THE FOUNDING of SALEM

CITY OF PEACE

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Excerpt from Chapter 1 ***The New England that was: The land that became New England and the people who lived there***. (Chapter that focuses on the Native Americans at Naumkeag)

By 1600, the tribes of Southern New England had developed into a fairly settled society, with vague but identifiable borders, and fairly routine patterns of subsistence based upon some fairly sophisticated agriculture, seafood, and game hunting. On what is now Boston and the North Shore of Massachusetts lived the Massachusett (hence the name of the state). To the south of them around Plymouth, Cape Cod, and the Islands lived the Wampanoag and their kinsmen the Nauset. Rhode Island was nearly exclusively the land of the Narragansett, while southern Connecticut was the home of the Pequot, Mohegan, and Mattabasic peoples. Northern Connecticut and Central Massachusetts was the dominion of the Nipmuk and in the far western regions of Massachusetts around the Connecticut River was the Pocumtuk. While there were indeed regional dialects as well as alliances and rivalries between nations, each of these peoples were fairly similar to one another in their language, lifestyles, and political customs. They all grew their corn, squash, beans and pumpkins together in such a complex and perfected manner that each vegetable complemented the growth of the other after fertilizing the soil with fish and hoeing it into neat little rows. They all seasonally migrated to the costs in the summer to take advantage of the abundant seafood and once the harvest was completed migrated back into the interior to exploit big game and avoid the deadly coastal storms in the winter. They all lived in neat villages of small bark huts called wigwams and often surrounded these huts with some sort of palisade for defense, shelter, and to keep out wild animals. One such "fort" was located near the intersection of modern-day Humphry and Maple streets in Marblehead, Massachusetts and was circular and about fifty feet in diameter as was another "fort" on Castle Hill in Salem.[i]

Together these are the peoples that turned the vast forests of southern New England into shaded pasture lands with dense canopies of diverse hardwood trees and little underbrush by periodically burning the land so that wild game would flourish. They fished with weirs and damned ponds to increase fish populations. Much like Europeans, the Native Americans of Southern New England had, through these practices, been engaged in altering their landscape to maximize that environment's potential to support their lifestyle for thousands of years and that environment had adapted to them as well. The result was obviously vastly different from the result of the European's interactions with their own environment, but it was in no way less intentional or methodical. It was simply different and, given the size of the populations reported by Samuel de Champlain and John Smith, quite successful for them.

However, their neighbors and distant kin to the North of New England lived a much different lifestyle than they did. Going north up the coast from the land of

the Massachusett, we would first encounter the Pennacooks around Portsmouth New Hampshire, followed by the Sacos, Sheepscots, Androscoggins, Kennebecs, Penobscotts, and finally the Passamaquadies near the modern border with Canada. These people, like their cousins to the south, were predominantly Algonquin speaking, but lived vastly different lifestyles. The region then, like today, was much more sparsely populated, with a harsher winter, poorer soil quality, and far less suitable for agriculture. Thus the natives of Northern New England, while engaging in some small scale horticulture, were far more dependent on hunting and gathering than their cousins were to the south. Yet to the Native Peoples of Southern Massachusetts the greatest military threat to their survival in the first decades of the 17th century wasn't the Europeans or any of these tribes, it was the Mi'kmaq, known to the Native Peoples of Southern New England as the Tarratines (Algonquin for "Eastern Men[ii]").

The Mi'kmaq are the native inhabitants of Nova Scotia and parts of Maine, and many of them still live in those areas today. Given their geographic location, they were in a prime position to exploit the trade between Native Peoples and Europeans during the 15th Century. For example, there are several documented incidences of Native People who were most likely the Tarratines using small 17th European sailboats known as shallops. Throughout the 16th and early 17th century, the Mi'kmaq enjoyed a very lucrative trade with the French for furs in exchange for manufactured goods and firearms…and in the second decade of the 17th century they began to attack the Massachusett to the south of them with devastating efficiency.

