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Author(s): Anthony F. C. Wallace and William D. Reyburn

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CROSSING THE ICE: A MIGRATION LEGEND OF THE TUSCARORA INDIANS

ANTHONY F. C. WALLACE AND WILLIAM D. REYBURN

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

1. The Tuscaroras
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1. The Tuscaroras belong to that group of North American Indian tribes who speak Iroquoian languages. The Iroquoian languages are conventionally classified into two sub-groups: Northern Iroquoian and Southern Iroquoian. The Tuscarora language is considered to fall into the Northern sub-group, together with Huron, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The chief member of the Southern sub-group is Cherokee. Of the Northern languages, Tuscarora is probably least known; no formal investigations of it have been made, although extensive library sources, in the way of texts and recordings now exist, and fragmentary vocabulary materials may be found scattered through the historical and ethnological literature. Among other contemporary linguists, Voegelin has pointed to the need for a study of Tuscarora linguistics, observing that "the precise position of the Tuscarora language in the Iroquois family is not definitely known, and the structure of Tuscarora is not at all known."¹

When the Tuscaroras were first met by

¹ C. F. Voegelin, *A Decade of American Indian Linguistics Studies*, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 93.137-40 (1949). At the present time, the collected material on the Tuscarora language known to the writer may be found listed in Wallace, *op. cit.* and James C. Pilling, *Bibliography of Iroquoian Languages* (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1888). Floyd Lounsbury, at Yale University, and William Reyburn, at the University of Pennsylvania, also have Tuscarora linguistic materials in the process of investigation.

whites, in the sixteenth century, they occupied a part of the piedmont and coastal plain of what is now the state of North Carolina. They were a matrilineal, horticultural people who lived in permanent villages, with a general pattern of life similar in most essentials to that of the better-known Five Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) of New York.² During the eighteenth century, after losing a costly war with the English in Carolina, they migrated north to reside with the Five Nations (who henceforth became known as the Six Nations). During the Revolutionary War, they split into two factions, one pro-British, the other pro-American. The pro-British band followed the British into Canada, where along with others of the Five Nations they settled on the site of the present-day reservation at Grand River, near Brantford, Ontario. The pro-American band acquired land near Niagara Falls and have remained on this land, the Tuscarora Reserve, since the end of the Revolutionary War.

The Niagara band acculturated themselves more rapidly during the nineteenth century than did the other Iroquoian bands, the men adopting wage-work and agriculture successfully, and the whole community abandoning the "pagan" religion in favor of Christianity. Thus today the Tuscarora material and religious culture are almost indistinguishable from the rural white culture of the Niagara Frontier. Nevertheless, the language is still spoken on occasion by

² For sketches of aboriginal Tuscarora culture see: J. N. B. Hewitt, *Tuscarora*, in *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, BAE-B 30 (1910), John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, BAE-B 137 (1946), and Wallace, *op. cit.*

most adults, and many of the old patterns of social relationship have remained more or less intact.

2. The legend which is the subject of this paper was obtained on the Tuscarora Reserve in Niagara County, from David Hewitt, who is a member of the Tuscarora community. During a summer's field trip in 1948, Wallace heard Hewitt tell the story in conversation, and asked him to make a recording of it: his wire-recorded version (Spool VI) is now in the custody of the Library of the American Philosophical Society. A second version was obtained from the same informant in June 1950 by William Reyburn, who heard the wire record in Philadelphia and then went to Tuscarora to gather additional linguistic material. Reyburn took the second version down on paper in phonetics, at Hewitt's dictation. Hewitt also supplied a free running translation for each version. The two versions differ only in minor detail, insofar as the story-content goes. Reyburn's version of the text and translation is reproduced below in broad phonetic script.

