

# People of the Dawn

As the glaciers retreated, the land now known as Maine was a treeless tundra, home to large Ice Age animals such as the woolly mammoth. As warming continued from south to north, the forests gradually moved northward and plants, like the wild blueberry, began to emerge from the soil.



The nomadic Paleoindian peoples, the earliest known human occupants of the region, arrived in Maine between about 13,000 and 11,000 years ago, during a time when remnants of glacial ice were still melting in northern parts of Maine. The Paleoindians who arrived were primarily hunter-gatherers and were likely the first people to gather, store, prepare, and consume wild blueberries in what is now Maine.



*Sunrise at Lubec, Maine- The easternmost point in the United States, where the sun's rays first touch the US.*

Over thousands of years, as the climate stabilized and forests, rivers, and coastlines took on more familiar forms, these early inhabitants adapted alongside the land. They spoke the Algonquian languages with regional dialects and formed many individual tribes. Together they were known as the Wabanaki, which translates to "The People of the Dawnland," a place name describing their proximity to the sunrise in the easternmost lands of the North American continent.

Blueberries were consumed fresh by the Wabanaki peoples and they were also preserved by smoking or sun drying. Berries were often cooked into a mash, shaped into cakes before drying. These dried berries were used in a variety of dishes. Many Wabanaki stories describe the wild blueberry as a sacred gift. During a time of starvation, the Great Spirit sent "star berries" down from the heavens to relieve the hunger of the children. The name "star berry" is a physical trait of the blueberry with a five-pointed star present on the blossom end (calyx) of the berry. Traditionally, blueberries have been viewed as a sacred gift for children, with grandparents, particularly grandmothers sharing blueberries with their grandchildren as a symbol of love, care, and endearment.



*Maine Wild blueberries, *Vaccinium angustifolium*, grow low to the ground and are smaller and sweeter than their cultivated cousins.*



*The blueberry barrens of the Passamaquoddy Blueberry company. This 2,000 acre blueberry barren is owned by the Passamaquoddy Tribe.*

Collectively, the Wabanaki believed in land stewardship rather than ownership. Wabanaki life followed a seasonal cycle shaped by Maine's natural environmental rhythms: fishing and planting in the spring, coastal living and harvesting in the summer, gathering wild blueberries in late summer, hunting and food preservation in the fall, and inland winter camps where stories, knowledge, and traditions were passed from one generation to the next. Among these cyclical practices, the Wabanaki, and particularly the Penobscot

tribe, used fire on the blueberry barrens. This practice encouraged growth, managed plant disease, and was a natural pest management measure. This management method is still used by commercial blueberry growers to this day.

As time went on, the Wabanaki belief that land was collectively owned and shared rather than individually owned was in direct conflict with the European worldview of private property and land ownership. These differing views contributed to conflict between the two populations and atrocities were committed. In the years of early exploration and settlement, contact with European explorers and settlers resulted in devastating disease outbreaks that decimated the Wabanaki population. In addition, the Iroquois Confederacy, a powerful indigenous rival to the south, was a threat to individual Maine tribes. In response, the Penawahpskek (Penobscot), Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Peskotomuhkatiyik (Passamaquoddy), Abenaki, and Mi'kmaq nations formed the Wabanaki Confederacy, a political alliance for mutual support and defense. The Wabanaki Confederacy developed gradually rather than being created on a single date, so historians cannot identify an exact year for its formation. Many scholars believe it emerged around the late 1600s. This political pact created an alliance between nations that became especially important as Indigenous nations faced increased pressure from European colonization. As tribal needs have grown and changed over time, tribes within the Wabanaki nation continue to work together to protect their tribal sovereignty, lands, waters, cultural traditions, foodways, and treaty rights to ensure that Native Nations within Maine continue to sustain their cultures for future generations.



*While borders were not fixed, this map represents traditional homelands of Wabanaki tribes.*

*Map courtesy of Maine DOE Wabanaki Studies.*

| Traditional Name            | pronunciation                               | Meaning                                  | Colonized Name            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mi'kmaq                     | meeg-maw                                    | My kin friends                           | Micmac                    |
| Panawahpskek                | buh-nuh-wub-skek                            | People who live where the rocks come out | Penobscot                 |
| Peskotomuhkatiyik           | beska-d'm-oo-kud-ee-ig                      | People who hunt pollock                  | Passamaquoddy             |
| Wolastoqiyik                | woh-luhst-tuk-ee-ig                         | People of the beautiful river            | Maliseet                  |
| Abenaki at Odanak & Wolinak | ah-ben-ahk-ee<br>Oh-dun-ahk<br>wall-uhm-ahk | People of the East<br>In the village     | Abenaki<br>Odanak Wolinak |



*This table represents both traditional and colonized names. To learn more about each Tribal Nation, visit the official Tribal Nation websites to explore and learn more about each community. Table courtesy of Maine DOE Wabanaki Studies*