



Massasoit Profile Rock in Assonet served as a god to the Indians 300 years ago. Today, it is a tourist at-

traction in an area set aside as a state reservation.

Herald News Photo

# Profile Rock Area Was Sacred To The Wampanoag Indian Tribe

"As he sat beneath the natural rock formation that was Assonet, the mysterious profile of Massasoit, his beloved father; Philip, the renegade sought to become imbued with renewed spiritual guidance."

This account of one of King Philip's grievous moments just prior to his flight to Mt. Hope in Bristol, where he was killed Aug. 12, 1676, is provided in the book, *The Last of the Great Wampanoag Indian Sachems*, written by Milton A. Travers.

The rock formation known as Profile Rock, where Philip sought inspiration during the final days of the bloody war between the Wampanoag Indians and the English settlers is similar to that of the famed Old Man of the Mountains of New Hampshire, but many, who have compared the two, agree the Assonet head is more sharply featured.

Nearly 20 years ago, the state Department of Natural Resources turned the Profile Rock area into a tourist attraction, providing an access road, parking space and an observation point on a nearby hillock.

The 67.76-acre area around Joshua's Mountain, on which Profile Rock is located, was purchased by the state in 1955 by means of eminent domain, at a cost of \$1,900.

The famous rock, originally called Old Man of

Joshua's Mountain, is practically in the backyard of Freetown's bicentennial chairman, Edmund Buckley, who said the area including the rock and his property were part of the 23rd lot of Ye Freeman's Purchase.

That was the name of the transaction of the original four-mile tract, containing 26 lots, between the Indians and the English settlers in 1659.

It is written that the land was transferred by deed from Wamsitti and his squaw, Tattapanum, to 26 persons known as "original purchasers" in consideration of "twenty coats, two rugs, two iron pots, two kettles and one little kettle, eight pair of shoes, six pair of stockings, one dozen of hoes, one dozen of hatchets, two yards of broadcloth, and a debt satisfied to John Barnes, due from Wamsitti to the said Barnes," which in all probability was for liquor.

Palo Alto Pierce reports in the book, *History of Freetown*, that John Tisdale of Marshfield (afterward of Taunton) was original purchaser of the 23rd lot, on which Buckley resides today.

Pierce continues: "It is upon this lot that a portion of Assonet Village is located. He (Tisdale) was a selectman of Taunton in 1672, and served until his death in June, 1675. He was a representative to the Colonial Court in 1674. He

was killed by the Indians, his dwelling burned, and his gun carried away by them, to be recovered at Rehoboth, Aug. 1, 1675.

"His son Joshua settled upon this lot and died thereon about 1714. The high rock east of Assonet station was upon this lot and hence has been known as Joshua's Mountain. The north half of this lot was at one time owned by George Winslow, through his wife Elizabeth, who was the daughter of Joshua Tisdale. He deeded the same on May 12, 1741, to Barnabas Tisdale."

Buckley advised that according to legend the Indians would gather in the vicinity of the rock, which they believed held the image of their god, Massasoit, and worship it.

Buckley explained that "as long as they could see his (Massasoit's) image, everything would be alright." But when they were in a position where the silhouette of the Indian head was not visible, they believed "Massasoit was angry with them and against them."

The name that stays with the figurehead today is Massasoit Profile Rock, Buckley said. He indicated the rock is another historical place of interest the town will attempt to list on the Massachusetts Register of Historical Places.

Travers wrote that it was in July of 1676, when the

King Philip War that had raged throughout Plymouth Colony for nearly a year was now "smoldering into its last gray embers."

The author acknowledged that King Philip, also named Pometacomet, was aware the beautiful land of Pokanoket was destined to the complete domination of the colonists ever since the overwhelming massacre of his allied tribes by the colonial armies at the Great Swamp Fort, where many of his finest warriors were killed and all his stores burned.

But it is written that the Wampanoag Sachem, suffered his greatest personal blow on the day his wife and only son were captured and carried away to the prison stockade at Bridgewater by Capt. Benjamin Church of the Plymouth Colonial Army, who had surprised the Wampanoags while they were camped in the swamps of Nemasket.

There, Philip had been forced to leave behind his loved ones and flee for his life into the vastness of the Assonet country where he hid.

"The loss of his wife and son had smitten the Wampanoag Sachem with deep grief and dire hopelessness. The cause and desire that had motivated his patriotism now seemed remote and of little consequence," Travers wrote of Philip, depicting the great sachem's feeling as he sat below Profile Rock.

"It was said by those who were present that they saw Philip shed his first tear."

Several weeks later, Philip, was slain at Mt. Hope in Bristol and his head impaled on a staff.

As part of Freetown's bicentennial activities in 1976, the townspeople will re-enact the events of the bloody King Philip War, beginning in Lakeville, formerly Taunton.

The re-enactment will include a pow-wow at Profile Rock where Philip spent his last night before crossing the river to Bristol, where he was killed.

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