

MAHONE BAY MUSEUM

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Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia is located on unceded land in the territory of Mi'kma'ki. 'L'nuk,' meaning 'the people' in the Mi'kmaw language, have occupied and honoured these lands for over 10,000 years.

This text was developed by the staff of the Mahone Bay Museum with the help of local Mi'kmaw in order to create an exhibit in the Museum. We received many requests on-site regarding a copy of our exhibit text and have created this document as a result of those requests. Our goal was to decolonize our local history by providing a narrative from the perspective of the Mi'kmaq and encouraging visitors to learn about the history of the Mi'kmaq. If you would like to quote text from this document, please list the information as Courtesy of Mahone Bay Museum, Introduction to the History of the Mi'kmaq, July 2021 Exhibit. If you have any questions or comments about the information provided in this document, please get in touch with us at info@mahonebaymuseum.com

The Mi'kmaq

The Mi'kmaq (pronounced meeg·gm·ahh) were just one of the Indigenous groups living in what is now known as Canada. The Mi'kmaq allied with many of the other Indigenous groups and defended their settlements from other groups. The Mi'kmaq would later become part of a group of Algonquian-speaking peoples known as the Buduswagan (the Wabanaki Confederacy), who allied against the Iroquois Confederacy.

The Mi'kmaq were hunters, gatherers, and nature-oriented people who traveled all over Mi'kma'ki (pronounced meeg·gm·aa·gi). They knew how to hunt, fish, and harvest food, how to build shelters, and manufacture a wide variety of tools, weapons, containers, canoes, snowshoes, clothes, and other implements from natural resources.

The Mi'kmaq relied on the variety of natural resources that were only available seasonally and therefore moved around Mi'kma'ki to harvest those resources and track the migratory and spawning habits of animals. By spending warmer months near the coast, they had access to marine resources. They then moved further inland during the fall and winter to hunt animals with harpoons, bows and arrows, and snares that they made. They made everything they needed, such as hooks and needles from bone, containers and pots from birch bark, kettles and baskets from wood. Mi'kmaq built birch-bark canoes that were used for short voyages through rivers and lakes as well as larger sea-going vessels that were large enough to carry their families and their possessions across long distances. Mi'kmaq settlements were scattered about the bays and rivers for easier transportation access by canoe, which is where they first encountered European travellers arriving to Mi'kma'ki.

Life in Mi'kma'ki: The Arrival of the French Acadians

By the late 1500s, the Portuguese and French began to arrive to Mi'kma'ki by ship, resulting in early contact with Mi'kmaq living on the coast. Thanks to the Mi'kmaw belief that land cannot be owned or possessed by anyone, the French (later known as Acadians) began to settle the area they called Acadie in 1605 with permission from the Mi'kmaq. They relied heavily on the Mi'kmaq for their knowledge of the geography to navigate Mi'kma'ki. The Mi'kmaq traded animal furs and pelts for manufactured goods from the Portuguese and French, such as copper pots, beads, ribbons, mirrors, and alcohol. Many Portuguese and French fur-traders used deception to receive more pelts by telling the Mi'kmaq that these objects were very expensive and rare. This was the beginning of a misleading, but friendly relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the French, which the Mi'kmaq later recognized and maintained a more distant political allyship.

The Mi'kmaw women were responsible for important tasks and held in the highest honour as the *Givers of Life* to the next generation. As leaders, the tasks of Mi'kmaw women included choosing the campsite, transporting the wikuom, also known as wigwam (meaning "house" in the Abenaki language), carrying and skinning game, caring for children and elders, making clothing, moccasins, snowshoes, and more. In contrast to the Mi'kmaw beliefs, Europeans considered women inferior to men; therefore, when French Acadian settlers arrived, they refused to collaborate with female Mi'kmaw leaders and the Mi'kmaq began putting more males in leadership roles.

Each Mi'kmaw village had a leader, later known as a Chief, which likely was a term introduced by the French word for chef, or leader of the kitchen. The local Chief of each village then answered to the District Chief. Mi'kma'ki is divided into seven districts. The present-day districts include Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, the Gaspé Peninsula of Québec, and parts of Newfoundland and New Brunswick. Mahone Bay is in the district of Sipekne'katik. The District Chief system then evolved into the 'Mi'kmaq Grand Council', likely in response to contact with the Europeans. A Grand Chief, or *Kji-Saqmaw* in Mi'kmaw (pronounced ûk·chee sahh·m·ow), is elected from the group of District Chiefs or based on the hereditary title.

