

GABE

by Karen Perley



New Brunswick Manuscripts in Archaeology 41

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New  Nouveau
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Culture and Sport Secretariat

Cover photo: Guthrie, Robert M. Collection. Gabe Acquin with pipe and rifle, standing Harry Manners Sutton, George Campbell, Major Alexander Ewing. circa 1860.
Neg. # GA 7

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Province of New Brunswick Collection

George T.Taylor Collection

“Gabe”

Preface

In 1998, the Maliseet Advisory Committee on Archaeology (MACA) nominated Gabriel (Gabe) Acquin (c. 1811 – 1901) to the Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada. MACA, which is supported by the Archaeological Services Unit (ASU) of the New Brunswick Culture and Sport Secretariat, meets on a regular basis to discuss matters of archaeological concern and is central to the continuation of dialogue between ASU and Wolastoqwey (Maliseet)¹ communities. Representatives from the Archaeological Services Unit worked with chief appointed representatives from each of the six Wolastoqwey communities in New Brunswick in the development of this nomination.

To be considered for designation as a person of National Historic Significance, an individual must have “made an outstanding and lasting contribution to Canadian history.”² To fulfill the requirements, a submission report must be submitted to the Historic Sites and Monument Board which in turn makes recommendations for designation to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. This booklet, which draws from the submission report prepared by Parks Canada,³ is also based on extensive archival research conducted by Archaeological Services Unit, New Brunswick.

Gabe was a 19th century Wolastoq’kew from the St. Mary’s First Nation designated of national historic significance in 1999 because of his prominence in the 19th century New Brunswick, the Maritimes and abroad as a guide, hunter and cultural broker. Gabe’s knowledge of Wolastoqwey customs and traditions, his superior woodsmanship and his winning personality made him a man of some repute amongst military officers, visiting dignitaries and others who regularly sought his services. As a result he was invited to several international shows where he shared his knowledge and experience of Wolastoqwey culture. Although never elected chief, Acquin is generally recognized as the 19th century emissary and statesman for Wolastoqiyik in New Brunswick.

Gabe’s recognition by Canada is an accomplishment celebrated by Wolastoqiyik today. In my opinion, his commemoration has, by association, also granted the title “significant” to all Wolastoqiyik who possess similar skills and knowledge. This commemoration is yet another accomplishment to add to the long list of contributions Gabe made to Wolastoqiyik, First Nations, and Canada.

Karen Perley

¹ In this booklet, Wolastoq’kew means a (Maliseet) person; Wolastoqwey means belonging to a (Maliseet) person or people; Wolastoqiyik means (Maliseet) people.

² “Criteria for National Historic Significance, and General Guidelines,” Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Parks Canada, 1998.

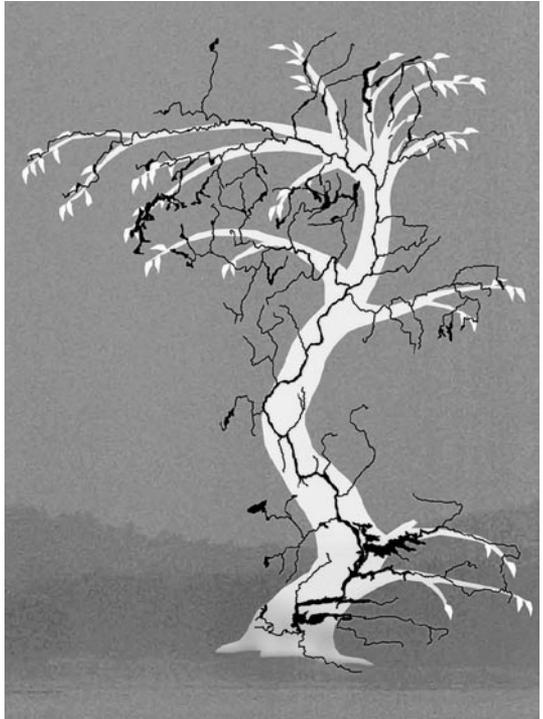
³ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

Wolastoqiyik Beginnings

Archaeologists rely on scientific data to ascertain that people first settled in the Maritimes approximately eleven thousand years ago.⁴ First Nations perspective does not suggest a numerical date for our origin. The facts explaining our beginning are embedded in our language, songs, origin stories and ceremonies that together form a body of social and cultural knowledge by which we have always lived. According to spoken tradition, Wolastoqiyik have been here since the beginning when the landscape was being formed. At the heart of this tradition is the story of the Wolastoq River and how it contributed to shaping the land in Wolastoqwey territory and its role in the origins of Wolastoqiyik.

The following story told by Gabe Paul of Plick/Kingsclear First Nation to ethnographer Frank G. Speck in 1917, tells of the Origins of the Wolastoq (Saint John River) and relates how the River is shaped like a tree. The word Wolastoq means the beautiful river; the First Nations people of the Wolastoq are Wolastoqiyik meaning people of the beautiful river.

