

Sachem Nickanoose of Nantucket and the Grass Contest.

By Elizabeth A. Little.

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Part 1. The Sachem

THE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION of a land use controversy between approximately 100 English and 1500 Indians on Nantucket stands in remarkable contrast to King Phillip's War on the mainland, where a brutal conflict set back English colonization for many years and virtually eliminated the Indian civilization of New England. The proud and powerful Sachem Nickanoose was a worthy counterpart for the aristocratic Tristram Coffin, leader of the English settlers. With the mediating leadership of two Nantucket half shares men, John Gardner and Peter Folger, a racial and cultural accommodation was reached without violence. The source of the controversy was an agricultural revolution, brought about by the introduction of domestic grass-eating animals into a hunting, fishing, gathering and planting culture. The resolution was accomplished without separation of the races and without the subjugation of the Indians. At the time of Nickanoose's death, the Indians retained ownership of most of the land, and the English had gained ownership and strict control over all of the grass. In addition, the Indians had won the right to join the English land use system; for example, Nantucket Indians could own and pasture horses on the commons, a right that Indians of the Massachusetts Bay never obtained.

The issues of Phillip's War, 1675-1677, are inadequately explained by saying the Indians couldn't learn the meaning of property deeds. See Vaughan (11). Complex and fundamental land use differences separated the Indians and English of early New England. Many of these issues are surprisingly relevant to our own future. Nantucket, because it was self-contained and has good early records, provides a unique opportunity to understand the conflict between the two cultures. Let us then explore the participants and events of what we shall call the "grass contest" on Nantucket.

Any history of this area must notice first a remarkable man, Thomas Mayhew, Jr., whose missionary efforts, starting in 1643, helped make good will and brotherhood concrete ideals for both races on the islands. To Peter Folger also is due great credit. He says in 1676:

"I have bin Interpreter here from the Beginning of the Plantation, when no Englishman but myselfe could speake scarce a Word of Indian...And I have ever since bin able by the Helpe of some Antient Men, to keep Peace upon the Island..." (Starbuck 10, p.55)

Who were the Indian counterparts of these Englishmen? In 1659, there were four main sachems of Nantucket: Wanackmamack, whose heir was Jephtha; Nickanoose, whose heir was Wawinet; Attapehat, whose heir was Musaquat; and Spotso, who married Nickanoose's daughter. In order to simplify the story and to obtain an Indian viewpoint, we shall focus on Nickanoose, who, as the least cooperative sachem, dominated recorded Nantucket history for 25 years. In Part 1 we introduce Nickanoose and in Part 2 we shall give details of his role in the grass contest.

Appearance

By all reports (8) Indians of the islands south of Cape Cod, also known as Indians of the South Seas (6), were good looking and taller than the average Englishman. See Figure 1 for an English view of one such Indian about 1629.

Domain

Nickanoose himself emerges from dusty records as a sachem of considerable power, autocratic and yet willing to learn. He shared with Wanackmamack rule of the whole island before the English came, possibly, as tradition has it, having won the land at the western end by a victorious battle with a hostile tribe. His homelands included today's Quidnet, Sacacha, Polpis, and Squam, and he called himself "Sachem of Nantucket", or "Sachem at Wannasquam" (Mass. Archives (3) 32, 385). Figure 2 shows the Indian sachemships and the lands sold to the English by 1684. The deeds will be listed in detail in Part 2.

Nickanoose sold the English their first piece of land on Nantucket, but in his lifetime (he died about 1684), I don't believe that he sold to the English any of his useful tribal lands, with the almost trivial exception of one acre for a fishing stage at Sacacha to Richard Gardner. The West End, as will be shown, was not indisputably under his rule, and Coatue, Quaise, and Pocomo appear to have been unused by Indians in 1660, a strange situation which may have resulted from intertribal wars. Nickanoose's sons, Watt Noose and Wawinet, did sell Polpis land to Swain and Cartwright, but this was neither legal by English rules nor authorized by Nickanoose. The most important conclusion to draw from



