Encounters: Allies and Adversaries

The historical interactions of the Wabanaki peoples with outsiders are a complex story of alliances and conflicts, truths and misunderstandings. Their relationships with other groups were fluid: changing and evolving over time along with their circumstances. The stories of these changing relationships are found in historical treaties and documents and are still being written today.

Right column:

This May 2015 flotilla on the Penobscot River brought together Wabanaki people and non-Native allies to demonstrate the importance of a healthy river and to protest state challenges Penobscot sovereignty that stem from centuries of treaties made and broken. Photo by Roger Leisner, The Maine Paparazzi.

When Governor Dummer asked what brought me here, I did not answer—I come to ask your pardon; nor, I come to acknowledge you as my conqueror….

… He did say to me, "But do you not recognize the King of England as King over all his states?" To which I answered, "Yes, I recognize him as King over all his lands; but I do not acknowledge your king as my King, and King of my lands."

- Loron Sagourrab, Penobscot Negotiator, 1727

Follow-on Text:

Learn about out how centuries of disagreement and misunderstandings are contributing to ongoing conflicts over Wabanaki salt water fishing rights.

Elvers

In 2013, the Elver fishery became the latest issue in more than three decades of debate around Wabanaki saltwater fisheries. In that year, the market price for elvers, or juvenile eels, increased greatly and led to a massive influx of non-Natives and Wabanaki into the fishery. As sovereign nations, Wabanaki tribes retain any rights that they have not specifically ceded through treaties– including hunting and fishing rights. Previous treaties and the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act do not clearly address saltwater fisheries. This brought Wabanaki tribes into conflict with the state around the use and preservation of this culturally and economically important resource.

Right column:

Mikoo Mendoza checks his net for eels while his mother, Veronica Sapiel, dips into the waters of the St. Croix River in spring 2013. Photo by Leslie Bowman.

Elvers, or glass eels, are immature American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) harvested as they return to rivers from their ocean spawning areas. Mount Desert Islander file photo.

Follow-on Text:

Find out how Passamaquoddy and non-Native partners came together to uncover Passamaquoddy history and restore the health of a special place.

In Depth: Elvers

As the rivers and streams of coastal Maine began to warm in the spring of 2013, elvers, or juvenile eels, began their migratory journey up river from the ocean. Hundreds of fishermen, both Wabanaki and non-native, arrived along salt-water tidal outlets and began harvesting what had by then become a very lucrative resource.

Passamaquoddy tribal members Mikoo Mendoza and Forrest Sapiel fishing for elvers on the St. Croix River. Photo by Leslie Bowman.

This fishery became the latest focus in more than three decades of debate around Wabanaki saltwater fisheries. The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (a piece of federal legislation) and the Act to Implement the Maine Indian Claims Settlement (the state's response) essentially failed to address saltwater fisheries, despite language in both acts around control and use freshwater resources. Thus, debates have carried on in the Maine legislature and courts ever since with little resolution.

> We feel we have an inherent right and a sovereign right. With that comes a responsibility not to overfish. - Joseph Socobasin, Passamaquoddy, 2013

As sovereign nations, the Wabanaki tribes retain any rights that they have not specifically ceded through treaties or other intergovernmental agreements. The Wabanaki continue to stand firm that they have never relinquished any of their saltwater fishing or hunting rights. The state's approach has been varied and inconsistent over the years.

> Department of Marine Resources Commissioner Patrick Keliher does not have the authority to rule on sustenance. His authority is limited. - Vera Francis, Passamaquoddy, Vice Chief, Sipayik, 2015

Elvers, or glass eels, are immature American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) harvested as they return to rivers from their ocean spawning areas. Mount Desert Islander file photo.

In 2013, many Wabanaki fished for elvers under tribally-issued licenses, and the state's Department of Marine Resources issued summonses to many of these harvesters for fishing without a state license. All of these charges

were later dropped by county prosecutors. Since then, the tribes have been working with the state to create a system for issuing tribal licenses that is both consistent with Wabanaki cultural values, and consistent with both state and federal management goals for the elver fishery.

