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### Article abstract

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# The Decline of Nova Scotia Micmac Population, A.D. 1600 – 1850

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This paper traces the decline of the Micmac population of Nova Scotia from A.D. 1600 to its nadir in 1840. It finds the major causes of this decline to be: diseases contracted from Europeans, a genocide campaign conducted by the British, and starvation. The paper then evaluates available population figures for the period 1616 – 1867 and finds them most reliable for the nineteenth century. Extrapolating back in time, the paper concludes that aboriginal Nova Scotia Micmac population might have been as high as 26,000.

*Dans ce texte, nous montrons le déclin de la population micmac de la Nouvelle-Écosse de 1600 à 1840, moment qui correspond à son point le plus bas. Les causes premières de ce déclin sont les suivantes : les maladies d'origine européenne, une campagne de génocide orchestrée par les Britanniques, et des cycles de famine. Grâce aux données démographiques qui nous sont parvenues pour la période allant de 1616 à 1867, nous évaluons ensuite adéquatement la population micmac au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces données nous permettent d'extrapoler et de conclure que la population aborigène a pu atteindre alors 26,000 habitants.*

There has been little published work on Micmac Indian ethnohistory and consequently great gaps exist in our knowledge of this important group. One area in which this is particularly true is the area of Micmac population, both for aboriginal and post-contact times. From early accounts and historical documents, it is readily apparent that the Micmac population overall underwent a decline following contact with Europeans. Both Miller (1976) and d'Entremont (1977) have considered the great drop which occurred in the Micmac population prior to 1600, when written records on the Micmac begin. The introduction of European diseases as well as lowered resistance to endemic diseases resulting from dietary change and the introduction of alcohol combined to bring about a rapid and intensive depopulation. But this decline was only the beginning of a longterm and constant dwindling away of Micmac numbers, which in Nova Scotia at least, persisted until the middle of the nineteenth century, when Micmac numbers finally stabilized before beginning to increase. Two obvious questions which may be asked of this decline are "what caused it?" and "how great was it?"; these questions are answerable by means of an examination of archival and published primary sources. This paper will present evidence of the factors responsible for the decline in the Nova Scotia Micmac numbers follow-

ing contact, then will present and evaluate the available population estimates for the period of decline, and finally, will use this evaluation to speculate on the Nova Scotia Micmac aboriginal population size<sup>1</sup>.

We will consider chronologically the factors contributing to the decline in Micmac numbers. For the seventeenth century, our principal sources on the Nova Scotia Micmac are the *Relations* of the Jesuit priests in Acadia and the accounts of Nicholas Denys, a trader and governor of Acadia for almost forty years after 1635. Because Denys was among the Micmac for such an extended period, while the Catholic priests tended to come and go, Denys is a better source for longterm ethnographic and demographic information. In 1670, Denys (1908) recorded his account of Micmac life as it had been when he first arrived in Acadia, and compared it to what Micmac life had become by 1670. From Denys' account, it is clear that much cultural disintegration had taken place, and it was the type of disintegration which would certainly have affected the population: from an aboriginal diet consisting heavily of meat and fish, the Micmac shifted to large-scale consumption of European dried foods, hardtack, and brandy. There was increased fighting and even murders as a result of drinking bouts. Denys also observed that Micmac families were becoming smaller as women had fewer children and as general mortality increased. Denys (1908 : 403) concluded in 1670 that "there was formerly a much larger number of Indians than at present". Unfortunately for our purposes, Denys never recorded an estimate of Micmac population size.

As stated above, Nicholas Denys and the *Jesuit Relations* are our best sources for Nova Scotia Micmac during the seventeenth century. Between them, the two sources span almost sixty years. It is significant that nowhere in either of these accounts is there any mention of the occurrence of epidemic diseases among the Micmac. Similarly, the account of the sole remaining observer among the Nova Scotia Micmac during the seventeenth century, Nicholas Gargas, a French clerk ordered to take a census of the area in 1687, also fails to mention any epidemic disease among the Natives in his incidental comments accompanying the census<sup>2</sup>. So we may conclude that the principal cause of Micmac population decline during the seventeenth century continued from that of the sixteenth, i.e. dietary change resulting in reduced resistance to endemic disease, with perhaps some local incidences of European diseases taking their toll on the population<sup>3</sup>.

Shortly after 1600, the first French settlers

arrived in Nova Scotia. Arrivals continued throughout the century and after the turn of the eighteenth century as increasing numbers of French Acadians came to Nova Scotia, where they settled around Port Royal and the Annapolis Valley along the Bay of Fundy, and along the isthmus of Chignecto, which connects Nova Scotia to New Brunswick. The Acadian settlers were small farmers, illiterate for the most part; they left few, if any, written accounts of the Micmac people although the two groups enjoyed good relations and apparently some intermarriage took place between them. After 1713, the French built a fortress at Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, and Dickason (1976) has pulled together much information on European-Micmac relations during the first half of the eighteenth century. During this time, both France and England vied with each other for the Micmacs' friendship, with the French being more successful because of their consistent policy of giving gifts to the Indians and also because of their having the advantage of a longer and kindlier relationship with the Micmac in general. The French used this friendship to incite the Micmac to commit hostile acts against the English and the result, according to Dickason, was a period of twenty years of intense Micmac-English hostilities between 1710 and 1730, followed by a brief respite and then again intense hostilities after 1740. Hostilities at one point escalated into a so-called "Indian-English War" between 1722 and 1726, during which the Micmac took great delight in harrassing and seizing English ships and fishing boats. The Indians even carried out an attack on Port Royal, which was held by the English at this time (Dickason, 1976 : 75ff). The English countered by raiding Micmac camps, serving poisoned food to the Indians at a 1712 gathering, and even importing a company of Mohawk Indians to combat the Micmac (Dickason, 1976 : 73). All these hostilities doubtless cost an unspecified number of Micmac their lives.

