

Delaware Jargon = Pidgin Delaware*

A pidginized form of Unami Delaware, developed in the 1620s, was used between the Delaware and Dutch, Swedish, and English colonists. The Delaware speak two closely related Eastern Algonquian languages, Unami and Munsee. Unami was spoken in colonial times in the Delaware River Valley and New Jersey, and Munsee to the north in the lower Hudson River Valley, on western Long Island, in the upper Delaware River Valley, and northern New Jersey. The fullest discussion of the pidgin is in Goddard 1997, with additional work in Goddard 1971, 1995 and Thomason 1980.

The earliest mention of it is by a Dutch minister Jonas Michaëlius in 1628, who recognized that it was not true Delaware, commenting that the Delaware:

rather design to conceal their language from us than to properly communicate it, except in things which happen in daily trade; saying that it is sufficient for us to understand them in that; and then they speak only half sentences, shortened words . . . and all things which have only a rude resemblance to each other, they frequently call by the same name. (Michaëlius 1628 in Jameson 1909: 128 cited in Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 175)

Sources of vocabulary and phrases are de Laet 1633, Campanius 1696, Lindström 1923, Penn 1683, the anonymous author of the 1684/1686 'Indian Interpreter', Thomas 1698, Pastorius 1700, and Denny 1785. Not all scribes realized that the language was not standard Delaware. The two most important sources are Campanius (C) and the Indian Interpreter (II). Campanius, a Lutheran missionary in New Sweden from 1642 to 1648, translated a catechism into the pidgin and appended a vocabulary. The 'Indian Interpreter' manuscript was found in the Salem Town Records book and published in Nelson 1894 and (with errors) in Prince 1912.