

# Museum of Ontario Archaeology

*An Affiliate of the University of Western Ontario*

## Teacher Resource Manual



Written and Compiled by William Langman, Erika Romanowski and Jeremy Johnston  
Copyright 2001, Museum of Ontario Archaeology  
*Revised February 2009*



## Introduction

---

This resource guide is intended to provide teachers with materials to complement the education programs offered by the Museum of Ontario Archaeology (MOA). In an effort to maximize the experience of the Museum, this package offers background information, lesson ideas and resources.

The Museum of Ontario Archaeology is an active archaeological site that showcases artefacts from the past 11, 000 years of southwestern Ontario's history. The focus of our in-house programs is to highlight the significance of these artefacts, while offering contextual information surrounding the creation, use and disposal of the items in our collection. The information contained in this manual is designed to be used either pre or post museum visit, with the goal of deepening students understanding and appreciation of the practice of archaeology as well as pre-historic cultures.

## Dispelling the Myths

---

The examination of culture requires an open mind and the ability to understand the cultural context; furthermore, it is important to understand and respect the cultural differences one may encounter when examining the history of Ontario's First Nations people. This section attempts to dispel popular myths and misconceptions.

### Timelines and Record Keeping

The European and Native traditions of record keeping are one challenge to many beginning to study Native history. In the European traditions, people are accustomed to written records. This differs from the Native tradition of oral record keeping. First Nations oral histories contribute to a rich historical record that spans thousands of years, but because this methodology differs from that of the European tradition, there has been scepticism on the part of many as to the validity of the information. Thus, it is important to remember that just because the tradition is different it is not erroneous or false and the oral history of the Native peoples should be examined with the respect and dignity it deserves.

### "Prehistoric"

Many associate the word prehistoric with such terms as 'primitive' and 'simple', this could not be further from the truth. There is no such thing as a simple or primitive human; people living 11,000 years ago were as complex as those living today. The misleading notion of believing that a culture is primitive resides in the



association of technology with cultural advancement. While technology can significantly change culture, it cannot measure cultural advancement. If we were to apply such thinking to Canadian culture, we could consider the culture of the 1960's as primitive as many Canadians today own home computers more powerful than the ones used to send man to the moon.

Consider what would happen if prehistoric peoples could examine our culture today. What might they think of our modern inventions and life ways?

### Cultural Stereotypes

When one thinks about Native people, some of the first images that come to mind may be those perpetuated in the media, most of which are inaccurate. For example, the image of the Plains Indians – and the tipi – are offered as a sort of homogenous image of “Native Americans.” This assumption of a pan-Indian culture and identity ignores the many important cultural and linguistic differences of diverse groups of Native people. The Iroquois (or Haudenoshonee) of southern Ontario live very different lives from the Haida on the Northwest Coast, who in turn are distinctive from the Zuni of the southwestern United States.

While the term Indian is still frequently used to refer to Native people (“American Indian” is often used in the United States), it is a misnomer. The word came into use when early European explorers, thinking they had found a passage to the West Indies, labelled the inhabitants of North and South America ‘Indians.’ Native or First Nations are the preferred – and more accurate - terms.

### **Notes for Educators**

---

The ‘prehistory’ of Ontario is divided into four approximate time periods; differentiated by recognizable differences in environment or culture. These environmental and cultural changes came about slowly, with no definitive turning point from one period to the next. The terms are a convenient, if somewhat arbitrary, way of dividing the 11,000 year time line.

Name	Time	Description
Palaeo-Indian Period	Ca. 9000BC-5000BC	Traces the first cultures which entered Ontario following the last ice age.
Archaic Period	Ca. 5000BC-1000BC	Major environmental changes and subsequently major cultural changes.
Woodland Period	Ca. 1000BC-1000AD	Much technological advancement in the areas of pottery and agriculture.
Terminal Woodland Period	Ca. 1000AD- beginning of historic period	Characterized by widespread agriculture and increased warfare.



