



PATHWAYS TO HISTORY CURRICULUM GUIDE III

The First Vermonters: A Brief History of the Abenaki Nation

The people of today's Abenaki Nation and their ancestors have been living in what is now Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Southern Québec since the end of the last ice age, about 12,000 years ago. Being among the first American Indian Nations to make contact and trade with newly arrived Europeans, Abenaki people appear frequently in the earliest written histories of New England: Missisquoi Sokoki, Cowasuck, Pennacook, Pigwacket, Kennebec, Androscoggin and St. Francis are all names that represent different branches of the greater Abenaki family tree. The word "Abenaki" itself speaks to the nation's geography: it is derived from Wobanakik, which means "dawn land" or "Eastern land." Abenakis from Vermont and New Hampshire are sometimes referred to as "Western Abenaki." In Maine, there are four groups, the Penobscot, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Micmacs that are today collectively known as the Wabanaki Confederacy and are officially recognized by their state and the federal government. In May of 2006, Abenakis were finally afforded official recognition by the Vermont state government after many decades of political action. As of this writing, federal recognition is pending for Vermont Abenakis. New Hampshire Abenakis also continue their struggle for state and federal recognition.

The purpose of this curriculum guide is to assist teachers and parents in exploring the history of the Abenaki people in a way that can be successfully introduced to young children. It is clearly impossible to adequately summarize the rich and voluminous Abenaki oral tradition, the written historical record, or Vermont's extensive archaeological discoveries here in this brief curriculum guide. Consider this document as a synopsis and a "map" for the exploration of the fascinating history of the Abenaki Nation.

Originally taught at the Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium, this lesson is partly based on the events and experiences during the lifetimes of eight famous Abenaki individuals from the last four centuries of Northern New England's history: Samoset, Passaconaway, Kancamagus, Grey Lock, Joseph Louis Gill, Capt. "Indian" Joe, Sarah Somers, and Homer St. Francis. Of course, for most of Abenaki history, the region now called "New England" was known by another name: Ndinakina, which means "our land" in the Abenaki language. Students should understand that the vast and dynamic history of the Abenaki Nation began long before European contact, and that the story continues with today's Abenaki people.

In the Beginning

Begin the lesson by asking: "Do you like Maple Syrup? Popcorn? Baked Beans? Pumpkin Pie? Corn-on-the-Cob? Cornbread? Turkey? Blueberries? Cranberries? Ever use snowshoes? Like paddling a canoe? Like to slide in a toboggan? Ever play Lacrosse?" Then ask, "Do you know where these things came from? Who invented the idea of tapping Maples for sugar?" Abenakis and other American Indian Nations introduced these cherished cultural concepts to the world. Every human culture on earth has its own unique foods,

technologies, ceremonies, music, arts, religions, sciences, sports, and fashions; so how did the whole world get to learn and benefit from these different aspects of Abenaki Culture?

There is a well-known story from Abenaki folklore about Odzihozo: the man who made himself. Odzihozo spontaneously gathered himself from the dust of creation and, having no legs, dragged himself about the newly formed landscape. His slithering locomotion shaped the hills, carved the rivers, and dug out the lakes of Ndakinna. At the end of his long travels, Odzihozo decided to rest forever in the biggest and most beautiful lake he'd made in all of Ndakinna: Bitawbagok or Lake Champlain. Odzihozo can still be easily seen from the lakeshore at Burlington, VT: there is a large boulder jutting out of the water near Juniper Island known on today's maps as "Rock Dunder." Appearing like the head and shoulders of a stone giant sitting in the water, Odzihozo and his story is a testament to the central importance of Vermont's land and waters for all of Abenaki culture and history.

