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THE MCKENZIE OR WOODBRIDGE SITE (AkGv-2), AND ITS PLACE IN THE LATE ONTARIO IROQUOIS TRADITION

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Site Location and Cultural Affinity

The McKenzie or Woodbridge site (AkGv-2) is one of a series of Late Ontario Iroquois Tradition sites located in and around metropolitan Toronto, on the Humber River Drainage System. It is located just to the south of two other Late Ontario Iroquois sites, Boyd (AkGv-3) and Seed/Barker (AkGv-1) as well as the Kleinberg Ossuary (A1Gv-1).

Excavations have thus far revealed evidence of only one occupation. This single component is assignable to the Southern Division of the Huron-Petun Branch of the Late Ontario Iroquois Tradition (Wright 1966:70). Early analysis of the ceramic data recovered from the McKenzie site places it within a unilineal progression (migration) of Huron (sites) moving northward on the Humber River from the Toronto area into historic Huronia (MacNeish 1952, Emerson 1954). Later analysis by J. V. Wright placed the McKenzie site with those sites leading to the historic Petun primarily on the basis of the high percentage of one ceramic type, Sidey Notched (Wright 1966:70–78, 148, 150). However, Wright did not significantly deviate from the general model developed by MacNeish and Emerson. The most recent work to include a ceramic sample from the McKenzie Site places it somewhat prior to the Huron-Petun separation and contributing to the final development of both (Ramsden 1977).

Various dates have been offered for the site's occupation (Emerson 1954:145; 1961:188; Wright 1966:101; Ramsden 1977:220). Based upon the presence and type of European trade material, and the pipe styles (William Noble, pers. comm. 1978), as well as the ceramic seriation, the date can now be narrowed down to about A.D. 1520 \pm 10 to 15 years.

The McKenzie site is situated on the edge of a bluff or terrace some 80 ft. above the flood plain at the confluence of the East and West Branches of the Humber River. This location affords easy access to the Humber River, and thence to points both to the North and to the South. In early historic times, the famous "Toronto Carrying Place" or portage trail from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe passed directly through the locality. The importance of the trail and the site's location suggests a significant time depth and, no doubt, this was a strategic spot in pre- as well as post-contact times.

The site once covered nearly 9 a. of land located between the aforementioned steep bluff or terrace edge to the north, a small interior draining swamp to the south, a deep gulley to the west (R. C. Dailey, pers. comm. 1978), and a narrowing of the area between the swamp and the bluff edge to the east.

The terrace on which the site is located was formed by the down-cutting action of the Humber River. The terrace is composed of glacial till deposited on the Dundas-Meaford Formation of Ordovician shale bedrock by various episodes of the Wisconsin Glaciation (Chapman and Putnam 1966:287-296; Freeman 1976). The final episode deposited in the immediate site area, on top of the till, a fine sand indicative of a deltaic or beach formation. The resulting soil is quite well drained, light, easily worked, and typical of the soils chosen by Huron groups (Heidenreich 1971:110), but is generally of low fertility and is drought and erosion sensitive (Webber and Hoffman 1967).

Excavation History

Norman Emerson first conducted excavations at the McKenzie Site in 1947 on property to the west of the current excavations. The first excavations concentrated primarily on the recovery of materials from the deep and extensive middens which stretched along the edge of the swamp on the south side of the site. Emerson returned to the site two years later in 1949 to recover settlement pattern data. This work revealed the presence of a possible 17 houses, one of which was completely uncovered and measured 174 ft. by 28 ft. These excavations also revealed the presence of a palisade along three sides of the site. While the data recovered have formed an important part of the work of a number of people (Emerson 1954, 1961, and 1968; MacNeish 1952; Ramsden 1977 and Wright 1966), as yet no report has been written on McKenzie.

The construction of a housing development in the middle to late 50's destroyed that portion of the site where the early excavations took place. In early 1974 a local amateur called Emerson's attention to the fact that what remained of the site was now threatened by additional development. Subsequently, 6 University of Toronto archaeological field school sessions engaged in salvaging the remainder of the site. Two seasons of excavations were undertaken under Emerson's direction, with the author assistant; the final season's work was under my direction. The most recent excavations proved to be of great value in spite of the unusually inclement (read *wet*) weather that plagued the 1977 excavations from prior to Labour Day until the last weekend in November, when solidly frozen ground made further excavation impossible.

