



edited by John A. Brebner, December 2015

Indian Pottery of Prince Edward County

Helen M. Merrill

Archaeological Report for Ontario, 1911

"Few pastimes have I found as interesting as that of collecting Indian pottery, particularly where white drifting sand-hills range in wild beauty and fascinating loneliness from West Point to Wellington, in Prince Edward County. Five miles along the graceful curves of Great Sandy Bay, fine, pure sand has for centuries been washing out of Lake Ontario. Not only has it formed the shores of the bay, but it has separated West Lake from Lake Ontario and afforded at the same time, by drifting into hills, happy playgrounds for passing races of men. The sandhills, or Sandbanks as they are better known, are still what they have been since the early settlement of the county, a popular pleasure resort.

Latterly they have attracted many persons from different parts of America who in summer come to spend an idle day or week or month by the shore. The breezy, practically barren sand-bar affords a pleasant driveway, on one side the crystal deeps of Big Sandy Bay in Lake Ontario, on the other the cloudy, reed-fringed, shallower waters of West Lake.



Depiction of native settlement; Image 13-6525



Beach-goers enjoy the sand dunes Image 12-1420; PEC Archives



Left; West Lake Bar looking north west; village of Wellington at top right. (Image 15-9347)

Note that while the current entrance to Wellington Harbour can be seen at top right, the outlet in the article was closer to the thinner bar at the centre of the image.

Near Wellington is an outlet which, changing from year to year and with the seasons, is not always easily forded. Once I ventured to cross it. My horse was a young thoroughbred. The road led precipitously into two feet of flowing water. A long drive from Picton via West Point, the last four miles by the wet shore sands, probably accounted for her taking the situation coolly and causing no accident. The following summer I approached the outlet from Wellington. It was as wide as an ordinary river and as formidable. A team bound for West Point was making a detour in Lake Ontario by a ridge of sand at no point visible above the water, a route beyond my venture.



"If an outline of this section of the county could be obtained as it appeared centuries ago, probably before any human being set foot on its shores, there is little doubt that it would show West and East Lakes as deep-set bays similar to South and Smith's bays on the opposite side of the peninsula. Traces of old sea shells still exist on the inner shores of West Lake. Similar shells are probably to be found in East Lake which lies back of Little Sandy Bay in Lake Ontario, round West Point.

Left: Shells along the West Lake bar; Image 15-8271

"A sand-bar again forms the line of separation between the smaller body of water (East Lake) and Lake Ontario. In this instance, however, the strip of land is thickly wooded for more than two miles with balsam, pine and spruce trees, among which winds a beautiful driveway. No wind enters here even when league-long breakers roar in from Lake Ontario, and it is delightful driving through the wood to hear the strange voice of surf, which seems to proceed from the heart of a forest so dense in the narrow belt of evergreens. At the present time a picturesque outlet runs for a mile diagonally through the sand bar, and the road crosses it over a substantial bridge. There are evidences still, it is said, of two outlets which at remote periods ran directly through the bar as does the one near Wellington.

"While Indian relics have been found at various localities in the county, the collection of sherds, or fragments of pottery, which suggested this sketch was made at the Sandbanks."

Right: Dr. R.W. Eells, Miss Helen Merrill of Picton, ON and Professor Marshall on Geological Excursion to the Sand Banks, Prince Edward County. Dr. Eells, former President of the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club collecting native pottery.

Library and Archives Canada; lantern slide No. 15, of Acc. 1983-013 (PA210785); Image 15-1456.

This is likely near the site of the Lakeshore Lodge, as described below in the Merrill account. Merrill makes no comment of any native remains further north along the West Lake bar in this 1910 article.

But further discoveries, by Pendergast, 1951, and Ives, c 1970 prove that there were indeed native remains along the bar. There may be more.



"Near the shore and close by the wood at West Point where the hills begin, sheltered of late by a wind-break of willows to prevent further encroachment of sand in that vicinity, our attention was attracted a few years ago to several sherds. Appropriating them we searched in the sands, digging with small pieces of driftwood. More were found and we returned at intervals, sometimes following a heavy wind which was likely to uncover a few good specimens which gave hints as to the location of others. To-day the store seems to be exhausted. Little more remains than traces of an ash-bed which indicates the site, possibly, of a lodge or other habitation, or of an open-air kiln.

