

Provenience of the Walam Olum

PAUL WEER, Indiana Historical Society

Rafinesque published his translation of the Walam Olum in the year 1836. His historical background for the document was that he "obtained, through the late Dr. Ward, of Indiana, some of the original Walam Olum (painted record) of the Linapi tribe of Wapahani or White River"; (1) and that "these actual olum were first obtained in 1820 as a reward for medical cure, deemed a curiosity; and were unexplicable. In 1822 were obtained from another individual the songs annexed thereto in the original language". (2)

Brinton's great critique on Rafinesque's treatment of the subject appeared in 1885. (3) Rafinesque had died in 1840. With him the fact of the Walam Olum was its prime importance. So also with Brinton who felt that the Walam Olum should be reexamined in the light of such advance in methods of approach as fifty years would provide. Also, who was Dr. Ward, and how did the Walam Olum chance to pass through his hands to Rafinesque?

Brinton made the attempt to document this transfer of the Walam Olum from the Delaware Indians living on White River in Indiana, through "the late Dr. Ward of Indiana", to Rafinesque who, at that time, was a professor at Transylvania College, in Lexington, Kentucky. Brinton could not find trace of a Dr. Ward in Indiana; and finally came to the conclusion that he must have been a member of the well known Ward family of Harrison County, Kentucky. (4) Family tradition hinted that in the early 1820's one of the Wards was a friend of Rafinesque: indeed, Rafinesque, in his autobiography, says, "my friend, Mr. Ward, took me to Cynthiana in a gig, where I surveyed other ancient monuments." (5) However, all Brinton's efforts to trace out a documented contact between Rafinesque and the Dr. Ward of Walam Olum fame were unsuccessful; nor were local history clues concerning the Walam Olum to be found. With this, Brinton turned from efforts to document its actual transfer to the internal linguistic evidence of the Walam Olum itself.

Today our problem is exactly the same as was Brinton's: internal linguistic evidence and historical documentation. The former has profited in techniques of study and approach, but lost in sources in the interim. The gain in techniques outweighs the loss in sources. So far as the primary issue, internal linguistic evidence, is concerned, Brinton's conclusion affirming the authenticity of the Walam Olum is confirmed and strengthened. As for historical documentation it also has profited in techniques, but lost most heavily in sources. We have not established positive proof that a Dr. Ward secured the Walam Olum from the Delaware Indians on White River, Indiana, in 1820, and presented it to Rafinesque; but we have found new material which lends

strong probability to its historical authenticity, and leads us to expect confirmation as the result of continued search.

Accepting, for the time being, the opinion of Brinton that there was no Dr. Ward of Indiana in the period of the 1820's, (later we had occasion to scour three Indiana localities hunting for the possibilities of such an one), our search for material documentation began in Cynthiana, Kentucky. In the Harrison County Clerk's office at Cynthiana are records of a Dr. John R. Ward filing suits for collection of medical fees in the years 1808 and 1809. The same Dr. Ward was being sued for the collection of his note in the year 1811. (6) After this last date the name of Dr. John R. Ward did not appear in the Harrison County records, in so far as we were able to discover. In the meanwhile, John M. Cromwell, mayor of Cynthiana, loaned us a volume in which we found the following: "Dr. John R. Ward, president of the Carlisle bank, was among the earliest physicians of the new town". (7) This was The Farming and Commercial Bank of Carlisle. The town of Carlisle, county seat of Nicholas County, adjoining Harrison County on the east, was organized, and its first town lots sold, during the summer of 1816. Certainly he continued residence in this county during 1818, for the Nicholas County, Kentucky, tax lists for that year list John R. Ward, as follows:

100 acres of land
Military-Hughes Co.
5 Black Slaves
1 White Laborer
2 Horses (8)

Covering the next ten years we found no records, except the indirect reference that in 1819 the Carlisle bank failed, (9) because of Kentucky's unsound banking conditions and the evils of unredeemable paper money; but it would seem likely he continued residence in Carlisle until 1828, in which year he sold his medical practice to Dr. Oliver Hazard Perry Stout, (10) a graduate of Transylvania Medical School, class of 1823. In the following year, September 28, 1829, John R. Ward and his wife, Clarissa Ammons Ward, sold their property and lands to John Mann. (11) Thus was found a Dr. Ward of the Cynthiana Wards in the vicinity of Rafinesque at Lexington during the period of the 1820's.

