Keeping one foot in each world: Mashpee Indians of Cape Cod in the Atlantic world

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Keeping One Foot in Each World: Mashpee Indians of Cape Cod in The Atlantic World

by

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Abstract

The Mashpee group, an Algonquian-speaking people occupying the present-day Mashpee district of Cape Cod, underwent many changes during the colonial period. Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries Indians adopted English technology, died from disease, converted to Christianity, litigated their land with whites, shifted their political structure, and changed their economic practices. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Mashpee Indians came increasingly into contact with the expanding English towns that surrounded them. Indians thus turned to the General Court with petitions to protect their lands, drafted wills, and made court appearances. By the mid-eighteenth century, the structure of the community had changed permanently. Indians faced increased consumption of alcohol, debt, and poverty. A higher death rate among Mashpee men as they participated in the Seven Years' War, American Revolution, and in whaling, to a degree, tore the community apart. As Indian men died in large numbers, women became the Indian majority in the district by the second half of the eighteenth century. To help their families, women worked as domestic servants in Euro-American homes and as traders at local markets. A lack of Indian men opened the door for African, European, and foreign-born sailors to migrate into the district. Yet despite these changes—some forced upon Indians by whites as tools of domination and some accepted by the Mashpee Indians on their own terms—the region remained an Indian place by the end of the eighteenth century. The “Indianness” of the district was maintained partially because Indians from throughout New England migrated into the region. While Mashpee Wampanoags, most of whom were women, still staked their claims to their homelands and to their rights as Indians, they married outsiders and widened their socioeconomic ties with a developing Atlantic world. One can therefore argue that the past historical view of the extinction of Indian populations and their traditions in eighteenth-century New England does not entirely apply to the Mashpees. Indeed, the group became more fully integrated into white society and culture as a multi-ethnic community of the “lower sort.” Yet even with a new way of life that included adopting English Christian practices and absorbing outsiders, Indians of Mashpee often put their adopted social customs to work for them to maintain their homelands and Indian traditions into the nineteenth century.
Introduction:
An Enduring Indian Community

I stand at the door of my wigwam, and gaze with saddened eyes, at the domain that was
once my ancestors' the fairest under the skies.

Mabel L. Avant, a Mashpee Wampanoag

Ask most Americans and they would tell you that no Indians live in New England
today. Visit most New England towns, cities, or districts and one would draw the same
conclusion. On the other hand, the Mashpee district of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is a
frequently forgotten home to modern-day Native Americans. Several up-scale
predominately white communities stand as contemporary symbols of how past historians
nurtured the viewpoint of the vanishing New England Indian. The place hardly seems the
home to an active Native American community when a visitor drives unwittingly past
Mashpee and Wakeby ponds surrounded by the modest dwellings of the Mashpee
Indians. One only need attend the July powwows in Mashpee, however, to understand
that Indian identity in New England is in fact real.

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1 Quoted in Russell M. Peters, The Wampanoags of Mashpee: An Indian Perspective on
2 Francis G. Hutchins, Mashpee: The Story of Cape Cod's Indian Town (West Franklin,
3 According to my conversations with Leigh Potter, powwows, tribal organized summer
festivals, are held annually in July. Of course, the word powwow (sometimes spelled
pawaw or powow during colonial times) has an Algonquian word-derivation. It was used
throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Puritans to refer to local Indian
shamans/medicine men. Laurie Weinstein, “‘We’re Still Living on Our Traditional
Homeland’: The Wampanoag Legacy in New England,” in Strategies for Survival:
American Indians in the Eastern United States ed. Frank W. Porter III (New York:
Greenwood Press, 1986), 85-112. Weinstein’s essay has been helpful in determining what
it has meant, and still means, to be Indian in Mashpee. According to Jean O’Brien,
Not only during the summer when powwows are held, but every day the rhythms of times past pulse in Mashpee outside the bounds of the town’s elegant communities and bustling shopping centers. Standing only a short trek from the ponds is the “Old Indian Meeting House.” A curious visitor must of course follow the “Old Meeting House Road” to see it. Mashpee Wampanoags remain convinced that Richard Bourne, the first English minister in the area, constructed the chapel in 1685, while others believe missionary Gideon Hawley built it in 1758. The “Old Indian Cemetery” with tombstones from as early as 1770 is nestled on the hillside below. Leigh Potter, who is the graveyard’s daily caretaker, is also a former Tribal Council member who can trace his family back several generations. He drives enthusiastic visitors around in his pickup truck and breathes life into the district with a personalized tour. Strolling around the graveyard, one cannot help but notice twigs, sticks, and rocks adorning several gravestones in the form of traditional Indian offerings to the ancestor spirits (tcipai). On one of the tombstones dated to the 1970s, hangs a colorful framed photograph of the deceased dressed in Wampanoag clothing.  


Indeed, while most places in New England have lost any traces of the Native Americans who once lived in their midst, Indian and white people are still living together in Mashpee. Several white upper-class communities expanding since the 1970s in no way have eroded the vestiges of the town’s Native American past. To understand the district’s history over the past three centuries one must then consider its Indian inhabitants central in discussion. And in doing so, one will discover a Native American community whose legacy, in large part, has been the continual fight to keep their homelands.

A history of the ways in which Mashpee Indians survived over three centuries on their traditional homelands serves as a counterpoint to the “extinction myth” bolstered by contemporaries of King Philip’s War and generations of writers. After the defeat of King Philip’s forces, printed narratives and letters by colonists such as William Hubbard, Increase Mather, and Nathaniel Saltonstall wove stories of how the English victory signaled the end for New England’s eastern aboriginal groups.\(^5\) Authors from English descent in the nineteenth century rekindled such tales of Indian decline. Antebellum novelists and playwrights spun stories of how their forefathers, although facing formidable opposition from “savage” natives and a vast untamed wilderness, planted English institutions to “tame” the land and its “uncivilized” inhabitants. Compelled by the crisis over Andrew Jackson’s policy of Indian removal, nineteenth-century white Americans thus labeled New England Indians “conquered” and “assimilated” in staking

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what they claimed as their ancestral rights to native homelands. Edwin Forrest’s play entitled *Metamora; or, the Last of the Wampanoags*, shown throughout the United States between 1829 and 1887, resurrected the story of King Philip’s War for generations of Americans and led them to believe that Native American removal was inevitable. An American identity founded on a romanticized Indian, as Jill Lepore has recently reminded us, required that Native Americans themselves be gone and vanished. The newly heroized death of Metacomet in Forrest’s play was thus ideal for creating a memory of the vanishing Indian because it glorified the defeat and disappearance of New England natives and helped make the concept of removal inviting to white America. Most nineteenth-century Euro-Americans started believing, then, that any friendly Indians living east of the Appalachians in the Jacksonian era lived scattered in a few remote patches of wilderness, and would eventually succumb, that is if they had not already, to the superiority of white society and culture.

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6 From this point forward, this thesis avoids the term “acculturation.” When referred to, it is within the context of a citation from another source. “Acculturation” is too confining a concept. As historian Nancy M. Farriss argues, “acculturation” connotes change moving in the direction of assimilation into the dominant culture, itself unaffected by the contact, and all one has to do is measure the rate (p.110). “Culture contact,” in this thesis the settlement of New England, as Farriss suggests should be viewed as presenting a new arrangement of options to both sides of the process. This could include acceptance or rejection of new practices, or a wholesale transformation of old forms into something that never previously existed. See Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1984), 2-20, 100-120.

7 Lepore, *The Name of War*, 224.

8 Ibid.

Apparently invisible to outsiders, Indians in southeastern Massachusetts became invisible in history books, a fact only giving further credence to the centuries-old fable of the "vanishing Indian." Fortunately, some previous historians did take notice that, after King Philip's War, southeastern New England natives confronted a wide range of disruptive changes including diminished or completely lost homelands, poverty, disease, and poached resources. Nonetheless, the majority more often than not failed to mention that Indians survived all these changing circumstances. Nurturing misconception and prejudice, the historical literature even as late as the 1960s obscured that many of New England's southeastern native cultures were not invisible, that they weathered centuries of conflict, poverty, racism, disease, conversion, intermarriages, and land seizures creating modified communities, some of which endure on their homelands today. So until the 1970s and 1980s, extinction of New England's coastal Indian peoples, dispossession of their homelands over the past three centuries, and not groups coming together and surviving up to the present, were dominant themes as historians canvassed the past of New England's native communities.


10 Calloway, ed., After King Philip's War, 2-3.
More recently, historians James Merrell, Daniel Mandell, and Jean O'Brien have pushed Native American survival to the front in countering the extinction myth, showing the ways in which Native American groups handled changing circumstances in as many different ways as Africans or Europeans. Merrell, Mandell, and O'Brien are just a few of the historians writing what has been called the “New Indian History.” All three have expanded our understanding of how various Native American communities responded to colonization, while, in the process, using cross-disciplinary approaches to reveal aspects of Indian life in the colonial period that might otherwise be forgotten.

James Merrell has opened new directions for American Indian history with his argument that Indians, like Europeans and Africans, encountered a “new world” with British colonization. His ethnohistory of the Catawbas in colonial South Carolina exposed a dynamic interplay between Catawbas Indians and their neighbors—African and European. For Native Americans, Merrell has argued, a new order emerged in several overlapping stages. First alien germs killed untold numbers of natives, sometimes, as Alfred W. Crosby has found, before the victims had ever seen a white or black person. Next came traders who exchanged European commodities for Indian products; in Catawbas country this usually meant English “baubles” or “bangles” for deerskins for the Atlantic market. In time, colonial settlers eager to develop the land according to their own wishes replaced tradesmen. And amid these intrusions of disease, trade, and settlers,

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13 Merrell discusses this fault in past scholarship in The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989); idem, “Some Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians,” 114.

14 Merrell, The Indians’ New World, x; Alfred W. Crosby, “Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America,” in Colonial America: Essays in
came, in some places like New England, missionaries intent on winning souls for Christ. Merrell’s conceptual framework, the idea of overlapping and fluctuating periods of challenges and responses, an ebb and flow as to how Indians blended their customs with new practices to create a “new world,” stands as one model for other studies on Native Americans. This thesis will consider Merrell’s framework when examining how the Indians of Cape Cod responded to English settlement in the seventeenth century.

In some ways Daniel R. Mandell has utilized Merrell’s conceptual framework. *Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts* outlined the central history in tracing the ways Indian enclaves--Natick, Mashpee, Gay Head, Hassanamisco, and several other communities--maintained their cultures and homelands while accommodating to increasing challenges after King Philip’s War (disease, trade, poverty, poaching, settlement, political disenfranchisement, conversion, land dispossession, and miscegenation). Mandell’s study, much like Merrell’s work on the Catawbas of South Carolina, further revealed how the eighteenth century was a redefining period for native groups of Massachusetts. Intermarrying and intermixing with whites and Africans after 1750 marked the development of modern “ethnic” identities in eastern Massachusetts that laid the groundwork for many groups to survive beyond the eighteenth century.

Yet *Behind the Frontier* lacked the details of an intensive community study. By trying to link general patterns for all groups in the region, Mandell never reconciled that each enclave developed its own culturally specific strategies for responding to disease, land dispossession, political disenfranchisement, trade, poverty, conversion, alcohol, and
intermarriages. For this reason, only a few points emerged from Mandell’s book for understanding the Mashpee group’s responses to these challenges. By looking more specifically at the history of the Mashpee Indians, and by expanding the analysis to include the sixteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries, this thesis provides a more detailed history of how one Indian group developed its own strategies for survival in the colonial era.\textsuperscript{15}

Historian Jean O’Brien has come closest to a complete community study of a native group in early New England. Her book, \textit{Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790}, can therefore serve as a model for comparable work. O’Brien revealed how Indians in Natick did not simply disappear. Rather, before and after King Philip’s War, Natick natives resisted colonialism, defended their lands, and rebuilt traditional community institutions through the selective use of English cultural practices. An ability to camouflage their “Indianness” by creatively adopting the Protestant religion, and Anglo-American socioeconomic practices such as material culture, land tenure, and livestock, rendered the Natick Indians virtually invisible within British America. O’Brien, though, showed how their culture was indeed active underneath a thick layer of English social customs.

Land was central to O’Brien’s narrative of Natick Indian survival and transformation. She was concerned with “struggles between English settlers and Natick natives over the possession and ‘proper’ use of land, ways different peoples viewed the connection between land and identities, and the means by which land served to mark the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{15} Mandell, \textit{Behind the Frontier}.
\end{flushleft}
place of Indian people in New England."\textsuperscript{16} O'Brien has looked at the connection between Indian land and identity in colonial Natick as a way of understanding Indian persistence and change under an imposed social order through forms of adaptation that by the early nineteenth century rendered them invisible to Americans.\textsuperscript{17} New England Indians and English colonizers had different views of connections to the land. And, according to O'Brien, one way to flesh out Indian survival is to examine how Indian families changed their uses of land, and how they used their land to negotiate cultural changes.\textsuperscript{18} Natick is ideal for this type of study because of the richness in sources. Examining this material, O'Brien found that the camouflage of Anglo-American socioeconomic practices, namely English forms of land tenure (the commodification of land), perpetuated the nineteenth-century view that starting with the Puritan missionary John Eliot, Englishmen soon dispossessed the Natick Indians of their lands.

The works of O'Brien, Mandell, and Merrell have all shown how examining native communities with more sophisticated frameworks can dispel the "tragically plummeting trajectory so commonly charted."\textsuperscript{19} This thesis builds upon their work by exploring the uneven and slow process by which Mashpee Wampanoags blended their customs with new practices as a strategy for survival. It also examines how part of the Mashpees' blend of traditions and English practices still included core connections to their homelands and families. And this thesis investigates the processes by which Mashpee Indians adopted selected English practices and intermarried and intermixed with outsiders to camouflage their "Indian core" so that by the nineteenth century they were

\textsuperscript{16} O'Brien, \textit{Dispossession by Degrees}, 10.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 12.
placed alongside the natives of Natick in the caste of conquered indigenous groups in early America.

The Mashpees and the Natick Indians, however, differed in their geographic location within the colonial regime and differed in the intensity with which they resisted any ties to Anglo-American society. Mashpee’s native population, on the coast of Cape Cod, had more direct access to the developing Anglo-Atlantic world, whereas the Natick Indians lived inland, adjacent to the town of Dedham. In bearing the traits of a coastal community, after 1760 Mashpee started to rival the larger seaports of British America in ethnic diversity, cultural interaction, and coastal connections to a seagoing life. Ethnic variety eventually had no bounds among these coastal people because the whaling industry attracted settlers from as far away as England, South America, and Bombay. Native men who worked aboard ship brought diseases to the district, while Indian whalers at sea died in large numbers. Mariners grew more addicted to alcohol, caroused around town, sinking into severe debt by exchanging their labor or land for liquor, while pulling their families into deeper poverty. Physical, emotional, and cultural connections to life at sea, no doubt, jarred Indian kin and community in Mashpee. Yet, this thesis will argue that the Mashpee Indians, as best they could, kept white culture at arms-length throughout the eighteenth century more so than the Indians of Natick who tried “to live more like [their] Christian English neighbors [did],” and who basically, by the end of the

19 Merrell, The Indians’ New World, x; O’Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 1-12.
20 See the Gideon Hawley Letters housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter cited as MHS) and Congregational Library and Archives (hereafter cited as CLA) both in Boston, for discussions of the cultural implications of the whaling industry.
American Revolution, were, as Mandell has pointed out, fading in the town they helped create. 21

Indeed, part of the struggle, in the eyes of the Mashpee group, was that their homeland became a less “rigidly sealed community,” when the color lines there grew hazy during the eighteenth century. 22 After 1750, as in Natick, people from surrounding areas gravitated to Mashpee. African men moved there seeking an Indian woman’s hand in marriage, perhaps a job at sea, perhaps the pleasures of strong drink, or the district’s abundant fishing and timber resources. 23 Four Hessian deserters from the Revolutionary War, several Englishmen, and foreign-born sailors, also sought refuge there contributing to the region’s ethnic diversity. As O’Brien and others have found elsewhere in New England, this “further blurred the vision of those who searched for Indians using categories of racial purity,” because the ethnic boundaries in Mashpee were much more fluid in the last half of the eighteenth century. The community by the 1800s had developed into a multi-ethnic maritime enclave made up of Africans, Indians, Euro-Americans, foreign-born sailors, and their offspring. 24 Culturally, the demarcation

22 Quotation taken from O’Brien Dispossession by Degrees, 1. She also affirms that Natick, like other Indian communities in the eighteenth century, was never a “sealed community.”
between “natives” and “non-natives” was therefore not fixed after 1750. What it meant
to be a “native of Mashpee” had become a stitched patchwork of colors and customs.\textsuperscript{25}

However, this change was just part of an ongoing process that was taking place
throughout America because Mashpee and the wider New England society and
developing Anglo-Atlantic world were all places where strangers found ways past their
differences.\textsuperscript{26} An argument that Mashpee was a place of changing social composition
during the colonial period, and during the early Republic, should then serve more as a
point on which a thesis should rest rather than the focus of a substantial inquiry.

Notwithstanding, the details of how Mashpee’s Indian culture and society
survived through all the changes wrought by a developing Anglo-Atlantic world until
now, remained an almost untold story. For the Mashpee group there were definite ebbs
descent. I use the term “mixed” to describe people of Indian-African, or Indian-white
descent within the region. There is no evidence of white-African intermarriage within the
district. Of course, the designations of “English,” “African,” and “black” changed in the
early republic. “English,” for the purposes of this project, becomes “Euro-American”
and “African” becomes “African-American.” Of course, “Euro-American” will refer to
those of German and English descent within the district. The term “mixed,” however,
retains its original connotations. “Indian” will still be used to refer to those of Native
American ancestry. “Black” was often used in the early republic to refer to people of
Indian and African descent. Otherwise, I will still use “black” to refer to only those of
African descent. “Mongrel” was a derogatory term often used to designate people of
mixed descent in the early Republic.

\textsuperscript{25} I am deeply indebted to the theoretical underpinnings of Cynthia Radding’s book,
\textit{Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces, And Ecological Frontiers in
Northwestern Mexico, 1700-1850} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-46. I thank
Professor James Saeger for introducing me to this insightful study. For a more recent
perspective on changing identities see Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds.,
from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830} (Chapel Hill: University of North

\textsuperscript{26} Merrell, \textit{The Indians’ New World}, x; Hoffman, Sobel, and Teute, eds., \textit{Through a Glass
Darkly}. See Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., \textit{Strangers within the Realm:
Cultural Margins of the First British Empire} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
and flows of "challenge and response, crisis and calm, disintegration and reformation." 27 This thesis will show how the identity of the Wampanoags in Mashpee, over time, became both Indian and English in the ways the group lived. My main argument, then, is that as with previous generations, Mashpee Indians in the eighteenth century maintained their family connections and lived on their traditional homelands despite widening ties with an Atlantic world. Mashpee remained an Indian place as evidenced by the petitions seeking help for kin and community, and the group's success at surviving the ravages of diseases, alcohol, war, and whaling. Indians in Mashpee during the eighteenth century, most of whom were women, still staked their claims to their homelands unlike the Natick Indians who were gradually selling most of their land. By staying on their homelands, Indians in Mashpee retained traditional subsistence and settlement patterns as well as native spiritual practices and crafts. One can also argue that despite demographic shifts of Indian women outnumbering Indian men in the region, thereby compelling Wampanoag women to seek marriages with Europeans and Africans, children were still raised as Indians. English, German, African, and foreign-born men, too, assumed an Indian identity to live and work in a Wampanoag community of the early republic. Moreover, dislocated Indians from all over New England, who took up residence in Mashpee in search of land and subsistence, helped keep the region an Indian place.

Even while Indians continued to guard customs, by the last half of the eighteenth century, Mashpee men and women were part of the Atlantic world's maritime and domestic working classes. They worked as whalers and servants, fought in colonial wars, and bartered crafts and timber at local markets. Residents fired off petitions, drafted

27 Merrell, *The Indians' New World*, x.
wills, and filed suits in court. They purchased English amenities and some constructed shingled homes. They attended church, married outsiders, and spoke two languages.28

Also, as Mandell has recently reminded us, the African-Indian marriages that took place in Mashpee were partially due to the legal and economic biases of New England society that separated whites from “people of color” in the early republic.29

By focusing on the Mashpees’ success at living as Indians on their homelands while immersed in a developing Anglo-Atlantic world, a fuller understanding of the ways the group survived into the nineteenth century as a Native American community emerges. The Indians and their customs, to be sure, never vanished from their homelands even as migrations of Euro-Americans and African Americans continued. Visitors to Mashpee in the early 1800s noticed how wigwams still dotted the landscape.30 And travelers of the nineteenth century recorded carefully how Mashpee Indians still honored Algonquian social customs such as sacrifice rocks.

Prior historical accounts of Mashpee’s colonial experience never examined thoroughly the Mashpees’ success at surviving into the nineteenth century as a multi-

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30 Wigwams were the traditional dwellings among Algonquians. Most were square or oblong, built from saplings. All were built on the same fundamental plan, despite variations in size. Long flexible poles were driven into the ground at intervals around the perimeter, arched over until they met members from the opposite side, and secured into place. Smaller horizontal poles were then fastened to the uprights to hold the slabs of bark or woven mats that covered the structure. For a discussion of wigwams see Bert Salwen, “Indians of Southern New England and Long Island: Early Period,” in Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 15, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 160-176, For a contemporary description of wigwams see Gookin, “Historical Collections of the Indians in New England,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, (hereafter cited as MHSC), 1st series, Vol. I, 181.
ethnic maritime community with strong connections to an Indian way of life. The first was Francis Hutchins' *Mashpee: The Story of Cape Cod's Indian Town*, published in 1979. In some ways he recognized the district's strong Wampanoag heritage by focusing on the Indian side of the story. Yet he lacked the colonial historian's perspective and gave the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries short shrift. More importantly, he wrote his book before the explosion of new works on Indians in early America. Hutchins argued that Indian responses to change were exclusively linked to English missionary and political manipulation by ignoring Wampanoag motivations and actions for blending their social customs with English practices. Similarly, Jack Campisi only briefly discussed the colonial period in *The Mashpee Indians: Tribe on Trial* while devoting substantial analysis to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His study, moreover, focused on tracing cultural continuity through time to support the Mashpees' land claims of the 1970s by arguing that they remained a culturally homogenous group into the twentieth century. Unfortunately, Campisi's approach did not consider Indian changes in the face of challenges as much as representations and expressions of group survival into the present. Because both authors wrote their studies before the "new Indian history" reached fruition, and because both authors are not social historians with a focus on colonial America, they did not benefit from insights of Merrell, Hutchins' study developed from his work as a defense expert witness in the land-claims trial in the late 1970s. For a succinct discussion of the trial and its results, see especially Jack Campisi's *The Mashpee Indians: Tribe on Trial* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 19.


