

An Ethnolinguistic Look at the Huron Longhouse

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*This paper examines 17th and 18th century Huron vocabulary pertaining to the longhouse in order to understand better the structure of **such** buildings and, to a lesser extent, the social arrangements of their inhabitants. Most of the material comes from the writings of the Jesuit missionaries, **published** in the Jesuit Relations and in an Ontario Archives report of 1920, as well as **unpublished** entries in manuscripts of French-Huron dictionaries. Other material comes from the journal of the Recollect Gabriel Saganj, and from his Huron phrasebook. The paper presents Huron terms, most of them noun roots, for various parts of the longhouse and items associated with the longhouse. The terms for **house, vestibule, door, end wall, platform, mat, hearth, support poles, extension poles, longitudinal poles, central suspended poles, rafter poles, roofing poles, bark, and smoke holes** are discussed.*

Introduction

Anthropological linguistics has great potential for aiding the work of archaeologists. This is especially true in the study of the Huron. In a series of short articles in Arch Notes, I have just scratched the surface of that potential, although dealing with such diverse subjects as the calendar of monthly names (Steckley 1983), tobacco (Steckley 1985), burbot (Steckley 1986a), infant burial (Steckley 1986b), beads (Steckley 1987b) and Huron armour (Steckley 1987c).

Huron ethnolinguistics is not without substantial difficulties that make certainty of interpretation hard won. No native speakers exist to act as knowledgeable informants. The tangled use of dialects in the sources has yet to be completely unravelled. Almost all the material in and about the language was written by Jesuit missionaries, people who, despite their skills, still only learned the language as adults, and who were more interested in the spiritual than the material world. Translations of Huron words, phrases and longer passages are either in 17th and 18th century French (which contains pitfalls for researchers familiar only with the 20th century variety) or in idiomatically abbreviated Latin. Thus, many of the findings must only be probabilistic and suggestive, until verified by other means. Accordingly, this paper's main purpose is to provide a new source of ethnohistorical information not previously available to the archaeological community. Suggestions will be made as to the interpretation of the data. It is hoped that this will

initiate a scholarly discussion in which the 'hard facts' will be hammered out.

Sources

The linguistic sources are both published and unpublished. The former include not only the scattered terms in the 'standard' ethnohistorical works of the Jesuit Relations (JR) and Recollect Brother Gabriel Sagard's *Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons* (Sagard 1939), but two, more obscure, sources that require some explanation.

Sagard also put together a French-Huron phrase-book, accessible to the researcher in his "Histoire du Canada" (Sagard 1866). This is the product of his work with the Huron in 1623-1624, combined with the labours of at least one other early visitor to the Huron, possibly one or more of Father Nicholas Viel, Joseph Le Caron, Joseph de la Roche Daillon, or even Estienne Brule. There is a linguistic diversity in this source, representing at least two dialects of Huron, and possibly even a few Neutral entries. Sagard's phrase-book is often difficult to interpret, as the orthography is not completely consistent, and as one or more syllables are often missing from the Huron words transcribed (see Steckley 1987a:14, and 5.1).

The second major published source that requires explanation is the *Fifteenth Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario, 1918-1919*. This contains a Huron grammar, a Huron-French dictionary organized according to the five Huron conjugations, and a collection of religious works, all copied by Jesuit Father Pierre Potier, who lived with the Wyandot (a remnant group of Petun, Huron and Neutral) from 1744 to 1781.

New Jesuit missionaries would learn Huron by copying out the work of those who preceded them. In time they would add newly-acquired knowledge to the model they were copying. Potier's dictionary was a 1751 recopying of 17th century manuscripts associated with Jesuit Father Etienne de Carheil (Potier 1920:xvii), who, in turn had built on the work of linguistic pioneers such as Fathers Jean de Brébeuf, Antoine Daniel and Pierre Chaumonot. As other copyists before him, Potier added what he heard to the work, in this case what can be termed the Wyandot dialect of Huron.

The bulk of the information for this paper, however, comes from unpublished sources. These are French-Huron dictionaries, built on an original model first developed by Brébeuf and his colleagues during the late 1630s and 1640s. These dictionaries are part of a group of manuscripts microfilmed by Victor Hanzeli in the course of writing *Missionary Linguistics in New France* (Hanzeli 1969; see pp127-128). The microfilms are kept at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Presented in what I feel is chronological order, they are:

- a) **FHO** - A French-Huron-Onondaga dictionary, written c1655 (see Steckley 1982:29);
- b) **FH** - A French-Huron dictionary, written probably sometime during that last quarter of the 17th century;
- c) **FHc1690** - A French-Huron dictionary, written during the early 1690s;
- d) **FHc1697** - A French-Huron dictionary, probably written during the period 1697-1700.

The Longhouse

Presented here are Huron terms for parts of the longhouse and items associated with the longhouse, for example, hearths and mats. Most of these terms are nouns, and will be looked at in terms of how they are typically incorporated into particular verbs. Translations, both from the original French and from Huron, will be given. Most of the examples that will be referred to come from lengthy entries listed under "cabane" in FHO and FHc1697 (in the latter case as one in a series of extended entries on a range of topics; see Steckley 1983 and 1987b).

Some of the symbols used require explanation. The '8' represents a 'w' before a vowel, and a 'u' before a consonant. The symbol represents a 'y', and the °, an h-like sound.

