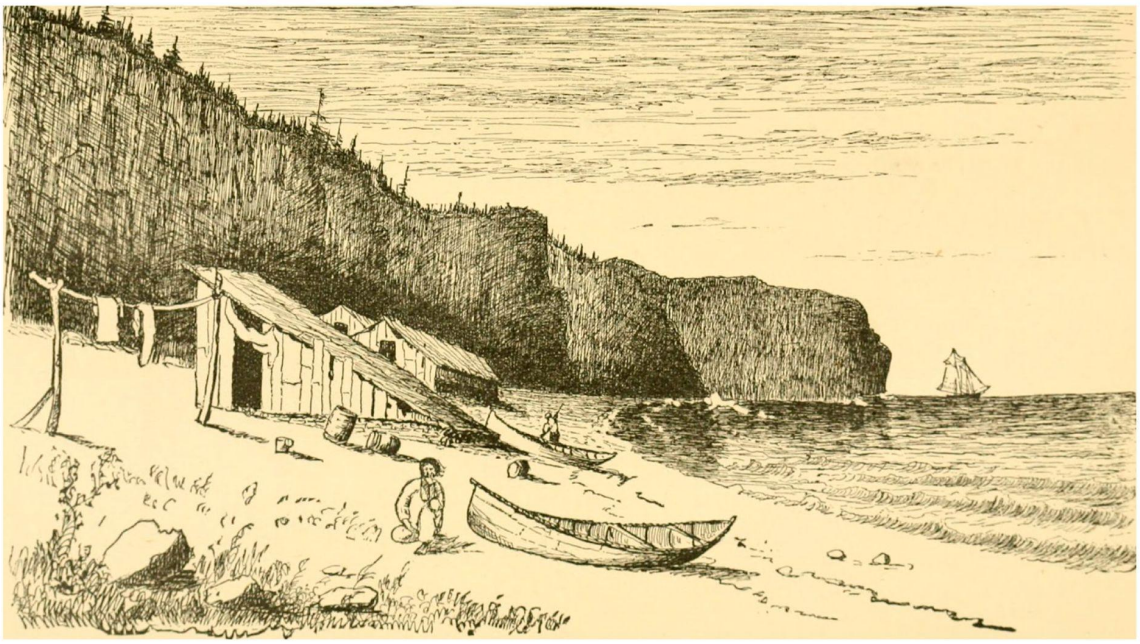
# NATIVE AMERICANS ON GRAND MANAN, N. B.

**by L. Keith Ingersoll**

Based on a letter to Art MacKay, January 1964



The story of the Indians on Grand Manan is a most complicated one. I have been trying for many years to find a single reliable authority that would clarify the tribal distribution with more than the usual generality, but so far have failed to satisfy my curiosity insofar as this area is concerned. There has been nothing come to my attention to convince me the Indians ever lived here on a permanent basis.

Father Baird, a Jesuit missionary, writing in 1612-14 estimated the Micmacs to number 2,000 (lower Saint John River, Port Royal, etc.) while the Malicites numbered only half that estimate. The Malicites had traditionally lived around the upper portion of the Saint John River but in time extended their camps, finally reaching the mouth of the River where the Micmacs gave way to them. He said the Passamaquoddy Indians were Malicites.

The Concise Dictionary of American History available (Scribner's) p. 464, defined the Abenaki “in colonial times as a loose confederacy of Algonkian tribes occupying the present state of Maine and Southern New Brunswick.” In 1724 the New Englanders

destroyed the great settlement on the Kennebec and its population dispersed "mainly to Canada...on the St. Francis River near the juncture with the St. Lawrence. The Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, and the Malecite to the east of them, did not move to Canada."

All of these, and many others, were also members of a larger "linguistic group", the Algonquins.

We could say that the Indians who inhabited this area were of the Passamaquoddy tribe, a sub-group or closely related to the Malecites of the great Algonquin nation, and were one of the tribes of the Abenaki confederation.

Many authorities agree that the Passamaquoddy people "inhabited" Grand Manan but always go on to say that they had a number of temporary campsites on the island, where they lived (seasonally?) a quiet life of comparative ease through hunting and fishing!

There was a definite limitation to their "hunting" - the absolute lack of large land mammals with which to sustain a winter diet. True, they could subsist on food from the sea, shellfish, and birds, but it is unlikely they were inclined to carry on too much of this type of activity during the winter months.

Professor S. F. Baird of the Smithsonian Institute and his investigations hace been referred to as evidence of more permanent inhabitation. However his reports in the Proceedings of the US National Museum, Vol. IV, 1881, pp. 292-295, speaks of his having found "many small heaps (of shells) at Grand Harbour, Cheney Island and Nantucket Island but none very extensive and those at Cheney and Nantucket Islands amounted to only three or four bushels each."

