

The Connections that Bind Us: The Colonial World of the Northeast



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Fort Necessity Battlefield National Park, Farmington, PA

June 2015

“Clearly, a problem with ethnic labels is that they do not reflect the fluid linguistic boundaries and migratory movements of transient Wabanaki groups. They also fail to indicate that Wabanaki peoples maintained cross-tribal kinship ties. Intermarriage between individuals from different ethnic groups was common, especially when population loss reduced opportunities for finding marriage partners within the community that were not too closely related.”¹

In order to understand Alnobak people, currently known as the Western Abenaki, we must understand the people around them and the social factors that created a community rather than distinctive social units separated by boundaries. The original intent of this research was to understand the Alnobak worldview during the seventeenth century but the similarities and intercultural connections created a much more inclusive picture that demands attention. One group of people in the Northeast to the exclusion of many of the surrounding groups is not historically or archaeologically accurate. Mixed villages and extensive interactions blurred tribal distinctions. The history of Alnobak quickly encompassed other Wabanaki and Algonkian-speaking people. Anthropological and historical classifications of indigenous communities can create the illusion that autonomous groups existed without intermarriage or extensive contact. Modern classifications divide people and are incorrect.² The vein of spirituality among the Northeastern indigenous community unearths a much greater understanding that people were very similar and

¹ Harold Prins and Bunny McBride, *Asticou's Island Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500-2000*, Volume 1 (Boston: Northeast Ethnography Program National Park Service, 2007), 3. This is the second printing and can be found digitally.

² In terms of Western Alnobak neighbors to the west, the term Iroquois is not a single nation. The term encompasses five and later six different tribal entities. When a researcher or first-hand account uses the term Iroquois, are they speaking of Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga, and later the Tuscarora? Each tribal distinction also had multiple villages of varying names for each, often outlined in the *Jesuit Relations*. This is similar to Western and Eastern Alnobak people that have multiple villages spread throughout varying regions Europeans classified by tribal names, such as Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliceet, and Mi'kmaq.

often heavily interrelated. This history of the Alnobak people may focus on the inland bands but overall their story is also the story of the Northeast.

The historical outlook on spirituality must come from the indigenous perspective and not from modern classifications and convenient boundaries. How did they see themselves? How fluid were village lines? Where did one group end and another begin? People often traded, intermarried, and found refuge with other groups as we will see. The people of first contacts, especially along the coasts (the Eastern Alnobak), and the villages located within interior New England share similar cultural and linguistic threads. Ethnographic analogy can be used without social and political ties but the technique is more applicable in this instance as there is evidence of both. Due to lack of documentation for inland Alnobak groups, information from surrounding areas can be used as a result of these factors.

The influx of European people added another spiritual and social component to the already diverse social and cultural fabric of the Northeast. European and indigenous peoples required a period of understanding to overcome dissimilarities. The French certainly did not understand the depth of indigenous peoples when John Cabot, Samuel de Champlain, Henry Hudson, and other explorers made their way in a new place. Misunderstandings plagued both European and indigenous people. They met on very different levels and in an age of possibility they learned how to bridge their differences in various ways both positive and negative. Colin Calloway said it best, "...The frontier operated as a sponge as often as a palisade, soaking up rather than separating people and influences....Interactions in frontier zones served to connect and unite people as well as divide and alienate them..."³ European sources during the early

³ Colin Calloway, *New Worlds For All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 152.

contact period require fleshing out inaccuracies but they can provide important insight into the indigenous world.

When French explorer Samuel de Champlain arrived he stepped into a world of pre-established alliances and a tradition of widespread contact. In one instance, when he exchanged his Huron companion for the Frenchmen near the Lachine Rapids during his later voyage in 1611, the Hurons mentioned rumors they heard from friends. He explained, “They were very much pleased to see our savage well, for they had supposed him dead, on account of reports which some Algonquins had made to them, who had heard it from the Montagnais savages.”⁴ They also awaited hundreds of warriors from the Algonquins to join them in their war against the Iroquois. He continued, “They also told me that the preceding winter some savages came from the region of Florida, beyond the country of the Iroquois, who lived in sight of our ocean sea and were on friendly terms with these savages.”⁵ The sphere of interaction was already well-established and could be drawn upon when necessary. Old alliances were renewed with each conflict and new alliances were forged throughout the colonial period.⁶

Northeastern groups were well-travelled from the coast line to fairly far into the interior. This tradition of travel and trade continued to be a trademark from the earliest days of occupation based upon the archaeological record. They circulated goods and information through these lines of contact and spheres of interaction.⁷ At a place near Pointe aux Vaches where the wind from

⁴ Samuel de Champlain, *The Voyages and Explorations of Samuel de Champlain*, Volume 1 (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1906), 243.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 245-246.

⁶ Frederick Wiseman, *At Lake Between: The Great Council Fire and the European Discovery of Lake Champlain* (Vergennes: Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, 2009). The idea of the Great Council Fire is integral to the understanding of the Northeast and spheres of interaction.

