



Pamunkey Indian Games and Amusements

Author(s): Mary K. Rowell

Source: *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 56, No. 221 (Jul. - Sep., 1943), pp. 203-207

Published by: [American Folklore Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/535602>

Accessed: 01/06/2011 07:39

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=folk>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



American Folklore Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American Folklore*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

PAMUNKEY INDIAN GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS

By MARY K. ROWELL

The subject of games and leisure time activities of the Indian groups of Virginia has been largely neglected by investigators. The classic work of Culin¹ on Indian games contains no information on this area. A brief treatment of string figures of the Pamunkey tribe has been published by Dr. D. S. Davidson,² and there are some unpublished Rappahannock data in the hands of Dr. F. G. Speck. The material which makes up the body of this report was obtained during a field trip to Virginia in the spring of 1941, in connection with the student research group of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Pennsylvania.³

Toys. Some home-made toys are in use among the Pamunkey. A kind of top is made by cutting off an ordinary wooden spool just below the rim, and plugging the hole with a wooden peg; the toy is spun by hand. A second toy, reported by Dr. Speck, is a pop-gun of alder bark with the pith pushed out, which shoots cedar-berry bullets or wads made of chewed cedar bark or paper. Next, there is the "whirligig" (frequently known as the "buzz-saw"). For this a string is threaded through two holes of a rather large plain button, and the two ends tied to form a continuous circle. One end is held on a finger of each hand, and the button is twirled rapidly until the string is tightly twisted on itself. The hands are brought together, then drawn apart rapidly, and the revolving button seems to hum as the string slacks and tightens. Mrs. Miles recalled that formerly circles of "tanbark" (red oak) about three inches in diameter were used as buttons are today.

From the old Pamunkey chief George M. Cook, several toys were obtained by Dr. Speck about 1915. Among them was the "magical" trick of the windmill. The toy was a stick of wood some eight inches long, with twenty-five notches cut on the upper side. At its outer end was a small revolving blade about two inches long, turning on a nail driven into the end of the stick. The windmill is held in the right hand and the notches are rubbed with another stick in the left hand. The operator mysteriously makes the blade revolve clockwise or counterclockwise according to his commands by slyly exerting pressure on the sides of the stick. If he presses with his thumb while grating with the rubbing stick, the blade revolves in one direction, and if he presses with his fingers on the other side, it reverses its direction.

The crossbow of the usual type was also reported from Pamunkey by Dr. Speck on the authority of John Dennis, the oldest man living on the reservation, now in his upper eighties.

¹ Stewart Culin, *Games of the North American Indians* (Report 24, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1907).

² D. S. Davidson, *Indian Notes* (Museum of the American Indian, New York, October 1927).

³ The informant for this material, unless otherwise noted, is Mrs. Paul Miles.

String Figures. Four different string figures were recalled and described by various persons at Pamunkey, but in no case were the figures actually performed, except "Crow's Feet," which was done by Mrs. Paul Miles exactly as described by Davidson.⁴

Group Games. The bulk of the games and pastimes collected among the Pamunkey falls into the category of games played in groups—either among children, or adults at a party.

1. Spinning the plate. One player spins a tin plate in the center of a circle of players, and names another who must catch the plate before it stops or pay a forfeit. This is played by adults.

2. In the well. A player sits in the center of the circle, and says "I'm in the well," and then names the person who must get him out. Further details were not given.

3. Club Fist. Children's games take the form of recitations of set, regular patterns. A matching-up game called "Club fist," which resembles the choosing-up method in sand-lot baseball, is started by each player putting his fist on top of that of the previous player until each has a fist in the stack. Then "It" says to the player who has his fist on the top:

"What you got there?" "Club fist." "Well, take it off or I'll knock it off."

And so each fist is removed until the last one, when the following exchange of questions and answers takes place: It: "What you got there?" Player: "Piece of cheese." "Where's my share?" "Cat got it." "Where's the cat?" "In the woods." "Where're the woods?" "Fire burned it." "Where's the fire?" "Water squenched it." "Where's the water?" "Ox drank it." "Where's the ox?" "Butcher killed it." "Where's the butcher?" "Rope hung him." "Where's the rope?" "Rat gnawed it." "Where's the rat?" "Cat caught him." "Where's the cat?" "Dead and buried behind the church door, and now the first one who shows his teeth gets ten pinches and ten rousing boxes."

Then "It" tries to make the other players laugh or speak.⁵

4. Chickamacham Crow. This is another game of the same general recitative type, and it seems to have undergone endless variations by different families. One player takes the part of a mother hen, others are her brood which stays close behind her. Another player, called variously the Hawk or the Crow, makes a little fire and hops around it, singing (according to Mrs. Miles' version):

Hawk: "Chickamacham Crow

I make to the well to wash my clothes
When I come back my chicken is gone.
What time, Old Witch?"

Mother Hen: "What are you doin'?" Hawk: "Makin' a fire." Mother Hen: "What for?" Hawk: "To cook my water." Mother Hen: "What you want water for?" Hawk: "To cook my chicken." Mother Hen: "Where are you going to get a chicken?" Hawk "I'll take one of yours."

With that, the Hawk starts for the brood, but they hang on to the Mother

⁴ Davidson, *op. cit.*

⁵ "Club fist" was described by Mrs. G. M. Cook, age seventy-eight.

Hen, who fights the Hawk. When the Hawk catches a chick, they are stacked by the fire and must not move.

A variant of this from Mrs. G. M. Cook, as recorded by Mrs. F. G. Speck in 1920-21, refers to the Hawk as a Buzzard, and the verse runs as follows:

"Chika-me-Chika-me-Crainio⁶
Went to the well to wash my toe.
When I got back my chicken was gone.
What time, Old Witch?"

