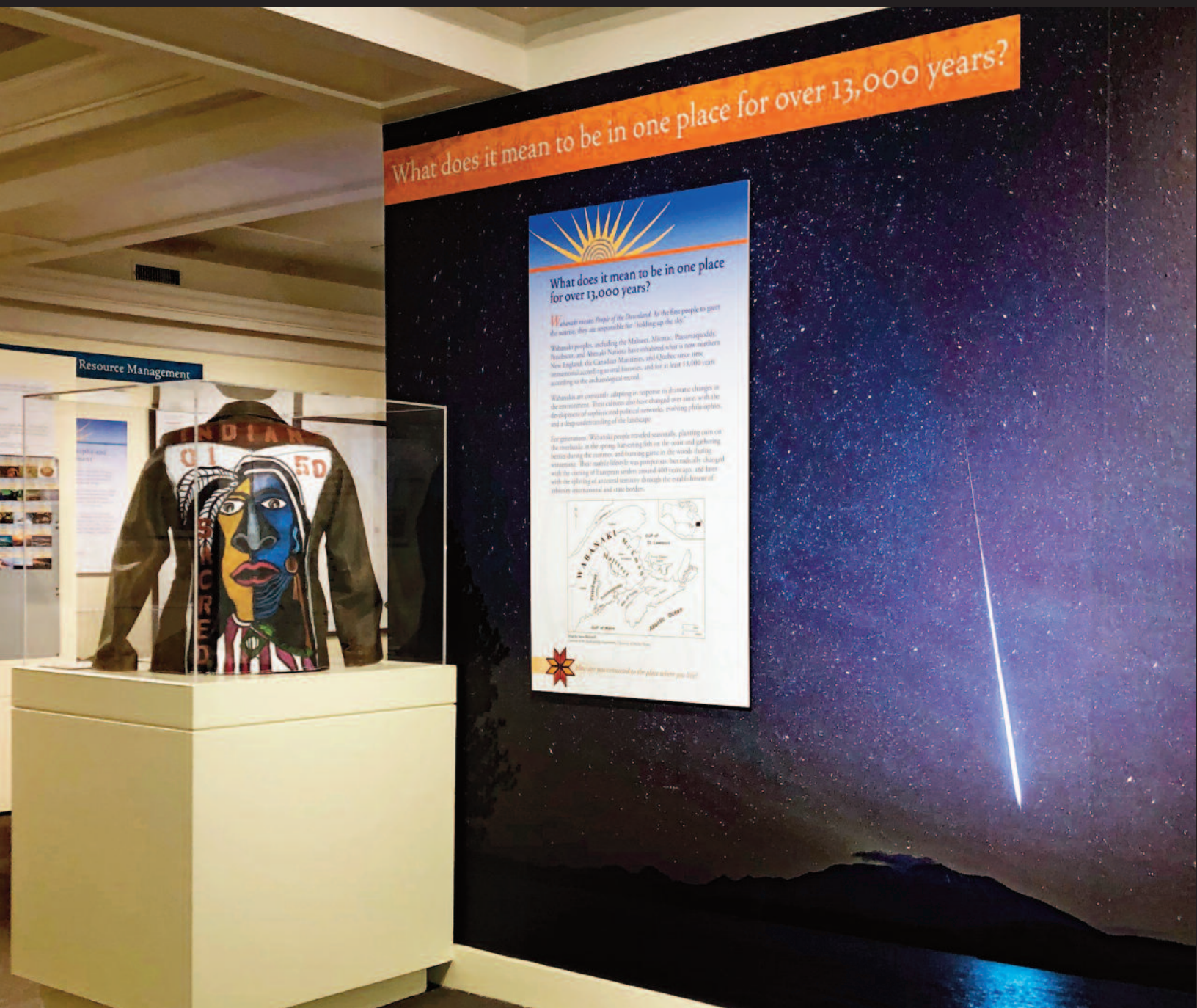




Gina Brooks (Maliseet), *Indian Jacket*, 2018.
Collections of Maine Historical Society, MaineMemory.Net #104976.

