12-1-1998

My Relationship with Frank Siebert

Richard Garrett
Siebert Project

RICHARD GARRETT

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH FRANK SIEBERT
Für meinen lieben Freund mit herzlichen Grüssen!

The next essay was written by Richard Garrett, who created the PENOBSCOT PRIMER PROJECT, a continuing exhibit at the Hudson Museum, University of Maine. Garrett lives in Wellington, Maine and, since 1995, has been the Principal Investigator and Project Director of the Siebert Project, funded by the National Science Foundation.

As Principal Investigator/Project Director of the "Siebert Project," I am helping Frank prepare his work for publication. Those who know Siebert, the consummate linguist, realize that this is a difficult and enormous task. I started writing this piece in Philadelphia after negotiations for the publishing of Siebert's *Penobscot Legends*, with the American Philosophical Society. Due to the unusually critical nature of Frank's work, Carole LeFaivre-Rochester at the APS requested camera-ready material from our project. This request was staggering. Undaunted, but apprehensive, we researched book design from Frank's collection. With the man himself as critic, a format was created, hopefully worthy for the presentation of this master's work. A great asset was the previously developed, computerized Penobscot font for the Penobscot Primer Project. After hard work and a few battles, the copy was submitted. We are elated by the vote of the APS to publish Volume I, and now Frank will take his place as an American Philosophical Society author. For Frank, a Philadelphia boy, this is a return home in fine fashion.

Volume 2 will be Penobscot Legends with Song. The accompanying audio (in a slip in the book cover) will be on a CD-ROM. The interdisciplinary cooperation of visual artists and Siebert, the traditional scholar, has yielded some unusual results. If properly approached, the opportunity for digital comparative analysis of linguistic data is an exciting desk-top reality with modern equipment. The Eurocentric approach of writing a spoken language can be definitely enhanced by Native voice in the digital medium. With adequate samples of Penobscot and Catawba Native voice the possibility for speech generation of these dead languages exists. For posterity, I have recorded Frank

reading msáhtawe: the man that wrote the phonemes reading the phonemes.

And now let me touch on Frank's most remarkable feature, his memory. Throughout our relationship with Frank, my wife, Martha, and I have been repeatedly astounded by the minute details of his relationships with Speck, Haas, Voegelin, his Native American informants, Red Thunder Cloud, and many friends and acquaintances that he has shared with us. Assisted by an old Penobscot friend and an early audio recording, we are working on an ésahsit legend for Volume 2.

Ésahsit, from interviewing Frank, is "one who shines through" – Flaming Skeleton – A terrible reality to an Indian: "The ghost of a person who has died of starvation in the woods and remained unburied. In the summer it couldn't pursue you in water deeper than the knee, as the water would put out the fire. It would knock you down and suck blood from your jugular vein. Also attacked in sleep."

Frank is particularly fond of ésahsit, as other researchers have missed this story. The ésahsit story is an unusual and special legend that is derived from Frank's 1966 audio recording of Arthur Neptune. Having digitized this recording to facilitate the generation of text, Microsoft Word and SoundEditl6 are run simultaneously on our computer. This system works for isolating individual words and phrases in the Penobscot audio while also word processing in both languages. The summer of 1997 should yield the Volume II of *Legends* with a revised Penobscot Dictionary to follow.

Also a researcher in Catawba, Cree, Shawnee, Munsee-Delaware, Montauk/Pequot, Powhatan, Massachusett, Mahican, Fox, Montagnais, and other Native American languages, the man has a wealth of information; and at eighty-five his memory is unusually acute. Of course I have only scratched the surface of a very complicated man. Many facets of his personality and research remain unvisited by my short offering. Having shared the nest with a brilliant brother, I recognize and acknowledge Frank's plane of existence. His contribution to the preservation of the languages, cultures, and ethnohistories of many Native American tribes is a brilliant accomplishment. Madeline Shay, the last speaker of Penobscot, repeatedly encouraged me to meet Frank. She was right. He is one of a kind.

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