

THE IRA F. MANSFIELD "TRADE AXE" COLLECTION

by

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Ira F. Mansfield (1842-1919) was a Civil War veteran who, following service in the 105th O.V.I., operated a general store in Cannelton, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, and leased and later purchased extensive clay and cannel coal mines in the area. In later life he was able to devote considerable leisure time to photography and the study of the natural history and archaeology of Little Beaver Creek, in eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. His published works contain elusive and romantic references to mound builders' forts and petroglyphs, as well as valuable information on local history and archaeology. He was the first to document the unusual boulder known as the Cannelton "Sun God," though regrettably he failed to provide any clue as to its origin (Mansfield 1916: 153; Murphy 1978).

At his Cannelton home, Mansfield had at least 16 cases of "relics," including Indian Pipes, Tom Tom, Chiefs' War Clubs, Indian War Bonnets, Bead Coats, Mound-builders' flints, Peace Pipes, Wampum, Mound Axes, and Esquimaux's Snow Shoes, not to mention numerous historic artifacts (Mansfield 1911: 201-204; 1914: 91-93). Although he does not mention them, Mansfield had also accumulated a large collection of metal "trade axes," and this collection apparently was preserved long after his death in 1919.

R. Max Gard, a Lisbon, Ohio, antique dealer and historian, and a good friend of the author for twenty-five years, acquired the Mansfield collection of trade axes a year or two before his own death in 1986. It is not known from whom he acquired the collection, which included at least one find dated too late to have been acquired by Mansfield. An undetermined number of these metal axes were sold to individuals before Gard's death, and it is not possible to determine how many were in the original Mansfield collection. My recollection, having been shown them briefly some time before Max died, would place the number at thirty to forty. In addition, at least two were acquired separately and could not have been part of the original Mansfield Collection.

In settling their father's estate, Marilyn and Ted Gard asked me to determine

what items remaining in his Sandy-Beaver Antique Shop ought to be donated to the Ohio Historical Society. In the event, the family decided to donate only four of the axes to the Ohio Historical Society: an axe from the Gnadenhutten massacre site, one found in Lake County, Ohio and originally from the H. Cook Collection, another from a pioneer barn near Tiffin, and a fourth "dug from a storage stockage at Fort St. Clair, Preble Co., Ohio, in 1932" (Murphy, letter to Melinda L. Knapp, Ohio Historical Society, December 26, 1986). As the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society conducted the 1932 excavations at Fort St. Clair, under the direction of Harry B. McPherson, it would be interesting to know how the Fort St. Clair axe became part of a private collection; but whatever the case, it is now back in the collections of the Ohio Historical Society.

The remainder of the Gard/Mansfield trade axe collection, not being from Ohio, was sold at the Gard estate auction and dispersed. Prior to the sale, several of these with specific provenience data were photographed but photographs are not available for the Ohio Historical Society specimens.

It should be noted that two of the axes are labeled differently, in Gard's printing on adhesive tape. That shown in Figure 1 is labeled as being from 36LR1, at Edinburg, Pennsylvania, and found by Harry McGol. The second (Fig. 2, 3) is a small axe found on Line Island, in the Ohio River near East Liverpool. (The island has since been entirely removed for gravel.) This small belt axe bears an unidentified "X" touch mark (Fig. 3).

Figure 4 represents "An authentic French tomahawk of the seventeenth century found at the site of a stockaded town in New York that was occupied about 1640 by the Onondaga - from the famous Cook Collection." This specimen also bears a touch mark, the initials "M A F" (Fig. 5), but the maker is not listed in Peterson (1965) and remains unidentified. Another New York axe (Fig. 6) was "Plowed up at Fort Hill in 1880 at Victor, New York" and was "Donated from Historical Society to my collection."

Figure 7 is an unmarked axe "Found in a grave presumably of an Indian in Lakeside, near Fort Wayne, Indiana." The axe shown in Figure 8 was "Found on the Fox River two miles north of Appleton, Wisconsin." According to the label, "Specimens almost identical with this form have been found in the Lake Champlain region. Probably French origin."

Figure 9 illustrates an axe from Agate, Nebraska, "plowed up by H. Cook on his Agate Ranch about 1890." According to the label, "Mr. Mooseau was at the ranch at the time of discovery and testified to that." While this provides a clue as to the identity of Henry Cook, the identity of "Mr. Mooseau" remains a mystery.

Finally, there is a touchmark shown in Figure 10, with the notation, "1780-1830, English trade tomahawk marked P J S. The marks are unknown to me but when purchased was said to be English." Unfortunately, other than a close-up of the touchmark, no photograph of this axe is available and no data on the location of the find accompanied it.

REFERENCES CITED

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Figure 1 (Murphy)

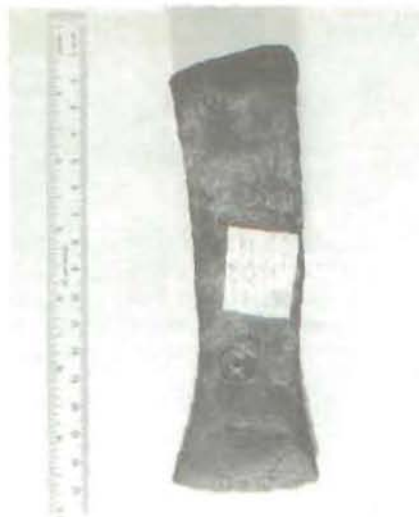


Figure 2 (Murphy)



Figure 3 (Murphy)



Figure 4 (Murphy)



Figure 5 (Murphy)



Figure 6 (Murphy)



Figure 7 (Murphy)



Figure 8 (Murphy)



Figure 9 (Murphy)



Figure 10 (Murphy)