Introduction

Artifacts recovered from the McHugh site (47WP294) were analyzed using the functional classification system proposed by Sprague (1981). Feature 1, the original McHugh homestead, produced 2031 artifacts subsequently classified as Personal Items, Domestic Items, Architecture, Commerce and Industry, and Group Services. Feature 6 yielded only 35 artifacts, but contained a similarly diverse assemblage and was of equal importance to site interpretation. Based on the variety of artifacts classified as Personal and Domestic Items, the McHugh site is interpreted as a significant mid- to late 19th century domestic site. Temporally early artifacts represent curated items and provide insight into how occupants adapted to frontier life. Military buttons recovered from the site elucidate the impact of the Civil War on Wisconsin families. The analysis of the toys and nursery items recovered serves to illustrate the Victorian era’s changing attitudes towards childhood.

Methods

In the Sprague (1981) functional classification scheme, each artifact is placed within a category based on its original function as well as context. While determining these functions can be difficult because a single artifact can have multiple functions (Saastamo 1971: 28), it is an important exercise because, as Sprague (1981: 252) states:

In the final analysis, the purpose of a historic site study is to contribute to our understanding of the culture as a whole...Logically resultant from the point of view of the anthropologist, function is the highest and most productive base for site analysis.

Given this emphasis on function, the interpretation of the assemblage is not reliant on artifact counts, but the variety and frequency of different artifact types within each functional category. For instance, the fact that there were 729 clear window glass fragments recovered from Feature 1 or the fact that this particular artifact type makes up 36% of the assemblage does not provide a lot of detail about the function of the site. However, noting that there are eight different subcategories of Domestic Items ranging from Domestic Ritual to Laundry is far more illustrative of the site’s function. With this framework in mind, each artifact from the McHugh site was cleaned, cataloged and then assigned to a functional category for analysis.

Artifact Summary

Feature 1

This feature is described as an 8 m by 7 m soil stain with intact subsurface architectural remnants. A total of 2031 artifacts were recovered from Feature 1 and while those classified as architectural constitute the bulk of the assemblage (Figure 1), as can be seen in Figure 2, the Personal and Domestic Items groups are far more varied. Personal Items:

A total of 114 artifacts representing 9 different subgroups of Personal Items were recovered from Feature 1: Clothing (n=32), Footwear (n=1), Body Ritual & Grooming (n=2), Medical & Health (n=10), Indulgences (n=55), Pastimes & Recreation (n=7), Ritual (n=3), Pocket Tools & Accessories (n=1), and Coins & Tokens (n=3) (Figure 3).

Domestic Items:

A total of 343 artifacts representing 8 subcategories of Domestic Items were recovered: Furnishings (n=3), Culinary (n=4), Gastro (n=303), Portable Illumination (n=12), Domestic Ritual (n=2), Home Education, Information & Business (n=15), Laundry (n=1), and Sewing (n=3). The Gastro category includes: glass containers (n=82), ceramic flatware and hollow ware (n=191), ceramic containers (n=20), glass hollow ware (n=3), storage (n=1), and utensils (n=6) (Figures 4 & 5).

Feature 6

This feature, though not excavated, yielded 35 artifacts from the top surface: Personal Items (n=4), Domestic Items (n=25), Architecture (n=4), and Unknown Function (n=4). Domestic Items dominate the assemblage in both frequency and variability, with fragments of glass and ceramic containers recovered as well as diverse ceramic flatware and hollow ware (Figure 9).

Discussion

The variety and frequency of Personal and Domestic Items within the artifact assemblage as well as the dates obtained from diagnostic artifacts suggests the McHugh site (47WP294) is an important mid- to late 19th century domestic site (Figure 10). The functional classification of artifacts specific to cultural activities and food consumption shows that the portion of the house excavated was the kitchen. Items like the sheldge ring fragment likely represent curated items that were brought to Wisconsin by the McHugh’s and may help to shed light on the ways in which they chose to adapt to the western frontier.

Literature Cited