"When? and by whom? were the insistent questions as gradually the sands gave up their secret stories. It was a time of enchantment, the sun and the wild wind, the surf on the beach, the absolute loneliness, the peculiar charm of the pervading influence of ancient days. Occasionally when resting for a moment and glancing around, a glimmer of poplars along the lagoon, which heightened the effect, Indians attributing the restlessness of their leaves to their being haunted by souls of the departed.

"So far as I know only sherds have been found here. Several years ago a pot was discovered in the hills remote from the shore. The nearest approach to a pot in my own collection is a rather large piece, a few handfuls of smaller ones, and several large edge pieces. The curves of the latter and the shape of the largest piece indicate a pot of no mean dimensions. On a rainy day they are as entertaining as a Chinese puzzle inasmuch as they ever resist falling into line in the shape of a pot. All through life we have our playthings. In childhood they include broken bits of modern china. When we are grown up, fragments of the red man's ancient ware are a pastime.

"Although with all my hunting I have not yet found a pot, I feel quite recompensed by having secured nearly 50 decorated edge pieces, which represent as many differently ornamented pots; and there is always an '*ignis fatuus*' promise of a pot, such as coming across something "hard and smooth and round" in the sand, which is more or less stimulating even though it so far unfailingly has proved to be only a stone.

"The pots represented by my collection of sherds were ornamented at the top, the decoration varying in depth from a half to four inches. A few have a row of short, slightly slanting creases around the edge inside, like fork prints round old-fashioned pies. Others have a crease running round in the rim. All markings presumably were made by bits of stone, bone or wood prepared for that purpose."

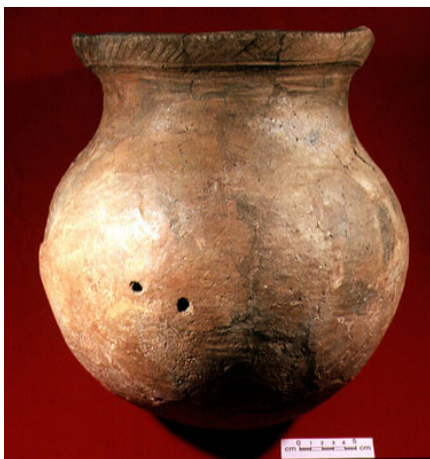


Exhibit specimen 19 (CMCC BaGg-2:1); *Image 15-2326*

Found by James F. Pendergast in 1951 at the Sand Banks, this pot is decorated in a style known as Middleport Oblique and dates to between 1200 and 1300 AD. It is characterized by a poorly defined collar decorated with parallel oblique incisions, those followed by a series of parallel, horizontal lines extending down the neck of the vessel. The two holes were likely used to insert a cord to bind the pot together. The Middle Iroquois Period in southern Ontario led to the later historic period from which the Huron, Petun and Neutral peoples emerged.

"Of the forty odd patterns no two are alike. Many are fancifully ornamented, others slightly. Two have perforations in groups near the edge, which are obviously only ornamental, as they end in protuberances inside the pot. The minute impressions which in several instances ornament the lower portions of a pot outside, are the result, perhaps, of the clay having been moulded inside a basket for support, or of the use of malleating tools.

"Beside diversity in decoration there is a marked difference in the thickness of the pottery, which varies from less than a quarter to over three-quarters of an inch, and also in color and texture, the latter owing in a measure to the fineness or coarseness of the granite or other broken stone which was always mixed with the clay. The color varies from grayish fawn to reddish.

"When? and by whom? The questions are still insistent. As to the date of manufacture the Indian left no record better than his ware. He kept note of time presumably by his pipe and the moon. He had not, like the Buddhist, been brought up on figures. He had never dreamed of even an Asankya.

"As to the potter, a history of Indian occupation of Prince Edward County and vicinity, together with a careful study of archaeological material found at various points might be of avail in tracing him. For some time it has seemed to me that there should be a compiled history on Indian occupation of Ontario by a series of maps as well as by text which would cite not only notes by early explorers and missionaries, but odds and ends of data which may be gleaned from Indian traditions. Text relating to the red man is becoming less and less prominent in our histories. This is to be regretted. Indians hold too prominent a place among the makers of history in the early days of the province, for the present writers on history to afford to exclude them.