When the ancient Abenaki ancestors first arrived in Vermont 12,000 years ago, the mile-thick glaciers of the most recent Ice Age had just melted. In the scraped and scarred landscape there was little soil and no tall trees, but there were numerous giant mammals, like the now extinct Mammoths, even bigger Mastodons, and Giant Bison. Hunting was done with spears and atlatls, and since survival depended on herds of now extinct megafauna, ancient Vermonters lived a fairly nomadic lifestyle. Over the millennia, the forests we know today gradually developed and new smaller, faster animals moved into the region, necessitating constant technological adaptation. Evolving technologies, such as the advent of archery more than 3000 years ago, are clearly demonstrated by Vermont's extensive archaeological record. In addition to ecological changes, North America was witness to several widespread cultural revolutions that greatly influenced ancient Vermonters. Since these earliest days, ancient Vermonters participated in trade networks that gave them access to exotic materials and goods from as far away as the Pacific Coast, the Caribbean, and the Arctic. Most notable among the cultural innovations brought through this exchange was the advent of agriculture, thanks to the still popular maize corn plant (*Zea mays*) that was originally bred into existence in the Oaxaca region of Mexico. This reliable grain crop, in addition to beans and squash, formed the basis of Abenaki farming practices that began more than one thousand years ago.

The Abenaki language and cultural traditions hail from the great Algonquian linguistic family (not to be confused with the Algonquin (or Algonkin) Nation of Canada who are also part of the Algonquian family). This large conglomeration of distinct nations is descended from a common group of cultural ancestors. The Algonquian group includes most of the American Indian Nations of present-day Ontario, Québec, New England, and down the East Coast of the United States as far south as North Carolina. For example, the Powhatan Indians from Virginia (of legendary "Pocahontas" fame) as well as the Mahican, Mohegan, Pequot, Narragansett, Wampanoag, Massachusetts, Potawatomi and Ojibwe Nations share a common root with the Abenaki Nation through language and cultural traditions. This cultural connection is analogous to the common Latin roots of modern Italian, Spanish, French, and Portuguese peoples.

Collections of traditional Abenaki stories can be found in the following books:

The Wind Eagle and Other Abenaki Stories

Joseph Bruchac (Greenfield Review Press 1985)

Seven Eyes, Seven Legs: Supernatural Stories of the Abenaki

Gerard Rancourt Tsonakwa and Yolakia Wapitaska (Kiva 2001)

Visit the Vermont Archeological Society's website to see what is constantly being found underground: <http://www.vtarchaeology.org/index.htm>

Five Centuries Ago in Vermont

500 years ago, Vermont was home to certainly more than 10,000 people, possibly even twice that number. A portion of the extreme Southwest corner of Vermont around present-day Bennington was actually Mahican land, but the rest of the state was Abenaki territory. There were numerous Abenaki villages spread throughout vast cleared "intervalles" along the fertile river valleys, surrounded by seasonal hunting camps up in the forested mountains. Some French historical accounts from the mid-1600's indicate that the following four communities may have once had populations of over 5,000 people in each town!

Mazipskoik - The Place of the Flint

(often written as "Missisquoi")

Near present-day Swanton, VT on the aptly named Missisquoi River (originally Wazowategok) near its mouth on the northern end of Bitawbagok – the Lake Between (a.k.a. Lake Champlain), this area is still home to the Missisquoi Band of Abenakis today.

Winoskik - The Place of the Wild Onions

The intervalle on the Winoskitegok – the Wild Onion River (a.k.a. Winooski River) near Burlington and Winooski, VT is still some of the most fertile farmland in the state.

Goasek– The Place of the White Pines

("Cowass," "Cohase," or "Coos")

Centered at present-day Newbury, VT around the fertile "oxbow" carved by the Kwinitegok – the Long River (a.k.a. Connecticut River), this place is the original home of the Cowasuck Band of Abenakis and also gave its name to Coos County, NH.

Sokwakik– The People Who Separated

(often written as "Squakheag")

Sprawling along the Kwinitegok from present-day Bellows Falls, VT to Northfield, MA, this place is the original home of the Sokoki Band of Abenakis.

