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HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN MICHIGAN

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During the past two decades, historical archaeology, which in North America deals with the period following European colonization, has grown steadily. Though practiced prior to the 1960s, it has recently benefited from new academic programs and increased public interest. This *Great Lakes Informant* explores what historical archaeology is and how it differs from traditional prehistoric archaeology.

What Is Historical Archaeology?

Historical archaeology, like prehistoric archaeology, deals with the remains and behavior of past cultures. However, unlike its prehistoric counterpart, it deals largely with peoples and sites in the most recent past. The realm of historical archaeology in North America usually begins with the initial exploration by Europeans, or non-Indians, of lands previously occupied solely by aboriginal peoples. Although the exact date of the contact between distinct cultural and national groups is often difficult to establish, a convenient date for the beginning of the historic period in Michigan is the seventeenth century. During this century, many explorers, missionaries, military men and fur traders traveled within the present boundaries of Michigan.

An archaeological site has been traditionally considered within the historic period when non-Indian items, such as glass trade beads, copper kettles and gun parts are located. However, while the occurrence of non-Indian trade goods at a site is a good indicator of its having been inhabited during the historic period, many historic-period sites do not contain goods because they were occupied long after the In-

dian trade either had moved west or ceased completely. An example of this type of site is an 1850 Michigan homestead. Other sites occupied technically in the historic period may not contain trade goods because they were too far from trading centers. Nonetheless, these sites are still considered historical archaeological sites.

Historical archaeology deals with subjects that range from the period of intense contact and conflict between distinct peoples during European colonization to the period of almost total non-Indian settlement. As a result, a historical archaeologist may excavate a seventeenth-century Indian village, an eighteenth-century military fort and trading post, or a nineteenth-century county jail or farmhouse. Historical archaeologists may even excavate twentieth century sites. One area of research, called industrial archaeology, studies technological change and concentrates on standing examples of the mechanized past that were developed during and after the Industrial Revolution.

Research Materials of the Historical Archaeologist

Because the historical archaeologist deals with the historic period, the possible sources of available evidence beyond below-ground archaeological sites are greater than for the prehistorian. Potential sources may be any type of information. The most obvious are written documents and maps, photographs and verbal information from people who remember the habitation of the site in question.

Written documents have proved particularly useful

in excavating historic sites. Generally, these materials consist of personal letters or memoirs, newspaper articles, or other written information. For example, detailed descriptions or maps of an abandoned military post describing the fort's structure and design assist in the location, identification and interpretation of its archaeological remains. Old newspaper advertisements provide interesting and important information on the contents, use and distribution of many historic-period artifacts, such as late-nineteenth-century patent medicine bottles. Photographs are useful in providing an understanding of many topics, including styles of dress, the use of non-Indian items by American Indians and the design of once standing buildings. Information from people who once lived in or near an area under excavation provides a great deal of otherwise lost information and adds a personal touch to the history of the site.

The use of written documents has led some to believe that historical archaeology is more historical than archaeological and perhaps better studied by historians. Such critics note that because so much is known about the historic period from documents, there is no need to conduct archaeological excavations on historic-period sites.

While it is true that historical records can assist the historical archaeologist in many ways, they can also present an inaccurate picture of the past. For instance, the size of a military installation or the condition of an Indian group may have been purposefully exaggerated for political or economic reasons. In addition, many groups, such as slaves or the very poor, did not write and were largely considered too unimportant to be written about. In these cases, archaeology adds substance to historical documents.

The use of historical records means that historical archaeologists, in addition to traditional archaeological and anthropological training, must also be trained in archival research and historical analysis. They may spend as much time in a library as at an excavation site.

Dating Historic-Period Sites

Historical archaeologists have many ways to date an archaeological site. Prehistorians have made excellent use of radiometric dating techniques, such as Carbon-14 dating. These techniques are usually not applicable to historic sites, because the oldest historic site in North America can only be about 400 years old. Within this context, a radio-carbon date of 1650 ± 200 years is virtually meaningless. As a result, historical archaeologists have developed dating techniques that supplement the basic archaeological dating methods of vertical and horizontal location.

