



A • M • E • R • I • C • A • N
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

"Abenaki" Clans - Never!

Author(s): F. G. Speck

Source: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 37, No. 3, Part 1 (Jul. - Sep., 1935), pp. 528-530

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of the [American Anthropological Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/661995>

Accessed: 03/07/2011 15:30

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=black>.

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.



Blackwell Publishing and American Anthropological Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Anthropologist*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

“ABENAKI” CLANS—NEVER!

In a recent article in this journal, “Some Moot Problems in Social Organization” (Vol. 36, 1934, pp. 321–30) Dr Lowie allows the virtues of an able discussion of Dr Olson’s treatise on sib and moiety in North America to be slightly marred through his perpetuation of what has been shown to be an error as regards a clan organization among the Abenaki (Wabanaki of northern New England). Dr Lowie refers in several places to the “Abenaki” as possessing certain “clan names” and lists them as such (pp. 327–28). His reliance is evidently placed upon Morgan who included the Abenaki among groups characterized by paternal clans. It is time to expurgate again certain misconceptions from our sources on social phenomena of the northeastern tribes as I attempted to do some years ago. The Wabanaki, or “Abenaki,” tribal groups, which include the Abenaki specifically, really are not to be included in the series of clan-possessing peoples of America, but rather with the socially undetermined hunters of North America north of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes. It evidently falls to my lot to quote a portion of an article printed in 1917 (F. G. Speck, *The Social Structure of the Northern Algonkian*, Publications of the American Sociological Society, Vol. 12 [1917], pp. 85–86, 94–96) in which I discussed the social typology of certain Wabanaki peoples (Penobscot, Micmac, Malecite) basing criticism of Morgan’s definition of “Abenaki” clans upon findings made among aged informants among those tribes. Undoubtedly Dr Lowie, whose professional insight is unquestionably keen, has forgotten rather than overlooked the section in question.¹

Thus far research among these predatory northeastern Algonkian . . . through Labrador, northern New England, and the Maritime Provinces to the Atlantic shows that the tribal subdivisions are based, without exception, on the family grouping with patrilineal tendencies. The family group as the social unit comprises the individuals of one family connection, primarily through blood but also through marriage relationship, who hunt together as a herd within the confines of a certain tract of country. This district constitutes a paternally inherited territory retained more or less exclusively by the family of the right of usage. These simple conditions are universal in the area, as has been established by the writer through personal investigation there. Nowhere in this sweep of territory have true clans or gentes been *reported*, except in two instances: among the Ojibwa as just stated and among *the so-called Abenaki, the latter instance resting on the sole authority of Morgan*. . . .

The status of the Abenaki, established by Morgan, however, requires some attention and revision.

In a very short presentation Morgan gives Abenaki material which by its linguistic form appears to be Penobscot. It would have been very helpful if he had told us, as he has in other places, who his informant was. Since, however, we cannot directly question his source, an internal criticism of his data is all that can be attempted. He notes fourteen gentes for the Abenaki, all of which coincide in name with family band names of the Penobscot, except five,*

¹ I have added italics to certain passages.

* The name of “Spotted Animal” (gens. No. 5 of Morgan’s list) is given as Ahlunk-soo.

on the corrected basis, Morgan's Snake, Caribou, Crane, Porcupine, and Muskrat gentes. On the other hand, we have twelve in the authentic list which are not included in Morgan's (Perch, Otter, Water Nymph, Fisher, Raccoon, Whale, Insect, Toad, Eel, Sculpin, and Lobster and Crab). The list of family names furnished the writer by his informant, Newell Lyon, during a lengthy period of study of the Penobscot, can still to a large extent be verified among the families on Indian Island today. Moreover, Lyon's memory is clear and full on events of forty years ago, at the time (about 1878) when Morgan consulted his Abenaki interpreter. At this period the family organization was still strong and the territorial hunting system had not entirely decayed. Comparing, then, what we may consider as the more critical list of family names, those given by Lyon, with Morgan's, we are, I believe, justly obliged to correct and amplify the latter's. Morgan says that descent is now in the male line, which is also true of the family group. He says that intermarriage in the gens was anciently prohibited. If his informant meant intermarriage within the family, this, of course, is also true to a certain extent. Morgan finally says "the office of sachem was hereditary in the gens." If we interpret in his favor by choosing to make this mean that the office of leader of the group was hereditary in the family, then this is also true but not exact, because there was only a vague idea of headship in the family. This completes his contribution to our knowledge of the social life of the Wabanaki.

As for the Abenaki proper (St. Francis Abenaki) Hallowell's more recent intensive study of their social forms, shows a similar situation—no indication of "clans" whatever.

