

The "New England Indians" in the Western Great Lakes Region

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There are scattered references in late 17th and early 18th century French documents to the presence of various eastern Algonquian groups in the western Great Lakes region. These Indians, usually referred to as "New England Indians" or "Loups" by the French, were Abnaki, Sokoki, Mahican, and Minisink, as well as other Algonquian-speaking groups which cannot now be identified from the names given in the French sources. During the late 17th century, all of these groups inhabited a territory near the eastern seaboard which extended from Maine in the north to the headwaters of the Delaware River in the south (5).

By mid 16th century the Indian groups of the New England coast were carrying on an extensive fur trade with Europeans and the heavy demand for beaver was causing the rapid extinction of this animal along the eastern seaboard. As early as 1616 Indians from New England had penetrated westward as far as the Great Lakes to obtain furs (9), and the Abnaki had encountered the Miami Indians (probably then located in Indiana and southern Michigan) sometime prior to 1680. Robert Cavalier, *Sieur de La Salle*, states in 1681 that the Miami called all Indians from New England, regardless of their tribal affiliation, Abnaki. According to the Miami, the Abnaki were the first Indian group from the eastern seaboard to contact them when they came west to trade for furs. Also according to the Miami, all the Indians from New England spoke closely related dialects. The trade excursion of the Abnaki to the Miami evidently occurred some time prior to 1681, but *La Salle* gives no precise date for it. It is probably due to such early trade expeditions by eastern Indians that European trade articles are found on protohistoric sites such as *Madisonville* in southwestern Ohio.

During the winter of 1680-1681 *La Salle* found at the mouth of *St. Joseph River*, Michigan, 20 or 30 Indians accompanied by their wives and children. *La Salle* notes that these Indians were from "various tribes among those who are at war with the English." (It should be noted that *King Philip's War* between the English and the Indians of New England had ended three years before.) According to *La Salle*, some of these Indians were from "Boston, some were *Moraiganés* [*Mahican*], *Anhanaganés* [identification unknown], *Mahiganés* [*Mahican*], and *Minissens* [*Minisink*]." They had been wandering for some years with no fixed dwelling place. Not wishing to settle near any French settlement because of the scarcity of beavers and also because of the difficulty of making clearings in the northern forests, they intended to hunt beaver in present-day Indiana or Ohio. Then they were either going to amalgamate with the Iroquois or to find some good land elsewhere to settle on. *La Salle* was able to convince this

group to settle at a Miami village located near the St. Joseph-Kankakee portage (near present-day South Bend, Indiana), pointing out to them the fertility of the soil, the abundance of beavers and buffalo in the region, and also the probability in the near future of cheap trade goods and a supply of horses and other draft animals as soon as he (La Salle) opened up a trade route to the Gulf of Mexico *via* the Mississippi River. The Loups, as La Salle called these Indians, were happy to stay since the Kankakee-St. Joseph drainage area was rich in game, and the Miami were glad to adopt the New England Indians since they would replace two cabins of Miami who had been killed by the Iroquois during the winter of 1680-1681. After the completion of the adoption ceremony at the Miami village near the portage, the Loups returned with La Salle down the St. Joseph to his fort at the mouth of the river, where they planted their crops. Exactly what crops were planted we do not know; it is possible that some European vegetables as well as corn, squash or pumpkin and beans were planted.

In order to increase his settlement, La Salle proposed to the New England Indians that they send a present of 50 beaver skins to each of the tribes they had originated from, and invite these tribes to come west to join them at their location near present-day Benton Harbor, Michigan. The New England Indians agreed to do this and sent two of their number, Ouabach and Amabanso, east to issue the invitation (7). Evidently this mission was accomplished during the summer of 1681 for we find that Amabanso returned to the St. Joseph River region in time to accompany La Salle in his exploratory trip to the mouth of the Mississippi River in 1681-1682. Thirteen other New England Indians were also hired by La Salle as hunters for his exploring party. Some of these Indians were accompanied by their wives (10 in all) and by three children. The tribal affiliations of some of these women suggests where this group of Indians may have been wandering before going west; there were three Nipissing (an Algonquian group then living at Lake Nipissing in Canada), one Ojibwa (Chippewa), one Huron, and five Abnaki, Sokoki or Mahigans. Besides hunting for the French, the New England Indians also constructed elm bark canoes for use by the party on the Illinois and Mississippi rivers (8, 10).

After the return of La Salle's party from the Mississippi venture in the summer of 1682, the New England Indians evidently remained associated with the Miami. In 1687, after the Miami had moved from the St. Joseph River to the vicinity of the Illinois Indian village of Kaskaskia and the French post of Ft. St. Louis on the Illinois River near the present Utica, Illinois, Henri Tonty, La Salle's lieutenant, was able to gather a few "Loup" warriors to accompany a large group of Illinois and Miami for the mass French-led Indian attack on the Iroquois (6).

However, two years before this (in 1685) Nicolas Perrot, French official and trader then stationed on the Mississippi River near present-day Trempeleau, Wisconsin, encountered near Green Bay "fifty Sokokis and Loups, from those who had been with Monsieur de La Salle in his voyage of discovery [of 1681-1682] . . . who had retired to the bay

[Green Bay] in order to hunt beavers there" (1). It should be pointed out that La Salle took 18 Indians in all with him down the Mississippi and only 14 of them were "New England" or "Loup" Indians. It is possible that some of La Salle's group were included in the party encountered by Perrot. However, from statements made by Perrot and Tonty in 1687, it is evident that there were at least two groups of New England Indians in the western Great Lakes region. One group was associated with the Miami and Illinois as mentioned above and the other, residing in a Mascouten village in Wisconsin, was distinctly anti-French and pro-Iroquois. This group shortly thereafter returned east (2).

Thirteen years later, in 1700, both Mohegan and Sokokis wintered in the vicinity of St. Joseph River in association with the same Miami group that had adopted them in 1681. Shortly thereafter the Miami moved to Detroit and the New England Indians evidently moved with them, for in 1706 we find that many of the Miami as well as the "Loups" left Detroit (3, 4).

This is the last reference found in the literature which associates any of the New England Indians with the Miami. It is entirely possible that after this date the New England Indians were completely assimilated by the Miami and lost their identity as a separate group. It is also possible that after this date the New England Indians lost their function as middlemen fur traders. In 1680, the date of first recorded extensive White penetration into the region, trade was carried on largely by various Indians bringing trade goods into the area from European posts to the east and north. However, after the establishment of near-by French trading posts, the Indians of Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois became aware that they too could carry on direct trade with the Europeans and no longer needed to rely on Indian middlemen such as the New England Indians earlier had been.

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