

THE CAPE COD-NANTUCKET-MARTHA'S VINEYARD CONNECTION  
A TRADITIONAL LINEAGE FROM SACHEMS OF THE CAPE AND ISLANDS

Russell Herbert Gardner, 1994

*Nantucket Algonquian Study #15*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

While researching the history of the Nantucket Native Americans, it became apparent that the descendents of historic Indians of the Cape and Islands must be all around us. However, with no hard data, I was confined to guesses. Therefore, with great pleasure I present this report written by Mr. Gardner, a descendant of many of the sachems of Cape Cod and the Islands.

Russell Gardner has been Wampanoag Tribal Historian for the past 37 years. He has contributed to or edited some eight town histories, and has published in *Yankee*, *Real West*, *The Mayflower Descendant*, *Dukes County Intelligencer*, and other journals. At present he is serving on the Advisory Committee of the Robbins Museum in Middleboro, and on the Display Committee of the Pilgrim Hall Museum in Plymouth.

He has published two articles in the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, one on his Martha's Vineyard ancestry (Gardner 1993) and another on the history of White's Island, Halifax (Gardner 1994). In the present instance, he hesitated to submit this article for publication, because he didn't feel it met modern standards for genealogical research. In particular, some of his information about Ebenezer Quason Robin clearly comes from what he terms "traditional" history, i.e., oral tradition.

As editor of both the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, and the *Nantucket Algonquian Studies*, I suggested that the Nantucket publication might be an appropriate place to record his knowledge of his ancestry, especially since he believes he is a descendant of Sachem Nickanoose of Nantucket. There are certainly Nantucket deeds that document Nickanoose's family as far as his granddaughter, Deborah, wife of Sam Robin of Harwich (Nantucket County Deeds, vol. 3: 88). In any case, a great beginning has been made in recording his family history, especially with photographs, for the use of future researchers.

Russell H. Gardner

1993 A Rare Aboriginal Artifact from Martha's Vineyard Island, with a Living Family History. *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society* 54:3-10.

1994 A Petroglyph from White's Island, Monponsett Pond, Halifax, MA, and Some Historical and Archaeological Notes on the Site. *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society* 55:38-42.



## THE CAPE COD-NANTUCKET-MARTHA'S VINEYARD CONNECTION

This paper traces a native lineage based on a strong oral family tradition, supported at key points by written documentation such as deeds, court orders, judicial acts, petitions of proprietors and authoritative opinion of physical characteristics derived from family photographs of descendants. (The Robbins Family Bible.) The various spellings herein of family names depend on the individual scribe.

Those who have chosen to pursue our native Indian genealogy are few in number and records are sketchy at best, requiring resort to methods not commonly accepted by genealogists at large to preserve this fascinating aspect of our aboriginal history. From time immemorial we have relied on our oral tradition as the principal method of historical and genealogical transmission. Here we simply return to this time honored form with considerable enhancement from the colonial records.

To those few individuals, mostly non-native in heritage, who have in the recent past contributed to the documentation and preservation of our native Indian genealogical history we owe a great debt of gratitude. This writer has known personally or corresponded with most of them, which vividly illustrates the amount of effort previously expended in this field. It follows, therefore, that those of us

privileged to have inherited these oral traditions and raised to honor and respect them, have thereby a sacred duty to preserve them. These native Indian lineages are primarily historic, and blood percentages of that race found here by Europeans some four centuries ago vary widely in modern descendants. They are, however, authentic descendants.

This sad fact is best illustrated by such writers as Schoolcraft, who in 1851 stated: "out of a total of 847 in the state only 7 or 8 fullbloods remain" (Schoolcraft 1851). The following is from Commissioner John Milton Earle's (1861) "Report on Indians in the Commonwealth." He totaled some 1600, and then commented:

of all these it is safe to assume that there is not one person of unmixed Indian blood. There are a few who claim it, but their claim does not seem to have any satisfactory basis. When it is considered that the intermixture, both with the whites and the blacks, commenced more than two hundred years ago, and that, in the course of ten or twelve generations there has been an opportunity, from intermarriages among themselves, for the foreign blood early introduced to permeate the whole mass, and when it is considered, that the intermixture has been constantly kept up from the outside, down to the present time, it would be a marvel indeed, if any Indians of

the pure native race remained (Earle 1861).

