

# **SAWDUST BAY-2 REVISITED: The Role of Small Sites in the Understanding of the Eastern Ontario Middle Woodland Period**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The role of small sites in the interpretation of the Eastern Ontario Middle Woodland Period is evaluated through a re-examination of the Sawdust Bay-2, a small seasonal, campsite located on the Ottawa River. This site, featuring a ceramic assemblage with a predominance of pseudo scallop shell impressions and utilization of local cherts, has been identified as part of the Ottawa Valley Phase within the Point Peninsula Tradition (Daechsel 1981). Subsequent research in Eastern Ontario has provided a more substantial understanding of the temporal sequences of Middle Woodland ceramics (Watson 1993). A considerable number of additional Middle Woodland sites have also been identified but very few have been investigated. The results of these investigations suggest patterns of regionalization for Middle Woodland Period populations. Excavation and analysis of assemblages from smaller sites hold considerable promise in further understanding these patterns in Eastern Ontario.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

L'apport que peuvent avoir les petits gisements pour l'interprétation de la période du Sylvicole moyen de l'Est ontarien est évalué en examinant le site Sawdust Bay-2, un petit site d'occupation saisonnière de la rivière des Outaouais. D'après son assemblage, qui incluait des tessons de céramique portant des impressions ondulés et une utilisation de cherts locaux pour la fabrication d'outils lithiques, l'occupation a été attribuée à la phase Ottawa Valley de la tradition Pointe Péninsule (Daechsel 1981). Des recherches plus récentes ont donné un cadre morpho-chronologique plus complet pour les céramiques du Sylvicole moyen (Watson 1993). Plusieurs autres sites de la même période ont été découverts mais très peu ont fait l'objet d'enquêtes. Nos recherches indiquent la régionalisation des populations pendant la période du Sylvicole moyen. Notre compréhension de cette tendance dans l'est ontarien ne peut que s'accroître avec des fouilles et analyses additionnelles.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The role of small sites in our understanding of the Middle Woodland Period in eastern Ontario has evolved appreciably over the past 20 years. This may be attributed more to the lack of research funding for investigation of larger occupations and the absence of these sites, rather than a theoretical shift in Middle Woodland research. Sites such as Ault Park, Kant and Serpent Mounds along with extrapolation of data from occupations in New York State have formed the historic basis for our present understanding of Middle Woodland sequences in eastern Ontario. More recently sites such as Gordon Island, Belle Island and Marshall's Bay in Ontario and Lac Lemay situated at the mouth of the Gatineau River in Quebec, hold considerable potential in further understanding the Middle Woodland Period of the region.

## Sawdust-Bay-2 Revisited

Attention, however, in Eastern Ontario over the past generation has focused on smaller sites such as Constance Bay, Wyght, and Jackson's Point (Charleston Lake) and a site on which I worked with Clyde Kennedy in 1974: Sawdust Bay-2. Data retrieved from this investigation provided the basis for suggesting that this site was part of a regional variation of the Point Peninsula Tradition referred to as the Ottawa Valley Phase (Daechsel 1981).

