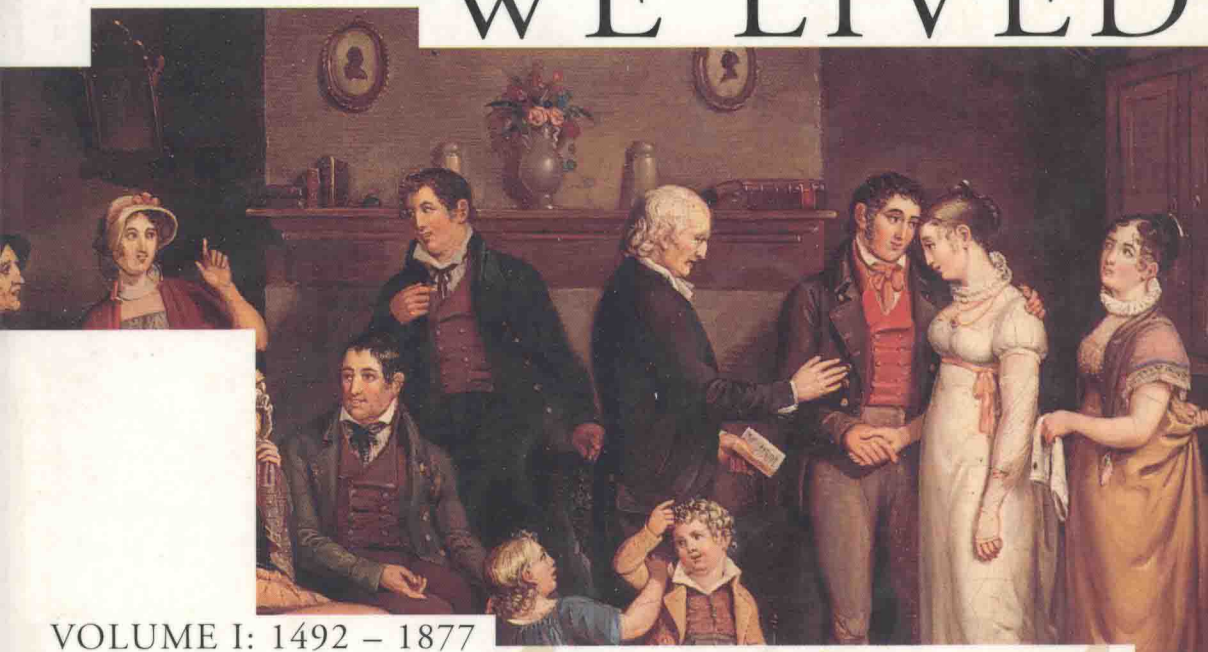
FREDERICK M. BINDER DAVID M. REIMERS

THE WAY WE LIVED



VOLUME I: 1492 – 1877

FOURTH EDITION

ESSAYS AND DOCUMENTS IN AMERICAN SOCIAL HISTORY

Volume I
1492–1877

The Way We Lived

Essays and Documents in American Social History

Fourth Edition

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Preface

History courses have traditionally emphasized the momentous events of our past. Wars and laws, technological advances and economic crises, ideas and ideologies, and the roles of famous heroes and infamous villains have been central to these studies. Yet what made events momentous is the impact they had on society at large, on people from all walks of life. Modern scholars' growing attention to social history is in part a recognition that knowledge of the experiences, values, and attitudes of these people is crucial to gaining an understanding of our past.

America's history as reflected in the everyday lives of its people provides the focus of these volumes. In preparing a work of selected readings, we have had to make choices as to which episodes from our past to highlight. Each of those included, we believe, was significant in the shaping of our society. Each of the essays is followed by original documents that serve several purposes. They provide examples of the kinds of source materials used by social historians in their research; they help to illuminate and expand upon the subject dealt with in the essays; and they bring the reader into direct contact with the people of the past—people who helped shape, and people who were affected by, the "momentous events."