1:0 House (-nnonchi-/-nnons-)

The Huron noun for 'house', typically *-nnonchi-* (see Potier 1920:162 #3, 183 #31, 201 #25 and 236 #691) but *-nnons-* in certain linguistic environments (see Potier 1920:241 #79, 267 #32 and 281 #67) was incorporated into a number of Huron verbs. In the entry in the FHO this noun was used in two different ways:

- 1.1 Annonste,ench[°]ra
 onatennonste,ench[°]ra
- le ceil*
/canopy/
nous avons (mis) des escorces au dessus

/We have put some bark over our place in order to create a joint tenancy/

FHO; the terms surrounded by (...) are guesses at words that are difficult to decipher, and those surrounded by /.../ are either translations from French or the letters missing from French abbreviations)

The word "onatennonste,ench[°]ra" is composed of the following morphemes or meaningful word parts:

Morpheme	Meaning/Function	Source
on-	we'	(Steckley 1987a:29)
-ate-	semireflexive	(Potier 1920:59)
-nnons-	house'	(op.cit)
-teen-	to join' (with -nnons- refers to people being next-door neighbours)	(Potier 1920:281-282)
-cha-	nominalizer (noun maker)	(Potier 1920:66 #10)
°ra-	'to put or be above'	(Potier 1920:332 #9)

The combined meaning is something like, *'we are joined in the longhouse, one above the other'*. This could be referring to something like the following kind of practice, taken from a 1639 discussion in the Jesuit Relations on Huron gambling:

They have no sooner arrived at the appointed place than the two parties take their places on opposite sides of the cabin and fill it from top to bottom, *above and below the Andichons* (see below for translation), *which are sheets of bark making a sort of canopy for a bed, or shelter*, which corresponds to that below, which rests upon the ground, upon which they sleep at night. It is placed upon poles laid and suspended the whole length of the cabin. (JR17:203-205; the emphasis and addition are mine)

The other part of the FHO entry to have this noun is the following:

1.2 *le milieu*,annonchiahenk

le milieu de la cabane /the middle of the house/

(FHO)

Unfortunately, the verb used here has neither been identified nor translated.

Entries appear outside the FHO that are of anthropological interest:

1.3 ,annonchia, enristi

changer la cabane, le transporter ailleurs

/to change house, transport it elsewhere/

,annonskenristi...

transporter une cabane ailleurs

/to transport a house somewhere else/

(Potier 1920:248 #95)

These combinations are with the verb *-enrist-*, which means 'to change the place or position of something' (Ibid.). What could be referred to here is literally moving a house, or at least the poles used in its construction, to a new location. This would be a strategy that would save a lot of labour. However, to the best of my knowledge such a practice is not referred to in the standard ethnohistorical literature. Therefore this suggestion can only be considered an untested hypothesis.

The following entry, using the verb *-on-*, meaning 'to be empty' (Potier 1920:163), has some interesting ramifications concerning Huron notions of social structure:

1.4 *elle e/st/ vuide. onnonchia, on /It is empty/*

ce que e/st/ q/uel/que fois une injure, c'est reprocher q/ue/l/qu'un/s sont pauvr/es/ ou foibles.

/This is sometimes an insult.

It reproaches someone with being poor or weak./

(FHc1697:234)

This seems to be suggesting that, in terms of the number of people and/or possessions found in a longhouse, there was some form of invidious comparison between dwellings. However, until this is found in sources earlier than 1697 we cannot be absolutely certain whether this existed at the time of first contact or was at least in part the result of Huron contact with the more possessions-conscious French.

There is an opposite term, "*annonchi*", that refers to a longhouse being 'full' (Ibid.), with *-nnonch-* being incorporated into the verb *-i-*, meaning 'to be full' (Potier 1920:393). As yet, however, I have been unable to uncover any social connotations.

When *-nnonchi-* is incorporated into the verb *-ohare-*, meaning 'to wash' (Potier 1920:405 #12), we have the following Huron ceremonial metaphor:

1.5 ,annonchiohare...

laver la cabane (metap.) faire festin a son entree clans une nouvelle maison ou l'on demeurer.

/to wash a house, metaphorically, to hold a ceremony at the entrance of a new house where people are going to live/

(Potier 1920:405 #12)

Similar metaphors existed with *-ohare-* and other nouns. With the noun *-chiend-*, meaning 'name', we get the expression for the resuscitation of a name (Potier 1920: 406 and 446), the ceremony through which a person acquires a new name. With *-ask8a-*, 'scaffold' (see also "ask8atonk8i" below for the use of this noun), we get the term for a ceremony involving the presenting of gifts during the Feast of the Dead (Potier 1920:406 and 445). Also see below for a similar Mohawk metaphor with the cognate (related word) for the Huron noun *-ndat-*, meaning 'mat'.

In the political sphere we have the following uses of *-nnonchi-* incorporated into the verb *-io-*, meaning 'to be large' (Potier 1920:396 #27):

1.6 *maistre le la cabane. honnonchio /master of the house/ /he is great in the house/*

(FHc1697:234)

The verb *-io-* was also used with respect to other political 'masters' or leaders. With the noun *-ondech-*, meaning 'country' (Potier 1920:455), we have in the Jesuit Relations "*/h/aondechio*"; meaning 'he is great in the country' (JR13:215). The context in which the term was presented is the following context:

...one *Achioantaete*, who makes a show of loving us, had gone so far as to say that if he were the *Aondechio*, that is, the master of the country, it would soon be over with us, and we would already have been put in a condition wherein we could do no more harm. (Ibid.)

