

## **ANCIENT MI'KMAQ CUSTOMS: A SHAMAN'S REVELATIONS**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

The article describes Mi'kmaq life just before European contact, based on oral history related by a Mi'kmaq shaman to Father Pierre Maillard about 1740. Included in the narrative are such activities as the procurement and cooking of food, fashioning of cooking vessels and canoes, creation and preservation of fire, treatment of animal bones, and thwarting attacks by marine animals. Glimpses are also provided of certain sociological phenomena. The shaman's account is the only known record where a specifically named Mi'kmaq person discusses what life was like before the arrival of Europeans, or where we hear his actual words.

L'article décrit la vie des Mi'kmaq juste avant le contact européen. Il est basé sur l'histoire orale d'un chaman mi'kmaq recueillie vers 1740 par l'abbé Pierre Maillard. Ce récit comprend la description d'activités comme la cueillette et la cuisson de la nourriture, la fabrication de canots et de récipients pour la cuisson, la production et la conservation du feu, le traitement des os d'animaux et comment on déjouait les attaques des animaux marins. L'article fournit aussi un aperçu de certains phénomènes sociologiques. Ce compte rendu du chaman constitue le seul document où un Mi'kmaq bien identifié, et de ses propres mots, raconte ce à quoi ressemblait la vie avant l'arrivée des Européens.

## Introduction

Aboriginal people have existed on Prince Edward Island for thousands of years. The first recorded European contact with the Mi'kmaq people on the Island occurred when the French explorer Jacques Cartier visited Island shores in 1534.<sup>1</sup> This paper deals with Mi'kmaq customs and practices about the time of contact, based on oral history related by a Mi'kmaq in the year 1740 or thereabouts.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the Mi'kmaq inhabited, and continue to inhabit, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, including Cape Breton, eastern and northern New Brunswick, and parts of the Gaspé peninsula in Québec.<sup>3</sup> The Mi'kmaq are the most easterly of the Algonquian peoples who inhabit the northeastern part of North America. They include, among others, the Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Abenaki. Algonkians were in general primarily dependent on hunting and fishing, whereas neighbours of the Algonkians to the southwest, the Iroquoian, were semi-agricultural and more sedentary.<sup>4</sup> Mi'kmaq have traditionally a number of districts or territories, one being Epegoitg (which may be recognized phonetically as Abegweit – Prince Edward Island) together with Pigtoegeog, a portion of northeastern mainland Nova Scotia, from which is derived the Nova Scotia place name Pictou.<sup>5</sup>

From the time that the French began to settle what are now the Maritime provinces and Maine, they established good relations with the local Aboriginal people. The latter's assistance to the newcomers sometimes proved invaluable in surviving the harsh winter and unfamiliar environment. From the outset, the government of France, as a matter of policy, endeavoured to convert Aboriginal people to Christianity, namely the Roman Catholic faith.<sup>6</sup> Some priests sent from France ministered to both the settlers and the local native people. Others were dedicated almost solely to working among the Indians. From the time that organized settlement of Prince Edward Island—known to the French as Ile Saint-Jean—began in 1720, French priests, sent to the Island to minister to the new colonists, worked among the local Mi'kmaq as well. The registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths for the parish at Port Lajoie, at which René-Charles Breslay was the first priest, record a Mi'kmaq baptism in 1721, the first year of record-keeping in this parish.<sup>7</sup> The first entries recorded in the register for the parish of Saint-Pierre-du-Nord involve Mi'kmaq people in 1724.<sup>8</sup> At both parishes baptisms of Mi'kmaq occurred until the end of the French regime on the Island in 1758.

The Mi'kmaq proved to be valuable military allies of the French in their recurring struggles with the British. The French government was careful to cultivate its relationship with the Mi'kmaq by ensuring that presents were ceremoniously distributed among them. During most of

the French regime on Ile Saint-Jean, the governor at Louisbourg came to Port La Joye once each summer to hold a feast and to distribute presents—typically guns, powder, shot, hatchets and other tools or utensils, clothing, blankets and food—to not only Island Mi'kmaq, but also to Mi'kmaq who had come from such places as Tatamagouche and Miramichi.<sup>9</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most prominent French priest to work among the Mi'kmaq was Abbé Pierre Maillard. Trained at the Séminaire de Saint-Esprit in Paris, he came to Cape Breton in 1735. Here he immediately began to study the Mi'kmaq language. Having a remarkable talent for languages, he quickly mastered Mi'kmaq and even went on to perfect a system of "hieroglyphics" which he used to transcribe Mi'kmaq words.<sup>10</sup> He was thus able to produce note-books of prescribed prayers, chants and catechismal responses in the Mi'kmaq language.<sup>11</sup> Maillard ministered primarily to the Mi'kmaq of Cape Breton, but made occasional visits to the mainland and to Ile Saint-Jean. He died in Halifax in 1762 but his name has continued to be revered among the Mi'kmaq of the Maritimes, and particularly those of Cape Breton, to this very day.

