

Algonquian Names

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With reference to Edward Taube's article "Tribal Names Related With Algonkin" (*Names*, June 1955) I find myself at variance with some of the views expressed by the author.

Tribal names are from place names. — It is the author's persuasion that the Algonquian place names of the Atlantic coastal area are corrupted tribal names. This opinion is contrary to the fact that for many of these names Algonquian scholars have found a definite, demonstrable place name translation. My thesis, *The Origin and Meaning of the Indian Place Names of Maryland* (University of Maryland, 1954), points out that the Algonquian tribal names of Maryland are primarily stream names, and that the application of the names of these streams to the Indians tribes living upon their banks was entirely secondary. Thus (so I maintain) the Wicomico Indians got their name from the river name, *Wicomico* (Proto-Algonquian stem **wik-*, 'dwell'¹); and the Pocomoke Indians got their name from the river name, *Pocomoco* (PA **pōxkwi-*, 'pierce'). That these completely different words are found together as names of the same stream means only that early observers made a geographical error. Of the watercourses of Maryland and Virginia, Captain John Smith² made an observation that no Algonquianist has successfully disproved: "The most of these rivers are inhabited by several nations, or rather families, of the names of the rivers."

Pakwaminikewininug is untenable. — Mr. Taube believes that *Abnaki*, *Accomac*, *Algonkin*, *Mahican* (*Mohegan*), and "many others besides," are all corrupted cognates of one ancestral name; and he

¹ Starred forms are Proto-Algonquian stems (PA).

² *A Map of Virginia...* ([*Original Narratives of Early American History*, ed., Jameson] *Narratives of Early Virginia*, p. 84). Italics mine.

has reconstructed that name as *pakwaminikewininug*, 'hominy makers.' Mr. Taube was guided to this word by the importance to the Algonquians of crushed Indian corn or hominy. On this principle he could as properly have set up a word having to do with fishing or the chase.

The scientific reconstruction of Proto-Algonquian words consists of comparing authentic dictionary and spoken form of the same stem in various dialects and then (following rigid sound laws) determining what their underlying Proto-Algonquian archetype must have been. Mr. Taube's *pakwaminikewininug* is not proposed as a Proto-Algonquian word; nor does Mr. Taube seem to follow the methods one would use to construct such a word.

Reasoning that the PA **pōxkwi-* in *Pocomoke* referred to the crushing of corn, because the Pocomoke Indians had important corn fields, Mr. Taube adds PA **pōxkwi* ('pierce,' 'break') to PA **-min* ('grain'). And he concludes that a resulting *pakwaminan* gave rise to the dictionary word *hominy*. In this way, though he gives no grammatical discussion, he tries to account for the *ho* of *hominy*. Dr. William Jones³, however, did not venture to give an initial stem for *hominy*. He merely declared that the word contains *-mīn*, 'grain,' and an unknown preceding modifying stem. To contend that the *ho-* of *hominy* is an abbreviation of PA **pōxkwi* is inconsistent with the fact that this *ho-* is found in words where *not* PA **pōxkwi* but *other* initial stems are present (viz., *tack-hummin*, *rockohominy*)!

Algonquian sound shifts are disregarded. — Throughout Mr. Taube's article actual tribal and place names are linguistically equated to *pakwaminikewininug*. I shall consider seven of his separate phonetic equations and one group.

1. *Pocomoke* is from *pakwaminik*...

Objection: a. What proof is there that *Pocomoke* is a fragment of any appreciably longer word? No record of a longer form has been found.

b. *Pocomoke* can be satisfactorily explained as 'It is pierced or broken ground' (PA **pōxkwi-* 'pierce' PLUS PA **axkami-* 'ground' PLUS the inanimate copula *-at-* PLUS the third singular inanimate

³ F. W. Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians*, Part I, p. 558 ("Hominy," signed by A. F. C., and J. N. B. H.). The information given by Dr. Jones is dated 1906.

ending *-ki* [with the *-at-ki* becoming *-aki*, and the entire word being shortened to *Pocomoke* by haplology].

c. Mr. Taube does not give a clear phonetic rationale of how the *-minike...* of *pakwaminike...* became the *-moke* of *Pocomoke*.

2. *Wicomoco* is from *pakwaminikewininug*.

Objection: a. Mr. Taube speaks of an *m* that "developed through syncope." His meaning is not clear.

b. *Wicomico* can be explained as 'dwelling enclosure,' it being plain that it contains PA **wik-*, 'dwell' (cf., *wigwam*, *wickiup*).

c. For *Wicomico* to be a corrupted fragment of *pakwaminikewininug* *p* would have to have become *w*. This in Algonquian is a phonetic impossibility.

3. *Raonoak* and *Hocomawananck* are from *pakwaminikewininug*.

Objection: This could be true only if *r* and *h* could develop from *p*. In Algonquian that is impossible.

4. Mr. Taube suggests a connection between *Conoy*, the name of the erstwhile Piscataways of southern Maryland, and "the place names Wiconowe 1638 (Onancock Cr.) and Wicoconu 1664 (Wicomico R.)."

Objection: a. Mooney and Townsend⁴ thought that *Conoy* was a linguistic variant of *Kanawha*.

b. *Conoy* can be explained as coming from PA **kenweewi*, 'It is long' (cf., Delaware *guneu*, 'long').

