The Twelve-Penny Chronicle: The Origins Of The Pequot War

Rod Guttormson

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.und.edu/theses
Part of the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://commons.und.edu/theses/782
THE TWELVE-PENNY CHRONICLE:
THE ORIGINS OF THE PEQUOT WAR

by

Rod Guttormson
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 1975

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota
July
1999
This thesis, submitted by Rod Guttormson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Thomas Howard  
(Chairperson)

Walt Ellis

This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Harvey Fink  
Dean of the Graduate School  1-9-99
PERMISSION

Title The Twelve-Penny Chronicle: The Origins of the Pequot War
Department History
Degree Master of Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in his absence, by the chairperson of the department or the dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Signature

Date
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER**

I. "INDIAN CREATURES" ................................................................................. 1  
II. "DO YOU NEVER BURN ANY?" .............................................................. 7  
III. "MY PEOPLE ISREALL" ....................................................................... 24  
IV. "OUR NEW PARADISE" ....................................................................... 37  
V. "STRANGE OPINIONS" ......................................................................... 47  
VI. "SOME SHOULD SWARM OUT" ........................................................... 57  
VII. THE "TWELVE-PENNY CHRONICLE" ............................................... 70  
VIII. THE "PLEF OF THIS WORLD" ........................................................... 91  

REFERENCES ................................................................................................. 98
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"Indian Creatures"

"The general assembly of this State, immediately after the Pequot War was finished, declared, and I think unfortunately, that the name of the Pequots should become extinct ..."¹ So says Lion Gardiner in his first-hand account of the Pequot War. Indeed, if James Axtell's *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* can be taken as an indication of recent trends, the general assembly need hardly have bothered, for Axtell mentions the Pequot Indians exactly five times, and the War is not mentioned at all. Nonetheless, the Pequot War retains an importance in that it was the first of the major conflicts between whites and Indians on the New England frontier, and as such it set precedents which were to be repeated with endless variations for more than two hundred years. The story, too, has a charm and a fascination about it, with all of the elements of Shakespeare, ranging from the exploits of the drunken Captain Stone, to the underhandedness of assigning the blame to the Pequots for the murder of John Oldham, to the sheer mystery of why the Puritans went to war at all.

Of necessity the lack of documentation from the native Americans means that the historian must concentrate on the European side of the equation, which means we must

with the Puritans, and to deal with the Puritans is to deal with religion, and in particular with the religious notions of what it meant for the Lord to plant a chosen people into the wilderness. With this as a background, we can see how these notions, in turn, were bound up with those pesky individuals who seemed to be inhabiting Eden on the eve of the Pequot War.

When Henry Jacie wrote to John Winthrop, Jr., in 1632 that “It would be very acceptable to this house if you writ to some of them, and if you pleased to send over also some of your Indian Creatures alive when you may best, as one brought over a Squirrel to Bures another some other creature, one a Rattlesnake Skin with the rattle ...” he left us with a marvelous nugget of insight into seventeenth century England’s view of the New World and of the people in it. While the reference to sending over “some of your Indian Creatures” leaps into the forefront of the modern reader’s mind, carrying with it a whole host of associations, there is more to Jacie’s urgent pleading than the request for an Indian specimen.

The first thing to note in Jacie’s letter is that “it woud be very acceptable” if Winthrop would simply write. Beginning in 1629, Puritan migration to the New World began as a trickle which swiftly turned into a deluge, earning the event the appropriate title of the “Great Migration.” Historians of an older generation have emphasized something that modern historians have tended to forget: there was a tremendous amount of solid, honest labor that went into cutting down trees, planting crops, and erecting houses that went into the initial settlement of the New England area, and while the means of communication across the Atlantic were limited, the simple luxury of having the free time to put pen to paper was equally constrained. People in England were desperate for

---

news from the New World of any kind; and what news there was to be had was often fanciful and conflicting. Later in that same year, Ed Howes would write to Winthrop, Jr., that “you would wonder what discouragements the divell putts in most mens mouths against your plantations, some that you are all comminge home, others that you are all gone for Virginia ...”3 Thus, Jacie begins with a request for news: “You haven’t fallen off the edge of the world, have you?”

Jacie then goes on to ask about what is really on his mind, which is those Indian Creatures that many people back home were talking about. Indians, of course, such as the famous Squanto, had traveled the ocean to Europe, and were objects of fascination and curiosity, as were all things from the New World. One rather gets the impression that items from the New World were of great demand in England at the time. But there was more to the European attitude than simple sensationalism. The spirit of emerging scientific inquiry is laced throughout Jacie’s request. A squirrel from the New World, a rattlesnake skin ... what are we to make of these things? One can almost sense a great inner battle to maintain a sense of calm and objectivity in the face of astonishing wonders unheard of and undreamed of from a completely different world, across an awesome sea.

When we look at Jacie’s statement, what is striking is not really the racism so much as the simple, unvarnished curiosity which enables him to link Indian Creatures with squirrels and rattlesnakes as things which are beyond his direct experience, and, for that reason, become all the more fascinating. Upon reflection, one gets the impression from Jacie’s letter, not so much of overt, malicious racism as of an honest, although somewhat naive, urge to understand the world around him.

What will we make of these Indian Creatures? Even from the safe distance of several hundred years, the question has not been properly answered, and probably will never be answered to everyone’s satisfaction. For our purposes, it will be enough to note that at the close of the twentieth century the question has become somewhat academic in nature, and does not have the vital urgency that it did in the early history of New England. The same can be said of the question turned on its head: What will we make of these European Creatures? Such questions have become the stuff of verbal arguments, not bloody battles. No attempts will be made here to apologize for either the European or the Indian Creatures; nor will there be an attempt to condemn either of them to hell. The Puritans were narrow-minded and parochial, and that fact is best not forgotten, but there is no need to whine about them in the manner of Francis Jennings who claims that “Winthrop probably rewrote the substance the Indian treaties to meet the Puritans’ political and ideological needs, and then he or a devoted descendant destroyed the originals.”

All creatures in this tale, great and small, were, after all, products of their own time, and every attempt will be made to see them as they saw themselves.

This becomes problematic when we look at the native American side of the story. We can guess and we can infer many things, but there are many more things that we cannot know. The first chapter of this essay is the attempt to place the natives of New England, and especially the Pequots, in their proper setting, as well as to clear up the several historiographical errors that have occurred in the telling of the Pequot War. The main point to be established in the first chapter is that the Pequots were a fairly powerful tribe located near the Connecticut River, and, with the Puritan “invasion” of Connecticut, they came to be gradually surrounded by enemies, including the Narragansetts, rebels from their own tribe, as well as the Puritans.

In the following chapters, we will trace the development and increasing sophistication of the Puritans’ knowledge of both the New World and the native Americans. The idea of bringing the Gospel to the New World will be explored, as well as the significance of the devil. Initially, it will be demonstrated that the Puritans acted with a unified, communal attitude, but this attitude soon changed due to the pressure within their own ranks, largely in the forms of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, and also because the Great Migration placed the Puritan experiment under far more pressure for more land than anyone could have possibly imagined at the beginning of the enterprise.

When we come to fight the war itself, we will find that several significant events have occurred, the most important of which is the simple change in the balance of power between the the arrival of the first Puritans in 1629 to their first “hivings out” from Boston in 1634 until the beginning of the war itself in 1636. An equally important event was that loose images of “Indian Creatures” had become specific people in specific tribes possessing specific names. When the war was fought, the war was fought against the Pequots, not against “Indian Creatures.”

Significant also was the sheer pace of change. In 1629 there were a handful of Puritans in the New World; a mere five years later there was a decided shortage of “brave meadows.” Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams came and went, each shaking the foundations of Puritan ideology in their own manner, John Winthrop was replaced as governor, and throughout this time, in the words of one of the settlers, “Captain Hunger” was a far more serious enemy than either Satan or the natives. Buffeted by hard work, adaptation to a new land, farming difficult and stony ground, the ideals of the Puritan
experiment were thrown against a hard-bitten reality and life reeled from crisis to crisis during the formative years of the Bay Colony. Given this backdrop, it is difficult to judge the Puritans too harshly when, in the summer of 1636, they first went to war.
CHAPTER TWO

“Do You Never Burn Any?”

Due to the lack of historical documents portraying the native American side of history, this first chapter will be devoted exclusively to examining their culture and way of life as it relates to our story of the seventeenth-century Puritans. We will begin with the native American tribes of the Northeast area of North America, often referred to by anthropologists as the “woodlands Indians,” and we will look briefly at how their culture was in some ways surprisingly similar to the European cultures that transplanted themselves onto “virgin soil.” Later in this chapter we will deal more specifically with one of those woodlands tribes, the Pequots, and along the way we will also deal with two important myths, one concerning our present-day attitudes toward the native Americans of the seventeenth century, and another, much less well-known, which evolved from the historiographical treatment of the Pequots.

At first glance, the tribes of the native people of America present to the scholar a bewildering array of life-styles, cultures, and languages only somewhat ameliorated by anthropological classification. Anthropologists begin their breakdown of native tribes by dividing them into ten major geographical areas: the Arctic, Sub-arctic, Northwest Coast, Plateau, California, Great Basin, South-west, Plains, Northeast, and Southeast regions. About the size of Europe, the sheer scope of geography and climatic variations included in the Northeast region, the home of the woodlands tribes, is considerable. This area stretches from the Atlantic coast westward to the Mississippi; its southern
border is fixed roughly at the northern tip of the Appalachian Mountains while the northern border approximates the 48th parallel.

Without the technological benefits (and some might say the encumberments) of modern civilization, the peoples of native America lived at what was often a level of bare subsistence, in close dependence upon the land of their immediate territory, and on the cycles of the seasons. Although several groups of people adopted a sedentary, agricultural livelihood, the prevailing lifestyle was semi-nomadic; that is, at certain times of the year the tribe followed the shifting movement of wild game, while at other times the tribe settled in one spot to raise crops and gather seasonal tubers and berries.

Given the great climatic variations at both the northern and southern extremes of the woodlands area, as well as local variations concerning topography and sources of water, those tribes inhabiting what would become the state of Maine were more or less typical of the whole. There, the fishing season began in late March when the ice melted on inland streams, and the smelt began to spawn. The smelt season was followed in rapid succession by sturgeon and salmon, and by May cod fishing could begin. Shellfish were common along the shore, and migratory birds returned to the north, providing additional sources of protein. Farther south, in the New England area, corn fields were being planted and tended, and by high summer, wild blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries, as well as various seeds and nuts, added to the native diet. By September, the return pass of the Canada goose signaled the end of the times of plenty, and with the turning of the season the tribes generally retreated inland and broke up into smaller family-based units which spread out among the smaller streams where ice fishing would supplement a diet more oriented to game such as deer, moose, and beaver. A winter with snow on the ground meant that animals could be easily tracked, while a mild winter with little snow often meant times of hunger and deprivation. That fact that by February and
early March game animals would be lean and scarce was accepted as a matter of course. Hunger was a natural part of the turning of the season.¹

There is a modern romantic myth about the native Americans, a myth which conjures up the picture of a group of people living in a state of natural goodness and innocence until the arrival of the wicked Europeans who brought destruction, pavements, and taxes to this otherwise fair land. It is perhaps wise to note that the introduction of hunger into North America prior to the coming of the Europeans is somewhat akin to the introduction of sin into the Garden of Eden before the arrival of the snake. We are, in our present popular culture, often inundated by images of the American Indian, as exemplified in such recent movies as “The Last of the Mohicans” and Disney’s “Pocohontas,” in which native Americans are presented as the Noblest of Savages living happily in their Eden in contrast to the invading hoards of wicked, greedy white men. While such images are excellent grist for the fairy tale mill (and they have, indeed, played a substantial part in the recent psychological make-up of the American mind), it is well to remember that while modern Americans and seventeenth Europeans both might well have looked upon early America as an Eden, the entire idea of Eden—whether it be that of an actual geographical location or that of a religious dream—was not a part of the native American tradition; the native Americans would never have held either such ideals or such delusions. Only in the European mind would the thought ever occur that one could leave home and actually find a geographically real Eden.² No such thought would

ever, or could ever occur to the people who were native to America. They could never imagine leaving home to find Paradise; they were home, and, in point of fact, their home was no Eden, as will be emphasized later when we discuss cannibalism among the Indians of the Northeast.

Also, it is important to point out that the phrase “native American” would have been equally incomprehensible to any native American actually living at the time. That the native Americans were different from the Puritans was as obvious then as it is obvious today; but what was equally obvious then, but not so obvious today is that they were also different from each other. They did not think of themselves as “Algonquians,” or “woodlands tribes,” or even as “Indians.” They did, however, think of themselves as “Pennacooks,” or “Nipmucks,” or “Nausets,” or “Pocemtucks,” or as members of a host of other, small, scattered tribes who had varied enemies and allies, and who shared a similar language and life-style.

Looking a bit more closely at the woodlands area, we find the native Americans living in that large, ill-defined area were divided broadly into two main groups: those who spoke the Iroquoian language, and those who spoke Algonquian. The Algonquian people were by far the more numerous, and held the larger portion of the woodlands territory. Estimates of early Indian populations necessarily differ, and, in the absence of accurate knowledge, are often the object of intense academic debate. One approximation puts the Algonquian population at somewhere between 50,000 and 90,000 souls.3 In the

heart of Algonquian territory, rather like a large island, located from the State of New York, west to the Great Lakes, north into southern Canada, and as far south as the headwaters of the Ohio River, was planted the ethnic group known as the Iroquois, with its several distinct branches who were occasionally at war with one another, but were more often at war with the neighboring Algonquian tribes. The five principal tribes of the Iroquoian family—the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onandagas, Cayguas, and Senecas—formed a loose confederacy and came to be known as the Five Nations in about 1570. The population of this entire group was not over 17,000—a remarkably small number, considering the active part they played in American history, and the control which they exercised through wide tracts of wilderness. Not unlike the Spartans of ancient Greece, the Iroquois were raised to war and sadistic torture; they were the terror of every native group east of the Mississippi. They formed a huge obstacle to early Jesuit efforts to Christianize the more gentle tribes of Canada. One Huron complaint—and they were themselves and Iroquoian-speaking people—as told to a French missionary, speaks volumes about the relations between the French, the Iroquois, and the Algonquians: “You tell us that God is full of goodness; and then, when we give ourselves up to him, he massacres us [in the form of the Iroquois]. The Iroquois do not believe in God, they are more wicked than demons, and yet they prosper.” The conclusion reached by one modern scholar, George E. Hyde, is both blistering and accurate when he says of the Iroquois that they were “the Hitler Nazis of the Indian world. They had the same haughty faith in their being a master race as the German fanatics, the same cold-blooded pitilessness in dealing with weaker peoples.” Tales of the blood-thirstiness of the

4 Jesuit Relations, Vol. 1, p. 11.
5 Ibid., Vol. XXV, p. 10.
6 Hyde, Indians of the Woodlands, p. 108.
Iroquois abounded in seventeenth-century America, and came to play an important part in the Puritan relations with the Pequots when it was rumored that the Pequots were about to enter into an alliance with the cannibalistic Mohawks.

Nonetheless, the Iroquois had no monopoly on either cannibalism or cruelty. Worth quoting at length is a story from the missionary Le Jeune’s *Relation* of 1632, which concerns the treatment of several captured Iroquois at the hands of the Huron:

There is no cruelty comparable to that which they [the Herons] practice on their enemies. As soon as the captives are taken, they brutally tear off their nails with their teeth ... [one of the captives] had a part of a finger torn off, and I asked him if the fire had done that, as I thought it was a burn. He made a sign to show me that it had been taken off by the teeth . . . When the hour comes to kill their captives, they are fastened to a stake; then the girls, as well as the men, apply hot and flaming brands to those portions of the body which are the most sensitive, to the ribs, thighs, chest, and several other places. They raise the scalp from the head, and then throw burning sand upon the skull, or uncovered place. They pierce the arms at the wrists with a sharp stick, and pull the nerves out through these holes. In short, they make them suffer all that cruelty [that] the Devil can suggest. At last, as a final horror, they eat and devour them almost raw.7

Nonetheless, it was the Iroquois who were the subject of most such tales. Ten years later, the *Relation* of 1642 contains an account of an Algonquian village which had been ever-run by the Iroquois in which the survivors were forced to watch some of their brethren cooked and eaten for supper. “[O]ne [of the Iroquois] seized a thigh, another a breast; some sucked the marrow from the bones; others broke open the skulls, to extract the brains . . . .”8 That the Puritans were well aware of the cannibalistic character of the

---

8 *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. XXII; the full account of the affair is given in pp. 253-257.
Iroquois—and that they had good reason to fear a rumored alliance between their potential enemy, the Pequots, and the Mohawks, an Iroquoisian tribe, is indicated by a letter from Roger Williams to John Winthrop in 1636.9

This America that the Puritans sailed toward in the seventeenth century was no Eden. This was a cruel land in a cruel time. After the torture and death of an Iroquois at the hands of the Hurons, Le Jeune’s Relation of 1637 contains this exchange between one of the Hurons and a Frenchman who had witnessed the event:

“Why art thou sorry,” added some one [of the Hurons], “that we tormented him?” “I do not disapprove of your killing him, but of your treating him in that way.” “What then! how do you French people do? Do you not kill men?” “Yes, indeed; we kill them, but not with this cruelty.” “What! do you never burn any?” “Not often . . . .”10

As has been noted, the presentist notion of a Pocohontas living in Paradise must be put aside; but it is also important not to go too far to the other extreme. Torture and death formed a part of the life of the Northeast Indians, but not the whole of it. If one were to suggest a philosophical statement that might have been made by a native American living at the time, it might well have been something to the effect that war is a natural part of life, as much a part of life as a beautiful sunrise or a beautiful sunset, and each will occur at its appropriate place and time.

