

Ancient History

Mi'kmaq oral history tells the story of the world being covered with water and Sebanees arriving in *kjiktū'lnu* (“our great boat”), what is now Prince Edward Island (PEI), on his boat of ice, carrying all the animals and fish his Mi'kmaq family would need to survive. It is also said the melting of the ice boat was what created PEI’s unique land formation. (Whitehead: 5).

Archaeological sites, including shell middens containing the remains of oysters, clams, and other shellfish and campsite remains containing burned bits of seal, bear, beaver and other mammals, have been found in many places throughout *Mi'kma'ki*, the traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq which includes the Québec, Gaspé Peninsula, Eastern New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, southern Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia – especially the coastline and rivers. There is also a federally recognized Mi'kmaq tribe in Presque Isle, Maine, USA. So, both Mi'kmaq oral history and archeological records clearly agree: the ancestors of the Mi'kmaq arrived in *Mi'kma'ki*, at least 12,000 years ago, most likely following the caribou, and other large land mammals, as well as the plants growing on the edges of the retreating ice of the last Ice Age.

The geology of Atlantic Canada at the end of the last Ice Age was vastly different than it was today. With the retreating of the ice, extensive areas of land became ice-free and the coastlines were much lower than today. Joined by a “land bridge,” the three modern provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were united together in what geologists and archaeologists refer to as the *Northumbria* land mass (Keenlyside: 2). It is surmised by archaeologists that the ancestors of the Mi'kmaq first arrived on PEI by crossing this land bridge. Indicating the long usage by the ancestors of the Mi'kmaq, archaeological sites are located throughout PEI, as evidenced by the attached archaeological site review map provided by archaeologist, Scott Buchanan.¹

Early Prince Edward Island History

Jacques Cartier’s first voyage to this New World, in the summer of 1534, included a short visit to the areas of what are now Cascumpec, Kildare Cape and North Point, Prince Edward Island. In his diary dated 1 June 1534, Cartier mentions seeing boatloads of “sauvaiges” crossing what he refers to as “ripvière dé Barques” (Canoe River) in the area, and these Mi'kmaq attempting to trade with him and his men. The Mi'kmaq people he eventually traded with, spoke a few words of Portuguese or Basque, most probably indicating a prior trade experience with other Europeans (Cartier: 40-41). Cartier’s visits opened up the area for subsequent voyagers to seek the riches of the New World.

Through a series of land grants in the mid 1600’s to the early 1700’s, PEI, or Ile St Jean as it was then known, was given to various ambitious men of France to use as a fishing station during the summer months. Despite the summer usage by the French, however, the endless wars between Britain and France, and the relative military insignificance of this small territory, meant that it was basically left alone most of the time.

¹ For one example, the Jones archaeological site, located on St. Peters Bay, on the northeastern coast of PEI, contains early campsite remains, dating from 9,000 to 10,000 years ago. (Keenlyside: 2).

It was not until 1720, that the Acadians were strongly urged to move to Ile St. Jean, and away from Acadia, so Ile St. Jean could be used as a resource to grow food for the inhabitants of the Fortress of Louisbourg. While the Fortress was located in an area of strategic military importance to the French government, the surrounding land could not be used for agriculture; therefore food for its inhabitants had to be grown elsewhere. As well, some early investors believed the forests on Ile St. Jean could be harvested for France's endless need of timber for ship's masts (Sobey: 19-22)

There are many oral stories, as well as some documents, in both the Acadian and Mi'kmaq communities on Ile St. Jean, that indicate the interaction between these two cultures.² One can almost picture the Acadians arriving on Ile St Jean, confronted with a seemingly endless amount of backbreaking work to even produce enough food to live – being befriended by the Mi'kmaq and helped to survive.

