

Niagara: The Crooked Place or Waianag?

By Alan Corbiere

Throughout Beaulieu's report he pits the written record against the oral tradition, all the while stressing that care is required when using both, but he adopts a more critical analytic lens to the oral tradition. Beaulieu privileges the written record throughout his analysis, which is understandable given that he is trained to do so, but this also privileges the British interpretation of events at the expense of the Anishinaabe perspective. An emblematic example of privileging the English record occurs when Beaulieu states that the Manitoulin Chiefs' petition of 1862 was not referring to Niagara but referring to Green Bay, Wisconsin, which is outright wrong.¹ Beaulieu comes to this erroneous conclusion because he did not consult the original Ojibwe document. The specific passage in question is:

I wish to chase anyone who comes near your lake - Your children shall possess their lands yonder. Did you say this to my forefathers at the place where the water runs into the sea? ²	Niwi akonajawa maba kigitchigamimiwang wa bimadabid. Oganidibendan kidabinodjiim odakim awadi waianag [emphasis added] agigaganonadwaba ningitisimag.
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Consulting Frederic Baraga's dictionary (version published in 1878) on the Ojibwe language we see that he lists "**Waiânag**. Basin of water; pl. -in. S. **Wâna**." The next entry is "**Waiânag** kakâbikawang. A basin of water where there is a waterfall over steep rocks, that is, **Niagara Falls** [emphasis added]."³ The chiefs clearly were referring to Niagara and not Green Bay, Wisconsin as Beaulieu summarized. Beaulieu tries to disconnect the Manitoulin petition from the Niagara treaty, "Even if we cannot definitively establish a link between the tradition of 1862 and Robert Dickson's speech in 1813, we can at least confidently confirm that the Manitoulin Island chiefs were **not** [emphasis added] alluding to the Niagara Congress of 1764."⁴ Throughout Beaulieu's report he attempts a number of times to distance Niagara from the Anishinaabe oral tradition.

Without consulting an Ojibwe dictionary, Beaulieu thinly ties his Green Bay location thesis to the speech Robert Dickson delivered to various nations around the nexus of the Great Lakes (Michilimackinac area) in 1813. Beaulieu utilizes a quote from the Jesuit Relations in which Marquette stated that "This bay [Green Bay] bears a Name which has a meaning not so offensive in the language of the savages; For

¹ Beaulieu 2017, p. 28.

² Manitoulin Island Chiefs, 27 June 1862, [English translation] LAC RG 10, Vol. 292, 195678.

³ Baraga 1992, p. 395 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English]. This reprint is one volume containing two parts: English to Ojibwe and then Ojibwe to English and each part is paginated on its own.

⁴ Beaulieu 2017, p. 29.

they call it la baye sallee [“salt bay”] rather than Bay des Puans,⁵ although with Them this is almost the same and this is also The name which they give to the Sea.”⁶ Beaulieu does not provide an Ojibwe or Ho-Chunk [Puan/ Winnebago] word for Green Bay or rather “salt bay” nor has he checked a dictionary for a possible word. This suggests that Beaulieu has disregarded the source and just relied on the English translation, which is problematic because it reveals Beaulieu’s bias for the British written record. Taking Marquette’s words at face value, Beaulieu could have looked up “sea” in an Ojibwe dictionary such as Baraga’s Ojibwe Dictionary and would have found “Sea, **Kitchigami, jiwitâgani-kitchigami**, (ocean).”⁷ Neither of these two words for the “sea” appear in the Manitoulin Chiefs petition of 1862, so we have to surmise that the chiefs were not referring to Green Bay (or Salt Bay) but were referring to Niagara – in their own tongue, Ojibwe.

