

## **UC Berkeley**

### **Survey Reports, Survey of California and Other Indian Languages**

#### **Title**

The Importance of Mary R. Haas

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1nq556kt>

#### **Author**

Teeter, Karl V

#### **Publication Date**

1996

## The Importance of Mary R. Haas

Karl V. Teeter  
Professor of Linguistics Emeritus, Harvard University

I left Berkeley in 1959. Now after thirty-seven years, I am here, as are we all, to pay tribute to Mary Haas. She wanted us to say Hawes, but I am a native speaker of English from the Boston area, and my tongue could never quite make this adjustment. Without Mary I have no idea what my career would have been. In the event, I became another one of the unprecedented number of Americanist linguists she trained. I was a fairly early exemplar, beginning in linguistics in 1954, but far from the first: Bill Bright, Bill Shipley, Sydney Lamb, Phil Barker (later Mohammed Ali Rahman Baker) and many others were ahead of me.

When I first encountered Mary in fall of 1954 I was a college dropout returning from military service in the so-called "Korean War", if anybody remembers that little incident in our century of wars. Having been out of college for eight years, in 1954 I became a 25 year old sophomore a month before the first of our four daughters was born. Thanks to my real world experience with the Japanese language, I was able to start off in third year courses and thus majored in Oriental Languages. In my first semester, however, I also took Linguistics 110, Phonetics and Phonemics, Mary's course. Among my classmates were Harvey Pitkin and Catherine Callaghan. Bill Shipley was Teaching Assistant for the course and we waited eagerly until Friday each week for him to explain just what it was Mary had been trying to say; it was a whole new and complex world to us!

Thanks to Mary, from almost the moment I received my A.B. in 1956 I was able to take advantage of one of the marvelous research opportunities provided by the many and diverse California languages, whose study was organized under Mary's direction in the Survey of California Languages. In organizing the Survey, Mary made herself personally responsible for preventing these languages from dying without documentation, the fate of so many languages, then and now. In thus becoming the mother of the California languages she also provided, as I

have said, unparalleled research opportunities for young and aspiring linguists. In my case, I was assigned to the last speaker of Wiyot, Della Prince, and studied with her from 1956-59 (she died in 1962). In my day one was given a University car, a notebook, and a Webcor tape recorder the size of a heavy suitcase, and charged to bring back a grammar, texts, and dictionary, whatever these might be (see my contribution to the Haas Festival volume). My Ph.D. thesis was a Wiyot grammar and texts (published in UCPL vol. 37, 1964), and thanks to my early retirement at age 60 in 1989, I am even now completing a comprehensive lexicon of Wiyot, giving me the grammar, texts, and dictionary: a minimal Boasian description, as Mary taught us, in my case completed a mere forty or so years after beginning field work!

Now I make an apparent digression. When I left Berkeley in 1959, I left equipped not only with Mary's indispensable tutelage but also with an introduction to her best pal in linguistics, Frank Siebert, who now lives in Old Town, Maine. In fact, this tribute is in a very real sense a collaboration with Frank, who was kind enough to correct and elaborate on an earlier version of these remarks. Frank Siebert is two years and three months younger than Mary, and only physical and financial problems have kept him from coming to this meeting. He would much rather be here in person, I can assure you.

In the early thirties Frank, who is a medical doctor, commuted from medical school in Philadelphia to Edward Sapir's classes in New Haven and to the seminars of Franz Boas held at Morningside Heights, Columbia, the latter attended by the entire set of linguists in the area: Frank recalls Sapir, Whorf, Hockett, Newman, Swadesh, Roland Kent, Zellig Harris, etc. Frank himself began field work on Penobscot in Indian Island, Maine in 1932, and is still carrying on his research there, although the last speaker of Penobscot is gone. He went with Mary in Oklahoma in November 1940 on an unsuccessful quest for the last speaker of Natchez, Watt Sam, and recalls their finding an old Cherokee woman named Polly Wildcat who knew Cherokee and Creek, but not English (Mary elicited Cherokee material from her by the use of Creek). Mary

had previously travelled to Maine (the first time she saw the Atlantic Ocean) in July 1936 and she helped Frank with the study of Penobscot, utilizing her gift of absolute pitch to transcribe the intonation of the language with musical staff and notes. Mary's closeness to Frank may be judged by the fact that in September, 1993, when he nearly died after urinary tract surgery, she telephoned him at the Maine Medical Center in Portland, which must have been one of her last voluntary acts before she sank into her final illness.

