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# Local Indian Place Names 1921

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Before Naming Club - South Branch  
Nov. 19 - 1921

### LOCAL INDIAN PLACE NAMES.

Charles Lamb, in his famous essay "Mrs. Battle's Opinions upon Whist", says that Mrs. Battle, whom otherwise we should never have heard of, declared for "A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game."

Specialists are always keen upon the "rigor of the game"; because it is their game.

I was aghast when I looked fairly at the subject I had chosen, Indian Place Names of Maine, to see that if I expounded it according to the rigor of the game that no one but myself could be interested; a very quiet audience but all fast asleep. Out of consideration for the hearers, I have decided to forego all the rigors and in addition to limit the topic to some of ~~the~~ **Local Indian Place Names**, not going below Castine nor above Oldtown. Within this space all can follow with understanding and, if I agree to forego the rigors, perhaps with interest.

### WHERE DO I GET IT FROM?

This is one of the first questions most would ask me. I do not get it from anywhere, if you mean from what books. What I am telling you is not as yet in any book, at least in this form.

The great trouble with most that has been printed so far is that it is wrong; some of it is idiotic, and most of it is incorrect. There was a man named Judge C.E. Potter, who many years ago took it upon himself to write about Indian place names without knowing anything about Indian or Indians, nor yet much about the places named. When he could not find an Indian word near by which seemed to explain a form, he went to another



There are some valuable contributions on the subject of Indian place names in Maine, notably Lucius Hubbard's list in his "Woods and Lakes of Maine", and his map; but the casual reader and the student not specially trained in the Indian tongues can never tell the good from the bad. Unless he knows a certain spot he is always at the mercy of the careless writer who, like Sylvester, in his Romance of the Maine Coast, writes of the Penobscot at Bangor, that "it forks upon the white rocks!" You who know the locality do not need to be told that there are no white rocks there, and never have been any. A student readily catches him carelessly quoting-- Father Vetromile at that!-- the meaning of Panawamskeak, or Oldt own. The "white" is a gratuitous insertion in both cases. Nothing in the roots indicate it.

Some day there is to be an authoritative monograph upon this subject. It is already in preparation. What I have to tell you comes from some of the preliminary studies for that work.

The sources are all the oldest writings upon New England and Canada, in French and in English, whether travel, maps, histories, deeds, treaties, printed or unprinted matter. Also from the Indians themselves, the information verified by cross-examination of different persons. Also from such unpublished papers of those of the Rt. Rev. M.C.O'Brien, now in the Maine Historical Society and from comparisons with grammars and dictionaries in many dialects of Abenaki and Micmac. When we are working according to the rigors of the game there is no limit to the amount of minute investigation expended upon a single word before it is passed upon finally. But what I have to give you today has no pretensions to scholarship and is merely a little of what I have collected myself locally.

In the old days every brook and stream, every point and cove, every island, but perhaps not every hill, had a name. They were not arbitrary names like ours; they were not held in perpetuity by maps and printed page; something in the spot itself had to make the name; they had to hit upon some characteristic which would tell the voyager that he had arrived at a certain spot. <sup>a name that was</sup> We generally got something apt and striking, though it usually took a whole sentence to describe the characterization. That is why Indian names are so long.

However, in studying them it is not the long ones that are hard, but the short ones, which have been clipped and corrupted. It is very easy to tell what Kokadjo-weengwasebemsie-ahwangan means; but it is very hard to make out Chesuncook, we have been working ~~years~~ on it; and Ripogenus is quite beyond us yet. Sunkhaze has been one of the hardest we have had to work on, and Segeunkedunk thus far resists all attempts to crack it.

Owing to this having been a long-settled part of the country many of the local names have been lost entirely, never can be recovered. I have found one for Little Brewer Pond, but I can find none for Great Brewer Pond. Phillips Lake has been said by some to have once been Congarnebeek. It is good Indian but by whose authority bestowed, or whether it belonged to that <sup>lake</sup> or to something <sup>there</sup> else I do not yet know. Holbrook's Pond is gone; Eddington Pond (in my day Davis Pond) is also gone; Leonard's Pond, as it used to be, or sometimes Nichols' Pond, has again an Indian name in Chemo, but what it means, how it came there is thus far a question. "Might be named for some person", says an Indian when consulted. Pushaw Pond is not Indian at all. It is named for the Pushor family, early settlers; but it has an Indian <sup>name</sup>

Sometimes we resurrect an Indian name for some place so old, so mal-formed, so unrecognizable in its ugliness that the Indians can do nothing with it. Etna Pond and Stetson Pond are examples; we have names for them which thus far have not been analyzed.

