

## Archaeology in the County

### Traces of the First People in Prehistoric Prince Edward County

[Archaic Period burial site](#)

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Archaeology is a branch of Anthropology, the study of Humanity in general, and is the study of people based on the "things" they have left behind. These "things" may be tools they have made and used, buildings or other structures built for various purposes, traces of different activities they may have engaged in, the bodies of people themselves or even indirect evidence of the impact people had on the land or the impact the land might have had upon them. Primarily, then, archaeologists study the traces and remains of people in the past, often the distant past for which we may have no other records.



### First People of Ontario: The Paleo-Indians

It is probable that Ontario was first occupied almost as soon as the land was exposed by melting ice. Fluted points, which are very similar to projectile points from the western and southwestern U.S., have been found on a number of sites in southern Ontario, although different "Type" names have been given to them to recognize slight differences in style which indicate variation in time and space. The fluted points in Ontario are believed to date between 11,000 and 10,500 years old.

During the late Paleo-Indian period, the glaciers which covered the northern half of North America began to gradually melt, exposing new land for occupation. At the same time as this was occurring, world wide extinctions among the large mammals also occurred. Mastodons, Woolly Mammoths, giant beavers, giant bison and many other important species disappeared. In North America, camels and horses also died off, the latter not to reappear on the continent until the Spanish brought them at the end of the 15th century A.D.

The late Paleo-Indian period is believed to date between 10,500 and 9,500 years ago.

### The Archaic Period

The Archaic period in southern Ontario is characterized by the appearance of ground stone tools, notched or stemmed projectile points, the predominance of less extensively flaked stone tools, increased reliance on local chert sources, a lack of pottery and smoking pipes (except in the later parts of this period) and an increase in the numbers and sizes of sites.

During the Archaic period, Native peoples evolved their way of life to adapt to a temperate forest environment in a landscape criss-crossed by streams and rivers and surrounded by large fresh water lakes. Subsistence strategies which developed during the Archaic are generally considered to be based on increased exploitation of seasonally abundant resources. Small hunting and gathering bands (20-50 people) utilized the lake shores during the spring and summer months, then broke into family groups and moved inland for the fall and winter. Food would have been plentiful during the warm months of the year. The lakes and rivers were teeming with many species of fish, aquatic birds and mammals. Nuts, berries and edible roots could be found in the forests and marshes. The fall would have been a busy time because foodstuffs would have to be stored and clothing made ready for the winter. During the winter, people moved inland to hunt and trap fresh food and furs.

We don't know exactly what Archaic houses looked like, but from the size of most sites, people probably lived in oval wigwam-like structures made of frame poles and covered with bark

slabs or reed mats. This type of house was easy to build or move and could be heated with a small fire near the centre of the structure. There might have been pits placed within the houses for the storage of food or other items.

Small Point Archaic sites and multi-component sites with Small Point Archaic material have been reported in the region. These include two burial sites in the Kingston area: Collins Bay and the York site near the community of Verona and a burial near Picton, Prince Edward County. Sites with Small Point Archaic material have also been identified in the Ottawa Valley near Arnprior.

Among the more significant developments to occur near the end of the Archaic Period is the elaboration of burial complexes including what has been referred to as the Glacial Kame Burial Complex. Sites relating to this complex have been found throughout southern Ontario. Representative sites include the burials at the York Site and Picton in eastern Ontario, the Hind Site southwest of London and the Port Franks site on the eastern shore of Lake Huron.

### **Early Woodland Period**

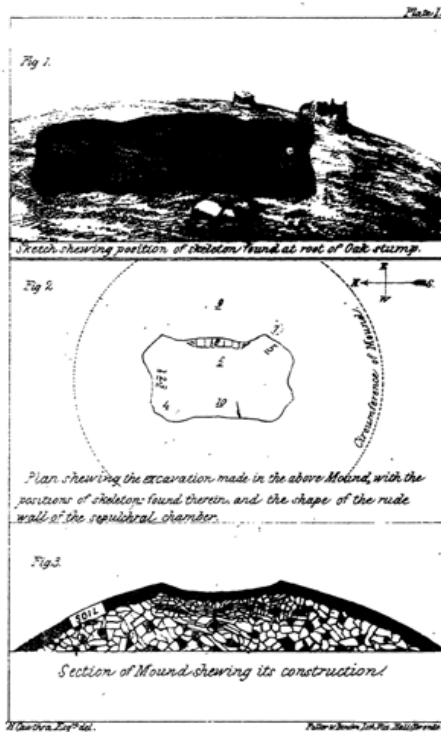
The Early Woodland period in Ontario is generally recognized as the period when pottery was first introduced. In many ways, however, the basic life styles of the people seems to have remained unchanged from preceding periods with hunting, fishing and gathering being the primary means of subsistence. This period is believed to have lasted from about 800 or 900 B.C. until about 0 B.C.

