

# ST. SAUVEUR

## A MEETING OF NATIONS

The year 2013 is the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a small, short lived Jesuit settlement founded somewhere in the Frenchmen Bay region. The exact location remains a mystery. The settlement lasted a few short weeks, destroyed by international conflict that besieged the region for the next 200 years. This settlement, and others like it, tell a story about nations coming together in trade, war, and common interests, struggling to hold on to the rich resources that make up the homeland of the Wabanaki. For the next two centuries, the Wabanaki would do everything they could to maintain sovereign control of their homeland, while the English and French would, each in very different ways, work to bring this land and its people under their control.

### **Saint Sauveur**

In May of 1613, the French ship *Jonah* departed the settlement of Port Royal in present-day Nova Scotia. Aboard the *Jonah* were four Jesuit priests planning to establish a new settlement and mission. The Jesuits wanted to escape internal quarrels with the secular leaders at Port Royal, and intended to set up their new post near the Wabanaki village of Kadesquit (present-day Bangor). Bad weather on their voyage led them to anchor off Mount Desert Island. Asticou, the local Wabanaki leader, invited them to visit his village, and encouraged them to locate the mission nearby, rather than up the Penobscot River at Kadesquit. The location recommended by Asticou appealed to the French crew, and they began the process of making a settlement. They started to construct buildings, plant gardens, and build relationships with the nearby Wabanaki. The captain of the *Jonah*, to the frustration of the Jesuits, did not make substantial progress on defensive structures at this new settlement, named Saint Sauveur by its French occupants.



French ships arriving.

Illustration by Francis Back, courtesy of US NPS/St Croix Island International Historic Site.

At the same time English ships from Jamestown, established six years earlier, were traveling to the Maine coast every summer to fish for cod. During a fog, the English ship *Treasurer* and its Captain Samuel Argall strayed up into Penobscot Bay. Here, they spoke with Wabanaki who, believing that the French and English were pretty much the same, shared with Argall the news that the French were building a mission settlement nearby. In Argall's mind, this was all English territory, granted to the Virginia Company by the King of England. So he proceeded to Saint Sauveur, and with a quick attack was able to destroy the fledgling colony that had stood for less than three months. Some of the French colonists were able to escape, while others were killed or captured. Father Pierre Biard, one of the Jesuits who chronicled his time in New France, was taken captive by Argall, and eventually returned to France.



Passamaquoddy petroglyph from Machias Bay depicting an early 17<sup>th</sup> century European ship. Illustration by William Burgess, courtesy of the Maine Archaeological Society.

## Where in the world was Saint Sauveur?

Where exactly the mission settlement of Saint Sauveur was actually located is a longstanding mystery in Maine history and archaeology. There is not a lot to work with since direct archaeological evidence has not yet been found, but two leading theories have developed over time.

The only first-hand written account we have of the Saint Sauveur mission was written by Father Pierre Biard, one of the Jesuits at the settlement. Different interpretations of this account give us two suggestions about the settlement's location.

On their journey from Port Royal, the ship encountered dense fog off Grand Manan Island, and this set them off their intended course for Kadesquit. When the fog finally lifted, Biard recounts:

“We recognized that we were opposite Mount desert, an Island which the Savages call Pemetiq. The pilot turned to the eastern shore of the Island, and there located us in a large and beautiful port, where we made our thanksgiving to God, raising a cross and singing to God his praises with the sacrifice of holy Mass. We called this place and port Saint Sauveur.”



Mount Desert Island.  
Photo by Astra Haldeman.

Biard later describes their visit to Asticou's village “only three leagues away,” and from there to the place where they started to construct the mission. He does not tell us how far from Asticou's village the settlement was located, but describes the place:



A Wabanaki camp on Mount Desert Island 1000 years ago. Abbe Museum collections.

“This place is a beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea, its sides bathed by two springs; the land is cleared for twenty or twenty-five acres, and in some places is covered with grass almost as high as a man. It faces the South and East, and is near the mouth of the Pentagoet [Penobscot River], where several broad and pleasant rivers, which abound in fish, discharge their waters; its soil is dark, rich and fertile; the Port and Harbor are as fine as can be seen, and are in a position favorable to command the entire coast; the Harbor especially is as safe as a pond. For besides being strengthened by the great Island of Mount desert, it is still more protected by certain small Islands which break the currents and the winds, and fortify the entrance. There is not a fleet which it is not capable of sheltering, nor a ship so deep that it could not approach within a cable’s length of the shore to unload.”

