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TURTLE SHELL RATTLES  
AND OTHER IMPLEMENTS

FROM

INDIAN GRAVES

AT ATHENS, PA.

BY

CHRISTOPHER WREN.

1908.

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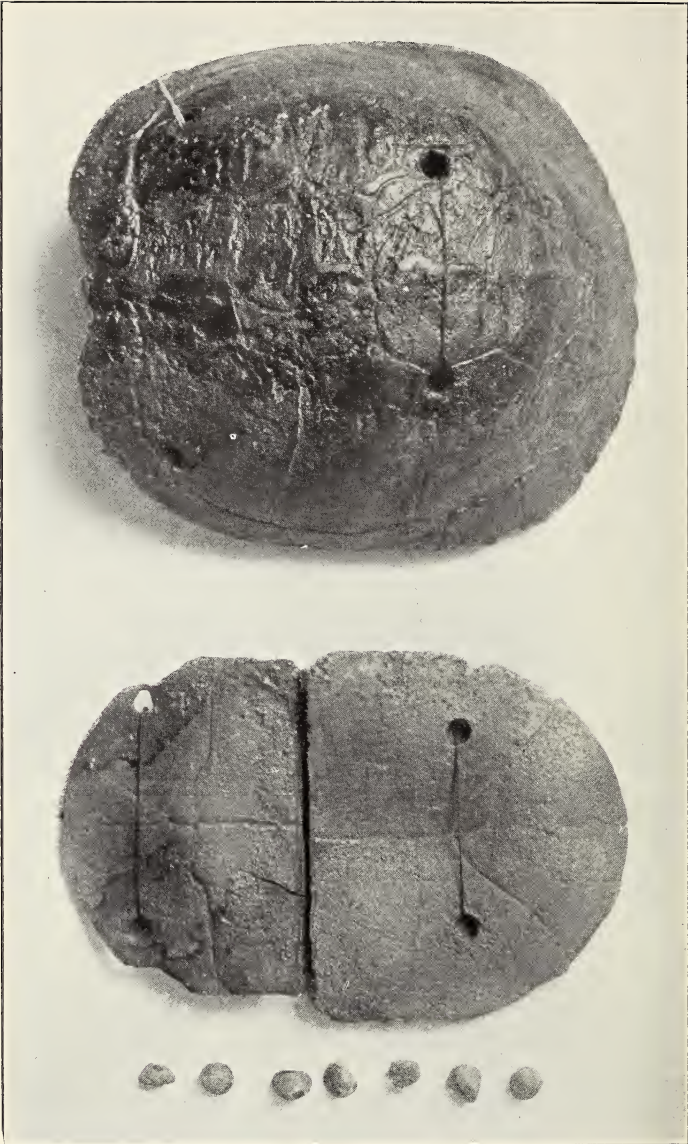
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No. 1. INDIAN TURTLE SHELL RATTLE.

From the Collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society.

(Reduced one-half.)



TURTLE SHELL RATTLES  
AND OTHER IMPLEMENTS FROM INDIAN GRAVES,  
AT ATHENS, PENN'A.

A PAPER PREPARED FOR THIS SOCIETY, NOVEMBER, 1908.

BY CHRISTOPHER WREN,  
Curator of Archaeology.

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In the month of April, 1883, Dr. Harrison Wright and Samuel F. Wadhams, Esq., members of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, supervised and directed the opening of several Indian graves on the property of Mr. Millard P. Murray, at Athens, Bradford County, Penna., from which they secured a number of human skulls, several specimens of aboriginal pottery and other implements, most of which are in the collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society.

Athens, Pa., is a town of 3,000 inhabitants, situated about ninety-three miles north of Wyoming Valley, by the various bends and turns of the Susquehanna River. By the early white settlers it was called Tioga Point, and Morgan gives the name of the Indian village which was located there as Tayoga.

In a paper read before this Society on May 4, 1883, Dr. Wright gave a description of the excavations made and the articles found. This is published in full, with illustrations, in "Proceedings and Collections" of the Society, Volume II, pp. 55-67, 1885. He speaks of some of the articles found in a very general way, while of others he gives a detailed description.

The object of this paper is to give a somewhat fuller account than has heretofore been given of two perforated turtle shells, a bone comb and a coiled copper ornament found in the Athens graves.

