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Archaeological Investigations at Batoche National Historic Site, 1982

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Batoche was established in 1872 as a ferry crossing where the Carlton Trail crossed the South Saskatchewan. By the early 1880s the Metis settlement consisted of Batoche Village itself, with several stores and houses on either side of the river, the Oblate Mission's church and rectory, and farmsteads spread out on long river lots on either side of the village. With the western land boom in the 1880s and the arrival of the Dominion Land Surveyors, friction grew between the Metis and the Canadian Government over land titles, culminating in the North West Rebellion of 1885. The last battle of the rebellion occurred at Batoche and it was there that the Metis surrendered to government forces. While the village suffered some damage during the fighting, its real demise did not come about until the Carlton Trail was superseded by the Canadian Pacific Railway as a freight route. Although the parish continued using the church and rectory until the late 1950s, most of the buildings in the village were gone by 1920 and most of the land on the east side of the river had been extensively cultivated by the time Parks Canada acquired the site in 1962. The river lot system of land ownership is still in effect at Batoche, which is still considered the centre of an active Metis agricultural community (Payment 1977: ix,x).

Archaeological research at Batoche was carried out by Parks Canada under the direction of Dr. Paul Donahue from 1976 to 1978, with the first season being primarily survey work aimed at assessing the cultural resources in the whole park, and the next two seasons concentrating mainly on excavations in the village (Donahue 1977; Putt 1977; Donahue, Hall and Putt 1978;



Burley 1980). With the establishment of a management plan in 1982 for the development of Batoche, a new program of archaeological research was begun.

The 1982 archaeological investigation of Batoche, directed by Ellen Lee, assisted by John Brandon and Dana-Mae Grainger, did not focus on any major research areas but rather was designed to answer a series of specific questions related to park development as laid out by the management plan. These questions were concerned with the location and nature of various features for landscape restoration, the furnishing of the rectory with artifacts appropriate to its late 19th century context, the assessment of future salvage requirements associated with the restoration of some of the Metis farmsteads to the late 19th century, and the survey of a highway corridor for cultural remains prior to highway relocation within the park.

Archaeological excavations related to landscape restoration focused on two areas, the environs of the rectory, and the zareba which commonly refers to the protective earthworks formed by General Middleton. In the area around the rectory, information was sought concerning the nature and location of the remains of the school, the barn and the well, all of which dated to the late 19th century. The school was known to have been located west of the rectory in a field which has since been extensively plowed. There were no surface indications of its location or of the barn which was thought to be somewhere near the south end of the same field. In order to try to locate any remains of either of these two buildings as quickly as possible, a systematic testing program was designed to examine the whole area. A grid was laid out over an area 37.5 m wide (east-west) and 95 m long (north-south) with its points being located at 2.5 m intervals east-west and 5 m intervals north-south. A mechanical post hole auger was used to dig a 30 cm diameter, 60 cm deep hole at each grid point. The earth removed was examined for artifacts and the holes were profiled and then backfilled. Although few artifacts were recovered which could be definitely linked to the school, its location was indicated by the presence of a disturbed soil layer containing varying amounts of mortar and plaster which extended over an area approximately 26 m long (north-south) and 20 m wide (east-west), with a heavy concentration over an area 4 m (north-south) by 7.5 m (east-west) in the approximate centre of the scatter. No further excavation was considered necessary in this area, since it was assumed that no more concrete evidence was likely to be found.

No trace of the barn was found in the south end of the field, either in the form of artifacts or



culturally deposited or disturbed soil layers. Thus, the systematic sampling strategy using the mechanical post hole auger saved a considerable amount of time, since the whole field was gridded off, tested, recorded and backfilled in about a week. The site caretaker, Emile Parenteau, who, as a life-long resident of the Batoche area, has considerable knowledge of the site's history, suggested another possible barn location near the modern garage and log shed northwest of the rectory. A test trench 1.0 m wide (north-south) and 8 m long (east-west), running from the back of the modern garage to the line of trees which runs parallel to the west side of the rectory behind the modern garage, revealed numerous artifacts and a thick layer of manure. Some of these artifacts were scattered, collapsed building components. Unfortunately, the area is quite disturbed, having been heavily used in the 1950s and many of the artifacts appear to date from the early to mid-20th century.

