

The View from The Crow's Nest



Newsletter of the Mattapoisett Historical Society

Fall 2014 / Issue XXIII

Fifty-six years of preserving the past for the benefit of the future.

People of the First Light

by Elizabeth Hutchison

As we move further into Autumn and closer to Thanksgiving, Pilgrims and Native Americans enter our thoughts. The Wampanoag people live in southeastern Massachusetts and were participants in the first Thanksgiving. Mattapoisett, a Wampanoag word meaning "place of rest," was a summer site for a Wampanoag community. What follows is a brief glimpse into the Wampanoag lifestyle before European settlement.

At the beginnings of the 17th century, the Wampanoag, a word meaning "People of the First Light", lived in southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Rhode Island, having occupied the territory for over 15,000 years. The northern boundary was approximately at Marshfield heading west toward Plainville. The Atlantic Ocean formed the eastern boundary. To the west the boundary followed the state line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, but did include parts of Providence, and all of Warren, Bristol, Tiverton, Little Compton and Aquidneck Island. Wampanoag territory also included Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and the Elizabeth Islands.



Wampanoag with English emigrate

"Within this area, there were 69 Wampanoag villages that ranged in size from one or two hundred people up to two thousand. The size of a village and the structure of life was purposefully based on what a given land area could support. Each village had sufficient area to contain the permanent winter dwelling area where everyone lived together, the individual family summer planting areas, and the hunting, fishing and gathering (food and materials) areas. Often the latter was shared by one or more villages. People had the understanding, the knowledge and the skill to fulfill all of their needs from the natural world in a manner that not only created a successful culture, but was also both respectful and highly sustainable."

The Wampanoag people were semi-sedentary, moving seasonally between summer and winter villages. Villages were concentrated on the coast during the summer to take advantage of fishing and shell fishing and to tend to crops in planting areas, but moved inland after the harvest to facilitate hunting. Each Wampanoag community had strictly defined hunting territories in order to avoid conflict. In the second half of the 17th century, this strict defining of Wampanoag territory fell apart as earlier in the century three epidemics swept across New England devastating the Wampanoag population. High mortality rates, sometimes 100% of a village, found the mainland Wampanoag population reduced by 50%-90%. Many villages were abandoned because there was simply no one left. The Wampanoag residents of the islands were somewhat protected by their isolation and suffered less loss than the mainland Wampanoag. It is speculated that these epidemics were spread to the Native populations from the European

(continued on next page)



People of the First Light (continued from cover)

merchant and fishing vessels the traveled the coasts of New England. These vessels were also known to capture and enslave Native peoples, further devastating their populations.

The People of the First light were a confederacy with a head sachem presiding over a group of other sachems. Sachems, who could be either men or women, were obligated to consult the councilors within their own tribes as well as any “lesser” sachems in the region. They took care of trading with other tribes, and organized protection for allies in exchange for tribute.

While men within Wampanoag society did perform most of the political rolls, interacting with other tribes and practicing warfare, these roles were not closed to women. In fact, Wampanoag society was organized using a matrilineal system. Women controlled property, the home and its belongings, as well as farming plots, and property was inherited through the maternal line. Men lived with their wives’ families and elder women approved the selection of sachems.

Men and women worked together within their families to produce and preserve all of the food their family needed. Families shared food with others in need, especially the sick and elderly. Sachems also made sure that widows and the poor had provisions. “Farmed foods such as corn and beans made up about 70% of the Wampanoag diet. Although the Wampanoag favored meat, [it] made up less than 20% of their diet. Roots, berries and other gathered plant materials, as well as eggs, fish, and shellfish (both fresh and dried) made up the rest.”