Dr. Wright describes these articles thus: "To the left of the skull [in the first grave opened] and in contact with it was a turtle shell, the upper part perforated with four holes, two in front and two back; and the plastron with four holes, two front and two back, was found, and in it were four small silicious pebbles about the size and shape of marrow-fat peas. About two inches to the right of the skull another, though smaller, turtle shell, similarly perforated, the upper shell having ten holes, two before, two behind and six down the middle, the plastron having seven holes, two before and five behind, was found, and in it were also four small pebbles of about the same size and shape as those found in the shell to the left of the skull. While an examination of these two turtle shells leaves little doubt that they were used for rattles, the perforated holes being made for the purpose of passing thongs through to secure the upper and lower shells together, and possibly also of attaching a handle, yet the question presents itself, might they not also have been the emblem or totem of the tribe? The Lenni Lenape, if I am not in error, even after their subjugation by the Six Nations, claimed to be proprietaries of a portion of the Susquehanna Valley, extending nearly if not quite to Tioga, and one of its tribes was a turtle tribe. Five, at least, of the Six Nations (as to the Tuscaroras, I am not prepared to speak) had each a turtle tribe [clan], and that they claimed to be proprietaries of Tioga is evinced by the fact that it was included in their sale to the Susquehanna Company in 1754." (p. 58.)

"In the earth immediately north of the skeleton—and whether a part of the grave was impossible to decide—was found a great quantity of red ochre, fragments of a shell gorget, a broken bone comb, remnants of small shell beads, which rapidly disintegrated upon exposure, and a very rude arrow point." \* \* \* (p. 59.)

In speaking of the seventh grave opened, Dr. Wright says: "The only thing found in this grave was the copper

or bronze bracelet which is herewith submitted for your examination." (p. 65.)

## INDIAN RATTLES.

F. W. Hodge, in his "Handbook of American Indians," Volume II, advance sheets kindly loaned to the writer, will give the following description of rattles: "An instrument for producing rhythmic sound, used by all Indian Tribes, except some of the Eskimo. It was generally regarded as a sacred object, not to be brought forth on ordinary occasions, but confined to rituals, religious feasts, shamanistic performances, etc. This character is emphasized in the sign language of the Plains, where the sign for rattle is the basis of all those indicating what is sacred. Early in the 16th Century Estewan, the negro companion of Cabeza de Vaca, traversed with perfect immunity great stretches of country occupied by numerous different tribes, bearing a cross in one hand and a rattle in the other.

"Rattles may be divided into two general classes, those in which objects of approximately equal size are struck together, and those in which small objects, such as pebbles, quartz crystals or seeds are enclosed in a hollow receptacle. The first embraces rattles made of animal hoofs or dew-claws, bird beaks, shells, etc. \* \* \*

"The second type of rattles was made of a gourd, of the entire shell of a tortoise, of pieces of raw hide sewed together, or, on the Northwest Coast, of wood. It was usually decorated with painting, carvings or feathers and pendants, very often having a symbolic meaning. The performer, besides shaking these rattles with his hand, sometimes struck them against an object. Women of Muskhogean tribes fastened several tortoise shell rattles to each leg, where they were concealed by their clothing."

These advance sheets of Volume II were sent to writer from Washington in reply to letter written to Prof. W. H. Holmes, asking for data about Indian rattles and totems.



Captain John Smith says: "For their Musicke they use a thicke Cane on which they pipe as on a Recorder. For their warres they have a great deepe platter of wood \* \* \* covered with a skin \* \* that they may beat upon it as upon a drumme, but their chief instruments are Rattles made of small gourds or Pompeon [pumpkin] shells. Of these they have Base, Tenor, Counter Tenor, Meane and Treble. These mingled with their voyces sometimes twenty or thirtie together, made such a terrible noise as would rather affright than delight any man." (v. True Travels, Vol. I, p. 136, Richmond reprint, 1819.)

John Bertram speaks of the Southern Indians being all fond of music and dancing, their music being both vocal and instrumental. Among their musical instruments he enumerates the tambour, the rattle gourd, and a kind of flute made of the joint of a reed or a deer's tibia. He says the flute made "a hideous, melancholy discord," while the tambour and rattle, accompanied by sweet, low voices, pleased him. The gourd rattles contained corn, beans, or small pebbles, and were shaken by the hand or were struck against the ornamental posts which marked the dancing ring. (v "Travels, Etc.," London, 1792, p. 502.)