Anthony Maillard, a priest who arrived at Louisbourg in 1735 and who devoted the rest of his life to the Micmac people of Nova Scotia, has recorded additional atrocities. According to Maillard, one crime perpetrated by the English in 1744 was particularly heinous in the Indians' eyes and set off renewed hostilities. A detachment of English soldiers came across a small camp of five Micmac women and three children in a remote area of western Nova Scotia and murdered and disemboweled them (Maillard, 1758 : 62ff). The next year, following the English capture of Louisbourg, some Englishmen dug up bodies from the nearby Indian burying ground and burned them before vandal-

izing the cemetery and its grave markers (Maillard, 1758 : 62ff). The following year, English merchants deliberately traded "poisoned" woolen goods to some Micmac, causing the deaths of more than two hundred Indians (Pichon, 1760 : 164). And in the meantime, the English had again imported a company of Indians, this time from New England, to roam western Nova Scotia, harrasing and killing the Micmac (Akins, 1869 : 149ff).

And so it went between the English and the Micmac. However, it was the French who unwittingly did more than all the English genocide attempts to destroy the Micmac population. A serious smallpox epidemic which raged among the French residents of Louisbourg in 1732 and 1733 (McLennan, 1979 : 81) spread to the neighbouring Micmac people where it "reached such proportions that the Indians refused to come in for their gifts, without which they were reduced to the utmost misery" (Dickason, 1976 : 44). Subsequently there were smaller outbreaks of unspecified diseases among these same Cape Breton Micmac, particularly after the arrival of significant numbers of French soldiers in the mid-1750's (Dickason, 1976 : 44). But the most disastrous epidemic came with the arrival of a French fleet in Chebucto harbour (now Halifax harbour) in 1746. This fleet, under the command of the Duc d'Anville, had been dispatched to retake from the English not only Louisbourg, but all of mainland Nova Scotia as well. While the fleet had set out from France with a total of 65 ships and a complement of 3,150 soldiers, storms and calms alternately beset the fleet during the Atlantic crossing, with the result that most of the ships were sunk or otherwise dispersed and the crossing was greatly delayed. When the remnants of the fleet, roughly a dozen ships, finally reached the agreed-on rendez-vous in Chebucto Harbour, the men on board were suffering from a highly contagious fever, most likely typhus, which had broken out at sea<sup>4</sup>. The fever took a heavy toll on the Europeans : more than 1,000 men had died at sea and another 1,000 died on the shores of Chebucto Harbour. However, it wreaked even greater havoc among the Micmac people, a large number of whom had gathered at the harbour to trade with the Frenchmen. Contracting the fever, the Micmac in the area "died like flies", while the fever rapidly spread through western Nova Scotia, an area especially densely populated in aboriginal and early post-contact times. The result was that fully "one-third of the Tribe in Nova Scotia" or about 4,000 Indians, perished, according to one early source (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115). The devastation of this epidemic left such an imprint in Micmac memory that even as recently as

the 1920's, old Indians could recall seeing mounds in the area near Halifax where great numbers of Indians who had died of the fever were buried, and they alleged that no Indians ever camped in that area again (Piers' notes).

This typhus epidemic of 1746 decimated the Micmac population in western Nova Scotia, but it marked only the beginning of increasingly large numbers of Micmac people dying. The English genocide campaign, begun in the early 1700's, intensified after 1749, when the English established the city of Halifax in an attempt to maintain their control over mainland Nova Scotia. It is a testimony to the great numbers of the tribe that when the English settlers arrived in Halifax three years after the great epidemic, they still found numerous Micmac people. Probably these had moved into the area from the east after the epidemic, since the Halifax area was reportedly a favourite hunting ground for the Micmac. Despite the ongoing campaign of English genocide in other parts of Nova Scotia, the newly-arrived settlers found the Indians around Halifax hospitable. One of them wrote home to England that :

... when we first came here, the Indians, in a friendly manner, brought us lobsters and other fish in plenty, being satisfied for them by a bit of bread and some meat (quoted In Murdoch, 1865, II : 185).

Cordial relations were short-lived, however, possibly because the head of the new settlement, Colonel Edward Cornwallis, seems to have been prejudiced against the Indians from the beginning. While admitting that he found the Micmac initially "peacable" (In Akins, 1868 : 561), he still ordered his troops to clear a space thirty feet wide around the settlement, erect a fence, and build a fort nearby, adding that "if the Indians do begin [hostilities], we ought never to make peace with them again,... [but] root them out entirely" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 209, Sept. 11, 1749)<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps because such actions and statements were not lost on the Micmac and perhaps because of French incitement, several incidents occurred which seemed to Cornwallis to justify punitive action toward the Indians. During the summer and early fall of 1749, some Micmac harrassed an English settlement at Canso in eastern mainland Nova Scotia and captured several British ships. For the British, the last straw came at the end of September, when a party of men sent to cut wood for a government sawmill across the harbour from Halifax was attacked and five of them murdered by Indians. Cornwallis wasted no time, but the very next day, October 1st, 1749, met with his Executive Council to consider the problem

of Indian hostilities. Openly declaring war on the Indians, Cornwallis felt, "would be in some sort to own them a free people, whereas they ought to be looked on as Rebels to His Majesty's Government, or as so many Banditte Ruffians" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 209, Oct. 1, 1749). Instead, the Executive Council decided to give orders to all Englishmen in the province "to annoy, distress, and distroy [sic] the Indians everywhere" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 209, Oct., 1749). At the same time, Cornwallis established two volunteer companies in addition to the company of New England Indians which for several years had been operating out of Annapolis against the Micmac, and ordered the companies to scour the entire province in search of Micmac. He promised a reward of "ten Guineas for every Indian killed or taken Prisoner" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 209, Oct., 1749). The following June, the reward was increased to £ 50 for each Indian prisoner or scalp brought in. Despite the size of the reward, only a single bounty was ever collected, perhaps, as one newspaper put it, because of "the care of the Indians in carrying off their dead" (London Magazine, 1751 : 341, quoted in Murdoch, 1865, II : 201). The genocide campaign did have its effects on the Micmac people, undoubtedly in numbers killed, but also in causing the population to shift its campsites and movements away from English settlements for, again as one settler described it, "our soldiers take great pains to drive [the Indians] away and clear the country of them" (In Murdoch, 1865, II : 185). The campaign became so uncomfortable for the Micmac that several chiefs came in to Halifax in 1752 with overtures of peace and concluded a peace treaty that year with the English. However, it was an uneasy peace as long as the French remained in Nova Scotia to incite the Indians against the English and as long as the Micmac themselves remained numerous and powerful enough to pose a threat to the English presence. Four additional treaties were negotiated over the next quarter century between the Micmac and the English as both sides violated treaties.

