

*In Taunton in Bristol County May the 8th
1694 The said Benjamin Leonard and the said
John Cobb took oath that they saw above said
Josias sign seal and deliver the above written
deed as his act and deed unto the said Peter the
day or the date thereof. Sworn before*

Thomas Leonard, Justice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Laurie Stundis for her help typing this report.

References Cited

Book of Indian Records, Plymouth Colony Records (1621-51) vol. xii, p. 238.

Plymouth Colony Records, Book of Indian Deeds. Commonwealth Edition of 1857.

Weston, Thomas

1906 *History of Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts.* Houghton Mifflin and Company, Boston MA.

(c) William Taylor, 2013

New England Native American Spirit Structures

Mary E. Gage

Introduction

In the *Spirit of the New England Tribes* (Simmons 1986:254) there is a reference to man-made "Spirit Lodges." This was a structure built for the purpose of working with a spirit(s). It was confirmed through several different informants in the early 1900's and again, later in the 1930's. That raised a question, were the Spirit Lodges an anomaly or part of a widespread practice of building structures associated with spirits?

Spirit Lodges

In the spring of 1907 Frank Speck interviewed several elderly Mashpee Native Americans and "uncovered new information regarding roadside memorials." (Simmons, 1986:254) He had been sent there by J. Dyneley Prince to collect information on the Mashpee language and other cultural practices.

"The only mention the present Mashpee authorities make of former religious beliefs is that the spirits of the departed (*tcipai*) frequently appeared in the paths of the living, and that such ghosts required propitiation before they could be induced to clear the way. The ancient Indians, they say, were always telling of meeting spirits on their journeys. Consequently, a religious practice grew out of this belief, *viz.*, that of erecting great square flat-topped lodges covered with brush at certain points along their accustomed roads or paths. At these the Indians used to stop and deposit some piece of property or food, or else pour out a libation of whisky. They also held religious meetings and carousals in these lodges. Such Mashpee of to-day as are superstitiously inclined still observe the custom of throwing a twig or branch upon the rotting frame-work, or on the former sites of these spirit-lodges, whenever they pass by." (Prince 1907: 495)

An interview with Gertrude Aiken circa 1930 gives an idea of what the custom meant. "We were so superstitious about this custom we actually believed evil spirits would follow us if it was not carried out." (Quoted in Simmons 1986:255)

The lodge was a physical structure specifically built and designed for activities involved with spirits. It was quite different from the cone-shaped wigwams and the dome shaped wigwams used for houses. The houses did not have flat topped roofs like the lodge. The houses were covered with "cedar bark" or "tightly bound grass". The lodge was covered with loose brush. (Prince, 1907:494) The Mashpee made distinct differences in their choice of covering material and shape of the roof, showing they distinguished between a dwelling house and a spirit lodge.

In southeastern and western Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York trailside cairns were built by Native Americans. A western Massachusetts example was a large pile of stones built on the ground, known as the Great Barrington/Stockbridge cairn (Figure 1). In southeastern Massachusetts there were stone and brush piles built on top of large boulders. (Butler 1946)

In these types of piles, stones or stones and brush were the offerings. These objects are different from the personal property, food, and whiskey used as offerings in the Spirit Lodges. Although the types of offerings differed, both the piles and the lodges functioned as places for trailside offerings to the spirits. The Spirit Lodges eventually lost favor with the Mashpee. However, for many, the fear of lingering spirits prompted them to place brush on top of the collapsed lodges (Figure 2).

The concept of trailside offerings to spirits also shows up in the Canadian Shield region of the Great Lakes. In the Great Lakes, travel by water was common. With the Canadian Algonquin Native Americans the offerings were placed along their water routes. The most frequent offering was a piece of tobacco to appease disruptive spirits who could cause bad weather, rough water and overturn canoes. "Whenever you want calmer weather give us some tobacco." (Dewdney 1967: 42) This shows a widespread practice among the Algonquin tribes of encountering disruptive spir-

its to whom they made offerings along their travel routes, whether it be on land or water.