Again we ask some Indian the name of a place and in perfect good faith he gives an answer which we have to translate back to him and show him that he has merely been giving us an English name under some disguise. Take menahan, meaning an island, and I have got such gems as Cowoosee-menahan, Cow Island, Soosunsee-senuchkack, <sup>Joe - Betty - menahan</sup> mean old lady live there, Old Susan, when look seen un dead"; <sup>Kela - Soosun - i - menahan</sup> K'chi-misel-louee-keek, that proves up to be some Big Mitchel Louis's abode; even Pigs-him-menahan, which is nothing more or less than Hog Island.

One works and works, in Indian, in English, in both, trying to make out some word which so long ago lost its Indian form and meaning that the Indians themselves have to be told what it is. <sup>what he meant</sup> Sachtalen;-- it sounds like good Indian. I tried it with my old lady, who is most intelligent; I tried it with Lewis Ketchum, who is superior. <sup>but he said that 100 years ago in old Indian</sup> neither could make it out. Finally by an inspiration I told them that it was not Indian at all; it was just Sock's Island. Then they remembered having heard that <sup>the</sup> an old Indian <sup>had</sup> called Sock-something or other <sup>had</sup> lived there.

What was Skeen Aylant? Hours of work, meantime digging out the true old name for it and the location, showed that it was Skin Island, later Treat and Webster Island between Oldtown and Milford, whose sides were so steep and whose place in the strong current made it so secure that they could leave their moose and other hides there safe from pillage from bears.

One last illustration. Here are the notes on Sarnach, which I learned was some sort of a plant, but my informant had trouble in describing it. "Oldtown the other side, Milford side, shore there, sarnach" (I hope it is clear to you!) "mean some old house, grow there just like some great something" (and she swept her hand in the shape of a round-topped tree); we call it sal-ah-nach-- sah-nach, short way " I confess I found it hard to tell what botanical prize I was hold of. So too did Bishop O'Brien; for in his notes I find sah-nach and sal-ah-nach given without any English attached. We could not make it out. But Lewey Ketchum told me that it was sumac

Then there are the words that started out a hundred years ago with a bad spelling and a false meaning and perhaps a wrong location, which have to be worked over until we get them straightened out. There are a number such in this locality, including the old name applied to Marsh Island on which Oldtown stands, Arumsankhungan, as it is given in the oldest deeds. One example only given by Moses "Greenleaf, Maine's first mapmaker, gives for Webster's Island, before mentioned the name of Ta-la-la-go-dissek, "where the ladies painted themselves", or "painting place for squaws". After my hunt for Skeen Aylant and final capture of the correct Indian word, it was clear that the ladies could not have had any proprietary rights there, or not enough to give it a name, and such a preposterous one at that. Lewey Ketchum applied to, suggested that it might be ELLA-GUA-GMAWAYSUK, a sort of flooded place. One day when crossing the bridge at Arono I saw what answered. Between the bridge and Webster Mills are two little islets, which I judged at high water, might be overflowed. I took it to Lewey on my trip up two weeks afterwards and he confirmed the guess. So then

are Ella-gwa-ga-waysuk, the under-water-on-freshets place and there never was any Ta-la-la-go-dissek at all, much less one four miles or more away. The Indians fooled Greenleaf by an absurd meaning and he put down the form too badly to be recognized.

Here is another, my latest reconstruction from Greenleaf. He writes almost a hundred years ago about a mountain near Katahdin which he calls Chinskehegan, or Ootop,-- two names for one hill. What was it? I have a clue. I guess the hill is Double Top to the west of Katahdin. On Father O'Brien's list I find the Psinskehegan, a notch, like the nock in an arrow. Then another guess. What if Ootop is a form of Wuttup, N'dep, N'tep, , etc. the words for head. It probably is just that. But the English word "or". I try it out as the possessive Indian "i", meaning his, and we have for our reformed word Psinskehegan-i-n'tep, Notched as to his head, as it might be rendered, of which our Double Top is only a translation. The word proves up on itself in this way. I do not know whether Professor Ganong will accept it, but like Massachusetts, there it stands!

So much for destructive criticism. For constructive work we may cite some of the names occurring within a short space which still persist or have been recovered.

Etlidawobsgassik. At Frankfort there evidently was once a village, which this name commemorates, Etl meaning village<sup>g</sup>

Keenabskatnek, name for Mount Waldo; from keenabs, steep rock; adn, mountain; k, or ek, locative. "At the steep<sup>rock</sup> mountain"

Kwikwi-musweeticook; from kwi -kwi-mus-ook, black ducks; that is, Black Duck Stream, very good for Marsh River.

