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"To Obey Jesus Christ And General Washington": Massachusetts, Catholicism and the Eastern Indians during the American Revolution

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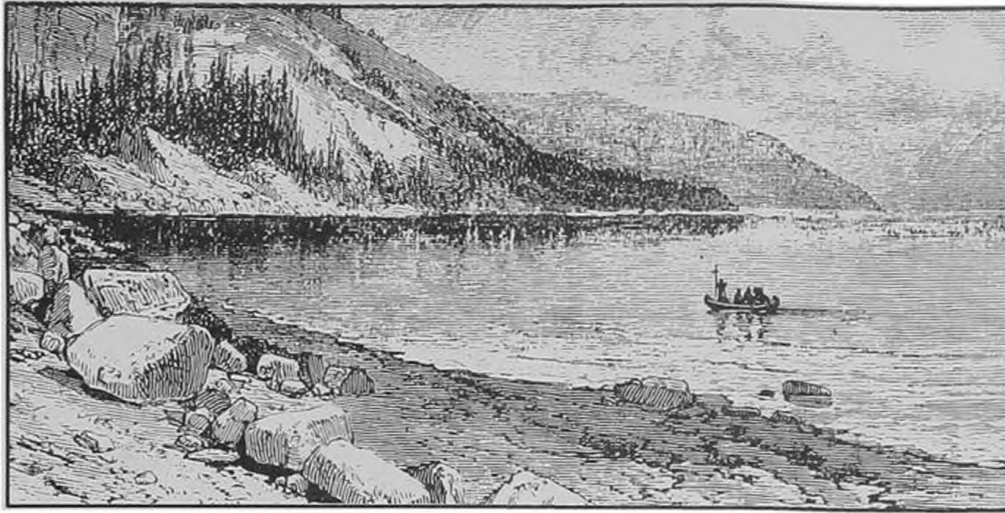
FRANCIS D. COGLIANO

“TO OBEY JESUS CHRIST AND GENERAL
WASHINGTON”:

Massachusetts, Catholicism and the Eastern Indians During
the American Revolution

Massachusetts government policy embodies a long history of anti-Catholic sentiment. During the Revolutionary War, the state faced a dilemma as the Indians of eastern Maine, whose loyalty was crucial to the defense of that region, appealed time and again for a Catholic priest to administer their sacraments. This study of the halting official policy regarding the religious needs of the Eastern Indians reveals both the ideological pragmatism of Massachusetts leaders under the pressures of war, and the perseverance of the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Micmac Indians as they struggled to protect their religious way of life.

On the eve of the American Revolution, Thomas Hutchinson wrote that New Englanders “would upon no terms..consent...to the publick exercise of religious worship by Roman Catholick priests.”¹ Hutchinson correctly gauged the level of anti-popery among his fellow New Englanders. What he did not recognize was their capacity to change their minds. By 1780 Massachusetts was expending public funds to support the ministrations of a Catholic priest serving the Indians of eastern Maine, thereby contravening its own anti-priest law of 1700. This remarkable change in religious policy is a testament to the persistent efforts by Native Americans on the eastern frontier to secure a Catholic priest between 1763 and 1783. The change also shows the impact of self-interest and military survival in forcing a more tolerant public policy toward religion. As its position on the eastern frontier deteriorated during the American Revolution, Massa-



Catholic missionaries had been active in Maine since 1613, when two Jesuit priests established a small, short-lived mission colony at Somes Sound on Mount Desert Island. Discouraged by the fall of New France in 1763, missionaries once again found their services in demand as the Bay State struggled to maintain the allegiance of the eastern Indians during the Revolution.

Inset from "History of Acadie," Deering Collection

chusetts demonstrated an growing willingness not only to permit but to promote the practice of Catholicism among the Indians.

In order to fully appreciate the change in Massachusetts policy regarding the practice of Catholicism one must understand the depth of the anti-Catholic sentiment noted by Hutchinson. New England anti-popery was a curious blend of religion and patriotism. Traditional English antipathy toward Catholicism was a legacy of the Marian persecutions and of Puritan theology, which, combined with longstanding competition with the French in Canada, sustained a deep distrust of Catholicism in colonial New England.

The pastor of the West Church in Boston, Jonathan Mayhew, delineated the prevailing form of anti-popery in the Dudleian Lecture he delivered at Harvard College on May 8, 1765. Mayhew emphasized the political aspects of the struggle against Rome. "Our controversy with her [the Catholic Church] is not merely a religious one...But a defense of our laws, liberties and civil rights as men in opposition to the proud claims and encroachments of ecclesiastical persons, who under the pretext of religion...would engross all power and property to themselves

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and reduce us to most abject slavery.”² The Catholic church was not only an opponent of Protestantism, but also a temporal foe seeking to impose tyranny and oppression on the world. The Reverend Samuel Cooper highlighted the threat to English political thinking when he described Catholicism as “incompatible with the safety of a free government.”³ New Englanders like Mayhew and Cooper associated the French Catholics in Canada, their immediate rivals in the imperial wars of the eighteenth century, with papal tyranny.

Anti-popery was not confined to ministers lecturing at Harvard College. Indeed, it was embraced by the overwhelming majority of New Englanders. It was manifest among the common folk in the annual celebration of Pope’s Day each November 5, when the pope was burned in effigy to commemorate the failure of the Gunpowder Plot. When Samuel Adams, writing under the pen name “A Puritan” in the *Boston Gazette*, cautioned fellow citizens to “be on guard against Popery,” he spoke as a politician, not a minister.⁴ Characterizing the pope as “the man of sin” foretold in the Book of Revelation was a notion that encapsulated an entire constellation of religious, political and patriotic symbols, defining New Englanders as good and their opponents as evil. Anti-popery was an integral part of the British nationalism embraced by New Englanders in the eighteenth century.

There was one community of New Englanders that would have disagreed with Mayhew, Cooper, and Adams on the matter of Catholicism. “Eastern Indians,” a term applied collectively to the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy of eastern Maine and the Micmac and St. John Indians of Nova Scotia, were linked not only by their membership in the Wabanaki confederacy, but by an ardent belief in Catholicism introduced by French missionaries during the seventeenth century. For more than a century the Indians of Maine and Nova Scotia had resisted English settlement on the frontier. Taught by French Jesuits and supplied by French traders, the tribes were formidable opponents; as New Englanders saw it, they combined popish cunning with native savagery. Thus they not only blocked the English claims to the



Responsible for the religious welfare of the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Micmac Indians, Governors Francis Bernard and Thomas Hutchinson chose to ignore the Indians' appeal for the services of a Catholic priest in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War.

