



## An American Indian Heritage Month Message

**"National American Indian Heritage Month"** honors and recognizes the original peoples of the United States in November. President George H. W. Bush signed into proclamation this joint resolution in 1990. Since 1994, similar proclamations have been issued. On May 3, 2006, Governor James Douglas signed into law the recognition of the Abenaki people in Vermont. As we celebrate American Indian Heritage Month it is only fitting that we take note of these tenacious Native Americans.

The newly created **Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs** is actively exploring the unique educational needs around the Abenaki Experience and providing the necessary resources to support these life-long learning opportunities for

all Vermont children. As Chairman of the Commission, I feel one of the greatest challenges is addressing the grave misconception by non-Indians regarding the Abenaki people.

Abnaki or Abenaki (*both: äbnä'kē*) are Native North Americans of the Algonquian branch of the Algonquian-Wakashan linguistic stock. The name *Abnaki* was given by the French. More suitable would be *Wabanaki*, a word referring to morning and the east.

*Wabanaki* may also be interpreted as those "living at the sunrise." By 1990, 1,500 Abnaki lived in the United States, mostly in Maine, New Hampshire, and northern Vermont. Acknowledging the Abenaki presence in Vermont is important.

November is when many Americans commemorate the time when American Indians and English settlers celebrated the bounty of their harvest and the promise of new kinships. Native Americans have given valuable contributions in agriculture, medicine, music, language and art, not only in Vermont but the United States and the rest of the world. During this month, all Vermonters should take the time and experience the life, history and the rich cultural traditions of the Vermont Abenaki.

You can reach the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs with questions or comments by e-mailing: [vcnaa@earthlink.net](mailto:vcnaa@earthlink.net).

*-Mark Mitchell  
 Chairman, Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs (VCNAA)*

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## Distinguished Native Americans

We all know about the achievements of Sitting Bull, Tecumseh and Geronimo. But do you know:

**First Native American Astronaut**  
 Cdr. John Herrington, Chickasaw

**First Native American U. S. Senator**  
 Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Northern Cheyenne

**First Native American Commissioner of Indian Affairs**  
 Ely Samuel Parker, Seneca

**NASCAR Native American Driver**  
 Cory Witherill, Navajo

**PGA Native American Golfer**  
 Notah Begay III, Navajo

**Native American Olympic Winners**  
 1912 – Jim Thorpe, Sac and Fox

1964 - Billy Mills, Oglala Lakota

2006 – Naomi Lang, Karuk

**Creative Native Americans**  
 Maria Tallfeather, Osage – Prima Ballerina

Joseph Bruchac, Abenaki – writer

F. Scott Momaday, Kiowa/Cherokee – writer

R Carols Nakai, Ute/Navajo – Composer

Buffy Sainte-Marie, Cree – Composer

**Native American Leaders**  
 April St. Francis Merrill – Leader of the St. Francis Sokoki Band of the Abenaki Nation of Vermont

Willa Mankiller – Leader of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma  
 Betty Mae Jumper – Leader of the Seminoles

Kathryn Harrison – Leader of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Reservation Oregon

*-Charlene McManis  
 Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs*

## Deconstructing the Myths of “The First Thanksgiving”

- by Judy Dow (Abenaki & NCNA member), and Beverly Slapin

### Members of the VCNA

Mark Mitchell  
Jeanne Brink  
Donald Stevens  
Charlene McManis  
Judy Dow  
Howard Lyons  
Timothy de la Bruere

To read Gov. Douglas' press release about the Commission, go to <http://www.vermont.gov/tools/w hatsnew2/index.php?topic=GovPressReleases&id=1997&v=Article>

What is it about the story of “The First Thanksgiving” that makes it essential to be taught in virtually every grade from preschool through high school? Why has it become an annual elementary school tradition to hold Thanksgiving pageants, with young children dressing up in paper-bag costumes and feather-duster headdresses? And why do teachers all over the country continue (for the most part, unknowingly) to perpetuate this myth year after year after year?

Is it because as Americans we have a deep need to believe

that the soil we live on and the country on which it is based was founded on integrity and cooperation. If we dare to give up this “myth” we may have to take responsibility for our actions both concerning indigenous peoples of this land as well as those brought to this land in violation of everything that makes us human. As good people, can we be strong enough to learn the truths of our collective past? Can we learn from our mistakes? This would be our hope.

We offer these myths and facts to assist students, parents and teachers in thinking critically about this holiday, and deconstructing what we have been taught about the history of

this continent and the world. (Note: We have based our “fact” sections in large part on the research, both published and unpublished, that Abenaki scholar Margaret M. Bruchac developed in collaboration with the Wampanoag Indian Program at Plimoth Plantation.)

**Myth #1:** The Pilgrims found corn. **Fact:** Just a few days after landing, a party of about 16 settlers led by Captain Myles Standish followed a Nauset trail and came upon an iron kettle and a cache of Indian corn buried in the sand. They made off with the corn and returned a few days later with reinforcements. This larger, **CONT. on p.4.**

## VASS 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

The 13<sup>th</sup> annual Vermont Alliance for the Social Studies Conference will be held on Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup> at the Equinox Resort and Spa in Manchester, Vermont.