David Hewitt is a Tuscarora Indian, officially enrolled with the Indian Bureau as a member of the tribe. He belongs to the Beaver Clan (the sib of his mother). His father was a member of the Bear Clan, and through his father David Hewitt is related to the late J. N. B. Hewitt of the Bureau of American Ethnology. About fifty-seven years of age, David Hewitt now lives with his son, who is about fourteen, in a small house in the middle of the reservation. He is self-supporting, holding a job as skilled workman in Niagara Falls, and bears a good reputation among both whites and Indians. A Rorschach protocol obtained by Wallace shows marked resemblances to the class of Tuscarora Rorschachs ($F\%$ over 60) which includes the two herb doctors in the Rorschach sample. It is a Rorschach which is statistically deviant from Tuscarora norms, but which falls into a class of "deviants" which is relatively frequent, and which re-

sembles, in its high $F\%$, the modal Ojibwa rather than the modal Tuscarora.³

The lineage within the Beaver Clan to which Hewitt belongs is the Shawnee Beavers. Although technically and officially Tuscarora, the Shawnee Beavers occupy a somewhat equivocal status on the reservation. Comprising perhaps twenty-five to fifty individuals, they constitute about half of the clan's membership; they are, nevertheless, at some disadvantage, because of their supposedly alien ancestry. The two council members raised by the clan are not, in theory, supposed ever to be Shawnee Beavers, although Shawnee Beavers have been raised (in spite of protests). Various legends account for this lineage: the most popular opinion is that they are the descendants of some Shawnee women who, along with some Shawnee men, were adopted by the Tuscaroras at a time in the remote past—some say, during the Tuscaroras' passage northward through Pennsylvania. By Shawnee, popular opinion implies the Shawnees of history and ethnology, who during the mid-eighteenth century occupied parts of Western Pennsylvania. These Shawnees spoke an Algonquian language and had close relationships with the displaced Delawares in that area.

There is, however, a large possibility that these Tuscarora Shawnee Beavers are not the descendants of the historic Shawnees at all. A variety of Algonquian-speaking bands have been called by terms cognate with Shawnee, not all of them affiliated with the historic Shawnee. Among these bands are a mysterious minor Algonquian tribe, the Chowan, resident in North Carolina in the early eighteenth century, northeast of and adjacent to the Tuscaroras. They are men-

³ For a study of the Tuscarora Rorschach material see: Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Tuscaroras: Sixth Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy*, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 93.159-65 (1949); *The Modal Personality Structure of the Tuscarora Indians*, doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania; to be published by the Smithsonian Institution (1950).

tioned in Lawson's list of the Indians of North Carolina as separate from the other tribes: *Chowan Indians*, Town 1, Bennets Creek, Fighting Men 15.⁴ The Chowan joined forces with the Tuscaroras during the war of 1711–1713—the war which resulted in the exodus. The Shawnee Beavers are thus probably the remnants of this allied tribe. This supposition seems even more likely in view of the statement of one Nash, a Canadian Tuscarora traditionalist, who told Speck in 1926 that the Tuscaroras and the Sawanu from whom the Shawnee Beavers were descended were associated in North Carolina.⁵ If this is the case, the use of the term Shawnee is probably simply a misleading use of an English approximation of a generic term for a number of Algonquian tribes, and deductions of historical connection with the Shawnees proper have in recent years been made off-hand by both the Tuscaroras and the whites.

The Shawnee Beavers have been discussed at such length because of the possibility that Hewitt's legend comes from an Algonquian rather than Tuscarora tradition. Hewitt says, indeed, that he was told this story by his father, who was a Bear, and that his father heard the story from his grandmother (a Bear), who is said to have been born in North Carolina. (This is quite possible, because the Tuscarora migration was made in dribbles from 1713 to about 1800.) Thus according to Hewitt, the story has been handed down within a lineage which is (in the matrilineal line) pure Tuscarora. On the other hand, however, neither Reyburn nor Wallace was able to obtain a more extensive genealogical statement from Hewitt, so that Shawnee Beaver males may have married into the lineage at many points in the past (as they may, indeed, have married into all the other clans too). The only lineage into which the Shawnee Beavers cannot have

married is the Tuscarora Beavers (intra-sib marriage being, even today, taboo).