An attempt to control such miscegenation was made by the Massachusetts State Legislature in the year 1786: "An act for the solemnization of marriage," and stated that: "No person authorized by the act to marry, shall join in marriage any white person with any negro, Indian or mulatto, under penalty of 50 pounds and all such marriages shall be absolutely null and void" (Mass. 1786). This prohibition continued until 1843, when it was repealed by a special act relating to marriages between individuals of certain races (Mass. 1843). It will become obvious, therefore, that the marriages dealt with in this paper predated the above act and thus were legal interracial unions.

The one particular pattern which emerges as we trace the interrelationships of native sachems' families of Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard, is that such alliances kept pretty well within their own social and political levels, the children of neighboring sachems tending to marry each other. The Cape Cod sachemships of the period of European contact and settlement dealt with in this paper are: Mattakeesett, now Barnstable and Yarmouth; Nobscusset, now Dennis; and Monomoyick, now Chatham and East Harwich. On Nantucket Island, the sachemship with the closest genetic ties to the Cape was at Squam, on its east end, where Nickanoose was sachem. At Martha's Vineyard, Towanquatuck, sachem of Nunnepog (Edgartown and Oak Bluffs) will be briefly mentioned (see Gardner 1993 for additional

maternal family background at the Vineyard). Figure 1 gives the locations of places named in the text.

At Mattakeesett, Iyanno, the so-called "courteous sachem of Cummaquid, unlike a savage save in his attire," was the earliest known sachem. He welcomed the Pilgrims there in 1621 at the estimated age of 26 years and is said to have died in 1623 (Vuilleumier, 1970: 19,20,21). His successor was Napoyetan, who on June 17, 1641, sold lands at Barnstable as follows:

In consideration besides what the said Napaiton hath already of the said inhabitants of Barnstable, that they shall build the said Napaiton one dwelling house, with a chamber floored with boards, with a chimney and an oven therein, the said Nepaiton hath given and granted unto the said inhabitants of Barnstable all of the rest of his lands lying about Barnstable aforesaid, which were his and his own proper inheritance, excepting and reserving unto the said Napaiton and Twacommacus and their heirs and assign forever, if they shall dwell upon it, all that parcel of playne lands bordering on the sea [*Plymouth Colony General Court*, vol.2] (Freeman 1860 Vol. 2: 160).

Thus, Napoyetan was probably the very first Cape Cod Indian to have an English dwelling house. It is likely, judging from the above document, that he was a son or brother of Iyanno, as these lands were "his own proper inheritance" (Nickerson 1961: 23).

