

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE PICKERING PHASE IN THE RICE LAKE AREA

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of Pickering materials housed at Trent University has led to the formulation of a newly defined regional manifestation of the Pickering Phase in the Rice Lake area.

The excavation of the early Pickering Richardson site southeast of Rice Lake in 1976 provided a focal point from which this regional development could be studied, as well as contributed to the understanding of the Early Ontario Iroquois stage.

INTRODUCTION

The Richardson site (BbG1-4), an early Pickering village in Percy Township (Lot 9, Concession 6), Northumberland-Durham County (Fig. 1) was discovered in 1968 and test excavated in 1969 by the Trent Valley Archaeological Survey of the Department of Anthropology, Trent University. In 1976, Trent University returned to the site to undertake a more detailed excavation with a crew of two Trent Anthropology students and the Grade 7 and 8 pupils of Roseneath Centennial School. The author served as field director under the supervision of Dr. Richard B. Johnston.

By the use of mechanical shaker screens and shovels, 227 one-meter squares were excavated in four weeks. This resulted in the discovery of two longhouses, one of which was partially excavated; a small midden; and portions of two separate palisades, indicative of village expansion.

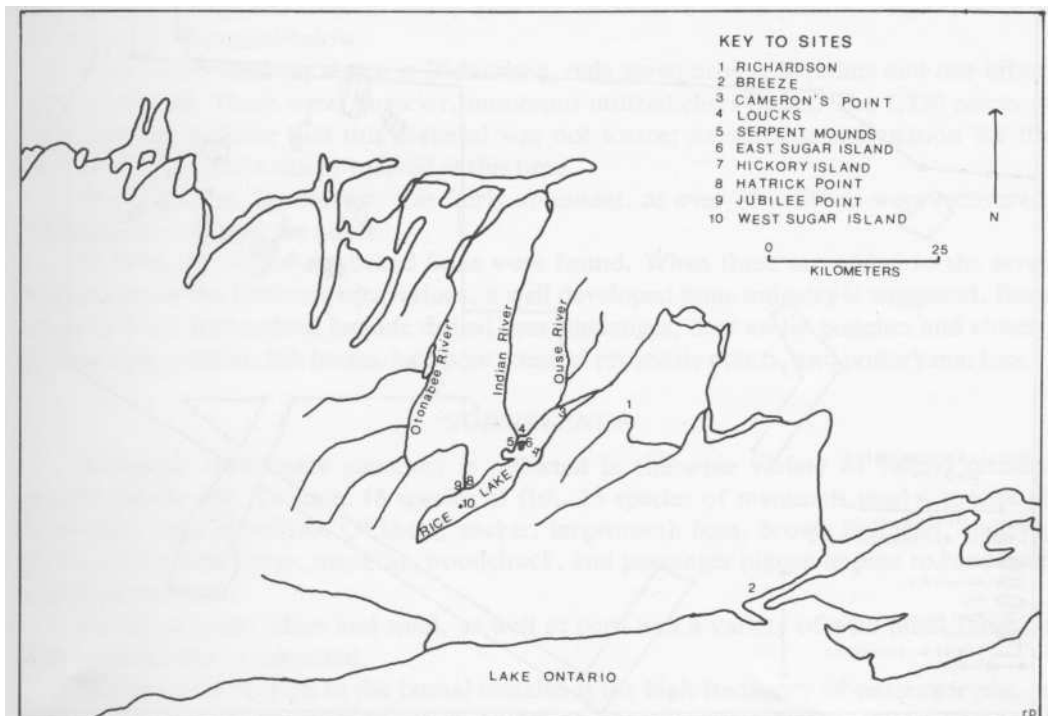


Fig. 1. Pickering sites in the Rice Lake area.

