

1 Aboriginal Homeland: millennia of occupation and use by the ancestors of First Nations peoples

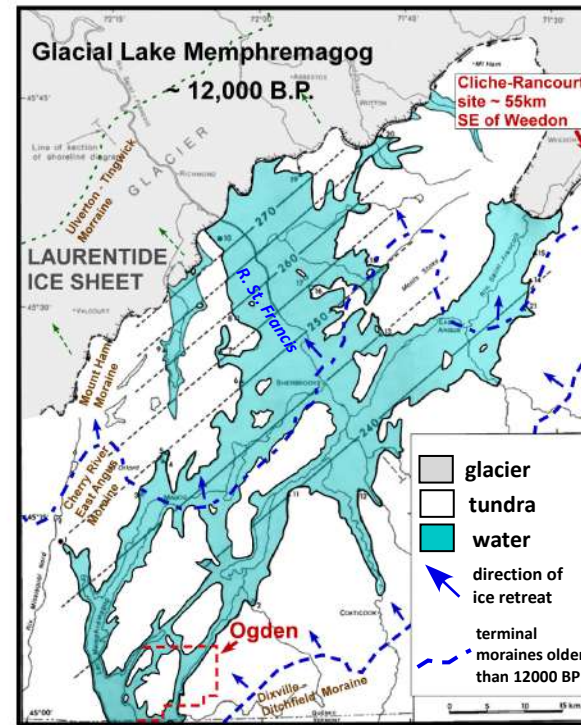
contribution by Paul Carignan et al.

First glimpses of an emerging landscape

The ancestors of today's First Nations peoples have lived on the lands surrounding Lake Memphremagog for millennia. Significant **Palaeoindian Stage** archaeological discoveries (see Table below) have been reported from the *Reagan site* overlooking the Missisquoi River near East Highgate in northwestern Vermont, and more recently another **Palaeoindian** site has been excavated at the *Cliche-Rancourt site* in the Lake Megantic region. These locations were occupied between 10,000 and 12,000 years BP (Before Present) when the region was emerging from the last glaciation and was an arctic tundra landscape.

At this time the only recognizable geography would have been the summits of the larger massifs, like Mont Orford and Owl's Head.

At least 40% of what is now the Municipality of Ogden would have been submerged under a vast glacial lake whose waters were both fed and dammed by the continental ice sheet that was gradually retreating northward. The land exposed by the retreating ice was populated mostly by tundra sedges and grasses with only local dwarf birches and willows rising a few feet from the frigid soil. This cold but vegetated landscape could support caribou, muskox and perhaps mammoth, and in turn, these animals, along with fish and birds, nourished the first human inhabitants.



A reconstruction of glacial Lake Memphremagog, circa 12,000 BP. Shown on the map are the boundaries of Ogden, the position of the edge of the ice sheet, and the position of some of the terminal glacial moraines, which are linear gravel beds that trace the former position of the retreating ice sheet. Also shown is the general direction of the Cliche Rancourt site (off the map), discussed in the text.

Glacial Lake Memphremagog drained towards the south. Note present day outline of lake and St. Francis River.

At right a Table of Archaeological Stages and Periods recognized for northeastern North America



Fragments of Palaeoindian fluted spear points from Cliche-Rancourt site, near Lake Megantic. Photo credit Claude Chapdelaine

Stage	Sub-Stage or Period	Time Interval Covered (years BP - before present)	Example Cultures & Traditions with dates *putative date for occupation of Lake Memphremagog region only	Archaeological Sites in Eastern Townships or Vermont	Known from Lake Memphremagog Watershed
Palaeoindian	Early	20,000 - 10,000 yr BP	Clovis Culture 15,500 - 13,000 yr BP	Reagan Site, East Highgate, VT Cliche-Rancourt Site, Megantic, QC	NO
	Middle				
	Late		Plano Culture 11,000 - 9,000 yr BP		
Archaic	Early	10,000 - 8,000 yr BP		East Angus Site, QC	NO
	Middle	8,000 - 5,000 yr BP			
	Late	5,000 - 3,000 yr BP			
Woodland	Early Woodland	3,000 - 2,400 yr BP		Pointe Merry Site, QC	YES
	Middle Woodland	2,400 - 1,500 yr BP	Melocheville Tradition	BhFa-3 (Magog River) Site, QC	YES
	Late Woodland	1,500 - 1,000 yr BP		single whole ceramic pot, from waters of Lake Memphremagog	YES
Historic	pre-Columbian	1,000 - 500 yr BP	St. Lawrence Iroquoian 700 - 420 yr BP	BgFg-1 Bilodeau Site, Pike River, QC BgFg-6 Florent-Gosselin Site, Missisquoi Bay, QC	NO
	post-Columbian	500 - 0 yr BP	Sokakis-Abenakis 370 - 0 yr BP	VT-GI-26/32 Bahannon Site, Swanton, VT Odamak fort site	Highly Probable