The story's peculiar status becomes even more marked upon further investigation. No other informant who knew it could be found by either of the field workers. The only approximation (and a very loose approximation) came from a woman with Seneca ancestry on her father's side, who said she might have heard it during one of her several Western trips, on the Klamath reservation! The point of resemblance lay only in an open reference to an eastward migration, crossing-the-ice, and finding a new country. The snake theme was missing, and the events subsequent to crossing-the-ice were different. Thus Hewitt's story does not seem to be general cultural property on the Tuscarora reservation.

Hewitt views the legend as a semi-sacred trust. He recalls that his great-great-grandmother told his father, when she told it to him, "You keep this story up!"—implying that it was sacred but esoteric tradition. It is the only legend which he has told his son. He is personally of the opinion that few other Indians know the legend: an opinion which the present authors concur in. Indeed, some of the words recorded by Reyburn were, when repeated to other Tuscaroras, unintelligible, and Hewitt himself regards them as archaic. He explains the presence of archaic terms as the result of repeating his father's version verbatim.

3. The *Crossing-the-Ice* theme in Delaware and Tuscarora legend. The theme of the Tuscarora legend reproduced below is the crossing by a people, in the course of their migrations, of an ice-and-snow covered body of water, in a cold country. Hewitt identifies the body of water as Bering Strait; thus in his account the tale becomes the narrative of the Indians' entry into North America. This ascription of the legendary events to one of the transcontinental passages which brought Indians into the North American

⁴ John Lawson, *The History of Carolina* (London, 1714), p. 234.

⁵ F. G. Speck, private communication.

continent is no doubt a rationalization supplied by Hewitt or another latter-day Indian. The details of the story, however, do not have the ring of recent fabrication; nor does Hewitt's evident serious respect for the sacredness of the story.

The *crossing-the-ice* theme (in the same context with allusion to a Snake Island) occurs in the famous Delaware Walam Olum. In Brinton's published translation,⁶ the relevant passage runs:

. . . Over the water, the frozen sea,
They went to enjoy it.

On the wonderful, slippery water,
On the stone-hard water all went,
On the great Tidal Sea, the muscle-bearing
sea.

Ten Thousand at night,
All in one night,
To the Snake Island to the east, at night,
They walk and walk, all of them.

The problem thus arises of a possible relationship between the two narratives. This problem is partly elucidated by other historical data. In Lawson's Account of the Indians of North-Carolina, which contains a great deal of material specifically concerning the Tuscaroras, Lawson describes at length a funeral or condolence ceremony for a dead chief (tribe not specified). The orator on this occasion extolled the dead man, exhorted his bereaved nation to "supply the dead Man's Place," and described the delights of the next world for the virtuous. "After all this Harangue, he diverts the People with some of their Traditions, as when there was a violent hot Summer, or very hard Winter; when any notable Distempers rag'd amongst them; when they were at War with such and such Nations; how victorious they were; and what were the

Names of their War-Captains. To prove the times more exactly, he produces the Records of the Country, which are a Parcel of Reeds, of different Lengths with several distinct Marks, known to none but themselves, by which they seem to guess, very exactly, at Accidents that happen'd many Years ago, nay two or three Ages or more. The Reason I have to believe what they tell me, on this Account, is, because I have been at the Meetings of several Indian Nations; and they agreed, in relating the same Circumstances, as to Time, very exactly; as, for Example, they say, there was so hard a Winter in Carolina, 105 years ago, that the great Sound was frozen over, and the Wild Geese came into the Woods to eat Acorns, and that they were so tame, (I suppose, through Want) that they kill'd abundance in the Woods, by knocking them on the Head with Sticks."⁷

Lawson's account contains several points of interest. First of all, the "Parcel of Reeds . . . with several distinct Marks, known only themselves," sounds reminiscent of the "bundle or bundles of either bark or stick tally records,"⁸ with mnemonic symbols painted thereon, which are supposed to have comprised the Walam Olum itself. Furthermore, the recitation of a formal, traditional history, with mention of climatic changes, wars, and "what were the Names of their War-Captains," sounds remarkably like the recitation of a Walam-Olum-like chronicle. And finally, it is certainly curious that an account of a time "105 years ago" (i.e., in 1609, reckoning from 1714), when "the great Sound was frozen over," and wild geese were tame, should have so sharply struck Lawson's attention. For this big freeze might very well have been the core of a concretion of legendary material such as Hewitt has given us today.