Edahlit'-quakilah-mook, "place where you run up hill". Two Indians identified this for me as the point at Bald Hill Cove. The canoes used to be left on the beach there, but the camp-ground was on top the high bank, and as a sport the younger ones often would run up the crumbling, sandy bank.

Tributaries to the main river were usually designated by something peculiar to the mouth of each one, which could be seen and identified easily. The name always had reference to anyone going up the river, not down it. Thus Mattawankeag means "enters the river over gravel; <sup>at the mouth</sup> Passadunkeag, "rapids below the mouth of stream. To return to the place where we were, the next important point above Bald Hill Cove was Sowadabscook Stream. It means "sloping ledge at the mouth", from "sewe, sloping" and apskw, ledge. In present days the name no longer applies. Some time before the last century set in one of my own ancestors who was the first settler there wished to build a second mill. His first mill was on the northerly side a rocky point from which the sloping ledge made out, so that the stream entered the river with a natural fall, seen from the main river. It was soft spring weather and while they were digging a canal on the southerly side of the rocky point mentioned, heavy rains came on. The cut they had made was so deepened by the freshet that the stream tore out a new channel, leaving the old one high and dry, and the mill with it, and now the stream enters by a rapid and not by a fall, though the old name still holds.

Hermon Pond got its name from this stream, it is said, though I fancy the name is a recent one and the primitive name as been lost.

The next stream above is Segeunkedunk . The name presents grave difficulties. My father always said, "It is not Indian". Others, Indians themselves, to whom I have submitted it say, "Not Indian" and immediately begin to do things to it. Of course it is fundamentally Indian, but so corrupted that no one can twist it into shape for a meaning. Sewey Ketchum with whom I discussed it , altered it to Sedeunkedunk, changing the g to a d . To my mind it would be better if the latter syllables were transposed and it became Sededunkeunk, after the analogy of Madunkeunk, but there is no evidence as yet for this. Professor Ganong has unearthed an old form from a plan dated 1779 which calls it Sededankiou and this is his base for work, as the oldest form extant. He thinks that if we could find a form of it beginning with matta, like ~~mattasedankunk~~ mattasedank-eunk, he would have a word with a meaning. It would be "enters the river with rapids". As this was certainly true before the dams were built, and as no other stream on the river has that characteristic, it would be a good meaning. But as yet we have no proof. Bishop O'Brien, on the other hand, was evidently trying to make it from something connected with the gravel bank on the up river side, which also is fairly characteristic, except that these stream names are usually named from water, and not from land characters.

We may note in passing that the mouth of the Tannery Br Brook, by the old Dirigo Mill, was an Indian camp-ground in my father's boyhood, a very pleasant place with a snug little entrance for canoes and great pine trees standing above the camps. From the oaks by the graveyard they got acorns always valued,

and no doubt there was a good spring somewhere on the point; for Indians never drank river water. This place they called Passadowbusit. Now that is the same word for anyone who is near sighted, and the application was that the camp was so snugly hidden from the river side that you had to be near it to see it.

Another very local name is one for the little ~~clump~~ bit of high pasture between the end of Fling Street and the Bucksport railroad track. My old lady was born there, she tells me, and she says they called Kags<sup>kan</sup>-binday, or "little hollow among cedars". In my own childhood there were a few gnarly cedar trees growing there, and I have been told that it was almost the only dry spot between Wilson Street and the graveyard, so swampy was most of the land from the Ferry to Starvation Hill.

The next name of importance is Kenduskeag, and this is one of the most important of all Maine place names. It not only contains history, but it must help to make history.

Champlain came here in September 1604. He sailed up as far as the Bangor Railroad Station and anchored his ship near what used to be, even in my childhood a bluff ledge at the foot of Oak Street. There he conferred with various Indian chiefs at the village called Kadesquit. He was the first to record the name and there are not many records of it in that form, none I believe in English. The next form under which it appears is when the first settlers came and they called it Condeskeag, and later Kenduskeag. The name is said to mean "eel-catching place", or "where there are eel weirs", for they caught eels on the rapids by Kenduskeag bridge and above by using rude traps of twisted withes. But the penobscot Indian name of an eel is nahurmo, the ~~right~~ "holes inside of neck", says my old lady when asked its meaning. On Pennebec there is a Nahumkeag stream which is said to mean and certainly does mean "Eel Street".

which is said to mean and certainly does mean, "Eel Stream".  
 Now the Sennebec Indians and the Penobscot Indians spoke the same language; why isn't ours Nahumkeag also?