The people of the **Palaeoindian** were nomadic, and came into this area over time, pursuing big game animals, and opportunistically exploring new territory. The caribou, then as now, would have migrated seasonally. Their human hunters would have followed the herds as their migration patterns evolved.

Due to our acidic soils, little is preserved of these ancient peoples apart from characteristic lithic artefacts, such as Clovis-like bifacial fluted spear points.

Palaeoindian scene: hunting caribou

Sketch drawn by Gael Eakin

A forest homeland

As the climate changed in the **Late Palaeoindian Period**, the region became a boreal forest of spruce, fir and tamarack. Big mammals adapted to the tundra moved north in concert with the treeline.

Glacial lakes and streams stabilized. Fish, moose, deer and small game, migrating birds and their eggs, along with a rich variety of berries, became the predominant source of nutrition for the peoples of the **Late Palaeoindian Period**.

Up until relatively recently sites datable to the subsequent **Archaic Stage** had not been found in the Townships. However, archaeologists have now reported findings from a site near East Angus that is dated as **Early Archaic** (8,000 to 10,000 BP), and that have strong affinities to material from Archaic cultural sites along the Gulf of Maine, suggesting that trade between the two regions had already been established.



Sketch by James Murray.

In the **Early Archaic** the climate became milder still, localized hardwood forests developed in our region with an even greater diversity of game for the hunt.

Archaic axes, including one held by the Colby-Curtis Museum, but whose date remains uncertain.



Stone weights for fish nets started to be used. Archaeologists see these changes also reflected in the evolution of different stone-point styles and the development of wood-working tools. Stone axes, adzes and gouges have been found throughout the Memphremagog and southern Quebec area, but commonly in isolation, and rarely from undisturbed (and hence datable) sites, but nonetheless bear a strong resemblance to known **Archaic Stage** artefacts.

The stronger and larger hardwood trees, such as maple, were cut for wooden tools and utensils as well as impressive dugout canoes used for transportation and fishing on the lakes and large rivers. Dugout canoes probably developed in the **Late Archaic Period**, about 4,000 years ago. At this time inhabitants of the Lake Memphremagog region would have lived in small family or clan-related bands, moving campsites often in pursuit of whatever food resource was seasonally available. Semi-permanent villages were not established, and this explains the scattered nature of **Archaic Period** archaeological finds. Nonetheless, certain advantageous sites would have been temporarily re-occupied over and over.



Above, stone gouge from the Archaic. Image courtesy of Louise Abbott. Artefact held by the Brome County Museum.

Archaic Stage scene: net fishing, dugout canoe making with axe and gouge.

Sketch drawn by Gael Eakin



Maize, ceramics, and the bow and arrow

The **Woodland Stage** starts about 3,000 years ago and continued up to the first contact with European trade goods in the mid-1500s. Major archaeological finds, particularly along the Magog River, are considered to represent the **Late Middle Woodland Period**. The material culture, particularly ceramics, suggests ties to both the *Pointe du Buisson* site (Melocheville tradition) in the Montreal region, and various sites at the eastern end of Lake Ontario in both Ontario and New York (representing the Point Peninsula tradition).

Material culture and linguistic affinities do not necessarily coincide, but as both the Melocheville and Point Peninsula traditions are considered *Proto-Iroquoian* a reasonable hypothesis would be that the southeastern Quebec groups, whose ceramics are stylistically similar, were also *Proto-Iroquoian*.

During **Woodland Stage** we see the first use of pottery, an important development for cooking and storage of food. Techniques in agriculture were learned from southern native groups through contact and trade. First Nations in the northeast were known to grow the Three-Sisters (corn/maize, beans and squash) as early as 2400 BP.

An extraordinarily rare complete ceramic corded-ware vessel dating from the Late Woodland Period (about 1,500 to 1,000 years BP) or slightly more recent and recovered intact from the waters of Lake Memphremagog. Brought to the surface by the Baird and Spencer families. Musée de la nature et science, Sherbrooke.



