

## **Equals of the King: The Balance of Power in Early Acadia\***

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## Equals of the King: The Balance of Power in Early Acadia

EARLY IN THE SUMMER OF 1613, Samuel Argall and the English ship *Treasurer* arrived off the coast of New England in response to reports that a French expedition was trying to settle on land claimed by the Virginia Company. Cruising the waters off what is now central Maine, Argall and his crew searched in vain for signs of the interlopers until a local Indian pointed them in the right direction. Their target, the fledgling mission settlement of Saint Sauveur, opposite Mount Desert Island, was totally unprepared for the attack. Though the French had been at Saint Sauveur for several weeks, they had done nothing to defend the place, and though they had known for days that English ships were in the area they had taken no steps either to fight or to flee. When Argall attacked, most of the French were on shore, and those still on the ship had turned its sails into a canopy to protect themselves from the sun. "The English ship came on swifter than an arrow", wrote one of the French, "...[with] the banners of England flying, and three trumpets and two drums making a horrible din". It also came with cannons blazing and with 60 musketeers, and it quickly overwhelmed the French.<sup>1</sup>

To the combatants at Saint Sauveur the context in which their battle occurred was obvious; it was part of an Anglo-French conflict that had started centuries before and might continue for centuries to come. And a similar ethnocentric bias has long marked histories of the event. To most scholars, Saint Sauveur was a "salvo of imperial conflict" in which Native Americans played only an incidental role. The French accepted, and most historians have repeated, the anguished confession of a Kennebec native that he mistook the English ship for a French one and directed it to Saint Sauveur.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, an alternative scenario that

\* Research for this article was partially funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I would also like to thank Tim Breen, Jim Merrell and the anonymous readers of this journal for their helpful comments on various versions of this article

1 Pierre Biard, "Relation of New France, of Its Lands, Nature of the Country, and of Its Inhabitants", 1616, in Rueben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols. (Cleveland, 1896-1901), 3: pp. 21-283 and 4: pp. 7-117, especially 3: pp. 275-83 and 4: pp. 8-19; "Rapport de Charles Fleury, Maitre du *Jonas*", 27 August 1614, in Lucien Campeau, ed., *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, 2 vols. to date (Rome, 1967-), 1: pp. 440-4; "Virginia Council to Privy Council", 1614, and "Reply of the Privy Council [to French Complaints]", 1614, in Alexander Brown, ed., *The Genesis of the United States*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1890), 2: pp. 730-4.

2 Among the works describing it this way are John Bartlet Brebner, *New England's Outpost: Acadia Before the Conquest of Canada* ([1927], New York, 1973), p. 20; Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 3 vols. (New Haven, 1934), 1: pp. 148-9; Marcel Trudel, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France, II: Le comptoir, 1604-1627* (Paris and Montreal, 1966), p. 129; Andrew Hill Clark, *Acadia: The Geography of Early Nova Scotia in 1760* (Madison, 1968), p. 81; Douglas R. McManis, *European Impressions of the New England Coast, 1497-1620* (Chicago,

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few historians have considered: that the Indian informant knew exactly what he was doing when he sent the English to Saint Sauveur and that he did so in the hope that Argall would expel the French and restore the area to Indian control.

There is no direct evidence that proves this view, but it fits closely with ethno-historians' view of Indian-White relations in the opening phase of European expansion. Whenever Europeans entered a new region of the Americas, they found that Indian numbers and knowledge of the local environment easily matched their own technological advantages at the time of contact, and this led to a temporary balance of power between the two groups that vanished once Europeans and their germs established themselves in greater numbers.<sup>3</sup> One of the most important elements of this distinctive early relationship was that Native American leaders sometimes found they could use the newcomers in advancing their own efforts to gain or maintain power in tribal and inter-tribal affairs. As Richard Metcalf wrote in 1974, "an examination of the lives of Indians who were prominent in the early phases of Indian-white relations...discloses that their central concern was not the white presence but the internal political context of their own communities, and that they were exploiting the white presence to promote personal and factional advantage within those communities".<sup>4</sup> More to the point of this paper, the idea of Indian agency at Saint Sauveur makes perfect sense if one understands the nature and extent of cultural contact in early Acadia and the Native American context in which Saint Sauveur was established and destroyed.

In the first decade of the 17th century, Acadia was home to perhaps as many as 30,000 Native Americans: Souriquois in what are now New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and Etchemin between the Kennebec and Saint John Rivers in coastal Maine.<sup>5</sup> Pre-contact Souriquois and Etchemin lived by hunting, fishing and

1972), pp. 87-9 (quote from page 87); John G. Reid, *Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland: Marginal Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 11-20 and 58-79.

