

# Catawba Indians Were Tribe Of Sharp-Shooting Archers

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The Catawba Indians were still using bows and arrows, blowguns and traps as constructed and employed by their ancestors when Dr. Frank Speck, an anthropologist from the University of Pennsylvania, visited them in 1913. Over the years, Speck returned to the reservation during vacation periods. In the 1940s, Speck published his notes on the "procuring methods" of the Catawba hunters and fishermen.

Writing of the poverty of animal resources, Speck stated that there were only 10 mammal varieties, three birds and 13 forms of water life available to the Catawbas. Still, the Catawbas were able to demonstrate to Speck five distinctively different weapons for killing warm-blooded animals, five trap mechanisms and six ways to catch fish. From this, Speck concluded that the Catawbas were basically hunting people, not agriculturalists.

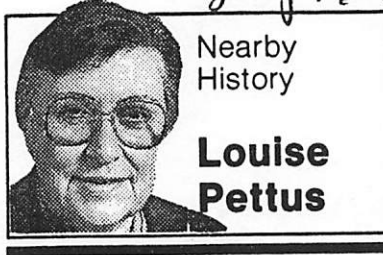
Speck wrote, "Until 30 years ago, Catawba men went about the region as vagrant archers shooting for bets, at coins or similar targets, to earn money." The bow was made from locust and was four to five feet in length. The arrows were made of cane and wood, either hickory or sourwood.

The points were of sharpened cane or tin, suitable for killing small game. There were no large animals left to require the quartz or flint arrowheads of their ancestors and the poverty-stricken Catawbas rarely had sufficient money to own guns, or be able to buy ammunition for them.

Speck thought the arrow's feathering was peculiar and interesting. A single feather of a hawk or swift was used for the rudder and the "entire quill is bound unsplit to the shaft, lying within one of the longitudinal grooves that run between the nodules of the young cane shoots chosen for arrow making."

The point was hardened by pushing it into hot ashes. Speck made drawings to illustrate the final product.

He investigated arrow poisoning and was told by Margaret Brown, who died in 1922 at the age of 85, that the Catawbas took venom from the "maxillary glands of the venomous crotalids inhabiting the bottom lands of the Catawba river, and allowed the liquid to permeate



Nearby  
History

Louise  
Pettus

meat."

According to tradition, the poisoned meat and quartz points were stored together in small clay pots, three to four inches in diameter. Several eighteenth century literary sources refer to the Catawba use of arrows dipped in rattlesnake venom.

The crossbow was used as a toy by boys and probably had been a hunting tool, but Speck could find no one competent with it.

From memories of his boyhood,

Chief Sam Blue described the throwing club made of green hickory stock and its use by John Brown, Thomas Harris, Peter Harris and Epps Harris. Four or five hunters accompanied by dogs always went together and chased the rabbits over burned brush. Each carried three clubs to throw at the hemmed-in rabbits. Speck thought the Catawbas had picked up this hunting method from Virginia Indians who practiced it. The Cherokees did not use this method.

The blowgun was frequently used to kill small game and birds. A cane tube, 5 or 6 feet long, was used with 8- to 10-inch darts that were constructed from oak, pine or cedar trimmed to a sharp point. On the "piston end" of the dart there was a wadding of soft feathers or down.