
Identifying the Ojibwa

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The Ojibwa are generally recognized as one of the largest groups of native peoples of North America. It has long been argued, however, just who should be considered Ojibwa, and how far they extended at the time of first contact (Bishop and Smith 1975; Greenberg and Morrison 1982).

Most studies of the Ojibwa have proceeded from two premises: first, that all groups now known as Ojibwa were originally Ojibwa, and second, that native cultures were essentially static. Thus it is assumed that those who are considered Ojibwa today were always Ojibwa, but that they were misnamed in early French records. I have found, on the contrary, that the name Ojibwa has been extended far beyond the original boundaries of the 17th-century people. Using historical documents and records of Ojibwa tradition, I propose to identify the Ojibwa in the 17th century, to trace them throughout the early period after contact, and to explain how so many people who were not originally Ojibwa came to be called Ojibwa.

The Ojibwa, located in the summer at the rapids or falls between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, were mentioned for the first time in Du Peron's letter of 1639 as the nation of the Sault (Thwaites 1959(15):155). The following year Le Jeune referred to them as *Sauteurs*, the people who reside at the rapids, and it is as such that they were known throughout much of the French period (Thwaites 1959(18):231).

Before identifying these *Sauteurs* I wish to suggest several principles of naming Amerindian groups. First, names vary according to time, place, and who is doing the naming. Second, the names people had for each other were often quite different from those given by outsiders, who saw groups either as enemies (*Nadouesioux*) or as allies (*Algoumequin*), or by where they lived (*Winnebago*, *Sauteur*). Third, most Amerindians, who do not even speak their own name, saw no need to name themselves as a group, and often called themselves simply "the people". Finally, names can be transformed linguistically to the point where no one can really remember what they once meant.

The French first made the acquaintance of the *Sauteurs* in 1642 at the Nipissirien Feast of the Dead held on the northeast shore of Lake Huron. Invited to go see them in their own country, the Jesuit Fathers made their

way to Sault Saint Marie where they found 2,000 natives gathered for the fall fishing (Thwaites 1959(23):223-227). This temporary village of so many related peoples has been the source of much confusion about who were and who should be considered Ojibwa. It will be seen that an annual visit to the Sault, or even a temporary residence there, did not make one a Saulteur.

At the heart of the problem lies the difference between the French concept of village and Algonquian concept. The French saw a village as a group of lodges, however permanent. These Upper Algonquians considered a village as a movable group of related people, a family (Cuoq 1886:312). The French did not understand that what appeared to them as a single large community was in reality many separate, independent villages. Thus when the Jesuit Claude Allouez arrived at the primarily Ottawa village of Chequamegon in 1665 he thought it was a single great village consisting of "seven different nations, living in peace, mingled with one another" (Thwaites 1959(50):273). Four years later the Reverend Jacques Marquette noted that there were five distinct villages (Thwaites 1959(54):167).

Until about 1658 all the groups between Montreal and Sault Saint Marie were known collectively as Algonquian nations, and the Saulteurs were merely one among many related peoples who had, at least among themselves, animal-related names. The Amikouai ('beaver'), the Ouasarini (a kind of sturgeon, according to the *Dictionnaire algonquin*, Anonymous 1661), the Outchougai ('osprey'), the Atchiligouan ('white sturgeon'), and the Noquai ('bear') were all mentioned in the Relation of 1640 (Thwaites 1959(18):229-231). Later were added the Nikikouek ('otter'), the Malameg ('catfish') the Chichigouek ('rattlesnake') and the Monsoni ('moose'). All of these, along with the Oumisagi (Mississauga), had relatives among the Saulteurs and remained closely allied to them throughout the 17th century, sharing as they did a common language and culture.

By 1667 the French realized that the Saulteurs had yet another name by which they were known among their allies. The Jesuit Father Allouez, writing of his work among the Saulteurs, called this his mission to the *Outchibouec* (Thwaites 1959(51):61). The Sulpician Galinee recorded three years later in his journal that the "nation des Saulteaux" was called in Algonquin *Outchipoue* (Margry 1879(1):97). In his testimony about the solemn taking possession of the Ottawa country by the French in 1671, the Sieur de St. Luson mentioned the *Etchipoes* inhabiting the place of St. Mary's of the Sault, along with the Noquets and the Malamegs (O'Callaghan 1853(9):803). The Baron de Lahontan, who visited the Sault in 1688, found a village of Outchipoues, alias Sauteurs (Thwaites 1970(1):152). Likewise, in his Memoir of 1697, De Chesnaye named the "Sauteurs qui s'appellent *Ouchipoë*" (Margry 1879(6):6). Finally, Antoine Denis Raudot, in his 1709 Memoir, listed among the various groups of native peoples the "Sauteurs

or *ouchipouais*" (Kinietz 1972:366). Although less used than Saulteur, the name Ojibwa was indeed recognized as the true name of the people who dwelt at the rapids. It is also clear that, at this early period, the Saulteurs were the only Ojibwa; the Noquets were Noquets, the Amikouets were Amikouets, and the Mississauga were Mississauga. And so they remained throughout the 17th century.

