Archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that Native Americans have occupied Cape Ann since Paleolithic times. More recently, and at the time of European contact, people who became known as the Pawtucket lived here, first as seasonal migrants and later as permanent settlers of agricultural villages.¹ The Pawtucket were closely related to the Pennacook and other peoples of northern New England who spoke Abenaki, a dialect within the Algonquian language family.

When Samuel de Champlain surveyed the New England coast in 1604 and 1606, he observed signs of permanent settlement, including cultivated crops and cleared land. He reported encountering “two hundred savages in this very pleasant place,” and the natives promised that “two thousand of them would come to see us” if they stayed longer in Gloucester Harbor, which he named Le Beauport.² Records relating to the settlement of England’s Dorchester Company two decades later described active trade with Cape Ann Indians, some of whom had a seasonal fishing camp at Fisherman’s Field.³ Nearby Pawtucket villages included Quascacunquen (present-day Newbury/Newburyport), Agawam ( Ipswich/Roselle), Winogun (Gloucester/Rockport/Essex), and Naumkeag (Beverly/Salem).

Mary Ellen Lepionka, an independent scholar, has done extensive research questioning the prevailing myths that the native population had ceased to exist after a pre-1620 plague, leaving no survivors when the Dorchester Company arrived, or that they were wiped out by the first smallpox epidemic of 1633. The idea that the people of coastal New England had simply disappeared was part of an erasure narrative repeated over many generations and therefore assumed to be true.⁴ Lepionka, however, has traced “the survival and resilience of the native people who lived here.”⁵ In the middle of the twentieth century, S. Foster Damon (1893–1971) and others deposited a collection of Native American artifacts (Fig. 3) at the Annisquam Historical Society. While the clay votive vessels have not been confirmed as from this area, the
stone artifacts indicate that Lobster Cove, as well as the rest of Cape Ann, was a major settlement area and was occupied during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries (often referred to as the Contact Period). Gloucester’s eighteenth-century vital records mention one “Indian”: Prinn, born in 1712, who was a “servant lad to John White.” The vital records of Manchester and Essex list no Indian births for this period. Some Pawtucket families assimilated into the colonial population, living as the colonists did. After 1676, the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony required that all unassimilated Native Americans—other than apprentices, indentured servants, and slaves—live on reservations designated as Praying Indian Villages. These villages were designed to confine the people, convert them to Christianity, and protect them from colonists.

In the early seventeenth century, Masconomet (d. 1658) deeded most of Essex County to the English settlers, but later, after the Massachusetts Bay Colony was established, townships were required to repurchase their land from the Indians to legally secure their claims. Masconomet’s grandchildren duly redeeded to each town the
land it occupied. In 1700, for example, Samuel English relinquished all right, title and interest in the land then comprising the township of Manchester to the settlers for 3 pounds 19 shillings. “The nineteenth-century historian D. F. Lamson (1832–1914) observed, “The Indians in this vicinity, it would seem, were soon reduced to a condition of weakness and vassalage.”

Records of observations and encounters with native people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries survive mostly in manuscript form, though some have been published, such as John Dunton’s (1659–1733) letter of 1686 describing the Indian village of Wonasquam in Gloucester. Local histories also preserve stories about early encounters. In 1637, John Burnham (ca.1616–1694) was one of three men from Essex drafted to join English settlers from the Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut colonies in fighting the Pequot War. Burnham told family members his stories of bloodshed in Connecticut, and Robert Crowell (ca. 1787–1855) related them in the History of Essex (1853). In the persona of Burnham, Crowell wrote: “The battle now was close and hot, the enemy seeming determined not to yield but at the loss of their lives. Out of about 600 of them, only 60 escaped. Our loss was 11 killed, and 20 wounded … We took many of them prisoners, some of whom were kept by our men as servants, and some were sent to the West Indies, and sold to the planters. This battle finished the Pequot tribe.”


FIGURE 5b. Covers of two of the diaries kept by John Lee, August 6–7, 1838, and August 19, 1840. Manchester Historical Museum.
We know that these English soldiers were re-
warded upon their return home. David Choate
recounted in his diary “25 or 30 Indians of the Penobscot tribe arrived here and encamp-
ed at Black Cove … They are bound to Boston. There
are about 60 in all … They were at work making baskets.
They are rather dirty looking but appeared healthy and
happy. The men and boys shot at cans and many go to
the river and wash their clothes and eat their fish.”

Burnham and the others who fought in the Pe-
quitt War between two and ten acres of land.13

The enthusiasm for scenes of Native Americans at
the depot about 4 o’clock to see a Company or tribe
visited there.16 In August 1854, Frances Bennett (b. 1837), a young store clerk working in
Manchester, recorded a trip to Manchester: “I went down
there” (Figs. 5a & 5b). Two years later, also in August,
Lee observed a similar scene: “In the evening I and my
wife went down to Norton’s neck to see some Indians
which were encamped there.” There were 6 wigwams, …
The people were engaged making baskets. There was a
great many folks there to see them.”16

In August 1884, Frances Bennett (b. 1837), a young store clerk working in
Gloucester, recorded a trip to Manchester: “I went down
by the depot about 4 o’clock to see a Company or tribe
of Penobscot Indians about 20 in number.”17 The fact
that an audience had assembled to see what Lee described as
a “curiosity” is evidence of a larger culture of racial-
spectacle in the nineteenth century.18

There are many reports of Algonquians visiting Cape
Ann in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.19 In Au-
gust 1838, for example, the local historian and antiquari-
ian John Lee (1813–1879) reported in his diary “25 or 30
Indians of the Penobscot tribe arrived here and encamp-
ed at Black Cove … They are bound to Boston. There are
about 60 in all … They were at work making baskets.
They are rather dirty looking but appeared healthy and
happy. The men and boys shot at cans and many go to
the river and wash their clothes and eat their fish.”

In her introduction, Sanders unites the plight of
the Native Americans with that of African Americans still
enslaved in most of the United States. The lessons in
Conversations proceed in a pietistic style, with the girls,
Eliza, Elizabeth and Caroline, asking their mother about
the history of land seizures disguised as treaties and mutual agreements. Sanders contrasts Andrew Jackson,
whose 1830 Indian Removal Act forced the evacuation
of all Indians to reservations west of the Mississippi, with
George Washington, who “would have acted as a friend
and protector” of the Creeks, the Muskogee Indians
indigenous to the Southeast.17 The number’s response
shows Native American culture and religion as well as
information from the Bible.

Native American history has not ended Today sur-
viving groups join together to resurrect their languages and
traditions, reestablish communities and cultures and
protect their interests. Gloucester’s Jacqueline Emerson
(1927–2004) was a well-known local Abenaki matri-
arch; her husband was Quiet Bear, who died in 1998.
For years, as the leader of the Intertribal Council Tolla
Menahan, Emerson organized powwows in Gloucester,
and these continued after her death for a time in her
honor. The last powwow was held in 2012 in Fisherman’s
Field, below Tackett Rock, a sacred place to the
people who lived here. In 1998, Algonquians performing
in Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show at Fisherman’s
Field explained the significance of Tackett Rock to town
fathers. In all our histories, the past and present contin-
ually interact, telling the stories of our lives.