Settlement Patterns

The reconstruction of settlement patterns at the McKenzie site reveals a discontinuity in the pattern of structure alignment. Houses 1, 2, and 7-23 are uniformly oriented on a northwest/southeast axis. Overall, the houses are fairly uniform and typical of Iroquoian longhouses, bearing close resemblance to those at Cahiague, with the exception of House 5. The McKenzie houses have squared to slightly rounded ends, are very tightly grouped, and appear in some cases actually to share walls. House interiors have bunklines along both walls and, where plowing has not removed the traces, exhibit medial hearths which are nearly always associated with small semi-spherical ashpits or cooking features. Storage features seem to be rare and those that are present are almost totally devoid of cultural debris. House length is variable and ranges from 174 ft. for House 14 to possibly less than 30 ft. for House 6. House width varies from 23 to 28 ft. with an average width of 24.8 ft.

Houses 1 and 2 are constructed quite close to each other and, as a possible consequence of their proximity, the west wall of House 2 has, basically, only a single row of posts. These houses also appear to have been interconnecting, sharing a doorway in their adjacent walls. House 1 also had two infant burials

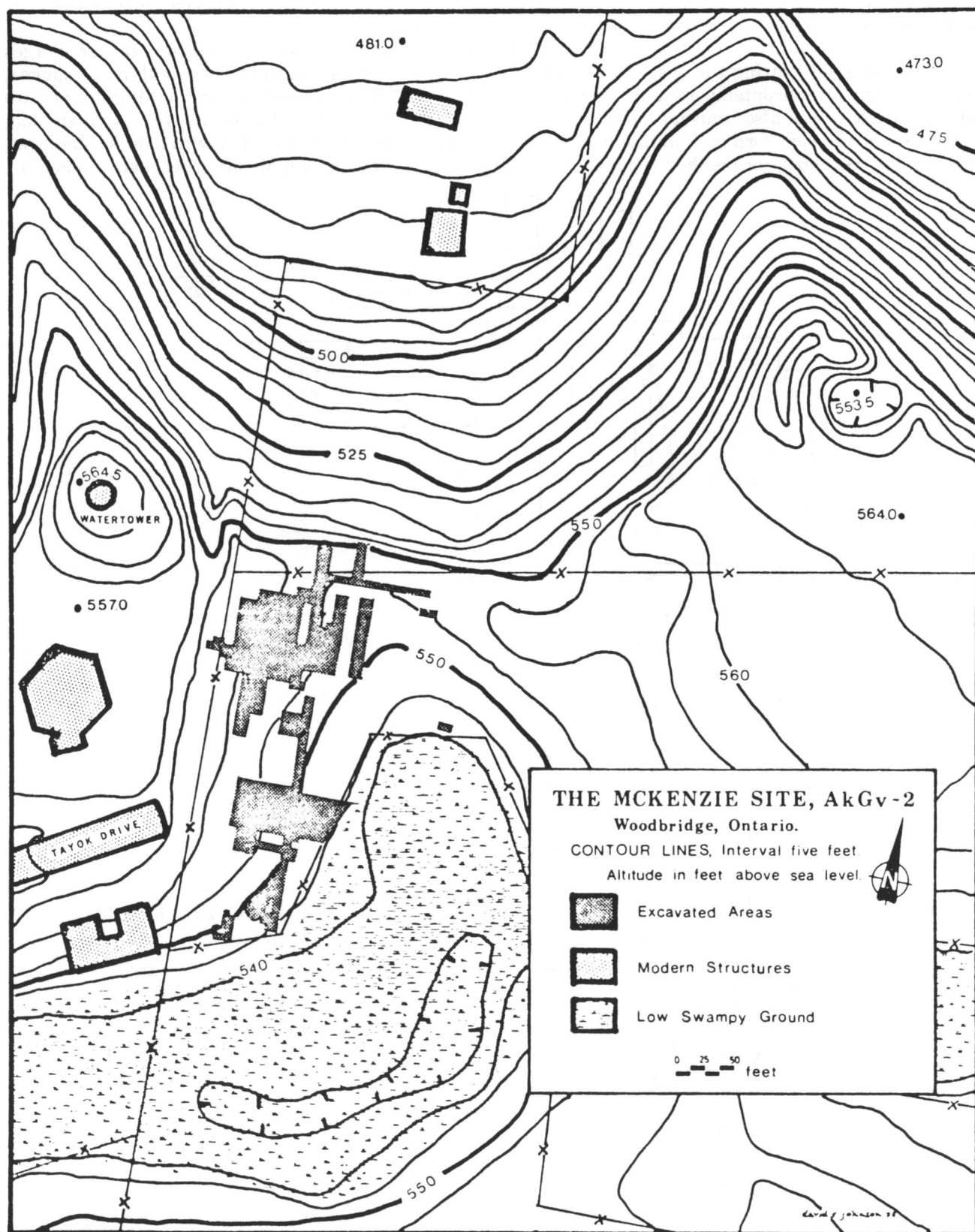


FIGURE 1.

placed below the floor in the house center opposite the common doorway, a pattern demonstrated by Kapches (1977) to be characteristic of the Ontario Iroquois.

