

Why Woods Hole?

by James Watt Mavor, Jr

Woods Hole today is a village in Falmouth. It is tucked into the southwest corner of Cape Cod on a neck of land that separates Buzzards Bay from Vineyard Sound. It has good harbors that once berthed whaling and clipper ships and are now used by ferry terminals, a Coast Guard base and several renowned scientific institutions. Woods Hole is also the name of the tidal strait between the mainland and the nearest of the Elizabeth Islands.

Many with roots in Woods Hole have been curious about the origin of its name. Richard Backus, writing in *Woods Hole Reflections* in 1983, discussed maritime meanings of the word hole.¹ Elon Jessup, my uncle and father of Ann Martin of Woods Hole, wrote an article entitled "What's In a Name" published in the *New York Times* on June 15, 1952.² In

1876, Joseph Story Fay observed that there were several places named hole about the Cape and islands. They were "Holme's Hole, Woods Hole, Quick's Hole, Robinson's Hole, Powder Hole and Butler's Hole."³

Four of these names can be traced back to the 17th century. They present fascinating puzzles. What is a hole? Who were Wood, Quick, Robinson and Butler? Was Homes a real person or a title? Was Powder Hole named because of an explosion? How did the beliefs and behavior of the people in the early American colonial period affect these matters?

As I thought about these questions, I tried to discern the thoughts of people on Cape Cod 350 or more years ago when Woods Hole and other curious names entered the historical record. I explored maritime terminology, native American legends and history, colonial records, and even glacial geology. The chances of discovering definite answers are slim, but maybe what is more important is the process of



Photograph of Woods Hole Passage and the Elizabeth Islands taken by Salley H. Mavor in 1972.

trying to bring different perspectives to bear on the many puzzles that arise when we try to answer the question, Why Woods Hole?

The Holes of Cape Cod and the Islands

The names of the holes appear to be made up of English words, but I did not know whether or not that was actually the case. Therefore, since most of the 17th century names of places were Indian, I started with those that appear in Wampanoag legends.

In the days before the first white people came across the sea, the Wampanoag culture hero Maushop lived on Cape Cod. Maushop attempted to build a bridge from Aquinnah (Gay Head) to Cuttyhunk by placing huge boulders in the sea, but before he had finished, a crab caught him by the heel and he was obliged to stop. Maushop then threw the crab toward Nantucket Shoals, broke off a portion of Aquinnah, and cast it into the sea, forming No Man's Land.

Pukwudgees, little people who used powerful magic, caused the young sons of Maushop to die. Maushop carried them to the waters near Saconeset (Woods Hole in this context), where he heaped sand over their bodies, creating small islands. He planted trees and grasses on the graves of his sons. The islands became Nanomesset, Kataymuck and Uckatimest Neck, Peschameeset, Nashawena, Cuttyhunk and Penikese. There are today seven major islands whereas Maushop had but five sons. This probably reflects 17th century or earlier conditions when Naushon and Uncatena were one and Cuttyhunk and Nashawena were joined. The group of islands, called Elizabeth by the English, was known by the Wampanoags as Nashanow. This word was derived from Nash Chawan which means "between the tide

rips or currents at each end, rather than the sides." Nashanow, then, was the ancient Wampanoag name that described the islands and the holes together.^{4,5} I was struck by the grace and power of this word.

I found that not all names were Wampanoag. The Puritans associated Maushop with the Devil; they named Devil's Bridge which is the rocky bottom of Vineyard Sound and the shoals off Aquinnah and Cuttyhunk, the remains of Maushop's attempt to build a bridge.^{6,7} The Indians saw their world being shaped by the forces of nature, whereas the 17th century colonists' faith lay in conflict between good and evil. Place names reflected these values. They were assigned by Puritans to replace Wampanoag names of sacred places as part of the Puritan campaign to Christianize the Wampanoag. On Cape Cod, there is not only a Devil's Bridge, but a Devil's Ditch, a Devil's Dumping Ground, a Devil's Den, a Devil's Ash Heap, a Devil's Heel, and a Squaw Hollow, where the Devil broke his apron string.⁸ Typically, such places have unusual or spectacular natural features. Therefore, in interpreting the names and their origins, we should be alert to their religious significance.

I thought that by examining the physical landscape on which the holes lie, I might discover shared features that would lead to an etymological source for the names. Woods, Quicks and Robinsons Holes are natural, rocky, water passages or straits. They were created during the past few thousand years by wave erosion which cut through the glacial moraine that forms the geological structure of Cape Cod and the islands. The straits separate the Elizabeth Islands, which stretch in a chain for 15 miles southwest from Woods Hole at the southwestern tip of Cape Cod. Woods Hole passage separates Uncatena and Nonamessett Islands from the mainland. It has the strongest tidal currents in the area. Robinsons Hole



Map of southeastern Massachusetts showing the extent of Wampanoag Manomet in 1654. Black area is Manomet. Dotted line shows boundary between Plymouth Colony and Mayhew's island colony, also claimed by the Duke of York and the Netherlands.

is between Naushon and Pasque Islands; Quicks Hole separates Pasque from Nashawena.

