

July 30
1834

STATEMENT

Of the means of Education and Religious Instruction enjoyed by the Marshpee Indians, connected with Mr Fish and Harvard College.

[The following statement of facts is derived from authentic documents and the testimony of the Indians and others.]

Up to 1835, the State had done nothing for education in Marshpee, except build two school-houses in 1831.

In the winter of 1835, the subject came up in the Legislature of distributing the School fund of the State among the towns. A bill was reported to the House, in which Marshpee was made a School District, and entitled to receive a dividend according to its population by the United States census.— This was meant well ; but had the law passed in that shape, it would have done no good , because Marshpee had no United States census. The people of Marshpee, or the Selectmen knew nothing of this law to distribute the School fund, and their missionary, or pastor (as he claimed to be) Mr Fish, never interested himself in such matters.— Mr Hallet, at Boston (who had acted as their counsel) laid their claims before the Committee, by two petitions which he got from the Selectmen and from himself, and the Commissioner. The chairman of the School Committee, Hon. A. H. Everett, took much interest in getting a liberal allowance for education in Marshpee. He presented the petitions and proposed a law which would give one hundred dollars a year forever, for public Schools in Marshpee, which was the largest sum that had been asked for by Mr H. A number of gentlemen spoke in favor of this allowance, and all showed that a spirit of kindness as well as justice toward the long oppressed red men, begins to warm the hearts of those who make the laws for the Indians as well as the white man.

The Bill passed the House and also the Senate, without any objection, and it is now a law of the State of Massachusetts, that the Marshpee Indians shall have one hundred dollars every year, paid out of the School fund, to help them educate their

children. The proportion as a District, according to what other towns receive, would have been but fifteen dollars. This money was wisely appropriated the last winter, as far as it would go, in employing competent white male Teachers, and has doubtless done more for the Indians by improving the rising generation, and preparing them to receive moral and religious instruction, than all Harvard College has done for them through Mr Fish, by an unfortunate though unintentional misapplication of more than *eleven thousand* dollars arising from the Williams Fund, of which the College is trustee. This will be one of the best means to raise them to an equality, and teach them to put away from their mouths forever, the enemy which the white man, when he wanted to cheat and subdue the race, first got them to put therein, to steal away their brains, well knowing that their lands would follow.

The following are the petitions presented to the Legislature, which will give some light on the history of Marshpee.

To the Honorable General Court.

The undersigned are Selectmen and School Committee of the District of Marshpee. We understand your Honors are going to make a distribution of the School Fund. Now we pray to leave to say that the State, as the guardians of the Marshpee Indians, took our property into their possession, so that we could not use a dollar of it, and so held it for sixty years. We could make no contract with a school-master, and during that time, till 1831, we had no school house in Marshpee, and scarcely any schools. We began to have schools about five years ago, but still want means to employ competent white teachers to instruct our children. Our fathers often petitioned the Legislature to give them schools, but none were given till 1831, when the State generously built two school houses.

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We also beg leave to remind your Honors that our fathers shed their blood for liberty, and we, their children, have had but little benefit from it.—When a continental regiment of four hundred men were raised in Barnstable county, in 1777, twenty-seven Marshpee Indians enlisted for the whole war.

They fought through the war, and not one survives. After the war our fathers had sixty widows left on the Plantation, whose husbands had died or been slain. We have but one man living who draws a pension, and not a widow. We pray you, therefore, to allow to Marshpee, out of the School Fund, a larger amount in proportion than is allowed to other towns and districts who have had better means of education, and to allow us a certain sum per year—and as in duty bound, will ever pray.

EZRA ATTAQUIN,	}	Selectmen and School Committee of Marsh- pee District.
ISAAC COOMBS,		
ISRAEL AMOS,		

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court Assembled :

The undersigned beg leave to represent in aid of the petition of the Selectmen and School Committee of the District of Marshpee, praying for a specific appropriation from the School Fund for the support of public schools in said district, that we are acquainted with the facts set forth in said petition, and believe that the cause of education could no where be more promoted in any District in the Commonwealth than by making a specific annual allowance to said Marshpee District. The Legislature have made a specific annual appropriation of fifty dollars to the Indians on Martha's Vineyard for public schools, and the undersigned are of opinion, that an annual appropriation of double that amount, would be no more than a fair relative proportion for the District of Marshpee. It is highly important that the District should be able to employ competent white teachers, until they can find a sufficient number of good teachers among themselves, which cannot be expected until they have enjoyed greater means of education than heretofore. The undersigned therefore pray that the petition of said Selectmen may be granted, by giving a specific annual allowance to said District.

