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Harald E. L. Prins

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MAINE HISTORY

Vol. 37, No. 3

Winter 1998



Frank T. Siebert, Jr. (1912-1998)
A Special Issue

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WILLARD WALKER AND HAROLD E. L. PRINS

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SPECIAL ISSUE
IN HONOR OF DR. FRANK T. SIEBERT, JR.

PREFACE	<i>Willard Walker and Harald E.L. Prins</i>	70
FRANK SIEBERT - THEN, AND MORE THAN "FORTY YEARS ON"	<i>Richard B. Singer</i>	71
FRANK SPECK'S OFFICE	<i>Edmund S. Carpenter</i>	78
A PENOBSCOT ASSESSMENT OF FRANK SIEBERT	<i>Eunice Baumann-Nelson</i>	80
SOME MEMORIES OF FRANK SIEBERT	<i>Dean R. Snow</i>	82
ENCOUNTERS WITH FRANK SIEBERT	<i>Ives Goddard</i>	86
SIEBERT AS ALGONQUIANIST	<i>Karl van Duyn Teeter</i>	90
ETYMOLOGY OF TUSCARORA	<i>Blair A. Rudes</i>	94
SIEBERT AND HIS CORRESPONDENCE	<i>Paul Proulx</i>	98
MY RELATIONSHIP WITH FRANK SIEBERT	<i>Richard Garrett</i>	102
CHRONICLES OF DR. FRANK T. SIEBERT	<i>Martha Young</i>	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FRANK T. SIEBERT	<i>Frank Siebert and Martha Young</i>	107
THE WABANAKI CONFEDERACY	<i>Willard Walker</i>	110
CHIEF BIG THUNDER (1827-1906): THE LIFE HISTORY OF A PENOBSCOT TRICKSTER	<i>Harald E. L. Prins</i>	140

PREFACE

This is a special issue in honor of Frank T. Siebert, Jr., a retired medical doctor from Philadelphia who specialized in pathology. But it is not his medical career that we want to commemorate here. Some sixty years ago, when Frank was still a college student in Pennsylvania, he began his inquiries into Penobscot language and culture. At the time, almost 100 tribespeople still used this language. After his retirement in the mid-1970s, Frank left Philadelphia and moved to Old Town, to be closer to his Penobscot friends. In a season of life that most spend in leisure, he dedicated his personal resources and his very considerable energy to linguistic research.

Now eighty-five years of age, Frank for many decades has worked closely with a generation that is no longer living. He has tirelessly committed thousands of Penobscot words to writing. His 1984 draft of the Penobscot dictionary contains nearly 15,000 entries, and many have been added since. In addition to recording words, Frank has done much to describe Penobscot grammar. Moreover, he has focused on the tribe's traditional world view as it informs, and is informed by, the language. Through his study of Penobscot language, he has acquired unique insights into traditional culture. Likewise, his research into Penobscot history has made important contributions to our understanding of this Algonquian language.

Since Indian Island's last fluent speaker of Penobscot passed away in 1993, notes tribal elder Eunice Baumann-Nelson in her tribute here, "Frank is the only living person who knows and can speak my ancestors' language." A year ago, aware that significant contributions to science are often made beyond the walls of the ivory tower, the editors decided that it was time to pay homage to this stalwart scholar. Never having sought personal glory for his unceasing efforts, Frank deserved this honor – as the contributors to this volume all make clear.

Willard Walker,
Canaan, Maine
Harald Prins,
Manhattan, Kansas
August 1997

Frank Siebert died January 23, 1998 of cancer. Regrettably, he did not live long enough to see this issue of *Maine History* in print. His colleagues mourn the passing of this gifted man.