

Contemporary Wampanoag People

Today there are approximately four thousand Wampanoag people. In spite of the fact of our being in first contact with the Europeans, the majority of us still live on our ancestral homeland. The two largest communities are Mashpee on Cape Cod, and Aquinnah on Martha's Vineyard Island. Mashpee has about 2000 people on their tribal roll, and Aquinnah about 1200. Both of these communities are governed by a Tribal Council which serves the business, health, education, and cultural needs of the people.

The Aquinnahs are a federally recognized tribe, having received this acknowledgement in 1987. Mashpee has had their petition in for many years, and are awaiting a ruling in 2007. Under federal recognition, tribes become known as domestic sovereign, and have a government-to-government relationship with the federal government of the U.S. In both of these tribes, to be eligible to be listed on the tribal roll one must be able to establish a direct line to the 19th-century roll as stipulated in the federal recognition process.

There are several other Wampanoag communities as well today. These include Herring Pond in south Plymouth; the Assonet, who are not the original Assonet people, but who have reorganized within the last thirty years; the Seaconk; the Pocasset; the Pokanoket, and others. Each of these groups works diligently and tirelessly to maintain culture and heritage in today's world.

Additionally, we have reconnected with some of our relatives who were taken from us during King Philip's War. After the war, many people from the Wampanoag, Narragansett, Pequot, and others were sold into slavery in the Caribbean Islands. Many of these people stayed together over the centuries and kept alive the knowledge of the people they came from. Today we are back together and getting to know one another again, and attending powwows and other events both here and in Bermuda.

Wampanoag people today carry on many of the ancestral ways as we always have. Many people are still hunters, fisherman, and farmers, and provide for their families and communities in this manner. In addition to the Tribal Councils, each community has a chief, medicine person, and other spiritual leaders. Many people are artists and craftspeople, specializing in the ancient traditional skills. Many people work out in the larger society alongside everyone else. They are social workers, nurses, carpenters, chefs and caterers, postal workers, clerks and cashiers, teachers, shop owners, etc., etc., etc., and museum workers! (Please visit the Wampanoag Homesite!)

These communities hold many private events which are cultural and carry on very ancient ways. Aquinnah has "Cranberry Day" every October where tribal members go the wild bogs to pick cranberries and have a cook-out lunch, and return to the Tribal offices building for an evening social, which consists of a meal and singing and dancing. The children are officially let out of school for this day. The Assonets host the Wampanoag New Year's ceremonies every spring (our new year), held on one of our old reservation areas.

There are many public events as well. The most well-known is the Mashpee Wampanoag Powwow, held every Fourth of July weekend. Very exciting and significant parts of this are the clambake, which is a traditional Wampanoag method of cooking; and the Fireball game, held at night and which has a deep spiritual meaning and is not, per se, a sport. The Wampanoag Indigenous Program of Plimoth Plantation holds an annual Strawberry Thanksgiving at the end of June.

The Wampanoag people have a long history of struggle, turmoil and death in the face of the process of colonization. We also have a long history of continuity, longevity and life as Wampanoag people, borne of the knowledge of who we are and the strength of our spirit.



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