

# John Michie Finds Indian Villages in Halton

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — In last week's history story we told of the history of these early Indians who inhabited Halton County. This week, the story of John Michie's collection of Indian artifacts, a portion of which he has agreed to donate to a County museum, should one be established.

By Roy Downs

This is the story of John Michie, the only local archaeologist whose hobby (to our knowledge) has reached so far into the lives of those early Indians who inhabited Halton before the arrival of the white men in the 1600s.

In his home at 15 John St., Georgetown, lies a comprehensive picture of these men and women who carved a living out of virgin forests, quiet valleys and rushing streams. His collection, unlike other collections of arrowheads, pottery and so on, is complete because it includes the complete gathering of articles from one Indian village in Halton which John dug himself.

It took him five years of his spare time to complete the "dig", and anyone seeing the collection would appreciate the work which has gone into his findings. It's a perfect start to a county museum.

I feel proud to tell this story, because John has never made public his findings before.

## Government Owns Findings

His reason, he explains, is because the Government some time ago declared that any findings from Indian villages are the property of the Government. They gather the articles, send them to Toronto, the best few relics are chosen and displayed at the Royal Ontario Museum.

This, according to John, is unfair. To tell a story you must tell the whole story; to give a picture of an Indian village with a few choice pieces of relics is useless. It's like buying a car after you've looked at the steering wheel, one hub cap and the rear bumper. "I'd chuck the whole works in the lake before I'd let them have it," he declares.

His idea, then, is to put the whole collection on display, properly labelled, with someone in charge who understands the collection to tell its story to visitors. A properly-trained museum curator, a good museum in a choice location, and a large collection of all facets of Halton's early days would be ideal.

How does one get interested in this fascinating hobby, I wondered as I talked to the collection owner on four occasions.

## First Find is Perfect

Well, John was born in Esquesing, son of the late Harold Michie and Mrs. Michie, and brought up on the Third Line. His uncle George Bailey of Hornby showed him an Indian arrowhead when he was 12 years of age, and it impressed John so much he wanted to know where he might find more. His uncle told him of two places to go, and his search unearthed the most geometrically perfect arrowhead he has ever seen!

This gave him a good start, and although his

interest was only for curiosity at that age, he started into archaeology in earnest. He felt that instead of hunting for treasure, it would be much more interesting to piece together the history of each campsite as he came to it.

"I wanted to compare their living with mine," he explained.

He read books, drew maps, and studied every possible site he could find. His collection grew and grew, as his studies increased and he began to write a book on his findings. He unearthed 14 campsites within a five mile radius right in Halton, and says there are more.

## Collection Lost in Fire

Then in March of 1953 a terrible fire razed



JOHN MICHIE, OWNER OF THE COLLECTION WITH AN AXE HEAD FOUND IN HALTON.

his house and the collection, books, maps and everything was lost. He sifted the ashes of the house and managed to recover many of his articles, but some near-perfect pottery and Indian pipes were lost. Also lost was his prize arrowhead to which he credits his hobby's start.

He had found only one village on which it was possible to make an accurate study. All the others have been plowed and disturbed by man's modern machines. He started to dig into this village in 1952, and had lost some sketches and some relics from it in the fire. He waited a year after the fire, then began again to rummage through the ruins. His dig was completed in 1958.

The village was situated on a flat plateau of sandy soil with a large bank all around it, where the ashes and refuse of the village were thrown into pits and burned. Five of these ash pits were found, also a sixth where the bones of animals and broken artifacts and pottery were thrown. The area was well watered by a spring creek, making an ideal site for the Indians who founded the village.

Four longhouses were unearthed the longest 42 feet long and the smallest 20 by 15 feet. Inside the large one, were 12 or 13 postholes for the bunk-type beds and a four foot avenue or aisle running from one end of the crude building to the other. Six firepits used for cooking were found, one firepit for each family.

## Finds Tee Pies, Firepits

Besides the other longhouses, John found three tee pie type homes, probably covered with bark or skin. The largest was 18 feet in diameter and had three firepits two for cooking and one for fashioning weapons.

To the east of the main camp area were small firepits but no longhouses or tee pies.

These pits were in a natural amphitheatre and it appeared as if this was the village's council area.

The whole site covered between four and five acres and would probably have accommodated about 175 villagers.

Other campsites uncovered would take up as much as 10, 15 and even 20 acres.

Some villages, he discovered, are older than others. Trade with the whites started around the years 1600 to 1610 and some villages showed signs of trade with the whites. One camp, however, seemed to be founded around the 1200.

## Uses Knife, Whisk, Shovel

Digging of a village is a painful, patience-requiring job. You must first study all records, then find a spot you think might have suited a wandering band of Indians looking for a campsite. Good drainage, a place to hide, and an abundance of water were necessary in each case. The color of the ground plays a large part in the discovering of these villages. The earth appears dark around the areas where the ash pits once burned.

