

History of the Metawampe Statue at the University of Massachusetts Amherst



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Introduction

The Metawampe statue at the University of Massachusetts Amherst has a tumultuous history, but still stands on the campus. Despite the history of vandalism and controversy of the statue, the University takes effort to preserve and display the statue. This article attempts to demonstrate how Metawampe became associated with the University of Massachusetts in the first place, and how the misattribution of historical information can lead to harmful perpetuation of stereotypes.

Land Deeds

Metawampe signed one tract of land to John Pynchon of Springfield in 1674. Pynchon represented a company of people, and signed the deed on behalf of their ownership. The deed ceded “a certain tract of land lying on ye east side of Quinnetticott River”¹ This land would become a part of the towns of Montague and Leverett, Massachusetts.

Comparing this deed to others in the time period, there are differences that raise questions. For example, several deeds identify the “Indians” that sign them as sachems. In the deed that would become parts of Northampton, Easthampton, Westhampton, “Wawhillowa Nenessahalant & Nassicohee” are described as “being the Sachems of Nanotuck.”² However, Metawampe is referred to as “Mattawompe alias Nattawassawet” throughout the Montague and Wendell deed.³ Why is there a lack of information that describes Metawampe’s relationship to the land?

When examining these “Indian deeds” in the context of other “Indian land deeds” at the time, patterns and connections begin to tell us what was actually happening when the colonizers undermined the land from the indigenous people. Historian Emerson Baker states, “if the Indians did not understand the concept of exclusive ownership, why did they demand clauses stipulating the rights they would retain after the sale?”⁴ There were several examples of Hampden county deeds that indicated “Indians” tried to preserve their use of the land. In the Parts of Northampton, Easthampton, Westhampton deed, it stated that “the Indians have liberty to plant their present corne fields.”⁵ According to historian Alice Nash, “Indians ... trapped by debt” resulted in Indians “becom[ing] enmeshed in the English legal system by breaking English laws.”⁶ There were many examples of debt influencing land transactions. In the Parts of Leverett, Montague, Sunderland and Wendell deed, the deed stated “in consideration of a Debt & Dues from her son Wattauchinksin to John Pynchon of Springfield⁷” on behalf of Mishalisk.

However, Metawampe’s deed did not have obvious clues of Indians keeping the right to use the land, or of the repayment of debt. Instead, the deed stated that “ye sd Mettawompe alias Nattawwasawet doth hereby covenant & promise that he will save harmless ye sd Robt Boltwood [and Company] from all manner of claims Rights Titles ... to the sd Lands and from all Incumbrances of Indian Rights to all or any part thereof haveing full Power & Lawful Right.”⁸ This deed stated that “Indians” lost all rights to the land. It is difficult to surmise what the motivation is, but it is clear that this deed differs from other deeds in the same period.

Amherst College President tries to rename Mt. Toby

Metawampe's land was further north than the land that would become the University of Massachusetts. How did he become associated with the land that would become a part of the University? One of the strongest misattributions of the land deeds occurred in 1849, when Amherst College President Hitchcock tried to rename Mount Toby to "Mettawampe." According to Frank Prentice Rand, Hitchcock "took this name from an old deed which he assumed was the record of the sale of the mountain to the white men; actually it seems to have referred to lands immediately to the north."⁹ Rand described that "the people of Sunderland resented bitterly the academic liberty which Hitchcock had taken with their mountain, and in town meeting assembled they repudiated the name he had chosen."¹⁰

UMass outing club named "Metawampe"

Despite the town of Sunderland's effort to change the name, the connection of Metawampe to Mount Toby did not disappear after 1849. In 1907, some faculty members at the Massachusetts Agricultural College formed an "outing club," which included Mount Toby in their hikes. The *College Signal* explained the choice of the name in 1907. The newspaper stated that "Mettawampe is another name for Mt. Toby and is of Indian origin. This name seemed especially appropriate for two reasons, firstly that the idea of such a club was called into existence on this mountain, and secondly because Mettawampe is the nearest mountain to M.A.C. and it is assumed that all members of the club are interested in mountains in one way or another."¹¹

At this point, the official name of the mountain was Mount Toby. However, the author of this article claimed that "Mettawampe" was another name for the mountain, and proceeded to call it "Mettawampe" in the next sentence. Despite the efforts of the town of Sunderland to reverse President Hitchcock's decision to rename the mountain, some people kept the other name of the mountain in their consciousness. The misattribution of the deed by President Hitchcock was powerful enough to remain in the memory of people at M.A.C. decades later.

Metawampe as the mascot

In 1947, Massachusetts State College became the University of Massachusetts. This prompted a discussion of a mascot change from "the Statesmen" to something that represented a University, and not a "State College". On September 25th 1947, *The Massachusetts Collegian* published an article asking students to vote for a new mascot. The options were: Minutemen, Mohawks, Indians, Bulls, Pilgrims, Pioneers, Yankees, Tomahawks, or Other Name.¹² They did not propose the mascot to be "Metawampe" in this initial poll.

