

“I don’t have feet. I have roots that are in this ground.” –John Thurman



Strong roots grow in the sandy Pembroke Township soil. They are nurtured by cultural traditions and ancestral knowledge, sprouting as organic vegetables and plant medicines. Explore the story of this unique place and its people.

Rich soils
Rich Roots
Rich
Rich
Traditions
Richness
Species
Rich Cultures
Communities
Rich in Water



Pembroke History



Fifteen thousand years ago the place now called Pembroke Township was covered with a mile-thick sheet of ice. As the Earth warmed, the ice melted, forming huge lakes that were held in place by ridges of rock, gravel, and sand. Eventually these dams gave way, resulting in a massive flood called the Kankakee Torrent. The floodwaters drained, leaving sand deposits which were shaped by wind into the dunes you see today. Black oak trees and tall prairie grasses thrive on these dunes, as they do in few other places on earth.

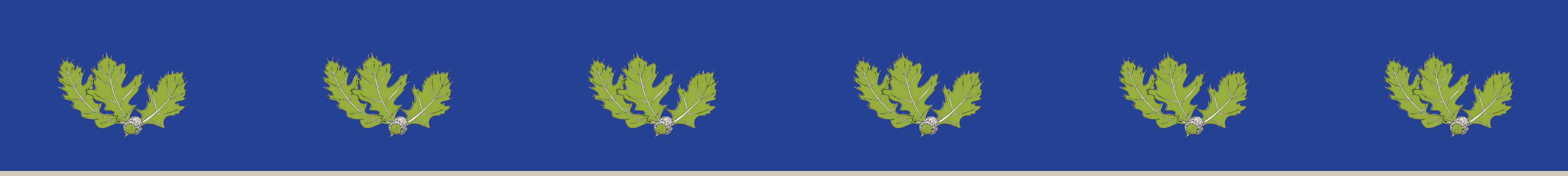


Native Americans such as the Potawatomi called this place home. Fur traders hunted and traveled through the region. Taverns and inns sprung up along trade routes. An African-American man, Joseph “Pap” Tetter, moved to the area with his family from North Carolina around 1862 and founded the town of Hopkins Park. Tetter settled on 42 acres that he subdivided and sold to other newcomers. Revenues from the land sales were used to support the escape of fugitive slaves. Hopkins Park became an important terminal of the **Underground Railroad**.



During the Great Depression, lack of employment and inadequate housing in Chicago drove a second wave of African American immigration to Pembroke. As the population grew over the next 50 years, Pembroke Township struggled with its outside reputation as a place of vice, poor soils, and poor people. Discover a different story told by community members.

