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Onondaga Iroquois Place-Names: An Approach to Historical and Contemporary Indian Landscape Perception

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Introduction

An interesting research theme for the place-name geographer is to determine whether place-naming practices are different between societies that coexist in the same landscape. On one hand, finding that compared place-names of both societies share the same lexical meanings for given landscape features suggests the derivation of one place-name set from the other. This means that a common overall perception of landscape prevails in both societies. On the other hand, finding that lexical meanings for given landscape features vary between the two societies implies independent derivation rather than cultural borrowing. This means that two sets of landscape perceptions exist and operate. Thus, place-name analysis can serve as an indicator of cultural differentiation.

The study of contemporary place-names used in the spoken Onondaga Iroquois language presents a particularly interesting and provocative research topic because both Indian and white societies inhabit central New York state. It was my purpose through examination to reveal whether Iroquois Indian place-names in the selected study area of Onondaga county, New York differ from those of the larger, dominant white culture in form or meaning. If patterns of naming places do differ, then comparative analysis should reveal differences in perceptions of place and space. Such examination should provide a measure of cultural relativity pointing to the existence of an independent structure of landscape perception held by the Onondaga Iroquois. Comparison of the respective place-name sets should also yield the degree and direction of cultural exchange that has occurred between the two peoples. Further, comparing contemporary Onondaga place-names with those discussed and recorded in the historical literature should reflect the nature and magnitude of perceptual change that has occurred to the Onondaga through time.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five parts. The first section

sets forth a methodological framework suitable for this place-name analysis. The second section reviews Iroquois place-name literature and briefly examines their historical place-naming practices, place-names, and lexical meanings. In the third section a comparative framework was constructed in which interviews with Onondaga informants were structured to gather similar data on current Onondaga place-name usage. The fourth section, in summary fashion, reiterates the significant findings generated by the study. Finally, the last section outlines additional avenues of Indian place-name research.

Methodology

To initiate place-name analysis, four traditional combinations of place-names and landscape features can be considered:

1. neither the landscape feature nor its place-name survive,
2. the landscape feature survives but not its place-name,
3. the landscape feature no longer survives but its place-name does,
4. both the landscape feature and its place-name survive.

Obviously, but unfortunately, place-name analysis cannot be applied in the first two cases. It is in the latter two that place-name analysis serves a most important function to illuminate the past physical and cultural geography of an area. Analogously to archeological excavation which uses the artifacts it uncovers as a basis upon which to reconstruct a former culture, many place-names existing on the landscape today are also relics. They too represent remnant evidence of previous human occupance. Likewise, place-name analysis enables inferences to be made concerning the lifeways of peoples in earlier times.[1] Two additional combinations of place-names and landscape features can also be considered:

5. new place-names arise designating surviving landscape features,
6. new place-names arise designating new landscape features.

Equally significant applications of place-name analysis can be undertaken utilizing these last two cases to focus upon recent place name-sets. Analysis of contemporary, often recent, place-names should reveal current perceptions of landscape therefore allowing inferences to be made concerning the culture and lifestyle of the present-day inhabitants. By comparing new place-names with the traditional place-names they have replaced, it should be possible to measure the degree of perceptual change that has occurred to a society through time.

In sum, the structure of this research design ideally was to discover what past and presently-spoken Onondaga place-names exist together with their lexical meanings, and then compare these data to the white

place-names and lexical meanings corresponding to the same set of landscape features. Further, to make this study fully operational a non-Indian would need to learn the Onondaga dialect of the Iroquois language and gain a working comprehension of its linguistic structure. Only in this manner could one understand the framework which guides place-name usage and correct contextual relationships. Unfortunately, however, it was found to be almost impossible to accomplish this locally. The Onondaga refused to discuss their linguistic heritage with non-Indians. Although Onondaga Iroquois is taught in the reservation school, it is taught only by Indians for Indian children. Reservation policy prohibits the sharing of Onondaga language skills with non-Indians.[2]

