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Dedicated at the 300th anniversary celebration in 1904, this tablet commemorates the multifaceted history of St. Croix Island. More than a century later, it reminds us of the interconnectedness of French, English, and Native American interests in the St. Croix region and throughout Maine. Photo courtesy Maine Historical Society.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

## ON THE HISTORY OF ITS HISTORY: ST. CROIX ISLAND CELEBRATIONS AND THE MISSING INDIANS

BY RICHARD D'ABATE, DIRECTOR, MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The following presentation was delivered at the 400th Anniversary celebration of the founding of the French Colony on St. Croix Island by explorers Sieur de Monts and Samuel de Champlain in 1604. The colony was short-lived, but its timing was auspicious. The first European settlement in Maine, it was followed in 1607 by the Popham Colony, now coming up on its own 400th anniversary. In his talk, delivered in Calais on June 25, 2004, Director Abate reflects on the previous celebrations of this founding event and, like other authors in this issue, expounds on the meaning of Native American history in the Maine experience.*

I WOULD LIKE to thank the Saint Croix Historical Society for inviting me here and express my pleasure in taking part in this momentous celebration. I've been asked to share a few thoughts about what we might call the history of the history of Saint Croix Island, especially as it unfolded in the twentieth century — a story in which the Maine Historical Society plays an important role. But before I do that, I'd like to take a quick run through the historical highlights of the last four centuries.

The European history of the island begins on June 26, 1604, when Pierre Du Gua, le Sieur de Monts, acting under a patent from King Henry IV, landed on the island with a small party of compatriots, including France's brilliant cartographer Samuel de Champlain. Though other French explorers had made important discoveries in these northern latitudes in the 1500s, it was this landfall at Saint Croix Island at the start of the seventeenth century that heralded the French presence in North America. They abandoned their homes and fortifications after one terrible year on the island, but successive settlements over the next

four years, in nearby Port Royal and ultimately in Quebec, finally established the colony on a permanent basis. And that presence, as we all know, grew and shaped the character of two great countries: the United State and Canada — a fact felt with particular pride in the state of Maine.

The De Monts settlement on Saint Croix surfaced again, literally and figuratively, at the end of the eighteenth century, almost 200 years later. Ever since the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War in 1783, the United States and Britain sought unsuccessfully to establish the most northern and eastern boundaries between the States and the Canadian colonies. One of the most vexing geographical, as well as political questions was locating the true Saint Croix River, since, according to the treaty, a river with that name was meant to be our eastern boundary. In 1797 the Saint Croix Commission, using Champlain's narrative and map of the island, was able to settle this issue by digging up the remaining foundations and graves of the Saint Croix settlement, and thus identifying the correct river. This dig was an early milestone for historical archaeology, but more importantly it averted an impending war between the two countries. The nineteenth-century history of the island was less dramatic, but in 1856 the northern half was sold to the United States to be used for a lighthouse installation. While the lighthouse served an important function, lasting in various forms until 1976, the purchase itself established the government's interest in the island, and this would eventually lead to its designation as a National and then an International Historical Monument.

It was on June 25, 1904, that official recognition of the island's history as a national landmark began to take shape. The date was the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Saint Croix settlement, and Calais was host to a splendid affair — all under the auspices of the Maine Historical Society. From its founding in 1822 as the third state historical society organized in the U.S. (after those in Massachusetts and New York), the Society paid special attention to America's national origins and to Maine's role in that story. The critical subjects in this national narrative were the Revolutionary War, colonial settlement, and, inevitably, the age of European exploration, and the Society was engaged in collecting important documents, maps, and key texts from these three epics. In 1869 the Society published *A History of the Discovery of Maine*, written by the German scholar Johann Georg Kohl, one of the foremost experts on North American exploration at that time. Kohl's was the first volume in the *Documentary History of the State of Maine*, a series of volumes issued by the Society with the help of state funding.

To the work of publishing, the Society added the business of commemoration. Between 1903 and 1907 members conducted five major celebrations, most commemorating the events of European settlement and exploration. All in all, from its inception forward, the Society led the way in thinking about Maine's earliest recorded history, and that is why they initiated the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Saint Croix.

The events and presentations of June 25, 1904, are described in a volume entitled *Tercentenary of the Landing of De Monts at Saint Croix Island*, published by the Society a year later. As the book points out, dignitaries and warships from four countries were in attendance; cannons were fired in the harbor; and a resolution was passed establishing for all time Saint Croix as the true and proper name of the island, banishing the many competitors. A bronze plaque, commemorating the discovery and occupation of Saint Croix and hence the start of the colony of Acadia, was affixed to a boulder on the island, where it remains to this day.

