

NC0047 Cree woman's¹ paddle

One interpretation of the repetitive zigzag design on both sides of this paddle takes into account Cree cosmology. Believing in a tripartite world composed of sky, earth and water, the Cree incorporate this cosmological concept into their material culture. For example, iconographic zigzags, representing the powers of the Sky World, are recognized as bolts of lightning emanating from the claws of the Thunderbird while undulating and/or repeated mirrored curves depict the waves and currents of the Water World. In turn, the Earth World is represented by such tangible materials as wood, hide, bone, antler, or more recently, in floral imagery, all of which possess not only the powers inherent in the earth but also have gained the powers of the Sun during their growth. Any combination of two or three of these cosmological aspects creates a synergistic power particularly important in areas or activities requiring such potent strengths of spiritual power. Canoeing in northern waters provides a prime example when those in the canoe would need the added power and protection of the spirits of the both the Sky and Earth Worlds. Furthermore, as the Thunderbird remains the mortal enemy of the much-feared Underwater Lynx (or Panther) as well as other malevolent spirits of the water, the repeated zigzags on this paddle would increase its power and invoke the protection of the Thunderbird to calm angry waters.

Adney, Edwin Tappan and Howard I. Chapelle

1983 *The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America*. Washington, D.C.:

Smithsonian Institution Press.

Flannery, Regina and Mary Elizabeth Chambers

1985 Each Man Has His Own Friends: The Role of Dream Visitors in Traditional East Cree Belief and Practice. *Arctic Anthropology* 22(1): 1-22.

Oberholtzer, Cath

1991 Embedded Symbolism: The James Bay Beaded Hoods. *Northeastern Indian Quarterly* 8(2): 18-27.

Cath Oberholtzer 2008

¹ cf. Adney and Chappelle 1983:133; Figure 124. See also, model paddles in the British Museum 1923.6.194ab.

NC0047
WC 8608007
NC0048

NC0047 is a wooden canoe paddle decorated on both sides with stained or painted decorations. Length 67 inches.

WC 8608007 is a small pouch decorated with quillwork on both sides. Length 5.675 inches; width 5.25 inches.

NC0048 is a wooden bow wrapped with sinew and inscribed on the mid-section with a written text. Length 61 inches. The bow has two cracks, one of which was repaired in the 1980's by Harold Gowers, retired head of the British Museum Conservation department. The readable part of the old written text states; "Esquimaux Bow with Arrows and bound with deer sinew. Presented to Dr. Gifford by George Holt, 1775". Harold Gowers covered this text with a preserving varnish. Included with the bow are 33 feather-fletched arrows. Some of the arrows are broken and the feather work is in poor shape.

These artifacts, as well as a strap of woven beadwork, a quillworked knife sheath, and three other wooden bows, were preserved as part of the Andrew Gifford Collection in the Baptist Academy Museum, Bristol, England, until 1979, when these artifacts were sold to Mrs. Linda Barnard Finer. These were the only ethnographic objects in the Gifford Collection, for the rest consisted of books, manuscripts and pictures.

Mrs. Finer was a collector and sometime dealer in tribal art and living in London, and well known to the staff at Christie's Auctions. After she acquired this collection, Harold Gowers cleaned all artifacts from layers of grime and made the aforementioned repair. By extensive research in the Greater London Record Office, the Hudson Bay Archives in London and the British Museum, Mrs. Finer was able to discover the following historical data pertaining to these artifacts.

The Reverend Dr. Andrew Gifford was born in Bristol in 1700 as the son of a Baptist minister. Andrew too became a Baptist minister, as well as a private collector of antiquities and an expert in numismatics. In 1757, he took up his residence in London, where he was appointed as the first Assistant Keeper in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Museum. During his residence in London, Gifford maintained wide-ranging cultural interest, and his collecting of curiosities was known to many people. At his death in 1784, Gifford bequeathed his collection to the Baptist Academy in Bristol.

