A Brief History:

From the Koas Meadows to You Today

INTRODUCTION

This booklet was developed to share the diverse cultural history of the Koas Meadows region and the local Koasek Abenaki people. It is designed in such a way that both educators and parents alike can use it to stimulate discussion and promote a better understanding of the Native Americans who have lived here for thousands of years. Discussion questions are included at the end of each section. Abenaki words are set in italics and can be found in the Glossary along with a list of Suggested Resources.

It is hoped that by providing this information, many of the common misconceptions pertaining to the Abenaki people will be clarified. Reading about our unique history will help the students of the Koas Meadows region gain knowledge of their own history and instill a sense of pride in their unique and culturally diverse heritage.

We hope this booklet provides insight into the origins of our families and the history of the Koas Meadows. Most importantly, our message to you is—from the history of Koas to you today, our community is strong and unique. It is not just the beautiful meadows or the amazing mountains that make this a special place; it is the community of people who live here.

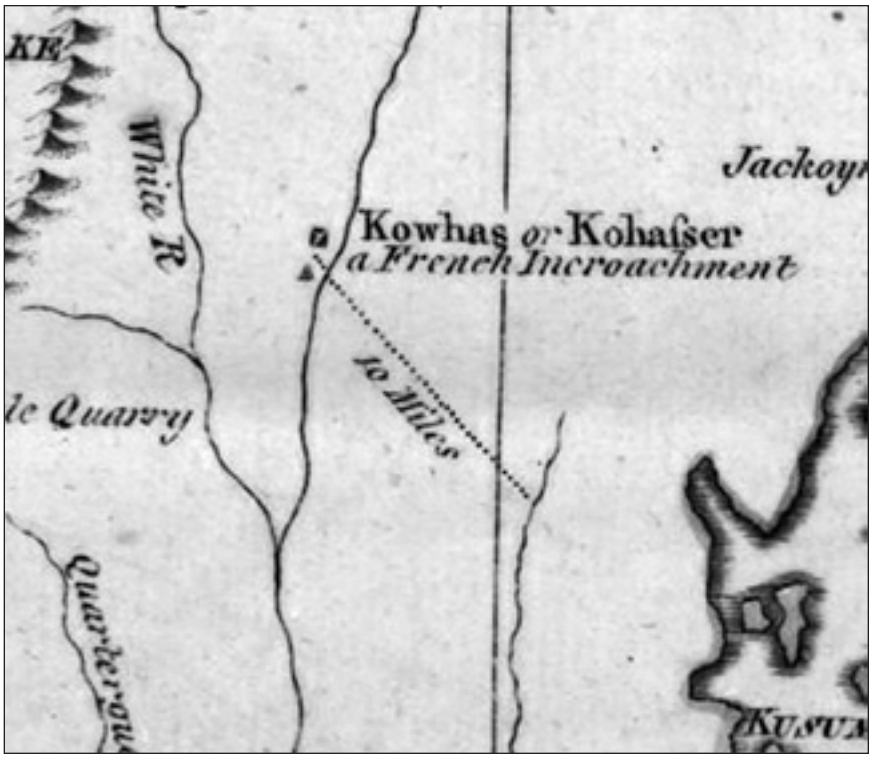
THE KOAS MEADOWS REGION

The Abenaki Native Americans have been living in the same region for 10,000 years. Today, this area comprises Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and southern Quebec. The Abenaki Alliance in Vermont and New Hampshire consists of four tribal bands, much like America is divided into states. These tribal bands include the Missisquoi (St. Francis/Sokoki), the Elnu, the Nulhegan, and the Koasek. Each individual tribal band is governed by a Chief and a Tribal Council, yet they are all part of the Abenaki Alliance. This is very similar to how each state has their own Governor and State Legislature, yet remains a part of the United States of America (*Pastonki*).

The Abenaki people of the Newbury, Vermont and Haverhill, New Hampshire area are called the Koasek. In the Abenaki language, *koasek* means "The Place of the White Pines." This area has also been called the Koas Meadows, Cahass, Cohassiac, Coos, Coosuc, Cowasuck, Cowass, Cohas, and Cohase. Today, people call this area the Little Oxbow and Big Oxbow region of New Hampshire.

