

HOW (AND WHY) WE ARCHAEOLOGY LESSON PLAN SERIES
FIRST PEOPLES OF THE ATLANTIC PROVINCES OF CANADA
MI'KMAQ, WOLASTOQIYIK, AND PESKOTOMUHKADI

HOW (AND WHY) WE DO ARCHAEOLOGY

An Introduction to the Indigenous Archaeological Record

A LESSON PLAN BY CORA WOOLSEY AND PATSY MCKINNEY

Lesson Plan 3: A History of Indigenous People in the Maritimes

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Lesson Plan 3

Publication Date: 2020

Ottawa and Fredericton



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Statement of recognition: This lesson plan has been developed using educational facilities and resources within the traditional lands of the Wolastoqiyik and many other First Nations of Canada. The material in these lesson plans deals with the culture and history of the Wolastoqiyik, the Mi'kmaq, and the Peskotomuhkadi, as well as the First Nations in the Northeast of North America and across all of the Americas. Much of the knowledge base shared in this lesson plan is the direct result of the sharing of knowledge by the First Peoples of the Americas. The authors gratefully acknowledge that the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, and Peskotomuhkadi and all First Peoples made this lesson plan possible and that the rich cultural history of these peoples created the sites that we study.

Note Concerning Ethical Treatment of the Archaeological Record

This lesson plan is not intended to replace archaeological education or give students or teachers the skills to conduct archaeology. The authors and NCCIE in no way endorse seeking out Indigenous artifacts, withholding archaeological information from regulatory bodies, looking for archaeological sites, or digging with the intention to find artifacts or sites. Conducting archaeology, including excavation, testing, surveying, and monitoring, is only to be undertaken by an archaeologist or under the direction of an archaeologist who meets the criteria to be permitted by the provincial regulatory body of the province in question. The authors and NCCIE strongly condemn any activity that endangers the archaeological record, treats artifacts in a disrespectful way (such as selling or destroying artifacts), or impedes the ability of regulatory bodies to protect cultural resources.

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A History of Indigenous People in the Maritimes

In this lesson, you will learn about the history of Indigenous peoples of Atlantic Canada and what is known of the history from archaeology.

People have lived in the Maritime Provinces since time immemorial, just as they have lived all over the Americas (North, South, and Central America). We have archaeological evidence that people lived here as early as 13,600 years ago, when the Earth was still in an Ice Age. People have continued to live here right up until Europeans arrived about 450 years ago. After Europeans arrived, things changed dramatically and Indigenous people have had to adapt to many new challenges, yet the culture endures from many thousands of years ago.

Earliest Archaeological Evidence

The earliest people we know about from archaeological evidence were **hunters** and **gatherers** who hunted **megafauna** (big animals like mammoths, bison, and giant cats), fished in the rivers and oceans, and gathered plants for food, clothing, and baskets. These people were wanderers and travellers, moving vast distances over the continent and meeting up with other groups of people to exchange gifts such as stone of high quality for making tools, called **toolstone**. We call these people **Paleo** people because they are the oldest people we know about (Paleo = “old”).

During this period, the Earth was much colder than it is today and much of North America was covered by a huge sheet of ice. Many of the animals that lived then were much larger than the ones living today. For instance, megafauna such as woolly mammoths and mastodons were two large animal species hunted by Paleo people that are now extinct, probably partly because of climate change after the last ice sheet began to melt around 10,000 years ago. Other megafauna included short-faced bears about the height of a modern human, saber-tooth tigers, giant sloths, giant beavers, woolly rhinos, and dire wolves, the largest wolf species known to have lived.

Our best archaeological evidence for the first people living in the Americas is between 25,000 and 15,000 years ago. Keep in mind that we can't say how long ago people lived here from archaeological evidence; we only know that people were here at least 15,000 years ago. We also can't say how people got here originally. Were people always here, or did they come from another continent, long ago? We know that some people did

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arrive by boat and maybe by foot from what is now Asia before the end of the last Ice Age, which ended around 10,000 years ago. We also know that people kept arriving throughout the next several millennia. But one mystery archaeologists have been trying to solve is why some of the earliest radiocarbon dates for sites are in South America! Shouldn't they be where people first arrived, which we believe to be in what is now Alaska? Why did they spread so far south, when they had plenty of food up north? Archaeologists have many different answers to these questions, but no one is really sure what happened.

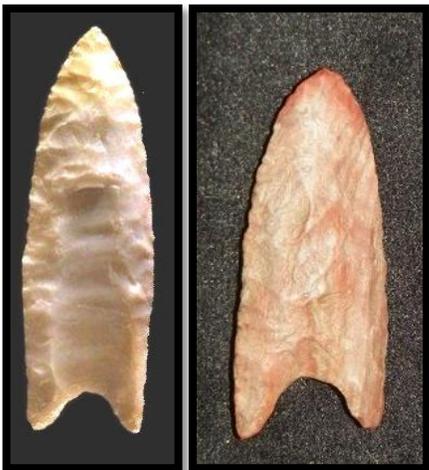
EARLIEST PEOPLE IN ATLANTIC CANADA

The Paleo people of Atlantic Canada were very much like those from everywhere else on the continent at that time. Like other Paleo people, they used brightly coloured or beautiful toolstone to create long, thin projectile points called **lanceolate bifaces** and **hafted** them onto shafts to make spears for hunting. These points are distinctive because they are **fluted**, meaning a large flake has been taken off up the middle, making a place for a wooden shaft to be set and lashed in place with sinew. They also wove fishing nets for catching fish in rivers and oceans and they gathered plants and berries for food and medicine.



