

LANDSCAPES

LANCE FOSTER* ON IOWAY ORAL TRADITIONS CONCERNING TRIBAL ORIGINS & IDENTIFYING A HOMELAND

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No Heart of Fear, painted by Charles Bird King.
Smithsonian American Art Museum

MIGRATIONS & ORIGINS: RED BANKS (RED EARTH)

The ancient origin place of the loway Tribe is shared with three other groups, which all split at some point before contact with European explorers: the loway, the Otoe, the Missouriia, and the Hochunk (or Winnebago). The place of origin as a tribe is given as Red Banks, a location at Green Bay, Wisconsin. However, the clan stories state that is actually the place where the clans came together to form a larger nation. The clans themselves came from various locations not at Red Banks (also called Red Earth, because the name in the native language, MaShuje, actually means, "Red Dirt").

Archeologists have long looked for sites at this origin place, but although the location of Red Banks is known, there is no large archeological site there.

The languages of the loway and Otoe, along with other Siouan speakers like the Omaha and Ponca, indicated ancient origins further east, by the Mississippi River and beyond. There were many migrations, and movements cycling through the land thousands of years ago in the Archaic and Woodland periods, when the roots of the Siouan language family took shape. loway and Otoe traditions hold that the clans originally came from various locations and directions. The Otoe stated each clan had its own village. This was a time when the social organization was made up of small bands. Omaha traditions talked of their origins coming down the Ohio River, and then later traveling up the Des Moines River (called by them the Raccoon River) with the loway. Identity is a snapshot in time,

and those traditions usually indicate those tribal identities had not yet been divided and defined as distinct groups, but were considered, in some sense, one people.

The formation of a new common identity from different bands or clans seems to be marked archeologically by the transition from the Late Woodland Period (such as at Effigy Mounds in Iowa) to the Upper Mississippian Oneota Tradition of the Mississippian Period (contemporaries of Cahokia, which is further south, and connected to the traditions of the Dhegiha people- Omaha, Ponca, Osage, Kansa, and Quapaw). That transition from regional Woodland clans to Oneota Mississippians would have taken place a little over a thousand years ago. The Ioway were connected to the Oneota by pioneering Midwestern archeologist James Griffith, and specifically tied to the protohistoric Orr Focus of the Oneota by the pioneering work of ethnohistorian Mildred Mott Wedel.

The eventual split into the Ioway, Otoe, Missouriia, and Hochunk, based on evidence from linguistics, archeology and oral traditions, seem to have been finalized sometime in the 1500s, perhaps in reaction from stresses rippling up the Mississippi and through the Great Lakes from tribes closer to European colonization. That split is discussed in various oral traditions, such as the seven days of the Hochunk, in which resource competition was resolved by the movement of the Ioway seven days to the west of the Hochunk. This brings us to the next part, the homelands and movements of the Ioway according to the No Heart map.

THE NO HEART MAP OF 1837

During treaty negotiations with the U.S. over cession of lands in Iowa, information supplied by Iowa negotiator Chief No Heart (or Nohart) conflicted with that of the Sac and Fox negotiator Keokuk. No Heart brought out a map that the Iowa had drawn to show their aboriginal homelands and the routes and villages they had lived in, apparently sometime after the split from the other three (Hochunk, Otoe and Missouri), so probably beginning in the 1600s.

This map has been written about many times, as one of the most famous maps drawn by Native Americans and is in the National Archives in Washington DC.

