

STORM UNCOVERS ANISHINAABEK ANCESTORS NEAR GOOD HART

Petoskey News-Review

Wednesday, August 4, 1999

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Good Hart: Wes Andrews (from left), Elli Andrews and Joe Mitchell sift through dirt Tuesday in hopes of finding Anishinaabek remains. (NEWS-REVIEW photo by Lisa Wheat)

What remains

Storm uncovers Anishinaabek ancestors near Good Hart

By LISA WHEAT
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GOOD HART — While some are agonizing over the ruins left by the weekend's storms, members of the Little Traverse Bands of Odawa Indians are grateful for one result of the washouts. The rain uncovered human bones, a clay pottery piece and other unidentified remains of their Anishinaabek ancestors.

A team of archeologists and historians from the tribe, Wes Andrews, Elli Andrews and Joe Mitchell, estimated the findings to be from 500 to 1,500 years old.

The Anishinaabek remains were found by Marietta Coulter of Good Hart around 7 p.m. Monday, in a pile of dirt where a house is under construction. Coulter and her two children were checking the progress of construction of the house, which belongs to friends.

The children had commonly played in the dirt pile near the site. When Coulter walked near the mound to watch them, she saw that the rain had uncovered what she described as a "funny looking stone." Upon further examination, Coulter realized it was actually a skull. Coulter and her children later found more miscellaneous bones and notified the homeowners.

They, in turn, notified the Emmet County Sheriff's Department.

The sheriff's department investigated the body remains as a possible crime scene. They contacted the tribe, and the archeological team was able to conclude that the remains were Anishinaabek.

Several clues helped the tribal researchers determine the remains were from their ancestors. The giveaway that distinguished the remains from those of a crime scene was the presence of a clay pottery piece, possibly from a pot. The pot was likely buried with the deceased

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as part of a belief that the dead will need household goods in their after-life. Elli Andrews said that items such as fish hooks, sewing materials, food, arrow heads and knives are customarily sent with the deceased on their journey.

The pottery also helped the archeological team to determine the age of the remains. Elli Andrews noted that the small piece, about two inches in diameter, is relatively thin and displays a fabric-impressed design. She said that type of pottery was no longer crafted after Europeans came to America, because with them they brought metal pots, which were more durable.

Wes Andrews pointed out that pottery is also associated with the agriculture societies, when people were more stationary rather than hunting and gathering cultures where they traveled in search of food. He said agriculture developed in this area at least 1,500 years ago

and that Europeans came to the continent about 500 years ago.

The archeologists identified several bones as fingers, the pelvis, toes, vertebrae, skulls, teeth and more. They believe the remains are those of a woman and a child. The pelvic bones and woman-shaped skull revealed the gender of the adult skeleton.

The width of the cheekbones and the shape of the teeth are also clues to the origin of the remains. Wes Andrews said that wide cheekbones and shovel-shaped upper and lower front teeth are characteristic of his people.

Elli Andrews noted that the condition of the teeth help indicate the time period in which the bodies lived. The teeth are ground flat, a result of eating gritty food. Elli Andrews also pointed out that the teeth were free of decay, which hints that they were not exposed to sugar and flour brought to America by the Europeans.

Joe Mitchell said the tribe will properly bury the remains according to Anishinaabek tradition. Without giving details of the ritual, he ensured it would be performed with

respect and honor, returning the bones to the ground from which they came.

"We are putting them back in mother earth the way they were in the first place. They are buried with the honor and respect they deserve," he said.

Upon talking with the original property owner, Emmet County Det. Bobra Johnston determined that the dirt pile where the remains were found was transferred to that site about 20 years ago. Because the original excavator is now dead, the researchers aren't sure where exactly the dirt came from. Based on information from the property owner, they believe it was transferred during the preparation of building a house on the lakefront in Good Hart.

Shorelines were commonly chosen as burial sites by the Anishinaabek people. They believe that life began in the water and that in order to complete a full cycle, the bodies must be returned to the water.

Wes Andrews said that finding Anishinaabek remains is becoming more common in Northern Michigan because of an increase in construction. He checks at least one Indian burial site in the area each year, and that there are possibly many more which he has not heard about.

Federal legislation gives Indian

tribes the authority to ensure that burial sites are not intentionally excavated. It also gives them jurisdiction over the remains.

Elli Andrews noted that construction personnel often don't report remains discoveries, because they fear their building schedule will be slowed. The group emphasized that the tribe is willing to survey the land in a time-efficient manner and that if remains are found, the discovery should be reported to the local law enforcement agency or the tribal police.

"It's not a legal hassle to get ahold of us," Wes Andrews said.

Wes and Elli Andrews operate a consulting firm for anthropology, history, and archeology. They travel throughout the United States providing these services.

Wes Andrews holds a master's degree in social sciences from the University of Chicago with an emphasis on anthropology and history. Elli Andrews received her master's degree in anthropology with a concentration in Great Lakes Indians and archeology from Ball State University.

Joe Mitchell considers himself a life-long Anishinaabek wisdom seeker. He feels his qualifications reside in the love and care he has for his people.