

Reading Abenaki Traditions and European Records of Rogers' Raid

by Marge Bruchac, August 2006

The October 4, 1759 attack on St. Francis is recognized as an important event in American history, but most people only know the fictional version. The movie "Northwest Passage" portrays half-naked savages, living in tipis and pounding on great war drums. Town histories depict the Abenaki as violent foreign marauders, who attacked no reason, conveniently forgetting to mention the broken treaties and boundary violations of English settlers in Abenaki territory. Some historians have claimed the Abenaki were engaged in a drunken orgy the night before the raid. Those who have read Robert Rogers' account think that more than 200 Abenaki people were killed, and that the survivors were few and far between. These fictions have twisted this event into unrecognizable shape. The truth, as preserved in Abenaki oral traditions, French records, and English documents, including the writings of Rogers' own men, is far more complicated.

The children's book, *Malian's Song*, recounts some of the Abenaki oral traditions regarding the English attack conducted by Major Robert Rogers, as seen through the eyes of two young girls – *Malian* and *Maliazonis* – who lived through it. The fishing scene and family encounters that open this book are semi-fictional moments that serve to illustrate the nature of Abenaki family life and activities at the time. The other elements of this story are factual, taken directly from the written records and personal accounts of witnesses and families who recalled specific events. This essay offers some excerpts from the extant written records, and some insights that help explain how the Abenaki oral traditions portrayed in *Malian's Song* relate to the European records.

Many of the well-documented historical details preserved in Abenaki oral traditions and French written records are unfamiliar to Americans, who have been widely exposed to the biased accounts of colonial soldiers, and the stereotypes and errors in the writings of later historians. A number of the cultural and historical details about family life, material culture, and the events surrounding Rogers' Raid, as illustrated in *Malian's Song*, come directly from oral tradition, and are corroborated by other sources. These include: premonitions among some of the elders about the impending attack; the silver brooch on *Simôn Obomsawin's* hat; the Council House dance; the warning given by the Stockbridge Mohican scout (*Samadagwis*) to a teenaged Abenaki girl; the location of the hiding place at *Sibosek*; *Malian's* falling asleep with her arms on the windowsill; *Malian's* rescue by her father; the burning of the village; the theft of corn from the storage houses; the return of Father Roubaud to the ashes of his church; the movement of survivors into winter camps or southward to rejoin other Abenaki communities; the lonesome song; and the rebuilding of the village.

Abenaki Homelands: Nda Kinna During the 18th Century

Malian's home village of "Odanak" (which literally translates to "at the dwelling-place") was, and is, situated on the east bank of the St. Francis River, northwest of Pierreville, near the St. Lawrence, about 40 miles north of Montreal (also known as Ville-Marie). The St. Francis River was known to the Abenaki as *Arsikantegouk* or *Alsigontekw* (meaning "empty cabin river" or "place of shells"), a name that recalled both a 1691 Mohawk attack and a 1700 plague. During

the late 1690s, Jesuit missionaries built a Catholic mission dedicated to Saint Francis there, and offered the Abenaki people protection under the colony of New France. The Abenaki people living at Odanak were, and are, closely related to the Abenaki at *Wolinak* (“a bay”), further north on the St. Lawrence near Trois Rivières and Bécancœur.

The original Abenaki homelands reached far beyond the boundaries of Odanak. *Ndakinna* (meaning, “our homeland”) includes all of present-day New Hampshire, all but the southwestern corner of Vermont, and parts of northern Massachusetts, northeastern New York state, and southern Canada, encompassing important waterways like the *Kwanitegok* (“long river” – the Connecticut River) and *Merrimack* or *Morôdemak* (“deep river”) and thousands of fresh-water lakes. Although particular bands and families took responsibility for specific sites and resources, Abenaki people routinely travelled all over this territory for seasonal hunting and fishing and ceremonial gatherings.