Jobs for food production were divided along gender lines. Women were active in all stages of food production and preservation-the importance of this work gave women significant political, economic and spiritual roles within their communities. Young girls were trained at an early age to work in the fields, to gather fruits, nuts and other edibles, and to work around the wetu-the Wampanoag round or oval house built out of young saplings and covered in bark for the winter homes and cattail mats for summer homes. Young boys learned to hunt and survive in the woods, in any condition, as hunting was vital to a family’s survival. “For the most part, foods were eaten when they were available. Some foods, however, were preserved by drying or smoking. At harvest time, beans

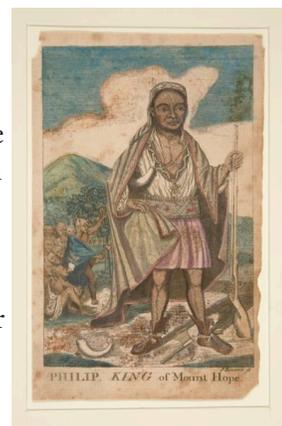
would be picked and eaten fresh, or dried and saved for winter food or for seeds. All corn would be dried on the cob. Some dried kernels would be removed to parch over a fire and then were pounded into nokehig, a fine corn flour used for a traveling food as well as thickening for soups. Seeds were saved from all the best plants for planting the following year.”

Clothing for all Wampanoag people included a breechcloth made from deerskin and worn hanging from a belt. Children wore nothing as long as the weather was warm enough. Colder weather saw the addition of mantles made from skins or furs fastened at one shoulder and wrapped around the body in myriad ways. Woven belts were often added over the mantles. Women sometimes wore skirts fastened with belts. Both men and women wore leggings in cooler weather and to protect them from underbrush in the woods. Men’s leggings were longer, tying at the waist, while women’s were shorter, tying at the knee. “Moccasinash were worn on the feet in cold weather or rough terrain. (The word moccasin is a Wampanoag word for a single shoe. Moccasinash is the word for a pair.) Wampanoag moccasinash were made from deerskin. Elk and moose were often used as well.”

Bodies and clothing were decorated with paint, as well as adorned with ornaments. “Men, women and children wore bracelets made from shell or glass trade beads. Earrings, necklaces, garters, belts and breastplates were made from various materials such as bone, copper, wood, shells and stone. Tattooing was reported by Europeans, who saw it on the faces and bodies of some 17th-century Wampanoag People.”

The Wampanoag who first interacted with the English settlers shared with them a successful and vibrant culture. Today, thousands of Wampanoag continue to live in New England, keeping the way of the People of the First Light alive.

All quotes contained in this article may be found on the Plimoth Plantation website at www.plimoth.org.



Philip King of Mount Hope by Paul Revere



Curators Corner by Elizabeth Hutchison

The summer of 2014 garnered a lot of new visitors to the Mattapoissett Historical Society museum as the fire and police communities and their families came out to enjoy our summer exhibit *Mattapoissett's Finest: Fire and Police*. Many thanks to Captain Anthony Days of the Mattapoissett Police Department and Lieutenant Justin Dubois and Deputy Chief Walter Morgado of the Mattapoissett Fire Department for their unending help in locating artifacts, photographs, and people willing to share their stories and objects to help tell the stories of these two departments and their importance to Mattapoissett.

Another very large thank you goes out to the Docents and Volunteers who helped us sort through just about half of our costume collection. We still have more than 30 boxes to get through before next summer, so if you have any free time during the week and would like to help care for our beautiful costume collection, please call me to let me know your availability.

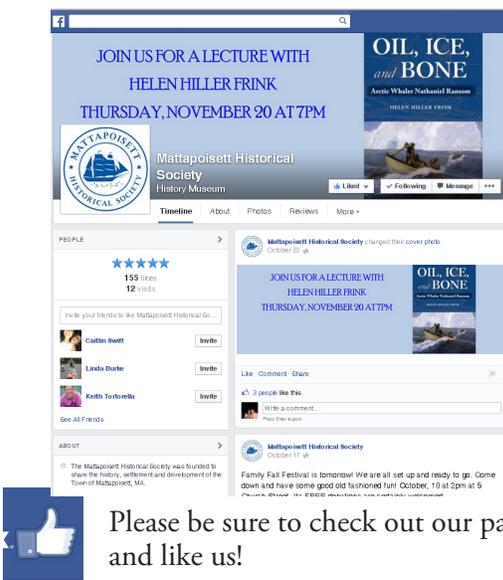
As usual, we are keeping busy at the museum, getting ready for the Holiday Season, and working hard to bring you interesting programs and events in 2015. Please make sure to check the museum's website or friend us on Facebook to keep up with our calendar of events.