With the noun *-Bend-*, meaning 'voice, word' (Potier 1920:452), the combination refers to those who 'controlled' rivers, paths, and lakes (probably as trade routes);

1.7 *le suis le maistre du lac, il est a moy.* Ni
auhoindiou gontara.
/I am great in voice on the lake/

N. est le maistre de la riviere, du chemin. N.
anhoindiou angoyon.

IN. is master, leading where he goes/

(Sagard 1866:78; translations are from the
Huron alone)

2.0 The Vestibule (*te ,anda,en*)

There are several references in the ethnohistorical literature to the vestibules or porches at the ends of Iroquoian longhouses (see Latta, 1985, for an insightful discussion). For the Huron language at the time of earliest European contact, we have the writings of Sagard and Champlain (also JR:241). From the former we have this quote:

At each end there is a porch, and the principal use of these porches is to hold the large vats or casks of tree-bark in which they store their Indian corn after it has been well dried and shelled. (Sagard 1939:95)

In giving a term for vestibule or porch Sagard seems to have been mistaking the casks for the porches. In the following entries he appears to have used the term for the vats or casks, "*ahak*" (Potier 1920:156 and 447) to apply to the vestibule:

2.1 *Le porche*
Aque.

(Sagard 1866:31)

2.2 ... but as to the great trunks or logs called Aneincuny, which are used for keeping the fire in by being lifted a little at one end, they pile these in front of their lodges or store them in the porches, which they call Aque. (Sagard 1939:94)

Sagard often used *-que-* to refer to what the Jesuits wrote as *-k-*, and it was not unusual for him to miss the first syllables of a Huron word (see the section on the noun *-onar-* below). There is a possibility that Sagard was just misreading an earlier source that was providing the information for this passage (2.2). Further study of Sagard's phrase-book and of the words and phrases in *The Long Journey to*

the Country of the Hurons are necessary before assertions such as this can be proven.

The best description in the standard ethnohistorical literature appeared in the writing of Father Joseph-Francois Lafitau about the Mohawk longhouses near Montreal in 1724:

The Iroquois lodges have exits at the two ends. At each end there is a lobby or small apartment and an outer vestibule...

Their outer vestibule is closed with sheets of bark in winter and serves as a woodshed for the heavy wood. In summer, however, they put their mats on the flat roof of these vestibules which is not raised as high as their lodges. They lie thus in the open air without minding the dew. (Lafitau 1974 vol.2:21-22)

More precise information, however, comes from the linguistic sources. The Huron term for these vestibules was "*te ,anda,en*". In the dictionary entries, the term seems to apply to two slightly different places:

- the space between the two doors at one end of a longhouse; and
- a space close to the doors at either end of the longhouse.

In chronological order we have the following:

2.3 *l'entree* *Te ,anda,en*

/entrance/

l'espace qui est entre les portes /the space that is between the doors/

item. la place qui est proche de la porte

also, the place that is close to the door

chi te kanda,en ihentron.

/he is at the porch at the other side/

il est a l'au/tre/ bout de cabane... /he is at the other end of the house/

,aro te ,anda,en.

/the vestibule or porch on this side/

(FHO)

2.4 *L'entre/e/ des portes de la cab/ane/.* *te ,anda,en*

/the entranceway of the doors to the house/

ce nest pas bien q/uand/ (les) files y

couche (nt)

/it is not good when girls sleep there/

te ,andeiaa d'aionrat te ,anda,en d'e8itsonnha

/it is not good when those who are girls sleep

on the porch (i.e., making themselves sexually available at night)/

(FHC1690:46)

2.5 *l'espace entre les portes, ou la place qui e/s/t proche des portes.* te ,anda,en
/the space between the doors, or the place that is close to the doors/

(FHc1697: 234)

2.6 Kanda,en... (*etre devant la porte de la cabane & P.*)
/to be in front of the door of a house/

item. l'espace mitoyen entre la porte de dehors et celle de la cabane...

/also, the dividing space between the outside door and the house door/

(Potier 1920:274 #47)

2.7 Vis a Vis *te 8anda,en, te sanda,en ,ae... *vis a vis porte de la maison* /opposite the door of the house/

te sk8anda,en *vis a vis de votre porte*
/opposite your door/

(Potier 1920:76)

One area of confusion remains. In the absence of two doors, was the vestibule inside the longhouse structure, or was it just a roofed vestibule without doors? Use of the translation 'vestibule' should not blind us to the possibility of it being inside. However, evidence presented below concerning the *-endich-* or 'platforms' would at least suggest that the vestibule could always have been outside.

3.0 The Door (-ndh8-/-ndho-)

The Huron noun for 'door' was *-ndh8-*, (Potier 1920:450). As we have just seen, Huron longhouses could have two doors at one end. We can learn more about the nature of these two doors by looking at the following entries taken from the Huron dictionaries:

3.1 as^e ekandh8ate *la porte de dehors.* /the outside door/

(Potier 1920:360 #89)

3.2 onie andh8ont *la porte de dedans.*
/the inside door/

(FHO; cf., FHc1697:234)

In the first example we have the verb *-te-*, meaning 'to be present, to exist' (Potier 1920:360 #89)

incorporating *-ndh8-* and the locative prefix (see Potier 1920:26-27), with the combined meaning of 'a door is located there'. With the first word, "as^ete", meaning 'outside' (Potier 1920:91), we get 'the door that is outside'.

In the second example, "onie" means 'inside' (FHO). The verb incorporating *-ndh8-* is *-ont-*, meaning 'to attach, to be attached', often used with parts of the body (e.g., legs, arms, nose and face; see Potier 1920:419-421). The combined meaning is 'the door attached inside' (i.e., to the main body of the house).

