THE SLOW RUSH OF COLONIZATION
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Introduction

Sawantaun, the Maritime Peninsula, and Settler Colonialism

The Maritime Peninsula is one of the most contested regions of North America. Consequently, few people think about it as a cohesive space. Bound on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean, and along its western edges by the Connecticut and St. Lawrence Rivers, the Peninsula was site to some of North America’s most defining geopolitical moments. Divided by French and British empires, it was here where many of the pivotal conflicts leading to the 1763 Treaty of Paris took place. With this agreement emerged a British North America that – following the American Revolution – laid the foundation for the nation-states of Canada and the United States.

This is a well-known history, and it has been approached from many divergent perspectives. Within these histories, the unescapable chain of events leading to the creation of the United States and Canada is usually driven by the growing influence of the French and British empires and conflicts between them. Though we cannot escape the visceral realities of this time and place, what this book proposes is that these events look very different if we consider this space as a cohesive unit rather than one defined by its divisions. What, in this book, I bring together as the Maritime Peninsula – following the practice of archaeologists – most historians have seen through a more fragmented lens; they might be interested in Mi’kma’ki, the Wabanaki Confederacy, or the colonies of Canada, New Hampshire, Acadia, or Nova Scotia, while I am interested in trying to understand this space as a more contiguous whole.¹
To illustrate why the Maritime Peninsula is a useful concept, we might turn to the life of Sawantaun. This man grew up in late eighteenth-century Lorette, a Wendat town, about thirteen kilometres from Quebec. Born around 1745, just before the British attacked the French on the Plains of Abraham, Sawantaun’s life spanned several significant geopolitical transitions: the demise of the French empire, rapid settler expansion and occupation of Indigenous Lands, the American Revolution, the creation of representative colonial government, and the War of 1812. Sawantaun navigated these changes in relatively unique ways. Despite his nation’s tight alliance with the French and Catholic Jesuits, then the British, in his late teens he attended and graduated from the Protestant, Anglo-American Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. While there, he fought for the Continental Congress in the American Revolution, interpreting for them the words of Penobscot and Mi’kmaw diplomats. After the war, he moved to Montreal and then the Bay of Quinte, working alongside the Loyalist Anglican missionary John Stuart. In 1791, he returned home, opened a school, and helped his nation petition the crown for their Land. His death, in 1825, was noted in the Salem Gazette, the semi-weekly newspaper in Salem, Massachusetts. This was a man whose life touched nearly every corner of the Maritime Peninsula. Over the pages that follow, I hope to show that the paths Sawantaun tread were not unique, but rather, they were emblematic of a cohesive international space, shaped and defined by the Indigenous nations who call this place home.

Though it was a cohesive space, the period between 1680 to 1790 was one in which the Maritime Peninsula underwent profound transformation. It is this transition, more than Sawantaun’s life, upon which this book focuses. At the beginning of this long century, few Europeans lived or worked in the Peninsula; by the end, well over a hundred thousand Euro-American settlers called it home. Thinking about this period in the Peninsula’s history from a regional perspective helps us see how this transition was facilitated not only by military expeditions, but also by international diplomacy between Indigenous, French, and British nations and related settler expansion. This was not a binary world of “Natives” and “Newcomers,” but rather one of differentiated Wendat, Wabanaki,
Mi’kmaw, French, and British economic, religious, and political interests. Though it was changing rapidly by the 1790s, with the rising power of the United States and British North American colonies, the Maritime Peninsula remained throughout this period a multicultural, multilingual, and multijurisdictional world.

There are three conceptual frameworks that help us better understand this complicated space. First, there is the Maritime Peninsula itself. Rather than looking at historicized political jurisdictions, such as European colonies or specific Indigenous national territories, a regional perspective better includes the diversity of peoples who wielded influence in the Maritime Peninsula. Second, to hold together such a diverse region, this book draws upon, and expands, Elizabeth Mancke’s ideas about *spaces of power*. Spaces of power is an approach to understanding the past that acknowledges the multicultural and jurisdictional nature of a space while recognizing the manifest and very real forms of power that acted upon people’s everyday lives. In applying these two perspectives – the Maritime Peninsula and spaces of power – to the eighteenth century, it becomes clear that a third concept is important for us to understand. After 1760, Euro-American resettlement of this space began to wield influence unlike anything before. The patterns that developed here were global in nature and fit within a conceptual framework commonly referred to as *settler colonialism*. With tight alignment to a moment that many still refer to as the “Conquest of New France,” I have built upon this concept, drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s vocabulary of “anti-conquest” to refer to the way that military expedition, settler pressure, and diplomacy worked together to undermine the political agency of Indigenous nations, facilitating a flood of settler expansion into the Peninsula and crafting a settler culture that ignored and absolved the legal and ethical implications associated with this expansion.

Revisiting the history of the Maritime Peninsula using these three concepts reveals the myths that have developed in Canada and the United States around the idea of conquest. These are myths that minimize the presence and agency of First Peoples, as well as the actions of resettlement on Indigenous Lands, in favour of spatial concepts made manifest by French and British officials and the archival records they created.
They are myths anchored in the idea that Britain’s victory over France could influence the legal standing of the Peninsula’s First Peoples without their involvement or consultation. They are myths that, as they grew in significance over the eighteenth century, enabled the resettlement of the Peninsula by Euro-American farmers without critical reflection of the implications of these actions upon the peoples who had lived in this place since time immemorial. These are the myths that normalize settler colonization and underpin a process of *settler conquest*.

**The Maritime Peninsula**

*Died:* At Indian Lorette, Louis Vincent, one of the Chiefs of the Hurons or Wyandots of that village, and father of the Grand Chief now in England. He was educated at Dartmouth College, and in the latter part of his life employed himself as a schoolmaster.

