The chance to catch a glimpse of the past is tempting to almost everyone. Tastes of what life must have been like before modern memory can be gleaned from a number of different kinds of sources: lore passed down from parents to children, old documents, archaeological discoveries, language. Each of these resources provides unique contributions. Documentation can furnish very specific facts. Archaeology can uncover information no one thought to pass down in legend form. Often traces of traditions which disappeared too long ago to be remembered by storytellers and historians or which left no material mark are passed down from one generation to the next in vocabulary. Ethnohistorical, archaeological, and linguistic tools can each uncover pieces of daily life in Proto-Iroquoia. Each has its own limitations, but together, they reveal a much richer picture of Iroquoian life in early times than any one alone. In the sections which follow, the method of cultural reconstruction from linguistic materials will be outlined, then some conclusions will be drawn concerning the life of the Proto-Iroquoians, the common ancestors of all modern Iroquoian peoples.

THE METHOD OF LINGUISTIC RECONSTRUCTION

Traces of earlier cultural elements still present in language are detected in the following manner. Sets of words are sought in related languages that are similar in both form and meaning from one language to the next. Such similarities can be due to several causes: common inheritance, borrowing, onomatopoeia, parallel creation, or chance. Words similar because of common inheritance, cognates, are
assumed to have evolved from a word in the common parent language. If a word was present in the parent language, in this case Proto-Iroquoian, there is a good chance that the referent of the word was part of the lives of the speakers of that language, the Proto-Iroquoians.

The Identification of Cognates

Compare the words for 'man' in the various Iroquoian languages:  

'man' M. ú:kweh  Oe. ú:kweh  Oo. ó:kweh  C. ó:kweh  
S. ó:kweh  H. onhoiöy  W. ó:meh  T. ê:kweh  Ch. ayuwi

The words are close but not identical in form. Examination of other cognate sets reveals that the differences in form from language to language are systematic. When Tuscarora and the Five Nations languages show kw in certain environments, Cherokee, Huron, and Wyandot show w. Next to nasalized vowels, Wyandot w becomes m.

'color' M. -ahsohw-  Oe. -ahsohw-  Oo. -ahsohw-  C. -ah-
sohw-  S. -ahsohw-  H. -ahsohw-  W. -ahsohw-  T. -ah-
θuhkw-  Ch. -hsuhwi-

The sound correspondences are systematic because when the original Iroquoian *kw changed to w in Cherokee and Huron, the sound changed in every word containing *kw in those languages at that time. If the expected, systematic sound difference does not appear in a modern word, we know the word was not part of the language at the time of the sound shift.

The accurate identification of cognates depends upon a thorough understanding of the sound shifts which have occurred in each language since the parent language first divided. For a detailed discussion of the sound shifts and their conditioning environments, see Mithun (1979). 3

Other causes of lexical resemblances across different languages can seriously interfere with the correct identification of cognates if undetected.

Borrowing. Words in different languages may be similar because one language borrowed the word from the other or because they both borrowed the same word from a third source. Compare the words below:

'cat' M. takö:s  Oe. takö:s  Oo. takus  C. takö:s  S. takö:tsi.  
T. ta:ku:θ

The words are strikingly similar in form and have exactly the same meaning. In fact, they are too similar to be cognate. In Tuscarora, proto *t became (?)n before vowels, as in the example below:

'two' PNI *tekni  M. tékeni  Oe. tékni  Oo. teknhí  
C. tekhní:  H. teni  W. tendí  T. nék̪tì:

This happened to all t's in all words present in Tuscarora at the time of the shift. If the word for 'cat' had been part of Tuscarora then, the modern Tuscarora word would be

T. *ná:ku:θ

The t in the actual form, T. ta:ku:θ, shows that the word was borrowed. In fact the word was probably borrowed from the Dutch into all of the Iroquoian languages about 300 years ago. Notice how different the words for 'cat' are in the Iroquoian languages that were not in contact with the Five Nations:

'cat' Su. tsitítsé  N. toöse  Ch. wehsa

Often systematic sound differences are the only basis from which to distinguish borrowed words from cognates, so if a word does not contain sounds which have shifted, borrowing may not be detectable. Borrowed words tell us little about the life of the Proto-Iroquoians, but if not identified as loans, they can be seriously misleading. It would be a mistake, for example, to hypothesize the presence of domestic cats in Proto-Iroquoia on the basis of these borrowed words. Nevertheless, borrowings whose source is identified can provide information about contacts between groups—in this case the Dutch and the Iroquois.

Onomatopoeia. Notice how similar the words for 'crow' are in the modern Iroquoian languages:

W. yahká?a  Ch. kho:ká

It is tempting to assume that these words all evolved from the same word in Proto-Iroquoian. This would be unjustified. The word could easily have been created independently by each modern group. Crows may simply have sounded alike to all of them.

Parallel Creation. Compare the words for 'church' in Mohawk and Oneida:

'church' M. onuhsatok̪vé:ti  Oe. onuhsatok̪vé:ti

The words are identical in form and meaning, and are probably not borrowings. Yet they are not descended from a single term in Proto-
Mohawk-Oneida either. They became part of the languages after contact, long after the groups had separated from each other. Both were formed from existing cognates, *-nu:hs- ‘house’ and *-tokwi:ti- ‘holy’. Although the pieces were part of the Proto-language, the compound was not. Care should be taken in assigning the referents of analyzeable terms to Proto-cultures.

