

# The "Speck Iroquois Collection" in The University Museum

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Among the objects of Iroquois manufacture in The University Museum are a number collected by Frank G. Speck, some given to the Museum by Samuel Fernberger, and a larger number given by Samuel W. Pennypacker, some of which he may have collected himself. These objects reflect Speck's interests, most particularly his research on the religious rites of the Cayuga Sour Springs Longhouse on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Canada. For this reason, they might be called the "Speck Iroquois collection."

## *Speck and the Museum*

Speck was an avid collector and trader in Indian artifacts (see box). However, he collected few items specifically for the Museum and almost none of these were Iroquois. The reason undoubtedly was a conflict between Speck and George Byron Gordon, then director of the Museum, that resulted in 1911 in the termination of Speck's connection with the Museum. Thereafter Speck devoted his energies within the University to building a separate Department of Anthropology. Lacking a depository at The University Museum, Speck turned to other institutions and to individuals as a substitute. Important among the latter was Pennypacker, a former student of Speck's, who later bequeathed to the Museum a number of objects (including Iroquois ones) he had obtained through Speck's offices.



1  
*False Face mask, spoon mouth type.*  
(UM no. 70-9-193. Provenance unknown; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)

It was through their ceremonials and ritual objects that Speck sought to understand and represent the Iroquois. Consequently, utilitarian objects such as bowls and baskets (the Iroquois are fine basket makers) are lacking or underrepresented in

the collection. Such as are represented (see ladle in Fig. 2) are of the sort that might be used in preparing the "feast" of a ceremony. There are few examples of clothing and ornaments, or weapons (war clubs, tomahawks, bows and arrows).

## *Speck's Research*

Speck took up the systematic study of Cayuga ceremonialism in 1931. It was an interest that developed out of his previous research among eastern Indians, and the specific questions he hoped to answer were those also suggested by this earlier work. He had, for example, worked among the Iroquoian-speaking Cherokee in the South, and the question of cultural resemblances between them and their northern linguistic relatives could not have been far from his mind. He had also done research among the Delaware, some of whom had taken up residence on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario on lands granted to the Iroquois by the Crown after the American Revolution. In studying Cayuga ceremonial practice, he wished to compare the information gained to that he had earlier obtained on the Algonquian-speaking Delaware. As a young man, he had carried out studies (particularly of material culture) of the Hurons of Lorette. This was a remnant Huron group who had moved to a location near Quebec City after the defeat of the Iroquoian-speaking Hurons at the hands of the Iroquois in the mid-17th century. He had also done a little field work among the Oka Iroquois, a group that moved to Canada in the latter part of the



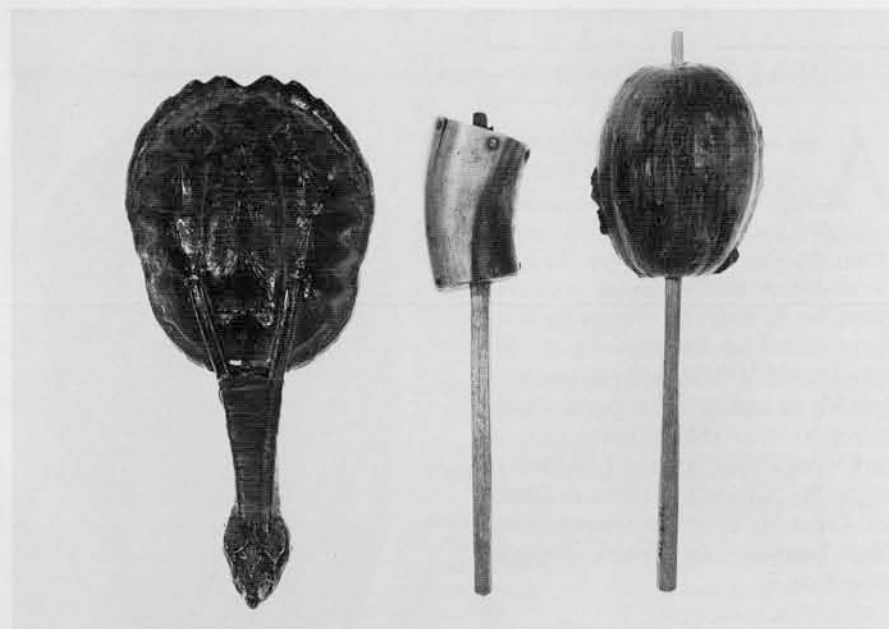
2  
Ladle used for serving soup at ceremonies. (UM no. 70-9-178. Collected by Frank G. Speck, Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)

17th century. He was, then, no stranger to Iroquoian studies in 1931, and, in fact, had witnessed some of the dances on earlier visits to the Six Nations.