— *Death Notices,* Salem Gazette

These words mark Sawantaun’s obituary, published on May 17, 1825, in the *Salem Gazette*. Known to many at the time as Louis Vincent, rather than Sawantaun, the obituary is nestled among other death notices for New Englanders, a New Yorker, a man from Alabama, and a Londoner. Though Sawantaun was an interesting and unique man, Salem was located over six hundred kilometres from where he lived out most of his life. Why did the *Gazette*’s editors – Ferdinand Andrews and Caleb Foote – think that Sawantaun’s life would have been of interest to their readers?

One explanation is that Andrews and Foote were interested in Sawantaun because people in Salem knew him. As the obituary notes, Sawantaun was an alumnus of Dartmouth College, a prestigious school along the Connecticut River in New Hampshire, bordering Vermont. Dartmouth had grown from a Connecticut charity school that had taught several well-known Indigenous leaders, such as Mohegan Samson Occom and Kanyen’kehaka (Mohawk) Pine Tree chief Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant). Though the college never lived up to its purpose – a reality that Occom long lamented – the school’s charter specifically framed Dartmouth’s mandate as providing higher learning for Indigenous stu-
dents. Sawantaun was one of the college’s first students and one of the few Indigenous students to graduate. War and revolution defined his time at the school. In his later years there, he worked directly with the Continental Congress, serving in one of Timothy Bedel’s companies of rangers. Far from taking an obscure role in the conflict, Sawantaun left enough of a service record that we know about some of his activities, serving as an interpreter between the Congress and the Penobscot, for example. He also drew the attention of early twentieth-century novelist Kenneth Roberts; Sawantaun plays a prominent role in his 1939 Revolutionary-era historical novel *Rabble in Arms*. Between school and skirmish, it is possible that Sawantaun remained connected to New England later in life.

We will probably never know whether this supposition accurately reflects Sawantaun’s lived experience. Nonetheless, in demarcating the world in which this man and his ancestors lived, we can see the boundaries of the Maritime Peninsula. Like several of his relatives, Sawantaun seems to have moved easily between Wendat, Wabanaki, and Mi’kmaw communities. Over his lifetime, Wendat from Lorette had strong relationships with the Wabanaki, French, British, and Americans, as well as both Catholic and Protestant religious leaders who lived in this region. These relationships were deeply entwined in the eighteenth-century geography of the Maritime Peninsula.

For centuries before Sawantaun travelled through the Peninsula, its riverways and portages drew together Wabanaki and Mi’kmaw communities whose Homelands defined this region. Archaeologists use the term “Maritime Peninsula” to describe this space; a world bound by the St. Lawrence River, Gulf of Maine, and the Atlantic Ocean and stitched together by the relatively interconnected waterways of the Saint John, Penobscot, Kennebec, Chaudière, and St. François Rivers. In this book, I expand this geography slightly, recognizing how these rivers often unified peoples rather than divided them. In my framing, the Peninsula includes peoples who lived on the northern and western banks of the Peninsula’s riverine boundaries.

The Maritime Peninsula is not just a concept applied to this space with hindsight by twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars. In 1713, the
Jesuit missionary Joseph Aubery drew a map (Figure 1) that demonstrates well how these rivers brought together the Atlantic coast and St. Lawrence River. Initially drawn in 1713, following Britain’s capture of Acadia, Aubery’s map presents quite a different picture than the one often depicted in the history books, where colonial borders continue to define our understanding of this time and place.10 Drawn in the aftermath of the War of Spanish Succession, the map encouraged French officials to define the border of their Laurentian colony as stretching over
Mi’kmaw and Wabanaki Land, from the Acadian community of Beaubassin to the Saint George River. Aubery’s ultimate argument in presenting the map was that, unless the region was considered as a whole, the British would gain access to these key waterways – specifically the Penobscot and Saint John Rivers – which led to the heart of the French colony. Though the labels “Nouvelle Angleterre,” “Nouvelle France,” and “Canada” can be found on the map, the Kennebec, Penobscot, and Saint John River systems are marked “Terres Abenaquis.” Having lived
with the Abenaki for over a decade, Aubery knew their Lands well; he used them to buffer France’s territorial interests, preventing British encroachment. As such, what the map reveals is not the contested terrain of empire, though that was its purpose, but rather the Wabanaki world of the Maritime Peninsula and the interconnections that made it a meaningful space. Here, Wabanaki space was central, while the definitions of European empires remained peripheral.

Though Indigenous in its lived realities, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Maritime Peninsula was not a homogeneous space. Parts of it were – and, in most cases, remained throughout the duration of this book – the Homeland for Mi’kmaw, Wolastoqiyik, Peskotomuhkati, Penobscot, Kennebec, Pigwacket, Sokoki, Cowasuck, and Mississquoi Peoples. Except for the Mi’kmaw, who might better be considered their allies, the rest of these people were, at one point or another, politically interconnected; known as the Wabanaki Confederacy. Two other nations were also active in the Peninsula, with their territory bordering it: the Kanyen’kehaka (Mohawk) lived around Montreal and west of Lake Champlain, and, as we have already seen, Sawantaun’s people – the Wendat – also played an important role, though they lived north of the St. Lawrence near Quebec. It is easy to neglect these latter two groups, but when we think about the Peninsula’s hydrology, we can see how they could easily enter – and act upon – this space.

To better understand the multicultural nature of the Peninsula, Figure 2 provides a window onto what this world looked like at the dawn of the eighteenth century. The map identifies the Homelands of each of the nations discussed in this book. The rivers identified on this map are the present-day watersheds identified by Aubery, better illustrating how these Homelands are geographically bound together. The map also identifies significant colonial settlements. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, these places were peripheral to life in the Peninsula and their influence territorially restricted. Although by 1690 – and even 1750 – the English and French had developed deep entrenchments at places like Boston, Port Royal, Quebec, Montreal, and Albany, linked to the coast by farms along the St. Lawrence and Hudson Rivers, few Europeans lived within this space until after the Seven Years’ War. As
such, the map represents the Peninsula’s geography by identifying territory based upon the understandings of the peoples whose daily lives played out within it. For most of the period discussed in this book, the Maritime Peninsula remained unambiguously Indigenous Land.