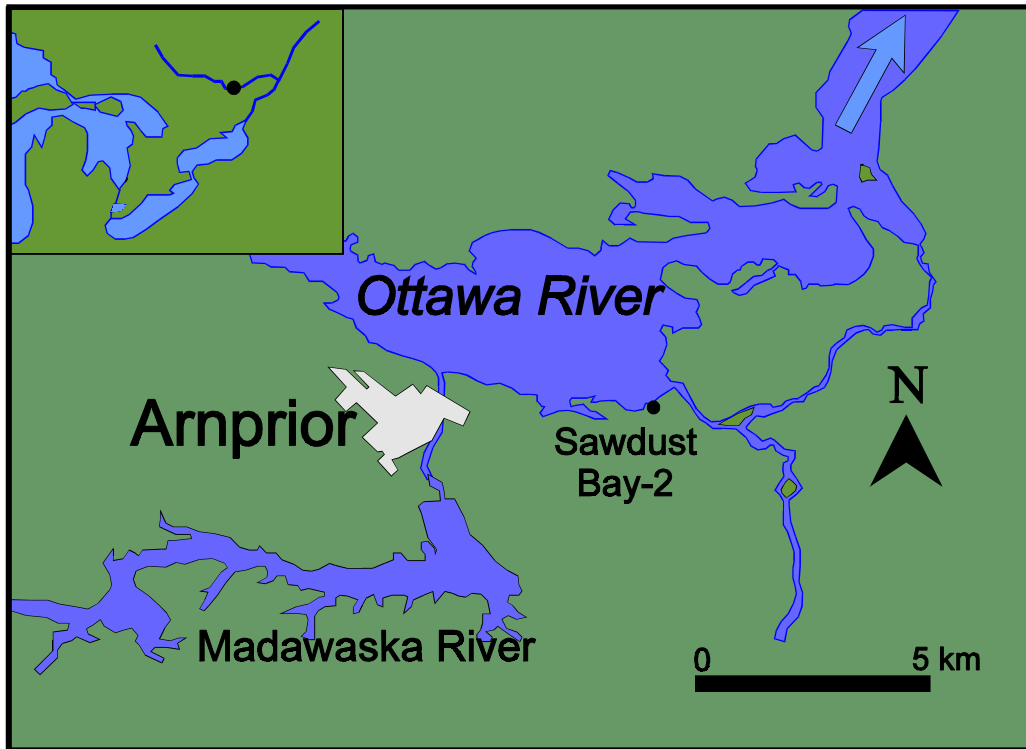


Figure 1 Location of Sawdust Bay.

The objective of this paper is to revisit this site with the intention of determining how this information "fits" with current understanding of Middle Woodland populations in Eastern Ontario. In the process, and in keeping with the theme of this symposium, the value of small sites in our understanding of Middle Woodland archaeology is evaluated.

### SITE DESCRIPTION

Sawdust Bay-2 (Figure 1) is located on the south shore of the Ottawa River approximately 4 kilometres east of the mouth of the Madawaska River. The site was identified by Clyde Kennedy in the early 1970's. Threatened with the planned construction of a cottage, the site was excavated under the direction of Kennedy in 1974 with financial assistance of an Opportunities for Youth Grant.

The site is situated approximately 30 metres from the shoreline and is about two metres above the present summer level of the Ottawa River. The area consists of a low sand plain with stands of white pine, cedar, maple, birch and hemlock. Analysis of charcoal remains from the site resulted in the identification of sugar maple, red oak, hemlock, balsam fir, beech, trembling aspen, white pine and cedar suggest a relative continuity in the site's environment over the past 2,000 years. 725 square feet or 67 square metres representing an estimated 80% of the site was excavated. The soils are characterized by a thin humus layer underlaid by a white/grey siliceous sand 6 to 20 cm in depth and an orange/brown sand. This profile was covered, in some instances, by fill from a drainage ditch which had recently been excavated at the western periphery of the site. Most of the cultural material was recovered from the white/grey siliceous sand with virtually all material no more than 40 cm below the grade.

