

THE DIGGER INDIAN, HIS GENERAL APPEARANCE  
AND  
HOW HE LIVED

--from notes by H. C. Bailey

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The American Indian like the buffalo, is fast passing away. Not many decades will pass till the Indian in all his tribal relations will be a thing of the past. The Indian has gone forth to be a white man or die.

As their numbers decrease and extinction approaches, the interest in their history, habits, tradition, religion, and in fact in all that in any way appertains to Indians seems to increase in an inverse ratio.

From my earliest recollection, I have felt the keenest interest in the Indian stories as told by the actors on one side of the scene, many of which showed him in his best light.

To the present time I have read and often reread all the literature treating of the Indian regardless of the pros and cons discussed. After all my studying though all kinds of literature and nearly twenty years of close observation and intimate contact, I feel free to say I don't believe the primitive family has had a fair shake.

Their worthlessness and cussedness had been overestimated, while their virtues (for they had some, if not abnormally developed, the germ was there) minimized.

There are several strikingly developed characteristics in the Indian makeup that seem so far as I have ever read or observed, that is common to all the tribes.

All are stoices of the extreme order and are almost without nerves. Consequently they suffer less from the same cause than most tribes of the earth. They seem almost if not entirely devoid of sympathy for another's suffering. I have seen their medicine man practicing his art in a way that caused intense pain and of the most nervous kind, and when his patient would squirm a little he would laugh as though it was the funniest



thing in the world.

The family bond is strong and their generosity in their way profuse. When the squaws came around the house and one was given a biscuit all had a piece of it regardless of the number present.

I don't think our government dealt with the Indians along the best lines for either parties.

They seemed to instinctively regard the white man as an enemy and would never fully trust him until, by the best possible evidence they were convinced to the contrary. But once their confidence was fully gained, I never had one to deceive me or misuse or abuse my confidence.

I never knew but one but what used both whisky and tobacco. Of all men when their sprres over they hate worst, the man who sells them whisky. And of all the unhuman, beastly sights in human form, a drunken Indian takes the cake. He is absolutely beyond conception, and repulsive beyond description.

When I went to Grand Island in '53, there were on the river three rancherias of 500 or more Indians each. One was three, one nine and the other twelve miles distant. They were still in their primitive state and to a raw tenderfoot were a sure enough revelation. We had seen on the Isthmus in the way of costumes, some pretty scanty clothing, but none in fig leaves. The Sacramento Digger had not advanced to the fig leaf stage when we came, at least the male contingent.

The female dress consisted of a kind of skirt of two parts, made of wild hemp, reaching not quite to the knees and plaited in a knot at the waist. It was allowed to hang loosely before and behind with ample space between the two sections, the front being used for a cushion when sitting.

In the rancheria the men dressed in the Georgia Meyers uniform, minus the necktie and spurs, though to their credit they always dressed up when they went visiting their white neighbors. Their dress consisted

of a very abbreviated loin cloth made of the same material. The children dressed in nature's uniform, fine and simple.

There was one thing noticeable about Indian, they were much more uniform in size than white people. The men were seldom more than five feet ten inches, and seldom under five feet eight inches and very uniform in flesh. I never saw a fat buck in a ranch area or a lank raw-boned one.

Their muscular strength was not great but their endurance was incredible. The distance an Indian could carry without rest or stop, a load which was all they could stand under is hardly credible to one who had never seen it. They carry all loads on the head or forehead band, never on the shoulder.

The squaws did all the carrying except game. They always used the forehead band and carried in a pointed basket, inverted cone shape, 18 inches deep and same in diameter across the top of the load.

The primitive squaw was, I don't know what, just a squaw and nothing else. There was nothing else like her or even approaching a resemblance.

Her average height was not more than five feet five inches, and more likely to come under than go over.

They had heavy heads of coarse hair, but bang fashion to an inch above the eyes, the back hair hung to just below the base of the skull when not done up. They dressed their hair something after the Elizabethan style except that they strove for width instead of height.

The hair was dressed with some substance resembling tar and was made turban shaped, flat on the top and extending an inch or more all around and so covered the head that no hair was visible.

The cheeks were covered with the same substance as the hair from the eyes to the corners of the mouth, some solid and others in stripes. The chin was striped with a different color, generally a bright green or yellow a half inch wide, equal spaces between.



They had big black eyes with a large white circle, huge mouth, were always laughing; and weren't they daisies. I never found out how long a done up head lasted or whether it was for ornament or utility.

The young squaws, most of them, had shapely hands, arms and feet. I have seen a few hard to surpass in shape and symmetry. But at 20 years of age the last vestige of shapeliness had disappeared and flesh began to accumulate. Fairly fat squaws were the rule.

Truly they were nature's children when uncontaminated by their white brother but whose contact soon brought distress and rapid extinction.

But under this rough, almost repulsive outside there were hid some good traits possible of developing astonishing results.

I always had a win place in my heart for the Indian and close contact failed to destroy it.