Brickell mentions the shells of terrapins as being fastened to the ankles or suspended from the waist-belts of dancers which contained small stones or beans, so that, with every motion of the body, they gave forth a rattling sound. (v Brickell's "Natural History of North Carolina," Dublin, 1737.)

Adair, in speaking of rattles as used among the American Indians, says they were made of shells of the land tortoise, or of conchs from which the interior had been removed, and in which pebbles, beans, or beads had been placed. These, by means of deer skin thongs, were fastened to the legs, and in the act of dancing produced a crude jingling music. (v "History of the American Indians," London, 1775.)

J. Owen Dorsey, in the 3rd Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, pp. 277 and 278, gives a full description of "The Calumet or Pipe Dance" among the Omahas. He illustrates the two gourd rattles used to make the music for this dance. The calumet dance was the ceremonial used in the adoption of a brother among the Omahas.

In the 13th Annual Report he describes five kinds of rattles used among the Omahas, none of which, however, were made from turtle shells.

W. J. Hoffman, in the 7th Annual Report, p. 191, etc., describes two kinds of rattles which are used in the "Grand Medicine Dance" of the Ojibways. One kind is made of a cylindrical tin box with a handle attached, the other of a gourd. Corn or seeds are used in them to produce the rattling sound.

J. W. Fewkes, in the 22nd Annual Report, p. 91, etc., describes and illustrates a sea shell rattle, and also one made of a gourd, found in Pueblo ruins of Colorado. He mentions the latter type as being in use at the present time among the Pueblo Indians.

Miss Alice C. Fletcher, in 22nd Annual Report, describes and illustrates a pair of decorated gourd rattles used in "The Haka," a Pawnee ceremonial. She describes these rattles as typifying the two sexes, and thus all mankind.

A number of writers on the subject of musical instruments of the Indians, describe and figure the rattles as being used among them in pairs. This may indicate a more general recognition of the sexes, as described by Miss Fletcher, than has been generally apprehended.

Some of the descriptions of rattles given are almost identical with those under discussion, but all of them were in use in parts of the country somewhat removed from the locality in which the specimens owned by our Society were found.

From the best information the writer has been able to

obtain, the two turtle shells described in this paper are probably those of a male and a female. If that be true, the turtle rattles would typify the sexes in a more real manner than would be the case in the symbolism of a decorated gourd or shell, the sex being a natural and inherent quality in the objects themselves.

We now come nearer home, and it seems almost certain that we can locate the former owners of the two tortoise shell rattles which we have under discussion, and also describe the use that was made of them.

Morgan, in his "League of the Iroquois," 1904, Vol. I, 48, gives us the following description of the territory occupied by the Iroquois:

#### THE PEOPLE OF THE LONG HOUSE.

"After the formation of the League, the Iroquois called themselves the *Ho-de-sau-nee*, which signifies The People of the Long House; it grew out of the circumstance that they likened their confederacy to a long house, having partitions and separate fires, after their ancient method of building houses, within which the several nations were sheltered under a common roof. Among themselves they never had any other name. The various names given to them at different periods were entirely accidental, none of them being designations by which they ever recognized themselves.

"The Long House was not only the mark of society of the grade to which the Iroquois has raised themselves. It was in itself the perfect similitude of the Iroquois social and political organization. To an Iroquois the League was not *like* a long house. It *was* a long house, extending from the Hudson to the Genesee, in which, around five fires, five tribes gathered. The Mohawk, Wolf Clan, kept the eastern door, the Seneca Wolves, the western. At each fire the sachems, like pillars, upheld the roof, the chiefs were the braces that fortified the structure."

The Long House, or territory occupied by the Iroquois,



extended, as has been mentioned, from the Hudson River on the east to the Genesee River on the west, and from the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario on the north, to about the present boundary line between Pennsylvania and New York States on the south, extending into Pennsylvania in a small point to the confluence of the Chemung River with the Susquehanna River at Athens, Pa., covering almost the entire country now within the boundaries of New York State. (See Map, Morgan, Vol. I, p. 48.)

