

# Boston Harbor Islands

## IslandCache Program

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



### Site 4: Native Americans on the Islands

N 42° 19.215' W 070° 59.130'



“Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom, an intense and absorbing respect for life, enriching faith in a Supreme Power, and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations..”  
—Luther “Standing Bear” Oglala, Sioux

#### Native Peoples Use of Boston Harbor Islands

Long before the European settlers arrived in the New World, Native Americans lightly used the islands for light agriculture and small game. Nipmuc and Wampanoag Indians lived off the land, many making summer residences on the inner islands. Research has shown the Native Americans might also have used the islands for similar reasons we do today—relaxation and solitude.

During the Central Artery Tunnel Project, a midden—or large piling of clam shells, pottery shards, arrowheads and animal bones—was found on the south drumlin. The archeological finding was excavated and dated to approximately 535 to 1590 A.D.E. The midden demonstrates the many uses of the island that was once a summer hunting ground for multiple coastal tribes.

#### King Philip’s War

Europeans first arrived in Massachusetts Bay in the early 1620s. Shortly thereafter, tensions between settlers and Christian Indians quickly mounted, and became a conflict that culminated in the internment of hundreds of Native Americans during King Philip’s War of 1675. On October 13, 1675, Massachusetts Bay authorities ordered the Christian Natick Nipmucs to be interned on Deer Island. Records indicate that

harsh conditions and a lack of adequate provisions caused more than 200 Natick men, woman and children to perish from disease and famine within the first two months of their imprisonment. Today, the descendants of the Natick Nipmuc retrace the path taken by their ancestors every October in a memorial ceremony on Deer Island to commemorate the lives lost during King Philip’s War.

#### Living in Two Worlds

Federal and state awareness concerning Native Americans and the significant historical and cultural impact they made on the islands has led to initiatives to protect these sacred sites. Descendants of the Nipmuc and Wampanoag tribes continue their ancestral way of life through oral history—the unwritten recording of personal stories passed from one generation to

another. The descendants also maintain their way of life through festivals, conferences and public education events. The National Park Service strives to increase visitor awareness of the history and lifeways of Native communities within Boston Harbor, and to provide further opportunities for reconnection.

Next Clue: Obsolete before construction was completed in 1851, the fort located at this site did not receive a full complement of guns until after the Civil War. The fort did not engage in one single battle; in fact, it gained notoriety as one of the most compassionate prisoner-of-war camps, housing nearly 1,000 Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

N 42° 32.078'  
W 070° 92.867'