⁷ Several archaeological sites throughout the Northeast during the Paleoindian, Archaic, and Woodland Periods stretching from the earliest days of occupation include materials from well outside of their immediate vicinity. A few include the Reagan site in Highgate, Vermont (Paleoindian) and information can be ascertained from Haviland and Power’s book as well as the following article: Francis Robinson IV, “The Reagan Site Revisited: A Contemporary Analysis of a Formative Northeastern Paleoindian Site,” *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 37

the Saguenay affected water travel, a number of people met to trade.⁸ Champlain's native allies from multiple nations explained to him their trading network and the route taken to get to a great bay. They described various lakes, nomads that lived upon them along the way, and people "from other regions of the interior..."⁹ Champlain recounted, "The savages said that it might be forty or fifty days' journey from this sea on the north to the harbor of Tadoussac, because of the difficulty of the roads and rivers, and because the country is very mountainous..."¹⁰ Champlain's allied natives described an interconnected web of economic, political, and social relationships amongst different groups with both communal distinctiveness and a shared political alliance identity.

When these allied tribes brought him down to the fateful battle in which Champlain killed several Iroquois chiefs, the scouts used a method of identification all of the allied groups knew. He explained, "...And the other part as scouts, to explore along the rivers, to see if there is any mark or sign to indicate that their enemies have passed, or their friends. This they recognize by certain marks that the chiefs of different tribes exchange. These are not always alike, and they inform themselves from time to time when they are changed."¹¹ Each group marked a unique symbol to record their passage. They identified themselves based upon individual groups and allegiances. They belonged to tribes, sometimes clans, or families; they lived in particular locations, and they also belonged to various alliances with other groups. In order to arrive at the

(2009): 85-147. The Bull Brook site (Paleoindian) is also a worthwhile investigation and further information can be gleaned from the following article: Brian Robinson, Jennifer Ort, William Eldridge, Adrian Burke, and Bertrand Pelletier, "Paleoindian Aggregation and Social Context at Bull Brook," *American Antiquity* 74 (2009): 423-447. Closer to the Contact Period is the Boucher Cemetery site located in Northwestern Vermont with an amazing assortment of goods from well outside the region and is an example of red ochre burials. More information can be found in Haviland and Power's book and the following article: Michael Heckenberger, James Petersen, Louise Basa, Ellen Cowie, Arthur Spiess, and Robert Stuckenrath, "Early Woodland Period Mortuary Ceremonialism in the Far Northeast: A View From the Boucher Cemetery," *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 18 (1990): 109-144. There are many other sites that might be of interest and these are but a few.

⁸ Champlain, 167.

⁹ Ibid, 169.

¹⁰ Ibid, 170.

¹¹ Ibid, 201.

rendezvous at the site of the killing, they traveled through Alnobak territory on the waters of Bitawbagok (renamed Lake Champlain).

A diversity of nations flocked to Montreal for various activities over time, which was relatively close to Western Alnobak territory. Dollier de Casson, one of the original settlers among the religious zealots that settled at Montreal, explained, “Yet if the Iroquois did not come here, other Indians came from all parts of the country, as they looked on this place as the common place of refuge from the Iroquois.”¹² The Lachine Rapids and the area at Montreal was a central point of refuge for a diverse group of native people. With a wide array of people located in one area, the conditions were conducive to trade. As the 1650-1651 relation described the world at Montreal: “It is a very advantageous place for all the upper nations who wish to trade with us...”¹³

Contact, especially trade, affected indigenous groups very quickly. In a telling statement Nicolas Denys remarked of his long occupation in Acadia, “But since they cannot now obtain the things which come from us with such ease as they had in obtaining robes of marten, of otter, or of beaver, [or] bows and arrows, and since they have realised [sic] that guns and other things were not found in their woods or in their rivers, they have become less devout.”¹⁴ They changed their burial practices, their hunting quantity, and their “superstitions” in order to maintain the relationship with their neighbors. Such changes were no doubt a part of many regions in the Northeast touched by first encounters. This effect spanned the trade region and complex web of indigenous peoples of the northeast. Calloway summed up the situation, “The fur trade produced far-reaching changes in Indian material culture, economic activity, and society; but most

¹² Ralph Flenley, ed., *A History of Montreal 1640-1672 From the French of Dollier de Casson* (New York: E.P. Dutton & co., 1928), 107.

¹³ Thwaites, Volume XXXVI, 201.

¹⁴ Denys, 460.

dramatically, it gave the Indians firearms...Indians now devoted their utmost energies to maintaining a tenable strategic position in a world thrown into dangerous upheaval...”¹⁵

Change occurred amidst every culture and place and not only as a result of European contact. Such contact facilitated indigenous cultural similarities. The native people at Montreal evacuated a century before the first settlers and in their midst new peoples moved in. Several groups visited Vimont on Mont Royal and claimed that they were from the earlier inhabitants of the area. They commented, “The Hurons, who then were our enemies, drove our Forefathers from this country. Some went towards the country of the Abnaquiois, others towards the country of the Hiroquois, some to the Hurons themselves, and joined them. And that is how this Island became deserted.”¹⁶ People found refuge with other groups and most importantly, part of this web of friendship and alliances included Abnaquiois (Alnobak). Even before mixed-mission communities, indigenous villages welcomed a variety of people. The original town of Ville Marie and later Montreal was as diverse a place as the Northeast indigenous community. This large collection of varying groups seemed to be characterized more by inclusion than separatism, which was evident in the pre-contact burial tradition. If these people took on cultural practices and life ways similar to the group they sheltered with, should the conversion of native peoples by Europeans be vilified in the manner that it is? New ideas and materials flowed throughout the area. In a truly syncretic world, both indigenous and European cultures made their mark upon the other creating a truly new experience for all involved.

