

Public Archaeology at the Silver Lake Sites

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The Silver Lake Site I (33SU639) lies on a glacial kame overlooking the upper Cuyahoga River.¹ The site is in the 26-acre Silver Lake Park (Figure 1). Following the river, south of the bike and hike trail, is a dirt foot path called the Mandala Trail by residents of Silver Lake. The footpath follows the bend of the Cuyahoga River and extends around the old Cuyahoga Falls and Silver Lake landfill. The Silver Lake sites I and II (33 SU 678) were discovered in March 2017 while the author was walking the trail (Olson 2017a). The initial discovery consisted of 15 small flakes of Upper Mercer, Flint Ridge, and Plum Run cherts. Both site discoveries were made while hiking up the steep inclines from the Cuyahoga floodplain onto the glacial features elevated roughly 10 meters above (Figure 2).

The hillside portions of the dirt path are heavily eroded. There are no steps or gravel to slow the flow of water during heavy rains. Erosion exposed some of the flake debris and fire-cracked rock (FCR) on the trail. The author then contacted the Mayor of Silver Lake, Mr. Bernie Hovey, to find out what to do about the archaeological discoveries. Mr. Hovey set up a meeting with the author and the archivist of the Silver Lake Historical Society, Robert Zimmerman. The meeting discussion focused on the disposition of the recovered artifacts, but the important question from both Hovey and Zimmerman was what to do about the archaeological site and the footpath through it. The author suggested shovel-testing to delineate the boundaries of the artifact scatter, to identify the remaining integrity of the site, and to possibly find temporally diagnostic artifacts that would help with making an eligibility assessment for the National Register of Historic Places. The project was viewed as a learning opportunity for University of Akron students, but also the public. It was ultimately determined that the Village of Silver Lake Counsel would be notified of the proposed investigation, and that all artifacts would be curated at the Archaeology Laboratory, Department of Anthropology, University of Akron.

Surface and Subsurface Surveys

On May 13, 2017, nine shovel test pits were excavated at Silver Lake Site I. The volunteer crew consisted of Department of Anthropology students from the University of Akron and Robert Zimmerman (Olson 2017a). All nine test pits were positive, containing mostly flakes and FCR. Due to time constraints, no additional shovel tests were excavated outside of the footpath. The most interesting discovery during the shovel-testing was a deformed, long rifle bullet, likely .40 or .45 caliber, found at the bottom of Shovel Test Pit 1. Based on the location of the bullet in the southwestern hillslope, the only place the bullet could have come from is the ridge to the west on which Silver Lake Site II sits.

After shovel testing, the site surface was visually inspected for artifacts on June 9-10, July 13 and 19, September 19, and October 5, 2017. Despite assurances from Bernie Hovey that few people hiked the trail, a concern remained that the shovel-testing would entice passers-by to look for artifacts or excavate. Luckily, no evidence of looting or disturbance was observed during surface surveys. Each survey consisted of a brief (less than 15 minutes) surface inspection

of the exposed soil on the trail, and every survey recovered some cultural materials. The artifacts consisted of flakes and FCR, except for one biface tip found in the southwestern slope of the trail heading toward the Cuyahoga River. This point tip was located one meter south of Shovel Test Pit 1.