In the Wabanaki area south of the St. Lawrence the patronymic family group is likewise the basis of society. Specific data, however, as to the numbers, naming, and geographical location of the families have only been obtained from the Penobscot and Micmac up to the present time, though indications point to the prospect that similar characteristics will be found among the Malecite and Passamaquoddy.

The Penobscot were divided into twenty-two families, comprising about four hundred individuals. They were exogamic only in respect to kinship. As noted in the case of the other tribes, there was a general tendency for a man to affiliate himself with his father-in-law's family. . . . The family bands possessed paternally inherited hunting territories which were referred to by the individual as "my river". These were marked by boundary signs, either blazes or birch-bark representations of the animals from which the proprietors derived their names. Resentment against trespass was not noticeably strong. Tacit self-control answered for the prevention of trespass, or the policy of exchanging privileges nullified it. One important point here, however, is that, with the Penobscot, the families held themselves in a certain

This is Penobscot *alāṅksu*, "wolverine" (*Gulo luscus*). In gens No. 2, given by Morgan as "Wild Cat" (Black), Pis-suh, we recognize *ṗəsu*, the term of "Bay Lynx" (*Felis ruffus*). There is no black wild-cat, so it is hard to account for Morgan's parenthesis unless it be that he was misled by the informant's confusion in an attempt to describe the animal in English. The Penobscot call the Fisher (*Mustela pennanti*, Erxleben) the Black Cat. This does occur as a family name in the tribe. Again, Morgan lists as No. 10, Pigeon Hawk, which he gives as K¹-che-ga-gong'-go. In Penobscot pigeon hawk is *awe'ləs* and *kici'* *gagago* is raven ("big-crow"). Raven is also a family name, but Pigeon Hawk is not.

Morgan's Abenaki information is, on the whole, so misleading and fragmentary that were it not for his known reputation as an observer it could well be ignored. Without being tested linguistically, evidence of identity furnished by half-educated natives is very unreliable.

association with animals. These animals are those upon which they prey for their subsistence. This peculiar condition, so far as I know, is unique as a group institution in America, although in individual association it is not so uncommon in the northern area, as I have attempted to show in the second paper referred to above. The Penobscot family names in most instances were derived from the animals which gave identity to the hunting districts through their being most numerous in them. The members of the family were known generally by their patronyms. As regards personal nicknames we find that a suggestion of band identity is involved in them. A fairly large percentage of these are derived from "baby talk" terms, others are derived from peculiarities of speech and behavior and from humorous anecdotes concerning the owners. Some are "use" names, nicknames derived from the kind of game hunted. That the Penobscot nicknames sometimes betrayed a certain connection with the ideas characteristic of the animal associated with the family is shown by a few examples. There is, moreover, still another imaginary association between the family and the animal eponym which appears in the idea that the families inherit some physical peculiarities from the animal. The members of the Whale family (Stanislaus) are pointed out as large, portly, and dark persons, those of the Rabbit family (Newell) as small, timid, and weak, those of the Bear family (Mitchell) as orderly and dignified, and so on. Their traits are thought to be traceable not only to descent but to the fact that they "used" them so extensively. A further psychological association exists between the family groups and their animal eponyms in the belief that certain (about thirteen) of them traced their descent indirectly to animal prototypes. This relationship is accounted for in a myth relating how the culture hero released the world waters from the belly of a monster frog which had held them back in his belly. After slaying him the culture hero frees the waters so that they flow again forming the river systems of the Penobscot country, whereupon some of the people who had been dying of thirst became transformed into marine creatures as a result of overindulgence in quenching their thirst. The others who restrained themselves escaped transformation, to become the ancestors of the human families, assuming, however, the names and to a certain extent the identity of the particular animal into which their nearest relatives were transformed. Totemistic characteristics seem not to be wanting altogether in the case of the Penobscot. What interests us more at this time is the structure of their society as regards possible marriage selection among the Penobscot and throughout the whole northeastern region, as well as upon the deductions from marriage statistics in several bands (Montagnais and Penobscot), a summary of the procedure may be stated, I believe, with some degree of correctness. There are no formulated regulations of marriage between members of different families or bands.

There is, in short, no reason to perpetuate any longer the illusion that any of the Wabanaki peoples possessed a clan organization. And the sooner the correction of Morgan's allegations is admitted the nearer we shall come to a valid understanding of what the termini of distribution mean in American ethnology.

F. G. SPECK

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES IN CALIFORNIA

In a recent paper¹ Professor Kroeber returns to the question of the correlation

¹ Yurok and Neighboring Kin Term Systems (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 35, 1934, pp. 15-22).