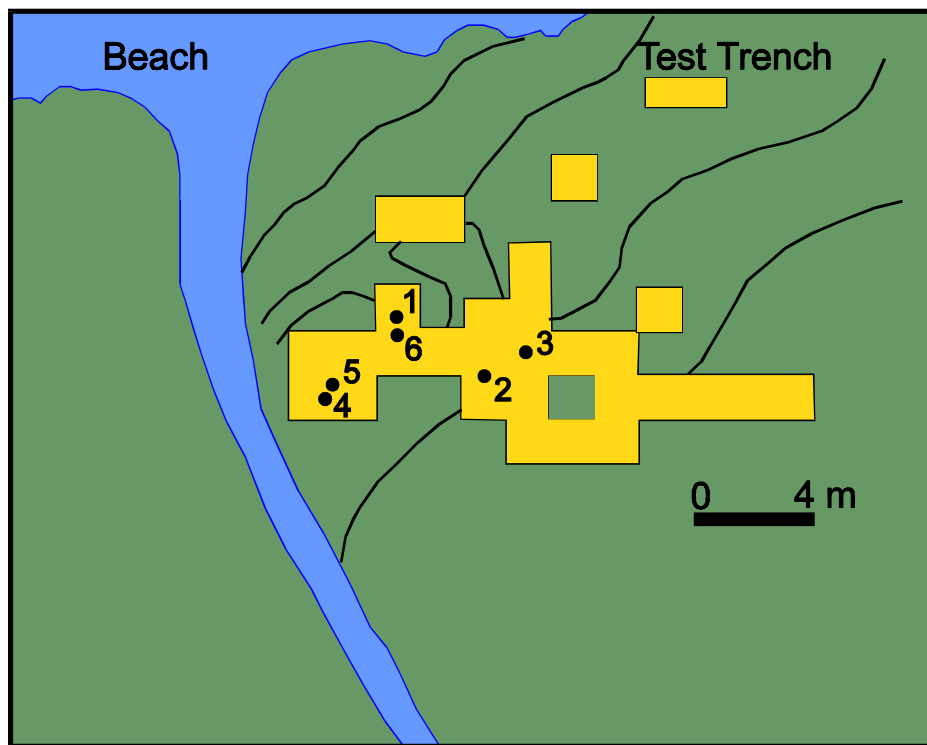


Figure 2 Site map of the Sawdust Bay-2 site.

### FEATURES AND ARTIFACTS

Six features (Figure 2) were noted during the excavation of Sawdust Bay-2. All but one of these were identified as hearths, each containing firestone and bone. The features extended between 30 and 52 cm in depth. Charcoal samples were recovered from five of the six features. Samples from features 2 and 3 were both dated to 3,650 B.P. with a standard deviation of 100

years for feature 2 and 290 years for feature 3. The striking similarity of dates obtained from separate features and processed at separate labs clearly indicates an earlier Late Archaic component at the site which is not immediately distinguishable in the assemblage.

A total of 4,723 artifacts consisting of lithics, ceramics and bone was recovered in the 1974 investigation. The lithic assemblage, made almost entirely of chert included 7 projectile points, 6 bifaces, 6 scrapers, 4 worked flakes, 37 utilized flakes and 1 drill. The majority of the assemblage consisted of flakes. Most of the chert is from the Ottawa Valley which indicates that the occupants of the site were almost entirely dependent upon local cherts for the production of chipped stone tools. Two side-notched, 2 corner-notched and 3 un-notched points are included in the assemblage.

The ceramic assemblage consists of just over 1,000 sherds from which 29 vessels were identified. The collection is characterized by coil manufactured, grit tempered ceramics with a predominance of pseudo scallop shell impressions. Other decorative impressions include linear stamp, complex and simple dentate stamps. Approximately 25% of the vessels have brushed interiors.

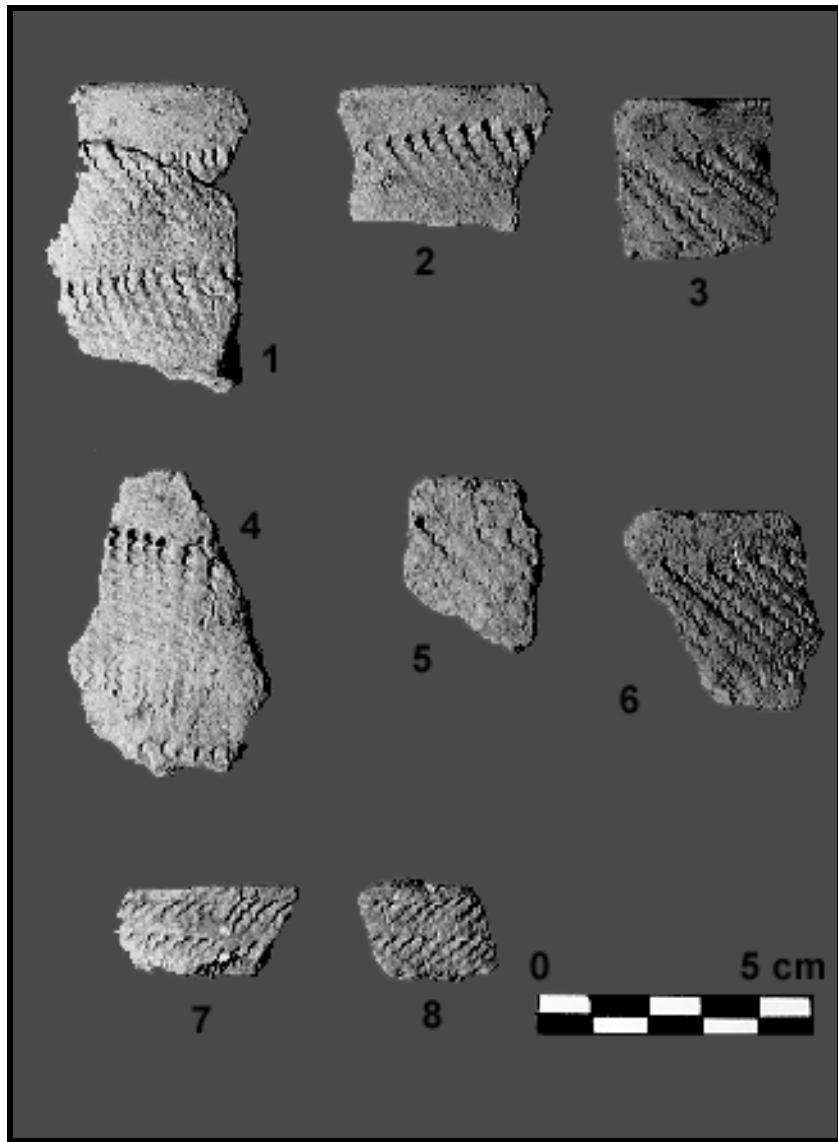
A total of 1,678 faunal elements were recovered in the 1974 excavation. This assemblage, analyzed by Stephen Cumbaa (1980), is dominated by mammalian bone, with a very small incidence of bird, fish and reptile. Represented in the collection are beaver, dog/wolf, black bear, moose, white-tailed deer, goose, snapping turtle, painted turtle and a channel catfish.