Historians have often confused which band or tribe some of the eastern Indians were from. If they saw an Indian in one location, they assumed that person was a member of the local tribal band. Many historians have called all Abenaki "St. Francis Indians." Other historians have used that term just to refer to the Abenaki of Odanak, who reside in Southern Quebec. This has often led to confusion about the history of the Abenaki people.

The Koas Meadows region has always been an important area for the Abenaki Nation. As Europeans came over to America, they discovered this beautiful region and chose to settle here too. The Koasek



Abenakis married with European settlers of Scottish, French, Irish, German, and English descent. This cultural diversity makes us who we are today. Regardless of our bloodlines, one thing is for certain—the people of the Koas Meadows are unique and have a history as deep as the roots of the ash tree.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How is the Abenaki Nation similar to the United States of America?*
2. *Why are the Koasek Abenaki a culturally diverse group today?*
3. *What has led to confusion about the history of the Abenaki people?*

DAILY LIFE OF THE KOASEK ABENAKI

The Koasek Abenaki have lived in the Newbury and Haverhill area for thousands of years. In the 1600s, Europeans came into the region through Canada and the New England seacoast, where they came in contact with the indigenous (or Native American) people.

To imagine what life was like, let's begin by considering the daily and seasonal activities that filled the lives of the Koasek Abenaki families. During the late spring (*siguan*) and summer (*siguaniwi*) months, the Koasek lived in the Koas Meadows where they spent their time gardening and harvesting; making birch-bark canoes; hunting; and gathering medical herbs, berries, and mushrooms.

The Koasek people were known for raising a unique strain of corn. When the settlers came into the meadow area, the Abenaki shared their corn and food with the new families. The Greene family was given some of the corn seeds and they grew it for many generations. Later, they shared the corn seeds with Sarah and Charlie Calley, who grew the Koasek corn for 25 years. In 2006, the Calleys gifted the seeds back to the Chief of the Koasek of the Koas. Today, the seeds are shared with many Koasek families who grow the special corn. As more and more people grow this corn, it is slowly being reestablished in the Koas Meadows region. This ensures the corn will be available to future generations to enjoy.

Although the Koasek Abenaki were famous for growing corn, they also grew beans, squash, and pumpkins. Corn, beans, and squash are called "The Three Sisters" by the Abenaki people because they grow in the same mound in the garden. The corn provides a ladder for the bean vines and, together, they give shade to the squash. The Three Sisters were a staple of the Koasek Abenaki diet.

The Koasek also tapped the maple trees found in the Koas Meadows to make maple syrup. They fished the Connecticut (*Kwenitegw* or "Long River") and Ammonoosuc ("Eel River") for salmon, trout, walleye, northern pike, and local freshwater eel (*nahomoak*). They hunted deer and moose and trapped small furbearing animals such as rabbits, beavers, and river otters. The land was very rich, the rivers and streams plentiful, and the dense population of wildlife and game ensured the people would never be hungry or cold.

During the last few weeks of Autumn (*taguogo*), some families would travel to Canada or other Wôbanaki regions. However, many of the Koasek Abenaki families would move up into the mountains. They would build their winter *wigwôms* to stay warm. A typical *wigwôm* has a curved surface that can hold up against the worst weather. The male of the family was responsible for the framing. Young, green, tree saplings about ten to fifteen feet long were cut down. These tree saplings were then bent by stretching the wood.

While these saplings were being bent, a circle was drawn on the ground. The diameter of the circle varied in size depending upon the number of people who would live inside the dwelling. The bent saplings were then placed over the drawn circle, using the tallest saplings in the middle and the shorter ones on the outside. The saplings formed arches all in one direction on the circle. The next set of saplings was used to wrap around the *wigwôm* to give the shelter support. When the two sets of saplings were finally tied together, the sides and roof were placed on it.

These structures were partly dug into the ground to provide added insulation from the cold. The outside of the *wigwôm* was covered with thick, overlaying sheets of waterproof birch bark. They were often built with an open area at the top called a "smoke hole." The hole would be covered by a loose covering or flap that could be lifted open to allow smoke to escape from the fire inside.