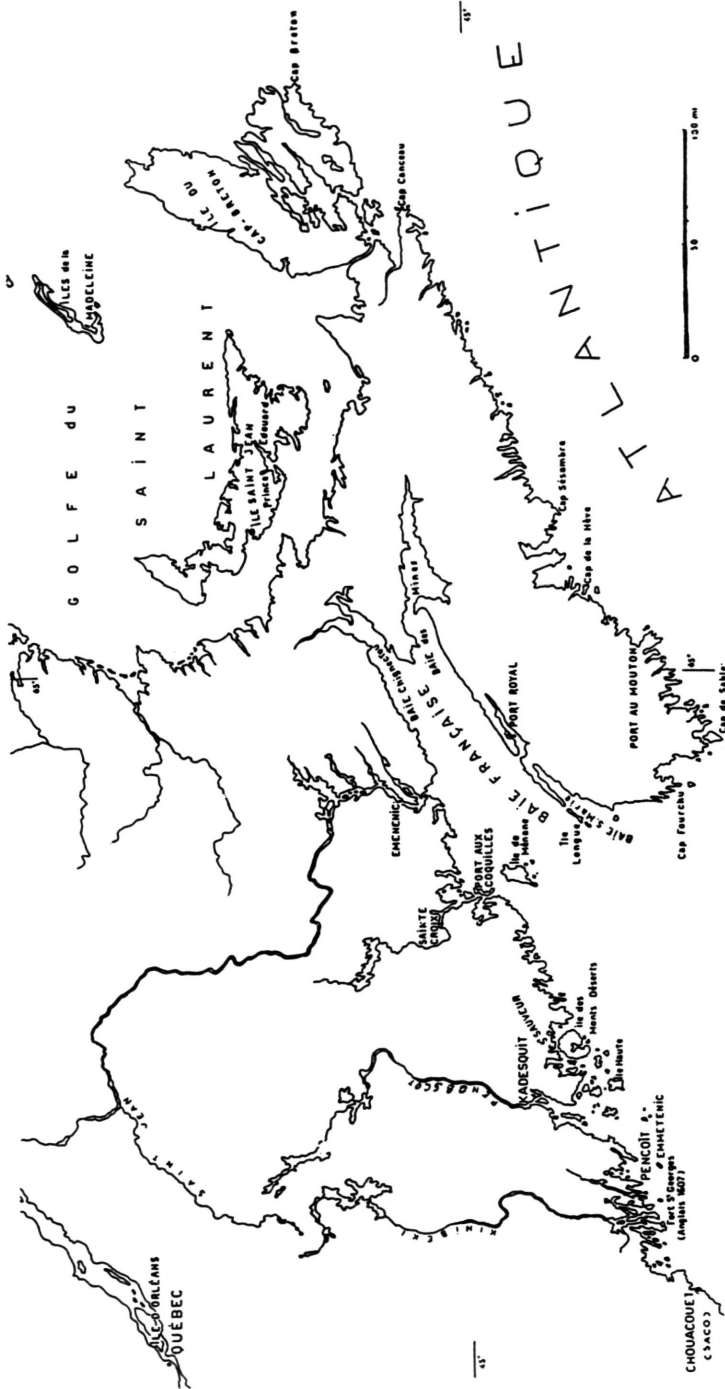
- 3 For a recent discussion of this process in America and elsewhere, see Urs Bitterli, *Cultures in Conflict: Encounters Between European and Non-European Cultures, 1492-1800*, translated by Ritchie Robertson (Stanford, 1989).
- 4 P. Richard Metcalf, "Who Should Rule at Home: Native-American Politics and Indian-White Relations", *Journal of American History*, 61 (1974), pp. 651-65, quote on p. 653.
- 5 Scholars have long debated the identity and distribution of the Indians living in pre-contact Acadia, especially in the Kennebec-Penobscot region (for a summary of this debate, see Bruce J. Bourque, "Ethnicity on the Maritime Peninsula, 1600-1759", *Ethnohistory*, 36 (1989), pp. 257-84 and Robert S. Grumet, *Historic Contact: Indian Peoples and Colonists in Today's Northeastern United States in the Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Norman, Oklahoma, and London, 1995), pp. 71-7). My own inclination is to accept the argument of scholars such as Bourque that early European observers accurately recorded the indigenous peoples of Acadia. In this paper, therefore, I have employed the names reported by Samuel Champlain for the three major groups he encountered in northern New England and the Maritime Provinces of Canada: Souriquois east of the St. John River, Etchemin between the St. John and Kennebec Rivers and Armouchiquois south of the Kennebec. To distinguish among different bands within these groups, I use geographical descriptors, often the rivers near which they lived. This is quite similar to the terminology recently employed in Emerson W. Baker, Edwin A. Churchill, Richard D'Abate, Kristine L. Jones, Victor A. Konrad and Harold E.L. Prins, eds., *American Beginnings: Exploration, Culture, and Cartography in the Land of Norumbega* (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London, 1994). Population estimates are equally debatable; mine are based on those provided in Harold E.L. Prins, "Children of Gluskap: Wabanaki Indians on the Eve of the European Invasion", in Baker, *et al.*, eds., *American Beginnings*, pp. 95-117.

gathering. Some of the western Etchemin may have grown small quantities of tobacco, but both groups took their food from the forests and waters around them. In the spring and summer men fished in rivers, lakes and coastal waters for salmon, shad, eels and shellfish or hunted marine mammals, while women gathered fruits, berries and ground nuts. During the fall and winter months they lived on the meat of large game — moose, bears and caribou — slowed by heavy snow or made do with smaller game and shellfish if the snows never came.<sup>6</sup>

Both Souriquois and Etchemin lived in bands under the leadership of sagamores,<sup>7</sup> and at the turn of the 16th century the most powerful sagamore in Acadia was probably Messamouet, a Souriquois from Cap de la Heve. Messamouet's power, while rooted in traditional Native culture, had been greatly enhanced by his early contact with Europeans. Cap de la Heve is on the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia, and during the last quarter of the 16th century English, French and Basque fishermen landed there to dry their catches. Once ashore, crew members did more than split and salt cod. They also traded with the local population. The latter, in turn, quickly gained an appreciation for European goods and an awareness of the European passion for furs, and by the end of the century Souriquois were coasting as far south as Cape Cod in search of pelts to offer their European friends.<sup>8</sup> To secure those furs, Souriquois parties used both trade and war, and both approaches served to increase their power. As traders with a European connection, they gained prestige through their ability to supply items of ritual significance, such as glass beads, as well as practical marvels, such as metal hatchets and knives. As warriors they enjoyed the greater power that came with metal arrowheads and axes. And in either guise, they benefitted from the perception that access to new technology meant access to powerful new beings.<sup>9</sup>