The French military outpost of Port La Joye, located on the other side of what is now the Charlottetown, PEI, harbor, was the scene of annual celebrations and giving of presents between the French and the Mi'kmaq celebrating their alliance. These celebrations took place from 1726 to 1754, excluding the years 1746-47, as Ile St. Jean was then under the rule of the British government. The celebrations would include Mi'kmaq from all over Acadia, as well as those from Ile St. Jean. They would also, occasionally, include members of the Maliseet Nation. It is interesting to note the French government considered the Mi'kmaq to be Allies of their nation, treating the Mi'kmaq, for the most part, on a Nation-to-Nation basis.

Even though there was a small population of Acadians on Prince Edward Island, there were no big attempts to colonize PEI until mid-1700 (de la Roque: Census). Even, *La Grand Dérangement*, the Acadian Expulsion, begun in 1755 by the British, which resulted in over 2,000 Acadians fleeing to the French occupied Ile St. Jean, did not increase the European population too greatly. This was good for the Mi'kmaq as they were able to maintain their traditional way of life.³ Nicholas Denys, former grantee of Ile St. Jean, writes in his *Description and Natural History* that the Mi'kmaq had hunted the caribou on Ile St. Jean so extensively that there were few still found there (Denys: 209).

British Colony

In 1758, the French Fortress of Louisbourg fell to the British, changing the course of history and, ultimately, the lives of all the Acadian and Mi'kmaq inhabitants of Ile St. Jean. Quickly realizing the strategic importance of Ile St. Jean, the British government moved to seize control of Ile St. Jean and establish a military outpost at the former French site of Port la Joye. France ceded what is now known as Cape Breton Island, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island to British in the Treaty of Paris in 1763. They were annexed to the Nova Scotia Colony, with the political power residing in Nova Scotia.

² For further information see Parish Registers for Port LaJoie, Saint-Pierre-du-Nord, Rivière-du-Nord-Est, and Father Kergariou for marriage, baptism and burial entries indicating both Mi'kmaq and Acadian participants.

³ Franquet, Louis, fl (1750) "Badeck, havre où sont rassemblés les Sauvages sous promesses que les habitants ne les avoisineront pas et qu'eux ne s'étendront pas plus loin" Le voyage de Franquet aux Iles Royale at Saint-Jean / Report made to the Government of France by Louis Franquet in his capacity of Inspector-General of Fortification, 1761 Publisher: Quebec; Archives de Québec, 1924, p. 133

In 1764, Capt Samuel Holland was tasked with surveying the Island. He divided the land into sixty-seven lots of about 20,000 acres each.⁴ As well, the Acadians and Mi'kmaq living on St. John's Island, as it was now known, were not consulted either then or during the subsequent Land Lottery. This Lottery, held in London, distributed all but one of these lots, the smallest, to individuals or small groups. Typically, the new owners were military, political, or commercial persons who had performed services during the war with France, or who had good connections to those in office. Some of the islands off the coast of St. John's Island, including Lennox Island, were neither attached to the lots, nor sold to the new proprietors.

In 1769, St. John's Island became a separate colony, independent from Nova Scotia. In 1772, Lennox Island, one of the traditional, historical campsite locations for the Mi'kmaq was attached to Lot 12 and given to Sir James Montgomery, the proprietor, who allowed the Mi'kmaq to continue to live there.

During this time, the British turned their eyes towards Ile St. Jean and began to colonize it in greater numbers. The resultant population explosion threatened the Mi'kmaq way of life. Game became scarce, access to traditional areas where they had for thousands of years freely hunted, fished, camped and gathered were now blocked off by the new English settlements.⁵

The name of St. John's Island was changed to "Prince Edward Island" in 1799. By 1800, it was realized there was no other land left for the Mi'kmaq to continue their traditional way of life. The year 1808, brought about a petition from the "Indians, inhabitants of Lennox Island" to the PEI government requesting them to purchase Lennox Island for them.

Concerned citizens on PEI began writing letters to the Government of PEI in the early 1800's urging compassion for the "abject poverty of the Indians" and predicting their imminent extinction.⁶ Despite these dire predictions, however, Mi'kmaq communities maintained a small but steady population of between 250 and 300 "souls" during the 1800's,⁷ sustaining their traditional livelihood by hunting game, as well using fish weirs and spears for catching eels. Continuing on to agricultural and craftsmanship pursuits in response to the time period, Mi'kmaq life on PEI changed and evolved along with the era.

