

Slicing through Our Past: Knives and Other Flatware at the Collier Lodge Site (12PR36)

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Background

- The Collier Lodge Site is located in northwest Indiana near the town of Kouts and on the banks of the old Kankakee River.
- In the 1830s, settlers built a log cabin on the site.
- The land changed hands many times over the next half-century.
- In this time, the surrounding area known as the Grand Kankakee Marsh was rich in game and became a popular hunting destination for the elite.
- To house these new visitors, expansive lodges were built for private hunt clubs.
- Built in 1904 by the Collier family, Collier Lodge was the only public inn and restaurant in the area.
- After the river's course was changed in 1916, game became less prevalent and hunting less popular.
- At this time, the Collier family converted their inn to a general store.
- The lodge still stands today and is on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The lodge's past use as a domestic, public, and culinary space makes cutlery artifacts especially prevalent in the archaeological record, inviting further study.



Collier Lodge on the Kankakee



Collier Lodge as a General Store

Dating Methods

1) Company of Origin

- If an artifact had a text engraving, it could be traced back to its company of origin.
- Cutlery companies often changed names, were bought out by other companies, or went out of business, making them useful in dating.
- These are especially helpful when an artifact's pattern could not be dated.
- The pattern on Spoon Y could not be dated, but its engraving was discerned under microscope to read "SIMEON L. & GEORGE H. ROGERS COMPANY."
- This company was founded in 1900 and taken over by William A. Rogers Limited in 1918, followed by Oneida in 1929.
- This dates the production of Spoon Y to between 1900-1918.



Engraving on Spoon Y



Patterning on Spoon Y

2) Patterning

- A distinctive shape or pattern, when present, could be used to date an artifact.
- Some websites devoted to antiques, especially silverware collecting, have limited photographs of flatware with company and pattern names.
- Patterning can often be used in conjunction with engraving to date an artifact.
- Spoon X has an engraving that was reconstructed as "TUDOR PLATE ONEIDA COMMUNITY."
- Photographs of Oneida spoons led to the identification of Spoon X's patterning.
- Spoon X's patterning was discovered to be "Queen Bess II," first produced by Oneida Cutlery in 1946.