33 Campisi, *The Mashpee Indians*. 

16
Mandell, and O’Brien and other historians interested in multi-ethnic communities of the eighteenth century. To incorporate the conceptual frameworks of recent works on Native Americans, my work revises Hutchins and Campisi’s examinations and contributes to the scholarship on ethnicity in early America.

This thesis begins by detailing the lives of southern New England Indians before English colonization. It then examines the development of Mashpee as a community before King Philip’s War. Finally, it extensively discusses the eighteenth century and only briefly examines the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in its conclusion. Chapter one examines indigenous life in Cape Cod on the brink of English colonization, within the broader context of Algonquian institutions and relationships found among many groups in early southern New England. It draws heavily on anthropology, ethnohistory, and early explorers and travel accounts, as only a fragmentary documentary record exists for seventeenth-century Mashpee. It then explores the first meetings between southern New England Indians and Europeans, and argues that when the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, Squanto and Samoset’s behavior toward the English was part of an adjustment already underway where Indians were learning how to put their acquired knowledge of Europeans to practice while still conducting business in a manner consistent with Indian customs.

Chapter two uses the available seventeenth century material--Plymouth records, missionary accounts, town records, English narratives--to examine the English settlement of Cape Cod and the development of the Mashpee “praying town.” The chapter reveals how the English settlers who came to New England in the seventeenth century would alter forever the Wampanoag communities of Cape Cod. It examines the waves of
epidemics that destroyed entire Indian villages, and explores the English settlement that followed right after. The chapter analyzes the formation of "praying towns" in New England under the leadership of John Eliot, and how the Mashpee reservation emerged out of these efforts. It considers the impact of King Philip's War on the Mashpee "praying Indians." And finally, the chapter discusses the series of colonial-crown conflicts between 1680 and 1700 and how these conflicts provided little stability to Indian groups on the Cape. Yet despite all these drastic changes, this chapter argues, the Mashpee group emerged as one of the largest Indian communities in Massachusetts that still lived on traditional homelands and that still practiced Indian social customs.

Chapter three uses the eighteenth-century evidence, namely the rich letters and diaries of the missionary Gideon Hawley, the few extant probate records and petitions from Indians on the Cape, a map drawn by Ezra Stiles, accounts of visits to Mashpee, evidence about whaling, and Revolutionary War data for the Mashpees. Chapter three focuses on the Mashpees' continued strategy for survival in the eighteenth century. The third chapter first explores how the Mashpee group came into more direct conflict over land with neighboring towns and how this led to the General Court in Massachusetts having greater authority over Indian lives. It examines petitions, probate records, wills, and court appearances as part of this process. The chapter then shows how religious and non-religious leaders in Mashpee were still caught in the midst of cultural change in the first half of the eighteenth century. It discusses Gideon Hawley's influence on the community, stressing the spiritual and material "comforts" he brought to the Indians. The chapter explores the conflicts over the guardianship established in 1746, and how the Mashpee group emerged triumphant with the help of Hawley. Then, the chapter uncovers
the variety of transformations that befell the Mashpee group in the eighteenth century, including continual battles with disease, the loss of men in colonial wars, the impact of the whaling industry, the effects of a growing consumer culture, and the changing roles of Indian women. It emphasizes how the socioeconomic changes in the community created both Mashpee’s changing social composition (intermarriages with outsiders) as a multi-ethnic maritime community of the “lower sort” and skewed gender ratios of a female Indian majority. The last part of the chapter emphasizes how Indian women, as the majority, became the principal keepers of their group’s culture and the defenders of the Mashpees’ rights as Indians.

The conclusion of this thesis assesses the historical significance of the colonial period for the Mashpee Indians. It contours the group’s history in the nineteenth century, showing that when facing conflicts over their homelands, the mixed group in Mashpee forged a collective identity that claimed to be “Indian.” The conclusion also identifies the enduring legacies that, with modification, still continue today to shape the Mashpees’ Indian identity in Cape Cod. Finally, the conclusion reflects on how this thesis counters earlier historical works in that it focuses on Wampanoag survival after King Philip’s War.
Chapter One:
Southern New England Indians: a People and Their Land on the Brink of
English Settlement

It has been many moons since Samoset said “Welcome Englishmen.” Since then our
land has gone from us, never to be ours again.

Mabel L. Avant

But about the 16th of March, a certain Indian came boldly amongst them and
spoke to them in broken English... At length they understood by discourse with
him, that he was not of these parts, but belonged to the eastern parts where
some English ships came to fish, with whom he was acquainted and could
name sundry of them by their names... He became profitable to them in
acquainting them with many things concerning the state of the country in the
eastern parts where he lived. His name was Samoset. He told them also of
another Indian whose name was Squanto, a native of this place, who had been
in England and could speak better English than himself.

Squanto was the last of the Patuxet Indians of the eastern part of southern
New England. Until his death in 1622, he was an interpreter, teacher, friend, and
diplomat to the Pilgrims. Squanto had been kidnapped and taken to parts of both
Spain and England before the Pilgrims arrived. Accordingly, his advantage over
Samoset and other Indians was that he possessed a fuller understanding of the ways of
the English. The lessons he taught the Pilgrims, especially the story of how Squanto
educated the newcomers on the usefulness of fish fertilizer for planting maize, have
reached mythical proportions in American history textbooks. Historians, on the

1Quoted in Russell M. Peters, The Wampanoags of Mashpee: An Indian Perspective
3My understanding of Squanto comes from Neil Salisbury, “Squanto: Last of the
Patuxets,” in Struggle and Survival in Early America, ed. David G. Sweet and Gary
B. Nash (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 228-246. And also the
essay by James Axtell, “Scholastic Philosophy into the Wilderness,” in The European
and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1981), 131-167. Several historians and anthropologists have
shown that Squanto probably learned about fish fertilizer on his trips to Europe and
Newfoundland. Agreeing with Lynn Ceci, Dean Snow has argued “Squanto was
other hand, have paid little attention to the lives of southern New England Indians before Squanto's encounters with the Pilgrims.

Reconstructing the lives of southern New England Indians before Squanto and the Pilgrims reveals two distinct yet interlocking stories. First, as historian Neil Salisbury has reminded us, New England Indian societies trained their males from childhood until adulthood for public lives in wars, trading, diplomacy, religious ceremonies, and decision-making. By dealing with the Pilgrims, then, Squanto and Samoset were simply following the traditions that they had been trained to observe their entire lives. Second, Americans have romanticized Squanto's encounters with the Pilgrims as the first real contact between European colonizers and the Indians of New England while actually the fabled meeting occurred after several other encounters between Europeans and southern New England natives had already taken place. For that reason, many southern New England natives, like Samoset, when the Pilgrims arrived, spoke little to no English but had garnered some knowledge of Europeans by sporadically trading and skirmishing with them. Thus Squanto and Samoset's behavior toward the English suggests that Indian men of southern New

simply teaching the Pilgrims a European technique that he knew would be compatible with their use of draft animals and permanent settlements (p. 75)." Crop fertilization with tons of fish or animal manure would have been required annually, and Snow and Ceci have aptly contended that Indian farmers simply did not have the capacity to acquire and move that much fertilizer. See Dean R. Snow, The Archaeology of New England (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 75; Lynn Ceci, "Fish Fertilizer: a Native North American Practice?" Science 188 (1975): 26-30. Also see Kathleen Bragdon, Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 88-89.

4 Salisbury, "Squanto: Last of the Patuxets," 228-246.
England were able to put their acquired knowledge of Europeans to practice while still conducting business in a manner consistent with native traditions.⁵

To make this argument and provide a backdrop for the rest of my thesis, what follows is an analysis of southern New England Indian life on the brink of English settlement: a discussion drawn largely from the narratives of European explorers as well as early English travel accounts. Of course, there are pitfalls to using these sources. The most obvious, as anthropologist Kathleen Bragdon has pointed out, is that they in no way form a homogenous body of information.⁶ Some sources are from the sixteenth century while some are from the seventeenth. Also, some works talk about coastal Indians of southern New England generally, oftentimes ignoring cultural or social differences. Yet even though the sources contain broad generalizations and biases, historians can learn a great deal about the social, political, and economic systems of the Wampanoags of southern New England by reading the narratives with a critical eye. This requires balancing European observations of Indian life with archaeological data on southern New England Indian groups. Examining native life from the travel accounts of Europeans with the support of archaeology reveals, with more clarity, the social customs of Indians on the brink of European contact. With a general description of aboriginal practices of southern New England, and with a discussion of the first meetings between Europeans and Indians in the region, we can turn later to a more focused analysis of the unique ways the group of Mashpee Wampanoags dealt with the English colonizers of Cape Cod.

⁵ Ibid., 228.
⁶ Bragdon, Native People, 13.
I. Southern New England: The Land and its Indian People

The European newcomers who came to the place that became known as southern New England encountered what seemed to be a limitless land abundant with resources. The first known account of the Cape by Giovanni di Verrazzano, in 1524, described the richness of fruits, nuts, and game in southeastern New England.\(^7\)

Visiting the Cape’s coast in 1606, the seafaring Frenchman Samuel de Champlain watched as local Indians along the shore gathered what seemed to be a limitless supply of horseshoe or king crabs. Champlain also observed how Algonquians on the Cape used the feathers of several different birds to decorate “their arrows and placed upon their head for decoration.” He described how Indians could imitate the call of wild turkeys to hunt “the flocks in summer.”\(^8\) Swans, ducks, cranes, pheasants, partridges, crows, hawks, quails, falcons, geese, and waterfowl also flocked to the Cape. William Wood’s *New England Prospect* (1634), Thomas Morton’s *New English Canaan* (1637), and Roger Williams’ *A Key Into the Language of America* (1643), likewise emphasized southern New England’s richness in land and resources.\(^9\)

The landscape was made up of rolling hills spotted by ponds and drained by river

systems. Sprouting up on hills and around ponds and rivers were dense forests of oak and pine, and other trees including hickory, chestnut, ash, elm, beech, walnut, cedar, and maple. Forests were often divided by grassy “medowes, wherein grow neither shrub nor tree, lying low.”

There was an overabundance of plum and cherry trees, cranberries, stawberries, blueberries, and whortleberries. Forests teemed with deer, bear, elk, beaver, raccoon, fox, wolf, muskrat, hare, and squirrel. Freshwater ponds and rivers abounded with trout, eels, alewives, as well as amphibious animals such as minks and otters. Wood, Morton, and Williams, too, described the number of fish that could be caught along the coastline, especially codfish, mackerel, bass, sturgeon, and shellfish like lobsters and crabs.

Early narratives noted the fertility of the soil in southeastern New England. Indeed, apart from sandy terrain encompassing most of Cape Cod, the soil near fresh water sources, if cleared and tilled properly, produced mixed fields of squash, beans, and maize.

By portraying the region as an abundant, virgin, and untamed land that offered a diversity of economically viable resources,

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11 Ibid; Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America*, 82-109.
12 Scholars debate when and why maize was adopted in southern New England. Kathleen Bragdon argues that the archaeological evidence does not support the notion that southern New England Indians were horticulturists before 1000 to 1300 AD. However, it is clear that by the time of European contact and settlement, Indians along the Cape were practicing maize horticulture. A lack of shell in middens in southern New England archaeological sites, Bragdon has argued, indicates that perhaps shellfish use was in decline from overuse. For a discussion of this debate see Bragdon, *Native People*, 81-85. “A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable,” 16 September 1802, Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, (hereafter cited as *MHSC*), 2nd series, Vol. III, 1-13, is useful for understanding that the resources of the Cape discussed by early accounts were also mentioned centuries later. Yet according to the observations on the Cape near Mashpee from 1802, the amount of useable game like bears and deer had diminished substantially by the beginning of the nineteenth century, except for a “range of deer” located to the north of Mashpee.
early descriptions were attempting to encourage others to colonize southern New England. Yet even while the land seemed boundless, wild, and open for the taking, the native populations who lived there had shaped the landscape as much as the land had shaped them.

Southeastern New England’s Indian populations before English colonization were small enough that groups shifted their settlements without overcrowding hunting grounds and fields, yet population densities of Indians were large enough that they left indelible impressions on the landscape. Archaeologist Dean R. Snow has done some compelling work estimating the pre-epidemic populations of New England. Projecting backwards from the pre-epidemic numbers provided in 1674 by Daniel

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14 Pre-epidemic, according to Snow, means the pre-1615 Indian populations of New England, because after 1615 waves of epidemics (namely those in 1617 to 1619 and 1633) destroyed large numbers of the native populations. Snow persuasively shows that before 1615, voyages to coastal New England were too sporadic to spread diseases with any great impact on Indian populations. The earliest of encounters with Europeans were with Basque, Portuguese, English, Breton, and Norman fishermen. However, Snow has found that many of these ships carried salt for packing fish and did not have to contact Indians or even land before returning home. Only after 1560, when beaver furs were in high demand, were there compelling reasons for fishermen to seek contact with Indians in New England—to set up packing and drying stations on the shore. Thus, contact was sporadic for at least two-thirds of the century. And, he also notes that many of the first voyages between 1500 and 1560 were too small in crew size and the passage was too long as compared to later trips. These factors did not “provide the reservoirs for European diseases (p. 32).” For example, Verrazzano’s voyage to New England in 1524 took a month and a half with a crew of less than a hundred men. However, Samuel de Champlain’s voyage in 1606 only took a month and had a crew of one hundred men. Quicker voyages and larger crews, Snow argues, created a “reservoir” for European diseases as opposed to Verrazzano’s longer voyage with fewer men. By using Snow’s analysis, there is no convincing evidence that anything like the epidemics after 1615 took place in the previous century. The populations of southern New England up to that point remained relatively stable in numbers. See Snow, “Abenaki Fur Trade in the Sixteenth Century,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 6 (1976): 3-11; Snow, *The Archaeology of New England*, 32-33.
Gookin (superintendent to the New England Indians), Snow has estimated that the Indians of southern New England, who included the Massachusett, Narragansett, and Pokanoket (Wampanoag), numbered 36,700 people (193 people per 100 km²) in 1600. According to Snow's numbers, the Wampanoags of Cape Cod would have totaled 10,000 people before the epidemics.¹⁵

The 36,700 people in southern New England had, indeed, carved out a way of life on the landscape. The visibility of native populations in southern New England is found in the first maps of coastal New England and early descriptions of Indian homelands. Visiting the Cape in 1524, for instance, Verrazzano noted how natives “moved their houses according to the richness of the site and the season.”¹⁶ Samuel de Champlain’s observations in the next century, too, described villages of Indians following the seasons. As he charted the Cape’s coastline in the summer of 1606, Champlain therefore mapped several Algonquian settlements on the coast with fields of corn (Figure I).¹⁷ English visitors recognized that forests in southern New England seemed open at times as the result of the native practice of periodically burning the woods to clear large areas. “This custome of firing the country,” Morton wrote, “is

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¹⁵ Snow arrives at his estimate by using Gookin’s numbers of men who could be mustered by Indian populations in southern New England before the epidemics—Massachusetts (3000), Wampanoag (3000), Narragansett (5000)—while assuming that men comprised 30% of the population. For Gookin’s numbers see Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians In New England*, Richard C. Robey ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 8-10. For Snow’s analysis of this data see *The Archaeology of New England*, 38-40.

¹⁶ Wroth, *The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazzano*, 139.

the meanes to make it passable." Within the woods of southern New England that had been shaped by native burning practices were, as historian Jean O'Brien has argued, trail systems that linked together villages, the rich coastline, and interior resource locations, creating a dense patchwork of places that helped mark native homelands.

The estimated 10,000 Indians who occupied the networks of villages, fields, hunting grounds, and wooded trails on the land that became known as Cape Cod were an Algonquian-speaking people who shared cultural traditions with people throughout southern New England under the name of Massachusetts-Narragansett. Anthropologists refer to these Indians as the Pokanoket, a term that is synonymous with their more common name of Wampanoag. The Indians on the Cape shared a common language with the inhabitants of southern Massachusetts and the northern part of Rhode Island, although linguist Ives Goddard suggests there were dialect differences among specific groups.

In 1643, Roger Williams noted how native peoples differed from one another in "the varietie of their Dialects and proper speech within thirtie or fortie miles" of one another. While important linguistic and

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19 O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 17.
22 Quoted in O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 16.
cultural differences existed, southern New England Indians shared similar social customs.

To use their land and resources efficiently, populations of southern New England Indians lived in villages of a few hundred people made up of several extended families. The extended family, or clan, who claimed a common ancestor, dominated the lives of individual Indians. The size of extended families at the time of contact was roughly twenty to fifty people. According to Verrazzano’s account of Cape Cod Indians, in each house, or wigwam, “we saw twenty-five to thirty people.” Yet scholars still debate whether extended families were patrilineal (determining descent through the father’s line) or matrilineal (determining descent through the mother’s line). Interpreting Algonquian patterns of descent remains difficult because of conflicting primary sources. Verrazzano’s account of 1524 claimed that Indians “lived [with] a father with a very large family.” However, European observers like Verrazzano may have simply viewed Indian families through the lens of their own cultural expectations that families should be patrilineal.

Whether Indians traced descent through the father’s line or mother’s line, determining kinship networks and reciprocal obligations was important to the mobile way of life of southern New England Indians and thus to their basic survival. The Narragansett word “Nqussutam. I remove house,” and the phrase “Awaanwei kukkoámis. At whose house did you sleep?” gave language to the importance of a

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24 Wroth, The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazzano, 139.
25 Ibid.
mobile way of life with patterns of visiting family in other places. Individual villages who moved seasonally, for example, consisted of families of several lineages all interrelated by levels of kinship. Also, family networks within and outside the boundaries of individual villages connected people to the group, or what became known by the English as “tribes.” As O’Brien has argued, marriages outside of villages tied relatives together by having kin in other places, thus providing Indians with choices for relocating their village affiliation as well as a network of places for visiting. Kinship, O’Brien continued, “entailed reciprocal bundles of obligations and rights surrounding justice, caretaking, and other social arrangements.” The following early account from Gookin clearly reflects this point:

> If any murther, or other great wrong upon any of their relations or kindred, be committed, all of that stock and consanguinity look upon themselves concerned to revenge that wrong, or murder, unless the business by taken up by the payment of wompompeague [wampum], or other satisfaction, which their custom admits, to satisfy for all wrongs, yea for life itself.

Determining kin was thus important to the survival of Indian communities because food and services were given and received between relatives. Reciprocity among village members ensured that resources would be distributed fairly, that

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28 O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 16-17.

relationships with other groups would be forged, that villages would be moved, that fields would be cleared, that hunting trips would take place, that the helpless would be provided for, and that “community interdependency would be continuously reinforced.”

Williams observed that “there are no beggars amongst them, nor fatherless children unprovided for.” Indeed, both men and women of Indian villages had separate reciprocal obligations that contributed to the survival of kin and community and thus contributed to the seasonal mobility that was central to the Indian way of life.

Connected to native customs of family mobility, sharing, and reciprocity were concepts of property and land tenure among Indians of southeastern New England. “They love not to be cumbered with many utensills,” wrote Thomas Morton, “and although every proprietor knowes his owne, yet all things (so long as they will last), are used in common amongst them.” Goods acquired through trade or manufactured at village sites, as Morton’s account indicates, were transportable and shared among family members. Men used small numbers of tools to catch and trap fish and game—bows and arrows for hunting and harpoons and hooks and lines for fishing. Indian men owned one cumbersome yet necessary piece of equipment, a dugout canoe constructed out of the trunk of a chestnut tree. Women carried their household utensils on their backs in sacks. They would leave behind at the camp or village site clay pots, wooden mortars, and other heavy items for use again in seasonal movements. Wood-frame wigwams were even portable: they were furnished with the

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30 Bragdon, Native People, 131.
31 Williams, A Key Into the Language of America, 29.
32 Morton, New English Canaan, 57.
most minimal items. Beds were mats and skins placed on the ground, or as Morton noticed, "[Indians] lye upon planke about a foot or 18 inches high." Individuals and kin groups, as presented in Morton’s account, “owned” and shared goods that they manufactured and carried while moving their villages with the seasons. Land ownership among the Indians of southern New England reconciled ideas of corporate ownership of group territories and ideas of individual family property with a mobile way of life. The ownership of land for hereditary sachems was, as O’Brien has stated, “analogous to the ownership that European monarchs asserted over their nations,” although landownership among Indian families was based upon usufruct principles. Within this system, individual households “owned” the use of the land where they constructed their wigwams and the use of their land where the women cultivated their crops. Yet because natives moved their fields every few years to avoid mineral exhaustion in the soil, landownership shifted with land use and with the seasons.

As Indian villages in southern New England moved according to the seasons, men from extended families were principally responsible for hunting and fishing. In the fall and winter, villages broke into small bands, or what might be called groups of extended families, where men hunted the deer, bears, muskrats, and raccoons, that were especially large in the fall. As William Wood described, Algonquian men “in that time of the yeere, when the Deer comes downe,” would hunt game with bows.

33 Ibid., 25.
34 O’Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 21.
35 Ibid., 21. My understanding of Indian landownership is based upon Cronon, Changes in the Land, 58-68.
and arrows and snares. 36 During the winter, Indian men might fish in the “fresh waters and ponds” sometimes cutting “round holes in the ice.” 37 In the spring, bands of Indians would move closer to fresh water sources where men could capture a wide variety of spawning fish--in canoes or from the river’s edge--with nets and lines “made of their own hemp,” and hooks made “with bone.” 38 In the summer, families of Indians spent their time near the coast where men fished and gathered shellfish. As Wood observed, “in summer they seldom fish any where but in salt [water].” 39

The subsistence activities of Indian women in southern New England were much different than those of men. This topic has stirred considerable debate among modern scholars concerning the status of women in native groups. According to Wood’s account, women made mats and clothing. They constructed wigwams when families shifted their settlements. Women planted and tended cornfields in the summer and fall and had to dry and store corn. They gathered nuts, berries, and wild plants in the summer and into the fall. Indian women gathered lobsters in the summer and prepared meats for cooking as well as processed animal skins throughout the year. 40 In 1624 the English ambassador and statesmen Edward Winslow wrote of women’s work among the Wampanoag as follows:

The women live a most slavish life; they carry all their burdens set and dress their corn, gather it in, seek to for much of their food, beat and make ready the corn to eat, and have all the household care lying upon them. 41

37 Ibid., 90.
38 Ibid., 89.
39 Ibid., 90.
40 Ibid., 94-98.
Daniel Gookin’s commentary that “the women carry the greatest burthen; they also prepare all the diet,” is similar to Winslow’s negative observations. However, the consensus among scholars is that reports like those from Winslow and Gookin about the condition of native women were based on a lack of understanding of the native division of labor and on the jealous perception of white males that Indian men had much in common with the English aristocracy.

