

**Research Paper 18<sup>th</sup> Century Trade Silver Gorget No. BH-2**

**Research Report by Steve Cox, November 27, 2016**

**Southwest American Historic Artifact Research Association SAHARA**

**Trade Gorget with engraved Fox**



**Description:**

Size: 5 ½" X 4 7/8"

Material: Sterling Silver, sg 9.5, a high quality Copper, Silver metal alloy

Decoration: Push engraved, Rocker engraving, and applied twisted Copper wire.

Age: Estimate between 1760 and 1830

Tribal affiliation: Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Miami, Menominee, Winnebago, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, and, Ojibwa

Construction:

Heavy gage hammered high quality Sterling Silver. The blank being cut out with tin scissors.

Upper edge trimmed with solder applied twisted 2 strand copper wire.

Remaining edges are roll swaged, and turned and rolled around iron wire.

Rocker engraving around perimeter

Push engraved with a standing Fox

Means of attachment are 2 silver dome bosses on the tips, with silver wire protruding through holes, and formed into loops to accommodate suspension from ribbon.



## Characteristics and Indications

Characteristic:

The Silver alloy used in this gorget has a Specific Gravity of 9.5 which is a high quality Sterling Silver. Sterling can range from 9.4 to 9.6 (Fine).

Indication:

This grade of silver would be more typical of important Native American gifts or rewards made before 1796. During this period, with the shortage of silver coinage, and laws preventing their use, it was a common practice to melt down quality Colonial Silver Plate to fill special orders. Between about 1760 and 1780 high quality sterling silver gorgets were more common in Montreal and Quebec, than in London, Boston and New York.

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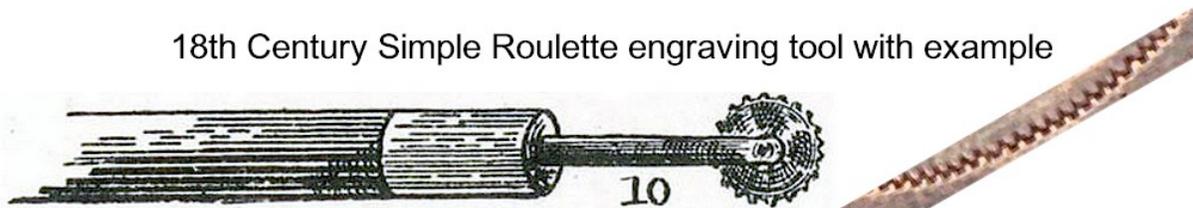
Characteristic:

Rocker Engraving

Indication:

Roulette engraving was developed in 1765 during the Industrial Revolution, and became popular with skilled Silversmiths. It was done with a wheel with cuts applied to the edge, and hafted with a handle. It could be used for borders or outlines, and was far more uniform and much faster than conventional rocker engraving of the type used on BH-2. The roulette engraving was not used on Gorget BH-2, so this would indicate a manufacture date more likely in the first half of the "Late Historic Period" 1750-1790

18th Century Simple Roulette engraving tool with example



Characteristic:

Use of Silver Solder

Indication:

Silver Solder, 80% Silver & 20% Bronze was used for attachment requiring strength, and on larger finer pieces would have the silver appearance to blend in with the pieces being joined. This was common on small pieces, but required a much greater skill level on larger pieces. For that reason it was avoided by most silversmiths on large items. This was a common practice of the more skilled Silversmiths, and Armorers.

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## 18th Century twisted wire wrapped sword grips



Characteristic: The use of twisted wire

Indication:

This may go unnoticed to most, but at that time in history wire was not that common, and required a draw plate for manufacture. Twisted wire was even more uncommon. One of the few uses in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was by Armorers, and Weapon makers, as wrapping on sword grips. It was far more common with the French swords.

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Characteristic:

Heavy gage hammered silver

Indication:

The heavy gage silver used in this piece indicates the maker was skilled, and was making a more important presentation piece. This gage would not be found in the more common "Trade Silver" used for trade.

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Characteristic:

This gorget displays very high quality hammer work

Indication:

High quality hammering was more common to armorers and Colonial Silversmiths specializing in high end Colonial Plate, and Church silver. The practice was labor and skill intense, and after

the introduction of rolling mills for sheet silver, in the late 1700's, hammering was seldom being used in the production of cheaper trade silver.