"Mount Desert," Deering Collection.

Penobscot Bay region, but they threatened the religious fiber of northern New England.⁵

After the British conquest of Canada, secured by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Protestant Massachusetts found itself nominally responsible for the government of hundreds of Catholic Indians on its eastern frontier. Throughout the 1760s the Eastern Indians repeatedly asked the royal governor, Francis Bernard, to provide them with a Catholic priest. Although in September 1763 Bernard promised to address their needs, he had no intention of keeping his word. In a private letter he explained that the Indians were

very religious and great Zealots for the Church of Rome. A Romish Priest would immediately enter into full authority with them;...A french Priest would probably be attached to french Policy as well as the Romish Religion & would endeavor to alienate them from the English Government as well as the Protestant Religion.⁶

Hoping to placate the Indians, Bernard sent an Anglican missionary, and when this duplicity failed, he simply ignored further appeals. With the French military threat muted, Bernard

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was under no pressure to woo eastern tribes. Moreover, the political situation turned against Bernard in Massachusetts in the later 1760s; the promotion of Catholicism in any form within his jurisdiction would have antagonized the residents of the Bay Colony still further. As a consequence of Bernard's policy, the Penobscots and Passamaquoddies were forced to travel to Nova Scotia (present-day New Brunswick) to obtain the services of a priest. In that more tolerant province, authorities allowed the Catholic church to do missionary work after 1767.⁷

Bernard's replacement by Thomas Hutchinson brought no change in Massachusetts policy toward the Eastern Indians. In May 1773 Governor Hutchinson reported:

I have also had an application made to me by the Indians along the Eastern Frontiers to allow them a Priest to Baptize their children and perform the other offices of their Religion. I gave them no Encouragement to expect this Indulgence, it being contrary to the Law of the Province.⁸

Had Bernard or Hutchinson been willing to send a priest to the Maine Indians the people of Boston would have objected vigorously. Controversies over the Anglican Episcopate during the 1760s and the Quebec Act in 1773-1774 fanned the flames of anti-papery in New England.⁹ As a consequence, it is unlikely that the people of Massachusetts would have tolerated subsidizing the services of a Catholic priest within their borders to satisfy a people whom they no longer feared and had never respected.

The situation was radically altered by the outbreak of war between the English and the American rebels in the spring of 1775. The powerful partnership between American colonials and the British Empire which had kept the Eastern Indians in check was ended. And when it became apparent that Nova Scotia would not join the American colonies in rebellion, the Indians, as they had during the struggle between France and Britain, assumed a critical role in the balance of power on the eastern frontier. The British in Halifax and the Americans in Boston and Watertown were willing to make concessions to obtain their

support.¹⁰ As the Massachusetts position deteriorated along the eastern frontier, the government in Boston became more amenable to the idea of a Catholic priest ministering to the Indians of Maine.

Although the Americans in Maine and the English in Nova Scotia outnumbered the Indians, the threat the latter posed was very real. Estimates put the total number of Indians in eastern Maine and Nova Scotia at between two and three thousand. Of this, there may have been five to six hundred males of fighting age — a formidable threat in this sparsely settled region.¹¹ Historian John Howard Ahlin estimated that in 1776 there were only four thousand settlers in Maine east of the Penobscot River. Although Nova Scotia had as many as 20,000 settlers, they were mainly clustered in a few large coastal settlements. Passamaquoddy Bay held around thirty families, and fifteen hundred settlers were scattered along the St. John River. The small communities on both sides of the border were vulnerable to attack.¹² With their mastery of hit-and-run raids along the frontier, the Indians could distract a disproportionate number of settlers.

Both the English and the Americans recognized the potential danger on the eastern frontier. In late 1775 Governor Francis Legge of Nova Scotia reported that the Americans were “trying every means to gain [the Indians] over to their party.” If they succeeded, he mused, “we shall not only lose the benefit of them for our own defense, but should they take up arms against us, they wou’d be more formidable to the settlers here than an army of Americans.”¹³

Under such circumstances, the Eastern Indians assumed great importance in the strategic planning of the English and the Americans. Throughout the conflict, both sides made great efforts to woo the tribes, offering food, weapons, and alcohol to secure their fealty. Both sides established truck houses at strategic locations. In this regard, Halifax was able to guarantee a steadier supply of quality goods, owing to its continued access to commercial sea lanes and the British Empire. Massachusetts, by contrast, was hampered by limited finances and British

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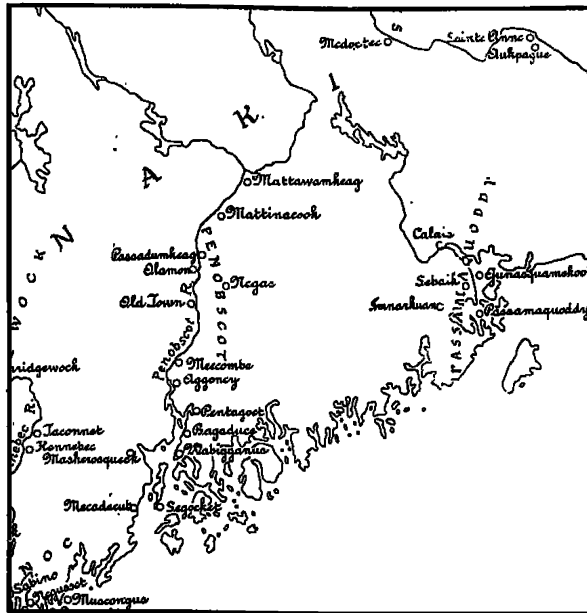
control of the Gulf of Maine. Indeed, as the British naval blockade tightened along the New England coast, Massachusetts began casting about for other ways to ensure the loyalty of the Eastern Indians, entertaining, in due time, the notion of a Catholic priest to minister to the tribes. As the situation on the eastern frontier became more desperate, especially after 1778, Massachusetts swallowed its distaste for Catholicism in order to placate the potentially dangerous tribes.

