

Part I. Nantucket's First Peoples of Color

The Ancient Proprietors: Wampanoags

Witnesses

Bones buried in the earth, discolored by minerals in the soil and disarticulated over time by frost heaves and moving water, become unintelligible to all but the most practiced eye.¹ Our skulls are another matter. When a human skull is found, the question is not “What?” but “How long ago?” These days when a skull comes to light, the site is treated as a crime scene until the medical examiner and an archaeologist determine its age.² Nantucket has been peopled for so long—for many thousand years—that the origin of such a find may be far in the past.³ If it predates the 1600s, then it is of the Nantucket people who have been called the island’s “ancient proprietors.”

As summer turned to autumn in 1894, Sarah P. Bunker watched from her upstairs bedroom window as workmen dug an immense hole across the street. They were preparing to lay a foundation for the Nevins mansion on the very brink of the Cliff. In the course of their work, they unearthed two human skulls that David Nevins conveyed to the Nantucket Historical Association. Albert Folger, Sarah P.’s neighbor up the street, had come upon others a dozen years earlier. It was noted that “Tradition locates an ancient Indian cemetery at this place.”⁴



The Hodges house before it was moved to West Chester Street, and the Nevins mansion that replaced it. On September 20, 1894, the *Inquirer and Mirror* reported: “During the process of excavating for Mr. Nevins’s new house on North Street [now Cliff Road], last Saturday, a human skull and a few rib bones were unearthed. Mrs. Sylvester Hodges, who until within a week or two has owned and occupied the premises, stated to Mr. Nevins previous to the commencement of the work that her husband was told by the late Richard Mitchell, who formerly owned the property, that Indians were buried there. No particular heed was given the statement, but the finding of the skull, which is undoubtedly that of an Indian, corroborates the story.” *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P11830, P2595.*

¹ For six decades bones in a burial uncovered by erosion in 1916 were described as the remains as a dog buried at the feet of its master. Then in 1978 they were identified as deer bones (Little 1996b, p. 15 and first unnumbered page following page 15).

² In 1983, after the Massachusetts legislature passed Chapter 659, An Act Relative to Certain Skeletal Remains, the Massachusetts Historical Commission issued a notice, “Information and Assistance Know How #4: What to do when human burials are accidentally uncovered.” For what may happen in the wake of such an uncovering, see D. Thomas 2000.

³ Rising sea level cut Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard off from the mainland about eight thousand years ago. Since then their inhabitants have been islanders. There are excellent maps of the retreat of the coastline in Levine, Sassaman, and Nassaney, eds., 2000, pp. 44–46.

⁴ Grace Brown Gardner’s Scrapbook #20 (Nantucket Historical Association MS.Collection 57) contains the information that Albert Folger found male and female skeletons at the Cliff in 1882 and that “Miss Nevins and others” found human remains in the same area in 1894. The Nantucket Historical Association was in possession of two human skulls, since repatriated under the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), one of which was catalogued #137: “Indian skull found in digging for the foundation of Mr. Nevins house on North St. 1894 (Cliff Rd.) Tradition locates an ancient Indian cemetery at this place. Donated by Mr. David Nevins.”

In December of 1987, a backhoe operator excavating for the foundation of public housing at the head of Miacomet valley dug into another unmarked cemetery. Subsequently a worker with a shovel unearthed a skull. Unlike the old interments found a century earlier, the deceased in this cemetery had received burial in wooden coffins. Remains of the 222 victims of a massive epidemic in the winter of 1763–64 had been rediscovered.⁵ The wonder was that they had lain undisturbed so very long in the pine woods on the very edge of Surfside Road.

Inadvertent disinterments bear witness to Nantucket’s first people in all stages of their history: from long before the coming of Europeans to these shores, during the transition from traditional life to a European-defined form of community, and at the near-termination of their existence on the island. Traces of their life on Nantucket dating back several thousand years show that the first stage had continued for a very long time before English settlers arrived. The last part—the population plunge toward extinction—took barely a century.

Their language, changed in pronunciation but still recognizable as theirs, is in our mouths a dozen times a day in familiar island names, many ending in –t: ’Sconset, Madaket, Quidnet, Wannacomet, Miacomet. More of them

used to have the –t: Coatue was once *Coatuet* and Capaum was *Capamet*. Eighty-six place names can be found in Nantucket deeds and wills, and a third of these remain in everyday use, a very high density when compared with even the most “Indian” of off-island locales.⁶



The density of Eastern Algonquian place-names in use on Nantucket is remarkable even for New England. Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, detail of 1869 Ewer map, P21257.

Their artifacts turn up constantly. Construction sites unearth the dumps where they disposed of bones and shells from their meals, and to this day heavy rains continue to wash arrowheads from sand banks. We are reminded by the occasional emergence of their skeletal remains from eroding bluffs and from dirt roads worn deep into the moors that Nantucket’s history did not begin in 1659.

⁵ *Nantucket Argument Settlers*, a publication of the *Inquirer and Mirror*, has persisted through multiple editions in stating that twenty-two, rather than two hundred twenty-two, people died in the epidemic. On Nantucket the death of

Wampanoags and their Language

Living descendants of the people who once inhabited Cape Cod and its neighbor islands still form communities at Aquinnah (Gay Head) on Martha's Vineyard and Mashpee on the Cape. Today they identify themselves as Wampanoags.⁷ An alternative name for the indigenous people of Cape Cod and areas immediately to the southwest is "Pokanokets," while people of the outer Cape, thought to have special connections with those on Nantucket, have been identified as "Nausets."⁸

It is difficult to sort out the political affiliations of the people living on the Cape and islands just before English and Dutch exploration of the area began. The native peoples left almost no records of themselves from that time, and the English and Dutch writers, having their own difficulties distinguishing among the various peoples they encountered, contradict each other and themselves. For the most part they called everyone they met "Indians," which would have dismayed the Pokanokets, who believed themselves to be as different from the Massachusetts as they were from the English and the Dutch.

Roger Williams, writing of the nearby Narragansetts with whom he had lived through the winter of 1636, remarked, "I cannot observe that they ever had (before the coming of the English, French or Dutch amongst them) any Names to difference themselves from strangers, for they knew none; but two sorts of names they had, and have amongst themselves." The first sort were words which simply meant "people,"⁹ and the other sort were specific names for their neighbors such as *Massachusetts* and *Pequot*. Williams continued, "They have often asked me why wee call them Indians."¹⁰

The English, who would have been mortally offended to hear their own language and Dutch described as just a couple of local dialects of Low German, nonetheless perceived a New World full of Indians who spoke one Indian language. To negotiate with them and to preach to them it was necessary to learn to understand and to speak "Indian." To this end Williams published *A Key Into the Language of America* in 1643, and John Eliot published *The Indian Grammar Begun; or, An Essay to Bring the Indian*

twenty-two people of a single cause in a short time would be remarkable, but the epidemic of 1763–64 was catastrophic.

⁶ For a list of these place names, see Little 1983.

⁷ In 1928 Speck wrote, "In most narratives those of Martha's Vineyard and the islands were definitely considered subject to the Wampanoag..." (p. 105). This indicates a political alliance rather than an ethnic unity, but he goes on to state: "An affinity in dialect, however, did exist between the peoples of the islands, both Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, and even over entire Cape Cod." He then presents as speculation that the idea that the peoples of the Vineyard and the west end of Nantucket were Wampanoags, while the people of the eastern side of Nantucket were Nausets (p. 107). He concludes that, "At most, however, we are distinguishing now only the subdivisions of a single ethnic and dialectic group, whose boundaries embraced everything from the Narragansett to the Pennacook about Merrimac river" (p. 109). "Wampanoag" may not be a local name at all, but—as is so often the case—someone else's word imposed on a native people by explorers who did not well understand the peoples and languages they encountered. See Bragdon 1996, p. 21. Both the term "Indiansog," which appears in the Massachusetts texts, and "Wampanoags" are double plurals with both the Massachusetts plural ending *-o(a)g* and the English plural *-s*, albeit in opposite orders.

⁸ A map clearly locating Wampanoags and Nausets is to be found in Russell 1980, p. 23.

⁹ In *Native People of Southern New England, 1500–1650* Kathleen Bragdon uses *Ninnimissinuok* (a form of the Narragansett word for 'people') to refer collectively to the Pawtucket, Massachusetts, Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, Narragansett, Pokanoket, Niantic, Mohegan, and Pequot peoples. See Bragdon 1996, p. xi.