The festivities included four significant historical lectures, each covering a different aspect of the early French experience. The four historians, all connected in one way or another to Maine Historical Society, were about as prestigious as you could find at the time. James Phinney Baxter, mayor of Portland and president of the Society, spoke about Champlain and the nature of earlier English and French claims in the New World. General Joshua Chamberlain was not quite as famous for his Civil War exploits as he would later become, but he was still a commanding and revered figure. Chamberlain spoke of the politics of French settlement and the overlapping patents that would create conflicts with the English. The Reverend Henry Burrage, soon to be the first State Historian of Maine as well as the Society's president, focused on the ecumenical and tolerant nature of the de Monts party, emphasizing the fact that it was composed of both Protestants and Catholics, a result, as he saw it, of the Edict of Nantes, which had officially established religious toleration in France in 1599, only six years before the landing. And finally William Francis Ganong, a native of New Brunswick, a professor at Smith College, and one of the foremost scholars of the exploration period, reminded the audience of the two classic texts of Saint Croix history: the eyewitness accounts found in *The Voyages of Samuel de Champlain*, first published in 1613, and Marc Lescarbot's nearly contemporaneous account, *The History of New France*, published in 1609. Ganong used these works to paint a vivid picture of life, friendship, suffering, and death on the island, and at the end of his talk he expressed an idea that would become key to all subsequent celebrations of the island's history. Saint Croix had become a symbol of international accord, repre-

senting the resolution of age-old European conflicts as well as the peace and friendship of two great New-World nations. This notion would become known, in the words of a later commentator, as the "Spirit of Saint Croix."

June 25 was a wonderful and no doubt uplifting day, but the modern historian looking back at that celebration might notice something strange: in an entire day of lectures about the French colonial enterprise, there was no discussion of the Indians. For those of us who witnessed the bitterly contested celebrations around the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing, this is almost unthinkable, but in fact it is not surprising, since clearly our ideas of what is or isn't important in history can change. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that such an omission would have also been unthinkable for our French friends back in 1604. When Champlain and De Monts arrived, the Etchimins, probable ancestors of the modern Passamaquoddy, were everywhere in the Saint Croix area, and they had been for almost three thousand years, as later archaeology on Saint Croix would indicate. Next to the dangers of the sea and the problem of survival, Indians were the number-one topic on every French explorer's mind: he feared them, fought them, grew fond of them, exploited them, traded with them, proselytized them, and studied them. We can see this clearly in Champlain's narratives, where native life is a constant subject, but it is more profoundly apparent in Lescarbot's *History of New France*, one of the classic Saint Croix texts recommended by Professor Ganong on that day in June a century ago.

Lescarbot joined the French colonists at Port Royal in 1606, and it was there he wrote the famous *Theater of Neptune*, a fascinating masque actually performed on the waves. Half of his *History of New France* concerns the de Monts landing, the settlement on Saint Croix, and the eventual removal to Port Royal a year later, but the other half is something entirely different and in some ways more extraordinary. It is a kind of comparative anthropology of the American Indian, from Brazil to Acadia, with chapters on religion, language, dress, courtship, marriage, child-rearing, and much more. The study was written in the light of what might be termed a universal notion of the primitive: an appreciation that every human race and nation, including the European, has a primitive stage that informs all later customs, language, and ritual. For the time, this was a highly advanced cultural thesis, inspired by a type of humanist research that arose in certain progressive circles in Europe in the early seventeenth century. This humanist scientific orientation, reflected as well in the works of Champlain and many other French writ-

ers, enabled at least some French colonists to recognize a bond between themselves and the Indians that transcended, or at least softened, the strangeness of their cultural differences. If we link this attitude to the distinctive brand of religious and cultural politics found among the Jesuits, who soon followed the explorers, it goes some way toward explaining why the French experience with Indians, although colonial and exploitive, was qualitatively different and often more humane than that of the English and the Spanish. The deep interaction of the French and the Native American is, in fact, an indelible and highly significant aspect of the Acadian record. And yet in 1904 no one saw fit to mention it.

The reasons for this are fairly clear. For the speakers on that day, for the audience, and I dare say for the majority of people in the country, the historical notion of Europe's manifest destiny in America — the inevitable progress of Western civilization — was still firmly in command. The purpose of the Saint Croix commemoration was to confirm this progress, and to stress the essential Anglo-Saxon unity that made it possible. In 1904 the old antagonisms between France and England, and between Canada and the United States, had been resolved in the Spirit of Saint Croix, and there could now be an unchallenged consensus about how the narrative of North American history should run and what its key events could be. To have included a discussion of the Indians would have troubled this pageant with awkward notions of injustice and with invidious comparisons between the French and the English. No, June 25, 1904, was about the reconciliation of differences. Only in a single poem, read by Henry Milner Rideout of Calais, do we hear of Indian lives passing forevermore and see the voyaging silhouettes of frail canoes heading into the sunset. This is no doubt an echo of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, and as with Longfellow, one gets the impression that it is only the vague disappearance of the Indians and not the real fact of their existence or destruction that can summon up our human sympathies. Perhaps that is all that we could offer a once bitter and dangerous foe — at least at the turn of the century.

