

**The historical ethnography of the Miemac of the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:
Part 1**

Bernard Gilbert Hoffman

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

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The Historical Ethnography of the Micmac of the Sixteenth
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I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the early disappearance of many aboriginal groups from their former habitats in northeastern North America, to the cultural decline of those who remained, to the difficulty of reconstructing non-Western cultures from historical sources, those students dealing with native life in the Northeast and Woodland areas of North America have long worked under a serious handicap. Although much important and valuable work was done, both among still existing groups and among museum collections, little attempt was made to reconstruct the ancient cultures from the then existing historical materials. The reconstructions that were made during the last part of the 19th century not only ignored the greater part of the available ethnographical information, but were ahistorical and pseudohistorical, proceeding through the use of unproved and highly questionable theories of culture origin and spread. Although many valuable points and problems were brought to light, the contribution to the factual base remained slight.

It is the aim of this work, therefore, to present a reconstruction, as far as possible, of the culture of a native American group immediately after contact and shortly before it. The Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have been selected as the object of this descriptive study for a number

of reasons. Most important, the historical sources relating to this group start at a very early date, and are particularly detailed for the 17th century, at which time the old culture ~~was still largely functioning.~~ Although the Micmac were some of the first Indians contacted by Europeans, influence seems to have been only slight during the first half of the 16th century, and only moderate during the second half. The historical sources dealing with the Micmac are also continuous—beginning for all practical purposes with Cartier (1534), and continuing up to the present. (Among the other reasons that may be cited for the selection of the Micmac are their survival in their original territory (with the result that borrowing from other Indian groups during the historical period was minimal), and the fact that much important information concerning them is available in the ethnographic literature.

The mode of presentation here followed is that of a standard ethnography, except that the requirements of critical historical procedure have made it necessary at times to present variant source accounts in full, and to follow these with discussions. Textual discussion was also necessary when the meaning of the sources was not clear, when these were being used for purposes of inferring interrelationships between various cultural complexes, or when cultural traits were being defined. It is unfortunately not possible when using historical documents to clarify obscure points and difficult problems by recourse to native informants, as can be done for ethnographies of still functioning groups. The work here presented can be considered an experiment in the

problem of simultaneously presenting primary historical information, critical analysis of this historical information, comparative data from recent ethnographic sources, reconstruction, and interpretation.

In the treatment of the historical and ethnographic materials it has been found most convenient to leave native words and names in the original spelling, without attempting to indicate the phonetics. The following conventions have, however, been employed. Micmac words deriving from early French or English sources are in lower case, but are underlined: thus, Chicabena- *Not Micmac*
akady, Acadie, Xoracade, Oorakin, and Leldestaganne. Micmac names and words deriving from late ethnographic sources in which an attempt has been made at phonetization or phonemicization, are in upper case: thus, MEGŨMOOWĖSOO, BOOÖIN, SEGEPENEGATIG. *Mic Mac*
However, in exception to this last rule, Indian personal names and names of tribes have been left lower case.

The Indian words in this work in which an attempt has been made at a phonetic or phonemic transcription derive largely from two references. The first, Rand's dictionary (1888), is phonetic, and gives us most of our words except place-names. The following transcription was employed by Rand:

A as in father.

Ā as in fate.

ʌ as in fat.

ʌ as the second a in abast.

E as in me.

E as in met.

EI as i in pine (ei in height).

I as in pin.

O as in no.

Ö as in not.

U as in tube, use.

Ü as in tüb.

OO as in fool, (move).

OO as in good, wood.

OW as in now.

To this list the following comments were added:

...When any other vowel is doubled, as AA, ÄÄ, EE, or when O is marked thus, Ö, the usual sound of these letters is prolonged.

The consonants are sounded as in English, G being always hard, as in go, egg, and C exactly like k: CH as in church. H (following a vowel, in the same syllable, (as in ÄHK), is a soft guttural, (like the German ch in ich).

(Rand, 1888, p. 11)

The second work, from which most of our native place-names derive, is Pacifique's "Le Pays des Micmacs" (1927-1934), in which the following semi-phonemic transcription was employed:

...The Micmac alphabet is composed of only thirteen letters: five vowels: A, E, I, Ö, O, and eight consonants:

G, L, M, N, P, S, T, TJ...

The vowels are pronounced as in French: A, as in Ā-PĀPI, "thread," "the lapdog of the old colonists"; E, Ê-PITES, "daughter"; I, I-LĀSGÖ, "map"; Ô, Ô-GÔSI, "nail"; O, without accent, pronounced ou, and replacing this sound very frequently in Micmac, O-TAN (pronounced oudane), "village."

The consonants are always pronounced with a firm É: GÉ (ké), GÉ-OISIN, "to be hungry"; LÉ, LÉ-MI, "Rémi"; MÉ, MÉ-GÔTIG, "dear"; NÉ, NÉ-METJ, "fish"; TÉ, TÉ-GÈG, "it is becoming cold"; TJÉ, TJÉ-NO (nou), "hero"; this latter is the only special character in use among the Micmac and has no correspondent in our language [French]. This is the typographical representation of a double consonant [consonant cluster] which is pronounced as the first syllable of the English word "cherish."

(Pacifique, 1939, pp. 9-10).

In a review of Pacifique's work, Siebert (1940, pp. 331-333) indicates the following correspondence between Pacifique's symbols and those more commonly used in American linguistics:

Pacifique's symbols	Linguistic symbols
---------------------	--------------------

TJ	č
KÖ	
GÖ	k ^w

\hat{G}	q
\bar{A}	a [•]
\bar{E}	e [•]
\bar{O}	o [•]

where k^w stands for a voiceless labialized palatal stop, and q for a voiceless uvular stop. The phonemes are identified to be:

p	t	k	k^w	q
s	\check{c}			
m	n	l		
w	y			
i	i [•]	o	o [•]	
e	e [•]	a	a [•]	

The contrast of long and short vowels is phonemic.