

The History of the Pokanoket Tribal Diaspora

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Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket, and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice and the oppression of the White Man, as snow before a summer sun.

Tecumseh of the Shawnees, 1811



King Philip's War has been called the United States' most devastating conflict. One in 10 soldiers on both sides was killed, 1,200 colonists' homes were burned, and vast stores of foodstuffs destroyed. The effects of the carnage and property damage were felt for years by colonists. The war's ramifications for native populations of southern New England included not only loss of life and, for some, enslavement but the continued erosion of sovereignty, land rights, and communities as well.

During the centuries following the war, Indigenous tribes were broken apart and subject to land theft, disease, survival as refugees, and racism, resulting in the depopulation of Indigenous people in Bristol and Warren. Those who had land were dispossessed of it by having to pay off debts. Others died of infectious disease following the conflict. Many survivors merged with other tribes to the north and west in Canada and Maine where some fought with the English, sometimes making up 1/7 of the colonial armies in the conflicts known as the French and Indian Wars.¹

As recently as 1991, the Historical Atlas of Massachusetts noted that after King Philip's War disrupted and dislocated the Indians of the peoples of southern New England "they were no longer important in matters of public policy for the English" and faded into obscurity by the end of the eighteenth century."²

Challenges of Survival

¹ Richard R Johnson, "The Search for a Usable Indian: AN Aspect of the Defense of Colonial New England," *Journal of American History*, 64 (1977-78), 623-51.

² Richard W. Wilkie and Jack Tager, eds., (1991) *Historical Atlas of Massachusetts*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, p. 15.

In the times following the war, tribal identity became more fluid, and tribal members would associate with whatever tribe gave them the most protection. By the 1720s, some New England Indians and their



offspring were mixed race and this trend only increased during succeeding decades. Because most of the Indigenous men were either killed or driven off, the women would often marry white men or African slaves, but kept their heritage alive. For example, during the Revolutionary War, Crispus Attucks wasn't considered to be Indigenous, even though he was, because he also had African ancestry. Many Indigenous people were then classified as

“Negro, black, colored, mulatto or The Poor.” The well-known 19th century advocate William Apess in his writings described the hardships of the Indigenous people of southern New England going on to say he was descended from King Philip, and was from Connecticut where the extended Pokanoket family of King Philip was forced to settle after the King Philip's War.

“After the Indian war and the decimation of the Indian tribes, the exportation of the irreconcilables and after the resettlement of the friendly Indians, the unoccupied lands were available for general colonial use, and they were offered for sale by the colony to meet a portion of the immediate public needs. Some were ordered sold, the proceeds to be used for the support of the widows and orphans of the war, and others were offered for sale to reduce the colony debt.”³

³ Arthur Sherman Phillips (1944) *The Phillips History of Fall River, Fascicle I, The Aborigines Explorations and Early Settlements, The Freeman's and Pocasset Purchases Boundary Disputes*. Privately printed, Fall River, Mass., Dover Press, p. 63.



Those Indigenous people who allied with the English or stayed neutral were treated differently than those “disloyal Indians” who fought with Philip and were sold into slavery as late as 1776. “The Council of Rhode Island on July 4, 1676, accordingly empowered a committee to sell all the Indian men and women who were able for service , and this power was confirmed by the General Assembly on the following August 6th.”⁴ Many were shipped to Spain, Jamaica, the Wine islands and the Azores. The “friendly Indians' ' were moved to communities, like Watuppa in Fall River

or Mashpee on the Cape, and given some autonomy. Research from the Bermuda Archives has only recently connected people in Bermuda with indigenous ancestry from southern New England. This includes Massasoit Po Metacomet (King Philip’s) wife and son who were sent there as slaves after King Philip's War.

In June, 1676, at the request of Plymouth Colony and upon the grounds that the Indians in Providence were hostages to the English forces, Rhode Island voted to return certain Indians to Plymouth. “The Indians were apparently turned over to the individual colonists without other consideration, except that each person to whom any one was allotted was required to pay 16 shillings, 4 1/2 pence toward the reduction of the public debt.”⁵ Specific laws were passed to keep Pokanoket people out of Rhode Island. The Town of Bristol, part of Plymouth Colony (now Bristol, RI) passed a law in 1681 stating that “no Indian shall hunt within the township”.⁶ Family members, including the extended family of the Massasoit Ousamequin, were placed on the Shetucket Reservation near Norwich Connecticut under overseer Reverend Fitch. Many surviving figures of importance among the Pokanoket who the English captured and decided to let live were placed. There, far enough away from their ancestral homeland it was believed that the descendants of Massasoit Ousamequin and their families would not cause any more trouble once they were removed from their base of power. There they were known as the “Shetucket Indians”, not the Pokanoket. They were ruled by the Mohegan Chief, Uncas, who was their historic enemy and were abused, so many of them left and moved to Griswold, CT where they lived for more than a hundred years.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Bristol Town Meeting Records, November 23, 1686