Throughout 1775, the rebels enjoyed a military superiority along the border. With superior numbers they threatened to carry an offensive war into Nova Scotia, where the British were holding out awaiting reinforcements. The American advantage over the lower Bay of Fundy helps explain the contrasting Indian policies adopted in Boston and Halifax during the first year of the war.¹⁴

Massachusetts attempted to ally with the Eastern Indians almost as soon as hostilities began. On May 15, less than a month after the battles of Lexington and Concord, the General Court sent the tribes a letter of friendship. Delivered by Captain John Lane, the letter assured the Indians, "We will do all for you we can & fight to save you anytime." The letter went on to invite the Indians to "list with us" their needs.¹⁵ This overture marked a change in attitude on the part of Massachusetts, as complacent indifference gave way to active interest in the Indians in 1775.¹⁶

In response to the letter, a delegation of Penobscots, led by their chief sachem, Orono, arrived in Watertown on June 19, 1775. Among the grievances the Penobscots listed was their want of a priest.¹⁷ Similarly, on September 12, Micmac and St. John Sachems Ambrose and Pierre Toma sent a letter to the General Court saying, "We have nowhere to look for Assistance but to you & we desire that you would help us to a Priest that he may pray with us to God Almighty."¹⁸

Representative Eldad Taylor spoke for many of his peers when he noted on October 11, 1775, that it would be "of a great advantage...to cultivate a Good harmony with the Indians."¹⁹ Five days later the Massachusetts Council sent a letter to the St. John Indians:



As the war progressed, the loyalty of the Indians in eastern Maine became increasingly important. Massachusetts provided trade goods and indicated a willingness to permit a Catholic missionary at Machias, near the Passamaquoddy settlement, in 1775.

"Abenaki and Passamaquoddy Tribes and Villages," Sister Mary Celeste Leger, M.A., THE CATHOLIC MISSIONS IN MAINE (1929).

We heartily receive you as brethren in the same manner we received your brethren of the Penobscot tribe. We will do everything for you that we have done for them....We are willing you should have a Priest of your own and worship as you choose, for our great dependence and trust is in Almighty God who made you and us.²⁰

For the first time, Massachusetts indicated its willingness to permit a Catholic missionary among the Eastern Indians. The council, however, did not offer to help the tribes secure one. As events were to demonstrate, it would require a virtual collapse of the American position on the eastern frontier before the state would finally act on this request.

In July 1776 a delegation of Micmacs and St. John Indians returned to Watertown to confer with the Provincial Council. Speaking for the tribes, Ambrose promised to ignore the British and "obey Jesus Christ and General Washington." He requested a truck house on the St. John River and once again asked for the services of a priest. On July 13 Council President James Bowdoin responded:

We are glad to see you have such a regard for religion and are ready to furnish you with a priest

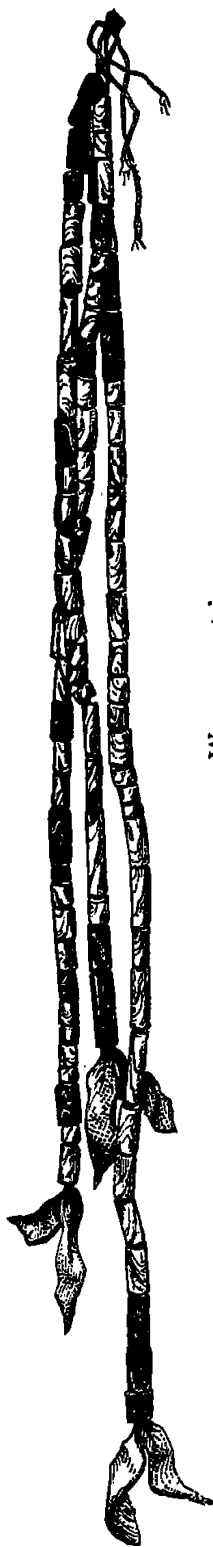
to assist you in your prayers and teach you the true Religion: but we do not know [that] we can get a french Priest. If one of our priests will be agreeable to you we will endeavour to get you one, and take care that he be a good man.²¹

Moreover, the council decided that it was not feasible to establish a truck house on the St. John. Instead they promised to build one at Machias, seventy-five miles to the southwest, to complement the one already established at Penobscot.²²

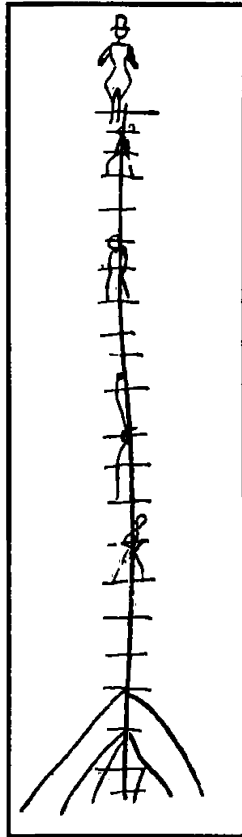
Despite their disappointments, the St. John and Micmac Indians entered into a treaty with Massachusetts on July 17, 1776. In this "Treaty of Friendship and Alliance," the Indians recognized the independence of the United States and agreed to remain peaceful brothers to the Americans. They also agreed to provide 600 men to serve with the Continental Army. Massachusetts, in turn, formally committed to building and stocking a truck house at Machias.²³

That Massachusetts had not seriously considered providing the tribes with a priest indicates its relative strength on the frontier in the early part of the war. The provincial government felt it could secure the fealty of the tribes without making a sacrifice that would offend its citizens. The deference the Indians displayed during the negotiations did little to help them achieve their goal. The Penobscots assumed a more militant strategy — to greater effect.

A few days after the Treaty of Watertown, a Penobscot delegation arrived in Massachusetts and reiterated their request for a priest. They



Wampum strings



Passamaquoddy picture-writing; a method of addressing the President of the United States or the governor of Massachusetts for help. The president, his vision and authority enhanced by his position, stands at the top of the pole; the Indians ascend to present their petitions.

Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology (1893).

explained their situation: "We are afraid the consequence will be if there is no Jesuit sent among us, the young people will go to Canada and they might be brought to act against the Colonies; but having a priest among us they should be quiet."²⁴ This shrewd, indirect threat paid off. On August 28 the General Court voted that "with respect to the Penobscot Indians this House is very desirous of cultivating their friendship and ready to afford all aid in our power towards gratifying them in their reasonable requests."²⁵ Although not exactly a promise, this is more than the Micmac or St. John Indians received. Massachusetts proved more responsive to implied threats than to deferential requests.

Throughout 1775-1776 the leaders of Massachusetts tried to make good on their promises to the tribes. They made contacts with all of the Eastern tribes, signed a treaty, and ordered truck houses built on the Penobscot and Machias rivers. As a consequence, the tribes did not go over to the English. Indeed, members of the St. John and Micmac tribes participated

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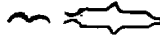
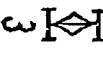


in John Eddy's abortive assault on Nova Scotia at the end of 1776. Of the seventy-two rebels involved in the attack on Fort Cumberland, fifteen were St. John Indians and four were Micmacs, including Chief Ambrose.²⁶

In some ways, however, Massachusetts religious policy had not advanced beyond that of Francis Bernard. Again, the Indians were told they could have a priest, yet when they pursued the matter they were put off and encouraged to accept a Protestant minister. During the first year of the war, Massachusetts dealt with the Eastern Indians from a position of relative strength. The British in Nova Scotia had not yet embarked upon a vigorous Indian policy, and Massachusetts was still able to supply the tribes with powder, shot, and other goods. Beginning in 1777, Britain launched two major offensives into Maine and pursued better relations with the Eastern Indians. Massachusetts, on the other hand, found it increasingly difficult to supply and maintain the tribes. The Indians complained about prices and threatened to approach the English. Furthermore, those who had served under Eddy had not been paid. Nor had the defeat at Fort Cumberland enhanced the Americans' reputation in the eyes of the tribes. Massachusetts found its stature among the Eastern Indians growing weaker in 1777, and under these circumstances the authorities altered their policy toward Catholicism.

Eddy's assault on Fort Cumberland shook the British out of their complacency downeast, and as a result competition for the fealty of the Eastern Indians increased in 1777. Early that year Michael Francklin was appointed Nova Scotian Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Charged with winning the support of the tribes, he sent the H.M.S. *Vulture* to the mouth of the St. John River to sever supply lines to the American truck house there. The Americans abandoned the post that summer. More importantly, the English promised to hire a priest to provide the Indians with the spiritual guidance they had sought for so long.²⁷

In an effort to shore up the eastern frontier, the Continental Congress named Colonel John Allan Indian agent in eastern Maine in May 1777.²⁸ Born in Scotland in 1746, Allan had grown

THE LORD'S PRAYER IN MICMAC HIEROGLYPHICS.

					
nushinen Our Father	Wajok in heaven	-ebin seated	tchiptook may	delwigin thy name	
					
meguidedemek be respected	Wajok in heaven	n'telidanen to us	tchiptook may	ignemwiek grant	ula theo
					
nemulek to see	nledechinen. in staying.	Natel There	Wajok in heaven	deli as	chkedoolk thou art obeyed
					
tchiptook may	deli so	- be	chkedulek obeyed	makimiguek on earth	eimek where we are
					
Delamukubenigual As thou hast given it to us	echemiegnel in the same manner	apch also	neguech now	kichkook to-day	
					
delamooktech give it	peneguunenwin our nourishment	nilunen; to us;	deli abikchiktakachik we forgive those		
					
wegaiwinametnik who have offended us	elp so	kel thou	nixkam O God	abikchiktwinn forgive	elweultick our faults
					
melkeninrech hold us strong	winnchudil by the hand	mu not	k'tygalinen to fall	keginukamkel keep far from us	
					
winnchiguel sufferings	twaktwin. evils.	N'delietch. Amen.			

Rev. Eugene Vetromil, THE ABNAKIS AND THEIR HISTORY (1866).



Stressing the competing British claim on the loyalty of the Eastern Indians, Colonel John A. Allan convinced Massachusetts to procure a priest at Machias in 1778. Hyacinthe de La Motte, an Augustinian priest funded by the Continental Congress, was hired to serve the Maine Indians.

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up in Nova Scotia, where he developed a close relationship with the Indians. When the war began, he left Nova Scotia to serve the rebel cause. A committed Patriot, Allan eagerly sought his appointment as Indian Agent. During his tenure, he was a staunch advocate for the interests of the tribes and the security of eastern Maine. In securing a priest for the Indians, however, Allan acted as an agent for the United States, not Massachusetts. Although he worked closely with state authorities, his commission, and ultimately his funding, came from the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.²⁹

In June 1777, one month after he took command, Allan concluded a treaty with the St. John and Passamaquoddy tribes which, among other things, guaranteed that "they should enjoy the free exercise of religion agreeable to their professions, a clergyman of that denomination should be furnished and a suitable residence provided for him, on which a place of worship be erected." After the treaty, many members of those tribes removed themselves from Nova Scotia to Allan's headquarters at Machias. Massachusetts now had charge of more than five hundred Catholic Indians who had the right, guaranteed by the

Continental Congress, to exercise their religion. The Indians still lacked a priest, but they had what appeared to be a credible promise that one would soon be forthcoming.³⁰

Colonel Allan negotiated the treaty of 1777 to counter British activity in the area. Francklin began trading extensively along the St. John River, and in August the British launched an unsuccessful assault on Machias. Moreover, in December 1777 British authorities obtained the services of Maturin Bourg, an Acadian priest. Against this aggressive policy, Allan could only offer diminishing supplies, the promise of a priest, and his good will. He would be hard pressed to maintain the support of the Eastern Indians.