But who, then, were the Ojibwa? What is the significance of their name? Like so many appellations, the meaning of this one has been lost through centuries of use and changing pronunciation. There have been several interpretations, even by the Ojibwa themselves.

One of the first to try to explain the name was Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, whose wife's mother was an Ojibwa from La Pointe, and the source of much of his information about the Ojibwa. In one of his earliest works, in 1826, Schoolcraft quoted his father-in-law as saying that the meaning was lost in antiquity (Mason 1962:31). Later he decided that the ending *-we* was part of the Ojibwa word for voice, *inwewin*, and thought it denoted a peculiarity in their voice or utterance (1851a:205). Anyone who has ever heard an Ojibwa speak knows that this explanation lacks foundation.

William Whipple Warren (1984:36), the Métis historian and interpreter, believed it had something to do with the verb 'to roast until puckered up', *ojib* + *ubway*, referring to their ancient method of torturing captives. There is, however, no tradition or record which supports this idea. Warren's contemporary George Copway saw only the word *ojib* as 'puckered up', and thought it referred to "a style of moccasins worn at a general council above St. Anthony Falls when land was distributed to Ojibwa" (Copway 1860:30). But the name Ojibwa precedes the council by over 150 years, and there is no evidence that the Ojibwa moccasins were uniquely gathered. Nevertheless, this theory is accepted by many Ojibwa today (Pfaff 1993:9).

Others relate the name to the verb *ojibiwa*, 'write on it', as found in Baraga's dictionary (1966:319), and think it has something to do with the signs and symbols which the Ojibwa—and most forest people—put on tree bark. The Ojibwa, however, had a very specific verb which already meant to 'make marks on', *masinibiige*, and which would have been used for this kind of writing (Baraga 1966:225). Moreover, the Ojibwa were not unique in their custom of leaving messages on trees (Figure 1).

Although the meaning of the word *outchibouec* may be lost in antiquity, it is also possible that, like the animal names of the groups most closely related to the Ojibwa, the word was once a reference to a totemic designation. One Ojibwa word for crane recorded in the 1661 *Dictionnaire algonquin* is *outchitchak*, recorded 200 years later by Baraga as *otchitchak*, and by Warren as *ujejauk*. Although any relationship of the name *outchibouec* to the

ancient Algonquian word for crane is denied by contemporary Algonquian scholars, it is nevertheless interesting that such a word is found to be the earliest designation of the people whose totemic sign was the crane.

Mythology as well as historical documentation support the identification of the Ojibwa as the people of the crane totem. In 1701, when the French gathered together all the nations to establish peace among them, the leaders of each group signed with the mark of their village. For the Saulteurs it is clearly a crane, as for the Amikouets, a beaver, and the Mississauga, an eagle (NAC C11A:F-19:43).

Many Ojibwa origin stories mention the crane. According to one tradition recorded by Schoolcraft, there were once two brothers fleeing from their cruel mother. When they reached the rapids at Sault Saint Marie on their journey south, they were helped across by a crane who befriended them. They then made their home at the falls, and became the progenitors of the Ojibwa people, taking the crane as their totem (Mason 1958:95-96).

The importance of the crane is again confirmed in the sacred migration scrolls of the Ojibwa people. A bird, thought to be a crane, appears as the people reach Lake Superior (Dewdney 1975:60-69). It is noteworthy that, before reaching Lake Superior, the otter, beaver, bear, and eagle are also evident, all totemic designations of closely-related groups.

Among the Ojibwa of Sault Saint Marie the pre-eminent role of the crane totem was always recognized. Shingaba Wossin, representing the cranes, was given first place as speaker and signer at the treaty councils of 1825 and 1826 (NA RG-75:T494:10; McKenney 1972:377). Ten years later, when Schoolcraft selected delegates for a trip to Washington from among his mother-in-law's family, who were of the reindeer totem, the Ojibwa of Sault Saint Marie were not pleased. Gitchee Kawkaosh, chief since the death of Shingaba Wossin in 1828, came to complain to the agent:

Why and for what purpose has the man Whaiskee gone to the home of our great father? Why did he leave without notifying me and other men of influence of my tribe, of his mission? Why should he, whose totem-fathers live about Shaugawamekong be at his own will made the representative of the ancient band of red men whose totem is the lofty Crane? (Schoolcraft 1951b:533)

One old Métis of La Pointe, whose mother was Ojibwa and whose father a Métis trader, emphasized the antiquity of the crane totem to Johann Georg Kohl in 1855:

La marque des Grues est la plus noble et la plus grande marque parmi les Ojibbeways. Les Grues montent jusqu'au Deluge. Ils ont pris possession de ces terres après la Deluge.

