

## excerpt from **THE YEAR WITHOUT SUMMER**

**Kelle Groom**

Winter sky gray light. Ancient Cemetery in Yarmouth, iron front gate open as usual. A man runs Ancient Way to Center Street, and rounds the corner, loping down Winter. Head turned toward the cemetery so long, I wonder if he might see me. Solitary in these hills of stones. My family cemetery. I have a stone here myself, waiting.

Too cold to walk. I drive my old green jeep on the sand paths, look for a stone for Frances W. Bray. A neighborhood surrounds the cemetery on all sides, streets quiet. Frances' death on November 6, 1816 was a catalyst. I want to see the ground where all of this began.

Lot 398, Section C. Unfamiliar with Lots and Sections, I drive down the path closest to me. At the end, a crossroads. Put my gloves on. Hands icy on the wheel. To my left, a large family stone: BRAY.

I'd come in Center Street, through the iron gates. Between Ancient and Winter. Frances is in the center front of the cemetery, 14<sup>th</sup> grave from the front gate. She's not on any of the cemetery roads. You have to walk through grass, graves. Right in the middle. Rectangle of brown grass in front of her. I'm surprised she was only a child, two years old.

Frances died in the Year Without Summer. A volcano erupted on an island, killing thousands of people. Ash blocked the sun, and the temperature dropped all over the world. On June 6th, a foot of snow fell. The bay full of ice floes.

She has family on both sides of her grave. Frances the first to die, has her own lot. One grave behind Frances, separating her from Hannah Studley's grave, Silvanus' wife, who died July 22, 1825. Nine years after Frances.

Did William Bray notice turned earth first? Or did Silvanus Studley see new graves near Hannah's stone? Was the ground still frozen? Was it Christmas, when Bray or Studley brought wreaths, flowers? In early November it had still been possible to dig a grave. Almost as warm as the month of May. But November 19<sup>th</sup>, a large flock of geese flew over, headed south. Winter coming. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, snow fell. Canal closed with ice.

In the winter of 1826, when Bray and Studley found new bodies near the graves of Frances and Hannah, it was cold. Low of minus 12. Ancient Cemetery is in Yarmouth Port, Yarmouth originally Mattacheese, Indian Town. The 22 acres of Ancient Cemetery, this whole town, all belonged to the Wampanoags. Since the beginning of time.

Whose bodies were buried near Frances and Hannah? When? What made Bray and Studley notice? Mind? So obsessed that they called a vote of the Selectman? The leafless black tree, the giant pines in the southeast corner stretch their arms.

This year, at Thanksgiving, I found two small pumpkins and two round yellow squash in the center of the empty southeast corner: patchy brown grass, little haze of green, sand. Someone else knows. Someone saying I remember. The removal of the bodies of people of color. Reburial in unmarked graves.

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In 1713, the town had set aside land from Long Pond to Bass River for Pawkunnawkut Indians of the Wampanoag tribe. In perpetuity. Thomas Greenough, my fifth great-grandfather, and the last surviving Wampanoag Indian in South Yarmouth, Massachusetts, was born in Yarmouth in 1747. Then the Wampanoags in this town died. Most of smallpox. Except Thomas Greenough.

A vote was taken for the cost the Wampanoags incurred for their smallpox care. It was paid by the town, and all of the Indians effects were "sold to pay this charge." The town sold their land, and said they reserved a piece for Thomas Greenough, "a survivor."

Jane Freeman, Thomas Greenough's wife, and my fifth great grandmother, died March 3, 1826. Twenty-one years before her husband. As a white woman married to a Wampanoag, would she have been buried with the Wampanoags on the shore of Bass River? It was Bass River reservation land, but it had been "sold." When the salt works were proposed to be built here, where Wampanoags had long been buried, the bodies were disinterred. Reburied on a hillside near Long Pond. The street is Indian Memorial Drive. It's marked with boulders now, inscribed with the following:

"On this slope lie buried  
the last native Indians  
of Yarmouth"

Long Pond also an ancient burial ground for the Indians. Hills fall away to the wide pond, trees my mother ran through as a child. A bright place. Where my great-aunt and her sisters swam. Maybe someone brought Thomas Greenough's body here. And Jane's. Grief could move their bodies. Yarmouth is less than 7 miles across, from Bass River and the ocean to the bay. From Bass River, head inland one and a half miles. A little to the right is Long Pond.

Where are their six children buried: John, Susana, Phebe, Thomas, Jinne, and Salle? Susana died Oct 21, 1825, just before people of color were removed from their graves in May of the following year. Susana was married to William Brooks, and had seven children. What about

"Child" Brooks born in 1795 who didn't live long enough to have a name? Are Susana's seven children buried with her? Are they all here under my feet?

The same year Deborah and John Greenough's daughter Eliza was born, Deborah gave birth to another child, not named. Deborah died on October 22, 1825. She's white. Deborah died almost simultaneously with Susana. Are Deborah's children buried with her? Her child died four days later on October 26, 1825. Were their bodies dug up? Reburied in unmarked graves? Is Deborah buried with her four-day-old child? I keep listening for children.

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It's hard to prosecute the dead. Thomas Greenough the only survivor. From a distance, smallpox looks like skin embroidered with pearls, no space in between. Blisters like bubble wrap. Only the eyes untouched, unless there's bleeding. I don't know what it looks like when it's the people beside you. Everyone you know.

One disease after another, until an outbreak of smallpox killed every remaining full-blooded Wampanoag of his tribe, except him. Bass River land taken in 1770 by a Writ of Ejectment. The last teepee gone. He became a self-educated lawyer, kept calling on the Selectman, asking for his land back. Bray and Studley were Selectmen.

Where he's buried, no one knows. Maybe out in the woods. Maybe the pond where he lived before the Alms House. Greenough's Pond, named after him. Maybe his children brought his body back to Bass River, secretly buried him on his land.

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Deborah Nickerson is John Greenough's wife, my fourth great grandmother. Were she and John indebted for the Small Pox? Why did the town auction everything she owned? Where did she live? Her husband at sea.

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Thomas Greenough did have a court case settled against on March 30, 1779 "for setting his house and making improvements on land that was laid down for Indian inhabitants to live upon, contrary to the directions of the Selectman." My grandmother's sister said Thomas was angry when the court took his land, and went to live on the pond. Pines line the road to the pond, as if everything is entrance.

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