Many of the familiar tribal names used today are actually locative words that refer to specific regions. During the late 1600s, some Abenaki families from the tribal bands called *Cowass* (“pine-tree place”), *Missisquoi* or *Mazipskoik* (“place of the flint”), *Pennacook* (“place of ground-nuts”), *Pequawket* (“broken, cleared land”), and *Sokoki* (“southern place”) started moving northward in response to the increasing incursions of English settlers from the Massachusetts colonies. Other families stayed in those places, and are still living there today. Odanak eventually incorporated a number of Abenaki families from these bands, along with Native refugees from the Massachusetts tribes of –*Pocumtuck* (“swift, sandy river”), *Woronoco* (“winding river”), *Nonotuck* (“in the midst of the river”), *Quabaug* (“red pond”), and others – who had been forced out of the middle Connecticut River Valley by English colonists. The tribal groups who moved north eventually became known collectively as “St. Francis Indians” after they allied with French soldiers during the military conflicts of the 1690s-1760s that are commonly called the “French and Indian Wars.”

By 1759, the Abenaki village situated on a bluff above the St. Francis River was neither a cluster of bark-covered wigwams, nor was it a stockaded arrangement of longhouses. The several hundred *Wôbanakiak* (“Abenaki Indian people”) living at Odanak inhabited 51 houses built in the English or French style. Monsieur Franquet, a French engineer who visited the village in 1752, observed that most homes were constructed of squared log timbers covered with lengths of bark or rough-cut boards. At least 12 were one or two-story French-style wood-frame houses with clapboards; 3 houses were built of stone. They were arranged in rows around a central square, with a church and a large Council House. Simôn Obomsawin’s family lived in a two-story French-style wood-frame house.

The premonitions about the attack came in various forms. Some elders are said to have had recurring dreams about English or Mohawk attacks that likely resonated from their experiences as young children during *King Philip’s War* (1675-1676), *King William’s War* (1689-97), *Queen Anne’s War* (1702-13), *Greylock’s War* (also called *Dummer’s War*, *Father Rasle’s War*, and *Lovewell’s War*, 1722-25) *King George’s War* (1744-48), the *French and Indian War* (1754-63), and other conflicts that had forced them to move north. Odanak felt like a safe place, since it had a Catholic mission under the protection of the French, and was located far to the north of the English settlements. But some of the more traditional elders felt that dependence on European lifeways was dangerous. In *Malian’s Song*, this attitude is reflected in *Nokomis’s* statement that “French houses bring bad dreams,” as she packs for her winter camp. Another common belief

among Abenaki people even today is that birds, animals, fish, and other non-human creatures carry important messages. This is reflected in the opening pages of *Malian's Song* when she slips and falls into the river, and later realizes that the *namassaak* ("fish people") were trying to warn her that trouble was coming.

General Jeffrey Amherst's Plans and Major Robert Rogers' Attack in 1759

During the French and Indian wars, Abenaki warriors gained a reputation for ferocity during their battles against English colonists who were encroaching on Abenaki territory. Their adversaries were New England men who spent most of their lives enmeshed in military conflicts as the English colonies tried to expand northward, meeting Abenaki resistance every step of the way. Robert Rogers adopted scouting and ranging techniques that blended military practices used by the Scottish border patrols in Britain with Native American Indian tactics and woodcraft.

In 1759, not long after his capture of Fort Carillon/Fort Ticonderoga from the French, General Jeffrey Amherst sent Rogers' Ranger Captain Quinton Kennedy northward carrying both proposals of peace for the Abenaki (who were loyal to the French), and secret dispatches to General Wolfe, who was then besieging the French town of Quebec. On August 8, Kennedy, along with Lieutenant Hamilton, Captain Jacob Naunaphataunk and six Stockbridge Mohicans set out. On August 24, they were captured by an Abenaki hunting party and conveyed to St. Francis where Father Pierre-Joseph Roubaud detained them. One oral tradition suggests that a Stockbridge man was tortured and killed after he refused to return to his St. Francis Abenaki wife. The officers were abused, and Amherst was so incensed that he decided, as Rogers recalled, "to chastize these savages with some severity."

General Jeffrey Amherst was moved to order an attack on the Abenaki at Odanak/St. Francis as retribution for their long participation in New England raids, their attack on British soldiers at Fort William Henry, and, more recently, their capture of Captain Kennedy and the killing of one of Captain Jacob's Stockbridge Mohican Indian scouts. Amherst's specific instructions to Major Robert Rogers, sent from his camp at Crown Point on September 13, 1759, read as follows:

You are this night to set out with the detachment as ordered yesterday, viz. of 200 men, which you will take under your command, and proceed to Misisquey Bay, from whence you will march and attack the enemy's settlement on the south-side of the river St. Lawrence, in such a manner as you shall judge most effectual to disgrace the enemy, and for the success and honour of his Majesty's arms.