The outside door may have been of different material than the inside or main door, if the situation was similar to that described by Lafitau for the early 18th century Mohawk:

The door of the lodges are of moveable sheets of bark hung from above with neither key nor lock...

They double their doors to protect themselves from cold and smoke and make a sort of second door of blankets of skin or wool. (Lafitau 1974 vol.2:22)

Other details about the door, probably most true of the inside door, come from the following dictionary entries. First, the door was opened by lifting it and putting it to one side:

3.3 8ta,enhén... *soulever, lever q/uelque/ chose/. d'une cote, comme une pone/*

/to raise, lift something to one side, as a door/

ct
,annho8ta,enhén *soulever la porte, l'entr'ouvrir...*
/to raise the door, to open it/

ct
sennho8ta,enk *leve la porte, entr'ouvre la*
/raise the door, open it/

(Potier 1920:439 #77; the superscript *-t-* is Potier's addition, reflecting the Wyandot dialect)

The door was sometimes held or kept open with a stick:

ct
3.4 ,aenta onnh8aiannonnati...
un baton tient la porte entr'ouverte
/a stick holds the door open/

(Potier 1920:265 #29)

ct

The last combination has *-ndh8-* (as *-nnh8-*) incorporated into the verb *-iannonte-*, meaning 'to be open, not joined' (op. cit.).

Knocking on a door had a symbolic meaning: ct

3.5 ,ann8ae *frapper a la porte de q/uelqu'un/*

/knock on someone's door;
metaphorically, to call to
council/

Potier 1920:163 #10)

The verb used in this last case is *-ae-*, meaning 'to hit' (Ibid.).

There are also parts of the longhouse that appear to have the noun *-ndh8-* in them. One involves part of the door:

3.6 *lea poutres*

/the beams/ Te Andhia^cronk

les poutres que traversent les portes

/the beams that cross the doors/

(FHO; c.f., FHc1697:234)

The verb in this combination is *Cron-*, meaning 'to cross' (Potier 1920:348 #46). With *-ndh8-* incorporated into it we have 'it crosses the door'. This would seem to be referring to the crossbeams from which the door, probably the inside one hangs.

Another part of the longhouse appears to be derived from *-ndh8-*. Unfortunately, so far the verb has defied my analysis:

3.7 *Le dossier* ,Andhok8enda

/headboard/ *cloison de dedans la cabane*
/partition inside the house/

item. le dossier de leur lits
/also, the headboard of their beds

(FHO)

3.8 ,Andhok8enda *cloison de dedans la cabane* /partition inside the house/

v. dossier ou l'on l'appuyer
/the headboard or backing that one leans against/

(FH)

These headboards/partitions probably are similar to what Lafitau was referring to when he wrote that 18th century Mohawk longhouse platforms were "shut in on all sides, except that of the fire" (Lafitau 1974 vol.2:21). It also conforms to the notion of a family unit as a "*maniere d'estable*" or as a 'stall or stable', a term that appears in the ethnohistorical literature with reference to the platforms (see Dodd 1984:318-319 for an excellent use of good translation in researching the parts of the longhouse).

4.0 The End Wall (*-nnre^c-*)

The noun *-nnre^c-*s was used to refer to the gable or end wall of the longhouse. In the following FHO entry, unfortunately, the section for this noun is extremely difficult to read:

4.1 *le pignon* , Annresa.

le pignon de la cabane.

/the gable or end wall of the house/

,Annre^csa^cron.

faire le pignon ...ab. A^cron,
mettre de travers
/to make the gable...from
A^cron, to cross/

aste etio (ndres)ata

au pignon de dehors
/at the outside gable/

(FHO; see FHc1697 and Potier 1920:451)

As we have seen in the discussion of the door (3.6), the verb *Cron-* means 'to cross', and is used with parts of the longhouse that cross the width of the building.

In the last part of the entry, the verb used appears to be *-ta-*, meaning 'to reach or be at the end' (Potier 1920:358 #84). With "aste", which as we have seen above (3.1) means 'outside', we get 'gable or end wall that reaches or is on the outside'. This may be referring to the end wall of the porch.

Another incorporation of *-nnre^c-*s into a verb is the following:

d

4.2 ,annresk8e,i *pignon ou coste de la cabane etre bouche*
/the end wall or side of the longhouse is blocked or closed/

(Potier 1920:320)

While it is not clear whether this refers to the wall's (end or side) being covered with bark, or to its not having doors. I suspect it is the latter.

5.0 Platform (-endich-)

One of the most poorly understood aspects of the Huron longhouse is the nature of the structures, here referred to with the function-neutral term 'platform', on the side or sides of the building. One problem in particular has been raised by a number of archaeological authors (Noble 1968; Dodd 1984:212, 318-319; and Latta 1985:49-50). While the published sources written in the 17th century speak only of platforms that ran the entire length of the longhouse and were on both sides, archaeological evidence suggests a greater variety, with platforms sometimes being shorter, existing only on one side, and even being totally absent from some longhouses.

In what follows I propose to use linguistic evidence to add to the understanding of Huron longhouse platforms.

This will involve a discussion of:

- a) linguistic evidence supporting archaeological evidence;
- b) platforms at the end of the longhouse; and
- c) platforms used as tables or sideboards.

a) Linguistic Evidence Supporting Archaeological Evidence

The Huron noun for the platforms was *-endich-*. The word occurs in the standard ethnohistorical literature twice: first, as "Eindichaguet" in the writings of Sagard; second, as "andichons" in the Jesuit Relations.

