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# Mascouten

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The Mascouten (məs'kōōtən, 'mäskə,ten) were a semi-sedentary Algonquian tribe that lived in the earlier historical period mainly in southern Michigan and Wisconsin and in northern Indiana and Illinois (fig. 1). After considerable moving about and a sharp decline in population (table 1) they lost their separate identity by amalgamating with the Kickapoo after 1800. Their obscurity and relatively early disappearance have engendered a number of attempts to identify them with some other group or groups, but none of these theories is borne out by the abundant if fragmentary historical record.

The Mascouten language, although virtually unknown, was most likely a dialect of Sauk-Fox-Kickapoo.

## History

In the first half of the seventeenth century the Mascouten were in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, probably in the southwestern quadrant. A map obtained from the Huron in the 1630s apparently located them (under the name Attistaehronon) to the west of the Sauk (Huat-toehronon), Fox (Skenchiohronon), and Kickapoo (Ontarahronon), the last three groups being in the area between Saginaw Bay and Lake Erie (JR 18:234; Sanson d'Abbeville 1656; Potier 1920:155; Goddard 1972). Some less precise sources for the early period appear to use the name of this group as a cover term for the various Algonquian tribes of the Lower Peninsula that were enemies of the Ottawa, Algonquin, Petun, and Neutral, then east of Lake Huron (Champlain 1922-1936, 3:96-99; JR 21:194, 27:25-27, 33:150); however, this usage disappeared as soon as the Mascouten became known to the French at first hand.

As a result of Iroquoian attacks around the middle of the seventeenth century, the Lower Peninsula Algonquians fled west of Lake Michigan. At one time the Mascouten and some of their allies, under attack by both the Iroquois and the Winnebago, went as far as the Mississippi (JR 38:180, 44:114, 249; WHC 16:7). In 1666, a year after the resumption of the fur trade from the Upper Lakes, the Mascouten, Kickapoo, Miami, and some Illinois made a large village 30 leagues (about 70 miles) from Green Bay near the Fox, perhaps on the upper Fox River of Wisconsin (WHC 16:41). From 1670 or before to 1679 the Mascouten and some Miami (mostly of the Crane band) are known to have lived in a single palisaded village on this river, apparently southeast of present-

day Berlin; these tribes had been closely associated as early as 1655 in Wisconsin and no doubt before their flight west as well. At different times the Kickapoo and some smaller groups are said to have lived either nearby or in the same village (JR 44:247, 54:226-228, 55:184-200, 58:20-22, 59:98-102, 61:148; J.J. Wood 1907; A.E. Jones 1907). Winter hunting camps were probably scattered over a fairly large part of the southern Wisconsin area; one was encountered on the lower Milwaukee River in 1674 (Kellogg 1917:264).

After an unclear series of events in 1679 involving French factional struggles, a group of Miami, Mascouten, and Wea settled on the Saint Joseph River near present-day South Bend, Indiana, but a rift between the Miami and the Mascouten resulted in the main part of the Mascouten remaining on the Fox River in association with the Fox and Kickapoo (Margry 1876-1886, 1:463, 2:216-220; Blair 1911-1912, 1:353; WHC 16:99; Hennepin 1880:258). For over a half-century thereafter there appear to have been two groups of Mascouten: a more easterly one associated with the Miami (especially the Wea subtribe) and one farther west generally with the Kickapoo and the Fox; but it is often not possible to distinguish the two in the available sources.

The groups on the Saint Joseph retreated westward in 1682 in fear of the Iroquois, with the Mascouten settling eight leagues (about 19 miles) northwest of the Chicago portage, between the Des Plaines and Fox rivers. The next year 60 Mascoutens were killed there by the Iroquois, and the anxiety among them and their allies was not quieted until the La Famine peace conference of October 1684. Here the French got the Iroquois to declare their peaceful intentions toward the Miami and Mascouten and sent these tribes a message that "they could remain secure at the place where they had been before they were at war with the Iroquois" (Margry 1876-1886, 1:612-613, 2:174, 341; IHC 23:61-62; NYCD 9:238, 260). The eastern Mascoutens may have stayed near the southern end of Lake Michigan during the ensuing period, though the evidence is circumstantial; but in any case at the beginning of the eighteenth century they were reported near Chicago with the Wea (Charlevoix 1866-1872, 5:141-142). There were some Mascoutens and Foxes on the Milwaukee River in 1680 and again, together with some Potawatomis, in 1698, but since they were with the Fox they were presumably