**Chance.** Each of the Iroquoian languages has approximately fifteen distinctive sounds, most of them roughly the same from language to language. It would not be impossible for two languages to form words consisting of the same sounds in the same order. It is less likely, but still not impossible, that the words might have relatable meanings. Such chance similarities would be misleading if mistaken for cognates.

Several factors aid in the detection of chance resemblances. For one, the probability of identity by chance decreases drastically as the length of words increases. Newly created words in Iroquoian tend to be quite long. Second, the probability of similarity due to chance is greatly reduced if the word fits into a cognate semantic complex. If words for ‘cornsilk’ are similar to two languages, they are more likely to be cognate if words for ‘corn’, ‘cornhusk’, ‘corncob’, ‘ear of corn’, ‘kernal’, ‘cornstalk’, etc., are also similar.

The identification of cognates thus involves the discovery of words similar in form and meaning which show systematic sound correspondences and the elimination of similarities due to borrowing, onomatopoeia, parallel construction, or chance.

**Inferences from Proto-Lexicon to Proto-Culture**

The existence of a set of cognate words for an object provides good evidence for the existence of the object in the Proto-culture, but the fact that certain terms for an object are not cognate does not constitute evidence that the object was unknown to speakers of the Proto-language. Compare the words for ‘knee’ in the Iroquoian languages:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘knee’} & \quad M. \text{ okwi:ts} \quad Oe. \text{ otsinikú:ta} \quad Oo. \text{ okéh} \? \text{na} \quad C. \text{ áóts} \quad S. \text{ áósh} \quad T. \text{ awtìkwé:ogh} \quad Ch. \text{ nì:ke:ni}
\end{align*}
\]

Although no word can be reconstructed for ‘knee’ in Proto-Iroquoian, we are not justified in concluding that the Proto-Iroquoians lacked knees. Words come and go in every language.

Just as sounds and vocabulary change over time, so do the meanings of words. Compare the terms below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{'corn tassel'} & \quad M. \text{ otsi:tsy} \quad Oe. \text{ otsi:tsy} \quad Oo. \text{ otsi:tsy} \quad S. \text{ otsi:ts} \quad T. \text{ utsi:tsíshëth} \quad Ch. \text{ utsi:tsi}
\end{align*}
\]

The cognate set suggests that corn tassels could have been part of Proto-Iroquoian culture around 4000 years ago. In fact, this term, which does have the specialized meaning ‘corn tassel’ in Seneca and Cherokee, means ‘hops’ in Onondaga and is a general word for ‘flower’ or ‘beer’ in the other languages. The fact that other terms for corn culture are not cognate for this period indicates that corn was probably not a part of Proto-Iroquoian culture and that the original meaning of the root *-tsì?tsy-* was ‘flower’. Semantic shifts are often detectable from differences in meaning among cognates.

**The Depth of Reconstruction**

The age attributable to reconstructions depends upon the relationships among the languages in which cognates are found. If languages \( L_1 \), \( L_2 \), and \( L_3 \) are related as shown in Figure 15.1 below, and cognates are found in \( L_1 \) and \( L_2 \), the word must have been in these languages at time \( t_0 \) before they separated. If cognates are found only in \( L_2 \) and \( L_3 \), we can be sure only that the word was present at time \( t_2 \). An understanding of the historical relationships among the languages of the family is thus crucial to correct reconstruction.

**The Iroquoian Family**

Perhaps four thousand years ago, the ancestors of the modern Iroquoians separated into two groups. One group, which became the modern Cherokees, migrated toward what is now Tennessee and the Carolinas. Perhaps two thousand years later, a second group left. This group, the ancestors of the Tuscaroras, Nottoways, and Meherrins, eventually settled in eastern North Carolina and Virginia. After some time, the remaining Northern Iroquoians divided again. Some of these, later known as the Hurons and eventually part of
the Wyandots, moved into Ontario. The others subsequently separated into a western group, (Seneca-Cayuga*), Onondaga, Susquehannock (=Andaste=Minqua=Conestoga), and an eastern group (Oneida-Mohawk). The existence of several other Northern Iroquoian communities is on record: Laurentian (Hochelagan, Stadaconan), Wenro, Neutral, Erie, and Tionontati (=Petun=Tobacco Nation). Because the languages of these last peoples disappeared with little or no documentation, their exact status within the family is uncertain, but they were clearly part of the Northern Iroquoian community which remained after the departure of the Tuscarora-Nottoway group.

The relationships among the Iroquois languages are shown schematically in Figure 15.2.

The crucial roles of Cherokee, Tuscarora, and Nottoway in the reconstruction of Iroquoian language and culture are apparent from the sketch of the family. To reconstruct a word for Proto-Iroquoian (PI), it is necessary to find cognates in Cherokee and any other language in the family. To reconstruct a Proto-Northern word (PNI), cognates must be found in either Tuscarora or Nottoway and any other Northern language.