BENJ. F. HALLETT,
Counsel for the Marshpee Indians.
CHARLES MARSTON,
Commissioner of Marshpee.

Thus it will be seen that where education was concerned, the missionary for the Indians on Martha's Vineyard, did not go to sleep over his flock, or run after others and neglect what ought to be his own fold, as did the missionary, Mr Fish, whom Harvard College sent to the Marshpees, and has

paid twenty-five years for preaching to white men. Mr Bayley, the white missionary on the Vineyard, took pains to send a petition to Boston, and he got fifty dollars a year for the people there. Mr Fish did nothing.

Mr Bayley, the missionary on the Vineyard, has about two hundred dollars a year, or one third of the income of the Williams Fund, from Harvard College, while Mr Fish, at Marshpee, has two thirds of the interest of \$13,000, which is between four and five hundred, and wrongly uses as his own, nearly five hundred acres of the best land on the plantation belonging to the Indians. The Legislature in 1809, took his land from the Indians, without any right to do so, and thus compel them, against the Constitution, to pay out of their property a minister they never will hear preach. Is this religious liberty for Indians? Mr Fish, in addition to \$433 from Harvard College, has cut already, this season, 250 cords of wood, amounting, standing, to \$425. This sum of \$858, belonging to the Indians, he has received, when there is scarce five adult Indians who will go and hear him preach in the Meeting-house, erected by the British Society for propagating the gospel among the Indians, and given to the Indians, but in which Mr Fish now preaches to the whites, (having but one colored male member of his church, and he a negro, and not a proprietor,) and keeps the key of it, for fear

that its lawful owners, the Indians, should go in it, without his leave. He will not let them have it for holding a camp-meeting, or for any religious purpose.

In August, 1834, the Selectmen of Marshpee invited Mr Hallett to come and address them on Temperance, and to explain the laws. They appointed to meet at the Meeting-house, as the most central place. Mr Fish first refused to let the Indians go into their own Meeting-house, and the people began to assemble under the trees, when it was proposed for the Selectmen to go and ask for the key, that they might see if Mr Fish would refuse it. At this moment, a white man, who had been there some time, and had tried to pick a quarrel with Mr Hallett and the Indians,* said he was sent by Mr Fish with the key, and would let the people in, if they would promise to come out when *he* told them to. Mr Hallett declined going in on such terms,

and proposed to hold the meeting under the trees. This shamed the messenger of Mr Fish, and he opened the door, and the people went in, where Mr Hallett addressed them. While the Indians were thus gratified in meeting their friends, and in hearing good advice, Mr Fish's messenger interrupted the speaker, in a very abrupt and indecent manner, and tried to bring on a quarrel and break up the meeting. Capt. George Lovell, always a friend to the Indians, tried to keep Mr Crocker still, and Mr Hallett declined having any controversy, yet the man persisted in his abuse, until he broke up the meeting. Had it been thought best, this insulting ambassador would have been put out of the house by the Indians, as a common brawler and disturber; but Mr Hallett forbore to have any controversy with him, and the Indians behaved with great forbearance and discretion. He afterwards met the Indians in their School-houses, and delivered two addresses without interruption from the emissaries of Mr Fish. This is a sample of the way the Indians have been treated about their own Meeting-house. In some of the old petitions, the Indians speak of this Meeting-house as *our* Meeting-house, and it was built for them, without a dollar from the white men of this country, except when the Legislature, at the petition of the Indians, repaired it in 1816—And now, no Indian can go inside of it, but by the permission of Mr Fish, whom they will not hear preach.

It seems that the Indians are not to have the benefit of any thing given to them. It must all go to the whites. The whites have the Meeting-house, and make Marshpee pay nearly half the support of a minister they will not hear preach. The other half comes from a fund. In 1716, a pious minister, named Daniel Williams, died in England, and in his will he said, "I give the remainder of my estate to be paid yearly to the College of Cambridge, in New-England, or to such as are usually employed to manage the blessed work of *converting the poor Indians* there, to promote which, I design this part of my gift."

