

Encounters: Artists and Traders

Artistry and skilled craftsmanship have been highly valued by the Wabanaki for thousands of generations and are an important point of encounter and engagement with others. Besides playing a significant economic role, these crafts, tools, and works of art communicate the culture, history, and values of the Wabanaki people to the world.

Right Column:



Sarah Sockbeson. William Drake, photographer. Image courtesy of the Hudson Museum, The University of Maine.

For my inspiration, I look to the past, present and future. I see it as being vitally important to acknowledge the traditions of the past. I have a responsibility to honor my ancestors that have practiced the art of basketry long before I was alive, to ensure that it is not lost or forgotten. It gives me great pride knowing that I am able to perform this tradition in almost all the same ways it was done years ago. To create a work of art out of raw material such as the ash tree is almost magical. As I weave, it is almost like having a spiritual connection with the past.

–Sarah Sockbeson, Penobscot

Follow-on Text:

See how Wabanaki artists are helping to break the “invisibility” of Indians in Maine by bringing their work to the national stage.

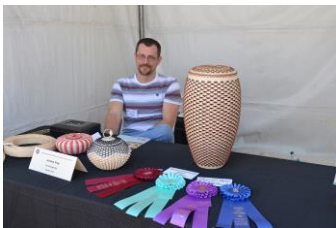
The National Stage

Contemporary Wabanaki artists are winning awards and national recognition for the quality and creativity of their work, especially in the time-honored tradition of basketmaking.

The growing understanding of and appreciation for what goes into making a fine basket has meant that some can make a living as full-time artists, acting as cultural ambassadors to the outside world and helping to break the “invisibility” of Indians in Maine.

National recognition began in the 1990s with National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships, and more recently with Wabanaki artists winning top honors at nationally-renowned juried Indian art shows.

Right Column:



Jeremy Frey and his winning basket, 2015 Heard Museum Indian Fair & Market. Image courtesy of Heard Museum.

I love that I do a traditional art form. I love that it connects me to my people — to who I am. Being successful at it helps a lot, but I’d still love it even so. You have to value what you’re doing.

—Jeremy Frey, Passamaquoddy, 2011

Follow-on Text:

Learn how the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance has preserved and fostered Wabanaki ash and sweetgrass basketry weaving traditions.

In Depth: The National Stage

Contemporary Wabanaki artists are winning awards and being recognized nationally for the quality and creativity of their work, building on generations of basketmaking knowledge passed down from their ancestors. The high quality of their work, the artistic creativity being expressed, and a growing understanding of the skill and labor needed to create a high-end basket are finally being more widely recognized and appreciated by collectors and museums alike. Not only has this meant that some basketmakers can make a living as artists, but it has also brought the cultural messages within Wabanaki basketry to a national and world stage, helping to break the “invisibility” of Indians in Maine.

Learn more about the central place of basketmaking in Wabanaki culture in the Story Tree section of the exhibit.



Mary Mitchell Gabriel, National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow. Photo by Bob Noonan.

National recognition of outstanding Wabanaki basketmakers began in the 1990s. Passamaquoddy master basketmaker Mary Mitchell Gabriel was named a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow in 1994. She was followed by Clara Neptune Keezer, Passamaquoddy, in 2002 and Molly Neptune Parker, Passamaquoddy, in 2012.

The next big breakthrough happened when Passamaquoddy basketmaker Jeremy Frey won Best of Show at both the Heard Museum Indian Fair & Market in Phoenix and the Santa Fe Indian Market in 2011. Since then, Wabanaki basketmakers have been winning honors at both shows every year.



Emma Soctomah with her winning baskets, Santa Fe Indian Market, 2015. Image courtesy of the artist.

Well, my apprentice has done it again--first and second place in the youth division for the third year in a row! Congratulations Emma! Did I mention she is only 11 years old? Also, I won an honorable mention in traditional basketry! Come and see us tomorrow and Sunday at the Santa Fe Indian Market, booth 671 PLZ. –George Neptune, Passamaquoddy, on Facebook, August 21, 2015

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance (MIBA) was founded in 1993 to save the highly endangered ash and sweetgrass basketry weaving traditions of the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Tribes. At the time of its founding, there were fewer than a dozen Wabanaki basket makers younger than the age of fifty.

