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Author(s): William Wallace Tooker
Source: *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Jul., 1895), pp. 257-263
Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/658508
Accessed: 14-06-2016 18:06 UTC

THE NAME CHICKAHOMINY, ITS ORIGIN AND ETYMOLOGY

BY WILLIAM WALLACE TOOKER

This well-known name acquired considerable celebrity in the days of the Rebellion for the reason that the geographical position of the river made it one of the natural bulwarks of defense for the capital of the Confederacy. Over two and a half centuries prior to this historic epoch it constituted one of the barriers of Wahunsonacock or Powhatan, when he immured himself and his treasures far up in the swampy wilderness at its source in order to escape the close proximity of the Jamestown people.*

It is not, however, the strife and turmoil of war, neither is it the jealous vagaries of Powhatan, that is now the theme of our story, but of an earlier period, in the very dawn of its annals—a point of time in the calendar of the past from which in reality we may date the genesis of our country. Inasmuch as Professor Edward Arber has justly observed, there can be no doubt whatever had Captain John Smith and his companions failed to have survived the winter of 1607–'8 it would have delayed all settlement from English sources for many years. Therefore the survival of the colony had a very marked bearing on the events which followed, and that led finally to the creation of this great commonwealth—the United States of America.

As the subject of my study, as applied to a people, is intimately concerned in having contributed more than their quota to these events, their story is more than worthy of being retold and analyzed—in fact, the name Chickahominy deserves to be enshrined in letters of gold on the pages of our colonial history; for we cannot find a counterpart where a tribe of Indians, in its consequent results, did more for an English settlement than the friendly natives whom Captain John Smith found dwelling on the stream now bearing their name.

The early recital of the Jamestown colony is a narrative of a

* Arber's Smith, p. 80.

struggle for existence—a struggle for their very lives, which we at this late day cannot realize, nor can we adequately appreciate it. The long and weary voyage of over five months' duration, in the most inclement of seasons, had its share in weakening the energy and ambition of the colonists, as it was also one of the main causes for the exhaustion of their food supply. The unhealthfulness of their chosen plantation soon showed itself, and in the very hot summer ensuing they dropped off one by one, until out of one hundred and five persons only fifty-nine remained when September arrived. This sickness, quarrels, and fear of the Indians had so unnerved the survivors that they were unable to plant or to properly provide themselves with food sufficient to last through the winter, which now confronted them. Their tents were decaying, and their temporary shelters were but poor substitutes for their English homes. Many of the colonists were gentlemen, totally unused to manual labor and to their new modes of living. Smith, however, was inured to hardships and to privation, and by his own example and unbounded personal resources induced them to build and to thatch their houses for the winter. Time was onward flying, all were on a limited allowance, having but fourteen days' food supply left. Lots were cast as to who should command a party to trade among the natives for the actual necessaries of life. The chance fell to our heroic English captain, who unselfishly was ready and willing for any emergency.

After a trip to several places on the James river with almost barren results, on the 9th of November, 1607, he set forward for the "country of the Chikahamania."* That evening, while "staying the ebb" in the bay of Paspahegh, "at the mouth of the river," he was hailed by certain Indians, one of whom, being of "Chikahamania," offered to conduct him to their country. He started by moonlight, under guidance of this Indian, and at midnight arrived at the town. The next morning he began his bartering of copper and hatchets for corn, each family endeavoring to give him all he wanted. They caused him to stay so long that one hundred at least finally assembled expecting trade. What he desired he purchased; but in order that they should not perceive his great want, he went higher up the river. Smith remarks: "This place is called Manosquosick [= Wanasqua-

*Arber's Smith, p. 11.

es-ick, at or on the top of a hill], a quarter of a mile from the riuer, conteining thirtie or fortie houses, vppon an exceeding high land: at the foote of the hill towards the riuer, is a plaine wood, watered with many springes, which fall twentie yardes right downe into the riuer. . . . A mile from thence is a Towne called Oraniocke. I further discouered the townes of Mansa, Apanaock, Werawahone, and Mamanahunt."

Smith was very kindly received at all of these villages, especially so at the last named, which was about the center of the habitations on the river, where he found assembled two hundred people, with such an abundance of corn that he might have loaded a ship; but he, having in his mind the great need of his associates remaining at their plantation, went back, where he arrived at midnight. The next morning he unloaded seven hogsheads of corn into their store. On November 13 he was back again at Mamanahunt, where the people, having heard of his visit, had gathered there with three or four hundred baskets, little and big, and soon he was enabled to load his barge again.

He says: "So desirous of trade wer(e) they, that they would follow me with their canowes; and for any thing, giue it me, rather then returne it back. So I vnladed again 7 or 8. hogsheads at our fort."

