

PREHISTORIC MAN IN THE MOHAWK REGION

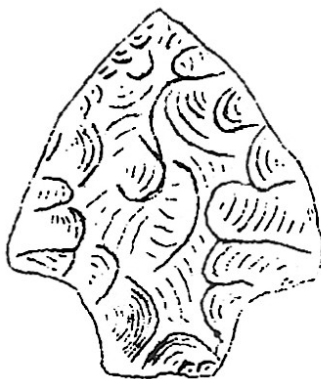
by

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VAN EPPS - HARTLEY CHAPTER  
NEW YORK STATE ARCHEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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FOREWORD

When, in the Fall of 1931, a local chapter of the New York State Archeological Association was formally authorized, a meeting of the charter members was held for the purpose of selecting a name for the new society. With the unanimous approval of those present, a unique decision was made; namely, to perpetuate in that name the work of two living men, naturalists and archeologists of note, whose careers typified the hopes and aspirations of the new-born Chapter. The first of these two men is Percy M. Van Epps, the author of the present paper. The second is his life-long friend and comrade in tracing the dimming trail of the Red Man through the hills and wooded valleys of the Mohawk Region, Robert M. Hartley.

Percy Van Epps is a tradition in the Mohawk Valley. There are few, interested in the early history of this region and in the still older story of the aboriginal races who came before the White Man, who do not know him, and fewer still who have not come in contact with his work, published over a period of many years in leading scientific and popular periodicals throughout the world. All too few of these are to be found today in libraries and private collections of rare volumes, for those were not the days of vast circulations and eager public interest in science, which he has lived to see and, in his own way, to bring about.

His love of the world about him and the people in it must have been born in him. For over three quarters of a century it has flourished, and it bids fair to go on for many years to come. The Town of Glenville has made him its historian and published a few of his valuable and delightful papers on people and things as he has known them, but by far the greater part of his vast fund of information is unrecorded, written only in his own active memory and the memories of those who have listened to his stories of other days. That is a great misfortune: greater than most of realize, for knowledge like his is a thing which, once lost, can never be recovered.

It is to the hope that more of the work of Percy Van Epps and others of his temperament will be recorded before it is too late, that the publication of this, his most recent paper, is dedicated.

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*P. Schuyler Miller*  
*Sec'y, Van Epps - Hartley Chapter*

PREHISTORIC MAN IN THE MOHAWK REGION

The subject chosen for my paper this evening is Prehistoric Man in the Mohawk Region. You will notice that I use the term "Mohawk Region", thus including a larger field than though I limited my survey to our valley proper. Furthermore, to clearly portray the story of early man in our region it will be necessary to step somewhat afield from our valley proper and its watershed.

Less than fifty years ago for one to express the belief in, or announce a discovery tending to show any great antiquity for man anywhere in our North American continent, north of Mexico, was promptly met in certain archaeological circles with a storm of protest and a cry of heresy. Sponsored, if not fathered by the head of one of our great educational foundations, this narrow and dogmatic dictum, limiting the period of human occupancy to a few centuries at most, was enjoined - yes, enforced on all his subordinate investigators, who, no matter what was disclosed by their labors, kept silence rather than brave the reproach of their chief or possibly lose their position. In this connection I will mention the case of Dr. Charles C. Abbott, who some forty-odd years ago announced the finding in the gravel beds of the Trenton River of certain chipped flint implements, or weapons, of a type similar to the paleoliths, or rude, chipped artifacts found in many places in Europe; chipped flints now known to be of a great antiquity. Perhaps there are some here tonight who will remember the storm of protest and hostile criticism that at once arose when Dr. Abbott published the account of his finds and his belief that the objects he described might be classed as true paleoliths; a belief now fully confirmed and corroborated by numerous authentic discoveries in many states of our Union.