This map also places specific attention on the seven districts of Mi’kma’ki, the Mi’kmaw Homeland. Because the Mi’kmaq feature prominently in this book, it is important to understand their more nuanced political geography and where each district was located. From north to south, the districts are: Kespe’k (end of land), Siknikt (drainage area), Unama’kik (Mi’kmaw territory), Epekwitk aq Piktuk (cradled above water and explosion place), Eskikewa’kik (translation unknown), Sipekne’katik (area of wild potato/turnip), and Kespukwitk (end of flow). Because Mi’kma’ki is a coastal place, where some of the very first interactions between North American nations and European kingdoms took place, it serves as a useful proxy from which we might consider the Peninsula as a whole.

Some readers might be skeptical of this claim that the Peninsula was a
meaningful space for its Wabanaki and Mi’kmaw residents. There were, after all, clear political and linguistic divisions between the peoples who called this place home. On at least two occasions, though, some of these peoples represented their geographical understanding in this way. In 1725, as another round of chronic warfare ended, Wabanaki and British diplomats met in Montreal to discuss peace. Making their independence from either empire clear, the Wabanaki delegates explained that their territory stretched from the Connecticut River to Mi’kma’ki.14 Thirty-six years later, a Mi’kmaw leader named Aikon Aushabuc, from the Siknikt district, explained a similar geography to a shipwrecked New Englander as he travelled south through Mi’kma’ki back home. Using his hand as a map, he laid out the geographic relationship between the colonial centres of Quebec, Montreal, New York, Boston, and Halifax; slowly bringing his thumb and index finger together, he indicated that imperial expansion had increasingly surrounded his people and was enclosing upon them.15 This was the Homeland of Wabanaki and Mi’kmaw people from time immemorial. The process of enclosure Aushabuc described, from west to east and south to north, is the subject of this book; it is contrary to the east-to-west progression that we often imagine when we consider European expansion in North America.

Though I have named the peoples whose Homelands comprised the Maritime Peninsula, in much of this book I have intentionally used broad rather than specific terms to refer to the diverse peoples of this place. A deep colonial legacy has encouraged us to name and label, but the historical record is often far more ambiguous. Few colonists or imperial officials had detailed knowledge of these peoples. Though it is true that people like Aubery knew the region well, Europeans remained outsiders to, and often excluded from, Indigenous diplomacy taking place across the Peninsula.

Further, like elsewhere on the continent, the eighteenth century was a time of change and transformation fueled by warfare and violence. Ned Blackhawk, whose work focuses on the southwestern parts of the continent, provides useful language to help contextualize and think about the eighteenth-century Maritime Peninsula:
No timeless ethnographic categories or political definitions characterize these Native peoples. Indeed, in this region [the southwest], precise band names, tribal locales, and stable political designations are often unreliable, particularly given the violent shock waves that engulfed these Indian homelands before their sustained documentation. Hybridity, adaptation, and exchange more clearly characterize these histories than do fixed ethnographic categories, let alone the convenient dichotomies so common to narratives of American Indians. Colonial violence, in sum, characterizes these Native worlds as the violence that saturated communities on the margins of empire has also destabilized the categories of analysis used to describe them.  

Though we will see some significant exceptions to this, Blackhawk’s words provide the subtext underpinning this book and help demonstrate why the spaces of power approach is useful.

Likewise, although there is a rich literature that tries to identify and categorize the peoples of the Maritime Peninsula – to tease out the historical nature of the Wabanaki Confederacy – I have followed Alice Nash in not concentrating too much on these efforts. She explains:

One reason why attempts to create classificatory schema break down is that, for much of their history, Wabanaki people did not define themselves in terms of fixed groups. Identity, if a twentieth-century construct may be applied in such a different context, consisted of multiple allegiances and reciprocal obligations that could be emphasized or renegotiated as needed.

For this reason, I generally refer to the peoples of the Peninsula broadly as either Wabanaki, Mi’kmaq, or Laurentian nations; the latter term referring to the peoples living along the St. Lawrence Valley. When appropriate, I also use more specific national names and, from time to time, use “Wabanaki” to refer broadly to the peoples along the Atlantic and its tributaries (Wolastoqiyik, Peskotomuhkati, Penobscot, and Kennebec)
and “Abenaki” to refer to the inland peoples living south of the St. Lawrence (Pigwacket, Sokoki, Cowasuck, and Mississquoi, as well as people living at Odanak and Wolinak).

The diversity of peoples living within the Peninsula means that we cannot assume these people related to the Land in the same way. As such, I have tried to use the languages of this Land for the places described in this book. The river commonly known today as St. Lawrence, for example, was/is known to the Wendat as the Lada8anna, to the Kanyen’kehaka as Kaniatarowanenneh, to the Abenaki as Ktsitekw, and to the Mi’kmaq as Magtogoeg. As much as possible, I use language specific to the people being discussed in each section of the book. Consequently, a place like the St. Lawrence River is referred to in different ways depending on whose history is being discussed. Often, I use all four terms (Kaniatarowanenneh/Ktsitekw/Lada8anna/Magtogoeg), or a subset of them, to directly emphasize that the meaning of this space varied by culture and political organization. Though it is only one body of water, the St. Lawrence was thought about differently by Wendat, Kanyen’kehaka, Abenaki, Mi’kmaq, French, and English. Drawing attention to a plurality of naming practices for places that today are commonly known by only one (often colonial) moniker reminds us that these places may have been conceived of differently than you and I consider them today. Europeans and their descendants authored much of the historic record for this period, leaving a lasting toponymic legacy, but the Land itself is storied and holds knowledge and histories of its First Peoples, often unknown to outsiders. Throughout the book, upon first reference, I have cited from where I have drawn each place name.

