Names Forum

Indian Names In Michigan: Reply To Professor Callary

I bow briefly to Edward Callary's rather copious praise in the first half his unusually long review and proceed to the ramainder, to which a reply seems necessary. *Michigan*, he says, in supposed summary of my text, is from general Algonquian, as distinguished from Algonquin (392). I know of Algonquian languages and of the Algonquin language, but I do not know what "general Algonquian" is.

Professor Callary is much concerned over what is the proper definition of an Indian name, and believes I have overstretched it (395). Much ado about nothing. If one looks for exactitude in this area, it will not be found. I indicated here and there that my focus was on the cultural impact of names related to Indians (67, 81, 91, 152, 176). I used those names relevant to this purpose, and leave it to others to debate on precise labels for everything. *Decorah* is a name which evolved from French into a common family name among the Winnebago (Vogel, *Iowa*, 16). In one of its many spellings, *Decorra*, it was once on the Michigan map. What should we call it now? Who cares? *Shavehead, Noon Day,* and *White Pigeon* are English translations of Potawatomi names. Should they be excluded from consideration because they are from the language of the conquerors? Bertrand and Edwards are European names adopted by certain Indian families (Vogel, *Michigan* 27, 35, 44, 51, 57). They are not Indian names, but they are the names of Indians. One can compile a long list of such names, and to exclude them would deprive our map of the names of many prominent Indians. The story is the thing, not the label.

Likewise with cultural or commemorative names. If a place is called *Battle Creek* because of a skirmish involving Indians, it is relevant to my story. Let others debate over how many Indians can dance on the head of a tomahawk.

Professor Callary, citing *Podunk* and *Peoria,* holds that when we borrow an Indian name and forget where we got it, it becomes "less Indian" (395-96).

I can agree that a name becomes "less Indian" if we mangle it a good deal in the transition, but the degree of our usage is not the determining factor, if that matters. George Friederici has listed over 1200 Amerindian words adopted into English, and most people are not aware of their origin. I suppose that makes them non-Indian, by the above logic.

Professor Callary finds "vexing questions" in my listing of English language place names which are translations, and often closely paired on the map with their native counterparts: (e.g., *Chief, Ogemaw*). He wonders if they should be called Indian names (396). Who cares? I find them an example of aboriginal influence, direct or indirect, and care not what label is placed on them. The substance is the thing, not taxonomy.

Professor Callary asserts that I believe onomastic research can be pursued "without considering the potential contributions of linguistics." He adds that "history and language cannot be separated so conveniently . . . ; the one cannot be fully informed without the other" (396). I don't see how Professor Callary fails to see that I have been saying those things for years and have tried, perhaps imperfectly, to follow those ideas in my writing. In all of my major work, I have called for the use of expertise from both these fields and others. In *Indian Place Names in Illinois* (1963) I said, however, that "linguistic methods alone often fail to produce the right answers, and historical accounts, for all their shortcomings, cannot safely be disregarded" (6). In *Iowa Place Names of Indian Origin* (1983) I said: "I have sought counsel from the language experts, through their writings and in person, to learn what I could" (xiii-xiv). In a talk at the American Society for Ethnohistory in St. Paul in 1974, I said:

> Perils await the unwary who believe it is enough to understand the language alone, or historical methods only. The linguists are needed, among other things, to define the language stocks and their relationships, to provide phonetic systems, evaluations of source materials, and explanations of the principles of grammar, syntax and word order peculiar to the languages used. Historians are needed to determine where each tribe lived and during what periods of time they occupied certain areas, and to furnish information on settlement patterns of white people [because of transfer names].

I have always agreed with points made by Morris Swadesh in a talk to the American Anthropological Association in December 1957: "Specialists in each field of research should try to fight free from any tendency to limit their efforts to a favorite procedure or to close their minds to the clues derived from other forms of study and from other disciplines." I have found some value in the writings of Leonard Bloomfield, Wallace Chafe, Joseph Greenberg, Charles Hockett, Harry Hoijer, Floyd Lounsberry, Truman Michelson, Edward Sapir, J. H. Trumbull and others. But one must add that these and other linguists have seldom written about placenames. Nearly always (Trumbull excepted) they have confined themselves to their highly specialized fields and have shown little interest in wider applications. They are, I have discovered, subject to error when they ignore history, as they sometimes do, and also when they do not. As George Stewart aptly put it, when Indians are concerned, the testimony of early travelers, who had contacts with the Indians, seems "more authoritative than any researches of modern linguistics can possibly be" (xii). It is worth noticing that when the 1966 membership roll of the American Name Society was compiled according to fields of interest, only eight persons listed Indian names as one of their interests.

Professor Callary believes I should have avoided confusion of differing phonetic systems by using the International Phonetic Alphabet (397). The problem is, that would require more expertise in each of a dozen or more languages than one person, certainly this person, possesses. Fannie Eckstorm, in her excellent work, *Indian Place Names of the Penobscot Valley and Maine Coast,* quite sensibly wrote: "There are three solid reasons for not attempting phonetic representation of Indian words: the printer could not print them, the reader could not read them, and the writer could not write them" (xiii). Such precious candor is rare.

Professor Callary is disturbed because I reproduce the varying phonetic symbols used in my sources without explaining them (397-98). I reproduce them because I was taught in graduate school that quoted or cited material must be reproduced exactly as in the original. Explaining them is not feasible, however, for two reasons: frequently there is no explanation in the source and, in any case, that would be a space-consuming digression that would be of interest only to specialists. People who live in Dowagiac already have a way of pronouncing it, but they would like to know where the name came from and what it means. Mr. Callary wants an explanation of the differing diacritical marks, or their absence. I cannot provide what the original authors did not provide.

