

Aboriginal Homeland - millenia of occupation and use by First Nations



Homme et femme abénaquis, entre 1750 et 1780. Bibliothèque Municipale de Montreal, Collection P Gagnon

First Glimpses of an Emerging Landscape

First nations have used and occupied the lands surrounding Lake Memphremagog for millennia. For instance significant Paleoindian archaeological discoveries¹ (see Table below) have been reported from the *Reagan site* overlooking the Missisquoi River near East Highgate in northwestern Vermont, and more recently another Paleoindian site has been excavated at the *Cliche-Rancourt site* in the Lake



Megantic region. These locations were occupied between 10,000 and 12,000 years BP (see Chapdelaine & Richard, 2017) when the region was emerging from the last (Wisconsinan) glaciation and was an arctic tundra landscape.

Fragments of Paleoindian fluted spear points from Cliche-Rancourt site, Lac aux Araignées. Photo credit Claude Chapdelaine

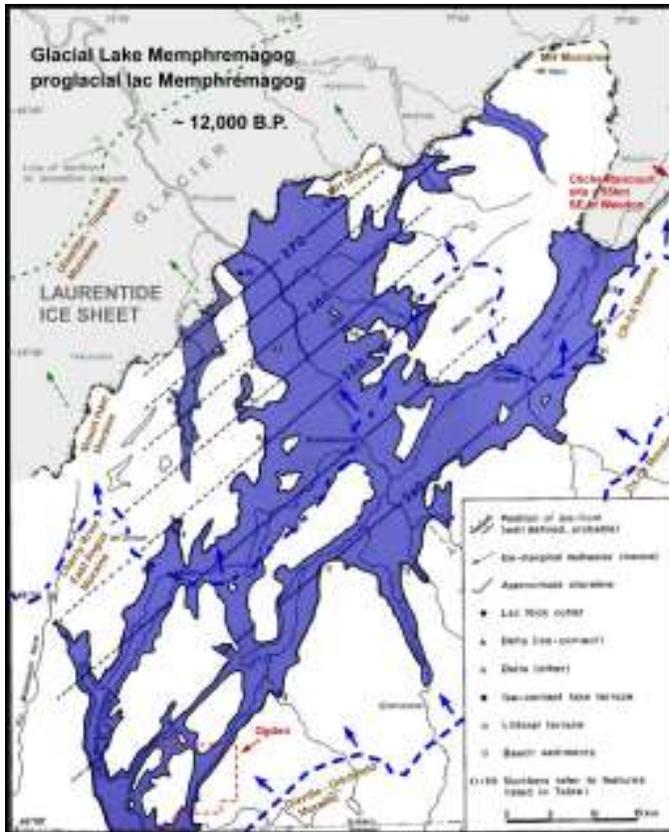
At this time in the distant past there would have been little of the present day geography recognizable with the possible exception of the summits of the larger massifs, like Mont Orford and

Owl's Head.

Stage	Sub-Stage or Period	Time Interval Covered (years BP - before present)	Example Cultures & Traditions with dates	Sites in Eastern Townships or Vermont	Known from Lake Memphremagog Watershed
Paleoindian	Early	20,000 - 10,000 yr BP	Clovis Culture 13,500 - 13,000 yr BP	Reagan Site, East Highgate, VT Cliche-Rancourt Site, Megantic, QC	NO
	Middle				
	Late				
Archaic	Early	10,000 - 8,000 yr BP		East-Upper Site, QC	NO
	Middle	8,000 - 5,000 yr BP			
	Late	5,000 - 1,000 yr BP			
Formative	Early Woodland	3,000 - 2,000 yr BP		Walleronville Site, QC	YES
	Middle Woodland	2,000 - 1,500 yr BP		St-Felix/Magoye Point Site, QC	YES
	Late Woodland	1,500 - 1,000 yr BP		Abenaki site (unclear) - Poulinville, QC	YES
Historic	pre-Columbian	1,000 - 500 yr BP		Abenaki site (unclear) - Poulinville, QC St-Felix/Magoye Point Site, QC	NO
	post-Columbian	500 - 0 yr BP		St-Felix/Magoye Point Site, QC Odeon peninsula	??