1. Reproductions of lanceolate bifaces.

Most of the evidence we have about these early people comes from sites with projectile points and bones of animals all over the Americas. In fact, the first time archaeologists realized how old Paleo people really were was when a lanceolate biface was discovered in Folsom, New Mexico, that was stuck into the bone of a mammoth. Before that, many archaeologists did not believe that people had been here so long. This evidence proved that people have lived here since at least the last Ice Age. The **Folsom** spear point type and the even earlier **Clovis** point type are both fluted, lanceolate bifaces and are found all over the Americas, showing that these early people occupied all of North America and a lot of South America.



2. Debert-style points.

Most sites lack evidence for baskets, plant remains, clothes, and other things that **decompose**, or rot, in the ground. Because of this, archaeologists believed for a long time that Paleo peoples *only* hunted megafauna and did not fish or hunt smaller animals. However, a very old site was uncovered on the West Coast of Canada that contained many baskets, fishing gear, and woven fragments of clothes. These things were preserved because of unusual conditions: the site had been covered in water for thousands of years, which

preserves these kinds of artifacts. Because we know that people across large areas of North America had contact with each other, we believe that most or all Paleo people shared this technology of basketry, fishing, and weaving.

THE DEBERT
SITE

The largest Paleo site in this region is the Debert Site in Nova Scotia, dated to around 11,000 years ago. At this site, hundreds of lanceolate bifaces were found, along with other lithic tools and **debitage**, the flakes that come from making stone tools. People clearly lived at the site, and also kept returning to the site over an unknown period of time. We know this because of a living floor (a layer that shows signs of having been lived on, such as a hearth or a house) found at the site. The Debert Site is very important to archaeologists because it is the most northerly Paleo site that has been found in eastern Canada.

The Archaic Period

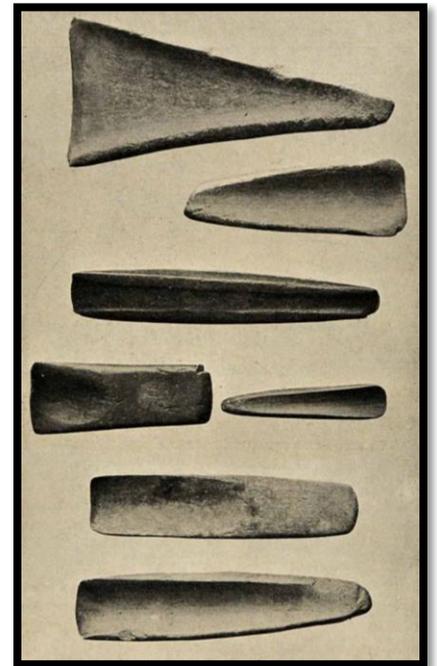
Sometime around 6,000 years ago, people began to change their **subsistence practices**. This means that they began to get food in a different way. The megafauna of the Ice Age were disappearing and the people had to find new ways to survive. Across the Americas, people split into groups that were very different

from each other according to what food **resources** were available. In the southwest (like Arizona), people began to practice **horticulture**, which is growing food in gardens and small plots, while still also hunting and gathering. In the Northwest (like British Columbia), people began to concentrate more on fishing, though they still hunted and collected berries, edible roots, and veggies. In central North America, people relied on new species of animals like deer and new birds like turkeys, while still hunting larger animals that remained

after the Ice Age, like caribou. In the North, people began to hunt sea mammals such as whales as well as land mammals such as bear. And in the east, people became reliant on large fish such as swordfish, sea mammals such as seals and killer whales, and shellfish and many kinds of plants.



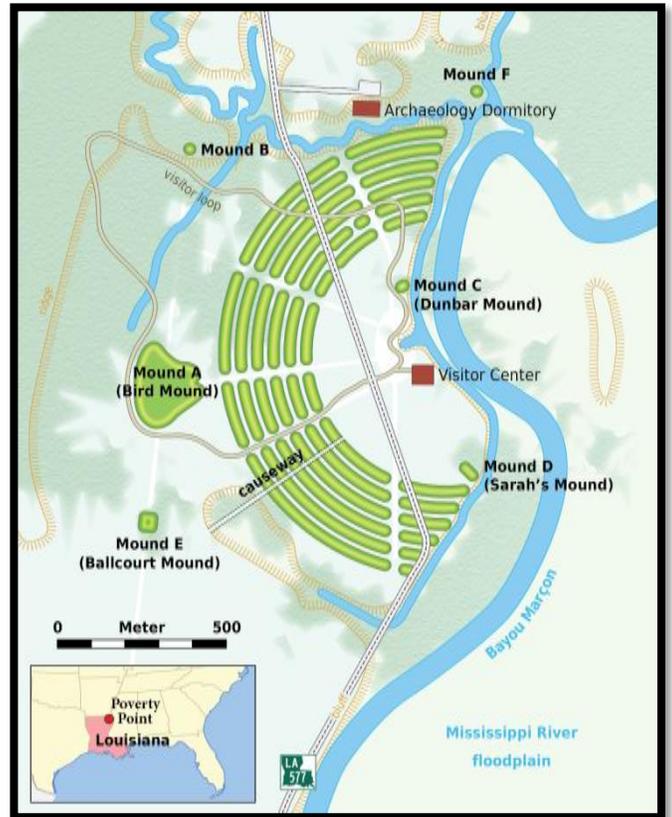
4. A groundstone gouge and groundstone axe hafted on handles.