The actual digging is undertaken not with shovels but with a sharp knife, a garden hand shovel and a whisk broom. As each item is found, the ground must be cleared from around it and the articles lifted carefully from the soil.

John's findings tell much of the story of our predecessors. Their teeth were very bad and a brew made of tree bark was the only solution for a toothache. No teeth were ever pulled out, no matter how rotten they became. "They must have had gangrenous mouths, bad breath and a lot of suffering," John declares.

## One Burial Ground

Digging up villages is fine, he maintains, but he stays away from the burial grounds as much as possible. He explains he ran across one bury-

ing spot by mistake and decided to dig it. But he'd rather leave them alone.

In his findings, John unearthed two battlefields which were the sites of "out and out battles". On one, it was plain to tell the story of this war 300 years ago from the position of the relics found. He saw an ambush, a heated battle and even determined the victors.

Their art amazes him. "It's all a cross-section of their way of life, and I appreciate the way their artistic ideas came to life through their clay and stone," says the collector. He says they found great artistic outlets through the manufacture of their pipes and pottery.

His collection contains too many articles to name here, however in it one finds a beautiful comb, many pieces of wampum, beads, flint and arrowheads, broken pottery, axeheads, tomahawks, knives, even a pair of crude scissors and an awl for leather working. The pipes are amazing, with short stems and artistically designed bowls depicting human and animal faces.

## Many Other Hobbies

And the owner is just as fascinating. He also collects old guns, does beautiful ornamental iron work, carves wood like a master, loves hunting and snowshoeing, and is enough of a wine connoisseur that he sometimes makes his own. On top of this, the Avro employee is enough of a carpenter that he has built his own new home near Limehouse, and moved into it this week.

Not to be outdone, John's wife does aluminum etching and leathercraft, so it's not an idle household.

I found this man one of the most interesting I have ever talked to, and his ideas about the establishment of a museum in Halton County are just as interesting. But more about that next week!

