

THE HISTORY OF THE LACROSSE STICK – PART TWO

The lacrosse stick was invented by the Haudenosaunee people (Six nations native American tribes, including the Mohawks, located near the Great Lakes) and the game was discovered by Europeans as early as the 16th century, although it was in the 1630's when the French Jesuits came to explore the land near the Huron country. The first written records of the game played by the Huron are by Jesuit priest Brebeuf in 1637 in now Midland, Ontario. The writings were part of the "Jesuit Relations" – journals sent back to the King of France from North America.

According to Dave Stewart-Candy "The oldest stick in the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame collection is an old Choctaw-style stick apparently from the 1890's as well as a stick from a New Westminster player believed to be circa 1895-1900.

Some years ago, a stick (with no pocket materials) was found in New Brunswick that was believed to be 1840's or 1850's. I was shown photos of it, but there is no way to know anything about it. It was found in a muddy river bed or shoreline and for all we know it could have just been a tree branch carved into the shape of a rudimentary homemade stick. It did not look native or anything like that. I was reluctant to say much about it, lest my words became changed into factual knowledge about it".

Below is the late legendary lacrosse stick maker Alfie Jacques with the famous 1830 Cayuga medicine stick that he was honoured to hold for about 45 minutes in the Penn Museum in Philadelphia! Notice the dog's head end near the webbing and the grasped hands and lacrosse ball intricately carved into the butt of the stick!



THE 1940'S

The Lally business was founded in 1880's by Frank Lally, who at that time was still playing with the Cornwall Lacrosse Club. The quality of his craftsmanship became well known and he received a special diploma when he exhibited at the World Fair in Chicago in 1893. In 1903 Frank's younger brother, Joe Lally, took over the stick manufacturing business. All of the Lally sticks were made by Native Americans who worked in the factory.

Given the success of the Mohawk business, which commenced in 1931, the Lally business declined and Joe Lally approached Chisholm in the mid 1940's to buy his business, but on the condition that he did not include the remaining Roundpoint brother, Frank. Chisholm was not prepared to do that but circa 1945 Lally agreed to sell the business to Chisholm and Frank Roundpoint.

Chisholm was highly respected by the Mohawks and vice-versa, and he retired in 1967 after 39 years of teaching Mohawk children only. His wife also taught at the reservation.

Sadly the factory was burnt to the ground in June 1968, Frank Roundpoint died a month later, but the workers wanted the business to continue and picked up their tools and what they could and started manufacturing sticks from their homes. A new cement block factory was built within 4 months of the fire.

As a result of the fire there was an extreme shortage of lacrosse sticks in the market. The recently introduced plastic stick helped fill the void in the field game and accelerated the take up in the lacrosse community. Up until this time Chisholm Lacrosse Company virtually had a monopoly in the box and field lacrosse versions of the game. The fire, the death of Frank Roundpoint, the introduction of the plastic stick and the expansion of other hickory stick manufacturers when the factory burnt down contributed to the start of the demise of the company.

In 1972 the Mohawk Lacrosse Stick Manufacturing Co. purchased the net assets of the Chisholm Lacrosse Manufacturing Co. Sadly the Mohawk Company went into bankruptcy in 1974, due in the main to the inability to regain the field lacrosse market in the U.S. and abroad.

According to Dan Bowyer "I still have my Michael Etienne 'Pro-All-Star' from the Oka Reserve outside of Montreal, Quebec that I purchased in 1970 from Coombes-Ferguson in Peterborough, Ontario.

A few years ago I took it to Alfie (Jacques) to have him (Photo below) replace the catgut wall and leather. When I went back I discovered that Alfie had used deer hide for the leather and totally cleaned the wood so that it almost appeared brand new. I told Alfie that when I went to purchase it I was directed to the back shed and asked to pick one. There were several hundred sticks in the shed and I spent the better part of an hour looking for the right one. I told Alfie that my stick at that point spoke to me and that's why I bought it. Alfie said he knew what I meant by that and simply smiled".

Hickory is not the only wood used - ash, ironwood, even beech have been used, but hickory has spiritual medicine applications for the Haudenosaunee where the others do not.



The Dept of Indian Affairs started a new company, Mohawk St. Regis Lacrosse Ltd, in October 1975, with Canadian Cycle and Motor appointed the distributor of their high quality wooden sticks.

The rest is history, sadly the hickory market is virtually non-existent and the plastic stick has taken all before it. Anyone who had a hickory stick, or still has one in their garage, would appreciate what a wonderful thing of beauty they were, the feeling of a perfectly balanced stick, with its lacquered fence and oiled frame. The sadness and gloom when that wonderful friend breaks! I have three in my garage and they will go to god when I do! Comparing hickory to plastic is like comparing something unique to a mass produced item. They can't be compared but sadly the hickory stick no longer competes, like an old warrior its time has come, but it lives forever in our memories.

WHO HAVE BEEN THE KEY MAKERS SINCE THE 1960'S?