---

10 Jesuit Relations, Vol. XV., p. 75.
From the early contacts of Columbus, while Europeans had been grappling with their understanding of the New World and the people in it, a similar process was likely occurring among the native tribes in regards to the Europeans themselves. There was a somewhat loose chain of communication which existed among the woodlands Indians, which included the Iroquois, and extended at least as far west as the Hurons in the Great Lakes area all the way up to those tribes which were in direct contact with the Puritan settlers along the Atlantic coast.\textsuperscript{11} Although few of the Indian people living in the New England area had experienced any close contact with Europeans before 1620, it is quite possible that by the time the Puritans reached the New World the Indian people were able to distinguish between Europeans of the Dutch, French, and English variety. The annual European fishing expeditions to the Newfoundland coast had likely become common knowledge by that time, and Squanto and other reprieved kidnap victims would have also brought home a knowledge of the European nationalities, which were likely placed into analogies that could be readily understood by the native tribes. Hence, one could imagine that the natives would be able to distinguish an English tribe which differed in customs and language from the Dutch tribe, and was sometimes at war with it, sometimes allied to it, and sometimes neutral. In short, it is unlikely that European political conduct would have been interpreted as being radically different from that of the native Americans themselves.

While the Iroquoisian tribes had formed themselves into a loose political confederation of sorts, one cannot consider the Algonquian-speaking peoples to be

\textsuperscript{11} Jesuit Relations, Vol. I, p. 13, for a brief sketch of the Abnaki, an Algonquian tribe based primarily in Maine.
politically organized in any larger sense of the word at all. They spoke a more or less common language, lived a more or less common lifestyle, and had a common enmity to the Iroquois, and this is where their commonality largely ends. Like the Balkan states, a closer look at them shows a bewildering array of alliances, land squabbles, and petty conflict.

The general pattern of political organization among the Algonquians was, to use the Puritan term of the time, “monarchical,” and, much like the European monarchs, the chiefs of the individual tribes derived their power from a combination of family descent and personal ability. Often the tribes were geographically divided, with smaller groups led by various sub-chiefs. Unfortunately, the Puritans seem to have used the term “sachem” or “sagamore” indiscriminately to describe not only the chiefs of the tribe as a whole, but also to describe the sub-chiefs, medicine men, and any other member of a tribe with some standing as well. Therefore, the actual political structure of the Algonquians is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand today.12

Nonetheless, some aspects of tribal organization can be known with relative certainty. One of the structures of the tribal system which closely resembled the European ways of doing business was called the “tribute system.” The tribute system was not unlike the Western notion of taxes, and served much the same purpose. Periodically, the tribal chief would visit the scattered bands under his jurisdiction and receive a sort of tax in a native currency called wampum. This served as a token of his

authority and provided him with a source of revenue, which was often augmented by spoils of war. Disputes over the quantity of these tributes occasionally led to the smaller band breaking away from the main group to seek independence, or to join another, larger tribe, which, if nothing else, further adds confusion to our understanding of the New England frontier. The Niantics, for example, were a relatively small and weak tribe, and often found themselves caught up in the power struggles of their more powerful neighbors. At times they were subservient to one tribe, then another, occasionally independent, and at one time they were split into two groups, one of which paid tribute to the Pequots, while the other paid tribute to the Narragansetts.\textsuperscript{13}

The use of wampum among the natives indicates a reasonable level of sophistication in their commercial transactions and greatly facilitated the integration of Europeans into the New World.\textsuperscript{14} In the case of the Europeans, this integration was so complete that from the 1630’s through the 1660’s wampum came to be considered legal currency among the English colonists themselves.\textsuperscript{15} Wampum was a sort of belt made

\textsuperscript{13} Alden Vaughan, \textit{New England Frontier}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{14} Upon the arrival of the Europeans, however, wampum had had only a limited use in native American trade, being confined to only a small number of tribes in the vicinity of Long Island and Block Island, which was situated near the coast, adjacent to Pequot and Narragansett territory. The Dutch were the first to discover its value in the facilitation of trade, and that knowledge was passed on to the Pilgrims who, in turn, introduced the use of wampum to the comparatively distant Abnaki in Maine. By the time the Puritans began to arrive in large numbers, the use of wampum had spread throughout the New England area. See George F. Willison, \textit{Saints and Strangers}, Time-Life Books, New York, 1964 (orig. pub. 1945), pp. 285-287.
\textsuperscript{15} Alden Vaughan, \textit{New England Frontier}, pp. 220-224. The use of wampum was discontinued by the Puritans, not because of an increase in silver specie, but because the white-shelled wampum could be dyed to closely resemble the more valuable blue-shelled wampum—an early case of forgery.
from either white or blue-black beads, carved from the seashells found along the coast. The primary sources for wampum were the northern shore of Long Island, the Narragansett Bay, and, significantly, Block Island, the site of the first salvo in the Pequot War. The darker beards were more scarce, and, hence, had a greater value, which was usually double that of the white shells. Corresponding to today’s “dollar,” the monetary unit of wampum was called a “fathom.” Although there was no government monopoly on its manufacture, the making of wampum was a difficult and time-consuming chore which was generally limited to the winter months.

Although the Puritan experiment was not primarily economic in nature, the impact of European trade on native American culture was being felt long before the Puritans’ arrival. Centered at Fort Orange, the Dutch traded guns, hatchets, and liquor to such an extent that local supplies of beaver were rapidly depleted. The demand for European goods touched off a series of “beaver wars” among the tribes of the Northeast, which by the end of the century left with the Iroquois in control of the beaver trade from New Netherland to the Great Lakes. As the local beaver population declined, the Mahicans, an Algonquian tribe who had acted as middlemen in the fur trade with the Dutch along the Hudson River, had both their economic position and territory usurped in 1628 by the Iroquoian Mohawks. The Mahicans were forced east of the Hudson and began a campaign of conquest on the western borders of tribes who would later have direct contact with the Puritans along the Connecticut River.

---

At the mouth of the Connecticut resided the Pequots and due east of them were their traditional enemies, the Narragansetts. The first of a series of massive plagues struck the entire New England area in 1616, but it left the Narragansetts largely untouched, thereby greatly increasing their political and military power by default. While the Narragansett chiefs Canonicus and Miantonomo generally maintained friendly relations with the Puritans, at one time or another this tribe was engaged in warfare with nearly every other major Indian power in New England.18

East of them, in turn, were the Wampanoags, another tribe which played a crucial role in the early history of New England. It was this tribe which had the nearest proximity to the Pilgrims and had been of great help to the Plymouth colony in its first years in America. The Wampanoags supplied the world with the famous Squanto, as well as Chief Massasoit, who led the Wampanoags to the guest table at the Pilgrims’ first Thanksgiving in 1621.19 Metacom, known to the English as King Philip, was also from this tribe, and it was he who would lead the uprising in 1675 that has come to be known as King Philip’s War. But upon the arrival of the first English settlers, the Wampanoags, as well as the Massachusetts tribe, to the immediate north of them, greeted their new foreign visitors warmly. Both of these tribes had suffered so greatly in the plague of 1616 that portions of their territories were entirely abandoned, and these abandoned areas were appropriated first by the Pilgrims in 1620, and later by the Puritans. It was perhaps because of their relative weakness that both the Wampanoags and the Massachusetts initially welcomed the English into their territory; after all, the new arrivals might prove

to be useful allies in the on-going struggles with their traditional enemies to the north, the more war-like Abnakis.20

This thumb-nail sketch of the tribes in the immediate vicinity of the English settlers in New England is by no means complete; such tribes as the Pennacooks, Pocumtucks, Wappingers, Nausets, Montauks, and others, have been entirely omitted on the sound principle that “enough is enough.” This paper is primarily concerned with the Pequots, and, of necessity, the Narragansetts and the Mohegans. Other tribes will be introduced from time to time, but their role will be minimalized to avoid confusion as much as possible. Never the less, it is well to bear in mind that while this work has simplified the Puritan frontier, that luxury was not available to the Puritans themselves. Their decision-making process always included the consideration that their actions would affect tribes other than those mentioned in the text.

We shall now return to the Pequots and examine some of the historiographical misconceptions which surround them. They are a tribe which has been the center of academic controversy for some years, and at least a portion of this controversy—and a great deal of somewhat gratuitous confusion—surrounds their name. During the historical period that we are examining, a portion of the Pequot tribe broke off from the main tribe, which, as has been noted, was not an unusual circumstance among the Algonquian Indians. What is unfortunate, however, is that the smaller group chose to adopt for themselves the name “Mohegan.” Alden Vaughan, one of the leading scholars of the New England frontier, asserts that the entire Pequot tribe was formerly known as the Mohegans. Furthermore, the name itself is suggestive of an earlier connection with the

Mahican tribe, and without any further serious inquiry into the subject, one could readily agree with Vaughan that the name “Mohegan” is actually a corruption of “Mahican.”21 However plausible this might sound to twentieth-century ears, Vaughan goes on to assert that the Pequots were recent invaders to the New England area, and that “the invading band’s brutal tactics soon earned it the name Pequot, Algonquian for destroyer.”22

Vaughan then goes on to lay out the standard version of the history of the Pequots, which began with William Hubbard’s *The History of the Indian Wars in New England*, which was in the process of being written during King Philip’s War of 1675, a full generation after the conflict with the Pequots. This version of the events, which was later severely criticised by Francis Jennings,23 is, in a way, elegant in its simplicity. In this version, the story of the Pequots is a story of a group of Mahicans who broke away from the main tribe and invaded the New England area--thereby inviting the collective hostility of its more peaceful (and more numerous) neighbors--before settling down in their recently conquered territory just prior to the arrival of the English settlers, during

---

21 Alden Vaughan, *The New England Frontier*, p. 56. James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* has added even more confusion to this matter. Cooper writes that “The whites have assisted greatly in rendering the traditions of the aborigines more obscure by their own manner of corrupting names. Thus, the term used in the title of this book has undergone the changes of Mahicanni, Mohicans, and Mohegans; the latter being the word commonly used by the whites.” (James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, The Franklin Library, 1977, p.2.) Cooper was flatly wrong; “Mohican” is a completely ficticious term was not used in the seventeenth century. Vaughan is also wrong; the Mahicans were a distinct tribe which had no relations with the Mohegans whatsoever. See T. J. Brasser, “Mahican,” *The Handbook of North American Indians*, p.201.
22 Vaughan, p. 56
which time they acquired the Pequot name. Then, shortly after the entrance of the
English, a group of the Pequots under the leadership of Chief Uncas broke away from the
main group and revived the old Mahican name which became corrupted into “Mohegan.”

In keeping with this standard version of events, the Pequots were a comparatively
powerful tribe, but they retained the enmity of the older, more established tribes around
them, and thus, when the time came for retribution, those other tribes, most notably the
Narragansetts and their allies, as well as their erstwhile brethren, the Mohegans, joined
forces with the Puritans in a combined effort to destroy the “destroyers.” In this story,
along with its variations, the Pequots have often been made out to be the villains in the
Pequot War of 1637-38, and Vaughan is perhaps the last major writer to place the onus
of the war on their shoulders, although it should be pointed out that in the revised edition
of his work he states that “I am less sure than I was fifteen years ago that the Pequots
deserve the burden of the blame.”

A more detailed examination of the war itself will follow later in this work, but
for now, it will suffice to point out that the initial assertion in this scenario, that the
Pequots were recent invaders in the New England area, simply does not stand up to the
facts. There is strong archeological evidence which supports a long period of in situ
development for the Pequot tribe, and a careful examination of the original historical

24 One of the first major historians to challenge this assumption was James Truslow
1921), pp. 197-205. See also Albert Bushnell Hart, Ed., *Commonwealth History of
26 “Indians of Southern New England and Long Island: Early Period,” Bert Salwen,
documents, along with linguistic and other archeological evidence, made by Alfred A. Cave, leads to the conclusion that the Pequots were not invaders to the region, but were rather indigenous to the area. Cave notes that the “Pequot invasion story was a belated embellishment to the Puritan propaganda of the Pequot War.”

The “belated embellishment” is primarily a reference to Hubbard’s later “official” Puritan history of 1675. Cave’s critique of Hubbard is brief and to the point:

The Pequot invasion of southern New England occurred only in the pages of historians who have echoed uncritically a seventeenth-century writer who either misunderstood his informants or consciously spun a tall-tale to give added force to his demonic characterization of the Pequots. The persistence of that tale over the years is, finally, far more remarkable than the story itself.

Nonetheless, the story has persisted, for two major reasons. The first is the relative obscurity of the conflict itself. If the Pequot War is mention at all in any larger body of work, it is generally regulated to a few sketchy lines or at most a paragraph or two, and such hasty treatment lends itself inherently to misinformation and inaccuracy.

---

28 It is not fair to conclude that William Hubbard was the only Puritan to be guilty of adding “embellishments” to the conflict. They began almost immediately after the event, most notably with Roger Clap’s assertion, written ca. 1640, that “God permitted Satan to stir up the Pequots.” See Memoirs of Roger Clap, Boston, Printed and Published by David Clap, Jr., 1844, in New Views of Early Virginia History, 1606-1619, Alexander Brown, 1886, Bedford Index Print, Liberty, Va. The Memoirs neither fall within the chronology of the title nor do they have anything to do with Virginia history.
29 Cave, p. 43 & 44.
Another reason for the lack of inquiry into the invasion myth has to do with the temper of the historical times. Historical treatment of the Puritans has tended to fall into the extremes of deification or vilification, with little or no middle ground. One of the most influential of the latter group of historians, Francis P. Jennings, in his 1975 book, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*, concentrates a vicious attack on Puritan motives in the Pequot War while curiously avoiding mention of the “Pequot invasion myth.” On the other hand, for those historians who attempt to justify the actions of the Puritans, such as Alden Vaughan, the story of the Pequot invasion is a centerpiece because with this story the Pequots themselves become invaders and are therefore placed on an equal moral footing with the Puritans.

When we come away from this chapter of necessary evil, full of strange names and unfamiliar stories, is a picture of the Pequots, a comparatively strong, powerful tribe, residing near the Connecticut River in close proximity to their equally strong, powerful rivals, the Narragansetts. Hopefully we will see them with eyes that are as fresh and unprejudiced as possible, as just another tribe composed of people who were just people, living in a land which ended up being called America, not Eden.
On the eve of their departure to the New World from Southhampton, John Cotton, a minister in Lincolnshire, preached a farewell sermon to those Puritans who had decided to leave Old England behind them. He chose for his text II Samuel 7:10: “Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israell, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their owne, and move no more.” God, Cotton assured them, selects a specific country in which to plant His people where they will not be uprooted if they continue to propagate the Lord’s religion.1

What is important to realize about the Puritans prior to the Pequot War was the depth of their religious conviction in an age of religious convictions. If today America is seen metaphorically as a promised land to immigrants, the Puritans in their day could see the New World quite literally as a promised land. And in an age in which Satan quite literally walked the earth, seeking souls for his kingdom of the damned, those mysterious Indian Creatures--might they be his minions? Could they be the Lost Tribe of Israel?

It is difficult, if not impossible, for modern readers to grasp the significance of the religiosity of the age. The Puritan movement, whose origins have generally been traced back to the Elizabethan age, resists an easy definition. It lacked a single leader to articulate its aspirations, and, more importantly, those aspirations changed with time.

