

# Foreword

by Joyce M. Wright, Ph.D.

Data is both a wonderful and a terrible thing. Too little of it and our understanding fails to advance. Too much of it and our ability to discern meaning can be quickly overwhelmed.

For much of Ontario's archaeological past, researchers have had to work with severely limited datasets. In the early days, there were few professional archaeologists and their excavations frequently only exposed small portions of sites, often focusing disproportionately on artifact-rich features such as middens. Other datasets were even more selective, being comprised entirely of the smoking pipes or lithic tools that happened to strike the fancy of amateur enthusiasts. Reports of this time were highly descriptive, and, admittedly, useful to this day for that reason, but the data upon which they were based permitted little in the way of interpretation.

As the profession matured and the ranks of its members began to grow and understand the need for representative samples from sites, large scale or even complete site (or nearly so) excavations were undertaken involving the full range of settlement pattern features and artifact types. Innovative methods, like flotation, were developed that teased even more data from the archaeological record.

But this presented a problem. While a lot of data presents the tantalizing prospect of great insights, its very mass effectively obscures those insights from discovery. Taxonomy, whether in the form of an artifact classification like Richard (Scotty) MacNeish's pottery types or a cultural taxonomy like Jim Wright's Ontario Iroquois Tradition, can be an effective tool to winnow data that is relevant to a specific research foci from that which is not. By the same token, a taxonomy that works for one research goal probably will not work for another for which entirely different attributes likely pertain. Unfortunately, this latter point has not always been recognized.

Today, as the data available to researchers continues to grow, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing nature of the archaeological enterprise. Nothing is written in stone, so to speak. What was written can and should be reassessed in light of new

evidence and revised accordingly. This includes the interpretations of the data we posit and the taxonomic tools we use.

When Bill Finlayson excavated the Draper site over forty years ago, he undertook an enormous challenge. To this day, it remains one of the largest—if not the largest—archaeological site excavations undertaken in the province of Ontario. From the more than four excavated hectares that were once home to over 1,700 people, were exposed almost fifty multi-family longhouses, multiple rows of defensive palisades and other defensive-works, special purpose structures such as sweat lodges and menstrual houses, over 170,000 analysable artifacts, thousands of flotation samples, and more.

In the foreword to Bill's first book on the *Draper site*, *The 1975 and 1978 Rescue Excavations at the Draper Site: Introduction and Settlement Patterns* (1985), Bruce Trigger noted that "The work done at, and in connection with, the Draper site has established a new standard in Iroquoian research." He would, no doubt, be impressed to learn of the present volume which revisits the data collected then and reassesses it in consideration of new data and archaeological developments that have transpired over the intervening years. In an era that has witnessed an unfortunate shift away from research-oriented archaeology to salvage excavations in advance of development, few present-day researchers have the opportunity to interpret and publish data, let alone re-evaluate it in light of new evidence. The current publication, therefore, constitutes a rare gift to those who value and seek to better understand Ontario's archaeological past.

Similarly, Jim Wright would be delighted to note the discussion and refinement of the cultural taxonomy he called the Ontario Iroquoian Tradition and Lawrence Jackson has since renamed the Ontario Woodland Tradition to reflect Algonquian as well as Iroquoian participation, an involvement Jim acknowledged shortly before his death, in *A History of the Native People of Canada (volume III)*. While his exceptional familiarity with Ontario and, indeed, Canadian archaeology would make his thoughts on the suggested refinements of significant interest, I expect that his greatest pleasure would come from witnessing the occurrence of a dialogue on the matter. If we are to understand the data with which we are presented, we need to work to discover its organizing principles. This is as true for artifacts as for cultures. Arbitrary segmentation will not suffice.

It has been said that there are qualities in wholes that are not apparent in the parts. Nothing could be truer with respect to archaeology. The people of the past, like us, lived in communities but ventured beyond these to acquire food, socialize, trade, fight,

and, frankly, for any number of other reasons. If we are to pay witness to these behaviours, we must examine the archaeological record from a variety of scales. The present volume offers us an opportunity to look beyond the Draper site palisades to other sites in the immediate area, to those of the Duffin Creek drainage and beyond. The added benefit in this is that a considerable amount of information that was heretofore more or less inaccessible in the so-called grey literature of unpublished reports and manuscripts, is made readily available to present and future researchers.

There is much work yet to be done, both with respect to classifying and interpreting the data recovered from the excavation of the Pickering Airport Lands and comprehending how it all fits within the wider landscape of the people of the past of these lands we now call Ontario. The present volume takes a tremendous step forward in this direction and should further serve to inspire others to make similar contributions.

It is my personal hope that some of these efforts will be directed at the wider public. It is not just archaeologists who are interested, or who have a vested interest in the past. For archaeology to continue to be practiced, for our understanding to continue to advance, we need to share our insights with others in ways that they can understand and appreciate.