

## HAMLETS BECOME VILLAGES

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### ABSTRACT

Archaeological settlement pattern data from two St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages are used to characterize St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in eastern Ontario circa A.D. 1500. These data are used to demonstrate how the movement of the hamlet populations associated with these villages played a significant role in the development of St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages. Several post-A.D. 1600 ethnohistorical references that reflect the pre-contact archaeological record of village/hamlet defensive conventions are noted. Corollary conclusions derived from archaeological settlement patterning evidence reinforce the likelihood that hostility was a significant factor in the destruction of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century.

### RÉSUMÉ

Les schèmes d'établissement de deux sites archéologiques des Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent nous ont servi à caractériser les villages de ce groupe culturel dans l'Est ontarien vers l'an 1500 de notre ère. Ces données nous ont permis de proposer que les déplacements des populations associées aux hameaux qui dépendaient de ces villages, ont joué un rôle dans le développement des villages des Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent. Nous citons plusieurs références ethnohistoriques postérieures à l'an 1600 de notre ère qui témoignent de la relation pré-contact entre villages et hameaux pour des raisons défensives. De même, l'analyse des schèmes d'établissement soutient l'hypothèse selon laquelle la destruction des Iroquoiens du Saint-Laurent avant l'arrivée des Européens au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle était dûe en partie à des hostilités.

### INTRODUCTION

Before particularizing the discussion in a St. Lawrence Iroquoian village-hamlet context, it might be prudent to recall that pan-Iroquoian non-material conventions, quite apart from soil depletion, insect infestation, the supply of firewood and village deterioration, played a role in Iroquoian village movement sequences. There comes to mind for instance the Iroquoian cosmological belief that real-world Iroquoian villages were paired with spirit villages in which there resided spirits of the village dead; those who, because they were infirm, old, and children, were unable to make the long, hazardous three day journey through the Milky Way to the great soul villages in the western sky. The spirits in these villages were believed to carry on their normal daily pursuits as once they had in life (Heidenreich 1978:375; Hewitt 1895:107-116; Tooker 1964:132, 141). Upon occasion there was liaison between the live and spirit villagers; for instance, when the spirit villagers played pranks on the live villagers, the villagers paraded to drive the spirits back into their spirit villages. Undoubtedly emotional attachments between the villagers and the spirits of their deceased kin in the spirit village were retained and perceived to be obligations. When plans to move the village were raised these obligations could not but give rise

