ABRAHAM QUARY.
The last Indian of the Nantucket tribe.

Presented to the Author by Col. C. Hart of New York.

Abraham Quary (Lewis 1835-6), lithograph, courtesy the Nantucket Atheneum.
Cover print: from a color postcard (1 cent postage) printed in Germany, The Metropolitan News Co., Boston and Germany, No. 2095. After the oil portrait by H. B. Dassel at the Nantucket Atheneum.

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Abram Quary, said to have been the last Nantucket Indian (see frontispiece), died November 25, 1854, leaving fertile grounds for legends and myths to spring up in memory of his existence. Some time ago, the Nantucket Historical Association inventoried prehistoric and historic sites at Nantucket (Little 1979, 1981), including the approximate site of Abram Quary's house (Figure 1). As a result of the considerable present interest in Abram Quary, I here present a detailed study that includes numerous vignettes obtained through a review of the historical records at the Nantucket Research Center and by interviews of a number of locally knowledgeable people. For general background on the historic Indians at Nantucket, see The History of the Town of Miacomet (Little 1988a). Here is a summary of the history of Abram Quary of Abram's Point as I see it at this time.

Figure 1. Portion of Walling's 1858 Map of Nantucket. Note Abram Quary's approximate house site on what was then called "Shema Point" (courtesy Nantucket Historical Association).

ABRAM QUARY

Abraham or Abram Api Quary or Quady, was said to have been the son of Judith Quary, a well-known fortune teller, and Quibby, a murderer (Douglas-Lithgow 1914:55). But I think we can reject these data. Abram Quary in becoming a legend has attracted many myths, and this information about his father and mother comes to us from the 1834 novel, Miriam Coffin: The Daughter of a Whale Fisherman, by Joseph Hart. Only a month after Quary's death in 1854, Benjamin Franklin Folger recorded that Sarah Apie Quary, Abram's mother, was the daughter of Joseph Quary, a principal man
and a leader among his people, whose wigwam was on the west side of Sesachacha Pond (B. F. Folger 1854). Scuhtquade (the title of a minor official in Dutch [P. Bakker 1989, personal communication]) was a Nantucket Indian whaleman about 1708 (Little 1992). He was probably Joseph's father, for he deeded him land in 1713 and 1742 (Nantucket County Deeds 3:81, 5:26). There exist both a deed and an inventory for Joseph Quary (aka Joseph Quady or Scoutquary), a fisherman and whaleman who lived in a framed dwelling house (boards, nails, lime) near Sesachacha Pond in 1762 (Nantucket County Deed 6:471,472; Will 3:23,45,46; Little 1980:30,60; 1981a:10). Joseph and "Jo Quadys wife" died in the Indian sickness of 1763/4, and an Abigail Quary died in 1806 (Douglas-Lithgow 1914; Little 1988b). Benjamin Franklin Folger (1854) also reported that Sarah Quary was noted for strength of character and endurance; among her skills was that of basketmaking.

Figure 2. Lithograph of portrait of Abram Quary circa 1850 (Starbuck 1924), showing the town across the harbor and the interior of his house, with baskets. The portrait, in oils on canvas by Herminia B. Dassel, is exhibited at the Nantucket Atheneum.
A significant number of portraits of Abram Quary exist, reflecting his major role in Nantucket history and legend as the last Nantucket Indian. There is an early portrait, a tinted lithograph (frontispiece), showing him between about 1800 - 1835, with a medallion around his neck (Lewis 1835-36). A portrait in oils on canvas by Herminia Borchert Dassel showing him in his house at Abram’s Point in 1851 is on display at the Nantucket Atheneum. Lithographs of this portrait exist in Starbuck (1924) (Figure 2) and Douglas-Lithgow (1914).

Figure 3. Portrait (oil on canvas) of Abram Quary by Herminia B. Dassel – 1849-1854 (from the collection of the Nantucket Historical Association, used with permission).

There is an especially fine oil portrait showing his head and shoulders by Herminia Borchert Dassel, at the Folger Museum (NHA) Nantucket (Figure 3). And, finally, a daguerrotype that proves interesting to compare with artists’ renderings of his face can be found at the Nantucket Historical Association’s Research Center (Figure 4).
Lewis (1835-36) states that Abram Quary was born near Miacomet Pond about 1769. According to his obituary, he died November 25, 1854, aged 82 years, 10 months and, thus, was born in 1772 (Starbuck 1924:120; Nantucket Inquirer and Mirror, 27 Nov. 1854, reprinted in the Inquirer and Mirror, June 10, 1911, Gardner Scrapbook #20). This, as we shall see, is a minor lack of consistency.

