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The French at Pentagoet, 1635-1674: An Archaeological Portrait of the Acadian Frontier

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The French at Pentagoet, 1635-1674: An Archaeological Portrait of the Acadian Frontier. By Alaric Faulkner and Gretchen Fearon Faulkner. (Augusta, Maine: Maine Historic Preservation Commission and The New Brunswick Museum, 1987. Pp. xiv + 330. Illus. Paper. Distributed by Maine Archaeological Society, P. O. Box 982, Augusta, Maine 04330. \$15. + \$2.00 postage).

For over three hundred years Fort Pentagoet lay undisturbed and half-forgotten beneath its own rubble in the town of Castine near the mouth of the Penobscot River. Only local historians recalled that in 1635, in a place then called Pentagoet, the French had built a substantial stone fort which a Dutch raider destroyed in 1674. The remains of Fort Pentagoet lay safe from human disturbance — but not from the forces of nature which by 1980 were clearly eroding away the site. Realizing the historical value of this early French settlement, Alaric Faulkner, professor of historical archaeology at the University of Maine, Orono, undertook a survey of the site in 1981. Faulkner then followed this up by directing three seasons of field work during which he excavated about half the complex. Today the site of Pentagoet is backfilled, landscaped, and protected from further erosion by a massive sea wall.

The French at Pentagoet, 1635-1674 is far more than a mere excavation report. Assisted by his wife, Gretchen, a Ph.D. candidate in early American history, Faulkner ranges widely over the social, economic, and political significance of the site and its finds, a scope suggested by the book's subtitle, *An Archaeological Portrait of the Acadian Frontier*. This is historical archaeology at its best.

In the first half of their book, the Faulkners provide a historical context for the founding of the French Acadian settlements, and especially Fort Pentagoet. Accurate details about the fort were difficult to find, for contemporary plans were mere "formula representations" rather than precise descriptions. Ground penetrating radar helped to determine the extent of the site as well as strategies of excavation. The authors'

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stratigraphic profiles across various sections of the site reveal to readers the fort's archaeological structures, their sequence of construction, alteration, and eventual demolition. By correlating these structural features with artifacts, the Faulkners were able to decipher the "anatomy of the fort." Computer graphics and the artistry of Catherine Brann provide vivid three dimensional aerial views of the fort as it existed in 1650 and as modified just prior to its demolition in 1674.

But artifacts, more than the structure itself, depict the quality of life at Pentagoet. The Faulkners devote the second half of the book to an analysis and interpretation of distinct assemblages: metals, clay tobacco pipes, ceramics, foodways, personal belongings, and trade goods found under the fort's demolition. The authors' detailed explanations of manufacturing techniques and uses of the various items provide invaluable insights into seventeenth century French social and economic life.

No less impressive is the Faulkners's capacity to wring significance from the inanimate objects they describe. Variations in the distribution pattern and shape of clay pipe fragments, for example, suggest to the Faulkners that originally tobacco was scarce, expensive, and confined to the fort's officers. Over time, however, as tobacco became more plentiful and cheaper, smoking spread to the troops and commoners who favored a short stemmed pipe they could hold between their teeth while working with their hands, rather than the longer, hand-held pipe smoked in leisure by the elite.

At Pentagoet, the most common type of ceramic was a green glazed, buff-bodied, utilitarian earthenware from the Saintonge region in southwestern France. Ceramics, too, shed light on the social structure of the fort's personnel. Shards of gaudy chafing dishes and of fine Venetian glassware indicate that Old World social distinctions persisted among Pentagoet's occupants. Personal items, such as remnants of gold braid, spurs — despite the absence of horses — and the practice of sword-wearing, provide the Faulkners with further such evidence. Even the distribution of garbage in "this fouled nest," as

the authors describe the fort, reflect differences in the quality of life among the inhabitants. But everyone suffered when supplies from France failed. Among the faunal remains of deer, moose, bear, fish and those of domesticated animals are numerous remains of domestic cats — grim testimony to the starving time of 1671-1672.

The Faulkners conclude that the evidence from Pentagoet contradicts the accepted assumption of early and easy French adaptation to the new environment. Pentagoet was a French outpost designed to exploit the fur trade by transplanting France to the Acadian frontier. Equipment, foodways, behavior, dress, social rank, and even the fort itself replicated French cultural patterns with little adaptation to alien customs either English or Indian. Indeed, it was the Indians who adapted to the ways of the French with disastrous consequences not only for the Indians, but the English as well.

One of the Faulkners's most startling suggestions is that the destruction of Pentagoet deprived the Indians of the guns which the French freely supplied and repaired. The English, who assumed control over the region after 1674, refused to follow the French practice. Denied firearms which had become essential for survival, the Indians reacted out of desperation in 1676 in what most historians refer to as King Philip's War. The Faulkners, however, look to the events at Pentagoet, not to southern New England, for the origins of the struggle in Maine. Most historians will ask for further evidence for such an interpretation, but few will deny its ingenuity.

This is an important book for historians of the seventeenth century and of Maine and Acadia as well. Archaeologists will undoubtedly benefit from it and be particularly grateful for the color illustrations of ceramics — a vital aid to identification of such artifacts in the future.

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