University of Memphis
University of Memphis Digital Commons

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

4-15-2012

Saints, "Savages," and Smallpox: Epidemic Disease and the Colonization of New England, 1616-1637

Steven Charles Buckingham

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
Buckingham, Steven Charles, "Saints, "Savages," and Smallpox: Epidemic Disease and the Colonization of New England, 1616-1637" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 422.
https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/422

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact khggerty@memphis.edu.

SAINTS, “SAVAGES,” AND SMALLPOX:
EPIDEMIC DISEASE AND THE COLONIZATION OF NEW ENGLAND, 1616-1637

by

Steven C. Buckingham

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Major: History

The University of Memphis

May 2012

Copyright © 2012 Steven C. Buckingham
All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

Buckingham, Steven C. M. A. The University of Memphis. May 2012. Saints, "Savages," and Smallpox: Epidemic Disease and the Colonization of New England, 1616-1637. Major Professor: Scott P. Marler.

This thesis argues that native epidemics of European infections were crucial to the English colonization of New England. In the early seventeenth century, this region was densely populated with natives who were happy to trade with Europeans but prevented them from establishing permanent settlements there. But in 1616, an epidemic, probably of smallpox, killed thousands of natives along the New England coast, creating conditions that helped ensure the survival of the Pilgrims' settlement at Plymouth and facilitating subsequent English expansion in New England. Then in 1633, in the midst of the Puritan "Great Migration," another smallpox outbreak caused extensive native mortality and social disruption from Massachusetts Bay to the Connecticut Valley, initiating a series of events that culminated in the Pequot War. By fundamentally transforming the natives' demographic, social, and political worlds, these epidemics created room for English settlement in the region and critically shaped interactions between Europeans and natives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
Introduction		1
1	From Eiriksson to Elizabeth: Europeans in Northeastern North America to 1600	13
2	“The Paradise of all those parts”: New England before 1616	34
3	“Doubtless it was Some Pestilential Disease”: Plague, Pilgrims, and Pokanoket, 1616-1621	65
4	“A land, which none useth”: English Expansion, Native Disease, and Smallpox in the “City on a hill,” 1621-1634	100
5	“They die like rotten sheep”: Pox, Puritans, and Pequot, 1633-1637	125
Conclusion: Providence and Pestilence		154
Bibliography		164

Introduction

> Through scenes of gloom and misery, the Pilgrims showed the way to an asylum for those who would go to the wilderness for the purity of religion or the liberty of conscience. . . . Enduring every hardship themselves, they were the servants of posterity, the benefactors of succeeding generations. . . . [These were] the men who, as they first trod the soil of the New World, scattered the seminal principles of republican freedom and national independence.
>
> –George Bancroft[1]

> Wherever the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.
>
> –Charles Darwin[2]

At the heart of the beliefs and values of most every nation's people lies an origin myth—a story, often entailing a sense of divine purpose, of how it came into existence. For citizens of the United States, the tale of the Pilgrims' arrival and subsequent travail at Plymouth in 1620 serves as our national origin myth. The broad outlines of this saga are well-known by every American schoolchild: the Pilgrims left England seeking religious freedom, first in Holland and then in America. They survived a grueling transatlantic journey on the *Mayflower*, then half of them died during their first winter in New England. In dire straits, they received assistance from "friendly Indians," including Squanto, who taught them how to plant corn. After their first harvest in 1621, the Pilgrims proclaimed their thankfulness with a grand feast, where colonists and natives ate, played games, and celebrated together. From there, according to nationalist historians like George Bancroft, the Pilgrims, and their fellow "servants of prosperity," the soon-to-follow Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, "scattered the seminal principles of republican

---

[1] George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1876), 1:252.

[2] Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. Millicent E. Selsam (1845; repr. New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 282.

freedom and national independence." Our modern republic, of course, is the seemingly inevitable result.

The settlement of Plymouth does make a compelling story, one that emphasizes such vital themes as religious freedom, generosity toward others, triumph over adversity, and thankfulness for good fortune. Like any good national myth, the Pilgrims' tale resonates with most modern Americans' sense of how they would like to see themselves. Thus it is understandable that citizens of the United States recognize Plymouth as the true birthplace of their nation. Moreover, it is hardly surprising that Americans continue to celebrate this story with an annual Thanksgiving holiday marked by food, football, and family. But while the Pilgrim myth contains a core of truth, it does not tell the full tale of the English colonization of New England. Indeed, that story begins not with the arrival of the *Mayflower* in 1620, but with a native holocaust that started four years earlier.

*

Long before the Plymouth colonists set sail for America, European vessels plied the waters of the northwestern Atlantic. As far back as the late Middle Ages, British, French, Basque, and Portuguese fishermen and traders were frequent visitors to coastal regions of northeastern North America. But despite repeated attempts, Europeans had failed to establish any permanent colonies in this region before the seventeenth century. The reason for this was simple: the land was occupied. Native Americans were densely settled throughout northeastern North America—and while they were usually happy to trade with their European visitors, they showed no proclivity toward allowing them to tarry too long on the mainland. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the region now called New England, where two well-organized expeditions, backed by some of the most

influential persons in England, attempted to found permanent settlements in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Both of these colonial ventures failed miserably: Bartholomew Gosnold's settlement on Cuttyhunk was abandoned after less than a month, and George Popham's colony at Sagadahoc lasted less than a year. In both cases, native resistance appears to have been a determining factor in the prospective colonists' decisions to leave their settlements.

Compared to the Gosnold and Popham expeditions, the *Mayflower* expedition must have seemed hopelessly disorganized. The Pilgrims were not seasoned adventurers, but rather, as one scholar has described them, "weavers, wool carders, tailors, shoemakers, and printers, with almost no relevant experience when it came to carving a settlement out of the American wilderness." Their stocks of provisions were wholly inadequate, and they brought no cows or draft animals with them. And they sailed late in the year, arriving just in time for the frigid New England winter. Indeed, the remarkable fact is not that half of them died in the winter of 1620-21, but that half of them managed to stay alive. Yet seemingly against all odds, their colony endured where other, better-planned ventures had failed.[3] How could this be?

As it turns out, the Plymouth colony only survived because the English received assistance from an unseen source. Beginning in 1616, a devastating epidemic of a European infectious disease swept through coastal New England with "such a mortall stroake," in the words of the English merchant Thomas Morton, that the natives "died on

[3] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 6; Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 55-56.

heapes, as they lay in their houses."[4] Although medical historians still debate the precise cause of the epidemic, documentary and epidemiological evidence suggests that it was probably an outbreak of smallpox. But whatever its cause, the epidemic decimated the coastal natives, killing as many as 90 percent of them in some areas and leaving the survivors to face a series of daunting spiritual crises and political challenges. In the wake of the epidemic, the region was fundamentally transformed. Where previous European explorers found populous nations of native inhabitants determined to exclude foreign settlers, the Plymouth colonists arrived in an area beset by demographic collapse, economic and social disruption, and political turmoil.

The plague left entire native villages deserted—in many cases, to be subsequently inhabited by English settlers. Plymouth itself was erected on the site of Squanto's forsaken village of Patuxet. Even for those natives that survived the epidemic, life would never be the same. Kinship networks collapsed, and the deaths of community leaders led to crises of authority. A spiritual crisis ensued among the surviving natives, who found that their gods and their medicine men were powerless against the devastating sickness. They abandoned traditional burial practices, in some cases neglecting to bury their dead altogether. Not enough natives were left to tend to their fields or to burn the underbrush in the surrounding forest, as was their custom. As the forest reverted to its natural state, it eventually could no longer support the large populations of deer and other game animals that the natives' husbandry had fostered. This change in the landscape, combined with the expanding influence of English settlers, fundamentally changed the surviving natives'

---

[4] Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (1637; repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), 23.

ways of life in the years following the epidemic, as they were progressively integrated into the larger economy of the Atlantic world.

Perhaps most importantly, the 1616 epidemic also transformed the regional balance of power among Native American tribes, as it severely affected the coastal Pokanoket and Massachusett natives while leaving their inland adversaries, the Narragansett, unscathed. Faced with the specter of subjugation by the Narragansett, the Pokanokets' principal leader, Massasoit, entered into an alliance with the Plymouth colonists—a decision that would have been all but inconceivable just a few years earlier. Both sides benefited from this partnership. The Pokanoket, knowing that they would have the colonists' firepower on their side in the event of war with the Narragansett, provided food for the starving colonists and helped them establish their farms in 1621. By assisting the colonists instead of driving them away, Massasoit helped to ensure that the Plymouth colony, unlike previous English settlements, would not only endure, but prosper. Unfortunately for the natives, Plymouth was just the beginning.

During the 1620s, while Plymouth gradually expanded its zone of influence along the coast of what is now Massachusetts, a slow but steady trickle of migrants bolstered the English population of the region. Then in the subsequent decade, this trickle became a flood. Thousands of Puritans—religious dissenters who wished to remain nominally affiliated with the Church of England—inundated the land surrounding Massachusetts Bay in the "Great Migration" of the 1630s. The Puritans hoped to create a godly community of "visible saints" in the New World, "a City on a hill," in the words of their leader, John Winthrop. But in addition to their Calvinist faith, they brought smallpox and other European diseases to the region. For New England's natives, who were still reeling

from the effects of the 1616 epidemic, the "City on a hill" turned into a charnel house. In 1633, a devastating smallpox epidemic ripped through the natives, killing thousands with such gruesome effectiveness that, as one colonist described it, they would "die like rotten sheep." Unlike the situation in 1616, the 1633 epidemic extended westward to involve the Narragansett, as well as their neighbors to the south, the Pequot. Indeed, smallpox weakened the once-powerful Pequot so thoroughly that they were unable to maintain their hold on the region now called Connecticut. Unable to fend off rival natives, or to reach a negotiated agreement with the English, the Pequot ultimately resorted to a strategy of launching small-scale assaults on English colonists who sought to settle in their territory. The English responded, in 1637, by bringing total war to the Pequot. Their conquest was so complete that the Pequot were virtually eradicated from existence. Other regional natives, learning from this experience, quickly submitted to English authority.[5]

The first half of the seventeenth century was disastrous for New England's natives, as epidemic disease and English war combined to reduce the total regional native population by about 90 percent. The English, for their part, saw this as evidence that God approved of their occupation of New England and would lend assistance, when necessary, by sending plagues among the natives. Writing many decades later, Cotton Mather nicely summarized the colonists' providential view of the natives' demise: "the

[5] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" (1630), quoted in *The Life and Letters of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, ed. Robert Charles Winthrop (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 18-19; William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647* (1650), ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Knopf, 1952), 270-71.

woods were almost cleared of those pernicious creatures, to make room for a better *growth*."[6]

*

The New England natives' experience in the early seventeenth century was a microcosm of a much larger process that occurred throughout the Americas in the centuries following Columbus's landing in the West Indies: the wholesale destruction of Native American populations by European infectious diseases. While many natives were killed in military confrontations with Europeans, and many more native deaths resulted from the harsh conditions of their enslavement, neither warfare nor bondage adequately accounts for the scale of Native American population losses after 1492. As it happened, the infectious pathogens that European explorers unwittingly carried to the New World turned out to be far more deadly to Native Americans than were the Europeans' vaunted steel weapons and guns. Modern scholars dispute the absolute magnitude of the post-Columbian Native American population loss, but most concur that it was a demographic catastrophe of unparalleled scope in world history. In Mexico and Central America, recurring epidemics reduced a population numbering between 8 million and 15 million in 1520 to just 1.5 million by 1650, and the Andean population suffered a similar mortality rate in the century after 1540. On Hispaniola, a precontact population of at least 60,000 (and possibly far larger) declined to fewer than 2,000 in 1542.[7] Indeed, in a pattern that

---

[6] Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England From Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698, in Seven Books* (1702; repr., Hartford, Conn.: Silas Andrus, 1855), 1:51.

[7] Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1998), 132; Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22-24. Estimates

recurred throughout the New World, initial contacts between Native Americans and Europeans were soon followed by devastating outbreaks of epidemic diseases among the former. According to one count, thirteen pandemics (large-scale epidemics) of various infections engulfed the Americas during the sixteenth century, with airborne viruses—particularly smallpox, measles, and influenza—leading the assault.[8] Together, these Old World microbes reaped a grim harvest in the New World.

Several hypotheses, none of which is entirely adequate, have been posited to explain the Native Americans' catastrophic mortality from Old World diseases. The consequences of these epidemics, however, are clear: by removing indigenous inhabitants, they allowed Portuguese, Spanish, and other European colonists to establish themselves in the Americas. Absent these waves of epidemic disease, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for European invaders to subjugate the core regions of the Americas in less than a century. A comparison of conditions on either side of the Atlantic illustrates this point, as the Europeans' rapid conquest of the Americas stands in stark contrast to their marginal presence in Africa during the early modern period.[9]

*

Over half a century ago, Colonel P. M. Ashburn mused that scholars, with the notable exception of Hans Zinsser, had "largely neglected the subject of the influence of

---

of Hispaniola's native population in 1492 range from less than 100,000 to more than seven million.

[8] Cook, *Born to Die*, 132-133, 206. Yellow fever, malaria, and cholera were imported to the Americas in subsequent centuries.

[9] Unlike Native Americans, African natives did not suffer devastating epidemics of European diseases. Indeed, in Africa the pattern was reversed: European explorers rapidly died of malaria and other tropical African diseases. See, for example, Philip D. Morgan, "Africa and the Atlantic, c. 1450 to c. 1820," in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford: University Press, 2009), 225.

disease upon history." Thankfully, this is no longer the case. In recent decades, scholars from various disciplines have built a rich literature on the historical significance of infectious diseases, much of which deals with the decimation of Native American populations by European microbes. Within this genre, early works by Ashburn and by John Duffy offer disease-by-disease accounts of the impact of smallpox, measles, yellow fever, and sundry other maladies. During the 1970s, Alfred Crosby and William McNeill presented the European conquest of the Americas within broader historical frameworks. Crosby viewed the importation of Old World microbes as one facet of a transatlantic exchange of biological entities—people, plants, and pathogens. McNeill, in turn, saw this "Columbian exchange" of pathogens as part of an even larger process whereby "varying patterns of disease circulation have affected human affairs in ancient as well as modern times." More recently, a similarly macrohistorical approach is evident in the work of Jared Diamond, who invokes epidemic disease, along with technological innovations, political organization, and literacy, as "proximate factors"—themselves subordinate to geographic and ecological "ultimate explanations"—that have determined the fates of human societies in the Americas and on other continents. Also in recent years, Noble David Cook, David E. Stannard, and Suzanne Alchon have offered concise and readable syntheses describing the importance of Old World diseases in the European conquest of the Americas. While Cook's work is largely free from overarching metanarratives, Stannard and Alchon both seek to situate the natives' disease experience within a wider context emphasizing the brutality of the European conquest. Stannard, uncompromising in his castigation of the colonizers, claims that "[t]he destruction of the Indians of the Americas was, far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the

world." In comparison, Alchon adopts a less polemical tone, though she, too, asserts that "during the past thirty years the pendulum has swung too far"—and, consequently, that recent scholarship tends to "overemphasize the long-term impact of disease and minimize the impact of other aspects of European colonialism."[10]

The foregoing books are noteworthy, and not only for their literary merit or the historical importance of their arguments (both of which are substantial). Such considerations notwithstanding, these works share another common attribute: they all offer only cursory discussions, if any at all, of the European conquest of northeastern North America. From their covers to their contents, these works clearly are more concerned with the Spaniards' subjugation of the Aztec and Inca empires than with the English displacement of the New England Algonquians. Alchon, for example, deals with "The Northeastern U.S. and Canada" in four pages—which provide a cogent summary, if no original arguments or interpretations. Yet, of the books listed above, her treatment of the epidemics that ravaged New England in 1616 and 1633 is the most extensive.[11] This is not to say that scholars have ignored the influence of epidemic disease in early colonial New England. Indeed, much has been written on this subject, but it exists scattered among a range of monographs and journal articles, written by scholars from such varied

[10] P. M. Ashburn, *The Ranks of Death: A Medical History of the Conquest of America* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1947), 2; Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935); John Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America* (1953; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972); William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (1976; repr., New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 4; Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997; repr., New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Cook, *Born to Die*; David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), x; Suzanne Alchon, *A Pest in the Land: New World Epidemics in a Global Perspective* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 5.

[11] Alchon, *Pest in the Land*, 96-99.

disciplines as ethnohistory, historical demography, anthropology, archaeology, and medical history. Some of this literature is several decades old, although a number of important works have appeared within the last twenty years. The time has come for someone to synthesize this extant scholarship.

Evidence of the importance of infectious diseases in the English colonization of New England also exists in a wealth of primary-source documents, including journals, letters, reports, and promotional narratives by European explorers, colonists, and colonial advocates, and in the secondhand accounts of later chroniclers, many of whom had opportunities to interview witnesses to the epidemics and their aftermath. This thesis will analyze these documents and review the pertinent secondary literature to show how European infectious diseases critically affected the New England natives during the first half of the seventeenth century. Chapter 1 examines the European "discovery" of northeastern North America from the time of the Vikings through the Elizabethan era, including early colonial ventures and the first introduction of an Old World epidemic disease into the region. The focus turns to New England in Chapter 2, which discusses the early abortive attempts by Englishmen to settle in the region and reviews the natives' situation before the disaster of 1616. Chapter 3 examines the cause and consequences of the 1616 epidemic, with particular attention on how it altered the demographic, socio-economic, and political landscape for New England's natives and thereby facilitated the survival of the Plymouth colonists. Looking beyond Plymouth, Chapter 4 looks at how epidemic disease accompanied English migration to and expansion within New England from 1621 through the 1630s, focusing especially on the devastation wrought by smallpox upon the natives in 1633-34. Chapter 5 reviews the particularly severe

consequences of this epidemic for the Pequot, for whom it proved not only a demographic but also a political catastrophe. As we will see, the epidemic initiated a series of events that culminated in the nearly complete extermination of this once-formidable nation.