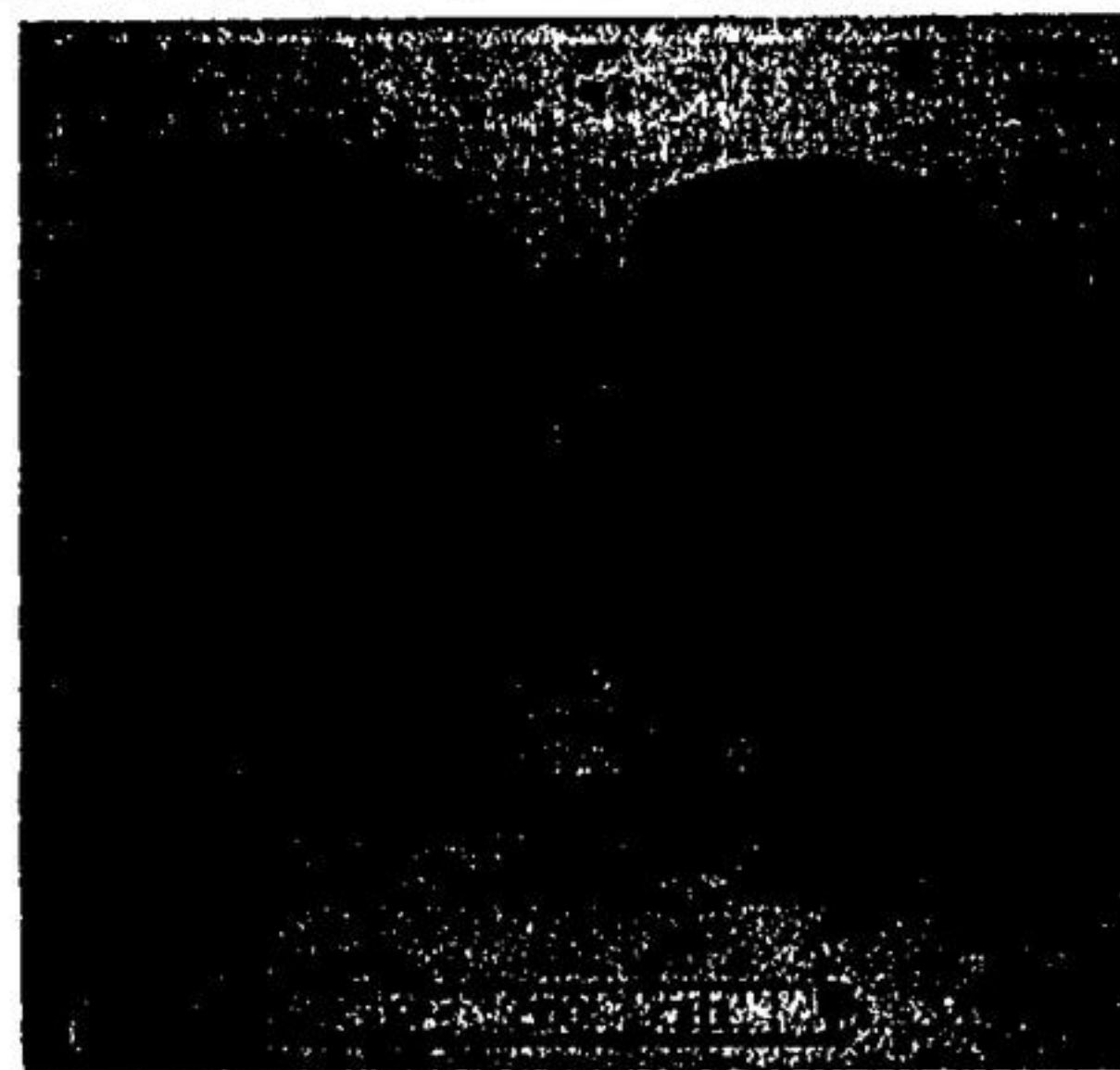
Many Relics Found in Area

## The Acton Free Press.

Eighty-Sixth Year, No. 11.

ACTON, ONTARIO, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8th, 1960

Second Section.



TWO PIECES OF BEAUTIFUL INDIAN POTTERY FOUND IN A VILLAGE IN HALTON

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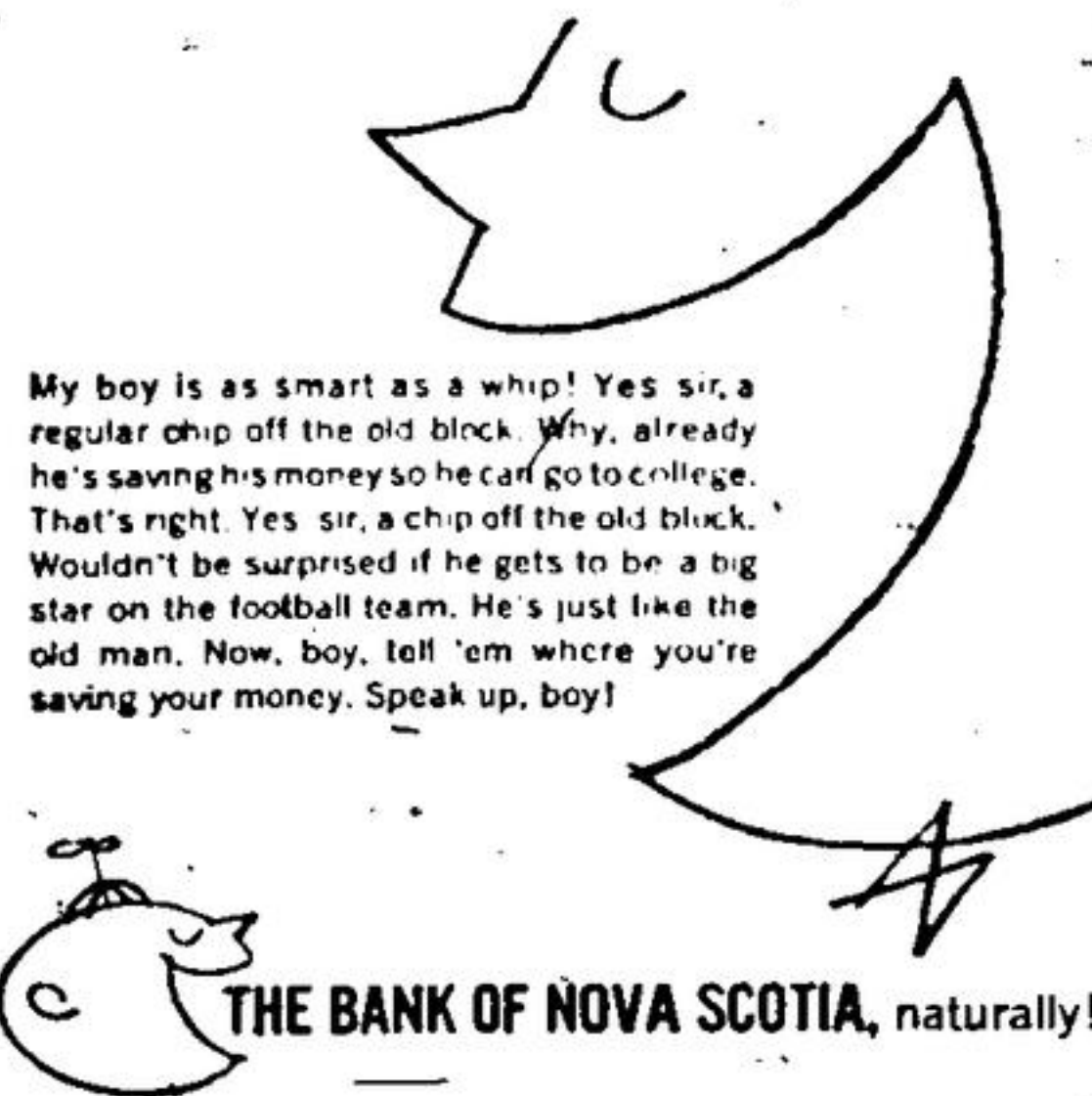
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FOR APPOINTMENT

