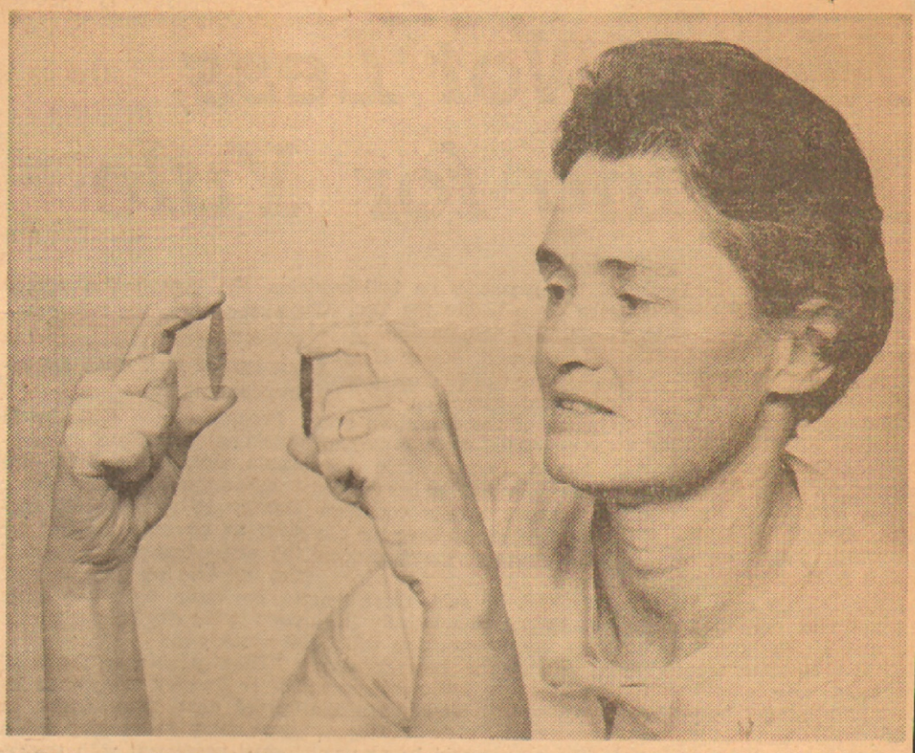

4,000-year-old blades fashioned from flint by people of 'Denbigh' culture in northwestern Alaska, are displayed by Mrs. J. Louis Giddings at Haffenreffer Museum.
—Brown University Photo

Brown Unit Uncovers 4,000-Year-Old House

Brown

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Giddings, headed the expedition. Douglas D. Anderson, Brown archeologist, also was a member.

Dr. Giddings made his first Alaskan discoveries in 1947 and had focused his research since 1956 at the Kobuk River site where ancient tribesmen of the "Denbigh culture" had camped for thousands of years. Erosion through the ages had spread insulating alluvial material over the area in layers which preserved evidence of the occupations in layers to depths of 14 feet. No Denbigh "house" ever had been found until last summer.

The Brown archeologists began digging at the fourth layer, estimated to be 4,000 years old. First they uncovered the remains of a house and some flint tools, then a second house at the same level. These were circular foundations some 12 inches deep in which poles were erected and pulled together at the top to make a framework over which skins or bark were stretched.

Digging two and one-half feet under the foundation first discovered, the archeologists came upon the major find.

"After painstakingly removing with trowels and whiskbrooms another layer of white sand," Mrs. Giddings said, "workers began to note the outlines of a steeply sloping wall. Carefully following its design, they exposed the walls and floor of still another Denbigh house.

"When the definite house signs began to emerge as the workers trowled away the dirt, excitement ran high. The house that was soon revealed is among the oldest yet found in the Arctic."

The foundation was rectangular with rounded corners, instead of circular. But its general construction was much the same as the two "newer" houses above it. Two parallel logs straddled the hearth area, running from front to back, an arrangement still used by Kobuk River Eskimos.

On the floor near the central hearth lay true Denbigh artifacts, including delicately-made flint knives.

In another dig at the lowest strata, estimated to date back 8,000 years, the Brown archeologists found thick pockets of charcoal from man-made hearths at a depth of 14 feet and many chips and tiny stone knives, known as microblades, some no more than a half-inch long. The Denbigh people were adept at stone flaking to make fine flint knives for cutting, scraping and preparing animal hides.

The expedition brought back several thousand specimens of artifacts, charcoal, bones and soil which will be analyzed at the Haffenreffer Museum this winter in a search for new knowledge about the migrating tribes that inhabited Alaska after the Ice Age, when a land bridge connected Alaska and Siberia.

The eight widely stratified bands at the Kobuk River site are believed to contain the remains of 30 cultures. The site has been only partially excavated and Brown University anthropologists expect to continue the field research next summer. Last summer's dig brought many interested archeologists as visitors from the United States, Canada, Sweden and Iceland.