## Records of Ancient Mi'kmaq Customs

Until comparatively recent times the Aboriginal peoples of North America have not recorded their own history through writing, relying instead on oral traditions. Over the centuries such knowledge has become blurred, possibly distorted, and even lost. Several accounts of Mi'kmaq customs written by early French priests have survived. Among the best known and most comprehensive is that of Father Chrestien Leclercq who worked among the Mi'kmaq in the Bay of Chaleur and Gaspé regions.<sup>12</sup> Another is Maillard's *Account of the Customs and Manners of the Mickmakis and Maricheets Savage Nations Now Dependent on the Government of Cape-Breton*, a book published in 1758. Adventurers or entrepreneurs, such as Marc Lescarbot and Nicolas Denys, have also added greatly to our knowledge through their written accounts.<sup>13</sup> There are several accounts which date back to the nineteenth century only, and while interesting, they are generally of more limited usefulness.<sup>14</sup>

Maillard has left one other account, namely a letter, part of which is the subject of this paper. In this part Maillard writes of a discussion he had with a Mi'kmaq shaman in Ile Saint-Jean. This individual recounted for Maillard a number of ancient Mi'kmaq customs. This account is significant and unique in that it is the only existing record of ancient Mi'kmaq customs which has come from Prince Edward Island. Further, according to a Nova Scotian specialist in Mi'kmaq ethnology, Dr. Ruth Holmes

Whitehead, this description "is the only existing record where a specifically named person discusses what life was like before the arrival of the Europeans, or where we hear his actual words."<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that from pre-contact times up to the nineteenth century the Mi'kmaq were very accustomed to travel – sometimes over great distances. One can thus presume that this resulted in a certain degree of homogeneity in their customs at any given time period throughout most of their territory, yet there was no doubt also some geographical differentiation. The customs of the Mi'kmaq encountered by Maillard on Ile Saint-Jean were probably, therefore, not dissimilar from those of Mi'kmaq elsewhere. The information provided to Maillard on Ile Saint-Jean is of interest, not only in the context of Prince Edward Island history, but in regard to anthropological and archaeological studies relating to the Mi'kmaq culture at the time of contact and during the centuries immediately preceding.

### **Maillard's Account**

Maillard's account of the Mi'kmaq takes the form of a very long letter to a Monsieur de Lalane, a senior ecclesiastic in Paris. The date of the letter is unknown, but almost certainly is not later than 1758 when Louisbourg was captured by the British, and probably not much earlier than 1754, the year that Augustin de Boshenry de Drucour became the governor at Louisbourg. The letter, which describes events which took place as late as 1750, was sent or presented to Madame Drucour under cover of another letter, also undated. For a variety of reasons, the letter to Lalane can be presumed to be circa 1755.<sup>16</sup>

In his letter Maillard synthesizes information that he had acquired over two decades. As for the information acquired on Ile Saint-Jean, it is stated by Maillard to have been gathered 15 years prior to when he wrote the letter to Lalane, or about 1740. This information was provided by several Mi'kmaq men, but primarily by a shaman, or spiritual leader, named Arguimaut, and has been reconstructed by way of a dialogue.<sup>17</sup> Though Maillard utilizes a series of questions and responses in the form of direct quotations, this is almost certainly a device which he chose to employ to present the essential gist of the information he remembered receiving 15 years previously. Also, it is important to bear in mind that the words of Arguimaut and his colleagues are a translation of what he had been told – Arguimaut's words would likely have been in Mi'kmaq. Further, Maillard's words have been translated from French to English. Nuances of meaning can sometimes be difficult to convey in translation, and this would apply in particular to the translation from the Mi'kmaq.

## A Shaman Speaks

Shamanism has been associated with most band-level societies throughout the world. Central to North American shamanism is healing. Shamans, either male or female, used various techniques, including herbal remedies. They exercised the roles of not only medicine-person, but also seer, mystic and "priest." They sought to apply their healing powers to the sick, provide catharsis through ecstatic rites, prognosticate through their visions, control events, including the weather, and bend the future through their communication with the supernatural or spirit world.<sup>18</sup> The powers of Mi'kmaq shamans, claimed to derive from the spiritual and animal worlds, has been said to include the ability to fly through the air, go down through the earth, remain under water for a chosen period of time, and to transform into an animal.<sup>19</sup>

Little is known of the shaman Arguimaut, for whom no other distinguishing name is stated.<sup>20</sup> The name (in its many spelling variations) was not an uncommon one in Acadia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the nineteenth century. The Prince Edward Island born- and New Brunswick-raised author, Samuel Douglas Smith Huyghue, writing circa 1840 under the pseudonym, Eugene, chose the title *Argimou: A Legend of the Micmac* for his novel based on the "captivity" genre popular at the time. In a census of Mi'kmaq in Acadia taken in 1708 by the French priest LaChasse, four adult males (14 males in total) are listed as having this surname, mostly in the Chignecto area.<sup>21</sup> Among these males is probably the man who spoke with Abbé Maillard in Ile Saint-Jean. In 1832 Chief Louis Francis Alguimou, among several other Prince Edward Island Mi'kmaq, signed a petition "To the Great Councillors of Prince Edward Island," requesting that land be set aside for Island Mi'kmaq, as had been done in Cape Breton, peninsular Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and that books be provided for the education of Mi'kmaq children.<sup>22</sup> Since the names Arguimaut and Alguimou are phonetically identical in Mi'kmaq, it is quite possible that the latter-day petitioner was related to the shaman of an earlier era.<sup>23</sup>

Maillard briefly sets the stage; Arguimaut, occasionally with input from his colleagues, then responds to the priest's questions:

Fifteen years ago I was on the Isle St. Jean, about sixty leagues from Isle Royale, to instruct the savages who had gathered there in great numbers. I met a certain Arguimaut, an old Micmac shaman who was there with his whole family as well as several other old men who had recently been baptised but who had not yet made their first communion. I put to him and to the others this question: "What did you do, my children, before the arrival of the Europeans in this

region? How did you occupy yourselves? How did you spend your time?"

