“Koluskap naka Pukcinsqehs: of Koluskap and the Witch that loved him.”

When the world was created, the Creator knew there was still much work to be done, so they created Koluskap. Koluskap was gifted with strong spiritual powers to help him complete this work. In addition to the plants, animals, and people on the earth, there were also monsters, giants, and other creatures of darkness that inhabited the Dawnland. One of these dark creatures was Pukcinsqehs, a witch.

Pukcinsqehs, whose name is also that for a small bottle, jug, or pitcher, was a very powerful and very dark sorceress. While she had multiple talents, her most famous power was her ability to change from woman to man. But one of her deepest desires was to become a mother, and she tried many times to have her own child, and gave birth to many gruesome monsters in the process. She so desperately wanted a beautiful child that she often stole Wabanaki children and attempted to raise them as her own.
Pukcinsqehs eventually fell in love with Koluskap, thinking that together they could rule the Dawnland with their incredible powers. Koluskap did not return her love, however, and she quickly became filled with rage. She vowed to exact revenge upon Koluskap, and did everything she could to make Koluskap’s work more difficult. She also began to direct her rage towards Koluskap’s children, the Wabanaki. For many years she tormented Koluskap, eventually kidnapping his family members, Grandmother Woodchuck and Nephew Marten.

A long chase ensued over many seasons, with Koluskap always close behind Pukcinsqehs and his grandmother and nephew. Eventually he caught up to the witch, and approached her camp undetected. When his Nephew Marten was ordered to collect firewood away from camp, Koluskap surprised him, and disclosed his plan for rescuing Marten and Grandmother Woodchuck. One of Marten’s responsibilities was to care for Pukcinsqehs’ most recent child, and Koluskap told Marten that when he was ordered by Pukcinsqehs to fetch the babe, he should throw it into the fireplace and call out to Koluskap.

When the moment came to pass that Marten was ordered to fetch the babe of Pukcinsqehs, he followed Koluskap’s instructions carefully. As he carried the infant past the fire, he tossed it into the fireplace and immediately fled for the safety of Koluskap. He ran, calling out to his uncle, with the wrathful Pukcinsqehs close behind him. Using his power, Koluskap grew himself to a mighty size and stepped out to surprise Pukcinsqehs. As Koluskap had foreseen, Pukcinsqehs was too distracted by her anger to use her own powers, and fled. There followed an epic chase through the Dawnland.

As she ran, Pukcinsqehs began to regain control of her emotions, and willed herself to grow with each step. Koluskap and Pukcinsqehs each grew to such size that their footsteps sounded like thunder, and their snowshoes left imprints in the earth and rocks throughout the Dawnland. Eventually, Koluskap caught up to Pukcinsqehs on the island of Pesamkuk. In the middle of a range of mountains, Pemotonet, Koluskap caught Pukcinsqehs by her hair and threw her to the ground.

As Koluskap held her by the hair, Pukcinsqehs began to laugh, only further maddening Koluskap. Growing himself to his largest size, he began to stomp Pukcinsqehs into the ground. As he stomped, Pukcinsqehs laughed louder and louder, only adding to his rage. When Koluskap finally calmed himself enough to remove his foot, he looked down in horror at what he had done. By stomping on the witch, he had helped her change from a singular
being into millions of tiny, biting insects: the first mosquitoes and black flies. As she swarmed around Koluskap and away from the island of Pesamkuk, she said to the giant, “Thank you for your help, Koluskap. Now I may torment your children forever.”

The Wabanaki Confederacy

According to Wabanaki oral histories, we, the People of the Dawn, have lived in the area now known as Maine and the Maritimes since time immemorial. Archaeological studies show that the Wabanaki have lived in this area for at least twelve thousand years—making us the first residents of this land after the Laurentide ice sheet retreated. Though our oral traditions are sometimes at odds with Western interpretations of history, we claim an intimate understanding of the landscape and ecology that is deeply rooted within our culture. The Wabanaki are unique among Native American cultures, as we are some of the very few tribes that were not removed or displaced from traditional territories. Other tribes that survived the European diseases eventually moved westward, leaving the Wabanaki to experience colonialism for the next several hundred years.

