

# ABENAKI CULTURE: POST-EUROPEAN CULTURE

Wonder Box 4 Teacher Packet



## INTRODUCTION TO THIS WONDER BOX

Wonder Boxes offer students a multi-sensory learning experience, allowing them to touch, observe, and interpret historical themes.

This Wonder Box examines Abenaki families in the Monadnock region after the arrival of Europeans and the introduction of European trade goods. These goods included a wide array of new tools and materials for the Abenaki people who, at times, chose to replace traditional materials that had been used for hundreds if not thousands of years. Within this teacher packet are discussion questions, a description of the reproductions, and activities.

Wonder Box No. 3 (Abenaki Culture: Pre-European Contact) contains artifacts and reproductions that Abenaki people used before the arrival of European trade goods, and offers a before and after contrast. The items in this Wonder Box are only a sample of the many items people used in everyday life.

## BACKGROUND

The arrival of Europeans and their trade goods changed the traditional material culture of the Abenaki and other Native peoples in New England dramatically. Traders offered Native people goods like iron axes, tomahawks, knives, eye-hoes, awls, fish hooks, trade cloth of various colors, woolen blankets, linen shirts, brass kettles, silver jewelry, assorted glass beads, guns, powder, rum, and brandy. This was not an overnight transformation. Nor did it completely transform the lifeways of Abenaki people. Hunting, fishing, and gardening continued. So did their ceremonies, rituals, and customs. Yet many of the items that were used for these activities were replaced with European goods. Tools, for example, could be made with metal rather than stone or bone. Wool cloth could be used instead of animal hide.

The desire for many of these new goods was generally quite strong. Extensive trading networks existed to transport European goods to the Monadnock region as well as Native peoples traveling to English, French, or Dutch trading posts. In return, European traders often wanted furs, and most of all they wanted beaver fur, although Indians also harvested otter, mink, fox, bear, and deer to trade.

Abenaki people were no longer hunting game for subsistence reasons. They were now engaged in a very different economic system. European diseases that killed hundreds of Native people, control of trade routes that often led to conflict, and loss of land were all outcomes that came with the arrival of Europeans and their trade goods.

### **THE WESTERN ABENAKI PEOPLE ARE STILL HERE TODAY.**

**They did not “disappear” from the region. The artifacts and reproductions that are used in this Wonder Box are only a sample of some of the many items that people used in everyday life here in the region.**



## ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

### Garments

Refers to items of clothing

### Indian Trade Cloth

Wool cloth woven in Europe was first traded to the Abenaki by early settlers in the 17th century, in exchange for fur. The fabric was easy to cut, sew and keep clean compared to animal hide.

### Commodity

A raw material or agricultural product that could be bought or sold, such as copper or coffee.

### Flint

A hard gray rock (mainly made up of chert) that was struck against steel to make fire.

### Char

Cloth that has been smoked in a fire and reduced to a fine charcoal. It was often made as a fire-starting material.

### Tow

The short strands of a linen plant, often used to start fires because of its flammable nature.

### Weirs

A fishing weir is an obstruction placed in a river to channel fish in the direction of fishermen, waiting with nets or spears.

## ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Have the students touch and feel the artifacts and reproductions.

### What are they made from?

Ask them to consider, based on what they see, what types of materials were available to the Indians to make their tools and household items. Would these materials have all come from the Monadnock region or could some have come from further away? Are these materials still around today in the Monadnock region? If not, what do you think Abenaki people use today?

### what are they used for?

Ask the students to consider what each item is in the Wonder Box. How was it used? Who made it? How was it made? Are these items still made today? Are these items still used by the Abenaki today?



## WOOL CLOTH

For the Abenaki people in this region the primary use of wool trade cloth was to make garments. By the mid-17th century this type of cloth was typically made by the French or English and would have been traded to the Abenaki.



Abenaki people used the wool to make an assortment of garments, including ceremonial dresses, coats, blankets, and capotes, and often double-lined garments for added warmth. These wool garments replaced many tanned hide garments because of its warmth, light weight, and ease of care.