Allan correctly feared that Bourg would lure the Indians away with Catholic services and introduce them to Francklin's influence and English manufactured goods at Fort Howe in Nova Scotia. Allan was forced to acknowledge Bourg's effectiveness:

The spiritual threat of the Priest [is great].... Their [The Indians'] zeal for the Roman Catholic Religion, their being a long time without a Priest, Confessions, Absolutions, Baptisms, Marriages, and other Sacraments of that Church, being in their ideas so necessary for temporal and eternal welfare, not having any administered for a long time, seemed to stagger the most zealous for America that were in this place.³¹

Without a priest, Allan doubted he could maintain the Indians' support. This was demonstrated in a dramatic fashion in September 1778 when most of the Indians abandoned Machias for a week to visit Bourg on the St. John River.³²

The government in Boston, which hitherto had ignored the spiritual needs of the Eastern Indians, almost immediately became more responsive. On November 12 the tribes made another of their almost ritual requests for a priest. That very day, the Massachusetts Council relayed the request to the Continental Congress with the following comment:

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We wish it was in our power to supply them, as we apprehend the residence of such a person among them of good political character might tend to attach them more closely to the United States & prevent our Enemies making ill impressions on their minds.³³

Not only was Massachusetts faced with increasing competition for the Indians' loyalties, but by late 1778 command of the Penobscot region was transferred to Continental authority because Massachusetts could no longer afford its operations there. Under these circumstances, Massachusetts had little choice but to endorse the idea of a priest on its side of the frontier. Moreover, earlier, in May, France entered into an alliance with the United States, thereby confronting Massachusetts with the prospect of dealing with thousands of military allies who were as Catholic as the Eastern Indians. The exigencies of war forced New Englanders to abandon anti-popery as an official policy.

On December 5, 1778, the Continental Congress responded to the letter from the Massachusetts Council. The lawmakers in Pennsylvania resolved that it was "the desire of Congress that they [the Massachusetts Council] comply with the Indians request in sending them a priest." Massachusetts was also authorized to charge the United States for the cost of his support. As a result, an Augustinian priest, Hyacinthe de La Motte, was hired by American authorities to serve the Maine Indians. La Motte, chaplain on a French naval vessel, had been captured by the English and brought to New York in February 1778. He was released in a prisoner exchange and selected by Admiral D'Estaing to serve with the Americans in Maine. Father La Motte had the distinction of being the first Catholic priest to be employed by the United States government.

It took La Motte more than five months to journey from New York to Machias, where he arrived on May 18, 1779, and was warmly received by the Indians and John Allan. Although delayed, the priest's arrival was fortuitous. On June 17 the British captured and fortified Majabagaduce (presently Castine)



Unsuited to the rigors of travel on the eastern frontier and at odds with Allan over matters of strategy, La Motte's tenure at Machias was short.

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at the mouth of the Penobscot River. With this victory Machias was encircled and eastern Maine cut off from Massachusetts. Allan's weakening supply line was finally cut, and Massachusetts' frontier policy was on the verge of total collapse. Retaining Indian loyalties suddenly became crucial to retaining control of Maine east of the Penobscot.

La Motte's presence kept the eastern tribes loyal to the Americans. Allan wrote of the priest in July: "His behavior and conduct has given me much satisfaction, he is indefatigable in the business." Indian loyalty put pressure on Allan's diminishing supplies, since loyal Indians had to be fed, clothed, and armed, but it also guaranteed the safety of Machias.

Although the Massachusetts Council had endorsed La Motte's downeast mission, financial support for the priest came from the Continental Congress, not Massachusetts. Boston authorized supplies for La Motte which were then charged to the Congress. While the presence of La Motte is significant, Massachusetts had not yet expended its own funds in support of Catholicism.

The conquest of Majabagaduce, however, marked another turning point in Massachusetts religious policy. Faced with

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defeat on the eastern frontier, the state began actively encouraging Catholic missionary work among the Indians in the region. This represented a dramatic departure from the Protestant hegemony which had characterized New England development for more than a century. Indeed, the Massachusetts anti-priest law of 1700 was still in force when La Motte arrived at Machias. The willingness of the General Court to dispense with the law and ignore public sentiment indicates the pressures that dictated public religious policy in Massachusetts.

Father La Motte's tenure was less than smooth. Neither by nature nor training was he suited for the rigorous work of an Indian missionary. The vastness of the eastern frontier exhausted the priest as he made lengthy and arduous journeys through the wilderness to perform his religious and political duties. Moreover, lack of promised support from Philadelphia (by way of Boston) forced him to draw on his own funds for expenses. The situation was further complicated by a growing rift between Allan and La Motte and during the autumn of 1779.

La Motte's repeated suggestion that he should go to the St. John River to lure Indians away from Father Bourg left Allan, who opposed the plan, suspicious. La Motte advocated his plan, in the presence of the colonel, to the Indians in an open council. A sudden call for Indian aid at the Penobscot interrupted the conference and postponed the conflict, but La Motte persisted. Allan's views of the priest became increasingly intolerant. On September 10, 1779 Allan wrote: "I went a second time for Passamaquoddy where I found the Indians in a [poor] temper...partley owing to some disputes among some persons of their own sect of religion who came with me, who I am much disappointed in." On October 20 Allan was more direct in his reference to La Motte: "I flattered myself much in the Spring in having a Chaplain, but am Greatly deceived in My Expectations." In October La Motte was recalled by the French consul upon Allan's recommendation.

La Motte's recall solved one problem, but it created another. Allan again contended for Indian loyalties without the aid of a Catholic priest. The situation was exacerbated by the

presence of the British on the Penobscot. Alexander Campbell, Allan's representative in Boston, ably described the situation in January 1780:

So long as British troops hold their Post at Penobscutt, by which means our communication is cutt of, unless some Vigorous Exertions take place by which the enemy...may be dislodged, or the country otherway's Defended, it appears impossible for the distressed Inhabitants to repel the force they are threatened with...not only the defense of that part of the Country but a valuable Interest...of the State, is depending on the Faith of the Savages, oppos'd to the force of Britain.

Without a consistent flow of supplies or a Catholic priest, Allan was hard pressed to maintain the support of the tribes. He persevered by holding repeated conferences to distribute his limited supplies and provide moral support in lieu of food and powder.

The futility of this approach was revealed on the morning of July 1, 1780, while Allan was treating with the Passamaquoddies at Machias. Three Indians arrived from the St. John River, having been sent by Father Bourg and Major Studholm, the British military attache in the region. The emissaries requested the attendance of the Passamaquoddies immediately, "if they wanted anything done in the church way." Allan's good will was unable to match this British offer. In addition to sacraments performed by Bourg, the Indians could expect to be given supplies by Major Studholm at Fort Howe. Allan looked on anxiously as the Indians weighed the invitation.