Thirty years would pass, and then a petition was sent from Chief Thomas Labone of the Micmac Tribe of Indians to the Queen and the PEI Legislature in May 1838, not so subtly reminding them of their former, and better, association with French.

"To the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, Petition from the undersigned, a Chieftain of the Micmac tribe of Indian Inhabitants of Prince Edward Island, in British North America ... That in former times our Fathers were the Owners of this Island and fully Enjoyed the Resources thereof until they were visited by the People of the French

⁴ For this and subsequent mention of Lots, please see the attached Samuel Holland map, pinpointing the exact location of all 67 Lots.

⁵ Abbé de Calonne in a "Memorial for the Mikmac of Prince Edward Island," outlined the plight of the Mi'kmaq on PEI – No hunting areas, starving, turning to agriculture, but no land of their own, CO226, Vol. 21, (16 July 1806), pp192-195

⁶ For one example : In a letter from the Honourable Sir Charles Augustus FitzRoy, Governor of PEI, to Lord Gleneig, Colonial Secretary, Fitzroy states: "...their [the Mi'kmaq] numbers are rapidly decreasing and, with few exceptions, they are sunk to the most abject and degraded state to which I should conceive it possible for human beings to arrive..." 08 October 1838

⁷ See censuses – 1841, 1861, 1873, 1881, 1891

Nation who taught them Religion and the Duties of Civilized Life, after which by a Treaty entered into that Nation with Your Majesty's Government, our People became British Subjects; since which our Tribe has been deprived of their Hunting Grounds without receiving any Remuneration for the Loss they sustained by which Privation and Want have reduced our once numerous Tribe in this Island to a Skeleton of Five Hundred Individuals..."

This spurred a flurry of activity in the 1840's, as several areas of land were suggested and discarded one being "Indian Island," a Murray Harbour Island. David Stewart, the new owner of Lennox Island, was approached to sell the island to the PEI government for the Mi'kmaq, but he asked for far too much money for the small area of land. He did, however, continue to allow the Mi'kmaq to live there.

1846 saw the settlement of 204 acres of land upon six Mi'kmaq families residing on the land owned by Charles Worrell, "a free gift of a portion of the lands of his estate to certain Indians, and their descendents." Located in Lot 40, the entire estate, including the land gifted to the Mi'kmaq, was subsequently purchased by the Government of PEI and sold to various individuals. The purchase was sanctioned through the Land Purchase Act. This empowered the PEI Government to purchase land from proprietors and re-sell it to tenants, in an attempt to rid the Island of its absentee landlord issues, not taking into account, of course, any squatter issues or the wishes of the proprietors.

By mid-19th century, only a handful of families lived year round on Lennox Island, the majority of Mi'kmaq hunted and fished and earned money selling firewood and handcrafted goods. The men fashioned barrels, furniture, ship fittings, brooms, axe handles, snowshoes, and canoes. The women made beaded cloth goods, birch bark utensils embroidered with animal hair, and wood splint baskets.⁸ The Free Education Act was passed in 1852, ensuring all children, including Mi'kmaq children, the right to have an education. Numerous Mi'kmaq families took advantage of this offer, as evidence by the yearly sums of money issued to various teachers throughout PEI for teaching Mi'kmaq children.⁹

Land, in Lots 15 and 55, was purchased for the Mi'kmaq in 1852 by the government of PEI. "Several large tracts of land in different parts of the Island set apart, from time to time, for the use of the Indians by the Executive Government; two of these are situated on Townships 15 and 55" (*Journal*: 1857). On Lot 55, the land was poor, and subsequently, was not used by the Mi'kmaq. Lot 15's land, however, was very good, and, as mentioned in Indian Commissioner Theophilus Stewart's Report in the *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 19 March 1860, "there is a tract on Lot 15, set apart by the Government in the same way...had been taken possession of and occupied by some of their [the Mi'kmaq] white brethren."