One dating technique used by historical archaeologists relates to white clay, or kaolin, non-

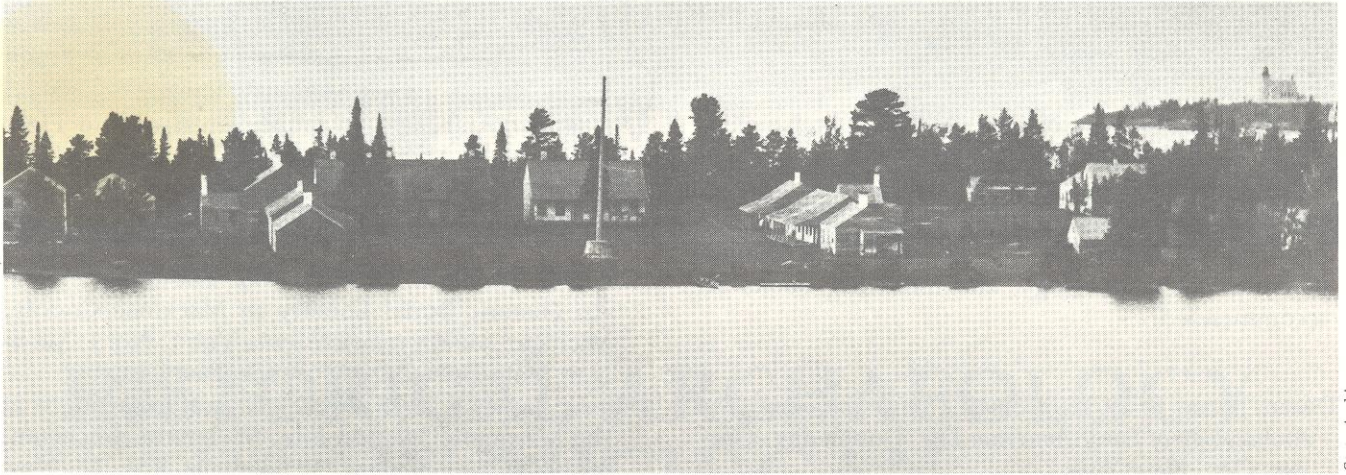
Indian smoking pipes. Clay pipes often changed style and are common on historic-period sites occupied by non-Indians throughout the colonial period up to about 1840. One way to date these pipes is through measuring the hole, or bore, in the stem. Because this hole is known to have gotten progressively smaller through time, statistical formula can be used to date large collections of these pipes through the change in bore diameter.

Another dating method has been developed with European ceramics. The known dates of manufacture of the different ceramic types are placed in a statistical formula and a mean date for the collection is derived. This technique can be used for whole collections, whereas ceramic composition, design and pattern can be a useful method of dating individual specimens. Individual plates, bowls and pitchers often exhibit a maker's mark on their base that can be used to identify their manufacturer, date of manufacture and location of manufacture. Some of these codes even indicate the exact date a vessel was made.



Lyle Stone

Historical archaeologists can easily date a ceramic with a maker's mark on its base. The above mark indicates that this piece of fine earthenware ceramic was registered on 24 May 1849. The mark reads, S (1849), E (May), 24 (24th day of the month), I (parcel number), IV (class of ceramics).



State Archives

Fort Wilkins, located at Copper Harbor, was established in 1844 to provide both law enforcement and protection in the rapidly growing mining areas of the Keweenaw Peninsula. Located between Lakes Superior (above) and Fanny Hooe (below), Wilkins was occupied until 1846 when its garrison was withdrawn for action in the Mexican War. In 1867 the fort was re-garrisoned for three years. Between 1870 and 1921 the site was maintained by various individuals, including operators of the Copper Harbor Lighthouse. The fort was deeded to the State of Michigan in 1923 to be administered as a historic landmark and public park. Many of its buildings were restored by WPA labor between 1939 and 1942. Today Fort Wilkins, pictured above in 1892, is on the National Register of Historic Places. During the late 1970s the Michigan History Division initiated a long-range plan involving historical and archaeological research at the fort. Archaeological excavations yielded many artifacts and provided a better understanding of military life at an isolated post in the mid-nineteenth century.

Glassware, like ceramics, was manufactured by industries that are generally well known today. As a result, technological changes in manufacturing techniques are useful ways to date archaeological specimens. Bottle seams are directly related to the type of mold used to make the bottle. Hand-blown bottles exhibit no seams, but are roughly datable solely because of their manner of manufacture. Shape, color, contents and maker's symbols can also be used for dating bottles.

Other historic-period artifacts, including trade beads, doll fragments and nails, can be dated. The style or construction materials of standing buildings associated with a historic-period archaeological site can similarly be used to provide a date for the occupation of the site, but this technique is not very exact. In addition, documents, photographs, and the memory of local residents provide occupation dates for a historic-period archaeological site. On sites where there are no obvious European or American artifacts, the historical archaeologist must rely on standard archaeological dating methods.

