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## **Dorcas Honorable: The Life and Heritage of an Oft-Married Woman**

**By Frances Ruley Karttunen**

DORCAS HONORABLE, WHO today is generally recognized as Nantucket's "Last Indian," died early in 1855. She had outlived by a few months Abram Quarry, who died in late 1854. Both had been born in the 1770s, at the time of the American Revolution, a decade after the "Indian sickness" killed 222 of Nantucket's 358 Wampanoags.

Quarry, however, better fit the nineteenth-century image of "the Last Indian" because of the striking painting of him that hangs in the Nantucket Atheneum and because in old age he lived the life of a hermit and supported himself by making baskets and steaming quahogs for excursionists. Dorcas, on the other hand, kept out of the public eye, worked as a domestic, and was a member of the Baptist church.



The life of Dorcas's mother, Sarah, however, was romanticized just as Abram Quarry's has been. She died in 1821 and was survived not only by her daughter Dorcas and by Quarry, but also by Abigail Jethro, whom the nineteenth-century Nantucket historian Obed Macy considered the island's "last Indian."

Nonetheless, Sarah was also characterized as the last of her people. As stated in a fictionalized version of her life published in the *Inquirer* just a dozen years after her death, "old Sarah Tashemy, the last of the Indian race on the island of Nantucket" was "the daughter of a famous chief whose kindness to the Whites was proverbial—without whose generous influence they would never have succeeded in forming their settlement within her father's territories." Having lost her family and her suitor in the 1763-64 epidemic, according to this story, she lived a solitary, shunned life, and then at death, "She spoke in a language which was recognized as that of her departed nation, although no one present understood its purport."

In 1834 Joseph C. Hart published a historical novel about Nantucket entitled *Miriam Coffin, or the Whale-Fisherman*. In it he fictionalized the life of Keziah Coffin, and as a subplot he also fictionalized and romanticized the life of Sarah Tashama. In the novel, Benjamin Tashama's daughter is not orphaned by the epidemic but, despite the protection of her father, she is seduced by a white off-islander named Dr. Julius Imbert. Before the end of the 1800s, island readers had confused the content of Hart's novel with Nantucket history.

Also at the end of the 1800s, Eliza Mitchell produced a manuscript *Book of Reminiscences* in which she pasted Dorcas's photograph and wrote down her own version of the lives of Dorcas and her mother. This particular reminiscence turns out to be a mixture of Mitchell's personal memories and pieces of both the 1833 and 1834 published stories.

She was daughter of Sarah Tashma. Sarah was the last Indian female and a daughter of the famous Preacher and Teacher who lived before my time. Sarah was called Matta in *Miriam Coffin*, or the *Whale Fishery*. Imbert probably the father of Daucas. Sarah was a true Indian but was never known to smile after her visit from Imbert. I remember her well as she worked for my mother when I was very young. Been dead about 70 years or more. Daucus lived many years in the family of Capt' John