

6-1-1927

Tribes, Stocks, and Cultures

Charles Reuben Keyes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Keyes, Charles R. "Tribes, Stocks, and Cultures." *The Palimpsest* 8 (1927), 189-193.
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol8/iss6/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Tribes, Stocks, and Cultures

It took the white man a long time to find out that there were various kinds of Indians. To the pioneer an Indian was an Indian and one looked and talked, if he talked at all, just like every other. The nineteenth century was far spent before it became generally known that the different Indian tribes were often very distinctly separated by their ways of life and thought and especially by language barriers. The church missionaries and a few early students, who dealt with the Indians more intimately and sympathetically, understood, of course, that the cultures of the numerous tribes differed much from one another, but even they had but a limited conception of the whole truth.

It will be well to look at this word "culture" for a moment. It means broadly the sum of the material attainments and the mental traits of a particular social group. The culture of a people may be identified by the weapons, household utensils, and ornaments they used as well as by their traditions and ceremonies. As it is often desirable to discuss the material apart from the mental, or spiritual, the terms "material culture" and "spiritual culture" have naturally come into general use. The group whose culture is the subject of consideration may be either a small social unit, such as a single Indian

tribe, or it may be a large social group, such as a whole linguistic stock.

Here again is a term of importance if a person is to think clearly about that most complex of all racial entities, the American Indian. A "linguistic stock" is composed of all those peoples who speak a common language. In a few cases a stock, as known within historical times, contains but a single tribe; generally, however, a number of tribes compose the stock, each speaking a dialect of the parent language and each, as a rule, more or less similar to the others in cultural traits. This similarity of cultural traits is not, however, the essential criterion of a common origin and relationship, but the test is rather the possession of a dialect of the common language. Tribes speaking variants of the same language, whether mutually intelligible or not, are blood relatives, be their cultural traits what they may. Tribes isolated from others of the same stock and long surrounded by peoples of a different stock not infrequently acquire much of the material, and sometimes even to a great extent the spiritual, culture of their neighbors, while their language continues to show clearly how their blood runs. Thus the Ioway and the Winnebago, both belonging to the Siouan stock, show many of the traits of the Algonkian peoples with whom they had long lived in contact. Since the language test is most important in establishing true relationship, the term "linguistic stock" has come into general and clearly defined use

to distinguish the divergent branches of the Indian race. "Linguistic family" is a synonym sometimes used to avoid too frequent repetition of the much-needed term, "linguistic stock".

It should not be forgotten that language differences made communication between the different stocks through the spoken word quite impossible. The lisping Algonkian tongue of a Meskwaki Indian simply could not be understood by the Wahpeton, who spoke a dialect of the guttural Siouan. This fact of the language barrier explains a good many things in both culture and history. Cultural differences are developed and magnified by isolation, and lack of understanding invariably begets suspicions the world over that often end in feudal strife and even war.

Both the historic and prehistoric Indian cultures have been receiving something like intensive study for a period of about fifty years and one of the surprising revelations concerning the native Americans is the remarkable number of their linguistic groups. About eighty-five stocks existed in North America and nearly, perhaps quite, as many in South America at the time of the first white contact. The exact number can not be given with certainty for the reason that sufficient knowledge of all the different languages does not exist. So far as known, some of these stocks have always been small; a few have become extinct; others were large and powerful, played conspicuous rôles in history, and

