

# Native Diaspora and New Communities: Algonkian and Wôbanakiak - by Marge Bruchac

## Introduction

During the 1600s, [Algonkian](#) and [Wôbanaki](#) peoples in present-day New England and Canada found themselves in what has been called "the maelstrom of change," as Euro-American settlers started flooding into Native homelands. (1) The settlers were preceded by explorers and traders, who had carried not only trade goods but diseases. Population losses from influenza, smallpox, measles and other sicknesses caused a disruption in Native communities. Existing tensions between tribes led some coastal Native groups, such as the [Wampanoag](#), to initially welcome small groups of European settlers and traders, who could provide trade goods, guns, and potential allies. European settlement led to Native political instability when international disputes made their way into local politics. As Native peoples were increasingly caught up in both inter-tribal and international conflicts, and crowded by European settlements, some Native communities began relocating to form new communities in diaspora, such as [Kahnawake](#), [La Montagne](#), [Lorette](#), [Odanak](#), [Sault-au-Récollet](#), and [Schaghticoke](#), and the praying villages at [Natick](#), [Wamesit](#), and elsewhere.

## Southern and Central New England

Wampanoag and [Narragansett](#) peoples in southern New England had met with a series of explorers, including Giovanni de Verrazanno (1524), Bartholomew Gosnold (1602), Samuel de Champlain (1605), and others who bought furs, took captives, and left diseases. In the aftermath of population losses, Native communities reformed around charismatic sachems, like Massasoit of the Wampanoag, who were at war with their Narragansett neighbors. Some English settlers, like the Puritans at Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, found these empty village sites and settled there. The competition to form alliances with Europeans to obtain protection and trade goods only increased conflict. The arrival of thousands of English colonists and their farm animals also created an insatiable demand for land that pushed Native people out of their homelands. Many Native peoples selectively incorporated European trade goods into existing lifeways, while working to preserve indigenous homelands through alliance, trade, and, at time, violent resistance. The eastern Wôbanakiak cautiously encouraged traders. (2)

Over much of the seventeenth century, southern and central New England tribal groups were embroiled in a series of conflicts. European and Native alliances formed and splintered in response to inter-tribal tensions among Wampanoag, Narragansett, [Pocumtuck](#), [Pennacook](#), [Mohegan](#), [Peguat](#), [Niantic](#), [Montauk](#) and [Nipmuc](#), among others. With the conquest of several key tribal groups, and the collusion of the Dutch and English, the entire balance of power, between the [Iroquois Confederacy](#) and Algonkian peoples and among Algonkian Nations, in New England and New York, began shifting.

During the 1620s, the [Kanienkehaka](#) (Mohawk) had forced the Hudson River valley Mohican into a tributary relationship, during the [Mohawk-Mohican war](#), with the help of Dutch munitions. Kanienkehaka war parties then started crossing the Berkshire Mountains to raid the Connecticut River valley. Those attacks led to the renaming of the trail between Mohican and Pocumtuck territory the "Mohawk Trail." As protection against attacks, the Kanienkehaka started demanding that Connecticut River valley tribes pay them [wampum](#) (shell beads) as tribute.



Wampum was important in many Iroquois rituals.

Courtesy of Historic Northampton

In 1637, the Mohegan, under the leadership of Uncas, joined the English and Narragansett in attacking the Pequot at Mashantucket. For decades thereafter, the Pequot who were not sold into slavery by the English were sheltered by their former Native enemies. The Mohegan, Narragansett, Pocumtuck, and others were forced to pay wampum to the English colonies, as a contribution to the costs of the Pequot War, and as protection against English attacks. The Montauk on Long Island started producing massive amounts of shell beads to supply the demand. (3) The Mohegan formed a lasting bond with the English in Connecticut and refused most other alliances with Native peoples. Southern New England tribal boundaries, which had already been relatively fluid, became more so with the adoption of captives from other tribes, and with intermarriages between leading families.

During the seventeenth-century, the Pocumtuck were one of the more powerful tribes, and sachems such as [Onapequin](#) and Werowomake led war parties against both the Mohegan and the Kanienkehaka. In 1648, the Pocumtuck fortified

their village site against Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) attacks, and hosted a large gathering of more than 1,000 Native warriors at Hartford, in preparation for general war. (4) The Pocumtuck then joined with the Niantic, Narragansett and Tunxis in raiding the Montauk, to secure wampum to pay tribute to the United Colonies and to the Kanienkehaka.