The building components appear to be in situ, as they consist of a fragment of a wooden beam embedded in a deposit of what appears to be collapsed clay chinking and, an associated concentration of broken plaster which would most likely have been deposited during the dismantling of a building. However, they are underlain by relatively recent material and cannot be positively identified as to origin or function. The manure layer lies directly on top of sterile sub-soil and is fairly substantial, being up to 0.125 m thick, 2.35 m wide and 2.14 m long. While the manure layer's most northwesterly extent appears to be 1.45 m north and 2 m west of the southwest corner of the modern garage, it extends under the modern garage and the log shed on its eastern and southern sides, respectively. Additional test trenching on the south side of the log shed yielded some scattered manure patches, but no continuous layer as was found on the north side of the shed. The manure layer ranges in thickness from 0.5 cm to 12.5 cm and undulates considerably with its surface ranging from 22 cm to 30 cm below ground surface. This is probably the result of animals walking through the area on a regular basis. Whether it is representative of the barn itself, or of the compound or pen associated with the barn, is unclear. However, if it does represent the barn, the barn would obviously have had a dirt floor. If, on the other hand, the barn had a wooden floor or was regularly and religiously cleaned, the manure layer would more likely represent the compound or pen.

The manure has been tentatively identified as cow manure and a sample was sent to the conservation lab for analysis. If this identification is confirmed and

historical documentation can establish that Father Moulin (at Batoche from 1882 to 1914) was the only priest to keep cows, then this general area would be identified as the location of the barn and cow pen from that period. Further archaeological testing will be carried out in this area when the modern buildings - the garage, log shed and pit privies - are removed.

The general location of the well associated with the rectory in the late 19th century was fairly well known thanks to references to it in the documentation of the battle. An 1885 sketch map of the area shows the well situated just to the north of the bottom of the east-west oriented ravine which lies between the rectory and the cemetery (Oppen 1979: 68). Some information concerning both the location and superstructure of the well is contained in the following reference from an account of the first day of the battle: "...and we carried him into the church. Later a call for an ambulance came from French's Scouts in the ravine and White of our corps, and I, proceeded to answer it. When about halfway down the ravine a rather heavy fusilade came over us and we took temporary shelter behind the cribbing of a well" (Wright 1885: 8).

The site custodian, Ed Bruce (another long time resident of the Batoche area) remembered the well in question being filled in and plowed over and was able to point out its general location. However, the plowing had been extensive and over time, all surface indications of the well's location had disappeared. The well was located by systematically sinking test holes in the general area using a hand operated post hole auger. When the location was found, a 2 m square was laid out over the area and the upper part of the well was excavated to a depth of 1.7 m below surface.

Little remained of the well cribbing except some collapsed boards containing nails. The top of the well hole was so collapsed that it was impossible to determine what its original configuration or dimensions were, although the hole which remained appeared to have been roughly circular and about 2.83 m in diameter (just over 9 ft.). The top of the hole appears to have been filled in with garbage, boulders and burned tree roots, and its sides slope in towards the bottom. Because of safety considerations and the paucity of remains being recovered, regular excavation was stopped at 1.7 m below surface and a hand operated post hole auger was used to drill into the bottom of the excavation. At a depth of 2.1 m below surface, water began to trickle into the hole and after about half an hour about 36 cm of water had collected in the bottom. The soil removed from this hole was a heavy

yellow sandy clay (which forms the sterile sub-soil in this area) alternating with layers of a slimy black muck which smelled of alkali and had a whitish alkali stain. Artifacts recovered from the well included bottle glass, machine cut nails, metal containers and large mammal bones which exhibited European (as opposed to aboriginal) butchering patterns (Grainger: pers. comm.).

Archaeological investigation of the zareba in 1982 focused on searching for evidence of the missing south flank and southwest corner of the military earthworks constructed by Middleton's forces during the battle in May 1885. A map dated to 1950 (for which no historical documentation can be found) shows a dotted line indicating the missing southwest corner of the zareba underneath a barn associated with the Caron Sr. house. However, examination of a 1959 aerial photograph of this area shows that the barn would have been situated somewhat south of the corner and that a small structure, whose remains consist of a 1.4 m by 1.6 m cement slab, was located where the corner of the zareba appears to have been. In an attempt to determine whether any remains of the corner of the zareba earthworks could be found in this area, test trenches were laid out along the east and south sides of the cement slab. Neither the 13 m long north-south trench nor the 5 m long east-west trench provided any conclusive evidence of earthworks. The bottoms of several fence posts were found, as well as some small patches of manure. It is difficult to conclude whether the lack of evidence of earthworks indicates that there were none there, since the ground appears to have suffered considerable disturbance as a result of the barn and animal compound having been in the area. More testing in this area is probably warranted, as it is entirely possible that by being a few feet out, we could have missed subsurface evidence of the earth-works which may still remain.

