

Arrowheads & Nipmucks in Boylston

By Judy Haynes

Some of the oldest artifacts in the Boylston Historical Society Museum collection are arrowheads found in Boylston, Massachusetts. One of the larger ones which measures 4 1/2 inches x 1 1/2 inches was donated by Oliver "Tex" Nelson (1914-2007). This arrowhead was found in 1955 in Hall Pond.

"Hall Pond is located westerly of Sewall Pond. It has had a variety of names over the years including Pout Pond, Temple's Pond, Kendall's Pond, and Slack's Pond. However, its true name is Spectacle Pond, so named because its shape somewhat resembles a pair of spectacles".¹

A second set of four arrowheads are mounted on a small board and were donated to the Boylston



Arrowhead
Found near Spectacle Pond
Boylston, Massachusetts

Historical Society and Museum by the Sawyer Memorial Library. The original donor to the library was not recorded, however the beautiful handwriting on the note attached to it, appears to be that of local historian George Lawson Wright (1856-1943). On the mounted set are three fairly small arrowheads less than 1/2 inch in length and one larger flint arrowhead that measures four inches. The very small ones are made from quartz, one from a reddish-brown in color, and a very tiny one almost translucent in color.



Arrowhead found in Garden
Boylston, Massachusetts

An arrowhead is an easily recognized artifact, usually with a pointed end and a worked element, called a haft. The haft enabled the head to be attached to a wood or ivory shaft. One need only to think of bow and arrow to understand the projectile point attached to wood. The point could be made of rock, stone, shell, metal or even glass, and was shaped by humans into a pointed working tool.² The main concept is to chip away at the edges of rock to form a point that is light enough to fly and sharp enough to pierce animal hide. Some were fashioned to be used as hunting tools or for warfare, and others modeled into a scraping implement for working and softening a deerskin or other animal skin. The arrowhead is the smallest of the point types that included spears, darts or atlatls (similar to a dart). Because of their small size they are tagged "birdpoints" but in fact it was easier to catch birds with a net while the small, sharp birdpoint was sufficient to penetrate and kill a deer.

Many myths exist surrounding the finding of arrowheads, one of which is that there must have been a good deal of warfare, but anthropological evidence indicates more arrowheads were used for hunting and non-warlike activities. Another myth is that it took a very long time to make an