Our introduction to each essay and its accompanying documents is designed to set the historical scene and to call attention to particular points in the selections, raising questions for students to ponder as they read. A list of suggested readings follows after each of the major divisions of the text. We trust that these volumes will prove to be what written history at its best can be—interesting and enlightening.

We are pleased to note that favorable comments by faculty and students as well as the large number of course adoptions attest to the success of our first three editions. Quite naturally, we thus have no desire in our fourth edition to alter the basic focus, style, and organization of *The Way We Lived.* Those essays that we and our readers consider to have been the earlier editions' very best remain intact. We believe that the new selections will identify and clarify significant issues in America's social history even more effectively than those they replaced.

F. M. B.

D. M. R.

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Part I

Colonial Society 1492–1783

Chapter 1

The First Americans

Up until a few short decades ago, students of history were taught that the story of America began with Columbus's voyage of discovery, followed by settlement of the land by Europeans. Native Americans were depicted primarily as part of the unfamiliar, exotic, and somewhat threatening natural landscape that had to be tamed. Fortunately, scholars in recent years have come to appreciate and to illustrate that American history predated European colonization by thousands of years. America's first settlers had begun their migration—one that would continue for centuries—across the land bridge that emerged periodically in the Bering Sea. Drawing from a variety of Asiatic peoples, the hundreds of native tribes that settled across America prior to the arrival of Europeans differed profoundly in language, religion, economy, and social and political organization. Before the first white men set foot on American soil, Indian nations used the land effectively and flourished.

The essay that follows, from Peter Nabokov and Dean Snow's "Farmers of the Woodlands," illustrates the complexity and vitality of the societies and cultures of

two groups of Indians, the Algonquians and Iroquoians, as they existed in 1492. Situated between the Atlantic coastline and the foothills of the Appalachians, both groups figured prominently in the drama of initial contact between Europeans and Native Americans. As you read, make note of the ways in which the Indians, in the authors' words, "made extremely efficient use of the natural resources in their river and forest world." What factors appeared to be most significant in leading some Eastern Indians toward a primarily seminomadic hunting-and-gathering pattern of existence and others toward an agrarian, semisedentary, village-based way of life? In what ways do the descriptions of Indian culture found in the essay complement or contrast with popular film depictions of Native Americans?

The image of the Indian portrayed by the early English colonists differs in many respects from that of modern scholars. Using their own culture as the guideline by which to evaluate others, colonists found some aspects of Indian life exotic, some even admirable, but on the whole they deemed Indians inferior savages. Thus, the prevailing attitude of the Europeans was that the Indians had to adopt white man's civilization or be vanquished. One of the earliest and most influential proponents of this view was Captain John Smith, swashbuckling adventurer and a leader of the Jamestown, Virginia, settlement of 1607. In his A Generall Historie of Virginia, *published in 1624, Smith describes the land and native people of England's first North American colony. The first document includes some of Smith's descriptions of Virginia's "Naturall Inhabitants." What evidence is there that Smith evaluated these people's culture by European standards?*

The Indians' resistance to attempts to subjugate them both culturally and physically during the colonial period contributed to the general consensus among the European settlers that they faced a truly barbarous and savage people. However, while few Indians embraced white society, evidence exists of a considerable number of English colonists who ran off to join the Indians and of white captives who, when given the opportunity to return home, chose to remain among the Indians. Look for clues to explain these phenomena in the experiences of Mary Jemison, related in the second document. The daughter of colonists, Jemison was captured and adopted by Seneca Indians in 1755, when she was twelve years old. Mary, in turn, assimilated the Seneca's way of life. When she related the story of her adventure to Dr. James Seaver in 1823, she still lived among the Seneca. In the excerpt that follows, she recalls her thoughts and experiences after four years in captivity.

