ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES FROM GOLDEN LAKE

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INTRODUCTION

Since I began my fieldwork at Golden Lake in 1978, in addition to the linguistic information which is the focus of my research, I have obtained from time to time some ethnographic material that may be of interest to others working in the Algonquin-Ojibwa area. Although I have not yet done a thorough search of the literature, I am persuaded that there is a rather small amount of published material from Golden Lake. The only recent publications I am aware of that touch on Golden Lake are the articles by Gordon Day in the Northeast volume of the Handbook of North American Indians (Day 1978, and Day and Trigger 1978), and it was with his encouragement that I prepared the present paper with a view toward making more of the ethnographic information from this dialect available.

The Golden Lake reserve is located in Ontario approximately 100 miles due west of Ottawa. To the best of my knowledge, it is the furthest south of the Algonquin reserves, a fact which may partially account for the high degree of acculturation evident there as well as for the use of English to the virtual exclusion of Algonquin. Of the approximately 275 residents of the reserve, fewer than a dozen persons, all over 60 years of age, are speakers of the Golden Lake dialect. My principal consultants have been a man who is 75 years old and a woman who is 87 years old. Since there is good evidence that the Golden Lake and Maniwaki dialects are rather closely related, I have also worked occasionally with a 45-year old woman who is originally from Maniwaki and who has lived in Golden Lake for over 20 years.

Given the circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that I have thus far obtained a rather limited amount of ethnographic material, including a small number of stories, only one of which was recounted in both English and Algonquin—curiously enough, the very first story I heard on an afternoon I was accompanied by Gordon Day. I make no claim to completeness in what I will present. In addition to the comment often made by my consultants that they have forgotten a great deal, I also sensed from time to time a reluctance on their part to tell me some stories for whatever reason, usually I surmise because they judged them to be too risqué. I should also indicate that, unlike what is reported in Savard (1978), I have found no evidence at Golden Lake that certain individuals are accor-
ded the special status of "story teller". In addition, another factor to be considered has been suggested to me by Gordon Day: much of my fieldwork has been done in the summer, a time when at least some types of storytelling have been traditionally avoided.

My aim in this paper is a very modest one: leaving out analysis and/or comparison, I will limit myself to presenting in broad outline the information I have collected at Golden Lake. Much of what I will say is doubtless familiar to anyone working in this area of Algonquian culture. Even if little that is presented herein is new, however, it is my hope that it will enable us to fill in a few more of the details in this one small part of the Algonquin-Ojibwa cultural picture.

windigo. It is not surprising to find numerous references to the windigo: at Golden Lake, although some of the features of the prototype are somewhat muted. The term is commonly used nowadays as an insult for a person, male or female, that one does not like or who is acting strangely. Nonetheless, traces of the earlier, stronger meaning subsist. Although no one I interviewed has ever seen a windigo: or known anyone who has, windigo:s are considered to be angry at everyone, untrustworthy, undeependable, and mentally unstable. Their voracious appetite is well known. It is said that men in the bush were reluctant to leave camp for very long for fear that a windigo: might steal a child and eat it. It is thought that windigo:s will eat anything, even spoiled meat. They are said to be superhuman—spirits, not human beings.

The following story, the first I obtained at Golden Lake, suggests some of these fearsome aspects of the windigo:, although there is no explicit mention of the windigo: in it. The story is as follows:

At night, a man sitting near the shore with his canoe close by suddenly hears the thumping of footsteps, first faintly then more distinctly as they draw near. He gets in the canoe and moves way out in the water. From the spot he came from, a voice says, "It's a good thing you are not here." The man in the canoe does not answer or make a sound. He camps for the rest of the night on the other side of the water. At broad daylight, he goes back across to where he had been. Who was it? What was it?

pagak. The starveling, pagak, is, as expected, also encountered at Golden Lake. According to my consultants, pagak is the spirit of an old Indian who had starved to death along the river and who was left unburied. He became so light that he floated in the air above the trees, using his sense of smell for direction. The smell of something cooking attracts him, and he is heard but not seen by those around the campfire in the evening. There is some disagreement over what
exactly is heard: some say that \textit{pa:gak} can be heard moaning in the distance, others say that one can hear \textit{pa:gak}'s bones rattle as he flies around. All are agreed that if meat or animal fat is thrown on the fire, as the smell and the fumes go up with the smoke, \textit{pa:gak} comes down to sniff up the smoke, refreshes himself, and moves on. \textit{pa:gak} does not steal food, appears rarely and usually in the summer, is not considered bad, but is nonetheless feared.