The Wabanaki are a confederacy of Nations indigenous to the areas now known as Maine and Eastern Canada. Post-European contact, the Confederacy was defined as five tribal groups: the Passamaquoddy, the Penobscot, the Micmac, the Maliseet, and the Abenaki. It can be difficult to determine the full extent of each nation’s historical territory, as the Western concepts of borders and land ownership did not exist in Wabanaki culture. But the Abenaki were generally located to the west of the Kennebec River, extending into New Hampshire, Vermont, and Quebec; the Penobscot were primarily located on the Penobscot River, extending south towards the Kennebec; the Passamaquoddy, while centrally located around the St. Croix River and Passamaquoddy Bay, consider their homelands to reach the Penobscot River and Mount Desert Island; the Maliseet were located along the St. John River, reaching south to the St. Croix; and finally, the Micmac were found north of the St. John, extending throughout New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Newfoundland. Each nation’s territory overlapped with those on either side, with agreements to share resources between the tribes, so clean lines cannot easily be drawn.
The fact of the Wabanaki’s uninterrupted presence in this land is deeply rooted within our culture. An equally crucial component of Wabanaki culture is language. The Wabanaki nations still have members who speak Passamaquoddy-Maliseet, Penobscot, or Mi’kmaq as a first language, making us among the few indigenous cultures on the East Coast that have retained our traditional languages. It is the combination of the uninterrupted connection to land and the retention of the languages that is the heart and soul of the Wabanaki identity, and therefore what lies at the core of our cultural survival throughout the process of colonization.

**Ckuwaponahkik, Skutik, Wolastoq, naka Peskotomuhkatik**

As in other New England states, the most noticeable influence that Wabanaki culture has had on Maine’s sense of place takes the form of place names. While these names tend to be slightly mispronounced—and in some cases, places are misnamed completely—they are often the only connection that local people have to Wabanaki culture. Even the word Wabanaki—or waponahki⁵—can be traced to a Passamaquoddy
place name, Ckuwaponahkik. The beginning syllable ćku denotes coming forward, as in the command ckuwi, “come here.” The root wapon denotes both light and things that are white in color—ćkuwapon refers to the rising sun. The ending, ahkik, denotes a physical location. Ckuwaponahkik, therefore, is interpreted to mean “the land of the dawn.” By changing the ending, ckuwaponahi—the long form of waponahki—comes to mean a single person from the Dawnland, and ending with iyik would denote a group of people. Thus, Waponahki, or Wabanaki, is interpreted to mean “the people of the dawn.” The Dawnland refers to the entire Wabanaki home territory, from modern-day Newfoundland to Cape Cod Bay.

It is interesting to note that two important and well-known names of places in the Dawnland are used quite incorrectly. The first is “schoodic”—in the Passamaquoddy writing system, skutik—the name given to the peninsula a few miles up the coast from Mount Desert Island. While the pronunciation of this word is correct, if slightly anglicized, the word is actually the traditional Passamaquoddy-Maliseet word for the St. Croix River. So not only is skutik actually the name for a different location, it also refers to a completely different geographical feature.

The second incorrectly used word is “Aroostook.” The name of both a river and a county in the state, “Aroostook” is in fact a French mispronunciation of the Passamaquoddy-Maliseet word Wolastoq, the traditional name of the St. John River in New Brunswick. Wolastoq is translated as “the beautiful river” and is the root word of the traditional name for Maliseet people, Wolastoqewiyik. Aroostook County was named after the Aroostook River, which is located several miles to the southwest of the St. John. In many ways, the existence of these place names serves an important role in acknowledging Wabanaki culture, yet the mispronunciation and misnaming of places has the potential to blur the line between a respectful acknowledgment of Wabanaki culture and cultural appropriation.

Wabanaki naming traditions differ significantly from those of Western European cultures. In typical European traditions, places are named for a historical figure or event. In Wabanaki traditions, however, places were most often named either for their geological features or for important resources that could be found there. Only rarely was a place
named for a particularly relevant historical event, and it usually would have been rooted deeply within traditional stories.

