

PETER LEWIS PAUL: A TRIBUTE

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On August 25, 1989, all who had any interest in the Maliseet Indians suffered a great loss with the passing of Peter Lewis Paul.

Peter was born on the small Woodstock Reserve. Both Pete's mother and grandmother were expecting at the same time. His mother died in childbirth; a twin brother and his grandmother's baby were stillborn. Peter's father was working in a lumber camp. He was brought up by his grandparents when his mother died and his father left the Reserve.

Pete's grandfather Noel Paul, born about 1850, was the village elder and head man. Noel's lifestyle was similar to that of his father; he was one of the last of the old hunters spending much time in his Maquapit hunting territory. During these years Peter absorbed much Maliseet lore from his grandparents. The stories and traditions of the early 1800s became a part of his daily life. He attended the poor Reserve school for several years. School was not held if it rained or snowed; each year seemed to be a duplication of the previous one. Pete claimed that he had little command of English until he was almost 30. Maliseet traditions taught informally by the elders, who spoke little English, made a greater impression on the children than did their school education. If problems arose relating to their White neighbours, Noel was always contacted. Bush camp training taught Pete to listen. Years later he recalled in vivid detail many events that took place in the early 1900s concerning his people. These early years provided Peter with the background knowledge of a decaying culture.

Peter's childhood was a contrast between carefree days and chores such as cutting firewood and muskrat hunting. There were no labour saving devices.

In 1928 Peter married Minnie Dedham, a granddaughter of Chief Gabe Atwin. They had nine children: Rowena, Donna, Carol, Diana, Wanda, Reggie, Bobbie, Billy and Darryl. Peter was convinced that education was the key to the future and gave the children the best possible education, but regretted that they lost their native language. Several times Peter brought Indian boys home, providing food, shelter and guidance. Peter was a model of love and devotion to his family.

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Edwin Tappin Adney made periodic visits to the Reserve, walking the five miles there from his Upper Woodstock home. The old men gathered around him and attempted to answer his questions. Pete, in his early 20s, stood at the edge of the circle listening, but in respect to the elders let them respond to the questions. Once there was no response; Pete spoke up. Adney asked how he knew the answer. Pete replied that he learned it from his grandfather. From that point on Adney found Peter a reliable informant, and met with him at least once a week either at the Reserve or at Adney's home. Peter developed expertise in the areas of linguistics and ethnohistory during this fine relationship that lasted about 25 years. Each needed the other.

Pete and Minnie cared for Adney in his last illness. When Adney died, there was a void in Pete's life as there was no one to take his place.

Dr. George Frederick Clarke who was beginning to write about New Brunswick history and Maliseet life became a very good friend. He had a camp that bordered Noel's Maquapit hunting grounds and found that his camping experiences were greatly enriched by his Indian neighbours. Clarke needed Peter, who was always welcome at Clarke's home, to discuss Maliseet lore, or in his campsite, as a skillful craftsman to repair birchbark canoes, old baskets and other antiques.

Pete had collected many examples of early Maliseet handicraft, but lost them in a disastrous fire that destroyed his home. The government provided no insurance for reserve housing; the people knew nothing about renters' insurance. Peter was over 50 when this disaster befell him and he had to start all over again. Peter had seen an old house not far away that was to be demolished. He asked Indian Affairs if he could have it. While he waited for a bureaucratic decision, he moved into an old shed, adding electricity and insulation. The wait was long and involved several trips to Ottawa. He finally won and had the first house with a flush toilet on the reserve.

This was not the first time he had to start over. A much younger Pete wanted to make baskets, using basket-making machines. He entered into a partnership with a Woodstocker. The partner sold the business without consulting Peter, who lost everything and had no recourse, because federal law did not permit Indians to borrow money or enter into contracts. Several years later Peter lost the ends of several fingers in an accident. In spite of all these reverses, he laboured indefatigably in order to pay off his debts. He found that repairing potato barrels was a good seasonal trade. About 1950 he observed that trucks came from as far as Virginia to New Brunswick for Christmas trees. He loaded his truck with trees and set off for the Boston market, making several trips a season. He was the first on his reserve to decorate an outdoor tree with lights.

