

May 23, 1966

Doctor Willie J. Belliveau,
Belliveau's Cove, N.S.

My dear friend:

It is a long time since we saw each other, and I hope that you are well and enjoying life in retirement.

Do you mind if I bother you for a bit of information?

For some time past I have been gathering facts and legends about the uninhabited forest which lies between the Mersey River and the back settlements of ~~High~~ Digby County, including the origin of the names of lakes and rivers.

One tributary of the Mersey is called "Shelburne River", because the first lumbermen thought it flowed from the interior of Shelburne County. Actually it flows from the interior of Digby County. One of the many small lakes on its course has always been known to the lumbermen as "Koofang Lake". I spell it phonetically, of course. That is the way the men pronounce it.

I thought at first that it was an Indian name, or a white man's corruption of an Indian name; but a number of Micmac people have told me that "Koofang" does not resemble anything in their language.

I have a theory that the name is French in origin. I believe there is a French word "couffin", meaning a basket or hamper made from rush-leaves or strips of wood. The Micmacs made and used such baskets, especially one kind, narrow at the top and wider at the bottom, which they strapped on their backs like a knapsack when traveling.

Can you tell me anything about a French word "couffe" or "Couffin" which has such a meaning? If so, is it in use, or was it in use by the Acadian people at some time in the past?

With my deep regards,

Sincerely,

Belleveau Cove, N.S.
May 27 1966.

Dear Doctor Raddall,

Your letter was indeed a pleasant surprise.

I see that you are keeping bright the "light of research" in history and otherwise. Good for you; and I know you always "make a fine job" of it all. I wish I could do as much as you, but the calendars (a miserable invention) are piling the years on my shoulders. Next August --- 77.

However, in spite of 3 operations in the last 15 months, I am holding "my end of the yoke" fairly well — and can wade up and down streams in quest of the elusive trout.

Yes, I retired from the class room some 6 yrs. ago; but I am still teaching French by Correspondence for N.S. Dep't of Education. I have been at that for 27 years now. I read papers for some 110 pupils from all over N.S.

Now, for the word "Koufang".

You are right in deducing that it comes from a French word.

This is what Larousse Dictionary gives: Couffe or Couffin: - a basket; also a kind of circular basket weighted to hang horizontally in the water and hooks (fishing) hanging from its edge.

I also found "Kouffa, or Couffa": - a good kind of round basket made of braided palm.

I never heard the word used by the Acadians.

By the way, with your knowledge of Indian lore, you must have heard the Indian word (I presume), "BISCASOET". My grandmother, with whom I lived as a boy, had one - made of birch bark (in the shape of a basin) - and she used it for one purpose only - to store doughnuts.

I hope I have been of some little help. Any time you think I can give you any help - (even the little I can) just write to me and if ever you motor thru there part, I should be insulted if you do come in to see me.

The very best to you.

Sincerely Willie J. Belliveau

P.S. Mr. Dick Emerson and wife from Greenfield had lunch with us yesterday. Very fine people. We like them.

May 31, 1966

Dear Doctor Belliveau:

Thank you so much for your letter.

I was sorry to learn that you had undergone medical operations in the past fifteen months, but I hope that you are now recovered, with many good and useful years before you.

Now that you have confirmed the meaning of "couffin" I feel sure that this was the name of the lake called "Koofang" by English-speaking woodsmen. The lake is shaped like one of the Indian baskets which were made to be slung on the back like a knapsack, and years ago I heard an old Micmac refer to the lake as "coofan". In more modern times the mapmakers were puzzled by "Koofang" and finally decided to spell it "Two Fan", which is not only false but ridiculous.

Couffin Lake (to spell it properly) is close to the old portage trail, between the so-called Sissiboo Shelburne River and the headwaters of the ~~Sixixkha~~ River. This trail was much used in olden times by the Indians and later by white hunters and woodsmen, including French-speaking woodsmen from the Fundy side.

I hope to call and see you some day this summer. Meanwhile, my best wishes and regards.

Sincerely,

Dr. Willie J. Belliveau