Some knowledge of Onondaga place-naming practices and place-names was gained, nevertheless, through indirect access to the currently spoken Onondaga language and through those selected place-names recorded by scholars in the literature (see bibliography). Without direct access to the language one recourse was to work with any available and knowledgeable Onondaga informants.[3] Using both literature and informants as information sources the research task was structured upon the following questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do Onondaga place-naming practices differ from those of white society?
2. What does this place-name differentiation, if found, suggest about Onondaga perception of landscape?
3. To what extent do historical Onondaga place-names still exist in current white usage?
4. To what extent do historical Onondaga place-names still exist in current Onondaga usage?
5. To what extent, if any, have historical Onondaga place-names been replaced by newer Onondaga designations?

Historical Iroquois Place-Naming Practices

Place-names created by Iroquois Indians served as realistic, practical, and accurate designations used to reference surrounding landscape features. Their language often utilized metaphors and other figures of speech to record facts real or perceived, and thus to create place-names.[4] From the Iroquois point of view this was the simplest, most direct and natural method of expressing thoughts and perceptions. However, their nomenclature was often misunderstood by whites mistakenly perceiving it as fanciful, ornamental, odd, romantic, or poetic. Iroquois oral language

was viewed as spoken poetry to non-Indians familiar with such construction only in written form.

The majority of Iroquois place-names was of a descriptive nature referring especially to terrain morphology, plant and animal life, and human events.[5] Complicating matters for the researcher, however, when the original context is lacking, is that:

1. A particular Iroquois place-name was commonly applied to several similar features (e.g. "Long Lake").
2. A particular feature might be referred to by a number of different place-names (e.g. "The mountain upriver"; "The mountain downriver").
3. A place-name for a particular feature could change through time (e.g. "Bark in the Water", "Huge Rock Pile").[6]

Because whites often took Iroquois place-names out of their spatial and temporal contexts thus reducing them to quite common appellatives, resultant lexical meanings were often vague, ambiguous, and transitory creating confusion for whites attempting to use them. Whites perceived Iroquois place-names as being merely descriptive and unsatisfactory designations, whereas they considered their own to be more exact and proper. However, Iroquois place-names were, in fact, precise when viewed in their original spoken context. As a rule they contained necessary locative criteria such as possessive or directional references serving to pinpoint place-name usage in space. Neither situation of a common place-name used for different landscape features nor different place-names used for the same landscape feature, as illustrated above, would confuse an intended Iroquois listener who literally knows when and where the speaker is coming from. Such lack of confusion occurs because the audience is aware of and correctly understands the speaker's spatial frame of reference as well as sharing his temporal frame. Without these locative references, however, Iroquois place-names can be seen to lack specificity.

In spite of confusion concerning Iroquois place-naming practices, whites did borrow a number of Iroquois place-names. In many instances this was not due to esthetic appreciation but simply because these toponyms already existed and were immediately available for use in places devoid of white nomenclature.[7] In New York state the Dutch, French, and later the English applying their own forms of spelling and pronunciation, adapted some Indian place-names for their own use.[8] As well as accepting existing Dutch and French terms, the English further modified these forms by Anglicizing them. Whites apparently did not strive to preserve correct pronunciation, form, or meaning of Indian place-names as long as

doubt and uncertainty were removed and unambiguous designations remained.[9]

Iroquois place-names, like their language, existed primarily in oral form. Whites recorded Iroquois place-names phonetically in their own written languages. When Indian place-names were needed in white documents concerning land grants, treaties, laws, and settlements, they were usually recorded by a white law clerk. This procedure introduced Iroquois place-names into official white oral and written usage, thus also establishing them in the white place-name landscape.