"As late as 1800 Indians were numerous in and around Prince Edward County. A few years later the first surrender was made of land owned by the Mississauga.

"With, the exception of the Mohawk and the Chippewa in Hastings County, the Mississauga appear to have been the only Indians then owning land in that district. Numerous surrenders of townships and part of townships were made by them in Hastings, Addington and Frontenac counties in 1822, and several at other dates in Hastings, including four by the Chippewa in 1818. The Mississauga were a sub-tribe of the Chippewa, and Algonquin tribe. Big Island, in the Bay of Quinte was surrendered in 1833 by the Mississauga, and Waupoos Island (*Wawboose*, rabbit skin) on the opposite side of the county in 1838. Near Waupoos Island a Mississauga reserve of 450 acres at the Rock, or Cape Vesey, a promontory 100 feet high is said to have been surrendered in 1835. In 1856 all islands owned by them in the Bay of Quinte and at Weller's Bay also were surrendered. The Mohawk of the Bay of Quinte are of United Empire Loyalist extraction, and once owned all of Tyendinaga township, near Deseronto, under a grant from Governor Simcoe, 1793. Small lots of land have been surrendered by them.

"While on the trail of the potter one would better bear in mind that by the middle of the 17th century the manufacture of pottery was on the wane and soon became a discarded art among Indians, owing to the fact that implements and utensils which they were in the habit of making were more and plentifully supplied them by explorers, missionaries and traders.

"On maps and in earlier writings are records of Indian fortifications and villages in different parts of the county. The first settlement where Picton is now situated was made by Indians at the south end of the bay. To-day Picton is known to the Mohawk in Tyendinaga as "jee-yoli-daii-ltoon...." which means "at the head of the river." The bay at Picton is narrow and river-like. Several years ago a sherd was dredged from the bed of the harbor, and an arrowhead was found at Chimney Point where the store-house and wharf of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company now stand.

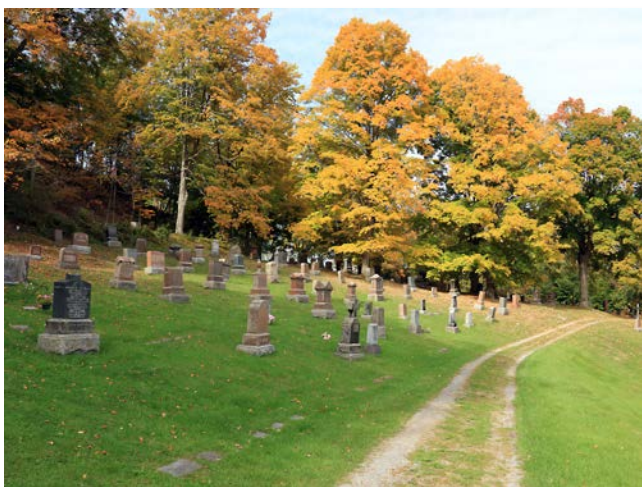
"On a knoll in a field overlooking the Little Swamp near Picton, is an interesting ash-bed, nor is it hallowed ground on account of its ancient stores. Yearly the field is ploughed and sherds turned in and out. Quantities of ashes are still easily distinguished from the sandy loam of the field. There is clay close by. The ash-bed is not on the crest of the knoll, but down the slope. The owner of the farm, a man over 80 years old, while spading out a few specimens for me in 1903, suggested as an explanation for its position, the knoll was an island. Shores of islands were favorite camping grounds. Considering the topography of the county and the similarity of or pottery found in different localities, this seems highly improbable.



Picton Harbour, Image 15-10700; courtesy Mariners Park Museum



Image 15-10659a; courtesy Mariners Park Museum



Glenwood Cemetery, Picton; Image 15-1532

"East of the Murray Canal lies Indian Island. Local tradition recounts a fierce battle fought there many years ago between hostile tribes. Near Massassaga (Mississauga) Point are several mounds.

