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The Indians giving a Talk to Colonel Bouquet in a Conference at a Council Fire, near his Camp on the Banks of Muskingum in North America, in Oct. 1764.

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Colonists and Native Americans during one of many attempts to negotiate peace, 1764. Despite the best intentions, peace councils and treaties often brought misunderstandings and tragedy. The Treaty of Pemaquid, which Massachusetts Governor William Phips negotiated in 1693, led directly to the "great massacre" at Oyster River (Durham) the following year. Photograph courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

## “The Great Massacre of 1694”: Understanding the Destruction of Oyster River Plantation

Craig J. Brown

*July 18. The Indians fell suddenly & unexpectedly upon Oyster River about break of Day. Took 3 Garrisons (being deserted or not defended) killed & Carried away 94 persons, & burnt 13 houses- this was the [f]i[r]e[st] act of hostility Committed by [them] after ye peace Concluded at Pemmaq.*<sup>1</sup>

WITH THESE LACONIC WORDS, the Reverend John Pike recorded in his diary the devastating events of the morning of July 18, 1694,<sup>2</sup> when out of the darkness 250 Abenaki warriors descended upon the sleepy little hamlet of Oyster River Plantation (now Durham and vicinity). They ravaged both sides of the river, cutting a swath of destruction some six miles in length. In small detachments of eight to ten warriors, they swept outward from the falls, killing and capturing some ninety-four to one hundred people, fully one-third of the population. Half of the settlement burned to the ground. The attackers destroyed countless crops and killed hundreds of head of livestock, bringing famine and financial ruin to those who survived.

Tradition has long held that this raid was an accident, some macabre trick of fate. This war-party was nothing more than a disgruntled band of outcasts collected from villages along the St. John's, Penobscot, and Kennebec Rivers. Led by the French officer Villieu and attended by a Jesuit priest, the party set out intending to strike at or near Boston.<sup>3</sup> Through poor planning, the war-party exhausted its supplies before reaching its target. Hunger and fatigue forced them to pitch into the settlement closest at hand. Accord-

ing to the usual story, that settlement just happened to be Oyster River Plantation.

The origin of this tradition can be found within the work of Francis Parkman. In his 1877 work, *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, Parkman wrote of the decision to attack Oyster River: “Necessity decided them. Their provisions were gone, and Villieu says that he himself was dying from hunger. They therefore resolved to strike at the nearest settlement, that of Oyster River, now Durham, about twelve miles from Portsmouth.”<sup>4</sup> In his otherwise meticulous work, Parkman appears to have consulted only a few sources when writing about the attack on Oyster River. Instead he relied heavily upon an account of the expedition written by the Sieur de Villieu, the French officer credited with leading the raid. Villieu, a sixty-year-old career army officer, was ambitious and not above bending the truth to cast himself in a favorable light. His inept participation actually threatened the success of the expedition on more than one occasion.

Before Parkman, historians like Jeremy Belknap<sup>5</sup> and Thomas Hutchinson<sup>6</sup> had not viewed the attack as an accident. Both cited Cotton Mather who wrote, “the desolation of Oyster River was commonly talk’d in the streets of Quebec two months before it was effected.”<sup>7</sup> Not all contemporary historians agreed with Parkman’s view of the attack. Everett S. Stackpole<sup>8</sup> went back to Mather in his work.

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Samuel Adams Drake specifically stated that Oyster River was “singled out for fire and slaughter.”<sup>9</sup> However, as Parkman gained in popularity, so too did his view of the attack.

In 1966, University of New Hampshire graduate student Jan K. Herman made news in the town of Durham with his work on the massacre. Quoting heavily from Parkman and Villieu, Herman concluded in his master’s thesis: “The attack on Oyster River was an accident, initiated on the spur of the moment by a band of starving Indians with no effective leadership. Poorly planned from the beginning, the expedition never had a chance to reach the outskirts of Boston, throw that region into turmoil and therefore be of lasting strategic importance.”<sup>10</sup> In 1976, Herman published an article based on his master’s thesis in *New Hampshire Profiles*. Herman is the only recent scholar to have focused on the attack at Oyster River as his primary subject. Concluding as he did, Herman confirmed the theory originally advanced by Parkman, solidifying this as the popular view.

However, the attack on Oyster River was no accident. This raid was a joint military operation, conceived far in advance and launched in response to the Treaty of Pemaquid. Parkman and Herman failed to see the Abenaki as equals, and in doing so, portrayed them as tools or dupes of the French. Their work betrays a lack of understanding of the intricacies of Abenaki politics and the nature of their allegiance to the French. More recent historians have pointed out that, “although the tribes were quite willing to accept military assistance, they did not think of themselves as fighting a French war.”<sup>11</sup> The Abenaki regarded themselves as a sovereign power on equal footing with the Europeans, and conducted themselves as such. The Indians were fighting primarily to recover kinsmen taken by the English and to push back English encroachment on their land. Parkman and Herman trusted Villieu and, in doing so, overemphasized French participation in the expedition. “The Abenaki considered the

French ineffectual allies and few if any of the war parties were truly French led.”<sup>12</sup> Because of the narrow range of sources available to them, Parkman and Herman relied heavily on the word of a single self-promoter. As a result, their view is incomplete and somewhat misleading. Only by examining the Abenaki role in the expedition can we gain a fuller understanding and ascertain the true nature of the Oyster River Massacre.

### King William’s War and the Treaty of Pemaquid

During 1687 and 1688, a series of seemingly disconnected events plunged the northern colonial frontier into a violent war. In New York, the Iroquois, instigated by the English, attacked French allies among the western Indians, disrupting the valuable fur trade in that region.<sup>13</sup> In response, then Canadian Governor, the Marquis de Denonville, led an expedition against the Seneca of western New York. The invaders ravaged four Seneca towns, destroying a vast quantity of grain.<sup>14</sup>

In marching against the Seneca, Denonville violated the territorial boundaries of the Province of New York. Enraged, New York Governor, Colonel Thomas Dongan, fired off a series of hot-tempered letters to Denonville upbraiding him for his violation of English territory and unjust attack.<sup>15</sup> The English increased their material aid to the Iroquois. In November 1687, the Iroquois were formally adopted as English subjects and further hostilities against them, by the French, were forbidden.<sup>16</sup> The Iroquois went on the war-path during the summer of 1688, launching several raids into French territory. In 1689, they sacked the town of La Chine, a mere six or seven miles outside Montreal, killing some two hundred inhabitants and carrying off 120 more.<sup>17</sup> For the French, the west would remain the main theater of operations throughout what became known as King William’s War.

In western Maine, the years of 1687 and 1688 brought with them a heightening of tensions be-

tween the Abenaki and their English neighbors. Increased settlement, especially near the mouth of the Saco River, triggered a series of conflicts over fishing rights, livestock, and land ownership.<sup>18</sup> The English placed nets across the Saco River, blocking migrating fish, a major Abenaki food source in the spring. English cattle continually damaged the local tribe's unfenced corn fields.<sup>19</sup> The leaders of the Saco Indians approached the English complaining, "that the corn, [the English had] promised by the last treaty, had not been paid, and yet their own was destroyed by the cattle of the English; and that they, being deprived of their hunting and fishing b[e]rths, and their lands, were liable to perish of hunger."<sup>20</sup>

The Abenaki complaints fell on deaf ears. English failure to address these complaints violated a 1685 treaty that established mechanisms for resolving such difficulties.<sup>21</sup> Frustrated in their attempts at diplomacy, the Saco killed the offending cattle during the summer of 1688. In August, a dispute between settlers and Indians at North Yarmouth ended violently with casualties on both sides.<sup>22</sup> Prompted by this Indian uprising, Benjamin Blackman, justice of the peace at Saco, ordered the seizure of twenty Indians that he suspected of causing the unrest. The Abenaki responded in kind, capturing several settlers during a raid on New Dartmouth in September 1688.<sup>23</sup>

While the events on the Saco were playing themselves out, Sir Edmund Andros, Governor of the Dominion of New England, sailed the *H.M.S. Rose* into the harbor at the mouth of the Penobscot River. Once anchored, Andros sent his lieutenant ashore at Pentagoet to summon the Baron de St. Castin.<sup>24</sup> St. Castin was a French army officer, who had established a trading post at Pentagoet near the mouth of the Penobscot. He married a daughter of Madockawando, the highly respected principal chief of the Indians living along the Penobscot River.<sup>25</sup> As the son-in-law of Madockawando, St. Castin enjoyed considerable influence among the Indians. The En-

glish, not wholly without merit, blamed the current Indian troubles on St. Castin.<sup>26</sup> When the lieutenant returned with word that St. Castin had fled, Andros promptly seized the trading post. All movable goods were conveyed to the *Rose*, leaving behind only the vestments in St. Castin's chapel.<sup>27</sup> Many historians point to this raid as the beginning of King William's War in the colonies.<sup>28</sup>