At Athens (or *Ta-yo-ga*) at least six principal trails converged, one from Genesee and Niagara Falls on the west, one from Seneca Lake and one from Cayuga Lake on the north, two from Schenectady, Albany and the Hudson River region on the east and northeast, and a principal trail up the Susquehanna River from the interior of what is now Pennsylvania, and all the country to Chesapeake Bay on the southward.

*Ta-yo-ga* (or Tioga) has been called the southern door of the Long House, and was a place of considerable importance in the Indian days. It seems to have been the most southerly point of land embraced within the Iroquois country, proper.

In enumerating the dances of the New York Indians on ceremonial occasions, dancing being a part of almost all such meetings, Morgan gives us the following description (p. 268), of

#### THE GREAT FEATHER DANCE.

“Second in the public estimation, but first intrinsically, stood the great Feather Dance, sometimes called the Religious Dance, because it was specially consecrated to the Great Spirit. The invention, or at least the introduction of this dance, is ascribed to the first *To-do-da-ho*, at the period of the formation of the League. In its Iroquois origin they all concur. It was performed by a select band, ranging from fifteen to thirty in full costume, and was chiefly used

at their religious festivals, although it was one of the prominent dances on all great occasions in Indian life. This dance was the most splendid, graceful and remarkable in the whole collection, requiring greater power of endurance, suppleness and flexibility of person and gracefulness of deportment than either of the others. The *saltandi ars*, or dancing art, found, in the Feather Dance, its highest achievement, at least, in the Indian family, and it may be questioned whether a corresponding figure can be found among those which are used in refined communities, which will compare with it in those particulars which make up a spirited and graceful dance.

“The music was furnished by two singers, seated in the centre of the room, each having a *turtle shell rattle*, of the kind represented in the figure. It consisted of a series of songs or measured verses, which required about two minutes each for their recitation. They were all religious songs, some of them in praise of the Great Spirit, some in praise of various objects in nature which ministered to their wants, others in the nature of thanksgiving to *Ha-wen-ne-yu*, or supplications for his continued protection. The rattles were used to mark time and as an accompaniment to the songs. To make this rattle they remove the animal from the shell, and after drying it they place within it a handful of flint corn, and then sew up the skin which is left attached to the shell. The neck of the turtle is then stretched over a wooden handle (p. 269). In using them they were struck upon the seat as often as twice or thrice in a second, the song and the step of the dancers keeping time, notwithstanding the rapidity of the beat.

“The band arrayed themselves in their costumes in an adjacent lodge, came into the Council-house, and opened in all respects as in the case last described. Instead of grouping, however, within the area of a circle, they ranged themselves in file, and danced slowly around the Council-house in an elliptical line.

“When the music ceased the dance was suspended and the party walked in column to the beat of the rattles. After an interval of about two minutes, the rattles quickened the time, the singers commenced another song, and the warriors, at the same instant, the dance. The leader standing at the head of the column, opened, followed by those behind. As they advanced slowly around the room in the dance, they gestured with their arms, and placed their bodies in a great variety of positions, but, unlike the practice in the war dance, always keeping their forms erect. None of the attitudes in this dance were those of the violent passions, but rather mild and gentle feelings, consequently, there were no distortions, either of the countenances or the body; but all their movements and positions were extremely graceful, dignified and imposing. The step has the same peculiarities as that in the dance last described, but yet is quite distinct from it. Each foot in succession is raised from two to eight inches from the floor, and the heel is then brought down with great force as frequently as the beat of the rattles. Frequently one heel is brought down twice or three times before it alternates with the other. This will convey an impression of the surprising activity of this dance, in which every muscle of the body appears to be strung to its highest degree of tension. The concussion of the foot upon the floor serves the double purpose of shaking the rattles and bells, which form a part of the costume, and adding to the noise and animation of the dance.

“The dancers were usually nude down to the waist, with the exception of the ornaments upon their arms and necks, thus exposing their well formed chests, finely rounded arms, and their smooth, evenly colored skins, of a clear and brilliant copper color. This exposure of their person, not in any sense displeasing, contributed materially to the beauty of the costume, and gave a striking expression to the figure of the dancer. Such was the physical exertion put forth in this dance that before it closed the vapor of perspiration steamed