The high nutritional value of the three sisters allowed less hunting and gathering activity for survival and a more stable village life. These additions to the food source resulted in larger and more permanent settlements. However, some groups also continued to move camp according to the seasons and game availability.

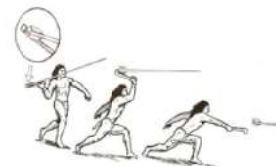


Native peoples of the northern mixed forests also made use of maple trees to produce maple syrup and sugar and passed on this knowledge to the settlers.

Another influence from the south was the use of built-up mounds of soil and gravel, forming distinct ceremonial sites and places for burials. One such mound was at Merry Point in Magog. An impressive polished stone in the shape of a bird (aviform) was found in a red ochre burial at this place. This artefact is dated to the **Early Woodland Period**. Other fragments of birdstones have been found in southern Quebec but this one is unique in that it is complete. The drilled holes suggest that it was used as an atlatl weight.



This exquisite birdstone was found in a burial mound at Merry Point. By the contact period, atlatls were entirely superseded by the bow and arrow in the northeast, and no European firsthand accounts record their use. photo credit Eric Gaillon, Musée de la nature et science, Sherbrooke.



Perhaps the most important technologies to develop in the **Woodland Stage** were the bow and arrow, snowshoe, and the birch bark canoe. The first was well-adapted to the pursuit of game in forested terrain and the second greatly enhanced winter hunting and travel. The third represented a revolution in transportation, being light, maneuverable, and both quickly built and easily repaired.



A variety of habitation styles used later by the Abenaki people were recorded from the European contact period, and were utilitarian, long-lived designs. These included the dome and A-frame wigwams used for seasonal camps and the larger shaputuan and longhouses used in more permanent settlements.

sketches on this page by Gael Eakin



Historic Stage: A post-contact mystery

When Jacques Cartier visited the St. Lawrence River (1534, 1535, 1540) the valley was populated with a people referred to by paleoanthropologists and historians as the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, distributed in six major areas, including both Hochelaga (Montreal) and Stadacona (Quebec City) mentioned specifically by Cartier. Of particular note are occupation sites just to the northeast of Lake Champlain, being relatively close to our own region. No mention is made historically, as to what tribes existed to the south and east of the St. Lawrence in the St. Francis River watershed. Isolated St. Lawrence Iroquoian artefacts have been found in outlying areas including near Lake Memphremagog.

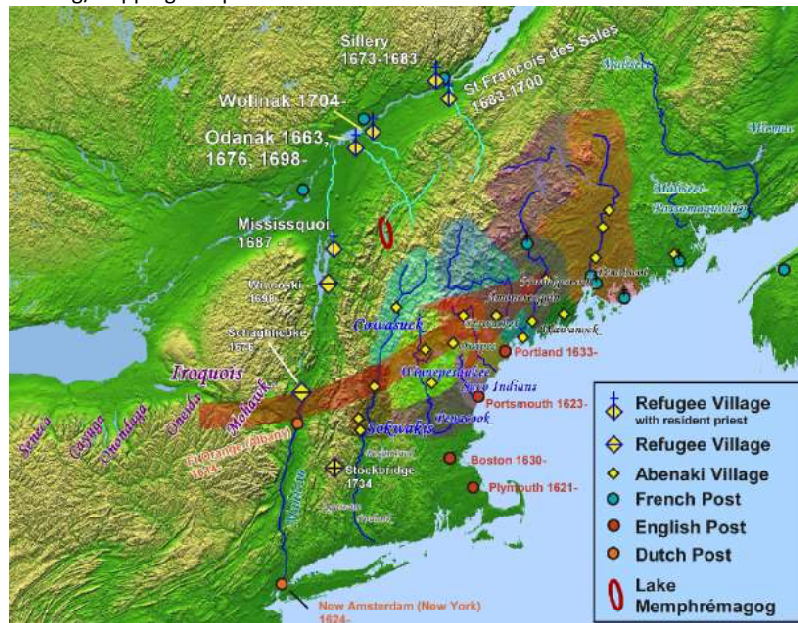
By the time Champlain visited the Montreal area in 1603, the St. Lawrence Iroquois had disappeared as a distinct people, and the St. Lawrence River valley was devoid of any large settlements.

The occupation of the Memphremagog watershed territory in the immediate pre-contact, Late Woodland Period and the early Historic Stage remains a mystery, as no significant well-dated occupations of this period have been discovered.