"Above the harbor of Picton, and the marsh, is the old Indian Carrying Place, or portage, to East Lake, which even prior to three centuries ago facilitated travel between the Bay of Quinte and the northern shores and regions of the county. Hunt as one may (finds) no trace of it, in Paradise Valley alone where hills converge near Glenwood Cemetery and the passage is so narrow that it would be inconvenient not to set foot on it, is one sure that he is on the trail. "

"At the eastern extremity of East Lake is situated the picturesque village of Cherry Valley, which derived its name from a species of cherry which until the middle of the past century grew in abundance in that part of the county, particularly on the sand hills, and was found only there.

"The fruit was described by [Adam Kidd, an Irish poet](#), who visited the Sandbanks in 1828, as growing on small shrubs. It is now extinct. It's possible origin is obvious in the light of the fact that Sulpician priests established a mission at Kenté, north of Wellington, not long after the arrival of the first of that Order from France in 1657, a clump of cerisiers de France was found by the first settlers on the north of Simcoe county near the site of a Jesuit Mission. The Sandbanks and East Lake were in a direct line of travel over the old route from the Bay of Quinte to Kenté. Indian pottery has been found at Cherry Valley and elsewhere on East Lake.

"The Bay of Quinte was called presumably after Kenté for the same reason that Toronto River (now the Humber), the water on which Indians inhabiting the northern districts set out in their canoes for the aboriginal village of Toronto, was so named. Similar instances are to be found elsewhere in Ontario, such as the Montreal River which flows into Lake Temiskaming, a place of embarkation remote indeed from the point of destination on the St. Lawrence. East Canada Creek and West Canada Creek, tributaries of the Mohawk River in New York State, may also be cited. The Mohawk was a convenient route to Canada in days long preceding as well as at the time of the exodus of the United Empire Loyalists.

"In 1688, according to reliable authority, a number of Cayuga and other Iroquois, with a few adopted Hurons emigrated from New York to the Bay of Quinte region. It would appear from various data that one of their villages, Kenté (from *l'cant*, a field, meadow, an Iroquois word of which Quinte is obviously a French spelling) was situated at Weller's Bay, a place of beautiful shores protected by curving headlands from the sweep of wide waters. On the west lies the sand-bar known as Bald Head Point, which is said to be one of the sites of Kenté. In 1847 this point, or bluff, appears to have been an island known as Newegcewaum (Bald Head). It belonged at that time to the Mississauga. The name, Kenté, obviously originated at a former site, possibly one of the fields cleared and cultivated by Indians who sojourned in the Quinte district previously to Champlain's arrival there. Numerous sherds have been found at Bald Head, as well as whole pots, wampum, arrowheads, beads, pipes, silver crosses and many other interesting relics. Skulls have also been discovered, one with an arrowhead piercing the temple, a gruesome thing to look upon; another with a hatchet embedded in it, evidence, possibly, of intertribal disturbance.

"Perhaps the manufacturer of my own collection of fragments of pottery will be found to be of the Iroquois of Kenté. Perhaps he was of the Mississauga or some other Algonquin tribe; the Algonquin inhabited the region north of the Bay of Quinte preceding the coming of the Cayugas, or, it may be, that he belonged to a still more remote period."

Helen M. Merrill, 1910

Editor's Notes:

This transcription was taken from a copy of the Annual Archaeological Report for Ontario, 1911.

The text had been subject to OCR, and while most of those transcription errors were easily recognisable, those of the native Iroquois and Mohawk place names were not.

Accordingly, those native words, in red text, **are not** accurate.

I found several comments within this Helen Merrill extract of interest.

First was that it seemed to be commonplace that people travelled across the West Lake bar from Wellington to West Lake (and likely to and from the Lakeshore Lodge to Wellington) along the beach, fording the gap by horse and wagon. There was talk in the 1890s of constructing a rail line over the bar from Wellington. Fortunately, that never came to pass!



