

THE TUSCARORA INTARSIA

By Paul Longnecker

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PHOTOGRAPHS, COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

When our club was formed in 1957 and its name selected, the Tuscarora Indian Head was chosen as our club emblem. The club is named after the Tuscarora tribe who long ago inhabited this region. The idea of an intarsia of this subject had been discussed at meetings, from time to time but somehow failed to generate anything more than talk and discussion.

As plans for our GEMARAMA '75 show were being formulated, we sought a theme or subject that would generate interest and publicity for our show. It was then that the intarsia idea was again resurrected and acted upon. The author was appointed to direct the project and a color sketch (11 inches by 14 inches) of the Indian head was prepared. This sketch, along with color swatches of the minerals needed, was presented at a meeting and donations of appropriate slabs was solicited. In the meantime, a tracing of the parts and shapes that would be needed was made and patterns were cut from a parchment type of paper.

When the selection of materials was completed, the patterns were shellacked and cemented to appropriate slabs and these parts then distributed among the volunteers. These helpers were selected according to their ability and the kind of equipment (small grinding wheels, etc.) available to turn out certain needed shapes and sizes. They were instructed to trim these shapes to within about 1/32 of an inch of the pattern. This would allow some give and take for the final assembly and fitting which was done by the director of the project. It was decided to have a semipolish rather than a high gloss which might detract from the subject. The assembling was done in five sections which were smoothed on a large lap. These sections were then cemented together, the background being added later, in the same manner.

In making a section the pieces were placed *face down* on a piece of plate glass, having first placed a piece of wax paper on the glass to prevent the epoxy from sticking to the glass. Placing the pieces in this reverse position can easily become confusing. It would be advisable to double check with the pattern numbers before cementing the pieces together. On the back of each piece to be joined, a "V" groove was ground.



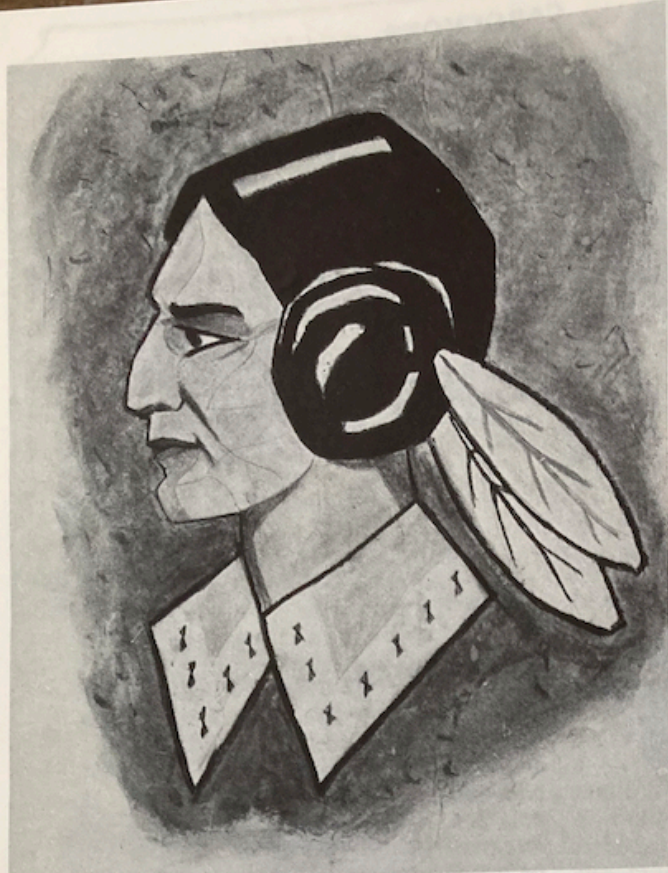
The completed Tuscarora intarsia.

When the pieces were joined, this groove was filled with epoxy thereby providing greater contact and consequently a firmer joint.

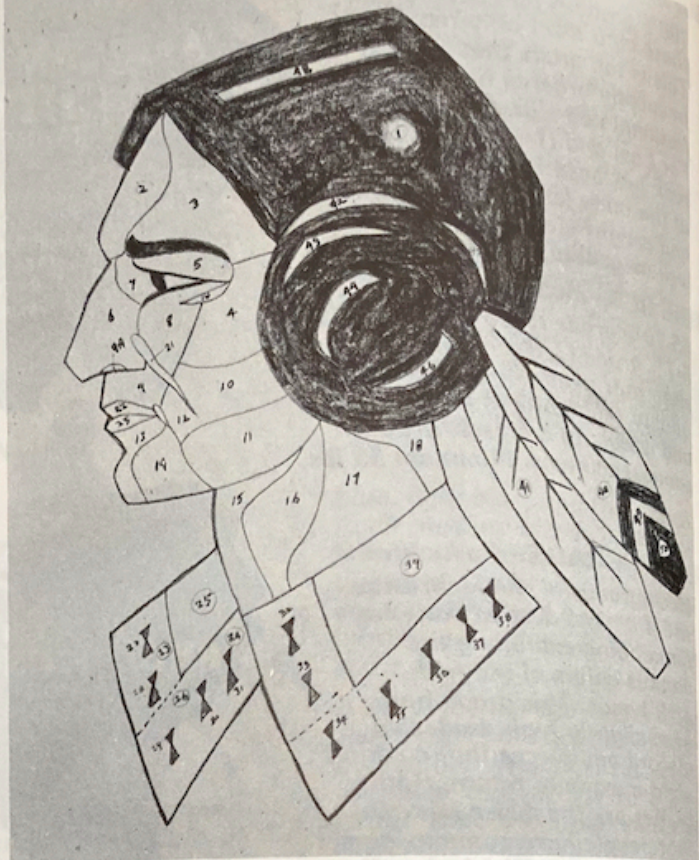
After the whole assembly was completed, the back was slightly uneven due to the variation in thickness of the slabs. The back was then leveled by brushing a few layers of a creamy mixture of plaster of Paris on the back, after first building a temporary frame around the project to contain the plaster. Now we were ready for the final clean-up and the addition of the permanent frame.

Interest and enthusiasm increased as the date approached for our television taping to promote our show. The intarsia was one of four feature subjects on a half-hour TV promotion. Since the taping was done a month before the show there was plenty of time to make any improvements or refinements. Our efforts were amply rewarded when the show opened and the intarsia occupied a prominent place befitting our cooperative project.

This being the first attempt at intarsia for many of us, valuable experience was
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The completed preliminary color sketch was made and measured 11 inches by 14 inches. From this initial sketch the project began with club members donating time and material.



This is the tracing of the numbered pattern indicating size, shape and color of the pieces that were necessary to complete the Tuscarora intarsia.

gained for those who participated and should be very helpful in any future projects of this nature.

In hindsight, a few observations might be mentioned. Considerable thought should be given to design. It should be simple but convincing, avoiding intricate patterns and delicate detail. It would be well worthwhile to study the methods of other masters of the craft and profit from their experience. When

selecting materials extremes in hardness should be avoided in order to minimize undercutting. Also, be sure to have an ample supply of material to take care of any breakage or accident. There will always be some slight variation in pieces of the same material so it is advisable to utilize as much of the material as possible, from the same stone. Scarce or rare materials should be avoided. Many suitable materials that are inexpensive can be found if a diligent search

is made for them.

The following materials were used: black obsidian (hair), light and dark feldspar (face), red jasper (lips and decoration), blue petrified wood (highlights), gray quartz and yellow jasper (feathers), and green serpentine (background). And finally, do not hesitate to attempt a cooperative club project. It is a challenging and worthwhile activity that will sustain interest and enthusiasm in your club. ⊕

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