**Reconstructable Semantic Complexes**

A number of terms for fauna, flora, and material culture can be reconstructed for Proto-Iroquoian, Proto-Northern Iroquoian, and the Proto-Iroquois Proper community. If a term can be traced no further back than PIP, we do not know whether it was present in PI or not.

**Fauna**

To reconstruct a term for PI, it is necessary to find cognates in Cherokee and any Northern language. Since Cherokee is now spoken in quite different ecological areas (North Carolina and Oklahoma) than the other languages (Pennsylvania, New York State, Quebec, Ontario), this is not always possible. Terms for animals not found in both places can be reconstructed only if they have remained in the language but undergone semantic shift.

**Mammals.** The Proto-Iroquoians probably lived among wildcats, wolves, deer, chipmunks, and skunks:

'wildcat' M. ʊːr-si'ku:n Oe. ʊːr-si'ku:n Oo. ʊə'kə:n S. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

'wolf' M. ʊə'kə:n Oe. ʊə'kə:n Oo. ʊə'kə:n S. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

'deer' Su. ʊə'kə:n O. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

'chipmunk' M. ʊə'kə:n Oe. ʊə'kə:n Oo. ʊə'kə:n S. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

'skunk' M. ʊə'kə:n Oe. ʊə'kə:n Oo. ʊə'kə:n S. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

The semantic shifts in the last cognate set are interesting. The modern Mohawk, Oneida, Huron, and Wyandot terms now mean 'raccoon'.

Several terms are reconstructable for at least PNI and may go back to PI. Words for 'elk' are similar, but the Cherokee term may rather be cognate to PNI 'deer'. A second term for 'elk' is shared by the western PNI languages:

'elk' Su. ʊə'kə:n Oe. ʊə'kə:n S. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

The presence of foxes and weasels can be traced back through vocabulary:

'fox' M. ʊə'kə:n Oe. ʊə'kə:n Oo. ʊə'kə:n W. ʊə'kə:n T. ʊə'kə:n Ch. ʊə'kə:n

Fig. 15.2. Relationships among Iroquois languages
'weasel' M. onú:kwe, 'weasel' Oe. onú:kote, 'weasel' S. hanó:kot; 'weasel' T. ðen'kut; 'mink' Ch. thané:kwa 'mole'

Note the different glosses in this last set. The Delaware word for 'mink' winingsus, which sounds strikingly similar to the Iroquoian words, is a descriptive term meaning 'dirty face', so the possibility of borrowing should not be ruled out. Words for 'dog' appear to be cognate at least to PNI and perhaps to PI:

'dog' Oo. tsí:hah S. tsí:yæh T. tsíhr N. cheer Ch. kihli

The Proto-Northern Iroquoians knew not only wolves, deer, wildcats, chipmunks, skunks, elk, fox, weasels, and dogs, but also beavers and others:


The Five Nations (PIP) community knew porcupines and their quills, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, and woodchucks:


Reptiles. Frogs and toads can be reconstructed for PI:


Interestingly, Zeisberger gives the Delaware word for 'toad' as tsqual-lac.

General terms for snakes and lizards can be reconstructed for PI. The final vowels in the Mohawk and Onondaga words for 'snake' are verb roots 'be in water':


The Northern Iroquoians also knew turtles:

'turtle' H. anyyahouiche W. gá?wic T. rá?kwihs

In addition to frogs, toads, lizards, and turtles, the Five Nations community (PIP) distinguished two other kinds of turtles and salamanders:


Insects. The Proto-Iroquoians had lice:

'lice' M. otsí:nu Oe. otsí:nu C. tsí:ndo S. tsí:ndò Ch. thí:na

It appears that they were bothered by mosquitoes:

'mosquito' H. tachyie:teshei Ch. té:se W. té:se Ch. dosa

Northern and southern words for 'katydid' look similar, but this could be due to onomatopoeia:

'katydid' S. tsí:skae:kæ T. tsíské:ke: Ch. tsíki:kí:

Terms for 'bee' are formed alike in all of the Northern languages, from the term for 'hive', *-nahkóh:-, which could itself come from a root for 'barrel' or 'drum', *-nahkw:-

'bee' M. otsí:nhahkuhtahkwá:ne Oo. nhahkóhkwá:ne C. káná:kó:th S. oⁿnohkó:ti T. oⁿndáhkó:ti Ch. runókvar

The Five Nations languages and Huron and Wyandot (PL) share terms for 'ant', for 'butterfly', and for 'tick':

'ant' M. tsíkínhotóstókh(wii) Oe. tyanhotéstökwi Oo. tsí:nógéstökhwi C. tsí:nóhkwehí S. tsihéstökhwehí H. sinonochoquey W. tisíthó:syúkhe?
'butterfly' M. tsí?ksiná:nawv Oo. kaná:wv Oo. haná:hwêh
C. tsí?taná:we: S. otsí?tanó:wé: W. thame10 dúme7 (Ch. kamama)
'tick' M. oséhto Oo. oséhtu Oo. oséhtöh C. oséhtôh
S. koséhtôh W. osetôk

Birds. The reconstruction of bird names is generally risky because of the high frequency of onomatopoeia. Some Iroquoian bird names which appear to match are those for 'whippoorwill', 'quail', 'king-fisher', 'turkey', 'robin', 'chickadee', perhaps 'eagle', and of course 'crow':

