The determination of the aboriginal social organization of the peoples of the Wabanaki cluster has proved troublesome to ethnologists for a number of reasons. One of these is that the sources at our disposal were obviously written by individuals who were not social scientists. Too many times descriptions of various social phenomena are cut short and we must be content with reconstruction, rather than discovery, of social interaction. Another reason for the problems facing ethnologists stems from the research interests of our predecessors in the beginning of this century. The two great concerns in the first half of the century were the land tenure debate and the correct placing of societies into culture areas. The first of these was intimately entwined with the political ideologies of the various proponents which certainly influenced their interpretation of the descriptive data. The second concern, while perhaps less subject to ideological bias, was just as detrimental to later scholarly studies. Too often social patterns from more well-known societies to the north and southwest were assumed to hold true for the Wabanaki because the Wabanaki shared supposedly diagnostic traits with a more well-known group. When the area was given special consideration, it was usually as a sub-area which possessed a mixture of traits from the two adjacent areas rather than being a region with a distinctive cultural tradition suited to a particular environment (e.g., Flannery 1946: 270; Cooper 1946: 279).

The interpretation of community type and kind groupings has been especially problematic. Interpretations of the same data have led some writers to suggest year-round coastal villages (e.g., Hoffman 1955, 1961: 215) and others to suggest small, seasonally mobile settlements which fluctuated in size depending upon the resources available (e.g., Wallis and Wallis 1955: 25, 226ff.). Likewise, interpretations of kinship data led to different conclusions. Jenness (1932: 268) suggests totemic unilineages while Bock (1966: 4) envisions composite bands. The confusion generated by these conflicting interpretations is most manifest in George Peter Murdock's attempted synthesis when he says:

the peoples of the maritime cluster had permanent settlements, which they occupied particularly during the fishing season in the spring and early summer, but they dispersed in migratory bands during most of the rest of the year (1965: 27).

He goes on to say that "families were aggregated into small patrilineal lineages" but:

patrilineal descent . . . was at best only incipient, and it is conceivable that what we have interpreted as patrilineages were in actuality only extended families and that at least some of the Maritime peoples had a bilateral form of organization (1965: 27).
Perhaps the most satisfactory published attempt to make sense of this ethnological hodge-podge is Dean Snow's (1968: 1150) suggestion that the fur trade produced an increased complexity in the social organization of Wabanaki peoples. Another solution to the problem of how to account for the differences in interpretation is to suggest a social organization that reconciles the apparent inconsistency in the historical descriptions. In 1964 Jack Frisch argued that the concept of the deme would account for some of the most difficult problems in social reconstruction for the Northeastern Algonkians. His paper was too general, including all of the Wabanaki groups plus the Montagnais-Naskapi, and too short to conclusively resolve the issue. This paper will briefly review the concept of the deme and make a case for deme organization among the aboriginal Micmac.

The Deme Concept

George Peter Murdock (1949: 63) introduced the term "deme" to modern anthropology in order to label a community in which all members were consanguinely and bilaterally related. He envisioned three types of deme based upon rules of residence and endogamy:

1. the endo-deme is endogamous and has a neo-local residence rule,
2. the matri-deme is exogamous and has a matrilocal rule of residence, and
3. the patri-deme is exogamous and has a partilocal rule of residence. Patrick Morris (1961) elaborates upon the possible sub-types by introducing community type (i.e., dispersed homesteads) as being diagnostic. His argument is that community type is of great adaptive significance and should be reflected in classifications of general social organization. As might be expected, he also sees implications for the evolution of social forms.

In a recent book-length essay on kinship theory, Ward Goodenough (1970: 51ff.) begins his section on descent groups by discussing endogamous, bilateral communities—Murdock's demes. I infer from his discussion that he sees the deme as being logically the most basic, least differentiated descent group and that when there exists a need for mutually exclusive task-groups some restricting principle must be introduced. If the restriction is on the basis of sex and has an ancestor focus then unilineages will result. Although it is certainly true that corporate exclusiveness of descent groups is impossible with bilateral descent because of the overlapping nature of kindreds, it should be noted that corporate exclusiveness may be approached by in-marrying. Elmora Matthews (1966: xxiii, 10ff.) illustrates this very well in her book describing the social organization of Tennessee Hill folk. When a patrilocal or matrilocal rule of residence is introduced to the deme they often become indistinguishable on the basis of personnel from unilineal descent groups.

