The Wabanaki Indian Collection

Compiled by Mary B. Davis

This collection contains items from the Passamaquoddy Indian Papers,#9014 and the Abenaki Language Collection, #9045

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Preface

The Passamaquoddy Papers, the Joseph Laurent Abenaki Language Collection, and the Micmac Manuscript comprise the Library's Wabanaki Collection. Dated documents range from 1778 to 1913; much of the material is undated. The condition of all three components of the collection is generally poor. The Passamaquoddy Papers, which document the political life for members of that nation during the 19th century, contain many fragments and partial documents impossible to put into proper context in this collection. Using information from other sources, scholars may be able to identify these materials in the future. The Abenaki Language Collection consists of bound manuscripts (and one unbound document) in the Abenaki language which largely pertain to Roman Catholic religious services. They were obtained from the Laurent family, prominent in Abenaki affairs in Odanak, Quebec, after they had sustained a fire. Many of the hand-written volumes are partially charred, resulting in losses of text which will never be retrieved. The Micmac Manuscript is written in the syllabary (sometimes called hieroglyphics) developed by Father Chretian Le Clerq in the 17th century to aid in teaching prayers to Canadian Indians. The Reverend Christian Kauder later used these same characters in his Micmac catechism published in the 1860s. This manuscript seems to be a handwritten prayer book for use in Roman Catholic services. In poor condition, it remains a link to interpreting the styles and approaches of Roman Catholic missionaries to Canadian Micmac converts.

The Wabanakis, by Nicholas N. Smith*

Early Missionary Contacts

The Wabanaki include the St. Francis, Penboscot, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Micmac Indians. They were among the first Indians to have an affiliation with Europeans. By 1610 there were contacts with adventurers, traders, explorers, fishermen, missionaries, and settlers. Missionaries began working among the Wabanaki early in the 17th century establishing missions on the Atlantic coast, the St. John River, the Penobscot River, and at Norridgewolk. Capuchins, Recollects, Spiritans, and Jesuits played significant roles in establishing and maintaining the Wabanaki missions. Good relationships developed with the Roman Catholic missionaries. The Indians looked to the missionaries as European representatives who had come to help Indians for the welfare of the band in their relationships with the Europeans. Some were made chiefs. From these early contacts the Indians developed advantageous policies that permitted them to adapt slowly to European ways while retaining their basic Wabanaki lifestyle and culture.

The Roman Catholic religion became a strong political influence on the Wabanaki. In the Wabanaki lands

under English domination, the Indians asked the English for Catholic missionaries, but were denied them for they were banned in those colonies. When the French fleet arrived in Newport, during the Revolution, a Maine Indian delegation went to Newport in the hopes of persuading a priest to accompany them back to their villages. For many years the Maine Indian Missions were denied priests. It was not until the 19th century with the establishment of a Catholic Diocese in Massachusetts that the Maine missions were able to obtain priests on a regular basis. For many years the Maine Indian Missions remained the largest Catholic congregations in Maine.

Wabanaki Languages and Language Study

Contemporary linguistic scholars distinguish three major divisions of Proto Algonquian Wabanaki languages: Micmac, Eastern Abnaki, and Western Abnaki. The early missionaries were not so perceptive and their religious renderings are a mixture of the linguistic groupings. LeClerq began to develop a Micmac pictographic system of writing the religious order of service as early as 1616. Rasles, the famous Abnaki missionary, compiled a dictionary in the early 1700's. His linguistics must have been based on that of Drillette. Rasles was unique, remaining with one group of Indians for most of his missionary career. Ciquard, who served the Penobscot in the 1790's and was assigned to the St. Francis about 1800, was like most missionaries receiving a new assignment after a few years. The 18th century was a time of turmoil for many Wabanaki whose villages were disbanded and split, some going here and others there. Often there were linguistic differences between neighboring bands. The interpreters used by the missionaries could have been newcomers with a different linguistic background.

Most of the new wave of missionaries who came to the Maine Indian reserves in the 19th century were young non-English speaking Europeans. These priests inherited manuscript material for the order of the Catholic services from their predecessors and attempted to improve on their work. Vetromile spent much of his time working with Passamaquoddy linguistics. He became obsessed with the idea of publishing a Passamaquoddy prayerbook or "Good Book," a project that Father John Bapst, head of the Maine Mission, thought unimportant. Vetromile found backing for his project from New York friends who published the book. In the middle of the 20th century several Passamaquoddy and Maliseet were asked to translate several of the prayers. They were not able to, saying that the prayers were of another dialect; they had been taught to say the prayers by missionaries and a St. Francis Indian, but they could not translate them. It seems to be a similar situation to that of the Mistassini Cree who have used prayerbooks in Moose Cree for over a hundred years. In spite of the linguistic problem, many of the Wabanaki asked to have their prayerbook buried with them. Vetromile also compiled a dictionary. The three volume manuscript is in the Smithsonian, but has never been published.

