 1 3/4" x 15/16"
1 3/8" x 13/16"
Possibly Early Woodland

D. Unclassified basal fragments.
3 specimens

2. One of foreign material - light tan with streaks of cream-colored flints.

3. Possibly Laurentian

II. Unstemmed projectile points (triangles)

A. Isosceles

1. Simple unmodified forms

a. Small, thin blades - 18 specimens

1. Complete - 10

2. Broken tips - 8

Only one of the complete specimens would I consider definitely Iroquois. This is 1 1/2" long, 3/4" across base. Base is concave. The others could be Iroquois but lack the fine, finished chipping seen on Many Iroquois points.

b. Bunt, or thick blade due to convexity of one surface. 3 specimens.

c. Thick blade, straight base, straight and convex blade edges - 2 specimens.

2. Measurements: 1 1/4" x 5/8"
1" x 5/8"

3. The longer of the two has an indentation near the base on one side. It does not appear to have been purposely chipped off after the point was completed. It must result from a blow delivered prior to the preparation of the blade surfaces.

Laurentian possibly.

d. Large Isosceles - 2 specimens.

Both fragmentary, but both show good chipping technique. One is 2 1/2" x 1 3/8". Their size is larger than the average Iroquois point. They could be Monongahela Woodland.

2. Side-notched (10)

a. 4 complete

Bases: straight, concave, convex.

Notches: definite. Flakes removed from both faces.

Blade edges: convex.

6 fragments

Bases: straight, convex.

Base with square corners not in line with blade edges, on most.

Notches: definite. Flakes removed from both faces.

Blade edges: convex, straight.

Possibly Raccoon Notched of Upper Ohio Valley, (See Mayer-Oakes, 1955, pp. 86,87, 159, 217). Middle Woodland. Similar points also from Port Maitland, Ontário. (See Ritchie, 1944, Plate 84, p. 179). So, Point Peninsula 3, a Middle Woodland culture.

b. Basal fragments - 2 specimens

These are similar to points illustrated as from Point Peninsula 2 sites (Oberlander #2, Pt. Peninsula site in Ritchie, 1944). The basal

section of the thinner fragment is suggestive of the form seen on Raccoon Notched points.

c. Side-notched, thick-bladed, eared. 1 specimen.
1 1/4" x 3/4"
Concave base with slight projection, or ear at basal angle.
Asymmetrical blade, with straight edges.
Possibly Laurentian.

d. Shallow-notched; asymmetrical blade, one convex edge and one straight edge. Concave base due to single fracture (hinge). 1 specimen.
Measurement: 1 1/4" x 3/4"
Unknown cultural association.

e. Broad-bladed, Brewerton type - 4

B. Equilateral - 2 specimens

One complete, one fragmentary. Possibly Owasco

C. Worked flakes. 3 specimens

These retain the curve of the original percussion flake, and one face is relatively unretouched.
Blade edges are straight, or convex.
Measurements: 1 1/4" x 9/16"
1 3/8" x 1/2"
1 1/4" x 11/16"
Possibly served as blades - Early Woodland?

111. Blades

1. Ovate. 6 specimens

   Two of these are fragmentary. One is dimunitive (1 1/8" x 3/4"). These, except for the smallest, could be Hopewellian (Early Woodland 111).

2. Leaf-shaped. 4 specimens.

   Asymmetrical forms. One is narrow with a convex and a concave edge. This may be Laurentian. Another is pentaganoid (1-12). This may also be Laurentian.

   Measurements: 1 9/16" x 13/16"; 1 5/8" x 9/16".
   1 1/2" x 3/4" (tip missing)
   1 11/16 x 5/8"

3. Trianguloid. Material: Flint Ridge, Ohio chalcedony, with quartz inclusion.

   Corner missing

   Measurement: 2 3/8" x 1 1/2"

   Fire blackened?

   Hopewellian Culture

   Asymmetrical Form

4. Fragments - 7

   While none of these are complete, these basal fragments appear to resemble Middle Woodland 1 and 11 cache blades (Point Peninsula 2 and 3.) They lack the usual size and thinness of the Pt. Peninsula 2 blades, however.

5. Unfinished blade - 1. Possibly a blade in process but discarded when the cleavage of one flake failed to do as expected. This may have been used as a scraper, but

the worked end lacks the appearance of a true scraper.

Unclassified culturally.

IV. Miscellaneous

1. Strike-a-lite?

Trianguloid, straight-edge with convex base. Base is thick and exhibits some battering, but of a minor amount. Shape is that of a Point Peninsula culture strike-a-light. It may be a broken point reworked.

Measurement: 1 1/2" x 7/8"

2. Drills ?

Possibly broken stemmed points reworked into drills. Point of each is off center. Each has an expanding stem.

2 specimens.

Measurements: 1 1/4" x 1 1/8" (22)

1 1/4" x 13/16" (F)

3. 2 Broken stemmed, or notched points. Unclassified.

4. Reject (surface)

5. Prismatic flake knife - Hopewellian.

Of Flint Ridge, Ohio, chalcedony.

Measurements: 1 1/4" x 5/16".

6. Flake - Flint Ridge, Ohio, chalcedony.

7. Basal portion of blade?

Material: Pennsylvania Jasper

8. Unclassified bases of projectile points - 2

One is of chalcedony

V. Scrapers

1. Rectanguloid - 2. Flakes with edges worked on one surface. Unusual forms not familiar to me.
2. Side and end scraper - 1. Crescent-shaped, thick flake with working along the majority of the edges.

VI. Chert drills (all Onondaga chert).

1. Expanded bases on 9. Forms have large, irregularly shaped bases.
    a. 2 fashioned from flakes, one surface unworked except at point.
2. T-shaped drills 3, (one a fragment)
    a. Maximum length 1 1/4"
3. Side-notched, expanded base. Slight concavity to base. Tip missing. 1 1/8" x 3/4"
4. Trianguloid 4.
    a. 1 1/4" x 1 3/8" x 1 3/8". Concave on 2 sides, convex on 3rd. Thick in center, thinning on edges. Two angles are rounded, the 3rd is sharp.
    b. 1" x 1 1/8" x 1 1/8". Tip missing. Concave on 3 sides. Ridge runs along one edge and would thicken one angle.
    c. 1" x 1" x 1". Concave sides. 3 points rounded, 2 smaller than the 3rd. Thick, heavy point probably drill tip.
    d. Squared stem for 1/2" then tapers to point. Thick. Both faces worked. Overall length 1 3/4". Width 3/4"
5. Straight drill? Base may be broken. 1 1/4" long, 3/8"wide. Finely chipped edges.

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