Of course, both his wife and his mother were of the crane totem (Kohl 1985:149). He himself, however, had no totem, since the totem descends only through the father.

William Warren's insistence on the pre-eminence of the crane totem is well known. Like the old Métis who was his mother's brother, Warren was a descendent of the crane chiefs of La Pointe, and is therefore seen as representing their traditions. In the allegory he recounted, it was the cranes who led the way to La Pointe (Chequamegon) and who later relinquished leadership to the loon totem (Warren 1984:87-88). This tradition is verified in the records of the council held at Fond du Lac in 1826. Tug-waug-aun-e, chief of the crane totem at La Pointe, was one of the first speakers. After a few words he became embarrassed and ceded his place to Peezhickee, chief of the loon totem, who "would explain better what he meant" (McKenney 1972:379). Thereafter Tug-waug-aun-e was considered second chief of La Pointe.

Tradition and the historical record both confirm the identification of the original Ojibwa as the crane totem of the Upper Great Lakes Algonquians of the 17th century. It remains to consider how the Ojibwa increased from a mere 150 persons recorded by the Jesuits in 1670 at the Falls of St. Mary to become one of the largest groups of native people in North America. Why did so many related groups take on the designation Ojibwa?

Throughout the latter part of the 17th and early 18th century there is ample evidence that other Algonquian peoples allied themselves to the Ojibwa. As Champlain had noted in 1609, the primary purpose of alliance was for mutual aid in time of warfare (Biggar 1929(2):70). It may have involved exchange of women in these patrilineal, exogamous bands, and often did. Louis André had noted in his 1688 *Préceptes* that men took wives from other nations whenever it was possible (1688:45). But even the Ojibwa could not have had enough men (or women) to go around to all. Having numerous wives from outside their group, and even retaining affinal relations, the Ojibwa appeared to grow and spread out over much of the area north and west of Lake Superior. The extension of Ojibwa goes beyond marriage, however, and many groups were simply subsumed, absorbed by the Ojibwa.

In 1653 a group of Sauteurs, Mississagua, Nipissing, Amikouet, and Atchiligouan joined together near Sault Saint Marie to go to the aid of the Ottawa and Huron who were being pursued by the Iroquois (Thwaites 1959(38):181). Two years later, according to Perrot, the retreating Iroquois were defeated by a combined force of Saulteurs, Mississauga, and Nikikouets (Blair 1911(1):153). It was soon afterward that the Saulteurs and Mississauga fled to the Keweenaw for lack of game (Blair 1911(1):159),

and in 1659 it was again the Mississauga who accompanied a group of Saulteurs to Trois Rivières in six canoes to trade (Thwaites 1959(45):105).

In 1662 a hunting group near the Sault included Saulteurs, Outaouacs, Nipissings, and Amikouets. When they came upon an Iroquois war party in the vicinity of the Sault, they elected as chief a Saulteur because of his familiarity with the area. Under his leadership, and although they did not yet have guns, they surprised and slaughtered the entire Iroquois party (Blair 1911(1):179). In 1670 it was a group of Saulteurs, Mississauga and Cree who went with the Ottawa to Montreal (Blair 1911(1):211-212). That winter, the winter of 1670-1671, a band of Saulteurs wintered with the Amikouets and hunted quite successfully on Manitoulin Island (Blair 1911(1):221). But by 1671 most of the scattered peoples had returned to their own homeland, or as close to it as they could, for, as one Jesuit noted, "these Savages possess an incredibly strong attachment for the country of their birth" (Thwaites 1959(55):143).

The Ojibwa homeland, however, remained a mixed community a little longer. Living at the Sault when Du Lusson took possession in 1671 were Saulteurs, Malamek and Noquet (Margry 1879(1):97). After 1671, when the Ottawa fled from Chequamegon because of the Sioux, they went first to Sault Saint Marie where they had relatives. And although the Jesuits make it appear that this was the mission to the Saulteurs, it was clearly a mission to the Kiskanon band of Outaouacs who later moved to Saint Ignace near Michilimackinac. Also living at the Sault at this time was a band of Chichigouek, inhabiting their own village, as did each totemic group (Thwaites 1959(57):211-229).

By 1680 it is evident that there were three distinct bands of Saulteurs, one at Sault Saint Marie, one at Chequamegon, and the other on the Keweenaw. Some of their allies, Amikouets, Noquets, Kiskakon Ottawa, Sinago Ottawa, Ottawa du Sable, Mississauga, and Hurons, lived in villages near them, but all retained their separate identity. During the winter of 1683 the Sieur Du Lhut encountered at least six Algonquian groups living at the Sault, each in its own village and with its own chiefs (Margry 1888(6):41-45). Although they shared in the riches of the falls, they did not thereby become Saulteurs.

