

INDIANS STUDYING BID TO BE NATION

Penobscots of Maine Retain Attorney to Scan White Man's New Proposal

By JOHN H. FENTON

Special to The New York Times.

OLDTOWN, Me., April 17—Indians of the Penobscot Tribe are taking a long look at a proposal for formal declaration of their independence as a nation.

On the basis of experience for many generations as wards of the state of Maine the Penobscots say that they want to see both sides of the coin and the milling on the edge, too, before committing themselves to any

further agreements with the white man.

The establishment of the tribe as an independent nation was suggested by James A. Murphy, an attorney of Beverly, Mass., whom the Penobscots retained to represent their interests. Mr. Murphy said he felt that the move would bolster an old treaty that said the Indians were entitled to an annual benefaction, "so long as they shall remain a nation."

Mr. Murphy is undertaking research on other possible treaties. He began his task about a month ago. He has met with the tribal leaders once, so far.

Mr. Murphy said this week that he was prepared to appeal to President Eisenhower, to Congress and to the United Nations, if necessary, to establish the Penobscots' rights as an independent nation.

In fact, he already has sent a statement of the tribe's position to those sources, as well as to the Governors of Maine and Mas-

sachusetts. Until 1820, Maine was a part of Massachusetts. The original treaties were signed with Massachusetts.

Until further research can be undertaken, Mr. Murphy said that the Indians chiefly would like a "moratorium" on legislation affecting them. They feel that both Massachusetts and Maine have violated treaties and that subsequent legislation has further eroded their rights.

One of the most controversial proposals, from the Indians' standpoint, already has been killed by the present Legislature. This would have given the three Indian reservations in the state the same considerations as unorganized territory, except for such special laws as applied to Indians.

The Penobscots opposed this bill from the outset. They held that this was merely a way of the state's "putting a foot in the door" to legislate the tribe out of existence.

What the Penobscots themselves appear to want most is a

director of Indian affairs. They would prefer someone "neutral" as to race.

Under present Maine law the Indians' affairs are administered by the State Department of Health and Welfare. Mrs. Sadie Mitchell, a Penobscot herself, is the official Indian agent at the reservation in this town.

But two groups of Indians, who hold differing views on some things, said today that they would prefer someone not of Indian blood to act as liaison officer. They contended that they had no neutral person with whom they could sit down and talk over their problems on the reservation.

Two Tribes in Maine

There are two tribes of Indians in Maine. They are descendants of the Abenaki Tribe, which was a part of the Algonquin nation.

The Penobscots, with a population of 704, live on an island of 300 acres in the Penobscot River. The reservation is connected to the mainland by a

bridge. There is unrestricted passage.

The Passamaquoddy Tribe is divided between two small reservations at Dana Point and at Pleasant Point in Washington County. The tribe numbers 558 and is not involved in the move for reaffirmation of tribal independence.

Indians living within the reservations pay no real estate taxes. The State of Maine cares for needy Indians and provides education for the children.

Some of the tribesmen earn good wages in shoe factories and a pulp mill around Oldtown. Others are indigent and live in housing that is decidedly substandard. The Passamaquoddies are even worse off. They reflect the depressed economic conditions of Washington County with no prospects of improvement.

The State of Maine has custody of Indian trust funds, established through sales of tribal land and of lumber on tribal lands. The interest from these

funds goes to the general fund of the state. The current state budget includes an item of \$317,000 for Indian support for the bienium ending June 30 this year.

Dr. Dean H. Fisher, Commissioner of Health and Welfare, contended that legislation proposed by his department was intended only to clear the statutes of unnecessary laws and give the Indians additional privileges, such as the right to vote, available to other citizens.

Business Teachers Elect

Paul Moody Boynton of Hartford, business education consultant in the Connecticut State Department of Education, was elected president of the Eastern Business Teachers Association yesterday. He succeeds Dr. William M. Polishook, assistant to the dean of Temple University. The election marked the close of the association's three-day convention at the Statler Hotel.

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