

The Mashpee Wampanoag

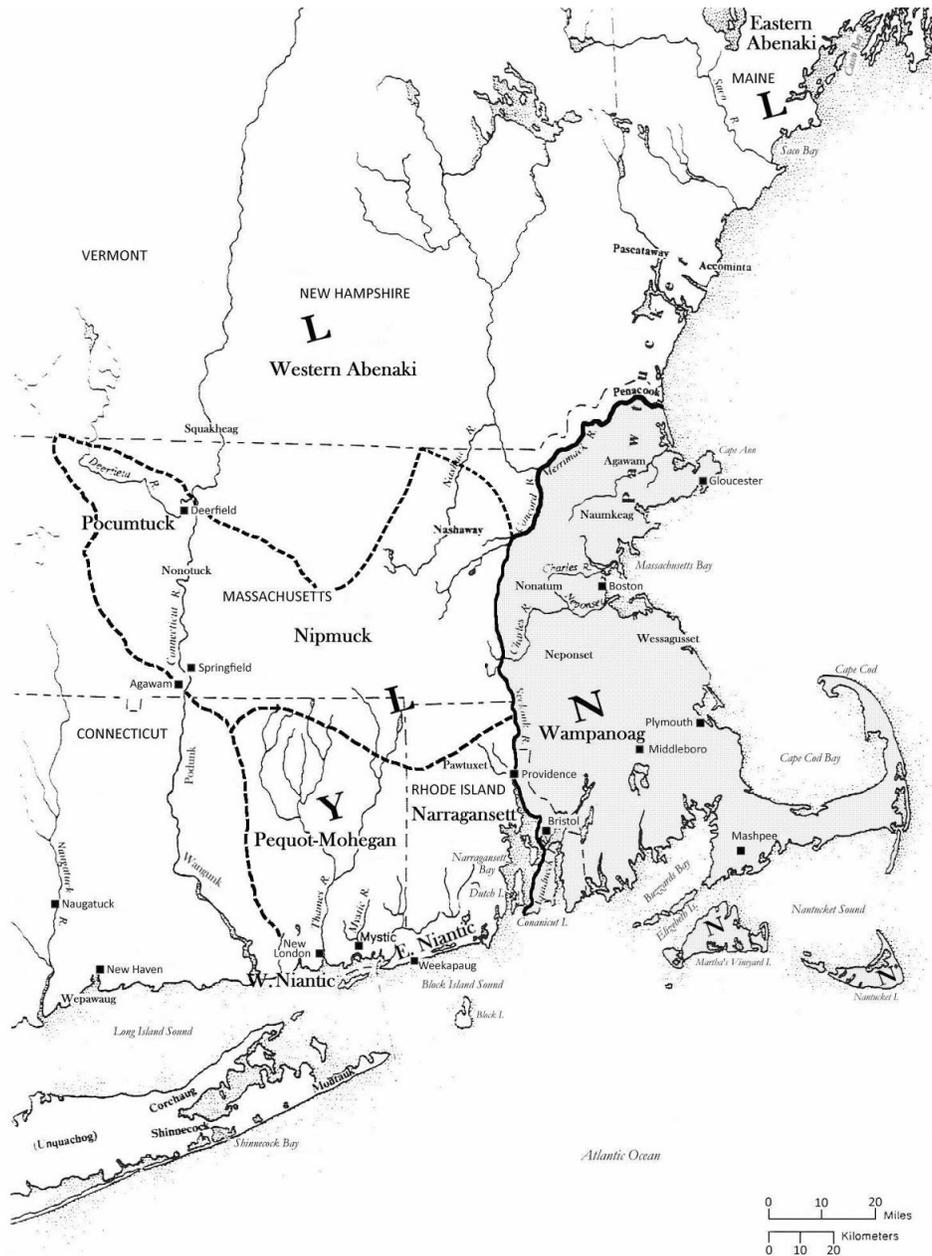
A Brief Sketch of Our History and Who We Are Today