The Abenaki enjoyed considerable success at the start of the war. In June of 1689, several of the Eastern Indians joined with Kancamagus' Pennacooks in an attack on Coheco (Dover).<sup>29</sup> That August, the English fort at Pemaquid Point (Maine) was destroyed.<sup>30</sup> Later that same month, a party of sixty Indians returned to New Hampshire, burning the Huckins garrison at Oyster River.<sup>31</sup>

During the fall of 1689, Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, succeeded Denonville as the governor general of New France (Canada). Frontenac, a member of the Court at Versailles and former governor general of New France, possessed experience with the peculiar military situation in the North American colonies.<sup>32</sup> He also brought with him news of the declaration of war in Europe between France and the League of Augsburg, which England recently had joined.<sup>33</sup> With the French and English now in direct confrontation on both sides of the Atlantic, Frontenac dispatched joint parties of French and Indians against the English frontier settlements. In 1690, three of these war-parties descended in spectacular fashion on the settlements of Schenectady (New York), Salmon Falls (Rollinsford, N.H. - South Berwick, Maine), and Casco (Maine).<sup>34</sup> After 1690, the war settled down into a pattern of retaliation and counterretaliation which inflicted much suffering on frontier communities but contributed little toward a meaningful victory for either side.<sup>35</sup>

In 1692, the fortunes of war began to turn against the Abenaki. A series of reverses undermined Abenaki confidence and heightened feelings of war-weariness. On the ninth of June, a



combined force of five hundred French and Indians suffered a humiliating defeat at Wells (Maine), where English militia captain, James Converse, with only fifteen men, resisted every assault during a two-day siege.<sup>36</sup> There is little doubt that the Abenaki saw this defeat as a sign of misfortunes to come. The Chevalier de Villebon, who as governor of Acadia was subordinate to Frontenac, wrote of the Wells debacle as a "bad augury," explaining that, "it has, so far, been impossible to overcome the superstition that, if they receive such a reverse when they set out on the warpath, they must stop at once, no matter how large the party may be, or how insignificant the action."<sup>37</sup>

To make matters worse, in August 1692, the English built a new fort at Pemaquid. Replacing the one destroyed in 1689, the new fort boasted stone walls rather than wooden palisades. Christened Fort William Henry, the new fort mounted fourteen to eighteen cannon, making it considerably stronger than its predecessor. A company of sixty men was detailed to permanently garrison the post.<sup>38</sup>

In order to divert the enemies' attention away from the construction of Fort William Henry, Massachusetts Major Benjamin Church led a military expedition up the Penobscot and Kennebec Rivers. At Penobscot, he encountered a large body of Indians, but failed to engage them in battle. While the main body eluded him, Church managed to take five prisoners and destroyed a quantity of corn and furs before returning to Pemaquid. After depositing his prisoners, Church proceeded up the Kennebec to the Abenaki fort at Teconnet. Forewarned of Church's approach, the Indians set fire to their fort and retreated into the woods. When the expedition arrived, they found only a couple of corn cribs that managed to avoid being consumed by the fire. Church set fire to the corn cribs and withdrew back down the Kennebec.<sup>39</sup> While this expedition failed to accomplish anything of real value, it served to demonstrate that the English

were unafraid to conduct offensive operations into the Abenaki heartland.

The Indians soon discovered Fort William Henry despite the precautions taken to conceal its construction. With their French allies, they made plans for its immediate reduction. The ships of war, *Poli* and *Envieux*, were to besiege the fort from the sea, while Villebon and a large body of Indians attacked from land.<sup>40</sup> As the Abenaki positioned themselves for an attack, the French ships entered the harbor opposite the fort. However, upon seeing the fort and the English warship at anchor nearby, they promptly withdrew without firing a shot.<sup>41</sup> For the Abenaki, this withdrawal was clear proof of French cowardice. The tribes dispersed for their fall hunting, disgusted with the refusal to attack.<sup>42</sup>

The spring of 1693 brought more unwelcome news. Captain James Converse, made legendary by his defense of Wells, was promoted to major. Given command of a strong militia force, he patrolled the coast from the Piscataqua to Pemaquid. Converse detached a portion of his men to construct another stone fort at Saco. Perched on the west bank of the river, the fort occupied prime hunting ground and blocked Abenaki access to the sea.<sup>43</sup>

The reverses of 1692 and 1693 eroded the Abenaki willingness to continue the war. During the summer of 1693, a group of ten to thirteen chiefs, led by Madockawando, began to explore the possibility of peace. The humiliating failures at Wells and Pemaquid exposed the ineffectiveness of the French military alliance.<sup>44</sup> The Abenaki "found themselves deceived [in the] expectation of receiving assistance from the French."<sup>45</sup> The cost of the war and lack of French support crippled the Abenaki economy. Continual war-parties interrupted traditional patterns of food gathering and fur production.

Late in July, Madockawando and his peace envoy approached the commander at Fort William Henry. Lamenting "the distress they have been reduced unto," they expressed "their desires to

be at peace with the English.<sup>46</sup> The chiefs sought to reopen their trade with the English, Boston being their nearest and best market. The English traded at rates that were much more advantageous than the French would agree to. The chiefs hoped that with improved relations they would be able to recover kinsmen captured by the English since the outbreak of King William's War. The two parties entered into council and by August 11th, reached an agreement. As proof of their fidelity, the sagamores gave four of their number into Governor Phips' custody to be held as hostages.<sup>47</sup>

The Treaty of Pemaquid was an incredibly one-sided document, reflecting English pretensions of innocence. The English either ignored or failed to see how their own actions contributed to the opening hostilities at Saco in 1687 and 1688. The treaty made the Abenaki the sole aggressors stating, "whereas a bloody war has for some years now past been made and carried on by the Indians."<sup>48</sup> The English wrongly attributed the war to the "instigation and influences of the French."<sup>49</sup>

The English assumed that the thirteen signers of the treaty represented all the Indians "from the Merrimack River unto the most easterly bounds of said Province [Maine which was then part of Massachusetts]."<sup>50</sup> This belief reflected a dangerous lack of understanding of Indian politics and social structure. While each tribe had a principal chief, there were several minor chiefs at the head of each village group. Abenaki politics relied on the "vagaries of social consensus."<sup>51</sup> Those chiefs who had not signed the treaty would not necessarily feel themselves bound by it. Not understanding this subtlety, the English assumed that the Indian peace envoy's promises to "forbear all acts of hostility" and to "abandon the French interest" applied to all the Indians.<sup>52</sup>

The treaty imposed humiliating conditions on the Indians, who conceded perhaps more than they realized. The very trade they were so desirous of now came under the strict control of the

Governor and General Assembly of Massachusetts. They gave up their very freedom, "herby submitting ourselves to be ruled and governed by their Majesties' laws."<sup>53</sup> In doing so, their only recourse in the event of a dispute lay in the English courts, which allowed the Indians no representation. In all likelihood, the Abenaki resented the treaty's terms. Even the notoriously pro-French historian Charlevoix concluded that "these Indians often beheld themselves abandoned by the French, who counted a little too much on their attachment, and the influence of those who had gained their confidence."<sup>54</sup> Yet the Abenaki could not bear the cost of the war alone.

For the English, the Treaty of Pemaquid was a master stroke. Many of the frontier settlements lay in ruins. Settlers confined to garrisons could not harvest crops. Food shortages were common. Commerce and trade were at a standstill. But now, with the Eastern Tribes under control, New England was free to muster her forces for a second attempt on Quebec.<sup>55</sup> Flushed with success, Phips sent runners to the frontier settlements to proclaim the peace. To a war-weary region this was welcome news indeed. As fall gave way to winter, and no new outbreaks occurred, the settlers began to leave the garrisons, returning to their homes. Word of the treaty reached Oyster River a year later on July 16, 1694, a mere two days before the attack on the morning of the 18th.<sup>56</sup>

News of the treaty stunned the French command. From his base of operations at Fort Nashwaak<sup>57</sup> on the St. John's River, Villebon understood full well the implications of this treaty. Except for a few regulars and Canadian militia, the Abenaki warriors constituted his entire military force. Their neutrality, or worse yet, their allegiance to the English, put all of Acadia in a very vulnerable position. Villebon moved immediately to counter the effects of the treaty. On September 6, 1693, he dispatched Manidoubtik, a St. John's chief, to see the Penobscot chief, Taxous, on his behalf. Madockawando's chief rival, Taxous refused to take part in the peace talks

and opposed any accommodation with the English. Manidoubtik was to implore Taxous to raise a faction to end the peace pact.<sup>58</sup>

On September 11, Father Louis-Pierre Thury, Jesuit missionary and the orchestrator of a 1692 raid on York (Maine), arrived at Fort Nashwaak. In this man of God, the English encountered their most dangerous enemy. Thury had established himself at Pentagoet in 1687 at the invitation of St. Castin. Thury regarded the English as heretics and accompanied the Indians on many of their raids. He had lately been at Quebec, but left for the fort at St. John's as soon as news of the treaty became known. Thury reported to Villebon and the two agreed on a plan of action. Two days later, Thury departed for Pentagoet with the intention of fostering disapproval of Madockawando's treaty.<sup>59</sup>

A few days after Thury's departure, Villebon received a welcome guest. Madockawando's son arrived from Quebec on his way back from France where he had been a guest at the court of King Louis XIV. Villebon wrote of the meeting, "I made known to him his father's behaviour, and said that, having been made so welcome in France, it was his duty to induce his father to change his mind and that as soon as he arrived at his village, he should gather together a force of his own."<sup>60</sup> This the son promised to do, but concern for his hostage kinsmen would override his word.

