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WILLARD WALKER

THE WABANAKI CONFEDERACY

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In a convincing assessment of Frank Speck's Penobscot scholarship, Frank Siebert (1982) argues that its flaws can be attributed to Speck's neglect of early documentary sources, his uncritical acceptance of informants' assertions, his over-reliance on Newell Lyon, and his failure to consult more knowledgeable Penobscots. One notable result, Siebert says, was Speck's notion of an "Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy" (Speck 1915), a concept which, in Siebert's view, was "at best only a half truth,

and was essentially antihistorical, or at least anhistorical" (Siebert 1982:111). He finds this concept flawed in a number of ways, some of which he details in the following passage:

a misnomer was involved in calling the confederacy Algonkian...or for that matter even Wabanaki, since the organization incorporated significant Iroquoian elements and had its headquarters at the Iroquoian settlement of Caughnawaga. In addition, the alliance was not cultural or linguistic in any sense, but was entirely political. Besides, the confederacy was not of aboriginal origin, but was proposed and organized at French instigation (Siebert 1982:111).

Then follows a thorough review of the many political, military, economic, and demographic problems which beset the Governor of New France in the 1720s. This demonstrates, in Siebert's view, that the French "arranged an Indian alliance to encourage and support the Abenakis against the English" (1982:115). The alliance, established in stages from 1721 to 1723, chiefly by Governor Philippe de Rigaud de Vaudreuil, "should never be confused with the original Abenaki Confederacy under the Penobscot chief Bashabes which the earliest English and French explorers described at the beginning of the seventeenth century" (1982: 115-6). Siebert's insistence on this point is apparently based on his conviction that the "Abenaki Confederacy" (but not the French-inspired confederacy) was not only Algonquian but Abenaki, was "cultural and linguistic" as well as political, and was of aboriginal origin.

In what follows I take issue with Siebert's assertion and argue that the Wabanaki Confederacy was, and continues to be, an authentic northeastern Algonquian institution. It has taken many forms in its efforts to adapt to external pressures, but it embodies a stable set of core values and has survived concerted attacks on its integrity over the last four centuries. British, French, American, and Canadian governments, and several states and provinces, have all failed in their attempts to dismember the confederacy and assimilate its adherents. The annual

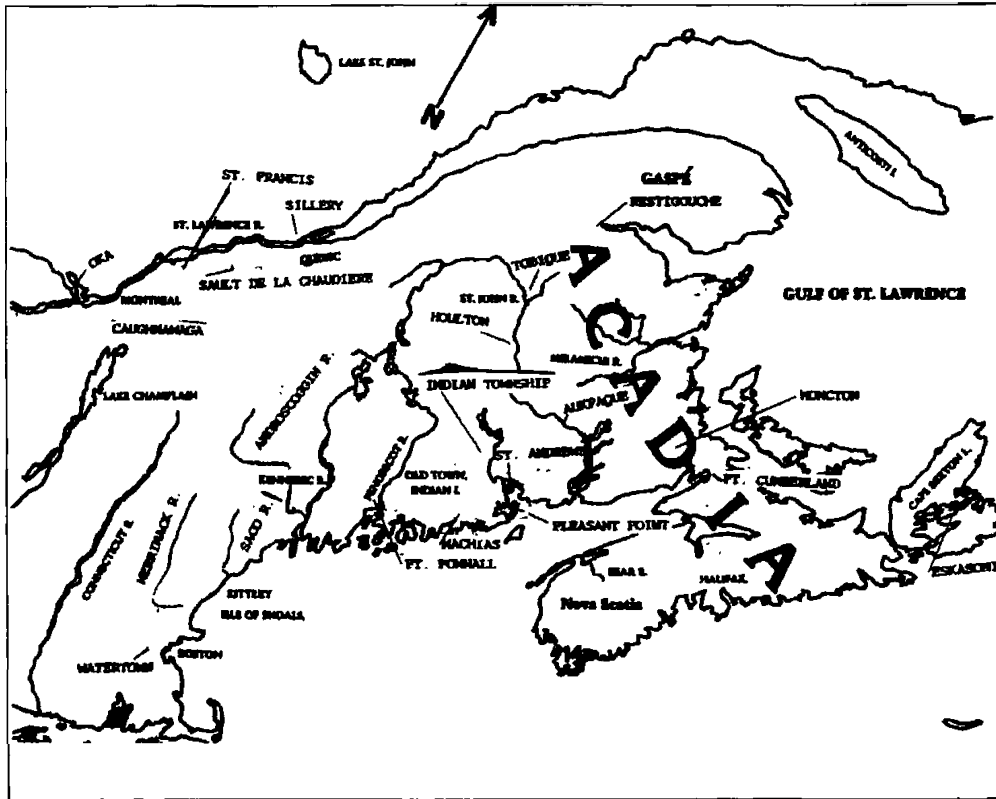
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meetings of the last few years are consistent with an ancient pattern that is indigenous, adaptive, and independent of any dominant society. The wampums and the chiefs' "hats" are gone, but a tradition of mutual support, civility, and consensus leadership persists in the minds and hearts and the collective consciousness of the Wabanaki people.

SPECK'S IMPLICIT DICHOTOMY

Siebert's assessment of Speck's article, "The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy," seems overly critical. To be sure, the title is misleading; it forecasts a description of a single, homogeneous Wabanaki political institution. But the substance of the article distinguishes clearly between the larger, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual confederacy that emerged in the eighteenth century and a smaller confederacy made up of just four Wabanaki tribes. These four tribes, Speck says, participated in the Caughnawaga Confederacy, but they also met frequently at their own council houses, had their own agenda, and participated in social as well as political activities.

