

illuminating the Schreiber Wood Project: Exploring the Diversity of Late 19th to Early 20th Century Lighting Devices in Ontario

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We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home of many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Introduction

- The Schreiber Wood Project (SWP) operates as an archaeological field school that focuses on sites (AjGw-534 & -535) associated with two of the three houses built by the Schreibers, a late 19th to early 20th century settler family, on a portion of what is now the University of Toronto Mississauga campus.
- Prominent among the large collection of ceramic, metal, and glass artifacts from the sites are items related to lighting devices, particularly oil lamps.
- This poster provides a tentative criteria for oil lamp characteristics that serve to differentiate lighting device glass from a large collection of vessel glass. The poster also examines how variations in oil lamps can both indicate differing functions and provide insights into the age of individual artifacts in relation to the Schreiber family occupation during the late 19th to early 20th century.

Metal Slip Burners

- Oil lamp burners are responsible for holding the wick upright, wick adjustment by turning the knob on the thumb wheel, and controlling the airflow to the wick for maximum burn of the oil (Russell 2003: 142).
- Metal slip burners are a particular style of burner that holds the chimney in place with four vertical prongs that extend upward from the rim of the base plate (Edminster 2001; Russell 2003: 163).



Figure 1. Brass slip burners demonstrating prong and size variation: metal slip burner with decorative prongs showcasing tear-drop shaped holes (left); metal slip burner with undecorated prongs and a thumb wheel marked "M. B. Co. N. Y. PAT. APL. 30. 1883" (center); metal slip burner with undecorated prongs and a thumb wheel marked "P&A PAT Feb. 11. 1873 PAT Jan. 16. 1883" (right). Photos by Nina Le.

Oil Font and Pedestal Glass

- An oil lamp font refers to either a glass or metal reservoir that holds the liquid fuel in a lamp, whereas the pedestal is a type of columnized base of an oil lamp (Edminster 2001; Thuro 1978).



Figure 2. The top of a glass font with visible markings on the lip (left); the top of a glass font with decorative etching on the body of the glass (center); glass pedestal (right). Photos by Nina Le.