In order to imagine what these places would have looked like, begin by simply considering the various daily and seasonal activities that filled the lives of Abenaki families five hundred years ago. Many families did not live in town all year long, but instead spent the winter months up in the mountains at family hunting camps. Up there a sturdy cedar-

framed winter Wigwam was often dug partly into the ground to provide additional earthen insulation. These long-lasting houses were usually covered by thick, overlapping sheets of waterproof birch bark often with a chimney hole in the roof. Being away from crowded villages allowed easier access to big game animals like the Moze ("moose" in its original Abenaki pronunciation) and Nolka (white-tailed deer) during the snowy months. Once the snows began melting in spring, it was time to begin making maple sugar! After sugaring season, families and neighbors would reunite at their bigger villages along the rivers and lakes because the "liquid highways" were clear of ice and it was time to prepare for the fishing and farming season.

The birch bark canoe was the ideal family vehicle for long distance travel in Ndakinna because its lightweight design made it easy to carry around rapids and waterfalls. The shores near a big town would have been crowded with hundreds of canoes of various sizes, all distinguished from each other by the elaborate designs etched into their golden brown hulls. Arriving in town in the spring likely involved many happy reunions with friends and neighbors as well as routine maintenance chores like repairing the family's summer wigwam, planting and weeding the gardens, cutting firewood, gathering medicinal herbs and decorative materials, mushrooms, berries and other wild foods. Nights could be spent listening to stories by the fire, or by dancing, drumming, singing, or flute playing.

The likely first priority, though, was building the various fish traps, nets, and hook lines that Abenakis developed for efficiently catching various fish all spring, summer, and fall. Whatever fish were not eaten fresh were "smoked" in a smokehouse to preserve them for storage, as were other meats and much of the copious berry harvest. The cornfields were often inter-planted with beans and squashes on small mound-shaped raised beds that dotted the vast gardens surrounding town. The tall corn stems provided support for the climbing beanstalks, and the creeping, prickly squash vines would control weeds and hopefully keep mischievous Asban (raccoon) from stealing too much corn. One of the original Abenaki corn varieties is still available to farmers and gardeners: known in today's seed catalogs as "Roy's Calais Flint Corn," this Vermont heirloom variety is ideal for grinding into long-lasting, sweet cornmeal and can be harvested in only 88 days after planting! During the fall the family harvest was dried and processed, the cornmeal was pounded in large mortars with pestles, and preserved foods were stored for winter consumption in ceramic pots, birch bark buckets, and black ash baskets. Canoes were loaded with baskets and kids, the wigwam was closed up, and many people were heard saying Olibamkanni! ("Have a nice trip!"). Families would paddle off to settle into their hunting camps before the Awassos (black bear) hid in its den and the Nolka bucks and Moze bulls began their annual mating ruts deep in the forest. During the short days and long nights of winter, whole families would strap on their snowshoes to reunite with neighbors and friends for annual celebrations and ceremonies that helped make the bitter cold months more enjoyable.

Of course, reality was much more complicated than this for Abenakis 500 years ago: don't forget all of the weddings, funerals, sporting events, political upheavals, biggest-fish stories, trendy hairstyles, wars, ice storms, flashy fashions, muddy roads, crop failures, and cranky in-laws that inevitably accompanied life in Vermont back then as it does today.

Excellent illustrations of traditional Abenaki and other nations' technologies can be found in this book:

The New England Indians, Second Edition

by C. Keith Wilbur (Globe Pequot Press 1978,1996)

Some of the traditional music from the various peoples of Ndakinna can be heard on this Compact Disc:

Songs of the Wabanaki

by Jesse Bowman Bruchac (Good Mind Records 1998)

Visitors From Another World

The first documented encounter between Abenaki people and Europeans occurred when Giovanni da Verrazano sailed to the coast of Maine in 1524. The cool reception given by the coastal Abenakis indicates that he was probably not the first European sailor they had met: Verrazano and his crew were literally "moonied" by the men in their canoes after they finished trading. Jacques Cartier came close to what is now Vermont in 1534 when he visited the populous Iroquoian cities of Stadacona (present-day Québec City) and Hochelaga (present-day Montréal) in order to begin establishing French fur-trading outposts on what is now the St. Lawrence River: K-tsee-tegok in Abenaki.