This leather “American Eagle” brand jacket is a 21st century component of Indigenous regalia. It recalls a deep history to the past, and asserts that whatever a Native person is wearing—a beaded dress, jeans, a designer gown, or a painted jacket—they are “Indian.”

Holding up the Sky:

Wabanaki People, Culture, History & Art

April 12, 2019 – February 1, 2020

Maine Historical Society

489 Congress St.

Portland, ME 04101

Co-curated by Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), James Francis (Penobscot), Suzanne Greenlaw (Maliseet), Darren Ranco (Penobscot), Theresa Secord (Penobscot), Ashley Smith (Wabanaki descent), and Donald Soctomah (Passamaquoddy), MHS curator, Tilly Laskey and University of Maine professor, Micah Pawling.

Wabanaki people, including the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki Nations, have inhabited what is now northern New England, the Canadian Maritimes, and Quebec, since time immemorial according to oral histories, and for at least 13,000 years according to the archaeological record. *Wabanaki* means *People of the Dawnland*. As the first people to greet the sunrise, they are responsible for “holding up the sky.”

Wabanakis are constantly adapting in response to dramatic changes in the environment. Their cultures also have changed over time, with the development of sophisticated political networks, evolving philosophies, and a deep understanding of the landscape.

For generations, Wabanaki people traveled seasonally, planting corn on the riverbanks in the spring, harvesting fish on the coast and gathering berries during the summer, and hunting game in the woods during wintertime. Their mobile lifestyle was prosperous, but radically changed with the coming of European settlers around 400 years ago, and later with the splitting of ancestral territory through the establishment of arbitrary international and state borders.

In *Holding up the Sky*, Wabanaki voices contextualize present-day relevance of centuries of shared histories between Wabanaki people and settlers to their region through seventeenth-century colonial treaties, historic photographs and heritage items, and contemporary artwork—everything from ash baskets to haute couture fashion.

Holding up the Sky is on view at Maine Historical Society through February 1, 2019. The exhibition gallery is located at 489 Congress St. in Portland. Please visit MaineHistory.org for hours and ticket information.



Mary Mitchell Selmore (Passamaquoddy), 1901.
Collections of Maine Historical Society, MaineMemory.Net #10927.

Holding up the Sky explores Wabanaki philosophies of leadership and obligation relating to humans and non-humans over 13,000 years in what is now known as Maine. Mary Selmore (1829–circa 1910) was married to Sopiell Selmore, the traditional Wampum Keeper for the Passamaquoddy Tribe. She wore silver trade brooches and a wampum collar around her neck, now in the collections of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Wampum belts have powerful meanings for Tribal communities that use them. They are symbolic of the stories from the past and Wabanaki diplomacy relating to peace and friendship as well as war and politics.



Dalaylun Demmons (Passamaquoddy) wearing Penobscot fashion designers, Decontie & Brown clothing and jewelry, 2019, courtesy of Jason K. Brown.

Jason K. Brown (Penobscot) made the necklace and hatband worn by Dalaylun Demmons. The jewelry was inspired by photographs of Molly Molasses and other Wabanaki ancestors wearing trade brooches and hats, as well as through interacting with original brooches and other Wabanaki adornment in museum collections.