Difficulties for the researcher attempting to correctly translate Iroquois place-names commonly include the discovery of a loss or change in original meaning. This problem often stems from alteration to the place-name during the recording process. The following types of variation were identified:

1. Linguistic and dialectal differences – The six dialects of Iroquois in New York state (Seneca, Tuscarora, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk) generated pronunciation differences affecting the place-names being recorded.
2. Deliberate mispronunciation – The Iroquois reporting the place-name to the white law clerk may have mispronounced the term as a pun or joke.[10]
3. Personal pronunciation – As Iroquois place-names were recorded phonetically by law clerks, they retained the personal variation in pronunciation of the Indian individual making the presentation.[11]
4. Recording accuracy – The degree of accuracy varied among law clerks phonetically recording Iroquois place-names thus affecting the terms recorded.
5. Written linguistic differences – Different linguistic spellings in European languages produced variations in the Iroquois place-names recorded by whites.

Iroquois terms – in addition to place-names – also have been taken out of their original spatial contexts by whites and reapplied as place-names to designate a host of natural and cultural landscape features. These are commonly of a non-Iroquois related nature such as white-originated transportation routes and businesses.[12] Several varied examples found in Onondaga county are:

Physical features – Chittenango Creek, Oneida Lake, Oswego River, and Skaneateles Falls,

Cultural features – Seneca Turnpike, Mohawk Thruway, Onondaga Boulevard, Genesee Street, Tuscarora Golf Club, Owahgena, Otisco Valley, and Owasco.

Some non-indigenous Indian terms, likewise, have been removed from their spatial contexts by whites and similarly applied as place-names. Examples of this type in Onondaga County are Hiawatha Boulevard and Tecumseh; elsewhere in New York state are the towns of Cuba, Osceola, Pontiac, Mexico, and Montezuma.[13] Thus, in addition to using Iroquois place-names per se, Whites have applied both Iroquois and extra-local Indian-derived terms as place-names for white related landscape features.

Further, many Iroquois place-names have been deliberately replaced by white place-names through time due to a number of factors found including:

1. War – Some existing Iroquois place-names were dropped and new white ones added to commemorate events of war. This probably occurs because war is traumatic to both people and landscape; the new place-name records a significant aspect of the war for posterity.
2. Local inhabitants – As a result of sequent occupance or the changing sentiments of local residents, some established Iroquois place-names were changed in favor of white ones. This sort of change, often approved and implemented by local government, reflects an emotional commemorative action.
3. Postal Service – Place-name duplication within a state, which sometimes occurs with Iroquois place-names, needs to be eliminated to avoid confusion. In such cases the postal service has allowed local inhabitants to select a new place-name or the postal service, itself, substitutes a new designation.[14]
4. State Commission on Geographical Names – Local place-names have been changed by means of petitions to the State Commission on Geographical Names, thereby eliminating some existing original Iroquois place-names.

In sum, the heritage of Iroquois place-names although persistent is only a vestige of formerly dominant Indian culture.[15] As most Indian groups were either exterminated or displaced from their ancestral lands, many of their place-names and lexical meanings were lost and those surviving commonly have uncertain meanings. Iroquois place-names remaining on the landscape are often divorced from their original spatial and lexical contexts; because of considerable change from their original form, their lexical meanings are correspondingly dubious or erroneous. As a consequence, literal translation of such Iroquois place-names shows them to be inappropriate. Reconstruction of the original form and meaning of many surviving Iroquois place-names is, therefore, extremely difficult.

Contemporary Onondaga Place-Naming Practices

To uncover place-names in current usage in the Onondaga language it was obviously first necessary to identify those who speak the language. The informants indicated that the Onondaga language is spoken fluently only by older people, now grandparents. These people learned to speak their language as children and continue to use it among themselves.[16] In their speech only standard Onondaga words are used. Because of numerous marriages with non-Onondaga speakers and the required use of English in the Onondaga reservation school, the majority of children of this grandparent generation (today's parents) although able to understand Onondaga cannot speak it.

The long-term future of Onondaga usage rests with the third generation, or grandchildren. Acutely aware that their linguistic heritage was in grave jeopardy, the Onondaga finally won the right to teach their language in the reservation school in 1971. Although all Onondaga children now learn their native language in school, there will still be a time lag before they become sufficiently proficient in their linguistic skills to transmit them to the next generation. Therefore, it remains for the present and immediate future primarily the older people who will continue to use and create place-names. Quite interestingly the Onondaga do not commonly adopt place-names from the whites. As was the practice historically[17] place-names used by the Onondaga are created by a concensus of older people; discussing an activity in a "new" place which has become significant to them necessitates a designation to refer to this place in their daily conversation.

