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IROQUOIS SILVER BROOCHES

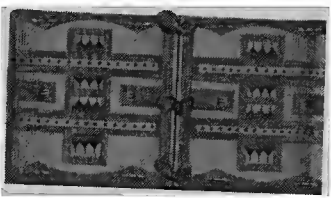


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THE IROQUOIS SILVER BROOCHES

BY

HARRIET MAXWELL CONVERSE

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1902

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THE IROQUOIS SILVER BROOCHES

BY HARRIET MAXWELL CONVERSE

On the insignia of authority of all peoples, be it scepter, staff of office, rod of empire or the simple rod of the primitive medicine man, there have been decorations, jewels, gold and silver. The ermine and the purple have been adorned with rare gems; the robes of state have nestled against the sheen of gold lace; the seal and the talisman have borne the embellishment of glinting jewels equally with the coronet, crown and diadem. The simple fillet of the peasant woman boasts its decorative twist; the snood of the maiden, the emblem of purity, is not guiltless of its dainty ornamentation; and even genius and bravery do not reject the laurel.

From the crown of the monarch, where precious stones rival one another in glory, to the trinket of the untrained savage the same theme embraces all human kind in the pomp and array of its vanities and vainglory. Be it tinsel or gem, the rainbowed glint of the diamond, the sanguine glow of the ruby, the stillness of the sapphire, the restfulness of the emerald, or the peaceful pearl, even these have caught the rhythmic vibration of nature and decked themselves with her gala colors to perpetuate the annals of kingdom and crown.

Primitive man had his conception of the beautiful in his rude way and his suggestions of decoration always. He may not have caught the glowing gem, but the threaded shell and varicolored pebble have answered his desire to decorate and beautify.

Silver "chaste and steadfast" has ever served the will of courtly and gracious peoples. With exquisite effect it illustrated ancient art. The shah of Persia has his most precious gems set in silver. The poison of the ancients was concealed in a silver ring, that the condemned might kiss its signet and die like a hero. The seal stones of Mohammed are set in silver. The Per-

sian is not permitted to say his prayer with gold about him, and the chaste silver holds fast his jewels. In the ancient empires he who was emancipated from his slavery wore, as the emblem of his freedom, silver rings and ornaments. Antique legionary devices, the rarest in history, are found in silver. Amulets of silver were given to soldiers going to war as the marks of valor or distinctive tokens. Many a Roman, when expelled from the equestrian order for libel, forfeiting his insignia of membership, a gold ring, wore a silver one in the bravado of his personal liberty. And so from the ages down, whenever and wherever decorations have been bestowed, silver has told the story everywhere.

So with the Iroquois Indians. Save a little in brass all their jewelry has been silver. I have never seen a gold decorative ornament made by an Indian. The collection of brooches in the Indian museum at the capitol in Albany N. Y. includes nearly all designs used by the Iroquois brooch-makers since the coming of the paleface to their country. There is a legend of the olden days of the Iroquois, that somewhere in the northern part of the state of New York, a young chief was led by a dream through rocky passes to a mountain top. During his travels a glowing light, which preceded him, illuminated the rocks, wherein were embedded in layers long strips of shining silver metal. From its hiding place, it answered only to the magic light; yet the traveler was permitted to take one of the shimmering ribbons in his hand as proof that it was a vision of reality. His dream was repeated several times; and, remembering the path, he succeeded in invading the secret repository in the daytime, yet could not find the precious metal. All the rocks looked gray and sullen. Finally the privilege of farther knowledge was granted him, but he must work only by torch light, with the caution that, if he betrayed the treasure place, his power would be taken from him. But tempted by the persuasions of those to whom he had shown his prize, he did betray the treasure trove, and the illuminations ceased forever. However, as nothing of silver has been found in the ancient burial places, I think we can safely date the Iroquois

brooches from the French invasion. The earlier ones were hammered from coins, larger ones, possibly, devised from medals; in fact, the French and English arms are frequently seen on the back of many of the larger varieties. On many of the smaller brooches we find the trademark of the manufacturer of the spoon, fork or whatever it may have been that had come into the possession of the brooch-maker. In his hammering, these trademarks were preserved by the brooch-maker as ornamentation and thus, ignorant of the alphabet, he has unconsciously perpetuated the name or initials of some foreign artisan in his story of silver.

