

The 1861 Earle Report On Native Americans In Massachusetts

by R. Andrew Pierce

In response to an act of the Massachusetts legislature in 1859, politician, editor and abolitionist John Milton Earle(1794-1874)was appointed as a commissioner "to examine into the condition of all Indians and the descendants of Indians domiciled in this Commonwealth, and make report to the governor, for the information of the general court."

Earle's investigations, and correspondence with local officials, produced a mass of manuscripts and letters which are preserved at the American Antiquarian Society; and a published "Report" in 1861, which includes a "census" including the names, ages, tribal membership, tribe/race, and location where the Native Americans resided in Massachusetts in 1861. It has been used as a genealogical reference by many Massachusetts area tribes to determine if someone may qualify as a member on the current tribal membership rolls as a descendant.

A. Biography and Background Of John Milton Earle

John Milton Earle (April 13, 1794 – February 8, 1874) was an American businessman, abolitionist, and politician. He was educated in common schools and at the Leicester Academy. He was the editor and publisher of the *Massachusetts Spy* from 1823 to 1857.

(Earle)was an early pioneer in Anti-Slavery movement first as a Whig, then as a Free Soiler. He tried to make Worcester County the stronghold of conscientious and determined political opposition to slavery. He was a member of the Massachusetts General Court, or state legislature, for several years, serving in both the House of Representatives (1844–1846 and 1850-1852) and the Senate (1858). He was also a city alderman, postmaster, state commissioner on Indian affairs, and founder of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

B. Earle's Research and Notes Between 1859 and 1861

John Milton Earle Papers, 1652-1863, at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. This collection contains material related to the activities of the Trustees and Commissioners to the Indians of Massachusetts. Much of the collection was generated or collected by John Milton Earle, (who)from 1859 to 1862 served as Commissioner to the Indians of Massachusetts. Included in the collection are maps, surveys, correspondence, property bonds, receipts, depositions, and legal documents

https://www.americanantiquarian.org/Findingaids/john_milton_earle.pdf

C. Publication of the Earle Report in 1861

Earle (was)appointed the Commissioner of Indian of Affairs of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It was during his tenure as Commissioner that the Senate passed an Act of April 6, 1859 to complete a report on the Native American population of the Commonwealth. Under this Act the Commissioner was tasked “to examine into the condition of all Indians and the descendants of Indians domiciled in this Commonwealth, and make report to the governor, for the information of the general court, on the following matters, namely:

The number of all such persons, their place of abode, their distribution, whether by tribes or otherwise, classifying them by age and sex, and distinguishing between the married and single; and also the number of persons reputed Indians, who are of mixed or other race.

The social and political condition of all such persons, including their municipal, religious, and educational organization, and their relation, individual and municipal, to the counties, town, or districts in when they dwell.

The economical state of all such persons, including the specification of all property of theirs in lands, and whether the same is held in severalty or in common, and whether now in their own possession, or unlawfully possessed by others, and, in the latter case, by what color of alleged title; and also what proportion of such persons are paupers, dependent on towns in which they dwell, or in the State.

All such facts in the personal or social condition of the Indians of the Commonwealth, as may enable the general court to judge whether they can, compatibly with their own good and that of the other inhabitants of the State, by placed immediately and completely, or only gradually and partially, on the same legal footing as the other inhabitants of the Commonwealth.”

Under this criteria Earle investigated the living conditions of the Native American population of the Commonwealth. His work included correspondence with local guardians of the various tribes, town officials and members of the various tribes around the state. His work would be published in 1861 as Massachusetts Senate Report No. 96. Report to the Governor and Council concerning the Indians of the Commonwealth, under the Act of April 6, 1859 (Boston: William White, Printer to the State, 1861). The detailed report of nearly one hundred and fifty pages contained additional appendix at the end.

The Appendix is a census listing under each tribe, name, age, sex or condition, tribe or race, occupation, residence, stock, acres of land (or real estate) in severalty, and remarks (e.g. deceased, since married).

The Earle Report is databased at

**<https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2777/massachusetts-earle-report-of-native-americans-1861>
“Massachusetts: Earle Report of Native Americans, 1861”**

**<https://www.dartmouthhas.org/native-americans.html>
Dartmouth Historical And Arts Society
(can download full report)**

**<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=znMTAAAAYAAJ&pg=GBS.PA10>
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