Language into Rules in 1666. Little did they know that the continent upon which they had intruded but a footstep was filled with languages as different from one another as are Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and Swahili. Unlike the French fur traders and Catholic missionaries at work in the St. Lawrence River valley, they had not yet come face to face with the Iroquois.¹¹

The first Europeans on the scene can be forgiven their cultural and linguistic short-sightedness, and we can be excused from belaboring the question of whether Nausets were Pokanokets and if in retrospect they should be called Wampanoags. Setting aside political alliances, which could shift in a matter of years, coastal New England emerges as a culturally and linguistically homogeneous place. The languages spoken in the area were all Eastern Algonquian languages, and the major division was between two languages: Massachusett and Narragansett. People on the Cape and islands spoke Massachusett, and people in what are today Rhode Island and Connecticut spoke Narragansett. Beyond the speakers of Narragansett were people who spoke yet another Eastern Algonquian language, Pequot-Mohegan. The differences among them were probably comparable to the differences among Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese.¹²

Guy Loman Jr. and his fellow dialectologists mapped local differences in English speech around about Southern New England early in the 1900s. Just so, in its time, Massachusett varied in pronunciation and vocabulary from place to place. Martha's Vineyard speech was said to be difficult for off-islanders to understand, and Nantucket, being farther from the mainland, probably even more so.¹³ But the language was Massachusett, nonetheless, as can be seen from wills, grave markers, transfers of land, and bills of sale written in it during the 1600s and 1700s.¹⁴

¹⁰ Williams 1973, pp. 84–85.

¹¹ Gideon Hawley, who as a fledgling missionary was sent to the Iroquois Six Nations before taking up his fifty-year ministry in Mashpee in 1757, described the Iroquois “in the northern country” as “savages” compared to those whom he called the “half civilized Indians at Nantucket, the Vineyard and in the old Colony of Massachusetts.” Hawley Papers, the Congregational Library, Boston.

¹² A table of the Eastern Algonquian languages appears in Mithun 1999, p. 327, and a description of Massachusett and neighboring languages is on p. 330. See also Bragdon 2000, pp. 173–74. “Massachusett” is not the best possible choice of name for the language, since it was spoken not only by the Massachusett people but also by the Wampanoags, the Patuxets, the Nausets, and others. However, it is the language name that was established in the 1600s and remains the name used in reference books to the present. A language-family map showing the relative locations of speakers of Massachusett, Narragansett, Pequot, and Mohegan is on p. 15 of Salisbury 1982. Knowing one of these languages makes it possible, with some effort, to make some sense of the others. Being able to carry on fluent conversations cross-linguistically is another matter, difficult for anyone but a practiced interpreter.

¹³ Banks 1911, p. 43, n. 1 states that Judge Sewall in 1702 was told by Thomas Mayhew and Japhet Hannit that it would not be feasible to send native preachers “to the eastward” (presumably to Nantucket) because “their language is so different.” Over time, the language of other Christian communities gradually converged toward that of Natick. Experience Mayhew expressed satisfaction in a letter dated 1721–22 (reproduced in Banks 1911, p. 43) that through the influence of Eliot’s Bible translation the speech of the Vineyard differed little from that of Natick: “most of the little differences that were betwixt them have been happily lost.”

¹⁴ For the extension of “Massachusett” as a name for the language spoken by people outside the core Massachusett ethnic group, see Goddard and Bragdon 1988, Part 1, p. xv.

There are current efforts to resurrect the language, but Massachusett has not been spoken in over a century. We learn about it through related languages that are still spoken and through written records.¹⁵ We owe a debt of gratitude to two Nantucket Quakers, Richard Macy and Richard Mitchell, who presented a collection of seven documents from Nantucket written in Massachusett to the Massachusetts Historical Society for preservation.¹⁶ They did this in 1802, nearly four decades after the great epidemic, at a time when very few speakers of the language remained living on Nantucket. Had the documents stayed on Nantucket and come to rest in the original Atheneum, they would have gone up in flames in the Great Fire of 1846, and Algonquian studies would have been the poorer. Today the surviving writings in Massachusett, including the precious Nantucket documents that Macy and Mitchell acted to preserve, are in print and available to library users in Nantucket and on the mainland.¹⁷

What are Eastern Algonquian languages like? The word for skunk sounds pretty much like *skunk*, and the word for squash sounds like *squash*. To English these languages have also contributed the words *moose*, *wigwam*, *moccasin*, *papoose*, *sachem*, *sagamore*, *wampum*, and *powwow* as well as the now less common words *succotash* (corn stew) and *mugwump* (an individual who isn't completely loyal to his party or faction). Despite the ugly connotations that became attached to the word *squaw* and despite the bitter assertion by many Indian people that the English adopted an Iroquois word meaning 'female genitals' or 'prostitute' to refer to women, Roger Williams recorded *squaw* in Narragansett as 'woman' and *keegsquaw* as 'young woman,' while the Massachusett documents have *squa* for 'woman' and *ussqua* meaning 'young woman.' The wife of a sachem was called *sauncksqua* in Narragansett. None of these are used with any implicit insult by speakers of Narragansett or Massachusett.¹⁸

Most Algonquian words are long, and English speakers have shortened them by dropping off syllables from the front. Tuckernuck was once *Petockenock*, Squam was *Wanisquam*, and Quidnet was *Aquidnet*. The practice continues today with the pronunciation of Siasconset as 'Sconset and Sesacacha Pond as 'Sacacha.

Personal names were shortened in the same way. The descendants of Sachem Nickanoose used Noose as a surname, while those of Sachem Wanackmamack went by the family name of Mamack.

¹⁵ Eastern Algonquian languages that survived through the twentieth century include Abenaki, Micmac, and Maliseet in New England and Canada, and Delaware, whose speakers had been transported to the Oklahoma Indian Territory in the nineteenth century.

¹⁶ Zaccheus Macy, justice of the peace, was most likely the last Englishman on Nantucket to speak the Massachusett language. His son Richard (named after his grandfather) was one of the donors of the documents to the Massachusetts Historical Society. Before his death in 1797, Zaccheus had probably passed the documents on to Richard for safekeeping. Both elders of the Nantucket meeting of the Society of Friends, Richard Macy lived until 1813 and Richard Mitchell until 1819.

¹⁷ Goddard and Bragdon 1988 (Parts 1 and 2).

¹⁸ Williams 1973, pp. 114, 205; Goddard and Bragdon 1988, Part 2, p. 725. Bragdon 1996, p. 178. Because of the long history of derogatory use of the word, in March 2000 the Maine House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a bill to ban *squaw* from public place names, and there is similar legislative debate and action around the United States and in Canada.

Descendants of the first native pastor on Martha's Vineyard, Hiacoomes, have continued the name in the form Coombs.¹⁹

Lifeways

Just as the Nantucket variety of spoken Massachusetts differed somewhat from that of the mainland, daily life in Nantucket before the coming of English settlers differed from life on the mainland. European explorers along the New England coast remarked on the extensive gardens and cornfields they observed, and the Pilgrims exploring Cape Cod came upon a large buried cache of corn that they dug up and used for themselves.²⁰ Little evidence for extensive cultivation of corn has been found on Nantucket, however. Just a few kernels have been recovered from old trash pits, nor are there signs that land was cleared for extensive planting prior to the mid-1600s. English settlers may have been the ones to introduce field agriculture to the island.²¹

Wigwams were light and easy to dismantle, and Algonquians in general moved frequently. In the winter the mainland Wampanoags and their neighbors withdrew from the coasts to the forests to hunt deer, which provided them with abundant meat, skins, and horn. Deer-hunting was a major occupation even as nearby as Mashpee on Cape Cod, but deer were scarce or absent from Nantucket for periods of time, and the cottontail rabbits that are so plentiful these days originated in Europe and were not introduced to Nantucket until 1891. While people may have moved their wigwams seasonally on the island, from summers along the beaches to sheltered winter sites in protected spots like Masquetuck on Polpis Harbor,²² their cold-weather hunting was for ducks and geese.²³ Woven grass mats took the place of skins for clothes and wigwam coverings, and trash pits yield few enough deer bones to suggest that whatever venison people got to eat was obtained by trade with the mainland.²⁴ Many migratory birds passed through

¹⁹ The Mashpee Coombs family, including Darius Coombs who died in Nantucket in 1932 and is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery, descends from Hiacoomes and his wife (Franklin Dorman, personal communication). Nanahuma (of Nanahuma's Neck in Hummock Pond) is a shortening of the name of Wannanahuma, who lived in the late 1600s and was one of the early whalers on Nantucket. Later, both Humma and Human appear as Wampanoag surnames on Nantucket.

²⁰ Bradford 1963, p.65; Salisbury 1982, p. 113.

²¹ See Bragdon 1996, pp. 36–38, 62–63. Little 1985, p. 17, states that, "little evidence has yet appeared for prehistoric horticulture at Nantucket." Freeman 1807, pp. 35, 36, reports of the Nantucket Wampanoags that they did grow the indigenous crops of corn, beans, squash, and tobacco, but only in small kitchen gardens that they cultivated with digging sticks. When the English brought plows to the island, the Wampanoags were impressed by them and adopted plowing for more extensive planting.