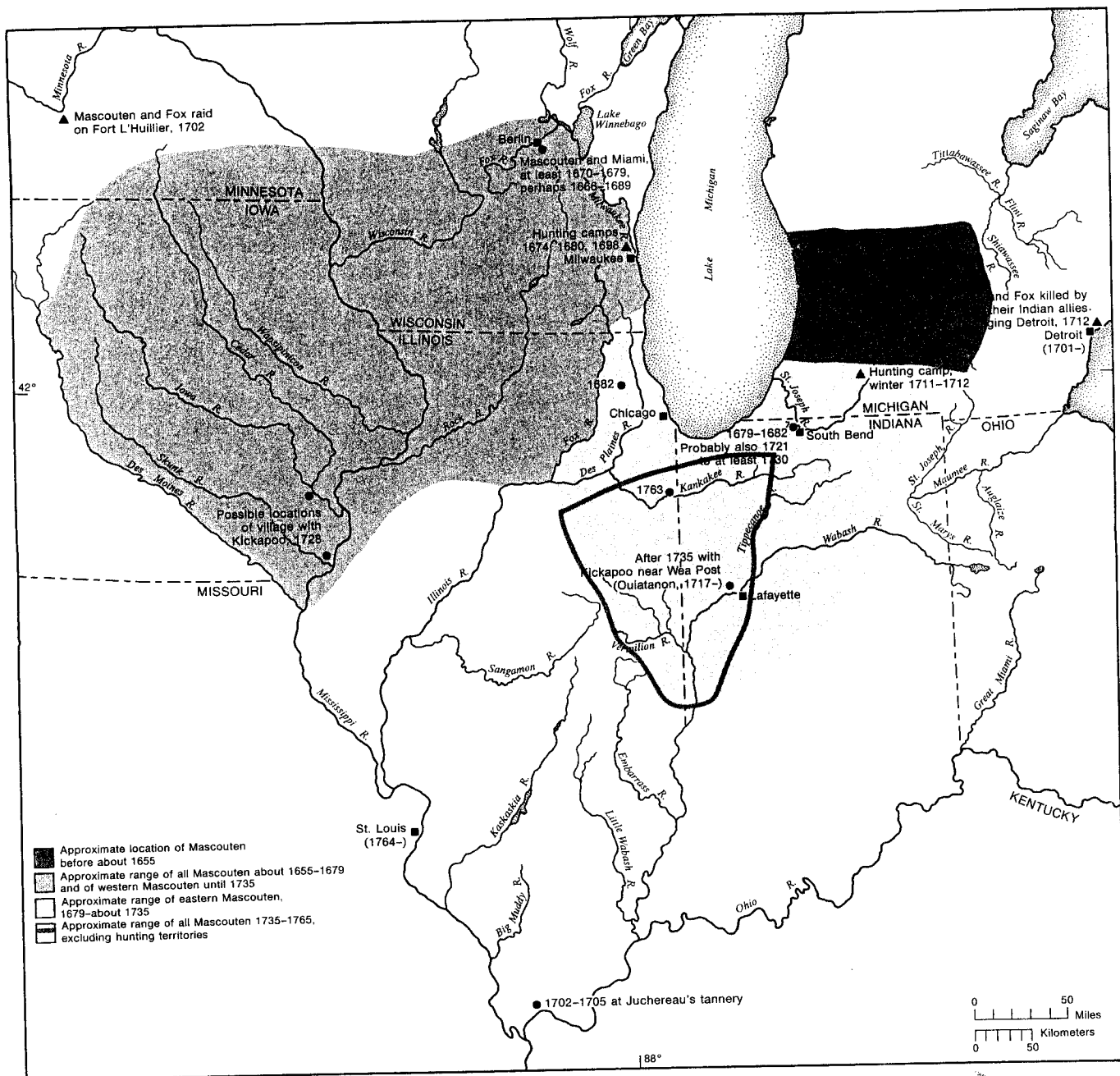


Fig. 1. Tribal locations 1640-1765. Their later range was coextensive with that of the Kickapoo.

bands detached from groups to the west and north (Shea 1852:150; Kellogg 1917:345). Eighty lodges of Mascoutens were induced to settle near a short-lived French tannery on the lower Ohio (in Pulaskie Co., Illinois) from about 1702 to 1705, but more than half were killed by an epidemic (JR 66:236-240; Fortier and Chaput 1969). Afterward the survivors may have withdrawn to the northern Indiana area, as there were Miamis and Mascoutens on the Wabash in 1711 (MPA-F 3:162). In the meantime, the main body of Mascoutens was mostly near the upper Mississippi, though there was still a village on the upper Fox River of Wisconsin in 1689. They were closely associated with the Kickapoo, and together

with the Fox they were in fairly constant conflict with the Prairie Sioux and the Iowa. Their intermittent contacts with the western Miami were somewhat strained after the murder of three Miami women, and their annoyance at the French trade with the Sioux led them to attack and plunder Frenchmen on occasion (IHC 23:276-277; NYCD 9:570, 609-611, 619-621, 724; WHC 16:200; JR 1:220; Blair 1911-1912, 2:54-114).

