

# Burial of an Ojibwa Chief Muskoka District, Ontario

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ARCHAEOLOGISTS have become accustomed to a rather monotonous routine of digging up hundreds of potsherds, mixed perhaps with a few projectile points, shell beads or bone tools, which for the most part are not very exciting. Once in awhile, they have the good fortune to come upon burials where the deceased have been laid away with the equipment deemed necessary for survival and the proper social position in the next world. But it is seldom that they are fortunate enough to discover the remains of a chief, well-accounted with such possessions, and having besides a well-preserved headdress. Such a stroke of luck befell a private citizen of Barrie, Ontario, in 1948. When he was digging foundations for a cottage, he encountered the grave of an Algonkian Indian, containing a skeleton decorated with the remains of an elaborate costume and well-provided with hunting and cooking equipment.

The discoverer, Mr. Frank Petersen, came upon his find quite without warning while digging in the wet sand on Six Mile Lake, Muskoka District. Mr. Petersen had no archaeological training, but was sufficiently impressed by his find to realize its probable significance. He collected the skeletal remains and the associated grave goods and turned them over to the writer for study. Unfortunately, no note was

made as to depth, position or similar facts, so that on this score we are at a loss for information. Mr. Petersen recalls, however, that the skeleton seemed to be in a sitting position. The remains which he was able to salvage included a skull, 2 femora, 2 tibiae, 7 vertebrae and 1 fibula, humerus, ulna, radius, patella and scapula. Since there is some post-mortem erosion on the cranium and certain leg bones, it is possible that part of the skeleton had decayed, but the writer is uncertain what became of the missing parts. The skull was in moderately good condition, except for such small bones as the nasal spine, the left squamous plate (which was missing) and the broken zygomatic arches. It had also sprung slightly along the coronal suture, thus making accurate measurement difficult, and all the incisors and most of the other teeth of the upper jaw were missing. Of the leg bones, only the humerus was well enough preserved to measure.

It was the grave goods which made the burial so noteworthy. Those removed were an iron axe, a small copper kettle, a fragment of a birch-bark basket, portions of a heavy cloth jacket and—most unusual—a bandeau of silver buckles and wampum beads on the forehead of the skull, (Pl. I). The finding of a burial with this type of headdress so well-preserved may be unique, and in any case is worthy of note.

Enough of the skeleton was recovered to yield some information. The ruggedness of the leg bones, the well-developed supra-orbital ridges andinion of the skull and the angle of the jaw clearly indicate that the deceased was a male. Suture closure had advanced to that stage usually prevalent at the age of 25. All molars had erupted; there was evidence of malocclusion, pyorrhea and caries. The young man, to judge by the somewhat unreliable measurements, was brachycephalic, with a broad face and a nose of medium width. The one measurable leg bone—a fragmentary humerus—indicated that the man stood about 5'6" tall.

His headdress suggests that the young man must have been a person of some consequence. In its present condition, this consists of a band across the upper part of the forehead, well above the brow ridges. The base was probably of felt, and upon this had been fastened two rows of plain silver buckles, with the tongues thrust through the felt from left to right. At one time, these ornaments likely were continuous across the forehead, though only 9 are now visible; several were certainly lost from the left side, and some of those on the right temporal region are now obscured by a piece of birch-bark which adheres in that place. The buckles are simply little circles of silver about 20 cm. in diameter, with a rudimentary sort of tongue, and quite devoid of ornamentation. A band of shell wampum had been placed over the buckles, part of which still remains at the right side of the skull. The wampum may have extended, in front, right across the head, for a small portion still adheres near the back of the skull; in this area, however, the beads are of glass instead of shell. Individually, the beads on the forehead are about 5 mm. long; those on the rear of the skull measure about 2 mm. In both cases they are arrayed in rows just as in

the so-called wampum belts. No colour remains in the shell beads, but the glass beads are white and purple; there is a suggestion that the two colours were combined into a definite pattern. In addition to the beads still adhering to the cranium, 153 were removed from the loose sand and undoubtedly once formed part of the headdress. Only 10 of these were shell, 117 were made of purple glass and 26 of white glass. This would be enough to make a 5-strand bandeau, 4" long, similar to the one on the skull.

