

## CORRESPONDENCE

### GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

#### *From a Collector's Point of View*

Speaking to "collectors," How many of you have ever thought of this collecting business in purely a business sense? It's a matter well worth considering. First, there's the question of value, present and future. Then there is the matter of ways and means of enhancing the worth of what you may have on hand. Third and last comes that inevitable and baffling problem of ultimate disposal.

Of all the conceptions of value in relation to our subject, I quote for you the *only one* that I have found that will stand up under analysis and still remain valid: "The value of all artifacts of ancient Indian origin, taken singly or collectively, either in a museum or a private collection, must be in direct ratio to how much can be learned from them." (Through a series of letters on the question, between E. A. Doolittle, of Painesville, Ohio, and the writer, this sense of value was worked out and chosen as our criterion, some six years ago.) Try to regard the value in any other sense and you will travel up a blind alley. Supply and demand? There is little demand for materials of this kind as a house decoration these days. (That women don't like them as a rule, is quite well enough known, but sometimes they are tolerated in a den, and among collectors there are bachelors, of course.) Dealer's list prices are good for the dealer; and purely for argument, I suggest, such may be a dependable valuation for old coins or postage stamps. However, such a comparison is absurd. Artifacts of ancient Indian origin may often be of much greater worth in one place, or in one collection, than they could possibly be in another, in view of association with other material which includes, at times, Indian remains. And when their identity, in this sense, becomes lost through a marketing process, I ask, where is the value?

If you wish to compare further, remember there is "something human about this. . . ." Whether from ancient dwelling places of the Indian, his mounds, or his burials, or from the records and material we have acquired, the existing evidence and the potential evidence is all that is left, on earth or under the earth, through which the prehistory of his people can be traced.

Of future value, I believe it is sufficient to say: When this basis for valuation is accepted, and becomes the bases of our methods, the worth will endure through any future time.

To enhance the worth of a collection, the ways and means must fit the special requirement of each case, depending on locality, and the individual's methods. So let us get down to the business of stock taking to see how we stand, and to find out whether our purpose, methods, and records are as sound as they should be. There are all kinds of ways of looking at this collecting business, and about as many different ways of going about it. Each individual "writes his own ticket." Out of this, different periods of progress can be established, and self scrutiny will show where we belong.

I recall correspondence with a fellow collector in Massachusetts who was much concerned about "fakes." He had been taking stock, and said: "It always takes so much of the joy out of life when I discover that one of my pet specimens is 'phony' that it always makes me sorry I ever found it out." (What a queer confusion of thought!)

While looking over an old time collection—surface finds picked up by a man who had spent his past "three score and ten" on the farm, I asked, among other questions, how he began collecting, or what purpose had prompted him "Oh," he said, "I've been at it ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. I know I often got licked for it, and I think I must have always had a kind of weakness that way!"

The most evident "weakness" was the absence of data records in any form, an all too common one in our rural districts. But in this instance there is potential evidence well worth salvaging. Most of the material is from places in his close neighborhood, including many shore finds along a stretch of the Grand River, about three miles each way from his farm. And several specimens I believe to be isolated records for Ontario that must mean something!

Now here's a two-way opportunity presenting itself for a collector in this vicinity, or for one who has acquired material from the same area. (1) By salvaging all possible data (before it is too late) he will preserve the latent evidence in this collection (a good enough thing in itself). (2) By associating the records, thus preserved, with those of his own for identical places, he will employ a form of co-ordination that will enhance the worth of what he may have on hand—and one that is among the best.

As a collector, I hold to the idea that data as recorded with associated objects is of greater importance, and worth, than the objects could ever be in themselves. With this as a basis, the writer's principal activity during the past five years has been a form of co-ordinated salvaging and recording; and if the idea became a general practice, I believe there would be a notable advancement among collectors as a whole, and their work would be of great assistance to archaeology.

The same idea affords a special kind of guidance, that will direct us beyond the pitfall of mere acquisition—that state of mind so well described by "I got!" The "I got!" period is a go-getting period; there is a rivalry in it, and its playmate is destruction. The advancement made, in this kind of business, is determined through the immensity of display in the collector's cabinet—his show window. I wonder how much can be learned from that. The greater the numbers, the more there will be to wonder over—like the stars above. Well, you can spend a lifetime gazing at the stars, each night, but unless you have been instructed in some way about the science of the heavens, they will merely twinkle, and you can still wonder what they are.

