Greetings!

The Mind of a Collector

by Charles A. Neff

I received positive feedback from the first installment of Mr Neff's memoir so I will continue to include excerpts. I came across this memoir while transcribing family papers for a friend. None of this information has been published and the artifacts which Mr. Neff collected over many years were destroyed in a fire. However, he left this narrative and photographs of his collection.

In the spots favored of the Indians (supposed to have been Iroquois) were to be found rather finely cracked stones which had unquestionably been brought there, for no entirely satisfactory reason that I have heard adduced, for the average size of such stones is about that of the ordinary "road material" used today. They appear not to have been reduced by fire but by what must have been laborious cracking, for they bear few original surfaces. However this may be, they were the unfailing sign of aboriginal occupation. These favored sites varied in length from a rod or two to a quarter mile and were almost invariably confined to places where the bank was of more than average height. An exception is a low shore which today marks a "carry" for canoes from the river by a short cut to the lake and which we may believe was so used by the Indians.

Tradition has it that the Indians visited this river seasonally, probably in the Spring, coming down from the frozen North for the early fishing. This stretch of the Missisquoi has an average width of perhaps two hundred feet. As it flows northerly it broadens and just before it enters that part of Lake Champlain known as Missisquoi Bay divides into three branches, with a delta
much like that of the Mississippi. Both in lake and river a fairly varied fish population is found. Until within a few years the spearing of fresh-water sturgeon from the bridge just below the dam was a regular Spring event, and even today they are occasionally so taken. The wall-eyed and ghostly pike too is freely caught in the Spring, with the going out of the ice, and an occasional mascalonge is taken even within the village limits, both above and below the dam. His small but no less tigerish brother, the pickerel, of several species is to be found in both lake and river plentifully. We mainly fished for them with trolling spoons, and on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion my son hooked and with my assistance landed one which scaled 11 1/2 lbs., measured 40 inches in length and 13 inches in circumference. His struggles in the boat broke our favorite spoon, but we did not hold it against him. Black bass, both large- and small-mouth are there, but not plentifully at all seasons. That citizen of the world, the yellow perch, is there of course, ready to bite at anything that bears the semblance of life, whether a worm or a spoon. The humble but succulent "bullpout" (catfish) is there, with the eel and a number of other species. The aristocratic trout is conspicuous for his absence.

As I have said, up to the year 1912, fishing and boating had as I believed filled to the full my vacation activities. Thenceforth the newer interest of hunting Indian remains had the preference. When I returned that year to Brooklyn where I lived, filled with the zeal of the convert, I looked about to see how I might continue my new pursuit within accessible distances. I learned that the New York Museum of Natural History was actively engaged in investigating Indian remains in New Jersey in cooperation with the authorities of that State. From Mr. Kinner, of the Museum's staff, some useful hints were obtained as well as some publications of the results of surveys of the vicinity of New York City and of the State of New Jersey issued by the State Geologist of that State. However, it was not until 1913 that I was able to annex, as it were, personally, productive sites of my own. Henceforth Sundays and holidays became sacred to the quest of the never-too-plentiful "artifact", as Indian relics are modernly known. The state of the weather became a subject of the liveliest concern about Friday afternoon, and one or two slips on the part of the weather man during that first year, when the new convert's zeal flames brightest, seemed nothing less than a personal affront.
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