He responded, on behalf of both himself and the others: "Father, before your arrival in these parts where God decreed we should be born and where we have grown like the grasses and the trees you see around you, our most constant occupation was to hunt all sorts of animals so as to eat their flesh and to cover ourselves with their skins. We hunted both small and large game-birds, and chose the best and the most beautifully feathered birds to make ornaments for our heads. We killed only enough animals and birds to sustain us for one day, and then, the next day, we set out again. But never think that our hunting was as arduous as it is today. All we needed to do in those times was to leave our wigwams, sometimes with our arrows and spears, and sometimes without, and at a very short distance from our village we would find all we needed. If at any time we did not wish to eat meat we would go to the lakes or rivers nearest our village, or to the nearest sea-shore, and there we would catch all sorts of fish to eat. Eel was our favourite catch as it is even today.

"It mattered not one bit to us whether the meat was cooked or raw, and, if we found we had only tough meat at any time, we would cut it and tear it into strips which we would pound on broad flat stones, and thus we were able to chew and swallow it easily. We could leave solid-fleshed fish, like sturgeon and halibut, to rot for a time, after which we ate it like all other food. At night when we met together, we would feast on meat roasted on a fire, a fire we lighted by briskly rubbing sun-dried pine wood in our hands for a long time. Sometimes, if the fire did not start as soon as we wished, we would go to the seashore to gather those white pebbles that are so abundant there. We would each take two of these and strike one against the other over powdered, dry-rotted pine wood. We had fire then, without fail.

"To preserve fire, especially in winter, we would entrust it to the care of our war-chief's women, who took turns to preserve the spark, using half-rotten pine wood covered with ash. Sometimes this fire lasted up to three moons. When it lasted the span of three moons, the fire became sacred and magical to us, and we showered with a thousand praises the chief's woman who had been the fire's guardian during

the last days of the third moon. We would all gather together and, so that no member of the families which had camped there since the autumn should be absent, we sent out young men to fetch those who were missing. Then, when our numbers were complete, we would gather round and, without regard to rank or age, light our pipes at the fire. We would suck in the smoke and keep it in our mouths, and one by one would puff it out into the face of the woman who had last preserved the spark, telling her that she was worthy above all to share in the benign influence of the Father of Light, the Sun, because she had so skilfully preserved His emanations.

“Then we would dance around the fire, and this is what we would sing: ‘Oh Fire, light our pipes and grant that, by sucking in Thy goodness, under cover of the smoke that hides Thee from our eyes, we may become strong and vigorous and always able to know our slave-women and wives of our bed. May you stay forever in our hearts so that we may never know what it is to flinch when we are face to face with those who wish to end our days. Grant that we may laugh and sing and dance when alien executioners wish to dismember us alive. Grant that hunger, thirst and illness may never overwhelm us to the point where we are no longer as indifferent to those ills as we should be. Thou, woman, by thy care, by thy vigilance, by the great attention thou hast paid to the preservation of this spark of fire, have thereby become the principal wife of our chief, if thou art not so already. And we now summon this chief, who has broken so many heads, both human and animal, to come forward, and here in our presence he will stretch out his great fur, and thou, woman, will lie under it first and he shall follow thee. But if thou art but a concubine, leave thy master now and seek among those gathered here which young man thou wishest for a husband. This shall be thy honour and reward.’

“If the woman was the chiefs’s principal wife, the assembly would bestow on her the honour of making a feast for the men, of being present at the feast with as many women as she should choose to bear her company, of being the first to speak after the feast was done, of presenting his pipe to her husband, lord and master, of being the first to get up both to dance and to sing as she wished while she danced. And all these things were done just as I have told

you, Father.

"We used the fire-spark which had been nursed [through the three moons of winter] to light a big pile of wood which had been gathered and piled up for the purpose, and then pulled from it the fieriest-burning pieces on which we would lay all sorts of meats. Dried meats were sprinkled with seal oil, or sea-cow oil, or with pieces of whale blubber held in sticks split in two. Game birds were thrown whole, unplucked and ungutted, on the glowing embers. As soon as the feathers had been consumed by the fire – or rather when the feathers had melted to form a thin sort of crust – everyone would take whichever piece he liked, rub it quickly in his hands, blow on it, break off pieces and so eat it. Large game birds, like Canada geese, mergansers, oldsquaws, eiders, other kinds of ducks, brant-geese, cormorants, eagles, gulls, etc., were only plucked of their long feathers and had their tripes removed. Then we would throw them on the burning embers from which we snatched them very soon after, cooked or not, and ate them hungrily. I must point out that, both at these improvised feasts and at all other times, we never left our food bones on the ground, nor did we give them to the dogs.

"It was a religious act among our people to gather up all bones very carefully, and either to throw them in the fire (when we had one), or into a river where beaver lived. I cannot tell you the reason for this, Father, for I do not know it. I only know that our ancestors used to tell us that we must throw all the bones of the beaver we ate into rivers where we could see beaver lodges, so that the lodges would always be there. All the bones of game we got from the sea had to be thrown in the sea, so that the species would always exist. They also told us that our domestic animals must never gnaw the bones because this would not fail to diminish the species of the animal which had fed us. None of the shamans, not even I, the foremost one (since I held the office before I was bathed in holy water) could give any reasons for these practices to our young people, who sometimes asked us questions on this subject."

"But did you," I said in interrupting him, "cook your food in containers of any kind [before the arrival of Europeans]? Did you have appropriate cutting tools? Who taught you to make your canoes in the fashion you do?"