These three straits are all noted for strong tidal currents which move the sea between Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay, and they have long been known as holes. The most southwesterly passage, Canapitset channel, separates Nashawena from Cuttyhunk Island, but is very narrow and barely navigable. Perhaps it did not exist in the 17th century when the other passages were being named.

Homes Hole on Martha's Vineyard is the oldest named hole in the region. The name was changed to Holmes Hole in the 1840s, and then to Vineyard Haven in 1871 when residents resented the indignity of hailing from a "hole" and considered Vineyard Haven a more "euphonious and appropriate" name.⁹

In the 17th century, Homes Hole referred to a large area including the harbor, Lagoon Pond, the bluffs of East Chop and West Chop, and the neck of land between the harbor and Lake Tashmoo.¹⁰ Homes Hole could be described as a small bay, cove or inlet, but it stretches this dictionary definition. The strongest current outside of Woods Hole passage runs around West Chop; Homes Hole contains the feature of strong tidal currents that is common to the other five holes on the Cape and islands.¹¹

From about 1800 to 1890, Powder Hole was the name of a harbor and adjacent fishing village at Monomoy Point on Cape Cod. It was next to the channel with a strong tidal current that partially surrounds the tip of Monomoy Point.¹² Fay suggests there may have been a hill there during the times of ancient Norse voyaging to America.¹³ During the last century, shifting sands destroyed the place and it is now a salt marsh and open sea.¹⁴

Butler's Hole still exists. It is a deep water channel with a strong tidal current through the shifting sands off Monomoy Point. It gives the principal eastern access for shipping to Nantucket Sound from the open ocean.

Southern Cape Cod and the islands are known for their strong currents, but all of the six places called hole have in common that there the water runs fast in a deep place adjacent to land or shallows.

There is another maritime meaning of hole which is very much a part of the topography of Cape Cod and the islands, the glacial kettle. These depressions formed by the weight of great blocks of ice left by the receding glaciers are noticed principally on the land as the counterpoint of the knobs or hills. But they are also found on the shores and under the water, creating small bays such as Kettle Cove and Tarpaulin Cove on Naushon Island. Why were these places called coves, not holes? And why were the nearby tidal passages called holes, not straits?

A survey of coastal guides, maps and nautical charts reveals no holes, in the sense of tidal straits, on the Atlantic coast except on Cape Cod and the Elizabeth Islands. *The Dictionary of American Regional English* implies that the Elizabeth Islands region is the only place in the U.S. where the term is used in this way.¹⁵

Creative Spelling and Meaning of Words

As the next step in my effort to trace origins of names, I sought out the names of the places called hole in original documents of the 17th century in order to find out how they were spelled and pronounced, and what they meant. The sources were mostly town proprietors' records and deeds. Only records of Holmes Hole and Woods Hole were numerous.¹⁶

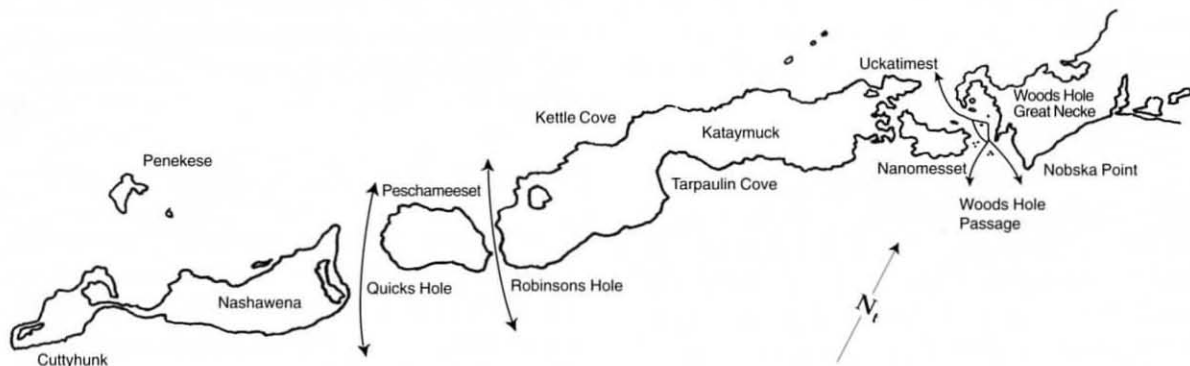
Few people could read and write in 17th century America and spelling a word the same way on different occasions was not considered important. The task of tracing names and words is made even more difficult because Cape Cod was visited very early by many explorers speaking various dialects of English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Icelandic, Norwegian and who knows what others. And on top of that, there was a written native language called Massachusett invented by John Eliot in the 1650s in order to convert the Indians to the Puritan sect.

