

NUMBER XIX.

STANDARD of TRADE at the several Factories of the *Hudson's Bay Company*, subsisting this present Year 1748.

NAMES of GOODS.	AR		MR		YF		CR	
	Quantity valued.	Beaver.						
Beads, large Milk of Colours of all Sorts	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kettles, Brass, of all Sizes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Black Lead	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Powder	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Shot	5	1	5	1	4	1	4	1
Sugar, Brown	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Tobacco, Brazil Leaf Roll	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Thread	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Vermilion	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Brandy, English	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4
Waters, White or Red	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4
Broad Cloth, Red, White, or Blue Fine Blue	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	3
Bays, Red or Blue	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	5
Blankets	1	6	1	6	1	7	1	7
Duffels, Red, White, or Blue	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2
Flannel	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Gartering	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Lace, broad Orvis	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Worsted Binding	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Awl Blades	12	1	12	1	8	1	8	1
Buttons, Coat Waistcoat	12	1	12	1	4	1	4	1
Cargo Breeches	1	3	1	3	1	1	1	1
Burning Glasses	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bayonets	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Combs, Ivory	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Egg Boxes	4	1	4	1	3	1	3	1
Barrel Boxes	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	1
Feathers, Red	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1
Fish Hooks	20	1	20	1	14	1	10	1
Fire Steels	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	1
Files, large flat	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Flints, Fre.	20	1	20	1	16	1	16	1
Guns, 4 Foot	1	12	1	12	1	14	1	14
3 1/2 Foot	1	11	1	11	1	14	1	14
3 Foot	1	10	1	10	1	14	1	14
Pistols	1	4	1	4	1	7	1	7
Gunwoms	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	1
Gloves, Yarn	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Goggles	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Handkerchiefs	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hats, laced	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4
Hatchets	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Hawk-bells	2	1	2	1	6	1	6	1
Ice Chisels	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Knives	2	1	2	1	4	1	4	1
Looking Glasses	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Mocotaugans	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Needles	12	1	12	1	12	1	12	1
Net Lines	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Powder Horns	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Rings, plain	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1

Looking Glass
Mocotaugans
Needles

The first appearance in written English of the Indian word “mocotaugan.”

The use of *mocotaugans* in the Hudson's Bay Company's list of trade goods in 1748, it seems safe to assume, indicates that the English traders had been using the word verbally for a considerable number of years prior to that year, and had been using it so frequently that even the HBC officials in London chose it to identify the artifact. It is interesting to note, too, that *mocotaugan* is the *only* Indian word used in the list, and that there is also a separate entry for “knives.”

Why Call It “Mocotaugan”?

MORE THAN SIXTY NATIVE TRIBES OCCUPIED THE WOODLANDS WHEN EUROPEANS FIRST arrived, and most of those tribes each spoke (but never wrote) their own regional variation of one of three major language families: Algonquin, Athabaskan and Iroquois. Thus, the distinctive man’s knife of the Woodlands Indians was known in native tongues by many names. For example, Frank Speck reported four different Penobscot names for this knife — such as *biketagenigan* and *pekarakenigan*. On the other hand, present day Paul Tamburro, of Indian blood and an independent scholar, says, “The name I had for it was from Micmac — *wahawknigan*.”

However, the most common Native word for this knife by far was some form of *mocotaugan*. The largest population of Woodlands Natives spoke various Algonquian dialects, each with its own version of the knife’s name derived from a common ancestral root. Since there was no written language in the pre-contact Woodlands, and transcriptions from a variety of spoken dialects into written English were made in the field mostly by men with no particular skills in linguistics, there grew up many English versions of the printed word. Among these versions are *mokotagan*, *mokutagan*, *mokuman*, *mukutan*, *mokutaken*, and *mohentagen*. The Canadian Museum of Civilization classifies each of its fifty-four Woodlands men’s knives as “crooked knife,” but further identifies three as *moxkEtaqin*, and various others as *mokk Edaqan*, *mokuman*, *mokEtaqEn*, *mokEtaqin* or *mokutagen*.

But the first Indian word for this particular tool to enter the English language in writing was spelled *mocotaugan*. This spelling first appeared in 1748 on a Hudson’s Bay Company list of trade goods, sixty years after the HBC set up its first trading post at Rupert House. Also, *mocotaugan* was the first word used to identify the knife in a major institutional setting, the British Museum, about 1836.



Yet, the word *mocotaugan* has always been, and is still, used only infrequently, in English or in French. The dominant common term for the tool has for years been *crooked knife*. This term was undoubtedly adopted long before 1695, when it first appeared in writing as *couteau croche* (hooked knife) in the French missionary Sebastien Rasles's *Dictionary of the Abanaki Language in North America*.

*“The first Indian word
for this particular tool
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was mocotaugan.”*

Since that time and up to today, English speakers have almost exclusively used the English equivalent of that term. Even most major museums use that term extensively to classify this artifact, but they use it along with many other terms such as “basket-making knife,” “bent knife,” “canoe knife,” “curved knife,” “carver’s knife,” “carving tool,” “crook knife,” “general utility knife,” “hooked knife,” “household knife,” “Hudson’s Bay Company knife,” “kitchen knife,” “man’s knife,” or simply “knife.” One museum, the Detroit Institute of Art, identifies its two *mocotaugans* as “sculpture.”

Another naming problem is that “crooked knife” is a term used in a variety of ways not at all related to the Woodlands Indian artifact. For example, Malaysia’s “tiger claw” knife is also known as a “crooked knife.” William Shakespeare, and other authors, used “crooked knife” to poetically describe death’s symbolic scythe. And G.K. Chesterton in one of his Father Brown detective stories describes as a “queer crooked knife of the Orient” an object far different from the Woodlands knife.

