

# Names and Respect: The Archivist's Role

## 1: Inconsistent Spellings as a Research Challenge

In the age of digital curation, the most significant challenges posted by inconsistent spellings will occur while trying to navigate within and between archives using search functions. While a human might infer from context that Kakiwequonebi is the same person as Kahkewāquonāby, a digital search cannot. On Google, a search for Kahkewāquonāby will return a Wikipedia profile of Jones and a number of museum entries, but just 1310 results. Conversely, a search for 'Kah-ke-wa-quo-na-by' will retrieve more than 400,000 results, almost exclusively comprised of ways to access Jones's Life and Journals.

Clarity and accuracy may come at the cost of the public accessibility of history, and in this particular case, where it is unquestionable that both Jones's history in particular and Indigenous history in general is already made inaccessible by educational systems that are not designed to or intent on teaching it. To transcribe the letters as literally written may do more harm than good by obscuring connections between them. If Kahkewāquonāby and Kah-ke-wa-quo-na-by were standardized into either each other, or the middle ground option of Kahkewaquonaby (12,300 results), then any future student or researcher who came across one of them would be able to find archival resources, images, and copies of the Life and Journals with significant ease. The question is: does this make it right?

Fig 3, Peter Jones's signature with name spelled 'Kaqawakanaby' (Peter Jones 1825)

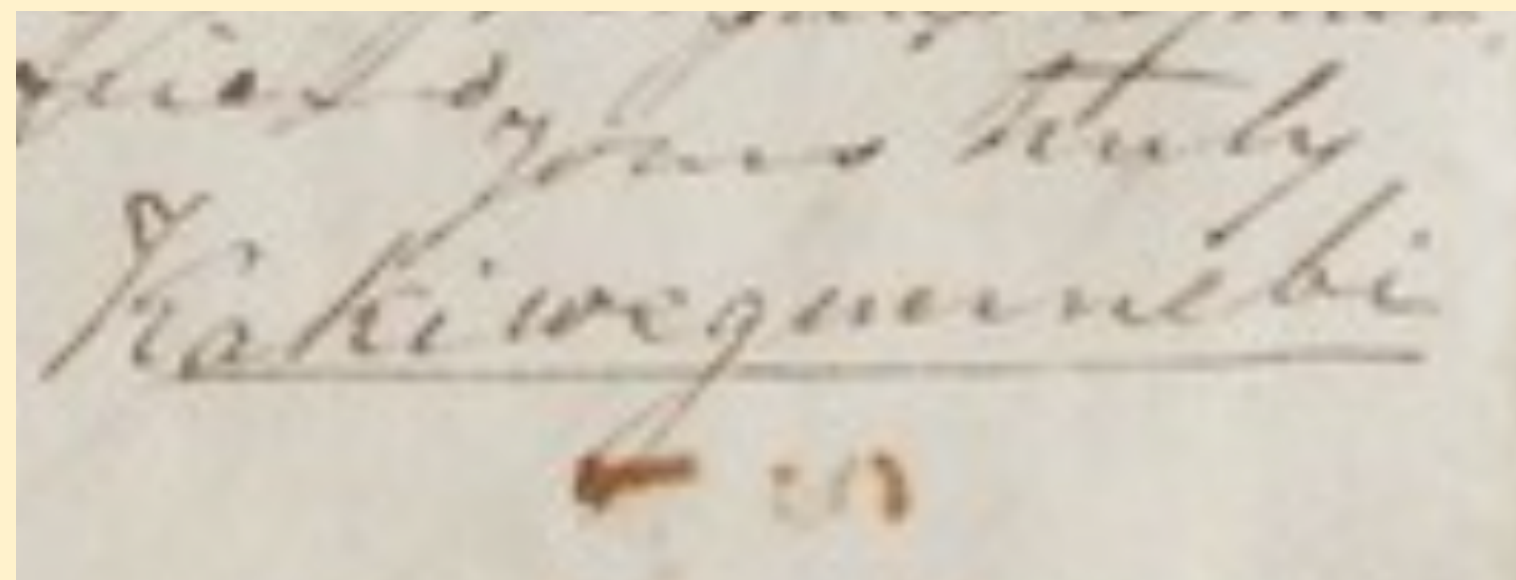
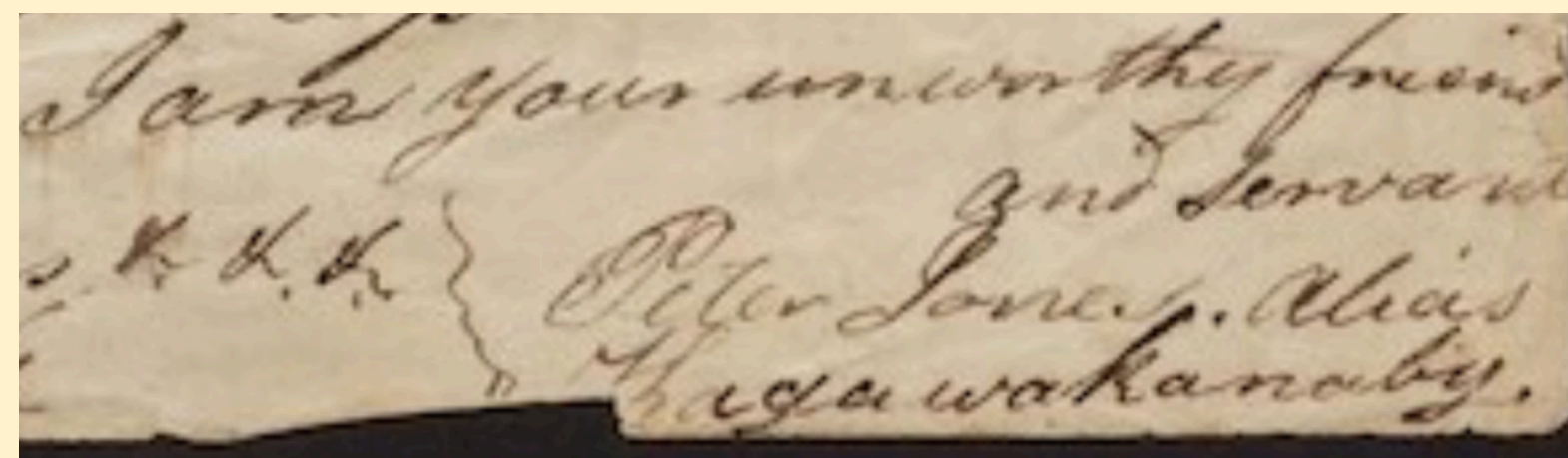