Designs

I fail to find in illustrations of jewelry ornamentation of either the French, English or Dutch, designs that have been actually followed in the hammered coin brooch of the Iroquois. In fact, I credit him with entire originality, very curious, in some cases; and again there are suggestions of the white man's work ingeniously interwrought with his own conception of art, not so rude or savage that it has not developed genius and invention. Totemic devices have conspicuously figured in the creation of these brooches. There are also stories of mythology depicted by the various tokens of nature; the moon, sun, stars, birds, beasts, and the secret symbols known to the medicine lodge have been wrought into these silent emblems. The white man also made these silver ornaments and sold to the Indian; but the eye of the expert can easily detect the work of the Indian, which is crude and uneven, done by hand, having no stamp work or sign of machinery blocking. The complete outfit of an Iroquois brooch-maker, who had retired from work because of old age, was discovered during the last year. His limited store of patterns were constructed from zinc taken from the back of an old washboard. He never made jewelry from American coin. He had a moral scruple against doing so. But his later work was more finely finished because of his opportunity for obtaining the white man's tools. He said he preferred silver to gold because it was the color of the clouds.

Interesting among these Indian fancies are the various patterns of bands which were worn about the head and decorated with feathers. This primitive crown did not represent the ruler of a kingdom, as the Iroquois were genuine socialists. There are bracelets of rare designs among the collection, and finger rings that represent union of hearts, also widows' rings of strange device, numerous and interesting. There is no entirely useless ornament. The brooches were worn as buttons, buckling the dress or coat together securely. Sometimes a well-to-do Indian woman will wear three or four hundred of these brooches on various portions of her dress. The men adorn the waistbands of their breechcloths in the dances and their buckskin coats with these ancestral inheritances; for many of these descend as heirlooms from one generation to another. Now that the Iroquois brooch-maker has passed away, and modern "spangle" jewelry takes the place of the old time brooch, it is left to the faithful and reverent "old folks" to preserve even the few yet in existence.

In the state collection at Albany there is a curious lot of small round brooches strung together on buckskin. As none other of their kind have been found among the Iroquois varieties, it was decided to investigate their origin if possible, and thus far they have been traced to the Algonquin maker. This is proved by the resemblance in form to the German silver brooches of the Sac and Fox—tribes of the Algonquin. These special brooches were in possession of the pagan wife of Red Jacket when she died. Her descendants tell the story of their having belonged to a captive in the old age. If the captive was an Algonquin, they were probably suggested by some French design, though the form is somewhat original.

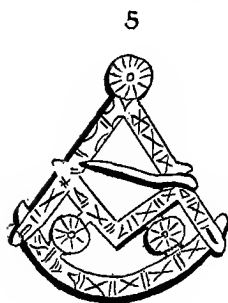
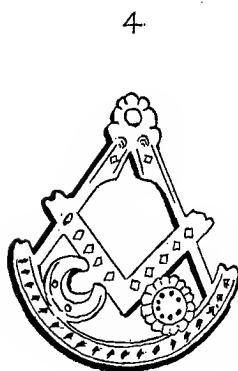
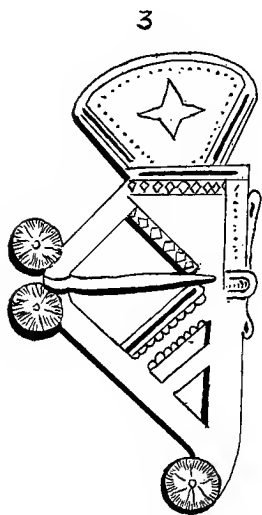
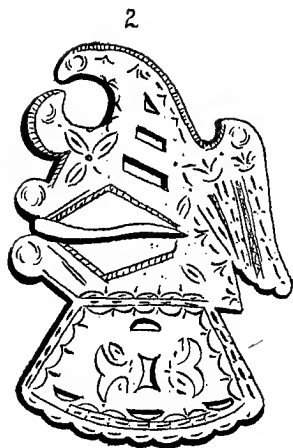
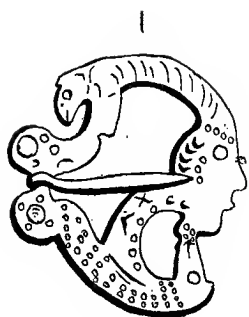
If an expert could identify a flint arrowhead as the hand work of any special nation or tribe of nations, so might the silver brooch be traced to either Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga or Mohawk. Though each of these had its own brooch-makers, the ornaments have been scattered among the various five tribes by gift, purchase or exchange and national identification rendered impossible.

