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Book Review of Antiquities of the New England Indians 1936

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ANTIQUITIES OF THE NEW ENGLAND INDIANS with Notes on the Ancient Cultures of the Adjacent Territory. By Charles C. Willoughby Director Emeritus of the Peabody Museum. Cambridge, Mass. Published by the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University. 1935. (PP. 8 + 314. Figs.146. Price $4.75)

An increasingly curious public has long been asking for just such a straightforward, untechnical book on our Indians as this of Doctor Willoughby. It is the ripe fruits of a whole life-time of patient study. Doctor Willoughby has grown up with his subject, his official position has afforded him oversight of the whole field and the comprehensiveness of his knowledge gives him a sort of regal simplicity in dispensing it. It looks like an easy book to write-- if one only knew enough. It is the Hand-book of the New England Indian: what you want to know about them is here, if anywhere, provided anyone knows it.

This is not saying that the book solves all our Indian problems. The field-workers in ethnology, linguistics, folk-lore and traditional beliefs, even those excavating where tomorrow the steam-shovel will tear out the relics of a vanished race before they have told their tale, know they will never get where the blue begins; but what Doctor Willoughby has done for the general reader is to give him a horizon, where before he had only glimpses of the sky through clouds. He is the first to show us a progressive sequence, traced from the unknown primitive people who lived in our our gardens and drank from our brooks so long ago that even their bones have disappeared, leaving only a few stone tools amid patches of red ochre to mark their burial places, down to Indians so modern that sometimes we know them by name and can be shown the pocket-book woven by Mollyocket, that famous Maine Indian, or the little basket of bast and corn-husk made for Major Fenner's wife while she watched its construction.

In recognizing this continuity of culture, Doctor Willoughby has taken a step at which other archaeologists have hesitated. Those early Red Paint people he is ready to accept as the probable ancestors of the Beothuk, or Red Indians, of Newfoundland, only recently extinct, a conclusion reached years ago by Dr. Frank G. Speck the ethnologist, who wrote: "I am inclined to believe that the historic tribes of the northeast are surviving representatives of the early unaffected Algonkian types of which the isolated Beothuk of Newfoundland were the last true representatives." But what a long step this is! In 1910, according to Doctor Speck, there was at Hampton Beach, N.H., a woman, born in Newfoundland, whose father was a full-blooded Red Indian. In 1913, while excavating for the Boston subway, there was found near the junction of Boylston and Clarendon Streets, almost thirty-three feet under the present street level, part of an old Indian fish-weir, with some of the wattles still intact. Dr. Shimer of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology estimated it to be almost three thousand years old. What a stretch of time between the man who made that weir and Santu Toney of Hampton Beach!

The ethnologist may well be the archaeologist's guide. It is easier to trace a twig back to the root of the tree than to follow from the root and find the twig. The shell-heaps, for example, are the archaeologist's problem, but he becomes so much interested in the relics he finds in them that he forgets to ask how the heaps were made. The Whale-back Shell-heap at Damariscotta is still 347 feet long, 123 feet wide at its widest and 15 feet high, yet the archaeologist is willing to believe it is the work of Indians more or less local, who came here for an occasional quick lunch and "returned home all within a very short time". He might even dry them in

the sun or over a slow fire. Drying raw clams and oysters! Give the archaeologist a bushel of clams,a knife and instructions to shuck and dry them and from that calculate how long it took to make the Damariscotta shell-heaps! The answer is eternity and a day. Our Indians first cooked their clams in great clam-bakes and then dried them easily, in the sun or by smoke. The enormous heaps are explained by a Penobscot legend that the oyster beds were neutral ground, where no fighting was ever allowed, and the older and more infirm men and women came from as far south as Cape Cod to get a winter supply of dried shell-fish and acorns,which grew there abundantly. This story has long been in print.

People who came together thus would naturally trade their products, and the existence of these shell-heaps points very directly to the old mystery of Pemaquid,which is in the greatest natural trade center for a European colony of any place on the North Atlantic coast.

There is the problem of language. Recent work on the place-names of Lincoln County showed that some of them were very ancient. Modern Indians made bad guesses; Abnaki gave poor results; Maliseet proved better; Micmac helped much. One of the most important names proved to be pure Micmac. Ped-coke-powake,the great Indian carry from the shell-heaps at Damariscotta to the upper Sheepscot, is named in deeds in 1662. Properly syllabled, it proved to be the Micmac Epetk-kutog-oye-k (Peticodiac,a corruption), which pr. W.F.Ganong has proved means "a place where a river makes a reverse turn about a point". This is precisely the feature found at both ends of this important carry. How came pure Micmac in the midst of this Wawenoc country?

Among all the good points of this excellent book,none is better than the way Doctor Willoughby has bridged the gap between buried artifacts and our living Indians.

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