

Maya Aristocrats Squeezed Skulls

Archæology

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It seems probable that the Mayas who built the great pyramids and temples whose ruins are now the wonder of the world followed the strange, and to us barbarous, custom of artificially deforming the skulls of their children, to give them what was doubtless considered an elegant and pleasing shape. That this art, followed by many primitive peoples and especially frequent among certain Amerind tribes, had its devotees at least among the Maya aristocracy is attested by

two well-preserved skulls found in a tomb near Progreso, on the northern coast of Yucatan.

The two skulls showed the same type of deformity. They had had boards bound against top and back in infancy, when the bones were soft, so that the head-form assumed a startling and unnatural length. It is impossible to determine the sex and age of the individuals to whom these skulls belonged, but it is evident that they were mature adults. This is shown especially by the condition of the teeth. It is conjectured that they were men, because musical instruments, including a flute,

were found associated with the burials; and musicians were usually men.

It is greatly to be regretted that skeletal material of the ancient Maya is so nearly totally lacking. Almost nothing is known of their burial customs, and most of the few known tombs were plundered before scientists could have access to them. It is to be hoped that new work in the less accessible ruins will uncover burials telling more of how the Maya treated their dead, and at the same time yielding specimens for study by physical anthropologists.

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He Showed Thousands the Stars—Continued

necessary to keep his water melted over an alcohol lamp, and to dip his brush in it frequently to prevent it from freezing.

In 1907 he abandoned the Arctic, and settled down to domesticity. He married, and settled at Port Clyde, Maine, his wife's home, where his interest in telescope making began. To make a living, he built cottages for summer visitors, but to gratify his higher tastes, he made lenses and mirrors for telescopes. Though he had never made a telescope mirror before, and at that time there was little published on the subject, he proceeded to work out his own methods, and made some as large as 16 inches.

His *alma mater* called him, and in 1916 he went back to "Tech" to teach architecture. But not for long, for when the United States entered the war, he found his most useful place was in optical work at the Bureau of Standards in Washington. It was here that he first made the acquaintance of Dr. Hale, who was then organizing the National Research Council, an organization of inestimable value in American science.

The war over, he was summoned back to Springfield, by his old friend James Hartness, who was destined, in 1921, to be elected governor of his adopted state of Vermont. As optical associate of the Jones and Lamson Company, Porter contributed a number of useful inventions resulting from his profound knowledge of optics and mechanics. But perhaps of even greater significance was his organization of a group of telescope makers.

Men and women from the plant—some clerical workers, others from the shop, they were. None had ever before had any astronomical or opti-

cal experience, but under the Porter guidance all made creditable reflecting telescopes. All felt the thrill which comes of looking into an instrument fashioned with one's own hands, and seeing the rings of Saturn, the moons of Jupiter, the craters of the moon, and other sights never seen by unaided human eyes. It is a wonderful experience to have one's first sight of these objects through a great observatory telescope, but to see them with one's own handiwork, is to give one some idea of the joy of discovery experienced by a Galileo or a Huygens.

In order to get a clear sky, into which their telescopes could be poked at will, the group made several all-night vigils on nearby hills. This led to the establishment of an astronomical club house, high above the town, which they built themselves and called Stellafane—the temple of the stars.

From a local activity, the telescope makers developed into a national movement when Albert G. Ingalls, one of the editors of *Scientific American*, heard about it. Mr. Ingalls was already interested in making telescope mirrors, so he soon found that he and Porter were united in devotion to a common cause. Publicity came for the telescope makers of Springfield, directions for making telescopes were published, and finally a book was issued, with Mr. Ingalls as editor, containing not only Mr. Porter's instructions for making the mirrors, but also all the other material that could be gathered on the subject. This provided the first modern book on telescope making, and led to other groups throughout the country. A group of amateurs in Pasadena, others in New York, some high-school

boys in Washington—these were but a few of the telescope clubs that were formed. Telescope making is not a difficult task, but it requires patience, and to the person who is willing to give this time and energy it offers large returns in the pleasure of beholding the results.

Naturally, telescope making centered around Springfield as its capital, and in 1926 its adherents held a convention there. From near and far they came, many bringing telescopes with them, camping out several nights at Stellafane, comparing the merits and performance of their instruments. Every summer since then, a similar convention has been held at the same place under Porter's leadership.

But now the telescope makers at Springfield will have to get along without him for eight months of the year. No longer will his bald head and ever-present stogie be in evidence at Stellafane, except during his return visits in the summer. But other leaders have arisen to carry out his work there while he is engaged in the still greater labor of helping to build the world's greatest telescope. Quite a contrast it is. Instead of making a small mirror by hand, out of simple parts, costing perhaps \$10 or \$15, his present endeavors are concerned with a project on which millions will be spent, with the finest of mechanical equipment. Wonderful discoveries may be confidently expected with its aid, and this modest man from Springfield may well feel proud of his part. But after all, is not the insight that thousands have been given into the nature of the world around them through his work of nearly as much significance? One wonders.

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