The antagonism between the Mascouten and the French came to a head in 1712, when some Ottawas and Potawatomis of southwestern Michigan killed or captured 50 of the tribe in an attack on a winter encampment on the upper Saint Joseph. When the Mascouten

and Fox retaliated against the Ottawas at Detroit, the French rallied their allies and dealt the two tribes a crushing defeat in which over 800 were killed (WHC 16:267-295; MPHC 33:537-571). After this defeat, the Mascouten and Fox who survived in the west were joined by the Kickapoo in unrelenting warfare against the Indian allies of the French. The Mascouten and Kickapoo lived together on the Rock River and in nearby places along the Mississippi and constantly raided the Illinois (WHC 16:295-381).

Eventually, however, French military pressures on the Fox forced their two allies to try to disassociate themselves from the campaign. Some Mascoutens asked to settle near the Potawatomi on the Saint Joseph in 1720 and 1721 in order to get away from hostilities engendered by the Fox. As the French were receptive to the idea, the move was presumably made. In October 1728, when the Mascouten and Kickapoo captured and detained in their village 12 Frenchmen who were descending the Mississippi, they resisted the urgings of Fox ambassadors to execute the captives and join against the French. Instead, after the Fox, leaving in anger, killed and scalped a Kickapoo and a Mascouten hunting at a distance, the two tribes were easily persuaded to turn against the Fox and ally themselves with the French and the Illinois. Subsequently, the Mascouten aided attacks on the Fox in 1730 and 1731 (WHC 16:398-467, 17:36-57, 100-118, 149).

The main body of Mascouten and Kickapoo settled near the Wea Post (Lafayette, Indiana) on the Wabash in 1735, perhaps joining fellow tribesmen already in the area, and a final contingent of eight lodges of Mascoutens arrived in 1741. After this reunion, all the Mascoutens seem to have stayed together in the same area; a 1742 reference to "two bands" of Mascouten among other Wabash tribes probably reflects the earlier division

into eastern and western subgroups, which had come together by that time. In 1747 the Mascouten sent war parties against the Chickasaw with the support of the French, but there was increasing English influence among the tribes of the area, resulting in a tendency toward independence. From 1751 to at least 1754 they were allied with the Kickapoo, Potawatomi, and others in hostilities with the Peoria (and as late as 1788 a Mascouten chief claimed he raided the Illinois annually to avenge harm done to the French). The Mascoutens declared their loyalty to the English after the French and Indian War but refused to fight the Americans during the Revolution. In 1788 they were still a separate group, some of whom used to travel to Saint Louis to get presents from the Spanish. But by 1813 they were reported to have become incorporated with the Kickapoo, their constant associates during the preceding century, and in 1825 mention was made of the Kickapoos, "of whom one tribe was called" Mascouten (Krauskopf 1955; NYCD 10:150, 162, 220, 263; WHC 17:336, 380-387, 18:89, 385; IHC 29:240, 359, 678; W. Johnson 1921-1965, 13:406-415; Kinnaid 1946-1949, 2:244-245; Brackenridge 1819; Trowbridge 1938:69).

## Culture

The Mascoutens lived in areas where they had access to both grasslands and woods. In the spring they set up or refurbished their large summer village and planted corn and other garden crops. In the summer they hunted buffalo, sometimes joining in large parties with members of allied tribes, and in the fall they scattered into small camps for the winter and hunted deer and bear. As late as 1712 they were said not to use canoes, but they had them in 1728. They were engaged in the fur trade. They had civil chiefs and war chiefs, and they are once described as having five or six "nations," which may have

**Table 1. Estimated Population of Mascouten and Allied Tribes**

Date	Mascouten		Other Tribes and Combined Figures	Source
	Men	Total		
1670	400	1,500		JR 55:200
1694			F + K + M: 1,400-1,500 men	NYCD 9:594
1702			M + K: 450 men, 450 families	Margry 1876-1886, 4:597, 601
1718			M + K: 200 men; F: 500 men	NYCD 9:889
1729			K + M: 200 men	WHC 17:55
1762	90		K: 180 men; P: 100 men; W: 200 men	W. Johnson 1921-1965, 10:545
1764		500		Jefferson 1801:200
1777	200		K: 300 men	Houck 1909, 1:146
1778			P + M + K: 1,000 men	Schoolcraft 1851-1857, 6:714
1779			P + M + K: 800 men	Jefferson 1801:201
1812			P + K + M + W: 1,000 men	Schoolcraft 1851-1857, 3:554

670 (F = Fox; K = Kickapoo; M = Mascouten; P = Piankashaw; W = Wea)

been a reference to an organization into clans. They believed in tutelary-animal manitous and practiced dog sacrifice. In short, the few cultural traits that can be definitely ascribed to the Mascouten confirm early statements that their way of life was virtually identical to that of the Kickapoo and Fox (JR 54:226-228, 58:34, 60:206, 66:236-240; WHC 16:372, 381, 17:38; MPHC 33:557).