---

1 John Cotton, “Gods Promise to His Plantation,” in Old South Leaflets, III (Boston, n. d.), 4-5, 14.
Initially, the early English Puritans, like the Anglicans, believed that the church should embrace the whole community, that attendance should be enforced by the state, and that church and state should be bound together. They agreed with Bishop Hall that it was "better to swallow a ceremony than to rend a church" and asked only to replace the Episcopal organization with the Presbyterian model. Neither Puritans nor Anglicans argued for separation of church and state, for religious tolerance, or for the unfettered individual who traveled through life disregarding the welfare of society as a whole. Initially, Puritans acknowledged no great doctrinal differences with their Anglican brethren, but they held that all taint of popery must be removed from the Church of England. In time, the Puritans accepted the idea of an exclusive church composed only of saints whose conversion was an individual affair with God. Nonetheless, in the seventeenth century no man was an island; all were members of the community, and therefore the Puritan reformer was obliged to remake all of society. Puritanism thereby became far more than a religious movement; it was a way of life that had vast social and political implications. But when Charles I, in March, 1629, abruptly dismissed a rancorous Parliament and embarked on an era a personal rule, for Puritans throughout England, the royal decision signaled the defeat of the forces of reformation.

"Harried from the land" by Bishop Laud, pinched by the disruption of the cloth trade by the Thirty Years War, and concerned about the future of their country, many of these disenchanted men and women now seriously began to consider the possibility of leaving their native land and erecting a godly commonwealth in America. To that end, there was no lack of information to fire the imagination of those about to set off in such an endeavor. There was, however, a lack of practical experience, and a sober judge of the times could easily temper undue idealism for a colonization effort in New England with the reality of the colonial situation in both Jamestown and Ireland. Neither place was apt to inspire excessive optimism.
Yet Europeans had been well aware of America’s existence for more than a hundred years now, and the idea of America played well in the European mind. Even before the advent of Christianity, Plato had left the legend of Atlantis, located somewhere vaguely to the west of the pillars of Hercules, imprinted in the European psyche.\(^2\) Atlantis, Eden, America, and reality came to be inextricably inter-mixed in European thought; during his third voyage to America, Christopher Columbus sailed off the mouth of the Orinoco and wrote that if the water “does not come from there, from paradise, it seems to be still a greater marvel, for I do not believe that there is known in the world a river so great and so deep.” In the Earthly Paradise is the Tree of Life, and from it issues a fountain, and from the fountain flow four of the chief rivers of this world—and the Orinoco was obviously one of them. Columbus goes on to say that this was “where I believe in my soul that the earthly paradise is situated.”\(^3\)

While seventeenth-century England had long ceased to care about Columbus’ soul (if, indeed, it ever had), the souls of the American natives were another matter. Nearly every defender of colonization in the seventeenth century proclaimed the advantages of exporting Christianity to America. Regardless of doctrinal variations, such appeals reflected and highlighted the theological premises of a time which interpreted all behavior in religious terms. As early as 1582, in his *Divers Voyages*, Richard Hakluyt noted that the vast region northward from Florida lay “unplanted by Christians.”\(^4\)

---


planting of Christians in Massachusetts, however, meant more than simply importing good Puritans into the wilderness; it also denoted the desire to convert the Indians from their sinful state.

Exactly who these native people were and what exactly constituted their sinful state is a question that has vexed the Western mind to this day. One of the earliest and most complete descriptions of the natives of the New World was given in Amerigo Vespucci’s *Mundus Novus*, published around 1504-1505: “We found in those parts such a multitude of people as nobody could enumerate (as we read in the Apocalypse), a race I say gentle and amenable. All of both sexes go about naked, covering no part of their bodies; and just as they spring from their mothers’ wombs so they go until death . . . .” Vespucci here clearly paints a picture which would justify Columbus’ earlier claims of paradise, a picture of a Noble Savage which would make Rousseau proud. “Beyond the fact that they have no church, no religion and are not idolators, what more can I say? They live according to nature, and may be called Epicureans rather than Stoics . . . .” On the one hand, Vespucci gives us the “noble;” and on the other, he gives us the “savage:” “The elders by means of certain harangues of theirs bend the youths to their will and inflame them to wars in which they cruelly kill one another, and those whom they bring home captives from war they preserve, not to spare their lives, but that they may be slain for food; for they eat one another, the victors the vanquished, and among other kinds of meat human flesh is a common article of diet with them . . . I . . . remained twenty-seven days in a certain city where I saw salted human flesh suspended from beams between the houses, just as with us it is the custom to hand bacon and pork. I say further: they themselves wonder why we do not eat our enemies and do not use as food their flesh which they say is most savory.”

---

Within these two simple observations arose the basic themes that would dominate so much of white thinking about native Americans. These ideas were, as Berkhofer noted, already well-developed in Spanish literature by the seventeenth century. Using the twin criteria of Christianity and civilization, the Spaniards had found the Indian cultures wanting in a long list of attributes: letters, laws, government, clothing, arts, trade, agriculture, marriage, morals, metal goods, and, above all, religion. Their judgments upon these failures might be kind and sympathetic or harsh and hostile, but no one argued that the Indian was as good as the European.

And, to Puritan eyes, the Indian was probably a good deal worse. When Hakluyt published his *Principal Navigations* in 1589, he included accounts of native Americans which were both excessively favorable and unfavorable. Now well known through modern quotation are the phrases of Arthur Barlowe, who sailed in 1584 under the auspices of Sir Walter Raleigh to reconnoiter his patron's grant from the Queen. He sums up his first impression of the natives of Roanoke Island as "very handsome, and goodly people, and in their behavior as mannerly and civil, as any of Europe." After a banquet, he again comments: "We were entertained with all love, and kindness, and with as much bounty, after their manner, as they could possibly devise." Although he noted that the Indian peoples maintained an extremely ferocious warfare among themselves, he depreciated any fears of hostilities from these natives because "for a more kind and loving people, there can not be found in the world, as farre as we have hitherto had traill." On the other hand, Hakluyt's work also contained a rather more discouraging

---

7*Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries*, Vol 8, pp. 300, 305, 306
view of the American Indians from one Dionyse Settle in his discussion of Innuik Eskino eating habits. After an account reeking with his disgust for their custom of eating meat raw, he concludes: “What knowledge they have of God, or what Idoll they adore, we have no perfect intelligence, I think them rather Anthropophagi, or devourers of mans flesh than other wise: for that there is no flesh or fish which they find dead (smell it everso filthy) but they eate it, as they finde it without any other dressing. A loathesome thing, either to the beholders or hearers.”

Settle’s story is important in that it shows the clear linkage of “civilization” and Christianity in the European mind, which formed a “Catch-22” vis-à-vis the native people. In order for them to become “civilized,” they must become Christians; but in order for them to become Christians, they must first become “civilized,” or, as the Rev. Charles Inglis put it, “they must first be made Men.”

This impression of the New World had not changed significantly by the time the Arabella set sail for Massachusetts. Some time before the sailing of the Winthrop fleet, Mathew Cradock, who as Governor of the New England Company first suggested emigration to America, expressed sorrow at the low level of spiritual development among the Indians and urged that efforts be made “to bringe [the natives] out of that woeful state and condition they now are in.” Although the natives appeared to be in the clutches of Satan and “live without God in this present world,” their situation was not necessarily permanent, for the Puritans could raise them “unto a forme of Piety and godliness.”

---

8 Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 220.  
9 Rev. Charles Inglis, quoted in James Axtell, The Invasion Within, p. 131.  
But if it may be said that Europeans were concerned with the souls of native Americans in general, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that they were even more concerned with their own souls in particular. It must be remembered that the seventeenth century vision of the world revolved around religion and God. Everything in this vision had theological implications, and nothing possessed meaning aside from God. Political, social, and economic affairs all, in some way, reflected the mind of God. When the Lord smiled upon a nation, he blessed that nation with political stability, social security, and economic well-being. Conversely, when God frowned upon a nation, he allowed these blessings to dissipate. This sense of God's grace was often articulated with the metaphor of a "hedge" which surrounded a nation or a community and assured those within that hedge that the Lord would protect and defend them.\(^\text{12}\) Clearly, though, that assurance was dependent upon the will of the Lord; as early as 1622 John Winthrop would write of "the present evill tymes,"\(^\text{13}\) a phrase which came to be repeated so often in England that it became nearly a cliché.\(^\text{14}\)

By May of 1629, the Thirty Years War was going heavily against the Protestants in Germany; in France Rochelle had fallen, and with these disasters to the true religion, Winthrop saw God turning his hand away from England. "My dear wife," he wrote in a letter, "I am veryly perswaded, God will bring some heavye Affliction upon this lande, and that speedylye: but be of good Comfort, he hardest that can come shall be a meanes ... to bringe us neerer communion with our Lord Jesus Christ ... he will provide a shelter and a hiding place for us and ours."\(^\text{15}\) As the summer wore on, the situation within and

\(^{13}\) John Winthrop to Thomas Fones, January 29, 1621[22], *Winthrop Papers*, I, 268
\(^{14}\) For a description of the social problems of England at the time, see Carl Bridenbaugh, *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen: 1590-1642* (New York, 1968)
\(^{15}\) *Winthrop Papers*, vol. 2, pp. 91, 94. This language was considered by the government to be seditious, and liable to punishment; see French, p. 345.
without England had not improved; "It may be," reasoned Winthrop, that "God will by
this meanse bringe us to repent of our former Intemperance." After all, the same motives
moved the Lord to carry "the Isralites into the wildernesse and made them forgette the
fleshpotts of Egipt." This short quotation contains within it a wealth of insight. First,
the reference to the "fleshpotts of Egipt" indicates the notion that society could, indeed,
degenerate. Although the worst of the religous wars had not touched England, and the
last of the religious conflicts were beginning to fade on the continent, there was no way
for Englishmen in 1629 to know that they, too, would not be engulfed in the horrible
blood-bath that had reigned in Europe for many years. The Lord could withdraw his
favor. Society could degenerate, and Puritans saw signs of that degeneration all around
them. And, since degeneration was only one step away from complete, bloody terror,
degeneration was something to be feared and fought in and of itself. One of Winthrops's
correspondents, Robert Ryece, concluded his letter by saying that it is better "to seeke to
dye ... in the wyldernes" than to remain besmirched in a land of sin.17 This idea of
degeneration would later come back to haunt the Puritans in the New World, but for now
it is enough to note that they were clearly not only going to America, but they were also
going from England.

They were also going with a great deal of cultural baggage, and Winthtrop, in his
short statement about the Lord carrying the Israelites into the wilderness, touched upon at
least two more aspects of that baggage which became lasting themes in the Puritan’s
experiment in America, that of the association of the Puritans with the ancient Hebrews,
and that of the American wilderness as a place of refuge. Later, the notion of wilderness
would also come to mean a place of religious insight, from which deviation in both

---

16 "Reasons To Be Considered," *Winthrop Papers*, II, p. 105-106, 144.
America and Europe might be challenged, as well as a place of trial in which God would test his chosen people as a necessary prelude to everlasting salvation. But probably the most influential theme supporting Puritan optimism on the eve of migration was the hope that New England would be the promised land.

That this hope was not universal among Englishmen of the time should come as no surprise. “[M]any speak ill of this Countrye [New England], of the barrennesse etc. of it,” Winthrop noted in 1629, but “so did the Spyes of the lande of Canaan.”18 Glowing reports about America had been in circulation in England for quite some time. Inheriting the mantle from Richard Hakluyt as America’s chief promoter, Samuel Purchas wrote several books and pamphlets promoting the idea of colonization in America. One of his first published works came in 1613, a volume entitled Purchas his Pilgrimage, a copy of which was reportedly kept in the bed chamber of King James I,19 indicating, if nothing else, its value as a cure for insomnia. But not even Purchas’ eloquence nor initial letters of encouragement would ever persuade the majority of Englishmen to leave their homeland. In 1632, James Hopkins wrote to John Winthrop, then in America, “If our peace be continued ... we hold our selves tied heere, and dare not breake loose till god sett us loose.”20

They held themselves tied there with good reason. Even today with our modern means of transportation we do not lightly untie ourselves from friends and family and go traipsing about the world. Even more so in the seventeenth century when the most casual

---

18 “General Conclusion and Particular Considerations: Early Draft” [1629], Winthrop Papers, 5 vols. (Boston, 1929--), II, 127.
19 Wright, Religion and Empire, p. 115.
20 James Hopkins to John Winthrop, February 25, 1632, Winthrop Papers, III, p. 106.
trip across the ocean meant, at best, as Thomas Shepard noted in his autobiography, "Sad Stomes and Wearisom Dayes".

Often extolled by those who are wont to glorify the founders of America, and often ignored by intellectual historians, the crossing of the ocean itself was not only a formidable challenge, but also the Puritan's first real experience with the wilderness, although of a different sort than the experience they would find when on land in America. In keeping with what would later become the metaphorical subject of many a sermon, John Winthrop in England referred to the power and the mercy of the Lord as revealed in the "streights of the redd sea." The crossing of the Red Sea did for the ancient Hebrews what the crossing of the ocean did for the Puritans: it gave them the common bonds of a shared experience, and, surviving the perils of the voyage, it sealed their faith as the chosen people of the Lord.

Winthrop's own account of his voyage on the Arbella is overly optimistic, and was probably written with an eye to public consumption. Commenting on one of the storms the Arbella encountered, Winthrop writes that it "continued all the day ... and the sea raged and tossed us exceedingly ... [but] through God's mercy, we were very comfortable." Edward Johnson, a first-generation New England historian, interpreted the voyage in a different manner. The Lord, he maintained, aggravated the normal oceanic hardships so that the land they were approaching "might not be deserted by them

---

22 John Winthrop to His Wife, March 10, 1629 [/30], *Winthrop Papers*, II, 219.
24 Ibid., p. 38 & 40.
at first enterance, which sure it would have been by many, had not the Lord prevented by a troublesome passage."  

A more-or-less typical story of the Puritan migration comes from Thomas Shepard, a minister in England who tarried behind while first John Winthrop and then other prominent Puritans, notably Thomas Hooker and John Cotton (who had delivered the Arbella’s farewell sermon) left for the New World. “I saw the harts of most of the godly ... bent that way and I did thinke I should feele many miseries if I stayd behind.,” he wrote in his autobiography. But before he removed himself from England, he left behind an account of England’s spiritual status, which was later published in England after his arrival in the New World: “Consider the approaching times ... I doe beleve the Lord at this day is coming ... to teare and rend from you your choysest blessings, peace and plenty.” This was necessary, he said, because “our age grows full, and proud, and wanton.” The Lord would punish “this God-glutted, Christ-glutted, Gospel-glutted age” with “sore afflications of famine, war, bloud, mortality, deaths of Gods precious servants especially.” In a farewell letter to a friend, Shepard expressed his hope that the recipient would be “preserved from national sins, which shortly [will] bring national and most heavy plagues.”

These cheery little sentiments behind him, on October 16, 1634, Thomas Shepard bade good-bye to England and embarked for Massachusetts Bay. Off the coast of

---

Yarmouth, however, less than two days at sea, a violent storm arose and nearly destroyed
the vessel, forcing its return to England. Only “the infinite wisdom and power of god”
preserved the Shepard family and permitted them to survive “such terrible stormes.”

The following year, perhaps a bit more apprehensively, Shepard boarded the
Defense which successfully carried him to America, but not without some difficulty. In
mid-ocean the ship sprang a leak which endangered the lives of the terrified passengers.
Then the Lord, having delivered them from this crisis, led them immediately into a
serious storm. “Men that sail upon the sea,” he later wrote, “If they see nothing but
waves, and vast raging of waters about them,” confine themselves “though their cabins be
but little.”
The crossing of the ocean had an effect on Shepard which stayed with him
through the remainder of his days on earth, with oceanic metaphors appearing frequently
in his discourses.

The Puritan record of safe passages across the Atlantic was truly remarkable, and
assured them of their special calling. Edward Johnson extolled the providences of God
“in delivering this his people in their Voyages by Sea, from many foule dangers.” You
are the people, he wrote of New Englanders, “who are pickt out” by the Lord “to passe
this Western Ocean” in order to transport “His name into the wilderness.”

Bolstered by their faith, and further knit together by the bonds of shared experience, the Puritans
were well-prepared for the communal endeavors necessary to survive in the American

30 Shepard [and John Allin], “The Preface to the Reader,” A Defence of the Answer made
unto Nine Questions or Positions sent from New-England, third ed. entitled A Treatise of
Liturgies... (London, 1653), p. 7
31 A good sketch of the life of Thomas Shepard can be found in Samuel Eliot Morison,
Builders of the Bay Colony, (Boston, 1930), Chapter IV.
wilderness, a wilderness which would, indeed, come for many of them to be a place of their own, from which they would move no more.
CHAPTER FOUR

“Our New Paradise”

After long, long weeks at sea, Francis Higginson, an early Puritan historian, finally saw the shores of America from the deck of the *Talbot* in June of 1629. “We saw every hill and dale,” he reported, “and every island full of gay woods and high trees.” The “fine woods and green trees by land” and the yellow flowers which painted the sea, he continued, “made us all desirous to see our new paradise of New England, whence we saw such forerunning signals of fertility afar off.”¹ A year later, John Winthrop, aboard the *Arbella*, wrote in a similar vein: “It is very high land, lying in many hills very unequal,” and there came “a smell off the shore like the smell of a garden.”²

Few of the new arrivals would be immediately concerned with Indian Creatures, but not everyone was so enthused with the shores of New England. As has been noted, Edward Johnson insisted that only the fear of another ocean crossing kept many settlers from deserting the colony. Anne Bradstreet, the famous Puritan poet, wrote, “I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose [i.e., rebelled].”³ William Wood, another early Puritan historian, said that many had anticipated “walled townes,

fortifications and corne fields.” Such people, “missing of their expectations, returned home and railed against the Country.”