News of the treaty came as a blow to Governor Frontenac. His entire eastern flank had evaporated. He had concentrated his efforts against the Iroquois in the west, relying on the Abenaki to hold Acadia. Without their presence on the frontier, Quebec was vulnerable to invasion from New England. Frontenac knew that it was the Abenaki raids that prevented Massachusetts from organizing a second major assault on Quebec. With no Indians to contend with, Acadia was likely to fall, paving the way for a thrust at Quebec.

Frontenac knew that the only way to regain his lost allies was to strengthen French influence

in Acadia. He also knew that the best way to accomplish this was to strike a decisive blow against a good-sized target in the heart of the English frontier settlements. The raid needed to be well planned, well led, and sure of success. Frontenac set his plan in motion in October of 1693. On orders from the King, he removed Rene Robineau de Portneuf, Villebon's brother and leader of the failed attack on Wells in 1692, on charges of illegal fur trading and debauchery. In his place, Frontenac installed the Sieur de Villieu, giving him orders to raise a war-party and attack the English settlements.

Sebastien de Villieu was a career soldier, having entered the French army in 1648 at the age of fifteen. Villieu fought well against the Iroquois in 1666 and was granted a tract of land on the St. Lawrence River. Despite having done little to develop his grant, Villieu sought loftier appointments. In 1690, he had command of a company of volunteers and acquitted himself favorably during Phips' siege of Quebec. However, Villieu possessed little real experience in dealing with the problems of a frontier command. He was used to the harsh discipline and regimentation of the regular army. Except for the 1666 campaign, Villieu had spent little time away from the European settlements. At the age of sixty, he was completely unprepared for the undisciplined rigors of frontier life.<sup>61</sup>

Then again, Villieu was something of an opportunist. Once out of Frontenac's sight, Villieu sought to better his position in life. Neglecting his duties to Fort Nashwaak, he began a profitable business at the expense of the soldiers he was supposed to be commanding. He began appropriating supplies intended for his men to use in illegal trade with the Indians.<sup>62</sup> Frontenac later commended Villieu for his efforts; at the same time, however, he summoned him to answer charges related to this trading.<sup>63</sup>

Desiring nothing less than the governorship of Acadia,<sup>64</sup> Villieu took advantage of every opportunity to discredit his commanding officer,

Villebon. Villieu detested having to answer to a man twenty-two years his junior. He acted with insubordination and disregard for Villebon's authority. It was clear upon Villieu's arrival at Fort Nashwaak in November 1693 that he had no intention of carrying out his orders with regard to the treaty.<sup>65</sup> Villieu's arrival on the fifteenth coincided with the loss of a shipment of provisions intended for Villebon's winter use.<sup>66</sup> This contributed to the overall supply shortage, rendering many of the troops at the fort unfit for duty. This shortage of supplies remained a source of contention between the two men.

Villebon, for his part, did little to ease tensions. Angered over his brother's dismissal, he was largely unimpressed with his new captain's credentials. With regard to illegal fur trading, Villebon was as guilty as Villieu. Several complaints filed with the Colonial Minister accused Villebon of using his position as governor in order to monopolize the Acadian fur trade.<sup>67</sup> Villieu's activities were a threat to this monopoly, contributing to the continual friction between the two men. However, the real threat to Villebon's fur empire came from the treaty itself. In this instance, Villebon's and France's interests were one and the same.

As Villieu settled into his new quarters, two Indians arrived bearing a message from Madockawando's rival, Taxous, who was livid over the signing of the treaty. He accepted Villebon's invitation to a meeting at Nashwaak, adding that he was already making preparations for a war-party of considerable size. However, with winter fast approaching, the Indians had already gone to their favorite hunting grounds. Any war-party would have to wait until spring.<sup>68</sup> There was nothing left to do except pass an anxious winter.

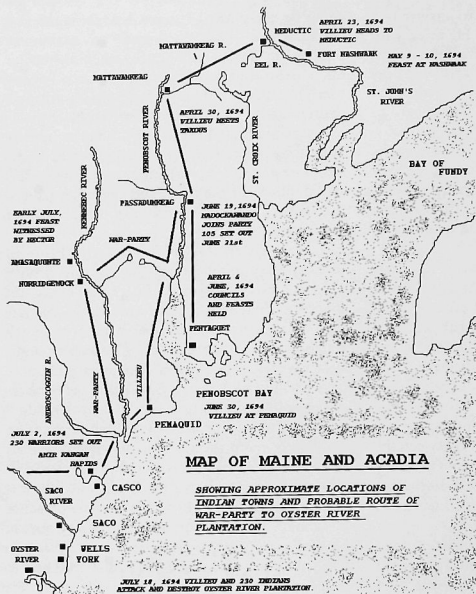
### Expedition to Oyster River

The spring of 1694 brought an urgent renewal of the French and Indian plan to organize a war-

party. By early April, in answer to the summons of Villebon, Indians began to gather at Pentagoet.<sup>69</sup> From Fort Nashwaak, Villebon set his plan in motion. On the sixteenth, he dispatched a Recollet friar to Meductic, a village a short distance up the St. John's from Nashwaak. Villebon instructed the priest to tell the Indians "that they were all to hold themselves in readiness, one party to go with me to await the vessels at the mouth of the river, and the other to join the force which was being collected at Pentagoet."<sup>70</sup>

The next step for Villebon was to bring in Villieu and get him to carry out his orders. With Thury's arrival on April 20, he found a ready and able ally. Villieu, in his account of the expedition, makes no mention of a meeting with Villebon and Thury, preferring instead to highlight his own patriotic zeal.<sup>71</sup> In a marginal note next to Villieu's log entry, Villebon remembers the episode quite differently: "This has made it necessary to inform the Government that the Sr. de Villieu, from the time of his arrival at Fort Nashwaak, had so little idea of joining the Indians on the war-path that the Sr. de Villebon was obliged to send for him and say, in the presence of M. de Thury, missionary, to whom he should have referred, that, as the Indians were ready to form a large war party, he had summoned him to find out if he were willing to go with them. He replied, thereupon, that he would do whatever he desired, and made his preparations for departure."<sup>72</sup> The presence of Thury appears to have shamed Villieu into the performance of his duty.

Villebon, intending for Villieu to act as France's representative, ordered him to Pentagoet. Villieu was to "assure the Indians of the King's protection and of the danger in which they placed themselves by negotiation with the English, who, under the guise of friendship and extensive trade, would not fail to betray them as they had done in the past."<sup>73</sup> On April 23, a canoe carrying Villieu, Thury, and their supplies departed Fort Nashwaak for Meductic.<sup>74</sup> This first leg of their



*Movements of the various participants in the war-party destined to attack Oyster River Plantation, as they proceeded from Acadia through Maine, April to July 1694. Though the attack on Oyster River Plantation is often judged accidental, gathering a war-party of 230 to 250 men involved considerable planning, negotiation, and coordination. The warriors' path to achieving their military objective was strewn with obstacles ranging from intrigue to delay.*

journey took only a couple of days. Situated on the west bank of the St. John's, the village marked the start of the main east-west portage. From there, it was a short march to the Eel River and eventually on to Pentagoet.

Villieu and Thury received a cordial welcome

upon putting in to shore. The friar sent by Villebon the week before had done his job well. The Indians of the village were held in readiness just as Villebon requested. Villieu reported the circumstances of their arrival in a light that was a little more favorable to him. In his account, Villieu wrote that it was he who had asked the Meductic Indians "to go on the war-path with the Pentagoet Indians, informing them that he had been sent from France to lead them against the English."<sup>75</sup> Villieu further reported that the Indians could not decide what to do, "deferring their answer until the following day."<sup>76</sup> During this second council, the Indians pledged themselves to him, saying "that they were ready to join him and would not leave him until many heads were broken."<sup>77</sup> To reward the Indians' fidelity, Villieu gave them a feast.

