

AVOCATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGIST

Dr. Thomas William Beeman (1859-1920)

In 1897, the Ontario Archaeological Museum's *Catalogue of Specimens* acknowledged Dr. Thomas William Beeman, a general practitioner at Perth, as,

*... the most generous friend of the museum ... through whom, directly and indirectly, many hundreds of valuable specimens have come into our possession, as a result of which primitive life in the country about Lake Rideau is very fully illustrated, perhaps more so than any other district in the Province.*¹

Dr. Beeman was born in 1859 at Selby², Ontario, the son of William Beeman (1820-1879) and Jerusha Hughes (1920-1913). He graduated from Queen's University with a medical degree in 1878 and practiced medicine at Odessa, Ontario, from 1878 until 1887 when he moved his practice to Perth.

When not tending to the needs of his patients, Beeman was a passionate amateur archaeologist, scouring the banks of the Tay River and the Rideau Lakes for First Nations artifacts, and passing his discoveries along to David Boyle (1842-1911), curator of the Canadian Institute 1884-1896 and the Ontario Provincial Museum 1886-1911³. Although without formal training in the science, Beeman was described by Boyle as an outstanding 'avocational' archaeologist⁴, foremost among

*... a new breed of amateur archaeologist, of true scientific instinct and not mere curiosity hunters; serious students who conscientiously devoted attention to the literature of archaeology generally and related that literature to their own localities. So seriously did these individuals⁵ take their archaeological avocation that they genuinely felt guilty if they happened to fall behind in their reading.*⁶

As he roamed the lake and river shores, Beeman collected artifacts and identified many sites of scientific interest. In an 1891 report, he wrote that,

¹ Introduction to the *Catalogue of Specimens in the Ontario Archaeological Museum Toronto (1897)*.

² Lennox & Addington County, north of Napanee.

³ Also, Secretary of the Ontario Historical Association from 1898.

⁴ Boyle himself was not an academic. He was first a blacksmith, then teacher, author, bookseller, and finally a self-taught archaeologist, historian and curator.

⁵ In addition to Dr. Thomas W. Beeman at Perth, the core of amateur collectors cultivated by Boyle across southern and central Ontario included Andrew Frederick Hunter (Simcoe County & Huronia), George Edward Laidlaw (Victoria County), J. Hugh Hammond (Simcoe County & Georgian Bay), John J. Long (Georgian Bay), William Wintemberg (Grenville County) and Frederick William Waugh (Perth County & Manitoulin Island).

⁶ *Arch Notes – Newsletter of the Ontario Archaeological Society*, May/June 1984, 'Bitched, Bothered and Bewildered: With David Boyle on the Midden Patrol', by Gerald Killan.

From all appearances the Rideau seems to have been the principal Indian resort, as here are found in greatest quantities, evidences of an occupation that must have been extended over a great length of time. There is a marked difference in the weathering of different specimens. The pottery also shows two different periods of time, and possibly two distinct peoples. About the lake every bit of sandy beach (at the mouth of streams) was sure to yield large numbers of specimens. Following up the streams, every small lake showed one or more old village sites.

Archaeologists have subsequently identified many of the ground slate points and gouges collected by Beeman as dating to the Archaic period (5000-1000 BP).

Among many submissions, in 1894 Beeman contributed to the annual archaeological report of the Canadian Institute with a paper on his findings at the mouth of the Tay River.



Projectile Point from Rideau Lakeshore

Where the Tay River empties in the lake, there was, without doubt, a village site that must have been occupied for a great length of time, as specimens from this place show many different varieties of pattern and great differences in their age.

This place gives more indication of having been a permanent village site than any yet discovered ... but nothing has been found in the way of earthworks, burial places or anything of that kind. The water of the lake being five or six feet higher than it was, has converted the surrounding part into marsh. All specimens secured from this place are found right at the water's edge, where they have been washed up by high winds in the fall or spring, or else washed out of the banks by ice shoving and the action of the water.

Construction of the Rideau Canal, completed in 1832, was responsible for the higher water levels that frustrated Beeman by flooding the Tay River mouth. His conclusions about that site at Plum Point, however, were proven correct in 1919 when the skeletal remains of two individuals, dating to the Early Woodland Period (3000-2400 BP), were excavated there. That find was made by two of Beeman's protégés, Charles Cyril Inderwick (1894-1962) and William Lees McLaren (1880-1932), both of Perth⁷. Between 1892 and 1932 Beeman, Inderwick and McLaren collected more than 90 items from the Plum Point site.



Rideau Lakeshore Pot Shard collected 1895

⁷ Inderwick was a founding member of the Perth and Lanark Historical Society and of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. William McLaren owned and operated a mica mine at the northwest end of Otty Lake in Burgess Township.

