



# NEW YEAR PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY

**By our Wampanoag eye in the sky,  
Flying Eagle Planting Moon Time, 1613**

**R**UNNERS HAVE been traveling throughout Wampanoag Territory, visiting all villages to check on preparations for new year ceremonies. Families from each of the 69 villages have completed the move from winter homes to their summer planting fields. Runners report certain Manomet families consulted with their sachem, or leader, regarding the planting fields he had designated, concerned they had not lain fallow long enough to ensure good soil for corn. After some discussion, the sachem agreed to assign them different fields.

Many men will be busy in the cedar swamps, collecting saplings for new house frames. The past winter gave just enough snow and rain, and the swamps are not too deep with water and spring melt. As the men make holes in which to set the frame poles, children watch their grandparents peel bark from the cut trees and separate the inner and outer layers. Little hands may try this

work, learning as they watch their elders that not even the smallest twig will be wasted. No one forgets that the trees have given their lives so we may have shelter, materials for our baskets and mats, and the green fronds for offerings in prayer. Their sacrifice is honored with thanksgiving and ceremony.

Every spring, in accordance with ancient tradition, people give thanks for the new life that comes forth: for the flowers that bloom even before the snow leaves the ground; for the tiny leaves of the oak that tell us there will be no more frost, and it is time to plant; for all the new fawns, baby rabbits, squirrels, and turkeys; for the herring and salmon that swim

THE WAMPANOAG people have lived in what is now southeastern Massachusetts for more than 12,000 years. By the 1600s there were as many as 100,000 people living in 69 villages, which comprised the Wampanoag Nation. When the *Mayflower* Pilgrims landed in what is now Provincetown in 1620, they were in the territory of Meeshawm of the Wampanoag Nation.

upriver to bear their young; and for our plant relatives that give us food and medicine. We especially remember the white pine, who the ancestor Creator made us from.

Ceremonies begin at first light on the day of the new moon, and the thanksgiving to all life will commence. Runners have reported to the sachem's councils that all preparations are well underway. The planting fields have been burned over and the earth of old corn mounds turned to bury the ashes. Each village is joyous with feast preparations (not to mention the warmer weather!), as the women reach into the remaining stores of corn and beans. Some folks may even have some dried squash or pumpkin left to share. Spring brings plenty of fresh herring (often used to fertilize our land), flounder, clams, quahogs, and other food from the sea. Fresh greens sprout in abundance. And every hearth will certainly have a turkey roasting, or a large cod or bluefish.

As new year observances conclude, the women will begin preparations for this year's planting ceremonies. This article is offered in thanksgiving to all my relations.