

Land-Use History of Cape Poge & Wasque



LAND-USE HISTORY OF CAPE POGE AND WASQUE

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Photographs and Maps

Cover background: 1775 map from the DeBarres Chart surveyed for the British Navy.

Cover photographs, clockwise from top right: Cape Poge Lighthouse by Paul Rezendes, sheep grazing, Wasque after a fire, and Wasque during a prescribed fire.

Acknowledgements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thousands of years ago, New England was buried under sheets of ice formed during the Ice Age. These masses of ice eventually melted and allowed for the Native American arrival in the United States. For thousands of years, practices of the Native Americans on Martha's Vineyard, known as the Wampanoag, had profound effects on species composition and landscape structure. The Wampanoag created drastic changes on their

surroundings predominantly through large-scale burning, which assisted in hunting game, maintaining berry patches, and creating fertile soils for cultivation.

Because of these Wampanoag practices, many explorers that traveled the waters surrounding the Vineyard in the 17th century found an “open” landscape.¹ Because a substantial proportion of Martha’s Vineyard was open at this time, the Europeans reasoned that the land would be well suited for agriculture and pasture. In the mid-1600s, the Europeans began to settle on Martha’s Vineyard and began associating with the Wampanoag. As the Europeans learned from the Wampanoag practices, various intensities and frequencies of burning continued to spread across the island throughout the European settlement period. As the European population on Martha’s Vineyard expanded, land clearing for agriculture, wood, and grazing became more necessary, and consequently, more prevalent.

The plant and animal communities present at Cape Poge Wildlife Refuge and Wasque Reservation today exist as a manifestation of the historic land use of these properties.² Through unearthing the past land-use history of Cape Poge and Wasque, we are able to unveil how present-day plant and animal communities came to exist, and how to manage and conserve them for the future.

- On Martha’s Vineyard, complex relationships have evolved between humans and their surrounding environment for thousands of years. These relationships or “disturbances” maintained a continuum of various habitats on Chappaquiddick. These disturbances—clearing, mowing, grazing, and burning—were applied in various regimes and combinations, ultimately creating a habitat “patchwork” shaped of diverse combinations of landscape structure and species diversity.³ On Chappaquiddick, these landscape disturbances have come to nurture species of plants and wildlife that are found in few places throughout the world.

¹ Raleigh, E.L. 2000. *Land-Use History of Long Point*. Vineyard Haven, MA: The Trustees of Reservations, white paper.

² Historical land-use on sandplain communities in Massachusetts has exerted a strong influence on today’s vegetation, although decades have passed following farm and pasture abandonment and the subsequent reforestation of the landscape. For more on this topic, see: Foster, David R. & Glenn Motzkin. 1999. *Historical Influences on the Landscape of Martha’s Vineyard: Perspectives on the Management of the Manuel F. Correllus State Forest*. Harvard Forest, Harvard University. Harvard Forest Paper No. 23.

³ Vegetation “structure” is extremely important when examining land-use practices. As landscapes evolve through time, such as from a grassland to a shrubland or a shrubland to a woodland, the landscape structure is altered as a result.

- For the first 100 years of European settlement on Martha's Vineyard, Chappaquiddick was inhabited solely by the Wampanoag. The Wampanoag used fire as a tool to aid in hunting, maintain berry patches, and to create fertile grounds for agriculture. Population numbers and densities fluctuated drastically on Chappaquiddick as the Wampanoag struggled for land rights and battled the illnesses brought to the Island by the Europeans. These population numbers and densities are important in determining the extent and intensity of the Wampanoag land-use practices.
- In the mid-1600s, European livestock was introduced to the Vineyard. Cattle, goats and sheep provided settlers with valuable products, such as: wool, milk, cheese, and meat. As land was cleared to provide for agriculture, sections were set aside as pasture for these animals. Since Chappaquiddick was surrounded by water, and free from natural predators, relatively minimal effort could be expended in detaining livestock at Cape Poge and Wasque.
- Early European land-clearing and grazing practices on Chappaquiddick were intense. As early as the 1660s the Town of Edgartown was passing measures limiting the amount of trees to be cut and the number of livestock to be pastured on Chappaquiddick. In 1663, the town imposed a fine of "five shilling for every tree that shall be cut without order from the town."
- Grazing on Chappaquiddick was a seasonal practice. Livestock were led through low waters from Edgartown via "the swimming place" to Chappaquiddick every fall.⁴ The animals were released to graze the upland and salt marshes throughout the winter and spring. By the end of April of the following year, the animals were returned to Edgartown. Regrowth of the pastures was allowed during the summer months, in which time wool was shorn from the sheep and spun into fabric.
- As European settlers increasingly laid claim to the land, and entered into agreements with the Wampanoag, conflicts inevitably arose, and continued through generations. Joshua Seeknout, sachem of Chappaquiddick, filed suits against the settlers for trespassing on Indian lands.⁵ Jacob, son of Joshua, inherited the responsibility of fighting for the rights of his people once his father passed away.
- Simeon Butler, son of Captain John Butler,⁶ received the first deeded purchase of Wasque from the sachem Jacob Seeknout in 1722. Up until the middle of the 18th century, Wasque remained in the Butler name. The Butlers were mainly farmers and keepers of livestock. Through a marriage between Ruth Butler and Thomas Fish, the Butler estate on Wasque fell under the possession of the Fish family. Although many

⁴ "The swimming place" is a short-distanced, shallow area in Edgartown Harbor that was used to walk or swim animals from Edgartown to Chappaquiddick.

⁵ The word "sachem" refers to a leader of the Wampanoag tribe.

⁶ Captain John Butler was the first recorded whaling captain to settle on Martha's Vineyard. During this time, whaling was a highly profitable trade; whaling men were generally the wealthiest of all the colonists.

of the family were yeomen,⁷ the Fish family was composed mainly of seafarers, an incidence reflective of the whaling boom during 18th and 19th centuries.