¹ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

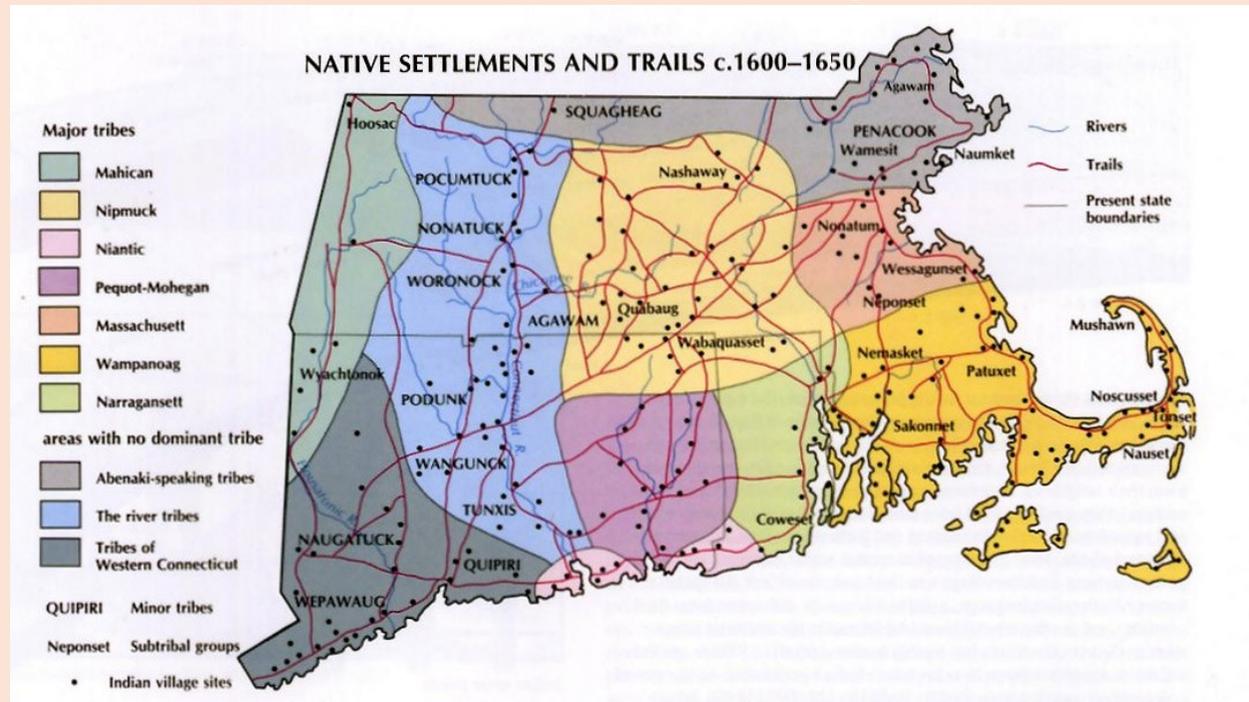
² www.arrowheads by K. Kris Hirst

arrow point. Some, the Clovis points, require more time and skill, but flintknapping in general was not a time-intensive task. They could be made in a matter of seconds. The arrowhead point was made by chipping and flaking the stone called flint knapping. The flintknapper worked a raw piece of stone into its shape by hitting it with another stone and applying soft pressure to shape it as desired.

“If a flintknapper is skilled, an arrowhead can be made from start to finish in less than 15 minutes.”³

Anthropologist John Bower timed an Apache making four stone points, and the average was only 6.5 minutes.

Many a farmer in Massachusetts has found an arrowhead while preparing the soil for crops. The one on the set from the library indicated the larger one was dug up in a garden. The one found by Tex Nelson was very likely made by one of the Nipmuck indigenous people who populated the area prior to English colonization. Since this arrowhead was found in or near Hall Pond, that fits with what we know of those natives. Nipmucks spoke an Eastern Algonquin language, their name meant ‘wanderers’ and often they settled near the water. Here in central Massachusetts, the Nipponet lived near the ponds and rivers, which was a practical place to settle. The word Nipponet indicated “the freshwater pond place.”⁴ While some thought of the natives as wanderers, they moved only, when necessary, as the seasons changed and their needs for farming, harvesting, and hunting changed. It has been said they were good stewards of the earth, moving when they understood that the land needed to rest allowing the soil time to replenish its minerals.



Location of Settlements of Indigenous People of Massachusetts
Map by Mary Ellen Lepionka

George Wright, Boylston’s late 19th and early 20th century historian writes about the Nipmucks, the Native Americans who once were dominant in our area. From 1653-1676, for about 20 years in Lancaster (Boylston’s ‘mother town’) the English settlers lived on mutual peaceful terms with the natives; that is while Sholan, their leader, lived. Events and accusations that Metacomet/Philip had murdered some English led to total distrust by Philip of the English. Thus, unrest was to come to Lancaster in 1675 when a raid by Shoshanim, leader of the Nashaways, also known as Sam, Sholan’s grandson, joined the forces of Metacomet (King Philip). During the raid eight were killed. In 1676 another raid led by Philip himself devastated the Lancaster people with many deaths and 24 were taken captive. The local minister’s wife, Mary Rowlandson, was one of those taken and held for many years until she was ransomed.⁵

This raid took place as part of King Philip’s War, a conflict where many Indians as well as English lost their lives. While it wasn’t a long war, lasting little more than a year, it was said that each side lost over a thousand lives. An excellent source for exploring the conflict more completely and the events leading up to it can be found in *King Philips War* by Eric Schultz and Michael Tougias.⁶ Also in that book are: “Excerpts from the narrative of the captivity and restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.”⁷ She witnessed some Indians kill some of her friends in Lancaster, but she was taken and had written that she was never sexually abused nor harmed to the point where she couldn’t survive. At times she suffered hunger, but she found some women in the wigwams who would share their food with her. The results of the 1676 raid were to cause the town of Lancaster to be abandoned for three years.⁸

Boylston still maintains close ties to the area’s Nipmuck history in the name of its secondary school, the Tahanto Regional Middle-High School. In 1701, George Tahanto, the Sagamore of the Nashaway Indians, deeded a significant amount of land to Lancaster, land which now comprises Boylston, for the sum of twenty pounds and 46 shillings, paid to his uncle Sholan. It was George Tahanto, the nephew, who set his hand and seal on June 26, 1701 for the certain tract of land as described by Bill Dupuis in *The Boylston Reader*.⁹ This bit of history honored the Nipmuck legacy with the school selecting George Tahanto’s name for their high school in 1951.

Boylston and its Native American people, the Nipmucks, not only left their arrowheads, but also a name familiar to all those who have attended the Tahanto Regional High School located in Boylston.

³ Ibid

⁴ Wikipedia; Sholan & Nipmuck

⁵ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

⁶ Schultz and Tougias, King Philip’s War, The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont, 1999

⁷ Schultz and Tougias, King Philip’s War, The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont, 1999

⁸ Boylston Historical Series, Bruce D. Filgate, 2012

⁹ Dupuis, William, A Boylston Reader, Olde Pot Publications, Boylston Historical Society Inc., Boylston, MA, 1997

Map by Mary Ellen Lepionka, <https://historicipswich.org/resources-for-local-native-american-history-and-dialects/>
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