

IS ARCHAEOLOGY A LUXURY ITEM?

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Today in Canada there are more trained and partially trained archaeologists than in any other period of our history. People in all walks of life are becoming rapidly aware of the new and stimulating history lying beneath their feet. The radio, the press, and the lecture platform are making known the new facts. In Ontario the dawn of history has been pushed back 10,000 years. This increase in our time perspective raises problems of profound intellectual and philosophical interest. It suggests that we, as Canadians, might well take stock of our place in the historical scheme of things. Yet, confronted with our virtual ignorance of this 10,000 years, we may well ask ourselves: "Are not such problems, such speculations, but idle luxuries to occupy our leisure moments in a world that is characteristically modern and realistic, too much confronted with Today and Tomorrow, to wonder about Yesterday?"

Upon first glance it would appear that the archaeological treatise possesses little of socially significant value. The archaeologist does not offer freedom from want, or sickness, or fear. His work does not command the dignity of the doctor, the engineer, the churchman, the judge, nor even that of the unskilled worker. In short, the archaeologist must ask himself: "Am I but a social parasite, preoccupied with problems of little account?" In facing this problem, it is well for the archaeologist to realize that he is but one element in a complex and complicated society, set up and maintained to satisfy the human needs of its people. These needs are many and varied, and the archaeologist must decide where his contribution can be made most constructively. Therein lies his hope for encouragement and support. Just as we cannot insist that everyone be interested in baseball and cocktail bars, so we should recognize that archaeology will not appeal to all. If the archaeologist can clearly recognize this he will avoid the frustration accompanying the response of disinterest and even ridicule. The archaeologist must recognize his place in society, and be prepared to state it honestly and well. Only then can he proceed to his ultimate goals. In order to do this he must know, and be clearly convinced of, the contribution he can make, a contribution which has reference to human needs and human values.

Archaeology makes a contribution on four distinct levels; for convenience of discussion we have delimited these as the aesthetic, historical, scientific, and applied. The nature of each will vary according to the archaeological area under investigation and the ability of the archaeologist to present his finding in a meaningful way. To do this the archaeologist must clearly assess the strength and weakness of his own area of investigation. Our present discussion is concerned with the contribution of Canadian archaeology in general, and Ontario archaeology in particular.

There is little doubt as to the abundance and richness of the archaeological remains in Canada. Ontario is perhaps the richest of all, but it is unfortunately without great aesthetic appeal. The Ontario archaeologist would do well to recognize that the Ontario prehistoric Indian was but a "dauber in clay" in comparison with the ceramic and architectural grandeur of the ancient Aztec, Maya, and the Inca. The archaeological search for art objects would lead us to Greece and Rome, to the complex civilizations of native America, not to Ontario. Ontario's aboriginal art is not without interest, but it holds very little aesthetic appeal for our culture.

Historically, however, Ontario has much more to offer. We possess a virtually unknown history of 10,000 years. We know only the last few centuries of this period in any detail. Based upon the writings of traders, missionaries, and military men, Ontario has one of the finest documentary histories of that crucial period dealing with the early contact of the Indians and the White Man. With one or two brilliant exceptions this period has been largely overlooked by orthodox historians. We are convinced that archaeology has and will serve a useful purpose in both supplementing and enriching the story handed down to us by early chroniclers. We may even suspect that scientific archaeological research and excavation may correct some of their errors. Such work will fill out our knowledge of the historic and late prehistoric Iroquoian and Algonquin tribes in Ontario. Back of this, however, lies nearly 100 centuries of unwritten history, to the time when early men hunted and fished along the beaches of Manitoulin Island. There can be little doubt that archaeology has a spectacular and important history to tell. But the archaeologist must face up to the question: "Who is really interested in history?"

The socially significant assumption underlying historical study is that "we learn from the past". It is a truism that we are part of all that we have been, but we may seriously question whether our youthful Canadian society believes that today. Canada is immersed in illusions of modern progressiveness and we are convinced that contemporary hard-headed economic and political rationalism can solve our problems. It would appear ludicrous that we need refer to broken fragments of pottery from a

prehistoric refuse deposit. One often feels that enough history has already been written without much ultimate effect.

I do not think it unfair to state that our high-school history texts are woefully inadequate on the problem of the Ontario Indian. But need that concern us? Our geography texts are similarly outmoded. It is difficult to comprehend how a nation can allow its educational system to proceed on a level of outmoded half truths. The graduating student is poorly equipped to meet the challenge of an Atomic World. It is obvious that archaeology, as a historical discipline, must lack support until such time as the knowledge of up-to-date, comprehensive historical data becomes a public social value. Until then the average Canadian must partially sacrifice one of his most precious assets, a knowledge of his Historical tradition.

