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FOUL PLAY ON THE KENNEBEC:

The Historical Background of Fort Western and the Demise of the Abenaki Nation

by Harald E. L. Prins

Living on the banks of the Kennebec River, one is bound to have questions about its nature. Being an anthropologist, I am primarily interested in the cultural history of this beautiful stream. As a European, I imagine how other foreigners may have felt when they arrived here as sailors, soldiers, and settlers in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. But, as an ethnologist who has worked for several years with the Indian peoples in South and North America, I am also conscious of the pain and havoc Europeans brought to the indigenous families in this region.

From the moment Champlain steered his French pinnace to the mouth of the Kennebec in 1604, this river turned into a flow of contention. For more than 150 years, competing groups of men tried to gain and maintain control over the vital arteries in Northeast America. Hunters, fishers, trappers, and traders, followed by merchants, missionaries, and mercenaries traveled along these riverine highways in the pursuit of subsistence. By means of the Kennebec, they could reach the St. Lawrence, Androscoggin, Allagash, St. John, Sebasticook, Penobscot, Machias, and the St. Croix rivers. On the banks of these rivers, hundreds of archaeological sites indicate the stations in this extensive aquatic communication system. Control over such channels secured command over the flow of commodities and information, hence over wealth. In the often bloody game of political chess, the indigenous tribes became the tragic victims of a morbid colonization venture. One of the remaining "rooks" of this macabre game is, of course, Fort Western.

Today, there is very little to remind us of the native cultures of this area. The remains are buried under rubbish, some artifacts are preserved in collections, and a few memories linger on. The Abenaki, rightful heirs to the best land in Maine, now live mostly on reservations east of the Penobscot and in Canada. In contrast to this native heritage, the historical remains of the invading nations are omnipresent and well preserved, frequently at great cost. It seems ironic that Fort Western, financed by a group of wealthy Massachusetts entrepreneurs known as the Kennebec Proprietors, is maintained as our major link to the cultural history of the region. Built in 1754 as a stronghold to contain the Abenaki Indians, this fort symbolizes coercion by force of arms and is a tangible piece of evidence of the expropriation of the native peoples in the lands which they called Wabanaki, "Land of the Morning Light".

In the following article, I will present the "Red" party on the historical chess-board, and in particular, the group of Indians known as Canibas, Kennebecs, or Norridgewocks, who formed part of the larger Abenaki Nation. Other Branches of this nation, also known as "Eastern Indians," lived on the various other rivers, lakes, bays, and islands, between the Saco and the St. John. These regional tribes are sometimes named after the rivers along which they lived, or after the location of their villages, such as Panaouamske and Pentagoet in the Penobscot area, Norridgewock (or Nanrantsouak) on the Kennebec, Ammasokanti on the Sandy River, Narankamigouak on the Androscoggin River, and Pigwacket on the Saco River. Also included are the Abenaki from St. Francis, known as the Arresaguntacooks, and those who lived in Becancour, who were called the Wawenocks, both of which were located on the St. Lawrence River. Finally, the Maliseets and Passamaquoddy Indians are often understood to form part of the greater Abenaki Nation as well. The Micmacs, on the other hand, are usually considered as a distinct Indian nation, closely allied to the Abenakis and sharing their fate.

The Kennebec had been gradually settled by Whites from as early as 1607, when the Chief Justice of England, John Popham, established a colony of "convicted felons" on the Sagadahock. One of the major reasons this colony failed was that Popham, like the Frenchman Cartier sixty years earlier, had ransacked the jails in Europe for any sort of criminal he could find to join his colonizing enterprise in the New World. According to an English critic of the time, America was used as an English "sinck...to drayne away their filth." And others would wonder: "If the planters be such a leap thither from the gallows, can any hope for cream from scum?"

Not surprisingly, the Anglo-Indian relationship was hostile from the outset. In 1605 the English Captain Weymouth had kidnapped five Pemaquid Indians, two of whom were used in 1607 to guide Popham's colonizing enterprise to the lower Kennebec. One of Popham's captains, Gilbert, explored upriver until he reached the place the Abenaki called **Cushnoc**, where the party camped on a "flatt low island" (Cushnoc Island below Coon's rapid). Here, the

English encountered the local headman **Sebenoa**, in whose company were certain Indians who spoke in "broken Inglyse." Visiting the Indian village, Gilbert found "neere fifty able men, very strong and tall, (armed) with bowes and arrowes." According to **Biard**, a French missionary, who visited in 1612 the village of the Kennebec **sagamore Meteourmite**, Gilbert's Englishmen "repelled the Indians disgracefully; they beat them, they abused them, they set their dogs on them with little restraint." According to an oral tradition among the Kennebec Indians, as recorded many years later, these White colonists had enticed friendly Indians into Popham's Fort St. George, under the pretense of trade, "and causing them to take the drag ropes of a loaded cannon, fired off the piece when the Indians were in line, and blew them to pieces." Meanwhile, back home, their celebrated poet Shakespeare wrote in his play **The Tempest**: "Any strange beast there makes a man: when they will not give a doitt to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian."

Immediately following the departure of Popham's

"scum," fishermen arrived to profit from the wealth of cod, haddock, and other seafood which they shipped to Europe and the West Indies. They also traded furs and sold the Indians wine, aquavit, rum, tobacco, pipes, biscuits, knives, kettles, and other merchandise. Confronted with the revolutionary changes in their world, the native communities adapted their styles of life to the new conditions, thereby profoundly changing the traditional cultures in the area. Biard, the Jesuit captured in 1613 by an English raider on the coast of Maine, described the Indians: "...in Summer they often wear our capes, and in Winter our bed-blankets, which they improve with trimming and wear double. They are also quite willing to make use of our hats, shoes, caps, woolens and shirts... for we trade them all of these commodities for their furs."

One year later, another English raider, Captain Hunt, appeared near the mouth of the Kennebec and kidnapped 24 Indians on Monhegan Island, who were sold as slaves at the Spanish port of Malaga. Thereafter, epidemics ravaged the entire coast of Maine, and reached as far as Cape Cod. Thousands of Indians perished. Morton, an English settler, wrote: "The hand of God fell heavily upon them, with such a mortall stroake, that they died on heape as they lay in their houses and the living that they were able to shift for themselves would runne away, and let them dy...And the bones, and skulls upon the severall places of their habitations, made such a spectacle that as I travailed in that Forrest...it seemed to mee a new Golgotha."

This hellish scene of horror was praised in Europe as the Promised Land, the New Canaan. English **Pilgrims**, believing themselves to be the Chosen People, sailed to take this Indian Country in possession: "The place they had thoughts on," wrote the Pilgrim Governor of Plymouth Colony later, "was some of these vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are frutfull and fitt for habitation, being devoyd of all civill inhabitants wher ther are only salvage and brutish men, which range up and downe, like otherwise then the wild beasts of the same." Only seven years after their arrival on Cape Cod, these Pilgrims obtained a patent for "a fitt trading place" on the Kennebec, where previously fishermen had supplied the native peoples with anything they could exchange for the valuable beaver and other furs. Bradford, the Governor of Plymouth and an acute merchant, complained that the Kennebec Indians were "already abundantly furnished with pieces, powder, and shot, swords, rapiers, and javelins; all which arms and munition is this year (1628) plentifully and publicly sold unto them." Moreover, he noted, "not only corne, but also such other commodities as the fishermen had traded with them, as coats, shirts, ruggs, & blankets, pease, prunes, & c.; and what they could not have out of England, they bought of the fishing ships, and so carried on their business as well as they could." Quite naturally, the Kennebec Indians also became exposed to alcoholism. A Jesuit historian, Du Creux (1644), observed that the Abenakis of this region were "certainly addicted to the intoxication...This drunkenness is a consequence of their intercourse with the English with whom they are much in contact?"

