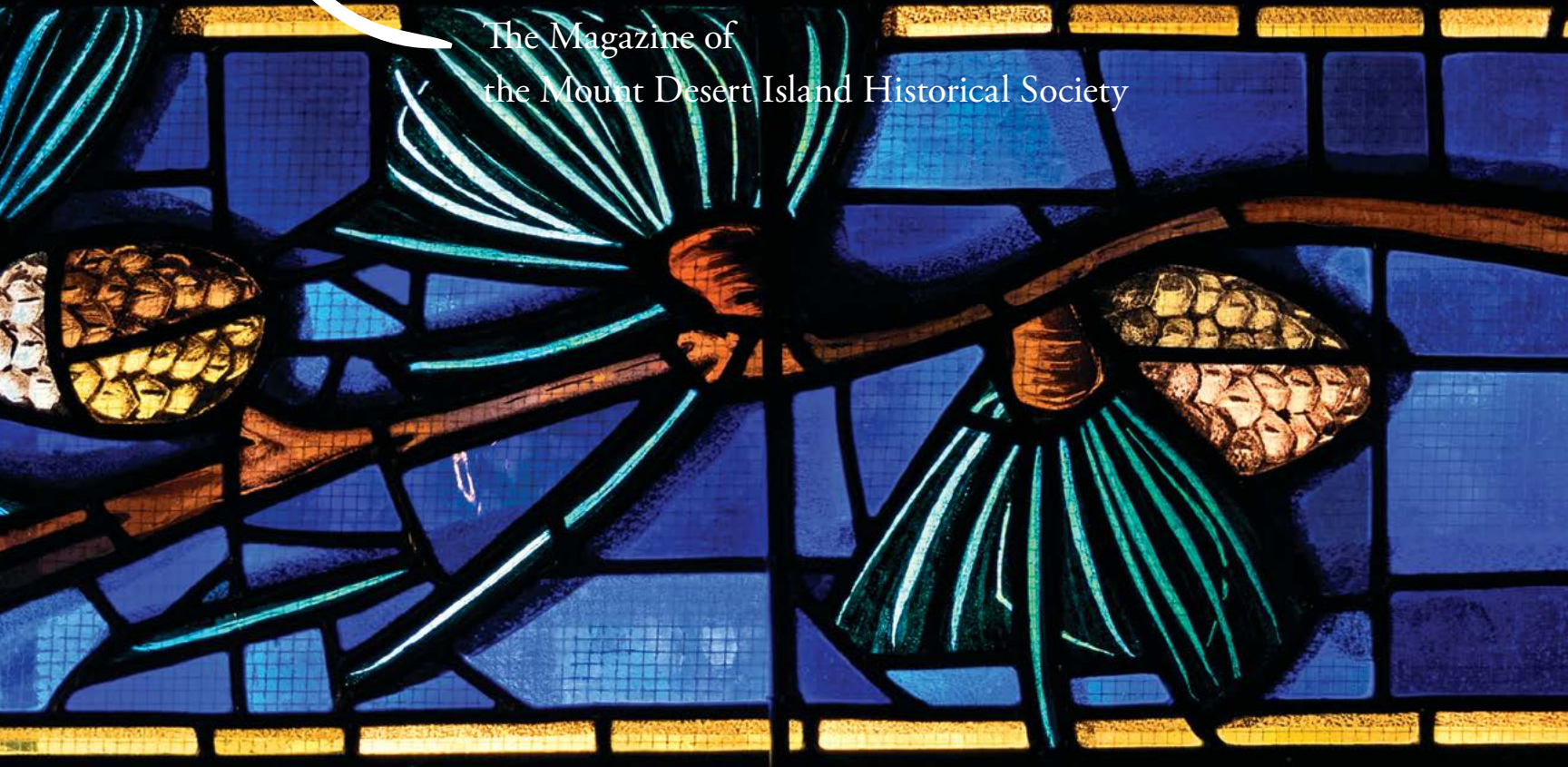


Chebacco

The Magazine of
the Mount Desert Island Historical Society



HARBORING RELIGION: MISSIONARIES,
CONVERTS, AND SOJOURNERS

Volume XX 2019

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Volume XX
HARBORING RELIGION:
MISSIONARIES, CONVERTS, AND SOJOURNERS