A student named George Burgess published an article in the *Massachusetts Collegian* advocating for the "Redmen" to be the University's mascot. George Burgess stated that "the move would please our great patron, Chief Metawampi."¹³ George Burgess was the first person to introduce the idea of Metawampe as the mascot of the University in an official public medium, such as the *Collegian*. To Burgess, Metawampe was the patron of the campus. Metawampe was not only

connected to the campus through the ideas of “patronage,” as Burgess referred to it, but he was connected to the idea of “Indian lore.”¹⁴

Burgess wrote another article in April of 1948, advocating for a bronze statue of “Chief Metawampi” as a class gift. He claimed that “a statue, with a suitable aura of tradition and ceremony associated with it would be a decidedly promising step in that direction.” He also stated “what better object could be provided than a statue of an Indian, patron chieftain to the Redman, and replete with all the and tradition worthy of a hallowed object on campus?”¹⁵ This connected the mascot change to the creation of a statue. The statue of Metawampe was unveiled to the campus in 1951, officially memorializing the misattribution of a land deed, and the idea that Metawampe had been the patron of the land that would become the University of Massachusetts.

The statue

On May 18th 1950, the Massachusetts Collegian reported that the senior class gave the gift of the “Mettawampe statue” to the campus. The Collegian stated that the “guardian spirit of the school will be five feet high from top to toe, and the arms will be extended over the head.” There were also plans to “place [the statue] in the triangular space of lawn in front of Memorial Hall.”¹ On February 15th 1951, the statue was unveiled to the campus. President Van Meter accepted the statue’s unveiling. The Massachusetts Collegian article states that “Standing on pudding stone base before Old Chapel, Metawampe will, in the words of Register Marshall O. Lanphear, ‘look forever toward the wigwams and tepees of the Massachusetts Redmen, both braves and squaws.’”

To justify the history and the establishment of the statue, the Collegian article stated that “Frank Prentice Rand, dean of the school of liberal arts, traced the Metawampe legend through the 300 years of its history. He said that ... the Metawampe of University legend owned tracts of land north of Mt. Toby, near Sunderland. He sold these lands to white settlers, and they later became part of the University holdings.” The article finished by stating the conclusion of the program. “Registrar Lanphear gave his traditional ‘invocation of the Great Spirit,’ known to generations of students who have attended football rallies where the registrar appeals to Metawampe for guidance and victory.” The statue was more than a misunderstanding of the history of indigenous peoples in the Pioneer Valley. It was a way to promote the strength of the University. The Collegian article stated that “Metawampe looks across the University campus toward the multi-million dollar dormitory area.”²

Vandalism once it was established

Despite the University’s claims of strength and unity, the statue was greeted with vandalism and mockery across campus. On March 27th 1951, a Collegian article described that the statue had “been subjected to coats of paint and much verbal criticism” since its establishment.³ In

¹ “Senior Class gift Mettawampe statue.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, May 18 1950, 2.

² “Metawampe, Gift of class of ’50 Unveiled, Accepted by Van Meter.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, February 15 1951, 1.

³ “Metawampe, a tradition.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, March 27 1951, 2.

December of 1951, the statue “was evidently taken from his place of repose and thrown directly into the campus pond.”⁴ In April of 1952, when a previous episode of vandalism left the statue missing the “butt of the gun and one of the legs were damaged,” the University decided to lock up “Metawampe ... in the power plant.” However, “the area had been broken into and Metawampe kidnapped during the night of April 9th.”⁵ The statue remained out of sight until 1956, when the University decided to mount the “Indian brave ... on a pedestal, part of this year’s senior class gift and placed on the green in front of south college.”⁶

Change of Mascot

In 1972, the Student Senate voted on and approved the change of the mascot for the University. Item 72-S230, introduced on April 26th, justified the change because “there is a growing American consciousness deploring the perpetration of racist, sexist, and ethnic discrimination and mystification, and whereas the use of Indian references on this campus e.g. ‘Redmen on the warpath’ gives a false, distorted, and racist picture of our Indian heritage.”⁷ On May 3rd, the senate proposed an amendment to the previous motion, which “resolved that the student senate rename the athletic teams W.A.S.P.S. and adopt the school sign as the wasp.” The amendment failed to pass, but Item 72-S230 as originally proposed passed.

Recent Vandalism and Alterations

In the book *Massachusetts Memories*, David and Lynn Adams stated that the bottom half of the musket disappeared from the statue between 1974 and 1985. Beyond that, the biggest act of vandalism against the statue occurred in 2004. The Massachusetts Daily Collegian claimed that “The Chief Metawampe statue was stolen from its stand near the Student Union around 5 a.m. on Sunday morning. The approximately 500-pound statue was pulled from its stand and then dragged into the roadway of North Pleasant Street.”⁸

The biggest alteration of the statue since this act occurred in 2014. The University had to move the statue to construct the Integrative Learning Center. The University described that “the iconic UMass Amherst statue of Native American Metawampe was placed in its new permanent home on Aug. 27.”⁹

Perception of the statue today

⁴ “Major facts withheld in Metawampe Theft.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, December 11 1951, 1.

