

# SANDSTONE AND CHISEL: THREE HISTORIC OHIO "INDIAN" ROCK CARVINGS

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## INTRODUCTION

Historic rock carvings often have intrinsic interest as folk art, not to mention their historic significance, and are worth documenting for that reason alone. Also, in today's politically charged climate, archaeologists and historians are often required to assess the validity of "Indian rock carvings," as it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Historic rock carvings from prehistoric carvings. Unfortunately, politicizing rock art has become a common tactic with some Native Americans, so that it is important to document the specific nature and history of any and all "Indian rock carvings" before they can be co-opted by any particular group. Three such Historic carvings are documented in this article.

## THE JOBES INDIAN HEAD ROCK, WASHINGTON COUNTY, OHIO

In September, 2007, while trying to locate a purported Indian rock carving in the village of Bartlett, Washington Co., Ohio, I learned from local historian Myrtie McVicar of nearby Vincent, of an Historic petroglyph in the form of an Indian head. She put me in contact with Lee Jobes, the son of the man who made this and other carvings, as well as Dana McAtee, who kindly took me to the location of the Jobes petroglyph.

The carving is located on a small sandstone cliff adjacent to an abandoned road in Fairfield Township, Washington Co., about a mile south of Union Cemetery, and cannot be reached by car. Figure 1 shows the main features of the carved head, which is three dimensional and sports a feather headdress. The carving is about 12 inches high. The soft Dunkard sandstone is heavily eroded and covered with moss and lichens, and the carving is only moderately well preserved, due largely to its heavy relief. More shallow carvings would by this time undoubtedly have been obliterated by weathering.

Figure 2, taken at a slightly different angle, shows the initials L.J. carved immediately to the left of the head and well above it is the year 1928. Proximity of names, dates, initials, or other carvings do not prove contemporaneity, but in this case there is reliable oral tradition. According to Lee Jobes, his father, "Lon" Jobes (1889-1968) made this and other carvings while monitoring oil well drilling in the area. The 1920 census lists Alonzo B. Jones as a stationary engineer in Wesley Township, Washington Co., while his brother Frank J. Jobes was an oil lease boss in Palmer Township. By 1930 Frank was an oil field foreman but "Lon" had taken up farming.

According to Lee Jobes, his father had considerable spare time while monitoring the oil wells and began rock carving to pass the time. Besides the Indian head near Bartlett, he also made a number of carvings in sandstone outcrops along Muskingum River tributaries near Stockport. Most of these, however, were subsequently vandalized. For this reason, a more specific location for the Jobes Indian Head Petroglyph is not provided here. (Many years ago there was a somewhat similar, elaborately Indian head carved by an unknown sculptor in Silver Switch Hollow, a tributary of the Ohio River between East Liverpool and Wellsville, Columbiana Co., Ohio, but it, too, was destroyed by vandals.)

No one is likely to mistake the Jobes Indian Head for prehistoric art, especially since it is three-dimensional, clearly signed and dated, and includes an Indian headdress more typical of Plains Indians than those who inhabited Ohio. Its location along an abandoned road cut into the small cliff is further evidence, although the strongest evidence is the information provided by Lee Jobes.

## THE BAUGHMAN PARK INDIAN HEAD ROCK

Baughman Park has been much in the news recently due to the auctioning of the more prominent, free-standing rock art. The story of this remarkable sculpture park has been detailed by Aaron Keims (2001). The park is located along a ridge top formed of resistant Massillon sandstone, north of Black Run and about three miles west of Frazeyburg, in Jackson Township of Muskingum County.

The statues and other carvings at Baughman Park were the work of Brice Baughman (1875-1954), whose father Noah Baughman opened a sandstone quarry in 1898. Brice began carving the larger statues in 1898, beginning with William McKinley and continuing until 1972, his last effort being the Harding statue. (At the recent auction, the McKinley statue brought \$8500 while Harding's soared to \$35,000 and one of Grant to \$36,000.) After operating a funeral home along with the Baughman farm for many years, the elderly Baughman moved from the farm to nearby Dresden. After his death in 1954, the land passed through several hands, eventually being purchased by the Longaberger Co. in 1997, which sold it in February of this year to Kevin and Heather Morehouse.