2019
Mount Desert, Maine

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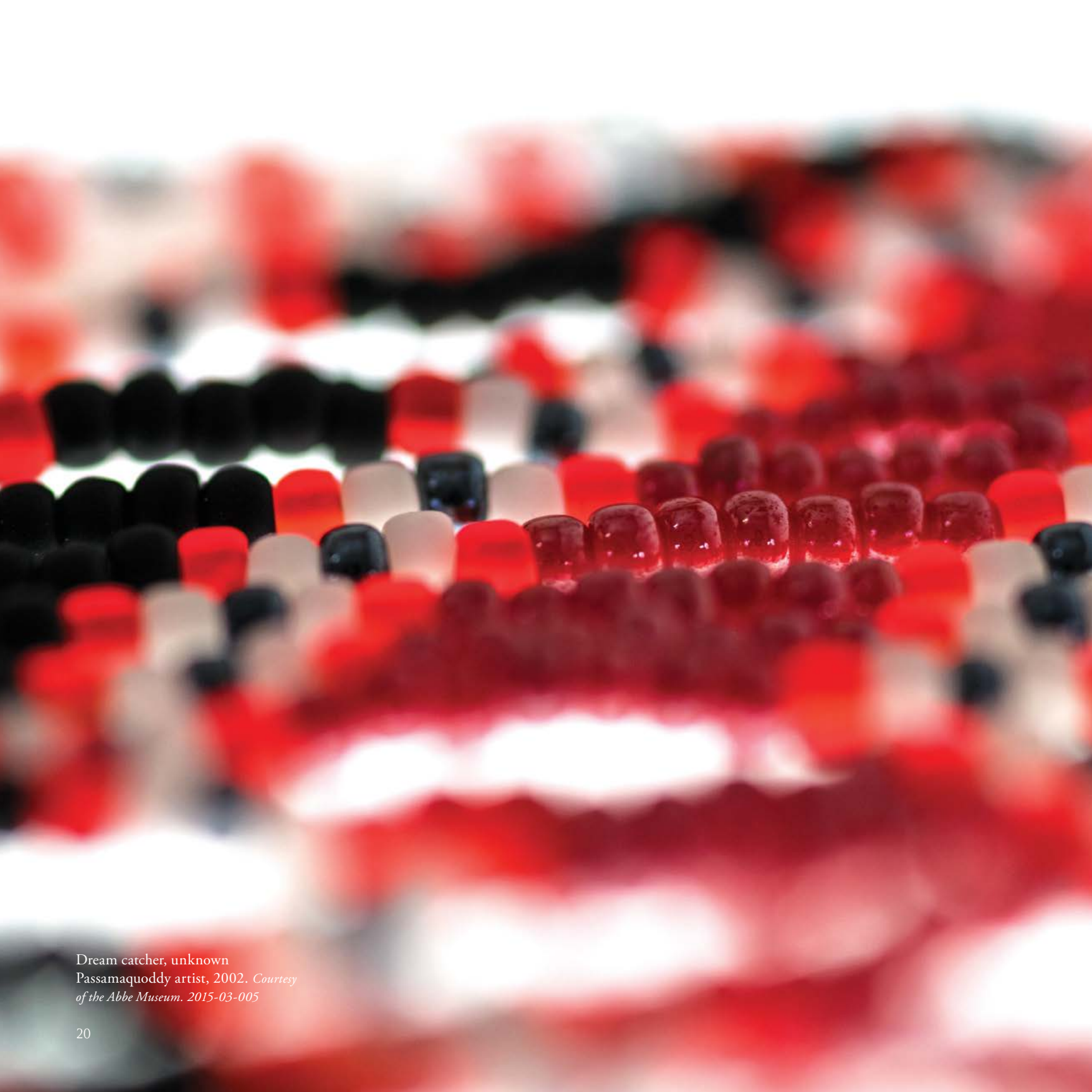
We would also like to acknowledge the Southwest Harbor Public Library Digital Archive and the assistance of Charlotte Morrill and George Soules in obtaining many of the historical photographs that illustrate this issue.



Detail of south
wall window,
ca. 1916, artist
unknown. *Sz.
Edward's Convent,
Bar Harbor (currently
the Bar Harbor
Historical Society)*

Contents

- 7 Introduction
R. Marie Griffith and Leigh Eric Schmidt
- 17 Stained Glass Windows of Mount Desert Island
Jennifer Steen Booher
- 21 Collisions of Faith on New England's
"Pagan Skirts": Protestants, Catholics,
and Religious Encounter in Early Maine
Laura M. Chmielewski
- 35 "Ter-Centenary": Inventing Tradition
for Maine's Catholics, 1913
James M. O'Toole
- 45 Congregationalists on Mount
Desert Island, Maine
Margaret Bendroth
- 55 "He Has Abundantly Poured out His Holy
Spirit in Eden and Mount Desert":
The Baptist Connection on
Mount Desert Island, 1790–1840
Brittany Goetting
- 67 The William Foy Story
Mark Silk
- 77 Elegy at Baker Island:
Charles W. Eliot's Maritime Pastoral
David A. Hollinger
- 87 George Hefflon's Silent Mission
Tim Garrity
- 97 From Harvard's Semitic Museum
to Mount Desert Island and Back
Mikeal C. Parsons
- 109 The Jewish Presence,
or Absence Thereof ...
Judith S. Goldstein
- 121 The Episcopal Church
Comes to Gott's Island
Craig D. Townsend
- 131 Acadia National Park:
A Soul and Spirit Stretching Place
Thomas S. Bremer
- 143 "Moment After Moment
After Moment": Cultivating a Zen
Presence on Mount Desert Island
Brook Wilensky-Lanford

