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A BRIEF HISTORY

of the

PASSAMAQUODDY INDIANS

By Susan M. Stevens - 1972

The Passamaquoddy Indians of Maine are located today on two State Reservations about 50 miles apart. One is on Passamaquoddy Bay, near Eastport (Pleasant Point Reservation); the other is near Princeton, Maine in a woods and lake region (Indian Township Reservation). Populations vary with seasonal jobs, but Pleasant Point averages about 400-450 residents and Indian Township averages about 300-350 residents. If all known Passamaquoddies both on and off the reservations were counted, they would number around 1300.

The Passamaquoddy speak a language of the larger Algonkian stock, known as Passamaquoddy-Malecite. The Malecite of New Brunswick are their close relatives and speak a slightly different dialect. The Micmacs in Nova Scotia speak the next most related language, but the difference is great enough to cause difficulty in understanding.

The Passamaquoddy were members at one time of the Wabanaki (or Abnaki) Confederacy, which included most of Maine, New Hampshire, and Maritime Indians. Because of this they are sometimes called Abnaki, as are other tribes who were members of the Confederacy. Much later, up into the 1800's, the Wabanaki Confederacy joined forces with the Iroquois Confederacy in a coalition known as "The Great Council Fire". Prior to this, however, the Iroquois and the people of Maine were enemies.

The ancestors of the Passamaquoddy have been in Maine for at least 10,000 years, and probably longer than that. The first recorded extensive contact with Europeans the Passamaquoddies had was in 1604 when Champlain, deMonts and their men spent the winter on St. Croix Island, just outside of Calais, Maine. At that time the Malecites and Passamaquoddies were one tribe (though they had a chief for each river district), and were called "Etchemins" by the French. They controlled and inhabited most of the rivers and tributaries of the St. Croix and St. John, as well as the area surrounding Passamaquoddy Bay.

Champlain's chronicler, Marc Lescarbot, complimented the Indians of the area, both as to their good looks and robust health and long life, and for their mental and moral condition as well. He said, "They have courage, fidelity, generosity, humanity and hospitality, judgment and good sense; so that if we commonly call them savages, the word is abusive and unmerited, for they are anything but that". Champlain's party got on well with the "Etchemins", as well as with some visiting Micmacs, and many feasts were held by both Indians and French that winter. Before the winter was over, one of the head Etchemin chiefs, Chkouden, converted to Catholicism, and many of his people followed the example. This was the beginning of a trend; today most Maine Indians are still of the Catholic faith. It may have been that same winter that the Indians of Maine became involved in the fur trade with the French, and perhaps it was then that they made the first of many long cold journeys to Port Royal in Nova Scotia to the main fur trading post of the northeast. Later they also traded at Quebec.

Indians all over the east soon became dependent on Europeans for powder and shot for guns, as well as for other manufactured items they admired, and new foods they came to like. It was inevitable that Indians sooner or later would have to take sides with the country that provided goods in exchange for their furs. France and England were locked in a power struggle in Europe and in the New World, and the Passamaquoddy soon found themselves fighting the French battle in the so-called French and Indian Wars -- though they should be called the French and English Wars! These went on for many years before France was defeated at Quebec. After this, Maine Indians were left to deal with the British as best they could. The British, anxious to take over the fur trade of the area, made peace treaties with Maine Indians, promising protection of their lands from further white encroachments. They failed miserably to uphold these promises. The result was a series of sporadic attacks and skirmishes between the settlers and Indians which lasted up to the Revolutionary War.

Maine Indians were never happy under British rule. Thus, when a body of colonists headed by George Washington approached the Passamaquoddies with a plan of revolution and separation from England, they were quick to offer their assistance, despite their own risks in loss of the fur trade with England. Under Colonel John Allen an Eastern Indian Outpost was formed at Machias, and a topnotch fighting regiment was made up almost entirely of Passamaquoddy and Malecite Indians. Maine historians of the Revolution have testified that this Indian regiment was the main force in securing Eastern Maine for the country. A letter of thanks and praise from George Washington is still in Passamaquoddy possession.

Colonel Allen had made certain agreements with the Indians before they joined the American cause. After the war he was appointed by the new federal government to set the wheels of treaty-making in progress and fulfill these promises. But just then, Massachusetts stepped in to announce that as an original colony, she alone had the right to deal with the tribes in her Province of Maine. The new federal government had more pressing problems to deal with, and let the matter go. The Federal Eastern Indian Outpost was closed down, Allen had no more authority, and all his promises to the Indians were made empty. This is the reason that Maine Indians have not been affiliated with the Federal Government or the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In 1794 Massachusetts, after considerable goading by the Indians and Colonel Allen, finally made a treaty with the Passamaquoddies (and the Penobscots). The Indians were induced to cede large areas of land in the State in return for protection, certain lands reserved for themselves, and support. They were not paid for the land ceded. The lands they were to keep were theirs already, and had never been owned by anyone else, so that the Passamaquoddies are quite right in claiming the State never had the right to sell or lease those lands, as it later did. It is clear that the Passamaquoddies were not conquered people, that the State did not "give" them land, and that the services they receive today are rights by treaty.