5. "Rockaway shows development of *r* from initial *p*, just as *Morhicans*, *Waoranecks*, and *Raonoak* exhibit *r* produced through weakening of various other sounds."

Objection: a. No amount of "weakening" can cause an Algonquian *r* to develop from *p*. Algonquian *r* is a dialectal variant of either PA **I* (which gives the *r* in such Powhatan words as *rakawh*, 'sand') or PA **θ* (which gives the *r* in such Powhatan words as *Rappahannock* [PA **θāpahanaki*]).

b. The *r* in *Rockaway*, for instance, is from PA **lexua*, 'sand,' which usually appears as *rockua* (*Rahway*, N. J., *Rockawalking*, Md.).

6. Mr. Taube states that *Wicomoco*ns in Maryland "echoes" *Algoumequins* in Quebec.

⁴ Hodge, *op. cit.*, I, 339-340 ("Conoy," signed by J. M. and C. T.).

Objection: a. It is phonetically impracticable for an Algonquian *Algo...* to give *Wico...*, or vice versa.

b. The two words cannot be related: Hewitt⁵ derives *Algonkin* (*Algonquian*) from Micmac *aloomaking*, 'at the place of spearing fish and eels...'; and in *Wicomico* is the demonstrable PA **wīk-*, 'dwell.'

7. "... Kinibeki in Maine matches Quinebaug and Quinnipiac in Connecticut as well as Konowiki in Pennsylvania."

Objection: a. These Maine and Connecticut place names are no doubt one and the same. It is usual for the same Indian river name to be applied all along the Atlantic coast to streams that have in common the particular meaning of that name (e. g., *Pawtucket*, *Patuxent*, 'Little falls').

b. But *Konowiki* (cf., Conowingo) is a different name. Phonetically it is not feasible for an Algonquian *-begi* (*-baug*, *-piac* [cf., *Chesapeake*]) to "match" *-wiki*.

8. Mr. Taube gives a final list of twenty-two words beginning with *p*. These words (so he contends) are fragments of *pakwaminikewininug*.

Objection: a. Some of these names are Maryland place names. These I have shown (Thesis, 1951) to contain stems different from PA **pōxkwi*, 'pierce,' 'break.' b. Others (beginning with *Peor...*, *Pu...*, *Pam...*, etc.) have nothing in common with PA **pōxkwi* except the initial *p*. c. The remaining ones have a slight similarity to *pakwaminikewininug* on account of the abundance in Algonquian of *p* and *k* syllables.

Modern Algonquian scholarship. — Mr. Taube states that the Indians, telling their ethnic names to the settlers, "did not speak distinctly." But Algonquian is—and was then—a highly inflected, polysynthetic tongue, replete with a copious vocabulary, and operating on demonstrable and consistent phonetic principles. Truman Michelson⁶ and Leonard Bloomfield⁷—taking up the work begun

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 38 ("Algonkin": etymology attributed to "Hewitt," article signed by J. M. and C. T.).

⁶ He was the first to apply Indo-European techniques to the study of Algonquian.

⁷ "Algonquian," *Linguistic Structures of Native America* ([Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology, Number Six] New York, 1946), pp. 85–129.

by the ill-fated Dr. William Jones—⁸in large measure reconstructed the Proto-Algonquian language. And the labors of Father James A. Geary,⁹ Frank Siebert¹⁰ and C. F. Voegelin¹¹ have untangled the Algonquian dialects, clarified certain Proto-Algonquian clusters, and verified the intuitions of Joseph Howse (1844) and W. R. Gerard (1904). Present day Algonquian etymology is based on a matrix of authentic PA prototypes. The study of Algonquian is a linguistic discipline; it has a system of orderly sound laws that must be reckoned with. Algonquian is spoken as distinctly as any standard language; it is as impervious to the workings of “polymorphic corruption” as English or French or Greek.

Mr. Taube seems to disregard the technical linguistic science, Algonquian. He does not mention either its originators or its principles. He lists J. H. Trumbull and W. W. Tooker in his notes; but those scholars have long been outmoded. He cites *hominny* in Hodge’s *Handbook*; but he does not prove the correctness of his addition of PA **pōxkwī-* to *hōminny*. The noteworthy dictionaries of Lacombe, Lemoine and Tims are mentioned; yet one sees no paginated citations from them. Mr. Taube’s hypothesis about “polymorphic corruption” and the Algonquian language is an interesting one; but the student will look in vain for any substantiation of it in the annals of modern Algonquian philology.

⁸ Dr. Jones (Ph. D. Columbia, 1904; murdered in Philippines in 1909; life by Henry Rideout) was of Algonquian (Fox) ancestry. His Columbia doctoral dissertation, *Some Principles of Algonquian Word Formation*, was later expanded into the grammatical sketch of Fox in Boas’ *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (Bulletin 40, BAE).

⁹ The author of important articles on Proto-Algonquian and on the subjunctive and changed conjunct in Fox. See *Language*, 17:4 and 19:2; also, *IJAL*, XI:3, XII:2, and XII:4.

¹⁰ “Certain Proto-Algonquian Consonant Clusters,” *Language* 17:298–303. October–December 1941.

¹¹ “Delaware, An Eastern Algonquian Language,” *Linguistic Structures of Native America* (Viking Fund Publications, Number Six, New York: 1946), 130–157.