This thesis argues that epidemics of European infectious diseases among the New England natives were pivotal to the English conquest of this region. By fundamentally transforming the natives' demographic, social, and political worlds, these epidemics not only created room for English settlement in the region, but also critically shaped the nature of interactions between invaders and natives in the early colonial period. Alchon's assertion that "the pendulum has swung too far" notwithstanding, it is difficult to overstate the importance of infectious diseases to the conquest of New England. Plagues of European diseases were not the only factors determining the fate of New England's natives, to be sure. But without their effects, the English conquest of the region could not have been so rapid or so complete, if indeed it could have occurred at all.

Chapter 1

From Eiriksson to Elizabeth: Europeans in Northeastern North America to 1600

> There is fat around my belly! We have won a fine and fruitful country, but will hardly be allowed to enjoy it.
>
> —Thorvald Eiriksson[1]

By 1620, when the Plymouth colonists sailed for America, Europeans had been active in northeastern North America for centuries. The identity of the first Old World explorer to set foot on American soil, and the date when he (or perhaps she) did so, remain shrouded in the mists of history. Tales of transatlantic voyages by Phoenicians and Greeks in antiquity can safely be dismissed as apocryphal, as can the story of the discovery of America by the Irish saint Brendan of Ardfert in the sixth century. Similarly, legends which place either King Arthur or the Welsh prince Madoc ap Gwynedd in America during the Middle Ages are not supported by any documentary or archaeological evidence.[2]

On the other hand, considerable evidence indicates that the Norse explorer Leif Eiriksson walked on American soil early in the eleventh century. Venturing across the Davis Strait from the Vikings' recently-established colony in western Greenland,

---

[1] "Eirik the Red's Saga," in Gwyn Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and North America*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 185.

[2] John L. Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497-1543," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (September 1992): 502-4; John C. Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization, 1558-1625," in *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Canny, vol. 1 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford: University Press, 1998), 62. There really was an Abbott Brendan in Ireland, but no evidence indicates that he ever set foot on American soil. Their lack of basis in historical fact notwithstanding, the Brendan and Madoc legends contributed significantly to European geographic lore in the early modern period. Moreover, John Dee, an advisor to Queen Elizabeth, readily invoked these legends to justify England's claims to North America in the late sixteenth century.

Eiriksson sailed southward along the coasts of Baffin Island and Labrador before landing on Newfoundland (which he called "Vinland," for obscure reasons), where he spent a winter before returning to Greenland. Over the next few years, Eiriksson's brothers also led exploratory voyages to the northeastern coast of North America. Then Thorfinn Karlsefni led an expedition of three ships, 160 people, and "all sorts of livestock" from Greenland to L'Anse aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland, where he sought to establish a permanent colony. The prospects for the Vikings' New World settlement must have appeared promising. As historian Gwyn Jones describes it:

> The prospect here would be one to charm a stock-farmer's eye: after long sailing off rock-bound barren coasts he could put his animals ashore amidst miles of fair grazing . . . with genial forest and wind-breaks. The soil was comparable with anything known in Iceland or Greenland, the rivers teemed with salmon and the ocean's harvest was inexhaustible. And there were sea-beasts and caribou to fill a hunter's dreams. . . . Indeed, their prospect was all too good—they banked on an easy winter and were hard hit when the cold came . . . . But with spring a good country once more. And empty. Or seeming so.[3]

Alas, the land was not empty. The native inhabitants, whom the Greenlanders called Skrælings, were Algonquin-speaking ancestors of the Beothuk natives that later Europeans would encounter on Newfoundland.[4] According to Norse oral tradition, relations with the Skrælings began peacefully, as the natives wished to trade "dark unblemished skins" for the Greenlanders' red cloth. The natives "also wanted to buy swords and spears," but the Vikings' leaders refused these requests. At some point, relations between the two peoples deteriorated and the Skrælings launched a massive

---

[3] Jones, *Norse Atlantic Saga*, 77-97.

[4] Robert McGhee, "Contact between Native North Americans and the Medieval Norse: A Review of the Evidence," *American Antiquity* 49 (January 1984): 8-9. Archaeological evidence indicates that Dorset Paleoeskimos inhabited Newfoundland until c. 500 CE, when they were displaced by ancestors of the Beothuk.

assault against the Norse settlement. The colonists saw "a great multitude of Skræling boats coming up from the south like a streaming torrent" and prepared for battle. Then, as the Saga of Eirik the Red recounts:

> They [the Skrælings and the Norsemen] clashed together and fought. There was a heavy shower of missiles . . . . Great fear now struck into Karlsefni and all his following, so that there was no other thought in their heads than to run away up along the river to some steep rocks, and there they put up a strong resistance.

Their "strong resistance" notwithstanding, the results of this pitched battle were apparently disastrous for the Greenlanders. Surveying their colony's prospects in the battle's aftermath, the Vikings concluded that "though the quality of the land was admirable, there would always be fear and strife dogging them there on account of those who already inhabited it. So they made ready to leave, setting their hearts on their own country." The Norse Greenlanders would not be the last prospective colonists in North America to express such thoughts. Indeed, this pattern of Native Americans driving away European interlopers would repeat itself many times before any permanent European settlement was successfully established in northeastern North America.[5]

*

Despite the failure of their Vinland colony, the Greenlanders continued to make voyages across the Davis Strait to gather lumber, and presumably to hunt and fish, in North America for at least the next few centuries. In fact, documentary and archeological evidence suggests that such journeys continued up until shortly before the Norse Greenlanders mysteriously disappeared in the early sixteenth century. Throughout this time, Norse adventurers must have occasionally encountered North American natives, but

---

[5] "Eirik the Red's Saga," 180-84; McGhee, "Contact," 22-23; Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier," 503; Kirsten A. Seaver, *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America*, ca. A.D. 1000-1500 (Stanford, CA: University Press, 1996), 22-27.

archeological evidence does not suggest that the two groups engaged in regular trade, exchanged any diseases, or influenced each other's way of life in any measurable sense. As prehistorian Robert McGhee notes, "The fact that neither group appears to have adopted any major cultural or technological elements of the other suggests that contempt probably outweighed respect in relations between the two populations."[6]

Probably owing to their relative isolation in the northwestern Atlantic, the Greenlanders' knowledge of northeastern North America did not readily diffuse throughout Europe. Nonetheless, it seems likely that they told at least a few Europeans traders and fishermen of what lay across the Davis Strait. British traders, particularly those sailing from Bristol, frequently visited the Greenland colonies throughout the late medieval period, despite the Norwegian crown's efforts to prevent such foreign trade. In fact, the Greenlanders increasingly came to rely on this illicit trade, especially as Norwegian officials gradually lost interest in their colonies during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Archeological and documentary evidence, including analysis of clothes found in the colonists' graves, indicate that British trade with Greenland continued through the late fifteenth century, or just before the colonies suddenly ceased to exist.[7] Thus it is tempting to speculate that at least a few Bristol traders might have crossed the Davis Strait to from Greenland to North America. Indeed, fragments of

---

[6] Seaver, *Frozen Echo*, 27-43; McGhee, "Contact," 14, 21.

[7] Allen, "From Cabot to Cartier," 503; Arthur Davies, "Prince Madoc and the Discovery of America in 1477," *Geographical Journal* 150 (November 1984): 364-66; Seaver, *Frozen Echo*, 95, 122-38, 139-40, 170-75.

documentary evidence of such voyages do exist, although they are not supported by extant archeological data.[8]

In addition to the Greenland trade, the search for new fishing grounds also provided a strong lure for Bristolmen to venture ever farther into the northwestern Atlantic. By the late Middle Ages, cod had come to serve as crucial source of protein for people throughout northern Europe. English fishermen were visiting the cod-rich fishing grounds around Iceland and eastern Greenland by the early fifteenth century, but increasingly violent competition among them drove at least some of them further west. Taking advantage of recent advances in shipbuilding, Bristol fishermen discovered the Grand Banks, off the coast of Newfoundland, perhaps as early as 1430. These Bristolmen, who had good reasons to keep their discovery secret, increasingly exploited the Newfoundland fishery as international competition for the Iceland Banks intensified in the second half of the fifteenth century. Eventually, some of these fishermen must have drifted westward, whether intentionally or not, and seen the North American shore. Indeed, these fishermen probably visited the Newfoundland coast on a regular basis, if only for the rather prosaic purpose of drying their fish before transporting them back to Europe. This would explain, for example, why two ships, commissioned in 1481 by Bristol merchants ostensibly to search the northern Atlantic for the mythical island of Brasil, each carried forty bushels of salt. As Arthur Davies notes, "Salt was needed to

---

[8] Davies, "Prince Madoc," 371-72. Davies asserts that Welsh sailors transported a group of Greenland Norsemen to hunting grounds on Baffin Island in 1475 but were unable to resupply them the following year. In 1477, the Welsh navigator John Scolvus (apparently a pseudonym for John Lloyd, "the greatest mariner in all England") found the hunting party frozen to death. According to Davies, Lloyd then proceeded to explore Hudson Strait and the American coast as far south as Chesapeake Bay. Because he felt "a deep sense of tragedy and guilt at the fate of the hunting expedition"—and, perhaps more importantly, because he traveled illegally and wished to avoid paying customs fees—Lloyd did not publicize his voyage.

treat dried stockfish or cod, and this implies a fishing centre on land." For obvious reasons, the Bristolmen did not publicize their discovery of rich fishing grounds in the northwestern Atlantic; but such a source of wealth could not remain secret for long.[9]

By the time of John Cabot's celebrated landfall on Newfoundland on June 24, 1497, fishermen and traders from Bristol had plied the waters off the North American shore for decades. Cabot was an intrepid and skilled navigator, but he was almost surely not the first Englishman to set foot on American soil. In 1498, the English wine merchant John Day wrote, in a letter to Christopher Columbus, that the land found by Cabot "was found and discovered in the past by the men from Bristol who found 'Brasil' as your Lordship knows."[10] Moreover, Arthur Davies argues that Cabot's route to North America followed that of a previous Bristolman, John Lloyd, who had explored the American coast from Hudson Bay to the Chesapeake as early as 1477.[11]

Nonetheless, Cabot's journey marked a turning point in European exploration of the northwestern Atlantic. Before 1497, voyagers into this region travelled in secret and did not publicize the findings of their unlicensed commercial ventures. Cabot's 1497 voyage was different, for he sailed with a license from Henry VII granting him and his sons

---

[9] Seaver, *Frozen Echo*, 160-63, 170-92, 221-22; Davies, "Prince Madoc," 369.

[10] David Beers Quinn, "Columbus and the North: England, Iceland, and Ireland," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49 (April 1992): 296-97. In this context, "Brasil" refers to the mythical Atlantic island that Europeans widely believed existed somewhere to the west of Ireland. In 1498, neither Day nor Columbus (nor any other European, for that matter) conceived that an entire continent lay between Europe and Asia.

[11] "The conclusion is inescapable. Before Cabot set out in 1497 the Atlantic seaboard of North America was already known, from Baffin Land to well south in what is now [the United States]." Davies, "Prince Madoc," 367.

> full and free authoritie, leave, and power, to sayle to all partes, countreys, and seas, of the East, of the West, and of the North, under our banners and ensigns . . . upon their owne proper costes and charges, to seeke out, discover, and finde, whatsoever iles, countreyes, regions or provinces, of the heathen and infidelles, whatsoever they bee, and in what part of the worlde soever they be, whiche before this time have been unknown to all Christians.

Furthermore, this royal license laid bare that the English intended to conquer and colonize territories in the New World, or at least that they believed that it was within their rights to do so. As King Henry stipulated:

> the foresaid John and his sonnes, or their heires and assignes, may subdue, occupie, and possesse, all such townes, cities, castles, and iles, of them founde, the kings which they can subdue, occupie, and possesse, as our vassailes and lieutenantes, getting unto us the rule, title, and jurisdiction of the same villages, townes, castles, and firme lande so founde.

Cabot's journey thus marked the beginning of official, state-sponsored English exploration in the northwestern Atlantic, the Crown's disinclination to actually pay for it notwithstanding.[12]

This expedition further differed from earlier transatlantic voyages in its objective, for Cabot was not principally interested in such mundane pursuits as trading with Norsemen or locating fishing grounds. Of course, Cabot did find fish, in such abundance that his men reported that "this kingdom will no longer have need of Iceland." But as Raimondo di Soncino, an agent of the Duke of Milan in England, reported, Cabot had "set his mind on higher things," for he proposed to

> keep on still further towards the east, where he will be opposite to an island called Cipango, situated in the equinoctial region, where he believes that all the spices of the world, as well as the jewels, are found.

[12] "A Latine Copie of the Letters Patentes of King Henrie the Seventh, Graunted unto John Cabote and his three Sonnes, Lewes, Sebastian, and Santius, for the Discovering of Newe and Unknown Landes" (1496), in Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent* (1582), ed. John Winter Jones (London: Hakluyt Society, 1850), 19-22.

By finding such a direct aquatic route to Asia, Cabot hoped "to establish a greater depot of spices in London than there is in Alexandria"—which would have been quite an accomplishment, had it been feasible.[13] As it turned out, Cabot was unsuccessful in this quest, for an entire continent stood in his way, though he could hardly have realized this at the time. Indeed, the search for an unobstructed water route to Asia—the so-called "Northwest Passage"—would occupy and frustrate European mariners and their descendants for the next four centuries.[14]

In 1498, Cabot led another voyage to North America, but his ship was lost at sea and he was never seen again. In his wake, European activity in the northwestern Atlantic only intensified. During the first decade of the sixteenth century, Bristol merchants commissioned several exploratory voyages to Newfoundland and adjacent regions, while Cabot's son Sebastian conducted a thorough exploration of the Atlantic coast from Canada to the Caribbean. Moreover, interest in North America spread beyond Bristol to other parts of Europe. The Portuguese navigator Gaspar Corte Real reached Newfoundland in 1501, but after a series of failed voyages, official Portuguese exploration in the northwestern Atlantic ceased in 1503. News of the rich fishery off

---

[13] Raimondo di Soncino to the Duke of Milan, December 18, 1497, in "John Cabot (c.1450-1499): Voyage to North America, 1497," Internet Modern History SourceBook, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1497cabot-3docs.html (accessed February 23, 2012).

[14] In fact, the Northwest Passage exists. In 1906, Roald Amundsen completed a three-year journey among the islands of the far Canadian north, proving that a gasoline-powered vessel could travel through the Arctic from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Until recently, the Arctic ice pack rendered this route impractical for maritime navigation. Since 2007, however, global climate change has sufficiently reduced the polar ice pack to allow at least some commercial shipping over the top of North America. See, for example, Anthony Brandt, *The Man Who Ate His Boots: The Tragic History of the Search for the Northwest Passage* (New York: Knopf, 2010); "Over the Top," *Science* 326 (October 2, 2009): 25; and Richard A. Kerr, "Is Battered Arctic Sea Ice Down For the Count?" *Science* 318 (October 5, 2007): 33-34.

Newfoundland also spread, so that by the early 1500s the Bristol fishermen were forced to share the grounds with Portuguese, Breton, and Basque fishermen and whalers.[15]

It was during these early years of the sixteenth century that documented contacts between Europeans and Native Americans began—although earlier, unrecorded contacts doubtless occurred. Early evidence of trade between Europeans and natives appears in the form of "a brasell bow and [two] Rede arowez" that were presented to Henry VII after a 1503 voyage. By this time, historian James Axtell asserts, natives and Europeans had already established routines for trading with one another, suggesting that cross-cultural interactions had been occurring for a number of years. Much of this early trade was conducted by European fishermen and whalers who sought to maximize the profits of their North American journeys by putting "into shore long enough to bargain for Indian furs."[16]

Ominously for the natives, it was also in this period that Europeans first demonstrated their proclivity toward kidnapping Native Americans and spiriting them away to Europe. In 1501 Corte Real's men "forcibly kidnapped about fifty men and women" from the Newfoundland coast and "brought them to the king," and in 1502 a

[15] Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 508-9, 519n9; Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 51. Limited evidence suggests that Corte Real might have landed on Newfoundland on an earlier voyage, even before 1500. Of three ships that Corte Real led to North America in 1501, two returned; Corte Real's ship disappeared and was presumably lost to the sea.

[16] "King's Daybook, 15 September 1503," in James A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1962), 216; James Axtell, "At the Water's Edge: Trading in the Sixteenth Century," in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 146-54; David B. Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 126. As Axtell notes, "Rather than new fashions in headware, the sixteenth-century fur market revolved around plush pelts of decorative value. Furs were not made into full-bodied winter coats, as in native America, but used only to make muffs for hands and feet and to trim the rich silks and velvets of the upper classes" (162).

group of English and Portuguese adventurers presented "three men taken in the new found Ilands" to Henry VII. French explorers also engaged in this practice: in 1504, a Breton ship returned from "Terre-Nueve" with "seven savage men," and in 1509 Thomas Aubert of Rouen brought another seven native men to Normandy. And this was just the beginning. During this early period, explorers kidnapped natives chiefly for their value as novelties to be displayed, along with other marvels of the New World, in European courts. Some later captives, however, were taught European languages so that they could serve as interpreters on subsequent voyages aimed at trading or settlement. Most captives were Beothuk from Newfoundland or Micmac from further south, though at least a few Inuit natives were also paraded around Europe. These kidnappings continued well into the seventeenth century, fueling ongoing resentment, suspicion, and hostility on the part of natives toward Europeans.[17]

*

After the first decade of the sixteenth century, official English exploration in North America slowed, as Henry VIII and his courtiers found themselves increasingly occupied with issues of dynastic, ecclesiastical, and marital politics. After commercially-funded voyages by John Rut in 1527 and Richard Hore in 1536 failed to locate a water passage to Asia, English activity in the northwestern Atlantic, other than fishing,

[17] Alberto Cantino to Hercules d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, October 17, 1501, in *America from Concept to Discovery: Early Exploration of North America*, ed. David B. Quinn (New York: Arno Press, 1979), 148-49; Quinn, *North America from Earliest Discovery*, 126, 131-32; David Beers Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620: From the Bristol Voyages of the Fifteenth Century to the Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth; The Exploration, Exploitation, and Trial-and-Error Colonization of North America by the English* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 117-18; Williamson, *Cabot Voyages*, 220-23; Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 519n9; Axtell, "Water's Edge," 150-52; McGhee, "Contact," 8.

effectively ceased until the 1560s. In the meantime, explorers from France assumed a preeminent role in northeastern North America.[18]

In January 1524, the Florentine navigator Giovanni da Verrazzano, sailing in the service of Francis I, took a single vessel, the *Dauphine,* "to explore new lands" and to search for a direct water route to Asia. But after searching the American seaboard from the coast of what is now North Carolina to as far north as present-day Maine, Verrazzano could find no such passage. As he later explained in a letter to the French monarch,

> My intention on this voyage was to reach Cathay and the extreme eastern coast of Asia, but I did not expect to find such an obstacle of new land as I have found; and if for some reason I did expect to find it, I estimated there would be some strait to get through to the Eastern Ocean. This was the opinion of all the ancients, who certainly believed that our Western Ocean was joined to the Eastern Ocean of India without any land in between. . . . Nevertheless, land has been found by modern man which was unknown to the ancients, another world with respect to the one they knew, which appears to be larger than our Europe, than Africa, and almost larger than Asia, if we estimate its size correctly.

