

Penobscot Country:  
Disagreement Over Who Lived There in the 17th Century  
Needs Resolving -- if Possible

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Introduction

It is my fond wish that this paper will start a meaningful dialogue between two opposing scholarly opinions among students of Wabanaki ethnohistory, by calling for help from both inside and outside the esoteric in-group.<sup>1</sup> Although I am partisan in this matter, I stand ready to change my current viewpoint if I can be shown sound enough reason to do so -- and I hope that other studiers of the Dawnlanders would do likewise. Heretofore, it appears that proponents of neither opinion have approached those of the other with resolution of this issue as an explicit goal, but the problem now is basic enough to my own future work to attempt an immediate parley. What better place to commence such interaction than at this Algonquian Conference? My presentation will be relatively short so that discussion can be relatively long.

The Issue

The place under consideration is the central Maine coast, the time is the seventeenth century (actually from ca. 1600 to ca. 1725), and the question is who lived there then.

I am one of those who accept the statements of Champlain (1613), Lescarbot (1618), Biard (1612), and others that the Etchemin lived on the lower Penobscot River-and-Bay then.<sup>2</sup> The consequences of my acceptance of these major ethno-historical sources on this point include the following items:

- 1A) Western Etchemin (allied with Abenaki) fought against Eastern Etchemin (allied with Micmac) in 1607;<sup>3</sup>
- 2A) Bashaba (died ca. 1615) and Madockawando (died ca. 1698) were great Etchemin leaders;
- 3A) Meaningful use of the tribal name "Penobscot" Indians cannot begin until after Etchemin migration eastward and Abenaki regroupings crystallized, ca. 1725 -- caused by English force and French persuasion.

Admittedly, some of these consequences are "awkward," but (to my mind -- currently, at least) not so hard to justify methodologically as what I call the "Gordian Knot-cutting" approach of those of the opposing viewpoint: eliminate all awkwardness by denying the veracity of Champlain's, Lescarbot's, Biard's, and others' Etchemin statements. The consequences of denying these major early sources on this point include the following alternatives to the three just-mentioned items:

- 1D) Eastern Abenaki (= "Penobscot" and others) fought against united Etchemin (allied with Micmac) in 1607;

- 2D) Bashaba and Madockawando were great "Penobscot" leaders;
- 3D) Meaningful use of the tribal name "Penobscot" Indians can begin at least as early as 1600.

Besides evading a more complicated sociopolitical-military situation (compare Items 1A and 1D above), the major muddle completely avoided by the deniers, but encountered head-on by the accepters, is the transition from Western Etchemin to Eastern Abenaki peoples in the lower Penobscot River-and-Bay area (compare Items 3A and 3D above). The modern Penobscot Indians spoke a dialect closely related to that of the Abenaki, whereas it is the more easterly modern Passamaquoddy and Maliseet Indians who spoke dialects supposedly deriving from Etchemin. To assume (as I do) that a seventeenth-century Etchemin people occupied the lower Penobscot River-and-Bay thus requires their subsequent departure, and replacement by an Abenaki people. Such alterations are easily explainable, however, in terms of frontier dynamics. Another believer-of-the-early-sources (and Maine's first ethnohistorian), Fannie Hardy Eckstorm (1945: 73-83), has proposed what seems to me to be a very plausible detailed outline of this switch. Until something better comes along, I am willing to accept as a working hypothesis most of Eckstorm's outline of the probable ways and means of this necessary Etchemin-Abenaki transition, completed by ca. 1725.

### The Task

Thus the Penobscot past lingers in scholarly dispute. The time period is too early to be relevant to the current Maine Indian land-claims legal case, but the unresolved problem hinders further academic work based upon Penobscot-origin assumptions. Currently, I<sup>4</sup> seem to be one of only two anthropologists directly concerned with the matter, although several past and present ethnologists, linguists, ethnohistorians, and historians clearly had or still have some interest, too. Thus, together with objective outside specialists, enough talent could be mustered to investigate this issue in depth.

