

## The People of the Dawn and their Adoption into the Assance Band

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It was at the beginning of summer in the year 1859 that the Assance Band Council had decided to accept and adopt into their band two Wabanaki Families from St. Francis in Lower Canada. Today St. Francis is known as Odanak First Nation in Quebec, south of the St. Lawrence River and Lac Saint-Pierre.

These two families of Wabanaki were led by Rev. Paul P. Osunkeshine. They had left their territory due to their belief in a Protestant Denomination of Christianity. In a letter dated June 23, 1859 from Chief John Assance Jr. and Chief James Assance to William Bartlett, Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs, the Chiefs state that their council had unanimously agreed to adopt the two Wabanaki families, 11 people in total into their band, and they said that they think the Reverend is a good man and minister of the gospel. The Chiefs had requested Bartlett to sanction this adoption of membership. Also in their meeting on June 22 the council had agreed to send the Potawatomi away from Christian Island *"on account of their drunkenness and their paganism."*<sup>1</sup>



At this period in time the Assance Band were slowly transitioning from Beausoleil Island to Christian Island, while the Potawatomi and Odawa had been living on Christian Island for some time.

In William Bartlett's forwarded correspondence to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Richard T. Pennefather, Bartlett states that he had refused similar applications in the past while making his visits throughout his superintendence. In the previous month of May, Judge Wilkes of Owen Sound stated to Bartlett that Osunkeshine had tried to get acceptance into the Colpoy's Bay Band, and that if he was accepted, he wanted to bring 200 more people from Lower Canada to that place. Bartlett had refused this request and hadn't heard anything more about Osunkeshine until the letter from Chief's John and James Assance.



*“The Pottawatimies, together with some Ottawa have for many years resided on the Christian Island, upon which the Beausoleil people are now removing from their former place of residence, and I dare say they want their clearings all ready under cultivation, and with this view would like to drive the Pottawatimies off.”<sup>2</sup>*

In Bartlett’s return letter to the Assance Band on July 2, he states in regard to the Wabanaki *“that foreign Indians are not allowed to enter any of these bands, either to participate in your annuity or hold any of your reserves.”<sup>3</sup>* Bartlett also reminded the Assance Band that the Potawatomi and Odawa were given permission by them to reside on Christian Island as they have *“cultivated the land for many years. The Department will not take any part in interfering with them.”<sup>4</sup>*

Chief John Assance had replied back to Bartlett on August 8, saying that at their General Council Meeting on June 22 that they had decided to adopt the two Wabanaki families and they are going to make their new home with them and will be able to cultivate the land for their well-being. Chief John Assance had no intention of listening to Bartlett and had continued with the council decision to adopt the two Wabanaki families.

*“...he (P.P. Osunkeshine) will in time be able to support his family + continue with us as long as he may choose to stay. Humanity and Christian feeling constrain us to show him kindness as much as we should desire to be done to us by others, if any of our bands should be driven from place to place for want of home.”<sup>5</sup>*

Four months later on December 6, 1859 William Bartlett writes Richard T. Pennefather to inform him that the Wabanaki Reverend Paul P. Osunkeshine had stopped at his office in Toronto while he was on his way to Lower Canada, Vermont and New Hampshire for business. Osunkeshine had asked Bartlett if he *“would allow him to occupy and hold the land the Beausoleil Indians had allotted to him”<sup>6</sup>* on Christian Island. Bartlett had refused his request as the Department had plans to *“concentrate the L.H. + Simcoe Indians there.”<sup>7</sup>* Osunkeshine had informed Bartlett that he had planned on creating a farm one-mile long as he had just drained the lake on Christian Island for that purpose. Bartlett also stated that he carries a certificate and a newspaper from Owen Sound that gives him *“praise of his doings on the Island.”<sup>8</sup>*

After Bartlett’s encounter with Osunkeshine in Toronto there is nothing more to be found in the Public Archives, BFN Censuses and Pay Lists regarding the two Wabanaki families at Christian Island. I’m sure more information can be found regarding Osunkeshine and these two families by exploring the archives of Lower Canada and the St. Francis Reserve a little further.



When I had shown these files to the BFN Seniors during one of my meetings with them in the past, they were all in agreement that they had never heard about this story of the two Wabanaki families adoption into the Assance Band, but they did have similar stories about BFN members who had tried to drain Zaayagaans/Douglas Lake on Christian Island.

### **Image of Abenaki Couple**

Dean Snow, Abenaki, The Canadian Encyclopedia, January 18, 2012, Image – Abenaki Couple, courtesy of the City of Montreal Records Management & Archives, Montreal, Canada, An 18<sup>th</sup> century watercolour by an unknown artist.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/abenaki>

### **References**

1. Beausoleil Chiefs John and James Assance Letter from Christian Island to Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Bartlett, Indian Affairs, RG 10, Vol. 249, no. 12001-12100, Public Archives of Canada, June 23, 1859
2. Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Bartlett, “Beausoleil Indians want to adopt 2 families from Lower Canada and to drive away the Potawatomes from the Christian Island” correspondence to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Richard Theodore Pennefather, Indian Affairs, RG 10, Vol. 249, no. 12001-12100, Public Archives of Canada, June 30, 1859
3. Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Bartlett’s reply letter to the Chiefs + Warriors of Beausoleil Island regarding their adoption of two Wabanaki Families, Indian Affairs, RG 10, Vol. 251, no. 12301-12400, Public Archives of Canada, July 2, 1859
4. IBID.
5. Chief John Assance letter to Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Bartlett regarding the adoption of the two Wabanaki Families into his band. Indian Affairs, RG 10, Vol. 251, no. 12301-12400, Public Archives of Canada, August 8, 1859



6. Visiting Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Bartlett, “Rev. P.P. Osunkeshine + Beausoleil Indians” correspondence to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Richard Theodore Pennefather, Indian Affairs, RG 10, Vol. 251, no. 12301-12400, Public Archives of Canada, December 6, 1859
7. IBID.
8. IBID.