The first documented visit of a European to present-day Vermont occurred in 1609 when Samuel de Champlain came with a crew of sailors from France. Champlain was previously looking for Stadacona and Hochelaga as described by Cartier many years before. Instead, Champlain found abandoned cities on the St. Lawrence. He and his crew then navigated their way south on the Bitawbagwizibok (a.k.a. Richelieu River) into Bitawbagok (a.k.a. Lake Champlain) where they finally saw the beautiful hills and green mountains we now call Vermont, but its villages were also apparently empty. His Indian guides told him that the Abenakis were staying at their mountain homes this year because their lake had become the battlefield of an ongoing war between many nations.

Lake Champlain's Abenaki name: Bitawbagok means "The Lake Between" and for centuries it has been the boundary between two distinct nations from two different linguistic families: the Algonquian-speaking Abenakis in the East, and the "Mohawks" or the Kanienkehaka Nation over the western shore and Adirondack Mountains in what is today New York State. Being the easternmost member nation in the powerful Haudenosaunee (a.k.a. Iroquois) Confederacy, the Mohawk people speak an Iroquoian language. Though there were many times in history when Mohawks and Abenakis had good relations, this was certainly not one of those times. This conflict was the likely reason for the abandonment of Stadacona and Hochelaga by the Iroquoian people that Cartier had met in 1534. An alliance of Algonquian-speaking Indian Nations, including Montagnais and Algonquins from faraway lands north of the St. Lawrence, had joined forces with the Abenaki to help defeat the Mohawks in this war.

Having already established trade relationships with various Algonquian-speaking nations, Champlain decided to take their side in this war. Recruited into the campaign against the Mohawks, Champlain and his men got into birch bark canoes and were paddled to a battlefield that is near where Fort Ticonderoga was built years later on the New York side of the lake. It is likely that Samuel de Champlain was the first European witness and

participant in an American Indian war. Both sides had thick armor made of wood and leather, longbows and arrows, large woven wooden shields, and wooden palisade fortifications that protected the armies who stood in large rank and file formations. Although clearly a lethal affair, Abenaki and Mohawk traditions for waging war were not as deadly as the style of fighting that was common in Europe. There was lot more teasing and insults than actual injuries until the Frenchmen joined in the fight. Champlain ordered his crew to use a weapon that neither Abenakis nor Mohawks had ever seen in use before: muskets. These primitive guns were heavy and more difficult to load, aim and fire than a longbow, but when the musket balls began splintering the Mohawk's armor and killing too many of their soldiers, they promptly retreated in defeat. Champlain's participation in this battle laid the foundation for an enduring economic and military alliance between the French and Abenaki nations that endured until 1759. Abenaki people eventually named their French allies the Blackmōnak.

The Algonquian alliance may have seemed victorious that day, but from then on wars in Ndakinna were nearly always fought with guns and the old tactics and armor quickly became obsolete. The Mohawks rushed to buy guns from the newly arrived Dutch people on the present-day Hudson River in New York, and the Abenakis armed themselves by trading furs with the French. War became much deadlier, and much more common because of the increased territorial competition between nations for the instantly precious pelts of animals like Demakwa (beaver), Mosbas (mink), and Apanakes (pine marten). Of course, many other valuable European goods like steel tools, iron cookware, textiles, and glass beads could be purchased with furs and every nation in the region sought to increase its hunting territory in order to access this new form of wealth. While the resulting economic wars and new weapons were certainly disruptive to the pre-existing social order of American Indian Nations, many more drastic changes were already on their way.