We next ventured to Lexington to see what we could find on the Rafinesque side that might dovetail into a Ward-Rafinesque contact. Mrs. Charles F. Norton, librarian at Transylvania College, generously permitted an examination of the Rafinesque material in the college library. The Kentucky newspapers for the period were read at the Lexington city library. Court records were gone over at the Fayette County court house in Lexington. Personal contacts were made, notably with Mrs. William T. (Maude Ward) Lafferty. According to Ward family tradition, Mrs. Lafferty believed Dr. John R. Ward was a brother of her grandfather, Andrew Ward, who was married at Cynthiana in the year 1804. Rumor averred that Dr. John R. Ward was

a friend of Rafinesque. But the expedition to Lexington produced no tangible results. The newspapers especially were disappointing. In those days the papers had no place for personal interest stories: Proclamations, State and National; political news; foreign news almost invariably quoting ship captains newly arrived from abroad; a literary section, and business notices and cards covered all the news. Local news must have gotten abroad by gossip. As an example of the meagerness of all things bearing on the lives and interests of home folks, this notice appeared in the May 12, 1820, issue of Lexington's *The Kentucky Gazette*: "Died—On Monday last John D. Clifford a citizen of this town, after a short illness." Monday last was May 8, and on that day died the most prominent citizen of Lexington, a business man with large interests in Lexington, Philadelphia and St. Louis, a member of the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, Massachusetts) a member of the Board of Trustees of Transylvania College, and the friend of Rafinesque who had been instrumental in his coming out from Philadelphia. Subsequent issues of the *Gazette* carried not a word concerning Clifford; although to this day in the county court house one may turn page after page through the old court record recording his will. The point here is that a story detailing the discovery of an Indian historical record found on White River, in Indiana, had no chance to get into news print in those days.

Rafinesque's name appeared frequently in business notices. For example— in *The Kentucky Gazette* for July 23, 1819: "Transylvania University: The trustees of this institution have unanimously elected the following gentlemen to professorships in the Medical School, connected with it: 1 ———, 2 ———, 3 ———, 4 ———, 5, C. S. Rafinesque, Esq., Professor of Botany and Natural History"; and in *The Kentucky Reporter*, November 19, 1821: "Avd. Transylvania University. Professor Rafinesque will deliver a public Lecture introductory to a course of Medical Botany, Mineralogy, Medical Zoology, etc. in the Chapel of the University, on Wednesday next, 21st. November, at 12 o'clock. The Medical Professors, Students, etc/ are invited to attend, as well as the ladies and gentlemen of Lexington. If the weather should prove unfavorable, it will be postponed to the next Saturday, at the same hour."

May 17, 1821, at Lexington, The Rev. Mr. John Ward, recently of St. Louis, married Miss Sarah Clifford, a sister of the late John D. Clifford. Shortly before this date Ward had been called to the rectorship of Christ Church (Episcopal) at Lexington. Here he remained for many years, and became one of Lexington's most distinguished citizens. It has been felt by us that this Ward may have some connection with our problem, for the John Clifford-Rafinesque friendship was strong enough to have continued in his family; but we have not been able to find correspondence or any other source that would throw light on his relationships with Rafinesque.

The best fruit of our contacts in Lexington was the enthusiastic cooperation of Mrs. Norton. The Indiana Historical Society was highly honored in having her make search, by personal contacts through-

out Kentucky and by correspondence into wider fields, in behalf of the Ward-Rafinesque-Walam Olum documentation. Her researches have produced the knowledge that "Dr. John R. Ward, of Cynthiana, and Carlisle, Kentucky, and Dr. John Russell Ward, of Fulton, Missouri, are one and the same. Proof came with finding in the court house in Fulton the record of his marriage, 'John R. Ward to Clarissa Buckner in Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1807.' This was filed at the time of his death, in 1834. The marriage bonds of Bourbon read: John R. Ward and Clarissa Buckner were married October 23, 1807." (12)

With ground broken in Kentucky our work had only begun. Four avenues of development were available: 1. Securing the services of a professional genealogist to trace out the family connections of the Kentucky Wards with an eye cocked for family traditions and correspondence suggesting archaeological interests and contacts with Rafinesque; 2. Search through records available in our local libraries; 3. Correspondence; and 4. Personal contacts. The services of Miss Jean Agnew, Richmond, Virginia, were secured for the study of genealogical sources; and Mrs. Norton was authorized to avail herself of the services of such a specialist in this field for southern Indiana.