In 1650, a French Jesuit, Father Gabriel Druillettes, tried to form an alliance of the Sokoki, Pennacook, Pocumtuck, and Hudson River valley Mohican, with the participation of the New England colonial governments, to subdue the Iroquois. The Colonies of Connecticut, New Haven, Rhode Island, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay not only refused to support their Native Algonkian neighbors and allies, they started sending delegations to New York to initiate a separate alliance with the Iroquois. (5)

In the same time period, an English Minister, John Eliot, founded a series of Puritan "praying villages" of Christianized Indians from Nipmuc and Massachusetts communities. Other praying Indian villages were founded among the Wampanoag on Martha's Vineyard, and among the Wamesit in Pennecook territory. These villages drew families who hoped to live peacefully without being drawn into warfare or troubled by their English neighbors.

For much of the seventeenth century, New England's Native communities were periodically harassed by Iroquois raids. The northern parts of Wóbanakia, however, were relatively safe from English and French incursions. The encroaching English settlements and inter-tribal tumult that troubled southern New England communities did not reach northward until after 1676, when escaping refugees from Metacom's Rebellion, or King Philip's War, including former praying Indians, began seeking refuge in Penacook, Sokoki, and Cowass homelands.



Metacom was a Wampanoag sachem who lead a broad alliance of Native peoples in New England in an uprising against English colonial expansion. No image exists of Metacom. This "fanciful" engraving was created by Paul Revere almost one hundred years after "King Philip's" death. Copyright Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association. All Rights Reserved.

## Shifting Locations in the Connecticut River Valley

Between 1645 and 1663, Native communities in the middle Connecticut River valley carried on a healthy trade with William Pynchon and John Pynchon, while carefully limiting English settlement upriver. The Agawam at Springfield and Woronoco at Westfield were among the first to be pressured by the dramatic growth of English villages, from a few English families to hundreds. The Pynchons recognized that the tribes upriver "must be esteemed as an Independant free people," but they also decided that, under English laws, they would have to find a way to purchase the land in order to control it. (6) The Pynchons began securing English patents to speculate in Indian land, while simultaneously encouraging Native hunters to enter into debt for trade goods. As the beaver population plummeted from over-hunting, Native peoples were encouraged to sign over deeds for land. The fact that so many of those signers retained rights to hunt, fish, and plant on the lands they supposedly signed away indicates that they clearly did not intend to leave.

During the years of 1663-1665, Native communities at Sokoki, Pocumtuck, and Nonotuck collapsed. After Kanienkehaka attacks on the Sokoki village at Fort Hill in present-day Hinsdale, New Hampshire, and the Pocumtuck fort at present-day Deerfield, Massachusetts, Native families began shifting residence within the valley. The Nonotuck requested permission to build a fort near the English settlement at Northampton, to facilitate the fur trade and to secure English protection. (7) When John Pynchon placed too many restrictions on them, Nonotuck peoples relocated to another fort at Hadley, and other Native peoples circulated to village sites away from the English. When the English claimed Native village sites like Pocumtuck, and when more deeds were contracted, tensions began to build.

## Metacom's War

During Metacom's Rebellion (or King Philip's War), Connecticut River valley tribes, in alliance with Wampanoag, Narragansett, and Nipmuc peoples, launched a series of devastating attacks on English settlements throughout the valley, including what is now called the Bloody Brook Massacre of Captain Lathrop's company on September 18, 1675. The English retaliated with attacks on Native non-combatants, including the massacre at



The English maneuvered a number of individual Native people to sign deeds that said the Natives forfeited rights to their homelands. Click [here](#) for more information.

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[Peskeompskut](#) on May 19, 1676. The Christianized praying Indians were among the first to be attacked by the English. Many Nipmuc non-combatants were captured, interned, and died, on Deer Island in Boston harbor.

In August, after the Wampanoag leader [Metacom](#) was killed, English colonists marked the date of his death to celebrate what they hoped would be the end of Native presence in New England. (8) But Wampanoag, Narragansett, Mohegan, Pequot, Nipmuc and other southern Algonkian communities did not disappear. By and large, they remained in New England, on reserved lands, in mission villages and in various enclaves, despite widespread losses from the war, and despite the prejudice of their English neighbors. (9)

## Schaghticoke and the Northern Diaspora

By contrast, after the deaths at Peskeompskut, many Native families began leaving the Connecticut River valley. The first waves of refugees from the valley were invited, by [Governor Edmund Andros](#), to move to [Schaghticoke](#), on the east side of the Hudson River, in northern Mohican territory in New York. The same Kanienkehaka community that had fought the Sokoki in 1663, burned the Pocumtuck fort in 1664/5, and chased Metacom out of his winter camp in 1675, now offered protection to their former enemies.