3. Groundstone gouges from the Cow Point Site in New Brunswick.

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One of the most important things that happened after about 6,000 years ago is that people began to settle down. No longer did they wander across the continent looking for the best and most beautiful toolstone, meeting up with other bands and trading and visiting. Now, people visited other people's territories, bringing gifts of red ochre and copper. The people began to bury their dead in lavish graves, almost always covered in large amounts of **red ochre** (an red pigment made of iron oxide), and usually with copper and beautiful groundstone tools. The people also began to build large earthen mounds and land forms that have been shown to be geometrically connected across thousands of miles. This suggests that groups across large areas of North America were working together to create sacred monuments towards a common purpose. However, what this purpose was is not known to archaeologists.



5. The Poverty Point Site, a monumental earthwork pointing toward several sites hundreds of kilometers away.

In the Maritimes of Canada, people became very focused on their **marine resources**, hunting seals, walrus, porpoises, and whales by boat and collecting shellfish on shorelines. They also hunted **terrestrial resources** such as caribou, beavers, and muskrat. Although the people undoubtedly travelled along rivers frequently, they did not fish from rivers as much as from oceans; however, one of the most important sites from around 4,000 years ago is located just below modern-day Fredericton on the Wolastoq (St. John) River. This site, called the Cow Point Site, is a burial with numerous graves and **grave goods**. From this evidence, we know that people moved up rivers for various reasons, and fishing and hunting may have been one reason why.

In order to hunt sea mammals so well, the people developed two important technologies: the dugout canoe and the toggling harpoon. The dugout canoe was important because hunting sea mammals is dangerous and some animals and large fish will attack a



6. Reproductions of toggling harpoons.

boat when they are being pursued. The dugout canoe protected hunters from attack to some extent, better than skin boats that might have been used previously. The other invention, a toggling harpoon, is a spear made for hunting sea mammals and large fish that was used across the Arctic regions and down the east coast. It first appeared in Atlantic Canada, however, so it may have been invented here and then the idea spread north and south. It was made of a point with a rope attached that fastens to the end of a spear shaft. When the harpoon is thrown and hits an animal, the head detaches and “toggles” or twists to the side, lodging it deep under the skin. The rope attached to the point is then used to hang on as the animal tries to escape and tires itself out, or more harpoons can be thrown to finish the animal off, after which it is hauled to shore.

The importance of these two technologies to the people living in the Maritime Provinces is clear from the number of toggle harpoons found at sites and the large number of woodworking tools that would have been used to make dugout canoes. We do not see the canoes in the archaeological record because they have decomposed, but we see the tools used to make them in large amounts. These tools, mostly groundstone, were axes, adzes, gouges, and mauls that could quickly hew away wood from large trees. Dugout canoes were not good on shallow rivers, however, because they were so heavy that they could not easily be carried when the water level was low, as birch bark canoes can be.

The Archaic Period seems to have been a time of great **ceremonialism** and building a sacred landscape. It is during this time that people began to build **monuments**, trade items such as copper and gemstones across long distances, and lay the dead in special places that were visited frequently by the living. Red ochre was very important and was used in graves and other sacred places. Getting red ochre must have been a big part of what people did, judging by how much we see in the archaeological record during this time. Since red ochre often comes from mountains and at least one known source is in the sacred place of Mount Katahdin, getting and bringing back red ochre was probably an important act of **pilgrimage** along with traveling to sacred mounds. Pilgrimage is when people travel to a destination that is sacred and the act of traveling itself is considered sacred.

WARREN
MOOREHEAD



Lessons from the Past: Digging Up Burials

You may be wondering how we know these things about the graves of the Archaic peoples of this region. We know so much about these graves because many had been excavated before archaeologists agreed to a **moratorium** on excavating graves in this region, meaning they stopped digging up graves. It has become clear to archaeologists over time that they had been acting disrespectfully and harmfully by excavating graves, particularly without the knowledge of Indigenous people who have descended from the people buried in those graves. Now, archaeologists in Atlantic Canada avoid excavating graves except where three conditions are met:



7. Warren Moorehead.

1. Graves are in direct danger, such as from **coastal erosion**, which is the destruction of the shoreline by storms and climate change. Development, such as building roads or buildings, is not considered a good enough reason to excavate burials.
2. The nearest First Nations wish for the graves to be excavated rather than destroyed. This has only happened once in the history of the Atlantic Provinces at a site called the Skull Island Site near the Fort Folly Band in New Brunswick.
3. An agreement is in place between an archaeological company and a First Nation for how the human remains and their grave goods will be **repatriated**, meaning buried again. Artifacts that came from a site need also to have a home or be repatriated along with the human remains.

Unfortunately, many graves were excavated prior to this moratorium. In fact, archaeologists often sought graves because they felt that burials show more about a culture than other kinds of sites. One archaeologist in particular, Warren K. Moorehead, became very good at identifying graves of what are now known as the Red Paint People, an Archaic Period people that lived about 4,000 years ago in New England and Atlantic Canada. He excavated many of these graves and explicitly intended to excavate as many as he could find. The artifacts that came out of the burials ended up in museums such as the Abbe Museum and the Peabody Museum as well as private collections, often with poor records of where they had come from.