A number of geographical insights into current Onondaga landscape perception were gained from the fieldwork component of this study. First, Onondaga place-names were found to originate from direct Indian experience. A reason for going to a place first had to exist, and the Indian actually had to travel to this place with this specific purpose in mind for a place-name to be generated. If the Onondaga did not have a designation for a place it was simply because there was no reason to go there. Travel occurred only when certain locational, site, or situational attributes found in these places fulfilled the Indian's needs. Every place actually frequented was thus important in some manner to Onondaga life or culture. In order to readily converse about these experiences it was necessary to create meaningful place-names. As mentioned earlier, the place-names generated were descriptive in nature reflecting either the function drawing Indians to a place or a distinctive characteristic of the place that attracted their attention.[18]

Second, Onondaga place-names generally were found to follow the distance-decay function. The majority of their place-names appeared to reference locations in their immediate homeland (Onondaga reservation), while fewer of their place-names referred to the remainder of New York state. Further, in this core area a number of Onondaga place-names were found not to have a corresponding set of white terms; and, most local whites were unaware that these particular Onondaga place-names even exist. It seems that reservation place-names hold significance primarily for the Onondaga. Several types of places so named in the village include houses, roads, and locations of religious significance.

Third, it was found that the personal experiences of the Onondaga apparently set limits to the quantity of place-names they apply to the larger landscape. In other words, a place far away usually is not referenced with a particular place-name per se. Often, they borrow a place-name for an extra-local feature from the Indian people in whose territory the feature is located. To a degree this practice reduces multiple place-name designations. Although the Onondaga language, as a rule, does not incorporate non-Indian terms, Onondaga speakers are able to refer to anything non-indigenous or any place exogenous by describing them in general terms according to their functions.[19] For example, even though the Onondaga language currently lacks state appellations as found in the larger white culture, a distant place is designated nevertheless by referring to its past or present Indian inhabitants. Thus Arizona is called *Dwah-gun'-ha* (''the wild ones''), descriptive of its nomadic people such as the Apache; similarly, the Rocky Mountains are referred to as ''the ones who follow sheep'' which describes the Blackfoot and Shoshoni.

Another way of referring to distant places is according to direction. The literature indicated that the use of cardinal direction was not a common historical place-naming practice.[20] In the past, direct experience was focused primarily in a local area. Therefore, directional references were made according to significant local landmarks such as rivers, mountains, and coasts. In this manner many relative directions could be indicated and applied to place-names such as: up or down (the river, coast, etc.), beyond (the water, cliffs, mountains, etc.), down at, or down below.[21] The informants stated, however, that references of cardinal direction are used in current place-name usage primarily for distant places. This results, most likely, from a wider range in geographical knowledge and spatial experience of the modern-day Onondaga. For example, California or the Pacific Coast is referred to as ''people where the sun goes down'' (i.e., west).

Fourth, the spoken language of the Onondaga was found to be quite

dynamic in that it constantly undergoes changes. The city, Syracuse, provides an example illustrating place-name change through time. In the 19th century, when Onondaga place-names were recorded in the literature, a number of terms probably originating at different times were given for Syracuse. Three refer to pine vegetation: *Nat-a-dunk* (''broken pine with drooping top'') or *Na-ta-dunk* (''pine tree broken with top hanging down''),[22] *Tu-an-ten-tonk* (''hanging pine''), and *Oh-na-ta-toonk* (''among the pines''); two additional terms refer to water: *Kah-ya-hoo-neh* (''where the ditch full of water goes through'') and *Ken-tue-ho-he* (''a creek or river that has been made''). The latter two place-names refer to Syracuse during the Canal Era when the Erie Canal constituted a prominent and significant presence. In addition, the term *Sy-kuse* was found – an atypical case of borrowing and obvious modification of the white form. Of these terms only the last was recognized by the informants, *Si-gus'*,[23] which they added was commonly used by the younger generation. The older generation they said uses a different term, *Gah-non-di'* (''that which is the town''), which was not found in the literature.

