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On Records: Delawares, Colonists and the Media of History and Memory

This study analyzes a series of controversies in the shared history of Native Americans and settlers in the colonial mid-Atlantic region, focusing on two dimensions of communication: between peoples and across generations. Its framework is a historical narrative that is presented in the most important early ethnographic source on the Delaware (also known as Lenape) Indians, the Moravian missionary John Heckewelder's *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations who once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (1819). It consists of a migration account and three epitomes of colonial contact:

1. Long ago, the Delawares migrated from "a very distant country in the western part of the American continent" to settle the region spanning the Delaware and Hudson River Valleys;
2. They were the first to welcome "the Whites," who sailed into New York Harbor bearing alcohol and metal implements, and initiated an ignominious history of land transactions by asking for only as much land as the "hide of a bullock" could cover;
3. William Penn came, bearing "words of peace and good will" (a reference to the so-called Great Treaty of Friendship);
4. The next generation of Pennsylvania Proprietors, Penn's sons, dispossessed the Delawares of the last remnant of their ancestral territory through "fraud" (a reference to the 1737 "Walking Purchase").[1]

This seemingly simple narrative – the rise and fall of "Lenapehoking" – cannot be considered as *the* early history of the Delaware people, for at least three reasons. First, as Amy Schutt has recently shown, the several neighboring Algonquian groups inhabiting the river valleys may have emerged from the colonial period as an entity called the Delawares, but they did not enter into it as such.[2] Thus the narrative can be understood less as a product of collective experience than as a collation of the several stories of the Munsees, the Unamis, and other groups. Second, insofar as the narrative also involves Europeans, it is not only a Native American history. The stories of how the Native grantors lost their land are also regional founding stories of particular significance to the latter-day residents of New York, the Philadelphia area, and the Forks of Delaware region of Pennsylvania. Third, and perhaps most significantly, each of the episodes composing this narrative is disputed, with regard to its significance, its status as historical fact, or both.

On Records aims to contribute to – and to bridge – two emergent transdisciplinary fields of study. The study of "language ideologies," a sociolinguistic term designating cultural attitudes towards language-use, including literacy, potentially converges with that of collective memory on the issue of the values societies assign to different media as records of the past.[3] I assert that the widespread reluctance among scholars to admit oral traditions as evidence of anything more than the subjective experience of the peoples who share them involves a logical fallacy: that a historical interpretation that excludes seemingly questionable sources is necessarily less speculative than one that does not. Such an exclusion risks diminishing rather than safeguarding the accuracy of an analysis. My approach, as the following chapter descriptions indicate, is to articulate connections among writing, recorded speech, visual and tactile media, scholarly research, popular memory, various pasts and presents, and texts and contexts. This broader view affords a nuanced understanding of what took place and also provides valuable insights into the divergent memories of a shared past.

This book should appeal to scholars in Native American studies, American studies, American history, American literature, media studies, memory studies and sociolinguistics.

Chapter Descriptions

The Introduction discusses the intersections between research on collective memory and language ideology. It considers the Delawares, the colonists and their descendants, and academic scholars as participants in "mnemonic communities." These communities are defined not only by the stories they share but also by the media and genres through which they share them, as well as different conceptions of historical truth and standards of evidence. The book analyzes the interaction – involving both conflict and interdependence – between these communities. The Introduction also explains my usages of several terms with contested definitions, including Delaware/Lenape, tradition, and writing.

1. "Lenape Annals." The mystery of the origin of the Indians was especially fraught in the nineteenth-century political context of Indian Removal. At issue with reception of the Delaware migration tradition recorded by Heckewelder, and its adaptations by James Fenimore Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Constantine Samuel Rafinesque in the *Walam Olum*, an apocryphal pictographic epic, is the media of collective memory. Can oral traditions retain memories of the remote past? Will a "people without writing" be recognized as a people?[4] My analysis focuses on the reception of the *Walam Olum* (ca 1834), attributing its longstanding acceptance, despite repeated challenges to its authenticity, to a desire to credit the Indians with the type of cultural achievement represented by the "one native record" from what is now the United States "that could be called, in our fashion, a book."[5]