The great Iroquois ceremonial of Midwinter or New Year's conveniently falls in the latter part of January or early part of February—about the time of college semester break. It was probably this circumstance that permitted Speck to witness the ceremony in whole or part during the years 1933-36 and 1944-45. On these and other field trips to Six Nations, he also had extensive conversations with his major collaborator, the noted Cayuga ritualist Alexander General. The results were published in 1949 by the University of Pennsylvania Press in a book entitled *Midwinter Rites of the Cayuga Long House*.

### Iroquois Ceremonialism

Iroquois ritual is built out of songs, dances (both "sacred" and "social"), games (including importantly the Bowl Game, a kind of dice game), and speeches. (Some speeches are addressed to human beings and some to what Speck terms "spirit forces"—a number of these are accompanied by a tobacco invocation, i.e., the burning of tobacco.) Typically, each ceremonial (in Midwinter, each day's ritual) begins with a Thanksgiving Speech which returns thanks to the beings on this earth and above. There follow the dances (and games) appropriate to that particular occasion, then a shorter, closing Thanksgiving Speech and the distribution of the feast (most importantly a soup) to



3  
Rattles. From l. to r.: Cayuga turtle rattle (UM no. 70-9-215, collected at Six Nations Reserve, Ontario); Cayuga horn rattle (UM no. 70-9-229, collected at Six Nations Reserve, Ontario); Seneca squash rattle (UM no. 70-9-334). (All rattles bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)

those attending.

The Midwinter ceremonial, the longest of all Iroquois ceremonies, is a particularly advantageous event from which to view Iroquois ritual as a whole. Both ending and beginning the ceremonial year, it incorporates a number of ceremonies held at other times in the Longhouse. For example, the Our-Life-Supporter dances (at the Sour Springs Longhouse, comprising the series Feather Dance, Women's Dance, Standing Quiver Dance, Corn Dance, Bean Dance, and Squash Dance) constitute the principal rite of the Sour Springs Raspberry, Green Bean, and Harvest ceremonies. This rite is also part of the longer Green Corn ceremony, which includes in addition



4  
Water drum. (UM no. 70-9-450. Provenance unknown; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)

There is in Iroquois ritual little visual symbolism and little manipulation of sacred objects.



5  
Cayuga Corn Husk mask made of an old straw hat. (UM no. 53-1-20. Collected by Frank G. Speck, Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; purchased by Samuel Fernberger)

performance of the Four Sacred Rituals—Feather Dance, Thanksgiving Dance, Rite of Personal Chant, and Bowl Game. All these rites also figure prominently in Midwinter.

Through the rites of dream renewal, the Midwinter ceremonial also includes some rites of the so-called medicine societies. During Midwinter all dreams should be renewed. These include dreams that indicated a particular dance or game would cure, as well as those that

indicated a Medicine Society rite would.

Certain other rites are unique to Midwinter. The ashes-stirring rite on the opening days is an example, as is the lengthy tobacco invocation to the Creator.

### Ceremonial Paraphernalia

There is in Iroquois ritual little visual symbolism and little manipulation of sacred ob-



6  
Cayuga Pig mask. (UM no. 70-9-449. Probably collected at Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)

jects. The Longhouse is as bare of sacred visual symbols as a Quaker meeting house. All that is required are benches along the walls on which people may sit, some movable benches for musicians, and two wood-burning stoves or fireplaces. "Indian" costume may be worn for certain dances, but is not essential. Rattles and drums ("singing tools"; Figs. 3, 4) are essential to the performance of certain songs and dances, but in and of themselves are not sacred.