### **Middle Woodland Period**

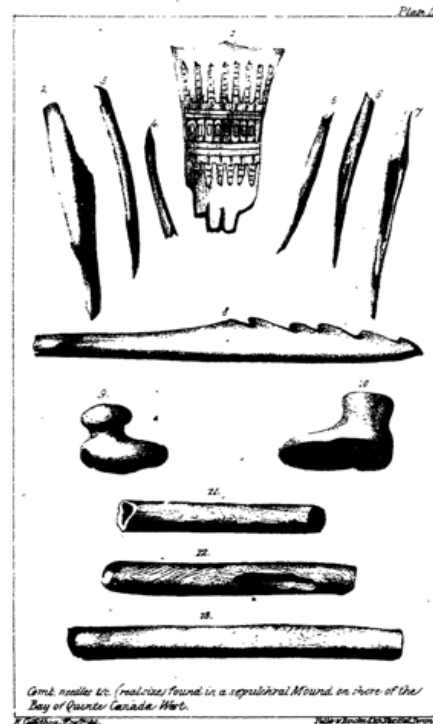
The Middle Woodland (200 - 300 B.C. to A.D. 700 - 900) period is distinguished from the Early Woodland only in few, relatively minor, aspects. These relate to some aspects of the chipped lithic tool inventory (i.e. changes in projectile point types) and the addition of decoration of increasing elaboration to the pottery. Pottery is found on a greater percentage of sites so may have become more widely used in the seasonal round.

The Middle Woodland Period in most of southcentral and southeastern Ontario is referred to as the Point Peninsula complex, as defined initially from sites in New York State. Point Peninsula people did, in some areas, bury at least some of their dead in burial mounds. The most significant mounds, at least for archaeologists, are those identified in the Rice Lake, Lower Trent River area including the Serpent, Cameron's Point and LeVescounte Mounds. Mound burials have also been reported in the Bay of Quinte area along the south shoreline in Prince Edward County. In most mounds, exotic grave goods including copper and silver pan pipes, marine shell gorgets and exotic cherts have been found.





Cross-section of a burial mound excavated in Prince Edward County



Artifacts found in the burial mound

### Late Woodland Period

The Late Woodland in southern Ontario is largely defined by the emergence of village life and the increased reliance on domesticated plants, particularly corn but with beans and squash (for food now) also playing important roles. In northern Ontario, however, this period is defined more arbitrarily on the basis of new ceramic types since there does not appear to have been as profound a change in lifestyle. This important difference is due to the fact that climate and landscape prohibited the adoption of agriculture north of the Severn River.

Many of the sites, such as Lakeshore Lodge in Prince Edward County, or the Kingston Outer Station, are fishing stations, a continuation of the Late Middle Woodland and Transitional Period settlement pattern. It has been suggested that these fishing camps serviced the inland sites by harvesting eel, an important element in the diet of St. Lawrence Iroquois populations.



Middle Iroquoian sites are rare in Eastern Ontario. One has been identified in Prince Edward County and in the Kingston area. The groups represented in these sites appear to have developed into the eastern-most branches of the Iroquoian linguistic group which we call the Wendat or Hurons.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that there was conflict between different populations or groups through this period. The appearances of St. Lawrence Iroquois ceramics on Huron sites in Prince Edward County and in the Trent River System, as well as the recovery of Huron ceramics on St. Lawrence Iroquoian sites have been explained as the result of the capture of women during raids between the two groups. We do know that in the mid 1500s, after the visits by Jacques Cartier, the St. Lawrence Iroquoians disappeared. Whatever the causes of

this dramatic event, there is one site in the Trent Valley, which was Huron territory, with St. Lawrence Iroquoian pottery in association with European trade goods, suggesting that at least some of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians ultimately settled among the Hurons.

### **The Contact Period**

While North America had been visited by Europeans on an increasing scale since the end of the 15th century, it was not until the voyages of Jacques Cartier in the 1530s that Europeans visited Ontario Iroquoians in their home territories. During these first explorations, Cartier encountered and described a series of large palisaded villages along the St. Lawrence River. One of these villages, called Stadacona, was located at present day Quebec City while a second, called Hochelaga, was located at present day Montreal. When Europeans returned to this area in the early 17th century, however, they found the villages of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians abandoned and the area occupied by Algonquian speaking people.



Beginning in the early 17th century, French explorers and fur traders such as Samuel Champlain and Etienne Brule travelled into southern Ontario and visited the Hurons and other groups. Because of raiding by New York Iroquoians, they took a somewhat round-about northern route and met and described a number of Algonquian speaking groups along the way. Included among these people were the Algonquins along the Ottawa River, the Nipissings around Lake Nipissing and the French River, and the Adawa, or Ottawa, along the east shore of Georgian Bay, on Manitoulin Island and on the Bruce Peninsula. These people all lived in small seasonal camps and did not practice intensive corn horticulture but did participate in the fur trade by trading furs, especially beaver, for various European goods and corn grown by the Hurons. Additionally, the Nipissings and the Adawa were known to have wintered among the Petuns and Hurons, respectively.

The Archaeology of Ontario (*Extracts from* [The Ontario Archaeological Society](#))