

Their Way of Life

Archeologists cannot write the same kind of history for prehistoric times that professional historians write for historic periods because their sources of information are of such a different kind. Archeologists literally have to "dig" for their data. Then they have to interpret critically the facts they learn from the actual excavated areas and from the specimens found there. Frequently workers in other specialized fields are asked for help in the interpretation: in analyzing geological strata, in identifying animal bones or plant remains, in analyzing metal fragments. Ascertaining the sequence of cultures, that is, working out the *relative chronology*, is another important and sometimes intricate problem that has to be solved in order to reconstruct the past.

So it comes about that the kind of history the archeologist ultimately produces is basically a history of past societies as revealed by archeological cultures. He is able to show which culture preceded another, define the geographical extent of certain cultures, reveal which contemporaneous ones were related and which developed from another, and finally, describe the way of life of the various cultural groups. There is no discussion of

personalities, of reigns or administrations. There are very few dates. Absolute dates for the use of the archeologist result from dendrochronology (tree ring studies) or radiocarbon calculations. They are highly valuable, but as yet, for many areas, they are few and far between.

A middlewestern archivist-historian recently characterized the contribution of archeology to the history of the American Indian as only "remote and conjectural." It is true, of course, that archeological interpretation involves setting up working hypotheses to explain facts and their significance. But as the accumulation of factual data has increased by leaps and bounds in the past twenty years, the hypotheses have come to rest upon firmer and firmer foundations, well beyond the bounds of mere conjecture. Particularly is this so when a culture extends into the historic period and can be linked to a known Indian tribe. Such is the situation with the Orr focus Oneota materials described hereafter.

These cultural remains are found in village and cemetery sites from the mouth of the Upper Iowa River upstream for over fifty miles where they dwindle out beyond Decorah, Iowa. However, they seem to be concentrated along the lower river, in the area where Dr. Keyes and Mr. Orr conducted their excavations. They are found also along some of the lower tributaries, as Bear and Waterloo creeks. Almost identical remains have

also been located in southeastern Minnesota, notably along Riceford Creek, a tributary of the Root River in Houston County.

How long did these Indians (the Ioways and possibly the Otos) live here, just west of the Mississippi River in the northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota region? They were here in the 1680's, very likely in the middle of the 17th century when visited by the Ottawas and Hurons, and possibly for many years before that. Absence of white contact material at some of these terrace villages, and its presence at others, suggests a sequence of occupation in the area; whereas several villages with, and several without, trade objects would imply occupation of more than one village at a time.

In the middle 18th century, the Ioways were said to number 200 to 250 warriors. This would mean a total population of 600 to 1000, depending upon the computing ratio used. Such a population figure was probably applicable to the late 17th century also, and could account for several contemporaneous villages. So could the added presence of the related Otos — a smaller group than the Ioways.

Another interesting consideration is that the people may not have lived together as a tightly coherent "tribe" under a powerful tribal "chief" in the familiar modern concept of Indian life. There is pertinent evidence that, instead, these Indians

may have lived in several *extended family* groups. The groups would have consisted of a single clan (a *gens*), with everyone related through the male line of descent, or several such clans may have lived together. Each group would have been self-governed with the head of the clan an important authoritative leader. All together the several units would have formed a loose confederation. Such a pattern of autonomous kin-grouped villages seems to have been the early village plan of the Oto and Winnebago Indians — relatives of the Ioways.

A confederation like this has been called a "small nationality" by the well-known anthropologist, Dr. A. L. Kroeber. Although functioning separately in the routine of daily life, the combined villages would have been recognized as a unit since all the people spoke exactly the same language, had the same customs, and had a strong "likemindedness." Moreover, in certain circumstances, when it was advantageous for the villages to function together as a larger unit, as on the summer buffalo hunt or in connection with certain ceremonies, they would join in concerted action. In historic times, under the pressure of coping with the white man's demands, such confederacies were apparently forced into the more tightly-knit units identified as *tribes* today.

It would seem that existence for these Indian groups on the Upper Iowa River must have been fairly peaceful from an Indian viewpoint. At least

there are no fortifications of any sort, nor remains of any weapons except arrowpoints. Certain circular earthworks have been ascribed to the Oneota culture, but it is likely that they were built at an earlier time by Woodland peoples.

The terrace villages were probably occupied by someone most of the year around, although during the period of the village buffalo hunt in mid-summer months only a few would be there, and during the winter, there may have been some exodus by small family groups to more protected wooded river-bank locations nearby. But they were permanent villages in the sense that here gardens were planted year after year, and to these villages the hunting parties returned. If asked where their villages were, the Ioways would undoubtedly have described this general location. It was home.

