

# Indians responsible for many inventions

OHSWEKEN — While following events at the Olympics on television, my wife was surprised to hear that the word toboggan was an Indian word. She had not really thought about it before. The word not only is an Indian word, the toboggan is an Indian invention. Snowshoes, canoes, tepees, moccasins and wigwams are other Indian inventions. Even the fringes across the shoulders and back of buckskin jackets are an Indian invention. They are not just a decoration. They allow the water to drip off the ends so as not to soak the lower back of the wearer, during a rainstorm.

I was recently reading a typically-racist history book which reported with contempt that the Indians of North America had never discovered the wheel, which was so common in Europe. This is simply not true. There are books on Indian archaeology in the public libraries, which show pictures of toys from before the time of Columbus which have wheels. One of these is a pottery or ceramic alligator with four wheels so it could be pulled by a little boy or girl.

The Natives of North America did not have any large domestic animals to pull wheeled vehicles, before white people brought horses over. Far from being too dull to invent the wheel, they knew enough not to put the cart before the horse.

## Our Town

George  
Beaver



Among Indian discoveries were many foods which are now common. The Indians had developed many varieties of corn, including popcorn, before the arrival of white people. Other gifts to the people of Europe were potatoes, tomatoes, cocoa or chocolate, turkeys, which many southern tribes had domesticated, and peanuts. Peanuts were called groundnuts or goober peas by white settlers.

Rubber balls were also an invention of some unknown southern Indians. A ball game played by the Mexica (Ma-hee-ka) or Aztec Indians was wagered on so heavily that sometimes the losing team's supporters lost everything they owned. Part of the game involved putting a large rubber ball through a hoop set vertically high up on the side of a stone wall.

Potato is a Taino Indian word. This word is all that is left of the Taino Indians, who are now extinct. They were one of the first tribes to

meet the Europeans in the West Indies. Now there are none left.

Other common Indian words are skunk, chipmunk, raccoon, puma, opossum, caribou, muskelunge and jaguar. Of course they came from various Indian languages and not just one. Papoose is not a bad word for baby but squaw should never be used to mean Indian woman. It has connotations which are too explicit and you should have your face slapped and your mouth washed out with soap for saying it. If you want to say Indian woman, you should just say Indian woman.

The map is loaded with beautiful Indian words such as Alabama, Tennessee, Wyoming, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Then there is Wichita, Miami, Omaha, Memphis, Tallahassee, Chattanooga, Saskatoon, Napanee and Ottawa.

I notice a modern tendency to shorten up some names such as Penetanguishene and Chinguacousy. Don't forget, Indian place names not only sounded nice, they were also beautifully descriptive. I hope we are not leaving off the best part.