

First Folsom

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Who was the first archaeologist to report evidence of the 10,000-year-old "Folsom" cultural complex in Manitoba? Perhaps the individual who most readily comes to mind is the present writer by virtue of his career-long commitment to research into, and publishing on, the Palaeo-Indigenous history of the province.

However, I wasn't by any means the first person to report the discovery of a Folsom cultural marker hereabouts; that distinction goes to avocational archaeologist Chris Vickers, who made the first-ever and subsequently documented recovery of a single specimen back in 1950. At the time, I was a five-year-old nipper living with my family on the Goose Bay, Labrador air station. Under those circumstances, I was in no position to discover Folsom points in Manitoba or anywhere else.

Chris found the point in question on the north shore of Rock Lake in the Pembina Trench. In his archaeological report of the 1948 field season, he noted that over the past several years he had been on constant alert for sites of the "preceramic past." As it turned out, he found evidence of just such a site on the lowermost terrace of the Pembina Valley. Along this terrace ran a road (Fig. 1), the construction of which had impacted heavily upon the said terrace and its Precontact cultural contents.

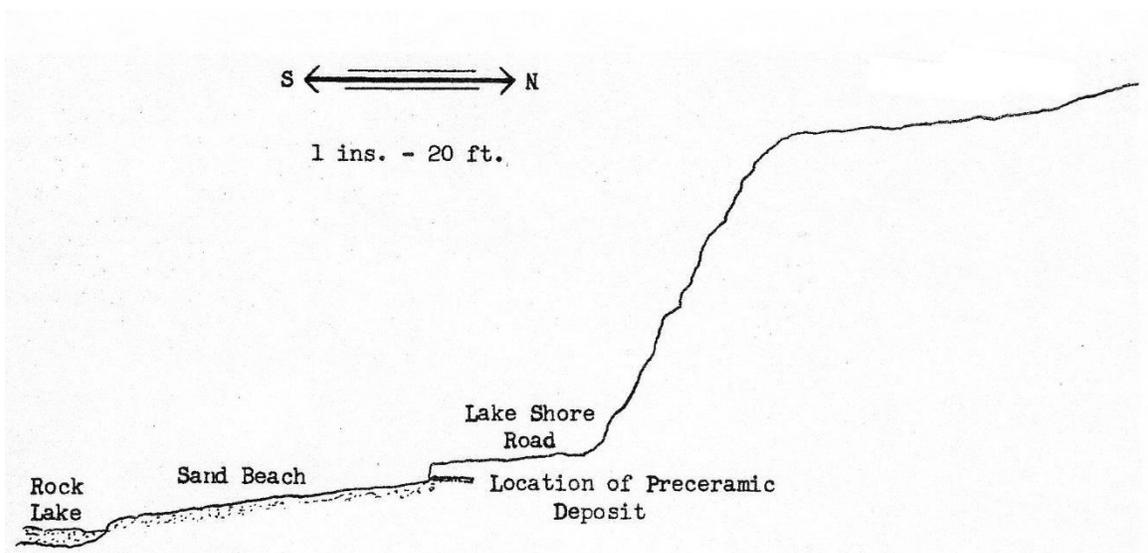


Fig. 1. Chris Vickers' cross-section sketch, drawn in 1948, of the north side of the Pembina Trench at the longitude of the Folsom point find-site.

Trowelling yielded evidence of what Chris denominated the "Lake Shore culture," but which we now call the "McKean complex." He had not yet discovered the Folsom point; that was to come later in 1950 during follow-on work at the site that brought him, in his own words, "to the very edge of the retreating ice sheet," figuratively speaking.

Chris described his unique find as “a true fluted artifact, typical of the stone-working technique that characterized the Folsom period in North American archaeology. This specimen is broken at the base; the material is a grey-black chert and is a good example of a very early type of artifact” [see Fig. 2]. Of more than passing interest is the caption to his artifact sketch shown in Figure 2. The original caption reads, “Fluted artifact. Groove [runs] from base to point [i.e., the tip], *Lake Shore culture, Rock Lake*” [italics mine]. Note that the Folsom point is lumped in with the McKean artifacts under the single rubric “Lake Shore culture”; in those days, all preceramic materials – at least, the ones in the Rock Lake district-- were considered to belong to a single culture -- the Lake Shore complex. Not only that, the presumed association of Folsom and McKean points meant either that the latter were, by modern archaeological standards, 10,000 years old, or the former, 5,000 years young!

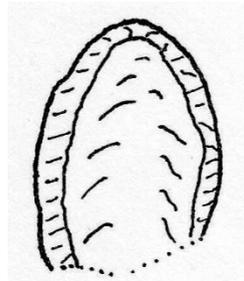


Fig. 2. Chris Vickers' published sketch of the Rock Lake Folsom point.

Since this initial find of a Folsom point, only a handful more of them have been reported in Manitoba. For a discussion of the Folsom period in the province, see “An Environmental and Cultural History of the Central Lake Agassiz Region, with Special Reference to Southwestern Manitoba 12,000 – 7,000 BP,” in the *Manitoba Archaeological Journal*, Volume 21, Numbers 1 and 2, pages 38-45, 2011.