This decision is important for how you read this book. Multilingualism was a daily reality in the Maritime Peninsula. As a translator between the Continental Congress, Penobscot, and Mi’kmaw diplomats during the late 1770s, the linguistic decisions I have made were likely meaningful for Sawantaun. These were the languages he was familiar with and used as he travelled throughout the Peninsula. Further, when he taught school in the early nineteenth century, he did so in both French and Wendat. Sawantaun’s polylingualism was a function of his comfort living within
the multicultural, multilingual, and multijurisdictional world of the eighteenth-century Maritime Peninsula.

The Maritime Peninsula was a meaningful space for Sawantaun and his Wendat ancestors, but – most importantly – it was (and remains) Wabanaki, Wolastoqiyik, Peskotomuhkati, and Mi’kmaq Homelands. It is important that I make this point explicit because this book developed from a more focused doctoral study that examined local Wendat and Mi’kmaq experiences of Britain’s victory over France at Port Royal and Quebec.22 This book builds upon that work to make a regional argument about the Peninsula as a whole. In doing so, it draws on the histories of other peoples who lived in this space, especially the Wolastoqiyik, Penobscot, and Abenaki. These histories are often pivotal to the chapters that follow, but more work needs to be done, focusing specifically on these peoples and others (like the Peskotomuhkati) whose experiences are poorly covered here. The purpose of this book is to introduce several ideas about the Peninsula and its histories that have developed since I finished my PhD in 2011. Hopefully others will take up these ideas and improve them, drawing upon other times, peoples, and places in the Peninsula.

Spaces of Power

The geopolitical complexity of the Maritime Peninsula requires us to carefully consider how we approach this time and place. Sawantaun’s home community of Lorette is useful for thinking about the tools a historian might need to study the Peninsula during the eighteenth century. Affiliated with the Jesuits for about a century by the time he was born, the Wendat town near Quebec shared much in common with their French neighbours. Lorette was a place tightly bound to the colonial church and state and – by the eighteenth century – several community members had acquired legal title to lands beyond their town’s borders.23 Despite this integration, the Wendat maintained and regulated hunting territories independently from colonial or imperial oversight. Their community also held considerable prestige because of its location relative to the imperial
administration and its widespread alliances with other nations throughout the northeast and Great Lakes regions. The Wendat at Lorette were deeply anchored into diverse colonial and Indigenous worlds that drew upon different – and often quite distinct – languages, laws, and cultures simultaneously.

It is difficult for historians to adequately explain these complexities. Over the past three decades, Indigenous nations themselves, historians studying their communities, and post- and decolonial theorists have called for a reorientation in historical approach to better represent these pasts. Many of their arguments echo ethnohistorian Daniel Richter, who thirty years ago called for “a larger vision of both native and Euro-American experiences, [one] that is inclusive and empowering, rather than imperialistic and dominating.”24 In attempting to grapple with this challenge, scholars have presented theoretical frameworks such as the Middle Ground, borderland studies, and the Atlantic World to better structure our understanding of imperial, colonial, and Indigenous politics and sovereignties.25 These studies have rendered our understanding of Indigenous-European relations more complex and nuanced.

None of them, however, satisfactorily encapsulates a place like Lorette. Sawantaun’s home comprised less than two hundred people and was surrounded by eight thousand French settlers, Jesuits, and military and imperial officials.26 This was not a borderland space, nor were the people who lived there directly embedded into eighteenth-century Atlantic networks. Although historians debate whether these people were dependent allies or sovereign subjects of France, after the 1763 Treaty of Paris, scholars agree that the Wendat could not escape the dominant institutions of European empire.27 Situated in a thoroughly colonial setting, the Land around their village was neither middle, nor native, nor common ground, at least as these concepts have been recently defined and used.28 Yet the social, political, cultural, and economic relationships that developed between the Wendat, their allies, and the French shared elements and similarities with the types of interactions embodied in all three concepts.

Though there are few Indigenous nations who lived in such proximity to an imperial centre, life in much of the Peninsula was similar in its
complexities to how I have described Lorette. Elsewhere, though day-to-day life remained primarily defined by the Mi’kmaw, Wolastoqiyik, Peskotomuhkati, Penobscot, Kennebec, Pigwacket, Sokoki, Cowasuck, Mississquoi, Kanyen’kehaka, and Wendat nations, these peoples’ Homelands were at the heart of France’s and Britain’s imperial desires. The social, political, cultural, and economic relationships that developed within these spaces required deft navigation between competing understandings of space and territory. Making the context even more complex: the interests of both Indigenous and European traders, farmers, missionaries, and on-the-ground military ofcials, as well as overseas colonial administrators and continental Indigenous allies (among others!) were often unaligned and fragmented. In this space, there was no unified Indigenous or European perspective on the events that took place. To understand the Maritime Peninsula at this time, careful attention needs to be paid to how stakeholders navigated the contested terrain between how they, and others, conceived, perceived, and lived within this common world.

Social geographer Henri Lefebvre’s work on everyday life in urban and suburban space may seem like an odd place to look for help. By focusing on how the meaning ascribed to specific spaces is constantly in a state of production, Lefebvre’s ideas help us hold the contradiction, competition, and divergent interests we see in the eighteenth-century Maritime Peninsula within a common frame. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre connects how people live within a space to the perceptions and conceptions they have built about it. Put another way, Lefebvre suggests that rather than defining space only through the signs and symbols that embody our thoughts and imagination, we must also consider how people conceived of space, lived within it, and how its use changed over time. Without attention to spatial practices, representations of space, and lived experiences, the on-the-ground power dynamics at work within a space are often ignored in favour of more abstract ideas applied to it, no matter how inconsequential they might be. What is important about Lefebvre’s approach is that it allows us to think about space in a focused and historical way while also remaining attentive to the diversity of human and ecological interests wielding influence within it.
In Lefebvre’s view, the meaning ascribed to a space is contradictory and comprises multiple but unequal influences. In our case maintained by Indigenous nations and the European empires that acted on their Lands – constrain how spaces are defined and used. Under these conditions, space is continually produced and reproduced through perceptions, conceptions, and lived experiences of it, creating an intertwined plurality of spatial meaning that collectively determines the nature of social, and political, space. To study a space well, Lefebvre suggests, scholars must be attuned to how it is shaped by words and language – mostly found in the archives – but also to the embodied experiences of the peoples living within it. Space is not an artifact to be studied as much as a relational process to be understood.

