

# The Passamaquoddy



Passamaquoddy basketmakers Madeline Stevens (left) and Mary Plochies Lewey (right). Photo from the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, photo no. 73-8364.

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Fall 2004

# **The Passamaquoddy**

“people of the place where polluck are taken”

“people of the dawn”

## **I. Description of Culture**

### **A. Demographics, Population, and Territory**

- Passamaquoddy- The tribe is one of four Maine tribes that make up the Wabanaki Confederacy. The Penobscot, Micmac, and Maliseet are the others.
- Reservations- Pleasant Point (Sipayik) on Passamaquoddy Bay and Indian Township fifty miles inland near the St. Croix River
- Population-The largest of Maine tribes with 3,300 members. Pleasant Point has 1,977 members on its tribal census roll. Indian Township has 800 members. An equal number of Passamaquoddies live off the reservations in Maine and other states, especially in Massachusetts and Connecticut.
- 60% of the population is under the age of 25.
- Total land before the Treaty of 1980- 23,000 acres at Indian Township minus 6,000 acres sold and leased in Maine. 100 acres at Pleasant Point. The tribe acquired an additional 115,000 acres protected by the U.S. government and 425 acres added to Pleasant Point. Since the Treaty of 1980 the tribe has a total of 300,000 acres of land.
- Also known as Abenakis, Etchemins, Machias Indians, Eastern Indians and St. Croix Indians.

### **B. History**

- Prior to European contact the Passamaquoddy nation had about 20,000 people. European diseases decimated all but 4,000.
- As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Maine coast had been attracting fishermen.
- 1790- The Non Trade/Non Intercourse Act was passed. States were not allowed to make treaties without a vote of Congress.
- Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Tribes received some recognition for service in the American Revolution. Three small reservations were established in northern Maine. This action was in violation of the Non Intercourse Act. Guaranteed health care was established.
- 1794- Passamaquoddy signed a treaty with Massachusetts giving up land in what is now Maine. Also this treaty reserved the largest piece of land, 23,000 acres, which became Indian Township Reservation.
- 1824- International boundary was drawn between New Brunswick and Maine, slicing through Passamaquoddy land.
- 1850- Most Passamaquoddies lived in Pleasant Point.
- 1852- Some moved to Peter Dana Point to establish a new village which became Indian Township.
- 1856- Passamaquoddy fund of 22,500 acres established for lease of timber, grass, and power rights.

- 1960's- Passamaquoddy Education Committee established to rebuild schools. Schools became part of the state education system. School boards were organized and the curriculum was revised to meet the needs of Passamaquoddy students.
- 1967- Last Native American group to receive full franchise to vote.
- 1970's- Tribe was making all decisions independently.
- 1980- President Carter signed the Maine Indian Settlement Act giving \$81.5 million to the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Tribes to purchase 300,000 acres of land. Also gave tribes \$27 million trust fund for economic development.
- Each tribe has its own government, laws, police, and other services.
- Today each Passamaquoddy reservation elects a governor, lieutenant governor, and a six-member council. One representative is sent to the Maine State Legislature where they are permitted to speak but not vote.
- Pleasant Point: Governor- Melvin Francis; Lieutenant Governor- Mark Altvater
- Indian Township: Governor- Robert Newall; Lieutenant Governor- Joseph Socobasin

### **C. Food**

- Currently most Passamaquoddies consume a typical western diet.
- Fish is now and always has been a large part of the diet.
- Traditional agriculture consisted of beans, corn, and squash, known as “The Three Sisters.”
- Traditionally hunted game, especially in the winter months.
- Gathered wild berries, plants, and made maple syrup.
- Used to hunt porpoise until it became an endangered species in the U.S.

### **D. Dress**

- Traditionally wore headbands with feathers, pointed caps, and moccasins.
- Women wore their hair long. Wore long skirts or long dresses with removable sleeves.
- Men wore their hair long. Wore breechcloths with leather pants legs tied on.
- Today Passamaquoddies wear modern clothes, some wear moccasins, and feathered headbands are worn on special occasions.

### **E. Language and Communication**

- All speak English today.
- Some still speak native Passamaquoddy (Peskotomuhkati) language, and attempts are being made to preserve the language.
- Algonquin language has two dialects: Maliseet is spoken mostly in New Brunswick and Passamaquoddy is spoken mostly in Maine.
- 1,500 speakers of both dialects.
- Passamaquoddy is a difficult language to learn, sounds are expressed using the whole body. The language is described as song like.
- Writing letters in the English alphabet with different sound values. They use 17 letters (5 vowels and 12 consonants) a, c, e, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, s, t, u, w, and y.

## **F. Holidays and Celebrations**

- The Annual Indian Days Celebration takes place in August at Pleasant Point. This event which preserves and celebrates the ceremonies, dances and traditions of the Passamaquoddy has taken place for over thirty years.
- Passamaquoddies celebrate a child's birth, first tooth and first step with feasts.
- Weddings are celebrated with feasts that last for days. There is also dancing, singing, storytelling, recitations and genealogies.

