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Later, in the 1800s, it went from being a necessity to being a way to make a living. ... My family's territory was Lake Champlain and the Cedar Beach area.

In 1885, 35-year-old Simon Obomsawin began selling baskets to tourists at Thompson's Point in Charlotte. The baskets brought in a few pennies; birch-bark canoes sold for \$15, Brink said. Obomsawin was a popular attraction at the resort, demonstrating his crafts in full Indian dress.

"It was a way to make a living, but they certainly didn't get rich," said Brink. Of his seven children, she said, four lived.

Into the 20th century

In 1890 Obomsawin became caretaker at Thompson's Point. His wife died a short time later, and he left his children — Elvina, Marion, Marie and William — with their aunt in Odanak. Elvina grew to adulthood, and about 1906 she joined her father at Thompson's Point.

Marion and William continued to sell baskets. After Simon died in 1932, they took his place and lived in the caretaker's house until it was destroyed by fire in October 1959. William, 75 years old and blind, was killed in the fire. Marion, 65, was only slightly injured, but the shock of the fire and her brother's death was too much for her.

"She never knew any of us after that," Brink said.

Elvina left Thompson's Point and married Daniel Royce, son of an Irish family from Chelsea. The couple divorced when Brink was young, but Elvina reared her children more in their father's traditions and language than her own, and they all married non-Indians.

"My mom maybe knows three or four phrases in Abenaki," Brink said. "I always knew I was Indian, but I never paid much attention to it when I was growing up. I've always been proud of the fact that I was Abenaki, but I didn't really know what that entailed."

In her later years, Elvina worked with historian Gordon Day, the leading expert on Abenaki. She also passed stories on to her granddaughter, "but back then I didn't listen," Brink said. "I just wasn't really interested. ... Now, there are so many times that I'd like to ask my grandmother, 'How was it then?' or 'How did you make this basket?' but she's gone now." Elvina died in 1969.

Heritage preserved

It wasn't until Brink's own children were grown that she rediscovered her heritage. Four years ago, while attending Vermont College, Brink took a class in contemporary Native American literature. Intrigued, she began to research her own family history. She officially joined the Abenaki tribe and learned to make the baskets that were so important to her ancestors.

Brink works closely with Day, who is compiling an Abenaki dictionary. Together they have written an Abenaki language text-

"And some Indians at once hurried home. ... They went to see about their people, their children, in order to run away as soon as possible."

Elvina Obomsawin

Rogers' massacre: Death came with dawn

By Patricia Haller
Free Press Correspondent

In the autumn of 1759, Robert Rogers and 150 "Rangers" sailed Lake Champlain from Crown Point to Missisquoi Bay, then marched north to the Indian mission village of St. Francis — now Odanak — near the St. Lawrence River in Quebec. Just before dawn, Oct. 4, they attacked.

Rogers later claimed that his raid surprised and annihilated the village, wiping out the troublesome St. Francis Indians. For many years, historians accepted his version. But Indian oral tradition contradicts Rogers' version on several points.

In 1957, Jeanne Brink's grandmother, Elvina Obomsawin Royce, told one such story of the raid to historian Gordon Day. Royce heard the story from her aunt, Mali Masodkwe, who in turn heard it from her grandmother, who lived in St. Francis at the time of the raid.

According to the Obomsawin family tradition, the St. Francis Indians were dancing to celebrate the autumn harvest when they were warned of the raid. Although many were killed, many more escaped. Here is Day's translation of the story as told by Elvina Obomsawin.

"And they danced and sometimes celebrated late, dancing and sometimes going out because it was a nice cool night. They rested, some went to smoke and rest. And one, a young girl, a young woman, she did not immediately go in when the others went in."

"When she was ready to go in, then someone stopped her. He said, 'Don't be afraid.' In Indian, you understand, he said, 'Friend.'"

"I am your friend, and those enemies ... they are there in the little woods (planning) that when all (the Abenaki) leave for home they would kill them all, their husbands, and burn their village, and I came to warn you."

"And surely the young woman went

to the council house, the dancing place, and she warned the other Indians what he told. She warned what she had been warned. And some did not believe her, because she was so young, because she was a child. ...

"And some Indians at once hurried home. ... They went to see about their people, their children, in order to run away as soon as possible. ... Our aunt's great-grandfather gathered everyone — it was dark of course — in the dark no one kindled a light. They gathered their children in the dark, you can be sure."

"And they left to hide somewhere where they could not find them. ... They hid — in a big ravine where they could not find them. And that man, the old one who was missing? And she did not know that she was alone in the house, but already she was awake, and she was sitting at the foot of the bed and she was looking out of the window leaning on the

window sill. She was singing, she was calmly singing (to herself). She did not even know that the others were gone. Suddenly then, her father quickly entered in the dark, entering quickly, and he took her — he found her singing — this one."

"Right away he took her and left as quickly as he possibly could to the ravine — the big ravine. ... And there they hid, the Indians, the Abenaki."

