

A New Hochelagan Burying-ground Discovered at Westmount on the Western Spur of Mount Royal, Montreal, July-September, 1898 eBook

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Contents

A New Hochelagan Burying-ground Discovered at Westmount on the Western Spur of Mount Royal, Montreal, July-September, 1898 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	11
Page 7.....	13
Page 8.....	15
Page 9.....	16
Page 10.....	18
Page 11.....	19
Page 12.....	21



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
		1
		1
REPORT OF Dr. HIBBERT ON THE WESTMOUNT SKELETONS		5
No. II.—A Brachycephalic Man		5
No. III.—The Tallest Man		6
		6
		7
Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm		11
		11



Page 1

Title: A New Hochelagan Burying-ground Discovered at Westmount on the Western Spur of Mount Royal, Montreal, July-September, 1898

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A NEW HOCHELAGAN BURYING-GROUND DISCOVERED AT WESTMOUNT ON THE WESTERN SPUR OF MOUNT ROYAL, MONTREAL, JULY-SEPTEMBER 1898

Notes by

W. D. *Lighthall*, M.A., F.R.S.L.

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1898

The above title is provisional as respects the term "Hochelagan." All those who are interested in the Indians of old Hochelaga, or in the Mohawks with whom they seem to have had a close and not yet fully ascertained race relationship, will be pleased to learn of the discovery of a prehistoric burying-ground which is probably one of their race, the only one heretofore known having been on the borders of their town itself, about upper Metcalfe street, Montreal. The new one is on the upper level (not the top) of Westmount, which is the south-western prolongation of Mount Royal, and the four or five graves thus far found are scattered at considerable intervals over an area of about 600 by 300 yards, nearly bounded by Argyle, Montrose and Aberdeen Avenues and the Boulevard, three of the graves being a little outside of these limits. A number of years ago a skeleton was discovered, near the surface, on the cutting of Argyle Avenue



on about a westerly line from the residence of Mr. Earle. As the remains were rumored to be possibly Indian, Mr. Earle secured the skull, which had been used as a football by boys, some of the teeth, which had originally been complete in number, being thus lost. This head is identical in form with those last found. Roots of grass interlaced in it show the lightness of the covering. On another occasion many years ago, a skeleton was found, also lightly buried, and with the knees drawn up, just east of the residence of Mr. John Macfarlane on Montrose Avenue, during the digging of a flower-bed. It

Page 2

was over six feet long. After being exposed for a few days it was re-interred in the same spot by order of Mr. Macfarlane, and could doubtless be obtained for examination if desirable. At a later period, the gardener, Mr. Latter, who had found the Macfarlane skeleton, dug up and re-interred another just within the bounds of his own property adjoining the head of Aberdeen Avenue opposite the St. George's Snowshoe Club-house. On the 22nd of July last (1898) a gardener excavating in the St. George's Club-house grounds found three skeletons interred at a depth of from two to two and a half feet and with knees drawn up. A report of the find was made to the Chief of Police of Westmount and to Mr. J. Stevenson Brown, and Mr. A.S. Wheeler, respectively President and Vice-President of the St. George's Club, the former being also an ex Vice-President of the Natural History Society. They examined the spot and remains, Mr. Brown concluding them to be probably Indian from the prominent cheek bones and large mouths. Having just been paying some attention to the archaeology of the Iroquois, which had been taken me on a flying trip to their former country in the State of New-York, I, on seeing in a newspaper at the seaside, a short item concerning the skeletons, was immediately interested, and especially in the possibility of their being Hochelagans, and having particularly commenced some inquiries into the relations between the latter Indians and the Mohawks, I wrote, as Chairman of Health of Westmount, asking Chief Harrison to note the manner and attitude of burial and any objects found, and to enquire concerning previous excavations in the neighborhood and save the remains for scientific purposes. (They had been sent by him to the City Morgue.) The above information concerning the previous skeletons was then collected and I found that the witnesses concurred in agreeing that the attitude seems to have been in all cases with knees bent up. No objects seem to have been noticed in any of the excavations then made, though some may have been overlooked by the workmen, particularly as the soil of the locality is full of pieces of limestone and small boulders, closely resembling arrow heads, hammers and celts. Several bones which are not human have however been since found with these three skeletons, one possibly of a dog, another of a squirrel. They may be those of the funeral feast Sir William Dawson mentions in his work "Fossil Men," as usually to be looked for over the Hochelagan graves.