"We did have some sorts of pots, or cauldrons, made of very soft sandstone which we hollowed out with moose or beaver bones of various sizes. The best kind [of tool] was beaver bone, one end of which we made almost as sharp a cutting edge as one of your chisels. It was not easy to prepare them for our purpose; they had to be rubbed for a very long time against or on a specially chosen hard stone. We made small, large and medium-sized cutting tools, for cutting the wood for the frames of our canoes and for making arrows of all sizes, at the end of which we would attach small pieces of very hard bone, which we shaped very much like the iron tips you put on your own arrows. We made our bows less by cutting than by scraping away against the grain at pieces of wood we judged apt for the purpose, using strips of the biggest bones we had, which we had allowed to dry out completely in the sun and then split for the purpose; that is, we split them lengthwise and not across.

"To return to those stones which we had hollowed out and rid of everything that made them rough, irregular and too heavy, we would throw our fresh and bloody meat in them without further ado, and, when they were put on a blazing fire, before long the heat released all the juice of the meat, which we drank. We also ate the meat, but when it was too dry we gave it to our dogs, except for the bones. Though I must say, Father, that when we were hungry we ate that meat too. Sometimes, when our pots were made of stones which crack and burn when exposed to heat, we would pour in water and then throw in the meat. Then we would draw out big stones from the fire, which we put there to get red hot, and placed these stones on top of the meat in the water. These red-hot stones boiled the water, cooked most of the rawness from the meat, and so made it edible, which was enough for us.

"We have had our canoes, Father, from time immemorial, and they have always been the same as you see now. In the older times, instead of the birch-bark we use now, our ancestors used moose skins, from which they had plucked the hair, and which they had scraped and rubbed so thoroughly that they were like your finest skins. They soaked them several times in oil and then placed them on the canoe frame, just as we do with birch bark today, fitted them, stretched them and fixed them by sewing them sometimes

with animal tendons, sometimes with spruce roots. With such craft they sailed from the coast to nearby islands without ever going too far away from the shore. But these animal skins rot too quickly. Birch-bark sheathing lasts much longer, and one is much safer in a birch-bark canoe than in one made of skins."

I said to my old man that I had seen canoes made of skin, and that, like him, I believed they were not as safe as canoes made of birch bark. He resumed the thread of his discussion. He told me that he had heard it said by those older than he that the frequent alarms caused by enemy tribes would oblige them to hurriedly build canoes. In order to avoid being taken by surprise, as often occurred in former times, they would endeavour to have a sufficient number of water craft to take them from one point of land, or cape, to another, not more than seven or eight leagues in distance. Thus they could vacate their village, transporting themselves along the coast to a neighbouring village of their own tribe.

"These are long journeys for us. We much prefer to make them in calm or good weather, since the Bad Fish which often infest these seas do not allow us to sail without worry and fear. All too often, these malicious beings attack the sterns of our canoes so suddenly and without warning that they sink the boat and all who are in it. Some escape by swimming, but there are always some who fall prey to these voracious flesh-eating fish. When we see them bearing down on us, we stop paddling immediately, and, taking a pole tipped with a very hard pointed bone, we try to harpoon the fish if we can. As soon as it feels the wound the creature draws off for a time. We take advantage of the short respite to paddle as fast as we can; and if it returns to the attack we repeat our actions until we see land. There is almost no way to escape if two animals attack the canoe at the same time. If we are caught without our spears, with fear and trembling we throw overboard any pieces of meat or fish we may have, one by one, to distract the fish behind us while the one in front paddles gently on without stopping. If we have nothing else to throw, we take off our furs and throw them overboard. We have often thrown even our game-bird headdresses to the creatures. At last, when there is nothing left to throw, we take the longest and sharpest of the bones we always have in our canoes and tie them as best we can to the ends of our

paddles. Or else we tie several arrows together, binding the points as tightly as we can, and tie the bundle to the end of a paddle or an oar with a belt. Then we lie in wait to harpoon the creature.

"Of course, it is not as easy to harpoon the animal with this weapon as with the spear, because the paddle is never long enough. However, this makeshift weapon has often served us well. Finally, when we have to make a journey (which we do rarely because of these fearsome animals), we take several very leafy branches and put them at the stern of our canoe, where they stick up about two feet above the rim. We know by experience that when these fish see and catch the scent of the branches they draw away and do not come near us. Apparently they think it is a piece of land where they could become stranded."

Here is how the old shaman Arguimaut continued, helped by the other old men who had come to his wigwam on purpose to see me, because I was a stranger – new to them, and to answer my questions, because they love being asked questions.

He began thus: "Father, what does the Prayer of your King, which is your own Prayer, and which is now ours, too, require of us? Does your Prayer really come from on high? I think that our Father, the King, is not a man, but more than a man, that he is much above you and us. We are led to think this by the way in which all the people who come here on His behalf speak of Him."

I stopped him there and said, "Listen, my son, it is late. The sun has set. I shall wait till tomorrow to answer your questions. Gather as many of the old men as you know; have them meet here before midday immediately after Mass and then we can all talk together. But before our discussion it is fitting that we should all eat together. That is why I told the interpreter Barthélemi Petit here, to tell the young men of your village this evening to go and bring back from Port La Joie three minots of corn, a quintal of flour, forty pounds of pork, and ten jars of molasses."<sup>24</sup>

"You do things very well, Father," he said, interrupting me. "But add the crowning touch by giving at least all the men one or two little drinks of brandy. You have no idea how grateful we would be."

I replied that they would get no brandy, but that I would

be delighted to give each of them one generous drink of wine, but no more.