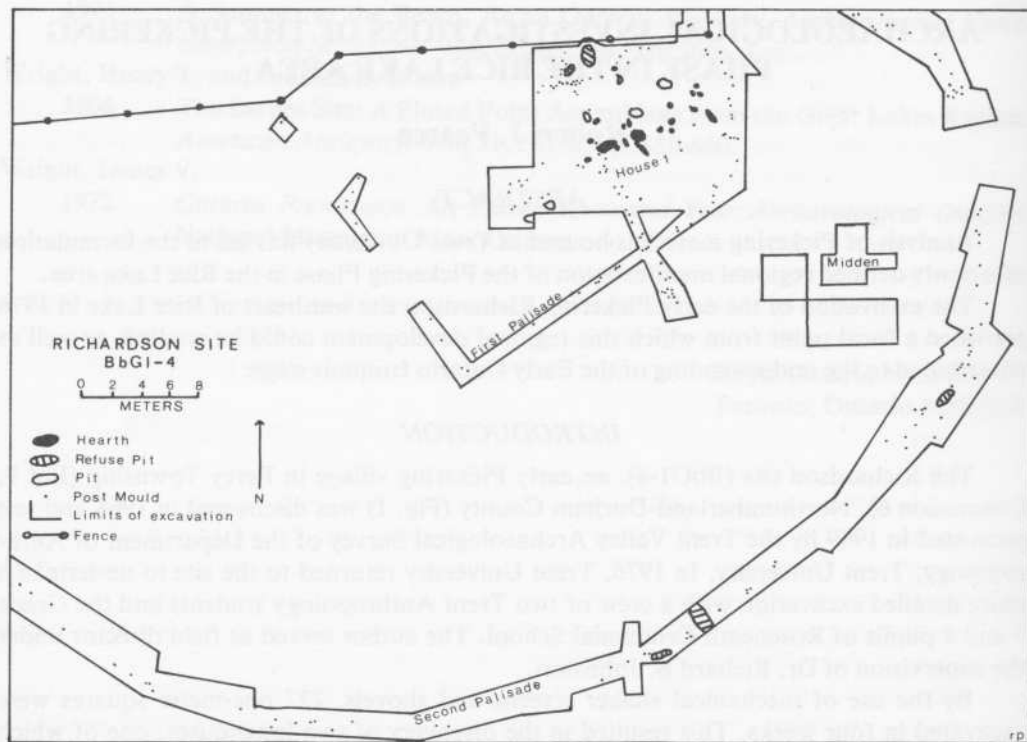


Fig. 2. Richardson site.