- Pocha Pond, and the adjacent lagoon connecting it to Cape Poge Bay, together comprises 210 acres of shallow salt water surrounded by approximately 300 acres of salt and brackish marsh. At present, these are the most extensive and undisturbed salt marshes on Martha's Vineyard.⁸ Following the decline in agriculture and the close of the whaling era, an inclination towards waterfowl hunting, shellfishing, and herring fishing on Chappaquiddick arose. By 1845, the Poucha Pond Meadow and Fishing Company had been formed to pursue these activities.
- By the early 1900s, the flow of water between Cape Poge Bay and Pocha Pond was controlled through a dike, creating magnificent spring spawning grounds for herring. The herring were trapped and exported to New York. The natural resources harvested from Cape Poge Bay and Pocha Pond fell subject to years of conflict between fishermen, hunters, local landowners, and other recreational users.
- As a result of socioeconomic conditions, technological advances, and advances in transportation by the turn of the 20th century, Chappaquiddick landowners began to subdivide their properties to nurture a resort community of summer residents. As subsistence living on Martha's Vineyard decreased, tourism came to sustain the island economy. By the early 1900s, Cape Poge and Wasque were surveyed into a myriad of subdivisions for development.
- By the mid 1900s, most of Cape Poge was donated to The Trustees of Reservations. Due to the formation of The Washqua Point Trust, and a massive fundraising campaign led by Mrs. Seth Wakeman, The Trustees of Reservations were able to purchase Wasque Reservation. Today, Cape Poge and Wasque are protected from development and are set aside for public use and enjoyment.
- Following the cessation of the agricultural era, Wasque Reservation fell victim to the threats of ecological succession. Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*) and oaks (*Quercus spp.*) quickly invaded the heathland/grassland complex⁹ at Wasque. In high numbers and densities, these trees stifle rare plants and create habitats unsuitable for rare animal species. As fragmentation increases, species that require a more open structure are threatened.¹⁰

⁷ Yeomen are simply farmers who cultivate their own property.

⁸ Gaines, Arthur G. Jr. 1998. *Cape Poge Bay: A Threatened Sea Grass Lagoon, final report*. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Woods Hole, MA.

⁹ Heathlands are dominated by shrubs of the Heath family (*Ericaceae spp.*) The "heathland/grassland complex" is a habitat type that forms a mosaic of heath species and grass species. This habitat type supports declining populations of the Northern Harrier, Grasshopper Sparrow, and the Short-eared Owl. Coastal heathlands and grasslands are able to remain open naturally because the plant species found in these habitats are tolerant to salt spray from the ocean, which typically kills most other plant species.

¹⁰ Fragmentation is an ecological term used to describe the interruption of a contiguous habitat type by another; in this case, separated by structure. Landscapes that have extensive tracts of a particular habitat

- As various forms, frequencies, and intensities of burning, clearing, grazing, and mowing were practiced by the Wampanoag and the colonists on Martha's Vineyard; they were the driving forces in determining habitat structure and composition. Today, we use such disturbances as tools to restore and maintain Wasque's rare habitats.

TIMELINE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS THAT AFFECTED LAND-USE PRACTICES ON WASQUE AND CAPE POGE

- 1602: The landing of Bartholomew Gosnold on Martha's Vineyard. At this time, thousands of Wampanoag lived on the island.
- 1641: Although inhabited by the Wampanoag, Thomas Mayhew received charters for the possession of Martha's Vineyard. Land was immediately divided and distributed amongst the colonists. Also around this date, the epidemic that had decimated Native American populations throughout New England had reached Martha's Vineyard, and began to take a serious toll on the island's Wampanoag population.
- 1646: Grant of township from Thomas Mayhew to "The Inhabitants of Edgartown at the Great Harbor" declaring Chappaquiddick an official part of Edgartown; although Chappaquiddick was inhabited solely by the Wampanoag at this time.
- 1653: Sheep were introduced to Martha's Vineyard.
- 1663: The Wampanoag on Chappaquiddick, also known as the Chappaquiddicks, deeded the island of Cape Poge to Thomas Mayhew.
- 1680: The Town of Edgartown declared a limit to the number of animals allowed to be pastured on Chappaquiddick per "commonage": 400 cattle, 200 sheep, and 1 horse.
- 1700: The first mention of a ferry in Vineyard Haven in court records. Beginning in 1703, Isaac Chase maintained a public ferry "for the transporting of man and beast" from Martha's Vineyard to Falmouth. This ferry facilitated the transportation of goods and resources between Martha's Vineyard and the mainland.
- 1718: Award granted to Benjamin Hawes from the sachem of Chappaquiddick, Jacob Seeknout: "1/8 part of all the herbage on Chappaquiddick annually from October 20th to March 25th." Seeknout also granted Hawes "200 head of cattle, along with the privilege to feed and mow" setting aside any salt grass growing in the award for the Chappaquiddicks.

type are generally better able to support viable populations of plants and wildlife than those that are fragmented.

- 1722: Jacob Seeknout granted his lands on Wasque to Simeon Butler, son of the renowned whaling captain, John Butler.
- 1723: Cape Poge became attached to the remainder of Chappaquiddick by the Great Gale of 1723. The storm closed off the east end of Pocha Pond from the Atlantic Ocean.
- 1767-1827: The peak years of the Vineyard whaling era. As agricultural fields became increasingly unproductive, many Chappaquiddick residents were forced into a seafaring life. Others took to whaling for the great profits associated with the trade.
- 1775-1783: The American Revolution. In September 1778, the Vineyard wool industry was hindered by the raid of British General Grey and his men, in which 10,000 sheep were stolen from Martha's Vineyard.
- 1826: The final occasion of agriculture at Cape Poge. From this time on, Cape Poge was used mainly for sheep pasture, fishing, and hunting.
- 1834: Tisdale Smith began reconsolidating land on Wasque, reuniting individual parcels into a more complete whole. Tisdale used Wasque as sheep pasture.
- 1845: The Poucha Pond Meadow and Fishing Company was incorporated and granted the power to construct a dike spanning the inlet of Pocha Pond to fuel the market for herring caught at the dike.
- 1848: Gold discovered in California on January 24, causing numerous Vineyard residents to abandon land in search of fortune out west.
- 1854: The final documented occasion of washing and shearing sheep at Shear Pen Pond.
- 1860: Jedidah Smith passed on her inheritance of Wasque from her husband, Tisdale, to her daughter, Parnell C. Pease. Charles Pease, husband of Parnell by this date, had previously fled to the Western U.S. in search of gold during the California Gold Rush. After acquiring a large fortune, he returned to Chappaquiddick to marry Parnell. Most of Wasque still served as haying fields and sheep pasture at this time.
- 1892: The Chappaquiddick fire of 1892 started in the dead grass on the "southern part" of the island, likely including Wasque. Fences, woods, and open fields of grass and brush were reduced to a black crisp by the fire.¹¹ In this same year, Cape Poge was subdivided into a summer community to be named "Country Club Estates."