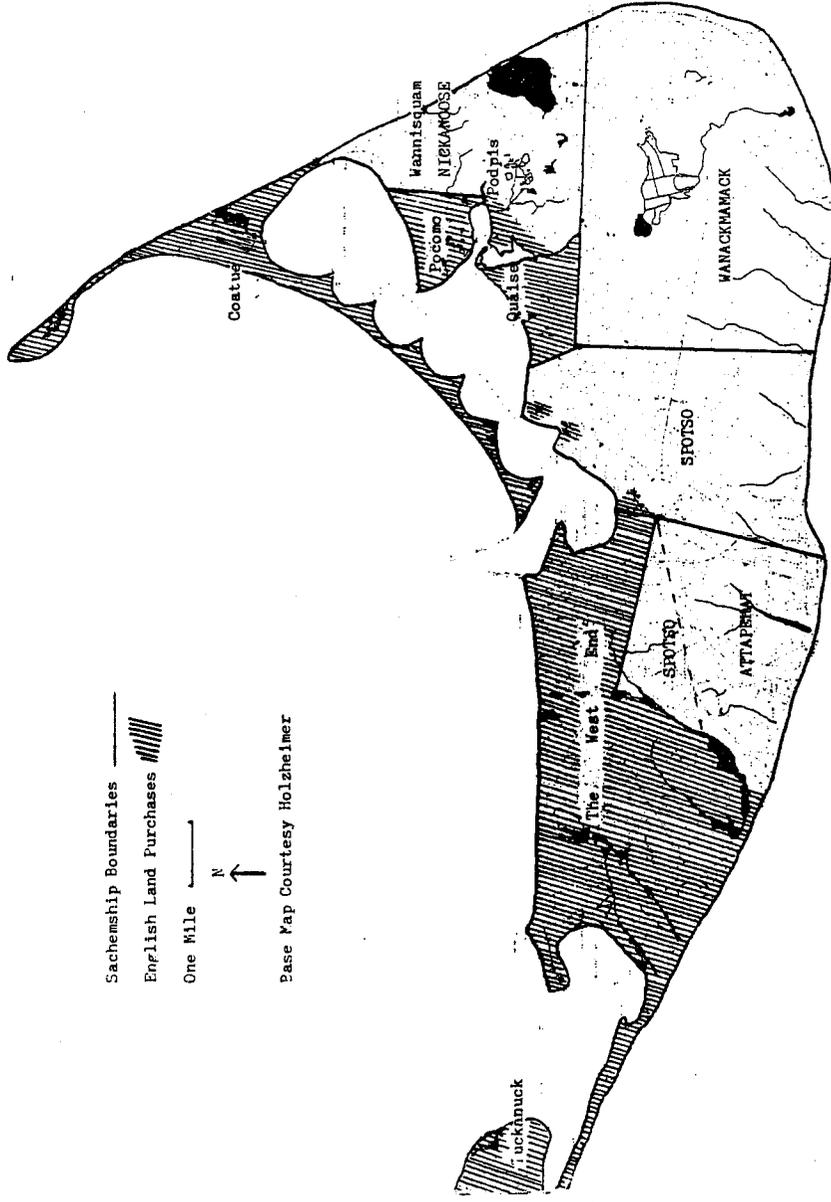
1 The Seal of the Colony in 1629. Its Charter was given on the pretext we would convert the Indians.

The Seal of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay in 1629. There is a tradition that this is a portrait of the Sachem of the Khauds who lived at Squam, Nantucket. Enough of the Indians from Cape Cod and the islands south of there had been to England before 1619 to make the tradition a real possibility. If this is not Nickanoose or his father, it at least gives us a suggestion of their appearance.

the map of Figure 2 is that until Nickanoose's death, Nantucket was still mostly an Indian land with mostly Indian people.

Love and Tribute

To read one of Nickanoose's deeds gives a glimpse into the quality of an Indian sachem — direct, simple, and related to his men by love and tribute. Here is a deed of land at Squam to Jutte (Judas), an Indian of Nickanoose's tribe:



2. Indian Sachemships of Nantucket and English Land Purchases by 1684.

Table 1.
DOCUMENTATION FOR FIGURE 3.

"Nickanoose, his father" (2-1), deceased before 1659 (Mass. Archives 32, 271).

Sachem Wawinet, son of Nickanoose "of good memory", 1684 (3-73).

I interpret this deed as written after the death of Nickanoose especially because of the respect with which his name is used.

Sachem Isaac Wawinet, son of Wawinet 1690, and deceased 1691 (P.R.-97), (P.R.-99), (P.R.-59), and (2-59).

Sesapana Will and Takas (Titus?, a common Indian name in Polpis), heirs and kinsmen of Isaac Wawinet (P.R.-59).

Benjamin Birdkeepers Brother (of Sesapana Will?) obtains land willed to kinsmen of Isaac Wawinet (P.R.-147) and (2-59).

Spotso, sachem, married Askamapoo (Martha's Vineyard Land Records (2) 1D, 122).

