

NOTICE OF THREE MICMAC FLINT ARROW-HEADS, FROM MERIGOMISH
HARBOUR, ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF NOVA SCOTIA, NOW
PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM. By PETER MILLER, F.S.A. Scot.

The place where these arrow-heads were found is a hill sloping to the south, and close by a cove of Merigomish Harbour which was the landing-place for canoes. The camping ground covered about three quarters of an acre, and evidently was of an early date. In some places ashes and oyster shells had accumulated to the depth of 14 inches. A great number of broken stone axes and arrow-heads were imbedded in this refuse. The place on the Big Island to which Dr Paterson refers in his history is near the west end of the island, and about two miles from this. There are other camping grounds on two small islands opposite our place about one mile distant, but these are now all grown over with trees. The collection which I had is now in the Halifax Museum. I have had spear-heads 6 inches in length. Broken fragments of arrow-heads are frequently found in our fields.—[Letter from P. Miller, Merigomish, to P. Miller, F.S.A. Scot., 1886.]

The following additional information respecting the Micmac arrow-heads is from a History of the county of Pictou (Nova Scotia), published in 1877 by the Rev. George Paterson, D.D., of that place:—

“Mr Donald M'Gregor of the Big Island, in ploughing a spot in his field where the vegetation was ranker than usual, turned up a human skull. On examination, there was found a mass of human bones much decayed, among them a skull, transfixcd by a flint arrow-head, which yet remained in its place. Along with these remains were a large number of ancient implements, stone axes, flint arrow-heads, &c., but none of them giving evidence of intercourse with Europeans. The transfixcd skull, and the whole appearance of the place, plainly showed that here the bodies of those who had fallen in some battle have been buried together.

“I visited the place in 1874. The spot is small, not more than 8 or 10 feet in diameter, and as soon as the ground is turned, it will at once be distinguished from the surrounding soil, being a loose black mould, containing decayed fragments of bone. This pit, if it can be called such, is very shallow, being not more than 15 to 20 inches deep. At the bottom I found decayed fragments of the birch bark, in which, according to the custom of the ancient Micmacs, the dead were laid. Below these was a hard subsoil, which plainly had never been disturbed. The shallowness of the pit also indicates that this burial took place previous to the coming of the Europeans, when sharpened sticks of wood were their only instruments of digging.

“The ground had been so thoroughly dug over before my visit that it was impossible to ascertain anything as to the arrangement of the bodies, and nearly all the implements had been carried away; but I found a stone axe, which bore the evidence of having been ground to a sharp edge, probably immediately before the encounter in which its owner fell; some fragments of very rude pottery; and a broken tobacco pipe, made of a very finely grained granite rock, the shaping and polishing as well as the drilling of the bowl and stem of which must have involved much labour.

“On examining the ground around, we found it was the site of an ancient cemetery, in which we found, in addition to such implements as

already mentioned, bone spear-heads and small copper knives. The burying ground used by the Micmacs till about forty years ago was about half a mile further to the west, but the place we refer to is evidently much older. Indeed, some of the remains seemed to indicate that they belonged to another race—a people of small size, like the Esquimaux. That the Algonquin race came from the south-east is now the received opinion of American antiquarians, and there are also strong reasons to believe that the Esquimaux occupied the shores of North America to a point much further south than they now do. Charlevoix describes the Micmacs in his day as maintaining a constant warfare with them, and the probability is that the former, on first occupying this region, drove the latter before them; and these remains may be the relics of their conflicts.

“One curious fact was manifest in this cemetery which has not hitherto been noticed in connection with Micmac customs, viz., the use of fire in some way in connection with the dead. Some of the graves give no indication of this, and in one I was able to trace the position in which the body had lain, viz., on its side in a crouching posture. But in other cases the remains were mixed with ashes, small pieces of charcoal and burnt earth, showing the use of fire for some unexplained purpose. In another I found quite a quantity of ashes, with small fragments of burnt bones, some of them an inch long. The whole had been carefully buried, and were probably the remains of some captive whom they had burned.”