The Iroquois were also workers in brass; but few specimens of that metal are in existence, rings being specially rare. The cross in silver and the double cross are commonly worn by the pagans as ornaments only, and by the Christianized Indians as a symbol of faith. The eagle, which so conspicuously figures in their mythology, is frequently seen in brooch and earring. Also the heron and snipe and a rude shield. There is also proof of clan and personal friendship in the designs of many of the brooches.

Plate 62

1 The most curious and ingenious form is that of no. 1. I have never seen a duplicate of this brooch. It symbolizes the totems, or family union and the man, including the story of their warrior ancestors. By the marriage law of the Iroquois, the tribes were divided into clans or families consisting of four elder and four younger brothers: For example, the Senecas were of eight families—Wolf, Bear, Beaver, Turtle, Deer, Snipe, Heron and Hawk. From the establishment of the confederacy this family heraldry has been perpetually hereditary. By special arrangements, fraternity was secured and the identity of blood kin preserved. The first four of the clans, being brothers, could not intermarry, and likewise the younger four, but either of the elder four could intermarry with the younger four, the relationship being cousins. The rigor of this tribe or clan rule has been somewhat relaxed during the past century, and a member of any one clan may marry with a member of any other, but members of the same clan may not marry—a Wolf may not marry a Wolf. Therefore brooch no. 1 tells the story of the union of the Wolf and Bear family. The upper figure represents the bear. The lower, the Wolf, united by a human face, signifying the head of the family. The figure of the Wolf terminates in the war club. The bear holds the war club, and the pin, or buckle, unites the two. The Bear chief had married the Wolf woman. Both descended from sachems, or head chiefs.

2 This represents a combination of the great eagle, guardian of the dews and war, or sky and earth. At the spread of the tail the small winged symbols indicate his duty in the air. The flat half circles tell the sign of his earth or war office. The simplest brooch mark is not an accident of the graver's tool. Each stroke is a symbol in hieroglyphs understood by the expert sign reader.



3 This is rare, inasmuch as the design is not common. It is the symbol of the warrior. On one end is formed the tomahawk, on the other a war club.

4 A masonic brooch worn by Red Jacket, made for him on his admission to a masonic lodge, said to be the only brooch in the collection hammered from an American coin. It has been proved that Red Jacket was a mason.

5 A smaller pin of the same order.

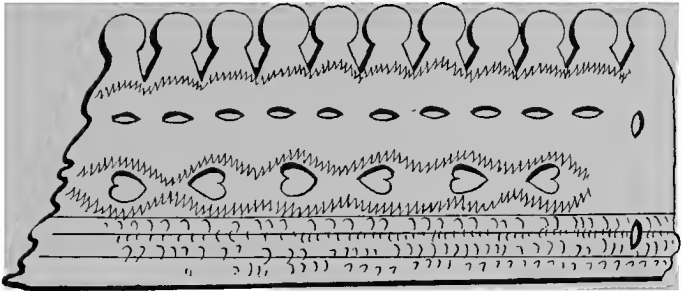
6 Represents union of the nations in war far from home, as it contains the land and water sign, wavy and straight lines, as well as a token of union of the tribes.