The available evidence including a white-tailed deer premolar, reptiles and goose suggest that the site was an early spring or early fall occupation.

The late Archaic dates from obvious features and Middle Woodland ceramics clearly suggest that this small site is multicomponent. Stratigraphic evidence suggests that the Middle Woodland occupation was, however, the principal component. The number of vessels identified at the site suggests that it was most likely repeatedly visited in the early spring and or fall by a group possibly consisting of one or two extended family units.

### **THE SEARCH FOR THE OTTAWA VALLEY PHASE OF THE POINT PENINSULA TRADITION**

The focus of the 1980 research was on the identification of the Middle Woodland component as part of a regionally distinct group within the Point Peninsula Tradition referred to as the Ottawa Valley Phase. Data from other Ottawa Valley sites including Kant, Meath Lake



**Figure 3 Pseudo scallop shell impressed rim and body sherds from Sawdust Bay-2.**

and Constance Bay was compared with the Sawdust Bay-2 assemblage in an effort to provide a regional definition of this phase.

This phase is defined as a distinct archaeological unit in the Ottawa River Drainage Basin occurring between approximately 100 B.C. and A.D. 200. These groups consisted of hunter-gatherers less heavily dependent upon fish than neighbouring populations including the Laurel to the north, Saugeen to the west and other Point Peninsula Tradition groups to the south and east. Ceramics consist of grit tempered, coil manufactured vessels featuring a predominance of pseudo scallop shell impressions (Figure 3) with between a third and a quarter of the vessels with brushed interiors. These populations utilized local cherts in the production of small chipped stone tools including medium to small projectile

points, scrapers, drills and utilized flakes.

Over the subsequent 15 years work on Middle Woodland sites in Eastern Ontario has been sporadic. Gordon Watson's excavation of the Wyght site (Watson 1980) and the Sand Island sites in the Rideau Lakes has provided a more substantial chronological framework for ceramic sequences in the region. Investigations in the Gananoque River Basin by Phillip Wright and Peter Engelbert in the late 70's and early 80's have expanded upon the known Middle Woodland sites in the Charleston Lake area and identified additional sites on South Lake (Wright &

Engelbert 1978). A number of these sites have underwater components which have provided several examples of semi-complete vessels.

Continuing the southward trek, possibly the most extensive work undertaken in the past 10 years on Middle Woodland sites has been the Cultural Resource Management investigations of the St. Lawrence Islands by Parks Canada. This work initiated by James Wright's 1978 survey and continued by Brian Ross along with a resource inventory by Northeastern Associates in 1993 has resulted in the identification of a large number of sites with Middle Woodland components including Gordon Island and the Mulcaster site excavated by Ross and reported on a paper presented at the 1993 Ontario Archaeological Society symposium held at Niagara Falls.