up, like smoke, from their uncovered backs. No better evidence than this need be given that it was a dance full of earnestness and enthusiasm. One of their aims was to test each other's powers of endurance. It not unfrequently happened that a part of the original number yielded from exhaustion before the dance was ended. Nothing but practice superadded to flexibility of person and great muscular strength, would enable even an Indian to perform this dance. When the popular applause was gained by one of the band for spirited or graceful dancing, he was called out to stand at the head of the column and lead the party. In this way several changes of leaders occurred before the final conclusion of the figure. In this dance the women participated, if they were disposed. They wore, however, their ordinary apparel, and entered by themselves at the foot of the column. The female step is entirely unlike the one described. They moved sideways in this figure, simply raising themselves alternately upon each foot from heel to toe, and then bringing the heel down upon the floor, at each beat of the rattle, keeping pace with the slowly advancing column. With the females, dancing was a quiet, and not ungraceful amusement.

"As a scene, its whole effect was much increased by the arrangement of the dancers into columns. In this long array of costumes the peculiar features of each were brought more distinctly into view, and by keeping the elliptical area, around which they moved, entirely free from the pressing throng of Indian spectators, a better opportunity was afforded all to witness the performance. To one who has never seen this dance, it would be extremely difficult to convey any notion of its surprising activity, and its inspiring influence upon the spectators. Requiring an almost continuous exertion, it is truly a marvelous performance."

For purposes of comparison, and as an indication that the Europeans were not unversed in the practice of the terpsichorean art, a description by Lord Byron is here introduced of a "dance" given by the officers of the British army

at Brussels the night before the battle of Waterloo, and about thirty-nine years after General Sullivan had taken his army into the heart of the Iroquois country and balanced the account with the "Six Nations" for the part they took in "The Wyoming Massacre":

"There was a sound of revelry by night,  
 And Belgium's capital had gathered then  
 Her beauty and her chivalry; and bright  
 The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;  
 A thousand hearts beat happily; and when  
 Music arose, with its voluptuous swell,  
 Soft eyes looked love to eyes which spake again,  
 And all went merry as a marriage-bell.  
 But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!

Did ye not hear it? No; 'twas but the wind,  
 Or the car rattling o'er the stony street:  
 On with the dance! let joy be unconfined,  
 No sleep till morn when youth and pleasure meet  
 To chase the glowing hours with flying feet!"

#### THE TURTLE SHELLS.

There were two turtle shells found in the graves opened by Messrs. Wright and Wadhams at Athens, only the larger of which is shown in the illustration.

They are both shells of the land turtle (or tortoise), but may be of different varieties, as they differ somewhat from each other in shape and markings on the back, or they may be those of a male and a female.

The top shell, or *carapax*, of the larger specimen is  $5\frac{3}{4}$  inches long by  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches broad; the bottom shell, or *plastron*, being  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad. There is a marked difference between the length and the breadth in both the top and bottom shells in this specimen.

The smaller specimen is nearly circular, the top has more of an arched or dome like shape than the larger specimen,

and measures 5 inches long by  $4\frac{3}{4}$  inches broad, the bottom shell being 5 inches long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad.

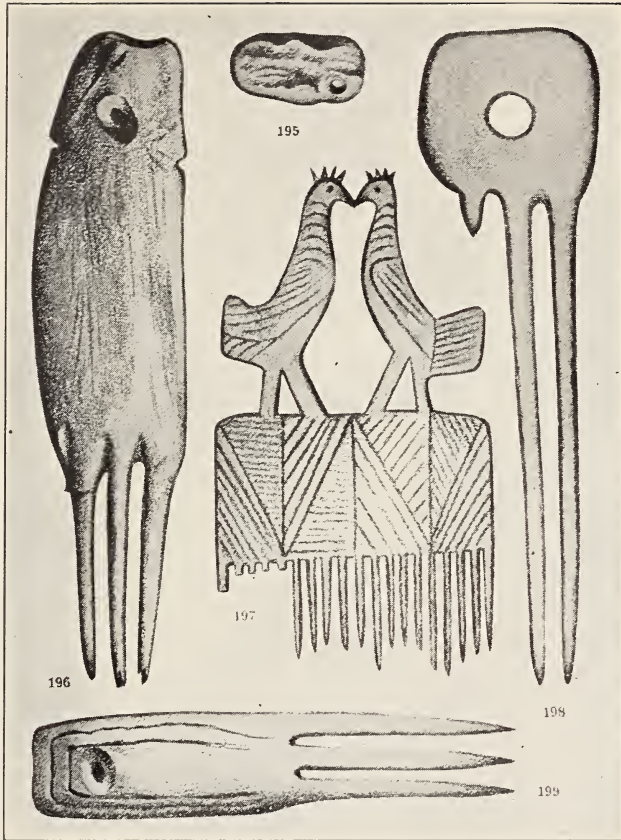
Both of the specimens are in an excellent state of preservation. The small pebbles which were inside the shells are shown on the bottom of the illustration. The illustrations are slightly over one-half the natural size. (Illustration No. 1.)