⁵ “No. Not again! Metawampe is gone.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, April 15 1952, 1.

⁶ “Metawampe to return to UMass Campus Site.” *Massachusetts Collegian*, May 18 1956, 1.

⁷ Student Senate Records. Student Senate Records, 1972. (RG-45-7), Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries.

⁸ Erika Lovely. “Chief Metawampe statue vandalized.” *Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, September 23 2004.

⁹ “Slideshow: Metawampe returns.” UMass Amherst News & Media Relations. September 1 2014. <https://www.umass.edu/newsoffice/article/metawampe-returns>

There is a shockingly low amount of information about Metawampe and the development of the statue. A Clio article describes this history of the chief and the statue, but it is brief and meant to contribute to a basic understanding.¹⁰ The University websites also offer very little information about the statue. On the “UMass Memorials Website,” there is an image with a description that reads “Statue and lawn dedicated to the local Nonotuck American Indian who sold land north of Mt. Toby to Hadley settlers.”¹¹



Image courtesy of <http://www.umass.edu/fcsadmin/memorials/others/metawampe.html>

On one of the UMass Alumni website pages, there is a description of “Traditions of Yesteryear,” where they describe the “Metawampe tradition.” The description says “Chief Metawampe, a local American Indian who lived in the area in the 17th century, became the official mascot of the University of Massachusetts in 1948. For the next 24 years, we were known as the Redmen until controversy over the nickname prompted the university to make a change. In 1972, students selected the Minuteman as our official mascot, replacing Metawampe.”¹²

Finally, one description of the memory of the statue comes from *Massachusetts Memories: UMass Amherst History* by David and Lynn Adams. In this book, the Adams claimed that some view Metawampe as a symbol of independence and strength, while others view it as demeaning to Native Americans, and it’s violent because of the musket. However, they claimed that no

¹⁰ Harned, Cheryl. “Metawampe Monument.” Clio. <https://theclio.com/web/entry?id=54206>

¹¹ “Metawampe.” UMass Amherst Memorials.

<http://www.umass.edu/fcsadmin/memorials/others/metawampe.html>

¹² “Traditions of Yesteryear.” UMass Amherst Alumni Association.

<https://www.umassalumni.com/s/1640/alumni/interior-2col.aspx?sid=1640&gid=2&pgid=634>

matter what, he is inspiration, tradition, and heritage.¹³ They wrote “one campus symbol that represented the spirit and ideas that guided and nourished this growth is the Metawampe.”¹⁴

Conclusion

The historical inaccuracy led to misinformation, and then led to perpetuation of stereotypes of indigenous people. The inscription on the pedestal that reads “Legendary Spirit of the Red Man” suggests the indigenous peoples willingly ceded their land to the colonizers, when the land was in fact undermined and then misattributed. The attempted preservation of the statue shows that the University values this narrative, or at least values the history that the statue accumulated. While it can be argued that the statue symbolizes progress and the movement away from the “Redman” mascot, not enough people know about the misattribution of the land in the first place. Historical accuracy and understanding the actual events is a way to resist this narrative. If we understand what the statue is actually symbolizing, we are less likely to believe the colonial narrative it perpetuates.

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¹³ David and Lynne Adams, *Massachusetts Memories: UMass Amherst History* (Collective Copies, 2008), 39.

¹⁴ Adams, *Massachusetts Memories*, 34.

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¹ Deed to parts of Montague and Wendell, April 10, 1794, in Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, MA: n.p., 1905), 86-88. Per Wright, the original deed is in the Town Records of Sunderland, MA.

² Deed to parts of Northampton, Easthampton, Westhampton, September 24, 1653, in Wright, *Indian Deeds*, 26.

³ Deed to parts of Montague and Wendell, April 10, 1794, in Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, MA: n.p., 1905), 86-88. Per Wright, the original deed is in the Town Records of Sunderland, MA.

⁴ Emerson Baker, “A Scratch with a Bear’s Paw: Anglo-Indian Land Deeds in Early Maine.” *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 1989), 246.

⁵ Deed to parts of Northampton, Easthampton, Westhampton, September 24, 1653, in Wright, *Indian Deeds*, 26.

⁶ Alice Nash, “Quanquan’s Mortgage of 1663,” in *Cultivating the Past: Essays on the History of Hadley, Massachusetts*, ed. by Marla Miller (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 33.

⁷ Deed to parts of Parts of Leverett, Montague, Sunderland and Wendell, April 10, 1794, in Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, MA: n.p., 1905), 84.

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⁹ Frank Prentice Rand, *Yesterdays at Massachusetts State College* (Amherst: The Associate Alumni of Massachusetts State College, 1933), 152.

¹⁰ Rand, *Yesterdays*, 152.

¹¹ "Mettawampe Club." *College Signal*, November 27 1907, 10.

¹² "Minutemen, Pioneers, Pilgrims, Bulls? Collegian asks students to decide." *Massachusetts Collegian*, September 25 1947, 2.

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