## **G. Religion**

- Many are Catholic or Baptist.
- It is not uncommon to mix traditional beliefs with present religion.
- Traditionally Passamaquoddies believed in spirits and supernatural powers.
- Supernatural beings served as agents of social control, premonition, or a source of special power.
- The Boogeyman is a good example of social control; he keeps small children off freshly formed ice in the fall or off unguarded beaches in the summer.
- A person having a spirit helper is "*metewelen*"; know today as a "witch".

## **II. Family, Relationships, and Roles**

- The extended family is the basis of the social organization.
- First and second cousin marriage is prohibited.
- The Passamaquoddy terms for cousins, brother and sister are differentiated by both the sex of the person speaking and being referred to.
- Grandmother and grandfather, in both English and Passamaquoddy, are used as terms of respect when speaking to anyone much older than oneself.
- From a very early age children help with adult tasks.
- Women are primarily the caregivers.
- Men are the protectors.
- Chieftainship of the tribe was hereditary in the male line. If the chief had no son or if the son was unsuitable, a nephew was selected.

## **III. Work and Leisure**

- Recently the Passamaquoddies purchased, rehabilitated, and sold for a profit a large cement-manufacturing plant.
- The tribe currently owns and operates a large blueberry growing business.
- They also operate a rapidly growing garment manufacturing business.
- Along with the Penobscots, the Passamaquoddy tribe earns income from the management of tribally owned timberlands and a high-stakes bingo hall.
- Basket weaving and beadwork are important economic and leisure activities.
- Traditional birch bark canoe construction is being relearned by some.
- Hunting and fishing remain important leisure activities. Some Passamaquoddies work as hunting and fishing guides.
- Traditional recreational activities included: foot races, canoeing, archery, lacrosse, soccer and baseball.
- Today reservations offer little recreational activity for the youth.

#### **IV. Health and Wellness**

##### **A. Traditional Medicine**

- Traditionally Passamaquoddies stayed healthy by eating and drinking what they needed. They also used sweat lodges, dancing and massage to maintain health.
- Illness was viewed as an imbalance and a shaman would be consulted to determine what was out of balance.
- Herbal medicine was used to treat illness. Women were usually the herbalists. This required an extensive knowledge of native plants.
- Smudging, the ceremonial burning of sweetgrass or sage, is a traditional purification practice still used today.

##### **B. Current Health Status**

- Outpatient health clinics funded by the Federal Indian Health Service are located at both Pleasant Point and Indian Township. Each clinic has doctors, physician's assistants, pharmacy, ambulance service, home health agency, dental clinic, mental health services, substance abuse counseling, and a WIC program.
- Nearest hospitals are located in Bangor and Calais.
- The average age of death is 48 years old.
- High rate of diabetes and obesity, partly due to the adoption of a western diet. The rate of diabetes in Native Americans is 230% higher than in the general population.
- High rate of tobacco use and an associated high rate of lung cancer.
- High rate of prescription drug abuse in Washington County and on the reservations, particularly among young people. Pain killer Oxy-Contin is ground into a powder and snorted or mixed with water and injected into the veins.
- High rate of alcoholism. Children start drinking as young as eight years old. Rate of cirrhosis of liver is three and a half times higher than the Maine state average. Homicide rate is seven times higher; suicide rate is double the state average, twice as many fatal car accidents, and three times as many deadly accidents from falls and poisonings. Alcohol is viewed as the underlying cause.
- Elementary schools are now teaching Passamaquoddy culture and language to build self image and esteem in an attempt to prevent alcohol and drug abuse at an early age.
- Passamaquoddy children have a higher than average rate of mental health problems, behavioral difficulties, and learning disabilities.
- Kmihqitahasultipon Project, meaning "we remember" in Passamaquoddy, is a relatively new program at the Indian Township Health Clinic. The project provides mental health services to children by promoting traditional Passamaquoddy culture and values. This is a collaborative effort with the Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts General Hospital Consultation Team.

## **V. Challenges for Health Care**

- Lack of transportation- there is no public transportation in these remote communities.
- Low income-effects nutrition, transportation and increases stress.
- Prejudice and racism in the broader community negatively impacts health and wellbeing.
- Lack of qualified personnel to work in remote locations
- Inadequate funding for health centers
- Inaccessible/culturally inappropriate mental health and substance abuse treatment programs and facilities
- Environmental toxins found in the environment such as lead, mercury, dioxin pose major health threats to Maine Native Americans.

## **VI. Suggestions and Tips for Health Care Providers**

- Some Passamaquoddies use only western medicine, some incorporate traditional medicine with western medicine. A few practice only traditional medicine and do not go to health centers or clinics for treatment.
- Include the head of the household in the family in all health care services and decisions.
- Providers must be open to include spiritual healers which are often incorporated into health care.
- Providers must also be open to include traditional practices such as the rituals of smudging and wearing medicine bags.
- In order for health care to be effective, it must be culturally relevant and respectful.
- Prevention and education are critical components in ensuring Passamaquoddy health and wellness. Areas of concern include: smoking, lack of adequate exercise, poor nutrition and substance abuse.

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