

BLAIR A. RUDES

ETYMOLOGY OF TUSCARORA

Dr. Blair A. Rudes has conducted linguistic and ethnographic work with members of the Tuscarora Nation of Indians in New York State since the early 1970s. In 1987 he published with Dorothy Crouse, a Tuscarora and historian, a two-volume collection of texts in Tuscarora and English entitled THE TUSCARORA LEGACY OF J.N.B. HEWITT: MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE TUSCARORA LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. He is presently completing a dictionary of the Tuscarora language. Dr. Rudes received his doctorate in linguistics from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1976.

Anyone who has corresponded with Frank T. Siebert, Jr. knows the sense of anticipation that accompanies opening one of his letters. They are often lengthy treatises, a veritable stream of consciousness of ideas, ranging from personal reminiscences, pet peeves, and the local weather conditions to well-thought-out and insightful analyses of ethnographic and linguistic problems that Frank has not yet gotten around to putting in print. Just one example of his insights is offered here in tribute to Frank.

The particular example I have chosen concerns the anomalous relationship between the name of the Tuscarora Nation used by the Tuscaroras themselves and those used in the related Northern Iroquoian languages, the more distantly related Chero-

kee language, the Algonquian languages in the East, and in English. The Tuscarora today call themselves the *skarù·re?* The names for the Tuscarora in other languages may be divided by form into three groups:¹

Cherokee and modern Mohawk

Cherokee *aniskalá·li*

Mohawk *tehatiskaró·ras*

European languages

English Tuscarora

Iroquoian and Algonquian languages

Cayuga *taskáowe?*

Mohawk *akothaskaróre?*

Oneida *taskalô·le*

Onondaga *taskáiyē?*

Seneca *táske·owe?*

Wyandot *taskáho*

Munsee *táskalo·w*

Shawnee *taskalónu*

The Cherokee and modern Mohawk words are plural verbs meaning "they are Tuscaroras." Once the plural pronominal prefixes (Cherokee *ani-*, Mohawk *-hati-*) and other inflectional markers are removed, the remaining verb stems (Cherokee *-skala·l-*, Mohawk *-skaror-*) appear to be direct borrowings from Tuscarora *skarù·re?*. While the borrowing of the Tuscarora self-designation would also account for the latter part of the names in the other languages listed above, no one has ever succeeded in finding a source for the initial syllable, *Tu-* in English, *tha-* in Mohawk, and *ta-* in all the rest of these words. There is no obvious explanation for the initial syllable within the Tuscarora language nor, apparently, in any of the other languages cited.

In a long-hand, eight-page letter addressed to me, Frank makes the following observations with respect to the etymology of the English name:

The Catawba form is *taskarú·de·* [*tʰskʰrú·de·*]
(Catawba *tas* 'salt', root *karu·-* 'dry, evaporate',
and final *-de·* 'eater, devourer'.) Catawba *-de·* is

found in *widé* 'buffalo, cow', also used for just 'bison' and 'domestic cattle'; and *isiwí·de* 'cannibal; Northern Iroquois, Seneca, Mohawk, etc.' (*isi* 'raw, flesh', *-wi-* 'body, main part', *-de* 'eater').

Now, there is much evidence that the natives of coastal N[orth] Car[olina], including the Tuscarora, dried sea water to make salt, and also traded salt to inland tribes (Lederer, Yearly, etc.)² so the term is suitable. Furthermore the Tuscarora were surrounded on at least two sides (west and south) by Catawban or Carolina Siouan speakers (Eno, Shakori, and Woccon), the Eno and Woccon at least being allied to the Tuscarora (Lawson 1709 lists the Eno as an actual Tuscarora settlement).³ The Eno later joined the Catawba Nation (see Adair),⁴ and the Woccon fought with the Tuscarora in the Tuscarora War, suffering terrible casualties, and many of the survivors were sold into slavery, being destroyed as a group. Also, William Byrd II in his writings uses the term *Tuskarode* for the Tuscarora.⁵ To me all this added up to the English adoption of the term for the Tuscarora from surrounding Carolina Siouan dialects (Woccon, Eno, Shakori, etc.). This is certainly sensible to me, and apparently reasonable.

The account given on page 524 of the new Handbook Vol. 15 ... does not strike me as being very relevant.⁶ Most of the terms given seem to be borrowings. The Catawba term is not discussed, although given by Byrd and I think also by Speck in one of his writings.⁷ "Hemp Gatherers" so far as I know does not fit Tuscarora early culture, but "salt making" does.⁸

I am open-minded, however; I would like to hear your counter-argument.

As I told Frank then, his explanation accounts nicely for the English word and I have no counter-argument. As for the names in the other Northern Iroquoian languages and neighboring Algonquian languages, I suspect they were borrowed either from the English or from the Catawba.

NOTES

¹With the exception of the modern Mohawk word, the data are taken from David Landy, *Tuscarora Among the Iroquois*, *Handbook of North American Indians*, Volume 15: *Northeast*, edited by Bruce G. Trigger, p. 524 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978). The modern Mohawk word is from Gunther Michelson, *Notes for a Mohawk Dictionary*, p. 61 (Ottawa: Gunther Michelson).

²John Lederer, *The Discoveries of John Lederer*, translated by Sir William Talbot (London: J.C. for Samuel Heyrick, 1672); Francis Yeardley's *Narrative of Excursions into Carolina, Virginia*, Linne-Hanover, 8 May, 1654, in *A Collection of State Papers of John Thurboe*, vol. II, pp. 273-274 (1742).

³John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina* (London, 1709).

⁴James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: Edward & Charles, 1775).

⁵See William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line Between Virginia and North Carolina* (Richmond, 1866) and Louis B. Wright (ed.), *The Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

⁶Landy, *Tuscarora Among the Iroquois*.

⁷Wright, *Prose Works*; Frank Speck, *Catawba Texts* (New York: Columbia University, 1934).

⁸The meaning "Hemp Gatherers" for *skarù're?* was first proposed by the Tuscarora linguist and ethnographer, John Napoleon Brinton (J.N.B.) Hewitt in his article "Tuscarora" in the *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, edited by Frederick Webb Hodge, Bulletin 30, part II, pp. 842-853 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1910).