

History of Written Mi'kmaw Language



This picture, which faces page 130 in the original, obviously represents the use of Father Le Clercq's characters, or hieroglyphs, in teaching the prayers of the Church to the Indians. The priest may be intended to represent Father Le Clercq.

Father LeClerc's own illustration of him teaching prayers in hieroglyphic writing.

~ **1665-1680** Father Christian LeClerc

Leclerc was a catholic missionary who worked among the Mi'kmaq of Kespek (Gaspé) down to Miramichi. He witnessed children repeatedly writing some symbols on sheets of maskwi (birch) and concluded that there was a simple Mi'kmaw hieroglyphic writing system precontact, a rarity among indigenous groups of the time. He expanded this and created an elaborate set of glyphs to help the communities remember prayers.

~ **1735-1762** Father Pierre Maillard

Maillard was the first to use Latin letters to write the Mi'kmaw language. His work was built upon by Pacifique. His mission was primarily in Unama'ki (Ile Royale/Cape Breton).

~ **1853-1889** Rev. Silas T. Rand

Rand's mission was the least funded but produced, arguably, the largest volume of linguistic work. His orthography was based more on English vowels rather than French. His dictionary is the largest written collection of Mi'kmaw words that exists, though a large part of these words have been lost to time. His capturing of Kluscaps Legends was extremely valuable to continued Mi'kmaw culture.

~ **1895-1935** Father Pacifique Buisson

Pacifique lived among the Mi'kmaq of Listukuj (Restigouche), Quebec. His Grammar book is the gold standard at present and the base of curriculum being developed in Qalipu Mi'kmaw Language Revival Program. Pacifique visited Miawpukek (Conne River) and Nujiq'onik (Bay St. George) in 1910. He and elders in Miawpukek compiled a list of Mi'kmaw place names in Ktaqmkuk (Newfoundland). His writing system is still in use in most of New Brunswick. Most catholic hymns and prayers are found in this system.

1973 Smith-Francis

Doug Smith created a 'latin letter' writing system for Inuktitut before teaming up with Bernie Francis of Maupeltu (Membertou) to create a Mi'kmaw system resulting in much shorter words and precise vowel lengths. This is the official system of the Sante' Mawio'mi (Grand Council) and most first nations in NL, NS and PEI

(Contributed by Dean Simon, QFN Mi'kmaw Language Facilitator)