Despite these treaties, the English genocide campaign against the Micmac was pursued relentlessly. In 1756, the English renewed their bounty offer (Dickason, 1976 : 103), and volunteer companies as well as individual Englishmen continued to hunt and kill Micmac people wherever they found them. One account of the massacre of a Micmac encampment near Digby in 1759 sounds much like the accounts of Indian massacres we are accustomed to hearing from other parts of North America :

Intelligence had reached Annapolis in 1759 that a hostile Micmac village existed on Green Point... Major

Rogers with his celebrated Rangers at once advanced in pursuit... they espied, through a spy glass, the object of their search. Here they encamped for the night, sleeping on the ground, as was their custom. Leaving the men there, Rogers went in the morning, before daylight, to reconnoitre the village by moonlight. Arriving near the property of the late Sheriff Taylor, he surveyed the Indian settlement of wigwams with its rude inhabitants now engaged in festive entertainment, wholly unaware of the presence, almost in their midst, of a British soldier preparing for battle. After all was quiet, Rogers joined by his men, attacked the sleeping encampment, killing the chief on the spot. Thus surprised and having no effective weapons of defense the Indians fled in disorder before the disciplined pursuers, who followed them along the shore... Here most of them were slain, some being shot on the bank, while others plunged into the waters and were drowned (In Clayton, 1966 : 7).

And this, of course, was only one such exploit perpetrated by one volunteer company ; needless to say, these companies did not keep records of how many Micmac they killed in such a manner, but the fact that historical records reveal that the English employed such volunteer companies from at least 1744 to at least 1761 gives us some indication that it was a considerable number.

In addition to killing Micmac people outright, the English tried other tacks to destroy the culture and reduce the Natives. For example, large tracts of forest lands were deliberately fired, ostensibly for the purpose of clearing land for settlement, but the fires in many cases burned uncontrolled and destroyed not only the Indian settlements the land contained, but also the game animals that the Indians relied on for food, clothing, and trade items. One Frenchman in 1756 discussed this policy of deliberate destruction of the forests, stating that :

I have myself crossed above thirty leagues together, in which space the forests were so totally consumed by fire that one could hardly at night find a spot wooded enough to afford wherewithal to make an extempore cabbin [sic] (de la Varenne, In Maillard, 1758 : 83).

Additionally, in 1763 the English toyed with the idea of again distributing blankets containing small-pox germs among the Indians, but there is no evidence that such a plan was carried out at this time (Johnston, 1960, I : 68). One way in which the English did manage to dispose of several hundred Micmac after 1763 was to allow, and even encourage, the Indians to emigrate to Newfoundland. This movement began soon after the 1763 Peace of Paris which gave all of Nova Scotia to the English ; particularly those Micmac who had been closely allied with the French at Louisbourg took advantage of the situation to leave Nova Scotia. Another

“strong party” of Cape Breton Micmac also departed the Province for Newfoundland under the terms of a treaty negotiated with the English during the American War of Independence (Chappell, 1818 : 77). Doubtless small parties left in the intervening years as well.

In the face of the intensive genocide campaign and other measures employed by the English against the Micmac, it is a testimony to the number, cunning, and strength of the Micmac people that they remained an independent people feared and fought by the English for thirty years after the founding of Halifax. The treaties negotiated while the Micmac still posed a threat to the English ended in 1778 ; the treaty period came to a close because the Micmac were debased and reduced to the point that they no longer posed any significant threat to the English, although it is worth noting that the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Nova Scotia in 1779 cautioned that there were still sufficient numbers of Micmac “that a war vigorously carried on by the Indians against us, would throw the whole Colony into the utmost confusion and distress” (PANS, RG 1, vol. 368, doc. 49). Nonetheless, the outright genocide campaign against the Indians seems to have ceased about 1780 ; it was replaced by indifferent and vacillating government policies at best, with the result that essentially a policy of indirect genocide continued and great numbers of Indians suffered as they died slow and painful deaths.

After 1780, pressure on Micmac lands intensified as increasing numbers of settlers poured into Nova Scotia, clearing and fencing land. Many of these were United Empire Loyalists, who chose to resettle in Canada rather than remain in the rebellious American colonies, and invariably they chose to settle in the most desirable locations, often in favourite traditional hunting or fishing spots of the Indians. Moreover, the settlers put increasing pressure on available game as they hunted moose as a replacement for the beef cattle which were not plentiful in Nova Scotia at the time (Benson and Dodds, 1980 : 8). As hunting and gathering opportunities declined and disappeared for the Indians and as the fur trade dropped off after 1780, the Micmac people found themselves without food or goods to trade for food. The result, of course, was starvation. And great numbers of Micmac succumbed to starvation at least until the mid-nineteenth century, as numerous petitions from concerned settlers to the provincial government on behalf of destitute Indians from all around the province testify.

Reports of Indians suffering from hunger date

from as early as 1775, when some settlers in western Nova Scotia appealed to the government on behalf of “several poor Indians, who from bad Success in hunting were in great Distress” (JHA, 1776 : 36). A few years later, a bill to “prevent the Destruction of Moose, Beaver, and Muskrat in the Indian hunting Ground” was introduced into the legislature, but was defeated (JHA, 1782 : 178ff). Meanwhile, non-native poachers in Cape Breton reportedly killed nearly 9,000 moose and caribou in the winter of 1789 alone (Brown, 1869 : 402). After 1790, when a series of unusually mild winters served to reduce further the number and quality of furbearing animals, accounts of outright starvation among the Indians became common. Even small game such as birds and rabbits was scarce and numbers of Micmac began to congregate around white settlements for food. Settlers around Windsor complained in the fall of 1793 of the large numbers of Indians in the area who not only begged food, but who had also become “extremely troublesome” to the point of stealing and slaughtering the settlers’ stock for food (Monk, Corres. Reel I : fr. 304). George Monk, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at the time, forwarded to the government numerous petitions from settlers on behalf of starving Indians. In response to Monk’s urgings, the legislature authorized minimal rations of potatoes, meal, and small amounts of fish or meat issued to the Indians, but it was not enough. A few Indians even stated that they preferred to pilfer food rather than accept such a trifling ration which would not allow them to subsist (Monk, LB, Reel II : fr. 1047). The situation became so desperate that, as one settler put it in his petition of January, 1794 :

A great many Mickmacks have died for want of victuals... notwithstanding the little they get from the superintendent... if they have not some more general relief they and their wives and children must in a few years all perish with cold and hunger in their own country (Monk, LB, Reel II : fr. 1054).