Askamapoo was the sister and heir of Wawinet (Martha's Vineyard Land Records 1D, 134).

Daniel Spotso, sachem, was the son of Spotso (3-109), (2-37), and (3-39).

Joshua Spotso was the son of Spotso (1-85) and (2-37).

Barney Spotso, sachem 1741, was the son of Daniel Spotso (5-17).

Josiah Spotso was a cousin of Barney Spotso (5-147), and a son of Askamapoo (Martha's Vineyard Land Records 1D, 134).

Keattohquen and Wohwaninwat were brothers of Nickanoose (Martha's Vineyard Deed (1) 1, 38).

Watt, Paul, James and Puttumpantanum Noose were sons of Nickanoose (Martha's Vineyard Deed 7 44).

Paul Noose was Woweatton, brother of Wawinet (3-4).

Rachel Pedwegin, daughter of Paul Noose, and Beriah, her son (5-11).

Jethro is named as an equal heir with Wawinet in 1675 (2-4).

Jethro, Joshua, of Harwich, 1730, sold his part of the sachemship of Nickanoose (4-79).

Pompasson (3-44), possibly Yompashom (see Worth), claimed heir of Puttumpantanum Noose (Mass. Archives 32, 168).

Isaac Noose (?) sold horse common deeds (3-47) and (3-49).

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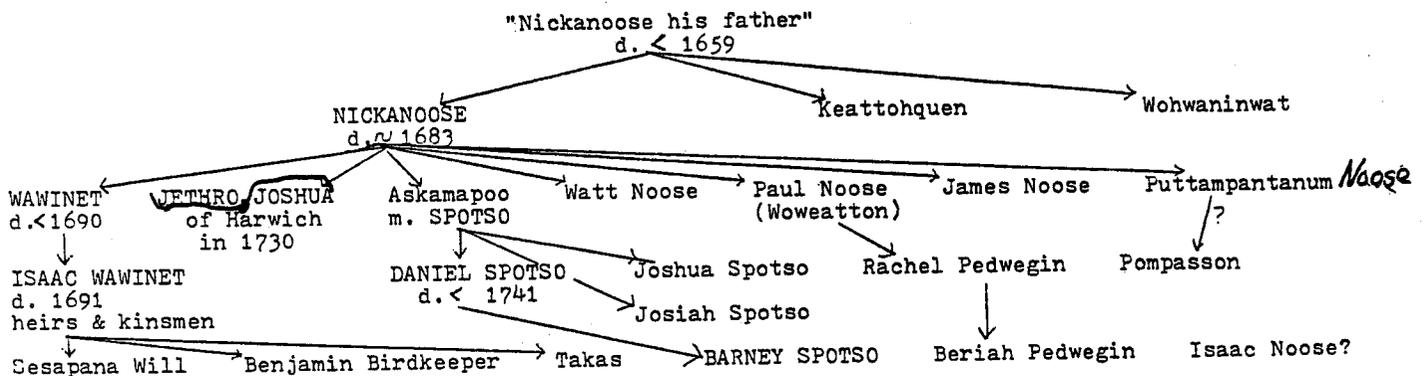


Figure 3. Probable Genealogy of Nickanoose from Town Records. Capitals denote the men identified as sachems. Uncertainties are indicated. For documentation see Table 1.

"I Nickanoose unto this Jutte I do give land twenty acres at Wassonuhkattog and so to Pakpannogkahkunnut toward the South East. It shall be measured unto him when he desires to have it measured. He hath forever. I give it him freely. He shall not have trouble about his land because this Jutte is my man. I love him and he often gives me victuals and goods freely. 1676.

Nukanooos Mark" (3-42)*.

Genealogy

Deeds give us accurate information about family relationships. Nickanoose's family, as shown in Figure 3 and documented in Table 1, differs substantially from that of tradition, which appears to be based on the memories of Zaccheus Macy (9). We are grateful to Macy, however, for recording his memories, because in them we find clues to otherwise mysterious puzzles. For instance, he tells of a sachem's son at Squam who was angry and left the island for many years because his father took a new wife, the mother of the Nooses. The records show that this son of Nickanoose was probably Jethro, who returned from Harwich to claim his share of Nickanoose's sachemship 45 years after the death of Nickanoose (4-79).