The pre-conceived ideas of America that the Puritans brought with them were merely confirmed or assaulted upon sight of the New England shore. That this should be the case was later noted by Peter Bulkeley of Concorn who remarked that for the uninitiated who rely upon a map, the wonders of nature “are seen darkly.” These lines on a map “are nothing to that when they are seen in their own beautie and greenesse.” But it is important to emphasize that this “entirely new world” was not seen with entirely new eyes.

Nevertheless, while those who returned to England might have “railed against the country,” the majority of those who remained praised the country to an excessive degree. Francis Higginson was among the latter. “This country aboundeth naturally with store of roots of great variety and good to eat,” he wrote, “turnips, parsnips and carrots are here both bigger and sweeter than is ordinarily to be found in England.” And there is “abundance of sea-fish ... almost beyond believing, and sure I should scarce have believed it except I had seen it with mine own eyes.” After carrying on some more in the same vein, Higginson concludes, “Experience doth manifest that there is hardly a more healthful place to be found in the world that agreeth better with our English bodies.”

---

7 Ibid., p. 248.
8 Ibid., p. 253.
“discommodities” to be found in the New World? Yes, according to Higginson. The greatest problem was the lack of good Christians to subdue the fertile land. “Great pity it is,” he maintained, “to see so much good ground ... lie altogether unoccupied,” while England remains desperately overpopulated.9

That so much good ground did, indeed, lie altogether unoccupied was at least in part due to a great plague which had struck the New England area in 1616-1617. Thousands of native Americans died as the result of disease, which possibly originated from earlier contact with Europeans. This was, in the eyes of the Puritans, a sure sign of the Lord’s favor, for He was clearly making room in the New World for His chosen people.10

One of the most persistent myths of American history is that the Puritan settlers arrived to rob the native Americans of their land, either by seizing it outright or by purchasing it in return for a handful of worthless trinkets. The first point of view cannot be maintained by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of the history of New England, and the second point of view, that the English swindled the native Americans out of their land, is equally invalid.11 This point of view assumes two things: that Indian and white concepts of landownership were different, and therefore the Indians did not know that they were bargaining away the ownership rights to their land forever; and that the items exchanged for the land were, indeed, worthless trinkets.

10 Johnson, Wonder-working Providence, 40-42; also, [John White], The Planter’s Plea, or the Grounds of Plantations Examined... (London, 1630 [Fascism. Rockport, Massachusetts, 1930]), p. 25.
11 Recent attempts to maintain this myth have been made by Howard Zinn, A People’s History of the United States, and Francis Jennings, The Invasion of America. Although not specifically concerned with early America, Donald Worster also writes in a similar vein.
Among most of the tribes of North America land was held in common, but this was not the case in the New England area. Here the disparity between English and Indian concepts of land tenure was actually rather slight. Roger Williams, probably the best-informed white authority on the tribes of the New England area, wrote that “the Natives are very exact and punctuall in the bounds of their Lands, belonging to this or that Prince or People, (even to a River, Brook), etc. And I have knowne them make bargaine and sale amongst themselves for a small piece, or quantity of Ground.”12 It is now generally agreed among anthropologists that most, if not all, of the New England tribes practiced some form of definite land ownership in the allotment of territory for residence and planting, and that ownership resided in the individual, the family, or some larger unit.13 Furthermore, the possessor of that land seems to have enjoyed full ownership, not merely rights of usufruct. The later “typical” frontier transaction, in which the pioneer bought land from an Indian who, in fact, had no legal right to sell part of the tribal domain, did not occur in seventeenth-century New England, where the tribes did not practice communal ownership.14

Now, it is still possible to believe that the first time a land transaction with the Puritans was carried out that the Indians did not know that the Puritans intended to keep that land essentially forever. It is even conceivable that the second time this happened the Indians still did not fully understand the intent of the Europeans to retain the land for their own purposes in perpetuity. But by the third time, it is absolutely beyond question that the natives of New England did understand that when they sold land to the whites,

12 [Roger Williams], The Complete Writings of Roger Williams (7 vols., New York, 1963), I, 180.
that land would remain with the whites until the Puritans themselves were driven from the continent.

As to the second point, that the Indians traded their land away in return for some worthless trinkets, this point is true only from an ethnocentric presentist perspective. In other words, glass beads, iron pots, steel knives, and the like are worthless trinkets only from a modern-day point of view. From the perspective of seventeenth-century Alqonquians, these were unheard of, and therefore highly desirable items. To make the point more clearly, if a mysterious and technologically advanced race of beings arrived on earth and was willing to trade an advanced technology for something which we have in relative abundance, such as a few gallons of water, wouldn't we be willing to make the trade? Even if, three hundred years later, someone might complain that the earth traded away its precious water for trinkets, wouldn't we be willing to make the trade? Of course we would, and we would not be much concerned about the opinions of historians some three hundred years in the future, either.

The question of land ownership was not among the highest priorities of the Puritans when they first arrived on the shores of the New World, at least in part because they had taken the time to deal with some of the theoretical aspects of the problem beforehand. The Puritans brought with them three separate means of justification for occupying the soil of New England. They were "pattent[,] Purchase and possession."15

The right of patent was simply the right that derived from discovery. According to prevailing European concepts, a Christian monarch had full authority over lands discovered in his name, so long as the inhabitants were not themselves Christians. A patent issued by a Christian king to any individual or corporation, such as the "Governor

15Winthrop, Journal, II, 331
and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England," permitted the grantees to act in his behalf. Since all land was the King's, patented land became the agent's, and therefore, according to English law, the Puritan had every right to simply dispossess the heathen natives. That, at least, was the theory, which, in the eyes of Roger Williams, was little more than a bold presumption. And the theory remained, very largely, just that: a theory. Early on the Puritans dispensed with this particular abstraction of the Old World and saw that the reality of the New World required the recognition of the Indians as "the true proprietors" of the land. In short, the Puritans assumed the right to land by patent, but they did not exercise that right.

They were, however, scrupulous about purchasing land from the Indians, and this theory was supplemented by the third claim—right by possession. John Winthrop was still in England when he stated in 1629 that

As for the Natives in New England, they inclose noe Land, neither have any setled habytation, nor any tame Cattle to improve the Land by, and soe have noe other but a Naturall Right to those Countries, soe as if we leave them sufficient for their use, we may lawfully take the rest, there being more than enough for them and us.

Winthrop's sentiments were later echoed by the Massachusetts General Court in its ruling of October 19, 1652, which declared that "what lands any of the Indians within this jurisdiction have by possession or improvement, by subduing of the same, they have just right thereunto, according to that in Genesis, 1 and 28, chapter 9:1, and Psalms 115:16." While the famous verse from Genesis commanded the Lord's chosen to be

---

17 John Winthrop, "Reasons to be Considered, and Objections with Answers," in *Winthrop Papers*, II, 141.
fruitful and multiply, Psalms declared that “the earth hath he given to the children of men.”

The General Court’s justification for land ownership based solely on Biblical precedent would later give the English government some cause for consternation, and, in turn, would come back to haunt the Puritans themselves. But for the time being the acquisition of land was not an immediate problem. Sheer survival was.

Francis Higginson had been in America for a full year when the Winthrop fleet arrived in 1630, and his early optimism had been tempered by a New England winter when, in failing health, he preached to the new arrivals on the text from Matthew 11:7: “What went ye out into the wilderness to see”? Reminding the congregation of their religious purpose, he warned them to be prepared for “the streights, wants, and various trials which in a wilderness they must look to meet withal.”18 The idea that they were the chosen people of the Lord did much to sustain them in the early years of colonization, a time when they were plagued by hunger, disease, and general insecurity. Shortly after Higginson’s death, Winthrop wrote that God “is pleased still to humble us,” yet “he mixes so many mercyes with his corrections, as we are perswaded he will not cast us off.”19

John Winthrop, Jr., recalled the problems of early settlement. “Plantations in their beginnings have worke ynough,” he observed, and require “buildings, fencings, cleeringe and breakinge up of ground, lands to be attended, orchards to be planted, highways and bridges and fortifications to be made.” In short, he concluded, the planters

have “all things to doe, as in the beginninge of the world.” It was also a time, Roger Clap recalled later, when “mean victuals ... would have been sweet to me.”

Perhaps the Puritans had not fully anticipated the extent of the physical hardships of their trial in the wilderness as God’s chosen few, but they certainly had anticipated Satanic opposition to the establishment of the true religion in the New World. While still in England, Thomas Shepard warned that “The Divill will sometimes undermine and seek to blow up the strongest walls and bulwarkes.” Whether Shepard was speaking literally or metaphorically is a matter of conjecture, but John Winthrop certainly believed that the devil had infiltrated his one special target, the Puritan ranks. In one of his first letters from the New World, he wrote, “Sathan bends his forces against us, and stirres up his instruments to all kindes of mischeife, so that I thinke heere are some persons who never shewed so much wickedness in England as they have doone heer.” Winthrop’s worst fears would later be confirmed in the Antinomian controversy surrounding Anne Hutchinson during the winter of the Pequot war. Winthrop saw her as “an instrument of Satan ... fitted and trained for her service” to poison “the Churches here planted.” One of Hutchinson’s most vehement prosecutors was Thomas Shepard, who preached that, in

25 *A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruine of the Antinomians* [1644], reprinted in *Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636-1638*, ed. by Charles F. Adams
New England, "We are in fear of enemies" who "are plotting to take us unawares." But, he added, "it may be the Lord will help [us] then."26

Even before the Hutchinson incident, the colonists were aware that the devil knew of their presence in the heart of his kingdom. For instance, those colonists who returned to England and "railed against the Country" convinced many of those who remained that the devil, threatened "soe i sightily" by the transplantation of the true church, was attacking the infant colony "with all [h]is might and maine."27 But signs also abounded of the Lord's favor: In the summer of 1632 a remarkable incident was recorded by Winthrop in which "after a long fight" a mouse succeeded in killing a snake. John Wilson, then pastor of the church at Boston, "gave this interpretation: That the snake was the devil; the mouse was a poor contemptible people, which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here, and dispossess him of his kingdom."28

The idea of a moral battle in the wilderness was perhaps best expressed by William Hooke, who wrote in the early stages of the English Civil War that "I cannot but look upon the Chruches in this Land as upon so many severall Regiments ... lying in ambush here under the fearne and brushet of the Wilderness." Although "our weapons [are] as invisible to the eye of flesh, as our persons are to all the world, we can fight this day with the greater safety to our selves, and danger to our enemies."29

---

(Boston, 1894), p. 228.
For most New Englanders, however, Satan's use of the Indians as instruments of his malice was more pertinent than the distant battlefields of England. Like all unregenerate men, the Indians were naturally assumed to be in the clutches of the devil, actively seeking his comradeship, and worshipping him in their "pawawes." And the devil would surely do his utmost to prevent the transmission of the gospel to America.\(^{30}\) The Lord would occasionally permit this to happen, as when, in the mid-1630's, Roger Clap reported that he had allowed "Satan to stir up the Pequot Indians to kill divers English men."\(^{31}\) And, on the eve of that war, Roger Williams noted that the Pequots did not fear the Puritan armies because they expected the assistance of Satan.\(^{32}\)

Given that the Puritans believed that they were the chosen people of the Lord, fighting a desperate moral battle in the wilderness in which they would face the full brunt of Satan's fury, conflict with the natives was as inevitable as the dawning of the day. Further machinations of the devil were anticipated, expected. Hadn't John Winthrop warned his people that, "Lest we should, now, grow secure, our wise God ... seldom suffers his owne ... to be long without trouble"?\(^{33}\) The real question was when, not if, a conflict would come.

---

\(^{30}\) See, for instance, Wood, *New Englands Prospect*, pp. 92-94.


\(^{32}\) Roger Williams to John Winthrop [c. September 1636], *Winthrop Papers*, III, 298.

The Puritan experiment was first and foremost to be a religious enterprise, one whose initial goal, at least as far as the native peoples were concerned, was to be one of conversion, not of conquest. Satan was clearly an even greater threat to the Puritans than the Indian Creatures who were, more than likely at any rate, his mere minions. In an age steeped in religion, the Puritans arrived in the New World upon the echo of John Winthrop’s observation in 1629 that the settlement of New England would be “a service to the church of great consequens by carringe the gospell into those parts to raise a bulworke against the kingdom of antichrist.”1 In one form or another, the propagation of the True Faith (which went by various names and doctrines) was part and parcel of every European colonization effort throughout the seventeenth century,2 and was promulgated with perhaps the same vigor and determination towards the native people of the New World as the “gospel of the free market” is preached to the people of the former Soviet Union today—and with, perhaps, as much success.

Still, when Mathew Cradock, then Governor of the New England Company, expressed his hope that the colonization effort would help “to bringe [the natives] out of that woeful state and conditon they now are in,”3 one cannot escape the feeling that he

---

2 See, for instance, Louis B. Wright, Religion and Empire: The Alliance between Piety and Commerce in English Expansion, 1558-1625 (Chapel Hill, 1943), and J. H. Parry, The Age of Reconnaissance (New York, 1963).
urged these efforts more with the eye of a promotionalist for domestic consumption in
England than out of a genuine concern for the spiritual development of the Indians
themselves. In a similar vein, John White noted (with perhaps a bit more sincerity) that
the natives lived in the clutches of Satan “without God in this present world,” but that the
word of God could raise them “unto a forme of Piety and godliness.”

Nonetheless, although it was self-evident that the savage state of the natives’
condition indicated Satan’s power in the New World, the main audience for the
production of the City on the Hill, as Perry Miller noted, was England, not America, and
for every solitary voice expressing concern for the souls of the Indians—whether heart-felt
or not—there was a chorus of praise for the wonderous hand of God when it was reported
that “[the natives] are neere all dead of the small Poxe, so as the Lord hathe cleared our
title to what we possess.”

Even a cursory examination of the records of the Antinomian crisis and the
exchanges between John Cotton and Roger Williams reveals that the Puritan endeavor
would have little time and energy for the conversion of the Indians to Christianity
because the Puritans were entirely too preoccupied with the equally difficult task of
converting each other. Besides the obvious language difficulties in communicating
anything beyond the most simple wants, the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the native
Americans was another factor in making attempts at conversion to Christianity well-near

4 John White, “The Planter’s Plea or the grounds of plantations examined and usuall
objections answered,” in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, LXII
5 See, for instance, Roy Harvey Pearce, “The ‘Ruines of Mankind’: The Indian and the
impossible. Furthermore, the mobility inherent in the native way of life added a further ingredient in the lack of trust between the two cultures: Who in England shifted about from place to place with no permanent home except the idle poor? The entire question of conversion became bogged down with the devil in the details.

So, given the impossibility of the task, and given that the sheer necessity of day-to-day living forced a different set of priorities, Indian affairs were put on a back burner for the first few years of settlement in the New World. To be sure, as Steven Katz points out, the 1622 Indian uprising in Virginia was never far from English minds, and numerous instances of false alarms and rumors of Indian “conspiracies” led to what Howard Mumford Jones called a “free-floating anxiety” concerning the native population all along the colonial frontier. Nonetheless, the initial availability of land and lack of resistance on the part of the local Algonquians meant that the Puritans would at first be more concerned with the devil within their enterprise than with the devil without it.

The devil, of course, came in many forms and many guises. For instance, in 1631 there appeared the case of one Sir Christopher Gardiner, a “knight of the golden melice,” who was sent to appear before the Boston magistrates under the accusation of having two wives in England even though “he came to these parts ... [with] a comely young woman whom he called his cousin; but it was suspected she, after the Italian

---

8 The same problem had been noted in Canada. “[The Indians’] wandering habit nullified all attempts at permanent instruction to the youth ...” Jesuit Relations, Vol. 1, p. 18.
manner, was [actually] his concubine.”  

13 Having thus attracted the notice of the Boston authorities, Sir Christopher took to his heels and “got among the Indians of these parts.” Probably these were the Wampanoags near Plymouth, who captured the errant knight and sent word to Governor Bradford and “asked if they might kill him.”  

