

# Draper Site Burials

## Structure 2

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During the excavation of features 3 and 5 of square 24–26N, 70–72E inside the longhouse two infant burials were exposed, described, photographed and then reburied. Burial 1 (feature 3) was located 34 cm below the surface in a shallow basin-shaped pit with dimensions 37 cm long by 16 cm wide. There were no grave goods, nor were there any artifacts in the fill. The individual was articulated and semi-flexed with the lower limbs flexed close to the pelvis (Fig. 1). The head was resting on the left side with the face inclined upwards. The orientation of the burial was aligned with the long axis of the house, with the head directed to the northeast.

The remains were in good condition. It is not possible to estimate the sex of the infant. The age at time of death was less than 6 months since no teeth had erupted (Bass 1971).

Burial 2 (feature 5) was located about 1 metre northwest of Burial 1. It was in a shallow basin-shaped pit 34 cm below the surface. Dimensions of the remains were 24 cm long by 14 cm wide. The body was articulated, the face turned up, and the head directed to the north (Fig. 2). Soil pressure, not trauma, is apparently responsible for the depression on the skull. There were no grave goods, nor artifacts noted in the fill of the pit.

Sex of the infant cannot be established. Age can be estimated between birth and six months of age as no teeth were erupted. The bones present were in poor condition. This individual lacked a pelvis, lower limbs, and hands. It is possible that these bones may be absent because of destructive rodent activity, however there was no other indication of such disturbance. It seems more likely that the infant was partially disarticulated at interment. This may be an instance of the ritual sacrifice of infants reported by the Jesuits (JR 19:71). The data is inconclusive for the latter interpretation, unless similar burials are found on other sites.

The location of the burials within the house is presented on the site map. They were in the southeastern segment of the house, just west of the longhouse central line and well within the area of the central floor. Burial 1

is east of an internal support post, while Burial 2 is west of this post. The burials are situated about equidistance between two hearths. There were post moulds around the burials but no pattern was discernible.

The occurrence of two infants of similar ages, in close proximity in one longhouse of the village leads to the question of whether the individuals were twins. Without the skeletal remains not even superficial treatment of the question is possible.

The location of the burials inside the longhouse is interesting since according to the Jesuits the usual mode of infant burials was to:

inter them on the road – in order that, they say, if some woman passes that way, (the infants) may secretly enter her womb, and that she may give them life again. (JR 10:273)

The belief in spirit rebirth may be the conceptual basis of the practice; burial within the house would insure rebirth. Of further interest is the fact that this does not appear to have been an isolated practice for the Draper site. In-house infant burials are known from several sites of the Ontario Iroquois, viz. Bennett (Wright and Anderson 1968), Crawford Lake (a young child, Wm. Finlayson, pers. comm.), Mackenzie-Woodbridge (J.N. Emerson pers. comm.), Roebuck (J.V. Wright pers. comm.), Stewart (Wright 1972), and Cahiaque (Tyyska pers. comm.). Many variables must be taken into account when studying these occurrences, viz. period during which the site was occupied, mode of interment during this period, and exact nature of the burials. The data from these sites will not be outlined in this paper. However, with all the above variables considered, a proposition has been developed from the analysis. It is suggested that the interment of infants (and young children) inside longhouses is a definite pattern and an alternative to burial outside the village. Whether or not this is due to some specialized ritual or to more practical considerations such as frozen ground outside the structures, cannot be assessed with the information available at the moment.

The discovery of infant burials at the Draper site adds



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

to the definition of a previously unreported burial custom. With the analysis of the material from the sites listed above and the future discovery of similar remains, the nature and

the frequency of the pattern will be clarified for the Ontario Iroquois sequence.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is being expanded to discuss all aspects of non-ossuary Iroquoian interments. The research on infant burials is one small aspect of the range of material being studied. Since much of the material referenced in this paper is unpublished, I would like

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