The most dramatic sculptures are the dozen or so large free-standing statues of various 19<sup>th</sup> century politicians and sol-

diers – besides Washington and Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, General William T. Sherman, and General James B. McPherson are represented. Scattered throughout the wooded park are additional smaller bas-relief carvings along the sandstone ledges. These include an Indian head and torso, replete with feather headdress and raised tomahawk, on a ledge next to another carving that resembles President Rutherford B. Hayes, during whose term major reforms in United States Indian policy were initiated (Figure 3).

As with the Jobes Indian Head carving, the feathered headdress alone is sufficient to identify the Baughman Indian as a modern work; its location adjacent to a putative sculpture of President Hayes only underscores the point. Tool marks are not conspicuous on these carvings, although chisel marks are plainly discernible on many of the other Baughman sculptures. Nearby is a partial sculpture of what may be intended as the head of a bison (Fig. 4) but clear traces of metal tool-making are present on it. Again, context and documented history leave no question about the origin of these carvings.

## THE PORTSMOUTH INDIAN HEAD ROCK

Unquestionably the oldest of these three "Indian" carvings, the Portsmouth Indian Head rock is also the most controversial. It is an eight ton sandstone boulder that until September 9, 2007, rested in the Ohio River opposite Portsmouth, Ohio. The boulder was a local landmark for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and many citizens of Portsmouth carved their names or initials on it. The earliest published reference to it is Squier and Davis' 1848 brief account, though as Coe (2008: 3) notes, those authors probably never actually saw the rock. The earliest account of any substance occurs in the Portsmouth *Inquirer* of September 26, 1851:

"The river is now within three inches of the Indian Head. This mark is the outline of a human head engraved upon a large rock now but a few feet from shore. It is said to have been cut by the Indians many years ago when the river was some two or three feet lower than at present. We do not know upon what authority the Indians have this credit, but think it more likely that the pioneers cut it for a low water mark."

A few years later, the Portsmouth *Daily Tribune* (September 5, 1854) reported that "Old river men say that the river is at a lower stage at Cincinnati than it has been since 1831. The brief article continued:

"Just opposite Portsmouth there is a

water mark called the "Indian Head," from its being supposed to have been cut by the Indians many years ago. It represents the rude outlines of a human face, and is cut upon the eastern side of a large rock embedded in the water just above Mr. Collings' Tannery. This mark is now more exposed than since 1849 [i.e., 1839] as will be seen from the following which we copy from the "log" at the U.S. Hotel."

**"1839 Nov. 10 Mouth 10 1/4 inches out of water..."**

Other data is given for 1846, 1848, 1849, 1851, and 1854, when "mouth just on the water-line - therefore lower than since 1839." This information was included in Collins' 1874 *History of Kentucky* but he referred only to "the log kept in the neighborhood" as the source; he did correct the 1849 typo to 1839.

So, while the earliest reference to the carving is 1839, the first known reference calling it the "Indian Head" is 1848. Of course, as with the Jobes and Baughman "Indians," calling it an "Indian Head" does not mean that it was carved by an American Indian any more than were the prolific cigar store "wooden Indians" dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, there are several historical traditions indicating that it was carved by an early 19<sup>th</sup> century inhabitant of Portsmouth, either as a water mark or as a Kilroy-type lark. E. T. Book, who was killed during the Civil War, is mentioned as one likely candidate (Anonymous 2008; Portsmouth *Daily Times* 1908). No such historical traditions have been verified. Although a number of the people who carved their names on the rock have been identified, there is no way of identifying any of them as the person who carved the stone.