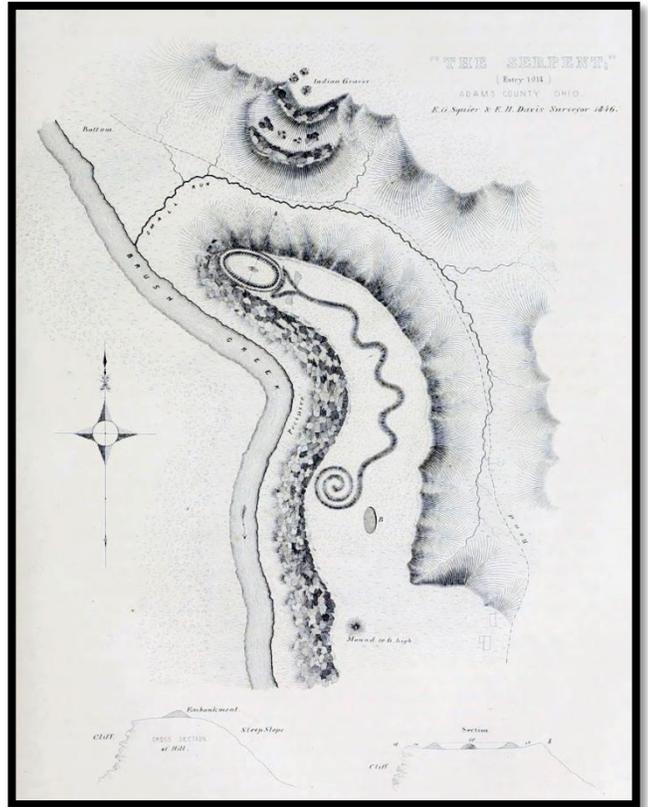
From a certain perspective, it is fortunate that the graves contained no human remains such as bones, which had decomposed by the time of Moorehead's excavations. Other archaeologists that have excavated human remains have been accused of very disrespectful treatment, leaving collections of bones in museums without any intention of reburial and sometimes even putting them on display for the public. This practice, which was quite common even as late as the 1960s, has outraged many Indigenous groups in North America.

In the US, the North American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted in 1990 and gave the right to Native American groups to re-acquire the excavated human remains of their ancestors and bury them. We do not have similar legislation in Canada, but we have certainly become more aware of the ethics of storing human remains and excavating cemeteries and communal burials. However, in other parts of Canada, burials are still excavated, sometimes without consulting First Nations. Clearly, we still have many issues to resolve around our archaeological practices.

The Woodland Period

Around
3000
years ago,
a

transformation occurred in the Northeast of North America, including Atlantic Canada. Although other groups had already been practicing horticulture for several thousand years, most groups in the Northeast had relied mainly on hunting, fishing, and gathering. However, around 3,000 years ago, people began to experiment with growing plants that were important to their diets. At first, they mostly encouraged some plants to grow by clearing spaces around where they were already growing, such as blackberries and knotweed, which had become an important food **staple**. Sometimes, it seems as though people transplanted plants to other locations where they would be happier or would work together with other plants, such as ground cover that would



9. A drawing of the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio.



10. The Great Serpent Mound as seen from the ground.

keep competing plants down around berries. In some places, people also started growing maize, the ancestor of modern-day corn. Around the middle of the Woodland Period (about 2000 years ago), horticulture was an important part of most peoples' subsistence strategies in the Northeast, with the exception of the Maritime Provinces and other parts of northern Canada.

Because subsistence had changed, people gained more freedom to pursue other activities, but horticulture also meant that people were tied down more, having to return to the same places every year to harvest what they had grown. It is during this period that archaeologists believe the first towns and cities in the Northeast began to be built. People began to gather more often, and to stay put more often, and they usually had a source of food ready-at-hand so they didn't have to follow the game as closely. In addition, the

HISTORY OF THE MARITIMES

climate had changed so that nearly everywhere in North America was rich with food resources: deer were very plentiful; caribou and moose were also common; many species of birds were plentiful and were easy to hunt all year round; nuts of many types were easy to harvest in large numbers; and fish, both from river systems and the oceans, were readily available. This may be why people began to build monuments with a whole new enthusiasm.

Whatever the reason, a series of **cultural complexes** emerged that spread across most of North America. A cultural complex is a set of artifact types and features that occur together in many sites, suggesting that the people who made them shared certain ideas and preferred certain ways of living. For instance, the Adena culture rose around the beginning of the Woodland Period and is found across central US, the Great Lakes Region, eastern North America, and the Maritime Provinces – a very large area! We can recognize Adena sites because they usually consist of a burial mound, beautiful groundstone “gorgets” (actually, we have no idea what these objects are, but they look a little bit like the piece of armour in a knight’s suit called a gorget), copper beads and other jewelry, smoking pipes made of stone, and “birdstones” (which are stones carved in the shape of birds that seem meant to rest on something, but no one knows what).

One new technology that became fairly common in the Woodland Period was pottery. People began to make and use pots for cooking over fires. This was a different way to cook food because, before pottery, cooking was done either in birch bark containers or in containers of other materials by heating rocks and dropping them into the containers. This cooking method is called **stone-boiling** and, although it is effective, it is not good for simmering (for instance, to extract extra nutrients from bones) and it can’t be left unattended. **Ceramic technology**, or pottery, allowed cooks to wander off and leave **foodstuffs** to cook slowly over a long time and also helped extract even more nutrients from food.

The Adena cultural complex shows that many, many people were building monuments together, as they had in the Archaic Period but on a larger scale. Yet in many places, these people were not inclined to live in cities; instead, they lived in small villages or single homesteads across the landscape but came together at certain times to build mounds, hold ceremonies, exchange gifts, and harvest resources. One of the most impressive mounds built during this time is the Great Serpent Mound, built around 2,300 years ago. To this day, Indigenous people gather here to celebrate events such as the full moon or harvest time.

