

Who are the Abenaki?

Abenakis can be classified into two categories: the Western and Eastern Abenaki. Historically the Western Abenaki people lived in what is today known as Eastern New York, Northern Massachusetts, Southwestern Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and north toward Quebec, Canada. As members of the Seven Nations and Wabanaki Confederacy, Abenakis interacted with their Native American neighbors to the North, South, East and West on a regular basis.



Upon the arrival of Europeans, disease and warfare caused immeasurable changes in the Abenaki way of life. The Abenakis allied with the French with whom they traded raw materials for new commodities such as wool, linen shirts, silk ribbons, glass beads, tools and firearms. As allies the Abenaki and French fought together against the British encroachment into N'Dakinna (the land).

By the late 18th century prejudice and the embattled situation in surrounding areas forced the Abenaki to break up into smaller family bands or clans in order to survive. In the 18th century the British burned our long-standing villages of Mission des Loups at the Koas, Missisquoi along the Missisquoi River and St. Francis – which the Abenaki people know as Odanak – in Quebec. Little is recorded of the Abenaki in historical accounts during the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. However, our families maintained oral histories and strong traditions from this time. Since the 1970s the Abenaki have been experiencing an interest in cultural revitalization.



Today there are two provincially recognized Western Abenaki tribes in Canada: Odanak and Wolinak. In the United States four Abenaki tribes received State Recognition in Vermont in 2011 and 2012: the Elnu, Koasek, Missisquoi and Nulhegan tribes. It's estimated that there are 2,100 Abenakis in Quebec and 3,200 in Vermont and New Hampshire. It's believed that's a conservative figure because it doesn't include non-recognized and unaffiliated Abenakis.

Maintaining Connections to the Past

Abenaki life today is very different than that of our ancestors. Over long periods of time language, clothing and daily lifestyles have changed.

Now we drive cars, have jobs, and live in regular houses and just like everyone else but there are also times when we wear our old style traditional clothes. Maintaining a connection to our ancestors and our culture is very important to us and that is one of the reasons we wear special clothing that we refer to as **regalia**.

When Bob and Jeanne Morningstar Kent (right) were married in 1998, they decided to wear a combination of traditional and contemporary clothing. Jeanne wore an 18th century style trade shirt, like the ones her ancestors received from their French allies, a traditional wrap skirt and peaked hood. Her husband Bob wore a finger woven sash (**belt**), with a more modern style ribbon shirt and his blue jeans.



In 2009, Frederick Wiseman Ph D organized a fashion show that outlined how Abenaki clothing changed over thousands of years. The show entitled *Always in Fashion: 11,000 years of Wabanaki Fashion* debuted at the Echo Lake Aquarium and Science Center and was an instant hit. It gave many Abenaki people the opportunity to wear regalia for the first time. In the photo on the left depicts Abenaki woman wearing clothing from many different eras.



There are other times when we wear normal clothing with small reminders of our cultural identity. Norm M'Sadoques, from the Odanak community (lower right), says that he always wears something special to represent his identity, even if he is wearing a suit. While attending the Wabanaki Confederacy Powwow in 2015, Norm wears a feather headdress called a **hair roach** with his modern vest, t-shirt and bandana. If you're not familiar with the word **powwow** it's the word Native American people use to describe an intertribal gathering or celebration similar to a festival. There is a lot of Native American drum music, singing and people dance in a circle that is roped off.



We may not live in the same way our ancestors did in the modern world but wearing our regalia helps us maintain a connection to our history and culture.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

All cultures change over time and Native American culture is no different. Over long periods of time, the language, clothing and daily lifestyles will change.

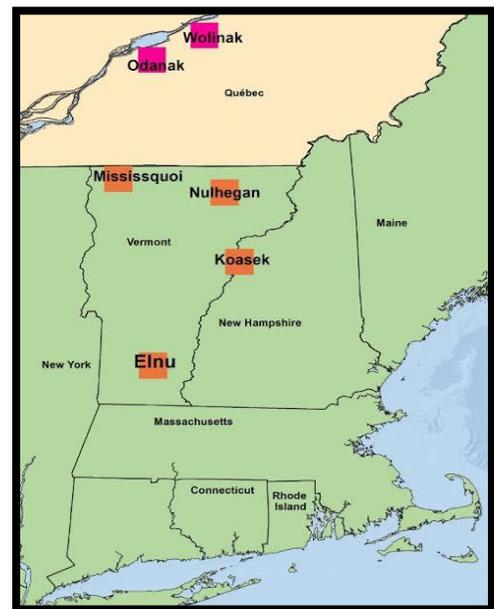
In the old days, the Abenaki people called themselves **Wabanaki** (pronounced wo ba na key). Sometimes, we still use that name but today the legal name for our people is Abenaki. Today we use the word **Alnobak** (pronounced all no bak) as the word for people so the title of this exhibit means, "People: Wearing Our Heritage."

We consider ourselves to be the people from the Dawnland because we live in the east, where the sun rises and where the sun first shines at dawn or day break. The old Abenaki word for the Dawnland is **Wobanakik** (pronounced wa ba na kik). However, today most Abenakis refer to our homelands of Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Quebec as **N'dakinna** (pronounced nn da kin na). Although most Abenakis still live in N'dakinna some have move to other states and even Europe!



