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VINEYARD
INDIAN RELICS

BY

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Edgartown
Island of Marthas Vineyard
Massachusetts

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THE FOLLOWING PAPER WAS READ AT A MEETING OF THE DUKES COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AT VINEYARD HAVEN, MASS., JULY 24th, 1924.

It is particularly fitting that thus early among the meetings of the Dukes County Historical Society we should consider an Indian subject, especially fitting not only on account of the wealth of material here, but because the early fame of Martha's Vineyard was so inseparably connected with the Indians. Our five missionary Mayhews by their religious work among them made our little island well known in those early days not only on the main land, but in far away London.

The first pretentious book written at the Vineyard, "The Conquests and Triumphs of Grace," by Matthew Mayhew, 1695, contains an interesting account of the Indians of Martha's Vineyard; while the work which is called by Colonel Banks the best known and most important of all the literary productions of the Vineyard is "Indian Converts," published in 1726, by the Rev. Experience Mayhew, who ranks next to Rev. John Eliot as a scholar in the Algonquian tongue, and who published several books in the Indian language, best known among them being "The Massachusee Psalter," 1709.

More than a century later, James Athearn Jones of Martha's Vineyard, friend of Washington Irving and of Hawthorne, contributed to the written lore of the Indian. The second edition of his "Traditions of the North American Indians," in three volumes, was published in London in 1830, and contains a number of Vineyard Indian legends. Tradition has it that Jones' poem, "Maid of the White Canoe," was the inspiration of Longfellow's "Hiawatha." The legends of the Vineyard in Jones' "Traditions" include, "The Choice of a God," as told him by Parson Thaxter; "The Devil of Cape Higgin," "Moshup," and "The Legend of Worship," told him by an old Indian nurse.

Richard L. Pease made thorough studies of the old Indian lands and bounds for the Commonwealth. His Report on the Gay Head situation, printed in 1871, gives much interesting history.

He says, "There are very many burial places upon Gay Head still marked by common, rough stones, picked up in the fields. One of these marks the place of the old minister Silas Paul. The inscription is a mixture of Indian and English and means, 'Here lies the body of Silas Paul an ordained preacher died in August 24th, 1787.'" This stone is mentioned by nearly every writer about the Gay Head Indians since the days of Daniel Gookin, 1795.

Mr. Henry E. Chase of Brookline made a study of the Wampanoag tribe to which the Vineyard, Nantucket and Cape Cod Indians belong. This was published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1883. He notes the fact that "the Indian student, unlike the Egyptologist, has no monuments to help his study, for the Indians expended unstinted labor with considerable skill in fashioning their implements, weapons and ornaments of stone, but nonwithstanding in preserving their history." "Inscribed tablets," he goes on, "or boulders with picture writing upon them have never been found in this region, excepting such instances as the gravestones at Gay Head inscribed after the Indian language had been reduced to writing by the whites." Nevertheless, nearby, beside the Taunton River, still on territory of the Wampanoags is the famous Dighton Rock over which there has been endless speculation, some contending it was a Norse inscription, but the best scholars now conceding it to be an Indian pictograph.

Mr. Chase was surprised at the ignorance prevailing among those who might most reasonably be expected to direct one to the sites of Indian towns and he emphasises the value of keeping the record of all old Indian place names. "On Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard," he adds, "it was easier to get information on our subject, probably partly from the fact that Indian names have been more easily preserved on islands where may still be found many descendants of the first white settlers."

"Porte Crayon," writing a Vineyard travel sketch for *Harper's Monthly*, in 1860 evidently notes this unusually common use hereabouts of the Indian place names, for he begins his article

"Naushon, Nonamesset,
Uncatena and Wepecket,
Nashawena, Pesquinise,
Cuttyhunk and Penikese."

a rhyme of the Elizabeth Islands, from easterly to westerly, that all Vineyard children used to learn, and indeed the daily use throughout Dukes County of the quaint old Indian names is certainly among the charms of this locality.

In 1859, the year preceeding Porte Crayon's article, a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly* rather bewails the fact that there are few traces of the primitive Indians to be found at Gay Head. The traveler could discern "only one aboriginal vestige in either inhabitants or customs. This existed in the shape of a dish of succotash (corn and beans boiled together) which the [Gay Head] woman was preparing—very possibly in ignorance that her ancestors had cooked, and eaten, and named the compound, ages before the white intruder ever saw their shore."

