

# Smoking at the Margins: An Analysis of Smoking Pipes from the Second Street Midden (45TN519), Olympia, WA

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## Abstract

This study presents an analysis of smoking pipe fragments recovered from the Second Street Sheet Midden (45TN519), a historic-period site located within the original downtown core of Olympia, Washington. Although the assemblage is modest (n = 86), these artifacts provide insight into everyday practices and spatial behaviors associated with Euro-American settlement between approximately 1853 and 1909. Clay tobacco pipes were ubiquitous, low-cost consumer goods, and are well suited to examining patterns of consumption, discard, and participation in global trade networks. This analysis integrates typological identification with spatial examination of horizontal distribution across the site. The observed discard pattern raises interpretive questions regarding site use, social norms, and the regulation of public versus private space in an emerging territorial capital. Additionally, the presence of imported pipes underscores Olympia's connection with international commodity flows despite its peripheral geographic position. This small assemblage thus contributes to broader discussions of everyday practice, urban order, and economic connectivity in the historical archaeology of the Pacific Northwest.

## Objectives & Methods

This study aims to characterize the smoking pipe assemblage recovered from site and to situate these materials within broader historical and spatial contexts. Specifically, the analysis seeks to: 1) assess the extent to which the assemblage reflects Olympia's participation in local and international trade networks and trends; and 2) contextualize smoking practices in Olympia from the 1850s through 1909. This study uses a small artifact class to explore American settler life in Washington Territory. A total of 86 pipe fragments were analyzed through quantification and measurement. Maker's marks and decorative attributes were recorded to identify production origins and establish approximate date ranges. Condition variables—including completeness, thermal alteration, breakage, and surface wear—were documented to evaluate use-life and discard processes. Spatial data were compiled and analyzed to assess horizontal distribution patterns across the site, with particular attention to clustering.



Figure 1. 1902 Asahel Curtis photograph of the Main (Capitol) and Second (Olympia) Street intersection, looking south. Location of 45TN519 at foreground left.



Figure 2. Foundation excavation in progress at 45TN519 at high tide, December 2020.



Figure 3. Pipe stem segment observed at base of sheet midden on native sediment at 45TN519.



Figure 4. 1853 ad in Washington Standard.

## Olympia's Waterfront

The site is situated on Olympia's historic waterfront, just north of the residence of Levi Smith, where the Bettman brothers established a mercantile in 1853 on the northeast corner of Main and Second Streets (Figure 1). The building and later outbuildings were at least partially constructed on pilings. As the waterfront properties deteriorated and newer buildings were developed along Fourth Street, the Bettman shop relocated some time before 1882. Older waterfront buildings fell into disrepair, and the area became incorporated into Olympia's "Dead Zone" (red-light district), characterized by saloons and "female boarding houses."

## The Second Street Sheet Midden

Site 45TN519 is an unstratified sheet midden that dates to the 1840s – 1900s. The site was capped with dredge fill in 1909. Antiquity Consulting provided archaeological services for a downtown Olympia development beginning in 2019 (Mathews 2020). Construction began in March 2020 with an archaeological monitor present, and an archaeological midden was encountered on the first day of construction. Following testing and data recovery in 2020, mitigation continued through 2023 (Figure 2).

## Preliminary Spatial Patterns of Pipe Discard

Artifact and spatial analyses of site 45TN519 are ongoing; however, preliminary results indicate that although pipe fragments were scattered across the property, the majority of pipe fragments were recovered from two contexts: a shallow privy feature located on the northeast side of the Bettman building and a secondary discard feature along the south side of the structure.

Broader distribution within the sheet midden suggests patterned disposal behavior, with materials concentrated along the street-facing edge of the property and around building perimeters. These patterns are consistent with discard into marginal spaces, potentially including shallow waterfront areas prior to dredge fill. However, extensive water wear was not observed.

## Pipe Styles in 1846–1909 Context

Eighteen pipe fragments from the sheet midden exhibit maker's marks or diagnostic decorative elements (Table 2). Two manufacturers were definitively identified: Duncan McDougall (Glasgow) and Duméril Leurs (St. Omer), with one specimen attributed to Paris production. Six bowl fragments may have been produced by McDougall but used the "TD" emblem that was widely copied from Thomas Dormer after the 1750s. Many of the pipe fragments featured fingerprints left in the manufacturing process. No country of origin marks were observed in this assemblage.

