

**AN IN-SITU HYPOTHESIS TO EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN
OF THE ST. LAWRENCE IROQUOIANS**

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Although the data are far from complete for the early part of the sequence, I believe that sufficient information is available from over forty sites in eastern Ontario and southern Quebec to postulate that there occurred in the upper St. Lawrence River Valley during the period A.D. 1250-1575, approximately, an unbroken in-situ Iroquoian cultural development. These are the Iroquoians sometimes known as the "Laurentian Iroquois" but who are now more often called the "St. Lawrence Iroquoians" to avoid their being confused with the Laurentian archaic culture and the Five Nations Confederacy Iroquois of New York State.

It is clear that by late Middle-Woodland times much of the area at the foot of Lake Ontario and both shores of the St. Lawrence River, at least as far east as Sorel, were occupied by a long-established indigenous, riverine-oriented, Point Peninsula people (MacNeish, 1952, p. 83; Kenyon, 1959, p. 52; Ritchie and Dragoo, 1960; Ritchie, 1965; Ritchie and Funk, 1973). About A.D. 1250 Pickering and Pickering-Mixed Canandaigua Owasco people extended their influence, including primitive agriculture, into the area around the foot of Lake Ontario (MacNeish, 1952, p. 83; Wright, 1966). The Pickering influence, initially restricted to the north shore, initiated an in-situ development in that area which subsequently spread down the St. Lawrence River and culminated in the St. Lawrence Iroquoians who Cartier visited at Hochelaga in 1535. The Pickering-Mixed Canandaigua Owasco influence, almost wholly restricted to the south-east shores of Lake Ontario, initiated a more local development in that area which, in part, culminated in the Iroquoians whose archaeological remains are found in Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties, New York State. They are under investigation by Earle Sidler, University of the State of New York in Buffalo, and Peter P. Pratt and Marjorie K. Burger, University of the State of New York in Oswego and Buffalo. Indubitably, the development of at least some of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and those New York State Iroquoians are somehow entwined but a solution to that problem seems unlikely until Sidler, Pratt, and Burger publish their findings.

Evidence of the Pickering influence, which appears to have prevailed around A.D. 1250, is sparse at the moment. Nevertheless Wright (1966, p. 186) has identified it on sites at Kingston, in the Thousand Islands, and near Cornwall. It also occurs near Valleyfield, Quebec (Girouard, 1967, 1969). Martijn's work (1969, p. 74) on Ile aux Basques may extend that influence into the lower St. Lawrence area. Manifestations appear on small sites on the St. Lawrence River near turbulent rapids and on marsh-surrounded islands and shores suggesting that the earlier Point Peninsula fishing and gathering subsistence pattern continued to prevail. However, this Pickering influence is the first evidence of there being a people in the area possessing a know-ledge of agriculture, however rudimentary.

As might be anticipated from events which took place farther west among the Ontario Iroquois (Wright, 1966), about A.D. 1350 the Pickering influence on the St. Lawrence developed into Middleport influences. Sites showing evidence of the Middleport influence are located on the banks and islands of the St. Lawrence River and they continue to reflect the earlier hunting and gathering economy (Pendergast, 1964). But, being more numerous than sites manifesting a Pickering influence, there is the suggestion that an increase in population took place on that time level, probably as a result of the increased importance of agriculture.

Between A.D. 1350 and A.D. 1400 a distinct change in settlement pattern occurs. About A.D. 1375 the riverine-oriented campsites showing a Middleport influence faded to be replaced by small agriculturally-oriented inland village and campsites located on light sandy soil not far from the St. Lawrence River. The Berry site (Pendergast, 1966) appears to be typical of these early village sites. As might be expected, there is a significant increase in population and by about A.D. 1425, on the Salem time level, a cluster of contemporaneous and sequentially occupied large inland villages appears in the Summerstown area (Pendergast, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1974). It is to be noted that this expansion occurs in the vicinity of Lake St. Francis, an area favoured continuously and increasingly by aboriginal peoples since Paleo-Indian times (Kenyon, 1959, p. 52; Ritchie, 1965, p. 17).

About A.D. 1450, a second cluster of sequentially occupied and contemporaneous large inland agriculture villages appears some fifty miles to the southwest of the Summerstown cluster in the vicinity of Prescott (Wintemberg, 1936, p. 121; Pendergast, 1962). The Roebuck site is probably the best known of these. Unlike the Summerstown cluster the Prescott villages are not adjacent to an area in which there is known to be a long sequence of Iroquoian development akin to that which is known to have occurred in the Lake St. Francis area. Possibly the Prescott village cluster is involved, to some degree, in the development of either, or both, of the yet to be clearly defined Iroquoian centres in New York State mentioned earlier. However, I suggest that the Prescott village cluster originated with the movement of a portion of the Summerstown people from the heavy glacial till and rough, boulder-strewn soil which predominates in that area onto the light stone-free sandy soil that predominates in the Prescott area. There the soil is much better suited to Iroquoian agricultural methods. Two isolated inland villages (Pendergast, 1966, p. 63) located approximately mid-way between the Summers-town and Prescott village clusters are anomalous in this area where clusters of villages reflect typical Iroquois village movement patterns. It is suggested that those two isolated villages represent stages during the movement of a group of the Summerstown population to the Prescott area. The move to an area better suited to farming suggests an increase in the importance of agriculture among the Summerstown group and the splitting of a population grown too large to be supported on the rough terrain in the Summerstown area.