If these few facts and fancies help to weave an Indian charm around our Island, how about the Indian whalemens who have brought the Vineyard so much fame from the days of "Indian Converts" down to "Moby Dick" and more modern history and fiction? And we might give a modicum of credit also to our Historical Pageants, which did so much to awaken an interest in, and to make vivid our Indian history and legends.

Anyone who goes to our Vineyard histories for a study of this subject will be amply repaid. Besides our greatest authority, Colonel Banks' comprehensive treatment of the "Aboriginal Inhabitants," we have much interesting Indian lore in the Vineyard histories of Mr. Hine and Mr. H. Franklin Norton, and also in Mrs. Mary A. C. Vanderhoop's interesting, "History and Traditions of the Gay Head Indians," published in 1904, and more recently in the *Vineyard Gazette*. But I must hasten on to a very tangible phase of this fascinating subject.

Vineyard Indian Relics is a phrase which I am glad to be able to illustrate with these loan exhibits of Mrs. Hertford Mayhew and Mr. Daniel Vincent of Chilmark, two beautifully mounted collections of skillfully wrought arrowheads, and these valuable gifts of Indian relics brought here this afternoon for the Society's collections. Here is a string of Indian Wampum from Mrs. Minnie Vincent, Oak Bluffs, and a finely mounted collection of arrowheads from Mr. Walter Willoughby, Edgartown, found by him on the site of the traditional first white settlement of the Island. These two specimens, from Sanchekantacket, one a large spear-head, the other a celt, unusual for their beauty and workmanship are presented by one of our Vineyard historians, Mr. H. Franklin Norton; while here is yet another handsome collection of arrowheads from the center of our island, and from an anonymous donor.

The Rev. Daniel Stevens, whose long service as preacher at Vineyard Haven terminated at his death about thirty years ago, was an ardent collector of trophies of the Vineyard Indians. After

his death, his fine collection, I am told, was offered for sale at a nominal figure, but no one realizing the importance of keeping the trophies where they had been gathered, it was lost to the Island.

Could one wish a better reason for the existence of the Dukes County Historical Society? Indeed since the above was written it was learned that a notable array of arrowheads was about to be sold to go off Island, whereupon a generous officer of this Society purchased it, and it is one of the collections given our Society today. And right here, I want to mention the public-spiritedness of Mr. John Crowell, who carefully kept his rare specimen of Indian pottery awaiting the time when a Vineyard Historical Society should be formed in order that he might present the treasure to us.

To us all, I think, there is an added interest and a touch of pathos in this subject just now, since we read that that genuine boy whom death has just removed, so tragically from the White House had for one of his fads the collecting of Indian arrowheads, and that he had found, and added to the notable collection of his friends in Pennsylvania, many fine specimens.

The stone implements and weapons of the Indians were many; not only the well known arrow, and lance heads for warfare, the killing of birds and other animals and even whales, but many flint articles used for scraping and smoothing wood, horn, and probably in the preparation of their skins. There were also hoes, axes, hammers, knives, pestles, pounding stones, drills, sinkers, etc. Their workmanship shows that the old Arrow-maker of Hiawatha was no romantic dream of Longfellow's, but was as expert in his line, and in his time, as the electrician of today. Yet even as we examine the sharp and skillfully made arrows it seems impossible to believe in their deadliness. However, in the hands of a hunter of skill and strength a single arrow has accomplished the extraordinary feat of penetrating three antelopes that had crowded together.

Mr. S. J. Guernsey made some archeological explorations on Martha's Vineyard for the Peabody Museum of Harvard in 1912 and 1913. His field included parts of Gay Head and Chilmark, and Watcha, and Oyster Ponds in West Tisbury. In his article published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1916 he notes some of his interesting finds. One of his illustrations shows a fragment of pottery found in the vicinity of the place where Mr. Crowell's pottery was excavated.

At various points along the west end of the South Shore, he mentions nothing of note, but many flakes, rejects, and chipped points of stone. At the "Brick Yard" on the North Side he found

so many chips and quartzite points that he believes it to have been a camp or workshop site. Along the shore of Quitsa and Menemsha Ponds he found almost uninterrupted evidence of aboriginal occupation in the shell deposits, chipped stone, etc.