Because the Portsmouth Indian Head Rock was submerged by damming of the Ohio River in the early 1900s, it has rarely been seen since, and we have had only a single blurry photograph taken during extremely low water in 1920 (Bannon 1921, 1927). In a 1979 letter cited by Swauger (1984: 161) I rashly "joined other authorities cited in judging the petroglyph to be Native American" rather than accepting the origin suggested in the *Inquirer*. Swauger concurred, though probably less because of my opinion than because of the (then) only known photograph of the petroglyph (Bannon 1921, 1927: 130), which he thought indicated the carving was in form and style "consistent with customary round-head Native American treatment of the subject in the region." In any case, study of the actual carving (Coe 2008) refutes any suggestion that the chiseled head could be American Indian in origin.

Figure 7 is an old postcard view of the downstream side of the rock ca. 1906, before it was submerged. In 1908 there was a plan by Portsmouth historian Henry Lorberg to remove the rock to Portsmouth but the plan fell through, probably due to the townspeople's inability to raise and transport the eight-ton rock. (Lorberg reported that an E.T. Book had carved the face as a young boy in the 1830s, using a chisel.) The idea of preserving the rock by removing it to Portsmouth

was suggested again in 1914 but nothing was done. The rock remained underwater, except for a brief exposure in 1920, when a dam downstream was damaged and the water level lowered. At this point, with a motor boat and considerable ingenuity, brothers Henry T. and Arthur Bannon managed to take a photograph of the carving. Subsequently, over the ensuing eighty-some years, even the precise location of the rock was forgotten. Finally, in 2002, historian and preservationist Steve Shaffer, rediscovered the rock after several seasons of leading a scuba diving team in search of it.

According to Dr. Robert F. Maslowski, retired archaeologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Huntington District, Shaffer had initially approached the Corps which agreed to help locate the rock and arrange to have it moved to Portsmouth. (Maslowski 2007). Initial attempts to locate the rock using the Corps' side scan radar were unsuccessful but perseverance eventually paid off and a group of scuba divers relocated the rock in 2002. On September 9, 2007, the rock was successfully raised from the river bed and transported to a Portsmouth municipal building, with plans to display it in a new Portsmouth city welcome center. The discovery and recovery of the Portsmouth Indian Head Rock is a fine example of volunteerism in historic preservation.

A month after recovery of the rock, the carving was examined by Dr. Fred E. Coy, a Kentucky expert on rock art, who concluded that it was probably made with a half-inch wide metal tool. This feature is well shown in Figure 6, confirming that Lorber was correct in describing the face as chiseled. Coe also felt that the lack of differential weather indicated the carving could not be much earlier than the adjacent dated initials and names. He also noted that Native American rock carvings rarely include representation of ears or noses and cites other archaeologists who agree. Dr. Carol Diaz-Granados, for example, asserts that "The Indian Head's Rock head is probably historic, along with the initials and dates!" Dr. Kenneth Tankersley, on the other hand, refers to "a similar individual" at the Leo Petroglyph Site "in Irontown, Ohio." Leaving aside the fact that these carvings are nowhere near Ironton, Coe notes that the Leo example does not include ears or a nose (Coe 2008). Most remarkably, the Leo head wears what I interpret as a bison headdress and also portrays eyebrows; it is nothing like the Portsmouth head. Coe also analyzed 71 round face figures included in Swauger's studies of Ohio Valley rock art and found only one example that included eyes, ears, nose and mouth, in a West Virginia rock shelter, but the presence of paint suggested it was not Native American. A more typical example of an Ohio Valley American Indian round face carving is shown in Figure 8, taken by the author the last time the Smiths Ferry, Pennsylvania, petroglyphs were exposed, during the winter of 1959. Note that while it has spirit lines emanating from the top of the head, the carving has no nose or mouth.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Coe persisted

on using the term "pecked" to describe the method of manufacture used on the Portsmouth head, as it obscures his important (and I would say, incontrovertible) conclusion that a half-inch wide metal tool was used, such as a narrow chisel or perhaps a screwdriver. In this case, while oral and written tradition is somewhat ambiguous, physical examination of the carving is conclusive: none of the marks on the rock are American Indian. This scientific conclusion could not have been reached if the Portsmouth Indian Head had not been salvaged through the efforts of Steve Shaffer and his associates - at their own expense - making it all the more regrettable that the issue has become a political football in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, largely through the grandstanding of Kentucky state Rep. Reginald Meeks, D-Louisville, a member of the Native American Heritage Commission. At the present time, two members of the team that recovered the rock are facing felony charges in Greenup Co. court and the Kentucky attorney-general has suggested that civil charges might be avoided by returning the rock to Kentucky, building a suitable shelter for its display, and paying legal fees he estimates at \$90,000! (Associated Press 2008)