Other shelters were built in the tipi style of the Plains Indians and were portable or able to be moved easily. Most Abenaki villages had a "long house." These were very large *wigwôms* where several families could live together or where important meetings could take place.

Dried or smoked fish (*namasiia*) and vegetables were available throughout the winter (*pebon*) because the Koasek spent much of their summer growing and harvesting food, hunting, and fishing. Big game, such as moose and deer, was plentiful. When spring came, the Koasek Abenaki would begin making maple sugar. After sugaring season was over, they returned to their village areas along the rivers to prepare once again for the long winter months ahead.

However, life was not all work for the Koasek people. At night, they would often gather together as a community around a central fire for storytelling, dancing, and singing. In the long winter months, they played a game called Snow Snake. Snow snakes are carved wooden sticks that are slid across an icy stretch to see who can slide their snake the farthest. The Koasek also enjoyed a fast downhill ride in a *toboggan* or "sled."

The Abenaki language is a dialect of Algonquin. For thousands of years, the Abenaki people spoke their own language. When Europeans settled the region in the late 1600s, they converted many of the Abenaki to the Christian church and introduced their own languages. Slowly, over hundreds of years, the Abenaki people began to speak French and English. Sadly, the Abenaki language is now on the List of Endangered Languages with only six fluent speakers. However, many local places still bear names from the Abenaki language. Ammonoosuc, Amoskeag, Coos, Hooksett, Monadnock, and Nashua are a few names you might recognize today.

Hollywood movies have portrayed all Native Americans as having copper skin, dark brown eyes, and long black hair. This is far from the way the eastern tribal people looked. In 1542, sieur de Roberval, Governor General of New France, described the appearance of the Abenaki people in his letters. He wrote, "They are a people of goodly stature and well made; they are very white, but they are all naked, and if they were appareled as the French are, they would be as white and as fair, but they paint themselves for fear of heat and sun burning." In 1637, Thomas Morton of Massachusetts wrote, "Their infants are borne with hair on their heads and are of complexion as white as our nation: but their mothers in their infancy make a bath of walnut leaves, husks

of walnuts, and such things as will stain their skin forever, wherein they dip and wash them to make them tawny."

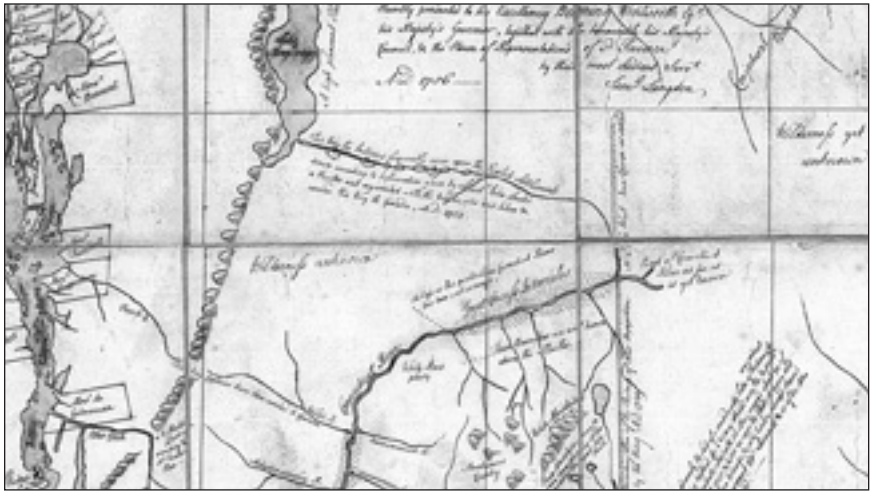
Discussion Questions:

1. *What kind of houses did the Koasek people live in?*
2. *What are "The Three Sisters" and why are they important to the Abenaki?*
3. *What activities did the Abenaki people engage in to have fun?*
4. *Do the Abenaki people look like other Native Americans? Why or why not?*
5. *Many of the names we have for our rivers and towns are derived from the Abenaki language. Can you name three places in the Koas Meadows region that still bear their Abenaki names?*

THE INDIAN TRAILS

The Koas Meadows is located along a network of woodland trails. These Indian Trails allowed people to easily travel to the St. Francis villages in Canada and throughout the entire region of the Wôbanaki Nation (including the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, Micmac, and Eastern Abenaki of Maine tribes). Wôbanaki means "People of the Dawnland." The Connecticut River that runs through the Koas Meadows region was instrumental in connecting the southern tribes to the northern tribes. Because of its central location, the Koas Meadows became a well-known trading center.

