

“Ten Little, Nine Little Indians...”

Historians, the Discourse of Disappearing Indians and the Nipmucs of Central Massachusetts

Thomas L. Doughton

Acquiring real estate in the Washakamaug Pond area of Framingham, Massachusetts, near a site of Native American occupation, an early town resident, Thomas Eames, “found everything as the Indians had left them.” The fields nearby were “ready for the plow, from previous cultivation by the squaws,” with “meadows...ready for the scythe.” Scattered about were “fresh signs of savage life,” including wigwam poles, heaps of firestones, open granaries, hoes and axes, domestic utensils, large sized stone mortars, smaller mill stones and ornaments. These remnants of a vanished or disappeared race, however, “awakened a sense of insecurity, rather than curiosity, and they were shunned and destroyed, rather than gathered up and preserved.”¹

“Framingham,” as named by English immigrants, originally comprised several sizable encampments or “villages” part of Assabet, a major Nipmuc homeland. Near ponds, lakes and estuaries of the Assabet and Sudbury Rivers, this Nipmuc homeland began approximately twenty-five miles west of Boston and encompassed several towns of contemporary Middlesex and Worcester Counties, all located within the Assabet and Sudbury River systems.

Typically five-to-ten-square miles in extent, containing one or two important settlement places, Native American homelands in southern New England were often located at long-used fishing sites, as was the case at Framingham. Here, clan ceremonies and elders’ councils were held. Usually extensive cornfields were nearby as well as cemeteries, memory piles, and sweat lodges used for curing. Throughout the core area and surrounding spaces of each homeland were dozens of wigwams, alone, in pairs, or arranged in small hamlets. Families living in each homeland were joined to one another and kin in other homelands by social and economic relations, maintained and re-enforced across established trails connecting homeland. Moreover, river systems typically traversing southern New England homeland landscape supported trade, diplomacy and social communication, for example, in this central Massachusetts area the Charles, Assabet, Miller’s, Thames, Blackstone and Chicopee Rivers originating in “Nipnet” or the homeland region of the Nipmucs.

Nineteenth-century regional historians, like Josiah Temple in his Framingham chronicle, offer clear and sometimes detailed descriptions of Nipmuc Indian homelands— but as a series of sites imagined discreet, separate, unconnected and unrelated. Within a Euroamerican discourse of disappearing Indians, homeland areas are conceptualized as locations of Indian “enclaves,” and atomized as occupied by “remnants” rather than Native American communities connected to a larger world that

was Indian New England; in the context of European settlements, Native sites become “anomalies” on an otherwise “civilized” landscape.

Yet Nipmuc Indians are the aboriginal people of central New England whose ancestral homeland—“Nipnet,” encompassed portions of Middlesex, Hampden, Norfolk, and Worcester Counties, in Massachusetts; Windham and Tolland Counties in northeastern Connecticut; and most of northern Rhode Island. They were the “Nippimook” or “fresh water people” distinguishing them from the coastal Mattachusetts tribe—at the time of contact with Europeans, a loose confederation of several thousand Natives clustered in at least nine major homeland regions along rivers, lakes and ponds in overlapping portions of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. One of these homelands, Assabet contained Cowassuck, Nobscot and Washakamaug encampments or “villages” that disappear as Framingham where objects unearthed “awakened a sense of insecurity” and were “shunned and destroyed, rather than gathered up and preserved.”

Landscape naming and renaming by Euroamericans at Assabet imposed a new conceptual and proprietary order on the landscape and represented a political act constituting proof of “conquest, proprietorship, and ultimately incorporation” of ancestral lands, as has been shown by Curtis Hinsley and others. Accordingly, Nipmuc settlements at Cowassuck, Nobscot and Washakamaug simply disappear yet still there persisted a “sense of insecurity” for whites when confronting reminders of Nipmuc presence at Framingham where “both tradition and authentic history” provided “the proof of Indian occupancy” of the region.

