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Dear Doctor Banks:

As Professor Ganong says to me sometimes: "Why do you always give me such hard ones?" Monhegan is a hard nut to crack.

However, there are four of us interested-- Ganong, Cabot, you and myself and among us we ought to come somewhere near cracking it. Somewhere I have an envelope containing Ganong and Cabot views, but just now it is buried under heaps of other stuff. Sometime I shall unearth it and know more; but just now I will take a random shot to try the range.

The earliest known English form which I remember is John Smith's Monahiggan. (His Moratigan I take for a misprint in some early edition; at least it seems negligible.)

Monahigan-- mona and hegan, root and ending.

Mona, as you say probably MUN. But vowels count for so little in Indian roots that M'N answers and it might be mon, mun, men, man. And there is where the trouble begins.

The root M'N seems to stand for a lot of things. It might be mun, a hump, as in Monadnock, the hump mountain; it might be "a skimmer" (Indians and Cabot); it may be the word for island, manahan, menahan, menan; perhaps others. Which?

My own preference, like yours, is for menahan, island; for this is par excellence one of the islands of the coast. I think a very good reason for preferring the "island" meaning of the root is that John Smith wrote Monahigan and Monanis of the big and the little, thus making them parallel forms; and no one denies that Monanis means "little island", (menahan, island, sis, diminutive). So Monahigan ought to have the root in menahan, as our present Penobscots have it.

The ending is that interesting hegan. In general it seems to be connected with tools, instruments, something done to something; and my interpretation was that it represented a cut, cleavage, passage, referring to the division between the big and little islands, which makes the harbor. My idea would be that the whole word meant an island with a gut, or passage through it, as if split with an instrument.

But Mr. Cabot does not agree. He has studied deeply the -hegan ending, while I have not, and knows a great deal more than I am ever likely to know; and he claims that the passage is between the island and Penaquid point.

Just there I fought! He had never seen the place, formed his idea wholly from the word itself. I have been there and know how the place looks, and I claimed his interpretation was untenable for a number of reasons.

Then we brought on our Indians. Mr. Cabot had talked of it with young Ronco and Stanley, who agreed perfectly with him. I know about Ronco and Stanley's great grandparents so feel sure the young fellows do not know what they are talking about and never saw the place.