Some evidence in fact favors the contention that “egalitarian” relations between the genders existed among southern New England Indians. According to Roger Williams’ observations, pre-marital sex was permissible. And as the following relation from Winslow tells us, divorce for Indian women was relatively easy:

If a woman have a bad husband, or cannot affect him, and there be war or opposition between that and any other people, she will run away from him to the contrary party, and there live; where they never come unwelcome, for where are most women, there is greatest plenty.

Anthropologists have provided compelling examples for the argument that “egalitarian” relations existed between Indian men and women in southern New England. As Robert Steven Grumet has found, women acted as traders in some parts of southern New England. There are a few recorded cases of women as sachems (village leaders) or powwows (shamans). At least two powerful “queen sachems”

42 Gookin, Historical Collections, 9.
43 Bragdon, Native People, 180.
44 Williams, A Key Into the Language of America, 30.
45 Winslow, “Relation of 1624,” in Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers, 349.
46 Robert Steven Grumet, “Sunksquaws, Shamans, and Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian women During the 17th and 18th Centuries,” in Women
ruled on the islands of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket: Wunnatukquannumou and Askamapoo. “These women ruled, not because of their status as sachems’ widows,” Bragdon has stated, “but because they inherited vast territories from their fathers or grandfathers.” 47 Also, there are some recorded accounts of Indian women being sent as diplomats or being given treacherous duties. 48

Yet despite the argument for “egalitarian” relations between the genders, male heads of extended families by virtue of descent dominated the public life of Indian villages. Sachems of southeastern New England Indian groups were mostly men who achieved their positions through inheritance. Indian political structure in southeastern New England seems to have centered around the village, although the actual nature of native leadership at the time of English colonization remains unclear. Anthropologist Bert Salwen has concluded examining the available primary sources that “day-to-day leadership was provided by the village chief or sachem.”49

Early accounts of individual events also suggest that Wampanoag sachems had very little coercive power and maintained their influence largely by persuading village members with their generosity and charisma. The Dutchman Isaack De Rasieres visited the Plymouth colony in 1628. On his trip, he described the political structure of the local Indians: “their political government is democratic,” because strangers who arrived in the village needed the consensus of village members to stay. “That being done, the Sackima [Sachem] announces his opinion to the people,” wrote

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47 For a discussion of these female sachems see Bragdon, Native People, 178.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 160-176.
Rasieres, “and if they agree thereto, they give all together a sigh— ‘He!’—and, if they do not approve, they keep silence, and all come close to the Sackima, and each sets forth his opinion till they agree.” Indeed, decision-making in Algonquian villages was not a duty exclusive to the sachem.

As Rasieres’ description implies, important decisions were always arrived at in consultation with the “great men” of the village, typically a group of elders—heads of extended families—called sagamores. “The sachem,” Gookin described, “hath some chief men that he consults with as his special councillors.” These other village leaders influenced activities that involved the entire group, such as selecting the size and location of family garden plots within a village, planning for village hunting expeditions, guiding trading activities outside the community, and guiding diplomacy between groups. Consultation with sagamores, and the ability of village members to abandon their sachems and seek kin in other places, limited the power of sachems and made group actions consensual. “Their sachems,” wrote Gookin, “have not their men in such subjection, but that very frequently their men will leave them upon distaste or harsh dealing, and go and live under other sachems that can protect them: so their princes endeavour to carry it obligingly and lovingly unto their people, lest they should desert them, and thereby their strength, power, and tribute would be

51 Gookin, Historical Collections, 14.
52 O’Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 20.
"diminished." Beyond the village level there also existed multi-village alliances that were loose organizations with no centralized command.

The first descriptions of Indian leadership in New England come from the Pilgrims' references to the confederation led by the Wampanoag sachem Massasoit. The Pilgrims, to be sure, could only equate sachem power with what they were most familiar: their monarchies in Europe. Since Massasoit negotiated a treaty of friendship with the Plymouth colony, the Pilgrims called him "a great ruler of a nation." However the fact was that when the Pilgrim settlers established the first permanent colony in the area in 1620, they were only noting a loose confederation led by Massasoit. At various times, this coalition included Indian communities at Nauset, Manomet, Cummaquid, Monomoy, and Mashpee on the Cape; Pawtuxet and Nemasket in present-day Plymouth County; other places on Martha's Vineyard; communities on Nantucket Island; and Aquidneck and Massasoit's village of Pokanoket in eastern Rhode Island.

While sachems and sagamores among southern New England Indians inherited their positions and were connected to specific villages and regions, Indian

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deities and village spiritual leaders were also connected to Algonquian ideas of kinship and the relationship natives shared with their homelands. Strong linkages between native religion and their environment was apparent in their pantheon of deities known as manitos. These gods could take on the form of women, children, men, animal species, the sun, the moon, fire, water, the sea, snow, the earth, directions, seasons, winds, houses, the sky, corn, and colors. The principal god, though, who appeared to humans in visions and dreams was Hobbamock, known also as Cheepi (Chepi). Indian groups respected the inherited positions of the powwow (shaman/medicine man) and the pniese because both had the ability to visualize Hobbamock. Their capacity to see Cheepi, among many other talents, made the powwows and pniese spiritual leaders in Indian villages of southern New England.

Salisbury has suggested that Squanto was probably better suited for the physical and emotional trials of traveling to Europe and for dealing with the Pilgrims because, in his youth, he was trained as a pniese. Indeed, the process of becoming a pniese was rigorous as young men underwent intense diets and training. This hardship enabled them to have the courage to face the vision quest of Hobbamock, a god who killed or inflicted great harm on those he did not like. Hobbamock only appeared to “the chiefest and most judicious among them,” in Winslow’s words,

“though all of them strive to attain that height of hellish honor.” Squanto’s training as a *pniese* thereby placed him among the “elite” of the Patuxet Indians. This explains Squanto’s duties as a respected counselor and bodyguard to the sachem Massasoit, and because of Squanto’s standing as a *pniese*, he was well qualified to deal with the Pilgrims.60

Village *powwows*, also esteemed for their ability to visualize Hobbamock and other deities, served in the capacity of religious leaders, but unlike the *pniese*, rarely worked as diplomats. When converting Indians at Martha’s Vineyard in 1651, Thomas Mayhew Jr. recorded the most detailed account of a Wampanoag *powwow* and his practices. Mayhew’s Puritanism found expression when he negatively responded to the shaman’s work as “diabolical.” His observations, nonetheless, remain noteworthy for their reflection on the *powwow’s* skill at dream interpretation.61 The shaman told Mayhew about his dreams, where four creatures over took his body. One was like a man he saw in the Ayre... and he said had its residence over his whole body. Another was like a Crow,” the *powwow* recalled, “and did look sharply to discover mischiefs coming towards him, and had its residence in his head.” “The third,” he believed, “was like to a Pidgeon, and had its place in his breast and was very cunning about his businesse.” He saw the fourth

creature as a serpent “very subtile to do mischief, and also to great cures and these he said were meer Devils.” Mayhew’s description shows how southern New England Indian powwows were able to access a range of deities. Powwows therefore cultivated reputations among fellow Indians for curing illnesses and changing weather patterns.  

Village sachems called upon powwows to guide religious rituals because of their talents at dream interpretation, healing, and divination. One of these ceremonies, observed by early Puritan settlers in southern New England, was the Nickommo. Indian celebrations, described by provincials, were held according to seasonal changes and therefore maintained spiritual balance with the environment by labeling harvesting and hunting as religious activities. When Roger Williams attended one Nickommo in 1643, he observed how the village-organized feast and dance heavily depended on the powwow’s leadership and the sachem’s support by distributing gifts.  

Some religious practices joined southern New England Indians with deceased family and community members both translating as tcipai. When Indians encountered tcipai, they offered a small gift of food, drink, or personal property to

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64 See Williams, A Key Into the Language of America, 120. Roger Williams translated “Nickommo” to mean a “Feast or Dance.” In southern New England, these feasts
induce the spirits to let them pass safely. As part of this observance, natives
constructed “spirit lodges” along certain paths. When southern New England Indians
passed an abandoned lodge, custom required them to throw a twig, stick or branch on
the former site to pacify the spirits inhabiting the area. 65 The burial of kin in the
ceremonially flexed position was another social-religious ceremony, where funerals,
according to Roger Williams’ account, ensured a safe journey into the afterlife where
Indians would meet up with deceased family. Sometimes, as Williams described,
“goods were cast in” with the body. Indeed, it was quite possible that native
mortuary practices in southern New England were designed to guarantee a quick and
safe passage for the dead to what anthropologist William Simmons has described as
the Indian version of Heaven. 66

These, then, were the contours of southern New England Indian societies on
the brink of English colonization. Natives of southern New England had shaped the
land as much as the land had shaped them. Cleared fields, villages, hunting grounds,
and wooded trails marked the homelands of Indians. Each group lived in extended
families who followed a mobile way of life according to the seasons. Connected to
Indian customs of family mobility, reciprocity, and sharing were Indian ideas of
property and land tenure. Also, both men and women had different roles in
subsistence activities as their families moved with the seasons. Men hunted and
fished while women planted and worked in, or near, the home. By virtue of descent,

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65 Constance Crosby, “The Algonkian Spiritual Landscape,” in Algonkians Past and
Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1991), 35-41.
sachems led individual villages with their charisma and generosity. Each sachem had a group of elders--heads of extended families--called sagamores. Indian deities (manitos) and spiritual guides of villages (pniese and powwows) were also connected to native notions of kinship and the relationship Indian groups shared with their homelands.

II. The Indians of Southern New England: Their First Encounters with Europeans

Until 1600, the encounters between Europeans and the Indians of southern New England were sporadic. The initial meetings with Europeans came when Basque, Portuguese, English, Breton, and Norman fishermen and explorers probed New England's coastline. Most were at first in search of codfish, whales, furs, or trade routes to the Orient, not land for settlement. The cod fisheries of America proved profitable: in 1517 "an hundred sail" could be seen in Newfoundland's summer harbors. After 1536, cod fishermen were sharing the waters of America with Basque whalers. Following Breton pilots to the narrow Strait of Belle Isle between Labrador and Newfoundland, whalers pursued bowhead and right whales with harpoons in delicate chalupas. By the last quarter of the century, accompanying fishing and whaling expeditions along the New England coast were ships in search of furs. The French Basque vessel, Catherine de St. Vincent, captured

by the English in 1591, contained stores of rich furs such as beaver, marten, and otter. Amid these fishing, whaling, and fur trading expeditions, came explorers bent on finding a passage westward and searching the New England coastline for commodities.

The European explorers who probed the shores of New England provided the first written accounts of the Indians. After several weeks at sea, most ships took port to restock their quantities of firewood, fresh water, and provisions. In the midst of these refurbishing expeditions the European explorers and Indians of coastal New England encountered each other. Observations from Europeans reveal that their arrival, and those unrecorded before them, had changed the lives of native groups. In fact, when Giovanni di Verrazzano met groups of Narragansetts along the coast of southern New England in 1524, the Indians there showed some familiarity with dealing with Europeans.

Natives near present-day Rhode Island according to Verrazzano’s account had developed certain rules for trading with Europeans. “They do not value gold because of its color,” wrote Verrazzano, “they think it is the most worthless of all, and rate blue and red above all others.” He went on to tell how Indian traders wanted bells, blue crystals, and beads, but “did not appreciate cloth and silk” or metals like steel and iron. When Verrazzano and his men showed them their firearms, the Indians “did not admire them” but merely examined their workmanship. These Indians had, indeed, developed tastes for European goods that were modifications of customary

68 Axtell, “At the Water’s Edge,” 146.
69 Ibid., 147.
70 Wroth, The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazzano, 138.
trading practices. Thus Verrazzano’s “trinkets, baubles, and bangles” were highly prized among Indians of southern New England because they resembled traditional trade goods such as shell beads (wampum), exotic stones, and native copper.72

According to Verrazano’s observations, however, the modifications to Indian trading protocols extended beyond the “water’s edge.”73 While Algonquian canoes maneuvered with ease along the coastline, Verrazzano’s ship was too large for the sandbars. From previous experience with Europeans, Indian traders no longer feared ships as “walking islands” and the discharge of ordnance as “thunder and lightning.”74 But rather, natives brought Verrazzano and his crew some food and showed them with signs where they should anchor “in the port for the ship’s safety,” and then accompanied Verrazzano’s entourage all the way until they dropped anchor.75

When Bartholomew Gosnold and Martin Pring explored the coast of New England in 1602 and 1603 respectively, the Indian acceptance of European social customs and trade goods had expanded prodigiously. Sailing south along New England’s coast, Gosnold met six Indians in a “Baske [Basque] shallop with maste and saile an iron grapple and a copper kettle.” One of the Indians who came aboard to offer gifts was “dressed with a waistcoat and breeches of blacke serdge, made after

71 Ibid.
73 Axtell, “At the Water’s Edge,” 154-155.
74 For a discussion of what Indians thought of Europeans in initial meetings see Wood, New England’s Prospect, 77.
75 Wroth, The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazzano, 138.
our sea fashion,” and wearing shoes on his feet. Gosnold noted similar changes among natives in southeastern New England. Indians near Buzzard’s Bay, in the vicinity of Cape Cod, spoke English with “great facilitie.” In the midst of exchanging gifts, one Indian tossed off the English phrase: “How now (sirha) are you so saucie with my Tabacco?” “He spake so plaine and distinctly,” wrote Gosnold, “as if he had been a long scholar in the language.” When Martin Pring went ashore at Cape Cod to gather loads of sassafras from the woods, the local Indians were distracted by the “youth in our company that could play upon a Gitterne [Guitar].” Abiding their trading protocols, Indians drowned the musician in gifts of skins, tobacco, and tobacco pipes. Enchanted by the music and perhaps understanding the revelry of English seamen, the Indian traders then started singing “lo, la, lo, la, lo,” and danced around the musician in a ring of twenty men. Traditionally, Indian men were greeters and traders, guides and diplomats. Yet the natives who did business with Gosnold and Pring had, too, garnered a working knowledge of European social customs because some donned English clothing, and some tossed off English slang, while others who met Pring made merry to the music of a guitar. Gosnold’s account is also revealing about the changing nature of Indian tastes for European goods. When Verrazzano explored New England in 1524, Indian traders only glanced at clothing and items made of metal. By the time Gosnold probed coastal New England, natives, however, readily accepted European attire, copper kettles, iron implements,

77 Ibid., 46.
and fishing vessels because more frequent contact with Europeans perhaps led Indians to recognize the technological superiority, or status, that came with European wares.

Yet as historian James Axtell has aptly noted, by the end of the sixteenth century, a rising tide of contact, competition, and outright European arrogance toward Indians had, over time, forced native groups into a state of defense against encroaching whites. Years of kidnappings as captive curiosities and years of Europeans discharging their cannons and firearms, had to a certain extent bred contempt among Indian groups of New England. For these reasons, some natives started to resort to thievery or had developed a penchant for attacking European seamen.

By the time Samuel de Champlain frequented Cape Cod in 1606, friendly exchanges had given way to stealing and skirmishing. Indians snatched several copper kettles by force from four or five of Champlain’s sailors who went ashore for water at the Cape in July. A chase ensued. Cries for help led to muskets being fired from the ship. Several Indians who were aboard the ship, jumped into the ocean to escape. Champlain’s party “was able to seize one of them.” Indians on shore who had taken flight, “seeing the others swimming, turned back to the sailor from whom they had taken the kettle and shot several arrows at him,” and killed the Frenchman. The prisoner on board, “bound hand and foot,” was eventually released despite the loss to Champlain’s crew. It was determined that the Indian had no knowledge of the

79 Axtell, “At the Water’s Edge,” 179-180.
situation. However, Champlain swore “it was in our power to avenge ourselves.”

Instances like these of mutual distrust led to further violent encounters. Later on the voyage when Champlain traded with a sachem named Anassou along the Cape’s coast, Anasou informed him that five Indians had been killed near a local river by a fishing vessel operating “under [the] cover of friendship.” As Champlain traveled southern New England, thievery and violence had to some extent replaced the amicable trade relations that had marked previous meetings between Indians and Europeans.

One can conclude that when the formative period of European exploration and discovery had come to an end, the Algonquian societies and cultures along the southeastern coast of New England would never again be the same. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the native groups who populated the coast of southern New England had indeed adjusted to the presence of Europeans. Of course, such adjustments extended beyond the mere acceptance of European beads and trinkets. Change reshaped the broad spectrum of the Indian way of life. For this reason, when the Pilgrims settled in the frigid December of 1620, Samoset said “Welcome Englishmen” in broken English, an encounter in which previous generations of Indians and Europeans had also participated. Eighteen years before the Pilgrims and

81 Ibid., 355.
82 Ibid., 364-365.
83 In Figure I, Letter B (front right), one can see that Champlain recreated a violent encounter on his map between local Indians and Europeans. Champlain labeled (B) on his map as follows: “Sand Dunes Where the Indians Killed a Sailor From The Sieur De Monts’ Pinnace.” The map and key can be found in Biggar, ed., The Works of Samuel de Champlain, Vol. I, 346-347.
Samoset exchanged words, Bartholomew Gosnold swapped gifts, hostilities, and English phrases with several Indians along the Cape. Thus the behaviors of Samoset and the Indians encountered by Gosnold are strong indicators that natives were able to put their acquired knowledge of Europeans to practice while still conducting business in a manner consistent with Indian traditions. Through it all, then, Indians of early New England never abandoned their cultures fully. My thesis will now analyze how the Cape Cod Indians, namely the group of Mashpee Wampanoags, held on to their way of life and adjusted to English colonization in the seventeenth century.
Chapter Two:
English Settlement and the Mashpee Indians

The English settlers who came to New England in the seventeenth century would alter forever the Wampanoag communities of Cape Cod. First came waves of epidemics that destroyed entire Indian villages. Next came settlement. The English on Cape Cod fenced in fields, settled towns, raised livestock, and established provincial governments. Then, under the leadership of John Eliot, Puritans of Plymouth colony started converting Indians between 1640 and 1674. English settlers also went to war with New England Indians in 1675. And finally, a series of colonial-Crown conflicts between 1680 and 1700 provided little stability to Indian groups on the Cape.¹

Despite the changes that came with connections to colonial New England society—more or less a Puritan society—Cape Cod Indians rebuilt some of their communities. Those who survived the epidemics of 1616 through 1622 and a smallpox outbreak in 1633, were forced into scattered hamlets around the Cape as English towns flourished on what Francis Jennings has aptly called the “widowed land” of southern New England.² With the help of Richard Bourne from 1658 to 1682, many natives moved to what became known as the Mashpee “praying town” and rebuilt a traditional Wampanoag society within the boundaries of the Plymouth

¹ These stages of development are similar to the ones outlined in James Merrell, The Indians’ New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989).
Colony. By the time the seventeenth century had come to an end, the Mashpee Indians had emerged as one of the largest Indian communities in the Bay Colony that still lived on traditional homelands and that still practiced Indian social customs.

I. Cape Cod Indians and English Colonization: 1616-1650

Beginning in 1616 and lasting until about 1622, a pandemic disease, or several epidemics, scythed through Indian communities along the New England coast. Estimates have placed the loss of life upwards of 90 percent of the population in most areas of southern New England, except for the Narragansetts of Rhode Island who largely escaped the outbreak. Thomas Dermer’s report from the Cape’s seashore in 1619 tells something of the devastation: “I passed alongst the Coast,” he wrote, “where I found some ancient Plantations, not long since populous now utterly void; in other places a remnant remains, but no free of sickness. Their disease the Plague, for we might perceive the sores of such as usually die.” Using Dermer’s account, some historians contend that it was the bubonic plague, a disease that had already made its mark in Europe. For instance, Dermer’s account refers to “sores,” which suggests the cutaneous necrosis and weeping sores common to bubonic plague.


primary sources have, however, led to other interpretations. When Captain John
Smith visited Massachusetts during the time of the outbreaks he noted a sequence of
diseases: “three plagues in three years.”6 Conversing with a group of Indian elders'
over forty years after the outbreaks, Daniel Gookin recorded that they remembered
“the bodies all over were exceeding yellow.”7 Gookin’s description of what appears
to be jaundice among Indians has led Arthur E. Spiess and Bruce D. Spiess to
conclude that viral hepatitis was the cause of the devastation.8

Whatever the source of the epidemic was, the loss of life proved catastrophic
to the Indians of southern New England. “They died in heapes,” wrote Thomas
Morton, “as they lay in their houses and the living would runn away & let them dy,
and let their Carkases ly above the ground without buriall.”9 The inability of villages
to bury their dead gives some idea of the upheaval created by the outbreak. “For in a
place where many inhabited,” Morton continued, “there hath been one left alive, to
tell what became of the rest. The living not being able to bury their dead, they were
left for Crowes, Kites, and vermin to pray upon.” Morton went on to explain how
“the bones and skulls” made such a spectacle that Indian country to him seemed “a
new found Golgatha.”10

Wampanoag communities and individuals on the Cape most likely solicited
help from their traditional customs, soon to realize how tradition provided little help

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6 Quoted in Ibid.
7 See Daniel Gookin, Historical Collections of the Indians In New England, Richard
9 Thomas Morton, New English Canaan (Amsterdam, 1637; reprint, Amsterdam: De
10 Ibid.
through the ordeal. The “hot houses” (sweat lodges) described by Roger Williams, where Indian men sat together in wigwams in large groups to “purge their bodies” hoping that sweating would lead to a “speedily cure,” probably did little else but to help spread the virus. 11 Powwows who were traditionally called upon to cure sickness, too, most likely provided little assistance. Williams described the inability of village powwows to cure during times of heavy illness: “for alas, they administer nothing but howle and roar.”12 According to Morton’s account, the pestilence of unknown origin had destroyed native kin and community with swift impartiality. Some Indians of southern New England, however, weathered the epidemic only to find themselves rebuilding their lives.