The keynote address, “Of Burqas and Bikinis: Afghan Women and the War on Terror,” will be given by Sanjukta Ghosh who teaches media and women’s studies at Castleton State College. Her talk focuses on how media constructions of Afghani women were used to mobilize war against an already beleaguered nation. Using images from mainstream as well as alternative media such as the feminist press, it shows that the rhetoric of the media and their neat cultural icons was reminiscent of that used by Victorian feminists. In making this analogy, the presentation brings into focus how Muslim women’s images have been used throughout history to further social and political ends.

Other exciting offerings include:

- Africa in 3-D: Diversity, Demographics, Discovery
- Art for Social Change
- Great Decisions: A Tool to Bring an International Perspective to Your Classroom
- History Comes Alive!
- Making of the Modern World: A Whole New Way to Teach the Same Old Course
- Malian’s Song: Teaching Vermont History from an Abenaki Point of View
- Modern Civil Rights Through Primary Sources
- Museum Mobs
- The 19th Century Journal Project: Using Primary Sources to Learn about Change and Continuity
- Project Citizen: Simulated Hearings for Instruction and Evaluation
- Strengthening the Future by Illuminating the Past: Teaching about Women and History
- Vermont’s Town Meeting: Then, Now, and Tomorrow
- Village Quest
- World War II Memories: An Oral History Project

The conference will also feature a SPECIAL GUEST, Afghan student Mehdi Rahmati, who will facilitate the breakout session **A Voice of Afghanistan: Perspectives of a 16-Year-Old Afghan Student.**

Download a brochure and registration form at <http://www.vermontsocialstudies.org/events.html>.

### “Vermont’s Two-Year Term: Anachronism or a Bastion of Democracy?”

A discussion between former governor Madeleine Kunin and University of Vermont political science professor Frank Bryan.

Moderated by Emerson Lynn, Publisher, St. Albans Messenger.

Tuesday, November 28, 2006, 7:00 p.m., Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building, University of Vermont.

For more information, contact The Snelling Center for Government at 802.859.3090.



Teachers at the NEK social studies network meeting discuss assessments and review data



What does good social studies assessment look like? How can we use social studies assessment data to inform our instruction? Participants in the recent social studies network meeting in both the CVEDC and NEKSDC regions of the state recently explored answers to these and other assessment-related questions at their respective network meetings.

The highlight at both meetings was the opportunity to share curriculum and assessment ideas with colleagues. In the Northeast Kingdom, participants heard from two area groups that are at the forefront of social studies assessment. OENSU presented their social studies portfolio system that has been in development and implementation for three years. Sample tasks and student work were on hand for review. The social studies department from Lake Region High School

presented their pre-test for 9<sup>th</sup> graders and, through a fishbowl session, allowed their colleagues to see how they use data from this test to make curricular and instructional decisions.

At the Champlain Valley meeting, Barb Spaulding from Hinesburg Community School shared a current events unit that focuses on differentiated instruction and assessment. John Alberghini, Assoc. Supt. of Curriculum from CESU, presented their web-based curriculum and assessment database that allows all teachers to easily access this important information.

Thank you to everyone who shared their ongoing work and also to those who attended. Thank you also to the NEKSDC and CVEDC ESAs - your participation and partnership is invaluable!

Information about upcoming network meetings will be in your "In" boxes soon!



Looking at student work

## National Geographic Bee – Register Now!

### Past National Geographic Bee Winning Questions

2006: Name the mountains that extend across much of Wales, from the Irish Sea to the Bristol Channel. [Answer: Cambrian Mountains]

2005: Lake Gatún, an artificial lake that constitutes part of the Panama Canal system, was created by damming which river? [Answer: Chagres River]

2004: Peshawar, a city in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, has had strategic importance for centuries because of its location near what historic pass? [Answer: Khyber Pass]

2003: Goa, a state in southwestern India, was a possession of which country until 1961? [Answer: Portugal]

The **National Geographic Bee** is a school competition for students in any grades four through eight. Excite your students about the world around them and reward those who excel in their knowledge of geography by giving them a chance to compete in a school geographic bee.

**The final deadline for registration has been extended to December 8, 2006.** School level Bees can be held up to January 12, 2007. Go to [www.nationalgeographic.com/geographicbee](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geographicbee) to get complete information and other dates and deadlines.

Principals must register their schools to receive the contest materials necessary to conduct a school level Bee. A letter on school letterhead, signed by the principal, with the \$60 registration fee (check or purchase order made out to

National Geographic) is required. The registration is not refundable, so make sure your school registers only once.

Mail the registration letter and fee, in the same envelope, to National Geographic Bee, National Geographic Society, 1145 17<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-4688.

National Geographic looks forward to your students being given the opportunity to know more about the world in which they live by participating in the National Geographic Bee.