Whereas, as we have seen, the archaeologist of fifty years ago, according to belief or policy, placed the advent of man on this continent but a few hundred years ago, today the trained investigator talks and writes in terms of thousands - yes, of tens of thousands of years. For instance, there is the so-called Folsom Man, a race that made excellent and efficient weapons and implements and was able to conquer giant beasts now extinct; a race of men that, like the mysterious People of the Red Paint that once inhabited our North Atlantic coast, seems

to have utterly vanished untold centuries ago. At a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held this past summer in Minneapolis, even the existence of Pleistocene Man on our continent was gravely discussed. Recent discoveries have been made in Minnesota of artifacts in unquestioned association with the bones of an extinct bison. Incidentally, these objects are said to be quite unlike those formerly used by the red Indian of that region.

#### FIRST MEN IN OUR MOHAWK REGION

Coming back home, what are the first traces of human occupation in our Mohawk Valley and its hinterland? As to the paleolithic class of relics -- rudely-chipped implements, "turtle-backs," so called, - a few scattered finds have been made, some of the objects found bearing a patina, or incrustation of a mineral oxide, only acquired through very long burial in the soil. However, hardly enough of this class of relics have yet been found, or in situations that would justify a positive claim for the presence of Paleolithic or Pleistocene Man.

Of man of an Eskimoan type, preceeding the red Amerind, a different story can be told. Here in our Mohawk region we now have undisputable evidence, given by numerous finds of the peculiar implements used by this race, of their presence, and possibly for a long period. This occupation occurred near the close of the glacial period, when the great and thick mantle of ice had waned and wasted away, not by a slow recession of a sharply-marked and high ice front, as formerly supposed, but by a process of stagnation and more or less swift melting of the ice sheet over large areas. Let us try to visualize the conditions as they probably were along the lower course of the Mohawk River. Our river, spoken of by the geologists as the "Iro-Mohawk," then flowed with a mighty volume, the main outlet of Lake Iroquois, a great interior sea occupying the basin of Lake Ontario and perhaps twice as much additional territory; its normal outlet through the valley of the St. Lawrence still blocked and dammed with the retreating ice mass. Passing the gateway of the valley, the Yantapuchaberg of Rotterdam and the opposite Glenville Hills, this mighty stream, its waters loaded with detritus, deposited the great delta flood-plain of Scotia and South Schenectady, stretching far towards the Normans Kill and Albany. A little to the east of Schenectady these waters were joined and augmented with a flood, bringing the waters of the Sacandaga and probably of the upper Hudson, by way of a postglacial channel through Greenfield, along the eastern base

of the Kayaderosseras Mountain, thence south through the trough of Ballston Lake and the valley of the Aalplaats. We might here add, however, some geologists think that early in post-glacial time, before the Ballston area, relieved of its load of ice, had regained its preglacial level, the flow in the Aalplaats-Ballston Lake channel was to the northward for a time, the waters finding an outlet eastward by way of the Round Lake depression and the valley of the Anthony Kill.

Here and there yet lay great masses of ice, "kettles," covered and thus preserved from melting by thick deposits of sand and drift material. The basins of Saratoga and Round Lakes are supposed to have been occupied by such masses of ice. The remains of the mastodon found at the building of the Harmony Mills at Cohoes, is thought to have been swept down this mighty river, thus lodging in the pothole where found. No doubt dead when thus transported, and with a possibility of having thawed from the ice sheet, perhaps there entombed for centuries, like the mammoths so often found in the ice of Siberia.

Of vegetation there was none, unless possibly certain species of mosses peculiar to an arctic habitat. If the region had been forested, as it undoubtedly was before the advent of the ice, all trace of such occupation had been utterly swept out of existence by the grind of the great ice blanket, lasting through untold centuries. Not until the passing of a long period would the region be again clad by the slow advance of the forest from the unglaciated Southland.

Of animal and bird life probably there was an abundance, of arctic or subarctic types.

During this period of transition, scattered here and there were many ponds and postglacial lakes, bodies of water impounded by the moraines and drumlins deposited at the breaking up of the ice sheet. These mainly were of small extent and of short life, being drained by their outlets cutting through the barriers of friable gravels and till. A certain few with barriers of rock remained for a longer period, and a few yet exist, sheets of open water.