On the basis of Penobscot oral tradition, largely as provided by Newell Lyon, Speck described the Caughnawaga-Wabanaki relationship as beginning with the termination of the Iroquois-Wabanaki wars, which ended, he said, "in the foundation of an alliance between the four Wabanaki tribes, headed by the Penobscot, and the Mohawk of Caughnawaga and Oka, together with other neighboring tribes....From this time onward,..the confederacy grew in importance; the four Wabanaki tribes forming themselves into an eastern member with their convention headquarters at Oldtown...and the whole confederated group,...appointing Caughnawaga as the confederacy capital" (Speck 1915:493). As we shall see, this description of the two confederacies is corroborated in part by other sources independent of Penobscot oral tradition, although we lack confirmation of Speck's claim that the Wabanaki headquarters was fixed at Old Town. With regard to the exclusively Wabanaki councils, Speck wrote that the four Wabanaki tribes, the Penobscots, Passamaquoddies, Maliseets, and Micmacs, "had a certain na-



Map courtesy Willard Walker.

tional identity based, of course, upon their close ethnical relationship. No doubt the political bonds which linked them together existed long before the alliance with the Iroquois and their neighbors" (Speck 1915:498-9).

Clearly, Speck was not describing a single Wabanaki confederacy with "Iroquoian elements." He was reporting the existence of two distinctive confederacies with overlapping membership. His article explicitly states that they differed as to size, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, the location and timing of their council meetings, the seating arrangements at their respec-

tive councils, and the degree to which, and manner in which, their constituent tribes differed in status. It tells us that Wabanaki chiefs could be elected and inaugurated only with the consent and active participation of all four Wabanaki tribes. It also provides detailed descriptions and drawings of Penobscot wampum belts and strings (as reconstructed in accordance with Newell Lyon's specifications), demonstrating the repeated use of the number four in their construction and design to manifest the integration of the four tribes. All these features of the Wabanaki Confederacy differentiate it from the larger confederacy associated with Caughnawaga, although it goes without saying that there must have been considerable overlap in the procedures, artifacts, and values of the two institutions, as there was in their constituencies and personnel.

According to Speck, the Caughnawaga Council met triennially at Caughnawaga, whereas the Wabanaki councils met "when occasion arose... at one or the other of [the four council houses associated with the four tribes]" (Ibid.:499). At Caughnawaga, Speck wrote, "the tribal delegates had assigned places according to the rank of their tribe. The representatives of the four Wabanaki tribes occupied one side of the council, while opposite them across the "fire" sat the representatives of the western members. Political prerogatives seem to have rested with the Penobscot on the one side, and with the Ottawa on the other side of the house" (Ibid.:497). "At the fire of the Wabanaki confederates," however, "the representatives of the four tribes sat facing each other, forming a rectangle about the wampum. The delegates of each tribe here had equal influence" (Ibid.:499). They did not have equal status, however. The Wabanaki tribes referred to one another as elder or younger brother, the Penobscots being elder brother to the Passamaquoddies, who were elder to the Maliseets, who in turn were elder to the Micmacs (Ibid.:499).

The tribal delegations at Caughnawaga also varied as to ranking and referred to one another with kinship terms reflecting status. The terms used there, though, included those associated with parent-child relationships. The Penobscots

referred to the Ottawas, who outranked all other tribes in the confederacy, as “our...father” and regarded them as “the oldest tribe” (Ibid.:495).

In the center of the Caughnawaga council house, wrote Speck, “a large wooden hoop hung suspended from the ceiling. This in effect symbolized the actual council fire of the confederacy” (Ibid.:497). The Penobscot council house also had a large hoop in the center of the hall “from which were suspended the belts of wampum to be used variously as occasion required” (Ibid.:499). The hoop, however, was of moosehide, not of wood.

Each of the Wabanaki tribes had its own council house. The Penobscots’ was at Old Town, the Passamaquoddies’ at Sipayik (Pleasant Point), the Maliseets’ in the St. John Valley at Aukpaque, later at Tobique, and the southwestern Micmacs’ at Bear River, near Digby, Nova Scotia (Ibid.:499).

The Wabanaki custom of electing and inaugurating chiefs only with the concurrence of all four tribes insured harmonious relationships between the head chiefs of the four tribes. Speck described the process as follows: “Upon the death of the...chief...the people went into mourning for a year....At the end of the year of mourning the council of the bereaved tribe would send messengers to the other allies inviting them to come and raise up a new chief to fill the place of the deceased” (Ibid.:503).

Speck’s account of the Wabanaki and Caughnawaga confederacies should not be accepted at face value, however, without corroboration from independent sources. For the Caughnawaga Confederacy, Speck sought confirmation himself from the western tribes: “Several visits to the Mohawk both of Caughnawaga and Oka in quest of confederacy material yielded only the vaguest general reminiscences among the old men of my acquaintance” (Ibid.:497). At Eskasoni, the Micmac head village on Cape Breton Island, Speck found (Ibid.:506) that diplomatic relations with the Mohawks were still “a live issue” and the wampum belts were “religiously preserved by the executive head” and were “displayed and explained to the people” each year, “as all the Wabanaki used to do, at the tribal meetings.”

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There was, however, no memory of participation in the Wabanaki Confederacy (Ibid.:507).

Other sources on the Wabanaki Confederacy are John Allan, who negotiated with the Wabanakis during and after the American Revolution, William D. Williamson, who described chief raisings at Old Town in 1816 and 1838, and two late nineteenth-century writers, Joseph Nicolar, a Penobscot, and Mrs. W. Wallace Brown, who attended the inauguration of a Passamaquoddy chief in the early 1890s. But the most valuable indigenous source on the confederacy is the Passamaquoddy oral tradition.

