

# 12,000 Years on the Kennebec Native American Presence

The Abenaki People lived in the Kennebec River valley long before the arrival of Europeans. The Alnôbiakabasa (Cabbassa band of the Kennebec tribe), from the Abenaki Indian Nation, lived near the mouth of the Cobbosseecontee Stream.

Kennebec is an Abenaki word meaning “long straight water without rapids.” Cobbosseecontee comes from Cabbasaquntiaq, an Abenaki word meaning “place of the sturgeon.”



ABENAKI  
COUPLE  
(1600)

## Village Life



ALNÔBAIWIGWÔMEK - An Indian House



ALNÔBAIWIGWÔM NADIALÔWÔGAN  
An Indian Hunting House

The alnôbaiwigwômek (left) was used in the main village. It was made with bent saplings, covered with reed mats or birch bark sheets layered and tightly lashed down. Bullrush mats were applied to the inside and grasses stuffed between, making for a warm house even in the coldest weather.

When traveling inland to hunt larger game (such as caribou, moose, bear, and deer) or make maple sugar, the lightweight alnôbaiwigwôm nadialôwôgan made moving easier. The birch bark sheets were untied and packed in a tightly rolled bundle. Poles were made at the new site.

Abenaki men fished and hunted. The women cared for the children, cooked the meals, tended the crops, made baskets and clay pots, and tanned the animal hides from which they made clothing. The Abenaki were a spiritual people, with explanations through many stories, passed from generation to generation, of how their world began, was shaped, and their place in it.



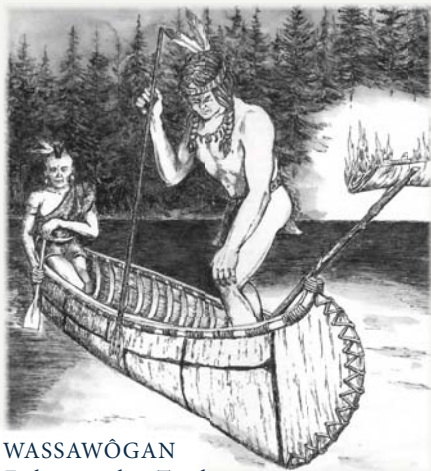
Artist impression: Jonathan D. Yellowbear  
Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Indian Nation

The alnôbai-msawakwôlôzin was fortified with logs sunk into the ground to help repel attacks from the Mohawks and other Native People. The stockade also protected the villagers from wild animals. It was usually built on top of a hill, near water.

Snowshoes and toboggans were used for hunting and traveling during the snowy winter months.



ATEMAWÔGAN - Snowshoes  
ODABÔGAN - Toboggan



WASSAWÔGAN  
Fishing with a Torch

Fish were an important source of food for the Abenaki. They used weirs, nets, bone fishhooks and fishing spears. These spears were used at night by fishermen in birch bark canoes with torches. The fish, including 10-foot-long sturgeon, would see the light and come up to the surface, then be speared. Some of the fish were dried for eating during the long months of winter.

TEKWIGWNIGAN  
Stone Plummet  
or Weight



NODAMAGWOGAN  
Harpoon or  
Fish spear



CHAWAPENIGAN  
Fishhooks



CHAWAPENIGANATAGW  
Fishing line



WABANAKI TCHIMAN  
Birch Bark Canoe

Most travel was by canoe on the rivers and lakes with portages between. Otherwise travel was on foot. Intertribal trade occurred along the Kennebec River, the main “highway” to the north or south, on smaller tributaries (such as Cobbosseecontee Stream), and on trails through the woods.



