

Taking a Closer Look: Joseph Treat's Journal Entries and Map Drawings

INTRODUCTION

On September 27, 1820, Major Joseph Treat and his companions, Captain Jacob Holyoke and Penobscot guide John Neptune departed from Bangor to survey the mostly undocumented northeastern area of the new state of Maine. Governor William King, Maine's first governor, instructed Treat to observe the quality of the lands, especially the quantity and quality of timber. With the boundary between Maine and British-controlled Canada still in dispute, the Governor was also interested to know about "British" subjects trespassing and stealing "American" timber.

It was late in the season for a trip into the wilderness, and it would be a challenging journey. The small exploration party would travel over 500 miles before concluding their trip on November 20. Their journey contributed new knowledge of the land through detailed maps and careful notes on who was living on the land. Much of the journey takes place in the original homeland of the Wabanaki peoples, particularly the Penobscot and Maliseet peoples, and interactions with Native peoples are also carefully noted.

PROCEDURE

1. Introduce students to the 1820 Journal of Joseph Treat as an important primary source.

Discuss primary sources as critical pieces of evidence that historians use to learn more about the past. Every piece of paper that people leave behind is full of clues. But to be useful, documents need to be studied carefully and critically. Discuss the strengths and limitations of primary source documents, such as:

- + Provides information on the who, what, where, when, why, and how of an event
- + Can give us clues about the reason and circumstance under which the document was created
- + Can be a clue to the level of education of the author
- + Sometimes offers evidence of emotion

- Not a thoroughly objective source
- May be incomplete
- May be biased
- Identity of the author is not always known
- The author is often no longer living and therefore unavailable to consult or verify
- Possibly difficult to read: handwriting difficult to decipher; words or phrases that are unfamiliar, their meaning changed over time

2. Discuss the goals of Treat's Journal.

Maine's first governor, William King, ordered Joseph Treat to journey into the northeastern areas of Maine to (1) observe the quality of the land, (2) report on timber resources, and (3) determine if trespass had been committed on state land. With the boundary between Maine and British-controlled Canada still in dispute, the Governor was interested to know about "British" subjects trespassing and stealing "American" timber. Treat writes

Tuesday 26th September 1820. Agreeably to Instructions from His Excellency Governor King, respecting a tour of discoveries up the Penobscot, St. Johns, and Aroostick [rivers] – thinking it advisable to keep a Journal # and survey my route commence at Bangor. . .

#Note. The Instructions from Governor King anticipates only that I keep a memorandum of my route, noticing the growth and soil – and such other remarks as may explain the Report which I may make on my return. I therefore consider this Journal as my private property. –

(signed) J. Treat.

Ask the students *If you were the first governor of Maine, what information would you feel is important to know about in the undocumented areas of the state?* Ask the students *Have you ever kept a journal?*

3. Discuss Penobscot Lieutenant Governor John Neptune's role as a guide to Treat and Holyoke as they traveled through Wabanaki homeland, particularly of the Penobscot and Maliseet peoples.

Through Neptune, Treat learns of how the Wabanaki people interacted with the land they called home. Treat and Holyoke depended on Neptune's knowledge of the land and traditional skills needed to navigate deep into Maine, where roads were few, and the waterways acted as highways. Treat carefully records Wabanaki place names, locations of wigwams and native communities, fishing weirs, encounters with hunting parties. Neptune was a respected member of Treat's party, but we should not forget that there was an ongoing cultural conflict between the Wabanaki and the newer Euro-American Mainers. The two groups perceived the value of land and its resources very differently. For Euro Americans, the land was a commodity to be cleared, farmed, and often fenced, whereas Wabanaki family bands practiced a traditional lifestyle of hunting and camping seasonally often with no regard to boundaries. Ask students *What do you know about the Wabanaki people in Maine?* It is important to inform students that relatives of the 1820 Wabanaki are still living in Maine today.

For more resources:

<https://www.abbemuseum.org/educatorhub>

<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360>

4. Analyze the journal entries and map drawings.

Use the *Traveling through Maine 200 Years Ago* interactive found on the Maine State Museum website <https://mainestatemuseum.org/interactivemap/> to examine images of the actual journal entries and map drawings. Each journal entry is numbered. Students should find the assigned journal entry and take a few moments to look closely at the written text and map drawing. Working in small groups or pairs, have the students complete the analysis worksheets.

You may want to begin by doing the first entry/worksheet together. This is an opportunity to model careful observation and critical examination of a primary source.

5. Review student findings.

Have different groups/pairs present their findings. Discuss students' opinions about the journal and map drawings. Ask students *What is the most interesting/surprising thing you discovered from Treat's journal entries and map drawings? How does the journal give us clues to what northeastern Maine was like in 1820?* Discuss any new insights gained from examining journal entries.