Forced migrations

If our Eastern Townships region in this period was largely unpopulated, this had changed markedly by the second half of the 17th century. English and Iroquois aggression drove a northward migration of Algonquian-speaking peoples, including Mahicans, Sokwakis, and Abenakis, into the territory starting as early as 1628.

By 1677, the general uprising by many Algonquian-speaking tribes in southern New England (King Phillips War), had been brutally crushed by English colonists and their Native allies. As villages were burned and stores of maize destroyed, the Abenaki and Sokwaki tribes in this region fled north to seek refuge with the French. Temporary refugee villages were established at several places, including Odanak (near Pierreville) and Wôlinak (Becancour), and by 1700 these villages had become continuously occupied. The villagers were Catholicized, had a resident Jesuit priest, and because of their faith and common enemies, were politically allied with the French. The inhabitants of these new villages continued to have communication with their kinsmen in southern New England and the canoe routes and portages in the upper reaches of the St. Francis watershed (including Lake Memphremagog) became well-known and well-established. The territory also became an important hunting and fishing resource area, and the shores of Lake Memphremagog became sites for numerous seasonal fishing and hunting/trapping camps.



Large scale migration of Abenakis to refugee villages in the north due to English and Iroquois (red arrow) aggression. Original Abenakis homelands shown as coloured regions. Western Abenakis tribes shown in blue.

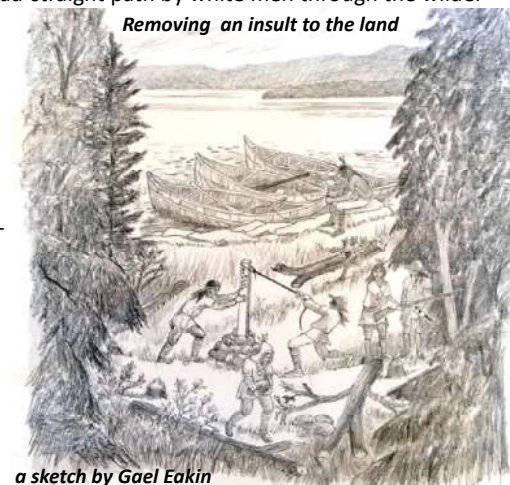
As these refugee villages became permanently established, the alliances with the French became stronger, and warriors from the villages of Odanak and Wôlinak became increasingly involved in the struggles between the French and British. In New England, the warriors from Odanak were referred to as the St. Francis Indians. They gained a fearsome reputation. Their raids against New England settlements in the broad period from 1690 to 1760 resulted in over 600 English captives being brought north. Often the captives were adopted into the tribe. These raids, and the threat of raids, very successfully kept the English settlement frontier at a standstill for 70 years.

Such hostilities resulted in retribution, and on October 4th 1759, a sizeable force of 142 colonial rangers and provincial militia burnt Odanak to the ground. It is interesting to note that the habitations in Odanak at the time of its destruction were all log dwellings, enclosed by a palisade. The Abenakis in this period were very familiar with colonial agriculture, but maize remained their critical crop, and seasonal forays to hunting and fishing territories were still a vital component to their food security.

A flood of settlers

Following the Conquest, and except for a brief pause during the American Revolution, peace brought with it a flood of northerly directed colonial settlements. Resistance by the Abenakis was futile, but local demonstrations were certainly made. For example, when the unscrupulous Ira Allen tried to wrest the area around Missisquoi Bay from the Abenakis, in the period 1786 to about 1796, confrontations between the resident Missisquoi natives and the would-be settlers were numerous, acrimonious, and sometimes violent. In 1772 the boundary between the old province of New York and the new province of Quebec was surveyed, following the 45th parallel, passing through traditional Abenaki territory. This arbitrary carving of a dead-straight path by white men through the wilderness, a pointless path that came from nowhere, and ended up nowhere, must have been seen as ludicrous by the Abenakis. However, they most certainly saw it as a sign of the eventual loss of their territory and sovereignty.

When the surveyors erected a post to help mark the line on the eastern shoreline of Lake Memphremagog (Ogden), the Abenakis promptly tore it down.

