

**GENERAL SERIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY,
NO. 6, CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE
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2; THE SINKAIETK OR SOUTHERN
OKANAGON OF WASHINGTON**

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NUMBER 6

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE LABORATORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY, 2

THE SINKAIETK OR SOUTHERN OKANAGON OF WASHINGTON

By

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Edited by Leslie Spier

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PREFACE

The Okanagon are a Salish speaking people of north central Washington and adjacent British Columbia. Their territory comprised the drainage system of the Okanogan River and the upper Methow River, both northern tributaries of the Columbia River, from Okanogan Lake and the Similkameen valley in British Columbia southward to the mouth of the Methow.

The subject of the present paper is the culture of those Okanagon bands which occupied the southern half of this territory, from the Methow northward to Osoyoos Lake immediately north of the Canadian boundary. Two tribal units may be distinguished among these bands: the Sinkaletk or Southern Okanagon, occupying the lower Okanogan River valley, and the southern bands of Okanagon proper or, as we prefer to call them, the Northern Okanagon, situated above and below the international boundary. There are other Northern Okanagon bands wholly on the Canadian side with whom we had no contact.

The data we obtained relate in the first instance to the Sinkaletk or Southern Okanagon, but include much on the southerly bands of the Northern Okanagon, that is, those located about the boundary. In addition there are incidental notes on the Colville, Wenatchi, Methow, and other neighboring tribes.

The culture is that of a southern Plateau people, with moderate influences from the Northwest Coast. The Southern Okanagon bands differ culturally from those of British Columbia, and further possess appreciable individuality among themselves. The local differences seem in part due to Northwest Coast influences entering the area by three routes: through the Thompson tribe in the north, from the south by way of the Columbia River through Wenatchi and Chelan, and again through the Chelan from the Skegit on the western side of the Cascade range. This means that the central bands are culturally undistinguished in contrast to those north and south.

The language of the Okanagon is a dialect of Interior Salish identical with that of the Sanpoil, Nespelem, Colville, and Lakes (Senajextee) adjacent to the east. It is said to differ only slightly from the forms spoken by Wenatchi and Chelan to the south, the Kalispel, Pend d'Oreille, Spokane, Coeur d'Alène, and Flathead to the east, and the Thompson, Lillooet, and Shuswap to the north.

This ethnographic study was made during July and August, 1930, by a group of grad-

uate students participating in a field training course of the Laboratory of Anthropology (Santa Fé, New Mexico) under my direction. The party comprised Miss Rachel S. Commons (of the University of Chicago), Miss May Mandelbaum (Columbia University), Emanuel Gonick (University of California), Walter Cline and Richard H. Post (Harvard University), who were joined by Miss L. J. W. Walters, financed by the University of Washington. A collection was made for the Washington State Museum (University of Washington), which has been used as the source of illustrations for this paper.

As a field for investigation for the group I hit on the Southern Okanagon. The cultures of the southern Plateau in eastern Washington, Idaho, and western Montana have been neglected. It was, and is, my contention that the more typical forms of Plateau culture are to be found in the southern part of that area rather than in the north. Further, the solitary general ethnographic report published at the time, J. H. Spinden's "The Nez Percé Indians," tends to over-emphasize Plains elements, although these are demonstrably recent and superficial.

After a choice of tribe to be studied had been made, I received through the kindness of Dr. Franz Boas, a proof copy of James A. Teit's "The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus," which contains an account of the Okanagon. Since it appeared, however, that Teit's account was brief and that he had not obtained information from the Okanagon bands in Washington, it seemed wise to proceed with our plan. The results appear to justify the decision, for the culture of the American Okanagon was found appreciably different from that of the Canadian bands.

Since I felt that the training would be incomplete unless it included the preparation of a printable manuscript, each member of the party was requested to prepare a section of the general ethnographic account. This despite our awareness of the insufficiency of the data. Before we disbanded we discussed a suitable division of the material and reached an agreement on the manner of treatment. Actually, when it came to writing these sections, the authors saw fit to depart quite widely from the agreed form.

