

Undergraduates in the Archives: Transcribing Quaker-Native Manuscripts, 1796-1801

“We were not simply analyzing someone else’s transcription, but actually starting from scratch ourselves.”

-Tiffany Lee, Swarthmore College, Class of 2012

The Project

Where: Swarthmore College & Friends Historical Library, Fall 2010

Who: Transcribers—Students enrolled in “Reading Red, White, and In-between in Early American Literature”

Textual Editor—Keat Murray, Visiting Assistant Professor of English
Archivist—Christopher Densmore, Curator, FHL

What: Transcribing scribal texts produced during Quaker visits to Seneca, Oneida, Tuscarora, Stockbridge, and Brotherton on New York reserves from 1796-1801

Objectives:

- Student transcriptions will contribute to FHL’s project to give researchers better access to the library’s rich store of Quaker-Native writings.
- Students will formulate and articulate conclusions about responsible scholarship, primary text authorship, textual genesis, mediation in constructing primary documents, Quaker-Native relations, and U.S. Indian affairs.

Three Texts:
James Cooper, Jonathan Thomas, Halliday Jackson

D.2140
Journal of a visit
to the Seneca Indians,
1796, by
James Cooper,
of Woodbury, N. J.

Jonathan Thomas
His Book 1798
595

Halliday Jackson's
Book 1799
Genesingukhta

Project Requirements and Options

Required Transcription & Response Paper

- Each student transcribes an eight-page section of James Cooper's journal, or the equivalent from Jonathan Thomas's book.
- Transcriptions must adhere to the guidelines and code designed by the curator and editor.
- Each student composes a 3 to 5-page essay, including reflections, observations, and conclusions about the transcribing experience.

Optional Extended Transcriptions & Essay

- Each student transcribes an additional twenty-four page section in the Jackson book or the Quaker-Stockbridge correspondence
- Students compose a six- to eight-page essay (with secondary sources) that discusses various aspects of the piece:
 - tone & rhetorical situation
 - Native & Quaker styles of discourse
 - local & regional cultural practices & contexts
 - racial, gender, & liminal identities
 - observations pertaining to acculturation & Christianization

Texts & Transcribers

- James Cooper—Ashley Acle, Nilo Bermeo, Youda Cao, Christie DeNizio, Anna Sagaser, & Brent Stanfield
- Jonathon Thomas—Tiffany Lee & Jessi Holler
- Halliday Jackson—Tiffany Lee, Youda Cao, & Brent Stanfield
- Assorted Letters among Quaker & Native Men & Women—Christie DeNizio

Some Resources for Student Research

- Course readings by Samson Occom, Thomas Jefferson, Red Jacket, William Apess, William Penn
- Densmore, Christopher. "New York Quakers Among the Brother-town, Stockbridge, Oneida, and Onondaga, 1795–1834." *Northeast Anthropology* 44 (1992), 83–93.
- Geherin, Christopher. "New Guinea: Racial Identity and Inclusion in the Stockbridge and Brothertown Indian Communities of New York." *New York History* (Summer 2009): 140-66.
- Richter, Daniel K. "'Believing That Many of the Red People Suffer Much for the Want of Food': Hunting, Agriculture, and a Quaker Construction of Indianness in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (1999): 616–17.
- Silverman, David J. *Red Brethren: The Brotherton and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 2010.
- Tiro, Karim M. "'We Wish to Do You Good': The Quaker Mission to the Oneida Nation, 1790-1840." *Journal of the Early Republic* 26.3 (Fall 2006): 353-76.

Rethinking Our Corner of the World in Undergraduate Study

- Undergraduates can do archival work and will enjoy it.
- Primary texts are studied in their primary form and offer new possibilities for study as complements to existing scholarship.
- Undergraduates participate firsthand in preparing primary documents for academic study.
- Undergraduates formulate and pursue questions about the complexities of textual genesis, textual study, and the production of history.
- Class becomes a forum for discussing their firsthand experiences and new dimensions for scholarship.
- Undergraduates embrace the responsibility of contributing to archives.
- Undergraduates will be interested in the project!