Additional examples of place-name changes through time are presented in Table 1. Note that for each place listed two current place-names with lexical meanings are given reflecting a different response from each informant. This suggests that a single designation existing for a particular place is not the rule. However, as only one place-name was ever given by an informant, it also suggests that only one designation is ever used by an Onondaga individual. Apparently due to a lack of personal large-scale interaction and thus being rather circumscribed in a spatial sense, an Onondaga consistently uses a particular place-name for a landscape feature although possibly aware that others also exist.

Fifth, the informants were found to believe that the place-names in use are permanent through time. However, comparison of Onondaga place-names and lexical meanings extending back several generations revealed that much change has indeed occurred. None of the above (Table 1) current Onondaga place-names or lexical meanings appeared in the 19th century literature and, conversely, none of the historical Onondaga place-names is in current usage. Marked place-name change over time is therefore revealed. Historically, Onondaga place-names appear to have changed along with the local events and peoples of the area. Different Onondaga generations often used their own place-names rather than the traditional or inherited ones for the same set of landscape features. Thus, Onondaga place-names, when compared to those of the whites, tend to be more ephemeral. Changing Onondaga place-names do not seem to indicate a deviation from historical practice. Although place-names in current

Onondaga usage are different from those of the 19th century, they were still found to be created basically in the traditional descriptive manner.

Table 1

White Place-Name	Historic Onondaga Place-Name	Historic Onondaga Lexical Meaning	Current Onondaga Place-Name	Current Onondaga Lexical Meaning
Buffalo	De-o-sa'-weh	splitting the fork	Da-yo-sa'yah	apart from something, far away
			Jo-sa'-yah	a big animal
Lafayette	Te-ka'-wis-to'-ta	tinned dome	O-wes-to'-nes	The place where the man does his work that sparks (i.e., smithy)
			De-cah-wes-to'-dah	there is a lot of money
South Onondaga	Swe-ne'-ga	a hollow	Gin-do'-tah	large tree
			Da-gah-yen-to'-tah	there stands a big pole
Onondaga Lake	Ga-nun-ta'-ah, T.	material for a council fire	(Gahn-yah-di')*	(body of water)*
			Gwen-an-dah'-ke	the big water
Jamesville	Ga-sun'-to	bark in the water	Gah-sta'-hes	huge pile, or wall, of rocks
			Gah-nah-ke'-yo	big rock (quarries)

*According to one informant, no name exists; but if it did it would most likely be this.

Summary

Historically, as gathered from the literature review, place-names created by the Onondaga Iroquois of central New York state served as realistic and practical designations for surrounding landscape features. Overall, they were of a descriptive nature relating to the attributes or functions of places. Whites, although commonly misunderstanding Onondaga nomenclature, nevertheless borrowed their place-names especially initially for numerous places lacking white designations. Significantly, the degree of place-name exchange found between Onondaga and white

cultures has been highly unequal. Although whites incorporated many Iroquois place-names and terms, conversely the Onondaga generally have not borrowed place-names from the larger society.

Even though still existing to a limited degree in white usage, many surviving Iroquois-derived toponyms present difficulties for the place-name analyst. Much confusion unfortunately has resulted from practices used by whites, especially in their recording process, when dealing with Indian place-names. Whites did not strive to preserve correct Onondaga place-name pronunciation, form or meaning as long as doubt and uncertainty were removed and unambiguous designations remained; in this manner, they modified Onondaga place-names by using their own European pronunciations and spellings. Whites also took many Onondaga place-names out of their correct spatial and temporal contexts thus reducing them to plain appellatives, and often applied them to non-Onondaga related landscape features. Further, whites commonly utilized non-indigenous Indian place-names and even mere Indian terms as place-names. This last place-name subset represents an extra-local intrusion of Indian, but non-Onondaga, designations. Lastly, through time many Onondaga place-names have been deleted from white usage and replaced by newer white place-names so that only a vestige of the former Onondaga place-name set remains at present.