The 17th century spelling history of Woods Hole and Homes Hole indicate that hole was spelled consistently and usually "h" was lower case. Of 44 entries, there are only two entries of holl and two of holle. Therefore, hole was most likely intended to be the common English word and not to be confused with its Old Norse cognate "holr" for hollow or the unrelated Old Norse "holl" for hill.¹⁷

I compiled a list of 24 instances in which Woods Hole appeared in 17th century documents. The name Woods appears with two "o"s 12 times and 12

times with one "o." In the compilation, there are eight appearances of Woods, two Woodses, one Woodes, one Woodse, six Wodes, and six Wodses. Wood, Wod and Wode would all have been pronounced the same way. Similarly, of the 17 references to Homes Hole I found there were 13 Homes, one Homeses and one Holms. The possessive term "his hole" is used twice with Homes and once with Woods, as in "Woods his hole."¹⁸

The variety of word endings of Woods and Homes struck me as odd. Daniel Robb of Woods Hole suggested that perhaps the apostrophe was not used in 17th century America. I found that he was right: "The apostrophe was introduced into English from the French in the 16th century and there was much uncertainty about its use until the middle of the 19th century." By the 18th century, it was being used to represent the omission of the letter "e" in the ending "es."¹⁹ It seems clear that the use of the third word "his" in the names identifies the genitive case in an unambiguous way for legal documents. Hereafter, I omit the apostrophe in 17th century place names.



Nashenow (Elizabeth Islands), from Woods Hole to Cuttyhunk.

Historical Events at the Places and Times When the Holes Were Named

My historical search followed the patterns of European settlement and the relations between the Europeans and the native Americans. This story begins with the voyage of what has become known as the Winthrop fleet of 1629/30 when the English popu-

The South part of Nevv-England, as it is Planted this year, 1634.



William Wood's map of New England, from *New England's Prospect*, 1634. The distorted geography and absence of villages implies that Wood did not visit Cape Cod before 1634. The dearth of Indian villages may have reflected the depopulation that had taken place even before the smallpox epidemic of 1633.

lation of eastern Massachusetts rose from several hundred to more than two thousand.²⁰ Four of the passengers are important to the story. John Winthrop was the first resident governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company and continued in this office until 1649. Thomas Mayhew, Sr. (1593-1682) and his son, Thomas Mayhew, Jr. (1621-1657) settled in Watertown at first, but later became the first English settlers of Martha's Vineyard. The fourth passenger was a certain William Woods who settled in Saugus (Lynn), Massachusetts. Historians consider that he is the author of *New England's Prospect*, an important book about early colonial New England, published in 1634.²¹ William Woods, writing under the name William Wood, became known as an author and careful observer.

In 1638, Captain John Underhill reported that "Martins Vineyard and Elizabeths Islands" were uninhabited.²² Presumably he meant that only Wampanoags lived there. In 1641, the Thomas Mayhews acquired one patent from James Forreth, agent of Lord Sterling, and just to make sure, another patent from the agent of Ferdinand Gorges, acting for the King of England. The Mayhews' patents gave them exclusive rights to plant and inhabit Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Elizabeth Islands, Tuckernuck Island and Muskeget Island.²³ The patents were confirmed in 1672 by Francis Lovelace, Governor of New York, who had claimed all the islands in 1671 for the Duke of York. They had been claimed by New Netherlands until 1664; in 1670 there was a very brief war between England and the Netherlands after which the Dutch were evicted from their North American colony.²⁴ Through all this, the Mayhews interpreted their patents as a right to buy the land from the Wampanoags, which they did either for themselves or by authorizing others to do so.

Thomas Mayhew, Jr. settled on Marthas Vineyard in 1642 and became the first and most successful Christian missionary to the Indians. His father settled there in 1645 and became known as Patriarch to the Indians.²⁵ He also became Governor of Marthas Vineyard and the other islands for life, and the lord of the only English manor in New England with absolute power over all its inhabitants, responsible to the Governor of the English province of New York. Banks suggests that the Mayhews founded what was in effect a separate colony because it was outside the lawful bounds of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.²⁶ Woods Hole was at this contested intercolonial and international boundary in 1654 when its name first appeared in the records.

This brings up the question of what was meant by the name. Did Woods Hole refer only to the strait, or did it include the harbors? Did it include the neck of land now known as Penzance Point? Where precisely was the New York/Plymouth Colony boundary line?

This was a time when there was brisk trade by sea between Manhattan Island in the Province of New York and the Plymouth Colony. The route was along the Connecticut shore, through Buzzards Bay, passing the Elizabeth Islands, up to Aptuxet in Manomet, now Bourne, and to other trading posts. Sandwich was the big town on the Cape, but there was not yet any English settlement in Saconneset (now Falmouth).²⁷ The perspectives of Dutch coastal traders from New Amsterdam, English settlers in Sandwich, and English and Wampanoag land traders in Manomet must be considered. The historical records of Marthas Vineyard, New York and New Amsterdam are likely to be as helpful and relevant to the inquiry as those of the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colonies.

Homes Hole

Homes Hole appears in the phrase, "the Eastermost chop of Homses Hole" in 1646 as a boundary on a grant of part of Marthas Vineyard to the inhabitants of that island. The grant dates the use of the name Homes Hole before any English settlers of record had settled in that part of Marthas Vineyard or in Woods Hole or Saconneset.²⁸

Homes is an Anglo-Saxon word, but it is just as surely an Indian word. According to Roger Williams, homes was an Algonquian word meaning "an old man." On Long Island there is an early place name, Homses Hill. Banks suggests that Homes Hole meant the home of an unnamed chief who lived there when the Mayhews granted the adjacent land in 1646.²⁹