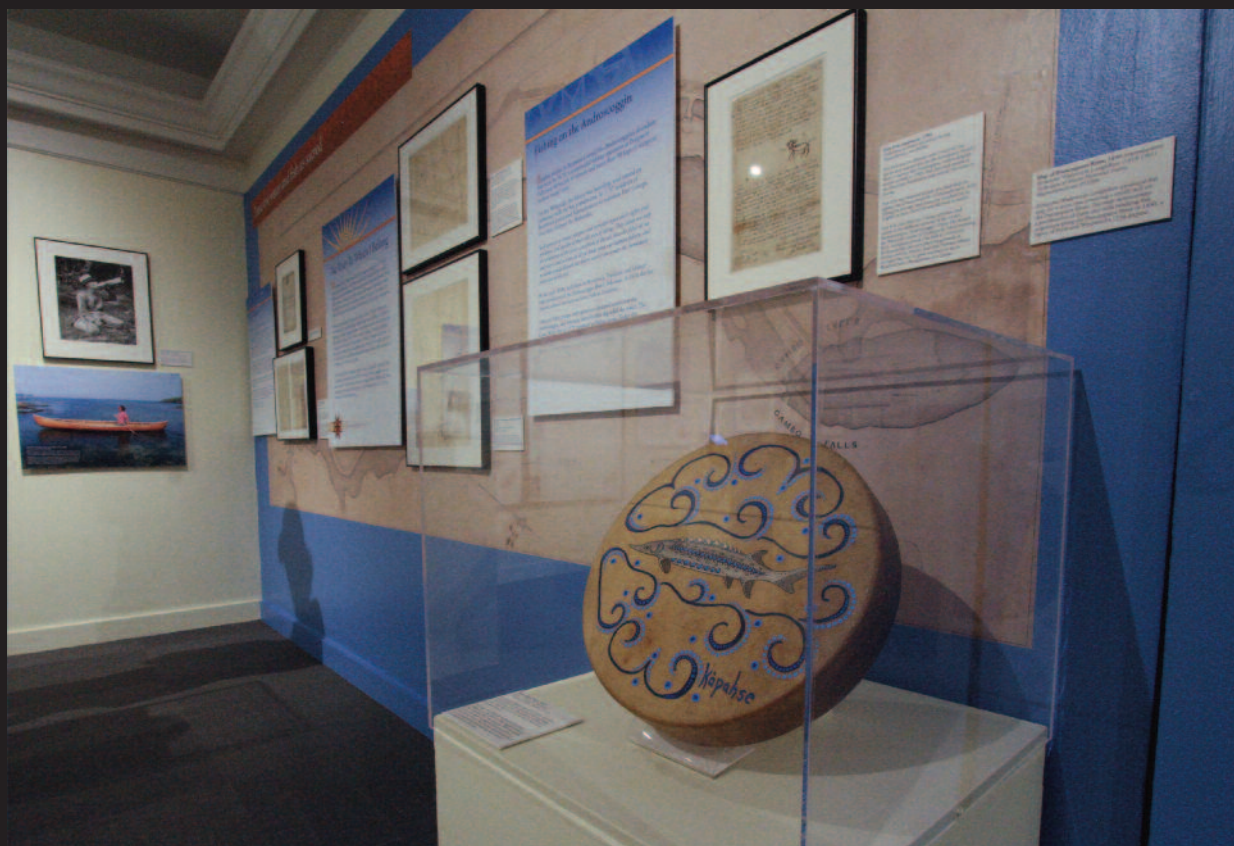


Decontie & Brown Gingham Glam coat and Gingham Glam dress with images of historic Wabanaki fashion, installation of *Holding up the Sky* at Maine Historical Society, 2019.

Jason K. Brown and Donna Decontie Brown are jewelry and fashion designers who celebrate their creativity and Penobscot heritage through their company, Decontie & Brown. Wabanaki people have always designed and decorated their clothing in beautiful and innovative ways.

