

Study Club
1931
Haworth

MANERS AND CUSTOMS OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS PARTICULARLY THE IANNI LANGUAGE

There are several different theories as to the origin of the North American Indians. They were considered by some authorities to be the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, by others as having come by canoe from some lost continent in the Atlantic or Pacific, or from Wales, China, Greece or Rome. The gold-seeking Spaniards claimed: "From Hell they came and they are devils incarnate guarding the hidden treasures of the earth." But whatever might be their racial ancestry, it is supposed that they came from Asia by Bering Strait, and spread out in a fan shape over the continent. This was no doubt prior to 700 B.C. and though the various Indian nations had a common origin and their manners and customs were very similar, they differed in speech more than the European nations, and even the various tribes of one stock spoke different languages.

As the nations migrated in search of new hunting lands or retreated from hostile neighbors, they developed differences in stature, color and habits, influenced by the territory in which they settled. The Indians of the northwest, who seasonally canoed to good salmon grounds, became stocky and round shouldered from constant loading over the paddle. Those of the plains, who became hunters, were tall, sinewy, and fearless. Tribes living in areas of abundant rain became agriculturalists having more permanent dwellings than those who had little success in gardening and had to travel far and wide for food. But in all the tribes are similar stories of their progress southward, conflicts with resisting tribes, and their gradual

transition from roving hunters to agriculturalists held by the soil in one location.

On the shores of the Delaware in the area which is now New Jersey lived a tribe of the Algonquin nation called the Leni-Lenape. They were described by the early white settlers as being of moderate height, well-built, and strong, with dark eyes, startlingly white teeth, and coarse black hair which the men burned off leaving only a cone-like tuft, and the women wore in two long braids. The men seldom had any growth of beard, but if they did they pulled it out. Their clothing consisted of animal skins worn around the waist with the fur turned inside in cold weather and outside in hot weather. In winter their legs and feet were bound in deer skin. Their skin, though exposed to all kinds of weather was kept supple by anointing it with oil of fishes, the fat of eagles or the grease of raccoons. These oils protected ~~their skins~~ ^{it} from the summer heat and insects, and in winter, by stopping up the pores, ~~protected them~~ ^{helped} ~~the~~ against cold. They were fond of tattooing their bodies with representations of animals, birds or symbolic designs and on special occasions they painted their faces with dyes extracted from plants or finely crushed stones.

The Lenapes were modest, quick-witted, loyal to friends, though cruelly treacherous toward enemies, and scrupulously honest and truthful, until, according to one writer, they had more intercourse with Christians.

The Delawares, as they are sometimes called, lived in villages but the wigwam sites were frequently changed seeking new hunting and fishing grounds. These wigwams were not the familiar conical [?]tippees used by the Indians of the Western Plains, but were longer than they were wide. Green sapling poles of hickory were planted

in two rows fifteen feet apart and thirty feet long. These were bent to a rounded roof with an opening left to emit the smoke from the fire which was always built in the center of the hut. The sides were covered with chestnut bark, leaves and sod. There was a door at each end, and along the sides were bench-like elevations where the occupants sat and slept. Six to twelve houses were *often* surrounded by a high enclosure, *constituted a fort.*

These huts were filthy inside from refuse of cooking and waste of all kinds on the dirt floor, yet the Indians kept their bodies clean and healthy by regular bathing and sweat baths. As soon as the family awakened in the morning the father would take all the children down to the river for a swim.

Their sustenance consisted of meat and fish supplied by the men, and corn, squash, beans and pumpkins *raised* ~~grown~~ by the women. All food was cooked together in one large pot which was kept on the fire and as the members of the household became hungry they would help themselves. They seldom had more than one meal a day, and since they usually dipped their hands in the pot and took out what they wanted, there were no dishes to wash afterwards. In cases of famine the Indians would sometimes eat snakes, frogs and skunks, but usually they provided against such times by drying and storing meat and vegetables, and no matter how little food they had, they would gladly share it with a friend in need or with a chance stranger.