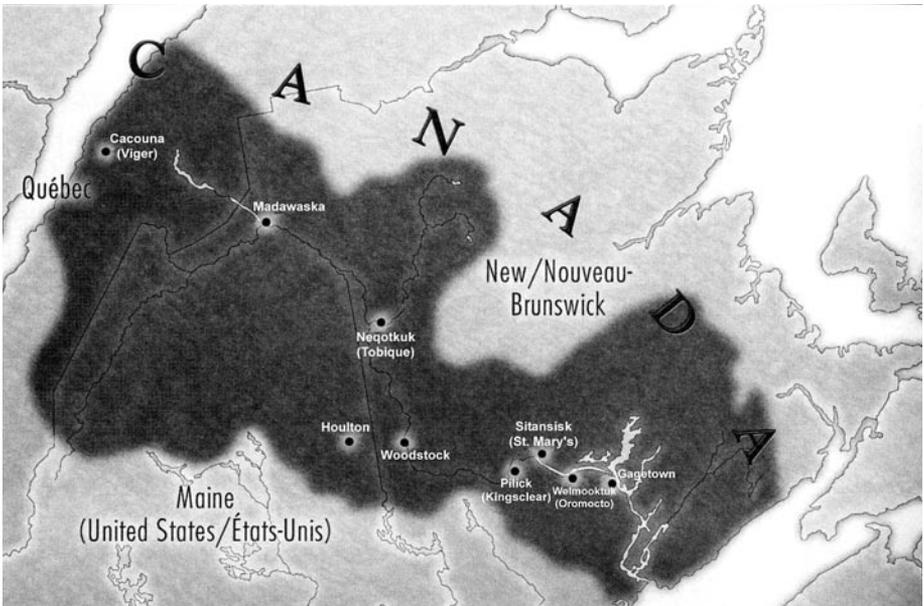
"Aglebe'm kept back all the water in the world; so that rivers stopped flowing, and lakes dried up and the people everywhere began dying of thirst. As a last resort, they sent a messenger to him to ask him to give the people water; but he refused, and gave the messenger only a drink from the water in which he washed. But this was not enough to satisfy even the thirst of one. Then the people began complaining, some saying, "I'm as dry as a fish," "I'm as dry as a frog," "I'm as dry as a turtle," "I'm as dry as a beaver," and the like, as they were on the verge of dying of thirst. At last a great man was sent to Aglebe'm to beg him to release the water for the people. Aglebe'm refused, saying that he needed it himself to lie in. Then the messenger felled a tree, so that it fell on top of the monster and killed him.



The Story of the Wolastoq Tree, Blair, Susan. *Wolastoq and its People* Unpublished Manuscript, 2001 p. vi

⁴ Turnbull, Christopher The Second Fluted Point in New Brunswick, *Man in the Northeast* 7, 1974, 109-110.

*The body of this tree became the main river... and the branches became the tributary branches of the river, while the leaves became the ponds at the heads of these streams.*⁵



Wolastoqiyik consist today of seven communities in Canada, six in New Brunswick and one in Québec. The six in New Brunswick are: the Maliseet Nations at Oromocto, St. Mary's, Kingsclear, Woodstock, Tobique and, the Madawaska Maliseet. In addition to a community of Maliseets in Houlton, in Maine, La Première Nation Malécite de Viger in Québec is the only other Wolastoqwey community in Canada.

Relationship Between People and River

The Wolastoq, for thousands of years, was the life source for its people because it provided access to a wide range of traditional foods and medicines. The wood, bark, and roots of nearby birch, ash, cedar and spruce trees were used for canoes, housing, tools, baskets and cordage, and the exposed river banks provided clay for the manufacture of pottery. From the river Wolastoqiyik also found a store of ready-made tools such as river cobbles, which were used as heating stones for ceremonial purposes, such as the traditional sweat lodge, and for cooking. Additionally Wolastoqiyik mined the bedrock outcrops for fine-grained rocks from which they created a complete kit of beautiful tools such as axes, knives, arrow and spear tips, scrapers and carving drills.⁶ In return for its generosity, Wolastoqiyik expressed their appreciation for the Wolastoq by protecting, nurturing and respecting it at all times. The interdependent relationship between people and river ensured a long and vigorous life to both.

⁵ Speck, Frank. (1917) *Malécite Tales*. Journal of American Folklore 30:479-485

⁶ Blair, Susan (2001). *Wolastoq and Its People*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2001 p.2

The great antiquity of this connection between Wolastoqiyik and the river also included the rest of the landscape, which is clearly evident by the names of places in their territory. Traditional place names blended language with the physical shape of the landscape, and together constituted a unique cultural map and social code for Wolastoqwey way of life.

These names, for instance, communicated locations of resources, temperament of the river and described the importance of particular locales. Names also distinguished the purpose of each site and separated the practical sites from where ceremonial, spiritual and gathering activities took place. This information was privy only to the speakers of the language, therefore they became the ones that held the key to unlock the knowledge or understand the language of the landscape.

Major critical changes took place in Wolastoqwey territory before and during Gabe Acquin's lifetime. A considerable amount of Wolastoqwey land was being transformed into farm lands and development resulted in the cutting of trees to build the much needed housing for the new settlers. The face of the landscape was being drastically altered. In spite of the changes, Gabe retained the language of the landscape, which, together with his knowledge of traditional Wolastoqwey culture, would later influence the course of his life in colonial New Brunswick.