Speaking of events, the museum is opening its doors on the morning of Saturday, December 6 to area artists and crafters for a Holiday Fair; we love to celebrate our local artists and crafts people as our museum is full of objects made by past Mattapoissett artists and crafts people. Please come down to the museum from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm and get some holiday shopping done while supporting our local talent. We will also be featuring the exhibit *Beloved Books: Bygone Children's Treasures* in collaboration with many of our local librarians and bibliophiles on Saturday December 6, 13 and 20 from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm. We invite you to come in and view this charming exhibit.



Part of the Historical Society's Children's Books Collection that will be on display this December in our *Beloved Books: Bygone Children's Treasures* Exhibit.

Mattapoissett Historical Society Facebook Page



Please be sure to check out our page and like us!

Recent Acquisitions:

- 2014.7 Mattapoissett Police and Fire photographs
- 2014.8 Framed photograph of Mrs. Charles Hamlin
- 2014.9 Photographs and memorabilia from the Hinsdale House
- 2014.10 Joseph Alves prints
- 2014.11 The book *A View, A Wish, Bluefish* by Ruth and Michael Joliffe
- 2014.12 Two logging pikes, one ice pike, two oil lamps and one chicken feeder

Recent Loans to the Museum:

- L 2014.1 Two oil paintings by Clifford Ashley *Wanderer Drying Sail* and *Old New Bedford*



Another Successful Annual Meeting

by Jennifer N. McIntire

The pews were full and the sun was shining. Sunday, September 21 was the perfect day for Mattapoissett Historical Society's Annual Meeting. From the perspective of the Society's Board Members and Curator, our annual meeting is a wonderful time to reflect on another successful year of preserving the past for the benefit of the future and share the specifics with our dedicated members. It is also a chance to celebrate our most busy and vibrant season: summer.

We welcomed two new Board Members: Kathleen Damaskos and Erich Carroll. Kathleen will be taking over as Treasurer and brings a wealth of experience. She served as chief administrative officer at Boston Lyric Opera for twelve years before moving to Mattapoissett in 2013. Erich teaches history at Old Rochester Regional High School. He is interested in better integrating local history with that of our nation and the world.

The Society was awarded a grant from the Community Preservation Commission to archive our collection of works on paper: surveyors' maps, deeds, etc. Moreover, summer docents were indispensable. They catalogued, photographed and re-wrapped 30 boxes of textiles. Elizabeth is appreciative and welcomes more volunteers.

I began my report by encouraging all present to take a closer look at the two Clifford Ashley paintings on loan to us from John and Dawn Mello. They are a significant contribution to our collection and they put us on the map as an important venue for works of art by Clifford Ashley.