Plate 68

7 Section of a headband.

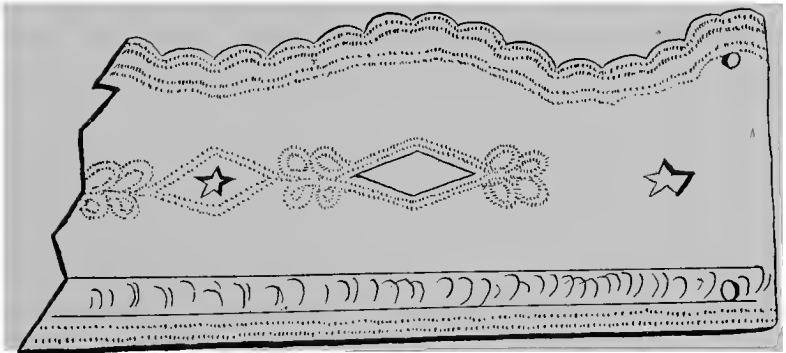
8 The same.

HEAD BAND (SILVER) 7
 LENGTH 23 INCHES WIDTH 1 3/4 INCHES



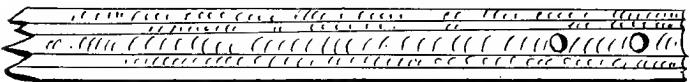
3 CORRUGATED LINES AT BASE

HEAD BAND (SILVER) 8
 LENGTH 22 3/8 INCHES WIDTH 1 3/4 INCHES



2 BROAD CORRUGATED LINES AT BASE

HEAD BAND (SILVER) 8
 LENGTH 22 3/4 INCHES WIDTH 3/8 INCHES



CORRUGATED



Plate 64

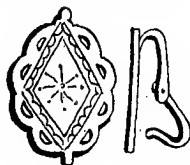
- 9 Silver earring, eagle.
- 10 Earring with pendants, the loop representing a war club.
- 11 Earring without pendant.
- 12 The only gold earring in the collection. This represents a melon.
- 13 An earring, inlaid with glass, with green tin foil underneath.
- 14 War club and arch combined. The arch signifies a brace, or union of the tribes.
- 15, 16 Similar in construction, yet 15 holds the club and is guarded by the heads of two turtles, branching out from the upper side.

10
SILVER EARRING

9
SILVER EARRING



11
SILVER EARRING



GREEN GLASS SETTING AT *a*

13
SILVER EARRING

12
GOLD EARRING

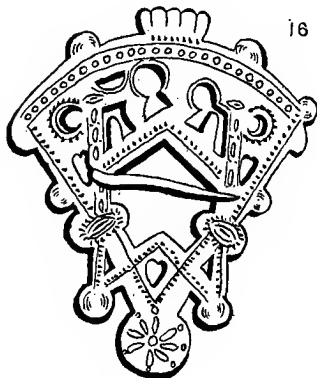
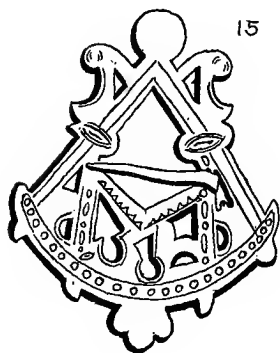
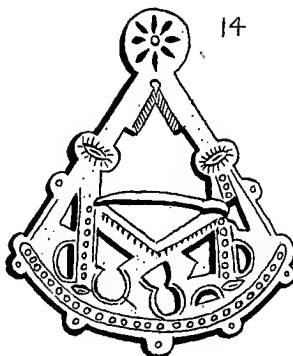
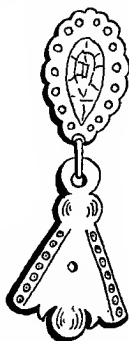




Plate 65

17, 18 Uncommon. Found in Canada. Two hearts surmounted by a crown, symbolizing friendship.

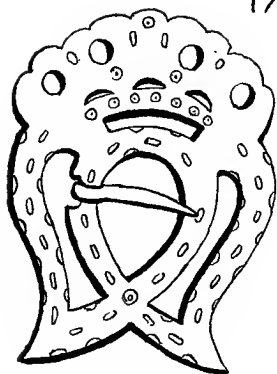
19-22 Same design varied.