THE
HOPEWELL
INTERACTION
SPHERE

Then around 2,000 years ago, the artifacts and monuments changed. We call this new time the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. An **interaction sphere** is a little different from a cultural complex because there probably was not only one culture with a set of ideas and material culture that everyone had and preferred to use. Instead, an interaction sphere is like an economy: special goods, such as carved stone pipes, copper jewelry, elaborately decorated pottery, shark’s teeth, and mica sculptures were traded all over North America. So while people in the Great Lakes Region were very different from

HISTORY OF THE MARITIMES

the people to the south in the American Bottom and also very different from the people in Atlantic Canada, everyone just *had* to have these precious **commodities** and traded what they made locally for them. Some have proposed that what the people in Atlantic Canada traded was maple syrup and birch bark canoes, but by whatever means, these goods came all the way here from Ohio – that’s a distance of over 1,800 kilometers!

The monuments people built at this time are not easy to understand. Unlike Adena mounds, these mounds do not contain human remains, so they were not burials. They are also not symmetrical like Adena mounds, which are often perfect cones or half-spheres. Instead, they are strangely shaped, with entrances and exits but no apparent structures like buildings or fences. Some have large depressions that fill up with water when it rains; others have lumps in strange places. Some archaeologists have thought that they were forts or defensive structures because they are sometimes ringed with an earthen wall, but there is no sign of conflict like bodies with injuries from weapons or places where populations disappeared suddenly. The best explanation so far is that the mounds people made were meant to be sacred gardens with looking pools and walking paths, possibly with mazes.

An important clue about their function is something called the Great Hopewell Road, a straight road six meters wide and with 1-meter-high walls on either side. Small portions of the road have been found in many locations of northeast North America, always running southeast–northwest, always straight, and always six meters wide with walls. The road is paved with limestone, so it would have shone bright white when it was still being used. Archaeologists believe that this road was a great road of pilgrimage along which many thousands of people travelled each year to visit the mounds. People would have brought their trading goods with them to deposit at the mounds, maybe as an act of offering, and would have travelled home with goods from the keepers of the mounds. While people were on pilgrimage, perhaps they would have spent time building or maintaining the mounds. This would explain how such monumental projects could have been built even though there were no large cities nearby.

An important mound has been excavated in the Maritimes on the Miramichi River in New Brunswick. This mound is called the Augustine Mound, named after Joe Augustine, a man from the nearby Metepenagiag First

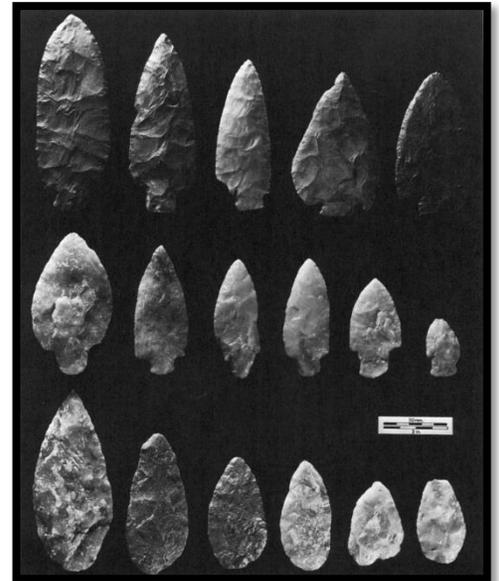
THE AUGUSTINE MOUND AND OXBOW SITE



10. The Augustine Mound being excavated.

Nation who discovered it and saved it from destruction when construction was planned in the area. There was also a nearby settlement long ago that archaeologists called the Oxbow Site because it sits in the crook of the river, a geological feature called an “oxbow.” The Augustine Mound and Oxbow Site both contain artifacts that clearly came from very far away, maybe as far as Illinois or Ohio, but also contain many products obtained closer to home, such as bright toolstone from the Saint John River and the Minas Basin in Nova Scotia.

The mound has been dated to about 2500 years ago and is thought to have been part of the Adena culture or the later Hopewell Interaction Sphere. It contained buried human remains as well as **cremations**, which are human remains that have been burned before being buried; after being excavated, these remains were respectfully re-buried by the Metepenagiag First Nation. It also contained many copper beads, which had a surprising effect on the other artifacts: the copper **preserved** the perishables like baskets, fabric, and birch bark, saving them from decomposing. From this mound, we have some of the best evidence for textiles and fibre arts in this region. The mound also contained some lithic artifacts that had **pocket polish**—rounding on some edges from something very soft over a long time—as though they had been carried a long distance in a pouch or pocket. It looks as though people came from very far away to build this mound or add to it, and maybe these people settled at Oxbow or moved in with the people already there.



11. Projectile points from the Augustine Mound.

The Oxbow Site was occupied from about 2700 years ago to about 1000 years ago. It seems as though the Augustine Mound was not added to after 2200 years ago, but it remained an important and sacred place for people living nearby. The people who lived there hosted many people from far away, which we know because **exotic** toolstone was found in several strata at the site. Some other mounds were built in the Maritimes but the Augustine Mound is the largest.

The Mississippians

Around 1,000 years ago, people began to build great cities that spanned large areas and had ball fields for a game like soccer, large **platform mounds** shaped like pyramids with their tops cut off, and sprawling neighborhoods and manufacturing districts for producing goods such as pottery and stone tools. These people were heavily invested in horticulture and one of the most common artifacts

found in these cities is the stone hoe for working the soil for gardens. Maize was a staple crop.