Recently I have been reminiscing about Mary with Frank, who is full of admiration for what he describes as her honesty, integrity, and skill in doing field work. He also points out what I think is central about her, and here ends my digression: Mary, he suggests, trained more American linguists than Boas, more even than Boas and Sapir put together, or anyone else for that matter, he adds to my draft of these remarks. As I put it earlier, she became the mother of the California languages, and her children thrived under her attention even while the speakers were dying out.

A scholar is most directly evaluated on the basis of what he or she has left behind; in Mary's case we are all familiar with the large body of her important written work: her grammar, dictionary, and texts of Tunica, her many papers on Muskogean and other southeastern languages, her *Spoken Thai* textbook, *Thai-English Student's Dictionary*, and papers on language teaching, Thai, Burmese, and classificatory problems in native American languages, a written legacy of unique importance. But one of the things I remember about even Sapir is that, as brilliant and multifaceted as his scholarly work was, the students he trained represented a contribution to linguistics beyond the written studies. Now Mary, as Frank Siebert reminded me, and I repeat this here, has trained more American linguists than Sapir, more than Boas, more than anybody! I believe that one begins to fully appreciate her scholarly output only when considering not merely WHAT she left behind, but WHO she has left behind.

In considering this question, I am fortunate to be able to supplement my memory, which is aging along with the rest of me, with two lists I have obtained, thanks to Leanne Hinton and Katherine Turner. On my behalf, Leanne asked the UC computers for a list of Mary's Ph.D. students. The task, apparently, was too much for them, and the best they could do was come up with a list of around sixty individuals who received Ph.D.s since the late sixties. Fortunately, I was personally at Berkeley from 1954-59, so I can beat the computers here at their own game, recalling that I myself received a Ph.D. in 1962, too early for Leanne's list to notice. And I was far from the first. Just to pick at random a few friends and colleagues from my memory, I was preceded by Bill Bright, Syd Lamb, Bill Shipley, Bill Jacobsen, and many others. So it looks as if in actual fact there were certainly more than a hundred Ph.D.s who may be considered Haas' students, the great majority of them Americanists.

The second list I was fortunate to obtain was from Kathy Turner. The individuals listed here partly overlap those on the PhD list, but the list has a different purpose: it includes those who received support for fieldwork from the Survey on California Languages, from 1953-77. My manual count gives me 75 of these, who studied mostly Californian languages, but also others, from Central America to Nez Perce.

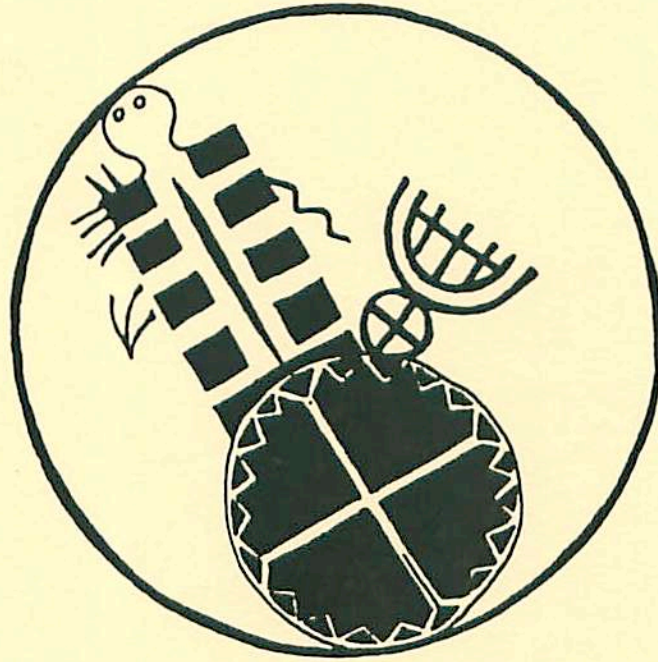
Now we all know that California languages are in bad shape, in spite of the excellent work currently being done by such as Leanne Hinton in encouraging natives to study their languages, the "lonely hearts language club.". But even in the extreme case where a language is gone entirely, as with Wiyot, the one with which I am most familiar, Mary's efforts mean that it is unlikely to be gone without a trace. In the case of Wiyot, for example, my work provides a body of data which may be mined in order to develop materials for teaching the language, a central interest of the modern Wiyot people. While it is my work and the efforts of Della Prince which have given us this material, I cannot claim credit for the impetus which sent me to do the work in the first place: that came from Mary.