The father of Nickanoose at present appears to be unknown. Traditionally it was Wawinet, but, since Wawinet was definitely the son of Nickanoose, it seems best to pause a bit before assuming there were two Wawinets. A reference to "Nickanoose his father" who gave land to "Spotso his father" (2-1) supports the tradition that it was bad manners to mention the name of a deceased father. King Phillip was supposed to have come to Nantucket in 1665 in order to punish John Gibbs (Assassamoogh) for naming Phillip's dead father, Massasoit. This Indian courtesy to the dead raises substantial obstacles to the reconstruction of an Indian history as we might hope to know it.

Shipwreck, Murder, and Hanging

According to Gookin (7), a Harvard student, Joel, the son of Hiacoomes, "took a voyage to Martha's Vineyard to visit his father and kindred, a little before the commencement; but upon his return back in a vessel, with other passengers and mariners, suffered shipwreck upon the island of Nantucket; where the bark was found put on shore; and in all probability the people in it came on shore alive, but afterwards were murdered by some wicked Indians of that place; who, for lucre of the spoil in the vessel, which was laden with goods, thus cruelly destroyed the people in it; for which fault some of those Indians was convicted and

executed afterwards." The Plymouth Colony Records (6) of February 1664-5 show the following order; "if the Natuckett Indians suspected for murther...bee found within this govment, that...they bee sent to the govment of the Massachusetts..."

Further details are given by William Worth of Nantucket, who testified: "in or near the year 1666 that Nickanoose being accused of being privy to a Murder committed by Indians on Englishmen at Coatue and being in grate fear he hired or otherwise got Quaquachwinnit to go with him to Plymouth in the winter to ask council of Nickanoose's had (head) Sachem. . ." (PR-97). * The year was probably 1665 as shown in Figure 4, a deed from Nickanoose to Quaquachwinnit in payment for his services at that time. This is quite interesting because it implies that Nickanoose's head sachem was King Phillip (Metacomet), Sachem of the Wampanoags, who, probably not by coincidence, was said to have visited Nantucket in that same year, 1665. Nickanoose himself does not appear to have been incriminated in this episode, but very likely some of his men were hanged.

Lifestyle

Indians had lived on Nickanoose's lands for at least 2000 years. A knowledge of their prehistoric lifestyle must come from archeology. However, for a glimpse into the Indian life on Nantucket in the 1660's and 70's, we report details from the town records and deeds.

One is impressed at the mobility of the Nantucket Indians. The records mention frequent trips or semi-permanent moves to Martha's Vineyard, the Cape, Plymouth, Boston, and even New York.

Important land decisions were made by large gatherings of old men, who interspersed their deliberations with formal "smocks". Zaccheus Macy describes the dignity and grace of the Indian ceremonial use of the tobacco pipe. As to the value they placed on age, one of their objections to the English during the grass contest was that the English magistrates were young. "They cannot believe that Young Men. . .can understand Things like old Men", according to Peter Folger (Starbuck, p.55).

In addition, we learn from the records that the Indians kept dogs, burned their planting fields in April, planted corn, harvested in October, used reeds and flags and beach grass for making mats and baskets, caught fish in weirs, owned bows and guns and canoes, and divided up, sometimes with controversy, drift whales and other fish washed up on the beaches. They lived in mat covered sapling-framed wigwams. So far I have found no mention of deer.

sachems of the west end such as Peteson, George Nanahuma, Obadiah (Jafet?) (6-112)¶, Mr. Larry Ahkeramo, Harry the son of Wapscowet, etc., but even off-islanders involved in the sale.

Francis, the Nosset (Nauset) Sachem, and Tequamomamy, a pawwaw or medicine man according to Mayhew (10), sold the site of today's town. Pakepenessa, whom Mayhew identifies as a Chappaquiddick sachem, sold his rights to what we call Ram Pasture. There was then a question of control over the west end for Wanackmamack and Nickanoose. However, by 1678, the west end had been paid for several times, and the Indians dwelling there had been resettled in the east end of Nantucket.

b. Grass.

Having bought some land and all the grass, the English settlers came here with their cattle, horses, sheep, goats, and pigs. And Nantucket proved to be a good environment for livestock; but, alas, in only seven years (1667) they began to feel the island was overstocked! A classic tragedy of the commons was about to take place. First the settlers required that the Vineyard people remove their horses from Nantucket, and then "finding by experience that horses are like to be the ruine of the neat cattle" (PR-20)¶, they limited each Englishman to one horse, and put a fine on the sale of horses to Indians.