W. meyuríhá T. kwa?kóhryeh Ch. wakulî
'quail' M. kóhkwayv Oo. kóhkwai Oo. kóhkowih C. kóhkowi S. kóhkawi W. (Potier) okóaki T. kúhkwihi Ch. ukhkwe1hi
'kingfisher' S. thá:se:h Ch. tsalóhi
'turkey' W. dètôta T. kv:nv N. kumun Ch. kv:ná
'chickadee' M. taktsísiré:ri Oo. tsíktsila:lê C. tsíksí:ye T. neksísiré:re Ch. tsikilili

All of these words, with the possible exceptions of 'turkey' and 'eagle' could easily be onomatopoeic. The word for 'robin' matches nicely among the Iroquoian languages, but it also matches those in American languages all over North America.

In addition to all of the birds mentioned above, the Proto-Northern Iroquoians also knew passenger pigeons, blackbirds, and partridges:

'pigeon' M. orís:te Oo. olí:te H. orittey T. urí:ne

Besides these, the Proto-Five Nations (PIP) community knew ducks, bluejays, gulls, flickers, snipes, great horned owls, and perhaps geese:

'duck' M. só:ra Oo. so:wäk S. so:wäk
'bluejay' M. ter:iri Oo. tít:lîi Oo. tít:hi C. tít:ti S. tít:ti?

The Proto-Iroquoians

'gull' M. tsyóhwàstaka?we Oo. tsyóhwàstaka?we S. tsó:we?staka? (T. tsúih?t0atakaw, borrowing)
'flicker' M. kwítō:kwito Oo. kwít0tutu C. kwítu:kwitu? S. kwítu:kwito?
'snipe, plow, woodcock' M. tawístawis Oo. tawístawi Oo. tawístahwis tawístawis C. tówístowi? S. tówístowi? (T. tówístawis 'snipe clan', borrowing)
'goose' M. káhum Oo. káhu Oo. káhök C. hó:ka:k S. hó:ka:k H. ahonque W. yáhök

The term for 'goose' is probably onomatopoeic but may go back to PL, since Wyandot shows it with the sound change of *k to y.

Hunting

Although terms for game animals can be reconstructed for PL, little pertaining to hunting can be established for that period. This course of things does not prove the absence of hunting in Proto-Iroquoian culture.

Words for hunting equipment can be traced back to PNI. Two roots for 'bow' can be reconstructed, although one may have originally meant 'stick'. In addition, terms for 'bowstring', 'arrow', 'arrowfeathers', and 'arrowhead' are cognate. Words for 'quiver' are later, independent constructions:

'bow' ('stick?') C. a:to:tá S. káeo:ta? ('gun?') (L. cacta) H. a:ta N. ata T. á:neh (′bow′ or ′gun′)
'arrow' C. ká:nóh S. ka:nóh? H. anda W. ú:nnda T. ú:teh (Ch. gá:ni 'bullet')

The verb 'hunt' can be reconstructed for PIP. The t in Tuscarora shows that it was a borrowing:

Flora

The reconstruction of significant flora referents is rendered difficult by the collection techniques of philologists. The domain is enormous to begin with and translations of plant names are seldom specific enough to yield the results crucial to homeland hypotheses.

Several tree names can be traced back to Proto-Iroquoian:

‘red oak’ M. karíhtú Oe. kalíhtú OoZ. garíhti C. ko:weh
S. okowé? H. ontuieri (‘acorn’) T. kú:reh N. coree Ch. ku:le
(‘acorn’)

‘hickory’ T. waht Ch. wane?i

‘soft maple’ C. kóhsa: S. kóhsa: T. hakvhú:si?

Ch. kwáunsdi?í

A word for a potato-like tuber, perhaps Jerusalem artichokes or ground nuts, can be reconstructed for PI:


In addition to these, the Proto-Northern Iroquoians must have lived among elm, slippery elm, basswood, and pine:

‘elm’ M. oká:ratsi Oe. kalánikwala Oo. ká:ó:kátha? C. khá:oka?
S. kaó:ke? W. (Potier) karakoat T. karatkvar


‘pine’ M. oohnéhta? (‘gum’) Oe. oohnéhta? Oo. oohnéhta?
H. xahí:dehta? W. (Potier) andeta T. uhténeh

The Proto-Five Nations community (PNI) knew these plus white ash, birch, hemlock, sugar maple, willow, balsam fir, and perhaps tamarack:

‘white ash’ M. káneru Oe. ká:no Oo. ká:ne? S. kanyóh
‘birch’ M. oná:ke (birch bark) Oe. onaké Oo. ná:ket T. unákuye
(borrowing) (Ch. uné:ka ‘white’)

(‘evergreen’) S. oné:ta? (L. Lanneda) W. (Pot) onnenta (evergreen) T. ux:nvé:teh (borrowing)

sugar maple’ M. wáhta Oe. wáhta Oo. ohwáhta C. ohwáhta?
S. wahta? H. ouhatta W. wahta
‘willow’ M. ó:se Oo. oséhta? C. oséhta? S. oséhta?
‘balsam fir’ M. otshohkó:tu Oe. otshohko:tú Oo. tshohkó:to
C. otshó:kó:to7 S. sohko:tó
(borrowing)

The term for ‘balsam fir’ is a verb meaning ‘it’s lumpy’, presumably referring to the bark, and the term for ‘tamarack’ is analyzable as ‘falling evergreen’ (it does lose its needles), so both could have been developed independently by each group or easily borrowed.