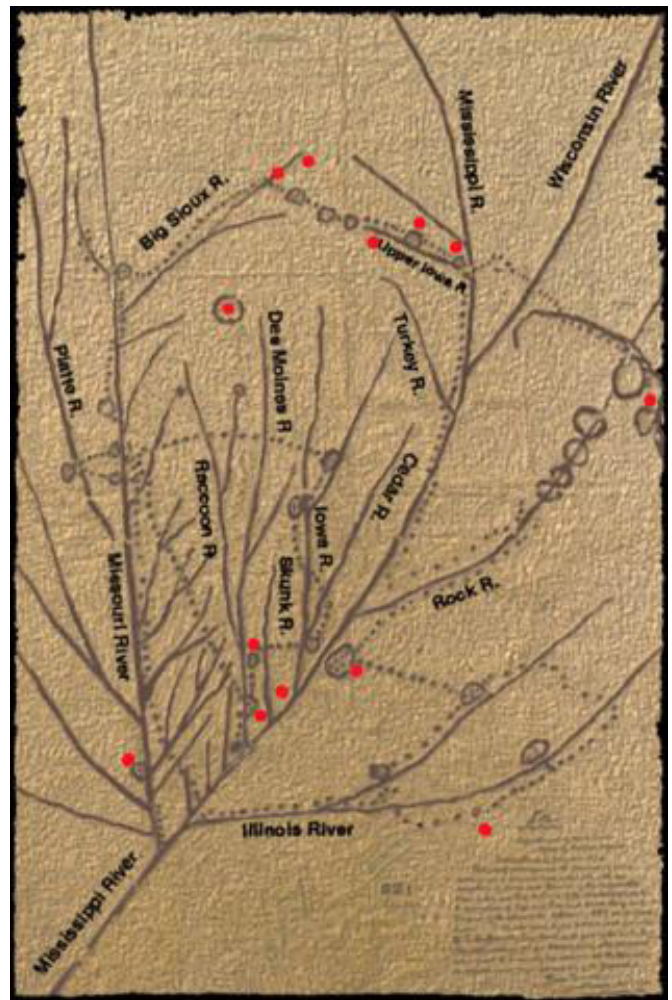
The sites and rivers on the maps have been interpreted differently by different authors. Probably the most thorough example was done by Mary Whelan as part of her University of Redlands Masters degree thesis, in which she tried to match the map through GIS to known locations of Iowa/Oneota sites. There was some correspondence but not for all the sites.

What complicates the situation is not only are there different interpretations of Nohart's map, there is a second map, by an Iowa named Wanonqueskoona, which does not match up with Nohart's map in many instances, and focuses much more on locations in northern Missouri. In addition, the original has not been located, as it was drawn for anthropologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft apparently, who had it redrawn.

In addition, there are also other oral histories unaccounted for in either map, such as Chief Mahaska (White Cloud I) saying his "father" (possibly grandfather) Wounding Arrow moved to the west bank of the Upper Iowa River from Michilimackinac, which is in Michigan! Further there are oral histories and archeological evidence which connect the origin of the loway with the area around Lake Pepin and Minneapolis-St. Paul, as well as archeological evidence showing loway-Otoe presence at the Leary site in southeastern Nebraska!

So what are we to make of this? These variations may be indications there were different groups that coalesced, split and reconnected, not just in prehistory, but during the historic period. The Iowa archeologist Colin Betts has done a recent paper comparing the two terms for the loway, "Baxoje" and "loway", as spatially reflecting different groups, one Missouri River-focused and one Mississippi, that later merged.

This gives a hint as to the complexity of the situation, but can't oral history clarify this further? Unfortunately, the loway had a near collapse of tribal population from about 3000 to 300 (a 90% collapse)



The No Heart Map of 1837.

Iowa Historical Society

in the 1800s, and many of the tradition-holders died or were unable to pass on the full knowledge they had.

Another difficulty is that, traditionally, people spoke little of past defeats and disasters. Contemporary elders I knew, and only a few of those, only spoke of the fact they knew they had come from up north, that there were connections to the Winnebago and others, and that the soil was richer up there.

Of course for many tribal people, oral history is all that is needed or wanted. There is a difficult history with settlers and later archeologist who dug up Indian graves in the name of science. They often also disputed and insulted descendants. This situation is beginning to be worked though with cooperation and partnerships between tribes and archeology seeking to tell the story of this land we all have a shared future in.