> Passamaquoddy management practices are based on our culture and didn't require policing because we don't approach resource utilization from the standpoint of exploitation. Over the past 15 years, we have very meticulously, methodically and carefully codified our cultural practices, and that takes a long time. The result is a management plan Native in origin. - Fred Moore III, Passamaquoddy Fisheries Committee, 2013

Mikoo Mendoza checks his net for eels while his mother, Veronica Sapiel, dips into the waters of the St. Croix River in spring 2013. Photo by Leslie Bowman.

The Maine Indian Tribal State Commission produced a detailed report on the issue in 2014. Among a number of recommendations at the conclusion of the report is the hope that "Where the tribal-state jurisdictional relationship remains contested, the state and the tribes should commit to good faith negotiations at the highest level," and that constructive dialogue, rather than confrontations and legal battles, holds the most promise for mutually beneficial solutions.

N’tolonapemk: Our Relatives’ Place

For more than 8,000 years, Passamaquoddy people lived in a small village at the outlet of Meddybemps Lake. As Europeans arrived in the region, the native population eventually moved away from the village, leaving behind traces of their history in the soil. Centuries later, a non-Native landowner began to dump toxic waste on the land, poisoning the soil and water.

In 1996, the area was declared a Superfund site and clean up began. During the clean up, traces of the Passamaquoddy village were uncovered and examined by archaeologists. This began a process of healing for the Passamaquoddy: both from the physical contamination of their ancestral village and from the generations of negative treatment of the Passamaquoddy people.

Right Column:

Passamaquoddy community visit to the N’tolonapemk Site. Photo courtesy of Northeast Archaeology Research Center, Inc.

The future of the N’tolonapemk Site is very important to the Passamaquoddy people. Tribal people need to be involved in archaeology, so we can have a voice and control in the ground work while we look for links to our past. The tribal people who were involved in this project say it is very important to stay involved, especially to continue this time of cultural healing with our artifacts and traditions.

-Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer

Follow-on Text:

Discover how a group of Passamaquoddy women stood up to non-Natives trying to take their land.

In Depth: N'tolonapemk: Our Relatives' Place

For more than 8,000 years, Passamaquoddy people and their ancestors lived in a small village at the outlet of Meddybemps Lake in eastern Maine, where the lake drains into the Dennys River towards Cobscook Bay. There they hunted caribou and moose, trapped beaver and muskrat, fished for alewives and sturgeon, and harvested wild plants for food and medicine. Then, beginning in the 1500s, Europeans migrated into the area. Eventually the Passamaquoddy people moved away from this village, although they stayed in their surrounding homeland.

Stone fish effigy found at the N'tolonapemk Site.

Centuries passed, and the land at the outlet of the lake was poisoned by a private landowner, the Eastern Surplus Company. In its 50 years of operation from the 1940s to the 1990s, this modern landowner took industrial and military surplus and waste, and dumped it all over the old village site. Toxic chemicals dripped out, and contaminated the soil and the water. The problem was so extreme that in 1996 the site was declared a Superfund Site, and a federally funded cleanup effort was undertaken by the Environmental Protection Agency. The cleanup crews soon began to uncover evidence of the Passamaquoddy village.

Waste on the site prior to the cleanup. Photo courtesy of Northeast Archaeology Research Center, Inc.

> The N'tolonapemk project was the seed that grew to bring together my interest in archaeology combined with the cultural connection I had. Archaeology gives me a sense of the past and the spiritual connection that the ancestors had to this land.
>
> –Natalie Dana, Passamaquoddy, archaeologist

Passamaquoddy community visit to the N'tolonapemk Site. Photo courtesy of Northeast Archaeology Research Center, Inc.

Passamaquoddy people and archaeologists then began to document this ancient village site while work continued to clean the soil and waters. The Passamaquoddy tribe was engaged in the entire process: planning, excavation, analysis, and the creation of several publications about the village site and its rediscovery. Not only did this result in a much broader and deeper understanding of the site, it also meant the Passamaquoddy people could start the process of healing the great wrong that had been done to their Ancestors' Place, N'tolonapemk.