- 6 Frank G. Speck, *Penobscot Man: The Life History of a Forest Tribe in Maine* (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 194; Peter A. Thomas, "Contrastive Subsistence Strategies and Land Use as factors for Understanding Indian-White Relations in New England", *Ethnohistory*, 23 (1976), pp. 1-18; Philip K. Bock, "Micmac", in Bruce G. Trigger, ed., *Northeast*, which is vol. 15 in William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, 9 vols. to date (Washington, D.C., 1978-), pp. 110-12; Dean R. Snow, *The Archaeology of New England* (New York, 1980), p. 56; Prins, "Children of Gluskap", pp. 102-5.
- 7 Sagamores, or sachems, were usually chosen by consensus among their people, on the basis of charisma, experience and lineage. They governed through their followers' consent rather than any ability to impose their own will upon them. Nicholas N. Smith, "The Changing Role of the Wabanaki Chief and Shaman", in William Cowan, ed., *Actes du Huitième Congrès Algonquistes* (Ottawa, 1977), pp. 213-21; Dean R. Snow, "The Ethnohistoric Baseline of the Eastern Abenaki", *Ethnohistory*, 23 (1976), pp. 291-306; Prins, "Children of Gluskap", pp. 99-100.
- 8 Bruce J. Bourque and Ruth Holmes Whitehead, "Tarrentines and the Introduction of European Trade Goods in the Gulf of Maine", *Ethnohistory*, 32 (1985), pp. 327-41; James Axtell, "At the Water's Edge: Trading in the Sixteenth Century", in his *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 144-81; James Axtell, "Through Another Glass Darkly: Early Indian Views of Europeans", *ibid.*, pp. 125-43.
- 9 Bourque and Whitehead, "Tarrentines"; Calvin Martin, "The Four Lives of a Micmac Copper Pot", *Ethnohistory*, 22 (1975), pp. 111-33; Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montreal, 1985), p. 137; *idem*, "Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalistic Interpretations", *Journal of*

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Acadia, 1600-1615

from Campeau, Monumenta Nova  
Franciae

It remains unclear whether Souriquois actions ignited new conflicts in the Acadian population or simply exacerbated old ones. According to Bruce Trigger, “as the fur trade became more important, Indian groups in the Maritimes seem to have begun to fight with adjacent bands in order to secure larger hunting territories”, and if that was the case, Messamouet may have made new enemies in his own tribe and among other tribes through his aggressive campaign to acquire pelts. Colin Calloway, however, has recently claimed that pre-contact Etchemin “repelled occasional Micmac [Souriquois] forays from the northeast”, suggesting that Messamouet simply widened pre-existing divisions within the Indian community. What is clear is that by 1604 some Etchemin and some Souriquois definitely considered one another enemies and that access to European trade goods was one of the issues dividing them in what many scholars call the Tarrentine War.<sup>10</sup>

It is also clear that relations between them grew more complicated as Europeans sought to establish permanent settlements in the region. Between 1604 and 1608 both France and England tried to colonize Acadia, and every new settlement offered the Indians near it a way around Messamouet’s monopoly on European products and perhaps an opportunity to replace him as the principal supplier of those products.

France provided the first opening to Messamouet’s rivals. In the summer of 1604 Pierre du Gast, Sieur de Monts, arrived on the St. Croix River, in what is now Maine, to establish a French base from which to conduct trade and missionary activity. The St. Croix was Etchemin territory, and the Natives there were probably too weak to challenge Messamouet. From the St. Croix, however, de Monts’ navigator and geographer, Samuel de Champlain, explored the largely unknown coast to the south and opened relations with larger, more powerful, Etchemin bands. Champlain spent several days meeting and trading with Indians fishing in Penobscot Bay and then sailed up the Penobscot River to meet “Bessabez”. Bashabes, as the name is usually rendered, was the most powerful Etchemin sagamore of the early 17th century and was probably the most powerful sagamore in Acadia after Messamouet. From the village of Upsegon, near the modern city of Bangor, Maine, he presided over a confederacy that included six other villages of the Penobscot Etchemin and some of those belonging to the Kennebec band — perhaps a third of the tribe’s total population.<sup>11</sup>

Until Champlain arrived, Bashabes had no regular contact with Europeans and could only acquire European products through middlemen such as Messamouet, whose Souriquois Bashabes identified as “enemies” to Champlain. The Etchemin sagamore, therefore, was no doubt delighted by the opportunity for direct trade that

*American History*, 77 (1991), pp. 1195-215; Christopher L. Miller and George R. Hamell, “A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade”, *Journal of American History*, 73 (1986), pp. 311-28; David V. Burley, “Proto-Historic Ecological Effects of the Fur Trade on Micmac Culture in Northeastern New Brunswick”, *Ethnohistory*, 28 (1981), pp. 203-16.

10 Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, pp. 137-8; Colin G. Calloway, *Dawnland Encounters: Indians and Europeans in Northern New England* (Hanover, N.H., 1991), pp. 5-6; Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, pp. 26, 37; Bourque and Whitehead, “Tarrentines”; Samuel Champlain, *Des Sauvages, ou, Voyage de Samuel Champlain*, in H.P. Biggar, ed., *The Works of Samuel Champlain*, 6 vols. (Toronto, 1922; reprinted 1971), I: pp. 289-98.

11 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 270-300; Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, p. 37.