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Characteristic:

The edge is rolled around an iron wire

Indication:

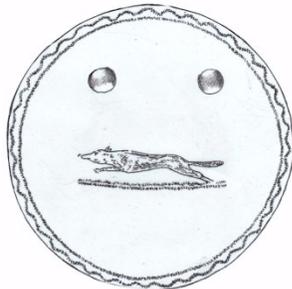
This feature was used to strengthen the edge, and was used by many of the European Armorerers and military suppliers. It was most commonly found on British gorgets. As for Euro-American Indian gorgets, it can be found on French, British, or American made pieces, but is much more common on the higher quality pieces. The vast amounts of fur trade gorgets, are flat, and have no edge treatment at all. It was common on special gorgets made for gifts, presentation, and Loyalty.

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Characteristic:

Engraved with a Fox

Moon Gorget with Robert Cruickshank mark, and dug in Will Co. ILL.



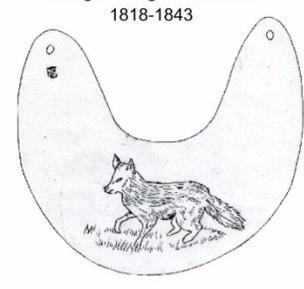
Gorget BH-2  
Illustrations by Steve Cox



18th Century Gorget collected in  
Detroit, Michigan area



19th Century Gorget Made by  
George Savage in Montreal  
1818-1843



Indication:

The presents of animals engraved on gorgets, although rare, is well documented through the Late Historic period (1760-1820). The engraved animals were most commonly used as tribal Totems. More rarely they were used as Clan symbols. Two tribes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the Great Lakes area with Fox Clans were the Meskwaki (Fox), and the Menominee. Also common, but not well known, were the use of plant or animal engravings on gorgets as substitutes for Royal Arms that represent loyalty. These were used by representatives or merchants from one country, within the confines of another countries boundary, to maintain Indian loyalty, without revealing to authorities the country they were representing. This was more common in the northeast owing to the large number of wars, treaties, and constantly changing borders. These were very common in areas like Detroit, where the British turned Detroit over to the Americans

in 1783, and still maintained a strong influence among Indian allies there for the next 13 years. I will also note that upon close personal examination, the fox engraving on BH-2, and the fox engraving on the 3<sup>rd</sup> gorget collected in Detroit may have been engraved by the same person.

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Characteristic:

Bosses as means of attachment

Indication:

Bosses were used on many forms of European military gorgets, and were quickly adopted on the gorgets used in the Americas. They can be found on the better gorgets that were based on British military issue. Bosses were quite rare on French military issue gorgets, but can be found on many quality gorgets made by French silversmiths in the Americas.

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## Opinion

I will start out by stating that it is extremely rare to encounter a piece of unmarked trade silver that is well documented. Other than a few pieces in museums, or retained by descendants, or persons having relations with the original owners, the best analytical documentation we have today are records kept from Archeological excavations. I have to say the remaining Archeological records are a rich source of details used to help put together the story of how Trade Silver influenced relations between the Europeans and the Native Americans. Today, with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of November 16, 1990, this source of professionally recorded information has come to an end. A vast amount of original notes or documentation concerning Trade Silver has over the years become separated from the artifact. All of these factors, and a lack of creditable provenance, make it very difficult to construct an authoritative opinion on Trade Silver, however, I feel it is an important goal worth pursuing. I will also inform everyone that Trade Silver artifacts are among the most counterfeited pieces in the world. I attempt to examine every facet of a piece before rendering my opinions, but there is no way for anyone to be 100% certain of their opinion.

First I will note that I have no previous information about the subject of this paper, an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Trade Silver Gorget BH-2. When possible, I prefer to form an opinion on a piece based first on what I can conclude from personal research and examination, rather than be influenced by what I may have been told about it.

Unlike many Trade Silver pieces, this gorget has many characteristics, and is very well made, and when studied in detail it becomes possible to develop a well substantiated opinion. A large number of characteristics are typically avoided by counterfeiters slimily because of the lack of knowledge required to produce such a piece without making mistakes. From the first time I looked at this gorget I did not see one trait that would make me question its authenticity. As with other research papers I have written, I will start with a list of conclusions.