Stopping the Bulldozers

By the 1960s, the state and private landowners had taken much of the land reserved for the Passamaquoddy Tribe in earlier treaties. The Passamaquoddy decided to fight back – and an opportunity quickly presented itself.

In 1964, a local non-Native man "won" a parcel of land at Indian Township in a poker game. When he began to bulldoze a road across the property, the Passamaquoddy took a stand. A group of women were soon arrested for blocking his equipment. In the process of fighting the charges against the women, the tribe found that they could take the fight for their treaty lands to the courts, and win. This laid the groundwork for federal recognition and land claims.

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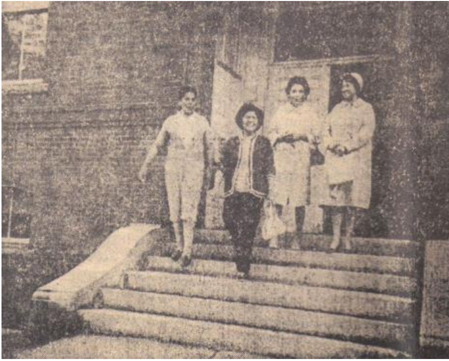

Passamaquoddy women leaving the Calais courthouse, 1964. Courtesy of Donald Soctomah.

Plaisted's camps, Indian Township, 1950s. Courtesy of Donald Soctomah.

Follow-on Text:

Learn about how Maliseet and Passamaquoddy allies helped the Americans achieve their independence.

In Depth: Stopping the Bulldozers

While tensions had been building for centuries, a series of confrontations in the Passamaquoddy communities in eastern Maine provided real momentum for regaining lost land and protecting Wabanaki sovereignty.

Image: ATLAS REVISED Plate 23 c.jpg

Pawling, Micah A., and Donald G. Soctomah, "Defining Native Space," in *The Historical Atlas of Maine*, edited by Stephen J. Hornsby and Richard W. Judd, cartographic design by Michael J. Hermann (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 2015), plate #23.

Between 1800 and the mid-1960s, the Passamaquoddy had large pieces of land taken from them that had once been part of their reservations. The tribes in Maine were not federally recognized by the U.S. government at this time, and as such their reservations were only "state reservations." For federally-recognized tribes, reservation land is held in trust and cannot be sold or taken by states or private individuals. For the Passamaquoddy, this meant that much of their land was being sold to or taken by people who were not tribal members, and there was little that the tribe could do. That was about to change.

Passamaquoddy women leaving the Calais courthouse, 1964. Courtesy of Donald Soctomah.

William Plaisted, a non-Native man, held a 999-year lease on a property within the Indian Township reservation. In a poker game in February of 1964, he won the lease to an adjacent piece of land from another non-Native man. In May, Plaisted began preparations to bulldoze a new road between the two lots, across an area being used by Passamaquoddy tribal member George Stevens as a garden. George's brother John was tribal governor at the time, and following a tribal council meeting, a group of tribal members decided to use non-violent protest to block the construction. They felt strongly that too much land was being taken illegally; this land legally belonged to the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and should not be under the control of outsiders. During the protest, a group of Passamaquoddy women– Delia Mitchell, Phyllis Sabattus, Rite Ranco, and Pauline Stevens – were arrested when they refused to move out of the path of the bulldozer. The charges against the women were later dismissed, but in the process of defending them, the tribe and their lawyers brought forward several important historical documents that suggested that large areas of Passamaquoddy land had been taken from the tribe illegally since the late 1700s.

Plaisted’s camps, Indian Township, 1950s. Courtesy of Donald Soctomah.

This interaction was part of a growing awareness and resistance that led to the federal recognition of the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Maliseet tribes in Maine, and then to the Maine Indian Land Claims case and resulting settlement. These four brave women were leaders in a movement to reverse centuries of loss and protect Wabanaki culture and sovereignty for future generations.

