HISTORICAL NOTES ON NEW ENGLAND LANGUAGES

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In panorama, New England Algonkian is very reminiscent of a northern muskeg, with its islands of more or less firm ground rising out of a generally uncertain terrain.¹ The firmest ground is formed by the two dialects still spoken in the region—Penobscot and Passamaquoddy—living languages offering no particular obstacles to the techniques of descriptive and historical linguistics, and it is gratifying that Frank Siebert’s extensive study of Penobscot continues and that Karl Teeter has commenced the study of Passamaquoddy. No other Algonkian dialects are still spoken in New England, although two or three persons possess a limited knowledge of Wampanoag which may be vernacular. The St. Francis Abenaki dialect, having western New England origins, is still spoken at Odanak, Quebec, and by members of the band elsewhere.

For two extinct dialects, there is abundant documentation from the 17th and 18th centuries. The speech of the Abenakis, who came from the Kennebec River to the Sillery and Chaudière missions, is represented by Rasles’s celebrated dictionary.² In fact, this dialect is one of the best documented of Algonkian languages. Besides Rasles, both Crespieul and Bigot wrote in it at Sillery, and to this dialect belongs also the two-volume dictionary of Aubéry, although it was signed and dated at St. Francis. The large dictionary of LeSueur, if it is ever found, will probably prove to be in the same dialect, judging from the fragment in the archives of the Séminaire de Québec. Lesser works by Virot and Roubaud and Nudénäs’s dictionary of roots are in this dialect also. The mouth of the Kennebec, the Pemaquid region, is witnessed only by the short but significant vocabulary collected by the Weymouth expedition in 1605.

The other large linguistic monument in New England is formed by Eliot’s Massachusetts Bible, grammar, and religious tracts. These are supplemented by Cotton’s vocabulary and a psalter and some notes by Experience Mayhew in the Martha’s Vineyard dialect. Other southern New England dialects are represented by printed monuments ranging in volume and worth from Roger Williams’s Narragansett “Key” through Pierson’s Quiripi catechism and the late Pequot-Mohegan material salvaged in this century by Prince and Speck.³ Some kind of all-time low in dialect documentation was reached for Scaticook, the refugee village on the Housatonic. From this almost completely acculturated group, Speck rescued three sentences and 23 words in 1903.⁴

The Stockbridge band west of the Berkshires has provided us with several minor works—the vocabularies of Edwards and Jenks and the prayer books of the Sergeants and of Quinney and Aupaumut. These works and the vocabularies collected from Stockbridge descendants in Wisconsin by half a dozen students are generally counted as Mahican, but the dialectologist should consider the number of refugees who reached Stockbridge from the Wappinger country in

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¹ Formerly of Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H., now at the National Museum of Canada.
Connecticut. Some future student of Mahican should examine all these documents and compare them with the Moravian manuscripts which represent the dialect of the Mahicans who migrated to the Susquehanna and later to the Ohio country.

It may be noted that all these data originated east of the Androscoggin River in Maine, on the southeastern coast, and west of the Berkshires. Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Algonkian New England is the linguistic and ethnographic no-man's-land which occupies the heart of it—western Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, most of Massachusetts, and northern Connecticut. There is not a single account or even an extended set of remarks about any group sessile between the Kennebec River and Lake Champlain prior to the disruption of the early pattern by the plagues and by the wars which were almost continuous after 1675. Nor does there seem to be any linguistic data from this region—definite, dated, and derived from a specific tribe in its original location. The only data existing are place and personal names which are linguistic data of a sort but which are seldom unambiguous. In the absence of data, all linguistic classifications for the region must be regarded as provisional.

This absence of data, however, has opened the door to invention. The Penacooks, who occupied the valley of the Merrimack River, may be taken as an example. Both archaeological reconnaissance and early documents indicate that they were an important group. They were in generally friendly contact with the English for about a century, but no one was thoughtful enough to leave a Penacook vocabulary. Local enthusiasm could not tolerate this vacuum, and in 1853 Judge Chandler E. Potter wrote an article entitled “The Language and Religion of the Penacooks,” actually an essay on local place names, explaining them all by the use of Cotton’s Massachusetts vocabulary. In 1898 John G. Crawford wrote an article entitled “Indians of New Hampshire: Etymology of their Language,” in which he rebuked Potter for using Massachusetts and then produced an alleged Penacook vocabulary which had obviously been cribbed from Laurent’s New Abenakis and English Dialogues that had appeared a few years before. Potter was a sober historian when he was not writing about the Penacooks, but his imaginative essays on them have taken the place of history in the popular mind and even in the schoolroom. His writings were also reprinted in Schoolcraft and from there they found their way into the Handbook of American Indians. Serious students likewise have had their troubles trying to classify the Penacooks and have associated them at times with the Abenakis, with the Massachusetts, and with the Mahicans, as well as at times according them separate status.

It is much the same story for other tribes in the problem area, groups of dubious affiliation which are mere names on the linguist’s map when they appear at all—the Missisquois, Coösucks, Squakheags, Pocumtucks, Nonotucks, Agawams, Woronokes, Nipmucs, Pigwakets, and others. Lacking linguistic data from them in place, one must attempt to follow their migrations through the French and English documents with the hope of catching up either with their modern descendants or with a linguistic work which, although made at another station, may be traced back to a particular band’s place of origin in Western New England.