CAHOKIA

The largest city of the Mississippians was Cahokia, which was in Illinois and reached a population of about 40,000 people. This population was the greatest city to have been built in North America until 1780, when its population was surpassed by Philadelphia. At its greatest population in the 13th century, it was bigger than London.



12. Artist's conception of Cahokia from the air.

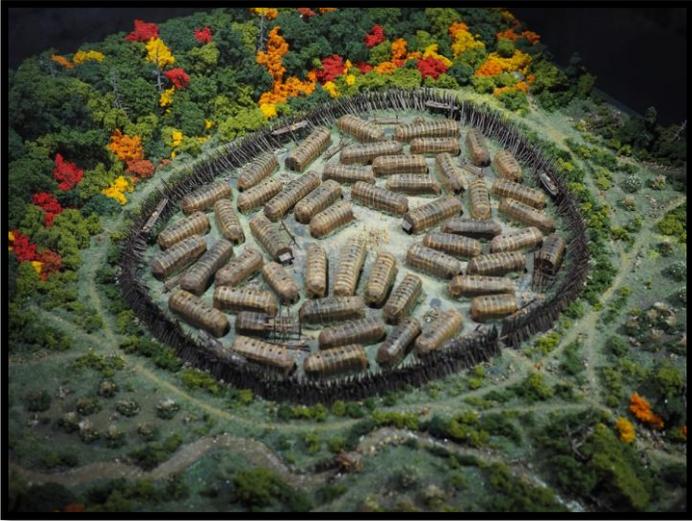
Because these cities were so large, they needed a great deal of resources brought to them, which they traded for items such as toolstone, stone hoes, pottery, and other utilitarian and ceremonial goods. Because of this vast amount of trading, resources from all over the continent were moving to and from the Mississippian cities. Although not many resources directly from the cities arrived in the Atlantic Provinces, these resources—like toolstone that was quarried in huge amounts—was being sent to places like New York, which gave the societies in New York extra items to send to the

Atlantic Provinces. Thus, trade was increased everywhere even though not all areas traded directly with each other.

The Iroquoians

Further north from the Mississippians, another society—very different but equally important—was the group known as the Iroquoians. Springing up around the Great Lakes Region around 1300 years ago, the origins of the Iroquoians are not well known. They were very different from their neighbours to the south, the Mississippians, but also very different from the highly mobile peoples to the west (the prairies), the east (Atlantic Provinces), and the north (Ontario and Quebec). They had highly organized societies with powerful militaries and rich resources such as copper and toolstone that they traded across the continent, but unlike the Mississippians, they seem to have avoided building cities entirely. Their subsistence strategy was built around maize horticulture and moving their towns every few decades to find more fertile soils. They also hunted deer and gathered wild rice, and they built great longhouses—large halls made out of spruce bows and bark—in which many families lived and worked. They were a **matrilocal** society, which means that husbands came to live in the village of their wives, and children took the name and property of their mothers' families. In this society, women chose the leaders of the group and could remove them from power if they were not performing well. The Iroquoians in

fact developed a system of government that was the inspiration for the American government.



13. Model of an Iroquoian village.

Europeans), who were not at war with either confederacy but waged war against several groups to the south. All three groups were known as fiercely warlike, but also as welcoming to refugees and captives and kind to people in difficulty such as orphans, absorbing many kinds of people into their society.

The Iroquoians probably disrupted the trade of the Mississippians to some extent by expanding their territory and taking over control of resources such as toolstone and copper. However, we know from archaeological evidence that there was also a lot of trade between the two regions. Yet for the most part, the two regions were probably not very friendly with each other and there is not a lot of influence on each other's cultures evident in the archaeological record.

On the other hand, the Iroquoians traded extensively with the people of Atlantic Canada and influenced their culture, and probably were also influenced by the peoples of Atlantic Canada as well. Even though war sometimes broke out between the two regions, it is clear from ceramic styles that the two regions had contact and probably intermarried.

The Algonkians

The Algonkians spanned a large part of North America and probably gave rise to both the Mississippians and the Iroquoians. They lived in northern Canada below the Arctic, in eastern Canada and the United States, and to the west of the Great Lakes and the Mississippian territory. Basically, they lived everywhere not occupied by the northern peoples such as the Inuit, the Iroquois, and the Mississippians, and not much further south than Georgia. They kept a more mobile way of life, moving around to follow the movement of animals such as the migration

of caribou, the seasons of plants such as harvesting of hazelnuts, and the gatherings and ceremonies that took place all over the territories of the Algonkians. The Algonkians also shared similar languages with a common root and included the Mi'kmaq, the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), the Peskotomuhkati (Passamaquoddy), Eastern and Western Abenaki in northeastern Canada, Ojibwa and Cree in northern Canada, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Blackfoot, and Pawnee to the east and south, and Nariganset and Mahican to the southeast.



14. Mi'kmaq or Wolastoqiyik men stopping for a rest while travelling.

Some Algonkian groups grew maize and lived in villages, while others relied heavily on big game hunting such as buffalo on the prairies. In the Atlantic Provinces, people made use of a wide range of resources, including big and small mammals like deer and beaver, shellfish like clams, nuts of many kinds, fish from rivers and coasts, and birds such as wild turkeys. People in Atlantic Canada also traded for many different things, including shark's teeth, toolstone, shells, copper, and gemstones, and probably supplied other regions with toolstone, metals, dyes, food like maple syrup, and art objects like baskets.