Having thus provided a store amounting altogether to sixteen hogsheads, he, for the third time, went up the "riuer of the Chikahamanias." He discovered and visited eight or more towns; but he found their plenty of corn had decreased, although he was enabled to load the barge again.

Others beside Smith bear testimony as to his visits vp the river. Wingfield says:* "The 10th of December, Master Smyth went up the Ryuer of the Chechohomynies to trade for corne." This was Smith's last voyage that season, on which occasion he was taken prisoner by neighboring tribes for being too adventurous, although the attempt was urged upon him by the colonists.† It will be observed from Wingfield's statement that he was aware that the appellation properly belonged to the people and not to the stream.

Thomas Studley ‡ says: § "But in the interim, he made 3 or 4. iournies, and discovered the people of Chickahamine. Yet what

* Arber's Smith, p. lxxxv.
† Arber's Smith, p. 98.
‡ Arber's Smith, pp. 86, 411.
§ Ibid., p. 97.

he carefully provided, the rest careles(s)ly spent. . . . The Spanyard never more greedily desired gold then he victuall: which he found so plentiful in the riuer of Chickahamine, where hundreds of Salvages, in diuers places, stood with baskets expecting his coming."

This extract is taken from the second part of John Smith's map of Virginia, with a description of the colony, etc., which was the condensed vindication or manifesto of thirty or forty gentlemen and soldiers who, under Smith, saved the colony.

In this portion of Smith's works I find the terminal dropped, and the name there given as Chickahamine or Chickahamina, which affords strong evidence in favor of the etymology that I shall present.

The highest inhabited town on the river was called Apocant, at the edge of the swampy wilderness, only forty miles from its junction with the James; consequently all of these towns that contributed so willingly to the necessities of the colony, and undoubtedly saved them from the horrors of starvation, were situated within a short distance of each other. The peaceful and unwarlike character of the tribe is accounted for by several facts. First, that they were under a different form of government from their neighbors, and had no war chief; second, that they were industrious agriculturists and a sedentary people at the time of Smith's visits; third, that the isolated position of the river, totally unnavigable, even by canoes, from the west, surrounded by almost impenetrable and uninhabited thickets, made their homes a place secluded and safe from the more nomadic and warlike tribes of the north and west.

In my essay on the name Susquehanna* I gave an analysis of its earliest form, *Sasqu-esah-anough* (= people who break into small pieces; hence by connotation "people of booty"), corroborated by historical facts and paralleled in several dialects of the Algonquian language. After further extended research and study, I am still more firmly convinced that this derivation is the true one; and that its demonstration can be much further augmented and proven, I quote it again, at this time and place, because I believe its terminal *-anough* and verb *-esah* enter into the composition of our present study.

In searching Smith's works I find that Chechohomynies,

*American Antiquarian, vol. 15, p. 286.

Checka Hamania, Chikahamania, Chickahammania, Chickahaminos, and the form before mentioned are among the most marked of its variations. The name, as well as the greater number of those terms applied to the principal Virginia tribes, belongs to the class formed from verbs, as participials or verbal nouns, denoting according to its terminal a place where or a people by whom the action of the verb was performed. In the proper interpretation of such cluster words we must find a clue, either historical or traditional, which will assist in unlocking its synthesis. The key was discovered in the case of my studies of the "Kuskarawaokes of Captain John Smith,"* "The Algonquian Terms Patawomeke and Massawomeke,"† "On the Meaning of the Name Anacostia,"‡ and it has been found in the foregoing relation left us by Captain John Smith and his associates, as will be observed later.

In our modern form of Chickahominy we have the original sounds, as indicated by its early variations, of *Chick-ahäm-min'-anough*. The special affix or verb *-ahäm* implies "he beats or batters" the object *min'*, after the manner of the root-word or prefix *chick*, and it is the Powhatan equivalent of the Massachusetts *-etaham;* Delaware, *-iteh'm;* Cree, *-tahu'm;* Narragansett, *-utahum*, "he beats." This verbal affix is the inanimate third person singular in all these dialects,§ and is in common use in all four, as well as in other dialects of the same linguistic stock. The verb, however, becomes animate in such words as the Massachusetts *m'etah;* Cree, *m'iteh*, "the heart," *i. e.*, "the beater;" Narragansett, *w'uttah*, "heart," *i. e.*, "he beats." The prefix *chick* or *k'chick*, "it is large, great," *i. e.*, "coarse, in distinction to fine," implies, with its verb *-ahäm*, "he beats coarse," *i. e.*, "coarse-pounded." The object *min* or *mŭn* denotes any kind of small berry, fruit, or grain,‖ but when used in compound words without a special prefix refers to corn. The terminal in *-ias*, *-anias*, or *-os* I regard as a softened or abbreviated sound of the generic *-anough*, "nation or people," with the mark of the English possessive added. Thus we have a synthesis of *K'chick-ahäm-min'-anough*, "coarse-pounded corn people," or, as it might be rendered