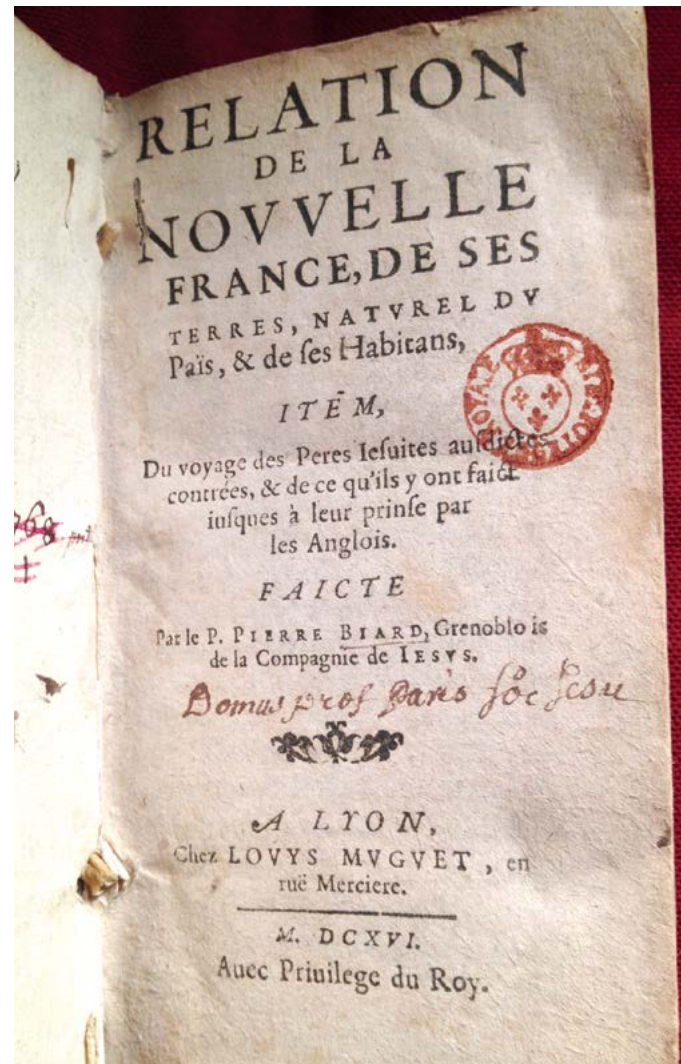


Dream catcher, unknown
Passamaquoddy artist, 2002. *Courtesy
of the Abbe Museum. 2015-03-005*

Collisions of Faith on New England's "Pagan Skirts": Protestants, Catholics, and Religious Encounter in Early Maine

By Laura M. Chmielewski

What would become the Province and, later, the State of Maine, was weakly defined in a geographical sense, and both France and England wanted it. The object of a territorial tug-of-war between these two colonial powers, it remained a dangerous place for much of its colonial past. The religious cohesion of the more densely-populated centers of New England and New France could not be achieved in such a volatile region. Instead, the province's vague boundaries made it the home to a surprisingly diverse array of believers, many of whom had beliefs or characteristics that made them undesirable to the more religiously-homogeneous regions of the colonial world. There were Calvinists, whose ideas didn't quite fit with "the New England Way"; Quakers and Baptists, whose beliefs few could comprehend and even fewer orthodox Calvinists liked; Anglicans, who were treated like outsiders despite living in the King's colonial dominions; and French-speaking Channel Islanders, who claimed to be Protestants but spoke the language of the papists. And then there were real papists. The province was also home to cunning French priests whose perceived goal in life was to destroy everything Protestant, and Indian people who tended to ally with the despised French while maintaining non-Christian beliefs as well and resisting full religious transformation.



This is the title page from an early (1614) edition of the *Jesuit Relations*.
Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France

Finally there were fishermen and timbermen from Cornwall and Portugal and as far away as Greece. These were men without clear beliefs, "whose gods were fish and pine," as Cotton Mather claimed.¹

Clearly, Maine was the home of religious diversity, but tolerance and coexistence were other things entirely. Still, religious encounter, the likes of which one rarely saw outside of the borderlands and frontiers of early America, was at times a routine feature of life in early Maine, and led to some surprising outcomes. We know about many of these encounters thanks to French Jesuits. Like their Puritan counterparts, these Catholic priests were highly literate and literary, with a mandate to write about their New World adventures. Also like Puritans, Jesuits were convinced they were making history. One of these, Pierre Biard, gives us a glimpse of early religious encounter on Mount Desert Island. Biard's story wasn't pretty, but its very existence underscores the idea that colonial spiritual boundaries were as permeable as geographical ones.

The New World's Jesuit missionaries have a reputation, at least in Catholicism, as pious, learned, and self-sacrificing men who bravely and stoically accepted whatever fate God had in store for them. They endured, even craved, every inconvenience and discomfort as a test of their spiritual fortitude and commitment. Martyrdom was not out of the question, and even embraced. The accounts of Jesuit lives and deaths are preserved for scholars thanks to the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, seventy-one volumes of Jesuit writings spanning over one hundred years of colonial North American work and encounter. Notable Jesuits from Isaac Jogues to Jacques Marquette wrote of their desire for martyrdom in this holy cause, and their words and deeds are preserved thanks to the Relations.

Jesuit Biard, however, does not give the impression he craved martyrdom. Instead, his voluminous writings about the mission he

founded, Saint-Sauveur, and his later picaresque adventures focus more on logistical challenges and troubles that nearly robbed him of his life and the indignities he had already suffered.

The demands placed on this would-be mission priest should have come as no surprise. Biard was an ordained priest of the Society of Jesus (the formal title of the Jesuit order). To be in the world, but not of it, was one of the order's basic ideals, and could only be achieved through a long and complex course of study in Europe. Such training blended theology, natural science, languages, classical literature, and history. Heavy emphasis was placed on the Society's sense of corporality as envisioned by its founder, Ignatius of Loyola.² Only those men who demonstrated the best combination of spiritual sincerity, practical and theoretical knowledge, and commitment to Catholic orthodoxy were sent out into the world with the Society's blessing. In France, Pierre Biard must have met that mark, or he never would have been chosen as a missionary to Indians.