Thus, when the Pilgrims settled in the frigid December of 1620, they found groups of Indians in the midst of recovering from the pandemic. For instance, Squanto was the only Patuxet Indian to survive the disease and thus quick to form alliances with the Pilgrims as well as other surviving natives. As Neil Salisbury has argued, only about 100 of the 3000 Pokanoket (Wampanoag) men lived to tell about the epidemic. Political and territorial realignments were constant. “Many survivors left their villages to combine with relatives elsewhere,” asserted Salisbury, undoubtedly accounting for some of the abandoned villages noted by Morton.13 The Wampanoag sachem Massasoit and ten of his pnneses, fearing the strength of the unscathed and thus larger Narragansetts, humbled themselves by stating that they and

12 Ibid., 190.
their people would evacuate their position at the head of Narragansett Bay and settle for the Taunton river drainage system. The Pilgrims in fact estimated that only about sixty Indian men were under the leadership of Massasoit.14

Land in southern New England was opened for settlement. An account by some Pilgrims traveling the Cape to visit Massasoit in the summer of 1621 gives this impression. On their way, they took the stores of corn from some newly dug graves because they found “no inhabitants.” Traveling closer to Rhode Island, they noticed how “few places along the river were inhabited,” although “thousands of men have lived there, which died in a great plague not long since.”15 The devastation to Indian communities noted by the Pilgrims facilitated the first permanent Puritan settlements on the Cape: Puritans founded the villages at Manomet in the 1620s and those at Sandwich, Yarmouth, and Barnstable in the 1630s. A smallpox outbreak that ripped through Indian communities in New England in 1633 continued to open the door for English settlers.16 Of course, with the “Great Puritan Migration,” English settlement on the Cape continued well into the 1640s and 1650s.

During this period of settlement the colonial records made first reference to the Indians at Mashpee in a few land deeds. Yet with no population counts and little descriptive material, it is difficult to estimate the size of the Indian population and it

is impossible to describe in any detail the physical organization of the Indian community at Mashpee. Historians nonetheless estimate the total English population settled on the Cape in the 1640s numbering only a few hundred in small pockets, while assessments place the sufficiently recovered Indian population at several times larger. To open land for English colonizers men like Captain Miles Standish were eager to confine the Indian populations to only a few areas. In 1648, Standish purchased a tract of land located to the south and west of the Mashpees, from the principal leaders in the area, the sachem Paupmunnuck and his circle. This sale, coupled with previous ones around the Mashpee Wampanoags, physically separated the Indians from native people to the east. Transactions like these led to a boundary dispute that was finally settled in 1658 and established the boundary line between the Mashpee Indians and Barnstable’s white settlers along the Santuit River and around Santuit Pond (Figure II). In the 1658 dispute, Richard Bourne, a founder of Sandwich and the first English missionary on the Cape, made his initial public appearance mediating between Barnstable townspeople and the Mashpee group.

II. The Mashpee Praying Town Comes Together: 1650-1676

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Ibid.; Campisi, The Mashpee Indians, 76; Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, 10 Vols, Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer eds (Boston: W. White, 1855-1861), Vol. 2, 125, 143-144.
The Mashpee praying town emerged from the efforts of John Eliot and other Puritans who were interested in converting Indians and changing the Indian way of life in the colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts. Cambridge-educated Eliot arrived in Massachusetts Bay in 1631 and took the position as teacher in the Roxbury First Church in 1632 where he remained until his death in 1690. Eliot was one of the few Puritans in seventeenth-century New England who worked toward Indian conversion most profoundly expressed in the 1629 Massachusetts Bay charter: “the principall Ende of this plantation [is to] wynn and incite the Natives of [the] Country, to the Knowledge and Obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of Mankinde, and the Christian Fayth.”20

Eliot’s Indian conversions began in the 1640s, when he made a few excursions to groups near Roxbury. In 1646 at the Indian village of Neponset, Eliot got little consideration from the leader of the Massachusett, Cutahamekin, and his followers, and returned to Roxbury. Six weeks later, Eliot found the promise of conversion among Waban and his followers at Nonantum. Eliot made biweekly visits from Roxbury to Nonantum, where he preached in both Algonquian and English. He instructed the Indians in prayer, indoctrinated children and adults, and encouraged natives to ask questions about English Calvinism. He explained to the Indians, in Algonquian, the rewards of heaven and the torments of hell. He then spoke of

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repentance and the promise of God’s forgiveness for their sins, and spoke of eternal salvation for those who followed God’s true words.\textsuperscript{21}

Eliot marketed his doctrine by working through the Indian social structure at Nonantum. He understood that to convert sachems meant greater possibilities of converting the entire group. “I do endeavour to engage the Sachems of greatest note to accept the Gospel,” wrote Eliot, “because that doth greatly animate and encourage such as are well-affected, and is dampening to those that are scoffers and opposers: for many such there be, though they dare not appear before me.”\textsuperscript{22} Also, Eliot paid particular attention to Nonatum’s powwows (shamans). Because powwows were healers and spiritual intermediaries, Eliot thought if he could convert them, he could undermine Indian spirituality.

Around this time, the Massachusetts General Court banned the practices of powwows.\textsuperscript{23} However, Indians resisted the Puritan crusade against powwows, mostly because natives still viewed their healing practices as helpful against epidemic outbreaks. The Indians at Nonantum, for instance, asked Eliot in 1647 that “If [we] leave off Powwowwing, and pray to God, what shall [we] do when [we] are sick?\textsuperscript{24} Despite the Indians’ resistance to Eliot, the minister claimed at one point in 1648 that “they have utterly forsaken Powwaws, and given over that diabolicall exercise,” and that “sundry of their Powwaws” were converted having “renounced their wicked

\textsuperscript{21} O’Brien, \textit{Dispossession by Degrees}, 27.
\textsuperscript{23} O’Brien, \textit{Dispossession by Degrees}, 28.
Having at least garnered the support of some Indians, Eliot was ready to quicken the conversion process by setting up his first praying town.

For the provincial governments of seventeenth-century New England, a plantation or “praying town” was a town-in-the-making, “a geographic area designated by the General Court as a future town which would remain a plantation until it had become settled by sufficient numbers of English-speaking ‘freemen’.” Then it would be granted all the privileges of a town, including representation in the General Court, thereby obtaining an equal voice in all decisions affecting the colony as a whole. To be sure, the town was the fundamental social unit in New England from the beginning. With the Great Puritan Migration between 1630 and 1640, English families had settled to form a series of towns, each of which was a largely self-supporting entity. The governor met with representatives from the various towns in General Court each year. Committed to a conception of social order that precluded pluralism, towns were small-scale to encourage Protestant homogeneity. Each New England town was tightly knit and controlled in every area because the people who directed the town church also ran the town and owned the town land. Each governed its internal affairs, dividing joint economic assets and decided which “strangers” would be admitted, and whether or not new settlers would be accorded the right to

26 Hutchins, Mashpee, 38.
27 Ibid.
own town land and participate in town affairs or "just live there as tenants on sufferance." 28

But for the Indians of New England and for the missionaries who worked among them, praying towns became more than just towns-in-the-making; through the campaign of ministers like Eliot they became places of cultural change. In praying towns, the ultimate goal laid out by missionaries for the Indians in these places was more than religious conversion. Eliot and others wanted English ideas of property and land tenure to prevail, English gender roles to supplant Indian gender roles, and English institutions, social customs, and ideologies to reign supreme. After this had taken place, Eliot and other ministers who supported the praying town model would extend Indians full religious rights in the Congregational Church. As O'Brien has stated, Eliot "viewed religious conversion as embedded in total cultural transformation." 29 From 1650 until 1675, the town of Natick near Dedham, Massachusetts came together as the first praying town.

With the financial backing of the Corporation for Promoting and Propagating the Gospel among the Indians in New England (known as the New England

29 O’Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 27.
Company), Natick became the model praying town. Indians erected a meetinghouse, a fort, and an arched footbridge across the Charles River. Indians families laid out their house lots in the English fashion. Algonquians used rock-reinforced post-and-rail fences around fields. Indians owned livestock and English tools. They modeled their leadership structure to please Eliot and provincial authorities. Natick adopted a legal code drafted by Eliot, which as Daniel Mandell has found "prohibited such practices as premarital sex, males wearing long hair, and cracking lice between the teeth." Eliot had certainly developed a dedicated group of Indian converts that he used to spread the word among other communities in southeast New England.

Historians have found, however, that Natick still remained an Indian place. In the praying town, Indians came together and rebuilt traditional family and community connections. Leaders of Natick, as Mandell has said, "maintained traditional emphasis on concord, actively discouraging community conflict." Between 1670 and 1700, Natick Indians rarely attended Eliot's church due to conflicts between Indian and English ministers, and thus held their services in the Massachusett language within their own homes. By 1684, Eliot noted that Natick Indians had abandoned the agrarian habits of the English and had taken up a migratory existence similar to their aboriginal economy. In a letter of April 1684, Eliot described how

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32 Mandell, "‘To Live More Like My Christian English Neighbors,’” 554.
"the occasional meetings are at places of fishing, hunting, gathering chestnuts in the seasons."  

Following John Eliot's plans and trying to mirror the developments that took place in Natick, missionaries encouraged other praying towns in the Bay Colony and Plymouth Colony; one of these was the Mashpee plantation developed by Richard Bourne. The first step to developing a praying town at Mashpee was to set aside land for Christian Indians. On December 11, 1665 Bourne witnessed the deeding of the land in Mashpee to the “South Sea Indians” (Mashpee Indians). The essential purpose of the deed was to transfer legal title of the plantation to Mashpee’s native inhabitants. The area’s principal sachems, Tookonchasun and Weepquish, in signing it also acknowledged that the plantation would be the homeland to a Christian group of Indians. The deed further assured any land within Mashpee’s limits would not be sold without the entire community’s consent. The following year, Bourne and his son, Sherijashub, witnessed a grant by Quatchatisset, sachem of Manomet, to the Mashpees for the same territory.

Bourne’s next step was to transform the Mashpees’ leadership analogous to other praying towns. He thus convinced the community in the late 1660s to elect a council of six and persuaded the council to show their political allegiance to the Crown, colony, and General Court, as well as to other sachems. The Plymouth

33 Ibid.
35 Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, Vol. 6, 159.
36 Massachusetts Archives (hereafter cited as MA), Vol. 33, 149-150.
37 Susan L. MacCulloch argues that a “tripartite political system” developed among the praying towns in seventeenth century Massachusetts. It was made up of the English colonial and the traditional tribal systems, and superimposed on both of these
government stated that the council of six was “to have the chiefe inspection and management thereof, with the healp and advise of the said Richard Bourne as the matter may require.” Plymouth, though, respected native power structures: “that what homage acostomed legally due to any superior sachem bee not hereby infringed.”

Second, in petitioning the General Court for their approval, Bourne was sanctioned “to acte as a constable amongst them.” Bourne not only transformed leadership among the Mashpee group, but also positioned himself as Plymouth’s counsel to the community.

Soon thereafter, Bourne began converting Cape Cod Indians to his brand of Congregationalism. In 1670 he organized the Indians into a Congregational church and led some of the Mashpee Indians into his flock. Following Eliot of Natick, Bourne believed in “an obdurate brand of Protestant proselytizing,” that believed the Cape Indians should be organized and demarcated into a praying town or plantation so “a competent number of Indians [can be] brought on to civility.”

It seems that, in all likelihood, Mashpee also developed this “tripartite political system,” with traditional sachems now exerting authority as part of the council of six. See MacCulloch, “A Tripartite Political System Among Christian Indians of Early Massachusetts,” Kroeber Anthropological Papers 34 (1966): 63-73.

38 Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, Vol. 4, 80.
39 Ibid.
praying town model on the Cape, Eliot ordained Bourne as the Mashpees’ permanent minister in August of 1670.41

Francis Hutchins has argued that Mashpee, like Natick, became an exemplary praying town in the 1670s. Mashpee, under closer examination, does not seem to fit the pattern of change found in Natick. Above all, a dearth of late seventeenth-century sources—a dilemma Hutchins never acknowledges—complicates the argument that the region developed into a “model praying town.” Hutchins has based his treatment on Bourne’s recorded account from 1674. Bourne counted seven villages with about 117 adults and adolescents meeting for prayer regularly in the Mashpee region.42 Bourne broke down his count as follows: “70 men and women and 25 young men and maids,” in five separate villages with “12 men and women and 10 young men and maids” in three other villages.43 Twenty-seven of these people who attended church services regularly were in “full communion” with the church, which meant they had demonstrated a salvation experience and thus were voting members of the church. However, since Bourne only recorded adults and children attending church, the actual number of natives living in Mashpee was probably higher. As Campisi has argued it is reasonable to suggest that the Mashpee group numbered “two hundred or so.”44 And because it is unknown who exactly in the population Bourne converted—although he does differentiate men and women from children—one cannot judge the extent of Christian conversion among sachems or sagamores in Mashpee society in

41 Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thacher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
43 Ibid.
1674. Among other regions of Massachusetts, Daniel Gookin, the Superintendent to the New England Indians responsible for monitoring missionary efforts, noted that "when a sachem or sagamore is converted to the faith... it has a great influence on his subjects." Bourne’s account of Mashpee, on the other hand, does not confirm whether his converts held positions of community leadership.

The number of twenty-seven Mashpee Indians in full communion, with a total of 117 converted Indians attending church, nonetheless is important as it does reflect that some Indians were devoted to the Puritan religion. The count of 27 Indians in full communion with the church placed the Mashpee group ahead of the town of Sandwich, numbering in 1692 only twenty-two people in full communion. One can thus suggest that among the segment of Indians in full communion, or among the 117 who attended church regularly, traditional tribal rituals highlighted by the Nickommo ceremony, a seasonal event closely tied to major subsistence events, faced formidable competition because Bourne, of course, encouraged Mashpee families to pray in the morning, evening, and before meals. Christian rituals thus changed the way Indians understood time because Sabbath worship and related Christian events were not tied to the environment and the seasons as much as Indian religious rites had been. As Eliot further claimed, Sabbath and days of public fasting and thanksgiving were observed religiously, so he could write enthusiastically that "[Mashpee converts

\[44\] Campisi, The Mashpee Indians, 79.
\[47\] Van Lonkhuyzen provides an excellent analysis for the Indians of Natick and how they also underwent changes in how they evaluated their spirituality, time and space, in "A Reappraisal of the Praying Indians," 416.
revealed a deep sense of their own darkness and ignorance, and a reverent esteem of the light and goodness of the English." With Bourne leading prayer, Mashpee powwows apparently gave up their services. Consultations with powwows at Mashpee, wrote Eliot when visiting the Cape in 1673, were "abandoned, exploded, and abolished, as also game by lottery and for wager... Yea, they are so severe that I am put to bridle them to moderation and forbearance."49

A folktale related in the 1930s suggests how the Christian Mashpees of the 1670s understood the collision between religious ideologies then underway, and the consequences it would have. According to the story, Richard Bourne met a shaman and solicited Christian conversion. "The angry magician chanted a bog-rhyme and Richard's feet became rooted in quick sand." He challenged the shaman to a "contest of wits," eventually winning and freeing his feet. 50 Clearly, the Christian segment of the population, at some point in time, incorporated Bourne's Puritan "conquest" into their community's collective memory. 51

Bourne's success at teaching the Mashpee group how to read, write, and speak English was, nonetheless, at first hampered because he lacked primers and catechisms in Algonquian. Eliot since 1654 had been publishing bibles, primers, catechisms, and psalms, some in the Massachusett language and others in Massachusetts with an

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48 Ibid.
English translation.\textsuperscript{52} Even with Eliot’s printing, books remained scarce. Bourne in 1669 hinted at the fact that his need for such tools would not be met unless Eliot’s presswork increased.\textsuperscript{53} Schools, though, appeared in Mashpee for instruction in the reading and writing of English as well as in Congregational theology soon after Bourne received the necessary teaching aides. He reported with excitement in 1674 that of his “117” praying-Indians, thirty-seven could read Wampanoag, seventeen could write English, and four could read English.\textsuperscript{54}

Changes in Mashpee introduced by Bourne’s religious zeal were, however, “moderated by the persistence of old ideas and customs.”\textsuperscript{55} Mashpee political leaders (the council of six) while now showing allegiance to the Crown and the colonial General Court, differed little in their functions from their aboriginal precursor. Clearly, Campisi has affirmed, the council’s acceptance by the General Court, while certainly enhancing its dominion, did little to disrupt the previous power structures that had sufficient power to lead the group, as evidenced by their sales of land and their ability to pay indemnities.\textsuperscript{56} In 1662, when a conflict arose between the Mashpee Indians and a man named John Allen “concerning a mare killed by the Indians at


\textsuperscript{53} “From the Commissioners of the United Colonies to the Hon. Robert Boyle, Governor of the Company,” 8 September, 1669, in \textit{Some Correspondence Between The Governors and Treasurers of the New England Company in London and the Commissioners of the United Colonies in America, the Missionaries of the Company and others, Between the Years 1657 and 1712, To Which are Added the Journals of the Rev. Experience Mayhew in 1713 and 1714}, ed. John W. Ford (New York: Burt Franklin, 1896), 33.


\textsuperscript{55} Mandell, “‘To Live More Like My Christian English Neighbors,’” 554.
Mashpee,” two of the sachems in the region, Paupmunnuck and Keencomsett, agreed to pay Allen £14 in goods as restitution. And though the region now had Puritan converts who followed a Christian course in their lives, the converts were not Christian townspeople, but still inhabitants of one or another Indian village around Mashpee or Wakeby ponds to the north, Santuit pond to the east, Johns or Ashumet ponds to the west, and near either Poponesset Bay or Waquoit Bay (Figure 1). In 1674 Bourne recorded his converts village by village, suggesting that they lived clustered around the Mashpee plantation. In many ways, Mashpee was still an Indian place as the group faced its own set of challenges during King Philip’s War.

The start of King Philip’s War in 1675 disrupted the lives of Mashpee’s “praying Indians.” The war thrust the Mashpees into an unprecedented diplomatic arrangement, forcing the group to choose between their traditional allegiances to their Wampanoag and Narragansett cousins or their newfound fealty to the province. This fact developed from the immediacy of the war to the Mashpees’ homeland. In the 1630s it had been the distant Connecticut Pequots who fought the English. New England Puritans were now waging their second Indian war right on the Mashpee’s doorstep.

In the eyes of Puritan colonists, King Philip’s War separated “friendly” Indians from “unfriendly” Indians. King Philip’s forces and their supporters were considered enemy Indians as they attacked Puritan towns and villages and killed

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whites. Yet the conflict in no way precluded "friendly" groups, namely a number of Massachusetts, Pennacooks, Nipmucks, and Wampanoags, from turmoil. While the Mashpee group chose to remain "friendly" to the English, and thereby escaped heavy involvement in the conflict, English colonists from the surrounding towns of Sandwich, Barnstable, and Falmouth, were unable, or unwilling, to distinguish an Indian friend from a foe and thus identified all Indians as threats. But unlike the Natick Indians and other "praying Indians" who during the war were forced from their homelands to Deer Island in Boston harbor, the Mashpees stayed in their region which served as a haven for Indians who were scattered in outlying villages on Cape Cod and whose "loyalty" to the English was questionable.

Several town meeting entries from Cape Cod reflect the dismay created by King Philip’s War. On February 28, 1675, it was decided that heads of families in Sandwich "that are necessitated to repaire unto the towne, into Garisones, for their safety, and thereby expose there own habetations to the mercy of ye heathens." Any land in Sandwich was open for planting until "pople can safely return to their own again." In spite of this fear, on February 22, 1676, the town of Sandwich "granted

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63 *Sandwich and Bourne Colony and Town Records,* No. 104 (Yarmouthport, Massachusetts: C.W. Swift, 1912), 24.

64 Ibid.
liberty to the Indians to set up a house to meet in on the Lord’s days for this present summer provided the said Indians do not damage [meadows] by letting their horses go into meadows.” What this seems to suggest is that townspeople permitted local “loyal” Indians to set up a church near Sandwich. Then again fearing attack from Cape Cod Indians sometime in July 1676, the town met and “judged for the saftey of the four towns” to keep careful watch near Waquoit Bay. The town hired scouts “to keep constantly out upon that service untill the towne see Cause to call them in againe.” On January 22, 1677, certain Sandwich men attended a town meeting “with Barnstable men, and men of the other towns. . . in reference to the settling of business about scouting at the Herring River.” Although the actual nature of the “scouting” remains unknown, Hutchins and others have suggested that post-war uneasiness of Cape Indians led to the scouting. It is reasonable to even argue that whites from Sandwich and surrounding towns were armed and guarding, as they had on Waquoit Bay the previous year, the banks of the Santuit River, the Mashpee-Barnstable boundary. This explains why Bourne had to act a cultural broker to persuade a group of Indians from Mashpee not to attack the small town of Sandwich in the early 1680s. Indeed, provincials from towns on the Cape, unable to discern friendly Indians from foes, made conflicting decisions. At one point, Sandwich townspeople allowed Indians to establish a church, while at other times Englishmen

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66 Sandwich and Bourne Colony and Town Records, 25.
68 Ibid. Hutchins makes this similar argument in Mashpee, 58.
from several towns armed themselves for fear of Indian attacks. Everyone on Cape Cod, Indian or English, lived in a state of uncertainty.

The war's end ushered in a new era of Anglo-Indian relations in southern New England. As historians Mandell and O'Brien have already shown, Puritan post-war anxiety of continued Indian attacks forced the dissolution of many Indian villages and praying towns, and the Massachusetts and Plymouth General Courts imposed stricter regulations to control Indian lives. The selling of many Indians into slavery clearly demonstrated the post-war hatred of Indians and the effect such feelings could have on governmental decisions. In 1678 Canootus, Symon, and Joel, Indians near Sandwich were apprehended and confessed to breaking into the house of Englishman Zechariah Allen and stealing £25 from his chest. "Appearing no other way how he may be satisfied from his loss," the court sentenced the Indians to be perpetual slaves and empowered Allen to sell them in New England or elsewhere.

Even with continued uneasiness following the defeat of Metacomet, the provincial government again allowed those considered "friendly Indians," the Mashpees and Natick Indians included, to live in designated praying towns. While unlike the Natick Indians the Mashpees had never undergone the difficult process of relocation, both Indian communities after the war continued a similar process of development by keeping one foot in each world. After the conflict, then, the Mashpee group, who now comprised many other Wampanoags from the Cape, still moderated their strong connections to English society and culture by maintaining Indian social

70 Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 16-27; O'Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 65-90.
71 There is no way to tell if these men were Mashpee Indians. Freeman, "Annals of Sandwich," in The History of Cape Cod, Vol. II, 72.
customs and ideas.72 Their existence was fragile, but one preserved through the tumultuous events between 1684 and 1700.

III. Colonial-Crown Conflicts and the Mashpee Indians: 1684-1700

In 1684, Charles II repealed the Bay Colony’s charter and a year later his successor, James II, thrust the region into political and legal disarray by uniting Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Plymouth into the Dominion, and by appointing Joseph Dudley to be temporary governor. For nearly a year, until the arrival of the military governor, Sir Edmund Andros, Dudley and his cronies manipulated land and law to increase their wealth. The repeal of the charter resulted in what Mandell has aptly called “additional demands on Indian lands,” since the existing Puritan land grants were suddenly plunged into a limbo of legal uncertainty creating new opportunities for fraud and misunderstandings.73 No evidence exists that these land deals directly affected the Mashpees.

