



The
Wôpanâak Language
Reclamation Project
(WLRP)



May, 2025

Welcome to the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP). We are honored to have you as a valued member of our community, and we deeply appreciate your interest in and support for our mission to reclaim and preserve the Wôpanâak language and culture.

Founded with the commitment to restore the language of the Wampanoag people, WLRP has become a beacon of cultural preservation and a vital force in the reclaiming of our heritage. Our work is grounded in the belief that language is the cornerstone of cultural identity, and by restoring our language, we strengthen the ties to our ancestors, our communities, and our future generations.

This booklet contains essential information about WLRP's development initiatives, including our mission, goals, and the various ways in which you can contribute to our success. We encourage you to review the materials and consider how you might become more involved, whether through sponsorships, donations, or spreading the word about our work.

We believe that together, we can achieve something truly remarkable: the restoration of the Wôpanâak language and the strengthening of our cultural heritage. Your support makes this possible, and for that, we are profoundly grateful.

Thank you for joining us in this journey. We look forward to working with you and sharing in the success of WLRP.

Sincerely,

Tracy Kelley Wilson, MS
Executive Director

jessie 'little doe' baird
Co-founder, Lead Linguist



Mission

The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP) is dedicated to the reclamation and sustainability of the Wôpanâak language through comprehensive education, community involvement, and cultural integration.



History

Introduction

There is a prophecy that speaks of Wôpanâak (Wampanoag language) as a beloved community member, created by the Creator to live with the Wampanoag people. Language is both our gift and our responsibility. It provides the Wampanoag with a unique way of communicating with the rest of creation, a means of understanding and passing on knowledge that is distinctly ours.

Our responsibility to the language is to continue speaking it, helping it to grow and change as all healthy languages must. Wôpanâak is one among a large family of sister languages. Some of these sister languages have always remained with their people and continue to thrive within their Tribal communities. Others, like Wôpanâak, had stopped being spoken for various reasons. In our case, colonization brought foreign education, religions, and laws that worked against our language for generations.

Our prophecy speaks of a time when the language would leave the Wampanoag people but also of a time when it would return if the people desired its homecoming and were ready to welcome it. It tells us that the children of those who were present when the circle of language was broken will be the ones to mend it. We believe that this is the time, in this seventh generation since we ceased speaking Wôpanâak.

Our language has journeyed with us for thousands of years, by our side as our friend in communication with the Creator, each other, and the world around us. It has been our companion in times of plenty and scarcity, in peace and strife. Wôpanâak has enabled our prayers of gratitude and supplication. It has helped us express love, sorrow, and our plans for the future. We have deeply missed the presence of our language in our daily lives, having been without regular communication with Wôpanâak for six generations.



For at least 12,000 years, the Wampanoag people have maintained a tenure to our ancestral lands, which extend from present-day Cape Ann, Massachusetts, west to the Merrimack River, south to the Blackstone River in modern-day East Providence, Rhode Island, and further south to Narragansett Bay, encompassing all territories east of this line. The Wampanoag geopolitical landscape closely mirrors our linguistic boundaries, with 69 distinct tribes originally united as one nation. Each tribe was led by either a sôkushq (female leader) or sôtyum (male leader), supported by ahtaskuhkawâak (council members) and governed by a mâhsasôyut—the 'most prominent leader of a nation.'

The Wampanoag economy was based on extensive trade networks, with wôpum (wampum) serving as currency. Vast planting territories were exchanged for fishing, drift whale rights, and hunting grounds on a seasonal and annual basis. A thriving trade in tools, hides, and furs also connected Wampanoag villages with neighboring nations. Beyond economics, the Wampanoag maintained a sophisticated system of law and accountability, ensuring justice through well-established traditions of conflict resolution and governance.

Art and culture flourished within Wampanoag society. Skilled artisans crafted pottery, carvings, and paintings, while music and storytelling preserved history and tradition. Language was central to Wampanoag identity, with oratory and debate recognized as traditional arts in their own right.