23 A single heart, surmounted by the horns of a chief, typical of the faithful love of whoever presented it to the chief, or sachem.

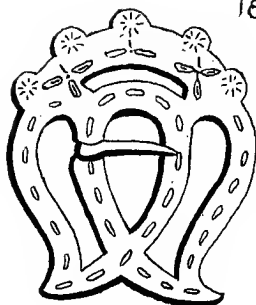
24 Rare. A crown terminating with a double eagle-headed snake. This serpent has power over the land and sea. The wavy lines signify water, the long line, land, and two dots, signify the day, sun and moon, or the journey, the rest and the start.

This brooch is also recognized as an important symbol in the secret medicine society.

17



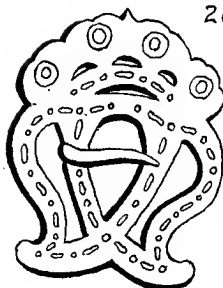
18



19



20



21



22



23



24



Plate 66

25 Council fire. Side half circles defining the earth; two crescents at top the first and last quarters of the moon.

26 This is very old. Chief's brooch with a good heart and the serpent of land that guards the war club.

27 Represents the flaring tail of a bird, yet the heart is on guard in the center. Evidently a totem bird.

28 The owl, guardian of the night. An emblem of silence and secrecy.

29 Owl brooch.

30 Heart, guarded by an owl face.

31 Very rare. Finely engraved.

32 Heart and face brooch.

33 Horned, or chief's brooch. The three branches denote three chiefs in family succession.

26



25



27



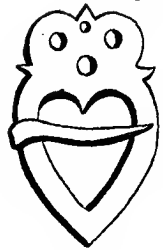
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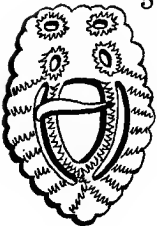
29



30



31



32



33



Plate 67

34 Heart and face.

35 Heart and horned owl, open mouth, no eyes.

36 Heart and speaking owl, defined by the open mouth.

37 Friendship ring. Two hands clasped across the heart, surmounted by a crown, the emblem of victory.

38 A widow's ring. Two hearts, one dead and the other living. The first has no mark. The second is graven with teardrops, called by the Indians "the weeping heart."

39 One variety of the various styles of star brooches.

40 The council fire. Uncommon variety. The three uprights are the signal flame of the council fire. The crossbars indicate the sticks of wood that are crossed in this fashion, as by the points of the compass, as they lie on the ground ready for the torch.

These cross sticks symbolize the extent of the Indian lands, or the roots of the great "Union tree" which extend north, east, south and west.

41 Chief's horns, journey signs and tents. This illustration is reversed; the horns should be at the top. Green glass ornament.

42 Very old. Double war club; braces, tent and chief's horns. A union nation brooch.



37
SILVER FINGER RING



38
SILVER FINGER RING

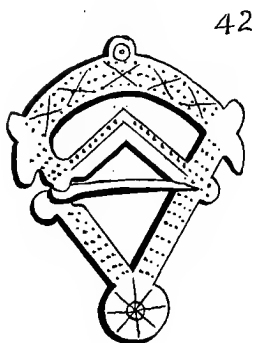
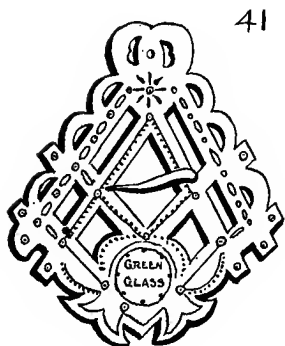
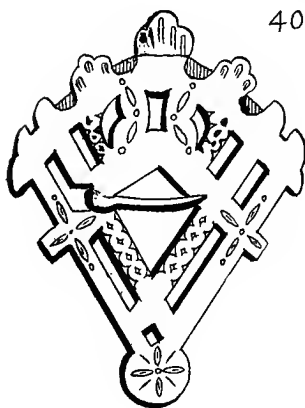
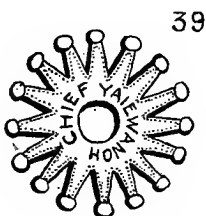


