

Sources: Bunny McBride, 785-532-6865, bmcbr@k-state.edu;
and Harald E.L. Prins, 785-532-4966, prins@k-state.edu

Photo available. Contact media@k-state.edu or 785-532-6415.

News release prepared by: Kristin Hodges, 785-532-6415, khodges2@k-state.edu

Media Relations

9 Anderson Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506-0117
785-532-6415
Fax: 785-532-6418
E-mail: media@k-state.edu
k-state.edu/media

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K-STATE ANTHROPOLOGISTS CHRONICLE THE LIVES AND RESOURCEFULNESS OF INDIANS IN MOUNT DESERT ISLAND FROM THE 1840s-1920s IN NEW BOOK

MANHATTAN — Cultural historical facts from the mid-1800s of the Wabanaki Indians in Mount Desert Island, Maine, have been preserved through the work of two Kansas State University anthropologists.

K-State's Bunny McBride, adjunct lecturer of cultural anthropology, and her Dutch husband, Harald E.L. Prins, university distinguished professor of anthropology, have detailed the lives of the Wabanaki Indians and their interactions with summer tourists in "Indians in Eden: Wabanakis and Rusticators on Maine's Mount Desert Island: 1840s – 1920s," published by Down East Books.

One of the results of extensive research originally commissioned by the National Park Service, "Indians in Eden" takes a cultural historical look at Mount Desert Island, a seasonal hunting and fishing place for generations of Wabanaki Indian families, primarily Passamaquoddy and Penobscot. By the mid-1800s, the island, and particularly Bar Harbor, which was then called Eden, was emerging as a popular summer destination for early American artists, wealthy tourists and seasonal residents.

Wabanakis established a makeshift encampment of canvas tents near hotels and summer homes and marketed native crafts, along with guide and canoe services for trips into surrounding saltwater bays. Today, much of Mount Desert Island is protected as Acadia National Park, one of the most visited national parks in the United States with 2.2 million visitors annually.

McBride and Prins said the significance of their book is best described in the foreword to "Indians in Eden" by Donna Loring, Penobscot tribal elder. The Penobscot Indian Nation will host the book's first launch at a special festive event on the tribal reservation.

"My great-great grandfather Frank Loring, known as Chief Big Thunder, loved Bar Harbor and spent many years traveling there seasonally and camping on the island. In these pages I've gained insight into why he returned year after year ... and the role that the Bar Harbor Indian encampment played in helping Wabanakis survive economically and culturally," Loring wrote. "My deepest gratitude to the authors for traveling back in time and bringing the spirit of our ancestors back to life."

(more)

The K-State anthropologists' research looks at the relationship the Wabanakis had in the tourist industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries and how Mount Desert Island was essential in the cultural and economic survival of Maine's coastal tribes. "Indians in Eden" precedes an exhibition McBride and Prins are curating for the Abbe Museum in Bar Harbor, and the book will serve as a catalog for that show when it opens in February 2010.

McBride and Prins have studied the Wabanaki culture and history and native rights for three decades. They have worked with all four Wabanaki tribal communities: Maliseet, Mi'kmaq or Micmac, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot. They both have done fieldwork and have written extensively about indigenous peoples in North America.

McBride and Prins did historical research and community development work for the Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians in Maine from 1981-1991. In 1990, their work resulted in legislation by U.S. Congress granting this tribe federal recognition and funds to buy back aboriginal land. Prins has served as an expert witness in several Micmac native rights cases in the U.S. Senate and Canadian courts. McBride was given a special commendation by the Maine legislature in 1999 for her research and writing on the history of Native women in the state.

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