

History of the Herring Pond Wampanoag People

by Billy Hunt, Vice Chairman, Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe

1500's The ancestors of Wampanoag people have lived for at least 10,000 years in Southern Massachusetts, on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Islands, pursuing a traditional economy based on fishing, hunting and agriculture. Documentation of Wampanoag existence dates back to the 1500's.

1600's The town of Plymouth was settled by the Pilgrims in 1620, centered in what is now Plymouth Center. The area of Plymouth south of the Pine Hills was occupied by the Pokanokets, better known as the Wampanoags, a general term for the Algonquin people who inhabited all of New England. This southern section of Plymouth was opened up to the Pilgrims by the Peace Treaty of 1621 with the Wampanoags. When Europeans arrived in the Cedarville Area, the major Wampanoag settlement, called Comassukumkenet (meaning 'trail going south') was located along the eastern shore of Great Herring Pond and south along the Herring River (Lovell 1984:21)



1637 Sandwich settlers were joining the Wampanoags in the annual taking of Herring on the Manomet River, using a log weir (Lovell 1984:41).

1654 The earliest white settlers in the Herring River area, now Bourne (south of Cedarville), came from the Sandwich settlement.

1669 Deed of conveyance from Sachem Quachetisset of Manomet to the Pilgrims, dated July 21, 1669 founds Cedarville. This deed encompassed "the land at Sandy Sea and Manomet and Herring River", and included a great deal of land besides Cedarville.

1700's The Herring Pond Reservation was laid out by 1700, in three lots of commonly held land totaling 3,000 acres on the eastern side of Great Herring Pond. The three parcels were known as the Great Lot, located north of Great Herring Pond; the Meetinghouse Lot, along the southeastern edge of the Pond; and the Herring River Lot, extending west from the Herring River (Lovell 1984).

1742 The State of Massachusetts passed an act that ordered all remnants of historical tribes within the state to move to one of the four communities that still have functioning Indian governments: the communities of Mashpee, Aquinnah, Herring Pond, or Grafton (although Grafton was actually Nipmuc Nation).

1783 The last minister to the Herring Pond Indians to use the native language was Ephraim Ellis, who died.

1842 By legislative action, 1800 acres of the reservation was divided and each family on the reservation was given a house lot and a woodlot, which they thereafter owned privately. The remaining 1200 acres remained in common ownership, although it was unproductive, the wood having been cut earlier (Earle 1861:68-69).

1850 The Second Meetinghouse was replaced by the meetinghouse now standing on Herring Pond Road, formerly the Pondville Baptist Church.

1869 Massachusetts law eliminated Indian reservations. The remaining common land of the Herring Pond Reservation was divided among the proprietors, and the balance was auctioned off in 1873 (Lovell 1984:364).

1880's While the tribe largely disappeared from historical records from the late 18th century, its people persisted. Survivors remained in their traditional areas and continued many aspects of their culture, while absorbing other people by marriage and adapting to changing economic and cultural needs in the larger society.

1924 Herring Pond tribe helped organize the first pow-wow in over 200 years at the Herring Pond Wampanoag Meetinghouse before growing and moving to Mashpee. The Wampanoag reorganized as the Wampanoag Nation in 1928.

1970's There are currently five organized bands: Assonet, Gay Head, Herring Pond, Mashpee, and Namasket. All have petitioned for federal and state recognition, but only Gay Head (600 members but without a reservation) has been successful (1987). The Mashpee Wampanoag and Herring Pond both petitioned together to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for recognition. Herring Pond and Mashpee were turned down by the federal courts in 1978.

Present Day The Herring Pond Tribe claims as traditional lands territory which ranges from the Plymouth (Plymouth Colony) areas to the upper parts of Cape Cod (Bourne, Sandwich and Plymouth). Many Cedarville residents (with names such as Swift, Harding, Cahoon, Hirsch, Fletcher, and Nickerson among others) are descendants of the Herring Pond Indians. Although the last native speakers of Wôpanâak died more than 100 years ago, since 1993 the tribe has been working on a language revival project that is producing new native speakers, the first time this has been achieved in the US. The project *We Still Live Here: Âs Nutayuneân*, produced a curriculum, teacher development and has hosted numerous classes from beginners to advanced.

