

INDIAN EXHIBITS AT PHILBROOK ART CENTER

By Mary Ann Rheam

Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa has recently opened four new exhibits in the Indian Museum. They are: the portion of the Spiro Mound material assigned to the University of Tulsa and lent to Philbrook¹; objects from the Delaware Big House, near Dewey on the Caney river, lent by Mrs. John T. Witcher; a collection of South-western Archaeology, lent by Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Darby; and a collection of 460 North American Indian baskets, recently given to Philbrook by Mr. Clark Field. All of the collectors are Tulsans.

Since its opening three years ago, Philbrook Art Center has had, as one definite objective, the building up of a comprehensive study collection of North American Indian objects, arts and crafts, with particular emphasis on the Indian of Oklahoma and the Southwest. This recent gift and the long time loans add materially to the museum's growing collection.

Spiro Mound is an interesting chapter in Oklahoma Archaeology. On display at Philbrook are two of the large effigy pipes, a number of large pieces of pottery, gorgets, fragments of encised shells, ear spools, shell beads, T shaped pipes, large conch shells, the highly interesting copper ornaments, a maskette, and fragments

¹ There are also exhibits of Spiro remains at the Oklahoma Historical Society and the University of Oklahoma.

of baskets, weaving, etc. The shells and copper show the possibility of trade with other peoples as far north as the Great Lakes and as far south as the Gulf of Mexico.

The Spiro Mound site is located on the second terrace of the Arkansas river, 10 miles northeast of Spiro, Oklahoma. The mound from which the specimens were recovered was a compound mound, two structures connected by a low saddle. The long axis was North and South.

Spiro art had characteristics of its own in spite of its resemblance to art work of other parts of the Southeast. It is, generally speaking, characterized by the use of human, rather than animals forms, by considerable naturalism, and by a generally bolder and more rugged style than is found in other parts of the mound building area. We draw these conclusions by viewing the objects on display; that they used buckskin for moccasins, made cloth of feathers, fur and milkweed fiber, and made the simple twilled mattings universally found in the Southeast. It is evident that they wore a great deal of ornaments and prized their beads, ear spools, copper pendants, pearls and carved shell gorgets highly.

The mound was known to people living near it for a number of years before excavation was begun and much fine material was looted and sold to museums and to private collectors outside of Oklahoma. Consequently no complete collection of Spiro material will ever be shown.

The Delawares brought the Big House, through a succession of moves in two centuries, to Oklahoma from New Jersey. They lived in Kansas for a while before making their last residence in Northern Oklahoma. "Big House" is a term meaning the house itself and also the religious ceremony of the Delawares. The Big House on the Caney river was destroyed in 1935 and the objects from it are now at Philbrook. In the collection are the center post with its two carved faces looking East and West, three side posts with the false face images painted half red and half black, the twelve prayer sticks, six plain and six with the spiral design, red paint dust, two tortoise shell rattles, the sacred drum sticks with their painted faces and the ceremonial fire drill.

The ceremony, which was held once a year and lasted twelve days, was very symbolical and deeply religious. It has not been held in recent years for various reasons, one, because poverty has driven them to abandon it. Loss of wampum, which at one time measured 128 Indian yards, is one reason for its discontinuance. Nearly all of the wampum has either been traded to other Indian tribes or sold to collectors and museums.

In the display case are large photographs of the Big House as it looked in 1920 and the ruins in 1935. Also displayed is a photograph of the detail of the center post which stands beside the case. "The Big House is regarded by the Delawares as the supreme reli-

gion among all forms of worship on the Continent. The center post with the carved faces of the two sides is the foundation, whose topmost end pierces the sky extending to the throne of the Great Spirit, whose right hand is resting on top of it as a staff to hold a great power given to the red man."²

The Darby collection of Southwestern Archaeology represents several centuries of culture from approximately 700 A. D. to 1300 A. D. Mr. and Mrs. Darby, members of the Tulsa Archaeology Society, have spent several seasons excavating on the Gila and Salt rivers in Arizona and in New Mexico. The principal part of the collection consists of pottery of Hohokam and Mimbres cultures, bowls, plates, ollas, burial urns, paint pots and ladles. There are also sandals, knots, braided rope, basket fragments and carrying baskets from the cliff dwellings and cliff shelters and numerous stone implements, axes, arrow straighteners, polishing stones and bone awls and obsidian points. The cultures have been identified by the University of Arizona.

We learn, from this exhibit, that the Hohokam people were agriculturists, that their sense of design was highly developed, (pottery types were fine red and plain buff) and that they cremated their dead. They used geometrical designs to decorate their pottery and human forms for their pictographs. Ornaments of shell and bone were exceptionally well made and abundant. Due to the fact that they cremated the dead, nothing is known concerning the physical type of these people.

Mimbres is a culture which evolved from the Mogollon culture. About 1000 A. D. their pottery changed to red on cream and to black on white. Mimbres is one of the most distinctive cultures in the Southwest, largely because of the remarkable designs found on the pottery. Two styles of decoration are commonly found; one is purely geometric, the other, highly conventionalized life forms, both of which are represented in the collection. The drawings are far superior to any other period of the Southwest.

The collection is displayed against a diorama background, suggestive of Mesa Verde, painted by Eugene Kingman. Adjacent to this display is an exhibit of Spanish-Pueblo architecture.

The collection of North American Indian baskets, given to Philbrook in July, 1942, by Mr. Clark Field, is primarily a study collection, representing every basket making tribe in the United States, and most of the basket making tribes of Canada and Alaska. One room has been especially designed for this exhibit and cases are arranged geographically.

Rarities in the collection include a Pawnee gambling basket, a Cherokee berry gathering basket, carried over the Trail of Tears, a Pennacook basket which is lined with a copy of the Boston Courier

²"A Study of the Delaware Indian Big House Ceremony," by Frank G. Speck. Vol. II, *Publications of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission* (Harrisburg).

of April 2, 1835, a Catawba eel catching basket and many others. The collection, very wide in scope, contains the very finely woven grass baskets of the Aleuts and the moosehair embroidered baskets of Northeastern Canada. Every basket making tribe of Oklahoma is represented. Several unfinished baskets and the materials used are also shown.

The purpose of the exhibit is to show:

1. The wide distribution of basket making people.
2. The many uses of baskets and the adaptation of their shape to their use.
3. The variety of materials used both for structure and for color.
4. The different techniques employed by the basket maker.

Other Indian exhibits, now on display at Philbrook Art Center are: Indian Art of the Northwest Coast, lent by the Washington State Museum, Navajo blankets, Navajo and Hopi jewelry, Southwestern pottery, materials woven by students at the Sequoyah Training School, Tahlequah, California baskets and Peruvian pottery. Exhibits change from time to time and materials for them are taken from the museum collection and from long time loans to the museum from individual collectors.