

Fidelia Fielding

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Fidelia Ann Hoscott Smith Fielding (1827–1908), also known as *Dji'ts Bud dnaca* ("Flying Bird"), was the daughter of Bartholomew Valentine Smith (c. 1811-1843) and Sarah A. Wyyougs (1804-1868), and granddaughter of Martha Shantup Uncas (1761-1859).^[2]

She married Mohegan mariner William H. Fielding (1811-1843), and they lived in one of the last "tribe houses," a reservation-era log cabin dwelling. She was known to be an independent-minded woman who was well-versed in tribal traditions, and who continued to speak the traditional Mohegan Pequot language during her elder years.^[3]

1 Mohegan Language

Fidelia insisted upon retaining the everyday use of the Mohegan language during an era when most New England Native peoples were becoming increasingly fluent in English. Her maternal grandmother Martha Uncas spoke it with family members, and other Mohegan people continued to speak and understand some of the language, but by 1900, few were as fluent as Fidelia and her sister. As an adult, Fielding kept four diaries in the language, which later became vital sources for reconstructing the syntax of Mohegan Pequot and related Algonquian languages.

Fidelia was regarded as a *nanu* (respected elder woman) and mentor to Gladys Tantaquidgeon, a traditional Mohegan woman who also studied anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania and served as a research assistant to Frank Speck. Gladys conducted field work and service work for a variety of Native communities and agencies before coming home to Uncasville. In Uncasville, Gladys and her family founded the Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum, and she became a respected elder herself, working on material and cultural preservation.^[1]

Many modern sources suggest that anthropologist Frank G. Speck, as a child, lived with Fidelia Fielding, but there is no evidence to support that in any Mohegan tribal records or oral memories. Speck recalled, in his own publications and correspondence, that he first met Fidelia around 1900, when he was an anthropology student at Columbia University. Speck was in the midst of a camping trip to Fort Shantok, Connecticut, when

he met up with several Mohegan young men---Burrill Tantaquidgeon, Jerome Roscoe Skeesucks, and Edwin Fowler---who introduced him to Fielding. This encounter sparked a lifelong friendship with the Tantaquidgeon family. Speck interviewed Fidelia, recording notes on the Mohegan language that he shared with his professor, John Dyneley Prince, who encouraged further research. Fidelia eventually allowed Speck to view her personal day-books (also called diaries) in which she recorded brief observations on the weather and local events, so that he could understand and accurately record the written version of the Mohegan language.

This material that Speck collected from Fidelia Fielding inspired four publications in 1903 alone: "The Remnants of our Eastern Indian Tribes" in *The American Inventor*, Vol. 10, pp. 266–268; "A Mohegan-Pequot Witchcraft Tale" in *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 16, pp. 104–107; "The Last of the Mohegans" in *The Papoose* Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 2–5; and "Mohegan Traditions of 'Muhkeah-weesug,' the Little Men" in *The Papoose* No. 7, pp. 11–14. Speck also co-authored a 1904 article with J. Dyneley Prince, "The Modern Pequots and their Language" in *American Anthropologist*, n. s., Vol. V pp. 193–212.

In 1908, after Fidelia Fielding's death, her relative John Cooper gave Fidelia's diaries to Frank Speck for safe-keeping. Speck later deposited them in George Gustav Heye's Heye Foundation/Museum of the American Indian in New York City. These documents were later relocated, as part of the Huntington collection, to the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University, where they are archived today.

2 Legacy and honors

Fidelia Hoscott Fielding died in 1908, and was buried at the Ancient Burial Grounds of the Mohegans at Fort Shantok State Park in Montville, Connecticut. A memorial marker was placed there to honor her, at a ceremony with an estimated 1,000 people in attendance on May 24, 1936.^[4]

Credited with being an instrumental influence in recording and preserving the language, in 1994 she was posthumously inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame under the category *Education & Preservation*.^[4] Fielding is one of only three American Indians who have been inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Years later, Gladys Tantaquidgeon, a Mohegan

woman trained by Fielding who similarly insisted on preserving traditional ways, was also inducted into the Hall of Fame.^[5]

During Fidelity's lifetime, parents were reluctant to use or teach the Mohegan language to their children, for fear of prejudice or reprisals from the English speakers around them. In the present day, linguists from the **Mohegan Language Project**, including Fidelity Fielding's relative **Stephanie Fielding**, have been carefully working with materials compiled and archived by Fielding and Speck in order to reconstruct and reanimate Mohegan-Pequot as a living language for new generations.^[4]

3 Notes

- [1] Fawcett, Melissa Jayne. *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon*
- [2] Biographical information for Smith, Fidelity Ann Hoscott, 1827-1908. Yale Indian Papers Project, Yale University (2015).
- [3] **Fidelity Fielding (1827-1908)**. Our History, The Mohegan Tribe, Uncasville, Connecticut (2015).
- [4] "Fidelity Hoscott Fielding". *Inductees*. Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Retrieved 21 February 2013.
- [5] "Fidelity Fielding, 1827-1908", *The Mohegan Tribe*, 2004 (retrieved 13 July 2010)

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4.1 Text

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