House 3, the first of the divergent houses, is constructed so that its southwestern corner merges with the posts delineating the east wall of House 2. Though the walls touch there is nothing to suggest actual overlap or noncontemporaneity. The west wall of House 3 was set into a trench for almost its entire length. House 3 was also unusual for the number of storage features it contained, as well as for the fact that those at the southern end, unlike pits in other houses at the site, were filled with debris. Moreover, two of these were more or less bell shaped, a configuration which occurs only in one other house, House 4.

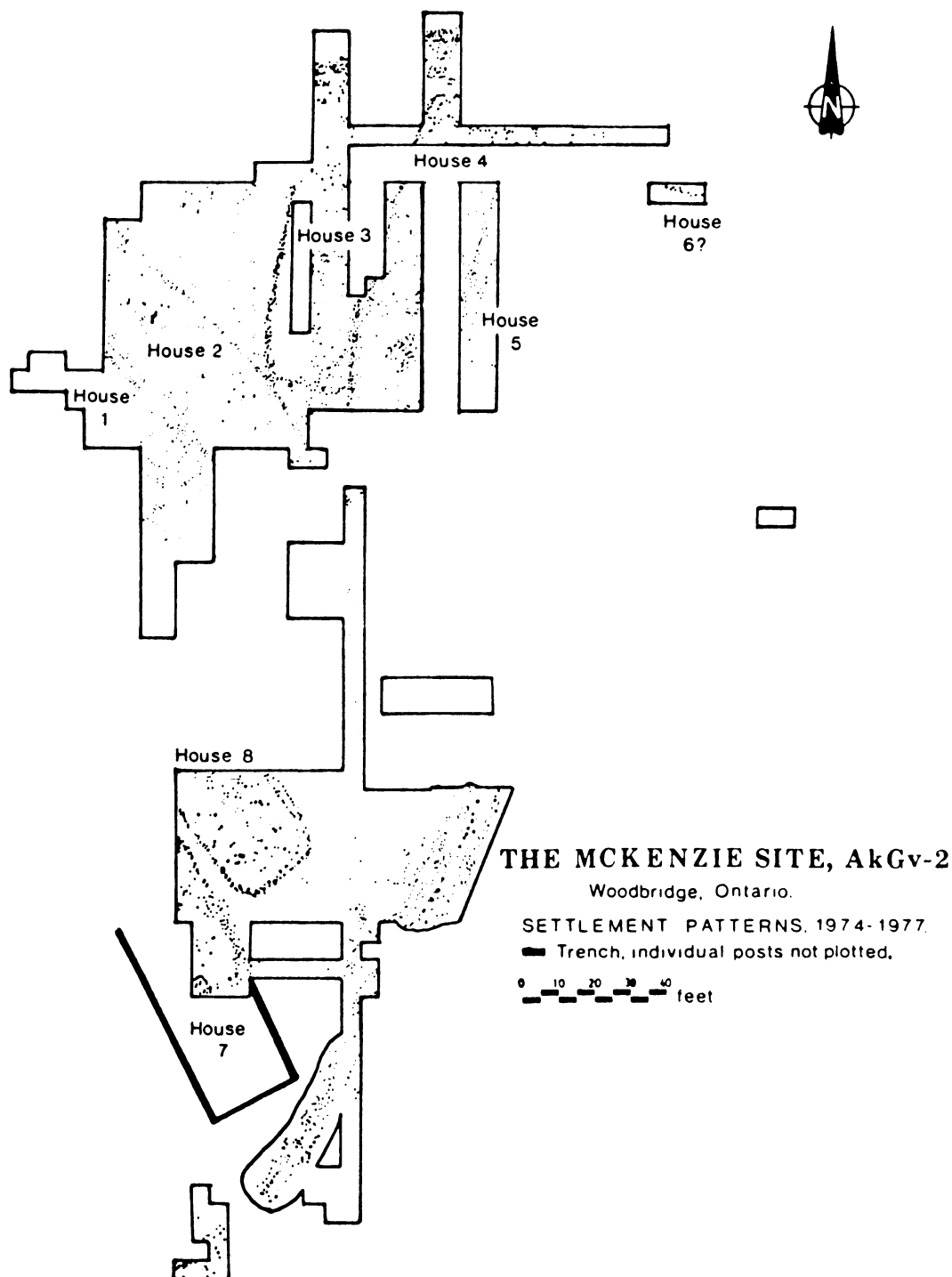


FIGURE 2.