²² According to Obed Macy's manuscript addenda to his *History* (p. 9): "As their places of residence were constructed of frail materials, they were easily removed from one place to another, which was frequently put in practice." Little 1985, p. 22, makes a pair of hypotheses that lead to the preliminary conclusions that small sites on Nantucket's north shore, adjacent to shell-fish beds, "were brief summer sites. Conversely, most of the large shell middens in protected hollows would fall into the winter site category."

²³ Bragdon 1986, p. 29, Table 1, lists birds as an available food source in fall, winter, and spring.

²⁴ According to Freeman 1807, p. 35, "They could now and then kill a bird; and there were few deer: goat skins, but not the animal itself were found by the English on the island. ... Their clothes were sometimes skins, but for the most part coarse mats, made of grass." Since this report was written a century and a half after English settlement on the island and nearly a half century after the decimation of the Miacomet community, it can be accepted only with caution.

in fall and spring, but Nantucket’s year-round land-animal population consisted of hardly more than voles, bats, snakes, and the Wampanoags’ dogs. There were no foxes, wolves, bears, skunks, moose, or even squirrels.

What did people eat besides water fowl? Middens where they dumped their refuse tell us that the original Nantucketers were shellfish eaters. They especially liked to eat the *poquauhock*, which we have shortened to “quahog,” and they don’t seem to have had much use for mussels, which surprised Europeans, who considered them good food.²⁵ English settlers adopted this local prejudice; their Nantucket descendants have eaten quahogs, scallops, and oysters but not until quite recently mussels.

Other food from the sea included lobsters, bluefish, herring,²⁶ eels, and meat and blubber from sea mammals—including seals and the blackfish that have periodically beached in large numbers on the island. Gull and turtle eggs, seaweeds, and plants from the tidal marshes were other available sources of nutrition.

Wampanoag women were gardeners and gatherers. Although the Nantucket women’s gardens may not have been extensive, the island offered an abundant natural harvest including cranberries, beach plums, and the tasty nodules that form on the roots of nut grass. Only pollen analysis from layers of centuries-old sediment and peat can sort out



Nantucket Wampanoags were heavily dependent on shellfish for nutrition; they buried the shells near their dwellings. They also benefited from the frequent beaching of blackfish (not fish, but pilot whales). *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P21262 (photo by Edie Ray) & P19681.*

which of the many useful plants that grow uncultivated on the island today were here before the English settlers brought their cuttings, seeds, and inadvertent weeds. Of all the useful edible and medicinal plants that have grown on the island for the last century or more, only some were available for use before the mid-1600s.²⁷ Many that we consider characteristic of Nantucket—the rugosa rose with its vitamin-rich scarlet rose hips, for instance—are attractive, useful, well-adapted aliens.

On their diet of shellfish from the shores, migratory birds from the air, and the original fruits of Nantucket’s sandy soil, the island Wampanoags²⁸ lived healthy lives. They were tall, well-nourished

²⁵ Most shell middens on Nantucket contain few or no mussel shells, although two contain nothing but mussels. Little 1986, pp. 46–59.

²⁶ These New England fish are actually alewives. The Europeans misidentified them as herring, and the name has persisted.

²⁷ These are described and illustrated by Alice Albertson and Anne Hinchman in Albertson 1921. An earlier list of plants and trees growing on Nantucket is to be found in Freeman 1807, pp. 24–25, under the category “Vegetable Productions.”

²⁸ The native people of Nantucket did not call themselves Wampanoags, nor are there documented instances of anyone else using this term in reference to them prior to the epidemic of 1763–64. But Wampanoag is now used by the descendants of the native peoples of Martha’s Vineyard and Cape Cod, as it would be by descendants of the native peoples of Nantucket if they returned to the island today.

people, whose teeth were undamaged by sugar or a diet over-reliant on corn.²⁹ One thing is certain: in order for two or three thousand people to maintain wholesome lives on Nantucket, the resources of the entire island—shores, woods, swamps, and grasslands—had to be available to everyone at all times, different spots offering different resources throughout the year.

The reported population just prior to the first English settlement in 1659 was about 3,000.³⁰ This population density (and a similar density on Martha's Vineyard) contrasts with an eerie emptiness across the Sound. The coastal mainland had been swept by epidemics introduced by European fishermen and explorers, the worst having completely depopulated the area where the *Mayflower's* passengers finally disembarked. The off-shore location of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard protected their inhabitants from contagion, and it is possible that refugees from the affected areas had swollen the island populations to the brink of their carrying capacities shortly before the English began to arrive.³¹ The 1600s were hardly normal times for anyone, indigenous or European. In any case, Nantucket's ancient proprietors needed every square foot, every nook and cranny of their island in order to carry on their way of life.

Wampanoag society was governed by sachems. The sachems were community elders who bore the responsibility of making decisions, creating alliances, and carrying out policies for everyone under their jurisdiction. They were also personally responsible for executions. In return for their services, sachems received loyalty and tribute (gifts from their people to support them in their work). Sachems' families were more influential than most families, but a sachem, unlike a European monarch, did not automatically pass on his position to his eldest son. Moreover, consensus-building among community members played as great a role as authority from the top of a chain of command.³² Europeans looking for Wampanoag equivalents of their kings and princes misunderstood and misrepresented what they encountered in southeastern New England, and in time, as the English sought to replace the sachems' authority with that of the King of England, those misunderstandings caused trouble for everyone.

From around the area—including Nantucket—there were also reports in the 1600s of “queen-sachems.”³³ These were wives, sisters, and daughters of sachems who exercised considerable authority

²⁹ At a symposium on “Nantucket and the Native American Legacy of New England,” Michael Gibbons reported that the average height of men was five feet, nine and a half inches, while the average height of women was five feet three inches. *Historic Nantucket* 43, No. 4 (Winter 1995-96), pp. 99–100. In “Dental Report on Tristram Coffin Monument Burial, May 19, 1977,” John Slavitz reported “...no evidence of dental decay indicating a diet essentially free of sugars, and low in carbohydrate.” (Little 1996b, second unnumbered page between pages 11 and 12).

³⁰ This figure was reported by Zaccheus Macy in 1792, and current scholars generally agree with the number. See Z. Macy 1792a, p. 6.

³¹ Little 1990a, pp. 2-3. In 1928 Speck wrote, “That the islands, and it seems especially Martha's Vineyard, proved a haven for refugees fleeing from the devastating conditions that confronted Indians on the mainland is evident in the instances of migrations recorded and by the relatively high population estimates for the region” (p. 117).

³² Bragdon 1996, pp. 140–155.

³³ There were at least two queen-sachems on Martha's Vineyard: Adommas and Wunnatukquannumou. At Mattakeesit, adjacent to Plymouth, there was Patience Keurp; Tohattawan, mother of the Sachem Thomas Waban at Natick, and Waban's wife Elizabeth were both considered royal by the English; in Pocasset the name of the “squaw sachem” during King Philip's War was Weetamo. See Bragdon 1996, pp. 158–59. Goddard and Bragdon 1988, Part 1, contains

themselves as well as conveying power to their husbands and sons. During English settlement of the island, Nantucket's queen sachem was Askammapoo, daughter of Sachem Nickanoose. Her husband's name, Spoospotswa, was shortened by English speakers to simply Spotso, and their son Daniel Spotso was an active broker between the early English settlers and the Wampanoags on Nantucket. Among the documents given by Richard Mitchell and Richard Macy to the Massachusetts Historical Society is a power of attorney written in Massachusetts by which Askammapoo delegated Daniel to appear in court on her behalf.³⁴

Among the Wampanoags power resided in the sachems and also in their spiritual leaders. The meaning of the word *powwow* has changed. It originally referred to individuals, not to gatherings of people. Powwows were men and women who had experienced visions calling them to serve as healers and seers for their communities. To find the cause of illness and to predict the outcome of important events such as harvests and wars, powwows made spiritual journeys outside their bodies, wafted along by tobacco smoke and in the company of companion birds and animals. In their travels they might encounter the powerful thunderbird, the horned serpent, and the sacred turtle, symbol of motherhood and fertility. Powwows traveled to the spirit world at great risk to themselves, and in return their people rewarded them with gifts and reverence, just as they rewarded their sachems. As a result, sachems and powwows accumulated wealth and influence through public service.³⁵

Most Wampanoags were not of sachems' or powwows' families. They lived out their daily lives on the island in ways that remain familiar to us today—hunting ducks, digging quahogs, and gathering cranberries on warm autumn days; surviving winter storms, bitter cold, and lean times long enough to produce new generations of native Nantucketers. As generations succeeded generations, they left behind their homesites, their tools, and their shell dumps for us to puzzle over.