14 Dissuaded from this option, the Indians returned the hapless knight to Plymouth, although they “did but a little whip him with sticks.”  

15 To add to Christopher’s misfortune, the Indians returned Christopher along with “a little notebook that by accident had slipped out of his pocket or some private place, in which was a memorial what day he was reconciled to the Pope and Church of Rome . . .”  

16 A Catholic spy! The good knight was promptly put on the next ship bound for England and obscurity, although his cousin remained in the New World and would soon marry and settle down in Maine.  

While Sir Christopher seems to have departed from the Puritan fold with little fan fare, the same cannot be said of one Roger Williams, “a godly minister,” who arrived aboard the Lyon in February of that same year, 1631. Williams, “a man godly and zealous,” in William Bradford’s opinion, and “having many precious parts but very unsettled in judgment,” was to play a crucial role in the history of New England, and a considerable role in the story of the war with the Pequots, a role which is generally under-rated by most hisorians of the conflict.  

Probably born in 1603, Williams had already acquired a considerable reputation by the time he arrived in the New World. In his own words--and it should be noted that

14 Ibid.  
15 Ibid., p. 248.  
16 Ibid.  
17 Ibid., p. 249.  
19 Of Plymouth Plantation, p. 257.
when Roger Williams’ wrote, his favorite topic was often Roger Williams—almost as soon as his feet touched New England soil he was “unanimously chosen teacher at Boston,” but he “conscientiously refused and withdrew to Plymouth, because I durst not officiate to an unseparated people, as, upon examination and conference, I found them to be.”

Williams’ remark is a bit self-serving. One of the cornerstones of the Massachusetts Puritans was the principle of Nonseparation, and Williams should have been well aware of that fact. It is almost as though he had attended a Midnight Mass sung in High Latin and “upon examination and conference,” found that most of the people in attendance were Catholic.

Although geographical proximity required cooperation of sorts between the Puritans and the Pilgrims at Plymouth there was little love lost between the two groups, for the Pilgrims had, indeed, taken the awful step of becoming “Separatists.” In England, they had been, in Perry Miller’s words, “naturally regarded with horror by the authorities, but with even more loathing by the Puritans, because they justified the authorities’ charge that Puritanism led to sedition.” Living in Plymouth, they now “were trying to live down their past by behaving in as orthodox a fashion as their meager resources allowed.”

Orthodox or not, at least the Pilgrims did not make the mistake of offering Williams any sort of official ministerial position, although he did spend some of his time at Plymouth “prophecying,” or informally teaching, which, due to a lack of books, was a

---

21 See Miller, p. 24 & 25.
22 Ibid., p. 24.
23 Miller, p. 23.
popular pastime among the Saints. But this endeavor was not much of a paying proposition, and Williams was forced to spend much of his time laboring “day and night, at home and abroad, on the Land and water, at the How [hoe], and the Oare, for bread.”

Within a short time, Bradford noted that Williams “began to fall into some strange opinions, and from opinion to practice, which caused some controversy between the church and him. And in the end some discontent on his part, by occasion whereof he left them something abruptly.”

Nonetheless, after a brief sojourn among the Pilgrims in Plymouth, Williams was then called to the church at Salem in such short order that no one had even bothered to check his references in Boston, much to the “marvel” of John Winthrop; Bradford, who by this time knew Williams a bit better, noted that he returned to the church at Salem, “with some caution to them concerning him and what care they ought to have of him,” wrote Bradford, who hoped that “he belongs to the Lord” and that he was “to be pitied and prayed for.”

Although his stay in Plymouth was brief, and, on the surface of things, largely uneventful, two things of critical importance in the story of the Pequot War occurred in Williams’ life at this time. The first was that he struck up what was to become a lifelong friendship with Massoit of the Wampanoag tribe, and through this friendship Williams later became associated with the Wampanoag allies, the Narragansetts. The second important event, intertwined with the first, was that at this time Roger Williams

---

25 Willison, Saints and Strangers, p. 375.
28 Ibid.
29 Willison, p. 375.
began to display his remarkable talent in learning the Algonquian language, for God had been please, he said, “to give me a painful patient spirit, to lodge with them in their filthy smoky holes, and (even while I lived at Plymouth and Salem) to gain their tongue.” And gain their tongue he did, for Williams’ military intelligence and correspondence during the Pequot War played an important part in the English victory. But, be that as it may, Williams’ return to Salem also inadvertently helped to set the stage for the war itself, for upon his return he began to strike blows at the core of Puritan society.

Having begun his career in the New World by making a somewhat dubious association between himself and the Pilgrims, Williams at Salem promptly set about alienating Puritan leaders by espousing “his opinion, that the magistrate might not punish the breach of the Sabbath, nor any other offence, as it was a breach of the first table.” A “breach of the first table” was a transgression of the first four Commandments. This earned him the eternal enmity of one John Cotton, who had accepted the position that Williams had earlier declined at Boston, and, no doubt after a certain amount of “examination and conference,” Williams was likely informed that the ilk who were likely to be more disposed to his opinions resided a bit further to the south, at Plymouth, with the hint that he might consider a return trip at his convenience.

One of his next acts as teacher at Salem was to write a “treatise” to John Winthrop, as well as to the “governor and council of Plymouth, wherein, among other things, he disputes their right to the lands they possessed here, and concluded that, claiming by the king’s grant, they could have no title, nor otherwise, except they compounded with the nativies.” Modern historians have seized upon this “disputation”

---

32 Ibid.
33 Miller, p. 27.
and made Williams out to be a great crusader for the rights of native Americans, which is something that he never intended to be. In point of fact, the Massachusetts Bay Company had been quite mindful of Indian claims to the soil, advising then Governor Endicott that, “if any of the salvages pretend right of inheritance to all or any part of the lands granted ... in our patent, wee pray you endeavor to purchase their tytle, that we may avoid the least scrupple of intrusion.” There is no evidence that the Puritans had acted in any way contrary to this suggestion, and “Mr. Endecott being absent,” Winthrop “wishing him to deal with Mr. Williams,” took it upon himself to “confute the said errors.” Williams “returned a very modest and discreet answer,” not only to Winthrop but to the Governor of Plymouth “and the rest of the council, very submissively, professing his intent to have been only to have written for the private satisfaction of the governor, etc ... without any purpose to have stirred any further in it ...” One rather gets the impression that Williams had been doing nothing more than shooting off his mouth, for “At the next court he appeared penitently, and gave satisfaction of his intention and loyalty. So it was left, and nothing done with it.” Nonetheless, the letter was procured at the following meeting of the council and “weighed” by Mr. Cotton and Mr. Wilson, who found that the letter contained “implicative phrases, [which] might well admit of doubtful interpretation.” Still, matters were “not to be so evil as at first they seemed,” and upon Williams’ “retraction, etc., or taking an oath of allegiance to the king, etc., it should be passed over.”

One rather gets the impression that Williams returned to Salem with his tail between his legs and bided his time, waiting for things to cool down somewhat, before he

35 Massachusetts Bay Company to John Endicott (17 April 1631), Massachusetts Colonial Records, I, p. 394.
37 Ibid., p. 119.
would come forth with another of his "strange opinions." A little more than a year later, in April, 1635, the governor, now John Haynes, "and his assistants sent for Mr. Williams." The occasion was "that he had taught publicly, that a magistrate ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man, for that we thereby have communion with a wicked man in the worship of God, and cause him to take the name of God in vain ... he was very clearly refuted,"38 and apparently returned home with nothing further said until the following July when "At the general court, Mr. Williams of Salem was summoned, and did appear,"39 this time on a series of charges ranging from Williams' disavowal of the magistrates authority to punish breaches of the first table to his opinion that "a man ought not to give thanks after the sacrament nor after meat, etc." These opinions were "adjudged by all, magistrates and ministers ... to be erroneous, and very dangerous ... [and] a great contempt of authority." The magistrates had been tolerant with Williams, but now their patience was running a bit thin. He was to "consider these things till the next general court, and then either to give satisfaction to the court, or else to expect the sentence."40 The sentence came in October, "to depart out of our jurisdiction within six weeks, all the ministers, save one, approving the sentence."41 With winter approaching, the sentence was later delayed until spring, along with an injunction, essentially, to keep his mouth shut in the meantime.

This was something that Williams either could not or would not do. In January he was found to have entertained "company in his house, and to preach to them, even of such points as he had been censured for."42 The magistrates then determined to take him

40 *Ibid*.
into custody, and send him back to England on the next departing vessel, but, having been forewarned by Winthrop, he fled into the wilderness, leaving behind in Salem many who “did embrace his opinions, and separated from the churches, . . . some of their members, going into England.”

“All [of Williams’] trouble at Salem,” wrote Perry Miller, “were consequences of his effort to impose Separatism on Massachusetts or, failing that, to force Salem to separate from the rest of Massachusetts.” The larger point that Miller might have made is that from a cursory reading of early American history one easily gets the impression that the Puritan endeavor in the New World was somewhat monolithic in nature; nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, an examination of the early years of the Puritan settlements reveals that what may well have begun as a communal endeavor became in short order a teeming, boiling caldron of opinions and attitudes within the Puritan ranks. Most of these “strange opinions” revolved around the designs of the devil; and if the Puritans’ war with the devil within their own ranks was unsettled and uncertain, their war with the devil without could not help but be of a like kind. The shape of the devil without would now begin to take form, and that form would soon resemble that of a native Pequot.

---

44 Miller, p. 25.
CHAPTER SIX
“Some Should Swarm Out”

The causes of war are never easily unraveled because, inevitably, both sides to a conflict have a story to tell, and in the case of the clash between the Puritans and the Pequots, which came to a head in 1637, the reasons for war are both complex and legion. Nonetheless, two factors stand out as being particularly important: First, among the Indians themselves, the Pequots had several tribes which were subservient to them, but they had many enemies, and no allies, and were therefore in a politically and militarily isolated position; and, second, the Great Migration itself had sent more Englishmen pouring into the New England area than anyone could have possibly foreseen, which put an unanticipated stress on all of Puritan society, and especially on its western frontier.

Beginning in 1629 until the outbreak of the English Civil War in 1642, some twenty thousand English settlers came to New England, primarily to the Bay Colony.1 In the midst of this flood of people a new world had to be built, quite literally from scratch. There were trees to be cleared, houses to be built, crops to be planted, a nearly endless round of physical activity that sapped the body and wearied the soul, all the while accompanied by hungry times. By the end of the Pequot conflict in 1638, the Antinomian controversy had already come and was in the process of going, Roger

Williams had been banished from the Puritan ranks, and Thomas Hooker, in a milder disagreement with John Winthrop, was in the process of establishing what would become the colony of Connecticut. All of this had happened at a lightening pace, and still new arrivals kept pouring in from the motherland, and with them came still more clearing, building, and planting. By 1637 one estimate puts the English population of Massachusetts at nearly 8,000, while at the same time a second epidemic of smallpox had killed thousands more of the native Americans, shrinking their population even further.

In the midst of this hustle and bustle, the city on the hill began to branch out from Boston, and in this process of expansion, fear and faith went hand in hand. Those settling Salem transported “great ordnance . . . to keep out a potent adversary,” wrote Francis Higginson, despite the fact that “our greatest comfort and means of defence above all others is that we have here the true religion and holy ordinances of Almighty God . . .” And, he asked rhetorically, “if God be with us, who can be against us?” Given that Satan can adopt many guises, Higginson’s “potent adversary” in this case may or may not have been native Americans--he might have meant that the French and the Dutch were the pawns of Satan as well. However, Higginson went on to summarize in a few sparse words the essence of the Puritan view of the Indians: “We neither feare nor trust them.” Higginson’s lack of fear was actually a bit of empty bravado which rested on the Puritan monopoly of firearms, and the “holy ordinances of Almighty God” were

---

supplemented by the assurance that "fourtie of our musketeeres will drive five hundred of them out of the Field."  

Puritan firepower and the ordinances of God notwithstanding, a bit of a panic was caused in the spring of 1631 when a settler outside of Watertown fired a musket shot after dark to frighten wolves away from a lost calf. A false alarm quickly spread from there to neighboring Roxbury where they "beat up their drum, armed themselves, and sent in post" to Boston, where the colonists made hasty preparations for defense. Although the cause of the alarm was quickly discovered, the general unease of the English settlers was not easily relieved. The next session of the General Court provided for a permanent guard to be placed between Roxbury and Boston, and an order was made that "no man should discharge a piece after sunset, except by occasion of alarm." The occasion was not long in coming. A bare two days later, a shot was raised in anticipation of a Mohawk raid that did not materialize.

That winter, one Henry Wey of Dorchester found that fear of the Indians was not entirely unfounded when he and a small group of men with him were killed on a trading expedition in Indian country. John Winthrop's remarks about the incident clearly define the Puritan attitude toward relationships with the Indians in the early 1630's: "Thus oftimes he that is greedy of gain troubles his own house; and, instead of acquiring a little plef of this world, loses his own life . . ." In other words, the blame for Henry Wey's

---

8 Winthrop, *Journal*, I, p. 60.
death was placed squarely on Henry Wey, almost as if no one else--least of all the
Indians--had anything to do with it. The attitude is vintage 1632, and highlights the
military position of the Puritans at that time: the holy ordinances of God were much
more easily obtained than forty spare Puritans to fire a musket.

It is also interesting to note that it was in 1631 that both the Pilgrims and the
Puritans had been urged to establish a settlement in the Connecticut valley by the chiefs
of several smaller tribes who had been driven from there by the Pequots. The eager
Indians offered to help the Puritans find corn, give them a yearly stipend of beaver skins,
and said that the land “was very fruitful.”¹² Both groups of Englishmen, however, were
far too busy with other things, and initially declined the offer, although the Pilgrims,
upon some reflection, reconsidered and asked their Puritan brethren about the possibility
of setting up a trading post at Matianuck, what is now Windsor, Connecticut, in a joint
venture with Massachusetts.¹³ The Puritans, however, had “no mind to it,” and agreed
that it should be the Pilgrims who would pioneer the area of “Conightecute.”¹⁴ At least
part of the reason for the Puritans’ decision was that “the place was not fit for plantation
... there being three or four thousand warlike Indians” in the neighborhood.¹⁵ But if the
Pilgrims were to be the first Englishmen to actually settle the Connecticut Valley, this did
not stop the Puritans from being at least a little bit “greedy for gain,” for less than two
months later, they dispatched a trading vessel into Connecticut waters, under the
command of someone destined to play a significant role in the Pequot War, one John
Oldham.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 103.
¹⁵ Winthrop, Journal, I, p. 103
¹⁶ Winthrop, Ibid., p. 107 & 108.
Although the Puritans "had no mind" to settle the Connecticut valley, the Pilgrims were not a bit surprised to find out that the Dutch certainly did. In a hasty effort to protect their flank on the Hudson, the Dutch had erected—or, more accurately, "slapped together"—the House of Hope, a trading post and fort at what is now Hartford, forcing the arriving Pilgrims to sail around them on their way upstream to Matinack, where the Pilgrims, in turn, quickly set about erecting their own fortifications. No sooner had they finished their stockade when they were greeted by some seventy armed men from New Amersterdam who apprised the Pilgrim defenses and returned home.¹⁷

In November of the following year, 1633, a wave of smallpox swept through the Indian villages of New England;¹⁸ especially hard hit was the Connecticut area where John Bradford estimated that "of a 1000 above 900 and a halfe of them dyed, and many of them did rott above ground for want of buriall ..."¹⁹ while at the same time, "by the marvelous goodnes and providens of God not one of the English was so much as sicke, or in the least measure tainted with this disease."²⁰

While there is no doubt that the effects of the plague on the Indian population was severe, Bradford may have been exaggerating somewhat; at least sickness among the Indians did not prevent the killing of Captain John Stone and his crew of eight along the Connecticut River in January, 1634. Stone's death, as it turns out, was far more important to the history of New England than his life ever was, and if he were ever to have an epitaph written, it might well read, "And Here Began the Pequot War." But at the

¹⁷ Willison, Saints and Strangers, p. 20.
¹⁹ Ibid., p. 312.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 313.
time, his death was little noted, although, of course, it was destined to be long-
remembered.