The Seneca Indians were members of the New York–based League of the Iroquois, a confederation that was able—through their unity, courage, and military and diplomatic skills—to withstand European incursions for more than a hundred years. Their ill-fated alliance with the British during the Revolutionary War led to their downfall. By 1805, the time of the final document, the once mighty Iroquois shared the fate of other Indians before them: encroachment on their lands and pressure to abandon their religion and way of life. The final document presents a speech by Red Jacket, a Seneca warrior and subchief. Born in 1751, Red Jacket was old enough to have served during the years when Iroquois power and prestige were at their height. Now he headed what detractors called the "pagan faction"—Iroquois

who sought to maintain their traditional culture and to keep European influences outside the borders of their reservation. In his speech, Red Jacket responds to Missionary Cram's suggestion that Native Americans convert to Christianity and accept European ways. What is Red Jacket's view of the European assault on Indian life?

ESSAY

Algonquians and Iroquoians: Farmers of the Woodlands

Peter Nabokov with Dean Snow

When the hunting party of three Penobscot River Indian families arrived at the frozen creek in the spring of 1492, the men tested the ice with their five-foot staves. It would support them today, but not much longer. The wintry season which they called "still-hunting and stalking" was ending quickly. A warm spell a few days earlier caused sticky snow to cling to their moose-hide snowshoes, slowing them down.

It was time to head downstream, following creeks to the broad river and continuing to where it widened to the sea. Other hunters and their families, whom they had not seen since autumn, would also be returning to the summer villages. The warmer evenings would offer time for recounting the past winter—all the deaths, births, hunts, and tragic, funny, and supernatural happenings of which human memory and history are made.

The hunting parties were traversing a well-watered and heavily forested landscape which white men would one day call Maine. In their own language they knew themselves as "people of the white rocks country," a phrase which Europeans would later shorten to Penobscot. They were one of six loosely organized eastern Algonquian-speaking tribes who would become known colloquially as Wabanakis, or "daybreak land people." Their territory marked the northern limits of Indian farming, for late thaws and early frosts permitted them to produce only a little corn, squash, and beans.

The annual shifts between seasonal camps up and down the Penobscot River valley were determined by the time-honored habits of fishing and hunting on which their survival depended. Branching out from this great stream were innumerable tributaries that were familiar to the hunters who revisited them, usually more than once, throughout the year. Each of these

SOURCE: Peter Nabokov with Dean Snow, "Farmers of the Woodlands," *America in 1492: The World of the Indian People Before the Arrival of Columbus,* Alvin M. Josephy Jr. ed.

natural domains was dubbed a "river," which, to the Penobscot hunting families, evoked a stretch of stream and adjoining lands on which they held relatively exclusive hunting and fishing privileges. Deep in the heart of their homeland loomed their sacred Mount Katahdin, home to the fearsome spirit known as Pamola. Few hunters ventured above the tree line to trespass on his territory.

Waterways, and the well-trodden trails that connected them, served as the hunters' routes into the dense interior forests, where their arrows, snares, and deadfalls yielded moose, deer, beavers, muskrats, and otters in their "rivers." The central river was their highway down to the coast, where they collected clams and lobsters, speared seals, and caught porpoises.

Mobility was a necessity for the hunting life of the Penobscot. Hence, their social groups were small, and rules of residence were rather loose. Generally, it was up to the husband whether his family lived with his own or with his wife's parents. The opportunities and dictates of the hunt dominated all other concerns; social organization had to be flexible enough to let men make the most of the availability of game or shifts in the weather.

The hunters were not unhappy to leave winter behind. The "master of the animals" had blessed this group with a late-season moose cow, her unborn still in its slick, wet pouch. Their hunting had yielded enough beaver and other pelts, thick with luxuriant winter hair, to weigh down the toboggans the men dragged behind them. Their dogs also sniffed spring, and seemed happier. Ahead, everyone anticipated spearing and netting the shad, salmon, alewives, and sturgeon during their spring spawning runs.

This was also a time to harvest bark. It is hard to imagine northeastern Algonquian culture without the paper birch tree. Thin, speckled flats were peeled from the trunks at different times of year. Spring bark was thickest and was preferred for canoes, so the entire trunk would be cut down and the bark separated in the largest pieces possible. Then it would be sewn onto a canoe frame of steam-bent cedar wood and waterproofed at the seams with white-pine pitch colored with charcoal.