Revolutionary Allies

The American Revolution presented the Wabanaki with new opportunities for alliances while also arousing concern about the impact of yet another colonial conflict on their lives and homeland. In the fall of 1775, the Maliseet and Passamaquoddy decided to take action and allied themselves with the Americans. In exchange, they expected the Americans to protect their lands and rights in the new country.

Joining against their mutual enemy, the English, Passamaquoddy and Maliseet warriors played a critical role in the American victory in a small but pivotal battle at Machias in 1777.

Right Column:

Portrait of Mrs. Denny Soccabeson, Eastport, Maine, 1817, watercolor and ink on wove paper. Painted during the War of 1812, this painting shows the ongoing presence of American and English conflict in the Wabanaki homeland. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum #1994.300.1. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Museum Purchase.

> We have talked with the Penobscot tribe and by them we hear you are engaged in a war with Great Britain, and that they are engaged to join with you in opposing your and our enemies. We heartily join with our brethren the Penobscot Indians in everything that they have agreed to... (We) are resolved to stand together and oppose the people of old England that are (trying) to take your and our lands and liberties from us...
>
> - Ambrose Bear and Pierre Tomah to Massachusetts colonial leaders, September 12, 1775

Follow-on Text:

Learn about violence committed by the British against the Wabanaki and the lasting effects this has had on contemporary Native people.

In Depth: Revolutionary Allies

In the fall of 1775, Passamaquoddy and Maliseet people began to discuss what was happening between the British and the newly formed American forces across their homeland. These two tribes lived at the intersection of the American state of Massachusetts and the British colony of Nova Scotia (which included present-day New Brunswick). During much of the colonial period, the Wabanaki had a difficult relationship with the English, leading them to side with the Americans in the conflict.

Portrait of Mrs. Denny Soccabeson, Eastport, Maine, 1817, watercolor and ink on wove paper.

These deliberations are captured in the correspondence between Maliseet leaders Ambrose Bear and Pierre Tomah. They knew about the agreement reached between the Penobscot, led by Chief Joseph Orono, earlier in the year, and were considering what to do.

On September 12, 1775, they wrote to Massachusetts colonial leaders:

> We have talked with the Penobscot tribe and by them we hear you are engaged in a war with Great Britain, and that they are engaged to join with you in opposing your and our enemies.
>
> We heartily join with our brethren the Penobscot Indians in everything that they have agreed to... (We) are resolved to stand together and oppose the people of old England that are (trying) to take your and our lands and liberties from us...
>
> We have nowhere to look for assistance but to you...We have no place to go to but to Penobscot for support and we desire you would provide ammunition, provisions and goods for us there; and we will come ... and give our furs and skins and take our support from you in return and will be thankful to you for the kindness...

The colonial leaders replied,

> We heartily receive you as our brethren, in the same manner as we have received our brethren of the Penobscot Tribe. We will do everything for you that we have promised to do for them. We shall be always ready to help you, and stand firm together with you in opposing the wicked people of Old-England, who are fighting against us, and who are seeking to take your and our lands and liberties from us, and make us their servants; and we have good reason to believe that we shall soon drive them out of our land.

Serapis & Bonhomme Richard, by F.S. Cozzens, # 1996.14.3, collections of the Penobscot Marine Museum. While we do not have any depictions of the 1777 Battle of Machias, this painting shows the Revolutionary War naval battle between the Bonne Homme Richard, commanded by John Paul Jones, and the British HMS Serapis in 1779.

The following July, Bear and Tomah traveled to Watertown, and signed a treaty of alliance and friendship. They had hoped that the American forces would come up and help them drive the British out of the St. John River, but the colonial leaders decide that was further than they wanted to extend their limited resources. Instead, a number of Maliseet families left their home villages and traveled to live, temporarily at least, with their Passamaquoddy neighbors around Machias. This combined Passamaquoddy and Maliseet support played a critical role in the American success at the 1777 Battle of Machias, reinforcing a small group of American soldiers. In fact, Passamaquoddy chief John Francis Neptune fired the first shot, instantly killed the British warship's captain, British Admiral Cox.