\textit{wi:ske:ja:k}. In contrast to the \textit{wi:ndigo} and \textit{pa:gak}, \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} (occasionally \textit{wi:sake:ja:k}), affectionately dubbed “Whisky Jack” in English, evoked little but feelings of warmth and merriment from my consultants, who clearly enjoyed recounting to me the several stories in which he figures (although they were sometimes hesitant to fill in all the details). From my data, it is obvious that \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} is quite popular, figuring in four stories, more than I have collected for any other personage.

\textit{wi:ske:ja:k} is sometimes portrayed as a trickster, playing pranks on unsuspecting individuals. This is the case in one story that involves the mother and the grandmother of one of my consultants. At the time of the year when the mother, then a young girl, was collecting maple sap with her mother, they would check and empty the birchbark containers used to collect the sap every morning and evening. One evening, on their usual round, they found to their surprise that all the containers were empty and upside down, an incident that the grandmother immediately blamed on \textit{wi:ske:ja:k}.

In one of the more popular stories, which purports to explain where the moss on the rocks came from, \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} is portrayed not as the author but as the victim of the prank. One day, the story goes, after having caught some ducks, \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} built a little fire and buried the ducks in the sand, feathers and all, to cook them. He was careful to leave their feet sticking out of the sand so that he could easily find them when they were done. Since he had to wait quite a while, he decided to take a nap. Before falling asleep, however, he enjoined his backside to wake him with a loud noise (\textit{po:gidi} ‘break wind, fart’) if anyone came by and disturbed the cooking ducks. When \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} woke up, the ducks’ feet were still sticking out of the sand, but someone, the “little people” (the \textit{pagwajiniwinaw}) according to one consultant, had eaten all the meat. Upon discovering this, \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} got angry at his backside because it hadn’t warned him and burned it by sitting on the fire. Afterward, during the healing process, his backside would get itchy from time to time, and \textit{wi:ske:ja:k} would slide down the rocks and scrape his backside on them to scratch himself. What this left behind on the rocks soon dried up and turned to moss. Of course, once one rock got it, the moss spread to all the other rocks.
**wi:ske:ja:k** is also credited with the ability to assume various forms, apparently at will. In my third story, when he was hungry again, *wi:ske:ja:k* turned himself into a little snake. He came to a moose head that was drying up, crawled inside to get at the brains, but couldn't get out again. He then turned himself into a moose head, and the head started to go. While moving along the rocks, *wi:ske:ja:k* fell. The head cracked apart on the rocks, and *wi:ske:ja:k* got out, having changed back into a snake again.

*wi:ske:ja:k* is sometimes depicted as being rather unperceptive, as shown by my fourth story, in which *wi:ske:ja:k* has turned himself back into a man. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he saw what he thought were a lot of berries in the water. He dived in after them, but he couldn't find any. What he had seen was the reflection of the berries that were up above overhanging the water.

As a final note on *wi:ske:ja:k*, I would like to point out that there was some disagreement among my consultants as to exactly what he is. On the one hand, he is said to be a person, a human being, albeit one with special powers. On the other hand, one consultant thought he was a “little man”, i.e., one of the *pagwajininiwag*.