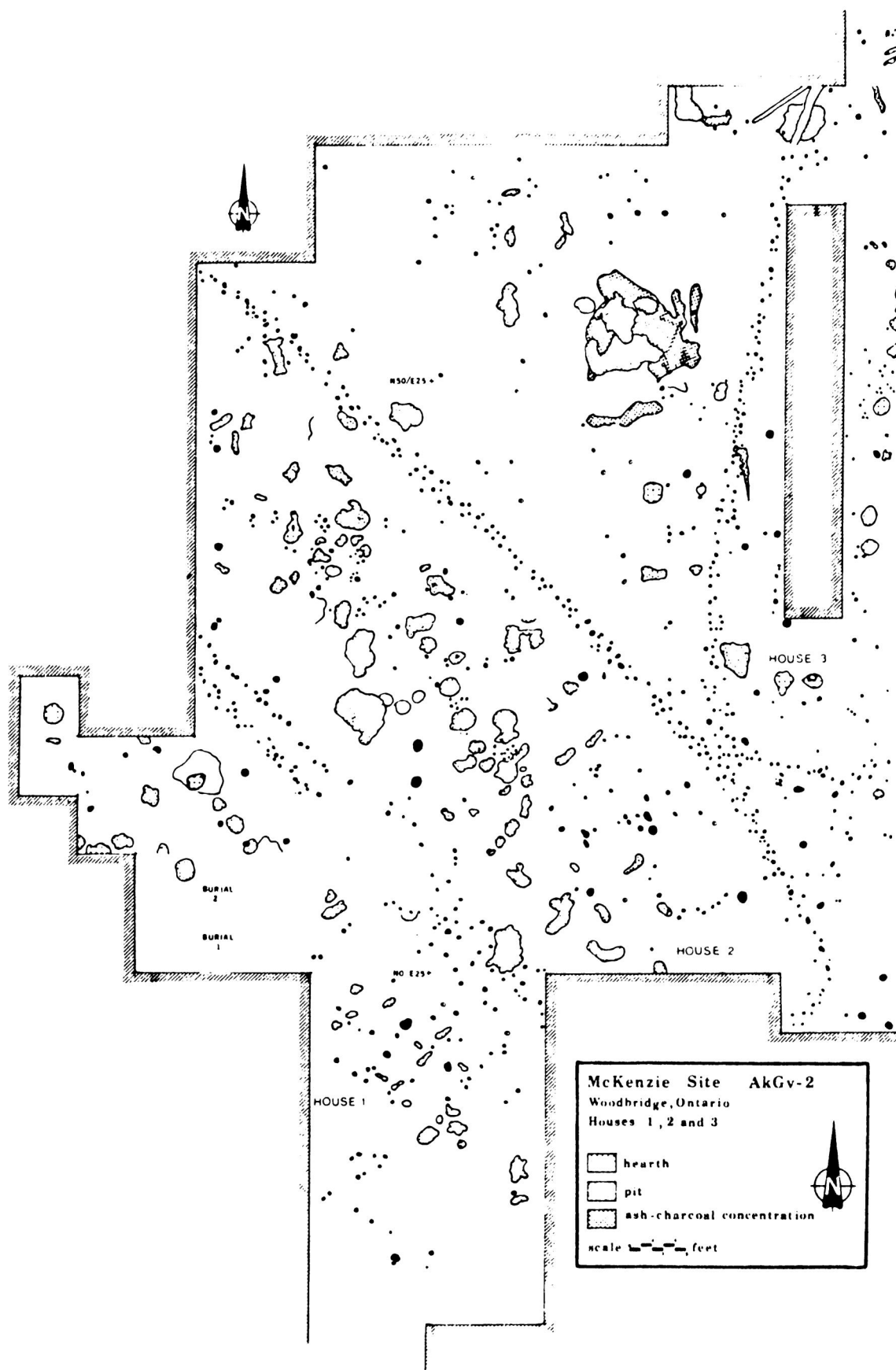


FIGURE 3.