James Cooper Journal of a Visit to the Seneca Indians, 1796

2nd of the Month riding the Road a little intricate
our friend kindly sent his Son about six miles
with us to put us in our Road & in riding about
12 Miles pass'd Sussex Courthouse, cross'd the line
of N. Jersey & N. York got a bait for our horses
& a Glass of Wine for our selves with a kind
Woman the Wife of a Colonel now General
Hethorn whose a Member of Congress for State
of N. York rode above thirty Miles mostly in
a Valley Mountains & Hill were as Wall
on each side put up at Joseph H Drakes a
publick house near Chester a town newly laid out,
50 Miles it was computed we rode this Day,
Third of the Month & 5th of the Week rode to New
burgh by the North River side the Hills so high
that we seemingly got on the Roofs of the Houses
before we ~~had~~ ^{had} them this morning rode about
20 Miles here we Din'd with Daniel Burns who
three Year ago removed from Pennsylvania his
Mill appears to be calculated for much business
& is within a few Chains of the flowings of the River
side, after refreshing our selves & Horses we set off by
12 Miles riding reach'd Edward Halluck's Father
in law of David Sands a Pleasant agreeable
antient friend in the 77th year of his life the force
of his Mental faculties appears to be without

[page 4]

2nd of the Month riding the Road a little intricate
our friend kindly sent his Son about six miles
with us to put us in our Road & in riding about
12 Miles pass'd Sussex Courthouse, cross'd the line
of N. Jersey & N. York got a bait for our horses
& Glass of Wine for our selves with a kind
Woman the Wife of a Colonel now General
Hethorn who'se a member of Congress for State
of N. York rode above thirty miles mostly in
a \?/ Valley Mountain & Hill were as Wall
on each side put us at Joseph H Drakes a
publick house near Chester a town nearly laid out,
50 Miles it was computed we rode this Day,
Third of the Month & 5th of the Week Rode to New-
burgh? \Winser/ by the a North River side the Hills so high
that we seemingly got on the Roofs of the Houses
by the turn \before/ was we ? \see/ them this morning Rode
about

20 Miles here we Din'd with Daniel Burns who
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Mill appears to be calculated for much business
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antient friend in the 77th year of his life the force
of his Mental faculties appears to be without [end of page 4]

Halliday Jackson's Book , Genesinguhta, 1799

Indians at Catarangus to Friends

12th month 28th We received the following letter
from the Indians of Catarangus Village - -
"Brothers Friends Quakers at the Allegany
We have received your letter that you wrote and
left with W.^m Johnson at Buffalo Creek - we have
got a full understanding of what you wrote in your
Letter - The instructions you gave pleases us very
much in general - you may rely upon it that we
are going to follow your directions, for we have swallow
it in our breast and heart -
Now Brothers we must inform you that we are
a going to lay up money to buy Cattle and other
useful articles 250 Dollars, and for the following
Year we meant to lay up as much more -
The mill is a going on all agree when we are ready
we will call on our friends the Quakers, we
wish you to give us all assistance you can when
we come to build, so that we don't give too much
for our works, our minds are determined to have
our Brothers Friends Quakers to oversee -
We have fully determined to throw up drink-
ing Whiskey - and if there comes Traders on we
have determined to order them off the grounds -
Brothers,
We hope you will keep your mind strong

[page 40]

12th month 28th We received the following Letter
from the Indians of Catarangus Village -

"Brothers Friends Quakers at the Allegany

We have received your letter that you wrote and
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Got a full understanding of what you wrote in your
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we will call on our friends the Quakers, we
wish you to give us all assistance you can when
we come to build, so that we don't give too much
for our works, our minds are determined to have
our Brothers, Friends Quakers to oversee -

We have fully determined to throw up drink-
ing Whiskey - and if there comes Traders on we
have determined to order them off the Grounds -

Brothers,

We hope you will keep your mind strong [end of
page 40]

Halliday Jackson's Book , Genesinguhta, 1799 Indians at Catarangus to Friends

as you was at First, and we return you great
Thanks for the kindness that you done already.

Our principal women return you their hearty
thanks, they understand that their friends
Quakers is going to give them assistance.

Tak con non dee
Won two guh tah
Se noch quo gau
Te ni an nee

The following we wrote to them in answer—
To the Chiefs and others of Catarangus
Village—
Friends and Brothers

We received your letter in
Company with the one you wrote to Captain
Obecal, and are glad to find you got a full
understanding of what our friends wrote to
you at Buffalo Creek and that the instructions
they gave please you generally—

And Brothers we did not see that speech
which our friends left at Buffalo Creek for you
but as you say you are determined to take their
advice and have already swallow'd it down in
your breast, we hope you will often remember

[page 41]

as you was at First, and we return you great
thanks for the kindness you have done already.