"The Indians" who killed him were more than likely either the Pequots or a tribe
subservient to them, but beyond that little is certain, for there are several conflicting
accounts of the episode. Stone, a rather colorful character from Virginia, had piloted a
shipload of cattle from there to Boston and had somehow managed to make a string of
enemies in every port along the way. By the time he arrived in Boston, he had already
attempted to steal a Pilgrim vessel while in New Amsterdam,21 tried to stab governor
Winslow while in Plymouth,22 and then got roaring drunk in Boston, during which time
he "spake contemptuously of [the] magistrates, and carried it lewdly in his conversation,"
in particular calling Judge Ludlow "a just as[s]"23 and, just to top off a good one, was
found the next morning "upon the bed ... with one Barcroft's wife."24 No mention is
made of what happened to one Barcroft's wife, but Stone's part in evening earned him a
suspended fine of one hundred pounds, and he was ordered "upon pain of death to come
here no more."25 He was on his way home when he stopped off to explore the trading
prospects along the Connecticut River and met his fate, which, one would guess, was
likely thought by the general Puritan populace to be quite timely enough. Along with the
probably erroneous report that Stone had been "roasted" alive, Roger Clap added the
appropriately religious comment that "thus did God destroy him that so proudly
threatened to ruin us."26

22 Willison, Saints and Strangers, p. 327.
24 Winthrop, op. cit., p. 108.
25 Ibid.
26 "Memoirs of Roger Clap," New Views of Early Virginia History, 1606-1619, by
Alexander Brown, 1886, The Bedford Index Print, Liberty, Va., Collections of the
Dorchester Atiquarian and Historical Society.
Meanwhile small pox had removed a goodly portion of the “three or four thousand” warlike Indians who had inhabited the Connecticut valley without a shot being fired, and the Pilgrim outpost, which had defied the Dutch and escaped the plague, now faced an adversary that it could not defeat: an invasion by the Puritans themselves, who had, beginning in 1634, changed their minds about settlement in the Connecticut Valley, and begun to migrate into Pilgrim territory en masse. The effect of the sheer number of people arriving from England in the Great Migration was being felt.

In the Bay Colony, tension had developed between the desire for social cohesion and the need to expand. In March of 1633, John Winthrop, Jr., led a group of twelve men to begin a plantation at Agawam (Ipswich), but within a month the Massachusetts legislature ordered that “noe person whatsoever shall goe to plant or inhabitt att Aggawam, without leave from the Court, except those that are already gone.” The following year, Winthrop argued that land in the Massachusetts area should be equitably distributed, because “it would be very prejudicial to the commonwealth, if men should be forced to go far off for land.” But neither actions of the Court nor Winthrop’s counsel could stem the constant influx of new settlers, for, as William Hubbard later recalled, the Bay Colony soon became “overpressed with multitudes of new families, that daily resorted thither, so as . . . there was a necessity that some should swarm out.”

And swarm they did, despite efforts on the part of Massachusetts authorities. When “some of Watertown took the opportunity of seizing a brave piece of meadow, 

---

28 *Records of Massachusetts Bay*, I, 103.
aimed at by those of New-Town,"31 the inhabitants of Newtown (Cambridge), led by their minister Thomas Hooker, complained in May of 1634 of a “straitness for want of land, especially meadow,”32 and, after inspection of land in the Agawam and Merimack areas,33 finally petitioned “that they might have leave to remove to Connecticut,” at least partly because in the Bay Colony “towns were set so near each to other.”34 Furthermore, in a magnificent case of selective memory which blythely ignored any agreement with the Pilgrims, it was also noted that there was the “fruitfulness and commodiousness of Connecticut, and the danger of having it possessed by others, Dutch or English.”35

The argument to remove to Connecticut did not prevail without a struggle; an intense debate erupted over the matter in the Massachusetts Court. “They ought not to depart from us,” went one line of reasoning, because they are “knit to us in one body.”36 Coupled with the urge to remain united on purely philosophical grounds, the colony was “now weak and in danger to be assailed,”37 although exactly who the assailants might have been goes unmentioned. Further, a Puritan settlement in Connecticut would deprive Massachusetts of needed manpower, and would “also divert other friends that would come to us,”38 while exposing the settlers to “evident peril, both from the Dutch . . . and from the Indians.”39 After weeks of bitter invective, the congregation of Newtown “accepted of such enlargement as had formerly been offered them by Boston and

33 Ibid., p. 126 & 128.
34 Ibid., p. 132.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 133.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Watertown,” wrote Winthrop, “and so the fear of their removal to Connecticut was removed.”  

But the agreement was short-lived, and although the magistrates opposed “removall and spreading further into other partes,” observed John Pratt, “they afterwards [conceived] it necessarie that some should remove into other places, here and there, for more inlargement.”  

By the following summer the “flattering accounts” which John Oldham, among others, gave of Connecticut “induced a number to go there in the summer of 1635.”  

This time, there seemed to be no opposition from the Magistrates of Massachusetts; with little fan-fare, leave to move was given to Ipswich, Watertown, and Roxbury.  

The first of the Puritans to arrive were led by John Wareham, late of Dorchester, and, as an early historian put it, “the wilderness, for the first time, resounded with the praises of God. They prayed and sang psalms and hymns as they marched along; the Indians following and looking on them in silent admiration.”

If the Indians enjoyed the music, Johnathan Brewster, the leader of the Pilgrim settlement at Matianuck, most certainly did not, for Wareham’s crew established their town of Windsor virtually at his doorstep. “I shall doe what I can to withstand them,” Brewster wrote to Bradford, but “what trouble & charge I shall be further at, I know not, for they are comming dayly.”  

An early history summed up the invasion: “In August, 1635, a number of people removed and settled a town called Windsor, on Connecticut  

---

41 “John Pratt’s Answer to the Court” [November 5, 1635], Recs. of Mass Bay, I, p. 358.  
45 George F. Willison, Saints and Strangers, p. 326
River. October following, another company settled a second town . . . called Weatherfield. The next month, a fort was begun at Saybrook, entrance of that river. Thirty-first of March following, Mr. Hooker . . . removed and settled a town . . . which they named Hartford.” 46 Within some three years, the English population of Connecticut had gone from a mere handful in 1634 to an estimated three thousand in 1637. 47 In proportion, the rush to settle Connecticut rivaled any land rush in American history. Nathaniel Ward, who remained behind in Ipswich, wrote: “I am in a dreame[,] att least not awake, if it be the way of God for so many to desert this place . . .” 48

So with Puritans pouring into the Connecticut valley on the heels of a plague which had struck down many of the native Americans in that area, it is time to take a look at the situation of the Pequots themselves. The effects of the plague on them cannot be determined with any accuracy, but it is likely that they escaped the worst of it because the heart of Pequot territory was located east of the mouth of the Connecticut River, while the area most directly affected by the plague was centered farther upstream. 49

Psychologically, however, the plague might well have had an influence on the Pequots, because its outbreak coincided with a time when they were at war with both the Dutch to the west of them, and with their bitter rivals, the Narragansetts, to the east.

The war was apparently not going well for them, for in November of 1634, nearly a year after the death of Captain Stone, they twice sent representatives to ensure peaceful relations with the Puritans. The first “Embassy” was sent away without comment; the

48 Nathaniel Ward to John Winthrop, Jr., December 24, 1635, Winthrop Papers, III 216-217.
second, however, was given the Puritan terms for peace which included two main points. The first was that “they should deliver us those.... who killed Captain Stone.” There is no good explanation as to why the Puritans should be so suddenly concerned about finding the murderers of someone who had so recently been driven from the Bay Colony under penalty of death, except perhaps that he was, after all, an Englishman. To this, the Pequots replied that all who had been involved in Stone’s death had died from the pox, except two, and, in any case, Stone had been killed because he had kidnapped two Pequots to serve as guides into their territory. Nonetheless, they said that they would refer the matter to higher authorities when they returned home. The second of the Puritan conditions was that the Pequots should “surrender up to us their right in Conectecott.” To this the Pequots readily agreed, even offering to assist the English in establishing a settlement there. The Pequots then asked a favor of the Puritans: would they make peace overtures to the Narragansetts on their behalf? Pequot culture would not permit them to do any such thing themselves, but they left “a great present of wampompeag and beaver and otter” for the Puritans to do this for them.

A few days later a formal treaty was signed, in which the Pequots agreed to deliver the two men who were guilty of Stone’s death; to “yield up Connecticut;” to give to the Puritans “four hundred fathom of wamponpeage, and forty beaver, and thirty otter skins;” (this was, apparently, an amount greater than the “great gift of wamponeage” that

51 Winthrop noted that “This was related with such confidence and gravity, as, having no means to contradict it, we inclined to believe it.” Winthrop, Journal, I, p. 139.
52 Ibid.
53 John Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., Dec. 12, 1634, Ibid.
54 Ibid., I, p. 139 & 140.
55 John Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., Dec. 12, 1634, Winthrop Papers, Vol III, p. 177.
the Puritans had already received), and that the Puritans should “presently send a pinnace with cloth to trade with them.”  

By coincidence, the Puritans had the opportunity to notify the Narragansetts of the Pequot’s wish for peace the very next day when news came that “two or three hundred” of them were reported in the area, on a mission to kill the Pequot ambassadors. The Puritans quickly mustered what men they could find and went to meet them, only to find, not a war party of two or three hundred, but only “two of their sachems, and about twenty more, who had been on hunting thereabouts.”  

The Narragansetts were told that if they “did make peace with the Pekods” the Puritans would “give them part of that wampompeage” from the Pequots. Thus, an agreement signifying peace between the Narragansetts and the Pequots was quickly signed by a group of Narragansetts who had been out hunting and with no Pequots present to witness the event.

Curiously enough, the treaty held, and for nearly two years an uneasy peace settled in on the New England area, although commerce between the Bay Colony and the Pequots did not materialize; when John Oldham took his trading ship into Pequot territory the next spring, in the words of John Winthrop, he found them “a very false people” and disinclined to amicable trade.

Nonetheless, the first Puritan settlers in the Connecticut valley “were kindly received by the aborigines,” and, although there were many hardships for the Connecticut settlers that first year, they were due primarily to small crops, “for they had cleared but very little of the ground for tillage.”  

---

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
60 Harris, “Chronological and Topographical Account of Dorchester,” p. 159.
61 Ibid., p. 154.
primary conflict on the frontier was the squabble between Boston and Plymouth, re-opened in February of 1636 when Governor Winslow began a bitter complaint against the expanding colony of Dorchester.62

If one were to assess the New England frontier in the spring of 1636, one of the last things that one would expect would be a major conflict of any kind. The most obvious potential source of trouble would be the Puritan expansion into Connecticut, but seemingly any obstruction to that expansion came more from the Pilgrims than from the local Indians. And, in order to reach Connecticut, Puritan settlers had been crossing both Pequot and Narragansett territory for nearly two full years with no recorded incident, none whatsoever.

Of course, there had been a few stray Puritans killed by “the Indians,” but the Pequots were not specifically responsible for any more than their fair share of such crimes, and, considering the opportunities they had for ambushing the “swarm” heading for Connecticut, one would not suspect any particular animosity in regards to them at all.

Furthermore, in the spring of 1636, the Puritans were well on their way to solving their largest internal problem, namely the “Godly and zealous” Roger Williams, who was currently residing among the Narragansetts. For a brief moment, if the City on the Hill ever came close to being a model for English society, it never came closer than the spring of 1636.

---

CHAPTER SEVEN
The “Twelve-Penny Chronicle”

“Though peace between the Bay Colony and the Pequots lasted until the fall of 1636,” wrote Alden Vaughan, “there was little harmony.”¹ Tension mounted between Indians and whites in the Connecticut valley with no apparent cause. The Puritan attitude toward the Pequots changed, and changed drastically, in a relatively short period of time. Why? Historians have struggled with—or avoided--explanations of this change from the first histories of the Pequot War to the present day.

While the Puritan involvement in the causes of the war with the Pequots cannot be so lightly dismissed as Roger Clap’s off-hand phrase that “God permitted Satan to stir up the Pequot[s],”² one cannot help but be intrigued by Johnathan Brewster’s letter to John Winthrop, Jr., dated June 18, 1636, in which he says, “I understand ... that the Pequents have some mistrust, that the English will shortly come against them, (which I take is by indiscreet speaches of some of your people here to the Natives) and therefore out of desperate madnesse doe threaten shortly to sett both upon Indians, and English, [j]oyntly.”³ Brewster, it will be recalled, was the lonely Pilgrim in charge of a trading

¹ Vaughan, New England Frontier, p. 126.
² Clap, “Captain Roger Clap’s Memoirs,” in Alexander Young, ed. Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, from 1623 to 1636, Boston, 1846, p. 344.
³ Johnathan Brewster to John Winthrop, Jr., (18 June, 1636), Winthrop Papers, III, p. 170.
house which had become the Puritan settlement of Windsor; at the time, John Winthrop, Jr., was at Fort Saybrook, at the mouth of the Connecticut River. No one will ever know what “indiscreet speaches” were passed around by the Puritans, but elsewhere in the letter Brewster alludes to an attempt by the Pequots to attack a Pilgrim bark near Pequot territory, and he has obtained further information about the death of Captain Stone: five of those involved in his murder were alive, and living in Pequot territory. In a second letter written that same day, Brewster reports that the Pequots “intend an e[n]vasion both of English and natives in this River.” He urges that all boats on the Connecticut be armed, and complains, with a language that would make Yogi Berra proud, that “many people gooes over land unarmed to the harting of the enemie, As thoughe we were soe stronge our selves, or the enimy soe weake as that is is Cowardize to feare any thing, whenas in wisdome all thinges considered neither of both is true.” Clearly, a conflict of some sort was anticipated by both sides.

Brewster’s warnings are completely ignored by Alden Vaughan, who instead says that New England was propelled into armed conflict by the attempt “to curb the militant Pequot tribe” which had been guilty of “the murder of ten or more Englishmen between 1634 and 1636.” Vaughan is clearly on thin ice here; he would be more accurate to say that the Pequots were probably guilty of the murder of Captain Stone and his crew in 1634. No other English deaths can be blamed on the Pequots. Vaughan goes on to say, on the next page, that “To a limited degree . . . [Endicott’s] punitive expedition served as the casus belli. Endicott’s expedition to Block Island will be dealt with later on in this chapter. Jennings, on the other hand, says “How much of [Brewster’s] report was based

---

4 Johnathan Brewster to John Winthrop, Jr., (18 June, 1636), Winthrop Papers, III, p. 171 & 172.
5 Vaughan, New England Frontier, p. 135.
on fact and how much originated in Uncas’s [the Mohegan sachem’s] malicious imagination must be a matter of conjecture.”

All conjecture aside, some two weeks later, Henry Vane, then governor of the Bay Colony, wrote to the “Mr. Hon. Winthrop the Yonger, Gov[ernou]r of Connectticut”--a flattering term, in as much as Connecticut had not yet been organized as an independent colony--in which he asks John, Jr., to convey to the Pequots a clear “expression of our minds to them.” He is to return to the Pequots the original sum of wampum which they had given to seal the treaty of 1634, and he is also to acquaint two visitors, a Mr. Fenwick and a Mr. Peters, with the situation at Fort Saybrook, then under construction at the mouth of the Connecticut River under the general supervision of one Lion Gardiner. A few days later, the full text of the instructions for the “Governor of Connectticut” arrived, in which he was given “full power, authority, and commission to treat and converse with the sayd Pequots . . .” and with that authority he was to “returne backe their present . . . and to acquaint them with all, that we hold ourselves free from any peace or league with them as a people guilty of English blood.” The “English blood” that Vane refers to is that of the drunken Captain Stone, who had been ordered “upon pain of death” to steer clear of the Bay Colony, and now, more than two full years after the event, his death was being made an issue. True, by terms of the 1634 treaty brokered by the Puritans, the Pequots had agreed to turn Stone’s murderers over to the Puritans, but over the course of time the matter had been neglected by both sides; the Pequots, presumably because they actually were responsible for Stone’s death, and the Puritans, presumably because they were far too busy with more important matters. Quite possibly because there was a sort

---

7 Sir Henry Vane to John Winthrop, Jr. (1 July, 1636) in *Winthrop Papers* III, p. 282.
8 Lion Gardiner, “History of the Pequot War,” p. 19.
of lull in Puritan affairs in early 1636, the matter was revived. Another possible reason for the resurrection of Puritan interest in the Stone affair was the mercurial career of the young Governor Vane, who perhaps wanted to make a mark for himself in military matters. Rumors had also reached the English that during the winter of 1635-1636 the Pequots were attempting to form an alliance with the Narragansetts against the English because the English had begun “to overspread their country, and would deprive them thereof in time.”\textsuperscript{9} The rumors were quite possibly substantive, and, in any case, were believed by the English to be true; and the notion that the Puritans began an action against the Pequots as a pre-emptive strike provides the best justification for their involvement in the Pequot War. But it was the death of Stone which was trumpeted as the English cause, not the rumor of a Pequot-Narragansett alliance. Also largely unspoken was a quiet thirst for land, perhaps not so much slacked by the invasion of Connecticut as whetted; that the Pequots held good farmland was surely noted by the migrating Puritans, as we shall soon see.