Remember the barbarities that have been committed by the enemy's Indian scoundrels on every occasion, where they had an opportunity of shewing their infamous cruelties on the King's subjects, which they have done without mercy. Take your revenge, but don't forget that tho' those villains have dastardly and promiscuously murdered the women and children of all ages, it is my orders that no women or children are killed or hurt.

When you have executed your intended service, you will return with your detachment to camp or join me wherever the army may be. Your's, &c.

Jeff. Amherst. Camp at Crown Point

(Journals of Major Robert Rogers 1769, pp. 131-132, reprinted Bargersville, IN: Dresslar Publishing 1997, pp. 131-132).

Major Robert Rogers led a group of 142 English regulars, including officers, volunteers, and provincial soldiers, north up Lake Champlain towards St. Francis. They were accompanied by 24

Mohican Indians from Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The known names of the Indians who accompanied Rogers included 2nd Lieutenant William Hendrick Phillips, Captain Jacob Cheeksaunkaun, Captain Jacob the younger, Sergeant Abraham Wnaumpos, and Sergeant Philip, in addition to Rangers John Maunaummaug, Jacob Miscoukuk, Jeremiah Maukhquampoo, John Jacob, Wonk Napkin, Andrew Wansant, Daniel Nepash, and Samadagwis.

They left Crown Point in mid-September and headed for Missisquoi Bay, but their numbers were soon diminished; forty men were sent back, some having been burned in a gunpowder accident, and others being sick. To add to their difficulties, the weather was stormy and raining for much of the journey, as Rogers' company continued north on foot. Rogers' whaleboats were discovered, and scuttled, by the French and the Missisquoi Abenaki. French scouts soon reported seeing English soldiers in the forests east of Montreal, heading towards the St. Francis River.

On October 1, 1759, a force of 100 French soldiers and Abenaki men set out from Odanak to search for Rogers' men. They went north along the St. Lawrence River to Wigwam Martinique, following information that claimed that the attack would come from the north. In fact, the intelligence was correct, but Major Robert Rogers had changed his plans after the loss of his boats and some of his men. On October 3, some Abenaki women washing in the St. Francis River spotted wood chips floating on the water – oral traditions suggest that these might have been from rafts or bridges that Rogers' men built to facilitate crossing the St. Francis River near what the Abenaki called the “little woods” around St. Joachim.

The moon was nearly full when Robert Rogers claimed he snuck into the village during the night of October 3 and “found the Indians in a high frolic or dance.” During that same night, one of Rogers' Stockbridge Mohican scouts, a man named Samadagwis, delivered a warning about the impending attack to a young teenaged girl (Maliazonis) during the dance at the Council House, as shown in the book, *Malian's Song*.

The exact number of people in the village that night is unclear, but tradition suggests that more than 100 people hid near the ravine at Sibosek. Some stayed at the Council House loading up muskets to fight back. Of the approximately 40 people who stayed behind in their houses, 32 died, most of them women and children. Most of the wooden houses at Odanak were destroyed. One tradition says that the bell of the church kept ringing as that building burned..

News was often slow to travel in the New England colonies, and the first reports of Rogers' Raid that reached Sir Jeffrey Amherst from French sources were ominous. Amherst's journal entry for November 2, 1759 notes:

Mons de Cadillac said M Rogers Party had burnt the settlement at St Francis, killed some Indians, women & children. I fancy he is mistaken about the women & children & that some Indians & Canadians had assembled & attacked M Rogers in his retreat at night. (Jeffery Amherst. The Journal of Jeffrey Amherst, Recording the Military Career of General Amherst in America from 1758 to 1763. Edited by J. Clarence Webster. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1931, p. 186.)

A few days later, Amherst received a letter containing Major Rogers' version of the attack, which sounded far more successful, from the English perspective:

At half an hour before sun-rise I surprised the town when they were all fast asleep, on the right, left, and center, which was done with so much alacrity by both the officers and men, that the enemy had not time to recover themselves, or take arms for their own defense, till

they were chiefly destroyed, except some few of them who took to the water. About forty of my people pursued them, who destroyed such as attempted to make their escape that way, and sunk both them and their boats. A little after sun-rise I set fire to all their houses except three in which there was corn that I reserved for the use of the party.