Verrazzano may have been unable to locate the elusive Northwest Passage, but his letter to Francis I did provide a vivid account of North America and its inhabitants. Moreover, Verrazzano and his crew were the first Europeans known to have visited the region now called New England.[19]

*

After Verrazzano, French explorers directed their search for the Northwest Passage further to the north, in the region that eventually became New France. In this regard, the three North American voyages of Jacques Cartier are particularly noteworthy.

---

[18] Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 511-12.

[19] Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 513-14; Giovanni da Verrazano, "Cellère Codex" (1524), trans. Susan Tarrow, in *The Voyages of Giovanni da Verazzano, 1524-1528,* ed. Lawrence C. Wroth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 133, 142. On Verrazzano's exploration of New England, see Chapter 2.

In 1534, Cartier sailed from St. Malo, taking two ships with sixty-one men, and explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence. At Chaleur Bay, Cartier's men initiated a brisk trade with the Micmac, Algonquian hunter-gatherers who Cartier perceived "are people who would be easy to convert." Then, at Gaspé Harbor, Cartier encountered a group of Iroquoian natives from Stadacona (near modern-day Quebec City) who "only come down to the sea in the fishing-season." Relations with the Stadacona natives were friendly at first, but when Cartier had his men erect a "cross made thirty feet high" at the harbor's entrance, the Stadacona chief, Donnacona, voiced his displeasure with "a long harangue . . . as if he wished to say that all this region belonged to him, and that we ought not to have set up this cross without his permission." Cartier's response to this tirade was quintessentially that of the sixteenth-century European adventurer in North America: He kidnapped Donnacona's two sons and took them back to France.[20]

The next year, Cartier returned to North America with three ships and, guided by his captives, ascended the St. Lawrence River to Stadacona, where Donnacona's sons were reunited with their people. Against Donnacona's expressed wishes, Cartier then traveled up the St. Lawrence as far as present-day Montreal, where he traded with a rival group of natives before returning to spend the winter of 1535-36 at a makeshift fort near Stadacona. The Frenchmen spent that miserable winter suffering from disease—by April, twenty-five of them had died, apparently from scurvy—and "fearing lest [the natives] should attempt some treasonable design and come against us with a host of people." On May 3, Cartier ended his stay at Stadacona. Before leaving, however, he ordered his men

[20] Ramsay Cook, ed., *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Toronto: University Press, 1993), xxi-xxvii; Jacques Cartier, "Cartier's First Voyage," in Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 3, 21-27; Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 516.

to erect a cross “some thirty-five feet high” and to kidnap ten Stadacona natives, including Donnacona, his sons (again!) and seven others “whose capture had been decided upon.” The captives were taken to France, where all but one died before Cartier’s third voyage. None of them ever saw his homeland again.[21]

On his third North American voyage, in 1541, Cartier returned to Stadacona, this time as part of a colonizing expedition of five ships under the leadership of Jean Francois de la Roque, seigneur de Roberval. The French colonists, who intended to establish a permanent settlement at Stadacona, had much in common with the Norse Greenlanders who had attempted to colonize Newfoundland some five hundred years earlier. Like the Vikings, the French brought livestock with them, including “cattel, as well [as] Goates, Hogges, [and] other beastes which we caried for breede in the Countrey.” And like Thorstein Karlsefni before him, Cartier extolled the agricultural potential of his prospective colony, which he found “as good a Countrey to plow and mannure as a man should find or desire.” But also like the Vikings’ fledgling settlement at L’Anse Aux Meadows, the French outpost at Stadacona was ultimately doomed by the hostility of the surrounding natives. In the spring of 1542, Cartier learned that several native leaders, including Donnacona’s successor, were meeting to decide “what they should do against us.” Faced with the natives’ burgeoning antagonism and running short on supplies, Cartier abandoned Stadacona in 1542. When Roberval and his men, who only arrived just

[21] Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, xxviii-xxxix; “Cartier’s Second Voyage,” in Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 39, 50-87; Allen, “Cabot to Cartier,” 516.

as Cartier was leaving, departed Canada under similar circumstances a year later, it was clear that the first official French colonial venture in North America had failed.[22]

Although Cartier did not establish a permanent French presence in the New World, the significance of his voyages should not be understated. Aside from increasing European geographical knowledge of North America in general, and of the St. Lawrence River in particular, Cartier's explorations prefigured the course of future French exploration, which would predominantly focus on the discovery and exploitation of the continent's interior rivers and lakes for the next two centuries. Furthermore, Cartier is important to the epidemiological history of North America, for the narrative of his second voyage documents the first known disease epidemic among the northeastern natives. In December 1535, Cartier "received warning that the pestilence had broken out among the people of Stadacona," and that "more than fifty persons were dead"—some 10 percent of the village's population. Just what this "pestilence" was remains unclear, but, as anthropologist Gary Warrick notes, the "mortality rate, epidemic behaviour, and timing of the disease outbreak suggest a European contagion"—possibly influenza or another respiratory virus, which might in turn have predisposed its victims to developing bacterial pneumonia.[23] Of course, this may not have been the first time that a European infection

---

[22] Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, xl; "Cartier's Third Voyage," in Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 96-105; Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 516-17.

[23] "Cartier's Second Voyage," in Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 76-80; Gary Warrick, "European Infectious Disease and Depopulation of the Wendat-Tionontate (Huron-Petun)," *World Archaeology* 35 (October 2003): 263-64. As the winter progressed, sickness also spread among Cartier's men. However, their symptoms—weakness, swollen extremities, purple spots on the skin, necrotic gums, and loss of teeth—have led modern scholars to conclude that they suffered from scurvy, which is caused by a nutritional deficiency of vitamin C. Also, because the Frenchmen were apparently cured by a native herbal remedy for scurvy, it seems likely that their illness was distinct from the presumably infectious malady that ravaged the local natives. See Ann F. Ramenofsky, *Vectors of Death: The Archaeology of European Contact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 98; Dean R. Snow and Kim M. Lanphear,

penetrated the Northeast—previous, unrecorded epidemics could have spread to the natives from Verrazzano's crew, or from other fishermen or traders—but it was the first such documented episode. Doubtless many Europeans embarked on transatlantic voyages carrying the seeds of contagion. Indeed, in March 1535, Cartier commented on the presence of "epidemic and plague" at St. Malo, which delayed the departure of his voyage.[24]

The "epidemic and plague" at St. Malo in March must have been unrelated to the Stadacona epidemic in December, given the lack of temporal proximity between the episodes. But viewed in a broader context, European diseases likely played a role in the ultimate fate of natives throughout the St. Lawrence River valley, including those at Stadacona. In 1542 and 1543, the St. Lawrence Iroquoians were numerous and powerful enough to repel the settlement efforts of Cartier and Roberval. But after the French departed, something went terribly wrong for these natives; by 1603 they had vanished altogether. The reasons for their demise are unclear. Their position on northeastern North America's main water highway ensured frequent contact with European traders; thus rival tribes seeking advantage in the burgeoning European fur trade, such as the Huron or Mohawk, might have eradicated the St. Lawrence Iroquoians through intertribal warfare. Alternatively, the Stadacona and their neighbors may have fallen victim to a catastrophic epidemic, or a series of epidemics, of infectious diseases brought to the valley by European traders. It is also possible that some combination of disease, warfare,

---

"European Contact and Indian Depopulation in the Northeast: The Timing of the First Epidemics," *Ethnohistory* 35 (Winter 1988): 18; J. V. Hirschmann and Gregory J. Raugi, "Adult Scurvy," *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 41 (December 1999): 895-906.

[24] Jacques Cartier, "Choice of Vessels for the Second Voyage," in Cook, *Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 119.

and absorption of survivors by neighboring tribes account for their disappearance.[25] In any event, the winter of 1535 represented a watershed moment not only for the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, but for Native Americans throughout the Northeast. For the "pestilence" that Cartier noted among the Stadacona marked the first documented intrusion into the Northeast of a process that had been underway for decades further to the south—the decimation of the New World's native population by European infectious diseases.

*

When Verrazano visited New England in 1524, he noted that the natives "live a long time, and rarely fall sick; if they are wounded, they cure themselves with fire without medicine; their end comes with old age." In this appraisal, Verrazano anticipated the arguments of twentieth-century scholars, such as T. D. Stewart and P. M. Ashburn, that infectious diseases were almost unknown to Native Americans before European contact. As it happens, such assessments were a bit too sanguine, for archaeological evidence indicates that the precontact New World was not exactly a disease-free paradise. Besides the sundry injuries attendant to normal life and various nutritional deficiencies, Native Americans had experience with a diverse array of parasitic, viral, and bacterial infections, including roundworms, tapeworms, pinworms, dysentery, tuberculosis, and syphilis, among others.[26] What the natives lacked—crucially, as it turns out—was

---

[25] Bruce G. Trigger and James F. Pendergast, "Saint Lawrence Iroquoians," in *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, vol. 15 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 360-61; Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 214-24.

[26] Verrazano, "Cellère Codex," 139-40; T. D. Stewart, "A Physical Anthropologist's View of the Peopling of the New World," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16 (1960): 265;

experience with numerous "crowd-type" epidemic diseases, such as smallpox, measles, diphtheria, and pertussis (to name just a few), that had evolved in the Old World in the millennia following their migration from Asia. These infections routinely circulated in the densely-populated cities of early modern Europe. Thus most (but not all) Europeans experienced these diseases in childhood—and those that survived developed lifelong immunity. But they were completely unknown in the Americas before 1492.[27]

Circumstances changed once the peoples of Europe and the Americas came into regular and sustained contact with one another. Beginning with Columbus's second voyage to the New World, European explorers unwittingly and repeatedly introduced Old World epidemic diseases to the Americas. The first epidemic—possibly caused by influenza—caused substantial morbidity among both Spaniards and natives on Hispaniola from 1493 to 1496. Over the next several decades, repeated waves of European diseases washed over the New World's "virgin soil" populations in large-scale epidemics, called pandemics, which left untold millions of Native Americans dead in their collective wake.

Ashburn, *Ranks of Death*, 4, 14; William A. Starna, "The Biological Encounter: Disease and the Ideological Domain," *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1992): 512; Karl J. Reinhard, "Archaeoparasitology in North America," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 82 (1990): 145-63; Marshall T. Newman, "Aboriginal New World Epidemiology and Medical Care, and the Impact of Old World Disease Imports," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 45 (1976): 667-69; Catherine C. Carlson, George J. Armelagos, and Ann L. Magennis, "Impact of Disease on the Precontact and Early Historic Populations of New England and the Maritimes," in *Disease and Demography in the Americas*, ed. John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 143-45.

[27] Prevailing dogma holds that crowd-type epidemic diseases arose in the Old World, but not in the Americas, because these infections evolved over thousands of years from diseases of domesticated herd animals. For example, measles and smallpox are descendants of the cattle pathogens rinderpest and cowpox, respectively. The New World's extremely limited menagerie of indigenous domesticated animals (which only included the turkey, llama, guinea pig, Muscovy duck, and dog) thus explains why European explorers were not killed by uniquely American crowd-type diseases, for no such diseases existed. See Diamond, *Guns Germs, and Steel*, 195-214; and McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 69-74, 208-11.

The first pandemic of smallpox, that unparalleled grim reaper of Native American souls, began in 1518 on Hispaniola, from where it spread throughout the Caribbean, across Mexico, and into South America, immeasurably helping the Spanish in their conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires. In subsequent decades, localized epidemics and continental pandemics of measles, mumps, influenza, and diphtheria combined with repeated attacks of smallpox to winnow the Americas of native inhabitants. The combined effect of these various maladies was a catastrophic population decline in the areas conquered by the Spanish: as Dobyns notes, "Ninety percent of the population of civilized Mesoamerica and Andean America perished by 1568." Even more poignant is historian Noble David Cook's assessment: "The century and a half after 1492 witnessed, in terms of the number of people who died, the greatest human catastrophe in history, far exceeding even the disaster of the Black Death of medieval Europe."[28]

Considered alongside the unfathomable mortality that smallpox and other European maladies claimed in sixteenth-century Spanish America, the deaths of fifty or so Stadacona natives during the winter of 1535-36 pales by comparison. But this episode may well have represented the beginning of the end for the St. Lawrence Iroquoians—and it ominously prefigured the future for millions of natives elsewhere in North America.

*

[28] Noble David Cook, *Born to Die*, 28-39, 60-94, 13; Henry F. Dobyns, "Disease Transfer at Contact," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 276-80. On proposed explanations for the exceptionally high native mortality rates in "virgin soil" epidemics, see Alfred W. Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 33 (April 1976): 289-99; Francis L. Black, "An Explanation of High Death Rates among New World Peoples when in Contact with Old World Diseases," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 37 (Winter 1994): 292-307; and David S. Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 60 (October 2003): 703-42.

Aside from fishing and trading, English activity in the Atlantic had subsided during the reign of Henry VIII. When it resumed under Elizabeth I, it did so primarily in the form of state-sanctioned piracy. During the second half of the sixteenth century, privateers such as Francis Drake and John Hawkins regularly attacked French and Spanish ships returning from the Americas, enriching England's treasury at the expense of its Catholic rivals on the continent. In fact, piracy formed the basis for England's first New World colonial venture in 1585; Walter Raleigh selected Roanoke as the colony's location because that site could serve as a suitable base from which to attack Spanish ships returning from the West Indies. That colony did not long survive, owing in part to Elizabeth's decision to deploy troops in northern Europe, rather than risk vital resources in faraway Virginia.[29]

Roanoke's failure notwithstanding, the English privateering war against Spain in the 1580s and 1590s laid the basis for English colonial settlement in the Americas. The war inspired a shipbuilding boom, as hundreds of vessels set sail seeking to relieve Spanish galleons of their American treasures. The English captains and sailors who manned these ships gained valuable knowledge of the Atlantic coast of North America and the Caribbean during the 1580s and 1590s. The war tended to concentrate capital in the possession of a group of wealthy merchants, particularly in Bristol and London, who would subsequently assume prominent roles in financing English colonial enterprises in the early seventeenth century. Perhaps most importantly, English privateering slowly but steadily weakened the Spanish empire in America throughout the later decades of the sixteenth century. Spain was gradually drained of resources and forced to concentrate its

---

[29] Allen, "Cabot to Cartier," 519; Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization," 60-64.

defenses on the empire's central regions, leaving peripheral areas such as the Lesser Antilles and the coast of North America vulnerable. These, of course, were precisely the regions where English colonists ultimately settled.[30]

Thus by the late sixteenth century, the English were well-poised to launch colonial ventures in the Americas—and they did so earnestly. From 1597 through 1610, prospective settlers set forth from England to establish colonies in far-flung corners of the Americas: on the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, along the Wiampoco River in Guiana, on St. Lucia and Grenada in the Caribbean, and on Newfoundland. All these efforts failed spectacularly, owing to such factors as inadequate supplies, environmental difficulties, foreign intervention, and native resistance. The English did plant one colony, at Jamestown in 1607, that managed to survive; but its prospects could only have appeared tenuous, at best, for its first decade of existence.[31]

England's inability to establish successful colonies in the New World contrasted sharply with Spain's legacy of American conquest in the sixteenth century. By 1600, Spain had conquered most of the New World south of the Rio Grande and was extracting a fortune from its American colonies annually—losses to English privateering notwithstanding. Native populations from Mexico southward had been decimated by smallpox and other European diseases, and the once-mighty Aztec and Inca empires had been destroyed. The situation in northeastern North America could scarcely have been

---

[30] Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization," 67-71. Privateering was not the only factor stimulating shipbuilding during this period; responding to increasing demand for fish in southern Europe, English fishermen "were sending as many as 150 ships a year to the [Newfoundland] fishery" by 1604.

[31] Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization," 69-75; Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 1-11, 184-88; Joyce Lorimer, ed., *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon*, 1550-1646 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1989), 26.

more different. There, Native Americans still controlled their own societies, as European attempts at colonization, outside the fledgling settlements at Jamestown and Quebec, had all failed. After over a century of exploration, fishing, and trading, Europeans had gained extensive knowledge of North America's geography, wildlife, and peoples. But, with the notable exception of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, European epidemic diseases had not yet infiltrated this region, and the northeastern natives consequently remained populous and powerful enough to repel foreign settlers. In the long run, of course, this situation would change. But before it did, the region now called New England would emerge as a focus of England's colonization efforts.