Agriculture

No agricultural terms have been reconstructed for Proto-Iroquoian. A number can be found for Proto-Northern Iroquoian, however. The Proto-Northern Iroquoians distinguished wild animals from domesticated ones:

S. kanyo? H. ayot T. káryu?

‘domestic animal’ M. -nahskw- Oe. -naskw- Oo. -naskw- C.
-nahskw- S. -nóskw- T. -tahskw-

A second cognate set for tame animals appears to have developed from PNI. It cannot be proven that the term is cognate in Tuscarora rather than borrowed, since it does not contain any of the sound sequences which shifted in that language. The root *-nahskw- is always incorporated, while the root *-ishén? is not, probably because it is basically a verb root:

‘domestic animal’ M. kathshén?: Oe. katshén?: Oo. kathshén?: C.
kathshén?: S. kashen?: T. kathshén?:

Terms for tapping maples match among the Five Nations languages, but because of their length and analyzability, it is likely that the word spread by diffusion. They are built on the root *-khar- ‘wood chip’, because maples were tapped by the insertion of hollowed wooden pegs:

‘he tapped it’ M. wahahkaró:tv Oe. wahahkalo:tv C. aahká:oté?
S. wá:keoté?

The verb ‘plant’ appears cognate in PNI, but again, it is impossible to determine whether the Tuscarora term is inherited or borrowed:
The root for ‘field’, -*heht-*, is cognate in all of the Northern languages, but it also means ‘meadow’, so provides no special evidence of early agriculture.

The corn complex is an interesting puzzle. At contact, of course, the Iroquois cultivated corn extensively. Corn seems to have arrived relatively recently in the Northeast, however, certainly after the initial breakup of the Iroquoian family. Lexical reconstruction bears this out. Two stems for ‘corn’ appear in the Northern Iroquoian languages:  

PNI *-nêh* - M. onô’ha  ‘seed’, *pit* onvakhô’ra  ‘white corn’  
Oe. kanîhe  ‘seed’  Oe. onvakhô’lated  ‘Indian corn’  Oo. onêha  ‘corn’  C. onêhâ  ‘corn’  S. onôkô  ‘corn’  H. onnehâ  ‘bled’  
W. dunêhâ  ‘corn’  T. unvôheh  ‘corn’  

PNI *-nëst* - M. önëstô  ‘corn’  Oe. önëste  ‘corn’  OoS. önîntchà  pepin  Su. onaste  ‘corn’  H. onesta  ‘semences de citrouilles’  
W. tsunëstâ  ‘seed’  T. unvënhëh  ‘seed’

There is a good chance that both of these words originally referred to seeds in general. The words for ‘cornhusk’ match among the languages and the Tuscarora word is clearly a cognate rather than a borrowing:

‘cornhusk’ M. onô:ra  Oe. -nol-oştô  ‘to husk’  Oo. onô:ya  
C. onô:nya  S. -nowi-  T. utû:rehe  Ch. nulâki  ‘to shuck corn’

This could have originated as a general term for husk, however, and only later become specialized for corn. Words for ‘corn tassel’ do not match, except where the word for ‘flower’ (*-tsî?tsî-) is used.

An interesting cognate is the verb ‘pound corn’, which goes back to PL. It is found in Northern words for ‘peltie’ as well as a basic verb and in the Cherokee word for ‘flour’:


It is not at clear, however, that the substance originally pounded was corn. It could have been any kind of grain or nut until the term became specialized for corn.

Additional words pertaining to corn and its preparation can be reconstructed for the Proto-Five Nations community. In most cases, because they do not contain the crucial phonological sequences, it is impossible to determine whether the Tuscarora counterparts are cognates, which would make the terms reconstructable for PNI, or borrowings, which would take them back only to P5N:

‘corn silk’ M. ôkera  S. okojît  T. ukû:rehs  
‘corn cob’  M. skanahkwôv:  Oo. onôhkwa:yë:  C. onôhkwe:  S. onôhkwe:ë  
‘cooked, ground corn’  Oe. onôhkwa:sv  ‘cooked, ground corn’  Oo. onôhkwa:  ‘ground corn’  S. onôhkwhà:  ‘boiled, sweetened corn’

‘mush’ M. otsîskwa  ‘falseface mush’  Oo. otsîkwa  C. otsîskwa  S. otsîskwa  T. uotsîkweh  

The word for ‘bread’ clearly goes back to at least PNI and perhaps PL:


The Five Nations languages (PI) share cognates for ‘grain’, ‘dough’, and ‘winnow’. The verb ‘winnow’ could have originated simple as ‘shake’, however. This and ‘grain’ can be traced to PL because of the Huron and Wyandot cognates:

‘grain’ M. onôtsya  ‘wheat’ onotsyakô:ra  ‘rice’ (‘white grain’)  
Oo. onátsya  ‘wheat’  C. onátsa  ‘grain’  S. onôtsa  ‘wheat’  onôtsa  ‘oats’ (‘standing grain’)  W. (Potier) onatsa  H. andotsa  ‘espèce de bled’

‘dough’ M. oshë:ra  Oo. oshë:la  Oo. oshë:ë  C. oshëa  S. oshë:ë  

A word for flour matches back to PNI, but it is not a provable cognate. It is based on a verb root *-he*- ‘pound’ and could have been developed independently in each language:

Words for 'beans' and 'tobacco' appear to go back to PNI, but again, the Tuscarora terms are not provable cognates. The Huron and Wyandot do not match.