Perhaps it will be found that (on balance) neither opposing viewpoint has more or less merit than the other, because of an absence of new conclusive "proofs." However, I hope that additional evidence -- especially historical linguistic data -- will help tip the balance one way or the other. For example, it might be partially decisive to discover which Amerindian language Madockawando was required most often to speak, as a sagamore on Penobscot Bay. Much fuller biographical information on this important man would be highly desirable in its own right, anyway, so the search would be self-rewarding.<sup>5</sup>

### The Sources

There is no lack of explicitness in those earliest ethno-historical sources in question here -- Champlain (1613), Lescarbot (1618), and Biard (1612) -- that it was the Etchemin who lived on the lower Penobscot River-and Bay;

they certainly cannot be denied for lack of clarity.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the nature of input upon which these clear statements were based, I (for one) can find no fault at all. Champlain was a first-hand visitor to the lower Penobscot River in 1604 (and he returned to the Bay on other occasions), and met and parleyed with native leader Bashaba. Biard also was an in-person visitor to Penobscot Bay in 1611; he too encountered Bashaba then and later. And while Lescarbot was not personally present on the Penobscot trips that he wrote about, he was close to those French officers who were. Indeed, Lescarbot serves as a good auditor of Champlain, implicitly verifying him by agreeing with his statement that the Etchemin inhabited the Penobscot area; certainly in some other matters, Lescarbot's considerable dislike of Champlain led him to point out with acrid relish whatever faux pas he felt that the latter had made, in either word or deed. Champlain occasionally reciprocated in this game, too.

In short, at the methodological level and in general comparison, ethnohistorical documentation is seldom much stronger than these three accounts taken together. To deny such straightforward statements surely requires a more scholarly reason than the mere expediency of avoiding the "awkward" consequences of accepting them at face value -- but I have not yet been made aware of any better reason than expediency. I see no reason whatsoever to believe that Champlain erred, and that the other writers blindly followed his mistake. As a matter of fact, although Champlain had the priority of actual visitation of the Penobscot area, he was the last of the three in date of his written account, which was in 1613, if one counts from Lescarbot's first edition of 1609, and considers Biard's date of 31 January 1612 in reporting to his Jesuit superior.

### Summary

Two opposing interpretations of the Penobscot past stem from either accepting or rejecting certain statements of some seventeenth-century writers. Each approach has its consequences. By rejecting the statements, one totally avoids several complications. Some of the consequences of accepting the statements most assuredly are "awkward," but (to my current belief, at least) they are justifiable in terms of what I believe to be proper ethnohistorical methodology. Given my present bias, I am suspicious that the approach of denying the seventeenth-century statements of who-lived-where is too similar to that of the legendary biologist who angrily squashed the harmless bug which did not fit into his newly-completed Revised Taxonomy of Insects. However, if I am wrong, I wish to be corrected, and soon. This matter seemingly cannot be resolved one way or the other without help from other Algonquianists, and this paper is an appeal for your scholarly assistance. Without your help, my work and anyone else's will be weakened wherever this unsolved issue is basic to other matters.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The TRIBAL DISTRIBUTION MAPS and CHART accompanying this paper represent only my approach of accepting the seventeenth-century statements of who-lived-where, and following their logical consequences. To view the issue in greater perspective, see Morrison 1977a.

<sup>2</sup> Explorer Champlain (1613.292, 297), referring to his own visit of 1604 (and he returned at other times, too), wrote: "So far as we could judge there are few Indians on this [Penobscot] river, and these also are called Etechemins [sic].... The tribe of Indians at Kennebec [Sagadahoc Estuary] is called Etechemins, like those of Norumbega [Penobscot River, more than fifty miles east]."

Lawyer Lescarbot (1618.2.277) wrote what he heard in 1606-07 at Port Royal (Nova Scotia) from those who had visited the area: "The nations between the river St. John and Kinibeki [Sagadahoc Estuary], a district comprising the rivers St. Croix and Norumbega [Penobscot River], are called Etechemins; from Kinibeki to Malebarre [Cape Cod], and beyond, they are called Armouchiquois [an imprecise blanket term (not unlike "Latin Americans" today) that went out of use soon after Lescarbot wrote]."

Father Biard (Thwaites 1896:2.69), who visited the area personally in 1611, wrote: "To the West and north [of Port Royal], from the river of St. John to the river Potugoet [Penobscot River], and even to the river Rimbegui [Sagadahoc Estuary], live the Ethechiniqui [sic] .... From the Rimbegui river to the fortieth parallel the whole country is in the possession of the tribe called the Armouchiquois."

It is quite conceivable that the Western Etchemin gradually withdrew eastward toward "their" Penobscot River as the seventeenth century wore on, because later accounts do not actually refer to Etchemin near the Sagadahoc Estuary -- only as far west as Penobscot Bay.

Father Lalemant (Thwaites 1896:46.67), in the Relation of 1659-60, refers to "...the Abnaquiois Mission. This, beginning at the river Kenebki [Kennebec River], includes on its right [east] the Etechemins of Pentagwet [Penobscot River], together with those of the river St. John; and on its left [west] all those great Nations of New England that speak Abnaquiois...."