Table of the major archaeological stages defined from northeastern North America. Time is expressed as years before present or yr BP.

¹ A projectile point similar to a typical Clovis Point has been found on Grand Isle in Lake Champlain, and bifacial fluted points have been found at the Cliche-Rancourt site (Lake Megantic). The Clovis Culture was short-lived and best estimates date the culture as existing from 13,200 to 12,900 calendar years BP (Before Present).



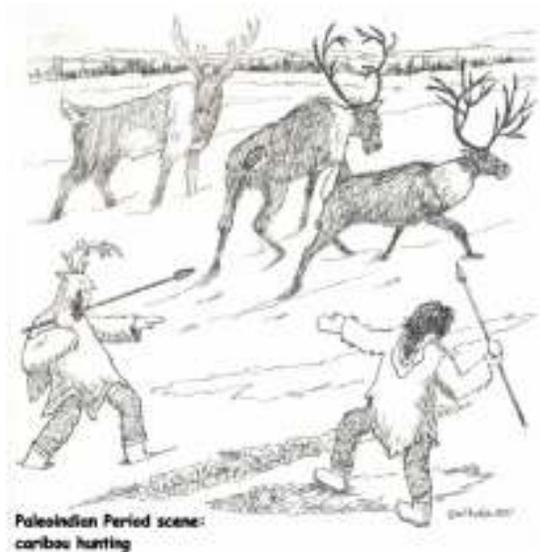
At least 40% of what is now the municipality of Ogden would have been submerged under a vast proglacial Lake Memphremagog whose waters were both fed and dammed by the continental ice sheet that was gradually retreating northward. This huge lake would have drained southward. The land exposed by the retreating ice would have been populated mostly by tundra sedges and grasses with only local dwarf birches and willows rising a few feet from the frigid soil. Nonetheless this cold but vegetated landscape could support caribou, muskox and mammoth, and in turn these animals, along with fish and birds, nourished the first human inhabitants, the Paleoindians.

A reconstruction of the extent of proglacial Lake Memphremagog. Geologists can accurately depict such an ancient geography by mapping and dating the terminal glacial moraines (sand and gravels

pushed forward by the ice into a lateral wedge shaped body). Minor advances during the general retreat of the glacier, leave these gravel bodies as the final testament to where the ice margin had been at one point. They remain because they were never subsequently eroded by a more recent advance of the ice sheet. For the time period depicted, about 12,000 years before the present date, it is the Mount Ham Moraine that marks the ice edge and the northern limit of the lake. Lake levels can be determined by the elevation at which ancient lake margin sediments (e.g. beaches) are located. Map is from Parent & Occhietti (2002). Position of moraines from several authors and summarized in Figure 5 of Parent & Dubé-Loubert (2017).

The Paleoindians were nomadic, and came into this area over time, pursuing big game animals, and opportunistically exploring new territory. The caribou, then as now, would have migrated seasonally, but from time to time conditions (hunting pressures, better forage, herd numbers, tundra wild fires, re-routing of rivers, etc.) would have forced the herds to change their routes, and look for new grazing and calving grounds. Their human hunters would have followed.

Apart from their most easily preserved lithic tools (e.g. Clovis-like bifacial fluted spear points), we have very little else of the material culture of these nomads to more precisely define their lives.



A Forest Home

As the climate changed in the late Paleoindian Period, the region became blanketed in a boreal forest of spruce, fir and tamarack. Big mammals adapted to the tundra moved north in concert with the treeline. Glacial lakes and streams stabilized and fish, moose, deer and smaller game, along with migrating birds and their eggs, became the predominant source of protein for the peoples of the late Paleoindian Stage occupying the landscape. A richer variety of berries became available for harvesting in season.

Up until relatively recently artefacts datable to the Archaic stage had not been found in the Townships. However Chapdelaine et al. (2015) have now reported findings from a site near East Angus that is dated



as Early Archaic (8000 to 10000 BP), and that have strong affinities to material from Archaic cultural sites along the Gulf of Maine, suggesting that trade between the two regions had already been established.