Mount Acquin, photograph by Brent Suttie,
Archaeological Services Unit.

A name proposed by Ganong (1903), and subsequently
accepted, after Gabe Acquin.

Blair, Susan, (2001) *Wolastoq and its People*,
Unpublished manuscript, p.28

About Gabe

Gabriel Acquin, believed to be the son of Gabriel and Marie, was born in the early 1800s and baptized in Kingsclear, New Brunswick.⁷

During Gabe's life, Wolastoqiyik were experiencing fast and dramatic changes brought on by government policy in response to an overwhelming demand of First Nation's land by settlers leaving the United States and coming to what is now known as New Brunswick. In 1841, Moses Perley was appointed as advisor to the government on the First Nations people in New Brunswick, where colonial policy designed to convert First Nations peoples into Christian farmers had resulted in the erosion of their traditional culture and displacement from their traditional territories. After his visits to all the settlements, where Wolastoqiyik continued to augment their living through seasonal hunting and gathering, Perley reported that they neglected their lands and that they should be moved to Kingsclear and the rest of the lands be leased out.



Gabe Acquin, of St. Mary's First Nation, Fredericton, N.B. c. 1866 (University of New Brunswick Archives, 3-6) Published by kind permission of the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment Museum, Chester, England



View of the Indian Village on the River St. John above Fredericton, N.B. 1832, painted by Captain J. Campbell (National Archives of Canada, C-11076 / C-149822)

⁷ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

His final report clearly outlined the Government's plan for Wolastoqiyik, which involved control of their territory and assimilation through the non-Native method of education for the people.⁸

The Government's settlement plan subsequently steered Gabe, as well as others, to guiding and taking non-First Nation sportspeople to prime hunting and fishing areas throughout New Brunswick.

Although Perley's report gives a pretty good description of the government's plan for Wolastoqiyik, nothing in particular is known of Gabe's childhood. Documents and sporting articles do offer some insight into his adult life, but again his story is interrupted by large gaps of information. There is little doubt, however, that Gabe's abilities, especially, as a hunter and guide were sought out by adventure seekers who had very little or no knowledge of the backwoods of what is now known as New Brunswick. The accounts of these men who contracted his services on a regular basis offer some of the best information about 19th century hunting and fishing adventures and also shed light on Gabe's character, strength, skills, sense of humour and knowledge of the landscape.



Moses Henry Perley, 1804-1862
(New Brunswick Museum,
Saint John, N.B., #1987.17.485)

It is reputed that Gabe's guiding always resulted in officers having successful hunting parties.⁹ Although some believed that his "principal hunting territory was between the Salmon and Gaspereau rivers northeast of Fredericton,"¹⁰ others write that "He knew every barren where the game congregated and where to hunt them at any particular season whether on the Caanan, or Canes River at Mount Champlain or in the interior near Nictor or on the Napisiquit Lakes."¹¹ It is likely that he would have guided, hunted and fished all throughout New Brunswick.



Sportsmen and Wolastoq'kew guides with sledload of venison, probably caribou and moose meat. Third from left is guide Gabe Atwin (Acquin) (Chief Gabe) (Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, P5-267)

⁸ Extracts from M.H. Perley's Reports, 1841. Extracts from Mr. Perley's First Report Respecting the Indians on the Saint John, pp 83-88

⁹ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Greene, F.B. (1980) *A History of Saint Marys*, York Regional Library p. 19

One sporting enthusiast who had the privilege to acquire Gabe's services as a guide was Frederick Harris D. Vieth, a Captain of the Nova Scotia Militia. He writes:

*"Towards the end of November I started out with the above mentioned Indian, Gabe, to a place called Newcastle stream to hunt caribou for a fortnight. We took no snowshoes with us as it was not thought that they would be required so early in the winter season. But we had hardly been comfortably settled in camp before there came a very heavy snow-fall which lasted all one afternoon and night and part of the following morning. Here was a pretty piece of business. It was impossible to hunt without them, for the snow was decidedly too deep, and we were puzzled what to do."*¹²

Gabe decided to walk to a nearby settlement but was told that they did not have any snowshoes and he could find a pair a few miles away. He returned to camp instead and Vieth, obviously annoyed, said: "Then why on earth didn't you go and get them?..." "You were half way there." Gabe replied: "Oh, "sarten 'fraid not get back in time to cut wood. Maybe you freeze."¹³

Vieth noted Gabe's physical strength, which in addition to his acumen, singled him out as: "the best hunter and guide among all the Milicete [sic] Indians near Fredericton. He was a small man, but very wiry, and possessed of great strength (for his size), and powers of endurance." Noting Gabe's remarkable vigor, Vieth continued that while: "on a fishing trip, a portage was made from Chickitzyhock river over to the South West Branch of the Mirimachi, he carried their canoe across on his shoulders the whole eleven miles, putting it down only twice on the way to rest."¹⁴



Gabe hauling caribou. George T. Taylor Collection. Photo dated April 1873.

Not only was Gabe knowledgeable in locating game for his sport, but he was also a resourceful hunter. Vieth was duly impressed when Gabe hauled their game out of the woods with an impressive deftness and determination.

