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Reconstructing Wabanaki History

The Editors

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RECONSTRUCTING WABANAKI HISTORY

BEYOND THE period of European contact and the colonial wars, the Wabanaki are poorly represented in the annals of Maine history. In the past twenty-four years, only twelve articles on Wabanaki topics have crossed the editor's desk — about one every two years. In this environment of scarcity, it is our pleasure to present our current issue. The focus on Wabanaki history follows a precedent in which we devoted the winter 1998 number to the memory of linguist Frank T. Siebert, Jr., who spent much of his career helping Penobscot speakers preserve their language. Along with perspectives on Siebert's work, the issue contained Willard Walker's history of the Wabanaki Confederacy and Harald Prins's fascinating account of Penobscot "Trickster" Chief Big Thunder. In this issue we offer four articles that reassess a hundred years of thinking and writing about Maine Indians, from the 1907 tricentennial celebration of French colonization on St. Croix Island, to Fannie Hardy Eckstorm's folkloric interpretation of Penobscot politics in the mid-twentieth century, and the literary depiction of Native heroes by author Henry Red Eagle, who lived from 1885 to 1971. These articles offer a new understanding of the often troubled and poorly understood relation between whites and Indians in Maine — what MHS Director Richard D'Abate calls, in his contribution, a "history of the history" of Maine Indians.

In our lead article, Jacques Ferland twines together three themes in his history of the history of the Penobscot people: the state's role in depriving Penobscots of their tribal lands north of Old Town; the impact of this dispossession on tribal politics; and the ways in which historians and folklorists have interpreted or obfuscated this history. Ferland points out that non-Indian histories tend to distance lumbermen, loggers, settlers, and state officials from this story of dispossession and white aggression. Ferland is assistant professor of history at the University of Maine, where he teaches Canadian, French-Canadian, Native American, and U.S. history. As a researcher, he devotes close attention to labor, business, and women's history in the textile industry, rural leather

tanning communities in the Northeast, and Franco-Penobscot history in Maine, and he has published in both French and English journals.

In her reflections on Ferland's article, Pauleena MacDougall focuses on Fannie Hardy Eckstorm as the best known white spokesperson for Penobscot history. In her history of Eckstorm's history, MacDougall emphasizes the Brewer folklorist's ability to see Penobscot historical figures as individuals, rather than as archetypes, and she defends the methods by which folklorists in general understand those whose own heroes and histories may be quite alien to the researcher. She urges a careful balancing and weighing of all sources — documentary and folkloric — to discover the truth. MacDougall is associate director of the Maine Folklife Center at the University of Maine and a faculty associate in the departments of Anthropology and History. She has published numerous papers on Penobscot Indian language, culture, and history, and is editor of *Northeast Folklore*. Her *Penobscot Dance of Resistance: Tradition in the History of a People* was published by the University of New England Press in 2004, and she is at work on a biography of Fannie Hardy Eckstorm.

Our third article focuses on author and guide Henry Red Eagle, whose career included guiding, clerking, writing, and roles in scores of Hollywood films and wild-west shows. In this history of Red Eagle's fictional history, we come to understand Native loggers, guides, and river drivers as individuals caught between two worlds — Indian and white, traditional and modern. Red Eagle, born Henry Perley in Greenville in 1885, was a Maliseet of full Native ancestry, and was an experienced woods guide, lumberman, and trapper before he took up a career in writing for pulp fiction magazines and sporting publications. He used his fiction and nonfiction to extol the virtues of the Maine north woods and to emphasize the continuing presence of Natives in the Maine woods. Dale Potts earned his doctorate at the University of Maine in 2007. His dissertation explored literary interpretations of the Maine woods from Henry David Thoreau and John Springer to the popular outdoor and nature writers of the 1950s. He teaches classes at the University of Maine and Thomas College.

Finally, Society Director Richard D'Abate adds to this history of Native histories his own reflections on the ways we have celebrated our common heritage in Maine. D'Abate's article is based on a recent speech commemorating the founding of the St. Croix colony by French explorers Sieur de Monts and Samuel de Champlain in 1604. D'Abate reflects on past celebrations of this event and on the fact that the Wabanaki were

curiously screened out of histories that marked these events. In explaining why, D'Abate adds another dimension to the "history of the history" of Maine's aboriginal people.

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THE EDITORS