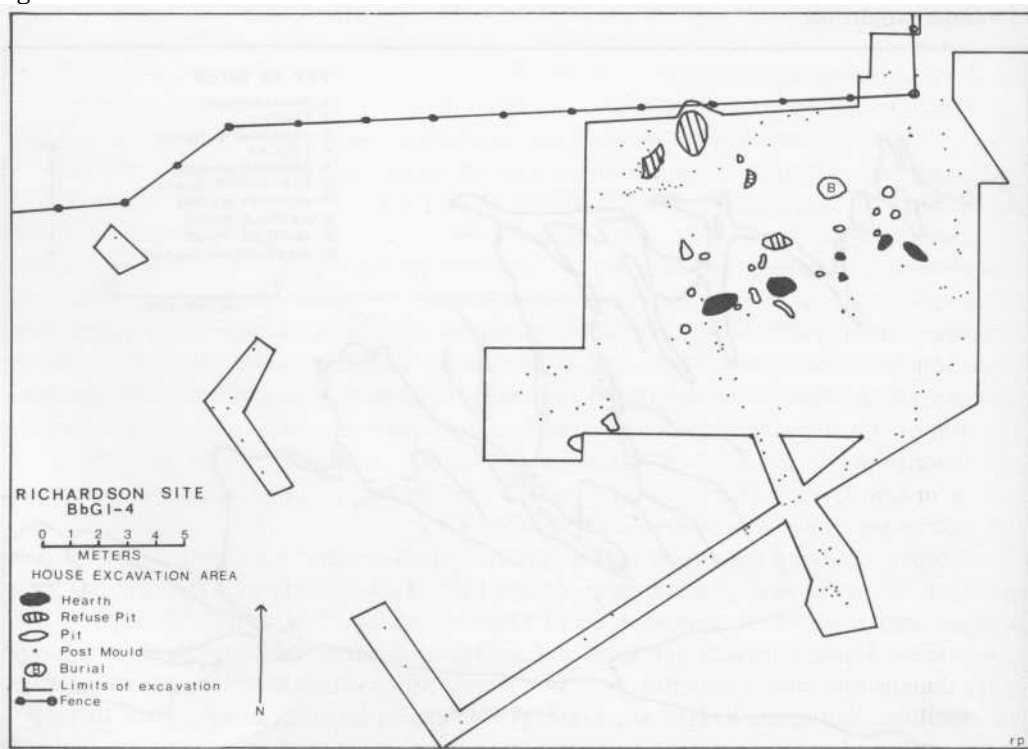


Fig. 3. Richardson site house excavation area.

MIDDEN

A small midden, located southeast of House 1 between the two palisades (Fig. 2), was fully excavated. It was 3 meters in diameter, 40 centimeters deep in the middle, and contained a mass of ceramic, floral and faunal material. Of the floral remains only carbonized corn kernels have been identified to date, although numerous charred seeds and nut fragments were present.

In addition, the inhabitants of the Richardson site were in the habit of throwing their garbage against the second palisade, for large refuse pits or "mini-middens" were uncovered by the backhoe (Fig. 2). Like the midden, these pits contained a mass of ceramic, floral and faunal material in a matrix of black organic soil. In one such pit the distal end of a human femur was recovered, possibly indicative of cannibalism.

MATERIAL REMAINS

A total of 18,027 items were catalogued as a result of the 1976 field season, including 6,250 pieces of pottery, 4,662 mammal bones and 3,851 fish bones.

Three hundred and forty-seven distinct analysable rim sherds served to place the Richardson site temporally in the Pickering sequence between the Miller and Boys sites (Table 1). As such it is estimated that this village was occupied circa A.D. 900.

The ceramic analysis has also served to confirm and reinforce the major trends in decorative techniques previously discussed by Wright (1966), Wright and Anderson (1969) and Reid (1975a, 1975b). However, there are certain significant ways in which Richardson differs from other Pickering villages, and it is felt that these differences represent a regional, localized development in the Rice Lake area. These include a high incidence of push-pull technique on the exterior, lip and interior of vessels, and the use of turtle suture stamp, cord-wrapped, stick and crescent stamp as minor decorative techniques. The significance of these traits is discussed below.

Lithics were relatively scarce at Richardson, only seven projectile points and one biface were recovered. There were, however, numerous utilized chert flakes. The 1,330 pieces of chert detritus indicate that this material was not scarce; no suitable explanation for the lack of lithic artifacts can be offered at this time.

Ground stone, in contrast, was fairly abundant, as over 70 artifacts were recovered. The majority of these are adzes.

In 1976, 43 pieces of worked bone were found. When these are added to the seven artifacts from the 1969 test excavations, a well developed bone industry is suggested. Bone artifacts from Richardson include drilled deer phalanges, deer antler punches and chisels, splinter awls, needles, fish hooks, harpoons, conical projectile points, and pottery markers.

SUBSISTENCE

A diverse subsistence economy is reflected in the wide variety of faunal remains present on the site. To date, 18 species of fish, 15 species of mammals, and 4 species of birds have been identified. Of these, sucker, largemouth bass, brown bullhead, walleye, yellow perch, deer, bear, muskrat, woodchuck, and passenger pigeon appear to have been exploited the most.

Added to turtle, clam and snail, as well as corn and a variety of wild plant foods, a well-rounded diet is suggested.

Of particular interest in the faunal remains is the high frequency of passenger pigeon bone in contrast to other species of birds. Obviously this now extinct species was a food staple during the summer months at Richardson.

A year-round occupation of the site is evident from the faunal remains, since winter spawning species (whitefish and brook trout) were present.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

House 1 is represented by a central row of six hearths oriented in an east-northeast to west-southwest direction (Figs. 2 and 3). Surrounding the hearths were myriads of small post moulds, storage pits and refuse pits. Only a portion of the north wall of this structure was visible in the form of paired post moulds.