THE PASSAMAQUODDY WAMPUM RECORDS

A Passamaquoddy oral history of the confederacy was preserved by Sapiel Selmo (or Selmore), who in his role as putuwosuwin was the last keeper of the Passamaquoddy wampums. He and Joe Lola were the last Passamaquoddy delegates to go to Caughnawaga, in "about 1870" (Speck 1915:498). Selmo's wampum records were converted into written form by Louis Mitchell, the Passamaquoddy representative to the Maine State Legislature in the late nineteenth century. Mitchell's manuscripts were acquired by John Dyneley Prince of Columbia University and then lost in a fire in 1911. Later, however, "Mr. Mitchell industriously reproduced them at [Prince's] request from memory" (Prince 1921:2-3). Prince published three versions of Mitchell's records in Passamaquoddy and English translation (Prince 1897, 1921, Leland and Prince 1902). The 1921 publication was revised and reprinted in 1990, edited by Robert M. Leavitt and David A. Francis, with the original words and phrases restored. The Leavitt and Francis text indicates that Prince's are unreliable. (Compare 1921:11 with 1990:41.)

Before they were written down by Louis Mitchell, Prince said, the Passamaquoddy Wampum Records consisted of "wampum shells arranged on strings in such a manner, that certain combinations suggested certain sentences or certain ideas to the narrator, who, of course, knew his record by heart and was

merely aided by the association of the shell combinations in his mind with incidents of the tale or record which he was rendering" (Prince 1921:2). These records represent a Passamaquoddy account of the origin and maintenance of the confederacy. They describe the procedures occasioned by the death of a chief and the consequent gathering of delegations from the confederate tribes to condole the bereaved, the selection and inauguration of new chiefs, and both ancient and recent (turn of the twentieth century) practices relating to courtship and marriage. They provide information on where and when confederacy meetings occurred and the standards of etiquette governing the behavior of hosts and guests at intertribal gatherings. The Passamaquoddy Wampum Records, then, can be used as an independent source to confirm or disconfirm the claims Speck made for his "Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy," and which Siebert has challenged.

The text of the Wampum Records is divided into five sections, the first of which describes the origin, structure, and composition of the confederacy. The descriptions are often rendered in metaphorical terms, but it is clear that the confederacy was a group of independent polities committed to maintaining peace with one another. It is also evident that this first section refers to the Caughnawaga Confederacy, not the exclusively Wabanaki alliance. "There were fourteen tribes of Indians, but there were many bands" (Leavitt and Francis 1990:40). This is more than the twelve stipulated by Siebert (1982:115) and the eight mentioned by Speck. The French are conspicuously absent in the account of the origin of the (Caughnawaga) confederacy; and the Wabanakis seem to have played only a minor role in the confederacy from the very beginning. The "wise ones" who first planned to organize the confederacy "sent out messengers in different directions to everywhere Indians were located....They even came to the land of the Wabanaki" (Leavitt and Francis 1990:38-39).

The second section describes "what they do when a chief dies." Unlike the first section, it refers to customs associated with the Wabanaki Confederacy, not with the larger alliance conven-

ing at Caughnawaga. When a Wabanaki chief died, his flagpole was cut down and burned together with his flag and all his belongings. He was mourned for one year, after which "they hold a council and talk about a new chief." One tribe alone could not decide upon a chief, so they sent out messengers. "If the chief happens to have died at Passamaquoddy, one [canoe] goes to the country of the Micmacs, and one to Quebec, one to Penobscot, one to the St. John River (Ibid.:41).

When the messengers reached their destinations, they took part in reciprocal greetings, prayers, feasting, and dancing, and then read their wampum belts, announcing the death of their chief: "He who lives at Passamaquoddy has lost his chief. And he wants you who are living here to go and help him make a new chief" (Ibid.:42). The host chief's response is significant: "He says to his people that he approves of going to help his brother's orphan." The chiefs of the Wabanaki tribes spoke of one another as "brothers" and of their constituents as children, or in this case "orphans."

After the messengers returned home from their several missions, they gathered the people and informed them that "they have merited assistance." When all the delegations had arrived and had been welcomed, the new chief was selected, a new flagpole was raised, "And one of the visiting chiefs sets out the new chief's...medals and puts them on him" (Ibid.:45). He explained the responsibilities of a chief and admonished the local people to obey him. "Another chief's wife wraps the new chief in a deerhide" (Ibid.:45). On the following day seven new captains were selected and given medals. (Ibid.:46). From this it appears that a new chief was installed by the chief of some other tribe, after having been selected from among the members of his own tribe. His authority stemmed, not alone from his standing in his own tribe, but from the power conveyed by a confederacy chief and confirmed by the wife of another confederacy chief. His authority, then, derives from the entire confederacy and from both the male and female segments of this community. The authority of the seven captains, however, is confirmed by the newly installed chief, to whom they are thenceforth responsible.

THE CONFEDERACY AS AN IDEAL

The various descriptions of the Caughnawaga and the Wabanaki Confederacy are alike in general and in many particulars, but there are discrepancies. The preeminence of the Penobscots over the other Wabanaki tribes, for example, both at Caughnawaga and at Wabanaki council fires, was reported by Speck's Penobscot informants. This is not confirmed, however, in the Passamaquoddy Wampum Records. There is disagreement on the location of the early summer conventions, on the presence of the Micmac, and as to whether the Micmacs were one of the confederate tribes. On the many occasions when the Micmacs were absent, as at the Penobscot chief-raising in 1816, for example, the Wabanaki delegations could scarcely have been seated in the form of a rectangle, each occupying one side in conformity with Speck's prescription.

There is also the matter of who was qualified to take part in the selection of a new chief. In Williamson's description of a Penobscot election in 1838, the visiting Wabanaki delegations voted as well as the Penobscots themselves (Williamson 1846: 96-99). Speck indicates, however, that the Penobscots "first chose their own candidate...; then they dispatched messengers to the neighboring tribes inviting them to attend the election" (1940:240; see also Chamberlain 1904:283).

