

1972

lowaville: A Possible Historic loway Site on the Lower Des Moines River

Dean F. Straffin

Copyright ©1972 Iowa Academy of Science, Inc.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias>

Recommended Citation

Straffin, Dean F. (1972) "lowaville: A Possible Historic loway Site on the Lower Des Moines River," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 79(1), 44-46.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol79/iss1/14>

This Research is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa Academy of Science at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science by an authorized editor of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Iowaville: A Possible Historic Ioway Site on the Lower Des Moines River

DEAN F. STRAFFIN

DEAN F. STRAFFIN. Iowaville: A Possible Historic Ioway Site on the Lower Des Moines River. *Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci.*, 79(1):44-46, 1972.

SYNOPSIS: In Iowa, the Ioway and Oto Indians bridge the gap between the historically known Indians inhabiting Iowa, and the long cultural continuum delineated by archaeological research on

prehistoric sites. Few historic Ioway sites are known today, particularly in southeast Iowa. The recently discovered Iowaville site may contribute substantially to our knowledge of scantily documented Ioway Indians, and may shed light on relationships with the prehistoric Oneota culture.

Early Iowa history contains little definite information concerning the tribes resident in Iowa at the arrival and consequently before the coming of the whites. For the most part, early explorers of the Upper Mississippi did not penetrate into Iowa very far, and only reported vaguely what they heard about the Indian inhabitants. The many vague statements in the early literature are generally of little value in locating the dwelling places of the Indians residing within the area which later became Iowa. When records start to become more common for the eastern part of the state, about the beginning of the 19th century, it is too late to gain much information from them concerning prehistoric conditions. Most of the tribes were on the move, and had greatly changed many aspects of their culture from their prehistoric antecedents. (For example, Marquette found firearms already in the hands of the Peoria in 1673.) Tribes encountered for the first time in Iowa were often recent immigrants themselves, having entered Iowa from the East since the latter part of the 17th century. (Keyes, 1951)

Of the presently known early historic Indian settlements in eastern Iowa, almost all are ascribed to the Ioway or the Sauk and Fox, and mostly to the Ioway who resided on the Upper Iowa River in the northeast part of the state.

The Ioways were evidently great travelers, and the sixteen-plus village sites where they have been located "would require a circle of approximately 500 miles if drawn from the mouth of the Iowa River." (Petersen, 1960) Mildred Mott Wedel (1959) states that the earliest documentary evidence that she has found relating the Ioway to the Upper Iowa River pertains to the 1650's. Two decades later, in 1676, some Ioways visited the French at Green Bay, and in 1685 they were mentioned by Nicholot Perrot who visited their village.

For reasons not clearly understood but perhaps related to the search for better hunting territory or pressure from other tribes, the Ioway moved out of the Upper Iowa River valley sometime after Perrot's visit and prior to 1700. Contemporary French references to them at the time of the 17th century indicate the presence of the Ioway in what is now the Dickson-Clay County region of Iowa along the Little Sioux River. These sites have also been ascribed to the Otos. (Mott, 1938) According to Keyes (1951), all of these sites are sit-

uated on high ground overlooking the Little Sioux River and cover from ten to twenty acres each. The Blood Run site, covering more than a mile along a high terrace overlooking the Big Sioux River, is also included in the list of Ioway sites in western Iowa.

By about 1760, and in the years following, the Ioway are mentioned several times, in rather indefinite terms, as being in southwestern Iowa, on the Des Moines River in southeastern Iowa, and even on the Illinois side of the Mississippi. From 1777 onward for nearly half a century numerous reports speak of an Ioway village on the lower Des Moines River. During the Spanish regime (1763-1800) reports indicate that the Des Moines valley was inhabited by the Ioway who were carrying on profitable commerce with English traders much to the annoyance of Spanish officials. (Petersen, 1941) In the journal of Lewis and Clark in the year 1804 they say they passed a place on the west bank of the Missouri "where the Ayouway (Ioway), a branch of the Otos, once lived, and who emigrated to the river Des Moines." (Fulton, 1882) Later reports are specific enough for an exact placement on the terrace on the north bank of the river a mile west of what is now the town of Selma in the northwest corner of Van Buren County. (Keyes, 1951)