Sagard, in a passage which he copied almost verbatim from Champlain's words, adding only the Huron term (see Champlain 1929:123), wrote that:

At the two sides there is a kind of bench four or five feet high extending from one end of the lodge to the other, on which they sleep in summer to escape the impertunity of the fleas;...The whole space underneath these benches, which they call Garihagueu and *Eindichaguet*, they fill with dry wood to burn in winter. (Sagard 1929:93-94; emphasis mine)

"Eindachaguet" here is what would have been written in the Jesuit Huron dictionaries as 'endicha,e' (See Potier 1920:76 "ad.apud"), with the meaning of 'on or at the platform'.

While both this and the "andichons" reference presented in section 1.0 have the *-endich-* extending the length of the longhouse, this is not the case with any of the Huron dictionary entries:

5.1 *L'andichon* Endicha...

*le lieu ou l'on met le xxx, au
coste de la cabane
/the place where one puts xxx,
at the side of the house/*

(FHO; xxx refers to a completely blurred word)

5.2 *Andichon*

*lieu eleve, ou l'on met
q/uelque/. c/hose%
/elevated place, where one puts
something/*

(FHc1697:28)

It is important to note that other parts of the longhouse that went the length of the building were specifically stated as doing so in the French translations of the entries (see 10.1, 10.2, and 12.1). But no such reference is made in any of the entries with *-endich-*. Similarly, there is no mention of them being on both sides. While not finding something is usually the weakest form of evidence there is, I believe that is not the case here with the typically very consistent Jesuit missionary linguists. This linguistic evidence, is consistent with suggestions made by archaeologists that not all longhouses had platforms that stretched the length of the building or existed on both sides.

b) Platforms at the End of the Longhouse

Like *-ndh8-* and *-nnre:s-*, the noun *-endich-* was incorporated into the verb *ron-*, meaning 'to cross' (see 3.6 and 4.1). A literal translation of this combination into English would be 'platforms that cross' (i.e., cross the ends of the longhouse). The translation into French presented in the dictionaries was "le seuil" (FHO and FHc1697:224), meaning 'doorstep, threshold'.

A question arises from this. If platforms were places at ends where doors were as well (as the French term "le seuil" suggests) does the existence of these platforms at the ends of some longhouses indirectly suggest that the "te ,anda,en" that were close to the door would be outside, there being no room, cognitively or physically, for both at the same place'?

c) Platforms Used as Tables or Sideboards

As we have seen, dictionary entries for "andichon" refer to objects being placed on them.

We have also seen a similar use described in the Lafitau quote concerning the 'canopies' over the beds. This point is reinforced by the way that the noun *-endich-* was used by the Huron to refer to items of French material culture:

5.3 Andichon. *lieu eleve, ou l'on met. q.c., table buffet. Endicha.*
/elevated place where one puts something: table, sideboard/

Endichato,e^{cti}. *Autel*
/Altar/

(FHc1697:13)

5.4 *Buffet...ou l'on met les utensiles.* Endicha
/sideboard...where one puts utensils./
(FHc1697:28)

This was probably the main function of the platforms, as the terms for 'bench' and 'bed' were not *-endich-*. As we will see below, the term for 'bed' was *-ndat-*. The Huron translation for the French '*banc*' ('bench'), '*chaise*' ('chair') and '*siege*' ('seat') was 'onkesarak8a' (FHc1697:21 and 32), which means 'one sits on it' (Potier 1920:167 #39). See Dodd 1984:318 for a different argument for this point.

6.0 The Mat (-ndat-)

The Huron noun *-ndat-* referred to an individual's mat used as a bed or resting place, and by extension connoted one's place or 'spot' in the longhouse:

6.1 *none, lit, place.* ,andata
/mat, bed, place/
Tsinnen ondata. *qui est ce qui se met la, se couche la?*
/Who is it that places himself there, that sleeps there?/

on,endata8e,indi. *on ma bouche la natte, on ma chasse de la cabane.*
/They close up my mat. They chase me from the house./

(FHc1697:129)

The verb in the last combination is *-8a-*, meaning 'to block, close' (Potier 1920:319-20).

In Mohawk, the cognate of *-ndat-* (*-nakt-* see

Michelson 1973:76) when incorporated into the verb *-ohare-*, meaning in both languages 'to wash', gives us the following metaphor:

6.2 Gannaktohare... *laver la natte, dit quand on jette de la porcelaine sur un corps mort.*
/to wash the mat, said when one throws wampum onto a dead body/

(Bruyas 1970:67)

7.0 Hearth (-tsenh-)

There are several references to there being two families per hearth in a Huron longhouse.

Champlain:

In one such cabin there will be twelve fires, which made twenty-four households...(Champlain 1929:122-24)

Sagard:

In one lodge there are many fires, and at each fire are two families, one on one side, the other on the other side; some lodges will have as many as twenty-four families...(Sagard 1939-93-95)

The Jesuit Relations:

In each cabin there are five fireplaces, and two families at each. (JR15:153)

There is support for this ethnohistoric data in the Huron dictionaries. The noun for 'hearth' was *-tsenh-* (Potier 1920:454; FHc1697:80 and 234). One of the most common uses of this noun in these dictionaries is the following:

7.1 *Le foyer* te onatsanhiaj
/the hearth/
(nous sommes au mesme feu vis a vis l'un de l'autre... /we are of the same fire, opposite one another/

(FHO)

7.2 katsenhia,i *diviser le foyer, les uns d'un coste, les autres de l'autre /to divide the hearth, with some at one side, the others at the other/*

te on,itsenhia,i *nous sommes vis a vis l'un de l'autre*
/we are opposite one another/

(FH; c.f., Potier 1920:73)

The verb form used here is "kai,i", meaning 'to divide, cut in two' (Potier 1920:264). With the noun *-tsenh-*, we get a translation of 'to divide a hearth in two'.

