

In Retrospect—The Early Archaeologist and His Contribution

ARTHUR B. CARR, Indianapolis

With knowledge of the rapid progress which present-day archaeological research is making toward a solution of vital prehistory problems, one naturally harks back to early indications of interest in the collection and study of prehistoric artifacts, the enduring documentary evidence of the past existence of primitive peoples.

As among friends, may I say that, acting upon the suggestion that I participate actively in this program, I have prepared what seems a far cry in nature from the usual strictly scientific papers of members of this section, seeking to present that early phase and period, potentially important to later study, and perhaps refresh your memories relative to the awakening of your own interest in anthropology, perhaps through a lucky find during a hiking trip, the specimen becoming the nucleus of a worthy collection, or at least an inspiration for the pursuit of a wholesome and fascinating study.

With such a background, one may imagine the enthusiasm of those who, during and immediately following the pioneer period, might gather with little effort, large quantities of implements of human manufacture, the use of which could only be conjectured, since perhaps little used if at all by the historic Indians living within the region until 1838, sixteen years after the Pigeon Roost massacre in Scott County.

To those early hobbyists, the sight of man-made mounds and fortifications was doubtless awe-inspiring and wonder-provoking, but conjecture satisfied for a time the latent desire for definite knowledge. Perhaps the obvious purpose and usefulness of their valued pieces was their foremost interest. Content with the collection of surface finds, they were of the theoretical school of archaeology, leaving action for those of that other, the later practical school, whose followers elected to dig, preserve, study, and compare discoveries in various sections, with a definite knowledge of ancient man the objective of perhaps their life-long effort, their work being covered by the term anthropology, the study of man.

The early amateur scientist doubtless envisioned the extensive use of soft substances, as wood and other perishable material by the makers of his stone artifacts, but sources of enduring material, classification, methods of manufacturing, chronology and culture were of little concern, and terms such as "pattern", "phase", and "aspect", were archaeologically speaking, foreign to their vocabularies. May we not acknowledge that even today, lists of traits of culture patterns need perhaps be modified, through inevitable involvements and influences, which tend to alter decisions?

Many notes and details of early discoveries, resulting in the published records in the early Geological Reports of Indiana, on archaeological finds in our state, describing with accuracy the surface objects, the location of sites and contour of fortifications et cetera, which even then were obscure and almost unrecognizable, were largely the contributions of those zealous amateur collector scientists of yesteryears, whose research methods were primitive, though effective, and helpful to those of experience who came after them. We concede the vastly superior composition and scientific accuracy of the present day publications, the splendid Prehistory Research Series, and the numerous other reports.

Inadvertantly, the early collector engaged in a little "digging", perhaps to satisfy curiosity, or work off surplus energy, but almost invariably with disappointing results. Surface finds were sufficient to meet the desire of the most ardent collector, so the few disturbed monuments seldom brought serious discouragement to later, authorized excavators. In this, I may not have your complete approval, but why begrudge those early enthusiasts their occasional indulgence in a little skeletal uncovering? After all, artifacts found, invariably came down to posterity.

I should mention the willing cooperation of early collectors in various communities who welcomed in their midst many eminent archaeologists who came from time to time; and contributed in a large way to the success of the efforts of the visiting scientists, who sought local data, and engaged in exploration and excavation. Present day research is benefitted by such helpful measures.

It appears that the practice of exchange of relics between early collectors of a community was prevalent, but with little infiltration of material from outside, or remote sources, so that most such collections might be considered as localized, a factual asset in later scientific research.