At this point in his letter Maillard allowed himself to get diverted from what transpired the following day. He launched into a long discourse about the horrific effects of intoxicating liquors on Mi'kmaq people and, unfortunately, did not manage to return to the subject of his discussions with Arguimaut and his colleagues. In his long discourse on the Mi'kmaq and alcohol, Maillard mentions three extremely brutal incidents that he had witnessed, one of which took place on Ile Saint-Jean 18 years before the time he wrote the letter, i.e., about 1737. Maillard provides no details of this incident, but leaves little to the imagination in recounting the other two incidents which occurred in Cape Breton. In graphic detail he describes the torture and slaughter of English prisoners, including children, by local Mi'kmaq.<sup>25</sup>

### Some Critical and Analytical Comment

Some remarks concerning several of Arguimaut's statements may be appropriate.

One individual mentioned by Maillard, who can be positively identified, is "Barthélemi Petit." He is in fact Barthélémy Petitpas, son of Claude Petitpas and his Mi'kmaq wife. It has been said that Barthélémy spoke the Mi'kmaq tongue even before French. Both were navigators and both were very familiar with Mi'kmaq ways and language. By coincidence, the mother of Claude's second wife was a servant of Father René-Charles Breslay at Annapolis Royal. Breslay served on Ile Saint-Jean, from 1721 (or possibly 1720) to 1723. Claude and Barthélémy, both of whom lived in Nova Scotia, were often employed as interpreters by French officials in Cape Breton.<sup>26</sup>

Arguimaut's remarks about cooking containers fashioned from *pierre grès tendre* (literally, soft sandstone) are both interesting and puzzling. There exists at least one other reference from the Maritime Provinces to the making of stone pots by native peoples. In 1889 geologist Abraham Gesner referred to a deposit of dark green chlorite on Grand Manan Island, off the south coast of New Brunswick. He wrote that "this material is much used by the Indians, who pay an annual visit to the spot, to procure a quantity of the chlorite to make their pipes. Before they were acquainted with iron, it was also used by them for pots and other vessels, thereupon the material has been called pipestone, potstone, etc."<sup>27</sup>

However, unlike pottery vessels, there is very little archaeological or other evidence of stone vessels having been used by the Mi'kmaq. It is true that a few soapstone (steatite) pots, or fragments thereof, have been found at archaeological sites in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In New

Brunswick these discoveries have been confined to locations on the lower Saint John River. These artifacts date from 2500 to 3700 years ago and are associated with the Susquehanna tradition which was strong in the New England region, but which influenced the Maritime Provinces rather minimally. The bowls and bowl fragments found in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia probably came from New England.<sup>28</sup> Fired-clay pottery, which could be placed directly on a fire, came into use in the Maritime Provinces about 2500 years ago and continued in use until at least 1300 AD, and quite possibly until European contact had been well established.<sup>29</sup> Being fairly fragile, clay pots did not lend themselves readily to travel, nor could they be made quickly. The first European to record observations of Mi'kmaq customs and behaviour in some detail was Lescarbot who was in Acadia from 1606 to 1607. He wrote that the Mi'kmaq were at that time no longer using clay vessels, though certain native groups in New England still were.<sup>30</sup> Nor do any of the other early chroniclers mention clay pots being used by the Mi'kmaq.

Other ways of cooking food by boiling involved hanging birch-bark vessels containing water above a fire, and heating water in a wooden trough by depositing very hot stones in the trough.<sup>31</sup> Such troughs were fashioned by hollowing out a segment of tree trunk on one side, by alternately burning and scraping the wood to be removed.<sup>32</sup> Lescarbot reported seeing such troughs in use.<sup>33</sup> Nicolas Denys lived in Mi'kmaq territory most of his life, beginning in 1633. In 1671 he noted that wooden troughs were no longer being used, having been completely supplanted by copper and iron pots obtained from the French.<sup>34</sup> The introduction of copper pots began in the early part of the sixteenth century. They gradually became more prevalent throughout the next century and a half.

Considering these factors, it is most surprising that Arguimaut would have referred to cooking in pots fashioned by hollowing out soft stone, and at the same time neglected to mention cooking in clay pots, birch-bark vessels or wooden troughs. One might speculate that fired clay pots can, perhaps, be as hard as pots made from soft stone, and what Arguimaut was really referring to was in fact clay pots. Such an interpretation, however, is not supported by the fact that Arguimaut clearly states that the stone pots were made by hollowing out the stone by employing cutting tools. Perhaps Maillard was told more by Arguimaut but couldn't remember it – we don't know when (or to what extent) he made notes of his discussion. Or possibly Arguimaut got side-tracked onto a different topic before completing his discourse on cooking vessels.

The identity of the sea creatures which frightened and sometimes killed the Mi'kmaq while paddling their canoes in coastal waters is intriguing. What species could have caused such alarm and posed so

much danger? Whitehead has concluded that it was the killer whale. She notes that in one of the Mi'kmaq legends recorded by Rand, a "killer whale" which chases a canoe is distracted by objects thrown into the water in the path of the beast, much as described by Arguimaut.<sup>35</sup> In *Les Micmacs et la Mer*, Charles A. Martijn indicates that the creatures described by Arguimaut were probably the small cetacean, or killer whale, *Orcinus orca*, the largest member of the dolphin family. Killer whales are both quick and voracious. Even today the Inuit fear these marine mammals which can quickly capsize their small boats. Martijn also notes that in the Gulf of St. Lawrence sharks can pose an equal danger – they sometimes mistake the turbulence produced by a paddle for distress signals of some marine mammals or fish.<sup>36</sup>

A Father Vincent de Paul in a memoir dated 1824 described an incident which may have involved the same kind of animals:

Another time that I started [from Tracadie, N.S.] on a mission to this same Cape (Breton) the Indians who conducted me in a canoe perceived three monstrous fish called *maraches*, and they were frightened, as these fish are very dangerous. Their teeth are made like gardeners' knives for cutting and boring, or like razors slightly bent. They are extremely voracious, and often follow boats, attacking them with violence. Bark canoes cannot resist them, they rend them open with their teeth, so that they sink to the bottom, which is why the Indians have such a terror of them.<sup>37</sup>

The word *marache* does not appear in standard French dictionaries, but may be found in one compilation of Acadian word usage.<sup>38</sup> According to this reference, the word, perhaps of Basque origin, means "shark," and it is suggested that it may refer to the basking shark in particular.