Marriage among the Indians was sometimes a casual affair which seldom lasted, ~~made for convenience~~ ~~inclination~~ but more often the unions would be controlled by the elders and were very serious *affairs* ~~and permanent~~ and if a wife was discovered to be unfaith-

ful she was disfigured in some way by her husband. Her nose or an ear was cut off so that she would always bear the mark of her infidelity. Polygamy was allowed in all tribes but was not always practised. A brave who wished to take another wife always asked the consent of his previous wife or wives, and since any addition to their number lessened the work to be done by each wife, a newcomer was usually welcomed.

The Lenapes married very young, the girls at thirteen or fourteen, and the boys at about seventeen or eighteen. When a boy had been initiated into the secrecies of manhood and had shown ability in the hunt he was allowed to choose a wife. A young woman wishing to marry would wear a particular headdress indicating her desire. She would sit by the roadside with face and body covered so she could not be recognized until the favored suitor appeared when she would reveal her identity. The suitor would then start negotiations for the maidens hand by sending gifts to her nearest relatives, sometimes supplemented by gifts to the girl. If the relatives did not approve the match - which usually meant that his gifts were not expensive enough to suit them - they returned the gifts, but if their decision was favorable, preparations for the wedding could begin. Wives of the girl's father would prepare the property it was her duty to contribute - household furniture, cooking utensils, clothing and horses. Sometimes the girls father would present to his son-in-law his own weapons of war as evidence of his high esteem.

The engagement would be announced by some trial on the girl's part. Each day until the wedding she would prepare food, and accompanied by a younger sister or close friend, would take it to her betrothed, and by this wifely service would announce that they were to be married. When she entered his lodge she would sit for

a moment on the left or woman's side of the ^{hut}~~lodge~~. Then she would give the food to her fiancé. He would eat part of it and then pass it to his mother and sister.

When the period of the engagement was over and all was ready, the maiden was led to the brave's ^{bed}~~hut~~ and her friends would march in solemn procession bearing presents of food, cooking utensils and weapons. When the girl entered ~~the hut~~ the marriage was considered performed. Sometimes the marriage was solemnized by having the man present the bride with a ham of venison in pledge of ample flesh food supply, and the woman gave him an ear of corn in pledge of tending fields and making bread. The bridegroom would then lead his bride to the nearest narrow stream of pure and running water and over it they would join hands. The wedding ceremony of the Navajos is considered one of the most beautiful of any tribe. *See note from Oscar Lipka in his "Little History of the Navajos"*
On the night set for the wedding both families and their friends meet at the hut of the bride's family. Here there is much feasting and singing, and the bride's family makes return presents to the bridegroom's people. The women of the bride's family prepare corn meal porridge, which is poured into the wedding basket. The bride's uncle then sprinkles a circular ring and cross of the sacred blue pollen of the larkspur upon the porridge, near the outer edge and in the center. The bride has hitherto been lying beside her mother concealed under a blanket, on the woman's side of the hut. After calling to her to come to him, her uncle seats her on the west side of the hut, and the bridegroom sits down before her, with his face toward her's and the basket of porridge set between them. A gourd of water is then given to the bride, who pours some of it on the bridegroom's hands while he washes them, and he performs a like

adult duties, but also how to count on their fingers, to reckon linear measure the unit of which was the distance from thumb and first finger to the pit of the elbow, how to compute time and learn values in terms of beaver skins, eagle feathers and beads which they called wampum. They were also taught to kill a rattlesnake that gave no warning, but to spare one that did; not to interrupt a person who was speaking; and to walk on the trail one behind the other in Indian file, each one stepping in the footprints of the one preceding so that enemies could not count their number.

Children also had to be instructed in the correct manner of burying the dead. The body was perfumed and dressed in the best garments of the deceased. The face was painted red and the body buried in the embryonic position lying on the right side facing east with the head to the south. The graves which were some distance from the villages were enclosed by a fence and covered over to protect them from prowling animals.