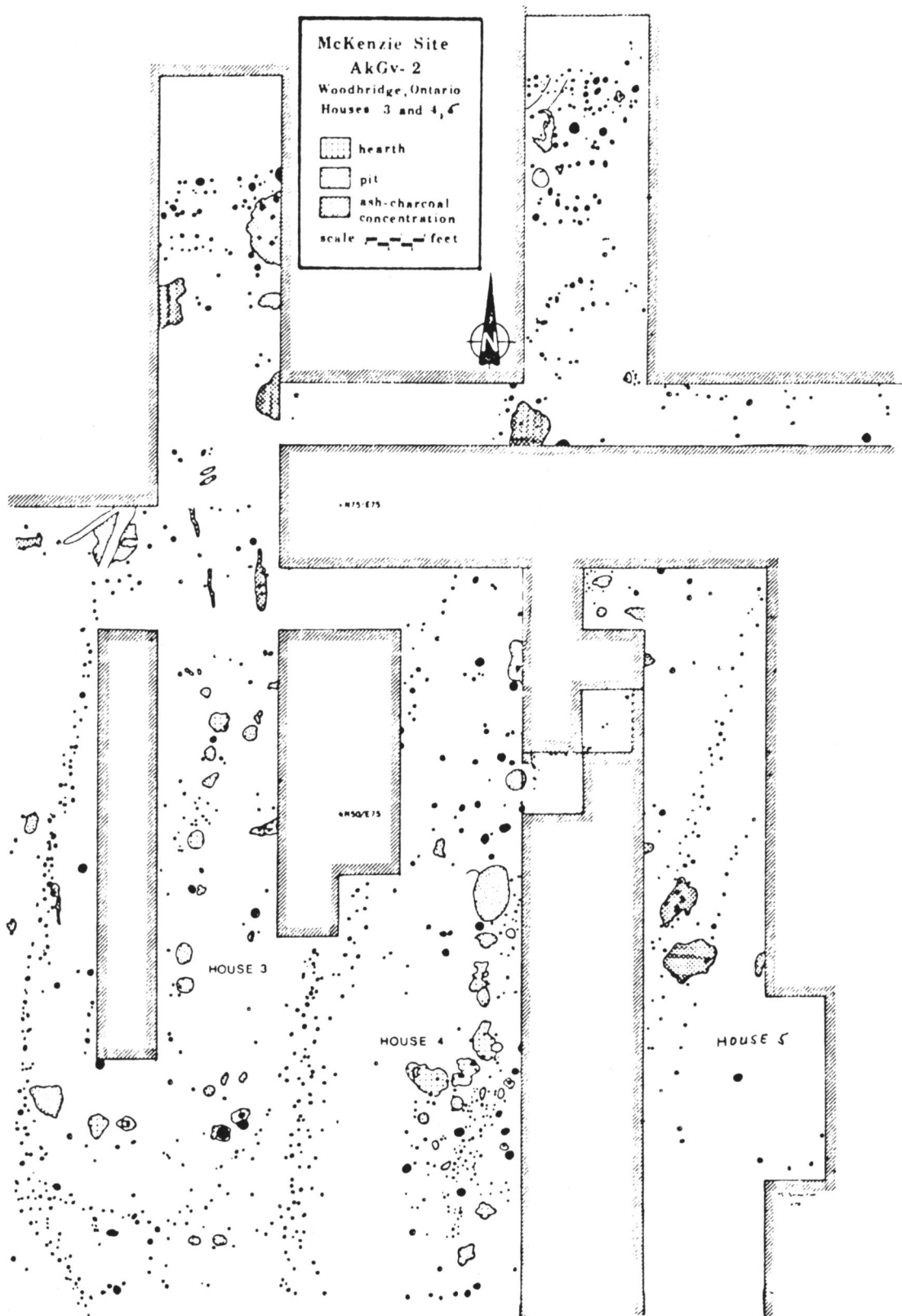


FIGURE 4.

House 4 is set very close to House 3 and, for at least part of its length, the wall between them appears to be a common wall; but again, as with Houses 2 and 3, there is nothing to suggest that these two houses were not contemporary. House 4 contained a series of superimposed features and a single bell-shaped storage feature occurs in the north end of this house. Also a profusion of small posts around a diffuse hearth suggests the presence of a sweat bath in the southern end of House 4.

House 5 is an anomaly; the exposed wall of this house is made up of a single row of widely spaced posts as opposed to the close spacing of posts in other house walls. The interior of this house, as far as currently excavated, seems to be curiously barren of features or posts. The posts in the wall of House 5 are very shallow and extend only 2 to 3 in. into the subsoil. Emerson (pers. comm. 1975) suggested the possibility that this was a temporary or perhaps even an Algonkian shelter. It does resemble House 5 at the historic Huron Ball site excavated by Dean Knight (Knight 1978:58).

House 8 is unusual in that it has a double east wall. Four clearly defined medial hearths, most with associated ash pits, were excavated in House 8.

The entire site was surrounded by a substantial palisade. The current excavations encountered this palisade in several locations. The northern exposure of the palisade is quite dense and is made from up to seven parallel rows of 3 to 4 in. posts. It is interesting to note that this, the most secure exposure of the site, has a palisade more substantial than that along the more vulnerable southern edge. This leads to the speculation that perhaps the palisade had a secondary (or primary?) function as a screen against the prevailing winds which cut across the site from the northwest.