Beaulieu and many others, rely on the “Crooked Place” as the translation for Niagara. I believe this English translation came from Thomas G. Anderson, who reportedly could speak Ojibwe.⁸ One of the first times this translation appears, if not the first, was in the translation of O-cai-tau’s 1818 speech on Drummond Island.⁹ At that time Thomas G. Anderson was already working for the Indian Department as Store Keeper and Clerk. There are versions of this speech and one is in Anderson’s handwriting, this I believe to be the original.¹⁰ The next time this translation “Crooked Place,” appears is on Treaty 45, the 1836 Manitowaning Treaty also known as the Bond Head Treaty. The opening line is “My Children – Seventy Snow Seasons have now passed away since we met in Council at the Crooked Place (Niagara).”¹¹ Thomas G. Anderson was in attendance, employed as the [Visiting] Superintendent of Indian Affairs. The original treaty is in his handwriting. Anderson then employs this translation again when he responds in 1857 to the special commission on Indian Affairs, aka the Pennefather report.¹² Taking the opportunity to provide additional remarks beyond the list of questions, Anderson wrote about the wampum belts and stated, “the English King sent over many canoes full of his warriors to keep the settlers quiet, but they would not obey his voice, and his warriors threatened to enforce obedience. About this time a great English chief (Sir Wm. Johnson,) invited the head men of the Tribes to meet him in council at the “Crooked Place.”¹³

⁵ Puans are the Ho Chunk people, also known as Winnebago. Puans is the French rendering of Bwaan, which is the Ojibwe word for Sioux. The Ho Chunk are a Siouan people.

⁶ Quoted from Beaulieu 2017, p. 28.

⁷ Baraga 1992, p. [222]** double check at home

⁸ Dictionary of Canadian Biography[?]**

⁹ LAC RG 10, Vol. 32, p. 19172 – 19177 and LAC RG 10, Vol. 35, p. 20381 – 20388.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Treaty 45

¹² Full citation in bibliography. Appendix No. 29, T. G. Anderson to R.T. Pennefather, Indian Office, Cobourg, 19th August 1857

¹³ Ibid.

Since Anderson could speak Ojibwe, why did he translate Niagara as the “Crooked Place”? The Ojibwe speakers clearly used **waianag** (now written as **wayaanag**) to refer to Niagara Falls or rather to its basin below the falls. If we look in Baraga’s dictionary for “crooked” we find the following

Crooked knife, wâgikomân, jashagashkâdekomân.
Crooked root, wâgitckibik.”¹⁴

There is no listing for the word “crooked” per se but the way Ojibwe works is like Latin, that is it is agglutinative, meaning it utilizes morphemes (word parts that carry meaning but are not words on their own) to create greater specificity. An initial morpheme is a word part that occurs at the beginning of a word, a final morpheme occurs at the end and a medial occurs in the middle. So on the English side of the Baraga dictionary we look up “crooked” and there are only the two words (crooked knife and crooked root). However, when we look at Part 2 of the dictionary, Ojibwe to English, we bear more relevant entries.

Wâgâkosi mitig. The tree is crooked; p. waia...sid.¹⁵

Wâgânakisi mitig. The top or head of that tree is crooked or bent; p. waiâ...sid.¹⁶

Wâgidjane, (nin). I have a crooked nose, an aquiline nose; p. waia...ned.¹⁷

Wâgikomân. Crooked knife; pl. -an.¹⁸

The morpheme **waag-** (rendered as wag- and wâg- in Baraga) refers to bent or crooked. This morpheme still conveys this meaning today, as evident by the entries in a dictionary of Eastern Ojibwa/ Chippewa/ Ottawa published by Rhodes in 1992.

waagaag *vii* bend, warp, be bent, be crooked, be warped; pres **waagaa**; cc **e-waagaag, yaagaag.**

waaggid *vai* grow bent, grow crooked; pres **nwaagig**; cc: **e-waagid, yaaggid**

waagging *vii* grow bent, grow crooked; pres **waaggin**; cc: **e-waagging, yaagging**

waaggizid *vai* be warped (of wood); pres **nwaaggiz**; cc: **e-waaggis, yaaggizid**

waagjaaned *vai* have a curved nose; pres **nwaagjaane**; cc **e-waagjaaned, yaagjaaned**

waagnaagzid *vai* look twisted; pres **nwaagnaagoz**; cc: **e-waagnaagzid, yaagnaagzid**¹⁹

In Baraga’s dictionary the letter “p” stands for participle, in Rhodes’ dictionary this is now called the “changed conjunct” and “cc” is used to symbolize it. So Baraga lists **Wâgidjane** (this would be translated as ‘he has a crooked nose’) and

¹⁴ Baraga 1992, p. 62 [Part 1: English to Ojibwe].

¹⁵ Baraga p. 394 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English].