In the Early Archaic the climate became milder still, localized hardwood forests developed in our region and there was now an even greater diversity of game for the hunt. Stone weights for fish nets started to be used. Archaeologists see these changes also reflected

in the evolution of different stone-point styles and the development of wood-working tools. Stone axes, adzes and gouges have been found throughout the Memphremagog and southern Quebec area, but commonly in isolation, and rarely from undisturbed (and hence datable) sites, but nonetheless bear strong resemblance to known Archaic Stage artefacts.

The stronger and larger hardwood trees, such as elm, were cut for a variety of uses in their habitations, for wooden tools and utensils and for impressive dugout canoes. These dugouts allowed for transportation and fishing on the lakes and large rivers. This usage probably developed in the late Archaic period, about 3000 years ago, and continued into the following Woodland period. The Archaic Period inhabitants of the Lake Memphremagog region would have lived in small family or



A stone gouge from the Archaic Period

clan-related bands, moving campsites often in pursuit of whatever food resource was seasonally available. No one resource was sufficiently static and available to allow for semi-permanent villages. This explains the paucity of Archaic Period archaeological finds. Nonetheless, certain advantageous sites would have been temporarily re-occupied over and over.



Archaic Period scene:
net fishing, dugout canoe
making with axe and gouge

The occupation of the Memphremagog watershed territory in the immediate pre-contact, Late Woodland period (see Table above), and during the historic period of French exploration and initial colonization (i.e. 1534 – 1650 CE), remains somewhat of a mystery, as no significant well-dated sites of this period have been discovered.

That is not to say that the archaeological record is barren. Major finds, particularly along the Magog River (*BhFa-3 site*), are considered to represent the Late Middle Woodland period. The material culture, particularly ceramics, suggest ties to both the Melocheville tradition (*Pointe du Buisson site*) centred in the Montreal region, and the Point Peninsula tradition (eastern end of Lake Ontario in both Ontario and New York).

Material culture and linguistic affinities do not necessarily coincide, but as both the Melocheville and Point Peninsula traditions are considered *proto-Iroquoian*, a reasonable hypothesis would be that the southeastern Quebec groups whose ceramics are intermediate between the two (St-Pierre,2002), were also proto-Iroquoian.



An extraordinarily rare complete ceramic corded-ware vessel dating from the Late Woodland Stage (about 700 to 1000 years BP) and recovered intact from the waters of Lake Memphremagog by the late Jacques Boisvert, dedicated amateur historian and scuba diver from Magog. Presently held by the Musée de la nature et science, Sherbrooke.

The Woodland Stage starts about 3000 years ago and continued up to the first contact with European trade goods in the mid-1500's². At this point the material culture of the indigenes slowly started to evolve in response to European technology, just as Europeans adapted to the local conditions and climate by using First Nations technology.



*Projectile points Musée Colby-Curtis
Projectile points Musée Colby-Curtis*

A variety of undated projectile points, likely of Woodland age.

During the pre-contact Woodland time we see the first use of pottery, an important development for cooking and storage of food. Techniques in agriculture were learned from southern native groups through contact and trade. First nations in the northeast were known to grow the 3-Sisters (corn/maize, beans and squash). They are always grown together and complement each other: the corn stalk is the base structure for the beans to climb and the beans provide nutrients for the soil and corn. The third sister, squash, had large leaves that helped to eliminate weeds and deter rodents and pests by their sharp edges and hairs. Native peoples of the northern mixed forests made use of maple trees to produce maple syrup and sugar. Incisions into the bark of the sugar maple and other maple species

² Penetration by Europeans into the immediate Lake Memphremagog watershed area, may not have occurred until the 1690's. Settlement by whites did not begin until the 1780's.

allowed the run of sap to be collected in birch-bark and clay containers. Pre-heated cooking stones were dropped into these vessels to boil the sap, reduce the water content and produce the final syrup and sugar.

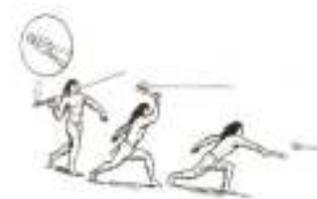
The high nutritional value of the three sisters together allowed less hunting and gathering activity for survival and a more stable village life for the people. These additions to their food source resulted in larger and more permanent settlements. However some groups also continued to move camp according to the seasons and game availability.