¹² Vieth, Frederick Harris D. (1907) *Recollections of the Crimean Campaign and the Expedition to Kinburn in 1855, Including Also Sporting and Dramatic Incidents in Connection with Garrison Life in the Canadian Lower Provinces*, 277

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Vieth, Frederick Harris D. (1907) *Recollections of the Crimean Campaign and the Expedition to Kinburn in 1855, Including Also Sporting and Dramatic Incidents in Connection with Garrison Life in the Canadian Lower Provinces*, 281

The undertaking required an early start and careful preparation, ensuring that the proper tools were at hand to expertly secure and tie the animal so it could be dragged, manually and while wearing snowshoes, over miles of hills and windfalls. The process would take all day and as expressed by Vieth: "It was the hardest day's work I ever had in my life..."¹⁵



Caribou Hunt, circa 1870, George T. Taylor. Seated on sleigh Col. John Saunders. Gabe Acquin with hand on snowshoes.

Having visited him at St. Mary's, some thirty five years later, in 1894, when he was approximately 83 years old, Vieth observed: "He did not look a day older than then, perhaps a little stouter, but that was all!"¹⁶

Among Gabe's acquaintances was Edward Jack, who employed Gabe as a guide and later wrote about him in his article entitled *A Day with the Abenakis*, which appeared in *Acadiensis* in October 1901. Gabe's knowledge of the landscape, history and origin stories, as well as Jack's deep trust in Gabe as his patient and capable guide, are reflected in the narrative, such as the following which was recorded following one of their trips on the Wolastoq:

"One of these, yet called Savage Island, was the place where, about the year 1760 or 1770, Charles Morris, then Surveyor General of Nova Scotia, saw the Great Indian Council House, built of rude poles, where, in the month of July in each year, the Abenakis met to allot to each Indian family its hunting ground. "As we rounded a point on the west side of the river, Gabe remarked: 'It is noon; here is a good place for dinner; on that bank is a clean, cold spring, and there are not flies to trouble us.'... When dinner was over, and Gabe's pipe filled and smoked, he became very communicative as one or other of

¹⁵ Ibid p. 283

¹⁶ Ibid p. 281

us drew him out: 'Ah!' said he 'the English when they took Quebec promised to treat us Indians as well as the French. They never have, nor never will. The French lived among us, learned our language and gave us religion; they were just like ourselves; that is why we thought so much of them.'"After leaving the point where we had dined we ascended the river a mile or two further, until we came opposite the foot of what is now called Hart's Island. This, Gabe informed us, was formerly called by the Indians, Old-Town..."Entering our canoes we poled along towards Savage Island, and the water became quicker and the bottom was covered by bright pebbles. 'This', said Gabe, 'is Augh-pa-hack, the head of tide. On the west side of the river, just here, once stood our church and village..."¹⁷

In addition to his services as a guide Gabe's clients were sometimes treated to stories, which they occasionally recorded. In Edward Jack's *Maliseet Legends*, for instance, Jack related two stories told to him by Gabe, such as the origin of the Cedar:

"Gabe says, *Glooscap* is still living. He is going to last as long as the world. They say that he is in the south end of the world. There were seven Indians who went to see him. It took them seven years to get to him. They saw him living with his grandmother. They went there to get their wishes. One man wanted long life. He gave them all their wishes, but he told him to come outside his wigwam. He took him to a place and told him to stand there. 'Stand there,' said he; 'you will get your wish.' He was turned into a curly cedar, all limbs fit for no use, so that nobody will ever cut him."¹⁸

Gabe also told Jack the origin of the medicinal plant *Ke-whis-wask* (calamus-root):

'Long ago', said he, 'there was a great sickness...many of them men, women and children, died. One night, when all was dark and silent, there appeared to one of our braves a strange figure, as of a man all covered with joints and bars. "I am," said he, "*Ke-whis-wask* (calamus-root), and can heal you all. You must, to-morrow morning, dig me up, steep mein warm water, and drink me, and I will cure you." After saying this he vanished, and next morning the brave, doing as he was told, the sick all recovered."¹⁹

Two Lieutenant Governors who served in New Brunswick were among the many sportspersons who sought Gabe's guiding and hunting services. John Henry Thomas Manners-Sutton who served as Lieutenant Governor from 1854-1861 befriended Gabe as a result of the hunting adventures they shared. The friendship, with little doubt, lead to the opportunity presented to Gabe and his *Wolastoqwey* family and friends to attend formal gatherings at Old Government House from which Veith gave his impression and description of the Snake Dance:

¹⁷ Jack, David Russell (October 1901) "The Indians of Acadia", *Acadiensis* 1(4): 192-193

¹⁸ Jack, Edward, (1895) "Maliseet Legends" *Journal of American Folklore*, 193

¹⁹ Jack, David R. (1901) "Indians of Acadia", *Acadiensis* 1(4): 194

*"During the week between Christmas and New Year's Day we were invited to Government House to take part in entertaining the Indians of the neighboring village. This it appeared had been customary at this season since the Honourable Mr. Manners-Sutton's first occupancy of the official residence some years before. It was a very odd spectacle that the large ballroom presented on our entering, for all round its sides squatting on the floor was the greater part of the members of the Micicete tribe who lived across the river, both male and female...provided the music for the dance using instruments consisting of bones, which they beat together, and disused powder cans, and pickle bottles filled with broken crockery that they rattled incessantly."*²⁰



Indian Dance at Government House by Capt. J. Campbell, 1835. (Province of New Brunswick Collection)

The invitation to Gabe from his Government House friends and his acceptance presented a platform and an opportunity for the two to exchange and display their respective cultures. The non-First Nations guests performed their dances first and then invited Wolastoqiyik to present theirs. This multicultural event was of such interest that it still holds fascination for contemporary authors and their readership.