A second exposure of palisade is on the eastern edge and lies along the border of the swamp. Here the palisade is at its most complex. It is composed of a central row of large posts, 10 in. to a foot in diameter, and butted or placed quite shallowly into the subsoil, no more than 6 to 8 in., in contrast to the placement of the smaller posts which extended typically 12 to 18 in. into the subsoil. This central row of posts is flanked by multiple rows of smaller posts and the resultant configuration is quite similar to that reported by Emerson and Russell (1965) for portions of the palisade from Cahiague. This portion of the McKenzie palisade may have contained a gate. There appears to be a diagonal break through the multiple lines of posts with a "buttress"-like arrangement of smaller posts flanking the "entrance." This may in part account for the complexity of the palisade at this point.

Several midden areas have been delineated, four of which may be portions of a large, nearly continuous midden or series of midden deposits stretched along the portions of the site bordering the swamp. Part of this nearly continuous midden was encountered by the north/south trench just below the point where the palisade crosses this trench. Here the deposits are sealed by a heavy layer of sheet wash and follow the outside arc of the palisade. The soil here is quite damp, which probably accounts for the excellent organic preservation as in the rim portion of an uncharred birch bark container found here. Bone preservation was excellent as well, but the moisture probably accounts for the friability of much of the ceramic materials excavated in these units. West of this the midden was encountered again. These deposits, also sealed by sheetwash, bottomed out at between 24 to 30 in. below the ground surface. Here the deposits are on top of the palisade line, as they were farther to the west, when encountered by Emerson in 1947. The only piece of trade material recovered in the recent excavations, a scrap of brass, is from this area and was found just inside the palisade at a depth of about 7 in. below ground surface in the top level of the midden.

Southeast of Houses 1 and 2, is a rich small interior midden. It was almost unbelievably disturbed, resembling a cratered battlefield; in spite of which it yielded much interesting material, including the only corn cob fragments recovered at the site. The occurrence of interior middens is not at all unusual for some areas, but their occurrence in this local sequence is quite so (Emerson, pers. comm. 1978). This midden does not overlap any houses or the palisade; however, an unusual hearth-like feature under it does indicate that some sort of activity preceded or accompanied its accumulation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The most obvious aspect of the McKenzie Site data requiring discussion and interpretation is the discontinuity observed in house orientation, which could be explained in several ways. The first is that it resulted from a simple and pragmatic decision on the part of the village inhabitants. Quite possibly they felt that the best utilization of available space was provided by orienting the houses at the east end of the