Passings

There is no longer a Wampanoag community on Nantucket. In one view of Nantucket history the ancient proprietors' presence ceased in the winter of 1763-64 when their numbers were reduced by half in a matter of a few months. In another view, the last truly native Nantucketers passed into history in the mid-1800s with the deaths of Abram Quarry and Dorcas Honorable, the last recognized Nantucket Indians.³⁶

nine documents by or pertaining to Wunnatukquannumou. For Patience Keurp, Tohattawan, and Elizabeth, see Mandell 1996, pp. 33, 50, 101–02. For Weetamo, see Leach 1958, pp. 5, 34–35, 47, 50, 76, 164.

³⁴ Goddard and Bragdon 1988. Document 56. Part 1, pp. 198–99. The power of attorney is undated.

³⁵ Bragdon 1996, pp. 201–14.

³⁶ On p. 11 of an 1843 manuscript of addenda to his *History of Nantucket*, Obed Macy identified Abigail Jethro as “the last survivor of the Indian race here,” recording her death on January 20, 1822. He did not count Abram Quarry, who was living in Shawkemo at the time, or Dorcas Honorable, who was also living when he wrote, because—despite the fact that there had been no recognized Wampanoag-English marriages on the island—both had some English ancestry. Obed Macy also ended the “coloured” section of his 1810 local census of Nantucket with the names of nine living “Native Indians,” including Abram Quarry and his wife and Abigail Jethro as “the last survivor” (Nantucket Historical

The disappearance of the Nantucket's indigenous population can be attributed to various pernicious practices of the English settlers who had arrived on Nantucket in 1659. Prominent among them are the appropriation of land, the introduction of alcohol, and the institution of a money economy, leading inevitably to failure of the Wampanoags' traditional way of life and thence to debt-servitude, the whipping post, and the gallows beyond the edge of town.

Or the responsibility can be laid at the door of sachems who, through incomprehension or personal greed, sold out their own people.

Or it can be attributed to impersonal and uncontrollable forces that were at that time utterly beyond human understanding or control: the failure of Wampanoag families to reproduce and the mystery of the deadly epidemic.

Or one can take the position that the story of the disappearance of Nantucket's first people was a typical nineteenth-century social construction and that there have been no "last Indians." But history is never simple, and none of those stories quite covers all the ground.

First Acquaintances

The Wampanoags and their neighbors enter documentary history with the arrival of European explorers along the New England coast, followed by English settlers—the Pilgrims of Plymouth, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, and eventually an odd lot of individuals who, having for one reason or another become marginal in the mainland colonies, sought

refuge and new beginnings for themselves out beyond the edges of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: in Rhode Island and on the off-shore islands. It is through the writings of these Europeans—opportunistic, often adversarial, and at best patronizing—that we have first records of the Algonquians.

The Pilgrims were not the first Europeans the peoples of coastal New England had ever seen. Before the Pilgrims arrived, some Eastern Algonquians had already visited Europe, not by their own design. Much of the early history of Algonquian–European contact involves kidnapping.³⁷ In 1524 Giovanni da Verrazzano, in the service of France, explored the coast from Manhattan to Narragansett Bay and described his visit with two local leaders who were either Wampanoags or Narragansetts. The very



Hugo Allard's 1673 "True and Exact Map of All New Netherlands" shows Cape Cod, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard. In the general area of Providence and New Bedford appears the word "Wapanoos." *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P21258.*

Association MS. Collection 96, Folder 25, unnumbered page). He later added six death dates, including Abigail Jethro's in 1822 at age 76.

next year Estevão Gomes, a harbinger of things to come, showed up in the same waters, captured more than fifty Algonquians from the shore, and carried them off to Spain for sale as slaves.³⁸

And so it went. Trade with Breton and Basque fishermen who frequented the waters provided useful goods. Exploring along the coast in 1602, Bartholomew Gosnold, who has been credited as the first European to record the existence of Nantucket, was met by Wampanoags in a Basque-style sailboat. They had aboard an iron grappling hook and a copper kettle. One was wearing a waistcoat and black serge knee-breeches with stockings and shoes, and another wore blue breeches.³⁹

For the Wampanoags, however, the desirability of such imports was tempered by the unpredictability of what next might come under sail over the eastern horizon. After Gosnold's visit, French and English explorers—including Captain John Smith, famous for his account of having been saved by Pocahontas from death in Virginia—began to frequent the coastal waters. In fact, John Smith took credit for first naming the area “New England.” Contacts that began as peaceful opportunities for trade sometimes exploded into violence. Resentments grew, and there were attacks and killings on both sides as the local people tried to drive off European explorers and the explorers tried to protect their material possessions and their lives.

In 1604 Martin Pring, working for a company of English merchants, built a fort at the tip of Cape Cod, where Provincetown is now located, and took to loosing his two large dogs on Nausets who came to see what he was up to. In frustration, the Nausets set fire to the surrounding woods to burn him out.

On Monomoy Point, at the elbow of Cape Cod, in 1606, a French party put on a show of force to intimidate the people onshore. The obnoxious intruders were run off, losing a man in the fight, while the angry local residents demonstrated their contempt by flinging beach sand at them and yapping like a pack of wolves.⁴⁰

There were more kidnappings. Among them, the English captains George Weymouth, Edward Harlow, Nicholas Hobson, and Thomas Hunt carried off close to thirty people, including a Martha's Vineyard sachem named Epinow.

Accounts of what happened next don't entirely agree. Apparently Hunt, like Gomes before him, tried to sell his captives in Spain, but Spanish authorities confiscated them. Some of the Algonquians who had been snatched from their own shores lived for a while in England and eventually returned home.

According to Sir Fernando Gorges, also exploring for England, Epinow ended up as the property of yet another English captain, Henry Harley, who exhibited him as a curiosity in London. By 1614, when

³⁷ See Sturtevant 1993 and Karttunen 2000.

³⁸ Brassler. 1978, p. 80.

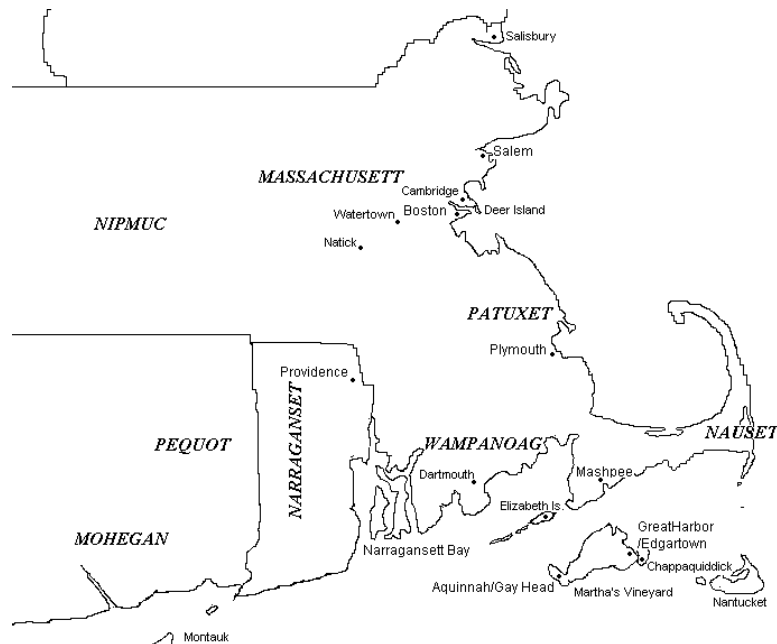
³⁹ Banks 1911, Vol. 1, p. 61. The original source is John Brereton's *A Brief and True Relation...* published in London in 1602. O. Macy 1880 (originally 1835), p. 12, is an early local source for crediting Gosnold as the first European to record an island in the location of Nantucket.

⁴⁰ Salisbury 1982, pp. 63–66.

the Dutch and the English were both engaged in mapping New England's coastal waters,⁴¹ Epinow had acquired a serviceable command of English. He, Assacomet (a servant of Gorges), and Wenape (another Wampanoag, who had landed somehow on the Isle of Wight) were sent with Captain Hobson back to the Vineyard to serve as interpreters for the English. Thwarting efforts to keep them captive aboard ship, Epinow managed to break loose from his captors and swim ashore. The English attempted to shoot him in the water while the Wampanoags counterattacked from their boats. Epinow survived to tell his story to his people and to enlighten them about the world from whence his captors came. The kidnapping of Epinow and the others (including Nausets from the outer Cape and Patuxets from the Plymouth area) was fresh in people's minds when the English settlers began arriving in the 1620s. The memory of the English raids inspired local resentment toward the newcomers, who were the washashores of their day.⁴²

In the early spring of 1621, three months after the *Mayflower* had delivered its Pilgrim passengers to the place they named New Plymouth, a man walked out of the woods and greeted them in English, introducing himself as Samoset. Through association with fishermen and traders along the Maine coast, he spoke English and probably bits of other European languages as well. He may have been to Europe and back in advance of the Pilgrims. A few days after his first visit, Samoset brought Tisquantum (a name the English predictably shortened to "Squanto") to meet them, and it turned out that Tisquantum was a local Patuxet who had been carried off to be sold in Spain. Like Epinow, however, Tisquantum had ended up living in London with an English merchant named John Slany before making more transatlantic voyages, ultimately in the service of Fernando Gorges.