The discrepancies are not necessarily proof that any one source is correct and others are wrong, however. It seems preferable to assume that the Wabanaki Confederacy was an ideal pattern, realized in different ways at different times and in different circumstances. Confederacy practice certainly changed with circumstance and over time. Siebert (1982:116) has interpreted the early seventeenth-century accounts of John Smith (1616) and others to mean that the Abenaki Confederacy of Bashabes embraced all the bands from the Penobscot to the Mousam River at Kennebunk, together with Western Abenaki-speaking groups (1982:116). The early seventeenth-century confederacy, according to Dean Snow, involved twenty-one villages on eleven rivers, represented by twenty-three "sagamores," of which Bashabes "appears to have

been first among equals" (1978:137). Thus Eastern Algonquian bands convened for political purposes long before Vaudreuil was born. He was merely elaborating on a traditional practice when, in 1723, he "arranged an Indian alliance to encourage and support the Abenakis against the English" (Siebert 1982:115).

Father Pierre Biard, who witnessed confederacy meetings in Bashabes' time, noted that the confederates were "generally those of the same language. Nevertheless the confederation often extends farther than the language does" (Thwaites 1896 (3):91). The seventeenth-century wars with the Iroquois and with the English colonists brought crowds of displaced Indian people to northern New England, the St. John valley, and the St. Lawrence. These demographic changes produced new interband relationships. When the "Grand Chief" of Sillery, a mission town on the St. Lawrence, died in 1666, his successor was inaugurated in the presence of "French, Algonkins, Montagnais, Micmak, Abenaki, Etechemins, Atticamegs, Nipissings, and Hurons" (Bailey 1969:93). By 1680, wampum was used to certify the authenticity of delegations from distant bands. Le Clercq saw Micmac "ambassadors, with collars of wampum" sent to invite their allies "to take up the hatchet against another nation" (LeClercq 1910 [1691]:269). It seems apparent that neither the Caughnawaga nor the Wabanaki Confederacy was created by the French. Both grew out of a long tradition of aboriginal diplomacy that was energized by heavy migration into the northeast during and after King Philip's War to evade the incessant depredations of Iroquois war parties and English trespassers.

The notion of confederating continued to evolve throughout the eighteenth century. In 1721 the representatives of at least eighteen different constituencies met and signed two letters to Governor Samuel Shute of Massachusetts. They included speakers of Iroquoian and Central Algonquian languages, but also Micmacs, Maliseets, Passamaquoddies, Penobscots, and other Abenaki-speaking groups (Ray 1974). In 1794 John Allan attended councils in which the Maliseets, Micmacs, and Passamaquoddies were represented, but the Penobscots were not (Campbell, Allan, and Stillman 1794). Thus it seems most

appropriate to postulate an ideal model of confederacy protocol that may have existed for some three centuries in the minds of Wabanaki peoples, but which was constantly adapting to a variety of contingencies. At all times and places, however, this ideal model consistently encouraged peaceful and harmonious relations among the confederate bands and created opportunities and incentives for co-operative and concerted action.

The ideal model was flexible with regard to both time and space. Caughnawaga councils convened at regular intervals, triennially according to Speck (1915:496) and Erickson (1978:132), although Nicolai (1893:137) said they met every seven years. The Wabanaki tribes convened annually (Erickson 1978:132, 1982:171), but also met irregularly as circumstances required (Speck 1915, Leavitt and Francis 1990). The Caughnawaga Council met always and only, it seems, at Caughnawaga, but Wabanaki councils might be held at any one of the four council houses associated with the four confederate tribes (Speck, 1915:499). The Wabanakis had "their convention headquarters at Oldtown among the Penobscot," according to Speck (1915:493). This statement, which may show the influence of Penobscot ethnocentrism, conflicts with the testimony of three nineteenth-century authorities, each of which places the annual meeting at the Passamaquoddy council house (Robinson Palmer, as quoted in Erickson 1982:171; Abraham Gesner 1847:115-6, as quoted in Erickson 1978:132; Louis Mitchell, as quoted in Leavitt and Francis 1990:vi).

MICMAC PARTICIPATION

Montague Chamberlain wrote (1904:281) that "The Micmacs appear to have stood alone, to have been entirely separated from their more immediate brethren; but the Maliseets were members of the Wabanaki League." Speck, however, explicitly stated that the Micmacs were an integral part of the Wabanaki Confederacy: "The Micmac, who were designated in the confederacy as the 'younger brothers,' owing to their extreme easterly location and being so widely scattered, seem to have occupied a position somewhat apart from their allies" (1915:505-6). According to

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Speck, the four Wabanaki tribes “were graded in the following order. The Penobscot came first and were referred to as...’our elder brothers,’ the Passamaquoddy, Malecite, and Micmac came next, in the order given, under the appellation...’our younger brothers’” (Ibid.:499). This is confirmed by Nicolar, who said the Micmacs were “the last born”; and “after the division [between older and younger brothers] was made the oldest Mik-mur present, was undressed and put into ‘T’ki-nur-gann’, – cradle, where he was kept tied and fed all day like the little babe, and every time the delegation met at the grand council fire this performance was repeated, which shows that the Mik-mur was once selected as the youngest of all, he must always be treated like a little baby” (1893:139).

The Passamaquoddy Wampum Records also include the Micmacs as an integral and equal component of the Wabanaki Confederacy, and this is confirmed by Bock (1978:109). Acadia’s Governor de Villebon reported Micmac participation in Wabanaki raids on New England settlements in the 1690s (Prins 1992:65). At times, however, the Micmacs may have played the role of staunch allies rather than integrated components of the confederacy. (See Massachusetts Historical Society Collection, Series 11, vol. 8, pp. 259-263.)