In light of the fact that the friar sent by Villebon had been at Meductic for over a week, it can be said that Villieu's recollections were somewhat colored. Villebon enjoyed considerable influence among the St. John's River Indians and noted the regularity with which they responded to his requests. In a marginal note to Villieu's log

entry, Villebon called Villieu's statement concerning the Indians' indecision an outright lie, saying that, "Nothing could be more false."<sup>78</sup> Villebon further states that Villieu's comments are, "imaginary, since they were already pledged to the Indians of Pentagoet."<sup>79</sup> Villebon later wrote that

"where he erred was in telling the Indians, that they were to follow him."<sup>80</sup>

Villieu and Thury left Meductic on April 26, heading west toward Mattawamkeag.<sup>81</sup> Arriving at the village on the thirtieth, the pair was pleased to find that Taxous, in response to Villebon's invitation the previous fall, was heading east along the same route. Taxous had lately come from Pentagoet where a mighty gathering of Indians had already taken place. Father Bigot, a colleague of Thury's with a mission on the Kennebec River, had come hither with the leading chiefs of the Kennebec tribe. Together with Taxous, they determined a plan of action and selected a target. Villebon wrote of this council: "The determination of the Indians to make war on the English was so strong that, before the arrival of the Srs. de Villieu and Thury, Father Bigot had been to Pentagoet with the leading chiefs of the Kennebecs, who had held council with the chiefs of Pentagoet and even considered the place to be attacked."<sup>82</sup>

Villebon's description of the council at Pentagoet reveals two important facts. First, from the start, the Indians were acting independently and not under the direction of Villieu. Although Villieu accompanied them and provided input, he did not lead them. Secondly, the Indians discussed among themselves where exactly to attack. Villebon's account is consistent with, and helps explain, Cotton Mather's statement: "'Tis affirmed by English captives which were then at Canada that the desolation of Oyster River was commonly talk'd in the streets of Quebec two months before it was effected."<sup>83</sup> As missionaries were in contact with their superiors in Quebec, it is likely that Bigot sent word of the council's decision to them. Taxous, when meeting Villieu, was on his way to report this progress to Villebon.

In his description of this council, Villebon exposes another Villieu half-truth. Villieu reports that he prevailed upon Taxous to accompany him to Passadumkeag, the main village of the

Penobscots. This Taxous agreed to do and together they arrived in the early morning hours of May 2. At a feast held that evening, Villieu addressed the warriors. He urged them to follow him, "assuring them they would not fail to strike an important blow and by it acquire reputation, as well as plunder."<sup>84</sup> The warriors indicated that they were ready, but needed to receive their presents before they could set out. Presents usually consisted of war material, such as powder, shot, and guns. Villieu agreed and invited them to return to Fort Nashwaak.

When the warriors arrived at Nashwaak on May 13, it was clear that Villebon was surprised to see them. Villebon assumed that Villieu had followed his orders, going immediately to Pentagoet to join the Indians gathering there. It would have been more expedient to send a runner to Villebon requesting the shipment of supplies to Pentagoet. Villebon was unaware that Villieu had only traveled as far as Passadumkeag. Upon speaking with the Indians, Villebon learned that Villieu had spent much of his time trading furs. It was evident to Villebon that "the pretext of accompanying the Indians [back to Nashwaak] was merely to safeguard the trading operations which he, in a manner unbecoming to an officer, carried on at Pentagoet."<sup>85</sup> Villebon recorded that Villieu "returned from Pentagoet to bring back five bales of beaver skins and other pelts which he had obtained by trading."<sup>86</sup> The Indians themselves stated that Villieu had more, but they "abandoned some of his pelts beyond the portage."<sup>87</sup>

Nevertheless, a special feast was put on at Nashwaak to honor the chiefs of the war-party. At some point, a second feast was given for the young men to incite them to war. During these feasts, Villebon ceremonially adopted Taxous as his brother. Villebon stated that, "This was done, partly to place him under the obligation to take special care of the Sr. de Villieu and not to abandon him during the campaign."<sup>88</sup> To honor Taxous further, Villebon presented him with the best laced suit he could find. Villebon knew that the Indians

“hold a single officer of small account among a large number of warriors, especially when he has no knowledge of the neighbourhood or of the enemy’s country.”<sup>89</sup> It would not do to have France’s representative lost during the expedition. This point appears to have been wasted on Villieu. Villieu overestimated his importance to the expedition, believing himself to be in control.

As the feasting drew to a close, Villebon passed out the presents Villieu had promised. Upon taking his leave of Villebon, Taxous assured him that, “although he was going to gather together a large war-party, he would not stop there but would make up another immediately after the first and induce Madockawando to join him, or render him contemptible to all the young Indians.”<sup>90</sup> With two targets in mind, the war-party left Nashwaak on May 16. After a brief stopover at Meductic, they continued on to Pentagoet, arriving there on May 25. Here, the Indians divided their presents and discovered that they “had received only a portion” of what they had expected.<sup>91</sup> Villebon’s breach of protocol proved a serious insult to the Indians. Villieu reported that “they murmured loudly,” and that this “almost destroyed their goodwill.”<sup>92</sup>

While Villieu did his best to mollify the unrest caused by Villebon’s indiscretion, Madockawando arrived with news that threatened to put an end to the expedition. Instead of attending the Pentagoet council in April, Madockawando and Edgermett, a principal Kennebec chief, had traveled to Pemaquid for a meeting with Governor Phips. On May 27, they returned, bringing the news that the English would deliver up their prisoners in one month’s time.<sup>93</sup> With a major objective of the war about to be achieved, enthusiasm for the expedition diminished. To further cement good relations, the English offered to send a “priest” to teach the Indian children to read and write. Until this point, Thury had remained relatively quiet. He may have even derived amusement from Villieu’s vain and amateurish attempts at leading this Indian

war-party. Now, upon hearing of the English minister, Thury “took vigorous measures to assure the success of the Sr. de Villieu’s plans.”<sup>94</sup>

The pair’s urgent pleas failed to move the members of the war-party. Things remained at a stalemate until the thirtieth of May. As Villieu prepared to return home, however, he came upon an Indian who had accompanied Madockawando to Pemaquid. In return for the tobacco and drink Villieu provided, this Indian revealed certain aspects of the meeting not known earlier. It seems that the unidentified Indian had accompanied Madockawando and Edgermett aboard an English frigate at anchor in the harbor. On the ship, they were met by Sir William Phips with whom they dined. As the men feasted and drank, Madockawando agreed to sell large tracts of tribal land. Then, to seal the agreement, the two chiefs, together with Phips, threw a hatchet into the sea. In this manner, the hatchet was buried where no descendant could recover it.<sup>95</sup>

In this news lay the salvation of the expedition. Villieu went immediately to Thury and told him the Indian’s story. As soon as a letter from Father Bigot had arrived confirming the land sale, Thury informed Taxous. Taxous had long been jealous of the prestige that Madockawando commanded. According to Villieu, Thury’s attempt to capitalize on Taxous’ jealousy “had a wonderful effect.”<sup>96</sup> Selling tribal land to the enemy without consulting the other chiefs was an unthinkable insult. Enraged, Taxous decried Madockawando and his treaty. The young warriors again caught the fire of war. Preparations began at once to return to Passadumkeag. From there the warriors would set out on the war-path.

On June 7, the party left Pentagoet heading up the Penobscot. While shooting a rapid on the ninth, Villieu’s canoe capsized. Villieu flayed about in the cold rushing water until he managed to reach the overturned canoe. Clinging desperately, he was able to hang on until he hit his head against a rock. Dazed, Villieu let go and was dashed against rocks as he was swept down-

stream. Unconscious, Villieu was eventually fished out of the river and carried the rest of the way to Passadumkeag.

By the time they reached the Penobscot village, Villieu had been overcome by a fever, which incapacitated him until the fourteenth.<sup>97</sup> During this time, Thury continued to advocate the persecution of Madockawando. Since the incident at Pentagoet, Madockawando and his clan had been subjected to every manner of taunt and insult. Still, Madockawando stubbornly refused to break the peace. On June 18, the first of two councils was held to determine a target. Disregarding the decision made by the Indians at the Pentagoet council in April, Villieu promoted his own choice. When he did not receive the answer he sought, Villieu concluded the council in disagreement. The following day, a second council was held, which concluded in the same manner as the first.<sup>98</sup>

Following this second council, a grand feast was held. There was dancing and singing, with the Indians' favorite dish of roast dog as the main entree. It was during this celebration that Madockawando's resolve would waver and break. He and his family had become the target of cruel jeers and hurled meat bones. Added to this was the constant pressure exerted by Thury, reinforced by years of religious indoctrination.<sup>99</sup> Bowing to the pressure, Madockawando acquiesced and joined the war-party. In deference to Madockawando's wishes, the departure of the war-party was postponed for one day. On June 21, 1694, they set out on the last leg of the journey to Oyster River.<sup>100</sup>

The thirtieth of June found the war-party approaching the area around Pemaquid. While the main body continued on toward the Kennebec River, Villieu and three Indians made their way to Fort William Henry. Villieu disguised himself as an Indian and procured a bundle of furs. The four then entered the fort presumably to trade. While his compatriots bartered with the officers, Villieu made a careful inspection of the works and, in his own words, "made a most satisfac-

tory plan."<sup>101</sup> When finished, he quietly slipped back into the woods to await the others. After a time, Villieu began to get impatient. He fired a pistol in an attempt to recall the tardy trio. The English officers, suspecting treachery, seized the three Indians. Somehow, the captives managed to convince the fort's commandant of their innocence. "On leaving the fort they went to find the Sr. de Villieu, upon whom one of them fell, giving him a very severe beating."<sup>102</sup> While the information that Villieu obtained proved valuable in a later campaign, it is unclear whether or not he wished to attack the fort at this time. What is clear is that the Indians had no desire to do so and the beating administered to Villieu left little doubt as to who was leading the war-party.