Older maps of the town indicate Cowassuck, Nobscot and other Native sites much as in the South, representations of Indians proliferated and Indian place names were “adopted in the thousands, particularly in the newly absorbed areas,” where “having hated and ‘removed’ most literal Indians,” Euroamericans “fell in love with figurative ones.” As Joel Martin has explained it:

Indian names were colorful and romantic. They added flavor to the landscape and heightened a sense of regionalism, serving for instance, to mark insiders, who could pronounce them, from outsiders who could not...on a symbolic level, Indian names enabled southerners to claim an archaic connection between themselves and the land...An Indian name made it seem as if the new town had been there forever, as if it was all right for whites to be living there. Finally names were like trophies: Much like Indian arrowheads, pots, and artifacts, Indian names were prized possessions, signs that whites used to assert they had inherited the land and its history.²

Similarly, Emerson could comment:

We in Massachusetts see the Indians only as a picturesque antiquity;—Massachusetts, Shawmut, Samoset, Squantum, Nantasket, Narragansett, Assabet, Museketaquid. But where are the men? ³

But, in the same period, Massachusetts residents experience “dread” and “insecurity” before signs of Native occupation of traditional homelands. Likewise, further west in state where an “abundance” of objects including pottery – “the outside covered rude figures” – were unearthed and human remains discovered, while underground granaries were left untouched. This was “partly because everybody had an undefined dread” of these signs of Indian occupation, a nineteenth-century resident explaining that in his youth when driving cow herds near the area, “he would ‘race them by’ ...for fear of seeing Indian ghosts.”⁴

“Relics” and “traces” of Nipmucs were common at numerous locations in central Massachusetts but, according to a period history of the area, objects or “artifacts” were the “remains” of Indians who “roved about in large bands, generally friendly, but frequently troublesome and insolent in demanding food and lodging.” They disappeared “utterly, without leaving a record behind...rude savage tribes of whom not enough is known even to say ‘he lived – he died.’”⁵ They were a disappeared people.

Works of local historians, accordingly, reflect aspects of the larger “Indian Question” that haunts the early Republic. In local writings the Question animates several discussions advanced at differing periods of the last century, concerning:

- ◆ the “origin” of Indians, whether they were “Asiatic” people who migrated to the New World, or a lost tribe of Israelites, and whether there were connections between aboriginal peoples of North and South America;
- ◆ the “pre-history” of Natives or whether a supposedly racially distinct advanced and sophisticated people were conquered and displaced by less developed “savages” encountered by Europeans;
- ◆ the “present” or “nature” of the “savages” and “children of the forest” or whether Indians could be civilized, christianized and converted from “roving bands of barbaric nomads” to settled, sedentary farmers; and,
- ◆ the “future” of the Natives whether they were “fading” through operation of impersonal biological laws, to be “exterminated” to make room for Euro-Americans or to be “removed” to specifically designated Indian residence areas.

Some local writings simply allege aboriginal people never occupied towns they described. For example, Indians were never at Rutland according to an 1836 history, however, in describing the town’s meadows its author states, “it is evident that some were partially cleared by Indians or beavers.” The Hardwick history likewise speculates that “there is no evidence...that the present township...was ever occupied by the Indians as a place of residence.” Since many “stone arrow-heads were found so abundantly in the fields” this work concludes these artifacts are a result of “their frequent and long-continued visitation in pursuit of game.” Natives never occupied the

town, but the hills of Hardwick “furnished favorite hunting-grounds.” The earliest Milford history invokes Natives as “savages” and “children of the forest,” claiming “whether Indians ever occupied our territory, except as roving bands for hunting and fishing purposes is doubtful,” yet describes a “burial-place” at the Milford-Holliston town borders, whence were taken “many arrow-heads, and perhaps a few rude implements of domestic use,” adding “arrow-heads, either whole or in pieces, and other unimportant relics” were found “from time to time, in all parts of our vicinage.” Examples abound confirming that a part of the local discourse of disappearing Indians is the allegation *there were never Indians here*.

