



# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

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*My namesake, my uncle, used to make snuff. He made it from scratch. I really like the look of that little birch bark snuffbox. . . . I must have got the snuffbox, then I peeked at my aunt parching rice, took a pinch, put the snuff in my mouth, and went playing around outside, spitting all around. All of a sudden I felt like I was spinning around, I felt like I was spinning, and I vomited, so I couldn't even walk. Then my aunt saw me crawling around, really sick and in bad shape, and she called them. I was just scared and she yelled to the Indians out paddling around. . . "Hurry up! There's no doctor. Hurry up! They'll have to drive to the point to get the Indian doctor. Hurry, harness up and get the old man!"*

*"What's the matter with her?" I must have been asleep, I don't know. And when I woke up, I was sitting up. I felt okay. An old man was sitting there and the ladies were laughing and laughing. "Naawakamigookwe," they told me. "Don't ever take snuff again," they told me.*

— Portage Lake

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## Quick Facts

- \* 1904-1996
- \* Dictated her memoirs to John D. Nichols
- \* Elder of the Mille Lacs band of Ojibwe

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# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

## Biography continued

Considering Maude Kegg as a writer may be problematic for some people unaccustomed to oral traditions. As an Ojibwe elder, Kegg orally related Ojibwe teachings to John D. Nichols, who transcribed and translated them. Yet, this was, and in many cases still is, the Ojibwe method of communicating and teaching. Kegg is most certainly an author - and so much more. Her books, as transcribed and edited by Nichols, range from children's storybooks to ethnographies to a rich mine of linguistic texts. Most of the books are bi-lingual in Ojibwe and English with detailed glossaries and text notes.

Maude Ellen Mitchell Kegg, or Naawakamigookwe (Middle of the Earth Lady), was born in a birch bark wigwam near a wild rice harvesting camp in Crow Wing County, Minnesota, in 1904. She chose her own birthdate as August 26, knowing only that she was born during "riceing (sic) time." Kegg's mother's family members were among 284 of the Chippewa band that refused to relocate to the White Earth reservation in northwestern Minnesota because the relocation order was a breach of the Mille Lacs Treaty of 1855. These band members who remained in Mille Lacs sometimes refer to themselves as the "non-removable band." It wasn't until 1934 and 1939 that the U.S. government officially recognized their band and their reservation (*Portage Lake*, xi).

Maude Kegg's mother, Nancy Pine, died either in childbirth or soon afterwards. Kegg's father, Charles Mitchell, and her maternal grandmother, Margaret Pine, (Aakogwan) took care of her. At Portage Lake, Kegg's grandmother did much of the nurturing, including recounting their tribal oral history. Kegg attended the local school to the eighth grade. She was the only non-white person, yet she spoke fondly of her experiences there.

In interviews, Kegg described her life in relation to seasonal activities such as maple sugaring, muskrat and beaver trapping, gardening, berry picking, swimming, wild ricing, camping, hunting and fishing (*Against the Tide*, 136-139). In 1917, while at a Midewiwin (Medicine Lodge) ceremony, Kegg met Martin Kegg. He existed in her memory at that point as the young boy who used to kick over her wood piles. She married Martin Kegg in 1920. Some sources record the date as 1922, but this confusion may stem from the fact that the Keggs considered themselves married before they had a church marriage ceremony (*Buffalo-head*, 137). Kegg herself uses the 1920 date.



# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

## Biography continued

The Keggs took up residence near Gabekanaansing, Portage Lake, and lived there until 1942 when they moved to the Mille Lacs reservation. They had eleven children (Buffalohead 139; but see Bataille 137 - Nichols states here that they raised ten children). Work came with the seasons: Martin found work at farms and resorts while Kegg continued her outdoors work, worked as an artist, and during the last thirty years of her life, acted as a mentor for to linguist John D. Nichols, to whom she taught much about Ojibwe linguistics and history. She also contributed her time and wisdom to the Minnesota Historical Society Indian Museum, where she was an interpreter of Ojibwe culture.

In 1969, she began dictating her memoirs which included Ojibwe stories and significant historical events. She had a rare talent at crafting the Ojibwe traditional bandolier bag, which was the centerpiece of the American Federation of the Arts' traveling exhibit, *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965-1985*. Maude Kegg has special works on display at the Minnesota Historical Society Indian Museum and the Smithsonian Institute. She has passed down many contributions through her artistry in beadwork, rugs, basswood fiber dolls, porcupine quill work, butterfly necklaces and beaded belts. Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich declared August 26, 1986 Maude Kegg Day and in 1990 President George Bush and the National Endowment of the Arts presented her with the National Heritage Fellowship award. Maude Kegg passed away on January 6, 1996.