Chief Membertou was the Kji-Saqmaw (Grand Chief) during the time of initial contact with Acadian settlers. Without his willingness to share Mi'kmaw knowledge and resources, the French Acadians would not have survived. The Mi'kmaq taught the Acadians about the environment and hunting. Although the Mi'kmaq openly shared their skills and customs, participation in traditional Mi'kmaw culture was never mandatory for the French. Meanwhile, at Acadian settlements, Mi'kmaw children were forced to attend French schools and learn Acadian culture, to replace their Mi'kmaw language and culture.

Between 1610-1616, Jesuit Missionary *Paul Je Jeune* visited Nova Scotia and stayed at Port Royal of Acadie. The goal of French missionaries was to catholicize and baptize the Mi'kmaq. These religious conversions quickly replaced Mi'kmaw traditions with French-Catholic traditions. Once a Mi'kmaw was baptized, they were no longer able to participate in Mi'kmaw ceremonies or be buried following Mi'kmaw tradition, separating them from their people and culture. When the French arrived, they also brought many diseases across the sea, which were later contracted by the Mi'kmaq. After suffering from tragic sickness, the Mi'kmaq began to promote multiple partners to increase their population. The forced adoption of the monogamous European marital system resulted in a drastic population loss in Mi'kmaw communities. European baptism, marriage, and burial minimized the strength of Mi'kmaw communities.

Life in Mi'kma'ki: The Arrival of the British

The 1713 Treaty of Utrecht between the French and British was the first political disruption of Mi'kmaq-Acadian relations. When the British began attempting to settle in Mi'kma'ki, conflict erupted between the French and the British. The French used their relationship with the Mi'kmaq to encourage them to defend Mi'kma'ki by attacking the British. Eventually the French were overwhelmed by the British and in the 1713 treaty between France and Britain gave the possession of Unama'kik (Cape Breton) and Siknikt (New Brunswick) to the French, and gave most of Mi'kma'ki/Acadie to the British. This broke the agreement between the Mi'kmaq and the French Acadians who had previously promised to protect the Mi'kmaw land from bureaucratic ownership. Although this was disloyal of the Acadians, this treaty was dominated by the British, who had more militia than the French by this time and used this as leverage throughout the treaty negotiations. This lead to the French signing the treaty to try to prevent further conflict even though the land had never been theirs. Most of the Acadians retreated to Cape Breton and New Brunswick, leaving the Mi'kmaq to deal with the fallout of the treaty and the British claim to the land.

The first attempt to mend the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and British was the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1726. This treaty was drafted after the Dummer's War to end the conflict between the New England British and the Wabanaki and was later adapted for use in Mi'kma'ki. Between 1725 and 1779, a total of six Peace and Friendship Treaties were attempted between the British and Wabanaki Nation. The original draft sought after the prevention of conflict; later, the treaties included the establishment of trade and the ability to 'possess lands,' but not to own them. The idea of possessing land was already understood by the French who did not desire exclusive rights to land—their system allowed for overlapping claims in which the land could be shared with the Mi'kmaq. In these treaties, the Mi'kmaq did not surrender rights to land or resources.

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Even with the treaties in place, the British continued to claim the land, thinking this would not disrupt their newly treatise friendship with the Mi'kmaq. Instead of improving the relationship with the British, this treaty, and the British not honouring the agreement, strengthened the bond between Mi'kmaq and Acadians, some of whom had begun to intermarry.

Later in 1744, after years of the British stealing the land, conflicts between the British and French continued. The New England colonies worried that Nova Scotia would be given back to France in the next treaty and pushed the British government to begin developing settlements in mainland Nova Scotia to attempt to claim the land as theirs. Throughout this planning and surveying for British settlements in Mi'kma'ki, no thought was given to the Mi'kmaq and their right to the land and resources.