The Indian braves led a life of indolence and contentment when they were not hunting or on the war path. They spent their time telling stories, smoking, holding athletic contests or gambling. The Lenapes were particularly fond of a betting game played with twelve flat bones, one side painted white and the other side a color. These were placed in a bowl, thrown into the air and caught as they fell. The pieces landing white side up were winning pieces.

The young men were very fond of athletic contests taking great pride in their skill and physical dexterity, and with their love of gambling many bets would be placed on foot races, archery and rolling hoop races. Among the Cherokees of the South, who early grouped themselves into more or less permanent communities, a ball game similar to our foot ball but played with rackets, was the favorite

office for her. With the first two fingers of the right hand he then takes a pinch of porridge, just where the line of pollen touches the circle of the east side. He eats this one pinch, and the bride dips with her finger from the same place. He then takes in succession a pinch from the other places where the lines touch the circle and a final pinch from the center, the bride's fingers following his. The basket of porridge is then passed over to the younger guests, who speedily devour it, a custom analogous to dividing the bride's cake at a wedding. The elder relatives of the couple now give them much good and weighty advice, and the marriage is complete^{*}

The home life of the Lenapes was considered happier than that of many other tribes. Wives were usually faithful and obedient, and their husbands respected and loved them. There was always a great bond of sympathy and love between parents and their children whom they reared with Spartan severity. In order to make the infants strong and healthy they were plunged into cold water, particularly in cold weather when the surface ice had to be broken to make an opening.

The education of the children was a serious matter and undertaken by the parents. They had to be trained in all the customs and traditions of their tribes, taught the necessary arts and crafts, the boys being trained in making and using the bow and arrow, the fishing rod and spear; and the girls in the womanly ^{tasks} ~~jobs~~ of keeping house, cooking, jerking venison and buffalo meat, dressing skins of an male killed by the men, cultivating the gardens, and preserving food for winter in holes dug in the earth and lined and covered with dry leaves and grass. They were taught not only sports and

Sport. The struggle was intense and violent and players were often crippled or even killed, but no matter what happened, the game continued to the end and was always played in good spirits and sportingly. To lose one's temper would show weakness of character.

In the government of the Lenapes, the first and most important unit was the Family. This meant not only husband, wife and children, but all their relatives. The children were considered the property of the mother and when a girl married, her husband became a member of her family and under their jurisdiction. In cases of individual wrong, the injured party retaliated or was appeased by presents.

Each tribe formed a petty kingdom ruled over by a king whose office was hereditary among the Lenapes, though in some of the other tribes he was elected by popular acclaim to hold office as long as the people wished, which was usually for his lifetime. The king presided over the Council composed of the warriors and wise men of the tribe and the representatives of other tribes who met to discuss treaties. Decisions were reached by a majority vote and in the end the peace pipe would be passed around.

When the white men first came to this country the Indians looked upon them as gods and worshipped them as such, but this attitude changed when it was found that they were mercilessly hunting for gold and valuable lands. Through the cruelty and ignorance of some of the early settlers the natives were antagonized. Thefts committed by white soldiers would be attributed to Indians and the government would offer rewards for Indian heads. Attempts were occasionally made by settlers to steal Indian squaws, and explorers sometimes enslaved Indian men on their ships. Two Dutchmen once caught an Indian trader picking peaches and killed him in the presence of his son. Is it any wonder that the son re-

taliated by killing an innocent Dutch tailor? This incident went down in history as another example of unaccountable Indian atrocities.

Their contact with the settlers communicated to the Indians tuberculosis, measles and many other diseases which proved fatal to them particularly as many of them had already become weakened by too frequent imbibing of the "spirits" imported by the settlers. Many of the indians tried to adopt the dress, weapons and ways of living of the white man, but they could not become adjusted, and those who escaped death and disease in civilization, migrated westward in search of the outdoor life for which nature and generations of training had better fitted them.