Summer bark was thinner, and was earmarked for roofing mats and receptacles. It could be stripped from the trunk in smaller flats without killing the tree. Then it could be folded and sewn into maple-sap buckets, baby craddleboards, and pitch-caulked cooking vessels in which heated stones were dropped to bring water to a boil. For more decorative items, floral designs were produced by careful scraping away to the darker, inner layer of the bark. Porcupine-quill or moose-hair embroidery might also ornament the bark surfaces.

In late spring, families planted gardens before heading for the coast and the pleasures of seabird eggs, escape from blackflies, summer berry picking, flirting among the young, easier fishing along the saltwater bays, and extended twilights. At summer's end, the "going about to find something" time, the forest lured them once more.

Hunting opened in earnest with moose mating season. To entice the fat summer bulls within arrow range, hunters trumpeted through birch-bark megaphones, imitating the sounds of cow moose. Then came winter, story-telling season, when a few families collected within wigwams and lulled children to sleep with the exploits of Glooskap, the trickster figure of Wabanaki folklore.

For Penobscot Indians in 1492, this cycle of tasks and pleasures seemed as predictable and everlasting as the seasons themselves. Their way of life also made extremely efficient use of the natural resources in their river and forest world. Woodlands, waterways, and—south of Penobscot country—open fields remain the ecological hallmarks of all of the North American East. However, in 1492, there was probably far more local variation in plant and animal life than we have today.

Indeed, if we are to believe the earliest European eyewitnesses, New England, for instance, resembled a checkerboard of natural preserves with dramatically contrasting ecological features. "It did all resemble a stately Parke, wherein appeare some old trees with high withered tops, and other flourishing with living green boughs," wrote James Rosier in 1605, after walking through the forests and fields not far from Indian Island in Maine. Yet in this stroll of less than four miles, the modern-day environmental historian William Cronon pointed out, Rosier's party actually passed beneath the leafy canopies of a number of quite different micro-environments.

The sylvan paradise of northern New England, lying at the northernmost extreme of the corn-growing region, was but one section of nearly one million square miles of the eastern half of North America that is commonly called the Woodland culture area. Farther west might be added 400,000 square miles of intermixed river foliage and tallgrass prairie, where—except on strips of narrow floodplain—Indians usually were not able to sustain substantial gardening.

By 1492, the native people of this huge eastern mass of the continent occupied a world already rich and complex in human history—many different histories, in fact. At least sixty-eight mutually unintelligible tongues, representing five of the twenty known language families of North America, were spoken in the region. The net effect of over 10,000 years of adaptation by contrasting native peoples who had grown deeply tied to a great diversity of environmental regions of the eastern woodlands had produced a complex cultural mosaic. . . .

It had taken time, new ideas, and experimentation for the woodland Indian peoples of 1492 to develop this annual round of land-use customs and mixed strategies of subsistence. Indian occupancy of the East is now believed to go back as far as 16,000 B.C., when Paleo-Indian foragers and hunters began settling the region in highly mobile bands. As these groups established local residency, they developed almost imperceptibly into the Indian world that archaeologists label the Archaic period, which lasted until about 700 B.C.

The domesticated dogs that accompanied the Penobscot hunters were introduced during Archaic times and were found throughout the East by 1492. Inherited from their Paleo-Indian forerunners, a principal Archaic weapon was the spear thrower. Archaic hunters improved this device to gain increased velocity during a throw by adding flexible shafts and by weighting the throwing stick with a ground stone to add leverage. . . .

By 1492, Indians in the East had been growing vegetables in two different ways for a long time. Both the Iroquoians and Algonquians practiced what is known as swidden, or slash-and-burn, horticulture. A plot of preferably well-drained land was cleared of its canopy of leaves and branches. The area was then burned and nutrient-rich ashes and organic materials were hoed into the forest floor. Seeds were dispersed within hand-formed mounds. The resulting fields did not have a very kempt appearance; generally, the corn stalks and squash vines flourished greenly amid a scatter of scorched or dead brush.