2. "Account of a Tradition." For at least two centuries, Lenapes and Munsees have recounted how the first Dutch colonists asked for as much land as a bullock's hide could cover, and then cut the hide into strips to claim as much as it could encircle. Some historians have pointed out that there are antecedents for this tale in European folklore and classical histories, especially the founding of Punic Carthage by Queen Dido (a story alluded to by Virgil's *Aeneid*). They have assumed that Native Americans borrowed this seemingly fabulous motif from Europeans. However, there are also stories of "Hide-Measured Lands,"[6] involving Portuguese, Spanish, and especially Dutch colonists, at several other sites of early modern empire, such as Cambodia, Java, and South Africa. Parallels appear in seventeenth-century Chinese annals recounting the Dutch colonization of Taiwan and the Spanish founding of Manila. In contradiction to both historical and folkloric scholarship, I argue that the best explanation for the distribution of the so-called Dido motif is that the European colonists, who emulated classical precedents as well as one another, actually performed the hide trick. I discuss the native tradition's consistency with early imperial policies and histories, as well as the hide trick's surprising practicability (Dido lends her name to a contemporary mathematical problem). The account thus represented an emblematic instance of "Punic faith" in colonial transactions. For the Delawares, it was both a history of an unfortunate precedent and an allegory for the Walking Purchase.

3. "The Most Valuable Record." Several commentators on Benjamin West's famous painting *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians when he founded the province of Pennsylvania in North America* (1772) suggest that William Penn never met with the Delaware Indians underneath the great Elm tree by the Delaware River in Shackamaxon in 1682. There is no extant written treaty from that meeting. After the fall of the Elm (which was made into relics) in an 1810 storm,

historians attempted to preserve and to corroborate the "testimony of tradition" regarding the treaty.[7] They depended, in part, on supposed Native American memories of the event, and indigenous media such as the wampum belt that the Delawares purportedly gave to Penn on the occasion. This chapter ultimately argues that a meeting did take place (in 1683), but that the event, aggrandized by tradition, is less significant than the memories of it. The chapter approaches the treaty tradition through various iconographic expressions – the painting, the tree, the wampum belt, peace medals, and the stock phrases of diplomacy – to explore its significances to different communities of memory.

4. "Writings and Deeds" While the ample historiography on the 1737 Walking Purchase has focused on the questions of whether and how the Proprietors cheated the Delawares, this chapter examines the transaction as a conflict of language ideologies. During the first phase of the dispute, the extremely erudite Provincial Secretary James Logan against the sachem (leader) from the Forks, Nutimus. Logan and Nutimus joined a longstanding debate over the authority of written records and their relation to memory. Similarly, the colonists and Indians brought to bear different approaches to the interpretation of the agreement, and especially the word "walk." Intriguingly, on the subject of the relation between words and things, the English "culture hero" John Locke has his counterpart in Delaware traditions in Wehixamukes, "the man who misunderstands." A generation later, a political scandal erupted over the legitimacy of the Walking Purchase, involving Quakers, Proprietary and Royal representatives, and contingents of Delawares and Iroquois. To an extraordinary extent, the controversy became embroiled in matters of communicative protocol: over who should have access to the documentary record, and who should write for, and speak for, the Indians. The problems the plaintiffs, especially Teedyuscung, had in making their voices heard anticipate the methodological problems facing contemporary scholars working with treaty records and related sources. In 2004, the Delaware Nation of Oklahoma reprised the eighteenth-century case, suing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for a 315 acre tract in the Forks of Delaware region of Pennsylvania.

"Conclusion: A Chain of Memory." In tracing a chain connecting the late Woodland period Algonquians whose remains were found during the restoration of the Immigration Museum on Ellis Island in 1985 with the Delaware and Munsee tribal members who reburied them, the conclusion articulates a conversation between memory studies and Native American Studies.

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[1] John Heckewelder, *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States* (Philadelphia: A. Small, 1819) chap. 1-3.

[2] Amy C Schutt, *Peoples of the River Valleys: The Odyssey of the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[3] Kathryn A. Woolard, "Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry," in *Language Ideologies: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-47.

[4] A. L. Kroeber, "The Morals of Uncivilized People," *American Anthropologist* 12: 3 (September 1910): 441.

[5] M. Austin, "Non-English Writings II: Aboriginal," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. W.P. Trent et al. (New York,: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 612.

[6] James G. Frazer, "Hide-Measured Lands," *The Classical Review* 2, no. 10 (December 1888): 322.

[7] John F Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania*, 1 (Philadelphia: John Pennington and Uriah Hunt, 1844), 131.