Plate 68

43 Brooch suggesting a masonic emblem. This form is frequent among the Mohawks. Brant and Red Jacket were free-masons.

44 Uncommon. A scroll; a wolf's head between two stars.

45 Brooch, star-shaped points terminating with war clubs.

46 Horned heart brooch.

47 One form of council fire brooch.

48 Cross; evidently white man's manufacture.

49 Heart brooch.

50 Double cross. Indian make.

51 Heart and deer horn brooch.

52 Earring.

53 Earring.

54 Brooch, reversed. Uncommon variety of the deer horn and war club combination.

55 Eagle earring.

56 Top of earring.

57 Earring.

58 A circle brooch with earth symbols.

59 Earring with turtle heads pendant.

60 Heart brooch.

61 Earring.

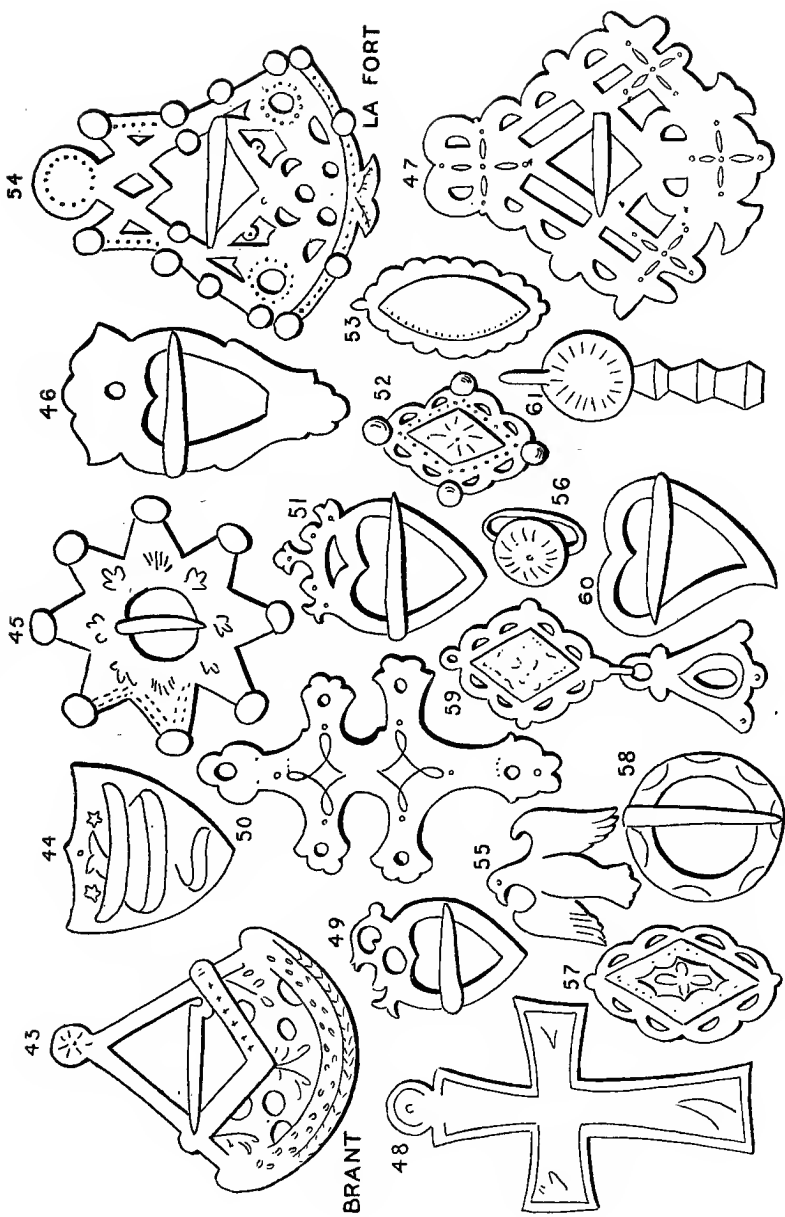





Plate 69

62 Another variety of fig. 71 and 74 on pl. 70.

63 Reversed. Turtle heads and horned crown combined. Turtle and deer clan totems.

64 Reversed. One of the council fire brooches. The  at the top signify the new and old quarters of the moon; this must have been an annual call.

