

# On the Origins of “Pickawillany”

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“Pickawillany” is the usual English name of a colonial-era Miami village located in western Ohio on the Great Miami River, near the site of present-day Piqua, in Miami County, Ohio. There have been many attempts to explain the etymology of “Pickawillany” as being related to “Piqua,” with a meaning “Place of the Ashes.” Using data drawn from various Algonquian languages, I will show that not only will this etymology not work, but I will demonstrate that the true etymology of “Pickawillany” is from the Shawnee name for the Miamis, and is unrelated to the word “Piqua.”

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“Pickawillany” is the usual English name of a colonial-era Miami village located in western Ohio on the Great Miami River (Tanner, 1986: 44), near the site of present-day Piqua, in Miami County, Ohio. Pickawillany was founded in 1748 by the Miami chief La Demoiselle, and was destroyed by the French and their Indian allies in June 1752. In Costa (2000: 43–44), I pointed out that “Pickawillany” was obviously the same word as the primary name for the Miami in the Shawnee language, *pkiiwileni*.<sup>1</sup> However, at the time of the writing of Costa (2000), I was not able to offer an etymology for *pkiiwileni*.

Not many etymologies have been offered for “Pickawillany,” and those that have been offered are rather half-hearted. Usually, it is assumed that the name “Pickawillany” is somehow related to the name of the Ohio village “Piqua”; on Ohio Archaeology Blog, sponsored by the Ohio Historical Society, it is stated that “Linguistically the word Pickawillany is thought to be of Shawnee derivation roughly translating to ‘Place of the Ashes.’ The same linguistic root appears in Ohio place names such as Piqua and Pickaway as well as Peckew, one of the five Shawnee clans or septs” (<<http://ohio-archaeology.blogspot.com/2007/03/some-thoughts-on-pickawillany-1748-1752.html>>). However, when one analyzes the original forms in the Algonquian languages in question, it can be seen that this etymology is not viable.

In order to determine the etymology of “Pickawillany,” it is necessary first to discuss the etymology of the name “Piqua.” “Piqua” was in fact the name of at least

five different Shawnee villages; the first, Piqua 1, was occupied in the 1770s near the Scioto River in Ohio; the second, Piqua 2, was located on the Mad River in Ohio in 1777; Piqua 3 was located at the site of present-day Piqua in 1780; Piqua 4 was located on the Upper Mad River in Ohio in 1782; and Piqua 5 was located near the Miami village of Kekionga on the Upper Maumee River in Indiana in 1790 (Tanner, 1986: 80, 85, 89). The name "Piqua" is from the Shawnee word *pekowi*, which is the name of one of the five original divisions of the Shawnee tribe (Callender, 1978: 623, 634; Voegelin, 1938–1940: 81). This indicates that the Piqua towns were occupied by Shawnees of the *pekowi* division, who simply named their villages after themselves when they moved (Callender, 1978: 623).

The linguist Carl Voegelin himself first acknowledged the etymology of *pekowi* when he included the Shawnee noun *pekowĩθa* (meaning a member of the *pekowi* division) under the same entry as *pekwi* "ashes, dust" in his Shawnee lexicon (Voegelin, 1938–1940: 81). *Pekowĩθa* is itself a diminutive animate noun derived from *pekwi*, thus meaning "(little) ash person." Most likely *pekowi* was secondarily derived from *pekowĩθa* to designate the division of the "ash people."

Moreover, this notion of Piqua deriving from the word for "ash" is echoed by Bureau of American Ethnology linguist Albert Gatschet (no date) in his Miami-Illinois fieldwork in the 1890s: Gatschet obtained two forms, ⟨pingwe mitusseniaki⟩ and ⟨pingwawilaniaki⟩, both of which he glosses as "the present Miami name for Pickawillany, with the meaning 'people of the ashes.'" Of ⟨pingwawilaniaki⟩, Gatschet further adds "people of the ashes are the Peorias, or Pickawillany."

The first of these two forms can be phonemicized as Miami-Illinois *pinkwi mihtohseeniaki*, a phrase transparently meaning "ash people" (Miami-Illinois *pinkwi* "ash" being cognate with Shawnee *pekwi*). The second form, *pinkwaawileniaki*, meaning basically the same thing, is a plural noun containing an initial form of the word for "ash," followed by a final derived from Miami-Illinois *alenia* "man."

While Gatschet's identification of the Pickawillany people as Peorias can be dismissed, these forms are nevertheless valuable for indicating that, even in the late nineteenth century, Miami-Illinois speakers still remembered these two forms as the native names of Miami-Illinois-speaking bands and connected them to Pickawillany. Moreover, they confirm that the Miami-Illinois name for Pickawillany shared the same "ash" etymology as the name the Shawnee used for their *pekowi* division.