Understanding cultural context is imperative when interpreting historical data. It is important to note that much of the early historical information was written by early missionaries whose goal was to convert the Native Peoples to Christianity. Many close-minded observations were subsequently included in our modern history books. A glaring example of this is a quote from one Jesuit who described the interior of a Longhouse as a “miniature picture of hell”. In thinking that they were coming to save a godless people many of these early missionaries were ignorant to the fact that the Native peoples prospered under their own system of governance and spirituality.

The Museum of Ontario Archaeology recommends that educators make an effort possible to contact local Native communities and Native Friendship Centres in order to gain a better understanding of the culture of Native Peoples. Historical descriptions of Iroquoian Peoples (more specifically the Neutral Nation) that occupied southwestern Ontario at the time of European contact can be found in Elsie McLeod Jury's *The Neutral Indians of South Western Ontario*.

## **Learning about Archaeology**

---

Archaeology is the scientific collection and study of the material remains of past cultures. As most of the material from the past is covered over or buried in the ground, archaeologists must search for these materials. The name given to the search for archaeological material or artefacts in the ground is called an ‘excavation’ or a ‘dig’.

It is the job of an Archaeologist to describe, classify and analyze the artefacts they find in an effort to understand how the artefacts were used and the people who used them. This process of description, classification and analysis begins with the search for the location of a site, and carries through the excavation and the subsequent work in the laboratory. Finally, the archaeologist writes a report and shares their discoveries and conclusions with other archaeologists as well as the general public.

### Location of a Site

Archaeologists use many sources when searching for the location of past activity: aerial photographs, which indicate changes indicative of human movement, speaking with people in areas where artefacts have been discovered and examining local geography and analyzing areas that would have been favourable for development.

For post-European contact sites, archaeologists often look for information in living architecture such as historical buildings or remains of buildings yet to be covered by earth. Census records, tax records, county atlases and surveyor's records are also valuable sources of information.



## Licenses

Once a site is identified, an archaeologist must apply for a special license from Ontario's Ministry of Culture and Communication to carry out the excavation. Ministry guidelines dictate that only licensed archaeologists can conduct excavations. It is important to note that it is illegal to sell or destroy artefacts in Ontario.

## Background Research

The first step an archaeologist must take when beginning research on a site is background research. This background information includes determining any past owners and previous excavations, which allows archaeologists to identify any past activity on the site and to determine the location of any buildings and fence lines that may be encountered during the excavation.

## Fieldwork

The type of site being examined changes the methodology used by the archaeologist.

## Living Architecture

In the case of living architecture, excavation is secondary to other collection methods. In such cases, the archaeologist \ would rely heavily on information gathered through background research. Expanding upon this information with recording and measuring the structure, as well as photography and selective sampling of artefacts found on the site would allow for further insight.

## Buried Information

If the site is beneath the ground, excavation is required to gain access to the information. Archaeologists perform a surface collection, which consists of systematically walking over the site to see if any artefacts or other signs of past activity are visible on the surface of the soil. The entire site is then surveyed and limits are set.

A system of squares, known as a grid, is mapped on the surface of the site. The purpose for systematically numbering squares is to track the location of the digging, as well as the locations of the artefacts and features found during the excavation. Fieldworkers work in 1 x 1 metre sub-squares; carefully scraping away earth using a bricklayer's trowel. As artefacts are revealed, their locations are marked and recorded by sketching or photography. If a large artefact is found, the earth is carefully removed using paintbrushes, grapefruit knives or dental picks. The artefact is then left in its original position in the ground, or *in*



*situ*, so that any other artefacts associated with it can be located and recorded together as a group. This type of information may be important to the archaeologist reporting on the site since groupings of artefacts may provide important contextual information. Finally, the soil that has been scraped away is sifted through a fine screen to ensure that no small artefacts are missed. At the end of the day, the fieldworker will report on the day's activities, sketch any important finds, and note any photographs taken in a field diary.

This information is important to the archaeologist when it is time to analyze and report on the site. All the artefacts are bagged with a label identifying the site, date, fieldworkers' names, grid location, 1 x 1 metre sub-square and the depth in the square.