Hieroglyphic Writing System

Vetromile encouraged his seminary friend and missionary neighbor, Christian Kauder, to publish a prayerbook in Micmac hieroglyphics, a system he claimed to invent. Kauder found backing for publishing the work from his friends at the Ludwigs-Verein in Vienna, Austria, the organization that originally sent Kauder to the Micmac Mission. Kauder has often been mistakenly identified as the originator of the hieroglyphic system used by the Micmac. It was begun by LeClerq, an early missionary to the Micmacs and further developed by others such as Maillard. The British Museum has a copy of the Lord's Prayer and The Creed in this Micmac system done on birch bark that was collected by John Thomson of HMS Fly from Newfoundland Micmac in 1791 (Add. ms. 11038, fo. 13-16), 75 years prior to Kauder's publication. For many years devout Micmac copied the prayers, hymns, and order of service by hand. Micmac manuscripts of a nonreligious nature that use this system are rare. At the present time Father Norman Thibodeau, O.F.M. is involved in a new translation of the prayerbook for his Tobique Maliseet congregation. Missionary correspondence has been a major source of historical documentation

concerning the Wabanaki.

Passamaquoddy History

The Passamaquoddy are considered the eastern group of Maliseet whose hunting territories were located from New Brunswick's Bay of Fundy to Machias, Maine, and perhaps extended as far south as Bar Harbor, Maine; and west almost to Lincoln, Maine, meeting both Penobscot and Maliseet territories. They were adept at hunting sea mammals as well as land mammals and depended on both for their survival. The Neptune family can be traced as producing Passamaquoddy chiefs, son following father in the ancient tradition, from the 17th century. A list of chiefs follows:

1689 circa Michael Nepton
1725 circa Peter Paul Neptune
1718-1778 Jean Baptiste Neptune
1833 Francis Joseph Neptune
1875 John Francis Neptune

Maine Law decreed that after John's death chiefs would be elected biennially. However, since 1875 the Neptune family has continued to dominate most elections.

Although both English and French claimed the area between the Penobscot and the St. Croix River, the French dominated the area until 1689. The Wabanaki supported the French against the English during the Colonial Wars until it was apparent that the French were going to be defeated. The Abnaki village of Norridgewolk on the Kennebec River was considered in English territory. Their priests Druillette and Rasles were active and politically motivated so that Boston felt threatened by these unpredictable neighbors. In 1725 the English attacked and completely destroyed the village. In 1728 an attempt was made to rebuild the mission but it did not regain the importance of the original mission and was abandoned. The inhabitants joined neighboring bands or went to Canada to find a new village. Eventually Odanak, Quebec, became the central St. Francis village. During the Colonial Wars no raids, battles or skirmishes took place on Passamaquoddy land, although they joined in sending participants on many raids in New England and the names of their chiefs appear on treaties with Penobscot, St. Francis, and Maliseet representatives.

Role in the Revolutionary War

During the Revolution the Passamaquoddy placed their allegiance with the Americans whose fight for independence appealed to them. Col. John Allan was appointed as the American military agent to work with the Passamaquoddy. The Maliseet chiefs, Ambroise Bear (St. Aubin) and Pierre Toma has under their control a larger number of men than the Neptunes did. One of Allan's first assignments was to obtain the backing of the Maliseet. It was considered a great victory for the Americans when several hundred Maliseet and a few Micmac joined the Passamaquoddy at Machias, Maine. The Indians retained their way of life, living together as was their custom, and hunting game for food. There was little actual fighting, but the Americans had the satisfaction of knowing that several hundred Maliseet would not join English forces. Their biggest contribution was as spies going to Canada and returning with news of the English plans, and attacking English coastal shipping. The Indians played a leading role in preventing an English attack on Machias by sea from being successful. The story of a young Indian lad who shot and killed the English officer of a landing barge, resulting in the English retreat, has become an important traditional tale among the Passamaquoddy.

When the outlook seemed unfavorable for the Americans, Pierre Toma began to make overtures to the

English. As Maliseet lands were on the Canadian side of the border, it was important for the Maliseet to show support for the English. The Maliseet thought that they had been ignored in the Treaty of Paris (1763) because they had supported the defeated French.

Aftermath of the Revolution

The Indians expected to have a role in the treaty making after the Revolution. By 1796 it was apparent that they were not to be included in the treaty. Chief Francis Joseph Neptune went to Boston to remind the Americans of their role in the Revolution. He obtained a guarantee of Passamaquoddy lands and was given a reservation at Pleasant Point, Maine.

Passamaquoddy guides were procured by the Boundary Commission to settle the border between the U.S. and Canada. Neptune insisted that the St. Croix was not the river that Champlain had originally named St. Croix, but that the next river to the northeast was. Passamaquoddy hunting territories were on both sides of the proposed border. Neptune wanted all the Passamaquoddy hunting territories to be under U.S. jurisdiction. The members of the Boundary Commission were quite vague about the extent of the land involved in the boundary dispute and were glad to settle on today's St. Croix river for the boundary.