Though he applied these ideas to his mid-twentieth-century present, they are useful for thinking about the Maritime Peninsula as well. In the case of Lorette, depending on the questions we ask, it might be proper to conceive of this town simultaneously as a sovereign Wendat space, a colonial and imperial space, as well as an autonomous international meeting place in the Indigenous northeast. From Lefebvre’s perspective, these multiple conceptions of place can all be true at the same time, wielding influence to varying degrees over time based on the nature of on-the-ground relationships and evolving perceptions of the town. Importantly, though, Lefebvre’s approach does not dismiss the very real manifestations of asymmetrical Indigenous and European power that – from a longue durée perspective – shaped the history of this region. Put another way, Lefebvre helps us see several realities, perspectives, and strategies – and their shifting influences – without diverting our attention away from the power relationships effecting Wendat lives.

Lefebvre’s work resonates strongly with current trends in borderland and imperial historiography. Recent assessments of borderlands studies, for example, lament that this field continues to focus on relatively large geographies on the edges of European empires. Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett suggest instead that the field begin to focus on “how imperial and national powers interpenetrated smaller (regional, local) scales without necessarily dominating them.” Implicit in this reconception of borderlands is greater emphasis on the lived experiences of a much
broader cast of historical actors than many historians have focused upon in the past. Conceiving of empires as heterogeneous entities influenced heavily by competing European crowns and assorted local contexts, historians of empire have similarly moved to depict a North American landscape where the vision of imperial and colonial officials was much more limited. Increasingly, scholars of empire have demonstrated that, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, European territorial control was only an “incidental aim of imperial expansion.” From this perspective, European empires comprised diverse corridors and enclaves—often bound by shorelines and waterways—rather than huge geographies containing sizeable portions of continental North America. Treating empire as a dominant force, or focusing the scholarly gaze on imperial desires—such as through imperial correspondence and cartography—occludes broader historical processes at work in North America. Taken together, both historiographical streams suggest that lived experiences and the conceptions and perceptions of imperial, settler, and Indigenous spaces created variable outcomes in the geography of Europe’s North American empires.

At the heart of these ideas is the concept of mobility. In her work on nineteenth-century Mi’kma’ki, Michelle Lelièvre draws on Lefebvre’s framing to push back against what she calls a “sedentarist ideology.” Building on Paige Raibon’s work, Lelièvre uses Lefebvre’s ideas to reveal the biases that—in the nineteenth century—ensured that sedentarism was a defining characteristic determining who was perceived as a political subject and agent in a settler colony. By studying the “commingling of lived practices, conceived imaginaries, and sensual perceptions,” Lelièvre demonstrates how the sedentarist ideology prevented colonists and imperial officials from understanding mobility as a core component of Mi’kmaw lifeways while also obscuring how mobility effected their own social and political practices. The biases of this sedentarist ideology apply equally to historical observers and to present-day scholars, whose studies have often privileged sedentarist societies over more mobile peoples like the Mi’kmaq. Lefebvre’s ideas help us to work against these biases, better understanding the ways the Peninsula’s peoples lived in relationship to the Land and each other. As we have seen in the example
of Sawantaun’s life, the mobility of peoples was a defining characteristic of the eighteenth-century Maritime Peninsula, a fact often forgotten in this sedentarist (settler colonial) age.

These ideas help expand recent scholarship focused on an idea called spaces of power. Advanced in its most detailed way by historian Elizabeth Mancke, this approach conceives of power as something that is manifest spatially and deployed by divergent actors and interests. Developing Michael Mann’s argument that no single power relationship completely defines an individual or community, Mancke explains spaces of power as “systems of social power, whether economic, political, cultural, or military, that we can describe functionally and spatially.” From this perspective, “social power has multiple forms that frequently operate at variance with one another.” Lefebvre’s ideas about understanding space through practices, representations, and lived experiences help us think through this approach. By studying the diverse tactics people used to control specific spaces – or avoid control within a space – alongside the spatial politics of everyday life (identified by Lefebvre), approaching this time and place through the lens of spaces of power helps us write more inclusive and accurate histories. This approach is particularly useful for studying environments like the world Sawantaun lived in, where imperial power was decentralized and sometimes neither Indigenous nor European peoples held widespread territorial control.

Settler Colonialism, Conquest, and Language

The heterogeneity of the Maritime Peninsula slowly diminished over the course of the eighteenth century. To better understand this, let us return to Sawantaun’s obituary once more. Another possible motivation for Andrews and Foote’s decision to publish this obituary in their Salem-based newspaper is that it lent the Gazette a bit of exoticism. Obituaries tended to feature interesting and significant lives, not just local deaths. Though not as salacious as that of Richard Stone, whose obituary appears a few lines above Sawantaun’s, and who had been axe murdered by his son, Sawantaun’s obituary appeared at a time in New England when indigeneity was becoming increasingly sensationalized. This was the era
of firsting and lasting, to use language coined by historian Jean O’Brien to capture the tactics of strategic erasure New Englanders deployed to legitimate their presence on Indigenous Lands. Through local histories and cultural productions like Last of the Mohicans, New Englanders fostered a perception that all Indians — and here I use this problematic word to signal a cultural stereotype as opposed to any real, living group of people — were destined to disappear, if they had not already. In this context, First Peoples, like Sawantaun, were used as foils for settler society, ennobled, set apart, and removed as a new colonial society built up around them at the dawn of the nineteenth century; the consequences of this transition continue to deeply shape the world we live in.