1. The first observation I made was the gorget type. There are a number of authentic gorget types, European Military Issue, American Military issue, Gift, Presentation, Treaty, Loyalty, Fur Trade, and adornment. Later gorget types would include Anniversary or Centennial pieces, sometimes called remakes. Although these later pieces cannot be correctly defined as Trade Silver, many of these pieces can be very rare, and quite collectable. Some of the earlier types can overlap. Gorget BH-2 would be a Gift Gorget designed to secure Indian relations. This is based on the following characteristics. It is a high quality specialized gorget, made of high grade Sterling and would have been a very expensive commission specifically for a Chief. These characteristics would eliminate Gift, Fur Trade, and Adornment gorgets. A treaty gorget of this quality would have likely included a Chief's name, and or a Treaty name, and possibly a date. A loyalty gorget of this quality would have displayed a Royal Arms, flag or symbol of the country soliciting loyalty or alliance. I eliminate later gorgets based on contemporary characteristics.
2. The design, quality, weight, and variety of materials all point to the maker having some experience in the making of armor, and or weapons, as well as a being a skilled silversmith.
3. Due to lack of maker marks, hall marks, date marks, or the British Lion mark for sterling, it's safe to say it was not made in Europe, but in the Americas.
4. Although the basic design is British in style, that in no way indicates the origin of the maker. There are many scenarios that explain that, but the main one being a maker wishing to get along with all the factions in the area he operated out of would make what the buyer wanted. When the territory changed hands, often so did the styles. An example would be, after the French and Indian war, British makers supplying trade goods to a tribe having been loyal to the French might use French designs, act like a French sympathizer, and at times even use French pseudo marks. It often came down to that, or move to a different location.
5. Questions often arise as to why a quality gorget does not exhibit a maker's mark. There are a lot of reasons, but the one I find most likely on this gorget would be based on conflicts between the French, English, and Colonials. The traders found out the Indians quickly learned the origin of a mark, and many times the Indians would refuse pieces marked by an adversary. Example: A French silversmith would rarely put a well known French mark on a presentation piece being ordered for a British Indian ally. Indians were known to deface the marks for the

same reason. Also for the same reason the traders often ordered the pieces left unmarked. It was also common for a maker to use pseudo marks to emulate a desired origin. I have seen American pieces with French and English pseudo marks on them. Do not let this discourage you, some such pieces can still be authentic, rare, and very collectable.

6. Because of the uniqueness, and cost of this piece, I believe the engraved Fox on this piece was made to be presented as a more important clan symbol rather than a Totem, which would have been more common on a less expensive trade gorget.

7. I think it is reasonable at this point to assume this gorget was most likely made as a gift to a chief of a Fox clan. There are at least 5 Indian tribes with Fox clans, but only 2 are located within the areas between New England, and the Western Great Lakes area. The Meskwaki (Fox) tribe, and the Menominee. We can eliminate certain areas these 2 tribes migrated from earlier and other areas where they were removed to in the 1830's. This places the Fox and the Menominee in the 18<sup>th</sup> century within present day Michigan, Wisconsin, and, northern Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. From as early as 1712 during the Fox Wars until 1738 the Fox were in conflict with the French in and around Detroit, the trade center of the Western lakes area. After that the Fox were pretty much at peace with the French and British. The Menominee were also at war with the French from time to time. During the Winnebago War of 1827, the two tribes fought each other, as well as the Americans. Other times the same factions were allies. Traders, merchants, and their representatives had to constantly adjust their appearances and loyalties to carry on successful trade with the warring tribes and maintain workable relations with the British, French, and Colonials. This was almost impossible with the exception of a few well connected men operating in Detroit, Mackinaw, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan between 1753 and 1796.

8. Based on the information above, all the facts seem to indicate the most likely place of origin for this gorget would have been Detroit. To follow up with where the facts seem to point, I have done research to see who might have been capable of making, and supplying such a gorget. All the characteristics of the gorget point very quickly to two persons. I believe it is very likely that Charles Andre Barth was the maker. His father came to Montreal from France in the early 1700's, and served as an armorer for the French Crown. Charles Andre Barth was a French silversmith who migrated to Montreal along with his friend Ignace Francois Delzenne, another French silversmith, in 1740. Charles Andre Barth relocated to Detroit later in 1740 and also served as Armorer to the French Crown, he also was a skilled silversmith, a maker and supplier of weapons, and a metal forger. By 1747 he was the main trader on the Saginaw River, and bay. While working in Detroit as a silversmith he became increasingly involved in the French fur trade, and specialized in the making of wristbands, medals, armbands, earrings, and gorgets. In 1783, it was estimated that just in Detroit there would be a need for 600 gorgets and over 53 thousand various other pieces of trade silver for Indian presents. With the end of the French and Indian war, and the British occupation of Detroit, Charles Andre Barth used various means of maintaining good relations with the French, and British, as well as most of the Indian tribes