The southeast corner of the zareba fades very gently into a slight ridge which extends west about two-thirds of the way towards the southwest corner and then fades out. At a point about halfway between the west and east side of the zareba's earthworks, a 10 m long (north-south) 0.5 m wide (east-west) test trench was laid out across this ridge. While no conclusive evidence of earthworks could be found in the stratigraphy, the ridge is obviously formed by a slight mounding of the cultural layer. It is impossible to determine, however, whether the ridge can be attributed to the earlier presence of military earthworks, since the area has been cultivated in the recent past (Emile Parenteau: pers. comm.). It is equally possible that

the ridge may be a plow line at the edge of a field. Testing this ridge where it appears to join the east side of the earthworks might be productive.

Because of renovations carried out on the rectory in the 1950s and 60s, including the construction of a basement beneath it, little original archaeological material remains around the building. Therefore, other sources had to be tapped to find material culture objects suitable for furnishing the rectory to its late 19th century period occupation. Since the steep east bank of the South Saskatchewan River is a favourite dumping spot for garbage in this area, and the ownership and use of land is governed by the river lot system, a basic assumption can be made that every person or group of people who occupy a river lot have their own private garbage dump. It follows, then, that the garbage dumped over the river bank in river lot number 50, which the church and rectory are on, should be associated with the people who occupied that river lot. A search of the river bank in river lot 50 turned up three garbage middens, one approximately 35 m southeast of the boundary between lots 49 and 50, and one each on either side of the same boundary.

These three middens were gridded into large (2 m by 6 m) horizontal units and surface collected. Three of the units in the first midden were tested to see if earlier material occurred beneath the surface but the artifacts recovered appear to be of the same vintage and variety as those found on the surface. A total of 250 artifacts were recovered from the first midden, 415 from the second and 996 from the third, with metal containers being by far the largest class and glass a distant second. While it appears that many of the artifacts from the middens are relatively late, dating from the 1920s and 30s, the first midden seems to contain somewhat earlier material. It is hoped that analysis of these artifacts will not only provide information concerning specific artifacts which can be used in furnishing the rectory, but also will indicate general trends in the kinds of packaged goods which were used by the people who occupied this river lot.

Test excavations were also carried out in the vicinity of three Metis farmsteads: the Jean Caron Sr. farm located immediately to the southwest of the zareba (river lot 52); the Jean Caron Jr. farm located at the southeast corner of the park (river lot 53); and the Champagne farm located along the north boundary of the park at the top of the bank above the river flats on the east side of the river (river lot 44). These excavations were small in scale and each was conducted for different purposes.

The original Jean Caron Sr. house,, built in 1881, was burned in the battle in 1885. A replacement was built about 10 ft. (3 m) to the southeast of its remains in 1887, and this house, with some additions and renovations, still stands today. It is to be restored to the late 1880s as part of park development. Archaeological research is required to gather information concerning its original construction and occupation and to salvage the archaeological material associated with it which might be disturbed or destroyed during restoration. As major excavations around the exterior of the house are planned for the 1983 field season, a 1.0 m (northeast-southwest) by 4.0 m (northwest-southeast) test trench was excavated adjacent to the north-east end of the northwest side of the main part of the house in order to determine the nature and condition of the foundation and other archaeological remains. This information will be useful in planning the 1983 excavations, as well as in assessing the location and condition of the burned remains of the original Caron house.

As on other parts of the site, the cultural layer here was shallow and had suffered heavy rodent disturbance. Out of a total artifact count of 183 items, the largest portion of the assemblage was made up of glass and nails. The foundations of the standing house consists of two courses of small, rounded fieldstones; little of the original mortar remains between the stones. At a distance of about 3.2 m northwest of the extant house, some scattered, burned wooden components which undoubtedly represent the remains of the burned original house were uncovered. While none were substantial enough to represent the original sill log, the cellar depression of this building can be seen just to the northwest of the end of the test trench. It is likely that with further excavation, evidence of the sill log and/or wall line will be found.

The Jean Caron Jr. farmstead is intersected by the park boundary and lies directly in the path of proposed highway relocation corridor. The house does not belong to Parks Canada, but is being considered for inclusion in the Saskatchewan Rivers Heritage Area agreement. While the plan for this agreement has not been finalized or approved, the proposal for the Caron Jr. house includes stabilization and possibly restoration of the exterior. Since the highway relocation corridor passes by the west side of the house, recording (mapping) of the outbuildings and other features associated with the house and testing of the area around the house were included in the highway survey. A shed, a well, a collapsed privy, piles of wood from

dismantled outbuildings and a cellar depression were mapped.