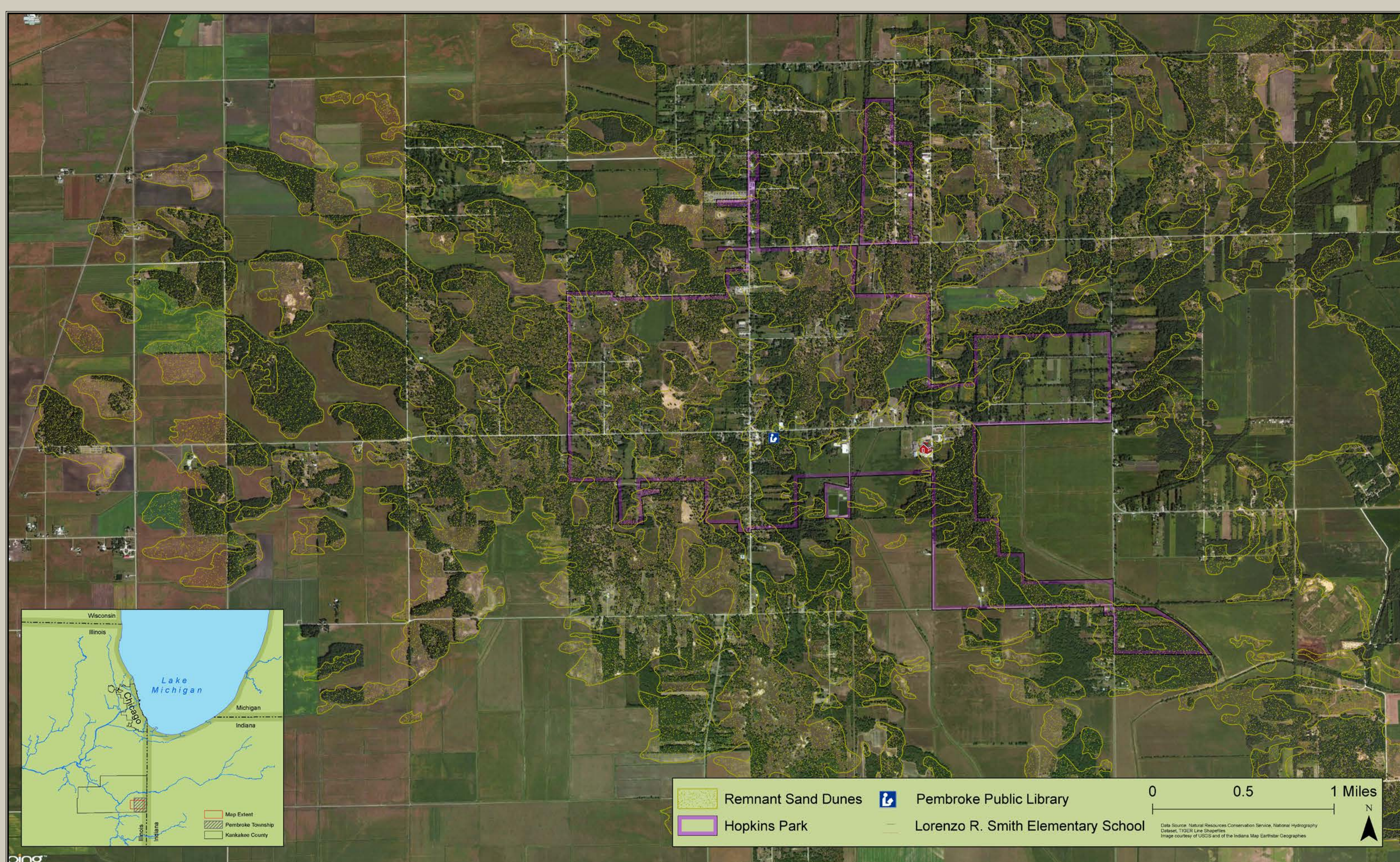




“All plants are medicine.” –Fred Carter

Farming Culture

Soil seen as poor by outsiders is an asset in Pembroke. On small parcels with a mix of soil types farmers produce a wide variety of crops that provide healthy food locally and to regional markets.

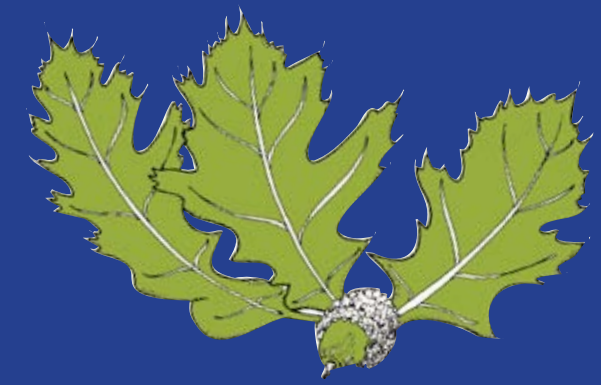


Sandy dunes support livelihoods built around small-scale organic agriculture, animal husbandry, wild food gathering, and hunting in the black oak savannas. Flying over northern Illinois it’s not hard to find Pembroke Township. Amid a sea of conventional corn and soybean farms, a leafy green oasis stands out in Kankakee County.



In Pembroke, health comes from the earth. The largest population of African American farmers in Illinois lives in the community, and they take great pride in raising plants and animals that nurture both body and soul.





“There are no weeds in Pembroke.” –Pam Basu

Healing with Plants

Drawing on knowledge passed down by elders, residents have long used local plants to maintain good health. Herbalists prepare wild materials that are sold to clients, while many people gather plants from the land around them to treat illnesses or imbalances in their daily lives.



“When you develop a relationship with these plants you can see that they have personality, they have life.”

