More Information on Michigan Prairie Names

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In a recent communication referring to the Indian components of the names listed in my article, "Prairie Generics in Michigan," which appeared in *Names* (Vol. VII, No. 3, September, 1959, pp. 188–190), Mr. Virgil J. Vogel of Chicago has kindly made several suggestions.

On pages 189–190 of the article, I cite Albert F. Butler whose "Rediscovering Michigan's Prairies" was published in *Michigan History* (see my footnote 3, p. 188). One of these prairies, *Coguaiack Prairie*, Butler says is "perhaps related to *Goguac Prairie*, 'pleasant water.'" In Mr. Vogel's opinion, "The absence of the Potawatomi, or other Algonquian term for water makes this dubious. Water is *neebe*, *nippi*, *neepi*, etc., according to dialect and the care of the recorder..." His authorities for the Algonquian *nippi* and its variants include Gailland's *Potawatomi Dictionary* (ms.) and Schoolcraft's *Indian Tribes* (II, p. 473). It is unfortunate that the precise meaning of a great many names, especially Indian names, cannot be given.

Butler explains *Nottawa Prairie* as "Indian: 'reported to mean the river of the Ottawa, or a prairie along the river.'" According to Vogel, "There are *Nodoways*, *Nottoways*, etc., in a dozen states, and its radix is found in *Nadowessioux* and its variants, from which *Sioux* is derived. The term has been applied also to the Iroquois and the Hurons. It is Algonquian for "snakes," or "enemies." (Vogel's chief authorities for this statement are as follows: Hockett, *International Journal of American Linguistics*, XIV, No. 1, p. 7; Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians* — "epithets for Iroquois, Wyandots, and Sioux;" John R. Swanton, *Indian Tribes of North America* — "adders... in the language of their Algonquian neighbors, a common designation for alien tribes by peoples of that linguistic stock;" John

Tanner, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (1830), "rattlesnakes" — *Nautowaig, Naudoways* — Ottawa language, name for the Ioways; A. S. Gatschet, "Notes and Text on the Fox or Utagami Language," ms. notebook, catalog No. 63 in the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, D. C. — *Notua a nene-u* (Fox Indian name for the Hurons), "*notua* means a rattlesnake...*a-nene-u*...a man" [thus, literally, "snake men"].

Mr. Vogel may be right on this point; but, on the other hand, there are plenty of names which consist of shortened forms, such as *Sioux* itself. Another example is the Pennsylvania river name, *Lehigh*, which is said to be a reduced form of *Lechauwekink*, the Delaware name for the river, which signifies "'where there are forks,' because at the point where their main trail or thoroughfare from the lower parts of the Delaware Indian country crossed the river, numerous trails forked off in various directions to the north and the west." (A. Howry Espenshade, *Pennsylvania Place Names*, 1925, p. 132.) (Note that the reference here is to bifurcating trails and not to watercourses, the latter meaning being the more common in topographic literature.) Espenshade continues: "The Indian name *Lechauwekink* was shortened by the early German settlers into *Lecha*, a name still used by their descendants. The form finally adopted by the English-speaking inhabitants was *Lehigh*. The name in its present form is unfortunately a corruption or an abbreviation of the original Indian name and conveys no special meaning." Thus, *Lehigh* apparently is an Anglicized form of a German shortening of an Indian phrase.

It may be that *Nottawa* is not related to *Ottawa*. Still, until the original form can be found (if it can), the various possible explanations of the term should be considered. Thus, since so many Indian names show linguistic corruption, it seems not impossible to me that there is a sandhi relation between *Nottawa* and *Ottawa*, such as we find in the English forms *newt* and *eft*. (Also, compare *nickname, nonce, adder* and *apron*. See Leonard Bloomfield's *Language*, 1933, p. 419, and [for examples in the Fox language] Charles F. Hockett's *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, 1958, p. 277 ff.) Furthermore, there does seem to have been a prairie associated with the Indian name, if indeed the "river of the Ottawa, or a prairie along the river" explanation is accurate. However, Vogel's "snake/snakemen/enemies" theory has merit and may be correct.

Pokagon's Prairie, Butler says, is named for "a Potawatomi chief; the word means 'rib' — At the time of his capture he was said to have been wearing the rib of a slain Potawatomi." Vogel expresses doubt that this story is true: "No mention of such an incident is made in the sketch of Pokagon in Hodge (*op. cit.*)... The Potawatomi word for rib is *opukeginima* (Gailland, *op, cit.*, p. 299)." He admits that *Pokagon* might come from *opukeginima,* but feels that the corruption ought to have been indicated, and also seriously questions the way Butler uses his sources on this point.

Regarding the entry on *White Pigeon Prairie* (Butler: "Potawatomi Chief *Wah-be-me-me,* 'White Pigeon,' in *Hiawatha*"), Vogel asks, "Why resort to Longfellow for an authoritative definition? This is the correct meaning, but a better authentication is in Hodge (II, 945-'6)." Mr. Vogel has a point here, even though it is confirming rather than corrective. He further comments that Butler's discussion gives "the impression that White Pigeon, the Potawatomi Chief of historic fame, is described in *Hiawatha,* when in fact only the name *O-me-mee, the pigeon,* is mentioned, and this reference is to the bird, not to a person (Cupples and Leon edition, no date, p. 201)."

Finally, Vogel also highly questions Butler's use of local sources in the interpretation of *Cocoosh Prairie* ("pork, hog"). Butler says merely that *Cocoosh* means "pork or hog in the language of the Indians," as though, Vogel points out, "all redskins are the same." In other words, Butler neglects to specify which Indian language he is referring to.

Coldwater Prairie, Butler explains, comes from *Chuck-sew-ya-bish* ("coldwater"), but here again the precise language is not given, and two local histories are cited. Mr. Vogel objects to local histories because they, "as most historians will agree, are mostly hogwash. They should be cited only with the greatest caution; their explanations of place names in particular are apt to represent nothing but local folk lore." Certainly, such histories should be used with caution. But it seems to me that Butler does carefully cite his sources, instead of "authoritatively" incorporating the information into his text. Probably these sources were the only ones available to him, in which instance he could not afford to ignore them unless he *knew* them to be inaccurate. Even so, for the sake of comparison, an erroneous explanation should sometimes be brought to light. Until some other

researcher *proves* the information to be incorrect, the explanation can stand for what it is — a tentative explanation with qualifications, that is, better than nothing at all, but not completely acceptable until confirmed with good evidence.

Butler discusses a total of eight Indian names, if both *Prairie Ronde* (*Wa-we-os-co-tang-sco-tah,* "round fire plain") and *Shavehead's Prairie* (Potawatomi Chief Shavehead) are included. Apparently these two terms are satisfactorily handled.

I wish to commend Mr. Vogel for the generous contribution of his time to this project. Of all the American place names the Indian names seem to me the most difficult to deal with. Because I am primarily a student of topographic terminology, and am not a specialist in American Indian languages, I greatly appreciate his thorough investigation of the Indian names of Michigan prairies.

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