There is a political and symbolic significance to being on the opposite side of the hearth. For the Wyandot in the early 20th century it had the connotation of belonging to different phratries, those who sat on the opposite side of the council fire (Barbeau 1915:87 fn5 and 1960:99 #49-51). The verb used in these instances was *-ti-*, meaning 'to be on a particular side' (Potier 1920:90-91 "askati", 98-99 "onati", and 69 "adverbi loci"). While I feel that phratries or moieties existed among the early contact Huron (Steckley 1982:31-33) at least for burial purposes (Gould 1984:39), in none of the 17th and 18th century dictionaries have I found an example of this verb incorporating the noun *-tsenh-*. This expression may just have been confined to the Wyandot.

8.0 Support Poles (-nda,ar-)

The noun *-nda,ar-*, pole, had two main uses with respect to longhouses, as can be seen in the following dictionary entry:

- 8.1 *les pilons* ,Anda,ar8t
/the piles/ *pieu qui soustien les pieu/x/...*
post that supports the poles/

Anda,ara
ou pend le bled...
/where corn is hung/

(FHO)

The first part of this entry has *-nda,ar-* incorporated into the verb *-8t-*, meaning 'to stand, rise above' (Potier 1920:437 #7; see also FHc1697:234 for this incorporation). The combined meaning is 'standing pole', referring to the vertical support poles of the longhouse. As the entry heading for both uses of *-nda,ar-* is "les pilons", this would seem to be the main use of the noun.

The second use, as an isolated standing pole from which things could be hung, is seen in the following two examples. The first comes from the Jesuit Relations, from Father Jean de Brébeufs discussion of the gifts received by a murder victim's family. In a special ceremony, the gifts provided by the murderer's family were:

...put on a pole which /is/ raised above the head of the murderer, and are called *Andaerraehaan*, that is to say, 'what is hung upon a pole'. (JR10:217; emphasis mine)

The term "Andaerraehaan" is probably 'anda,arenhaon', using the verb "enhaon", meaning 'to bring, take' (Potier 1920:258). With the noun *-nda,ar-* incorporated into the verb we have the meaning 'it is brought on a pole'.

In Potier's writings we find a slightly different form, possibly coming from a different dialect of Huron:

- 8.2 ,anda,arara *grande perches dans la cabane a pendre q.c.*
/large poles in the house for hanging things/

(Potier 1920:448)

The noun *-nda,ar-* was also used for poles employed either in the construction of canoes or for poling canoes:

- 8.3 ,anda,ara *perches qu'on met dans le canot.*
/poles that one puts in the canoe/

(FHc1697:235)

9.0 Extension Poles (-ent-)

Another term for "perche" ('pole') in the FHO entry comes from the noun *-era-* (Potier 1920:446). It was a commonly found noun, usually translated into French as "baton" ('stick' or 'pole') or "buche" ('log'), and sometimes as "perche" ('pole') and "bois" ('wood'). It was found in the place name for Manitoulin Island, "ekaentouton" (JR55:132, 136, 140, 170 and 174; and JR59:216), meaning 'where there are many standing poles' (with the verb *-8t-*, 'to stand' Potier 1920:437 #37).

There term in the FHO entry using the noun *-ent-* came between the two *-nda,ar-* examples cited above (8.1):

- 9.1 Aentontiek *les poutres*
/the beams/

(FHO, c.f., FHc 1697:234)

The verb used is *-ontion-*, meaning 'to continue' (Potier 1920:424-25), giving a combined meaning of 'the poles that continue', probably referring to continuing or extending from where the vertical poles leave off. This could be either a general term for other poles or for vertical extension poles specifically.

10.0 Longitudinal Poles (*ask8atonk8i*)

The FHO entry for longitudinal poles (i.e., poles that run the length of the longhouse) is unfortunately a blurred one:

10.1 *les perches* Ask8atonk8i *les longues pieux ou perches qui regnent de la cabane qui (ti) enment les (ceintres) xxx*
/the long poles that run the length of the house, and that (hold up) the arches xxx/
(sous) celles de dehors que celles de dedans
/all those of the outside and the inside/

(FHO)

A similar, but more limited entry is the following:

10.2 *longues pieces qui regnent le long de la cab/ane/.*

ask8atonk8i
/long pieces that run the length of the house/

(FHc1697:234)

A key point is that the poles were mentioned as being both on the outside and the inside. This probably refers to longitudinal poles being on either side of the bark that made up the wall.

Concerning the construction of the word, as it ends with -i- it cannot be a noun by itself. It is either a verb, or, more likely, a noun incorporated into a verb. A distinct possibility is that it involves the noun *-ask8-*, meaning both 'scaffold' and 'bridge' in Huron (Potier 1920:445). According to Mithun, in other Northern Iroquoian languages (e.g. Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora) it can refer to "any arching, protruding structure, such as a porch, bridge or shed" (Mithun 1984:277). What the verb might be is not clear to me.