Frances Parkman, an American popular historian writing in the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, interpreted Biard’s description as Somes Sound, on Mount Desert Island. Parkman, however, applied creative license to Biard’s account, creating details where none existed. Biard’s “beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea” became “a gentle slope, descending to the water, and backed by rocky hills.” This, Parkman felt, best describe Fernald Point on Somes Sound. In the decades since, various writers and historians have repeated this conclusion. It has also become part of the local history lore on Mount Desert Island.

In the 1960s, Jesuit historian Lucien Campeau presented a strong case against Fernald Point as the location of the Saint Sauveur mission. He went back to the original French and Latin manuscripts of Biard’s accounts, and was convinced that the mission settlement was located on Frenchman Bay, but not on Mount Desert Island. Historians and historical archaeologists continue to debate the question.



Topographic Map, Acadia National Park, Hancock County, Maine.  
U.S. Geological Survey, 1931.

So how do we evaluate the two claims? We can look at Biard’s fairly vague description, which according to historical archaeologist Peter Morrison, could describe “a number of southeast facing points” around Frenchman Bay, “in fact, south-southeast is the dominant orientation in the region. In addition, the entrance of Frenchman Bay, as well as most of the smaller bays within it, is protected by small islands, as is Somes Sound. While the springs in the area are literally uncounted,

locations with two of them nearby cannot be uncommon.” Since no direct archaeological evidence of the settlement has been found, we just don’t know. And Morrison is confident that if the site were found, it would have distinctive archaeological evidence supporting its attribution. On the other hand, he expects that excavations would have to come down right on top of the settlement site to find it, as artifact distribution patterns seen at contemporary European sites in Maine are very concentrated. The fact that no archaeological evidence for a French settlement has been found at Fernald Point does not exclude that location, either. In the end, Morrison says, “we can still tell the story without knowing exactly where Saint Sauveur was.”

St. Sauveur was located within the traditional homeland of the Wabanaki, and disputed territory both the French and British wanted control over. The cultural perspectives and purpose for being in the region differed for each nation, resulting in shifting alliances and feuds.

## The Wabanaki

When the first Europeans reached the shores of northeastern North America in 1497, the land they claimed to discover had been home to the Wabanaki and their ancestors for more than 10,000 years.



A Wabanaki village on Mount Desert Island before the arrival of Europeans.  
Painting by Judith Cooper, Abbe Museum collection.

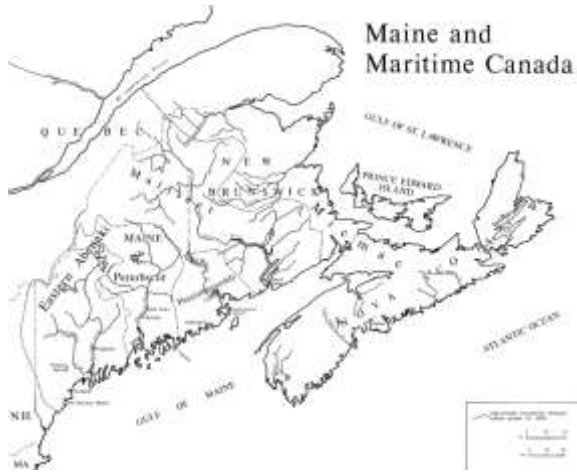
Wabanaki people living in what is now eastern Maine and adjacent territories lived a life well-adapted to the abundant world around them. They hunted, gathered and foraged the forests, oceans, lakes, rivers and streams for food, medicines, and raw material. Traveling by birchbark canoe in the spring, summer and fall, and on snowshoes in the winter, they had intimate knowledge of resources across a wide area. While the Wabanaki spent most of their year in small, extended-family groups, they also gathered together at certain times of the year to share resources like the annual alewife runs up many of the rivers in their homeland, to trade, and to make alliances. Leadership in Wabanaki communities was based on respect and the ability of the leader to provide for his group. Decisions were made by consensus, and one person could not command another to do as they wished.