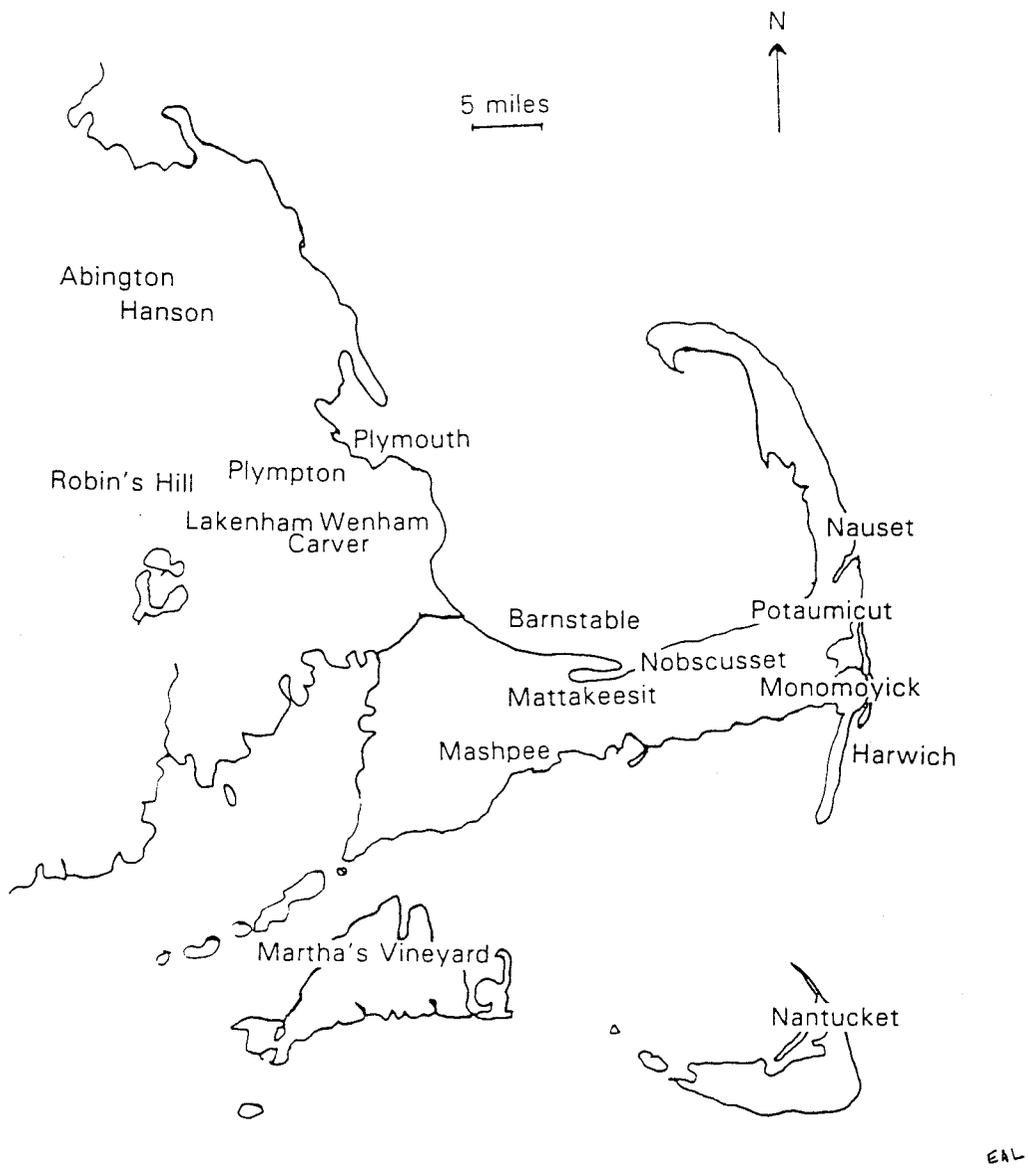


Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in text from Plymouth to the Cape and Islands.