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*Figure 1 (Murphy) Jobes Indian Head Rock, near Barlow, Washington Co., Ohio*



*Figure 2 (Murphy) Jobes Indian Head with L.J. initials to left and 1928 above*





Figure 3 (Murphy) Carved Indian and President Hayes (?) at Baughman Park



Figure 4 (Murphy) Partial head of bison (?) at Baughman Park



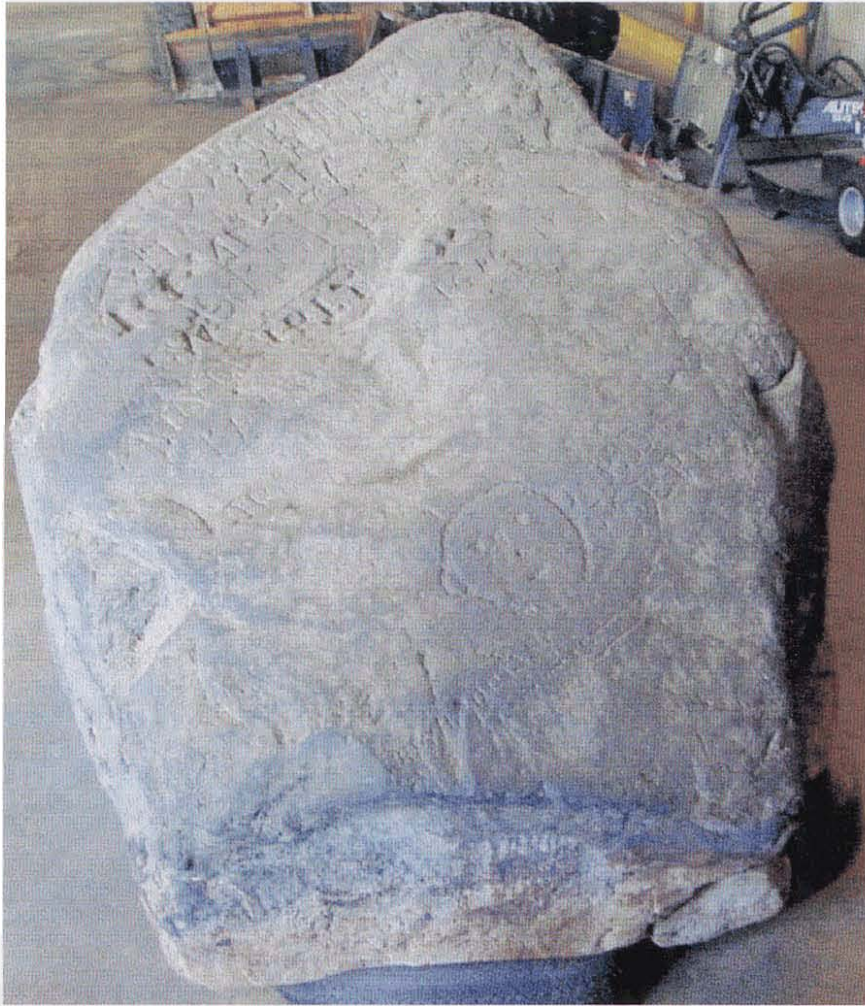


Figure 5 (Murphy) Portsmouth Indian Head Rock (Courtesy Wikipedia)



Figure 6 (Murphy) Close-up showing chisel marks. (Courtesy Wikipedia)





Figure 7 (Murphy) Early 20th C. postcard view. Courtesy of Portsmouth Public Library.



Figure 8 (Murphy) Smiths' Ferry Petroglyphs, January 1959. Note circular head in lower left.