

HISTORIC INDIANS OF THE NORTH SHORE OF NANTUCKET

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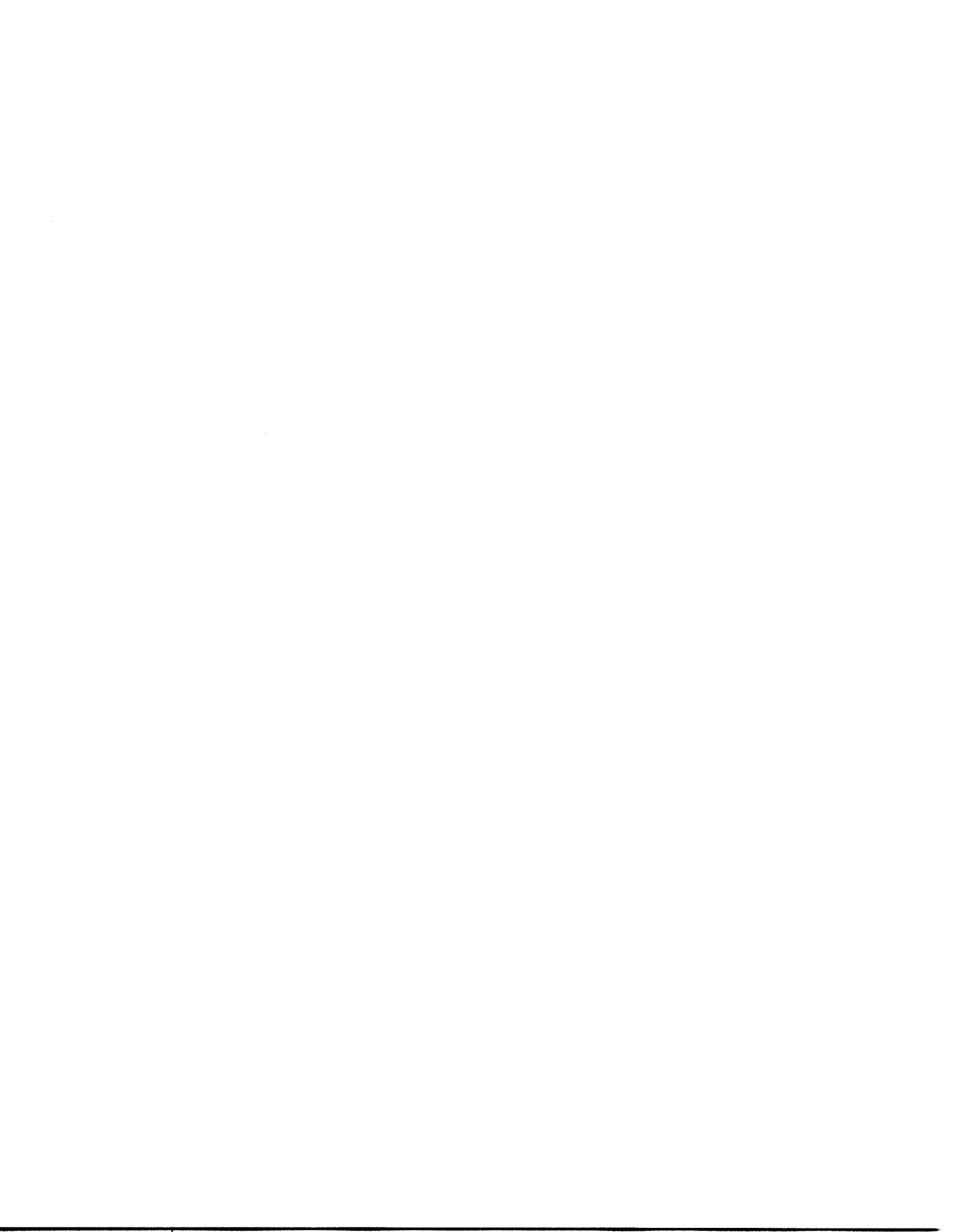
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The Nantucket Historical Association and Historic Districts Commission are cooperating in an intensive survey of the historical resources of the island. A portion of this survey being undertaken in 1989 concerns the area known as "The North Shore". The focus of this essay is that part of the island between Monomoy meadow (Consue Spring, the Creeks), the Head of Hummock Pond (Waquittaquag), Capaum Pond (Cuppamet Harbor) and Brant Point, which forms a natural historical unit (Figure 1), perhaps slightly larger than what we now call "The North Shore".

Three kinds of sources of information about the historic Indians of this area exist. One is Nantucket County Indian Deeds of 1659-1684, one is Zaccheus Macy's account of the Indians written in 1763, and one is a wonderful legend recorded in 1827. I shall discuss the data as we know it from these three sources.

