

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Stephen Powers can be called the first ethnologist of California. A. L. Kroeber (1925: ix) in the Introduction to his monumental Handbook of the Indians of California expresses "sincere appreciation of my one predecessor in this field, the late Stephen Powers," and acknowledges that Powers' Tribes of California (1877) "will always remain the best introduction to the subject."

Powers was born in Ohio in 1840 and graduated from the University of Michigan in 1863. He was employed as an "army correspondent" by the Cincinnati Commercial to cover the Civil War and witnessed the battle of Kennesaw Mountain, the three battles near Atlanta, and the battle of Nashville.

In 1866 he went to Europe as a correspondent for various newspapers, principally the New York Times, and stayed for fifteen months. His travels were mainly in Germany, and in his later writings on California Indians he refers to incidents and observations made on this trip.

On January 1, 1868, Powers started on foot from Raleigh, North Carolina on a cross-country walking tour of 3600 miles, arriving "upon the shore of the Pacific at San Buenaventura, October 14, thence to San Francisco, arriving November 3." Of this trip he says, modestly, "it was not a remarkable feat in any respect, as the only qualities required were health and persistence. At no time did I accomplish over forty miles a day, generally only twenty or twenty-five." He published a book, Afoot and Alone; A Walk from Sea to Sea by the Southern Route: Adventures and Observations in Southern California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, etc. (Hartford, Columbian Book Co., 1872) recounting his experiences, but "it had a very limited sale, and I have long ago consigned it to oblivion without regret." He later wrote, "there never was a period of equal length in my life that passed so happily away as the ten months of that grand, lonely walk from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

Once in California Powers apparently looked for something to occupy himself, and he wrote in 1874 in his autobiographical sketch (now an unpublished manuscript of 9 pages in Bancroft Library), "Since my arrival in California I have travelled some thousands of miles in the summers of 1871 and 1872, partly on foot and partly on horseback, collecting material for a book on the California Indians. That book is now in manuscript form, nearly ready for publication. A large portion of it was published in the Overland Monthly, and one chapter in the Atlantic Monthly."

Powers' book on the Indians was published in 1877 under the title Tribes of California as Vol. III of Contributions to North American Ethnology and under the sponsorship of the Department of Interior, U. S. Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region.¹ J. W. Powell, later to found and direct the Bureau

¹ For the complex history of the federal Surveys see Goetzmann (1967).

of American Ethnology, was in charge of the USGGSRMR, and by 1874, perhaps earlier, negotiations were concluded between Powell and Powers over publication of the volume.

Perhaps as an incentive to securing Powers' manuscript, Spencer Baird (Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution) and Powell arranged to have the Secretary of the Interior appoint Powers, on August 21, 1875, a "special commissioner to make a collection of Indian manufactures, etc., illustrative of Indian life, character, and habits on the eastern slope of the Sierras, and also in California, for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876." Powers carried out this charge, and was in California and Nevada from September, 1875 until late January, 1876. He wrote two reports on this mission. The first was published in 1877, and the manuscript for the second was discovered in the National Anthropological Archives and published in 1970 by D. and C. Fowler. The manuscript of Tribes of California was in Powell's hands in late 1874, and Powers notes a special preface to the volume that in 1875 he was "enabled to collect additional information, all of which has been incorporated into this /1877/ volume." Actually much of what Powers recorded in 1875 (cf. Powers 1877, 1970) was not incorporated in the Tribes volume, perhaps because much of it referred to the Indians of western Nevada.

Powers left California in late 1874 or early 1875 to live on his farm in southern Ohio where he raised Merino sheep -- apparently a serious interest with him judging from the fact that he later published a book on the subject (The American Merino: for Wool and Mutton. Orange Judd Co., New York, 1887). In 1884 Powers moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where he was engaged as an orange grower and newspaper reporter. He died there at the age of 64 on April 3, 1904.

There follows here a full reprinting of the nineteen articles which Powers published on California Indians in his lifetime and the portions of his 1875 manuscript dealing with the Washo and Northern Paiute of California. I have not gone to the effort of cross-referencing the content of these articles with that in the Tribes of California volume which does contain certain additional information beyond that published earlier in article form.

What has seemed to be to me of greatest utility is to provide some minimal annotation to the articles. Numbers appearing in the left hand margin of the pages refer to "Notes" at the end of the volume.

Today's reading of what Powers wrote over a century ago must be understood in terms of the fact that Powers was a journalist and not a trained ethnographer. Powers, I think, liked the Indians he met, and they must have liked him or they would not have shared with him the information which he recorded. But even though he liked the California Indians, he also was occasionally critical of them, and this I would attribute to his experience as an observer and correspondent where he wrote about what he saw as objectively as he could. It must also be remembered that in 1871 and 1872 the

living California Indians were the dispirited survivors of a once more numerous people who, between 1848 and 1870 had seen their numbers reduced from about 100,000 to 50,000 souls -- some estimates (Merriam 1905: 600; Cook 1943c: 96) calculate as few as 23,000 to 30,000. This decimation occurred at the hands of the Americans through starvation, disease and homicide (Cook 1943b; Heizer and Almquist 1971; Heizer 1974 a; 1974b). Nor should the reader forget the California of the early eighteen - seventies, and its white population which had effectively reduced the "Indian menace," and had now begun to concentrate its racist feelings on the Chinese (Eaves 1910: 105-196; Heizer and Almquist 1971: Chap. 7; Saxton 1971). So we cannot forget as we read here what Powers, the journalist, wrote over a century ago that these are the observations of a perceptive and sympathetic but untrained ethnographer. Some of the conclusions he reached are quite wrong, but many are correct. There was no body of anthropological literature to guide Powers, and for nearly every tribe he describes his are the very first systematic observations on that culture.

Powers recorded a good many word lists, most of which were published in the Appendix by J.W. Powell to Powers' Tribes of California. Using the simple method of comparing words and spotting cognates, Powers was able to identify a number of related languages among tribal groups and thus devised the first broad classification of California Indian languages. Some relationships were, of course, not determinable by the method he used, and the result is that his list of linguistic stocks runs to nineteen. Powers also drew a map showing the territories occupied by the various stocks, and this is the first such map ever made for California. By and large it is remarkably accurate, though this is somewhat modified by the crudity of the linguistic classification he devised. A simplified copy of this map is presented here.

Powers' theorizing about the Chinese origin of the California Indians was not very well received, and no mention of this occurs in the 1877 volume -- an omission resulting, perhaps, from Powell's lack of enthusiasm for the idea.

More could be said, but to no real point. Here, collected together for the first time, are Stephen Powers' original writings on the Indians of California which he wrote from first hand observations.

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May 12, 1975