Other historical writings concede Natives had previously occupied the area. Ellen Larned, the historian of Windham County across the border in Connecticut, for example, represented aboriginal Nipmucs as “of little spirit or destructive character,” their numbers “small,” and much of the region “left vacant and desolate.” Living in “poor” dwellings, their lives “were spent chiefly in hunting, fishing, idling and squabbling.” At the end of the King Philip War, the Nipmucs of northern Connecticut were “almost annihilated...the few remaining...found a refuge with other distant tribes.” The “aboriginal inhabitants of future Windham County were destroyed or scattered, and their territory opened to English settlement and occupation.” Emory Washburn’s Leicester history informed “the last vestige” of the Nipmucs inhabiting the own “has long ago disappeared...beyond its name nothing remains of them. Their story was that of most of the tribes in New England; they disappeared.” A Westborough history maintains, “besides the names they have left and the legends they have suggested, there is very little by which we may trace the occupancy of the Indian proprietors.” Similarly, in his 1837 history of Worcester, William Lincoln wrote of the Nipmuc Tribe that after the King Philip War “the whole nation perished,” or “dispersed, seeking refuge in Canada...or migrating far westward,” leaving the soil “almost without a relic of the aboriginal population.” Again, examples abound confirming that a part of the local discourse of disappearing Indians is the allegation *There were once Indians here but they vanished a long time ago*.

Notions that *there were never Indians in the region* and that *Indians had long ago disappeared* should, on one level, have represented a difficulty for local historians arguing Indian erasure. Numerous town histories claim Natives had disappeared, usually in portions of their texts describing the trials and tribulations of “our” ancestors in “carving” townships out of the alleged wilderness, yet these same works resolve the apparent contradiction of Natives who did not disappear by arguing that living Nipmucs were less than Indian. On the one hand, these nineteenth-century Natives are part of the “last of...Tribe,” and, on the other hand, they were debased, often racially mixed remnants. By white definition, they had ceased being Indians. In the romantic imagination of the antebellum period, for example, aboriginal New England Natives were noble, heroic, handsome, long-suffering, virtuous, freedom-loving, eloquent, stout-hearted “children of the forest” while nineteenth-century Nipmucs are represented in local texts as ugly, filthy, lazy, immoral, degenerate, drunken, racially-mixed beggars rootlessly wandering through the area selling their baskets and brooms. Accordingly, they were, for regional historians, not really Indian. In their degraded state, they existed as living proof Nipmucs had ceased to exist.

"Disappearing" Indians are, however, first encountered in the works of the seventeenth-century Massachusetts writers and have been a persistent presence of an absence at the center of the American mythology of progress and manifest destiny. In outline, seventeenth-century writers inform: Massachusetts Natives did not enclose their land, therefore, it was not really property; Indians had more land than they needed or knew how to use; they welcomed the coming of Europeans; and, epidemics and pandemics prior to 1620 were proof Jehovah was clearing the "uncouth" and "heathen" wilderness to make way for his saints. Indians were, simply, doomed to disappear, and as such, their disappearance central to the myth of New England codified and given the semblance of "objective fact" in filiopietistic writings of the nineteenth century whose authors sometimes excuse, exculpate and justify seventeenth-century attitudes they reflect uncritically.

Not only do many nineteenth-century historians accept this "official" rendering of the disappearance of Massachusetts Indians as fact, but some applaud and congratulate the "founding fathers" on their equitable dealings with Natives. Much of the discourse of disappearing Indians – whether in the seventeenth century or recycled as "scientific" history in the nineteenth century, is, however, inconsistent in arguing *There are no more Indians*.

Neither in the 1620s, nor in the last century, had Indians of Massachusetts disappeared. The discourse of disappearing of Indians, however, provides linkage to themes that have resonated in New England historiography, ennobling "our" Puritan Fathers who merely acquired unused, unneeded or vacant Indian homelands, in a contest between "civilized" land improvement and a "savage" under-utilization of their "uncouth wilderness."

Still, at a Framingham farm, for instance, the variety and profusion of found artifacts suggested a cluster of wigwams, recognized a significant permanent or long-term settlement with appropriate access to nearby fresh water and planting, hunting and foraging areas. The discovery of a sweat pit in the nineteenth century confirmed that ceremonial or ritual activities took place at the site. Moreover, a few miles away at neighboring Cochituate Pond were found lithics – hoes, axes, gouges, mortars, pestles, spear heads, buttons, kettles and fire stones, assumed by a period town history to be "the work of successive generations" of Nipmuc Indians.