### THE FUR-CLAD RACE

In the desolate, treeless area we have envisaged, sandwiched in a slowly-shifting zone between the retreating ice mantle and the advancing forest from the Southland, as we know, there dwelt and hunted along the banks and uplands of the great Iro-Mohawk a race of men, undoubtedly fur-clad, and of an Eski-

mo-like type who have left for us unmistakeable evidence of their presence, in many artifacts peculiar to people of the far north. Among these we find arrow and lance heads of a silicified red slate, material seldom if ever used by the red Indian. Several examples of the semi-lunar woman's knife, or "Ulu," have been found in our region, and from a fire-bed of this period near the mouth of the Mohawk there was taken a perfect and shapely curved knife fashioned from walrus ivory, its blade and handle in one piece.

Two miles north from the Mohawk River, in the town of Glenville, there is a low swampy area of considerable extent, the bed of a postglacial lake. On a hillock of gravel very close to the margin of this former lake there was found, a few years ago, an interesting and important group of relics of this Eskimoan people. These objects evidently used and left on this hillock while yet the lake was in existence are here listed: a semi-lunar knife of grey slate; a spear point of chert bearing a cream-colored patina; a notched spearhead of chert with smoothed base; four leaf-shaped knives of red slate, all about three inches long; a notched arrowhead of brown slate; a notched and slightly-barbed arrowhead of red slate; a notched spearhead of red slate with smoothed notches and base, and four broken arrowheads, slate and argillite. This interesting group of artifacts differs essentially from the usual type of Algonkian relics found everywhere on the adjacent area.

#### THE RED PAINT PEOPLE

With the retreating ice sheet the fur-clad folk passed from the scene, their culture followed or perhaps merged, as some think, with that of their successors, the Algonkin. Here, however, we must note the existence in our Mohawk region of at least one site thought to have been occupied by men of that little-known race, the People of the Red Paint; a race given this odd name from the occurrence of red iron oxide or red ocher on their village sites and with their burials.

The principal habitat of this race seems to have been along the coast of Maine, thence extending in a more or less narrow belt westward across New Hampshire and Vermont, entering our state in the Champlain region, thence westward to Oneida Lake and Ontario. Among the characteristic relics left by this race is a series of worked stones resembling the plumb-bob of a mason's level. Their use is unknown.

In our Mohawk region we have but one site that can safely be attributed to this race -- others may be found. The site in question is on the eastern margin of the Consalus Vlaie, an extinct, or occluded lake of small extent lying some six miles north of the Mohawk River, in the towns of Charlton and Galway, Saratoga County. This swampy tract is the birthplace of the Aalplaats, or Alplaus Creek. The site mentioned, on which objects peculiar to the Red Paint culture occur, is on the exact margin of the swamp -- the shore line when yet the area was entirely covered with water. Therefore, taking in account the extremely slow process of the filling, or occlusion, as it is called, of former bodies of water by vegetable growth, water lilies, sedges, and sphagnum followed by shrubs and tamaracks, we can safely assign the occupation of this place to a very remote period.

But a short distance from this lakeside site the late Hawley B. McWilliam, in 1890, unearthed a hoard, or cache, of nearly one hundred large leaf-shaped blades chipped from a blue flint. Thanks to the foresight of the finder, this cache of flints was deposited in its entirety in the collections of the National Museum at Washington. These objects were undoubtedly buried by the folk of the lakeside site.

#### THE ALGONKIN

At last the great ice sheet completely disappeared from our Mohawk region, its outposts far to the north, and its retreat was closely followed by the fur-clad race and the animals of a polar type. The barrier of ice blocking the valley of the St. Lawrence wasted away and that river again became the outlet of the interior seas of glacial time, and Lake Ontario came to its present size and level. The advancing forest line from the Southland gradually overspread and covered the desolate, treeless region with a heavy growth inhabited by the deer, bear, wolf and panther. Beavers built their dams and curious domed houses on the streams. The shallow and ephemeral ponds and lakes left by the melting glacier shortly cut through their barriers, their beds becoming swamps overgrown with willows, tamarack and swamp ash and the flooded river, long the outlet of Lake Iroquois, now relieved of the lake water, settled down to much the same volume and level it has today.