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Mashpee is but one of an original 69 tribes comprising the Wampanoag Nation. Archeological evidence has determined the presence of Wôpanâak (Wampanoag) in this region for at least 12,000 years. Another term for the nation has been the Pokanoket but this is mere confusion as there was in fact an area called Pokanoket *Place of Cleared Land* with several Wampanoag tribes residing in the area. Throughout history, this confusion has led to Pokanoket being an ethnonym for Wampanoag. Some historic terms applied specifically to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe by settlers or missionaries have been the South Sea Indians, the Mashapoag Indians, the Sandwich Indians, the Praying Indians, and the Marshpees.

Traders visited throughout our history. The Wampanoag and our indigenous neighboring nations lived in this region without sustained European contact until the 17th century. The name of the Nation, meaning Eastern People/Original People/First People, is often translated as *People of the Dawn* or *People of the First Light* due its similarity to the word for East, Wôpanayuw. This term for East is such due to the direction where the daylight first appears.

Wampanoag Nation Tribal and Linguistic Territory About 1630



This is Mohegan/Pequot territory west to the Connecticut River after 1620. Most of the modern towns shown here were established after 1630. The linguistic distribution territory equals the political territory of the nations. The original of this map is found in: Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 15, Northeast, editor, W.C. Sturtevant Washington, DC 1978, Smithsonian Institution.

The map above shows the places of residence of the Wampanoag Nation during the decades following sustained contact with Europeans arriving here on the Mayflower and several other

ships. The places where Wampanoag lived are seen in the Native-written documents of the 1650s and later. Also displayed are the various linguistic boundaries of the region.

The Language

The name of the language is Wôpanâk, pronounced, *womp a naa on too aah onk*. It has been referred to by various names throughout history such as Natick, Wôpanâak, Massachusetts, Wampanoag, Massachusee and Coweaset, as well as others. The language is but one in some forty languages that comprise the Algonquian language family-the largest geographical distribution of languages in the Western Hemisphere. There are two dialects of Wôpanâk- Mainland and Islands. It was the first Native American language to employ an alphabetic writing system and Wampanoag people wrote many documents in the language beginning in the first half of the 1600s. In fact, today this body of Wampanoag written documents is the largest collection of Native written documents on the continent. These documents written in the language tell us much about the Wampanoag Nation boundaries since the place names within the Wampanoag Nation are written in the Wampanoag language and the villages within another nation's boundaries are written in that nation's language. The native written documents also speak to the contact experience as written by our Wampanoag ancestors.

The first Bible produced on a printing press in North America was printed in Wôpanâk in 1663 on the printing press at Harvard University. Today this Bible, as well as all of the other documents in the language, are the foundation of the Wampanoag language work that has earned critical acclaim through film and the work of Wôpanâk Language Reclamation Project. The project's co-founder and its' linguist Jessie little doe baird is also from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. There is now a Mukayuhsak Weekuw Preschool and Kindergarten class taught in the language and staffed by a dedicated group of language speakers. There are plans to expand and add grades 1-12.

Wampanoag Philosophy

Wampanoag philosophy is based upon an understanding that balance is the basic ingredient required for sustainable life. Both our Land and our People have thrived sustainably as part of the greater circle of life. We understand that Creation has given to us many privileges as well as responsibilities. The earth, the sun, the moon, the wind, our waters, and all living beings, our language and understanding of the world are all privileges. We also recognize our responsibility to be stewards of these gifts and to take care of our sisters and brothers. Our philosophy includes being mindful that the actions we take and the work we do now will have a direct effect on the seventh generation to come after us. Our children have historically been the object of great Love and care. Traditionally, a child was never physically punished by anyone in the community. Children were spoken to and it was a mark of a strong adult when a child was convinced of the good way to conduct oneself. We live this philosophy of privilege and responsibility still today in our approach to decision making for our families as well as the tribe

and our neighbors. There are many traditional Creation stories about the formation of the Land and waters as well the first Wampanoag man, woman, girl and boy and also mythological creatures. The tribe has a rich history of storytelling where these stories teach lessons and reflect our philosophy. Our history was traditionally kept orally and each person developed a sharpened skill for repeating exactly what was said, as this was also the method to recall and recite agreements between individuals and tribes. During the 17th century and after, the tribe recorded history in the language. Today we have many tribal citizens who enjoy both telling and writing histories and stories in both English and Wampanoag.