Still visible in the last century at Framingham were other granaries or "underground barns," –about five feet deep, smaller ones some three to five feet in diameter, the larger ones, twelve to sixteen feet across," dug in the sloping side of a knoll or bank, some of them "set close together...that they might be protected from bears and other enemies by a picket." Also, at Long Pond there were remains of an "Indian fort" –a circular earthen work, covering an acre and a half, a ditch in front of it, enclosed by a wall some four feet high, a raised mound at its center with several "cellar holes" built into the embankment of the interior of the mound surrounding the fort. Nearby was a fish weir. In the nineteenth century, "quite recently" two large mortars were unearthed near the fort, along with an "abundance" of pestles, mortars, gouges, spearheads and steatite kettles. Moreover, a few miles distant from this palisaded fort,

at the Hopkinton and Framingham town border was another knoll where once stood a second "Indian fort" whose features were recalled by residents.

During road construction at the center of Framingham in the 1870s, a sweat pit, four feet deep and three feet in diameter, was uncovered. Additionally, several Native burial grounds were "discovered." One was on a small Framingham island in a meadow, where in the last century were "still plowed up unique ornaments and weapons." At another location was a second burial plot "on a sandy knoll," where "many skeletons were brought to light...buried not more than three feet below the surface." At a third site in town a Native had been found in "the remnant of a coarse kind of sack." In 1873, still another Indian grave was opened, showing a skeleton with a set of tools, a thirty-inch bark peeler a few feet below the surface indicating "the probability" of other graves at the site.

Four years later, in 1877, more Indian skeletons were found, "in a fair state of preservation but were carelessly handled and badly broken up." Other Native interment sites included the location of the Baptist Church on the Framingham Common, where a grave was opened revealing a skeleton with "five or six new spear heads," it assumed by town residents that additional graves could be discovered near the church.

At Framingham, some Nipmuc Indians were memorialized in place names still employed in the nineteenth century like Boman's Brook, Roger's Field, Jacob's Brook, Benjamin's Meadow, Indian Head Hill, Captain Tom's Hill or Jacob's Field, each of these sites recalling specific seventeenth-century Nipmucs described in town histories and further documented in other source material.

Nipmuc presence is likewise confirmed in other regional historical texts. At Boylston, north of Worcester, Mount Tom, an oblong elevation, mound-shaped hill with a level area cleared at the summit was recalled as the site where an Indian named Tom had a wigwam. Additionally, during the construction of a reservoir at Boylston, "the finding of many stone implements, Indian knives, arrow points, tomahawks, and axes in both a complete and semi-complete condition showed that the region and ledges around Diamond Hill, and the woods and forest adjacent to it were favorite localities of the Redmen...and many traces of their cornfield and granaries were found on the intervalles of the Nashua River."⁶

In eastern portions of central Massachusetts, at Hopkinton⁷ it was recognized that Natives had occupied sites near Whitehall Pond, "one of their favorite resorts," along with "every hiding-place and cave" in some nearby ledges. Town oral history traditions identified an area near the ledges covered by pine growth as an Indian cornfield, a sizable rock at the site, "a depression probably once used by them as a mortar...near it was found a large rounded stone, its surface worn smooth by grinding corn." In last century, "Wigwam yards" remained the designation for a site at Marlborough, where Natives had been previously had a settlement; and, at Northborough was a burial mound, a raised embankment of some seventy-five by twenty-five feet, yet in the second half of the nineteenth century, "there is now no trace of graves, and no one who has dug into the various mounds has been fortunate as to find remains of these first inhabitants."

At neighboring Sudbury, where allegedly there was “no evidence that many Indians” lived in town and “not very much is known, at most” of its Nipmuc Natives, a period town history proceeds to detail the area’s Indian occupation. Along with human remains, “relics” had been found “in various localities”: arrow and spear heads; stone plummets; chisels and gouges; mortars and pestles; stone tomahawks or hatchets; stone kettles; and, fired cooking stones, were found; and human remains – all indicating “the former existence of a wigwam or cluster of wigwams.”

One of the sites was at a riverine meadow, an area of one or two acres with “light, sandy upland, in places, almost or quite without sod,” where Native materials were found “in abundance,” not only including arrow-heads and plummets “unearthed there by the plow or spade,” but “some have been uncovered by the wind.”