According to Dave Stewart-Candy from the Canadian Lacrosse Hall of Fame "My understanding with Logan was, along with the Etienne - Martin, Mitchell (Mohawk International), and Patterson, they became the four main wood stick manufacturers in the 1960's -1980's, picking up the slack around 1968-1972 range when Chisholm had their factory fire and then later closed down operations. Not sure when Logan and Martin stopped producing sticks, probably sometime in the 1980s. Patterson was still making some in the 1990's but was having quality problems, to the point it probably helped speed up transition to synthetic sticks, tupperware, pool scoopers, call them what you want... it was around this same time 1990-1995 that we saw the transition from wood sticks to synthetic sticks in the Canadian game. Mitchell was still making sticks into the 2010's - my two woods that I used when I played were both brand new Mitchells made around 2007-2008 range".

According to James Calder, Mitchell/Mohawk International are still making and selling sticks today.

Dave Stewart-Candy again "I think the difference between Alf Jacques and the others mentioned above, is Alf has been more of a small batch manufacturer, custom ordered, etc. while the rest were more factory production with a production

crew involved in some aspects, if not the wood harvesting or carving at the start, then the pocket weaving at the end. Alf does all this from start to finish himself”.

Jim Calder adds “My guess on quantity of sticks being made today would be in the low thousands each year. There are probably 10 or so stick makers located in Ontario and Quebec in Canada and in New York State in the USA, who make long sticks. There are also 3-4 Anishinaabe (Ojibwe, Potawatamie, Odawa, and Chippewa are all Anishinaabe) stick makers who make the smaller great lakes stick.

These Great Lake style Sticks are still used in ceremonial games and I am finding greater interest in them as people see re-enactments of the game with single post goals. Joe Valliere is a Chippewa stickmaker who makes Great Lakes Sticks”.

It is surprising that given the Ojibwe seem to live from Ottawa to Wisconsin, along the border, that their sticks haven't taken off or been used widely by players in the last century compared to what we know as the traditional stick, although we know there have been ceremonial games in south-western Ontario over the last few years.

“There are probably the same number of stick makers who make the sticks for stickball (two small sticks), Clovis Hamilton is one of the Choctaw stick makers and are located in Choctaw and Cherokee territories in the southern USA. The Great Lakes sticks and stickball sticks are not made from hickory as it is not central to their cultures”.

Hickory sticks are primarily used these days in the First Nations Box League, and it seems people are more and more getting interested in the roots and history of the game and feel a "Real stick" should be part of their collection.

ALF JACQUES

Alf Jacques is a famed maker of wooden lacrosse sticks. He has been in the art of making lacrosse stick for over sixty years, since his father walked him through the forests of the Onondaga reservation south of Syracuse and helped him pick a tree.

“I was about 13 years old, around 1962, and we were playing lacrosse here on Onondaga Nation, and the local Indian guys were running around playing,” Jacques remembers. “I didn't have my own stick, and they cost about \$4 or \$5 apiece at the time, and we didn't have any money”.

“So my father says, ‘What the heck? Let's make our own.’ So we went into the woods, found a tree and started making sticks.”

The time that Alf has poured into his craft has made him not only a master artisan, but a keeper of a centuries-old tradition indigenous to upstate New York.

In the beginning, “We made a lot of ugly sticks,” Alfie remembers. But once the father-and-son team perfected their technique, the market for their product was huge. They produced as many as 11,500 sticks a year, employing several workers and selling to men, women, boys and girls.



Then, in the 1970's plastic sticks came into vogue, and demand for hickory dried up. Louis went to work stringing plastic heads to supplement his income and Alfie took a job as a machinist, making rocket engine parts for Allen Tool.

Even as they took outside employment, the stick makers refused to give up their trade. After Louis died in 1985, Alfie maintained the family business alone. He emerged from the lean years with a new business model, a new clientele.

Apparently Alfie prefers shagbark hickory for his sticks, and while he still strings sticks, he has passed on the heavy lifting to a number of apprentices.

The oldest stick that Alfie has is a Lally Special circa 1920!

Click the link below to learn about how sticks have been made by Alfie Jacques, 60 years on!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKb1rArGurA>

LOGAN

Wilfred "Willie" Logan (1935-2021) was inducted into the Ontario Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 1998 as a player that played for intermediate and senior teams based in Kitchener, Hamilton and St. Catharines. He was a member of an Ohsweken team that won a CanAm League championship.



CRAFTSMAN WILLIE LOGAN: Making the best lacrosse sticks in the world

522 x 700

He was known for the “Logan special,” a coveted design and make of wooden lacrosse stick, as Logan utilized a unique technique in carving of the curve for the head of the stick.

The legacy of stick making was passed down by his father Joseph Logan of Six Nations, and Logan set out to keep producing the best wooden lacrosse sticks in the world. Lacrosse players from Canada, U.S. as well as England regularly ordered “Logan specials”. A draw knife was used to produce the final form of the stick with Willy carefully providing finishing touches with sandpaper.

The Logan special was made of selected wood with straight, close grains that gave superior strength and resilience and remain a favourite among stick collectors.

We believe his sticks were made at Six Nations and heard only good things about them from players from the 70's era, however we don't believe there are any other family members of that name making sticks these days.

There are other stickmakers at Six Nations these days including Henhawk and Powless.

PLASTIC

The first patent for the plastic field stick was late in 1970 and it took just under two years for it to completely replace wood in the NCAA. Plastic had really replaced wood by Spring of 1972 in the USA. (STX and Brine) There was a plastic box stick made in the late 1960's in Canada but it was not successful when used in box games.

Click below on the evolution of the plastic stick from Dan Bowyer

<https://youtu.be/W6pU2gBMXCo>