War and Scalps, 1675-1763

Over a period of more than 80 years, the Wabanaki were drawn into repeated conflicts with and between European colonial powers. In some cases, the Wabanaki participated on behalf of their French allies; in others the problems were much more local.

A series of scalp proclamations are a vivid example of the violence directed at the Wabanaki, especially by the English. Following a 1755 attack on a group of Penobscot hunters that left one dead, tensions escalated between the English and the Penobscots. Governor Phips of Massachusetts named the Penobscot enemies and traitors to the King. He issued a bounty on all Penobscot men, women, and children – with proof of bounty to be a scalp.

Right column:

G R

SPENCER PHIPS, Esq;

A PROCLAMATION.

S. Phips.

GOD Save the KING.

> I do hereby require his Majesty's Subjects of this Province to Embrace all opportunities of pursuing, captivating, killing and Destroying all and every of the aforesaid [Penobscot] Indians.
>
> –Governor Spencer Phips, Massachusetts Colony, 1755

Follow-on Text:

Find out how French traders formed alliances with the Wabanaki, a strong contrast to their relationships with the English.

In Depth: War and Scalps, 1675-1763

A series of European and global conflicts between the English and the French significantly impacted the Wabanaki and their homeland. Despite regular conferences and negotiations to maintain peaceful relationships and sustain strained alliances, broken promises and poor communication pushed the Wabanaki into frequent conflict with their new neighbors. In some cases, the Wabanaki participated on behalf of their French allies. In other conflicts, the problems were much more local. A series of what are today known as scalp proclamations are a vivid example of the violence directed at the Wabanaki, especially by the English.

Wabanaki treaty signatures, 1721

In July of 1755, at the English settlement of Wiscasset, six Englishmen attacked a group of three Wabanaki men, killing one and wounding the other two. Three of the Englishmen were arrested, and one was convicted of assault. Nobody was punished for the murder. This injustice kicked off a series of small-scale conflicts between the English and Wabanaki communities, throughout which Wabanaki leaders tried to re-establish calm.

Despite attempts by the Penobscot to maintain neutrality, the acting governor of Massachusetts declared war in November of 1755, and named the Penobscot (probably in this case used as a catch-all name for all Indians in Maine) to be enemies and traitors to the King. Governor Phips then issues a bounty on all Penobscot men, women, and children:

> For every male Penobscot Indian above the age of 12 years, that shall be taken and brought to Boston, 50 Pounds.
>
> For every scalp of a male Penobscot Indian above the age aforesaid, brought in as evidence of their being killed, 40 Pounds.
>
> For every female Penobscot Indian taken and brought in as aforesaid and for every male Indian prisoner under the age of 12 years taken and brought in as aforesaid, 25 pounds.
>
> For every scalp of such female Indian or male Indian under the age of 12 years that shall be killed and brought in as evidence of their being killed as aforesaid, 20 pounds.
>
> Issued the 3d day of November 1755. S. Phips…God save the King.

By the time the conflicts ended, many Wabanaki had been killed, or died as the result of starvation and disease. Constant conflict kept them from hunting, gathering, and growing food. Across the parts of Maine that had been the focus of English settlement during this time period—central, western, and southern Maine—Wabanaki

people were either killed, displaced, or forced to go “underground,” giving up their cultural practices and communities in order to survive by blending in with the colonists.

SPENCER PHIPS, Esq;

A PROCLAMATION.

S. Phips.

GOD Save the KING.

In recent years, Penobscot and other Wabanaki people have brought the Phips Proclamation back to the attention of both their own communities and to non-Native audiences. It was an important part of the successful effort to change the Wiscasset High School mascot from the Redskins to the Wolverines. The term “redskin” originally referred to Native scalps. The document is also posted in various places around the Penobscot reservation, and shared on the internet by tribal members and others.

