

Westford Recollections

by Mrs. Charles S. Kennedy
INDIAN TALES

Concerning the tribes, or rather subtribes of Indians supposed to have been in digenous to Westford and its neighboring towns there is little in the early records to indicate that the various Massachusetts red men were warlike or otherwise then friendly toward the white settlers. The tribes in this locality were probably by affiliation at least of the Abenaki nation. To the northwest were the Algonquins, to the west the Mohawks, or Iroquois. History tells us that the Massachusetts tribes suffered greatly and in many instances were exterminated by the bloodthirsty Mohawks who came across the Berkshires by way of an established mountain trail, now used as a scenic high way. In Connecticut the powerful Narragansett tribes

were alone able to hold their own against these murderous savages. Our local Indians were easy prey. Records seem to indicate that they were a splendid type of savage, dignified and industrious to a degree for they cultivated the soil as well as hunted and fished. We know of Wampanoag son of the great Passaconaway, schemer of all the tribes in this locality including the Pawtuckets, the Nashuas, the Tadmucks and the Nashobas and indeed all the subtribes of the Abenaki nation as far north as the White Mountains.

The following are excerpts taken from a letter written by a Mr. William Goode about forty years ago. I wish I knew more about the Indians who lived about Westford hill, trod its wild forests, hunted the deer and the bear on Scribner Hill perhaps, or fished in Forge Pond,

Nabnasset, the Stony Brook and our other ponds and brooks. That he lived here once and in considerable numbers there is plenty of evidence. In my quondam wanderings in our pine woods or along some crystal stream in quest of the elusive trout I often see him in fancy with his feathered headdress, his bow and quiver, his copper skin glistening against the green of the foliage, threading his silent way cat-like through the almost impenetrable undergrowth. I come across undoubted signs of him by some bubbling spring, for he always set his tepee up where there was good water. Afraid of him am I? Oh no! Far rather would I meet with him than many a specimen of my own race in these modern and lawless days. (This was written in 1931.)

But you asked me to give you such items as I have been told by others, and for the absolute truth of which I cannot vouch — which does not mean that I

distrust my informants though they may have been led to accept as fact that which perhaps is tradition.

Well, to begin; As I understand it, Forge Pond was considerably less in size in early days, due to the fact that a dam at present a meadow, which I am not inclined to believe, though the level was in the outlet into the Stony Brook, for it is known that Andrew, an Indian, maintained a fish weir there, the rights to which he sold for a red coat and a musket and some small consideration. Salmon and shad came up from the sea by way of the Merrimack River, therefore the pond was doubtless a favorite fishing place for the Indians. So they named it "Mat-lawamakee" which is said to mean "good fishing place."

From Mr. Parsons I learned that it was Indian custom to excavate in the slope of some highbank on the shore and construct an oven of stone. The stones were heated, the fish laid

upon them, covered with some material that would retain the heat and thus nicely baked. He indicated to me two of these fish ovens, one on my shore and the other on the high bank near Dr. Sleepers camp. On the bluff at the eastern or lower end of the pond, I was told my Mr. Gurney, who owned the land there, that he once ploughed up what he believed was the foundation of an old block house. There were decayed timbers, part of an old musket and some flint arrow heads.

It is well known that a block house existed back of Richard Prescott's house in the village (Forge Square at Hanley Yarns). Some of the foundation remains. The steeping stone used for mounting horses Mr. Prescott has placed on his lot in the cemetery located on Cemetery Road. (Mr. Fred Baker recently told me that the mounting block contains chisel marks left by the Indians.)

To Mr. Frank Hildreth I was indebted for a bit of interesting information. I think it was about his grandparents who lived in the old homestead—I am sure you know where it is—in Indian Times. The Nashoba tribe lived and had their corn fields on the plain at the foot of Nashoba Hill. While they were friendly, the grandmother was afraid of them. On the hill above the homestead is a wood road. It was her custom to take a gun and walk up that hill after sunset to wait for her husband to come home from work. There was a particular boulder upon which she sat to wait for him. This became known as "grandmother's rock." I have sat there myself and tried to picture the scene—in those old pioneer days of peril. What brave hearts those old forebears must have owned.

On your wonderful farm, where I spent many happy years, there is a wonderful spring. Beside this spring there is no doubt a family of Indians lived. Arrow heads have been found on the farm. In fact, there is no doubt a tribe lived on Westford Hill. I have been told many Indian relics were ploughed up on the Bunce Farm, as well as on the Chamberlain or O'Brien farm on the other side of the hill. Tadmuck swamp was probably a good hunting ground. In fact the region about must have been the resort of much game for Indians did not locate permanently in any other place. There is a tradition of an Indian battle between two tribes on the hill by the Decatur farm on Lowell Road. In this section can be seen a round hole in a ledge which some feel was an Indian baking oven and others feel it was a mortar for grinding corn. Relics have been found on Amos Polley's place. I think the Nashobas were likely the strongest tribe hereabouts, and the other were merely scattered families of that tribe.

And now I speak of an incident which I have many times regretted. When I purchased my land at Forge Pond from Mrs. Parsons, I was shown a deed by Mr. Parsons signed by an Indian owner of the same land. I cannot recall the Indians name, but his mark was on the deed which was written on heavy paper of parchment. I cannot say which I did not give it much attention at the time as I was in a hurry to leave. He offered to give it to me but I forgot to take it away with me when I left. I recall his calling my attention to the quaint phraseology viz "To have and to hold as long as wood grows and water runs."

THE PHOTO Photo by Ruth will accompany article



The chisel work at the Fletcher library appears to be the outline of a Viking Ship