¹¹ The Vineyard Gazette, July 8, 1988.

- 1907: The beginning of an economic depression. It may have been this depression that prohibited a summer resort community from developing on Chappaquiddick.
- 1909: Ending up in the hands of the State Street Trust Co. of Boston, Wasque had almost become a massive housing development named “Chappaquiddick-By-The-Sea.”
- c. 1935 The first powered car ferry to Chappaquiddick titled “The City of Chappaquiddick.” In 1947, the operator built a new ferry named the “On Time” due to the lack of time that remained to build it. At this time, Wasque remained open and served as sheep pasture.
- 1959: By this time, most of Cape Poge was donated to The Trustees of Reservations.
- 1967: The Washqua Point Trust was formed to save Wasque from development. Wasque was purchased in five different units and subsequently sold to The Trustees of Reservations. The entire process lasted until 1971.

THE WAMPANOAG TRIBES OF MARTHA’S VINEYARD

Today, Martha’s Vineyard is composed of a diversity of assorted cultures, ethnicities, and races. Up until approximately 400 years ago, this was not the case; Martha’s Vineyard was named Noepe, and was inhabited solely by the Wampanoag. The Wampanoag still exist on Martha’s Vineyard today, and have lived here for approximately 12,000 to 13,000 years.¹² Approximately 3,000 years ago, as the Archaic Period shifted into the Woodland Period, the Wampanoag began to create more-permanent settlements along the coast, or along inland watercourses.¹³ Up until this time, the Noepe tribes were mainly hunters and gatherers, using inland resources for food, clothing, and shelter. The wetlands were used to hunt waterfowl as the upland fields were used to cultivate crops.¹⁴ The Wampanoag also hunted white-tailed deer, fox, squirrel, raccoon, muskrat, and many of the other animals that existed on the Island. The Wampanoag were also able to subsist upon fruits and berries, as well as being able to harvest marine resources, such as: fish, shellfish, seals, and whales.¹⁵ In addition, the Chappaquiddicks cultivated various stores of tobacco and flax. The tobacco was smoked fresh from the picking and the flax was used to make strings and cords. Plants were both cultivated and gathered for food, shelter, tools, ritual, and medicine.

¹² Although according to Ritchie (1969), the oldest site on Martha’s Vineyard dates back to 4,300 years ago. Sources from the Wampanoag tribe, and not yet published material from Harvard University, support the claim that 12,000 to 13,000 years ago is far more accurate figure.

¹³ Raleigh, E.L. 2000. *Land-Use History of Long Point*. Vineyard Haven, MA: The Trustees of Reservations, white paper.

¹⁴ An unknown number of arrowheads have recently been discovered in the region of Shear Pen Pond, suggesting that Native American hunting may likely have occurred in this area.

¹⁵ Ritchie 1969; Mulholland, M.T., T. Binzen, C. Donter. 1999. *Community-wide Archaeological Survey of West Tisbury, Massachusetts*. U-MASS Archaeological Services, UM-254.

Tree saplings were used for the construction of huts. To provide flooring and walls for the Wampanoag shelter, known as a wetu, the Wampanoag harvested and wove salt grasses into mats.¹⁶ Settlements were moved from one location to another, depending upon the season. During the summer months, shelters were placed around the inlets and coast; come winter the Wampanoag would seek refuge in the woods and hills for protection from the winds.¹⁷

Approximately 1,000 to 450 years ago, during the Late Woodland Period, the Wampanoag became more sedentary as crop cultivation became increasingly prevalent.¹⁸ In addition to shellfish, finfish, and sea mammals to feast upon, the Chappaquiddick tribe cultivated corn, beans, peas, and squash and fertilized their crops with herring caught in the surrounding waters. Because their communities were more permanent, the use of fire and land clearing became more common around native settlements.¹⁹ In comparison to other New England tribes, the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard lived in high densities, and likely created a more altered landscape.²⁰ Fire was an important tool for the Wampanoag, being used to cook food, stay warm, perform rituals, create hunting lands, and aid in agriculture. The Wampanoag may also have used fire to exterminate plant diseases and pests, such as fleas and ticks, which were rather common around settlements. Burning large tracts of land would also assist in maintaining berry patches, provide space to plant crops, facilitate hunting, and allow the growth of succulent vegetation to attract deer. These fires had a massive influence on the landscape, drastically altering structure and species composition. One early explorer noted that these fires would consume "all the underwood and rubbish which otherwise would overgrow the country, making it unpassable, and spoil their much affected hunting".²¹ Other English visitors to the New World wrote that the Native Americans, "are accustomed to set fire of the Country in all places where they come, and to burne it twice a year"²² and that these fires created landscapes that were "open and parklike".²³ For

¹⁶ In land transactions with the Europeans, some grasses were reserved to the natives, specifically for making mats.

¹⁷ Banks, Charles E. 1966. *The History of Martha's Vineyard*. Edgartown, MA: The Dukes County Historical Society. vol. 1. The Wampanoags moved several times a year, and according to past research, would return to the same location year after year, generation after generation. Raleigh 2000; Ritchie 1969.

¹⁸ Mulholland, M.T., T. Binzen, & C. Donter 1999.

¹⁹ Patterson, W.A. and K.E. Sassaman. 1988. Indian Fires in the Prehistory of New England. Pages 107-135 in: *Holocene Human Ecology in Northeastern North America*. Ed. George P. Nicholas. Plenum Publishing Co.

²⁰ Cook, S.F. 1976. The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century. *Publications in Anthropology*, no. 12: 1-91. Berkeley: University of California; Raleigh, E.L. 2000. When settlers first arrived, approximately 3,000 to 3,500 Wampanoags lived on Noepe, the highest densities occurring on the periphery of the island.

²¹ Cronon, William. 1983. *Changes In The Land*. New York: Hill and Wang. 241pp.

²² Cronon 1983. According to Glenn Motzkin, however, it is unlikely that the Vineyard Wampanoag burned the same area twice in one year, as not enough fuel would exist to do so. In areas frequently burned, small non-woody plants would likely be the main fuel source for the fire to consume, causing the fires to move quickly, and at relatively low temperatures. The fires would soon extinguish themselves as a result.