In 1637, **Abenakis** from the Kennebec tried to obtain more commodities by tapping into the flow of furs on the St.

Lawrence River and attracting the trade toward the Kennebec, instead of Quebec. This attempt to establish themselves as middlemen at the expense of the French in Canada was prevented by the European traders who had monopolized this commerce for about three decades. At the same time, **Mohawks** (one of the 5 Iroquois Nations) tried to expand the fur-trade activities from the Hudson River to the Great lakes region and the St. Lawrence river area, and to direct the flow of wealth to their tribal headquarters near the Dutch trading posts on the Hudson River. Both the Abenakis and the Mohawks did become major middlemen in the fur-trade and controlled the flow of **wampum**, or shell-money, into the hinterland. Via their respective partners in the trade, the English and the Dutch, they obtained this wampum from the **Pequods**, until this nation was destroyed in 1637. Afterwards both White nations gained direct access to this form of wealth, used as a native means of exchange throughout the hinterlands of the fur-trade. Hubbard, the Puritan minister in Massachusetts, commented: "But whatever the honey in the mouth of that beast of trade, there was a deadly sting in the tail; For it is said, they (the Dutch) first brought our people to the knowledge of **wampampeag**; and the acquaintance there with occasioned the Indians of these parts to learn the skill to make it, by which, as by the exchange of money, they purchased store of artillery, both from the English, Dutch, and French, which hath proved a fatal business to those that were concerned in it." Not incorrectly, this English protestant observed that "the love of money is the root of all evil." The scramble for America was now in full force and the **Leviathan** turned its claws to Indian Country, where "each man became a wolf to his fellow man." (Hobbes 1651) Total villages went up in flames and entire Indian nations were annihilated.

In 1640, a group of 20 Abenakis accompanied an English trader to Quebec, where the French forbade him to penetrate deeper into their commercial empire and sent him to Tadoussac. Meanwhile, several **Algonquins** from the St. Lawrence River areas had come and settled among the Abenaki of the Kennebec. Three years later, an Abenaki chieftain was baptized in Quebec, and became the godson of the French Governor, thus forming part of a ritual kinship system which connected all "Christian Indians" in Canada, who formed a new league. Facing hostile pressure from the Mohawks, the Kennebec Indians tried to obtain support from these French Indians, living in the mission of **Sillery** near Quebec. Two years later, in 1646, a party of Abenakis in three canoes traveled from the Kennebec to the French in Canada and reported that "a Malady which caused vomiting of blood had destroyed a good part of their nation," and that their neighbours, the **Etechemins**, had a bloody war with the Indians of Gaspé Peninsula, with whom they had been in conflict before. These Abenakis requested the aid of a **Jesuit** missionary, a "Black-robe," which would allow them to cultivate an alliance with the Mission Indians on the St. Lawrence, as a defense against the Iroquois League and other enemies. The missionary, **Dreuilletes**, came with these Abenakis to their village **Nazanchouak** (Norridgewock), where the local headman Oumamanradok welcomed the Jesuit with "a salvo of arquebus shots." With several Abenaki men, the French priest traveled downriver to the

place "within sight of the English themselves, who live at **Koussinok**, the place where the cemetery of these good people (the Abenakis) is situated, because they hold two large assemblies on this spot, one in the spring, and the other in the autumn."

Having survived the Iroquois attacks on their villages in the 1660's, the Abenakis of the Kennebec saw themselves confronted with the consequences of the second phase in the Puritan conquest. The guerilla war under the **Wampanoag** sachem "**King Philip**" of Massachusetts signified the armed uprising of virtually all subjected and neighbouring Indian nations of the English colonies in New England. The **Narragansetts** and the **Nipmucks** joined the Wampanoags, and others followed suit. The chain reaction also shook the inhabitants of the Kennebec, where the Indian sachem **Robin Hood** and his fellow tribesmen were suddenly forced to give up their arms. An English fur-trader in Pemaquid reacted: "these Indianes Amongst us live most by Hunting...how we Can Take Away their Armes whose livelyhood dependeth of it...I doubt of such Actions whether they may not be forced to go to the French for Reliefs or fight Against us, having nothing for their Support Almost in these parts but their guns!" Fishermen on the lower Kennebec forced some of the local Indians to give up their arms, and vowed to "kill any Indian they met." On Monhegan Island, the English offered a bounty of five pounds, "for every Indian that should be brought in." In addition to other grievances, this unilateral disarmament of the Kennebec Indians forced some tribesmen to join the uprising, while the majority took refuge on the Penobscot. Throughout New England, trading posts were closed down and hundreds of Indians were sold as slaves to Spain, Barbadoes, Bermudas, or the West Indies. The **Praying-Indians**, living in Protestant mission towns near Boston, were herded together in a concentration camp on an island off the coast. Many of these "English Indians",

however, joined the uprising under King Philip.

The General Court of Massachusetts, which also governed Maine, decreed in February 1676 that "every person or persons that shall surprize, slay, or bring in prisoner any such Indian on the south side of the Piscataqua River, he or they shall be allowed three pounds per head." An open hunting season on Indians in New England was declared, and "all trade with the Indians (was) prohibited for the future." In this total war of extermination, entire communities fell victim to the ruthless actions. Fearing these mopping up raids, many Indian families sought refuge in the Eastern frontier or in Canada, where a large number of Abenakis settled in the French mission village of Sillery. In the **Jesuit Relations** of that year, the local missionary noted: "The extraordinary contempt in which (the English) held these peoples, whom they have ever treated very harshly, led them to believe that it would be very easy, either to destroy them utterly, or to reduce them to such a condition that they would never again have to fear a similar revolt among many of them."

But, as far as the Abenakis on the Kennebec River were concerned, the fight for freedom had just begun. It would take the Boston elite in Massachusetts another eighty years, in which six more "Indian Wars" were fought, before these Englishmen could claim themselves "Proprietors" of the Kennebec Valley. Until the construction of Fort Western and Fort Halifax, in the 1750's, the Abenaki warriors remained master over the river above Merrymeeting Bay.

Following the King Philip's War, which was the third phase in the Puritan conquest of Indian Country, another war broke out, commonly known as the King William's War (1688-1699). Two years after its conclusion, Abenakis from **Norridgewock**, **Ammasokanti**, and **Narrakamagog**, came to Casco Bay where they met with an English delegation from Massachusetts. The Indians requested "to have a Trading house erected at Merry Meeting", but refused to send any of



Reconstructed view of Norridgewock in the summer of 1703. This is the author's perception, based on historical accounts, of how the village may have looked some months before the Abenakis abandoned it to seek refuge in the French missions along the St. Lawrence River in Canada. According to the Boston Newsletter of March that year, the English "advise of a large Fort, meeting-house (i.e. church) & School-house that were erected, the Fort encompassed 3 quarters of an acre of ground built with Palisado's wherein were 12 Wigwams but no Enemy...The Meeting-house was built of Timber 60 Foot long, 25 Foot wide, & 18 Foot studd ceiled with Clap-boards, in it were only a few old Popish Relicks...at which they burnt, near to it was a Field of Corn ungathered..."

their children to the English as the requested sign of mutual friendship "because Moxus his son when he was sent to France, he died there." One Abenaki child previously taken by the English had died in Boston, while another lived in London.