Practically all the tribes in this problem area settled, after one to several removals, at two mission villages on the St. Lawrence River—the so-called
Abenaki villages of St. Francis and Bécancour—but there is the additional complication that these villages also received the more eastern Abenakis from the Chaudière mission in 1705-06,¹¹ and Penobscot and Malecite families at a later date. Bécancour now contains only three families and practically no linguistic recollections. The descendants of those Bécancour families that migrated to Lake St. John are now Montagnais in culture. Speck caught the last gasp of native language at Bécancour in 1912, but his naming it ‘Wawenock’ should be queried pending a thorough study of the history of the band.¹²

This leaves St. Francis as the only living linguistic and ethnographic source for western New England. The St. Francis band, with its long existence as a small native enclave in rural French Canada, its 250 years of Christianity, its intermarriage with New England captives, and its Dartmouth-educated boys, has often been regarded as too civilized and has been largely by-passed by students in favour of what appeared to be more primitive groups. The band still contains a handful of elderly conservatives, however, and among them they have preserved a surprising amount of old lore. The language is still perfectly vigorous among the elderly and middle-aged. The problem is not, then, that there is no St. Francis culture but that there are seemingly only one culture and one language in a village said to have been made up from ten or a dozen bands. Whose culture and language is it? Or if it is a composite, who contributed what?

I have made a study of the family dialects within the band, of the genealogies of and dominant speech influences on each speaker, and finally of the historical movements of the various components of the band. Historical conclusions are not yet clear, but four family dialects have been distinguished, and the first data on the principal dialect, whatever its provenience, have just been published.¹³

The other possibility for identifying dialects—that of finding a manuscript grammar, dictionary, or other linguistic record from some specific Western New England group en route to Canada—did not seem at all bright until 1960. Repeated attempts to find the LeSueur dictionary and the Cutter manuscript had failed.¹⁴ But in that year, two breaks occurred. First, a map was found in the collection of the New Hampshire Historical Society, which showed that the language of the Indians on the upper Connecticut and Androscoggin rivers in the late 18th century was essentially the modern St. Francis dialect.¹⁵ Second, and much more important, the archives of the Order of St. Sulpice in Montreal became accessible to students for the first time in many years. These archives contain the manuscript dictionaries, grammars, and devotional texts produced by the Sulpician Fathers at their several Iroquoian and Algonkian missions. Eventually these missions were all united at Lake of Two Mountains, and there in the last century the manuscripts were seen by two investigators from the Bureau of American Ethnology, Erminnie A. Smith and James C. Pilling. Unfortunately, the Smith and Pilling lists do not entirely agree and together do not name all the manuscripts in the collection, which is a veritable treasure trove of high interest to Algonkianists and Iroquoianists.¹⁶

According to the Sulpician philologist, Jean-André Cuoq, there were formerly among the Sulpician documents two manuscripts which might have come from Western New England. In his Algonkin dictionary, in a footnote to the word “Maingan, loup,” he wrote, “Maingan is still the name of an extinct nation of Loups. Their language, judging by two notebooks in the hand of M. Mathevet, appears to me to hold a middle place between Algonkin and Abenaki, with a
mixture of Iroquois. These two notebooks unfortunately perished in the fire of 1877." Again in his historical sketch of the Sulpician missions, he remarked, regarding Father Mathevet, "There remains to us still from this missionary other proofs of his zeal and of his ability, namely a vocabulary in the language of some Loups, a language which he would have wished to learn in order to instruct the poor infidels of that tribe, who would come to settle at the Lake." At one time or another, the French included under the name 'Loup' all the tribes between Massachusetts and Virginia and even the Pawnee of the Great Plains. Of what possible significance, then, would Mathevet's lost notebooks be for New England studies? It seems to have escaped general attention that early maps placed Loups on the lower Connecticut River, at Coös on the upper Connecticut, at Penacook on the Merrimack, and even in western Maine. It is true that a few Pawnees were known in the Montreal missions before Mathevet's time, and during the early years of his residence in Canada, Delawares from the Ohio country were well known to the French. Nevertheless, the Loups nearest Montreal and most likely to have been encountered by a Sulpician were those of Western New England and the fugitive Schaghticokes on the Hudson. This made the loss of Mathevet's notebooks especially regrettable, but prior to 1960 there was no reason to suspect the existence of other Loup documents.