What emerged in North America following the Seven Years’ War was a dominant set of relationships that many scholars have described using the term settler colonialism. The peace that came with France’s defeat in 1760 opened the floodgates for Anglo-American settlers to expand — in numbers never before seen — onto Wabanaki, Haudenosaunee, and Mi’kmaw Lands. Whereas in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, powerful Indigenous and European economic, military, religious, and settler interests vied for influence, by the end of that period, the power of the colonial state increasingly reflected the interests of its new, and much more homogeneous, immigrant population. These people had come to better their lives by remaking North America in the patterns of their Homelands. Unable (or perhaps unwilling) to compromise with the North American nations whose Lands they coveted, these settler colonists believed that — over time — Indigenous peoples would come to realize benefits from their new world. From this perspective, a culture developed that marked Europeans, and their interests, as the defining moments of progress; in the face of this, First Peoples would either join and assimilate into settler society or lead an increasingly marginalized life. Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, who coined the term settler colonialism, called this “the logic of elimination.” At its core, through the law, culture, economy, and social relationships, Indigenous interests ceased to matter for the new body politic that developed following the Seven Years’ War.

Sawantaun’s cousin-once-removed, Zacharie Vincent Telari-o-lin
(his cousin’s son), provides a useful example, both about how settler colonialism worked and how it was resisted. In 1838, Telari-o-lin (an accomplished painter in his own right) sat for the celebrated Canadien painter Antoine Plamondon. Entitled *Le Dernier Huron* (the Last of the Huron), Plamondon’s painting (Figure 3) sent a clear message to the Canadien public: the Huron were soon to be no more, as men like Telari-o-lin adopted French Canadien dress and culture. Plamondon’s work reinforced a myth that the Wendat were a people defeated by the Iroquois in the mid-seventeenth century and had subsequently assimilated into Canadien society.46
Le Dernier Huron resonated strongly among colonists. The painting was first purchased by the governor general at the time, Lord Durham, who – in the aftermath of the 1837–38 Rebellions – proposed a union between Upper and Lower Canada. Several years later, François-Xavier Garneau, widely considered one of Canada’s first historians, put the image to verse in a well-known poem by the same name.

Though in many ways Le Dernier Huron expressed post-Rebellion francophone anxieties, specifically a fear that Canadiens might meet a fate similar to the Wendat, the message about the Wendat is an example of what O’Brien calls Lasting, a cultural phenomenon whereby Euro-Americans sought to chronicle the ennobled “Last of” the Huron, or – elsewhere in New England – the “last of” the Mohicans, or “last of” the Wampanoag, or “last of” the Narragansett (among others) in an effort to discursively remove them from political influence. After all, these nations could not threaten the legitimacy of the emerging colonial state if it was well known that they had already ceased to exist as a people. The language of lasting made it difficult to claim these identities for political purposes. The indigeneity and agency of anyone claiming these identities, therefore, was rendered suspect by colonial art and literature.

Telari-o-lin’s subsequent artistic career responded to this type of politicized art. Figure 4 is a self-portrait of the artist with his son, Cyprien. Rather than marking either firsting or lasting, when set side-by-side with Plamondon’s work, the message is very direct: rather than erasure, Telari-o-lin painted a message of cultural and national continuity and survival, not just in the intergenerational nature of the painting but also in his wearing of a treaty medal and wampum belt. In this self-portrait, Telari-o-lin speaks back to settler representations of his people and the broad attempt to marginalize the Wendat from the nineteenth-century political landscape. In doing so, Telari-o-lin’s work demonstrates that, though hegemonic and powerful, settler colonial attempts at erasure were actively resisted and never complete.

The relationship between these paintings is like the production of history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both textually – as studied by O’Brien – and within our civic fabrics. Throughout North America, “pioneer” or railway museums enshrine the early nineteenth
century as a moment of beginning, of firsting. They curate images of the past not unlike Plamondon’s painting. Indigenous histories are seldom told in these museums and, when they are, they follow the same patterns of firsting and lasting that O’Brien identified in local histories in New England.

Where museums interpret the past for the public, the archives and libraries upon which they are based often embody a similar politics. Not only are these institutions selective about what types of documents they have chosen to keep for posterity, but, in their organization, they likewise
promote or obscure how specific pasts are remembered. Neither the ar-

Library cataloguing provides a relatable example. The Library of
Congress cataloguing system is organized in such a way as to normalize
the European presence in North America. The history of Canada is lo-
cated using the call number FC (F in the United States), while Indigenous
peoples are located between E75 and E99 in the American history section
and located before the so-called Discovery of America. The symbolism
here is clear. Canada and the United States are envisioned as distinct
places of the present-day without the active participation of First Peoples;
Indigenous peoples belong to a time before the nation-state and — ac-
cording to this method of organizing information — are not compatible
within it.

This is what the settler colonial logic of elimination looks like for the
historian, archivist, and librarian. Our institutions are not unlike Le
Dernier Huron. They have been organized around a set of ideas that as-
sumed the eventual extinction of Indigenous peoples and their inability
to act politically in the past, present, or future. A consequence of these
institutional structures is that scholars sometimes dismiss Indigenous
agency, even when it is in plain sight. Historian Donald Smith has coined
a useful phrase to describe this. In the past, Indigenous peoples were too
often “seen but not seen,” both by their Euro-American contemporaries
and the historians who followed.

The history and scholarship of settler colonialism matter for how you
read this book. In North American history our disciplinary focus has
often drawn upon the idea of “conquest,” whereby the legitimacy of our
present-day society hinges on a perceived military conquest of earlier
societies. Though sharing a common interest in conquest, the meaning of
the word varies between the United States and Canada. In the United
States, historians associate the word with the military “Conquest of
America”; they tie the word to initial actions by Spaniards and their
proxies — such as Christopher Columbus — but also to the Indian Removal
Act and Indian Wars of the nineteenth century. In Canada, the word is
seldom used in this context. Instead, historians refer to “The Conquest”
as an event spanning three years (1758 to 1760), whereby Britain routed
France on the shoreline battlefields of the St. Lawrence River, eclipsing the French empire and establishing a foothold upon which Canada would subsequently develop.53 Taken together, both “conquests” have been used to identify a moment of rupture with a specific Indigenous and French past to mark the beginning of an Anglo-settler society that remains dominant in North America today.