By 1669 the commons were stinted (PR-19). This old-fashioned phrase means that rules were established whereby each English share owner, and there were 20 whole shares men and 14 half-shares men, could keep on the common 40 cattle and 40 sheep. He could substitute 1 horse for 2 cows and count 6 sheep as equal to 1 cow in order to vary the proportions. Since the commons were all that they owned, excluding land set off to individuals for house lots, it follows that the commons included all the grass, and in particular, pasture on the entire island between Indian harvest and the first of May. Here we see how the grass rights of the Indian deed have been transformed into rights to own animals, or what came to be called "sheep commons", and ultimately represented land. For the first 50 years, sheep commons represented only grass! The Indians still owned most of the land. And now the problem shows clearly: because the Indians sold the *use* of their grass to the English, they found themselves not allowed to keep grazing animals *on their own lands*.

¶ Nantucket Deed (3) number.

¶ Nantucket Proprietors' Records (4) page.

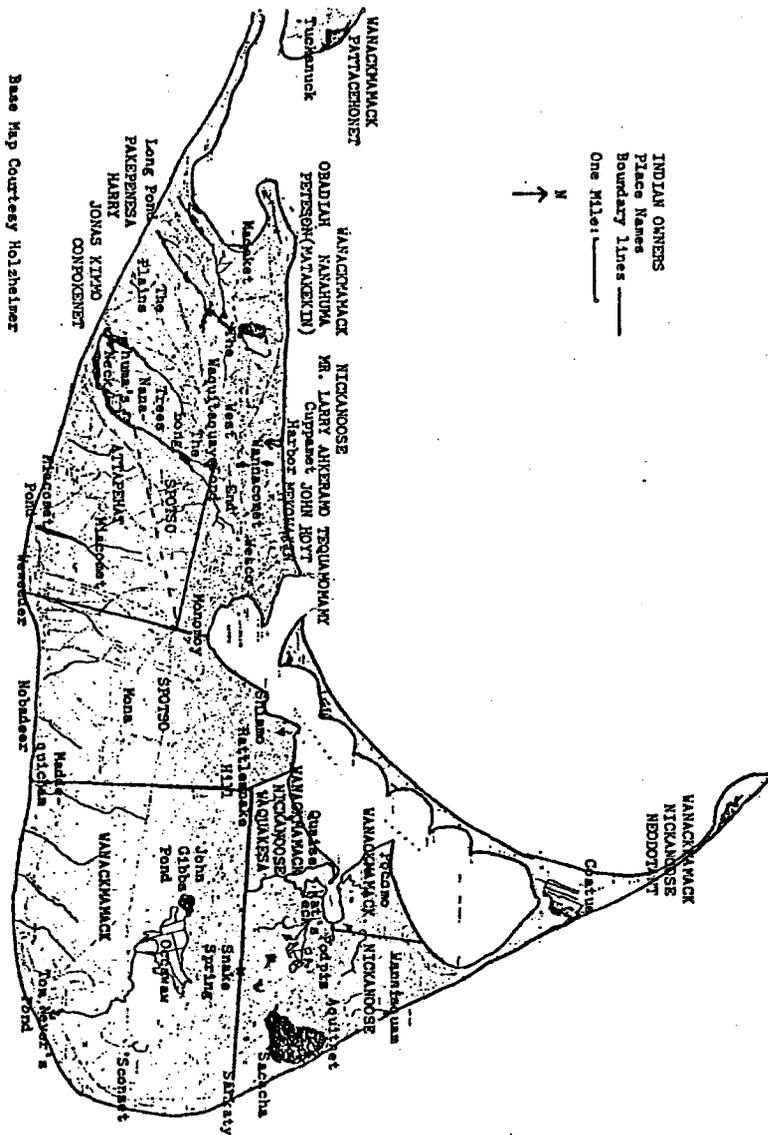


Figure 6. Indian owners and place names on Nantucket from deeds about 1660.

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(Continued from the April issue)

Part 2. The Grass Contest

* IN PART 1 we introduced Sachem Nickanoose and other Indians of Nantucket, their lands and way of life. Not until 1659 did Nickanoose sell some land on Nantucket to a group of English settlers from the Massachusetts Bay. All of the deeds of Nickanoose and other Indians for the first 25 years in which the Indians and English shared Nantucket are listed in Tables 2 and 3 together with an interpretive map, Figure 6. A study of the deeds and other documents reveals that the major conflict between the two cultures concerned grass.