Few of the details of what sparked the conflict between the Tarratines and the Massachusett survive, in fact we cannot even say for certain what years the conflict took place, other than that it was in the latter half of the second decade of the 17th century. Writing nearly seventy years after the event, Puritan historian William Hubbard wrote;

"Those that were seated more eastward…..were called Tarratines, betwixt whom and those that lived about Pascatoqua, Merrimack and Agawam…..had arisen some deadly feud, upon account of some treachery used by those western Indians against others; so as every year they were afraid of being surprised by them, which made them upon every occasion to hide themselves among the English after they were settled in any of those places.[iii]"

The Tarratine unleashed a campaign of complete destruction upon the tribes of Southern New England. Using their newly acquired shallops, they soon proved capable of raiding and burning villages as far south as the Wampanoag people. One of those Tarratine raids that struck fear into the heart of the Massachusett

occurred at Naumkeag in present day Salem, Massachusetts. While the details, including the exact year, of this raid are vague, the repercussions of the raid for the Massachusett is well documented. At the time the Sachem, or chief, of the Massachusett was a man named Nanapashemet whose main place of residence was at Castle Hill in Salem. Fearing the Tarratine attack on Naumkeag, Nanapashemet moved to the vicinity of present-day Medford Massachusetts to escape and was later found by the Tarratines there and killed. Before moving to Medford, Nanapashemet had sent his wife and children into hiding someplace further in the interior of Massachusetts[iv].

It is unfortunate that Nanapashemet's wife's real name has been lost to history. We know her today only as "the Squaw Sachem," which is simply a vulgar Algonquin word for vagina. Thus, Squaw Sachem literally translates as "Vagina Chief," and any leader who led her people through such trying years as the Massachusett were about to experience deserves to be remembered by more than her title and genitalia…yet sadly such is not the case. There are some other hints though as to what her name may have been. There is a record of her signature on a document in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum, but that signature is a drawing of a bow and arrow with the words "The Squaw Sachem's Mark" scrawled next to it by some Englishman. There is also a Native American woman named Sarah Wuttaquatinnusk on the deed of for the city of Salem, but that document was signed in 1686, roughly 70 years after the death of Nanapashemet. While it is not impossible that Sarah Wuttaquatinnusk is the same person as the woman who signed her name as a bow and an arrow, it is highly unlikely given the extremely short life expectancy of the time and the fact that whatever her age was when she became the leader of her people, she clearly was already an adult with children of her own. At any rate, the woman with the bow and arrow signature returned to Naumkeag, assumed the role of Sachem soon after, and began trying to rebuild the Massachusett[15]. Shortly thereafter, the English came to settle on her shores. After being so thoroughly decimated by disease and engaged in brutal warfare against an enemy with superior technology, it is no wonder that she viewed these new English settlers as valuable potential allies. Years later, some of Salem's very first European inhabitants recalled that:

"When we settled, the Indians never molested us…..but shewed themselves very glad of our company and came and planted by us and often times came to us for shelter, saying they were afraid of their enemy Indians up in the country, and we did shelter them when they fled to us, and we had their free leave to build and plant where we have taken up lands.[v]"

Yet relationships between the Massachusett and the English were not always so benign. When the Plymouth Colony was first established, the Pilgrims entered into a series of alliances with the Wampanoag, Nauset, and Narragansett peoples that often aggravated the Massachusett. At the same time, the Plymouth Colony was facing rival English attempts at settlement and commercial exploitation of resources in other parts of the region. Unfortunately for the Massachusett, this occasionally led to some violent encounters with the Plymouth Colonists. Yet despite these unfortunate events, the Massachusett still welcomed the settlers at Cape Ann and later at Naumkeag (Salem). After all the settlers at Cape Ann, while still English, were a different people than those at Plymouth….as different from the Plymouth Colonists as the Massachusett were from other Algonquin speaking peoples.

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[i] Sidney Perley, *History of Salem*, 1924, Sidney Perley, pg. 27-28

[ii] William Hubbard, *A General History of New England*, Massachusetts Historical Society 1848, pg. 31

[iii] William Hubbard, *A General History of New England*, Massachusetts Historical Society 1848, pg. 30

[iv] www.menotomyjournal.com/massachusett/timeline.html

[v] John Wingate Thornton, *The Landing at Cape Ann; or the Charter of the first permanent colony on the territory of the Massachusetts Company*, British Library, 1854 pg. 52