"Queen Bess II" Pattern on Spoon X



Discovery of Knife Q

Below: B E
G V

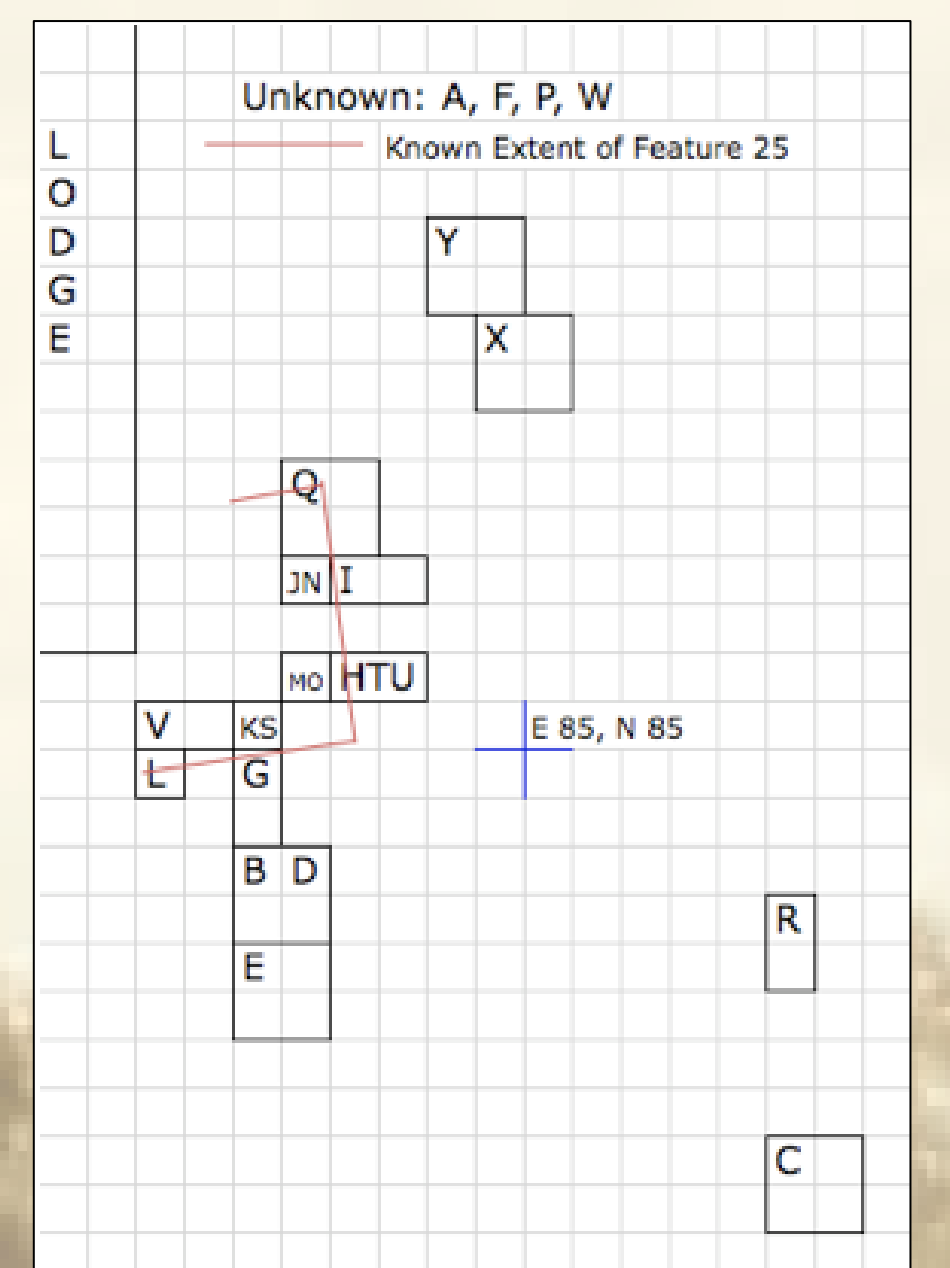


Discussion

- In total, many more knives were found at the site than any other type of flatware, portraying the knife as a multipurpose tool for the pioneer or hunter.
- Surprisingly, of the 17 knives that were found, none appeared to be hunting knives, despite Collier Lodge's proximity to hunting grounds.
- This may be because hunting knives were either highly valued and guarded by their owners or were lost or broken while hunting but not at the lodge.
- Of the knives that were recovered, it is possible that Knives C, I, and Q could each have been used for hunting, but all of them could have just as likely been used instead for culinary and domestic purposes.
- The vast majority of flatware found at the site was made of iron, a common material in flatware production that was less expensive than silver.
- The artifacts vary in condition from good as new to practically falling apart, and it remains a mystery why so many usable pieces of flatware were discarded.
- Most of the artifacts, however, are in poor condition.
- Many artifacts were found near Feature 25, the cellar of the log cabin.
- This may be due to the large number of historic trash pits found in the vicinity of Feature 25, but it may also be due to the larger number of excavations that have taken place near Feature 25.

Material	Knives	Forks	Spoons
Iron	ABCDE FGIJKL MNO PQ	RS	UV
Brass	H		TX
Stainless Steel	L		
Wood	IOP	S	
Plastic	E		W

Material Composition



Artifact Location

The Challenges of Flatware Analysis

- Flatware, like most metal artifacts, is susceptible to rust and does not always preserve well in the archaeological record.
- There is no one universal way of dating flatware.
- Due to its durable and reusable nature, the production date and discard date of an artifact could potentially be decades apart, complicating dating efforts.
- Datable differences between nineteenth and twentieth century cutlery are primarily technological, rather than stylistic in nature. These subtle technological differences are difficult to see unless the artifacts are in very good condition.
- Between 1870 and 1920, there were very few large technological changes in cutlery production. Many of the artifacts in the Collier Lodge collection come from this time period, making more specific dating difficult.
- There is no complete and academically reliable database of flatware patterns.
- Plenty has been written on historic ceramics and even fine silverware, but not much has been published on the analysis of common flatware, and as such there are few if any true experts in the field.
- Flatware is not present at every archaeological site, and even when it is, flatware artifacts are not usually discussed in detail in site reports and other publications.
- This leads to a lack of easily available comparable material available for researchers to study.

The Future of Flatware Analysis

- At a historic hunting, residential, or culinary site, cutlery represents an important part of past everyday life.
- Understanding these artifacts can shed new light on the domestic culture of the time period.
- However, at present, there lack adequate resources to unlock the full learning potential of flatware.
- We have the technology to make this happen.
- A universal, searchable database with measurements, archaeological context, site information, and photographs would revolutionize the way archaeologists do comparative research, not only with flatware but with all types of artifacts.
- Similar databases are already in existence at the regional level for artifacts such as historic ceramics, as is the case at the Florida Museum of Natural History.
- More collaboration, research, and publishing is essential in order to utilize flatware as an archaeological resource.

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Image Credits

Thanks to John Hodson and the Kankakee Valley Historical Society for providing the two historic photographs of Collier Lodge as well as the picture of the discovery of Knife Q. More pictures can be found at www.kankakeevalleyhistoricalsociety.org. All other photographs and figures are my own. A complete list of works cited is available upon request.