When Murdock introduced the deme he was aware of the structural similarities between demes and clans; he says:

unilocal extended families and exogamous demes reveal a composition identical with that of clans, from which they differ only in lacking the unifying principle of descent; unilinear descent is absent in the case of demes, absent or incidental in the case of extended families (1949: 68).

He goes on to say that:
all that is necessary to convert . . . an exogamous deme into a clan-community is to give cultural recognition to the unilinear affiliation of the core of the group (1949: 75).

Patrick Morris (1961: 41), in his review of the deme concept, reiterates Murdock's statements and brings attention to Harold Driver's observation that demes:

tend to cluster near areas of unilinear descent, rather than being randomly scattered about. This suggests that the kind of geographic and cultural environment conducive to lineages and sibs, or the contact with lineages and sibs, encourages demes (in Morris 1961: 10).

It would seem that the distribution of demes and clans and the similarities in personnel of exogamous demes and clans are the factors responsible for much of the confusion regarding the social organization of the aboriginal Micmac.

Although an examination of kin terms is necessary in ferreting out the principles involved in how kin groups are restricted, there is certainly no clear-cut relationship between types of terminologies and rules of descent—as we are all aware. But there are certain regularities which provide clues to kin groupings; for instance, most of us expect to find bilaterality when we find generational terms at the first ascending generation. However, in the case of demes, there is an equally likely chance of finding lineal, bifurcate merging, bifurcate collateral, or generational terms (Murdock 1949: 158). As we shall see later, the recognition of a pattern of kin terminology that is associated with unilineages has been offered as proof for the existence of unilineages. One must ascertain the principles responsible for a pattern as well as recognizing that a pattern exists.

While Murdock (1949: 63f.), Morris (1961: 40) and Goodenough (1970: 51f.) all indicate that a deme must also be a community, they place much more emphasis on the kinship aspects of the concept. Murdock and Morris stress the conscious recognition of bilaterality and the approximation to consanguineal corporateness but seem to ignore the necessity of conscious recognition of community. However, I think it possible to consider bilateral consanguinity simply as a requirement for membership in a community. The community, then, must be emically recognized and be a corporate group. I think previous writers have assumed the community followed from the residence rule. I would argue that residence rules follow from choices concerning community membership. The choice is, "In which community do I wish to reside", not "With which relatives must I, or should I, live?"

I should like to offer the following as criteria for the determination of deme organization:

1) demes are bilateral descent groups,
2) demes approach corporate exclusiveness as kin groups, and
3) demes possess corporate exclusiveness as community groups.

The ethnohistorical evidence for the Micmac will now be examined to ascertain the presence of each criterion.
The Ethnographic Data

Discussions of a descent rule for the Micmac have been based on either the authority of previous scholars or on the examination of historical and ethnographic accounts. The dangers of using authority as the basis for argument may be illustrated by reference to a recent article by William Simmons and George Aubin (1975) and my comment (McGee 1975) on it. They cite Murdock's 1965 synopsis of what he calls the Maritime cluster to support their argument that the Wabanaki possessed patrilineal totemic class. In that chapter Murdock also indicates that these peoples had a "Guinea" type social organization. The Guinea type social organization is one in which there is an emically recognized patrilineal rule of descent but which is not reflected in the kin terms because the shift to patrilineality has been recent. Had Simmons and Aubin looked at Murdock's 1949 Social Organization they would have found that he typed the Micmac as having a Hawaiian structure and as being organized into parti-demes. Considering the internal inconsistencies in Murdock's 1965 work and the inconsistancy between the 1949 and the 1965 work, I think it safe to conclude Murdock is not the best authority for work with the Wabanaki cluster. But, my original comment on the Simmons and Aubin article is subject to the same criticism, for I appealed to the authority of Frank Speck to make a counter argument and he was certainly undecided on the issue of clans for the Wabanaki. A more productive approach is to reexamine the kinship data and to argue methods of interpretation rather than choose, and defend, "authority figures."