Doing business and socializing with the French introduced Abenakis to another cultural concept brought from Europe: Christianity. French Jesuit priests began establishing several Catholic missions on the St. Lawrence in the late 17th century: the one that served primarily Abenakis was St. François du Lac (St. Francis) at the Abenaki village Odanak. This village is still home today to thousands of Abenaki people in present-day Québec. Odanak - St. Francis became a major center of commercial and religious exchange between French and Abenaki people beginning in the late 1600's. This is why Abenakis are often referred to in historical accounts somewhat confusingly as "St. Francis Indians." In addition to the St. Francis mission, Abenaki people helped the Jesuits build the first Christian church ever in what is now Vermont: there is a monument near old Mazipskoik (near Highgate and Swanton, VT) on the Missisquoi River that commemorates this now destroyed building. Stories say that Abenaki builders transported the massive stone blocks for this church in their birch bark canoes. According to old French maps, Goasek (present-day Newbury, VT) had a Jesuit mission before 1713, but little record of it exists today.

An excellent synthesis of the history following Abenaki contact with Europeans can be found in this book:

The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600 – 1800
by Colin G. Calloway (University of Oklahoma – Norman, 1990)

Ndakinna's Greatest Tragedy

Beginning with the visits of Verrazano, Cartier, and Champlain, Abenaki people and neighboring nations were exposed to a number of highly lethal illnesses, viruses, and bacteria to which no one in North America had ever experienced before. Europe had been dealing with these various plagues gradually for centuries, with many millions dying from Typhus, Influenza, Smallpox, Bubonic Plague, Measles, Diphtheria and other diseases. As a result, the European sailors had strong immunities simply because they and their ancestors were the survivors of these various illnesses. Unfortunately, many of these Europeans were carriers of these diseases as well, and they unwittingly infected the American Indian Nations they contacted everywhere in North and South America. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the American Indian population of what is now New England was decimated by 90 to 98 percent because of several unprecedented epidemic diseases. Smallpox alone is capable of killing of half of the people that it infects, and this was only one of the plagues that were simultaneously spreading rapidly across the Americas. Imagine what the Abenaki survivors felt as nine out of 10 people in their families, villages, towns, and nation died horribly in just a few years. Most of the victims had not even met Europeans; they were exposed by other infected American Indians. By the time most English immigrants began arriving to build their own farms and villages, some had the mistaken impression that this was an empty land.

In addition to the plagues, American Indian Nations began to feel the pressure of a seemingly endless flood of English immigrants, eventually known as Bastaniak in Abenaki, that began with the legendary "Pilgrims" of the Plymouth Colony led by William Bradford and the passengers of the Mayflower. Although the events enshrined in the Thanksgiving holiday transpired on present-day Cape Cod in the Wampanoag Nation, there was an Abenaki man present who played a crucial role. He is the first in this lesson's list of "Famous Abenakis" whose lives provide illuminating insights into the last four centuries of Abenaki life.

Eight Famous Abenakis

Samoset

Why was an Abenaki from the New Hampshire coast present at the "First Thanksgiving" down on Massachusetts Bay? Unlike most Abenakis at the time who still had not met people from England, Samoset got an unwanted crash course in English language and culture. Fishermen on a voyage from England kidnapped Samoset. While he was their captive, he managed to learn a bit of English. Eventually he escaped, but not until the ship had sailed hundreds of miles down the coast from his home. Samoset was eventually taken in by Massasoit, a Sachem (an elected leadership position) of the Wampanoags that also was host to the Mayflower passengers in 1621. Samoset, knowing some English, served as an interpreter and liaison between Massasoit and William Bradford. Of course, the famous Wampanoag Tisquantum (a.k.a. Squanto) also served as an interpreter: he knew English because he had also been kidnapped. Tisquantum actually lived in Spain and England before somehow making his way back to his old village on present-day Cape Cod just in time for the "First Thanksgiving."