While Villieu scouted the fort at Pemaquid, the main body of Indians entered the Kennebec River and traveled downstream toward its mouth. At the Kennebec village of Amasaquante, a short distance above Norridgewock, several of the Kennebec chiefs and warriors prepared to join the war-party. Hezekiah Miles, known to the English as Hector, was a friendly Indian in the employ of the Massachusetts militia. Hector had been captured in the 1691 raid on Berwick (Maine) and was being held at Amasaquante at the time of this gathering. In a 1695 deposition, Hector described what transpired: "two or three days before they intended to set out they kild and boyled several dogs and held a Feast, where was present Egermet, Bomaseen (Bomazeen), Warumbee, Ahasombomet, with divers other of the chief among them. They discoursed of falling upon Oyster River and Groton, and Bomaseen was to command one of the companies."<sup>103</sup>

Young Bomazeen, a minor chief of the Kennebecs, played a significant role in the formation of the war-party and in the attack itself. Bomazeen had signed the Treaty of Pemaquid in 1693. Acting as an emissary of goodwill, he had traveled to Boston several times during the winter of 1693 to 1694. In late November, Bomazeen was thrown in prison by the order of the Lt. Gov-

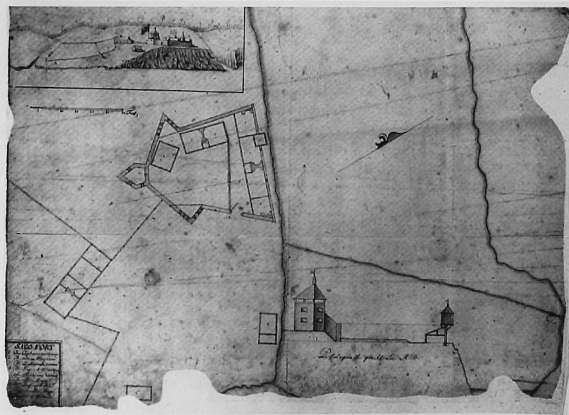


ernor of Massachusetts, where he stayed until mid-December. He was eventually released, but was committed twice more in January and March.<sup>104</sup> Angered by this treatment, Bomazeen became a major proponent of an attack on the English. During the feast at Amasaquonte, the young chief was honored by being given command of a contingent of warriors for the coming attack.

A few days after the feast, Bomazeen and forty warriors set out from Amasaquonte to rendezvous with the main body of the war-party. The remaining Kennebec warriors were to travel by different routes and join them farther on.<sup>105</sup> On July 1, the Kennebecs connected with the war-party at a village near the Amir Kangan Rapids, on the Presumpscot River. Villieu and his three companions, fresh from their scouting trip to

Pemaquid, arrived at the same time as the Kennebecs.<sup>106</sup> The following morning, they were joined by thirty more warriors from Narakomigo, a village on the Androscoggin River. By early afternoon they were ready to set out. Over the next five days, the war-party traveled in a general westerly direction, skirting the English fort on the Saco and avoiding Major Converse's militia force.

On July 7, the war-party met the remaining forty Kennebecs while crossing a lake. That night, the chiefs held the first in a series of councils. Villieu misrepresents the content of these councils by repeatedly saying that nothing was decided. Actually, a struggle over the leadership of the war-party was underway. A faction of young warriors, Kennebecs under Bomazeen for the



*"The Prospect of Saco Fort," 1699. Constructed in 1693, the stone fort at the falls on the Saco River stood as a symbol of English domination over what had been prime Abenaki fishing, hunting, and crop land. In 1694, the assembled warriors, on the last stretch of their journey south, swung west toward Penacook to avoid encountering the military forces stationed at Saco. British Public Record Office; photograph courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.*

most part, were in favor of keeping with targets established two months before. This younger faction had become frustrated with the older leaders. The young chiefs and warriors saw this attack as a means to garner war honors and take revenge upon the English. The older chiefs, Madockawando in particular, had lost much prestige in the eyes of this younger group. The young warriors had little or no use for Villieu, who was under the care of Taxous. In spite of the wishes of the elders, the march resumed. Three days later, a second council was convened with the same result. Villieu reported that, "some wanted to strike above Boston, others below it."<sup>107</sup> The matter was decided the following morning. Villieu wrote that, "the following day the elders gave way to the young men, and, their idea having prevailed, they took command of the expedition."<sup>108</sup> There would be no further debate, the fate of Oyster River was sealed.

On July 13, the war-party crossed over into New Hampshire, soon coming to Lake Winnepesaukee.<sup>109</sup> Some within the band began to complain of a lack of food, threatening to turn back if the plans were not changed. These threats seem to have come primarily from the older members of the party, Villieu chief among them. Villieu blamed the lack of supplies on Villebon, saying, "he had no supplies, the Sr. de Villebon refusing to give him any."<sup>110</sup> Villebon had, in fact, given Villieu "a canoe and such supplies as he required."<sup>111</sup> Villieu failed to procure his own supplies, as was the custom, preferring to take from supplies allotted to the garrison. Villebon, calling attention to a "special budget," showed where Villieu had been "granted extras."<sup>112</sup> Apparently, Villieu had used most of his supplies while conducting his illegal fur trading. To cover that fact, Villieu attempted to shift the blame to Villebon. That evening, another council was held, during which, in spite of the complaints, "it was resolved to advance."<sup>113</sup>

The following day, the war-party made its way down the Winnepesaukee River, and into the Merrimack. Leaving their canoes at Pennacook,<sup>114</sup>

the warriors were soon joined by others from the tribes around Boston.<sup>115</sup> Now numbering between 230 and 250 warriors, they struck out on the trail heading east. On the morning of the fifteenth, a scouting party of ten men was dispatched in the direction of Oyster River. The war-party followed along in their wake, covering a distance of twelve miles. They were now no more than fifteen miles from the outskirts of Oyster River Plantation.

After a nine-mile march during the morning of the sixteenth, the war-party was met by two of the scouts. The scouts reported that the way to the settlement was open. The inhabitants suspected nothing and had set no patrols or watches. The remaining scouts had pushed on, trying to infiltrate the settlement itself. These spies were ultimately successful, bringing back a very detailed layout of the town. Survivors later reported that on the night before the attack, "knocks were heard by night at certain doors, and stones were thrown at garrisons, to find out whether the houses and garrisons were defended and whether any watch were kept."<sup>116</sup>

On the seventeenth, the war-party reached the upper portion of Oyster River. Moving downstream, they approached the outskirts of Oyster River Plantation from the west. When the party was within three miles of the falls, they halted to await the remaining scouts. By three o'clock in the afternoon, all the scouts had returned and a plan of attack was formed. As soon as it was nightfall, they would begin moving into position. Once they had reached the falls, the war-party was to divide into two divisions. The first division, under Bomazeen, would cross the river to the south shore. Once there, they would separate into bands of eight to ten warriors and position themselves around each garrison. Paquaharet, another minor chief of the Kennebecs, was to take the second division and do the same on the north bank. Madockawando and Taxous, along with Villieu and their people, were to attack the outlying farms to the north of the main settlement (now in Madbury). At dawn,



*Bunker garrison house, Durham, built in 1652. The war-party's first priority was to ambush the fortified houses toward which neighborhood residents would attempt to flee. The Bunker garrison was one of the few to withstand the attack. Garrisons differed little from other houses of the time, except for their hewn log construction and their defensible location, often on a height of land. Photograph courtesy of the Durham Historical Association Museum.*

a single musket shot was to be the signal to begin the simultaneous attack. No one was to be spared; they were all to be killed, without regard to age or sex. Every building was to be burned. No crops or livestock were to be left standing. After they finished, the war-party would reunite at the falls and move together on the final garrison (Woodman). From there, they would head west back to their canoes.<sup>117</sup>

It was a solid plan, designed to achieve massive destruction by preventing a unified defense. The Indians knew from experience that, at the first shot, those in the unfortified homes would try to escape to the garrisons. Having already surrounded the garrisons, the Indians would be waiting there to intercept the fleeing villagers. It would then be a simple matter to sweep through the settlement, burning the homes and destroying whatever was left.