The Passamaquoddies held a council among themselves. Sachem Pierre Toma answered for the tribe:

.Brother our great Trouble is about a Reverend father to take Care of our Souls — Great Charges & Guilt Lyes upon them, we have much to answer for, & must soon go where we can find one to tell our faults — a long Time we have been promised

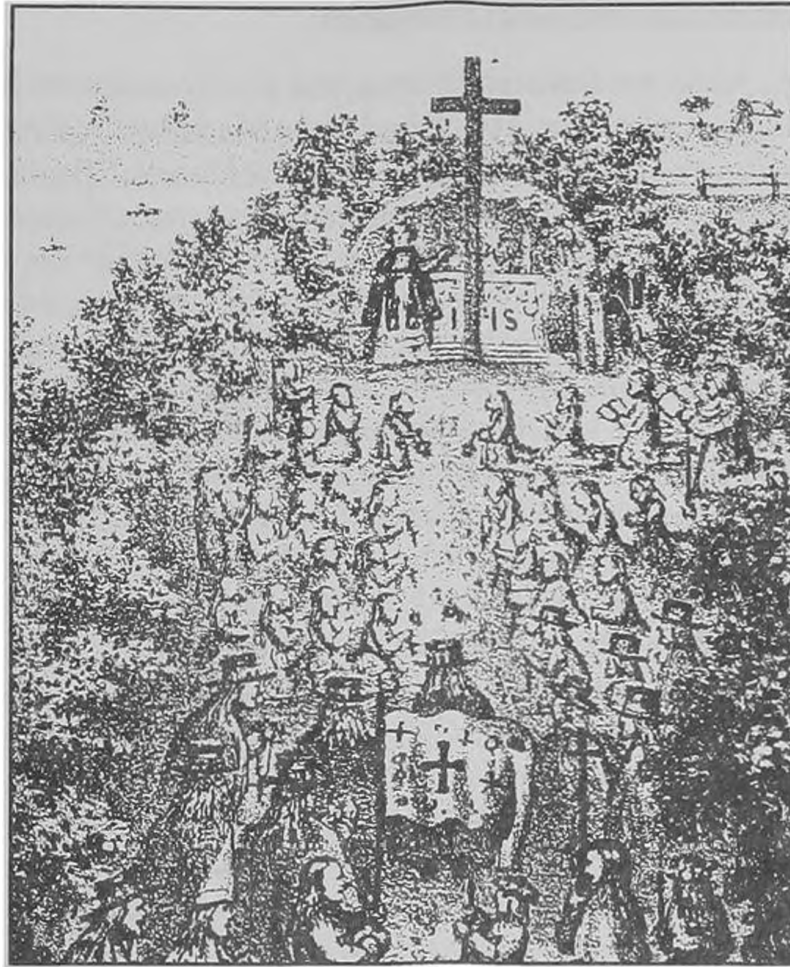
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to have one from the Americans, but we are still without...Brother here is an Express from the Reverend Father on the St. Johns River — we know him, & he knows us — he can administer the ordenances in our own Language — from his Kindness to us, we think he will not insist upon our doing any thing for Old England, if he does we will reject it and leave him — But as we think for the best we have Come to a determination to go and see him, we are sorry if it offends you but we must go. What Major Studholm wrote we take no notice of we do not intend to stop at the fort.

The tribes wrote from the St. John promising Allan that “our Language to the Britains is from our Lips only, but when we address the Americans & French it is from our hearts.” This probably did little to reassure Allan. More than one hundred men, women, and children had departed for the St. John, leaving Allan with thirty-five warriors to defend Machias.

Faced with an tenuous position on the eastern frontier, Massachusetts again considered the matter of sending a priest to the region. In mid-August 1780 the Massachusetts General Court wrote to the Indians remaining at Machias: “Your good and ancient Fathers the French...hearing of the destitute Situation you were in upon Account of a Reverend Father to take care of your Souls, have in their Great Goodness sent one, to whom you may tell your Faults and he will hear you and will administer the Sacrament of his Order in your own Way.” Allan’s secretary, James Avery, had petitioned both the government in Boston and the French fleet at Newport. Once again, when faced with the loss of the eastern frontier, Massachusetts proved remarkably pliant in its religious convictions.

The new priest, Frederick de Bourges, was a Capuchin, who served as a chaplain in Admiral Ternay’s French fleet based in Newport. Bourges petitioned the Provincial Congress for supplies on August 23, 1780. He was granted coffee, sugar, flour, pork, meat, butter, and rum, as well as fifteen gallons of wine for



Capuchin priest Frederick de Bourges arrived in eastern Maine in the fall of 1780. With the region cut off militarily from the rest of Massachusetts, Father Bourges' work among the Indians, and the latter's continued loyalty to the rebel cause, were instrumental in keeping the region in American hands through the dark remaining years of the war.

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"his use and for the purpose of the Ceremonies in the business of his order." While the expenses were charged to the Continental Congress, the provision of sacramental wine is ironic testimony to the ability of Congregationalist Massachusetts to cooperate in providing for the Catholic needs of the Indians when it served Massachusetts' best interests.

Bourges was delayed by the supply problems that plagued all of Massachusetts' efforts on the eastern frontier. He did not arrive at Machias until the middle of November 1780. In the meantime the British continued to make inroads among the

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Indians. Allan pessimistically assessed the situation on November 2: "If then a proper Attack had been Made by the Enemy the country must without Doubt fall into their Hands." Bourges had been summoned to prevent just such an occurrence. The question in early November was whether he would arrive in time.

When Bourges finally reached Machias, he enjoyed considerable success among the tribes. Allan's mood improved considerably. On January 26, 1781 he observed:

The Priest which came from the French Fleete, Appears the most Calculated for the Indians then Any I ever saw, either from the French or Britains, the Steps he has taken, the Conduct he persues, gives the Indians the Greatest Satisfaction And which...will be of the Greatest Utility as Benefit in Securing the Interest of the Indians. And I am now well convinced, if Suitable Supplys are Laid in for the Indians to prevent their Going to the Britons for Necessarys, the whole of them as far as Canada, will Immediately Joyn for any Sort of Business the [United] States may require.