operating in and around the Detroit area. He was also a fluent speaker of the local Native language. He was quick to show loyalty and friendship to almost any person or country that would do business with him. He seemed to make a guarded effort not to show favoritism to any country or Indian tribe that might limit his business ventures. Given the constant conflicts along the Detroit and St. Clair rivers in this area between French, British, Colonials, and Indians, this behavior was not uncommon at all. This was also a good reason not to show preference by using specific types of maker marks on certain pieces like this gorget. To elevate Charles Andre Barth to even a higher position in the Michigan Fur Trade, family ties came into play. His first daughter, Marie Archange, born in 1749, married John Askin in the French settlement of Detroit. John Askin came to America in 1758 with the British army. After the French and Indian War he entered the fur trade, and established a trading post in Michilimackinac, and was a onetime governor of that settlement. In 1772 John Askin's marriage to Marie Archange Barthe, the daughter of Charles Andre Barth, proved instrumental in his efforts to expand his control over the infrastructure of the Great Lakes fur trade. He served in many positions from Detroit to the Straits of Michigan and Sault Sainte-Marie. John Askin, along with Charles Andre Barth and their business associates, and family members, continued to control and supply a great deal of the fur trade in Michigan. Each of these men mastered the art of dealing with whatever country or Indian tribe that was dominant in the area. A great deal of the time even the ruling authorities did not know where either mans loyalties rested. This was a complicated and risky path to take, but the two men, Charles from France, and John from England, for a time became very powerful and successful in the Great Lakes Fur trade. Barth died in Detroit, Michigan in 1786, and Askin died in Sandwich Illinois in 1815.

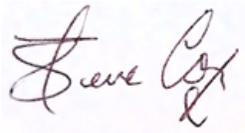
9. Another possible, but less likely origin I discovered for the gorget occurred after the Menominee fought the Americans during the Winnebago War of 1827. This war was brief and limited. Tribal wars continued, and in response, the US government attempted to organize a second council to keep peace. The effort produced a war instead. In 1830 a Menominee and Dakota war party murdered 15 Fox chiefs en route to a treaty conference with the Americans at Prairie du Chien. In retaliation, the Fox killed 26 Menominee setting in motion the events leading to the Blackhawk War (1832) in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Based on this event, and the following facts, I believe this could possibly be a second viable explanation of the origin of the gorget BH-2.

As with all important treaties between the U.S. government and the Native American tribes, it was customary for the U.S. Government to supply presents for all the chiefs and sub chiefs having part in the treaty. These gifts almost always included medals, trade silver Armbands, and gorgets. I have no reason to believe this treaty would have been any different. Although this treaty never took place, all the preparations had been made, and the concerned parties were in route to Prairie Du Chien for the event. We know the two primary warring tribes involved in the treaty were the Fox, and the Menominee. An important factor in this research stands out; each tribe had Fox Clans, the only two Fox Clans in the Great Lakes area. We also know at least 15 Fox Chiefs were murdered on their way to the treaty, so we can assume there would have been a number of Menominee Chiefs in route there as well. The gorgets used in a treaty of this nature would have been of the type given as gifts. It is almost a certainty that some of the gorgets made for the more important Fox Clan Chiefs would have bore the Fox engraving.

Gorget BH-2 may be just such a gorget. Due to the abrupt changes in Trade Silver that accompanied Indian removal, and the lack of characteristics found on post removal silver adornments I would not expect this gorget would have been made any later than 1830.

10. In conclusion I believe gorget BH-2 to be an authentic Trade Silver Gift Gorget, circa. 1765-1830. No findings in the two scenarios I give in this research paper would be in conflict with either history, or the details revealed by the examination of this artifact. We will never know for sure, but out of the two scenarios I give, I find the Barth/Askin connection to be the most likely.

Steve Cox

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Steve Cox". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