Fulton (1882) describes a principal village of the "Iowas" situated on the Des Moines River, near the northwest corner of Van Buren County, and where the old trading post of Iowaville was subsequently located. His source of information was James H. Jordan who settled at Iowaville as a trader when the region was still in the possession of the Indians. Prior to that time the region had passed out of the possession of the Ioways and was held by the Sauk and Fox. Jordan, in his later years, recorded stories told to him by Sauk and Fox Indians including Chief Blackhawk, when he entered the region. Jordan reports being told of a battle wherein the Sauk and Fox destroyed a large Ioway encampment on the Des Moines River. Jordan claimed to have personally seen the aftermath of this battle in the form of "fresh graves" when he first visited the spot in 1828. From this single secondhand account given by Jordan have come many subsequent reports of the "Battle of Iowaville." The lack of any other documentation for the battle has led to several attempts to locate the Ioway site.

In March of 1924, Charles R. Keyes searched the site of pioneer Iowaville in the hopes of finding traces of Indian

occupation. Keyes noted that early settlers used to find glass and shell beads, pipestone, iron tomahawks and parts of flintlock guns in the vicinity, but after searching "over about a square mile of terrace" he did not find any traces of Indian occupation. Keyes returned to search the Iowaville terrace again in 1938, this time in the company of Waldo Wedel, curator of Archaeology at the U.S. National Museum, and Mildred M. Mott. "Not a thing was found that would identify the Ioway, or any other group that ever lived within our borders." (Keyes, 1951)

Subsequently, the State Archaeologist, Marshall McKusick, and Otto Knauth from the Des Moines Register have attempted to locate the Ioway site with no success. This area is also indicated on a map of Indian burial sites published by the Bureau of American Ethnography (B.A.E. report 1883-84). In November, 1970 this author located an historic Indian village in the area described by Jordan and searched by Keyes and others.

The site is extensive. Its true area is unknown, although surface evidence covers at least five acres. No features are discernible on the surface, however artifact concentrations and cultural debris hint at discrete house structures and/or refuse deposits. Recognition of the site has been "masked" by the paucity of typical aboriginal remains such as chipped stone and native ceramics, and the abundance of manufactured items of European origin including very recent cultural debris including pieces of farm machinery and bottle caps, etc. The site is located on the broad flood plain of the Des Moines River.

To date, no excavations have been conducted, and all collections are from the surface. In many instances it is difficult or impossible to tell whether certain objects are derived from the Indian occupation or from the later Iowaville pioneer settlement. Included in this problematical category would be pieces of gun furniture, musket balls, earthenware and miscellaneous brass and iron items. On the other hand, a number of these European manufactured objects were produced for the Indian trade or modified for aboriginal use. Included here are glass trade beads and sheet brass made into conical tinklers. Also present are aboriginal artifacts made from native raw materials; included here are fragments of catlinite pipes, ground hematite and cut and polished bone. Faunal remains recovered by surface collecting presents evidence of domestic horse and pig, but the preponderance of the bone is representative of deer. Also present are the remains of catfish, gar, drumfish, soft-shelled turtle, large canids, raccoons, and other small mammals and birds.

Found in close association on the surface were a fragmentary human right frontal and right maxilla, a brass military button and honey-colored gun flint of probable French derivation. All of this material has been accessioned as part of the collections maintained by the State Research Center at Fairfield, which is part of the Office of the State Archaeologist. The site number for the Indian occupation at Iowaville is 13VB-24. Excavation of 13VB-24 by the Research Center was planned for the summer of 1971; however the site is rented to a tenant farmer who prohibited excavation.

Ascribing the Indian occupation at Iowaville to the Ioway is done tentatively on the basis of the scant documentation of the Ioway residing in this vicinity alluded to earlier. The site location fits Jordan's description of the location of the Ioway

village very closely. Not to be overlooked is the possibility that the site may represent the Sauk and Fox who briefly lived in the region later in time.