Another statement of Arguimaut may deserve a word of explanation. This is his reference to "your own arrows," seemingly meaning the arrows of the French, or perhaps those of the White man in general. Bows and arrows, including the crossbow, were not used in Europe beyond 1650 except as sport, i.e., archery. Prior to then, the Basques, French and others who came to the coasts of North America to fish and hunt whales and walrus may well have brought bows and arrows, though the historical record clearly indicates that they brought, and used, artillery which relied on gunpowder. Since the time when French and British colonies first took root in North America, neither the colonists nor military forces are known to have used bows or arrows for utilitarian purposes, though it is possible that some of the upper class would have engaged in archery. What Arguimaut was clearly referring to was the iron arrow-heads obtained from the French as trade goods. Just when these were

introduced is unknown but such trade certainly was taking place during the first few years of French settlement in Acadia, as reported by Lescarbot.<sup>39</sup> Denys, writing in 1671, noted that the Mi'kmaq "arm [their arrows] today with iron which is made expressly for sale to them."<sup>40</sup>

A number of the practices described by Arguimaut are also mentioned by Denys, Le Clercq and others. However, Arguimaut's discourse covered several matters which appear to have received little or no attention from Denys, Le Clercq and other early recorders of Mi'kmaq customs and ways. Notable in this regard is Arguimaut's description of how the Mi'kmaq started a fire and how they preserved fire, particularly over the winter months, including certain sociological and ceremonial aspects. Neither Denys nor Le Clercq say anything about starting or maintaining fire. Lescarbot makes several references to tinderboxes, carried when travelling through the woods. The context suggests that Lescarbot was of the view that without these tinderboxes, the Mi'kmaq would be at a loss—under much hardship—to light a fire in the woods. While it is possible that such tinderboxes were in fact containers of the traditional Mi'kmaq tinder—pulverized dry-rotted wood (punk)—or even clay-lined clamshells containing embers, it seems likely that they were European-style tinderboxes containing not only tinder, but also a steel and flint.<sup>41</sup>

There are two aspects of food preparation mentioned by Arguimaut which are not reflected in the writings of the early European chroniclers of Mi'kmaq customs and mores. Only Arguimaut makes reference to solid-fleshed fish, such as sturgeon and halibut, being allowed to rot to a certain extent before being further prepared for eating. Similarly, only he speaks of completely unplucked game birds being placed directly on the fire's glowing embers with the subsequent melting of the feathers into a sort of crust.

As Ruth Holmes Whitehead has said regarding Mi'kmaq legends, "For the first time since humans came to this continent, their actual words—rather than the mute speech of lithic fragments—are recoverable."<sup>42</sup> From Arguimaut's contributions we gain insight from an identifiable Mi'kmaq into how his ancestors lived before their lifestyle was changed as a result of European influence. We also gain the earliest account of Aboriginal life to have come out of Prince Edward Island.

## Notes

1. H.P. Biggar, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Ottawa:F. A. Ackland, 1924), pp. 41-42.
2. The spelling "Mi'kmaq" is generally accepted to have replaced the earlier "Micmac," though the latter is still used in reproducing, or quoting from, earlier written works in which the form "Micmac" was employed. In recent years there have been attempts to reflect certain orthographical variations in the Mi'kmaq language by utilizing corresponding variations in English spelling. In particular, the adjectival form of the word has been held to be "Mi'kmaw," with a somewhat different pronunciation from "Mi'kmaq." Further refinements have been made to the "rules," based on whether usage refers to the singular or plural. The result has been much confusion and inconsistency, not only among the general population, but also within the Mi'kmaq community. The English language does not use adjective-noun agreement and does not attempt to accommodate, for example, the variations of "French" (français, française, françaises). The French, as a nation, speak French and buy French wines; the French people have given the world French toast and French salad dressing. The form "Mi'kmaq" is employed throughout this paper, regardless of usage – noun, adjective, singular, plural.
3. Mi'kmaq also occupy small parts of Newfoundland, their ancestors having migrated there in the eighteenth century from Nova Scotia.
4. Jacques Rousseau and George W. Brown, "The Indians of Northeastern North America," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pp. 5-6. Early French explorers reported that in the most southerly reaches of their territory, Algonkians were engaging in some agriculture. See Bruce J. Bourque, "Ethnicity on the Maritime Peninsula, 1600-1759," *Ethnohistory* 36, 3 (1989), pp. 257-284.
5. Bernard G. Hoffman, *The Historical Ethnography of the Micmac of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, PhD Dissertation. University of California (Berkeley), 1955, pp. 520 and 547-553.
6. In 1607 Henri IV of France allowed Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt to continue his colonizing endeavours in Acadia, but on condition that he take some Jesuit there to Christianize the Indians. See André Vachon, "Jessé Fléché," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 1, p. 307. About the same time Marc Lescarbot commented that "it is a shameful thing for us that the Ministers of La Rochelle pray to God every day in their congregations for the conversion of the poor savage people...." See Marc Lescarbot, *Nova Francia: A Description of*