The Indian had been buried in a heavy cloth garment, probably of wool, dyed golden yellow with a green cast. It consisted of several layers—mostly padding. The outer part was woven with a two-ply warp in an S-twist, and a single-twist welt of flat, rose-coloured wrapped thread. The inner portion which we take to be padding, was done in a simple herringbone weave, with coarse, brown woolen thread. The jacket was decorated with stripes of braid, which had hemp weft, with a border of silk about 17 mm. wide on one side only.<sup>1</sup> The braid was accented at intervals with round brass buttons made in two sections, (Fig. I). Beyond this we cannot determine many of the details of the costume.

The iron axe head is in the usual 17th century French form, with a length of 15 cm. and a width of 7 cm. No stamp mark is visible in its present corroded condition. The copper kettle is a simple affair with a slightly rounded bottom and almost straight sides, completely lacking in decoration; it is damaged on the bottom at one side, probably intentionally. The only other metal objects were six small copper bangles found in the loose sand,

1. The study of the textile remains was made by Miss Vera Clark, of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, and Miss Jessie Roberts, Department of Household Science, University of Toronto, to whom my thanks are due for the identification.

that "wampum continued in vogue into the first three or four decades of the 19th century but its day was done."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the shell and glass wampum in this burial date from about the last-mentioned years.

Silver was a medium new to the Indians, and its introduction can fortunately be dated rather accurately. Moreover, we would expect the earlier products to be simple and less elaborate than the later. Compared with collections of silver jewelry from the Indians of the northeast in later times—chiefly the 19th century—the pieces found in the burial are relatively simple, being mere rings with a tongue. Though similar forms persisted into later times, the complete absence of more sophisticated styles from the burial would seem to indicate that we are here very close to the threshold of the introduction of silver to these people. In 1794, Loskiel remarked that the Delaware and Iroquois both adorned their heads with a considerable weight of silver ornaments, but he did not describe them. Heckewelder is more help; he speaks of "a kind of round buckle with a tongue, which the Indians fasten into their skirts"<sup>2</sup>—precisely the kind found in the burial, only these were fastened into felt. Barbeau would have it that such articles were first manufactured in Philadelphia about 1758, but points out that silver ornaments did not become abundant until after 1775.<sup>3</sup> Traquair, another authority on the silver trade, says that "so far as dates can be fixed, all that has been found up to now, crosses, crucifixes, brooches and bosses alike, date from the years 1790 and 1853".<sup>4</sup>

In the light of the evidence, we may not be far wrong in dating the burial to about 1790-1810, for this seems to be ap-

proximately the time when the simple silver buckles would be most common, when the combination of shell and glass wampum might still be possible, and only a few years after the buttons came into use. The axe and the kettle we must put down, as heirlooms, and perhaps the same is true of the chert arrow point. The family of our dead Indian must have been an important one, and one which set a high value upon the symbols of prestige inherited from past generations, as well as a well-to-do one by contemporary standards.

There is no positive proof as to the tribal connections of the young man. The headdress tells us nothing, at least at this stage, for such gear was used by many people of the Northeast Woodlands. The axe, kettle and jacket are contradictory, for the first, being French, suggests that the man was probably an Algonkian, and the kettle appears to be English. Yet the English were more closely associated with the Iroquois, at least in early times. The arrow point seems to be of Iroquoian origin, but the birch-bark basket is almost certainly Algonkian. And, as we have seen, the skeletal remains have yielded no proof one way or the other; in fact, it would be a rare case indeed which could do so. In the face of such conflicting evidence, we must base any opinion we reach upon the grounds of probability, and it seems that the man was most likely an Algonkian. This is so because (I) the burial occurred in territory held by tribes of that stock both before and since interment, and more specifically Ojibwa; (II) the birch-bark basket is definitely Algonkian in concept and style, and (III) the headdress could well be Algonkian. Perhaps we are really influenced by the locale of the burial in reaching such a decision, but in the absence of any positive proof to the contrary, it seems to have the best support.

Mr. Petersen apparently found the re-

1. Woodward, Dr. Arthur: 1934, Vol. 3, No. 6, Pp. 20.  
2. Heckewelder: Pp. 270.  
3. Barbeau: Pp. 29, 1940.  
4. Traquair: Pp. 88, 1940.