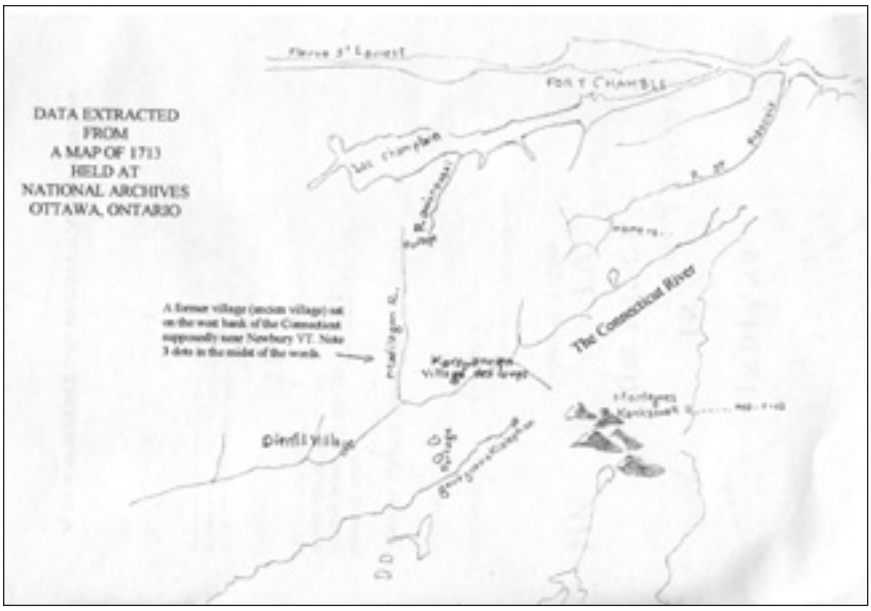
For countless generations, the Abenaki used these trails to connect them to relatives and friends who lived far away. The trails on both sides of the Connecticut River in Newbury and Haverhill were routes from southern New England to Canada. As the New World began



to develop, the Indian Trails were used by Europeans to build their settlements and villages. The Jesuits came to the New World to bring Christianity to the Native Americans. They followed the trails to well-known Indian villages, where they would build their missions.

Jesuit Joseph Aubrey came to the Newbury Koasek Village in 1675 and build Mission Des Loups of the Koas. The French called the


NEW ENGLAND
NEW
EXPLANATION.
Brook or Brumah.
Creek.
Carrying Place.
Point.
Points.
River or Run.
Island.
Islands.
Fort and Fortified Place.
Local Mark for the Meeting house of the Town or Township.
English Habitations.
Indian Habitations.
The Setting of the Tide.



Abenaki "Loups" a French word that means "wolves." Aubrey named his mission to reflect the people of the area. The mission stood on the Newbury side of the Connecticut River and serviced the Abenaki and other visiting tribes until it was destroyed by war around 1705.

Aubrey also built the mission at Odanak in Canada shortly after the construction of the Mission Des Loups. Once again, the St. Francis Abenaki were connected to the Koasek Abenaki of the Koas Meadows.

During the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War, the Indian Trails extending from Massachusetts to Canada and through the Koas Meadows were used by the military to transport troops and supplies. With the increased number of travelers, the trails soon evolved to become roads, drawing in new settlers to the area.

The Chief of Odanak Abenaki of Southern Quebec came to the Koas Meadows to live after Rogers Rangers attacked his village. Chief Joseph Louis Gill (*Magouaouidombaouit*, meaning "Friend of the Iroquois") was the son of Samuel Gill and his wife Rosalie. Samuel was

captured by the Abenakis on the east coast and eventually married the daughter of the principal Chief of Odanak. He later became known as "the White Chief of the St. Francis Indians."