Long before the arrival of the Pilgrims, the Wampanoag people had cultivated a thriving, interconnected society along the coasts and inland regions. Our deep spiritual and agricultural ties to the land, combined with our resilience and ingenuity, shaped a rich cultural legacy that endured for millennia before European contact.



NEGONNE OOSUKKUWHONK MOSE

Ne asowttamuk

GENESIS.

CHAPTER I.

Of the creation of heaven and earth &c: Of man in the image of God. 29 The pointment of food.



Eske kutchissik a ayum
 God Kesuk & Ohke.
 2 Kah Ohke mō-
 matta kuhkenauu.
 neuukquatinno kab
 monteagunninno, &

mosket skannemunnüook skannem
 noh pasuk ueane wuttinnussuor
 tug meechemmucok, ubbuk
 wihhogkat niinnoh p. suk uean
 suonk, kah wunnaumun Gonne
 13 Kah mo wunnonkucok, I
 tompog shwekesukod
 14 Kah nowau Gor, f We
 nuohettich ut wussefakentamoo
 sukquath kah noh shehettich ut na



The Pilgrims' Arrival

When the Pilgrims first crossed the Atlantic, their initial sight of the 'New World' was a portion of Wampanoag territory, known today as Cape Cod. Although bound for Virginia, challenging wintry seas forced them north and shoals around the Cape led them to seek safe harbor in Provincetown. They eventually moved across Cape Cod Bay and settled in Patuxet (known today as Plymouth), in Wampanoag country.

Early Colonial Efforts to Convert Native Americans

Within one decade after the English colonists established themselves in Wampanoag territory, their mission was to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Shortly after Harvard University was founded in 1636, the Indian College was established in Mâsachuwsut- current day Cambridge, Massachusetts, to train Native American students.

The Indian College and the Wampanoag Indian Bible

The Indian College housed the first printing press in the English colonies. Under missionary John Eliot's direction, this press printed a Native-speaker Wôpanâak translation of the Bible, known as the Mamusse Wunneetupantamwe UpBiblum God or the "Eliot Indian Bible". This was the first Bible printed in British North America and the first full translation of the Christian Bible into a Native American language. James Printer, a Nipmuc, did much of the typesetting. The translation itself was accomplished by numerous Wôpanâak speakers including Ruben Cockenoe, Job Nesuton, and John Sassamon as well as other speakers. While Eliot initially wrote to his benefactors in England that he had little hope for seeing a translation completed by him due to his lack of sufficient grammar, he later wrote that he decided to try and teach some Wampanoag to read English to effectuate a translated work. He said of them, 'they are all genius' and then portioned out sections to each of them for translation. The press produced fifteen (15) books in Wôpanâak and other Algonquian languages and eighty-five (85) books in English before it was decommissioned in 1692. Of the translated, printed works in Wôpanâak, many were burned following King Philips War 1675-76.

a Pſal.
23. 6.
136.
5. Acts
14. 15.
17.
24. Heb.
11. 3:



Eske kutchissik a
God Kefuk & O
2 Kah Ohke
matta kuhkenau
neukquttinnoo
monteagunninno,
pohkenum woske
mcondi, kah v
Nashausnitom
God rodomthau w



Preserved Wampanoag Documents

In addition to the "Wampanoag Bible," many handwritten deeds, wills, and petitions to the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Plymouth Colony from around Wampanoag territory in Massachusetts, signed by Wampanoag citizens and written in the Wôpanâak language, have been preserved. One notable document is the original deed to the town of Eastham, with an 18th-century copy displayed in the town administrator's office. These documents provide valuable insights into Wampanoag history and land agreements.



Did You Know?