The Historic Period in Michigan

As noted above, a historical archaeologist can study sites inhabited solely by American Indians, by both American Indians and non-Indians, or by non-Indians alone. While this distinction is not always as clear-cut, it is a convenient framework in which to discuss the historic period.

The American Indian Phase. Just prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Great Lakes, Michigan was inhabited by a number of American Indian groups, including the Ojibwa (Chippewa), Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Wyandot or Huron. This era is usually called the "prehistoric" period. Each group occupied its own territory, with the Ojibwa being the northernmost group and the Potawatomi and Wyandot the southernmost. The Ojibwa, by virtue of their region's environment, were largely hunters, fishermen and gatherers, while the Potawatomi and Wyandot were agriculturalists. Each group was culturally and historically distinct.

Though these native groups are defined here as living within the period before the influx of non-Indian explorers and colonists, much of what is known about them comes from the writing of European missionaries, military personnel and explorers, like the *Jesuit Relations* (accounts and letters sent to Europe by Jesuit missionaries in the New World throughout the colonial period). While Europeans did not necessarily meet or live with a particular Indian group during this phase, many European items reached the villages indirectly through other Indians. As a result, protohistoric Indian villages may contain glass trade beads, gun parts and other non-Indian goods.

One of the most notable fully protohistoric sites in Michigan is the late-seventeenth century Dumaw Creek site in Oceana County. Pottery, copper beads

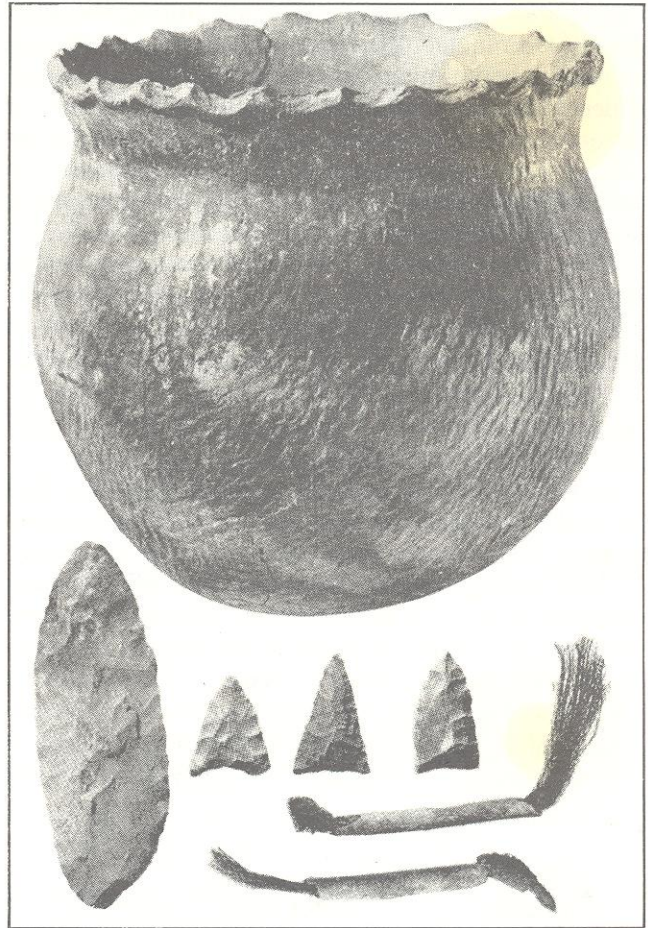
and buffalo, beaver and elk skins have all been found at this site, but it is not clear whether any of the metal items located at the site are non-Indian in origin.

The Tionontate Huron village in St. Ignace, while falling within the American Indian/Indian phase, also contains some artifacts that represent the retention of prehistoric Indian traits into the historic period. In addition to many European items, archaeologists found flint arrowheads, flint scrapers, bone combs and ornaments, and catlinite pipes.

The American Indian/non-Indian Phase. With the advent of direct contact between Indians and non-Indians beginning in the late seventeenth century, the Indians' culture changed. This change is defined archaeologically in many ways, most obviously through the increased proportion of non-Indian and modified non-Indian goods in the archaeological collections from Indian sites.

During the 1670-1820 period, the Indians in Michigan received a large number of items from non-Indian traders and incorporated them into their way of life. But it is incorrect to assume that they readily and unquestionably accepted all non-Indian items. North American Indians were generally selective in adopting foreign goods, and they modified many items to fit their own needs. Old kettle fragments made into arrow points and tinkling cones for decoration, bottle fragments reshaped into hide scrapers, and glazed ceramic sherds and white clay pipe stems drilled and strung as pendants and beads clearly document the modified adoption of non-Indian goods by North American Indians. Historical documents are useful in this instance because they mention goods that were simply not accepted or used by the Indians. Examples are large kettles that could not be easily carried and cheap, inferior fabric that was paler in color than quality cloth from England.