The lack of game animals and trade items also meant that the Micmac had no way of making or otherwise obtaining clothing. This meant that in the middle of a cold Nova Scotia winter, they were at the double disadvantage of having neither food nor clothing, and this took its toll as well. Reports of Indians naked or “miserably clad” in “filthy rags” (Monk, LB, Reel II : fr. 1046), and whole families owning only one blanket among them “as they lay to sleep by turns” (Monk, LB, Reel II : fr. 1067) in the middle of winter abounded. As in the case of food, the legislature authorized distribution of small amounts of cloth, a few yards at a time, but this, too,

was certainly inadequate to the needs of the Indians. The situation was so desperate that one settler reported that :

I have seen them in so much distress that those of large families were obliged while a part of them put on all the cloathing [sic] they have to beg around the settlement the rest sat naked in the wigwams (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 119).

Finally at the Indian Superintendent's urging, in 1800 the government established a committee to study the situation of the Indians and to make recommendations for dealing with it. The sole outcome of this committee was the establishment of a small sum set aside annually for relief of the Indians. At first £ 150 and then gradually increased until it reached £ 300 in the years just preceding Confederation, the sum was never sufficient to cover the food, clothing, and medical attention that the Micmac people needed. The very first year that goods were distributed, the government agent in Antigonish reported that while the Indians in his jurisdiction were certainly in a "miserable condition", some of them "entirely naked", (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 60), the goods allotted were insufficient to answer the needs of the overwhelming number of Indians who turned up for the distribution. Essentially, his statement spoke for all the Indians in Nova Scotia since the suffering and deprivation went on at least until 1867, when the Federal Government assumed responsibility for the Indians. Settlers continued to send petitions on behalf of Natives in their neighbourhoods from all around the province ; excerpts from these depict a grim scene indeed for the Micmac people. For example, in 1812, a petition on behalf of the Natives around Halifax stated that :

... game has become so scarce that they cannot live in the woods... several of them are widows or old and infirm persons, who live chiefly by begging, but have so worn out they stay in their wigwams (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. town, as they have nothing to eat upon a stormy day if they stay in their wigwams (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 149-1/2).

By 1827, reports of the Micmac situation drew comment from the Lieutenant Governor who said in a message to the legislature that "the distresses of these poor people are much greater than is commonly supposed, and there is reason to believe that [unless something is done], they must soon altogether perish" (JHA, 1827 : 74). Nothing was done, and petitions continued to come in. An 1831 petition from Rawdon stated that the Indians there were desperate, there being no animals to hunt for food, and only about ten ragged blankets altogether

among an encampment of fifty people (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 176). An 1834 petition stated that the Micmac camped near Windsor were :

Unable to maintain themselves through hunting... many of them are at this instant almost naked and are compelled to sit down in their open and exposed camps without anything to cover or shelter them from the severity of the season (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 9).

It added that if relief did not appear soon, "they must inevitably perish" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 421, doc. 9). The Micmac living in Cape Breton weren't any better off at the time ; they were receiving rations of meal and flour in an attempt to stave off starvation (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 11).

And petitions continued to pour in in ever increasing numbers. To cite just a few more, in 1837 came a petition from Pictou pleading for food and blankets for the Indians in that vicinity (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 32). Indian Superintendent Joseph Howe's 1843 report contains accounts of disbursing "miscellaneous charities" to Natives all around the province, while Howe pointed out that if the situation continued, "the whole race [of Micmac] would be extinct in 40 years" (JHA, 1843 : 9,4). The situation not only continued, but worsened if that is possible, as in 1846 the Natives at Digby were reported dying "for want of food and sustenance" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 1). In 1851, it was the Micmac in Cape Breton again, this time alleged to be in a state of "famine" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 61). In 1855, the Micmac at New Glasgow "were ready to drop from hunger" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, Feb. 18, 1855), while in 1856 in nearby Pictou, the Indians were "actually starving [and]... crying for food" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, Mar. 10, 1856). There can be no doubting an Indian Superintendent's 1861 assessment of all the Indians in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton as "destitute and miserable" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 124).

But of course Micmac people were dying from causes other than simple starvation and exposure during this time. The malnutrition and cold they suffered, the excessive consumption of alcohol by some Micmac, all contributed to lower the Indians' resistance to diseases, and in the historical records and reports after 1800, we see evidence of much disease among them. Many diseases they contracted from Europeans. For example, during 1800 and 1801, there seems to have been a widespread epidemic of smallpox, possibly contracted from some recently-arrived Scottish immigrants who landed at Pictou (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 88). Reports of the epidemic during this time came in from all around the province, including not only nearby Antigonish, but from far-away places such as

Shelburne, St. Margaret's Bay, and Tatamagouche. Indian families fled from their usual haunts and from settled areas to the woods, hoping to avoid the smallpox, but this movement had two bad consequences : it spread the disease to other Indians, and it prevented Indians from collecting their relief supplies which were issued in the settlements. Both these factors contributed to additional suffering at the time. Smallpox was only the first well-documented European disease to affect the Nova Scotia Micmac during the nineteenth century, and it recurred several times at least. In 1826, a ship carrying smallpox came in to a Cape Breton port ; the smallpox was communicated to people in the area, where, according to one local White resident, it "prevailed for some time, and to a considerable extent, particularly among the Indians, numbers of whom died under the infection" (PANS, RG 5, series B, vol. 41, Feb. 10, 1827). Records of smallpox outbreaks are also known from 1838, 1849, 1860, and 1861. As the disease recurred around the province, Indians came to know and to fear greatly this disease, in at least one instance refusing blankets which they feared had been in contact with smallpox patients. Since the early years of the century, the government had provided inoculations for immunity against the disease and encouraged the Indians to take them, but the Indians' dislike and avoidance of vaccinations doubtless contributed to the smallpox mortality.