Generally, the period following the American Revolution became the most difficult economically for the Wabanaki. Their participation in the Colonial Wars and the Revolution assured them economic benefits. The Wabanaki were hunters spending much of their time in isolated hunting camps. The additional pressure of several hundred people on the Machias area's hunting territories had drastically depleted the game, resulting in a shortage of food. They were far from large population centers that could provide sources of income. The basket industries developed during this period and by the middle of the 19th century Indian craftwork became their largest single source of income.

The Passamaquoddy chiefs were noted hunters whose territory included Campobello Island. Some, like the chief, decided to remain in their remote hunting camps; others decided to create a European style village on the newly acquired reserve lands. Those attempting to form the new community found many problems in their unfamiliar situation. The chief, in his hunting territory, was quite unaware of the problems that his people had in their new venture at Pleasant Point. As time went on, problems became more complex. Interaction with the white community increased. A church was built on reserve lands soon followed by a school. Deacon Socabasin, son-in-law of Chief Joseph Neptune, built the first frame house on the reserve, became fluent in English and served as tribal spokesman when it was necessary to negotiate with the whites. He led regular church services when no priest was available. Later, it became one of the chief's duties to lead church worship in the absence of priest. At this time the priest hardly knew the chief, who rarely visited the community. Someone was needed who could act and make decisions. In the absence of the chief, the New Party was formed that attempted to govern the village. The strife between the New and Old (traditionalists) Parties lasted about 20 years, terminating when a treaty was negotiated with Maine in 1852 guaranteeing that John Francis Neptune would remain chief as long as he lived, and establishing another village at Peter Dana's Point for the New Party who could elect their own chief.

The ocean was an important source for food as well as income from those inclined to hunt. The hunters were expert canoemen, skillfully maneuvering their small craft on the open sea in their quest for sea mammals such as seals, porpoise, and even whales valued for their oil as well as meat. Most Passamaquoddy retained their traditional values.

The 19th and 20th Centuries

During the 19th and 20th centuries the Passamaquoddy generally maintained a low profile except for an occasional hunting infraction to test claims of Indian treaty rights. It is doubtful if the Indians ever won their case, but they were persistent in believing that their treaties gave them certain Indian rights that had long been ignored by white society. Slowly the leaders collected papers and reports bolstering their theory that they did have certain meaningful treaty rights. Most refused to accept the right to vote in state and national elections fearing that this action would mean the loss of their Indian rights. In the middle of the 20th century there were a series of meetings pertaining to land claims. The Indians were positive that the State owed them a significant sum of money for land, but they did not know how to file a successful claim. It was a big surprise to the people of Maine when the Indians won their land case against Maine and the successful investment of their money has been an even bigger surprise.

The Passamaquoddy Papers

The Passamaquoddy Papers in the Huntington Free Library are particularly valuable because they contain important material, hitherto overlooked, which permit a better understanding of the local political scene and the acculturation process from 1775-1875. They are evidence of the bitter political struggle that existed between John Francis Neptune and his New Party rivals for the leadership role of the band during a very difficult period for the Passamaquoddy. The collection is particularly valuable as it supplements material in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston; Archives of the Diocese of Maine; Lem Collection, Dinand Library, College of the Holy Cross; Archives of the Maine State Library; Archives of the Maine Historical Society; and other collections.

*Nicholas N. Smith, a scholar of Wabanaki history and culture, is the compiler of WABIB, a computerized bibliography of materials relating to the Wabanaki culture, language, and history.

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Guide to the Microfilm Text

The papers in the Wabanaki Collection at the Huntington Free Library are on one roll of microfilm. Its contents, which fall into three separate sections, are outlined below. The frame numbers refer to the frame in the microfilm where each section starts.

PASSAMAQUODDY PAPERS, #9014. Starting frame 12

1. Papers Relating to Governorship of Francis Joseph Neptune, 1778-1834 (14 documents) Starting frame 015

2. Papers of John Frances, 1830-1875 (24 documents) Starting frame 065

3. Dealings with the Iroquois Grand Council of Chiefs at Caughnawaga, 1847-1865 (15 documents) Starting frame 124

4. Organizing Claims to Washington for Services During the Revolution, 1849-1860 (13 documents) Starting frame 173

5. Canadian Papers, 1849-1860 (6 documents) Starting frame 208

6. Pleasant Point Tribal Affairs, 1891-1913 (6 documents) Starting frame 224

7. Economic Documents, 1839-1866 (9 documents) Starting frame 240

8. Missionary Correspondence, Religious Text, 1827-1833 (4 documents) Starting frame 258

9. Charity Letters, Most Undated (4 documents) Starting frame 274