

# NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier  
University



## **Twenty-five years of digging and discovery draws to a close**

*Laurier's field school in Medonte Township one of Ontario's longest archeological digs*

**For Immediate Release**

**July 05, 1999**

**53-99**

**Contact: Dean Knight**  
**Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology and Classics**  
**(705) 325-2558**

**or**

**Patricia Lancia**  
**Media Relations Assistant**  
**(519) 884-0710, ext. 3786**

WATERLOO – Close to 400 people will attend a series of reunions as a quarter century of digging and discovery comes to an end. They'll join the final team during the last days of one of Ontario's longest running archaeological projects – the Ball Site.

Laurier's final Ball dig runs from July 5 to August 13. Almost two-thirds of the nearly 650 people who helped excavate the site plan to attend one of the four reunions being held from August 3 to 7 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and conclusion of the dig.

Excavation at the Ball Site in Medonte Township, between Lake Simcoe and the Penetanguishene Peninsula, began in 1975 as part of an archaeological field school offered by Wilfrid Laurier University's anthropology department. Named after property owner Don Ball, the site was discovered by Laurier instructor Dean Knight.

"I was walking towards this site through another field when I began noticing things on the ground – glass beads, arrowheads, pottery shards," said Knight, who has organized digs at the site since 1975. "We've learned a great deal about the people who lived in this area. The project has been a very rewarding experience for myself and the students involved."

Most of the students who excavated at the site were teachers who had time off in the summer and students from Laurier's part-time studies program in Orillia. Organized into six-week digs, each dig involved from 12 to 40 students.

– more –

Covering nine acres, the site includes the traces of 71 structures and was probably occupied by the Huron people for 10 to 12 years between 1595 and 1610. Longhouses at the site range from six or seven meters to 40 meters in length, with a hearth every 10 feet. According to Jesuit reports a hearth served two families, making the size of the site's population an estimated 1000 to 2000 people.

From the findings, the village appears to have been built or occupied in two stages, surrounded by a palisade. Considering the size of the buildings and palisade, construction of the village would have been an enormous amount of work for a society that largely used stone implements.

The site has yielded thousands of artifacts over the years, including burnt corn and deer jawbones, about 28,000 pieces of pottery, pieces of ceramic pipes and gaming discs, stone and copper arrowheads, glass beads, and stone and iron axes.

Only a few decades after abandoning the site, the Huron people were pushed out of the area by the Cayuga, Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida and Onondaga Iroquois.

After abandoning the Ball Site many of the Huron gathered at Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons in Midland, which was burned by the Jesuits in 1649-50 to prevent it from falling into Iroquois hands. The Jesuits then took the Hurons to Christian Island, off the Penetanguishene Peninsula, where many starved to death.

After taking a sabbatical in the year 2000, Knight plans on producing two books on the Ball Site, one describing its houses and settlement pattern and a second, heavily illustrated book on artifacts from the site.