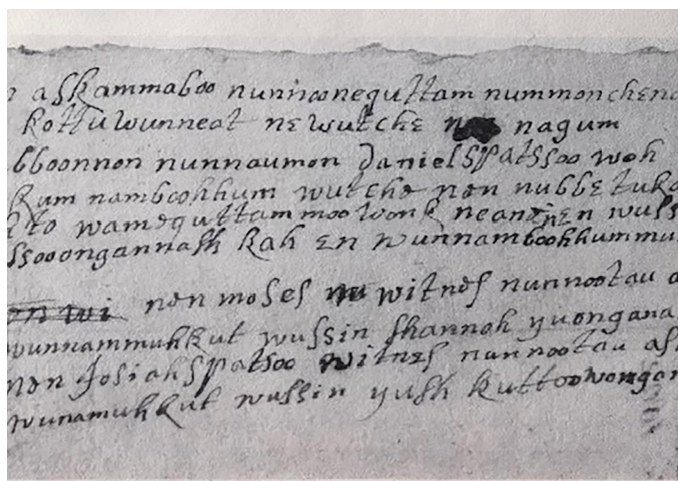
The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP) was co-founded in 1993 by Elder Helen Manning from Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe and jessie "little doe" baird from Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. Today, WLRP extends its support to Wampanoag families and households in Assonet Band of the Wampanoag Nation and Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe as well.

WLRP's two linguists, jessie "little doe" baird and Tracy Kelley Wilson, both received degrees in Algonquian linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), making this language family the only one to have two credentialed Indigenous linguists involved in a reclamation project. Their work involves researching and standardizing the Wôpanâak language using the extensive written records, the largest corpus on the North American continent, left by our ancestors and subsequent Algonquian scholars.

The Algonquian language family, to which Wôpanâak belongs, comprises some 40 sister languages. Wôpanâak (Wampanoag people) are the first Native Americans to use an alphabetic writing system in North America. Starting in the 1620s, they collaborated with English missionaries to translate religious texts.

Many documents in Wôpanâak were recorded by our ancestors in the 1600s and 1700s, during a time when literacy in our language was widespread. Remarkably, during this period, more Wampanoag people were literate in Wôpanâak than European immigrants were in English.

The first Bible printed in the Americas, the King James Bible (published in 1663), was translated into Wôpanâak by Wampanoag speakers from several Tribal communities across the Wampanoag territory from the Boston area to Cape Cod and the Island of Martha's Vineyard. For nearly two centuries, Wampanoag people meticulously recorded land transfers, deeds, wills, letters, and notes in their Bibles. However, after Wôpanâak ceased to be taught as a first language, there were no fluent speakers for seven generations, approximately 150 years.



Today's standardized Wôpanâak writing system, or orthography, is primarily based on the English (Roman) alphabet but includes sounds and symbols with distinct pronunciations. For instance, "8" is pronounced "oo" as in "boot," "ô" sounds like the "on" in "honk," and "ty" is pronounced with a sound between "ch" and "c" in "chew" and "cue."



The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP)

In the 1990s, jessie 'little doe' baird, a citizen of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, had a powerful vision three nights in a row. In this vision, she received a sacred message in Wôpanâak, the Wampanoag language, and saw a circle of familial Wampanoag faces. Although she initially knew nothing of her people's language, baird felt a deep connection and decided to pursue its reclamation.

baird collaborated with linguists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), including Professor Kenneth Locke Hale, one of the most prolific polyglots of the modern era and a direct descendant of Roger Williams, a 17th-century missionary to Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Ken Hale played a significant role in the prophecy, as he was a child descended from those who had broken the circle of language. jessie and Ken worked together to establish an idealized spelling system, striving to stay as close as possible to the original Wôpanâak texts. They used sound change comparisons with other sister languages in the family to ensure a conservative linguistic foundation for Wôpanâak.



In 1993, baird co-founded the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP), which includes Wampanoag citizens from the Mashpee, Aquinnah, Assonet, and Herring Pond Wampanoag communities. The project's mission is to restore fluency in the Wampanoag Nation, making the language a primary means of cultural expression once again.