²³ Russell, E.W.B. 1983. Indian-set Fires in the Forests of the Northeastern United States. *Ecology*, 64(1):78-88; Bromley, S.W. 1935. The Original Forest Types of Southern New England. *Ecological Monographs*, 5:61-89.

thousands of years, fires set by the Wampanoag assisted in maintaining the open nature of the Vineyard landscape. These fires aided in creating savannas and open woodlands where grasslands and forests met. As these surface fires killed aboveground vegetation and reduced surface organic matter, a diversity of grasses, shrubs, and herbs were able to persist on Martha's Vineyard.

In addition to using fire, the Wampanoag created open space as trees and saplings were cut to provide wood for fuel, shelters, and boats. Trees were cut using a hand-axe; in which trees could have been harvested immediately. In many southern New England Native American societies, trees were girdled three feet above the ground, the branches and trunks burned, and seeds planted among the stumps.²⁴ Although it is unknown if the Wampanoag girdled trees, Edgartown town records document using woodland for cultivation. In 1658, the town officials declared "every man shall have liberty to plant anywhere in ye woods, to ye quantity of six acres to a man".²⁵ In 1663, Pahkepunnessoo, leader of the Chappaquiddick tribe at the time, reserved for the colonists, a "woodland to use of for planting corn to the number of Ten families, but the planters are to fence their fields for the Scarcity of their Corn".²⁶ It is peculiar that woodland would be set aside for planting corn if these girdling methods or clearing methods were not employed.

As the European population on Martha's Vineyard increased, the practices of the Wampanoag were increasingly replaced by those of the English. In 1674, 60 families of Wampanoag resided on Chappaquiddick.²⁷ By 1790, the number had dwindled dramatically to a mere 75 individuals inhabiting Chappaquiddick.²⁸

²⁴Weinstein, Laurie Lee. Seventeenth Century Southern New England Indian Agriculture. *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*. 47 (2): 59-67. Girdling is a process that entails making an incision into the bark of trees and around the trunk, leaving the trees to die standing. This technique would prohibit trees from producing leaves, and consequently, from photosynthesizing. It is unknown if the Wampanoag on Martha's Vineyard used girdling. However, they would remove bark from trees to provide roofing for their shelters, ultimately causing those trees to die standing. According to members of the Wampanoag tribe today, trees were also dropped from burning. Clay would be packed around the circumference of a tree, roughly 3 feet high, so that when burned, the fire would weaken the base of the trunk and not affect the upper portion of the tree.

²⁵ Edgartown Proprietors Records, volume I, page 30.

²⁶ Dukes County Land Records 1/388. The citation 1/388 is arranged as book number and page number, and can be found in the County of Dukes County Court House, Registry of Deeds. All subsequent references will follow this format.

²⁷ Gookin, Daniel. 1970. *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England (1674)*. Jeffrey H. Fiske, Annotator. The number of individuals that comprised the average native family at this date is unknown.

²⁸ Gookin [1674] 1970.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS, MAPS, AND CHARTS

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, various explorers traveled the waters of the southern New England coast. These explorers documented their discoveries in journals, land deeds, maps, and other documents. Through these records, we learn that Cape Poge was an entirely separate island from Chappaquiddick less than 300 years ago. Historical maps and charts can provide useful information to help interpret land-use disturbances and settlement patterns. For example, in Figure 1, we see that Chappaquiddick was

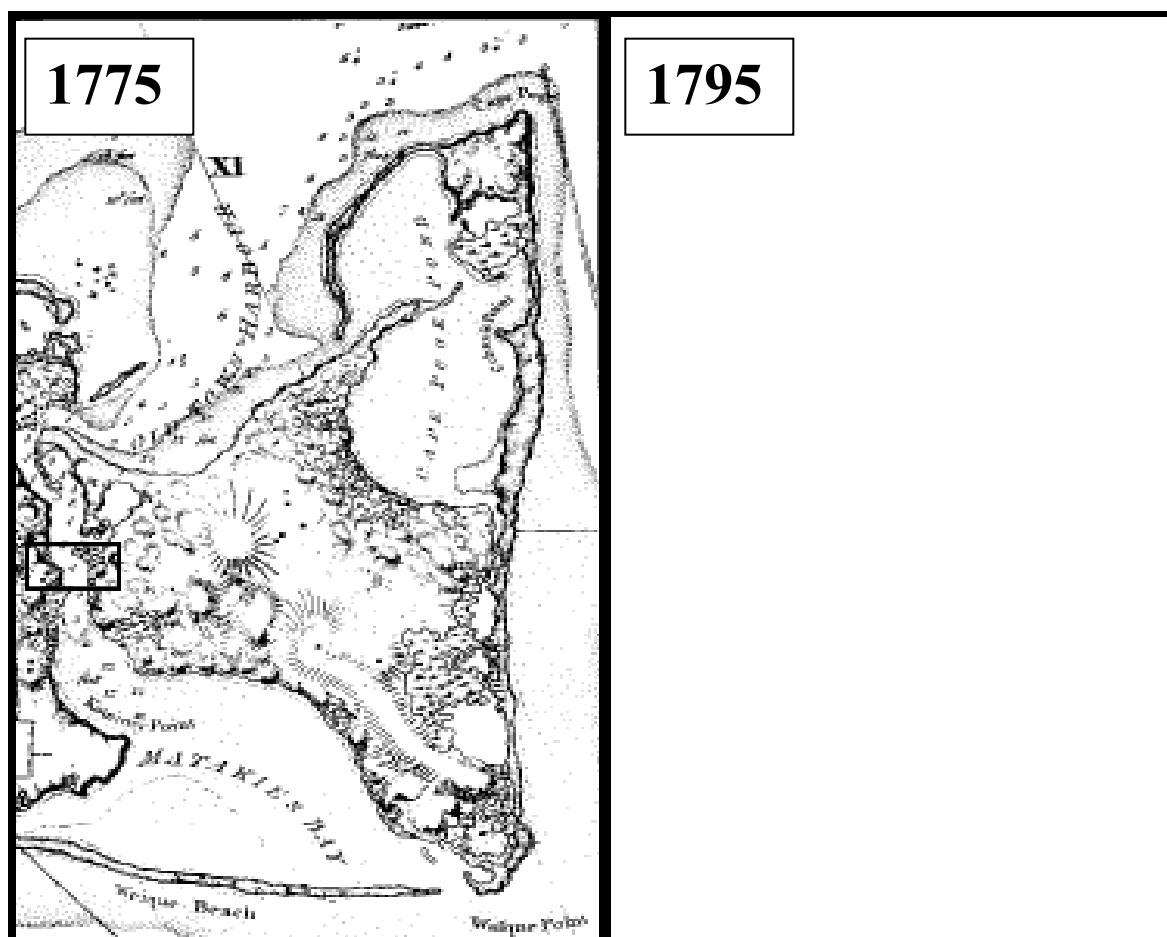


Figure 1. Post-settlement Martha's Vineyard; date unknown. Note that Chappaquiddick was named "Indian Town" at this time, as it was likely occupied solely by the Chappaquiddick tribe.