²⁰ Vieth, Frederick Harris D. (1907) *Recollections of the Crimean Campaign and the Expedition to Kinburn in 1855, Including Also Sporting and Dramatic Incidents in Connection with Garrison Life in the Canadian Lower Provinces*, 285

For example, in *Will O' Wisp*, Carol Spray made direct reference to Gabe's relationship with Manners-Sutton and the Christmas event.

"Sutton and Gabe were good friends. Often they went hunting and fishing together and sometimes they would stay in the forest for many days if Sutton wanted a bear. Gabe would set the trap—for nobody could set a trap like Gabe. If Sutton wanted a moose, Gabe would strip some bark off a tree and call the moose to him—nobody could call a moose like Gabe...At Christmas time, Sutton threw a big party, and true to his word, he invited Gabe and the Indian people from Saint Mary's. It was a grand occasion..."²¹

Gabe's association with colonial dignitaries, however, did not end with Manners-Sutton. Lieutenant-Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon, serving after Manners-Sutton, also hired Gabe to guide him and his associates leading to a friendship between the two men.²²



Governor Gordon and Party. Gabe Acquin standing second to the left. (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John N.B., #1987.17.417.1)

As the following summary of his experiences in England reveal, Gabe had been more than just hired help to the many officers whom he had guided years before in New Brunswick.

"Gabe was an accomplished showman and took full advantage of the situation. Moreover nearly every officer who had known him when they were stationed in New Brunswick, 20, 30, or even 40 years before came to see him. Many of them had risen to high rank. They entertained him at their London clubs and at their homes as

²¹ Spray, Carol (1979) "Will O' Wisp: Folk Tales and Legends of New Brunswick", in *Gabe Acquin and The Prince of Wales* (Fredericton: Brunswick Press) 27-32

²² Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

the greatest social lion of the decade. After the exhibition was over several of these officers took him to their ancestral estates and did everything they could to show their great pleasure in meeting again their former companion and guide in the New Brunswick wilderness. Every member of the British Royal Family, with the exception of the Queen, visited Gabe at the exhibition. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, and Prince Alfred were particularly pleased to see him again and review the events of their visit to Fredericton in 1860 and 1861."²³



John Henry Thomas Manners-Sutton.
(University of New Brunswick Archives & Special
Collections, Harriet Irving Library)



Arthur Hamilton Gordon
(University of New Brunswick Archives & Special
Collections, Harriet Irving Library)

²³ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

Gabe and The Prince of Wales

In 1860 the Prince of Wales, Albert Edward, who would eventually become King Edward VII, toured British North America and the United States from July to October.²⁴

During his visit to Fredericton, while walking within the Government House grounds, he caught sight of Gabe who was paddling his birch bark canoe on the Saint John River. The Prince called him over asking questions about the process involved in making a birch bark canoe after which Gabe invited the young man to take a ride with him in the canoe.

During their short trip on the beautiful river, the Prince was so impressed by Gabe and his birch bark canoe that he requested a canoe and paddles to take back with him to England.



“The Micmacs of Fredericton bid the Prince/ Farewell at Fredericton” 1860, Sir Henry Acland (1815-1900) National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, C-124442/C-128606. (Based on the style of canoes depicted in this image, these were more likely to have been Maliseet from the St. Mary’s First Nation than Mi’kmaq).

In 1883, Gabe would be remembered and visited by the Prince and other members of the royal family when he made his trip to England as one of the delegates and performers for Canada’s installation for the International Fisheries Exhibition.²⁵

It seems that Gabe, as with the rest of the exhibition, made a lasting impression on the English. He was later visited by a number of officers whom he had guided when they were stationed in New Brunswick, and evidently, wanting to return Gabe’s hospitality, they treated him royally.²⁶

Gabe Acquin 1850’s Frequent guest in England, where this tin type was made. (University of New Brunswick Archives & Special Collections, Harriet Irving Library 74-17338) There is some doubt that this is Gabe.



²⁴ Blom, Margaret Howard and Thomas E. Blom eds. *Juliana Horatia Ewing’s Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869* (University of British Columbia Press 1983), 382

²⁵ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

²⁶ Ibid



INDIAN IN BIRCH CANOE, FISHERIES EXHIBITION.

Possibly Gabe Acquin, taken at the International Fisheries Exhibition 1883 (Fisheries – Oceanography Library, Freshwater and Marine Image Bank University of Washington)

Upon his death many years later his outing with the Prince appeared in the Saint John and Fredericton newspapers.

