

Abenakis of Odanak.

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FOR TRANSLATION

ABENAKIS OF ODANAK

The term "Abenakis" or "Abnaki" is derived from the Algonkian word meaning "east land" or morning land". It was also used to designate an Algonkian confederacy centering in the present state of Maine, which comprised the following tribes: Norridgewock, Penobscot, Etchemins, Malicite, Sokoki, and Wewenoc, the name Abenkis being applied in the restricted sense to the Indians of the Kennebec River.

The Abenakis from a very early date formed an attachment for the French through the influence of their missionaries.

In 1637 the Jesuits established at Sillery on the north side of the St. Lawrence five miles up the river from Quebec a Montagnais mission which became almost solely Abenaki a decade later through the migration of a portion of the Abenakis tribes of the Kennebec river.

In 1646 Father Drouillettes of the Jesuit mission at Sillery went to the Kennebec country and continued his visits for eleven years. Upon the departure of Father Drouillettes in 1657, it was found that the field could not be persistently worked owing to the demands upon the Order from other quarters and, therefore, the Fathers sought to draw Abenakis converts to Sillery. The Penobscot, the Etchemins and the Malicite, however, remained in their ancient homes and a band of the latter tribe may still be on the Maliseet Reserve at Tobique in the Province of New Brunswick.

The Abenakis mission soon became too crowded, and at the invitation of Father Jacques Bigot, S.J., the Indians moved across the River St. Lawrence, (the south side) to the Falls of the Chaudiere River, nine miles from Quebec, in the fall of 1683.

In 1685, the Abenakis mission at Sillery was finally abandoned in favour of the new mission established on the Chaudiere River in the present county of Levis.

After his arrival at Quebec, on the 13th October, 1689, Father Sebastien Rasles devoted himself at first to learning the language of the Indians. He went to dwell in the Abenakis village situated at the Chaudiere River. This village was inhabited by 200 Indians, nearly all of whom were Christians. It was in the midst of these Indians that he served his missionary apprenticeship. When he had remained nearly two years among the Abenakis, he was recalled by his Superiors and assigned to the Mission of the Illinois.

Two years later he was recalled from the Illinois country to spend the rest of his life with the Abenakis tribe. He went to the Kennebec River where he established a mission at Nanrantsouak.

In 1700 Governor de Callieres decided to unite the Abenakis of the Chaudiere River with the others of the same tribe who had already settled on the St. Francis River as early as 1673 in order to put up a barrier against the incursions of the Iroquois. To implement the governor's plans, the Seigneur of St. Francis, Marguerite Hertel, widow of Jean Crevier, gave to the Abenakis a grant of land in her Seigniory under date of August 23, 1700.

They were also granted land in the Seigniory of Pierreville by Sieur Antoine Plagaish and Charlotte Giguere, his wife, under date of May 10, 1701. Father Jacques Bigot, S.J. accepted for the Indians and in the fall of 1701 transferred the mission of the Chaudiere River to St. Francis. Father Bigot remained in the new mission until 1708.

In the early part of the 18th century Father Rasle urged his Indian converts to move farther into the interior toward Quebec where they would be protected against their enemies. Before 1727 most of the Wewenocs who lived around the mouth of the Kennebec River had moved to St. Francis and Becancour and in 1747 only a few families remained in Maine. They soon afterward removed to Canada.

Father Aubery was ordained priest in the fall of 1700, and celebrated his first mass at the mission of St. Francis, but he was removed to Acadia shortly after where he remained until 1709 when he returned to St. Francis. He stayed in the St. Francis mission until his death in 1755.

L'Abbe J.A. Maurault, an authoritative writer about the Abenakis, has written:

"Ces sauvages (Abenakis) étaient d'une taille au delà de la moyenne. Ils avaient généralement une grande force; mais cette force les rendait plus aptes a supporter les rudes fatigues des voyages et de la chasse que celles d'un dur travail. Leurs membres étaient bien proportionés et souples. On ne remarquait que très rarement des difformités corporelles chez eux. Leur figure, ordinairement bien régulière, était d'un brun jaune ou rouge. Leurs cheveux étaient plats, noirs et longs.

"Ils n'avaient ordinairement pour vêtement qu'une chemise, ou une couverture, dont ils s'enveloppaient. Avant l'établissement des Européens parmi eux, ils ne s'habillaient que de peaus. Les femmes étaient toujours vêtues plus décemment que les hommes;

"Chaque tribu avait ses armoires, qui consistaient en la figure d'un animal, ou d'un oiseau, ou d'un poisson. Chaque guerrier peignait ordinairement sur ses bras, ses jambes et sa poitrine les armes de sa tribu. Quant les sauvages allaient en voyage ou en excursion, ils peignaient leurs armes sur des arbres a chaque campement, surtout lorsqu'ils avaient réussi dans quelque campagne. Ils faisaient aussi connaître, par a moyen, le nombre de leurs prisonniers et

celui des chevelures qu'ils avaient levées. A la guerre, ces sauvages se peignaient la figure en rouge. Pendant tout le temps de la guerre, leurs principaux amusements consistaient à chanter, à danser autour d'un feu et à raconter leurs principaux faits d'armes, afin d'animer le courage des jeunes guerriers. Dans les combats, ils se servaient d'arcs et de flèches, de tomahawks et de lances.-----