No evidence of Indian houses was found by Dr. Keyes and Mr. Orr on the village terraces. This suggests that they were rectangular or elliptical structures built with a pole framework and covered with bark slabs or reed matting, and with a central fireplace, like the dwellings used by Indians living in the woodland areas to the east. Frequent plowing would soon have destroyed the only certain vestiges of their existence — the fireplaces and post-holes.

Many pits dug into the ground to serve as small storage cellars were found; in fact, more than fifty were dug out at the Lane site. Some may have

been within houses, serving as closets do nowadays for stowing away personal possessions and provisions, but most were probably outside and used only for food storage. The ultimate use of many of them for trash containers — where broken tools, pottery and food remains were thrown — often makes them a rich source of information for the archeologist.

The year long pattern of village life undoubtedly accommodated itself to the essential economic pattern. Although gardening was important, as noted earlier, hunting was equally or more so. The excavations yielded large amounts of bones of deer, elk, and smaller mammals, as well as of wild turkey and other birds.

Hunting for small game would have gone on all the time close at hand. Hunting buffalo was a different matter. The animals moved in large herds in seasonal migrations north and south, and for several reasons they were not suitable game for a few hunters on foot to kill, or to carry home. They required an organized village hunt. The reward was great, however, for buffalo furnished an abundance of tasty meat, large hides for clothing, blankets, tipi covers, and other purposes, as well as bones for hoes, perforators, and other tools.

The hunting and corn-growing Indians who lived westward on the edge of the short-grass Plains in early contact times were accustomed to go on summer and winter village hunts that lasted

several months and involved very elaborate ceremonialism. Some of the Indians who lived in the woodlands east of the Upper Iowa River also had summer village hunts, but they were usually shorter, simpler affairs. We do not know which hunting pattern the Orr focus Oneota people followed more closely, but that they did go on a hunt of this nature at least in the summer is most likely. Father André wrote in 1676 from Green Bay "their [the Ioways] greatest Wealth consists of ox-hides [buffalo hides] and Red Calumets [catalinite pipes]."

The hunt would have taken place after the corn was hoed twice and could be left untended to grow to maturity. It was truly a village proposition in that everyone would go who was able, carrying tipis and other necessary equipment. At this period the Ioways probably had no horses — there is no such evidence in the excavations or early documents — so the hunt entailed a march of many miles. A special staff of officers would have been appointed to guide and control the movement. A certain amount of ritualism that attended the whole procedure would have added further discipline.

These Oneota culture people probably searched for the buffalo to the west and southwest of their villages. Even as late as the early 19th century, in mid-July, Lt. Stephen W. Kearny noted a herd of 5000 buffalo on the upper Raccoon River. The

buffalo herds were approached by stealth, surrounded, and the animals killed by bow and arrow.

When each herd kill was made, the women would butcher immediately. A hearty feast, probably spiced by pleasure of success and noisy conviviality, would follow. Then the women would begin to dry and prepare the meat for transportation back to the village and to clean and cure the hides. It would be a heavily loaded caravan that plodded eastward on the return trip even though most of the bones had been left at the butchering sites. But succulent sweet corn would be ready for eating when they got home.

Wild berries and fruits, nuts and roots supplemented the meat, corn and bean diet, and the occurrence of fish bones in the refuse pits reveals that these Indians were also fishermen. The profusion of clam shells suggests that mussels too were eaten.

There must have been much activity in these Indian villages. All their ornaments of dress, their pipes, and the tools they used in preparation of food, or in skin working, pottery making and other activities, had to be made from stone, bone or shell. The men did the stone chipping, using for the most part local cherts, flints, and jasper. In addition, some use was made of catlinite which is found in Pipestone County, Minnesota, and of Knife River chalcedony and Bijou Hills quartzite from the Dakotas. Whether these foreign materials were pro-

cured on special excursions or chiefly through inter-tribal trade is not known.

Although many of the tools were quickly made for utility purposes, some of the arrow points and leaf-shaped blades are beautifully shaped and chipped. Their creators were highly skilled craftsmen. Besides chipped stone projectile points and knives, the excavations revealed scrapers for skin working, drills, gravers, and various unspecialized tools. Stone objects shaped by grinding and abrading rather than chipping included hammerstones, chisels, celts, hand grinding stones and mortars, rubbing stones, abraders and pipes. One of the limestone pipes had a little effigy animal head at the end of the bowl stem.

