

Abby Kelly Foster Charter Public School Teaching American History Grant
*Citizenship, Property, Identity, and Representation: the Historical Journey of Southern New
England's Native Peoples*

Summer Seminar July 14 – 18, 2008

Friday July 18, 2008

**Friday, July 18 *Native Peoples of New England*: Tribal case studies: Abenakis,
Wampanoags, Nipmucs and Penobscots**

Participating Teachers Present: John Daly, Phil Hureau, Kelly Davila, Mike Penny, Andrea Bien, Nora Werme, Sandra Gibson-Quigley, Ann Weeks, Nancy Clark, Jen Connors, Sarah Kaye, Henry Zussman, Rosemarie Ward, Ed Belbin, Tim Gervais

Presenters and AAS: Jim Moran, Michelle Renihan, Thomas Doughton, Hilary Wyss

Jim Moran gave a brief tour of the Council Room—pointing out the desk and clock of Paul Revere, the collection of Staffordshire ware, the high chair of Richard Mather and other items from the collection.

9:00-10:30 Hilary Wyss, Auburn University (Council Room): Indian Literacy in the 17th & 18th century

- What do we mean by literacy? There are various types of literacy.
- Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson were two among many literate Indians in the 18th century. Looking at the picture of Samson Occom from the collection we are presented with an image of a learned man wearing clerical attire at a desk. There are books on the shelves in the background. Clearly he is an important man. We cannot tell that he is an Indian—he is wearing the paraphernalia of the elite intellectual class. Literacy here is presented in its elite form. The two columns in the image indicate that he is reading the Scriptures—perhaps in Greek, Latin, or Hebrew. His posture is a sort of code for his status. (*In other images of Occom we do see his “Indianness” being portrayed—a bow and arrow in the background, Occom in “Indian” clothing, etc.*) The image indicates status.
- But Occom’s literacy is only one type of literacy—it is not just a matter of reading and writing—but *what* you read, what you write—how *fluent* and *erudite* you are.
- Native people were overwhelmingly NOT interested in this type of literacy... Wheelock’s school attempted to teach the higher level of literacy (which probably explains the high number of students who stayed only a very short time and left). However, Occom himself was able to take what he knew and make it available to the native communities he served as an itinerant minister. Indeed, the Great Awakening was, in part, a movement away from the elite level of literacy to one that was more available to ‘regular’ people.

- Even in New England, where there was widespread literacy, most could read, but many could not write...some could read print but not cursive...some wrote letters others needed someone to write for them. Many who could not read (a newspaper for instance) were read to and were, thus, well informed—while still ‘illiterate’.
- Examining a deed from Masconomet to John Winthrop, Jr, there are a variety of signatures (Hugh Hilliard, an Englishman, signs with a simple “H” which is labeled “ his mark”; Masconomet’s signature looks like a bent arrow). How can we tell these are legitimate signatures? Is Masconomet’s mark an indicator of a type of literacy? If his mark is recognized within his own community does it indicate that he is literate within a certain context? This raises questions whether images in wampum, basket weaving, other images—can be interpreted as a form of literacy (in other words, can they be read and interpreted by others from within the community)? Even clothing is ‘readable’...
- Because we are not literate in the codes of Native Americans we consider them ‘illiterate’ until they acquired alphabetic literacy. Once we move away from the ‘gold standard’ of alphabetic literacy we can see that there are other forms of *literary* communication.

At this point various reading assignments from “The Writings of Joseph Johnson” were assigned to small groups.

- We have the example of Sir William Johnson (the English agent in charge of Indian Affairs) who acted as an interpreter between the “Brothertown” Indians of New England and the Iroquois...Wm Johnson gave a wampum belt to Joseph Johnson (*New England Indian—not related to William Johnson*) and, later, a silver pipe and tobacco. It seems as if Wm Johnson was seen as trustworthy by both groups and that he was able to act as a go between.
- Joseph Johnson had to explain to the Oneida why there are so few representatives from New England and, again, Sir Wm Johnson appeared to lend legitimacy to the New Englanders by his presence. (They could read the status of the New England Indians because Johnson was there).
- Joseph Johnson acted as a suppliant—stating that he (and the New England Indians) had nothing to offer and must depend on the kindness of the Oneida. The issue was one of giving and receiving (gifts given vs. deeds signed)—very much different from the English way of negotiation. Joseph Johnson had to rely on Sir William Johnson in order to know how to approach the Iroquois (to use the right diplomatic language).
- In his sermon to the Oneida, Joseph Johnson, used the biblical language of repentance to describe his own conversion (since the example we have is in English and in print we cannot be sure that it is an exact transcript of what was actually said). The Biblical references were not annotated and the sermon was given in an already built church—with the assumption that people understood what he is saying. (Joseph Johnson was also aware that missionary society members would be reading the sermon). Johnson’s references to his own previous bad behavior—his acknowledgment of sin—connected him to the people who had seen him behaving that way and showed that change is possible....
- The Oneida’s ***Second Answer*** was welcoming but cautious (it stated that the Tuscorora also needed land and not everyone in the region was Christian so the newcomers would need to find a way to fit in). The “Answer” urged the hearers not to jump to conclusions