#### THE BONE COMB.

In his article in Bulletin No. 50, New York State Museum, p. 284, on the "Horn and Bone Implements of the New York Indians," the Rev. William M. Beauchamp says: "The Indian use of bone combs seems not very old, and yet it is prehistoric in a sense. Most of those found are of the 17th Century, but some seem a few years earlier, suggesting a knowledge of Europeans without direct contact. The early ones are very simple in design, and with few but strong and large teeth. They are almost entirely confined to Iroquois sites, or those classed with them.

"The Iroquois were not fond of working in stone, though they did this well, but long maintained their liking for bone and horn. \* \* \* They are usually plain, but early decoration sometimes occurs. The smoothness of the work is often surprising, and the lustre may have come from the absorption of fat."

The bone comb found in the grave at Athens is  $\frac{7}{8}$  of an inch wide, about  $\frac{1}{8}$  of an inch thick, and  $1\frac{7}{8}$  inches long to the point where the teeth begin. The teeth are all broken off, so it is not possible to give the entire length as it was when in a perfect state. It had four teeth which were cut out with a stone tool, as is seen by the manner in which the teeth join the solid part of the comb. It is made in the same manner as Nos. 196, 199 and 200, shown in the illustration of Iroquois specimens, which were made with stone tools. (Illustration No. 2.)



No. 2. Indian Bone Combs (reduced one-fifth).  
(Beauchamp. Bull 50. N. Y. State Museum)





In a letter to the writer, of October 20, 1908, Rev. William M. Beauchamp says: "The bone combs are most frequent in New York, and are all, so far as I know, Iroquois. A few are in a way prehistoric. Cartier gave away combs at *Hochelaga*, and this seems the origin of the earlier ones. They tried to imitate them with stone implements, and the result was a rude 4 or 5 toothed article. About half a dozen have been found in Jefferson and Onondaga Counties on early Iroquois sites. When they got saws they made them more elaborate. \* \* \* Not one has been found that is 400 years old. Perhaps half a dozen that reach 300, while they are rather frequent after 1630, but mostly 40 years later. Of course, I don't know the form of yours, but they were much used at the time the Iroquois were sending war-parties down the Susquehanna against the Andastes. If simple, it would be earlier. \* \* \* As to *date, again*, if made with stone tools, and with few teeth, call it about A. D. 1600. If with many teeth, 1630 to 1700. The Mohawks first used the many toothed combs, the Cayugas and Senecas last of all. The Onondagas and Oneidas seem to have used the later forms but little."

The bone comb owned by our Society is in a rather marred state, owing to lapse of time and exposure to conditions unfavorable for its preservation. (Illustration No. 3.)

#### THE COPPER COIL.

The other article in which we are interested in this paper consists of a piece of coiled copper, which appears to be made of a solid copper wire. A close examination of it, however, shows that it was first made into a thin, narrow strip, and then wrapped over so as to give it the appearance of being solid wire. If straightened out it would be  $12\frac{3}{4}$  inches long. It is about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick and weighs somewhat less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  an ounce. The coil is about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter, and is carried around the circle three times. It is considerably oxidized, and is now of a greenish color. It was

