

Topic Page: [Wampanoag Indians](#)

Definition: **Wampanoag** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(1676) : a member of an American Indian people of Rhode Island east of Narragansett Bay and neighboring parts of Massachusetts



Image from: [Maliseet, Micmac in Cassell's Peoples, Nations and Cultures](#)

Summary Article: **Wampanoag**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Member of an American Indian people who lived between Narragansett Bay and Cape Cod on the Atlantic coast (Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket Island) in the 1600s. An Algonquian-speaking people, they lived in palisaded villages of dome-topped wetus (wigwams), and farmed, fished, and hunted. They helped the Pilgrims, and joined them to celebrate their first Thanksgiving (1621). However, they were decimated by disease and

the colonists cheated them out of land, leading to a war 1675–76 in which the Wampanoag were defeated and dispersed. Some neutral Wampanoag survived, and many of their descendants remain in southern Massachusetts, where they number around 3,000 (1990).

Before the arrival of the Europeans the various Wampanoag groups had well-defined territories for farming and hunting, although property was not 'owned'. Each band had a chosen sachem (chief), and they sometimes organized under a grand sachem (great chief) when the need arose. Religious leaders were known as 'powwaws', from which the term powwow is derived. Families worked together to make a living; they farmed an allotted area and shared rights over the hunting territory. The cultivation of maize (corn), beans, squash (pumpkins), and other crops was considered women's work; the men hunted and fished. Families maintained a number of wetus that were used depending on the season.

The Wampanoag reorganized as a nation in 1928, and now form five groups: Assonet, Gay Head, Herring Pond, Mashpee, and Namasket, although only the Gay Head are federally recognized.

First contact with Europeans occurred in the early 16th century. Although relations were generally peaceful, some Wampanoag were taken by slavers, and the population suffered diseases introduced by white traders and colonists; three large epidemics 1614–20 killed three-quarters of the Wampanoag and exterminated entire villages. However, in 1621 the Wampanoag, under their grand sachem Massasoit, aided the foundering Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, giving the colonists food and assistance; one particular Wampanoag, Squanto, who had previously been captured as a slave and learned English on his travels, served as a guide and interpreter. But the Wampanoag community continued to contract devastating disease, and were also swindled out of their land by the English colonists and became subject to British rule.

In 1674 the colonists attempted to drive out the Wampanoag after attracting hostility from other American Indian groups. The Wampanoag grand sachem Metacomet, nicknamed King Philip by the colonists, tried to organize neighbouring Indian tribes to unite and fight the colonists to reclaim their land and way of life. Between 1675 and 1676 a series of battles took place, known as King Philip's War,

but resulted in the defeat of the American Indian allies, and the death of Metacomet. Some of the Wampanoag who had fought fled north to Canada or west to join the Delaware and Iroquois, while those who had been captured, including Metacomet's wife and son, were sold into slavery. The few remaining neutral mainland bands were relocated, while the neutral offshore Wampanoag were left alone; the Martha's Vineyard group still remains, but the Nantucket Wampanoag were killed off by an epidemic in 1763.

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Chicago

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