Legend today claims he was the last male Nantucket Indian. This is not entirely clear to me and seems to fall into the category of legend. He was said to have been a "half-breed" (Douglas-Lithgow 1914). Henry D. Thoreau wrote in his journal for December 28, 1854, that he had "visited the Atheneum. The Last Indian, not of pure blood, died this very month, and I saw his picture with a basket of huckleberries in his hand" (Thoreau 1962 VII:96; see Fig. 2). In Catherine Carlson's study (1990) on fish remains at the Quidnet, Nantucket, site, she points out that the legend that the bluefish, which had disappeared about 1764, would return upon the death of the last Nantucket Indian, requires that Abram Quary be only partly Indian. This is because strong evidence exists that bluefish returned to the Gulf of

Figure 4. Photograph of Daguerrotype of Abram Quary, circa 1850 (collection of the Nantucket Historical Association, used with permission).
Maine and probably to Nantucket between 1810 and 1834. Abigail Jethro, the last full-blooded Nantucket Indian (Godfrey 1882), who died in 1822, may have been the person to which the legend originally referred (Carlson 1990). There are certainly people who claim descent from Nantucket Indians living in southeastern Massachusetts today. I've met some.

There are a number of vignettes either recorded at the time or passed down by oral tradition concerning Abram Quary. He was early "placed in the family of Stephen Chase, where he continued many years" (B. F. Folger 1854). Richard Swain (1911) wrote a letter from Shanghai, in which he stated:

[Abram Quady] lived in Shimmo, on land belonging to my grandfather, Hezekiah Swain. His house was small, comprising two rooms, and in one there was an old-fashioned fireplace with its crane, hanging hooks, kettles, fire-irons, etc. These were a constant source of curiosity and interest to us, as children. I can remember well his skill in using them while doing his cooking. His baking was done in a pan hung over a pile of wood ashes. I seem to see him now, sitting in a straight-backed chair, with his legs crossed, holding a long-stemmed pipe in his left hand, watching the fire, and at times lifting the cover of the pan to see how his bread was doing.

Near his house was a garden spot, fenced in, where he raised several kinds of vegetables. On going into his house we would notice little bunches of seed corn, of sage, and other herbs, which he was fond of gathering, for he knew the use of them all. We used often to see him walking about the fields, or working in his garden. His farming tools--hoses, rakes and such--were kept in good order. I remember that my grandfather used to plough the field for Quady's garden in the spring, and probably he helped him with seeding.

After grandfather's death, in 1849, the land at Shimmo was used by his children, principally by my father, Aaron Swain. Quady carried on some farming there, and many a day we children worked hard with him, pulling weeds, hoeing corn, or gathering the crops. During these days we would see much of the old Indian.... (Swain 1911)

Mr. Albert Lewis (interviewed at Our Island Home, 8/12/92) recalls a family story about Abram Quary. Mr. Lewis's great grandfather worked on Mooney's farm, just to the southwest of Abram's Point, and the story goes that, when the Lewis children were sick, Abram used to give advice and offered healing dried herbs.

Abram Quary used to provide clam bakes for the public. In his newspaper article written in December of 1854, Benjamin Franklin Folger (1854) recalled that Quary, by raising a flag in the morning to indicate his clambake preparations to the town across the harbor, would serve the cooked clams on
outdoor tables to Nantucketers who rode or drove horse carts out from town in the afternoon. He was noted for his snowy white tablecloths (Swain 1911). K. Neustadt (1992) has found that Indians living at Shimmo and providing quahog clambakes can be documented as far back as June of 1775, when Mrs. Mary Holyoke wrote in her diary of a Nantucket trip "in a calash to a part of the Island called Shimmer where a number of Indians live. We carried our provisions with us. They treated us to with roasted Paqwaws (a sort of clam)" (Holyoke 1911:89). In 1643 Roger Williams called quahogs, "poquauhocks", and they were long called poquaws at Nantucket (Williams 1973; Neustadt 1992:43-44).

