

### THE ALGONQUIN CROOKED KNIFE

(Note. This indigenous knife of the Micmac and other Algonquin tribes who lived along the St. Lawrence estuary and the Atlantic coast of Canada should not be confused with the "crooked knife" of the Hudson Bay Company, which was traded to Eskimos and northern Indians for centuries. The HBC tool was an English farrier's knife, having a long steel blade curled at the tip.)

A prototype of the Algonquin knife was found in an ancient camp site on the east coast of New Brunswick many years ago. It had a very short blade of sharpened flint, fastened in a handle of deer horn, the socket of the horn making a natural place for the human thumb in drawing the blade toward the user. The ~~handle~~ handle was slightly curved or crooked, but not the blade. As the stone might snap with the pressure of cutting, one side of the blade was flat, and the other side rounded for extra thickness and strength.

When European traders brought metal to the Atlantic littoral of Canada, the Micmac and other coastal tribes continued to make their own knives after the ancient pattern, but now they used metal blades and carved the handles out of wood.

White hunters and woodsmen found the Indian type of knife useful in whittling axe handles, skinning pelts etc. and they made their own, after the Indian pattern. Some continue to make them, in Nova Scotia and probably elsewhere. Often they make the handle from a piece of maple knur or some other wood that gives a handsome appearance when polished. Sometimes they carve the tip of the thumb-rest in whimsical shapes. They vary in size, but the average crooked knife used in Nova Scotia has a five-inch handle and a three-inch blade. The blade is usually of imported steel, and flat on both sides like any European knife.

I have a crooked knife made and used by a Micmac at Broad River, Queens County, about the year 1930. The handle is of wood, with the usual shape and thumb-rest. The blade is of steel, ground down from a white man's discarded file. It is securely fastened in the handle by 32 turns of brass wire of the kind used in making snares -- the so-called "rabbit-wire." When shaping the blade, this Micmac had followed the ancient Indian pattern, making the blade flat on the underside, and rounded on the upper side.

The knife was used in various ways on the hunt and in the camp. When whittling axe handles, snowshoe frames, etc. the knife was always drawn towards the user, with the flat side of the blade against the wood.

(T.H. Raddall)