His opportunity to serve came in September, 1610, when he and a fellow Jesuit, Énemon Massé, were sent to the new French settlement of Port-Royal (now Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia).³ Interfaith trouble arose before they even left France: the vessel meant to convey the priests was owned by Huguenots (French Protestants) who refused transport to Catholic missionaries. Eventually paid off by a pious and wealthy Catholic laywoman, Madame de Guecherville, the owners continued to deride the priests and "were very obstinate, swearing with



Bitten birch bark by Bonnie
Newsom, Penobscot, undated.
*Collection of Cinnamon Catlin-
Legutko, Hall Quarry*

their loudest oaths."⁴ Once aboard, Biard suffered from the predictably extreme physical discomforts of a transatlantic passage — seasickness, cramped quarters, bad food, a suspension from the rhythms of daily life, and having to care for himself.

Worse still from Biard's perspective, the ship was filled with Protestant passengers. Yet this provided an opportunity for Biard to test his skills. Though he converted no one, familiarity and corporate activity eased contempt between the priests and Protestant crew members and passengers, who reportedly came to view the priests as "honest and courteous men, of good conduct and pure consciences."⁵

Tensions arose again when the vessel arrived at Port-Royal, but this time Biard ran afoul of his fellow Catholics. Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt, the French governor at Port-Royal, claimed to have converted local Indians to Catholicism. Biard declared Poutrincourt's efforts ineffectual. An outraged Poutrincourt threatened to hang Biard; Biard threatened to deny Biencourt the sacraments.⁶ Now alienated from his Port-Royal protectors, Biard again turned to pious rich women in France to bail him out. Would they help him escape the spiritual mess of Port Royal? Yes, they would — and this is where Mount Desert Island comes into play.

In May of 1613, Madame de Guecherville's agent, René de Coq de la Saussaye, arrived to evacuate the Jesuits and a few additional settlers from Port-Royal. He took them to the large, sheltered island at the mouth of Frenchman Bay. Struck by its stark, simple beauty, Samuel de Champlain had called the island "l'isle des Monts-deserts." Here the Jesuits began anew. They immediately erected a cross demonstrating their intentions as Old World Christians claiming land.⁷ They also engaged in thanking God for bringing them safely ashore to Mount Desert's "large and beautiful port."⁸

While beautiful, the island posed great challenges, promising fly-ridden summers and frigid

winters. No bother — the Jesuits were there for souls, not vacation. But the arduous tasks of building a mission from scratch forced Jesuits to reassess what types of "work" they were actually suited for. Pierre Biard was now in a tiny colony, with limited defenses, food, and a handful of lay settlers with fraying tempers. Biard, Massé, and another Jesuit companion, Gabriel du Thet, had to work as carpenters, labor coordinators, and farmers. This presented a stark contrast to their companions who remained in France, who looked forward to lives as professors, preachers, and intellectuals. Biard must have been grateful that his companions included Énemond Massé, a less intellectual though cheerful and happy man who possessed carpentry skills. Nicknamed "Père Utile" ("Father Useful"), he reportedly "wielded a tool more readily than a pen."⁹ Observing Massé build a boat almost single-handedly, a Saint-Sauveur settler remarked, "Father Énemond can do anything; and in case of need he will be found to be a good Sawyer of planks, a good caulker, and a good Architect." When asked how Biard could possibly contribute anything useful to the shipbuilding enterprise, the same colonist remarked "Dost thou not know that when the boat is done he will give it his blessing?"¹⁰ The contrast was clear; among their fellow colonists, Biard used his hands for prayer and dispensing sacraments, while Massé put his to building.

Despite its desirable mix of skilled people, the settlement on Mount Desert Island was extremely short-lived, a victim of fierce colonial and religious competition. In August 1613, an English fleet under

Samuel Argall of Virginia searching for cod came upon the unsuspecting French and attacked them. Argall and his crew wasted little time in destroying the little they had managed to build, including a flimsy little chapel. In the process, they killed Gabriel du Thet and took the surviving Jesuits — Biard, Massé and a Brother Quentin — captive. The charge: piracy. Biard described the incident in detail:

Our brethren approached [Argall]; frankly revealed themselves to him, as he was still ignorant of their identity; and begged him not, in elation over his easy victory, to adopt severe measures against their colony; they earnestly warned him to remember the conditions of human life, saying that just as he would wish his own interests mildly handled, if a similar calamity had fallen upon him, so he ought to act humanely in the case of others.¹¹