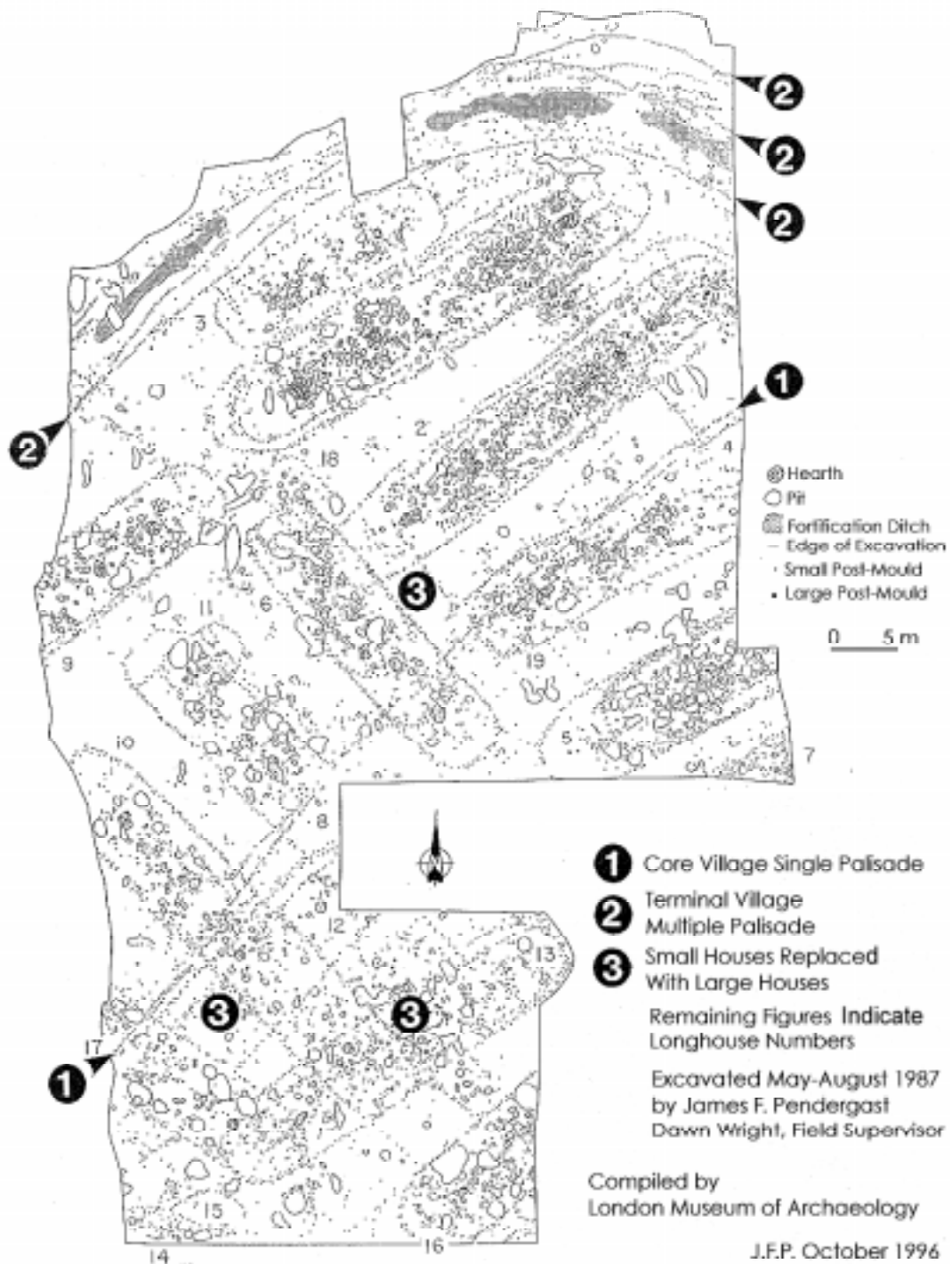


Figure 1 Settlement patterns at the Maynard-McKeown site.

emotionally dedicated to the spirit village. Indeed some elected to remain behind in the old village, Fenton's 'Old Town' concept (Fenton 1978:302; Gehring and Starna 1988:37), to be near the spirits of the deceased. It is not certain how far into the past the villagers remained obligated to the generations of their kin in the spirit villages, but there is an element of credibility in an assumption that these obligations arose each time village movement was contemplated.

