

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is the story of Joshua Wilson and Rencatha, two teenagers who shared some unusual and dangerous experiences.

It's also a story about how things might have been different in what is now Canada and the United States, if history hadn't gone in the direction it did. We all learn in school about how Native Americans, the People in this story, were displaced by the colonists. For example, the Mahicans lost their territories in the valley of the Hudson River, and only a few hundred of them eventually made it to much smaller reservation lands in Wisconsin. Powerful colonies such as Massachusetts and New York grew up on lands that originally belonged to the Aboriginal nations.

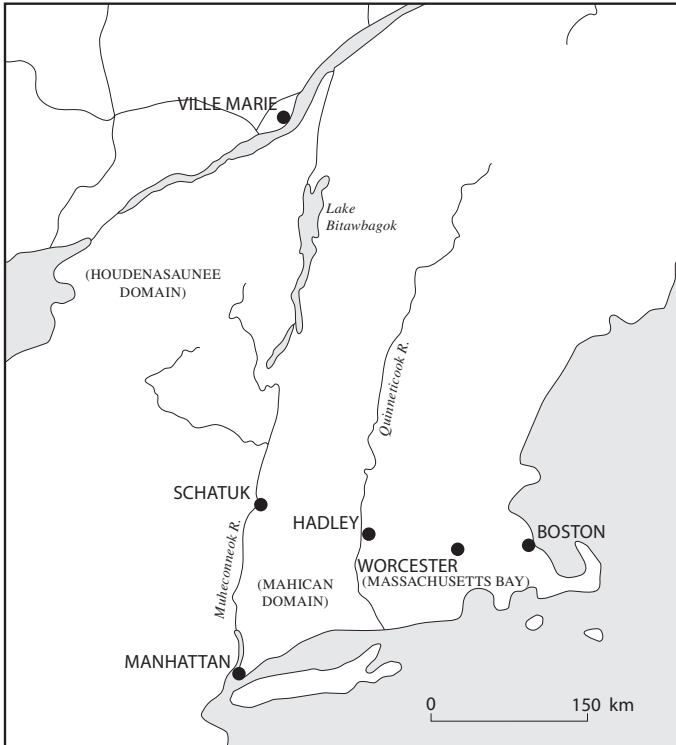
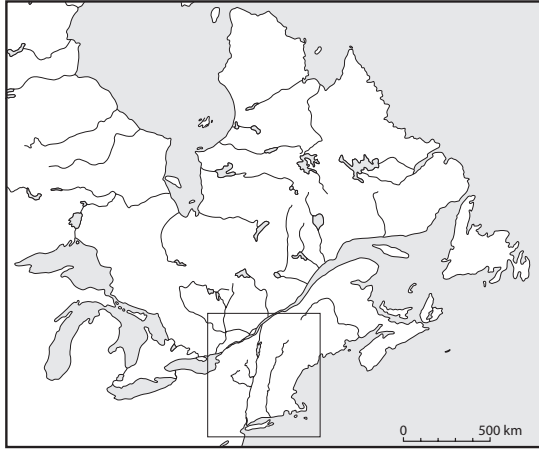
But did it have to happen that way? What if a few important developments had gone differently?

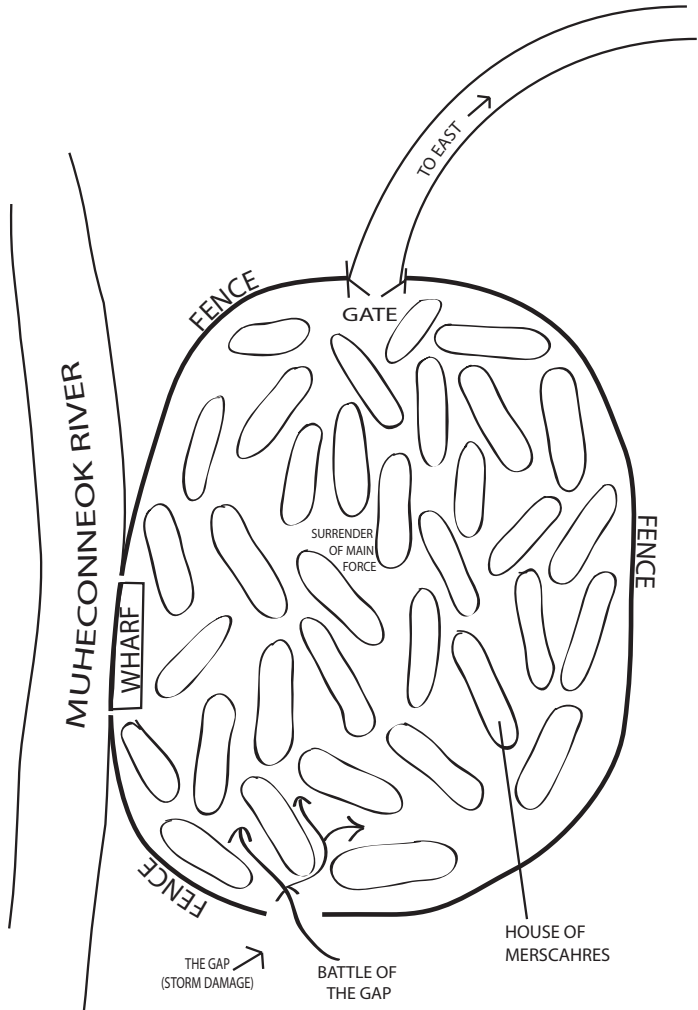
Joshua Wilson had the opportunity to find out for himself. Chances are that you and I never will. Even so, I hope that reading about the few days Josh shared with Rencatha will give you the chance to think about it and make up your own mind.

