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Ellison Orr

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INDIAN POTTERY OF THE ONEOTA OR UPPER IOWA RIVER  
VALLEY IN NORTHEASTERN IOWA.

ELLISON ORR.

The Oneota, or Upper Iowa, a small river about eighty miles in length, flows through Winneshiek and Allamakee counties in Iowa, close to their northern border, which is also the line between this state and Minnesota. It flows through a beautiful, winding valley, which has a width of half a mile, and is bounded by precipitous bluffs. The glacial terraces which extend up this valley for forty miles to Decorah have afforded very abundant evidences of a former considerable Indian population. Earth embankments, mounds, and camp sites have yielded up a treasure of implements, weapons and ornaments. Notable among these are the large number of small earthen vessels found in burial places and the fewer larger ones which seem to have been buried by themselves.

All along the valleys of the Oneota river and its tributaries, Bear and Waterloo creeks, in Allamakee county, as far up as the benches occur, abundant fragments of pottery may be found. These are pieces of the necks, sides, and the bottoms of pots, kettles or jars, with an occasional handle, usually with a bit of the body and neck attached. Except in or about the circular earthworks, these pieces of earthenware are seldom or never found on the bluff tops or anywhere on the general upland fields. In all the years that I have been collecting I have never found a single piece of pottery anywhere except in the narrow valleys of the Mississippi, the Turkey, the Oneota or its larger tributaries, where they are particularly abundant about the camp sites, and not rare anywhere on the flood plains and benches. Much pottery had been buried, and when the land began to be cultivated it was broken and turned up by the plow.

It was a common custom to bury pots of small size with the dead. They were presumably filled with food for the spirit of the deceased, to sustain it on its way to the happy hunting grounds. Others, larger ones, were buried by themselves, for what reason we are unable to determine. As some, apparently whole, have been struck by the plow,

Note—In the following paper the local name "Bench," is used to designate remnants of the glacial river valley terraces occurring along the Oneota, and all earthenware vessels are called "pots" regardless of the use to which they were put.

where they were buried under fire or hearth stones indicating teepee sites, it may have been customary to place them there, such burial having some religious or other significance.

Very rarely a whole pot has been turned out by the plow, or, much oftener, washed out of one of the numerous ditches that flood water began to cut into the benches and hillsides after cultivation began. Many stories are told by people living in these valleys of finding whole pottery thus washed out, that, after lying about for a while, was broken.

About the year 1890 some persons discovered that some of the graves of the benches, and in the sandy places on the sides and tops of the bluffs, when made, had been covered, or partly covered, with a few flat rocks. As not many were used, and as they had become more or less sunken in the earth and covered by soil or leaf mold, and brush and trees had grown upon and around them, they had not attracted attention before. It now became quite easy for the initiated to discover all these rock-covered graves. It only required patient search, and in the course of a dozen years, all, or at least nearly all, such rock-covered burial places had been found and opened. In many of these pots were found, sometimes whole, but oftener more or less broken—sometimes beyond repair. This pottery so found has been scattered far and wide among collectors.

One digger found seven unbroken vessels on a sandy point of a bench on the west side of the Dorchester road, about eighty rods north of the school house at the forks of the road on section 35 of Waterloo township. Others had been taken out of the same place before. But none of the graves of this small cemetery were rocked over. It had been accidentally discovered by the finding of a pot in a ditch which had cut through one side of the bench. The whole point was then systematically dug over and the skeletons with their pottery and other relics found.

Another burial place on a similar point, on Bear creek, near the northwest corner of section 3, township 99 north, range 6 west, now a part of Mr. Dennis Malone's farm yard, was discovered in the same way by the creek washing out skeletons and pottery. An old man living with Malone claimed that one eighteen inches in diameter was washed out and that he broke it with a rock because it was "Heathen pottery."

Nearly all earthen pottery found at any time along the Oneota, so far as we know, has been of one general pattern—a rounded "pot" bottom, running upward into regularly rounded sides reaching the vertical at about one-half the total height of the vessel, at which point they turn sharply inwards, approaching the horizontal, and then upward, terminating in a neck having a height of from one-fifth to one-third of the entire

height of the vessel. The opening, or orifice, of the neck has a diameter of approximately two-thirds of the greatest diameter at the swell. Where the pot is oval shaped the opening is also often oval, and both long and short diameters have the same relative proportion of two-thirds of the long and short greatest diameters.

