

# Chebacco

The Journal of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

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BEFORE 1820

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Jennifer Sapiel Neptune, anthropologist, photographed at the Penobscot Nation Museum, Indian Island, holding an antique basket mold. Ms. Neptune is a citizen of the Penobscot Nation, curator of the Penobscot Nation Museum, a Master basketmaker and beadworker, a trustee of the Abbe Museum and chair of the Abbe's Collections Committee, and director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance.

## *Historians of the Wabanaki Nations*

Portraits by Jennifer Steen Booher


The following portraits present citizens of the Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy nations who are actively involved in the preservation of their tribal history, which is the history of Maine. Each historian chose an artifact or location to represent the main focus of their work. Many of them combine research with activism: for the Wabanaki people, preservation of their history is an act of political self-representation and resistance. These portraits layer the past and the present — the world before 1820 is still relevant in the world of 2020.

As an outsider, I wanted to avoid any attempt to interpret the experience of indigenous people. I also wanted to avoid contributing to a general impression that Wabanaki culture is a thing of the past. "We are still here," is a refrain I have heard over and over. For both reasons, I feel it is important to show living people and the importance of their work both to their communities and to those outside. In my own mind I framed this as "Indigenous People in Charge of their Own History." I set up a methodology I hoped would minimize my Eurocentric, academic biases. I am a product of the western academic tradition, which values (insists upon) diplomas, publications, awards, and other quantifiable "qualifications." The older I get, the more obvious the limitations of those qualifications become. Here on the Mount Desert Island, if I want to know where the ruin of an old

schoolhouse is, or where a road used to run, the people I would turn to do not have degrees in history, have no publications to their names, do not even maintain a blog. I only know of their knowledge from years of living here and sharing experiences with them. So how was I to determine who within a Wabanaki community would be considered a history-keeper? Whom should I photograph?

I began by asking James Francis, the Tribal Historian for the Penobscot Nation, for suggestions. When I wrote to that first group of historians, I asked if they would sit for a portrait, and also who else they would suggest I contact. If someone from within the Wabanaki community named a person as a historian, I contacted that person and asked for other names. At first I struggled a bit, wondering why one person who is a basketmaker might be considered a historian while another was not, but I did my best to suspend that sort of judgment in favor of asking the community to define itself and abiding by its decisions. I learned quickly that many people wear multiple hats — someone I saw first as an archaeologist is also an artist, and someone I would have thought of as an artisan is also a language-keeper.

Since I had specified that the historians would be photographed with their research subjects, I imagined that I would be photographing people in archives, museum storage spaces, and libraries, and designed a lighting style that would work in tight, crowded spaces. My very first photo shoot was with an ethnobotanist, who chose to be photographed in a grove of brown ash. It was a good reminder of my outsider status and the limitations of academic thinking!




Darren Ranco, PhD, anthropologist, photographed at the Hudson Museum, Orono. Dr. Ranco holds a Penobscot canoe paddle (ca. 1900) and stands before a birch bark canoe (ca. 1888). The modern pack basket is by Gabriel Frey. Dr. Ranco is a citizen of the Penobscot Nation, associate professor of anthropology and chair of Native American Programs at the University of Maine. His research focuses on the ways in which Wabanaki communities resist environmental destruction and protect cultural resources.





Bonnie Newsom, archaeologist, photographed in her office at the University of Maine, Orono. Dr. Newsom is a citizen of the Penobscot Nation, assistant professor of anthropology, and associate faculty in the Climate Change Institute. She also serves on the Maine State Museum Commission. Dr. Newsom's research focuses on the past lifeways of Maine's Native peoples with an emphasis on past potters and their ceramic technology.

A full-length photograph of Maulian Dana, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue dress and a black shawl. She is standing in a room with several flags in the background, including the United States flag and the Maine state flag. The room has dark wood paneling and a patterned carpet. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows on the floor.