W.H. Mechling (1958:103) ascerts the presence of patricians for the Micmac on the grounds that a man's own children are equated with his brother's children, while his sister's children are called by a separate term. A detailed examination of the terms for individuals in the first descending generation demands a very different interpretation. Let us first look at the terms ngwi?s and ndo?s, which Mechling glosses as "my son" and "my daughter" respectively (see figure 1). Using the diagrams for male ego all but one of the terms on the patrilateral side support Mechling's contention. In a partilineal descent system father's sister's son's children should not be equated with one's own children. The matrilateral portion of the diagram completely undermines the notion that these terms have any significance for determining a unilineal system. When one refers to how these terms are employed by females, it is apparent that a different gloss may be more appropriate. I suggest that ngwi?s refers to the "son of a same-sexed person as ego in ego's own generation" and that ndo?s refers to the "daughter of a same-sexed person as ego and ego's own generation." Turning to the terms nlu?s and nsu?m, which Mechling glosses as "nephew" and "niece", we have further confirmation that the principles at work are those which differentiate kinsmen on the basis of sex of referent and sex of linking person (see figure 2). Note that nlu?ks can be glossed as "son of opposite-sexed person as ego in ego's own generation". This pattern is consistent with what Murdock referred to as the Hawaiian system of organization (1949: 228-231).

When the term for the second descending generation is examined, there is only one--nodji?tc--there is no differentiation of any kind. In ego's own generation sex and relative age are the significant factors for differentiation. The second and third ascending generations are distinguished only by sex.
are consistent with an Hawaiian system and no terms are reciprocal; that is, someone I refer to as "A" does not refer to me as "A" in return. The only deviation from a pattern that is consistent with an Hawaiian system are the terms in the first ascending generation. One might expect generational terms here; that is, where differentiation is only on the basis of sex. Instead one finds confusion. In the recent literature one finds a lineal pattern. However, terms collected a century or more ago indicate that the pattern was one of bifurcate collateral terms; that is, everyone is differentiated from one another. This apparent deviation from an Hawaiian system may be explained by noting that according to Murdock (1949: 146) "non-sororal polygyny tends to be associated with kinship terminology of the bifurcate collateral type." Polygyny among contact-Micmac is adequately documented.

Admittedly the presence of a basically Hawaiian kinship terminological system is not sufficient to prove bilaterality. However it is certainly more compatible with a bilateral descent system than it is with a unilinear system. Although I think the burden of proof should rest with advocates of the unilinear system there is evidence from other than the terminological system to argue against unilinear systems.

One of the jobs of the headman of was to care for orphans by distributing them to the wigwams of the best hunters who foster the orphans and bring them up "as if they were own children" (LeClerq 1910: 238). It is quite difficult to imagine a headman being able to assign orphans to just anybody in a society that is organized into totemic clans. Surely that would be a clan responsibility and not a responsibility of a village official. The only way this system of orphan care can be made compatible with a clan system is if one has clan-communities.

It has been argued that the association of communities with animal symbols supports just such a conclusion. One would expect, however, to find an expressed rule of village exogamy if this were the case. There is no such rule attested in the literature. There are accounts of peace-pacts being ratified by exogamous marriages but these have the "feel" of being special, not particularly desirable, marriages. Indeed, the mythical and legendary narratives are full of tales of disaster resulting from community exogamy. The generalized accounts of Denys, LeClerq, and others make no mention of community exogamy. They do relate that the groom provided a year of bride service for his father-in-law and then returned to the home of his own father. If one posits a dispersed settlement pattern for communities, this need not be considered negative evidence for community endogamy. I suggest that there was a norm of community endogamy for the un-ranked Micmac, demography permitting, and a pattern of community exogamy for the families of headmen.

Demes would seem to be ideal for organizing labour under conditions which normally only require the coordination of large task groups at certain specified times. The construction of fishing weirs and traps for the spring and autumn runs of anadromous fishes would be one such task, game drives would be another, and undoubtedly there are others. The majority of production activities would require fewer people and the resources would be more efficiently exploited with dispersed households scattered about the periphery of a bay, or along the banks of rivers. The compounds of prestigious headmen would be larger than those of others in order to accommodate the "bachelors"
(ulbadoo) who were normally attached to his household. The community would be the collection of scattered, bilaterally related households who recognized a common headman and whose corporate identity was symbolized by a particular animal. A deme kin/community organization and a rank-level political structure (Fried, Morrison) provide the most parsimonious interpretation of the ethnohistorical data.
Fig. 1. Micmac terms of reference. (A) ngwiʔs, (B) ndoʔs, (ME) Male Ego, (FE) Female Ego.
Fig. 2. Micmac terms of reference. (C) niu'ks, (D) nulu'm, (ME) Male Ego, (FE) Female Ego.