Wabanaki people named themselves in a similar manner, and like many place names, their tribal names were inaccurately recorded in the history books. For example, the word Passamaquoddy is derived from two words that share the same root: peskotomuhkatiyik, meaning “the people that spear pollock,” and peskotomuhkatik, meaning “the pollock spearing place.” Peskotom is the word for pollock (*pollachius pollachius*), while *ubkat* denotes the action of spear-fishing. The ending *iyik* both is a descriptor for a person and pluralizes the word. Alternately, the ending *ik* denotes a location. So, the traditional name refers not only to a resource that was vital to the survival of the Passamaquoddy, but also to its geographical location.


**Pesamkuk, Pemotonet, naka Wapuwoc**

When Samuel Champlain and Pierre Dugua, Sieur de Monts, first viewed Mount Desert Island, they marveled at the peak that would eventually be known as Cadillac Mountain. Noting the barren surface of Cadillac and the other mountains, they called the island Île des Monts Déserts, the “island of the deserted mountains” (or “the island of the lonely mountains” in an alternate translation). The Passamaquoddy
name for the island is Pesamkuk, and the exact meaning of the word is unknown.

But an examination of the etymology of pesamkuk and associated words reveals a likely answer to the mystery. The ending *amkuk* denotes a sandy place, as its root word, *amkis*, translates as “sand.” The beginning syllable *pes* is harder to translate, however. Occasionally, Passamaquoddy words are shortened over time—such as the shortening of *c kuwaponahki* to *waponahki*. Peskotomuhkat is the traditional word for a Passamaquoddy person, while pestomuhkat is an alternate pronunciation that many native speakers use. This example lends credence to the theory that pesamkuk is a shortened version of a word similar to “peskamkuk.” The root word of peskotom is *peskhal*, meaning “to shoot something;” though one doesn’t “shoot” a spear, the root of the word implies the action of striking a target with a projectile. Historically, pesamkuk was a central meeting place for Wabanaki people to hunt deer, spear fish, and trade during the summer months. Therefore, by combining the meanings of the root words with the historical significance of the island, pesamkuk—or “peskamkuk”—could plausibly be interpreted as “the sandy hunting and spearing place.”

It is widely believed that “pemetic” is the original name of Mount Desert Island; however, the word’s original form, pemotonet, is defined as “a range of mountains.” According to native speakers of the language, pemotonet—or pemotonek, for some—refers specifically to the mountains of pesamkuk. The biggest mountain was called wapuwoc. One of the many words for “mountain” is *woc*—which is clearly seen in the ending *uwoc*. The beginning, *wap*, can be defined as the noun “light,” and is often used as a prefix to describe things that are white; for example, the word for owl (*bubo virginiana*) is *kuhukuhkahs*, while the name of a snowy owl (*bubo scandiacus*) is *wapikuhukuhkahs*. So, speakers define Wapuwoc, the indigenous name of Cadillac Mountain, to mean “[the] first light white mountain”—or as I like to call it, “the white mountain of the first light.” The ability to see the sunrise from the summit of Wapuwoc before anywhere else in the Dawnland has always given the mountain spiritual significance in Wabanaki culture. Based on the abbreviating trends within the language, such as peskotomuhkat to pestomuhkat and ckuwaponahki to waponahki, it is possible that wapuwoc is a shortened version of a word similar to “ckuwapuwoc.”
Ktopeqonuk, Wiwonotonet, Mimuwipon, Kei Puktesok, naka Wawonok

Another place that would become significant in the history of Mount Desert Island was called Ktopeqonuk. The root of the word, ktopeq, means “spring; cold water.” Ktopeqon literally translates as “there is a spring of cold water,” and the ending uk denotes a location. So, Ktopeqonuk was “the place of the cold spring,” and eventually would be named Sieur de Monts, after Pierre Dugua.

