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Letter to Mr. Wheelwright 1925

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Brewer, Maine, June 8, 1925

Dear Mr. Wheelwright:

My sister has told me of your wanting the Indian name for "grandmother".

In penobscot Indian the word Nokomes, Nokemes, or Nokomis (for there is no hard and fast spelling) means "My Grandmother". The Indians never say simply "grandmother", "father", "mother"; but always "my grandmother", "thy father" "his mother" combining the possessive pronoun with the root so that the word looks very unlike often when it means mine from what it does when it means yours or his.

You will recognize the third form I have given as the same Longfellow uses in Hiawatha . But Longfellow pronounces his word wrong; he makes it No-ko-mis , has to for his meter. Our Indians accent the first syllable, Nok-o-mis, and have a pretty word, prettily pronounced.

As for form I have looked it up in Rasle's Abnaki Dictionary, in Laurent's Indian grammar and in Chamberlain's Maliseet Vocabulary and find the forms essentially the same, though they look unlike. So long as you pronounce it correctly, you may take your choice of forms.

I think your wife has a pretty idea in naming the cottage and I am glad that the Indian is so kind to it. You could hardly add the word for house; it is wigwam! With the possessive you would get Nokemes-i-wigwam, my-grandmother-her-house , or the more idiomatic Nokemes-i-gamigw, with the same meaning . If you were speaking of an estate, land, a farm, you might say Nokemes-i-ki, my grandmother-her-farm (strongest accent on last syllable, secondary accent on first), though "a field" would be Kikon or pemskudek if mentioned alone.

very truly yours,

Fannie H. Eckstein