*The fire consumed many of the Indians who had concealed themselves in the cellars and lofts of their houses. About seven o'clock in the morning the affair was completely over, in which time we had killed at least two hundred Indians, and taken twenty of their women and children prisoners, fifteen of whom I let go their own way, and five I brought with me, viz. two Indian boys and three Indian girls. I likewise retook five English captives, which I also took under my care. (Robert Rogers, *Journals of Major Robert Rogers*, 1765, reprinted Corinth, NY: Corinth Books 1961, pp. 105-107.)*

Rogers lost only one man during the fighting in the village – Samadagwis, the Stockbridge scout who warned Maliazonis (he was found later that morning, and, at his request, was “baptized” before he was killed by the Abenaki).

When Rogers left Odanak, he took with him at least 6 Abenaki people as captives, including Nanamaghemet (Marie-Jeanne Gill), wife of Chief Joseph Louis Gill, and 5 children. His prisoners told him that a large force of 300 French and Indians were situated at the mouth of the St. Francis River, and another 200 French and 15 Indians were at Yamaska. During the disastrous return journey, as Rogers’ men were hotly pursued by Abenaki and French fighters, he split up the company and 43 rangers – more than half of his remaining men – died of wounds or starvation.

Abenaki oral traditions and the Rangers’ own journals recall the extreme state of starvation that Rogers’ men were in by the time they attacked Odanak. The Rangers stole some corn, but they were forced to flee so quickly out of the village that there was no time to hunt, and they scabbled for ground-nuts and lily roots to avoid starvation. In desperation, some of the raiders cannibalized their own dead. One Abenaki captive, Marie-Jeanne Gill, was killed and eaten by the rangers during the retreat, according to the diary of Lieutenant George Campbell, who wrote:

*Ye Chef's wife expired & may have been kill'd by ye Stockbridges. Ye Major has asked me not to reveal this probability that Jenkins Stockbridges kill'd ye Chefs Squaw. – She led them toward ye French on Loch Champlain. Her flesh kept them alive, except poor Jenkins who did not eat... (Lieutenant George Campbell, December 12, 1759, original manuscript in the possession of Burt G. Loescher, excerpted in *The History of Rogers' Rangers*. Vol. 4. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books 2002, p. 259)*

In Abenaki traditions, the resort to cannibalism is an atrocious act that signals a terrible transformation out of human form. Traditional stories contain warnings about cannibal giants and other spirits that might harm the unwary. In the first pages of *Malian's Song*, Abenaki readers may recognize the veiled reference to these stories in the humorous exchange between Malian and her father about the “water monster” who “eats whoever is last.” This is also a poignant reference to later events, since Malian, who reached the house first that morning, survived the raid while her father perished.

The Jesuit Father Pierre-Joseph Antoine Roubaud was away during the attack, but he returned that afternoon to find the church burned to the ground, the sacred objects looted, the corn stores stolen or burned, and many families just returning from their sheltered place at Sibosek. In a

letter to the Count de Vergennes, Roubaud briefly described the scene, and the effect of the Abenaki pursuit of one of Rogers' detachments of soldiers:

Most of the village was burned to ashes including my house. Considerable Indian corn and Indians were burned. Ten men and twenty-two women and infants [dead]. I gathered my savages and the next day we pursued the assailants with our complement. Because of lack of provisions, Major Rogers divided his party. My savages took prisoners and destroyed three-fourths of the detachment. (Father Pierre-Joseph Antoine Roubaud, letter to Count de Vergennes, Lourdes, 2 March, 1776, original in Paris, copy in National Archives of Canada, FM, 5, Vol. 515, pp. 12-13.)

The historians who have compared English, French, and Abenaki records now generally agree that Rogers exaggerated the success of his raid, and inflated the numbers of the Abenaki dead, in large part to cover his own losses. The French and Abenaki records agree that only 32 Abenaki people actually died during the raid, among them 10 men and 22 women and children who were burned in their homes or shot while trying to escape. Several hundred people survived, thanks to the warning delivered by Samadagwis. Roubaud's account of the number of dead and looting of the church was corroborated by Bishop de Pontbriand, who wrote to the Bishop of France:

The Mission of the Abenakis Indians of Saint Francois has been utterly destroyed by a party of English and Indians, who have stolen all the vestments and sacred vessels, have thrown the sacred Hosts on the ground, have killed some thirty persons, more than 20 were women and children. (Bishop de Pontbriand, Montreal, letter to a Bishop of France, November 5, 1759, Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, Volume X, p. 1058.)