Within Champlain’s tale, the narrator outlined one of their goals for this diverse group of natives. “But there is hope that the clergy who have been sent there and who are beginning to establish themselves and to found seminaries will be able in a few years to make great progress

¹⁵ Colin Calloway, *Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) 22.

¹⁶ Thwaites, Volume XXII, 215.

in the conversion of these peoples. This is the first care of His Majesty...turning his eyes toward Heaven..."¹⁷ The French established a fledgling religious mission community at Montreal in 1642. A Jesuit father commented during this time, "The belief which they have nearly everywhere, that Mont-Real is established only for the sole benefit of the savages, is the strongest attraction that we have to incline them to God; these are chains of love, which bind them to us potently, and cause resistance to be no longer..."¹⁸ Religion was a central theme in the early narratives and one in which they hoped might bind them closer together with indigenous peoples.

Another dimension of conversion was the indigenous way of life. Groups, such as the Alnobak, were well-traveled and interest varied depending on their survival efforts in hunting. Similarly, the Sillery Mission village only attended holy week when the elk hunt did not coincide with the event.¹⁹ Those that did not want to convert or listen to the Jesuits might sway those that had already sparked a relationship. At Three Rivers, many nations assembled for years. Jerome Lalemant wrote in the 1647 relation: "The diversity of the nations which assemble at three Rivers occasioned, all these years, an indescribable confusion, which caused unusual difficulties to those who instruct the Savages. It is incredible how well these tribes, so different, agreed toward the end of Autumn, and a great part of the Winter; that caused profound astonishment to all our French."²⁰ Without specifics on the exact "diversity" of these gatherings, speculation as to the groups involved must be employed. Algonquian-speaking nations, Hurons, and other allies, most likely participated in such gatherings. They had great affect upon one another. Even though

¹⁷ Champlain, 4.

¹⁸ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. XXIV, *Lower Canada and Iroquois: 1642* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, Publishers, M DCCC XVIII), 231.

¹⁹ Thwaites, Volume, XXXI, 143.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 285.

the indigenous groups were apparently very different they all agreed upon a common belief structure, which is a greater indication of their level of contact with one another. The Northeastern may be seen as a community of villages rather than a collective of completely unique nations.

The 1647 Jesuit relation mentioned Western Alnobak people, the Sokoki group, of the southernmost village near present-day Massachusetts. The Sokoki traveled to a Mohawk village that held Father Jogues captive and offered gifts for his return as reciprocity for his previous acts of kindness toward one of their countryman. Despite their efforts, "...Those barbarians, having accepted the gifts, nevertheless did not set him at liberty, – violating the law of nations, and the law accepted among all these tribes."²¹ A great effort was made to return one Jesuit father to safety through the proper social channels and widely-held customs. They heard about his captivity within the communication network. They were a part of the network with common practices, one of the ways in which people acquired power – alliances.

A necessity of such a communication network was the ability to understand languages along the network whether Iroquoian or Algonquian-based. Gabriel Sagard, a missionary among the Huron village, mentioned that anyone that sought to convert the savages had to learn the language of the area. He listed the other groups that utilized the same language such as the Neutrals, the Forest nation, the Coppermines, the Iroquois, the High-Hairs, and others. He continued: "...The Sorcerers, the Island people, the Little tribe, and the Algonquins...know the language in some measure on account of the necessity of using it when they travel, or when they have to trade with any persons belonging to the provinces of the Hurons and the other sedentary tribes."²² If they traded with them periodically, they might be able to do without an extensive

²¹ Ibid, 87.

²² Gabriel Sagard, *Sagard's Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1939), 9.

understanding of their language but the fact that several nations found it important to do so certainly points to sufficient contact to warrant a mutual understanding and a common purpose. Extensive language usage and contact is often accompanied by a thorough understanding of cultural practices.

In addition to an understanding of the language amongst the people they traded with, they held another custom. In particular, Sagard's guides brought him amongst the Forest Tribe. Sagard related, "Their faces are painted in different colours with oil, very prettily; some had one side all green, the other all red...Their custom is to paint and stain themselves, especially when they are approaching or passing through another tribe...." Body decoration, a seemingly shared custom, at least in this region, was important during visitation and the attendance of ceremony or socials. Gift-giving and body decoration were both important aspects of common social protocols.

Furthermore, the Hurons maintained a very specific set of rules for guests within the village. Sagard explained, "When any one of our Hurons wishes to make a feast for his friends, he sends early to invite them...and if they who gave the feast were Algonquins, the Hurons would take to it a little meal in their bowls, because these Aquanaques are poor and hunger-bitten."²³ The Aquanaques may have been the Abenakis or Alnobak. If this was the people known as the Alnobak, they traveled a fairly long distance to attend the feast. They had much more elaborate customs based on social etiquette for such feasts. Concerned about manners and protocol, the Hurons had a need to create such elaborate outings. Visitation was an important aspect of life in the Northeast.