Into this changed region came the Algonkian nations, following, as some think the Eskimoan occupation only after a lapse of many centuries, or while the area was becoming more fit for human occupation. Here it is fair to say that others think

the two cultures, the Eskimoan and the Algonkian, may have overlapped and possibly to a certain degree merged; this, however, has not been definitely shown; at any rate, our Mohawk region as well as much of the area of our state finally became the seat of an extensive occupation by people of the Algonkian stock. This is shown by their numerous village sites found in nearly all the counties of the state. Dr. Parker has said that there may have been wave after wave of such occupation.

Where this people and our other red races originated, and how and when they came to our continent is a question still open, and one about which volumes have been written, advancing many different theories. This, however, is a matter outside the scope or design of this paper. Furthermore, as the story of the habits, manners and customs of the Algonkin, has been so ably told in many publications, and doubtless is familiar to all present, therefore we will pass that phase of the subject by, and simply tell of their village and workshop sites; their cornfields, granaries (cornpits), and the quarries from which they mined the material to fashion their tools and weapons.

In our Mohawk region we have several village sites, some of considerable extent, that we know were occupied by the Algonkin; and due to the zeal of our local chapter of the New York State Archeological Association others are now and then being disclosed.

The trained investigator has no difficulty whatever in deciding who were the occupants of our primitive villages. The artifacts found thereon plainly tell the story; the ornamentation borne by the potsherds is a well-nigh certain guide. The archaeologists of our state now recognize three separate periods of Algonkian occupation, distinguished from each other by a certain diversity of the artifacts found. To enlarge on the characteristics of these periods falls in the province of the specialist.

A large Algonkian village once existed in Glenville, very near the mouth of the Aalplaats, on its west bank. By the growth of the village of today all trace of this is now obliterated. Glenville also had numerous workshop sites, where the rough blocks of flint brought from some distant quarry, were flaked, chipped and deftly fashioned into knives, scrapers, arrowheads and spear points. Indeed, Kinaquariones, the name borne by the projecting rocky eminence just west of Hoffmans, according to Cusick, an authority on the derivation of place-names, means "She Arrowmaker." Therefore may we not fairly infer that long ago here lived a copper-colored woman, an adept in chipping and flaking arrowheads?



The source whence the Algonkian flint-workers of the region got their supplies of flint for making the weapons and implements, here found by the thousands, evidently was somewhere outside the territory embraced by this paper. It is true there are a few places where small quantities of flint seems to have been mined, as in a ravine north of Sprakers on the Mohawk, and possibly to a small extent at the Kinaquariones, but the material from these places is not of the quality and color principally used by the Algonkin of the region. Neither does their supply of this mineral seem to have been taken from the great flint pits near Coxsackie, in Green County--a place said to have been worked by the Indian for perhaps thousands of years; nor yet from the ancient flint quarry discovered near Middle Falls, Washington County. Perhaps we may look to the great primitive flint quarries on the Vermont shore of Lake Champlain, opposite Fort Ticonderoga, as the source of the excellent grade of flint used. The truth of this surmise might be ascertained by a comparison of our Algonkian finds with the Champlain material. Godfrey J. Olsen who is studying the archaeology of Ticonderoga and its vicinity writes: "So fine is the quality of this flint that General Knox ordered seven ox-loads to be shipped to the American army besieging Boston." This material to be used, of course, for the making of gun and pistol flints.

Small cleared areas in the primitive woods, spots cleared by the Indians for their cornfields were found here and there by the first white settlers of the region. These when used by the Indian were surrounded by a fence of stakes and wattlework to protect the growing corn from deer and other wild animals. One such cornfield was about a mile west from the village of Glenville, in the lee of a knoll, on the farm of Charles Kinum. Near the home of Joel Swart, on the eastern slope of the Kinaquariones can be seen today the primitive granary wherein the ripened corn from this very cornfield was stored for winter use. Here are a series of pits which when used were lined with bark, each one capped with a little teepee of skins or bark to shed the rain and snows of winter.