There is also the story told by George Franklin Folger (1910) of Quary's defense (armed with a gun) of an Indian graveyard near his house, which was being disturbed by relic hunters. He was arrested, but released by an understanding magistrate with a mild reprimand.

A Mrs. Sturgess (93 years old in 1928) of Mashpee recalled "having visited Quary at Nantucket with her [brother] Solomon Attaquin.... Quary was very Indian in appearance, wore long hair, and could speak Indian" (Speck 1928:113). According to Lewis (1835-36), Abram Quary had a 'girl-friend' in Sandwich on the Cape, whose daughter's maiden name was Thompson, and whose grand-daughter was Josephine (Cesar) Webquish (Russell Gardner, 1993 personal communication).

Quary was persuaded to go to the Nantucket alms house a year or so before he died in 1854, according to Grace Brown Gardner in a March 26, 1949 clipping (Inquirer and Mirror, Gardner Scrapbook #20).

According to J. Clinton Andrews (1980, personal communication) and Charles Sayle (1992, personal communication), Sidney Fisher bought Abram Quary's house in 1873 and moved it to second bend, Coatue. In 1933, Sayle purchased it, but it was destroyed by vandalism in 1956 (see Little 1980). However, in a May 17, 1857 Inquirer & Mirror clipping (Gardner Scrapbook #20), we learn that Quary's house burned down "entirely consumed" in 1857, about three years after his death. I am not trying to destroy legends here, but some serious historical research is needed to sort out the facts about Quary.

In summary, pieces of information about Abram Quary are extraordinarily garbled and inconsistent. Although I tend to believe a source such as B. F. Folger, who was alive during Abram
Quary's lifetime, even that can be dangerous. One lady wrote to the newspaper (June 10, 1911, Inquirer and Mirror, Gardner scrapbook #20) that she had had a meal with Abram Quary in 1857, and so she was convinced that he couldn't have died in 1854. The editor replied by reprinting the brief 1854 obituary (date of death and age).
Everyone agrees that Abram Quary was the Abram who is said to have lived at Abram's Point. However, there has been a great deal of confusion about the place names in this area, especially that of Shimmo. Many modern and ancient maps or memoirs show Abram's Point as Shimmo Point (USGS map of Nantucket Sound 1966; Walling's map of 1858, Fig. 1; Douglas-Lithgow 1914:55). The Nantucket Proprietor's Records (19th century) record Abram Quary's house at Shimmo or Pimney's Point (2:33; 1:98). Grace Brown Gardner (Scrapbook #20, Inquirer and Mirror March 26, 1949) even reported that Quary's house site was at Monomoy (Figure 6). However, J. Clinton Andrews (1980, personal communication) is of the opinion that Abram lived at Abram's Point at the east side of Shimmo creek (Fig. 1; Fig. 7; Charles Sayle 1992, personal communication). The name, Shimmo, which originally was the name of a spring (Little 1981b) at the head of Shimmo creek, is the word which has wandered around quite substantially (Figure 7).

The early Indian place name, Aquidness Neck, Aquitnet Point, and Aquidnose, translated as meaning "at the point or pensinsula", also introduce uncertainty. Located at Abram's Point by Douglas-
Lithgow (1914), Ewer (Fig. 7) shows Pimney’s Point as Aquitnose. This excerpt from the 1687 deed from Spotso explains the difficulties with either interpretation:

1687. Spotso to Stephen Hussey, "a certain parcel or tract and neck of land called by ane Indian name Aquidnese and is bounded by a hill all along from the head of the westernmost branch of the creek that goeth in at or towards Shemo over to the shore, which faceth the harbour & so down to lowwater mark, which sd hill fronting the harbour cometh [a hill] to the southward of a valley called by the Indians Cocyeama, having upon the Ridge of the sd hill several holes dug from the head of the sd creek to the water side over the neck against the harbour....18 acres.... (Nantucket County Deeds 3:91).

Since Spotso originally owned the land to the west of the Spring called Shimmo (Little 1981b), I would tentatively agree with Ewer (1869) that Aquidnose was Pimney’s Point.