Yet the idea of conquest brings with it too strong a sense of discontinuity. Much like Telari-o-lin’s relationship to *Le Dernier Huron*, the significance of these events is not nearly as clear as it might first appear. Recently, historians have well demonstrated that neither so-called conquest was as conclusive as the term suggests. In the heart of New England, for example, O’Brien’s first book, *Dispossession by Degrees*, documents the strategies that Natick people used to remain on the Land despite the significant settler colonial pressures pushing against them. Among others, Andrea Bear Nicholas, Lisa Brooks, Jeffers Lennox, Daniel Paul, Micah Pawling, John G. Reid, William C. Wicken, and Frederick Wiseman have made similar observations about other northeastern peoples.54

In Quebec, though scholars such as Guy Frégault, Maurice Séguin, and Michel Brunet (the so-called Montreal school) argued that *The Conquest* marked a major rupture for francophones, historians have tended to follow the Laval school (which included among others Marcel Trudel, Jean Hamelin, and Fernand Ouellet) in nuancing the event’s influence.55 In studying the colony’s legal structures, for example, Donald Fyson demonstrates that change mainly occurred within the upper echelons of society; the legal world remained the same for most of the colony’s French settlers.56 For historians who have studied both of these supposed conquests then, we can see that they were neither as significant nor all-encompassing as the term suggests.

Despite this scholarship, the legacy of earlier interpretations continues. In Canada, historians usually refer to the imperial warfare that shaped this period using Eurocentric terminology. The wars that led to the fall of New France are often known as the War of the League of Augsburg (1688–97), the War of Spanish Succession (1701–13), the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48), and the Seven Years’ War (1755–63). This terminology reflects European interests and the imperial stakes of
the conflicts, but it ignores how Indigenous resistance and interests were tied up in – and often started – these wars. American scholars, on the other hand, use a more colonial-specific language. The first three of these wars are known individually by the name of the reigning monarch (King William’s War, Queen Anne’s War, and King George’s War), while the Seven Years’ War is commonly known as the French and Indian War, signifying a simplistic unity between the historiographic conquest of Indians and the French empire. In neither case is Indigenous agency or power adequately considered.

The term French and Indian War is worth considering in more detail. Though the term is most tightly associated with the Seven Years’ War, its use dates to the 1690s, the period of first interest in this book. International conflict in New England began to be called the French and Indian War following the last of the purely “Indian Wars” fought solely by the English against Indigenous peoples in southern New England. The term was coined in 1716 by a key agitator in many of these early conflicts, Benjamin Church, when he published The History of Philip’s War, commonly called the Great Indian War, of 1675 and 1676. Also, of the French and Indian Wars at the Eastward in 1689, 1690, 1692, 1696, and 1704. The lexical transition Church makes in his title – between “Indian War” and “French and Indian Wars” following the end of Metacom’s War (or King Philip’s War) – marks the beginning of our story.

The shift in language is important. As we shall see, as the English eyed Indigenous Lands in the Maritime Peninsula, their perspective about whom they were fighting shifted from the people whose Lands they coveted (Wabanaki peoples, mostly) to those who had little land but shared a common, and developing, international legal tradition (the French). In shifting their attention from concerns about colonial legitimacy, relative to Indigenous rights and title, to that of imperial conflict with France, the two ideas of conquest merged. In a single set of events – the capture of the French towns of Port Royal (1710), Louisbourg (1758), Quebec (1759), and Montreal (1760) – the British could claim “conquest” over both French and Indian. This rhetorical bait and switch – a telltale tactic of the developing settler colonial regime – enabled the British to use European international law and diplomacy to
excuse themselves from the legal and ethical implications of expanding onto Indigenous Lands.

But even this framing around military conquest is somewhat reductive. In privileging war, we miss the mundane. Though military conflict, and its rhetorical framing, was an important tool, it was the Anglo-settlers in New England who fueled these conflicts through their desire for Land and profit. They came to define the systems of power that developed after France’s defeat. This flood of settlers, and the publication of maps and tracts that preceded them (and followed in their wake), slowly achieved political and cultural hegemony in the years following the events covered in this book. There was no question for these people about the legitimacy of their actions. For them, the conquests that preceded their migration into the Peninsula neutralized the political implications of their expansionist behaviour.

Mary Louise Pratt has termed this process — a defining feature of nineteenth-century imperialism — as anti-conquest. For Pratt, the concept of anti-conquest brings together “the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.” Pratt uses the concept to think about travel writing in the mid-nineteenth century. In the chapters that follow, I trace a similar trajectory, in an earlier period, whereby the rhetorical interlinking of French and Indian in these military defeats — when set alongside the treaties the British made with the Peninsula’s peoples — established a context within which British officials could ignore the jurisdictional claims made by First Peoples. Put another way, Britain’s military victories over France served to justify imperial officials’ decisions to ignore Indigenous claims of autonomy and self-determination as they reconceived of Indigenous Lands as settler homelands. The idea of conquest, in this context then, is not an act but a process, often stretched over decades.

Rather than using the term anti-conquest, which is a bit confusing, I think a better label for what took place in the Maritime Peninsula is settler conquests. The idea here is that military conquests and settler expansion were intimately linked and part of a common process. In using this
term, I follow Lauren Benton, who frames the idea of conquest as one of nuanced and heterogeneous processes more than simply a lasting act of dominance by one political group over another. For Benton, “recognizing the pluralism of early modern political entities before and after conquest, studying the violence of peacetime, and tracing the instability of alliances – these approaches bring into view important and often overlooked elements of the legal logic of conquest.” A spaces of power approach is useful for this type of study. In our case, by examining lived relationships, through deeds, treaties, censuses, and personal networks, this book traces an evolution of both French and British empire that used the rhetoric of conquest, and related claims of military successes against the French and Indians, to facilitate and legitimize a type of settler conquest that followed. In other words, “the legal logic of conquest” (to use Benton’s words) had to be gradually established through war, peace, violence, diplomacy, and – eventually – popular culture.