A large Algonkian village, classed as of the third period, was on the flats of the Mohawk River, in Rotterdam, on the Turnbull farm and quite near Lock Nine. This was discovered in 1923 and systematically explored by Vincent J. Schaefer and his able and zealous co-workers of the local branch of the State Archeological Association. Many fine and characteristic relics of the Algonkin have been recovered from this site. A series of these is displayed in the rooms of the Schenectady County Historical Society.

In the town of Amsterdam, close to its eastern border and about a mile north of the Mohawk, there was also an Algonkian village of considerable extent, and of a very early period. In a spring at this place, in 1880, there was found a hoard of 120 leaf-shaped blades of flint. One of the many theories advanced regarding the purpose of such deposits is that they were thus placed to propitiate the deity of the spring.

Noting certain finds made in former years, there are good reasons for believing that at a remote period there was an Algonkian village in the area now covered by the city of Schenectady; probably standing somewhere near Nott Terrace. Incidentally, in certain local histories Schenectady is said to occupy the site of a former Mohawk town. This is an error, for never at any time did the Mohawk Nation have a town or village at or anywhere near this place. Their nearest town was some twenty-five miles up the valley, not far from the mouth of the Schoharie Creek -- "two day's journey from the Hudson," said the Dutch traders. Nor did the Mohawk Indians until the day Van Curler made his shrewd purchase, claim ownership of the area. In the words of their old men, the eastern boundary of their lands was the top of the high hills bordering the Schoharie Creek. The sight of Van Curler's "Koates of Duffell," and his strings of "Good White Wampum," temptingly displayed, seems suddenly to have caused them to conclude that, after all, perhaps they really did own the lands the Dutchmen coveted.

Falling well within the historic period, the Mohawk Nation was not be included in the scope of this paper. Their occupation of the region, compared with that of their predecessors, was ephemeral. Jacques Cartier, the French explorer, sailing up the St. Lawrence in 1535 found the Mohawks then living in a group of towns along that river, their chief town being called Hochelaga. Dr. Beauchamp placed the time of their migration to our valley somewhere between the years 1560 and 1580; little over half a century before the entry of the Dutch. Therefore, reaching the close of the prehistoric era, it is seemly that this paper should also come to an end. However, a few words will be added regarded a race of primitive immigrants whose entry, sojourn and disappearance cannot be accurately fitted in our time scale of the prehistoric peoples.

#### THE MOUND-BUILDING RACE

At some undetermined period during the long though intermittent occupation of our region by various algonkian nations there came into our state a people from the West, unquestion-

ably of the Mound-Building race, whose remains are so common in the valley of the Ohio and elsewhere. Entering the Mohawk Valley they followed its full length to the Hudson. Here they seem to have divided, one stream going northward even to the Champlain region, the other following down the west bank of the Hudson nearly to Catskill. Below this point they do not seem to have advanced.

Several burial places of this race have been found in our Mohawk Valley; an extensive one at Palatine Bridge, another at Hoffmans and a third at a point about midway between Scotia and Hoffmans. Near Athens a large cemetery of this race was disclosed some years ago. Here were graves lined with slabs of stone. From one of these a necklace of 300 small beads shaped from native copper was taken. One of the graves in the cemetery west of Scotia also yielded a large number of unusually-large native copper beads. A fine celt, or axe, of native copper was taken from another grave at this place, also other characteristic artifacts of the mound-building race, among these, two fine stone tubes, one of these finely engraved with cross-hatching. The use of these tubes of stone, often found in association with relics of this race, has never been definitely determined. The sojourn of this race in our Mohawk region was seemingly short. No village site that can be attributed to them has yet been found, though it would seem that such of greater or less extent must somewhere exist not far from the burial places mentioned above. These may be hidden in some of the many forested areas of the region. A search for these is herewith suggested and recommended to the members of our progressive and efficient local archaeological society.

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