## Pipe Elements Identified at 45TN519

All pipe artifacts recovered from beneath the dredge fill consist of white kaolin clay tobacco pipes, consistent with imported forms dating from ca. 1850s–1900s. Artifacts were classified into four elements: nib, stem, heel, and bowl. Stem fragments dominate the assemblage, comprising 71% of identified specimens (Table 1).

The relative frequencies of these elements are interpreted as reflecting the proportions of pipes made at this time. However, analysis of breakage patterns may challenge prevailing assumptions, particularly the notion that pipe nibs and stems were routinely snapped by smokers to remove accumulated tar from the bore or mouthpiece.

Table 1. Smoking pipe elements represented in 45TN519 sheet midden.

| Pipe Element | Count | % of Assemblage |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|
| Nib          | 1     | 1.2%            |
| Stem         | 71    | 82.6%           |
| Heel         | 4     | 4.7%            |
| Bowl         | 10    | 11.6%           |
| Total        | 86    | -               |

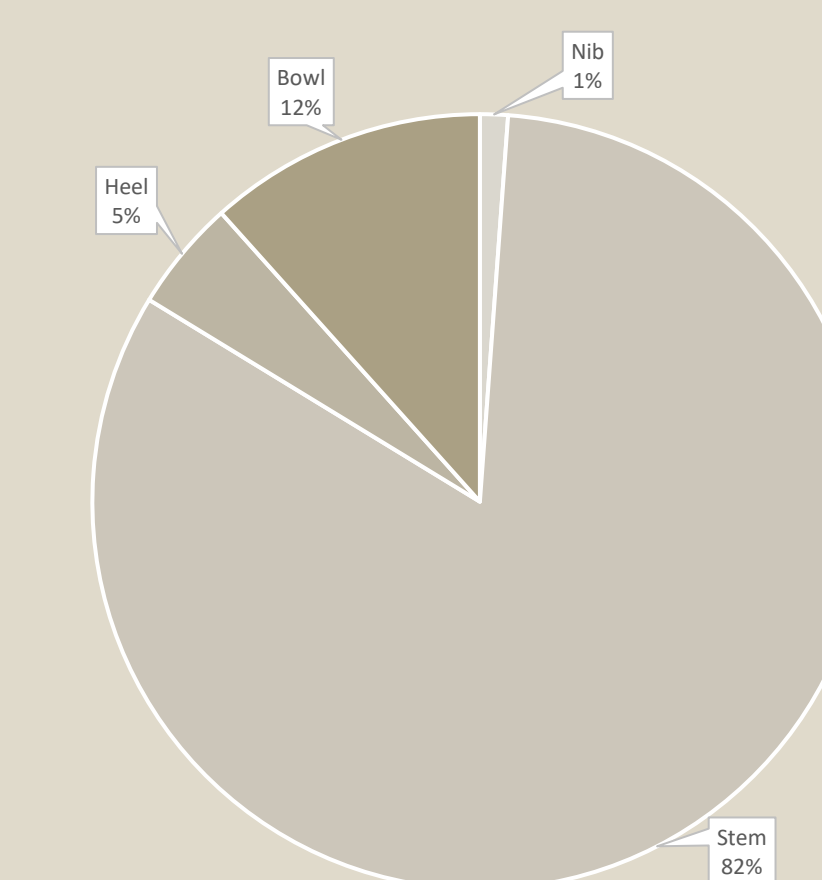
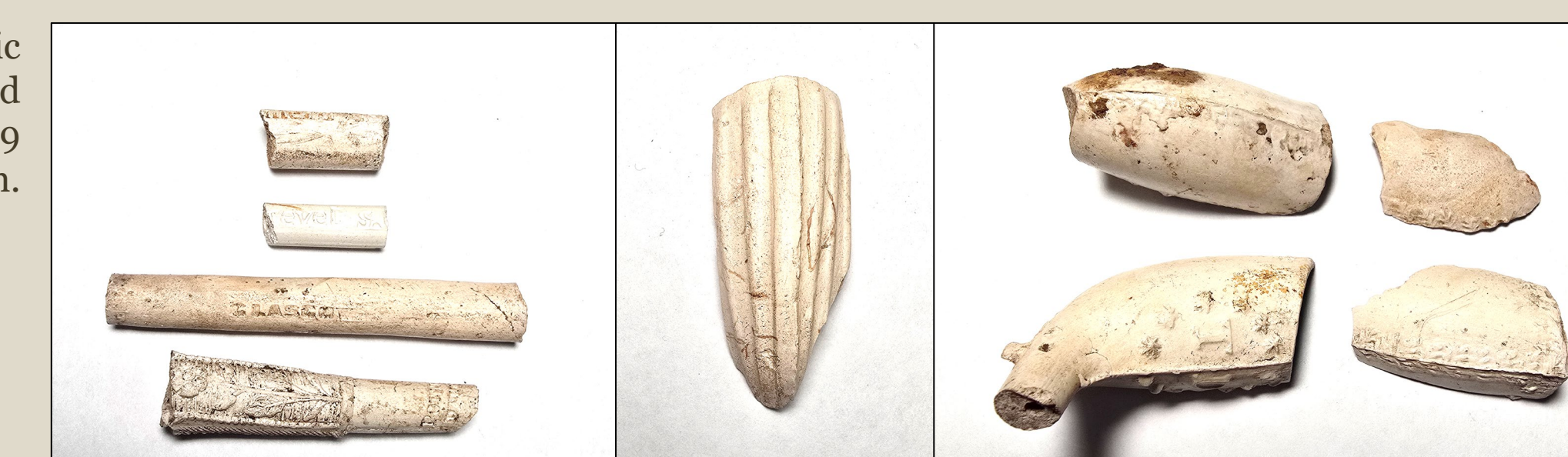