Hunting deer, as depicted on a birchbark log carrier, Passamaquoddy, late 19<sup>th</sup> century.  
Abbe Museum collections.

Within the wider Wabanaki homeland, there were a number of groups linked by shared languages\*, and alliances were formed even with those who spoke a different language, often, to present a united front against a common enemy.

\*All of the people living in what are now Maine and the Canadian Maritimes spoke languages that are part of the Algonquian language family. Today, these languages include Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy-Maliseet and Mi'kmaq.



Traditional Wabanaki tribal territories, ca. 1600.

## Wabanaki Confederacy

While a good deal of attention is given in history books to alliances and conflicts between European colonial powers, alliance and conflict among the Wabanaki and between the Wabanaki and neighboring groups is often ignored.

Both Wabanaki oral traditions and accounts of early explorers and colonists recount a complex history of alliance and conflict in Native America. Europeans arriving on the Maine coast in the 1600s tell of the Mawooshen Confederacy, an alliance of a number of Wabanaki bands and their sagoms (leaders), with Bashaba, the sagom from the Penobscot village near present-day Bangor, as its head. This alliance was probably formed to strengthen defenses against Mi'kmaq raiders from the northeast and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) groups to the west.

The larger Wabanaki Confederacy, which may have first been formalized in the late 1600s, had its roots in pre-Contact social and political interactions. The Wabanaki Confederacy included the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki. It was created to protect the Wabanaki homeland from the powerful and aggressive Iroquois Confederacy (also known as the Five Nations or the League of the Iroquois) to the west, and became an important diplomatic entity in dealings with the French and English. And while at times the Wabanaki Confederacy was in conflict with the Iroquois, at other times they formed an important alliance.

The Native nations involved recognized that ending conflict was vital to the survival of their people and their sovereignty, and these historic alliances were formed primarily to end conflict within and among the original inhabitants of the region.



Wampum belt representing the four tribes forming the Wabanaki Confederacy.

Illustration from "The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy," by Frank G. Speck, *American Anthropologist*, 1915.



## What's in a name?

When trying to make sense of descriptions of the Wabanaki provided by early explorers, traders, missionaries, and settlers, some attention must be given to understanding the various words the Wabanaki use to refer to themselves and their neighbors, and the names the French and English used.



Map of tribal names used by the French, ca. 1600.

### Contemporary Names:

*Wabanaki/Waponahki* (People of the Dawnland) The collective name for the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot and Abenaki.

*Abenaki* (People of the Dawnland) Stems from the same word as Wabanaki. Some writers and scholars use the term Abenaki in place of Wabanaki, while the more common use of Abenaki applies to Native people from what is now southern and western Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and parts of Southern Quebec. Abenaki tribes are recognized by the state of Vermont and in Canada, but do not have federal recognition in the United States.

Penobscot (*Penawahpskewi, Panawahpskek*): (People where the rocks come out of the water): Wabanaki Nation from the Penobscot River watershed, with a reservation and tribal headquarters at Indian Island on the Penobscot River above Bangor. The modern-day Penobscot may include refugees from communities to the south and west displaced by English colonists and warfare in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Passamaquoddy (*Peskotomuhkat*, plural *Peskotomuhkatiyik*): (People of the place where the pollock are plentiful): Wabanaki Nation from Passamaquoddy Bay and the St. Croix River, with reservations and tribal headquarters at Pleasant Point on the bay and at Indian Township inland on Big Lake.

Maliseet (*Wolastoqew/Wolastoq*, pl. *Wolastoqewiyik/Wolastoqiyik*): (People of the beautiful river /St. John River): Wabanaki Nation with bands in northern Maine and the St. John River valley in New Brunswick. The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians has its tribal headquarters in Houlton, Maine. The majority of the Maliseet population is in Canada.

*Micmac/Mi'kmaq*: (Possibly “the family” or “people of the red earth”): Wabanaki Nation with bands in northern Maine, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. The Aroostook Band of Micmac has its tribal headquarters in Presque Isle, Maine. The majority of the Mi'kmaq population is in Canada. The spelling “Micmac” is used in Maine, while the spelling “Mi'kmaq” is used in Canada.

#### Names used in historical sources:

Eastern Indians: This term was sometimes used by the English to refer to all Native people in Maine and eastern Canada.