In summary, probably Quary’s house was near the north end of Abram’s Point, but there are a number of conflicting statements that require historiographical methods to resolve.
In a study of historic Indian houses on Nantucket, I found no deeds to or from Abram Quary, and, indeed, few references in town records to houses in Monomoy, Shimmo, Shawkemo, Abram's Point or Quaise (Figs. 6, 7; Little 1981). Shawkemo and Shimmo were early purchases (1674) from the sachems or rulers of the island by the individuals, John and Richard Gardner, Stephen Hussey, Thomas Macy and Edward Starbuck & Co. (Little 1981b). After this practice was declared illegal by the Proprietors, these deeds in 1678 were returned to the Proprietors. No deeds to Indian occupants of these lands have been found. On the other hand, Obed Macy (1842) recalled that the "principal places where the Indians resided were Squam, Polpis, Shawkemo, Shimmo, Nobadeer, Miacomet and Maddeket" ([Macy's spelling] (Figure 8). Possibly there was a method of proprietary land assignment for the Nantucket common lands such as Shimmo and Shawkemo, whereby the Proprietors could assign certain land uses to individuals, Indian and English. A flexible system of use of the commons such as this also appears to have obtained for the land just outside the town gate that developed into the Indian, Indian/black, and black community of New Guinea (Little 1988b). Note that this method of land assignment, like the traditional usufruct of the sachems, requires no deeds.

Figure 8. Locations of the "principal places where the Indians resided", as named by Obed Macy (1842) and Folger (1854): 1) Squam; 2) Polpis; 3) Shawkemo; 4) Shimmo; 5) Nobadeer; 6) Miacomet; 7) Madaket; 8) Sesachacha (modern spellings). Stars indicate possible approximate burial locations (Douglas-Lithgow 1914).
Historians have also speculated as to the locations of Indian burial grounds. Douglas-Lithgow (1914) suggested that it was "probable...that the Indians buried their dead in the neighborhood of Shawkemo, Pocomo, Folger’s Hill on the Polpis Road, at Quaise, beyond the present water-works, and at or near Miacomet" (Douglas-Lithgow 1914:55-56). In Figure 8, stars indicate these very approximate general locations (in 1914 the waterworks was at Quaise [J. C. Andrews 1992, personal communication]). This information seems to have existed on Nantucket only as oral tradition. The Reverend F. C. Ewer, for example, in 1869 showed only two Indian cemeteries, one at Miacomet village and one ("Indian Graveyard & Village"), in the general region of Abram’s Point ([6] and [3] in Figure 7).

Christian Indian cemeteries in both regions have recently been found and preserved from any further disturbances through conservation archaeology. In the 1978 survey by the NHA (Little 1979), no documentary evidence for the locations of Indian cemeteries other than that at Miacomet was found. Thus, it was with some surprise that I learned in August, 1992, that workmen had reported Christian burials at a construction site at Shawkemo. In accordance with the 1983 Massachusetts Unmarked Burial Laws, the state archaeologist, Brona Simon, had been notified, along with the State Police, John Peters of the Massachusetts Commission on Indian Affairs, and the Nantucket Medical Examiner, Timothy Lepore, M.D. An archaeological study was immediately carried out by Brona Simon, Lenard Loparto, Edward Bell and Constance Crosby of the Massachusetts Historical Commission. At the site I observed profiles of two coffins in the sidewalls of the foundation pit, as indicated by the soil variations. Another grave contained a clay pipe and iron objects as grave goods. There was also a trash pit in the sidewall containing bricks, glass (window and bottle), whole whelk shells and quahog shells (Fig. 9). Cow and

Figure 9. Material from trash pit at Shawkemo, Aug. 13, 1992: whelk, quahog shells, animal bone and brick.
pig bone was present. From these data, which include Christian as well as Indian burial attributes, we infer that the area represented an historic Christian Indian domestic site and burial ground spanning the 17th and 18th centuries. Further destruction of the cemetery was halted with a conservation restriction.

It is pure speculation, as is far too much of the history of Abram Quary, but perhaps this was the cemetery defended by Abram Quary some 150 years ago, and maybe, even the remains of some quahog shells from one of his clam bakes. If these discoveries awaken our interest in discovering the truth about Abram Quary, they will have made a contribution to the island's heritage. Abram Quary, who was respected by those who knew him and played an important role in the history of Nantucket Island, deserves better than a fictional and inaccurate history.

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