

Introduction

Eva M. MacDonald

This collection of papers is offered as an exploration of best practice in Ontario historical archaeology. The papers speak to some of the thornier issues that face the discipline, such as determining site significance and appropriate excavation strategies. It is intended to bring historical sites archaeology to the forefront of a journal that traditionally has been dominated by topics in precontact archaeology. Every year, dozens of new historical sites are found by consultants during routine housing subdivision assessments and the pressure to excavate them rather than protect them is great. Yet very few practitioners take the time to present conference papers on historical topics or publish their data so that others might find it useful for comparative purposes. With this volume it is hoped that others will be encouraged to use *Ontario Archaeology* as a venue for furthering our understanding of our most recent past.

Another purpose of this volume is to stimulate discussion among practitioners. If the published responses to the Ministry of Culture's 1996 "Stage 4 Questionnaire" are any indication, there is little consensus as to best practice among consultants with respect to historical sites (Ferris 1999). While it is acknowledged that provincial standards and guidelines for Stage 4 fieldwork are now widely circulated, it remains to be seen whether they have been wholly adopted by the consulting community since the final draft was released by the Ministry of Culture in August of 2006. The guidelines (MCL 2006) fill in the gaps of the Archaeological Assessment Technical Guidelines issued by the Ministry in 1993. The former guidelines (MCTR 1993) did not go beyond standards for Stage 3 assessments, were not very helpful for defining significance of historical sites, and did not distinguish between urban and rural contexts, or address standing structures and the man-made landscape. The papers in this volume, therefore, also present some feedback on how these draft guidelines fit into the notion of best practice as it is understood today.

Together, the authors bring numerous years of collective experience in the province and an appre-

ciation for historical sites in particular. If anyone can make a case for why we should be approaching these sites in a particular way, it is these people. And that has been half of the battle in Ontario, getting people to pay attention to "that historic stuff," as the article by Neal Ferris will remind us. Neal witnessed the birth of historical archaeology in Ontario, and has contributed to its development as an academic, government agent, and CRM archaeologist. The history of CRM investigations into Euro-Canadian domestic sites is not a lengthy one. As little as 25 years ago, archaeologists regularly ignored nineteenth-century materials. Rather than lament this situation, however, we should recognize the fact that a serious interest in domestic sites, as opposed to military or industrial sites, can be credited to CRM work, as the domestic site type challenged archaeologists to develop coherent research designs for a resource previously overlooked.

Dana Poulton and Christine Dodd of D.R. Poulton and Associates Inc. present important case studies on the excavation of plough-disturbed Euro-Canadian domestic sites. In particular, the paper examines the relative success of different excavation strategies, from partial Stage 3 surface collection to systematic test excavation, and mechanical stripping. They also discuss the relative merits of Stage 4 block excavation in the ploughzone of historical sites. A strong argument is made for thorough block excavation of the ploughzone on sites that date up to circa 1830, as early nineteenth-century sites rarely yield substantial subsurface features. Dodd and Poulton further opine that this prescription for block excavation could also be extended to sites occupied into the 1840s and 1850s, as a broad picture of daily activities in the province is not afforded in archival documents until the publication of the decennial censuses beginning in 1842.

In contrast, Dena Doroszenko, the Archaeologist for the Ontario Heritage Trust, must make decisions on sites that include standing structures, a situation not commonly encountered in CRM archaeology, where development pressures are

placed primarily on agricultural, plough-disturbed lands. As Doroszenko points out, the study of homelots with standing structures is best approached from a diachronic perspective, as what remains from the earliest occupation may be difficult to interpret without understanding what happened later. The analysis of a man-made landscape should be combined with a quantitative analysis of fully delineated phases of feature construction and refuse deposition that relate to the documentary chronology of household composition. In this manner, the archaeology of domestic spaces contributes to our understanding of how people in the past consciously altered their immediate surrounding as they sought to establish and maintain order in the larger context of the external world.

Henry Cary and Joseph Last, of the Military Site Unit, Parks Canada, comment on a different type of excavation strategy, one that deals with stratigraphy and its importance in understanding the site formation process. They will make the case for a Parks Canada technique that can be adopted in CRM contexts, where detailed stratigraphic recording and analysis is often seen as a time-consuming process. The technique focuses on the single stratigraphic unit and asks of it three questions that ensure that crucial information is not lost once the site is disturbed, and allows the archaeologist to determine the site-wide sequence and the phases of development later in the analysis.

Finally, Katherine Hull of Archaeological Services Inc. addresses the way that ceramic artifacts are handled in archaeological site reports. While the current standards and guidelines (MCL 2006) do not address reporting standards and artifact analysis, this paper reminds us that the way we treat the artifacts that we excavate can be just as problematic as the choices we make when conducting fieldwork. One common approach to analysis includes examining aspects of the quantity, quality, and variety of fine earthenware in assemblages to reveal social position. Consideration of

ceramics in this anthropological way need not be confined to historical archaeologists in academia. Archaeological consultants can easily incorporate these approaches into their own work, thereby amplifying their contribution to our understanding of life in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ontario. Hull's paper discusses analytical techniques developed for fine earthenware and introduces the use of under-studied coarse earthenware as data sets for anthropological inquiry.

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Eva M. MacDonald
Archaeological Services Inc.
528 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2P9
emacdonald@iasi.to