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# Henry Buxton Says . . . Mrs. Sylvia Stanislaus, 101, Remembers Early Years at 'Quoddy Indian Reservation

## Lincoln Centenarian, Her Memory Blurred by the Years, Can Still Recall Many of the Tribal Songs of Her People; Lived on Mattanawcook Island

I experienced one of the most solemn and impressive moments of my life when I was escorted into the bedroom of Mrs. Sylvia Stanislaus, 101 years old, of Lincoln, and listened to her reminiscences of her long-ago youth.



Buxton

This old Indian woman, who is beloved by everybody in Lincoln, was suffering from a cold plus the infirmities of great age, and it was expected that at any time she would slip quietly and peacefully away into the land of the Great Spirit.

After all, one cannot expect any great extension of life after one has attained and passed the century mark, so no one in Lincoln will be surprised if in a very short time this beloved old character passes to the "Happy Hunting Ground."

The centenarian made a remarkable picture as she lay there basking in the golden warmth of childhood memories of long ago. Her dark profile stood out with cameo sharpness against the white of the pillow, the contrast throwing into bold relief the nobility of her features. In that strong face were many of the best characteristics of the Indian before he felt the effect of the white man's civilization, and there was present also the influence of the white race, for Mrs. Stanislaus' mother was the daughter of a white woman and an Indian. Sitting on her right and looking fondly down upon her was her son, Francis Stanislaus, and on the left of the bed with her arm thrown lovingly about the pillow was the nurse, Miss Mabel King of Lincoln, who has cared for the centenarian for more than a year and a half.

Tactfully I asked Mrs. Stanislaus questions. Sometimes she would answer them lucidly, and again she would abandon her English and slip back into the language of her tribe as if her mind had gone wandering through the pleasant memory-aisles of her youth. She seemed to be in no pain but rather to be in the soft embrace of a delightful languor that brought her peace and happiness. I could not avoid the thought that she was hovering on the borderland of life and eternity as if uncertain whether to go all the way into the great beyond or to abide for a little while longer on the earth which has been her home for 101 years.

### MEMORIES OF PRIMITIVE RED-SKINS

But I was able to piece together something of this old Indian woman's past life as I listened to her softly crooned reminiscence. Now and again she would speak a sentence in English that would open vistas of Maine Indian life of long ago, and once she chanted the opening bar of an ancient Indian love song in the slurring gutturals of the Abnaki tribes. And as she talked my imagination constructed something of the life of the Maine Indian a century ago when they lived in log huts and tepees and were rated as mighty hunters and tireless travelers of forest trails. I could al-

Stanislaus died in 1916 at the age of 86.

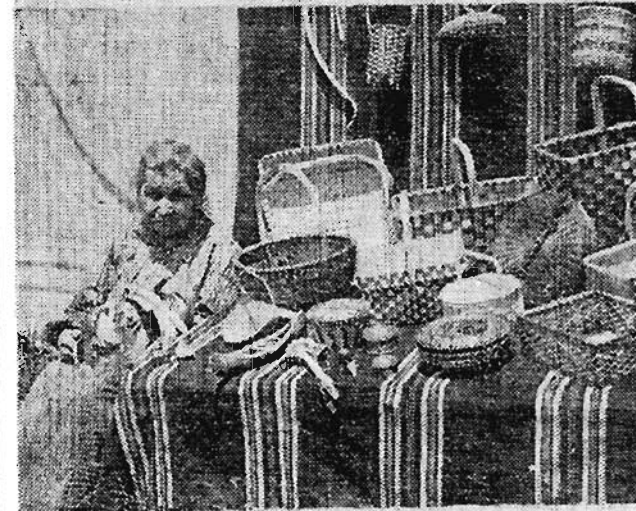
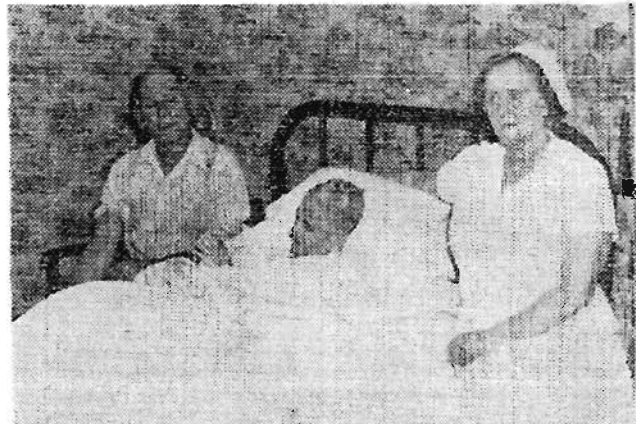
In an interview shortly before his death Stanislaus said: "I can remember back at least 70 years, for I was born in this place. It was then a howling wilderness and among my first recollections are encounters with wild animals. The wolves were very plentiful here at that time and as they went in packs it was very dangerous to be out after dark. On more than one occasion I have had to run for my life with a lot of these howling creatures behind me."