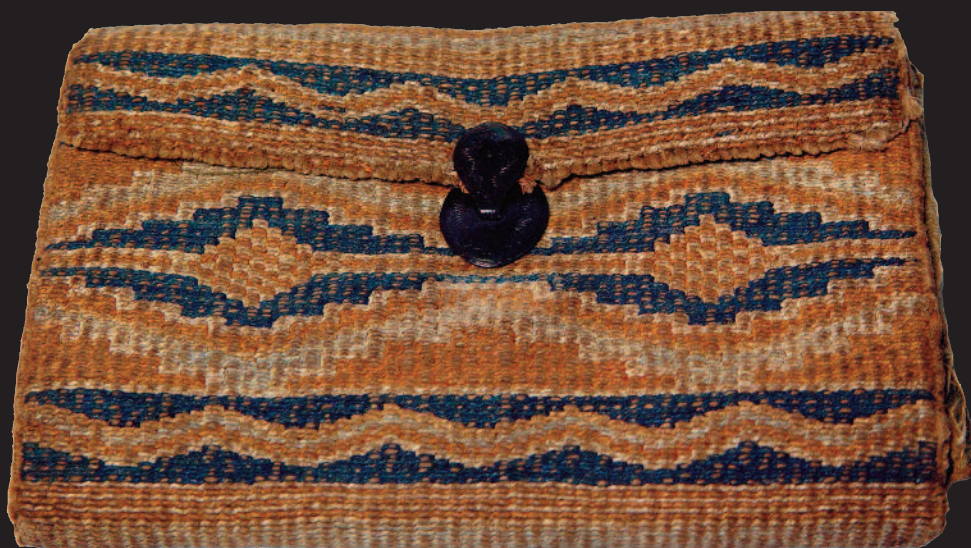
David Moses Bridges (Passamaquoddy), *Story Basket*, 2012. From the Abbe Museum collections, Bar Harbor, Maine, 2013-01-001 A-B.

Naturally waterproof, odorless and resistant to insects, birch bark can be cut into any shape, bent, folded, and sewn. David Moses Bridges (Passamaquoddy) made this basket during an extremely challenging economic time for his family, reflecting on his internal struggles to provide for them.



James E. Francis Sr. (Penobscot), *Kapahse (sturgeon) Drum*, 2019. Collections of Maine Historical Society, MaineMemory.Net # 104988.

Penobscot oral histories include stories about obligations to fish, but their migrations have been inhibited for over a century. With the recent removal of dams through the Penobscot River Restoration Project, the sturgeon, salmon, and shad are returning, along with language and cultural activities related to the fish, including items like this drum.



Molly Ockett (Pigwacket) purse, circa 1785.
Collections of Maine Historical Society, MaineMemory.Net #6802.

Molly Ockett (circa 1740–1816), was a Wabanaki “doctress” from the Pigwacket homeland. Like many Wabanaki people, Mali Agat (Ockett’s Abenaki name) adapted to the changes wrought by colonization. The sale and exchange of purses, woven ash baskets, and birch bark containers represent the adaptation of Wabanaki subsistence, incorporating trade to settlers into seasonal cycles.



Micmac and Maliseet basket case installation of *Holding up the Sky* at Maine Historical Society, 2019.

Pack baskets are the oldest form of Native basket in Maine, developed thousands of years ago to fit into the bow of the birch bark canoe. Other utilitarian baskets developed, like potato baskets and carrying baskets—forms in which Richard Silliboy (Micmac) and Eldon Hanning (Micmac) specialize.

Fred Tomah (Maliseet) started making baskets in the 1960s and apprenticed with master Maliseet basketmaker Jim Tomah in 1990. Although he made potato baskets in his youth, he went on to specialize in twill weaving, taking utilitarian baskets into the art realm. The four corners of the Katahdin series basket represents the four tribes of the Wabanaki - Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot.



Mary and Benjamin Neptune at the Maine Centennial, 1920.
Collections of Maine Historical Society/MaineToday Media, MaineMemory.Net #5380.

From June 26 to July 5, 1920, about 100 Passamaquoddy and Penobscot people inhabited an "Indian village" at Deering Oaks Park in Portland. Cousins Mary Neptune (left) and Benjamin Neptune (right) of the Passamaquoddy Tribe participated. For the Wabanaki, the sojourn to Portland was less about Maine turning 100 years old, but instead was an opportunity to re-connect with the greater Casco Bay region that remained part of their ancestral homeland.