At any rate, the Puritans began to put themselves on a war footing, and the next part of the tale is told most eloquently by the commander of Fort Saybrook--it might be more accurate to say “the commander of the construction site which would become Fort Saybrook”--Lion Gardiner. Gardiner had been hired by Lords Say and Brook to construct their fort and he was a military man, not a Puritan. Likely, he was quite lonely in his new environment, and his comments provide a refreshing change of pace from the religious rhetoric of those around him.

He begins by noting how well the construction at the fort is going, but he ends his story with war clouds in the air:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
... we [were] expecting, according to promise, that there would have come from England to us 300 able men, whereof 200 would attend fortification, 50 to till the ground, and 50 to build houses. But our great expectation at the River’s mouth, came only to two men, viz. Mr. Fenwick, and his man, who came with Mr. Hugh Peters, and Mr. Oldham and Thomas Stanton, bringing with them some Otter-skin coats, and Beaver, and the seins of wampus, which the Pequits had sent for a present, because the English had required those Pequits that had killed a virginean, one Capt. Stone, with his Bark’s crew, in Conectecott River, for they said they would have their lives and not their present.

... if they will now make war for a virginian and expose us to the Indians, whose mercies a.e cruelties, they, I say, love the Virgineans better than us; for, have they stayed [from war] these four or five years, and will they begin now, we being so few in the River, and have scarce holes to put our heads in? ... these entreated me to go with Mr. Humfry and Mr. Peters to view the country, to see how fit it was for fortification. And I told them that Nature had done more than half the work already, and I thought no foreign potent enemy would do them any hurt, but one that was near. They asked who that was, and I said it was Capt. Hunger that threatened them most, for (said I) War is like a three-footed stool, want one foot and down comes all; and these three feet are men, victuals, and munition, therefore seeing in peace you are like to be famished, what will or can be done if war? therefore, I think, said I, it will be best only to fight against Capt. Hunger, and let fortification alone awhile.

... Mr. Winthrop, Mr. Fenwick, and Mr. Peters promised me that they would do their utmost endeavour to desist from war a year or two,* till we could be better provided for it; and then the Pequit Sachem was sent for, and the present returned, but full sore against my will.11

The clear impression that one receives from Lion Gardiner’s evidence is that in the summer of 1636 the Bay Colony was planning a military operation against the Pequots. But if so, it was not be a forerunner of Pearl Harbor, because John Winthrop,

* Italics are mine, not in the original.
11 Lion Gardiner, A History of the Pequot War, p. 9-11.
Jr., by returning the Pequot wampum, would serve them notice of the Puritan intentions, and, in any case, Brewster’s letter implies that word of the Puritan plans had already gotten around. The ostensible reason for the Puritan hostility, as Gardiner relates the story, is the death of an “outlaw” Virginian, but this reason simply does not hold water, for, in late June of 1636, one William Hammond was “Goeing with all that his father and he could make and borrowe to trade in Virginia for Corne” when his “vessell was caste away on Longe Iland and 7 persons drowned: Hammond escaped on shore but was killed by the Indians.” Hammond was no renegade Virginian; he was one of the Puritans’ own, and Winthrop’s call for justice in Hammond’s case is conspicuous by its absence. His epitaph was not to be “Here began a war with the Indians,” but, rather the droll comment that with his death “... the old mans estate is wholly overthrowne. It hath been observed that the Lord hath allways crossed us in our trade with Virginia.”12 Hammond’s death seems to have provoked no more emotional reaction in John Winthrop than that of a passing shower, while Captain Stone and his crew were transformed into “indeared friends” whose “cruell murthers” were committed by “a barbarous and bloudy people called Peaquods.”13 Clearly, for some reason, Winthrop had it in for the Pequots.

At any rate, Gardiner’s account omits a detail which would eventually seal the Pequot’s fate, for some three weeks after Hammond’s death, and before John Winthrop, Jr., could leave on his diplomatic mission, the body of John Oldham—the same Oldham that Gardiner referred to—was found in his boat, floating off the shores of Block Island. The boat was still occupied by several Indians when John Gallop, en route to Long Island, happened upon the scene; a brief battle ensued which left Gallop in possession of

two prisoners and Oldham’s boat. One of the prisoners indicated that the attack was made with the assent of the Narragansett sachems in retaliation for Oldham’s attempt to trade with the Pequots in the previous year. Gardiner mentions some time later that he had seen a keepsake belonging to Oldham among the Naragannsetts. Additional evidence indicating Narragansett involvement in the murder is circumstantial; the natives of Block Island were subservient to the Narragansetts, and the island itself, situated north east of Long Island, was directly off shore of lands held by the Narragansetts proper, and was some fifteen miles from Pequot territory. It would not have been impossible for the Pequots to make such a journey, but it would have been difficult for them to do so.

To all intents and appearances, Roger Clap had gotten it wrong; if Satan had stirred up anyone, it would seem to have been the Narragansetts, not the Pequots. A hasty message was sent to Roger Williams to “look to himself, if we should have occasion to make war upon the Naragansetts,” as well as a message concerning the Puritans’ suspicions to Canonicus and Miantanomo, the leaders of the Narragansett tribe.

Acting promptly to smooth things over with the Puritans, the Narragansetts, acting via one of their subserivient tribes, the Niantics, within days returned the bulk of Oldham’s possessions and his two small boys who had accompanied him on his expedition. This had the desired effect on the Puritans, who decided that the Narragansett leaders were to be “held . . . innocent; but that six other under-sachems were guilty . . .” of the death of John Oldham, indicating clearly that Puritan authorities

knew Oldham’s death was not the work of the Pequots. Furthermore, the speed with which the Narragansetts acted suggests that, if they were indeed innocent of the crime itself, they quite likely had a great deal of influence over those who actually did commit the murder.

Nonetheless, a week later, Edward Gibbons and John Higginson, along with Cutshamekin, a translator from the Massachusetts tribe, were sent to Narragansett country ostensibly only to make further inquiries into the death of Oldham, but also to possibly forstall a rumored alliance, this time between the Niantics and Pequots. There they met with Canonicus an important sachem of the Narragansett tribe, who held “great command over his men,” and with “marvelous wisdom in his answers” cleared “himself and his neighbors of the murder.” Not only that, but he offered “assistance for revenge of it.”

Thus was formed an alliance of sorts between the Puritans and the Narragansetts which would last until the termination of the Pequot War. William Bradford offers a slightly different interpretation, saying that the Narragansetts saw “an opportunity ... by the help of the English” to get “revenge” against the Pequots, and that “revenge was so sweet unto them” that it prevailed against all other considerations.

The Puritans then quickly launched an expedition of reprisal against both the natives of Block Island and the Pequots which can only be characterized as extreme in nature. The Block Islanders would be the first to receive the brunt of the Puritan’s fury.

---

19 Johnson’s Wonder-Working Providence, p. 162. It is worth noting that the author of this work is not the most reliable source in the world and at times refers to the “Narrow-ganzet” and “Niantick” Indians almost interchangeably; see, for instance, p. 148. It is possible to assume, as did Alden Vaughan, that the rumored alliance was between the Pequots and the Narragansetts, not the Niantics. See Vaughan, p. 127.

20 Ibid., p. 186.

On August 24, 1636, about a month after Oldham’s death, the Bay Colony acted unilaterally, and set some ninety volunteers under the command of John Endicott with instructions that called for merciless measures. Endicott was commissioned to put to death the men of Block Island, sparing only the women and children, and take possession of the island. From there he was to proceed to Pequot territory and “demand the murderers of Capt. Stone and other English” as well as “one thousand fathom of wampom for damages ... and some of their children as hostages, which, if they should refuse, they were to obtain it by force.”

Endicott vigorously complied with his instructions. Upon his arrival at Block Island, his troops met little resistance from the natives, who quickly fled into the swamps, and for the next two days he set about burning wigwams, destroying corn fields, and smashing canoes. Seeing only that “some were wounded, and carried away by their fellows,” the Puritans were not sure that any of the natives had actually been killed; perhaps dissatisfied with the paucity of Indian casualties, the English then “destroyed some of their dogs instead of men.”

The devastation at Block Island complete, the Endicott expedition then set sail for Pequot territory, via Fort Saybrook, where they were met by Lion Gardener, who was far from pleased with their work. Knowing that Endicott would be soon leaving for the safer confines of Boston, and that the Connecticut settlers would be the ones who would receive the brunt of the Indian reprisals, he told Endicott, “You come hither to raise these wasps about my ears, and then you will take wing and flee away.” Nonetheless,

---

23 *Ibid*, p. 188.
Endicott was not to be dissuaded, and Gardiner, his own cornfields in jeopardy in the event of hostilities, dispatched some of his own men to accompany the expedition with orders to gather Pequot corn if negotiations should fail.26

When Endicott’s fleet arrived in Pequot Harbor some four days later, it was more than evident to the natives that they had not come to deliver the mail. They were met with “doleful and woful cries,”27 for it was obvious that this was no friendly visit, and that the earlier rumors of a Puritan attack were about to be proven true. The Pequots responded to the incursion with delaying tactics; a spokesman arrived to tell the Puritans that the Pequot chiefs were away on Long Island, and then offered a new version of the death of Stone that absolved the Pequots of any blame, while insisting that they were still trying to discover the real culprits.28 The parley to this point had lasted some four hours, while the numbers of the Pequot men gathering to watch the talks had quietly and gradually increased to some three hundred, when a final Pequot suggestion that both sides lay down their arms brought things to a breaking point. Interpreting this as a ruse for an ambush, “We rather chose to beat up the drum and bid them battle,” recorded Captain Underhill.29

As the English began to brandish their weapons, the Pequots fled with the English in pursuit, and, following a brief exchange, the pattern of Block Island was repeated except, Winthrop noted, perhaps a bit sadly, that “their corn being standing, [Endicott’s men] could not spoil it.”30 The English spent another two days in the destruction of the Pequot camp while the Indians, in deference to English firepower, kept a respectful

26 Gardiner, p. 12
28 Ibid., p. 10.
29 Ibid.
distance. Although Winthrop would later write that Endicott’s mission was for the sole purpose of drawing the Pequots “to parley, and so to some quiet end,”31 it was at this time that one of Endicott’s men, Captain Israel Stoughton, wrote to the governor of Massachusetts and gave a very different set of reasons for the Puritan endeavor: “It hath pleased God further to crowne our poore endeavours with success . . . Much is done, but not all . . . It is beyond my abilities for the present to resolve you which is best in all things, or particularly about planting Pecot. For tho’ the place be subsistable, and an excellent harbor, and abundance of course, and the same ground ready for English grayne forthwith, which is a great help to planters, yet the providence of God guided us to so excellent a country at Quaillipioak [New Haven] river and so all along the coast as we travelled, as I am confident we have not the like in English possession as yet, and probable ‘tis the Dutch will seaze it if the English do not. It is conceived generally far more worthy than Pequid notwithstanding the former considerations. It is too good for any but friends . . . .”32

Stoughton’s admission of Puritan motives is brutally honest; and by the time Winthrop was recording the return of Endicott’s men with the note that “it was a marvellous providence of God, that not a hair fell from the head of any of them,”33 the wasps’ nest that Gardiner had feared was already swarming over the Connecticut Valley. Remaining behind to gather Pequot corn, the Saybrook contingent was attacked within the hour of Endicott’s departure, and within a matter of days Fort Saybrook itself was

under seige, as well as virtually the entire Connecticut Valley. Shortly thereafter, at a court “holden at Dorchester” it was ordered “that every town should keep a watch and be well supplied with ammunition . . . they also were required to take care that the inhabitants were well furnished with arms and ammunition, and kept in a constant state of defence.”

Nor did the Puritans’ actions go unnoticed among the Pilgrims. In short order a letter of criticism was dispatched to the Bay Colony by the governor of Plymouth. The actual text of the letter has been lost, but John Winthrop refers to it in his journal, in what is quite likely watered-down terms. In brief, the governor of Plymouth accused the Puritans of having “occasioned a war, etc., by provoking the Pequods, and no more, and about the peace with the Narragansetts, etc.” Winthrop then goes on to sketch out the Puritan justification for Endicott’s expedition, with a battery of reasons that one might expect from a child caught with a suspicious hand in the cookie jar. He begins: this “was as much . . . as could be expected, considering they fled from us.” Generally speaking, those armed with bows and arrows do tend to flee from those armed with muskets. “We went not to make war upon them,” he continues, “but to do justice . . . .” These high-sounding words are promptly emptied of meaning a bare two sentences later when Winthrop writes that the Pequots “had no cause to glory over us, when they saw that they could not save themselves nor their houses and corn from so few of ours.” Winthrop here bears out the ancient sophist Thrasymachus, who once remarked that justice is the advantage of the stronger. Finally, Winthrop concludes that it “was very likely they would have taken notice of our advantage against them, and would have

---

... sought peace, if God had not deprived them of common reason.”36 In the last analysis, then, all of this was God’s fault for depriving the Pequots of “common reason.”

Be that as it may, a game of cat-and-mouse emerged in Connecticut, with the settlers primarily playing the role of the mouse, a game which lasted through the winter, and into the following spring. Thus, a year which began in the Connecticut Valley with little more than harsh words between the Pilgrims and the Puritans ended with the English settlers “filled and surrounded with numerous savages” such that they “conceived themselves in danger when they lay down and when they rose, when they went out and when they came in.”37 The situation worsened, at least psychologically, when Roger Williams reported that “the Pequots and Nayantaquits [Niantics] resolve to live and die together, and not to yield up one. Last night tidings came that the Mohawks, (the cannibals), have slain some of our countrymen at Connecticut. I hope it is not true.”38 As it turned out, neither rumor actually was true; nonetheless, it was a time in which it “was judged necessary for every man to be a soldier.”39

Amidst the sporadic fighting through the winter of 1636-1637, the rumors of a Pequot-Mohawk alliance continued. “These cannibals [the Mohawks] have been all the talk these days, and the Narragansetts are much troubled at them,” Williams wrote. “I sadly fear if the Lord please to let loose these mad dogs, their practice will render the Pequots cannibals, too . . . [and will] cut off all hopes of safe residence at

37 Harris, “Chronological and Topographical Account of Dorchester,” p. 155.
39 Harris, Ibid.
Writing from Connecticut, Thomas Hooker noted that “the [friendly] Indians here” importune “with us to make warr presently” and, lest the local Indians grow contemptuous of the Puritans and cause “them to turne enemyes agaynst us,” he urged the Bay Colony toward war, and “not to do this work of the Lord’s revenge slackly.”

Thus, it was no surprise that as soon as spring broke the Connecticut settlers would take the lead in the war effort; a total of 90 troops were levied from Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield and placed under the command of Captain John Mason. The troops massed at Hartford and sailed on May 10, 1637, bound for Fort Saybrook, and were accompanied by some 60 members of the Mohegan tribe. The Mohegans, it will be recalled, were at one time full members of the Pequot tribe, and had broken ranks with them scarcely a year earlier, and retained strong blood ties to the Pequots. Mason could hardly be expected to be anything but a bit skeptical of them, particularly when they insisted on leaving the Puritan fleet shortly after their departure from Hartford and proceeding to Fort Saybrook on foot. Mason feared that they would attack the fort rather than defend it.

Upon the Mohegans’ arrival at Fort Saybrook, Lion Gardiner’s fears were, if anything, more acute than Mason’s. Immediately, he put the Mohegans to a test of loyalty. For some time a small group of Pequots had been lurking in the area; would the

---

41 Thomas Hooker to John Winthrop, (spring, 1637) in *Winthrop Papers*, III, p. 407.
42 Ibid., p. 408.
Mohegans be kind enough to find them and kill them? Acting with extreme alacrity, the Mohegans disappeared into the woods and in short order returned with a present for Gardiner: four Pequot heads and one prisoner. The prisoner was turned over to the English soldiers who tied one of his legs to a post, put rope around the other, and tore him limb from limb. His agony was ended by a pistol shot, and then, according to one account, the body was roasted and eaten by the Mohegans.45

This was good news to Mason’s arriving troops who had had the good Christian sense to bring along with them the Reverend Samuel Stone to serve as chaplain for the expedition. The good reverend had earnestly implored the Lord to “manifest one pledge of they love, that may confirm us the fidelity of these Indians [the Mohegans] towards us.”46 That fidelity had been confirmed with Pequot heads.

While the Connecticut troops briefly rested and reorganized at Fort Saybrook (and were augmented by a bare nineteen troops from Massachusetts, led by Captain Underhill), a dispute arose as to the proper plan of attack against the Pequots. The Conneticut Court had specifically ordered that an amphibious frontal assault be made on the main Pequot village, but now an alternative plan was proposed which called for a flanking manuver through Narragansett territory, by-passing the main Pequot settlement at Pequot Harbor, and striking instead at the Pequot’s secondary stronghold, Mystic

Fort. Since it was this second plan which was adopted—and which proved to be successful—it is no surprise that Mason claims full credit for it in his memoirs, but it is highly unlikely that the plan originated from him.

