

Primary Source Excerpts

Indigenous Basketry

Indigenous basketmakers traveled throughout New England and sold or traded their baskets with eager customers. They migrated seasonally, trading not only baskets, but also brooms, herbs, and other products, and were an important part of economic networks at the time. A Nipmuc woman named Granny Sprague was one of these itinerant basketmakers.

Here is a recollection of Granny Sprague from a letter in Old Sturbridge Village's Collection:

Granny was a basket-maker. She made baskets for all white farmers, near and far. In the fall it was a familiar sight to see Granny, with her little granddaughter [Angela] on her back in papoose fashion, going along selling her baskets. The Bemis' farm was one of her favorite stops. Here she was always sure of a hearty welcome, food and shelter. She was a fine honest lady and Mr. Bemis always planned on her coming to buy the baskets he needed for picking fruit on the farm. The Bemis family and Granny Sprague became very good friends.ⁱ

Question: How did the white farmers feel about Granny Sprague's visits?

Indigenous Herbal Medicine

Indigenous healers were trusted for their skills during the early 19th century. During the period, they were called "Indian Doctors" and "Indian Doctresses." They relied on their knowledge of herbal remedies to treat a variety of ailments. Some healers were itinerant, which means that they traveled around and treated their patients and gathered medicinal herbs. Rhoda Rhodes was an "Indian Doctress" who lived in Huntington, Massachusetts, when printer Homer Merriman sought her help for his dyspepsia (pain in the upper abdomen). While she sometimes made house calls, other patients came and stayed with her while she treated them with medicinal roots, herbs, and flowers.

Merriman wrote:

After leaving Saratoga, I again began to run down at once. This was very discouraging, and in a sort of desperation I decided to try the skills of an Indian doctress, an acquaintance whose ailments in some respects resembled mine believing he had derived much benefit from her treatment. She lived in Norwich [now Huntington] Massachusetts, 20 miles from Springfield. I went to see her and remained with her several months. She was 80 years old or more, had a son of perhaps 50 who was her factotum, gathered roots and herbs for her

and prepared them into medicine. She was I believe pure Indian, had a good knowledge of roots and herbs and their medical properties, and a good degree of skill in the use of them, and quite a reputation in the country round and the name of having cured or helped a good many sick people. She lived in a house of two rooms and an attic. One room was used for a storeroom only, and the other was the kitchen, parlor and the old ladies' bedroom; the visitors, of which there were sometimes several, sleeping in the attic, which was divided into bedrooms, as occasion might require, by hanging up blankets or sheets for partitions. I slept at one end of the attic; near my bed a space had been cut for a window, but it seemed never to have been filled [63] with sash or glass. Two boards, set up endwise, filled up the space, and when I rose in the morning, I removed one of the boards to let in the light to see to dress by. I could look down through the floor of the attic to see when breakfast was ready. The lower room once had a window in front, which was now boarded up, also a window at the end, one half of which had been boarded up; the room being lighted by the remaining half and a very small window on the back side.

Here I remained for nearly four months. Our fare was of the plainest, mainly codfish, potatoes and bread. A Miss Douglas, a single lady of forty or fifty, was staying with the old lady, as a patient, while I was there, and did the housework, so that the cooking was good which it would not have been if I had been dependent upon the old lady's cookery. I improved very decidedly in health, taking very freely of various preparations of roots and herbs, and when I left at the end of the four months, I weighed ten pounds more than I had ever done before, and some of my friends were apprehensive that the medicines were causing me to bloat. I left the old lady in November, and did not run down again as I had done after leaving Saratoga, but continued in comfortable health, and have been able to attend to business most of the time since, now some twenty-four years, yet have not at any time had [64] such health as formerly, having decided dyspeptic and nervous tendencies, these causing a good deal of discomfort to myself and doubtless to others around me.ⁱⁱ

Questions:

- What kinds of remedies did Rhoda Rhodes use on Homer Merriman to help his dyspepsia?
- Can you think of any herbal or natural remedies that people still use today?

Education

One woman, Hannah Moore of nearby Union, CT, was a teacher who applied for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and was sent to a Cherokee mission in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) around 1839. There, she taught orphaned Cherokee children who had been forced, with their families, out of their eastern homes and to land west of the Mississippi River on the "Trail of Tears."

One of Hannah's students, Rutha Wilson, wrote on the back of one of Hannah's letters home:

To Miss Amy Moore, I am a Cherokee girl at Dwight and attending school. Your sister requested me write to you. I suppose her object was to let you know that Indian girls could learn to write and distinguish peas, and beans, from potatoes and pumpkins just as well as white girls....P.S. There are a great many white people in this country that can neither read nor write, I pity them.ⁱⁱⁱ

Questions:

- How do you think Rutha and her classmates felt about her school and education?
- What might have been some of the lasting effects of mission schools like this one?
- Are there any other examples of ethnic groups you can think of from American history that remind you of this story?