As soon as the sun had set and the moon was up, the warriors began moving into position. Reaching the falls, they broke up, using rocks and out-buildings to conceal their movements. The English settlers went to bed, never suspecting that the enemy was in their midst.

A little after two o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, July 18, 1694, John Dean, a miller in the employ of Nathaniel Hill, was preparing to leave his home near the falls. He was on his way to Portsmouth on an errand and wanted to get an early start. Dean kissed his wife and daughter goodbye and quietly slipped out the front door. As he walked

down the path, thinking of the day's work, he failed to notice the dark forms huddled in the bushes. John Dean probably never heard the shot that killed him.<sup>118</sup>

### The Attack at Oyster River

The sound of the shot echoed all along the river, prematurely signaling the start of the attack. The parties close to the falls were in position, but those whose targets were further down river had yet to reach them. This provided an opportunity for some settlers to escape or prepare for defense. The units not yet in position hastened toward their targets, pitching into whatever they came across. The carefully constructed plan quickly degenerated into wholesale slaughter.

The attack on the south bank of the Oyster River was pressed with brutal ferocity. The fam-

ily of Stephen and Ann Jenkins tried to escape the carnage by fleeing into their cornfield. In a June 1695 deposition, Mrs. Jenkins described what happened: "in the morning about the dawning of the day my husband being up went out of the dore, and presently returning cried to me and our children to run for our lives, for the Indians had beset the town: whereupon my husband and myself fled with our children into our cornfield, & at our entrance into the field, Bomazeen, whome I have seen since . . . , came towards us and about ten Indians more: & the sd Bomazeen then shot at my husband and shote him down, ran to him & struck him three blows on the head with a hatchet, scalped him & run him three times with a bayonet. I also saw the said Bomazeen knock one of my children on the head & tooke off[f] her scalp & then put the child into her father's armes; and then stabbed the breast. And Bomazeen also then killed my husband's grandmother and scalped her."<sup>119</sup> Bomazeen took Ann and her remaining children captive. Binding them securely, he moved on to the next home.

The Drew garrison was the next to be struck. Francis Drew, the patriarch, made a dash for the Adams garrison to seek help, but was easily captured. He was bound and dragged back to within sight of his home, which he then surrendered on the promise of quarter. The promise of quarter was not upheld. Francis Drew was summarily tomahawked as his family was taken captive. Francis' wife was eventually abandoned by her captors and left to die in the woods. Nine year old Benjamin Drew was forced to run a gauntlet of Indians as a moving target for their tomahawks. Struck repeatedly, he could run no more.<sup>120</sup> Thomas Drew and his wife, Tamsen, were also taken prisoner. In 1698, Tamsen testified to her experience: "they heard a great Tumult and Noise of firing of Guns which awakened her out of her sleep, and she understanding that the Indians were in arms & had encompassed the House, willing to make her escape, she endeavored & at last got out the window and fled,

but the Indians firing fast after her she returned to the House and her father-in-law [Francis Drew] took [her] by the hand and haled her into the House again, where upon she endeavored to get out at another window, but the Indians had beset that, so she returned to the other room where her friends were, and the window of that Room being open an Indian named Bombazine [Bomazeen] caught hold of her Arm and pulled her out att the Window & threw her violently upon the ground, she being then with child."<sup>121</sup> Tamsen's captors killed the child a short time after birth. However, after some four years of captivity, Tamsen was reunited with her husband.

Beyond the Drew garrison, near the mouth of the river, stood the garrison of Charles Adams. A party of warriors had just finished moving into position when they heard the shot that killed John Dean. They gained entry to the house undetected. In an instant, the warriors set upon the sleeping family. Within minutes, Charles Adams and fourteen members of his household had been tomahawked in their beds. The only survivor was a daughter named Mercy. Her captors carried her to Canada, where she remained for the rest of her life.<sup>122</sup>

Thomas Bickford's garrison was just a few hundred yards from the Adams home. Awakened by the sounds of battle, Bickford quickly saw what was happening to the Adams family. Gathering his family together, he led them down to the shoreline, where he saw them safely off by boat to join other refugees gathering across the bay at Fox Point. Determined not to let the Indians have their way, Bickford returned to his home and made preparations to defend it, alone. As daylight came, Thomas could see his attackers as they advanced. An English-speaking warrior, taking cover behind a stonewall, demanded that Thomas surrender. The Indian promised safety if Thomas accepted, or death by torture if he declined. In as many voices as he could fabricate, Bickford shouted insults back in defiance. As the shooting commenced, Thomas ran from window to window

changing his clothes at each one. By appearing in different outfits, snapping off shots, and shouting orders to an invisible army, Bickford managed to give the impression that a well armed-garrison was held up in there with him. Losing heart, his attackers withdrew and left him in peace.<sup>123</sup>

The people on the north side of the river fared a little better than their fellow settlers on the south bank. The Beard garrison, near where Beard's Creek empties into the Oyster River, was attacked at the opening shot. The original owner, William Beard, had been killed by Indians during King Philip's War. His son-in-law, Edward Leathers, lived in the house, along with the rest of the family. At the first shot, Edward was able to barricade the front door, and with the rest of the family, slipped out the back before the entire Indian squad could attack. In their attempt to reach the safety of the Jones garrison, the family members were pursued and cut down in flight. Edward and his son William were the only ones who made it into the garrison.<sup>124</sup>

The Jones garrison occupied a good defensive position along the west side of Jones Creek. Sometime after midnight, Jones was awakened by the sound of his dog barking. Believing wolves were after his hogs, he went out to secure them. Finding nothing amiss, he returned to the house, taking care to make sure that everything was locked up. During the whole time, Jones was under the watchful eyes of Indian warriors hiding in the bushes. The signal had not yet been given, so they left him unmolested. A little while later, still feeling that something was not right, Jones again got out of bed. He climbed up into the flankart (a type of tower) and sat on the wall. After a few minutes, he heard the shot at the falls. Turning in that direction, he caught sight of the flash of a musket close at hand. Instinctively, Jones fell back into the flankart just as the musket ball struck the perch he had been sitting on. Since he had previously secured the house, the Indians were prevented from entering. Jones roused the rest of the household and mounted a

desperate defense. After a few hours of hard fighting, the Indians withdrew without inflicting any casualties on those in the garrison.<sup>125</sup>

Downriver from the Jones garrison stood the Bunker, Smith, and Davis garrisons. The distances between these fortified houses were much greater than the distances between the garrisons on the south side. The warriors sent to attack these homes had much further to travel to get into position. The families inhabiting these garrisons were able to prepare and repelled several spirited assaults. All three garrisons were successfully defended with no loss of life.<sup>126</sup>

On a neck of land on the shore of Little Bay, directly opposite Fox Point, stood the garrison house of John Meader. The Meader family could see the flames from the burning houses steadily advancing in their direction. Taking stock of the situation, they found that they did not possess enough powder or shot to mount a successful defense. Locking the house up as best they could, the Meader family boarded a boat and crossed over to Fox Point. Many accounts tell of them stepping out of the boat and turning around to see their home go up in flames.<sup>127</sup> This is doubtful because soldiers impressed at Hampton were quartered in Meader's garrison in the days following the attack.<sup>128</sup>

At the prearranged time, the smaller parties disengaged and reunited at the Falls. Once everyone was together, they proceeded to move en masse upon the Woodman garrison. The garrison stood in a truly formidable position, occupying a hill nearly surrounded by creeks and ravines. The warriors found Captain Woodman well prepared to meet them. To give the impression that a strong company of militia defended the garrison, Woodman set a bunch of hats on sticks. The sticks were then positioned in such a manner as to look like soldiers. The Indians fired on these fake soldiers, doing very little damage to the garrison.<sup>129</sup>

Seeing that any further attempts would be futile, the Indians decided that they were satisfied with the day's work. It seems that Villieu's only

real contribution to the attack was to apprise his companions of the possible danger that they would be in if they stayed much longer. Villieu was leery of being surprised by a pursuing force bent on revenge. Thury conducted a brief mass, asking God to reward his charges for their valiant efforts. The war-party then withdrew to a nearby hill where they could safely sleep until the next day.<sup>130</sup> The following morning, they departed for the return trip to Pennacook, leaving a ruined settlement in their wake.<sup>131</sup> The people of Oyster River Plantation were left to mourn their losses and bury their dead.

### Aftermath and Conclusion

Villieu, the man who complained that he was dying of hunger on the eve of the Oyster River raid, did not accompany the war-party sent against Groton.<sup>132</sup> Nor did he return to Fort Nashwaak. Upon questioning the captives taken at Oyster River, Villieu learned of a projected attack on Quebec. Using this as a pretext to report directly to Frontenac, Villieu bypassed Villebon and proceeded straight to Quebec. He arrived there on August 22 to find that Frontenac was in Montreal. Without delay, Villieu left Quebec, arriving at Montreal four days later.<sup>133</sup> Villieu told Frontenac his version of the raid, which was later to form the basis of his official report.