Baird and other Wampanoag Tribal citizens from the communities of Mashpee, Aquinnah, Assonet, and Herring Pond developed instructional materials, learned to speak the language, and reintroduced it into everyday use. baird's daughter, Mae, became the first native speaker of the new generation. baird, Mae, and other Tribal linguists have since taught the language to other Tribal children and adults, ensuring its continued growth and reclamation.

"Reclaiming our language is one means of repairing the broken circle of cultural loss and pain. To be able to understand and speak our language means to see the world as our families did for centuries. This is but one path which keeps us connected to our people, the earth, and the philosophies and truths given to us by the Creator." - jessie 'little doe' baird, Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project Co- Founder



In addition to baird's Master of Science degree in Linguistics from MIT in 2000, her efforts have also been recognized with a MacArthur Fellowship in 2010 and several honorary doctorates and degrees from Cape Cod Community College, Yale University, and University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. In 2021, baird was named One of 100 Women of the Century by USA Today.



Future of the Project (WLRP)

The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project continues its mission of language reclamation through educational programs, language classes, and cultural initiatives. By reintroducing and normalizing the use of Wôpanâak among the Wampanoag people, the project seeks to preserve and strengthen the cultural heritage and identity of the Wampanoag Nation for future generations and to accept both the gift and responsibility that comes with the language created especially for them by the Creator.



Case for Support

Problem Statement

The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP) was established to address a profound and urgent challenge: the reclamation of the Wôpanâak language. As a result of centuries of colonization, forced assimilation, and oppression, the Wôpanâak language, once spoken by thousands of people across Wampanoag territory from Cape Anne to the Islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard Massachusetts, had fallen silent. Language is more than just words; it is the heart of a culture, carrying with it the traditions, wisdom, and identity of a people. The loss of the Wôpanâak language represents not only the erosion of cultural heritage but also a disconnection from the values, knowledge, and spiritual beliefs of our ancestors. The significance of recovering the Wôpanâak language cannot be overstated. It is a vital act of cultural survival and a reclaiming of our history and identity. By restoring our language, we empower our community, strengthen our bonds across generations, and ensure that the voices of our ancestors continue to resonate in the present and future.

Impact

Since its inception, WLRP has made remarkable strides in bringing the Wôpanâak language back to life. Through dedicated efforts in language research, education, and community engagement, we have achieved significant milestones:

The project has also been a national leader in the development of federal language policy and language project policy for tribal and intertribal governments working on language revitalization or complete reclamation.



Language Reclamation: We have successfully developed a Wôpanâak dictionary and grammar resources as well as the creation of immersion nest curriculum for several domains of community life, which are foundational tools for language learning. These resources have enabled the creation of language classes for children and adults, where community members are now able to speak, write, and understand their native tongue.

Cultural Reconnection: Our language immersion programs have helped foster a deep reconnection with Wampanoag culture. By learning the language, community members are also rediscovering traditional stories, songs, and ceremonies that had been dormant for generations.

Education and Outreach: WLRP has introduced Wôpanâak language and culture programs in local schools, ensuring that the next generation grows up with a strong sense of cultural identity. Additionally, we have produced educational materials, including books, digital resources, and multimedia content, which are accessible to a wider audience.

Community Building: We have organized immersion programs that bring together Wampanoag families and households, creating a strong and vibrant community united by a shared mission.



Giving

The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP) offers a variety of ways for you to contribute and support our mission of revitalizing the Wampanoag language and culture:

Ways to Give

One-Time Gift:

Make a one-time donation that provides immediate impact and supports ongoing projects requiring urgent funding

Recurring Donations:

Set up a recurring donation on a monthly or quarterly basis, ensuring a steady stream of resources to sustain our programs over time.