Considering what he knew first-hand about the English from being their captive, living in their country, and learning to speak their language, it seems little short of miraculous that Tisquantum attached himself to the struggling little Plymouth Plantation and made himself useful to



Locations on the New England mainland, Cape Cod, and the islands of special significance to Nantucket history.

⁴¹ Adriaen Block led an expedition for the Dutch all the way to Buzzards Bay and gave his name to Block Island.

⁴² Salisbury 1982, pp. 95–96, 101, 107-08, 120. Also Brassler 1978, p. 82, and in same volume, Salwen 1978, p. 171.

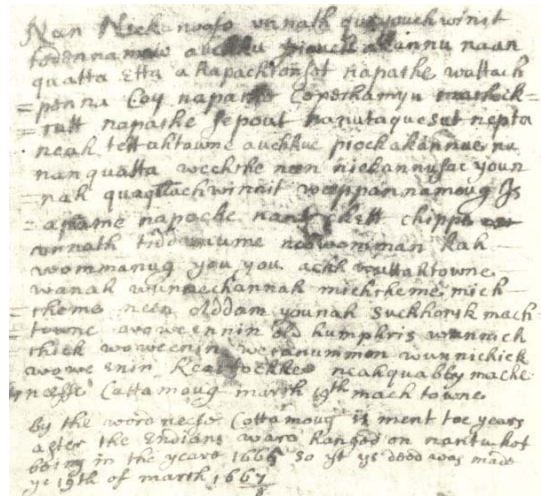
English people he had every reason to consider his enemies. The English at the time and historians since have had reason to question his motives, but Squanto was now a man alone. Unlike Epinow, whose fellow Vineyarders had turned out to cover his escape by raining arrows on his English captors' ship, Tisquantum had returned home to a silent, empty land.

Sometime around 1616, in horrific foreshadowing of what was to happen in Nantucket a century and a half later, an epidemic had broken out and raged for two years along the coast from Narragansett Bay to Penobscot Bay. Before the *Mayflower* arrived, the Patuxet had perished.⁴³ Their fields stood uncultivated, shoulder-high in grass, ready for the English settlers to reclaim for themselves with minimum effort. Scavenger birds—crows, gulls, and the vultures that gave their name to Buzzards Bay—had cleaned away the human carrion, but bones lay unburied, witness to the horror that had come in advance of the sails of the diminutive *Mayflower* with its seemingly insignificant human cargo.

What the Pilgrims observed at Plymouth was deceptive. The epidemic had not swept inland or reached out to the islands. There were far more Massachusetts, Nipmucks, Abenakis, Narragansetts, Pequots, and Wampanoags than they imagined, and in the years to come, these peoples and the English would engage in mutual bloodletting.

Island violence had come already in 1620, months before Samoset's and Tisquantum's meeting with the Pilgrims. Captain Thomas Dermer had a commission from Gorges to visit Martha's Vineyard, and Tisquantum accompanied him as interpreter. Mindful of what had happened to Epinow, the Wampanoags attacked and wounded Dermer, who escaped but eventually died of his injuries. More violence was to follow.

Before the century was out, the mainland had been shaken by two devastating conflicts, the Pequot War of 1637 and King Philip's War of 1675–76.⁴⁴ Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard had not seen their first English settlers at the time of the Pequot War, however, and the violence of Philip's War didn't touch the islands. Philip himself did visit Nantucket a



This deed of land to Quaquachwinnit by Nickanoose was written in the Massachusett language; it includes a note in English about Indians being hanged on Nantucket in 1665. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P21265.*

⁴³ Because almost no one who could write was there to record the exact nature of the disease, it is presently impossible to identify what it was, but the overwhelming mortality rate implies that it was a “virgin soil” epidemic introduced by European visitors to a population with no previous immunity. See Crosby 1994.

⁴⁴ For a description of the Pequot War see Cave, 1996, and for one of King Philip's War, see Lepore 1998.

decade before the war that bears his name, and at about the same time—to put it in the words of an English footnote to a document written in Massachusetts—“Indians ware hanged on nantucket.”⁴⁵

Out to the Islands

English reach to the islands had begun at the opening of the 1640s, after the Pequot War. Thomas Mayhew, a Puritan businessman, faced bankruptcy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. His son, Thomas Jr., and his employee of several years, Peter Folger, had both been learning to speak Massachusetts.⁴⁶ Thomas Jr. studied the language as part of his training for the ministry. Peter Folger learned it for practical business purposes, but in the course of time, he too became an evangelist. When Thomas Mayhew Sr. decided to rebuild his lost fortune outside the colony on Martha’s Vineyard, both young men, with their special language skills, were indispensable to the enterprise.

Mayhew’s first act was to legally clear his new off-shore land holdings. This included obtaining from the Earl of Sterling in 1641 a deed to Nantucket, Tuckernuck, and Muskeget for himself and his son. Then, concluding that the outer islands didn’t suit his plans, he soon after obtained a separate deed to Martha’s Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands.

The Earl of Sterling did not hold undisputed title to the land in question, however. Despite a broad royal grant of coastal lands to Sterling in 1635, the explorer Sir Fernando Gorges had a competing claim, and for security’s sake, Thomas Mayhew also sought confirmation from him of the right to settle the islands.

In 1659, Mayhew sold Nantucket to the “original proprietors” (as contrasted with the ancient proprietors). These new proprietors were Tristram Coffin, Thomas Macy, and their fellow investors—residents of Salisbury, a town on the northern edge of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They paid to Mayhew the famous price of thirty pounds and two beaver hats “one for my self and one for my Wife.”⁴⁷

Within the year the Nantucket sachems Wanackmamack and Nickanoose signed a deed as well. For the price of twenty-six pounds (twelve already paid and fourteen more to come), the sachems sold to Mayhew and the Nantucket proprietors the west end of Nantucket; one half of the remainder of the meadows and marshes on the island; rights to “what grass they shall need to mow” from the remainder of the island’s marshes and meadows; liberty to take timber and wood from any part of the island; and liberty

⁴⁵ Document 71 in Goddard and Bragdon 1988, Part 1, p. 247.

⁴⁶ Other future evangelists who were learning to speak Eastern Algonquian languages at the time were the doctrinally orthodox minister John Eliot and the religious nonconformist Roger Williams.

⁴⁷ The terms of the 1659 agreement are printed in A. Starbuck 1924, p. 18.

to graze livestock anywhere on the island from after the Wampanoags' harvest in the fall until planting began in May.⁴⁸

To this deed of sale Wanackmamack and Nickanoose placed their marks in the presence of Peter Folger, Edward Starbuck, and Felix Kuttashamaquah, interpreter.

A year later, Wanackmamack signed a second deed of sale covering all that is in the previous deed and adding that "likewise I...doe sell unto the English...the property of the rest of the Island belonging unto mee." For this Wanackmamack received forty pounds more.⁴⁹

The sachems had, so to speak, given away the farm. With the signing of these deeds, which were further confirmed with additional witnesses in 1664 and 1677, Nantucket was forever alienated from its ancient proprietors, the island's sachems and their people. Subsequent petitions to the General Court of Massachusetts in the first half of the 1700s for the recovery of their lost land would not prevail. The court pointed out that English title to the island had been triply obtained: from the Earl of Sterling, from Sir Fernando Gorges, and from the Nantucket sachems.

How could such a thing have happened in the wink of an eye, when the number of English settlers actually resident on the island could be counted on one's fingers? The case has been made that the sachems did not grasp what such a sale meant; that perhaps they understood the money presented to them as tribute comparable to what they received from their own people; and that they believed they were temporarily renting out their sachem rights. From their viewpoint such agreements were not made in perpetuity but were subject to frequent renewal. Granted that a phrase appearing in the 1660 deed, "so long as the English remain on the Island," implies that the sachems regarded the deal as temporary, still both deeds also state that the land was conveyed to the purchasers, their heirs, and their assigns "forever." Peter Folger, the Massachusetts-speaking agent of Thomas Mayhew, and Felix Kuttashamaquah, the English-speaking Wampanoag interpreter, knew between them what the deed meant, and if they failed to make this intelligible to Wanackmamack and Nickanoose, then they were jointly responsible for a grave injustice. In obtaining the sachems' marks on the deeds before witnesses, they were taking away for all time the only means of independent living the ancient proprietors of Nantucket had or could have on the island. In the future, following the signing of the deeds, their only means of subsistence would be as dependents of the English. This was not immediately evident in 1660, when Wampanoags overwhelmingly outnumbered English on what had been their island. But they would soon see the light.