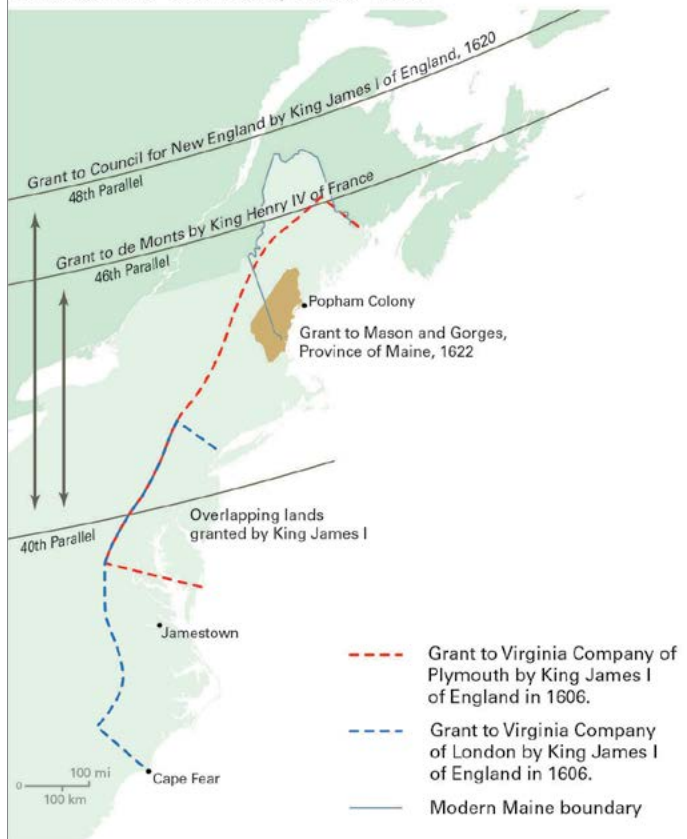
Argall listened to their pleas with patience, but remained unconvinced of their innocence. Priests or not, the men were clearly up to no good on Mount Desert Island, and their fate would need to be settled according to English law. This was serious, as conviction for piracy carried the penalty of hanging throughout English territory. Pirates were enemies of legitimate power and utterly lacking in scruples or honor as they used various guises and pretexts to legitimize plundering the property of others. As historian Marcus Rediker notes, piracy "represented 'crime' on a

massive scale. It was a way of life voluntarily chosen, for the most part, by large numbers of men who directly challenged the ways of the society from which they excepted themselves."¹² Pirates were some of the Atlantic World's most dangerous people, and accusing someone of piracy was potentially fatal for the accused. Certainly being carried to Virginia as a Frenchman, a Catholic priest, and an accused pirate lessened Biard's and his companions' chances of leaving the English colony alive.

Biard and his fellow Jesuits were, of course, not pirates, and though he used the charge as a pretext for capturing them, Argall likely recognized that. The English captain extended various courtesies to them, allowing them to bury their dead, offering the services of an English Catholic doctor, and inviting the captive priests to dine at his table.¹³ In a more unusual offer of interfaith cooperation, his French-speaking Protestant pilot named Bailleur "came by night to Father Biard, and, taking him by the hand, with many protestations bade him and the other Fathers to expect from him ... to employ his aid freely, and consider what they should decide upon, as to making their escape."¹⁴

Argall's reaction to the priests and the courtesies he extended to them are all the more remarkable when assessed against the conventional negative image that English Protestants harbored of Jesuits. The New World's English Protestants in particular feared and despised Jesuits, a reaction that would only fester and grow stronger as the seventeenth century wore on. Throughout the early modern period, English writers derided Jesuits as equivocators, liars, murderers and regicides who possessed supernatural powers and dabbled enthusiastically in various dark arts, all aimed at destroying God's true, Protestant church.¹⁵ Such biases were transported to the New World, and took on an even more urgent meaning as a means of forming identity in Europe's fragile, lightly-populated colonies.

Grants and Charters, 1603–1622



Territorial claims of the English and French overlapped, with neither regarding the fact that Indians already occupied North America. This map is from the *Historical Atlas of Maine*, edited by Stephen Hornsby and Richard Judd. *Courtesy of University of Maine Press*

Why then, would an English Protestant, who held the power of life and death over these hated minions of the Church of Rome, feed them well, solicit their company, and even promise them fair treatment by the governor at Jamestown? The possible answers are numerous. Yet perhaps the most compelling for the purposes of this essay is that Argall was like many Atlantic travelers whose travels provided opportunities to encounter their enemies face-to-face. Catholics and Protestants, Englishmen and Jesuits, were oppositional tropes that existed on paper, in speech, and in popular rhetoric. Yet the actual people behind these stereotypes often displayed a different, unanticipated human reality.

By the time they arrived at Jamestown, the Jesuits had "converted" Samuel Argall — not to Catholicism, but to the belief that the priests were innocent pawns in the complex game of colonial borders.¹⁶ Virginia's governor, Thomas Dale, wanted to deal harshly with the priests, but Argall pleaded with him to refrain from executing his newfound Catholic friends. Freedom was far from imminent — Biard was sent to England, imprisoned there, pressured into anti-French espionage, and through a series of maritime mishaps, blown around the Atlantic from the Azores to West Africa to Wales. But the interfaith interlude that began with violence and imprisonment on Mount Desert Island segued into the type of nuanced, often-surprising religious encounter that would come to characterize Maine's colonial period.¹⁷