Another influence from the south was the use of built-up mounds of soil and gravel to have distinct ceremonial sites and places for burials. One such mound was at Merry Point in Magog. An impressive polished stone in the shape of a bird was found in a red ochre burial at this place. This artefact is dated



to the early Woodland period about 2500-3000 years ago. Other fragments of *birdstones* have been found in southern Quebec but this one is unique in that it is complete. The drilled holes suggest that it was used as an atlatl weight on a hunting spear-thrower.



The exquisite birdstone found in a burial mound at Merry Point in Magog and dated as Early Woodland Period. Its use as an atlatl weight is reasonable if conjectural. By the contact period, atlatls have been entirely superseded by the

bow and arrow in the northeast, and no European first hand accounts record their use.

Perhaps the most important technologies to develop in the Woodland Stage was that of the bow and arrow, snowshoe, and the birch bark canoe. The first was well-adapted to the pursuit of game in forested terrain and the second greatly enhanced winter hunting and travel. The third represented a revolution in transportation, being light, manoeuvrable, and both quickly built and easily repaired.



A variety of habitation styles used by the Wabanaki people were recorded from the European contact period, and were utilitarian, long-lived designs. These included the dome and A-frame wigwams used for seasonal camps and the larger shaputuans and longhouses used in more permanent settlements. **Seasonal camp with A-frame wigwam. Birch bark canoe building in foreground.**



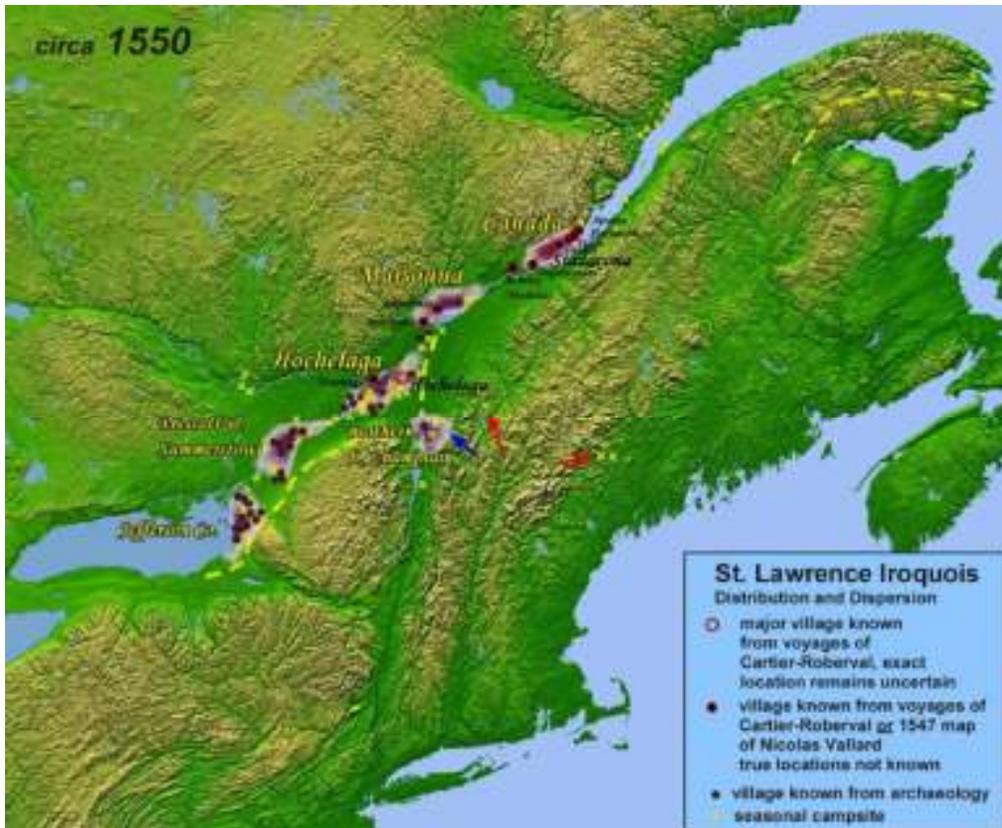
Other known sites in the Lake Memphremagog area