There are many traditional ceremonies. These are held for seasonal occurrences such as the arrival of herring and for many other reasons including naming, healing, death, birth, thanksgivings, marriage, and cleansing. Ceremonial life and prayer is still important to us today.

Homes

We traditionally sustained our communities by hunting, fishing, foraging, and planting. Today many Wampanoag families still supplement our households with traditional activities. Wampanoag traditional homes coming in two types- weety8 and neesquty8- are built with cedar frames, cattail mats, and bark coverings. The smaller of the two is the weety8 which has one smoke hole at the top. The neesquty8 is a longhouse with two smoke holes and can accommodate more than one family. The construction materials and shape of these homes are thus to deal with the weather of our region.

Family

Traditional family structure for the Wampanoag was matrilineal. Each person was accounted for as belonging to his/her mother's family line rather than the European social practice of accounting for family names based upon a person's father. Wampanoag villages traditionally showed an extended network of inter-connected families.

Traditional Government

Each village was led by a Sôtyum (a male chief) or Sôkushq (a female chief) informed by katyâqutyâmweenune8ak (both male and female councilmen) and clan leaders who were more often women. The chief of each community communicated with the Muhsasôyut (the highest ranking chief of the Wampanoag Nation). This 'Longhouse' style of governance is a model found in other Northeastern Woodland societies and used by the Founding Fathers for the democracy that became the United States of America.

First Arrivals from England

At the time of first sustained contact in 1620, the Wampanoag Nation was already experiencing a massive change in the political structure of the nation due to the loss of many tribes.

In 1616 a disease, believed by medical researchers to be yellow fever, arrived on the coast of Maine likely by fishing traders. This sickness spread south to Narragansett Bay killing an

estimated two thirds of the Wampanoag Nation by the time the Pilgrims arrived on the shores of current-day Cape Cod Bay in 1620. The Mayflower brought Pilgrims from England, an iconic group of colonists who occupied the Wampanoag village of Patuxet.

Still, with defenses weakened by the loss of so many to plague, Muhsasôyut 8sâmeeqan was wise to seek an alliance with his new neighbors in Plymouth in 1621. The alliance ensured mutual protection against threats to both communities. After a devastating first winter, during which half of the colonists died, the Pilgrims also benefitted from Wampanoag knowledge of survival in their new environment.

Prior to the sickness there were at 69 thriving Wampanoag villages within the political boundaries displayed above. By 1620 however many of the tribes in the Wampanoag Nation had fallen to this disease. As early as 1632, missionary efforts began with John Eliot to convert Wampanoag to Christianity. By 1677 only 14 Wampanoag communities (traditional or praying town) are found discussed in the record as communities with a governing body.

As with many places in the world and especially on the North American continent, colonization brought more than people and livestock. It also brought a wave of loss. Religion was basis for arguments made in the taking of Land, traditional Wampanoag law, language, and natural resources. The growing tensions between two world views would eventually erupt into open warfare.

Clash of Cultures

With the death of Ousameeqan in 1661 and during a time of heightened tension, his son Wamsutta became the Massasoit. Known to the English as, 'Alexander,' Wamsutta died only a year later. It was speculated at the time that he was poisoned by the English and his brother Pametacom (a.k.a. Metacomet, who the colonists called King Philip), ascended to lead the Wampanoag.