- Acadia 1606* (New York and London: Harper, 1928) [originally published in 1609], pp. 66-67.
7. Registres des Baptêmes, Mariages et Sépultures de la Paroisse de Saint Jean l'Évangéiste, Archives Nationales (Paris), Archives des Colonies (AC), Série G1, Vol. 411 (National Archives of Canada (NAC), MG1 G1, 411, Microfilm Reels F-595 and C-1472). Port La Joye, near the current Charlottetown, was the administrative centre as well as the site of a small garrison.
  8. Registres des Baptêmes, Mariages et Sépultures de la Paroisse de Saint-Pierre-du-Nord, dans l'Île Saint-Jean, Série GG, Cultes (Nos. 225-257), Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, Rennes, France (NAC, MG 6, A4, Microfilm Reels F-817 and C-2970). Saint-Pierre-du-Nord was near the current St. Peters, P.E.I.
  9. Presents were distributed at Port La Joye most summers, beginning in 1726, if not earlier. See St.-Ovide to Minister, 18 September 1726, AC, Série C11B, Vol. 8, pp. 34-38v. Useful descriptions of the events surrounding the distribution of presents on Île Saint-Jean may be found in *Memoire Sur les Missions des Sauvages Mikmak et de l'Acadie*, AC, C11B, Vol. 1, pp. 249-254. Also, Bourville to Minister, 26 October 1740, AC, C11B, Vol. 22, pp. 118-124.
  10. More than half a century earlier, Father Chrestien Leclercq had similarly developed a system of hieroglyphics while working with the Mi'kmaq of the Gaspé region. It is not known whether Maillard's work in this regard was independent of Leclercq's.
  11. Micheline D. Johnson, "Pierre Maillard," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. III (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 415-9.
  12. Chrestien Le Clercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia with the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians*. Edited by William F. Ganong (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1910) [first published 1690].
  13. Lescarbot, *Nova Francia*, pp. 145-330; Nicolas Denys, *The Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia)*. Translated and edited by William F. Ganong (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1908) [first published 1672], pp. 399-452.
  14. See for example, S.T. Rand, *A Short Statement of Facts Relating to the History, Manners, Customs, Language and Literature of the Micmac Tribe of Indians in Nova-Scotia and P.E. Island* (Halifax: J. Bowes, 1850). Also, Stansbury Hager, "Micmac Customs and Traditions," *The American Anthropologist* (1895), pp. 31-42.
  15. Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us: Excerpts from Micmac History 1500-1950* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1991), p. 10.
  16. The letter to Lalane and the covering letter to Madame Drucour were

published as "Lettre de M. L'Abbé Maillard Sur les Missions de l'Acadie et Particulièrement Sur les Missions Micmaques," in *Les Soirées Canadiennes*, Vol. 3 (Québec: Brosseau et frères, 1863), pp. 291-2 and 292-426, respectively. The segment of the letter to Lalane which relates to Ile Saint-Jean begins on page 299. Most of this segment has been translated by Margaret Anne Hamelin and published in Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us*, pp. 9-14, 17-21, 37-38 and 98-99. Whitehead however has not used all of the portion of Maillard's letter relating to Ile Saint-Jean. Further, the material she has used has been divided into eight pieces which have been interspersed non-sequentially throughout her book, e.g., the piece which appears first in Maillard's letter occurs last in Whitehead's book. Hamelin's translations have been used in this paper with the permission of Dr. Whitehead. Portions of the segment of Maillard's letter which relates to Ile Saint-Jean and which were not utilized in Whitehead's book, have been translated by the author of this paper.

17. Maillard refers to Arguimaut as "*un jongleur*." Literally, the word *jongleur* translates variously as one who performs tricks or acts of magic; an itinerant provider of entertainment, chiefly through music or recitation; a pretender who beguiles or transforms by trickery. The term, *jongleur*, is used also by Le Clercq and by Dièreville, a visitor to Acadia in 1699-1700 (see *Sieur de Dièreville, Relation of the Voyage to Port Royal in Acadia or New France*. Edited by John Clarence Webster (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1933), pp. 290-291. Le Clercq's *jongleur* was translated by Ganong, approximately a century later, as "juggler." A typical seventeenth century European assessment of such individuals is that of Father Pierre Biard who spent 1611 to 1613 among the Mi'kmaq of Acadia. He wrote that their office was "the same as [that of] our Priests (*Prestres*) and our Physicians (*medecins*). But in truth they are not Priests, but genuine Sorcerers (*sorciers*); not Physicians, but Jugglers (*triacleurs*), liars (*mensongers*) and cheats (*trompeurs*)." For Biard's Relation, 1616, see *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. III. Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Burrows, 1897), pp. 116-117. Denys referred to such people as, simply, *medecins* – healers – which, though used by him more than three centuries ago, is an apt rendition in a modern ethnological sense. Whitehead uses the term "shaman-chief" to specifically describe Arguimaut. See Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us*, p. 10.
18. Various early French writers describe, from a European point of view, Mi'kmaq shamans, their methods and their results. The most comprehensive account is that of Le Clercq, *New Relations*, pp. 213-

225.