An excellent and detailed account of both Samoset and Tisquantum's roles in this famous and mythologized moment in American history can be found in this book:

Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium
1302 Main Street • St. Johnsbury VT • 05819
(802) 748-2372 • www.fairbanksmuseum.org

1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus

by Charles C. Mann (Knopf, 2005)

Passaconaway

Born sometime around the 1570's, Passaconaway witnessed many great social changes and tragedies during his nearly 100 year long life. He grew up before the time of Champlain, guns, and horrible diseases. As an adult he was elected as Sachem of Penokok (or Pennacook – bottom of the hill), the old capital of the Pennacook Band of Abenakis that is near present-day Concord, New Hampshire on the Merrimack River. After having witnessed the atrocities of wars against the Mohawks and the relentless plagues that decimated his people, Passaconaway advocated peace with the new English immigrants that were encroaching on his land. As a very old man in 1665, he made a great speech at Penokok before delegates from many nations. In his speech, Passaconaway warned his audience: "peace is your only hope."

A transcript of this speech is available in the following book:

Aunt Sarah: Woman of the Dawnland

by Trudy Ann Parker (Dawnland Publications, 1994)

Kancamagus

Just like his grandfather Passaconaway, Kancamagus was a Sachem for the Pennacook people. Despite his hopes for peace, Passaconaway's dying wish did not come true: right after he died, the confrontation between Indian Nations and the English immigrants escalated into a brutal war known as King Philip's War. "King Philip" was actually a Wampanoag Sachem named Metacom who lead an alliance of many nations in an unsuccessful offensive against the English immigrants in the Massachusetts Colony. As a result, Kancamagus witnessed the stream of Indian war refugees that sought shelter in his people's land. To make matters worse, Kancamagus was being threatened with attack from Mohawks who were now allies of the English. Many of his people then began to move over to present-day Vermont and Maine in order to avoid the looming conflict. Kancamagus refused to give in and, despite his grandfather's warning, he attacked the newly built English village of Dover, NH in 1689. The next year, the English captured his wife and children in retaliation; Kancamagus was finally forced to make peace with the Bastaniak.

Grey Lock

After King Philip's War, Vermont Abenakis became hosts to a vast multitude of people displaced by English immigration and aggression. Even Sokwiak was abandoned at this time because it was too close to the newer English villages like Deerfield and Hadley, MA along the Kwinitegok in now Western Massachusetts. Mazipskoik, Winoskik and Goasek were becoming cosmopolitan places made up of citizens of many displaced nations in addition to the welcoming Abenakis. In 1723, a young man from Mazipskoik with an unusual stripe of white hair began a four-year campaign that discouraged the English from moving up the Kwinitegok into Vermont for many decades. Stealthy tactics and daring raids earned Grey Lock the Abenaki nickname "Wawanolewat" which means "the one who can't be followed." On small missions, often with less than a dozen men, Grey Lock captured hundreds of English people in their sleep and eluded thousands of demoralized English soldiers. Believed to have a secret "castle" in Mazipskoik, Grey Lock attained

legendary, almost supernatural status in the eyes of the British who could never catch him despite his frequent appearances in their backyards. Fort Dummer, once near present-day Vernon, VT in old Sokwakik, was built in a useless attempt to stop Grey Lock's raids. In 1727, for no apparent reason, Grey Lock ceased his attacks on Massachusetts but fear of him lived on for years afterward. According to French Church records, Grey Lock was later baptized and lived to a ripe old age in Mazipskoik. Despite the mischief he wreaked on its previous residents, the state of Massachusetts eventually named its tallest peak in honor of him.