I ask your indulgence for projecting into the picture something of a personal nature, through introducing James L. Carr, my father, as one of those early archaeologists of amateur status, who had opportunity to explore over large areas of virgin soil but recently "cleared" and broken by the plough. As a young man he developed interest and zeal in the study of the mysterious forms of Indian origin so numerous in Clark County, his native section of the state, that adjacent to the Falls of the Ohio, and rich in antiquities. This region in recent years has been the scene of much carefully planned and executed excavation and research, chiefly by E. Y. Guernsey, whose youthful beginnings in anthropology were engendered through contact with father and his hobby. (I may say that E. Y.'s father and my father's mother were brother and sister.) I mention also that another, a recognized authority in his line, our own Glenn A. Black, graciously ascribes his initial interest in this field, to have been the same source, though later, in Indianapolis.

Through the years Carr's village store was the setting for many hundreds of transactions, whereby pocketsful of flints, quantities of grinders, diggers, axe-heads, hammers and other queer shaped Indian stones, (to use familiar terms of the period), brought in principally by

boys of the farm, whose watchful eyes frequently detected the unusual forms as they tilled the soil, were gladly relinquished, the medium of trade usually being handfuls of peanuts and candy, possibly a Barlow knife or a pair of gallouses, since the common relics had little intrinsic value. Somewhat rare or more sought after types however, were always acquired at "fair" and even "fancy" prices. At times the seller would drive a hard bargain with success. So numerous that they were picked up with comparative ease, the relics served as an incentive for frequent trips to town. It is related that it was sometimes difficult to restrain a small trader from giving a pyrotechnic demonstration to show the high efficiency of his choice arrow or spear heads through "making the sparks fly" as he said. There is abundant evidence of such mutilation in every collection.

With not too much local competition, father's collection grew apace, and at its peak numbered in the thousands. To encourage the collecting spirit particularly among his youthful townsmen, he through the years made gifts of specimens and small groups of objects to those interested. Pictorial evidence of its meagre beginning is a small tintype of his early collection, but of the pieces shown thereon, three are illustrated in Mr. Eli Lilly's "Antiquities of Indiana", published nearly eighty years later, in 1943, as are others, father's collection with some of my own material having been incorporated into the valuable Indiana Historical Society collection. May we not conclude that through preserving the vast numbers of choice Indiana artifacts which finally came to be a part of that famous aggregation of material, the collectors of our state extended a worthy service?

Contemporary with father's activities, were those of his friend Prof. W. W. Borden and others, some in adjoining counties, while across the Ohio, in Kentucky, General Bennet H. Young and others were amassing large accumulations of valuable material, and giving intensive study to finds and sites in that state.

I find in father's files interesting correspondence with eminent collectors of those early years, also of later date his certificate of membership in the International Society of Archaeologists, with Bulletins of that organization published in 1909 and succeeding years, which had a circulation of around six thousand copies. Laudable aims of the Society were:

To lessen as much as possible the reckless opening of Indian graves and mounds;

To curb the mercenary spirit so manifest in some individuals;

To unite the collectors and students for mutual aid and protection;

To expose frauds and makers of fake relics.

From this source I quote a statement from an Indiana collector and dealer who had been expelled because of fraudulent practices. Quote—"I do not care where a thing comes from, or what it is, if I buy it as an Indian relic, I will sell it as an Indiana relic". Fortunately, in the early years of collecting, there was little incentive for fraud, and seldom was it practiced. With an almost uncanny ability to detect

fake artifacts, authorities of today could scarcely be misled into the acceptance of pieces not genuine, except perhaps for use as type replicas.

It has been said that the commonest artifact of prehistoric workmanship loses nine-tenths of its study value after having passed through the hands of a dealer, since it has probably completely lost its identity as to location, though its monetary value may have increased through commercial manipulation, regulating supply and demand. Even in fair dealing, the "Almighty Dollar" the predominant religion of the many, has often been a deterrant in the pursuit of archaeology.

Fortunately, few of the early collectors could rightfully be classed as dealers, and it is our observation and contention that the innumerable hobbyists, with their groups of implements of prehistoric life of the region, gathered, and preserved intact, have made a distinct contribution and proven a great boon to the study of physical anthropology, and the remarkable present day unraveling of the knotty problems concerning ancient peoples of Midwest America.