



ARTHUR CASWELL PARKER — 1881-1955

On New Year's Day, 1955, after an eventful and fruitful life of 73 years, Arthur Caswell Parker died suddenly of a heart attack. Even on the final day of his life he had been busy about the delightful hilltop home overlooking Canandaigua Lake, where he and Mrs. Parker had spent his "active retirement" period since 1945, when he terminated a score of his most productive years as director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences. It was largely owing to his skillful planning and energetic accomplishment that the Rochester Museum developed from a small nucleus housed at Edgerton Park to its present impressive establishment on East Avenue and its general recognition among the museums of the country. This was the phase of his career best known to me because of my close association with him as his staff archaeologist.

His youth was passed on the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation, where he was born at Iroquois, N.Y., on April 5, 1881, the son of Frederick Ely and Geneva Griswold Parker. His paternal lineage included Seneca Indian ancestry; his grandfather, Nicholson H. Parker, a civil engineer and leading Seneca sachem, being a brother of Brigadier General Ely S. Parker, military secretary to General Grant in the Civil War, and Lewis Henry Morgan's principal informant on the Seneca.

Out of this nurtural background stemmed Arthur Parker's intimate and sympathetic understanding of the beliefs, customs, and problems of the contemporary Indian, which consistently characterized his whole life and was manifest in many

(Continued on next page)

directions, as in his service as secretary of the New York State Indian Commission (1919-22), his presidency of the New York State Indian Welfare Society, his active affiliation with the Society of American Indians and the Indian Rights Association, and his chairmanship of the Committee of 100 appointed in 1923 by the Secretary of the Interior to investigate prevailing conditions among the reservation groups.

This sense of kinship and deep concern probably also accounts for his preoccupation with the ancient beginnings and early history of the Iroquois, whom he has defended with the written and the spoken word. Yet, rather curiously, his formal education, taken at Dickinson Seminary, Williamsport, Pennsylvania, was in preparation for the ministry. The lure of "old, forgotten, far-off things," soon led him, however, into the anthropological fold, first as an archaeological assistant at the American Museum of Natural History (1900-03); and then (1903-04), in company with a like-minded young man, Mark R. Harrington, now Curator of the Southwest Museum, he performed his apprenticeship as a field archaeologist for the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University, under the stimulating direction of the erudite and dynamic Professor Frederick Ward Putnam.

In the latter year he came to Albany as ethnologist for the New York State Education Department and in the following year he was appointed the first full-time salaried archaeologist of the New York State Museum, a position he held until his acceptance of the Rochester Museum directorship in 1925. At the State Museum he accomplished his field work in Iroquoian ethnology and archaeology and wrote his major publications in these subjects. Among those of most enduring value are "Excavations in an Erie Indian Village and Burial Site at Ripley, Chautauqua County, New York" (1907); "Iroquois Uses of Maize and Other Food Plants" (1910); "The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet" (1912); and "The Constitution of the Five Nations" (1916).

Coincidental with this field work came the amassing of some of the chief collections of anthropological materials of the New York State Museum. Among his other accomplishments, during this highly creative interval, should be listed the still popular and treasured series of 6 full-scale Iroquoian life groups, the

planning and construction supervision of which were his responsibility.

In 1916, in the same year he organized the still-thriving New York State Archeological Association, Parker was awarded the Cornplanter Medal of the Cayuga County Historical Society for his research in Iroquoian ethnology. The University of Rochester conferred an honorary M.S. degree in 1922, following publication of his "Archeological History of New York," the initial effort to classify the then known prehistoric cultures of the state.

The second major phase of his career began with his role of administrator at the embryonic Rochester Museum. Now his interest in the educational function of the museum, which he regarded as "the university of the common man," came to full heat. With characteristic vigor he undertook the difficult assignment of developing a small, obscure museum under public support, into a monumental institution dedicated, through a host of varied services, to the promotion and dissemination of knowledge.

With mounting success came more numerous tokens of recognition, in the form of academic honors and public acclaim. Union College conferred a doctorate in science (1940), and Keuka College bestowed upon him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters (1943). In 1946 he received the Civic Medal of the City of Rochester and in the following year, the Citizenship Award of the Rochester Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution.

Still I have not exhausted the ledger of this multifaceted man. He stood at the top in Masonry, to the history of which he had contributed research and writings. He probed, also, into other historical domains, as attested by his well-received book entitled, *A Manual for History Museums* (1935). He authored a series of books for young people; he served in various capacities in historical, archaeological, Masonic, and civic organizations; he wrote voluminously, and lectured much to popular groups. In a word, he sought, and found, acclaim and distinction in a host of abiding services to his fellow man.

WILLIAM A. RITCHIE

The following items have been selected by Alfred K. Guthe to indicate the range of Arthur C. Parker's interests and contributions.

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