## Identity

Some scholars have considered the Mascouten mysterious and have sought to identify them with one or more better-known tribes. Yet the available sources seem consistently interpretable only as the record of an originally independent tribe that merged with the Kickapoo in the historical period; accordingly, a review of some of the evidence against these opposing theories may be useful. The idea that the tribe the Huron called *atsistaehronon* (in French *Nation du Feu* 'Fire Nation') was not the Mascouten but the Potawatomi (Hewitt 1910) is disproved by numerous explicit statements, including a list of tribal names in a Huron grammar (Potier 1920:155; JR 54:226, 55:102, 198, for example). This theory starts from the incorrect assertion that *Potawatomi* (in Ojibwa *po'te'wa'tami*) means 'people of the place of the fire' (contrast Ojibwa *po'tawe* 'he makes a fire'), and from the unwarranted assumption that names for the same tribe in different languages have to have the same literal meaning (*Mascouten* is related to, for example, Fox *maškotewi* 'prairie' rather than *aškotewi* 'fire'). There seems to be no merit at all to the notion (inconsistent with the preceding) that the Mascouten were a division of the Potawatomi (see Michelson 1934a, 1935; Goddard 1972). Fox has *meškotewa* 'Illinois, especially Peoria' for the name of their traditional enemies (Jones 1907:14; Blair 1911-1912, 2:202), agreeing with the Miami name for the Kaskaskia (Trowbridge 1938:68), but this usage is not reflected in the French sources. The completely distinct history of the Mascouten shows they cannot be the Shawnee (Carr 1901) or the Sauk (Wakefield 1966), and the same mass of data disproves the thesis that the name referred to no one tribe but was used by the French for any unidentified Algonquians (Brose 1971).

## Synonymy

The Huron called the Mascouten by a term meaning 'People of the Place of the Fire' or 'Fire Nation', and in the earliest period the French used this or its translation: *Asistagueronon*,\* *les gens de Feu* (information of 1616

in Champlain 1922-1936, 4:280, 283); *La Nation de Feu*: *Atsistarhonon* (cf. *Feu*: *Assista*, *Atsista*; Sagard-Théodat 1632); *Atsistaehronons*, *Nation du feu* (1640: JR 20:60); *la Nation du feu* (1644: JR 27:26); *Athis-taëronnon* (1646: JR 30:89); *ceux du Feu* (1658: JR 44:114); *Atsistagheronnons* (1658: JR 44:248); *Assista Ectæronnons* (1670: JR 54:226); *atsistaëronnon*: *Mask8tins* (a = ya; e = ye; 8 = ou; Potier 1920:155).

Later on the French used a term borrowed from an Algonquian language (presumably Algonquin or Ottawa, rather than Potawatomi as stated in Charlevoix 1744, 2:251): *Makoutensak* (1658: JR 44:246); *Machkoutenk*, *Machkoutench*, *Machkouteng* (1670: JR 54:218, 226, 232); *Maskoutench* (1671: JR 55:184); *Mascoutens ou Nation du Feu* (1671: JR 55:map); *Mascoutechs*, *Mascouetechs* (with French plural -s: Perrot in Blair 1911-1912, 1:171, 223); *Maskouten* (French singular, by back-formation; 1681: Margry 1876-1886, 2:217); *Mascoutins* (1679: JR 61:148); and other minor variants in French. English borrowed the French word, with some corruption: *Máskoutins* (1761: W. Johnson 1921-1965, 3:501); *Musquetoons*, *Musquetons* (1762: W. Johnson 1921-1965, 10:526, 545); *Mascotain* (1763: Mereness 1916:362-363); *Mascoutens* (1765: W. Johnson 1921-1965, 4:823); *Musquattamies* (1765: IHC

*Sauvage des Mascoutensak*  
qui est la Nation du feu. Il est armé de son  
bouclier, de son arc, et de ses flèches.  
f. 16.



Thomas Gilcrease Institute of Am. Hist. and Art, Tulsa: Granville 1701.  
Fig. 2. A Mascouten man drawn about 1700.

\*In this section the spelling of the original sources is kept; in some cases phonetic interpretations are supplied in brackets.