The Abenaki were greatly insulted by Villieu's behavior. As was their custom, they dispatched several messengers to Frontenac to "give utterance to the death cries of the enemy."<sup>134</sup> Although they left about the same time, Villieu quickly outdistanced the messengers in his drive to reach Frontenac first. This was a major insult to the Abenaki, particularly the Kennebecs, who rightfully felt that the honor belonged to them.

When Frontenac questioned the Abenaki about Villieu's conduct while with the war-party, they replied "that although they had been together in the enemy's country, they had never been united in action."<sup>135</sup> From the beginning, the

Abenaki had a plan of action, a plan that Villieu did not agree with. Most likely, the numerous councils to which Villieu refers were his attempts at promoting a target of his choosing. Villieu may have favored an attack on Pemaquid, accounting for his scouting mission to that post. When the Indians failed to adopt his plan, Villieu reported that nothing had been decided. Eventually, Villieu gave up and the Indians' plan prevailed.

Despite the attack not being executed to perfection, the raid was considered a great success. In August, Villebon confided in his journal that "the blow struck was important, because it will put an end to the negotiations which have been going on, and leave no chance for their renewal."<sup>136</sup> The loss of Abenaki allegiance reflected by the Treaty of Pemaquid had placed the French in a very dire military position. The French knew that a successful attack was the best way to maintain their fragile alliance with the Abenaki. The success of the attack on Oyster River accomplished this very important strategic objective. Herman contradicted his own conclusion in this regard, "But looking at the events as the French did from their vantage point, the operation at Oyster River was a success."<sup>137</sup>

For the Abenaki, the events surrounding the Oyster River Massacre brought a political crisis. The signing of the Treaty of Pemaquid had threatened traditional tribal methods of reaching consensus.<sup>138</sup> In signing the treaty, the thirteen sagamores, whether knowingly or not, appeared to speak for all of the Eastern Indians. This insulted the chiefs who had not signed the treaty, and in some cases provoked considerable ire. A successful raid was necessary in order to protect their sovereignty. Madockawando's self-interest, in his sale of tribal land, seriously undermined the prestige of the older sachems, particularly those among the Penobscot.<sup>139</sup> This allowed the younger chiefs among the Kennebecs, like Bomazeen, to come to power. Their plan, discussed in April at Pentagoet, was carried out at Oyster River in July.

For the English, the attack on Oyster River was devastating. Several letters written after the attack attest to the turmoil it created. Militia Captain Thomas Packer wrote from Portsmouth on the day of the attack: "Just now arrived a post from Oyster River. The Indians have destroyed the place killed & burned all they could. Nere [a one] have Escaped and are too badly wounded doe not know but they be all over our frontiers."<sup>140</sup> New Hampshire Lieutenant Governor John Usher wrote to Governor Phips: "we fear Several other . . . Towns in the province are besett."<sup>141</sup> Writing directly of Oyster River, Usher reported, "judge the whole place is cutt off."<sup>142</sup> In Massachusetts, a delegation on its way to New York for a council with the Iroquois was called back. William Stoughton, of the Massachusetts Council, advised Governor Fletcher of New York: "the present circumstances of this Province by the fresh breaking out of the Indians . . . are such as cannot admit of any souldiers to be sent from home, the Province of New Hampshire lying at this time bleeding."<sup>143</sup>

Nowhere was the turmoil greater than at Oyster River. The pre-dawn attack caught the settlers of the plantation unprepared. Just two days earlier, Captain John Woodman had assembled the people of the settlement, notifying them of the Treaty of Pemaquid.<sup>144</sup> As a result, the people had returned to their homes and disbanded the night watch. By the time the attackers withdrew, forty-five people lay dead with another forty-nine taken captive.<sup>145</sup> Half of the dwellings lay in charred ruins. The attackers butchered most of the livestock and burned many crops. Many of the wounded were evacuated to Portsmouth. Several of the survivors removed to Massachusetts.<sup>146</sup>

In 1982, historian Neal Salisbury wrote of Parkman's works: "aside from a romantic style which some readers still - a century later - find entertaining, their chief value is in orienting the beginner chronologically and geographically. As a colonial history and, particularly, as Indian ethnohistory, they are unreliable."<sup>147</sup> Parkman

lived during the time before modern Indian ethnohistory came into being. As a result, he fell prey to the common prejudice of the era and could not see the Indians as equals. Parkman wrote about the Oyster River Massacre as part of a much larger work. Consequently, he consulted a narrow range of sources, relying on the report of the inept Villieu. In doing so, Parkman may have discounted evidence that proved incompatible with Villieu's story. The actions of Villieu following the attack on Oyster River were not those of a man dying of hunger. Nor, were the younger warriors and chiefs dissuaded from following through with their original plan by Villieu's hunger plea.

Indian ethnohistory had yet to become popular when Herman was writing his thesis in the 1960s. Although Herman had access to a much larger range of sources, he and Parkman labored under similar limitations. Herman also failed to see that the Abenaki operated on their own initiative. He overlooked the connection between Mather's statement concerning the attack being talked of in Quebec two months before it happened and the council held at Pentagoet in April. This attack was clearly not, "initiated on the spur of the moment."<sup>148</sup> Herman did not recognize Hector's deposition as confirmation of the Abenaki attack plan. Even when consulting the writings of Mather, Villebon, Thury, and Hector, Herman continually deferred to Parkman and Villieu. He relied on Villieu's story without taking the record concerning his character into account. Villieu did not lead the war-party, although he wanted Frontenac to think so. Even today historians often point to Parkman as the definitive authority of the colonial time period. Herman may have been reluctant to reach a conclusion that ran contrary to Parkman's opinion.

The people of Oyster River Plantation were not sacrificed on the altar of fate. Their deaths reflected the accomplishment of a very real strategic objective. When the Abenaki are accepted as a sovereign people, a more accurate picture of

the Oyster River Massacre emerges. The Abenaki went to war in order to protect their land and their way of life. The signing of the Treaty of Pemaquid, by a small group of disaffected chiefs, demanded action from both the French and Native Americans. The attack on Oyster River was the successful culmination of their joint action. By carefully analyzing the primary sources, within the framework established by modern Indian ethnohistory, we gain a fuller understanding of the Oyster River Massacre. The true story is no less compelling than the legend.

### Notes

1. Rev. John Pike, *Journal of the Rev. John Pike, of Dover, N.H.*, ed. Rev. A.H. Quint (Cambridge: Press of John Wilson and Son, 1876), 16.
2. The French adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1582; England not until 1752. In 1694, a nine-day difference existed between the French and English calendars. I have used the English date throughout, in keeping with the date established by Pike.
3. "Curiously, the death and destruction visited upon Oyster River had been meant for Boston." Jan K. Herman, "Massacre at Oyster River," *New Hampshire Profiles*, October 1976, 50.
4. Francis Parkman, *Count Frontenac and New France under Louis XIV*, vol. 2 of *France and England in North America* (1877; reprint, New York: The Library of America, 1983), 263.
5. Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire*, ed. John Farmer (Dover, N.H.: S.C. Stevens and Ela & Wadleigh, 1831), 1:138.
6. Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (originally published 1764-1828; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 2:55.
7. Cotton Mather, *Decennium Luctuosum* (Boston, 1699); reprinted in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), 86.
8. Everett S. Stackpole, *History of New Hampshire* (New York: The American Historical Society, 1926), 1:182.
9. Samuel Adams Drake, *The Border Wars of New England Commonly called King William's and Queen Anne's Wars* (Williamstown, Mass: Corner House, 1973), 96.
10. Jan K. Herman, "Massacre on the Northern New England Frontier, 1689-1694" (master's thesis, University of New Hampshire, 1966), 43.
11. Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 128.
12. Ibid.
13. W. J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1969), 117.
14. New York State Museum, *A History of the New York Iroquois*, by William M. Beauchamp, Bulletin 78 (Albany, February 1905), 233.
15. Parkman, 121.
16. New York State Museum, 233.
17. Parkman, 135.
18. Jere R. Daniell, *Colonial New Hampshire: A History* (New York: Kto Press, 1981), 106.
19. Morrison, 113.
20. William D. Williamson, *The History of the State of Maine* (Freeport, Maine: Cumberland Press, 1966), 1:606.
21. Morrison, 113.
22. Williamson, 607.
23. Hutchinson, 1:309.
24. Williamson, 597.
25. Belknap, 1:124.
26. Hutchinson, 1:309.
27. Williamson, 587.
28. Stackpole, *History of New Hampshire*, 1:171.
29. Pike, 12.
30. Williamson, 612.
31. Everett S. Stackpole, Lucien Thompson, and Winthrop S. Meserve, *History of the Town of Durham, New Hampshire* (1913; reprint, 2 vols. in 1, Portsmouth, N.H.: Peter E. Randall Publisher, for the Durham Historic Assoc., 1994), 87.
32. W. J. Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV, 1663-1701* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 77-78.
33. The League of Augsburg consisted of Holland, Austria, Sweden, several German states, England, and Spain. England entered the league upon the ascension to the throne of William of Orange. King William's War is the name given to the North American portion of this conflict, known in Europe as the War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697). King William's War was the first of the so-called French and Indian wars. Robert E. Lerner, Standish Meacham, and Edward McNull Burns, *Western Civilizations*, 12th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 2:590-91.
34. Several accounts have been written about Frontenac's three war-parties of 1690. See Parkman, 154-72; Belknap, 1:132-33.