In 1767, Captain Goldthwait, the British commander at Fort Pownall, reported that Micmacs were present at a meeting of the Wabanaki Confederacy on the Penobscot. He was told that there were a great number of Indians of different tribes assembled on Penobscot river; that they were determined to maintain their right to twelve rivers which they claimed, and that they intended soon to pay a visit to the post. Goldthwait mentioned Cape Sables (Micmacs) St. Johns (Maliseets), Norridgewalks, Aresegunticooks (St. Francis Abenakis), and “some other Indians & some white men now on Penobscot River” (Baxter 1906-1916:24:149-150). Micmacs were also present in 1783 when John Allan met with representatives of the Passamaquoddies, Penobscots, Maliseets, and Micmacs on the St. Croix River to discuss a new British settlement on unceded Passamaquoddy territory at St. Andrews (Hawwawas 1783).

There is no mention of Micmac participation, however, in Williamson's account of the 1816 chief-raising at Old Town or at the impeachment and subsequent inauguration there in 1838 (Williamson 1846). Indeed, Williamson speaks of "the three Etechemin tribes," which he called the "Tarratines" (Penobscots), the "Openangos" (Passamaquoddies), and the "Marechites" (Maliseets).

In the 1820s, Robinson Palmer made no mention of the Micmacs when he wrote of the "summer powwow" to which the Passamaquoddies regularly invited the Maliseets and Penobscots (Erickson, 1982:171), but in 1847 Gesner wrote that the Micmacs met annually at Pleasant Point with the Penobscots and "Melicetes" (Erickson 1978:132). There is, however, no mention of Micmacs at Pleasant Point one year later when the Passamaquoddy factions agreed to separate in the presence of Penobscot and Maliseet delegations (Vetromile 1866:119).

There can be no doubt that the Micmacs were active participants in northeastern Algonquian intertribal councils in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although their involvement in the Wabanaki Confederacy in the nineteenth century is not documented by either Palmer, Vetromile, or Williamson, their participation is unequivocally attested by two of the most reliable of the nineteenth-century authorities, Abraham Gesner and Sapiel Selmo. By the early twentieth century, however, Speck could write that "the Micmac in general seem to have less remembrance of the alliance among the four [Wabanaki] tribes than either the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, or the Malecite" (1915:505).

EARLY TIMES

The sixteenth-century ancestors of the Wabanakis were subsistence hunters, who also practiced horticulture in the southwestern part of their territory. Band membership was fluid, and political leadership was necessarily based on consensus rather than coercion (Chamberlain 1904:282-3; Speck 1940:239; Leavitt and Francis 1990:vii; Prins 1996:33-35). Political leaders were often older members of extended families, well

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versed in hunting ritual and shamanism, but to become recognized as chiefs they would also have to have shown a talent for settling disputes, collecting food for the needy, and maintaining the corporate resources of the band, both tangible and intangible.

European contacts in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries made a drastic and lasting impact on band organization. Guns, liquor, the fur trade, and new diseases were introduced. Widespread epidemics ravaged the area, with consequent depopulation and deterioration of the kinship-based social organization. Subsistence hunting gave way to beaver trapping. Reciprocal exchange was replaced by dependence on European traders. Competition for beaver and for access to European traders caused population movements and intraband, as well as interband disputes. The band chiefs found it increasingly difficult to compete with their new rivals, the French priests, who had the economic and political support of the French Empire.

In 1640, according to Harald Prins, "Algonquin and Montagnais envoys from the St. Lawrence valley invited the Abenaki to join them in league against the Iroquois....French Jesuits, particularly those headquartered at the mission of Sillery, near Quebec City, helped cement the alliance" (Prins 1995:110). In the 1660s this Algonquian league included "the Mahican, their Sokoki neighbors of the Connecticut, the Pennacook on the Merrimac, and the western Wabanaki along the Saco, Androscoggin, and Kennebec" (ibid.:112).

During and after King Philip's War in southern New England the French missionaries made rapid progress in discrediting the shamans, assuming positions of leadership in the bands, and concentrating much of the population in large, permanent, hierarchically controlled settlements, as at Sillery, St. Francis, and Sault de la Chaudiere. The native bands were becoming an increasingly well integrated, if not unified, society, dependent on French trade and missionary leadership and committed to France in her developing struggle with Great Britain.

The French talent for gaining military advantage through economic leverage did not make the Wabanakis French by any means, however. What we know of confederacy practice suggests that the ideal pattern of confederacy that emerged among the Wabanakis in that period generated political and diplomatic forms based on indigenous patterns of reciprocity and consensus.

THE TIES THAT BIND

Wabanaki diplomacy was designed to ensure that all parties at a council would listen carefully to the others in the expectation that they would be listened to in turn. The way “they all set about deciding to join with one another in a confederacy” is described in the Passamaquoddy Wampum Records:

Silently they sat for seven days. Every day, no one spoke. That was called, “The Wikuwam is Silent.” Every councillor had to think about what he was going to say when they made the laws. All of them thought about how the fighting could be stopped. Next they opened up the wikuwam. It was now called “Every One of Them Talks.” And during that time they began their council....When all had finished talking, they decided to make a great fence; and in addition they put in the centre a great wikuwam within the fence; and also they made a whip and placed it with their father. Then whoever disobeyed him would be whipped. Whichever of his children was within the fence – all of them had to obey him. And he always had to kindle their great fire, so that it would not burn out. This is where the Wampum Laws originated. That fence was the confederacy agreement....There would be no arguing with one another again. They had to live like brothers and sisters who had the same parent....And their parent, he was the great chief at Caughnawaga. And the fence and the whip were the Wampum

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Laws. Whoever disobeyed them, the tribes together had to watch him. (Leavitt and Francis 1990:39-40)

This can be seen as a Wabanaki expression of the ideal pattern of confederacy. The obligations of confederate tribes are identified with those of siblings, and failure to meet those obligations incurred sanctions imposed by their “father,” the Ottawa sakom. But there is also a reward: harmonious relations with all the confederate tribes and help in the event of attack from outside.