In the Indiana State Library and in the Indianapolis Public Library records and lists of early days in Indiana, Kentucky, and Missouri were studied. These were: Rolls of enlistments for the War of 1812; marriage, death, church, and court records; S.A.R. and D.A.R. records; medical records; lists of early doctors, missionaries, church and law circuit riders; grave records; and lists of early settlers. Some years ago an independent search through the records of early Indiana medicine produced no clues. We had an idea that Ward might have spent the years between our last record of him in Cynthiana in 1811, and his appearance at Carlisle in 1816, as a soldier in the War of 1812; and that on his way home from Canada might have stopped for a short time in the Delaware villages on White River in Indiana—the setting for a later visit. In Lexington we received the information (13) that the Ward issue in Missouri were Clara Cecil Ward Wilson, daughter, and grandsons, Cecil Wilson and Ward Wilson, of Kansas City. The State Historical Society of Missouri and the Kansas City Public Library cooperated in our search for them or their descendants.

Through correspondence we endeavored to find the sources used for the Walam Olum-Ward-Rafinesque statement published in Kerr's "History of Kentucky." (14) By the same method we contacted the surviving relatives of Brantz Mayer, of Baltimore; and likewise corresponded with the Maryland Historical Society, of which organization Mayer was a founder (with B. F. Latrobe), and its president for many years. Letters were written to all Wards listed in WHO'S WHO, stating the nature of our problem, and asking if family letters or traditions could throw light on the subject. By personal contacts and also by correspondence we sought the assistance of individuals and institutions which we had any reason to believe might be helpful. The major portion of all contacts are listed as a permanent supplement to this paper; and this list and all letters and other items pertaining thereto

have been deposited in the Smith Library of the Indiana Historical Society as a permanent part of this record.

In Rafinesque's handwriting we have knowledge that he contemplated a trip to White River in Indiana during the summer of 1820. An extract from a letter by him, dated Lexington, Ky., June 15, 1820, to Dr. C. W. Short, Hopkinsville, Ky., reads: "My intention was to go this Summer to the Olympian Springs, Cumberland Mountains & White River in Indiana."

The original letter is the property of the Filson Club, in Louisville, Kentucky, in the Dr. C. W. Short collection of letters. Photostatic copies of this letter have been deposited in the Smith Library of the Indiana Historical Society.

Our search is still an open one. Did Rafinesque go up on White River during the summer of 1820? His plans had been completely upset by the untimely death of Clifford. Together they had planned botanizing and archaeological trips; suddenly everything was changed. His friend Short was cast in a mould similar to Clifford's. He wanted to see Dr. Short in Hopkinsville, and so he wrote Short (June 15) that he hoped to visit him that summer, "although my intention was" etc. as above quoted. Unfortunately, the Short letters give no clue: at the date when Rafinesque and his affairs again appear in the Short letters the events of the Summer of 1820 do not receive so much as a scratch of the pen. Mrs. Norton's discovery that Dr. John Russell Ward died in 1834, at the very least gives chronological correctness to Rafinesque's employment of the expression "The late Dr. Ward."

Bibliography

1. Rafinesque, Constantine S., 1836. *American Nations*, p. 122. F. Turner, Philadelphia.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
3. Brinton, Daniel G., 1885. *The Lenape and their Legends*, Philadelphia.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.
5. Rafinesque, Constantine S., 1836. *A Life of Travels and Researches*, Philadelphia, p. 74.
6. Documents furnished by Miss Margaret Duffy, Cynthiana, Ky.
7. Perrin, Wm. Henry, 1882. *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, Kentucky*. O. L. Baskin & Co., Chicago, p. 358.
8. Tax lists of Nicholas County, Ky., for 1818. Kentucky Historical Society files, Frankfort.
9. Perrin, op. cit. 358.
10. *Ibid.*, 412.
11. Nicholas County, Ky., records. County clerk's office, Carlisle.
12. Correspondence. April 3, 1941. Mrs. Charles F. Norton, Lexington, Ky.
13. Personal interview. Mrs. Wm. T. (Maude Ward) Lafferty, Lexington.
14. Kerr, Charles Ed., 1922. *History of Kentucky*. American Historical Society, New York. Vol. I, p. 22.