Look at the painting entitled *Aerial View of N'dakinna* by Amy Hook Therrien at the bottom left of this page. Notice that there are no lines on the map. That because we have a different perspective about land ownership than modern Americans do today.

Compare that map to this next map that shows state and country boundaries. The pink square represents Abenaki Communities in Canada and the orange square represent Abenaki communities in the United States. where several Abenaki communities are.



Do you notice anything about where the lines are? Can you imagine how those invisible lines might impact communities that live near them or that they pass through.

Think about what it might be like if your road was suddenly divided by two different counties. How might those changes impact your lifestyle?

Curator Corner: Behind the Scenes

While developing the *Alnobak: Wearing Our Heritage* exhibit, I spent a lot of time communicating with the Abenaki community and artists from all over N'dakinna. It was important to make sure that the exhibit reflected how modern Alnobak wear regalia as a reflection of their identity. A lot of time was spent collecting historic images as well as regalia items that are connected to those eras. For example, we have an image of a Native American woman and man from a map created by Samuel de Champlain in the 17th century, grandmothers from the 19th century and an early 20th century basket maker and his family. However, we weren't able to get permission to use images of an 18th century watercolor paintings of an Abenaki man and women, so we contacted Francine Poitras Jones who is a painter and member of the Vermont Abenaki Artists Association.



Francine studied the historic images that we provided her with and immediately she began to do charcoal sketches on a piece of **rawhide** – a hard piece of leather. She showed me her sketches and I conferred with an Abenaki team of researchers. Then, we would make suggestions for additions and sometimes color changes so the fabric might closer match colors that were available in the 18th century. She completed two versions of the Abenaki Couple. The first was on raw hide (hard leather), and the second on canvas. Although the images of a man and woman are similar to the original watercolor paintings they are based on these painting have much more vivid colors.

Abenaki clothing from the French and Indian War era is very different than what you might have imagined. They wore very little leather with the exception of moccasins, a shot bag, a knife sheath and possibly leggings. There were few indigenous textiles in use with the exception of twined plant fiber bags. Most of our cloths were made of trade cloth we received from our French allies who were members of a worldwide trade network.

White linen French style shirts and chemises were commonplace. Abenaki crafts people usually fashioned clothing from red and blue wool. Wool hoods, wrap skirts, leggings and breechcloths were decorated with silk ribbon. Abenakis wore **matchcoats** (blankets) to keep warm. Finger woven **sashes** (belts) and **leg ties** (garters to hold up their leggings) were made from yarn.

Ornamentation was an important addition to clothing. The Abenaki wore silver or brass nose rings and ear ornaments. European trade goods were incorporated into everyday wear. European glass wampum beads were strung and worn much as costume jewelry is worn today. They also wore European trade silver pieces such as nose rings, arm bands, wrist bands and earrings. With so many new items available Abenaki men still wore white shell “moons” at the breast.



FOR THE NEXT 7 GENERATIONS

There are many perspectives that can be used to define **sustainability** and equally as many ways to achieve sustainability, each often emphasizing a certain goal. Generally, an activity is considered sustainable when the inputs required to perform do not exceed the outputs gained from it *and* it does not limit or compromise the ability for others to perform that same activity. When activists speak of sustainability, it takes on the additional meaning: ensuring that the ability of future generations to meet their needs is not compromised.

The significance of this is more often than not, lost on politicians, corporate business owners and industrial giants who prioritize profit over the welfare of humanity. By contrast, teachings of sustainability are nothing new to most Native American communities. From a young age, we are taught to care for the planet and its resources for **the Next Seven Generations**. Our natural resources are to be cherished and protected, as no generation has more of a right to enjoy those resources than any other. We are taught to think of ourselves as **stewards** of the environment, safeguarding it for the future, and we are each responsible for teaching the next generation to do the same.



Sustainability has remained one of the core principles of traditional Native American lifestyles across this country for hundreds of years. Just as many of the artists in this exhibit use their clothing to express their pride for their heritage, sustainability allows us to have the resources necessary to create the art you'll see today. When combined with our traditional teachings, it also gives Natives a deep-seated reverence for the natural world even as they work materials into art. Native people from a young age know never to take more than what is needed whether the situation at hand is a dinner celebration or harvesting milkweed to make a basket like in the photo below.



We are also taught never to allow anything to go to waste -- a concept that's virtually unheard of many industries where factories generate excessive waste because it is "cheaper" to dispose of waste than try to repurpose it or invest in machines that would generate less waste. This of course is a fallacy; while it appears financially cheaper, continual resource extraction degrades the local environment, the watershed, and threatens **biodiversity**. All of which are 'long term' expenses that must eventually be paid and the consequences are suffered not just by the current generation, but for future ones as well.

Instead of thoughtlessly extracting resources from the planet, let's build on what we've learned and see how we can address the needs of current and future generations without compromising either group's livelihood. Everyone needs food, clean water, clothes and shelter. As you outgrow your clothes or notice certain clothing is hardly worn, you can donate them to shelters, charities, and thrift stores. Instead of buying every outfit straight off the rack at a large retailer, try going through second-hand stores to see if how many of your needs can be met there. Do your best to make conscious choices to reduce your impact on the world around you by taking shorter showers and shutting off the water when you brush your teeth.