Within Pemotonet were several bodies of water, one of which was called Wiwonotonet. The root word, wiwoniw, means “around in a circle; encircling.” The ending, otonet, shares a root with pemotonet, “a range of mountains.” What is now known as Eagle Lake was called Wiwonotonet, “[the lake] surrounded by mountains.” The second body
of water was called Mimuwipon,\textsuperscript{26} which translates as “the water is perfectly calm and smooth.” This body of water is now the famous Jordan Pond.\textsuperscript{27} Close to Mimuwipon are two small mountains that were called Kci Puktesok,\textsuperscript{28} with \textit{kci}\textsuperscript{29} denoting something large, the ending \textit{ok} denoting the plural, and the root word \textit{puktes}\textsuperscript{30} literally translating as “bubble.” One wonders, with these mountains now called the Bubbles, whether their name came from a translation of the original indigenous name, or vice versa. Another example is Wawonok,\textsuperscript{31} a place where Wabanaki people living on Pesamkuk would gather waterfowl eggs. Wawon\textsuperscript{32} translates as “egg,” with the ending \textit{ok} denoting the plural. Now, this place is known as Egg Rock.

\textbf{Kci Matuwehsok}

Several smaller islands surround Pesamkuk, some with specific names in Passamaquoddy. One group of islands was called Kci Matuwehsok,\textsuperscript{33} literally translated as “the big porcupines.” Interestingly, matuwehs,\textsuperscript{34} the name for a porcupine (\textit{erethizon dorsatum}), comes from the phrase “\textit{Eci matuwehta},” which translates as “it looks like he’s having a hard time.”\textsuperscript{35}

When I moved to Mount Desert Island—Pesamkuk, in Wabanaki—I heard from several locals stories about the Porcupine Islands that featured an ancient Wabanaki Chief who had pets that were porcupines. As the account goes, the porcupines ate all of the large birch trees on the island, making the Chief angry. As punishment, he kicked them from the summit of Cadillac, and they fell into the bay, becoming the islands that are now their namesakes. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any authentication of this story as Wabanaki, and several Wabanaki historians have never heard of it in our documented oral histories.\textsuperscript{36} Some stories, such as Koluskap naka Pukcinsqehs and another story\textsuperscript{37} told by Passamaquoddy elder Wayne Newell, cite Pesamkuk as the place where Koluskap punished giant beasts, but make no mention of porcupines being punished and transformed into islands.

\textbf{Moneskatik}

The geographical feature that gives Moneskatik\textsuperscript{38} its name is a large sand bar connecting the main island to a smaller one—a sand bar that gives this location its modern name, Bar Harbor. The root of the word, \textit{ess},\textsuperscript{39} is the name for a clam, and the beginning \textit{mones} has the root of
monese, meaning “s/he digs clams.” The ending, katik, denotes a location, so moneskatik is translated as “the clam digging place.” The large sand bar, which is visible only at low tide, was a valuable source of clams, an important form of sustenance for coastal Wabanaki people.

There were several Wabanaki encampments on Pesamkuk in the same locations as many of the modern communities on Mount Desert Island. It is estimated that the island held a summertime population of several hundred, with only a few families staying through the winter, as the resources on the island did not provide for a large year-round community. Samuel Champlain recorded encountering a Chief of the island named Asticou—who would eventually become one of the most famous Chiefs in history. According to native speakers, Astuwikuk is a location near Northeast Harbor. The root of the place name, astuwi, is translated as “moving toward each other,” “coming into contact with each other,” or “face-to-face.” The ending kuk denotes a place, so astuwikuk can be defined as “meeting place.” At the time of first European contact, what was perhaps the largest indigenous settlement was described as located at the mouth of a long, narrow inlet bay—where Chief Asticou was encountered. Based on the survival of the place name, I propose that Astuwikuk may not have been the Chief’s name, but the name of the location he represented.