11.0 The Second Row of Longitudinal Poles (*-ndent8tr-*)

In the FHO entry following "ask8atonk8i", and also under the heading of "les perches", we have *-ndent8tr-*:

11.1 *Andent8tra les perches qui sont au second rang.*
/the poles that make up the second row/

to kandent8tra *celles qui sont au 3^e rang.*
/those that make up the third row/

(FHO)

This term has so far defied clear analysis. It could be related to the noun *-ndent8ar-*, generally used for the poles and paddles used to propel canoes (FHc1697:235). The entry for the third row of longitudinal poles adds the dualic prefix, adding the sense of 'the second' to the term for the second row.

12.0 Central Suspended Poles (*-sonar-*)

While, as we have seen above, *-nda,ar-* could be used when speaking about poles from which objects could be hung, *-onar-* was used to refer to such poles when they were suspended from the centre of the longhouse, over the fires. The FHO entry is blurred, but useful information can still be obtained from it:

12.1 *,a,onara les perches ou plustot longues pieux (debris) qui regnent le long de cabane xxx au milieu le long de feux pour pendre la chaudiere.*
/the poles or (the remains of) long beams that run the length of the house xxx in the middle of the line of fires for hanging the pots/

,A,onafrontak perches pendues du haut de la cabane pour xxx
/poles hung from the top of the house for xxx/

(FHO)

The latter part of the entry has *-onar-* incorporated into the verb *-ont-*, meaning 'to attach, be attached', the same verb as was used in the word for the inside door (3.2). The combined meaning is 'attached pole'. This term appears twice in the writings of Sagard:

In the midst of the lodge are suspended two big poles which they call *Ouaronta*; on them they hang their pots and put their clothing, provisions and other things, for fear of mice and to keep their things dry. (Sagard 1939:95)

Perches suspendues au dessus du feu. Ouaronta
/poles suspended over the fire/
(Sagard 1866:91)

Although at first glance "A,ona^crontak" and "Ouaronta" look somewhat different, it could be kept in mind that in Sagard's Huron writing:

- a) -u- was sometimes printed when -n- could have been used (e.g. "Les gencives. Anouacha" for "annonacha"; Sagard 1866:29 and Potier 1920:451 respectively);
- b) the first syllable was often missing (e.g., "Reindahohet" for "arenda8ahe"; Sagard 1866:29 and Potier 1920:316 and 452 respectively);
- c) final -k- was sometimes omitted (e.g., "3. Hachin." for "achienk"; Sagard 1866:95 and Potier 1920:106 respectively); and
- d) the dialect recorded was sometimes one without -,- (e.g., "Le nes. Aongya", for "a,ond^{si}a"; Sagard 1866:86 and Potier 1920:447 respectively; also see Steckley 1987a).

In summary, then, *-onar-* was the name for poles that were suspended from the centre of the house over the fires. From these poles were hung pots, clothing, corn (see JR38:247) and other objects.

13.0 Rafter Poles (-ndast-)

The noun *-ndast-* means 'rafters' in a good number of Iroquoian languages (e.g. Mohawk, Cayuga and Seneca; see Mithun 1984:277). In Huron it seems to have been used to refer to the curved posts that formed the roof:

13.1 *les ceintres*

Andasta
les perches qui font la mute de la cabane fichees en haut. /the poles that make the vault of the house, attached above/

,Andasta8ak8i
les courbes
/the curves, arches/

(FHO)

The term "Andasta8aki" involves the verb *-8ax8-*, meaning 'to curve' (FHc1697:42). The curve aspect is stressed in an entry in a 17th century Mohawk dictionary:

- 13.2 Gannasta, *perches a faire cabane, celle de dedans que l'on courbe pour servir de moule a la cabane.*

/poles for making a house, those inside poles that are curved to make the mould or shape of the house/

(Bruyas 1970:68)

- 13.3 *anhanda^cst8ten* *il fiche les perches de lit.*
the is attaching, has attached the bed poles/

(FH)

As the verb used here is *-8t-*, meaning 'to stand, rise above' (op.cit.), it is possible that this is referring to the purely vertical poles set up inside the longhouse to support the platforms or 'canopies' referred to above (1.1).

14.0 Roofing Poles (-nde^ctorak-)

On the outside of the roof were sticks or poles used to join the sheets of bark that formed the roof:

- 14.1 *perches de dehors* *Ande^cto^craka*
/outside poles/

petites perches qui se mettent sur les escorces en voute pour les faire joindre
/small poles that are placed on the sheets of bark on the vault in order to join them/

(FHO)

The primary function of holding the roofing bark together is stressed in the entry in another dictionary:

- 14.2 *petites perches p/ou/r* *,ande^cto^crak.*
tenir les escorces
/small poles for holding the sheets of bark/

(FHc1697:234)

The construction of this term is instructive. It appears to be made up of the noun *-nde^ct-* meaning 'pine' (FHc1697:233), and the verb *-om-* (Potier 1920:426 #259), meaning 'attach, haft' (e.g., an axe or an arrowhead). The combined meaning is 'pine that attaches, hafts'.

15.0 Bark (-st-)

The word for bark covering a longhouse was the generic term for 'bark', *-st-* (Potier 1920:453):

15.1 *les escorces*, Asta, ask8ata, Arak8at
 aionastonti
*ce que xxxx les escorces pour
 couvrir la cab/ane/*. ab.
 ,Astontion
 /that which xxx the bark for
 covering the house!

(FHO)

The verb in ",Astontion" is *-ontion-*, meaning 'to continue' (Potier 1920:424; also see 9.1).

