

Soil Names of American Indian Origin

New soils are named after mountains, streams, rivers, hills, villages etc that are in the area where the soils are first recognized. The origin of many place names in New England was usually from the area where the first white settlers came from or they were derived from poor attempts by the English, Dutch, and French settlers to translate American Indian Names into their own languages.

There were many American Indian Tribes settled along the coast and throughout the river valleys all over New England. Many of these tribes relied on farming along with hunting and fishing as a source of food. We also know that they understood many of the principles of farming and soil conservation that we use today. In fact it would be accurate to say that American Indians were the first soil conservationists in North America.

When exploring the origin of American Indian Names there are a number of things to keep in mind.

The names of American Indian villages and individuals applied to landscape place names are fairly well documented. The spellings vary from author to author as result of many attempts to translate the American Indian pronunciation into European Languages. As a result the pronunciation that we use today is probably not the same pronunciation in the original native language.

There a number of books written on the origin of American Indian Place Names. Unfortunately the accuracy of the translation of these place names varies from source to source. In New England there was flurry of activity in the late 1800's and early 1900's to record the meanings of various place names that were perceived to be of American Indian origin. Unfortunately some authors relied more on local tradition for their definitions instead of talking directly to members of the local tribes. Future authors unknowingly perpetuated misinformation by using these unreliable sources.

If the author of source is an American Indian the source is probably a good one. If possible contact the local tribes for translations, information on reliable sources and for verification of the information that you have collected.

Even when dealing with reliable sources you may find disagreement on translations and also territories of some local tribes. The best source to resolve this appears to be the series on American Indians put out by the Smithsonian Institution, which is available in many libraries.

When dealing with local tribes be aware that some may prefer the term Native American instead of American Indian. Use of the tribal name is even better.

Some soil names of American Indian Origin:

Listed below are just a few of the many soil names in New England that are of American Indian Origin.

Allagash Soil – Allagash may have been derived from the Abenaki word walagaskok which means “bark” or “rough bark”.

Canandaigua Soil – Canandaigua was a Seneca Tribe village that was destroyed during the campaign by the American Army under General John Sullivan in 1779. Canandaigua may have been derived from kanandarque which means the “chosen spot”.

Missisquoi Soil – Missisquoi is derived from the Abenaki word masipskoik which means “where there is flint” or “where flint is”. The name originates from an Abenaki chert quarry located near Missisquoi Bay on Lake Champlain.

Monadnock Soil – The Abenaki name for Mount Monadnock in southeast New Hampshire is menoadenak, which means “smooth mountain”.

Occum Soil – Sampson Occum was a Mohegan Christian missionary during the latter part of the 1700’s.

Podunk Soil – The Podunk Tribe lived in the Connecticut River Valley in northern Connecticut. Podunk may have derived from the word petunk, which means “to put anything in a bag” or “clean place”.

Scantic Soil – Scantic may have been derived from Scanticook which was a Podunk Tribe Village or Scantic could have been derived from the Nipmuc word Scatacook, meaning “fork in the river”.

Sunapee Soil – Sunapee may have derived from the Algonquin words suna and apee which together could be translated as “goose lake”.

Taconic Soil – Taconic may have been derived from a Mohegan or Natick word which means wild forest or the Delaware word tatchan which means “woodland”.

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