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Letter from Ruth Benedict, American Folk-Lore Society, 1939

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American Folk-Lore Society

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The American Folk-Lore Society

Ruth F. Benedict, Editor
Department of Anthropology
Columbia University, New York City

January 11, 1939

Mrs. Fannie H. Eckstorm
173 Wilson Street
Brewer, Maine

Dear Mrs. Eckstorm:

Your letter came in a busy week and I inadvertently laid it aside. Now I am shocked that so much time has passed.

I am delighted with your account of the Indian tales you have. Have you any idea how many printed pages of the Folklore Journal they would fill? I believe from your description they could appear in the Journal as you got any one of the three collections in shape.

I know you know well the tales already published from the three tribes you mention, and in general I should advise not re-printing tales already available in print even though your version is nearer to Indian "as she is spoke" (this would not apply to variants which are often valuable). The very best rendering of Indian tales, seems to me to be idiomatic rendering of Indian texts, (a good example is Ella Deloria's "Dakota Tales" in the American Ethnological Society Publications) and the vernacular a matter that can be studied phonetically but is not particularly important in the translation of tales. There is difference of opinion about this, and I am only voicing my own which is, that it is faithful translation that is important and that the Indians lack of familiarity ^{with} the English language is not the fundamentally important point. So in the tales you have access to I should value most the vividly dramatic presentation and the new material, and not the vernacular as such. Too often, however, in discarding the vernacular all the vividness has been discarded too.

Sincerely yours,

Ruth Benedict

RB:B