The most obvious exceptions to this lack of attention to sacred objects are the masks. These are of two types: those made of wood and those made of corn husks. The latter (usually now of braided corn husks) are worn by members of the Corn Husk medicine society in their rituals (Figs. 5, 8). Members of the False Face Society wear masks carved of wood, most often with horsehair, and tin circles around the eyes (Fig. 1). A few masks figure in the rituals of other societies, such as the Pig mask in the Medicine Men's Society (Fig. 6). Some others, such as the Beggar masks worn by children on their tobacco-collecting rounds during Midwinter, have no sacred connotations, although they may over the years come to be regarded as having curing power. Maskettes (small masks a few inches in size) are also made as a kind of token for the guessing of the correct



dream in the Dream Guessing Rite (Figs. 7, 8).

### Eagle Dances for Speck

In January of 1950, Speck went to the Allegany Seneca reservation in western New York State for the purpose of witnessing the Midwinter ceremonial scheduled to begin in the Coldspring Longhouse there on January 22. That day he collapsed. The Indians, much concerned about his health, decided to hold an Eagle Dance to restore him. The previous year, not long after

Speck had gotten out of the hospital (he had a myocardial condition), the Indians communicated to him that they wished to know about his recent dreams in order to determine which ceremony might be performed to help him recover. Paying attention to his dreams, Speck remembered one in which a few eagle-like beings had appeared. The Senecas took this as evidence that the Eagle Dance should be performed. It was. In January of 1950, after the Midwinter ceremony had been concluded, another Eagle Dance was given. Speck was sufficiently restored to return to Philadelphia. He died a week later. 2



7 Six Cayuga False Face maskettes used in the Dream Guessing Rite. (UM no. 70-9-185. Collected by Frank G. Speck, Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)



8 Two Husk Face maskettes used in dream curing rites. (UM nos. 70-9-181 [left] and 70-9-201. Collected by Frank G. Speck, Six Nations Reserve, Ontario; bequest of Samuel Pennypacker)



9 Frank Speck, ca. 1912. (Photographer unknown; photograph reproduced courtesy of Roy Blankenship)

### Frank G. Speck

In 1951, A. Irving Hallowell wrote an obituary of Frank Speck in *American Anthropologist*. Following are excerpts from that piece.

"Speck not only studied American Indians, but was deeply attached to them. They were as much a part of his personal as his professional life . . . In fact, the abiding interest he had in their languages and all other aspects of their mode of life and thought long antedated his entrance into anthropology as a scholarly discipline . . .

" . . . He became an Assistant in the University Museum and an Instructor in Anthropology at the University [of Pennsylvania] in 1908 . . . Although a meager offering of courses in anthropology had been available prior to Speck's arrival, it was he who must be considered the real founder of a Department of

Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. He was made Professor in 1925, was the senior member of the Department for the rest of his life and Chairman for almost the entire period. . . .

"In connection with Speck's early association with the University Museum as well as the fact that, at the time of his death, he was one of its Research Fellows, it should be noted that one of his most continuous ethnographic interests was in material culture, although he never viewed technology apart from its wider cultural context. Collecting, however, became an integral part of his field work. In the course of his career he must have collected thousands of objects which, in addition to the University Museum, are housed in many other museums . . ." These include such institutions as the American Museum of Natural History (New York), Reading Public Museum and Art Gallery (Pennsylvania), Cranbrook Institute of Science (Michigan), Royal Ontario Museum (Canada), Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (England), and Danish National Museum (Denmark).

"If there is an art of collecting, Speck had mastered it. He loved to handle 'specimens,' to surround himself with them, to discuss them in detail, to trade them or to sell them. He often visited antique shops where

he might, on occasion, buy an African figurine or an Australian boomerang, besides American Indian things. Many of the objects in his possession were to be found on the walls, on tables or on the floor of his office, to which they gave a distinctive atmosphere. Some he kept at home, others might be found in the handbag he often carried, or even in his pocket. . . .

" . . . [A]nyone who ever tramped the Jersey Pine Barrens, the tide-water swamps or the Canadian forests with him knows that besides his keen eye for snakes, birds, rare ferns or other plants, and his love of being outdoors, he never missed an opportunity to pick up an arrowhead or some other stone artifact that he often spotted before any of his companions . . .

"Frank Speck will not only be missed from the ranks of anthropologists; the many Indians who knew him even more intimately sometimes, will have lost one of their most welcome visitors and devoted friends."

(1951:67, 69-71, 75)

The Life and Times of Frank G. Speck, edited by Roy Blankenship, will be published by the Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, in 1988 as No. 4 in their Publications in Anthropology series.



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