The history of Sudbury describes another twelve comparable Native habitation sites, quoting the nineteenth-century owner of one of these locations:

I have found on my land, east of Cedar Swamp, a stone axe, part of a tomahawk, a gouge, chisel, flaying knife, and other strange things; also about four hundred arrow-heads, one half of them broken. I have plowed over seven or eight collections of paving stones that were discolored by fire, that I suppose were the hearthstones of Indian wigwams.

Human remains were gathered at several town locations. At one burial ground where “an Indian skeleton has been exhumed by the roadside...discovered when the road was built, by a person passing by,” who “drew it from the bank, together with several Indian relics.”⁸ At a second Native burial site of two or three acres, “remains of human skeletons have been exhumed,” an older town resident of the last century, claiming that in his boyhood when men worked at this location, “he saw bones which they dug up, that he thought belonged to several human skeletons and that he himself in later years dug up a human skull.”

On some occasions, however, Nipmuc human remains were preserved such as items removed in 1875 from Mount Wachuset area, or others, later exhumed at a burial ground in Winchendon, recently in the collection of the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology at Harvard University in Cambridge.⁹ Indeed, with an amazing determination, local historians and regional antiquarians were involved in disinterring Nipmuc Indians. At innumerable sites, depicted in their histories, human remains were disturbed; sometimes skeletons or skulls became the property of historians, in other cases they were “badly handled and destroyed,” in some instances simply “disappearing.” In this, also, local historians were following the lead of the American Antiquarian Society, for example, that, in the 1820s and 1830s, sought out physical remains of Indians: the earliest of its Indian human remains became part of AAS collections in 1814.¹⁰

At Sudbury, however, finds of comparable artifacts and human remains suggested that “no distinct tribe is known to have existed” at town. Rather, Sudbury’s Indian residents were imagined “a race that has passed away.”

Other period texts frequently describe fixed seventeenth-century settlements before and during the “invasion” of central Massachusetts Nipmuc homelands: Washakim, a major Nipmuc encampment site and with smaller sites at Lancaster; Tatnuck and Packachoag at contemporary Worcester; or Wabaquasset, [now in Woodstock, Connecticut]. These works also frequently document subsequent “purchase” of many Indian growing areas, “broken up land” and “old cornfields,” whose specific locations can be confirmed in numerous deeds from the late seventeenth century.¹¹

Wabbaquasset was a significant Nipmuc homeland area, a map of the town drawn in 1883, included in a multi-volume town history, marking older Indian habitation sites at Senexit meadow, the location of an “Indian fort” built in the 1670s and several burial grounds, as well as sites of Indian homesteads in town. Woodstock’s Hatchet Pond area “was always an attractive place for the Indian. A very large rock on the south shore is still known as the ‘Indian rock,’ the fields where they raised their corn are now covered with a forest growth, their little grave yard is now almost covered with weeds and brush. Its few rough stones mark the resting place of the last of our Indians. A few cellar holes here and there are all that remain of their habitations with the exception of a few old crab tress now almost leafless and lifeless.”¹²

At Union, Connecticut along the Massachusetts border, it was written, of the Mashapaug Pond area that “the land along the northern shore of the lake consists of a light, sandy soil, of easy cultivation,” so, “upon this many Indian relics have been discovered, such as stone arrow heads, spear heads, and tomahawks,” whose discovery “proves that the plains around the lake were once inhabited by the Nipnet Indians, a powerful tribe, who before King Philip’s war ruled all the region of the upper Quinebaug valley.”¹³

Indeed, it is the rare town history from this period that fails to mention Indian occupation of the central New England region. Although labeling their Indian neighbors “specimens” of a “doomed and degenerate race,” many older town chronicles associate the landscape with its aboriginal Nipmuc occupants, even if depicting a terrain almost haunted by Nipmuc people. These “remnants of the race” are invoked in a 1826 Northborough history which described a Nipmuc burial ground in town, claiming that “Many aged persons can remember when the last degraded remnants of the race, once inhabiting the soil we occupy, enclosed in rude coffins of rough boards, hastily put together, and without any religious ceremony, were conveyed to this repository of the dead.” Although this burial ground was on privately owned land, but “it has been enjoined on the family in each succeeding generation not to trespass on this repository of the dead.”