#NAS #7 (1981)

The English and Their Land Use

The English brought to North America cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, and goats, all of which were a novelty to the Indians, who had no domestic grazing animals. Since the winters were more severe here than in England, the early colonists soon found that they needed extra hay to carry their animals through the cold weather. Unfortunately, American grasses, with two exceptions, turned out to make very poor hay. See Bidwell and Falconer (6). The exceptions were salt marsh grass and fresh marsh grass. Once you become sensitive to the word marsh or meadow, which then meant only wetland, you will find in reading old records that the settlement of New England was much influenced by the distribution of meadow. Incidentally, the colonists didn't bring hay seed from England to plant here because grass was not successfully cultivated until Timothy and Red Top were developed in the mid-18th century.

First Deeds

Keeping in mind the potential value of fresh meadow and marsh, let us look at the two deeds Thomas Mayhew obtained from the sachems on Nantucket for the new English settlement. He bought first a small amount of land, about twenty acres per settler seemed a good guideline, to provide for about thirty-four families.

Deed No. 1. June 12, 1659

"Nickanoose of Nantucket, Sachem, and Nanahuma of Nantucket, Sachem, . . . to Thomas Mayhew of the Vineyard, the plain at the west end of Nantucket. . . (for) Twelve pounds answerable to peage (wampumpeage) at Eight a penny, also. . . the use of the meadow and to take wood for the use of him the sd Mayhew. . ."

(See Figure 6. Deed No. 1 was not recorded for 72 years.)

On the basis of Deed No. 1, and his patent from Lord Sterling and Sir Ferdinando Gorges, Mayhew formed a company of ten proprietors to settle on Nantucket. These ten men, in the first recorded Indian deed, next obtained from the sachems the whole west end, and most significant, *all the mowing grass* on the whole island, both fresh marsh and salt marsh, and *all the pasture grass* on the whole island between October and May. This deed is sometimes described as the purchase of the island, which it was not, the Indians for some years owned most of the island, and was later alleged to be fraudulent. We excerpt the relevant parts.

Deed No. 2. May 10, 1660.

". . . Wanackmamack and Niconoose to. . . Thomas Mayhew, Tristram Coffin, etc., . . . (The West End of the island, see Figure 6). . . none of the Indians Inhabitant. . . shall be removed without full satisfaction. . . and we the aforesaid sachems do give, grant, bargain and sell the *one half of the Remainder of the Meadows and Marshes* upon all other parts of the Island and also that the English People shall have what *grass they shall need for to mowe out of the Remainder of the Meadows and Marshes* on the Island so Long as the English Remain upon the Island. . . and also. . . free liberty for the *feeding of all sorts of cattle on any part of the Island* after Indian Harvest is ended until Planting time or until the first day of May from year to year. . . 12 pounds already paid (Deed No. 1) and 14 pounds to be paid within 3 months. . ." (Emphasis added.)

a. The Land.

To consider first the sale of the land at the west end of Nantucket, we find that Nickanoose and Wanackmamack were acting in the roles of chief sachems of the whole island. However, a letter from John Gardner to Governor Lovelace of New York in 1676 presents Obadiah's claim that "his Land is wrongfully sold from him by other Indian sachems that had nothing to do with it" (Starbuck (11), p. 136). Many such complaints and additional deeds (see Table 2) suggest that not only were these minor

It was horses the Indians wanted. Apparently, they obtained horses despite fines on the English who sold them. The town then enacted rules setting fines for animals found on the commons beyond the number allowed a person. Furthermore, a pound was built to hold illegal animals until the fine was collected. The Indian response to such unusual constraints as fines and pounds may be imagined.

Another problem in pasturing cattle, sheep, and horses on Indian lands was damage done to Indian crops when animals strayed into planting grounds. In this case, the English took responsibility for hiring herders, building fences both around pastures and around Indian planting fields, and paying for any damages. However, this issue never caused the outrage that fines and impounding did.

Nickanoose vs. the English.

It is possible, even with the fragmentary records that we have, to reconstruct the course that Nickanoose followed after he learned that he would not be allowed to keep cattle or horses on his own lands. When Governor Lovelace of New York in 1671 required proof of the Indian deeds of purchase, Wanackmamack signed a deed like No. 2, but not Nickanoose. In an interesting concession, the town voted in 1672 to allow the sachem's sons, Wauwinet and Jephtha, each to have a horse, and then gave liberty to the Indian sachems to keep two or three more horses on condition that they bind themselves to promise to keep no more, forever (PR-31).

Nickanoose now grasped the English concept of deeding "land use" separately from "land". Here is a recorded deed of his of this period, in which he contracts the right to keep cattle on his land for tribute:

"I Nickanoose this Jutte and all his children they have power and Right to keep cattle six on my land. He shall not have trouble on my land for this cause or Reason that he doth greatly give me penys all the year in victuals and cloths.
dated August 1st day 1675 Nickanoose X his mark".