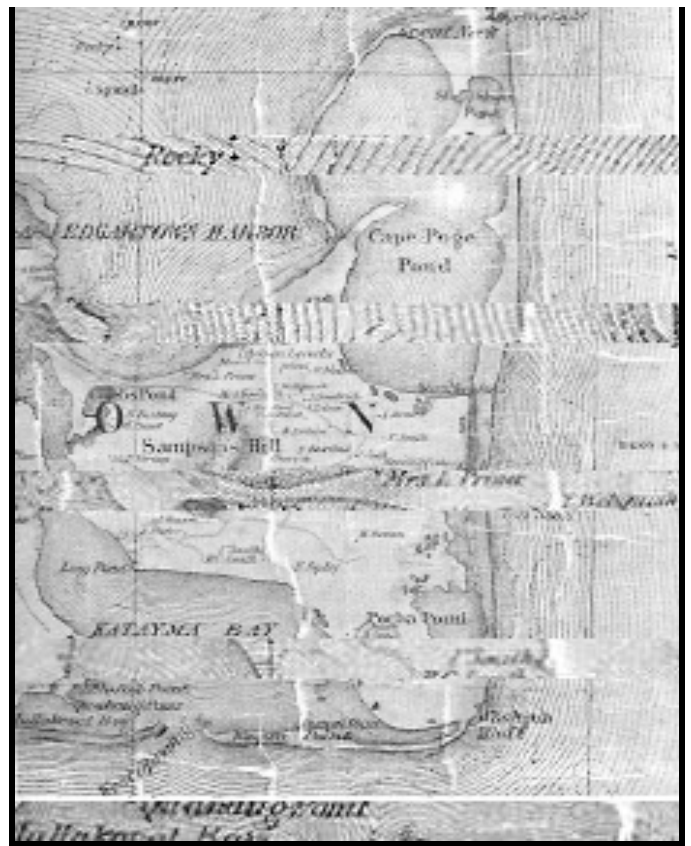
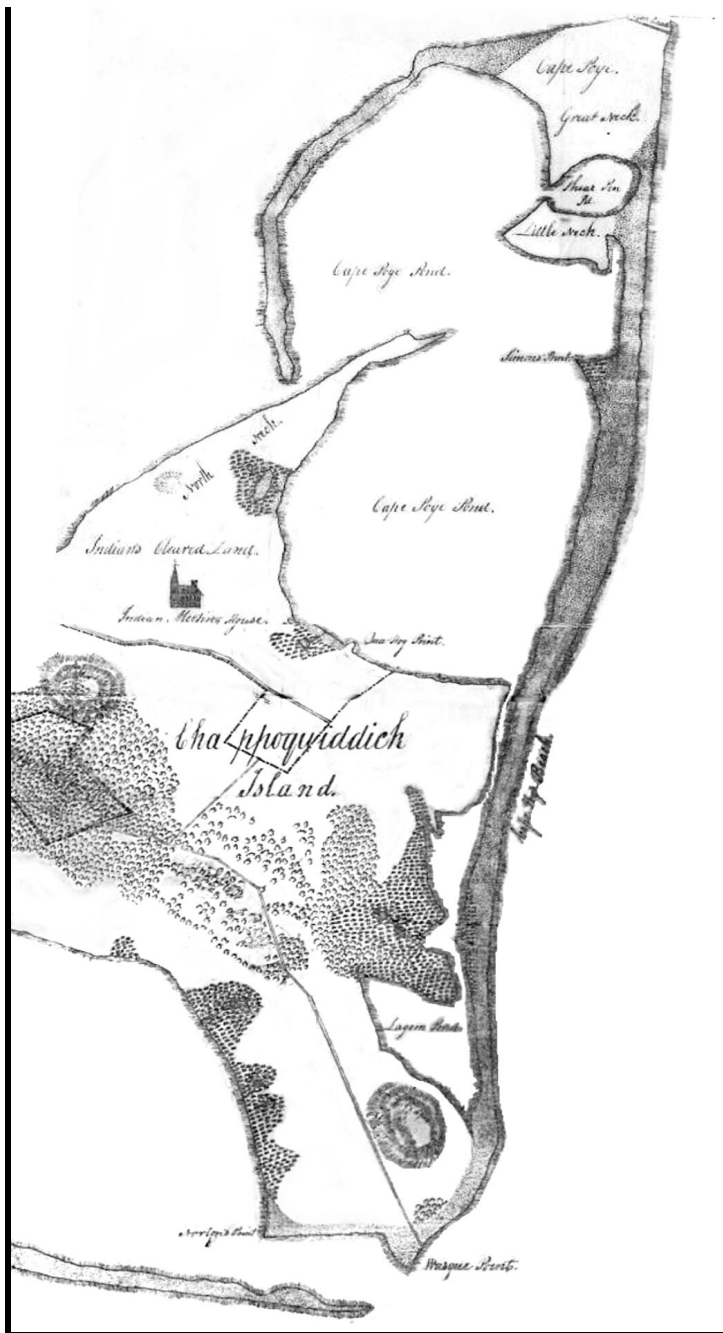
named "Indian Town" by the English.²⁹ Figure 2 portrays a map drawn for the British Navy in 1775. During this time, Wasque was owned by the Fish family, serving mainly as pasture for sheep and fields for haying. In Figure 3, we see a map of Chappaquiddick drawn in 1795. By this time, Wasque was in the possession of several owners, yet still served mainly as pasture and meadowland. In 1830, a map was drawn by Henry H. Crapo. This map, shown in figure 4, more accurately portrays the central woodland, owned by the Wampanoag, while also