“The death of Gabe Acquin “Sachem Gabe”, has set loose a flood of memories of the doings and saying of the aged Indian, and many are the stories and anecdotes being related about him. It may not generally be known that the only time that King Edward Seventh of England was upon the water in a birch bark canoe was on the St. John River at Fredericton in company with Gabe, because the story has not heretofore appeared in print; but such is the well authenticated fact. As Gabe’s best friends well knew he was not given to boasting, yet he occasionally mentioned to intimates and with evident pride that he had taken the Prince canoeing, and he treasured in fond remembrance the kindness of the Young Prince, and the boyish mischievousness of the present King, as known in the following anecdote.

When the Prince of Wales visited Fredericton, about forty years ago, he arrived on Saturday and spent Sunday here. Early on Sunday morning Gabe, then in his prime and general favourite at Government House, left his wigwam at Saint Mary's and boarding his canoe, built by himself of bark stripped by his own hands off the stately birches, swiftly paddled up river to Government House, landing for the purpose, as Gabe afterwards expressed it, "jus' to look aroun'." It was about 9 o'clock when Gabe paddled slowly past Government House and who should be seen on the terrace back of the house, but the young Prince himself, enjoying the cool morning air, the beautiful view of the river, and a before breakfast cigar. The Prince, who was of course unknown to Gabe, who was dressed out in his most fantastic garb, hailed the Indian and asked him to come ashore. The Prince evinced a lively interest in the canoe and asked Gabe many questions about its construction and uses, and finally expressed a wish to have a short sail in the, to him, novel craft, a request which Gabe gladly complied with. Scarcely had they put off from the landing when the Duke of Newcastle who accompanied the Prince, and exercised a very strict watch over him, appeared upon the river bank and called upon the occupants of the canoeto return at once to the shore. The Prince, in an undertone, asked Gabe to pay no attention to the old fellow, meaning the Duke, but to keep on, and Gabe plied and paddle with such effect that they were soon out of call from the shore. Gabe took his Royal visitor across the river and a short distance on the beautiful Nashwaaksis, the Prince thoroughly enjoyed his first and probably, only trip in a birch bark canoe, and Gabe in relating the story would say "an' he not one bit 'fraid." When Gabe was asked if the Prince gave him anything for disobeying the Duke of Newcastle's command, he would say: "I got some gold," and more than this he would not say."²⁷

As well, Juliana Horatia Ewing an artist, writer and wife of a military man, who came with her husband to Fredericton in 1867 to 1869 wrote numerous letters to her family, back in England, in which she briefly mentioned two Wolastoqiyik, one of which was Gabe. The other was Peter Polchies, who supplied the Ewings with snowshoes and a birch bark canoe, as well as other various Wolastoqwey items that were sent as gifts for their family in England.²⁸ It appears that Peter also tried to teach Major Ewing "Melicete" names for plants and as an expression of gratitude Major Ewing presented Peter with a gun before returning to his native England.²⁹

²⁷ Jack, David Russell, (October 1901) "Gabe Acquin," *Acadiensis* 1(4):250-1

²⁸ Blom, Margaret Howard and Thomas E. Blom eds. *Juliana Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869* (University of British Columbia Press 1983) 111, 142, 164-165, 174, 244, 253-254, 341.

²⁹ Gatty, Horatia K.F. *Juliana Horatia Ewing and Her Books* (London : Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885) 48.

Although Juliana Horatia Ewing's mention of Gabe was very brief, her personal recollections, such as her account of a river outing with some of her friends, made an interesting contribution to the historical portrait of Gabe. "The most interesting to me was a song sung by Gabriel the Indian-a curious wild, monotonous, plaintive affair, but wonderfully in keeping with the motion of the canoes & the splash of the water in the moonlight."³⁰ She drew a sketch of Gabe from a photograph and later sent it to England writing: "...I think I will send your photo's next mail. I have got one of "Old Gabe" for you..."³¹

In his book *Chiploquorgan*, Richard Lewes Dashwood offered yet another reference to Gabe, providing further evidence of the wide reputation he had established as a first class guide and cultural liaison between Wolastoqiyik and the colonial population.

*"We set off for the head of Pleasant Brook the end of January with Sebattis and another Indian named Gabe, a well-known hunter at Fredericton, who spoke excellent English, and did not use Yankee terms for everything. This man from his earliest youth had been accustomed to go out with officers stationed in the province."*³²

Yet Gabe Acquin's accomplishments were not limited to being the best and preferred guide by non-First Nation sportspeople, or because he was possibly the most knowledgeable of the backwoods throughout New Brunswick. He also aided and provided support to his Wolastoqiyik friends during this very critical time for First Nations people and their land.



"Gabe Acquin" Juliana Horatia Ewing, Yorkshire Libraries and Information Ewing Gatty Collection Wakefield, England. Reproduced in Juliana Horatia Ewing's *Fredericton Letters 1867-1869*, Margaret Howard Blom and Thomas E. Blom eds. (University of British Columbia Press 1983) 47

³⁰ Blom, Margaret Howard and Thomas E. Blom eds. *Juliana Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869* (University of British Columbia Press 1983) 199

³¹ *Ibid.*, 237

³² Dashwood, R.L. *Chiploquorgan, or, Life by the Camp Fire in Dominion of Canada and Newfoundland* (Dublin: Robert T. White 1871) p. 124.