During the Revolutionary War, Chief Joseph Gill and many Koasek Abenaki joined forces with George Washington to help found the United States of America. George Washington was so pleased with the support of Chief Joseph Gill and the Koas Abenaki, that he gave him the title of Captain. He wrote to Congress, asking for a memorial for Gill and the Koas Abenaki at the end of the war. In November 1779, George Washington wrote to Congress, "Sir: I have taken the liberty to enclose for the consideration of Congress, the memorial of Colonel Hazen on behalf of Capt. Joseph Gill, Chief of the Abeneeke or St. Francis tribe of Indians. The fidelity and good services of this Chief and those of his tribe are fully set forth in the memorial."

In 1780, Superintendant of Indian Affairs in Montreal sent a message to Captain Joseph Gill in Newbury Vermont requesting him to return to Canada and offering him a full pardon. The Superintendent hoped to regain the support of the Abenaki. Chief Joseph Gill did return to the Odanak Reservation in Quebec, Canada and became a prayer leader and important person in the church until his death in May 1798.

Other important figures in the settlement of the Koas Meadows region during the war were Indian Joe and his wife Molly. They lived in the Newbury area. Joe was an important scout who led the military through the wilderness areas along the Indian Trails. Indian Joe and General Bailey became good friends and allies during the war. Later in life, when Joe's health began to fade, he became a ward of General Bailey. He died at General Bailey's home under the care of the General's son in 1819, at the age of 79. His story has been told for many generations and he is known as "Joe the friendly Indian." You can find Indian Joe's headstone in the Newbury Cemetery on Route 5.

In 1702, the Abenaki of the Koas and the Penacook of New Hampshire met with the Iroquois and joined together. They formed an alliance that became known as the Seven Fires, and was a group who were united in friendship. The Abenaki took the oath of the "Great Law

of Peace" (*Gayanashagowa*) that the Iroquois lived by. They buried their weapons under the Great White Pine Tree and promised to forever live in peace with their neighboring tribes. This same Great Law of Peace inspired Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin when they drafted the U.S. Constitution.

As the English and French fought for control over the New World, the upheaval divided Indian families and friends. People chose to either support the English or the French. Ateawanto (Jerome Atecuando) of the Koasek stated that the Abenaki did not want war. However, they would not tolerate any Europeans taking even one stick of wood or settling beyond Fort #4 in the Koas Meadows. The Iroquois vowed to aid the Abenaki if it became necessary. This warning slowed the European settlement of the Koas Meadows until 1761.

In 1775, there were 200 Mohegan and Pequot and over 1,000 Abenaki loyal to the American Revolution. On August 6, 1775, Abenaki Chief Swashon addressed the Massachusetts House of Representatives and said, "As our Ancestors have given this country to you, we would not have you destroyed by England. We are ready to afford you assistance."

Colin Calloway states in his book, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, "Other Indians also enlisted in the American cause as individuals. Lewis Indian and James Indian volunteered for services in New Hampshire in the first months of the war. Peter Indian, a Dartmouth graduate, enlisted in New Hampshire Company to fight Burgoyne in 1777. Others with distinct Indian names or with names no different from their colonial comrades, joined up in other colonies; still others may have enlisted with their Indian identity unrecorded."

Today, U.S. Census figures show that Native Americans are the highest minority per capita to enlist in the Armed Services of the United States.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Why were the Indian Trails important to the Abenaki? Why were they important to the Europeans?*
2. *What role did the Abenaki play in founding the United States?*
3. *How did the Abenaki influence the United States Constitution?*

FIRST SETTLERS

The first European settlers to come to the Koas Meadows were Michael Johnson and John Pettie. They came to the Oxbow via Fort #4 in 1761. Reverend Grant Powers wrote in his book, *Historical Sketches of Coos* that from November 1761 to June 1762, these two men did not have another white man within sixty miles of them. They were surrounded by Indians. A year later, the first families came to live in Newbury and Haverhill. The Irish and Scottish came to the area to work and build gristmills and saw mills. In 1763, the first English child was born in Newbury. Later that year, another English child was born in Haverhill.