Wabanaki encampment at the end of Ledgelawn Avenue, Bar Harbor, 1890s. Courtesy of the Abbe Museum

Astuwikuk naka Pihci-cihiqi-pisipiqe

There were several Wabanaki encampments on Pesamkuk in the same locations as many of the modern communities on Mount Desert Island. It is estimated that the island held a summertime population of several hundred, with only a few families staying through the winter, as the resources on the island did not provide for a large year-round community. Samuel Champlain recorded encountering a Chief of the island named Asticou—who would eventually become one of the most famous Chiefs in history. According to native speakers, Astuwikuk is a location near Northeast Harbor. The root of the place name, astuwi, is translated as “moving toward each other,” “coming into contact with each other,” or “face-to-face.” The ending kuk denotes a place, so astuwikuk can be defined as “meeting place.” At the time of first European contact, what was perhaps the largest indigenous settlement was described as located at the mouth of a long, narrow inlet bay—where Chief Asticou was encountered. Based on the survival of the place name, I propose that Astuwikuk may not have been the Chief’s name, but the name of the location he represented.
Abraham Somes, an English colonial fisherman, first visited the island in 1755, encountering the body of water my ancestors called Pihci-cihciqi-pisipiqt and that would eventually take Somes’ name. The beginning, pihci, has the root word of pihceyu, meaning “it is long.” The middle, cihciqi, has the root word of cihciqeyu, meaning “it is narrow,” and pisi is a pre-verb meaning “into.” The ending pique means “hollowed out,” referring to the inlet formation in the landscape. So, pihci-cihciqi-pisipiqt, the name for Somes Sound, is interpreted as “[the] long, narrow, inlet bay.”

Putuwewiw

A place well known to visitors today was originally named Putuwewiw. The root of this word, putuwe, means “it blows air.” One animal significant to Wabanaki culture and spirituality was Putep, the whale, whose name shares the same root. Because of this connection, when I bring visitors to what is now called Thunder Hole, I tell the story of one of the first treaties in the Dawnland, which took place between Koluskap and Putep.

Putep agreed to carry Koluskap across a body of water during his pursuit of the witch, Pukcinsqehs, as long as Koluskap promised Putep that she would be allowed to return to the ocean. Although Koluskap apparently broke his promise, he was able, being a giant, to push the whale back into the bay. As a sign of their agreement, Koluskap gave Putep his pipe, and she swam away, smoking as she went. Eventually, Koluskap left the Dawnland to prepare for a great battle, which had been foretold to occur after the arrival of foreign visitors from the East (Europeans). Before leaving in his stone canoe, he left images of himself in rock formations so that his children, the Wabanaki, would recognize him when he returned.

Today, when viewed from the right location on the platform, a stone likeness of a man’s face can be seen in the rocks overlooking Thunder Hole.

Mount Desert Island

Moneskatik did not truly begin to interest the vast majority of non-Wabanaki people until long after Asticou and Champlain first encountered one another. In fact, it wasn’t until after Maine became a state that the general American public began to recognize it as a place at
all. Much credit can be given to Henry David Thoreau, whose descriptions of Maine’s natural beauty in his book *The Maine Woods* enticed other artists to the area. Like Thoreau, many hired Passamaquoddy and Penobscot guides to show them around the relative wilderness in safety. After the various paintings, poems, and other artworks made their way into mainstream American culture, the desire to visit this “Garden of Eden” grew. Traveling to Mount Desert Island in the 1800s required affluence, so visitors expected a certain level of luxury when it came to their housing quarters. Eventually, Moneskatik became officially known as Bar Harbor to the rest of the country, and more and more members of the upper class sought a “rustic” experience in the wilderness of Maine. What became known as the Rusticator period lasted approximately from the 1840s to the 1920s, and arguably represents a peak of the influence that Wabanaki history and culture had on the sense of place in Maine.

Penobscot Elder Reuben "Butch" Phillips reviews the Timeline of Wabanaki History at the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor.
*Photo by Peter Travers. Courtesy of the Abbe Museum*

During the Rusticator period, tensions between Native and Euro-Americans in the Western part of the country ran high. The “Manifest
Destiny” impulse, and with it the intentional expansion of American society into Indian territories, resulted in gruesome acts of violence, both literally and metaphorically through political policies. Fear and distrust of Native peoples was common in American culture, yet Eden provided a unique opportunity: the chance to interact and learn from Indians in a safe and trusting environment.