It seems as though people in the Atlantic Provinces were beginning to settle down in towns more and become more attached to some places where they continuously returned. Ouigoudi is a town where Saint John is now built, written about by the explorer Champlain where a great longhouse was said to have stood; this may have been a permanent settlement, or maybe a gathering place where people returned every year. Other places, such as Bear River in Nova Scotia, have long been important gathering places for people even up to the present day.

**THE SKULL
ISLAND SITE**

The Skull Island Site is an important Late Woodland Site in New Brunswick near the modern town of Shediac. It is located on a small island with a burial and a **shell midden** or garbage heap, both from about 650 years ago. The burial contained the remains of several individuals, each with a ceramic jar next to them. In the burial were many wealth objects such as copper nuggets, projectile points made of gemstone-quality toolstone, and other things that would have been difficult to come by. Archaeologists have wondered if these wealth objects show that people were collecting wealth in order to become leaders. In many societies, leaders are chosen based on how much wealth they can get and then give away at important events like ceremonial gatherings or funerals. People who have given away the most wealth are often considered the greatest leaders because they take care of their people. Leaders chosen

in this way are sometimes called “Big Men” because the first time this style of leadership was discovered was in Papua New Guinea where leaders host feasts and display great generosity. These leaders are called Big Men. No “Big Women” have been reported, but this does not mean they do not exist.

Whether Skull Island is an example of a **bigmanship** or something else, the fact that so many wealth items occurred in one place means that someone was working hard to gain wealth, and this means trading. When trading increases and wealth becomes important, often the society is changing its **hierarchy** structure. This means that some people’s opinions are becoming more important and others’ opinions are becoming less important. The people who are more important are referred to as having a higher **status**. Modern-day society has a very large difference in status between people, and one of the things that causes people to have different status in this society is the amount of wealth they have. At Skull Island, everyone was probably still more-or-less equal, but some people may have had more decision-making power. Yet it is important to note that archaeologists can’t really answer this question; we can only speculate.



What’s in a Name? What We Call Our Ancestors

You may be wondering why we don’t use the names of the people who live now, since we know that modern people like the Mi’kmaq, the Wolastoqiyik, and the Peskotomuhkadi descended directly from these early people. The reason is that we can’t be sure that the ancestors of these groups would have thought of themselves this way. More than likely, they did see themselves much as the people today see themselves, but we can’t know this from archaeological evidence, and so it would be wrong for an archaeologist to call people living 3,000 years ago Mi’kmaq, for example.

One thing we do know, from studying human cultures everywhere in the world, is that cultures change through time, sometimes very much. Just in the last 500 years, Indigenous cultures in Atlantic Canada have changed dramatically. Subsistence practices are very different from before Europeans arrived, as well as where people live and in what kind of houses, what people make and use in their daily lives, and probably social customs have changed as well. The need to survive has forced Indigenous people to make many of these changes, but Europeans’ arrival was not the first time the people were challenged to adapt to difficult circumstances. Paleo peoples had to find a whole new way to live after the disappearance of the megafauna. Archaic people had to deal with several changes in sea level and global temperature, which made the old ways hard to maintain when favourite hunting and fishing spots were submerged by the sea or animals found it too hot and would not migrate as far south as before.

And let’s not forget that humans also make things hard sometimes! The Iroquoians probably emerged as a distinct group because they were facing increasing pressure from the Mississippians who were expanding further and further into mobile peoples’ traditional hunting lands. All these things probably caused people to think differently

about themselves and their culture, and to consider who they were as a group. For instance, studies of language suggest that the Iroquoian languages all emerged out of an early language called Proto-Iroquoian, and material culture suggests that many people living around the Great Lakes saw themselves as one people; however, by about 1,000 years ago, several groups within this language group began to make war on each other, something that usually only happens when a group sees another group as very different and, probably, very bad. Because of all this, we have to be careful about saying that the Mi'kmaq, the Wolastoqiyik, or the Peskotomuhkadi made the sites we are seeing dated to 10,000 years ago because we don't know what those early people would have called themselves or whether they would have divided themselves up along the same ethnic boundaries.

When we are not sure what to call people in the past, we usually go by the period they probably came from, but sometimes we don't even know that. In this case, we can call them "the people," "ancient people," or "Indigenous people."

European Contact

The first Europeans arriving in the Americas were the Norse as early as 1000 years ago. Settlements have been found in the Arctic that show "meeting houses" where Vikings would leave items for trade and the ancestors of the Innu would come get the items and leave their own trade items. L'Anse aux Meadows is an archaeological site on the coast of Newfoundland that was a Norse settlement, showing that the Norse attempted to **colonize** this continent, and their own oral and written records tell of a continent west of Greenland that they travelled to for various reasons. However, they were unsuccessful in their efforts to colonize (meaning to set up their own villages and territories), probably partly due to hostilities between the Norse and the Indigenous people of Newfoundland. These Europeans may have come as far south as Maine, but they did not really impact the people of Atlantic Canada.

Other Europeans in North America were the Basque, a people from Spain and France who came to fish and bring their catch back home as early as AD 1450, about 40 years before Columbus. The Basque set up several **processing stations** around the northeast coast where they lived during the fishing season, drying and salting fish like cod, and then travelled home again. They also set up several whaling stations and hunted whales for their blubber. The Basque had good relations with the Indigenous people and even left members of their crew to winter with the Mi'kmaq in order to learn their language and customs. They may have also **intermarried** with the Mi'kmaq, meaning Mi'kmaw women may have taken Basque husbands.