### Laboratory Work

In the lab, excavated artefacts are taken from the bags and washed by hand with water and a toothbrush. The artefacts are then separated into classes and each artefact is assigned a Borden number. Information about the specific kind of artefact, its size and weight, location found and any interesting details are recorded and catalogued.



## The Lawson Site: A Neutral Iroquoian Village

---

### History of the Site

The Lawson site has been known since at least the mid 1800's; the first archaeologist to visit the site was David Boyle, in 1894. Boyle made a sketch map of the eastern earthworks and collected a few specimens for the museum he worked for, which would become the Royal Ontario Museum. His successor at the site, Rowland B. Orr, published a sketch map of the entire site in 1917.

It was not until 1921 that a large scale systematic attempt at excavation was made. Archaeologist William Wintemberg, working for what is now the Canadian Museum of Civilization, spent three summers excavating about 0.3 hectares of the core area of the village. Due to the large collection of artefacts that were recovered from these excavations, the Lawson Site is a cornerstone in our current understanding of the prehistory of Ontario.

In an attempt to bring archaeology to the public, Wilfrid Jury conducted summer field schools on the Lawson site in the 1940s, through the Museum of Indian Archaeology and Pioneer Life at the University of Western Ontario. Jury was instrumental in having the site declared a Historic Site by the Government of Ontario. In 1969, the lands and the Museum of Indian Archaeology were donated to the University of Western Ontario by Col. Tom Lawson, Martha Hamilton and Elizabeth Klinger of the Fuller family.

To date the Museum of Ontario Archaeology has excavated 0.4 hectares, almost entirely within the expansion area of the site. The artefacts recovered number over one hundred thousand pieces; all or parts of 14 longhouses have been exposed as has over 120 metres of palisade.

### The Neutral

One of the Native confederacies encountered by the first Europeans in Ontario was the Neutral. These people occupied the Hamilton/Brantford/Milton, the Niagara Peninsula as well as the Lawson site. The name Neutral was a French construct, applied to this nation because they did not take part in the conflict between the Huron and the Iroquois nations. Their own name for themselves was never recorded, but the Huron called them the *Attawandaron*, meaning 'people who speak a slightly different language.' Sadly, the Neutral no longer exist as a distinct nation; archaeologists postulate that the group was wiped out by diseases, such as small pox, increased conflict and warfare. Others theorize that the Neutral dispersed shortly after the age of European contact and united with other nations that had similar cultural and linguistic traditions.

Dating to about 1500 AD, the Lawson village is a pre-contact site, meaning that the people who lived here had no contact with Europeans – thus there is no contemporary written record describing neither the site nor its



inhabitants. It is believed that some time shortly after the abandonment of the Lawson site, its people moved east to join with the others of the Neutral nations.

### The Expansion Area/Disturbed Area

This part of the site measures approximately 0.4 hectares. This expansion of the core village which, was about 1.4 hectares in size, was a later addition to the site.

There are nine longhouses in the expansion with an estimated population of about 500 people; this probably represents all or part of another village that decided to join forces with the original Lawson inhabitants. Where these people came from and why they chose to move to the Lawson site are questions which current archaeological research hopes to answer. This portion of the site was, unfortunately, ploughed starting in the late 1800's. Therefore, it is also known as the 'disturbed' area.

### The Palisade

A palisade completely surrounded and enclosed the site like the stockade of a European style fort. It is composed of a varying number of rows of posts, between which branches were interwoven to form solid walls running parallel to one another.

Breaks in these walls would be staggered to form a complex maze-like entrance. Warriors would keep watch from these defensive platforms or galleries, which were accessible by ladders. These platforms were stocked with rocks and pots of water; the rocks were used as missiles to hurl upon the enemy, while the water was for thwarting any attempt by attackers to set fire to the palisade.

### The Earthwork

The earthwork is a long, narrow mound of earth; it is what remains visible above the ground of the original palisade support system marking the western end of the core area of the village. Excavations have revealed five to six rows of palisade posts and a ditch associated with the earthwork. The palisade was torn down when the people in the expansion area joined forces with the original inhabitants. The earthwork appears to have been levelled and the ditch filled in with one of the expansion area houses crossing this original palisade and overlaps with the core area of the village.

