

DENVER ART MUSEUM

DENVER, COLORADO

Department of Indian Art

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MENOMINI INDIANS

Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

Leaflet No. 25

June 1931

2nd Printing, March, 1945

THE MENOMINI INDIANS

A WOODLAND TRIBE

LOCATION. The Menomini, or Menominee, Indians are an agricultural and hunting people of Algonkin linguistic stock, now living on a reservation in north central Wisconsin, west of Green Bay. The 1930 population was about 1,950, which is an increase over former years and probably about equal to that of pre-white days. But only half are of full Indian blood. Full tribal bloods are very scarce, as the tribe has much inter-married with neighboring Algonkin and Siouan tribes.

NAME. Menomini is an anglicized abbreviation of the Algonkin word Manomanewuk, meaning "Wild Rice Men," the wild rice plant *Zizania Aquatica* being a very common food of the tribe.

HISTORY. The tribe anciently lived on Green Bay, Wisconsin, where it was first discovered by Nicollet in 1634. Until 1763 it was under the French, helping them in war and being always friendly. Much of their aboriginal culture was lost in this period. Under the British there was not quite as much friendliness, but aid was still given in war and no moves were made to join enemy groups. In 1817 the first treaty was made with the United States. This was followed by other agreements, which led to the establishment of the present reservation in 1856. Here the tribe has remained at peace ever since.

PHYSIQUE. Originally they were of medium size with very light skins.

DWELLINGS. There are two principal types of dwellings. In winter the tribe lived in domed huts made of arched over poles covered with reed mats. Sometimes canvas replaced the mats. A low door and a smoke hole were the openings. A low bench ran around the wall and a fireplace was built in the center of the floor. The summer house had a rectangular frame of poles, with a peaked roof, covered with overlapping sheets of elm or cedar bark. It also had a door, smoke hole, fireplace and bench. Its construction was much like that of the Iroquois Long House described in Leaflet 12. The ceremonial lodge was like the winter house except in size and shape. It was 50 to 70 feet long, 20 feet wide and 7 or 8 feet high in the center. Nowadays most of the tribe live in frame or log cabins.

CLOTHING was once made of deerskin. The men wore shirts, breech cloths and leggings, and the women shirts and skirts. All were ornamented with quills, beads, or painted designs. The men wore fur turbans, braided sashes or deer hair roaches on the head. The women wore beaded cloth or skin head bands, with long beaded streamers. The ancient large back combs of wood have long been replaced by those of German silver. Both sexes wore soft soled moccasins, some with a broad U shaped vamp to which the bottom was sewed, and other with a seam running up the instep.

For many years, except on ceremonial occasions, the men have worn shirts and trousers of white make, and the women cloth waists, wrap around skirts, shawls and leggings. The waists are of the tight fitting Winnebago type or the beruffled variety of the Potawatomi (Ref. 4, plate 32). They are often decorated with many round brooches of silver and with silk ribbon in appliqué designs. These ribbons are also sewed on the other articles of clothing.

FOOD. Wild rice, corn ground with mortar and pestle, squash, many berries, roots, nuts and fruits made up the vegetable part of the diet in the old days. The deer was the chief source of meat, but all other game found in the locality was hunted for food. Fishing was highly developed and important, the large lake sturgeon being an especially valuable catch. Part of the food supply was dried for winter use. Boiling and roasting were the common methods of cooking. Much maple

sugar was made and eaten. Long white domination has done away with most of the old foods.

BASKETRY is not well developed. From eastern tribes they have learned to make checker, twilled and wicker baskets from hardwood splints. A few coiled baskets are made from sweet grass and trimmed with quills.

BEADWORK.* Colored glass beads, all of white make, are woven in several technics on wooden frames or sewed on skin or cloth with the spot stitch (see Leaflet 2). Belts, garters, head bands, square bags with broad shoulder bandoleers, moccasins, leggings, bags, and many small ornaments are made of beads or are trimmed with them. The designs are of two kinds, either highly conventionalized life forms, chiefly floral, or very realistic floral designs adopted from the neighboring Ojibwa.

BIRCH BARK is made into many different sorts of containers, the "mocock" is the most usual form, a truncated pyramid with rounded edges, ranging in size from small trinket boxes to large storage bins. Sap buckets and various dishes are also made. Many of these articles are decorated with porcupine quill designs.* Formerly canoes were made of birch bark, but their use has been abandoned in the last fifty years.

YARN BAGS.* Flat, more or less square bags have long been woven. Formerly they were made from vegetable fibre and trimmed with buffalo hair, but for a long time they have been made with commercial yarn. They are woven downward on a frame of two vertical sticks. Rather few colors are used in the designs, which are a mixture of purely geometrical units and conventionalized life forms. Bags of similar shape, for hulling corn, are made from cedar bark.

YARN SASHES are braided from many colored yarns. They are in several lengths and widths and very often have a design showing a continuous series of points.

MATTING* is made from reeds and cattail-flags. The reed mats are plaited on a vertical frame, simple geometrical designs in a few colors being used for decoration. They are for floor or bench coverings or for interior wall lining. Cattail mats are made by sewing the flags together with basswood fibre string. They are used to cover the domed winter houses. Checker and twilled cedar bark mats no longer exist.