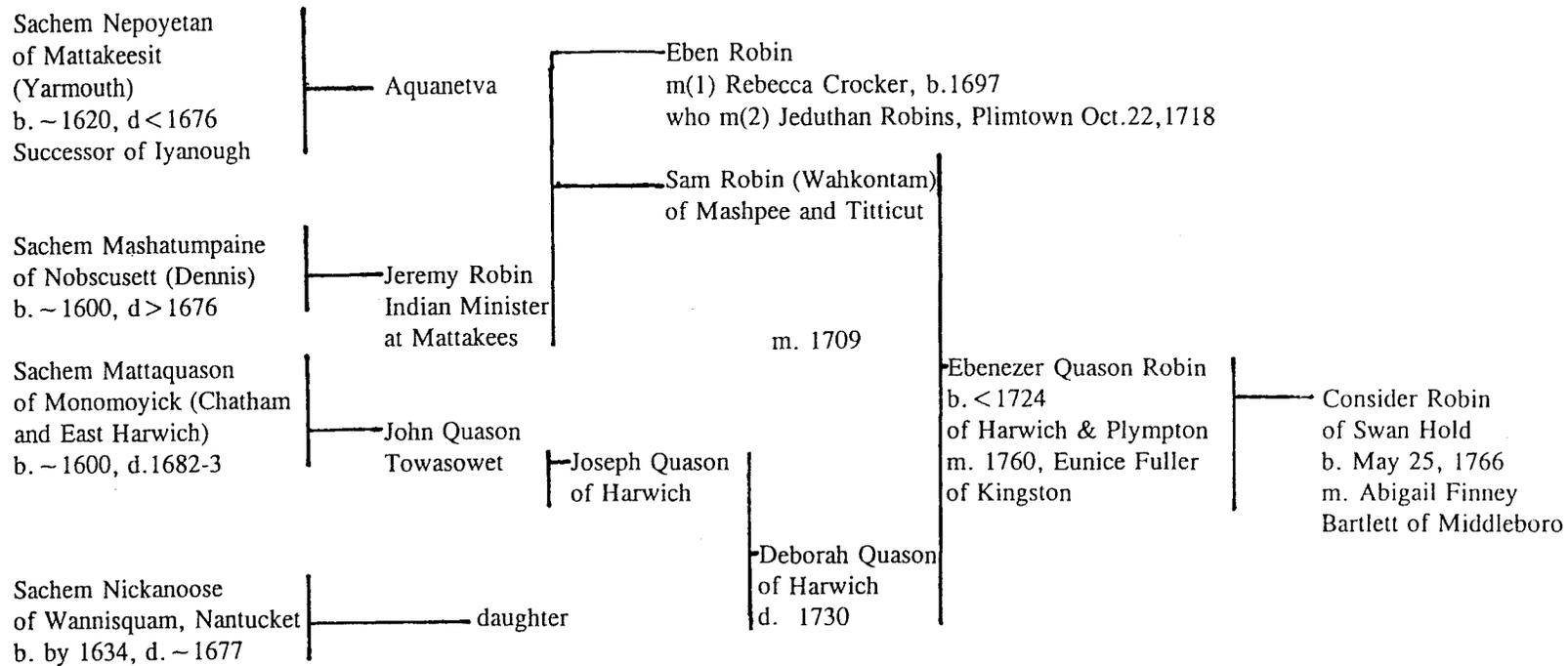
He had three daughters by an unnamed wife. These were, Aquanetva alias Sarah, Manatotomuske and Penassamuske. Each of these married a son of Mashatampaine or Massatumpum, the neighboring sachem of Nobscusset, who by wife unknown, had three sons who married the three daughters of Napoyetan (*Plymouth Colony Judicial Acts 1674-5:195*; for schematic family tree see Figure 2). It is likely that Massatumpum's name survives in the small Tumpum Burying Ground on Meetinghouse Road in Mashpee. His sons were Jeremy Robin Wahwoonetshunke (Travers 1961: 178), who married Aquanetva alias Sarah and removed to Mattakesett where he served as their preacher; Sampson, who married Penasamuske and succeeded his father as sachem of Nobscusset; and Ralph, who married Manatotomuske and remained at his ancestral village (Nickerson 1961:23). Though involving an element of coincidence, and obviously an extreme case, this serves as a prime example of a common practice among sachem's families, especially on Cape Cod and the Islands as the following will illustrate further.

The sachem of Monomoyick was Mattaquason, who sold lands to William Nickerson the first settler there from 1655. He had, by wife unknown, a son and daughter, John Quason Towasowet and Sarah Maskuck. John, by wife also unknown, had a son Joseph Quason of Harwich (Nickerson 1958:63, 67). Meanwhile, at Squam on Nantucket Island, across the sound from the Cape, Nickanoose was sachem. He may have been the model for the Indian figure depicted on the 1629 Bay

Colony Seal (Little 1976:16). Nickanoose married twice and an unnamed daughter of his second marriage married Joseph Quason of Harwich, Cape Cod. Her half brother, Capt. Joshua Jethro, a son of the first marriage of Nickanoose, also married a Quason of Harwich, forging yet another genetic connection between Cape Cod and Nantucket Island and their sachems' families. Joseph Quason and his wife had a son, Joseph Jr. and a daughter, Deborah (Little 1981; Nickerson 1958).

Now, we must tie all these genealogical threads linking Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard (Gardner 1993; Figure 2) sachems' family lines together, a tortuous but well documented record, forming a solid base for our strong and persistent oral family tradition of our native Indian descent from these Cape Cod and Island sachems. Jeremy Robin Wahwoonetshunke, the Indian preacher at Mattakesett, formerly of Nobscusset, and Aquanetva alias Sarah, daughter of Napoyetan, had several children. Among these were two sons, Samuel Robin Wakontam, who married Deborah Quason in 1709 (Nickerson 1958:63), and a possibly younger brother whose name has come down to us traditionally as Eben Robin, and who became the first husband of Rebecca Crocker of Barnstable, born December 10, 1697 (A. Otis 1888, vol 1: 218). She married second, at Barnstable, Jeduthan Robins of Plimtown on October 22, 1718, after the early death of her first husband. Her second marriage is recorded by Col. John Otis, Esq. in a list containing at least six Indian unions, including an Indian Robin, whose descendants removed to the

