

DEFINING MAINE

Exploring the 1820 Journal and Plans of Survey of Joseph Treat

MAINE STATE MUSEUM TEACHER MATERIALS

Recommended grade level: 8-12

In 1820, the District of Maine separated from Massachusetts, and statehood became a reality. Maine entered the Union on March 15 as the twenty-third state of the United States of America. Much of northern and eastern Maine, however, was wilderness, and the boundaries were not clearly defined. Illegal logging operations from Canadian loggers were also a concern.

Maine's first Governor William King authorized Major Joseph Treat to survey the northeast section of Maine. Treat enlisted the help of John Neptune, lieutenant governor of the Penobscot tribe, to guide him across the Wabanaki homeland. Jacob Holyoke of Brewer was the third member of the expedition.

Treat kept a detailed journal of his observations. Treat chronicled their journey, describing the condition of the land, settlements, Native camps, timber resources, and noted evidence of illegal logging operations.

In the following activities, students will analyze excerpts from Treat's journal entries as a means to explore what Maine looked like in 1820. Students will be prompted to draw conclusions about how our understanding of the land and its resources has changed over time.

Entries from Treat's Journal and the map, by Moses Greenleaf, Treat recorded his route on, are available to be explored on the Maine State Museum's website.

<https://mainestatemuseum.org/interactivemap/>

Background

The new state of Maine entered the Union without a clear boundary to separate it from the British-controlled colony of New Brunswick. Uncertainties about the location of Maine's northeast border caused clashes over control of the area's valuable forests. Maine and New Brunswick lumbermen competed to set up timber harvesting operations along the disputed territory's major rivers.

Defending Maine's claim to the area was a high priority for Maine's new government.

Maine Gov. William King hired Joseph Treat to travel deep into the territory and report on who and what he found, including New Brunswick lumbermen trespassing on state land.

Treat wisely hired Penobscot lieutenant governor John Neptune as the expedition's guide.

Neptune had paddled the area's waterways for decades and would be an invaluable liaison with other Native people who knew the rivers, lakes, and lands well. Treat, Neptune, and a third man, Jacob Holyoke, started in late September 1820. Fifty-six days and 500 miles later, the three men concluded their difficult journey.



Maine's northern border according to Great Britain (left) and the U.S. (right). The conflict centered on the definition of the "highlands" in a 1783 treaty. In 1842, the northern border was finally settled along the St. John River. *Reproduced from the Historical Atlas of Maine. Courtesy of the University of Maine Press.*

Treat created a journal and maps during the long, challenging expedition. These documents provided an invaluable, detailed record of the landscape of Maine in 1820. Treat also documented Native and non-Native settlements and described the impacts of Maine's uncertain border that would remain unsettled for another 22 years.

Joseph Treat (1775-1853)

Joseph Treat was born in Bangor to a prominent fur trader. He became a surveyor, politician, and land proprietor. Gov. William King hired Joseph Treat, who brought his cousin Jacob Holyoke along, to travel and document the interior of northern Maine.

Traversing the landscape would have been impossible without Wabanaki skills and knowledge. Joseph Treat engaged Penobscot leader John Neptune to guide the expedition and make a birchbark canoe for the trip. Birchbark canoes were keenly suited for the shallow streams and swift rivers that flowed through Maine's interior.

The Wabanaki knew every natural feature of their homeland. Treat relied heavily on John Neptune's cultural knowledge and ability to move through the Wabanaki territory. Neptune relayed the names of rivers and lakes and described the natural resources therein.

Lt. Gov. John Neptune (1767-1865)

John Neptune was the lieutenant governor and second chief of the Penobscot tribe. He provided vital information that safely guided the Treat expedition through the Penobscot and Maliseet homelands.

As a young man, Neptune joined other Wabanaki to fight alongside the Americans in the Revolutionary War. Given their military service, the Wabanaki expected to have a role in treaty negotiations after the war that would secure their rights to their land. It became apparent, however, that they were not to be consulted while increased numbers of settlers continued to encroach on their land.

In response, the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy began submitting petitions to limit settlement and restrict trespassing to the Massachusetts government in Boston. After 1816, when John Neptune assumed his leadership position, he became a key negotiator with state officials. On multiple occasions, Neptune served as a nonvoting representative in the state legislature at Augusta.

Teacher Guide to Understanding the Treat Journals

Joseph Treat's journal and the 1815 Moses Greenleaf map he marked his route on are important primary sources that give us a rare look into the past. Careful reading and analysis of these materials will be part of the next series of student activities. We have highlighted a handful of journal entries so students can get a feel for Treat's journey and the landscape of 1820 Maine. Use one or all of these guided explorations.

What is a Primary Source?

Primary Sources are immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it. Some examples are photographs, video recordings, journals, letters, speeches, artifacts, or books and newspapers published at the time.

Why Use Primary Sources?

Primary sources are a direct window to the past—to how people from another era thought, talked, looked, and lived. Students often find them to be more memorable and relatable. Analyzing primary sources is a way for students to construct knowledge and develop their critical thinking and visual literacy skills. More primary source resources can be found [here](#).

Reading Primary Sources are challenging!

Treat frequently does not write in complete grammatically correct sentences. His spelling is not always correct or consistent. It is good for students to remember that Treat was often writing in adverse conditions, and it was more important to him to capture the essence of what he was observing. Cursive writing from the 18th century can be very intimidating and difficult to make out, but don't worry, we have provided transcriptions of all the journal entries, and notes about the big ideas covered in each excerpt.

The Greenleaf map used by Treat is not always correct and is incomplete, especially in the northeastern area of the state. Many of the place names on the map have completely different names today. Several of the maps Treat sketched in his journal are upside down. Modern maps have North at the top of a map and south below. Many of Treat's maps have south at the top of the map. Our online map interactive allows viewers to flip the maps so they can be seen both as they were drawn and in the correct orientation.

Analysis Worksheets

Each activity is accompanied by an analysis worksheet to use alongside the journal entries and when looking more closely at the 1815 Greenleaf Map. The analysis worksheets are designed to help students get past the barrier of working with unfamiliar materials—getting information from an old document may seem impossible at first! The worksheets will help guide students in interpreting what they are reading and seeing.