Whooping cough, measles, typhus, typhoid fever, and numerous outbreaks of unspecified ailments labeled simply as "sickness" all are recorded as causes of death among the Micmac during the first half of the nineteenth century. It appears that outbreaks of diseases occurred locally and when White settlers in the vicinity were made aware of such an outbreak, they notified the Indian Superintendent who in turn called a doctor to attend the ailing Natives. An example of this procedure is provided by an epidemic of infectious hepatitis which swept through Micmac camps around mainland Nova Scotia in 1846 and 1847<sup>6</sup>. Transmitted by frightened Indians fleeing infected camps, the disease brought considerable suffering and painful deaths to "a number" of Indians before medical doctors were summoned. Because of the "threatened... annihilation" from the disease of Micmac people living around Dartmouth, the government built a temporary hospital in order to isolate victims and bring the epidemic under control (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, Feb. 22, 1847). But the conditions in which infectious hepatitis flourishes — poor hygiene, inadequate diet, substandard living conditions — testify once again to the mid-nineteenth century living conditions of the majority of Micmac people

and thus, their vulnerability to all manner of disease. Under such conditions, there was no chance of any significant population rebound.

Infectious diseases as those just cited, run their course, for better or worse, in a victim in a relatively short period of time ; such diseases dominate the medical records for the Micmac people during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. Tuberculosis, on the other hand, a lingering, wasting disease similarly associated with poor living conditions and exposure to dampness and cold, was not reported until 1841, when a Bear River settler wrote the Lieutenant Governor that "many have died off with consumption" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 20). After this year, reports of deaths from consumption, particularly among the elderly Natives, came in fairly regularly : in 1847, an Indian Superintendent cited consumption as "frequently induced by intoxication, and exposure to severe cold" (JHA, 1848 : 117). Subsequently, in 1853, another Indian Superintendent agreed, saying that "consumption I regret to state has of late become very prevalent among these poor people... this I think may be attributed to the privations they have endured" (JHA, 1848, Jan. 12, 1853). And scattered among doctors' bills and reports in the archival records are also mentions of consumption in various stages. In addition to consumption, rheumatism and bronchitis, other consequences of exposure to cold and dampness, were regularly treated.

Venereal diseases, scourge of so many North American Native groups, were also found among the Nova Scotia Micmac, although not, the records suggest, to the degree that they prevailed among some other groups or it would have been so recorded by medical doctors who attended the Natives. The earliest possible reference to venereal disease could be Dickason's statement that "outbreaks" occurred among the Cape Breton Micmac, particularly after the arrival of ground troops at Louisbourg in the mid-1750's (Dickason, 1976 : 44). Nineteenth century records contain only isolated references to, *e.g.*, a woman with "clap or pox" in 1853, another woman with "uteritis" in 1857, while a Micmac man was reported with inflamed testicles in 1856 (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, various). One Indian Superintendent, however, claimed that venereal diseases were "by no means rare" and were contracted among the Natives by "the visits of the dissolute to the towns" (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 117). Venereal diseases also took their toll indirectly on infants while still "at the breast", and in addition, may have been partly responsible for the infant mortality which was reported to be "very great" in 1847 (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 117).



**TABLE I**

**Population Estimates for Nova Scotia Micmac, 1616-1921**

Date	Estimate	Source
1616	1,610	Calculated from the Jesuit priest Biard's 1616 statement of "in all, 3,000, or 3,500 Micmac" (Thwaites, 1896, III: 111). From my own calculations of a total of 121,148 km. <sup>2</sup> in aboriginal Micmac territory, of which 55,491 km. <sup>2</sup> are in Nova Scotia, I have assumed the Micmac population to be more or less evenly distributed throughout their territory, putting 46 % of 3,500, or 1,610, in Nova Scotia.
1687	1,231	Gargas, In Morse, 1935, I: 149.
1740	2,208	Calculated from Maillard's citation of a French ministry source that "Before the last war [the Micmac] could raise about six hundred fighting men" (Maillard, 1758 : ii). Based on an average of four children per family (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115), one wife for each fighting man and, conservatively, two persons in the grandparental generation surviving for each family, this yields a total of 4,800 Micmac in 1740, of whom 46 %, or 2,208 would be in Nova Scotia using the same assumptions as in the 1616 estimate above.
1745	15,000	Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115.
1750	5,520	Calculated from a late eighteenth century account that in 1750 "the Micmac tribes... were able to Arm 1500 Effective Men" (Brown, Reel I : fr. 259-63, doc. 58) and applying the same average family size and logic used in the 1740 estimate above.
1760	1,380	Calculated from Frye (1809 : 115) statement of "near three thousand souls" altogether, using the same assumptions as in the 1616 estimate above.
1761	10,000	Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115.
1779	1,380	Calculated from Franklin's statement of "near three thousand persons, who are scattered throughout the whole Province" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 368, doc. 49). Because Nova Scotia at the time included what is now New Brunswick, it is likely that this population estimate should be treated the same as Biard's 1616 estimate above.
1808	2,812	Calculated from Monk's estimate that the Nova Scotia Micmac could raise "from 350 – 400 fighting men" (PANS, RG 1, vol. 430, doc. 145), using the 375 midpoint of Monk's estimate and an average of each fighting man having one wife and 3.5 children, plus two surviving grandparents for each family.
1838	1,425	Howe, In JHA, 1843 : 3.
1843	1,300	Howe, In JHA, 1843 : 4.
1847	1,461	Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115.
1852	1,556	Calculated from Fairbanks' census of 1,056 Micmac in mainland Nova Scotia in 1852 (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 98-1/2), combined with an estimated 500 Micmac in Cape Breton Island ; this latter estimate is taken from an Indian Superintendent's estimate of "about 500" Micmac in Cape Breton in 1849 (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, Feb. 1, 1849) and seems justified since in 1860 a census revealed 576 Micmac in Cape Breton (Perley, In JHA, 1860 : 323).
1861	1,573	Chearnley, In PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, doc. 124.
1866	1,633	Calculated from Fairbanks' high estimate of 1,835 Micmac in Nova Scotia if there were five in a family, or 1,468 Micmac in Nova Scotia if there were four in a family (In JHA, 1867 : 4). The figure used here represents the midpoint of Fairbanks' two estimates.
1871	1,666	Census of Canada, 1871, I : 333.
1881	2,125	Census of Canada, 1881, I : 221.
1891	2,076	Census of Canada, 1891, cited In Wallis Fieldnotes.
1901	1,542	Census of Canada, 1901, I : 297.
1911	1,915	Census of Canada, 1911, II : 187.
1921	2,048	Census of Canada, 1921, I : 385.