GENEALOGICAL CHART FOR THE CAPE COD-NANTUCKET-MARTHA'S VINEYARD CONNECTION



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Ebenezer Robbins, son of Consider Robbins & Abigail, b. Carver, 1806-1871, m(2) Jan. 16, 1842, Eliza C. Josselyn (d. of Samuel) of Hanson  
 their son, Ebenezer Webster Robbins (Sr.), Oct. 29, 1847-1912, Abington, m. Laura Annjanette Wade  
 their dau. Mary Eliza Robbins, 1874-1953, m. 1899 George Herbert Gardner  
 their son, Herbert Thomas Gardner 1899-1967, m. Dec. 4, 1924, Marion G. Look\*  
 their son, Russell Herbert Gardner, b. 1925-

\*Sachem Towanquatuck of Martha's Vineyard, d. 1670, his dau. Adomas, her son Wampamog d. 1689, his dau. Ahoma, her dau. Ales Sestom, her dau. Alice Daggett (1675-1711) & Samuel Look Sr., their son Samuel Look (1702-1782), his son Adam Look (1726-1778), his son Joseph Look (1776-1857), his son Isaac W. Look b. 1799, his son Jacob C. Look (1827-1909), his son Herbert E. Look (1857-1901), his dau. Marion G. Look (1898-1969) m. Herbert T. Gardner (Gardner 1993).

Manament Ponds of Plymouth (J. Otis 1934: 151,152). Other Robins Indian marriages appear in the next generation in Harwich, Yarmouth, and Barnstable vital records.

Our family tradition places Sam Robin Wakontam at the Titticut Indian Plantation in Middleboro, MA, at about this time and, sure enough, his name appears on a 1719-20 petition of the proprietors there (*Plymouth Records* 1719-20:216,217), and a hill there, Robin's Hill, still bears his name. He could have been their preacher as he could write his name, not a common ability among Indians of that period. He also signed a proprietor's petition at Mashpee in 1753, after his return to the Cape some years later (Goddard and Bragdon 1988: 176-181). Eben Robin may have preceded Sam'l at Titticut, as an Eben Robin was baptised in nearby Rehoboth on Sept. 5, 1697, according to church records. Sam Robin's Mashpee land is mentioned in a 1788 deed from Shearjashub Bourn, grandson of Richard the missionary, to Nathan Bourn for property located at Nathan's Mill Dam below Mashpee Pond, "bounded westerly by Robbins's Field" (*Plymouth Colony Deeds* 1788:58). This was at a time when only the native Indians and the family of Richard Bourne could own property there (*Plymouth Colony Court Orders* 1685:159). This remained true until Mashpee's incorporation in 1870, when it was opened up to others. The Robbins family was still represented there until the middle of this century, when they sold the last of their family lands and removed to the State of Maine.

Rebecca, daughter of Eleazer Crocker of Barnstable, after her marriage to Jeduthan Robins in 1718, lived at Swan Hold in Plympton, MA, where her husband's family had settled in 1702. This part of Plympton became Carver in 1790 and was locally called Wenham. Jeduthan and Rebecca had several children of their own.

Between 1724 and the death, in 1730, of Deborah (Quason) Robin in Harwich, according to the family oral tradition, Deborah's young son, Ebenezer Quason Robin, came to live with the Robins family in Plympton, MA. Ebenezer may have come to Plympton with the family of Rebecca's brother, Abel Crocker, who moved to Plympton from Barnstable after 1725, returning to Barnstable in 1757 (A. Otis 1888: 218). In Harwich records Ebenezer is simply called Quason, his mother's family name. His father's last name, Robin, does not appear (Nickerison 1958:63). This was not uncommon among the native people. The bible record of Tuspaquin or the Squins, descendants of Massasoit, is an example of this (Squin Family Bible). We can be certain of one fact, in regard to Ebenezer Quason Robin, he was a fullblood of the pure native race of Cape Cod and Nantucket Island and the last such in our paternal line. To trace this further we must revert to the oral family tradition, as it has come down to us through generations of Robbins descendants to the present.