Two years after the 1701 meeting, another period of open warfare raged in the lands of these Eastern Indians. This war was known as the Queen Anne's War, which lasted from 1703 until 1713. Like the Indian families from the neighboring mission villages of Ammasokanti on Sandy River, Narakamagog on the Androscoggin, and Panaouamske on the Penobscot, the Norridgewocks under their sachem **Taxous** alias **Moxus** deserted their village on the Kennebec River. Quite some time after these Abenakis left the area, about 300 English troops, including 20 Indian scouts, marched through the woods on snowshoes from the Piscataqua River to Norridgewock. When they reached the Indian village in February 1705, they found the Abenaki headquarters deserted. The English burnt the fort with its church and school to the ground. Several years later, c. 1707, part of the Norridgewock tribe returned to their homeland on the Kennebec. In 1711, **Father Rasle** and the remainder of the Abenaki refugees left the Jesuit mission at Becancour (**Wawenock**) and returned to Norridgewock. There, at **Old Point**, these Abenakis rebuilt their village, where **Taxous**, the old war-chief, became their **sachem**.

The Queen Anne's War ended when the French and English signed the **Treaty of Utrecht** in 1713, in which the French agreed to give up their claims on **Acadia**, the land between the Kennebec and Cape Breton. As a result of this cession, the Abenakis lost their military support from the French on the coast of Maine and in Nova Scotia. The Indians were unable to stem the influx of English colonists encroaching on their lands. The Norridgewocks complained: "We are not eble to hendar thir settling. (The English) are many in number." Indeed, after this Treaty of 1713, the English had won almost total control over the coastal lands and built five new forts in the lower Kennebec area. They settled Irish, German, and English Protestants in new towns as far as the head of Merymeeting Bay, where they built **Fort Richmond** in 1719. Abenakis from St. Francis and Becancour were agitated about these developments and wrote to the Norridgewocks, chiding: "that in giving away their lands, they kild themselves and (us) too?" They told the English that they "had fought three times for this land and would fight again for it was never sold...Know, that we all who inhabit this vast continent will, whensoever we please, as long as we exist, unite to expell all foreigners from it, be they who they may?" Equally determined to occupy the rich lands on the Kennebec, the English planned to get rid of the "**Black rogues**" and their Jesuit missionaries, and offered a reward of 200 pounds for the capture of the Jesuit priest at Norridgewock.

Although some of the Kennebec Indians, such as **Colonel Abombazeen** tried to mediate in the conflict by riding on horseback to Boston and back to the Kennebec, others believed that they should make a stand. The pro-English faction gained the upper hand in the tribe, when their old sachem **Taxous**, alias **Moxum**, died in 1721 and his nephew (?) **Ouikouiroumenit** was elected in his place. Alarmed by

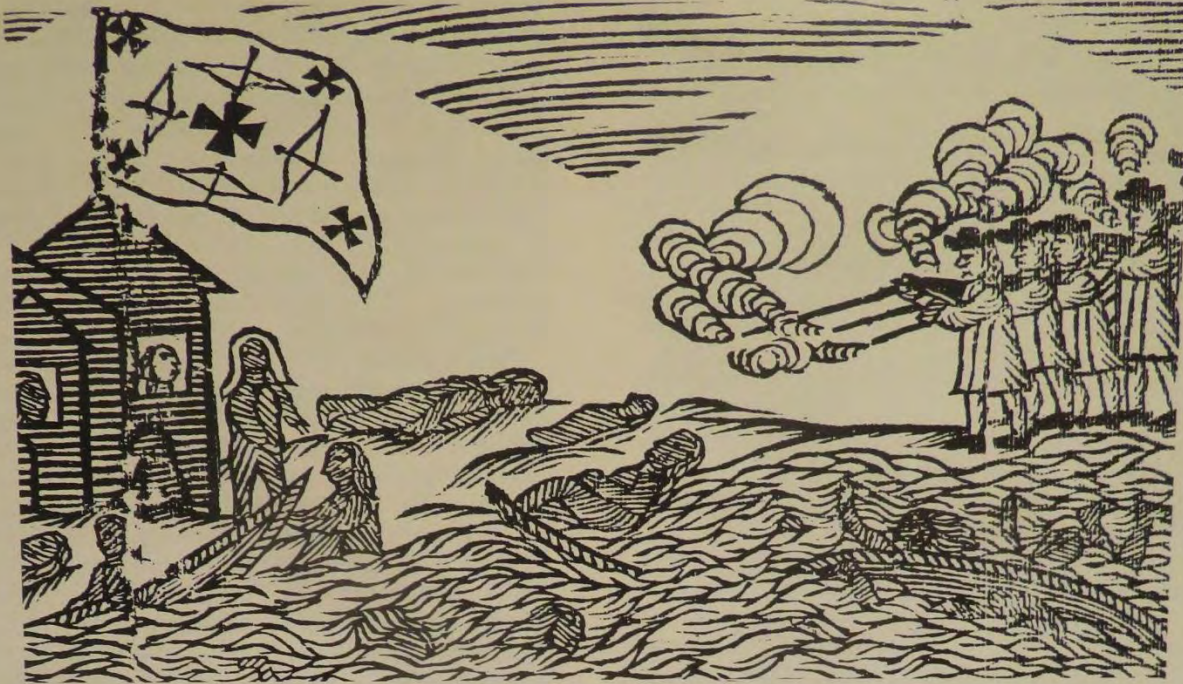
this event, the French missionary warned the Abenakis in Canada and the Governor in Quebec, because this change in the village politics of Norridgewock eliminated the role of this village as a bastion in the defense of Canada. The entire league of Jesuit mission villages was pulled together under command of **Father LaChasse**, and an impressive delegation of 250 warriors belonging to the Abenaki tribes of St. Francis and Becancour, Penobscot and Norridgewock, as well as those from Meductic on the St. John's and Passamaquoddies assembled near Arrowsick on the lower Kennebec. Joining these Abenakis and their allies were some Hurons from the mission of **Lorette**, as well as others.

The following summer, the Indian league, which now included a large Micmac force, attached the English on Arrowsick Island. About 60 warriors in 20 canoes took part in this destruction of the English settlement, about which the Abenaki had complained for many years. Norridgewock turned into a rendezvous for war-parties on their way down river to attack the English colony on the coast of Maine. According to a Memorial of 1718, there were at this time "two tribes of Indians, one of them known by the name of the Kennebeck Indians: one hundred fighting men, who live chiefly at a place called Neridgiawack, within a sort of fort, made of wood,... There are two or three other small settlements of Indians, that may make out in all fifty fighting men." The other tribe lived on the Penobscot. and counted 150 warriors. The total number of warriors in the region "does not exceed 500 fighting men."

In 1724, after two years of open warfare in the Kennebeck Valley, 200 English conscripts and three Mohawk bounty hunters attacked the Abenaki village at Norridgewock. An English historian, **Captain Penhallow**, celebrated "the wonderful Victory obtained August 12, 1724, over the bold and Bloody Tribe at Narridgewalk, and their sudden Destruction that Memorable Day, was the singular Work of God." As a righteous Puritan, Penhallow was glad that the Roman Catholic priest, whom he described as "the Ghostly Father of those perfiduous Savages," had been killed. For the sake of propaganda, the English claimed to have exterminated "about one hundred men, women, and children, which is the greatest slaughter we have made upon them for many years, or indeed over the Eastern Tribes."