⁷ John Lawson, op. cit., pp. 180-81.

⁸ Paul Weer, Brantz Mayer and the Walam Olum Manuscript, Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science, 54.44-48 (1945).

⁶ Daniel G. Brinton, *The Lenape and Their Legends* (Philadelphia, 1885).

Lawson unfortunately does not tell us what particular tribe he observed in this ceremony, but it is very likely Tuscarora, for several reasons: 1) Lawson knew the Tuscaroras better than the other tribes and lived in closer contact with them; 2) they were more numerous than the other nations adjoining the white settlements; 3) Daniel Smith, a Tuscarora traditionalist living today, told Wallace that "the old Indians" used to keep records on "notched sticks." It is not likely that he was describing the Algonquian Chowan, because by 1714 they were reduced to one town with fifteen fighting men: hardly enough to put on the elaborate ceremony described by Lawson. But we simply cannot be sure what tribe he means even though Lawson explicitly states that his description "pretty much accounts for them all."⁹

Thus we cannot assert positively that Lawson's account is relevant to Hewitt's narrative; but if it is (and it is more likely than not), then it would seem that Hewitt is telling a fragment of a longer account—an account which resembles, in several respects, what we know of the Walam Olum and its mnemonic devices. It would be useless to try to push a synthesis further: all we can say is that some of the North Carolina Indians, probably including the Tuscaroras and/or possibly the Chowan, knew a Walam-Olum-like narrative; and that Hewitt's *crossing-the-ice* theme, from its resemblance to an incident in the Delaware Walam Olum, and to the incident related by Lawson, may very well be a fragment thereof.¹⁰

⁹ John Lawson, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

¹⁰ Brinton also mentions a sacred migration myth of the Shawnee proper according to which the Shawnees "arrived at the main land after crossing a wide water." (*op. cit.*, 145). The Nanticokes also had a similar legend, involving a bridge provided by God which was taken away after the passage. Brinton also notes a similar tale for Mohegan. Perhaps the crossing the ice theme was common to many of the Northeastern Woodlands tribes. The fact that at least four (Delaware, Shawnee, Mohegan, and Nanticoke) were Algon-

4. Tuscarora text and translation.

1. akriɛʔ waʔakwatká:riʔθ tæ tuwiá:rəʔ gwæʔhé:wæʔ gəna yiawhagaiyæ tí:huʔ. [*My father told me how the Indians came here.*]

2. unéha iska agayaɛná:rit góna wáʔ-fnaiyɛʔ. [*Long ago they didn't know there was land here.*]

3. waréʔrɛʔ unéha waʔgaiyɛʔnaká:riaks. [*He said long ago they began to starve.*]

4. ufnanahá:kiəʔ sawɛtiʔædawéta ayθ-ayahú:raʔ. [*In the old world nothing would grow.*]

5. yaustakáʔna gaiyɛʔnaká:riaks. [*For many years they were starving.*]

6. unəhəsənə waʔgaiyɛnə taiyarúʔərö. [*So they gathered together*] 7. waʔgaiyɛkənisa tæʔnə gaiyæ:yæks. [*they held a council.*]

8. wiksəhəs gaiyɛʔnaká:riaks waʔtgaguʔi-whaiyɛ:nəθ waʔgaiyɛnawatiéta uwáʔčə wáʔfnaiyɛʔ. [*Because they were starving they decided to go and look for another land.*]