The Kerosene Composite Table Lamp

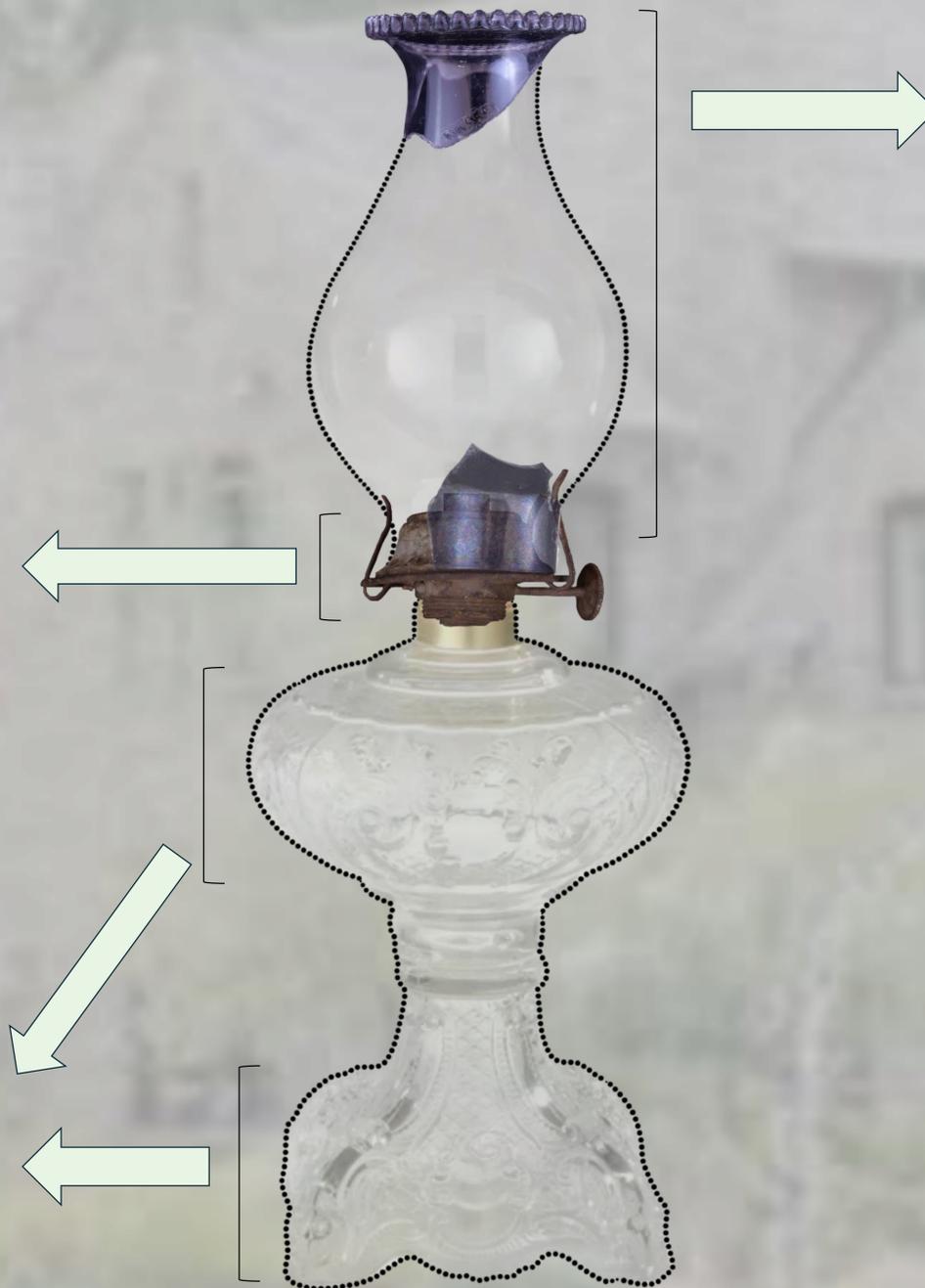


Figure 3. Composite image of kerosene lamp components from the SWP, overlain on an image of a popular lamp style from the 1870s (B&P Lamp Supply Inc. 2024).

Acknowledgments

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Chimney Rim and Body Glass

- Chimneys are a type of glass or metal enclosure that helps control the flow of air to and around an oil lamp burner (Edminster 2001).
- Chimney glass can be further categorized into rim and body glass. Chimney rim glass demonstrates significant diversity (Cooke 1984).

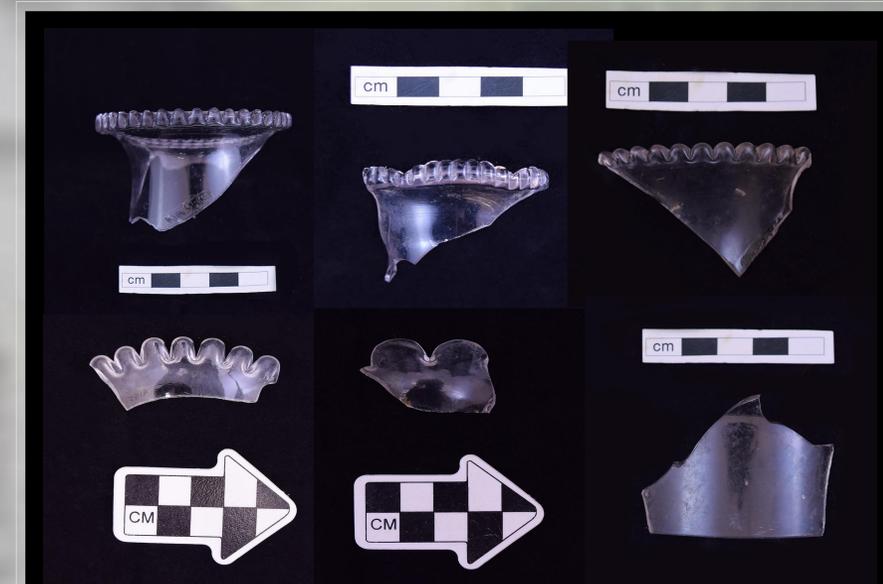


Figure 4. Pearl top chimney rim glass (top left); petal top chimney rim glass (top center); crimp top chimney rim glass with small petals (top right); crimp top chimney rim glass with medium petals (bottom left); crimp top chimney rim glass with large petals (bottom center); chimney body glass (bottom right). Photos by Nina Le.

Table 1. Chimney rim glass, chimney body glass, pedestal glass, and oil font glass average thickness based on collected lighting device artifacts.

	Average Glass Thickness (mm)
Chimney Rim Glass	2.2
Chimney Body Glass	2.2
Oil Font Glass	4.5
Pedestal Glass	5.1

Discussion

- Metal slip burners** from the assemblage (Figure 1) are smaller in size and maintain a simple design, indicating that these types of burners were likely easily replaceable to the Schreiber family. The decorative prongs could indicate a more expensive permanent room lamp (Russell 2003: 164). All burners found are single wick burners as opposed to a double wick, specifying a kerosene burner and therefore dating the burners to the 1870s and later when kerosene replaced whale oil (Russell 2003: 55).
- Glass oil fonts** from the assemblage (Figure 2) are quite thick and maintain a simple design. The decorative etching on the body of the oil font could suggest a more expensive permanent room lamp (Edminster 2001).
- Only one glass pedestal fragment is present in the collection, and it has a simple design.
- Chimney rims** from the assemblage (Figure 4) show an abundance of variation. The decorative rim is characteristic of later chimneys, introduced after 1885 (Cooke 1984).
- Chimney body glass** fragments from the assemblage (Figure 4) share the same thickness as the rims but do not share the same decorative characteristics.
- It is highly recommended that more research be done on defining characteristics of oil lamps with a better representation of each section.