⁴⁸ The practice of clearing title in all directions was not novel to Nantucket. It had been a policy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from the beginning, and already in the 1630s the towns of Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown, Concord, and Ipswich had made payment for lands they occupied. Roger Williams was a gadfly of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, insisting that it was immoral to occupy the land of indigenous peoples without purchasing it from them. See Salisbury pp. 199–200.

⁴⁹ The texts of these two deeds are reproduced on pp. 20 and 21 of A. Starbuck 1924.

English Insecurities

The period from Thomas Mayhew's purchase of Nantucket in 1641 to his sale of the island to the English proprietors in 1659 was a time of great change and anxiety for the English as well as for the Wampanoags. In 1641 Oliver Cromwell considered leaving England for a new life in Connecticut. Had he departed, and had King Charles I averted the English revolution against its monarchy, Massachusetts and Connecticut would have been flooded with thousands more Puritans following Cromwell's lead and abandoning their homes in England for new lives across the seas. But parliamentary winds shifted, and Cromwell stayed in England to head up the civil war that broke out the following year. Instead of experiencing an influx of new settlers, the New England colonies lost population as men returned to England to fight against their king and his party. Harvard College had been founded in 1636. Between 1640 and 1650, more than fifty percent of the young men graduating from the college departed for England to support the revolution.⁵⁰ The conflict culminated in the execution of Charles I in 1649, and Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of the English republic until his death in 1658.

Then the political tide turned once again. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the New England Puritans who had returned to their old country to assume positions of power were once again vulnerable. Some, including the Reverend Hugh Peters, who had exerted considerable influence on the young Peter Folger, were executed for treason.⁵¹ Even the deceased Cromwell was not safe; his body was exhumed from the grave for posthumous beheading. He might have done better by himself and his associates had he gone to Connecticut in 1641 rather than luring his supporters back to misfortune in England.

In any case, Thomas Mayhew was a lucky man to sit out this bad time on Martha's Vineyard, and the men who bought Nantucket from him for their own enterprise in 1659 had had close to two decades to read the political and economic handwriting on the colonial wall. If the off-shore islands had previously served Wampanoags as a refuge from contagious infection in the 1620s, they now, forty years later, offered a safe haven from the contagion of political turmoil for a group of insecure English businessmen and religious nonconformists.

A local consequence of this turn of history is that the given name Cromwell became popular among the offspring of English settlers in Nantucket for generations, persisting well into the 1800s. The Coffin family must drive genealogists to despair with its four Cromwell Coffins, four Oliver Cromwell Coffins, and two Oliver C. Coffins, whose birthdates range from 1709 to 1823.⁵²

⁵⁰ Philips 1999, p. 32.

⁵¹ King 1963, p. 62.

⁵² *Vital Records of Nantucket I and II* (Births to 1850). There were also an Oliver Cromwell Hussey, an Oliver Cromwell Barnard, an Oliver Cromwell Gardner, an Oliver C. Gardner, an Oliver C. Swain, an Oliver C. Folger, a

Strangers and Their Religion

During the English political and religious upheaval that unsettled the New England colonies, the Wampanoags of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket were also swept up in a revolution on their home islands. Thomas Mayhew Jr., who had been ordained into the clergy, went to the islands as an evangelist just at the time when John Eliot began his preaching ministry to the native peoples of Natick. During the following decade a primer for teaching how to read in Massachusetts was produced on the printing press in Harvard Yard, and Eliot set about translating the Bible into the Massachusetts language. Seven "praying towns," including the flagship community of Natick, were established along the western frontier of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.⁵³ Because the Puritans believed that all Christian communities required spiritual leaders with a mastery of Latin and Greek as well as Protestant theology and English, young men from the praying towns were sent to Cambridge and Dorchester to be prepared for a college education in order for them to return to their peoples as ministers.

The task at hand for Thomas Mayhew Jr. was to organize the Wampanoags of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket into Christian communities like those on the mainland. Members of these communities were to be self-governing, literate in their own language, and orthodox in Christian doctrine according to Puritan beliefs. In addition to Mashpee and nine other praying towns on Cape Cod, there came to be ten on Martha's Vineyard and five on Nantucket, the accomplishment of the Mayhews together with Peter Folger.⁵⁴

The first step was for the Mayhews and Folger to take up residence on Martha's Vineyard, from whence Captain Dermer had been repelled two decades before. As they built English frame houses at Great Harbor (later renamed Edgartown), no one attacked them. The island's sachems and powwows were not receptive to evangelization, however, and their people reacted dramatically to the stress of having English settlers among them. Experience Mayhew, writing later about his grandfather's and great-grandfather's first year on the Vineyard, recounted an incident in 1643 when the Wampanoags blackened their faces as though in mourning, shouted, brandished weapons, and "ran up and down as if delirious till they could run no longer." Yet they offered the Mayhews no harm.⁵⁵

Meeting opposition to the Christian message from the sachems and powwows, Thomas Mayhew Jr. found his first convert from outside the elite Wampanoag families. Hiacoomes was a young man with a wife and two children when he began his association with the English in the mid-1640s. Experience Mayhew described him as a gifted but marginal member of his own society. The Mayhews provided him

Cromwell Barnard, a Cromwell Macy, a Cromwell Pinkham, and a Cromwell Folger. Even the Boston family, descendants of Nantucket Africans and Wampanoags, produced an Oliver C. (1836–1872).

⁵³ Mandell 1996, p. 17. See map, p. x.

⁵⁴ Gookin 1970, p. 97–105

⁵⁵ Mayhew 1727, p. 3. This frantic running back and forth in times of stress was not unique to the Vineyard. The beheading of a Massachusetts sachem, Wituwamet, by soldiers from Plymouth "so terrified and amazed them [his

an intellectual outlet for his unrecognized talents by giving him one of the new “Indian Primers” and some instruction in how to use it. In a small reading class in 1645, Hiacoomes advanced so much faster than the others that he took over their instruction from Thomas Mayhew Jr. Within the year the two men were preaching jointly to the sachems, and Hiacoomes was engaging the Vineyard powwows in public debates. Having begun his ministry in 1646, Hiacoomes was formally ordained as a minister in 1670, and continued his career in public speaking nearly to his death in 1690.

The informal reading group of 1645 gave place to a regular school established in 1651 with Peter Folger as schoolmaster. In the school he taught reading and writing in both Massachusetts and English along with church doctrine. Although the “Indian school” operated only sporadically, it produced a number of Wampanoag preachers for the Vineyard’s praying towns, and according to Experience Mayhew, reading became widespread among the island’s men, women, and children.

Being reckoned as a Christian among the Puritans was hard even for the English. Once accepted into the church, one could easily make a misstep and be ejected again, as Roger Williams learned painfully during his first years in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. For Wampanoags the cultural leap was orders of magnitude greater. They had to learn to abase themselves, shed tears over their inherent unworthiness, and look to death as deliverance from this sinful world in the hope of a better one to come. Experience Mayhew wrote a book about the lives, last words, and deaths of godly Wampanoags to show how men and women, young and old—those who had lived lives of prayerful good behavior and those who had engaged in scandalous backsliding—all were brought humbly to final resignation. A formulaic deathbed confession of unworthiness appears often in the book, as for instance in the last hours of Jonathan Amos, when reportedly, “He confessed himself to be a Sinner, and utterly unworthy of God’s Mercy; and yet declared that he had Hopes of attaining eternal Mercy thro’ Jesus Christ, our only Savior.”⁵⁶

As an early test of faith and a triumph for Christianity, Mayhew described the death in 1650 of one of the young sons of Hiacoomes and his wife. The child was buried without the traditional rites of face-blackening, lamentation, and burial of grave goods with the body. Thomas Mayhew Jr. preached at this new kind of funeral and praised the bereaved parents for presenting such a good example of patient Christian acceptance of their child’s death.⁵⁷

The English evangelists tacitly assumed that the people they sought to convert were not their moral and intellectual equals. The Mayhews seem to have been a bit more easy-going than John Eliot and his associates in their dealings with the residents of praying towns under their supervision, but nonetheless,

supporters on Cape Cod]...that they forsook their houses, running to and fro like men distracted.” Salisbury 1982, p. 133.

⁵⁶ Mayhew 1727, p. 38–39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

we find Experience Mayhew stating, “It must indeed be granted that the Indians are generally a very sinful People: Iniquity does abound among them.”⁵⁸

Three bulwarks of defense against unchristian behavior were established in praying towns: church, home, and civil authority.

