

SKANDATUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE PRESERVED AS A RESULT OF AN HISTORIC LAND TRANSFER AGREEMENT

by Neal Ferris

In the City of Vaughan, on the east side of the Humber River across from the site of the late 16th century Kleinburg Ossuary, lies the archaeological village site referred to as Skandatut.

This site was found in the mid-last decade during CRM survey of extensive lands planned for future development. The preliminary findings of the site indicated it was also a late 16th century occupation that may well have been associated with Kleinburg.

Given its temporal affiliation within the known, coalescent sequence of village relocations in the GTA region (see Birch 2010 for a detailed review of that trend) – and the fact that by the early 17th century Aboriginal communities in the Toronto region had relocated up to the lower Georgian Bay area and came to be known in European accounts as the Huron-Wendat – this site may well represent a pivotal moment in the history of the ancestral Aboriginal people from this region, and the crucial role their descendants would play in shaping the early history of Canada. Certainly the existing Huron-Wendat community of Wendake, Quebec has drawn much heritage value from and connection to the archaeological record of this region, and have specifically identified the Skandatut site as a critically important part of that heritage.

The value and significance of this site invited considerations of preservation, while development needs invited considerations of excavation. That tension came to a head in the fall of 2010, when the landowner contracted an archaeological consulting firm to excavate the site. Objections raised by members led the OAS to call on people to meet in order to try and resolve differences. Later on, the OAS was also asked to facilitate an evaluation of the conclusions made within a Ministry of Tourism and Culture inspection of this rare and significant site.

Ultimately the Ministry of Tourism and Culture facilitated a stoppage of excavations in order to enable mediation between the landowner and Huron-Wendat representatives. This led to a long and involved process of discussion, possible solutions considered but ultimately rejected, and continuing uncertainty over the fate of the site. The process proved extremely stressful

for the directly affected parties, and for the many others who saw and raised concerns for the site, the archaeology, the archaeologists, and the communities that all had an interest in the management outcomes.

So I'm pleased to say the OAS was recently informed that, on June 5th, 2012, the lands containing the Skandatut site and a surrounding buffer were transferred from the landowner to the Toronto Region Conservation Authority.

This will ensure that Skandatut, the river valley lands, and the location of the Kleinberg Ossuary on the other side of the river, will all be preserved within an important cultural heritage landscape, eventually accessible through a series of trails. As well, and importantly, this resolution also ensures the landowner can proceed with their development plan elsewhere on their property.

Many, many people worked very hard to ensure this agreement was satisfactory to the landowner, TRCA, Huron-Wendat, and City of Vaughan. Many more people, communities, the province, and the Region of York all worked hard to ensure this important archaeological site, ultimately, could be managed by preservation rather than excavation.

The OAS would like to commend the landowner, TRCA, City of Vaughan, and Huron Wendat for finding a solution that ultimately bridged the many competing pressures placed on this locale. The decision and transfer ensures that this specific, important part of Ontario's archaeological heritage has the chance to remain and be appreciated for generations to come as part of a landscape setting that, through their imagination, people will be able to be transported back to that moment in the past when the future history of Canada and Ontario – the heritage of all and available for all to appreciate – began.

REFERENCES

- Birch, Jennifer
2010 *Coalescent Communities in Iroquoian Ontario*.
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Anthropology, McMaster University, Hamilton.