### Reconstruction

The Museum of Ontario Archaeology's reconstruction of the Neutral Iroquoian Village is based on the archaeological evidence from the site as well as the historic records from other parts of Ontario. Archaeologists can recover a floor plan of a palisade or longhouse structure by observing stains or discolouration in



the soil corresponding to the positions of original storage pits, hearths and posts. Consultation of the historical record, including written descriptions of Huron and Neutral villages by early French explorers and missionaries, provide information about the aboveground appearance of the house and palisade.

### The Longhouse

Built with a frame of saplings supported by large posts in the house interior, typical longhouses were covered with sheets of elm bark. Openings at either end served as doors, while openings in the roof acted like chimneys, letting the smoke from the fires out. Fireplaces or hearths were spaced down the length of a central corridor in the house, flanked with platforms for sleeping and storage in the central corridors.

The historic record shows that each hearth was shared by two families, one on either side of the house. On average, families had six to eight members. A medium sized longhouse, such as the one reconstructed at the Lawson site, would have been occupied by 38-40 people, all related through the female line. When a couple got married, the husband would move into his wife's family longhouse.

A very large portion of the longhouse was devoted to storage. The upper platforms would have been filled with personal possessions and a variety of foodstuffs such as strings of corn, dried and/or smoked fish and meat. In addition, there were cubicles at the ends of the houses for storage of firewood and large pits were dug under the bunk lines for further storage of foodstuffs.

In the winter months, the longhouse was the focal point of village life. Tools and other personal items were made and repaired; stories and folklore were passed on from one generation to the next and numerous social and ritual events were held. In the summer months a large portion of the inhabitants lived away from the village itself, maintaining nearby fields of corn, beans and squash.

### The Garden/Subsistence

An area of land between 560 and 720 hectares would have been required by the Lawson site inhabitants to grow the food for the village during their twenty - twenty-five year occupation of the site. All the major crops consumed by the village were grown on that section of land, including the Three Sisters: corn, beans and squash. Sunflowers were grown for oil while tobacco was grown for smoking by the men and use in rituals. They would have had about 240 hectares under cultivation at any one time. The land for cultivation would have been cleared by the men using their stone axes to cut the smaller trees and burning the larger ones. The women would then scrape the earth up into mounds one to three feet in diameter where the seeds were planted.

Women tended the crops, keeping them free of weeds, while chasing birds and other animals away. The women were also in charge of the harvest, which took place in the fall. While tending the crops, the women would live in



small hamlets located close to the fields with some men present for defensive purposes.

### Other Subsistence Activities

Farming was introduced to the province around 500 AD and combined with wild plants, game and fish it provided a the varied diet for the Neutral People. Berries and fruits, such as strawberries, raspberries, plums, cranberries and mayapples were among the plants gathered for food. Vegetables under cultivation included Jerusalem artichokes, vetches and leeks. Nuts, including butternuts, walnuts, hazelnuts, and acorns supplemented the diet of the Lawson site residents.

Corn was the most important of all crops, accounting for 50 to 75% of the diet. It was most often eaten in the form of soup. The kernels themselves could be boiled or the corn could be ground into meal to make soup, corn bread, or cakes.

### Mortar and Pestle

To make corn meal the Native people would use a mortar and pestle, which were often made of wood. The basin of the mortar was created by burning and scraping away the charred wood.

Another way to grind the corn was the using a round hand-held stone called a *mano* and a broad flat stone called a *metate*. One such *metate* is known from the Lawson site.

### The Bluff

The erosive actions of the Medway River on the east side of the site and Snake Creek to the south created the high steep banks that surround the site. The difference in elevation between the site proper and the Medway surface is about 20 metres, with slopes ranging from between 45° and 60°. The sides of the site bordering the river were well protected from attack by the natural topography; consequently the palisades on those sides of the site are much less complex than those at either end. Only two rows of posts have been discovered and the area appears to lack defensive ditches and earthworks.