Yet in the midst of the agitation over land grants, or perhaps in reaction to them, the Mashpees petitioned the Plymouth General Court to recognize the lands ceded them by Tookonchasun and Weepquish twenty years before. The Plymouth General Court finally accepted the deed as legally binding in 1685, “secured to said South Sea Indians & their children for ever, soe as never to be given sold, or aliened

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72 Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 3.
from them without all their consents.™ Of course this excluded the “parcells of upland & meadow” that the Bourne family owned on Mashpee River, the east side of Mashpee pond, and nearby Waquoit Bay. The Bournes also could take 10,000 alewives per year, cut ten or twelve loads of marsh hay, and cut wood and graze cattle on lands adjoining their own. An important document, the deed forbade land within Mashpee to be sold without the consent of the entire community. More significantly, it made determining community and kin membership even more critical for the group because status as a “Mashpee Indian” defined who could or could not be a proprietor. The document, moreover, stated that the region was to be the home to Christian Indians. Richard Bourne had died in 1682. His son, Sherijashub, took his place as the community’s minister and according to the Plymouth government, was to construct a meetinghouse for prayer.

The aftermath of the Glorious Revolution in 1689 had a direct impact on the Mashpee group. Distance provided little protection from the tumult, because colonial governments were removed and political structures altered. William and Mary issued a new charter to Massachusetts in 1691 that kept the colony attached to the Crown, made property ownership the sole yardstick for voting (instead of church membership), and mandated toleration of dissenters and Anglicans. Above all, from the Mashpee group’s point of view, the Bay Colony obtained New Plymouth, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket. Mashpee, the largest Indian enclave on the Cape, now answered directly to the Bay Colony’s General Court. Recognizing its new

™ Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, Vol. VI, 159; Gideon Hawley to Reverend James Freeman, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.

power over Indians in the recently annexed regions, in 1694 the legislature passed into law that their “[intent was] that the Indians may be forwarded in civility and Christianity, and the drunkenness and other vices be more effectually suppressed amongst them.”

English-funded missionary work thus continued in Mashpee. In 1685, 141 “praying Indians” lived in Mashpee under the tutelage of the Indian minister “Shanks,” reputedly from Natick. Yet the minister Rowland Cotton from Sandwich, in a letter dated June 29, 1693, wrote that there were “214 [Indians] all belonging to the same assembly.” Of course, Cotton noted that his number fluctuated because of numerous “stragglers that had no set place.” Some Indians who obviously maintained their semi-sedentary life made it difficult for Cotton to accurately count his “praying-Indians.” This may be the reason for the discrepancy between Shonks’s count and Cotton’s tally. Either way, the numbers from 1685 and 1693 suggest that Indians in Mashpee were still showing a dedication to the Puritan faith.

Although Indians were dedicated to Christianity, old customs and ideas continued to hold the Mashpee group together. When the ministers Mr. Grindal Rawson of Mendon, and Mr. Samuel Danforth of Taunton, visited Mashpee at some

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76 The Acts and Resolves Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1869), 1693-1694, Second Session, Chapter 17, 150-151; Campisi, The Mashpee Indians, 80.
77 “Thomas Hinkley to William Stoughton and Joseph Dudley,” 2 April 1685, MHSC 4th series, Vol. V, 133. O’Brien Dispossession by Degrees, 120. I would also like to thank Dr. O’Brien for her helpful e-mails regarding this minister, Josiah Shonks.
78 Rowland Cotton to Increase Mather, in Matthew Mayhew, A Brief Narrative of the Success Which the Gospel Hath Had Among the Indians of Martha’s Vineyard and the Places Adjacent in New England (Boston: Bartholomew Green, 1694), 52.
79 Especially with Bourne’s death in 1682, there was very little stability in Mashpee’s pulpit. The lack of a full-time preacher did not help increase the number of converts.
point between May 30 and June 24 in 1698, they took careful note of the strength of
the Mashpee group’s spiritual and secular leaders.\textsuperscript{80} In their account, even while the
Puritan preacher from Sandwich, Rowland Cotton, “frequently dispensed the word”
to “well-clothed” Indians, his inadequacy at preaching “in the Indian language”
remained troublesome for the Mashpees. Therefore Mashpee preachers, namely
Simon Popmonet, stood in Cotton’s absence in Mashpees’ pulpit, “a person [Simon]
suitably qualified as most among them for that work.”\textsuperscript{81} Also, Simon Popmonet’s
brother, Caleb, served as one of the Mashpees’ four sachems, along with “Pohgneit,
Sancohsin, and James Ketah.”\textsuperscript{82} Rawson and Danforth’s letter gives the impression
that hereditary leaders still held sway among the Mashpee Indians. Simon, entitled to
lead by virtue of descent, kept the critical institution of Mashpee’s church in Indian
hands because the Mashpees requested an English schoolteacher from Rawson and
Danforth, but not a minister. Here are just the beginnings of references to the
Popmonet and Ketah family names, for both would be mentioned in the next
century’s documentary record in positions of leadership.\textsuperscript{83}

Importantly, Rawson and Danforth also provided the first count of Mashpee’s
entire Indian population, unlike the numbers from 1674, 1685, and 1693, which
included only converted Indians. By 1698, Mashpee included “263 persons...being

\textsuperscript{80} “Account of An Indian Visitation, 1698, Copied by Dr. Stiles, by Reverend Mr.
Hawley, Missionary at Mashpee, From the Printed Account of 1698,” \textit{MHSC}, 1\textsuperscript{st}
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Keetah had a variety of spellings. One of the more common of these by white
colonists was Keeter. Poghneit also had a variety of spellings. Some of these
included Pocknet, Pocknett, Pocknit, Pocknitt, and Pognit.
in number 57 families." 84 Compared to the one hundred Puritan families with six persons per household in Sandwich at the same time, Mashpee was the home to a relatively small population. 85 Yet by comparing the demographics of Mashpee with Natick at the same time one obtains a different view. Natick in 1698 numbered just twenty-nine families with 180 people. 86 Scholars should therefore not underrate the size of the Mashpee plantation. Among Indian settlements it was large. Indeed, Mashpee was the largest Indian community in Massachusetts, and would remain so throughout the next century.

During the seventeenth century, the Mashpee Indians on the Cape weathered the many challenges posed by disease, Puritan settlement, and missionary work. For the Mashpee group, as found in the account of 1698, even though they wore English-style clothing and prayed, traditional connections to their families and their hereditary leaders remained central to group survival. To preserve links with their past, the Mashpee Indians of the eighteenth century continued to live within British America while still maintaining critical boundaries against outsiders.

84 "Account of An Indian Visitation, 1698, Copied by Dr. Stiles, by Reverend Mr. Hawley, Missionary at Mashpee, From the Printed Account of 1698," MHSC, 1st series, Vol. X, 133.
85 Sandwich population statistics from R.A. Lovell, Sandwich: A Cape Cod Town (Sanwich, Cape Cod: Town of Sandwich Historical Center, 1996), 240. Lovell has used all available evidence including wills, published genealogies, vital records, town meeting records, and extant deeds to calculate these numbers.
Chapter Three:
"In Possession of [Their] Liberty and Independence" Amid a Developing Multi-Ethnic Maritime Community: Mashpee Indians in the Eighteenth Century

In a letter from 1797, the Reverend Gideon Hawley reflected on his first arrival in Cape Cod forty years earlier. He was an experienced preacher to Indians when he came to Mashpee in 1757. Hawley had spent over ten years in Iroquoia and the frontier town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The minister was then no novice when it came to understanding and writing about the ways English social customs had changed the lives of Indians. Hawley’s correspondence from 1797 compared the extent to which the Iroquois and Algonquians had adopted English dress. Wampanoags in Mashpee “dressed in English mode” when he first arrived. Yet their sampling of English clothing only went so far. Unlike many Iroquois who had adopted English attire, “the natives appeared here [in Mashpee] in a very abject state in comparison of the Iroquois,” remarked Hawley. The Mashpee Indians were “below a half naked Indian in possession of [their] Liberty and Independence.” Apparently, Indians in Mashpee in the mid-eighteenth century, like their ancestors, wore minimal clothing.

Though Hawley’s observations are of interest to the contemporary scholar, generations of historians have largely ignored the experiences in the eighteenth century of New England Indian groups like the Mashpee Wampanoags. Historical works published until the 1980s focused on the period in British America as a time of
growth for a new nation, not as a period when Native Americans were either pushed off their homelands entirely or rebuilt their communities on traditional homelands. Whereas past historians saw the history of Indians in early New England ending with King Philip’s War in 1676, more recent works have countered this view by showing how New England’s native communities were indeed active in the eighteenth century.

Daniel Mandell has completed some of the most extensive work in this field. He claimed in several studies from the 1990s to revise the commonly held belief that New England Indians had vanished a few years after King Philip’s War ended. However, Mandell’s broad focus in *Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts*, although mentioning the ways in which a few enclaves survived the century, otherwise emphasized the declining state of eastern Massachusetts Indians during the eighteenth century. And because his book is broad in scope, Mandell only provides a surface analysis of the history of individual groups like the Mashpee Indians. Coupling lack of depth with a narrative of aboriginal decline in eighteenth-century eastern Massachusetts, Mandell’s efforts to show that some groups like the Mashpee Indians retained their Indian identity into the nineteenth century are incomplete. In a *William & Mary Quarterly* article on the Natick Indians, Mandell argued similarly that for many of the Indian communities of British North America, the eighteenth century was the end. “While situations varied,” he stated, “the reasons for decline were the same everywhere: pressure exerted by white settlers, internal demographic crisis, and problems of a changing

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1 Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thatcher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter cited as MHS).
Focusing on the richly documented town of Natick, Mandell showed clearly that the Indian people there, by the end of the American Revolution, were fading "in the town they helped create." At first glance, Hawley's somber portrayal of the Mashpee Indians' "abject state" adds to Mandell's story of Indian decline in eighteenth-century eastern Massachusetts. Yet while Natick Indians and other groups in early New England lost touch with their Indian ways by selling their homelands and trying "to live more like [their] Christian neighbors," a more thorough examination reveals that Indian families retaining Indian practices within an English Christian world truly marked Mashpee's colonial past.

Examining Hawley's observations from this perspective, one is intrigued by his second description of the Mashpee Indians: they appeared "in possession of [their] Liberty and Independence." Like previous generations, Mashpee Wampanoags of the eighteenth century maintained their family connections and lived on their traditional homelands despite widening ties with British America. Mashpee remained an Indian place as evidenced by the residents' petitions to protect kin and territory, and the community's overwhelming success in surviving the ravages of disease, colonial wars, poverty, alcohol, and whaling. Indians in Mashpee of the last half of the eighteenth century, the majority of whom were women, still staked their claims to their land and their rights as Indians unlike the Natick natives who, as Jean O'Brien

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2 Daniel Mandell, Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth-Century Eastern Massachusetts (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
4 Ibid., 579.
has shown, were selling most of their land by degrees. Remaining on their homelands, Mashpee natives retained a traditional subsistence economy and settlement patterns as well as traditional crafts and spiritual practices. And though Indian women outnumbered Indian men in Mashpee after 1750, compelling women to seek marriages with Europeans and Africans, children in the group were still raised as Indians. Indian women assumed leadership roles. Some white, black, and foreign-born sailors, too, assumed an Indian identity to live and work in a Native American community of the early republic.

While Mashpee Indians guarded their customs, the population became part of the Anglo-Atlantic world’s maritime and domestic working classes. They worked as whalers and servants, fought in colonial wars, and sold crafts and timber at local markets. They fired off petitions, wrote wills, filed suits in court, and went into debt. They acquired English amenities and some constructed shingled homes. They went to church, attended school, married outsiders, and spoke two languages. By the last half of the eighteenth century, as Mandell has recently reminded us, Indian and African-American intermarriages took place in Mashpee partially because of white society’s legal and economic biases against “people of color.” Mashpee developed into one of the early republic’s multi-ethnic maritime communities of the “lower sort.”

5 Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thatcher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
A fuller understanding of the ways in which the group survived into the nineteenth century as a Native American community thus emerges by focusing on how Mashpee families were immersed in a developing Anglo-Atlantic world, but also by paying closer attention to how a persisting Indian way of life moderated this change. Indians and their customs, to be sure, never vanished from Mashpee even as migrations of Euro-Americans and African Americans continued. Visitors to Mashpee in the early 1800s noticed how wigwams still dotted the landscape. And travelers of the nineteenth century recorded carefully how Indians continued to honor traditional social customs such as sacrifice rocks.

I. A Changing Indian Community: Mashpee Before the Revolution

Within the boundaries of the Mashpee plantation in the eighteenth century, Indians lived in scattered villages rather than an English-styled town. Ezra Stiles' map drawn on his visit in 1762 depicts Indian dwellings even by the mid-eighteenth century standing near either Mashpee and Wakeby ponds to the north, Johns and Ashument ponds to the east, or Poponesset Bay or Waquoit Bay to the south (Figure II, Figure III), places traditionally settled by Indian villages. Hawley’s letters and journal entries for the second half of the eighteenth century, too, suggest that the Mashpees’ customary way of occupying their homelands in scattered hamlets never changed dramatically during the fifty years he worked among the Indians (1757-1807). Mashpee was unlike other praying towns in the 1700s that had adopted the

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8 See Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 52.
9 Jack Campisi, The Mashpee Indians: Tribe on Trial (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 78. Mashpee Indians throughout the colonial period lived on
agrarian and town habits of their English neighbors. Mashpee Indians stayed in their separate settlements on approximately 12,000 acres of land procuring a meager (by white standards) but relatively independent and traditional subsistence: fishing from ponds, rivers, and the coast, gathering shellfish and lobsters, planting corn and squash, and cutting the region's abundant timber.\(^{10}\)

Though Mashpee Wampanoags had retained their traditional settlement patterns and subsistence activities, English town expansion at the beginning of the eighteenth century—Sandwich to the north, Falmouth to the west, and Barnstable to the east—drew Mashpee Indians into closer contact with English colonists and their way of life. Populations in several English towns on the Cape doubled between 1650

Cape Cod in what is now called the district of Mashpee. A ridge shielded the region from the northern mainland and sandbars in both bays provided limited access by sea (Figure 1). Also, the Cape is widest at this point, inhibiting communications and transportation. This combination of geographic factors, argued Campisi, was why the Mashpee Indians remained relatively isolated. During the colonial period, Mashpee included roughly 12,000 acres of land exclusive of the spaces covered by the harbors and lakes. Despite some minor boundary shifts between the surrounding white towns and what was set aside as the Indian land of Mashpee, the region was approximately eight and half miles in length and four miles wide. Indeed, the size of the plantation changed little over time. In 1674, for example, Bourne recorded that the Mashpee land was "near ten miles in length and five in breadth." For Bourne's account, see Daniel Gookin, "Historical Collections of the Indians in New England," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, (hereafter cited as MHSC), 1\(^{st}\) series, Vol. I, 196-199. My interpretation of the size and location of the Mashpee plantation comes from the only full description of the district, "A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable," 16 September 1802, MHSC, 2\(^{nd}\) series, Vol. III, 1-13.\(^{10}\) The number of acres is from "A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable," 16 September 1802, MHSC, 2\(^{nd}\) series, Vol. III, 1-13. See Francis G. Hutchins, Mashpee: The Story of Cape Cod's Indian Town (West Franklin, New Hampshire: Amarta Press, 1979), and Campisi, The Mashpee Indians. By using Hawley's observations, both authors show that the Mashpees' subsistence practices of hunting, fishing, and harvesting were still practiced throughout the eighteenth century.
and 1700. With colonial population in Massachusetts burgeoning, and the resulting scarcity of land, English families moved to Cape Cod steadily after the Glorious Revolution when the Bay Colony absorbed the Cape. Demographic growth at an accelerated rate led to boundary disputes between the Mashpee plantation and neighboring English towns. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, then, Mashpee Indians faced increasing contact with a growing number of colonizers pushing onto native homelands. To make matters worse for the Mashpee group, while provincial law deemed squatting and poaching by both Indians and whites illegal activities, authorities never clearly defined nor pursued these regulations.

As with other southern New England Indian groups, Mashpee Wampanoags drafted petitions against English encroachments into their way of life. Simon Popmonet, the Indian preacher and eldest son of the legendary sachem Paupmunnuck of Oyster Island, sent several petitions to the Massachusetts provincial government in 1700. He fired off the first when “two houses [were] built on the said lands [Mashpee lands].” The second petition, too, expressed the group’s concerns with their English neighbors to the General Court. Popmonet and a handful of other Indian leaders complained about their English neighbors’ crooked labor practices. Local Englishmen would make small loans to Mashpees. In labor scarce New England, Wampanoags

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11 Sandwich’s population doubled between 1650 and 1700, from sixty families with an estimated five per household to one hundred families with an estimated 6 per household; R.A. Lovell, Sandwich: A Cape Cod Town (Sandwich, Mass., 1996), 240. Mandell in Behind the Frontier, and O’Brien in Dispossession by Degrees, have already discussed the issues of population growth in New England and its impact on Indians.

were forced into work, or had to make their "poor children" servants for an "unreasonable time," if loans were not paid quickly and in full.\textsuperscript{13} Massachusetts' General Court sympathized with the Indians' charge. The Court accepted the Mashpees' request that two justices of the peace had to approve future indentures, and also authorized officers to deal with problems Indians had with existing contracts.\textsuperscript{14}

The Mashpee leaders' decision to write petitions indicates that they were departing from their customary way of handling disputes, a direct consequence of more frequent contact with colonists. Traditionally, southeastern New England Indians settled disputes through blood feuds and clan responsibilities, systems different in many ways from English common law. Native American judicial systems in southern New England were, nevertheless, very effective and were as enforceable as any statute of colonial government despite lacking "written laws" of a structure comparable to the English legal process.\textsuperscript{15} Yet with closer ties to the province, men who headed prominent Mashpee families such as the Pomponets petitioned the General Court for help with their community's contracts and land disputes.

Also revealed in the petitions are other transformations that had befallen Mashpee's Indian community. Their complaint of houses being built on Indian lands indicates that the group started to conceive of landownership in ways that resembled those of their English neighbors. And though Wampanoag labor was coerced, the mention of Mashpees as indentured servants reveals that the Indians were actively engaged in the colonial economy. Southern New England Algonquians by 1700,

\textsuperscript{13} Indian Petition, Massachusetts Archives (hereafter cited as MA), Vol. 31, 68. 
\textsuperscript{14} Mandell, \textit{Behind the Frontier}, 69. 
\textsuperscript{15} Kawashima, \textit{Puritan Justice and the Indian}, 5.
Mandell has found, were more fully integrated into provincial society than previous
generations had been. Mashpee Indians thus displayed openly their discontent with
the neighboring English who moved onto their homelands and swindled kin in
economic agreements.16

In contrast, English colonizers of the Cape viewed their conflicts over land
with local Indians through the lens of their own cultural expectations. With their town
growing, English settlers of Sandwich denounced any local Wampanoags who
continued to practice a semi-sedentary way of life. Townspeople of Sandwich on
September 19, 1695 expressed their anxiety over Indians squatting “on the Towns
commons, firing the wood and scaring the cattle and stealing of corn.” Sandwich
leaders responded by passing into law that no local Indians should build wigwams on
any part of the commons, or within two miles of the country road, without first
obtaining approval from the town’s selectmen.17 Authorities would tear down any
Indian dwellings constructed without town approval. Algonquian usufruct principles-
-that extended families could take up and clear unsettled land--still clashed with
English attitudes about property and land tenure on Cape Cod. Mobile Indians
around Sandwich who perhaps unknowingly built wigwams on lots intended for
English families, stood in the way of Sandwich’s plans for expansion. Because of
their prejudices against Indians, only Sandwich proprietors could put up new homes
on recently opened lots.18

16 Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 48-79.
17 Sandwich Town Meeting, 19 September 1695, Sandwich Town Records, Sandwich
18 O’Brien, Dispossession by Degrees, 22-23.
Conflicting ideas about land and boundaries continually forced Mashpee Indians into aggressive dealings with neighboring English. Residents from Barnstable complained in 1717 of boundary disputes grumbling that “they [were] unwilling to contend with the said Indians in the Common Law reason of the Poverty of the said Indians and other Inconveniences.”\textsuperscript{19} Requests for government intervention led the General Court to appoint a mediating commission. It met with both parties in 1717 and worked out a boundary settlement. For the Indians, though, boundaries remained ambiguous because similar disputes arose in 1735 and 1741.\textsuperscript{20} In all instances between 1700 and 1740, when the Mashpees disputed their landholdings in colonial society, the group pressed their claims and defended their rights and boundaries as intensely as English colonists.

That the Mashpees had entered more fully the province’s political and economic systems before 1740 is also made clear by the Indians’ use of probate records and wills; nevertheless, the inventories reveal that Wampanoags remained Indian within an English Christian world. The estate of Thomas Quanset, an Indian who lived near Mashpee, is one example. He left the following English items when he died in 1715: “one chest almost new, one axe, one lamp, two old coats, a hat, an old pair of shoes, dishes, a linen wheel, a hoe and sickle, and an old bible and some old books.” His “Indianness” was evident, though, because he lived in a wigwam and

\textsuperscript{19} The Acts and Resolves Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay (hereafter cited as \textit{Acts and Resolves}) (Boston, 1869), 1717-1718, Chapter 151, 577. The Boundary between Mashpee and Barnstable was established by Richard Bourne in 1658, along the Santuit River and around Santuit pond \textit{Records of the Colony of New Plymouth}, Vol. 2, 125, 143-144. (Figure I). However, this line was always in dispute. See Campisi, \textit{The Mashpee Indians}, 76.
fishes from an Indian styled canoe. The inventory of Zachariah and Patience, two Indians deceased in October of 1730 who lived in a Wampanoag settlement not far from Mashpee, listed similar items. Their estate included “one gown, two petticoats, some neck cloth, and one gun,” a wigwam and a canoe.21 Through purchase or trade, Wampanoags on the Cape took part in the region’s growing consumer culture. As evidenced by these inventories, Algonquian social customs, however, still flourished for some Wampanoags who owned English items still lived in their customary dwellings and engaged in traditional subsistence practices. Yet several Mashpee Wampanoags who saw themselves as part of the province’s political and economic systems carried their newly acquired English social customs to the grave. Indian traditions saw that family members buried kin in ceremonially flexed positions in family plots. The wills of “Black Sachim of Mashbee” written in 1722, and of “Peter Natumpow,” who died in Mashpee in 1733, illustrate that some Mashpee Indians on their deathbed had started following the English practice of writing a will.22

20 See Acts and Resolves, 1718-1719, Chapter 18, 595; idem., 1736-36, Chapter 123, 177; idem., 1741-1743, Chapter 32, 26.
Indians appearing in court also indicate that the group in the eighteenth century fell more under the jurisdiction of the courts of Massachusetts than previous generations of Mashpees. According to provincial law, in most civil procedures within the province, laws were supposed to apply equally to whites and Indians. This meant that the court in the plaintiff’s county heard suits between people of different counties. So when Noah Wepquish from Mashpee sued a local white settler from Highman, the case was settled in the county where Wepquish lived: the Barnstable’s Inferior Court of Common Pleas.  