Perhaps the most publicized archaeological site in the region, is also the least thoroughly understood. The *Indian Rock petroglyphs* found in the Canton de Potton were discovered in 1927. They consist of a



series of geometric scribing (mostly straight lines or simple combinations thereof). The petroglyphs are locally overgrown by lichen, suggesting they are not recent given the slow growth of these simple plants. They occur in a soft rock that has been shown to be capable of being inscribed by the simple use of a harder stone, like slate. No specialized tools would have been required to produce the petroglyphs. Various opinions and reports have been made public, in the period 1965 to 1993, and the site has been

examined by experienced archaeologists, geologists, and professionals familiar with Amerindian petroglyphs. No consensus has been reached, but the most recent syntheses by Archeobec (1993) and then by Daniel Arsenault (1993) has rejected an Amerindian origin and given the softness of the stone and the rate at which the petroglyphs are eroding, favours a euroamerican origin, possible Irish settlers from the mid 19th century familiar with the use of Ogham script, with which the petroglyphs bear considerable resemblance.



Map, with data based on Tremblay (2006) showing distribution of St Lawrence Iroquois. Note settlement area north and east of Missisquoi Bay (Lake Champlain) – blue arrow, as well as scattered finds further to the east near Lake Memphremagog and even northern New Hampshire (red arrows).

A Post-Contact Mystery

When Jacques Cartier visited the St. Lawrence River (1534, 1535, 1540) the valley was populated with a people referred to by paleoanthropologists and historians as the **St. Lawrence Iroquoians**, distributed in six major areas, including Hochelaga (Montreal), and Stadacona (Quebec City) mentioned specifically by Cartier. Of particular note is the area just to the northeast of Lake Champlain, being relatively proximal to our own region. No mention is made historically, as to what tribes existed to the south and east of the St. Lawrence in the St. Francois River watershed, and as discussed above, the archaeological record is largely mute. Isolated St. Lawrence Iroquoian artefacts have been found in outlying areas including Lake Memphremagog, but of course trade was widespread, and these isolated artefacts could have been the product of trading (or warring) parties, either Algonquian or Iroquoian in composition.

By the time Champlain visited the summit of Mount Royal in 1603, the St. Lawrence Iroquois had disappeared as a distinct people, and the St. Lawrence River valley was devoid of any large settlements. The disappearance of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, sometime prior to 1580, remains a controversial subject of debate amongst archaeologists and historians.

What would appear clear, is that by the early 17th century this vast region was largely unoccupied, and the Mahican, Sokokis and Abenakis diaspora (largely due to Mohawk and English aggression) that

commenced as early as 1628, was responsible for re-populating this territory by Algonquian-speaking peoples. These migrations of refugees gradually built to a crescendo, and a permanent presence in Canada was established.

By 1677, the general uprising by many Algonquian-speaking tribes in southern New England (King Phillips War), had been brutally crushed by English colonists and their Mohawk allies. As villages were burned and stores of maize destroyed, the Abenakis and Sokokis tribes in this region fled north³ to seek refuge with the French. Temporary refugee villages were established at several places, including Odanak and Becancour, and by 1700 these villages had become continuously occupied. The villagers were catholicized, and had a resident Jesuit priest, and moreover because of their faith and common enemies, they were politically allied with the French. The inhabitants of these new villages, continued to have communication with their kinsmen in southern New England, and the canoe routes and portages in the upper reaches of the St. Francis watershed (including Lake Memphremagog), became well known and well established⁴. The territory also became an important hunting and fishing resource area, and the shores of Lake Memphremagog became sites for (numerous) seasonal fishing and hunting/trapping camps.



Broad attack by Mohawks (and English) against Western and Eastern Abenakis tribes. Small yellow diamonds are sites of known Abenakis villages. Red oval encircles Lake Memphremagog.

³ Previous dispersions due to Iroquois aggression started in the historic period as early as 1628. Odanak was briefly occupied by Amerindian refugees in 1669.

⁴ These routes, used for trade, were doubtlessly known deep into prehistory.



Refugee villages (large yellow diamonds) with dates of establishment. Those with resident Jesuit priest shown with blue cross.



Refugee routes north during and following King Phillips War.