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My boy is as smart as a whip! Yes sir, a regular chip off the old block. Why, already he's saving his money so he can go to college. That's right. Yes sir, a chip off the old block. Wouldn't be surprised if he gets to be a big star on the football team. He's just like the old man. Now, boy, tell 'em where you're saving your money. Speak up, boy!

THE BANK OF NOVA SCOTIA, naturally!

## ROCKWOOD

### Pranksters Toss Table Over Bank Into River

During the past few weeks, some party or parties have been removing a picnic table on Valley Road and dumping it over the edge of the rocky bank onto the river bed. A number of lights have also been tampered with by youths from out of town.

James Milne's booth in the park adjoining the highway is being well patronized since Civic Holiday.

Gordon Griggs concluded his services at the Presbyterian church Sunday morning. His ministry was much enjoyed.

Mrs. Leonard Nightingale has taken over duties as organist at St. John's church.

Schools reopened Tuesday at

ter the long summer holidays. Weekend and holiday visitors: Mr. and Mrs. Fred Day and family, Ancaster.

Mr. and Mrs. F. Day had been up in northern Ontario for a holiday and stopped here on the way home.

Mr. and Mrs. Milton Greer and family, Abershot.

Mr. Roy Day, Toronto.

Mr. Terry Heffernan and sister Patsy, Milton.

Mr. Dave Bauer and friend, Sudbury.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin Bauer and Miss Marjorie Bauer returned home during the past week from their holiday in part of Northern Ontario.

## Tattered Facts

### Town Was Seeking Industry Back in '16, Review Reveals

Rewiring his house, Charlie Binnie of R. R. 2 came across a faded old publication that proved so interesting he brought it in to the Free Press. The 20-page magazine-type booklet is titled "Commercial, Industrial and Progressive Edition of Hampton, Georgetown and Acton, Ontario" — a descriptive review of a number of manufacturing and mercantile interests located in the above-named live-wire towns in Peel and Halton Counties.

The date of the edition was 1916, and of course it was the Acton section that drew attention at once.

## Just 2,000 Then

Here one reads, "Acton is an incorporated village of 2,000 population... one of the most charming villages in this section. Factory sites, exemption from taxation, cheap electric power, good shipping facilities, sites for homes and good schools are available. Before you decide a location for your industry or home, write to the Reeve or Village Council."

"For 1916 they are reeve: George Hynds, councillors, Alex Bell, D. A. Henderson, Charles A. Bailey, Wm. H. Smith, clerk and treasurer, A. J. Mackinnon, Board of Education as follows: John R. Kennedy chairman, John Kenny, C. C. Speight, N. Forbes, Robert Scott, Wm. Johnstone and H. P. Moore, secretary treasurer."

There follows short articles on the town's industries — and businesses — Ryder and Mowat Glove Company, Beardmore and Co., the Merchants Bank of Canada, W. M. Cooper, D. C. Rus-

## Announce Dates District's Fairs

The following are the dates for fall fairs in this district and major fairs in Ontario.

- Aberfoyle—September 20, 21.
- ACTON—September 16, 17.
- Ancaster—September 22, 24.
- Bolton—September 30, October 1.
- Brampton—September 15-17.
- Caledon—September 9, 10.
- Elm—October 7, 8 and 10.
- Galt—September 22-24.
- Georgetown—September 30, October 1.
- Grand Valley—September 30, October 1.
- Kitchener—September 26 to October 1.
- Lastowel—September 26, 27.
- London (Western Fair)—September 12 to 17.
- Markham—September 29, 30, October 1.
- MILTON—September 23, 24.
- Orangeville—September 20, 21.
- Ottawa (Central Canada)—August 19 to 27.
- Rockton—October 8 and 10.
- Shelburne—September 16, 17.
- Toronto C.N.E.—August 24 to September 10.
- Toronto (Royal Winter Fair)—November 11 to 19.
- Walkerton—November 2, 3.
- Waterdown—September 13, 14.

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