Beeman's passion for archaeology was well known locally and his office at 52 Foster Street⁸ in Perth became the 'go-to' repository for anyone who unearthed an artifact on their farm or garden plot across a wide swath of Lanark and Leeds Counties. The local newspaper reported in 1894 that,

*... during the past year Dr. Beeman of this town has received a large number of additional Indian relics and has now in his rooms an extensive and valuable collection. They consist of flint, slate, sandstone and copper samples in arrow and spearheads, axes, tomahawks, knives, needles and various other implements together with ceremonial and religious articles. They were procured from this neighborhood near Rideau Lake. They can be seen at the doctor's rooms.*⁹

In addition to his own finds, Beeman ensured that these thousands of artifacts collected by others reached the Ontario Museum. In his 1894 report alone Beeman acknowledge contributions sent on to the Institute that had originated with 33 individuals from across Lanark and Leeds Counties,

*John Atcheson, Gilbert Beeman, Robert Blair, J. W. Borrowman, A. B. Budd, T. B. Caldwell, Dick Carpenter, Edward Cavanaugh, John Coutts, William Dunlop, John E. Glover, Thomas Haley, George Hone, Leo Jarbeau, David Lepper, Arthur Love, Daniel McEwen, John McEwen, John McGuire, William McLaren, R.C. McLaren, J. C. McLean, James Peters, E. Playfair, John Richards, Hugh Robertson, William Rothwell, Peter Stewart, S. Stevenson, Edward Tilt, M. Tovey, J. P. Vrooman, Samuel Wilson.*¹⁰

Beeman's archaeological efforts were greatly facilitated by Sophia Elizabeth Lees-McLaren (1845-1923), wife of Lumber Baron and Senator Peter McLaren (1831-1919), who, beginning in 1891, placed the McLaren steam yacht, *Geraldine*¹¹, at his full disposal¹². Beeman wrote that,

*... through the kindness of Mrs. Peter McLaren I was enabled to visit many different places about the Rideau ... Mrs. McLaren takes an active interest in the work and, but for her, I would not have been able to do nearly so much. The engineer and pilot of the 'Geraldine' – Messrs. George Hone and Dick Carpenter – are enthusiastic workers and secured a large number of valuable specimens ...*¹³

⁸ Later moved to 38-36 Foster Street.

⁹ Perth Courier, December 7, 1894.

¹⁰ *Report of the Canadian Institute, 1894.*

¹¹ The *Geraldine* frequently won the 'Steam Yacht Race' at the Rideau Ferry Regatta over the years around the turn of the 20th century.

¹² Beeman Protégé William L. McLaren who, with Cyril Inderwick, unearthed the skeletal remains at Plum Point in 1919 was the son of Senator Peter McLaren and Sophia Lees-McLaren.

¹³ *Report of the Canadian Institute, 1894.*



The McLaren steam yacht Geraldine c1900¹⁴

In the summer of 1895 Beeman persuaded his mentor Boyle to join him on an expedition to Mazinaw Lake on the upper Mississippi River where they were the first to scientifically record one of Ontario's most spectacular pictograph sites. On the huge granite escarpment north of the narrows of the lake they located and traced over 100 of the more than 260 painted symbols scattered along three kilometers of the cliff face. Created by Ojibwe or other Algonquian-speaking people three to four centuries ago (or longer), the Mazinaw pictographs were designated a national historic site of Canada in 1982.¹⁵



Mazinaw Lake Pictographs

Beeman was also an accomplished amateur painter in both oil and watercolor. In 1897 the *Perth Courier*, reporting on an art exhibit at the local library, noted that the many Beeman paintings loaned by local citizens,

¹⁴ Photo courtesy of Perth Matheson House Museum.

¹⁵ Now within Bon Echo Ontario Provincial Park.



Dr. T. W. Beeman Watercolor c1910
(Courtesy Perth Museum)

... made the collection from his brush a large and desirable collection. Among his best were 'On the Tay Near Glen Tay', 'Wild Grasses' and some landscape scenes all of which brought out the strong artistic genius of the doctor.

In 1898 Beeman married Mary Russell Shaw (1872-1941), daughter of Henry Dowsley Shaw (1833-1886) and Flora Madeline Matheson (1836-1894) and granddaughter of Senators James Shaw (1801-1878) and Roderick Matheson (1794-1873). They were the parents of two sons, Milton (1899-1900) and Thomas R. (1903-1974).

Dr. Thomas William Beeman practiced medicine at Perth for over 30 years, during much of which time he was also the County appointed physician for the House of Industry¹⁶. He died at Perth in 1920 and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery.

- *Ron W. Shaw (2019)*

¹⁶ Now Lanark Lodge.