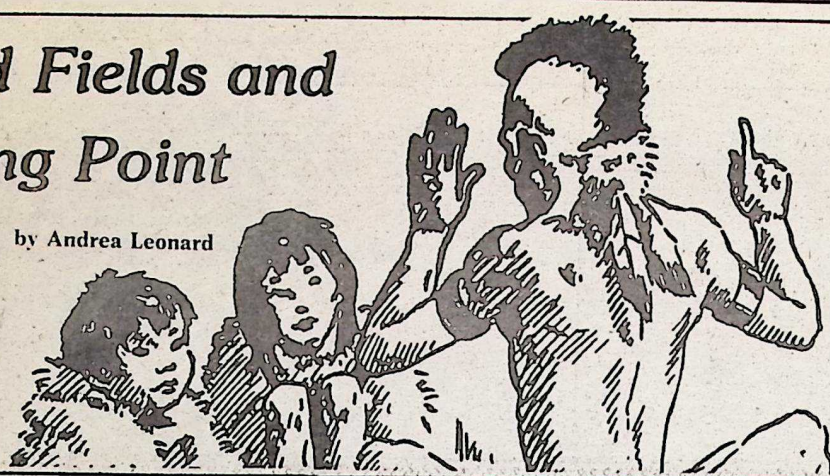


# Old Fields and Long Point

by Andrea Leonard



## JOTTINGS

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As in all primitive societies, Wampanoag Indian culture was rich in mythology. Passed from generation to generation, their stories still hold fascination for us who follow, centuries later. We walk the same earth, watch the same tides ebb and flow, see the same dawns and sunsets, seek shelter from the same storms, and feel the same damp fogs drift inland from across the Great Marshes. We view the same scenes from hilltops that met the eyes of the native Americans who dwelt on Cape Cod before white men came.

According to Indian lore, an old woman named Too-quah-mis-quan-nit lived at Cummaquid in a cave among the sand dunes on Great Neck at the entrance to Barnstable Harbor.

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She was known as Ki-eh-pah-wesh-hok, or great medicine woman, and the Indians called her Granny Squannit. Keeping to herself and walking her own trails, Granny Squannit held none of the chiefs in respect, for she concocted powerful medicines of roots, grasses, seeds, and pods grown from small bushes and plants she cultivated in the forest, and the chiefs feared her magic.

Her potions were strong enough to turn naughty boys and girls into good children; she sang songs that brought the great whales into the harbor; she was brazen enough to steal the pipe of the great Indian giant Maushop, he who cast his sand-filled moccasins into the sea and created Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard Islands.

In spite of her powers, Granny Squannit had weaknesses, too; for one thing, water instead of blood flowed in her veins and the smallest pinprick would allow her vital liquids to run out of her body into the sand. Only a drop of human blood could heal a break in her skin. One night Maushop tore his skunkskin cap on the sharp point of a star and brought it to Granny to mend. In sewing, her clamshell needle pierced her finger; to save her, Maushop cut his own finger to give her a drop of his blood. And when another drop of Maushop's blood fell to the ground, a cranberry plant sprang forth; that is how the first cranberry came to grow on Cape Cod.

Granny Squannit's appearance alone may have been enough to frighten Indian children to obedience. She is described as short and stout like other Indian women, but her long thick black hair hung down over her shoulders, her back, and over the upper part of her face, so that only her mouth and chin were visible. There was a good reason for this, for instead of having two eyes, normally placed, Granny Squannit had but one, located in the center of her forehead. The lidless great orb never closed, but remained wide-open and glaring, even while she slept.

The child who stole wampum, destroyed paint shells, or burned war arrows in the campfire was warned that unless he mended his ways, Granny Squannit would come after him in her canoe, would seize and paddle him away with her. She would lock him in her Cummaquid cave and feed him broth of green herbs. He was told of a long sleep, lasting many moons, while Granny Squannit made magic and medicines to drive the devils from his spirit.

Indian children heard, too, the story about Granny Squannit's agreeing to mend Maushop's cap only if he would let her puff on his pipe. Then, when she pricked her finger and Maushop gave her a drop of blood to save her life, his blood burned like fire. Granny Squannit became so furious she determined to steal Maushop's pipe.

One day Maushop was busy singing his magic song of Whales, and the great fish swam into the bay to play at his feet; the whales sang bass while Maushop sang giant-voice, and the clams sang very high and clear. Granny Squannit slipped up behind Maushop and took his pipe. She hid it in her cave.

The whales told Maushop who had stolen his pipe, and he was very angry. A raging storm arose in the bay. Granny Squannit's cave at Cummaquid filled with salt water; her fire was drowned, and all her medicines spoiled. More waspish than ever, Granny Squannit threw a stick at Maushop. He caught it in his right hand and dropped it on the ground where it turned into a black snake. The snake slithered to Granny's side and sunk its fangs into her great toe. So powerful was Granny Squannit's magic that the snake's fangs were torn from its jaws. Embedded in her toe they burned worse than Maushop's drop of blood, and Granny pulled them out. Ever after, the black snake has been a harmless friend to man.

But this time, Maushop refused to give Granny Squannit a drop of his blood to staunch the waters of life flowing from her body. As the water drained from her, she shrank to a flat puddle in a tidal pool and turned into a flounder that, ever since, spends staring up at the sky with but a single eye.

Long after Maushop died, the Indian stories were told and retold to generations of growing boys and girls. And long after Maushop died, white men came to Plymouth on "winged islands" as the Indians described the ships that brought Englishmen to the Land of the Wampanoags.

The first white men to live in Cummaquid were the Reverend Stephen Bachiler and his followers. To the site of Iyanough's settlement at Old Town, in the winter of 1637-38, came Bachiler with his children and grandchildren and their families.

Life held few dull moments for the first white settler and the first minister in Cummaquid. Educated at Oxford and ordained in the established Church of England, Bachiler had been vicar of Wherwell in Hampshire County before the bishops ejected him for non-conformity. He left England and moved first to Holland; from there in 1632 he sailed to Boston. Bachiler was then 72 years of age.

A man of extraordinary vitality, Bachiler first established his little family church at Lynn. Four years later, after arousing the ire of the Boston Court for preaching non-conformity, he removed to Ipswich. After a short sojourn there, he set forth with his small flock, on foot, for Barnstable. He and his band of family-followers walked the 80-odd miles to the northeast corner of this town, to the place we now call Cummaquid.

The Bachilers proved to be poor pioneers; they stayed but one winter here. After several more moves, the last one back to England, the Reverend Bachiler died in 1660 at the age of 100 years, in Hackney, near London. He was four times wed and the father of seven children.

Cummaquid, to the Indians, meant Sandy Neck and all the land surrounding the harbor we have named Barnstable. The sachem Iyanough had resided there at some seasons of the year, sometimes on the south side of the harbor, a site Indians named Mattakeese, compounded from *matta* (old), and *ohkee* (fields), and sometimes at Long Point which we call Sandy Neck.

Stand on the bridge that spans Maraspin Creek on Mill Way at Barnstable Harbor, and imagine (if you can) the Indians around their fires at night telling tales of Granny Squannit and Maushop. And, imagine, if you can, Stephen Bachiler and his family, the first white settlers at Cummaquid.