Mr. Beauchamp, the New-York authority, writes concerning the Mohawks; "Burial customs varied greatly among the same people, but usually the knees are drawn up. The face might be turned either way in contiguous graves. I have seen many opened with no articles in them." By the kindness of Dr. Wyatt Johnston, Pathologist to the Provincial Board of Health, the three skeletons have been preserved and are now in the Chateau de Ramezay Historical Museum where they will doubtless be regarded with interest by scholars.

Page 3

The skulls have been fully identified as of the Indian type, and found to be those of two powerful males in the prime of life and one young woman. The skull in possession of Mr. Earl is doubtless of the same race. Some large stones were found placed above the bodies, and also a number of naturally flat stones which appear to have been used as scoops to excavate. The plateau where the remains were found is about half way up the side of the "Mountain" or hill, as it more properly is, the total height being only about 700 feet. The plateau slopes somewhat and looks towards the south-east, and being protected by the hill behind it from prevailing winds, and having a good light soil, constitutes a very favorable situation for the growth of the Indian crops of corn and beans. The Mountain being an isolated rise in the great plain of the St. Lawrence, the plateau was also most favorably placed for look-out and defence. A hundred yards or so to the west is a fine perennial spring, and a short distance further is another which has always been known as "the old Indian Well," having been a resort of Indians at a later period. Only a few spots on the plateau have so far been excavated; but with approaching improvements I have no doubt that other graves will soon be found. The ground to the west, in the neighborhood of the two perennial springs, has in particular, never been much disturbed. If therefore, as on the site of the old Hochelaga, this burying-ground is on the out skirts of a town site, relics of a much more interesting character may be looked for in the undisturbed neighborhood just referred to, the Raynes and Murray farms, and those on, the southern slope of the Mountain.

Should a town-site be fortunately discovered I have no doubt that progressive Westmount will see to proper care being taken in the matter. Such a town would likely be older than Hochelaga and thus afford a fresh step in tracing the record of this mysterious people. Such towns were frequently moved, when the soil or supply of wood gave out, or disease or enemies made removal imperative. As to the remains already unearthed being prehistoric, there can be no doubt. The Island was deserted after the destruction of Hochelaga by the Hurons about 1560. The next Indian inhabitants were Catholic converts and therefore were buried at full length in a consecrated Christian ground. The village of the converts was at the Old Towers of the Fort des Messieurs, some quarter of a mile eastward of the plateau referred to.

In tracing back the history of the land in which these discoveries have been made, we learn from the *terrier* or land book of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, that it was conceded about 1708, and that it has ever since remained in private hands. Had the site been known as a burial place, even years previous to that date, it is altogether unlikely that such a concession would have been made; especially as there was abundance of unoccupied land in the vicinity. The faint



Page 4

doubt which arose as to whether the interments were made subsequently to the founding of Montreal, is therefore eliminated. The authorities of the Seminary, who conceded the land, state not only that they have no record of a burying-ground there, but agree with me that the space covered is too large, to be consecrated ground, as it would be in Christian times, and they also state that the burials of the mission of the Mountain where the Montreal Indian converts lived, were made chiefly at the cemeteries of Montreal and were very few. These Indians had originally been assembled around Ville Marie but were removed to the Fort des Messieurs where Montreal College stands in 1662, and thence, towards the beginning of the 18th century, to Sault-au-Recollet and in 1717 to Oka. The method of burial, also, is not Christian, but pagan, and similar in every respect to early Mohawk burials.