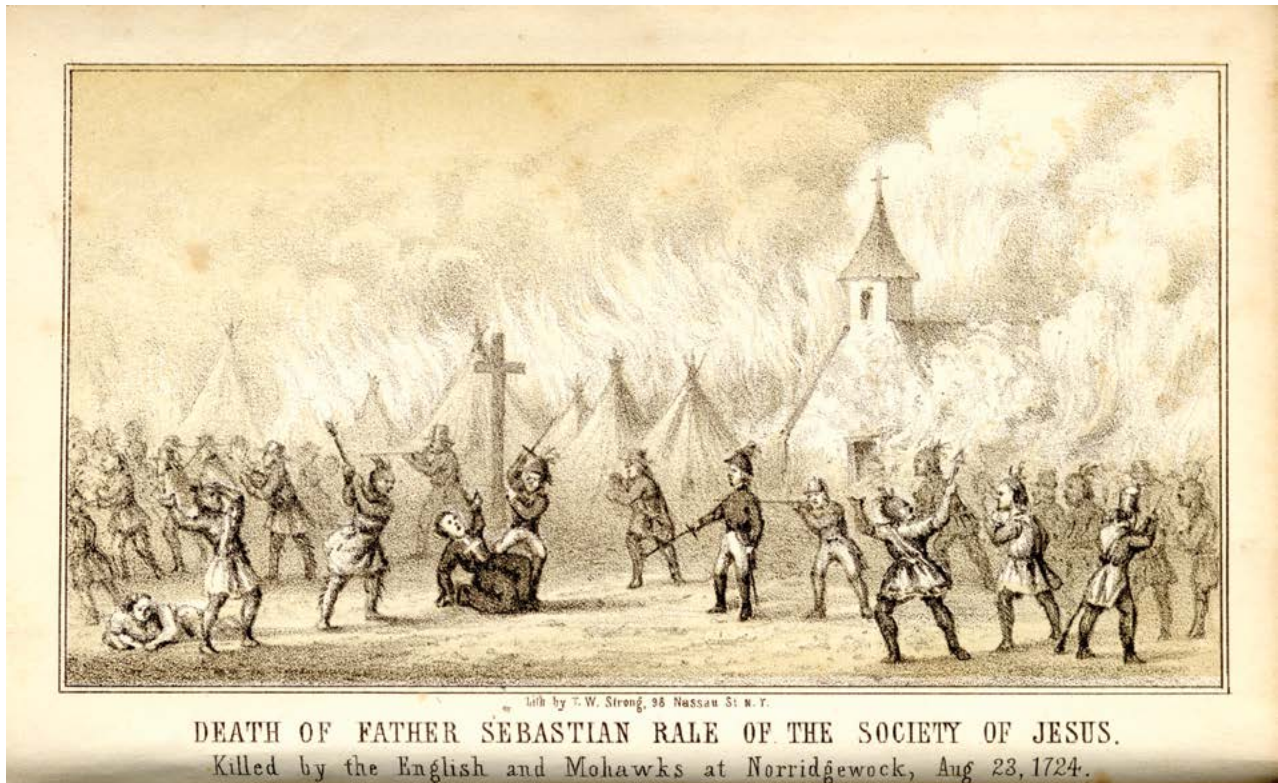
Biard faced a world of religious unknowns and encounters on Mount Desert Island and beyond. Subsequent Jesuits with ministries in Maine had interfaith experiences with different results. Much of their missionary activity centered around Narantsuoak (Norridgewock to the English), a large Wabanaki settlement on the banks of the Kennebec River about 100 miles west of where Pierre Biard first attempted to set up his spiritual shop. Jesuits were attracted to this region by stories of earnest Native American interest in Catholic Christianity.¹⁸ One of these was Gabriel Druillettes, a gentle linguist and philosopher whose ability to build relationships across confessional lines became the stuff of frontier legend. Druillettes was so renowned as a reasonable and learned man that he was accepted as a diplomat to the Puritan Separatist colony of Plymouth in 1651. His travel companion to the heart of Puritan New England was John Winslow, who ran a local trading post at Cushnoc and had become a valued friend. Through Winslow's intervention, the Jesuit enjoyed a visit to Plymouth marked by courtesies sensitive to his status as a Catholic and a priest.¹⁹ These included meatless dinners to conform to the Catholic calendar's dietary laws and provisions for a private space to say Mass for himself in secret. The diplomatic goal of the mission (a union against the Iroquois) was not achieved, but Druillettes recalled his time with his friend Winslow, Edward Gibbons, and "John Brentford" (Bradford) with affection.²⁰

Half a century later, the misadventures of another Maine Jesuit, Sebastien Rale,

represented changing times. Rale tracked with keen interest the growth of France's and England's colonies and their overlapping boundaries, and was determined that the Indians would remain tied to the French. In temperament and goals and preferring diplomatic power to martyrdom, Rale represented the key transition that separated eighteenth-century Jesuits from their seventeenth-century counterparts. He wasn't alone in wanting to live and put his imprint on the region's future, holding the English in tremendous contempt. But when he fell from the Narantsuoak chapel's steeple (an unambiguous spiritual mark on the landscape), he consulted an English Protestant doctor, Hugh Adams, who set up shop on Arrowsic Island some eighty miles away.²¹ There, priest and Protestant got to know and like one another, and Adams became convinced that Rale would use his influence among the Kennebec Wabanakis to ensure peace in a fractious region. The doctor was ultimately disappointed. In the year that followed, Rale actively and mischievously undermined the efforts of Joseph Baxter, a Massachusetts minister who hoped to gain some converts among the Wabanakis. Rale aggressively derided the minister's conversion techniques and training. In one notable incident, the puckish Rale sent Baxter a one hundred-page treatise on the virtues of Catholicism in Latin and instructed the Wabanaki messenger to wait for a response! Outraged, the minister wrote back a few lines about being above the priest's games; Rale, in turn, criticized the quality of Baxter's Latin. Though overlapping territorial claims to Maine put them in each other's paths, Rale could clearly take or leave the English (and the feelings, at least for a while, were mutual). Yet he loved his life among the Kennebecs, claiming, "As for what concerns me personally, I assure you that I see, that I hear, that I speak, only as a savage."²² Whether or not the Kennebec people loved him is less certain. Rale was useful in protecting them from English