Carmella Bear, Penobscot, demonstrates traditional dances for the public while the Burnurwurbskek Singers perform on the summit of Cadillac Mountain, 2013. Courtesy of the Abbe Museum

Though European settlements began to grow in both number and size on Mount Desert Island, Wabanaki people did not allow these visitors to deter them from their traditional migration to the island. Wabanaki encampments continued to make their appearance, and their locations were still chosen based on proximity to resources, but it was the resources themselves that experienced the biggest change. While Wabanaki people traditionally harvested food from the island, the arrival of Euro-Americans eventually created the need to survive in a currency-based economy, and Wabanaki culture adapted. Traditional crafts such as ash baskets, birchbark baskets, and porcupine quill embroidery were adapted into smaller, more intricate forms to be sold as trinkets to the tourists—the early Wabanaki fancy baskets. From the 1860s until 1890, Wabanaki encampments alternated among over six different locations in
Bar Harbor alone—the most common being shoreside at the foot of Bridge Street; Albert Meadow; and at the end of Ledgelawn Avenue, where the athletic field is now located.54

In addition to serving as guides and selling trinkets to tourists, many Indians began to perform. These “authentic Indian ceremonies” were, more often than not, exaggerations of America’s misconceptions of Native culture; they were not authentic representations of Wabanaki culture, but rather a Wild West-themed “Hollywood Indian” style of performance. One of the most famous of these performers was Frank “Chief Big Thunder” Loring of the Penobscot. Pictures of Loring depict him in his “traditional” chief’s regalia—a stereotypical Plains-inspired Indian outfit consisting mostly of an ostrich-feather headdress and boa-constrictor skin sash.55 Loring was one of several Wabanaki who “played Indian” in order to make a living, but it is impossible to know whether his performances contained any cultural accuracy. Given the costumes used and his clearly adopted “Indian name,” it is more likely that Wabanaki culture was represented through his guided canoe trips and traditional crafts. After the Rusticator period, and following Loring’s example, many other Wabanaki performers put on pageants and shows as a means of financial support, including Molly Spotted Elk and Princess Watahwaso.56

By 1893, Wabanaki encampments had been banned from the shoreline in Bar Harbor. “Squaw Hollow,” the annual encampment on Ledgelawn Avenue, made its last appearance in 1920 before the property was converted for public use. From this point on, small Wabanaki families continued to visit the island, but their minimal roadside camps were nothing compared to the former encampments. Ultimately, Wabanaki interest in visiting Mount Desert Island, and tourists’ interest in Wabanaki peoples, declined.57

Today, Wabanaki people and our history are represented by the Abbe Museum. With a mission of inspiring new learning about the Wabanaki Nations with every visit, the Abbe strives to feature the Wabanaki voice and perspective as the primary perspective in its exhibits and programs. While the Wabanaki no longer make encampments on the island as we once did, we have maintained our tradition of visiting the island to sell our traditional crafts through the annual Native American Festival and Basketmaker’s Market, a collaboration among the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, the Abbe Museum, and the
College of the Atlantic. There are no longer any Wabanaki communities on the island, but several families and individuals—myself included—have chosen to make Pesamkuk our home.

Notes

1 The gender-neutral pronoun was a deliberate choice made by the author.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Interview with Roger Paul, Adjunct Professor, University of Maine, Passamaquoddy language speaker, November 2014.
8 Ibid.
11 Interview with Dr. Conor Quinn, Wabanaki languages expert, November 2014.
13 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
24 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
26 Ibid.
27 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
33 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
35 Interview with Roger Paul, University of Maine.
36 Interviews with James Francis, Penobscot Nation Cultural Director, and Donald G. Soctomah, Passamaquoddy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, November 2014.
37 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
45 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Soctomah with Francis, *Passamaquoddy People*.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Lucy “Princess Watahawaso” Nicolar Poolaw (1882-1969) and Molly “Spotted Elk” Dellis Nelson (1903-1977) were famous Penobscot performers.
57 Ibid.