

The Spoken Word

Natives of New Hampshire spoke the Algonquin language. Some of that language is still familiar to us today. We understand the meaning of such words as *papoose*, *hominy*, *succotash*, and *tomahawk*.

The Western Abenaki and Penacooks were only two of the many local tribes that made up the larger Algonquin Nation. Very often each tribe would have its own specific words for the same object or place, and so the language varied from place to place. Despite these differences, the basic structure of the language remained the same and New England tribes communicated with each other without difficulty.

Indian words are often “word-pictures” formed by putting together short descriptive words or phrases. Winnepesaukee is a combination of three words: *win*, meaning “smiling,” *nipi*, meaning “lake,” and *aukee*, meaning “at the high place.” Joined together the meaning becomes “smiling lake between the mountains.”

Placename	Meaning	Placename	Meaning
Acadia	the earth	Cuttyhunk	thing that lies out in the sea
Agwam	lowland	Damariscotta	river of little fishes
Alamoosuc	little dog place	Hammonasset	sandbar
Algonquin	people of the other shore	Hoosac	mountain rock
Amoskeag	fishing place	Housatonic	over the mountain
Androscoggin	fish-curing place	Iroquois	real adder
Appalachian	people of the other side	Kennebec	long water land
Apponaug	oyster or shell-fish	Lashaway	between
Aquidneck	the island	Manhasset	sheltered place
Aroostuck	shining river	Manitook	God's country
Ascutney	at the end of the river fork	Mashpoag	bad water
Assinippi	rocky water	Massachusetts	people of the great hill country
Assonet	at the rock	Massapoag	great water
Caribou	digger	Matchuk	badlands
Casco	muddy	Meriden	pleasant valley
Chappaquiddick	separated island	Merrimac	rapids
Chepacket	river fork	Mingo	treacherous (another name for Iroquois)
Chicopee	rushing water	Minnechaug	berry-land
Cochituate	swift river	Mishawum	great neck
Cohasset	young fine land	Misquamicut	well-wooded country
Connecticut	at the long estuary	Mohawk	cannibal or coward
Contoocook	pine river bank	Monadnock	mountain that stands alone
Coos	pine tree	Monahegan	grand island

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Cummaquid	harbor	Monomonack	lookout point
Montauk	in the island country	Sasco	marsh
Mystic	great tidal river	Saugatuck	tidal river outlet
Nantucket	far off among the waves	Saugus	swamp
Narragansett	people of the point	Sawquid	pleasant point
Nashua	the land between (or river with pebbly bottom)	Scantic	where the river branches
Natick	my home	Scituate	cold brook
Naugatuck	one tree	Sebago	big lake
Niantic	tidal land	Seekonk	wild goose
Noank	it is a point	Shawomet	a spring or place to which boats go
Nonotuck	middle of the river	Shetucket	land between rivers
Ossipee	rocky river	Skowhegan	a place for waiting and watching
Pascoag	river fork	Squam	pleasant water place
Passumpsic	flowing over clear sandy bottom	Sunapee	rocky pond
Pawtucket	little falls	Suncook	rocky point
Pemaquid	long point	Taconic	wilderness
Pemigewasset	long rapids	Titicut	at the great river
Penacook	crooked place, at the bend	Tuckerneck	loaf of bread
Penobscot	rocky slope	Umbagog	clear lake
Pequot	the destroyers	Weatug	at the village
Pisquataquis	at the river forks	Weekapaug	at the end of the pond
Podunk	place where the foot sinks	Weepowaug	narrow crossing
Quechee	quick, whirling falls	Weybossett	at the crossing place
Quidneck	beyond the hill	Winnipesaukee	lake land
Quinesaug	long pond	Winnisquam	salmon-fishing waters
Quinnipiac	long water land	Winooski	wild onions
Quonset	boundary	Wiscasset	at the hidden outlet
Saco	outflowing	Woonsocket	a place of deep descent
Sagadahoc	swift water flowing near the sea	Woronoco	winding about
Sakonnet	place of black geese	Yankee	Indian pronunciation of "English" ("Yenguese")
Saranac	piver of sumac trees		

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