The authentic shell-heaps found at the site of permanent camps have been more extensive. Professor Baird found one at Mace's. Bay, for instance, 150 feet by 50 feet, 20 feet deep, which contained, in addition to shells, great quantities of Moose and Caribou bones.

There is a tradition that Joel Bonny, Abiel and James Sprague were "driven off the Island" in 1780 by the Indians after they had spent the winter here, leading many to believe the Indians were permanent residents. The actual record left by Bonny, however, shows that a communication was brought to the party from Machias, under the authority of the Commanding Officer, warning them to "leave without delay" because

Grand Manan had been left to the Indians. Bonny and his colleagues went to Machias and had a conference with the Indians who claimed the Island and who agreed to allow them to remain unmolested on payment of ten dollars and a heifer they had taken to the Island with them. It has been shown that the rebel nest at Machias had taken this means to prevent Grand Manan's settlement by Loyal persons and had used the Indians in their purpose. Up to this time, both France and Great Britain had "claimed" the Island; one might say that the Machias incident was the beginning of the movement of the United States to assert its claim. (Actual settlement was not made until 1817.)

In 1817, Moses Gerrish forwarded information to the Honorable Ward Chipman at Saint John in response to a request for any evidence that might help to establish claim by settlement prior to the arrival of the Loyalists. Question 3 was: "Were there any and how many Inhabitants upon that Island at or before the peace of 1783?". Answer: "At the time we landed (May 6, 1784) here there was not a human being on the Island, except a few Indians."

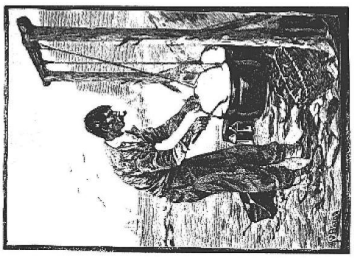
Note that the time was May, the spring of the year and the beginning of the period when the Indians visited the place for the long Spring and Summer seasons.

Sarah  Moses Smith, writing in 1908 in "The Lewiston Journal" in an article entitled "An Afternoon With The Indian Porpoise Hunters", states "The Indians, a remnant of the Passamaquoddies, come each year to Grand Manan from their village at Pleasant Point to hunt porpoise that abound in the Channel." They had a camp at Indian Beach and often brought entire families with them. Older residents at North Head can remember this.

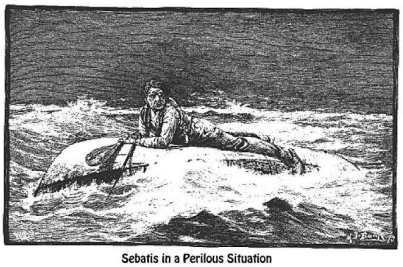
Some of the people also came to the eastern side of the Island and camped on the little islands along the shoreline to hunt seals and porpoise, and to collect sweet grass for basket making. They did this even in my time; I can remember visiting Kent Island and finding a small group camped there. They roasted a small seal over coals for their noon meal and I can remember one of them (Tomas Lola) telling the older ones in our group that his people had been coming to Grand Manan "for many, many years". The small shell heaps found by Professor Baird goes along well with this picture of temporary encampments.

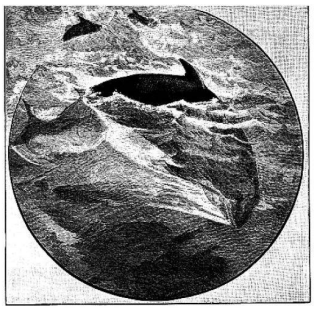
I don't know why I have gone on at such length on this topic. It may be that, placing them in sequence, the story adds up to a negative. I have never been able to find a single bit of evidence that would be a positive point in the case that Indians lived here permanently. However; the Island became permanently settled when it filled a need for

those people who wanted to create a new life, a people who dared to challenge the unusual problems that such a life here unquestionably presented. Others, including the early transients, Norsemen, Indians, and even American tourists, saw it only as a "summer place". The community that developed after 1764 has been marked by a great spirit of independence, resourcefulness and stubborn resolution. And these qualities have built a standard of living second to none for an economy based on the fishing industry!


TRYING OUT LUMBER.


THE CAMP AT INDIAN BEACH.


Sebatis in a Perilous Situation

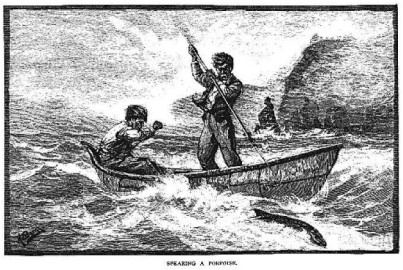



TAKING A PORPOISE ASHORE IN SHORE WATER.


SHOOTING A PORPOISE.


CAPTAIN SAM AND HIS BOY.


Beaching the Canoe


SPEARING A PORPOISE.