Fig 3, Peter Jones's signature with name spelled 'Kakiwequonebi' (Peter Jones 1838)

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## Introduction

Most people who study history have had the experience of looking back and forth between two texts and realizing that a proper noun is being spelled differently in one than the other. This might be because of transliteration or simply an inconsistency. Over time, a near-consensus is usually reached for the most famous. Imposing these standardizations – and Anglicizations, in cases where the original name is non-English – reveals biases inherent in the way standardization operates in historical circles. However, for archivists working with systems of metadata tagging and organization, good alternatives to standardization are unclear. Looking at a single case study of the digitization of the letters in the Peter Jones Fonds at the EJ Pratt Library demonstrates these nuances and problems in detail.

## Objectives

My initial objective in examining this topic was to try and decide how I, personally, should approach inconsistent spellings in archived materials. Specifically, I was transcribing letters contained in the Peter Jones Fonds at the EJ Pratt library, and found the inconsistencies of spelling and the basic inability of European spellings to represent Indigenous languages caused difficulties in transcribing and compiling metadata for the letters. Because of the nature of my work, I wanted a solution that might enable future research to be conducted with greater ease than mine was, to know which spellings to assume as correct and which to mark with '[sic]'.

## Background: Peter Jones Fonds

Peter Jones (fig 1) was an Ojibwe Chief and Methodist missionary who lived between 1802 and 1856. He is best remembered for his petition to Queen Victoria on land titles, and less favourably remembered for his advocacy of residential schools (Smith 1987, 193). He was also a translator of bibles and one of the first people to attempt to transfer Ojibwe language to Latin characters (Smith 1987, 185). Jones usually went by his English name, reflecting his own views of himself and the 'rebirth' he associated with his conversion (Wyatt 2009, 163). Referring to Jones by his Ojibwe name of Kahkewāquonāby in print may also be uncommon because, including in letters sent by Jones himself, the spelling of his name is inconsistent. A selection of Jones's letters include: Kahkewāquonāby (with accents) (Peter Jones 1845), Kahkewaquonaby (no accents) (Peter Jones 1829), Kaqawakanaby (fig 2), and Kakiwequonebi (fig 3). Jones's posthumously published journals, on the other hand, are under the name of 'Kah-ke-wa-quo-na-by'.

## Conclusion

There is no good or simple answer to this problem. While Jones's specific preferences make using his English name, as the Peter Jones Fonds does, acceptable, this would not work elsewhere. The only universal option is to be respectful and responsible, while remaining conscious that our decisions effect not only a single object in a single moment but also a network of information that risks losing out when poor decisions are made. Hopefully, in time, language that is respectful and language that is commonly understood will no longer be at odds.