* American Anthropologist, vol. vi, p. 409.
† Ibid., vol. vii, p. 174.
‡ Ibid., vol. vii, p. 389.
§ Howse Grammar of the Cree, p. 87.
‖ Lenâpé and Their Legends, p. 48, Brinton.

by a free translation, "hominy people." The term was probably applied to them by neighboring tribes for the reason that it was one of their products of trade, or, as was more probable, their principal article of sustenance, as it remains today among certain classes in the Sunny South.

Some analogous terms are *Schéechgänīm'*,* "shelled corn coarse-pounded." [Chaff? Zeisberger.] This word is identical in meaning with our *k'chick-ahäm-min'*, *sché* being an explosive sound and a variation of *k'che* or *k'chick-echgän*, being another verbal signifying to beat [with a hand instrument], *-īm'* a contraction for min', corn. Powhatan (Strachey), *rokohamin* = *rok-ohäm-min*, "parched corn ground small." Allowing for the alternating sounds of its initial, *rok* is undoubtedly the same verbal noun as the Narragansett *nókehick*, "parched meal," *nokhik* (Eliot), "meal," "flour," "ground corn." Wood says: † "Nocake (as they call it), which is nothing but Indian corn parched in the hot ashes, . . . beaten to powder." *Ushuc-cohomen*, "to beat corn into a meal;" *usketehamū*, "meal made of gynny wheat." Strachey here gives us two distinct forms of the same verbal in words having the same meaning, for "gynny wheat" was another name for maize.‡ The verb in the first *-ohom* has the Powhatan characteristics, while the latter *-eteham* resembles the Massachusetts and Delaware forms. The reason for this is probably found in the fact that *usketehamū*, "fine-beaten corn," belongs to a dialect other than the Powhatan. Compare the Narragansett *tackhummin*, "to grind corn;" *tack-humíinnea*, "beat me parched meal." From these cluster words, including that of our subject, is derived our common name "hominy," of which it is a contraction for ease of utterance among the English. Here I differ somewhat from Dr J. Hammond Trumbull, with good reasons, for the name "hominy" was given to the grain dried and pounded.

He says: § "Hominey is a form of *minne* with an emphasizing aspirate *-h'minne*, to denote the grain par excellence—*i. e.*, maize; but in Virginia and New England this name was restricted by the English to one, and the most common prepara-

* Lenâpé Dict., Brinton.
† N. E. Prospect, p. 2, chap. 6, p. 76.
‡ Hariot's Narr., p. 21, Quaritch Ed.
§ On some Words derived from Language of the North American Indians, p. 6.

tion of maize. In Norwood's "Voyage to Virginia, 1649, 'homini' is described as the corn of that country beat and boiled to mush." Josselyn in "New England Rarities," page 53, says that "after the first flour had been sifted from the pounded corn the remainder they call 'homminy,' which they boil upon a gentle fire till it be like a hasty pudden." Consequently, as will be observed, the *h*' is not an emphasizing aspirate except as it is so much of the Algonquian verb "to beat," as erroneously used by the English.

Rev. John Heckewelder, in his "Names which the Lenni Lennape or Delaware Indians gave to rivers, streams, and localities within the States of Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Virginia," presents a translation of the name which has been and is still frequently quoted, viz., "Chickahominy, corrupted from Tschikenemahoni, signifying 'a turkey-lick, a lick frequented by turkeys.'" It does not require much argument to show that such a derivation is entirely out of place, as applied to these people, and that this suggested etymology is entirely contrary to its early forms, therefore unworthy of further examination or reiteration.

Again, some one has suggested that Chickahominy denoted "great corn," which Dr Trumbull* says "does not stand for 'great corn,' because 'corn' does not designate place or imply a fixed location, therefore cannot be made the ground-word of a place name." Dr Trumbull is undoubtedly correct in this statement so far as a "place name" is concerned, but he was evidently unaware that "Chickahominy, as I have demonstrated, was not originally 'a place name,' although it became one by its bestowal on the river by the English, without consideration for its true meaning." In proof of this fact, the tribe offered to relinquish the appellation of "Chickahomania and to be called Tassantessus [= strangers], as they call us."† Therefore the analysis which I have presented, although it does not exactly stand for "great corn," is in accordance with Algonquian grammar, and, as I firmly believe, beyond question, its true etymology.

* Indian Geographical Names, p. 49.
† Arber's Smith, p. 515.