65 Same as fig. 71 on pl. 70.

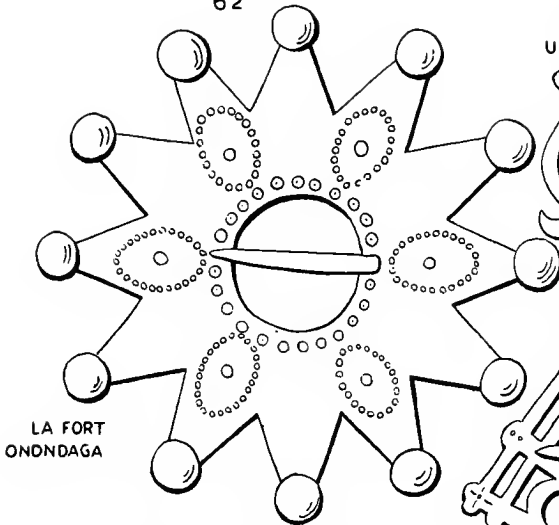
66 One of the double crosses not frequently found in burial places but occasionally among families. Evidently white man's manufacture.

67 Reversed. War brooch. Clubs at the termination point possibly among foreign nations, inside club among domestic or nearer people; rather an unusual combination.

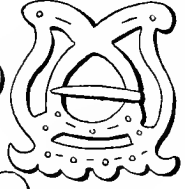
68 The owl and heart variety.

69 The simple diagonal which is a type of braces (symbol of union and strength). This is one of a large variety.

62



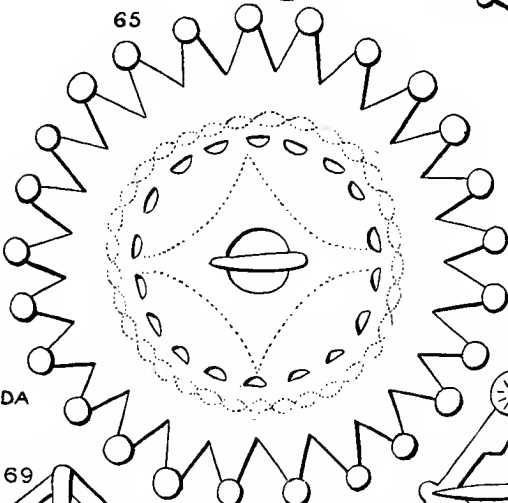
63
CANADA
UNUSUALLY WIDE



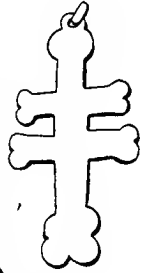
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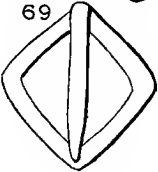
66



67





69




68



Plate 70

70 Canadian. A combination of the horned owl and heart; land dots and water signs  signify travel; the curved lines  and two divided lines are winding paths and journeys.

71 An unusually large brooch. The outer circles at the points sometimes signify moons. This would count 24 moons. The  in the center is the sign of camping. I should call this a war brooch. Sometimes these lines are simply ornamentations and doubtful to interpret unless signified in combination with other symbols.

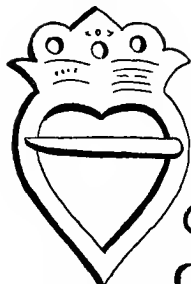
72 A rare battle brooch, the upper end a tomahawk combining the war clubs (3) at each point.