23 Restitution for crimes in the province was to apply equally to whites, blacks, or Indians. Historians have nonetheless suggested—although they have not yet compared in any systematic way the differences of sentencing between whites and Indians in the eighteenth century—that sentences often came down very hard on Indians especially in cases of theft and burglary, the two crimes New England Indians were most commonly charged with committing.  

The when, in the late eighteenth century, a piece of land was set aside near the meeting house as a cemetery, replacing the family lots located near homesteads. See Peters, The Wampanoags of Mashpee, 78; Axtell, “Last Rights,” 110-128; John R. Stilgoe discussed the changes English settlers brought to the New England landscape, including the setting aside of cemeteries in Common Landscapes of America (New Haven, 1982). In my conversations with Leigh Potter, Indian and caretaker of the Mashpee graveyard, he described the Indian Cemetery “as a very special place for my people.” Hinckley, “The Will of Black Sachim of Mashbee,” Barnstable County Probate Records, NEHGS, Vol. IV, 115; Hinckley, “The Will of Peter Natumpow of Mashpee,” Barnstable County Probate Records, NEHGS, Vol. V, 126-127. “Natumpow” was most likely Nautompon.  


24 Lyle Koehler has compared the sentencing for whites and Indians in the seventeenth century. He has found that for crimes like theft, fornication, and assault, Indians in both Massachusetts and the Plymouth colony received harsher sentences than white offenders did. Kawashima’s work on Puritan law and Indians in the eighteenth century unfortunately does not compare white sentencing to those given to
court handed down a severe punishment when convicting the Mashpee Elisha Peter of
stealing a silver cup from a Barnstable settler in 1727. Even though Peter returned the
cup, which cost forty shillings, he was sentenced to pay eight shillings to the owner as
restitution, as well as a twenty-shilling fine (or ten stripes with a whip).25 Although
some Mashpee Wampanoags faced harsh prosecution, others turned to colonial courts
for their own self interest, especially to file suits against other Indians. Gideon
Nautompon of Mashpee sued a fellow Wampanoag from Sandwich in the Plymouth
common pleas court for allegedly entering Nautompon’s enclosure and running off
with a mare and a colt.26 Like petitions and wills, appearances of Mashpee Indians in
court indicate that the group was actively engaged in the Bay Colony’s economic and
political systems. Court appearances by Mashpee natives in the first half of the
eighteenth century further suggest that the group’s traditional forms of law and justice
were still caught in the midst of cultural change.

Conflicts surrounding religious leaders before 1740 are also suggestive of the
processes of cultural change that had become central to the Indian way of life in
eighteenth-century Mashpee. Ever since Richard Bourne’s death in 1682, the Indian
congregation thought of English ministers who came to them as either deceitful or
incapable. Richard Bourne’s Harvard-educated grandson, Joseph, who became the

Indian offenders. And, moreover, such a comparison is not within the bounds of this
work. See Lyle Koehler, “Red-White Power Relations and Justice in the Courts of
Seventeenth-Century New England,” American Indian Culture and Research Journal

25 For an analysis of how New Englanders often accused Indians of theft and burglary
see Bragdon, “Crime and Punishment Among the Indians of Massachusetts, 1675-
137.

26 Kawashima, Puritan Justice and the Indian, 109, 141.
Mashpees' minister in 1726, and whose familiarity with "the Indian language" was appreciated, betrayed the trust of his superiors and the Mashpees when he was accused in July of 1740 of giving "sundry Indians Namely Isaac Nautompon Amey Nautompon and Mary Porrage one pint of Rhum."\(^27\) Perhaps Bourne was acquiring land for liquor, as he often complained of his meager salary from the New England Company and had originally requested fifty acres from the Mashpees but received twelve instead.\(^28\) His lack of financial support, too, curried little favor among the Mashpee Indians because he was unfitted to provide them with the necessary gifts. Shortly after Bourne's departure, the congregation sent a letter to the Commissioners of the New England Company in Boston, explaining that they had no need for any English ministers because "we cannot understand [them], only a few can."\(^29\) The Commissioners ignored the Mashpees' resistance and sent a minister from nearby Yarmouth named Smith. Indians, however, would have nothing to do with Smith.\(^30\) Despite the occasional attempts to install an English minister, a local town preacher and Indian Solomon Briant ran Mashpee's church until the official appointment of Gideon Hawley in 1758. Briant held services in the local Indian dialect which led one commentator to believe that the Mashpees felt content with his teaching, "meeting the first of every week to pray, sing Psalms and hear the word of God, and

\(^{28}\) Ibid.  
\(^{30}\) Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thacher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
such instructions as an illiterate Indian could give them."³¹ Therefore Hawley’s permanent appointment as missionary to the Mashpees in 1758 was an interesting addition to the community. In fact when Hawley arrived, he confronted opposition from the group for he spoke the “Onoyda language [Iroquois]” not Wampanoag.³² Such heated disputes over religious leaders played a critical role in the Mashpee group’s struggle for self-preservation.

Though Hawley’s initial placement as missionary to the Mashpees had an impact on Indian lives, historians have given this topic little attention. Mandell rightly claims that with Hawley’s appointment, the Mashpee group “gained a strong voice in provincial politics without losing control of their critical institution.”³³ The minister advised and aided Indians on matters of provincial politics, especially when it came to Mashpee leaders gaining internal control of land and power. Having both Hawley and Briant was particularly advantageous for the Indians in a time of religious and linguistic change. Hawley recalled at one service that he prayed in English, Briant prayed in Algonquian, while both administered the sacrament.³⁴ Hawley not only advised Indians about the ways of the provincial government, but also in attempts at a fuller Anglicization of the Indians, preached to them in English.

Hawley’s appointment, however, touched the lives of his Wampanoag congregation in other ways. Until the missionary’s arrival, evidence indicates that the

³¹ Briant was not illiterate, as he translated the 1748 petition into English. Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thacher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
³² Gideon Hawley to Stephen Sewall, 15 September 1779, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
³³ Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 157.
minister Briant was destitute. Briant was borrowing money regularly from Hawley by the 1760s. The minister gave him £6 in 1765 “to pay the doctor expences of his sickness in year 1763,” while Briant still owed £10 that he incurred over the previous year. Briant was in such dire straits in 1767--owing over £40-- that when a committee from the New England Company visited that year, “he prayed for some relief.”

Even a little income at times received directly from Boston (they considered giving him a salary) did little to comfort Briant: “When Solomon needs and begs for food and raiment, I cannot deny him,” Hawley sympathized.

Briant and others among the group welcomed missionary activity because on several occasions Hawley pulled Briant from the depths of poverty, whereas monetary assistance to Briant made known to other Indians the material benefits of lending an ear to Hawley’s teachings. Briant’s congregation of Indians from around the plantation also sought Hawley out for his charity or what Wampanoags understood as gift giving. The minister dispersed glasses, blankets, paper, books, money, and other necessities. After the Revolution, the Mashpees petitioned Samuel Cooper, one of the commissioners for the New England Company, pleading with him to keep the minister’s funds and goods intact so that “we [Indians] may have the

35 Ibid., 16.
36 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 10 October 1765, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
37 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 26 November 1764, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, Congregational Library and Archives (hereafter cited as CLA).
stationary and other articles," which they felt they "never needed more." A dependence on English consumer goods and money was part of the Mashpees’ motivations to keep Hawley as their permanent minister. While Hawley furnished them with gifts and sermonized in English, natives around the plantation, however, still maintained essential parts of their identity after 1760 including speaking their language and practicing a traditional Wampanoag subsistence-based economy.

To Hawley, Mashpee Indians’ religious enthusiasm often seemed less important than receiving his gifts, because the missionary often contemplated in his journal entries what would be the best course to permanently deliver the Mashpees from their ancestral ways. While the missionary believed that he had to protect the “artful, cunning, and sly” Indians from backsliding into “heathanism” by providing them with Christian education and the material benefits of the English, Hawley however often expressed his displeasure with the Indians’ lack of progress towards “civility.” Mostly, Hawley complained that “Indian morals were not in a good state,” and referred to their meeting house as “a cage of unclean birds.”

According to the missionary, though, Indians sometimes did reveal a deep sense of understanding Congregational doctrine. Hawley and the commissioners of

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38 “The Humble Petition of Daves Quapish, Gideon Nautumpum and Moses Pognit Indians and Chiefs of the Mashpee tribe,” 22 January 1782, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
39 Hawley makes several references to the Indians still practicing a traditional subsistence-based economy. And it seems that they still hear prayers in their language until Solomon Briant’s death in 1774. See the Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
40 Gideon Hawley to Governor John Hancock, 8 July 1781, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
the New England Company paid a visit in September 1767 “at a time of the year when the Indians of Martha’s Vineyard, and the neighbouring Indians on the Continent,” would come to Mashpee “to celebrate the holy communion together.”

Solomon Briant and the Indian pastor of the church at Gay Head, Zachary Osooit, carried on the service in the Wampanoag dialect, while Hawley preached in both English and an Algonquian dialect. The meetinghouse was “filled with the Indians who appeared there in becoming gravity.” The event, although held in September when Indians traditionally celebrated their harvests, was reshaped to conform to the Puritan religion. The devotion of some Indians to Christianity also found expression in 1783 when a well-respected Wampanoag man on his deathbed at the age of thirty-five desired communion with the church. Hawley was inspired to perform this conversion because the nighttime ceremony “was attended by a number of the Church.” The reverend described the event as “one of the most serious and solemn occasions of the kind that I ever attended in my life.”

As with most Indian communities in eighteenth-century Massachusetts, religious and political change often went hand in hand in Mashpee. Hereditary leaders who showed surprising strength and continuity had developed an intermediary existence by remaining vital to the Mashpee group while working within the framework of colonial society. “The Popmunnuck family,” wrote Hawley, “is the

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41 Gideon Hawley to Governor John Hancock, 8 July 1781, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS; “A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable,” 16 September 1802, MHSC, 2nd series, Vol. III, 6.
43 Ibid.
first in dignity here.” The sachem Paupmunnuck of the seventeenth century left three sons, two of whom, Simon and Caleb, took Christian names. Simon Popmonet was deacon of the church until his death in 1720. He wrote several letters and petitions on behalf of his people. Caleb, too, for years “was a famous Indian magistrate,” signing Mashpee petitions in 1736 and 1750. Simon had three sons Isaac, Experience, and Josiah. Isaac was an “Indian magistrate of great reputation” before he died in 1758. Hawley’s descriptions, and several names found on petitions, demonstrate that the Paupmunnuck family, and others like the Wepquish family, remained leaders of the community in the eighteenth century. Working within the framework of colonial society, some as magistrates and others as preachers, the Mashpees nonetheless balanced this change with old ideas and customs in often selecting their magistrates and ministers from those families entitled to lead by virtue of descent.  

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44 Gideon Hawley to Isaac Smith Esquire, 28 January 1783, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS. 
46 John Wepquish’s name appears on petitions or reports in 1736, 1750, and 1753. A petition of 1788 named the “chiefs” of the tribe that included Moses from the Popmonet family. The petition was labeled as follows: “The Humble Petition of Daves Quapish, Gideon Nautumpum and Moses Pognit Indians and Chiefs of the Mashpee tribe,” 22 January 1782, Gideon Hawley Letters, CLA, one reel. Obviously families like the Popmonets, Wepquishs, Nautumpums (Nautompons) were prominent in the Mashpee community. Others appeared with regularity like Ketah, Attaquin, and Amos family names. “Keetah” and “Pognheit” (Popmonet) first appeared in the 1698 report from Rawson and Danforth, “Account of An Indian Visitation, 1698, Copied by Dr. Stiles, by Reverend Mr. Hawley, Missionary at Mashpee, From the Printed Account of 1698,” *MHSC*, 1st series, Vol. X, 133. Both family names had a variety of spellings. One of the more common of these, by white colonists, was Keeter. Pognit (Pomponet) also had a variety of spellings. Some of these included Pognheit, Pocknet, Pocknett, Pocknit, and Pocknitt. These different spellings were most commonly found in the various records of Mashpee Indians who served in the Revolutionary War. For references in the American Revolution see 92
But though hereditary leaders still exercised influence on the community, the
Mashpee Indian political system in the 1720s started to resemble the town meetings
of New England. In petitioning “we had meeting and chose officers among ourselves
and appointed men to oversee our lands and marsh and take care that everyone had
his share,” Mashpee Indians expressed clearly that they had adopted English forms of
land ownership as proprietors of their own lands. Yet the land was not surveyed
and divided in any systematic fashion. Within the Mashpee proprietary system, an
Indian could take up a piece of land, clear it, while his or her family inherited the
right to use that land. As anthropologist Jack Campisi has said, “proprietors had to be
members of the Mashpee community and of Indian descent.” If a proprietor died
without family, male or female, in this system the land went back to the group.
“Tribal membership assured the individual the right to land, and, conversely, having a
right to land identified an individual as a member of the group.” Tracing one’s
descent from a proprietor thus became how people identified themselves as
Mashpees. Between 1720 and 1746, a mediator attended an annual spring meeting of
all proprietors where Judge Ezra Bourne, grandson of Richard Bourne, recorded the
minutes (none exist), noting any division of common lands or assets agreed upon by
the Mashpee Indian proprietors. A lack of Indian petitions of grievance from this
time and a dearth of meeting minutes suggests that the Mashpees controlled their

Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War (Boston, 1904). For
mention of the Keetahs who served see Vol. IX, 25. For mention of the Poghneits
who served see Vol. XI, 487.
48 Campisi, The Mashpee Indians, 82.
49 Hutchins, Mashpee, 69-73.
homeland and controlled internal affairs without dividing their common lands or assets to any great extent.

The General Court's appointment of white guardians to oversee Indian lands threw this system into turmoil. The Massachusetts General Court in 1746 selected Sylvanus Bourne, a descendant of Richard Bourne, James Otis, and David Crocker, Esquire, to lease out surplus Indian land to whites. The overseers lived too distant from Mashpee to spend extensive time on Indian affairs. When the guardians and Mashpees did convene, the whites chose a tavern as their assembly room where the Indians complained that they would "gitt to much liquor." These meetings at taverns were counterproductive. As Mashpee Indians claimed, "there was fighting and quarreling," and that "some of us [were] abused by English men and we know not what to do." By appointing white guardians, the provincial government tried laying the groundwork in several native communities for the transfer of land from Indian hands to white hands.

Twenty-four Mashpee proprietors countered the guardianship on March 29, 1748 by submitting another petition in their native language. The minister Solomon Briant, esteemed by the Mashpees as a go-between and teacher, translated their grievances into English: "the great court at Boston to remove those gentlemen, the Honorable Colonel Bourne, James Otis, and Mr. Crocker esquire from being our guardians." Expressing alarm over their homelands, the Mashpees complained that

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“since they [guardians] have intermeddled about our lands and meadows... We do humbly beseech our Honorable rulers to take care of us that they may not have power to sell our land to any [whites].” Because of the guardians’ actions, some of the Mashpees were “forced to buy hay to keep our cattle from starving because they have taken our meadow and this will be the way for us to starve also.” Despite Indian complaints, the General Court did not remove the overseers.\textsuperscript{52}

The unpleasant state of affairs surrounding the appointment of Mashpees’ guardians lasted until 1760. That year, a young Mashpee Indian schoolteacher Reuben Cognehew set out to take Mashpee’s complaints directly to King George III. His trip, rare for New England Indians, was more equivalent to an odyssey. Before arriving in England, Cognehew was mistakenly sold into the West Indian slave trade. When he finally arrived in England, the King heard his complaints and then ordered the governor in Boston to look into the matter.\textsuperscript{53}

Massachusetts finally passed a bill in 1763 creating the district of Mashpee. This law reverted back to the pre-guardianship years in that it permitted Mashpee leaders to control their own internal affairs, including the rights to tax themselves, control homelands, elect their officials, and enforce provincial laws with their own forms of discipline. The government removed Mashpee’s externally appointed

\textsuperscript{52} Mashpee Petition, 1748, MA, Vol. 31, 102; Campisi, \textit{The Mashpee Indians}, 84. For other petitions by the Mashpees requesting the removal of the guardians see particularly, Goddard and Bragdon, \textit{Native Writings}, Part I, 373, and the Indian Petition, 13 August 1761, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.

\textsuperscript{53} Several historians have already told the full story of Cognehew’s journey and its outcome and eventual impact. See particularly Hutchins, \textit{Mashpee}, 73; Campisi, \textit{The Mashpee Indians}, 84-85; Mandell, \textit{Behind the Frontier}, 157. Cognehew retold his saga in a petition in MA, Vol. 33, 146-147. Gideon Hawley recounted Cognehew’s story in No I., 4 April 1792, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
guardians. Now, Indian proprietors elected five overseers annually to regulate Mashpee. Only two of the five were to be Englishmen, to serve as a clerk and treasurer. The act of 1763 was critical to the group because it bridged English laws and Indian customs.

As in earlier times, the Mashpees after 1763—until 1788 when the guardians were reinstated—enjoyed powers within their community while conceding to the provincial need to regulate their lives in the form of the clerk and treasurer and with Indians still involved in court proceedings. As their petitions had indicated, Indians in Mashpee desired most to make their own decisions and control their own affairs and lands. With this new law of 1763 the Mashpees could still support themselves with their traditional subsistence patterns on their protected homelands. If they opted for English economic practices, including toiling aboard whaling vessels or serving in white homes, there was some hope that their Indian magistrates would step in to ensure that kin would be treated by whites with some level of fairness. Hawley wrote after the guardians were removed that "We enjoy tranquility, have no quarrels, nor law suits." He also wrote in support of the removal of the guardians that "Indians who go to sea, go upon better terms; and sundry of our young Indians who used to follow the seas stay at home this year and follow husbandry." With the minister Hawley's arrival and assistance, Mashpee by 1763 once again showed signs of a

54 Gideon Hawley to James Freeman, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS; Hutchins, Mashpee, 69-73; Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 157-158.
55 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 3 April 1764, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
56 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 20 May 1765, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.

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relatively autonomous Indian community, albeit under the jurisdiction of colonial courts.

Hawley, however, had his own motivations for supporting the removal of the guardians in 1763. By the time Mashpee’s overseers were removed and the district was established, the minister had been in Mashpee for just five years. Not a firmly entrenched figure, Hawley viewed his support of the Indians in political matters as a way of gaining the favor of his congregation. He also hoped to increase his own power among the Indians. His efforts were rewarded, because after 1763 the Mashpees chose Hawley for years as one of the two required English overseers. 57

II. Disease and the Changing Family Economy

Minister Hawley’s letters and journal entries indicate that the Mashpee community still in the last half of the eighteenth century, like other New England Indian enclaves, faced frequent outbreaks of disease. 58 Growing connections to a developing Anglo-Atlantic world kept diseases chronic among the group as outsiders moved into the community or Mashpee men brought illnesses with them when returning from whaling and soldiering. Sam Pognit brought yellow fever back with him from a trip to Nantucket in 1763. Richard Simons’ death that same year also serves as an example of how migrants carried disease with their supplies and trade goods. When Simons resided in a wigwam with an Indian woman recently settled from Nantucket, the woman apparently gave him yellow fever. Perhaps quarantined

57 Hutchins, Mashpee, 88–89.
58 For disease in Natick see Mandell, “‘To Live More Like My Christian English Neighbors,’” 565.
from his neighbors, he died in his neighbor Joseph Keetoh’s abandoned wigwam. Such examples suggest that the Mashpee Indians of the mid-eighteenth century had a better understanding of the communicability of European ailments. When a smallpox outbreak occurred in Boston in 1764, Hawley felt he could not travel to the city with some Indians to get supplies because “Our People will be afraid to venture up until the town is cleansed.” Despite efforts to control diseases, consumption, yellow fever, measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, and other infections still ripped through Mashpee families with low immunity, perhaps with a lower resistance than Euro-Americans. Hawley described to a friend how in December 1776 he had to bury “8 within a few weeks” because of a terrible ailment that plagued the community. “And have several at the point of death,” wrote Hawley, “and I fear it will carry off numbers before ending.” According to Hawley’s records, Mashpee children and adolescents, as in many Euro-American homes, always felt the brunt of the storm. In the years 1759 and 1760, children and teenagers comprised 78 percent of the recorded Indian deaths from illness. Such evidence suggests that the numbers of adults dying in no way matched those of children and adolescents. But because complete vital records for Mashpee do not exist, it is impossible to determine the overall impact of epidemics at every level of society.

59 See Hawley’s Birth and Death Records, 1761-1768, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
60 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 3 April 1764, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
62 See Hawley’s Birth and Death Records, 1761-1768, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
63 Ibid.
Socioeconomic connections to an emerging Anglo-Atlantic world transformed Mashpee families in critical ways. One of these changes came with heavy losses of Indian men who served in the Massachusetts provincial forces during the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution. Shifting alliances to the province’s government or need for wages were perhaps two reasons why Mashpee men would take up arms for Anglo-American regiments. 64 Richard R. Johnson and Daniel Mandell have both noted that for Indians this service was not only an important source of income, but also, “in contrast to the alternatives of apprenticeship, whaling, and domestic servitude, it allowed young men to earn their manhood in traditional ways frowned upon by a surrounding white society.” 65 Whether for wages or to fill a the traditional male Indian role as warriors, Ben Mingo at thirty years of age and dozens other younger Mashpee men died in service on the New York frontier in 1757.

By analyzing the impact of Mashpee men serving in colonial forces two decades later, other historians have estimated that nearly half of Mashpee’s male population died aiding the Revolutionary cause. 66 If their assessments are correct, losing 50 percent of the male Indian population in the Revolution proved calamitous to a region that in

64 No first-hand accounts exist of why Mashpee Indians joined provincial forces.
66 For references to men dying in the Seven Years’ War see Hawley’s Birth and Death Records, 1761-1768, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA. I have found the names of twenty-four Mashpee Indians who served in the American Revolution in Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors, 17 Vols. However, it is difficult to determine all the men from Mashpee who enlisted because many signed up from other Cape Cod towns while some adopted English names when they enlisted. “An Act for the Better Regulation of the Indian, Mullattoe and Negroe Proprietors in Marshpee, in the County of Barnstable,” 1788 May Session, Acts and Resolves, Chapter II. In this act,
1765 numbered at most 338 residents: 101 male Indians; 129 female Indians; 38 white males; 39 white females; 18 black males; and 13 black females (Table I).