The greater part of the small pottery is round, with a round orifice, but some of it is very symmetrically oval. Most of the round pots have two handles, on opposite sides from each other, placed much the same as those on a modern common jug, the top of the handle being flush with the top of the neck, and the lower part attached to the upper part of the swell. Some have four handles, placed at one quarter of the circumference apart.

On oval pots the handles are placed at right angles to the shortest diameter, but on many of these, instead of handles, the neck is pierced with holes for a cord or thong. On all small handled pots the hole between the handle and the body of the pot is seldom large enough for the insertion of even one finger, and a cord must have been run through it with which to carry the vessel.

Handles were made of a separate piece and put on after the other part was finished. They are often strengthened and ornamented by a rib on the outside, and sometimes are ornamented by markings similar to those on the body.

The neck and body, from the middle of the swell up, are quite often ornamented with both long and short lines, usually straight, but sometimes curved, indented with the point of a flint or a bone or wood instrument in the soft material before burning, and with rows of indented dots made in the same way. Lines resembling those which could be made by pressing a tightly twisted double string into the soft clay are also found on some. But even where the most elaborate work has been done in ornamentation, anything approaching a symmetrical and regular pattern is not often seen. The top of the neck was sometimes ornamented by pinching around it with the thumb and finger, or by making indentations on the top with the finger, entirely around, forming a sort of scallop. Plate XXIII is from a photograph of pieces showing bits of the more elaborate markings and tracings.

The center of gravity is such that the vessel, though having a rounded bottom, retains an upright position, and if laid on its side will at once resume the vertical.

Among the fragments of pottery picked up on the fields of the Oneota bottoms and benches, and along the ditches washed in the latter, are

many pieces of from one-fourth to three-eighths of an inch in thickness, the curvature of which would indicate vessels having a diameter of from one to two feet. While the ornamental markings on the smaller pots are usually quite regular, and sometimes approach elaborateness, and the work was quite well done, these larger ones had little or no ornamentation, and what they did have was crude and irregular.

Handles large enough to thrust from one to three fingers through them are not uncommon among these larger pieces, while the handles of the smaller pots were just large enough to thrust a good sized cord through them.

Pots of the size that these larger fragments indicate are never found in the graves, and it would seem that this larger pottery was probably used for cooking, or for holding water or storing corn or wild rice, or for some of the other various uses to which such jars could be put by families permanently encamped. Abundant fragments of pottery indicate the sites of settlements or encampments of long standing, as this earthenware was of so fragile a nature that great care must have been necessary in handling it, and it is doubtful if it was possible to move it for any distance by the usual methods of Indian transportation.

Occasionally vague reports of the striking of one of these large vessels by the plow, or of the finding of one broken in a ditch, are brought in by some farmer. One was reported to have been struck and broken by the plow in making a dug-way road on the north side of the bench between Bear creek and the Oneota, almost directly south of the bridge across the former, on the northeast quarter of section 2, township 99 north, range 6 west, in Hanover township. Another was reported to have been washed out of a ditch on the Tartt farm on section 36, township 100 and same range, in Waterloo township, and found by Mr. Tartt, but afterwards broken by some horses before being moved to a place of safety. Another was said to have been struck by a road grader and smashed to pieces, near the northeast corner of section 4, township 99 north, range 5 west, in Union City township.

In July, 1907, Harry Orr found one of these large pots in situ in the side of a large ditch in the O'Regan farm, near the center of section 6, township 99, range 5, in Union City township. A cow, in stepping too near the side of the ditch, had broken off a piece of it and exposed the pot to view. Unfortunately most of one side of the bowl was broken off and lost, having been washed away with the earth and sand. The pot lay exactly up side down in the sand, with which it was filled, and the bottom was one foot below the surface. The field had been cultivated at one time, and for about one foot below the surface was a black sandy

loam. No bones, flints, shells, burnt rocks or other relics were found with or near the bowl, and the sand with which it was filled was the same as that which surrounded it.