Bourges's presence attracted many Indians back to Machias. Historian John M. Lenhart estimated that Bourges may have ministered to at least 573 Native American men, women, and children. Yet while this Indian presence augmented the security of eastern Maine, it placed an unbearable strain on Allan's supplies. Consequently, many Indians traveled from one side of the border to the other in search of either physical or spiritual comfort.

Bourges was used as a troubleshooter to appease dissatisfied Indians, particularly those who felt they were not properly supplied by the Americans. For example, on May 25, 1781 Allan met with a group of Passamaquoddies and noticed a "Gloom & Coldness that I had not been Accustomed with." He returned to Machias the next day and, "the first instant Dispatch'd off the Priest." This was typical of Bourges's tenure along the eastern frontier.

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Father Bourges's missionary efforts in eastern Maine came to an end in September 1781, when he was recalled by the French navy. The government of Massachusetts spent more than £7897 for Bourges's supplies and expenses — a considerable financial outlay by the Bay State in support of a Catholic priest. The General Court later petitioned and received compensation for Bourges's expenses from the United States. In the case of Bourges's successor, Massachusetts would assume the entire cost of his support.

On November 11, 1780, the General Court resolved that Juniper Berthiaume, a Recollect priest recommended by the French Consul, would "reside with the Penobscot Tribe of Indians, be allowed & paid for his Services in Establishing the said Tribe in the interest of America." For the first time, Massachusetts openly approved the expenditure of state funds for the support of Catholicism. This was in direct response to the critical situation described by Allan in early November 1780 before the arrival of Father Bourges. Interestingly, Berthiaume was appointed not as a priest but as a "religious instructor" — a term usually given to Congregationalist missionaries. No doubt this language was intended to make his presence more palatable to the taxpayers of Massachusetts.

Like his colleague at Machias, Father Berthiaume enjoyed good rapport with the Penobscots — in fact, with both whites and Indians along the Penobscot River. William Lithgow of Winslow, on the Kennebec, wrote of Father Berthiaume in August of 1782: "That the Government were fortunate in their Choice of Instructor I am fully persuaded both by the Indians themselves over whom he has gained a peculiar ascendancy also by the Information of some of the first Characters in this Country."

In late 1782 Massachusetts concluded that Father Berthiaume's services were no longer necessary in light of the military situation. The war on the eastern frontier had wound down, and the tribes ceased to be important to Massachusetts. The circumstances of Father Berthiaume's dismissal bear testimony to the diminished importance of the Catholic Indians in Massachusetts policy by 1783. On June 4, the General Court



Missionary work on the upper Penobscot.

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voted to pay Father Berthiaume the £74 due him as wages through June 1, 1783. Massachusetts thereby terminated its support. Berthiaume, however, did not learn of his dismissal until June 1784 when he applied for his annual salary. His petition was ignored. When the war ended in 1783, the Indians and their religious needs ceased to be a strategic concern to the government in Boston.

Thus ended Massachusetts' brief experiment with state-supported Catholicism. Despite the promises made as early as October 1775, Massachusetts did not actually provide the tribes with a priest until the situation on the eastern frontier was so dire that there was no alternative. Massachusetts requested Father La Motte's services only in December 1778, when supplies began to falter and British initiatives along the eastern frontier began to pay dividends. Similarly Father Bourges was not sent to Maine until the British had established themselves at Majabagaduce. In 1780 the British again posed a grave threat to eastern Maine. Only then did Massachusetts expend its own money in support of Father Berthiaume. John Lenhart has argued that a British plan to seize the remainder of eastern Maine in 1780 was thwarted only by the loyalty of the Eastern Indians. The key to this loyalty was the presence of Fathers Bourges and Berthiaume.

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The study of Massachusetts' Eastern Indian policy reveals two characteristics about eighteenth-century New England religious beliefs. First, Massachusetts leaders, who have been characterized as rigidly intolerant, could be notably flexible when faced with extreme circumstances. Second, Native American New Englanders proved remarkably devout and persistent in their own beliefs. Despite adverse circumstances beginning in 1763, the Eastern Indians never wavered in their desire to obtain the services of a priest. Their perseverance paid off during the Revolution when they were able to exploit the weakness of Massachusetts to obtain, at least briefly, what they desired.

NOTES

¹Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of...Massachusetts-Bay*, edited by Lawrence S. Mayo (Cambridge, 1936), volume 3, pp. 30-31.

²Jonathan Mayhew, *Popish Idolatry* (Boston, 1765), pp. 48-49.

³Samuel Cooper, *A Discourse on the Man of Sin* (Boston, 1774), pp. 66.

⁴*Boston Gazette*, April 4, 1768.

⁵See "Some Account of the Catholic Missions in Maine," *Collections of the Maine Historical Society*, 1 (1831): 323-340; Mary Celeste Leger, *The Catholic Indian Missions of Maine, 1611-1820* (Washington, 1929); Vincent A. Lapomarda, "The Jesuit Missions of Colonial New England," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 120 (April, 1990): 91-110; Cornelius J. Jaenen, *The Role of the Church in New France* (Toronto, 1976), especially Chapter 2; and Auguste Gosselin, *L'Eglise du Canada apres la conquete* (Quebec, 1916).

⁶Bernard to Halifax, August 18, 1764," *Documentary History of the State of Maine*, in *Collections of the Maine Historical Society* 13: 365-67 (hereafter noted as Baxter Mss.). For Bernard's attitudes on this question see John Sexton, "Massachusetts Religious Policy with the Indians Under Governor Bernard: 1760-1769," *Catholic Historical Review* 24 (1938-39): 310-328; and Robert H. Lord, John Sexton, and Edward Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston in its Various Stages of Development, 1604-1943*, 3 volumes (Boston, 1943), I, chapter 10. For religious conditions on the Maine frontier in the 1760s see William S. Bartlet, *The Frontier Missionary: A Memoir of the Life of the Reverend Jacob A. Bailey* (Boston, 1853). Bailey was an Anglican missionary sent by Bernard to the Eastern Indians.

⁷Gosselin, *L'Eglise du Canada*, pp. 313-321.

⁸*Massachusetts House Journal*, 50 (1773-1774): 9.

⁹See Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Scepter* (New York, 1964) and Charles Metzger, *The Quebec Act* (New York, 1936).