Contemporary Onondaga place-naming practices, as assembled through fieldwork, show that Onondaga place-name creation and usage are currently in a precarious state. Due to much intermarriage with non-Onondaga speakers, today's parent generation while understanding their native language cannot speak it. Their children, who just recently began to receive Onondaga language instruction in school, are neither sufficiently fluent as yet to transmit the complete scope of Onondaga linguistic usage nor old enough to fully reflect the Onondaga cultural heritage. Consequently, it is the small and steadily dwindling number of Onondaga-speaking grandparents, representing the depth and breadth of the Onondaga cultural repository, who are keeping the Onondaga language alive and in daily use at least for the immediate future. Onondaga place-names are coined by this grandparent generation by means of a general concensus among themselves. As was the practice historically, contemporary Onondaga place-names continue to be descriptive and have readily understood lexical meanings.

Of special interest to the place-name geographer is that Onondaga toponyms represent spatial indicators of only those locations significant in some purposeful way to the Indian. They are formulated within a totally Indian context rather than directly extracted from the larger society. The

Onondaga place-name set therefore constitutes a selective record of landscape perception; toponyms are given only to places actually frequented by the Onondaga and significant to his lifestyle, a point made by both the literature and informants. As Onondaga place-names originate from personal experience, this limits both the total number of place-names they apply to the landscape and the particular place-name an individual will use.

As a result, Onondaga place-names follow a rather steep distance-decay function with most place-names concentrated about their reservation and declining markedly in number with distance from this core area. Some Onondaga place-names within the reservation are unique both in that they neither have white counterparts nor are they known to exist by most local whites. Distant landscape features are referenced in several ways: by borrowing place-names from the local Indian tribe in whose territory the particular place is located; by referring to the past or present Indian peoples inhabiting the area in which the particular place is located; in a general or indirect fashion by referring to the function of the place; and, by cardinal direction. Comparison between Onondaga and white place-names for the same sample set of landscape features revealed that Onondaga place-names differ in form and lexical meaning. Thus, two sets of landscape perceptions exist and an independent structure of landscape perception apparently is held by the Onondaga.

Even though the Onondaga informants believed their place-names to be permanent, they were found to be transitory. Historical Onondaga place-names are not in use by the Onondaga at present. Although still following the descriptive tradition of place-naming, new Onondaga place-names have arisen to replace older ones. A correlation seems to exist in this dynamic process, therefore, between successive generations constructing new place-names which each can better relate to and are more suitable for daily use, and the ever-changing events and nature of places which are reflected in these new landscape designations. For the Onondaga, the primary result is a sequential generational recreation of a contemporary, relevant, and readily identifiable place-name set by means of a recurrent reinterpretation and redefinition of the perceptual landscape.

In sum, although current Onondaga place-naming practices remain the same as they were historically, new place-names reflect the changing nature through time of both the landscape and Onondaga culture. The place-naming practice and resulting place-names clearly represent one key in understanding Onondaga spatial cognition, perception, and interaction. Thus, historical place-name analysis aids reconstruction of these cultural attributes for the past; correspondingly, contemporary geographi-

cal place-name analysis serves to monitor the current rate and degree of change in these spatial characteristics.

Future Avenues of Research

Based on the limited data generated from this initial research, the need for and benefits of future research are evident. This study revealed through both the literature and informants that a complete survey of Onondaga place-names has never been undertaken. The record of Onondaga place-names in the literature is not only fragmentary but contains numerous inaccuracies and errors as pointed out by the informants. For example, many place-names listed as Onondaga Iroquois are actually derived from the Mohawk or Seneca Iroquois dialects. Further, many lexical meanings are themselves incorrect. For example, the lexical meaning given for South Onondaga should translate as "a hollow log" and not as "a hollow."