On attempting to remove the wet sand with which it was filled and surrounded, the vessel broke into fragments, the bottom crumbling into small pieces. The writer was present and assisted in removing it but was unable to determine whether or not it was whole when buried. If it was, it must have been packed full of sand before being placed in the ground.

The pot was of the oval type with two handles at right angles to its shorter diameter. These handles were large enough to thrust the forefinger through them and were ornamented with a central vertical rib. The neck was one and one-fourth inches in height, flaring out quite strongly, and without ornamentation, the lip pinched out and without finger scallops or other ornamentation. The bowl below the neck swelled out strongly and symmetrically and was without ornamentation except some irregular markings from the neck downwards to the swell. The bottom was rounded potlike as usual.

The pieces were glued together and the result showed, that had we been able to save it whole, we would have had a handsome, symmetrical vessel. Plate XXV is from a photograph of it when restored. From the swell of the bowl up it had been stained black on the outside.

#### DIMENSIONS OF THE VESSEL.

	INCHES
From lip to lip, longest diameter .....	10 $\frac{3}{4}$
From lip to lip, shortest diameter .....	8 $\frac{3}{4}$
Longest diameter at swell of bowl .....	14 $\frac{1}{2}$
Shortest diameter at swell of bowl .....	11 $\frac{1}{2}$
Depth .....	9

The O'Regan bench lies along the bluff on the north side of the river, which here runs east and west. It is irregularly rectangular in outline and has an area of about sixty acres. East of it the river turns and runs north, coming in quite close to the bluff, which also turns north. A narrow bench lies along this north and south bluff, having a width at the top of from one hundred to three hundred feet. This north and south bench is composed of light loess clay, easily dug. Scattered through it are fragments of rock, some of which are very large.

On June 14, 1908, Harry Orr found a second large pot in the side of a small ditch which had been washed in the steep slope of this bench about half way to the top. The pot was of the same shape and orna-

mentation as the one found the year before in the ditch on the O'Regan bench, but was larger, having the following dimensions:

	INCHES
Longest diameter at swell of bowl .....	16
Shortest diameter at swell of bowl .....	14
Depth .....	10½

The circumference of the lip of the orifice is an almost exact circle, having a diameter of eleven inches.

When found the pot lay on its side about one foot below the surface, with the top down hill, was complete, and was filled solidly with clay. The weight of the earth, aided probably by the creeping or sliding down hill of the clay when wet, had distorted it and broken it into many fragments, and may also have been the cause of its lying on its side. On the inside of the bottom was a thin coating of soot or some burned substance. There was also a fragment of a smaller pot. Plate XXVI is from a photograph of this pot when restored.

The right hand figure on Plate XXVII is from a photograph of pot No. 1 of our collection of pottery from the Oneota valley. The greatest diameter is 5 in., the height is 37/8 in., and the opening at the top 3¼ in. It is a very symmetrical two-handled vessel, but with little ornamentation, having only a few incised lines running from the neck downwards to a little below the swell of the body. In firing it did not turn red but a dark ash color changing to a reddish or pinkish cream on the outside. The whole of the outside of the body and neck, and the inside of the neck, had once been stained black, but much of this had come off.

This pot was taken by Mr. W. F. Dresser, in 1893, from a grave in a sandy spot about half way up the sloping eastern extremity of the high and narrow "Hog Back" or divide between Bear creek and the Oneota, and on the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 2, township 99, range 6. Other graves, rock covered, were also found at the same place.

Above and below this sandy spot the surface is very rocky. At the foot of the slope is a rectangular piece of bench about twenty rods each way, the flat top of which is about seventy feet above the flood plain, and which is said to be thickly dotted with graves, but as they were not rocked over they cannot now be found.

The east end of this bench is a sand "slide", along the bottom of which runs the Waukon-Dorechester road. The bridge across the Oneota, a few rods to the southeast, is known as the New Galena bridge. Sand is being hauled away from the bottom of this slide causing the top to

break off from time to time. In the fall of 1910 a piece broke away exposing a part of a skeleton, with which were found, when it was wholly excavated, two silver band bracelets having the word "Montreal" stamped on them.

