

DEAN R. SNOW

SOME MEMORIES OF FRANK SIEBERT

Dean R. Snow, a professor of anthropology at Pennsylvania State University and author of numerous books and articles on the archaeology and ethnohistory of Native Northeastern America, was once on the faculty of the University of Maine at Orono and was a frequent visitor at Indian Island. He has known Frank Siebert for almost thirty years and has this to say about Frank as colleague and as field worker.

I first began to correspond with Frank Siebert in February of 1968. Frank was then still living in Philadelphia, still working at his profession in pathology and still yearning to spend more time at his avocation in linguistics. We had a polite exchange of letters on Eastern Algonquian linguistic classification. Later on I attempted to draw him out more on ways in which historical linguistics and archaeology might be better used together to solve problems of common interest. Eventually Frank sent me a copy of his article on the Proto-Algonquian homeland (Siebert 1967) and I found what I needed for my own subsequent article on the same subject (Snow 1976).

Frank started working with Penobscot speakers in the 1930s, when there were still quite a few of them. Among others, he worked with Newell and Joe Gabriel, who had been born in the middle of the nineteenth century. Joe was the older and more knowledgeable, but he had grown both deaf and "sort of foolish with age," according to Frank. Joe knew more Penobscot, but he was almost impossible to interrogate. Frank got around this by working with Newell until something had him stumped, then Newell would turn to Joe and shout at him in Penobscot

until the problem was solved. This is how Frank advanced his research in linguistics as time permitted while pursuing a separate profession in pathology.

By the 1960s most of the old speakers of Penobscot had passed away. I had come to know Andrew Dana and Arthur Neptune over the previous couple years, but I had neither the linguistic skills nor the time to take advantage of their fluency in the language. Andrew worked with Frank from time to time, had known Frank Speck, and liked to joke that "Speck was short for speculation." On one occasion, and with the help of Ted Mitchell, I was able to persuade the two old curmudgeons to carry on a conversation in Penobscot for my tape recorder. They did not like each other very much. Arthur had been married two or three times and was proud of the fact that he had outlived them all. One of his wives had been Mabel Dana, Andrew's sister, and there was some history there that even in the absence of specifics will be understandable to anyone who has ever had in-laws. In any case, I recorded what may well have been their last conversation in either Penobscot or English. It was probably thereby the last conversation between two men in Penobscot and for all I know the last real or staged conversation in that language between any two Penobscots.

Frank moved to Old Town around 1968 in order to pursue his linguistic research. When Frank came to town my wife Jan and I decided to have him over for dinner. It was the first time we had met him face to face. Frank appreciated Jan's Germanic background, and seemed to forgive my largely English one. Dinner took a long time because Frank spent most of the time talking. This continued after dinner as well. It was three or four in the morning before he reluctantly gave up conversation so that Jan could get a little sleep before reporting to work at the student infirmary. It was one of the most extraordinary evenings we can remember.

Jan and I moved our household and our newborn daughter to upstate New York in the summer of 1969. Frank and I began a new kind of correspondence after our move to New York. I began to get the long rambling commentaries that Frank sent to

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a few people he trusted. Frank continued to work with Andrew Dana, sharing the smoke of nasty little cigars in Andrew's house. Frank's analytical skills and Andrew's memory combined to make a great permanent record of the disappearing Penobscot language. But Andrew's health was also failing fast, and Frank complained in October that they had accomplished little in recent days. Andrew died in January. Frank was devastated by the loss of his old friend and collaborator. They had known each other for thirty-five years. Frank was depressed and unsure about how to carry on his work.

By autumn Frank was back working with Suzie Glossian Dana, Andrew's widow. Suzie was about eighty by this time, older than Andrew had been when he died. She had spoken nothing but Penobscot from the age of two to fifteen. Although she had an excellent vocabulary, she could not translate well. Like some others of us she kept her languages in separate mental compartments and could not move between them easily. He tried to work with Arthur Neptune as well, but Arthur was beginning to slip. On a trip to New York City to visit his son Arthur wandered off and the police had to call Old Town to find out who he was.

Our correspondence slowed in the late seventies and early eighties as I finished up my New England work (Snow 1980) and tried my hand at university administration. I had moved on to my Mohawk Valley Project by the time I heard from Frank again in 1983. By this time he had teamed up with Pauleena Seeber. They were still working together four years later, by which time Frank was employed by the Penobscot Nation. We lost track of each other after that. My work took me deeper and deeper into things Iroquoian and my unfinished Penobscot projects rested in banker boxes. A year and a half ago I moved from Albany to Penn State. My work in Iroquoian archeology has led me into new research in demography using a range of wonderful new computer programs that were unimaginable only a decade ago. Two months ago I pulled out my banker boxes containing the Penobscot demographic data that defied manual analysis thirty years ago. They are already producing results, and

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more than a few of the loose ends have been tied up by bits of information Frank has given me over the years.

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