

Colonial Conflict Between the Native Americans and the Colonists

There is a continuous interest in the Indians who inhabited these parts prior to the coming of the Europeans; I must get five or six queries a year. The bare facts are that there were no permanent villages in or near Colebrook; the nearest Native American communities were along the Housatonic River. With this in mind, a logical question would be why there was such a dread of Indians by the early settlers. To find the answer, we must begin with the earliest conflicts between the two groups in what is now eastern Massachusetts.

King Philip's War began in 1675. Philip resided in Mount Hope, R.I., and was the grandson and successor of Massasoit, with whom the Plymouth colonists had made a treaty some fifty years before. His object seems to have been to unite all the Indian tribes to make a combined effort to exterminate the colonists and thus preserve their hunting grounds and independence. The spark that touched off this war was the execution of three Indians by the English, whom Philip had incited to murder a Christian Indian who had informed the whites of the plot Philip was forming against them. Philip, to avenge their deaths, commenced hostilities, and by his influence drew into the war most of the tribes in New England. The Indians, by this time, had acquired the use of firearms, and the war soon became a general conflagration.

Their first attack was made June 24, 1675 upon the people of Swanzy, as they were returning from public worship; eight or nine people were killed. Brookfield, in Worcester County was next attacked, and every house burnt but one. During the month of September, Hadley, Deerfield and Northfield, all on the Connecticut River were attacked; many people were killed and many buildings burnt to the ground. During the winter the colonists raised an army of about 1,000 men, some of whom were on horseback. The men came from Massachusetts and Connecticut, with Connecticut supplying five companies. This was the largest assemblage of troops on the short history of the Europeans up to that time. The attack on the enemy's fort in December was completely successful. It was a counterpart of the memorable expedition against the Pequots 40 years before by the men of Connecticut. The Narragansett nation never recovered from the results of this battle in which 700 of their fighting men were killed outright and another 300 died later as a result of wounds received that day. The colonists lost 85 killed and 150 wounded.

From this blow, called the "swamp fight", the Indians never recovered, although they were not yet effectually subdued. On the 12th of August 1676, the finishing blow was given to the Indian power by the death of Philip, who was killed by an Indian friendly to the whites. In this war the English lost 600 men, the flower of their strength; twelve or thirteen towns were destroyed, and 600 dwelling houses burnt down.

Early in 1689, William, Prince of Orange (in the Netherlands) invaded England and dethroned the king. The people of New England, reeling under the heavy-handedness of the king's emissary, Edmund Andros, arrested Andros and returned him to England in chains to stand trial for overstepping his authority.

It was at this time period (1690) that the French in Canada instigated the northern and eastern Indians to begin hostilities against the English settlements. The first to feel the effects of this new threat were villages in New Hampshire, Maine and upstate New York. This war harassed English settlements for seven years, until peace took place between France and England; this became known as the first French and Indian War. But

in a few years war again broke out between France and England, which immediately involved the American colonies. In February 1704 Deerfield, on the Connecticut River was surprised during the nighttime and about 40 persons were killed and more than 100 made prisoners. In 1710, New England, assisted by armed forces of the mother country, succeeded in capturing the French fortress at Port Royal, Nova Scotia and changed the name to Annapolis, in honor of Queen Anne. This success led the English to have visions of conquering all of French Canada, and a fleet of warships was sent to capture Quebec City, while at the same time an army of New England troops was assembled at Albany to prepare for a land invasion from the south. The fleet met with severe weather conditions while attempting to ascend the St. Lawrence River and had to return to England, whereupon the troops in Albany returned to their homes. In 1713, peace was made between France and Great Britain at Utrecht.

In 1744, war again broke out between France and England, and the colonies were involved with its calamities. Their commerce and fisheries suffered greatly from privateers fitted out at Louisburg, a strong fortress on the island of Cape Breton. This place was considered one of the strongest in America; the fortifications had taken twenty-five years to build and had cost France five and a half millions of dollars. (1837 dollars) The legislature of Massachusetts, convinced of the importance of reducing this place, planned a daring but ultimately successful attack. Accordingly, about 4,000 men from Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut sailed from Boston for the conquest of Louisburg. These troops, with four warships, arrived about May first, 1745 and commenced a six-week siege that ended with the surrender of the fortress. A treaty signed in 1748 ended the war, by which all prisoners were exchanged and all conquests made during the war were returned to their former owner.

Scarcely had the colonies begun to reap the benefits of peace, before they were again thrown into anxiety and distress by yet another war with France. This war actually began in 1754, but was not formally declared until May 1756. Early in the spring of 1755, preparations were made by the colonists for vigorous exertions against the enemy. Four expeditions were planned: one against the French in Nova Scotia; a second against the French on the Ohio; a third against Crown Point; and a fourth against Niagara. The expedition against Nova Scotia, consisting of 3,000 men, was mostly from Massachusetts. After being joined by 3,000 British regulars in the Bay of Fundy, there commenced a campaign that ended with the complete capitulation of the French. In order to put an end to these incessant episodes of warfare with the French, all French inhabitants were evacuated from Nova Scotia and dispersed among the English colonies.

The war continued with varied success, until the conquest of Quebec in September 1760. This event caused great and universal joy in the colonies, and public thanksgivings were generally appointed. A definitive treaty was signed at Paris in 1763, by which all Nova Scotia, Canada, the island of Cape Breton and all other islands in the Gulf and River St. Lawrence were ceded to the British crown.