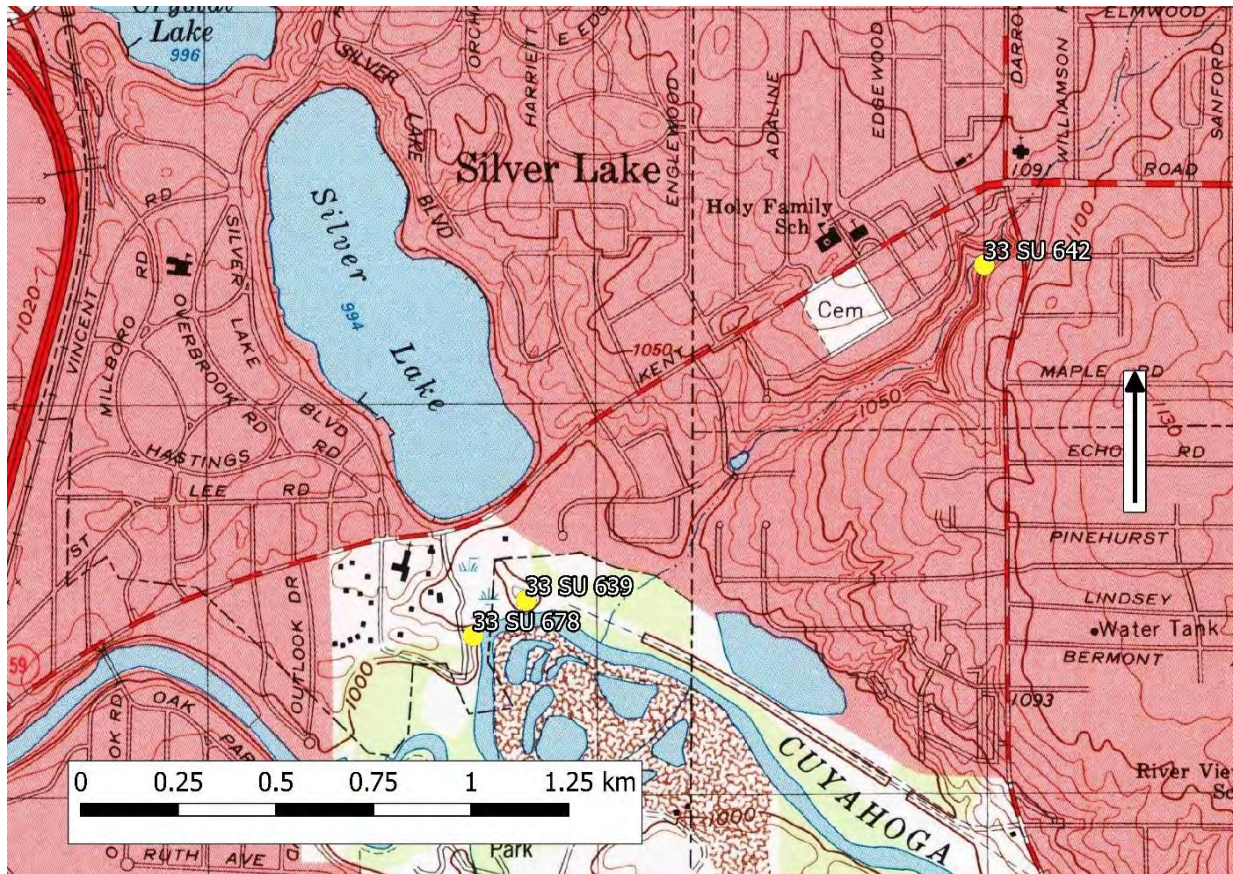


Figure 1: Location of the Silver Lake sites.

The Silver Lake Historical Society associated the 26 acres of Silver Lake Park with historical accounts of a roughly 500-person Seneca village that existed in the early nineteenth century and was led by “Chief Wagmong” (Bloetscher 1981; Lodge 1933).² The results of the shovel tests and surface surveys were presented at the March meeting of the Silver Lake Historical Society. During the presentation, the author discussed the poor documentation relating to the chief and the ‘stretching of truth’ that likely occurred as the legend of Chief Wagmong was passed down in the Akron area. There were over 50 people in attendance at the presentation, which was followed by a lengthy question and answer session. A significant concern was how the public would react to an archaeologist coming into their village and telling them their chief might be a flight of fantasy. Instead of angry mobs, the presentation was received by an inquisitive audience that seemed genuinely intrigued by the methods of excavation and research that lead to the conclusions. While the relationships and partnerships built through this project were a success, there is still more work needed.



Figure 2: Trail leading to 33 SU 639 looking southeast.