Tobacco was not the only offering made by the Canadian Algonquins. Like the Mashpee, they too used property as offerings. The property consisted of neatly folded clothing, towels, and tobacco along with prayer sticks (40 sticks of uniform size, linked together with string). The items were placed in a pile on flat ledges where rock art was located. The items were an offering to a spirit asking the spirit for help in healing a sick member of their family. Chinaware and other odds and ends were found inside splits in rock. (Dewdney 1967: 51, 52, 54) These latter items were offerings, but for an unknown purpose.

Tobacco-only offerings were primarily used for a safe journey and were often found at split rocks with an associated spirit. According to numerous stories, spirits reside in splits in rocks in the Canadian Shield region. The splits were portals for the spirits to enter or exit the rock. "Certain dwarfs [spirit people] haunt a crevasse [split] in a rock on French river, where they sometimes make themselves visible; if you throw them some food they disappear." (Jeness 1935:43) Dewdney documented this belief throughout the region:

"May-may-gway-shi 'Rockmedicine Man' The word is variously translated into English. Among the Cree, where these mysterious creatures are described as little men only two or three feet high living inside the rock, the English is 'fairy'. Among the Ojibwa various translations run from 'ghost', 'spirit', and 'merman,' even to 'monkey.' The best rendering in English I could hazard from the scores of descriptions I have listened to would be 'Rockmedicine Man'.

Authorities disagree on details, but some features of the Maymaygway-shi are common over wide areas. They are said to live behind waterside rock faces, especially those where cracks or shallow caves suggest an entrance. (Dewdney and Kidd 1967:13)

It should be noted that not every split was considered to have an associated spirit. A split became associated with a spirit when some Native American had an experience or encounter attributed to a spirit at one.

In New England there are numerous split stones, a few of which have stone fill placed inside the split (Figure 3). Are these Native American offering features or farmer field clearing features? The dilemma is that no formal studies have been done on either cultural aspect. At present the author's son and research partner, James Gage, is doing research on farm-related stone removal through agricultural journals.

His research has revealed that clearing a field of stones was a time-consuming and labor-intensive activity. Prior to the transition to mechanized farming, farmers generally only removed stones from a field if the stone posed a risk for damaging tools. Most field clearing, therefore, took place in plowed fields and to a lesser extent in some hay fields. Pasturage and orchards were rarely if ever cleared of stones. The agricultural literature repeatedly recommended that the stones removed from a field be put to practical use building stone walls, repairing roads, for use in underground drainage systems, and for filling in wetlands (Holbrook 1848:105; Holbrook 1851:36; Platt 1873:116-148). However, not all farmers followed this advice. These farmers dumped their stones along the edges of the field or piled them in the center of the field on exposed ledge or around an immovable glacial erratic. There is no evidence for, nor is there any logical reason for, a farmer to fill a split in a rock with stones.

The author is doing research with the assistance of her research partner on groups of stone piles that include split stones with stones inside the splits. These are in New England. I found that split stone cairns are hardly ever found as an isolated stone structure; they are almost always found as part of a group of cairns.

Did Native Americans create groups of cairns? An excavation of a cairn in Freetown, Massachusetts confirmed that cairns were built by Native Americans in groups. The Freetown site had one hundred and ten cairns in the group. One cairn that

was excavated dated to between 875 and 970 years ago. (Mavor & Dix 1983; 1989: 67-75)

In New England split stone cairns are usually not found on travel routes like their counterparts in the Great Lakes. They are almost always found within a group of cairns. The question, are there other cultural aspects with split stones and other spirits? That is, other than the disruptive spirits found at the Canadian Great Lakes sites?