Relationships between confederate tribes were saturated with ritual and reciprocity. The greeting to the chief and the chief’s greeting to the people recorded at the inauguration of a Passamaquoddy governor in 1963 were so ritualized and prescribed that they were identical to those recorded by Speck at Tobique, a Maliseet reserve, forty-three years earlier (Smith 1955:29). Reciprocity is a recurrent feature. (See Williamson 1832 vol. 1:497-8.) Delegates were regularly sent with wampum belts to “feed” the Caughnawaga fire and returned with new belts to feed the one at home. Confederacy protocol assigned complementary roles to participants, who on any given occasion were either hosts or guests: “When the messengers come to the country of the Micmacs, and the Micmacs see a canoe coming carrying a flag....the chief gathers his soldiers. He says to them, ‘Those who are coming arrive here as messengers.’ Then all of them – children and women and men – walk down the hill to greet them” (Leavitt and Francis 1990:41). There were men’s and women’s roles. Wabanaki women seem to have played no overt part in decision making, but they had effective veto power. (See Leavitt and Francis 1990:45) The departure of embassies was customarily delayed when the hosts “take out the wampum – the one for delaying the departure – and they read it. They say to them,...’Our mother has hidden your paddle. She is granting you a very great favour.’ This means, they are not allowing them to leave” (ibid.:43). The women’s acquiescence is, of course, critical here (ibid.:49).

Participants were seldom free to act as individuals. These complementary ceremonial relationships precluded the polarization of the confederacy over any single issue. Everyone's several loyalties were unlikely to coincide, and conflicting loyalties do not permit segmentation. Two of the confederate tribes, the Passamaquoddies and the Penobscots, did become polarized in the first half of the nineteenth century, but only as a result of extraordinarily severe external pressure (Walker et al 1980; Erickson 1982). There is no reason to believe that the Wabanaki Confederacy as a whole ever became polarized.

Familiar ritual, reciprocity, and metaphorically ascribed kinship statuses enabled strangers to feel secure and comfortable with one another. They were encouraged to think of themselves as elder or younger brothers, and familiarity and mutual trust flourished in the confederacy because intertribal relationships were not exclusively diplomatic and political. The formal greetings were inevitably followed by house-to-house visiting, feasting and dancing, communal prayer, and athletic contests.

Confederacy meetings, which were as much social as political, were almost certainly favorite times for negotiating marriages. The fourth and fifth sections of the Passamaquoddy Wampum Records are devoted entirely to "the marriage custom of olden times" and "the marriage custom as it has been put together in recent times," respectively. Marriage bonds may have been crucial to the stability of the confederacy, bridging the cultural and linguistic boundaries between the confederate tribes.

Confederacy meetings provided the sort of political and social context that might be expected to promote consensus. At Eskasoni, Speck said, "the belts are regarded as sacred and a smoking ceremony precedes the wampum recitations" (1915:507; see also Kidder 1971 [1867]:286). In all the Wabanaki tribes the ends of the warp strings of the wampum belts were left untied, "symbolizing emanating words" (Speck 1915:507). Clearly, men, when they stood to address the fire through their wampum belts, did not speak as private individuals. They took on a measure of

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divine authority. It is small wonder that "the Passamaquoddy and Micmac remember how their councilmen and chiefs would kiss the belt or string that was presented to them" (ibid.:501).

The Wabanaki Confederacy may have been glued together with reciprocity, fictive kinship, intertribal marriages, and the invocation of divine authority, but there was at least one other very important structural factor. Williamson's account (1832 [vol. 1]:497) of the inauguration of John Aitteon as chief at Old Town in 1816 is a detailed illustration of how Wabanaki chiefs were raised with the approval and active participation of delegations from the confederate tribes. Four Maliseets inducted four new Penobscot officials in the council house while the Passamaquoddies, outside, raised and lowered a flag and fired "salutes from a well-loaded swivel" as each new official was inducted. (See also Speck, 1915:603; Chamberlain, 1904:283-4.) This practice must have played a significant role in binding the confederacy together. It would tend to select chiefs who could maintain harmonious relationships with one another and whose authority at the local level was based on a mandate from the entire confederacy.

FRIENDS AND GOOD BROTHERS

The American Revolution returned the balance of power to the Wabanakis in Acadia. The Whigs in Massachusetts and the Loyalists in Nova Scotia both sought Wabanaki aid or, failing that, Wabanaki neutrality. In April 1775, the Massachusetts delegation to the Provincial Congress wrote to the Penobscots. "Friends and good Brothers," they wrote, "We will do all for you we can & fight to save you any time & hope none of your men or the Indians in Canada will join with our enemies" (Kidder 1971:51-52). On the strength of this letter Chief Joseph Orono, the Penobscot sakom, advocated war (Williamson 1846:88).

In June, Orono and three other Penobscots met with the Provincial Congress, which promised to set up a trading post at Fort Pownall and to "strictly forbid...trespassing or making waste upon any of the lands...now claimed by our brethren the Indians of the Penobscot tribe" (Kidder 1971:53). In October, the

Provincial Congress received a letter from Ambrose St. Aubin Bear and Pierre Tomah of the Maliseets, dictated on behalf of "ye St Johns Tribe" and also "the Micamac Tribe." It said: "We heartily join with our brethren the Penobscot Indians in every thing that they have or shall agree with our Brethren of the Colony of the Massachusetts and are resolved to stand together and oppose the People of Old England that are endeavouring to take yours and our Lands & Libertys from us" (Ibid.:55). In February 1776 George Washington sent a letter and "Chain of Friendship" to the Maliseets and a similar letter to the Passamaquoddies and Micmacs (Ibid.:57-59). He promised trading posts which were not contingent on their active participation in the war.