> The re-introduction of [the Phips Proclamation] into contemporary society links people to their ancestors, homeland, and identity. It reinforces a sense of identity in that it validates the past and celebrates how indigenous people have endured through time regardless of the violent forces acting upon them.
>
> –Bonnie D. Newsom, Penobscot, and Jamie Bissonnette Lewey, Abenaki, in “Wabanaki Resistance and Healing: An Exploration of the Contemporary Role of an Eighteenth Century Bounty Proclamation in an Indigenous Decolonization Process,” 2012

A Strategic Union: Wabanaki-French Interactions in the 17th and 18th Centuries

During the colonial period, there were few large French settlements in the region. French interests focused on trade for furs and other resources and converting the Wabanaki to the Catholic faith.

One of the most effective ways at this time to solidify an alliance was through marriage. French soldier and trader Jean-Vincent d'Abbadie de Saint-Castin came to present-day Castine, Maine in 1667. Local Penobscot leader Madockowando saw an opportunity to strengthen economic, political, and family ties with the French through the marriage of St. Castin to his daughter, Mathilde. Their descendants have been leaders in the Penobscot Nation ever since.

Right Column:

Abenaki Couple, an 18th-century watercolor by an unknown artist.
Courtesy of the City of Montreal Records Management & Archives, Montreal, Canada.

Follow-on Text:

Discover how the earliest English encounters with the Wabanaki established a foundation for centuries of distrust and conflict.

Kidnapped

The first documented direct interaction between English and Wabanaki people happened during George Waymouth's voyage to America in 1605. Arriving off what is now Pemaquid, Waymouth and his crew encountered Wabanaki peoples who showed an interest in trading with the English, but were wary of how the foreigners might behave.

Following a series of cautious interactions, Waymouth and his crew kidnapped five Wabanaki men– Mahanadi, Amoore, Skidwarres, Manida, and Assacomoit – taking them back to England against their will. The men eventually made their way home, but Wabanaki-English relations were strained from that point on.

Right Column:

Captain George Waymouth on the Georges River, by N.C. Wyeth, 1937. Frontispiece illustration for Kenneth Roberts' *Trending Into Maine* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938).

> The voyage of George Waymouth set the stage for many other voyages, but the result of his first encounter with Native people had a ripple effect along the coast and then across North America. Waymouth's kidnapping of Native people set a negative impression of the English that would stay in the minds of Native people forever.
>
> –Donald Soctomah, Passamaquoddy, 2005

Follow-on Text:

Learn about how the Wabanaki built alliances and engaged with their Native neighbors long before the arrival of Europeans.

In Depth: Kidnapped

English explorer George Waymouth's ship set anchor in May of 1605 off what is now Pemaquid, where they quickly encountered Wabanaki men who were hoping to understand the purpose of these new visitors, and what could be gained from them. By this time, the Wabanaki had been interacting with Basque and French fishermen and traders for as much as a century, so Europeans were no longer a novelty in the region. Interactions over the years had been both positive and negative, so caution was necessary.

One interaction between the Wabanaki and the English was reported by a member of Waymouth's crew, James Rosier. After luring three men aboard their ship, they headed to shore with more trade items to attempt to lure three more. One took off for the woods, but two stayed on hand to trade.

> I opened the box, and shewed them trifles to exchange, thinking thereby to have banisht feare…we used little delay, but suddenly laid hands upon them. And it was as much as five or sixe of us could doe to get them into the light horseman [boat]. For they were strong and so naked as our best hold was by their long haire on their heads; and we would have been very loath to have done them any hurt…Thus we shipped five salvages, two canoas, with all their bowes and arrowes.

Captain George Waymouth on the Georges River, by N.C. Wyeth, 1937. Frontispiece illustration for Kenneth Roberts' *Trending Into Maine* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938).
This romantic depiction of Waymouth's arrival does not reflect the negative impact his voyage had on the Wabanaki. How might you depict the encounter if Waymouth and his crew has kidnapped your friends or family?