Among the semi-nomadic hunting-and-gathering Algonquian bands, who traveled relatively light and who fished, foraged, hunted, and gathered maple syrup, growing vegetables was but one subsistence activity. If a season's garden was beset by insects, or a hunt came up empty, the people generally could rely on stored foods or other options. The Iroquoians, however, who elevated swidden agriculture to their dominant means of support, might be considered true "farmers," rather than part-time "gardeners." Their sizable hillside lots were the mainstay for their matrilineal social system and for a semi-sedentary, village-based way of life. . . .

Prior to the advent of gardening, food foraging among woodland Indians had probably been the responsibility of women. The heightened importance of plant cultivation, processing, and storage steadily enhanced their role. By the time of Columbus, women were clearly the primary food producers in a number of woodland cultures whose political and religious systems reflected their status.

South of the northeastern territories of the Wabanaki peoples, the weather softened. Among the Indian groups of central and southern New England, the length of the summer allowed greater attention to gardening and so promoted a more settled village way of life. While for Penobscot hunters corn was a sometime delicacy, for the south it became a basic food staple. In present-day New Hampshire and Vermont, the western Abenakis were marginal farmers and fishermen. Among the Mahicans of eastern New York, like the Pocumtucks of the interior Connecticut River valley, work in the fields was still augmented by hunting in the woods and trapping migratory fish in local rivers.

Not surprisingly, this more temperate world had a larger native population than did the northern forests. It is estimated that the Massachusett, Wampanoag, and other Indian nations of southern New England possessed a population density of five people per square mile—ten times that of the

hunters of Maine. Population densities at this high level also obtained for other eastern Algonquian-speakers farther south, the Lenapes (Delawares) and Nanticokes, and their linguistic kinfolk in coastal Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. There, also, among the Powhatans and others, were permanent villages and more stable intertribal alliances.

All central and southern New England Indians spoke languages belonging to the same language family—Algonquian. Commonly, a tribesman was conversant with the words and pronunciation of his immediate neighbors, but communicated with decreasing fluency as trade, hunting, or warfare drew him farther from his home territory.

By 1492, techniques for growing and storing vegetables had been developing in the Northeast for four or five centuries. Wampanoag men cleared fields from the forests of oak, elm, ash, and chestnut. They felled the smaller trees and burned the thicker trunks at the base together with their branches, which left a coating of ash to enrich the soil. In Wampanoag society, rights to these cleared plots were inherited through the female line of descent.

Women broke up the ground with hoes edged with deer scapulae or clamshells. Around April, they began planting the seed corn in little mounds, often counting four kernels per hillock and perhaps adding heads of alewife fish for fertilizer. The corn came in many colors and kinds—flint, flour, dent, and pop.

By midsummer, an early crop yielded squash and beans and green corn, but the major harvest occurred in September. Apparently these crops helped each other out. The beans growing amid the corn added nitrogen, which corn consumes, while the heavy stalks offered support for the climbing bean vines. Finally, the corn provided the shade that the low-lying squash needed to reach maximum maturity.

When eaten together, beans, corn, and squash produced a greater protein intake, and Indians developed the mixed-vegetable dish which is still known by its Algonquian name, "succotash."

While garden caretakers weeded roots and protected the emerging crops from birds and pests, the majority of villagers headed for the coast to gather clams and oysters and to catch lobsters and fish. Wild greens, nuts, and fruits, which were also important to their diet, varied with season and habitat. They included blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and wild grapes, and walnuts, chestnuts, and acorns, which could also be dried and stored for leaner times.

In autumn, the Indians divided their time between preparing their agricultural surplus for winter storage and dispersing in hunting parties before winter set in. Deer were stalked by individuals, or were flushed into special game pens by communal drivers. For warm skins as well as meat, Indians stalked moose, elk, bears, bobcats, and mountain lions in late fall, winter, and early spring. In midwinter, they dangled lines into local ponds through the ice, but dipped nets or repaired fish weirs in milder seasons.