Two test trenches were excavated close to the house, one on the north side and one on the south side. The north trench was 0.75 m wide (east-west) and 2 m long (north-south) and was situated 0.75 m east of the north-west corner of the house. It cut across a shallow ditch which runs parallel to the north wall of the house at a distance of approximately 90 cm from the wall. This ditch appears to be a borrow trench from which dirt was taken to bank up against the base of the north wall which faces into the prevailing wind. The weatherboards and logs covered by the earth bank are quite rotten. The log wall rests on a foundation consisting of one course of heavily mortared fieldstone. The mortar appears to have been applied after the log wall was constructed but before the weatherboarding was attached since both the sill log and a vertical nailing strip which had the weatherboards fastened to it, were embedded in the mortar. The logs have hand-hewn sides but still retain bark on their tops and bottoms, and a stiff, heavy clay has been used to chink the gaps between the logs.

The south trench was 1 m wide (east-west) and 3 m long (north-south) and was located just on the west side of the doorstep and doorway centred in the south wall of the house. A considerable amount of window glass was recovered from this trench, undoubtedly as a result of its being situated just to the east of a window. One unusual feature of this house is that while this south wall had a second floor balcony which extended across its entire width, supported by vertical posts, the doorstep in front of the door beneath this balcony did not run the entire width of the building, but was only slightly wider than the door.

The Champagne farmstead lies in the vicinity of the proposed access road for the village parking lot. While it is not slated for development, it has been recognized in the management plan as an important historic resource from the period of the battle and is to be protected. Archaeological investigation of this area in 1982 was intended to record building outlines and other features and, through test excavations, to delineate the eastern and southernmost extent of the archaeological resources. This was done so that the area which must not be disturbed by road construction could be outlined.

The northern and western boundaries of this resource unit are formed by the old ferry road and a steep bank, respectively. The outlines of three houses, a garage pit, a barn, two privy pits, a corral or animal pen, a garden and several small depressions

were marked out, based largely on information from Emile Parenteau who had lived there during the 1950s. Unfortunately due to time constraints and demands from other projects, the E & A survey crew was forced to delay the actual mapping of these features until next spring. Three test trenches were excavated along the east and southeast side of the farmstead: one near the south end of the area, one near the middle and one near the north end. The southernmost and middle trenches were 0.5 m wide (north-south) and 4 m long (east-west) and both contained the remains of the bottom of a fence post and very little in the way of artifacts. The northernmost trench was located in an area which appeared to have been the location of a woodpile, and a considerable number of artifacts were recovered, including glass, ceramics, nails and metal containers. While this trench started out at 1 m wide (north-south) and 4 m long (east-west), an extension 0.5 m wide and 6 m long was added to its east end so that the eastern limit of the woodpile debris could be found. Once the testing had been completed, a line was staked out along the eastern side of the farmstead delineating the westernmost extent that the access road could take in this area without endangering the archaeological resources.

As of the beginning of August, two alternate routes were still being considered for the highway relocation through the park. Both enter the park at its southeast corner and run along the eastern park boundary for some distance before angling over to rejoin the present highway, the first angling away from the eastern boundary just after it passes the zareba and the second just as it crosses the Carlton Trail. Both routes were therefore included in the survey.

In both cases, most of the corridor has been cultivated and now supports a heavy growth of grass. The ground surface is not clearly visible and therefore surface collecting was not considered appropriate for the survey. A method of sub-surface testing using a regular interval systematic sampling procedure was considered to be the most efficient way of determining whether any historic resources were likely to be disturbed by road construction. A provincial highways crew had laid out the centre lines of both routes and, using these lines, the archaeology crew laid out a grid with points at 25 m intervals in three rows 25 m apart along both routes. All grid points were excavated except for points which were under water, under crop or in dense bush using a 9 in. diameter post hole auger. A total of 334 holes were excavated over a total distance of 2.8 km. The dirt from each hole was trowelled, artifacts were collected, the holes were profiled and then backfilled. (S. Lee.)

Only 19 artifacts were recovered and most of these were in areas associated with 20th century farmsteads, with the exception of a few artifacts found in the area just to the east of the zareba. Since this is a rather small sample for such a large area, selected areas will be more intensively sampled when a final decision concerning the route for the highway has been made. These will include the area east of the zareba and the area where the highway will cross the Carlton Trail.

Further archaeological investigations are planned for Batoche during the 1983 field season, including survey of the areas to be disturbed by the construction of a Visitor Reception Centre, parking lots and access roads, and full excavation of the Caron Sr. house in support of restoration and furnishing to the late 19th century.

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View looking south, of field west of rectory showing layout of systematic sample using post hole auger. Area outlined in white is where plaster/mortar layer was concentrated, indicating school location. (Photo by D. Grainger.)



2. Test trench across missing south flank of zareba, looking south. (Photo by E. Lee.)



3. View of south side of Jean Caron Jr. house, looking north. Note the location of the test trench just to the left of the doorway. (Photo by E. Lee.)



4. Test trench adjacent to west side of doorstep in front of central door on south side of Jean Caron Jr. house, looking north. (Photo by E. Lee.)

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