Obviously, many avenues of Indian place-name research remain. A correct orthography of place-names with their attendant lexical meanings is necessary so as not to perpetuate the types of errors found in the literature. The Onondaga linguistic heritage is in a precarious state. As place-name information is stored primarily by the elderly, the need to begin toponymic research quickly is imperative. By preserving the exact pronunciation used in the oral Onondaga language, the place-name record can be maintained in an accurate and reliable form. Tape recording, as used in this study, seems to be the most reliable method both for maintaining accuracy and for place-name storage and preservation.

A data set comprising every place-name and its lexical meaning in use by the Onondaga today is needed. A major contribution of the geographer will be to map these data and then interpret the resultant map. Representing a complete set of locations extracted and divorced from the multiplicity and complexity found in the larger set of white place names, such a map should reveal the distribution and nature of all places of significance to contemporary Onondaga society. In short, this map will reflect a total picture of current Onondaga spatial interaction. I suspect this place-name map will reveal a simpler, more intensively focused, and less spatially extensive lifestyle than that of white society. In sum, Onondaga place-name analysis can serve to reveal an Indian geography or, in other words, a geography of landscape from an Indian point of view.

Although many studies have been done concerning Indian place-names, non-Indian scholars writing in the literature lack intimate knowledge of Indian culture, language, and perception. Clearly, Indian scholars

also are needed to write about their place-names. However, until such time as this may occur, more work with Indian informants is suggested. On a larger scale, a systematic and comprehensive national survey of contemporary Indian place-names needs to be undertaken.

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Notes:

[1]The importance of Iroquois Indian place-name analysis can be dramatically illustrated by a fascinating historical occurrence between the Tuscarora Indians and the Iroquois. The persecuted Tuscarora of North Carolina wished to join the Iroquois Confederation or League of Five Nations of New York for reasons of protection and security. In addition to similarity in language structure, the Tuscarora used the commonality of place-names shared with the Iroquois to show that they had at one time also resided in the New York area but had since migrated to North Carolina. The close similarity of Iroquois and Tuscarora place-names held in common for places along the Tuscarora migration route from Montreal to the Mississippi River was sufficient and convincing evidence to satisfactorily prove a common origin and identity. As a result of this action the claim of kinship was accepted by the Iroquois and the Tuscarora were repatriated to New York state to become the sixth nation of the Iroquois Confederation (Morgan, 1851, 44).

[2]The principal of the Onondaga Reservation School, Mr. Lloyd Elm, himself an Onondaga familiar with the language, was personally interested in my project and noted its educational merit. However, he declined to discuss Onondaga place-names because of reservation policy. He did provide the names of two community members he thought would cooperate. When contacted, one declined to discuss Onondaga place-names respecting this reservation policy; the other was subsequently interviewed. Additionally, a second informant was found through the help of a priest familiar with the Onondaga community. I was told by the Onondaga that the Mohawk Iroquois are more liberal and might assist in this study of the Iroquois language. It should be possible, therefore, to make operational an in-depth analysis of Iroquois place-names with a working knowledge of Iroquois learned from the Mohawks.

[3]Two Onondaga informants from the reservation, fluent in their language, were interviewed. The late Del Logan not only conducted language classes for Indian adults on the reservation and worked with non-Indian scholars, but she taught Indian Culture at Auburn Community College. The second informant, Mrs. Edna Pierce, has given presentations to community groups on Indian culture.

[4]Adams, 100.

[5]Holmer, 14; Morgan 413.

[6]Morgan, 413, 415; Lownsbury, 25.

Further, these are neither extremely different nor unusual practices as compared to our own methods and uses of place-naming as follows:

(A) A particular place-name applied to several similar features – e.g., main street, downtown, countryside,

(B) A number of different place-names referencing a particular feature – e.g., New York City, Big Apple; Detroit, Motor City, Motown,

(C) A place-name for a particular feature changing through time – e.g., New Amsterdam, New York; Cape Canaveral, Cape Kennedy, Cape Canaveral; Fort Orange, Albany.

[7]Flick, 299.

[8]Rydjord, 270.