In April of 1671 Metacomet was called to Âhqahanut, a.k.a. Cohannut, current-day Taunton, to engage in a treaty on behalf of his people with Governor Thomas Prence of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colony. The two men signed a promise to lay down arms inside the Taunton meetinghouse. The treaty provided little relief for our people who continued to be dispossessed of land and oppressed and unfairly persecuted in English courts. In July of this same year, Sôkushq Awashonks (sister to Sôkushq Weetumoo who was wife of King Philip) made an agreement with Captain Benjamin Church that would remove her tribe from participation in King Philip's War. This agreement moved Awashonks' tribe to Mashpee to remain there with the Mashpee Tribe a.k.a. the Sandwich Indians for at least the remainder of the war with the promise that she be able to return to her territory after the war.

In June of 1675 Metacomet led the resistance we now know as King Philip's War. The conflict, which resulted in thousands of colonial and Native casualties, ended after the death of

Metacomet in August of 1676. King Philip's War, according to historians, was the bloodiest war per capita ever waged on American soil. During battle, Awashonks' sister Weetumoo was captured crossing the Taunton River and was decapitated. Her head was displaced on a pike on Taunton Green for 20 years.

After King Philip's war, Indian praying towns such as Mashpee (that were created by order of the General Court) became the only refuge for Wampanoag wishing to remain within our traditional territory. Some of Awashonks' people from the larger Pokanocket area remained in Mashpee and are today still in Mashpee. These are the Pocknett family and many cousins who today number in the hundreds.

The Tribe's Deeded Lands

In 1630 immigrant Richard Bourne of Devonshire England arrived in Shawme (current day Sandwich, MA) and was a preacher there until John Smith succeeded him in that post. Bourne left the post to become apostle to the 'Sandwich Indians.' He secured the 16 square miles of Marshpee by legal purchase and Apostle John Eliot and Reverend John Cotton ordained him as the tribe's minister in 1670. In 1685 Richard Bourne's son Shearjashub Bourne obtained a confirmation of the deed of Marshpee from the Plymouth Colony Court. The original territory of the Mashpee Tribe is a 16-square mile tract from Cape Cod Bay to Vineyard Sound. The local reservation included land in portions of present-day Sandwich, all of present day Mashpee, portions of present day Barnstable, and portions of present-day Falmouth.

In 1742 the Province of Massachusetts passed an Act that ordered 'all remnants' of historical tribes in the state to move to one of four surviving communities with functioning governments. Among the choices were Mashpee, Aquinnah, Herring Pond, and Grafton.

A panel of three White Overseers was appointed by the Province of Massachusetts in 1746 to attend to the affairs of Indians. This panel also divided lands within communities to individual families and leased Indian lands to Whites as 'excess' Indian lands.

The Mashpee Tribe began to petition the legislative body in Massachusetts for the removal of Overseers in 1748, requesting that the tribe also be 'allowed to conduct its own affairs.' The request is denied and further requests for redress and protection were made in 1752 and 1753. Neither petition was granted.

Mashpee Wampanoag Struggle and Retention of Self-governance

Determined to exercise sovereignty over our own people, Mashpee sent an emissary to request an audience with the King of England. Ruben Cognehew attained audience with King George III in 1760 to ask for redress of abuses by the Overseers. In response, the King issued a General Order to the colonies forbidding the colonies from issuing land grants of Native lands. By 1763, the Province of Massachusetts declared 'Marshpee' an incorporated Indian Plantation with rights to establish her own governmental leaders.

Having fought and lost all but three men in the Revolutionary War, Mashpee Wampanoag understand the concept of freedom and the importance of self-governance. In May of 1833 a new self-governance petition was drafted including a demand for an end to the poaching of trees, hay and fish from our land. This resulted in the "woodlot riot" on July 1, 1833 when white farmers tested Wampanoag resolve and arrived in Mashpee to take trees. Our men overturned the white farmers' cart of lumber and in much the same spirit of defiance, ejected the white minister from the meetinghouse.

