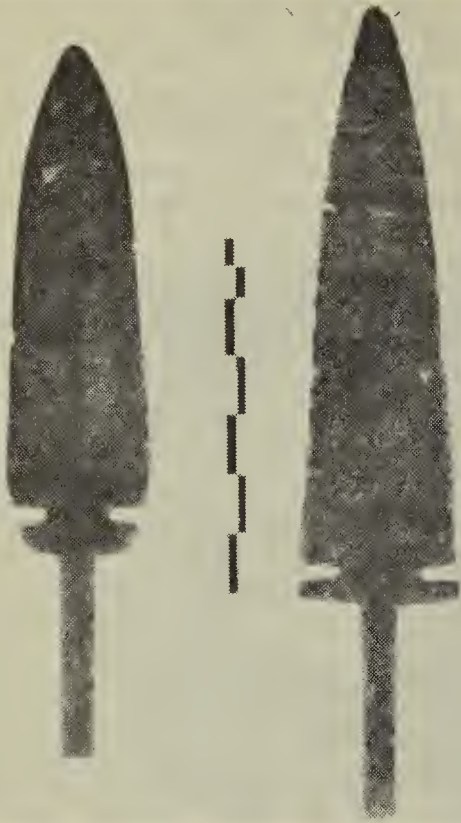


# The Steel Trade Blade

By H. K. CRONK, Secretary, Saskatoon Archaeological Society



The blades in the photograph were used as trade goods by the early white traders in the West. Though their age is "recent" when compared to the stone blades found on the Prairies, I feel that it is permissible to think of them as being of archaeological interest. These blades are still being found while cultivating and some readers of the *Blue Jay* may have one or more in their possession, but few know anything of their origin. The Saskatoon Archaeological Society wishes to pass on to those readers some definite information on these blades.

Through the "trade marks" on the tangs, the Director of the Sheffield Museum has traced the manufacturers and the dates when their marks were registered. The longer blade, which is  $13\frac{1}{2}$  inches and  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches at the widest part, bears the mark of John Sorby and the Sons of Sheffield, which is "I S". The letter "I" was used in place of "J". This mark was used by this firm until 1827. In that year another son joined the firm and the trade mark was changed to "I & H SORBY". This is the mark on the shorter blade. This blade is  $12\frac{1}{4}$  inches long, with a greatest width of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Since 1827 many changes have occurred in the company, but the mark is still being used by the present owners. A

blade bearing this mark could have been made any time between 1827 and the time when the traders lost their sway.

It is possible that the mark was not impressed on all blades at the time of making, as a blade of identical shape to the "I S" blade is in the Western Development Museum, Saskatoon, without a mark. Another possibility is that those without the mark are copies made by other makers in England or in other countries, as was the case with the "Northwest Gun" — a gun originally made for the Hudson Bay Company in England, but copied for rival traders by firms in France, in Belgium and even in the eastern part of the U.S. *American Antiquity* Vol. XIX, No. 1 shows a drawing of a blade found on the campus of the North Idaho Junior College in 1949 by construction workers who accidentally found an Indian grave. The shape is that of the "I S" blade, but I have been unsuccessful in ascertaining the presence of a trade mark. I have a drawing of a blade which is the "I S" shape only eight inches long, found near Nipawin. Again I have been unable to verify the trade mark. The Luxton Museum, Banff is the owner of a "I & SORBY" blade. This was found embedded in a buffalo skull on Seventeen Mile Flat, west of Banff. Dr. F. G. Roe, writing in the *Alberta Historical Review*, stated "that this is the farthest western point at which buffalo vestiges have been found in the Bow River Valley". The Curator of the Hudson's Bay Historical Museum, Winnipeg, has advised: "They appear to have been used as spear heads and war club blades and daggers by the Indians and as snow knives by the Eskimo." It would be interesting to know the trading value of these blades, but the "Bay" has no records. The Sheffield Museum which kindly searched the records for both the Society and for Dr. Roe, has no blade in their collection, but would like to have one. If any reader of the *Blue Jay* would like to donate one or both of these blades to Sheffield, the Saskatoon Archaeological Society will be pleased to forward it to the proper authorities.