The truth, however, was different. English troops returned from their raid on the fortified Indian village at Old Point with no more than 26 scalps and 4 captives. Fourteen scalps were those of Indian children, while 7 belonged to murdered women. About 150 Norridgewocks escaped, and of the 60 warriors in the village, the English had managed to kill no more than 6 fighting men. The killers received bounty for the scalps, which were taken to Boston. One of these belonged to the old Jesuit missionary, **Father Rasle**, who had lived with the Abenaki for more than 30 years. The village of Norridgewock, including its church, was burned to the ground and the corn fields destroyed. Struck, but not wiped out, the surviving Norridgewocks once again took refuge in the French missions for the Abenakis at St. Francis and at Becancour, where their kinfolk lived.

The following year, English troops marched to the Abenaki village of the **Penobscots**. Two years previously they had burned the stockaded village, its church and 23



In the summer of 1724, four English companies of militia, in total more than two hundred soldiers, under command of Captain Harmon, attacked the Abenaki village of Norridgewock, the mission Father Rasle, the Jesuit priest. Captain Penhallow reported that the troops "gote within sight of the Fort" on August 12. He notes that there "were 60 fighting men and about 90 women and children; the enemy were so secure, that our men gote within pistoll shot, before they were discovered; who then fired a full volley, but hurted none; upon which our men fell on with great courage and resolution." On the French side in Canada, Governor de Vaudreuil reported: "Father Ralle, the ancient missionary of the Abenakis, in whose head the English had last year set a price...was killed... The bravest of the warriors, who had held out a long time against the English...flung themselves into the river like all the rest, and the English Indians pursued them to the water's edge with their shots. Firing, as they did, unimpeded, against a mass of frightened people who were crossing a river, some in canoes and some swimming..."
 Woodcut by James Franklin, Boston 1724 (in: Reilly 1975:1160)

houses, and now returned to destroy the rebuilt settlement. Another scouting party moved to destroy the village of **Pigwacket** on the Upper Saco River, but was defeated by the Pigwacket warriors under Chief Paugus, who was killed. The survivors left their homeland and also found refuge among the French in Canada, where they joined other Abenaki families. Forced to accept the English terms of peace, the Penobscots signed the **Dummer's Treaty** at Casco Bay, in 1726. They realized that further armed resistance was futile. No more than 2,500 Indians were left in the land between Canso in Nova Scotia and Boston, a region which was at that period inhabited by more than 46,000 Whites. In other words, approximately 5 percent of the total population in this area was native.

According to **Loron**, the Penobscot orator, the Norridgewocks were "scattered among them tribes..We suppose they are at Arreseguntacook and Weweenock?" In the fall of 1726, **Toxis (II)** alias **Moxus**, the new sachem of the Norridgewocks, wrote to Captain Gyles, truck-master at **Fort St. George's** on the coast, that they desired to return to the Kennebec and to settle once more at the site of their former village. This chief asked Gyles to send his regards to the Massachusetts Governor, whom he saluted "with his cap of to the ground!" The following summer, in 1727, about 40

Abenaki warriors, belonging to the Norridgewock tribe settled once more on the banks of the Upper Kennebec, confirmed the **Dummer's Treaty**, together with their fellow Abenaki tribes of **St. Francis** and of **Becancour**, and went to business as usual. Trading their furs, in particular beaver, as well as feathers at **Fort Richmond**, these Kennebec Indians tried to maintain their way of life as trappers, hunters, fishers, and farmers in the lands of their ancestors.

During the next 20 years or so, no significant changes took place in the life of the Kennebec Indians. However, after the **King George's War** which ended in 1749, a small group of wealthy entrepreneurs in Massachusetts revived the English claims on Abenaki lands and formed a speculative land company, officially designated as "**The Proprietors of the Kennebec Purchase from the late Company of New Plymouth**," or more simply known as **The Plymouth Company of the Kennebec Proprietors**. They challenged the official English policy, in which the Abenaki tribes of Penobscot, Norridgewock, Arreseguntacook, and Wawenock were guaranteed at the **Treaty of Falmouth** in 1749, that "the Indians shall peaceably enjoy all their lands and property, which have not been by them conveyed and sold unto, or possessed by the English, and be in no ways molested or disturbed in their planting or improvement."

And further, that there shall be allowed them the free liberty and privilege of hunting, fishing and fowling, as formerly.' The official commissioners from the government of Massachusetts Bay promised these Abenakis that "no private revenge shall be taken by the English; but in any case any person shall presume so to do, upon complaint thereof, justice shall be done the person aggrieved."

At the same time the Kennebec Proprietors in Boston planned to manipulate the law by retaining the best attorneys in the province, the English settlers on the lower Kennebec took the law in their own hands. Two months after the formal signing of the treaty at Casco Bay in Falmouth, some armed Englishmen attacked a small group of Abenaki families in the woods near Wiscasset. A Norridgewock Indian was killed, and another was wounded. The third Abenaki, also wounded, was from St. Francis. About 14 Indians, "young and old that are destitute of support only what the squaws can git on the clam banks," were left when the two wounded Abenaki men escaped to Penobscot. The Indian widow, "being in poor Circumstances" received 2 blankets from the trading post at Fort Richmond, "the one for her Selve , the other to Bury her husband." Travelling along the Kennebec, in the middle of the winter, she and some fellow Abenakis took the body upriver, "till they came to the Jeasuiet's habitation where they Burried him" in the blanket as "it was their Custom."

Contrary to the official promise by the government, the killers were allowed to escape "from the hands of the Officer to whose Charge they were Comitted in order to be conveyed to the Comon Goal" in Falmouth. The predominant view of the English was that these Indians "were a very wild people (who) lived like beasts." Several months later, more Abenakis were killed, and this act too remained unpunished. Together with the overall decline in the price for their furs, this injustice "soured their tempers." Moreover, English hunters, contrary to the official guarantees, penetrated deeper into the Abenaki hunting and trapping territories on the Androscoggin, Kennebec, and other rivers.

Praised by the French as their "most faithful allies," the Abenakis were once more pushed with their backs against the Blue Mountains. The French cultivated their good relations with these Indians, because their colony in Canada was outnumbered by the English on the east coast. They relied on Abenaki protection of their south-eastern flank, and the villages on the Kennebec, Penobscot, and St. John served as a valuable buffer for their settlements on the St. Lawrence River. The Kennebec, in particular, was praised as "the most convenient station, for affording support and safe retreat to the Eastern Indians in way of their attempts upon the Government of New England." The French policy therefore was that "the boundary line of New England should remain fixed at the river **Kinibequi** (also called **Nanrantsouak**)... That, moreover, the Abenakis should be maintained in the possession of their villages of Nanrantsouak (Norridgewock) and Panaouamske (Penobscot) and continue to enjoy the protection of France." Afraid that the Abenakis to these two tribes on the English frontier would be forced to surrender, the French supplied the warriors of St. Francis and Becancour, together with a number of Algonquins from Three Rivers, and encouraged them once more to join their

kinsmen of Norridgewock and Penobscot to halt the English advance. That summer of 1750, the Abenakis raided the English settlement near Fort Richmond, burned some homesteads, killed cattle, and carried off about 13 captives, who were taken to Canada. The following year, the Abenaki orator **Atiwaneto** spoke to an English delegation: "We have not yet sold the lands we inhabit, we wish to keep the possession of them. Our elders have been willing to tolerate you, brothers Englishmen, on the seaboard as far as Sawakwato (Saco River)... But we will not cede one single inch of the lands we inhabit beyond what has been decided formerly by our fathers. The lands we possess have been given to us by the Master of Life. We acknowledge to hold only from him... We expressly forbid you to kill a single beaver, or to take a single stick of timber on the lands we inhabit; If you want timber we'll sell you some, but you shall not take it without our permission."