This was the trust of a dying man, given to Harvard College, that great and honorable Literary Institution. And how do they fulfil the solemn trust? They have been and still are paying about five hundred dollars a year to a missionary for preaching to the whites. This missionary, by his own statement, shows he has added to his church, *twenty*

members from the tribe of over three hundred persons, *in twenty-five years*, and now has but one colored member! Is not this more expensive in proportion to the good done, than any heathen mission on record? Mr Fish has now been preaching in Marshpee twenty-five years. In that time he has received from the Williams fund, given solely to convert the poor Indians, nearly five hundred dollars a year, as nigh as can be ascertained, which is, say about TWELVE THOUSAND DOLLARS, for persuading twenty colored persons to join his church! This is six hundred dollars for every member added to his church, and if his other pay is added, it amounts to about nine hundred dollars for each member!

Mr Fish has derived an income, formerly, not much if any, short of two hundred and fifty dollars a year, and now upwards of four hundred dollars a year, from the woodland, pasturage, marshes, Meeting-house, house lot, &c. which he has wrongly

Held and used of the property of the Indians. Add this to his pay from Harvard College, and he has had EIGHTEEN THOUSAND DOLLARS, of money that belonged to the Indians, and which, if it had been laid up for a fund, would have supplied missionaries for all the Indians in New-England, according to the will of the pious Mr Williams. We respect the President and the Trustees of Harvard College.— They are honorable men, and mean to do right, but we ask them to look at his statement, then to read the will of Mr Williams, and laying their hands upon their hearts, to ask in the presence of the God of the Indian as well as the white man, whether they have done unto the Indians of New-England and their children, as they would that the Indians should do unto them and their children?

It is said that the Indians might bring a suit in equity, or in some other way, to compel the Trustees of the Williams fund, to distribute it as the pious donor meant, not for the conversion of the whites, even to the taking away from the Indians of their Meeting-house and lands, but for “the blessed work of converting the poor Indians,” as Mr Williams says in his will. This, however, would be a painful resort, and it is hard for Indians to contend in the courts of white men, against white men. They can have none of their people to decide such questions, and what could they do against all the power and influence of the Corporation of

Harvard College? If the President and Fellows of Harvard College prefer to deal unjustly by the Indians, and violate the trust of Mr Williams, by giving the funds to the whites instead of the poor Indians, they must submit to the wrong, we suppose, for there are none strong enough to help them.— The College can take the money from the Indians, but but cannot compel them to hear a preacher they dislike

All they ask is, that Harvard College and the State will not support an *established religion* in Marshpee, but leave the Indians free to choose for themselves. Mr Williams did not give his property to the Marshpee Indians, more than to any others. The will of Mr Williams is not specific as to what Indians he meant. The phrase is “there,” referring to Cambridge or New-England. The legal construction is perhaps doubtful, as to the right of the Marshpee Indians to claim it as cestuy que use, but we cannot see what right Harvard College has to give it all for the whites near Marshpee, and the Indians on Martha’s Vineyard. If they are afraid that the Indian preachers should have any of this money, if it is withdrawn from Mr Fish, let them take it, and send a missionary among the Marshpee Indians they can like. A missionary schoolmaster, or such as the ministers at large in Boston, is what the Indians want to instruct and improve them. Or let them employ a man, some Elliot, if they can find one, to visit all the Indians in New-England, to find out their condition and spiritual wants, and try to relieve them. This would be doing some good with money that is now only used to disturb the Indians, to take from them their Meeting-house, to create divisions among them, and turn what the pious Williams meant for a blessing, into a curse to the Indians. What would the donor of the \$13,000 to convert poor Indians, say to Harvard College, could he visit Marshpee on a Sabbath? He might go to the Meeting-house built for the Indians, by the society in England, of which he was a principal member. He would find a white man in the pulpit, white singers leading the worship, and the body of the church occupied by seventy or a hundred white persons, of the neighboring villages, scarcely one of whom lives on the plantation. Among these he would see five, six, ten, or possibly twenty persons with colored skins ; not but one male among them belonging to the church, and not six adults. He would probably think he had

made a mistake, and that he was in a white town, and not among the Indians. He might then go to the house of blind Joseph, (the colored Baptist preacher,) or to the School-house in Marshpee, and he would there find thirty, forty, or fifty Indians, all engaged in the solemn worship of God, united and happy, with a little church, growing in grace. He might then visit the other School-house, at the neck, where he would find another Indian, preaching to fifty, sixty, or seventy Indians, all uniting in fervent devotion. After the sermon, he would

hear a word of exhortation from several of the colored brethren and sisters, in their broken way, but which often touches the heart of the Indian, more than all the learning that Harvard College can bestow. He would hear the Indians singing praises to God, and making melody in their hearts if not in their voices. What would he say then, when told that Harvard College had paid twelve thousand dollars of his funds for converting the poor Indians, to the white minister, who had made twenty members in twenty-five years, while the two Indian preachers, with forty-seven members to their churches, added in three years, were like St. Paul, laboring with their own hands for a subsistence?