When the British began to issue land grants to British subjects on Mi'kmaw land, the Mi'kmaq began peaceful protests. However, the British government went ahead with plans to develop a new naval centre at K'jipuktuk (present day Halifax) in 1749 without the consent of the Mi'kmaq Nation. Halifax was to act as a trading post and ship landing, to counter the French Louisbourg fortress (prior to its siege) and to better control Nova Scotia from the Mi'kmaq and Acadians. Before contact, the Mi'kmaq used K'jipuktuk (Halifax) for settlement, trading, ceremonies, ritual gatherings, ocean access, and moose hunting. The Mi'kmaq considered the British Settlement at K'jipuktuk as a breach of The Peace and Friendship Treaties. The removal, renaming, and rebuilding of Mi'kmaw representation at K'jipuktuk could not be compared to the friendly 'overlapping claims' and 'land possession' previously shared with the French.

Hoping to secure control over the land, starting with Halifax, and reconfirm loyalty to the British Crown, Nova Scotia's Governor Edward Cornwallis invited the Wabanaki Nations to sign a new treaty in 1749. However, most Mi'kmaw leaders refused to attend the peace talks in protest of the governor's development of Halifax at K'jipuktuk earlier that year. After realizing that the Mi'kmaq were not interested in signing any land ownership of Mi'kma'ki to the Crown, Governor Edward Cornwallis began to advocate the genocide of Mi'kmaq to forcibly remove them from the land. The Edward Cornwallis Scalping Proclamation of 1749 was a law that stated that the British government would pay a reward of ten guineas in exchange for a Mi'kmaw held prisoner or for the scalp of a Mi'kmaw killed, including children. Ten guineas in Canadian currency today is approximately \$3,805. Cornwallis had budgeted £39,000 for the first year, but he spent £174,000. Today, this equates to accidentally over-spending by \$51 million. Cornwallis also paid the reward if people showed up with scalps of Acadians, claiming that "they are the same nuisance." A group of vicious mercenaries were also hired; John Gorham and about 50 of his Gorham Rangers were paid by Cornwallis to scalp or kill as many Mi'kmaq as possible. A year later, Gorham convinced Cornwallis to

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increase the reward of ten guineas to fifty, making a single Mi'kmaw scalp reward what would be about \$20,000 Canadian dollars today.

This was only the beginning of the genocide. To support the creation of the "Halifax" British settlement at K'jipuktuk, the British government began recruiting new British subjects to settle on land in E'se'katik (place of clams, pronounced "eh-say-ga-teeg"), which the British called Lunenburg. This area was selected to forcefully expel Mi'kmaq and French Acadians living on the resourceful coastal land. The Mi'kmaq began to defend their land with attacks on British settlements, which was encouraged by the Acadians, who hoped that the British would leave so they could stay in Acadie.

The conflict did not slow down the British plans and they developed a recruitment program to bring what they called "Foreign Protestants", primarily farmers, from the Germanic States, a small area near France called Montbeliard, Switzerland, and the Netherlands and offered them free land in a new British settlement in E'se'katik (Lunenburg) area. Protestants were chosen because their beliefs aligned more with the British Anglican faith rather than the Catholic Acadians. In fact, many Protestants were leaving Europe to escape persecution from the Catholic Church.

The British had hoped that placing over 2,000 British subjects at a new settlement would develop into enough successful farm land to feed their Halifax naval centre while also forcing the Mi'kmaq and Acadians out of the area. The Mi'kmaq and French continued to fight back after the settlement in Lunenburg was developed in 1753 and in 1755 the British deported the majority of the Acadians in an attempt to end the Mi'kmaq and French alliance. The deportation was mostly successful but some Acadians were able to hide from the British with the help from the Mi'kmaq.

War between the British and the French, with the Mi'kmaq in the middle, continued. The British continued claiming the land as theirs and gave land to more British subjects, including the Loyalists, colonists from the 13 Colonies who had been loyal to the British in the American Revolution, and German Hessian soldiers who arrived after the American Revolution. The British also continued using genocidal tactics, which included killing, serious bodily or mental harm, intentionally worsening group life conditions, and preventing the transference of culture to the next generation. They soon heavily out-numbered the Mi'kmaq and took over the land of Mi'kma'ki, displacing Mi'kmaq to small areas of land set aside for Mi'kmaq reservations and forcing Mi'kmaw children to attend residential schools far away from their parents. Thankfully, the Mi'kmaq have survived, are recovering their lost culture and language, and are still here today.