As these refugee villages became permanently established, the alliances with the French became stronger, and warriors from the villages of Odanak and Becancour, became increasingly implicated in the imperial struggles between the French and British crowns. In New England, the warriors from Odanak were referred to as the St. Francis Indians, and gained a fearsome reputation. Their raids against New

England settlements in the broad period from 1690 to 1760⁵ resulted in over 600 English captives being brought north, many of whom were adopted into the tribe⁶. These raids, and the threat of raids, very successfully kept the settlement frontier at a standstill, or even in retreat, for 70 years.

These hostilities and enmities resulted in retribution, and on October 4th 1759, a sizeable force of 142 colonial rangers and provincial militia, many originally from New Hampshire, burnt Odanak to the ground, killing about 60, and taking some captives. Many of the warriors were away from the village, and the attack in the very early hours of the morning caught the villagers by surprise. It was not so much a battle as a slaughter with many of the victims trapped in their burning buildings. Nature and the abenakis had their revenge, as less than 73 rangers survived the force's chaotic retreat. In small groups the rangers were killed as they struggled southward, essentially lost in the wilderness, and easily tracked by vengeful abenakis. Many rangers simply starved to death in the wilderness. It is interesting to note that the habitations in Odanak at the time of its destruction were all log dwellings, enclosed by a palisade. The abenakis by this time were well-versed in colonial agriculture, but maize remained their critical crop, and seasonal forays to hunting and fishing territories were still a vital component to their food security, and a lynchpin for their culture.

Following the conquest, notwithstanding a slight reprieve during the American Revolution, peace brought with it a deluge of northerly directed settlement. Resistance by resident abenakis was perhaps futile, but local demonstrations were certainly made, and the most was made of the available political capital in appealing to higher authorities in Quebec City⁷. For instance when it was decided to demark on the ground where the boundary between the old province of New York and the recently proclaimed province of Quebec lay, survey teams were sent out to measure and cut a line along the 45th Line of Latitude. In the summer of 1772 a team of 20 men, mostly axemen, were attempting to cut a narrow



straight line where they supposed the parallel of latitude to be. Local abenakis must have viewed this endeavour with incredulity. Only white men would build a path in the middle of the woods, arrow straight, going up and down mountains, through swamp and alder growths, coming from nowhere and leading to nowhere. In their disbelief they would also have recognized that this was a direct threat to their land, and a very dangerous portent of what was to follow. When the surveyors erected a post to help mark the line on the eastern shoreline of Lake Memphremagog (Ogden), the abenakis promptly tore it down.

Re-imagining the removal of an insult on the land. Abenakis tear down a survey post in August of 1772. Sketch by Gael Eakin.

⁵ The attacks from Odanak against settlements in New England only occurred when a state of declared hostility existed between France and England (1689-97, 1704-13, 1744-48, 1754-60), which indicates the métropole dictated, in a coarse fashion, the external relations the western abenakis had with the English colonists. At all other times a degree of uneasy peace and limited trade prevailed.

⁶ Some of the white captives rose to positions of authority in the tribe. Famously Joseph-Louis Gill (1719-1798), son of captive Samuel Gill and his wife Rosalie, was known as the "white chief" of the St Francis Indians.

⁷ For instance, and more than a tad ironically, the abenakis from Odanak under Chief Francis Annance petitioned for a grant of land. In 1805 they were granted 8000 acres by Lt. Governor Robert Shore Milnes.

Soon enough the deluge followed. A combination of population pressure and greed drove settlers and speculators relentlessly north, transforming any hunting ground sitting astride arable soil, into farmland. The fate of the abenakis in Vermont and southeastern Quebec during this period of unprecedented upheaval is poorly known. According to the eurocentric chroniclers of Town and Township histories (largely written decades after), the native presence is relegated to a few colourful anecdotes of how they helped the settlers or peddled their basketware, then just disappeared. Contemporary documentation that has survived strikes a far more resistant tone. The unscrupulous Ira Allen tried to wrest the area around Missisquoi Bay and along the river of the same name from the abenakis, and it is clear that in the period 1786 to about 1796 confrontations between the resident Missisquoi natives and the would-be settlers were numerous, acrimonious, and sometimes violent⁸. But the onslaught was unyielding, and gradually the abenakis from the Coos (upper Connecticut River) and the Missisquoi area, retired in large numbers across the boundary into Canada. Permanent settlements furthest from the American frontier continued to exist (Odanak, Becancour), and welcomed these latest refugees. Certainly many Missisquoi and Cowasuks joined relatives in these last bastions, but others survived in Vermont through adaptation to, and to be sure assimilation into, the newly dominant white society. As stated by Calloway (1990, p.234):