We have seen then, that a great number and variety of diseases were prevalent among the Nova Scotia Micmac people, particularly after 1800 when, because of their impoverished condition, they were forced to come into sustained contact with white settlements to beg for food and as their land base shrank in the face of ever increasing expansion by Whites. Indeed, so many of the Micmac people during this half of the nineteenth century required medical attention that several times the province's annual appropriation for the Indians was threatened with being consumed entirely by doctors' bills (PANS, RG 1, vol. 431, Mar. 4, 1852). The Micmac continued to suffer from diseases and from the threat of starvation after 1850, but as we shall see, their population decline hit its nadir about 1840 and subsequently began to increase. The decline, which had begun with initial contact with Europeans sometime before 1500, was a continual one down to 1840, and it was especially intense (or possibly best documented) after 1745. Judging from the historical records, the principal cause of this decline was disease; as one Indian Superintendent put it, "numbers are swept off annually by complaints unknown to them in their original state" (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 117). The second most important cause was outright genocide perpetrated by the British, and the third major cause was starvation, once again brought on by the British presence.

Let us turn now to Table I, which is a tabulation of estimates made of Nova Scotia Micmac population between 1616 and 1921, and see how the preceding accounts of disease, genocide, and starvation accord with the population estimates. It seems logical that the more recent, nineteenth century, population figures are the most trustworthy; by this time, the government was reasonably familiar with and organized with regard to the Natives. Commissioners for Indian Affairs were appointed regularly after 1830, and the individuals who were appointed seem to have been conscientious about their charges. Population figures provided by these Commissioners reveal a good deal of consistency, despite the fact that the Commissioners were all working independently of each other and at different times. The 1838 and 1843 figures were recorded by Joseph Howe, Indian Commissioner during the 1830's and early 1840's, and a man widely travelled among and knowledgeable about the Indians of the province through his planning of the reserve system in Nova Scotia. Howe had to count the Natives as accurately as possible and know where they were situated in order to suggest appropriate land areas for reserves. In at least one of his annual reports as Indian Commissioner, Howe

discussed the shrinking Micmac population and documented this for the period from 1798 onward, pointing out that if such a rate of decline continued, the tribe would be extinct in another forty years (JHA, 1843 : 4).

The 1847 figure was the result of a census taken by another individual at least equally knowledgeable and sympathetic toward the Natives, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Abraham Gesner. Gesner travelled among the Micmac, spoke at least some of their language, and was on familiar terms with a number of Natives, who felt free to come directly to his home with their problems. Gesner made it a special point to talk with older Indians. In a historical survey of Micmac population presented with his 1847 population figure, Gesner made it clear that "unless the vices and diseases of civilization are speedily arrested, the Indians... will soon be... forever blotted out from the face of the earth" (JHA, 1848 : 116)<sup>8</sup>.

The 1852 figure is the work of a third Indian Commissioner, Samuel Fairbanks, who took a census that year of 1,056 Indians in mainland Nova Scotia. Added to that are the circa 500 Micmac living in Cape Breton at the time, as indicated in the Table.

Similarly, the 1861 figure resulted from a census taken by Indian Commissioner William Chearnley after travelling through the mainland visiting "many districts" and including a possibly slightly conservative estimate of 400 Indians in Cape Breton.

The 1866 figure also came from the incumbent Commissioner of Indian Affairs Samuel Fairbanks, who, after acknowledging the difficulties involved in making censuses of mobile Natives "arrived at the conclusion that their numbers exceed fifteen hundred" (JHA, 1867 : 2). In office only a year before he made this assertion, Fairbanks in reality had a good comprehension of the Micmac and their situation, having been Indian Commissioner during the 1850's and a Commissioner for Lands in the interim. Fairbanks estimated by counties in Nova Scotia the number of Micmac families, for a total in the province of 367 families, then offered the choice of a total population of 1,835 if there were an average of five to a family or a total population of 1,468 if there were an average of four. We have chosen here an average of 4.5 to arrive at the figure of 1,633 cited in Table I.

Following Canadian Confederation in 1867, the Federal Government took over responsibility for the Native peoples and for making censuses, and so the remaining Nova Scotia Micmac population figures given, for the years 1871 through 1921, are taken from federal censuses. Although reporting

procedures may have varied with the census and affected the results (note especially the 1901 and 1911 figures), it should be apparent that the Micmac population hit its nadir about 1840 and was definitely on the increase after 1850. After 1921, this increase was steady and the population never again dropped below 2,000.

The remaining nineteenth century figure to be considered is the population figure for 1808. We have calculated this estimate from an estimate of "from 350 – 400 fighting men" which could be raised from the Nova Scotia Micmac in the event of war; this estimate was provided by Judge George Monk, already familiar to us from his accounts of starvation among the Nova Scotia Micmac after 1790, who had been in close contact with the Micmac in his capacity as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Nova Scotia from 1783 to 1799 and again from 1807 to 1809. Say there were 375 "fighting men", with an average of 3.5 children in each of their families (this figure is midway between a 1761 estimate of four children in a family (JHA, 1848 : 115) and an 1847 estimate of three children in a family (JHA, 1848 : 111), each fighting man also having one wife and each man and wife having only one parent surviving, this would make a total of 2,812 Natives in Nova Scotia. This figure is probably conservative since "fighting men" obviously does not include all the men, but as a minimal figure, it is borne out by the 1847 statement of an old Micmac to Indian Commissioner Gesner, "that their tribe has decreased one half within the last 40 years" (JHA, 1848 : 115), and twice the population in 1847 would have been 2,922, or only 110 more than our estimate. We are reasonably safe, then, in saying that the Nova Scotia Micmac population in 1800, eight years previous, was about 2,800 at a minimum.