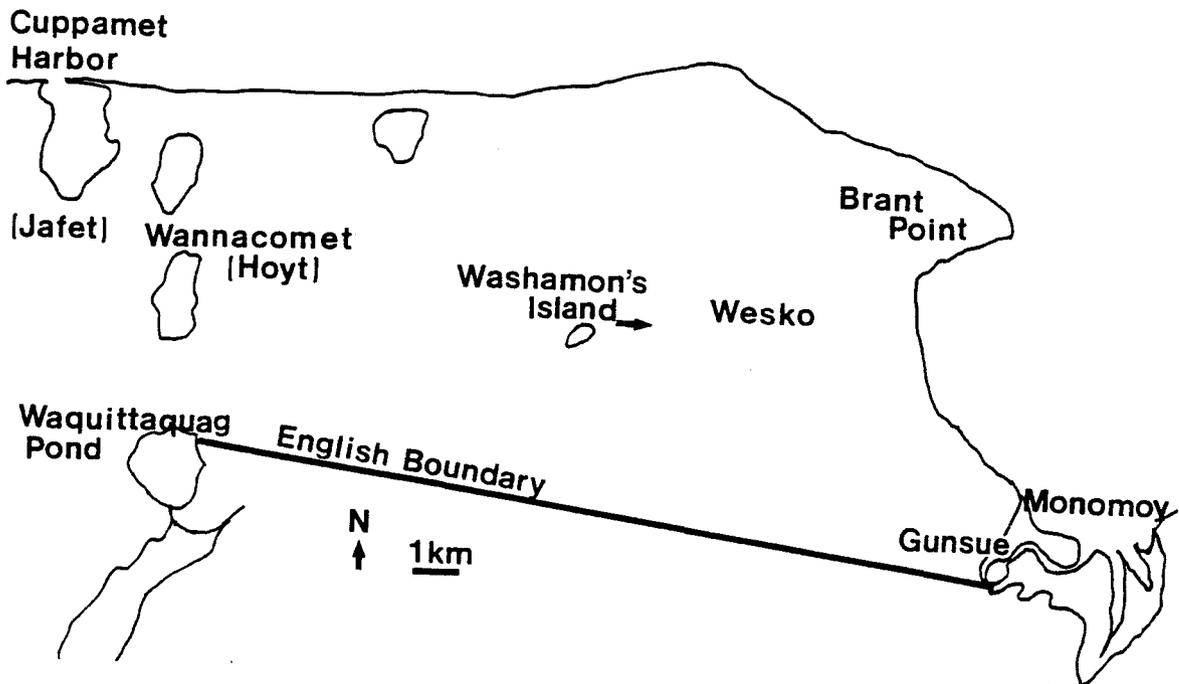


Figure 1. The North Shore of Nantucket, with its Indian place names (Little 1984).



INDIAN DEEDS 1659-1684 (Little 1981b:42)

In 1660, Wanachmamak and Nickanoose, head sachems of Nantucket, deeded the West End of the Island to the English (NCD 1:3; 2:7). This included the land north of a line between the Head of Hummock (Wauquittaquage) Pond and Monomoy, Mr. Macy's meadow or Gunsue Spring (NCD 3:73). A number of individual Indians later sold their rights to parts of this land. Tequamomemy and Mekowakin, with the advice of Francis, the Nauset sachem, in 1664 sold the broken up land around Wesco (NCD 1:5), on the harbor near the center of the present town. Tequamomemy (Tequanonim) was a pawwaw (shaman or medicine man) of great esteem from Martha's Vineyard, who said "he had been possessed from the crown of the head to the soal of the foot with Pawwawnomas, not only in the shape of living creatures, as Fowls, Fishes and creeping things, but Brasse, Iron, and Stone" (Mayhew [1651] 1834:186). His presence along with the Nauset Sachem, suggests that Wesco may have once been an important Indian township, perhaps decimated by sicknesses in 1664.

ZACCHEUS MACY'S ACCOUNT IN 1763 (Sussek 1981:5,6)

Macy's "Account of the names of the old Sachams & som of the most resptabel Indians & there habitations taken from the best authors that Could be had ye 15 ye 3mo 1763, at that time there was living here about 370 of the neativs on the Island of Nantucket" (Sussek 1981:5,6), is a transcription of a manuscript held by the Research Center, Nantucket Historical Association. In it Macy reports:

the fourth Sacham of the northwest part was Called Potconet & owned all the litel Island Called Tuckanuck which Signifies in English a louf of brad & his bound Exstended from Madacit down Eastward to weskos [see Fig. 1] which in English is at the white stone & so on the North Side of Autapeots land all bought of him at the Coming of the English Saveing som particular tracts that belonged to the Jafets and the hoights & Som others".

Henry Barnard Worth, citing Dr. F. C. Ewer and a thorough deed study, disagreed and stated that Potcomet, or Pottacohannet, exercised control only over the western islands (Worth 1902:116). Attapeat's land would have been south of the line between the Head of Hummock Pond and Monomoy meadow. Zaccheus Macy went on to say:

...next westward (of Wesco) is a place called Watacumet, which Signifies a pond field, which formerly was owned by the old Neatives called the Hoites. Then next westward is the great pond called Cuppame [see Fig. 1], where old Trustram Coffin lived, the old granfather to almost all of us, which was owned by the old familys of the Natives called



the Jafets... (Sussek 1981:10).