Father Morain (Thwaites 1896:60.263-265) wrote in 1677: "The Etechemins are a tribe of about 4 or 500 souls, as far as I can judge, whose country consists of 3 rivers... --namely pemptegwet [Penobscot River], pessemouquote [Passamaquoddy = St. Croix], and the River st. John.... Although they have but one language, it nevertheless has Some variation in proportion as they live Farther away from Here [Riviere-du-Loup (Quebec)]; and, as those of pemptegwet are nearer the Abnakis, their language also resembles that of the latter more closely.... Those of Pemptegwet are allied in war with the Abnakis against the English [King Philip's War Northern Front--see Morrison (1977b)]."

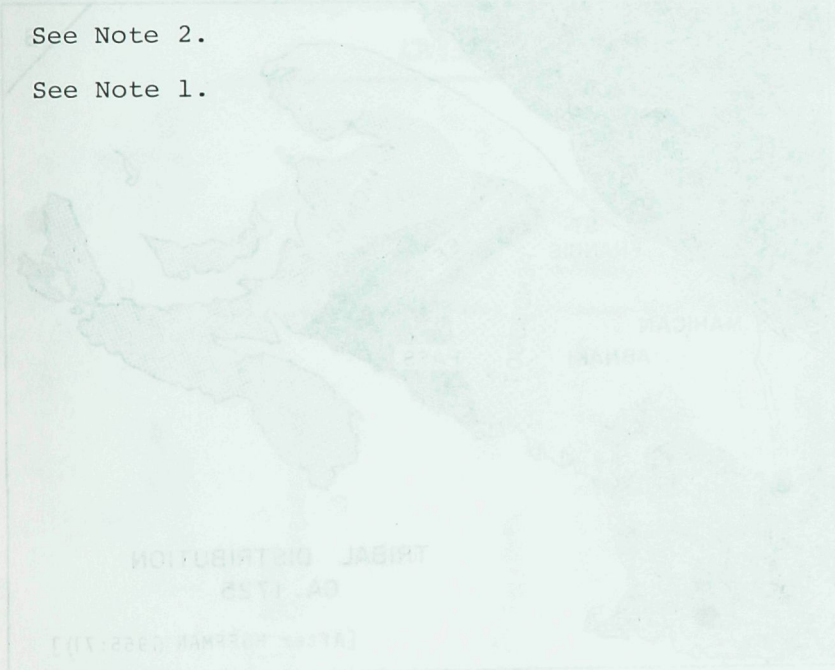
<sup>3</sup> Regarding this intertribal warfare, see Morrison 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Yours truly is Alvin Hamblen Morrison, Ph.D. in Anthropology from State University of New York Center at Buffalo, 1974 (Dissertation topic: Dawnland Decisions: Seventeenth-Century Wabanaki Leaders and Their Responses to the Differential Contact Stimuli in the Overlap Area of New France and New England). For both of our sakes, I am not to be confused with Kenneth M. Morrison, Ph.D. in History from University of Maine at Orono, 1975 (Dissertation topic: The People of the Dawn: The Abnaki and Their Relations with New England and New France, 1600-1727). Because we are of no known genealogical kinship connection (and were unknown to each other until common acquaintances introduced us), our kindred interests of peoples and century are that much more extraordinary.

<sup>5</sup> Madockawando's daughter was Baron Castine's wife. A much clearer picture is needed of the genetic and through-"adoption" parents of Madockawando and the sociopolitical ramifications thereof. Clarification of these matters would go far to help resolve the main issue of this paper. Careful attention to the concepts and principles of sociocultural anthropology, as well as to those of ethnohistory, would be sine qua non to the attempt to do a meaningful biography of Madockawando.

<sup>6</sup> See Note 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Note 1.