The Proto-Northern Iroquoians must have gathered many berries and fruits:

'fruit', berry' M. kâhi Oe. kâhih Oo. òhìya? C. ohyà? S. ọya? T. úhyeh

Aquatic Subsistence

One semantic complex appears to be quite old. The set of words relating to water suggests that the Proto-Iroquoians lived near a large river or lake:

'water' M. aw³:ke 'in a lake or river' Oe. aw³:ke 'in a lake or river' Oo. aw³:ke 'in a body of water' (L. ame 'water') H. ailen 'water' W. m³:ye 'in water' T. aw³: 'water' N. auwa:owan 'water' Ch. ama 'water'

'be in water' M. -o- Oe. -o- Oo. -o- C. -o- S. -o- H. -o- W. -u- T. -u- Ch. -u-


'bathe' M. -ataw³v- Oe. -ataw³v- Oo. -ataw³- C. -ataw³- S. -ataw³- H. attahoulan T. -anawv Ch. ataw³a

'row a boat' M. -kawe- Oe. -kawe- Oo. -kawe- C. -kawe- S. -kawe- T. -kawe- Ch. -kawe-


'fishhook' C. atâhstëethra? S. kast³:shë? W. distsúhkwa T. útsúnhëh Ch. suhdì

Besides these, a number of terms can be reconstructed for Proto-Northern Iroquoian:


'Material Culture

The rapid change in the way of life of most Iroquoians within the past three hundred years has resulted in heavy replacement of terms for tools and utensils.

In the area of clothing, a term for 'leggings' is clearly reconstructable for PNI and perhaps for PI:

'leggings' M. kàris Oe. kàlis Su. khalis Oo. kàis kàisse? C. kaisra? S. kâishë? H. ariche W. urísa N. oríragh Ch. aíto

A term for 'shoe' or 'moccasin' goes back to PNI:
'shoe' M. áhta 'shoe' ahtahkwahú:we 'moccasin' (original 'shoe')
Oe. áhta 'shoe' ahtakwahú:we 'moccasin' Su. atackqua
Oo. ahtákwa? C. ahtákwa? S. ahtákwa? (L. atta/atha)
H. atakwa N. otagw T. uhnahkwah:weh 'moccasin'

Another cognate set for shoe, Huron arassiu, Wyandot aracu, and
Cherokee alasulo is probably analyzable as something like 'on the foot'.

The verb 'sew' goes back to PNI:
'sew' M. -nikhuh- Oe. -nikhuh- Oo. -nikhô- C. -nikhô- S.
-ñikhô- H. dandiche 'je recoudu' T. -ñikw-

Terms for 'hemp' and 'thread' go back at least to PIP, as does a
term for a type of gown or petticoat. The Tuscarora term for 'hemp'
appears to be a borrowing because of the simplification of the is
class:
'hemp' M. këtskaara 'mat' ('hemp in it') Oo. osêka? C. këtska?
('mat', 'blanket', 'towel', etc.) S. ëská? H. ononhasquara
T. ûhskareh N. nikirara 'linen'
'thread', 'string' M. ahséri:ye Oe. ahsli:yë? Oo. ohsli:yë?
W. yatsea
'petticoat', 'skirt' M. kà:khare 'slip' ka?khar:res 'long skirt'
Oe. kà:kale? 'dress, gown' kakalakés 'bad skirt' Oo. ka?khwaes

A number of household utensils can be reconstructed. Pipes and
jugs can be traced back to Pl:
'pipe' M. kan:ñawv Oe. kanu:nawv? Su. chanoono
Oo. kanonaw?ta H. noo ouen W. yanadúme T. u?nû:weh
Ch. ganwonoa
'jug' M. kàtshe? Oe. kàtshe? Su. kaatzie Oo. katshè?ta?
Ch. -atsi-

Baskets, wooden troughs, kettles, dishes, bowls, cradleboards, and
perhaps harnesses go back to PNI:
'baskets' Oe. wà:ahslìiyô (good basekt) Oo. ka?áhsæ? C. k'àhtra?
S. ështà? H. atonsha W. tâhcraye T. u?áhtohreh
'trough or wooden bowl' M. ka?ú:wà? Oe. ka?ú:wà?
'pot' or 'kettle' M. ú:ta Oe. û:ák Su. owntack L. undaco
T. nñawewh:weh

'dish' M. katsyv:tha? 'dipper' Oe. kàtsyv 'cup' Oo. kâ:tsyë?