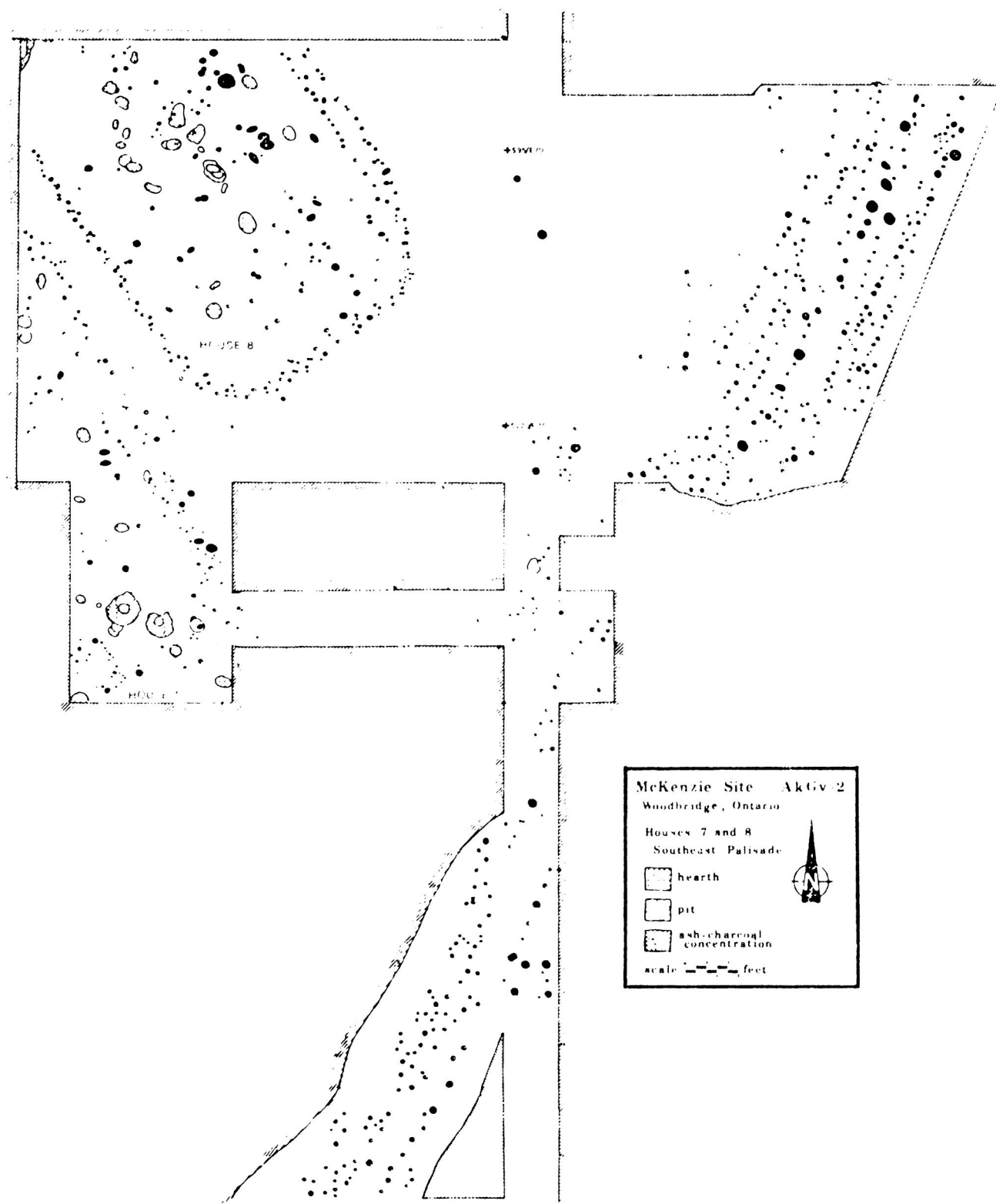


FIGURE 5.

site at 90° to the others. A second explanation is that the houses were erected sometime after the village's initial construction and that the best utilization of available space within the existing palisade would be by changing the house orientation. The additional population for which the new structures were needed could have been the result of an expansion of the prior population, in which case it would have come late in the village's occupancy. Or the additional population could have resulted from the arrival of an outside group and thus could have come any time after the village's initial construction. A third explanation might be that prior to the initial construction and occupation of the site two groups allied and agreed to construct a new village at a new location (McKenzie) and that the two different longhouse alignments are representative of these two separate groups.

In selecting the best possible explanation for the discontinuity, it is possible to discard the suggestion that the village expanded areally because there is no archaeological evidence to indicate such a shift. That the non-conforming houses were constructed after the village was initially occupied and were oriented to fit available space seems unlikely as well. Unless the initial inhabitants and constructors of the village had prior knowledge that they would need additional space to handle internal expansion or the arrival of another group it is highly unlikely that they would have expended the additional effort to build a palisade around what would have been, for a time at least, unoccupied space; moreover, the relationship of these houses, archaeologically, to the others indicates contemporaneity. We are left with an explanation which suggests that the village layout or actual construction included these deviant houses from the start. If the shift in orientation was not a purely pragmatic decision to take the best advantage of local topography and had a "social" significance, i.e. an alien group, we should expect the settlement discontinuity to be reflected in other ways as well.

The houses themselves at least suggest that there might be differences beyond those of orientation. House 3, with its short length, wall trench, and debris-filled storage pits of bell-shaped configuration, is certainly different from portions of Houses 1, 2, 7, and 8 that we have seen. House 5, with its short length, widely spaced single post wall construction and apparent paucity of interior features, is certainly different from any of the others. On the other hand, House 4 is somewhat more typical, but the large bathtub-shaped feature as well as the bell-shaped feature are unusual.

Ceramics

The distribution of ceramic "types" at the McKenzie Site probably says more about the deficiencies of a strict typological approach than it says about real differences between the 1947–1949 or "Western" sample and the 1974–1977 or "Eastern" sample. It does suggest, however, that the comparative absence of "types" bearing horizontal motifs in the "Eastern" sample is perhaps significant. However, only an attribute-based analysis will allow proper assessment and demonstration of the differences, if any, between the site areas.

An attribute code is under development which, it is hoped, will be sensitive to intrasite as well as intersite variability on a social (lineage) or corporate group level. I shall later be examining the methods, order, and technology of design-motif application as well as specific components of the motif itself and aspects of rim morphology.