While Wampanoags would not have named land after a dead person, a sachem could have been associated with a place. Sachem Ponit in 1682 called himself, "of Nobnocket alias homes his hole," Nobnocket being the ancient Indian name for Vineyard Haven. Mayhew and others could well have known of the Indian tradition of an old Wampanoag being the sachem of Homes Hole and used his status on the 1646 grant.³⁰

Woods Hole

The first known appearance of the name Woods Hole is in a deed to Kataymuck (Naushon) Island dated 1654, reflecting the grant of tenancy of this island by Thomas Mayhew, Sr. of Marthas Vineyard from Sachem Seayk of Manomet.³¹ This deed, written before Saconneset (Falmouth) was settled by Europeans, shows that Thomas Mayhew already knew the name Woods Hole. It is the only extant 17th century record of Saconneset or Woods Hole that men-

tions a person named Wood or Woods. A photograph of the original deed is reproduced here. It reads:

"Be it knowne unto all men by these presents that I Seayk Sachim of Monument doe hereby freely gyve unto Thomas Mayhew of Martins vyneyard, one lland neare Woods his hole Called by the Indians Cataymuck for him his heires and Assignnes to Injiye for ever witnes my hand this twentyeth day of Aprill 1654

The mark Seayk

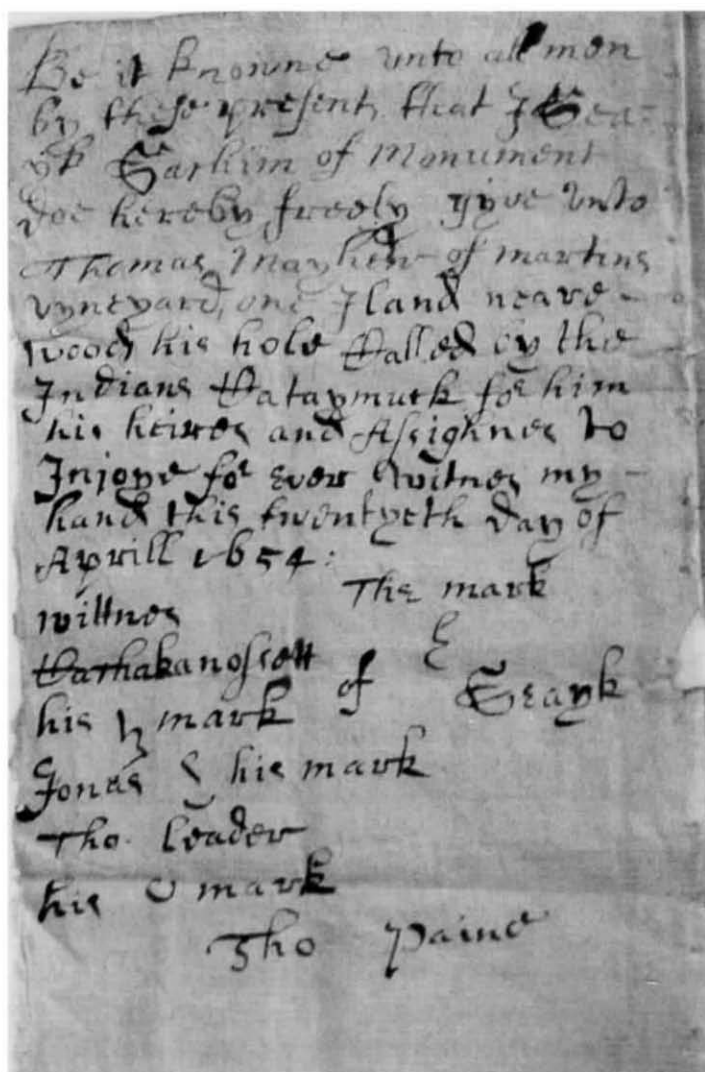
wittness Cachakonossett his mark Jonas
his mark Tho. Leader his mark

Tho: paine

[on the verso:] Entered uppon the records
at Marthas Vineyard May 2nd: 1682

Matt: Mayhew Secret. Alyce hir Covenant
James daughter 24 June 1661"

Why was Woods Hole not referred to as Seayks Hole in the 1654 Mayhew deed? At the signing of this deed in 1654, both Thomas Mayhew and Sachem Seayk must have known who Woods was and perhaps knew him personally. Was there a Marthas Vineyard Wampanoag name like Woodis or Widdiss that might have been that of the sachem whose territory included Woods Hole before 1654? Did different Wampanoag sachems "own" the same land? Additional deeds in 1657 and 1658 for the same land signed by different sachems and putting different conditions on the land transfer indicates that may have been the case, at least when it came to transferring land to the En-



Be it knowne unto all men
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hand this twentyeth day of
Aprill 1654:
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Jonas
his mark
Tho. Leader
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Tho: paine

Original 1654 Deed to Naushon, photographed by James W. Mavor, Jr., courtesy of Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts. This is the earliest known written record of the name Woods Hole. There is a contemporary copy of this deed, with some differences, in the County Records Office, Edgartown, Massachusetts.

glish settlers. Also, after four years and three versions of the Naushon deed, the principals evidently did not yet understand each other.³²

Who Was the Wood of Woods Hole?

If Woods was a Wampanoag, then Woods Hole was probably named by the colonists. Speaking the names of people who had died was forbidden by Wampanoag tradition; their place names were not likely to include any personal names.³³ But English colonists might have named Woods Hole after a Wampanoag, especially if he had converted to Christianity.