portraying the salt marshes to the west of Wasque and north of Pocha Pond. This map is also important in indicating the extent of land cleared on Chappaquiddick at the time. Blank areas on this map indicate land that was cleared to serve as meadow or pasture. It is apparent that nearly all of Wasque and Cape Poge were cleared by this time. This map is also useful for indicating the land on Chappaquiddick owned by the Wampanoag. Surrounding the Indian Meeting House on the North Neck is the land cleared by the Wampanoag. To the southwest of this meetinghouse, a woodlot was bounded that was also owned by the Wampanoag. South of the Great Neck at Cape Poge, is Shear Pen Pond, in which hundreds of sheep were washed and shorn of their wool up until the mid-1800s. In Figure 5, we see a map depicting house lots and families residing on Chappaquiddick in 1858, none of which were situated on Wasque or Cape Poge, aside from the lighthouse keeper and his family. In Figure 7, we have a comparison of Chappaquiddick in 1830 and 1848, portraying open land, woodland, and wetland. During this time, Wasque and Cape Poge were open. Figure 8 is also useful in understanding land use patterns on Chappaquiddick. This map portrays the roadways laid out to connect the "swimming place" to Wasque; for hundreds of years, astounding numbers of livestock would travel this route every fall and spring.

²⁹ Before European intervention, Wampanoag settlements were commonly established strategically, in areas where access to land and marine resources were ideal for hunting and gathering. Map courtesy of Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, MA.



Figures 2 & 3. Maps courtesy of the Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, MA. *(Above Left)*: From the DeBarres Chart, surveyed for the British Navy in 1775. This map topographically portrays salt meadows west of Pocha Pond and Lagoon, and south of Shear Pen Pond. “The Swimming Place” is outlined in the box on the westerly part of Chappaquiddick. *(Above Right)*: Drawn in 1795, this map portrays “Great Neck”, “Capoge”, “Little Neck”, “Capoge Pond”, “Washqua Neck”, “Washqua Outlet”, “Washqua Pond”, and “Washqua Point”.



Figures 4.5, 6. Maps courtesy of the Dukes County Historical Society, Edgartown, MA. (*left*): “A Map of Edgartown, Shire Town of Dukes County: __Map: Made Agreeably to a Resolve of the Legislature Passed February 1830” by Henry H. Crapo. The woodland in the center of the island was termed “Indian Woodland.” (*top*): Chappaquiddick in 1858. This map plotted house lots on Chappaquiddick. Wasque and Cape Poge were not inhabited; the Fish family lived just northwest of present-day Wasque. (*bottom left*): legend to the 1830 Crapo map. This Legend is very useful in determining land use at this date. In an explanation (not shown) the legend states, “Cleared land, viz. meadow and Pasture land, denoted by natural colour of Paper”.



Land interspersed with short stunted oak shrubbery with the exception of a small part thereof which may be termed woodlands. The same sign however is given to the whole.

Salt Marsh

Beach

Hills, or most prominent points of high land.

Shores

Windmills

Churches – with the addition of the letter C, denoting Congregaional; B. Baptist, M. Methodist.