The 1647 relation specifically mentioned the "Abnaquiouis." The people they referred to were not the people today referred to as Abenakis or the Alnobak; they were instead a part of the

²³ Ibid, 110-111.

eastern bands and once again were allied with the people at Sillery and people to the west.²⁴ The classification of people contemporaneously specifically listed villages and the term Abenaki or Abnquiouis had not grown to include Eastern and Western Alnobak bands. They traveled to the Sillery mission to specifically request a father to service their communities and upon arrival they immediately took him to visit their friends in a local village and as far down as Acadia. They not only brought him to meet other indigenous peoples but the English they befriended. They went to the English settlement named Kinibeki and “seven or eight English settlements, at all of which he was received with a cordiality all the more extraordinary since it was little expected.”²⁵ The world of the seventeenth century was much more fluid than rigid.

Upon settling within the Alnobak village Father Dreuilletes set several goals in order to work toward total Christian immersion. One of the first steps was to quash the feuds between small groups that plagued the harmony of the village. The relation chronicled these shortcomings. “It is incredible how much the Savages of the same region are united together; but, as one sees in France, between two cities or hamlets, I know not what caviling, there may be seen also in this part of our America small envies between the various districts of the Savages.”²⁶ They maintained alliances but as in any population there were quarrels.

The 1651 Jesuit journal specifically brought the Northern alliance connection to the Southern New England groups. Father Dreuilletes left with those the French deemed Abenakis from the Kennebec River and the Sokokis for New England among the tender negotiations between the New England groups that opposed the Iroquois.²⁷ The Alnobak people from the

²⁴ Thwaites, Volume XXXI, 185.

²⁵ Ibid, 187.

²⁶ Ibid, 191.

²⁷ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. XXXVI, *Lower Canada, Abenakis: 1650-1651* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, Publishers, M DCCC XCIX), 129.

Kennebec River enjoyed the spiritual guidance of the French but they were also “under the protection of this colony of Plymouth, -- which has the proprietorship of Koussinoc, and for its rights of lordship takes the sixth part of what accrues from the trade.”²⁸ In short, they had a solid relationship with Plymouth Colony but they also worked with the French and their influence ranged from Canada to the Southern-most areas of New England.

Furthermore, they had direct contact with their Western Alnobak allies. On one occasion the Eastern Alnobak gave the Sokokis gifts of fifteen collars and about a dozen porcelain bracelets (most likely shell or wampum) in order to arrange a political front against their enemies.²⁹ Likewise, the Sokokis also traveled up the Richelieu River on a hunting trip.³⁰ The Western Alnobak dealt with not only those groups next to them but traveled up toward the missions at Sillery and Quebec and perhaps farther. The Jesuits recorded, “...It is certain that the Sokouckiois have been closely allied to the Algonquains...”³¹ Western Alnobak people were situated directly in the center of the happenings throughout the Northeast bordering the Iroquoian groups that threatened many of the New England and Canadian villages. In a precarious situation, they created relationships across a relatively vast territory, linked by water travel. This amount of interaction was not unique to the Contact Period but we benefit from the written descriptions of these networks with the arrival of Europeans.

Additionally, the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* are rife with multi-national councils and very extensive travel. In particular, the 1651-1652 relation confirmed contact along the coasts and into the Western Alnobak territory. Native guides took the father “with five or six Neophytes, in little bark Canoes, to go to the shores of Acadia and, by that route, find an easier

²⁸ Ibid, 99.

²⁹ Ibid, 103.

³⁰ Ibid, 141.

³¹ Ibid, 105.

approach to the tribes called Etechemins, Abnaquiois, Sokoquiois, Sourikois, Chaouanaquiois, Mahinganiois, Amirgankaniois, and numerous other savage nations, which are sedentary...”³²

There were differences in lifestyle between those that were sedentary and those that were more mobile but they maintained contact with one another. Contact certainly shaped the exchange of goods and the exchange of ideas before and after European arrival. This no doubt also allowed for a certain amount of intermarriage.

Father Chrestien Le Clercq described the way in which the indigenous people in Gaspesia traveled place to place. He acknowledged, “They have much ingenuity in drawing upon bark a kind of map which marks exactly all the rivers and streams of a country of which they wish to make a representation...An Indian who possesses one makes long voyages without going astray.”³³ The waterways provided extensive transportation highways. The native people voyaged far enough to warrant the use of a map in the various areas they traveled to during the seventeenth century.

The Jesuit priests offered new ideas in the same way that surrounding native groups did. If one looks at the interaction between the French and the allied tribal nations of the Northeast as nations, the French were simply one more nation that spread its influence. Big game hunters, maritime traditions, and agriculture were all a part of the past of the Northeast and its people. Change was necessary for survival and continuity was seemingly necessary for comfort. Different nations infused new ideology and technology into Alnobak lives and there was a measure of choice associated with these changes.

³² Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, Volume XXXVII Lower Canada and Abenakis: 1651-1652 (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, Publishers, 1899), 261.

³³ Chrestien Le Clercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia: With the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1910), 136.

Change amongst the “other” is sometimes difficult to accept but is nevertheless necessary. There is often an aversion to viewing indigenous peoples as more than stereotypes caught in a historical vacuum that somehow lose a sense of “Indianness” when mixed with something else. The problematic term “traditional” can encompass the thousand-year-old belief in Thunderbirds as well as the adoption of Jesus Christ.