Andros' goal was to use these Algonkian peoples as suppliers for the fur trade, and as a buffer against possible attacks by their allies. Groups of [Agawam](#), [Nonotuck](#), [Pocumtuck](#), [Sokoki](#), and [Woronoco](#) peoples, among others, moved to [Schaghticoke](#), some staying for a generation or more, others using the village as a rendezvous point on the way to northern missions on the St. Lawrence. By 1754, the Native village of Schaghticoke was empty, and most of its inhabitants had joined other Native villages in the north and east. Some went to [Odanak](#), some went to [Kahnawake](#) and other mission villages, and others sought refuge with Wōbanaki communities in Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and other parts of Canada. Older Wōbanaki settlements like [Cowass](#) and [Missisquoi](#) in Vermont, and [Pequawket](#) in Maine took in some refugees, and new diaspora communities began to appear in the interior of Maine and New Hampshire.

## Odanak

The village site on the St. Francis River that was originally known as Anosagunticook is today known as [Odanak](#). Wōbanaki traditions maintain that there were twenty Native families already living at Odanak in the 1660s, and Native baptisms first begin showing up in the French church records at Trois Rivières around that time. The Native community at Odanak clearly predates the migrations after King Philip's War, although it grew considerably in size after that war. In 1675, a large group of [Sokoki](#) people from the north central Connecticut Valley moved north to Canada to Trois Rivières. Some Wōbanakiak relocated at the same time to the [Sillery](#) mission, and others went to Odanak. (10) Such moves were rarely a one-way trip, since sachems such as [Shattookquis](#) guided groups back and forth between Odanak, Schaghticoke and the Connecticut River valley. With each outbreak of fighting in the Northeast, the population of Odanak changed as Native families, who lived beyond the frontiers of New England settlements, arrived or departed.

In 1701, Jesuit missionaries moved their mission church, Saint François de Sales, from its location on the Chaudière River to Odanak. By 1704, Odanak was a sizeable Wōbanaki village, with about 300 to 400 residents representing a number of different Native communities from across northern and central New England, who still maintained ties with their homelands. Due to the large proportion of [Missisquoi](#) and Sokoki people, the Wōbanaki dialect known as Western Abenaki eventually became the dominant language of the village. (11)

## Pennacook Communities Under Pressure

During the late seventeenth century, the Pennacook, in present-day New Hampshire, found it difficult to maintain peaceful relations with the English, who had begun moving in from the coast, encroaching on [Pawtucket](#), Pennacook and [Peguawket](#) lands. English authorities, in their panic to restore order after Metacom's War, harrassed and tricked Pennacook into surrendering their guns. Diogenes Madoasquarbet complained to the Governor at Boston "how we have been abused...because there was war at naragans [Narragansett](#)" and noted that "we can drive you out but our desire is to be quiet." (12) In 1700, some Nipmuc families moved from central Massachusetts to Pennacook, claiming that they were annoyed by the praying Indians, and that "the religion of the Penikook Indians was more beautiful." (13)

The Pennacook were still allied with the Sokoki and other Wōbanakiak, and they were still at war with members of the [Iroquois Confederacy](#) who were allies of the English. To preserve a position of independence, Pennacook people alternately made treaties, fought, or withdrew from the fray by seeking refuge at Cowass, Schaghticoke or Odanak.

This balancing act became impossible when the War of the Spanish Succession re-ignited fighting between France and England and between the Wôbanakiak, the New England colonists and the French. The English and some Native peoples made it clear that they would not let the Pennacooks remain neutral.

## **Wôbanaki Communities Today**

Among the Wôbanakiak who remained in their traditional homeland, [Ndakinna](#), were the Missisquoi, at present-day Swanton, Vermont, along with several other sub-tribes and extended family bands of Cowassuck, Sokoki and other Wôbanaki peoples across Vermont and New Hampshire. [\(14\)](#) The Pennacook also remained, living in a region that roughly stretches from Pequawket, near what is today Fryeberg, Maine, to Cowass, near what is today Newbury, Vermont. In Maine, the eastern Wôbanakiak, [Penobscot](#), [Passamaquoddy](#), Aroostook [Mi'kmaq](#) and [Malecite](#) remained, and these four Nations eventually gained federal recognition, while living on substantially diminished and still-contested land reservations. The Connecticut River valley tribes – Pocumtuck, Nonotuck, Agawam, and Woronoco – lost their land base and, for the most part, folded into the populations of their Algonkian allies and neighbors.

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