

**INDIAN NAMES OF PLACES IN  
WORCESTER COUNTY,  
MASSACHUSETTS: WITH  
INTERPRETATIONS OF SOME OF  
THEM**

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Indian Names of Places in Worcester County, Massachusetts: With Interpretations of Some of Them by Lincoln N. Kinnicutt

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**LINCOLN N. KINNICUTT**

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# INDIAN NAMES

OF PLACES IN  
WORCESTER COUNTY  
MASSACHUSETTS

WITH INTERPRETATIONS OF  
SOME OF THEM

*By*  
LINCOLN N. KINNICUTT  
*//*

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

1905

*"Your rivers guard our ancient names."*

*"Your mountains are our monuments."*





## INTRODUCTION

MY object in writing this paper is the collecting together of Worcester county Indian names, which in many cases have been known only to the very few, who, having occasion to search the original deeds, have unexpectedly found them. It is, I think, to be regretted that the Nipmuck names are not more generally used. They belong to Worcester county, and remind us that we have a past history dating far back of 1620. They were the only possessions we were unable to take from the red man, and now they have come to us as residuary legatees. These names are about the only relics of an ancient people who once inhabited our own county. The Indian before we civilized him with fire-water and European morals was far different from the Indian of a few years' subjugation to our civilizing influences, and it is our fault rather than his that a more honorable place has not been accorded to him in the history of Massachusetts and of our whole country; it is our fault, not his, that the blot on the American escutcheon is the Indian.

The Nipmuck tribe, by whom these names were used, inhabited before 1620 certainly the greater part, if not the whole, of Worcester county, and probably their country was of much larger extent. The exact boundaries of their dominions have never been determined, and historians differ widely on this point. On a map compiled chiefly from a survey of 1774 their boundaries extended as far east as Boston and Andover, on the south to the boundary lines of Rhode Island and Connecticut, on the west to Stockbridge and Bennington, and on the north to a portion of the southern part of New Hampshire. The principal seat of the Nipmucks was in the neighborhood of Worcester.

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“The country of the Nipmoogs or Nipmucks is of very uncertain extent. Its bounds were probably never exactly understood by anybody. It was a general name for an undefined tract of inland country between the Merrimac and Connecticut rivers.” (Samuel G. Drake, *Old Indian Chronicle*, p. 141 note.)

From examination of much early colonial history and from old deeds, I am led to believe that the Nipmucks were once a numerous and important people, occupying a large extent of country, governed by one sachem (the last possibly having been Nanopashamet), and probably subdivided into many smaller tribes. Through civil war or by combination of several of the neighboring tribes, their power was destroyed, and their country divided among the Massachusetts, the Wampanoags, the Pawtuckets, the Narragansetts, and others. Some writers have believed the Nipmucks to have been inferior to the other Massachusetts Indians, but from what Gookin wrote about them this is to be doubted, and Eliot certainly must have judged them differently, as most of his Indian praying towns were in the Nipmuck country, and he selected many teachers from among them. In 1688 he wrote to a friend in London in regard to a revised edition of the Indian Bible, “we have but one man, the Indian printer, that is able to compose the sheets and correct the press with understanding.” This man was James the Printer, from Hassanamissit (Grafton).

I have also attempted to suggest the meaning of some of these names, but in the interpretation of Indian place names so many difficulties have to be overcome that it is not surprising that the best acknowledged authorities sometimes reach very different conclusions in regard to the same word. Some of the difficulties of translation are as follows:

The Indians had no written language.

Their place names were spelled differently as they sounded to the individual recorder. English spelling, even of English

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words, in deeds of the seventeenth century was very capricious. We sometimes find a common word spelled several different ways in the same deed. To represent the foreign sound of a word spoken in a strange language is always very difficult to a writer.

Differences of dialect of the various tribes. (Dr. J. H. Trumbull says, "The Mohigans and Narragansetts had different names for the same birds, fish and trees, as well as for the same rivers, ponds and hills.")

The introduction or omission of a letter for the sake of euphony by English writers. (Dr. Trumbull also says, "The methods of Algonquin synthesis are so exactly prescribed that the omission or displacement of a consonant or emphasized vocal necessarily modifies the signification of a compound word, and may often render its interpretation or analysis impossible.")

The strange corruption of place names in old records probably attributable to the use of an interpreter.

In the translation of Indian names, I believe it to be very essential that a knowledge of the exact locality should be obtained, as it is at present, and if possible as it was in the seventeenth century. Very valuable information is sometimes found by searching local histories and land grants; often a local tradition or early colonial literature will furnish valuable clues.

The Indians of New England were very practical in their place names, and almost "every name described the locality to which it was affixed." Imagination was rarely if ever used, and any translation expressing this faculty must, I think, be taken with great caution. Our Indians used their imagination, however, in other words, almost poetically. Their name for the Pleiades was "Chippapuock," the brood hen; for the belt of Orion, "Shwishacuttowwauog," a wigwam with three fires; for a trap, "Appch," from "*Up-pacheau*," he waits for him. In their names of many plants and flowers great imagination and keen observation are expressed. The Indian place names