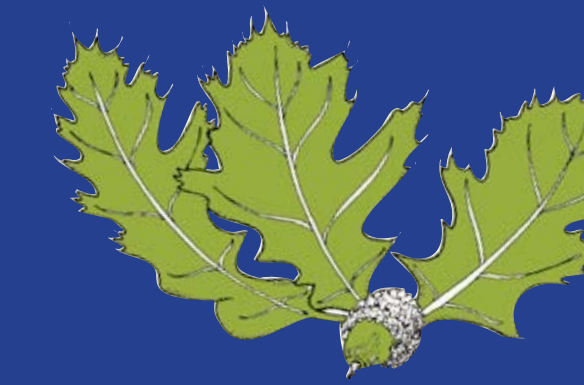
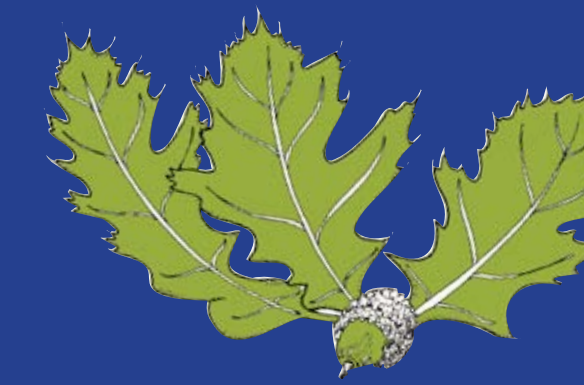
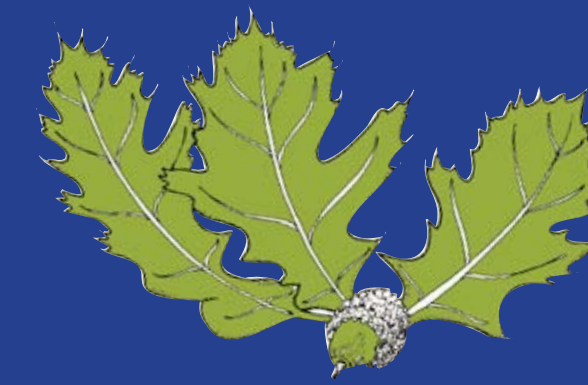
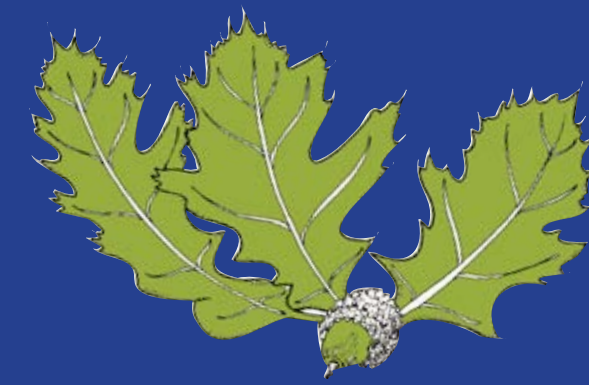
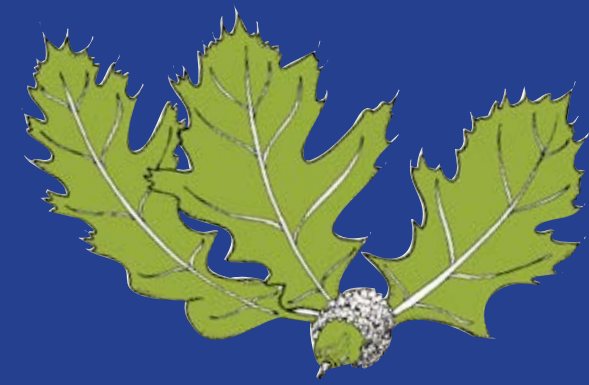
–Marc Haygood



1. Prepared tinctures ready for use at the home of a healer.
2. Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) Used for respiratory problems such as asthma, coughs, and lung disorders.
3. Horsemint (*Monarda punctata*) Used as spice in foods.
4. Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*) Produces a natural soap.
5. Showy Goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) Like mullein this plant is used for respiratory problems.
6. Common Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) Used to control fever and bleeding.
7. Slender Nettle (*Urtica gracilis*) Highly nutritious wild edible.

Herbal remedies made from plants are often sold as oils and tinctures. See examples from Pembroke in the exhibit cases.





Growing Up Pembroke



Pembroke's unique natural environment is drawing national attention. Some people feel that large-scale farming threatens local livelihoods and biodiversity. Others believe that land purchased for conservation limits community development opportunities. Yet others envision a vibrant future for Pembroke in sustainability and eco-tourism.

How do you feel?

Pembroke people are resilient.