Maulian Dana, activist and political scientist, photographed in the Maine State House, Augusta. Ms. Dana is the tribal ambassador of the Penobscot Nation to the Maine State Legislature, a member of the Penobscot Nation Tribal Council, and a board member of the Maine Center for Economic Policy. Ms. Dana is currently working to update LD291, a 2001 law requiring Wabanaki history to be taught in Maine schools.

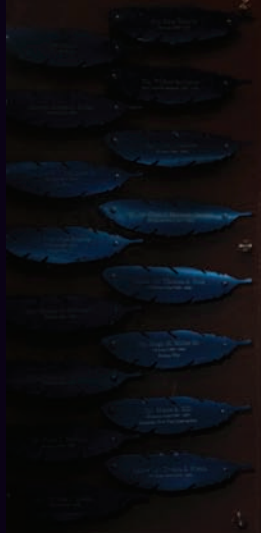


John Dennis, storyteller and cultural director for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, photographed at the Micmac Cultural Center, Presque Isle. Mr. Dennis is holding an eagle feather and a drum he uses in storytelling. He is seated on an antique splint-shaving bench, and on the floor beside him are traditional games.



**"Let us  
honor the  
soldiers"**

**Micmac  
Veteran  
Honor Wall**




Jennifer Pictou, bead artist and tribal historic preservation officer for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, in front of the Mi'kmaq Veterans Honor Wall at the Micmac Cultural Center, Presque Isle. Ms. Pictou worked for four years to bring the Honor Wall to life. It is the first formal list of Mi'kmaq veterans. Ms. Pictou is the owner of Bar Harbor Ghost Tours and served as curator of education at the Abbe Museum.



Suzanne Greenlaw, ethnobotanist and bead artist, photographed in a brown ash grove in Orono. Ms. Greenlaw is a citizen of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, a PhD student in the School of Forest Resources at the University of Maine, and a member of the Native Advisory Council of the Abbe Museum. Brown ash is a cultural and economic cornerstone of the indigenous people of Maine. Acadia National Park is developing new policies based on Ms. Greenlaw's research that will allow federally recognized tribes to re-establish sustainable sweetgrass and brown ash harvesting.



A photograph of Natalie Dana-Lolar, a woman with glasses and a white fringed shawl, holding a large, dark, circular drum. She is standing in a museum gallery with several octagonal framed artworks on the wall behind her. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting her and the drum against a dark background.

Natalie Dana-Lolar, University of Maine graduate student in anthropology and environmental policy, photographed at the Penobscot Nation Museum, Indian Island, holding a drum she crafted using traditional techniques. Mrs. Dana-Lolar is a Passamaquoddy/ Penobscot tribal citizen currently at work on photographing and digitizing the collection at the Penobscot Nation Museum. Mrs. Dana-Lolar was awarded the Abbe Museum's New Artist Fellowship Award and is a member of the Abbe's Archaeological Advisory Committee.



Richard Silliboy, Master basketmaker, photographed at the Black Bear Inn, Orono. Mr. Silliboy is vice-chief of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, a member of the Native Advisory Council of the Abbe Museum, a volunteer at the Southern Aroostook Agricultural Museum in his hometown of Littleton, a former president of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, and an advocate for the defense of the brown ash against the emerald ash borer.



The portraits gathered here are not in any way comprehensive. I had two months to execute the project. Not everyone I contacted was willing to sit for a portrait, and many people who were willing were simply too busy with grant applications, committee meetings, teaching duties, family, or life in general. The weather in November was also extremely uncooperative, and several outdoor photo shoots had to be canceled. There are many more historians in the Wabanaki communities, many more people engaged in fascinating projects. In addition, the captions accompanying the photographs are the briefest summary of lives devoted to uncovering, preserving, and advocating for the history of a place we all call home. I hope the readers of *Chebacco* will take the opportunity to find out more about their work — the tribal museums are excellent places to begin, and many of the people represented here have writings available online.