19. Silas T. Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs* (New York and London: Longmans, Green, 1894), pp. xliii-xliv. See also, Stansbury Hagar, "Micmac Magic and Medicine," *Journal of American Folk-Lore* 9 (1896), pp. 170-177. Rand and other nineteenth century recorders of Mk'kmaq folklore state that the Mi'kmaq word for shaman is *booöwin* – which Rand equates to "wizard."
20. Silas T. Rand, a nineteenth century missionary and Mi'kmaq philologist and ethnologist, recorded a considerable number of Mi'kmaq legends. One of them concerns an individual whose name he gives as "Ulgimoo and who is portrayed as having shamanic powers. Although this Ulgimoo is said to have lived to over 100 years of age, there is no way of determining specifically during which period he may have lived. See Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs*, pp. 294-297.
21. Eugene [Samuel Douglas Smith Hugyhue], *Argimou: A legend of the Micmac* (Halifax: The Morning Courier, 1847). "General Census Made in the Month of November 1708, of the Indians of Acadia who reside on the East Coast....," by Père LaChasse. Edward E. Ayer Collection, Ayer MS 751, Newberry Library, Chicago.
22. Petition of Louis Francis Alguimou et al., *Journal of the House of Assembly of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: King's Printer, 1832), pp. 11-12.
23. The phonetics system of the Mi'kmaq language lacks the letter "L." Traditionally, Mi'kmaq have had difficulty forming the sound of the French or English "R," tending to pronounce it as "L," e.g., "*mon pele*" instead of "*mon père*." Recognizing, and often compensating for this limitation, someone like Maillard would as often as not substitute the "R" sound in rendering a Mi'kmaq name into French. The name Arguimaut, which is pronounced as "Ulgimoo," would be today spelled L'kimu. The word literally means "he sends." More than a dozen forms of spelling of the name are encountered, some using the letter "L" and others using the letter "R."
24. A minot is an ancient French measure of capacity, approximately equal to 39 liters. The source for the requested supplies was no doubt the King's storehouse maintained at Port La Joye by the administrators there. The discussions between Maillard and Arguimaut give no hint as to precisely where they took place. A major resort of the Mi'kmaq on Ile Saint-Jean during the French regime was in the area of Malpeque Bay. However, it would seem that the place where Maillard met Arguimaut was considerably closer to Port La Joye, given what was likely a summer sunset and the time frame within which Maillard expected the foodstuffs to be delivered.

25. "Lettre de M. L'Abbé Maillard," pp. 315-320.
26. Clarence J. d'Entremont, "Claude Petitpas," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 524; Bernard Potier, "Barthelémy Petitpas," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. III, pp. 512-513. A younger brother of Barthelémy, Louis-Benjamin Petitpas, lived with Maillard as a servant and translator.
27. Abraham Gesner, "First Report on the Geology of Grand Manan," *The Grand Manan Historian* 23 (1981), p. 19.
28. Regarding steatite pots found in New Brunswick, see Michael Deal, Lecture Notes Week Five, Anthropology 3241, Memorial University, St. Johns, Newfoundland, <http://www.mun.ca/archaeology/notes5.HTM>. See also Mac Trueman, "What Lies Beneath," *The Times Globe* [Saint John, N.B.], 26 October 2001, p. A1. In a personal communication Ruth Holmes Whitehead has informed the author of one or two reported examples of stone vessels having been found in Nova Scotia. These discoveries may or may not have found their way into the scientific literature. For steatite vessels in the northeast, generally, see Kenneth E. Sassaman, "A Southeastern Perspective on Soapstone Vessel Technology in the Northeast," *The Archaeology of the Northeast*. Edited by Mary Ann Levine et al. (Westport, CA: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), pp. 75-95; Curtiss Hoffman, "Pottery and Steatite in the Northeast: A Reconsideration of Origins," *Northeast Anthropology*, 56 (1998), pp. 43-68.
29. Bruce J. Bourque, *Twelve Thousand Years: American Indians in Maine*, (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 76. Calvin Martin, "The Four Lives of a Micmac Copper Pot," *Ethnohistory* 22 (1975), p. 123.
30. Marc Lescarbot, *The History of New France*, Vol. 3. Translated by W. L. Grant (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1914) [originally published in 1609], pp. 194-195.
31. Wilson D. Wallis and Ruth Sawtell Wallis, *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 68-70. Ruth Holmes Whitehead and Harlod McGee, *The Micmac: How Their Ancestors Lived Five Hundred Years Ago* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1983), pp. 14-15. Martin, "Four Lives of a Micmac Copper Pot," pp. 124-126.
32. Denys, *Description and Natural History*, pp. 401-402.
33. Lescarbot, *Nova Francia*, pp. 270-271.
34. Denys, *Description and Natural History*, p.406. Writing in 1691, Le Clercq also noted that the wooden troughs had been replaced by metal kettles or pots. For a discussion of the progressive use of pottery and wooden troughs, through to metal pots, see Arthur E.

- Spiess, "Progress in Prehistoric Technology: Advances in Cooking Methods," *Maine Archaeological Society Bulletin* 21, 1 (1981), pp. 8-13.
35. Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Stories from the Six Worlds* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1988), p. 224. Whitehead's story of Wsitiplaju is based on what Rand recorded as the story of Usitebulljoo, but Rand simply records the pursuing beast as a "whale." See Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs*, p. 56.
  36. Charles A. Martijn, *Les Micmacs et la Mer* (Montréal: Recherches amérindiennes au Québec, 1986), p. 250, footnote 12.
  37. *Memoir of Father Vincent de Paul*, translated by A.M. Pope (Charlottetown: J. Coombs, 1886), p. 29.
  38. Pascal Poirier, *Le Glossaire Acadien*. Edited by Pierre M. Gérin (Moncton: Editions d'acadie, [1994?]), p. 259.
  39. Lescarbot, *Nova Francia*, p. 244.
  40. Denys, *Description and Natural History*, pp. 442-443.
  41. For a brief discussion of how the Mi'maq made and carried fire in former times, see Whitehead and McGee, *The Micmac*, p. 52.
  42. Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *Nova Scotia: The Protohistoric Period 1500-1630* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Museum, 1993), p. 3.