Unlike most other known sites ascribed to the Ioway, the Iowaville surface collection does not contain any shell tempered pottery or many chipped stone artifacts. Other known Ioway sites represent earlier periods embracing the time when the Ioway as an historically recognized entity were developing out of a recognized prehistoric antecedent population referred to as Oneota. Oneota sites are noted for their characteristic shell tempered pottery. Ioway sites on the Upper Iowa River, and in western Iowa contains Oneota pottery in conjunction with European trade items. According to late 18th and 19th century documents, the Iowaville site is temporally late, representing the very end of the cultural continuum from prehistoric Oneota into historic Ioway. Consequently, many native crafts such as ceramics had been completely supplanted by brass trade kettles and other items of European derivation.

Very few late prehistoric and historic Indian sites are known in southeast Iowa. The only other site which bears evidence of historic material which has been ascribed to an historically known tribe is the McKinney site (13LA-1), located on the bluff top at the confluence of the Iowa River with the Mississippi in Louisa County. This bluff top village covers an estimated twenty acres and contains an octagonal enclosure, now almost obliterated by agriculture. Mott (1938) has suggested that the McKinney site may have been an early historic Ioway village. Henning states that pottery from the McKinney site is "similar in all respects to that of the Orr Phase." (1970) Orr Phase pottery is characteristic of prehistoric ceramics found on the Upper Iowa River and elsewhere. It is therefore probable that the McKinney site is a close contemporary to similar sites more fully described in the northeast corner of the state, with Ioway affiliations dating to before 1700.

Other Oneota sites in southeast Iowa are practically unknown. An exception is the Kingston site (13DM-3), excavated by Straffin and located on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi near Kingston in Des Moines County. This site yielded no historic remains and C₁₄ dates indicate occupation circa the 14th century. Kingston C₁₄ dates are A.D. 1220, 1325 and 1400 ± 90 years.

Almost all known Oneota sites in Iowa are found in bluff top locations or on high terraces, and this is also true for the known Ioway sites which date to the early historic period. The Iowaville site, located on the flood plain of the Des Moines River, is the only known example of an historic site tentatively identified with the Ioway which is located in the physiography of a broad flood plain. Such a shift in settlement pattern is probably correlative with the changes in tribal culture due to European influence. Although the surface collections from the site still indicate a strong reliance on more ancient economic patterns involving deer hunting and other diverse animals, the Ioway by this period in time were in possession of horses. The adoption of the horse, guns and other aspects of European derived material culture undoubtedly led to great changes in the Ioway who lived on the Lower Des Moines when compared to the earlier historic Ioway settlements known in other parts of the state which date around the turn of the 18th century.

No ancestral Ioway (Oneota) sites are known in Van Buren County at present, and no Oneota sites have been located in an initial survey of the Des Moines drainage anywhere in the Iowaville vicinity. Despite the seeming lack of time depth, as a late historic Ioway village persisting into the early 19th century, the Iowaville site is unique, and may provide useful data in our attempt to understand the process of development from prehistoric Oneota horticulturalists into the historic tribal Ioway who were strongly influenced by the fur trade, pressure from other tribes and impinging European civilization.

LITERATURE CITED

- FULTON, A. R. 1882. The Red Men of Iowa. Mills & Co., Des Moines.
- HENNING, DALE R. 1970. Development and Interrelationships of Oneota Cultures in the Lower Missouri River Valley. *Missouri Archaeologist*. Vol. 32.
- KEYES, CHARLES R. 1951. In Quest of Facts. *The Palimpsest*. Vol. XXXII, no. 8, August.
- KEYES, CHARLES R. 1951. Iowa Prehistoric Cultures. *The Palimpsest*. Vol. XXXII, no. 8, August.
- PETERSEN, WILLIAM J. 1941. Iowa. The Rivers of Her Valleys. The State Historical Society. Iowa City.
- PETERSEN, WILLIAM J. 1960. The Ioways. *The Palimpsest*. Vol. XLI, no. 50, May.
- WEDEL, MILDRED MOTT. 1959. Oneota Sites on the Upper Iowa River. *The Missouri Archaeologist*. Vol. 21, nos. 2-4, December. Bureau of American Ethnography, annual report, 1883-84.