In the fall of 1752, Abenakis from Norridgewock and Penobscot once more agreed to confirm the treaties of 1726 and 1749. **Colonel Louis**, one of the sagamores of the Penobscots, said at Fort St. George's: "I speak at the desire of the Norridgewocks, and for them: Above Richmond there are some things doing, which we believe you know nothing of ... We dislike your hunters, hunting on our ground: They hunt as far as Norridgewock, and thereby spoil our game, and hurt us greatly." The English commissioners responded that the "Government is entirely ignorant of this ... justice shall be done to you ... and God grant that (the peace) may continue as long as the Sun and Moon endure." These must have eclipsed, for nothing was done to stop the English encroachment of Abenaki land above Fort Richmond.

In April 1753, a committee was formed in Boston, which studied the Kennebec problems. It reported "That inasmuch as there is a Law past this present Sessions forbidding the hunting after or taking any Beaver or other Furrs on any Lands Lying to the Northward of any English Settlements and Eastward of Saco Truckhouse," and suggested placing "that Law in Execution, (which) would prevent any more such Complaints being made from the Indians." This recommendation jeopardized the interests of the Kennebec Proprietors, who immediately presented their land claims to the royal governor, with whom some of them were on very friendly terms. As a result, the governor sent General Pepperell and 4 commissioners, 2 of whom were Kennebec Proprietors, to negotiate with the Norridgewocks at Fort Richmond. They took with them 500 pounds worth of presents from the government of Massachusetts, as a gift to the Abenakis.

In the last days of September 1753, an Abenaki delegation of 12 "principal Indians from Norridgewock" and some fellow tribesmen arrived at Fort Richmond. **Quenois** was their orator, who explained that "all of the leaders of the Norridgewock tribe are here present except Toxus, now an ancient man." General Pepperell told these Norridgewocks that the English had a legal claim on the lands in Kennebec on the basis of deeds signed by their ancestors. These so-called "Indian Deeds" were given as proof that the Abenakis had conveyed away the Indian rights of ownership to "the Lands above Richmond Fort all along the River Kennebec;" until the Wesserunset Stream, not far from Norridgewock at

Old Point. On the basis of these deeds the Company argued that the Norridgewock Indians had "no reason to complain of any English Settlements on s(ai)d River above Richmond!"

Commenting on the authenticity of the deeds shown to them, the Norridgewocks said: "...we apprehend you got the Indians drunk and so took advantage of them when you purchased the land." Earlier, they had said that "some men, eighty years of age, had never heard of any contract, or convention with the English to cede them their land." According to the French, "the Deeds produced were forged", and the English philanthropist Thomas Coram also complained about "the Base & fraudulent practices of the Massachusetts in making (the Indians) drunk, then enticing them to Execute Deeds of Conveyance for large quantities of their Land, when they knew not the meaning of those Deeds." In addition to these denouncements, the Pejepscot proprietors were embroiled in a series of lawsuits with the Kennebec Company on the basis of conflicting "Indian Deeds," showing contradictions in the legal claims on land along the Kennebec River.

The Norridgewocks stated that their forefathers had allowed the English to build a truck-house at **Teconnet**, "for the convenience of trade." This, they maintained, did not give the English title to the land. Moreover, "as you insist upon a purchase of the lands from our ancestors, of which we are entirely ignorant, we desire to know what sums of money have been paid for these lands, and why are not the sums expressed in the several deeds?" In short, notes Jacob Bailey, citing a report by one of the attendants to this conference, the Indian orators "almost reduced the English Commissioners to silence, and the latter were so pressed with solid reasonings and weighty arguments that they could only repeat what they had often mentioned before."

The Norridgewocks reaffirmed the previously signed treaties and stated once again that "It would greatly injure us for you to settle higher up the river than Frankfort. We consent that you should go so far up, but are unwilling you should proceed any farther... We never heard that any of the Governors desired that the English might settle higher up than Richmond, altho' we have heard it from other people... You have land enough below that fort without going any further up... The Indians hunt on both sides of us; we have but little space; we desire to live as brothers; but this country is necessary for our subsistence." Increasingly desperate, the Norridgewocks again complained in 1753, that "A Number of (English) Hunters who are Come from the Westward who go up into the country and spoil their Hunting which so enrages the Indians that they Threaten to Kill them if they meet them upon Their Hunting Ground, which," reported Captain Moody, "I am afraid will be the case unless some method be Found out to Prevent our Peoples Taking away Their Game which is their Life!"

