

Malian's Song - *Measuring Seasons and Counting Moons in Abenaki*

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Abenaki seasons

In the region between southern New England and southern Canada, there are four distinct seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, and autumn, each lasting approximately 91 days. The Western Abenaki names for the seasons are:

Pebon	winter season
Sigwan	spring season
Niben	summer season
Tagwôgo	autumn season

18th Century Abenaki Names for the Full Moons

For generations, Native people have measured the year by a lunar cycle of 13 full moons, which are visible every 28 days, over the course of the 365 days that make up a year. In Abenaki, the word “kesos” or “kisos,” which also means “sun,” is used to refer to the full moon only when it looks like a fully round orb. The names of the full moons varied from tribe to tribe, and from region to region, since each full moon was known by whichever natural resources were most abundant at that time. By 1759, many Abenaki people at Odanak had also adopted the English and French calendar system of 12 months to measure the year. They continued to use the old names for important seasonal resources and hunting or gathering activities.

1 st moon	Alamikos	new year's greeting moon (January)
2 nd moon	Biaôdagos	boughs-shedding moon (February)
3 rd moon	Mozokas	moose-hunting moon (March)
4 th moon	Zogalikas	maple sugar-making moon (April)
5 th moon	Kikas	planting moon (May)
6 th moon	Nokkahigas	hoeing moon (June)
7 th moon	Sataiikas	blueberry-maker moon (midsummer)
8 th moon	Temashikos	hay-making moon (July)
9 th moon	Demezôwas	harvesting crops moon (August)
10 th moon	Skamonkas	Indian corn-reaping moon (September)
11 th moon	Benibagos	leaf-falling moon (October)
12 th moon	Mezatanos	ice-forming freezing moon (November)
13 th moon	Pebonkas	winter-maker moon (December)

17th Century Agawam, Nonotuck, and Pocumtuck Names for the Full Moons

In 1645, the fur trader William Pynchon noted that the Agawam, Nonotuck, and Pocumtuck Indians used the following names for the full moons. Since the English measured the year by only 12 months instead of 13 moons, Pynchon did not record a translation for the moon named “qunnikesos.” His list reflects the importance of corn (*Zea mays*) cultivation at that time, a fact reflected in the vast quantities of corn that were being grown, stored, and traded by Native people in the middle Connecticut River Valley during the 1600s.

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| 1. Squannikesos | When they set Indian corne (pt of Aprill & pt of May) |
| 2. moonesquan nimockkesos | when women weed their corn (pt of May & pt of June, |
| 3. Towwakesos | when they hill Ind corne (pt of June & pt of July) |
| 4. matterl lawawkesos | when squashes are ripe & Ind beans begin to be eatable |
| 5. micheeneekesos | when Ind corne is eatable |
| 6. pah quitaqunkkesos | ye middle between harvest & eating Ind corne |
| 7. pepewarr | bec: of white frost on ye grass & grain |
| [8.] qunnikesos | |
| [9.] papsapqhoho | about ye 6. th day of January |
| [10.] Lowatannassick | So caled bec: they account it ye middle of winter |
| [11.] Squo chee kesos | bec ye sun hath strength to thaw |
| [12.] Wapicummilcom | bec ye ice in ye River is all gone (pt of February & ...March) |
| [13.] Namassack kesos | because of catching fish (pt of March and pt of Aprill) |

During the late 1600s, many Native families from the Connecticut River Valley moved north to join the Abenaki villages of Cowass, Missisquoi, Pennacook, and/or Saint Francis/Odanak. In 1967, ethnologist Gordon Day found that the 17th century Agawam names for the full moons were very similar, phonetically, and culturally, to the 20th century Western Abenaki dialect.

<i>original words, phonetically recorded by William Pynchon</i>	<i>comparative words in St. Francis Abenaki</i>	<i>St. Francis Abenaki modern translation</i>
1. Squannikesos	sigwani gizos	spring moon
2. moonesquan nimockkesos	mezaskenimek gizos	keeping weeds out moon
3. Towwakesos	8towahkahigamek gizos	hilling corn moon
4. matterl lawawkesos	matahtawal gizos	mature flowers moon
5. micheeneekesos	mitsini gizos	eating moon

6. pah quitaqunkkesos	pohkwidagw8goo gizos	it is early fall moon
7. pepewarr	toopuwudt	when there is frost
8. qunnikesos	kwenigizos	long moon
9. papsapqhoho	babass8pkwao	he (winter) half passes
10. Lowatannassick	n8wihponassik	where it is middle winter
11. Squo chee kesos	tokskwatsit gizos	ice honey-combs moon
12. Wapicummilcom	mat ohpihkamalkino	not stepping on it (ice)
13. Namassack kesos	namassak gizos	fishes moon

See Gordon Day. 1967. "An Agawam Fragment," International Journal of American Linguistics, Volume 33, no. 3, pp. 244-247.