Western Abenaki: Abenaki living in western Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Quebec.

Eastern Abenaki: Generally refers to the people now known as the Penobscots.

Etchemin: Used primarily by the French to refer to Wabanaki living between the Kennebec and St. John Rivers (possibly derived from the Passamaquoddy-Maliseet word *skicin*, which translates as “the people,” or “the real people”).

-Western Etchemin: Kennebec River to Narraguagus River, today's Penobscot Nation

-Eastern Etchemin: Narraguagus River to St. John river, today's Passamaquoddy and Maliseet

Armouchiquois: Used primarily by the French to refer to Wabanaki and related people living south and west of the Kennebec River. Some sources extend this term as far south as Cape Cod, while others are limited primarily to Maine and perhaps New Hampshire (possibly derived from a term used by eastern Wabanaki people, perhaps translated as “dog people”).

Souriquois: Used by the French to refer to the Mi'kmaq, the eastern-most Wabanaki.

Tarratine/Tarrentine: French term for an alliance of Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy people, perhaps formed in response to alliances among Penobscot and other Wabanaki groups to the

southwest. This alliance both traded with and raided agricultural villages along the southern Maine coast.

Acadian: A version of a Mi'kmaq word, referring to the French. the root meaning "people living off the land."

Names given to groups to the south and west of the Penobscot:

Caniba (Kennebec): lower Kennebec River

Norridgewock (Nanrantsouak): upper Kennebec River

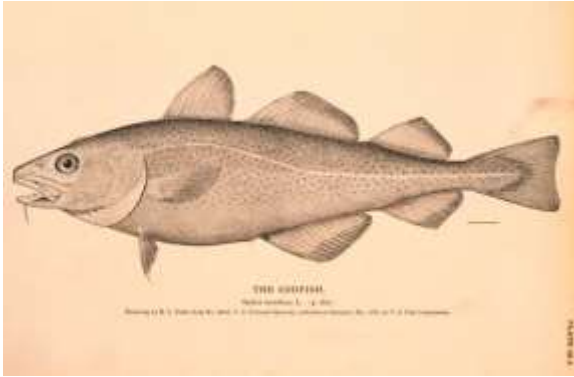
Arosaguntacook (Aroosagunticook or Androscoggin): Androscoggin River

Wawenock (Wawinak): St. George River and Midcoast Maine

Pigwacket (Pequawket or Saco River Indians): Saco River, southwestern Maine

Surviving members of these communities were substantially displaced by the English and heavily impacted by disease in the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and were probably absorbed by Abenaki groups in Quebec and Vermont, or joined the Penobscot communities to the east.

## Early Exploration & Trade



Cod (*Gadus morhu*)  
U.S. National Museum, 1872.

It is likely that the first Europeans to visit the Wabanaki homeland were English, Portuguese, Basque and French fisherman, coming to the western Atlantic to harvest the large quantities of cod available in the area. The fishermen spent time on shore salting and drying their catch, which was an extremely valuable commodity at home in Europe.

Soon after, European visitors began trading for furs from the Native people, and the fur trade became as lucrative as the cod fishery. The fishery and the fur trade were two of the most significant drivers behind European exploration and colonization of the Wabanaki homeland.



A new and exact map of the Dominions of the King of Great Britain, by Hermon Moll, 1715. This map shows the importance of both fishing and the beaver fur trade, even as late as 1715.

Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a number of English, French, Italian, Spanish and Dutch explorers traveled the shores of the Wabanaki homeland, but by the end of the century there were no permanent European settlements - this was still entirely the land of the Wabanaki.



Cast of Passamaquoddy petroglyphs at Machias Bay depicting a 17<sup>th</sup> century European ship and a CROSS. Courtesy of Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer.