Some information about the Rangers' retreat came from the Missisquoi Abenaki community, situated about 80 miles south of Odanak. Monsieur de Sabrevois, who had been out hunting at Missisquoi Bay with the Abenaki, reported:

...while crossing the bay in bark canoes, they had seen few men shooting at ducks. Then, some of the Abenakis set out to go by land to their fort on the Missisquoi River, which they had deserted since the beginning of the campaign [1759]. When they arrived, they saw a heavy smoke rising up. Coming nearer cautiously, they heard English words, and they noticed that of the five horses they had left only four were remaining; the English must have killed one for food. (Thomas Charland, "The Lake Champlain Army and the Fall of Montreal" in Vermont History 28(4), 1960, p. 298.)

Sir Jeffery Amherst started receiving various reports as Rangers trickled in to English outposts. In his journal entry of November 8, 1759, he noted that several Rangers returning from Otter Creek "were loaded with wampum & fine things they took at St Francis" (*The Journal of Jeffrey Amherst*, 1931, p. 189). In the decades since, weapons and other items lost during the hasty retreat have periodically turned up. Treasure hunters are still searching for the church relics, two of which may have been found in the early 1800s, according to a November 15, 1869 letter from E. Harrington to Louis Gill at Odanak:

In 1827, an incense vessel, believed to have been left by one of Rogers' men, was found on an island in the Watopeka river where it empties into the St. Francis, at Windsor Mills, Quebec, and in 1838, one Robert Orme, of Vermont, found a large image of a saint at the mouth of the Magog river, and gave it to a priest then living in Sherbrooke. (Letter from E.

Harrington at Magog to Louis Gill at Odanak, November 15, 1869, in “Major Rogers and the Abenakis’ Treasures” by Jacques Boisvert, *Sherbooke Daily Record*, March 20, 1987, available on-line at the *Ne-do-ba* website <http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/rrr_4.html>

Two of the Abenaki captives that Rogers’ men brought back – girls who were said to have been relatives of Eunice Williams (an English girl captured by the Mohawk from Deerfield, Massachusetts in 1704) died of smallpox at Albany. One of the captives was reunited with a familiar face, in one of the more poignant encounters after the raid, when he met with Susannah Johnson, who had been captured by the St. Francis Abenaki five years earlier. Johnson wrote from Charlestown, New Hampshire in late October of 1759:

He [Major Rogers] brought with him a young Indian prisoner, who stopped at my house, the moment he saw me he cried, my God, my God, here is my sister; it was my little brother Sabatis, who formerly used to bring the cows for me, when I lived at my Indian masters...When he got to Otter Creek, he met my son Sylvanus, who was in the army with Col. Willard; he recognized him, and clasping him in his arms, “My God,” says he, “the fortune of war!” - I shall ever remember this young Indian with affection. (Susannah Johnson, A Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Johnson, original 1796, reprint of the 3rd edition from Windsor, Vermont 1814, Springfield, MA: H. R. Hutting 1870, p. 133-4.)

Recollections of Rogers’ Raid in Abenaki Families

In the years after the attack, Malian Obomsawin combined her memories with those of the teenaged girl we have named Maliazonis, who was a close relative, when she passed the oral tradition on to her granddaughter, Mali Msadoques, at some time in the early 1800s. An elderly Mali Msadoques passed the story on to her young niece, Elvine Obomsawin, when Elvine was a child in the late 1800s.

In 1959, 200 years after the attack, when Elvine Obomsawin Royce was living in Vermont, she recorded the family recollections of Rogers’ Raid on audiotape for the ethnologist Gordon Day. When Day first heard Elvine Obomsawin’s family tradition, he thought that perhaps she was describing a Mohawk attack, until he recognized events related to Rogers Raid. In Abenaki, the word *Magwak* usually referred to Mohawk or Iroquois people, but the literal translation is “man-eater,” a term that could refer to any especially fearsome enemy. Traditions vary about precisely what words Rogers’ Stockbridge Mohican scout, Samadagwis, spoke, but it is clear in all versions that he carried a warning about strangers who were planning an attack the next morning. The Obomsawin family tradition recalls Samadagwis saying:

Akwi sagezi. (“Don’t be afraid.”)...Kwidobawo nia -- ni nigik alnobak -- magwak pilewakak -- odaino yo kpiwsi. (“I-am-your-friend -- and those Indians -- Iroquois strangers [Rogers’ Rangers] --they-are-here in-the-little-woods”) Alemi môdziidit alemi wigwômwôk, mziwi môdzoldimek ni alemi tebakak nidzi mziwi ogadi nhlônô, ozanôbamewô, ni odzikseminô kedodanawô, ni nebaiôn nia wadzi wawôdokwlan. (“When they-leave [the Abenaki] for-their-home, all leaving and during-the-night then-will all [Rogers’ men] they-will kill-them, their-husbands, and they-burn-it your-village, and I-come I for warning-you.”) (Elvine Obomsawin’s original interview recorded by Gordon Day in 1959, reel 29, side 1, in the collections of the Museum of Civilization, Hull, Ontario)

Malian’s story was a particularly sad one, since shortly after her father Simôn rescued her, he was killed, when an English soldier fired his gun at the sunlight glinting off of the silver brooch

that Simôn wore on his hat. Day realized that the warning had saved Malian and most of the village, but he was puzzled that one of Rogers' own scouts would take such a risk.

Samadagwis' action reveals the presence of some friendships and family ties between Mohican and Abenaki people, despite their conflicting loyalties to the English and French. When Day first wrote about this event in the 1970s, he speculated that Samadagwis's tribal identity was Schaghticoke, primarily because so many "Schaghticoke Indians" had moved to Odanak during the 1740s. This is a common error, however. Samadagwis actually identified himself as "Mahikan," a variant spelling of Mohican. By the 18th century, the Mohican Indians who lived in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, along the Housatonic River, were primarily Housatonic Mohican from the lowlands of the Berkshire Mountains. They were entirely separate from the Connecticut River Valley Indians (Pocumtuck, Nonotuck, Woronoco, etc.) who had recently relocated to the refugee village of Schaghticoke, New York, which happened to be situated in Mohican territory near the Hudson River. "Schaghticoke" is a locative name that references a place where two rivers come together. An entirely different tribal group, the Schaghticoke tribe, is located in northwestern Connecticut. Some historians have also been confused by the similarity of "Mohican" to the name "Mohegan," yet another tribal group located in southern Connecticut.

Since Odanak had also become a refugee community over time, there were marriages between people from several different Abenaki bands. There were also close political relations, military alliances, and some marriages between Abenaki people living at Odanak on the Canadian side, and Abenaki people living at Missisquoi, Lake George, Cowass, and other enclaves on the United States side of the border. Those family connections still cross the border today. There were also some family connections with Mohawk people from the Catholic mission villages at Kahnawake and Akwesasne. Francis Annance's Abenaki mother was away from the village when the fighting broke out, but his Mohawk father, Gabriel Annance, rushed back to the house to rescue him:

Simon Annance's grandfather, Gabriel Annance, was a Mohawk Indian. Gabriel Annance occupied the house where Ignace Masta lives now, the SAME house, and he and his family fled into the brook in rear of the house, and in their fright they forgot their young child FRANCIS -- who was born the day that Quebec surrendered to the English -- and his father returned into the house through the back window and got out of the back window with the child just as the soldiers entered the front of the house by breaking in the door... (E. Harrington, 1869 interviews with Abenaki at the village of St. Francis, manuscript copy from Louis Annance, available on-line at Ne-do-ba <http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/rrr_3.html>.)

According to Abenaki oral tradition, one of the Native men who guided Rogers to Odanak hid in the brush during the raid, but came back to Odanak, many years later, with his daughter and son. In 1869, historian E. Harrington collected this story from Simon Annance:

Pissenne was the guide of Major Rogers when, by order of General Amherst, he made an attack upon the Abenakis Indians at their village on the Saint Francis river in Canada, in the year 1759. Pissenne did not belong to the Abenakis Tribe at Saint Francis, but the first that they knew of him he came through the great forest to their village from Penobscot. He had no relations at Saint Francis except one woman who was his cousin, and she died at Saint Francis when she was very old...Sometimes he lived for a while at Saint Francis; and, when very old he came here to stay, and died here at the age of about 115 years...He was a