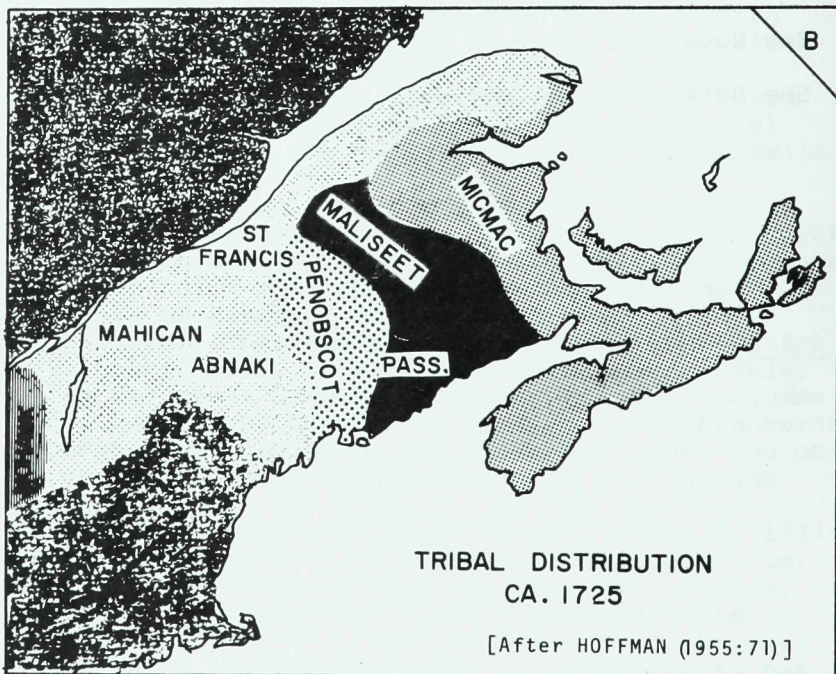
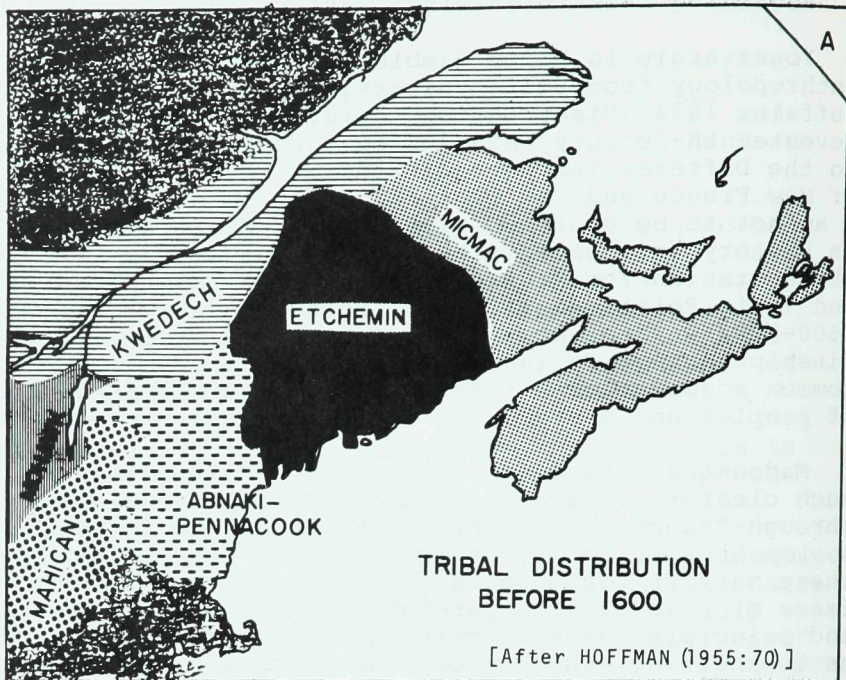
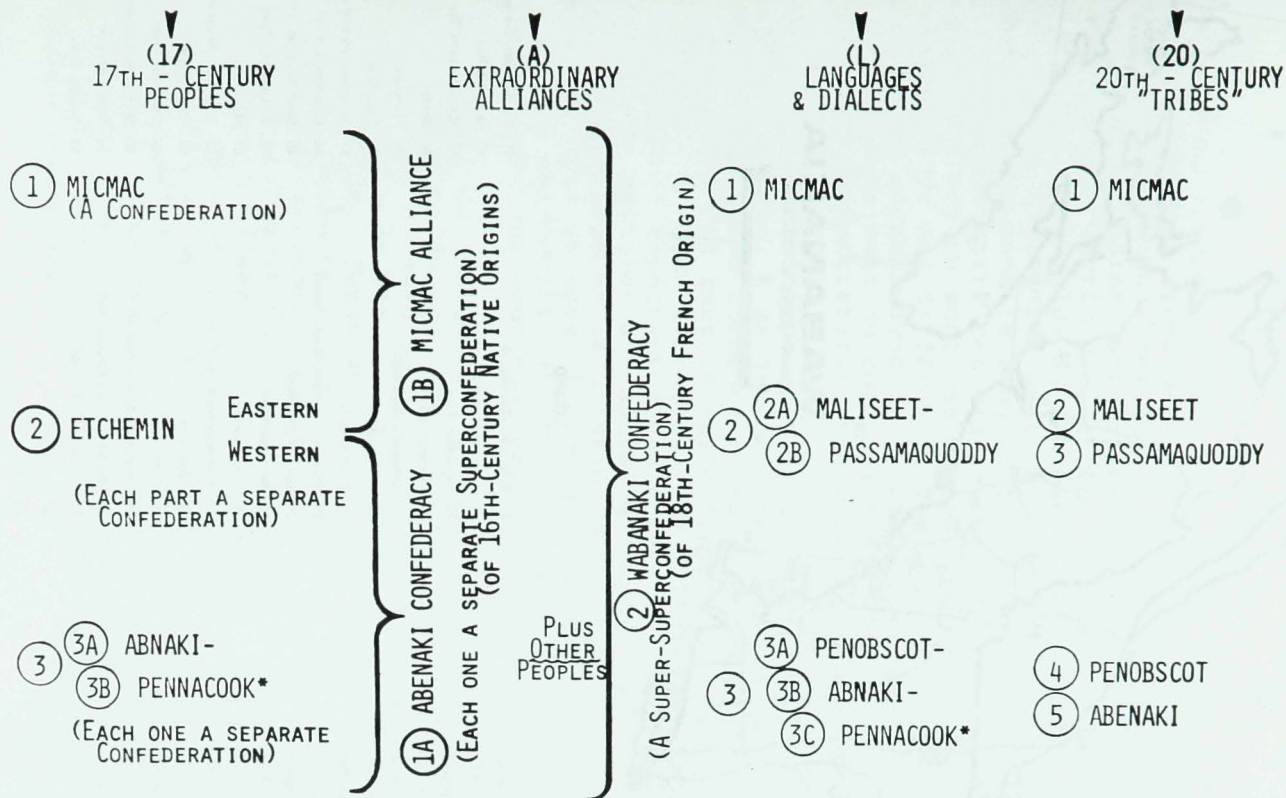