The events and the people in this book are all imaginary, although there was a fortified Mahican town at Schatuk. The names of the Mahican characters do not represent actual Mahican names. Because I am not a

member of that community and have no understanding of the Mahican language, it seemed more respectful to invent names than to pretend to a knowledge I do not have.

My wife, Jackie Hicks, first suggested that I try writing fiction, and she contributed important ideas to this book. My children, Jane and Robert, also provided encouragement all along. I'm grateful to Don Bonner for drawing the maps. My sincere thanks to Errol Sharpe, Beverley Rach, and all at Fernwood Publishing, to Myah Rach-Sharpe for a valuable review, and especially to Kim Goodliffe for her insightful editing.





THE ATTACK ON SCHATUK

CHAPTER ONE

The Connecticut River sparkled. Josh absorbed the comfortable warmth of the late September sunshine and looked across the river to the skyline of Holyoke. Standing in the long grass at the top of the river bank, he tried out angles for his digital camera. He was here on assignment, specifically his ninth grade history assignment: write about what it would have been like to live in a local community a century ago, and include lots of illustrations. Josh was fascinated by Holyoke. The huge brick mills hadn't made paper for thirty years or more, and Josh was impressed that they were still standing. The station where the workers had flooded in every morning was derelict, and the wooden stairs to the street were rotten and fenced off. But he could imagine the crowds arriving to start the working day, the people in grey or black clothing, walking by the canals and talking in many different languages.

Pictures of the mills and the station would come later. For now, Josh wanted some long shots across the river. He took a couple of pictures. They would show the outlines of the mills and the chimneys pretty well. They wouldn't show much of the river and the dam though. The dam was important because it had supplied electricity for the town's industries. Maybe he should try some angles from lower down? He took a look.

Scrambling down the bank wasn't going to be easy because of the series of storms that had poured heavy rain and loosened the soil. The last storm had been the remains of a hurricane and had ripped up sections of grass, leaving whole surfaces of eroded dirt. Josh took a few steps down and struck his foot sharply on something in the dirt. It was hard enough to hurt. In fact it hurt a lot. He hopped around on one foot until the pain in his big toe calmed down, and then he thought about the white sneakers he'd got for the new school year. He slipped his camera in his pocket and got down on one knee to see if they had come to any harm. There was a small but noticeable dent on the toe, surrounded by mud. But what was it that had caused the damage? He looked among clumps of uprooted grass and patches of muddy soil, and he patted the area with his hands. Then, in the same moment, he saw it and felt it. A small metal tube was sticking out a couple of inches, and what was really intriguing was the metal tip on the side. It looked very much like a gunsight.

Josh crouched down on his hands and knees, unworried now about the dirt on his sneakers, or on his jeans for that matter. He was focused, digging down. The earth was soft and damp, and he found a flat stone that made digging easier still. Ten minutes later, he held the pistol in his hand.

Josh was no expert on guns, but he knew this one was old. It was rusty, and it didn't look like any modern-day pistols that he'd seen. The shape was different, the barrel was maybe six inches long. What if it turned out to be a

relic of the Civil War? Josh had heard his father say that those were worth a fortune. Whatever it turned out to be, it had obviously been a sleek weapon in its day. But the design must be a century old or more.

Something else was interesting too. By digging out the pistol Josh had uncovered a flat piece of wood, and he could see that more of it was buried under the soil. Could an old floor be down there? He started digging again, widening the exposed area. Soon he had uncovered a rough circle, maybe two feet across, and now he ran his finger over the surface. It was obviously old, but he was no longer sure that it was made of wood. It seemed harder and more unyielding than that, and there were no joins where planks had been put together. Still, it might be an old stump of a hardwood tree. He used the pistol to knock on the surface. It didn't exactly sound hollow, but the hard surface didn't seem to be quite solid either. Now he was sure that it wasn't a tree stump. He decided to test it carefully. He stood up and placed one foot on the bare surface. Gradually he shifted all his weight onto that foot. Suddenly he felt himself falling into a hole. His whole body lit up and his skin tingled as if it had been charged with electricity.

He landed on some sort of wooden floor, and yet he was surprised that he wasn't hurt because he must have fallen about six feet. Dazed, he found himself in a little room about ten feet square with wooden walls. On one wall there was an opening, and he could see a length of corridor disappearing around a corner. On the opposite wall there was a doorway, although the door

itself was barred by thick but brightly painted pieces of wood across the frame. They looked removable, but as long as they were in place nobody would be coming in here from the other side. The walls were smooth and elaborately decorated with complicated patterns of circles in red, white, and black. As he began to feel more normal again, Josh realized that there must be a source of light, although he couldn't see where it could be. There were no windows and no visible lamps. He was still thinking about it when two big men in brown leather ran up the corridor and into the room.

One of them pointed his crossbow, and the other took the pistol out of Josh's hand.