Notable in the ceramic assemblage are a series of vessels assigned to a "St. Lawrence Iroquois" provenience; in a general sense these vessels conform to the St. Lawrence typology (correct design motif, proper rim and collar configuration, etc.). However, Pendergast, examining these vessels, agreed with the type assignments and the conformation of the "diagnostic" attributes, but felt that some of these were not in any way St. Lawrence Iroquois vessels. They seemed to be copies or "sloppy" imitations of St. Lawrence pots, not unlike those attributed to Algonkians elsewhere (James Pendergast, pers. comm. 1977). This is not to say that there are not "good" St. Lawrence ceramics at the McKenzie Site. Rims selected by Pendergast representing forty vessels (20 "good" St. Lawrence and 20 "typical" Huron) are currently on loan to Bruce Trigger for trace element analysis to determine whether or not these vessels were from the same clay source in hopes of answering the old "Is it pots or people?" conundrum. The preliminary results of this analysis indicate that the "fingerprints" of the St. Lawrence ceramics conform to those of the Huron ceramics from the site suggesting local manufacture, not trade origin, for these St. Lawrence vessels. (Bruce Trigger, pers. comm. 1978).

As a final note on the site's ceramics, there is a minor occurrence of strap-handled, uncollared, cord-marked vessels as well as some shell and limestone tempering.

Lithics

The chipped stone assemblage, primarily of Onondaga chert, in its quantity and variety is most unusual for Southern Division proto-historic sites of the Huron-Petun Branch. Ramsden noted this, adding that "All sites in the McKenzie sequence [Downsview, McKenzie, and Aurora] are characterized by a relatively prolific chipped stone industry, particularly in the scraper class" (Ramsden 1977:272). He sees this as indicating the cohesiveness of the sequence, seeing outside influences manifested only ceramically. Noble, on the other hand, has suggested that the presence of this relatively developed lithic industry is direct evidence of Neutral Iroquois males at the McKenzie Site, perhaps as resident traders (William Noble, pers. comm. 1978).

Finally, as concerns other sites in the area of more or less equivalent age, it seems that both Boyd (Donaldson 1962) and Seed/Barker are somewhat "alien" to the local sequence, perhaps being Neutral (Ramsden 1977:272). Additionally, direct contact is hypothesised between the Boyd Site people and the McKenzie people. While I do not agree with the identification of these people as Neutral, contact is apparent between these groups and I suggest that some of them were resident at the McKenzie site. However, only additional excavations in the valley will clarify these sites relationships and affinities.

All of the foregoing, while largely speculative, does at this point suggest the very real possibility that two "different" groups lived at McKenzie at the same time, and I further suggest that this "mix" of typical Southern Division people with a "foreign" influence is what led, at least in part to the development and definition of the Historic Petun as being distinct from the Huron.

I have felt for some time that the traditional models for developments during the late Prehistoric and Protohistoric Periods of the Ontario Iroquois have been, while valid in a general sense, less than adequate and not too reflective of a cultural reality. Ramsden (1977) was among the first to begin a movement away from the simplistic unilineal models of Huron/Petun development. He was moving towards what I hope to develop—a "*Fission-Fusion Model*" for Iroquoian development in Ontario. This model will be based on the hypothesis that settlements were not and did not act as, homogenous units. There were many sub-units, perhaps operative at clan, lineage, or some type of corporate or economic group level. The increasing evidence for village expansion and/or contraction indicates that villages did not act cohesively at all times; groups could both leave and join a village during its life span. A graphic representation of this phenomenon through time and space would have a net-like configuration.

Traditional typological approaches to ceramic analysis are not sensitive enough to detect accurately and document changes operating at the corporate level. The use and manipulation of specific attributes may allow research on a finer level; there is, however, a very real difficulty in determining at what level the idiosyncratic characteristics of individual potters end and the "micro-traditions" of the corporate groups begin. The detection of a discontinuous distribution of specific attributes and clusters of attributes at one site where both numerical and distributive samples are adequate and the presence of these phenomena at other sites, should begin to allow the tracing of the movements of lineage or corporate groups through time and space. This approach should also allow an accurate assessment of the presence of "foreign" groups at a given site or within a specific sequence and the attendant acculturative process.

Using the approach briefly outlined, along with data from the McKenzie site, data being recovered from my current excavations at the Boyd site, as well as from other existing collections, I intend to pursue research oriented towards (1) testing the feasibility of such an approach; (2) using the McKenzie site as a "keystone" to refine the sequence and interrelationships of area sites (I feel that there were at least two or three "village movements" in the Middle Humber Valley A.D. 1490–1600; and (3) an examination of the origins and growing separation and segregation of the peoples who ultimately became the Huron or Petun of the 1600's.

To conclude, I suspect, as Noble (1974:17) suggests, that the origin and definition of the Petun is complicated and multi-faceted; going a step further, I have suggested that a key to Petun origins is to be found in the Humber Valley sequences with the arrival and/or influence, perhaps from as far away as Northwestern Pennsylvania and Northern Ohio, of elements formerly not considered relevant to the later developments of the Huron-Petun Branch of the Late Ontario Iroquois Tradition.

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