However, the problem with determining the etymology of "Pickawillany" is that Shawnee *pkiiwileni* "Miami" **cannot** be cognate with Shawnee *pekowi*, nor with either of the Miami-Illinois names for the Pickawillany band. The Shawnee and Miami-Illinois words for "ashes," *pekwi* and *pinkwi* respectively, both regularly derive from Proto-Algonquian *\*penkwi* "ash, dust." It is impossible for this etymon to be related to Shawnee *pkiiwileni* since there is no way the "ash" word could undergo the deletion of the first-syllable vowel seen in *pkiiwileni*. The initial *pk*-sequence in this word points to older *pVhk*- (explicitly seen in the Trowbridge's transcription of the plural as ⟨peekeeweeleneekēē⟩), and does not match the plain *pVk*- sequence found in the Shawnee *pekwi* "ash." Thus, *pkiiwileni* cannot derive from Proto-Algonquian *\*penkwi* "ash," nor can it be related to *pekowi*, and there is thus no connection between the names Pickawillany and Piqua, despite their superficial phonetic resemblance.<sup>2</sup>

As it turns out, the true etymology of Shawnee *pkiiwilēni* lies in an entirely separate root. In Shawnee itself, this root is attested in the verb *pkiinaakoθi* “he looks different, strange,”<sup>3</sup> with an initial component meaning “strange, foreign.” Among the sister languages of Shawnee, this root is even better documented; note the Meskwaki verbs *pehki-na-kosiwa* “he looks foreign” and *pehkiwa* “he is different, is someone else, of another family, clan, or tribe,”<sup>4</sup> as well as the Illinois verb *pibkiwa* and its participle *pehkita* “he is a stranger, an outsider,” variously glossed as “etranger” and “un autre.”<sup>5</sup> Even more compellingly for the connection between these verbs and Shawnee *pkiiwilēni*, there is Kickapoo *pehkita* “Potawatomi,” and, especially, Meskwaki and Sauk *pehki-neni-ha* “Potawatomi.” The Kickapoo, Sauk, and Meskwaki names for the Potawatomi all clearly mean “outsider, stranger”:<sup>6</sup> Kickapoo *pehkita* is in origin simply an animate intransitive participle, exactly matching Illinois *pehkita* “un autre,” meaning “one who is an outsider.” Meskwaki and Sauk *pehki-neni-ha* contain the same morpheme, plus the “man” final (and the diminutive ending *-i-ha*). Shawnee *pkiiwilēni* “Miami” shares the same initial “foreigner, stranger” morpheme, as well as a cognate final related to Shawnee *hileni* “man.” Thus, Shawnee *pkiiwilēni* “Miami” can be seen to derive from a word meaning “outsider, foreigner,” presumably a name given by the Shawnees to the Miamis when they settled near them in the village later known as Pickawillany.

Thus, while it is clear that there is no etymological connection between Shawnee *pekowi* (Piqua) and *pkiiwilēni* (Pickawillany), this leaves open the question of why Miami-Illinois speakers referred to the Pickawillany band as *pinkwaawilēniaki* and *pinkwi mihtohseeniaki*, which **do** explicitly mean “ash people” (just like Shawnee *pekowiθa*). It appears that Miami speakers made the same confusion between *pkiiwilēni* and *pekowi* that English-speakers later did: presented with two phonetically similar forms from a foreign language (Shawnee), neither of which was matched in Miami, and the knowledge that *pekowi* meant “ash people,” the two terms were conflated, and calqued in Miami into terms that explicitly **did** mean “ash people”: *pinkwaawilēniaki* and *pinkwi mihtohseeniaki*. In other words, the Miamis gave the village of Pickawillany a name that was a literal translation of the similar, and semantically related *pekowiθa*.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Voegelin never published this word, though it is found in this form in his unpublished notes. Moreover, Gatschet (1879–1880) gives it as *·pkiwi=lēni* “Miami” in his unpublished Shawnee fieldnotes, and Charles Trowbridge (1939: 66) gives a plural form *·peekeeweeleneekēē* “Miamis.” Additionally, George Washington wrote the name of the village as *·pik-kavilinua* (see McCafferty, 2008: 216). In Voegelin’s Shawnee lexicon (1938–1940: 352), the only name given for the Miamis is *loowaani*, which is unattested in anyone else’s notes, and of unknown etymology.
- <sup>2</sup> In further support of the fact that Pickawillany and Piqua are not “the same name” is the fact that the first village of Piqua does not appear until the 1770s, some twenty years after the village of Pickawillany was destroyed.
- <sup>3</sup> This form is phonemicized from the original form *·pkinakúθi*, found in Albert Gatschet’s (1879–1880) nineteenth-century Shawnee fieldnotes.
- <sup>4</sup> Ives Goddard, personal communication. In Meskwaki an extended form of this initial, *pehki-n-*, is also seen in several derived forms such as *pehki-nina-kosiwa* “he looks foreign,” *pehki-na-towe-wa* “he speaks a different language,” and *pehki-nikenwi* “it is different” (Goddard, 1994).
- <sup>5</sup> The form *pibkiwa* is found in LeBoullenger’s and Gravier’s Illinois dictionaries as *·piki8a*, while Gravier’s dictionary also has *·pekita*.
- <sup>6</sup> In his 1895 Sauk fieldnotes, Albert Gatschet explicitly says that *pehki-neni-ha* literally means “stranger,” something which his speaker presumably told him.

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