Planned Giving:

Include WLRP in your long-term financial plans through planned giving options such as stocks & securities, bequests, charitable trusts, or other legacy gifts

Each method of giving plays a vital role in securing the future of our language and culture.

We deeply appreciate your commitment to our cause.

To see how your donation makes a difference please head to our website at

<https://www.wlrp.org/ways-to-help>



Project Goals

While we have made tremendous progress in reclaiming the Wôpanâak language, our work is far from done. The challenges we face remain significant, and continued support is essential to ensuring the language not only survives but thrives for future generations.

..... Our Objectives

1. Increasing the Number of Fluent Speakers & Certified Teachers (Ongoing)

To strengthen language instruction, we will expand our teacher certification programs and establish a fluency proficiency certification for immersion instructors. Our goal is for speakers to achieve at least an Intermediate High proficiency level, following the ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages) scale. This ensures all educators meet rigorous standards for both language mastery and teaching effectiveness.

2. Expanding Curriculum Development (Ongoing)

Within the next couple of years, we will launch dedicated curriculum development classes to enhance, standardize, and strengthen WLRP's educational programs. This initiative will ensure consistent, high-quality language instruction across all age groups and learning levels.

3. Publishing Children's Books (Ongoing)

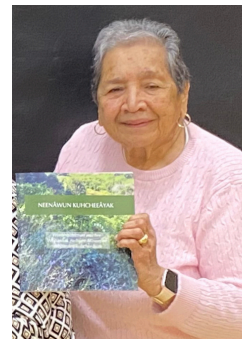
We aim to publish five new children's books each year, securing illustrations and resources to develop 10–20 more titles in the coming years. These books will serve as essential tools for early language exposure and literacy development.

4. Enhancing Media & Interactive Learning (5+ Year Plan)

To make language learning more accessible and engaging, we plan to develop and distribute a variety of multimedia resources, including:

- Online language labs
- Books & interactive e-learning materials
- Radio & TV programming

These tools will support language learners across different platforms, ensuring that Wôpanâak reaches a broader audience, including youth, educators, and community members.



..... How You Can Help

Your support is an investment in the future of the Wampanoag language and culture. By contributing to the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project (WLRP), you help expand language classes, develop essential learning materials, engage youth, and preserve our cultural heritage.

Together, we can build a future where the Wôpanâak language is spoken with pride and passed down for generations to come. Join us in this vital mission—your support makes a difference.



Leadership

WLRP Staff (2025)

Tracy Kelley Wilson, MS
Executive Director
Linguist, Certified Speaker
Mashpee Wampanoag

jessie 'little doe' baird
Co-founder
Lead Linguist, Certified Speaker
Mashpee Wampanoag

Ann Marie Askew
Administrator
Treasurer, Board of Directors
Mashpee Wampanoag

Judith Goetz
Marketing & Communications

Tysonnae Aiguier-Bolling
Certified Speaker
Aquinnah Wampanoag

Eva Blake
Certified Speaker
Assonet Wampanoag

Eleanor "Toodie" Jackson-Coombs
Certified Speaker
Mashpee Wampanoag

Camille Madison
Certified Speaker
Aquinnah Wampanoag

Melanie Roderick
President, Board of Directors
Certified Speaker
Assonet Wampanoag Band

Board of Directors

President
Melanie Roderick
Assonet Wampanoag Band

Vice President
Mae Baird
Aquinnah & Mashpee Wampanoag

Treasurer
Ann Marie Askew
Mashpee Wampanoag

Secretary
Zoë Harris
Mashpee Wampanoag

Board Member At-Large
Jason Baird
Aquinnah Wampanoag

Board Member At-Large
Michael Dugan
Aquinnah Wampanoag

Board Member At-Large
Seat Open



Contact Us

**Our Mailing Address:
11 Market Street, #2241
Mashpee, MA 02649**

**Our Physical Address:
2C Center Street
Mashpee, MA 02649**

(774) 602-5490

info@wlrp.org