Excavation Methods

The excavations at Silver Lake Sites I and II included two and three one by one meter test units, respectively (Figure 3). The original project proposal planned for three one square meter test units, each supervised by a professional archaeologist with a volunteer crew of up to four excavated per day. The excavations were conducted over three days, from April 27 to 29, with the plan for a different site location and volunteer crew each day. The three locations included the two known archaeological sites, plus a third location just east of Silver Lake Site II in a picnic clearing in the woods. Volunteers included seventh and eighth grade students from the Lippman School in west Akron, Anthropology students from the University of Akron, and residents of Silver Lake.

Test units were placed adjacent to the existing park trails at Silver Lake Site II, the first site investigated as part of the project. The original plan was to excavate at five-centimeter arbitrary levels. This size interval was chosen as a means of forcing volunteers to be methodical and work slowly. The first day consisted exclusively of Lippman school volunteers, with Dr. Timothy Matney, the author, and recent graduate Maeve Marino as unit supervisors. What was not anticipated in the proposal was how meticulous the volunteers would be. After taking several hours to dig the first level, the standard of five centimeters was quickly changed to 10 cm

arbitrary levels. The three units opened at 33 SU 678 were not finished by end of day April 27, so the units were covered with tarps and buried with leaves. The units at Silver Lake Site II were finished by the end of day on April 28. On Sunday, April 29, the final volunteer crew opened two test units at the Silver Lake I site. Charlotte Gintert and the author supervised the test units and had only four volunteers for the entire project.



Figure 3: Test Unit 1 at 33 SU 639 facing south.

At both sites, a dumpy level (also known as a surveyor's level or builder's level) was used to site in unit locations to a known point and to measure the corner depths at each level. Volunteers were instructed in how to use the dumpy level, and how to take readings using stadiametric rangefinding, a common method of surveying involving a person holding a rod and another to read the numbers that cross stadia hairs on the level. The seventh and eighth grade students enjoyed calculating the distances from these numbers. Artifacts were washed, inventoried, and bagged by Eric Olson and Maeve Marino and stored at the Archaeology Lab, Department of Anthropology, University of Akron. FCR attributes were identified using Custer's (2017) FCR attributes. Lithic source materials were identified using 25x and 30x magnification and a comparative lithic collection. Brose (1994) was used to identify potential ceramic types recovered during excavation.

Results

Silver Lake Site I contained a substantial number of artifacts. The site consisted of 5,145.9 g of FCR (N =83), 75.5 g of debitage (N=100), 126.3 g of chert pebble cores (N=7), a

2.7 g *Brewerton Side Notched* scraper, a 5.3 g *Stanley Stemmed* projectile point, 3 projectile point tips (4.7 g), a 414.1 g nutting stone, 0.8 g of unidentified calcined animal bone fragments (N=19), 81.2 g of Late Woodland *Cuyahoga Cordmarked* pottery (N=71), and a 13.6 g expedient scraper.



Figure 4: Interior surfaces of pottery from 33 SU 639, cordmarking on top right.

The historic component of Silver Lake Site I is represented by a broken piece of slate roof tile (12.6 g) a .40-.45 caliber lead bullet (13 g), and a nondiagnostic piece of whiteware (not collected) found on the western hillslope of the trail. Only two pieces of modern clear bottle glass were observed between Shovel Test Pits 4 and 5. Aside from these items, the site did not have any of the typical beer cans, cigarette butts, or other common modern trash expected in public parks. The slate roof tile was found on the trail surface near Shovel Test Pit 3.5. There was no evidence observed of any structure or historic dump site that would otherwise explain the location of the broken roof tile.

The Silver Lake II site did not yield a dense or diagnostic artifact scatter. There were 13 pieces of FCR (949 g). The lithic assemblage consisted of 4.7 g of flakes (N=11), 4.3 g of retouched flakes (N=2), 5.8 g of lithic shatter (N=3), and 106.7 g of chert pebble cores (N=4). The historic component consisted of 2 wire nails, a highly corroded nail, 2 corroded iron masses that could not be identified, and 1 undecorated whiteware rim sherd from a small plate.

