



STRANGERS IN THE LAND: EUROPEAN CONTACT 1500-1675

The Wabanaki were some of the earliest Native communities to encounter Europeans. Contact involved the exchange of ideas and knowledge, as well as material goods. Within decades, European diseases, warfare, alcohol and conversion to Christianity dramatically altered Wabanaki societies.

1660s

Mohawk raiding parties attack Wabanaki villages, as they compete to control trade with English, French and Dutch trading partners.



1651

Uphanum, alias Jane, a Wabanaki woman, deeds lands in Scarborough to Andrew Algers. In exchange for the land, she retains the rights to plant corn in his field and to receive a bushel of corn yearly.

1646

A Jesuit Mission is built at the Wabanaki village of Norridgewock on the Kennebec River.

Jesuit missionaries established the first French missions in North America in Maine between 1611 and 1613. The French missionaries wanted to convert the Wabanaki people to Catholicism. To do that, they established mission villages where the Natives could settle, grow crops and attend mass. Some of the mission villages became places of refuge for the Wabanaki when they were forced to flee their homelands. Image at right is a Jesuit Cross found at Norridgewock. Photo © Maine Historical Society.



[More about the Jesuits in Maine \(Appendix A\)](#)

1635

French capture the English trading post at present day Castine in Penobscot Bay and begin Fort Pentagoet.

Oral Tradition: Glooskap Visits England

Glooskap built a stone canoe. He worked a year at it. Then, he dried meat, and so provisioned the canoe with food and water. Along with his Grandmother Woodchuck, Glooskap sailed across the sea. This was before white people had ever heard of America. The white people did not discover this country first at all. Glooskap discovered England, and told them about it.

Adapted from The Algonquin Legends of New England by Charles G. Leland, 1884.



Photo from Detail of an etched birchbark mailpouch, Passamaquoddy, 19th Century, Abbe Museum Collections

1629

An English trading post is established at present day Castine in Penobscot Bay.

The Wabanaki exchanged furs, moccasins, canoes and snowshoes as well as the knowledge of how to survive in a strange land for metal tools, beads and clothing.



European Glass Beads
Trade Ax from the Abbe Collections
Snowshoes from the Abbe Collections

1628

Governor Bradford, Massachusetts Colony, complains, that the Kennebec people:

"...already abundantly furnished with pieces, powder, and shot, sword, rapiers, and javelins; all which arms and munition is this year plentifully and publicly sold unto them... not only corne, but also such other commodities as the fishermen had traded with them, as coats, shirts, rugs, & blankets, pease, prunes, [etc]; and what they could not have out of England, they bought of fishing ships..."

1620

Understanding European Depictions of Native Americans

Early depictions of Native people from European sources often provide more information about what the Europeans were thinking than about the actual appearance of the Wabanaki. Depictions of naked people reflect the European view of Natives as uncivilized. Written accounts often describe the Wabanaki as statuesque, handsome people in comparison to the typically short Europeans.



Early European Accounts of Native People and the Use of the Word "Savage."

Sixteenth century European culture and society contained very different ideas from today about civilization, humankind and the social order. Early European explorers wrote descriptions and accounts of Native people based on their accepted cultural belief that Natives were uncivilized, inhuman and at the bottom of social order. In most accounts, they used the biased and damaging word "savages" to represent Native people.

The early European use of the word "savage" reveals early European bias and discrimination against Native people and does not reflect who Native people really were or are today.



Photo from Detail from Champlain's Map of New France
The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

1616-1619: The Great Dying

Massive epidemics devastate Wabanaki communities.

The introduction of European diseases to the Wabanaki was devastating. The years from 1616 to 1619 are known as the "Great Dying." During this time, a deadly disease swept coastal New England from Cape Cod through Maine. In Massachusetts, the death rate among Native people was as high as 90-95%. Among the Wabanaki, even with a more spread out population, the death rate was more than 75%. The specific agent responsible for this epidemic has not been specifically identified, but it may have been plague, small pox or viral hepatitis. At the end of the Great Dying, many coastal villages were entirely abandoned, and the land was left virtually empty of its original inhabitants.

In 1634, Maine Native people were hit by another epidemic, this time of small pox, which began at Plymouth Colony the preceding year. Small pox struck again in 1639, and in 1646 the Wabanaki were overtaken by an epidemic disease which has not been identified but which caused its victims to vomit blood. Smaller epidemics and outbreaks of infections and often fatal diseases continued throughout the rest of the 1600s, and small pox epidemics reoccurred in the 1730s and 1750s.

There is also evidence of deliberate distribution of blankets infected with smallpox to Native communities. For instance, in a series of letters to Colonel Henry Bouquet, Commanding British General Jeffrey Amherst, for whom the town of Amherst, Massachusetts is named, talked about infecting Native people with smallpox through gifts of blankets exposed to the disease, as a way to end the 1763 Native revolt known as Pontiac's Rebellion.