The left hand figure shown on Plate XXVIII is from a photograph of pot No. 6, of our collection. It is somewhat unsymmetrical, one side of the rim of the neck being an inch higher than the opposite side. Its greatest diameter is  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches, the height in the center is  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches, and the opening at the top,  $3\frac{1}{8}$  inches. It is a four-handled, red burned, unstained pot with something attempted in the way of an incised ornamental pattern, as shown on photograph and figure. This pot was found by Mr. Tartt, about 1900, in a grave on the small bench on the east side of Waterloo creek opposite his residence. A number of other pots were dug up on the same bench by him.

Pot No. 7, shown on Plate XXVII, was dug up close to No. 6, and also by Mr. Tartt. The bench cemetery from which these two were taken is on the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 36, township 100, range 6.

In this pot both body and orifice are oval, and there are no handles. Instead it has holes three-sixteenths inch in diameter punched through the neck, at the ends of the oval orifice, where there are triangular upward projections of the same, somewhat like ears. The top of the swell is ornamented with a few straight incised lines, and the edge of the orifice is indented with shallow notches all around. The long diameter at the swell is 6 inches, the short is  $5\frac{1}{4}$  inches, and the height in the center is 4 inches, the ends of the oval having the holes for suspension cords, rising a half inch higher. The mouth or orifice has a long diameter of  $4\frac{5}{8}$  inches, and a short one of 4 inches.

This pot shows very distinct marks, both inside and out, of having been rubbed down or smoothed with a piece of dressed skin. As in No. 6, the outside of the body and neck, and the inside of the neck, have been stained black. It is a question hard to determine, whether this black color is a stain, or whether it is the remnants of a coating of soot acquired while in use and still adhering.

Pot No. 2 is higher in proportion to its diameter, and has a larger orifice, than any yet described. It is of the round type, having the following dimensions:

	INCHES
Diameter of swell at five-eighths of height .....	7 $\frac{1}{2}$
Height .....	5 $\frac{1}{2}$

The mouth is slightly oval, the longest diameter being  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches, the shortest, 5 inches. It burned to a light ash color in firing, and the outside is blackened in patches. Plate XXIX is from a photograph of this pot. There are two handles, and the ornamentation consists of straight vertical marks on the upper part of the body, and an indented lip.

The pot was found by Mr. W. F. Dresser in the most southerly of a group of rocked-over graves, located on the southern point of the bench under the nose of the southern vertical escarpment of the Elephant, (a hill of circumundation for cut of which see page 46, vol. IV, Annual Report of Iowa Geological Survey), and located on the southeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section 32, township 99, range 5. In the grave was also a flint knife.

In the next grave, also excavated by Dresser, was a four-handled pot containing a clam shell spoon. Two more of this group were excavated by Mr. Bulman and each contained a pot. The remaining one was later excavated by Doctor Ratcliff and in it he found the Dragon or Lizard pipe of diorite of which Plate XXII is a photograph.

Pot No. 4 seems to be something of an anomaly. It is rudely hemispherical in shape, and without handles or ornamentation. Two holes one-fourth inch in diameter are punched on opposite sides half an inch below the rim. The rim is approximately round, having a diameter of six and one-fourth inches. The depth is four inches. Plate XXX is from a photograph of this kettle. The original was found by W. W. Carpenter, in 1897, in one of a group of rocked-over graves on the top of a low rocky point just north of the Dennis Malone residence. It was in one of these graves that, in 1896, I found a steel table knife almost entirely rusted away.

Very rarely is a pot found having a hemispherical form. On this type the top of the opening is the greatest diameter of the vessel. There are no handles, no lines, dots or other attempts at beautifying this class of ware. Holes are made on opposite sides for thongs.

Tiny pots of no particular shape and with no ornamentation or handles are sometimes found with the skeletons of children. See Plate XXVIII.

On the whole it may be said that the aboriginal dwellers of the Oneota Valley had a sufficient knowledge of ceramics to make pottery that was symmetrically formed and well constructed; that it was easily broken, being usually less than one-fourth of an inch in thickness, and consequently great care was required in handling it, so that it probably was seldom moved from one camp ground to another; and that the ornamentation was simple and crude, and beyond a few incised lines and

dots but little was attempted. Nothing approaching the intricate designs of the southern and southwestern pottery is found. In short, these prehistoric potters, while they were able to produce very shapely ware, were unable to add to its beauty by elaborate, intricate and symmetrical designs.