Current Research in Ohio Archaeology 2018

Eric Olson

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The soil profiles in the shovel test pits did not show any evidence of plow-scarring or disturbance aside from root stains. Likewise, there was little in the way of modern and historic debris, suggesting that the site has impeccable integrity for such an urban surrounding.

The small size of the flakes (< ¼ inch), high number of dorsal scars (5+), feather terminations, and lipped platforms suggest that most of the flakes from the site are the result of bifacial thinning (see Andrefsky 2001). There were three decortication flakes and a chunk of chert with cortex, all of which were glacially deposited in the kame. None of the glacial chert was reworked, and all the formal tools were made of Upper Mercer or Flint Ridge Flint.

The FCR was mostly sandstone by count (N=54) and weight (3890.7). The other FCR materials included basalt (N=2; 123.1 g), granite (N=10; 553.1g), and quartz/quartzite (N=17; 448.9). There were 60 spalls and only 23 cores. The small average weight of FCR (61.9 g) coupled with the red discoloration observed on all faces of several pieces would seem to suggest that this FCR assemblage was the result of stone boiling activities (see Custer 2017). Wilson and DeLyria (1999:86) have suggested 70 g as the cutoff for re-useable FCR; at the Silver Lake I site, 61 pieces (73%) of FCR weigh less than 70 g.

As of this publication, there are no features discovered at the site. Test Unit 2, in the northeastern half of the kame, yielded Late Woodland pottery, Middle and Late Archaic projectile points, and numerous pieces of heat damaged flakes, FCR, and small flecks of charcoal. However, no ash lens, pit, or other feature was observed in the first 30 cm of excavation. Due to time constraints, the excavation of this unit was halted at 30 cm and it backfilled. Four pennies were placed in the corners of the unit to mark the location in the event of renewed excavations. Typical of fieldwork, the pottery was found in the last hour of the scheduled work day, near the depth at which every other test pit and unit was hitting sterile subsoil.

The abundant FCR, heat damaged flakes, and calcined bone from Silver Lake Site I are likely the waste products from a fire pit located elsewhere on the site. Other than Test Unit 2, the site has not been investigated farther from the kame edge. However, some observations can be made about the density and distribution of prehistoric artifacts. Figure 5 is an inverse distance weighted (IDW) interpolation, created in QGIS, of the weight of FCR and the location of recovery with other artifact types plotted. A blank white background was used instead of aerial photos or a USGS topographic map for readability. The black line around the map is the boundary of all survey methods (surface, shovel testing, and test units). The area around test unit one to the south clearly has the highest density of FCR. This area also corresponds to the steep sloped path that is heavily eroded. The density of FCR may, in part, be explained by the high rate of site exposure through erosion.