In southern Worcester County, at Quabaug or Podunk Pond in Brookfield, “the distinctive remains of Indian occupancy were still plainly visible” in the last century.

Underground storage areas were identifiable; kettles, pottery, personal ornaments and “more or more skeletons” were taken from the site since “as far back as any one remembers” in the 1880s “this vicinity abounded in Indian relics of various kinds.”

An early history of Warren, Massachusetts, mentions “some vestiges of the aboriginals” unearthed in the eastern part of town – formerly part of Brookfield, where “large beds of clam-shells were discovered under the soil,” along with “Indian utensils.” On the southern bank of the Quinebaug River, near the Sturbridge and Brimfield borders, nineteenth-century residents were aware of “large planting-fields” of Nipmuc Indians from which “many relics, of various kinds” were retrieved. Moreover, in this area a West Brookfield amateur collected numerous Indian objects on a family farm, items now at the Haffenreffer Museum of Brown University.¹⁴

In this significant southern Worcester County Nipmuc homeland region, according to the first history of Sturbridge, a group of “hardy pioneers” in the 1720s, in “solitary, self-denying circumstances” traveled through “the impenetrable thicket” of woodlands, “chiefly on foot and alone into an almost unbroken forest, with each a good axe on his shoulder, and a pack on his back containing whatever provisions and utensils would best enable him to grapple with rude nature in single combat.”¹⁵ This text would have us imagine this part of southwestern Worcester County without Nipmuc Indians where, in fact, Natives had long occupied, cultivated and shaped the landscape at Sturbridge as well as at neighboring Warren, Brookfield, Monson and Brimfield.

Additionally, “numerous relics” found at Ware indicated “a camp and a nearby fishing place,” while in town, “tradition has it that a left-over family of Indians lived at the foot of Colonel’s Mountain, on the east side near the double spring, and that an old Indian known as Big Panther used to come back every year and pitch his wigwam a month in October near the spring.”¹⁶ At Monson, Nipmuc people had inhabited known sites including Deer Pond and Moose Mountain. At Brimfield, for example, they had created a 2,000-acre growing field where in the last century objects were unearthed, and Indian Field Hill was used to designate a second area where older town inhabitants recalled having seen extensive Native cornfields.

“Relics” and “traces” of Nipmucs were common at several locations, according to a period history of the area which alleged they were the “remains” of Indians who “roved about in large bands, generally friendly, but frequently troublesome and insolent in demanding food and lodging.” They disappeared, however, “utterly, without leaving a record behind...rude savage tribes of whom not enough is known even to say ‘he lived – he died.’”¹⁷

Collectively, these and other works of local history in central New England describe homelands from which Nipmuc people were absent. They represent a conceptual appropriation of a portion of Indian America purged of a potentially troubling continued presence of Indian people. In these and other works of nineteenth-century historians, Nipmuc Indian people take on the presence of an absence. With few exceptions, nineteenth-century histories of central Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut are part of a discourse of the disappearance of Indians: they clearly mark

the regional landscape affirming Nipmuc occupation, at the same time insinuating these Native Americans were people of the past. The discourse of which they are a part and which they prolong serves to project an extinction, dissolution and vanishing of the Nipmuc peoples of central Massachusetts. In depicting a landscape purged of Nipmucs, this discourse is an exercise in domination as it perpetuates almost "canonical" or regulatory distortions and simplifications of Native experience long part of an "official" New England historiography. The discourse reinforces a conventional historical wisdom that continues repeating Nipmuc Indians disappeared in the wake of the Metacomet's Uprising or the so-called King Philip War of 1675. In this less than ambitious or inspired reading of New England history the "disappearing Indian" it constructs is a stock character like, for example, the "thrifty Yankee."

