

4 On the Eastern Edge of the Mainland

Chapter Outline

This chapter explores the relationships that would develop between the French, English, and various Indigenous nations as the two European nations moved into the mainland of North America. The chapter begins with the well-known first encounter between Jacques Cartier and the Stadacona Chief Donakoh-Noh. Cartier's voyages and travels up the St Lawrence to Hochelaga are traced, along with an outline of his eventual kidnapping of Donakoh-Noh and his two sons. The chapter then turns attention to Samuel de Champlain and his trading relationship with the Innu. As a result of this alliance, the Innu were able to control the early fur trade, and Tadoussac became the centre of the Gulf of St Lawrence trade. The relationships that existed were not without problems, and the friction had ramifications for both the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and the French. The frictions ranged from confrontations involving death to more minor misunderstandings that were viewed as insults because either particular protocol was not followed, or expectations were unclear and confusing. Further, when relationships did not work out, Indigenous Peoples adapted the situations and would play European nations off against each other.

Once the French moved further inland, formed a new trading partnership with the Wendat, and established Montreal, the importance of the Innu and Tadoussac diminished. As the French expanded their control in North America, they looked at New France and Acadia not simply as trading outposts but as colonies. That viewpoint was reinforced by France's belief that they owned these areas by right of discovery and that the Indigenous populations were at best French subjects. This, of course, allowed the French to discount any semblance of Indigenous sovereignty. This was demonstrated when, under the Treaty of Utrecht, the French ceded Acadia to the English without mentioning Indigenous Peoples, who had been French allies and were occupying the territory.

The chapter concludes by analyzing the relationship that developed between the French and Abenaki and the latter's refusal to be used as pawns between European groups. In the end, the Abenaki associated with the French as a strategy for making the best out of a bad predicament. Further, regardless of the European power in control, it was always evident that Indigenous Peoples recognized their own sovereign status over their lands.

Learning Objectives

- To recognize early relationships between the French and Indigenous Peoples, under Cartier and Champlain
- To understand what caused friction between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans on the east coast
- To explain how the French became dependent on their Indigenous allies
- To understand European views of indigenous title and sovereignty
- To understand Indigenous Peoples' views of indigenous title and sovereignty

Key Terms, Figures or Sites

Champlain, Samuel de (c. 1570–1635): French geographer, explorer, and founder of Quebec (1608). His writing and maps provide the only extant written information on the first 15 years of French occupation. (p. 63)

Compagnie des Cent Associés, La: One of the societies that received a charter (1627) from France authorizing it to explore, develop, and exploit New France. (p. 68)

Donnakoh-Noh (d. 1539): Chief of Stadakohna before 1536, when he and his sons Domagaya and Tayagnoagny were kidnapped by Jacques Cartier and taken to France, where he died. (p. 61)

Hochelaga: St Lawrence Iroquoian settlement at the site of present-day Montreal. (p. 62)

King Philip's War (1675–6): Last Indigenous attempt to oust Europeans from New England, led by Wampanoag chief Metacom, called King Philip by the English. It resulted in the exodus of Wabanaki to Canada. (p. 73)

Nescambiouit (“He who is so important and so highly placed because of his merit that his greatness cannot be attained, even in thought,” c. 1660–1722): Pigwacket (Wabanaki) chief who was taken to France but returned in 1716 and attempted to form a pan-Indigenous alliance. (p. 76)

Odanak: Present-day Saint-François-de-Sales, near Sorel, Quebec. In the 1700s, it was the largest Wabanaki settlement in New France. (p. 73)

Pidiwamiska: One of the first Indigenous women to marry a French colonizer. These marriages worked politically, socially and economically to help consolidate the alliance with the French. These Indigenous women played crucial roles teaching their husbands how to function in the new environment. Pidiwamiska is thus recognized as a leader of cultural change that swept the land which would later become Canada. (p. 73)

sachem: The Algonquian word for leader among the peoples of the Atlantic region. (p. 76)

sagamore (also sagamo, saqmaw, saqmawaq, sakimaa): In the Atlantic region, among the Mi'kmaw and Wabanaki peoples this word is used to refer to the junior of the two leaders. In the Great Lakes region it is used to denote the elders who keep and disseminate knowledge. (p. 71)

Stadakohna: Major Haudenosaunee settlement on the St Lawrence River at the time of first contact near present-day Quebec City. (p. 60)

Tadoussac: Innu settlement at the mouth of the Saguenay River and an important fur-trading centre in the mid-1600s. (p. 64)

Treaty of Boston (1725): Treaty signed at the end of the English–Indian War between the English and Wabanaki, Wuastukwiuk, and Mi'kmaq. (p. 75)

Treaty of Utrecht (1713): Treaty in which France ceded Acadia to the British that ended French–British hostilities in Acadia that had begun in 1701. (p. 68)

Study Questions

1. Who was Donnakoh-Noh, and why was he important?
2. What and where were Stadakohna and Hochelaga?
3. What is believed to be the fate of the St Lawrence Iroquoians?
4. How did the Innu come to control the early fur trade and where was the trade centred?
5. Who benefited from the fur trade when it shifted westward from the 1630 to the 1640s?
6. What were French views on Indigenous Peoples' ownership of land?
7. What were the benefits and costs to Indigenous Peoples as a result of the English–French rivalry in North America?
8. What were the short- and long-term results of European contact for the Abenaki?
9. What strategies did the French use to maintain alliance with Indigenous Peoples in New France? Were they successful?
10. How did the Mi'kmaq view the British and the French?
11. Who were the “People of the Sunrise”?
12. Who was Pidiwamiska and why was she important?
13. What are wampum belts and what were they used for?