In 1820, Maine separated from Massachusetts. In a treaty made with Massachusetts, Maine agreed to assume all the responsibilities and obligations previously assumed by Massachusetts towards its Indians. Massachusetts set aside in the treaty a large township in the Mattawamkeag area, the produce of which was to go towards the Indian fund. This was never done. Massachusetts also gave \$30,000 to Maine to start a trust fund to help meet the treaty obligations to the Passamaquoddies and Penobscots. For four years, Maine upheld its part of the bargain. Then began a long series of court rulings detrimental to Indians, of sales and 999 year leases of the Indian lands, misuse of the Indian fund, graft on the part of some agents, and the siphoning off of the trust fund interest into the State's general

fund. These abuses are well documented in the State's own records, and are still going on. The upcoming land case being brought by the tribe against Maine and Massachusetts has its origin in these abuses. The cynical attitude of many Indians today stems directly from the cynical attitude of the State over the years towards the friends it once promised to protect.

In 1928, the United States Government passed a law that all Indians in the United States were citizens of the United States. The last state in the Union to ratify this law was Maine. Finally, in 1957, Maine Indians could vote in national elections. They have been eligible to vote in State elections only since 1967.

In the past, Maine Indians have come under many departments, including Fish and Game, Highway, Forestry and Health and Welfare. But recently the Maine Department of Indian Affairs was formed, the first such department on the State level in the United States. The Department consists of a Commissioner, two Agents, and clerical helpers. The job is a difficult one, for the State and the Indians are basically at odds, and a Commissioner must decide if he is working for the Indians or working for the State. Either way, he is in trouble! The first Indian Commissioner of the Department of Indian Affairs was John Stevens, a Passamaquoddy Indian, who was appointed by the Governor of the State of Maine. This represented a breakthrough in Maine Indian history.

In recent years, Maine Indians have benefitted from various "War on Poverty" programs of the federal government. They find at last that they can get federal assistance, not as Indians, but as low-income citizens. In several cases Passamaquoddies were the first in the State to apply for the government programs. The Community Action program, in trouble only 2 years ago, was recently judged the most successful in the country -- after the tribe insisted it be run their way! Other programs are Operation Mainstream, Headstart, Housing and Urban Development, and Economic Development Administration. These programs are just beginning to bear fruit, and hopefully will succeed in upgrading housing and living conditions, employment opportunities and job training. Some of the most hopeful prospects lie in the new Passamaquoddy Basket Co-op, where traditional skills are being coupled with more streamlined production methods. When the Co-op gets on its feet, production will be diversified to include other products and use other local skills. Other plans are for a salt-water marina at Pleasant Point and a fresh-water marina at Indian Township on Dana Point. These new developments should do a lot to put Passamaquoddies on an economic par with other Maine citizens and give them more control over their lives.

Many of these new programs are administered through the tribal councils. The council on each reservation consists of a Governor or Chief, a Lieutenant Governor, and six council members. A joint council meeting combines the officers of both reservations. There is also one representative to the State Legislature, elected alternately from each reservation. (He may speak on the floor on Indian related bills but may not vote on them.) Tribal officers are elected by secret ballot every two years. The Governor may not vote on tribal business, nor may he undertake action on his own without the consent of the council. His power lies in his personality, judgment and powers of persuasion.

The Passamaquoddy people still maintain many of their old stories, songs, medicines, beliefs, and special abilities. Far from dead also are the language, certain crafts and the dance. The main craft is basket-making in which all work is hand done, even the tools used in the art. There are heavy utility baskets of all kinds, down to the tiniest "fancy basket" of bright colors and sweet-grass decoration. The main material used is brown ash. Leather and bead work are enjoying a revival at present, and many men and boys are excellent wood carvers.

The Passamaquoddies are the only Indian people in New England and the Maritimes who still perform traditional dances for their own enjoyment alone. They and other Indian groups of the area also put on yearly exhibitions for tourists in the summer. The dances are authentic, and many have a wide distribution in the United States, while others are more locally based. They are usually accompanied by a drummer and a singer, who may be the same person, may be man or woman. Many of the children are already excellent dancers.

Today the Passamaquoddy are making themselves heard, and are successfully coming to grips with economic and social problems resulting from years of neglect, discrimination, poverty, land grabs and other abuses. A growing self respect and some long-awaited help from outside are bringing about far-reaching changes on Maine Passamaquoddy reservations. One thing is certain, however, the Passamaquoddy culture will guide these changes, strengthening itself in the process. The Passamaquoddy have been rooted to the Maine soil for thousands of years, and it is vain to believe they will either "disappear" or cease to be themselves.