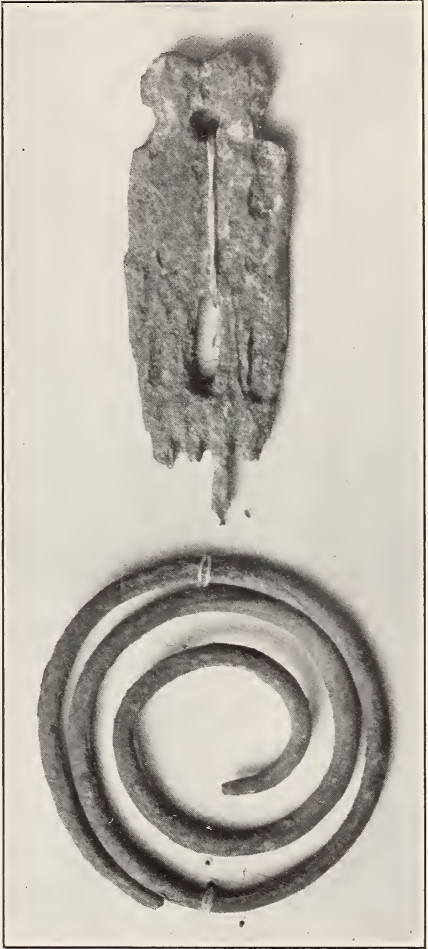
found in the seventh grave opened by Messrs. Wright and Wadhams. (Illustration No. 4.)

Dr. Wright describes this as a bracelet, but, from its shape, it would seem not to be well adapted for wearing on the arm; it was, however, doubtless worn in some manner for personal adornment. Because of the rare cases in which copper implements or ornaments have been found, it would seem that they were little known or used by the Indians of this locality. The Wyoming Historical and Geological Society has a fine copper spear point, which was found on the Kingston Flats opposite Wilkes-Barré, which is the only article of copper of Indian manufacture found in Wyoming Valley, so far as known.

Lewis H. Morgan says: "Metallic implements were unknown among them [the Iroquois], as they had not the use of metals." Later researches have shown, however, that while copper implements were very rare in the Iroquois country, a number of specimens have been found, proving that they had some knowledge of copper. (v. Bull. 55, N. Y. State Museum.)

Col. C. C. Jones ("Antiquities of the Southern Indians") says: "No implements of iron or bronze existed at this early period, and copper was used only to a limited extent. In its treatment, that material was regarded rather in the light of a malleable stone than as a metal. Its employment was confined almost exclusively to the manufacture of ornamental axes, gorgets, pendants and spindles or points for piercing pearls." (p. 47.)

Copper was procured in a pure state from the Lake Superior region, and hammered out cold into the desired shape. Its use among the Southern Indians was also extremely rare, and doubt is expressed whether such specimens as were found among them were made by themselves, the probability being that they were procured by barter from the region of Lake Superior.



Nos. 3-4. INDIAN BONE COMB AND COPPER COIL.

From the Collections of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society (natural size).



CUS-DA-WA-SA, or RATTLE.

(*Morgan's League of the Trognois*, Vol. 1, 268).





From the rarity of copper implements, as noted by many writers, this piece of coiled copper becomes an unusually interesting specimen, especially as the conditions under which, and the exact locality where it was found, are so completely authenticated by Messrs. Wright and Wadhams.

This case is another illustration of the prime importance of having an exact record made of the locality in which implements were found, with any other circumstances connected with them, otherwise, for the purposes of study they have lost their identity and value and are only articles of curiosity.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

After a careful examination of the implements which are discussed in this paper, and of the literature bearing on the subject, the writer is led to believe that the following are correct conclusions about them:

*First.* That they were owned and used by the Iroquois Indians; (a) because the locality where they were found lies within the boundaries of the Iroquois country, proper; (b) because the bone comb, as described by Rev. William M. Beauchamp, an eminent authority on the subject, was distinctively an Iroquois manufacture; (c) and because the writer does not know of a single bone implement of this character having been found in the Wyoming Valley or along the lower reaches of the Susquehanna River, either from hearsay or by having seen such a specimen.

*Second.* That the turtle shell rattles were used by the Iroquois on ceremonial occasions, and very probably these specimens were used by them in their "Great Feather Dance," their most important religious ceremonial, as fully described in this paper from Lewis H. Morgan.

*Third.* That the bodies with which the two rattles were found were very probably those of two men who had held the office of making the music or beating time for the dances,

and whose musical instruments were interred with their bodies.

*Fourth.* That the coiled copper object was of Indian manufacture, made from a piece of pure native copper, without the aid of heat, and was an article of personal adornment. It also gives evidence of some promptings of an esthetic taste among these people.

*Fifth.* That the bone comb is of the earlier period of the manufacture of these articles among the Indians, was made with stone cutting tools, probably in the first half of the 17th Century, and was worn by the women in dressing and adorning their hair, copying after the white women in this particular.

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