Figure 1.

THE WABANAKI OF THE NORTH-ATLANTIC SLOPE CULTURE AREA

(HUNTING-FISHING-GATHERING BASIC; MAIZE HORTICULTURE SUBSIDIARY WHERE PRESENT)



\*NOT ALL OF THE PEOPLES OF THE PENNACOOK CONFEDERACY ARE MEANT TO BE INCLUDED IN EITHER ALLIANCES ①A & ② OR IN LANGUAGE ③



### LEGEND

- |                        |                                    |                               |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Gaspe Bay            | 21 Pentagoet (Castine, Me)         | 41 Oyster River (Durham, NH)  |
| 2 Bay of Chaleur       | 22 Kenduskeag (Bangor, Me)         | 42 Merrimac River             |
| 3 Restigouche          | 23 Penobscot River                 | 43 Massachusetts Bay          |
| 4 Richibucto           | 24 Monhegan Island                 | 44 Boston                     |
| 5 Gulf of St. Lawrence | 25 Samoset's Deed Area             | 45 Plymouth                   |
| 6 Ingonish             | 26 Pemaquid                        | 46 Cape Cod                   |
| 7 Cape Breton          | 27 Cape Newagen                    | 47 Squakheag (Northfield, Ma) |
| 8 Canso                | 28 Popham (Sagadahoc River) Colony | 48 Connecticut River          |
| 9 La Heve River        | 29 Merrymeeting Bay                | 49 South Royalton, Vt         |
| 10 Port Royal          | 30 Kennebec River                  | 50 St. Lawrence River         |
| 11 Bay of Fundy        | 31 Norridgewock                    | 51 Montreal                   |
| 12 St. John River      | 32 Androscoggin River              | 52 St. Francis Mission (#2)   |
| 13 Meductic            | 33 Cape Small                      | 53 Three Rivers               |
| 14 Passamaquoddy Bay   | 34 Casco Bay                       | 54 Chaudiere River            |
| 15 St. Croix Island    | 35 Quackey/Yorke (Portland, Me)    | 55 St. Francis Mission (#1)   |
| 16 St. Croix River     | 36 Black Point (Scarborough, Me)   | 56 Sillery Mission            |
| 17 Mt. Desert Island   | 37 Chouacoet (Saco, Me)            | 57 Quebec City                |
| 18 St. Sauveur Mission | 38 Saco River                      |                               |
| 19 Gulf of Maine       | 39 Wells                           |                               |
| 20 Penobscot Bay       | 40 Cocheco (Dover, NH)             |                               |

Figure 3.