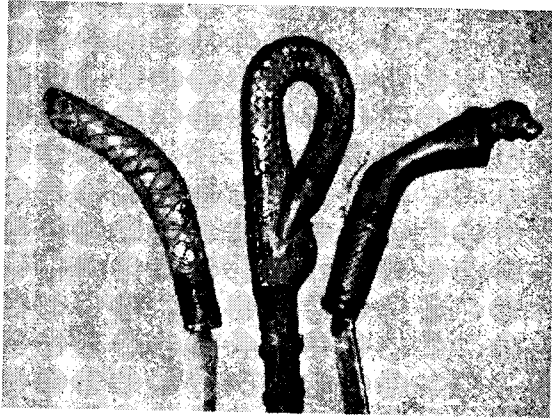


Pine cone, snake and Retriever crooked knives
Loaned by Kim and Brenda Cartwright



The crooked knives featured in this exhibit reflect the lavish workmanship which was bestowed on a "simple" tool. Crafted with care and decorated with motifs that had significance to their makers, these crooked knives reflect the distinctive woodcarving traditions of Maine and Atlantic Canada. Dated examples in this exhibit range from 1871 to 1912, a period in which the Maine woods was extensively harvested. Until the Depression, crooked knives were a commonly made and used tool. After the Depression, manufactured goods began to replace the objects made with crooked knives resulting in a significant decline in the production and use of this knife form. Today Maine Indian basketmakers and birch bark canoe builders continue to use crooked knives celebrating their unique qualities and encouraging their perpetuation for future generations.

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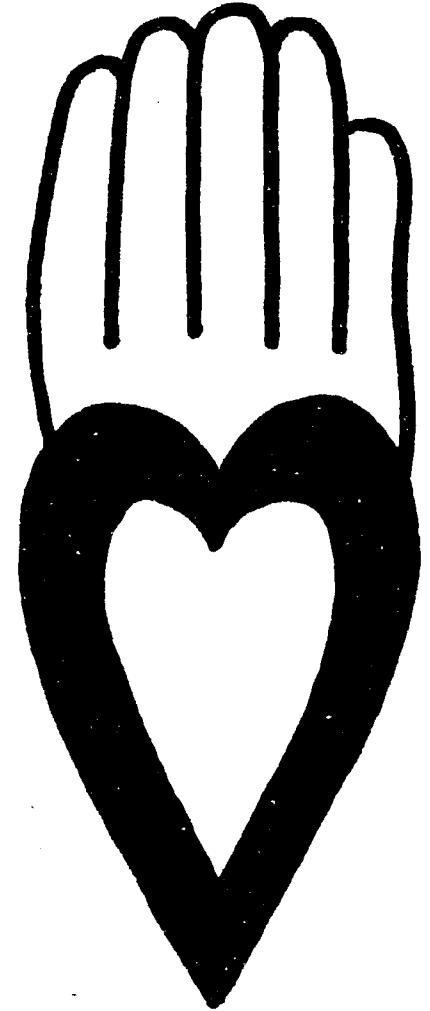
The crooked knives featured in this exhibit are loaned to the Hudson Museum by Kim and Brenda Cartwright and Nancy and Roger Prince.

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CROOKED KNIVES TOOLS OF THE TRADE

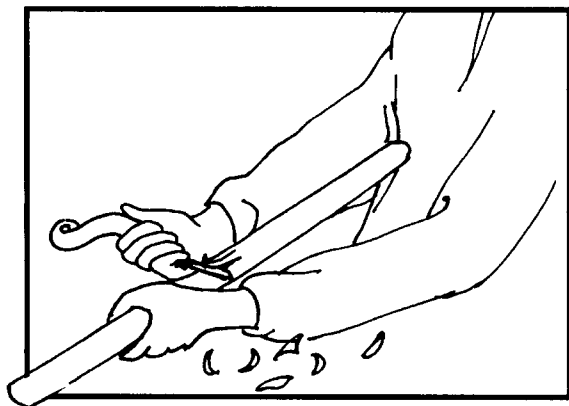
JUNE 13 TO SEPTEMBER 3, 2000



 **HUDSON MUSEUM**
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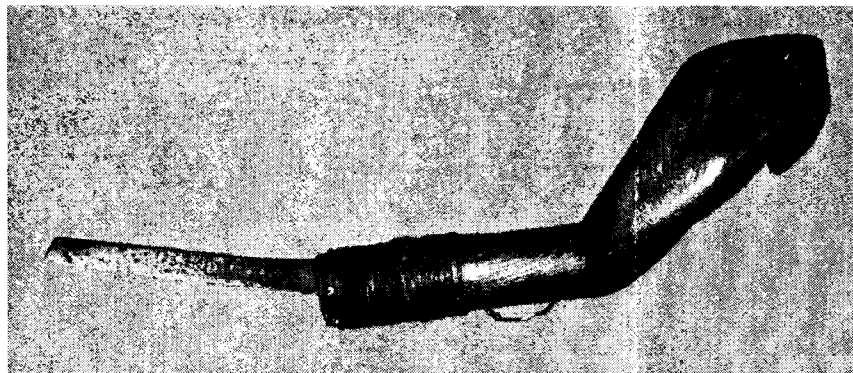
A crooked knife is a one-handed drawknife form with a bent handle made from wood or antler. The knife's blade is made by modifying a flat steel file, farrier's knife, or straight razor to make a tanged blade with a cutting edge that is beveled on only one side. The blade's tang is inserted into a wooden or antler handle and is secured to the handle by sinew lashing, pitched string, wrapped wire or a metal sleeve. Handles are carved from a variety of hardwoods and antler and many are decorated with ornate carved designs ranging from playing card motifs to women's legs.

The knife is grasped fingers-up with the cutting edge held towards the user. Unlike knives used to whittle, the crooked knife is used to shape objects—sticks of brown ash for baskets, ax handles, canoe frames, and decoys—by slicing and shaving.



*How a crooked knife is used.
Illustration by Bonnie Bishop.*

*Penobscot clenched hand form
Loaned by Nancy and Roger Prince*



Indigenous to the Northeast, the crooked knife was an essential tool for Native Peoples and the ability to make one was a necessary life-skill. The earliest crooked knives were made from a beaver incisor left imbedded in a portion of the mandible or a beaver or porcupine incisor hafted into a handle. After European contact, Native Peoples had access to a variety of metal blade forms that could be modified to make crooked knives, and some companies, such as the Hudson Bay Company stocked blades for crooked knives. By the 1700s Maine Indians made crooked knives with metal blades. Handles for these knives were often decorated with chip-carved designs or double-curve motifs.

Crooked knives were readily adopted and used by Franco-American, Franco- and Anglo-Canadian, and Scandinavian woodsmen, who recognized the utility of this knife form which required no vice to hold the

object being worked. In the Maine woods, lumber men used crooked knives to make ax handles and wooden “folk art” carvings. Crooked knives were also used to make waterfowl decoys and they were readily found in the tool boxes of Maine farmers, carpenters and canoe company employees.

Like their Native American counterparts, the crooked knives made by woodsmen often had carved hardwood handles. Mirrors and even photos of “sweethearts” were inlaid in the handle. Others were decorated with playing card motifs (heart, diamond, spade, and club) or had their owners’ initials or dates as part of their designs.



*Woodsmen folk artcarving
Loaned by Kim and Brenda Cartwright*