Maj. Joseph Louis Gill

Abenaki raids on English towns often resulted in some deaths, but usually most victims were taken back as prisoners to Abenaki villages. Surprisingly, many captives chose to stay with the Abenakis despite having opportunities to return to their homes. This was the case with both of Joseph Louis Gill's parents before they married each other. Despite having 100% English blood, their son was raised as an Abenaki child and went on to be called "The White Chief of the Abenaki" at Odanak – St. Francis during a critical time in history. Just as Old France and Old England had been engaged in nearly constant warfare around the globe, so were New France and New England in Ndakinna. Always caught in the middle, Abenakis consistently took sides with the French. Throughout these various smaller wars over the years, Abenakis didn't sustain very many casualties. During the final struggle between America's European colonizers, known in the U.S. as the French and Indian War, the English decided to finally exact their revenge on the Abenaki Nation in what became known as the legendary Roger's Raid. Although there are conflicting stories about how many people were killed, there is no doubt that at 6am October 4th, 1759, the English Captain Robert Rogers and his Rangers burned every building in St. Francis – Odanak including the church. Joseph Louis Gill survived this tragic event, but the French went on to lose the whole war: Québec soon belonged to the English Crown. For the first time in their history, the Abenakis felt like they were a conquered people. The Abenakis were not the only people unhappy with the English Colonial Authorities: it should be no surprise that Joseph Louis Gill and many other Abenakis supported the burgeoning movement for American independence. During the American Revolutionary War, Colonel Moses Hazen and General George Washington personally directed the Continental Congress to bestow on Joseph Louis Gill the rank of Major.

Capt. "Indian Joe"

The end of the French and Indian War in 1760, and the consequent end of Abenaki resistance, is what finally allowed English settlement in Vermont. Many Abenaki families went into hiding to escape the new domination by the English Colonial Authorities. When General Jacob Bayley and other English-American families began building Newbury, VT in 1762, they were surprised to find that many Goasek Abenakis remained at their ancient settlement. One of them came to be known simply as "Indian Joe." He served as a guide and interpreter for his new neighbors, and he showed them the many traditional Abenaki trails that connected distant regions of Vermont. One of these ancient paths became the famous Bayley-Hazen Military Road that was used during the American Revolutionary War.

A few years after making friends with these English-American settlers, Joe reportedly saved all of their lives. After the beginning of the Revolutionary War, England dispatched troops from Canada to attack Newbury's rebellious citizens. Instead, they

found a deserted village. According to Newbury oral traditions, Joe saved all of his neighbors' lives by leading them to a hidden cave on the north end of the village. There they huddled underground as the Redcoats searched in vain for Newbury's residents above. The construction of U.S. Route 5 in the 20th century eventually sealed the only entrance to this historic cave. In addition to this heroic act, Joe took up arms against the English and fought alongside General Bayley as a Captain of the Continental Army in the American Revolution. After helping to deliver the newborn United States from English tyranny, Joe and his wife Molly retired to an island in the pond that now bears his name: Joe's Pond in West Danville, VT. Because of his significant contributions to this nation's creation, the Daughters of the American Revolution in Newbury have honored Joe by placing a prominent monument in the town's cemetery overlooking the "oxbow" on the Kwinitegok. The D.A.R. also display Captain Joe's original gun at their museum in Newbury, VT.

Sarah Somers

Even though her ancestors had lived in what was now Guildhall, VT on the Kwinitegok for centuries, Sarah Somers was treated as a stranger in her own land. As her family struggled to maintain a traditional Abenaki life, they faced ridicule and discrimination everywhere they went. Despite being called insulting names like "river rat" and "gypsy," Sarah was always proud of her Abenaki heritage. As a teenager, she sold traditionally made black ash and sweetgrass baskets to numerous families in Lunenburg, VT and Lancaster, NH.

As an adult, she became a well-trusted healer and midwife in the Abenaki tradition of herbal medicine. Her family was from the Bear Clan: the clan entrusted with the healing arts in traditional Abenaki society. By the time she died in 1931 at the age of 108, Sarah was well known and respected by her neighbors. A newspaper article that announced her death mistakenly called her the "Last of the St. Francis Tribe." In reality, there were many thousands of Abenakis in Vermont when Sarah died. Their apparent "disappearance" in the 20th century was an illusion that allowed Abenaki families to survive what may be the most nefarious chapter in Vermont's recent history. The years immediately before Sarah's death saw the launch of the now infamous Vermont Eugenics Survey.

