Gumpas vs. Gumpus

By HARRY H. ATWOOD — Part 2

GUMPASS OR GUMPAS.

A name wholly traditional, peculiar only to Pelham and its early history—Whence, its derivation? What its significance? About 100 years ago Moody Hobbs of this town, a descendant of Rev. James Hobbs, the first settler minister here, in addressing a Pelham audience in Tyler Hall, which then stood where the parsonage now stands, remarked that "Gumpass Pond" was named for an old Indian who in ancient times lived and camped near it.

He mentioned tradition as his only authority. Such source of the origin of the name of Gumpas was there and still is the most commonly accepted derivation.

The name had its origin long before this town was incorporated or even settled, for that matter, but it is practically certain that the root of the name at least was of Indian derivation.

The name, as a whole, may have originated from the name of the old Indian in its entirety, as is popularly traditional.

It may have been derived from literal translation long ago of some Indian word or phrase applied by the Indians themselves and subsequently accepted by the white settlers.

Then again, the early settlers south of the Merrimack may have been wholly responsible in applying the name, taking the name of the old Indian as the root (Gum) and using in conjunction with it, conditions significant to the section adjacent to or surrounding his habitat—his trail (?) his path (?)

Note that 100 years ago this traditional name was even then of over 100 years standing.

In 1853 a 500-acre reservation extending along the Merrimack river at Fawtucket Falls had been granted the Indians, and in 1868 they were still in possession of it.

There, from many miles around, the Indians congregated to fish and pow-wow and hold their councils.

Then, more than 50 years later, when Mitchell and Hazen surveyed in 1741 to establish the Province line, the trail or bridle path, later to become known as Mammoth road was only spoken of as "The Path," and at that time this town had been settled (sparsely), for 20 years. However used following the first settlement in 1721 and however previously used—pioneers journeyed by this route to Londonderry for settlement—it is logical to assume that "The Path" was originally the trail also used and frequented by the old Indian (who had his habitat at Gumpass Pond at the time) as he traveled to and from his wigwam to the reservation and fishing grounds at the river.

Early pioneers and settlers from the Chelmsford district would have known of this old Indian, of his trail and of his location at this pond even before the "setting off" of territory north of the Merrimack which in 1702 was to constitute the Township of Dracut, (Augustus—cook.) The settlers as a precaution in those early days kept themselves informed of the whereabouts and habits of all Indians in all vicinities.

So, to the Chelmsford settlers, "The Path" of 1741 may previously have been known to still earlier settlers, as "Gumpas Path," from which the name of Gumpass might easily have been evolved, and used by those early pioneers to designate a trail or route through this wilderness to new settlements to the north—the name thus emanating from Indian root only and may not necessarily have been the name of the old Indian in full. In other words, it is highly logical to my mind to believe that the name Gumpass was in reality synonymous to the Indian and to the section occupied by him and was commonly applied by settlers south of the river in naming a favored route through this wilderness northward — G-U-M-P-A-S-S.

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