Work in the Kingston area has included investigations at Bell Island site and access to an assemblage from Jack Barret's investigation of a series of Middle Woodland sites in the Tamworth area and on Beaver Lake, north of Napanee.

Until very recently work on Middle Woodland sites in the Ottawa Valley has been limited. Barry Mitchell has continued investigations at the Kant site and possibly most significantly Marcel Laliberté has been investigating a number of archaeological sites at the mouth of the Gatineau River at Lac Leamy for the National Capital Commission.

These investigations have contributed to an increased understanding of the distribution of Middle Woodland sites in the region and as indicated above have provided a more substantial control over the ceramic sequences associated with these occupations. They have also contributed to our understanding of the transition of Middle to Late Woodland period. Available information from investigations in the Ottawa Valley have yet to yield data that might be effectively employed in further evaluating the definition of the Ottawa Valley Phase.

Gordon Watson's dating of a pseudo scallop shell vessel from the Driscoll site to 385 and 392 B.C. and second date from the Constance Bay site at 370 B.C. (Watson 1993) indicated that the Point Peninsula occupation of the area may extend to at least as early as 400 B.C. suggesting that an earlier date for the Ottawa Valley Phase be considered.

### **A REGIONAL PATTERN DEFINED**

A more intuitive interpretation of the data that has been generated from this research suggests that there are "sub regional" patterns within the Point Peninsula Tradition and certainly for subsequent populations. These may be distinguished at least through ceramic assemblages. These patterns appear to correlate to dendritic units such as the Ottawa River and its tributaries. Utilizing an analogue from more contemporary hunter-gatherer societies (Speck 1915) these

areas reflect hunting territories of various bands sharing cultural attributes but adapting to the environmental idiosyncrasies of the areas in which they live. This is most strongly reflected in the archaeological record by the use of local lithic sources in the manufacture of stone tools.

Extending this analogue it would be expected that the majority of Middle Woodland sites such as Sawdust Bay-2, would be small. Although in excess of 150 Middle Woodland sites have been registered in eastern Ontario only a small percentage of these have been excavated. The majority of these, based upon available data, could be regarded as small. This begs the question of what is small? Is size based on the number of events and/or activities of an occupation within an identified component, the number of components or simply a measure of horizontal area? For purposes of this paper criteria for defining size has been restricted to the horizontal distribution of a site. An arbitrary figure of 200 square metres is suggested as a guideline.

Most of the sites identified and excavated within the past 15 years, would, under this definition, be considered small. As already indicated they have contributed to our understanding of the distribution and to a certain extent the degree of Middle Woodland occupation in Eastern Ontario. They have also provided a clearer picture of ceramic sequences and their chronology. However, as very few have been thoroughly investigated, specific information on patterns of resource utilization, interregional cultural affiliations among other issues is wanting. An understanding of the relationship of these sites with larger occupations such as Marshall's Bay on the Ottawa River and Bell Island in Kingston has also not been fully developed. This is due in part to the absence of research on existing collections and field data from these occupations.

## **DISCUSSION**

Continued investigations of small sites will further increase our understanding of regional sequences of Middle Woodland populations in Ontario. Smaller sites are of particular value as they generally offer a potentially less complicated picture of activity and they are less expensive to excavate. However, to realize the full potential of these sites a number of them need to be investigated. It is also inevitable that if a comprehensive model of regional band utilization is to be achieved, some larger sites will also require attention.

In the case of Sawdust Bay-2 a thorough analysis of material recovered from Marshall's Bay-1 site located less than a kilometre west of Sawdust Bay holds great potential for evaluation of the chronological and cultural affiliation of the site. The Lac Lemay sites should also shed considerable light on the Middle Woodland occupation of the Ottawa Valley. Current research of Middle Woodland ceramics from eastern Ontario by Rob Phil and the author's locational study of Middle Woodland occupations should provide a broader geographic framework for relating regional sequences of Middle Woodland populations.

This theoretical approach in essence echoes that advanced by William Finlayson in his concluding statement on the Saugeen Tradition in which he emphasized the need to excavate smaller "less productive" sites in varied locational settings within well defined geographic areas (Finlayson 1977: 646-47).

Data generated from these investigations will enable archaeologists to more critically evaluate the application of hunter-gatherer analogues in the reconstruction of past cultures and ultimately provide a better understanding of these cultures.

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