STRING is made mostly from the inner bark of the basswood, though elm and cedar bark and nettles are also used. The fibre is twisted, smoothed by pulling through a small hole, and rolled into balls.

METALWORK. Formerly native copper was worked. Now brooches, bracelets, rings, ear-rings and bangles are made from German silver.

WOODWORK. Bowls and spoons of wood were formerly very common. Boxes, canoes, combs, mortars and pestles, grave boxes and markers and brooms are other wooden articles.

POTTERY was once made from clay tempered with powdered clam shells. The pot was molded around a ball of twine, which was pulled out when the clay was dry. Pottery making ceased at least one hundred years ago.

RELIGION. Above the flat earth are four levels, the homes of the good gods. The Supreme Being lives in the top layer while the other three are the homes of bird-like dieties, the Thunder-bird war gods being the most important. The Evil gods live in four levels below the earth. The most powerful, the Great White Bear, lives on the bottom. Above are the Underground Panther, the White Deer and the Horned Serpent. Numberless good and bad spirits are everywhere. Manabus, the Great Hare or Great Dawn, a child of the Sun, is the culture hero, about whom many of the myths and religious practices are built. Most of the latter are attempts to placate the evil beings by sacrifices, and to gain power from the good gods through dreams. There are medicine men and women. There is much belief in witchcraft. Only a few of the tribe cling to the old faith. The peyote cult is weak.

CEREMONIES. The only great ceremonies now surviving are those of the Medicine Lodge or Mitawin, and of the Dreamers. The former is an annual affair conducted during several days by the members of the society in the large ceremonial lodge mentioned above. It consists of a dramatization of the origin myth with accompanying use of ceremonial bundles, songs, prayers, sacrifices, magical performances and initiation of new members of both sexes. For a list of obsolete ceremonies see reference 2, page 74.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION. There are several phratries, each divided into clans named for animals or birds from which the members are supposed to be descended. There is an hereditary head chief* a lineal descendant of the first Menomini, whose creation is described in the origin myth. Oshkosh, 1795-1850, was the best known leader. There is a tribal council made up of the clan and phratry leaders, who also meet in separate councils. These chiefs were civil only, the war command being in the hands of men to whom power had come through dream revelations.

MUSIC. There are many songs of all kinds. They are accompanied by the water drum of the medicine lodge, the huge, elaborate drum of the Dreamers, the hand drum or tambourine and by gourd or turtle shell rattles. Flutes and whistles are used ceremonially and in courting.

GAMES. Lacrosse, shinny, horse and foot racing, a game to test one's good temper by submitting to kicks from the opposing team, snow-snake and throwing sticks were the more strenuous games. There were various dice and stick gambling games and small amusements such as cat's-cradle and cup-and-ball.

TRANSPORTATION. There was much travel on water in birchbark and dugout canoes until the latter part of the 19th century. Horses were used for riding and packing, but not extensively. Travel on land was along forest trails, loads being carried with burden straps over chest or forehead. Snowshoes were used in winter.

CUSTOMS. Children were born in a special lodge and placed on cradle boards. Names were given by medicine men and later changed after some brave deed. Marriages, with accompanying gift giving, were arranged by parents out of the clan. Descent is through the mother. Divorce was for adultery or by mutual consent. Polygamy was once practised. The dead are buried with much ceremony, after a wake held around the finely dressed body. Later a wooden box is built over the grave. There are many beliefs about ghosts. Mourning is long and severe. The people were peaceful, but were famous fighters when necessary. Warriors counted coup and wore eagle feathers for foes slain. Since chastity was held to be a strictly personal possession, promiscuity was not condemned and was quite common.

PRESENT CONDITION. Because the people are government wards and have been well protected against preying whites they are quite prosperous and healthy. Most of the men are farmers or lumbermen. To a large extent the ways of the white men have been adopted. Nearly all are Roman Catholic.

Compiled from the following sources by F. H. Douglas:

BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY, WASHINGTON

1. The Menomini Indians—Hoffman. 14th Annual Report, 1892
2. The Menomini—Mooney and Thomas. Bulletin 30. Handbook of American Indians, Vol. 1, p. 842
3. The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes—Jenks. 19th Annual Report, part 2, 1898

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4. Material Culture of the Menomini—Skinner. Indian Notes and Monographs, Misc. No. 20, 1921
5. Medicine Ceremony of the Menomini—Skinner. Indian Notes and Monographs, Vol. 4, 1920

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, NEW YORK

6. Menomini Societies, Ceremonies and Myths—Skinner. Anthropological Papers, Vol. 13, in three parts, 1913-1915.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM

7. Dream Dance of the Menomini—Barrett. Bulletin Vol. 1, Art. 4, 1911

For pictures, 1, 4, 5, 7; details of clothing and houses, 1, 4; designs, 4; bead and quill technics 1, 4.

*In June, 1931, the Menomini Indian Agent gave the following facts: The head chieftanship no longer exists; bead and quill work and silk applique are still made to a small extent; yarn bag and mat making are gone.