On the Vincent farm at Quitsa he found thirty points and rejects on the surface and the Vincents had before him found many objects which they had given away, and they had preserved a stone mortar, a pestle and many arrowheads. At Peases Point, now owned by Mrs. Percy Cowen, Mr. Guernsey dug at will and found Indian graves, hearths and pits from which some fragments of pottery, arrowheads, and sinkers were obtained. On the shores of Quitsa Pond in land of Mr. Ernest Mayhew, Mr. Guernsey found a hearth and five pits. In the pits besides the usual shells of scallops, clams, quohaugs and sea snails he found bones of dogs, deer, turtles, birds and fish, thus giving us an idea of the varied "bill of fare" of the Indians. While oyster shells were found in his search at Oyster Pond they were not general throughout the shell pits of the Island.

Mr. Guernsey describes a number of Indian Burial Places, which he explored very slightly and in his interesting article gives a number of illustrations of the sherds, bone implements, and points, arrowheads, net sinkers both notched and grooved; a plummet and pendant.

A reading of his article makes you feel more than ever the possibilities of discovery in these old Indian burial places and camping sites. He made a preliminary archeological survey of Martha's Vineyard, so what might an exhaustive search produce?

Let me emphasize again that it is one important duty of this Society to be interested enough to make sure that any private collections that the owner may wish to dispose of, or which are the results of future search, may go to the making of a noteworthy Indian collection upon this Island. As a practical suggestion, right here, I would like to ask all owners of Indian collections to register that fact by giving their name to any of the officers of the Society. Thus we may have on file a record of the whereabouts of Indian material, for study and possible future exhibition.

There are many other Indian Burial Places not mentioned by Mr. Guernsey. Notable among them being one on Mr. Guerin's estate in Chilmark and the well known one near the Mayhew Chapel at Christiantown. An interesting collection of Indian pottery from ancient graves is owned by Mrs. Hayson of Gay Head.

The largest stone Indian mortar I have ever seen is in the garden of Mr. Perrin's estate at Squibnocket. It was placed there by the late Mr. Hammond, having been obtained from the South Road, Chilmark, on the old farm of the late Deacon Moses Vincent. A wooden mortar almost as large is still treasured in West Tisbury having been obtained from the Christiantown Indians.

There are a few old Indian baskets preserved; Mrs. Vanderhoop has a notable collection, and the fine example which I show you was made by that well known Deep Bottom Indian, Mima Easton. This basket made of beach grass, as you see, is in craftsmanship singularly like a wild grass basket recently found in the Ozark Mountains by two scientists from the Museum of the American Indian, New York. The Ozark basket is thought to date back at least two thousand years. Nantucket has her "Light Ship Basket"; a worthy basket for young Vineyarders to make would be replicas of these old Indian beach grass baskets.

The prevalence of the fragrant, yellow-blossomed tansy upon the Vineyard has often been noted. This herb was highly prized by the Indians and is said to mark their old wigwam sites. Rev. Thomas Mayhew describes the early Indian huts as covered with mats instead of skins, as on the mainland. Withes and "popping" (beach grass rope) were doubtless used as fastening. A few eelers are now living who still make popping. Was not that craft and the art of making corn-husk mats, also the construction of eel weirs, and other ingenious eeling gear passed on to the whites from the Indians as well as many clever ideas for whaling implements?

In the records of the Commissioners of the United Colonies, 1661, is this item, "To Wheele Cards and Cotten Woole to Imploy the Indian weemen att the Vineyards 10 pounds." What lovely blankets they may have spun and woven. Are any of the fabrics or designs and patterns of those early days now in existence? Surely an intriguing thought! Indeed just to examine these wonderfully wrought stone weapons and other examples of the Indians' patient and primitive handicraft is to summon for us, from the past, Martha's Vineyard as it was in those olden days, when our ancestors came to dwell in Christian fellowship among the natives—the days of which Whittier wrote:

"Sanchekantacket's isle of sand
Was once his father's hunting land
Where zealous Hiacoomes stood,—
The wild apostle of the wood,
Shook from his soul the fear of harm,
And trampled on the Powwaw's charm."

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