One of the most important questions to consider when examining the situation among indigenous peoples of the Northeast pre- and post-contact is that if they were so heavily influenced by one another, how much can one generalize between groups? How much distinction was there? Might the worldview and culture from one area find its way throughout the region, especially when one considers the meeting among the allied tribes that took place at Three Rivers? Like the religious conferences of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, might the people of the Northeast have had something similar that allowed a fair amount of homogeneity with some amount of regional variation? If the world was not closed in with boundaries established by newcomers, what were the possibilities? If we shed the current understanding of political and supposed ethnic boundaries and open to the possibility of a heavily interconnected web of villages, how does the picture of the colonial world change? Does this help to illuminate the atmosphere of the eighteenth century in a different way?

As evidenced by Champlain and related testimonies, people traveled regularly, traded, and found refuge in mixed villages. The St. Francis mission experienced varying amounts of immigration from other communities that included an initial influx of Sokokis (Western Alnobak) but also large numbers of Alnobak from Maine and other communities throughout the Northeast.³⁴ The history of one of the principal communities of Western Alnobak people spans

³⁴ Day, 85-86. His essay on the identity of the Saint Francis people was very informative and his conclusion (page 276) underscored the diversity of the seventeenth and eighteenth century village at first coupled by the influx of

more than just the immediate region but people throughout the Northeast. This was not an isolated characteristic of this one community and the villages, especially after years of conflict, found refuge. There was ample opportunity for exchange and as evidenced by the similarities in culture and spiritual life, people created a common ground. Trade, political, spiritual, and social networks were extensive.

The spiritual journey of one nation seemed to closely resemble the spiritual journey of their allied nations. Such experiences correlate heavily to other aspects of culture. Mixed mission villages sprang up along the coast and throughout the Northeast. People continued to maintain old spheres of interaction equipped with new ways of knowing. The newly-created world of the Northeast was an exciting place even if at times scary and conflicted. Throughout the contact period and the many conflicts that plagued the newly formed Northeastern world, the indigenous experience was nuanced and multi-faceted. Historical trade networks and the waterways that connected people provided the system by which the world functioned throughout the contact period in war and the few years of “peace.”

By the time that the French and Indian War arose, the middle ground of the colonial world was still evolving and weaving together cultures and renewing and establishing both alliances and enemies.³⁵ Historian Colin Calloway underscored this concept, “The traditional concept of ‘frontier’ has serious limitations for the study of interactions between Indians and non-Indians. It carries with it outmoded notions about the advance of ‘civilization’ and the conquest of a ‘savage’ and ‘empty wilderness.’”³⁶ All sovereign groups, European and

Sokwakis, then the Penacooks, the Eastern Abenaki, Alongonquins, Pigwackets, Norridgewocks, and those from the refugee community of Schaghticoke.

³⁵ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This seminal work illuminates the concept of the middle ground and negates the idea of a frontier. The ways in which cultures weaved together correlates to the colonial world in general.

³⁶ Calloway, *Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People*, 17.

indigenous, had a tremendous amount of influence on the formation of this new world.

Indigenous people were not passive participants in history. They actively interacted and shaped the world around them. On April 10, 1758 George Washington wrote to Brigadier-General Stanwix to underscore the importance of indigenous allies, "...Every service of theirs must be purchased; and they are easily offended, being thoroughly sensible of their own importance."³⁷

As Europeans integrated into the pre-established community of the Northeast, people learned from one another and interacted daily. Robert Rogers, an integral English ranger during the French and Indian War known for his guerilla tactics and his attack on St. Francis, grew up in New Hampshire during the mid-eighteenth century alongside an Alnobak village. Far from the image of a scary frontier always fearful of Indian attack, he lived alongside people with faces and names that dealt daily with them. He wrote, "Such...was the situation of the place in which I received my early education, a frontier town in the province of New Hampshire, where I could hardly avoid obtaining some knowledge of the manners, customs, and language of the Indians, as many of them resided in the neighbourhood, and daily conversed and dealt with the English."³⁸ The outdated concept of a frontier that divided the line between the civilized and the uncivilized no longer can provide the grounding for the colonial world. As evidenced by Robert Rogers, different groups of people coexisted in close proximity and found ways to interact both positively and negatively. No longer a frontier, as Rogers himself called it, the different peoples provided a new cultural landscape.

Similarly, Susanna Johnson's account is one of the many important captivity narratives, a genre with its own nuances and limitations, with strong potential to shed light on this ambiguous

³⁷ Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington; Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private*(New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1847), Volume II, 276.

³⁸ Robert Rogers, *The Journals of Robert Rogers of the Rangers: The Exploits of Rogers & the Rangers from 1755-1761 in the French & Indian War in his Own Words* (United States: Leonaur Ltd, 2005) 8.

colonial world. Johnson resided in Charlestown, New Hampshire during the mid eighteenth century at the time of the construction of Fort No. 4. She explained the “frontier” situation during those early days of settlement,

The Indians were numerous, and associated in a friendly manner with the whites. It was the most northerly settlement on Connecticut River, and the adjacent country was terribly wild. A saw mill was erected, and the first boards were sawed while I was there...In those days there was such a mixture on the frontiers of savages and settlers, without established laws to govern them, that the state of society cannot be easily described; and the impending dangers of war, where it was known that the savages would join the enemies of our country, retarded the progress of refinement and cultivation.³⁹