And my (aunt's) grandfather, the Great Obomsawin, the Great Simon, he crossed the river, just as the sun was rising. Just as the sun is seen first. He didn't arrive soon enough, and just at that time he is almost across the river when the sun showed. And his hat — something shone on his head, something (bright) that he wore. And there he was shot down on the other side. ... All that were with the houses — well, that was when they burned the village — the others, surely many were killed of the others, all that were with the houses."

The Obomsawin family: 1600-1989

Before 1600 — Up to 10,000 Abenaki and Maliseet Indians live, hunt and fish in Vermont. There are more than 20 Indian villages, including trading settlements at Missisquoi (Swanton/Highgate), St. Albans, Milton and the riverbanks of Burlington.

1600 — Europeans push into Abenaki lands. The Indians move north in an attempt to preserve their culture and avoid the disease and war the whites bring with them.

1690 — King William's War — the first of the so-called French and Indian Wars — begins. The struggle between the French and British for control over North America lasts until the French are defeated in 1759 and sign the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The Abenaki, who have a strong trade relationship with the French, side with France in the wars.

1723 — Greylock leads the Missisquoi Abenaki in raids against settlers at Rutland, Fort Dummer (Brattleboro) and in the Massachusetts towns of Northfield, Deerfield and Westfield.

1759 — Rogers' Rangers raid the Indian village of Odanak, Que., at the request of British commander Sir Jeffrey Amherst. Simon Obomsawin, along with many of his people, is killed.

1763 — The French and Indian Wars end and settlers pour into the lands between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River. The Abenaki fight back, harassing the settlers in an attempt to stop white expansion and keep their lands. More and more, however, they are forced northward to Canada.

1765 — Joseph Obomsawin signs an agreement to lease some of the Missisquoi lands to James Robertson for 91 years.

1775 — The Revolutionary War begins. Some Abenaki join the American fight for independence. Others side with the British.

1806 — Robertson's lease on the Missisquoi lands expires.

1850 — Simon Obomsawin is born in Odanak. Like his grandfather, he learns to make baskets, moccasins and birch bark canoes, which the family sells to tourists at Cedar Beach in the summer.

1885 — Simon Obomsawin begins to sell baskets and canoe accessories at the resort community of Thompson's Point.

1886 — Elvina Obomsawin is born in Odanak.

1890 — Simon Obomsawin becomes caretaker at Thompson's Point. After his wife dies, his four children are raised by their aunt in Odanak.

1925 — Daniel Royce buys a farm in

Florida and sets off from Waterbury Center with his wife, Elvina Obomsawin, who is pregnant, and two small children in a horse and buggy. The couple runs out of money, and Elvina supports them by making and selling baskets along the way. Elvina gives birth to a girl, Nellie Royce, in Florida. A few years later, the family returns to Vermont.

1932 — Simon Obomsawin dies and two of his children — Marion and William — become caretakers at Thompson's Point. They continue to make and sell Abenaki baskets.

1944 — Jeanne Brink is born in Montpelier.

1957 — Elvina Obomsawin tells historian Gordon Day the story of Rogers' Raid on Odanak. The interview is one of several conversations with Elvina, Marion and William Obomsawin that

Day records.

1959 — The caretaker's cottage at Thompson's Point, built for Simon Obomsawin in 1890, is destroyed by fire. William Obomsawin is killed, and his sister, Marion Obomsawin, is injured.

1962 — Elvina Obomsawin Royce returns to Odanak for the first time in nearly 60 years. She and Brink's mother, Nellie Royce DeForge, attend a ceremony on the Odanak reservation called by Rogers' Rangers in 1759.

1969 — Elvina Obomsawin Royce dies.

1986 — Jeanne Brink begins to study her family's heritage and learns to make Abenaki baskets.

1989 — Brink spends five months with Gordon Day in Odanak, helping compile the Abenaki Dictionary. She begins to learn Abenaki and they write a textbook to help others learn the language.

book called "Alnohadwa," or "Speak Abenaki." She has also joined the drive for an Abenaki Cultural Center in Swanton and is collecting and making baskets. Some would be displayed at the Cultural Center; others will be used to rebury Indian remains and artifacts that are now souvenirs and museum pieces.

"Our immediate need is land for reburial," Brink said. "We have over 300 sets of remains coming back to us that have been dug up in different places, and those remains need to go back into the ground. So we're in the process of trying to raise money now to purchase land and conduct reburials. Culturally, that's a very big issue. These are human remains — our ancestors."

An important part of her work, Brink said, is teaching schoolchildren about the Abenaki.

"History is written from a

white point of view," she said. "When I was in school, my history books said there were no Indians that were native to Vermont. Unfortunately, they haven't changed a lot of those history books, even though they now

know we've been here for 10,000

According to Brink, there is some disagreement about the origin of the family name. Some claim it means "fire tender." Others claim it means "one who

guides or leads."

Either way, Brink is carrying her Obomsawin heritage with her, making sure the flames of her family's traditions do not die out and leading others to a better understanding of her heritage.

"I see it like a continuation of

the oral tradition my grandmother got from her aunt and her aunt's grandmother," Brink said. "Now I'm the one that's trying to keep the oral tradition. Now I'm the basket maker."

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