

**THE ABENAKI INDIANS: THEIR
TREATIES OF 1713&1717, AND
A VOCABULARY WITH A
HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION**

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Introduction by Frederic Kidder

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FREDERIC KIDDER

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

BY

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THE ABENAKI INDIANS.

THE present spirit of inquiry into the early history of New England is bringing forth additional facts and evolving new light, by which we are every day seeing more clearly the true motive and incentives for its colonization. But whenever the student turns to investigate the history of the aboriginal tribes, who once inhabited this part of the country, he is struck, not so much with the paucity of materials, as with the complication and difficulties which our earlier and later writers have thrown around the subject, as well as the very different light with which they have viewed it.

The first explorers of our coast, whose intercourse with the Indians was limited to trading for furs and skins, seem to have had a much better opinion of them than Mather, Hubbard, and some still later writers. It is not to be supposed that while a large part of the population were smarting from the distress of almost continued Indian wars, that even the most candid could coolly investigate, and impartially record the history, character, and wants of such a people. But the time has arrived, when, divesting ourselves of all prejudice, we can examine carefully their true situation, and making allowance for their condition, write their history with fairness and candor.

The present sketch is confined to a brief notice of the tribes who inhabited the territory now constituting the

States of Maine and New Hampshire, all of which may be considered as embraced under the name of Abenakis, or more properly Wanbanakkie. It has often been supposed that this name was given them by the French, but it is undoubtedly their original appellation, being derived from Wanbanban, which may be defined the people of aurora borealis or northern light.

It is only now intended to sketch their earlier history, and to trace the various emigrations to the present residence of the Abenakis proper, in Canada; and viewing this tribe as the living representative of our extinct ones, to consider its interesting history, so clearly connected with New England frontier life, although most of that history is but a record of war and wretchedness.

The celebrated discoverer, Capt. John Smith, in his general history, furnishes the earliest and most reliable description of the Indians on the coast of Maine, as they were in 1614; other writers give accounts of tribes there, some of which it is difficult to distinguish or locate; but it may be best to consider all that were residing in the two States above-mentioned as embraced in about eight distinct tribes, namely: Penobscots or Tarrentines, Passamaquodies or Sybayks, Wawenocks, Norridgewoks or Canibas, Assagunticooks, Sokokis or Pequakets, Pennacooks, Malacites or St. Johns.

The Penobscots¹ were probably the most numerous and influential tribe. Their chief or bashaba was said to have been acknowledged as a superior as far as Massachusetts Bay. They occupied the country on both sides of the Penobscot Bay and River; their summer resort being near the sea, but during the winter and spring they inhabited lands

¹ For a pleasant and very well-written account of this tribe, by Hon. Lorenzo Sabine, see the *Christian Examiner* for 1857.

near the falls, where they still reside. It is somewhat strange to find a tribe numbering about five hundred still remaining in their ancient abode, and, though surrounded by whites, retaining their language, religion, and many of the habits and customs of centuries past, with a probability of perpetuating them for ages to come. Their name is from *penobsq*, rock, and *utoret*, a place, literally, rocky-place,—which no doubt refers to the rocky falls in the river near their residence. It is not supposed that many of this tribe emigrated to Canada, although they had constant intercourse with that country.

The Passamaquodies were found occupying the northeastern corner of Maine, if, as it is generally supposed, they are the descendants of those seen and described by De Monts, who spent the winter of 1604 near their present head-quarters. Their subsequent history for more than a century was but a blank, as in all that time they are not mentioned by any writer, or named in any of the treaties, till after the conquest of Canada. This omission is certainly strange, as in the ones of 1713 and 1717 now published in this volume, mere fragments of tribes are named and represented.

Still, if any reliance can be placed on their own traditions, they had resided for generations previous to the Revolution around the lower Schoodic Lake, where the recent discovery of stone hatchets and other implements of an ancient make would seem to verify their assertions. They also point out the place of a fight with the Mohawks, who two centuries ago carried terror into all the Indian villages from Carolina to the Bay of Fundy. It is probable that from their distant inland and secluded position, as well as their limited numbers, they were in no way connected with the various wars which the other tribes waged against the colonists, and so were unnoticed. As their residence on the lake was

nearer Machias than any other available point on the sea coast, it may be that to trade with this people the trading house was established there by the Plymouth Colony, in 1630, and they were often called the Machias Indians. Although their intercourse has long continued with Canada, up to this time they have sent no emigrants there. They number at present between four and five hundred souls, and still adhere to the religious forms taught them by the Jesuits. This tribe designate themselves by the name of Sybayk.¹

✓ The Wawenocks were located on the sea-coast, and inhabited the country from the Sheepscot to the St. George; they are quite fully described by Capt. John Smith, who had much intercourse with them. From their situation on the rivers and harbors, they were much sooner disturbed by the settlements than any other of the tribes in Maine. In 1747 there were but a few families remaining. At the treaty at Falmouth, in 1749, they were associated with the Assagunticooks, among whom they were then settled, and with whom they soon after removed to Canada. The Canibas or Norridgewoks occupied the valley of the Kennebec, from the tide water to its sources; their principal residence was at Norridgewock. Here the Jesuit missionaries, at an early period, taught them their religious faith, and by sharing with them their privations and hardships, obtained a controlling influence over them.

As they inhabited fertile intervale land, they gave more attention to agriculture than any of the neighboring tribes, and appear to have been originally more peaceably inclined towards the whites than some of their neighbors. Residing so far inland, they were but little acquainted with the prow-

¹ Mr. Sabine has given their history in a truthful and friendly communication to the *Christian Examiner* for 1852.

ess of the whites, and sent out their war parties to commit murders and depredations on the unprotected settlers, without expecting a retribution on their own heads. After a long succession of murders and captures in the English settlements, by this tribe, instigated, as was believed, by their priest, Sebastian Rasle, an expedition was sent against them, consisting of about two hundred men, who killed about thirty Indians, including Rasle, and destroyed the place, without the loss of a man. This broke their power, but they continued to reside there for many years, and gradually retired to the St. Francis, — the last family migrating near the end of the last century.

The Assagunticooks were a numerous tribe who inhabited the country along the whole valley of the Androscoggin; and although their lands were not occupied by whites, they were frequently bitter enemies, and were the first to begin a war and the last to make peace. Their location gave them easy access to the settlements, from Casco to Piscataqua, which they improved to glut their thirst for blood and slaughter. About 1750 they moved to Canada and joined the St. Francis tribe. They could then muster about one hundred and fifty warriors, and being much the most numerous tribe that emigrated there, it is supposed they had the greatest influence, and that their dialect is more truly perpetuated than any other in that confederacy.

The Sokokis inhabited the country bordering on the Saco River, but were mostly limited to its head waters. Their villages were located on the alluvial lands in what is now Fryeburg, Me., and Conway, N. H. The Pegwakets and Ossipees were either identical with or branches of this tribe. In 1725 Capt. John Lovewell with about fifty soldiers, on a scouting adventure in the vicinity, fell in with a war party of the tribe, and a sanguinary battle ensued, disastrous to both parties. Their chief, Paugus, was slain;