Columbus first found the Americas in 1492 and had a tremendous impact on the areas around Central America where he landed. However, the first explorer to make contact with the Atlantic Provinces was John Cabot in 1497, although little is known of this trip. A century followed during which explorers did not come frequently to this region, but in 1604, Champlain, a French explorer, and his group attempted to set up a

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permanent French settlement on St. Croix Island in New Brunswick. This settlement failed badly but the French did not give up; Champlain went on to found the first settlement where Saint John would eventually be founded, and from there, founded a settlement that would become Montreal on the St. Lawrence River. The first century of contact with Europeans was relatively peaceful, but war with different groups of Europeans (French and English, mostly) soon took over. Following this period, Indigenous people suffered the loss of much of their land and could no longer follow their traditional ways of life.

Indigenous people suffered greatly from contact with Europeans, even during times of relative peace. Europeans brought deadly diseases with them, which they had mostly become immune to, but Indigenous people had never been exposed to these diseases and many people died. Some have estimated that 95% of the people living in the Americas were killed by disease. This amount of death is beyond devastating; it was so bad that entire cultures died, and all the knowledge and history they had died with them. In some societies, some people lived but all the Knowledge Keepers died, leaving the young people with no history or skills. To imagine what this would have been like, think of the 20 people closest to you and now imagine only one of those 20 people surviving. How much would be lost?

This was a great blow to the Indigenous people all over the Americas. Yet we do not know of any Indigenous people in history that blamed Europeans for this great tragedy; in fact, Indigenous people seem to have behaved as generously toward Europeans as ever. Many groups devastated by disease came together to rebuild, and went on with their traditional ways of life. They also traded animal furs and other supplies with Europeans as the foreigners became increasingly interested in furs. In this way, the Indigenous people of Atlantic Canada and elsewhere came back from unspeakable tragedy.

Unfortunately, the Europeans were not very respectful and continued to push their agendas further and further beyond their original stated goals. They began settling on land that was important for Indigenous hunting, fishing, and gathering. They began to push for more and more animal hides. Eventually, war broke out as Indigenous people began to defend their homes and their rights, but because they were so small in number after the devastating diseases—which kept coming even after the first wave—that defending their homes was difficult. Their technology was in many ways better for waging war in the Atlantic Provinces, and their military tactics were definitely superior to Europeans, who tended to stand in a line and march forward shooting guns. The bows and spears people used for fighting were lightweight and did not need to be reloaded, and they could be shot while running, allowing the warriors to advance quickly and silently on their foes in the thick woods of the Maritimes. However, Indigenous warriors frequently faced ten-to-one odds or worse and, though they were remarkable warriors and tacticians—often scoring large victories—they were ultimately overpowered by the much larger forces of the English.

What would have happened if the Americas had not been devastated by disease? There is little doubt that Indigenous people would have been able to push back Europeans, especially since many Indigenous groups adopted European technology so quickly that they became better at things like firing guns and riding horses. Perhaps some of the larger societies, like the Aztecs, might have gone on to dominate world politics and economics. Perhaps the Iroquoians would have united to become a major military force in the world, like the Romans had long ago.

Many sad and terrible things happened to Indigenous people across the Americas after the arrival of Europeans. The residential schools in Canada and the massacres and forced marches in the United States are only a few. We cannot cover these things in depth because we know these things from written records rather than from archaeological evidence. However, here are some important sources of information that should be essential reading for all Canadians:

King, Thomas. 2013. The inconvenient Indian: A curious account of native people in North America. University of Minnesota Press.

Knockwood, Isabelle. 1992. Out of the depths: The experiences of Mi'kmaq children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. Lockeport, NS: Roseway Publishing.

Mann, Charles C. 2005. 1491: New revelations of the Americas before Columbus. New York: Knopf.

Wrapping Up a History of Indigenous People

The history of Indigenous people in the Americas is a story of survival on the land, monument building, the formation and re-arranging of empires and great societies, and the movement of people all over the continent. It is also the story of living on the land and practicing spirituality. Sometimes, people formed large-scale religions, such as at Cahokia, where people came from all over to take part in ceremonies. Sometimes, people helped build huge monuments on the earth as part of their spiritual practice, as they did at the Great Serpent Mound. Sometimes, burying the dead was one of the most important ceremonies of all, as it seems to have been for the Archaic peoples living in Atlantic Canada. All these different people and their customs have come down to us in some form and we still practice many of the ways of life from thousands of years ago.

It is important to remember that the society we live in now is the result of a huge change that happened around 400 years ago when Europeans started interacting with Indigenous people. Life changed dramatically for most Indigenous groups. But Europeans have been here for a very short time compared with how long Indigenous people have lived here. Indigenous people have survived huge challenges and atrocities and continue to thrive even in difficult circumstances. When looking to the future, we

must remember always to look at the past as well, because there are many important lessons to be learned from the ancestors and their ways of life.

In the next lesson, you will learn about the science of archaeology and the Traditional Knowledge that many Indigenous people are now applying to archaeology. You will learn how to conduct archaeology scientifically but also to use Two-Eyed Seeing to better understand the archaeological record.

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10. *The Augustine Mound. Courtesy of Metepenagiag Heritage Park.*
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12. *Artist's conception of Cahokia. Painting: Heironymous Rowe.*
13. *Model of an Iroquoian Village. Model: Michel Cadieux.*
14. *Mi'kmaq or Wolastoqiyik men. Photo: unknown.*

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