In a search for possible Wampanoags named Woods, I turned to Russell Gardner, Wampanoag Tribal Historian, whose ancestors are from Gay Head. He supplied me with the names of several historical native Americans named Wood in Sandwich. He suggested tracing the genealogy of Robert and Nathan Whood of Taunton, as well. He mentioned Samuel and Love Woods of old Manomet who were Wampanoags.³⁴ Bournedale was a part of old Manomet and I found the names of Samuel (born 1802) and Love (born 1832) and six other native Americans of the Herring Pond Tribe named Woods who made up 12% of the population of the village in 1861. Wood or Woods was the most numerous family.³⁵ This is promising, but if the Wood of Woods Hole was a Wampanoag, he or she would have lived before 1654, and therefore known in oral but probably not written tradition.

Might Woods mean simply woodland? Probably not. The word Wodland appears seven times, each time clearly in the sense of woodland, in the same documents as the name Woods Hole. The variants Wood and Wod had the same meaning and pronunciation in the 17th century. It is much more likely that Wood and its variations all refer to the name of an individual or a Woods family, and did not refer to woodland.³⁶

Was Woods an Englishman? There seems to be no mention of Woods Hole in the English colonial records on the mainland before 1662. The Woods Hole deeds from Job Notantico (or Antiko) were dated 1662 and 1679, eight and twenty-five years respectively after the first appearance of the name on the deed to Naushon Island from Sachem Seayk in 1654.³⁷ If Woods Hole was named for its owner and not some passing mariner, then either that owner was a Wampanoag or the land had been transferred illegally. Any Englishman who acquired land from the Wampanoags should have had the transaction approved and recorded by Plymouth Colony; no such record has been found for Woods Hole before 1654.

On the mainland part of Manomet, Plymouth Colony had permitted English settlement only on the Cape Cod Bay side of Cape Cod. By 1637, 60 English families had moved lock, stock and barrel from Saugus to form the town of Sandwich. In a few years the towns of Barnstable and Yarmouth were founded as part of the Plymouth Colony. In those first years, no individual purchases of land were allowed.³⁸

While Barnstable extended all the way from Cape Cod Bay to Nantucket Sound, Sandwich did not. Plymouth Colony left the south shore from Woods Hole to Chatham for the use of the South Sea Indians, later called Mashpee. Saconesset, the land that is now Falmouth and includes Woods Hole, remained untouched although surrounded by lands that had been acquired by English colonists. It is largely thanks to Richard Bourne that this policy was enforced. Bourne was one of the founders of Sandwich. When he first arrived in Sandwich, he, like his companions, was interested primarily in aggressive real estate accumulation. But his objectives changed. He became a well known missionary to

the Wampanoags of Cape Cod and he acquired land to prevent his fellow colonists from taking it, delaying the development of the south shore towns. He managed to get a special dispensation from the Plymouth Colony to preserve a large area for the Indian reservation that came into being as Mashpee in 1665.³⁹

The Three William Woods

A search of the shipping lists shows that there were few European Woods around the Upper Cape in the 1630s. William Wood, author of *New England's Prospect*, was a journeyman with no extant genealogy. He wrote in his book that he came to New England in 1629 and sailed back to England in 1633. His book was published in 1634 and was so popular that two more editions were printed in 1635 and 1639 with very little revision. The Massachusetts Colony Governor's council voted to write a letter praising his efforts on behalf of the colony to a wealthy patron in England and thereafter he was called Mister. However, Wood's 1634 map of New England is so inaccurate with respect to Cape Cod and the islands that it is nearly certain that he did not know Cape Cod until after it was published. If the author was the William Wood of Sandwich, surely he would have revised his inaccurate map for the third edition of his book.⁴⁰ There is no direct evidence of the return of the author William Wood to America after he left in 1633.

At least two other people named William Wood did appear on the historical scene, one or both of whom could have been the author. They were both referred to as Mr. Wood, a term used to identify gentry or notable persons. One died at Concord, Massachusetts, in 1671 aged 86 after many years of residence. As I was about to search the Sandwich records, John York of Bourne told me about William Wood who,

with Thomas Dexter and eight other men, were the ten men of Saugus who had founded Sandwich in 1637. Sandwich abutted Saconesset. He came over on the ship *Hopewell* from England in 1635 with a Mrs. Elizabeth Wood and John Wood and settled in Saugus.⁴¹ This William Wood was constable and town clerk of Sandwich and remained there from 1637 to 1649 after which his name is lost to history. I am skeptical of the identification of William Wood the author who came over in the Winthrop fleet with William Wood the town clerk of Sandwich.⁴²

The historical record confirms a tight network of at least ten individuals on Cape Cod, who worked during the mid-17th century to transfer land from the Wampanoags to the inhabitants of the townships as communities. In 1648, they were all brought together by common interests, family connections and the circumstances of a single event, a land agreement between inhabitants of Barnstable and the Wampanoag inhabitants of Mashpee before it became a reservation. These facts may lead to the identity of Wood of Woods Hole.⁴³

First, there was Paupmunnock, sachem of Manomet, and then Moash and Wampum, who represented the Wampanoag people of Manomet. Next, there was William Wood, town clerk of Sandwich, which was part of Manomet. Next came Richard Bourne of Sandwich, who had tenancy of land in Mashpee and was an associate of Wood. The inhabitants of Barnstable were represented by Captain Myles Standish, who had been sent by the Plymouth Colony Court to sort out irregularities in the frenzy of land grabbing that characterized the period. Standish had not only the authority of his person and the colonial administration but a military force behind him.