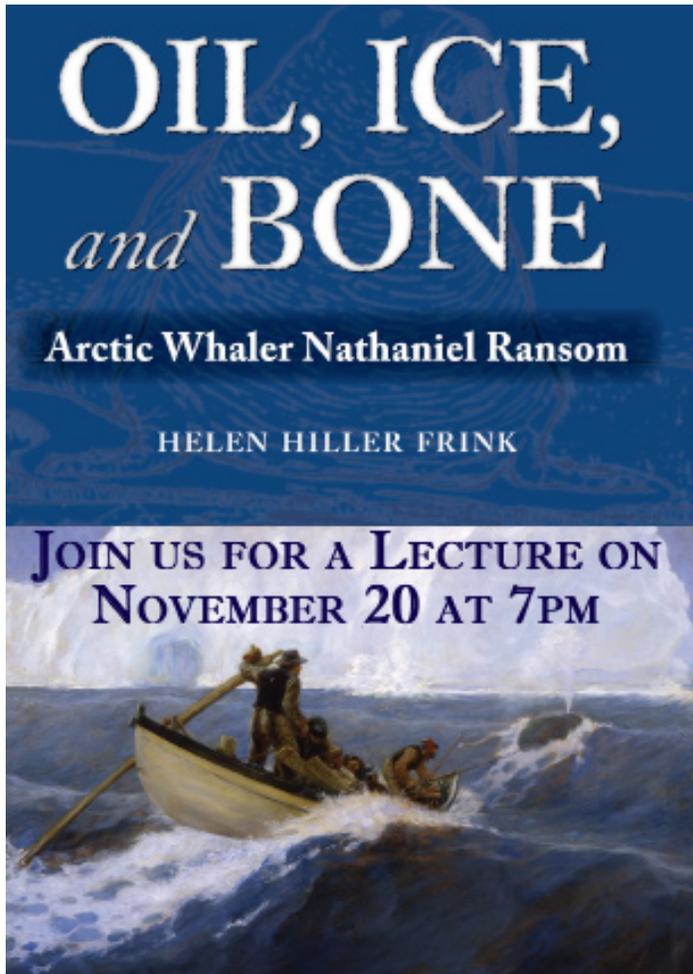
Our website is also worth a visit! Katharine Staelin volunteered to work on a massive data project for the Historical Society. She has developed digital educational material that explores life in Mattapoissett, MA in the 1800s and late

1700s. The project uses visualizations to communicate the scale and role of the shipbuilding and whaling industries in Mattapoissett in relationship to the size of these industries nationally. The feature also includes lists of whaling voyages originating from Mattapoissett and vessels built in Mattapoissett.

I ended my report by thanking all the docents and volunteers for their work this year, with special appreciation to Betty Pennington for her tireless work on the photography project. She has worked diligently on cataloging our large photograph collection. At her suggestion, Elizabeth installed a small photography exhibit encouraging townspeople to share what they know about the photographs on view.

Having Seth back in the area this summer was wonderful. We all benefited from his presence after the meeting was adjourned as he informed us about Mattapoissett during the depression of 1848, the Gold Rush, and the Clipper Ship era. Members present learned that economic depression and the news of gold discovered in the California Territory caused 160 men to leave Mattapoissett in hopes of getting rich quick. 800 men departed New Bedford and Nantucket lost a fourth of its adult male population. Seth explained that most of these men did not strike gold and they struggled in this lawless territory far from home.

It was an informative and educational meeting.





What's Your Collection?

by Katherine Gaudet

In the 1960s my parents would “drag” me along on their antiquing excursions. During one such occasion, I was whiny, bored and wanted to leave. The enterprising owner of the store asked me if I liked to read. When I replied yes, he handed me the *Little Ones Annual* published in 1890. As I turned the first page to read, my lifelong love of antique children's books was born. I have been hooked ever since and have a collection to show for it!

What do you collect? Do you have a treasure you'd like to share? Memorabilia of Mattapoissett? Stamps? Dolls? Something more eclectic like toasters? Tin boxes? Seashells or butterflies? We'd love to know and bet that lots of others would, too.

On February 26 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, the Mattapoissett Historical Society invites you to bring your collection (or part of it) down to the museum in order to display it for the public. A reception will accompany the exhibit and will allow everyone to mingle to ask questions and enjoy the eclectic collections. If we have piqued your interest, please contact curator, Elizabeth Hutchison, at the Museum to reserve a space to display your collection. She is also available to answer any questions you might have.



Save the date, and join us to view what promises to be unique collections from the SouthCoast area. I hope to see you there so I can share the best antique children's books in my collection!