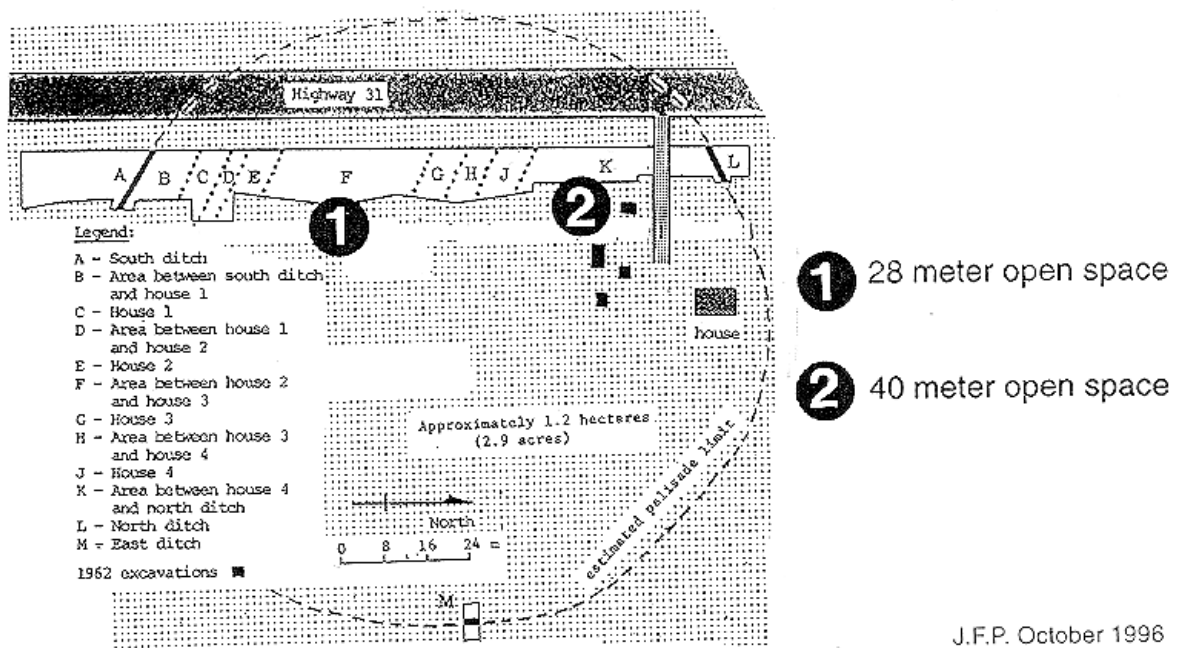
Parenthetically, the spirits in these spirit villages should not be confused with the spirits of those who, by Iroquoian convention, had no communication in the afterlife with other spirits and so did not reside in spirit villages (Tooker 1964:132). These included the spirit of those who, for instance, were killed in war, suicides and generally those who died a violent death.

Inconsistencies in the length of time attributed to Iroquoian village lifespans is also germane in the context of this discussion. The ethnohistoric record provides several estimates. For instance, the Jesuit's noted that villages were re-located twice in a generation, every 8 to 12 years (Fenton 1978:302; Tooker 1964:42), as a result of soil and firewood depletion and village deterioration. Champlain and Sagard noted circumstances in which villages might be moved every 10, 15 or 30 years (Biggar 1929:124; Wrong 1939:92). De Lamberville describes in detail how a Huron village was moved after 19 years in one location (JR 62:55-7). Recently it has been suggested that in the contact period some Mohawk villages were occupied for fifty years, and longer (Starna 1980:378). Generally, St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages are believed to have been occupied from 10 - 20 years which is, admittedly, a lifespan conveniently compatible with bidecadal calibrated 14C dating techniques in use at present (Pendergast 1996).

### **HAMLETS AMALGAMATE TO FORM FORTRESS VILLAGES**

St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in eastern Ontario can be characterized by the amount of vacant land within a village-encompassing palisade. There are some villages--for instance McKeown, Figure 1, (Pendergast 1988, 1990) and probably McIvor (Wright 1972:82; Chapdelaine 1989)--in which the longhouses are closely spaced within the terminal palisade. This is a result of these villages having been expanded several times to accommodate major population increases. Perimeter palisades were moved outward several times to encompass significantly larger areas. Frequently short houses capable of housing a small population were removed to make room for longer houses able to house a greater number of people. As a result of repeated population augmentation, very little land inside the terminal palisade remained unbuilt upon. It is not credible to attribute these major and rapid population increases to accelerated birth rates by the village population. Rather, they are believed to be the result of an amicable influx of kin and politically allied populations from nearby hamlets that could no longer provide their residents with safe haven.

On the other hand there are also well palisaded St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages--for instance Beckstead (Figure 2) (Pendergast 1984)--in which there are relatively few longhouses and large areas within the palisade remain unbuilt upon. These villages are believed to reflect a village construction policy whereby large open spaces were intentionally left unoccupied in well fortified villages so as to be able to accommodate major population augmentation on short-notice in the event nearby less defensible hamlets came under attack. Significant economies in labour and building material could be effected by having a few optimally located villages, not every last hamlet, constructed with defensive works.