The two Huron nouns following *-st-* in 15.1 ",ask8ata" and "Arak8at", are the terms for 'cedar' and 'elm' respectively (Potier 1920:453 and 452). This suggests that they were the two kinds of bark used most often in the making of Huron longhouses in the early contact period. In the Jesuit Relations cedar was reported as being considered the best covering (JR8:105; JR13:45 and JR14:43). Other types of bark referred to in the Jesuit Relations were elm, ash, fir and spruce (JR8:105).

The process of preparing the bark for putting it onto the roof seems to have involved heating, probably with steaming or boiling the sheets of bark to make them pliable. There is a reference to this preparation in Potier:

15.2 *sestanda8ant* *amollis cette exorce
 dans l'eau*
 /soften this bark in water!

(Potier 1920: #55)

The verb used with *-st-* here is *-nda8an-*, meaning 'to warm, to be warm' (Ibid). The literal meaning of the combination would be 'warm this bark'.

16.0 Smoke Hole (-ronk8-)

There are a number of references in the standard ethnohistorical literature to smoke holes in the roof of the longhouse (Champlain 1929:124, Sagard 1939:95 and JR8:107). The Huron term for smoke hole is the noun *-ronk8-* (Potier 1920:453), possibly derived from the verb *-ron,-*, meaning 'to be pierced, opened' (Potier 1920:349 #48).

In the FHO we have the following taken from a very blurred part of the entry on the longhouse:

16.1 *trou xxronk8aharent...*

ndio tsironk8are8ha
 fermez le trou de la...
 /shut the hole of the...!

tsironk8are8haska

xxxx le cheminee
 /xxxx the chimney/

(FHO)

The first Huron word in this entry has *-ronk8-* incorporated into the verb *-haren-*, meaning 'to have holes, openings' (Potier 1920:259 #10). The next two words with *-ronk8-* in them are constructed with the verb *-re8h-*, meaning 'to darken, have darkness' (Potier 1920:342 #34). In the following two entries from Potier we can get a better picture of the nature of this combination:

16.2 *,aronk8are8hi...*

fermier le trou de la cheminee
 /to close the smoke hole,
 chimney/

tseronk8are8ha

ferme le trou de la cheminee
 /close the smoke hole!

(Ibid)

The next entry adds the suffix that has the effect of 'undoing' the semantic content of the verb (marked by "destr" in Potier's dictionary; see examples "o8an" Potier 1920:403 and "onta8an" Potier 1920:423):

16.3 *,are8haska8an...*

ouvrir, donner ouverture
a q.c. qui faisait jour par q.
ouverture
 /to open, create an opening in
 something that lets in the light
 of day by some opening/

orok8are8haska8an

ouvrir le trou de la cheminee
(on oter l'ombre)
 !to open the smoke hole,
 to remove the shade!

tsironk8are8haska

ouvre le trou de la cheminee
 !open the smoke hole/

(Ibid)

Summary

In the discussion presented above, a number of suggestions were made as to the nature of Huron longhouses at the time of early contact.

First of all, it is possible that, as a labour-saving device, the Huron may have moved parts of their houses when they moved (1.3).

Secondly, the emptiness or fullness of a longhouse in terms of people or possessions was a potential source of invidious comparison (1.4).

Thirdly, the longhouses had 'vestibules', which were roofed structures that seem to have either been between two doors at the end of the longhouse, or just outside of a single door (2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7). The ends of the longhouse also could be closed (i.e., without a door; 4.2), and it appears that the end walls had at least one set of cross beams, from which the inside doors hung (3.6).

Fourthly, the longhouses had platforms that were not necessarily on both sides, nor did they always extend the length of the longhouse (5a). These platforms could cross the ends of the longhouses (5b), and seem to have been primarily used for keeping utensils on (5.3 and 5.4). They also appear to have at least occasionally been doubled up in terms of having 'canopies' (1.1) overhead that provided space for another person or persons.

In terms of the family household space inside a longhouse, we find evidence to suggest that there were partitions (3.7 and 3.8), possibly like Huron doors in their construction, that may have made the household space like a 'stall' or 'stable' in appearance. Further, a person's 'mat' that served as his/her bed possibly acted to define symbolically that person's 'space' (physically and socially) in the longhouse (6.1 and 6.2). The hearths used by the households were shared by at least two families (7.1 and 7.2), but no evidence has revealed, as yet, whether being situated at opposite sides of the hearth had a political or symbolic meaning at the level of phratry or moiety.

The Huron had a number of different nouns for poles used in the construction of the longhouse. The entries for these nouns give us a good idea of the structure of the building. One of the nouns was the term for vertical poles. Incorporated into one verb (8.1) it signified the supports that could have other poles (with another name, 9.1) extended from them. Incorporated into another verb (see quote) or by itself (8.1 and 8.2), it refers to poles from which things were hung. Another noun for vertical poles was used, when incorporated into one verb (13.1), to refer to curved 'rafters' that formed a vaulted roof, when incorporated into another (13.3), denoted bed poles.

Two different terms were used for longitudinal poles, one for those at the first level (10.1 and 10.2), and another at the second and third levels (11.1). Another term (12.1) applied to poles suspended

from the centre of the longhouse, poles from which the Huron hung corn and other objects.

Three features of the roofs were discussed in the linguistic sources. There were sticks on the outside (14.1 and 14.2) that were used for joining the sheets of bark that made up the roof. These sticks appear to have been made of pine. The bark seems to have been primarily cedar and elm (15.1), and to have been heated in water or steam to be made pliable (15.2). Finally, there is mention of smoke holes that could be opened or closed (16.1, 16.2 and 16.3).

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