SUPPORT YOUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Mattapoissett Historical Society is supported through the generosity of individuals, families, foundations and businesses who wish to help us *Preserve the Past for the Benefit of the Future*. In addition to being a member, please consider other ways you can support our efforts:

Memorial Gifts or Contributions in Honor: Mark an anniversary, a passing, or honor a loved one with a donation to the Historical Society

Bequests: Naming the Mattapoissett Historical Society as a beneficiary in your will will leave an enduring legacy for the future.

Corporate Matching Gift Programs: Please check with your employer to see if they offer a matching gift program.

Business Sponsorships: We offer many ways for local businesses to sponsor the Historical Society and its efforts.

Thank you to the following Businesses for their support:

American Research and Management, Co.

Mattapoissett Boatyard, Inc.

Rogers Gallery

Brownell Systems, Inc.

Oxford Creamery

Town Wharf General Store



Mattapoisett Historical Society Calendar of Events *Fall 2014*

- November 20 **Oil, Ice and Bone Arctic Whaler Nathaniel Ransom Lecture at 7:00 pm**
Meet Helen Hiller Frink author of *Oil, Ice and Bone Arctic Whaler Nathaniel Ransom* and enjoy learning about Mattapoisett's own Nathaniel Ransom: He survived the worst whaling disaster in the history of the New England fleet, when captains and crew abandoned thirty-three vessels, trapped and crushed by drifting ice off the Alaskan coast. Ransom's eyewitness account of his four voyages depicts in rich detail whaling's brutal slaughter and sudden losses. His engrossing story opens a window on the life of an ordinary whale man during the heyday of the Arctic bowhead hunt. Free; donation encouraged.
- December 6 **Arts and Crafts Holiday Fair and opening of the *Beloved Books: Bygone Children's Treasures* Exhibit 9:00 am -12:00 pm**
Join us to **Shop for unique gifts** made by Mattapoisett crafters and artists and see the new **Children's Literature exhibit** featuring books from the 19th and 20th centuries. Light Refreshments will be served. Free; donation encouraged.
- December 13 **Museum Open for Holiday Shopping and *Beloved Books: Bygone Children's Treasures* Exhibit 9:00 am - 12:00 pm** DROP IN CHRISTMAS CRAFT 9:00 am - 12:00 pm
Join us to craft a felt fish ornament to swim across your tree. Free; donation encouraged.
- December 20 **Museum Open for Holiday Shopping and *Beloved Books: Bygone Children's Treasures* Exhibit 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**
Join us at 10:00 am for a SPECIAL HOLIDAY STORYTIME. Free; donation encouraged.

VOLUNTEER!

If you have an hour or two a week and are looking for an interesting and fun way to spend some time, please join our year round Volunteer Program.

Are you interested in:

- ◆ Programs (both public and school groups)
- ◆ Exhibits
- ◆ Acquisitions Registration
- ◆ Office Administration
- ◆ Public Relations
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Museum Shop
- ◆ Museum and Artifact Maintenance

If you have a particular interest, we have a need! We look forward to hearing from you!

Please call Elizabeth Hutchison at (508) 758-2844 or email mattapoisett.museum@verizon.net with any questions.





WORD SEARCH

by Lisa Hill

Wampanoag Indians

- Massasoit Fish
- Wamsutta Game
- Alexander Squash
- Metacom Beans
- King Philip Maize
- Easterners Fishing
- Amie Hunting
- Mashpee Planting
- Aquinnah Harvesting
- Mount Hunting
- Hope Thomas
- Swanzy Dermer
- Plymouth Verrazzano

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One of the many dresses encountered by our Docents this summer as they helped unpack, check for wear, catalogue, photograph and repack over 300 pieces of clothing.

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Vice President

Katherine Gaudet

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MATTAPOISETT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Fifty-six years of preserving the past for the benefit of the future.



Family Fall Festival

The Family Fall Festival was a great success. Participants enjoyed good old fashioned fun including decorating pumpkins and making corn husk dolls.

Photograph by Jennifer McIntire

Become a member today!

- Annual - Family \$50.00 Life - Family \$1,000.00
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