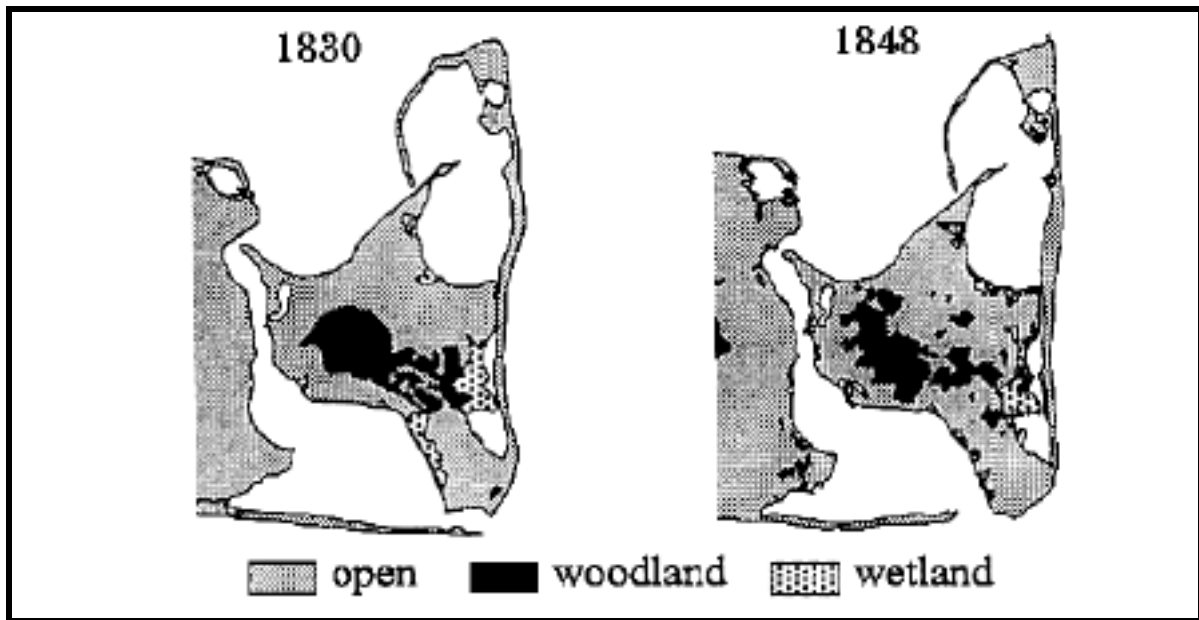


Figure 7. Chappaquiddick in 1830 and 1848.³⁰

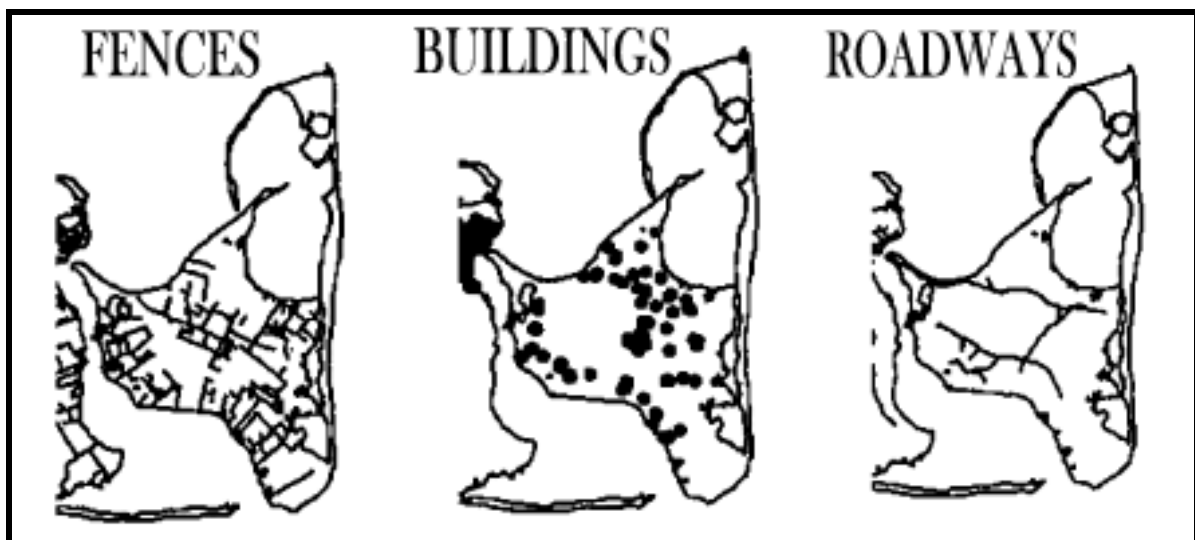


Figure 8. Fences, houses, and roads on Chappaquiddick in 1848. Note the fence that crosses Wasque, along with the absence of buildings and roads on the property.³¹

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AND THE RESULTING SHIFT IN LAND USE

Between 1530 and 1680, the human population in England had doubled. Land became rare as many of England's largest landowners evicted their tenants, fenced in their lands, and raised sheep to accommodate the rapidly growing wool industry in Europe. Many English citizens were forced to retreat to the American colonies as land, food, and shelter became scarce.

³⁰ Maps modified from Foster & Motzkin 1999.

³¹ Maps modified from Foster & Motzkin 1999.

Patterns in land use shifted dramatically upon the settlement of Europeans on the Vineyard in the mid-1600s. The English were granted land from the crown that did not belong to England, but did belong to the Wampanoag. Through the English court systems, additional means of claiming land owned by the Wampanoag were discovered.³² By the 18th century, three Wampanoag districts existed on Martha's Vineyard: those on Chappaquiddick, Christiantown, and Gay Head (Aquinnah). The Wampanoag of Chappaquiddick and Christiantown suffered from numerous health and land problems.³³ Daniel Gookin, who spent much of his time with the Martha's Vineyard natives in the 1600s, wrote, "the Indians upon [Martha's Vineyard] sow English as well as Indian corn, sew and knit stockings, and are more industrious than many other Indians".³⁴

Edgartown was the first permanent European settlement on Martha's Vineyard, established in 1642. Landholders on Chappaquiddick actually resided in Edgartown, up until the mid-1700s when European settlement on Chappaquiddick first occurred.³⁵ The Vineyard proprietors of each new town initially held all town land in common. Town lands were eventually divided to create permanent settlements. The locations of fields and meadows were taken into consideration when surveying the land for housing lots. In the age when usually only men were deeded land, the amount of land he was deeded depended chiefly upon the amount of land he was able to hold and make productive. Generally, this man's profession decided the proportion of land he was deeded. Those who owned large amounts of cattle and/or servants were better able to "improve" the land than those who did not, and therefore, held a higher priority to the town. Interestingly, the town frequently reserved the right to enforce regulations on private lands when deemed necessary. In the division of lands on Chappaquiddick, certain rights were allotted to settlers who owned a "commonage," in which the farmers of Edgartown were given rights to graze their cattle and sheep.³⁶ The property boundaries delineating the commonage on Chappaquiddick were extremely obscure. Most records failed to describe accurate boundaries on Chappaquiddick, while many were not even recorded. For example, in 1679, the town of Edgartown was forced to declare, "the meadowe at

³² According to members of the Wampanoag tribe, a tribal member that was indebted to the English, in one form or another would often plea to the sachem of that tribe to exchange a proportion of Wampanoag land for the relinquishment of that persons debt to the English.

³³ Weinstein-Farson, Laurie. 1988. *The Wampanoag*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers. It is important to note that although this author referred to these districts as reservations, this was not the case. These lands were not "reserved" for the Wampanoag, as the land was already owned by them.

³⁴ Gookin [1674] 1970. This statement is interesting in that corn did not exist in England at this time. According to members of the Wampanoag tribe, "English corn" may actually refer to the method of sowing crops. The Wampanoag cultivated in a method known as "the three sisters," in which corn was planted along with beans and squash. The corn would provide a pole for the beans, and the squash would form a mat at the base to inhibit soil moisture from escaping.

³⁵ Interestingly, Cape Poge had not been permanently settled by anyone other than the Wampanoag up until the 20th century, aside from the lighthouse keeper and his family. A lighthouse keeper had consistently been employed until 1943. For a more complete description of the history of the Cape Poge Light, see: Railton, Arthur R. Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely. Pages 150-182 in *The Dukes County Intelligencer*. May 1984. Vol. 25, No. 4. Edgartown, MA. An additional segment was published in: Railton, Arthur R. Cape Poge Light: Remote and Lonely, Part Two. Pages 91-123 in *The Dukes County Intelligencer*. February 1984. Vol. 25, No. 3. Edgartown, MA.

³⁶ "Commonage" refers to a share of common land that was set aside by the town and to be used by town residents.

