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Afterword to Life and Traditions of the Red Man by Joseph Nicolar

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THE
LIFE AND TRADITIONS
OF THE RED MAN

* by *

Joseph Nicolar

Edited, Annotated, and with a History of the Penobscot
Nation and an Introduction by Annette Kolodny

Duke University Press
Durham and London
2007
known, the stuff of many legends as it were, became a powerful symbolic
representation of that earthquake-prone land, his
cribbling.

In this century, the Mohawks are known
for their traditional grassroots efforts to main neutral
relations between First of the Iroquois
people and the Mohawk, the Iroquois
people who had themselves been al-
tained their traditional role as the
tribe's council fire only now that council
fire no longer bears the name of
the Mohawks.

The republication of this book marks a significant milestone for the Penobscot Nation. It epitomizes the cyclic process of history. As a Penobscot person, Joseph Nicolar took control of how his tribe was represented through the written word. Today, the Penobscot Nation again seeks to take control of how we are presented to the public. We work with scholars and researchers, both Native and non-Native, to ensure that the errors and distortions of the past are not perpetuated.

After several months of telephone and written communications with several tribal members, including Chief of the Penobscot Nation, James Sappier, in June 2005 Annette Kolodny came to Indian Island and approached the tribe about republishing The Life and Traditions of the Red Man. Professor Kolodny asked to meet with members of the Nicolar family. In keeping with Penobscot tradition, we supported that request because we view a scholar's consultation with the family as part of the appropriate protocol for this type of project. In our view, it was necessary for Nicolar family members to consider whether or not republication of The Life and Traditions of the Red Man was in the best interests of the family and tribe. Not everyone agreed that this book should be republished. There were many issues to consider. First of all, Professor Kolodny was unknown to most people in our community. Could we in good conscience support a stranger republishing the work of a tribal member? Could we trust her to represent the tribe appropriately and convey the spirit of the Penobscot people accurately through her writing? All of these questions had to be addressed and a certain level of trust had to be earned by Professor Kolodny before any kind of collaborative project could move forward.

These concerns arise from the fact that many publications about Native American tribes occur without consultation with the appropriate tribe. As a result, Native Americans have been repeatedly misunderstood and misrepresented in the works of many scholars. Would Professor Kolodny choose to move forward without our endorsement of and/or participation in the project? If we chose not to participate, what kind of product would be produced?

In the end, all these questions were resolved through months of careful and mutually respectful consultation and cooperation. Professor Kolodny sent drafts of her introductory materials to family members and to the Penobscot Nation's Department of Cultural and Historic Preservation. We reviewed her materials and gave her feedback and comment, most of which she was able to incorporate into her subsequent drafts.

This process began in June 2005, when Professor Kolodny first visited Indian Island. After a series of meetings and a thorough consideration of all these
issues, Charles Norman Shay, Joseph Nicolai’s grandson, determined that re-
publication of the book was important at this time. We, as a tribal government, 
honored his decision. However, the family and tribe made certain specific re-
quests. Charles Norman Shay asked if a history of the Penobscot Nation might 
be included in the republication. The most important request from the tribe, 
however, was for the inclusion of a contemporary Penobscot voice. Professor 
Kolodny welcomed both suggestions.

For the tribe to endorse the republication of Nicolai’s book, the tribal voice 
must be a prominent part of the product. In our view, the most logical and 
qualified individual to be that voice was Charles Norman Shay. Charles Norman 
Shay’s contribution to this project represents true indigenous scholarship. It 
is as valuable to us as Nicolai’s original book. Charles Norman Shay’s preface 
represents more than the contextual information it presents. It represents a 
rebirth of Joseph Nicolai’s commitment to take control of how the Penobscot 
people are presented publicly.

Finally, one question remains unanswered: what would Joseph Nicolai have 
wanted? Would he have been satisfied with a non-tribal member taking the lead 
on republication? If he were alive today, would he republish his book himself 
in light of the tribe’s current political, cultural, social, and economic status? 
Nicolai’s grandson, Charles Norman Shay, suspects he would, because, in 
Shay’s opinion, “authors produce their material for the widest dissemination 
to readers and scholars and in this way make the public aware of other cul-
tures.” That said, we will never definitively know if Joseph Nicolai would have 
approved of this republishing of *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man*. How-
ever, through the Penobscot Nation’s endorsement of this republication, we 
want to make clear how highly we value his contribution to the literary world. 
We hope this republication will prove an inspiration for other tribal members 
to continue his legacy of indigenous scholarship and self-representation.

We wish to thank Professor Kolodny for her extensive research, her coopera-
tion with us, and for her efforts to get this important book back into print. We 
wish to thank Duke University Press for taking up the project.

BONNIE D. NEWSOM,
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Penobscot Nation, Indian Island, Maine

February 6th, 2006