Against two votes of the tribe, Mashpee became an incorporated town in 1870 and the land divided into 60-acre parcels among each adult man and woman age 18 or older. Some months later, property tax bills were sent to each landholder and when the tax could not be paid, this began the period of a final push to dispossess Mashpee Wampanoag from Mashpee land. Township stripped the tribe of the security of the original promise to hold our land "forever," but not of our pride and body politic. It also did not change the reality on the ground in that the tribe itself has never left Mashpee.

By 1910, the Wampanoag Nation was reduced to three governments: The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, and the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe. These communities remain inter-connected in tribal affairs including social and cultural events. In the 1920s our tribe established what is today the longest running public powwow east of the Mississippi. The Assonet Band was authorized by resolution of the Mashpee Wampanoag to form as a band of Wampanoag whose tribal governments ceased to exist over time. They gather on lands set aside for the Wampanoag at Wattuppa in the Freetown State Forest. This band was formed in 1992.

In Mashpee, we continued our long history and hard fought self-governance of our tribe by electing selectmen who were nearly exclusively Wampanoag until 1967. In 1974, we incorporated the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council to continue to provide leadership to our tribe after non-native population increase caused a shift in the political structure of the town. During this same time period, the tribe – in response to ever-shrinking access to traditional hunting and fishing – filed a suit for the return of Mashpee lands unlawfully taken from the tribe during the incorporation of the town in 1870. The tribe however would never see its day in land court due to the court finding that the tribe must be first be considered such by the federal government.

In 1975 the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council submitted its Letter of Intent to petition the federal government Bureau of Indian Affairs for acknowledgement. This occurred prior to the establishment of the administrative federal recognition process that we know today. Several tribes along the eastern seaboard filed similar land claim suits and some tribes settled those land claims in exchange for federal acknowledgement, the return of some acreage, and money. Mashpee did not accept that offer in 1984, opting to remain in the administrative process. One

of the major sticking points in the tribe's refusal of the settlement offer was the tribe's unwillingness to give up its Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights in exchange for acknowledgement. The regulatory requirements continued to be developed and changed during this application process. There are today seven requirements that a tribe must meet in order to gain federal acknowledgement. After 31 years of documentation submissions and an application that is an astounding 54,000 pages, the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe completed the process and was acknowledged by the United States of America in 2007.

The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe's current citizenship enrollment is just over 2,800 people-the majority of which still live in Mashpee or within 25 miles of Mashpee. We serve our citizens through a variety of education, health, employment, public safety, cultural, and social departments as well as the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Court.

Today's tribal governance is accomplished via adherence to the Constitution of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. Its preamble reading:

This Constitution is created under the divine guidance of our Creator and the wisdom of our Ancestors to establish and proclaim to the World that we, the People of the First Light, are a sovereign nation.

This Constitution is established for the self-governance of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, as is our inherent right to do.

This Tribe declares this Constitution to be the free act and will of its People. The Constitution is created without fear of, not wanting from, any man woman, child, or government. The Tribe extends Peace and Respect for our neighbors, with whom we share Mother Earth.

Accordingly, we, the Tribal members being a sovereign native People, in order to organize for the common good, to protect our self-government and our right to govern ourselves under our own laws and customs, to maintain and foster our tribal culture, to protect our homeland, to conserve and develop its natural resources, to promote the social, economic, and spiritual well-being of our People, do establish and adopt this Constitution to govern, protect, and advance the common good of the Tribe and for its future generations.

The wellbeing of the tribe is accomplished by the hard work of volunteer community citizens and over 100 employees for the tribe as well as the Tribal Council.

Laws and regulations of the Tribe are passed by an elected council of 11- including two traditional leaders- the Pawâeenun (Medicine Man) and the Sôtyum (Chief). The elected positions include the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and seven councilmembers.