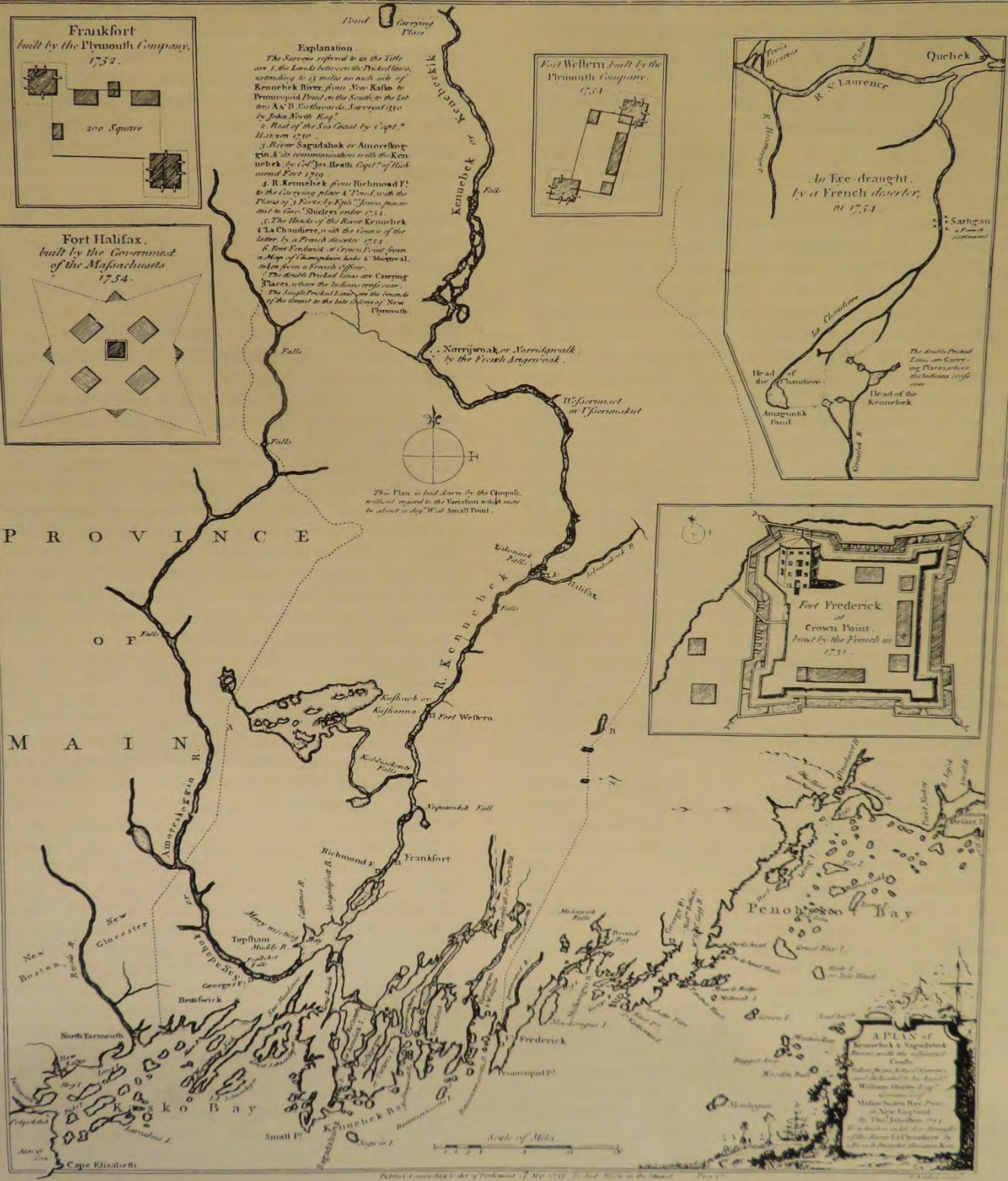
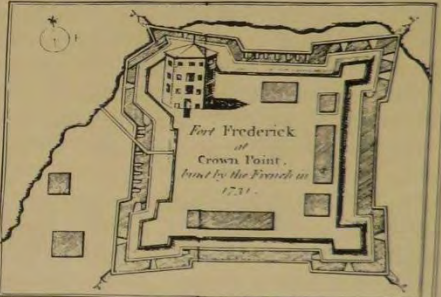
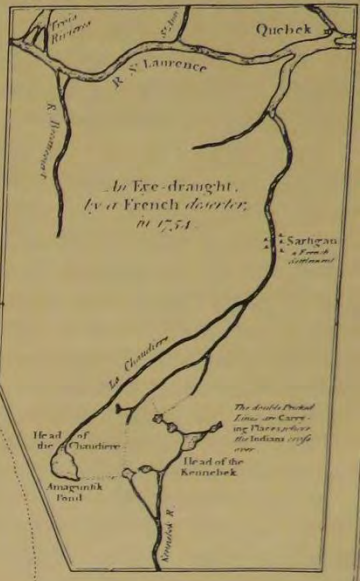
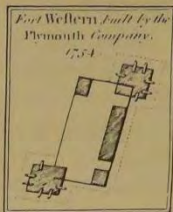
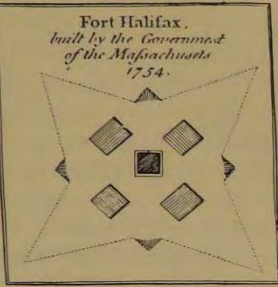
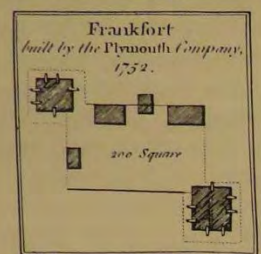
Trusting the magical formula of monetary wealth and military power, the Kennebec proprietors were turning their rich dreams into reality and the Indian reality into a nightmare. During the summer of 1752, the Proprietors had ordered the construction of their Company fort at the proposed new settlement of Frankfort (Dresden). "Foreign Protestants" from Germany and France were shipped from

Europe to the Kennebec lands, which were claimed by the Proprietors. In an attempt to please the royal governor, the Company baptized the new stronghold: **Fort Shirley**. Soon, English settlers moved upriver, and the colonization venture was ready for the push into the ancestral lands of the Norridgewock Indians.

In early 1754, the Kennebec Proprietors recommended their protegee, Captain Lithgow of Fort Richmond, for promotion and for his services rewarded him with a grant of land. Shortly thereafter, it was Lithgow who would report that the French were building a stronghold at the head of the Kennebec River, near the portage at Megantic Lake, which led the way to Quebec via the Chaudiere River. Lithgow also claimed that he had heard from the Abenakis that the French were settling the lower Chaudiere with families in order to protect the passage from the Kennebec into the St. Lawrence River. While the commander of Fort Richmond wrote this alarming report, the Jesuit missionary to the Norridgewocks, Peter Audron, traveled to the lower Kennebec and encouraged the new settlers at Dresden to come to Canada, promising them each 200 acres of land. The missionary, however, "was unable to prevail and returned to his habitation, which was about three or four miles above Cushnoc, at the distance of half a mile from the eastern shore, and where his house was surrounded by a number of wigwams." Quite conceivably, this Norridgewock Indian village was located in the same area as that which belonged to the Indian sagamore Sebenoa, who received the visit from Captain Gilbert in 1607. Possibly, it was also the same site which Dreuillettes had visited with some Abenakis from Norridgewock, when he declared that he was "within sight" of the English at **Koussinok**.

In February 1754, 60 Norridgewocks and other Abenakis came to Fort Richmond and warned: "Better for Englishmen to leave these rivers, else our French brothers, clad like Indians, will, soon as the ice is gone, help us drive you all away. Certain they will come to us from Canada in the spring, and bring us guns and powder; for a good priest tells us the truth: — Yes, and the Hurons will come likewise." One month later, Governor Shirley announced his plans to "build a Strong Fort near the head of the River Kennebeck, above the Settlements of the Norridgewalk Indians," which the General Court in Boston approved. This, of course, was exactly what the Kennebec Proprietors had planned, and they offered to construct a fort "at or near a place called Cushenac upon the River," if the Province of Massachusetts would pay for the fort at Teconnet falls. Although the original plans for the defense strategy called for repair of Fort Richmond, the General Court approved the new plans and called for the dismantling of this dilapidated fortification at the head of Merrymeeting Bay. The plans to establish **Fort Western** in the summer of 1754 were set in motion, and the final phase in the scramble for Abenaki country had begun.

At the end of the spring hunting season, Arresaguntacooks joined the Norridgewocks in their village and prepared to meet once again with the English to negotiate for peace. They were in need of supplies in exchange for the packs of beaver and other furs which were taken that season in the woods. One of the Norridgewock chiefs, **Pessequant**,



Explanation.
 The Surveys referred to in the Title are 1. the Lands between the Double Lines, extending to 25 miles on each side of Kennebec Baye from New Kaska to Pennunguod Point on the South; on the East betw. A. & B. Northwards, Surveyed 1750 by John North Esq.
 2. Road of the Sea Coast by Capt. Williams 1750.
 3. River Sagadahoc or Amorehogen in A. its communication with the Kennebec by Col. Jos. Heath Esq. of New England Fort 1750.
 4. R. Kennebec from Richmond F. to the Carrying place & Canal with the Plans of 3 Forts by Eph. Jones Esq. and a Plan of the "Shedlers order" 1751.
 5. The Heads of the River Kennebec & La Chaudiere, with the Course of the latter by a French discoverer 1754.
 6. Fort Frederick at Crown Point from a Map of Champlain made by M. de La Moignon from a French Officer.
 The double Parallel Lines are Carrying Places where the Indians carry over.
 The Single Parallel Lines are the bounds of the Grant in the late Colony of New Plymouth.

This Plan is laid down by the Surveyors without regard to the Variation which may be about 11 deg. West Small Point.

A PLAN of Kennebec & Sagadahoc Rivers, with the Situation of the several Forts, and the Boundaries of the several Colonies in the Bay Province of New England, by Thos. Johnston, 1754.