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Champlain presented. Speaking through interpreters from the St. Croix, the French told Bashabes that they hoped to be friends with the Etchemin and to reconcile them with their northern enemies. Moreover, said Champlain, the French “desired to settle in their country and show them how to cultivate it, in order that they might no longer lead so miserable an existence as they were doing”. According to Champlain, Bashabes understood this and was pleased. The sagamore even declared, wrote the French explorer, “that no greater benefit could come to them than to have our friendship; and that they desired us to settle in their country, and wished to live in peace with their enemies, in order that in the future they might hunt the beaver more than they had ever done, and barter these beaver with us in exchange for things necessary for their usage”.<sup>12</sup>

Champlain was only visiting though. He soon returned to St. Croix, and in the year that followed the French grew even closer to Bashabes’ Souriquois enemies. The winter of 1604-05 proved so harsh at St. Croix that when spring came the survivors chose “to escape the cold and the dreadful winter” by moving across the Bay of Fundy to a more sheltered harbour where they established Port Royal. This move took the French back into Souriquois territory, though far from the la Heve region they already knew.<sup>13</sup> Around Port Royal the local sagamore was Membertou, an aggressive and ambitious leader. Champlain said he “had a reputation of being the worst and most treacherous man of his tribe”, and Marc Lescarbot called him “a very great and cruel warrior”.<sup>14</sup> On meeting the French, however, he was on his best behaviour. Like Bashabes, Membertou had previously enjoyed European goods only through Souriquois traders from la Heve, and like Bashabes he was apparently anxious to establish his own links with the French in order to increase his influence around the Bay of Fundy and the Gulf of Maine. Eventually, he would show a willingness to do so at the expense of any Natives in the region, including other Souriquois, but at first he deferred to Messamouet, who was serving then as one of de Monts’ guides and translators, and cooperated with his fellow Souriquois against a common foe: Bashabes.<sup>15</sup>

They began by strengthening or establishing alliances between the Souriquois and other Natives closer to Bashabes’ Etchemin. Such an alliance may have existed already between the Souriquois and some of the eastern Etchemin bands as Messamouet seems to have known the St. Croix and St. John regions before he arrived there with de Monts in 1604. It was certainly established by September of 1606, because in that month Messamouet and an Etchemin sagamore named Secodun travelled south from the St. John to the Saco River “to make an alliance with those of that country”. These overtures were probably directed at the northernmost village of the Armouchiquois, and the logical object of any

12 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 270-300.

13 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: p. 367.

14 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: p. 384; Marc Lescarbot, *History of New France*, 3 vols., translated and edited by W.L. Grant and published as vols. 1, 7, and 11 in *Publications of the Champlain Society* (Toronto, 1907, 1911, and 1914), 2: p. 254.

15 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: p. 295; Lescarbot, *History*, 1: pp. 281 and 354-5.

cooperation between Souriquois and Armouchiquois were the Etchemin bands living between the Saco and St. John Rivers. If Messamouet could enlist southern aid he could attack Bashabes on two fronts;<sup>16</sup> so to impress the Armouchiquois, he played the French card very heavily, bringing with him both a range of goods obtained from the French — including kettles, axes, knives and clothing — and a French ship. Champlain and the new French commander at Port Royal, Jean de Biencourt, Sieur de Poutrincourt, had encountered Messamouet outside the mouth of the St. Croix just as he and Secodun were preparing to leave for the Saco and had agreed to accompany the Indians on their diplomatic mission.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in late September, Souriquois, Etchemin and French all came calling on the Armouchiquois. According to Champlain, Messamouet “began a harangue before the Indians, pointing out ‘how of past time they had often had friendly intercourse together, and that they could easily overcome their enemies if they would come to terms, and make use of the friendship of the French, whom they saw there present exploring their country, in order to bring merchandise to them and to aid them with their resources’”. When he finished, Messamouet presented to the Armouchiquois the French goods he had brought with him, suggestive, no doubt, of what might follow from an alliance with the Souriquois. The next day the Armouchiquois sagamore responded in kind, bringing the northerners a canoe-load of what his people had. The Armouchiquois, however, did not have ready access to European manufacturers, and summer was not the hunting and trapping season; so all they offered was corn, beans and pumpkins. Messamouet took this as a rejection and, in Champlain’s words, “departed much displeas’d...and with the intention of making war upon them before long”.<sup>18</sup>

It was not Messamouet, however, who returned to make war upon the Armouchiquois. After the meeting at Saco, Messamouet all but vanished from the historical record. Lescarbot mentioned him briefly in 1607, but there is nothing after that, and it is clear from both Lescarbot and Champlain that by 1607 Membertou had replaced Messamouet as the preeminent Souriquois in the eyes of the French.<sup>19</sup> This in itself would probably have been enough to insure that he and Bashabes would eventually go to war, but more immediate clashes led to a rapid escalation of the situation. While negotiations had been taking place on the Saco, another party of Souriquois had stopped along the Penobscot River and killed

16 John Smith seems to confirm that this was the Souriquois strategy; he wrote in 1616 that the Armouchiquois “sometimes have warres with the Bashabes of Pennobskot”. Smith, *A Description of New England*, in Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580-1631)*, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill, 1986), 1: pp. 291-370 (quote on p. 341).

17 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 392-5; Alvin H. Morrison and Thomas H. Goetz, “Membertou’s Raid on the Chouacoet ‘Almouchiquois’ — The Micmac Sack of Saco in 1607; English Translation of Marc Lescarbot”, in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Sixth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa, 1975), pp. 141-79.

18 Lescarbot, *History*, 2: pp. 323-4; Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 395-6; Morrison and Goetz, “Membertou’s Raid”.

