

Malian's Song – *Misconceptions About The Abenaki Of Vermont*

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A number of myths shape popular conceptions of Abenaki people and experience in Vermont:

Myth: No Native American people ever lived in Vermont and there are no Abenaki people here now.

Fact: There is archeological evidence demonstrating that Abenaki people have lived in Vermont for thousands of years. Because Native people were not accepted by the dominant society and were actively discriminated against, for reasons of safety many Native people hid their identity. Only in the past thirty years have Abenaki people felt safe enough to begin coming forward and making their presence known.

Myth: The only Native American people who have kept their cultural traditions live on reservations out west; The Abenaki people who live in Vermont have lost their culture and are just like everyone else.

Fact: For Abenaki people in Vermont, the family has played an important role in transmitting Abenaki traditions and cultural knowledge from generation to generation. Gatherings and reunions have also reinforced the transmission of cultural knowledge. Today Abenaki culture is vital and alive.

Myth: All Native American people look alike and have dark skin, dark eyes, and dark hair.

Fact: Even prior to sustained contact with Europeans, Native Americans in New England did not have uniform skin, hair, and eye color-and over four hundred years of occupation, Native peoples and Europeans have intermarried. As a result in Vermont there is no single "Indian" type, but rather a broad range of variation in physical characteristics. Some people may more closely resemble the popular image of an American Indian than others, but appearance is not a determining factor in Native identity-whereas genealogy and cultural heritage are.

Myth: All genuine Native people live in tepees, wigwams, or longhouses and dress every day in buckskin and feathers.

Fact: On the surface at least, most Abenaki people's lives are indistinguishable from the lives of non-Native neighbors: they live in houses, drive automobiles, wear manufactured clothing, have jobs, go to school, watch television, and are generally part of mainstream American culture. At the same time, they carry on the time-honored traditions of their cultural heritage.