

The Abbé Pierre Maillard: Treaty-making in Halifax, 1759-1762.

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At the southeast corner of Spring Garden Road and Barrington Street in Halifax, there is a cemetery that city residents know as the "Old Burying Grounds."

With over 1,000 gravestones remaining intact, dating from the grounds' opening in the early 1750s to its close in 1831, the cemetery – belonging to St. Paul's Anglican Church – is one of the oldest settler burial sites in North America – the other being at Annapolis Royal. Like many cemeteries, the Old Burying Grounds is a place where, if the dead could speak, listeners would be humbled by the life stories now at rest.

There is a gravestone though that you will not find; nor is the name of the person listed in the official register of those who were buried in the Old Burying Grounds. However, historical records do confirm a very unique burial took place on those grounds in August of 1762. Let's take a brief step back to those times.

Further south on Barrington, at South Street, there is an assortment of office buildings and apartments. But early in 1760, that specific area was outside the town's southern palisade walls. And not too far from the south gates, there once stood a large barn whose owner, John Murphy, a farmer of Irish Catholic descent, had offered it as a place of worship to a Roman Catholic missionary.

But Halifax in 1760 was not a place for Roman Catholic missionaries. In essence, the town was a British military outpost where the Anglican faith maintained its authority. Nevertheless, being an outpost, such an authority also had to compete with the most common and successful enterprises in Halifax at the time, namely brothels and the selling of rum!

It was into this world that the British powers had invited a Roman Catholic missionary. After having travelled a few days over land and by river from the

ancient Mi'kmaq settlement known as Merigomish Island, located at the northeast part of mainland Nova Scotia, he arrived and was greeted at the gates of the town's northern palisade walls. The missionary was the Abbé Pierre Antoine Simon Maillard.

The invitation Maillard had accepted came from the British Governor, Charles Lawrence, who had requested his consideration to come to Halifax to act as a British agent to conduct peace treaty negotiations with the various Mi'kmaq communities. Lawrence had long heard about Maillard and the respect the missionary had amongst the Mi'kmaq.

Maillard was a 24-year veteran of missionary life with the Mi'kmaq, from Isle Royale (present day Cape Breton), to Isle St. Jean (P.E.I.), and Bear River (southwest Nova Scotia); and had served many Acadians who had been on the move in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick due to the Deportation orders of 1755, or who had escaped from Louisbourg after its fall in 1758. Maillard was a missionary in the Spiritan Order and a native of the French village of Chartres, home of the famed Chartres Cathedral and the labyrinth floor it contained.

Since his arrival at Fortress Louisbourg in 1735 at the age of 25, Maillard had walked his own labyrinth during his many years of missionary service – service that would outlive three popes, one British crown, and two French kings.

During that time, he had also been captured once by the British at the first siege of Fortress Louisbourg in 1745. He was sent to Boston, then deported back to France, only to arrive back on the Chebucto shore with the ill-fated Duc d'Anville fleet in 1746, a fleet that had lost ships and men due to storms and disease.

After arriving at Chebucto, he had made his way back to a missionary post at Isle de la Sainte Famille (Island of the Holy Family), now known as Potlotek Chapel Island – a sacred aboriginal site and home of the St. Anne Mission, located near the French garrison of Port Toulouse (modern day St. Peter's, Cape Breton). It was there that Maillard organized a cadre of literate lay catechists, the *nujialasutma'tijik* (literally, "those who pray"). And it was during this time that he also began his work on the famous hieroglyphic texts of prayers for the Mi'kmaq people. With his home-base at Potlotek, Maillard would travel throughout the Maritime region to visit various Mi'kmaq communities till 1758.

Fast forward to September 1759 when Quebec fell to the British under General James Wolfe ending French power in North America. In Nova Scotia, after years of conflict the British continued to fear the Mi'kmaq as adept forest fighters and warriors. They wanted to seek agreeable peace terms and needed assistance. The British understood Mi'kmaq organization well enough to know that they did not have a highly centralized political structure, and therefore they needed to bring in the individual band chiefs one at a time before peace could be restored. Thus, on November 26, Governor Lawrence invited Maillard, (who had relocated to Malagomich/Merigomish, Nova Scotia), to assist the British in obtaining peace treaty agreements with the Mi'kmaq tribal chiefs.¹

In late 1759, after 24 years of working as a missionary, and experiencing much hardship and witnessing too much bloodshed, Maillard was to enter the final chapter of his life and accepted Governor Lawrence's invitation to come to Halifax and conduct peace treaty work for the British. The French called Maillard a traitor for his decision to assist the British. But Maillard's decision to come to Halifax was in the service of the Mi'kmaq people he loved and had served.

The winter of 1759 was the worst ever on record. By the spring of 1760, New England Planters were starting to arrive in Nova Scotia to settle on lands previously farmed by the Acadians. In mid-October, Governor Charles Lawrence died. But throughout 1760 into '61 Maillard was able to ratify peace and friendship treaties between the British and Mi'kmaq chiefs - treaties that would endure into the 21st century, becoming the legal basis for many important Mi'kmaq land claims.

On June 25, 1761, many Mi'kmaq chiefs came to Halifax, from such areas as Merimichi, Jedicak, Pogmouch and Cape Breton to participate in a 'Bury the Hatchet' ceremony at the Lieutenant Governor's farm in Halifax (near the present day Court House on Spring Garden Road). One Mi'kmaq Chief from Cape Breton described that; *"As long as the Sun and Moon [the treaty] shall endure, as long as the Earth on which I dwell shall exist in the same State as you this day, with the Laws of your Government, faithful and obedient to the Crown."*

¹ HMHPS Historical Paper No. 1: Edward Cornwallis, p.13. <https://hnhps.ca/pdf/HMHPS-historical-paper-no-1-edward-cornwallis.pdf>

The treaty reflected a consensus agreement which was mutual and non-coercive.² And the event “concluded with dancing and singing and toasts to His Majesty’s health. An honour guard fired three volleys to mark the joyful occasion...”³ Later in 1762, the new Lieutenant-Governor, Jonathan Belcher, would issue a proclamation forbidding the settlement or trespassing of certain lands claimed by the Mi’kmaq.

After two and half years of negotiations, as well as attending to more Acadians being deported to Boston, and serving the spiritual needs of the local Irish Catholics, Abbé Pierre Maillard died on August 12, 1762, at the age of 52, completing 27 years of dedicated missionary life.⁴

Maillard was buried in the Old Burying Grounds with full official honours, with British, Mi’kmaq and Acadian peoples in attendance at the first ecumenical service in North America. It is recorded that he gave all his belongings away, including his extensive library of books – some of which are now held at King’s College and at the New Brunswick Public Archives. There is, as yet, no gravestone that marks his place or the memory of his important service to the peoples of the province of Nova Scotia.

² Wicken, William C., *Mi’kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land, and Donald Marshall Junior*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2002, p. 166.

³ Upton, L.F.S. *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian White Relations in the Maritimes 1713-1867*. Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1979, p.58-59.

⁴ Dictionary of Canadian Biography: http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/maillard_pierre_3E.html .