Simeon Simons (1759-1835), was a direct descendant of Metacom ("King Philip"). He was born in Griswold, CT and served as George Washington's personal bodyguard early in the Revolutionary War without ever revealing that he was Pokanoket. His marriage to a woman named Sarah is recorded in Norwich town records in 1793. He is described as a "full blooded Wampanoag Indian." His brother, Abraham, was listed in the Warwick, RI 1777 census, but they do not know what happened to that branch of the family. Simons reportedly drowned late in life, but nothing

is known of the circumstances. His granddaughter, Susan Simons, married George F. Weeden and had eight children, including Hannah, Otis and Fredrick. Fredrick Weeden was born in 1868 and was the older brother of Ebbin Otis Weeden who married Mary Jane Oliver. Fredrick was Treasurer of the National Algonquin Indian Council in R.I. Their sister, Hannah, married Walter Glasko. Their daughter, Mary Glasko (née Weeden), soon began to emerge as a public representative of the Indigenous people of Rhode Island. In the late 1800s, family members began moving to Rhode Island, some in West Elmwood and others in East Providence, many raising large families. At the time, the family was on the Narragansett tribal rolls in Rhode Island, when being Indigenous was difficult and families wanted to stay together by changing their tribal identity.



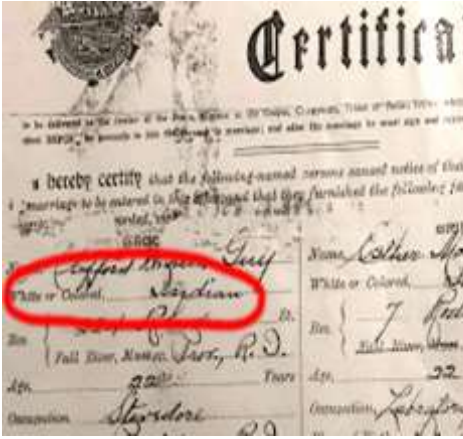
Recent Family History

Esther Martha Weeden was the daughter of Eddin Otis Weeden. She married Clifford Guy, Sr. in Fall River, MA in 1938. Clifford descended from Anawan, the Head Pniese (Pokanoket warrior) who had been given the Wampum Belt and the mantle of leadership after Massasoit Metacom was killed. Anawan's band of followers had been captured by Benjamin Church but were allowed to remain in the area now known as Seekonk, Massachusetts, where descendants remain to this day. Their children are Clifford, Jr. in 1935, Carol in 1938, William in 1943, and Arlene in 1944. During that time, Mary Glasko, the prominent 20th Century historian known as Princess Red Wing, who was both Narragansett and Pokanoket, put on plays in which Esther and Clifford. Sr. often appeared. Princess Red Wing was the co-founder and editor of *The Narragansett Dawn* tribal newspaper which was published from 1935 to



1936. She became Squaw Sachem of the New England Council of Chiefs in 1945, a position which allowed her to preside over sacred ceremonies and festivals. She preserved their history by founding the Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum in Rhode Island. From 1947 to 1970, she gave an address to the United Nations in 1946 and served as a member of the Speaker's Research Committee of the Under Secretariat of the UN. William Guy, Winds of Thunder, today is the Sagamore of the Tribe.

Racist attitudes of the the Pokanoket people. copy of his parents' William Guy noted that certificate in 1932 When he challenged it by document, officials "Indian." In 1949, his not correct people when



larger society continued to affect For instance, when examining a marriage certificate, Sagamore their race on the marriage showed their race as "blank". showing his copy of the original changed their race back to father and some of his uncles did they were mistaken to be Sicilian

or caucasian in public. This was a survival tactic that many indigenous people with lighter complexions used to their advantage as they would be denied better jobs if they openly identified as Indian in the times before the United States passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On the positive side, Governor Green declared Indian Day in 1936, and Governor Garrahy declared Princess Red Wing Day in 1978. Proclamations by Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and the president of the Mayflower Society also attested to the growing public recognition of Indigenous people.



Among the Pokanoket people, tribal identity was nearly lost except within families. Growing up in fear, some members remember their cousins not wanting to call themselves Pokanoket, saying “I just want to exist”. The current generation does not prefer to be called Latino/a, black, or mixed but many have resigned to the label that people in society place on them based on their physical appearance. Only in the past few generations have Pokanoket children begun to proudly identify themselves and their heritage. As more people begin to hear their story, others will also understand their struggle to survive. As Tribal Historian Donald Brown, Jr. states, “We never disappeared; history has written over us. We never got the attention we deserved until recently.”