Our oral tradition is quite specific, in the words of elders of my family: "They were all of pure colonial stock - and then there



Figure 3. From bottom L counter clockwise, Ebenezer Robbins, his wife, Eliza C. Josselyn Robbins, their son, Ebenezer Webster Robbins (Sr.), and his wife, Laura Annjanette Wade Robbins circa 1870.

was Rebecca - who took her little nephew Ebenezer, grandson of Robin of Mattakeesett, and raised him as her own." Thus, according to our tradition, did Ebenezer Quason Robin of Cape Cod become a member of the Plympton Robbins Family. One tangible artifact retained by Ebenezer, a talisman representing his aboriginal heritage, was a drilled and scored red-hematite charm-stone, now in the author's possession, having dangled from the watch-chains of four succeeding generations of direct male descendants. Ebenezer married Eunice Fuller of Kingston, Ma. in 1760 and Consider Robbins, the fourth of their seven children was born on May 25, 1766. He married Abigail Finney Bartlett of Middleboro, MA, before 1793 and had eight children. Their son Ebenezer (Figure 3), named for his Indian grandfather, was born in 1806 on the old Robbins grant at Swan Hold in

Carver, MA. Though Jeduthan and probably Rebecca were buried in the old Lakenham Cemetery (Gravestone Record), Ebenezer Quason Robin was buried in the Wenham Cemetery on the old Nemasket Indian Path close by the more pretentious stone of Consider and Abigail. His rough head- and footstones, photographed by the author over thirty years ago (Fig. 4), have since vanished without a trace. They were typical of the gravestones in Praying Indian cemeteries of this region.

Ebenezer Robbins, son of Consider and Abigail, removed to West Abington, MA, and married twice. His first wife and daughter having died, he married second Eliza C. Josselyn, daughter of Samuel of Hanson, MA. The ceremony took place at the old Indian Pero - Wood place in that town, but they resided at Cary Hill on the Abington - North Bridgewater line. Here, Eliza Eudora was born on September 25, 1844, and their first son, Ebenezer Webster Robbins, on Oct. 29, 1847 (Abington Vital Records). His gravestone, placed in 1912 the year of his death, says 1849 (Pleasant Street Cemetery, Rockland, MA). Shortly after this they removed to Hanson, MA, where their second son, Samuel Ophar, was born (Vital Records of Hanson). Old Ebenezer died from cancer of the knee on January 2, 1871 (Vital Records of Hanson). His widow, old Eliza, then moved to a small cabin near Cushing's Corner, Hanson, a couple of miles away. From this generation we have a fine photographic record (Robbins Family Bible) of which Dr. Maurice Robbins commented, in a letter to the author:

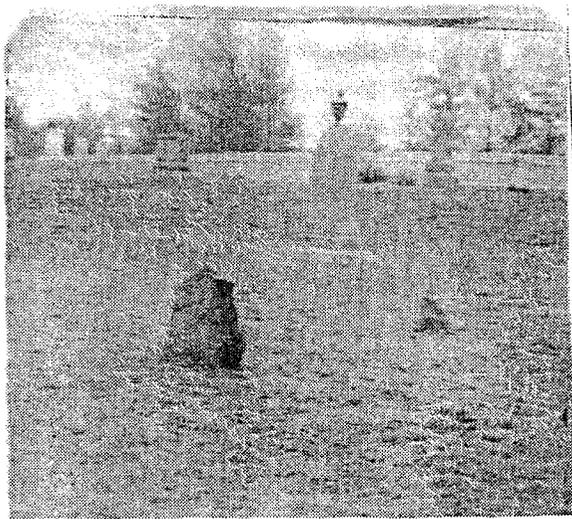


Figure 4. Wenham cemetery with Ebenezer Quason Robin's two gravestones (now gone) in the foreground and, in the background the tall stone of Consider and Abigail Robbins.



Figure 5. Children of Ebenezer and Eliza C.J. Robbins, L to R: Eliza Eudora (Robbins) Euell-Hale, b. 1844; Ebenezer Webster Robbins, Sr., 1847-9 to 1912; Samuel Ophar Robbins.