Although there are still many who regret it, this sort of consensus about Western history, made possible by leaving out the inconvenient parts, is no longer possible. It is not just a matter of political correctness; the old certainties, hierarchies, and narratives — the very things that make commemorative activities an effective tool for social cohesion — have been jostled and challenged. And that is what good history should do: our generation sees things through different eyes and accepts the idea of many possible narratives, even for the history of Maine.

And I'm pleased to say that if you look at the National Park Service's Saint Croix Management Plan, published in 1998, you will find the Indians everywhere in evidence, from the indisputable archaeological facts, to Native representation in the review process, to their thematic role in the Long Range Interpretive Plan. Whether this plan actually comprehends the significance of the French-Indian interaction and the special quality of French cultural and intellectual attitudes is not altogether clear, but it certainly improves on the 1904 version of Saint Croix history. What contemporary Indians think of all this, however, is for them to say.

How do we get from 1904 to 1998 and thence to the present? A quick chronology suggests the growing legal and historical recognition of Saint Croix. In 1932, at the insistence of Mr. and Mrs. William Parker, owners of part of the island, the National Park Service studied and confirmed the national historic significance of Saint Croix. After abortive legislative efforts in the mid-1930s and time out for war, the Maine congressional delegation, led by Senator Owen Brewster, also Maine's former governor, went into action. On June 8, 1949, an act to authorize the Saint Croix Island National Monument was signed into federal law. Though actual creation of the site awaited full federal title to the island, the event was celebrated in Calais at the Four Day Jubilee on July 2, 1949, which also included dedication of the newly completed Calais Memorial High School. As it turned out, it would take another nineteen years for the federal government to acquire deeds to all the property, but on June 30, 1968, the Saint Croix Island National Monument was formally dedicated. It included, this time, a special blessing for the Abenaki, to whom God first entrusted this land, delivered by the Reverend Kenneth Lindsey of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Calais.

In the early 1980s the U.S. and Canadian governments began discussion of formal international recognition of the site, and in 1982 the National Park Service and Parks Canada were given joint responsibility. In 1984 Saint Croix Island received official designation by the U.S. Congress as an International Historic Site. Three years later Maine and New Brunswick created the Saint Croix International Waterway Commission, and it was this same commission that was charged in 1996 with planning the 400th anniversary celebration. In that same year the National Park Service began to write its Saint Croix long-range management plan. Published in 1998, it was easily the most comprehensive document ever compiled about the island, including its archaeology, history, and ecology, along with the environmental impacts of tourism. Not coinciden-

tally, the document included thoughts about what might happen at the celebration of Saint Croix on the 25th and 26th of June in the year 2004, which is where we are at this very moment. I don't think they mention my coming to speak to you, but it's only a plan, after all, and not the book of fate.

We close with a note about the island's future, and in good historical fashion we turn to the past for a sense of this trajectory, picking up a thread of concern about Saint Croix that plainly runs from the 300th anniversary celebration of 1904, to the Dedication of 1968, and on to the Management Plan of 1998. In each instance we learn that the southerly shore of the Island has long been eroding in the weather and the tidal ebb and flow of the river, a fact easily discerned by comparing Champlain's famous map of 1604 with more modern renditions. The anxiety is clear: unless this erosion is held in check, the island and all its historical associations might disappear. I bring your attention to this fact since it allows me to get back to my favorite part of the 1904 celebration: the closing ode written by Mr. Rideout of Calais. We've already talked about his sympathy for the disappearing Indians, and it is quite apparent throughout the poem that death and loss were on his mind. He noted that the island itself was eroding, slowly effaced by weather and water. What was once visible and palpable, he says, now "Melts in the leveling centuries." And then he does what poets are supposed to do: he turns the erosion of the island into a metaphor. History — our collective memory — is eroded by time: "the envious wave overflows earth and the man/ and Oblivion would seem victorious." But he despairs for only a moment, since he knows that something will endure: the bronze plaque unveiled on Saint Croix is anchored to the rock, and will continue to bear witness to history, even as the actors and the historians become nothing more than dreams and illusions in the minds of their own children. I find this touching. It suggests to me what a century's worth of talk and legislation, of research and writing, and of gathering together has been about. We do all this to bear witness to the reality of the past, to raise a bulwark against oblivion, to defeat the erosion of memory and the anxiety of loss. We do history in order not to lose our place in the world.