Our principal women return you their hearty
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In The End

- Collectively, eight students transcribed more than 140 pages of scribal texts; three students completed extended transcriptions
- In the process, students completed transcriptions of
 - two Quaker journals from 1796 and 1798
 - a compilation of copied correspondence from 1799
 - a large assortment of letters from 1797 to 1801
- Hard copies of the transcriptions are credited to the students and stored with the manuscripts in the FHL. In the coming months, the transcriptions and digital images of the manuscripts will join other materials on FHL online archives.

Student Observations and Comments

Ashley Acle

- Cooper's journal sparks student questions about people and places mentioned in the journal and requires additional contextual information to understand the text.
- Cooper's journal presents a biased account, the interests of which are unclear as long as the range of perspectives is limited.
- "I wished I had been able to do some background research and understand who Cooper was describing in his records . . . **Who were these seemingly invisible friends who hosted him during his journeys?**"
- "In parts, his writing appeared rushed, as if there was a great urgency that he share all this information in some transferable form . . . What was he thinking? What pressures, restraints, backgrounds influenced his writing and thinking? . . . Though Cooper's tone did not condone or reflect negatively upon anyone he encountered, his writing still reflects his biased narrative and observational style. At times his journal focused upon describing the fertility of the land, without describing many of the other features of the land . . . **In the absence of other sources, Cooper's journal presents the reader with one personalized story but fails to tell the stories of many more.**"

Student Observations and Comments

Youda Cao

- The transcription project was “**very rewarding**” for encouraging a close reading of the text and attention to the voice and tone of the author.
- Transcribing texts “has led me **not to take for granted the compiled texts and anthologies we use today**, as the work done to amass them can be extraordinarily extensive.”
- Quaker writers, like James Cooper, were not inclined to interject personal sentiments into their accounts but were somewhat detached from the events they reported.
- “Of particular interest to me was on page 23 where . . . the Oneida address outlines the problems and havoc [inflicted] upon them by alcohol, which they refer to as a ‘tyrant.’ I always knew that there were issues with Native Americans and alcohol, . . . but I had never seen it described from a native perspective. They are focused on finding a way to combat the issue because it is making a deplorable situation . . . The Oneida go as far as to cite their current situation as ‘miserable,’ referencing how their ancestors were conquered by alcohol immediately after the white man arrived, how it still ‘reigns among Indian Tribes with tyranny,’ and how their young men ‘become willing slaves to this Diabolic Heroe’.”

Student Observations and Comments

Christie DeNizio

- The initial difficulties of transcribing wane with experience and familiarity with the purpose, diction, and tone of the manuscript.
- References to Quaker women and their contributions to society are absent.
- Quaker accounts reinforce course readings about Euro and Native cultural attitudes that affect their interaction.
- Students experience intellectual and emotional responses to the texts they transcribe.

- “[P]ersonal journals of the 18th century were approached very differently from the modern day journal. The events that the author focuses on are waking time, meals, places traveled[,] people encountered, and Indian relations. Feelings or emotions very rarely enter into the text. **The retelling of events is not approached as a connected narrative; rather it is a cataloguing of experiences.**”
- “I found it frustrating, yet congruent with our class readings, that the Quakers adopted an air of superior knowledge and morality in their advice to the Indians. It was satisfying to read an original account of these meetings because it confirmed the type of interaction between the Quakers and Indians that we as a class have begun to form a picture of in our readings. The Quakers being in favor of . . . an agricultural way of life for the Indians, and **the Indians answering them in a friendly but non-enthusiastic response.**”

Student Observations and Comments

Tiffany Lee

- As transcribers, students read culture and history in its most immediate scribal form, unmediated by print editors, scholars, and textbooks.
- “[T]he transcription project was an appropriate supplement to the class materials. It gave us a chance to work with primary sources in a way that [we] have never been exposed to, not simply analyzing someone else’s transcription, but actually starting from scratch ourselves. The project, as a deviation from the usual papers that we expect to write in all our classes, was a good way to keep us on our toes, and for those of us who dread writing papers, a healthy alternative.”
- “In this age of print, email, and text messaging, when does the average person actually have the chance to read anything handwritten? Even handwritten letters have gone the way of Hallmark cards. Therefore, I appreciated the personal nature of the texts, even if the handwriting was bordering on illegible”
- “Thomas tries to reconcile the natives with the disappearance of their land, since it corresponds to the primary goal of the Quaker mission—to help the Oneidas develop into a working, self-sufficient agricultural society. The Oneidas, however, do not simply sit by and let the Quakers run the show.”

