What is the Traditional Government of the Nipmuc Nation?

The Constitution of the Nipmuc Nation, SECTION II Tribal Government, Part H, 1 defines the Traditional Government as:
“The Traditional Government of the Nipmuc Nation shall cultivate and perpetuate the customs, heritage, and religion of the Nipmuc Nation and shall include the current Hassanamisco Chief and an Elders Council whose members shall have attained sixty (60) years of age.”

The Traditional Government is in fact the continuation of the old Hassanamisco Tribal Council. One of our principal responsibilities is the stewardship of the Hassanamesit Reservation.

The Elders Council has an additional mission –
The Elders Council of the Nipmuc Nation shall cultivate and perpetuate our culture, history, and customs and encourage the harmony and unity of all of our People.
Any enrolled member of the Nipmuc Nation age 60 and over is welcome to serve on the Elders Council. The Elders meet on the 2nd Saturday of each month at 10 am except during the winter. There is a call-in line for those who cannot attend in person. Visitors are welcome at these meetings. Per the Elders Council Bylaws, there is a core group of 10 Elders with voting rights. Those members include (and can/do change):

Nellie Toney – Chair
Nancy Charleston – Treasurer
Gail Schuyler
Chief Walter Vickers
Sydney Schuyler
Ethel Toney
Muriel Geter
Ann White
Denise Lewis
Valerie Harden Wilson
The current Chief or Sonksq (female leader) of the Nipmuc Nation and Hassanamisco Band is Cheryll Toney Holley.

*** Please note that the Traditional Government and Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council are NOT the same. They are two different entities with different purposes. ***

Responsibilities of the Traditional Government

Below is the chart outlining the Traditional Government’s responsibilities.

What does the Traditional Government do all year?

As stated in the definitions above, the traditional government is responsible for the continuation of our culture. To that end, several programs and activities are sponsored by the traditional government. These activities are open to all Nipmucs regardless of enrollment status.
Powwow

The Nipmuc Nation Powwow (once known as the Hassanamisco Indian Fair) is held on the last Sunday in July at the reservation. It is open to the public, charges admission to all, and offers drumming, vendors, and dancing. This is the main fundraiser for the reservation as well as a yearly reunion for Hassanamisco Band.

Strawberry Moon

Held on the 3rd Saturday in June. This ceremony followed by a potluck social focuses on forgiveness. This year’s ceremony and social was held on June 15, 2019.

Winter Social

This is a winter gathering focused on sharing our connections with each other. This year’s winter was held on January 12, 2019 at the Worcester Public Library (whose patrons did not appreciate our drum). The social included storytelling, giveaways, drumming, and a round of Nipmuc Jeopardy.
Hassanamisco Indian Museum

The Museum building is still closed for renovation, but activities continue either on the reservation or at the tribal office. School and scout visits are welcome. Each year a Native American Youth camp stays at the reservation. Visits to area schools have been suspended due to not enough volunteers. Language classes at the tribal office have been suspended but online classes are held once a month. When the Museum reopens, it will more accurately reflect Nipmuc history and culture throughout the years, have classroom space, and include visiting artists and instructors on a regular basis.

Homestead Restoration

**Rae Gould** is leading this effort to restore the 1801 Homestead on the reservation. Once restored, it will re-open as a Museum. The exterior is now finished, and the focus has shifted to plans for the completion of the interior.

Tribal Historic Preservation Office

**Rae Gould, David White, and Cheryll Holley** monitor federally funded construction that may have an impact on historic or sacred Nipmuc landscapes. We also re-inter remains returned to the tribe by Museums, historical societies, and other tribes. We are now working to reinter individuals from Millbury, Wayland, and Worcester in our own homelands.
Reservation Extension

We are currently negotiating with the town of Grafton for the return of land to the reservation. The land will be used to practice stewardship of the land, invigorate our paddling activities and for ceremonial space.

Massachusetts Native Peoples is now the State-wide Anti-Mascot Group
The listening sessions and discussion groups aimed at raising awareness of Native Peoples in the Commonwealth, especially among legislators, and promoting the condition of and needs of tribal groups in Massachusetts narrowed their focus to removing Native mascots form all Massachusetts school systems. Both the Hassanamisco and Chaubunagungamaug Bands appointed Britney Walley as our representative in this group.
Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation (NIDC)
The NIDC serves as a vehicle for funding community development projects. All the work and programs created and sponsored this year were funded through the NIDC.