At this point the Buzzard begins to count to twelve. When the number twelve is reached, the chickens scatter and the Buzzard tries to catch them.

5. Company and Dogs. This is a make-believe game that follows a more or less set form. One player is the mistress of a house, and several others are her dogs, who kneel on the ground, snarling and yapping. Another player is a visitor. The visitor comes to call at the house, shouting "Hui-hui" as she approaches the house. The mistress, with whip, makes her dogs behave. Then the visitor and mistress make conversation until at the end the visitor says something the mistress could take offense to, whereupon the latter "sics" the dogs on the company.

6. Fox in the Water. For this game one player is the Fox, who stands at one of two bases and cries "Fox in the water!" The players at the second base run to the Fox's base, while he tries to catch them en route.

7. Hide and Switch. One of the party hides a switch while the rest of the players remain on a spot called the "base." The hider starts them hunting for the switch by saying:

"Bread and butter come to supper.
Who is burning?
You're burning.
You're burning up, blazing."

The others race to find the switch. The one who succeeds chases the others around trying to "cut them," and chases them back to the base. The finder then hides the stick again and the game is repeated.⁷

8. Cut Jackets. Two boys take each other by the left hand, holding a switch in the other hand. Then they turn around and switch each other until one gives up.⁷

9. Blind Man's Buff. This game, as described by Mrs. Miles, follows exactly the same pattern as that familiar to all children in modern America.

Counting-Out Rhymes. Several series of rhymed syllables have been re-

⁶ Or: Chika-me-chika-me-Chimio. In Mrs. Speck's version, the burden is "Chika-me-Chika-me-Crainio." This recitative brings us to consider a vague possibility of the syllables "Crainio," referring to Buzzard, being an echo of the deep southern vernacular name "Carrion-Crow" (Creole French), or the Louisiana French "Carencro" for the same bird. It might be hazardous to make such a suggestion at this time, but the point apparently challenges attention as an indication of influence coming from farther south.—F. G. Speck.

⁷ This game was recorded by Mrs. F. G. Speck from Mrs. Robert Miles who learned it from Eliza Allmond, her grandmother, who died at the age of about one hundred.

corded from various informants on the Pamunkey reservation. It may be pointed out that some of the syllables in the series to follow correspond to the native words recorded by Rev. E. A. Dalrymple in 1844⁸ and quoted by J. G. Pollard.⁹ This is the earliest recorded folklore from the tribe, and establishes the date of these rhymes as well over a century. The numerals given, from one to ten inclusive, are as follows. Nikkut, one. Orijak, two. Kiketock, three. Mitture, four. Nahnkitty, five. Vomtally, six. Talliko, seven. Tingdum, eight. [Nine missing.] Yantay, ten.

Both Dalrymple and Pollard accepted these terms as enumeratives in the Pamunkey language of the time. Their correspondence, however, with terms recorded as counting-out rhymes in childrens' games by the recent investigators would seem to indicate their function in this capacity. The living informants who gave the terms to the recent recorders were citing material which extended back into the time of Dalrymple and Pollard.

Mrs. Cook told Mrs. Speck that in her childhood when going to the store to buy articles in quantity they did not count by English numerals but used the rhymes equivalent to the numbers from one to twenty. (For example, she remembers being sent to the store to buy "a tan's worth" of sugar.) The rhymes were also used in dividing articles among children. The syllables, as recorded by Mrs. Speck in 1920-21 from Mrs. Cook, are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Ones-zall | 11. Skarum |
| 2. Twos-zall | 12. Spared eye |
| 3. Zig-zall | 13. Borum |
| 4. Zan. | 14. Zingum |
| 5. Strain ahead whiddles | 15. Bangum |
| 6. An'a | 16. Buckeye |
| 7. Tiddle | 17. Phyllis |
| 8. Tall | 18. Short- |
| 9. Tan. | 19. Tail |
| 10. Harum | 20. Nannie |

Lately children have employed them in counting out among a group the one who would be "It." There is little doubt that the rhymes were equivalents for numerals in the illiterate stage of Pamunkey history. In the counting-out version the verse runs as follows (from the same source as the above):

Ones-zall
 Twos-zall
 Zig-zall
 Zal.
 Bob-tail nanny goat
 Tie tall tal.
 Harum scarum
 Virgum marum
 Singulum sangulum
 Jolly old buck.

⁸ Historical Magazine (New York, first ser., 2: 182, 1858).

⁹ The Pamunkey Indians of Virginia (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1894) 12.

During the spring of 1941, another kind of counting out game was given by Mrs. G. M. Cook. In this version, each person holds out an index finger next to his neighbor's, and "It" spells them out with the following verse:

William Attrivity
He's a good fisherman.
Catches fishes.
Puts 'em in dishes.
Catches hens.
Puts 'em in pens.
Some lay eggs.
Some lay none.
Wire . . . Briar
Limberlock.
Sit and sing till twelve o'clock.
Clock fell down, mouse ran 'round.
O-U-T spells out!

Then the player who is spelled out must run around the house on tiptoe, and if one sound is heard by the other players, he must start over again.

"We used to have a lot of fun with that because some could tiptoe, and some couldn't," reminisced Mrs. Cook.

New Haven, Conn.



THEIR WAY OF SAYING IT:—How far is it to the store? Just about a spoilt mile [that is, not quite a mile].—Rhode Island; contributed by Elizabeth S. Sergeant.

Would that I might hear you are at death's door
Would that I might hear you are lying with your nose turned up.—Ammassalik Eskimo.

As they went back, songs were torn [that is, rent the air].—Navaho; contributed by Helen H. Sturges.

By threatening to seduce his wife you will make his mind forked [that is, you will distract him so that he cannot concentrate].—Navaho.