1613

The French Jesuit Mission of St. Sauveur is established in Frenchman Bay. Father Pierre Biard writes of the people in the Jesuit Relations:

...I confess we often see in these Savages natural and graceful qualities which will make anyone but a shameless person blush, when they compare them to the greater part of the French ...we were very glad to be in a country of safety; for among the Etchemins, as these.

Image at right © The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

[More about the Jesuits in Maine \(Appendix A\)](#)



1609

Popham Colony (in present day Maine) is founded as the first English settlement in North America but lasts only five months. The English fail to gain the trust of the Wabanaki after the kidnapping of their people in 1605.

Henry Hudson steals Native hides:

"...we manned our Boat & Scute with twelve men and Muskets, and two stone Pieces or Murderers, and drave the Salvages from their houses, and tooke the spoyle of them, as they would have done of us. Then we set sayle." - Robert Juet, Henry Hudson's log keeper, 1609, Penobscot Bay Jamestown Colony (in present day Virginia) is the first permanent English settlement in North America.

1606

From Marc Lescarbot, French explorer, 1606:

"...the maids and women do make [ornaments] with the quills or bristles of the porcupine, which they dye black, white and red colours, as lively as possibly may be..."

Traditionally, porcupine quills were worked into armbands, necklaces and other jewelry and applied to leather clothing for ornamentation.



Porcupine quills
Quill decorated birchbark box about 1850
From the Abbe Collections

1605

In the first encounter between the English and Native Americans in present day Maine, explorer George Waymouth kidnaps five Wabanaki men from present-day Pemaquid, at the mouth of the St. George River in Maine.

1604

Samuel de Champlain maps New France.



Champlain describes Mount Desert Island:

"The island is high and notched in places so that from the sea it gives the appearance of a range of seven or eight mountains. The summits are all bare and rocky. The slopes are covered with pines, firs, and birches. I named it Isle des Monts Desert. Two canoes with savages in them came within musket range to observe us. I sent out our two savages in a boat to assure them of our good-will, but their fear of us made them turn back. On the morning of the next day they came alongside and talked with our savages. I ordered biscuit, tobacco, and other trifles to be given to them. These savages had come to hunt beavers and catch fish." - Samuel de Champlain, September 1604 off Mount Desert Island

Image above right © The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.

Visit www.oshermaps.org to learn more about Champlain's maps of New England.

1538

Geographer Gerardus Mercator uses the name America for the first time on a map.

1524

Explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano trades with cautious Natives along the coast of Maine.

"If we wanted to trade with them for some of their things, they would come to the sea shore on some rocks where the breakers were most violent, while we remained in the little boat, and they sent us what they wanted to give on a rope, continually shouting to us not to approach the land; they gave us the barter quickly, and would take in exchange only knives, hooks for fishing, and sharp metal." - Giovanni da Verrazzano, north of Cape Cod.

APPENDIX A

French Missions in Maine: 1611-1613

Jesuit missionaries established the first French missions in North America in Maine between 1611 and 1613. The French missionaries wanted to convert the Wabanaki people to Catholicism. To do that, they established mission villages where the Natives could settle, grow crops and attend mass. Some of the mission villages became places of refuge for the Wabanaki when they were forced to flee their homelands.

The French government encouraged missionaries because it believed that having religious power in the New World would strengthen New France during their struggles with England. The English were less interested in converting Native people to Christianity than in gaining control of lands that could be settled by English colonists. Therefore, the English saw the activities of French missionaries as a sneaky way for the French to win the loyalty of Native people and turn them against the English.

British Attacks on French Missions

Father Pierre Biard came to Acadia and established St. Sauveur mission somewhere on the coast of Frenchman Bay in 1613. The English destroyed that mission after only 13 weeks. Father Biard was taken hostage and Brother du Thet was killed in the skirmish. This began nearly 150 years of warfare between the French and English in North America. The Wabanaki were often caught in the middle of many wars between the French in Acadia and English colonists in New England as these European powers fought for control of territories in North America.

In 1689, Jesuit priest Father Sebastian Rale arrived in Maine and established the mission village at Norridgewock. The Norridgewock village became very important as a Wabanaki - French settlement on the eastern edge of English territory. The English accused Rale of inciting the Wabanaki to wage war against them. The English attacked and burned the village in 1705 and again in 1722, when a warrant for Rale's arrest was issued. During that same war, the English burned the mission fort at Panawamske (Indian Island, the Penobscot Nation's home).

Finally, in August of 1724, an English, Massachusetts and Mohawk raiding party attacked Norridgewock. Father Rale and 26 Wabanaki were killed and scalped. Many other Wabanaki were killed and the survivors fled to French missions in Quebec.