Chapter 2

"The Paradise of all those parts": New England before 1616

> European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. . . . They did not settle a virgin land. They invaded and replaced a resident population.
>
> —Francis Jennings[1]

Though he was probably not the first European to make landfall in the region now called New England, Giovanni da Verrazzano did provide the first known account of the region and its inhabitants. In April 1524, Verrazzano led the *Dauphine* into "a very excellent harbor" in what is now Narragansett Bay, whereupon a host of natives—"about XX [twenty] boats full of people"—rushed out to greet him and his crew. Verrazzano praised these natives, calling them the "most beautiful" people, with "the most civil customs that we have found on this voyage." Remarking on the natives' semi-sedentary lifestyle, Verrazzano noted that

> They move these houses from one place to another according to the richness of the site and the season. They need only carry the straw mats, and so they have new houses made in no time at all. . . . They live on the same food as the other people—pulse (which they produce with more systematic cultivation than the other tribes, and when sowing they observe the influence of the moon, the rising of the Pleiades, and many other customs derived from the ancients), and otherwise on game and fish.

The *Dauphine's* crew stayed among the natives at Narragansett Bay for fifteen days, during which time they "made great friends with them." Affable as they might have been, however, the natives were cagey enough to keep their women away from Verrazano's crew, for "however many entreaties we made or offers of various gifts, we could not persuade them to let the women come on board ship." Verrazzano complimented the natives for their generosity, noting that they "give away all they have," and found them to

---

[1] Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonists, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 15.

be "very compassionate and charitable toward their relatives." Moreover, the natives placed high value on baubles but were unimpressed with European technology:

> The things we gave them that they prized the most were little bells, blue crystals, and other trinkets to put in the ear or around the necks. They did not appreciate cloth of silk and gold, nor even of any other kind, nor did they care to have them; the same was true for metals like steel and iron, for many times when we showed them our arms, they did not admire them, nor ask for them, but merely examined the workmanship. They did the same with mirrors; they would look at them quickly, and then refuse them, laughing.

During his time in Narragansett Bay, Verrazzano explored the surrounding country, which he found "as pleasant as I can possibly describe, and suitable for every kind of cultivation—grain, wine, or oil. For there the fields extend for XXV [twenty-five] to XXX [thirty] leagues; they are open and free of any obstacles or trees, and so fertile that any kind of seed would produce excellent crops."[2]

Further north, in what is now southern Maine, Verrazzano found a different sort of country, "full of very dense forests, composed of pines, cypresses, and similar trees which grow in cold regions." In this land, "we saw no sign of cultivation, nor would the land be suitable for any fruit or grain on account of its sterility." The local natives were also different from those they had encountered in Narragansett Bay, "for while the previous ones had been courteous in manner, these were full of crudity and vices, and were so barbarous that we could never make any communication with them." These were Abenaki natives, Algonquian-speaking hunter-gatherers whose behavior toward Verrazzano's crew contrasted sharply with that of the southern New England natives. Doubtless reflecting previous experience with European visitors, the Abenaki exercised both caution and pragmatism in trading with their visitors:

---

[2] Verrazano, "Cellère Codex," 137-40.

> If we wanted to trade with them for some of their things, they would come to the seashore on some rocks where the breakers were the most violent, while we remained in the little boat, and they sent us what they wanted to give on a rope, continually shouting to us not to approach the land; they gave us the barter quickly, and would take in exchange only knives, hooks for fishing, and sharp metal. We found no courtesy in them, and when we had nothing more to exchange and left them, the men made all the signs of scorn and shame that any brute creature would make.

Eventually, the Abenakis' hostility erupted into violence. Ignoring the natives' objections, Verrazzano "penetrated two or three leagues inland with XXV [twenty-five] armed men, and when we disembarked on the shore, they shot at us with their bows and uttered loud cries before fleeing into the woods." The disparity was thus obvious: unlike Narragansett Bay, northern New England was a land of cold climate and barren soil, populated by hostile natives. Summarizing his attitude toward this northern region, Verrazzano put it simply: "We did not find anything of great value in this land."[3]

Verrazzano's negative impression of the region notwithstanding, French traders and fishermen continued to visit northern New England throughout the sixteenth century. Moreover, during this time the French came to exert far-reaching influence over the Micmac, who lived on Acadia and on the mainland just north of New England. As demand for beaver pelts increased in Europe, French traders realized that the Micmac were only too happy to exchange these pelts for such items as tools, weapons, clothing, and trinkets. The Micmac profited handsomely from this trade; and, armed with European steel weapons, they expanded their hunting territory at the expense of other northeastern native groups. But for the Micmac, the French trade also extracted a price. Over time, as the acquisition of beaver pelts became their principal economic activity, they came to depend on this trade. The natives stopped producing items that they could acquire from

---

[3] Verrazano, "Cellère Codex," 140-41; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 52-53.

the French, such as tools and utensils; by the end of the century, their knowledge of how to make these items was lost. Eventually, their devotion to beaver-hunting undermined even their procurement of food. As historian Neal Salisbury has noted, by the end of the sixteenth century the Micmac "were leading a precarious existence every winter, relying on the French and other outside sources of food for survival."[4]

While the French busied themselves in North America in the mid-sixteenth century, English involvement overseas was essentially limited to privateering. Indeed, more than a half-century after 1524, Verrazzano's discoveries remained largely unknown in England. But that situation would change, thanks in no small part to the work of an ardent proponent of English colonization in the New World, the Reverend Richard Hakluyt.

*

In 1582, Hakluyt published a translation of Verrazano's letter to Francis I in his landmark work, *Divers voyages touching the discoverie of America*. In so doing, Hakluyt introduced a generation of Englishmen to Verrazzano's description of what was then called Norumbega—the region now known as New England. Prospective colonizers quickly recognized the potential benefits of a colony in the region around Narragansett Bay, with its fertile soil and friendly, generous native inhabitants, who were so naïve that they treasured "little bells, blue crystals, and other trinkets" but were uninterested in silk cloth, gold, or armaments. In 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert led an expedition of five ships to Norumbega, carrying a patent from Elizabeth I granting him and his heirs "full power and free libertie . . . to enjoye to his and their owne use" what was then called the Dee

---

[4] Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 55-57.

River—today's Taunton River, in Narragansett Bay. Gilbert's voyage was a fiasco. Two ships were forced to turn back before reaching North America; then the 120-ton *Delight* ran aground near Nova Scotia, losing ninety-six men and most of the expedition's supplies. At this point, Gilbert and Edward Hayes—the captains of the two remaining ships—decided to abandon the project and head back to England. On the return trip, Gilbert's vessel disappeared during a storm off the Azores; only Hayes's *Golden Hind* returned home safely. Hakluyt, ever the colonial publicist, published Hayes's account of the fateful voyage in 1589 in his *Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*.[5]

Hakluyt's works stirred the imaginations of young Englishmen, such as Bartholomew Gosnold, who longed for adventure on the high seas and in America. In fact, Gosnold probably knew both Hakluyt and Hayes personally, and it is likely that he heard Hakluyt extol the virtues of Norumbega as a place for English colonization firsthand. By 1602 Gosnold, financially backed by the Earl of Southampton, was ready to lead his own colonizing expedition. On March 26, he and a crew of thirty-two men sailed from Falmouth with one ship, the *Concord*, intending to establish a permanent English settlement in the region secured by Gilbert's patent. Travelling directly westward from the Azores—a transatlantic route not used by previous British explorers—Gosnold

[5] "Relation of John Varrazanus, a Florentine, of the lande by him discovered in the name of his Majestie . . ." (1524), in Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, 55-71; Warner Foote Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold, Discoverer and Planter: New England—1602, Virginia—1607*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), 3, 6-7, 54, 219n1; "Agreement between Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Sir George Peckham and George Peckham, 28 February 1583," in *Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert*, ed. David Beers Quinn (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940), 2:342-43; Edward Hayes, "A report of the voyage and successe thereof, attempted in the yeere of our Lord 1583 by sir Humphrey Gilbert . . . ," in *The Principall Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation* . . . , ed. Richard Hakluyt (1589; repr., New York: August M. Kelley, 1969), 8:34-77.

arrived off the coast of Maine on May 14. The Englishmen were immediately met by a boat "having eight persons in it, whom we supposed at first to bee Christians distressed. But approaching us neare, wee perceived them to bee Savages." Clearly, these natives had encountered Europeans before—they came out to greet the *Concord* in a "Biscay shallop with saile and Oares" and "spake divers Christian words, and seemed to understand much more than we, for want of Language could comprehend." Gosnold did not linger off the Maine coast, but headed south in search of the "excellent harbor" Verrazano had described. In so doing, he discovered and named Cape Cod, then sailed around the dangerous shoals off the coasts of Massachusetts and Nantucket before exploring Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Sound. [6]

After reconnoitering Buzzards Bay—which he apparently mistook for Narragansett Bay—Gosnold decided to erect the English "Fort and place of abode" on "Elizabeths Iland" (modern Cuttyhunk) at the bay's entrance. In his account of the voyage (later published by Hakluyt), John Brereton acclaimed the island's agricultural potential, calling its soil "fat and lustie" and noting that "in comparison whereof, the most fertile part of all England is (of it selfe) but barren." Brereton also praised the local natives: "These people, as they are exceeding courteous, gentle of disposition, and well conditioned, excelling all others that we have seene; so for shape of bodie and lovely

---

[6] Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold*, 26-35, 51-57; Gabriel Archer, "The Relation of Captaine Gosnol's Voyage to the North Part of Virginia," in *Forerunners and Competitors of the Pilgrims and Puritans*, ed. Charles Herbert Levermore (Brooklyn, 1912), 1:44-45. As Gookin notes, before Gosnold, British mariners sailed from the Azores "on the starboard tack, which took them far to the south before they crossed to the Americas in the tropics. Gosnold saw from his charts that a long reach on the port tack would take him westerly to the part of the coast in the temperate zone on which he wished to land." Thus, sailing westerly from the Azores, the *Concord* "was off for America through uncharted waters. No Englishman had made that turn at the Azores before him" (85).

favour, I think they excel all the people of America.” The English traded with the natives for furs, including “Beavers . . . Otters, Wild-cat skinnes very large and deep Furre, blacke Foxes . . . Deere skinnes very large, Seale skinnes, and other beasts skinnes, to us unknowen.” Indeed, of the natives, Brereton even claimed “we became very great friends.” This friendship notwithstanding, the Englishmen were not taking any chances: They “spent three weeks and more” building their stronghold, all the while “being loth [the natives] should discover our fortification.”[7]

In addition to fertile soil and friendly natives, Brereton commented on the health benefits of life in New England. These accrued both to natives, who were “of a perfect constitution of body, active, strong, healthfull, and very wittie,” and for Englishmen:

> we found our health & strength all the while we remained there, so to renew and increase, as notwithstanding our diet and lodging was none of the best, yet not one of our company (God be thanked) felt the least grudging or inclination to any disease or sicknesse, but were much fatter and in better health than when we went out of *England*.”

Thus, Brereton’s narrative—a promotional account, designed to encourage investment in future North American colonizing schemes—portrayed Elizabeth Island as a productive, nourishing utopia inhabited by affable natives. Yet the English settlement was abandoned after less than a month. Gosnold’s plan had been for twenty men, himself included, to remain in New England as colonists. On June 18, 1602, however, the *Concord* departed for England, loaded with “so much Sassafras, Cedar, Furres, Skinnes, and other commodities, as were thought convenient”—and with all thirty-two seamen on board. As Brereton explained,

---

[7] Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold*, 4-5; Archer, “Captaine Gosnol’s Voyage,” 49; John Brereton, “A Briefe and true Relation of the Discoverie of the North part of Virginia” (1602), in *Sailors’ Narratives of Voyages along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (1905; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 39-46.

> some of our company that had promised captaine *Gosnold* to stay, having nothing but a saving voyage in their minds, made our company of inhabitants (which was small enough before) much smaller; so as captaine *Gosnold* seeing his whole strength to consist but of twelve men, and they but meanly provided, determined to return for *England*.

Just why so many intrepid men would suddenly desire nothing more than a "saving voyage" back to England, Brereton did not say.[8] But another account of the voyage exists.

Like Brereton, Gabriel Archer was a member of Gosnold's crew who wrote a relation of the voyage in 1602. Unlike Brereton's account, however, Archer's manuscript was kept secret until 1625, when it was finally published by Samuel Purchas. Archer claimed that the English quit their colonial project because they were insufficiently supplied with "victuals," owing to the (perhaps deliberate) faulty planning of Captain Bartholomew Gilbert, the expedition's commissary officer. Similarly, Gosnold, in a letter to his father, also mentioned that having "taken view of our victual, we judged it then needful to use expedition." But inadequacy of foodstuffs seems an unlikely explanation for the colonists' precipitous departure, given the bountiful supplies of game, fish, clams, berries, and nuts that would have been available on Cuttyhunk. Moreover, the colonists quite possibly could have obtained corn from local natives, as would future generations of English settlers in New England. In all, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion of historian Phillip Barbour: "Something besides food surely took Gosnold back to England."[9]

---

[8] Brereton, "Briefe and true Relation," 47-48; Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold*, 187.

[9] Archer, "Captaine Gosnol's Voyage," 52, Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold,* 156-58, 248n6.

Archer tied the discovery of the food shortage on June 8 to the colonists' decision to return to England on June 13. But something else happened between June 8 and June 13, and it probably had everything to do with the colonists' decision to leave. On June 10, Gosnold sailed to a neighboring islet "to take in Cedar wood, leaving [Archer] and nine more in the Fort, onely with three meales meate, upon promise to return the next day." When Gosnold did not return as scheduled, Archer "commanded foure of my companie to seeke out for Crabs, Lobsters, Turtles, &c. for sustayning us till the ships returne." The four men split into two groups of two, and then "One of these petie companies was assaulted by foure Indians, who with Arrowes did shoot and hurt one of the two in his side, the other, a lusty and nimble fellow, leapt in and cut their Bow-strings, whereupon they fled." The two Englishmen spent that miserable night "driven to lie all night in the Woods, not knowing the way home thorow the thick rubbish, as also the weather somewhat stormie," while those in the fort despaired for their colleagues, "not able to conjecture anything of them unless very evill." Thankfully, Archer's two companions returned to the fort on June 12, as did Gosnold. But the very next day "beganne some of our companie that before vowed to stay, to make revolt: whereupon the planters diminishing, all was given over."[10]

Thus Archer's manuscript makes clear what was not mentioned in Brereton's narrative or Gosnold's letter: the decision to abandon the settlement on Cuttyhunk occurred in the immediate aftermath of an attack by the local natives. Moreover, the fact that the Englishmen were assaulted while trying to obtain food underscores the significance of their inadequate stores of "victuals." As abundant as the island's wild

---

[10] Archer, "Captaine Gosnol's Voyage," 53-54.

food sources might have been, attacks like this one would surely make the colonists think twice about venturing forth to collect them again. The omission of such a critical event from Brereton's manuscript was surely no accident. Hakluyt, who edited Brereton's manuscript before its publication, was a passionate advocate of English colonization in North America. Because he did not wish to advertise the fact that American natives were capable of disrupting a colonial endeavor, he excluded the story of the native attack from Brereton's published narrative. Moreover, he made certain that Archer's manuscript, which was prepared for publication in 1602, remained unpublished for more than two decades. Not until 1625 would Samuel Purchas publish Archer's *Relation of Captaine Gosnol's Voyage*—by which time Plymouth Colony was thriving, and Hakluyt was long since dead.[11]

*

Gosnold's experience on Cuttyhunk did not dissuade colonial advocates, such as Hakluyt and Sir Walter Raleigh, or the Bristol merchants who financed their enterprises, from their commitment to planting a colony in New England. In April 1603, Raleigh and Hakluyt sent Martin Pring forth with two ships and about forty men to explore Cape Cod Bay, "that great Gulfe which Captaine Gosnold over-shot the yeere before." Whether this voyage was aimed at establishing a colony or simply gathering reconnaissance is unclear; indeed, Pring's account suggests that his primary objective was to obtain sassafras, "a plant of sovereigne vertue for the French Poxe [syphilis], and . . . against the Plague and many other Maladies." Pring dropped anchor "in a certain Bay, which we called Whitson Bay," where "sufficient quantitie of Sassafras" could be found on shore. During their stay

---

[11] Gookin, *Bartholomew Gosnold,* 75, 177-87. Hakluyt died in 1616.

in New England, the English also "sowed Wheate, Barley, Oates, Pease, and sundry sorts of Garden Seeds," which "came up very well, giving certaine testimonie of the goodnesse of the Climate and of the Soyle."[12]

Whatever their purpose, the presence of Englishmen on Cape Cod did not pass unnoticed by the local natives. According to Pring, "the people of the Countrey came to our men sometimes ten, twentie, fortie or three-score, and at one time one hundred and twentie at once." Pring described relations with the natives as friendly, noting that the English "used them kindly, and gave them divers sorts of our meanest Merchandize. They did eat Pease and Beanes with our men." English actions, however, revealed that they regarded the natives warily. For one thing, Pring "thought it convenient to make a small baricado to keep diligent watch and ward in" while the men gathered sassafras in the woods. Moreover, the English brought with them two large mastiffs, "of whom the Indians were more afraid then of twentie of our men." Revealing something of his attitude toward the natives, Pring stated that "when we would be rid of the Savages company wee would let loose the Mastives, and suddenly with out-cryes they would flee away."[13]

Within two months of their arrival, the local natives had apparently tired of the English presence on Cape Cod. One July afternoon, while most of the men were gathering sassafras, "about seven score Savages armed with Bowes and Arrowes" surrounded the English fort. In response, Pring "caused a piece of great Ordnance to bee

---

[12] Martin Pring, "A Voyage Set out from the Citie of Bristoll . . . in the Yeere 1603 under the Command of Me Martin Pring," in Levermore, *Forerunners and Competitors*, 1:60-65. On the location of Pring's landfall, see David B. Quinn, "Martin Pring at Provincetown in 1603?" *New England Quarterly* 40 (March 1967): 79-91. Whereas previous historians placed Pring at Plymouth Bay, Quinn cites ample evidence that he anchored in Provincetown Harbor.

