

Maushope



by Jan Kelly

This is the name the Provincetown Housing Authority has chosen to name their senior citizen housing complex.

In the time before the European approach to America, the Cape area was inhabited by several tribes of Indians—our lower Cape was populated by Cummaquids, Nausets, and Pamets. Besides having a thorough knowledge of the land, the coast, the rivers, ponds, and the weather, these peoples were protected by Maushope, a legendary giant who silently and invisibly guided them from danger. The stories of Maushope are multiple and, appear in the earliest chronicles of Massachusetts history as well as in Thoreau's writings. Larger than life and capable of correcting all wrongs, the presence and power of Maushope was one of every Indians earliest lessons. Maushope was considered the guardian of Massachusetts when Massachusetts extended from the bluff over Pilgrim Lake or East Harbor to the tip of the Cape. This territory was paternally protected from dangers by the benevolent giant. His forefinger stuck in the sand could bring forth much needed water, a push of sand with his large moccasin could dam it up. His foot could form or improve a harbor. His pushing the clouds together could bring rain. His ripping up of trees, splashing a great wave could scare off enemies. He provided fish and corn for the needy by silently leaving supplies by the wigwams. He was an inspiration to all members of the tribe, particularly the children who were touched by Maushope, ensuring courage, wisdom, and good choices. When the wind would howl and branches snap and fall, the children were told, "Maushope is gathering his firewood." He was ever in their lives. Maushope was a part of every household. The great knowledge of seasons and weather was said to be fed to the populace through Maushope. He could save fishermen from drowning at sea by predicting storms. He could also direct them to schools of fish. He could predict drought and supply water ahead of time. He could ensure good harvests, fertile seeds, and good planting weather planned long ahead. He could trace the moon's path so optimum use of each day eased a would-be-difficult life. He was the big father of the Cape.

Maushope was also a romantic. He was forever facilitating the tangles of lovers' liaisons, meddling merrily like an oversized Cupid. He fostered domestic harmony and was particularly draconic to shrewish wives and neglectful husbands. When a beautiful,

wealthy, and accomplished Cape princess chose a worthy but poor warrior of the Pamets as her marital choice, her father refused. Of all her suitors, only this brave commanded her attention. She, of course, approached Maushope with her problem. She found him guiding a group of fishermen to a school of fish. The grateful fishermen paid tribute in the form of tobacco. With all in such a good mood, any problem seemed easy. Scooping up the Pamet brave and the princess, Maushope made the lengthy journey in three steps. He arrived at the Sachem's or wise man's lodge. In a most pleasing tone, Maushope asked why the young couple could not marry; that the brave was poor was the answer. "And what would make him rich?" "A great deal of land," was the answer. Having an answer, Maushope could make a plan. Harnessing the girl's father, Chief of the Cummaquids, Maushope headed to the shore, the members of the tribe, hurrying in pursuit. Maushope sat comfortably on the shore. After several minutes of mysterious incantations, he packed his pipe with great amounts of tobacco and touched it to a star to light it. A storm ensued. The noise was deafening, the wind, rain and lightning threatening. The skies were populated with all mythical creatures burdened by a mighty task.

Maushope dumped the ashes of his pipe into the sea. A volcanic hiss was heard. He filled his pipe again and puffed long and heavy clouds of smoke into the air. This scene went on for three long and arduous days. Tobacco gone, plan executed, Maushope rose up, stretched, and smiled to all present. The storm cleared as quickly as it came. The heap of ashes was transformed to an island of great beauty and promise. Today we call it Nantucket. With this as a present the young couple could marry. It is said that Martha's Vineyard was formed when Maushope dumped sand out of his moccasins.

Altruism was Maushope's real joy—giving to others was his joy, because he created joy. He created security and comfort as a part of his diurnal course, but to create joy made all his responsibilities easier to perform, his burdens lighter.

Most Indian mythologies have a Maushope by their personal name. Hiawatha has similar aptitudes and strengths. For the Peruvians it's Huraken from which our word hurricane was termed.

Now when you see that sign on Harry Kemp Way, you will know just what it means—Maushope, legendary giant Indian of benevolence and protection of the Lower Cape, specifically Provincetown.