Essay Questions

1. Describe Jacques Cartier's three trips to Canada.

On Cartier's first visit in 1534, he presumed he had "discovered" Canada. To that effect, he erected crosses of possession at Gaspé and Stadacona. Cartier brought Chief Donnacona's two sons back to France and intended to train them as interpreters. They were brought back to Canada on Cartier's second trip in 1535–6. During that trip Cartier travelled in areas the Stadacona's did not want him to travel to. As a result, Cartier kidnapped Donnacona and his sons as well as other headmen and took them all to France with him where they all died. On his final voyage in 1541, Cartier brought settlers with the intention of building a colony for Lieutenant-General Jean-François de La Rocque de Roberval. By that time, relations with the Stadaconan people were strained, even hostile. This first attempt was not very successful and lasted less than two years. (pp. 60–62)

2. Describe the early trading relationships between the Mi'kmaq and Europeans.

Initial relationships were based on the fisheries, which is what attracted the Europeans. Mi'kmaq and their relatives, the Maliseet, at first engaged in servicing Europeans with goods such as marine mammals, cleaning and butchering whales for very little pay. This led to a transition to the fur trade. Soon, the Mi'kmaq were sailing European boats called shallops. They also continued acting as middlemen between northern hunters and southern agriculturalists. This is how they came to be known as "Taranteens" or "traders." (pp. 67–68)

3. Briefly explain how the Treaty of Utrecht was considered a betrayal by First Peoples.

Historically, the French policy towards Indigenous Peoples was peaceful in nature, aimed mostly at developing alliances and helpful relationships. This was achieved through various gifts and promotions. Although the French considered their presence to be the same as "owning" the lands they occupied, this was not the view of the Indigenous Peoples. Their view was they only allowed the French to share and use their lands by permission. The French signed the Treaty of Utrecht and handed occupancy of Acadia to the British without consulting with the First Peoples who lived there. This was seen as a breach of Aboriginal sovereignty. (p. 68)

4. Discuss the concept of Indigenous rights to land. Refer to the following three ideas: i) what were Indigenous concepts of land rights? ii) how do we know Indigenous Peoples had a clear understanding of their rights to these lands? iii) what was the nature of Indigenous efforts in defending these land rights?

Indigenous land rights were conceptualized more in terms of the right to use and control its usage, rather than as outright ownership (p. 76). In this way, Indigenous concepts of rights to the land and its resources was closely connected to the responsibility to care for those resources (p. 69). Thus, territoriality referred to communal land rights and conservation, an example being the practice of leaving untouched, the supply depots and food caches of others (pp. 67–68).

Indigenous Peoples clearly recognized their territorial rights to land. For example, Atecouando, of the Odanak, expressly forbid the English from exercising any authority over Indigenous lands

or resources without permission (p. 76). It was clear that Mi'kmaq and Wuastukwiuk peoples also saw themselves as friends and allies only; on occasion, they were known to have reminded the French that they had only granted the use of their lands and that it still belonged to them (p. 69). Even though Champlain had sealed a pact of friendship with the Innu in 1603, which allowed the French to establish themselves on Innu territory, it did not involve land title (p. 64). Instead, the Innu motives for establishing this relationship with the French was to be able to exploit the advantage of having Tadoussac within their territory because it was ideally situated at the mouth of the Saguenay and St. Lawrence River, making it an outlet for the interior trading networks (p. 64).

Further, once George I had been declared King of Acadia, the English sought an oath of loyalty and permission to set up truck houses on Indigenous lands, but the Mi'kmaq felt trade could continue from shipboards instead (p. 69). Earlier French establishments had not been seen as problematic because the French population was small; also, because the French depended on their allies, they were careful to treat them with respect (p. 68).

Indigenous groups were willing to go to war to protect their lands from European encroachment. King Philips War in 1675-6, represents a major push to expel Europeans from New England (p. 73). In 1721, the Wanakaki also declared their sovereignty over their territories and delivered an ultimatum to governor of Massachusetts, saying that there was to be no further intrusion on their lands. This began the three-year English-Indian war, which ended with Treaty of Boston in 1725 (p. 75).

Additional Resources

Further Readings

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Websites

Samuel de Champlain

<http://www.samueldechamplain.com/>

How Canada Got its Name

<https://www.thoughtco.com/how-canada-got-its-name-510464>

Jacques Cartier

<https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/jacques-cartier>