Figure 5. Relative frequency of smoking pipe elements from 45TN519 sheet midden.

Table 2. Pipe designs identified in the 45TN519 sheet midden assemblage.

| Design   | Maker              | Possible Date Range | Location          | Count | % of Assemblage |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------|-----------------|
| "McDougall" / "Glasgow" marked on stem                 | Duncan McDougall   | 1846-1890           | Glasgow, Scotland | 2     | 2.4%            |
| Leaf motif on bowl seam with "TD" encircled with stars | [unknown]          | [unknown]           | [unknown]         | 6     | 7.1%            |
| "Duméril Leurs" / "revet s." or "a St. Omer"           | Dumeril Leurs & Co | 1845-1885           | St. Omer, France  | 2     | 2.4%            |
| Scallop design bowl                                    | [unknown]          | [unknown]           | [unknown]         | 4     | 4.7%            |
| "Bonne Paris" on floral design stem                    | [unknown]          | [unknown]           | Paris, France     | 1     | 1.2%            |
| Oval design on bowl rim                                | [unknown]          | [unknown]           | [unknown]         | 1     | 1.2%            |
| Glazed stem  | [unknown]          | [unknown]           | [unknown]         | 2     | 2.4%            |

Figure 6. Diagnostic elements identified in the 45TN519 sheet midden.



## A Brief History of Tobacco Pipes in America

Clay tobacco pipes represent one of the earliest forms of mass-produced, low-cost consumer goods, emerging within the context of European mercantilist economies. Tobacco, a plant indigenous to the Americas, was introduced to Europe in the 1500s, where it was rapidly adopted for recreational use. Rising demand for tobacco contributed directly to the expansion of colonial plantation systems and the enslavement of millions of people, embedding tobacco consumption within global systems of exploitation and exchange.

By the early 1600s England became a center of pipe production due to the availability of fine white kaolin

clay. As global tobacco use expanded, pipe manufacturing spread to the Netherlands and France, supporting increasingly international markets. By the early 1800s mass-produced clay pipes were widely distributed commodities, with major production and export occurring in England and Scotland through the 1850s, and export from France peaking in the second half of the 1800s into the early 1900s.

In the United States, the McKinley Tariff Act (1891) required imported goods to be marked with their country of origin, providing archaeologists with a means for dating pipe assemblages within global trade networks. Cigarettes largely replaced pipes by the 1930s.

## Conclusion

This preliminary analysis provides insight into tobacco use and import patterns in early Olympia. The assemblage suggests a primary period of deposition between the 1850s and 1880s, consistent with documented American occupation and subsequent capping by dredge fill. These findings point to the circulation of imported clay pipes and their use within a developing waterfront community. The proximity of the Bettman mercantile (1853–1882) to nearby lodging and working docks suggests the site functioned as a social and commercial node where both residents and visitors likely engaged in smoking. Further analysis of the assemblage has the potential to refine interpretations of trade networks, consumer preferences, and social practices.

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References and more papers available: [www.AntiquityConsulting.com](http://www.AntiquityConsulting.com)