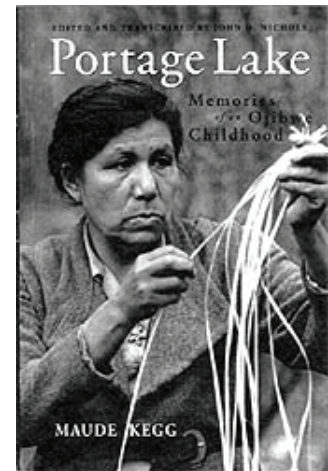
Maude Kegg recounted many Ojibwe stories to John Nichols, her student and a professor at the University of Manitoba, between 1971 and 1986 (when she was 67 to 83 years old). *Portage Lake* is the most extensive collection of these recitations. They are the memories of an elder, yet they describe Ojibwe life through the eyes of a little girl. *Portage Lake* includes universal themes as well as unique aspects of Ojibwe life and the Ojibwe struggle to maintain it in the mid-twentieth century. Kegg's stories highlight the fact that the land the Ojibwe traversed aided them in sustaining a self-sufficient lifestyle. Nichols used this theme of industriousness to organize Kegg's stories into a seasonal chronology of work: maple sugaring, fishing, berry picking, ricing, hunting, snaring, snowshoe making, and hide-tanning. Each activity takes place in a different locale.



# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

## Biography continued

One reads *Portage Lake* sensing movement and enterprise. Amid all this daily activity are stories of Kegg's misbehavior as a little girl - stealing the maple sugar molds to play canoe or dallying with other children when she was needed back home. We experience her life as a child complete with the joys of stealing treats from the proverbial cookie jar - or in this case uncooked wild rice - and then the pain of tummy aches from overeating sweet treats. Indeed, some of these stories were published as children's books. There are also menacing stories, however, and teachings for adults to ponder. For example, we read with dread when Kegg as a little girl must deal with too much unwanted attention and adult innuendos from an older man. We wonder at the meaning of the daughter who mysteriously leaves home. On her return she chastises her parents for crying over her disappearance and then dies - the story ends without any explanation. Kegg also describes ritual taboos and offerings and briefly mentions the Midewewin Society. Overall, *Portage Lake* is a multi-faceted book with many possible uses. It genuinely speaks with an emic (or insider's) voice.



*Nookomis Gaa-Inaajimotawid: What My Grandmother Told Me* is a special edition of *Oshkaabewis Native Journal*. The narratives presented differ from those in *Portage Lake* by virtue of their point of view. Taboos, battles with the Sioux (now known as the Dakota), disease, and death rituals as well as Kegg's industrious grandmother are subjects which lend a more adult portrayal of Ojibwe life than the child's perspective found in *Portage Lake*. Nature continues to play a predominant role in the Ojibwe life presented here. For example, arranged marriages are performed when selected trees remain erect and healthy after being entwined when the betrothed were young. Respect and ritual observance of seasonal events are further elaborated. The connection of the land to ritual offerings and other themes are continued here.



# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

## Biography continued

Besides pure entertainment and for the joy of the storytelling itself, the bi-lingual presentation of these books allows language students, whether beginning or advanced, an opportunity to explore the intricacies of the language. Other scholars, especially historians, can also use the original text and translations to understand Ojibwe epistemology and world views in terms of word usage and phrasing. The text notes of both books contain extensive linguistic explanations. The notes to *Nookomis Gaa-Inaajimotawid: What My Grandmother Told Me* also include historical, geographical and ethnographical detail which furthers our understandings of Kegg's accounts. *Nookomis* also presents the dates of narrations; *Portage Lake* does not and this is a major drawback for anyone attempting to reconstruct Kegg's flow of words rather than the editor's. In his defense, Nichols states that his emphasis in this book is on the language (*Portage Lake*, x). (In this vein, Wolfart's article, "Ojibwa Texts," is a useful linguistic adjunct of *Nookomis* as are the dictionaries to which Kegg contributed.) Both books are delightful reads as well as informative texts; because of its more extensive notes, however, *Nookomis* is perhaps the more useful of the two selections for the non-linguistic audience.

While interesting and enjoyable in their own right, the meaning of these narratives sometimes remains cloudy and ambiguous. Knowledge of Ojibwe culture and history is helpful; yet, even for the Ojibwe, grasping the intent of a teaching is often not obtained until one questions many elders, ponders their answers and continues to muse over other teachings. Profundity is not meant to be self-evident nor easily obtained. These books contain many lessons worth contemplating.

*Mii sa go i'iw. Miigwech.*





# Maude Kegg Naawakamigookwe

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