Some two weeks earlier, Roger Williams relayed to John Winthrop the details of a proposed attack on the Pequot stronghold of Mystic Fort which had been given to him by Miantonomo, one of the leading sachems of the Narragansetts. Miantonomo, who had “kept his barbarous court” at Williams’ house, outlined six major points which were necessary for a successful military operation against the Pequots, including that “the assault would be in the night, when they are commonly more secure and at home, which advantage the English, being armed, may enter the houses and do what execution they please,” and that “before the assault be given, an ambush be laid behind them, between them and the swamp to prevent their flight, &c.” Williams, having enclosed a crude map of Mystic Fort, then goes on to mention the price for this information as being a “a box of eight or ten pounds of sugar, and indeed he told me would thank Mr. Governor for a box full.”

Quite likely this plan was transmitted to Mason via Captain Underhill. Mason, in turn, directed the Reverend Stone to pray about it, and to “commend our Condition to the Lord ... to direct how and in what manner we should demean ourselves in this Respect.” After a night of prayer, the reverend delivered the Lord’s verdict: the assault on Mystic Fort was approved.

---

Sailing from Fort Saybrook to Narragansett Bay, the Puritan and Mohegan forces picked up an additional contingent of Narragansett warriors on their way to Pequot territory. Guided by a renegade Pequot, on the evening of May 25, 1637, they encamped within a mile of the enemy fort and spent the night straining to hear the "burthen" of the Pequot's "song."  

The combined forces attacked the palisaded village at dawn. Firing a hasty volley between the log walls, Mason charged in, set fire to the wigwams and then retreated to form a circle around the walls of the fort to shoot down the Pequots who tried to escape. A second circle of Mohegans and Narragansetts cut down those who broke through the Puritan ranks. Those who remained within the walls perished from the flames.

Mason estimated that six or seven hundred perished in the attack; 52 Underhill guessed only four hundred, 53 but both agreed that not more than seven escaped, and seven were captured. Separated by both time and distance, Winthrop put the number at three hundred killed. 54 Mason thought that the total time spent in the attack had been about half an hour. 55

Mason, of course, gave full credit for the victory to God, who had "laughed his Enemies and the Enemies of his People to Scorn, making them as a fiery Oven .... Thus did the Lord judge among the Heathen, filling the Place with dead Bodies." 56

Underhill’s assessment has been quoted time and time again in American Indian history:

---

51 Mason, "Brief History," p. 138.
52 Ibid., p. 141
55 Mason, Ibid.
56 Mason, Ibid., p. 140-141.
"I would refer you to David's war," he began. "When a people is grown to such a height of blood, and sin against God and man . . . there he hath no respect to persons, but harrows them, and saws them, and puts them to the sword . . . We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings."\(^{57}\)

The attack on Mystic Fort broke the back and the spirit of the Pequot tribe, and, upon the arrival of the news in Boston, the Massachusetts General Court set aside June 15 as a day of thanksgiving. It was to be a purely Puritan affair; neither Indians nor Pilgrims being invited.\(^{58}\)

Mopping-up operations commenced almost immediately; with the aid of the Narragansetts. Those Pequots who had not been at Mystic Fort, and who did not flee to the west were quickly captured. The men were killed, women and children to be parceled out among the victors,\(^{59}\) at least a fair share of which went to the Puritans, who were "intending to keep them as Servants," wrote Mason, "but they could not endure that Yoke."\(^{60}\) Whether they died under that yoke or escaped is uncertain, but the Mohegans and Narragansetts wanted their fair share, too. Roger Williams soon wrote to John Winthrop that "Miantunnomu requests you to bestow a Pequot squaw upon him . . . ," and then Williams goes on to complain that "he had his share sent to him," but he still "desires to buy one or two of some Englishman."\(^{61}\) Quarrels broke out almost immediately between the Mohegans and the Narragansetts over "who should have the

---

\(^{57}\) Underhill, "News from America," p. 25.
\(^{60}\) Mason, "Brief History," p. 148.
\(^{61}\) Roger Williams, *Letters of Roger Williams, 1632-1682*, p. 20.
and a sort of feeding frenzy set in among them, as well as among all of the other tribes in the area.

By mid-July little remained of the Pequots. Other groups of Indians vied for the honor of slaying the remaining Pequots. Mason noted that “happy were they that could bring in their Heads to the English: Of which there came almost daily to Winsor, or Hartford.” At Fort Saybrook, too, Lion Gardiner did some business in the Pequot head-trade, paying a reasonable price for them. In early August the only tribe which might have proven friendly to the Pequot cause, the Mohawks, delivered the scalp of the Pequot sachem Sassacus to Hartford.

“The general Assembly of this State,” wrote Lion Gardiner, “immediately after the Pequot war was finished declared, and I think unfortunately, that the name of the Pequots should become extinct.” The river that was once called Pequot was renamed the Thames, and the place that was once called Pequot was changed to New London. With a touch of sarcasm, Gardiner notes that this was done “in ‘rememberance,’ as the records declare, and as the Assembly say, ‘of the chief city in our dear native country.’”

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the Pequot land ended up in the hands of the English, most of it parceled out to veterans from the Connecticut valley. When Connecticut formed itself into a separate colony, disputes erupted between it and the Bay Colony over jurisdiction of the former Pequot territory which lasted several decades until the

---

64 Gardiner, p. 22.
66 Gardiner, p. 7.
Crown finally awarded the land to Connecticut, after which the question of jurisdiction was promptly taken up again by Roger Williams at Rhode Island. Writing more than thirty years later, Williams finally concedes his claim to what he can now honestly call "the Pequot conquest" in a bitter letter written to Major Mason: "Only this I must crave leve to say, that it looks like a prodigie or monster, that countrymen among salvages in a wilderness; that professors of God... should not be content with those vast and large tracts which all the other colonies have... but pull and snatch away their poor neighbours bit of crust: and a crust it is, and a drie hard one too, because of the natives continuall troubles, trials and vexations..." 

If the Puritans felt themselves vexed by the Indians, the feeling was mutual. Some time after the war was over, Lion Gardiner recorded a striking conversation among the Narragansetts, in which the speaker pleaded for unity in the face of the English challenge, "otherwise we shall be all gone shortly, for you know our fathers had plenty of deer and skins, our plains were full of deer, as also our woods, and of turkies, and our coves full of fish and foul. But these English having gotten our land, they with scythes cut down the grass, and with axes felled the trees; their cows and horses eat the grass, and their hogs spoil our clam banks; and we shall all be starved..."

"Thus far of the Pequot war," wrote Lion Gardiner, "was but a comedy," which might yet turn into a tragedy "if God do not open the eyes, ears, and hearts of some that I think are wilfully deaf and blind, and think because there is no change that the vision fails... for say they... none dare meddle with us. Oh! woe be to the pride and security

---

which hath been the ruin of many nations, as woful experience has proved.”71 Lion
Gardiner was perhaps the only person in all of New England to see the dangers of the
excessive pride displayed by the Puritan oligarchy. “Our New England twelve-penny
Chronicle is stuffed with a catalogue of the names of some,” he said, “as if they had
deserved immortal fame.”72 Nonetheless, in short order the Puritans returned to their
business of cutting, planting, and preaching, on their way to building a city on a hill, and
their endeavors would now be largely uninterrupted by problems with the “Indian
Creatures” for an entire generation.

71 Gardiner, History of the Pequot War, p. 23.
72 Gardiner, p. 30.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

The "Pleb of this World"

In anticipation of T. S. Eliot, the Pequot War ended, appropriately enough, not with a bang, but a whimper. The tripartite Treaty of Hartford, signed by representatives of the Mohegans, the Narragansetts, and the Connecticut settlers a little more than a month after the Pequot sachem's head was delivered to English authorities, was little more than a formality. For all intents and purposes, the battle at Mystic Fort had both decided the historical war and started the historical controversy.

Based on a highly selective use of source material, Francis Jennings charges that "all the secondary accounts of the Pequot conquest squeamishly evade confessing the deliberateness of Mason's strategy, and some falsify to conceal it."¹ Jennings goes on to say that Mason--the commander of the Puritan forces at Mystic Fort--intended to "massacre and plunder" the Pequot village.² Jennings, in his urge to vilify the Puritans, completely over-looks the fact that "Mason's strategy" had been originally to attack Pequot Harbor, not Mystic Fort. The "deliberateness" of the attack on Mystic Fort had been spelled out, point by point, by the Narragansetts and had been delivered to Mason while he was preparing for the campaign at Fort Saybrook, and if the Puritans are to be condemned for the "massacre" at Mystic Fort it would be better to condemn them for

¹ Jennings, The Invasion of America, p. 220.
² Ibid., p. 221.
executing the Narragansett plan perfectly rather than for squeamishly omitting any mention of Narragansett involvement in it.

The most important recent topical controversy surrounding the Pequot War, however, concerns the Treaty of Hartford and its relation to the question of genocide vis-à-vis the Pequots. The treaty called for the Pequot survivors to be divided up between the Narragansetts and the Mohegans, that the Pequots shall be removed from “the country that was formerly theirs but is now the Englishes by conquest [and] neither shall the Narragnsets [sic.] nor Mohegans possess any part of the Peaquot country without leave from the English,”3 and, more pertinent to the question of genocide, “after they the Peaquots shall be divided . . . [they] shall no more be called Peaquots but Narrangansetts and Mohegans . . . “4 Thus with the Treaty of Hartford the Pequots ceased to exist as a political entity, and, when coupled with Lion Gardiner’s observation that “The general assembly of this State, immediately after the Pequot War was finished, declared, and I think unfortunately, that the name of the Pequots should become extinct . . .”5 a prima facia case can be made that a genocide of sorts did, in fact, occur.

The question arose in Steven Katz’s 1991 article in the New England Quarterly, which seems to have been written primarily as a reaction against Francis Jennings.6 Katz is primarily a Middle Eastern scholar, and has written several articles about genocide and the Holocaust in particular, but is not generally concerned with the history of the Puritans in general. Katz concedes that Jennings “does not use the term genocide per se,” but goes on to argue that “it is clear from the rhetorical thrust of his argument and his use of

---

4 Ibid.
5 Gardiner, The History of the Pequot War, p. 23.
phrases like 'deliberate massacre' that Francis Jennings is an insistent advocate of the genocidal thesis” which came to be articulated by Richard Drinnon in *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (1980).7 Katz is a good enough scholar to have gone back and read the original documents sufficiently well to note that Jennings relies heavily on Captain Mason’s account of the battle at Mystic Fort in a “marvelous display of selective reading,”8 which leads Jennings to assert—without a shred of evidence—that “The wretches crawling under beds and fleeing from Mason’s dripping sword were women, children, and feeble old men.”9 In Underhill’s version of the battle, the Pequots fought “most courageously”10 while Mason claims that some 150 braves had reinforced the Indian garrison the day before the attack.11 Katz does not mention that later on in his story Mason notes that the English were “loath to destroy Women and Children.”12 Mason does not deny that women and children were killed in the battle of Mystic Fort, but Jennings is clearly engaging in some more of his “sleight of hand”13 when he claims that “Mason’s deliberate purpose” was to massacre “noncombatants.”14 Katz goes on to conclude that “to interpret [the Pequot War] through the radicalizing polemic of accusations of genocide is to rewrite history to satisfy our own moral outrage.”15

9 Jennings, p. 222.
13 Katz, p. 217.
15 Katz, p. 223 & 224.
Thi remained the last word on the Pequot War until the question of genocide was again taken up by Micheal Freeman, a teacher of political theory at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom. Freeman begins his article, also published by *The New England Quarterly*[^16], by stating that “We should . . . recognize that to name the encounter of Puritans and Pequots in 1637-38 the ‘Pequot War’ is to adopt the Puritan point of view.”[^17] Freeman then goes on to make numerous references to the Pequot War, thereby adopting—inadvertently one would suppose—the Puritan point of view. Generally, his essay adopts Jennings’ version of historical events in which English settlement is seen as inherently aggressive, violent, and destructive, rather simplistically noting that in the process the “natives were converted from self-sufficient hunters and agriculturalists into suppliers for the European market.”[^18]

Freeman then goes on to quibble over the definition of genocide, arguing that it is not, as Katz asserts, the “intentional action aimed at the complete physical eradication of a people,”[^19] but rather “the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group,”[^20] and that “the goal of the Treaty of Hartford was to annihilate the Pequot people as such.”[^21] Freeman goes on to argue that it was the *outcome* of the Pequot War which made it genocidal, and that the “suspicions, fears, and calculations of the Puritans were of a kind common in ethnic conflicts, including those that result in genocide.”[^22]

[^17]: Freeman, p. 278.
[^18]: Ibid., p. 285.
[^19]: Ibid., p. 290.
[^20]: Ibid.
[^21]: Ibid., p. 291 & 292.
[^22]: Ibid., p. 292.
Katz responded to Freeman's article with another one of his own in December of that same year, in which he attempts to seize the moral high ground in the debate by noting that Freeman offers "a series of faulty inferences and non-sequiturs to my carefully argued paper," and then goes on to first maintain that the definition of genocide does not apply to the Pequot War, before conceding that they "were instead subjected to a form of *tribalcide*," Katz then explains that what "the Treaty of Hartford sought to *annihilate* was the *identity* of the Pequot people, their distinctive tribal identity and political organization; it did not seek or sanction their physical or cultural extermination." Katz does not explain exactly how one can destroy a tribe without also destroying its culture, but this does not prevent him from concluding that "If Freeman uses the term 'genocide' in the [sense of ethnocidal elimination and reconstitution] there is no disagreement between us regarding what occurred during the period immediately following the end of the war, but then there is no physical genocide either, the real point at issue." The world might benefit greatly if one could but once commit *egoicide*.

Leaving aside the question of genocide—a twentieth-century term which would likely have been incomprehensible in the seventeenth century—the question becomes why *would* the "general assembly of this State declare . . . that the name of the Pequots should become extinct" in terms that people of the seventeenth century could understand? Let us for a moment consider the effect of the Pequot land on those settlers who made their weary way to Connecticut. The land was good. The land was better than the land that

---

26 *Ibid*. Italics are in the original.
they had left behind them. And it was _here_ while Connecticut was still _there_, still some ways to go with Capt. Hunger yet nagging them with every step. The Pequot land might well have been quite desirous, quite tempting.

Keeping in mind that the Connecticut migration, the death of Captain Stone, and the demonization of the Pequots all began at roughly the same time, 1634, suggests that there might be a connection between all three events. One might search the historical records diligently, but one will be hard pressed to find anything other than aneutral remark with regards to the Pequots prior to this time. But in 1634, William Bradford refers to them as “a stout and warlike people”28 while Winthrop calls them “a very false people.”29 The wickedness of the Pequot people is beginning to grow, perhaps in proportion to the goodness of their land.

Those Puritans who trekked to Connecticut were a tired, hungry, thread-bare lot who had suffered the shock of a New England winter or two, and who were perhaps looking for a promised land with a bit more desperation than the popular image will allow us to see. One gets the sense that these were people who had already fought a long and difficult fight before any shots were ever fired in anger against the Pequots. Likely, they were reacting to events with emotion more than they were responding to events with reason. Furthermore, although they had arrived in the New World with a sense of communal unity, that unity had been severely tested, not just by the internal quarrels of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, but the very act of leaving the immediate confines of Boston had been met with debate and had been thought to be “very prejudicial to the Commonwealth.” A strain of individualism had begun to creep into the Puritan fold.

29 Ibid., p. 291.
Thus we can see groups of ragged men and women trudging their way through the "brave meadows" of Pequot territory, perhaps with feelings not unlike those that Adam had when he first beheld the Apple, with the promise of land in Connecticut not satiating the appetite as much as whetting it, and with the "plef of this world" calling them, they gave in to temptation and seized the Forbidden Fruit. Thus "the name of the Pequots should become extinct," not because the Pequots were hated, but because the Puritans were ashamed, and the instinct to forget that war, to put it out of memory was the same instinct that Adam had when he donned a fig leaf in the sight of God. Learned scholars may argue whether the Pequot War was genocidal or not; but no one can argue that at its conclusion sin had entered the Garden of Eden.
REFERENCES

Primary Sources


Harris, Rev. T. R. “A Chronological and Topographical Account of Dorchester” in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1 ser. IX. Boston, 1815.


“Pincheon Papers,” in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 2 ser. VIII (1826), 228-249.

[Pratt, John]. “John Pratt’s Answer to the Court” in *Records of Massachusetts Bay*, I, Boston, 1881.


“Winthrop Papers” in Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 4 ser. VI-VII (1861-1865); 5 ser. I (1871), VIII (1882); 6 ser III (1889), V (1892).


Secondary Sources