Indigenous Removal

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law. This called for the forced removal of Indigenous people from their eastern homes to land west of the Mississippi River, allowing white settlers and would-be plantation holders to control their traditional homelands. While the law applied to the entire American east, it mostly impacted the tribes of the southeast: Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles, amounting to at least 60,000 people.

Jackson delivered this speech to Congress in December of 1830:

It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation. Two important tribes have accepted the provision made for their removal at the last session of Congress, and it is believed that their example will induce the remaining tribes also to seek the same obvious advantages.

The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual states, and to the Indians themselves. The pecuniary advantages which it promises to the Government are the least of its recommendations. It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. By opening the whole territory between Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier and render the adjacent States strong enough to repel future invasions without remote aid. It will relieve the whole State of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power. It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good

counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community. These consequences, some of them so certain and the rest so probable, make the complete execution of the plan sanctioned by Congress at their last session an object of much solicitude.^{iv}

Questions:

- What do you think Jackson's motivation was in signing the Indian Removal Act?
- What other motivations might the government have had, but not mentioned?
- How does he say removal will be positive for Native people? White people?

The Mashpee Revolt

One eastern Massachusetts Tribe, the Mashpees, part of the Wampanoag people, governed themselves through most of the 18th century. A board of white overseers was appointed to govern the Mashpee people after the Revolutionary War, and the community struggled to keep non-tribal members from encroaching on their land and stealing their timber. In the 1830s, a Pequot minister named William Apess came to live with the Mashpees and tried to help them gain back some of their independence. After Apess helped the community develop more strategies, they nullified (or invalidated) the authority of the white overseers, and ordered all trespassers off Mashpee land. The state declared the Mashpees "in revolt," and Apess was arrested. Later, the Mashpees were able to gain back some of the self-governance through their political action. The Mashpee Council governed over the town as an independent community within Massachusetts until the 1970s.

From the Mashpee Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, May 1833:

To the Governor & Council of the State of Massachusetts

We say in the voice of one man that we are distressed and degraded daily by those men who we understand were appointed by your honors. That they have the rule of everything. That we are not consulted, it is true, and if we are, they do as they please and if we say one word then we are called poor drunken Indians when in fact we are not....

Much of our land is also rented out and white people have the preeminence and the overseers will not rent our own land to us and we cannot turn our own sheep on what little stock we have... all of our privileges (sic) are in a measure taken from us. Our people are forsaken (sic) – many of them sleep upon the cold ground and we know not why it should be so, when we have enough if properly managed to supply all our wants....

There is much more, but we think that this is sufficient to satisfy you. Knowing that if we were whites, one half

would be enough for redress – and now in consideration thereof and believing that you sirs would do the same – we as proprietors of the soil proud to return your honors thanks for the interest that we believe that you have taken in our welfare yet afore. With a cheering hope that we one day would take care of ourselves believing that you will comply with our wishes and resolutions, and discharge those men, as we have several good trusted men who are capable men who are about to be chosen officers by us... For if we do not take such measures in five years our property will be gone...

Resolved

That we as a Tribe will rule ourselves, and have the right to do so for all men are born free and Equal, says the constitution of the country.

Resolved

That we will not permit any white man to come upon our plantation to cut or carry off wood or hay or any other article, without our permission after the first of July next.

Resolved

That we will put said resolution in force after the date of July next with the penalty of binding and throwing them off the plantation if they will not stay away without.

Yours most obediently as the voice of one man we approve the above as the voice of one man we pray you hear. See list [of 108 signatories] Presented below.^v

Questions:

- Would you call this a “revolt?” Why do you think Massachusetts did?
- Why did the Mashpee tribe petition the state government?
- How did they ask that these issues be resolved?

- i Excerpt from a letter of recollection written by Octavia M. Sweetser, a friend of Granny's granddaughter Angela Sprague Leach, circa 1949, OSV Research Library
- ii “Annals of the Merriam Family, Gathered by Homer Merriam, Commenced in 1862”
- iii Hannah Moore letter, 1987.56, OSV Research Library
- iv Andrew Jackson, Second Annual Address to Congress, December 6, 1830 (accessed on loc.gov)
- v “Let Us Rule Ourselves”: Excerpts from the Mashpee Petition to the Massachusetts Legislature, May 1833 (accessed from massmoments.org)

Self Guide: Indigenous Peoples in the 1830s

Old Sturbridge Village depicts rural New England life in the 1830s. During this time, Indigenous foods, medicines, place names, and craft traditions were folded in to the daily lives of most people. Indigenous peoples living in what came to be called New England were an important and visible part of their communities. As you walk around the Museum, see what you can learn about the lives of Indigenous peoples during the early 19th century by observing and asking questions of the Village's costumed historians.