[13] Pring, "Voyage," 62-64.

shot off, to give terrour to the Indians, and warning to our men . . . in the Woods." After a second shot, the Englishmen "betooke them to their weapons" and called for their mastiffs, at which point the natives "in dissembling manner . . . turned all to a jest and sport, and departed away in friendly manner." But the natives were not finished, for in early August "they set fire on the Woods where wee wrought, which wee did behold to burne for a mile space." The next day, the English weighed anchor and headed for home. Seeing the English depart, the natives "came downe to the shoare in greater number, to wit, very neere two hundred by our estimation, and some of them came in their Boates to our ship, and would have had us come in againe: but we sent them backe, and would none of their entertainment."[14]

*

As Pring sailed for America in 1603, news of the death of Elizabeth I was just spreading across England. By the time he returned, the reign of James I had begun. This was a time of ascendant fortune for Sir Ferdinando Gorges, a wealthy Englishman who, just a few years earlier, had been imprisoned as a suspected co-conspirator in the Earl of Essex's plot to overthrow Queen Elizabeth. But he had since obtained a pardon and, with James's accession, had been restored to his position as commander of the fort in Plymouth. Gorges was an ardent proponent of English colonization in North America, and he actively employed his considerable financial resources to fund transatlantic ventures toward that end.[15]

---

[14] Pring, "Voyage," 66-68.

[15] Henry O. Thayer, ed., *The Sagadahoc Colony, Comprising The Relation of a Voyage into New England; (Lamberth Ms.) with an Introduction and Notes* (Portland, Maine: Gorges Society, 1892), 20-21.

In 1605, Gorges dispatched George Waymouth with a single vessel, the *Archangel*, and twenty-nine seamen to explore northern New England. They arrived on present-day Monhegan island, off the coast of Maine, in late May, and then proceeded to explore what they called the Sagadahoc River—today's Kennebec River. James Rosier, who wrote the only known account of the voyage, was duly impressed by the Sagadahoc, which featured "more good harbours for ships of all burthens, than England can affoord and far more secure from all winds and weathers than any in England, Scotland, France or Spaine." He also praised the "very good ground, pleasant and fertile" of the surrounding countryside, "which might in small time with few men be cleansed and made good arable land: but as it now is will feed cattell of all kindes with fodder enough for Summer and Winter."[16]

Inevitably, Waymouth's crew came into contact with the local Abenaki natives. At first, relations between the two groups were harmonious; Rosier even noted "the kinde civility we found in a people, where we little expected any sparke of humanity." And the trading was profitable: at one exchange, "for knives, glasses, combes and other trifles to the valew of foure or five shillings, we had 40 good Beavers skins, Otters skins, Sables, and other small skins, which we knewe not how to call." Nevertheless, as their sojourn continued into June, Waymouth's crew began to suspect that the natives were setting a trap for them. Acting preemptively, the Englishmen "determined so soone as we could to take some of them, least (being suspitious we had discovered their plots) they should absent themselves from us." They enticed three natives aboard their ship, then "five or

[16] James Rosier, "A True Relation of the most prosperous voyage made this present yeere 1605, by Captaine George Waymouth, in the Discoverie of the land of Virginia" (1605), in *Sailors' Narratives of Voyages along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*, ed. George Parker Winship (1905; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 134-37.

sixe of us" forcibly abducted two more natives from the shore—an act Rosier described as "a matter of great importance for the full accomplement of our voyage." Rosier justified the seizure of these "savages" by noting that they belonged to a "purblind generation, whose understanding it hath pleased God so to darken, as they can neither discerne, use, or rightly esteeme the valuable riches in middest whereof they live . . . nor acknowledging the Deity of the Almighty giver."[17]

Even if the natives could not appreciate the "pleasant fertility" of their land, they certainly could serve some useful purposes for the English. Specifically, Rosier noted that the captives could provide "further instruction, concerning all the premised particulars, as also of their governours, and government, situation of townes, and what else shall be convenient, which by no meanes otherwise we could by any observation of our selves learne in a long time." Thus it was that, once back in England, Waymouth handed his captives over to his sponsor, Sir Ferdinando Gorges. The knowledge Gorges gained from Waymouth's captives added fuel to his desire to plant a colony in New England. In fact, Gorges's machinations would take two of the kidnapped natives, Tahenedo (in 1606) and Skidwarres (in 1607), back to New England, in the role of guides and emissaries for subsequent English voyages.[18]

On April 10, 1606, James I certified two charters granting the Plymouth Company and the London Company rights to establish colonies in North America. Gorges, a leading figure in the Plymouth Company, acted quickly, dispatching two ships to New England just four months later. It is not clear whether this expedition was supposed to

[17] Rosier, "True Relation," 127-42.

[18] Rosier, "True Relation," 142-43; Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 20-21.

establish a colony or simply to gather reconnaissance. In any event, the *Richard*, under the command of Henry Challons, was driven off course by storms and then was captured by a Spanish fleet in November, effectively scuttling any intended colonial endeavors for the time being. The other ship, under the command of Thomas Hanham and Martin Pring, managed to reach the Maine coast and, following up on Waymouth's discoveries of the previous year, explored the Sagadahoc River. Deprived of the resources and colonists stored on the *Richard*, however, Hanham and Pring could do little more than write a detailed narrative of their findings and return to England.[19]

*

Fortified with the knowledge gained from the Waymouth and Hanham/Pring voyages, Gorges sent two more ships, the *Gift of God* and the *Mary and John*, to New England in 1607, this time with the unmistakable purpose of establishing a permanent settlement near the mouth of the Sagadahoc River. Most of what is known about this voyage comes from the journal of one of its participants, James Davies, whose narrative also provided the basis for accounts of the journey written by Samuel Purchas in 1614 and William Strachey in 1618.[20] The expedition consisted of between 100 and 120 men and was led by two particularly well-connected individuals: George Popham, nephew of

---

[19] Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 10-12.

[20] In the 1624 edition of *Purchas, His Pilgrimes*, Purchas cited some of his primary sources: "I had the voyage of Capt. Thos. Hanham written by himself unto Sagadahoc; also the journals of Master Rawley Gilbert . . . of James Davies, John Eliot, &c. I have the voyage of Master Edward Harlie one of the first who went with Popham and Nicholas Hobson to those parts in 1611, with divers letters from Capt. Popham and others" (quoted in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 89-90). Moreover, Thayer notes Strachey's reliance on the Davies manuscript: "Many sentences are transferred complete, others with slight changes . . . . [T]he arrangement is so clear that the two cannot be independent narrations. Strachey, however, must have had other sources of information—memoranda or log-books of the voyage." See Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 15-19, 114-15.

Sir Francis Popham, Chief Justice of the Realm; and Raleigh Gilbert, son of Sir Humphrey Gilbert. After an eight-week Atlantic crossing, the colonists dropped anchor in the Sagadahoc River in mid-August, selected a site on Sabino Point for their settlement and "began to fortefye" their position. By early October, they had "fully finished the fort, trencht and fortefied it with twelve pieces of ordinaunce, and built fifty howses, therein, besides a church and a storehowse." But the colonists were not prepared for the unusually cold winter of 1607-08, which Purchas described as "fit to freeze the heart of a Plantation." George Popham, the colony's first president, died in February 1608, leaving Raleigh Gilbert in command of the fledgling settlement. During the summer of 1608, Gilbert received word "that his brother was newly dead, and a faire portion of land fallen unto his share, which required his repaier home [to England]." At this point, the colony's fate was sealed, as "the company by no means would stay any longer in the country." Strachey lists Gilbert's departure for England, along with Popham's death, the colonists' inability to find any "mynes . . . nor hope thereof," and "the feare that all other wynters would prove like the first," as key factors in the colonists' decision to abandon their fort on the Sagadahoc.[21]

The aforementioned factors notwithstanding, the local Abenaki natives also appear to have played a crucial role in forcing the colonists to leave Sagadahoc. Davies portrayed relations between the colonists and natives as friendly during the settlers' first

---

[21] James Davies, "The Relation of a Voyage unto New England. Began from the *Lizard*, ye first of June 1607, By Captn. Popham" (1607), in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony,* 35-76; Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrimes* (1614), quoted in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 89-90; William Strachey, *The Historie of Travaile into Virginia Brittania: Expressing the Cosmographie and Commodities of the Country, Together with the Manners and Customes of the People* (c. 1618), ed. R. H. Major (London: Hakluyt Society, 1849), 179-80. The exceptionally cold winter of 1607-08 was a global phenomenon, apparently related to unusually strong El Niño conditions in the southern Pacific Ocean. See Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, 167-69.

two months at Sagadahoc. In September, for example, the colonists entertained and traded with a visiting troupe of "near fortye persons men women & Children . . . we aggain ussed them in all frindly manner We Could & gave them vyttails for to eatt." But relations were probably strained after several colonists, led by Gilbert, missed their planned rendezvous with local natives who were to lead them up the Penobscot River to trade with Bashaba, "the Cheefe Comander of those parts." At this point, the Abenaki may well have decided that the French were more reliable trading partners than these English interlopers and that the benefits of allowing the English to stay in New England were not worth the risks. In his private correspondence, Gorges expressed his worry that "the french ar in hande with the natives, to practise upon us, promisinge them, if they will put us out of the Contry, and not trade with none of oures, they will come unto them and give the succors agaynst theyr Enemyes." In fact, this concern was entirely justified. By this time, French traders had not only transformed the lives of the Micmac, but had also made substantial inroads with their neighbors to the south, the hunting-gathering Abenaki of northern New England. Like the Micmac, the Abenaki traded furs for European goods, which they in turn traded to the farming natives of southern New England in exchange for corn.[22]

Samuel Purchas, for his part, ascribed native resistance not to French influence, but rather to the sway of an "evil spirit" that "commanded them not to dwell near or come among the English, threatening to kill some and inflict sickness on others . . . saying he had power and would do like to the English the next moon, to wit, in December."

[22] Davies, "Relation," 71-72; Gorges to Sir Robert Cecil, February 7, 1608, in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 137-39; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence,* 77.

But whether they were encouraged by French traders, evil spirits, or their own perceived self-interests (or perhaps some combination of these), it seems clear that the Abenaki conspired to make the English feel unwelcome in Maine. One incident, described in Strachey's narrative, demonstrated that while relations between the English and Abenaki seemed amicable on the surface, this appearance masked a deeper tension undergirding these relationships. In late September, Gilbert led a party of twenty colonists on an exploratory trip up the Sagadahoc, where they met "Sebenoa . . . lord of the river Sachadadoc," who led them to his village. There the English saw "neere fifty able men very strong and tall . . . all newly painted and armed with their bowes and arrowes." The visit was ostensibly friendly, and the natives "made shew that they would come downe to the boat and there bring such things as they had to exchange them for ours." But after the colonists returned to the boat, sixteen natives arrived "and brought with them some tobacco and certayne small skynes, which were of no value." Suspecting duplicity on the natives' part, Gilbert ordered his men into their shallop and prepared to depart. In response, Sabenoa's men "subtilely devised how they might put out the fier in the shallop, by which meanes they sawe they should be free from the danger of our men's pieces." One particularly bold native "came into the shallop and taking the fier brand which one of our company held in his hand . . . he presently threw it into the water and leapt out of the shallop." With their cannon thus disabled, the English were in a precarious situation. Gilbert sent one man "to stepp on the shore for more fier," but "the salvadges resisted him and would not suffer him to take any, and some others holding fast the boat roap that the shallop could not putt off." At this point, "Captain Gilbert caused the musquettiers to present their peeces." The natives, in turn, "presently lett goe the

boatroap and betooke them to their bowes and arrowes, and ran into the bushes, nocking their arrowes, but did not shoot, neither did ours at them. So the shallop departed from them to the further side of the river." With the standoff over, another group of natives approached the colonists in a canoe "and would have excused the fault of the others. Captain Gilbert made shew as if he were still friends, and entertayned them kindlye and soe left them."[23]

Apart from this incident, Strachey's narrative offers no further evidence of difficulties between natives and Englishmen at Sagadahoc. But Strachey's manuscript, like Brereton's relation of the Gosnold journey five years earlier, was a promotional account, designed to encourage future investment in North American colonizing schemes; as such, it was not likely to feature stories of hostile natives disrupting a European settlement. Other sources, however, indicate that as relations between the colonists and the Abenaki deteriorated, the natives carried out violent attacks against the colonists. Purchas, for example, noted that one colonist, "Mr. Patterson was slain by the savages of Nahoc."[24] Surely the death of even a single Englishman at the hands of the natives would have caused some trepidation among the remaining settlers, and might have even inspired some to leave. But the situation may have been even worse than Purchas acknowledged.

In a 1612 letter, the French Jesuit missionary Pierre Biard reported the local natives' version of what had transpired at Sagadahoc. The natives told Biard that Popham

---

[23] Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrimes* (1614), quoted in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 88; Strachey, *Historie of Travaile*, 176-77. The standoff with the natives is not described in the Davies manuscript, which terminates abruptly after the appearance of Sabenoa on September 26, 1607. Strachey, then, must have had access to a previous, intact version of Davies's journal. See Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 114-15.

[24] *Purchas, His Pilgrimes*, quoted in Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 88-89.

was “a very honest man, who got along remarkably well with the natives of the country.” Nonetheless, the Abenaki “were afraid of such neighbors, and so put the captain to death.” Then, under Gilbert, the English “changed their tactics. They drove the Savages away without ceremony; they beat, maltreated and misused them outrageously and without restraint.” Accordingly, the natives, “anxious about the present, and dreading still greater evils in the future, determined, as the saying is, to kill the whelp ere its teeth and claws became stronger.” When the Abenaki saw a chance to do just this, they seized the moment:

> The opportunity came one day when three boat-loads of [colonists] went away off to the fisheries. My [native] conspirators followed in their boat, and approaching with a great show of friendliness (for they always make the greatest show of affection when they are the most treacherous), they go among them, and at a given signal each one seizes his man and stabs him to death. Thus were eleven Englishmen dispatched. The others were intimidated and abandoned their enterprise the same year; they have not resumed it since, being satisfied to come in the summer to fish.

Thus, according to Biard’s report, the natives killed not one, but eleven Englishmen, including the colony’s president. Furthermore, the natives were convinced that their actions—not the cold winter, or the death of Gilbert’s brother in England—had driven the English away from Sagadahoc. Writing in 1616, Biard reiterated this belief and contrasted the English treatment of the natives with that of the French:

> These people [the Abenaki] do not seem to be bad, although they drove away the English who wished to settle among them in 1608 and 1609 [sic]. They made excuses to us for this act, and recounted the outrages that they had experienced from these English; and they flattered us, saying they loved us very much, because they knew we would not close our doors to the Savages as the English did, and that we would not drive them from our table with blows from a club, nor set our dogs upon them.[25]

---

[25] Pierre Biard to the Reverend Father Provincial, Port Royal, January 31, 1612, in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York: Pageant Book Co, 1959), 2:45-

Of course, French informants might be expected to portray English colonists in the worst possible light; but other sources have also attributed the abandonment of Sagadahoc to native hostility. In 1677, the Puritan chronicler William Hubbard published this story:

> It is reported by an Ancient Mariner yet living in these parts, a person of good Credit . . . he heard an old Indian tell this story; that when he was a youth, there was a Fort built about Saga-de-hock . . . and possessed for some time by the English: But afterward upon some Quarrel that fell out betwixt the Indians and them, the English were some of them killed by the said Indians and the rest all driven out of the fort.

The natives' victory came at a high price, however. As Hubbard reported, after the colonists fled,

> there was much left of their Provisions and Ammunition; amongst which there was some barrels of Powder; but after [the natives] had opened them not knowing what to do therewith, they left the barrels carelessly open, and scattered the Powder about, so as accidentally it took Fire; and they blew up all that was in the Fort, burnt and destroyed many of the Indians, upon which they conceived their God was angry with them for doing hurt to the English.

Finally, in 1792, James Sullivan related the following account of a remarkable event that reportedly occurred at Sagadahoc:

> There was a tradition amongst the Norridgewalk Indians, that these [Sagadahoc] planters invited a number of the natives, who had come to trade with them, to draw a small cannon by a rope, and that when they were arranged on a line in this process, the white people discharged the piece, and thereby killed and wounded several of them. . . . The story is, that the resentment of the natives, consequent to this treacherous murder, obliged the Europeans to re-embark the next summer.

As historian Henry O. Thayer noted in 1892, this story's "origin, and continuance for more than a century, is a fact to be accounted for."[26] That said, it is certainly consistent

---

47; Pierre Biard, "Relation of New France of its Lands, Nature of the Country, and of its Inhabitants" (1616), in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 3:223.

[26] William Hubbard, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England, From the First Settlement to the Termination of the War With King Philip, in 1677* (1677), ed. Samuel G. Drake

with the general pattern of other narratives describing the deterioration of relations between English and natives at Sagadahoc. Considering the accumulated evidence in the narratives of Davies, Strachey, Purchas, Biard, Hubbard, and Sullivan, it difficult not to conclude that English-native relations at Sagadahoc quickly soured, and that native hostility was a major factor—indeed, the principal reason—behind the colonists' decision to abandon their fledgling settlement in 1608.

The Sagadahoc colonists, of course, were hardly unique in this regard. As we have seen, native hostility disrupted all attempts by Europeans to settle in northeastern North America form the time of the Vikings through the early seventeenth century. As Popham's colony foundered, the seeds of the first successful European colonies in North America were just taking root to the south, at Jamestown, and to the north, at Quebec. But despite the efforts of colonial advocates, such as Hakluyt and Gorges, and of intrepid explorers, such as Gosnold, Pring, Waymouth, and Popham, Norumbega remained firmly under the control of the local natives. Though French and English fishers and traders continued to visit the region, the Sagadahoc venture was the last serious attempt at establishing a colony there for over a decade. Then, in 1621, a group of English religious dissenters arrived in southern New England and established the first permanent European colony in the region, at a place they called Plymouth. By the time these colonists landed in New England, the natives' situation had drastically deteriorated from what it had been two decades earlier, thanks to the intervention of a European epidemic disease. But

(1865; repr. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2002), 251; [James Sullivan], "A Topographical Description of Georgetown," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st ser. 1 (1792): 252; Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 107-8.

before telling that story, it will be useful to review the situation of the natives of southern New England before 1616, when things went so horribly awry.

