

Massachusetts Legislature Introduces Land Bill

Bill May Return Alienated Lands Back to Wampanoag and Nipmuc Indians

A "Give It Back To The Indians" bill has been introduced in Massachusetts to return alienated lands to the Wampanoag and the Nipmuc

Indians.

The bill was introduced by Rep. James Smith and would establish a Commission, including three Indian members, to investigate land which has been seized by eminent domain.

However, Frank James, Chief of the United American Indians of New England, said Indian claims go far beyond the land taken by eminent domain.

"We're going to make a claim to every piece of land we can find proof of and to any land they (the State of Massachusetts) can't produce a deed to."

James said there are thousands of acres of land in the state which have no deed. Those acres, he feels, belong to the Wampanoag and Nipmuc.

In cases where there are white homes or businesses on the land, the Indians will seek a cash

settlement.

Mrs. Amelia Bingham, a Wampanoag Indian from Mashpee, Mass., is seeking the return of two beaches, taken from the town by the National Guard. Mashpee we established as an Indian "plantation" in 1640 but today only 5 per cent of the population is Indian.

Another Indian "plantation" at Wattupa Pond near Fall River was deeded to "the Indians and their heirs forever" in 1709 but in 1907 the state allowed the town of Fall River to use part of the reservation for its water supply and by 1930, the reservation no longer existed.

Frank James holds the position that the 227½ acres does not in any sense belong to the state but to the Wampanoag tribe under the 1709 deed which stated that the land was "not to be assigned or alienated, but continue an Indian plantation forever."

The state government has no jurisdiction over Indian affairs, said James, and all dealings with Indians must proceed through the federal government.

In any case, the state of Massachusetts is taking a good

look at the status of Indian claims and the proposed bill is a step forward in restoring at least a portion of the lost lands.