

400th Anniversary of MDI's First European Settlement

Saturday, June 8, 2013

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400th Anniversary of Mount Desert Island's First European Settlement and Introduction to Christianity

A bronze memorial outside St. Ignace Church in Northeast Harbor, ME summarizes an event whose 400th anniversary on Mount Desert Island occurs this summer.¹ It says:

FIRST RECORDED LANDING OF WHITE PERSONS ON MT. DESERT ISLAND, MAINE 1613
FRENCH EXPEDITION UNDER SIEUR DE LA SAUSSAYE, INCLUDING THREE JESUIT PRIESTS, FATHERS PIERRE BEARD, ENCAMOND MASSA, JACQUES QUENTIN AND JESUIT BROTHER GILBERT DU THEI LANDED ON WEST SIDE OF SOME SOUND AT WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS FERNALD'S POINT. THEY NAMED THEIR SETTLEMENT SAINT SAUVEUR. SEVERAL MONTHS LATER, A BRITISH FORCE ATTACKED THE COLONY, KILLED BROTHER DU THEI AND DISPERSED THE COLONY. BROTHER DU THEI'S BODY IS BURIED SOMEWHERE ON THE SHORE OF WHAT IS NOW KNOWN AS THE JESUIT MEADOW.



This event and its location have been recorded by many historians, among them Francis Perkins, William Otis Sawville, Samuel Eliot Morison and David Hackett Fischer. My intent here is to verify the location of the Saint Sauveur settlement on Fernald Point based on Father Biard's own description.²

With regard to their landing on MDI after departing Port Royal, Nova Scotia, some 150 miles seaward, Biard records, "... by morning the fog had all disappeared. We recognized that we were opposite Mount Desert, an island, which the Savages call Penatiq. The pilot turned to the Eastern shore of the island, and there located us in a large and beautiful port. ..."

Indians arrived and told Biard, "It is necessary that thou comest, since Artican, our Sagamore, is sick unto death, and if thou dost not come he will die without baptism, and will not go to heaven. Thou wilt be the cause of it, for he himself wishes very much to be baptized." This argument, so naturally deduced, astonished Father Biard, and fully persuaded him to go there, especially as it was only three leagues away, and in all there would result no greater loss of time than one afternoon; so he got into one of their canoes with Sieur de La Motte, lieutenant, and Simon the interpreter, and went off."

Biard met with Artican, who was not dying but suffering from a cold, at his summer camp on Manchester Point, in Northeast Harbor, opposite Fernald Point. The Indians convinced Biard to settle nearby.

Biard's description of the settlement site: "This place is a beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea, its sides bathed by two springs; the land is cleared for twenty or twenty-five acres, and in some places is covered with grass almost as high as a man. It faces the South and East ..."

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Identifier: 15570

Title: 400th Anniversary of MDI's First European Settlement

Type: Reference

Subject: Events

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Date: 2013-06-08

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