Both the Summerstown and Prescott village clusters are characterized by there being nearby a number of small sites that are coeval with the major villages. Those located on sandy areas near the major villages (Pendergast, 1962) are believed to be farming or food-gathering stations used by the villagers on a seasonal basis for short periods. Those on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, or short distances up-stream from the mouths of small creeks entering the river, are believed to be the villagers' fishing camps sited to exploit the seasonal fish runs (Pendergast, 1969; Wright, 1972). Wright (*ibid.*) has observed that one longhouse on such a fishing station differs from the longhouses in two nearby major contemporaneous inland villages. It seems likely that there are yet to be recognized longhouse architectural variations which reflect a non-residential function for these structures that are now all called 'houses.'

About A.D. 1525-1550, there is evidence of significant Huron influence on at least two of the larger villages in the Summerstown village cluster (Pendergast, 1968). That influence continues into proto-historic times in the eastern portion of the area as is evidenced by the Huron influences noted on the Dawson site (Pendergast and Trigger, 1972) which was contemporaneous, or nearly so, with Cartier's Hochelaga. The full significance of this situation is not yet clear. However, it is suggested that the more limited Huron influence on coeval villages in the Prescott village cluster is the result of their being more remote from the Ottawa River which had by that time, apparently, become a Huron route at least as far east as Montreal.

However attractive it might be to end this sequence on a well-known, firmly-dated historic site, that is not possible. With the exception of the Dawson site, and one small site in the Prescott village cluster, there as yet no known Iroquoian sites in the St. Lawrence River Valley that have European material to date them as proto-historic or contact. The sites noted by Cartier in A.D. 1535 and A.D. 1541 during his travels on the St. Lawrence River had disappeared when Champlain visited the area in A.D. 1603 and they remain unlocated to this day.

However, there is good archaeological evidence to explain why Champlain did not encounter the St. Lawrence Iroquoians Cartier visited. For reasons that are still not clear, although war and the introduction of European disease are likely prime reasons, it is clear *they* had been decimated and dispersed via the Trent and Humber River Valleys to points as far distant as Huronia before A.D. 1600. It is interesting to note that Boyle (1891, p. 25) and Laidlaw (1891, pp. 76-77) remarked upon that possibility in the Trent River Valley as early as 1891. The evidence accumulated since by Wintemberg (1936, p. 121; 1946, p. 182), Emerson (1954, p.251), MacNeish (1952, p. 84), and Pendergast (1963, 1964, 1965, 1972) supports their speculation. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether remnants of these people may not also have been assimilated by the Iroquoians in Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties in New York State, although it seems likely that those Iroquoians suffered the same fate of extinction and dispersal at about the same time.

It is suggested that some St. Lawrence Iroquoians may also have been assimilated by the tribes of the Confederacy Iroquois. Should that possibility be demonstrated, a plausible explanation would emerge to provide substance to the unsubstantiated tradition of the Iroquois homeland having been on the St. Lawrence River as suggested by Perrot (1911, 1: pp. 42-47) and subsequently elaborated upon by Charlevoix, La Potherie, Lafitau, Golden, Cusick, and Morgan. Brassier (1968, p. 263) has noted that the "Traditions of adopted splintergroups [sic] were incorporated into the adopting tribe." His comment on the probability of Sauk and Fox traditions regarding a migration from the Atlantic being attributable to Sokoki and Mahikan adoptees in the eighteenth century seems particularly pertinent.

There is a significant area peripheral to the territorial core of this St. Lawrence Iroquoian sequence that I have not mentioned. Using material in the University of Vermont and the Heye Foundation, Schuyler Miller (personal communication) has shown that the St. Lawrence Iroquoians also occupied the area at the north end of Lake Champlain on the Salem time level. While it seems likely that sequence also extends into the upper Richelieu River Valley, no sites have yet been found in the area between the Richelieu and St. Lawrence Rivers to link the two areas.

I **have** not discussed the Iroquoians east of Hochelaga. Cartier met them at Gaspé in A.D. 1534 and took them as hostages to France, he visited Stadacona, their unpalisaded riverine-oriented village on the site of present-day Québec City, and he listed their villages as he journeyed up-river from Stadacona to Hochelaga in 1535 and 1541. Wintemberg (1936, p. 122) found their archaeological remains near Lanoraie. Trudeau (1971), Wintemberg (1942, p. 134) and Levesque (1966) found their archaeological remains on the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Wintemberg (1942, p. 137), Lowther (1965, p. 35), Levesque (1962, p. 47), and Martijn (1965, 1966a, 1966b, 1969) have recovered their material on the lower St. Lawrence. Ribes (1965) and Burger and Pratt (1973) have excavated their riverine-oriented villages on the St. Maurice River north of Trois-Rivières. Marois (1974, p. 223) recovered their material on Lake Abitibi and the Société d'archéologie préhistorique du Québec has excavated a village site on the Richelieu River near Sorel. It remains to be seen how those riverine-oriented Iroquoians who lived on the lower St. Lawrence River are related to the Iroquoian farmers who lived on

the St. Lawrence River above Hochelaga. Aside from remarking on the likelihood of the sites near Lanoraie and Sorel somehow being involved with the eastern New York State Iroquois on the Oak Hill time level, and therefore not part of the sequence I have described, I will leave the lower St. Lawrence Iroquoian problem to others.

This is, necessarily, a greatly telescoped presentation of the data available on the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. However, it should make clear that there was a large group of Iroquoians in the St. Lawrence River Valley above Hochelaga, present-day Montreal, who were not Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Huron, or any of the other historic Iroquoian tribes to which their have been attributed. It is postulated that this distinct group of Iroquoians, the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, are the result of an in-situ development in the upper St. Lawrence River Valley during the period A.D. 1250-1575. I hasten to add that I am not under any illusion that this first generation, relatively simplistic, hypothesis explains the whole of this complex problem. Considerable additional data, particularly settlement pattern data, will be required to improve our comprehension of the Iroquoian occupation of the St. Lawrence River Valley and refine this hypothesis.

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