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Letter to Lucius L. Hubbard 1927

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Answered Apr. 11. 27

173 Wilson Street, Brewer, Maine
January 28, 1927

My dear Mr. Hubbard:

It was my impulse to reply at once to your pleasant letter of November 21; but the past two years Indian matters have been set aside by me for the nearer interest of the old folk-songs, and at the time your letter came I was very hard at work getting our first volume ready for the press.

You pay a distinguished compliment in expressing the wish to collaborate with me; for it should have been I seeking the honor of doing work with you, one of the first on the field and not as yet surpassed on Maine place-names. Professor Ganong has always held your work in high esteem, and we both have found it most useful and dependable.

As long as any Indians whom I knew were alive I did what I could in working out the old names; but now the last of my old friends is gone and I could not depend upon those now there; indeed, most of them know less of the roots of the language than I do. I have quantities of material laid aside-- a drawer full of notes upon old legends, and note books with the natural history and others with biographical material,-- if ever the day comes when I can use them! I get older and the past does not drift away, but is carried off on the flood of a rising freshet, whirling down stream. Yet some day I should like to use the natural history notes; for I was trained both to the mammals and birds by long and scientific training, so that I could identify accurately what the Indian word meant, while the fishes and the smaller forms of life were pretty well known to me, and I knew the literature of the Indian tribes and comparative words ^{in other languages}. That list of names should not be lost; for no one but myself now can do it, not even Dr. Speck, I think-- indeed, know.

However, all this ballad-stuff has to come first, and we won't lament what we cannot do.

Your story about "Onaway", (or "Onawa" as we call it), is very important. Immediately I copied that part of your letter and sent it to professor among that it might not be lost sight of. It fully explains my trouble with the word, and unless I have already left the matter too long, may stop the inception of another "legend", for already one who is interested but ignorant has identified the girl who was buried in the woods as "Onaway", daughter of Chief Orono! I shattered his dream of that by blowing up the family legend of what was told his grandfather; for I could show that when the secret of her grave was imparted, if it was by Orono, then the grandfather was about eight years old and the chief was reputed to be a good deal over an hundred (said to have died aged 113, but can't be proved) and therefore the grandfather was unlikely to be the chosen confidant. I must get hold of him again and tell him your story, which has to be accepted as fact. A part of my unwelcome task seems to be destroying people's faith in the preposterous tales that have been manufactured.

Poor Sprague! You gave a very close estimate of him as he was when you saw him. But he was better than that, and when last spring he blew his brains out from sheer lonesomeness and dread of becoming a burden, the whole state mourned "Uncle John". No man could have a poorer chance in life-- as poor as poverty, with a shiftless Adventist father, two of the worst club feet ever put on a human body, no chance for an education; a tin pedler in his youth, ignorant and discouraged; a rather cheap politician later on, and a small town lawyer. Yet somehow he kept his chin above the tide and kept swimming; was honest and kindly and kept at his work and picked up a hobby; and he grew to be a man of real influence in the state, and was greatly regretted when he took his own life last May. He had no relative nearer than one cousin, no one to care for for him and he was unweildy and getting helpless.

If I knew enough I should like to discuss the word for "Ship Pond", "Obernectsombeck". All Chadwick's words are amazingly difficult, and even Professor Ganong shakes his head over them. So far I think he has said nothing upon this one, and my own venture is only a conjecture, very likely far-fetched. But, proceeding upon the foundation that, as this was on an important route, and as the notable landmark for many miles in both directions was Boarstone Mountain, it would be reasonable to suppose that they would name the pond from the mountain. The characteristics of Boarstone are its shape and its color; it is perhaps our whitest mountain. Therefore, said I, it might be that

Obern	ectt	som	back	is only
Wabun	adene	soo	beck	or
White	mountain		pond	

that is, with the locative, "at the pond of the white mountain."

This is pretty poor analysis and pretty good guessing. I realize that there are some lions in the way of making "ect" into "adn"! On the other hand, if it were divided into "Ober-nect-sombeck", it would be a grade nearer; and when you have allowed for what Chadwick could do with an Indian word, you have a pretty free hand in conjecture; for a Chadwickian sense is a long way beyond a Pickwickian sense in matters of interpretation. Generally I find that I have to do my guessing first and levelling up afterwards with his words. By dint of long puzzling I have a number of them now.

That word you mention is not "Stellogongo", but "Hollogongo" as you will see from the enclosed proof of the map. (I could send you a better one, but it is stiff and could not be folded into a letter, so probably would not be forwarded you. Keep this; I have a good array of Chadwickiana.) You will see that it goes with several other names beginning with Allegong- and Arragong- and I suspect that the whole mess of them is just one and the same thing, a little done over.

I am more puzzled by "Qualligohogs", which occurs twice. Now I don't know Northwest Carry and the upper Penobscot, but I told Prof. Ganong that my idea would be that these words had something to do with beaver-damponds. One of them certainly points out the remarkable beaver-pond mentioned by Montresor as having a dam about ten feet high. But temahqueh is our word for beaver. Qualibet, the Quoddy word (meaning "red-tooth") would hardly seem to be likely to occur, though we find the different languages a good deal overlaid on the Penobscot. I think I gave a hypothetical solution once to Ganong, but fancy he smiled at it and said nothing. Still-- if the beaver ponds were there, on an important route, would not that have been likely to give a name to the place? I consider Qualligohogs a hard nut. Chesuncook is worse. Which makes me think to tell you that Ganong's reading of it demands that at some prehistoric time there should have been a point of land, possibly a village, at the outlet. I tell him there is no evidence of any such thing; he says it seems to be in the history of the word, shown by old maps. Would you say "point at the outlet"? I say, "Big at the outlet", which would describe its old shape, not, alas, the present welter of waters which makes an inland sea there, drowning all the landmarks.

Rickaby's "Ballads of the Shanty Boy" I knew from the first. It is good but does not cut into the work Miss Smyth and I have been doing on Maine songs. Our book now with the publishers.

Wishing you a pleasant winter,

Most sincerely,

Fannie H. Ekstrom

Wabun - Nec - som - beck