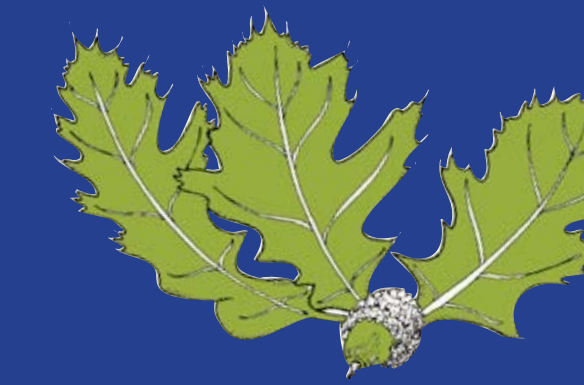
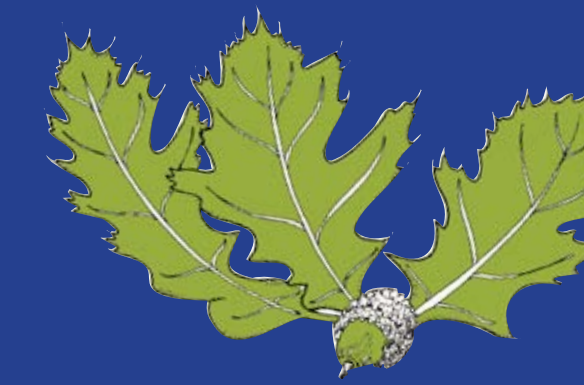
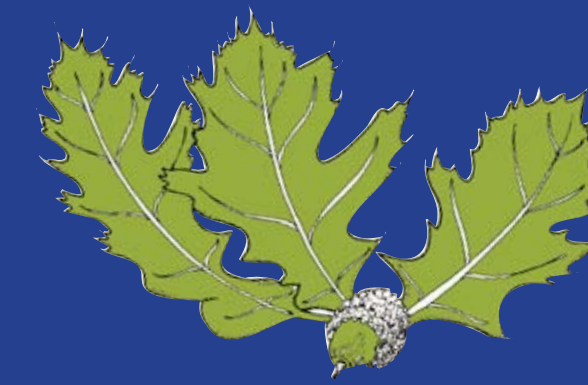
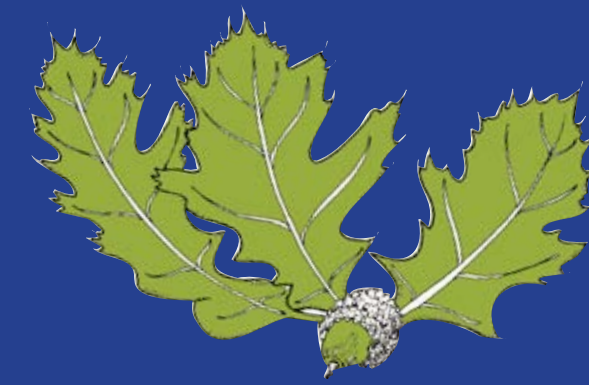
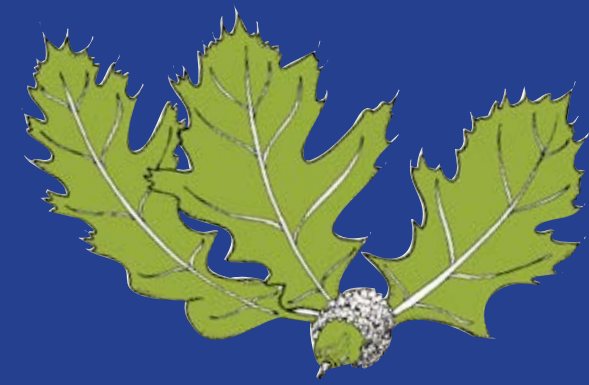
They have deep roots in the local soil. Residents have much to teach the world about how to live as stewards of the land. Drawing on their rich culture and natural environment, community members work to create sustainable livelihoods for future generations.



“The greatest joy is to see my children and grandchildren walk on our land, eating peppers and tomatoes, knowing the names of plants, teaching others how to carry on this way of life.”

–Ida Thurman





Watermelon

We be the watermelons
 Growing on the vine
 Our seeds are so strong
 All we got to do is spit
 And a watermelon patch grows
 Right up through the sand.

We don't even need a lot of
 attention. Just a little moisture
 from the morning dew.
 And we grow green and gigantic
 And once we start to grow
 We spread all over
 We take up space
 We're out of control
 And when we're ripe enough
 Everyone wants to eat us
 Refresh their bodies and souls
 With our sweet juice.

—Abiodun Oyewole
 founding member of
The Last Poets