### The Core Area/Undisturbed Area

It is estimated that between twenty and twenty-five houses, home to between 1000 and 1300 people, occupied this 1.4 hectare area. Fortunately for archaeologists, this section of the Lawson site has never been ploughed or cultivated and as such is referred to as the “undisturbed area.” Thus, the pottery, tools and other objects left behind by the Native people when they abandoned



the site are still in place as the people left them 500 years ago. Through careful excavation and recording of the exact location of every object left behind by the people, archaeologists hope to create a complete picture of exactly what kind of activities took place in any given area on the site.

### Storage Pits

Storage pits are one feature of the original village still visible on the ground surface, which show up as depressions in the ground. Often, these depressions form rows that appear to coincide with the placement of storage pits under the bunk lines of the longhouses. The presence of storage pits can be helpful in determining the number of longhouses, their size and orientation.

### Eastern Limit of the Site

A complex arrangement of earthworks, ditches and rows of palisade suggest that this was a main entrance to the village. The land surface to the east slopes down very gently toward the juncture of the Medway River and Snake Creek forming a natural ramp. This may have been a route taken by men when setting out for a hunt, while women could have taken this route to work in the fields.

### The Seasonal Round: A Year in a Neutral Village

In early March, groups of men would start to hunt game; they would fish – both locally and on long expeditions to Lakes Erie and Huron – until mid-May. Meanwhile, the women gathered firewood and collected sap from maple trees. By the middle of May, any new fields to be planted would have been cleared by the men and the old growth burnt over by the women. Planting was complete by the end of May. Through the summer, the women would tend the crops and gather various wild foods. Some of the men would remain behind to protect the village and hamlets, to fish and hunt locally and to repair or modify structures in the village.

In August and September, the women harvested the fields and processed the crops. The men who had left on long range hunting and trading expeditions returned. From late September until early December, deer were hunted in mass hunts where both men and women participated. Much of the meat would be dried and stored for winter use.

In the winter, when everyone was present in the village, a wide variety of feasts, ceremonies and other social activities took place. Tools and implements were repaired or replaced and preparations were made for the renewal of the cycle in the spring.



## Burial Practices

The Lawson inhabitants' burial customs had two steps. The first phase was temporary burials, which were sometimes interments in the ground, but more often, six-foot platforms were used to raise the deceased off the ground. The

belief was that the soul was comprised of two parts, with one part of the soul remaining with the bones of an individual through the period of temporary burial which would not leave until the end of the final burial.

The Huron practised a final burial during a ceremony called the Feast of the Dead. It could be that the Neutral did the same. The Feast of the Dead was held once every ten to twelve years. Normally, more than one village participated in this ceremony and it appears to have had a political as well as religious significance. Some distance away from the village, a large pit about five metres in diameter and about three metres deep would be excavated. The bones of all the dead would be placed in the pits and mixed together. This mingling had the political effect of solidifying alliances between villages and between different groups of people.



## Glossary of Basic Archaeological Terms

---

**Absolute dating:** *analysis that determines the approximate calendar date that an artefact or feature was used.*

**Anthropology:** *the study of past cultures.*

**Archaeology:** *the branch of anthropology that is concerned with the scientific study of remains of past human life.*

**Artefact:** *any object made or modified by humans.*

**Artist:** *someone that draws newly found objects usually done on graph paper to represent artefacts according to scale.*

**Assemblage:** *artefacts that are found together and that presumably were used at the same time for similar or related tasks.*

**Attribute:** *a characteristic or property of an object, such as weight, size, or colour.*

**Botanist:** *someone who studies plants.*

**B.P.:** *years before present: as a convention, 1950 is the year from which B.P. dates are calculated.*

**Cartesian Coordinate System:** *two-or three-dimensional graph based on intersecting, perpendicular incremented lines or planes.*

**Ceramic:** *pottery, fired clay.*

**Ceramist:** *someone who reconstructs pots by piecing together broken sherds. A ceramist is an expert who can identify pottery by shape, design, glaze and chemical content of the clay.*