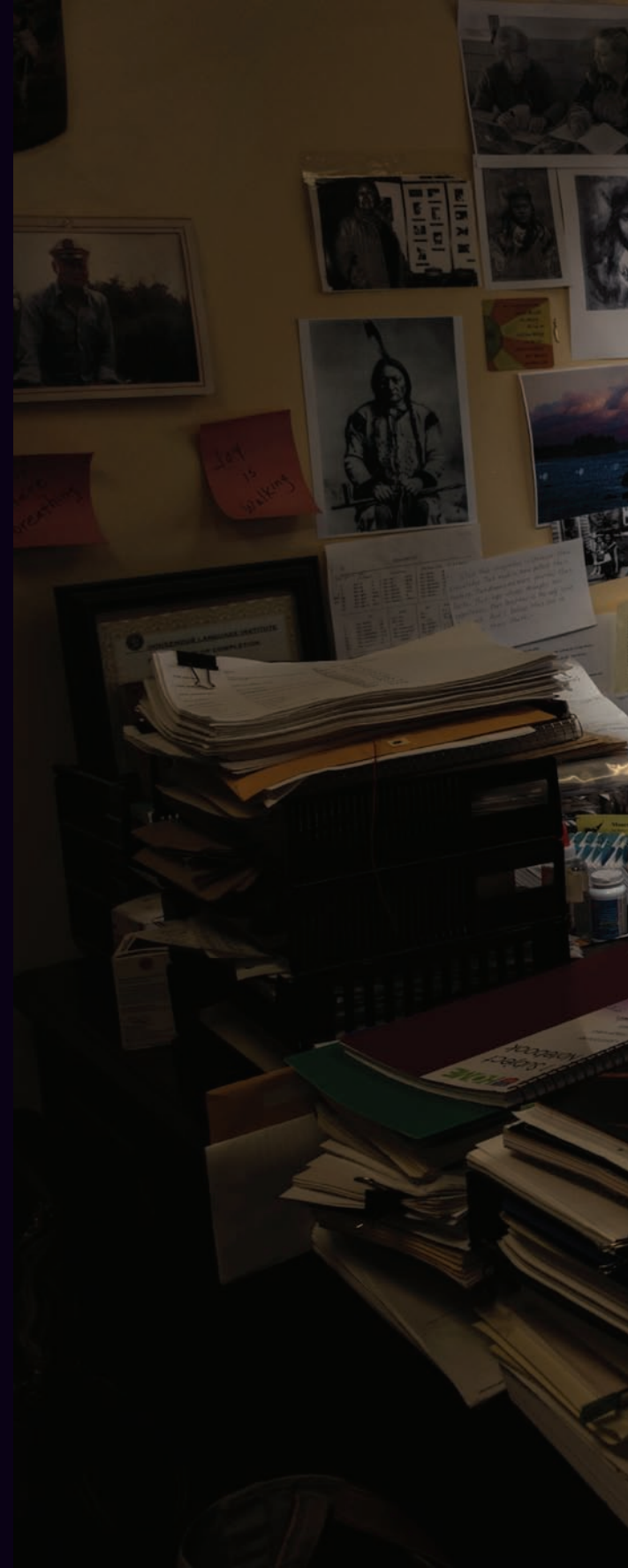
I am deeply grateful to the people who made time to meet with me, and who trusted me to photograph them. I hope the portraits convey the respect and admiration I have for their work.

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*Jennifer Steen Boober is an artist and photographer living in Bar Harbor, Maine. She received a BA in Art History and Asian Studies at Vassar College in 1989, and a master's degree in Landscape Architecture and Historic Preservation at the University of Virginia in 1997. In addition to her work as Artist in Residence with the Mount Desert Island Historical Society, she is a Resident Artist with Acadia National Park. Her current project, the Coast Walk, a multimedia web-based project combining photography, historical research and environmental documentation, has won an Environmental Stewardship award from the Frenchman Bay Partners and a Kindling Fund grant.*

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Carol Dana, language keeper, photographed in her office at the Penobscot Nation Cultural and Historic Preservation Department, Indian Island. Ms. Dana is a member of the Penobscot Nation, recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Algonquian Language Conference for her work on the revitalization of the Penobscot language, and a teacher of the Penobscot language. She is currently collaborating on a bilingual book of traditional Penobscot tales.