35. Douglas E. Leach, *The Northern Colonial Frontier, 1607-1763* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 112.
36. Edward E. Bourne, *The History of Wells and Kennebunk* (Portland, Maine: B. Thurston & Co., 1875), 212-16.
37. Joseph Robineau de Villebon, *Journal of Villebon, 3 October 1692, in Acadia at the End of the Seventeenth Century: Letters, Journals and Memoirs of Joseph Robineau de Villebon*, by John Clarence Webster (St. John, N.B.: The New Brunswick Museum, 1934), 42 (hereafter cited as Webster).
38. Williamson, 636.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Journal of Villebon, 21 Sept. 1692, in Webster, 43; Hutchinson, 2:52.*
41. Williamson, 688.
42. Morrison, 127.
43. Hutchinson, 2:55.
44. Morrison, 127.
45. Gov. Phips to Gov. Fletcher, 24 August 1693, Massachusetts Historical Society, file xxx. 342, Boston.
46. *Ibid.*
47. "The Submission and Agreement of the Eastern Indians," 11 August 1693, in *Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New Hampshire*, ed. Nathaniel Bouton (Manchester: John B. Clarke, 1868), 2:112 (hereafter cited as Bouton).
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. Morrison, 130.
52. Bouton, 111.
53. *Ibid.*, 111-12.
54. Rev. P.F.X. de Charlevoix, *History and General Description of New France*, trans. John Gilmary Shea (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1900), 4:255.
55. The first attempt in 1690 had failed miserably. In 1694, Phips was set for another attempt, but failed when sickness decimated the fleet sent to take part in the attack.
56. Sebastien de Villieu, Account Of A Journey Made By M. de Villieu, 30 July 1694, in Webster, 65.
57. Fort Nashwaak was on the St. John's River in what is now New Brunswick, Canada. At that time, it was the principal base of operations for the Governor of Acadia, Joseph Robineau de Villebon. The location of the fort was also referred to as St. John's and Naxoat.
58. *Journal of Villebon, 15 September 1693, in Webster, 53.*
59. *Journal of Villebon, 20 September 1693, in Webster, 53.*
60. *Journal of Villebon, 26 September 1693, in Webster, 53.*
61. Webster, 200-202.
62. *Journal of Villebon, 19 May 1694, in Webster, 55.*
63. *Ibid.*, 201.
64. *Ibid.*, 202.
65. *Ibid.*, 201.
66. *Journal of Villebon, 25 November 1693, in Webster, 54.*
67. Eccles, *Canada under Louis XIV*, 194.
68. *Journal of Villebon, 24 November 1693, in Webster, 54.*
69. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 25 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
70. *Journal of Villebon, 25 April 1694, in Webster, 55.*
71. Villieu Account, Nov. 1693, in Webster, 57.
72. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, Nov. 1693, in Webster, 57.
73. *Journal of Villebon, 29 April-5 May 1694, in Webster, 55.*
74. Villieu Account, Nov. 1693, in Webster, 57; *Journal of Villebon, 29 April-5 May 1694, in Webster, 55.*
75. Villieu Account, 3 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Villieu Account, 4 May 1694, in Webster, 58.
78. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 3 May-4 May 1694, in Webster, 58.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 11 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
81. Villieu Account, 5 May 1694, in Webster, 58.
82. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 5 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
83. Mather, 86.
84. Villieu Account, 11 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
85. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 16 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
86. *Journal of Villebon, 26 May 1694, in Webster, 56.*
87. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 16 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
88. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 22 May 1694, in Webster, 60.
89. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 11 May 1694, in Webster, 59.
90. *Journal of Villebon, 22 May 1694, in Webster, 55.*
91. Villieu Account, 25 May 1694, in Webster, 60.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*, 61.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Villieu Account, 8 June 1694, in Webster, 62.
96. *Ibid.*

97. Villieu Account, 18 June 1694, in Webster, 63.
98. Villieu Account, 27 June 1694, in Webster, 63.
99. One of the standard stories used by the Jesuits, in teaching religion to the Indians, was that the Virgin Mary was a French lady. Her son, Jesus, was murdered by Englishmen. After his death, he ascended into heaven and all who wanted to earn his favor must avenge his murder. Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 48.
100. Villieu Account, 27 June-30 June 1694, in Webster, 63.
101. Villieu Account, 9 July 1694, in Webster, 63.
102. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 9 July 1694, in Webster, 63.
103. Deposition of Hezekiah Miles, 31 May 1695, Massachusetts Historical Society, file VIII. 39, Boston.
104. Report of Caleb Ray, Keeper of his Majesty's Prison in Boston, 4 Aug. 1693-1 Mar. 1694/5, Massachusetts Historical Society, file XL. 313, Boston.
105. Villieu Account, 10 July 1694, in Webster, 63-64.
106. *Ibid.*
107. Villieu Account, 11 July 1694, in Webster, 64. This is in effect what happened. Oyster River, which is above Boston, was attacked July 18th. Groton, which is very near Boston, was attacked on July 27th.
108. *Ibid.*
109. Lake Winnepesaukee was a point along the main east-west trail into the area of what is now Portland, Maine. The trail led to the Merrimack River, the main north-south route into the Massachusetts interior. This route had long been used by war-parties raiding settlements in central Massachusetts. The war-party used this route to avoid the militia under Major Converse and to utilize the water route into Groton, Massachusetts via the Merrimack and Nashua Rivers. Ann Jenkins testified that the war-party left their canoes at Pennacook.
110. Villieu Account, 25 May 1694, in Webster, 60.
111. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 3 May 1694, in Webster, 58.
112. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 25 May 1694, in Webster, 60.
113. Villieu Account, 22 July 1694, in Webster, 64.
114. Deposition of Ann Jenkins, 11 June 1695, Massachusetts Historical Society, file VIII. 40, Boston.
115. Thury to Villebon, 2 Aug. 1694, in Webster, 56-57.
116. Stackpole, *History of New Hampshire*, 1:183.
117. Villieu Account, 26 July 1694, in Webster, 64-65.
118. Belknap, 1:138.
119. Deposition of Ann Jenkins.
120. Stackpole, Thompson, and Meserve, *Durham*, 93-94.
121. Deposition of Damson (Tamsen) Drew, 23 May 1698, Massachusetts Historical Society, file VIII. 41, Boston.
122. Stackpole, Thompson, and Meserve, *Durham*, 94.
123. Mather, 86.
124. Mary P. Thompson, *Landmarks in Ancient Dover, New Hampshire* (Durham, N.H.: Durham Historic Assoc., 1965), 178.
125. Belknap, 1:140.
126. Stackpole, Thompson, and Meserve, *Durham*, 100.
127. *Ibid.*
128. "Captain Woodman's Return for Subsistence of Soldiers at Oyster River, 1694," in *Miscellaneous Provincial Papers, from 1629 to 1725*, ed. Isaac Hammond (Manchester: John B. Clarke, 1889), 7:645.
129. Belknap, 1:140.
130. Villieu Account, 26 July 1694, in Webster, 64-65.
131. Deposition of Ann Jenkins.
132. Villieu Account, 23 July 1694, in Webster, 64.
133. Villieu Account, 30 July 1694, in Webster, 65-66.
134. Villieu Account, Villebon Margin Note, 30 July 1694, in Webster, 66.
135. *Ibid.*
136. Journal of Villebon, 9 Aug. 1694, in Webster, 56.
137. Herman, master's thesis, 43.
138. Morrison, 131.
139. Morrison, 131-32.
140. Capt. Thomas Packer to Lt. Gov. John Usher, 18 July 1694, in Bouton, 128.
141. Usher to Phips, 18 July 1694, in Bouton, 128.
142. *Ibid.*
143. William Stoughton to Gov. Fletcher, 23 July 1694, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
144. Villieu Account, 30 July 1694, in Webster, 65.
145. W. Sears Nickerson, "How The Smiths Came to Cape Cod," *Orleans, Massachusetts Cape Codder*, October 1960.
146. Nickerson.
147. Neal Salisbury, *The Indians of New England: A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 16.
148. Herman, master's thesis, 43.

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