Websites
The Hassanamisco Indian Museum website is www.nipmucmuseum.org.
The Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation website is www.nippi.org.

Food Sovereignty Programming
Many Nipmucs have family members that have diabetes and/or heart disease and many of our tribal members have died from these diseases. The NIDC, the Elders Council, the Women’s Group, and the Sonksq are working on ways to reduce these diseases in our community. One of the best ways to do this is to change what we eat. For the past six years, we have grown vegetables, berries, and herbs on the reservation, encouraged Nipmucs and their families to start food gardens at home, and taught medicine-making and plant identification.
Reservation Garden

This past year, the reservation garden was taken over and stewarded by Nia Holley. The effect was wonderful with lots of vegetables distributed to Nipmuc families and elders, Nia and her team also planted berry bushes throughout the reservation and fruit trees in selected spots. The goal of growing food at the reservation is to produce food from non-GMO seeds for distribution to elders and other Nipmuc families -- with the ultimate goal to change what we eat thereby reducing diabetes and heart disease in our community. Personal donations enabled the addition of a fence to protect the garden this year.

Herbal Education & Apothecary

Tribal members continue to offer herbal education including plant walks and an online group. Currently, there is an apothecary in Worcester and one in Boston with free herbs, teas, and other items for tribal members to use.
Home Gardens

Kristen Wyman and Nia Holley from the Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective once again assisted Nipmuc families in establishing home gardens with the same goals for distributing food to Nipmuc families.
Youth Cohort

Nippeash Waapemoosh is a tribal civics/rites of passage initiative to address the unique challenges Nipmuc youth experience and to promote a positive sense of self-worth and cultural pride within the tribe. Through this program, our youth are developing skills and values relating to histories, traditional arts, farming, and tribal government/civics that will one day assist these young people in leading our future.

Lead by Erica Campbell, the inaugural year of the program ended in June. The young participants all received certificates of completion during this year’s powwow. We look forward to many more years of this program.

Women’s Group

Squaognipmug Waantook Society is a group of Nipmuc women from different bands and non-bands who meet once a month to talk, share, and work on crafts and other projects. Occasional field trips included! We also practice ceremony at the reservation. Below are photos from a hand drum making session and a moccasin workshop.
Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective

The NIDC is happy to be a fiscal sponsor for the remarkable group of people. Their self-description reads

“Eastern Woodlands Rematriation is a collective of Indigenous people and kin, inclusive of all genders AND led exclusively by Indigenous women, femmes and two spirits. We understand that in order to rematriate traditional food systems and heal our communities all of our people must be a part of the circle to restore and respect matriarchies again.”

EWRC hosted a gathering to harvest Indigenous corn grown by Keeley Curliss in Lincoln, MA.

There are many individual Nipmucs who work for and with the Traditional Government to help us accomplish many things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tashanna Carter</th>
<th>Donald Gould</th>
<th>Douglas Geter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licine Carter</td>
<td>Sherry Cavers</td>
<td>Elizabeth Santana-Kiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae Gould</td>
<td>Crystal Avakian</td>
<td>Ite Santana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Tall Pine White</td>
<td>Nia Holley</td>
<td>Anthony Richardson and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen Wyman</td>
<td>Kohar Avakian</td>
<td>Ken Gould Sr and his crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Smith</td>
<td>Darlene Charleston</td>
<td>Bud Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Campbell</td>
<td>Cheryl Stedler</td>
<td>Robert Carter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Campbell</td>
<td>Talin Avakian</td>
<td>Keely Curliss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Vickers</td>
<td>Lydia Curliss</td>
<td>Kim Toney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Gould</td>
<td>Rana Smith</td>
<td>Brittney Walley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert and Sarah Stedler</td>
<td>Millie McCowan</td>
<td>Keshon Jackson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many thanks to these organizations who provide multiple layers of support to Nipmuc People and the Nipmuc Nation:

- Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective
- Suffolk University Law School Indigenous Peoples Rights Clinic
- UMass Boston Institute for New England Native American Studies
- Five College Native and Indigenous Studies Program
- MA Commission on Indian Affairs
- Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe
- The Farm School