19 Morrison and Goetz, “Membertou’s Raid”, p. 172; Eileen C. Cushing, “Messamouet”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 1 (Toronto, 1966), p. 507.



several Etchemin. The latter, seeking revenge, had then killed a member of Membertou's band who happened to arrive soon after on a trading voyage and had had nothing to do with the earlier attack. When Bashabes learned of this, he tried to appease Membertou by denying any knowledge of the murder until after the fact, expressing his regret that it had happened and sending the body to Port Royal for proper burial. Membertou was not satisfied. He called on the Souriquois and their allies "to take up vengeance for the wickedness and treachery committed by the subjects of Bassabes, and to make war on them as soon as possible".<sup>20</sup>

In the ensuing effort to enlist allies, Membertou flaunted his own growing connection with the French, just as Messamouet had done the year before. He assured fellow sagamores "we have close to us the support of the French / To whom these dogs have done a similar wrong", and he treated them to the fruits of that support — corn, beans and wine. As he told Poutrincourt, "I am held your friend and that of all of Normans [i.e. French]...and to be held of you in esteem; it would be a reproach to me did I not show the effects of that love".<sup>21</sup>

By June 1607, a Souriquois war party, some of its members carrying guns obtained from the French, had assembled at Port Royal to revenge both the insulting conduct of the Armouchiquois and the murderous attack of Bashabes' Etchemin. On their way to the Saco, Membertou's warriors picked up their St. John Etchemin allies as well as some belonging to an Etchemin band from the Androscoggin River. The Androscoggin was near the southern limit of Bashabes' influence, and the sagamore there, Sasinou, may have been transferring his allegiance from Bashabes to Membertou in recognition of the latter's rising power and links to the French. Together, Membertou and his allies descended on Saco in July and won a decisive victory — killing 20 of the Armouchiquois, including their sagamore.<sup>22</sup>

Having defeated the Armouchiquois, however, Membertou did not go after Bashabes, despite his earlier calls for a war of revenge against the Etchemin. Without Indian testimony it is difficult to explain this decision, but it may be that Membertou was reacting to a change in the regional balance of power. His own French allies were leaving America; the Port Royal colonists had been recalled and were packing to go when Membertou left for the Saco.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, a new player was entering the game, apparently on the side of Bashabes. While the Souriquois were fighting the Armouchiquois, English colonists had arrived among the Etchemin.

The English, like the French, had been fishing off the coast of North America since early in the 16th century and by the close of the century had begun to consider

20 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 435-6, 442-5.

21 Morrison and Goetz, "Membertou's Raid"; Lescarbot, *History*, 2: pp. 354-60.

22 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 451 and 457-8; Lescarbot, *History*, 1: pp. 354-60 and 364; Morrison and Goetz, "Membertou's Raid"; Snow, *Archaeology*, pp. 26 and 37; Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, pp. 137-8; Alfred G. Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700* ([1937] Toronto, 1969), p. 13; Bourque and Whitehead, "Tarrentines", pp. 333-4.

23 Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 450-69.

establishing permanent bases there. In an effort to prepare the way for such a base, the English navigator George Waymouth spent several weeks along the Acadian coast during the summer of 1605. He came to evaluate the region's potential and to capture some of its residents, and after two weeks in the Penobscot area he had accomplished both of his missions.<sup>24</sup> He returned to England with news of a land "whose pleasant fertility bewraieth [sic] it selfe to be the garden of nature" and with five members of the Etchemin's Penobscot band.<sup>25</sup> In England at least three of the kidnapped Indians were taken to live with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who used his guests both as a source of information about America and as an advertising gimmick for the Virginia Company, which he was then helping to organize. "The longer I conversed with them the better hope they gave me of those parts where they did inhabit, as proper for our uses", wrote Gorges. The Spanish ambassador, however, reported that the English were also "teaching and training them to say how good that country is for people to go there and inhabit it".<sup>26</sup>

Gorges and others questioned the Etchemin for a year, using what they learned to plan further American expeditions.<sup>27</sup> Then they started to send the Indians back as guides and translators for English explorers and settlers. Two were included in the Virginia Company's first effort to settle New England, in August of 1606, but their ship was intercepted by a Spanish vessel and those aboard it thrown into a Spanish jail. Another, Nahanada, went that October with Thomas Hanham and Martin Pring to explore further the coast of Maine and stayed in Maine when Hanham and Pring returned to England, while a fourth, Skidwares, came back to America in 1607 as part of the Sagadahoc colony — the first English settlement in what later became New England.<sup>28</sup> It was the latter two, Nahanada and Skidwares, who brought the English into Membertou's war with Bashabes.

Sagadahoc lay at the mouth of the Kennebec River, just north of the Saco, and was settled less than a month after Membertou's attack on the Armouchiquois. When the English arrived, Bashabes was in the midst of responding to that attack,

24 James Rosier, *A True Relation of the most prosperous voyage made this present yeere 1605, by Captaine George Waymouth, in the Discovery of the land of Virginia* (London, 1605), (reissued as *Prosperous Voyage in March of America Facsimile Series*, number 17 (Ann Arbor, 1966)). Rosier states in his account that the return of live captives was "a matter of great importance to the full accomplishment of our voyage" (p. 22) and that such captives would provide a source of "further instruction concerning all the promised particulars" of the new land (p. 31).

25 Rosier, *True Relation*, p. 31.

26 Ferdinando Gorges, "A Briefe Narration of the Originall Undertakings of the Advancement of Plantations Into the Parts of America", (London, 1658), in James P. Baxter, ed., *Sir Ferdinando Gorges and His Province of Maine*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1890), 2: pp. 1-81; A.L. Rowse, *The Elizabethans and America* (New York, 1959), pp. 90-7; Zuniga to the King of Spain, 16 March 1606 in Alexander Brown, *The Genesis of the United States*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1890), 1: pp. 45-6.