By 2013, through twenty years of educational programs and marketing efforts, the Alliance lowered the average age of basket makers from sixty three to forty, and increased the number of members from fifty to more than 200 active basketmakers.

Right column:



Master Basketmaker Molly Neptune Parker, Passamaquoddy, and her apprentice, grandson George Neptune. Courtesy of the Maine Arts Commission.



Mi'kmaq baskets for sale at the Native American Festival, Bar Harbor. Photo by Madelaine Azar.

Follow-on Text:

Find out about how the Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op provided economic opportunities and sustained basketmaking skills in the Passamaquoddy communities.

In Depth: The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance counts several nationally award-winning basket makers among its membership, including National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellows, First Peoples Fund Community Spirit Award Recipients, a United States Artists Fellow, Maine Traditional Arts Fellows and a Native Arts and Cultures Foundation Fellow.



Clara Keezer, Passamaquoddy, and the Native American Festival & Basketmaker's Market, 2012. Photo by Grace Jia.

The MIBA also partners with other organizations across the state to produce several shows and sales throughout the year.

Native American Festival & Basketmaker's Market, July, Bar Harbor

Maine Native American Summer Market and Demonstration, Sabbathday Lake, August

Common Ground Country Fair, Unity, September

Maine Indian Basketmakers Sale and Demonstration, Orono, December

The Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op

The first Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op was established at Sipayik in 1968, and the Motahkomikuk Co-op started up two years later. These basket co-ops were an innovative approach to economic development in communities facing great economic hardship. They tapped into the traditional basketmaking skills and communal work ethic of the Passamaquoddy communities to both generate income and educate non-Native visitors about Passamaquoddy culture. While they were only in operation for about a decade, they played an important role in keeping basketmaking alive in the communities.

Quote:



Working on a basket at the Co-op, 1971. Photo courtesy of the Passamaquoddy Cultural Heritage Museum.

All of the women, all of the elders, really enjoyed being able to work together; it was a way for them to provide for themselves, but it was more important that they were able to work together. The Basket Co-op was good for our people, because it was a place for them to be happy. It was a way for them to make money together while doing what they loved.

—Molly Neptune Parker, Passamaquoddy master basketmaker

Follow-on Text:

Read about the central role of Wabanaki work baskets in the agricultural economy of northern Maine.

In Depth: Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op

During the first part of the 20th century, Passamaquoddy basketmakers relied heavily on the sale of fish scale baskets to the processing plants and canneries in eastern Maine. When the fisheries dropped off and the canneries closed, the tribe looked to other ways for basketmakers to make a living.



Scale baskets aboard a sardine carrier, Eastport, Maine, date unknown.

The Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op was started at Sipayik in 1968 by Molly and Moses Neptune, who after a few years turned over management to Arthur Newell. Set up in the local Parish Hall, the Co-op created a new marketplace for Passamaquoddy tribal members to sell their work. Two years later in 1970, Moses Neptune helped set up a second Basket Co-op at Motahkomikuk inside the local theater. The basket co-ops were now being funded in large part through federal economic development grants and contracts. Many tribal members were employed, with women making dozens of fancy baskets per week and men preparing materials and making utility baskets.



Baskets and collectibles for sale at the Basket Co-op, 1971. Photo courtesy of the Passamaquoddy Cultural Heritage Museum.

After several years of supporting the creation and sale of hundreds of ash and sweetgrass baskets, government and tribal economic development priorities shifted, and the Basket Co-ops were closed in before the end of the 1970s.

At the time, I thought it was a good idea—and I never gave it much thought, to be truthful. But it would have been something good if we kept it up, that I do know. I think it could have been good for the tribe if we had. All of the women, all of the elders, really enjoyed being able to work together; it was a way for them to provide for themselves, but it was more important that they were able to work together. I wasn't as involved at Indian Township as I was at Pleasant Point—I would come to Indian Township and visit, and you could see how happy they were on their faces. That's the biggest thing I would say about

the Basket Co-op; it was good for our people, because it was a place for them to be happy. It was a way for them to make money together while doing what they loved. –Molly Neptune Parker, Passamaquoddy master basketmaker

Potato Baskets

Maine's potato industry took off in 1878 when Aroostook County got its first rail connection to outside markets. By the mid-20th century, there were more than 40,000 people picking potatoes in the fall harvest. Each of these pickers needed a basket.