Enthralled by amassing "relics," the victim has little or no time for taking stock in regard to purpose, or methods; but sooner or later he will want to have some of the "know" about the material he collects. Then, to have enlighten-

ment, he must take his troubles to "the doctor"—either the professional archaeologist, or a student of the subject who has collected with some intelligence. No matter how wrong the methods may be, he should have enlightenment *if* it will lead him to something better. There are men whose purpose is sound, but who are wrong in their idea about methods; and a wrong beginning cannot bring a right ending.

For example, a "new" collector, that is a beginner, came to me a while ago wanting some "tips" on how to properly record data. I explained that it was necessary to know something of his purpose, or what he had in mind. His field was "a number of old Indian camps and village sites in the neighborhood." One, he believed, was new—never been exploited! From this site, and others, he proposed to collect specimens, properly record them, and then consult the archaeologist by means of a questionnaire. Thus, having the archaeologist's help and knowledge attached to the work he was "willing and ready to do," something would be known of the Indians who once dwelt in the district. Thus, while he gained some of the "know," archaeology would benefit by his activities. "Your purpose in seeking cooperation is quite right," I said, "But otherwise you have things twisted and are all wrong; you would fail because you have written your ticket without having proper advice. Such an undertaking would react on the purpose like a boomerang! Do you know what you'd really be doing? You would be destroying the evidence required for the archaeologists to answer the very things you wish to ask and know about. More than that, you would overlook evidence and thus destroy records of other things in connection with the prehistory of these sites, perhaps of the greatest importance to archaeology. That would not be cooperation at all; it would be directly the opposite!"

Let us close in and examine some of the recent research reports. Anyone who has the right kind of a thirst for knowledge of methods can see that in scientific excavating there is no "monkey business!" Under the earth is to be found the closest possible association of artifacts and numerous other things; if their situation is disturbed in the least, it can never be restored, and proper records of these intricacies are necessary for the story.

Some collectors have a penchant, or a "weakness" for digging, and knowing they are wrong (like our friend in Massachusetts), it makes them "hot under the collar" every time they find it out.

To make collecting worthy of continued existence, it is well to seek the archaeologist's advice. On the strength of the cooperation which followed such a course, in my case, thus proving its worth, I will pass on the basis of it—summed up in this simple code: To successfully cooperate we should bring our activities under control and use restriction, so that whatever we do will be complimentary to the work of the archaeologist, and not competitive.

The problem of ultimate disposal confronts us with limitations as never before. At the present time many museums are overcrowded, and recent advancements in the archaeological field bring further restrictions. The outlook

is toward a period of sifting—a “house cleaning” from which there will survive few exhibits bearing the old familiar label, “Presented by ——.” I take it that our collecting should be considered a custodianship rather than an ownership, and our records, more than the material, will show “Who’s Who and Why.”

When you have a three-in-one collection, as I have, the problem is more complicated. One part, a reference collection of projectile points, a series of representative types which has now served its purpose, could be sold. The other two interlock; i.e., material personally collected from a stretch of the Grand River Valley extending twenty miles upstream from Lake Erie, and of greater value, research records for this area, including salvaged records from a number of collections, which in a sense I have made my own, as a custodian. Sell these? No! I think there’s something human about them, both Indian and of myself.

In winding up our collecting “business,” we may rest assured, and nothing can efface the fact, that: “The good will live, the bad will die, and tomorrow will tell us which is which.”

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#### SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE ON CORNER-TANG ARTIFACTS

In last October’s issue of *AMERICAN ANTIQUITY* (Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 152–154) I published a brief note on corner-tang artifacts. The material contained therein had been collected and submitted during the summer of 1937. It is only fair to state that since that time Dr. Patterson has published in the *University of Texas Bulletin*, no. 3734, *Anthropological Papers*, Vol. 1, No. 5: *Supplementary Notes on the Corner-Tang Artifact*.

In the article he embodies, with three noteworthy exceptions, most of the occurrences of the corner-tang artifacts covered by my brief note. In addition to the list of states given by me, Dr. Patterson reports these artifacts from Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. The number of counties in Texas where these artifacts have been found increased from seventy to eighty-three, and the total number of corner-tang artifacts known to Dr. Patterson grew to 725.

Dr. Patterson gives as present boundaries of the corner-tang artifacts fourteen states, located between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains, extending from Texas (the presumable place of origin) to Montana. The map in Dr. Patterson’s report showing the central states indicates the four states of Louisiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin without any reported occurrence of corner-tang-artifacts. Of the three exceptions, by which my tabulation exceeds Dr. Patterson’s list, two fit in neatly with his distribution, showing occurrence of corner-tang artifacts in the two states of Louisiana and