Because much of this conquest was conducted by unilaterally crafting Euro-Americans’ collective perceptions and conceptions of space – through maps, art, literature, and the law – it always remained incomplete. Through to the present, Indigenous lived experiences in the Peninsula ignored, resisted, and accommodated the settler world constructed around them, never embracing it in the ways hoped for by settler society. If we enter the past remembering this reality – that settler conquests were never complete – there are two consequences for how we must approach the past.

First, we must recognize the limitations of the historical record. With few exceptions, the evidence from the past that teaches us about this period is limited to official reports, journals, and letters written by Europeans. Rarely can we hear Indigenous voices unfiltered by a European lens. I have tried, therefore, to highlight and explain where I think Indigenous perspectives are clearly articulated, with a specific emphasis on documents written in Indigenous languages. Though I do not understand these languages, much like Telari-o-lin’s self-portrait, it is important to centre these texts and include them unabridged. Two of these documents, a 1715 Wabanaki letter to the French king, Louis XIV, and a 1721 letter
to the governor of Massachusetts, form the physical centre of this book to remind us about historical perspectives that often elude us in the archives.63

Second, we must recognize that the implication of these archival limitations is that names of peoples and places were often – and quickly – redefined by the Europeans who authored the historical record. Throughout this book, when known to me, I have chosen to use Indigenous people’s names for themselves and the places they lived rather than the names ascribed by imperial officials, colonists, or languages.64 In doing so, I hope to emphasize that although this was a shared space, its meaning could be quite variable depending upon a person’s cultural understanding and upbringing. As a white scholar without strong connections to the Indigenous nations discussed in this book, this observation applies to me just as much as it may apply to you. The Land and its peoples have much to teach us about continuities that have withstood the tests of European colonial and imperial pressures. In adopting this practice, I hope this book makes it easier to see the Maritime Peninsula as an Indigenous space in both the past and present.

From the 1790s Back to the 1680s

Returning for a final time to Sawantaun’s obituary, there remains one other possibility for why the Gazette chose to mark the Wendat leader’s death. Even in Salem, where in 1825 English settlers were about to commemorate the bicentennial of the town’s founding, much of the northeast had only recently been occupied by New England settlers. In other words, what took place in Indigenous communities, especially those like Lorette with a deep colonial history, mattered to the settler public. Though his childhood was spent in the environs of France’s North American stronghold at Quebec – and his mother was likely French – Sawantaun’s relatives travelled extensively throughout the Peninsula from as early as the 1720s. The Land that France and Britain fought over in those years was mostly Wabanaki and Mi’kmaw territory and – aside from a handful of coastal outposts and the Acadian settlements on the Bay of Fundy – neither the French nor English had extended much fur-
ther than a hundred kilometres from the coast. Where they had moved further inland, it was along major waterways such as the St. Lawrence and Connecticut Rivers. This limited, and very recent, European presence on Indigenous Lands, combined with the coastal nature of the region, meant that neither North American nor European/Euro-American interests were homogeneous.

It is this final observation that captures this book’s purpose. Between the 1680s and 1790s, life in the Maritime Peninsula underwent profound change. The region transformed from a Land primarily defined by peoples who had lived in relationship with it since time immemorial to a space where European form, politics, boundaries, and institutions were increasingly influential. The process through which this happened was not simple. Local events and regional relationships intersected with the growing global stakes of empire to create a unique cultural and political context that continued well into the twentieth century.

There was much more at play during the eighteenth century than just a contest between empires and its subsequent impact on First Peoples. To demonstrate this, *The Slow Rush of Colonization* examines several moments of imperial conflict, often identified in the past as harbingers of change, to show how a local perspective reveals important underlying continuities. Rather than centring on well-known European actors and their respective institutions, the book instead focuses on several spaces of power to draw out the on-the-ground lived experiences for the peoples upon whose Lands these conflicts took place. In the first three chapters, the book focuses on the Wabanaki and Mi’kmaq during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, before the Wendat became involved in the Maritime Peninsula; in the four chapters that follow, the book shifts focus almost entirely to Mi’kma’ki and the so-called Conquest of Acadia. The last three chapters address the Seven Years’ War and its aftermath across the region, with an emphasis on the Abenaki, Mi’kmaq, and Wendat. From this vantage point, it becomes apparent that military conflict and other imperial systems of power were important in shaping social and political life for First Peoples in their regional contexts, but not nearly as significant as the varied flood of Euro-American settlers and their institutions that accompanied the Seven Years’ War.
At its core, this is a book about human relationships to space and Land. There is ample evidence that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Land that settlers were remaking into places called New England, Nova Scotia, and Canada remained (and remain) Wabanaki, Mi’kmaw, and Wendat Homelands. Despite these continuities, the geopolitical transitions of the eighteenth century were palpable and mattered. For the most part, before the 1750s, these spaces were dominated by the region’s First Peoples. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are best conceived as Wabanaki territory; Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island as Mi’kma’ki. Though most of the people who lived here may not use these terms, they most accurately reflect the geography of the time. The sole exceptions were areas of dense French settlement: principal Acadian villages such as Port Royal, Beaubassin, and Grand Pré or French imperial centres at Quebec, Trois Rivières, and Montreal. These were places where the French had lived for well over a century. After 1760, change was abrupt. With the arrival of New England Planters in the Upper Connecticut Valley and on the shores of Mi’kma’ki, Indigenous spaces were flooded by a settler colonial world. By the 1780s, these spaces developed into the political geography we are familiar with today, cemented by the Planter, then Loyalist, migrations that coincided with the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution. It is this process of spatial transformation that this book seeks to introduce, historicize, and establish as important for understanding the tensions that continue to underpin settler colonialism in North America today.