**Classification:** *a systematic arrangement in groups or categories according to criteria.*

**Chronology:** *an arrangement (of cultures or sites) based on the order of occurrence.*

**Context:** *the interrelated conditions in which a site, artefact, or feature occurs.*

**Datum:** *something to use as a basis for measuring.*



**Decompose:** *to break down; to rot.*

**Dendrochronology:** *a technique for finding out the age of wood based on the variation in a tree's annual growth rings.*

**Diagnostic artefact:** *an item that is indicative of a particular time and/or cultural group.*

**Epigrapher:** *someone who decodes ancient languages.*

**Excavation:** *the study of an archaeological site by carefully digging the layers of earth.*

**Feature:** *cultural remains more complex and permanent than a single artefact (such as house floors, storage pits, fire hearths, burials, or cooking pits).*

**Function:** *the way something was used; its purpose.*

**Geology:** *a science dealing with the earth's history as recorded in rocks.*

**Geologist:** *someone who studies rocks and minerals.*

**Grid:** *a network of uniformly spaced lines that divide a site into equal-size squares.*

**Inorganic:** *materials that have never been alive.*

**In situ:** *in the original place.*

**Level:** *an excavation layer, which may correspond to strata. Levels are numbered from the top to the bottom of the excavation unit, with the uppermost is Level 1.*

**Lithic:** *stone, or made of stone.*

**Midden:** *an area used for trash disposal.*

**Organic:** *materials that were or are alive.*

**Palaeontologist:** *someone who studies the fossil remains of plants and animals.*

**Pot sherd:** *a piece of broken pottery.*

**Registrar:** *the keeper of accurately catalogued and stored records.*



**Stratigraphy:** *the study of soil layers.*

**Survey:** *to measure and make a map of an archaeological site.*

**Trowel:** *a tool used by archaeologists to scrape away soil layers.*

**Zoologist:** *someone who identifies animal species and studies their evolution.*

## **Additional Resources for Teachers**

---

Suggested additional resources available through The Quill Box Gift Shop at the Museum of Ontario Archaeology.

### *Native Stories and Games*

Keepers of the Earth: Native Stories and Environmental Activities for Children

by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchae

Fifth House Publishers, Saskatoon

©1988

Keepers of the Animals: Native Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children

by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchae

Fifth House Publishers, Saskatoon

© 1991

### *Background information for Educators*

Ontario Prehistory: An Eleven-Thousand-Year Archaeological Outline

by J.V. Wright

Archaeological Survey of Canada

National Museums of Canada, Ottawa

© 1972

Six Chapters of Canada's Prehistory

by J.V. Wright

Archaeological Survey of Canada

National Museums of Canada, Ottawa

© 1972



Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times

by Olive Patricia Dickason

McClelland & Stewart Inc.

© 1992

Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada: An Anthropological Overview

by Alan D. McMillan

Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver

© 1988

Historical Atlas of Canada: Volume 1 From the Beginning to 1800

R. Cole Harris, Ed.

U. of Toronto Press

© 1987

*Additional archaeology sources on the Web:*

Ontario Archaeological Society

[www.ontarioarchaeology.on.ca](http://www.ontarioarchaeology.on.ca)

*Provides a summary of Ontario's archaeology with a detailed description of each time period starting from post Ice Age to the English era (mid 1800s).*

National Parks Service: Archaeology for Kids

<http://www.nps.gov/archeology/PUBLIC/kids/index.htm>

*This interactive site guides you through a day in the life of an archaeologist. Gives a step-by-step explanation of the digging techniques (e.g., site survey, measuring excavation units, stratigraphy, etc.).*

For up to date information on Native Peoples, the internet can be an excellent resource. Most First Nations have web sites that provide a great deal of information from a First Nations perspective.

Educators can also make use of our Website at:

<http://www.uwo.ca/museum>

**London and Area Phone Numbers**

Museum of Ontario Archaeology

519-473-1360

Fax: 591-473-1363

Woodland Cultural Centre (Brantford)

905-759-2620

N'Amerind Friendship Centre

519-672-0131