Indians firmly believed that early treaties made in the 18th century, guaranteeing Indians “free liberty of hunting, fishing, fowling and all other lawful liberties and privileges,” gave them the right to cut basket ash anywhere. Brown ash was considered to be good only for baskets. Soon after Adney’s death Pete was ordered to appear in court for cutting an ash on private property. Pete learned from Adney that old treaties were recognized in court. He also became impressed by Gandhi’s passive resistance philosophy. Pete and Minnie agreed that Peter would fight even if it meant going to jail. Armed with treaties and abstracts of previous Indian cases based on these treaties, Peter faced an unprepared lawyer and judge. Peter remained cool under questioning. The case concluded in a draw. Although the judge tried to discourage Peter from cutting ash indiscriminately, Peter interpreted his “not guilty” verdict as meaning that he could continue to cut ash. Winning this case probably meant more to him than the many honours bestowed on him later because it was a landmark case which would benefit his people. Some years later Simon Paul and Patrick Tomer were arrested in Hodgdon, Maine, for cutting ash valued at \$3.50. They called the reserve, explaining that they had been advised to plead “guilty” to cutting ash. Peter told them not to do so, and, armed with treaties, went to court and again upset unprepared lawyers. Ken Buckley of the “Bangor Daily News” called Peter for an interview. Peter showed Indians that they could win in the White world.

Peter had an amazing array of friends. Once when dining in a Fredericton restaurant, Peter introduced me to the Premier of New Brunswick who was at a nearby table and who addressed Paul cordially by his first name.

An old Edison player was needed for Mechling’s cylinder recordings of Maliseet songs. Pete quickly obtained three. Night after night Peter played the cylinders until he knew the old songs by heart, wrote down the words and translated them into English. The cylinders were recorded on tape and played at other reserves bringing back memories of Mechling. Peter talked to the elders in their language; memories were stirred and other songs, long dormant, were remembered. Visitors were rare; hosts stayed up until nearly dawn reminiscing.

A list of all of Peter’s achievements would be just as difficult to produce as would be a list of all the anthropologists who found their way to his door. Each year more came. The names of those who consulted him such as Tappan Adney, Karl Teeter, Ives Goddard, Tom McFeat, Vincent Ericksen, Gaby Pelletier, Andrea Bear and James Wherry sound like a Who’s Who of Wabanakiasts. He had the ability to put all that he learned from childhood into a context that resulted in a better understanding of his culture. In 1970 the University of New Brunswick gave him an honorary Ph.D. He received many congratulatory cards and notes from the White community. Clarke

told a reporter that Peter Paul “commands the respect of all who know him,” and that “he is a legend.” The acknowledged expert on the traditions and culture of his people felt that he was becoming more like a White man!

Peter wanted to see museum Indian displays and visited the New Brunswick Museum, the Robert Abbe Museum, the Museum of the American Indian, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. He repaired birch bark canoes and was consulted about the Maliseet at the New Brunswick Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

Of the many memorable experiences I have had with Peter it is difficult to select one as being of greater import. They were all unique, such as the time when Peter Polchies was skinning several beaver. Paul asked if I had eaten beaver tail; my reply was negative. He said, “We’ll try one.” He found a stick, sharpened one end, thrust it through a tail and stuck the other end in the ground. Then he gathered some shavings and started a fire. A ring of young Indians who had not experienced bush life gathered around him.

Few people are honoured with the bestowal of an honorary doctorate and the Order of Canada, both representing recognition above and beyond the ordinary. These honours were testimonial evidence of acceptance and success in the white world; Peter was an exceptional and distinguished Maliseet ambassador to the Whites. Certainly one would be justly proud of such honours. His Woodstock Reserve, too, honoured Dr. Paul, presenting him with a plaque in a simple ceremony of honour and veneration. This act of recognition by his own people probably meant more to him than all the others. Although the white world acclaimed Dr. Paul a success, his Maliseet world and identity was always of first importance to him.

Dr. Peter Lewis Paul Memorial Fund

Dr. Peter Paul helped many student and professional anthropologists with their studies and special projects. His collections of Maliseet handicrafts, old photographs and other materials presented to museums and archives will provide much valuable information concerning the Maliseet for future generations.

As a means of perpetuating the efforts of Peter Paul to educate both anthropologists and his own people, the Peter Lewis Paul Memorial Fund has been established at the University of New Brunswick for the collection of materials concerning Maliseet Indians and to encourage the Maliseet Indians to study their history and culture. Donations to the fund will be gratefully accepted and can be sent to Dr. Vincent O. Ericksen, Department of Anthropology, University of New Brunswick, Fredricton, New Brunswick, Canada E3B 6E3.