With stronger connections to a developing Anglo-Atlantic world, Mashpee men found themselves forced to shift their traditional subsistence activities. Men who did not divide their time between fighting in colonial wars, animal husbandry, crop raising, fishing, or selling wood to a growing Nantucket market, worked as whalers.67 The boom in the deep sea whaling industry after 1716 brought ships regularly to the Cape in search of Indian labor. Mashpee men, although unaccustomed to the rigors of hunting whales, were familiar with what a slaughtered beast produced as they often killed beached whales. Also, it seems reasonable to suggest that Mashpee men had little apprehension of traveling away from their villages for extended periods because their customary roles as hunters had required them to leave their homes for weeks maybe even months at a time.68

Whaling, however, was perilous, if not more so than the Indians' traditional roles as hunters. Because many Indian men never returned, Hawley often feared the hazards of whaling on Mashpee families, especially with younger generations of males dying. For example, several seventeen-year-old men such as Joseph Caleb drowned while whaling near Oyster Island in 1760. Joseph Cognehew, the brother of the Indians claimed that there were about eighty families many of them headed by widows because of the service of men in the American Revolution.67 His letter to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS, Gideon Hawley makes references to the shifting subsistence practices of Mashpee men and women. Other references can be found in “A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable,” 16 September 1802, MHSC, 2nd series, Vol. III, 5.
Reuben, lost his son at the age of fifteen “drowning off whaling.” Stephen Wepquish who died in 1766 on a voyage, never received a proper burial at home from his family because he was buried by his shipmates in the seas off Newfoundland. And a young man with the last name Pognit died in 1768 at the age of twenty while whaling. Working in maritime pursuits became one of the few options for many males young and old, in spite of the industry’s recognized dangers.

Not all Mashpee males, though, turned to whaling willingly. Debt peonage occurred frequently. “The case is,” Hawley wrote, “an Indian having gotten into debt obliges himself to go a whaling till he pays.” Because of the risk involved, “his life being uncertain,” many whites forced an Indian father “in his Covenant or Indenture to include his boy, who is bound to serve in case he should die or should go farther in debt to him.” While going into debt was relatively simple, paying off the debt proved near impossible. Whaling ships traveled the coast and exchanged goods and strong drink for a man’s signature, verbal consent, or handshake. Cape Cod Indians

69 See Hawley’s Birth and Death Records, 1763, 1760, 1766, 1768, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
71 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 9 December 1760, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
then paid off their arrears, sometimes taking years, hoping finally to profit from whaling. “These whalemens have money perhaps,” Hawley wrote, unconvinced.  

For all men, risks and sacrifices involved with whaling sufficiently outweighed any returns that could be gained from working at sea. Perhaps the experience of the Mashpee Indian John Skipper best exemplifies this disparity. After Skipper died indentured on a Nantucket ship in pursuit of a whale, the captain sent a letter to the overseers or guardians of the “Mashpee tribe,” because another Indian whaler, Joseph Gardner, was claiming to be Skipper’s father and thus “had rights to his wages.” The deceitful shipmate Gardner, who turned out not to be the father, almost cheated Skipper’s family out of his wages. But because indentured agreements were often sealed with handshakes or head nods, it is difficult to determine on what terms Indians like Skipper went to sea in the first place.  

A rare surviving indenture from 1794 between a Wampanoag from Sandwich named Benjamin Turner and a ship Captain Nathan Nye from Nantucket is revealing about the nature of these agreements, and the minimal material gains Indians acquired from their contracts. The agreement bound Turner to work for six years, eleven months, and seven days. It restricted Turner not to commit fornication or enter into matrimony, leave his master’s side to “haunt Alehouses, Taverns or Playhouses,” or play cards, dice or any other “unlawful game,” that would put him in debt. At the time his indenture finished, Turner was awarded “a new suit of apparel suitable for

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72 Gideon Hawley No III, 1790, CLA.  
73 Obed Macy to Overseers of Mashpee, 1816, Collection 335, Edouard A. Stackpole Research Center, Nantucket, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as ESRC), folder 1024.  
74 For a discussion of this bargaining process see Vickers “The First Whalemens of Nantucket,” 580.
him to have & wair." Skipper and Turner are two examples from generations of Cape Cod Indians who never made large material gains from working in the whaling industry. Of course as Daniel Vickers' work on New England whaling has shown, this was more common than not. Though Indian men procured meager returns, many looked impulsively to life at sea as a last resort or debt peonage forced many to join. Conversely, white ship owners profited greatly from a relatively inexpensive supply of Indian labor.75

Intense physical and emotional sacrifices of working in the Atlantic whaling industry took a toll on Mashpee men and their community. Like most seamen, Indian whalers who lived to tell about life at sea often sought relief in alcohol or turned to violence as an outlet. As one account tells us, some were so drunk that they wandered into foreign ports never to return. Whaling permanently scarred men because life at sea was "pernicious to the Indians." Many men anguished back home in Mashpee, "preposterously drunk." Hawley remarked on the violent behavior of drunken whalers. Because residents feared for their lives when whalers returned, Hawley remarked he had "scarcely seen from Monday morning to Saturday evening an Indian not far from his wigwam the time when the whalemen are at home." Yet some locals sought to profit from the licentious conduct of seamen by exploiting their sexual freedom and lust for alcohol. When they "were about town day to day, and from tavern to tavern," a Mashpee whaleman could stagger into the wigwam of

Hannah Babcock or “Joseph Amos’ squaw” where, for a pinch of their wages hosts offered up “bad women and a quantity of intoxicating liquor.”

For some Indians economic survival at home in Mashpee was as bleak a prospect as taking up the life at sea. Hawley’s multitudinous accounts of blankets and other items he regularly dispersed to suffering Indians, gives some idea of the severity of poverty for some in Mashpee. In fact several residents became so destitute that burying dead Indians became one of Hawley’s charitable activities. Sarah and Widow Nahaut “two negroes in poor health,” who might have been seeking fruit “and other necessaries,” wandered not far from their wigwams in 1788. In time, both were discovered dead, “the corpse of the other was [so] putrid,” that it was “unfit to be moved from the place where her body was found and therefore was buried in a hole near the spot she lay.” Sarah Keetoh was so poor that two years later she had to borrow from Hawley boards and nails for her child’s coffin.

Disheartened by disease, poverty, low wages, and debt, some Mashpee Indians--and not only whalers--turned to liquor as an escape during the colonial period. One person observed how several Indians paid little attention to tribal claims to Mashpee land because “they [men] will give it all away [their land] for a few gallons of rum, to poor whites.” In trading their land or earnings for liquor, men left their wives and children without support, thereby making them dependent on

76 Gideon Hawley No III, 1760 [?], Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
77 Gideon Hawley to Governor John Hancock, 8 July 1791, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA; Gideon Hawley Account Ledger, 1790, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
78 Gideon Hawley to Governor Hancock, 8 July 1791, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
Hawley's charity. Other English trade goods did not tear apart Mashpee families like alcohol did.

Historians have shown that as the rural poor created closer ties to British America, "ownership of consumer goods such as pictures, silverware, and coffee pots" generally increased among these groups in eighteenth century Massachusetts. Unlike many Anglo-Americans, Mashpee Indians did not leave behind inventories so analysis of their consumption must remain tentative. Work as whalers and traders, though, carried not only new incomes but also new tastes into the region. English styled fences and shingled homes among Indian and African residents in mid-eighteenth-century Mashpee dotted the landscape with more frequency. English homes, though, continued to share the Mashpee countryside with customary wigwams. On a visit in 1762, Ezra Stiles noticed Indians had constructed six shingled houses as compared to the sixty or so wigwams in the region. In 1766, Deacon Popenah and several other proprietors had saved enough money to construct their own English built homes, so by 1767, twenty-one shingled homes had replaced traditional Mashpee dwellings. In 1776, Hawley noted forty-two English houses as compared to only twenty-six wigwams. Six families headed by African males occupied shingled homes. Indians lived in the other thirty-six homes. All thirteen

80 Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 197.
81 Stiles, Extracts from the Itineraries, 167
82 Gideon Hawley's Birth and Death Records, 1766, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
83 Gideon Hawley to Thomas Cushing, 24 June 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
widows resided in wigwams. Six Africans lived in wigwams with their wives, leaving seven Indian families occupying the remaining wigwams. Yet floor plans of wigwams and framed houses found together at the eighteenth-century Simons archaeological site in Mashpee, suggest that the interiors of many Indian frame houses were single, unpartitioned spaces, more reminiscent of traditional dwellings than colonial homes. Though the Mashpees lived outwardly in English-style dwellings, the residents of some of these homes retained Indian ways within an English Christian world by designing the interiors of their shingled houses like wigwams.

By mid-century, the way in which some Mashpees gained high political or social status incorporated English standards of success. The rental of pews in Hawley’s new meetinghouse provides one example; Indians could thus purchase status readily with pounds sterling. Anglo-American custom required that people sit in the meetinghouse according to their status within the community. This arrangement meant that Indians and Africans were forced typically to the back, while whites paid a high price to sit in the front. In Mashpee, the situation proved different. Because Hawley could not “rent” the pews to any local whites, coupled

84 Ibid.
86 For an interpretation of the assignment of seats in Massachusetts churches see Robert J. Dinkin’s essay, “Seating the Meeting House in Early Massachusetts,” NEQ 43 (1970): 450-464. Gideon Hawley, 20 October 1762, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts,
with “it being a new thing for them [Indians],” Mashpee’s “more ambitious” Indians seized the opportunity to pay for the front pews. In one account, they would “give anything for the privilege of a pew because they elevate them to the highest of rank in the meeting house.” For £10 per person, Mashpee Indians by 1760 “had and have now the seats that are nearest the altar, and nothing could content them without the pews.” Wealth in the form of English money had become by mid-century more of a marker and contributor to social status among Mashpee Indians.

Burgeoning connections to Anglo-America also resulted in the placement of English schools in Mashpee. Schoolhouses were additions to the community that started with Richard Bourne. However, with the English minister Hawley stationed permanently in Mashpee, Indian families after 1760 seem to have sent their children to school more frequently. The Mashpees’ teacher was the Indian Reuben Cognehew, esteemed for his odyssey to England. He taught Mashpee children at various times throughout the years. In an expense account presented to Hawley for July 1763, Cognehew listed Wepquish and the Nautompon children among several notable Mashpee families in his class. Hawley fitted schools with English “bibles, primers, spelling books, and Watt’s Catechism.” Indian women also taught children. The minister owed eight Indian women in a 1776 expense account payment for their

CLA. Hawley also mentions the pews in another letter. Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 22 October 1762, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
87 Gideon Hawley, 20 October 1762, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
88 Reuben Cognehew to Gideon Hawley, April 1763, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, MHS. Hawley kept several accounts of books and other materials that he dispersed regularly for educational purposes. See particularly, Gideon Hawley to Honorable Lt. Governor, 26 October 1772, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
“schooling” of various children throughout the year.\textsuperscript{89} Mashpee women demanded a role in Christian schooling so much that in the summer of 1790 local white mistresses kept two women’s schools to educate Indian women. There was also a woman’s school in the summer of 1791, “constantly at the meetinghouse supposed to be as near the centre as any other place.”\textsuperscript{90}

As Wampanoag men died in large numbers in active military service and in the hunt for whales, and as Indian families faced poverty, Mashpee women not only received payment as educators, but also changed their socioeconomic roles within their families in other critical ways. Algonquian women traditionally took responsibility for agriculture, craft-production, and other household-related work. By the second half of the eighteenth century, women still made their traditional crafts but traded them with regularity to local whites from Sandwich, Falmouth, and Barnstable. Mashpee women often peddled their wares of brooms, baskets, and woven mats at local markets. A burgeoning Nantucket trade also provided opportunity for women to sell their goods, so they “frequently carried them over there.” Several Mashpee women, too, were noted for making butter and cheese and selling these goods in local towns.\textsuperscript{91} However, the majority of females, young and old, traveled to Boston “for

\textsuperscript{89} Gideon Hawley to Lieutenant Governor, 24 June 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
\textsuperscript{90} Gideon Hawley to John Hancock, 8 July 1791, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
months together, and serve[d] in gentlemen’s kitchens.” Although domestic servitude provided Mashpee women with a meager livelihood, this work proved displeasing to them because servitude was exploitative, “to the great injury of their [women’s] morals.” As Anne Marie Plane has recently shown, servitude permanently altered Indian families. Many southern New England Indians spent their childhoods in English homes, returning to places like Martha’s Vineyard only to be alienated from native kin.

With New England Indian women shouldering greater burdens as domestic servants, and with many husbands not living up to the English “patriarch model” as heads of households because men went whaling for years at a time, Algonquian women understood better than their men English ideas of how to run a household as they were taught these concepts in European homes or by missionaries. Indian women in New England often had a lot of room for independent management of their household affairs, sometimes following Christian practices to manage their families. As Plane has shown for Martha’s Vineyard, it was often women influenced by missionaries and raised in white homes as servants who introduced prayers, good order, and Christian practices into their families. One can find similar changes in Mashpee, for better or for worse. Hawley found drinking and promiscuity rampant among Indian whalers. However, he believed many “females were temperate.”

92 "A Description of Mashpee, In the County of Barnstable,” 16 September 1802, MHSC, 2nd series, Vol. III, 5; Gideon Hawley to Reverend James Freemen, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.

According to Hawley, the best way of instilling English values, namely ideas of Christian order, was to send female children to “white families at an early age.”

III. The Mashpee Community’s Changing Social Composition

Along with women’s new duties as Christian teachers, traders, and servants, Indian women after 1760 became central to the Mashpee Indians’ struggle for self-preservation. This was because of the manifestation of a female Indian majority within the community as Indian men died in active military duty or hunting whales. Hawley attributed the large number of widows and fatherless children in Mashpee to the Indian men who “have gone distant on ten month voyages,” whaling. High numbers of widows are found in Hawley’s several accounts of blanket distribution among the Mashpee Indians. Out of thirty-seven blankets from one ledger, fourteen widows received blankets, 47 percent of those receiving blankets. Such numbers are standard for the district and sometimes even higher. Hawley reported to the New England Company that, in 1767, he had thirty-six widows in the district. In 1788, Hawley recorded a total of 35 widows out of 125 females in the region. By looking at these numbers closely, one finds that gender ratios including unmarried Indian

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94 Gideon Hawley to Reverend James Freemen, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS
95 Gideon Hawley to Andrew Oliver, 14 October 1772, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
97 These demographic trends were common for many New England Indian communities. See O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 198-202. Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
women and very few available Indian men had opened the door for non-Indian men to migrate into the community and find Mashpee wives.

As indicated in Table One, Mashpee’s population increased after 1760, yet some of this growth is attributable to a steady rise in blacks and foreign-born sailors settling in the district. Hawley wrote in 1776 that the large number of widows (thirty-three to be exact) “was the means of introducing among my people the African blood.”98 In 1788, the minister recorded how the Mashpee population was largely mixed because of the region’s 400 inhabitants, there were “only twenty and five males and about one hundred and ten females, who are truly originals and not mixed.”99 Likewise, the Mashpee Indians complained in a 1788 petition because of the eighty families remaining in the district after the American Revolution, widows headed most of them, or women married to “foreign-Negroes and Molatoes.” Of course, while women could vote, the “foreign-Negroes and Molatoes” had no right to vote in district meetings.100 Around this time, according to Hawley, whalers from Bombay and Mexico took up residence in wigwams and married Mashpee women.101

Mashpee, to be sure, stood out for the unique opportunities it offered to the Atlantic world’s migrating people, despite some evident poverty. Mashpee was a

98 Gideon Hawley to Thomas Cushing, 24 June 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
99 What is most important about Hawley’s figure is that the number of Indian women more than quadrupled the number of Indian men. Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
100 “An Act for the Better Regulation of the Indian, Mullattoe and Negroe Proprietors in Marshpee, in the County of Barnstable,” 1788 May Session, Massachusetts Acts and Resolves, Chapter II.
101 Gideon Hawley to William Lane, 18 July 1787, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA; see Hawley Birth and Death Records, 1766, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
community of the "lower sort" that by the 1760s had reached some degree of internal independence because of the 1763 act allowing Mashpee proprietors to control their affairs and homelands. Thus despite the nagging threat of poachers and squatters, and the looming specter of poverty, overall, the region offered more to free and unsettled males of the "lower sort" than larger seaports like Boston. For instance, in New England's urban centers, as William Pierson has noted, white society proved hostile to mobile blacks. Men of African descent therefore found it increasingly difficult to make a living in these places. On the other hand, opportunities for subsistence, personal attachments, and pleasure existed in Mashpee, namely the chance to find Indian wives, to own lands, to find work at sea, to drink, and to hunt and fish as well as cut timber. The region showed signs of becoming a multi-ethnic maritime community of the "lower sort."

Mashpee most importantly provided African men the opportunities to make personal attachments. As Jean O'Brien has recently reminded us, "Indian women with African husbands seem to have been more common; which seems logical given the apparent decline in the male Indian population, coupled with the demography of African American slavery in New England, which skewed the sex ratios toward more

males then females." Hawley’s numbers suggest that Mashpee fitted this overall demographic pattern of New England’s Indian communities in the last half of the eighteenth century. The shifting racial and legal categories among New Englanders that placed Africans and Indians in the same “lower class” also determined that Indians and Africans were bound to meet. Africans and Indians in Massachusetts shared the same jobs, taverns, and neighborhoods. As Gideon Hawley remarked, “many of our women have found negroe husbands, as they were strolling the country and bro’t them home.” In search of work, pleasure, love, or all of these, there were fourteen black men in 1776 residing in Mashpee who had married Indian women and lived in their homes. Among these fourteen blacks was Cato Black, who married a Mashpee woman, had two children, and resided in an Algonquian wigwam. His


104 It is possible that African men met Mashpee women when the women traveled to Boston or other seaports to work as servants, although I do not have specific evidence of this taking place. Mandell, “Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity,” 467-470. African men were also taking jobs at sea. For the best examination of African-Americans as mariners see W. Jeffery Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, New York: Harvard University Press, 1998). He estimates that by the 1740s, twenty-five percent of the male slaves in coastal Massachusetts had experience at shipboard work (p. 7). Thus, one can speculate that freed slaves carried on with their shipboard skills in areas along the Massachusetts coast. Although there is no evidence for Mashpee, one can speculate that the free blacks who migrated there after 1760—many of whom came from coastal communities—were familiar with a life at sea. Billy G. Smith estimates that by the 1790s one out of every five crewmen on vessels shipped out of Philadelphia was African-American. By examining the protective certificate applications for the same period, he has determined the birthplace of many African-American mariners. Some, he argues, were from New England. See Billy G. Smith, *The “Lower Sort”: Philadelphia’s Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 156-157.

105 Gideon Hawley to James Freeman, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
neighbor, an African Tom Remon, also married an Indian woman, had four children, while also living in a wigwam.  

Thoughts of love and companionship aside, African men may have also assumed an Indian identity and lived in a wigwam in Mashpee to make a claim to native lands. Because many Indian men had died by 1780, Indian women, as a direct consequence of the proprietorship established in the 1720s, became most of the group’s landowners and voters in district meetings.  

In an Indian society where women could own land and vote, African-American men were compelled to marry Mashpee women and assume their wives’ lifestyle to stake their claim to Wampanoag homelands and status. Yet only two black men by 1788, Newport Mye and old Vulkin, could “make any claim upon this territory.” Mye, who married Sarah the daughter of Daniel Soncansin “has a right by his wife,” while old Vulkin, “who married Norah Wepquish’s sister hath a similar right.” Evidence like this suggests that relationships between Indian women and African men existed more in terms of consensual unions than recorded marriages.  

Men of African ancestry did not stop pouring into the Mashpee district, although restricted from owning their own land and voting in meetings. Between 1780 and 1800, many became squatters infamous for illegally tapping the district’s abundant fishing and timber resources. Black men relocated to Mashpee from as far away as “Rochester, Rhode Island, and even from Port Roseway or Shelburn in Nova  

\[106\] From Hawley’s account, only four out of the fourteen blacks lived in shingled homes. See Gideon Hawley to Thomas Cushing, 24 June 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.  

\[107\] Mandell, *Behind the Frontier*, 193.
Both the Mashpee Indians and Hawley considered illegal activities by unwelcome blacks disruptive. When the guardianship was reinstated in 1788 for fear that Indians were losing control of their lands, one of Hawley’s main goals was to restrain the settlement in the district of what he called unwanted blacks or “mongrels.” In a letter of 29 July 1794, Hawley feared the situation in Mashpee as a new “Saint Domingo” because “poor whites, negroes and mongrels of every gender” pushed onto the Mashpee Indians’ land. Hawley in 1802 complained to the Massachusetts government when several squatters of black and mixed ancestry “came with two teams and in a forceable manner” attacked the premises of Richard Contuit, who lived on the shore and was a proprietor. They “knocked down Richard’s fence,” then proceeded to “take up and push into their carts hay on the shore which said Richard and his partner had constructed and made.” The parties eventually made off with much of Richard’s useable hay leaving “several acres near low water much which they did not sever.” Acting on the incident, Hawley and his fellow guardians sought out the men responsible.

A few Indian-white relationships also added to Mashpee’s development into a multi-ethnic maritime enclave. Writing in 1790, Hawley concluded that Mashpee Indian blood “hath been comixed with English and Germans...as it now is, to a very great degree and is daily growing more and more so.” The Germans were four Hessian deserters of General Burgoyne’s army who “have married squaws, who have

108 Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
109 Gideon Hawley to James Freeman, 26 May 1796, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
110 Gideon Hawley, 29 July 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
seven or eight children born in wedlock.” However, these German men “who formed connections” with Mashpee women quickly realized whose customs ought to hold sway. Residing in wigwams, they lived like their wives “to conform to the Indian manners.” Two English settlers also married Wampanoag women and lived in wigwams. The spotty evidence about these Indian-white relationships makes it difficult to determine their exact nature. However, the lifestyle of the Englishman McGregor from Manchester, England, who lived in Mashpee in the 1780s, perhaps is revealing. McGregor seemed to have “gone native” with unusual enthusiasm. Many years after he arrived, he was still living in a wigwam while many of the Indians “lived in a wooden house.”

