

Abstracts for Maine Bicentennial Conference Papers on Panel #4:
The Madawaska Territory and the Aftermath of Statehood
Friday, May 31, 2019, 1:30-3:00 pm

**Free trade before free trade:
John Emmerson, Petit Sault merchant, his suppliers and
customers in the mid nineteenth century**

Béatrice Craig
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The 1842 Webster-Ashburton treaty drew a border between the United States and British North America. Nineteenth century borders, especially north American one were not meant to prevent or even control the movement of people. On the other hand, they were used to control, and sometimes prevent the movement of goods; custom duties were at the time the main source of revenues of most governments. Goods crossing the river in the former disputed territory should therefore have paid custom duties – at least until 1854 when the Reciprocity treaty provided for the free trade of natural products between the United States and British North America. Goods entering from Lower Canada (present day province of Quebec), a separate colony, should also have paid custom duties. The federal government opened a custom office at Fort Kent right away, the only one north of Houlton; New Brunswick made no effort to do the same. Trade could still flow as in the past, and in 1851, John Costello, another Madawaska (NB) merchant wrote to the province’s attorney general to complain about disloyal competition from John Emmerson, another local merchant, who was bringing into the province goods from Lower Canada.

And indeed, John Emmerson was trading across colonial and international boundaries, seemingly with complete immunity. Thank to his delivery (1845-1873) and receiving (1849-1859) books, we know what he purchased where and in what amount, and thanks to his daybooks and ledgers (starting in 1852) we know where he sold them. Those sources show that staples came mostly from Lower Canada and the manufactured goods from New Brunswick, and that all were sold on both sides of the river. There is no indication any custom official ever intervened. At mid century, the former disputed territory was still a free trade zone.

Madawaska and the Convergence of Empire, Nation, and State

**Professor Elizabeth Mancke
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton**

Historically, few places in the eastern half of North America have been more contested among more diverse stakeholders than Madawaska: between the Wolastoqiyik and Europeans, between France and Britain, between New Brunswick and Quebec, between Acadians and Canadians, between Maine and New Brunswick, between the United States and the British Empire. Indigenous peoples and Acadians heeded the dangers posed by these other power groups when necessary, but ignored them when they could, shaping cultures that traditionally were not over defined by these geopolitical forces that bore down on them.

Although distant powerbrokers attempted to project their jurisdictional visions onto the area, those visions had little traction until the early 19th century. The separation of Maine from Massachusetts, and the desire of the Maine government to know the extent of Maine territory, intensified disputes over the area. But the complexity of the claims, and their prioritization relative to other geopolitical disputes, delayed the international resolution to the boundary claims until the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Nine years later in 1851, the British Parliament passed legislation that defined the boundary between New Brunswick and Quebec. This paper will present an overview of these struggles, with a particular focus on their impact on Indigenous peoples.

The Madawaska Territory, 1785-1990s

**Lise Pelletier
Acadian Archives acadiennes
University of Maine at Fort Kent**

When Maine became a state in 1820, its northern borders with the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick and Québec remained undefined. The British and the Americans did not agree on the exact location of the “highlands” that were supposed to indicate the new international boundary according to the Treaty of Paris that ended the American Revolution in 1783. The land resting between the British and American claims contained millions of acres of forest on both sides of the majestic St. John River and in the Allagash wilderness. The tensions between Great Britain and the United States in the ensuing years nearly caused an international war. Diplomats arguing the claims of their respective countries paid little attention to the people living in the disputed territory.

The Acadians of the St. John Valley, whose community stretched throughout the Madawaska Territory (which includes northwestern New Brunswick, Témiscouata, Québec, as well as parts of Maine), had set down roots in 1785. They were the descendants of Acadians who had escaped ethnic cleansing at the hands of the British in Acadie from 1755 to 1762. Many of these refugees had gone on to settle in the Lower St. Lawrence area of Québec, others on the Lower Saint John. Would Acadians in Madawaska be able to maintain their close ties and cultural distinctiveness? Might they suffer yet another “deportation”?

The international border would finally be resolved with the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842. Yet, this diplomatic resolution meant that Acadian families in the trans-national Madawaska Territory would be separated into two different nations with different governments, different values, and different languages. This presentation will focus on the effects of the international boundary on the French Catholics of the St. John Valley, as they are integrated into the state of Maine and the United States.

**The Effect of 9/11 on a Borderlands Community:
Fort Kent, Maine, and Clair, New Brunswick**

**Lisa Lavoie
Independent Scholar, Aroostook County**

Fort Kent, Maine, and Clair, New Brunswick, are fully integrated borderlands. When French Canadians and Acadians began settling what is now extreme northern Maine, northern New Brunswick and southern Quebec in 1785, the two communities belonged to an area called the Madawaska Territory. The Madawaska Territory was not officially part of either the United States or the British Empire. The area was, and continues to be, populated by an inextricably linked population sharing a history, a culture, a religion and a language. Additionally, since the two locales are geographically proximal, many citizens share family networks.

Although the citizens of the geographically isolated Madawaska Territory mostly went about their business with little interference from the United States or the British governments, by the late 1830s logging disputes placed the countries at an impasse which resulted in the bloodless Aroostook War. The signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842 resolved the boundary dispute. The Treaty, which assigned the St. John River as the international boundary, abruptly divided the Fort Kent-Clair community, assigning Fort Kent to the United States and Clair, to Canada. Subsequently, the citizens went from being “one people” to a people unceremoniously divided by an international boundary, although the boundary was readily navigable.

For over one hundred and fifty years, the citizens of Fort Kent and Clair crossed the border with relative ease. However, the events of September 11, 2001, and the United States’ response to these events transformed the boundary into a barrier. Ultimately, the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) and the militarization of the border, particularly in the United States, has resulted in markedly decreased border traffic which has yet to recover to pre-911 levels, perhaps it never will. Despite the aforementioned factors, however, the rapport between the two communities, although undoubtedly altered, endures.

Forthcoming:

Abstract, Guy Dubay (Independent scholar, Aroostook County)