Splits in boulders on the ground are openings into the earth's underground. Splits in ledges along the water are openings into the water. Both types of splits lead to a place called the Underworld. References to both were found in a vision received by Ogauns, a Parry Island Native American. Ogauns recounts, "But while my face was thus covered the pathway stood revealed to me, and looking up, I searched for the mouth of the chasm [split] by which I must enter. ... At times the invisible Little Wild Indians helped us [Ogauns and his companion, "one of the suns in our sky"] in our descent through the vaults and galleries hollowed out beneath the surface of our earth. At the end of the road lay a pool, which we could only pass by diving into the water and emerging at the farther side." (Jenness 1935: 57) In these statements, Ogauns enters the Underworld through a split. He travels through cave-like rooms and pools of water. It confirms the Native American's belief in the Underworld being both underground and underwater. Ogauns' purpose in going into the Underworld was to meet the "Great Manido" which he also called the "blessed Manido" (Jenness 1935:58-59).

There are other references to powerful benevolent spirits in the Underworld. Earth Grandmother is mentioned in gathering roots and herbs for the Mita'wiwin ceremony. (Skinner 1921: 66) During another ceremony, the rice harvest ritual, an offering is made to "Grandfather, the Master of Rice, who caused it to grow for our use. We give this tobacco (with these words he stops and digs a small hole and puts tobacco in it), as an offering to the Underground Powers and ask them to permit us to make the harvest." (Skinner 1921:144-5) Another reference to an Underworld spirit "...Shingwauk [a shaman] went to Agawa to gather fresh power on a vision quest. He called forth Michipe-

shu, the guardian spirit of the underworld and minerals, especially copper." (Conway and Conway 1990:74)

Through these excerpts are glimpses of master and guardian Underworld spirits. These spirits were benevolent toward ordinary people like Ogauns who as a youth went into the Underworld seeking a vision and went on to become a warrior. The spirits assist medicine men seeking power. They were called upon in annual rituals for assistance to provide good weather for the rice harvest.

Based upon this anthropological evidence, the purpose of the split stones filled with stones becomes clearer. The Native Americans placed the stones in the split as offerings to an Underworld spirit. These offering stones converted a natural split stone into a spirit portal (i.e. a sacred feature with an associated spirit.) The spirit portal allowed the Native Americans to make contact with a spirit inside the Underworld.

Another type of cairn whose purpose has been lost but is recoverable are cairns directly associated with water. In Canton, Maine (in the central part of the state) there is a small cairn site with a cairn built across a seasonal stream. It is on a steep hillside. The stream is only active during the springtime. The cairn is elongated with its long axis perpendicular to the stream. It does not dam up the water. On the uphill side water was observed flowing under it in an uninterrupted stream that does not pool. On the downhill side the water exits in a steady flow of water. The water comes from snow melt and springtime rains. Therefore it may be associated with the Upperworld Water Spirit (rain) that returns each spring.

A private landowner in Sandown, New Hampshire (southeastern part of state) contacted the author this previous spring (2012) when he learned he had partially dismantled a potential cairn attached to a spring. The spring is on the edge of wetlands where several small cairns were identified by the author and her research partner. Approximately half of the stone in the cairn attached to the spring was removed and used for landscaping. The half that remains is attached to the spring. This is an active spring with a steady flow of water

creating a small stream. The associated spirit may be an Underworld Water Spirit (spring water).

Cairns sometimes have features which can be interpreted. This past spring we had an opportunity to visit a cairn site in Deerfield, New Hampshire through the New Hampshire Chapter of the New England Antiquities Research Association. Built into the top of one cairn was a Thunderbird Nest. A Thunderbird Nest is a circular feature surrounded by boulders that is several feet in diameter with a rough stone-lined interior (Figure 4). Within the same cairn was a niche that faced the nest (Figure 5). The niche was a long, small, enclosed channel going deep into the cairn. The depth suggests an access feature to the Underworld. As for the Thunderbird Nest designation, the term comes from the Canadian Shield region of the Great Lakes where this type of feature was documented through interviews with Native Americans. (Dewdney and Kidd 1967:53; Carmichael 1981)

This is an excerpt from *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*: "I have yet to learn why Devil's Bay is so named. Yet in Sabaskong Bay there is a small rock island in the centre of which a huge 'nest' of boulders, obviously an artifact – though a laborious one – and the island is named Devil Birdsnest Island. Indians as far east as Lake Nipigon refer to such constructions as 'Thunderbird's Nests'. I have heard of others but this is the only one I've seen." (Dewdney and Kidd 1967:53)

The name "Devil Birdsnest Island" denotes a Christian influence attached to the structure while retaining the Native American's underlying association with a bird spirit. The name "Thunderbird Nest" denotes a Native American Upperworld Thunderbird Spirit whose images appear in some of the rock art paintings of that region.

