

WABANAKI HOMELAND AND THE NEW STATE OF MAINE:

The 1820 Journal and Plans of Survey of Joseph Treat

Micah A. Pawling, Editor
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On 3 March 1820 Maine separated from Massachusetts. As a new state, two of its most pressing issues were the disputed northeastern boundary with Canada and Indian relations within its jurisdiction. Seeking knowledge about quality of the land, extent of timber resources, trespass (from Canada) on state land and individuals who might serve as land agents, Maine's first Governor, William King, commissioned Joseph Treat to conduct a survey of northeastern Maine and adjacent Canada. Treat and companions including his guide John Neptune, Lieutenant Governor of the Penobscot Tribe, covered over 500 miles between 27 September and 20 November 1820. His detailed report to King remained unedited and collecting dust in Maine's Land Office files. The work has recently been edited and annotated by Micah Pawling who also wrote an informative introduction. Pawling places Treat's work within the broad geopolitical and cultural setting of the early nineteenth century focusing on boundary disagreements and European/Indian relationships.

The 66 page introduction provides an excellent framework for understanding the critical need to assess conditions in the disputed frontier region of Maine which was also the Wabanaki homeland. Wabanaki people include the Penobscots. Pauling reviews the Indian/European relationship in eastern and northern Maine while Massachusetts controlled the area and examines the transition of state responsibility to Maine. Treat and Neptune were both involved with the 1820 treaty between the Penobscot Indian Nation and Maine. Business relationships between the two men predate treaty negotiations. Property rights along the Penobscot River around the Penobscot Nation settlement of Old Town were a point of contention. This discussion coupled with the full text of the 1820 treaty (appendix) set the tone for a delicate but productive working relationship between Treat and Neptune.

Upon accepting the survey task, Treat recruits Neptune as his guide. Neptune had traveled extensively within the Penobscot, Allagash and upper St. John River systems. By late September, Treat had crew, provisions and plans in hand and departs Bangor. He travels by canoe, makes detailed field notes and drafts maps for each segment of the trip. These maps and associated notes describe the terrain from a water route through the region. The Wabanaki and later the Europeans viewed the landscape from this perspective. Until the arrival of float planes and timber company logging roads of the twentieth century, this area of Maine was largely traversed by water (canoe routes and log drives).

Pawling's transcription of Treat's report is arranged with a trip segment map on the left with the facing page devoted to notes about the locale. The first half of the journey, Bangor to the St. John River, north is at the bottom of each map. Once the route turns south, north is moved to the top of the maps. In addition to remembering this cartographic pattern, I found the use of a large scale atlas of Maine most helpful in following Treat's route (DeLorme 2008).

Treat records European settlement north from Bangor and notes that the last whites are in Howland, about thirty miles up the Penobscot River. From that point to the Madawaska settlement in the St. John Valley, he found no European presence. Provisions and water levels are the primary concern in the early phase of the journey with ice conditions being critical considerations in mid-November.

Land quality is assessed in terms of intervals along the waterways and timber varieties. Treat appraises land as good if it supports hardwoods while softwoods are associated with poor ground. Lumber value is measured by varieties and size of stands. Potential mill sites and mineral resources are recorded (p. 107). Cartographic notations document extensive burnt land. Topography also is noted and Mount Katahdin's elevation is overestimated by 1,000 feet (p. 115).

One of the most significant cultural imprints of Treat's passage through the interior of northern Maine is the preservation of water feature Indian place names. Neptune informed Treat of names of lakes and streams enroute. Names such as Umbazooksus Stream and Umsaskis Lake are scattered throughout the region. Whites have since renamed some of the features. Pumungangoma Pond is now one of many unimaginatively named Mud Ponds. Each settlement group attached its sample of names, however, many of the old Indian names noted by Neptune and penned by Treat have been resilient.

Arriving on the St. John River, Treat encounters French Acadian farms, records the extent of agriculture and visits local settlers. He observes many farms downstream from the Fish River and compares the area to the Ohio River Valley between Pittsburgh and Marietta (p. 175).

The journey progressed through settled territory with a transition into a more English population below Grand Falls, New Brunswick. British military activity is recorded from time to time as well as the free flow of workmen, Canadians and Americans, in the border area. Treat ventures up the Aroostook and Meduxnekeag Rivers to document timber trespass by Canadian lumbermen (pp. 230-231). He ventures to Houlton, the only significant American town in the area, seeking a suitable person to serve as a Maine land agent.

Having completed his assigned tasks, Treat and his party depart for Bangor and contend with the approaching fall freeze-ups. Two weeks of breaking through thick and thin ice along the water route and long, difficult portages across eastern Maine brought them to the Penobscot River and back to their starting point.

Treat's journal and maps provided King and Maine's government with a comprehensive physical, economic and cultural overview of the state's northeastern section. Neptune's input adds a rich Indian dimension to the survey.

Pawling has written an organized and well researched work. I found only one minor error. The Siegas River enters the St. John River upstream of the Grand River, not downstream (p. 191). This report by Treat and the accompanying text by Pawling reflects the nature of wilderness in Maine some two decades before Henry David Thoreau passed through the area. Thoreau

wrote about the landscape after vast tracts had been altered by the lumbering industry (Thoreau 1950). Maybe Treat's description, not Thoreau's, should be the standard for the pre-European northern Maine forest.

This book should be of interest to historical geographers, cartographers, historians, ethnologists and individuals wishing to expand their knowledge about Maine in the early nineteenth century. I found this work a joy to read!

References

- DeLorme. 2008. *Maine Atlas and Gazetteer*. Yarmouth, ME: DeLorme.
Thoreau, H. 1950. *The Maine Woods*. New York: Bramhall House.