This bell is said to have announced the mass in Fr. Rale's chapel at Norridgewock. Its catalog listing says that after the raid that killed Fr. Rale, "One of the Indians helping to bury the dead hid this bell. It was found in 1808 under a decayed hemlock, taken to Norridgewock and later given to the Maine Historical Society." Maine Memory Network, item 7918. *Courtesy of the Maine Historical Society*



This engraving, published in 1856, shows the death of Father Sébastien Rale at the hands of English and Mohawk fighters in 1724. Maine Memory Network, item 7530. *Courtesy of the Maine Historical Society,*

encroachments, but when it became more convenient to consider negotiating with the English, the Jesuit became a liability. By the early 1720s, some Kennebecs were encouraging him to leave. Rale refused — and paid for the decision with his life, and those of several other mission Indians, in 1724's Dummer's War.

The parts of early Maine in the English sphere of influence were home to many Protestant non-conformists, including Quakers, Baptists, and Calvinists, who were either deficient in their orthodoxy or

disregarded it. Cotton Mather referred this frontier as the "pagan skirts" of New England.²³ When war between France and England spilled out into Maine (and it frequently did), Maine's status as a borderland between French and English colonists, Catholics, and Protestants led to a complex religious intermingling of family trees. Two of the most vivid examples of these Maine interfaith families were the Storer and the Wheelwrights. Mary Storer was one of three young women from the same family taken captive from Wells during Queen Anne's War and, approaching marriageable age, converted to Catholicism and married into a wealthy Montreal

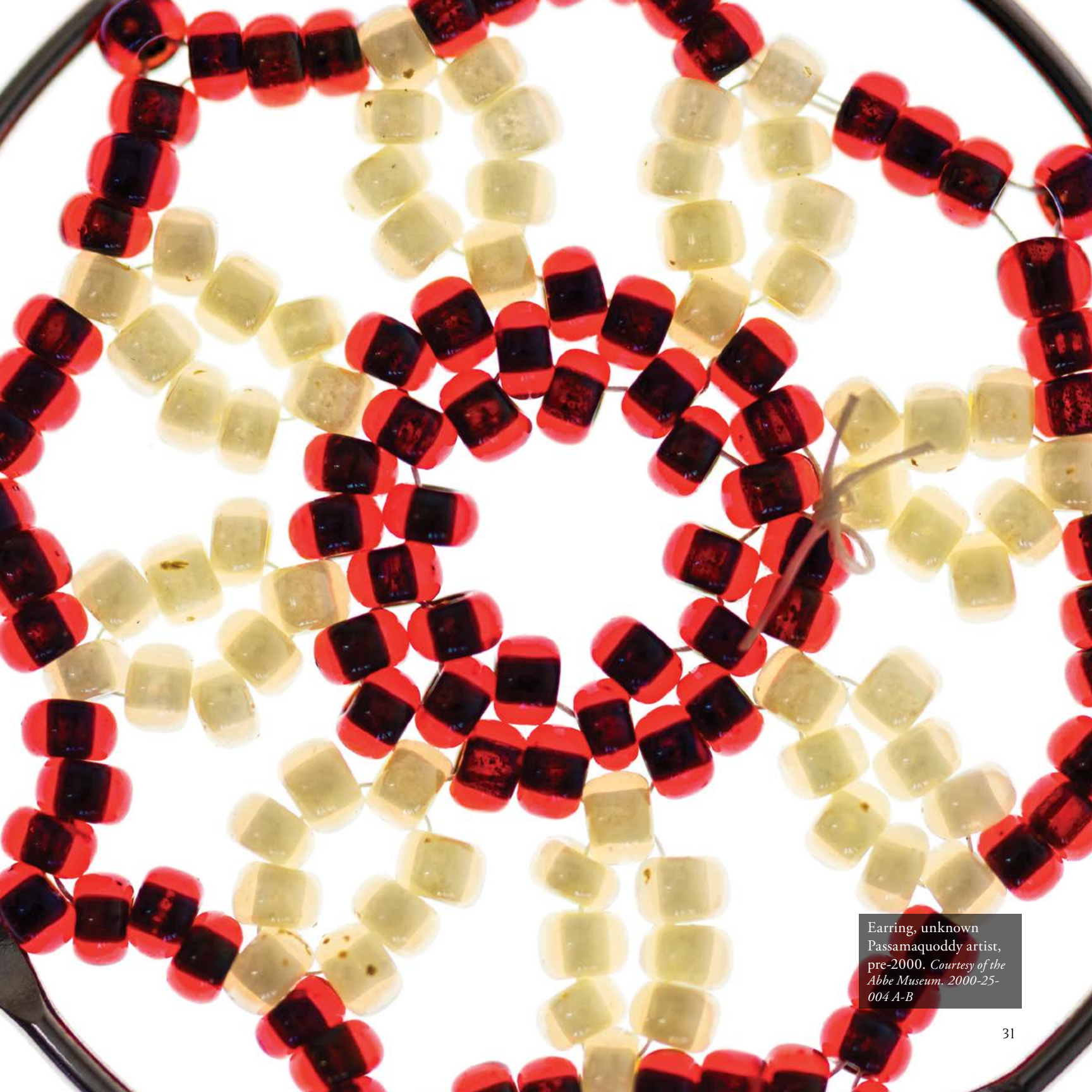


Esther Wheelwright, was abducted from her Wells, Maine home in 1703. She grew up among Indians and French and became a Catholic nun. For the rest of her life, she refused repatriation. *Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society*

family, the Gaultiers. As adults, however, Mary and her Protestant brother Ebenezer exchanged letters and offers of business connections and, despite disagreement over their father's will, visited one another. In this case, blood mattered more than confessional difference.²⁴