The implications of this should be readily apparent when one looks at the pre-nineteenth century figures in Table I. Accepting the nineteenth century population figures for the Nova Scotia Micmac and then considering the accounts of epidemics, diseases, genocide, and starvation, it is readily apparent that something must be wrong with most of the population figures predating the nineteenth century. Taking the three earliest ones of 1616, 1687, and 1740, we see that all of these are below 2,800, the figure accepted for 1800. We can safely discount all three estimates as too low because admittedly they were made well after the aboriginal Micmac population had begun its decline, but *before* the great epidemic of 1746, the British genocide campaign of 1710 – 1780, and the subsequent starvation and associated diseases, all of which are well documented as causing the deaths of

great numbers of Micmac. Additionally, these early estimates of population are just that: the 1616 estimate was given by a Jesuit priest Briard after spending two years in Nova Scotia, and almost all that time in the vicinity of Port Royal; Biard never travelled through southwestern Nova Scotia or on Cape Breton Island, for example. The 1687 estimate was given by Nicholas Gargas, principal clerk of Acadia, who was ordered to take a census of all Acadia on his arrival there in 1687. Gargas did some travelling around mainland Nova Scotia, but never visited Cape Breton and instead seems to have concerned himself most with enumerating the Acadian population in the principal settlements. He does not tell us how his information on Natives was gathered and indeed, seems to have had "great difficulty" in collecting information generally since the governor of Acadia at the time opposed the taking of a census (Morse, 1935, I: 139ff). The absurdity of Gargas' total of 1,231 Indians for all Nova Scotia is well demonstrated by his count that 491 of these, or well over a third, were concentrated along the Annapolis River in one small area of Nova Scotia, presumably leaving the remaining 740 Indians to be dispersed around the rest of the mainland and Cape Breton. The 1740 estimate of 2,208 Natives at that time in Nova Scotia was calculated from a figure cited by the priest Maillard, who lived a total of 23 years among the Micmac in Cape Breton and eastern Nova Scotia. In his 1758 account of the Micmac, Maillard cited someone else's estimate that in 1740 a total of 600 fighting men could be raised among all the Micmac in Acadia. Again, using the method of calculation employed in translating George Monk's 1808 number of fighting men into actual population and using an average of four children in a family, the resulting total Micmac population would be about 4,800, and assuming a uniform distribution of the population around Acadia, about 2,208 of these would reside in Nova Scotia. Such a figure is impossible in the light, once again, of events after 1746. Although recognizing that the Micmac were certainly "numerous", Maillard never gave an estimate of his own on Micmac population; presumably he would have been able to make a reasonable guess although his time in Nova Scotia among the Indians was spent in the eastern end of the province, an area less densely populated than the southwestern part, where Maillard never went.

The two remaining very low population estimates for the years preceding the nineteenth century, 1760 and 1779, may also be dismissed. The 1760 estimate was a flat figure provided by a priest who had worked among the New Brunswick Micmac and

indeed, may never have spent any time in Nova Scotia<sup>9</sup>. At any rate, his figure of 1,380 Indians in Nova Scotia is simply too low to square with the nineteenth century population numbers for the Micmac.

Indian Superintendent Michael Franklin's 1779 figure also must be discounted. While Franklin had been Superintendent for two years before citing this figure, in fact he does not seem to have travelled much among the Indians, but had spent most of his time negotiating a 1778 treaty. It is possible that he was just reiterating the population figure first given by the priest Biard in 1616 and indeed, which may also be the ultimate source of the 1760 estimate. At any rate, such a population figure would mean that there was only one Indian for each 40 km.<sup>2</sup> in Nova Scotia in 1779, a hardly noticeable concentration and one which would certainly contradict an observation made fourteen years later that "there are numbers of Indians, in every river on the peninsula of Nova Scotia" and adding "how uninformed most people even in [Nova Scotia] are in regard to the number and situation of the Indians" (Kidder, 1867 : 307-09).

One reasonably well informed person was French immigrant Moses des Le Dernier, who arrived in Nova Scotia in 1750 and, upon inquiring about the Indians, was told by a Lunenburg preacher and "very intelligible man" that the Micmac could arm "1500 Effective Men" (Brown, Reel I : fr. 259-63, doc. 58). A 1750 population of 5,520 calculated from this statement is more realistic than any of the other eighteenth century figures we have considered ; this estimate dates from after the disastrous 1746 epidemic, but from only the halfway point in the English genocide campaign, and before the diseases of the nineteenth century had begun to take their toll. If we were to accept this 5,520 figure, it would mean that in 1750 the population density of the Nova Scotia Micmac was one Indian for each 10 km.<sup>2</sup>, and more specifically, one "Effective Man" for each 80 km.<sup>2</sup>. Such a sparse population would hardly have forced the English to form several volunteer companies for the express purpose of killing Indians or to establish a bounty on Micmac scalps.

Thus, we are left with Gesner's population citations from "old French historical accounts" (JHA, 1848 : 113), citations which might appear extreme at first glance, but in the light of documentary evidence considered here, certainly seem plausible. From Gesner's 1745 figure of 15,000 Micmac in Nova Scotia, the drop to the 1,300 remaining in 1843 means that the average annual

population drop among the Micmac was 140, or 11.7 Indians on the average died every month and were not replaced. This is certainly not a large figure ; in fact, if anything it seems low in light of the 1746 epidemic, which reportedly killed 4,000 Indians, and also in light of the incidences of European diseases documented after 1800, as well as the accounts of "hundreds" of Indians dying of starvation after 1790. Similarly, Gesner's citation from "old French historical accounts" of 10,000 Micmac in Nova Scotia in the year 1761 makes sense ; easily 5,000 Indians could have perished between 1745 and 1761 from typhus and the genocide campaign at least<sup>10</sup>.