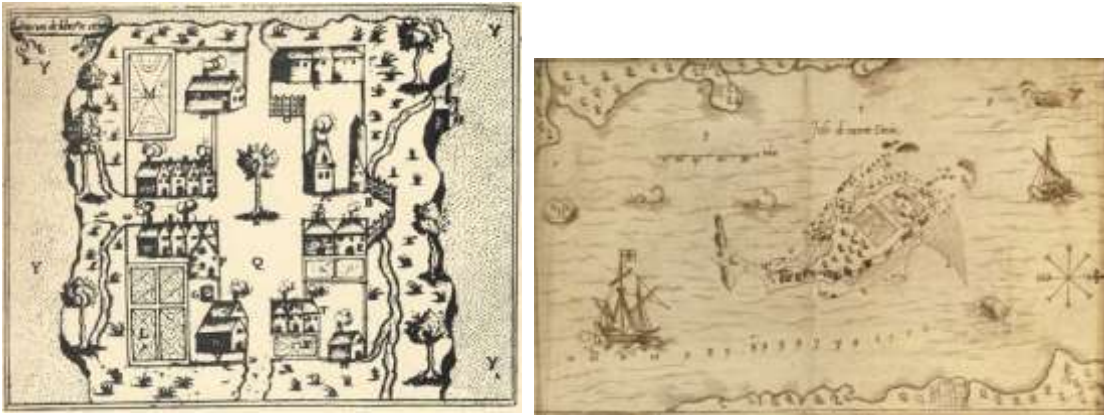
## **The Doctrine of Discovery**

The concept and legality of the divine right to conquer lands on behalf of European powers was established by the Catholic Church in a series of 15<sup>th</sup> century papal bulls (or decrees). These decrees were issued in an effort to create standards by which competing European powers could understand claims to newly discovered lands. The problem was, these lands were already inhabited, in this case by the Wabanaki.

In 1452 Pope Nicholas V declared war against all non-Christians throughout the world, specifically calling on Portugal to colonize and exploit non-Christians and their territories. Spain and Portugal began to compete for colonized lands and resources, requiring a second bull, issued by Pope Alexander in 1493 dividing the hemispheres for the two countries. Part of this bull stated that the “Christian Law of Nations” asserted a divine right to claim absolute title and authority over any newly discovered non-Christian lands and inhabitants. This belief gave rise to the Doctrine of Discovery, used by Spain, Portugal, England, France, and Holland as they claimed title to lands in North America. Important to the Wabanaki, the Doctrine claimed that non-Christian lands were owned by no one, and once a Christian monarch had claimed the right of dominion, that claim was transferred to other political successors. United States Indian policy is built on this concept, solidified by the Supreme Court in 1823 by Chief Justice John Marshall in *Johnson v. M’Intosh*.

## New France

In 1524 King Francois I of France sponsored Giovanni Verrazano's exploration along the coast from Florida to Newfoundland, mapping the region and making notes on the environment and peoples. The first maps to use the term New France (Nova Gallia) applied it to the entire coastline.



Samuel de Champlain's maps of the French settlement on St. Croix Island, 1604-1605.

From *The Works of Samuel de Champlain, Vol. 1, 1599-1607*. English version published by the Champlain Society, Toronto, 1922.

After several short, unsuccessful winter settlement attempts in northeastern North America, on November 8, 1603, King Henri IV appointed the Huguenot Pierre Du Gua de Monts Lieutenant-General "of the coasts, lands and confines of Acadia, Canada and other places in New France." In the spring of 1604, de Monts landed at St. Croix Island with 80 settlers. They thought this small island was an ideal location for a new settlement because it was both defensible and had easy access to the mainland, both for access to resources and for trading with the Wabanaki. While the settlers were erecting buildings and planting gardens at St. Croix, Samuel de Champlain, perhaps the most well-known member of the de Monts party, took a boat and a small crew and explored down the coast as far south as Cape Cod. Champlain's descriptions of the Wabanaki people and villages he encountered during this journey are some of the most detailed early accounts by a European.

After just one winter, during which almost half of the settlers died from scurvy and other diseases, St. Croix Island was abandoned, and the surviving colonists moved to Port Royal on the Bay of Fundy in present-day Nova Scotia.



Samuel De Champlain's *Carte Geographique de la Nouvelle France of 1612*. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

## Wabanaki-French Interactions



Abenaki Couple, an 18th-century watercolor by an unknown artist. Courtesy of the City of Montreal Records Management & Archives, Montreal, Canada.



