

Eighteenth Century Domestic Architecture in the St. Joseph River Valley



Domestic architecture refers to the buildings that people inhabited. Archaeologists study these buildings to learn about various aspects of culture such as group size, technology, patterns of movement, and the identities of the inhabitants.

French rowhouse at Fort Michilimackinac. Courtesy of Mackinac State Historic Parks.



Native Americans and the French built domestic structures in and around Fort St. Joseph in accordance with their needs and cultural values. These habitations often left archaeological evidence in the form of fireplaces, postholes, and foundation walls along with the presence of artifacts indicating their function.



▲ Potawatomi summer houses were much larger than winter homes. Summer houses were built with a rectangular frame of saplings, covered with elm bark, and had an arched roof or could be a large domed shaped wigwam. From *Native American Architecture* by Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton.

Structures

and Domestic Activities –

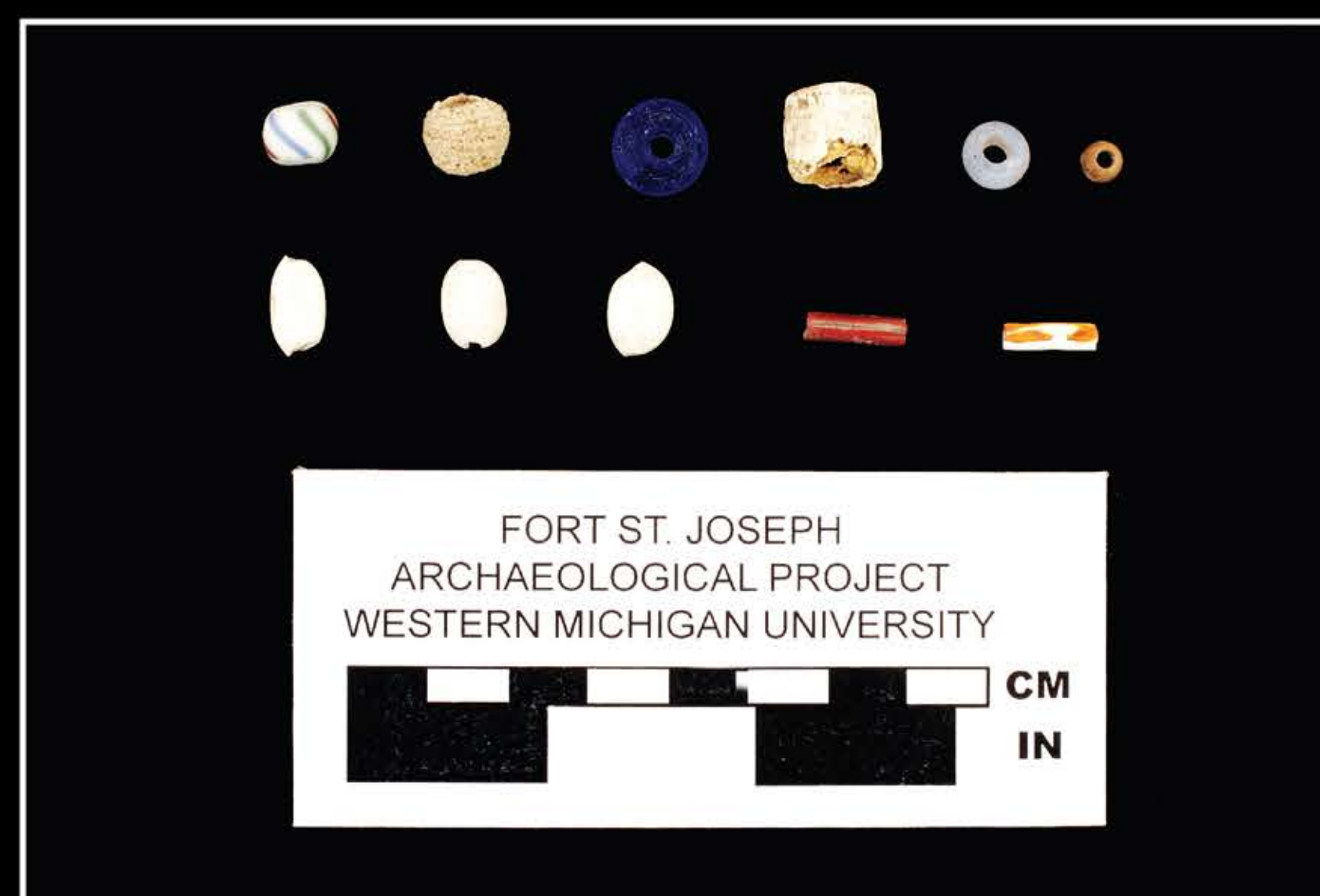
The Potawatomis were the native peoples who lived in southwest Michigan in the eighteenth century. They spent little time in their homes and regarded them as shelters from the weather, places to sleep, and storage areas. They cooked food and ate outdoors. Potawatomi homes had a central fireplace and sleeping platforms padded with mats or skins along the sides. They used the rear of the shelter for storage and hung materials from its frame.

The fur traders, missionaries, and soldiers who inhabited Fort St. Joseph also viewed their homes as shelters — places to sleep and store goods. However, archaeological evidence like



▲ Copper kettles such as this one were used in food preparation and trade activities. Courtesy of the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project.

burned bone fragments found scattered near the fireplaces indicate that they cooked meals inside the structures. Beads recovered from in front of the fireplaces indicate that embroidering occurred indoors, taking advantage of the fire as a source of light and heat.



▲ Left: Beads found at Fort St. Joseph. Right: Thimbles and needles recovered from Fort St. Joseph. These artifacts provided evidence of embroidering activities. Courtesy of the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project.



Attics or lofts may have been built within French-style homes for sleeping areas and to store dry foods and goods used in the fur trade.