Susanna’s description of life in the colonial world was complex with nations living adjacent to one another. Susanna did not seem to be very appreciative of the local native peoples, most likely made up of the local Alnobak village, or the fact that they were predisposed to French allegiances. Warfare plagued early settlements such as this due to conflict between the French and English and their respective tribal allies.⁴⁰

Toward the last days of August 1754 while the Johnson family slept, a party of indigenous people burst into the building. Johnson explained, “According to their national practice, he who first laid hands on a prisoner considered him as his property.”⁴¹ Johnson’s captor was particularly excited that he captured two people and might get double the amount of money if he sold them.⁴² Johnson was often surprised at the humanity the Alnobak exhibited towards them but could not understand their practices. They traveled to Crown Point and then up

³⁹ Colin Calloway, ed., *North Country Captives: Selected Narratives of Indian Captivity from Vermont and New Hampshire* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992) 48.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 49.

⁴¹ *Ibid*., 58.

⁴² *Ibid*, 62.

to Chamblee. When the party reached St. Francis the captives underwent the gauntlet, a traditional practice, and escorted them to their new homes.⁴³

One of the most important aspects of Susanna Johnson's experience surrounded her shift into the Gill family at St. Francis. Her new master, named Gill, "was son-in-law to the grand sachem, was accounted rich, had a store of goods, and lived in a style far above the majority of his tribe."⁴⁴ She continued, "He often told me that he had an English heart, but his wife was true Indian blood. Soon after my arrival at his house the interpreter came to inform me that I was adopted into his family. I was then introduced into the family, and was told to call them brothers and sisters."⁴⁵ Her purchase and adoption into the Gill family was telling of the coexistence of multiple identities. A son of captives, her master eventually married a native woman and adopted their culture. By the time of the American Revolution the Gill family became very prominent in the village. Colin Calloway explained, "Joseph Louis Gill, a prominent Abenaki chief at Odanak at the time of the American Revolution, was the son of two English people who had been captured, adopted, converted to Catholicism, and married each other. Gill- 'the white chief of the St. Francis Abenakis'- was English by blood but Abenaki by upbringing and allegiance."⁴⁶

Therefore, the modern conception of "blood" that Colin Calloway referred to does not seem fitting within the colonial conception of adoption and the indigenous mindset. Gill became a prominent chief at St. Francis, a respected and integral position held by active citizens. Johnson's experience underscores the different perception of what it meant to be an indigenous person in that time period and is very much at odds with the modern concept of blood quantum. She recalled, "My new sisters and brothers treated me with the same attention that they did their

⁴³ Ibid, 66.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 67-8.

⁴⁶ Calloway, *New Worlds For All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*, 157.

natural kindred; but it was an unnatural situation to me. I was a novice at making canoes, bunks, and tumplines...”⁴⁷ While she experienced culture shock, she was very much accepted and treated as a member of society. Much like the indigenous people that created the mixed-mission communities from a wide variety of cultural traditions and indigenous nations, people that lived in those villages participated in the culture of that particular place. Everyone participated in society to the benefit of everyone and those that were considered citizens were treated as family regardless of their roots.

Years after her return from captivity Johnson met an old friend named Sabatis from her time at St. Francis. Ecstatic at their meeting in Lancaster, Sabatis exclaimed, “My God! My God! Here is my sister!”⁴⁸ After Robert Rogers raided St. Francis, he captured Sabatis and took him to Lancaster where he met Johnson. She said, “It was my little brother Sabatis, who formerly used to bring the cows for me when I lived at my Indian masters. He was transported to see me, and declared that he was still my brother, and I must be his sister...I shall ever remember this young Indian with affection...”⁴⁹ Robert Rogers wrote in his diary under the heading September 13, 1759 that he followed his orders to St. Francis and killed as many inhabitants as possible but took many captives and resolved that “there was of no other way for us to return with safety, but by No. 4. on Connecticut River.”⁵⁰ Sabatis and Johnson’s paths once again crossed at the conclusion of that conflict. Both lost family, and somehow amidst suffering and war, they found a common ground of friendship across political and cultural boundaries. While the colonial period was plagued by warfare, there were also glimpses of worthwhile interactions of love and friendship.

⁴⁷ Calloway, *North Country Captives*, 68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ Rogers, 118.

A contemporary of Johnson, Colonel James Smith wrote one of the most interesting period accounts of captivity amongst the Caughnawaga Mohawks, allies within the Seven Nations, written during the French and Indian War. His account provides very similar political and cultural experiences. According to his preface he wrote the account during his captivity. He explained, “As the Indians never attempted to prevent me either from reading or writing, I kept a journal, which I revised shortly after my return from captivity...”⁵¹ As with any historical piece and the eventual revision of his journal, his motives should be examined but the quality of his narrative can provide some insight into the mindset of the period.