In nineteenth-century New England, across works of history, fiction and reportage was created and solidified an obstinate discourse of disappearing Indians that claimed Nipmucs and other aboriginal people had already vanished or were doomed to disappear. At times contradictory, if not duplicitous, this discourse was, on the one hand, an attitude of the dominant culture toward New England's past imagining that Indians had become "extinct." On the other hand, it is an ideology of vanishing Indians that refused to "see" the continued presence, persistence and survival of the region's nineteenth-century Natives. In countless town chronicles, newspaper articles, fictional treatments and poetic works—all reinforced through a visual iconography—New England Indians took on the presence of an absence. Nipmucs became "people without history," people without "a place," absent from the social landscape, their collective identity as Nipmucs, in both past and present, "erased."

On a "hot sultry" Saturday in July 1889 Worcester residents gathered here on Packachoag Hill at the Worcester/ Auburn border to celebrate the 215th anniversary of the acquisition of Worcester from the Nipmuc Indians and recall the Nipmucs of Packachoag. Signifying "near the bend" of the Nipmuc or Blackstone River, Packachoag is the site of a pre-Contact Nipmuc settlement and was later one of the seventeenth-century "Praying Towns" of converted Indians created by Rev. John Eliot, the "Apostle to the Indians." In a ceremony designed particularly to honor Eliot for "philanthropic labors for civilization and Christianization of the red men," over 100 elegantly outfitted "ladies and gentlemen" who were "some of the most prominent citizens of Worcester and Auburn" assembled for "a gala time for old Pakachoag Hill."

Auburn's Joseph P. Eaton, the event coordinator, provided carriages to transport guests from the base of the Packachoag Hill to the Stevens family homestead, where the party met in "the delightful grove a little east of the spring" of former Indian village site. As they left the grove "everyone partook of cool, refreshing drafts from the spring," it popularly accepted at the time that Packachoag meant "place of beautiful springs," but what mattered, in the words of a local paper, was appreciation of a site "redolent with interesting historical association in the past."

Rev. Charles E. Simmons of Worcester began the program with a prayer. Historian Caleb Wall then spoke for an hour about the founding of Worcester and its aboriginal people. According to news accounts, Wall's presentation ranged "from the

time of almost universal sway of the uncivilized races to the present unexampled condition of civilization and Christian enlightenment."

Following Wall's address several "notables" from Worcester, Auburn and Boston offered "remarks." Participants applauded Eliot and lamented the disappearance of the "red man." The gathering ended with the assembled guests, all joining hands in a large circle, singing "Auld Lang Syne."

Where, however, were the Nipmucs in this and other comparable events? In the same decade, for example, the Worcester Society of Antiquity sponsored a field trip to Grafton, formerly the Nipmuc "plantation" or reservation of Hassanamesit, which like Packachoag had been a "praying village." Here, as at Packachoag Hill, accomplishments in "settling" the "wilderness" were lauded and participants bemoaned the "demise of the red man."

Nipmucs were gone, "disappeared like shadows in the stream," known and remembered only in their absence.

¹ Native American occupations sites in the Framingham and Natick areas are discussed in Josiah H. Temple, History of Framingham Early Known as Danforth's Farms 1660-1880, hereafter Framingham History (Framingham: Town of Framingham, 1887) 37, 44-5, 49, 55-6. One of the more careful and accurate of regional 19th century historians, Temple [1815-1893], a lifelong Framingham resident, was author or co-author of still equally useful histories of Whately [1872], Northfield [1875], North Brookfield [1887] and Palmer [1889].

² Joel W. Martin, "My Grandmother Was A Cherokee Princess': Representations of Indians in Southern History," in S. Elizabeth Bird, Dressing in Feathers, The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) 135, 136, 138

³ Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, ed., Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson with Annotations, 1845-1848, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1914) 23

⁴ George Sheldon and Josiah Temple, History of Northfield, Massachusetts, For 150 Years [shortened title] (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1875) 35-36

⁵ Rev. Charles M. Hyde, Historical Celebration of the Town of Brimfield, Hampden County, Mass., Wednesday, October 11, 1876, (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan Co., Printers, 1879) 19-21

⁶ George L. Wright, "The Local Names of Place In and Around Boylston," Boylston Historical Series, Boylston [Mass.] Historical Commission, 11 vols.(1980) I, 24-5

⁷ Harriette Merrifield Forbes, The Hundredth Town, Glimpses of Life in Westborough 1717-1817, (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1889) 172-185.