A search of the archives in 1960, nevertheless, turned up a Loup manuscript. It was anonymous, approximately octavo, of about 120 pages, and was entitled simply "Mots Loups." It was obvious from quick inspection that it was Algonkian and therefore not Pawnee. It was in an L-dialect and therefore not Wappinger or Mahican. Lexically, it was not Delaware. This seemed to leave only some tribe from the Western New England region as the source. A study of the handwriting has since shown that the author was Father Jean-Claude Mathevet, and circumstances point toward the period after 1740 and perhaps before 1760 as the time of its composition. Nowhere is the tribe that spoke this dialect clearly identified. Their own name for themselves is given, but it is a new name in the literature. Eventually it may prove informative. Internal evidence suggests that the manuscript may have been made at Missisquoi or from Indians who had migrated from Missisquoi. Inasmuch as Missisquoi may have been a refugee village at the time, this information permits only speculation that the dialect may have been Penacook or Schaghticoke, the Schaghticokes themselves being a refugee band of Southern New England origins. In its present state, the manuscript is in two parts which may represent two fascicles sewn together. The first thirty-nine pages and a foreleaf appear to be a field notebook in which Mathevet recorded his first impressions of this dialect, judging from the crossed-out words and interlined corrections. The remainder of the manuscript is a revision which incorporates, in no particular order, new words and phrases and the writer's second thoughts on some, but not all, of the first part. It may well be that these are the same notebooks which Cuoq saw and thought had been lost.

This manuscript might have been mined immediately for linguistic and ethnographic data, but it appeared to be a reference point for Algonkian linguistics in New England on a par with Rasles's dictionary, Eliot's works, and Roger Williams's "Key," and, as such, deserving of publication. The redaction was accordingly commenced last year and is now well advanced. Pending the publication of the complete work and commentary, a few sidelights may be mentioned.
The words and phrases are arranged to form a Loup-French word and phrase book, but there is no alphabetical order. The order is either random or by groups of related ideas or objects, such as commonly occur in eliciting vocabulary. Verbs are frequently expanded. Loup words often have Algonkin or Iroquoian equivalents, and there are several inserted paragraphs in some Iroquoian language. These indications that the writer knew both Algonkin and Iroquoian were not very helpful even at the beginning of the study, because several of the Sulpicians learned both languages. Since it has been determined that the writer was Mathevet, whose knowledge of both languages is well exemplified in other manuscripts, these entries serve only to expand the semantic referents of the Loup words.

The most significant of the non-Loup insertions are some three pages of Loup-Abenaki comparisons and some miscellaneous Abenaki entries. The interesting thing about these Abenaki data is that they are unlike all the other Abenaki writings of the 18th century but practically identical with the modern speech at St. Francis. They also shed new light on the century-old controversy about the apparent change from an R-dialect to an L-dialect among the Canadian Abenakis. Missionaries were still writing an R in 1760, and educated Indians sometimes wrote R in their signatures until about 1850, at which time the spoken language most probably employed L. It is very noticeable, but not particularly diagnostic, that most of the loan words in this dialect were drawn from English.

Scattered clues to the culture of these Loups will probably be of more value for characterizing the culture of the group when it has been identified than for identifying it.

In résumé, western and central New England have always been unknown territory linguistically, and no particular hope has been held out for new information on it. Four dialects from this region, however, still survive at St. Francis, probably modified by contact with each other; and Mathevet’s “Mots Loups” probably represents another and much more divergent dialect from the region. I think that there is some reason to be optimistic that when an exhaustive and rigorous study has been made of the historical evidence for New England tribal movements, the peopling of Canadian missions, and the genealogies of specific families at St. Francis, it will be possible to lay down the main boundaries of the languages and dialects on a map of New England.

NOTES
1 Most of the data in this paper were obtained in the course of research under grants from the Spaulding-Potter Charitable Trusts of Manchester, New Hampshire, and from the National Science Foundation.
2 See James C. Pilling, Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages (Washington, 1891), for all Algonkian works not cited in a footnote.
3 Frank G. Speck’s, “Native Tribes and Dialects of Connecticut: a Mohegan-Pequot Diary,” Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report, 43 (1928): 199–287, is the most substantial publication of this material and contains a bibliography of the other Mohegan-Pequot material in footnote 1, p. 206.
5 There is one fragment from the periphery of the problem area. The account book of John Pynchon of Springfield, Massachusetts, contains the names of thirteen months and three fur-bearing animals in the dialect of some of the Indians who traded with him about 1650. The original is in the Sylvester Judd Papers, Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.
7 Manchester [New Hampshire] Historic Association Collections, 1 (1898), pt. 2: 177-188.
15 Plan of Chief Philip's Grant, 1796.
16 Many of the manuscripts are described in Pilling's Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages and Bibliography of the Iroquoian Languages under the separate Sulpician authors. All of them may now be seen on microfilm at the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia.
17 Lexique de la langue Algonquine (Montreal, 1886), p. 198.
19 Especially the anonymous Carte d'une Grande Partie du Canada and Father Joseph Aubéry's Carte pour les hauteurs de terre . . . . Numbers B902-1680 and H3/900-1715 respectively in the Map Division, Public Archives of Canada.
20 I am grateful to J. Raymond Denault, Director of the Canadian Microfilming Company, for discovering this manuscript and calling it to my attention.
21 I am indebted to Father Thomas-M. Charland, O.P., on whose paleographic authority this identification rests.
22 For example, the Nudenâ dictionary and Father Pierre Roubaud's letter to the Abenakis in the Haldimand Papers, M.G. 2, Vol. B-26, Public Archives of Canada.
23 For example, Pial Pol Wżökiklain signed his name Osunkhirine, although he wrote four books in Abenaki employing L throughout.