In the field a row of post moulds to the south of the hearths (Fig. 3) was initially interpreted as the south wall. However, this row continued past the expected western limit of House 1 and was not parallel to the longitudinal axis running through the six hearths. This row of post moulds; which swings northward at the eastern end of House 1, is now interpreted as the first palisade. Since the east end of House 1 was not found, it is not possible to say whether or not the palisade pre-dates or post-dates the House.

House 1 then is represented only by internal features and a portion of the north wall. Other sections of the house wall, particularly in the southeast corner, could not be observed in the field. This may be due in part to the sandy soil conditions in this area. Therefore it is not possible to give the dimensions of House 1, although the internal features suggest a length in excess of 10 meters.

A second structural feature, interpreted as a side wall of House 2, is represented by a row of post moulds, some of which were paired, running north-northwest to south-southeast through the western end of House 1. This row also cuts through the first palisade. No other features of House 2, which was a least 17.5 meters (57.5 feet) in length, were uncovered.

The first palisade, as noted above, runs south of House 1, then swings northward. Its orientation parallels that of the second palisade (Fig. 2). The area which this palisade enclosed is estimated at 0.12 to 0.20 hectares (0.3 to 0.5 acres).

The second palisade was uncovered on three sides of the village thanks to the assistance of a backhoe. This palisade runs along a small bluff which forms a natural southern boundary for the site. The area enclosed by the second palisade, which no doubt was constructed to allow village expansion, is estimate at 0.3 to 0.4 hectares (0.8 to 1.0 acres).

BURIALS

Two burial pits were encountered along the north wall of House 1 (Fig. 3).

One of these (Feature 25) was the interment of an adult male, age 24 or 25, in a secondary bundle. He was oriented north-south, laying on his side with the head facing east.

The second was a small ossuary-type grave 70 centimeters in diameter which had been truncated by plowing. Five totally disarticulated individuals had been included in this pit. They were one male age 25-35, two males age about 25, one female age 18-25, and one female under 18.

THE PICKERING PHASE IN THE RICE LAKE AREA

The Richardson site is the easternmost known Pickering village to be excavated in Ontario. One other village, the Breeze site, lies even farther east (Fig. 1) but is known only from surface-collected material. Based on the seriation of 68 analysable rim sherds, the Breeze site appears to fall between the Boys and Bennett sites, a date of circa A.D. 1100.

In addition, there are at least eight multicomponent camp sites along the north shore of Rice Lake which contain Pickering remains. Some of these have been reported by

Johnston (1968). These eight sites are located in clusters at the mouths of the three rivers which flow into the lake from the north: the Otonabee, the Indian, and the Ouse (Fig. 1).

Each river serves as a major spawning ground for a variety of fish species, and the mouth of each is the center of a specific environmental zone which includes forest, grassland, marsh, swamp, open water, and sluggish waters. As such, a large, diversified number of food resources are available for exploitation.

It is suggested that, during the Pickering Phase, these sites served as base camps for the exploitation of food resources which were taken back to the inland villages for consumption or storage.

If this were the case, then interaction between the camp sites and villages should be evident. This evidence is provided by the ceramics, or at least by three minor decorative techniques on the rim sherds: turtle suture stamp, crescent stamp, and cord-wrapped stick.

TABLE 1
PICKERING EXTERIOR RIM DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES*

| Technique | Miller | | Richardson | | Boys | | Bennett | |
|---------------------|--------|------|------------|-------|------|-------|---------|------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Dentate stamp | 5036 | 67.2 | 106 | 30.5 | 111 | 29.3 | 11 | 3.0 |
| Push-pull | 707 | 9.4 | 185 | 53.3 | 78 | 20.6 | 205 | 55.1 |
| Turtle suture stamp | 584 | 7.8 | 13 | 3.7 | - | - | - | - |
| Linear stamp | 417 | 5.6 | 19 | 5.5 | 77 | 20.3 | 66 | 17.7 |
| Punctate | 361 | 4.8 | 1 | 0.3 | 9 | 2.4 | 19 | 5.1 |
| Plain | 348 | 4.6 | 6 | 1.7 | 24 | 6.3 | 3 | 0.6 |
| Incised | 37 | 0.5 | 12 | 3.5 | 9 | 2.4 | 35 | 9.4 |
| Other | - | - | 5 | 1.5 | 71 | 18.8 | 33 | 8.9 |
| Totals | 7490 | 99.9 | 347 | 100.0 | 379 | 100.1 | 372 | 99.8 |

*Data for Miller, Boys and Bennett from Reid (1975a, 1975b).