Wabanaki pickers developed the now-classic potato basket form while working in the fields. They found the bags that were being used awkward. Entire Micmac families would work for several months to produce enough baskets to meet the demand, often hiring other Wabanaki to help.

The increasing mechanization of the potato harvest has meant that demand for potato baskets has dropped dramatically. Several Micmac families in Maine still make smaller quantities of workbaskets for use in households and kitchen gardens around the region.

Word Count: 123

Right Column:



Nora Estabrook, Maliseet, picking potatoes at Houlton, Maine, ca. 1950. She began picking potatoes when she was seven years old. Photo courtesy of Nora Estabrook.



Contemporary potato baskets by Eldon Hanning, Micmac, and his family, for sale at the Native American Festival & Basketmaker's Market, 2013.

Follow-on Text:

Find out how Mi'kmaq carvers inspired and supported the growth of Canada's national pastime, ice hockey.

Mi'kmaw Hockey Sticks

While the Wabanaki are perhaps best known for their baskets, they are also well known for a game, and specifically a stick, that evolved out of Mi'kmaw traditions – hockey!

First marketed by the Starr Manufacturing Company of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in the 1860s, the Mic-Mac brand ice hockey stick was the best-selling stick in Canada by 1903. At this time, hand-carving hockey sticks was the primary occupation of Mi'kmaq on reserves throughout Nova Scotia.

Mi'kmaw oral traditions tell of *Alje'ma'tijik*, a stick and ball game played on ice, long before the arrival of Europeans. There are more than thirty Mi'kmaw words describing this predecessor to hockey.

Quote:



Photograph of Mi'kmaq making hockey sticks from hornbeam trees (*Carpinus caroliniana*) in Nova Scotia, ca. 1890

I [want my son] to be proud. I always tell him, “Chase, this is our game. You can do this. This is our game. The Mi'kmaq invented hockey.”

- Cheryl Maloney, president of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and member of the Indian Brook First Nation

Follow-on Text:

See the Indian encampments that introduce tourists and summer visitors in Maine to the Wabanaki and their traditions.

In Depth: Mi'kmaw Hockey Sticks

The Mic-Mac brand ice hockey stick was first marketed by the Starr Manufacturing Company of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in the 1860s. With the rising popularity of hockey in Canada in the 1890s, the Mic-Mac was the best-selling hockey stick in Canada by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1903, it was noted that making hand-carved hockey sticks was the primary occupation of the Mi'kmaq on reserves throughout Nova Scotia, particularly Shubenacadie, Indian Brook and Millbrook. As the manufacture of hockey sticks became mechanized, the practice of hand-carving quickly disappeared. The surviving 19th century sticks have now become valuable antiques—in 2006, a stick made by Mi'kmaq in the 1850s was sold at auction for \$2.2 million.



Traditional carved hockey sticks, courtesy of the Windsor Hockey Heritage Society.

There is a deep history behind the Mic-Mac hockey stick. Mi'kmaw oral traditions tell of a game played on ice with a stick and a ball well before the arrival of Europeans, and there more than thirty indigenous Mi'kmaw words describing this game, a predecessor to hockey. Recently, a carved wooden hockey-like stick was found that may date back to the 1630s.

I [want my son] to be proud. I always tell him, “Chase, this is our game. You can do this. This is our game. The Mi'kmaq invented hockey.”

– Cheryl Maloney, president of the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and member of the Indian Brook First Nation

While hockey sticks are no longer carved by hand by Mi'kmaw artisans, the game of hockey is still played by First Nations players across Canada.

Indian Encampments

With the rise of tourism in Maine in the mid-1800s, Wabanaki artists, craftspeople, entertainers, and guides traveled to tourist destinations to market their goods and services.