Gabe and The St. Mary's First Nation

Gabe has been credited as the founder of the St. Mary's First Nation, which is located on the north side of the Saint John River in Fredericton. Wolastoqiyik likely chose a location away from the river's edge because they preferred higher, and therefore dryer, ground and because of the freshwater sources they found there. This follows an ancient tradition of First Nations who since the precontact period deliberately selected their campsites at locales where fresh water, a necessary ingredient of life was readily available. The traditional importance of fresh water in the selection of a living site was recently emphasized when Elders from the St. Mary's First Nation, on talking about the Old Reserve, remembered, "Indians are on this side of the river" because there was "no fresh water in town, [but] there was a brook running through the reserve."³³



Maude Paul, granddaughter of Gabe
(University of New Brunswick Archives &
Special Collections, Harriet Irving Library)
74-17337



Matilda Paul, granddaughter of Gabe
(University of New Brunswick Archives &
Special Collections, Harriet Irving
Library) 74-17343

During the first half of the 19th century many Wolastoqiyik, in addition to Gabe and his family, had seasonally camped on the north side of the river across from Fredericton. But Gabe was the first Wolastoq'kew to settle there permanently. In 1847 he was invited to settle at St Mary's by the executors of the estate of one Xenophon Jouett, a Loyalist settler who had been granted 300 acres of land in 1798. There he welcomed other Wolastoq'kew families to settle with him on his land as he continued to support his family through the traditional pursuits of hunting, trapping and fishing. Gabe also augmented his living by sharing his traditional expertise and knowledge with non-First Nations clients with whom he would develop a considerable following.

³³ Perley, Karen and Susan Blair, eds. (2001) *Wolastoqiyik Ajemseg People of the Beautiful River at Jemseg* 1:24 Fredericton: Archaeological Services, Heritage Branch, Culture and Sport Secretariat.

In 1867, the two and a half acres upon which Gabe had been living were sold, without his knowledge, to the Crown. Never, in the twenty years since he had settled his family on this piece of land, now known as Indian Lot 24, had his right to be there been challenged. Gabe and his family had lived here in a wigwam for ten years until 1857 when he built the house in which he would live until his death in 1901. Gabe and others had always believed that their land was of considerably greater extent, but to their surprise only this small riverfront lot had been legally set aside for Wolastoqiyik.

In 1883 Gabe applied to the federal government for right of possession to all of the land upon which he, his family, and several other Wolastoq'kew families had been residing, but he apparently received no reply. The land to which they were limited was the two and a half acres that the government had purchased in 1867 and upon which Gabe had been living since 1847.

The community that Gabe formed, along with twenty-seven Wolastoq'kew families, changed over the years from Lot 24, to the Indian Camps at Saint Mary's, to the Saint Mary's Indian Reserve. With time, the small community became overcrowded, and given the small size of their lot, there was no room to expand. To solve the problem of severe overcrowding, in 1929 the Federal government purchased land for what became the North Devon Reserve, a parcel six hundred and sixty feet wide by four and one quarter miles long. Wolastoqiyik from the original reserve founded by Gabe soon moved to the new Reserve, which today is the home of the Maliseet Nation at St. Mary's.³⁴

³⁴ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

Almost a Century of Gabe

We will never know what his contemporaries thought of Gabe during his ninety years of life since historic Wolastoqwey sentiments were rarely recorded in the written record.

One can only infer that he would have earned their respect because of his generous nature, which was demonstrated in many ways, including his invitation to other Wolastoqiyik to live with him on his land. In addition to his generosity, Gabe also contributed to the economic survival of his people, creating a network through which guiding services could be contracted and by helping to develop a commercial market for the exceptional products made by skilled Wolastoq'kew professionals whose beautiful baskets, birch bark canoes, paddles, snow shoes and stone pipes were much sought after by colonial settlers. With this wide network of associates and clients, Gabe was in a position to connect the entrepreneurial Wolastoqiyik with buyers for their wares.



"The Basketsellers" Juliana Horatia Ewing, Yorkshire Libraries and Information Ewing Gatty Collection Wakefield, England. Reproduced in Juliana Horatia Ewing's *Fredericton Letters 1867-1869*, Margaret Howard Blom and Thomas E. Blom eds. (University of British Columbia Press 1983)

Juliana Horatia Ewing was one of the most frequent buyers of Wolastoqwey merchandise and was always pleased with the quality of work. "We are going to set up our own canoe. Peter is building it...Your snow shoes are ordered with our canoe! And also a "pipe of peace" to add to Maggie's collection..."³⁵

In addition, Gabe's responsibilities may have extended to the highly prestigious office of Wampum Keeper, which he may have held at the meeting of the Wabanaki Confederacy in 1838, but there exists no definite proof of this.³⁶ The following photograph, taken in 1866, shows Gabe wearing what appears to be a Wampum collar/belt. Though compelling and to many, quite convincing, this is not taken as conclusive evidence that he carried the title of Wampum Keeper.