27 It seems likely, though impossible to prove, that what Philip Barbour called "The Manuscript 'Instruction for a Voyage to New England'" was prepared on the basis of information provided by Gorges' Etchemin houseguests. Philip L. Barbour, "The Manuscript 'Instructions for a Voyage to New England' (1608-1610?)", in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Eleventh Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa, 1980), pp. 135-42.

28 Snow, *Archaeology*, pp. 53-5.

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and both Skidwares, who came with the English, and Nahanada, with whom they soon re-established contact, went to the aid of the Etchemin sagamore. In the wake of the Saco raid they helped punish the Androscoggin Etchemin who had joined the Souriquois. Of much greater importance, however, is the role they played in laying the groundwork for an Anglo-Etchemin alliance. Through early October at least, when the extant record breaks off abruptly, the former captives brought other Etchemin, including the brother of Bashabes, to meet the English and spoke frequently of their meeting Bashabes himself. Such a relationship was just what Bashabes needed to counter Membertou's Port Royal connection. The English were close but not too close to his home on the Penobscot, provided occasional gifts, such as knives, and promised to bring in the future "divers sorts of Merchandise for to trade with the Bashabe".<sup>29</sup>

This unexpected development may explain why Membertou, despite his earlier threats, did not go on to attack Bashabes after his victory at the Saco. His own French allies were leaving Port Royal, and he had no way of knowing how deeply the English planned to involve themselves in Native affairs. The complication posed by the English proved brief though. During the winter of 1607-08 the settlers at Sagadahoc quarrelled with one another and with their Etchemin neighbours, their leader died, and many of their supplies were lost when their storehouse caught fire. When spring came, and an English ship with it, the survivors packed up and headed for home.<sup>30</sup>

Membertou, on the other hand, could still exploit his links to the French, even after the evacuation of Port Royal. In the two years the French had been there they had provided the Souriquois with a stockpile of European products, including firearms, that Membertou could use to impress and intimidate his neighbours. Moreover, French ships continued to visit Port Royal and St. Croix and to demonstrate the Kingdom's continuing attachment to Membertou. This was shown most clearly, perhaps, in the summer of 1608, when a ship under Pierre Angibault (also known as Champdoré) returned to trade at Port Royal. After visiting Membertou, the French went on to the Saco, where they promised the Armouchiquois protection and convinced them to accept a truce with the Souriquois.<sup>31</sup> To the French this made good business sense, as war might disrupt trade. To the region's Native community, it must have seemed further evidence of Membertou's ascendancy and of French support for his bid to control Acadia.

Still more evidence appeared in 1610, when the French reoccupied Port Royal and brought with them the first French missionary to Canada. He was a secular priest named Jéssé Fleché, and he wasted no time. Fleché baptized any Native who would stand still long enough for the sacrament, including Membertou and 20

29 Andrews, *Colonial Period*, 1: pp. 90-1; Snow, *Archaeology*, pp. 53-5; Henry O. Thayer, ed., *The Sagadahoc Colony: Comprising the Relation of a Voyage into New England* (Portland, Me., 1892); Alfred A. Cave, "Why Was the Sagadahoc Colony Abandoned? An Evaluation of the Evidence", *The New England Quarterly*, 68 (1995), pp. 625-40.

30 Thayer, *Sagadahoc*, pp. 83-6; Cave, "Sagadahoc".

31 Elizabeth Jones, *Gentlemen and Jesuits: Quests for Glory and Adventure in the Early Days of New France* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 124-5.

members of his family. To Christian observers, including the Jesuit priest, Pierre Biard, such wholesale “conversions” were of limited religious significance because initiates received no training before the ceremony and showed no understanding of it afterwards. “As regards Christ, the Church, the Faith and the Symbol, the commandments of GOD, prayer and the Sacraments, they knew almost nothing”, wrote Biard. To the Souriquois however, such theological niceties were irrelevant. What mattered to them at this early stage in their relationship with the French was politics. “They accepted baptism as a sort of pledge of friendship and alliance with the French”, wrote Father Biard. Moreover, that is also how it must have looked to other Natives in Acadia — that the French and the Souriquois had formalized an economic and military relationship that had evolved between them over the past six years. Thus, when Membertou announced after the ceremony that he would “have others baptized, or else make war on them”, he was not calling for an American crusade. He was making a political statement, a promise to fight anyone who resisted Franco-Souriquois hegemony around the Gulf of Maine.<sup>32</sup>

Membertou did not live long enough to carry out his threat, but by the time he died — in 1611 — France’s most effective missionaries, the Jesuits, had already arrived in Port Royal, and while under orders not to establish missions anywhere else, members of the order did visit Etchemin settlements on the Penobscot and Kennebec rivers late in 1611. There, according to Father Pierre Biard, they laid the foundation for closer relations with the followers of Bashabes. “Through our conversations, pictures, and crosses, our way of living, and other similar things, they have received the first faint ideas and germs of our holy faith, which will some day take root and grow abundantly, please God, if it is followed by a longer and better cultivation”.<sup>33</sup>

The opportunity to begin that “longer and better cultivation” was not long in coming. Word reached Port Royal in the spring of 1613 that the Jesuits were free to operate anywhere they wanted and that their patroness wanted them to establish a mission on the Penobscot. Her wish set in motion a fascinating contest between the French and the Etchemin. The French wanted to settle among the Etchemin and bring them “the happy freedom of the favored children of God”, but the Etchemin must have seen the French as allies of the Souriquois and, therefore, as potential enemies.<sup>34</sup>

Late in May, 1613, the Jesuits left Port Royal for the Penobscot, but this time they intended to go farther than they had in 1611. They planned to sail up the

32 Robert Rumilly, *L'Acadie Française (1497-1713)* (Louisville, Quebec, 1981), pp. 15-32; Jones *Gentlemen and Jesuits*, pp. 123-37; “A Letter Missive in regard to the Conversion and Baptism of the Grand Sagamore of new France”, 28 June 1610, in Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, [JR] 1: pp. 121-3; Pierre Biard to Christopher Baltazar, 10 June 1611, JR 1: pp. 139-83; Pierre Biard, “Canadian Mission: Letter from Port Royal in Acadia”, 31 January 1611, JR, 2: pp. 59-105 (quote on p. 89); Campeau, ed., *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, I: pp. ccxlv-ccxlv; Kenneth M. Morrison, “Baptism and Alliance: The Symbolic Meditations of Religious Syncretism”, *Ethnohistory*, 37 (1990), pp. 416-37.

