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The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations

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later on "White Indians," settlers systematically terrorized their antagonists and destroyed their property. Not until 1807 did violence escalate into bodily harm, culminating two years later in the famous murder of Paul Chadwick, a back country "traitor."

Such extremism split a movement which, as Taylor points out originally, sought to defend property and order. Opposition collapsed when the rise of the Democratic Republicans failed to bring significant relief to Maine's frontier. Broken and disillusioned, the "White Indians" faced one of two bitter alternatives — either to compromise with the hated proprietors, or else to take up land anew in New York, Ohio, or — most ironic of all — under the British crown in Canada.

Liberty Men and Great Proprietors deserves to be read in conjunction with yet another recent contribution to the social history of Maine's rural interior, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale: the Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (1990). Ulrich's skillful explication of the Ballard diary provides a vivid account of family life and a woman's experience in the new settlement of Hallowell. *A Midwife's Tale* nicely complements the broader context Taylor provides in *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors*. These two studies by Ulrich and Taylor, along with the two earlier ones by Clark and Kershaw, constitute a record of historical writing on the Maine frontier which, if not notable in quantity, is remarkable in its quality.

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The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations. By Kenneth M. Morrison (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984. Pp. x + 256. \$35.)

In his introduction, the author of *The Embattled Northeast* informs his audience that he was born near the ancient

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Wabanaki village of Norridgewock on the Upper Kennebec River. He briefly explains that it was the location of a French Jesuit mission post, strategically situated on the New England frontier, until it was destroyed by English troops in the summer of 1724. In addition to killing a number of Wabanaki Indians, the attackers killed and scalped Father Sebastien Racle (or Rasle/Rale), the old missionary. In light of this tragedy, Kenneth Morrison divulges: "I learned my historical craft by coming to grips with the issues Norridgewock raised."

Trained as a historian at the University of Maine, Morrison explains that the purpose of this almost 200-page study is to present "a fair-minded, comparative approach to Indian-White relations." He offers us one of Maine's first in-depth ethnohistories concerning the dynamics of frontier relations between natives and newcomers. In particular, he is interested in examining "the criteria by which the Abenaki assessed Europeans." Accordingly, he tries to couple an anthropological and historical approach to the complex process of social interaction between the region's three major ethnic groups: Wabanaki, French, and English. Concentrating on the period from early contact until the end of Dummer's War in 1727, he records "a brutal history [in which] conspiracy, treachery, and animosity had been the order of the day."

In the course of six chapters, Morrison submits a revisionist version of Maine's colonial period. He demonstrates in vivid detail "that Indians were active participants in their own history." Generally, he gives careful consideration to the geopolitical conditions of the tribal communities inhabiting the territories between New England and New France. Morrison pays attention to the various European and Indian social ideologies of contact, political strategies, and the diplomacy which ultimately led to a French-Wabanaki alliance during a "period of intense internal crisis" among the tribespeople. The book shows that although the tribal leaders were forced to operate within a constricted political arena, they persistently tried to pursue their own domestic and diplomatic objectives. Nevertheless, the sagamores were frequently cornered by the

intercolonial power conflicts. Consequently, the Wabanaki people were dragged into six major wars against the English in less than one hundred years.

It is difficult to assess the full value of Morrison's scholarly treatise. Undoubtedly, most readers will agree that it breaks new ground and supplies us with previously unpublished information pertaining to native peoples in colonial Maine. In contrast to many previous historical studies of the period, its undisguised heroes are the Wabanaki. However, in his effort to set the record straight, he assumes a partisan position, and in this sense he follows a beaten track in writing history as morality play. Taking sides with the Wabanaki, he depicts their antagonists as arch-villains and misses no opportunity to lash out at white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. He accepts uncritically the French, especially the Jesuit, "genie colonial," a supposedly unique quality which allowed them to get along with native peoples. In this regard, he underemphasizes the fact that English military expeditions against the Wabanaki were frequently accompanied by other Indian fighters, such as Mohawk, Mohegan, and Wampanoag.

In 1720, Father Rasle wrote to Captain Samuel Moody that he planned to write a book telling the world how "the English treat the Indians," and how they rejected the tribes' legitimate demands for sovereignty. Morrison seems to have set himself the task which the French missionary of Norridgewock was prevented from doing more than 250 years ago. Morrison admirably defends Wabanaki values and perceptions, but as Wilcomb Washburn, a pioneer of American ethnohistory, suggested years ago, "an understanding of conflicting values seems to be a condition of great history, great imaginative writing, and great religious insight." By this standard, it is questionable whether *The Embattled Northeast* succeeds as a "great" Wabanaki ethnohistory.

Despite Morrison's obvious sympathy with the Indians, the book does not effectively bring the Wabanaki tribespeople themselves to life. They remain distant, enigmatic, and almost completely anonymous. We get little sense of the Wabanaki

mode of subsistence, their kinship and community structure, their political relations, or their rituals. For instance, name resuscitation, such as the succession of Kennebec sagamores bearing the name Toxus (variously spelled), leads to an insufficiently recognized problem in identifying the *dramatis personae* in Indian country.

Nor does Morrison engage in the present debate over Indian ethnicity. Because ethnicity is controversial, it is not surprising that he avoids this issue — generally by lumping Maine's natives together as "Abenaki." Even still, some of his ethnic identifications are not consistent. For instance, he sometimes refers to seventeenth-century "Etchemin" as Maliseet or as eastern Abenaki, misidentifying Maliseet chieftains as Abenaki sagamores and Micmac warriors as Abenaki tribesmen. Moreover, he is not always correct in locating the various tribal communities. To mention one example, the Wawenock are not from the Pemaquid area, but from the mission village of Becancour.

The author of *The Embattled Northeast* deserves credit for bringing this important material to our attention. For those readers who are not familiar with Wabanaki history, there is much to learn from Morrison's discourse. His book represents a significant contribution, and calls for much additional research and writing in the promising field of ethnohistory.

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