Waymouth and his crew kidnapped five Wabanaki men– Nahanada, Amooret, Skidwarres, Manida, and Assacomoit. Taken back to England, these men where they spent the next year living in English households, learning the language, and gaining insight into these new people and *their* homeland. They were eventually returned to their homes, and sometimes served as reluctant guides for the next round of English explorers and settlers. This encounter did not bode well for the future of Anglo-Wabanaki relations, which remained fraught with distrust.

The Wabanaki Confederacy

The Wabanaki Nations and their neighbors had been building and breaking alliances long before the first Europeans arrived on their shores. The Wabanaki Confederacy had previously come together to protect members from the Iroquois to the west, while at other opportune times the Wabanaki and the Iroquois joined in alliances to pursue other goals. Other intra-tribal confederacies were formed on smaller scales as conflicts arose among the Wabanaki.

When Europeans came into the Wabanaki homeland, these confederacies played an important role in building a unified resistance to colonization, and in managing new alliances with Europeans.

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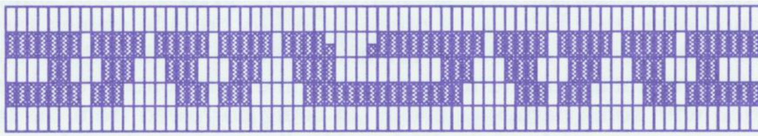


Wampum belt representing the four tribes forming the Wabanaki Confederacy.
Illustration from “The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy,” by Frank G. Speck, *American Anthropologist*, 1915.

In Depth: The Wabanaki Confederacy

While a good deal of attention is given in history books to alliances and conflicts between European colonial powers, these same types of interactions among the Wabanaki and their neighboring tribes are often ignored.

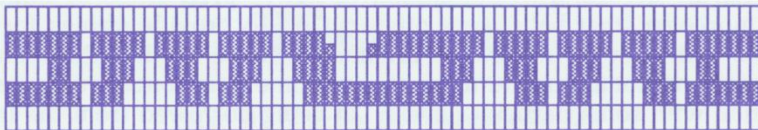
Europeans arriving on the Maine coast in the 1600s tell of the Mawooshen Confederacy, an alliance of a number of Wabanaki bands and their sagoms (leaders), with Bashaba, the sagom from the Penobscot village near present-day Bangor, as its head. This alliance was probably formed to strengthen defenses against raiders from Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) groups to the west.

The larger Wabanaki Confederacy, which was likely formalized in the late 1600s, had its roots in pre-Contact social and political interactions. The Wabanaki Confederacy included the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki. It was created to protect the Wabanaki homeland from the powerful and aggressive Iroquois Confederacy to the west, and became an important diplomatic entity in dealings with the French and English.

The Native nations involved recognized that ending conflict was vital to the survival of their people and their sovereignty.

> Long ago, the Indians were always fighting with one another. They struck one another bloodily. There were many men, women, and children who alike were tormented by these constant battles. At that time the wise ones thought that something had to happen. Whatever was to happen had to happen soon. They sent out messengers in the different directions to everywhere Indians were located…. Every Indian, to the farthest boundaries, was informed that a great confederacy was going to be made.
>
> –Lewis Mitchell, Passamaquoddy, as recorded by John Dyneley Prince, 1897, translated from the Passamaquoddy by Robert M. Leavitt and David A. Francis

These historic alliances were primarily formed to end conflict within and among the original inhabitants of the region, which the Native nations knew was vital to the survival of their people and their sovereignty.



Wampum belt representing the four tribes forming the Wabanaki Confederacy.
Illustration from "The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy," by Frank G. Speck, *American Anthropologist*, 1915.

The primary function of wampum was to symbolize a pledge of honor. It was often used to communicate messages among tribes. The geometric patterns were meant to recall important events such as oral histories, treaties, and agreements. Belts were brought back and forth from important events and passed down from generation to generation. Community members who carried the knowledge of how to read wampum had a special status. Wampum was traditionally made from quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) clam shells.