



## Book Review

**The Names of the Wyandot.** BY JOHN STECKLEY. Oakville, Ontario: Rock's Mills Press. 2023. Pp. 291. (Paperback) \$13.44 CAD. ISBN 13: 978-1-77244-264-9.

While the topics of Indigenous place names and plant and animal terminology have received considerable interest in past naming literature, Indigenous personal names have garnered comparatively less attention. This book offers insight into the latter aspect through linguistic and cultural analysis of Wyandot personal naming conventions for those who gave and received these names, as well as those who recorded them. It also explores how these conventions evolved over time in response to linguistic and social contact throughout written history.

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of Indigenous names and some cultural nuances of the acts of naming; here, the sources used throughout the book are given, with a brief overview of each, as well as their importance, historical context, and authors' backgrounds. This chapter also includes an outline of the book's structure, a comparison of features of Wyandot and closely related language varieties, and an explanation of the Jesuit writing system used for early documentation of the names, together with Steckley's system. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive overview of the grammatical elements of Wyandot name construction, using the names themselves to demonstrate pronominal prefixes, verb roots, aspect, pre-pronominal prefixes, nominal roots and suffixes, clitics, and particles. An understanding of these components is necessary for translation, interpretation, and overall understanding of not only the names under study but also any Iroquoian name. Chapter 3 discusses gender within the context of Wyandot names, both addressing grammatical aspects and highlighting the issue of gender bias in the recording of the names. In particular, Steckley notes the underrepresentation of female names in the archival sources. This chapter also presents a statistical analysis of the use of certain roots which are connected to particular clans in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 marks an important discussion on nicknames, a topic not normally considered when dealing with Iroquoian names. Chapter 6 presents names that are shared with the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederacy, whose languages are closely

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related to Wyandot, while Chapter 7 examines the names, both formal and informal, given to non-Indigenous people with whom the Wyandot interacted. Chapter 8 outlines Wyandot names found within the stories recorded by Marius Barbeau in 1911–12, and Chapter 9 focuses on the acquisition and application of Wyandot surnames during the nineteenth century.

Finally, Chapter 10 provides comprehensive grammatical analysis and interpretation of 602 Wyandot names, akin to a “dictionary”. The names are presented in alphabetical order with standardized spelling, an approximate pronunciation, an English translation, the gender indicative of the name, and the clan, if known. Individual morphemes are listed under the name in a left-hand column and defined in an adjacent column. An example is given below from page 151:

Aqndatōti	She abandoned, left her village. (female Snake)
[ah-on-dah-ton-tee]	
a-	factual
-o-	feminine-zoic singular patient – she
-ndat-	noun root – village, community
-ōti-	verb root – abandon, quit + punctual aspect

The archival sources of the names and other pertinent information regarding the name, such as alternative documented spellings and facts regarding some of the bearers of those names, are given in the form of footnotes on each page.

Throughout the book, Steckley makes several points of importance to naming studies and Indigenous studies. His address of the gender bias encountered in the study of Wyandot names is significant given the role that women, and mothers in particular, play in Iroquoian societies. In addition, the connection of specific names with the appropriate clan will be particularly important to communities engaging in personal name reclamation, especially where the names may have been separated from the original clans to which they belong. Finally, the examination of names given to non-Wyandot individuals, such as adoptees, Jesuits, politicians, and others, is important for further investigation into the interaction and relationships of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as well as historical facets of colonialism.

As Steckley points out, Wyandot is so very dissimilar to the Indo-European languages that it is easy to find oneself completely drowned by the differences. This is not because the author does not explain these differences, simply that Iroquoian is such a grammatically complex language family. As a result, those not familiar with the language or those with only a beginning understanding may have difficulty accessing the content, although morphological glosses and translations are provided. Those who do have an understanding of the language and the morphology will appreciate these same features. Despite these challenges, as mentioned above, this book has the potential to be a very useful resource to Iroquoian communities seeking to know more about their traditional naming practices and the names themselves.

Steckley utilizes archival sources which served as primary source recordings of the Wendat/Wyandot language. He couples these with a knowledge of the different varieties of Wendat/Wyandot and other Iroquoian languages, language change, and other aspects of historical linguistics, as well as a necessary understanding of the recording conventions of the time period and individuals involved in the recording. Additionally, he adopts a bidirectional approach when possible translations are available by examining not only the morphology of the Wyandot name itself but also exploring potential roots which may relate to the proposed translation. Steckley meticulously provides the source for each name as outlined in the first chapter, as well as the sources for less frequently used or historical roots which may be relevant to the name.

Very little is written regarding Indigenous personal names that is not historical in nature. Much more is written about place names and the Indigenous names of flora and fauna, for example. This difference may be attributed to the intimate connection between personal names and identity, as well as to the spiritual significance of names and the loss of elements of language and identity due to varying forms of colonialism; however, it may also stem from the potential for appropriation and misuse of those names (see, for example, Horn-Miller 2018). That being said, analysis of names of the sort provided by Steckley may help to shed light on worldviews and ways of life tied to language which have been affected by colonialism and language shift. Such analyses may also aid in the revitalization of these cultural and linguistic aspects and of the languages themselves. While this book mainly serves as a dictionary of personal names, it contributes to these broader goals.

Overall, *The Names of the Wyandot* delves into some important topics that have received limited attention. I recommend it for its meticulous research and use of the historical sources, and for its interesting exploration of these less-discussed facets of Indigenous personal naming conventions. Steckley candidly acknowledges when he encounters questions or problems for which he does not have immediate answers. As with his other books and articles, he injects his own personality, sharing his experiences, anecdotes, and reflections. The overall effect is a refreshing and often entertaining addition to the overall highly informative and thorough research.

## References

Horn-Miller, Kahente. 2018. "You May have Stolen and Mined our Lands, but You Will Not Steal and Mine Our Names". *CBC News*. 18 Dec. 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/opinion-mohawk-name-stealing-kahente-horn-miller-1.4950734>.

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