Her efforts, directly and through those of us she guided into linguistics, more than a hundred of us, as indicated by my lists, more than Boas taught and even more than taught by Boas and Sapir together, have kept knowledge of California languages alive, even in the worst cases where all of the speakers have died.

This is the unique legacy of Mary Rosamond Haas, and I pay tribute to her here for her extraordinary achievement.

**REPORT 10**

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND  
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**



**THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN &  
J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES  
And  
THE MARY R. HAAS  
MEMORIAL**

**June 28-29, 1996  
University of California at Berkeley**

**Leanne Hinton, Editor**

**REPORT 10**

**SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA AND  
OTHER INDIAN LANGUAGES**

**THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN &  
J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES**  
And  
**THE MARY R. HAAS  
MEMORIAL**

**June 28-29, 1996**  
**University of California at Berkeley**

**Leanne Hinton, Editor**



copyright © 1997  
by the Survey of California and Other Indian Languages  
cover design by Leanne Hinton (Santa Barbara Chumash rock painting)

This volume is dedicated to the memory of

MARY R. HAAS

Professor emeritus of Linguistics

at the University of California at Berkeley

## INTRODUCTION

This volume of the Survey Reports is the Proceedings of the Hokan, Penutian and J.P. Harrington Conferences, held at the University of California at Berkeley on June 28-29, 1996. Part I includes five of the papers that were presented at that conference, and also a paper by George V. Grekoff, who was unable to attend the conference but arranged in advance to submit an article for inclusion in the Proceedings. During the conference, a memorial session was also held for Mary R. Haas, who died a month before the conference. Part II of this volume consists of the presentations that were made about her life and research.

We gratefully acknowledge grants from Joseph Cerny, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate Division, and William Simmons, Dean of Social Sciences, that helped make this conference possible.

Leanne Hinton  
Volume and Series Editor

# **THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN AND J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES**

**and the**

## **MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL SESSION**

June 28-29, 1996  
University of California at Berkeley, Alumni House

### **PART I: PAPERS FROM THE HOKAN, PENUTIAN AND J.P. HARRINGTON CONFERENCES**

Catherine A. Callaghan - Hulpun: my home town language	1
Anthony Grant - Reviving a Penutian Language: Steps and Strategies in the Revival of Miluk Coos	7
Margaret Langdon - Notes on Highland Oaxaca Chontal internal reconstruction	25
George V. Grekoff - Surface-Marked Privatives in the Evaluative Domain of the Chimariko Lexicon	35
Suzanne M. Wash - Hyphenating Harrington-Style	57
Margaret Langdon - J. P. Harrington and Al Hayes	83

### **PART II: THE MARY R. HAAS MEMORIAL SESSION**

Introduction - Leanne Hinton	95
Wally Chafe - Remarks on Mary Haas	97
Murray Emeneau, UCB - Mary Haas and Berkeley Linguistics	99
Margaret Langdon, UCSD -- Mary Haas as a teacher	101
William Shipley - Mary Haas as a Historical Linguist	103
James Matisoff - Remembering Mary Haas's Work on Thai	105
Pam Munro - The Contribution of Mary R. Haas to the Study of Southeastern Languages	115
Karl Teeter - The Importance of Mary R. Haas	119
Mary R. Haas 1910-1996 - Awards and Honors	125
Mary R. Haas: Bibliography	129

## **PART II**

**The Mary R. Haas  
Memorial Session**