Land was also found on the East side of the Charlottetown Harbour. Ten acres of Ordnance Land was loaned by the War Department to the Indian Commissioners for the use of eleven Mi'kmaq

⁸ For an extensive examples of similar Mi'kmaq cultural artifacts dating from this time period, see Stephen Augustine's 2005 book, *Mi'kmaq & Maliseet Cultural Ancestral Material*, in which he has photographs and descriptions of the historic Mi'kmaq collection found at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, ON

⁹ For one example: "Warrants...sum to purchase Books and Stationary for Simon Prospiere and [another child] at school at Murray Harbor..." "Appendix R," in *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island, Anno Vicessimo Primo Victoriae Reginae: Fourth Session of the Twentieth General Assembly Charlottetown*: George T. Hazard, 1858

families. It should also be noted here that this "...was always a favorite spot of the Indians, and then laying as a wilderness..." as described by Indian Commissioner Henry Palmer in his 1858 Report to the Government of PEI in the *Journal of the House of Assembly*.¹⁰ This "Ordnance Reserve" was used extensively, with the resident Mi'kmaq families building a road and planting fields of potatoes.

During this time, petitions regarding the government's purchase and sale of the entire Worrell estate, including the property deeded to the Mi'kmaq families, were sent by members of the Mi'kmaq community, Indian Commissioners, Theophilus Stewart and Henry Palmer, and other concerned citizens to rectify this situation. In the words of the PEI Attorney General, however, it would not be "fair to those who purchased the land to be robbed of it," therefore an alternative area of land was suggested – 189 acres in Lot 39, ninety of which was barren. This was granted in 1859, and became the Morell Reserve, but brought about another problem. Settlers in the adjoining land refused the Mi'kmaq access to the property, denying an access road be built.

In the 1860's, Indian Commissioner Theophilus Stewart urged PEI government for more land, a place for "Indians who have no land to call their own," but received only negative replies. This time period also brought the recommendation by Stewart to sell the Reserves on Lots 15 and 55, with the money from the sale to be used to purchase other land for the Mi'kmaq. The sale proceeded in 1866, but no other land was purchased.

1866 also brought about another blow to Mi'kmaq land possession. The "Ordnance Reserve" land was seized by the government of PEI and a Fever Hospital was placed upon the exact 10 acres used by the Mi'kmaq. In the Prayers and Petitions heard by the Legislative Assembly on May 4, 1866, was an appeal from the Mi'kmaq formerly of the Ordnance Reserve.

"The Hon. Mr. Henderson presented a Petition of James Louis, and divers other native Indians, complaining that a Fever Hospital had been erected on a piece of ground, on the eastern side of the entrance of Charlottetown Harbor, which had for a long course of years been used by them as a Camping Ground, etc., and praying that suitable locations for petitioners and their families, in the neighborhood of or as near the City of Charlottetown as possible, may be granted" (*Journal*: 1866)

The Petition was laid on the Table, and nothing more was mentioned of it.

In desperation, Stewart approached the Aborigines Protection Society in London, England to purchase Lennox Island for the Mi'kmaq. Struck with the idea, the Society immediately began a subscription to raise money to purchase the island. It was eventually purchased in 1870 by the Society for the "use and benefit of such members of the Tribe of the MicMac Indians as are or may from time to time be natives of and resident in Prince Edward Island..." for £400. The title to the land would be held by a board of trustees, one of whom was PEI Indian Commissioner, Theophilus Stewart.

In 1873, PEI joined Confederation, and responsibility for the Mi'kmaq was transferred to Ottawa. Stewart was appointed Visiting Superintendent in charge of the Mi'kmaq of PEI for the federal

¹⁰ For one example: In a letter to L. Vankoughnet, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, from J. Arsenault, PEI Indian Agent, dated 27 May 1886 "Joseph Louis lived on the land [Indian Cove] for 38 years. He used to move in the winter, but returned in the spring..."

government. Lennox Island also gained the title of “Special Reserve” and fell under the direction of Ottawa, as well.