The several sections were allocated partly in accordance with preferences, partly by lot. All the field notes were then collected so that I might sort them by topics and dispatch them to the authors. It proved impracticable to send the whole set of notes or the finished manuscript to each in turn. Hence it fell to my lot as editor to scrut-

inize the full set of notes to see that nothing was missed. The whole procedure was awkward, and without doubt valuable details and interrelations of phases of culture have been lost in the process.

It must be distinctly understood that each author is responsible only for the presentation of his topic, not for the content with all its inconsistencies and gaps. I, too, must share this responsibility: I have added, deleted, and otherwise changed those manuscripts to a considerable extent, for the most part without consulting the authors or initialling my contributions. This is especially true of the sections Material Culture and the Individual Life Cycle.

It is unanimously our feeling that this ethnographic account is incomplete and inaccurate. Local differences in culture seem to have been marked; informants had quite diverse backgrounds. These, plus the inevitable contradictions of informants, caused confusions which were never resolved. It is our feeling that the culture of the Sinkalek should be restudied by one who will use these data as merely provisional.

The Southern Okanagon now live on and about the western part of the Colville Indian Reservation. They now number about 250-300. The group is much mixed, both by intermarriage with other peoples for generations and by the inclusion of many individuals of neighboring tribes. Add to this a high mobility, such that most or all of our informants had resided at one time or another with other peoples. Mixture and intergradation of bands and tribes in this area is clearly ancient and only accelerated by the concentration of interior Washington tribes on the Colville Reservation in the middle of the last century. The upshot is that the ascription of various items of culture to particular bands and tribes is exceptionally difficult.

The aboriginal culture is now largely a thing of the past. Older people maintain some aspects of their former economic life and material culture. There is some fishing at weirs; some gathering of berries and roots; some casual hunting. A few tipis and sweat lodges are in use; baskets and bark buckets are still made; occasionally a cradle board prepared and hides tanned in the old manner. The simple social structure has been adapted to reservation purposes, but is now nearly functionless. Shamanistic procedures, the winter dance, the Dream cult, and other organized religious activities of the ancient type are gone. Yet, while many are at least nominal Catholics, the old religious outlook, with its emphasis on guardian spirits, prevails to a surprising degree. The language is still functioning. On the whole, they are about as much deulturated as the Klamath or Walapai.

The following notes on some of the informants and interpreters were prepared by the members of the party.

Michel Brooks, Southern Okanagon, aged 55, was born of a Canadian mother (Northern Okanagon?). He remembers the old life as a little boy. His father and grandfather told him much of the old ways.

Cecile Brooks, about 58 years old, was born at the time of the great earthquake (1872?). Wife of Michel Brooks by the levirate. (Her first husband had been a cousin of Michel's and a son of Lucy Joe's.) Kallispel by birth, but married into the Kartar branch of the Okanagon at a rather early age (about fourteen). There got rather full technological training as well as some insight into the functioning of the social and religious order, and traditions about the tabus of menstruation and so forth, which were for the most part no longer practised. Very able and intelligent. Distinguished very carefully between customs of the Okanagon and those she knew of the Kallispel.

Lucy Joe, Kartar, aunt of Michel, was more than 70 years old. She first married at the time of the earthquake, or somewhat before; her oldest child died at the time of the Nez Percé war (1877). Remembered days before the establishment of the mission. Herself able and intelligent, she was respected and somewhat feared by the others, particularly as she had a reputation as an important shaman. She did not admit this power openly during the five days we [M.M. and R.S.C.] talked with her, but hinted at it. This may have colored her material on religion somewhat, but her disavowal of Catholicism was frank and clear enough. Had been strongly influenced by the Indian preachings of the local advocates of the Dream dance. Had travelled, particularly to the Thompson country. Intelligent and well-informed on economics and theoretical social arrangements, ceremonies, and so forth.

Julie Josephine, also Kartar, probably about 80, but only a little older than Lucy Joe. These two are cousins: Lucy Joe calls Julie Josephine "older sister," since the father of the former was first cousin of Julie Josephine's mother (or more distantly related?). This informant was good at specific details, such as relationships between actual individuals in a particular village. Time too short to get very much information.