when they heard rumors.... Be aware of the conditions that exist here (in New York) and the traditions that already exist (this is traditional Iroquois language of diplomacy)...

- *And aside about literacy: Scholars debate this constantly—some insist on the classical need for grammar, etc, while others point out all the symbolic literature (the symbols for men’s and women’s washrooms, the wavy lines that indicate an air blower, McDonald’s ‘golden arches’, certain clothing styles within certain groups...etc.)*

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:15 Alice Nash, University of Massachusetts at Amherst: Gender and Wabanaki Catholicism in the Seventeenth Century

- The US/Canadian border is an arbitrary division that was meaningless to the native peoples who used waterways as highways.
- The natives in Maine were located in territory controlled by the Massachusetts colony during this time period.
- The Wabanaki peoples are part of New England history but their territory crosses into Canada, many of the people were at least tri-lingual (French, English, and native language); Catholicism plays a much larger role in this region than Protestantism due to the proximity of French Canada. *The captive narratives of New England Puritans are as horrified by the Catholicism (Papism) of the Indians as they are of their ‘savagery’.* In fact a number of Puritans wrote that they would prefer to know that their captured relatives had been killed by the Indians than that they converted to Catholicism.
- **The two main language families** spoken in the Northeast Woodlands culture area: Iroquoian and Algonkian (these language groups were as different from one another as Romance languages are from Germanic language systems).
- Iroquoian includes the five (later six) nations: Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Tuscarora, Cayuga and also some of the Huron groups
- Algonkian includes the languages of Southern and Northern New England and parts of Quebec.
- **Document study:** An account written by a Jesuit Missionary from St. Joseph de Sillery (near Quebec City), in 1643-44 about Charles Meiasawat and his wife Marie and their conversion/baptism/marriage....The account describes how Charles Meiasawat interrupted his own Catholic wedding ceremony to demand that his wife change her “arrogant and violent temper” or that he would not proceed. What is problematic are the language and cultural values on both sides of the story (the report was originally written in French and for a French (Jesuit) audience; it raises questions about what the real message is. Is it about a difficulty of getting native women to fit into traditional French Catholic models? Is it about a real couple who experienced a change of behaviors? Is it all mixed up? Did Meiasawat really agree to take Marie as his “only and legitimate wife”? Did her behavior change? Why would this story be a model for the missionary’s report?
- **Animate vs. inanimate nouns:** In Algonkian language, gender is a grammatical category that refers to animate or inanimate rather than masculine, feminine, or neuter. Nouns that are classified as animate include living things (trees, people, animals)—but if a tree is cut

down it becomes inanimate; when wood is worked it becomes animate again. Blueberries, for some unknown reason, are inanimate, but a blueberry pie is animate. Some of this seems to do with the *relationship* between beings/spirit. What we (in our 21st century Euro-American culture) sometimes consider ‘things’ have a spiritual dimension in the Wabanaki (and other indigenous) culture. Thus, water has a right to be clean; fish have a right to swim in clean water. The notion that things are spiritual does not mean that they are ‘gods’ to be worshipped (as is often assumed by those outside the culture). The language issue for Wabanakis is not gender but spirit. What is important are matters of ‘spirit, power, and protocol’.