A Report sent to the Department of the Interior in 1875, by Theophilus Stewart mentions six Mi'kmaq families encamped for the last few years near Warren Farm, in the Rocky Point area. The families had requested this become a “permanent abode,” with the purchase of the land for them. Over the next few years, petitions were also received from Stewart regarding the loss of land and lack of access to the Morell Reserve, finally leading to a PEI Order-in-Council in 1879, granting 15 additional acres. As well, in 1880, a road was finally approved to provide access to the Reserve.

By this year, it is also noted in Meacham’s *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Province of Prince Edward Island*, an allotment of land titled “Dominion Gov’t for Indians” on Lot 36. This eventually becomes known as the “Scotchfort Reserve.” It is also listed in the Indian Lands Registry Files as being a “pre-Confederation Reserve.”

By 1912, the trustees for Lennox Island had either died or were very elderly. The land reverted to the Crown (King George V) and becomes known as an “Ordinary Reserve.” This year also saw a petition filed by Alice Mitchell stating that she, her father, her grandfather and her great-grandfather lived off the lands in Rocky Point. She says, “Indians never off that place.” In 1913, the fourth and final Reserve is created when three acres of land at Rocky Point are sold to the Crown to become the Rocky Point Reserve.

At this time, it should be noted that many Mi'kmaq families on PEI chose not to live on the four reserves. Instead, as Visiting Superintendent Theophilus Stewart stated in 1875, “Old fashioned camps, and structures of an improved character form the rest of the habitation, numbering about fifty-six, embracing different Indian localities throughout Prince Edward Island.”

Baskets, wooden items, mayflowers, and other goods were, in many cases sold from door-to-door with the Mi'kmaq extensively using the railway system to travel to different harvesting campsites and to sell their goods. Many PEI Elders today still speak of the craftsmanship and sturdiness of the “potato basket” made from ash splints.

Mi'kmaq in the 20th and 21st centuries

Throughout the 1920’s to the 1950’s, the Mi'kmaq continued to travel throughout PEI, setting up harvesting campsites to gather natural resources. One of the oral histories collected from Mi'kmaq Elders in the early 1990’s speak of leaving a campsite in Wellington by rowboat at the age of 3, and travelling with his family to campsites in Richmond, Wiltshire, Coleman and Borden, collecting wood to make baskets. An elderly lady speaks of being born in a “winterized wigwam” in Northam, then travelling to Portage to camp behind the church. Her family were proud basket makers, “...we peddled them [baskets] from house to house from Summerside to Tignish and sometimes we’d go to summer, ah Charlottetown but there is some from Summerside to Tignish.” Tar paper shacks made some of the housing in Mi'kmaq campsites, wigwams others, as well as more sturdier wooden houses. In the words of a Mi'kmaq Elder, “...you go down to Richmond you take a right on the railroad tracks about two miles in before you come to the bridge my mom and her mother made a little log cabin in the woods...” Another person, a Veteran of both World War I and II, he and his wife lived on Hog Island in a house. He

hunted and fished while his wife made baskets. They lived on Lennox Island for the winter, but rest of the year on Hog Island.

A further oral history collected at this time speaks of the Mi'kmaq making campsites around his family farm in Indian River while he was growing up in the 1920's. A Mi'kmaq Elder states, "...there was a camp in Breadalbane down by the old Kennedy store, down by the bridge, then there's well actually to be honest with you, I don't think there's a place in PEI they never camped..."¹¹

The overharvesting of Black Ash, both culturally relevant to the Mi'kmaq, as well as an almost perfect source of wooden strips for basket making, meant an increasing expense of importing it from New Brunswick and Québec, and a reluctance on the part of Indian and Northern Affairs to continue this practice. As well, Mi'kmaq families were strongly encouraged to send their children to the Shubenacadie Residential School, in another attempt to discourage the Mi'kmaq culture and traditional occupations. This, coupled with Indian and Northern Affairs escalating attempts to consolidate the Mi'kmaq population in particular areas, created an atmosphere of distrust for the traditional Mi'kmaq nomadic pursuits. While almost succeeding in wiping out traditional ideals, Mi'kmaq hunting and gathering on PEI did continue in a quiet and covert manner.