The circular rock structure is an enclosure. Enclosures were used by Native Americans to separate a person from the outer world. (Chartkoff 1983:749) In some cases, the enclosure was used to contain a person and spirit together where the two entities could interact with each other. The "shaking tent" used by medicine men in the Great Lakes region is a good example. The shaking tent was a small cylindrical structure (large enough for one person)

built of saplings and covered with hides, bark, or blankets. The top of it was left open to allow spirits to enter and interact with the medicine man. (Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1970:103-104)

Reading the Native American structures is possible to a limited degree, provided we do not project

our modern ideas onto the old structures. To recover snippets of the past it is necessary to utilize historical, anthropological and archaeological data on stone structures as a combined set of data. That permits the recovery of small amounts of data currently thought to be lost.

References Cited

Butler, Eva L.

1946 The Brush or Stone Memorial Heaps of Southern New England. *Bulletin of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut* 19: 2-11.

Carmichael, Patrick H.

1981 The Thunderbird Site and the Thunderbird Nest Phenomenon in Southeastern Manitoba: Megaliths to Medicine Wheels: Boulder Structures in Archaeology, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Chacmool Conference*, Archaeological Association, Department of Archaeology, University of Calgary, pp. 279-295.

Chartkoff, Joseph L.

1983 A Rock Feature Complex from Northwestern California. *American Antiquity* 48(4): 745-760.

Conway, Thor & Julie Conway

1990 *Spirits on Stone: The Agawa Pictographs*. Heritage Discoveries, San Luis Obispo CA.

Dewdney, Selwyn & Kenneth E. Kidd

1967 *Indian Rock Paintings of the Great Lakes*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

Holbrook, F.

1848 Removing Stones and Bushes, *The Cultivator* 5(4): 105-107. [Farm of Leonard Stone, Esq., Watertown MA]

1851 Practical Husbandry, *The Cultivator, New Series* 8(1): 35-38. [Farm in Lexington, MA]

Jenness, Diamond

1935 *The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life*. (Bulletin No. 78, Anthropological Series No. 17), Canada Department of Mines, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, I.S.O., printer); [Facsimile Reprint, Coyote Press]

Mavor, James W. Jr. & Byron E. Dix

1983 New England Stone Mounds as Ritual Architecture. *Early Sites Research Society Bulletin* 10(2): 2-24.

1989 *Manitou: The Sacred Landscape of New England's Native Civilization*. Inner Traditions Inc., Rochester VT.

Platt, George F. et al.

1873 Clearing Rocky Land, *Sixth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Connecticut Board of Agriculture 1872-73*. Press of Case, Lockwood & Brainard, Hartford CT. pp. 116-148.

Prince, J. Dyneley

1907 Last Living Echoes of the Natick. *American Anthropologist, New Series* 9(3): 493-497.

Speck, Frank G.

1928 *Territorial Subdivisions and Boundaries of the Wampanoag, Massachusetts and Nauset Indians. Indian Notes and Monographs no.44.* Museum of the American Indian, New York.

Ritzenthaler, Robert E., and Pat Ritzenthaler

1970 *The Woodland Indians of the Western Great Lakes.* American Museum of Natural History, New York.

Simmons, William S.

1986 *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984.* University Press of New England, Hanover NH.

Skinner, Alanson

1921 *Material Culture of the Menomini. Indian Notes and Monographs [Series],* Museum of the American Indian, New York.