33 Pierre Biard to the Reverend Father Provincial, 31 January 1612, JR, 2: pp. 4-55 (quote on p. 53).

34 *Ibid.* (quote on p. 55).

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Penobscot to the mouth of the Kenduskeag (Kedesquit) River and to establish themselves near Upsegon, Bashabes' principal village. As the Jesuits sailed south, however, they ran into thick fog along the Maine coast and for two days had no idea where they were. When the weather finally cleared the ship's pilot recognized Mount Desert Island, just east of Penobscot Bay, and quickly sailed into a harbour that the grateful French named Saint Sauveur. From there the Jesuits intended to sail on to the Penobscot and up that river to the Kenduskeag. The ship's crew, however, had other ideas. They had been engaged to bring the party to Acadia and had done so. Besides, added the captain, no one had ever sailed up the rock-strewn Penobscot as far as the missionaries had in mind, and he did not intend to be the first.<sup>35</sup>

In the midst of this dispute, the French noticed a plume of smoke and, perhaps thankful for the distraction, set off to investigate its source. It came from an Etchemin camp at the mouth of the Union River, just opposite Mount Desert, where the Natives already showed a keen understanding of Christianity and of the Jesuits. When they learned the French were bound for Kenduskeag, the Natives tried to convince them to stay on the Union River instead. "If thou wishest to stay in these regions", they asked, "why dost thou not rather remain here with us, who have truly as good and beautiful a place as Kadesquit?" When this approach failed they tried another, telling the Jesuits "it is necessary that thou comest, since Asticou, our sagamore, is sick unto death; and if thou dost not come he will die without baptism, and will not go to heaven". This found the missionaries' weak spot, and they quickly agreed to go see Asticou, whose illness proved far less threatening than reported. "We found him truly sick", wrote Father Biard, "but not unto death, for it was only a cold that troubled him". Biard also wrote, however, that his journey convinced him Asticou's band had not exaggerated the appeal of its Union River home. The French, therefore, decided to stay at Saint Sauveur and build their mission there.<sup>36</sup>

Why the Union River Etchemin were so anxious to keep the French from proceeding remains a mystery. Two explanations seem likely, but it is impossible to prove or disprove either one. The first assumes that Bashabes remained the dominant sagamore of the Kennebec and Penobscot valleys. If that were the case then the Union River sagamore, Asticou, could have been acting to protect Bashabes and the villages loyal to him. Keeping the French on the coast would leave them close enough to trade with but miles from the Indians' principal villages, thus providing Bashabes with a counter to the Souriquois' cosy relationship with Port Royal without bringing foreigners dangerously close. The second interpretation depends on Bashabes' influence beginning to fray at the edges. One sagamore had already sided with Membertou during the latter's 1607 raid on Saco, and if Asticou's loyalty was wavering too, then his inviting the French to stay at Saint Sauveur looks suspiciously like an effort to establish his own link to the French or to the emerging Franco-Souriquois alliance. Either

35 Pierre Biard, "A Relation of New France", 1616, *JR*, 3: pp. 261-5.

36 *Ibid.*, 3: pp. 261-73.

explanation fits the events of the decade preceding 1613, and the fact that Asticou replaced Bashabes as chief sagamore at the latter's death could mean either that he was loyal to the end or that his scheming paid off.<sup>37</sup> In either case, Etchemin wishes figured prominently in the Jesuits' decision to build their mission at Saint Sauveur rather than Upsegon.

What has been less well understood, even by students of Native American history, is the extent to which Indian actions may also have contributed to the mission's destruction. An Indian role has long been clear. According to the French, a Kennebec Etchemin told them afterwards that he mistook the English ship *Treasurer* for a French vessel and naively directed it to Saint Sauveur.<sup>38</sup> No one seems to have considered that the Indian might have known all along that Argall was English — an enemy of the French — and may have deliberately sent him to Saint Sauveur in the hope that he would destroy the mission and remove a Franco-Souriquois threat to Bashabes.

It is certainly not unreasonable to think that a Penobscot or Kennebec Etchemin could distinguish between English and French sailors in 1613. Many Acadian Natives could distinguish among the different nationalities visiting their region and had been doing so for years. Marc Lescarbot claimed that Souriquois around Port Royal in 1607 had been able to distinguish between Basques and other Frenchmen, and Pierre Biard wrote in 1611 that the St. John Etchemin identified Basques and residents of St. Malo as different from other Frenchmen. Further south, when Samuel Champlain sailed past Penobscot Bay in 1605 he encountered an Indian sagamore of the region who told him that a fishing vessel — actually George Weymouth's ship — had killed five Indians — the captives Weymouth took back to England — and, wrote Champlain, "from his description of the men on the ship we judged they were English". Champlain did not explain what the Indian saw or heard that distinguished an Englishman from a Frenchman. It could have been any number of things: dress, language, decorum, ship design, flags, religion and who knows what else. Whatever it was, though, the Indians were quick to notice it. And two years later, in 1607, English settlers from Sagadahoc sailed up the Kennebec and reported "sertain Salvages Callinge unto us in broken inglyshe". Clearly, by 1613 there were Etchemin who knew the difference between the English and the French.<sup>39</sup>

