A MORAVIAN CLAY PIPE FROM GRAPE VINE TOWN, BELMONT COUNTY, OHIO

by
James L. Murphy
Professor Emeritus
Ohio State University Libraries
Columbus, OH 43210

Abstract

Despite intensive CRM surveys in the immediate area along Captina Creek, Belmont County, Ohio, the Historic Delaware settlement known as Grape Vine Town or Frank’s Town has never been precisely located. The discovery of a Moravian white clay anthropomorphic pipe in a local collection strongly supports the contention that the settlement noted by George Washington in his 1770 voyage down the Ohio River, was in the NW 1/4, Section 27, York Township, Belmont Co., Ohio, associated with a site designated 33-B1-179.

Introduction

In 1992, while engaged in CRM field work for Cravat Coal Co., I examined a small, cigarbox collection of artifact material collected by Ronald D. Saffell from a garden area near his house. While the collection contained a variety of prehistoric flint artifacts, the artifact that stood out was a broken Historical white clay tobacco pipe (Figure 1). Rick Bailey, then of Cravat Coal Co., had been informed of the pipe’s significance by Dr. Jeffrey C. Reichwein, of the Ohio Division of Natural Resources. The pipe and a variety of prehistoric artifacts had been found. This house and small garden are within an area designated Stewart Site 1 (33B1179); test excavation here recovered a Cresap Stemmed point, a Kirk Corner Notched point, a broken ater, and probably both limestone- and shell- tempered, and hickory nut shell, but no historic artifact material (other than “cinder” fragments). The site was determined eligible to the National Register (McDaniel 1990: 23).

The situation is somewhat confused by vague references to a “Saffell Garden Site” by Grimes and Hillen (1990: 23). No OAI form exists for this site, as it apparently lay outside the project area, but it is said to lie along the bluff southwest of the Saffell Site 2 (33 B1 178) and was interpreted as a possible source for historic and prehistoric artifacts found in the secondary deposit of material comprising 33 B1 178. This would place the “Saffell Garden Site” about a fifth of a mile to the northwest of the garden site pointed out to Rick Bailey and me by Mr. Saffell. In either case, the pipe was found on the terrace circumscribed by the meander of Captina Creek in the northwest quarter of Section 27, York Township, Belmont Co., Ohio, and serves as an important indicator of the location of Fox Grape Vine Town.

Historic References

There are very few references to Grape Vine Town and most of these are confined to the journals of George Washington, who in 1770 made a voyage down the Ohio River to prospect for land suitable for Virginia soldiers who had been promised western lands in return for their services during the Indian Wars. Washington was also interested in acquiring some of the choicest lands for himself (Smith 1932: 1).

On October 24, 1770, Washington wrote in his journal:

“Two or three Miles below the Pipe Creek is a pretty large Creek on the West side call’d by Nicholson Fox Grape Vine by others Captina Creek on which, 8 Miles up it, is the Town call’d the Grape Vine Town; & at the Mouth of it, is the place where it was said the Traders liv’d, & the one was kill’d. To this place we came abt. 3 Oclok in the Afternoon, & findg. no body there, we agreed to Camp; that Nicholson & one of the Indians might go up to the Town, & enquire into the truth of the report concerning the Murder” (Jackson 2: 298).

The following day (October 25th), “Nicholson & the Indian retumed; they found no body at the Town but two Old Indian women (the Men being a Hunting). From these they learnt that the Trader was not kill’d, but drown’d in attempting to Ford the Ohio; & that only one boy, belonging to the Trader, was in these parts; the Trader (fathr. to him) being gone for Horses to take home their Skins.” Smith (1932: 5) notes that Washington clearly was a little hesistant about continuing down the river until he could learn more details about the alleged death of the two traders.

In a shorter diary of the same trip, Washington wrote: “24. We reach’d the Mouth of a Creek call’d Fox Grape vine Creek (10 Miles up which is a Town of Delawares call’d Franks Town) abt. 3 Oclok in the afternoon--distant from our last Camp abt. 26 Miles.” (Jackson 2: 282).

Hanna (1911, 1: 259-260) notes that Frank’s Town was a well-known Delaware village about six miles from the Juniata River in Pennsylvania. Originally called Assunepachla, it was named for a Pennsylvania trader, Frank Stevens, as early as 1754 and apparently was deserted by the Delawares before Braddock’s Defeat in 1755. Hanna speculates that although no Delaware village called Frank’s Town is shown on Captina Creek on early maps it is possible that the Delawares had established such a settlement in the area and that it may have been identical with Grape Vine Town. He also notes that in 1772 Baptist missionary David Jones, on his way to preach to the Ohio Indians, met a Frank Stephens at the mouth of Captina Creek. This man was an Indian, who had received his English name from that of Frank Stevens, the Trader and may even have been a half-blood son of the trader.