All the Indians ask of Harvard is, take away your pretended gift. Do not force upon us a minister we do not like, and who creates divisions among us. Let us have our meeting-house and our land, and we will be content to worship God without the help of the white man.

This Meeting-house might as well be in India as in Marshpee, for all the benefit the Indians have of it. It is kept locked all the time, with the key in Mr Fish's possession. He would not let the Baptist church of Indians have it to ordain their beloved pastor, blind Joseph in, and we see how it was granted to the Indians, when they wanted it for Mr Hallett to address them in 1834. Not only were they forbidden the use of the Meeting house, but even the land which the Legislature unconstitutionally, took from the Indians to give to Mr Fish, is considered by him too holy to be defiled by the Indians, who are its true owners

In the summer of 1834, sometime in July, one of the churches desired to have a Camp-meeting, of which they had had one before. They selected a spot

some distance from the Meeting-house, in a grove, beside the river; but though not in sight of the Meeting-house, it was on the ground which Mr Fish thinks had been set apart for his sole use. After the notice was given of the Camp-meeting, Mr Fish sent the following note, which is here recorded, as an evidence of the Christian spirit with which a church in Marshpee, consisting of thirty-five members, who were Indians, was treated and molested in their worship, by the missionary Harvard College has paid so liberally to "convert the poor Indians," and who had but five Indians in his church, not one being a male member.
MR WM. APES,

MARSHPEE, July 19, 1834.

Sir,—Perceiving by a notice in the "Barnstable Journal," of last week, that you have appointed a Camp-meeting, to commence on the 30th inst. and to be holden on the Parsonage, and in the vicinity of the Meeting-house,

This is to forbid the proceeding altogether!

You have no pretence for such a measure; and if you persist in your purpose to hold such Meeting, either near the *Meeting-house*, or on *any part of the Parsonage allotment*, you must consider yourself *responsible for the consequences*.

I am &c.

PHINEAS FISH.

Soon after this, the Selectmen, one of whom was a member of the church, applied to Mr Fish respecting holding the Camp-meeting on the parsonage. The place selected could not have disturbed Mr Fish, any more than people passing in carriages in the main road. The Indians had no Meeting-house, their School-house would not hold the people, and they had no other means but to erect their tents and worship God in the open air. A pious family of whites from Nantucket, came on the ground, and began erecting their tent. Mr Fish came there in person and ordered them off. The man told him that he had his family there, and had no other shelter for the night but his tent, which he should not remove, but would do so the next day, if he found that he was trespassing on any man's rights. But he added, if Mr Fish turned him off, he would publish his conduct to the world. Mr Fish's interference to break up this religious meeting, created much talk, and finally he wrote the following letter to the Selectmen; after which the Indians went on and had their meeting in a

quiet, and peaceful manner.

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To the Selectmen of Marshpee.

On mature thought, and in compliance with your particular request, I consent to your holding the Camp-meeting, which is this day commenced, on the spot near the river, where the first tent was erected. I consent, (I say,) on the following conditions, viz; That you undertake that no damage come upon the parsonage property, either wood land, or Meeting-house; *that no attempt be made to occupy the Meeting-house*; that there be no attempt on the Sabbath, or any other day, to interrupt the customary worship at the meeting-house, and, *that peace, order, and quietude* be maintained during the time of the Camp-meeting. It is also understood, that this license is of *special favor*, and *not conceded as your right*, and no way to be taken as a ground for similar requests in future, or for encouraging any future acts of annoyance, vexation, or infringement of the quiet possession of the privileges, secured to me by the *Laws*. And that should any damage be done in any way as aforesaid, you will consider yourself responsible to the proper authorities.

With my best wishes for your welfare,
Your friend,
PHINEAS FISH.

Marshpee, July 30, 1834.

We invite to the above facts, the particular attention of the christian community, and of the Corporation of Harvard College. If there ever was a case calling for correction of error, it exists here. No one can doubt the honorable intentions of the Trustees of the Williams Fund. They have been ignorant of the facts but are now no longer so.— The Indians have petitioned for redress and their friends cannot doubt that they will find it, in the love of justice and sense of honor, which govern the corporation of the first university in America.

*This was Mr Alvin Crocker, who had formerly enjoyed more benefits from the Plantation, than he does under the new law.

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Statement of the
Condition of Education
and Religious Instruction
in Marshpee
July.1834

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