However, the fines and impounding were too much for the Indians to accept. According to John Gardner in 1677, "one of the Indians sachems told me, they could not forbear but must fight if these Laws wear prosicuted on them..." (Starbuck, p. 61). Furthermore, Gardner wrote to Governor Andros of New York,

"...the deade ov Indian purchas which Mr. Mayhew brought to yourk when he recieveed the patent for the town of Governor Lauelas: and now

stands on Record at yourk is A false thing as will apear it being nether signed nor sealed. I supose it was of mr mayhews one making being much moar in it then was ever brought as will Aboundantly Apeare but mr Mayhew sayth it is the Copy of A deed that was procured of the Indians to preuent others from purchasing; but now it is Aserted to be An onest thing...it might be the Ocation of Envolving vs in blod..." (Starbuck, p. 137).

Gardner apparently believed Deed No. 2 to be false. The undated Deed No. 2 to be found in Albany today, signed only by Wanackmamack, may well have been challenged by Nickanoose, but Nickanoose had signed the original Deed No. 2 of May 10, 1660. Did Gardner know that? At the time of his letter to New York, his friend, Clerk of the Court Peter Folger, was in jail for refusing to produce the Court Book which presumably contained all the Indian deeds. In this complex affair, Folger and Gardner were clearly supporting Nickanoose, who, faced with the full implications of Deed No. 2, was refusing to accept its conditions. Thus, in 1677 at a general court Nickanoose issued a *land use* deed which spelled out what he believed he owned, including specifically grass.

"Then This Keattohquen and Wohwaninwat These Two have full Commission To Use of all Niconoosoo his Land and With all ye fruits of The Land at Nantuckett Every Roots or trees or Grass and all That is There in aye and the Stones Shall Be theirs and If ye Whale Shall happen to come Shore That Shall be theirs also and all that Is Belongs There in Shall Belong to his heirs & Assigns for Ever: after him. This Deed was Given Before me Tho's Mayhew, Witness Pakapanossoo and Wanauteohquontum and Kestumun This is a True Coppic of a Deed of Niconoosoo Gave to my own Brothers-Keatohquen and Wohwaninwat They Shall Inherit it for Ever as Well as I and Niconosoo and all our Children for Ever In witness whereof I Do to this before Generall Cort Sett To my hand This fifth of June 1677 Nicanoose X his mark".

Seven days after this affirmation of his land rights, Nickanoose acknowledged his signature on Deed No. 2 of May 10, 1660 as his act and deed. However, the whole shares men, with 1500 Indians and the half shares men arrayed against them, temporarily abandoned their attempt to enforce the conditions of Deed No. 2, that is, to control the use of all the grass on Nantucket. Support for the position of Gardner, Folger and the Indians was later voiced by Governor Bellamont of Massachusetts when in 1700 he called the terms of Deed No. 2 a "circumvention and fraud" (Starbuck, p. 140).

Winter Feed Deeds and Horse Commons.

The settlers, however, did not abandon their conviction that land use controls were essential to commonly used land. And remember that there was never an Indian reservation on Nantucket. Rather than resort to apartheid, they would try to include the Indians in the land management plan. First, they settled their internal conflict, the rebellion of the half shares men led by Gardner and Folger, by giving the half shares men proportional rights in all land divisions, in return for which everyone gave up to the town their privately acquired Indian deeds (6-3). The town, now unified, formed a committee of William Worth, John Swain, and James Coffin to negotiate with the sachems about grass rights. Although Spotso and Wanackmamack had already sold their grass rights, Spotso and Jephtha, the son of Wanackmamack, were again asked to sign deeds giving their grass, herbage, and rights to pasture in the winter on all their land to the town. In return for what are called "winter feed" deeds, the committee covenanted in 1682, (PR-128 to 135) to allow Spotso liberty to keep 15 cattle or horses, and Jephtha liberty to keep 22 cattle and 1 horse on the commons. If they ever wanted to sell the liberties, they had to offer them first to the town to buy. The sachems gave them to their men, and most of the so-called "horse commons" were sooner or later converted into cash. They litter the deed records for the next 60 years.

And what of the sachem up at Squam? Nickanoose's is the third and last winter feed deed in 1682. The fourth sachem, Musaquat, did not sell his grass, for 15 horse commons, until 1689. Since the records say there was a covenant with three sachems in 1682, there must have been a deed of horse commons to Nickanoose. Although this deed has not been found, the heirs of Nickanoose sold so many horse commons to the town that I am satisfied that Nickanoose obtained at least 15 in return for his grass.