No longer able to survive solely on the old lifeways, Wabanakis now made a living by selling their traditional arts, crafts, and canoeing skills to rusticators who visited their tented encampments.

At its peak in 1885, Bar Harbor's summer Indian village was home to 250 Wabanakis.

Right column:



Wabanaki family inside sales tent, circa 1884. Photo by Bryant Bradley, courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.



Wabanaki encampment along Bar Harbor's rocky north shore at the foot of Bar/Bridge Street, 1881. Photo by Kilburn Brothers, courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

Follow-on Text:

Learn how Wabanaki traders engaged with Europeans in ways that both preserved and changed their traditional lifeways and art forms.

In Depth: Indian Encampments

With the rise of tourism in Maine in the mid-1800s, Wabanaki artists, craftspeople, entertainers, and guides traveled to tourist destinations to market their goods and services.



At a time when economic resources and opportunities on the reservations were extremely limited, tourists and wealthy summer residents provided a means of survival, both economic and cultural.

My great-great grandfather Frank Loring, known as Chief Big Thunder, loved Bar Harbor and spent many years traveling there seasonally and camping on the island. While there, his mind was on finding folks to rent his canoes, sport-hunters he could guide, customers for his traditional wares, and audiences for his stories. Very often, his mind was on the show or pageant he was going to perform in or direct. He was a real showman, a very good one.

—Donna Loring, Penobscot



Shoreside view of the Indian encampment at the foot of Bar/Bridge Street, Bar Harbor, 1881. Photo by Kilburn Brothers, courtesy of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

Wabanaki people came to Mount Desert Island and other resort locations seeking economic opportunities. For them, the island was a familiar place long frequented by their ancestors for fishing, hunting, and gathering. No longer able to survive solely on the old lifeways, Wabanakis now marketed their traditional arts, crafts, and canoeing skills to rusticators who visited their tented encampments. At its peak in 1885, Bar Harbor's summer Indian village was home to 250 Wabanakis.



Wabanaki sale tents at the southeast end of Ledgelawn Avenue, Bar Harbor, 1890s.

The Indian encampment at Bar Harbor will be found a pleasant place to wile away an hour or two. The village is composed of a score or two of little wood and canvas shanties, in which are sold a great variety of aboriginal trinkets, skins of seal and deer, baskets of birch-bark, moccasins, bead-work, snow-shows, gulls' breasts, stuffed birds, clubs, carved sticks, bows and arrows, etc. -Chisholm's Mount Desert Guide, 1888

Early European Trade

Main Text:

Trade between the Wabanaki and Europeans in the earliest years of contact benefited both groups. Europeans were able to extract resources like furs and food without having to venture into the surrounding areas to fend for themselves. At the same time, Wabanaki people were able to acquire new technologies and materials that they incorporated into traditional art forms and subsistence activities. This has resulted in a rich tapestry of cultural artifacts stemming from the experiences and encounters of both peoples.

Right column:



Mary Christianne Paul Morris (1814-1884), and her adopted son Joe, Mi'kmaq, ca. 1865. Their clothing follows the tradition of incorporating trade goods like glass beads and silk ribbon into special-occasion regalia. Photograph by J. S. Rogers.

I would say our culture has definitely adapted...I imagine that people think, "That's really white. That's cloth, that's not Native." I think that speaks to our history, to who we are. It shows us as an evolving culture, as people who had exposure to non-Native culture, and used their materials. I think it tells the story that we are not just a stagnant culture that only wore buckskin.

–Suzanne Greenlaw, Maliseet

Follow-on Text:

Find out how Wabanaki innovations and interactions shaped their material culture long before the arrival of Europeans.

In Depth: Early European Trade

Many Europeans traveling to the Wabanaki homeland in the sixteenth century were interested in the wealth of natural resources, many of which were depleted or nearly so back in Europe. Europeans often found trading with the Wabanaki for furs and food much more efficient than harvesting these resources themselves.



From *A Map of the Inhabited Part of Canada from the French Surveys, with the Frontiers of New York and New England*, William Faden, 1777, Library of Congress.