⁸ Information here on Native sites at Sudbury is contained in Alfred Sereno Hudson, The History of Sudbury, Massachusetts 1638-1889 (Sudbury: Town of Sudbury, 1889) 8-25, 569. Hudson [1839-1907] was also author of Wayland, Maynard and Concord histories.

⁹ Nipmuc remains from several regional towns became part of the Museum's collection. Specifically, Peabody Museum, B:8682, from "Wachuset," Accession #59-27, and Winchendon Burial Ground, B:57385, Accession #91-19. Other Nipmuc remains at the Peabody Museum include: "beads of European origin found with Indian bones," O:72782, Accession #07-64; human remains from Thompson, CT., B: N/3899, Accession #41-75; and, from Uxbridge, #14111, Accession #78-9; and, remains from Harvard, B:69744, Accession #19-4

¹⁰ AAS Donations Books confirm that sometime in 1814 the Society received a “lot” including “several ancient skulls from New Hampshire.” Later on Oct. 25, 1820, Caleb Atwater sent from Ohio items including: “an under jaw-bone of a fossil skull of the ancient inhabitants, found in a tumulus” and “human bones taken from mounds in Ohio,” [Vol. I: 3, 15, 16, 19]

¹¹ At Lancaster, [“There were Indian settlements besides the one as Washacum, at the following places, viz. near the house of Samuel Jones, not far from the road to Leominster; one on a neck of land running into Fort pond; a third, east of Clam Shell pond, and north of John Larkin’s near Berlin; and a fourth, above Pitt’s mills in the south part of town,”](#) Joseph Willard, [Topographical and Historical Sketches of the Town of Lancaster in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts \(Lancaster: C. Griffin, 1826\)](#) 46. Tatnuck and Packachoag are mentioned in Caleb Wall, [Reminiscences of Worcester From the Earliest Period Historical and Genealogical With Notices of Early Settlers and Prominent Citizens, and Descriptions of Old Landmarks and Ancient Dwellings, Accompanied by a Map and Numerous Illustrations](#) (Worcester: Tyler & Seagrave, 1877) [10](#)

¹² Nipmuc occupation of the Wabbaquasset or Woodstock region is discussed in Clarence Winthrop Bowen, [The History of Woodstock Connecticut](#), hereafter [Woodstock History](#), 8 vols. (Norwood, Mass. Plympton Press, 1926-1943) I, 9-19, 45-51, 72-74; citations here are from Oliver A. Hiscox, “The Last of the Wabbaquassets,” in Albert Lincoln, ed., [A Modern History of Windham County](#), 2 vols., (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1920) I, 60-2

¹³ Lawson, [Union History](#), 20

¹⁴ [The Quabaug site at Podunk Pond is discussed in Temple, Brookfield History, 28-29; Whitney, History of Warren; the Quinebaug River site or Putikookuppoge is described in Temple, Brookfield History, 31.](#) In 1923 documentation William E. Lincoln, affirmed that in the previous sixty years, he and his brother David, had found this material on their farm including: twenty pestles, twelve axes, two pipes, twenty-seven arrow points and “other specimens.” See David W. Gregg, “The Archaeological Collections,” in [Passionate Hobby Rudolf Frederick Haffenreffer and the King Philip Museum](#), Brown University Studies in Anthropology and Material Culture, Vol. 6 (Providence: Brown University Press, 1994) 143

¹⁵ Joseph S. Clark, [pastor of the Sturbridge Congregational Church], [An Historical Sketch of Sturbridge, Massachusetts From Its Settlement to the Present Time](#), (Brookfield Mass.: E. & L. Merriam Printer, 1838) 6; Compare with, George Davis, [A Historical Sketch of Sturbridge and Southbridge](#) (West Brookfield, Mass.: O.S. Cooke & Co., 1856) 8

¹⁶ Arthur Chase, History of Ware, Massachusetts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) 5

¹⁷ Rev. Charles M. Hyde, Historical Celebration of the Town of Brimfield, Hampden County, Mass., Wednesday, October 11, 1876, (Springfield, Mass.: Clark W. Bryan Co., Printers, 1879) 19-21