*pagwajininiwag*. The *pagwajininiwag*, the “little people”, are spirits that live in the bush and travel along the rivers. Although none of my consultants claimed to have seen any *pagwajininiwag*, older Indians, presumably now dead, told them about what they had seen or about someone they knew who had seen one. For the people at Golden Lake, the *pagwajininiwag*, if encountered, are best left alone. Although they are usually good to people and are not considered to be bad, they nonetheless inspire fear. The mother of one consultant would often say to the children if they were noisy when camping in the bush, “Keep quiet or the *pagwajininiwag* will get you!” The *pagwajininiwag* are said to leave people alone unless they are bothered first in some way. They then avenge the insult, usually by attacking the offender in a group and administering a sound thrashing; in some cases, apparently, death may result.

Some of these characteristics of the *pagwajininiwag* can be seen in the following story. One day, an Indian hunter, walking along the shore of a lake, saw a “little woman” on a rock holding a baby in her arms. For some reason, the hunter tried to push her off the rock, not just once, but three times. His efforts were to no avail, and, when he couldn’t budge her, he went on his way. He had only gone a short distance, however, when he was attacked by a group of *pagwajininiwag*, who gave him a good beating for not having minded his own business.
These admittedly sketchy observations on the pagwajininiwag lead me to the final section of this paper, in which I would like to present evidence for some ethnographic differences that my data indicate obtain between Golden Lake and Maniwaki, differences that are of some interest in light of the linguistic dissimilarities between these two closely related dialects that I have discussed elsewhere (Aubin 1979, 1981). One caveat is in order: my information about Maniwaki comes from interviews with only one consultant originally from that reserve. Clearly much more information is required before any definitive conclusions on these matters can be arrived at.

pagwajininiwag. To return to the question of the pagwajininiwag discussed above, for my consultant from Maniwaki, the pagwajininiwag are definitely good “little people”. Always smiling and happy, they are said to look after sick animals and lost people.

Some of these good qualities of the pagwajininiwag are illustrated in the following story involving the half-brother of my consultant’s mother. When the mother was a nine-year old girl, her half-brother got lost at one of the places the family stopped at in the bush. Although they searched for him for days, they could not find him, and, giving him up for dead, they finally moved on. When they returned to that spot six months later, to their great surprise, they found the half-brother sitting on a log. He tried to run away, but they caught him and questioned him closely. He had survived, he said, thanks to the pagwajininiwag, with whom he had lived in a beautiful cave. They had given him anything he desired, and he had been very happy. Soon after he was reunited with his family, however, the boy began to forget almost everything that had transpired during the time he had spent with the pagwajininiwag because they made him forget.

maškadisiwag. According to my consultant from Maniwaki, the pagwajininiwag are not the only “little people” in the bush. There exists another group, the maškadisiwag, the bad “little people”, which none of my Golden Lake consultants had ever heard of. The maškadisiwag are held responsible for a wide variety of misdeeds. It is they who are blamed if an empty camp has been wrecked and everything spoiled. It is they who make you get lost in the bush. It is they who make you do things you don’t want to do or are not supposed to do, such as harming someone or stealing something. My consultant stated that if her mother’s half-brother had been living with the maškadisiwag instead of with the pagwajininiwag, he would
never have been allowed to go free, but would have been forced to remain and become one of them.

pa:škimo:daye:kwe:. The only story about the maškeđisiwag that I have collected concerns the pa:škimo:daye:kwe:, the "skating woman", who is unknown at Golden Lake. The pa:škimo:daye:kwe: is especially interested in children, whom she entices out onto the ice so that they will fall through into the water. Children are often warned to stay off the ice lest she catch them. One day, when still a young girl, my consultant told me that she and her sister saw the pa:škimo:daye:kwe: out on the ice. She was dressed in a white kerchief, a light blue blouse, a darker blue top, and a faded blue skirt that flared out as she skated. Her hands were stretched out, and she waved for the girls to come out on the ice to her. They attempted to do as she had requested, but couldn't seem to draw near to her. In fact, however much they tried, the pa:škimo:daye:kwe: stayed at the same distance from them. Finally the two girls noticed that, although they could clearly discern the features of the pa:škimo:daye:kwe:, she seemed to have no face. Further, she was wearing boots on her feet, not skates, and was floating in the air at least a foot above the ice...