- The late 17th century introduction of Catholicism to the region worked to keep families intact and gave women a different way of thinking, a different way of demonstrating strength of spirit when everything was falling apart (due to colonization). *“My husband is a miserable drunk, but I am bearing with it and raising my children because I have a strong spirit”*.
- Looking at women individualistically (i.e. using the value system of our own culture) may be the wrong way of going about things when the issue was the survival of a whole people—the adoption of and adaption to—an entirely different world.
- Did conversion mean something to people? If so, what? There are wampum belts with Latin lettering which were sent to Chartres Cathedral in France with the inscription: “To the Virgin Mother from the Abenakis”. This was done with very great skill and care; the letters have serifs and many thousands of beads were used. This seems to indicate that the people valued their new faith affiliation highly.
- Marguerite & Family: Marguerite brought her family of about 45 people to the mission at St. Joseph de Sillery and St Francois de Sales. The family already knew their catechism when they arrived for baptism (they had been taught it *(by Marguerite?)* and memorized it).
- Some people seem to have associated baptism with medicine; some liked the ritual; some liked the Catholic teaching that they would be re-united with their loved ones in heaven—somewhat different from the native understanding of a difficult road to the afterlife where getting there was dependent on the body’s being rightly dealt with after death....The Catholic teachings about the afterlife and the reunion with relations there was very consoling to people who had lost huge numbers of relations to plagues in which bodies had been left to rot with no one to bury them properly for the journey to the afterlife.
- Music may have played a role—singing was very important. Natives became very adept at singing the Mass and other religious rites.
- There may have been economic reasons for conversion for some (many) but spiritual and emotional reasons were extremely important to people, too.
- **A note on ‘squaw’** —*skw ending indicates a female. English speaking people turned this into a denotation of all native women. It became a derogatory term—especially when applied to non Algonkian speaking people.*
- *Primary Sources: “Google” Jesuit Relations on line as an excellent Primary Source as is Canadiana Online; Bedford Books are great resources (and inexpensive)*

12:15-1:00 Lunch with scholars: Discussions related to the morning and other previous presentations

1:00-2:45 Discussion of readings

- How Europeans thought natives perceived them (usually as gods) vs. how they were actually perceived by natives (dirty, arrogant, hairy). These interethnic perceptions can be very enlightening as to what was actually going on.
- Christendom vs. “heathendom”. Europeans often understood indigenous people in the context of their own pre-Christian history.
- “*Right of discovery*”: claims based on European self perceived rights of discovery based on Christian identity and thus, ***rights to make claims*** on lands merely “occupied” by heathens. This seems to relate to ideas that land must be “improved” to be owned. The non Christian natives didn’t ‘improve’ the land in many areas so they didn’t “own” it.
- There will be follow-up on the relationship between various Indian groups (Protestant/Catholic; French speaking/ English speaking, etc.) over the next year when we look at the 19th century.

Thomas Doughton on the Pre Test results and the responses: reviewed some of the ‘tribes’ that were named as being native to the region—some of which were correct and some of which were simply place names.

There was some improvement over the past when tribes far outside the Northeast were named (this time no one mentioned Cherokee, Cheyenne or Sioux, as native to our region and only one mentioned “Dakota”). By the end of the grant we ought to be able to name ten tribes native to our region without any difficulty.

Reflections: What did you get from the week? *Participants gave various responses, some of which were:*

- *That colonial society wasn’t English on one side and Indians on the other but there was a deep inter-relationship between the groups.*
- *The history pre-contact period was made clearer and set the stage for contact.*
- *The assault on the native culture through disease and occupation.*
- *The importance of land. How much role geography played.*
- *Surprised by the unifying role that Christianity played for natives.*
- *That detailed records were kept and the role of Christianity in literacy.*
- *The broadness and diversity of literacy.*
- *The strong voice of native peoples coming through in the records (Occom, etc.).*
- *The physical and cultural devastation of the native peoples.*
- *The resiliency of the natives*
- *Racial aspects—the ‘one drop’ theory—loss of “Indianness” when intermixture with Blacks occurred (and why—in order to take Indian land because they were no longer Indians)*
- *How Indian identification (by whites) was being changed even while people were retaining their own sense of identity...*

- *Adaptation of (dominant culture) concepts of ‘clear’ or pure bloodedness among Indians (Brothertown)*
- *The adoption of Indians as symbols and mascots as well as the adoption of Indians as symbols of America (in a Europeanized version—noble savage vs. lazy, shiftless, debased Indian + disappeared Indian)...*
- *That the pattern will continue as the Euro-Americans move west....*
- *That learning European ways and values wasn’t enough (Cherokees, Brothertown, etc.)*
- *How many wounded and indigent people (mostly men) would be disconnected from their communities*
- *About economic pressures... loss of land to pay off ‘debts’ then the use of labor to pay off debts (unfree—indentured—slave labor)*
- *About guardianship and loss of land/wealth*
- *About the addition of years to indenture at a higher rate for natives than for whites... crisis of conscience among the colonists (a notion of rights)*
- *About degrees of freedom*
- *About Puritan concepts of slavery/labor based on the Old Testament—master owed their slaves/servants certain things for which they would be accountable on Judgment Day.*
- *About how and why New England slavery was very different than southern chattel slavery...*

Discussion about possible paper topics for graduate credits:

2:45 – 3:00 Break

3:00- 3:45 Final Evaluations

4:00 Closing Reception