While in Pennsylvania in 1755 as a young English soldier, Smith met a group of hostiles near the Allegheny Mountain- two Delaware and one Caughnawaga citizen. While in captivity during the first few days he heard about Braddock’s Defeat. The borders between New France and the American colonies were still very fluid. Eventually adopted into the Caughnawaga group, he had to first transition to his new family. Forced to run the gauntlet as Susanna did, the women took possession of him. Smith described the incident: “At length one of the squaws made out to speak a little English...and said, *no hurt you*; on this I gave myself up to their ladyships, who were as good as their word; for though they plunged me under water, and washed and rubbed me severely, yet I could not say they hurt me much.”⁵²

Once in possession of the women, they washed and dressed him in their style with the ruffled shirt, leggings, beaded garters, and they painted his face, most likely with red ochre.⁵³ He arrived in the council house, smoked the pipe, and listened to the leaders. They asserted, “My son, you are now flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone. By the ceremony which was

⁵¹ James Smith, *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Col. James Smith During His Captivity With the Indians in the Years 1755-1759* (Lexington: John Bradford, 1799) 4.

⁵² Smith, 10.

⁵³ Ibid.

performed this day, every drop of white blood was washed out of our veins; you are taken into the Caughnewago nation...you are adopted into a great family...”⁵⁴ The women ritually washed the white blood out of his veins but this was more than symbolic. To his captors, Smith was no longer a stranger to them. He was family. Smith’s interpretation of the incident is integral to the story as he was the main actor in his own tale. He did not see the ceremony as anything more than symbolic. He said, “At this time I did not believe this fine speech, especially that of the white blood being washed out of me; - but since that time I have found that there was much sincerity in said speech,- for from that day I never knew them to make any distinction between me and themselves in any respect whatever until I left them...”⁵⁵ The entire concept of blood was radically different between the two cultures. For the Caughnawaga people, culture and the collective family within the village defined the person. Much like the original inhabitants of what would become Montreal, people moved within the community of the Northeast to various villages and contributed to the overall diversity of the nations. Skin color, blood quantum, and other socially constructed identities that divided people within the European mindset did not exist within the indigenous worldview of the period.

With that important distinction in mind, the Alnobak and ultimately indigenous view of personhood becomes crucial to the story of the colonial world. As essential shapers of the history of this nation, the indigenous people’s ultimate gift and the reason to delve deeper into the past comes into focus. What is a person? What is a human being? Ultimately, what is that person’s responsibility to society and the environment around them? In a world that can be very divisive, the indigenous worldview stands in stark contrast to the concepts that would ultimately be used to define them, such as blood quantum and race. Ironically, the practice of taking captives during

⁵⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

periods of conflict illuminates the way in which the indigenous mentality highlighted the importance of interconnectedness, love, and friendship.

Alnobak storyteller Gerard Tsonakwa told of the beautiful Tsesuna Raven at the beginning of the world. Tsesuna was flying when he came upon a house and at the back of the house he saw a light. The house spoke to Tsesuna,

And now, Tsesuna, you sit by my fire, and this is no common fire indeed, for this is the fire of life. The warmth of this fire is love, and it warms the hearts of people against the cold winds of loneliness and hate, so that the spirit will not sicken and die, and the race will always survive. And the light of this fire is the light of wisdom that comes with learning as we walk through the seasons on life's way. And Tsesuna, you take this fire of life and plant it in the hearts and minds of humankind, and let it warm and light the world.⁵⁶

Most importantly, this light that Raven provided to the people “sits somewhere behind our eyes, and the warmth in the core of our being that we call love.”⁵⁷ The world that Tsonakwa illustrated so beautifully has a glaring message. The person in that story was defined by the light behind their eyes, not their blood and not their skin. Through stories the people preserve memory and ideas long held by the culture that lived them. Storyteller Joseph Bruchac explained, “...These powerful tales are not just spoken or written words to American Indian people. They are alive. Alive as breath and the wind that touches every corner of this land. Alive as memory, memory that shapes and explains a universe, alive, aware, and filled with power...Our stories remember when people forget.”⁵⁸

Through stories both preserved through historical collections and stories that remember the ideas and happenings of the past, there is a great potential to balance the colonial

⁵⁶ Gerard Tsonakwa and Yolai'kia Wapita'ska, *Legends in Stone, Bone, and Wood* (Minneapolis: Arts and Learning Services Foundation, 1986), 34-35.

⁵⁷ Tsonakwa, 35.

⁵⁸ Joseph Bruchac, *Our Stories Remember: American Indian History, Culture, and Values Through Storytelling* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 35.

interpretation. As seen during Colonel James Smith's experiences, the indigenous people washed the white blood out of his veins in ceremony and practice. All people view the world through a particular lens and it is in the diversity of experience that the possibility of a more beautiful world exists both in the past and today. Wabanaki groups of the Northeast viewed people as something akin to Tsonakwa's story, the light behind the eyes. Father Chrestien Le Clercq of New France experienced the same tradition, "Our Gaspesians, in common with all the other Indians of New France, have believed up to the present that there is in everything, even in such as are inanimate, a particular spirit which follows deceased persons in to the other world..."⁵⁹ A human being's soul lived in their core and death was another journey.

Within the Six Worlds outlined in Ruth Holmes Whitehead's collection of stories, she painted a picture of the Wabanaki worldview. "Form is continually changing. The entire landscape of the six worlds is a nexus of Power moving beneath the outward appearance of things like light: of Persons shifting in and out of form, of patterns recombining. Life is a kaleidoscope of Power, and Death is just a shifting of the glass."⁶⁰ Power was the backbone of their experience. Vine Deloria Jr. compiled one of the most important pieces of scholarship on Native American spirituality. He explained, "The world that [the Indian] experiences is dominated by the presence of power, the manifestation of life energies, the whole life-flow of a creation."⁶¹

Power or life-energy morphed people into various shapes. Stories defined "people" as animate objects that interacted with each other. As the essence of the person defined their being, Whitehead inferred from the stories that stars, the winds, the seasons, the mountains, the horned

⁵⁹ Le Clercq, 209.