Constant admonition, a feature of Puritan religious life, was instilled as a practice among the new converts. From their ministers, members of praying towns received weekly reinforcement of the notion of their deep and inherent sinfulness. Japheth Hannit took the occasion of his own impending death to issue the following denunciation of his fellow Wampanoags: “God is constantly calling us to Repentance, and has offered repeatedly his Chastisements on us, by grievous Sickneses, but this notwithstanding, how full of Wickedness has he seen all our Towns, for both Men and Women, young Men and Maids, do all delight in Sin, and do things therein greatly grievous.”⁵⁹

Parents were expected to carry on spiritual instruction at home as well. Long before his final illness, Jonathan Amos “used his Endeavors to bring up his Children in the Knowledge and Fear of God; to this end he used to make useful Observations on the Scriptures when he read them to his Family, and to exhort them to the Duties mentioned in them, and did often at other times instruct and admonish them.”⁶⁰

And finally, each praying town had native magistrates and constables to enforce good behavior and punish wrongdoing. Sometimes the whippings imposed by the magistrates struck the English as excessive. When Thomas Mayhew Sr. suggested to Wampanoag magistrate William Lay of Chilmark that he was too severe, Lay replied that that unlike guilt-wracked Englishmen, Indians had no sense of shame and so had to be mercilessly punished for crimes they committed.⁶¹

On Nantucket there is a legend of “Corduda’s Law.” According to this, the Wampanoag justice of the peace would arbitrarily have both plaintiff and defendant whipped before they were granted a hearing. The original source for this, however, tells a different story from the one that has developed through retellings. On one occasion Nantucket’s “great justice” Corduda had a conversation with a Massachusetts-speaking Englishman named Nathan Coleman, who happened to be present when a Wampanoag sought an appeal of a previous ruling. It was Coleman who suggested that the man be punished for coming to court. The original report refers to Coleman as a “crank” for inserting himself into Wampanoag judicial proceedings. Yet folklore has suppressed the role and even the name of the Englishman and perpetuated the story as a joke at the expense of the Wampanoag magistrate and, presumably, his imperfect mastery of English principles of justice.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. xxi.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 38–39.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1727, p. 26.

⁶² O. Macy 1880, p. 34; Mooney and Sigourney 1980, pp. 33–34. Z. Macy 1792b, reproduced in O. Macy 1880, p. 257, and in A. Starbuck 1924, p. 122.

Interpreters and Patrons

Whenever two peoples with no previous knowledge of each other's language and culture come together, someone sooner or later (and usually sooner) manages to learn to communicate in the other's language and becomes an intermediary between the two. As we have seen, a common practice of explorers and incipient colonizers has been to kidnap people for a period of total-immersion language learning before employing them as interpreters. A less coercive tactic is to find exceptional individuals who have been undervalued among their own people and reward their talents in such a way as to inspire deep loyalty to the outsiders.⁶³

In the earliest period of Wampanoag/English contact, Epinow and Tisquantum stand as examples of captivity and immersion. Hiacoomes, who was the most gifted learner in the Mayhews' reading classes but did not enjoy privileged status among the Wampanoags, is a prime example of the second sort of interpreter.

Many are the jokes about the relentless monolingualism of English speakers. For example: a person who speaks several languages is multilingual; a person who speaks two languages is bilingual; a person who speaks one language is an American. In fact, Europeans abroad in the world have generally placed the burden of language learning on other people. In any contact situation of any duration, however, someone among the newcomers does manage to learn the local language. In the 1620s Edward Ashley was able to offer to broker a trade partnership between the English and the native people of the Penobscot area of Maine because he "had for some time lived among the Indians as a savage and went naked amongst them and used their manners, in which time he got their language."⁶⁴ The religious dissident Roger Williams could write his *Key into the Language of America* and establish his Providence colony because he had lived with the Narragansetts while evading deportation to England. A profound sense of religious obligation impelled John Eliot to learn Massachusett, organize the native people on the western edge of the Massachusetts Bay Colony into praying towns, and keep issuing religious books in their language from the Harvard Yard printing press. Captain Daniel Gookin, Superintendent of the Indians of Massachusetts Bay for 30 years from the mid-1650s to the mid-1680s, came to his position from a military career in Ireland and Virginia, posts where he had become accustomed to dealing first with speakers of Irish Gaelic and then with speakers of Powhatan.

These atypical Englishmen, moving with familiarity, relative comfort, and a modicum of appreciation among the indigenous peoples of southern New England, became spokesmen and negotiators before English civil and military authority. This gave them power over indigenous society (although less than they might have wished for) and at the same time exposed them to hostility from other Englishmen who did not share their concerns for the material and spiritual well-being of "savages." Their lives were

⁶³ For the careers of sixteen linguistic and cultural interpreters, see Karttunen 1994.

⁶⁴ Bradford 1963, p. 219.

often threatened by their fellow Englishmen. At the same time they wrought enormous and often detrimental and irreversible changes in the lives of the people they intended to serve or to exploit. For surviving communities such as Aquinnah and Mashpee, the process of recovery continues to this day.

In Latin America men who speak an indigenous language as well as their native Spanish or Portuguese and who look out for and control people they consider theirs are called *patrones*. The word has connotations somewhat different from the English *patron*, although the English definition of a patron as a source of financial support touches on one aspect of this sort of relationship. Once a European-style economy has been brought into an area where currency-based exchange was previously unknown, the introducers of money also become the source of it, and being able to provide and to demand money conveys power over other people's lives.

Patrones are more than walking moneybags, however. The word is derived from the Latin root meaning 'father,' and being a father implies that one has moral authority over people considered to be one's children. *Patrones* are on hand to get their people out of trouble, to intervene in community affairs, to call in favors and debts, to mediate disputes, to take over people's lives on a direct one-to-one basis. In the case of missionaries who claim to be gatekeepers of the hereafter, this control extends even beyond death.

In their various ways, Ashley, Williams, Eliot, and Gookin functioned as *patrones* in New England in the 1600s. However much they valued and admired their indigenous friends, as Europeans and as Christians they did not for a moment doubt their own intellectual and moral superiority or their right to radically remake other people's lives.

The first Massachusetts-speaking Englishmen operating on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard were, as we have seen, Thomas Mayhew Jr. and Peter Folger. Mayhew and Hiacoomes preached together on the Vineyard, while—beginning in 1651—Folger served as schoolmaster there. The Mayhews and Folger became the first English *patrones* of the islands' native peoples.

In 1657 Thomas Mayhew Jr. embarked for England. The ship on which he took passage sailed off to the east and was never seen again. Thereafter his father, Thomas Sr., his son Matthew, and eventually his grandson Experience, all continued his religious mission. Experience Mayhew, in particular, left extensive narratives from which we can learn the names and life stories of many Vineyard Wampanoags.⁶⁵

Before Thomas Jr.'s ill-fated voyage, he, Peter Folger, and Hiacoomes had made evangelical visits to Nantucket. Thomas Sr. had decided against business operations there, but other settlers were certain to come. In the meantime, the groundwork was laid for Christian praying towns on Nantucket similar to the ones forming on the Vineyard and Cape Cod.

⁶⁵ Similar source material does not exist for Nantucket, where names, dates, and life experiences must be teased out of court proceedings, probate records, deeds, and account books.

Peter Folger was undergoing a religious conversion himself. Although he taught the Wampanoags Puritan doctrine in the school on the Vineyard, he was attracted to ideas of the sort Roger Williams espoused and was leaning toward the beliefs of the people who at that time were called *antipedobaptists* ‘those opposed to the baptism of children.’⁶⁶ A question raised by the Baptists was how an infant could be received into the fellowship of faithful Christians before attaining the maturity to personally acknowledge Jesus Christ as savior. They refused to allow their infants to be baptized in accordance with traditional rites that involved sprinkling of water on their foreheads. Instead, they conducted baptism of adult believers by full immersion in ponds and rivers. This doctrinal disagreement between Puritans and Baptists drove Baptists to join Roger Williams in Rhode Island. It also led Peter Folger to resign his membership in the church at Great Harbor (Edgartown) in October 1659, just when the first English settlers arrived on Nantucket.

Although he assisted Nantucket’s new proprietors as interpreter and surveyor of land on the island, Folger did not immediately move to Nantucket himself, nor was he one of the shareholders in the new venture. Instead, he remained with his family on the Vineyard for three years, disenfranchised from local government by his resignation from the church. Then he packed up his household and departed for Rhode Island, a place where being a Baptist was not an impediment to full citizenship.

The next summer, however, the Nantucket proprietors offered Folger and his son Eleazar a half-share in their enterprise if they would move to the island permanently. Peter was to serve the settlers as interpreter, surveyor, and miller and Eleazar as shoemaker. Some of the proprietors, notably Thomas Macy and Edward Starbuck, were themselves Baptists. Starbuck’s troubles with the Puritan General Court of Massachusetts over his beliefs may have motivated his move out of the colony. On Nantucket Peter Folger and his family would not be isolated because of their convictions or hindered from practicing them.