But more important and more interesting to us are the implications of these figures. The population drop between 1745 and 1843 represents an 11.5:1 depopulation ratio for the Nova Scotia Micmac during that 98-year period, and that period began at least 200 years after contact with Europeans. We know from other sources cited at the beginning of this paper that the Micmac population had diminished considerably before 1600, when the earliest population estimates were recorded. Hence, the overall depopulation ratio for the Nova Scotia Micmac must exceed 11.5:1 ; by how much, we don't know, but it is of interest here as a rough estimation of possible aboriginal Nova Scotia Micmac population to use Dobyns' depopulation ratio for North America of 20:1 on the average (Dobyns, 1966 : 414), or what this is saying is that for every 20 Natives alive at the time of first contact with Europeans, one remained at the time of population nadir. Using a nadir figure of 1,300 in 1843 and multiplying by 20, we arrive at an aboriginal population of 26,000 in Nova Scotia. Such a figure accords with early seventeenth century statements made by older Micmac to Jesuit priests, to the effect that in their youth, the "savages" had been "as thickly planted there as the hairs on [my] head" (Thwaites, 1896, I : 177), and such a figure is also consistent with the demographer Sherburne Cook's observation that in aboriginal North America, population drops of 90 % to 95 % were "the rule rather than the exception" (Cook, 1976 : xvi). And it would certainly be feasible that almost half of the population could have disappeared in the 200 years preceding 1745 and about that many again by 1850, as contact with Europeans intensified and the Micmacs' land and resource base shrank. Furthermore, a population of 26,000 Micmac in aboriginal Nova Scotia would have meant a population density of one individual per 2.1 km.<sup>2</sup>. This seems entirely possible, given the rich marine resource base of aboriginal Nova Scotia and the intensive exploita-

tion of all available resources by the Micmac people, as discussed by Dodds (1982)<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, this population density of pre-contact Nova Scotia is entirely consistent with the complex ranked social structure and political organization found among the Micmac: slaves, commoners, and three different levels of chiefs made up pre-contact Micmac society (Miller, 1981). This population density might also explain why hunting territories reportedly were assigned by chiefs to heads of family units in pre-contact times; pressure on hunting land existed and this assignment of family hunting territories served to distribute the population around the land area<sup>12</sup>. And finally, a dense population would provide the numbers of warriors needed to defend the Micmacs' sizable aboriginal territory against other warring groups in the Northeast<sup>13</sup>.

One could go on to speculate about the implications of the Nova Scotia population density if extrapolated throughout all Micmac territory in aboriginal times. Such speculation is risky until all the ethnohistorical data from these areas are examined, but tantalizing in view of Nicholas Denys' seventeenth century description of the lush food resources and especially dense Micmac population in the Miramichi River drainage of New Brunswick (Denys, 1908 : 199), or also in view of the eighteenth century account of 4,000 Indians on Prince Edward Island (Gesner, In JHA, 1848 : 115). Even if only the Nova Scotia population density held throughout Micmac territory, with an aboriginal territory size of 121,148 km.<sup>2</sup>, the implications are that total aboriginal Micmac population might have been in the neighbourhood of 50,000 Indians.

## NOTES

1. This paper originally was presented at the Eleventh Algonquian Conference in Ottawa, October, 1979. I would like to thank Ronald Nash of the Dept. of Sociology & Anthropology, St. Francis Xavier University; Marian Binkley of the Dept. of Sociology & Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University; and Lawrence Willett of the Institute for Resource and Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Ms. Penny Hoover of the Dept. of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University, for calling to my attention pertinent material in the Journals of the House of Assembly and in the Monk Papers, during the initial stages of my research.

2. Patterson (1972 : 61) reports a "1694 epidemic in Acadia," but neglects to cite his source for this. A check of LeClercq (1910), Diereville (1933), Maillard (1758), and Charlevoix (1902) does not reveal such an epidemic.

3. According to Crosby (1972 : 45ff), the lack of at least a smallpox epidemic during the first decades of contact is not surprising. Crosby points out that smallpox runs its course in a victim, for better or worse, in at most a month. Most ocean voyages took more than a month, so any infected Europeans would be dead or recovered and immune to the disease before a ship arrived in the New World.

4. Thomas Raddall in an unpublished paper titled "Groundwork and Guesswork" (1974) has identified this fever as typhus.

5. PANS documents are cited here by document number; where no document number was visible, the document date is cited.

6. I am indebted to Dr. C. Noel Williams of the Clinical Research Centre, Dalhousie University School of Medicine, for identifying this epidemic as infectious hepatitis, from the description of the symptoms and course of the disease recorded by an attending physician in 1847.

7. Beginning with the sixteenth century, "pox" was a common English term for syphilis (Crosby, 1972 : 122); gonorrhoea and syphilis were frequently confused in their early stages of development in past centuries (Crosby, 1972 : 152).

8. For this paper, we have used only total population figures which Gesner cited from the old French accounts; we have not used figures calculated by Gesner himself, some of which contain minor errors.

9. Fr. Manach, the priest, had charge of three French settlements in New Brunswick (Frye, 1809 : 115). Johnston's *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia* (1960) contains no mention of this priest, thereby implying that he never had an assignment in at least the eastern part of the province.

10. Unfortunately, a search of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia has not yet yielded the "old French historical sources" that Gesner relied on. It may be that these records are no longer in existence or are in France.

11. In this context, it is significant to note that unlike a number of inland hunting and gathering groups, the Micmac did not practice infanticide; on the contrary, polygyny was not uncommon and additional children were always welcomed into the family, another testimonial to the available food supply.

12. Bock (1978 : 111) appears to regard these family hunting territories as a post-contact development. Other sources, however (Hoffman, 1955 : 511ff), agree with the Micmac people today that, unlike sub-arctic groups, the Micmac people had assigned hunting territories in pre-contact times.

13. I am indebted to Lawrence Willett of the Institute for Resource and Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University, for this observation.

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