

# Report of the Traditional Government of the Nipmuc Nation

February 2017

## 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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  
Tom Garr  
Ethel Toney  
Muriel Geter  
Valerie Wilson  
Kenneth Hamilton, Sr

The **current chief or Sonksq** (female leader) of the Nipmuc Nation and Hassanamisco Band is Cheryl Toney Holley.

## 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, a number of 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.

### **Strawberry Moon**

Held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in June. This ceremony followed by a pot luck social focuses on forgiveness. Last year, the Elders also held a special Strawberry Moon in the town of Ashland.

### **Nikkomo**

This is a winter potluck social focusing on sharing our gifts. The Elders purchase toys and books to give to tribal youth. Last year's Nikkomo was cancelled due to low turnout the previous two years.

### **Hassanamisco Indian Museum**

The Museum building is still closed for renovation but activities continue on either the reservation or at the tribal office. School and scout visits are welcome. Last year a Native American Youth camp stayed at the reservation. Visits to area schools have been suspended due to not enough volunteers. Language classes have been suspended for the past year but will resume soon. 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.

### **Reservation Improvements**

There is a new shed for storage on the reservation, and 6 new picnic tables. Brush has been cut back along the edges of the main open area. Many of you helped us to tidy up the reservation, move and paint the shelter, and clean up the fire pit. Fruit trees have been planted and blueberry bushes will go in this year.

### **Elders Trail**

We are working on funding to install a permanent walkway to the rear of the reservation so that Elders and others can enjoy the ceremonial part of the reservation.

### **Nipmuc Indian Development Corporation (NIDC)**

The traditional government re-activated the NIDC to serve as a vehicle for funding community development projects. All of the work and programs created and sponsored this year were funded through the NIDC.

### **Herbal Course**

15 Nipmuc women are studying plant-based medicine with the goal of renewing our medicine traditions and creating a database of traditional and new medicinal strategies for tribal use.

### **Commercial Kitchen**

Once funding has been secured, the cook shack will be transformed into a commercial kitchen to provide: 1. An extended menu at powwows; 2. A licensed facility for tribal members to use for food and/or plant-based medicinal microenterprises; and 3. space for classes and workshops.



### **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.

#### **Reservation Garden**

The women's group planted a three sisters garden (along with other vegetables) at the reservation last year and will again this year. The goal is to produce food from non-GMO seeds for distribution to elders and other Nipmuc families with the ultimate goal to change what we M

#### **Home Gardens**

Three home gardens were also planted last year with the same goals for distributing food to Nipmuc families.

### **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 will be finished this spring and the focus will shift 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 recently participated –with other Nipmuc groups- in a multi-tribal re-internment of over 200 individuals in the Connecticut River Valley. We are now working to reinter individuals from Millbury and Worcester in our own homelands.

### **Website**

The Museum website is [www.nipmucmuseum.org](http://www.nipmucmuseum.org). We recently added a feature to allow the Elders to sell the Zara CiscoeBrough cookbooks and t-shirts from past powwows.

### **Reservation Extension**

We are currently negotiating 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.

### **Family/Youth Activities**

Many of you have paddled with us or have been to family camp outs. We are also working with UMass Amherst professors to have a youth mapping camp this summer in Grafton. Your families are welcome at all our activities and events.

### **Massachusetts Native Peoples**

For the past two years, we have been actively involved in 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.

### **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)**

We continue to work closely with the Department of Children and Families, CBNI, Suffolk Law School, and UMass Boston clinics to ensure that Nipmuc families receive care and treatment under the national ICWA regulations as stated in the DCF policy.

### **National Park Service Battlefield Protection Grant**

We continue to support the efforts of the town of Montague to recover the history of and honor our ancestors who perished at the Massacre at Peskeompskut.

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

Tashanna Carter	Donald Gould
Licine Carter	Sherry Cavers
Rae Gould	Crystal Avakian
David Tall Pine White	Nia Holley
Kristen Wyman	Kohar Avakian
Andrea Smith	Darlene Charleston
Erica Campbell	Cheryl Stedler
Danny Campbell	Talin Avakian
Ken Gould Sr and his crew	Mrs. Vickers
Anthony Richardson and family	Eric Gould
Rana Smith	

**Many thanks to these organizations who provide multiple layers of support to Nipmuc People and the Nipmuc Nation-**

Gedakina  
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  
Mashpee Wampanoag - Department of Historic Preservation and NAGPRA  
Nolumbeka Project

#### **Members of Squaognipmug Waantook Society**

Andrea Smith	Lisy Smith
Jo-Anne Medeiros	Licine Carter
Rhonda Symonds	Michaela Symonds
Tashanna Carter	Crystal Avakian
Nancy Charleston	Darlene Charleston
Cheryll Holley	Rana Smith

#### **Nipmuc Herbal Group Members**

Jodie Chaplelaine	Cheryl Stedler
Erica Campbell	Tashanna Carter
Crystal Avakian	Barbi Gardiner
Candia Flynn	Keely Curliss
Morgan Russell	Sydney Schuyler
Love Richardson	Kristen Wyman
Cheryll Holley	Allexys Burbo
Sherri Putnam	