[9]Holmer, 43; Adams, 125.

[10]Bolton, 51.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Twenty of the 62 counties of New York state have Indian names.

[13]Flick, 297.

[14]Beauchamp, (1893). It should be mentioned that, likewise, Indian designations are sometimes added in this manner.

[15]Flick, 296, notes that of the 4500 Indian place-names recorded by Beauchamp for New York state, only 500 still survived.

[16]As important matters of concern to all six Iroquois tribes are discussed in Council at the Onondaga longhouse, the Onondaga dialect represents the mandatory, official, court usage of the Iroquois.

[17]Bonvillain, 32. Note that interlinguistic borrowing is rather unilateral.

[18]An example quoted from one informant of a place-name reflecting functional significance is:

> In those days, they had nothing but farms and so they would have to take their horses somewhere to be shod. And so there was one man up there who was a blacksmith, and so they referred to that town as 'home of the blacksmith.' But it doesn't mean Lafayette. They say 'O-wes-to'-nes,' which we say (means) 'he makes the silver stuff.' We have a word in our language for silver, because it was part of our way of life . . . In order to tell somebody at home or when they met anybody, they'd say, 'I'm going to get shoes for the horse, or fix the wagon. So they would go to Lafayette. That's 'Gah-wes-to'-dah,' the silversmith. They know he's a smitty, but we don't have a (word for) blacksmith in our language, so we say 'Gah-wes-to'-dah.' It's not even in our regular way of speaking. We don't have a word for it. So it's suggestive and it's a word taken from our vocabulary, but otherwise we'd never use it.

An example quoted from one informant showing how a distinctive characteristic influenced a place-name is:

> In the olden days, they didn't have any of the surrounding towns that they got now. And so the towns that they used in the past, like the little town that might have had what they call an Indian Agent, (who) was a notary, who just takes down official things, like if your son or daughter is Onondaga and they're entitled to treaty rights, and they get their checks off that. So they would go to a place like South Onondaga, which was the home of one of the agents. So our people from the reservation would go there. And in order to tell somebody else where they are going, they made a suggestive name. It doesn't mean South Onondaga. They say 'Gin-do'-tah.' And that means 'large tree.' Apparently, in the town there was a large tree, a great big tree, and a watering trough underneath it. So they referred to it as that town having a huge tree.

Another quoted example is:

> They might have gone to what they (whites) call Elmwood here, or toward Solvay, in that area. But their first impression was that there was a little store, or maybe a cigar store, in Elmwood. And they had a huge sign and there was a cigar on it. And so, the people that were going in that direction would say 'Go-se-gin'-took' . . . This means 'A huge cigar hanging' . . . Because, that's the first impression they got, of this great big sign.

[19]A quote from an informant illustrates this practice:

> If you . . . sat down with me to have something to eat and there was . . . mayonnaise, peanut butter, (butter, and bacon fat) on the table, and you had a piece of bread and you wanted (to) butter (it) . . . In our language we don't have any word for them, but we know what we mean . . . We would say, 'Gah-sun'-tah-gah O-wes-saht' ' (Give to me what we spread on the bread). It can be butter; it can be peanut butter; it can be mayonnaise; it can be bacon fat. But we know what we're talking about. But you (in white society) specifically . . . say I'd like peanut butter; I'd like mayonnaise,' whatever. (If all four sandwich spreads were present, to designate the one you want) . . . your hostess would say, 'This?' (peanut butter) 'No.' 'This?' (mayonnaise) 'No.' And then the one you said yes to (butter) would be it. But it still has to be ''Wes-saht'.'' (what we spread on bread). There's no butter (a specific term) involved.

The above example represents the conceptual approach of the Onondaga in dealing with introduced items for which they have no name. This logic of using a general designation applies to place-names as well.

[20]Holmer, 27.

[21]Ibid., 26.

[22]I selected two variations of the same term, the first by Beauchamp (1893) and the second by Morgan, to illustrate differences which occurred in recording and translating as discussed previously.

[23]Note the difference in pronunciation between these two forms.

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