I am happy to say that the several photographs of your immediate (paternal) ancestors, which you showed me at the meeting of the Old Bridgewater Historical Society, seemed to me to have definite indian physical characteristics. I noted, for example, the high malar arches, exaggerated orbital ridges, nasal development and cranial shapes. This was especially noticeable in two of the males and one elderly female. Of course, it is not possible from photographs to check such important points as dentition and hair forms (Robbins, July 15th, 1959).



Figure 6. Mary Augusta Robbins Murphy, dau. of Samuel Ophar Robbins.

It should be noted also that grades of complexion can also be seen in these same photographs, many of which are tintypes and ambrotypes of the Civil War period. This constitutes a visual form of evidence in addition to the written record and oral tradition of this

family.

Ebenezer Webster Robbins (Sr.) married first, Laura Annjanette Wade of Plympton, MA, and they had four children, Laura A., Ebenezer Webster, Jr., Mary Eliza, and



Figure 7. Children of Ebenezer Webster (Sr.) and Laura Robbins, L to R clockwise: Mary Eliza (Robbins) Gardner 1874-1953. When this photograph was taken she commented, "I like to be an Indian" (RHG 1993). Ebenezer Webster Robbins, Jr., and Ebenezer W. Robbins, Jr., and Laura Robbins as children. Note the pendants each wears.

Nellie May, who choked on a thimble in infancy. Mary Eliza, born in 1874 (Vital Records of Hanson), was the author's paternal grandmother. She always referred to her birthplace as Tunk, the Indian name for the

area indicating a crossing place. When she was ten years of age, her mother died of typhoid fever and her father remarried (Vital Records of Hanson). Mary Eliza, not getting along with her stepmother, declared: "you



Figure 8. Herbert Thomas Gardner 1899-1967, son of Mary Eliza (Robbins) Gardner.

may be my stepmother but you're not going to step on me," and proceeded to move in with her grandmother, old Eliza. Later, after the death of her father Samuel Ophar Robbins, Mary Augusta, Mary Eliza's little cousin, also moved in with old Eliza. This close contact with the older generation was most fortunate for the more direct transmission of our oral family tradition, both genealogically and in traditional knowledge of medicinal herbs and their use, as these might otherwise have been lost to us. The author recalls both his grandmother and her cousin recounting those times in later years. How they went on forays with old Eliza into the fields and woods for queen-of-the-meadow or boneset, sassafras root, oak bark, and goldthread (*copis trifolia*) for canker of the mouth and stomach. This latter was always kept steeping on the back of the stove, for ready use as a mouthwash. Eliza also smoked a clay pipe, the smoke of which blown into the ear relieved earache. Curiously, she wrote all her correspondence in verse. She died in 1897 (Vital Records of Hanson).

Both Mary Eliza and Mary Augusta called their grandfather, Old Ebenezer, a Native Indian. He was one quarter Indian, about the average percentage for his generation. Mary Eliza Robbins married George Herbert Gardner of Whitman, MA, in 1899 and their only son, Herbert Thomas Gardner, was born that same year in November. On December 4th, 1924, he married Marion G.

Figure 9. Russell Herbert Gardner, b. 1925, son of Herbert T. Gardner. Wampanoag Tribal Historian since 1956.

Look of Whitman, MA, a descendant of Martha's Vineyard Island sachems, and their only son, Russell Herbert Gardner, author of this paper, was born on September 10th, 1925.

As aforementioned in this work, percentages of blood descent are not a proper measure in the enlightened approach to anthropology of the present day. Cultural survivals, mental attitudes and the concepts of the place of man in the natural world where all things, animate and inanimate, are viewed as equal, none dominating, none expendable, a world that is sacred and deserving of ultimate respect in its every facet, are more relevant. Thus, our oral tradition, perpetuating these aspects, seems a proper gauge at this point in our history. After all, we are not just descendants of the native Indians, we are what there is, the only living remnant of the Wampanoag. That is undeniable fact. I have listened long and well to the tales of our old ones, documenting them where possible, for it is in families, rather than in communities, that such tradition is best preserved.

Thus, by means of this paper, or speaking leaf as our elders would say, I seek to record our oral tradition before it is irretrievably lost forever. Remember, through our oral tradition we still live. It is the key to our identity in the modern world, yet predates written history.



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