

**INDIAN NAMES OF
PLACES IN PLYMOUTH,
MIDDLEBOROUGH
LAKEVILLE AND CARVER**

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Indian Names of Places in Plymouth, Middleborough Lakeville and Carver by Lincoln Newton Kinnicutt

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LINCOLN NEWTON KINNICUTT

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INDIAN NAMES

OF PLACES IN

PLYMOUTH, MIDDLEBOROUGH
LAKEVILLE AND CARVER

PLYMOUTH COUNTY
MASSACHUSETTS

With Interpretations of Some of Them

By

LINCOLN NEWTON KINNICUTT

WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

1909

*To the land of Massasoit,
On the hills of Pometacon,
By the streams of Quadequina,
Through the woods of Queen Weetamoo,
If you will, this book will lead you.*

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INTRODUCTION

MY object in collecting some of the Indian Place Names of Plymouth County and attempting their translation, is the wish to create an interest in the use of Indian names in New England.

Although of the following comparatively small collection, few can be used, the early Massachusetts records and deeds contain innumerable Indian Place Names, many of which are more euphonious. The Algonkin language possesses also many euphonious words, which will describe some natural characteristic of almost any locality.

We scarcely realize that this whole country was once inhabited by a people whose history is almost unknown, but whose characteristics, and traditions, and myths, and religions offer, in some respects, almost as wide a field for interesting study and for research, as the myths and traditions of the races of the old world. I am speaking of the race before it was corrupted by European influences. This is not a country without a past, and much may yet be revealed of great interest to the historian.

The almost universal idea of the Indian is associated with cruelty, torture and massacre, while all other traits are generally unknown or forgotten. A very little study of the subject creates a broader estimate of his character. It seems to me that the Indian has never been given his true place in history. When condemning the "savage" to everlasting obloquy for his methods of warfare, and judging him by this alone, we should remember the civilized cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of the French Revolution of the eighteenth, and the treatment of the Armenians by the

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Turks, and the Jews by the Russians, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and nine.

Massachusetts was inhabited by different tribes of the great Algonkin family, which "extended from Hudson Bay on the North to the Carolinas on the South; from the Atlantic on the East to the Mississippi and Lake Winnipeg on the West."

(*Parkman.*)

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth the territory was occupied by a family of tribes known by the name of Pokanokets, all under the dominion of Massasoit. The Pokanokets or possibly the Wampanoags alone, at a little earlier date, "numbered about three thousand warriors." (*Samuel G. Drake.*)

Some of the Sachems, Sagamores and Captains (Mugwomps) of the Plymouth County tribes deserved admiration, respect, gratitude and sympathy from the descendants of the Pilgrims. Massasoit, Metacomet (King Philip), Iyanough, Tisquantum (Squanto), Hobomok, Tispequin, Sassamon, were all important factors in the early days of the colony, between the years 1620 and 1675.

With a little investigation and study of the Algonkin language, euphonious and locally characteristic Indian names can easily be found for our country and seashore places and for our institutions. They bear the hall-mark of our own country and are more consistent with our national traits of independence and individuality than borrowed names from England, France or Italy.

Imagination was rarely, if ever, used by the Indians in New England in their place names, and any translation expressing anything except a description of the locality to which it is affixed, must be accepted with caution. In many other words, the Indian did use imagination, sometimes almost poetically. They called the sunset, *Wagont*, "when he has lost his way." The name of the belt of Orion was *Shwishacontoweaouy* "The wigwam with three fires." One of the names for the sun was

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Munnannock, probably from *munnok-annoch*, "The Island Star." The names of some of the plants, trees and flowers are wonderfully descriptive and at the same time imaginative.

In the attempt to translate Indian Place Names the first and most important step is, in my opinion, to obtain a knowledge, if possible, of the peculiar characteristics of the place itself when the Indians occupied the country. The next step is to attempt to consider it, as one who has been much with the Indians of the North expressed it, "from the Indian point of view." The place names were, in a large majority of cases, very descriptive, so as to be easily recognized by the Indians of the neighborhood, and often so descriptive as to serve as guide-marks for wanderers through a country, almost a wilderness, with few inhabitants and with only narrow trails from point to point. It must be borne in mind that the Indians had no written language.

We cannot expect to find the exact meaning of many of these names, but I believe, to most, we can give the idea that was intended to be conveyed. The only foundations on which we have to build are the early records of these names, written by men very ignorant of the Indian language, struggling with the difficulty of expressing in writing, the sound of a word of an unknown tongue. As that same word was expressed by different hearers, with different spellings, the problem is a difficult one. Sometimes, for the sake of euphony, sometimes for contraction, more often through carelessness, almost all place names have been corrupted. This accounts, in part, for the different opinions of different students in regard to the same word, and a true student of the language, at the start, acknowledges possible wrong deductions in many cases. One object of my work is, however, the collecting by localities, the Indian Place Names of some of the towns of Plymouth County. I believe this has not been attempted before in a published form. I hope that my wish to create a new interest in the Wampanoag or Pokanoket names will be realized by this paper.

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I must ask the indulgence of Plymouth, Middleborough, Lakeville and Carver for any geographical errors or errors from ignorance of some local tradition or history, as I am not a native of Plymouth County.

I have included in my list of names quite a number over the boundaries of the designated territory, but this is on account of their frequent recurrence in deeds examined. Many Indian names must have been omitted, which are probably to be found in old deeds and manuscripts inaccessible or unknown to me.

I am greatly indebted to the late Hon. William T. Davis, of Plymouth, for the advice and information received from him, also to the late J. Hammond Trumbull, whose translations and suggestions, taken from his publications and letters, I have used whenever possible.

From the early publications of the Massachusetts Historical Society I have made many quotations, with the consent and courtesy of Dr. Samuel A. Green, and the manuscripts of the American Antiquarian Society have given me much valuable information.

Roger Williams' "Key to the Indian Language," Wood's "New England's Prospect," Josiah Cotton's "Vocabulary of the Massachusetts Indian Language," Dr. Arthur Gallatin's "Vocabularies," Rev. Jonathan Edwards' "Observations on the Mohigan Language," Rev. Experience Mayhew's "Observations on the Indian Language," Dr. J. Hammond Trumbull's publications, are the authorities I have mostly consulted in regard to the translations.

"The Plymouth Colony Records," "Records of the Town of Plymouth," "The Mayflower Descendant" and various Plymouth deeds and manuscripts are the authorities I have mostly used for the original spelling of the Indian place names.

Mr. William Wallace Tooker's "Algonquian Series" and Mr. Henry Andrew Wright's "Indian Deeds" have furnished many valuable suggestions.

I wish to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. Charles E. Weston whose familiarity with the old deeds and land boundaries in Middleborough has been of great service.