Returning to the Deeds (Little 1981b:42), in 1684 Wannaquin (a.k.a. John Hoyt, which is a Dutch name) sold to the English lands and meadow, probably those referred to as Watacumet by Zaccheus Macy and called Wannacomet (see Fig. 1) in deeds (Little 1984). Hoyt was an owner of one of the drift whaling rights to the beach from Hummock Pond to Smith Point in 1673 (Little 1982:33). The Hoites in the 18th century lived in the Miacomet area, where Zacara Hoite was a minister, who "told his herears they must do as he Said but not do as he did" (Macy 1763 in Sussek 1981:6).

Jafets, Obadiah Japhets, or Obadiah, was in 1677 a prominent Indian drift whaleman (Little 1982:34). He disputed with Attapeat over land division (Worth 1902:117-119), and, between 1723 and 1736 he (or his son) was an along-shore whaleman (Little 1981c:67). Jafets had a framed dwelling and garden in the Polpis area in the 18th century (Little 1981a:10).

Another important Indian, Washamon, was also master of a beach share of the Indian drift whaling project on the west end in the late 17th century (Little 1982:33). When he was not at Nantucket, an Indian named Desire was master of the share. Washamon's son, Jacob Washamon, a weaver, was married to Betty Wanataquanmow, squaw sachem of half of Martha's Vineyard (NCD 2:52), and spent part of the year on that island. Jacob lived between 1674 and 1676 in a framed house on ten acres which he had bought from John Savage and sold to Samuel Bickford (NCD 1:63; 2:11; Little 1981a:11). John Savage, incidentally, was the cooper offered a half-share to join James Loper in 1672 in an along-shore whaling industry at Nantucket. Loper never came to the island, and Savage had by 1677 returned to Chatham, Cape Cod (Starbuck 1924:32,33; Eteson et al. 1978:32). There is a place called Washamon's Island just east of No Bottom Pond and at the edge of the swamp which was near the town house in 1754 (NPR 1:103; NPP 1:65; NCR Miscellaneous:201; Figure 2).

Jacob Washamon lived in a framed house at Squam between 1679 and 1690, sold to William Bunker in 1690 (NCD 1:53,55; 2:56; Little 1981:11).

THE LEGEND OF MUDTURTLE

In the New England Galaxy 10 (486) Feb. 2, 1827, appeared an article entitled, "The Tradition of the Taumkhods", by Samuel Jenks of Nantucket, purporting to tell the legend of the Khauds and Taumkhods, the eastern and western Indians on the island. There was a soothsayer, called by an Indian name which signified Mudturtle. "He dealt in rat-skins, smoked snakes, poke-weed, and future events." His feet, legs, hands, arms, ears and eyes, although coupled, were not mates. His dark copper visage, speckled with green spots, seemed in a state of "oxydation", and he had a tail. This frightening person,



for he was malicious as well as ugly, dwelt in the Taumkhod lands "under a high cliff overhanging the sea, some twenty furlongs northwest from Brant Point - where he scooped a large cave, the foundations of which, consisting of several huge rocks, may now be seen, partly sunk in the tide upon the beach below...." In brief, he kidnapped by canoe the daughter of the sachem of the Khauds at Squam, but she jumped overboard and escaped. When they couldn't find Mudturtle in order to punish him, the Khauds and Taumkhods had a fierce battle. They subsequently discovered the drowned body of Mudturtle washed up at Brant Point and buried it. Three times it was cast up again, and finally stayed buried only after its tail was cut off and it was placed face down with a conch shell in each hand. The King of the Khauds afterwards wore the tail as a trophy, and a charm against the nightmare.

This tale has lots of color and some interesting details, one of which is that a legendary paw-waw, lived at the north shore near Brant Point. But perhaps it is only coincidence that Tequamomemy, a paw-waw of Martha's Vineyard participated in selling land near Wesco.

SUMMARY

Deeds, accounts and legends give us meager evidence of what must have been a rich history of occupation of the North Shore of Nantucket on the evidence of prehistoric archaeological finds in that area. However, an argument can be made that by 1659 the Indians of the west end had vanished, perhaps from sicknesses, and that the land was available both to Indian whalers from Martha's Vineyard and to English settlers (Little 1988). Jacob Washamon, the Hoyts with a Dutch name, and Obadiah Japhets with a Biblical name, all whalers, probably from the Vineyard or Tuckanuck, would not then have been ancient tenants of the North Shore. All moved or were moved to the east end of the island after the sale of the West End to the English by sachem Wanachmamack of the East End.

Legendary accounts of the sorcerer, Mudturtle, and of battles between the Indians of the east and west of Nantucket might possibly be reflections of actual 17th century Indian events on the North Shore of Nantucket (Little 1983).





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