Fun Fact!

When Europeans arrived, they found Nipmuc people living in small Villages throughout what later became Massachusetts, Connecticut, and northern Rhode Island; including Wabaquasset, Quinnebaug, Quaboag, Pocumtuc, Agawam, Squawkeag, and Wachusett.



Map of Nipmuc Territory, from nipmucnation.org

1. What was the name of the tribe that inhabited this area of Massachusetts?
 - a. What does that name mean?
 - b. Are there still members of the Nipmuc tribe in the region?
2. What was the Sturbridge area called by the Indigenous people who lived here?
 - a. What does that name mean?
3. What did the Nipmuc people originally mine at Tantiusques?
 - a. Bonus point! What did they mine the above to make?
4. Go to the Small House. A house this size was a common choice for many New Englanders in the 1830s. Young couples, immigrants, renters, and poorer families of all ethnicities, including some Indigenous and African American households, lived in homes like this. During this time, some Indigenous Peoples lived on what were called “reserves,” or land under state supervision that was often what remained of their once-large tribal holdings.

Draw a picture of the Small House here:



- a. Traditional Nipmuc homes were movable dwellings called _____.

5. Go to the Towne House garden and look out at the water. This river was a travel route for local tribes. Many seasonal villages were located along it, too. The river is still known by a Indigenous placename. What is the river's name?
6. Go to the Asa Knight Store and locate the baskets. Draw a picture of the baskets here:



These are Yankee baskets, but basketry was a strong Indigenous tradition in New England in the 1830s. Ask the costumed historian in the store about Indigenous basketmakers and their baskets.

7. Many traditional New England foods were derived from Indigenous food traditions. Find someone cooking in one of the households and ask them for a couple examples of these foods. Write them here:

Find a farmer. Ask about what crops were grown in New England in the 1830s, where they came from, and how they were grown and stored. How did Euro-American use of these crops differ from the people who introduced them to European settlers?

8. At the Freeman Farmhouse, find the skunk oil. It is an Indigenous remedy. What was it used for?

9. Look out at the Freeman Garden. What Indigenous plants might the Freeman family have planted in their gardens?
10. Ask a farmer what “sugaring off” is and how it relates to Indigenous foodways.
11. Go to the printing office Homer Merriam, a printer in the next town, relied on the knowledge of “Indian Doctress” Rhoda Rhodes to treat his dyspepsia (pain in the upper abdomen). Indian Doctors and Doctresses were trusted healers in the early 19th century. Ask the printer about the story of Homer Merriman and Rhoda Rhodes.
 - a. Can you think of any herbal or natural remedies that people still use today?