The northwestern section of Connecticut was spared the horrors of contact with hostile Indians primarily because of two factors: the buffer zone to the north provided by a string of fortifications erected by Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York, and the goodwill of the friendly Stockbridge Indians. While residents of the Connecticut River Valley and other areas to our north and west had a great deal to fear, and almost on a daily basis, what was to become Litchfield County, remained relatively tranquil. What

special set of circumstances allowed for this situation? We will first look at the protecting towns to our north, then undertake to explain our local Native American connection.

The Massachusetts communities that formed a buffer between the French and Indians to the north were Becket, Lanesborough, Lenox, Charlemont, Deerfield, Gill, Northfield, Rowe, Williamstown and Bernardston.

Had it not been for them, and the sacrifices that were made by their inhabitants, our history would be far bloodier and shorter than it is. The original highways through our area, built at the request of the colonial legislature, were laid out to facilitate troop movements from the populated Connecticut River Valley to the Hudson River Valley. Note that settlers having military titles populated many of Colebrook's and surrounding towns. Many of these were earned during the so-called northern campaigns. Locally, we do not have any military graves decorated with emblems from these early wars, but many are to be seen in eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. These use a fleur-de-lis design to hold the flag, as opposed to the Revolutionary War veterans, who have a five-pointed star enclosed within a ring of laurel leaves.

With respect to our relationship with the local Indians, part of the answer lay with the actions of the Massachusetts legislature.

The town of Stockbridge was originally laid out by the general government of the colony in 1735, for the accommodation of the Indians. In the year previous a mission was commenced among the Housatonic Indians by Mr. John Sergeant, then a candidate for the ministry, assisted by Mr. Timothy Woodbridge as schoolmaster, under the patronage of the board of commissioners for Indian affairs in Boston, of which his excellency Jonathan Belcher, then British governor of Massachusetts, was an active and influential member. At that time about half of these Indians lived in the great meadow on the Housatonic in this town, called by them *Wnahktukook*. Here Konkapot the chieftain resided, whom Gov. Belcher had just before honored with a captain's commission. His cabin stood on a knoll a few rods north of the Konkapot Brook, on the east side of the county road. The other Indians lived on their reservation in Sheffield, called by them *Skatehook*. For the better improvement of their moral condition it was soon found desirable to have these united and settled in one place, with such other Indians in the vicinity as might be disposed to join with them. Being made acquainted with their situation, the legislature, on the 17th of march, 1735, granted them a township 6 miles square, to be laid out on the Housatonic River, immediately north of Monument Mountain, provided the proprietors and settlers of the Upper Housatonic could be induced to give up their right to that portion of their lands on which the new township would partly fall. It was wished to include the fine alluvial ground at Wnahktukook, where the chieftain resided, and which to some extent, was under cultivation. The committee met with but little difficulty in performing the duties assigned them, and in April 1736, they laid out the town in a square, which included the present townships of Stockbridge and West Stockbridge,

Early in May of that year the Indians began to move into their plantation, and by the last of June there were more than 90 persons in the settlement. In January 1737, the subject being laid before the legislature by the governor, they ordered that a meetinghouse 40 feet by 30, together with a schoolhouse should be built for the Indians at the charge of the province. On the 7th of May in this year the grant of the town was

confirmed to the Indians, their heirs and assigns; and in 1739, the town was incorporated by the name of Stockbridge, after the town of that name in England.

Some of the Indians' houses were on the plain, some on the meadows near the river and a few about Barnum's Brook. These Indians at first were called by the English "River Indians", afterwards more generally Housatonic Indians, until the incorporation of the town; since which they have more generally been called Stockbridge Indians. They have also sometimes, as well as the tribe at Norwich, Conn., been called Mohegans, which is a corruption of their proper name Mahhekaneew or Muhhekaneok, signifying "the people of the great waters, continually in motion."

One very important effect that this mission produced was that the friendship of these Indians was effectually secured to the English. They performed numerous kind offices for the early settlers of the county; in time of war were spies for the English, and often fought and sometimes shed their blood for them in the army.

Though Fort Massachusetts was repeatedly attacked in the time of the first French war, and terror was spread through all this region, yet, in consequence of the well known friendship of the Muhhekaneews, no hostile Indians ventured down into the vicinity of this place, and the southern section of the county was saved from such calamities as befell some of the settlements on the Connecticut River, and others to the west, in the State of New York. Though in the second French war a few families in different parts of the county were disturbed, yet the mischief was small compared with what probably would have been done had it not been for the friendship of the Stockbridge tribe.

In this war many of the Indians were received as soldiers in the service of Massachusetts, and showed their fidelity by fighting for the whites. In the Revolutionary War a part of the company of minutemen under the command of Captain Goodrich of this town, was composed of these Indians. A company went to White Plains under Capt. Daniel Nimham, where some were slain and others died of sickness. Numbers served at other places. At the close of the war Gen. Washington directed the contractors for supplying a division of the army at West Point with provisions, to give the Indians a feast in consideration of their good conduct in the service. An ox weighing 1,100 lbs. was roasted whole; the entire tribe partook of it; the men first, and then the women, according to custom. The feast was held near the residence of chieftain King Solomon, and after this was over the Indians buried the hatchet in token that the war was past, and performed some other ceremonies in their own style for the gratification of the company.

The school begun for these Indians in 1734 remained in service until the Indians emigrated to the region of the Oneidas in 1788.