In response to Washington's letter seven Micmacs and three Maliseets traveled to Watertown in July. Ambrose St. Aubin Bear requested a trading post and "a Father or a French Priest," saying that "the St. John's and Mickmac Tribes are all one people and of one Tongue and one Heart" (Baxter 1906-1916:24:165-170). In November, fifteen Maliseets and four Micmacs took part in Col. Eddy's abortive assault on Fort Cumberland (Kidder 1971:78). This was acknowledged by George Washington in a letter to his "Brothers of the St. Johns Tribe" written on December 24, 1776, the day he crossed the Delaware.

In January 1777 Congress appointed Allan to the post of Superintendent of the Eastern Indians and Colonel of Infantry. He was commissioned to treat with the Indians "Eastward & Northward of Connecticut River, making no exceptions in what Nation or Country the Indians resorted" (Ibid.:311). Allan arrived on the St. John in May and reported that "We soon had a general meeting composed of deputies from different parts, including the whole tribes of St. Johns and Passamaquoddy. It was agreed and concluded that Peace and Friendship be now Established permanent & lasting between the United States & the Several Tribes....That they should be forever viewed as brothers & children, under the Protection & Fatherly care of the United States." (Ibid.:311-312). At Machias, on August 14-16,

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Maliseets, Passamaquoddies, Penobscots, and the Machias volunteers repelled an attack by British naval vessels and a detachment of marines.

The Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War, was signed in September 1783. The Wabanaki allies of the Americans and of the French were not present; their interests were not represented; and the assurances made to them during the war by John Allan and others were never fulfilled (Walker et al. 1980: 65-69).

WARDS OF THE STATE

During the war with Great Britain the United States had found it expedient to court the Indians on its eastern frontier, for these "Friends and good Brothers" could secure the frontier, provide intelligence, and supply the best troops in the world for campaigning in Acadia. If their several bands were integrated in a confederacy whose chiefs communicated frequently with one another and had the means and motivation to act in concert, so much the better. Col. Allan could deal with representatives of all the Wabanaki tribes at a single conference, as when he made the treaty in June 1777. After the war, however, it was no longer expedient to encourage a confederacy of tribes residing in both the United States and Canada which continued to cross and re-cross the still undefined international border. The new federal government took no notice of them, leaving Indian Affairs in the northeast by default to Massachusetts, which passed the matter on to Maine in 1820. The location of the border became an increasingly volatile issue, which was finally resolved by mustering troops and hurling invective in what is dimly remembered as the bloodless "Aroostook War" of 1839. But Maine Indians, who exchanged delegations with their traditional tribal allies in Canada, were seen as a problem by Maine's governors.

At the end of the war the Wabanakis lost the balance of power and soon began to lose control of their hunting territories and coastal fishing and fowling areas as well. The Maine tribes were forced to apply, for basic necessities, either to their priest

or to their state Indian agent, two powerful figures who were often at odds with each other. The inexorable pressures exerted on the Maine tribes in the nineteenth century to conform to the conflicting demands of a powerful church and an equally powerful state have been described in Walker et al. (1980:65-76; see also Erickson, 1982).

The Penobscot chief, John Attean, and vice-chief, John Neptune, were impeached in 1838 at a meeting attended by twenty-one Passamaquoddy and twelve Maliseet delegates. According to Williamson (1846:94), a new slate of officers was elected by a majority vote of the Penobscots, many of whom abstained, the Maliseets, who were about equally divided, and the Passamaquoddies, all of whom were in the Church party, which opposed John Francis, the Passamaquoddy life chief, and had come to vote for the new Penobscot candidates. This impeachment and election, which may have been the first instance in which Wabanakis made a political decision by majority vote, provoked a response from the Maliseet chief and his council. They proclaimed themselves in support of the impeached Penobscot chiefs and wrote a letter to the governor of Maine in 1839 which was witnessed by the Maliseet Indian Agent:

About twenty two years ago [1816], the St. Johns Tribe, and the Quoddy Tribe, met, by their Councils, with the Council of the Penobscot Tribe, at Old Town, and duly elected John Attean, Governor, and John Neptune, Lieutenant Governor, of said Penobscot Tribe of Indians, both for their natural lives, according to the laws, usages, and customs of all Indians wherever found. That in violation of these laws, usages, and customs, a part of the Penobscot Tribe, wish to turn out the Governor and Lieutenant Governor so elected, because [in 1833] they consented to the sale of Four Townships of land belonging to said Tribe, to the white men under the direction of the Legislature of the State of Maine; and to choose new Governor and Lieutenant Governor; Now

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St. Johns Tribe say, we no want new Governor and Lieutenant Governor, for the Penobscot Tribe, while John Attean and John Neptune, who were duly elected, shall live.

White man may have one Governor this year, and a new Governor next year – for white man can read – Indian no read. White man say him Governor good this year, and next year he no good, so make um new one – Indian like good Governor, and when he make him good one, God keep him so – he want no new Governor until the old one is dead; for new things not always better than the old (Ayer Collection, ms. 787, Newberry Library).

Factionalism erupted into violence among both the Passamaquoddies and the Penobscots. The Penobscot dispute eventually involved both the Catholic Diocese of Boston and the State of Maine. Bishop Fitzpatrick went to Indian Island to mediate, but succeeded only in excommunicating three supporters of the life chief (Eckstorm 1945: 160,170). Governor Edward Kent did not appear in person but sent a “monitory letter” and threatened to send in troops in the event of disorder (Ibid.:172-3). Fighting and intimidation continued, however, and, in 1851, Governor John Hubbard of Maine wrote Isaac Staples, Maine’s agent to the Penobscots: “You will say to them...that they are answerable to our criminal laws, and that every crime committed, every breach of the peace will and must be tried and punished severely by our laws” (Hubbard to Staples, 7-30-1851). In this same letter Hubbard threatened to discontinue the annual treaty payments if they continued to be wasted “in useless festivities,” i.e. in support of cross-border confederacy meetings. Thus Maine’s governor was prepared to violate several of the terms of the treaty of 1818.