Given all this confusion, it seems to make sense to use the word *mocotaugan* consistently. Such use is both more precise and more appropriate. Practically, this word clearly distinguishes the knife from all other kinds of knives and from those of other peoples, especially from its near relatives, the palm-up drawknife of the Eskimos and the Indians of the Northwest Coast. Historically, it is the word rooted in the oldest and largest indigenous language family of the Woodlands. It is the first word for the knife recorded in written English. And *mocotaugan* is a word that encourages continued remembrance of the distinctive culture from which it came.

What Dictionaries of Native Languages Say

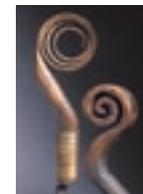
Drawknife...

An informed review of some well-known Native American language dictionaries tells us that *some* form of the word *mocotaugan* was present in a significant number of Woodlands tribal vocabularies, and that, whatever the tribe, whatever the spelling, the *meaning* of the word in every instance was *drawknife*.

The review was conducted by Gregory Finnegan, chief researcher at Harvard's Tozzer Library of Anthropology. The dictionaries covered the dialects of the Algonquin/Nipissing, Ojibway, Ottawa and Saulteaux tribes — all "Middle Tier" members of the ancestral Algonquian language family. The books consulted were the *Lexique de la Langue Algonquine* by Fr. Jean-André Cuoq, 1886; *A Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language* by Fr. Frederic Baraga, 1878; *Eastern Ojibwa-Chippewa-Ottawa Dictionary* by Richard A. Rhodes, 1985; and *A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe* by John D. Nichols, 1995.

All these dictionaries include some variant of the word *mocotaugan*, e.g., *mokoman*, *môkomÁn*, *môkodjigan* and *mookojigan*. The *very* strong similarities of these word forms in different Middle Tier dialects indicate clearly that the root word for the Native drawknife was present in the ancient mother tongue; was present in some form in other tiers of the Algonquin language family that was centered in the region between the Great Lakes and Hudson's Bay; and spread throughout an immense area north and east — the area where most mocotaugans have been found.

This evidence of the broad range of some form of the root word strengthens the proposal for adopting the name *mocotaugan* to distinguish the generic Woodlands man's knife from all others.



The Importance of the “Man’s Knife of the North”

SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL, IN THE WOODLANDS THAT STRETCH DIAGONALLY FROM THE FAR northwestern tundra of North America south and east through dense forests, rivers and lakes, and down the Atlantic coast to North Carolina, the Native men almost universally used these odd-shaped but highly versatile knives for practically every aspect of their daily life.

Europeans who early ventured into the great Woodlands of the New World again and again were struck by both the great prevalence of this “peculiar” knife and the skill with which the aborigines made use of it. For example:

Captain John Gyles, writing of his captivity about 1696 by the Maliseet Indians in Maine, observed that the crooked knife was part of every man’s equipment.

In the northwestern mountains, by 1806 or earlier, traders Hunt and Hankinson were selling imported crooked knife blades to the natives.

John Franklin wrote in his *Narrative, to the Shores of the Polar Sea, 1819-1822*: “Our working party that had shown such skill as house carpenters soon proved themselves to be, with the same tools (hatchet and crooked knife), excellent cabinet makers, and daily added a table, chair or bedstead.”

Franklin G. Speck, the eminent anthropologist who lived for years with the Penobscot Indians at the turn of the last century, observed, “The crooked knife is of prime importance. Two to half a dozen are owned by every Penobscot man. I have seen a worker here split out a cedar log a foot in diameter with maul and wooden wedges, and in several hours trim down the ribs and lining of different sizes for a canoe, using only the crooked knife for shaping and smoothing.”

John Wesley Powell, the noted explorer and curator of the American Bureau of Ethnology, reported in 1898 that “no [Northeastern Woodlands] man ever goes off on a journey without this knife, however short may be the distance... [and he uses the knife] to make a thousand and one indispensable objects.”

Those thousand and one indispensable objects ranged from the most elemental (fire starter shavings and sliced rawhide thongs, for instance) to the most spiritual (carving ceremonial false face masks). Other objects included ax and adz handles, wigwams, moose hide and bark canoes and their paddles, harpoons for beaver and spears and weirs for fish, vessels for carrying and storing daily necessities, wheels for starting fires, cooking pots, food trays, bowls, ladles, spoons and drinking cups, bows for drills and bows and arrows for hunting, toboggans, snowshoes, snow snakes and snow goggles, tobacco pipes, drums and rattles, lacrosse sticks and dancing sticks, war clubs and cradle boards. The list could go on.

What makes the Woodlands mocotaugan so unusual to the Western eye at first glance is its form: the metal blade is typically set at an angle to the handle, something like a jack-knife not quite fully opened. What is even more unusual is that the knife is used by *pulling* the blade toward the body with one hand. The knife is gripped palm upward with the thumb pressed against the handle’s underside.

What makes the knife especially distinctive is that it carries on a drawknife culture that was created tens of thousands of years ago, a culture long abandoned in other parts of the world.

This design provides a user with an implement of superb ergonomic efficiency. In pulling the blade toward the body, palm up with the fist at a natural angle, the purchase force of the knife is remarkable. Equally remarkable is how this toward-the-body motion maximizes the small motor control of the thumb, wrist, elbow and upper arm to enable the user to produce work of extraordinary versatility, complexity and precision. Thus the crooked knife was an exceptional tool for the native North American man to use both to carry out many different daily chores and to create significant works of art.