During the American Indian/non-Indian phase, a number of early non-Indian (French and British) settlements developed in Michigan. Initially connected with the military or the fur trade, some of the more important settlements included: Fort Pontchartrain (1701-1760, renamed Fort Detroit from 1760 to 1779) and Fort Lernoult (1778-1796), which later became the City of Detroit; Fort Michilimackinac (1715-1781) at the Straits of Mackinac; Fort Mackinac (1781-1796) on Mackinac Island; and Fort St. Joseph (1691-1781) at present-day Niles. Early Jesuit missions were located in areas of concentrated Indian settlement, such as Sault Ste. Marie (1668) and St. Ignace (1671). Extensive excavations at Fort Michilimackinac and St. Ignace not only permit a glimpse of the physical items used during the colonial period, but also present the historical archaeologist with a way to understand Indian/non-Indian contact. These excavations also provide comparative data on how the French, the



Artifacts excavated from the Dumaw Creek site, a seventeenth-century prehistoric Indian village and cemetery near Pentwater, include a pottery vessel (top) and (left to right) a chipped flint knife, triangular arrowheads, and two copper hair beads.

British and the Americans colonized and settled Michigan.

The non-Indian Phase. With the advance of the frontier in the early nineteenth century, particularly after 1840, the proportion of non-Indians living in Michigan steadily grew. Because the southeastern portion of the state was geographically closest to the rapidly expanding and newly created state of Ohio, which was granted statehood in 1803, this was the area first settled by immigrants. Correspondingly Indians were generally pushed ahead of the Michigan frontier in a northwestern direction. The first lands ceded in treaties were those in the southeastern portion of the state. The Greenville Treaty of 1795 ceded the Indian lands directly around Detroit, while the lands in the western Upper Peninsula were not ceded until the La Pointe Treaty of 1842.

Once settlement by non-Indians started, there were periods of intense immigration by speculators and ordinary citizens, who were encouraged by the promise of wealth through iron and copper mining

and timber harvesting. As a result, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Michigan saw the rise of many boomtowns, permanent towns and large cities. Many such towns were established around one resource, such as lumber or copper. When the resource was depleted, the town either decreased in size or disappeared completely as the inhabitants moved to new, more profitable locations.

Only recently have archaeologists paid attention to late-nineteenth or twentieth-century sites. The general tendency in historical archaeology has been to concentrate upon early colonial sites, such as Williamsburg, Jamestown and Plimouth Plantation, or upon very well known Revolutionary War sites, such as Valley Forge or Yorktown.

However, because modern archaeology is founded in anthropological theory, historical archaeologists believe that as much, and perhaps even more, can be learned about human behavior from an 1870s lumber camp as from a 1770s battlefield. As a result, some archaeologists have conducted excavations at seemingly "historically-unspectacular" sites such as farmsteads and jails. At some of these sites, archaeologists have been able to add a great deal of information to what was previously known. For

example, while studying the Carp River Forge in Marquette County, historians determined that its period of operation was from 1848 to 1855. Archaeologists, however, provided most of the specific information about the physical layout of the forge and the artifacts used at the site during its operation.

Archaeologists were also able to add a great deal to what is known about Fort Wilkins, located at the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula. The fort was occupied from the mid-1840s to the late-1860s, but archaeologists were able to comment on what life was like at this far northern post from the remains of the items that were thrown away during the fort's occupation.

Historical archaeology is a multifaceted area of study within archaeology. Because archaeology is a subdiscipline of anthropology, many historical archaeologists are anthropologically trained. There are many historic-period sites in Michigan, including Indian villages, French and British forts, American trading posts, mining towns, lumber camps and Civilian Conservation Corps camps. Each site represents a legitimate archaeological site that preserves valuable information about our past and deserves to be studied.



Items from the non-Indian phase that were excavated at Fort Wilkins in the 1970s include, clockwise from top right, a rifle shell casing, a white paste earthenware plate produced by Edward Challinor between 1843 and 1867, iron nails, an eight-sided light green medicine bottle with relief letters advertising Sand's Sarsaparilla, a Rogers & Co. German spoon, two kaolin (clay) pipes—one with a diamond-weave bowl (bottom) and the other bearing a Masonic emblem (top)—and a minie ball.

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