Around this time was the splitting of Lennox Island Band into two First Nations. Abegweit First Nation was created as a response to a conflict concerning the Council of the Lennox Island First Nation. The distance from Rocky Point, Scotchfort, and Morell Reserves, to Lennox Island also played a significant factor in this, as members of these communities were not always able to attend Band functions or meetings. As well, there was a significant lack of communication between the Lennox Island Band Council and other members of the Band. This led the Scotchfort and Morell Reserves to consider creating a separate band so they could "have their own Council and conduct their own affairs."

The matter was put to a vote, and on a stormy day in March, (7th), 1972, the majority of those who were able to attend the voting, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the separation. It was agreed that Lennox Island Band "would retain Lennox Island Reserve #1." Morell Reserve #2, Rocky Point Reserve #3, and Scotchfort Reserve #4 would form the new Abegweit Band.

The first election for the Abegweit First Nation occurred in May of that year, with Mrs. Margaret Bernard becoming the first Abegweit Chief, with Councillors Joe Jadis and Cyrus Sark also being elected on that day, 17 May 1972.

The Abegweit First Nation and the Lennox Island First Nation operated separately for many years after that. Nevertheless, traditional pursuits began a resurgence among the Mi'kmaq of PEI, at this time. Oral histories, focusing upon the "living memory" of Mi'kmaq community members, trace this "underground economy" of PEI Mi'kmaq traditional hunting and gathering. Collected stories might be from the time of being a small child and learning traditional Mi'kmaq ways from the grandparents, or personal stories of harvesting shellfish and medicinal plants as a family, right through to today.

The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI

On 2 April 2002, the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI (MCPEI) was formed as a not-for-profit Tribal Council and Provincial Territorial Organization (PTO) governed by a Board of Directors

¹¹ For more information about these and other oral histories collected, see *Document Index – Appendix C*

consisting of the Band Councils from Lennox Island and Abegweit First Nations. As a PTO, MCPEI serves as a provincial forum for the member First Nations on political and policy issues. As a Tribal Council, the organization provides advisory services to member First Nation Councils in five key areas: band governance, community planning, financial, economic development and technical services.

Since its inception, MCPEI has worked to build the necessary infrastructure to promote, protect and enhance all PEI Mi'kmaq. MCPEI is also the common forum and unified voice for the advancement of Treaty and Aboriginal rights for the Lennox Island and Abegweit First Nations. The MCPEI promotes knowledge and understanding of these rights, conducts research, develops and implements initiatives and builds relationships necessary to resolve issues in a cooperative manner. In recognition of these rights, MCPEI unifies the Abegweit First Nation and the Lennox Island First Nation in protecting, enhancing and strengthening the Mi'kmaq Nation in Prince Edward Island. They uphold and sustain the principles of unity, cooperation, partnership, trust, respect, and integrity.

One of the programs at the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI is the Integrated Resource Management Land Use Program, a “living memory” community mapping project done through interviews with members of the Lennox Island First Nation and the Abegweit First Nation. The questions asked during the interview run the gamut of traditional cultural Mi'kmaq activities and include some of the following:

1. Have you ever trapped beaver?
2. Did you ever collect clams, or quahogs, or mussels?
3. Do you know of any traditional routes, such as old footpaths or canoe routes and portages?
4. Do you know any places where spirit beings have lived, or giants or little people?
5. Do you know of any places where the Mi'kmaq have collected decorative plants like..., etc.¹²

The mapping and documentation of hunting grounds, fishing, cultural sites and other natural resources, provides the PEI Mi'kmaq with a preservation of knowledge for present and future generations. And ensures the skills and expertise used in the following of the traditional Mi'kmaq livelihood will not be forgotten.

¹² For a overall view of “living memory” Mi'kmaq land and resource use of PEI, see *Thematic Map of Mi'kmaq Land and Resource Use*

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