Even more surprising is the life of Esther Wheelwright, or Soeur Esther Marie-Joseph de l'Enfant Jésus. Also abducted from Wells in 1703, Esther lived in a Jesuit mission as an adopted Indian child for several years until she was ransomed to the home of none other than Philippe Rigaud de Vaudreuil, the colonial governor of French Canada, and was sent to the Ursuline convent to be educated with Vaudreuil's daughter. When the time came for her to leave, she rejected both marriage and return to her birth family in Maine. Undeterred, the birth family determined to maintain contact. They sent Soeur Esther gifts in the form of communion silver; Esther sent a portrait of herself in return and offered to educate her grandnieces in the Ursuline convent. Esther became culturally French, but she never lost her ability to speak English — a skill that proved helpful to the Ursulines when the English conquered Quebec in 1759. Esther, now the superior of the entire convent, was able to negotiate with the invaders to assure the safety of her institution, school, and fellow sisters.

Early American studies often accept religious identification as hard and rigid. And yet Maine's early history demonstrates it often was not, chiefly because the religious "other" was a human reminder in your region, your neighborhood,



Earring, unknown
Passamaquoddy artist,
pre-2000. *Courtesy of the
Abbe Museum, 2000-25-
004 A-B*



Detail of "Christ the Fisher
of Mankind," 1966, Susan
Dunlap, USA. *St. Saviour's
Episcopal Church, Bar Harbor*

or even your family. The human relationships teased out of this religious complexity confound simplistic ideas of early American religious identity and coexistence. Perhaps some of Maine's early settlers even preferred things this way.

Laura Chmielewski teaches early American, Atlantic world, and public history. She is also the author of three books: The Spice of Popery: Converging Christianities on an Early American Frontier (2011), The Atlantic Experience: Peoples, Places, Ideas (with Catherine M. Armstrong, 2014), and Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet: Exploration, Encounter and the French New World (2017), as well as numerous essays, book chapters, and reviews, and public presentations. Chmielewski is also a historian-in-residence at History Hudson Valley, a consortium of house museums, and frequent contributor of book reviews to America magazine, the national Jesuit weekly.

Acknowledgments:

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 2. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31.
 3. Lucien Campeau, "Biard, Pierre," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography 1* (digital version; hereafter "DCB"), University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed February 1, 2019, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/biard_pierre_1E.html.

4. "Biard's Relation," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (hereafter "JR") 3: 173.
5. JR 3: 183.
6. "Biard," DCB, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/biard_pierre_1E.html.
7. JR 3: 265.
8. Ibid.
9. "Énemond, Massé," DCB, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/masse_enemond_1E.html
10. JR 3: 257.
11. Ibid.
12. Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 255.
13. JR 2: 253, 255.
14. JR 2 :259.
15. For an extensive treatment of the tradition of anti-Jesuit rhetoric in early modern English literature, see Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
16. JR 2: 267.
17. JR 2: 265. Biard eventually managed to return to France and resumed his work as a university professor.
18. "Noel Negabamat," DCB, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/negabamat_1E.html.
19. Winslow's brother, Edward, was one of the founders of the colony and had served a prison term in England for preaching opposition to England's high-church archbishop, William Laud. Richard Gildrie, "Edward Winslow," *American National Biography* 23: 648.
20. Laura M. Chmielewski, *The Spice of Popery: Converging Christianities on an Early American Frontier* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 24–5.
21. James Phinney Baxter, *Pioneers of New France in New England* (Albany, NY: Nabu Press, 1894), 67; Calvert, *Black Robe on the Kennebec* (Madison, ME: Monmouth Press, 1991), 172–3.
22. JR 67: 93.
23. Qtd. in James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 276.
24. For the complete story of Storer children's interactions, see Chmielewski, *The Spice of Popery*, Chapter Three passim.



Detail of "Christ the King," ca. 1929,
Franz Mayer of Munich, Inc. *Holy Redeemer*
Catholic Church, Bar Harbor



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Cover design by Rebecca Hope Woods based on Jennifer Steen Booher's photograph of a stained glass window in Saint Saviour's Church, Bar Harbor.



Chebacco silhouette adapted from a photograph by Len Burgess for the Essex Shipbuilding Museum.

Our magazine, *Chebacco*, is named for a type of boat built in the eighteenth century in Gloucester, Massachusetts and nearby towns. In 1762, Abraham Somes, his wife, and four young daughters sailed in a Chebacco boat to make their home in Somesville and become Mount Desert Island's first permanent Euro-American settlers.

We invite you to voyage through the histories of Mount Desert Island in this contemporary Chebacco.



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