On Saturday the 10th September, 1898, I went with two laborers granted by the Town of Westmount to the excavation on the club house grounds, and choosing a spot on its edge cut a short trench some two feet deep. About ten feet southward of the three skeletons previously found, this trench revealed two large stones placed in the form of a reversed V, clearly in order, as it afterwards appeared, to partly cover a body. On raising these, a skeleton was found of a tall young man laid on the hard-pan, on his right side, with face down, head towards the west, knees drawn up, and covered with the mealy dry whitish earth of the locality, to a depth of about two and a half feet. Mr. Earl assisted in carefully uncovering the remains, of which Mr. Charles J. Brown then took two excellent photographs in situ. The form of skull was similar to the others, the teeth fine and perfect except a grinder which had been lost years before. One arm-bone showed that it had once been broken and healed again. No objects were found, though the search was very careful. On the 17th, the excavations were continued in the hope of finding objects of value to science. On this occasion there was present, besides the writer Mr. Earl, Mr. C.J. Brown, Mr. Wheeler and others and Mr. R.W. McLachlan, one of the excavators of old Hochelaga. About four or five feet north of the grave last-mentioned, large stones were again struck and on being lifted, the skeleton of a young girl was unearthed whose wisdom teeth had just begun to appear in the jaw. The large bone of her upper left arm had at one time been broken near the shoulder. Her slender skeleton was in the same crouching position as the others but much more closely bunched together; the top of the head was laid towards the north and looking partly downwards. Above her were found several flat stones which may have been used as scoops for the excavation. Under her neck was discovered the first manufactured object found, a single rude bead of white wampum of the prehistoric form, and which is now deposited in the Chateau de Ramezay. As white wampum was the gift of a lover, this sole ornament tells the pathetic story of early love and death. Mr. Chas. J. Brown again photographed the remains in situ. The work will still proceed and no doubt more important discoveries are yet to be made.



Page 5

Montreal, September 20th, 1898.

REPORT OF Dr. HIBBERT ON THE WESTMOUNT SKELETONS

No. I.—A Young Woman

The bones of this skeleton, are fragile, broken and considerably decayed.

The skull is in fair condition, though the lower jaw is broken in half.

The skull is round and arched above the breadth index being 77.7, of brachycephalic or Mongoloid type. *The superciliary* ridges are not very prominent, but the frontal, parietal and occipital eminences are very distinct. *The forehead* is non receding and the breadth measures 9 c.m. The cheekbones are not unduly prominent, the official measurement being 119 m.m. The gnathic index is 93, or orthognathous. The teeth are well preserved and not much worn, the 3d. molars not having erupted in either jaw. The face is short and broad, the height being 108 m.m. in and breadth 119 m.m., the orbit is inclined to be square with rounded angles and the type megaseme, the nasal index is mesorhine.

A very striking feature of this skull is the well marked central vertical frontal ridge and some tendency to angularity of the vertex. In the whole this skull is of a more refined type than the others and suggestive of some fair intellectual development of the individual. There are two wormian bones on the left side of the skull, one at the pterion and one below the asterion each being 9 m.m. long.

The bones generally are fragile and the long bones slender, with no marked impression for muscular attachment. A curious fact is that the ends of all the long bones are absent, presumably from decay, and as these ends are united to the shafts between the age of puberty (14-15) and adult life it is suggestive that the individual may have been of about the age of 18 or 20 and this is somewhat confirmed by the noneruption of the third molars.

With this skeleton are two animal bones. White and very dense in structure. They are both femura, one probably that of an ungulate; the other of a carnivore.

No. II.—A Brachycephalic Man

This skeleton is that of a large and powerfully built man, the bones being very heavy and strong with marked impressions and prominences for muscular attachment. The

skeleton, with the exception of some of the small bones of the hands and feet is complete.

The skull is large and massive, and the lower jaw very strong and heavy. The teeth are well preserved but much ground down at the crown. The superciliary ridges are very prominent. The fore head is narrow (102 c.m.) receding.

Judging from the size and strength of the bones and their impressions for muscular attachment, this man must have been very powerful and calculating from the length of the femur, at least six feet tall. With this skeleton we found a small humerus of some mammal possibly a squirrel.



Page 6

No. III.—The Tallest Man

This skeleton is also that of a large powerfully built man, even taller man the last. The skull is larger, though not quite so massive. It is longer and narrower and dolicephalus, the occipital region very prominent. The height index is low (70.5).

The face is broad as compared with the length 124-112 and the cheek bones are prominent, lower jaw is heavy and strong.

The bones of this skeleton are well preserved and it is almost entire, there being only a few of the bones of the hands and feet missing. The pelvis is masculine. The bones are long, large and heavy with marked impressions and processes.

The femur measures 17-7/8 inches so that this man must have been six feet or more and of muscular frame.

Among the bones of No III skeleton were 2 small rib bones of a bird.

Judging from the general conformation of the three skulls, it would appear that No. I, was that of the most intelligent person of the three and No. III of the least No. II being intermediate.

It is difficult to estimate the height of No. I as the femur is so decayed at both ends, but allowing for this, the height would not be more than 5 feet and probably less than that. The skeletons undoubtedly belong to the Mongoloid type and are distinctive of the North American Indians.

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