¹⁰For Nova Scotia and the American Revolution see Maurice Armstrong, "Neutrality and Religion in Revolutionary Nova Scotia," *New England Quarterly* 19 (1946): 50-62; Viola F. Barnes, "Francis Legge, Governor of Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1773-1776," *New England Quarterly* 4 (1931): 420-47; John Bartlet Brebner, *The Neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia: A Marginal Colony During the Revolutionary War* (Toronto, 1969); and E.P. Weaver,

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"Nova Scotia and New England during the Revolution," *American Historical Review* 10 (1904): 52-71.

¹¹Richard I. Hunt, "British-American Rivalry for the Support of the Indians of Maine and Nova Scotia: 1775-1783," M.A. Thesis, University of Maine at Orono, 1937, p. 37.

¹²John Howard Ahlin, *Maine Rubicon: Downeast Settlers During the American Revolution* (Calais, Maine, 1966), p. 7; Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," p. 41-42.

¹³Nova Scotia Archives, 94, pp. 235-236, as quoted in Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," p. 55.

¹⁴Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," pp. 187-188.

¹⁵"Letter to the Eastern Indians, May 15, 1775," Baxter Mss., 14 : 254-56.

¹⁶John Sexton, one of the foremost students of early American Catholicism, has argued that it was "May, 1775, when the Patriot authorities...offered freedom of religion to the Catholic Eastern Indians." He described this change in attitude as "epoch-making." Sexton cites the letter of May 15 as evidence as well as "the circumstances of the time and the evidence of later events." See *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, volume 1, pp. 278-281. There is absolutely no written evidence to support such a conclusion. Indeed, the records show that it was still five months before Massachusetts would give even oral permission for the presence of a priest among the Indians, and three years before a priest arrived.

¹⁷*House Journal* 51:1 (1775): 148.

¹⁸"Letter from Penobscot Falls, September 12, 1775," in Frederick Kidder, *Military Operations in Eastern Maine and Nova Scotia During the Revolution, Chiefly Compiled from the Journals and Letters of Colonel John Allan, With Notes and a Memoir of Col. John Allan* (Albany, 1867), p. 55.

¹⁹*House Journal* 51:1 (1775): 155.

²⁰*Ibid.* p. 166.

²¹"Minutes of the Watertown Conference," Baxter Mss., 24: 168-89.

²²*Ibid.*

²³"Text of the Watertown Treaty," Baxter Mss., 24: 189-92.

²⁴Massachusetts Archives (hereafter noted as MA), 29:530-534.

²⁵Massachusetts Council Records, 35:183.

²⁶"A Return of the Indians who were present at the Attack on Fort Cumberland," in Kidder, *Military Operations*, 78.

²⁷Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," pp. 78-101.

²⁸It should be remembered that although Massachusetts assumed primary responsibility for the eastern frontier, the Continental Congress was ultimately charged for most of the expenses of the war downeast. Consequently the Congress was well within its jurisdiction when appointing Allan.

²⁹See Kidder, *Military Operations*, for Allan's journal during the war years. Also John Francis Sprague, "Colonel John Allan," *Sprague's Journal of Maine History*, 2 (1915): 233-257 and George H. Allan, "Sketch of Colonel John Allan of Maine," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 30 (1876): 353.

³⁰"Col. Allan's Report on the Indian Tribes, 1793" in Kidder, *Military Operations*, pp. 305-318. The treaty did not apply to the Penobscots, with whom Allan was not authorized to treat. Because the tribe lived within the confines of the Massachusetts, relations with the tribe fell completely within state jurisdiction. See Sexton et al. *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 1, p. 294.

³¹Allan to the Massachusetts Council, October 8, 1778," Baxter Mss. 16: 107.

³²Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," p. 122; Ahlin, *Maine Rubicon*, p. 116.

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- ⁵³MA 200:204
- ⁵⁴MA 200:247; "Resolution of the Congress Relating to the Indians, December 5, 1778," Baxter Mss. 19: 325.
- ⁵⁵Sexton et al., *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 1, pp. 313-319.
- ⁵⁶Hunt, "British-American Rivalry," pp. 127-149.
- ⁵⁷Allan to Powell, July 16-18, 1779," Baxter Mss. 16: 362.
- ⁵⁸Sexton et al., *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 1, pp. 317-318. Bartlet, *Frontier Missionary*, pp. 78, 88-89, has excellent examples of the difficult circumstances and terrain facing a missionary.
- ⁵⁹"Letter from John Allan to the Massachusetts Council," *Collections and Proceedings of the Maine Historical Society*, 2nd series, 5 (1894): 311-218, quotation from p. 312; "Capture of Colonel Allan's Dispatches by the Enemy," Kidder, *Military Operations*, pp. 268-272, quotation from p. 270.
- ⁶⁰"Petition of Alexander Campbell," Baxter Mss. 18: 70-72.
- ⁶¹"Conference with the Indians, July 1, 1780," Baxter Mss. 18: 335-340.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*
- ⁶³"Colonel Allan to the President of the Council, July 12, 1780," Baxter Mss. 18: 345-348.
- ⁶⁴"Address to the Indians of the Eastern Tribe, August 23, 1780," Baxter Mss. 18: 376-378.
- ⁶⁵"Secretary Avery's Report, August 18, 1780," Kidder, *Military Operations*, p. 286.
- ⁶⁶"James Avery to the Council Respecting the Priest," Baxter Mss. 18: 381.
- ⁶⁷"Letter from John Allan, November 2, 1780" Baxter Mss. 19: 28.
- ⁶⁸"John Allan to President Powell, January 26, 1781," Baxter Mss. 19: 107.
- ⁶⁹Lenhart, "Two Revolutionary Chaplains," 455-456.
- ⁷⁰"Letter of Colonel Allan, June 16, 1781," Baxter Mss. 19: 284.
- ⁷¹Baxter Mss. 19: 376.
- ⁷²*Resolves of the General Court of the Province of Massachusetts, Oct. 26, 1780 to March 19, 1781* (Boston, 1781), p. 151.
- ⁷³"William Lithgow to the Governor, January 25, 1783," Baxter Mss. 20: 69.
- ⁷⁴"Resolve, June 4, 1783," Baxter Mss. 20: 232-233. "Petition of Juniper Berthiaume, June 1784," Baxter Mss. 20: 385.
- ⁷⁵Lenhart, "Two Revolutionary Chaplains," p. 456.

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