Isaac Robinson served as aid and advisor to Standish and was an old friend. He had come over from England in 1631, was experienced, had lived in Barnstable for 9 years, later was co-founder of English Saconesset or Falmouth, and his family name was attached to Robinson's Hole. His daughter received a legacy from Myles Standish, when he died in 1655. Also involved as witness and helper was Jonathan Hatch, the other co-founder of Falmouth. Finally, the Thomas Mathews, rulers of Marthas Vineyard, were concerned when the deed of land transfer included a part of Marthas Vineyard to which they claimed exclusive rights.⁴⁴

All of these people must have known each other well enough for us to assume that actions by any one affected all. How natural it would have been for Isaac Robinson to arrange for Woods Hole to be named after his associate William Wood, probably between 1646 and 1654.

Saconesset Becomes Part of Manomet

1654, the year that the name Woods Hole first appeared in the historical record, was the same year that the English Town of Sandwich started on a campaign to buy as much of Manomet as possible, a practice which accelerated from 1656 to 1660.

In 1660, men from Sandwich and Barnstable received the first major land grants in Saconesset and created a whole new settlement there. The records of Sandwich and Saugus confirm that a William Wood and Thomas Dexter were close acquaintances and active in the movement to encourage townships to acquire land from the Indians and forbid individuals to do so. They would have had every reason to travel to Woods Hole and the Elizabeth Islands in the conduct of their business. If the Wood of Woods Hole was an Englishman, William Wood

from Sandwich is a very likely candidate, whether or not this was also William the author.

We have seen that the mid-17th century English and Wampanoags were able to manage fairly orderly transfers of land in spite of their different languages and ideas about property. However, throughout the period of the naming of the holes, 1620 to 1654, land as a commodity was a concept foreign to the Wampanoags and the English colonists did not make their position clear before executing deeds. The devastating 1633 drought and smallpox epidemic severely weakened the Wampanoags' effort to maintain the traditional attitude toward the land.⁴⁵

It is curious that Massasoit, Governors William Bradford and Edward Winslow, and Miles Standish all died between 1655 and 1660. Lovell suggests that their absence caused a turning point in the history of the Plymouth Colony, toward aggression on the part of the English colonists against the Indians, which then led to King Philip's War. It certainly was a turning point for land transfers in Saconesset.⁴⁶

Robinsons Hole and the Others

Isaac Robinson was one of the proprietors of Saconesset in 1660 when Englishmen were finally allowed to acquire land in that unsettled corner of Cape Cod. He was also one of the first two settlers of record; he actually came to live on his land. Robinson had come to America on the ship *Lyon* in 1631.⁴⁷ He was active in Barnstable affairs from 1640 to 1657 before he became a proprietor of Saconesset. Emerson states that Isaac's son, John Robinson, born about 1640, was a missionary to the Indians and probably lived at Naushon. In 1667, he married Elizabeth Weeks, the daughter of another Naushon family. Other than these connections, 1729 is the earliest genealogical reference which places a

Robinson anywhere on Naushon Island. Emerson writes that "The Robinsons take first place among Naushon inhabitants both as to length of stay and numbers." It is therefore likely that Robinson's Hole was named after this Robinson family and that they lived at Robinson's Hole as early as the mid-17th century.⁴⁸

Emerson dates the Quick's Hole name at least as early as 1667 by a record that states, "west end of that lland next to Quickshole." A mariner named William Quick who sailed frequently through Quick's Hole on voyages between Newport, R.I. and Boston from 1638-1644 may have been the source of the name.

Manomet and the Nashanow Documents

Who was the Sachem Seayk of Manomet and what were his ideas of land ownership and transfer? What was Manomet?⁵⁰

The sachem of Manomet held authority over the Wampanoags of southern Plymouth, the whole of the later Sandwich, part of Barnstable, and the eastern shore of Buzzards Bay down to and including the islands off Woods Hole. The sachem of Manomet administered a community that extended into two separate English provinces, New York and Massachusetts, and English colonists from the Massachusetts towns of Sandwich and Barnstable and the New York island of Marthas Vineyard did business with him.