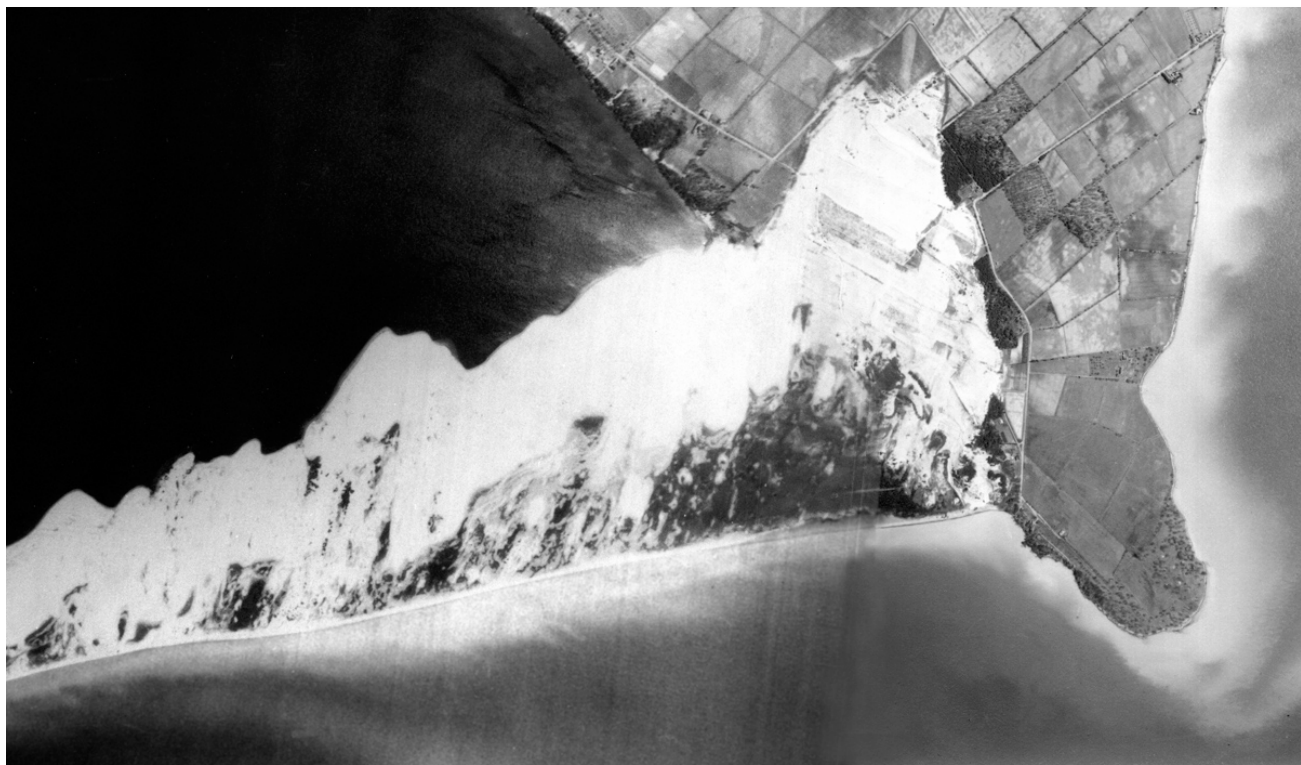
Looking north along the West Lake bar, summer 2015, horses and carriages replaced by bicycles; Image 15-9671, John A. Brebner

Second, that given that Helen rode along the West Lake Bar, that she seems not to have found any artefacts at what is now known as the Ives site, about midway from the Lake Shore Lodge and Wellington, where Jim Ives, the Park Superintendent at the time, found a complete but fragmented pot in the 1970s.

In fact, her declaration that *"today the store seems to be exhausted"* makes me think that, despite publicizing her discoveries of pottery fragments at the Sand Banks, she may have been trying to discourage others from descending on the area "en masse" searching for native artefacts.

After all, the 1951 Pendergast discovery, as well as the 1970's Ives pot suggests that there may be more artefacts still to be uncovered. That suggest that a more professional study would uncover further artefacts.

Third, that Helen refers to *"the practically barren sand bar"* between lake Ontario and West Lake. The 1930 aerial image confirms that, but today's bar is considerably more vegetated, although still showing cart tracks.



1930 aerial view of West Lake bar at West Point; Image 13-6781a

Sources:

Merrill Article, *Annual Archaeological Report for Ontario*, 1911; pp 75-82

Transcription and commentary: John A. Brebner

Archival photographs: [Prince Edward County Archives](#), [Mariners Park Museum](#)

1930 Aerial Image: [National Air Photo Library, Natural Resources Canada](#)

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Editorial Comments: The comments by John A. Brebner are his alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Friends of Sandbanks