very funny man, and entertaining in his narratives, and everybody liked his pleasantries. But he had guided a strong and stealthy band of soldiers to the secluded village of Saint Francis, and this had resulted in a "horrible massacre" of the Indians, and the Abenakis never trusted him, but always respected him...When he became too old to hunt, or trap, or work any more, and he became blind, too -- he lived mostly on the charity of the Indians of Saint Francis village. The women and the girls would take care of him and carry him plenty of food -- as if he had never been their enemy in war. One night, he ate a hearty supper, and smoked his pipe, both with much enjoyment, and the next morning was dead in his bed, his prominent breast apparently collapsed, or sunk in. He sleeps profoundly in the same cemetery that contains those slain by Rogers. July 31, 1869. (E. Harrington, 1869 interviews with Abenaki at the village of St. Francis, manuscript copy from Louis Annance, available on-line at Ne-do-ba <http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/rrr_3.html>.)

Other Abenaki families preserved other details of the oral tradition. Sophie Morice, born at Missisquoi, told her grandson Theophile Panadis a family tradition with more details about the dance and the warning. She also told him that Rogers' men were pursued as they retreated down the St. Francis River and split into three parties. Those events are corroborated by the personal journals of Rogers and his men. In the Panadis family tradition, Samadagwis warning was:

Polewadikw polewakhokw kedawôsizemowôk ta kebahamwomwôk ni ktsayomwôk.
(“To-escape to-make-escape your-children and your-women and your-old-men.”)
Pamidebakak nita akwôbi nabiwi wzômi saba spôzewiwi kwakwataolgona. (“This-very-night as-soon-as-possible because tomorrow morning they-kill-you.”) (Theophile Panadis' original interview recorded by Gordon Day in 1961, reel 27, side 1, in the collections of the Museum of Civilization, Hull, Ontario)

Theophile Panadis told Gordon Day how, the morning after the attack, some Abenaki men found the Stockbridge Mohican scout lying wounded on what is now Louis Paul Road. They raised a hatchet to kill him, but he asked to be named and baptized first. So they named him “Samadagwis.” Then they killed him.

In the book *Malian's Song*, Malian and Maliazonis are excited about a dance and feast being held at the Council House. According to the Annance family tradition, the celebration had been going on for nearly a week, and was so loud that some Abenaki families had moved their bedding to an island below the village just so they could sleep.

The Indians had been having a triumphal dance every night for nearly a week, and some of them had retired to the first island below the church for undisturbed rest. When the killing began, some fled to the islands, and some were shot in the river while trying to get to the island, or to the opposite shore of the river...

When Rogers came, Simon Annance's father was a boy, about ten years old, and his name was Bartholomew Annance. His mother -- Bartholomew's mother -- was tired of the dancing, and the boisterous noise, and she took her boy, Bartholomew, and went down to the great island, about a mile and a half below the village, to sleep in quiet, and the next morning she was waked by the guns of Rogers' onslaught. Rogers pillaged and burnt the Indian church. (E. Harrington, 1869 interviews with Abenaki at the village of St. Francis, manuscript copy from Louis Annance, available on-line at Ne-do-ba <http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/rrr_3.html>.)

Some Abenaki oral traditions about the attack became entangled with other events, and were confused in the mists of time. One of the Abenaki people who spoke to Harrington said that the priest was killed while kneeling at the foot of the cross; this event did not actually take place at Odanak, but during an earlier attack at Norridgewock, another Abenaki mission and refugee village on the Kennebec River in western Maine, where Father Sebastian Rasles was murdered by English militia in 1724.

According to the Annance family, Malian Obomsawin was not the only child rescued in the nick of time. Dr. John B. Masta told Harrington that his mother, Marguerite Annance, who was in the house with her brother Bartholomew and Francis Annance when Rogers' men arrived, recalled rushing to escape:

...her father said to her brother; "Where is your gun?" Her brother said; "I don't know." Her father said to him; "Have not I told you to have your gun always ready? - for you do not know when the enemy may come. Run, both of you, into the bush and hide." They were running along a little path, and there was in the path at one place a little depression with water in it, and they turned a little out of the path, for a few steps, to shun the water, and an Indian was close to them and he said, "Run, little girl, just as fast as you can." And she said; "I will run fast as I can." The Indian saw one of Rogers men coming from the bush in the path that the children were in, and he would meet the children. So the Indian went down on one knee and shot his gun at the man. (E. Harrington, 1869 interviews with Abenaki at the village of St. Francis, manuscript copy from Louis Annance, available on-line at Ne-do-ba <http://www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/rrr_3.html>.)