Manomet was a Wampanoag community defined by natural boundaries. It extended 40 miles from Cape Cod Bay to Cuttyhunk Island. There is a major Wampanoag trail all the way from Cape Cod Bay to Woods Hole. Manomet is full of glacial hills, many with awe inspiring views, and kettle holes, many holding fresh water ponds. To the native Americans, the entire landscape is alive and sacred. Byron Dix and I studied the sacred landscape of New England and found natural features that signal places where man-made structures were

built to honor sacred places and to observe astronomical events. This is particularly evident in Manomet. There are many definitions of native American sacred places. They include places which are ordinary and out of the ordinary, places of momentary or lasting experience, inspiring landscapes, places of personal and shared rituals, places with connections to unseen powers. There are shrines used for observing astronomical events. One such observation site in Manomet, in the part now called Beebe Woods, is directed to the north shore of Cuttyhunk Island, the last of the chain, where the last gleam of the winter solstice sun is precisely aligned. In Woods Hole, there is another shrine for observing Nantucket Sound and Marthas Vineyard and for pinpointing stellar and solar events on the horizon.⁵¹

The Wampanoags did not understand that when they gave a deed to the English newcomers that it was received as a permanent transfer of exclusive ownership from one individual to another. The English based their view on the divine right assumed by the King of England to usurp the land. This resulted in many conflicting and overlapping transfers of land. For example, Thomas Mayhew, Sr. acquired deeds to Kataymuck (Naushon) Island from

Powder Hole and Butler's Hole were probably named sometime after the other holes. The name Powder is said to have originated either from an explosion of powder stored in an anchored ship or underwater in a sealed container during the War of 1812. The story of Butler's Hole has been lost. There is no history of a Butler's village or harbor. It is simply a strait with submerged sand boundaries and a strong tidal current.⁴⁹

Sachem Seayk of Monument (Manomet) in 1654 and from Sachem Quaquaquinegat also of Manomet in 1657 and again from Sachem Seayk of Monument in 1658. The 1657 deed specifies that the grant of tenancy applies to the heirs and assigns of the sachem as well as Mayhew. The 1654 deed omitted the heirs and assigns of the sachem indicating that Sachem Seayk intended that Mayhew's use or ownership of the island would be temporary, ceasing at Seayk's death or if Seayk assigned use of the property to someone else. Mayhew intended that the transaction be permanent. The third deed, dated 1658, added more islands and a receipt for specific payment.⁵²

Conflicting island ownership perception and records are further demonstrated by the testimony of an Indian named Old Hope or John or Mopes of Manomet to the Plymouth Colony Court in 1679. He stated that the "great island called Kataymuck (now Naushon) and another island called Peskehamessit (Pasque) belonged to Webacowet. Will Numack, Indian, also testified that he had often heard his father say the same concerning the islands commonly called Nashanow (the original name of the Elizabeth Island group)." Webacowet and Numack were Wampanoags of the Saconesset part of Manomet. Sias and William

If the use of the word hole followed the traditions indicated in dictionaries, it would seem likely that Woods Hole was named after its deep and protected harbors. But in the days of sail and oar power, the strong tidal current in the strait between Nonamesset Island and the mainland would have been the most noticeable topographic feature of the place. The name could have been applied to the strait first and then later to the harbor and village.

Numack were two leaders who seemed to have been engaged in expediting land transfers, the 17th century equivalent of real estate agents. They acquired land themselves and endorsed other people's titles to land.⁵³

In 1988, Goddard and Bragdon published a collection of native American writings in Massachusetts, the written language into which John Eliot translated the Bible in 1663. Up to the time of this book, written records of native American affairs were largely those of English scribes. These recent translations of 17th and 18th century documents provide access to the experience of southern New England communities in the words of the native Americans themselves. Document No. 1 is the will of the old sachem Quateatashshit, dated April 26, 1679. It bequeathed the island of Mashshinnah, which may be Naushon, to his four children. It is witnessed by William Numuk, whom we know from above and previous documents was from both Manomet and Saconesset. The will also states that Job Antiko or Notantiko, who sold Saconesset to Jonathan Hatch and other English proprietors in 1679, owned Nonamesset and Uncatena Islands. The will and several deeds confirm that Manomet included the Elizabeth Islands.⁵⁴

The name Woods Hole may have been casual in its origin, with the possessive referring to an event rather than actual ownership. Perhaps a Wampanoag or English person named Wood or Woodis traveled through the passage frequently, just as William Quick traveled through Quicks Hole. Perhaps Wood or Woodis lived at Woods Hole, just as the descendants of Isaac Robinson lived at Robinsons Hole. But this is conjecture.

More certain is the observation that the single feature common to all six of the holes is an unusually strong tidal current caused by the land and underwater topography of Cape Cod. These names may well be the only examples of hole being used to describe tidal straits between islands rather than bays or inlets.

But whether or not the word hole was intended to refer to the tidal straits between islands, one term that we know of surely did and that was Nash Chawan, the traditional Wampanoag name, mentioned in the beginning of this article. It meant all of the Elizabeth Islands and the straits between, including Woods Hole. It described a natural place without reference to persons or ownership. In modern usage, it has been reduced to the names of the two largest islands, Naushon and Nashawena.