**Figure 2 Beckstead site settlement pattern.**

### VILLAGE MOVEMENT ONTO HAMLET SITES

St. Lawrence Iroquoian hamlets were locations peripheral to the parent village where small undefended or lightly defended habitation sites were established to facilitate the exploitation of local resources, usually subsistence-oriented resources, often, but not solely, on a seasonal basis. There comes to mind, for instance, the fishing stations at the Stewart (Jamieson 1982), Grays Creek (Pendergast 1966) and McDougald (Pendergast 1969) sites, the farm hamlets at Crystal Rock (Pendergast 1962) and McKeown (Pendergast 1988) and the special purpose hamlets represented by the Sugar Bush site (Pendergast 1974) and the Swamp Island site (Pendergast n.d.).

## Hamlets Become Villages

The paramount importance of corn, bean and squash crops to Iroquoian survival (JR 27:65; Tooker 1964:61) caused the matrons, who were responsible for the crops, to be well aware of the relative merits of the several hamlet locations where the village crops were grown (Fenton and Moore 1974, (2):70; Fenton 1978:299). The matrons' experience regarding each farm hamlet's productivity and potential would be weighed heavily when future village sites were being considered. This hypothesis is supported by the archaeological data excavated at the McKeown site.

On the south side of the McKeown village elements of four longhouses were excavated under the terminal palisade (see Figure 3). Two of these are superimposed which indicates that longhouse construction took place sequentially on that location at least once before the McKeown village had been built over the hamlet site. Several explanations could be proffered to explain these longhouse features. One option might identify these longhouses as McKeown village lodges located outside the terminal palisade similar to the lodge at Nodwell (Wright 1974:91). Alternately there may have been a wholly separate habitation area outside the village palisade reminiscent of the Draper site configuration (Finlayson 1985). The interpretation proffered here is the possibility of there having been a farm hamlet on that location before the McKeown village was built over it.

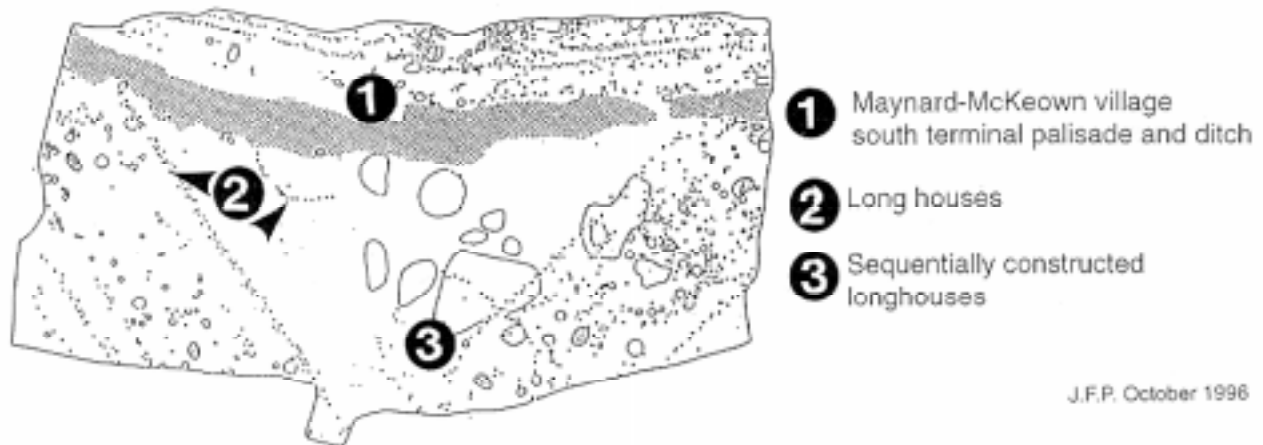


Figure 3 Remains of a farm hamlet at the Maynard-McKeown site.