A Jesuit priest holding Mass with the Mi'kmaq of the Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec. From *Nouvelle Relation de la Gaspésie*, 1691, by Father Chrétien Le Clercq. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

French relationships with the Wabanaki in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century revolved primarily around the fur trade and conversion to Catholicism. Individual traders and missionaries, sometimes with their families and perhaps a few associates, resided in or near existing Wabanaki villages. The traders often married Wabanaki women and had children, who played important roles in alliances between the Wabanaki and the French. The Catholic missionaries, coming from a well-established tradition of syncretism - integrating elements of different belief systems into Catholic teachings and rituals - were quick to bring Wabanaki spiritual beliefs into their teachings, making the conversion to Catholicism easier. Both missionaries and traders learned multiple Wabanaki languages.

While the French did not have serious designs on the Wabanaki homeland, they did not hesitate to use the Wabanaki as a buffer between their claims in what is now eastern Canada, and English colonists to the south who asserted that they had jurisdiction over most of Maine and Maritime Canada.



Constant political and military conflicts between the French and the English over territory called Acadia resulted in challenges between French and Wabanaki alliances. Because of this ongoing conflict, French traders in Acadia were often unable to meet the demands of the Wabanaki for European trade goods, while the English had abundant material to trade. The French did not hesitate to trade firearms, shot and powder with the Wabanaki, which after a century or more of the fur trade had become essential for both the fur trade and subsistence hunting. The French also avoided trading alcohol to the Wabanaki, under the urging of the Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries. On the other side, the English, who lived in relatively constant fear of Indian raids, were officially forbidden from trading firearms to the Wabanaki. And, the English kept a steady supply of alcohol flowing into Native communities, often to very destructive ends.

## **New England**

John Cabot (Giovanni Caboto), an Italian navigator hired by England under the commission of King Henry VII, was the first explorer to officially make landfall in North America for the English crown. Cabot arrived in Newfoundland in 1497, just five years after Columbus's voyage to the Caribbean.



Captain George Weymouth on the Georges River, by N.C. Wyeth, 1937  
Frontispiece illustration for Kenneth Roberts' *Trending Into Maine* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938)

In the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, two brothers, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Humphrey Gilbert, were commissioned by Queen Elizabeth to lead English colonization efforts in North America. The most detailed accounts of what is now Maine came from George Weymouth's voyage in 1605. A member of Weymouth's crew, James Rosier, wrote an account of their voyage that served as promotional material for the potential for settlement of Wabanaki homeland.

Crippling the development of Wabanaki-English relations was the capture of five Wabanaki men at Pemaquid at the mouth of the St. George River by Weymouth and his crew. These five men – Nahanada, Amooret, Skidwarres, Manida and Assacomoit – were taken back to England, where they



spent the next year living in English households, learning the language and gaining insight into these new people and their homeland.



Fort St. George (Popham Colony) as drawn by John Hunt, October 1607.

From *Fort St. George: Archaeological Investigation of the 1607-1608 Popham Colony*, by Jeffrey Phipps Brain, Occasional Publications in Maine Archaeology No. 12, 2007. Original at the Ministerio de Cultura de España, Archivo General de Simancas.

In the Wabanaki homeland, two English ships, carrying about 120 Englishmen arrived in early August 1607 at the mouth of the Sagadahoc River. Unlike Jamestown, which became a permanent settlement, the Popham colony at Fort St. George lasted just over a year. A combined lack of resources, problematic relationships with the Wabanaki, loss of leadership with the death of Captain George Popham, and Raleigh Gilbert's return to England contributed to its failure.



An Early Sabbath in New England.

From *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, 1871.

Permanent English settlement in New England becomes a familiar story to modern Americans with the arrival of the Mayflower and the Pilgrims on the Massachusetts coast in 1620. By 1640, there were an estimated 13,700 colonists in what we now know as New England. By 1640, the 900 or so English settlers in Maine were located almost entirely south and west of the Kennebec River, although English trading posts were established up the Kennebec River and on the Penobscot River starting in the 1620s.

### **Wabanaki-English Interaction**

English interests in the Wabanaki homeland were very different from the French. While the French were primarily interested in trade and bringing Catholicism to the Wabanaki, the English wanted

natural resources (fish and furs) and land. With a much larger population, New England settlements extended farther into Wabanaki territory, and did so with little to no consideration for the fact that this land was already inhabited. And while their protestant religions were central to life in New England, they showed little interest in converting Wabanaki people.