By the late 1600s a point system was established, which was a unit of measurement for the size of the cloth. Indian trade cloth had a 1 to 5 point system, with 5 being the largest and 1 the smallest or sometimes referred to as cradle blankets. The most common size traded was the 2 point blanket. Standard colors were red, blue, white, and white with red and/or blue stripes.

## Beaver Fur

To acquire European trade goods, the Abenaki primarily traded furs and beaver was considered one of the more important commodities. The beaver offered a lustrous pelt.

Yet more important for traders and merchants was the beaver's fine underhairs, which you can see and feel with the two pieces of hide. Interlocking barbs holed together this fine hair, and when pressed together it makes a type of felt of the highest quality. This felt was used to make hats in Europe for three hundred years.



## AWLS & NEEDLES

Awls are tools that were used to make small holes in materials like leather so that it can be sewn together with a needle. There is one example of a steel awl with a wooden handle on a piece of wood in the Wonder Box. Awls like these were made in Europe and traded, but they could also be made by Indians. **This awl, although in a board, has a sharp point and care is needed when handling.**



## FLINT & STEEL

There are five essential elements that are needed to start a fire with a flint and steel. They are the flint, steel, char, tinder, and wood.

The flint needs to be of good quality, large enough to hold in your hand and with a sharp edge. Any good hard steel is useable, with most traditional steel's in the shape of a "C."

Traditionally char was made of cloth that was heated to a high temperature in the absence of oxygen to remove flammable solids, leaving a black cloth that will catch and hold a spark that will smolder with a hot ember. Tow is the short fiber found inside the leaves of the flax plant. Long fibers are woven to make linen. The tow is a material that will easily catch fire when used with char.

One method to start a fire is to take your tow, about the size of an egg, and flatten it. Lay it down, and place a piece of char on top of it. Holding the steel in one hand just above the char and tow, strike downward on the steel with the edge of the flint. This will make sparks that will catch on the char. When you see a red ember start to develop, drop the flint and steel and wrap the char into a bird's nest like shape with the tow. Blow on the tow until it bursts into flame, then place under the wood to start your fire.



## PROJECTILE POINTS

Sometimes simply referred to as “points,” these three reproductions are made out of brass. Indians found that they could make points that were just as effective (perhaps quicker) from trade metals than with stone, from such items as cooking kettles. Over time the flintlock musket became a highly desired trade item and the use of points on arrows, spears, and other tools diminished.



## BEADS & PENDANTS

After Abenaki people made contact with Europeans, they began to incorporate new types of materials into their pendants and beadwork. Brass, silver, tin, glass, and European copper became popular materials. Beads and pendants remained very important to the culture.

As art, sewn onto garments, and as jewelry, beads and pendants had social, economic, political, and religious importance. Animal pendants identified people as belonging to a particular family, clan, or society. Beads and pendants were used in many rites of passage during a person's life during ceremonies of dance, curing, and other rituals.

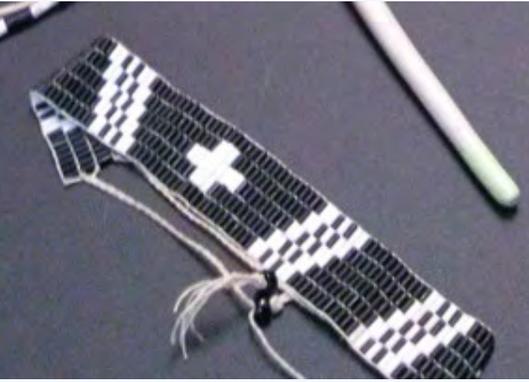
Wampum beads were a part of an economy of reciprocity and gift exchange. Reciprocal gift giving helped tie people together, establish agreements, and build relationships.

Before European contact Indian people produced barrel-shaped and disk-shaped shell beads, along with strands of small shells. After contact a wide variety of glass beads became available. Beads came in a number of shapes and sizes depending on the country of origin. Three common sizes of glass beads included crow (being the largest), pony, and seed beads (see examples of each in the Wonder Box). Beads were strung onto necklaces, woven on apparel, and sewn onto garments and wool cloth.