Chappaquiddick which the bounds is unkown to be measured over and be divided and thay that knowe not there meadow to draw lotts for there shears”.³⁷ A year later, the town set a limit to the number of animals that could be pastured: “four hundred great cattle, two hundred sheep, and one horse upon a commonage.” Just five months later, town officials increased this limit by three cows per commonage and one cow to a meadow lot; further stating, “there shall be twenty five head of Great Cattle for the twenty five lotts upon Chappaquiddick neck or small cattle proportionable”.³⁸ Furthermore, with every share of commonland that a person owned, a share of wood was also offered to that person. Legislation in 1663 allowed that “every man shall have a load of wood or timber for his use for a share and he that shall have any more shall pay five shilling for every tree that shall be cut without order from the town till further order”.³⁹

By the early 1800s, Chappaquiddick held an estimated 50 acres of woodland, consisting mainly of white and black oak roughly 10-15 feet in height, and held an approximate 300 acres of shrub oak. The land on Chappaquiddick was “of a better quality, and has not been so much worn as the opposite land in Edgartown”.⁴⁰ As the settlers cleared the forests, trees were used to build fences, boats, and houses.⁴¹ The first European houses were likely log huts, with roofs constructed from interwoven salt hay.⁴² For such purposes, the early division of lands in Edgartown set aside “thatch lots” for each proprietor. Each lot was to remain as such, and was passed from owner to owner up until around 1680.⁴³ Shingles were split from logs. Secured with wooden pegs, these shingles eventually replaced thatch rooftops. The smaller trees were used for fuel in the home or industry. The oak and pine woodlots on Chappaquiddick were especially useful for the settlers. Pitch pine, for example, was harvested for the use of pitch, which was manufactured to create grease for carts, turpentine, and rosin. In addition, before 1700, many homes were actually lighted by the fireplace, in which large pine knots were often burned to create a short-lasting, intense fire. The oak trees on Chappaquiddick were also used, in which the bark was removed and used to supply island tanneries to darken animal hides.⁴⁴ The wood from these oaks and pines were often used by the coopers as well, who produced a variety of barrels, boxes, and other products. In addition to the oaks and pines on Chappaquiddick, cedar trees were also rather valuable. These trees could be used for fences or housing shingles, as these products were relatively immune to rot and could withstand the forces of weathering.⁴⁵

³⁷ Edgartown Records, volume I, page 23.

³⁸ Edgartown Records, book I, page 7.

³⁹ Banks 1966, vol. II, Annals of Edgartown.

⁴⁰ Rev. James Freeman. 1807. *A Description of Dukes County*. Pages 1-51 in *The Dukes County Intelligencer*. 1971. Edgartown, MA: Dukes County Historical Society, Inc. Vol.12, No. 4.

⁴¹ Wood fences were typically constructed on sandplain, as stones were much less common than on moraine.

⁴² Interestingly, structures built on Wasque were later moved to Edgartown over the ice to create open space for livestock. In order to allow safe pasturing, the remaining foundation holes were filled and leveled off.

⁴³ Banks 1966, vol. I.

⁴⁴ Simeon Butler, the first deeded European owner of Wasque, was a tanner by trade.

⁴⁵ The “Cedars” at Cape Poge, located between Lagoon and Whistlers Point, may be as old as 200 years. Cranberry bogs likely flourished where the cedars are today. Migrating sand and storms filled the bogs and eventually created habitat for cedar colonization.

IF JUSTICE COULD BE SERVED: DISCORD AND COURT TRIALS

As colonists increasingly participated in bartering and land transactions with the Wampanoag, conflict was nearly inevitable. Disputes began to surface amongst the colonists and the Chappaquiddicks as early as 1690, in a matter concerning “sheep they asserted were stolen from them”.⁴⁶ In a letter written to Matthew Mayhew, Joshua Seeknout, Chappaquiddick sachem, stated “Several of your English have been on my Island,⁴⁷ and would have forceably taken Sheep from thence; and we are much threatened therewith.” If justice had not been served to the Chappaquiddicks, Seeknout threatened it would “occasion blood-shed.” Joshua described to Mayhew the peace that had existed between his people and the English, and requested, “the same Amity may be continued,” reiterating the unconditional allegiance his people had offered to the king of England. Joshua demanded justice: “we shall not see (as is too much practiced in other places) an English man, pretending an Indian to be in his debt to come to our Houses and pay himself or in other cases beat our People;⁴⁸ but as hitherto we may have equal Justice, being the Kings Subjects.” Joshua further accounted the “Violence and Riot committed on our People by the English.” In 1712 Joshua Seeknout filed a lawsuit against Thomas Pease and others in action of trespass “on the south east part...at a place called Wassaehtaack alias pocha.”⁴⁹ The defendants appointed Matthew Mayhew and Thomas Lothrop to represent them. Appointed attorney for Seeknout was a European, Benjamin Hawes. In 1713, Seeknout registered additional complaints of “Undue Proceedings in a Suit brought by John Norton against Nicholas and Phineas Norton for Trespass.”⁵⁰ By October of that year, Joshua had passed away, leaving his eldest son, Jacob, to continue the trials on behalf of his people. A year and a half later, a resolution had finally been reached. The General Court reserved to the English, among less notable awards, the complete possession of Chappaquiddick, with the stipulation that it could not be sold without the consent of the Provincial Government. In addition, the English reserved the right to mow the salt marshes on Chappaquiddick, paying the tribe one shilling per acre annually. In regards to the “winter herbage”⁵¹ the English were to pay Seeknout “the fifteenth goat and for every fatted Beast one Shilling & Sixpence” ever year; and were to share the pastures with the Chappaquiddicks.⁵² Lastly, the proprietors were allowed no more than one hundred head of “great cattle” to be pastured on Chappaquiddick.⁵³

⁴⁶ The following excerpts have been taken from: Mayhew, Mathew. 1694. *A Brief Narrative of the Success Which the Gospel Hath Had, Among the Indians, of Martha's Vineyard (and Places Adjacent) In New England With Some Remarkable Curiosities, Concerning the Numbers, the Customes and the Present Circumstances of the Indians on that Island, Further Explaining and Confirming the Account Given of Those Matters, By Mr. Cotton Mather in the Lite of Renowned Mr. John Eliot.* Boston.

⁴⁷ In reference to Chappaquiddick

⁴⁸ The English would accuse members of the Chappaquiddick tribe of being indebted to them in order to obtain land on Chappaquiddick as payment for the debt.

⁴⁹ The word “alias” is Old English for the term “also known as”.

⁵⁰ Banks 1966, vol. II.

⁵¹ The “herbage” that could be utilized between October 25th and March 25th of each year.

⁵² There was confusion in what actually constituted a “fatted beast”, allowing the English to refuse payment to the sachem on numerous occasions.

⁵³ For the original description of the Court's decision, see 6/463.