*

Before the arrival of Europeans, southern New England was anything but an empty wilderness; on the contrary, as Verrazzano noted in 1524, it was densely settled with human inhabitants. While staying among the natives at Narragansett Bay, Verrazzano commented, “In each house there lives a father with a very large family, for in some we saw XXV[twenty-five] to XXX [thirty] people.” In later decades, other European explorers also remarked on the large numbers of people they saw in southern New England. In 1605, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain surveyed the Massachusetts coast, where he observed “a great many little houses” and “a great deal of land cleared up and planted with Indian corn.” Upon reaching modern-day Boston Harbor, Champlain was greeted by a host of “fifteen or sixteen canoes of savages,” some of which contained as many as “fifteen or sixteen” men. At what is now Stage Harbor in Chatham, Massachusetts, Champlain observed “some five to six hundred savages” who were, he duly noted, “all naked except their sexual parts.” And on a 1614 voyage to New England, Captain John Smith found that in “the Countrie of the *Massachusets,* which is the Paradise of all those parts. . . . The Sea Coast as you passe, shewes you all along large corne fields, and great troupes of well proportioned people.”[27]

---

[27] Verrazano, “Cellère Codex,” 139; *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain*, 1604-1618, ed. W. L. Grant (1619; repr. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 66-67, 95; John Smith, *A Description of New England: Or, the Observations, and Discoveries, of Captain John Smith (Admirall of that Country) in the North of America* . . . (1616; repr. Boston: William Veazie, 1865), 37.

Despite the observations of Verrazzano, Champlain, and Smith, scholars have long debated the question of just how many natives lived in New England before 1616. In 1674, the Puritan chronicler Daniel Gookin published a report, based on interviews with older natives, claiming that the five "principal nations" of southern New England natives—the Pawtucket, Massachusett, Pokanoket, Narragansett, and Pequot—together comprised about 18,000 adult male warriors before European contact. If one conservatively assumes a ratio of three to four dependents per warrior, then Gookin's figures imply that the total native population of southern New England numbered between 72,000 and 90,000 in the early seventeenth century. Gookin's numbers, however, were dismissed by nineteenth-century historians, such as Albert Gallatin and John Gorham Palfrey, who blithely asserted that the total population of southern New England could not have exceeded 30,000 to 50,000 souls. Then, in 1928, the ethnographer James Mooney's "provisional detailed estimates" of North American native population were posthumously published. Mooney estimated the total native population for *all* of North America north of Mexico to be about one million, of whom merely 25,000 lived in New England. Although his report cited only scant evidence to support such low population estimates, Mooney's numbers went unchallenged for nearly half a century, influencing the work of respected scholars such as Alfred Louis Kroeber and Alden T. Vaughan.[28] Over the past several decades, however, anthropologists and

---

[28] Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians of New England* . . . (ms. 1674; orig. pub. 1792; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1972), 7-9; Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 26-29; Albert Gallatin, *A synopsis of the Indian tribes within the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, and in the British and Russian possessions in North America* (1836; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1973), 37; John Gorham Palfrey, *History of New England* (1858; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1966), 1:24; James Mooney, "The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico," *Smithsonian Historical Collections* 80, no. 7 (1928): 1-4; Alfred Louis Kroeber, *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America*, vol. 38 of *University of California*

historians following the lead of Henry F. Dobyns have argued that precontact native populations throughout the Americas were considerably larger than previously thought; thus Mooney's estimate has been supplanted by the substantially higher calculations of modern scholars.[29] Sherburne F. Cook's 1976 analysis of documentary and archaeological evidence yields an estimate, similar to that implied by Gookin, of between 60,000 and 80,000 inhabitants in southern New England and southeastern New York in 1610. Subsequently, archaeologist Dean Snow and historian Neal Salisbury have argued for even higher population estimates of between 126,000 and 144,000. Quibbles over the precise number of inhabitants notwithstanding, modern scholars concur that before 1616, New England was a populous region.[30]

*

Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, ed. A. L. Kroeber, R. H. Lowe, and R. L. Olson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 131-77; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675,* 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 28-29.

[29] On precontact Native American population estimates, see Henry F. Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate," *Current Anthropology* 7 (September 1966): 395-449; Dobyns, *Their Number Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); William M. Denevan, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), xvii-xxix; and David P. Henige, *Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). Estimates of the native populations of the Americas in 1492 have ranged from as few as 8.4 million to as many as 113 million. Denevan's estimate of a population numbering between 43 and 65 million seems reasonable.

[30] Sherburne F. Cook, *The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 84; Dean R. Snow, *The Archaeology of New England* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 35; Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 24; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 22-30. Snow's 1980 estimate of the population of southern New England in 1600 was 105,200. Snow and Lanphear's 1988 revised population estimates indicate a population of 126,700 for this same region.

Although the natives' principal economic and social unit was the village, their villages were themselves subordinate (albeit loosely, at times) to larger confederacies, which Gookin termed "principal nations." Five such nations dominated southern New England in the early seventeenth century, three of which occupied coastal regions of present-day Massachusetts. According to Salisbury, each of these coastal nations had a total population of between 21,000 and 24,000 inhabitants before 1616. Furthest north were the Pawtucket (also called the Penacook), a confederacy of bands that extended from southern Maine to just north of Massachusetts Bay. To their south were the Massachusett, an ethnically homogeneous tribe that occupied the region from just below Salem to just north of Plymouth, centered on the eponymous bay. Furthest south were the Pokanoket (descendants of whom are also called Wampanoag), whose territory extended from the eastern shore of Narragansett Bay to Cape Cod and whose tributaries included the Nauset on Cape Cod and the natives of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Further inland, the Narragansett dominated the western shore of their eponymous bay and surrounding regions with an estimated population of between 35,000 and 40,000. Finally, the Pequot (including, for purposes of this estimate, the closely related Mohegan), with a population of 28,000 to 32,000, controlled most of the region now known as Connecticut.[31]

---

[31] Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 7-9; Kathleen Joan Bragdon, *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 28-30; Cook, *Indian Population of New England*, 13-14, 29, 35, 40, 46, 50-51. Population estimates cited are taken from Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 24-30. Some authors use the term "Wampanoag" interchangeably with "Pokanoket." One historian summarizes the complex relationship between the Pequot and Mohegan thusly: "[T]he Mohegans were never part of the Pequot sachemdom per se but were instead a distinct and separate kinship group loosely tied to the Pequots through intermarriage and through a tributary relationship with the Pequot principal sachem." Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 66. See also Cave,

Though they grouped themselves into these five principal nations, the southern New England natives were similar enough to be regarded as a single linguistic and cultural unit. Unlike the hunting-gathering Abenaki and Micmac to their north, the southern New England natives were semi-sedentary farmers whose subsistence was primarily derived from the cultivation of maize, beans, squash, and other plants, supplemented by protein from fish and game. Native villages generally comprised up to a few hundred inhabitants who were bound together largely by ties of kinship. Each village was ruled by a sachem, who derived power through hereditary succession and was responsible for coordinating hunting, conducting diplomacy, and dispensing justice. The natives were deeply spiritual people whose animistic religion focused on the "manitou" inherent in every plant, animal, and object. They actively modified their environment by clearing fields for planting and stripping forests for firewood. Moreover, they burned large sections of the woods surrounding their villages once or twice annually, producing forests of large, widely spaced trees with minimal shrubby undergrowth. The abundance of grass in these modified forests attracted large populations of various game animals, such as elk, deer, beaver, and hare, which provided the natives with meat for their diet and skins for their moccasins and clothing.[32]

Pequot War, 41-42, 66-68; and Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 48, 210, 289n11. On the defection of the Mohegan from the Pequot, see Chapter 5.

[32] Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, 27-31; Bragdon, *Columbia Guide*, 28-30; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 34-53; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 30-49. In northern New England, village leaders were called sagamores, rather than sachems. The Puritan theologian (and iconoclast) Roger Williams interpreted "manitou" to mean "god;" but, as Salisbury explains, it "actually referred to the manifestation of spiritual power, a manifestation that could occur in almost any form."

Internecine warfare was an integral part of the New England natives' experience before 1616. Micmac warriors frequently raided the Pawtucket and Massachusett villages to their south, and Mohawk attacks on villages in the Connecticut and Merrimac valleys were commonplace. Moreover, conflict among the five southern New England nations was not unknown. As Gookin noted, the coastal Pawtucket, Massachusett, and Pokanoket confederacies generally "held amity" with one another, while the Pokanoket "held war with the Narragansitts; and often joined with the Massachusetts, as friends and confederates against the Narragansitts." Still, while internecine confrontations must have been attended by some loss of life, they do not seem to have caused widespread social or economic disruption. Indeed, as archaeologist Dean Snow notes, "the last six centuries of prehistory appear to have been a period of peaceful growth and prosperity" for the southern New England natives."[33]

Alas, that was about to change.

*

During the sixteenth century, smallpox and other Old World epidemic diseases afflicted native populations in what is now the southern United States, from California to Florida. In contrast, the extent to which such diseases affected northeastern regions of North America before 1600 is less certain. Given that European traders and fishermen regularly visited the northeastern coast throughout the sixteenth century, it seems likely that localized epidemics, such as that documented among the Stadacona in 1535, occurred repeatedly. Because such epidemics may have occurred far from any European

---

[33] Sherburne F. Cook, "Interracial Warfare and Population Decline among the New England Indians," *Ethnohistory* 20 (Winter 1973): 3; Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 7-9; Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, 335.

eyewitnesses, their absence from written records is not surprising. The first well-documented effects of European disease in the northeast were noted among the Micmac, in the regions north of New England, in the early seventeenth century. In 1611, Samuel de Champlain noted that the number of Micmac who came to trade was sharply reduced from previous years, because "one of their chiefs and many of their tribe had died of a fever which had broken out amongst them." Indeed, according to Dean Snow's estimate, by then the total Micmac population was only 25 percent of what it had been a century earlier. As one native leader reported to the Jesuit missionary Pierre Biard, the Micmac in Acadia had once been "as thickly planted there as the hairs upon his head." However, their population had "diminished since the French have begun to frequent their country," owing to "pleurisy, quinsy and dysentery, which kill them off." During 1611 alone, Biard reported, "sixty have died at Cape de la Heve, which is the greater part of those who lived there." Despite the massive native losses, no Frenchmen became ill, a fact which Biard noted "has caused the Savages to apprehend that God protects and defends us as his favorite and well-beloved people."[34]

Whether epidemic disease appeared in New England in the sixteenth century is a subject of debate. For one thing, present-day scholars disagree over whether to accept Roger Williams's assertion that four separate epidemics afflicted the Narragansett in the second half of the sixteenth century. In a 1638 letter to John Winthrop, Williams

---

[34] Noble David Cook, *Born to Die*, 132-33, 154-62; Carlson, "Impact of Disease," 145-48; Warrick, "European Infectious Disease," 264; Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, 35-36; Samuel de Champlain, "The Voyages to the Great River St. Lawrence by the Sieur de Champlain, Captain in the Royal Navy, from the Year 1608 until 1612" (1613), in *The Works of Samuel De Champlain*, ed. Henry Percival Biggar (1925; repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 2:207; Biard to Christopher Balthazar, Port Royal, June 10, 1611, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 1:177.

mentioned that Narragansett elders drew a connection between earthquakes and epidemics:

> The younger natives are ignorant of the like: but the elder inform me that this is the fifth [earthquake] within these four score years in the land: the first about three score and ten years since: the second some three score and four years since, the third some fifty-four years since, the fourth some forty-six since: and they always observed either plague or pox or some other epidemical disease followed; three, four or five years after the Earthquake.

As anthropologists Dean R. Snow and Kim M. Lanphear note, this chronology "would imply that the Narragansett suffered epidemics in about 1568, 1574, 1584, and 1592." Snow and Lanphear discount this possibility, arguing that "Williams's earthquake epidemics do not stand up under rigorous testing," but other scholars have been reluctant to dismiss Williams's account entirely. As Catherine C. Carlson, George J. Armelagos, and Ann L. Magennis assert, "The association with earthquakes as disease causation may be questionable, but not the epidemics themselves. It seems reasonable that numerous localized epidemics probably occurred during this century due to contact with traders and fishermen." Dobyns, for his part, has argued that American pandemics of louse-borne typhus in 1586 and smallpox in 1592, both of which originated in Mexico, extended as far northward as southern New England. However, Snow and Lanphear vigorously dispute these claims, as they question both Dobyns's reading of primary and secondary sources and his interpretation of archaeological evidence. Instead, Snow and Lanphear assert that areas of relatively sparse native settlement created "large buffer zones" that impeded the spread of pandemics from southern portions of North America to the northeastern woodlands. Moreover, the archaeological evidence assembled by Ann

Ramenofsky does not support Dobyns's hypothesis that sixteenth-century epidemics extended to New England.[35]

The only documentary evidence supporting a New England epidemic prior to 1616 comes from Gookin's manuscript, which reported that "a very great number of [natives] were swept away by an epidemical and unwanted sickness, [about] 1612-1613."[36] Because Gookin wrote this in 1674, it is unclear to which epidemic he actually referred. Possibly it was the 1611 scourge among the Micmac, which might have extended into the northern portion of coastal New England; or perhaps it was an otherwise undocumented New England epidemic that began around 1612. Then again, it is possible that Gookin was simply confused about his dates. In that case, this "epidemical and unwanted sickness" might have started not in 1612, but in 1616.

---

[35] Williams to John Winthrop, June 1638, in *Letters of Roger Williams, 1632-1682, Now First Collected*, ed. John Russell Bartlett, vol. 6 of *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 99; Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 19-21; Carlson, "Impact of Disease," 147; Dobyns, *Their Number*, 15, 21, 314-18; Ramenofsky, *Vectors of Death*, 97-102, 131, 135-36.

[36] Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 8.

Chapter 3

"Doubtless it was Some Pestilential Disease": Plague, Pilgrims, and Pokanoket, 1616-1621

> The good hand of God now brought them to a country wonderfully prepared for their entertainment, by a sweeping *mortality* that had lately been among the natives.
>
> —Cotton Mather[1]

The extent to which Old World epidemic diseases penetrated the Northeast in the sixteenth century is, as we have seen, a subject of continuing scholarly debate. But in contrast to the disputes concerning possible earlier epidemics, there is little question that something cataclysmic happened in New England in the second decade of the seventeenth century. In just a few years, an epidemic disease decimated the natives along the coast from Maine to Massachusetts, killing as many as 95 percent of the population in some areas. Precisely when the epidemic began, and who was responsible for bringing it to New England, are impossible to determine with certainty. Still, one story concerning its origin bears repeating.

After Sagadahoc was abandoned in 1608, English interest in Norumbega was largely confined to trading and fishing for the next several years. But one Englishman who remained fascinated with the region's colonial potential was Captain John Smith, a man better remembered for his role in preventing the collapse of the Jamestown colony. Smith was the first person to use the term "New England" to describe the region formerly called Norumbega, and he published numerous tracts extolling its virtues. For example, in *A Description of New England*, Smith wrote:

> And surely by reason of those sandy cliffes and cliffes of rocks, both which we saw so planted with Gardens and Corne fields, and so well inhabited with a

[1] Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:51.

> goodly, strong and well proportioned people, besides the greatnesse of the Timber growing on them, the greatnesse of the fish and the moderate temper of the ayre . . . who can but approove this a most excellent place, both for health and fertility?

Above all, Smith viewed New England as ripe for English colonization. Indeed, he continued, "of all the foure parts of the world that I have yet seene not inhabited, could I have but meanes to transport a Colonie, I would rather live here then any where."[2]

In 1614, Smith led an expedition of two ships, with 45 men, to explore the coasts of present-day Maine and Massachusetts. Their mission, Smith reported, was "to take Whales and make tryalls of a Myne of Gold and Copper. If those failed, Fish and Furres was then our refuge." After mapping the coast and writing a description of the region and its inhabitants, Smith departed, leaving his lieutenant Thomas Hunt to transport their fishing catch to Malaga. Not content to take just fish, Hunt also kidnapped about twenty natives from the mainland, in the areas around Patuxet and Cape Cod. The local Nauset natives were understandably incensed by Hunt's treachery; as Smith later wrote, this kidnapping only encouraged them "to moove their hate against our Nation."[3]

The Nauset found an opportunity to vent their fury when a French ship wrecked on Cape Cod about two years later. According to an account left by the English merchant Thomas Morton, the natives "set upon the men, at such advantage, that they killed manie of them [and] burned their shipp." The five sailors who survived the assault were captured and distributed "unto five Sachems which were Lords of the severall territories adjoyninge, [who] did keepe them so longe as they lived." Morover, they "made these

---

[2]Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization," 75; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 97-100; Smith, *Description of New England*, 28.

[3] Smith, *Description of New England*, 19, 66; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 101. The Nauset were one of several village-bands that together comprised the Pokanoket confederacy.

five Frenchmen fetch them wood and water, which is the generall worke that they require of a servant." Eventually, one of the captives, "out livinge the rest had learned so much of their language, as to rebuke [the natives] for their bloudy deede, saying that God would be angry with them for it; and that hee would in his displeasure destroy them." Unimpressed, "the Salvages (it seemes boasting of their strength,) replyed and sayd, that they were so many, that God could not kill them." As subsequent events would demonstrate, however, the natives' complacency was ill-founded. Morton described what happened next:

> in short time after, the hand of God fell heavily upon them, with such a mortall stroake, that they died on heapes, as they lay in their houses[;] and the living, that were able to shift for themselves would runne away, & let them dy, and let there Carkasas ly above the ground without buriall.[4]

Morton was certainly typical of his Puritan contemporaries in attributing the natives' calamity to "the hand of God." Modern scholars offer a more prosaic explanation: the coastal natives of southern New England were wiped out by a devastating epidemic of a European infection. It is tempting to speculate that one of the five French captives unwittingly initiated the epidemic by transmitting a pathogenic microbe to his Nauset captors. The disease could then have spread, first through the Nauset village and then through the Pokanoket confederacy, before extending to the allied Massachusett and Pawtucket nations. Of course, the true source of the epidemic

[4] Morton, *New English Canaan*, 22-23. John Smith gave a slightly different version of these events in *Advertisements For the unexperienced Planters of New England, or anywhere* . . . (1631; repr. Boston: W. Veazie, 1865), 20. Nearly a century later, Cotton Mather reiterated Morton's story in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:51. Mather added that those natives "that were left alive, were smitten into awful and humble regards of the English, by the terrors which the remembrance of the Frenchman's prophesie had imprinted on them."

will probably never be known for certain, and it is even possible that more than one European brought infection to coastal New England around the same time. Moreover, the precise disease responsible for the epidemic remains a subject of ongoing debate, though the available evidence favors smallpox as the most likely etiology. But whatever its cause, the epidemic of 1616-19 completely transformed the demographic, social, and political landscape of New England, devastating the coastal natives and preparing the way for English colonization of the region.

