

An Addendum to:
MAINE INDIANS' CONCEPT OF LAND TENURE
MHS Quarterly, Vol. 13, pp. 28-51.

We are indebted to Dr. Monique Crochet, Associate Professor of French at the University of Maine, Portland-Gorham, for translating the letters which follow from the original French as they appeared in the *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, Series II, volume 8, pp. 259-263 (Boston, 1819). These letters seem to have received scant attention by historians since their publication over 150 years ago; perhaps this is because they have never appeared in a good English translation.

These letters precipitated an understandable shudder among colonists who vividly remembered previous Indian incursions. The General Court in Boston, however, was moved to little more in the way of action than their customary condemnation of the French and the Jesuit Missionaries in Maine. The threats contained in these letters have been thoroughly aired by historians on the subject; however, what we found of particular value and worth skillful translation, was the list of Indian complaints, revealing clearly their concept of land tenure. Since their land was received from "God alone" it could not be conveyed to king or anyone else by conquest, grant, or purchase. Rather, the lands were intended to be shared, as we have seen earlier (*MHS Quarterly*, volume 13, pp. 28-51). We also found it interesting that evidence of these strong convictions, so apparent throughout the seventeenth century, should appear as late as 1721, the date of these letters.

Professor Crochet first translated the letters into modern English; and then, in order to retain some of the spirit and flavor of the originals, she made a second trans-

lation in an eighteenth century idiom. We chose to reproduce the latter version. We have reproduced the signatures (of great value in establishing how truly widespread were such beliefs) as they appear in the original French version printed in the *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*.

Roger B. Ray

July 27, 1721

Eastern Indians' Letter to the Governour
(Governor Samuel Shute)

Great Captain of the English,

Thou seest from the peace treaty of which I am sending thee the copy that thou must live peacefully with me. Is it living peacefully with me to take my land away from me against my will? My land which I received from God alone, my land of which no king nor foreign power has been allowed or is allowed to dispose against my will, which thou hast been doing none the less for several years, by establishing and fortifying thyself here against my wishes, as thou didst in my Anmirkangan, Kenibekki and Matsih-an-ssis Rivers and elsewhere and more recently in my Anm-kangan River where I was very surprised to see a fort which I was told was being built by thy command.

Consider, great captain, that I have often told thee to withdraw from my land and that I am telling thee so again for the last time. My land is not thine either by right of conquest, or by grant or by purchase. It is not thine by right of conquest.

When didst thou drive me away from it? And did I not drive thee away from it every time we waged war together, which proves it is mine under several titles.

It is not thine by grant. The king of France, sayest thou, gave thee it. But could he give thee it? Am I his subject?

The savages, sayest thou, gave thee it. Could a few savages whom thou caughtest by surprise by getting them drunk give thee it to the detriment of their entire nation which, far from ratifying that grant, which would be necessary to give thee any right, declares it invalid and illusory?

Some of us had lent thee a few places but know now that the entire nation revokes those loans because thou misusedst them. When did they allow thee to build forts and advance as much as thou doest along their River?

It is not thine by right of purchase. And thou art telling me something which my grand-fathers and fathers never told me. That they had sold my entire land when some of us had sold some pieces of it, which is not the case since thou canst not say that thou paidst enough for the smallest of the islands which thou wantest to seize; I have the right to take back a property which should never have been taken to my detriment and which I reconquered so many times.

Therefore, I am awaiting thy answer 3 Sundays from now; if within that time thou hast not written to me that thou withdrawest from my land, I will not tell thee again to withdraw, and I will believe that thou wantest to dominate it against my will.

Beside, these are not the words of 4 or 5 savages whom thou canst easily trick into sharing thy views by thy gifts,

thy lies and thy deceits; these are the words of the entire Abanakis nation scattered over this continent and over Canada and of all the other Christian savages their allies who have gathered together on my land for the purpose of speaking to thee in this manner and who, after having waited for thee for more than fifty days and after having waited for my people whom I am surprised thou art not sending back according to thy word, are now all together summoning thee to withdraw from the land of the Abanakis which thou unjustly wantest to usurp and which has for boundaries the Kenibegge River which separates it from the land of the Iroquois. I would have the right to ask thee to return the whole territory which lies between that River and mine, since thou ownest none of it but by seizure, but I am willing to let thee have that territory on the absolute condition that no Englishman may dwell within a league of my Peggakki River, nor from that boundary along the seashore which parallels the entire stretch of my land nor along the estuaries of my Rivers, nor on any of the off-shore islands which belong to my land and where I can go by canoe.

If a few individual savages, addicted to drinking, tell thee thou mayest dwell where thou dwelledst formerly, know that the entire nation disapproves of that permission and that I will go and burn down those dwellings after plundering them.

by my people who are in Boston.

In my village of Nanrants-ak, I am awaiting thine answer in French as I wrote to thee. If thou writest to me in English, I will believe that thou didst not want to be understood and that thou hast decided to retain my land and my people against my will; but I am telling thee once more to give them back to me, because the land is

mine and because as far as my 4 men are concerned I paid the ransom we agreed upon to fulfill my promise although I owe thee nothing. These are the words of the whole Abanaquis Nation scattered over this continent and over Canada, and of all the Catholic savages, Hurons, Iroquois, Misemaks, and other allies of the Abanaquis, whose Elders and Representatives have appeared at the place called Menaskek and spoken to their chief.

July 28, 1721

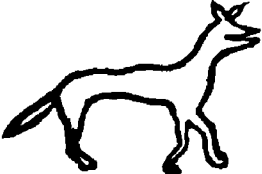
Know also great captain that the whole Abanaquis nation declares nul and void all the agreements that thou hast made up to now with the savages, because they were neither admitted nor accepted by the entire nation and because they were nothing but the result of thy trickery as in the agreement of Peskadoe, upon which thou basest thyself so firmly, and by which thou very falsely made the savages believe that thou wast the sole owner of the land, and that the king of France had given thee their country as if a king could give what is not his.

Considering the effect of the beverage that thou givest in abundance to the savages, after which they promise thee anything thou wantest.

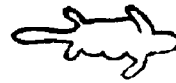
Considering the effect of the violence which thou exercisedst towards them in several encounters and more recently last winter, when after calling six of them to speak to thee about thy cattle which we had killed and which we had the right to kill in order to force thee to withdraw from a land which is not thine, thou hadst them brought into a house and there surrounded by almost two hundred Englishmen armed with pistols and swords, forcing 4 of them to remain as hostages for the killed cattle. Thou then tookest those 4 men as prisoners to

Boston. Thou hadst promised to return those 4 men upon my giving thee 200 beavers. The beavers are given but thou still retainest those men. By what right?

Signature of the Abanaquis nation and of the savages its allies:

Ceux de Narantsuk	
Ceux de Pentugset	
Ceux de Narakamigæ	
Ceux d'Anmissakanti	
Ceux de Muanbissek	
Ceux de Pegsakki	
Ceux de Medokteck	

Ceux de Ksupahag



Ceux de Pesmokanti



Ceux d'Arsikantegε



Ceux d'εansinak



Leurs alliez



Les Iroquois du *sante*



Les Iroquois de la Montagne



Les Algonquins



Les Hurons



Les Mikemaks



Les Montagnez du cote du
nord



Les Papinachois, et autres
nation voisines