A Plan of Kennebec and Sagadahoc
 by Thomas Johnston, 1754

Harald E.L. Prins, "Foul Play on the Kennebec & Demise Abenaki Nation" (1984)

and some other Abenakis planned to accompany their missionary back to Canada, and the other Indians took their canoes downriver, traveling to the truckhouse that still remained at Fort Richmond. Here they waited for a meeting with Governor Shirley, who arrived with the English army under General John Winslow, a descendant of one of the four original proprietors. At Falmouth in Casco Bay, the governor told the Norridgewock that he "did not ask their consent to the building of the new fort, or extending the English Settlements upon the River Kennebeck, but only appriz'd them of our intentions...I reminded them (Shirley wrote later) of the Calamities, which going to War with the English had brought upon them." The Abenakis were forced to sign a new treaty and the army moved in. The troops sailed first to Fort Richmond, "where the Indians were assembled," and from there the English army went upriver, "When the Raft of Timber for the first fort (Fort Western) Come up the river with above three hundred tuns in it," wrote the conscript John Barber in his diary. They "Landed at Cooshenauk where the English had built a fort formerly." While Fort Western, was being constructed, part of the army, consisting of 10 companies, proceeded upriver: "We had two Gundalows in the river, ten Whale Boats and Eighteen Battoes with Stores." They sailed "to view a place where to build the upper fort," and landed at "Teconnet Point, where the Plymouth Company had built a Fort above one hundred years since." General Winslow decided "to set (the new stronghold) where the old fort stood," and Governor Shirley honored his superior by naming it after Lord Halifax, the English Secretary of State in London. From this junction of the Kennebec and Sebasticook Rivers in the upper part of the Kennebec Purchase, as claimed by the Proprietors, 500 militia were directed higher upriver. They had orders to "March thro the Famous Indian town of Norridgewalk," and to proceed to the head of the Kennebec where supposedly the French had built a fort. The army, in 18 bateaux, passed groups of scattered Abenakis "that we never spoke with" (note: part of the manuscript is torn) but received no resistance. From Norridgewock the English troops slowly moved upriver, via the Carrabassett, to Megantic Lake, where they expected to find French fortifications. The information turned out to be based on false rumors, and no trace of French activity was discovered. Having completed their special mission, the English troops returned without having been forced to fight. A number of troops were left behind at Taconnet Falls, where thirteen carpenters, with the help of militia, constructed **Fort Halifax**, about seventeen miles from Fort Western downriver and fifty miles from the nearest English settlements.

However, in the fall of 1754, an Abenaki war-party from Canada reached the region where Fort Halifax was under construction and killed one straggling soldier and took four others captive. This incident was later used by the English as their *casus belli*, in spite of the multiple provocation and murder on the part of the English. In December, Shirley wrote to the Board of Trade in England, and explained that the Kennebec Proprietors had plans to settle 1,000 families on the lands they claimed on the basis of the old patent. Because their activities served the Crown's interests as well, Governor Shirley asked the Board of Trade under Lord

Halifax, if the Company could get a new royal charter, which would legitimize their claims. The Crown did not grant them this favor. The Proprietors, however, could manage without royal permission, and merely waited for the army to expel the Abenakis from their hunting grounds, so that settlers could move in, without danger for their lives and possessions. This process would cause the value of their holdings to boom instantly.

In 1755, the "French and Indian War" began. The Massachusetts Government declared that the Abenakis should be killed and "destroyed." Sir Spencer Phipps, Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts gave orders that 40 pounds would be paid out of the Province Treasury for each scalp of a male Indian more than twelve years old. The reward for murdering women and children was less: "For every Scalp of such Female Indian or Male Indian under the Age of twelve years that Shall be killed and brought in as Evidence of their being killed as aforesaid Twenty Pounds...God save the King." Condemned as "Enemies, Rebels and Traitors to His Most Sacred Majesty King George the Second," the Norridgewock Indians and their fellow Abenakis in Maine became free game for all bounty hunters in New England. Special scouting companies were formed to range "the Indians hunting grounds between the Eastern Frontiers and Canada." Shirley reported in 1756, that "the Indians are lurking about the frontier (and) Fort Halifax and Fort Western are in great danger of falling into the enemies hands." The commander of Fort Halifax warned that during the spring time the danger of Indian attacks was greater "then in any other Season of the year, as then the Ponds & Rivers will be all Cleer of ice, and consiquently an easy transportation for them in Birch Cannooes and also good hunting for Beaver or Inghish Inhabitence.." Indeed, in May 1757, a war-party of 17 Indians appeared on the bank of the Kennebec near Fort Western and fired at an English boat on its way upriver. They wounded two and the English claimed to have shot two of them.

That summer, there were some skirmishes on the Kennebec and the Penobscot Bay area, but the majority of Abenakis had joined the large French-Indian army which attacked Fort William Henry at Lake St. George on the upper Hudson River. A large Abenaki force of 245 fighting men, from Penobscot, Norridgewock, Becancour, and St. Francis, marched as Indian auxiliaries, together with a total of about 2,000 other warriors from 32 Indian Nations and more than 5,000 French troops. The major English stronghold was taken after a siege, and the Abenakis returned to their villages, except for the Norridgewocks, on whose lands a chain of English strongholds had been established to protect encroaching whites settling the Kennebec Valley. Although a new royal governor of Massachusetts Bay had been appointed to replace Shirley, the government's protectionist policy remained unchanged. The Kennebec Proprietors praised the new Governor for his benevolence by naming the settlement at Frankfort in his honor: Pownallborough. He was further rewarded with 500 acres of prime land in this area.

The deadly turnaround for the Indians of the Kennebec River Valley was signaled by the loss of the French fortress at Louisbourg on Cape Breton, for now their supply route

via the St. Lawrence River was blocked by the English navy. With the surrender of the French forts at Ticonderoga and Quebec in 1759, the French-Indian backbone was broken, and the league fell apart. An additional tragedy befell the Abenaki when Roger's Rangers raided and burned their mission village at St. Francis. Approximately 200 men, women and children were killed, with the survivors finding temporary refuge among the Catholic Mohawks of **Saint Regis**.

In continuation of the policy by Shirley, Governor Pownall planned a stronghold to contain the Abenakis in the Penobscot region, which he called a "Den for Savages & a lurking place for some Renegade French... (and) Indianized Frenchmen intermixed with them." With the construction of Fort Pownall on Penobscot Bay in the summer of 1759 control of this river was assured, and the Abenaki realized that further resistance was suicidal.