TABLE 2
MINOR CERAMIC DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES ON
FIVE PICKERING SITES IN THE RICE LAKE AREA

| | Richardson Breeze (347)* | East Loucks (68)* | Sugar Island (83)* | Jubilee (30)* | Point Point (18)* |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Turtle Suture Stamp | | | | | |
| Exterior | 13 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Interior | 5 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Lip | 21 | 9 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Crescent Stamp | | | | | |
| Exterior | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Interior | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Lip | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cord-Wrapped Stick | | | | | |
| Exterior | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Interior | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lip | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

* Total number of analysable rim sherds in the collections of Trent University.

Turtle suture stamp has been previously reported for the Pickering Phase only from the Miller site (Kenyon 1968) and from Treasure Island (BbGc-4) in Lake Ontario east of Kingston (Wright 1966:49,186). In the Rice Lake area this technique is present at both the Richardson and Breeze village sites and at three camp sites (East Sugar Island, Jubilee Point, and Loucks).

Cord-wrapped stick and crescent stamp are two techniques which Wright (Wright and Anderson 1969:65) had previously believed to be totally absent from the Pickering Phase. In the Rice Lake area, cord-wrapped stick has been found at both the Richardson and Breeze villages, and crescent stamp at two villages (Richardson and Breeze) and two camp sites (East Sugar Island and Loucks) (Table 2).

Furthermore, the two village sites differ in certain significant traits from other known Pickering villages, suggesting that they may be recognized as regional variants. The most striking of these differences are the high incidence of push-pull and punctate segregated exterior bosses as decorative techniques.

For these reasons it is postulated that the two villages and eight camp sites are representative of a regional manifestation of the Pickering Phase in the Rice Lake area.

This regional manifestation is not unexpected as the Rice Lake area has been a center for prehistoric cultural developments since early Archaic times (Johnston 1968). These sites nonetheless form an important element in our understanding of the the Early Ontario Iroquois stage.

CONCLUSION

The three Pickering villages which had previously been excavated — Miller (Kenyon 1968), Boys (Reid 1975a, 1975b), and Bennett (Wright and Anderson 1969) — have served to define the Pickering Phase and delimit certain temporal trends. Other Pickering components such as Frank Bay (Ridley 1954), Barrie (Ridley 1958), and Dougall (Wright 1972) document the spatial distribution of these people in Ontario.

With what is now known about the Pickering sites in the Rice Lake area, it is possible to outline in greater detail some aspects of daily life in Ontario from A.D. 800 to A.D. 1250.

Although corn was being grown, the Pickering people continued to rely heavily upon fish, mammals, birds and other sources of food. In the Rice Lake area at least, fish were abundant and, accordingly, exploited to their maximum.

In terms of a subsistence-settlement pattern (Struever 1965; White 1963), it is known that at least one village (Richardson) was occupied on a year-round basis. From this inland village, excursions were made to base camps located at strategic positions to exploit the available food resources. These foods were then taken back to the inland villages for consumption or storage. In the Rice Lake area, these base camps were located near the mouths of rivers where the environment allowed maximum yields of a wide variety of foods.

The excavation of the Richardson site has added significantly to our understanding of the spatial and temporal aspects of the Early Ontario Iroquois stage. It has also led to the formulation of a newly defined regional manifestation of the Pickering Phase in the Rice Lake area, complimented by one other village and eight camp sites.

Taken together, these sites show a high degree of interaction which is reflected in the ceramics. Furthermore they have illustrated a subsistence-settlement pattern consisting of inland villages and lacustrine based camps utilized for the exploitation of food resources.

In light of this pattern, it can be postulated that known Pickering components such as Frank Bay and Dougall served as base camps to supply food to as yet undiscovered in-land villages in their respective areas.

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