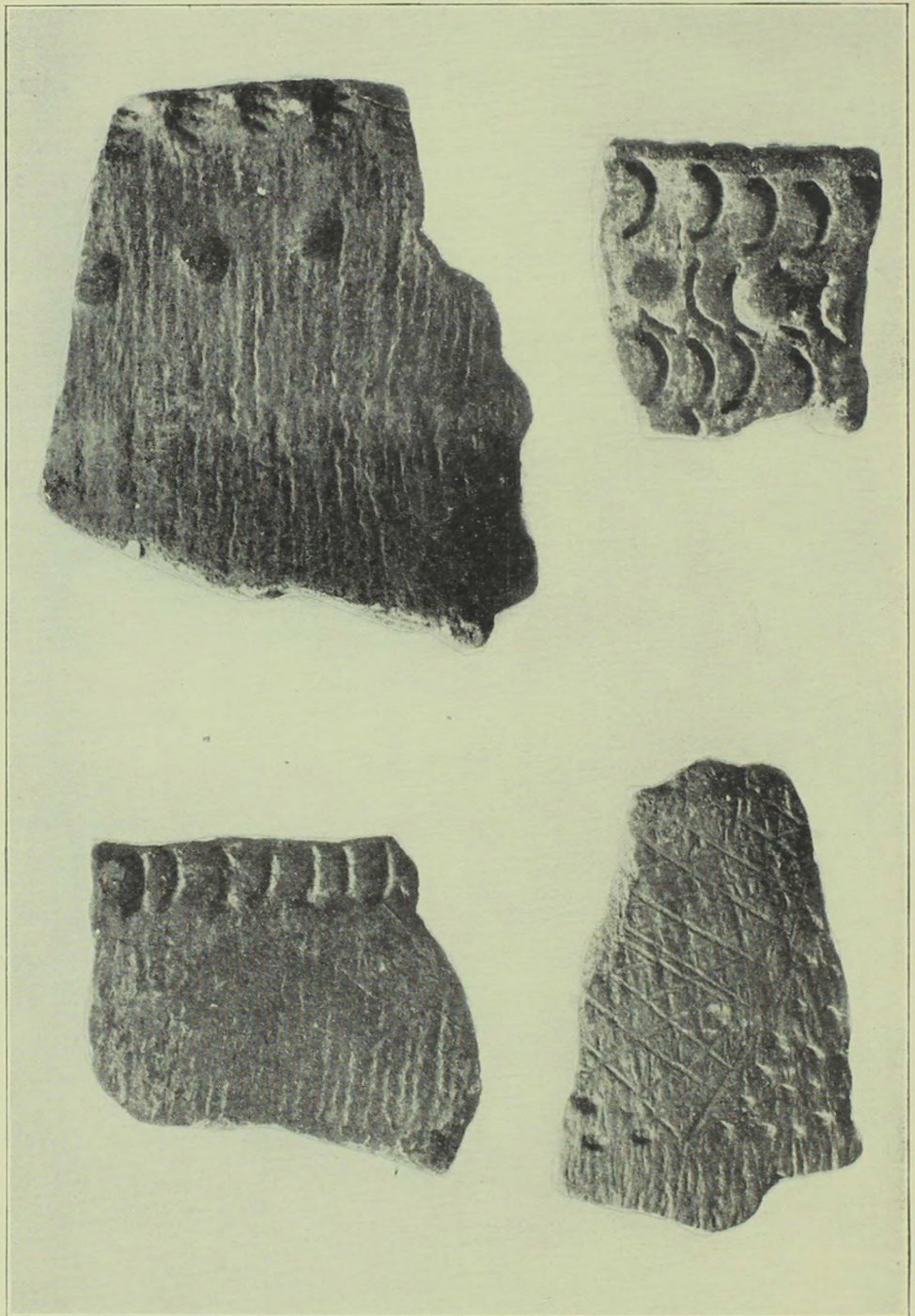
still count in their existing tribes some thousands of members.

Further consideration of terms will be useful in order to avoid confusion in the names for the numerous stocks and their still more numerous subdivisions, the tribes. A stock usually receives the name of one of its well-known tribes or tribal groups, to which is added the ending -an. Thus the great Algonkian stock of more than fifty tribes is named after the Algonkin tribe of the province of Quebec; the Siouan stock of nearly fifty tribes receives its name from one of the tribal groups, the Sioux, within this great family; the Iroquoian stock of eighteen tribes is named from the Iroquois, a tribal subdivision, or group, of six tribes in central New York.

The names of stocks are used either as adjectives or nouns. Thus the members of the Algonkian stock are all Algonkians, whether they belong to the Powhatan tribe of Virginia, the Algonkin of Quebec, the Sauk and Fox of Wisconsin and Iowa, the Cheyenne and Arapaho of Wyoming and Montana, or any of the fifty other tribes. Similarly the Winnebago of Wisconsin, the Mandan of North Dakota, the Osage of Missouri, the Ioway of Iowa, even the Catawba of the Carolinas and the Biloxi of Mississippi are all Siouans, though none of them are Sioux. Sioux is a name applied by the early French to the Dakota branch of the Siouan stock, which branch includes the Wahpeton, Yankton, Teton, Oglala, and a number of other tribes.



AN ANCIENT ROCK SHELTER THREE MILES EAST OF MONTICELLO, IOWA



ALGONKIAN POTSHERDS FROM A VILLAGE SITE AT AMANA

The Algonkian, Siouan, and Iroquoian stocks are used here as examples for the reason that history connects these three with a beautiful country now known as Iowa. To understand fully the wide application of these terms it would be necessary to look at a map showing the distribution of the different Indian stocks in America when the whites first established definite relations with them.

CHARLES REUBEN KEYES