9. wanetdigáiyeʔ digəʔúʔnə. [*They made up their minds.*]

10. gaiyakia:ri uwáʔčə wáʔfnaiyɛʔ. [*They thought elsewhere there was land.*]

11. agaiyeʔtiæ:nəʔ agaiyɛʔču:riʔ. [*They will try to eat.*]

12. əθənəgagutahákə twaʔgaiyɛniæiʔči [*As they were walking suddenly they knew*]

13. uwisáʔkiaə gaiyægwaríaʔ. [*they were walking on ice.*]

14. gwá:nə diwɛʔnákiəʔ gaiyægwaríaʔ uwisáʔkiaəʔ. [*For many days they walked on ice.*]

15. unəhəsənə waʔgaiyehɛʔnaʔáʔku jánaʔ digaiyákə hatawɛ:rúʔ gaiyeyeturəháʔnə. [*Then they chose seven of the best runners.*]

16. unəhəsənə waʔgaiyɛʔskuʔ nəgənuʔ-kwáikiəʔ. [*So the two groups started out.*]

17. skənúʔkwat taʔagagunswaʔkíhəʔ. [*One group didn't want to go.*]

18. skənúʔkwat wagaiyɛskuʔ nwaʔnətkəθ. [*One group went to the east.*]

quian speakers may be taken to imply that it is an Algonquian theme. This would lead one to suspect that its presence at Tuscarora is owing to alien, possibly Chowan, tradition.

19. wagaiyeyáŕaθ híta nwa?áetkəθ. [*They went where the sun rises.*]

20. wa?gaiyənawatiéŕta wagaiyěú:rí? [*They went in search of food.*]

21. θutás:ə jána? digaiyákə tawę:řú? gaiyeyeturə há?nə nwa?nətkəθ. [*Early in the morning several of the runners went away to the east.*]

22. wa?gaiyeyáŕaθ wau?teáte nwa?nətkəθ tigaguyəřá?nə. [*They continued a long time in the direction of the east.*]

23. wa?gaiyənarišə? haúna wauθátu? [*They rested when night came.*]

24. twagaiyənīə ríđi wa?gaiyeggátu? ninu-həna:ríθ uhı:mí? [*Suddenly they saw a black streak in front.*]

25. wa?gáiyets řuskwanə?huwi há?tu? gá:tač [*They thought a big snake lay there.*]

26. wakakúrif heníkə jána? digaiyákə. [*The seven of them stopped.*]

27. wa?gaiyěsku? [*They started out.*]

28. wa?gaiyėnakasėku? [*They separated.*]

29. hanə?twagaiyėřə. [*They spread out.*]

30. hađi rarəθə. [*The first runner calls.*]

31. ęθrəři? [*He will hear.*]

32. ęθrahəřəθə. [*He will call.*]

33. diđi ęθrəhđi? [*The next will hear.*]

34. dú:rə jána?ká:niθ ęθwa?f. [*Until it returns to the seventh (the message).*]

35. unəhə jána?ká:niθ yiawháraf wa?-rá:kə usa?nú?uwi tə tə arəuhúřəθ agaiyě-ú:rí? [*When the seventh runner arrived he saw a big woods with abundant food.*]

36. há?tu? ukwa?kátə agaiyetiəné agaiyěú:rí ha góna wá?fnauyę? watgaguri-whaiyě:naθ aθəgaiyənaniŕ?sa. [*There was so much food to eat here they decided to go back for the others.*]

37. góna nđkwə agaiyętákrat. [*Here they will also live.*]

38. unəhəsə wa?gaiyənawa?tiénta hę:-wə? tigaguyá:kə. [*They went back to find where they had come across.*]

39. íska?aiθgaiyęgučóni. [*They were not able to find it.*]

40. twę?ha?uwisa utatawę?wę? [*The ice had melted.*]

41. íska?həsə wa?gaiyęgwəni θəgaiyę-na?ninęsa. [*Then they were not able to go back for the others.*]