Nor is it unreasonable to think that a Native of the Kennebec-Penobscot region would understand the rivalry that existed between England and France. Nahanada, Skidwares and the other Weymouth captives must have learned about it during

37 Snow, "Eastern Abenaki", p. 141.

38 Biard, "Relation", *JR*, 3: pp. 275-9; McManis, *European Impressions of the New England Coast, 1497-1629*, p. 87; Alvin H. Morrison, "Dawnland Decisions: Seventeenth-Century Wabanaki Leaders and Their Responses to the Differential Contact Stimuli in the Overlap Area of New France and New England", Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York-Buffalo, 1974, pp. 80-1.

39 Lescarbot, *History*, 2: pp. 348-9; Biard to Baltazar, 10 June 1611, *JR*, 1: p. 163; Champlain, *Voyages*, 1: pp. 364-5; Thayer, *Sagadahoc*, p. 75. Concerning a similar phenomenon in the Pacific Northwest, see Warren L. Cook, *Flood Tide of Empire: Spain and the Pacific Northwest, 1543-1819* (New Haven and London, 1973), pp. 164-5 and 179-80.

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their stay in England, and English settlers at Sagadahoc, no doubt, expressed their animosity towards the French and probably tried to win Etchemin support. Certainly the English, for their part, considered the Etchemin potential allies against the French and the Souriquois. When John Smith planned a small colony for New England, in 1615, he wrote that “the maine assistance next God, I had to this small number [of settlers], was my acquaintance among the Salvages; especially, with Dohannida [i.e. Nahanada]...who had lived long in England”. “With him and diverse others”, continued Smith, “I had concluded to inhabit, and defend them against the Terentyne[s] [Souriquois]; with a better power than the French did them; whose tyranny did inforce them to imbrace my offer, with no small devotion”.<sup>40</sup>

This is not to say that the Etchemin would have considered the English their friends and welcomed their return with open arms. The English had, after all, kidnapped several Etchemin in 1605 and had sometimes failed to meet or even understand Native standards of hospitality during their stay at Sagadahoc.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that the Etchemin recognized Argall as the enemy of their enemies and hoped to exploit his presence to help them expel a more immediate threat from the French. All they had to do was point Argall in the direction of Saint Sauveur. If the attack succeeded, it would expel the French from Bashabes’ territory. If it failed they could tell the French it had all been a dreadful mistake.

It did not fail. Saint Sauveur fell to the English, and its founders were sent back to France or carried to Virginia as prisoners. Moreover, when the *Treasurer* arrived in Jamestown, it was ordered back to Acadia to finish what it had started. Thus, in October, 1613, the English returned to Saint Sauveur and razed what they had missed the first time. Then, they attacked Saint Croix and Port Royal, destroying both and driving most of the French out of Acadia completely.<sup>42</sup> But if Bashabes helped engineer the French defeat, it was a pyrrhic victory. Expulsion of the French did not end the struggle between Etchemin and Souriquois for regional supremacy. Indeed, Alvin Morrison has suggested that the virtual elimination of French settlement in the region removed a powerful check on Souriquois ambitions and that the tribe’s renewed assault on the Etchemin was an unforeseen consequence of Argall’s raids. Over the next several years, the Souriquois escalated their attacks, and about 1615, in the words of Ferdinando Gorges, they “surprised the *Bashaba*, and slew him and all his People near about him”.<sup>43</sup>

Given the extant evidence, it is impossible to prove that Bashabes used the English for his own ends. But that is not the point. It is not the aim of this paper

40 *A Description of New England*, in Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, 1: p. 351.

41 Cave, “Sagadahoc”, pp. 638-40.

42 Biard, “Relation”, *JR*, 3: pp. 275-83 and 4: pp. 9-37; Clark, *Acadia*, p. 81; Rumilly, *L’Acadie*, pp. 46-7; Andrews, *Colonial Period*, 1: pp. 148-9.

43 Bourque, “Ethnicity”, p. 263; Morrison and Goetz, “Membertou’s Raid”, p. 154 (Gorges quote, pp. 154-5).

to prove that the interpretation offered here of the events at Saint Sauveur is more valid than the traditional view. Rather, I want to offer Saint Sauveur as an example of the fact that when considering the early stages of contact between Natives and colonizers the range of plausible alternatives is often wider than Eurocentric scholars are willing to admit. In that regard we are still too much like Marc Lescarbot. When Lescarbot met Membertou, he wrote that the sagamore acted like he was “the equal of the King”. Lescarbot advised the French King to humour Membertou, but he never believed that the sagamore was really the equal of Henry IV because racial and cultural blinders prevented him from recognizing the reality of power in early Acadia. Among modern scholars, hindsight often has the same effect. Knowing as we do that European germs and European technology eventually devastated Native cultures, we sometimes forget how long that process took, and we act as if the final outcome was known in advance to Indians and Europeans meeting for the first time. Worse, we forget that Native Americans had their own agendas in which Europeans were not always central.

In their world, Membertou, Bashabes and Messamouet *were* the equals of the king. Before disease decimated Acadia’s Native population, sometime after 1615, sagamores had the power to negotiate or to compete with Europeans as their equals and to use them just as selfishly as the Europeans tried to use the Natives. Both sides were in a position to employ a range of tactics to advance their ends. In the complex politics of early Acadia, each party could offer favours to the others, could withhold them, could withdraw, could attack and could form or break alliances. And in order to understand the choices that Native leaders made, historians have to remember the world in which they made them.