(c) Mary E. Gage, 2013

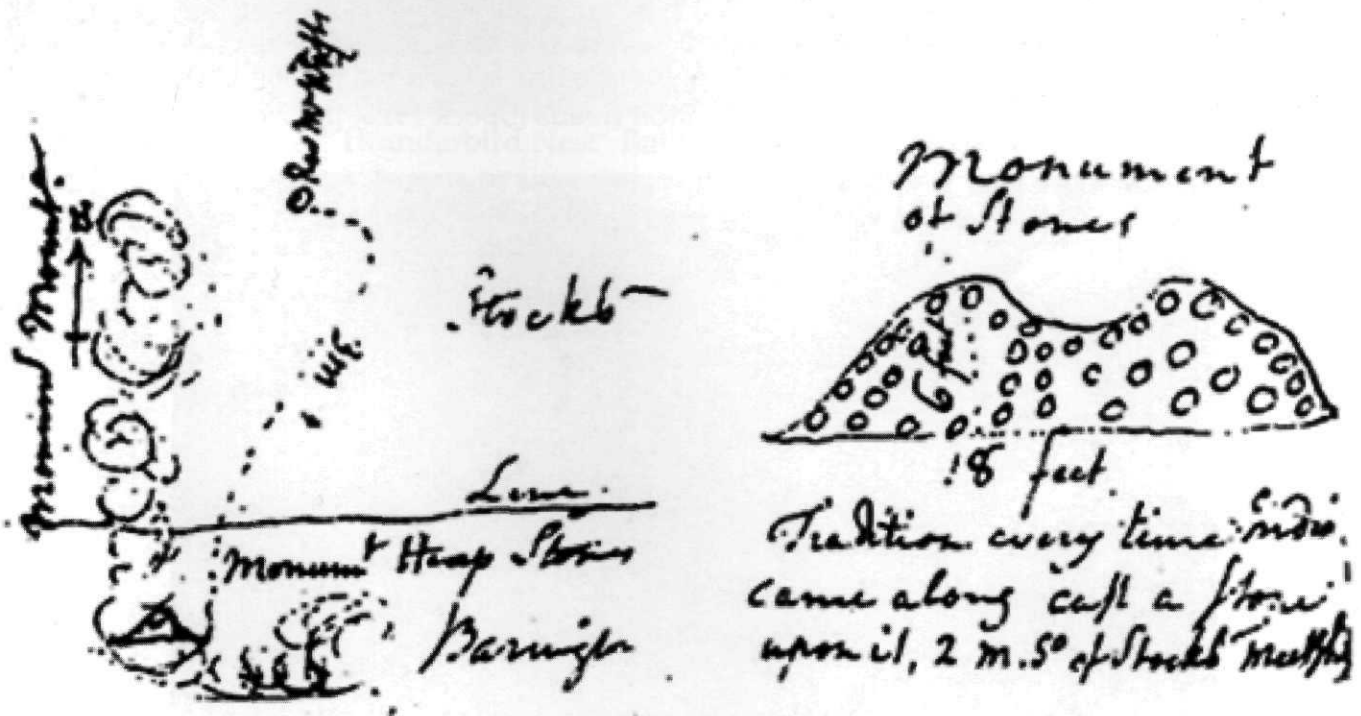


Figure 1: Rev. Erza Stiles' 1762 Sketch of the Barrington/Stockbridge MA (Monument Mountain) Stone Cairn. (reprinted in Butler 1946)



Figure 2: Photograph by Frank Speck of the Remains of a Brush-Covered "Spirit Lodge" in 1922 at the Junction of Mashpee & Waquoit Roads (Speck 1928: fig. 74)



Figure 3: Double Split Stone Cairn Built into an Outcrop. Part of a Stone Cairn Group Site in Newbury, MA.



Figure 4: A "Thunderbird Nest" Built on Top of a Stone Cairn (Deerfield NH)



Figure 5: Niche Built into the Cairn with the "Thunderbird Nest."