It would seem, then, that Washington estimated the location of Grape Vine Town as eight to ten miles up Captina Creek from the Ohio River. Grimes and Hillen (1990: 11), erroneously placed Grape Vine Town five miles from the mouth of Captina Creek, citing Wheeler-Voeglin (1974: 3 34), who had relied on Fitzpatrick’s transcription of Washington’s Diaries. Jackson’s more recent transcription is considered the more reliable.

Discussion

The pipe in question consists of only the stem and base of the bowl (Figure 1) and is approximately 4.3 cm long. Bore and stem measurements are not available. It was decidedly gray in color but this might be due to discoloration due to use, burial, or possibly burning. The pipe clearly resembles anthropomorphic pipes produced by Gottfried Aust at Bethabara (1755-1771) and later at Salem, North Carolina, where he continued to make pipes until his death in 1789 (South 1965, 1967). In 1786, Rudolph Christ moved from Salem to Bethabara, where he started another pottery. This, too, made anthropomorphic pipes but South indicates that they appear to be distinguishable from the earlier Aust pipes. In particular, those with a pronounced C-shaped ear, as in the Captina specimen, South assigns to the 1755-1771 period of Aust production. In 1789, Christ returned to Salem to operate Aust’s potshop, selling his Bethabara pottery to Gottlob Krause. John Butner bought the Bethabara pottery from Krause in 1802 and continued the business. Production of such pipes extended into the 19th Century but were certainly commercially available at the time of Washington’s Ohio expedition.

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The pipe from Captina Creek appears to be distinctly thicker-walled and heavier than comparable Moravian anthropomorphic pipes from North Carolina. This is significant because such pipes also may have been made in eastern Pennsylvania. Whatley (1980) has documented the production of very similar Aust-like anthropomorphic pipe forms at the Mount Shepherd Pottery in Randolph Co., North Carolina, about 50 miles southeast of the Moravian Tract, which he attributes to an Aust apprentice, Philip Jacob Meyer. But Whatley also documents that in 1788 Gottlob Krause ordered pipe molds from Christiansbrunn, Pennsylvania. At the same time, there were at least two potters active in the Christiansbrunn (Christian Spring) area of Northampton Co., Pennsylvania, Abraham Albert (1772-1788) and Ludwig Hibner (Whisker 1993: 36, 150) and they or other potters in the region might well have produced Aust-style pipes from Christiansbrunn molds, perhaps even before Aust did. Sudbury (1979: 178) summarizes the known occurrence of Aust-like anthropomorphic pipes in Pennsylvania (Fort McIntosh, Friedenshutten and Hanna’s Town) and Ohio (Fort Laurens) which he presumes were made during Aust’s period at Salem, North Carolina (1771-1786). Related pipes have also been reported from northwestern Ohio and eastern Indiana. All of these would be consonant with a date during the last 30 years of the 19th Century and the Captina occurrence would readily fit in this time period.

A brass mold for an eared anthropomorphic pipe very close in design to those manufactured at Bethabara and Mt. Shepherd, North Carolina, was obtained at auction in southern Indiana several years ago. It is shown in Figure 2. There are slight differences even on the two sides of this mold, as well as between it and the Captina pipe. It accompanies the wooden form in which it was placed in vise of the pipe-molding machine, and this is very similar to examples from Salem, North Carolina (Albright 1958: 20). Unfortunately, sufficiently detailed photographs of the actual pipes from Salem, Bethabara, and Mt. Shepherd that would allow distinguishing these styles are not available.

Conclusions

The occurrence of a white clay anthropomorphic pipe similar to those produced in the Moravian settlements of North Carolina during the last three decades of the 19th Century very likely marks the visit of George Washington’s scouts to Grape Vine Town, Belmont Co., Ohio, in October, 1770. It is likely that such pipes were produced from molds made in eastern Pennsylvania, so it is possible that these or similar pipes were also manufactured in the Northampton Co. area, although no such pipe production has been documented thus far.

References


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McDaniel, Gary 1990 Archaeological Assessment Survey of 33 B1 179,33 B1 179, and 33 B1 180, Three General Woodland Sites and Documentation of Tunnel Portions of a Mill Race at 33 B1 176 within the Proposed Cravat Coal Company Strip Mining Tract (#D-1127) in York Township, Belmont County, Ohio. ASC, Columbus.


Figure 1 (Murphy) Moravian-style white clay pipe attributed to Grape Vine Town, Belmont, Co., Ohio.

Figure 2 (Murphy) Brass pipe mold for Aust-like eared anthropomorphic pipes very similar in form to the Captina Creek example but not identical.