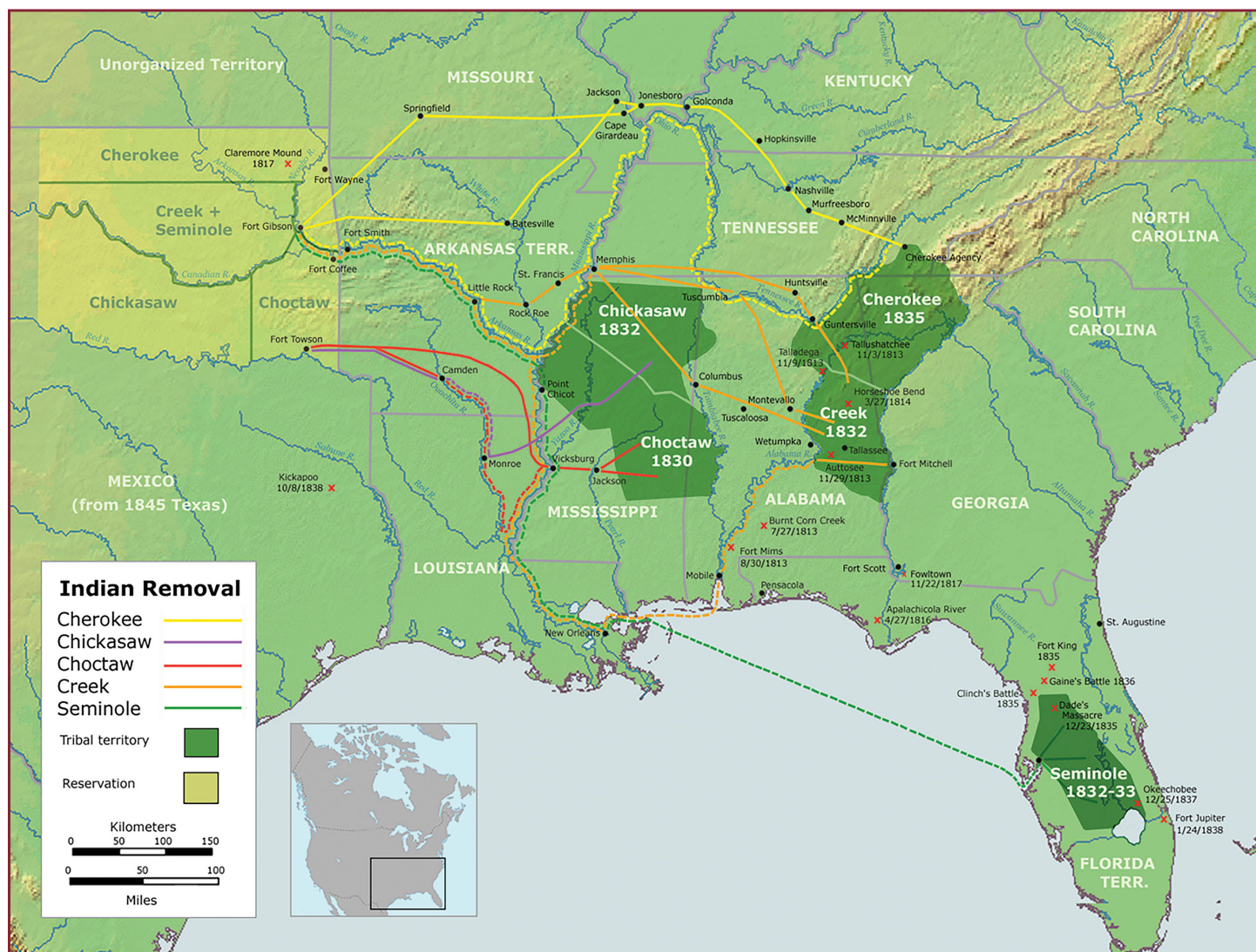
Hepzibeth Hemenway was a Nipmuc woman who lived in Worcester during the late 1700s and early 1800s. A laundress and cook, Hemenway became well-known for the wedding cakes she made for the elite families of the city. The cakes would have been different than the ones we know today, and probably large, dark, and filled with nuts and fruit. She lived on Mechanic Street in Worcester at the time of her death in 1847.



12. Stop at the Herb Garden. Write down two medicinal herbs and what they treat:
13. The Center Meetinghouse was a place for worship on Sundays, but it was also the center of civic life in a town like Sturbridge.

AAask: What other kinds of events would have taken place in the Center Meetinghouse? Were Indigenous peoples able to participate in these events?

Look at the map below.



- a. Approximately how far did those on the “Trail of Tears” have to travel?
 - b. Which tribes were impacted by Indian Removal, according to this map?
16. Guy Scott and his family were important members of the Sturbridge community in the 1830s. Ask the costumed interpreters for more information about Guy Scott and his family.

17. Go to the schoolhouse. A schoolhouse like this one was public, for all children who lived in the community. Children of color may have been seated separately by race. We know that the children of Guy Scott and Hannah Simmonds attended Sturbridge public schools alongside their white neighbors. In Worcester County by 1850, the literacy rate was 90% among students of color, with a school attendance rate of 75%.

- a. How many benches do you see in the schoolhouse?
- b. Write one thing about this schoolhouse that is similar to your classroom:

18. Go to the Mill Pond. This Mill Pond area was at one time a cedar swamp. Draw a picture of the Mill Pond here:



What are the mills that are powered by this pond?



William Apess and the Mashpee Revolt

One eastern Massachusetts Tribe, the Mashpees, part of the Wampanoags, governed themselves through most of the 18th century. A board of white overseers was appointed to govern the Mashpee people after the Revolutionary War, and the community struggled to keep non-tribal members from encroaching on their land and stealing their timber. In the 1830s, a Pequot minister named William Apess came to live with the Mashpees and tried to help them gain back some of their independence. After Apess helped the community develop more strategies, they nullified (or invalidated) the authority of the white overseers, and ordered all trespassers off Mashpee land. The state declared the Mashpees “in revolt,” and Apess was arrested. Later, the Mashpees were able to gain back some of the self-governance through their political action. The Mashpee Council governed over the town as an independent community within Massachusetts until the 1970s.

19. How did Indigenous and Euro-American people use water resources differently?

20. The Nipmuc are still an active tribal government. The Hassanamisco Reservation in Grafton, Massachusetts, is their ancestral home. How many people claim membership to the tribe today?