

How the Pilgrims Found Their Way to Kennebec in Maine

One March day, following the winter of rationing corn by the kernel (after the excesses of the first Thanksgiving), a Captain Huddleston on his way to the Maine fishing ground dropped in on that weather-beaten band of Pilgrims upon the shore at Plimoth. The Captain sent a note ashore telling them of the massacre which he had recently witnessed of some four hundred souls at Jamestown and suggested that they might face the same fate by remaining there.

Instead of reacting in fear, they expressed the hope that he could sell them food and lead them to other fishermen who could do the same. And it was off the coast of "the main" that they received the food from men who would accept no pay. Even more important than the food, Governor Bradford wrote, "they found their way there" to what was to become "Kennebec" in the Bradford charter which confirmed and enlarged their first conditional patent at Plimoth.

In the meantime, they have cultivated a relationship with the Indians there, trading Indian corn for beaver pelts, and gaining valuable knowledge of the resources there as well as learning the survival skills necessary to harvest and market these furs which unlike their other ventures proved to be quite profitable.

Governor Bradford says they established a "house well up in ye river in ye convenientest place for trade" which they kept well stocked both summer and winter for trade with the Indians. He referred to the hardy souls who first ventured a trading trip there as "the old standers" (or standards). Names which have been confirmed are Howland, Alden, Standish and (Edward) Winslow later followed by Josiah and John and Gov. Prence. But many more, no doubt, went later along with employees and settlers, and possibly Governor Bradford himself, came to supervise.

Thus fur trade was put in the charge of John Howland, Factor, who headed "the family there" as it was referred to by Governor Bradford. The trade ultimately reached thousand of (pounds) £ in value and in time required a "frigate" to defend shipments from pirates who snatched their first trans-Atlantic shipment right in the English Channel.

By the time they reached Maine, Hobbomock had replaced their "Squanto" as their invaluable guide and a bay in a river branch carried his name for many years until it was changed to "Hockomock". Some of the Indians were Christianized by the Jesuit priests with the encouragement and the cooperation of the Pilgrims, to their mutual benefit and everlasting credit.

Documentation of the sites and specific activities is an ongoing fulfillment of the "objects" of the Maine Society of Mayflower Descendants.

Eben L. Elwell
Research Committee, Chairperson

May 21, 1993