In this detailed section of the image, Gabe is wearing what appears to be a Wampum collar/belt. Published by kind permission of the 22nd (Cheshire) Regiment Museum, Chester, England

³⁵ Blom, Margaret Howard and Thomas E. Blom eds. *Juliana Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters, 1867-1869* (University of British Columbia Press 1983) p.164

³⁶ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

Regardless of the fact that there is little written information available, Gabe is still remembered as a man of many skills who was appreciated for his generosity, sense of humour and cultural knowledge, and still admired for his leadership qualities, resourcefulness and great physical strength. In addition, there was the added flair with which Gabe carried out his responsibility as a guide. Along with ensuring a successful hunt and serving traditional Wolastoqwey fare to his hungry campers, Gabe's sense of humour and gift for story telling made sitting around the campfire an enjoyable experience his clients would never forget. In return, they often invited Gabe into their world as well, welcoming him, for instance, both at their officers' mess and at Government House. These connections led to even more opportunities for Gabe, which included canoeing with the Prince of Wales, and being the guest, and the friend, of high ranking British officers, Lieutenant-Governors and other notables, both in New Brunswick and in England.³⁷



Image of Gabe cropped by Brent Suttie, Archaeological Services Unit

Gabe Acquin looking at map, surrounded by friends c.1862. Vice-regal group on the portico of Government House. The group include Arthur Hamilton Gordon, Gabe Acquin and six other unidentified men, one of whom may be Henry Youle Hind. (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, N.B., #1999.8)

³⁷ Ibid

During his life, Gabe, who was blessed with an easygoing nature, showed a remarkable resilience and ability to adapt in a rapidly changing world. This combination of qualities that defined Gabe as a man, can also be credited for bringing him close to a century of life. Gabe died at St. Mary's on 2 October 1901 and was "buried at Sunny Bank Cemetery in an unmarked grave."³⁸ His funeral was attended by many dignitaries, including Lieutenant-Governor Abner Reid McClelan."³⁹

One of his acquaintances, David Russell Jack editor of the journal *Acadiensis*, ran a special obituary:

*"To many of our readers to whom the name of Gabe, the Sachem of the Abenakis, has been familiar for many years, the news that he has gone to the happy hunting grounds will be learned with regret. He passed away at the Indian reserve on Wednesday, the 2nd of October after the article upon the Indians of Acadia, in which reference is made to him, and which appears in the first portion of this number of Acadiensis, had been off the press. He was the veteran Indian guide and trapper, the leader of his tribe, and had, in his day, been the associate, for the time being, of many men. Gabe had been in failing health for some time, and at his decease must have been about ninety years of age."*⁴⁰

³⁸ Greene, F. B. *A History of Saint Mary's*, Fredericton: York Regional Library 1980, 41

³⁹ Smyth, David. *Gabriel Acquin*. (Parks Canada: HSMBC Submission Report, 1998-58)

⁴⁰ Jack, David Russell, (October 1901) "Gabe Acquin," *Acadiensis* 1(4):250

Conclusion



Gabe, G.T.Taylor Collection

Though he is recognized as a man of singular reputation and achievement, Gabe Acquin is also representative of most Wolastoqiyik living during the 19th century who possessed guiding and hunting skills, understood the language of the landscape, knew locations of game, were resourceful and had a strong sense of survival.

In my mind, Gabe represents many Wolastoqiyik just like him who shared his natural knowledge and life experiences. It was, after all, their collective resilience and determination that guided them in the face of the challenges and hardships brought on by the rapidly changing world of colonial New Brunswick and ensured their survival as today's Wolastoqiyik population. Throughout history, regardless of their changing world, Wolastoqiyik continued to honour their lifestyle and their territory, within which lay the river Wolastoq, the heart of their existence. All of these people, who for countless generations closely guarded their valued relationship with the river, were indirectly and appropriately acknowledged through the designation of Gabe.

Gabe is remembered for his diplomacy, his sense of leadership, his pivotal role as cultural educator, as founder of the second largest Wolastoqwey First Nation community in New Brunswick, the first Wolastoqiyik to earn a place of significance in Canada, and for bringing recognition to all Wolastoqiyik who share and identify with his life experiences. Throughout his life, Gabe remained close to his community and was a major contributor towards its economic growth and stability. Additionally, Gabe's natural ability, his vigor and enthusiasm in every activity, and his knowledge of the wilderness made him a valuable member of any hunting party. His superlative reputation as a 19th century hunter and guide earned him an important place in Wolastoqwey, New Brunswick, and Canadian history.



Gabe Acquin in white striped coat, holding knife. G.T. Taylor Collection

A Few of Gabe's Descendants



University of New Brunswick
Archives & Special Collections, Harriet Irving Library

Simon Paul, Tobique First Nation,
grandson of Gabe
(74-17335)



From left,
Maggie Paul, Minnie Acquin, 1905
(74-17372)



University of New Brunswick Archives & Special Collections,
Harriet Irving Library

Second from the left, Cecilia Paul, granddaughter of Gabe
(74-17348)

Gabriel Dedam,
(1924-1998) great grandson
of Gabe (74-17349)





University of New Brunswick
Archives & Special Collections,
Harriet Irving Library

Third from left, Gabe's daughter,
Sarah Gabriel Acquin (74-17367)

Madeline Dedham, granddaughter of
Gabe Acquin. Taken at the World's
Fair in Chicago. c. 1903. (University
of New Brunswick Archives & Special
Collections, Harriet Irving Library 6-38)



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