I am particularly disturbed that Professor Callary faults me for recording different spellings for names like *Pokagon* without explanation (397). I made clear that the variations were given as they were found in treaties and other documents, and it is a little too much to demand that I explain what was in the minds of the original recorders. Frequently a treaty clerk would spell a name different ways in the same treaty. Only God knows why. Mr. Callary seeks to see in those varieties the operation of some theoretical principles or the effects of historical change. Sorry, but I cannot buy that. My best explanation is very mundane: the clerks were undereducated and careless. Callary's guess that they were perhaps "perceptive and conscientious recorders of the language" prompts me to advise him to read a few of the 372 ratified Indian treaties and find out for himself. Moreover, while the spelling of tribal names was standardized by the Bureau of American Ethnology about eighty years ago, the same is not true of Indian personal names. Therefore, I can only show them as they are on the map and in the sources.

Professor Callary charges that I rely upon "linguistic misinformation" and perpetuate "myths which were rejected by linguists decades ago" (398). I am unable to answer this adequately because Callary does not provide specifics enough. Also, I think he overlooks differences within the profession. Consider for example the differences between Sapir and Hoijer on classification. Callary cites my reference to the lack of distinction between *b* and *p* in contemporary Ojibwa. He says I got this idea from Baraga, and he quotes Nichols to the contrary (v). However, I have found this *b* and *p* matter mentioned in several places, as well as in early vocabularies, and not only in Ojibwa. Eckstorm, speaking of Maine Indians, says "They do not, perhaps cannot, distinguish *p* and *b*, saying 'Penobscot' and 'Bemopscot' indifferently and the shift from *p* to *b* may occur in almost any word" (xxiii). It appears that for every expert opinion there is a counter opinion.

My reason for mentioning the *p* and *b* problem was not to create or take sides in a controversy but to illustrate for a general reader why an Ojibwa name such as *bibon* 'winter' can appear on the map and in literature as *Peboan*, or why *Pabama* may be related to *babamisse* or *babamosse*. In the latter instance, Callary is disturbed about "the same morpheme" being used in slightly different forms here (397). Yet I plainly state that these are the forms used by Baraga. I report what I find, but I feel no compulsion to theorize about the intention of every source.

Vogel

Professor Callary charges that I explain all variations as corruptions, usually by whites, when in fact, he argues, they may represent natural language evolution. He cites my illustration of *Kish-kau-ko* and *Kawkawlin* (399). But the Indians did not introduce the "l" sound into this word; the whites did, and so I call that a corruption.

He says that "the notion that language change is 'corruption' or 'degeneration' has never had any empirical support" (399). May I ask, is it language change, or is it corruption, when some fool treaty clerk mangles an Indian name so badly that no one on earth can explain it, and the mangled form is frozen forever in maps and documents? In my discussion of Missaukee I made clear that not all variants are corruptions, but some are (*Baw Beese*). The Indians likewise corrupted French when they made Chevalier into *Shobonier*, Champ de Blé into *Shabbona*, and Marie into *Monee* (see Vogel, *Illinois*).

I heartily agree with Callary's remark that when we deal with the prehistory of a language "we have no way of knowing . . . what the oldest and thereby 'correct' form is (or was)" (399). However, all names that I have dealt with are from the historic period, and their evolutions can be traced through documents. But while Callary delivers this warning about prehistory, he relies upon proto-Algonquian in note 10 and below. Is not proto-Algonquian based on the same kind of speculation he deplores when he says "we have no way of knowing . . ."?

Callary cites an article by Ives Goddard which professes to find rather sharp changes in several Algonquian languages in the historic period (399). I have reservations about this, however, because of the fragmentary examples that are furnished, and also the lack of precision and uniformity in tribal nomenclature over the years, not to mention the possibility of error by the recorders. On classification (nomenclature of tribes) I cite one example from my experience. Gatschet's 1904 "Peoria Lexicon" has terms more nearly matching older Miami forms in Volney and elsewhere than its more natural ally, Kaskaskia dialect as recorded by Boullenger. This may indicate that the Oklahoma Peorias of Gatschet's time had been physically and culturally absorbed by their Miami neighbors. Again, early writers used terms such as Saulteaux and Algonquin more loosely than is now done.

I have chosen not to rely upon proto-Algonquian because it has a long way to go before it is firmly established, as I see it. George F. Aubin's *Proto-Algonquian Dictionary* contains only 2294 terms from eleven authors, some of whom disagree among themselves.

On another issue, when I remark that there is no *l* sound in Ojibwa, I sidestep speculative references, especially suppositions about prehistoric forms, whereupon I am charged with being of two minds (400). It appears to me that Callary has two minds. In one instance, we cannot guess about the past, but in another we should, according to him. Apparently he wants me to explain why there is no *l* in contemporary Ojibwa (or in any Ojibwa of the historic period). I cannot do that, and I do not know who can.

Much of what Professor Callary demands of me falls in the category of those pedantic disquisitions that it was my declared purpose to avoid. I have no apology to make for following the methods of my own discipline, history, while utilizing what I find useful from linguistic material. It is unfair that Callary charges, again, that I believe "that linguistics is not particularly relevant to historic/ethnographic research on names" (399-400). I have repeatedly paid my respects to those scholars, to the best of my ability.

If there are some onomasticians among the linguists, I wish that they would write a few placename books (especially Indian place name books) for the enlightenment of folks like me. Meanwhile, I am not trying to be one of them, but just to be a recorder of some marginal aspects of American cultural history.

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