“In the view of most of the white community, the western Abenakis seemed to have ‘disappeared’ from Vermont by 1800. But large numbers stayed, living in family bands and off the land as they had for centuries by hunting, fishing and gathering. Usually poor, often intermarried and French-speaking, these people came to live a nomadic existence, and they cropped up in local records as ‘gypsies’, wandering vagrants who appeared on the edge of white communities. Others adjusted to the new world around them by taking on work as day labourers, carpenters, tanners, and traders in or near the settlements.”

With Lieutenant-Governor Clarke’s proclamation in February of 1792, the Eastern Townships were formally opened up for settlement, and once again the abenakis were displaced from their traditional territories, including those in the Lake Memphremagog watershed. For a period of time during the initial settlement period companies (bands) of abenakis, commonly numbering between 25 to 30 individuals, would frequent their traditional hunting and fishing territories in the watershed. Typically they would arrive in the Fall, and depart late in the spring. E.H. LeBaron, writing in Hubbard’s *Forest and Clearings* (published 1874), states that ... *“the Indians were uniformly quiet and peaceful, unless irritated by the injustices from the white men ...”*, and that *“... the early settlers had far less trouble with the Indians than they did their Yankee brethren.”*

However the early settlers tended to dam the spawning streams for the fish for the sake of mills, thus depleting the fish stocks in the Lake, and they hunted unstintingly the deer and moose of the area for their own needs. The clearings being cut soon truncated the primal forest and by 1850 about 47% of the forest had disappeared along with the game and fur-bearing animals it could support. Soon there was little reason for the First Nations to return to the Lake Memphremagog area, except to find employment

⁸ Calloway (1990, p.225) indicates that the relationships with different settler groups were not equal and states “The Abenakis coexisted and even intermarried with the (Loyalist) Dutch as they had with the French, but there was persistent tension between them and the Yankees”

as guides or to sell their handicrafts. The rapidly changing landscape and resource availability in the watershed, led to a controversial decision in 1830 by many in Odanak to shift their hunting and trapping to the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. As a consequence their visitations to this, their traditional territory, became increasingly infrequent.

Again, not all the abenakis left their ancestral lands. As in northern New England, some lived on the margins of the settler society, others inter-married into that society. Nelson and Malloy (2003) document several instances of this survival, along with photographs, stating (ibid,p.4) that *“Intermarriage between the native population and Europeans was common, especially during the 1800’s,*



when assimilation was one of the methods of survival for the Abenakis people”.

“Abenakis children walked to town to their r auntie’s house in town to make a visit”

. From Nelson and Malloy (2003) p.4.

For example in Cedarville in Ogden, the Toleman family were abenakis descendents and they had a cottage in Cedarville during the 1920’s. Below is a picture of the extended Toleman family with friends