MASKWADAWTIGANAL  
Birch bark containers



OLOMKWAKWIKWATSIS  
A personal belt cup of burl wood



MAZALÔPSKWKWATIZ  
Pot of red clay

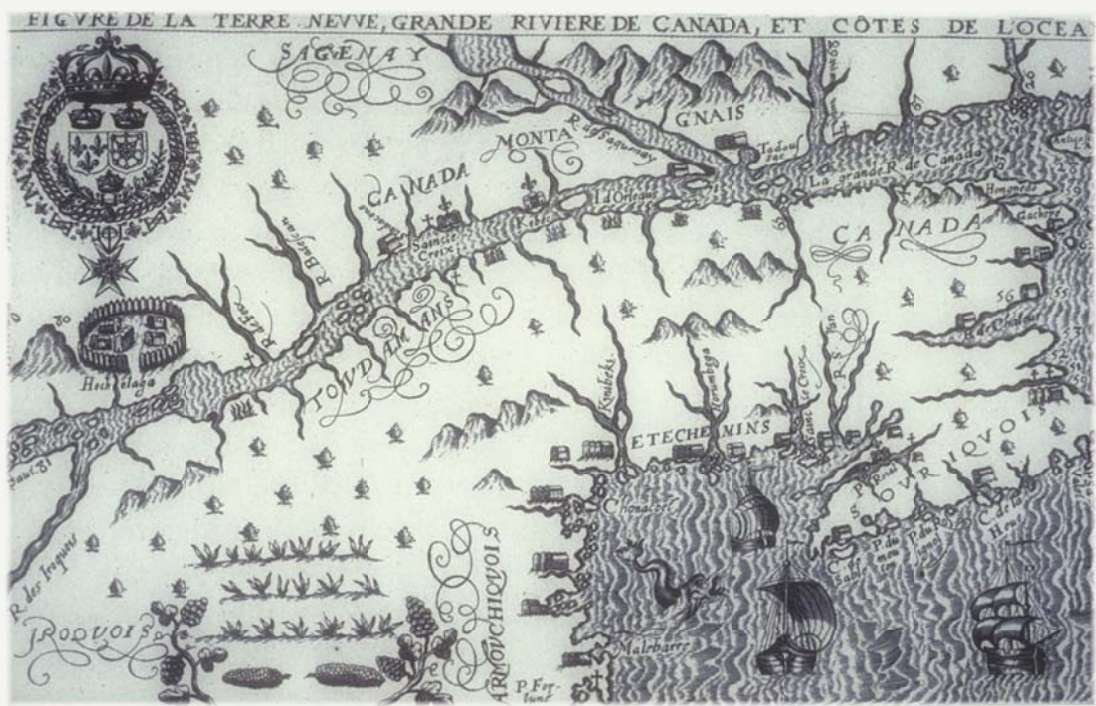


KWOLASKWDAWBA  
Gourd water container  
KWOLASKWDAT  
Gourd bowl



# The Kennebec Frontier 1604-1760

The Abenaki witnessed profound changes between the early 1600s and 1760. They were devastated by disease introduced by Europeans and had to contend with English and French claims to the frontier. From the south, the Kennebec waterway gave the English access to abundant and valuable furs, fish, and forest products. Soon, former Abenaki homelands were being settled by the English. From the north, French missionaries followed the Kennebec to reach Indian villages – and, in so doing, helped the Abenaki impede the English advance north.



Map, drawn in 1609 by Marc Lescarbot, shows the territories that had been explored by the French at the time. The Kennebec (Kinibeki) River is in the center.

These different cultures mingled peacefully until 1676. From then until 1760, a series of wars and incidents kept the English in conflict with the Native Americans and the French. English colonists relied on several forts and garrison houses to survive these conflicts. After 1760, with the French defeated and the Abenaki retreating north, English settlers thronged to the area.

## French Presence

In 1604 French explorer Samuel de Champlain settled a colony on the St. Croix River, the present border between Maine and New Brunswick. The next year, looking for a place to move the colony, he sailed up the Kennebec River, at least as far as Merrymeeting Bay.

The French presence in North America, however, was soon centered in Quebec and present day Nova Scotia. Acadia (today's New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) extended as far west as the east shore of the Kennebec River. To impede and block encroachment by the English, the French supported Jesuit missionary work with the Abenaki in the Kennebec valley. The river was the frontier and dividing line between the French and English territories. To the Abenaki, the French were not only missionaries but allies who helped them keep the English from settling their homeland.

The best known missionaries were Father Druillettes, a Jesuit who lived in the area between 1646 and 1650, and Father Sebastian Râle (or Rasle) who lived with the Abenaki for 30 years at Norridgewock village (today's Madison). He and Chief Bomazeen were killed by the English militia in 1724, when they destroyed the village. Thereafter, for nearly 40 years, the valley remained a thinly settled and disputed territory.

## English Presence

In the fall of 1607 the Sagadahoc Colony (also known as Popham Colony) was settled near the mouth of the Kennebec River, and Fort St. George was erected. After 13 tough months, the colony failed, and the colonists returned to England. While here, Raleigh Gilbert, a leader of the colony, sailed a shallop upriver as far as the head of tide (today's Augusta) where he met a large number of Abenaki. Expedition to Quebec.



A Shallop Illustration by: Kerry Hardy from Notes on a Lost Flute



A reconstruction of Fort Western

Fishing stations were set up at the mouth of the Kennebec by the early 1620s. The Pilgrims, who went there to fish, soon discovered a ready supply of valuable beaver pelts. In 1629 they built a trading post at Cushnoc (near present day Old Fort Western). By 1660 about 300 settlers lived peacefully along the river, from Cushnoc to the ocean, until being driven out by Native Americans in 1676.

From 1718 to 1722 settlers, many of them Scots-Irish, established themselves in the Merrymeeting Bay area. Fort Richmond served as the center of the settlement and as a trading post. Native Americans traded with the settlers between periods of hostilities.

Later, in 1752, French Huguenots and Germans settled in Frankfort (Dresden) and built Fort Frankfort/Shirley. Two years later Fort Halifax (Winslow) was built 30 miles upriver, and Fort Western (Augusta), was built as a supply depot for Fort Halifax.



Pownalborough Courthouse (today)

After 1760, Fort Shirley was converted to non-military use, and the Pownalborough Courthouse was built within the fort walls. Law came to the Kennebec frontier, along with many settlers. Gardinerston became a commercial center as saw and grist mills were established along Cobbosseecontee Stream.

Although no tribal villages remained in the region, some Native Americans continued to live amongst these new settlers. At the time of the American Revolution many of these Native Americans volunteered their services to the American cause, including during the Arnold Expedition to Quebec.