The practice of kidnapping Native people, especially leaders, and holding them hostage created a foundation of distrust among the Wabanaki towards the English. This distrust was strengthened as European settlers in southern and western Maine attacked Wabanaki communities, allowed their livestock to consume Wabanaki gardens, and stole Wabanaki possessions and trade goods. Furthermore, the refusal of most English settlers and government officials to learn Wabanaki languages left the full burden of diplomacy on the Wabanaki, and led to decades of misunderstandings.



A new map of Nova Scotia and Cape Britain, with the adjacent parts of New England and Canada, by Thomas Jefferys, 1755. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection, [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com).

The relationship between New England the Wabanaki became especially strained in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A series of conflicts, some which were local and others which were part of larger conflicts between the French and the English, had a significant impact on the Wabanaki, especially those living between the Kennebec and Merrimack Rivers. While Wabanaki leaders and diplomats repeatedly tried to establish peaceful relations with New England, the colonial government in Boston and the settlers in Maine repeatedly violated agreements, and refused to trust the Wabanaki negotiators. The French, at times, helped keep the region unstable, through ongoing alliances with the Wabanaki, whom they encouraged in their aggression towards the English, thus keeping the English from encroaching on what the French felt was their colonial territory.

### **Disease and Warfare**

Wabanaki populations were devastated throughout the 1600s by diseases introduced by Europeans, and by warfare to defend their homeland and lifeways. The resiliency and adaptability of the

Wabanaki people and their culture is nowhere more evident than in their survival of massive epidemics of plague, small pox, cholera and measles, brought by Europeans. The heaviest death tolls occurred during a time known now as “The Great Dying,” from 1616-1619. During this three-year pandemic, as many as 95% of Native people from Penobscot Bay to Cape Cod died. The death toll east of the Penobscot River, where populations were more dispersed and people were not settled in agricultural villages, may have been closer to 75%. While the European immigrants had been living with these diseases for centuries and had developed immunities, the destructive organisms were new to Native populations. With no immunity, the impact was massive.



16th century Aztec drawing of smallpox victims included in *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, c. 1575-1580, by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.

The huge reduction of the Native population, especially along the southern Maine coast, opened up much of the area to English settlement. It left dramatically fewer people to defend their homeland. It also left survivors demoralized, unsure about why such devastation had been brought to their families and communities. In eastern and interior Maine, this opened the door to the Catholic missionary priests, who were able to baptize the dying, offer care to the sick, while apparently being immune themselves, a sign of immense spiritual power.

For the English, this plague upon the Wabanaki was seen as a sign of God’s will, bringing down the heathens and opening the land for God’s true children, protestant New Englanders.

Despite the population decline brought about by disease, the Wabanaki fiercely defended their homes, families, and cultural values from invaders through a series of wars, but more importantly, through efforts at peace. Generally, the Wabanaki tried to remain neutral in the conflicts between England and France, but when they could not, they were more sympathetic to the French, with whom they had strong relationships. Wars such as the King Phillip’s War (1675-1678) and the French and Indian War (1754-1763) were interspersed with peace, when Wabanaki, French and British people traded with one another. These wars also resulted in a series of treaties signed between the various nations stipulating the terms of peace, land acquisition and territorial boundaries.

## Treaties

Treaties are documents signed between nations agreeing to certain terms. Each nation enters treaty negotiations with a bundle of rights inherent in their sovereignty, and those rights are retained unless specifically signed away. If title over a sovereign is transferred, as with the British and the formation of the United States, treaty obligations are transferred to the new nation.



Wabanaki signatures, 1721.

From *Collections of the Maine Historical Society, Series One*.

Treaties as documents and agreements were brought to Native people by Europeans, but the process of negotiating a treaty in North America became a Native construct. Treaty negotiations with Native people involved much ceremony and often took several days that included speeches, gift giving and feasts. Early English records indicate frustration with how drawn out Native people made negotiations, and Europeans often misunderstood much of what was going on. Exchanging gifts was common practice, representing friendship, respect and good faith in the process. Europeans, while gladly accepting gifts, rarely gave them in return, or were disdainful of the process and had the opinion that by giving gifts Native people were acknowledging submission to the crown.