No longer constrained by his former employer Thomas Mayhew Sr., Folger gave free rein to his religious beliefs. A couple of generations later Nathaniel Starbuck Jr. paused to comment to Hezekiah Cartwright as they passed by a pond near the Madaket Road, that in this place “through blind zeal Peter Folger dipped my mother and thy grandmother all under.”⁶⁷

From his base in Nantucket, Folger boldly returned to the Vineyard to preach the need for rebaptism to the Wampanoags there. Experience Mayhew tells the following story without mentioning Folger by name. In answer to the new ideas of a former teacher who had “unhappily imbibed the Errors of the Antipedobaptists, [and] thought himself obliged to endeavor to bring Mr. Japheth over to his

⁶⁶ The shorter forms *anabaptist* and *Baptist* have become more common, but the usage of the time favored the longer form.

⁶⁷ An unsigned note in the Peter Folger folder, Nantucket Historical Association Vertical Files. Nathaniel Starbuck Jr.’s mother was Mary Coffin Starbuck, daughter of Tristram Coffin. Later she became instrumental in establishing a Friends Meeting on Nantucket. Cartwright’s grandmother was Peter Folger’s daughter Dorcas. Mary Coffin is said to have been twenty years old at the time of her pond baptism. The pond is identified as Waqutaquaib Pond on what is now the Sanford Farm property, owned and maintained by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation.

Persuasion,” the Wampanoag elder Japheth Hannit accused his teacher of having become the very sort of false prophet he had once warned his students to shun.⁶⁸

Despite Mayhew’s depiction of the Vineyard Wampanoags’ standing firm in the Puritan faith and Daniel Gookin’s similar story of how they rebuffed visiting Quakers,⁶⁹ the Baptist faith eventually became the preferred form of Christian worship among Wampanoags both on the Vineyard and in Mashpee.

On Nantucket through the end of the 1600s and into the first years of the 1700s, religious pluralism prevailed among the English settlers, who sometimes referred to themselves as Electarians. Organized religion on the island was the domain of the praying Wampanoags, who were said to be “very solid and sober in their meetings of worship.”⁷⁰ From time to time they would complain that the English settlers did not observe the Lord’s Day in decent prayer and worship but instead engaged in everyday work, went rambling all over the island, and—if a whale came into view from the shore—troubled the Wampanoags to leave their devotions and launch their boats for the pursuit.⁷¹

Indian Superintendent Gookin reported in 1674 that there were three places where the native peoples of Nantucket worshipped: Oggawame (near ’Sconset), Wammasquid (possibly Miacomet), and Squatesit. Twenty years later, shortly after Peter Folger’s death, there were five assemblies of praying Wampanoags on the island with three churches, two of them Congregational and one Baptist.⁷²

Since Folger rebaptized English settlers and sought to do the same for his former students on the Vineyard, he doubtless shared his convictions with the Nantucket Wampanoags, and their Baptist church may have been part of his island legacy. Another Folger legacy was the popularity of the baptismal name Dorcas among the Wampanoags. Of the two English women Peter



Waquataquaib Pond was near Maxcy's Pond.
Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, photo of Ewer map, P21257

⁶⁸ Mayhew 1727, p. 50. See Appendix 1a for the full text.

⁶⁹ Gookin 1970, p. 100.

⁷⁰ Z. Macy 1792b. Reproduced in O. Macy 1880, p. 253, and A. Starbuck 1924, p. 122.

⁷¹ Complaints of 1746 and 1747, reproduced in A. Starbuck 1924, pp. 148–50, 153–56. See Appendix 1d for the text of one of them.

⁷² Gookin 1970, pp. 104–05. Anderson 1940, p. 204, implies that Peter Folger baptized John Gibbs by immersion in Gibbs’s Pond, but if Gibbs and the Oggawame congregation had been Baptist in 1674, Gookin would have noted it in his report.

Folger had zealously dunked in Waqutaquaib Pond, one was his own daughter Dorcas. Records exist of at least sixteen Wampanoag women who subsequently bore her name.⁷³

There was more than evangelism, however, to Peter Folger's three decades of interaction with Nantucket's ancient proprietors. He was an agent of the settlers, the new proprietors who had made him a half-shareholder in their corporation in exchange for his services. He carried out the surveys and wrote the deeds by which Wampanoag land passed into the possession of the English settlers, and he was indispensable to both sides as a conduit of information, especially when dealing with the mainland Wampanoag leader Metacom, who had become known by his English given name Philip.

Late in life, smarting from a power struggle with the English proprietors that landed him in jail for half a year, Folger warned that the Nantucket Wampanoags were upset by his incarceration. Stating that "I have been interpreter here from the beginning of the Plantation, when no Englishman but myself could scarce speak a word of Indian," he went on to say that he had on occasion stepped in to avert violence against English settlers who had committed offenses. In concert with the Wampanoag elders, he said, he had kept peace on the island. Now, as his confinement dragged on, he couldn't answer for what might happen.⁷⁴

When Folger wrote those words, King Philip's War had been over for less than a year. During that time English towns had been burned, farmsteads had suffered deadly attacks, and English settlers had been gruesomely killed or carried off into captivity. Precisely the same fate befell the native inhabitants of mainland praying towns. Worse still, Christian residents of the praying towns who did not join the insurgents were interned by the English colonists on desolate Deer Island in Boston harbor, ostensibly for their own safety. During the winter of 1675–76, half of them died there of starvation and exposure, and massacre of the survivors by an English lynch mob was barely averted. As for Philip, his allies, and his family, defeat by the English in the summer of 1676 brought death for some, long terms of involuntary servitude for others, and—for those considered too dangerous to remain in New England—export to the Caribbean slave markets. Like Oliver Cromwell, Philip was beheaded after death. His head was mounted on a pole for public viewing in Plymouth, where his father Massasoit had celebrated with the Pilgrims their first harvest in 1621.⁷⁵ Mainland New England had been knocked reeling by its second Indian war of the century, and more of the same lay ahead in the century to come.⁷⁶

Peter Folger read a lesson into this war as it ravaged the mainland while sparing the islands. He was inspired to write a long poem entitled *A Looking Glasse for the Times* in which he lay the blame for

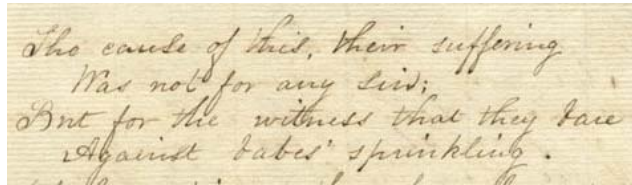
⁷³ Dorcas Cane, Dorcas Corduda, Dorcas Esop, Dorcas Homney, Dorcas Jacob, Dorcas Kenny, Dorcas Levi, Dorcas Mingo, Dorcas Punkin, Dorcas Quabe, Dorcas Timmit, Matakeken's daughter Dorcas, Oqua's daughter Dorcas, Matthew Jenkin's servant Dorcas, "Limping Dorcas," and Dorcas Honorable.

⁷⁴ The full text of Peter Folger's petition to Governor Andros of New York appears on pp. 343–50 of Anderson 1940.

⁷⁵ Lepore 1999, pp. 140, 150–55, 174.

the war on Puritan intolerance and persecution of people who held religious beliefs different from their own. In his view, Philip and his allies were instruments of God's wrath, and the sooner the Puritans stopped harassing Baptists and other dissidents, the sooner the war would end.⁷⁷

In traditional Wampanoag society, the burden of punishing wrongdoers rested with the sachems. In the new context of Christian praying towns, the responsibility belonged to Wampanoag magistrates, who—as we



Peter Folger's poem *A Looking Glasse for the Times* asserted that King Philip's War was divine punishment for Puritan misdeeds, including persecution of Baptists. This handwritten copy of a verse from the poem reads: "The cause of this their suffering was not for any sin / but for the witness that they bore against babes' sprinkling." *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, 21259.*

have seen—might lay on whippings so severe as to disturb English observers. English punishment and execution of Wampanoags, on the other hand, were profoundly troubling to Wampanoags. Of the ten or more hangings that have taken place in the course of Nantucket history, the tradition is that all those “dropped” were Wampanoags. A number of lists of the ten have been published with minor variations. Despite misdatings, misreadings, and lack of complete documentation for all cases, there is no doubt that English settlers and their descendants did hang Wampanoags in the 1700s. There is also that cryptic reference to Indians being hanged on Nantucket in 1665, within two years of Peter Folger's taking up residence on the island. At about the same time King Philip put in a brief, threatening visit to Nantucket, and Peter Folger negotiated his departure. Both the obscure hangings of 1665 and the much better-known visit of King Philip that same year seem to have ties to an off-island institution, Harvard College.

⁷⁶ For a narrative of the Deerfield Massacre of 1704 and its aftermath, see Demos 1995.

⁷⁷ A notable verse about Puritan persecution of the Baptists reads: “The cause of this their suffering/was not for any sin/but for the witness that they bare/against baby's sprinkling.” Anderson 1940, p. 308.