## 2: Names are Respect

In Gregory Younging's Indigenous style guide he puts forward the most obvious solution to this problem: "[use] the name for Indigenous Peoples that Indigenous Peoples use for themselves." (Younging 2018). Younging also advises that writers explain their editorial choices, which can easily be applied in the archival context as well (Younging 2018). It is under this principle that I refer to the man in question as 'Peter Jones'; unfortunately, this advice doesn't necessarily settle the question of how to spell Jones's Ojibwe name on occasions where it is important or relevant. One possible approach is to strive for something that represents the pronunciation of the name most accurately (Wolvengrey 1998, 113). After all, confusing European spellings of Indigenous names are hardly a rare phenomenon; in particular, they are emblazoned on much of the geography of North America. As Arok Wolvengrey writes in the Saskatchewan context, it is often difficult to replace the familiar English spellings with the Indigenous original; misspellings and mispronunciations can both be pernicious (Wolvengrey 1998, 113). But this difficulty doesn't mean it isn't important to try. In the geographical context, Thomas F. Thornton proposes three-Rs of Indigenous place names: resilience, for the language that has survived, resonance, for the interplay of meanings between language, culture and experience, and respect, both for the meanings of names and their survival (Thornton 2012, xxii-xxiii). None of this can tell an archivist how to solve the essential problem of inconsistent spelling and the need for streamlined searchability, but it should serve as a reminder that the matter cannot be simplified to just 'picking one'. Both Jones's agency and the value of Indigenous language must be offered respect.

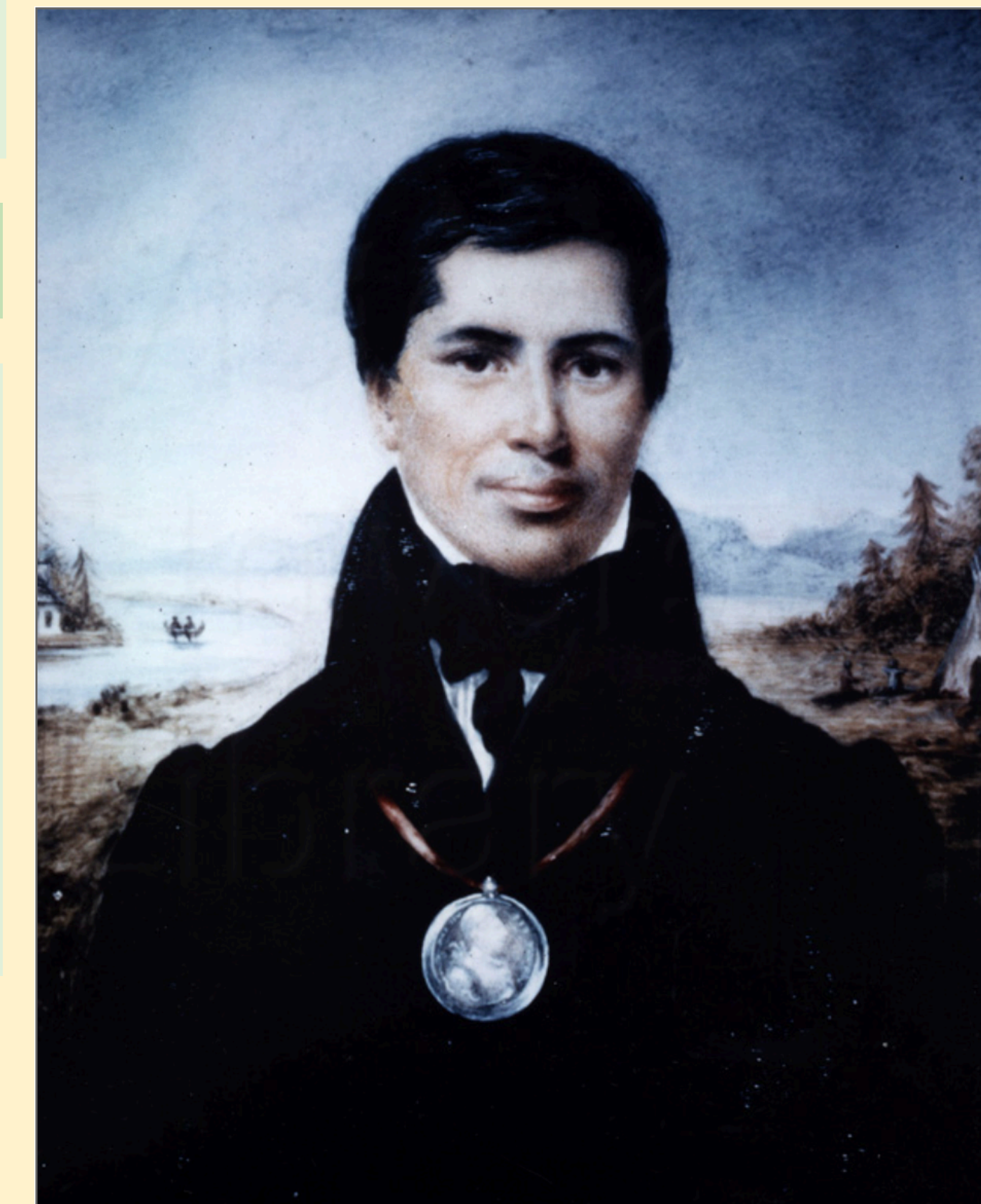


Fig 1, *Portrait of Peter Jones*. (Matilda Jones 1832)

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