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The Bruce County Board of Education: Excavations at the Mason Family Cabin Site

Between 30 May and 6 June 1990, a successful small-scale field school was operated on the Mason Family Cabin Site (BeHh-8). The excavation was sponsored by the Bruce County Board of Education with additional funding by The Ontario Heritage Foundation to support faunal and artefact analysis as well as report preparation. The field school was directed by Elise Marla Sherman. Supervisory staff included Rita Kingston, Kristi Long, Michelle Murray, Bobbisue Trelford and Alison Evans. Thirty-one grade 7 and 8 students in the TRAIL (To Realize Advanced and Independent Learning) Program excavated a total of twelve 1.5 by 1.5 metre and four 1.0 by 1.5 metre units (figure 1) during the day and were instructed in artefact cataloguing, dating and analysis in the evening.

The Mason Family Cabin Site is located on the southeast corner of Lot 19, Concession 23 in Amabel Township, Bruce County. This property, along with Lots 17-20 (Concession 22) and Lot 20 (Concession 23), was granted in 1868 to William Roy, a St Catharines land speculator (deed: Crown and William Roy 1868). Roy died prior to visiting the properties (Clarke Birchard, personal communication). In 1874, the lands were purchased by William James Mason and his wife Cicely Alderson (formerly of Yorkshire, England) (deed: William Roy and William James Mason 1874). The Masons then built a log cabin on Lot 19 (Concession 23). A root-cellar basement, stone foundation and brick chimney, frame kitchen, and woodshed were later added to the initial log cabin structure (William J. Mason, personal communication), probably in the late 1870s (figure 2).

Several generations of Masons occupied the cabin structure and farmed the properties. In 1916, the second generation of Masons to occupy the cabin moved to a stone house, constructed between 1900 and 1907 on the northeast corner of Lot 19, Concession 22. The cabin was then

probably used as a storage shed. For a brief time between 1921 and c. 1931 or 1932, the cabin was occupied by Harry Fogden and his wife Anne Vicary of England. The Fogdens were sponsored by William James Mason's nephew, William Preston (McGregor 1984, 245). By c. 1931, the Fogdens had moved from the log cabin, which was probably once more used as a storage facility. It shortly fell into disrepair and was torn down. In 1971, the properties were purchased by the Bruce County Board of Education to be used as an outdoor education facility (deed: William J. Mason and Bruce County Board of Education 1971).

In 1990, there is little surviving evidence of the former cabin, probably because of the method of demolition. When the cabin was dismantled, most of the wood was sold or reused. The poorer quality wood was thrown into the cellar along with broken bottles, ceramics, and other garbage. The site was probably then levelled with fill and bulldozed (William J. Mason, personal communication). As a result, only one small portion of the stone foundation remains *in situ* while the rest of the site is littered with fieldstones. Other Mason occupation features include a large rock identified by William James Mason's grandson, William J. Mason, as a stone base for one of the cabin's two brick chimneys (brick from both chimneys also litters the site); a builder's trench common to the foundation and chimney base, indicating both were constructed at the same time; a large post mould, probably a support for a woodshed wall adjacent to the cabin; a large organic stain to the west of the approximate location of the woodshed's west wall, probably from the woodpile that was kept along that side of the shed (William J. Mason, personal communication); and the possible border between the cabin (indicated by loosely packed fill) and

the kitchen (indicated by hard-packed sandy clay) structures (figure 2).

Features relating to cabin demolition include several drag mark stains created by fieldstones moved by the bulldozer during demolition activities. Artifacts uncovered support the 1874 to c. 1931 date for the cabin, as do written documentation.

The 1990 field season at the Mason Family Cabin Site served as an exercise to introduce TRAIL students to the discipline of archaeology and to acquaint supervising archaeologists with the site. Future excavations should concentrate on the cellar, front door, and woodshed and kitchen perimeter areas. To accomplish this goal, one or two additional field schools could be carried out at the Mason Family Cabin Site.

Works Cited

McGregor, Mildred Preston. 1984. "Lot 18, Concession 23. The Robert Preston Family." In *Green Meadows and Golden Sands: The History of Amabel Township, 1851-1982*. Edited by Annice Blake, Helen Gowanlock, and Sheila Gatis. Warton: Amabel Township Historical Society.