Evaluation.

The Nantucket Indians now had rights to own horses and graze cattle side by side with the English on the common. From a practical agricultural viewpoint, cattle were more valuable than horses. But horses have always meant more than simple utility. As of 1682, the Nantucket Indians had become horsemen. On a purely monetary basis, horse commons, some of which sold for 3 pounds each, plus all the money for the deeds of Tables 2 and 3, increased the total cost to the English of the right to live on Nantucket to many times the traditional 30 pounds and 2 beaver hats. But most important, as a matter of principle, the Indians had gained rights to join the English land use system, the proprietary. Contrast this with conditions in the Massachusetts Bay Colony where,

before the war, selling a horse to an Indian was against the law (to the tune of a 100 pound fine), and the few Indians left after the war were legally confined to Natick and two other places (12).

Shortly after 1682 Nickanoose died, leaving his sachemship and his thousands of acres of land in Squam and Polpis to his son, Wawinet, whose term was brief. By 1695 the sachemship had passed to Daniel Spotso, a grandson. In a letter of 1694 to Cotton Mather (9), John Gardner wrote: "although it is true there is a great decay of religion among the first (Indian) Societies, many of their best men, and I may say good men, are dead...."

Afterwards.

It would be satisfying to report that after the statesman-like negotiations and covenant of 1682, the grass contest was settled. In actuality, it was reenacted vigorously and periodically for 70 years.

Only 10 years after the peaceful settlement of 1682, there was "a great increase of the Indians horses and cattle beyond their proportional liberty or right reserved to the grate damage of the cattle, the land being overstocked" (PR-43). The town ordered fines and impounding for any overstocking, either Indian or English. About 1699 Daniel Spotso and Seikinnou complained to the governor, now of the Massachusetts Bay, that the English "making divers purchases on the said island have claimed such interest in the herbage of the whole...forcing us to pay for using our own lands and pasturing on our own rights" (PR-95). To the English, the Indians now had no case. But from the Indian viewpoint, the sachems, accustomed to tribute, instead found themselves liable for frequent small fines. "The Contest between the Sachims and English on Nantucket about Feed of Cattle", as it is called (Mass. Archives (2) 32, 17), with complaints and hearings and committees to investigate, continued until about 1758. Soon after that a sickness wiped out most of the remaining Indians on Nantucket, effectively ending the dispute.

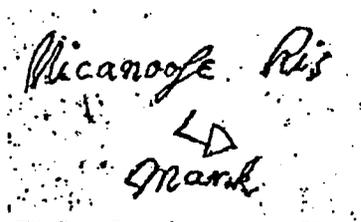
Conclusions.

Nickanoose deeded the English their first Nantucket land, yet kept intact his homelands for his people, a remarkable achievement. He did not understand the implications of the sale of his grass to the first purchasers, and when he did, he rebelled at the terms. From a position of strength and with the help of some of the English half shares men, who were themselves contesting the first purchasers for equal land rights, he obtained liberty to keep horses on the common lands, a restricted liberty,

but still a concession the English had clearly not planned on originally and one that may have been unique to Nantucket. He seems always to have had the respect of his people and of the English and he helped keep the peace. Of the four early sachems, Nickanoose, whose mark was a broken arrow, emerges as the most complex, proud and human, and the most difficult for the English to deal with. In retrospect, these qualities were virtues for the Indian culture on Nantucket. Surely he deserves better than to have his name forgotten in favor of his son Wauwinet, who ruled at most six uneventful years after his father's death.

If the land of Nantucket could support 1500 Indians in a hunting, fishing, gathering, and planting culture, then the addition of 100 or so English, if they had adopted the Indian culture, should have had little effect. As it was, the system of land use introduced by the English, which involved holding most of the island as common land, must have seemed reasonable to the Indians at first. If the commons are under-used, the fruits of the land seem endless. But the new cattle and horse culture, although coveted and obtained by the Indians, doomed the traditional Indian ways.

A paradox that has meaning for us today is that the quality of Indian life on Nantucket was increased by the much desired horses, but at the same time decreased by a loss of freedom in using the land. The world faces the same problems now with many natural resources that Nantucket had 300 years ago with grass. Can we learn to share and to stint earth's energy, wilderness, and other resources, with a concern for the quality of life for all?



Nickanoose
↳
Mark

from Deed #1.

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