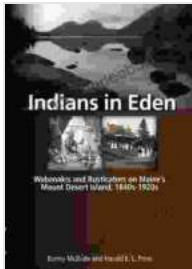


# Wabanakis and Rusticators: A Harmonious Union on Maine's Mount Desert Island



## Indians in Eden: Wabanakis and Rusticators on Maine's Mt. Desert Island by Bunny McBride

★★★★☆ 4.9 out of 5

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Nestled along the rugged coast of Maine, Mount Desert Island is a haven of natural beauty and rich history. Its pristine shores, towering mountains, and tranquil lakes have long captivated visitors from far and wide. However, the island's allure extends beyond its breathtaking scenery; it is also a place where two distinct cultures have intersected and harmonized for centuries.

The Wabanakis, the indigenous people of Maine, have inhabited Mount Desert Island for millennia. They were skilled hunters, fishers, and farmers who lived in harmony with their surroundings. Their knowledge of the land and its resources was integral to their survival and cultural identity.

In the late 19th century, Mount Desert Island experienced an influx of wealthy summer visitors seeking respite from the hustle and bustle of urban

life. These "rusticators," as they were known, were drawn to the island's unspoiled beauty and the promise of a simpler lifestyle.

As the rusticators established their summer colonies on the island, they encountered the Wabanakis who had long been living there. Rather than conflict, a remarkable relationship emerged between these two very different groups.

The Wabanakis welcomed the rusticators, sharing their knowledge of the land and teaching them how to navigate its rugged terrain. In turn, the rusticators brought with them new ideas and technologies that benefited the Wabanaki community. A mutually beneficial exchange of goods, services, and culture ensued.

The rusticators admired the Wabanakis' skill as canoeists and fishermen. They often hired them as guides and companions on their outdoor excursions. The Wabanakis, in turn, learned from the rusticators about modern medicine, agriculture, and education.

One of the most notable examples of this cultural exchange was the establishment of the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor. Founded by the rusticator George Dorr in 1927, the museum houses a vast collection of Wabanaki artifacts and art. Dorr's deep respect for the Wabanaki culture inspired him to create a space where their heritage could be preserved and celebrated.

The relationship between the Wabanakis and rusticators was not without its challenges. There were instances of prejudice and discrimination, particularly in the early days of tourism. However, the bonds of respect and

shared experiences that had been forged between them proved stronger than any social divisions.

Today, the legacy of this harmonious union continues to shape the character of Mount Desert Island. The Wabanakis remain an integral part of the island's community, contributing to its cultural and economic life. Many descendants of the original rusticators have made Mount Desert Island their permanent home, carrying on the traditions and values of their ancestors.

The relationship between the Wabanakis and rusticators on Mount Desert Island stands as a testament to the power of human connection and the ability of different cultures to coexist and thrive together. It is a reminder that despite our differences, we can find common ground and build lasting bonds through mutual respect and understanding.

## **The Rusticators**

The rusticators who flocked to Mount Desert Island during the Gilded Age were a diverse group, but they shared a common desire for escapism and a love of nature. They came from all walks of life, from wealthy industrialists and financiers to artists, writers, and scholars.



Some of the most prominent rusticators included John D. Rockefeller Jr., who built a grand summer home on Mount Desert Island; George Vanderbilt, who established the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina; and J.P. Morgan, who is known for his role in the Gilded Age's financial elite.

These wealthy summer visitors brought with them their own unique style, which came to be known as the "rustic" aesthetic. They built sprawling summer cottages and mansions that were inspired by the natural beauty of the island. The rustic style emphasized natural materials such as wood, stone, and bark, and featured large porches, fireplaces, and open floor plans.

The rusticators also played a significant role in the development of Mount Desert Island's infrastructure and tourism industry. They built roads, bridges, and hotels to accommodate the growing number of visitors. They also established yacht clubs, golf courses, and other recreational facilities that continue to attract tourists today.

While the rusticators brought wealth and investment to Mount Desert Island, they were also mindful of the need to preserve its natural beauty. Many of them were active in conservation efforts and supported the establishment of Acadia National Park in 1916.

## **The Wabanakis**

The Wabanakis are a confederacy of Native American tribes who have inhabited the northeastern coast of North America for thousands of years. The Wabanaki Confederacy includes the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac tribes.



Wabanaki people in traditional clothing

The Wabanakis were skilled hunters, fishers, and farmers. They had a deep understanding of the natural world and lived in harmony with their surroundings. They also had a rich cultural tradition that included storytelling, music, and art.

When the rusticators arrived on Mount Desert Island, the Wabanakis were initially wary. However, they eventually came to trust the newcomers, who brought with them new goods and technologies that benefited the Wabanaki community.

The Wabanakis shared their knowledge of the land and its resources with the rusticators. They taught them how to navigate the rugged terrain, how to fish and hunt, and how to build canoes and other tools. In turn, the rusticators provided the Wabanakis with access to new markets for their goods and services.

The Wabanakis also played an important role in the development of Mount Desert Island's tourism industry. They worked as guides and boatmen for the rusticators, and they sold their crafts and other goods to visitors.

Today, the Wabanakis continue to play an important role in the cultural and economic life of Mount Desert Island. They own and operate businesses, provide educational programs, and participate in local government. They are also active in preserving their traditional culture and language.

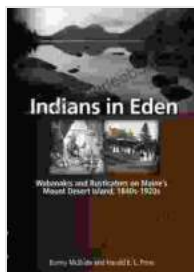
## **The Legacy**

The relationship between the Wabanakis and rusticators on Mount Desert Island is a unique and enduring one. It is a testament to the power of human connection and the ability of different cultures to coexist and thrive together.

The legacy of this harmonious union can be seen in the island's architecture, its cultural institutions, and its tourism industry. It is also evident in the strong bonds that continue to exist between the Wabanakis and the descendants of the rusticators.

The story of the Wabanakis and rusticators is a reminder that we are all part of a shared human experience. Despite our differences, we can find

common ground and build lasting relationships based on mutual respect and understanding.



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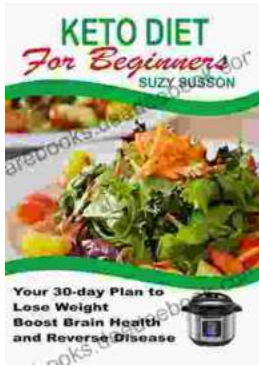
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