Suzzen Timentwa, 48 years old, present chief of the Kartar band, was born at Okanagon town. Ancestry is a mixture of Moses-Columbia and Kartar on his mother's side for several generations; father was Chelan. Intelligent person with mystical tendencies; prone to formalize everything into a cosmic scheme centering around his religious ideas.

Mary Carden, about 78 years old, member of the Tukoratum band. Her ancestry is Tukoratum and Chelan. Very shrewd, excellent memory, no scruples about divulging the past, and no pet philosophy to uphold.

Josephine Marchand, 38 years old, Mary's daughter. Her father was white. Considers

herself a Tukoratum. Excellent interpreter; interest was not in the past but in financial returns. Annie Marchand, aged 16, her daughter, furnished a tale.

Chilowhist Jim was born at Entiat about sixty-five years ago. He came to Malott as a boy of eight or younger. His mother lived at Malott, his father at Entiat. He has been on the Methow River a great deal and still goes there often.

Old Harry is also from the southern end of the Okanogan River. He married at twenty-six; had twelve children by two successive wives; his youngest son is now forty; hence Old Harry must be about ninety.

Billie Joe was an unsatisfactory informant whose views were undoubtedly colored by his wide contacts with other tribes. His father was Wenatchi; his mother a Northern Okanagon from Penticton; his stepmother Wenatchi; and his wife a Wenatchi shaman.

Johnnie Louis, aged 49, served both as interpreter and informant. His affiliations seem to be mostly among the central and northern bands, but one or more of his grandparents were Colville, and there is a question how far he identified himself with the Colville. Much of our Colville information was supplied by him. He is shrewd, intelligent, well-informed, and was active in furthering our enterprise.

Emma Louie, his wife, aged about 25, was also interpreter. She is Colville by birth, marriage, and normal residence. Nine years of mission school education. Adequate knowledge of languages; fairly intelligent, completely naive. Translations fairly accurate, as far as could be judged, and unbiased, but not always full enough.

Andrew Tillson, aged 76, affiliated with the northern bands and with the Northern Okanagon. Difficult to work with because of Johnnie's resentment of his deafness, and his character. Material seems to have been trustworthy whenever certainly checked by his own.

Tom Martin, about 60 years old, member of the Inkanip band, Northern Okanagon. He gave reliable information, but there were many things about the past that he did not

know, or had forgotten.

Maggie Felix, 24 years old, born at Nkamapeleks [Douglas Lake band of Northern Okanagon?] and married to an Inkanip man, was all right as an interpreter. I [L.V.W.] did not work with her long enough to train her. She was completely naive, friendly, and intelligent.

David Isaac, aged about 75, was born and grew up just north of Croville. His mother's mother was of the Penticton band of Northern Okanagon; his father was Inkanip. His father's mother was Northern Okanagon of Croville; his father's father was Inkanip; his mother's parents were both Penticton.

Margaret Seresepkin is now about 92. She was seventeen or eighteen when she went to the Plains (i.e., about 1855-56), which was six years after a severe earthquake.

We are indebted to Mrs. Martha Flahaut (Washington State Museum) for the identification of plants, and to Mrs. Richard E. Post, A. H. Gayton, and Verne Ray for line drawings. Mr. Ray also prepared the map of tribal distribution.

The rendering of native words leaves much to be desired. None of the students had received adequate training in transcription, and Interior Salish is phonetically difficult. Each one followed his own scheme of transcription. I have reduced these, somewhat ruthlessly, to a single notation. The phonetic system printed here follows the simpler system suggested in "Phonetic Transcription of Indian Languages" (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 66, 1916, No. 6). The vowel series is as follows:

a	as in father	á	as in but
á	" hat	e	" met
é	" fate	i	" pin
i	" pique	o	" not
o	" note	u	" put
ú	" rule	ɛ	the indefinite vowel

Glottalized components with fortis effect are indicated in the usual way by an exclamation mark after the consonant. Whispered sounds are raised above the line. It is doubtful that the native forms given in this paper are any more than mere approximations.

Leslie Spier

Yale University
September, 1933

Since this was written we learned of the untimely death of Rachel S. Commons. In her we have lost an ethnographer of promise and a companion whose charm meant so much to our life in the Okanagon country.

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