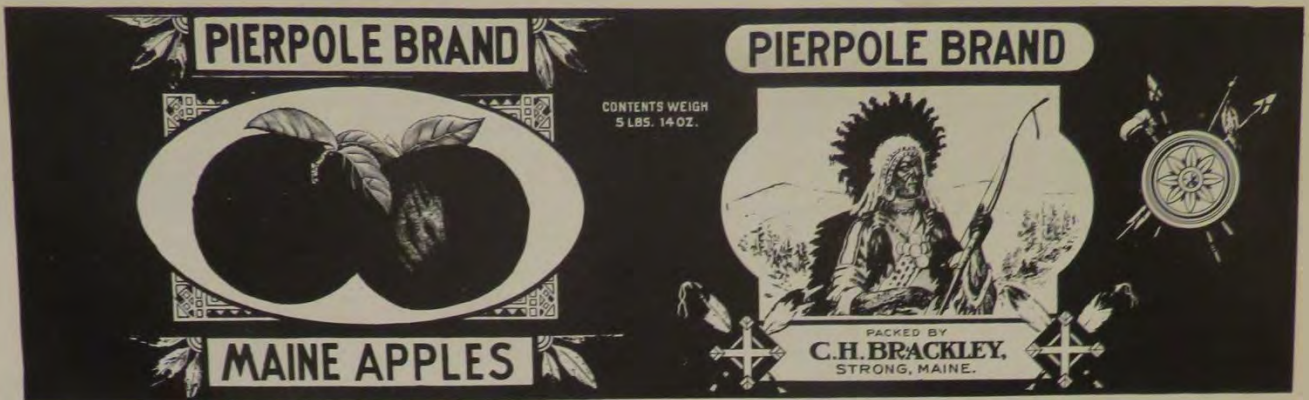
Throughout the frontier territories, Indian bands surrendered and peace treaties were signed. In 1763, the French formally agreed to cede all their dominions in Canada and signed the **Treaty of Paris**. That same summer, Abenakis from the Passamaquoddy tribe wrote to Pownall's successor, Sir Francis Bernard, complaining about Whites settling on their land. **Abowdrawonit** said: "We Kno That We are in Your Power. Pray, Consider ouer Case and You Will Be Inlightned Into Your owen." The Indians had reason to worry, because the General Court had just awarded their new Governor with Mount Desert Island, and Bernard was now establishing six new settlements on his grant, which he claimed had "not been inhabited by Indians for many years past." The Governor answered the Passamaquoddy letter, and wrote that it was not his "intention to injure the Indians, but on the contrary to assist & benefit them." Two months later, three Penobscots appeared in Boston. These Abenakis said that they represented their own tribe as well as that of the Passamaquoddies. The Norridgewocks, on the other hand, "are now joind with the Wewenocks & live among them at Becancour." They despaired about the lack of trade goods in the store at Fort St. George, in particular "Cloathing & Provision, Flour, Bread, Corn, Peas, Pork, Tobacco, Rum, Wine." They accused the truck-master of cheating them, and claimed that the English were spoiling their hunting. Sir Francis responded that "The English have a right to hunt as well as you. They fairly conquered your Country in time of War. (You) should sit down content when you are assured of our protection and friendship." Meanwhile, the Kennebec Proprietors assured themselves of the governor's friendship by presenting him a lot of 500 acres in Pownalborough, for "encouraging settlement" as the Company reasoned.

In 1764, about 50 Norridgewock hunters under their leader, the old Chief **Nodogawerrimet**, returned to the woods of the Kennebec only to be confronted with heavy competition by Englishmen. With two other Abenaki leaders, Nodogawerrimet went to Boston, in the summer of 1765, for a meeting with their "Father", Governor Bernard. They gave him a bundle of sable skins and the Norridgewock Chief said: "When I was with General Johnson (at Niagara, where a large "Indian Congress" was held in July 1764) he told the Indians that all was now peace, and they must betake themselves to hunting and carry their Skins where they could

get most for them; When we returned to our own Country we found the Beaver mostly killed up." The Governor, as usual, responded: "We do all we can to preserve the Beaver, and to prevent our people from Hunting in your Country, and we have made a Law for that purpose." The Abenakis returned to the woods of Maine. During the next autumn, English hunters murdered the Abenaki Chief of the Norridgewock Indians, Nodogawerrimet, and his wife near his camp at Cobbessee Ponds. The English stole his furs, his guns, traps, and **wampum**, and burned his camp.

Two years later, Sagamore **Esak** of the Arresaguntecooks wrote to the Governor that "notwithstanding our earnest desire of living in peace and Amity with our English Brethren, yet the repeated cruelties committed on some of our Friends and relatives has obliged us to apply to your Excellency for your protection and assistance." This Abenaki chief told Bernard that English hunters had killed one of the Indian families at Sebago lake. Both parents and two young girls were murdered and their furs and supplies were robbed. Captain Lithgow at Fort Halifax warned the government that the Indians "were fond of peace (but) if the English were determined to steel their lives by peace meals, (they had told him), it wou'd be best for them to Die like Men then to be killed Lick Dogs..." That summer, in 1767, "a considerable number of Indians of different nations such as Cape Sable (Micmacs), St. John's (Maliseets), Norridgewalks, Arese-quantecooks, with some other Indians, & some white men," gathered at Penobscot river, and discussed the situation of "Englishmen hunting and settling upon the river." Some were in favor of resuming the guerilla war while many realized that this would be fatal for the survival of their peoples. In 1769, the Penobscots requested a "tract of the land assigned for us for a Township as settled upon us and our posterity for the purpose of husbandry (because their) hunting is daily decreasing." Dwindling in numbers, the Norridgewocks continued their hunting and fishing life in the lands around Moosehead lake, Sandy River, and so on, but rapidly their traditional culture was no longer possible in these regions.

Although Abenaki Indians continued to frequent the Kennebec River throughout the 19th century, the ancient tribe of Norridgewocks ceased to exist as a separate tribal group. Some moved back to St. Francis or to Becancour, where they had found refuge before. Others joined the Abenaki village on the Penobscot. During the American Revolution, the Penobscots camped near Fort Halifax at the junction of the Sebasticook and Kennebec Rivers, where they traded their furs and hides in the 1780's, probably together with Norridgewocks. Possibly the last known Norridgewock Indian was **Captain Pierpole** (Peter Paul?) who lived with his family at Farmington Falls in 1780. Four years later, Pierpole moved higher upriver and settled on the banks of the Sandy River (now the town of Strong) where he was the first to build a frame house, immediately followed by various white settlers from the Damariscotta region. In 1799, Pierpole and his family left the Sandy River and moved away. He was last seen at Farmington Falls, the site of the ancient Jesuit mission at the Indian village of Ammasokanti, which was now settled by Whites. He may have gone to Moosehead Lake, to the St. John, or even to Labrador, where several Abenakis joined the Montagnais Indians. Today, all



Pierpole Brand, the label of canned apples from Strong, Maine, the place where Captain Pierpole, the last of the Norridgewock Indians lived until 1799. (Coll. of the author)

that reminds us of this last member of the Norridgewock Tribe is a commercial label for Maine apples, canned in Strong, and called the “**Pierpole Brand**.”

Such was the fate of the Abenakis of the Kennebec River, who are now buried in oblivion. In the town register (1903) of a settlement which not only took the Norridgewock tribal lands, but their name as well, the vindictive mentality of the invaders is expressed as follows: “While we mourn the fate that followed the race we can only say: ‘It was the **natural result** of the advent of a **higher plane of civilization** and progress, to which they were **destined** to give way.’”

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Author's Note:

Henry Ford II declared: “All history is bunk.” Certainly this American entrepreneur was right if he meant the type of historiography written exclusively from the perspective of the powerful elite, and remaining silent about the cultural history of those who lived on the other side of history. From the viewpoint of the Abenakis of this river, Fort Western and the Kennebec Proprietor signify ruthless oppression of their culture and conquest of their “Land of the Morning Light.” Both symbolize a lack of respect for the traditional rights and lives of fellow peoples, for whom the English had no place but on the underside of history.

The present function of the fort as a museum, serving as unique educational institution preserving knowledge of the cultural history of the Kennebec, turns this obscure symbol into one of enlightenment, if also room is made to present the other side of history. My attempt to understand the “ethno-history” of the Kennebec is reflected in this contribution.



Harald E.L. Prins, “Foul Play on the Kennebec & Demise Abenaki Nation” (1984)