¹⁶ Baraga p. 395 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English].

¹⁷ Baraga p. 395 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English].

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rhodes 1993, p. 350 -351.

then at the end of entry has “**p. waia...ned** (this would be fully spelled out as **waiagijaned**)” Rhodes has **waagjaaned** and then lists the changed conjunct as “**e-waagjaaned, yaagjaaned**” which would be translated as “The one who has a crooked nose” or “he who has a crooked nose.” The morpheme for crooked is **waag-** and the changed conjunct form is **wayaag-**, it is possible, but unlikely that Anderson got these two forms mixed up with **wayaanag** (basin or Niagara Falls). The “waia-” in waianag indicates that the word is a changed conjunct (or participle in Baraga’s usage) of a morpheme “waan-”. Consulting Part 2 of Baraga’s dictionary (Ojibwe to English) we see the following:

Wâna, or **-magad**. It is hollow, deep; also, there is a basin of water; p. waiânag, or –magak.²⁰

Wânadina. The mountain is hollow, there is a cavern in the mountain; p. waia...nag.²¹

Wânikân. A hole in the ground, a grave, etc.; pl. –an.²²

Wânike, (**nin**). I dig a hole in the ground, I dig a grave, etc.; p. waiâniked.²³

So the morpheme “**waana-**” (listed in Baraga as wâna-) refers to hollow, deep, or basin. Closely related is “**waani-**” (listed in Baraga as wâni-) which indicates a hole. This morpheme is still in use today. Rhodes (1992) provides the following:

waandoosbiising *vii* be puddles of water, impersonal, *W*; *pres waandoosbiisin*; cc: **e-waandoosbiising, yaandoosbiising**.

Waankaadang *vti* dig s.t. out; *pres nwaankaadaan*; cc **e-waankaadang, yaankaadang**.

Waankaan *ni* hole, pit, *M*, obs on *W*, *CL*, *pl waankaanan*.

Waankaanaad *vta* dig s.t. (an) out; *pres nwaankaanaa*; imp **waankaazh, waankaanizh**; cc **e-waankaanaad, yaankaanaad**.

Waanked *vai* dig a hole; *pres nwaanke*; cc **e-waanked, yaanked**.

Waanzh *ni* lair, den, cave, [animal’s] hole, *Ot*; *pl waanzhan*; *loc waanzhing*.²⁴

To summarize, translating the “Crooked Place” would have likely used the morpheme “**waag-**” (bent or crooked) and its conjunct would have been “**wayaag-**” but the word the chiefs and Baraga used was **waianag** (wayaanag) based on the morpheme “**waana-**”. Did Thomas Anderson mix **wayaanag** (waianag) with **waagaa** (wayaagaag). He must have had another reason to translate Niagara as the crooked place. A clue to Anderson’s translation lies in a slightly different translation of the morpheme “**waan-**” when it is connected with the final morpheme “**-namo/ -**”

²⁰ Baraga 1992, p. 398 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English].

²¹ Ibid.

²² Baraga 1992, p. 400 [Part 2: Ojibwe to English].

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rhodes 1992, p. 352.

nama” for road, making word “**waannama**: [road] bend, [road] curve.”²⁵ Similarly, another two words in the same source provide some insight, “**waannibiiyaa vii**: [lake] curve” and “**waannijwan vii**: [river] bend.”²⁶ The inflected form (also called participle and changed conjunct) are listed respectively: **wyaannamak**, **wyaannibiiyaak**, and **wyaannijwang**. So Anderson likely registered the morpheme “**waan-**” as “crooked” instead of bent or curved, ergo, he translated **wayaanag** (waianag) as the “Crooked Place.”

Ojibwe language has a role to play in the interpretation of history. In Beaulieu’s analysis, the 1862 Ojibwe petition of the Manitoulin Chiefs does not refer to Niagara, but the preceding demonstrates that they clearly were referring to the Treaty of Niagara or what Beaulieu refers to as the Congress at Niagara. This is why it is important to work with the Ojibwe documents and not disregard them because they contain the Anishinaabe perspective.

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²⁵ Nishnaabemwin Online Dictionary downloaded 13 September 2017
<http://dictionary.nishnaabemwin.atlas-ling.ca/#/results>.

²⁶ Ibid.