Many Native communities were governed through consensus or democratic-like systems, requiring representatives at treaties to take conditions back to the community to discuss and approve or disapprove collectively. This is not a process that Europeans understood, and often participants in the process left the negotiations drawing two different conclusions. Differences in cultural values and foundational understandings about land ownership and use also led to misunderstandings and conflict.

## **Perspectives on Trade**

Trade between Europeans and the Wabanaki began with the first interactions between these groups. Both Europeans and the Wabanaki were introduced to new foods, materials and technologies. Europeans traded to survive in this region, or for resources to take back to Europe to sell. Birchbark canoes, snowshoes, corn and animal fur were vitally important for survival in this landscape, and for the economic success of Europeans. In contrast, the Wabanaki traded for luxury items, including corn from southern New England, wampum beads and metal tools from Europeans. Trade items sought after by the Wabanaki were integrated into their cultural systems and values, and did not always serve the original purpose of the object. For example, copper pots were broken apart and reworked into spear points and jewelry.

The fur trade shifted economic structures for the Wabanaki, impacting life patterns, material culture, and gender roles. However, this impact was generally absorbed into the values of the communities. Dishonest traders and the use of alcohol at times, created dependency on European goods and changed Wabanaki community and political structures. The ability of Wabanaki people to adapt and change while holding onto their core values, unique identity and traditional territory is evidence of their resilience.

## Religion

French and English religious institutions approached the Wabanaki in very different ways, and these perspectives affected interactions, ultimately leading to many of the conflicts, including the destruction of St. Sauveur. Many of the early arrivals in New France were Catholic priests, primarily Jesuits. These religious leaders played key roles in early French settlements in North America, often as leaders within a community or as the sole European living in a Wabanaki village. They also worked with trading posts near Wabanaki communities and formed strong relationships.



18<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit Cross found at Norridgewock on the Kennebec River. Photo courtesy of the Maine Historical Society.



Late 17<sup>th</sup> century gravestone in a burying ground in downtown Boston. This “death’s head” imagery is representative of orthodox Puritanism’s beliefs about life and death. Photo by Linden Tea.

In contrast, the British made little effort to spread their religion to the Wabanaki, and made no attempt to integrate Wabanaki spiritual beliefs into Puritan religion. Rather than send missionaries into Wabanaki communities as the French were doing, the religious leaders of New England preached that Native people were less than human and a threat to the civilized world. While communities of “praying Indians” developed in parts of southern New England, in Maine Protestant

religion brought division and conflict, instead of being a way to bring Wabanaki and English people together.

Deep-seated religious conflict between the French and the English also shaped how both groups interacted with the Wabanaki. England's break with the Catholic Church was not an amicable split. Protestant New Englanders held strongly negative prejudices against Catholics, who they often referred to as Papists – Catholic rituals and their abundance of saints made them idolaters and sinners in the eyes of Puritan leaders. Witnessing the influence of Catholic priests in Wabanaki communities, the English saw this as yet one more sign of their own superiority over Native people.

### **Today**

Although St. Sauveur was a short lived settlement, and the French and British colonies have become the United State and Canada, we still see influences from this meeting of nations and the different values and priorities each group brought to their interaction. The Wabanaki remain in their home territories, with growing population numbers, their language and culture are still practiced, and their voices are part of this landscape. Although separated by a border that crossed through their territories, the tribes remain united in a confederacy, and work together toward common goals.

The destructive results of early English settlement in southern and western Maine can still be seen when you look at a map of present-day Wabanaki communities. The Native people who were living in the part of the state that fell under the earliest English colonization died in greater numbers, were killed over years of conflict, or were displaced and joined Wabanaki communities in places like Quebec and Indian Island on the Penobscot River. The current reservations and tribal headquarters in Maine all fall within what was known as Acadia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where the primary interactions were with the French.

A legacy of European influence is also evident culturally and in communities, with French speaking Canadians and Mainers absorbed into Wabanaki and non-Native communities: in the devastation of natural resources reflective of European demands, and in the oral histories of the tribes. Treaties agreed to during the 1600-1700s remain important and form the foundation of federal Indian policy and the relationship between the state of Maine and the Wabanaki. And while the location of St. Sauveur may never be discovered, the history of that settlement, the complex social and political upheaval it was part of, and the economic changes it heralded remain an important part of Maine history and identity.