Thus while many different groups passed through the Sault in the 17th century, wintered with the Saulteurs, even married into them, they all remained distinct groups in the narratives of the period. The designation Saulteur was reserved for one group, the original and true inhabitants of Sault Saint Marie, the Ojibwa.

As population increased throughout the 18th century, the old Algonquian pattern of band fission continued. The same process which resulted in a plethora of animal-named villages in the 17th century, now formed

new totems, such as the stag and the loon, while others, such as the beaver and otter, almost disappeared, and became footnotes in the pages of history. In the enumeration of 1736, which counted only warriors, both the crane and the stag totems were found at Kiouanon (the Keweenaw peninsula), the crane and the catfish at Sault Saint Marie, and 60 warriors of the catfish totem were located at Kaministiquia northwest of Lake Superior (O'Callaghan 1853(9):1054). By 1743 these were already being called the "Sauteux Ouassés" by Beauharnois (PAC C11A:F-79:118).

By the 19th century the Mississauga were so much a part of the Ojibwa that many no longer recognized their once separate but equal status. George Copway, Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, recalled in 1847 that his great-grandfather, one of the first who settled at Rice Lake in Ontario in about 1700, was of the crane totem, and his mother an eagle. Even there the pre-eminence of the crane totem was recognized; except in a few instances, wrote Copway, the chiefs were of the crane tribe (Copway 1847:14-16). Of course, the cranes were the Ojibwa who had migrated with the Mississauga towards Fort Frontenac in the early 18th century (O'Callaghan 1853(9):848).

It is not difficult to follow the Ojibwa, and many other totemic groups, into southeastern Ontario, or south through the Michigan peninsula towards Detroit, or north and west of Lake Superior. But why Ojibwa? Why did so many groups lose themselves in the Ojibwa? I suggest that the pre-eminence of the people of the crane is the result of several factors. First and most obvious, is their location at one of the richest fishing grounds of the Great Lakes. Their rights at Sault Saint Marie were recognized by the Cree, the Gens des Bois, the Monsonis, and by all who resorted to the Sault at various times.

The Ojibwa were a strong and fiercely independent people. They seldom went to Montreal, and generally did not hang around French forts and missions. They were so unreceptive to Christian proselytization that, in 1671, the Jesuits moved their Huron-Ottawa flock from Sault Saint Marie to St. Ignace. Time after time the Jesuits complain of the obstinacy of the Saulteurs to Christianity, of their debauchery, idolatry, superstitions, and polygamy. Even Galinee, when he went through the Sault in 1670, remarked that he saw no sign of Christianity among the natives there (Margry 1879(1):97).

One last factor contributing to the pre-eminence of the Ojibwa was their strength and ability as warriors. The Potawatami fled to them for protection in 1642, and some were still there when Radisson and Groseilliers passed through in 1661 (Adams 1961:113). It has already been shown how, on at least two occasions, they and their allies defeated the Iroquois without French help. There is one incident, however, which shows their

extraordinary military ability. In 1688, when the Baron de Lahontan, then stationed at Michilimackinac, needed reinforcements for an expedition with the Ottawa against the Iroquois, he made a special effort to enlist Saulteurs, for, he wrote, "I knew that the Outaouas had not the Reputation of too much courage." Indeed, when the first two canoes of the enemy appeared, it was the Saulteurs who proposed to surround them and cut off their escape, and then effectively executed their plan. As 400 more Iroquois were approaching with some Miami captives, the Ottawa were of the opinion that they had done enough, but the Saulteurs maintained that they would rather perish than fail to attempt the rescue of the prisoners, even if they had to do it by themselves. Reluctantly, the Ottawa agreed to the proposal, but, firing too soon, gave the Iroquois the opportunity to escape. The captives, however, were retaken, and the Saulteurs returned home satisfied (Thwaites 1970:152-161).

So aware were the French of the strength of the Ojibwa, that they were constantly watchful of their relations with their numerically stronger neighbors, the Sioux, because a war between these two peoples would severely curtail the fur trade. Certainly, the Sioux were at war with the Cree, the Assiniboine, and their allies, but a war with the Saulteurs would be disastrous.

In summary, then, it should be said that in the 17th century Sault Saint Marie was at the center of a vast circumference filled with Algonquian nations, and for a long time all these nations remained distinct. While later historians, ethnologists, and archaeologists may have confused them, they themselves did not. They always knew who they were, and for the Saulteurs, that meant Ojibwa. Those who were not Ojibwa, those men who married into the crane totem, or those who just resided among them, eventually became known as Ojibwa, retaining their former identity instead as totemic clans. The extension of the name, however, was done by outsiders. For the Ojibwa and all their allies it was, and is, enough to be called simply "the people", *Anishinabeg*.

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