'cradleboard' M. kàrhù? Oe. kàlíhu? Oo. ka?hôhsæ?
'harness', 'burden strap' M. okéhta? Oe. okéhta? Oo. okéhta?
C. kákéhta? 'scarf', 'necktie') S. kakéhta? 'sash traditionally worn
over shoulder' T. ukéneh 'burden strap'

The word for 'harness' is related to a verb to 'carry something over
the shoulders', so its use in 'harness' could be a later independent
innovation.

In addition to the bows and arrows mentioned earlier, axes and
knives can be reconstructed for PNI:
'axe' M. atô:kv? Oe. atokv? Su. adwgen, hadoogen C. ató:kè?
'knife' M. ëshare? Oe. ëshale? Oo. ësha? S. kakanya?sha?
H. assara W. a?sha? T. ëhara?ku 'get that knife'

Besides these, pails, spoons, and barrels can be reconstructed for
PIP:
(borrowing)
'spoon', 'ladle' M. atôkwà Oe. atôkwat Oo. atô:kwat
S. atôkwâ:shà? H. estoqua
'barrel', 'drum' M. ka?nhkwà? Oe. ka?nhkwà?
W. aha?nahkuri T. u?nhkweh (borrowing)

On a larger scale, the Cherokee word for 'room' is cognate with
Northern 'house'. It is not unlikely that the two were essentially the
same thing. A term for any arching, protruding structure, such as
porch, bridge, or shed, can be traced by PNI.

'bridge', 'porch' M. áhskwa? Oe. áskwa? Oo. -askw- waskóhwi
'bridge' C. ahskwa? S. waskóh T. ûskweh H. aqua

Rafters can be traced back to P5N:
'rafter' M. kanáhsta? Oo. kanástá? ('post') C. kanáhsta?
S. onóstá? H. andaste W. kandasta (Pot)
Social Traditions

An interesting cognate involves the word ‘clay’. The word is used in both the Southern and Northern Iroquoian languages for ‘chimney’ and for ‘clan’ as well. It could be that the languages independently extended the term for ‘chimney’ to ‘clan’:

S. kaʔta:a? T. uʔnyehreh N. odeskah W. yaʔtara Ch.
-hstählyʔ?

None of the names for clans can be traced back, however, except where the animal name can be reconstructed:

Words for ‘family’, ‘marriage’, and ‘spouse’ go back to PNI:

‘family’ M. -hwatsir- Oe. hwatsil- Oo. -hwatsiy- C. -hwatsiy-
S. -hwatsiyə-

‘marry’ M. -yak- Oe. -nyak- Oo. -nyak- C. -nyak- S. -nyak-
H. sanye ‘tu es marié’ T. -tyak- N. gotyag ‘marriage’

‘spouse’ M. -nahkw- Oe. -nahkw- C. -nahkw- ‘(marriage)’ S.
-nóhkw- H. eatenonha ‘ma femme’ T. -tahkw- N. gotyakum

The Proto-Iroquoians practiced medicine:

‘medicine’ M. onóhkwa? Oe. onúhkwaʔ Oo. onóhkwaʔtshe
C. onóhkwaʔthraʔ S. onóhkwaʔsheʔ H. énönüquat
W. nóhkwaʔ T. unvóhkwaʔsreḥ Ch. nı́voti

‘witch’ M. ótku Oe. aktu Oo. aktkóʔ C. kotkóʔ S. otkóʔ
H. oki W. utki Ch. asgina

‘bewitch’ M. -aʔvn- Oo. -aʔen- C. -aʔen- S. -aʔets- Ch. atun

The Proto-Northern Iroquoians had the concept of luck. (The Tuscarora is a likely but not provable cognate):

‘luck’ M. -atéraʔsw- roteraʔswiy: ‘he is lucky’ Oe. -atéraʔsw-
lotlaʔswiy: Oo. -atéraʔsw- hotæʔswiyoh C. -atéraʔsw-
hotraʔswiy: O. -atéraʔsw- hotæʔswiy: T. -atéraʔsw- rutraʔswiy:

Dancing can be traced back at least to PNI:

‘I danced’ Oe. waʔtákweʔ Oo. waʔtákweʔ C. atka:t
S. oʔtka:t T. wátiktkw

Singing and rattles go back at least to PIP:

‘I sang’ M. waʔkatervnó:teʔ Oo. waʔkatlunó:tv (‘I played an
instrument’) Oo. waʔkatɛ:ʔnêteʔ C. akatɛnó:teʔ S. oʔkatɛnó:teʔ
H. otoronte ‘il chante’ W. yareunda ‘song’

‘rattle’ M. ostawvʔsera Oo. kástá:wéʔsæʔ C. ostáwʔétrə?
S. kástowéʔsæʔ W. ostaməʔsra T. ustawvʔtsreḥ (borrowing).

CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges of the Proto-Iroquoisians through their vocabulary is one of a people living near water and relying heavily on fishing. They must have known wolves, wildcats, deer, possibly elk, foxes, weasels, chipmunks, dogs, and skunks, as well as frogs, toads, snakes, and lizards. They were probably bothered by lice and mosquitoes. They may have listened to katydids, whippoorwills, quails, kingfishers, robins, chickadees, and crows, and watched eagles and turkeys. They lived among oak, hickory, beech, and plum trees, and ate tubers, some kind of meal which they may have made into bread, and fish. They smoked pipes and practiced medicine.

