

Montauk Indians Dispute the Corbin-Pratt Title

TO THE EAST END TRIBAL LANDS

Wyandank Pharaoh, King of the Montauks, Leaves for Washington to Consult Counsel—An Indian Berrying Party Enters the Lands and Is Ordered Off. A Test Case That May Have to Go to the Supreme Court.

(Special to the Eagle.)

Easthampton, L. I., October 8.—The leaders of the remnant of the Montauk Indians propose to dispute the Benson and Corbin titles to their old Montauk lands. While Mr. Benson has undoubtedly bought up most of the individual claims, it is held that no man has a right to sell tribe lands. A meeting of the Indians was held at Sag Harbor about a month ago for the purpose of considering the question of taking steps to assert their claims to the Montauk lands. About eighty Indians were at the meeting and a lawyer named Smith was there to advise them in the matter.

A second meeting was held within the week at which a number of the representatives of the tribe residing at Easthampton were present. Some came from other places. Among them was Benjamin Coles, who came over from Connecticut. The Easthampton members of the tribe who are most active in the matter are Wyandank Pharaoh and Charles and George Fowler. On Saturday last some of the tribe went to Montauk to pick wild grapes and cranberries. They gathered a number of bushels of grapes and some cranberries and were ordered off by the agents of the Corbin-Pratt syndicate. Charles Fowler, one of the Indians, however, asserted his right to go upon the property and declared that he would do so at any time when it suited his pleasure. Wyandank Pharaoh, known as the king of the Montauks, left Easthampton yesterday and it is understood that he has gone to Washington, D. C., to confer with a lawyer there who is to undertake the prosecution of the claim of the Montauk Indians to the lands near Great Neck and the Indian fields.

Since he came into possession of the property at Fort Pond bay Mr. Corbin has taken the necessary steps to prevent trespass upon his lands. James Grimshaw, a constable of Easthampton, has been engaged to patrol the beach and warn off all gunners and fishermen. Many sportsmen from Connecticut and other sections have been accustomed to make a yearly excursion to the lakes and harbors and hills on the peninsula in quest of game and fish and wild fruits. All who have so far received the warning to cease trespass have quietly left the premises.

Should the representatives of the Montauk tribe continue to trespass after being warned off, they will probably be arrested by the officer who is patrolling the property and be taken before a magistrate at Easthampton. Then if the question of title is raised, it will bring up a point of law which must be passed upon by the supreme court of the state and proceedings will be adjourned to that tribunal.

The two deeds for the 5,500 acres near Fort Pond and Great pond and Oyster pond on Montauk, given to Austin Corbin and Charles M. Pratt by the Bensons, contain no reference whatever to any Indian claims. When Arthur W. Benson of Brooklyn, the father of Frank Sherman Benson, bought all of the peninsula east of Napeague from the trustees of Montauk in 1879, a number of members of the Indians were living near the Indian fields and Oyster pond and the Head ponds. All the claims of these individuals were bought from them by the Bensons. Some were given a sum of money, \$100 or thereabouts, and some were given deeds to land and houses near Easthampton. An annual payment of \$100 or \$150 was made by the trustees of Montauk to the Indians as a tribe for the use by the former of the Indian fields. It is said that this annual payment is still made by the Bensons. When the Indians removed from Montauk all their former habitations were removed or torn down or burned.

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