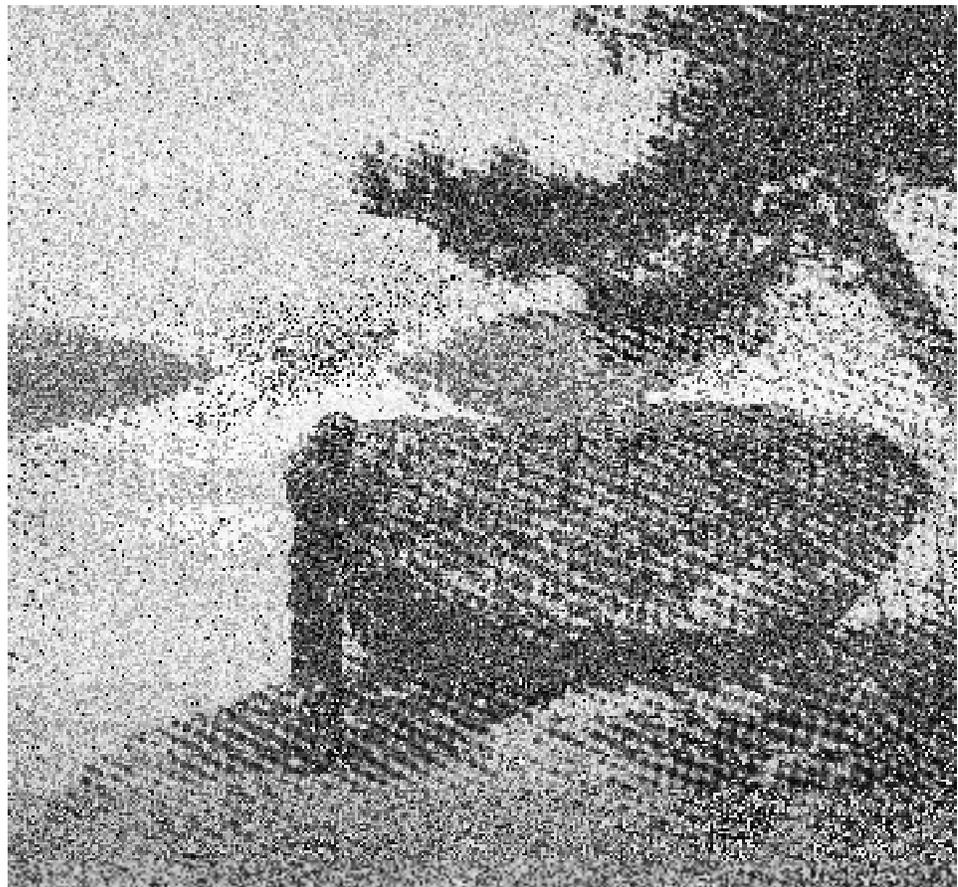


at their Auntie Rosella Toleman’s (nee Cole) camp in Cedarville.



Berry picking with great-grandma Edla Longeway (nee Cole), sister of Auntie Rosella, at Cedarville. The Cole sisters were abenakis..

A young abenakis man standing beside balance rock on Long Island, Lake Memphremagog, circa 1860. From a A.F. Styles Burlington stereographic photograph no 84 published in Matthew Farfan's Eastern Townships: On Lakes and Rivers (2008) p 45, published by Les Editions GID.



Traces of First Nations Occupation in Ogden?

There are no confirmed archaeological sites representing First Nations cultures in Ogden, at least to the authors' knowledge, but almost certainly undiscovered sites must exist.

When fields were plowed by oxen or horses, farmers commonly spotted and picked up artefacts such as projectile points, becoming family heirlooms in some cases. Without appropriate context these "souvenirs" are of interest, after all they signify the former enduring presence of First Nations on this territory, but they are of reduced archaeological value. Undisturbed sites are however extremely valuable.

If the reader is aware of such a site, or a potential site, then the following protocol must be observed.

1. Please do not dig or otherwise disturb the site. Please leave that for a professional.
2. Do contact Archeo-Quebec <https://www.archeoquebec.com/en/reseau-archeo-quebec/tous-pour-larcheologie> to be guided as to next steps to pursue.

At all times respect this native heritage which also represents our collective heritage as Canadians. If the site truly has value from an archaeological perspective, a professional investigation in consultation with First Nations representatives, will ensure this heritage is honoured and its inherent knowledge shared.

References and Suggested Reading

Yet to be completed

The Voice of the Dawn: An Autohistory of the Abenaki Nation Paperback – Jan. 1 2001

by [Frederick Matthew Wiseman](#) (Author)

Reclaiming the Ancestors: Decolonizing a Taken Prehistory of the Far Northeast

by Frederick Matthew Wiseman | Jul 5 2005

Properties of Empire: Indians, Colonists, and Land Speculators on the New England Frontier Hardcover – April 23 2019

by [Ian Saxine](#) (Author)

In the Shadow of Agiocochook: Stories from the Land of the Shapeshifter Paperback – July 29 2011

by [Stephen W.F. Berwick](#) (Author)

Women of the Dawn Hardcover – Sept. 1 1999

by [Bunny McBride](#) (Author)