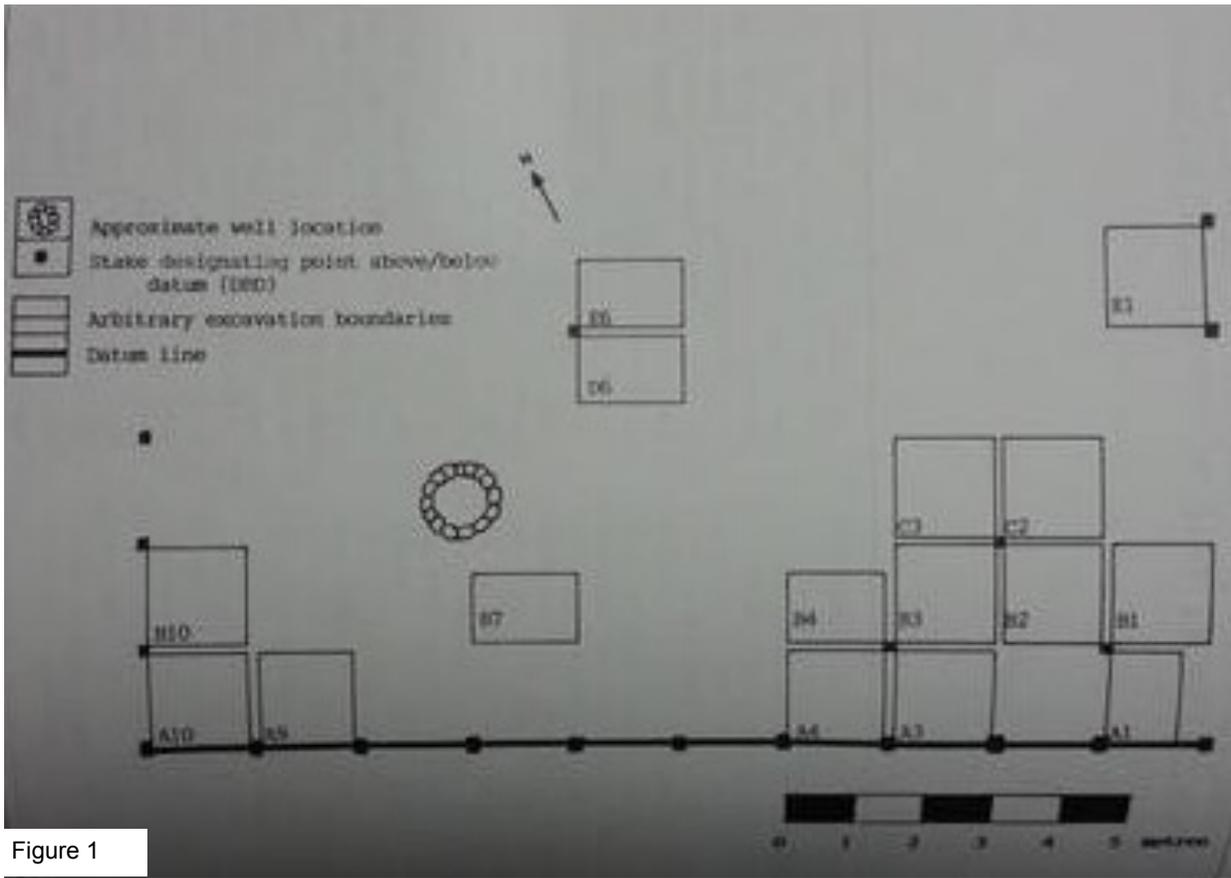


Figure 1

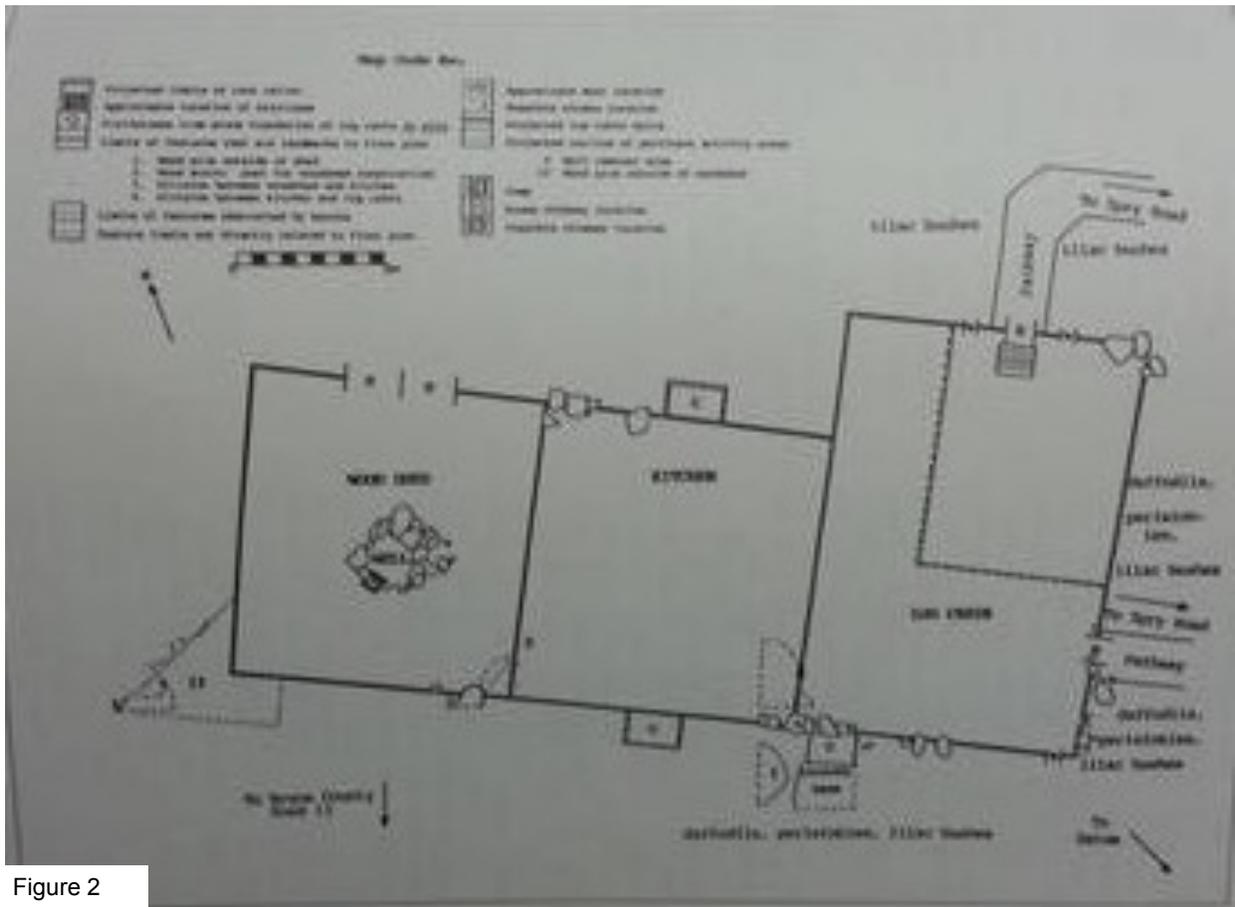


Figure 2