Most of the early archives of this academy have long since disappeared, but there survives a handwritten inventory of the books and manuscripts donated by Gifford. This inventory was made in 1787-88, shortly after the donation was received. No reference to the ethnographic items was found other than the written text on the bow. There is more faint writing on the bow, which an expert with correct lighting may be able to decipher.

The George Holt mentioned on the bow was born in 1749, the son of a London cheese monger. In 1768, he was hired as a crewmember on a Hudson's Bay Company ship, sailing to Fort Prince of Wales near present Churchill on the southwest shore of Hudson Bay. Holt served in the region from 1768 until 1771, first as a sailor, then as a mate, and finally as a sloop master.

In 1769, he moved from Fort Prince of Wales down the coast to York Factory. In 1770-'71, Holt visited Inuit camps at present day Eskimo Point, Whale Cove, Dawson Inlet and Marble Island. In 1771, he returned to Fort Prince of Wales, where he carved his name on the nearby rocks, presumably just before he returned to England (The Beaver, Winnipeg, June 1943).

Back in London, George Holt presented an Inuit ("Esquimaux") bow to Dr. Andrew Gifford in 1775, and at the latter's death in 1784, it was donated to the Baptist Academy in Bristol. Mrs. Finer assumed that the other ethnographic objects in Gifford's collection were part of Holt's gift to Gifford in 1775. In 1986, Mrs. Finer offered this collection for sale. The following notes may lend some support for their association with George Holt.

The canoe paddle (NC0047) conforms to the type used by the northern Cree people on Hudson Bay. Typically, the handle is scarcely more than half the length of the paddle; in this case the handle is even somewhat shorter. This may well be the oldest Cree paddle in existence, and its decoration is more elaborate than on recent Cree paddles. Painted paddles from both sides of the Hudson Bay are illustrated in the literature. It is recorded that such paintings had a personal meaning based upon dream experiences. The zigzag pattern on this early example may stand for water.

Adney, E.T. & H.I. Chapelle, *The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of North America*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., 1964, p. 133.

Taylor, J.G., *Canoe Construction in a Cree Cultural Tradition*. National Museum of Man, Ottawa, 1980, p. 95.

VanStone, J.W., *Material Culture of the Davis Inlet and Barren Ground Naskapi*. Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1985, p. 21.

The quillworked pouch (WC 8608007) is in pristine condition. It is a miniature of the shotpouch worn by the northern Cree hunters in the 18th century. The quillwrapped fringes hold tassels of red-dyed hair. Unique is not only its small size but also its decoration on both sides with strips of woven quillwork. Most probably this small pouch was made as a present for a European visitor, possibly for George Holt while he was at York factory in 1769.

The bow (NC0048) is unmistakably Canadian Inuit origin, reliably documented and dated back to the early 1770s. Acquired along the coast of present Keewatin, it is probably of Caribou Eskimo origin.

I have a photograph of six of the arrows and they appear to be too short for the Inuit bow. Moreover, most Arctic arrows that I have seen have shafts consisting of two parts. The points on these arrows are of metal and of a most unusual form. They have a large barb on one side of the point only, and the point extends from a conical tube that fits around the end of the wooden shaft. Bone harpoon points of the Inuit have frequently a barb on one side only, but they fit into, not over, the end of the shaft. Metal points, as on these arrows, are exactly the same shape as those used on harpoon-arrows from Liberia (Hirschberg & Janata, 1966; 196). Unknown from North America, these arrows may have been in Dr. Gifford's collection, but he did not acquire them from Gorge Holt. I have not seen the other arrows in the group.

Hirschberg, W. & A. Janata, *Technologie und Ergologie in der Volkerkunde*.
Hochschultaschenbuecher 338, Mannheim, 1966.

With the exception of the arrows, the other objects undoubtedly came from the Hudson Bay Region in the late 18th century. Certainly the bow, but also the paddle and pouch were most probably collected by George Holt around 1770.

Drs. T.J. Brassler
Peterborough, Ontario
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