

MEMORANDUM

To: Jonathan Freedman, Chair
Natick Select Board

From: Karis North, Town Counsel
James Errickson, Deputy Town Administrator

cc: Melissa Malone, Town Administrator

Re: Request for Reinterment of Remains in the Natick Praying Indian Burial Ground

Date: November 20, 2020

The Wampanoag Confederacy is seeking permission to reinter the remains of Mr. Alexander Quapish, a Native American, and a Natick American Revolutionary War Veteran, in the Natick Praying Indian Burial Ground ("Burial Ground") at 29 ½ Pond Street. The land on which the Burial Ground sits is owned by the Town, and thus is under the control of the Select Board. Any reinterment would also be subject to a burial permit and related requirements issued by the Natick Health Department on behalf of the Board of Health.

Background

According to research, in 1856, human remains representing, at minimum, one individual, were removed from a location in Dedham in Norfolk County, MA, by Dr. Henry Jacob Bigelow. Bigelow transferred the remains to the Warren Anatomical Museum in Boston ("Museum"). The remains appear to be those of Mr. Alexander Quapish. Records and histories indicate Mr. Quapish and his wife, Sarah David, were Native Americans living in Dedham, MA. Mr. Quapish was originally from Yarmouth, MA, Wampanoag territory, and may have moved to Dedham because both Dedham and Yarmouth were associated with a network of Native American Christianized settlements. Shortly after his wife's death in 1774, Mr. Quapish enlisted in the Continental Army. Mr. Quapish reportedly died in 1776 at the age of 34 in Needham, Massachusetts, and may have been buried in Needham or Natick.

The Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA)

Under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), 25 U.S.C. section 3003, an inventory of the human remains under the control of the Museum, was completed. The Museum determined, "by a preponderance of the evidence," that the human remains are of the Native American individual Mr. Alexander Quapish. Where no direct lineal descendants can be identified, the remains were repatriated to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), Tribes that represent people of Wampanoag descent.

The Natick Historical Society concurs with the Museum's analysis of the remains and conclusions, and is "reasonably confident that Quapish was [originally] buried in the Pond Street Burial Ground" in 1776.

The full history of Mr. Quapish's remains, and the findings of the museum, is set forth in the Federal Register notice concerning the NAGPRA process, found here:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/03/2020-16776/notice-of-inventory-completion-warren-anatomical-museum-harvard-university-boston-ma>

The Tribal Council is making the request for reinterment of the remains in the Burial Ground. The request went from the Natick Historical Society, to Natick Recreation and Parks Department, which maintains the Burial Ground, and to the Select Board.

Legal Requirements

The real property consisting of the Burial Ground was deeded to the Inhabitants of the Town of Natick by the First Congregational Church on September 16, 1971. Thus, control over the parcel is under the Select Board. There are no other requirements for reinterment of remains in Town property known at this time. We expect the Natick Health Department may have its own requirements, including at a minimum, a burial permit. The Director of the Health Department is aware of this pending request and can be contacted for additional guidance.

Requested Action

Approve the reinterment of the remains of Alexander Quapish in the Natick Praying Indian Burial Ground, subject to any requirements of the Natick Health Department.