# Deconstructing the Myths of “The First Thanksgiving” *continued...*

## Other resources to further understanding about Thanksgiving:

Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth, from the National Museum of the American Indian:  
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/education/files/harvest.pdf>

Thanksgiving information from Plimoth Plantation:  
<http://www.plimoth.org/visit/whatsat/exhibit.asp>

The First Thanksgiving, Christian Science Monitor:  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/1127/p13s02-lign.html>

The Wampanoag section of The Boston Children’s Museum web site:  
<http://www.bostonkids.org/educators/wampanoag.html#>

Recommended books about Thanksgiving and books to avoid about Thanksgiving from Oyate,  
<http://www.oyate.org/resources/booklist.html#recommended>

Teaching About Thanksgiving, State of Washington Office of Public Instruction,  
<http://www.cwis.org/fwdp/Americas/tchthnks.txt>

Thanksgiving on the Net: Roast Bull with Cranberry Sauce Part 1 (debunks many of the “debunking” web sites, including the one previous):  
[http://www.sail1620.org/discover\\_feature\\_thanksgiving\\_on\\_the\\_net\\_roast\\_bull\\_with\\_cranberry\\_sauce\\_part\\_1.shtml](http://www.sail1620.org/discover_feature_thanksgiving_on_the_net_roast_bull_with_cranberry_sauce_part_1.shtml)

group “found” a larger store of corn about ten bushels, and took it. They also “found” several graves, and, according to Mourt’s Relation, “brought sundry of the prettiest things away” from a child’s grave and then covered up the corpse. They also “found” two Indian dwellings and “some of the best things we took away with us.” There is no record that restitution was ever made for the stolen corn, and the Wampanoag did not soon forget the colonists’ ransacking of Indian graves.

**Myth #2:** The Pilgrims invited the Indians to celebrate the First Thanksgiving. **Fact:** According to oral accounts from the Wampanoag people, when the Native people nearby first heard the gunshots of the hunting colonists, they thought that the colonists were preparing for war and that Massasoit needed to be informed. When Massasoit showed up with 90 men and no women or children, it can be assumed that he was being cautious. The visit that by all accounts lasted three days was most likely one of a series of political meetings to discuss and secure a military alliance. Neither side totally trusted the other: The Europeans considered the Wampanoag soulless heathens and instruments of the devil, and the Wampanoag had seen the Europeans steal their seed corn and rob their graves. In any event, neither the Wampanoag

nor the Europeans referred to this feast/meeting as “Thanksgiving.”

**Myth #3:** The Pilgrims provided the food for their Indian friends. **Fact:** It is known that when Massasoit showed up with 90 men and saw there was a party going on, they then went out and brought back five deer and lots of turkeys. Though the details of this event have become clouded in secular mythology, judging by the inability of the settlers to provide for themselves at this time and Edward Winslow’s letter of 1622 (10), it is most likely that Massasoit and his people provided most of the food for this “historic” meal.

**Myth #4:** The Pilgrims and Indians feasted on turkey, potatoes, berries, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, and popcorn. **Fact:** Both written and oral evidence show that what was actually consumed at the harvest festival in 1621 included venison, wild fowl, and quite possibly nasaump—dried corn pounded and boiled into a thick porridge, and pompion—cooked, mashed pumpkin. It would have been too cold to dig for clams or fish for eels or small fish. There were no boats to fish for lobsters in rough water that was about 60 fathoms deep. There was not enough of the barley crop to make a batch of beer, nor was there a wheat crop. Potatoes and sweet potatoes didn’t get from the south up to New England until the 18th

century, nor did sweet corn.

**Myth #5:** The Pilgrims and Indians became great friends. **Fact:** A mere generation later, the balance of power had shifted so enormously and the theft of land by the European settlers had become so egregious that the Wampanoag were forced into battle. In 1637, English soldiers massacred some 700 Pequot men, women and children at Mystic Fort, burning many of them alive in their homes and shooting those who fled. The colony of Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay Colony observed a day of thanksgiving commemorating the massacre. By 1675, there were some 50,000 colonists in the place they had named “New England.” That year, Metacom, a son of Massasoit, one of the first whose generosity had saved the lives of the starving settlers, led a rebellion against them. By the end of the conflict known as “King Philip’s War,” most of the Indian peoples of the Northeast region had been either completely wiped out, sold into slavery, or had fled for safety into Canada. Shortly after Metacom’s death, Plimoth Colony declared a day of thanksgiving for the English victory over the Indians.

This article has been deliberately shortened for the purposes of space and format for this newsletter. For the entire text, go to <http://www.oyate.org/resources/shortthanks.html>.

## In the next issue of Currents...

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Vermont Civic Summit
- Constitutional Convention Roleplay
- Guide to Civic Education Resources
- Dates for upcoming network meetings
- and much more!

As a service to its users, the Vermont Department of Education offers resources and information developed by other organizations. This information is provided as a resource only. Unless specifically stated, the inclusion of such information does not imply endorsement or support, and information contained on such resources should be independently verified. For more information or to provide feedback about these resources, contact Sigrid Lumbrá, Social Studies Coordinator, at (802) 828-0200 or [sigrid.lumbra@state.vt.us](mailto:sigrid.lumbra@state.vt.us).