Even as intermarriages and intermixing with whites and Africans took place, refugee Algonquian families who settled in Mashpee increased the population and helped keep the region an Indian place. That Indians moved their residences was not a phenomenon created by colonization. Networked by kinship ties, New England Indians before the colonial period had frequently moved from one village to another, even one region to another, for reasons of subsistence. Indian migrations took on a new dimension in Mashpee after 1750 because the region’s population increased. “This Mashpee has been an Asylum for the poor Natives and their connections, which are become exceeding various & mixed,” wrote Hawley. Indians relocated to Mashpee from Mohegan and other places in Connecticut, from Narraganssett and

111 Gideon Hawley, September 1801, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
112 Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
113 Gideon Hawley to William Lane, 18 July 1787, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
other areas of Rhode Island, as well as towns in Massachusetts, including Natick or Gay Head on Martha’s Vineyard.\textsuperscript{115} Many of these migrations included entire Indian families moving into the group. Two Indian families migrated to Mashpee from Newport in 1763, bringing in all eight people.\textsuperscript{116}

Natives frequently visited from all over New England, helping to keep the region distinctively Algonquian in the second half of the eighteenth century. Mashpee served as a hub for New England Indian culture during certain times of the year when Wampanoags, Massachusetts, and Narragansetts from outside the community frequented the district. As noted earlier, every year in mid-September was “when the Indians of Martha’s Vineyard, and the neighbouring Indians on the Continent,” would come to Mashpee “to celebrate the holy communion together.”\textsuperscript{117} Daniel Mandell has noted that the event held in September, while reshaped to conform to the Puritan religion, retained aboriginal elements. Services, for example, were held in the Wampanoag dialect. Mid-September also held particular significance because that was the time of year when Indian families traditionally held festivals in honor of the harvest.\textsuperscript{118} Indian communities like Mashpee, by the American Revolution, had developed new kin loyalties as migrations, visitations, and jobs cut across regions and connected the once clearly demarcated tribal boundaries of southern New England. A “pan-Indianism” had developed in New England by the second-half of the eighteenth century.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid; Hutchins, \textit{Mashpee}, 79.
\textsuperscript{115} Gideon Hawley to William Lane, 18 July 1787, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
\textsuperscript{116} Hawley’s Birth and Death Records, 1763, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
\textsuperscript{118} Mandell, \textit{Behind the Frontier}, 180.
century. This was perhaps expressed most profoundly in the annual mid-
September gathering in Mashpee of Indian families from all over New England.

Multiethnic relationships in the Mashpee group had by the 1780s found
reflection in Gideon Hawley's changing racial language. The minister was caught up
in the racial ideology and prejudice of the early republic, often referring to all Indians
and Africans as "blacks." A high frequency of mixing in the Mashpee group surely
blurred the racial lines making it difficult for Hawley to distinguish Indians from
Africans. Though he often complained of the influx of African-American and Euro-
American squatters, Hawley paradoxically believed that "mixing" was "improving"
the Mashpee Indians. According to the minister, Mashpee women had become "more
prolific, and children healthier since their intermarriage with English, Germans and
Negroes." He also described how Jeffery, a Wampanoag minister from Martha's
Vineyard, married one of the "mixed blooded" females from Mashpee. Hawley
concluded that she was "a better woman than some of them," because "she has a
sprinkling of white blood in her veins."

IV. Enduring Legacies

Mashpee women in the late eighteenth century became the principal keepers
of their group's culture and the protectors of their community's rights as Indians.
Because of intermarriages with males of African and white descent, matrilineal

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119 Ibid., 202.
120 Quoted in Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity," 470.
121 No Date, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
descent became the "primary route for Indian ancestry." Hawley observed how "some ancient families" had lost their names, "particularly the Wepquish and Sincausin," because Mashpee had "none of the male kind of those names." Book-length studies of Mashpee have, to a large degree, ignored the important role women played in keeping Mashpee families Indian. These scholars have in the process also ignored that children were still raised as Indians. As discussed thus far, with Indian men dying in large numbers many children were born fatherless, several Indian mothers worked as teachers, and some African, English, German, or foreign-born fathers who replaced the declining male Indian population, for a variety of reasons, assumed their Indian wives' lifestyles. Each of these circumstances resulted in Indian women playing a key role in training children.

The importance of women in preserving Indian autonomy is perhaps revealed in the conflicts that arose between Hawley and the two Indian sisters, Sarah Mye and Hannah Babcock. Hawley found these two women to be "very artful females," as he complained that Hannah was a "great opposer of our regulation (the guardians)." Yet a closer look reveals the women's perspective. In 1791, Babcock and Mye put their adopted social customs to work as both complained to local authorities of their unfair treatment under the overseers. Babcock, owner of a local tippling house, even took her objections to the local court, claiming that she was not receiving proper use of Mashpee's meadows and charitable money. Hawley probably considered Mye more troublesome when she garnered community support for the "half-Indian" Baptist

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123 Gideon Hawley to James Freeman, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
preacher John Freeman “to have the meeting house,” and exposed Hawley’s cutting of cordwood for his own profit. ¹²⁴ These Indian women made Hawley uneasy not only because they complained to local courts, but also because Sarah’s outbursts were the final blows that tore most Indians away from Hawley.

Indeed, the mutiny by Sarah Mye and her followers, who comprised most of the Indian population, capped a series of disputes over the church already underway between Gideon Hawley and the Mashpee Indians. Hawley started to lose control of his congregation when the Indian preacher Solomon Briant died in 1774. ¹²⁵ Without a permanent Indian minister, Hawley feared a complete “backsliding” because in his words he thought they would quickly “return to heathenism.” ¹²⁶ In fact, the Mashpees still wanted a minister who preached in their language while Hawley did not. In his desperate bid for control, Hawley proclaimed his intention to fully “Anglicize the Indians,” by abandoning sermons in Wampanoag, preaching to them only in English, and establishing men on the altar of the highest character where Briant proved “lax” in his ways. ¹²⁷ The minister’s efforts to Anglicize the community only led to rebellion among the congregation. The rift between Hawley and the majority of his Mashpee congregation became complete in 1790 when Sarah Mye promoted the taking over of the Mashpee meeting house by the Indian John Freeman’s Baptist Congregation. A visiting preacher named Deacon Nye, too,

¹²⁴ Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, 2 September 1795, MHS; Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, January 1796, MHS; Gideon Hawley, Sept 1795, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA; Hutchins, Mashpee, 99.
¹²⁵ Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 194.
¹²⁶ Gideon Hawley, 5 May 1777, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, CLA.
contributed to the dismantling of Hawley’s congregation. According to Hawley, Nye went “from house to house to hinder the Indians from going to my meeting.” With the backing of Sarah Mye, Deacon Nye, and their followers, Freeman by the 1790s became the primary preacher in Mashpee. Freeman won out because his doctrine in their language emphasized “liberty and equality.”

Hawley’s estrangement from his Indian congregation and the other events surrounding Sarah Mye and Hannah Babcock show that Mashpee residents, most of whom were women, oftentimes used their adopted social customs such as going to court to defend their rights to live as Indians. Many of the Mashpees, motivated by Sarah Mye’s and Deacon Nye’s outspokenness, resisted Hawley efforts at cultural change by choosing their own minister, the Baptist Indian preacher Freeman. So though Mashpee Indians of the eighteenth century had continually strengthened their socioeconomic ties with an Anglo-Atlantic world sometimes with Hawley’s help, and despite the community’s increasingly multi-ethnic nature, the Indians there ended the century much as they had entered it: as a self-sufficient Indian community defending their homelands and interests.

Evidence from the late eighteenth century shows that many residents still procured a meager (by white standards) yet relatively independent subsistence, and

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127 Gideon Hawley to Stephen Sewall, 15 September 1779, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS; Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thacher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
128 Gideon Hawley to the Honorable Senate and the Honorable House of Representatives in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2 September 1795, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
129 Quotation from Mandell, Behind the Frontier, 194; Gideon Hawley to Thomas Cushing, 24 June 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
130 Campisi, The Mashpee Indians, 97.
also discusses how many traditional Mashpee family names pervaded the district. Mashpee men by the 1780s and 1790s continued exploiting a wide variety of traditional fishing resources. Hawley wrote “in regard to their fisheries will only observe that they are the greatest support of the Indians.” Natives still cultivated the ground although using American manufacturing techniques to produce their clothing. Fields of beans, maize, and squash still colored the Mashpee landscape. And Hawley commented on how several Indian women used spinning, combing, and weaving to “clothe themselves and their husbands.” Women still prepared traditional caches of food, stored in the ground, to support their families in the lean months. One year, Hawley remarked on how during the summer, “their stores are generally very small, as an Indian depends for his daily bread upon his daily success.” And many of the prominent family names that were on petitions in the 1700s were still heard around Mashpee in 1802: “particularly the Popmonets, Keetohs, and some others that I need not mention, who were always of Mashpee.”

Even as late as the nineteenth century, travelers to Mashpee observed the persistence of Indian social customs. An anonymous writer in 1802 was fascinated when discovering that Mashpee still housed Indians in wigwams with “a fire made in the middle of the floor and a hole in the top suffers the smoke to escape.” This same observer not only met Indians living in wigwams, “built of sedge,” with “unfinished floors,” but also remarked on a piece of folklore called a “marvellous story” that had

131 Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, 15 December 1788, S.P. Savage Manuscripts, MHS.
132 Gideon Hawley to Governor Hancock, 8 July 1791, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
survived the overwhelming company with Christianity. A closer look reveals that the story was probably one of many “creation” myths that were a common thread to Mashpee life. The tale told how before the existence of Coatuit Brook, a benevolent trout, intending to furnish the Indians with a stream of fresh water, forced his way from the sea into the land; but finding the effort too great for his strength, he expired. Another fish took up the work where the first fish had died, and completed the brook to Sanctuit Pond. Most English travelers at this time were ready to dismiss this story as “fiction.” According to the Indians, skeptics could view a mound twenty-seven feet in length “not far from Mr. Hawley’s house,” were the benevolent trout was buried.  

Mashpee Indians also maintained spiritually charged stone heaps and brush piles in certain places to mark the region as an Indian place. The Englishman Edward Kendall, on his way from Plymouth to Mashpee in 1807 to visit the aging Hawley, traveled part of the way, interestingly enough, with several Wampanoag women from Herring Pond. Curious about native social customs, Kendall asked the women about what local white inhabitants called “sacrifice rocks.” “When

133 Gideon Hawley to Reverend James Freemen, 2 November 1802, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
questioned,” he wrote, “they rarely go further than to say, that they do so because they have been taught that it is right to do it, or because their fathers did so before.”

The Mashpee Indians weathered the many challenges of the colonial period. English settlement, and all that it brought, created tensions in, and between, individual Indian communities on the Cape in the seventeenth century. Colonial population growth, continual bouts with disease, colonial wars, economic changes, and multiethnic relationships rapidly changed the Mashpee group in the eighteenth century. By 1800, though, the Mashpee group, the majority of whom were women, still moderated their connections to a developing Atlantic world by maintaining Indian social customs. In the early republic, Mashpee Indians continued to honor sacrifice rocks, remain connected to other Indians throughout New England, transmit Wampanoag folklore, choose their own ministers, live in wigwams, practice a traditional subsistence-based economy, make customary crafts, as well as pass on traditional family names. For these reasons, the group ended the eighteenth century immersed in a developing Atlantic world while in some ways still “in possession of [their] liberty and independence.”

136 Crosby, “The Algonkian Spiritual Landscape,” 38; Edward Augustus Kendall, Travels Through the Northern Parts of the United States in the Years 1807 and 1808, Vol. 2 (New York, 1809), 49.
137 Gideon Hawley to Reverend Dr. Thatcher, 1 January 1794, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
Epilogue

Bury me with my tomahawk, my fishline, bow and quiver. Forget not my birch canoe as it silently rides on the river.

Mabel L. Avant

Anthropologist William Simmons’ book, *Spirit of New England Tribes*, details the rich folklore that still circulates among the Mashpees of the twentieth century. What remains unique in many of these stories is the combination of Indian motifs with non-Wampanoag ones. Much like the legend discussed in chapter two that pitted Bourne against the shaman, non-native influences were important characteristics to Mashpee’s surviving folklore. The story of the two Screecham sisters, Hannah and Sarah, is one example (interestingly, the same names of the two sisters mentioned in the last chapter). Most of the motifs in the story, Simmons argues, are consistent with treasure, ghost, and witch-lore from southern New England Indian, Euro-American, and African legend. The will-o’-the wisp leading people astray, is also known in Mashpee lore as well as among local blacks and whites. Other legends, such as the story of Maushop related by a sachem of the Mashpee in 1934, blended Wampanoag lore with motifs from the Ojibwa and Delaware. Such legends expressed clearly the Mashpee interest to not only preserve their links with the past, but also to remain closely knit with other American Indian

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3 Ibid.
groups. There were, of course, also those that remained distinctively Wampanoag in content. When one observer visited the district in 1920, the Mashpee Spirit Fox or Witch Fox, a vestige of the aboriginal Cheepi, was still considered dangerous and a bad omen.

The creative process of blending old practices with new selected ones had its roots in the colonial period and obviously encompassed the broad spectrum of the way of life for all people in Mashpee. Indeed, it rendered the flood of novel experience intelligible in familiar terms, providing a formidable shield against psychological and emotional deterioration. The outsiders who came to the community--Euro-Americans, African Americans, and foreign sailors--no doubt brought their own influences to the group as evidenced by the borrowed motifs found in Mashpee folklore in the twentieth century. Yet the Mashpees’ readiness to jettison the less-than-necessary while selecting the essential from the flood of new practices was, indeed, a strategy for their survival. By the same token, the outsiders had to design their own strategies for survival. Finding common meaning with their new neighbors, accommodating to the Mashpee routines, was one of the ways by which these strangers could coexist with their new Indian neighbors. So the Africans, Europeans, and foreign-born sailors, who sought residence in the district in the eighteenth century, lived in wigwams and adopted their wives’ lifestyles. Such adaptations allowed diverse people in Mashpee to commingle.

The mix of people living in Mashpee would surely astound any visitor in the early nineteenth century. A report in 1835, for instance, stated that only two men and

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Ibid., 215.
six women at Mashpee claimed to be of “pure blood.” 6 If these estimates are correct, the rest of the population were mixed progeny of African Americans, Indians, Euro-Americans, and foreign-born sailors. The “Indianness” in the region was without a doubt blurred on the surface because the group was thoroughly mixed. Yet no matter what any resident’s skin color had come to be, all people in Mashpee in the nineteenth century had to confront the same set of issues and problems. All had to fish from the same ponds and use the same timber. All lived in a relatively isolated area and attended the same churches. All had to face poverty, the impact of the whaling industry, and the deleterious effects of alcohol on kin and community. Amid this common struggle for survival, the diverse people in Mashpee forged a collective identity.

The Mashpee group’s struggle for their self-preservation as a multi-ethnic community confronted a prodigious obstacle in 1788. That year, the Massachusetts government revoked their limited self-government established in the 1760s when Rueben Cognehew voiced the Mashpees’ complaints to the King of England. In 1788, the state legislature reinstated the guardianship system, which had caused discontent in the past. The plantation entrusted to the overseers, by 1832, supported a population of 315 “Indians” obviously variously mixed by this time, of whom 229

5 Ibid., 138, 215.
were proprietors, those entitled to economic and legal rights in the plantation through inheritance or adoption into the group.\textsuperscript{7}

With the support of a visiting preacher, William Apess, the Mashpee voiced their complaints on 21 May 1833, in a heroic effort to retake their land. One hundred and two Mashpee residents signed a memorial. As Donald Nielsen has argued, the memorial incorporated rhetorics of reform, equality, temperance, civil rights, the Constitution, and religion. Following a trip to Boston to address their grievances to the governor, Levi Lincoln, the Mashpee group approached the white overseer, Obed Goodspeed, to turn over the plantation books and papers so that harmony would prevail. They soon elected their own tribal council and sent out public notices that mandated their resolutions to be enforced. Nothing was to impede their actions, and when a white man, William Sampson, tried to take wood from the Mashpees' reservation land, he was stopped forcefully by nine Indians including Apess. Continued grievances and heartfelt complaints, followed by a brief stint in jail for Apess, propelled the Legislative Joint Committee on the Mashpee Indians to finally give them district status in March of 1834. The Mashpees could once again select their own officers. The group had, once again, achieved some degree of internal autonomy.

This bold effort, often called the "Mashpee Revolt," was what one historian has described as "a rare success story in a period of continual reversals for American Indians."\textsuperscript{8} Residents of Mashpee were able to use white America's reform rhetoric to

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 411-416.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
revitalize their own community. And while much of the Mashpee community by this point was mixed, the socially diverse group found strength and a voice by taking the posture of a repressed Indian group. The Mashpees, whether Indian, black, white, or mixed, had without a doubt carved out an identity for themselves that on the surface displayed many characteristics that were Wampanoag. Over years of mediation and negotiation, the mixed group called the Mashpees, although many voices from many backgrounds, by the nineteenth century spoke in unison as an Indian community.

Turning forward to 1976, the Mashpees filed suit in Boston’s federal district court, requesting that the court declare them to have always been the legal owners of most of the land in Mashpee. The catalyst for their claim was the building boom of the 1960s: in particular an elaborately designed condominium complex fronting the ocean called New Seabury. The trial was nothing short of déjà vu for the Mashpee Indians. Just as their ancestors had, the Mashpees were once again forced to stake claim to their homelands which they knew, and the expert witnesses (anthropologists and historians) in the trial knew, were rightfully theirs. Unfortunately, the case hinged on the technicalities of the definition of the word “tribe,” and whether the Mashpee Indians fitted the definition decided upon by the judge and jury. The decision on January 4, 1978, was that the Mashpee group was not a federally recognized tribe and thus the land was not theirs to claim as their own. It was another setback for a group of Indians whose history, in large part, has been one of facing setbacks created by outside interests.

Yet while the defeat at the hands of the district court was a severe blow to the Mashpee Indians, it in no way destroyed the sense of Indiannessness within the district.
Some say there are no "Indian" families or there is no "Indian" community in Mashpee--on the contrary, they exist with vitality. An ability to camouflage a true Indian core with white social customs protects the group today as it did hundreds of years before. Whether it is the guise of Puritanism, whaling, reform rhetoric, or modern-day housing, the Mashpee group underneath has always remained Indian. Just ask local residents of the Cape, they will tell you the same thing.

Ever since 1620, when Samoset welcomed the Pilgrims in his broken English, the history of the Cape Cod Indians has not been a tragically plummeting course to extinction, but has been the story of people rebuilding their lives, holding on to the past while borrowing from the present. In short, it is the saga of native people developing strategies to survive when facing sets of changing circumstances. Thus the end of King Philip's War in 1676 did not mark the end for Cape Cod Indians, but rather marked a new beginning. Events in the eighteenth century, while challenging the Mashpee group and often impinging on their existence, never shattered the group's Indian way of life completely. Conflicts over land, diseases, whaling, soldiering, drinking, adopting outsiders, all certainly reshaped the structure of the community. Yet by the nineteenth century, Mashpee was still an Indian place, thanks largely to a female Indian majority. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries also posed sets of challenges. Through it all, though, the Mashpee group survived, and so did their Indian way of life. Leigh Potter, who tends the Indian graveyard, already has his plot and tombstone awaiting his passing. The epitaph on the stone says, "I will dig no more." I asked Mr. Potter the meaning behind it. "Do you know the Plains Indian Chief who said "I will fight no more?" he asked me. "Well I am an
Indian who tends a graveyard,” Potter continued. “When I die, I will dig no more.”

Potter’s remarks not only testify to his perception of his Indian heritage, but also confirm how Mashpee Indians feel connected, and have felt connected, to the struggles endured by all Native American groups.
Table I

Mashpee Population, 1674-1788

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Sources: Richard Bourne’s count of praying Indians in 1674 is in Daniel Gookin, “Historical Collections of the Indians in New England,” *MHSC*, 1st series, Vol. I, 196-199. Count of Praying Indians in 1685 is taken from “Thomas Hinkley to William Stoughton and Joseph Dudley,” 2 April 1685, *MHSC* 4th series, Vol. V, 133. Count of Praying Indians from 1693 comes from Rowland Cotton to Increase Mather, in Matthew Mayhew, *A Brief Narrative of the Success Which the Gospel Hath Had Among the Indians of Martha’s Vineyard and the Places Adjacent in New England* (Boston: Bartholomew Green, 1694), 52. Cotton noted that his number fluctuated because of “several stragglers who have no set place.” One might argue that this accounts for the discrepancy between the 1685 and 1693 counts; Indians still lived in shifting settlements. The 1698 account is the first that provides the full number of the population. Rawson and Danforth counted “57 families” at 263 people; “Account of An Indian Visitation, 1698, Copied by Dr. Stiles, by Reverend Mr. Hawley, Missionary at Mashpee, From the Printed Account of 1698,” *MHSC*, 1st series, Vol. X, 133. The 1729 account is found in William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776: Missionary Society to the American Indians* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1961), 248. It only states that there were 70 Indian families under the care of Joseph Bourne. I multiplied that number by 4.0. From the 1698 estimate and Stiles census of 1762 of “not 4 to a family at a medium,” I concluded the logical average was 4.0 people per household. For Stiles 1762 account see “Mashpee Indians, A.D. 1762,” *MHSC* 1st series, Vol. X, 113. The 1765 count can be found in *Early Census Making in Massachusetts, 1643-1765: With a Reproduction of the Lost Census of 1765 and Documents Relating Thereto*, ed. J.H. Benton, Jr. (Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed, 1905). Compare Mashpee with the surrounding towns of Sandwich, Falmouth, and Barnstable in 1765 and one gets the idea of the small size of the Mashpee population. Sandwich numbered 1,449 residents: seventy-three Indians and thirty-two blacks; Barnstable numbered 2,146 residents: thirteen Indians, fifty-six blacks; Falmouth numbered 1,125 people: 62 Indians, 31 blacks. Yet by comparing the Indian populations of Mashpee and Natick, one sees how for an Indian settlement Mashpee was rather large. In 1764, Natick was the home to only 141 Indians. As Daniel Mandell shows this number continued to decline. For Natick population numbers see Mandell, “‘To Live More Like My Christian English Neighbors’: Natick Indians in the Eighteenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 28 (1991): 552. For the 1767 count see “Report of a Committee on the State of the Indians in Mashpee and Parts Adjacent, 1767,” *MHSC*, 2nd series, Vol. III, 14. For the 1776 count see Gideon Hawley’s census from 1776 in Gideon Hawley to Thomas Cushing, 24 June, 1776, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS, one box, folder five. For the 1788 numbers see Gideon Hawley to Shearjashub Bourne, Gideon Hawley Manuscripts, MHS.
Figure II
Map of Mashpee. Drawn in 1762.

Figure III
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Vita

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END OF TITLE