It is seldom suggested that historical knowledge serves a deep-seated human need. Yet nothing is closer to the truth. Historical understanding makes a very real contribution to the personal and national pride of every Canadian. In the recognition of this fact, the archaeologist finds a very real reason for being. A profound faith in the future can only be built upon a deep sense and understanding of the past. Human beings thrive upon the secure feeling that their roots are set deep in the soil. They are neither timid, nor reckless in the manner of men without firm foundations. The archaeological deepening of our historical perspective serves by introspection to enhance our concept of "Canada Unlimited".

Knowledge in itself is recognized as one of the greatest defenses of the personality. Ignorance breeds sham and mediocrity, knowledge breeds vitality and enthusiasm. Already American archaeologists have carried out and financed archaeological work in Ontario. We welcome this interest and activity. But it is embarrassing to have the stranger tell you about yourself! We must feel somewhat crestfallen when we realize that we have young men and women trained to do the work, we have the equipment -- but we lack the financial support to carry out the work ourselves. Must we, in all sincerity, become increasingly dependent upon the United States for our intellectual development in the historical field? It can hardly be counted a contribution to Canadian nationalism. Do we really care, not in terms of dollars and cents, but in human values? Great civilizations are in part built upon a deep sense and appreciation of the past.

Upon the scientific level the contribution of archaeology is only limited by the facility of the mind to make use of the excavated data. Year by year new knowledge is added in many fields. Archaeology has provided medicine with knowledge of prehistoric tuberculosis. Knowledge of prehistoric dentition has broadened our understanding of dental

diseases and their causes. The archaeological distribution of the red fox is adding depth to the study of animal ecology. Soil profiles derived from excavations are producing important information on problems of soil erosion and changing water levels. The contribution can be indefinitely extended; suffice it to say that archaeology is making an increasingly important contribution to our scientific knowledge in many fields.

The contribution of archaeology at the applied level is only gradually being recognized. Here it can play a very real part in the development of Canadian cultural maturity. The impact is felt at all levels, from that of the small local historical society to that of the large metropolitan museum. We read in the daily newspapers of gang activity and an increasingly menacing delinquency rate. This is the product of a boredom and restlessness that is fostered by our society. Youthful minds are stimulated by a propaganda of brutality, obscenity, and violence. On every side we see the demand for increased recreational and educational facilities. Archaeology can play an important part in such a needed programme. One hesitates to constantly refer to the lead provided by our American neighbours, but there the union of archaeology and recreation has been very successfully done. Many State parks have been established on the site of known Indian villages. The story and legends connected with the site provide the additional impetus to produce a healthful outing. At Starved Rock the imagination is stimulated by the knowledge that it was the scene of the famous exploits of Black Hawk. Starved Rock is the scene of a beautiful State park; it is but one of many. We have our own heroes; Champlain, Brulé, Brébeuf, Joseph Brant, Deganawidah, Tecumseh, and the legendary Hiawatha. There is real inspiration in the words of Deganawidah: "I wipe away the tears from thy face, using the fawn skin of pity ... I make it daylight for thee ... I beautify the sky. Now shalt thou do thy thinking in peace ..." This is solace for tired minds and bodies. Canadians do become tired in the great work of building Canada. How appropriate that they should relax by the side of a stream underneath a broad sky, carried away into realms of prehistory where the imagination is fired by the long past achievements of an alien people. A Sunday outing becomes not only a picnic but an emotional and intellectual rebirth very painlessly achieved. There are such sites within easy reach of all Ontario cities, towns, and villages. Many have already been destroyed and built upon by the expanding metropolis. Archaeological excavations should be part of a national plan for recreation and conservation.

A programme of recreation and conservation grades by stages into one of travel and publicity. The application of archaeology is evident. The actual excavation work itself attracts many visitors. The development of small local museums

adds to the interest and appeal of any area. -- There is added a further reason for going and seeing. Ontario already possesses one of the very finest museums in North America, but our efforts must not cease here. It becomes yearly more important to be able to point with pride to our Canadian achievement in the fields of cultural attainment.

The problem is evident. We are on the threshold of archaeological development. Current demands hang heavy upon us. We have a responsibility to our trained students. Unless we can place them, they must fall into the inevitable pattern of migration to the United States. At the same time we must meet the challenge of American infiltration on its own level. Moreover there is, most important, of all, a public demand for archaeological work, a demand which can rationally be solved by a long term programme worked out by local and provincial interests. Ontario, as the richest province in our dominion, must feel a responsibility in providing the leadership towards a Canada proud of her historical and cultural heritage, a country which can take her place in the brotherhood of nations, a place determined by cultural achievement as well as economic and political considerations. The archaeologist must be aware of his place in this development; by the nature of his work he is not only a scientist, but a public servant. He must share in the responsibility of keeping the minds of his fellow citizens to their mark, the development of a mature set of social values appropriate to an atomic world.

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