From bone were made perforators, needles, chisels, and hoes; and from antler — arrowpoints, flakers, and handles for stone tools. Spoons fashioned from mussel shells had notched and scalloped decorative edges, and handles or hafting tangs made by notching.

It was women's work to make the pottery vessels used for cooking. Perhaps some wooden or birchbark dishes were used, but if so there was no evidence of them remaining in the excavations. The buff-colored pots are basically uniform in shape and decoration, generally varying from quart-sized containers to much larger ones that would hold several gallons. They were made from native clay combined with flaked shell for temper

and were fired in open or banked fires, a crude process that resulted in frequent mottled color.

The shape is usually that of a round or elliptical globular jar, somewhat flattened in its vertical dimension, with a rim that inclines outward at the opening, and with two opposing strap-handles. Decoration was simple both in technique and in design motifs. The edges of the rim were scalloped or notched, somewhat as a pie crust edge is crinkled. The trailed or incised lines and punch marks on the jar body, usually forming rectilinear designs, were frequently imprecise as if done quickly or inattentively. Obviously pottery making procedures were strongly traditional, passed from mother to daughter as a routine matter.

Most of the personal ornaments found in the course of digging were bone or shell beads. There was also a shell pendant, and some copper beads, ear coils, and serpent shapes.

Some of the metal objects have offered a puzzling problem in interpretation. Although brass indicates white contact, copper ornaments may be made either from trade copper kettles, or from native Lake Superior copper. It is important to distinguish between the two because of their time implications, especially if no glass beads or other articles of European manufacture are present to verify a post-white contact dating.

The surest way to distinguish is by qualitative and quantitative spectrochemical tests of the metal,

along with metallographic ones. Recent spectrochemical tests on the Upper Iowa River specimens suggest that some of the objects were of native manufacture made from either Lake Superior float copper (chunks carried southward by glacial action) or from copper procured at surface outcroppings near Lake Superior, either directly or in inter-tribal trade. The copper would be pounded cold or hammered when hot into thin sheets. From these sheets, rolled tubes or large cones were made which served for beads, ear dangles, or for other decorative purposes. The interesting serpent shape was made by folding in half lengthwise a strip of the thin metal originally c. $2\frac{1}{2}$ " long and $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide. That was then hammered flat and bent into three arcs with a tiny loop for a head.

Delicate ear coils that would "clip" onto the edge of the ear were made by folding a strip of copper in upon itself from two sides, making a 3-ply strip only $\frac{1}{16}$ " wide. This was then wound around a stick or little finger making a coil $\frac{5}{16}$ " in diameter. There are four or five rounds in each of the preserved coils. Rings were made in a similar way.

The excavations revealed little of the ceremonial life of these Indians who lived on the Upper Iowa River, although that surely was a highly important phase of their existence. Certain traditional burial practices were noted when the cemeteries were investigated. It was customary to

place the body on its back in a grave in full attire. With the body were usually placed objects that may have represented the person's special abilities or rank in the social group. It is a matter of record that among the Ioways there were three classes of society in early times: "chiefs," "braves," and "commoners." Although some burials did not have any objects specially placed with them, and some had definitely more than others, it is unsatisfactory upon present evidence to try to correlate them with any class distinctions.

It is known that in 1676 curious Ioways visited the French at Green Bay. Perhaps it was on this visit that they got some of the blue glass beads, the iron knives, or the brass coils found with burials at several sites. Or perhaps they got some of them through Nicholas Perrot who was in their area in the early 1680's and who actually visited an Ioway village in 1685. Certainly the scantiness of trade materials at the sites excavated — the absence of substitution of metal pots for clay ones and metal tools for stone and bone ones — and the lack of gun parts, all suggest that these were the first trade articles these Indians had received. That they cherished them is illustrated by their placing such objects with the dead. That they wanted more after Perrot's visit is illustrated in La Potherie's comment, "Their eagerness to obtain French merchandise induced them to go away to hunt beaver . . . and for this purpose they penetrated

far inland." In 1688 in Montreal, Perrot engaged a Frenchman, Mousseaux "dit Laviolette," to make an expedition just to the Ioways to trade European-made goods for beaver skins.

But before trade goods in any abundance had reached the Ioways, they had moved westward, perhaps into the region of the Blue Earth River or farther west into what is now Clay County, where Dr. Keyes reported sites with cultural remains similar to those on the Upper Iowa River. Whether the Ioways left in order to live nearer untrapped beaver streams or whether attacks from other tribes were the underlying cause is not known. It is certain beyond question, however, that this move signalled the beginning of the disintegration of their native culture and of their cherished independence.

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