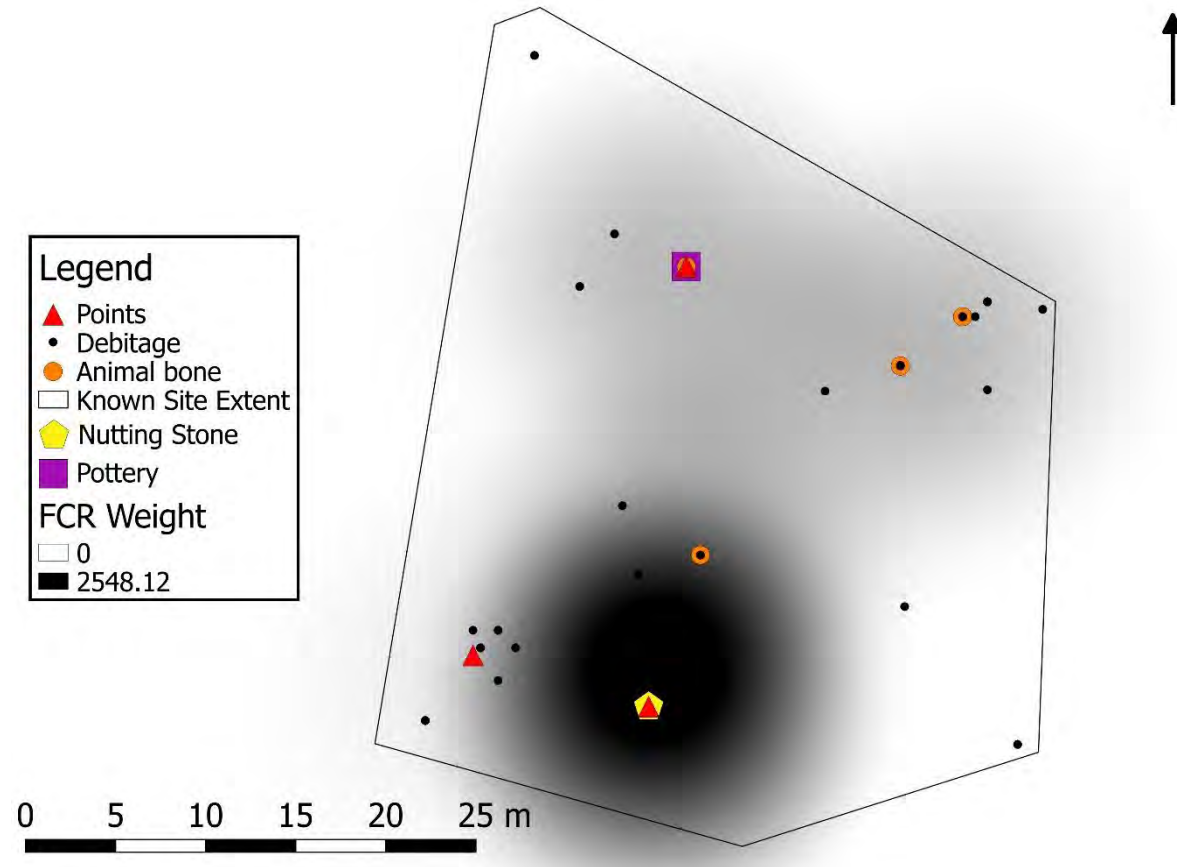


Figure 5: Density map of FCR and other artifacts at 33 SU 639.

The distribution of debitage at the site patterns slightly different. Another IDW interpolation map was created of debitage (flakes and shatter) by weight and location of recovery (Figure 6). A second “cluster” of debitage is in the northeastern corner of the same, which is not subject to the same amount of erosion as the southwestern path.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the lower Cuyahoga River Valley has been extensively studied (Brose et al. 1981; Finney 2002; Whittlesey 1871), the research conducted in the upper Cuyahoga River Valley has been limited (Spurlock et al. 2006; Bragg 2015). The disproportionate research of the lower Cuyahoga Valley is directly related to both the denser urban populations of Akron and Cleveland, and the federally required section 106 compliance within Cuyahoga Valley National Park (Finney 2002).

Prior to the public archaeology project, no archaeological sites were recorded in the Village of Silver Lake. Just outside Silver Lake Park, at the headwaters of Walnut Creek, is the Stow Rock Shelter site (33 SU 642). The Stow Rock Shelter was first excavated by an amateur in the 1950s (Spurlock et al. 2006), and later revisited by Dr. Olaf Prufer of Kent State University in the late 1990s. Excavation of the rock shelter revealed Late Archaic projectile points, in

addition to Late Woodland and Late Prehistoric features; Prufer and Pedde (2006) interpreted the site as a hunting campsite, based on the overwhelming numbers of deer remains almost to the exclusion of other faunal remains. One of the more interesting artifacts recovered from Stow Rock Shelter are two “Chunk-ee” stones, not typically associated with Late Prehistoric cultures in the Cuyahoga River Valley (Spurlock et al. 2006).