The Proto-Northern Iroquoisians lived the same kind of life, and also knew otters, beavers, turtles, bees, pigeons, blackbirds, and partridges. They hunted with bows and arrows in forests of elm, slippery elm, basswood, and pine. They had domestic animals, wore leggings and moccasins, and sewed. They put their children on cradleboards and carried loads with burden straps. They used axes and knives, made baskets, wooden troughs, and dishes. They married, had families, and believed in luck.

The Proto-Five Nations community knew these things and others. They lived among porcupines, raccoons, squirrels, and woodchucks, three kinds of turtles, salamanders, mudpuppies, ducks, bluejays, gulls, flickers, snipes, great horned owls, and possibly geese. They hunted in forests of white ash, birch, hemlock, sugar maple, willow, balsam fir, possibly tamarack. They may have tapped sugar maples for syrup. They had hemp and wore skirts and petticoats. They grew corn and beans. They pounded the corn with mortars and pestles into meal, from which they made cornbread and mush. From the husks, they made mats. They used pails, barrels, and spoons. They sang, danced, and used rattles.

The picture is colorful, but gaps remain where no cognates are to be found. Total absence of cognates for an entire semantic field, such as corn cultivation in Proto-Iroquoia, indicates the possible absence of that cultural complex, but does not prove it beyond doubt. The lack of a specific cognate in isolation proves nothing. Interpreted in conjunction with hypotheses arrived at from archaeological and ethnohistorical resources, however, the linguistic data contribute a rich source of information about the past.
Notes

1. I would like to thank Reginald Henry, Dean Snow, and Jack Campisi for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. I am grateful to Annette Jacobs and Dorothy Lazore of Caughnawaga, Quebec, and to Mary McDonald, of Akwesasne, New York for the Mohawk examples cited here, abbreviated M. The symbols u and v used in the Mohawk and Oneida data stand for nasalized vowels [u] and [v]. The Oneida (Oe.) is from Floyd Lounsbury (personal communication), Clifford Abbott, “Oneida Dictionary” (manuscript), and my own notes from Winnie Jacobs, of Syracuse, New York. The Onondaga (Oo.) is from my notes from Reginald Henry, from Hanni Woodbury (personal communication) or (Oo.Z) from David Zeisberger, Indian Dictionary (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1887). The Cayuga (C.) is from my own notes from Reginald Henry and James Skye of Six Nations, Ontario. The Seneca (S.) is from Wallace Chafe, Seneca Morphology and Dictionary (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1967), and from my notes from Myrtle Peterson of Steamburg, New York. In the Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca examples, the symbols i and á are used for the nasalized vowels in these languages. The Andaste or Susquehannock (Su.) material is cited in the original transcription of Johan Campanius, Lutheri Catechismus, Oftwesati pa American-Virginiske Spraket (Stockholm: 1696), pp. 157–60. The Laurentian (L.) is cited in the form found in H. P. Biggar, The Voyages of Jacques Cartier (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada Publication 11, 1924). The Huron (H.) is taken from Gabriel Sagard-Théodat, Dictionnaire de la langue Huronne (Paris: 1632). The Wyandot (W.) is from C. Marius Barbeau, “Huron-Wyandot Traditional Narratives,” Translations and Native Texts (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada Bulletin 165, 1960), unless specified as W. (Potier), in which case it comes from Pierre Potier, Radices huronicae [1751]. 15th Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario for the Years 1918–1919, Alexander Fraser, ed., Toronto: Clarkson W. James, 1920, pp. 159–455. The Tuscarora (T.) is from my own field notes from Mr. Elton Green of Lewiston, New York and Mr. Robert Mt. Pleasant, of Six Nations, Ontario. The Nottoway (N.) is given as transcribed by John Wood in his “Vocabulary of the Language of the Nottoway Tribe of Indians” (Manuscript, American Philosophical Society, Freeman and Smith No. 2478, Philadelphia, 1820). The Cherokee (Ch.) is from Duane King, “A Grammar and Dictionary of the Cherokee Language” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, Athens, 1975). (In the Tuscarora examples, the symbol v represents a nasalized schwa [ə], the symbol e represents [ɛ], and a represents [a].) The v in Cherokee represents [ə].


4. It appears that the Cayuga actually separated from the rest of the Northern Iroquoians earlier, sometime after the departure of the Tuscaroras but before that of the Hurons. They later rejoined the Seneca, never quite losing their identity, until relatively recently, when they separated definitively.

For a detailed discussion of this hypothesis consult Wallace Chafe and Michael Foster (1981).

5. Mohawk, Cayuga, and Seneca all share a dialect split, whereby for some speakers, the affricate is palatalized:

\*tsy > [dży]

while for others, it is not:

\*tsy > [dz].

All words containing this sequence thus have two alternants:

M. tso:kwaris/tsò:kwaris
C. tsy?okris/ts?okris
S. tsyokok:i:h/tsoko:k:i:h.

6. Dean Snow informs me that there is no clear evidence for corn in New York until A.D. 1000, although some presume it to be present as early as A.D. 500.
Extending the Rafters
INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO IROQUOIAN STUDIES

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JACK CAMPISI
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