*

The first European known to have directly witnessed the epidemic was Richard Vines, an agent of the Plymouth Company who was sent to New England by Sir Ferdinando Gorges. Vines and his men stayed among the natives near the mouth of the Saco River, in what is now southern Maine, during the winter of 1616-17. Although Vines's original notes have apparently been lost, a record of his observations appears in a later narrative by Gorges. According to this account, the local natives "were sore afflicted with the plague, so that the country was in a manner left void of inhabitants." Nonetheless, Gorges noted, "Vines and the rest with him" remained unaffected. Indeed, even though they "lay in the cabins with those people that died . . . (blessed be God for it), not one of them ever felt their heads to ache while they stayed there." The next original description of the epidemic comes from Thomas Dermer, another English captain sent to New England by Gorges. Describing the New England coast in 1619, Dermer portrayed a scene of desolation:

> I passed alongst the Coast where I found some antient plantations, not long since populous now utterly void; in other places a remnant remaines, but not free of sicknesse. Their disease the Plague, for wee might perceive the sores of some that escaped, who describe the spots of such as usually die.

One of Dermer's passengers was a Pokanoket native named Squanto, who had been among those kidnapped by Hunt in 1614. Upon returning to his home village of Patuxet, Squanto found that it had been wiped out by the epidemic. What must have been a devastating realization for him merited only a parenthetical mention in Dermer's letter to Samuel Purchas: "When I arrived at my savage's native Country (finding all dead) I travelled alongst a daies journey Westward, to a place called Nummastaquyt."[5]

As it turned out, however, Patuxet would not remain uninhabited for long.

*

While the natives in New England suffered and died, on the other side of the Atlantic a group of religious dissidents resolved to emigrate to North America. These were a congregation of English Separatists who have become known to American folklore and popular culture as the Pilgrims.[6] In England, as their leader William Bradford explained, they had "laboured to have the right worship of God and discipline of Christ established in the church, according to the simplicity of the gospel, without the mixture of men's inventions." But their efforts only invited harassment from an English

---

[5] Ferdinando Gorges, "A Briefe Narration of the Originall Undertakings of the Advancement of Plantations into the Parts of America, Especially, Shewing the Beginning, Progress, and Continuance of that of New-England" (1658) in *Sir Ferdinando Gorges and His Province of Maine, Including the Brief Relation, the Brief Narration, His Defence, the Charter Granted to Him, His Will, and His Letters*, ed. James Phinney Baxter (Boston: Prince Society, 1890), 2:19; Dermer to Samuel Purchas, May 19, 1619, in Levermore, *Forerunners and Competitors*, 2:579.

[6] The term "pilgrim" only appears once in William Bradford's 347-page chronicle of the Plymouth colonists. In describing this group's departure from Leyden, in the Netherlands, he wrote: "So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on these things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits." Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation,* 47. As Morison notes in his introduction to this work (xxxi), "The term *Pilgrim Fathers* was first applied exclusively to the *Mayflower* passengers in the celebration of 1799, but it was Bradford himself who first called himself and his companions Pilgrims."

government that, given the acrimonious ecclesiastical climate of the early seventeenth century, increasingly strove to enforce religious conformity (or at least the outward appearance thereof). Summarizing their predicament, Bradford wrote: "Religion hath been disgraced, the godly grieved, afflicted persecuted, and many exiled; sundry have lost their lives in prisons and other ways." Frustrated in England, in 1608 "they resolved to go into the Low Countries, where they heard was freedom of religion for all men." But while they did find a religious refuge in the Netherlands, after "some eleven or twelve years" there they "began to incline to this conclusion: of removal to some other place." Bradford cited "sundry weighty and solid reasons" for their emigration, including concerns over their limited employment opportunities in the overpopulated Netherlands and their fear that that "their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted" by amalgamation into the general Dutch population. At length they determined to head for "those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same."[7]

In leaving Holland for the distant American shore, the Pilgrims knew they were taking an enormous risk. In reply to those who questioned the wisdom of this move, Bradford later wrote:

> It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate. The difficulties were many, but not invincible. . . . True it was that such attempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground and reason; not rashly or lightly as many have done for curiosity or hope of gain, etc. But [the Pilgrims'] condition was not ordinary, their ends were good and honourable; their calling lawful, and urgent; and therefore they might expect the blessing of God in their proceeding. Yea,

[7] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 6-7, 10, 23-25.

> though they should lose their lives in this action, yet might they have comfort in the same, and their endeavors would be honourable.

Indeed, it was entirely plausible that the Pilgrims might lose their lives in this venture—not only because of the risks inherent in such an undertaking, but also owing to a combination of bad luck and poor planning that plagued them from the outset. The first leg of their adventure brought them to Southampton, where it became clear that both their financial backing and their stocks of provisions were wholly inadequate. In one letter "subscribed with many names of the chiefest of the company" the Pilgrims complained:

> We are in such a strait at present, as we are forced to sell away ₤60 worth of our provisions to clear the haven, and withal put ourselves upon great extremities, scarce having any butter, no oil, not a sole to mend a shoe, nor every man a sword to his side, wanting many muskets, much armour, etc. And yet we are willing to expose ourselves to such eminent dangers as are like to ensue, and trust to the good providence of God, rather than his name and truth should be evil spoken of for us.

In an August 1620 letter, Robert Cushman offered an even more somber assessment of his fellow Pilgrims' prospects in America:

> Friend, if ever we make a plantation, God works a miracle; especially considering how scant we shall be of victuals, and most of all ununited amongst ourselves, and devoid of good tutors and regiment. Violence will break all. . . . If I should write to you of all things which promiscuously forerun our ruin, I should over charge my weak head and grieve your tender heart; only this, I pray you prepare for evil tidings of us every day. . . . I see not in reason how we shall escape even the gasping of hunger starved persons; but God can do much, and his will be done.[8]

Insufficiently supplied though they were, and completely lacking cows or draft animals, the Pilgrims departed for America in early August 1620 in two ships, the 60-ton *Speedwell* and the 180-ton *Mayflower*. They were forced to turn back, not once, but twice, because the *Speedwell's* master "complained that his ship was so leaky that he

---

[8] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 27, 50; Robert Cushman to Edward Southworth, Dartmouth, August 17, 1620, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 56.

must bear up or sink at sea." To their great disappointment, they found that the *Speedwell* "would not prove sufficient for the voyage," and thus "resolved to dismiss her and part of the company, and proceed with the other ship." Finally the remaining 102 passengers left England in the *Mayflower* on September 6, far later than they had originally planned. During their transatlantic passage, they "they were encountered many times with cross winds, and met with many fierce storms," but only one passenger had died by the time they arrived off Cape Cod on November 9. From there they tacked southward, hoping "to find some place about Hudson's River for their habitation." This plan further revealed the Pilgrim's poor planning, for they were apparently unaware of the navigational hazards which lay off the southern coast of Massachusetts, even though Gosnold had described these nearly two decades earlier. Predictably, the colonists "fell amongst dangerous shoals and roaring breakers, and they were so far entangled therewith as they conceived themselves in great danger; and the wind shrinking upon them withal, they resolved to bear up again for the Cape."[9]

After beating a hasty retreat from the shoals off southern Massachusetts, the *Mayflower* dropped anchor just inside the tip of Cape Cod, in what is now Provincetown Harbor, on November 11, 1620. Then the colonists "fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven, who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof." Still, Bradford recognized just how precarious their situation was. In America, the Pilgrims "had now no friends to welcome them, nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies, no houses or much less towns to repair too, to seek for succour." Instead, they were surrounded by "savage

---

[9] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 51-60.

barbarians" who, in all probability, "were readier to fill their sides full of arrows then otherwise." Moreover, "it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast." As Bradford bleakly concluded, "which way soever [the Pilgrims] turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects."[10]

In this grim summary, Bradford did not exaggerate. By all accounts, the colonists endured a horrific first winter in New England—one marked by disease, starvation, and hostile encounters with the Nauset natives. But even in this "hideous and desolate wilderness," the Pilgrims found evidence of "a special providence of God, and a great mercy to this poor people." For a few days after their arrival, on an exploratory mission to the shore of Cape Cod, they found

> a good quantity of clear ground where the Indians had formerly set corn . . . . and heaps of sand newly paddled with their hands. Which they, digging up, found in them divers fair Indian baskets filled with corn, and some in ears, fair and good, of divers colours, which seemed to them a very goodly sight . . . . So, their time limited them being expired, they returned to the ship lest they should be in fear of their safety; and took with them part of the corn and buried up the rest.

And on a second expedition, three weeks later, they found

> two of [the natives'] houses covered with mats, and sundry of their implements in them, but the people were run away and could not be seen; also there was found more of their corn, and of their beans of various colours. The corn and beans [the colonists] brought away, purposing to give [the natives] full satisfaction when they should meet with any of them as, about some six months afterward they did, to their good content.

Considering the inadequacy of their supplies of foodstuffs, the discovery of these native stores of corn and beans likely made the difference between survival and death for many

---

[10] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 61-62.

of the colonists in their first year in New England. As Bradford noted, "here they got seed to plant them corn the next year, or else they might have starved, for they had none, nor any likelihood to get any till the season had been past." Bradford saw this as evidence of God's providence: "the Lord is never wanting unto his in their greatest needs; let his holy name have all the praise."[11]

The colonists continued to reconnoiter the region, searching for a place to build their homes. On December 8, an exploring party arrived at a bay that seemed "fit for situation." The colonists described it as "a most hopeful place," noting the bay's "innumerable store of fowl; and excellent good: and cannot but be [full] of fish in their seasons." In the surrounding countryside, they found "a very sweet brook [that] runs under the hill side; and many delicate springs of as good water as can be drunk," and "a great deal of land cleared, and [that] hath been planted with corn three or four years ago." But the area seemed to be devoid of native inhabitants: "We marched along the coast, in the woods, some seven or eight miles; but saw not an Indian, nor an Indian house: only we found where formerly had been some inhabitants; and where they had planted their corn." Whether the colonists paused to consider what had become of the area's original inhabitants, surviving records do not say. At the time, practical considerations must have been paramount. As Bradford put it, this location "was the best they could find, and the season, and their present necessity, made them glad to accept of it." Thus the colonists decided to establish their plantation, which they called Plymouth, here on the shore of its eponymous bay.[12]

---

[11] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 65-66.

[12] William Bradford and Edward Winslow, "A Relation, or Journal, of the Beginning and Proceeding of the English Plantation settled at Plymouth, in New England" (1622), in *The Story*

*

As the colonists started building their little settlement, their lack of preparation and the harshness of the New England winter began to take their toll. As Bradford reported, "in two or three months' time half of [the] company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases which this long voyage and their inaccommodate condition had brought upon them." At the mortality's peak, "there died some times two or three of a day," so that "in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound persons" available to care for everyone else. Finally, as spring approached "it pleased God the mortality began to cease amongst them, and the sick and lame recovered apace." By this point, the colonists had been devastated. Of the 102 *Mayflower* passengers who had embarked for America, 50 had died by the summer of 1621. According to one historian's analysis, by this time "[o]nly 12 of the original 26 heads of families and 4 of the original 12 unattached men or boys were left; and of the women who reached Plymouth, all but a few [had] died."[13]

The colonists' presence at Plymouth did not pass unnoticed by the local natives. Throughout the winter "the Indians came skulking around them, and would sometimes show themselves aloof off, but when any approached near them, they would run away." Then in March 1621, "a certain Indian came boldly amongst them and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand but marveled at it." This was Samoset,

---

of The Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-1623 A.D; as told by Themselves, their Friends, and their Enemies, ed. Edward Arber (London: Ward and Downey, 1897), 435-36; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 72.

[13] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 77, 77n5.

a native from Maine who had been living among the Pokanoket for several months. The colonists “questioned him of many things,” and in reply “he discoursed of the whole country, and of every province, and of their sagamores [sachems], and their number of men, and strength.” Samoset also explained that the colonists were building their settlement on the site of what had once been a native village:

> He told us the place where we now live is called Patuxet, and that about four years ago all the inhabitants died of an extraordinary plague, and there is neither man, woman, nor child remaining, as indeed we have found none, so as there is none to hinder our possession, or to lay claim unto it.

Whether the colonists knew, or even suspected, that such a calamity had cleared the way for them before meeting Samoset is uncertain, for this was their first known documentation of the epidemic of 1616.[14]

Several days after this initial meeting, Samoset came back to Plymouth with Squanto, “a native of this place, who had been in England and could speak better English than himself.” This was the same Squanto who had been kidnapped by Hunt in 1614 and returned to New England with Captain Dermer in 1619. Having been in England when the epidemic struck his home village, Squanto was “the only surviving native of Patuxet.” Squanto arranged for a meeting between the colonists’ leaders and the Pokanoket principal sachem, Massasoit, who arrived with “chief of his friends and other attendance” shortly thereafter. This meeting resulted in a diplomatic alliance between the colonists and the Pokanoket, which was codified in a mutual defense treaty signed by both sides. After Massasoit and his entourage left, Squanto remained with the colonists; indeed, until his death in November 1622, he never left them. He not only served as their interpreter,

---

[14] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 79, 80n8; Bradford and Winslow, “Relation, or Journal,” 451-52. Samoset is thought to have learned English from his frequent interactions with fishermen and traders that visited coastal Maine.

but also "directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places." Indeed, without Squanto's assistance, it seems quite likely that the Plymouth colony would not have survived. Recognizing his importance, Bradford called Squanto "a special instrument sent of God for [the colonists'] good beyond their expectation."[15]

In July 1621, Squanto accompanied two colonists, Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins, on a diplomatic mission "to see their new friend Massasoit" in his village of Sowams, some forty miles from Plymouth. It was on this journey that the colonists began to fully appreciate the scale of the calamity that had befallen the natives before their arrival. As Bradford later described it, Winslow and Hopkins found

> the soil good and the people not many, being dead and abundantly wasted in the late great mortality, which fell in all these parts about three years before the coming of the English, wherein thousands of them died. They not being able to bury one another; their skulls and bones were found in many places lying still above ground where their houses and dwellings had been, a very sad spectacle to behold.

In another account of this journey, the colonists described the devastation along the banks of the Taunton River:

> The ground is very good on both sides; it being for the most part cleared. Thousands of men have lived there; which died in a great plague not long since: and pity it was, and is, to see so many goodly fields, and so well seated, without men to dress and manure the same.

Such grisly evidence of the epidemic's aftermath was still apparent when the merchant Thomas Morton first arrived to New England in 1622. As Morton described it, native carcasses

---

[15] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 80-81; Bradford and Winslow, "Relation, or Journal," 455. Squanto, who now serves in American folklore as the archetypal "friendly Indian," was in some accounts referred to by the name Tisquantum.

> were left for crows, kites, and vermin to prey upon. And the bones and skulls upon the several places of their habitations, made such a spectacle after my coming into those parts, that as I traveled in that forrest, near the Massachusetts, it seemed to me a new found Golgotha.[16]

*

The skulls and bones littering the ground, like the untended fields dotting the countryside, gave silent testimony to the scale of the demographic disaster that had befallen New England's coastal natives. While it is impossible to precisely determine just how many natives died, the writings of early European explorers and settlers convey some impression of its impact. Before 1616, Samuel de Champlain and John Smith described coastal New England as a densely settled region. But within a few years, most of the villages they had seen no longer existed, their residents having either died or fled elsewhere. Smith reported that the "exceeding great plague" had reduced the native population such that "in some places there scarce remained five of a hundred," and that "where I have seene two or three hundred, within three yeares after remained scarce thirty." Smith also related an account that "such a sicknesse came, that of five or six hundred about the *Massachusets* there remained but thirty" (though he qualified this last assertion by stating "if this be not true in every particular, excuse me, I pray you, for I am not the Author"). Another numerical estimate of the natives' loss comes from Robert Cushman, who came to visit Plymouth Colony in November 1621. In a sermon, Cushman related that the epidemic "hath so wasted [the natives], as I think the twentieth person is scarce left alive." Other reports on the epidemic's demographic impact came from Puritan chroniclers, such as John White, who never personally visited New England, and

---

[16] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 87; Bradford and Winslow, "Relation, or Journal," 466; Morton, *New English Canaan*, 23.

Edward Johnson, who emigrated from England with John Winthrop's fleet in 1630. According to White, the plague

> swept away most of the Inhabitants all along the Sea coast, and in some places utterly consumed man, woman, and childe, so that there is no person left to lay claime to the soyle which they possessed; in most of the rest, the Contagion hath scarce left alive one person of a hundred.

Johnson did not provide a numerical estimate of the natives' population loss, but his account nonetheless painted a bleak demographic picture:

> a little before the removeall of that Church of Christ from Holland to Plimoth in New England, as the ancient Indians report, there befell a great mortality among them, the greatest that ever the memory of Father to Sonne tooke notice of, chiefly desolating those places, where the English afterward planted.