During the time that Mrs. Stanislaus lived on Mattanawcook Island a school was maintained there for Indian children. She spent winters making baskets, and in 1865 she began going to Rye Beach, N. H., for the summer seasons.

### HONORED BY SUMMER RESIDENTS

"At Rye," said Francis Stanislaus, "my mother would sell all the baskets she had made during the winter, not forgetting to take many orders for the following season. For a half century she travelled to Rye every summer, and the fiftieth anniversary of her going there the wealthy summer residents of the place got together a purse of \$500 in gold and presented it to her. At this presentation mother made known her intention to cease her visits to

## Indian Centenarian



Mrs. Sylvia Stanislaus, 101, of Lincoln, is believed to be the oldest Indian woman now living in Maine. Top photo shows her with her son Francis, and her nurse, Miss Mabel King of Lincoln. She continued making baskets until she was 96, and the center photo was taken only a short time before she gave up this work. Even at an advanced age Mrs. Stanislaus was expert at handling a canoe. In the lower photo she is shown helping her son, Francis, seated in stern of canoe, paddle the frail Indian craft. Seated behind her is her husband, the late Stephen Stanislaus.

ago, and once she chanted the opening bar of an ancient Indian love song in the slurring gutturals of the Abnaki tribes. And as she talked my imagination constructed something of the life of the Maine Indian a century ago when they lived in log huts and tepees and were rated as mighty hunters and tireless travelers of forest trails. I could almost see the smoke of council fires rising in crisp autumn air, and I could see Indian hunters tracking moose in the fastnesses of the forest. Before my mental eyes came the scene of an Indian village with the squaws curling hides and drying fish, and dark skinned children playing with small bows and arrows on a river bank. In those days Maine Indians were noted for their courage and their endurance. They could run scores of miles through the forests without impairment of wind, and they could withstand the pangs of starvation and of suffering with astonishing fortitude.

I found that the long ago romance of her mother was much in the mind of the centenarian. Softly she told me that her mother was half Indian and half white, and her faltering voice edged slightly with excitement as she started to tell of a long flight in a canoe made by her mother when the latter was a girl. But before I could get the thread of the story she lapsed again into the low gutturals of the Indian tongue.

"She is trying to tell you," smiled the nurse, "that her mother was half white and half Indian, and when a child lived with her parents at Old Town. The American relatives of the child plotted to steal her away, and her grandfather, hearing of this, spirited his granddaughter away in a canoe to the Passamaquoddy reservation at Pleasant Point, Perry. Many times her mother told her the exciting story of this flight in a canoe.

#### REMEMBERS TRIBAL SONGS

"Since I have been here Mrs. Stanislaus has told me many stories of her life when she was a child. She can remember when she lived in a tepee and played on a dirt floor. She remembers the games that were the favorites of the Indian children, and many times she has sung for me the old chants of her people. She is probably the only living Indian in Maine today who is familiar with all the old chants and dances and the tribal customs of the Maine Indians."

Mrs. Stanislaus was born on the Passamaquoddy reservation March 28, 1836. She was the daughter of Joseph and Mary Solmore. When she was two years old her father died and her mother removed with her to Old Town. Shortly afterwards she was adopted by Mary Mowhawk Ranco of Greenbush, who was very kind to the child. In 1859 she was married to Stephen Stanislaus of Lincoln, the ceremony taking place in one of the Bangor churches. Mr. and Mrs. Stanislaus journeyed up the Penobscot river in a canoe to Mattanawcook island (Lincoln) where they lived for many years, after which they moved to a new home on the mainland.

Stephen Stanislaus, who for eight terms was governor of the Penobscot tribe, was one of the most competent guides in Maine. He was the grandson of John Attean, one of the greatest chiefs of the Penobscots. He guided many distinguished parties along the Penobscot river and was well versed in the lore of his tribe. Mr. and Mrs. Stanislaus celebrated their golden wedding anniversary Sept. 15, 1908, and Mr.

let not forgetting to take many orders for the following season. For a half century she travelled to Rye every summer, and the fiftieth anniversary of her going there the wealthy summer residents of the place got together a purse of \$300 in gold and presented it to her. At this presentation mother made known her intention to cease her visits to Rye on account of her age, but her friends there were so grieved by her decision that she agreed to come back one more summer and she did so.

"Mother continued to make baskets until she was 96 years old, and the last one she made I shall always treasure as a prized family heirloom. She has been a wonderful mother, and it makes me happy to know that she will be comfortable and well cared for the little time she has left on this earth. One of mother's happiest moments came on the occasion of her one hundredth birthday when she was made an honorary member of the Lincoln Historical society."

I have before me a copy of the telegram which Governor Louis J. Brann sent to Mrs. Stanislaus on her one hundredth birthday. It reads:

"The people of Maine very heartily congratulate you on attaining the age of 100 years. I am pleased to know that you are very highly honored in your community and throughout the state, and that you have rendered very important service in bringing about a better understanding between the people of your own race and Maine residents. Heartiest congratulations."