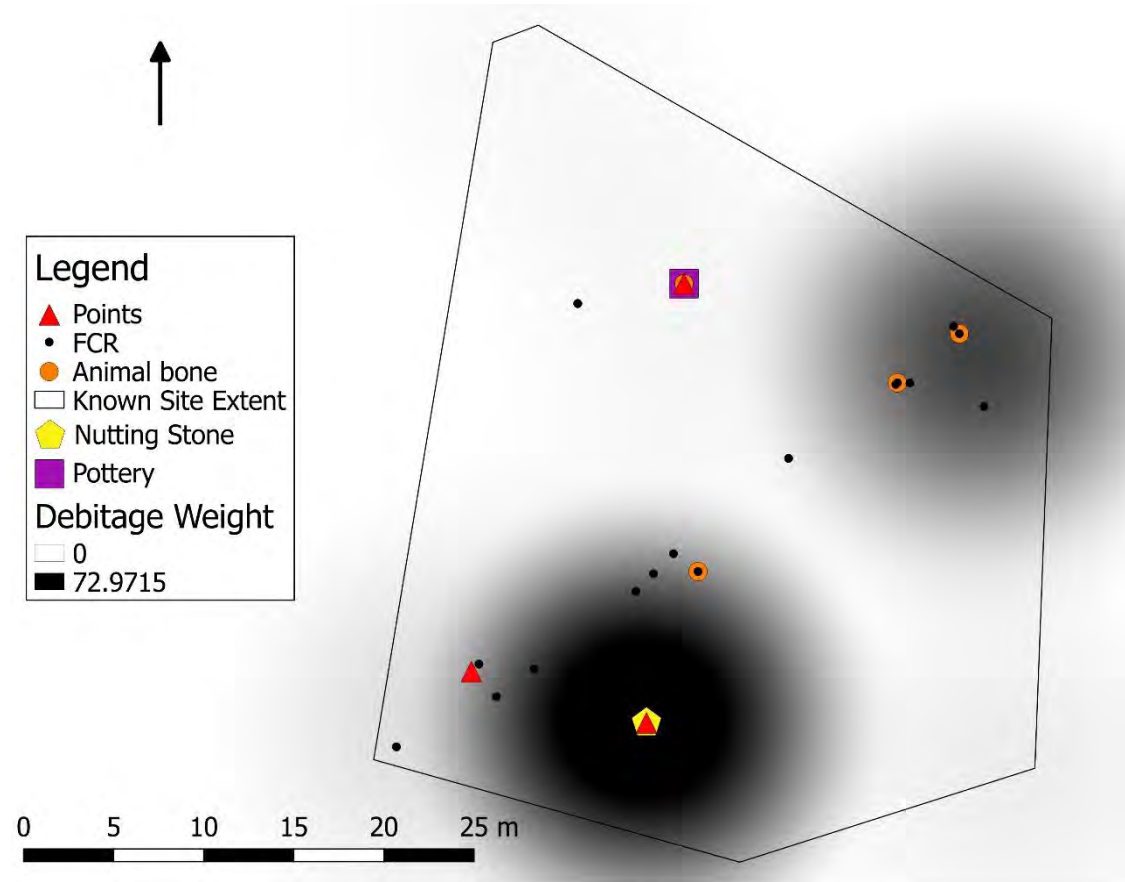


Figure 6: Density map of debitage and other artifacts at 33 SU 639.

The Silver Lake site I (33 SU 639) is likely also a resource extraction camp, but probably for nut harvesting and processing rather than deer processing. Using the fracture attribute analysis from Custer (2017) and Wilson and DeLyria (1999), the FCR are likely the result of stone boiling activities. The vegetation in the area is dominated by mixed oak forests including white, black, chestnut, and scarlet oaks (Forsyth 1970). At the Silver Lake I site, the ground is littered with thousands of acorns from White and Scarlet oaks that could have been easily harvested for nut oil, fat, and meat on an annual basis.

Like the Stow Rockshelter (33 SU 642), the Silver Lake I site contains diagnostic artifacts from the Middle and Late Archaic, Late Woodland, and the Proto-Historic or Historic (the single musket ball) periods. None of the materials recovered during investigations represent

the assemblage of a large village like that described in Lodge (1933). The only artifact that may be contemporaneous to the time of “Chief Wagmong” is the single .40 or .45 caliber fired musket ball. Further discussion is needed to contextualize the ceramic assemblage at 33 SU 639, in addition to the historical accounts of “Chief Wagmong” and his village of 500 people.