# WAMPUM BECOMES CURRENCY

Colonists quickly learned of wampum's value to Native people and began to use it as a means of currency with Indians when trading for European goods, land, captives, or other types of exchanges. With this change of use, wampum evolved from a reciprocal exchange item to one of capitalistic means. By the late 1660's, however, wampum had lost most of its economic value among colonists and slowly became less important as a **trade commodity**.



## WAMPUM

The word "wampum" comes from the Narragansett word for white shell beads. Wampum does, however, come in two types. The white beads are made from the Whelk shell and the purple/white beads from the growth rings of the Quahog shell.

A broken quahog shell is in the Wonder Box. Can you find the white and purple growth rings on the shell? Wampum was originally made with stone drills, so they were more robust and larger.

After contact coastal Indians in southern New England used iron drills, thereby producing a smaller form of wampum in much greater quantities. The use of wampum by Native people was wide and varied, and its use and value for gift giving was widely accepted. Wampum use included ornamentation, gifts between friends, prizes for winning games, payment of services, marriage proposals, tribute, ransom for captives, given to maintain peace or to wage war, and compensation for crimes.

The giving of wampum was generally in the form of a belt, with rows of beads that told a story or shared some culturally important message or meaning. The Wonder Box contains two examples of wrist or arm belts. One tells a story of adoption and the other refers to North, South, East, & West.





## COMBS

Find the reproduction comb known as a **Louse Comb**. This style of comb goes back to the eleventh century in Europe. As the name implies, the small tooth side of the comb was used to help control lice.

## CONES & TUBES

Native copper may not have been always obtainable for Native people in New England because it mainly comes from the northern Great Lakes region. Cones and tubes could be easily made with the already flattened brass and then used on garments or as jewelry.

Another type of brass trade item in the Wonder Box is a small bell. Combining a cone with imitation wampum beads and red deer tail fur on a line of imitation sinew shows an example of how various items can be used to create a gift or something of cultural or personal importance.



## PIPES

The first clay smoking pipes, as well as tobacco, were introduced to Europeans by indigenous people from South and North America.

Tobacco became very popular and widespread in Europe after contact with Native Americans. Although clay pipes were being made in North America, they also became a popular in Europe as a trade item by the late 17th century. Smoking tobacco was and remains an important role in many Abenaki ceremonies, rituals, and gatherings. The two reproductions in the Wonder Box show a traditional pipe made of soapstone and an 18th century, English, short-stem clay pipe.

## HARPOONS & FISH HOOKS



Attached to a wooden shaft and thrown by a person, steel harpoons replaced ones made of bone. They appear to have been used in coastal areas, and may have been used by Abenaki people visiting the coast to fish. Whether they used harpoons to spear larger fish in the Connecticut River or elsewhere in the Monadnock region is not known.

The availability of metals made it possible for Abenaki people to make their own fish hooks, such as the two brass reproductions in the Wonder Box. Abenaki people also traded with Europeans for more commercially-made versions fish hooks. Fish were an important source of food, and traveling to particular fishing sites was often part of the seasonal movement that bands undertook each year.