One of Sarah Somer's descendants has written a book about this incredible woman:

Aunt Sarah: Woman of the Dawnland
by Trudy Ann Parker (Dawnland Publications, 1994)

Homer St. Francis

When Homer St. Francis was growing up in Swanton, VT, most Abenaki families kept their identities secret for a very good reason. The ongoing Vermont Eugenics Survey was attempting to "improve" Vermont's gene pool by weeding out "undesirable" peoples. Beginning in the 1920's, victims of this regrettable decades-long program were forcefully sterilized in order to prevent them from having children. Although "Abenakis" were not on the official hit list, so-called "Gypsies" and "River Rats" were prime targets. Many Abenaki families today have stories of nocturnal round-ups with ambulances and police cars that resulted in the sterilization of young Abenaki children as well as their parents. Some Abenaki parents grew so fearful of being taken that they didn't inform their own children of their true heritage. Other families also invented false genealogies in order to pass

undetected by the Eugenics Survey. It was a dangerous time to proclaim any Abenaki ancestry.

After having spent many years serving Vermont and the United States in the National Guard, Army, and Marines, Homer returned home and was disgusted with the way his people were being treated. His daughter April's history textbook said that Vermont's Indians were "savages" but Homer St. Francis was proud to be a descendant of Grey Lock. Homer went on to become Chief of the St. Francis – Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi and he dedicated the rest of his life to reversing the racism, injustice, and ignorance that was then threatening his people and their culture. The movement he began finally reawakened Vermonters to the great legacy of the Abenaki Nation.

Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., Homer St. Francis began using similar non-violent methods of public protest in order to advance the Abenaki cause. The "Fish-Ins" that began in 1979 are perhaps his most famous protest action: by fishing openly without state permits, Homer and his Abenaki protestors forced confrontations with game wardens and police that certainly gained a lot of media attention. Homer St. Francis died in 2001 without realizing all of his many hopes for the Abenaki Nation. As of this writing, his daughter, April St. Francis Merrill, is the acting Chief. Under her leadership, Vermont Abenakis have finally achieved one of Homer's goals: official state recognition. This legal recognition simply gives Abenaki people eligibility for college scholarships reserved for American Indians, and it allows them to sell crafts and artwork with the label "Native American." Before this law was passed in May 2006, the official state position was that Abenaki people had ceased to exist long ago. As of this writing, federal recognition is still pending for Vermont Abenakis. Regardless of the outcome of this bureaucratic process, Abenakis can now look forward to a brighter future while they remain well rooted in their long and beautiful history.

The University of Vermont's extensive archive of all the known documents relating to the Eugenics Survey of Vermont can be found here:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~eugenics/>

Although a novel, this book is based on the experiences of many real Abenakis during the Eugenics campaign:

Hidden Roots

by Joseph Bruchac (Scholastic Press, 2004)

A Eulogy for Homer St. Francis by Burlington Free Press writer Sam Hemingway can be found here:

<http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/Columnists/Sam/0711045558.htm>

Additional Resources

<http://www.abenakination.org>

This is the website maintained by the St. Francis – Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Nation at Missisquoi.

Be sure to check out the pictures from the Abenaki Museum in Swanton, VT.

<http://www.cowasuck.org>

This incredibly informative website is maintained by the Cowasuck – Pennacook Band of Abenakis. Their newsletter, *Aln8bak News*, will keep you informed of upcoming events.

<http://www.abenakis.ca>

This is the homepage for Waban-aki Nation Grand Council in Quebec.

<http://www.museedesabenakis.ca/>

This is the newly renovated Museum in Odanak, Quebec. (Unless you're a francophone, click on the "English" button near the top right of the page.)

<http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/>

Abenaki people played a major role in the famous Deerfield Raid of 1704. This website provides an excellent introduction to the situation in Ndakinna immediately preceding the rise of Grey Lock.