Passamaquoddy factionalism can be traced to the 1820s, but was greatly exacerbated in 1838, when John Francis, vexed at his church-oriented council, “threw down his [wampum] belt and medals” at Pleasant Point and said, “You have me for

governor no longer.” He later reconsidered and reclaimed his life chieftaincy, but he could never heal the rift in his tribe (Williamson 1846, 1:96). A meeting called to reconcile the factions in 1842 ended in a fight, during which the chief’s flagpole was cut down. Two years later a new chief was unanimously elected by sixty-eight votes, but John Francis’ supporters, like those of Attean at Old Town, boycotted the election and refused to acknowledge the new chief. At a confederacy meeting in 1848, with Penobscot and Maliseet delegations attending, it was decided that each faction should have its own chief. The Church party then withdrew from Pleasant Point. Both parties later petitioned the state to build a village for the Church party at Indian Township.

Maine sought to break the ties binding the confederacy when it began to exercise its authority over the tribes within its own borders. As a cross-border alliance, the confederacy posed a threat to the state’s vertical power and was seen as a bothersome anachronism by Maine governors. In January 1852 Governor Hubbard attempted to explain his position in a letter to the Passamaquoddies: “We are told that some of you wish to call upon your Red Brethren, of the Tribe of St. Francis in Canada to settle your difficulties. We think you had better not. They have difficulties amongst themselves....They are controlled by the British Government, and their interests are different from yours and from ours” (Hubbard to Passamaquoddy Tribe, Jan. 1852).

Mrs. W. Wallace Brown, the wife of Maine’s Indian Agent for the Passamaquoddies, was an astute observer of Passamaquoddy social and political practices in the 1890s, when many of the indigenous customs had been discontinued, including life-tenure for chiefs, and new ones adopted, including majority rule. Elections were held every four years at Indian Township, and voting was by ballot. But her observations of Passamaquoddy government at Indian Township indicate that the old practices and forms had not all been swept away: “The government is a tribal assembly, composed of chief, subordinate chief, Po-too-us-win [Putuwosuwin], captains, and councillors.

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The latter are appointed by the chief from among the old men of the tribe. They do not make the laws, for the law is usage transmitted by tradition. They settle all matter of dispute by the decision of the majority, receiving the chief's sanction" (Brown 1892:57). By Mrs. Brown's time, Indian Township governors were not installed by visiting delegations, although it was still "customary to invite friends from neighboring tribes to attend the festivities" (1892:59, note). The installation ceremony, as described by Mrs. Brown, was still elaborate, however, and included many of the forms described in earlier accounts of Wabanaki chief-raising (Brown 1892:57).

RENEWAL

By the mid-twentieth century, the Wabanakis were destitute, degraded, and divided. (In Maine, it was not until 1964 that Indians were even permitted to vote in state elections.) The leaders in the struggle to redress old wrongs had little or no knowledge of traditional Wabanaki political procedures. They expected decisions to be made after discussion and debate, the majority asserting its will over that of the minority.

In the late 1960s and 1970s the Wabanakis began to seek relief by pleading their case in the federal courts, relying on laws and treaties already on the books to get federal recognition and services and compensation for land expropriated in violation of law. Soon they were making effective use of federal courts, government agencies, and the media.

The Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1980 provided federal recognition and services, together with funds for land acquisition, to the Passamaquoddies, the Penobscots, and the Houlton Band of Maliseets, an off-reservation group in northern Maine. The settlement had been approved by a majority vote in each of the tribes. Other court judgements and out-of-court settlements were won by Indian communities on both sides of the international border. This resulted in the emergence of organized Wabanaki communities with property to manage, payrolls to meet, and decisions to make. Not surprisingly, the decisions were made, for the most part, by

majority rule (Prins 1994a). The Aroostook Band of Micmacs was excluded from the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act, but it incorporated in 1982 as the Aroostook Micmac Council, with a biennially elected president and an eight-member board of directors. Appealing to its old confederacy ties, it received the unequivocal support of the previously recognized Maine tribes and won federal recognition, services, and a land acquisition fund through the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act of 1991 (Prins 1994b). Everywhere, it seemed, the Wabanakis were at last getting compensation for injuries done them in the past and recognition of their right to plan their own future as legitimate corporate entities.

In August 1977 a meeting was held at Indian Island (Old Town). The three Maine reservation communities and at least twenty-four Indian groups from elsewhere in New England and Canada were invited to send representatives (Walker et al 1980:78-79). There was to be a moose-meat stew and a "greeting dance." The next year, the Passamaquoddies, Penobscots, Maliseets, and Micmacs "resurrected the Wabanaki Confederacy" to "discuss common issues such as land claims and border-crossing rights" (Prins 1996:212). The Confederacy still convenes at alternating tribal headquarters on a regular basis.

According to Leavitt and Francis (1990:vii), "a number of native organizations and communities in the Maine-Maritime region" have introduced a practice known as "Talking Circle," which is a renewal of the ancient practice of seeking consensus after all present have had a turn to speak. This was used in place of parliamentary procedure at the March 1989 meeting of all Micmac chiefs in Moncton, New Brunswick, "the first such gathering in more than two hundred years" (Leavitt and Francis 1990:vii).

In 1993, Brenda Gideon, a Micmac Chief from Restigouche, had a vision that directed her to once again revive the confederacy. The Micmacs at Restigouche hosted a meeting later that year; and annual meetings have been held since. A four-year cycle has been established, the meetings passing in succession from Micmacs to Penobscots to Passamaquoddies to Maliseets and back to Micmacs.

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Not only is the Wabanaki Confederacy an indigenous, Algonquian institution, it has survived four centuries of contact and gives every indication that it will continue into a fifth.

NOTE

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