In the years after the raid, although many Abenaki families fled back to the old places, in present-day Vermont, New Hampshire, upstate New York, and elsewhere, others returned to Odanak. The village was rebuilt, and today, it is a peaceful place, with few reminders of the devastation of 1759. On a boulder in front of the church, there is a bronze plaque that reads:

NEMIKWALDAMNANA WE REMEMBER THIS AREA IS PLANTED AS A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE SAINT FRANCIS INDIANS, MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, WHO DIED IN ROGERS' RAID OCTOBER 4, 1759

Living With Oral Traditions

When Gordon Day published the Abenaki accounts, in an article titled "Rogers' Raid in Indian Tradition," historians were amazed. Elvine Obomsawin's granddaughter, Jeanne Brink was awestruck to hear the Abenaki perspective on Rogers' Raid.

To think that my grandmother had known that story, and that no one had heard the Abenaki version in over two hundred years...it really made me see my grandmother in a different light, when I realized that she knew this amazing piece of history.

The technique of passing oral traditions from the eldest people to the very young had long helped to ensure that accuracy was maintained over time. For generations, Abenaki children grew up continuing to learn the details of the historical, medicinal, spiritual, occupational, and other knowledges their families carried until they, themselves, were old enough to pass them on. Over time, other practices began to take the place of oral tradition as the primary means of passing on knowledge. The shift from speaking Abenaki to speaking French or English, the institution of regular schooling rather than traditional learning, changes in lifeways, movements away from

familiar territory, and the practice of writing things down all resulted in a loss of some of the traditional knowledge that lived in the spoken word.

Rogers' Raid was one attack, on just one Abenaki village, but it has had a lingering impact on Abenaki history ever since. The Abenaki community at Odanak is recognized as a First Nation by the Canadian government, but the Abenaki community at Missisquoi, which has also persisted to the present, has yet to be federally-recognized by the United States government. Enclaves of Abenaki families persisted in other places, around Lake George, Pennacook territory, and elsewhere, but the connections throughout Ndinna are still poorly understood by many historians today, in part because of the emotional impact of Rogers' Raid, and the mistaken illusion that Odanak was the only homeplace of Abenaki people. During the 1950s, and 1960s, many Abenaki elders tried to protect their children from prejudice by not teaching them their Native language, and not talking to them about their history. Some, especially those who lived in New England lived in fear that one day, the descendants of Rogers' Rangers would come to finish them off.

Over the past few decades, as increasing numbers of Native people have begun trusting and working with white historians, more indigenous narratives like these have been emerging to complicate the straightforward narratives of American history. Non-Native historians are now struggling with their attempts to devise standards for verifying all of these "new" oral traditions, while failing to recognize that orality is older than writing. The written record is not more inherently "truthful" than any spoken text. All texts have their peculiarities, biases, and flaws, some more than others. Indigenous oral traditions, when rooted in the memories of a living community, are typically connected to specific families, objects, events, and moments in time, and depend upon an intimate knowledge of the language and landscapes within which those events took place. Until we know Native people, and the language, and the land, as they do, we should not presume to know their history.

Today, Jeanne Brink, and many other Abenaki people, refuse to live in fear anymore. They are finally speaking the truth about the past, sharing their family history, and their life stories, with anyone who is willing to listen.

Suggested Further Reading:

Jeffery Amherst. *The Journal of Jeffrey Amherst, Recording the Military Career of General Amherst in America from 1758 to 1763*. Edited by J. Clarence Webster. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1931.

Joseph Bruchac. *The Winter People*. New York, NY: Dial Books 2002.

Steven Brumwell. *White Devil: A True Story of War, Savagery, and Vengeance in Colonial America*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, Perseus Books Group 2004.

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Gordon Day. *The Identity of the Saint Francis Indians*. Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 71. Ottawa, Ontario: National Museums of Canada 1981.

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Burt Garfield Loescher. *The History of Rogers' Rangers*. Vol. 4. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books 2002.

Robert Rogers. *Journals of Major Robert Rogers* (1769) reprinted in *Warfare on the Colonial Frontier: The Journals of Major Robert Rogers etc.* Bangersville, IN: Dresslar Publishing 1997.

Timothy Todish. *The Annotated and Illustrated Journals of Major Robert Rogers*. Fleischmanns, New York: Purple Mountain Press 2002.