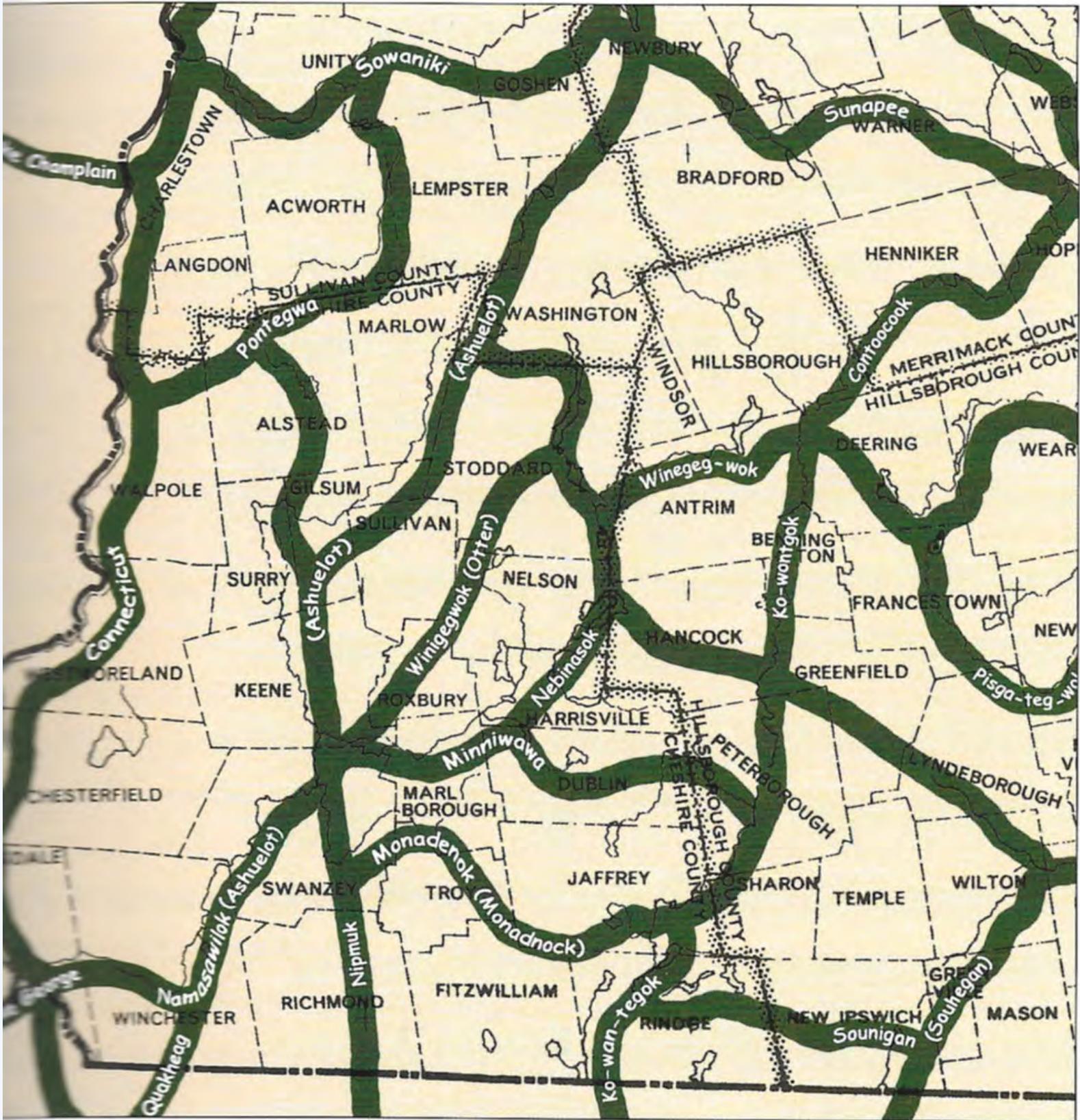
## FISHING ALONG THE ASHUELOT RIVER

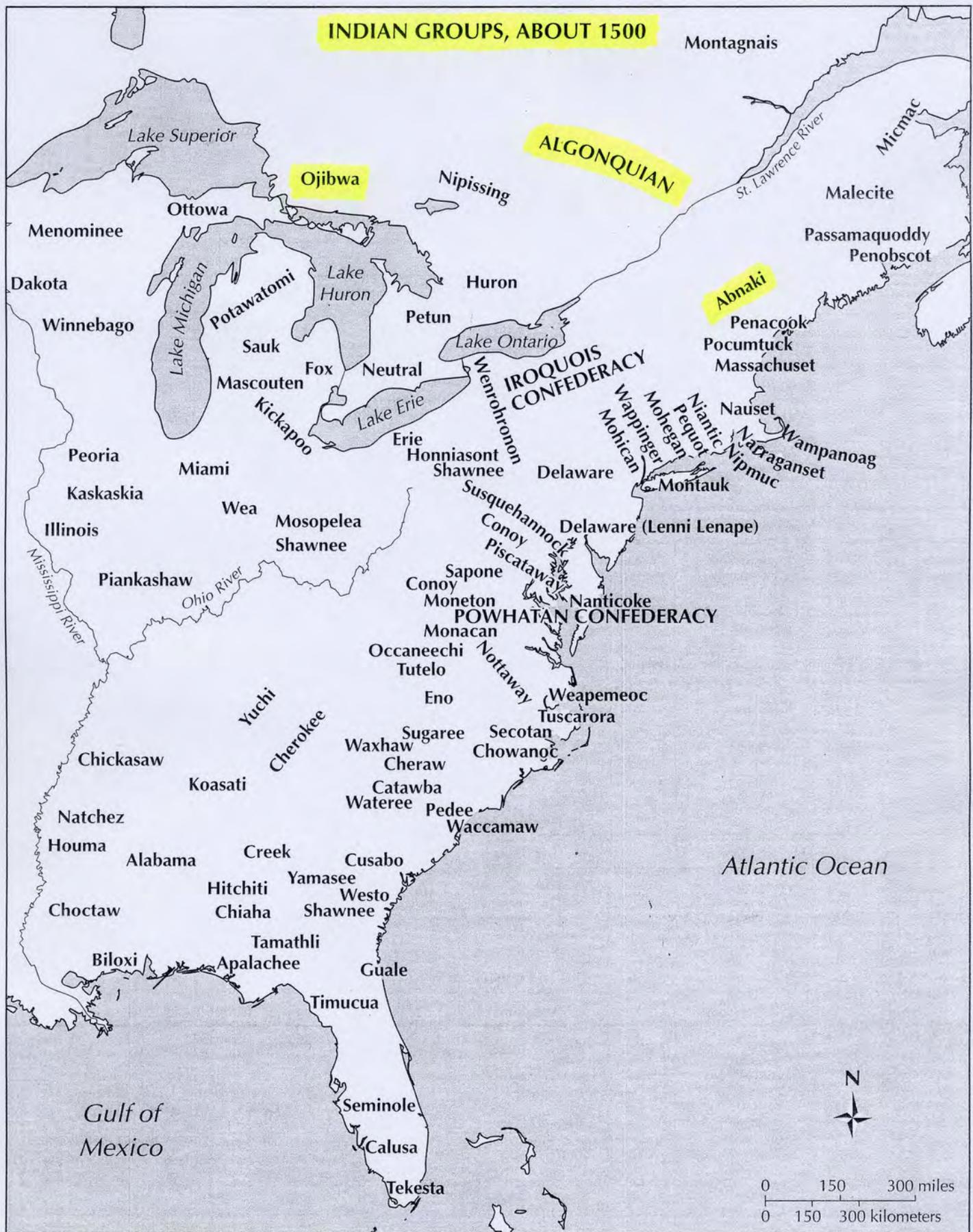
The Great Falls at Bellows Falls is one location where Indian people congregated to fish. The location of a fish dam on the Ashuelot River in Swanzey, along with numerous artifacts found nearby on the land, indicate that this was also an important place where Indian people returned to fish for perhaps thousands of years.

Traditional fishing methods depended upon the species, the natural environment, and customary usage, and in some places traditional methods are still practiced today. The simplest fishing techniques tend to be the ones that were most widely used. Spears, harpoons, gaffs, and dip nets are common methods that may have been used in the rivers and lakes in the Monadnock region. Fishing with a hook and line or trolling behind a canoe may have been another method used on larger bodies of water.

Fish traps and weirs required the cooperation of large numbers of people, but potentially could catch a large number of fish. Weirs were generally devices that formed a blockage across a stream with openings. As the weir initially blocked fish, they would find and pass through an opening where they were easily captured in traps of baskets or with nets. The Swanzey fish dam may have been used in such a way. Gill nets capture fish by entangling them in a net constructed to catch specific size fish. Seines also required a net that was small enough to trap specific size fish by pulling the two ends together to surround the fish.

# MAP OF KNOWN ABENAKI TRAILS THROUGH CHESHIRE COUNTY





This map shows the most numerous Native American groups inhabiting the area east of the Mississippi. Most groups in the South spoke Muskogean dialects, while those in the North predominantly used Algonquian dialects. Iroquoian dialects were mostly concentrated along the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. Sizable groups of Iroquoian and Siouan speakers could also be found in the Chesapeake and Carolinas. (Jeremy Eagle)

*Abenakis*

*Abenakis*