73 Canadian. An uncommon variety of the double heart; the five circles are possibly a five nation symbol.

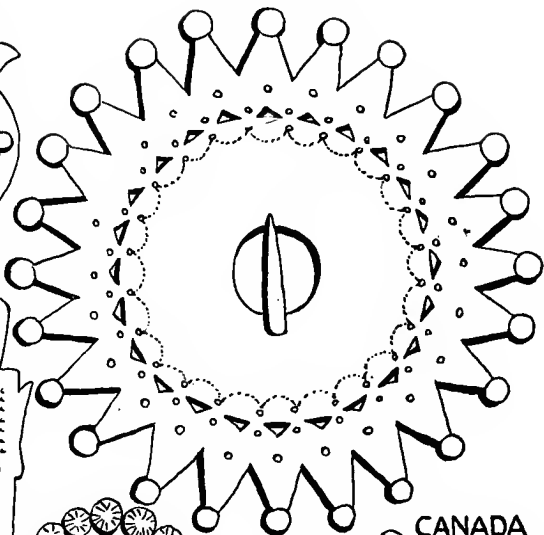
74 Not unusual, same type as fig. 71.

75, 76 These brass brooches are found in the west, notably among the Sacs and Fox tribes.

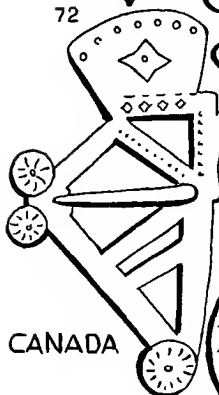
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CANADA



CANADA 71



72

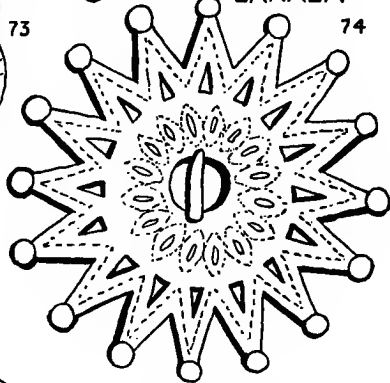


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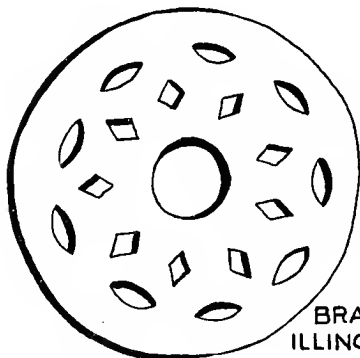
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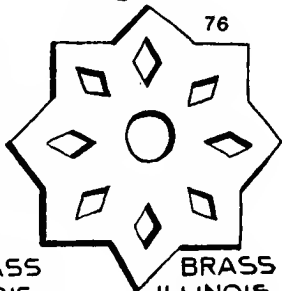
74

75



BRASS
ILLINOIS

76



BRASS
ILLINOIS

Plate 71

- 77 Lower pendant of an earring.
- 78 Lower section of earring; uncommon; turtle heads projecting from the lower edges.
- 79 Heart earring with earth designs in union sections.
- 80 Earrings.
- 81 Brooch. Uncommon design. A heart surmounted with a hovering heron, the clan bird.
- 82 Brooch, reversed. A varied form of combination of the heart surmounted with antlers. Deer clan.
- 83 Heart brooch; council, uncommon design; surmounted by a crown within which are the heart and war clubs. On the projecting corners are the deer horns and turtle heads, the oblong squares signifying councils are guarded by men, and the sun circles which indicate days. The larger circle at the point would indicate the circle of wampum guarded by the wampum keeper and the subkeeper.
- 84 Brooch, reversed. Earth and stone axe design.
- 85 Earring.
- 86 Earring. Inside glass, under which is green tin foil.
- 87 Earring.
- 88 Brooch. A heart surmounted by horns guarded by the blazing suns.
- 89 Reversed. One class of the council in session. The eight circles at the extreme point may typify the eight clans of the Senecas: Deer, Heron, Hawk, Wolf, Bear, Beaver, Turtle and Snipe.
- 90 Cross-shaped pendant, diamond-shaped center, inclosed glass with green tinfoil.
- 91 The rare double eagle-headed serpent encircling five hearts which indicate the five nations.
- 92 Brooch, reversed. The 0 - - 0 - - 0 - - circles and dots signify night and day journeys. Rare.
- 93 Earring.
- 94 Earring with glass and a tin foil center.