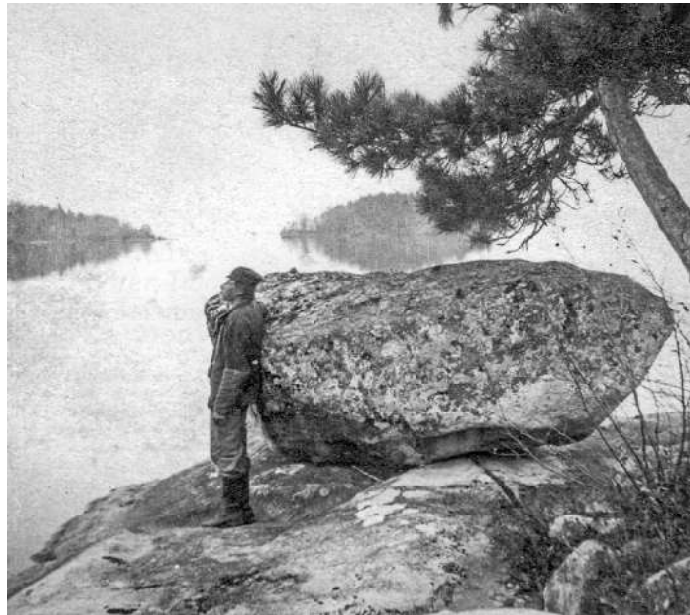


a sketch by Gael Eakin

Further displacement in the 19th century: adaptation and resilience

The settlement onslaught was unrelenting. The fate of the Abenakis in Vermont and southeastern Quebec during this period of unprecedented upheaval is poorly known. Many migrated north to the settlements of Odanak and Wôlinak, but others survived in Vermont and New Hampshire through adaptation to, and to be sure, assimilation into the newly dominant white society.

When the Eastern Townships were formally opened up for settlement in 1792, the Abenakis were again gradually displaced. Direct conflict was rare but the early settlers tended to dam the fish spawning streams to build mills (depleting the fish stocks in the Lake), and they hunted unstintingly the deer and moose of the area for their own needs. The clearings being cut soon truncated the primal forest and by 1850 about 50 percent of the forest had disappeared in our immediate area along with the game and fur-bearing animals it could support. Soon there was little reason for the Indigenous people to return to the Lake Memphremagog region, except to find employment as guides or to sell their handicrafts. The rapidly changing landscape and resource availability in the watershed, led to a controversial decision in 1830 by many in Odanak to shift their hunting and trapping to the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. As a consequence their visitations to this, their traditional territory, became increasingly infrequent.



A young Abenaki man standing beside balance rock on Long Island, Lake Memphremagog, circa 1860. Image courtesy of Matthew Farfan Collection.

With cruel irony, the Abenakis were soon land poor in their own homeland, and were forced to petition the government for a grant of land, in line with all the white settlers. Chief Francis Annance and others from Odanak were granted 8,000 acres, a portion of the new Township of Durham, by Lt. Governor Robert Shore Milnes in 1805. Even the lands around the mission villages were diminished. During the War of 1812, when the Abenaki warriors were off fighting with distinction for the British, English-speaking speculators took over the majority of the Wôlinak mission's lands. Upon their return, the Abenaki warriors threatened to assert their territorial rights by force of arms, but in the end were only able to keep a small part of the original mission territory.

A 20th Century connection to Ogden

Somewhat remarkably, an Abenakis presence in Ogden remained at least into the 1930s. Bea Nelson of Newport reports that her great aunt Rosella Toleman (née Cole) had a cottage in Cedarville, and Rosella's sister Edla Longeway, lived in Lineboro. They were Abenakis.



Berry picking with great-grandma Edla Longeway (née Cole), at Cedarville. The Cole sisters were Abenakis. Courtesy of Bea Nelson

Current status

In the 2020s there were only a few hundred individuals in the Townships who openly self-identified as descendants of First Nations peoples, and most of these individuals would have Abenaki heritage. In Vermont after decades of research and presentations to the state, four tribes were finally recognized: Nulhegan, Elnu, Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi and the Koasek Traditional Band. In Quebec, north of the Townships, approximately 400 Abenakis live in the community of Odanak, and 200 in Wôlinak, collectively these two reservation communities form the heart of the Waban-Aki Nation.

Traces of aboriginal occupation in Ogden?

Apart from the scattered projectile points found along the shoreline no confirmed archaeological sites representing ancestral First Nations cultures have yet been found in Ogden, but almost certainly undiscovered sites exist.

At all times respect any native artefacts that might be found. They represent our collective heritage as Canadians. If an artefact or site truly has value from an archaeological perspective, a professional investigation in consultation with First Nations representatives, will ensure this heritage is honoured and its inherent knowledge shared.