The Indians themselves say promptly enough that Kadesquit, or Katesquit, which to them is the same, or as they have rendered it in Penobscot Ko<sup>m</sup>deskeag is from the root kat, an eel, which is a Quoddy word. When I asked why we had a Passamaquoddy word here, Lewey Ketchum answered me slowly, as if thinking it out, "Seems as if the Quoddies must have named it"

But why should the Quoddies name a place in the territory belonging to another tribe? They must have done it long before Champlain came here in 1604.

It means, it can mean but one thing. That there was a time when the Quoddies and other Maliseets, speaking a different language from our people, though related to them, held this country. centuries ago they were pressed eastward by the waves of immigration from the west and though they went in a body they left some of their names behind them. Elsewhere on penobscot we get these mixtures of language, with suggestions of a land fought for by different tribes if not different races. And we know that far, far back very different civilizations, existing probably centuries, perhaps hundred of centuries before the Red Indians came to these shores, inhabited and loved the land and died here and were buried. The Red Paint people, the newer race which Mr. Walter B. Smith of Brewer has demonstrated lived here after them, a trace of some primitive culture living even before the glaciers came, have left their markings in stone tools or pottery. Ten thousand years from now all our buildings and rail roads and pulp mills may leave hardly so clear a trace of our occupation for a brief period.

One could go on indefinitely taking up local names, but one of the more interesting is the familiar, yet always to me unfamiliar penjejawock. It is very bad Indian in form and seemed a most unnecessary name to be retained when important ones had been lost. As all know it is applied to a little brook above Mount Hope, entering the river at the so-called Red Bridge.

But not everyone knows that in the beginning ~~this~~ <sup>the Red Bridge</sup> was an important place, larger than the present Bangor of those days. There were the falls, beneath the present dam, where was good fishing; there was the ~~first~~ <sup>first</sup> ford across the river, and there was the first saw-mill in Bangor and the truck house where reble before the Revolution was trading with the Indians.

Yet even this does not account for the name of that insignificant little stream being saved and the name of the falls on the river being lost.

By varying the form of it the Indians gave the clue-- pemijwock, "comes pouring down", they said, and that word pem pr bem carries with it the idea of extent, width or length, as pemadeneseesuk, the long line of low mountains back of Brewer, "the little long mountains" It was professor Ganong who saw the point. "Pemijwock must have been the falls across the river, Treat's Falls. They were the first the Indians met in coming up river; it was where the main Penobscot "comes pouring down'". Clearly this must be so, for the small brook has no fall upon it within sight of the river before clearing the land. Major Treat's name displaced the old Indian name, and the Dam has made the Major to be forgotten.

At this spot was another point of local interest now

gone forever. <sup>edge</sup> Marjeehondu-beemoptuck, the devils foot-prints it was called. In the <sup>edge</sup> rock now covered by the railroad embankment or else under water from the flowage of the dam, were a number of prints "just like some one walking down the river," an Indian told me. He had followed them. My old lady says, "His foot one horse-shoe, one so," extending her own. That is why they were called the "Devil's Foot-prints" Below Treat's Falls was ~~Marjeehondu~~ wooda-dawa-boodi, the Devil's Arm-chair. My old lady said she had sat in it. These names are interesting because they are taken from the whites. The Indians had no idea of an impersonated spirit of evil, with horns, hoof and tail. But they willingly adopted him along with the innumerable less powerful agents of mischief which were their own. To give him a name they took the word they used for their own personal charms against evil which they always had with them, madaondos, as they were called

If time permitted we could tell of a number of places connected with aboriginal superstitions, for the Glooscap, or Glusgehbeh legend was localized on the Penobscot. Instead there is one we passed in coming up the river. Hampden Narrows was always a place of mystery and awe to the savage. There lived the little dwarfs, <sup>nan-pun-aw-ah-ah?</sup> Mikumwessuk, who have their homes in the rocks and make beads and little kettles and teapots for the Indians, and who write upon the rocks. Often they would talk with the Indians, these little people only as long as your finger foretelling what was to come, and always they took tally of the canoes passing down the river and wrote it upon the rocks. So that place was called EDALOWEKEK-WARDIMUK, "place where they drew marking or writing", or as Father O'Brien has it WANAGAMESSUK  
 EDALAWIK+HEDEGIT

So far I have not touched upon the names Penobscot and Pentegoet, which properly should be pronounced with the last syllable accented, pentegwet.

Singularly enough the English in general who first visited this river adopted the word Penobscot while the French took that of Pentegoet. John Smith in 1614 speaks of Penobscot and hardly had the Pilgrims settled on Cape Cod before they had a trading post at Penobscot, evidently Castine. It was not long before the French dispossessed them and called the same place (or certainly one very near ~~thence~~ it) Pentagoet.