⁶⁰ Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Stories From the Six Worlds: Micmac Legends* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 1988), 9-10.

⁶¹ Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 30th Anniversary Edition, 87.

serpents, special features in the landscape, the human beings, the shape-changers, the stones, and the animals were people.⁶² She explained, “[Power] is everywhere at once, and yet it is also conscious, particulate: it is Persons.”⁶³ People in the broadest sense of the word interacted with each other as animate beings. The European explorers, missionaries, and settlers did not understand the world through indigenous eyes. The concepts inferred from the stories of power will be utilized to counteract their lack of perspective.

The six worlds contained people in many different forms, from human beings to the loons. Transformation was common between and in worlds. For instance, in the story of “Kwimu” the Loon Person had the power to change form. Whitehead recorded, “Now all the time Kwimu is talking to the boy and the girl, teaching them, giving them lessons in the use of Power....Always Kwimu is talking to that girl. Kwimu. Loon Person. Sometimes she sees him in his Loon shape, sometimes he appears to her as a man.”⁶⁴ Kwimu manipulated the power available to him and he existed in the water, on the earth, and in the sky in multiple forms. As Deloria explained, “Each form of life has its own purposes, and there is no form of life that does not have a unique quality to its existence.”⁶⁵ Kwimu had multiple talents, especially as a hunter in the water, but in general all people have power. All “persons” have a story and everything made of power or the life-flow of creation is related.

Even a person’s remnants, such as their bones, contain the indestructible creative forces of the universe. Even after they have seemingly passed into a new place, they retain power and the bones still have the ability to speak. Father Chrestien Le Clercq during the seventeenth century wrote a fairly interesting story pertaining to the beaver and the respect owed to each of

⁶² Whitehead, 4-5.

⁶³ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 118.

⁶⁵ Deloria, 87.

the people they hunted. “The bones of the beaver are not given to the dogs, since these would lose...the senses needed for the hunting of the beaver. No more are they thrown into the rivers, because the Indians fear lest the spirit of the bones of this animal would promptly carry the news to the other beavers, which would desert the country in order to escape the same misfortune.”⁶⁶ Everything had a consciousness.

The past can teach not only how the ancestors walked in the world but that there are different ways to experience it and that every belief is a choice. Where one culture may see value and another misunderstanding, the space between offers the opportunity for growth and change. The framework of the world was such that everything was a part of creation and everything was a person. Shape shifting stories illuminated a world in which people changed form but the consistent identifying substance was that core of their being, their sense of themselves. Alnobak people interacted with the world in such a way that they recognized the consciousness and value of all things but new ideas such as the fur trade changed their purview and in negative ways as evidenced by the story of the beaver bones. Gkisedtanamoogk, Wampanoag elder that married into the modern Mi'kmaq nation, elaborated on the hunt, “[Animals] recognize each other in the forest; they live with each other; they reproduce. Family is family. And our experience of family can be no greater than any other...be it the experience of trees or any of the four leggeds.”⁶⁷

Much can be learned from this history. Ultimately, it began as a history of a small group of villages in interior New England but the view was too narrow and did not do them justice. Their social and spiritual world was much larger than assumed and groups throughout the Northeast maintained contact, intermarried, and established alliances. Their worldview was relatively inclusive and ultimately, the legacy of the past has not faded. This history was

⁶⁶ Le Clercq, 226.

⁶⁷ Gkisedtanamoogk and Frances Hancock, *Anoqcou: Ceremony is Life Itself* (Portland: Astarte Shell Press, Inc., 1993), 18.

interspersed with information still found in the modern community and represented in the archaeological and historical record. If everything was a person and human beings were seen as souls that carried with them their core values, the acceptance of different groups of people is not surprising. While there were many very negative interactions and captives were sometimes tortured and killed, others were adopted as family.

As modern indigenous living historians journey into the past to walk in their ancestors' footsteps, there are a lot of values worth remembering and reincorporating into society. Modern academia created fairly extensive classification systems and anthropological families of indigenous groups in order to better understand people. While indigenous people have sometimes been placed into boxes by those within a society that often orders itself in such ways, it is essential to recognize that indigenous people such as the Alnobak lived in a society that did not subscribe to the same barriers. Crow Dog, a Lakota medicine man wrote about the creation of divisions, "As an Indian you don't divide life into little boxes: A – politics, B – education, C – religion, and so on. It is all one, it is life. You break it up...and it becomes a jigsaw puzzle without meaning."⁶⁸ Modern Alnobak people can utilize values of the past to understand themselves. They descend from a people that when accepted into the community, were valued and could become leaders in the community. Their rise was not related to blood, it was related to their strength of character and dedication to the culture and people of the community. Identity is deeper than blood, skin color, and the physical boundaries used to separate people. The key to identity surrounds the core values of the communities to which all people belong.

⁶⁸ Leonard Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes, *Crow Dog: Four Generations of Sioux Medicine Men* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995) 203.

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