For the Wabanaki, some of the most desirable trade goods were those that Native artisans could use to embellish their clothing and other belongings: fine metal needles, a wide variety of glass beads, fine silk ribbons. Wabanaki women developed a skilled tradition of beadworking and textile work that continues to flourish across Indian Country. Even practical objects like copper kettles were repurposed when they wore out, cutting and rolling the copper into beads and tinkling cones.



Trade beads from the Tranquility Farm Site, Gouldsboro, Maine.

Standing fair along the shore...we came to an anchor where six [Mi'kmaq] Indians, in a Basque shallop with mast and sail, an iron grapple, and a kettle of copper, came boldly aboard us, one of them appareled with a waistcoat and breeches of black serge, made after our sea-fashion, hose and shoes on his feet. —John Brereton in his account of Bartholomew Gosnold's 1602 voyage to New England

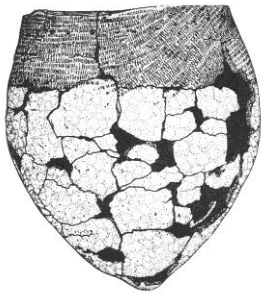
Working in Clay

Before the arrival of Europeans, the Wabanaki shared innovations in craftsmanship and art across tribal groups. Perhaps one of the most important innovations that we see in the Wabanaki homeland is the manufacture of clay pottery beginning about 3,000 years ago.

We cannot know for sure whether Wabanaki potters discovered the potential of fired clay vessels on their own or first encountered clay pots in the hands of their neighbors. As people throughout the region developed their own pottery shapes and decorative styles, each learned from their neighbors, innovating and adapting knowledge and skills to create pots using local clays.

Word Count: 100

Right column:



Reconstructed clay pot. Illustration by David Putnam.

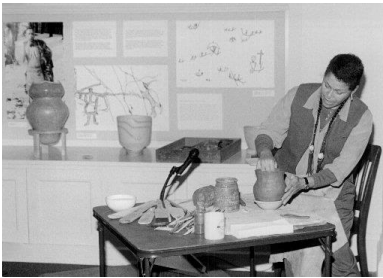
The introduction of this new technology must have been transformative on many levels. It's an important reminder that technological innovation shapes us as much as we shape it.

—Bonnie Newsom, Penobscot, archaeologist

In Depth: Working in Clay

Millennia before Europeans arrived on these shores, the Wabanaki and their ancestors interacted with tribal groups both near and far through trade, marriage, war, and the exchange of ideas and crafts. Perhaps one of the most important craft innovations that we see in the Wabanaki homeland shaped by these interactions is the manufacture of clay pottery around 3,000 years ago.

We don't know for sure whether Wabanaki potters discovered the potential of fired clay vessels on their own, or first encountered clay pots in the hands of their neighbors to the south and west. As people throughout the region developed their own pottery shapes and decorative styles, each potter would have actively learned from their neighbors and applied innovative and adaptive knowledge and skills to create pots using local clays.



Ramona Peters, Wampanoag, demonstrates pot-building techniques at the Robert S. Peabody Museum in Andover, MA. Photo by Malinda Blustain.

In the last few centuries before the arrival of Europeans, ideas about pottery form and decoration were shared between the Wabanaki and their Iroquois neighbors to the west. The similarity between pots from the two regions reflects an increasingly involved and complex relationship between the two groups. At times adversarial and at other times cooperative, the Iroquois and Wabanaki eventually found themselves drawn into opposite sides of colonial conflicts between the French and English.



Pottery fragments from Wabanaki sites around Frenchman Bay.

Wabanaki potters continued to make and use clay pots until the arrival of Europeans, when copper and other metal vessels, along with the birchbark containers they had also been making all along, replaced the fragile and heavy clay for preparation, storage, and transportation of food and other materials.

What is most significant about the adoption of pottery is that this is the first evidence we have of people in the region engaging with a new natural resource--clay. I suspect that along with that came a whole suite of cultural behaviors (rituals, gender roles, subsistence, settlement choices, etc.). The introduction of this new technology must have been transformative on many levels. It's an important reminder that technological innovation shapes us as much as we shape it. –Bonnie Newsom, Penobscot, archaeologist