The Abenaki did not give up the Koas Meadows easily. They did not grant permission allowing European families to settle within their precious Oxbow region along the river (*sibo*). It is well documented that the Indians would often visit the early families to remind them that they owned the land on which the new European settlers' farms now stood. They continued to visit these farms well into 1767.

However, many Indian and European people fell in love and married. They raised their families with love and strong commitment to each other. They shared their mixed cultural heritage with their children, who, in turn, grew up and married others of mixed heritage. Today, we are people who have come from many heritages, but have learned from our mothers and fathers the importance of family, love, and respect for this place we call home.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Why did the first European settlers come to the Koas Meadow?*
2. *Did the Koasek Abenaki people disappear from the Koas Meadow region?*

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Reverent Eleazer Wheelock, pastor of a Presbyterian church in Connecticut, established a private school in 1743. He admitted an Indian student by the name of Samson Occum, who later became a preacher. In 1765, Joshua Moore in Connecticut gave a small property for an Indian Charity School. Additional funds were given for this project by the colonies in England and Scotland. Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire secured the school to be built in New Hampshire and granted a charter for Dartmouth College to be built in Haverhill for teaching the Indians. Reverend Wheelock chose to build Dartmouth College just south of Haverhill in Hanover, New Hampshire.

One the first Indian graduates of the Charity School was Iroquois Joseph Brant who was educated by President Wheelock. Brant became a fierce Captain in the Revolutionary War and maintained a strong relationship with Wheelock. Wheelock asked Brant for protection of the Koas during the war. Thanks to the friendship between the two men, the Koas Meadow region was spared from much of the war.

The highly regarded, Ivy League school called Dartmouth College is known as an institution of higher education dedicated to teaching Native American students. Dartmouth College continues to thrive today and has educated more Indian students over its long history than any other college in America.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Why was Dartmouth College founded?*
2. *Do you think it would have been difficult to be the first Indian student to attend Dartmouth College? Why?*

CONCLUSION

Descendents of the original Abenaki people still live in Koas Meadows area today. Although there are no known full-blooded Indians in the region, there are many who carry the mixed blood of our history. Irish, Scottish, Abenaki, Italian, French, English, and other cultures have been woven together to make the people of Haverhill and Newbury unique. As new families have moved to the region over the last 300 years, they have married into the old Koasek families, building the strong and proud foundation of our community.

Regardless of our bloodlines, one thing is certain—the people of Haverhill and Newbury are an example of the cultural diversity that makes America great.

GLOSSARY

Ammonoosuc . . . . . Eel River

Koasek . . . . . The Place of the White Pines

Kwenitegw . . . . . The Long River (now known as the Connecticut River)

Moze . . . . . Moose

Nahomoak . . . . . Eel

Namasiia . . . . . Fish

Nolka . . . . . Deer

Pastonki . . . . . The United States of America

Pebon . . . . . Winter

Sibo . . . . . River

Siguan . . . . . Spring

Siguaniwi . . . . . Summer

Taguogo . . . . . The last few weeks of Autumn

Toboggan . . . . . A large sled

Wigwôm . . . . . A sturdy home built of saplings and covered in birch bark

Wôbanaki . . . . . People of the Dawnland

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The White Pine Association: *www.whitepineassociation.org* has information about upcoming cultural events they sponsor in the area as well as Abenaki language preservation information.

The Abenaki Nation Tribal Websites: *www.abenakination.org* (Missisquoi/St. Francis/Sokoki), *www.koasekabenaki.org* (Koasek), *www.elnuabenakitribe.org* (Elnu), and *www.nulheganabenaki.org* (Nulhegan).

Further information on Endangered Languages can be found at *www.yourdictionary.com/elr/index.html* and *www.sil.org/sociolx/ndg-lg-home.html*.

A brief biography of "Indian Joe" can be found at *www.avcnet.org/ne-do-ba/bio_jo01.html.*

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