For comparison, a photograph of a pot or jar dug up near Dubuque by Mr. Herrman, in the territory of the Sacs and Foxes, or prior to their occupancy, of the Illini, is shown on Plate XXIV. This shows much greater skill in this line.

The pottery of the Oneota was made of clay, mixed up with pulverized clam shells, and did not always burn red in the firing, but more commonly a slate black or ashy color. Pieces often exhibit a more or less laminated structure.

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PLATE XXII.—Dragon pipe.

Orr: Indian Pottery of the Oneota or Upper Iowa River Valley in Northe

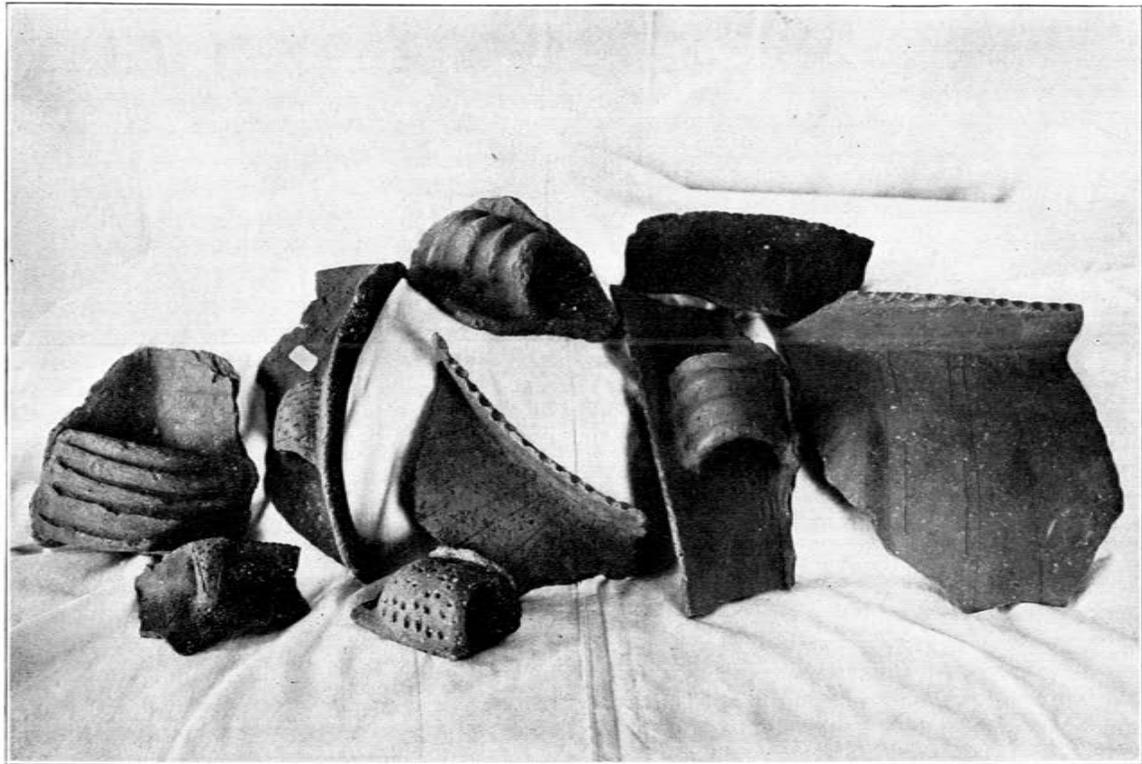


PLATE XXIII.—Pieces showing ornamentation.



PLATE XXIV.—Herrman pot, from Dubuque.



PLATE XXV.—First large pot found.



PLATE XXVI.—Second large pot found.

Orr: Indian Pottery of the Oneota or Upper Iowa River Valley in North



PLATE XXVII.—Pots number 1 and number 7.



PLATE XXVIII.—Pot number 6.



PLATE XXIX.—Pot number 2.



PLATE XXVI.—Second large pot found.

Orr: Indian Pottery of the Oneota or Upper Iowa River Valley in Northe



PLATE XXVII.—Pots number 1 and number 7.



PLATE XXVIII.—Pot number 6.



PLATE XXIX.—Pot number 2.



PLATE XXX.—Pot number 4.