Chief Wagmong

The first written account of the Seneca village comes from William Wetmore’s son, Edwin Wetmore, nearly 60 years after the events described (Bloetscher 1981; Lodge 1933). According to the transcribed texts of Charles Cook Bronson (Wybenga and Battista 2006), Wetmore wrote down his memory of Chief Wagmong and the Seneca who lived along the south shore of Silver Lake. In 1804, the year the Wetmore’s moved to Silver Lake, Edwin was 2 years old. In 1805, Wetmore describes the kindness of the tribe to his family when his mother grew sick. The chief’s kindness was tested again with the War of 1812, when Wagmong chose to leave Silver Lake rather than take arms against his friends the Wetmores. The 1812 story of Wagmong was retold in Lodge (1933) and by Karen Fuller at the dedication of the statue erected in his honor (Armon 2014). The Ohio Historical Marker (20-77) located at the entrance to the park indicates the village’s historical account is based on “local lore.”

The Silver Lake Site I likely represents a small campsite possibly representing a handful of re-occupations or even only a single occupation. According to Bloetscher (1981) and Lodge (1933) chief Wagmong’s village had a population of 500 living along the south shore of the lake. Jerri Holland (personal communication, March 2017), claims the village was on Goose Island, southwest of both sites excavated during the project. The number 500 comes from Edwin Wetmore’s original accounts (Wybenga and Battista 2006). During my presentation to the Silver Lake historical society, this number was brought up several times.

So how big is a village of 500? For comparison, the city of Cleveland’s population in 1810 was 57, and did not come close to 500 until 1825 (Whittlesey 1867:456). It seems odd that Edwin’s recollection does not pause to consider the enormous population living in Silver Lake relative to other western settlements at the time. From Birch’s (2014) estimates of early Iroquoian villages (A.D. 1300-1450) a population of 400 to 500 people is reasonable. However, these villages consisted of three or four longhouses surrounded by a palisade. Similar palisaded villages with population estimates can be found within the Cuyahoga River valley. Brose (1994:164-165) estimates 100 to 220 people lived at the South Park site from A.D. 1550 to 1640. However, in Brose’s (1994) analysis, these villages consisted of nine to 15 elongated houses.

Longhouses, or elongated houses, should show up in the archaeological record. The South Park Site (33 CU 8) is one of the largest, densest, and well known archaeological sites in the region. A village of 100 to 500 will leave behind evidence of their activities. While only two locations were investigated as part of the public archaeology project, Lodge (1933) spent decades combing the beaches of Silver Lake and hiking in the woods around town collecting artifacts. No mention is made of a large “village” site that could possibly fit the re-printed story of Edwin Wetmore. In addition to Lodge’s (1933) account, no reports have been located to date about

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Eric Olson

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discoveries during the excavation of the Village of Silver Lake landfill to the immediate southwest of 33 SU 678. It is a large presumption that archaeological discoveries were not made during urban development around Silver Lake, and that Lodge (1933) was accurate in his histories; however, it is not unprecedented to find detailed archaeological information from historical non-professional reports such as newspapers (Olson 2017b; Price 2012).

The known artifact assemblage is not associated with an Iroquois village site. The assemblage is simply too small to represent a village of 500 people. Likewise, the surface area of the kame is too small to support a large group of people. However, the research conducted to date at the Silver Lake sites has opened a new line of dialogue about the history of the village among professionals and community members. Since beginning the project in May 2017, the Silver Lake Historical Society has received artifact donations from around the Village that are now on display at the Village Hall. The author has been called in occasionally to examine artifacts, and future research projects with the Silver Lake Historical Society are planned. Current research is being led by locals, involving historical documents of the formation of the village in 1918, with assistance from professional archaeologists from time to time. By this measure, the goals of the Silver Lake Public Archaeology Program were a success.

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Eric Olson

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¹ Upper and lower Cuyahoga River here refers to the sections of the river above and below Cuyahoga Falls.

² A wood carving of Chief Wagmong was erected to commemorate the Seneca chief in 2014 (Armon 2014).