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23. Minutes of the Executive Council of the Province of New York, Administration of Francis Lovelace, 1668-1673, pp. 345-348.
24. Ibid.
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27. The Wampanoag name for the place later named Falmouth had several spellings, pronunciations and perhaps meanings. I have chosen Saconneset, the spelling that prevailed from 1644 to 1673 determined from contemporary Indian deeds, proprietors' records and Plymouth court records. In later periods, Suckanesset became common. These conclusions are confirmed by Frederick Freeman in his *History of Cape Cod*, 1862, and R.A. Lovell, Jr. in his *Sandwich*, 1984.
28. Banks, *History*, Vol II, Tisbury, p. 3-5. op. cit.
In 1646, Thomas Mayhew, Sr. and Jr. granted land for a township which abutted but did not include Homes Hole. That name was mentioned in the grant as "Homses Hole." This grant is published in Banks' *Annals of Edgartown*, in which the following appears. "Land as farr as the Easter-Chop of Homses Hole, and also all the lland called Chapaquegick." A "true copy" of this grant made by Thomas Dasset Clerk for ye Towne Great Harbour on ye Vineyard" Edgartown, reads, "Land as farr as ye Eastermost Chap of Homses Hole, & also all ye Island called Chapaquegick." The word Chop appears in its two modes of spelling, chap and chop. The plural chaps or chops means the entrance of a bay or harbor adapted from the word "jaws" East and West Chop are the two headlands at the entrance to Vineyard Haven Harbor. Homes Hole at this time included the present village of Vineyard Haven, the neck of land between it and Lake Tashmoo, West Chop and East Chop as well as the Lagoon and Vineyard Haven Harbor.
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32. Transcriptions above of the 1657 and 1658 deeds are published by the Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts.
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36. Mavor, Transcriptions.

A Curious Story

About Ancient Manomet and Woods Hole's Place In It

Dr. Augustine Shurtleff wrote in 1867 the enigmatic story of Thomas Marlowe and his bride, Patience. It could have been the earliest historical mention of the name Woods Hole, or it could have been fiction. The story tells of the trade between the Dutch settlement on Manhattan Island and Aptucxet Trading Post at Manomet. Thomas saw and admired Nonamesset Island. The young couple landed at Uncatena Island and they settled at Naushon Island (not named) in 1630. They lived there for about 15 years and produced many children, then the entire family except for Thomas died of smallpox. Possible confirmation of this story may be found in the fact that William Bradford wrote in his diary that a Thomas Marloe came from England to the Plymouth Colony in 1628.

The story mentions Woods Hole, Sandwich and Tarpaulin Cove, all very early names. If true, Shurtleff's story would suggest that the name Woods Hole was known in Manomet 24 years before it first appeared in the Naushon deed of 1654 and 32 years before the 1662 deed for part of Woods Hole.⁵⁵

In spite of its uncertain origins, this story provides a personal perspective on the connection between Manomet and the Elizabeth Islands and the Plymouth Colony trade with Dutch Manhattan Island, topics that can be verified by existing contemporary documents but which are otherwise little known.

37. Ibid.
38. Lovell, R.A. Jr. *Sandwich, A Cape Cod Town*, Town of Sandwich, 1984, pp. 1-10.
39. Ibid.
40. Wood, *New England's Prospect*.
Freeman, Frederick, *History of Cape Cod*, Vol II, Boston, 1862, pp. 67, 78, 79, 85, 169, 427.
41. Banks, Charles E. *The Planters of the Commonwealth*, Genealogical Publishing Co. Baltimore, 1967. pp. 65-85.
42. Lovell, *Sandwich*, p. 31.
43. Barnstable County Records, C.W. Swift Pub. Yarmouthport, MA. 1910, in Leonard H. Smith, Jr., *Cape Cod Library of Local History and Genealogy*, Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD. 1992, Vol 2, pp 958-960, 1652-1654.
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44. Ibid.
45. Salisbury, Neal, *Manitou and Providence*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 181, 193.
46. Lovell, *Sandwich*, p. 63.
47. Banks, *History*, Vol III, p. 418.
48. Emerson, *Naushon*, p. 425.
49. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Chart 13244.
Roscoe, Monomoy.
50. Manomet was Anglicized to Monument, the version used to name Monument village in the Town of Bourne.
Se-Bay-Ik means "at the narrows" or "at the passage" in the Penobscot dialect. The name is tantalizingly close to Seayk, the sachem of Manomet in 1654.
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52. Deed from Sachem Quaquaquymeygat 1667.
53. Freeman, *History*, Vol II, pp. 67, 78, 79, 85,
From Freeman, Frederick, *History of Cape Cod*, Vol II, Boston, 1862. op. cit.
1679 is the date of the deed in which Woods Hole Neck was conveyed by Job No(ta)ntico, son of Thomas Notantico, of Suckanessett, to Jonathan Hatch. The grandfather to father to Job transfer of land, within the native culture could have taken from 50 to 80 years, placing the earliest events remembered by Old Hope at about 1600 or at the time when Bartholemew Gosnold landed on the Elizabeth Islands.
54. The will of Quateatashshit, dated Aug. 26, 1679. Translated from the Massachusetts language by Goddard and Bragdon.

James Watt Mavor, Jr. came to Woods Hole as an infant in 1923 when his father, an MBL investigator, and Stanley Eldridge were building the Mavors' summer cottage. After a career in college teaching Jim moved to Woods Hole year round with his wife, Mary, and their three small children. Jim joined WHOI full-time in 1961 to start a manned submersible program which produced *ALVIN*. Since then his careers have included ship design, more college teaching and research, oceanographic engineering and, for the past 33 years, developing interest in interdisciplinary study of past cultures as an independent researcher and writer. He has published two books, *Voyage To Atlantis*, 1969, 1990, and *Manitou, The Sacred Landscape of New England's Native Civilization*, 1989.