## DISCUSSION

The presence of hamlets, sometimes called 'towns', peripheral to Iroquoian villages, sometimes called 'castles', is largely a pan-Iroquoian characteristic (Abler 1970:22; Gehring and Starna 1988:4-8; Pendergast *op. cit.*) Lennox's comprehensive examination of Neutral village, hamlet and cabin habitation sites in the late prehistoric and contact eras, including "the ties

between hamlets and villages for defensive purposes”, is mandatory reading for those pursuing this matter (Lennox 1995:1-7). The amalgamation of Iroquoian habitation centres to improve their defensive posture is described several times in the ethnohistoric literature. For instance, the Hurons united five villages when they came under attack and upon occasion the Seneca moved their women and children into Cayuga villages for protection (JR 37:97). Gehring and Starna (1988:27) conclude that *ca.* A.D. 1634 it was a Mohawk and Oneida practice to move people from hamlets into fortified villages when they came under attack. Sagard recounts how *ca.* A.D. 1623 in Huronia, “when war is declared...all the towns, hamlets, cities and villages near the frontiers, if they are incapable of holding back the enemy, are destroyed, otherwise they are fortified and each man takes his place in (one of) the fortified towns...and in each (town) they build new lodges to house them” (Wrong 1939:155). On the other hand, Ramsden (1988:181) has interpreted the three-phase expansion of several terminal prehistoric Huron villages in the Upper Trent Valley as evidence of the *amicable* assimilation of St. Lawrence Iroquoians migrating westward from their homeland on the St. Lawrence River.

Some Iroquoian villages, usually those called 'castles', were heavily palisaded and sited with defense in mind (Abler 1970:*passim*; Gehring and Starna 1988:34 n. 37). In Huronia, the heavily fortified villages were located nearest the enemy (Biggar 1929:49). Champlain noted that in A.D. 1615, only six of the westernmost Huron Attignawantan (Bear) tribe villages were fortified (Biggar 1929:122). Later in his A.D. 1632 *Voyages*, this was revised to be eight of their eighteen villages (Biggar 1932:301). Later Sagard noted that in A.D. 1623, only some of the twenty-five Bear tribe villages were fortified (Wrong 1939:91). Only twenty-four years later in 1647 hostilities with the Iroquois had forced the Arendarhanon (Rock), the eastern tribe of the Huron Confederacy, to abandon their villages and move their people into neighbouring villages (JR 23:81). Indeed, the Jesuits explained that *ca.* A.D. 1649 when attacked the Huron in undefended villages had no option but to flee into the forests and swamps (Tooker 1964:40).

## CONCLUSION

Archaeological research using excavation techniques pioneered by Ritchie and Funk (1973) and J.V. Wright (1974) has demonstrated that *ca.* A.D. 1500 some St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in eastern Ontario were built as fortresses able to accommodate neighbouring allied hamlet populations in the event they came under attack. This suggests that by *ca.* A.D. 1500 the St. Lawrence Iroquoians had adopted a village-hamlet mutual defence policy similar to that described in the ethnohistoric and archaeological record of Iroquoia (Gehring and Starna 1988; Lennox 1995). As a result, and in this particular context, the credibility of the ethnohistoric record is enhanced by precontact St. Lawrence Iroquoian archaeological data and the possibility arises that this interdependent village-hamlet defensive posture was a long-standing widespread Iroquoian convention.

The archaeological data also demonstrates that on occasion, a particularly favourable farm hamlet location might be selected as the site for a new village.

Several collateral conclusions arise from this discussion that have a bearing on the disappearance of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians. On one hand, the rapidly escalating population and the heavy defensive works in evidence at the McKeown village suggest that the St. Lawrence Iroquoians in the Prescott village cluster were being attacked heavily at this time (see Pendergast 1993). On the other hand, when the earlier Beckstead village farther to the east was present, the low population density and large open areas inside the palisade there, suggests that at that time hostilities were not sufficiently intense to cause the outlying hamlets to take refuge in the Beckstead fortress village.

In the event the McKeown and Beckstead villages were contemporaneous, the contrasting levels of hostility noted would suggest that not all St. Lawrence Iroquoian villages in eastern Ontario were under attack with equal intensity at this time. Alternatively, in the event McKeown and Beckstead were not contemporaneous villages, the low population density in the Beckstead village would suggest that the Beckstead site was present before hostilities had reached the intensity that later culminated in the destruction of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians in the Prescott village cluster, including the McKeown village, *ca.* A.D. 1500. Current evidence favours the latter option.

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