Johnson went on to explain that "[t]he Country of Pockanoky [Pokanoket] . . . was almost wholly deserted, insomuch that the Neighbour Indians did abandon those places for feare of death," while the "Abarginny-men" to their north, the Massachusett and Pawtucket, "were greatly weakened." Finally, Cotton Mather, writing several decades after the fact, said this of the 1616 epidemic: "The Indians in these parts had . . . been visited with such a prodigious pestilence, as carried away not a *tenth*, but *nine* parts of *ten* (yea, 'tis said, *nineteen* of *twenty*) among them."[17]

For their part, modern scholars generally concur with these contemporary estimates of the epidemic's demographic impact. Sherburne F. Cook, for example, has determined that, after allowing for "a certain degree of exaggeration" in the primary

---

[17] Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 103-4; Smith, *Advertisements*, 20-21; Robert Cushman, "Cushman's Discourse" (1621), in *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth, 1602-1625*, ed. Alexander Young (Boston: Little, Brown, 1841), 258; John White, *The Planters' Plea: Or, the Grounds of Plantations Examined, and Usual Objections Answered* (1630; repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968), 25; Edward Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*, *1628-1651*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (1654; repr. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 41; Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:51.

sources, about 75 percent of the Massachusett and Pokanoket populations died in the epidemic. For those who are disinclined to believe such catastrophic mortality rates, Cook points to Zaccheus Macy's account of Nantucket to illustrate the potential impact of an epidemic disease on a previously unexposed population. Between August 16, 1763, and February 16, 1764, "an uncommon mortal distemper" led to the deaths of 222 of the island's 358 natives—an overall mortality rate of 62 percent.[18] This is not an extreme example. In fact, the Nantucket experience represents a milder-than-average case, considering that Dobyns has postulated a "depopulation ratio of 20 to 1" throughout the Americas following European contact.[19] When viewed in this context, the 90 percent depopulation rate that Smith and Mather suggest for the 1616 epidemic seems reasonable.

As in other Native American epidemics, various factors—including increased mortality, decreased fertility, and migration—contributed to New England's calamitous population loss in and after 1616. Certainly, many natives, lacking immunologic experience with this Old World infection, died directly from the disease itself. In addition, countless others must have died not of disease, but of starvation, in places where not enough healthy people remained to procure food. In this regard, the "antient plantations, not long since populous now utterly void," noted by Dermer, and the "many

---

[18] Sherburne F. Cook, "The Significance of Disease in the Extinction of the New England Indians," *Human Biology* 45 (September 1973): 497-501; Zaccheus Macy, "A Short Journal of the First Settlement of the Island of Nantucket, with Some of the Most Remarkable Things That Have Happened Since, to the Present Time," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 1st ser., 3 (1792): 158-59. Because some Nantucket natives were not exposed to the disease, the overall mortality rate of 62 percent understates the epidemic's true virulence. Of the island's 358 native inhabitants, sixty-six were not exposed. Of the 292 natives who were exposed, 256 (88 percent) became ill, and of these, 222 (87 percent) died.

[19] Dobyns, "Estimating Aboriginal American Population," 416. In addition to their losses from disease, Sherburne F. Cook concludes that about 25 percent of the New England native population died as a result of warfare with Europeans between 1620 and 1720. See Cook, "Interracial Warfare," *Ethnohistory* 20 (Winter 1973): 1-24.

goodly fields, and so well seated, without men to dress and manure the same," observed by Hopkins and Winslow, represent both cause and consequence of the epidemic's mortality. Even where food was available, many among the very old and very young probably died of neglect if no healthy adults were left to care for them. Furthermore, beyond increasing mortality, it is likely that the epidemic also induced population loss by causing the native birth rate to decrease. Commenting on the "general experience among the native races of America," Sherburne F. Cook notes, "Not only disease but physical dislocation and unrest . . . caused the Indian women throughout the hemisphere to resent giving birth to more children. This reaction expressed itself frequently in abortion and infanticide." Of course, a dearth of healthy male adults could also adversely affect the native birth rate. As Edward Johnson noted, the epidemic (which he called a "sore Consumption") was responsible for "sweeping away whole Families, but chiefly yong Men and Children, the very seeds of increase." Finally, the epidemic was catastrophic even for those who survived, and some population loss can be ascribed to the flight of surviving natives from the region. According to anthropologist William Starna, epidemic mortality was "ramified into the post contact experiences of Indian people" throughout the Americas:

> The socialization process along with political organization became disordered as high rates of death led to the loss of important community leaders and knowledgeable and influential people. Routine tasks associated with subsistence and the maintenance of settlements could not be completed. Health care systems were strained, genealogical ties severed, and technological knowledge lost.

In the most severely affected villages, kinship networks would have collapsed, and the deaths of community leaders would have led to crises of authority. In many cases,

survivors had little choice but to abandon their devastated communities and move elsewhere.[20]

*

The question of what disease caused the New England epidemic of 1616 has occupied scholars for nearly four centuries. Lacking definitive proof of its etiology, researchers have suggested various infections as possible explanations for the epidemic. Diseases that have received historiographical attention include five caused by viruses: chickenpox, measles, hepatitis, smallpox, and yellow fever; and six caused by bacteria: bubonic plague, epidemic relapsing fever, epidemic typhus, leptospirosis, meningococcal infection ("epidemic meningitis"), and typhoid fever. Most of these possibilities can be summarily excluded because they could not have possibly caused the exceedingly high mortality rates associated with the 1616 pestilence. Measles, chickenpox, and some types of viral hepatitis are highly contagious, but none of these has been associated with mortality rates exceeding 30 percent, even in previously unexposed (i.e., "virgin soil") populations. On the other hand, meningococcal infections result in death for most infected persons (in the absence of antibiotic therapy), but even during epidemics these do not affect more than 1 percent of a population. An epidemic of either typhoid fever or leptospirosis might have killed roughly 10 percent of its victims, at most; moreover, such extensive disease from either of these bacteria would have required widespread contamination of water sources throughout coastal New England. The louse-borne bacteria that cause typhus and relapsing fever have been responsible for epidemics with

[20] Dermer to Purchas, 2:579; Bradford and Winslow, "Relation, or Journal," 466; Cook, "Significance of Disease," 497-98; Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 41; Starna, "Biological Encounter," 513-14.

mortality rates of up to 40 percent, but such highly fatal epidemics have only occurred in populations recently suffering from war or famine. As we have seen, the New England natives were under no significant demographic stress before 1616, and thus it is difficult to imagine that either typhus or relapsing fever could have killed enough natives to account for the 90 percent depopulation observed in this epidemic. Indeed, of the suggested possible etiologies of the 1616 epidemic, only three—bubonic plague, yellow fever, and smallpox—could conceivably have caused such catastrophic population loss.[21]

In the earliest accounts of the epidemic, Vines, Dermer, Winslow, and Morton all described the disease as "the plague." Some modern scholars have interpreted these references to "plague" as evidence that the epidemic was caused by the disease now called bubonic plague, a frequently fatal infection caused by the flea-borne bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. It should be noted, however, that seventeenth-century writers also used the term "plague," rather generically, to refer to any widespread epidemic disease with

---

[21] The literature on causation of the 1616 epidemic is scattered among a range of sources. Of these, the most detailed synthesis is found in Timothy Bratton, "The Identity of the New England Indian Epidemic of 1616-19," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62 (1988): 351-83. Other useful sources include Sherburne F. Cook, "Significance of Disease," 485-508; and Herbert U. Williams, "The Epidemic of the Indians of New England, 1616-1620, with Remarks on Native American Infections," *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* 20 (1909): 340-49. On measles, see Bratton, "Identity," 357-58; and Noble David Cook, *Born to Die*, 86-87. On chickenpox, see Bratton, "Identity," 360-61; Billee Hoornbeck, "An Investigation into the Cause or Causes of the Epidemic which Decimated the Indian Population of New England 1616-1619," *New Hampshire Archaeologist* 19, no. 7 (1976-1977): 40-41; and Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 87. On viral hepatitis, see Arthur E. Spiess and Bruce D. Spiess, "New England Pandemic of 1616-1622: Cause and Archaeological Implication," *Man in the Northeast* 34 (Fall 1987): 75-77; and Mann, *1491*, 60. On meningococcal infections, see Bratton, "Identity," 372-74; and Marsha S. Anderson, Mary P. Glodé, and Arnold L. Smith, "Meningococcal Infections," in *Feigin and Cherry's Textbook of Pediatric Infectious Diseases*, 6th ed., edited by Ralph D. Feigin, James D. Cherry, Gail J. Demmler-Harrison, and Sheldon L. Kaplan (Philadelphia: Saunders, 2009), 1351. On typhoid fever, see Bratton, "Identity," 358-60; and Hoornbeck, "Investigation into the Cause," 41. On leptospirosis, see John S. Marr and John T. Cathey, "New Hypothesis for Cause of Epidemic among Native Americans, New England, 1616-1619," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 16 (February 2010): 281-86. On epidemic typhus and relapsing fever, see Didier Raoult and Véronique Ross, "The Body Louse as a Vector of Reemerging Human Diseases," *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 29 (1999): 888-911.

high mortality, and it seems likely that these early chroniclers intended this more general definition when they wrote of the "plague" of 1616. Semantics aside, the colonists were presumably familiar with bubonic plague, which caused repeated epidemics in London throughout the seventeenth century, including one that lasted from 1603 through 1611. Thus it would seem likely that these Englishmen could recognize the signs and symptoms of this disease and could correctly diagnose its victims.[22]

Bubonic plague was certainly capable of causing widespread disease with catastrophic mortality. Other epidemiological considerations, however, cast doubt on the hypothesis that bubonic plague caused the 1616 New England epidemic. Various species of burrowing rodents serve as the natural reservoir for *Yersinia pestis*, and these animals show no ill effects from infection with the bacterium. Another rodent is closely associated with human outbreaks of disease: the black rat, *Rattus rattus*. This "so-called 'domestic' rat," which thrives on garbage and stored food in urban human communities, is not a natural reservoir of the disease but plays a central role in its spread to humans. Fleas, which are the principal vectors of *Yersinia pestis*, become infected by feeding on infected rodents and can then transmit infection to other mammals, including humans. Thus when plague spreads among the black rats in an urban community, human disease quickly follows. Once bubonic plague has been established in a human population, the infection can spread from person to person via infected respiratory droplets, causing the

[22] Gorges, "Briefe Narration," 2:19; Dermer to Purchas, 2:579; Edward Winslow, "Good News from New England" (1624), in Arber, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 537; Morton, *New English Canaan*, 24; Cook, "Significance of Disease," 489; Bratton, "Identity," 366-68; Williams, "Epidemic of the Indians," 348.

highly fatal form of the disease known as pneumonic plague. But black rats and fleas must be present to introduce the disease into the community.[23]

Rats and fleas were widely present in North America by the early seventeenth century, but prevailing conditions in New England were hardly conducive to a bubonic plague outbreak. According to Snow and Lanphear, "the black rat was . . . unable to compete with the now widespread brown rat when both were introduced to the Americas." And as Timothy Bratton notes, plague outbreaks required "heavy concentrations of rats, fleas, and people, preferably in garbage-strewn urban settings; these conditions simply did not exist in precolonial New England." Moreover, any black rats that did successfully emigrate to the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were almost certainly free from infection with *Yersinia pestis*, for they, like humans, are susceptible to the ravages of plague. In the days of sail-based travel, only a grim fate could have awaited any ship that embarked on a transatlantic crossing with plague-infected black rats on board. Any infected rats would have sickened and died within a matter of days; and their infected fleas would have abandoned their dying hosts, transmitting disease to other rats and humans until no susceptible hosts remained aboard.

---

[23] McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 30, 137-42, 177-80; Hoornbeck, "Investigation into the Cause," 40-41; Bratton, "Identity," 366-67. Bubonic plague's ability to devastate populations was illustrated vividly in its two most famous European outbreaks: the Plague of Justinian of 542-43, which, at its zenith, killed as many as 10,000 persons each day in Constantinople, hurtling the declining Roman Empire toward its final death throes; and the Black Death, which killed approximately one-third of the total population of Europe between 1347 and 1353. On evidence that bubonic plague caused these ancient epidemics, see, for example, Ingrid Wiechmann and Gisela Grupe, "Detection of *Yersinia pestis* DNA in Two Early Medieval Skeletal Finds from Aschheim (Upper Bavaria, 6th century A.D.)," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 126 (January 2005): 48-55; and Verena J. Schuenemann et al., "Targeted Enrichment of Ancient Pathogens Yielding the pPCP1 Plasmid of *Yersinia pestis* from Victims of the Black Death," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108 (September 20, 2011): E746-52.

As P. M. Ashburn notes, "If plague broke out among the people on shipboard, it probably resulted in the loss of the ship."[24]

Two final arguments may be leveled against the hypothesis that bubonic plague caused the 1616 epidemic. If this disease had actually penetrated into New England in precolonial times, we might reasonably expect that *Yersinia pestis* would have established itself in local communities of burrowing rodents, as it has done elsewhere in the world. This did not occur. Indeed, even today bubonic plague is unknown in eastern North America. In contrast, plague has remained endemic among rodents of the western United States ever since its introduction on the Pacific coast in the nineteenth century. Finally, and perhaps most conclusively, bubonic plague was never a normal childhood disease in Europe, and thus it remained highly fatal to Europeans and natives alike. Before the advent of antibiotic therapy, *Yersinia pestis* killed about two-thirds of its victims. Had Vines's men slept among the natives, and their rats and fleas, during a bubonic plague epidemic, not only would their heads have ached, but several of them would certainly have died. Thus bubonic plague is an unlikely cause of the 1616 epidemic.[25]

Like bubonic plague, yellow fever is an insect-borne disease that can cause epidemics capable of depopulating a region. The etiologic case for yellow fever as a

---

[24] Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 19; Bratton, "Identity," 369; McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 164-70; Ashburn, *Ranks of Death*, 227; Dobyns, *Their Number*, 20. It was not until the advent of much faster, steam-powered oceanic transportation in the late nineteenth century that plague-infected shipboard black rats could survive long enough to disembark and transmit disease in distant seaports, allowing *Yersinia pestis* to achieve a truly global distribution. Although Dobyns has postulated that a pandemic of bubonic plague stretched from Mexico to New England from 1612 to 1619, it is rather difficult to reconcile this claim with what is known about the disease's epidemiology.

[25] Cook, "Significance of Disease," 49; McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 165-66; Bratton, "Identity," 366, 369-72.

possible cause of the 1616 epidemic hinges principally on a single statement in Daniel Gookin's chronicle. Writing of the epidemic some six decades after the fact, Gookin claimed that he had "discoursed with some old Indians, that were then youths; who say, that the bodies all over were exceedingly yellow, describing it by a yellow garment they showed me." Several historians have assumed that in this statement, the natives were describing jaundice, which is a yellowish coloration of the skin that indicates either liver disease or a massive destruction of red blood cells. Noah Webster, for one, was persuaded enough by Gookin's account to declare flatly that "the pestilence was the true American plague, called yellow fever."[26]

Epidemiological considerations, however, mitigate against Webster's hypothesis. To be sure, jaundice and widespread mortality were hallmarks of yellow fever, which caused terrifying summertime epidemics in New World port cities from the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. But outside its evolutionary homeland in West Africa, yellow fever only appeared in regions where the African slave trade had been established. African slaves were first brought to the North American mainland in 1619, in the Chesapeake region; none would arrive in New England until much later. Indeed, there is no evidence of any American yellow fever epidemic until 1647, when the disease first appeared on Barbados. The first recorded yellow fever epidemic in New England did not occur until 1693. Moreover, when yellow fever did strike New England, it did so during the warm months of the year. The *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes that transmit this virus could not have been active during the winter of 1616-17, when Vines observed that the natives

[26] Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 8; Noah Webster, *A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases with the Principal Phenomena of The Physical World.* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799), 178.

"were sore afflicted with the plague." Finally, it should be noted that Europeans were as susceptible to yellow fever as were Native Americans. Had Vines's men visited New England during a yellow fever epidemic, many of them certainly would have become ill and some quite possibly would have died. Thus yellow fever could not have been responsible for the 1616 epidemic.[27]

With bubonic plague and yellow fever excluded, only smallpox remains a plausible etiology for the 1616 epidemic. As it happens, this dreaded malady fits the epidemiological requirements for causation nicely. Smallpox was caused by *Variola major*, a highly contagious airborne virus that readily spread from person to person. Unlike yellow fever or bubonic plague, smallpox was a strictly human disease and thus did not require the presence of a suitable animal reservoir or insect vector. *Variola* was ideally suited to cause disease following a transatlantic voyage, owing to the long contagious period of its sufferers and its prolonged viability on environmental surfaces. If smallpox broke out in a single individual on a transatlantic voyage, the virus could remain alive and infectious in the affected person's scabs for several weeks, and on clothing or blankets he or she had used for several months. Thus, unlike measles, which faced death unless it could find a new susceptible host before its victim recovered or died, *Variola* could board a ship in a single person in Europe and remain alive to cause disease in the Americas.[28]

---

[27] Molly Caldwell Crosby, *The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic that Shaped our History* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006), 11-13, 245-48; Gorges, "Briefe Narration," 2:19; Noble David Cook, *Born to Die*, 179-81; Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 19; Bratton, "Identity," 356-57.

[28] Hoornbeck, "Investigation into the Cause," 39; Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 25; Snow, *Archaeology of New England*, 32-33; Bratton, "Identity," 377-78; Cook, *Born To Die*, 86.

When smallpox arrived in the New World, it flourished in the previously unexposed aboriginal population. For even as it was a leading cause of death in seventeenth-century Europe, smallpox was far more devastating in populations that had not been previously exposed to the disease. In such "virgin soil" populations, *Variola* infection typically produced mortality rates ranging from 55 to 90 percent; in contrast, the death rate among Europeans was about 15 percent. Moreover, smallpox not only killed untold millions of Native Americans, but it often did so in spectacular fashion. Some natives became ill very rapidly and died within a few hours of the onset of symptoms, even before any rash had a chance to appear. Others suffered a universally lethal form of the disease, malignant confluent smallpox, in which the characteristic fluid-filled blisters merged into one another, with subsequent pus formation under the disrupted skin. This, according to Oliver Wendell Holmes, is another potential explanation for Gookin's comment about the affected natives' yellow skin: "As for the yellowness like a garment, that is too familiar to the eyes of all who have ever looked on the hideous mask of confluent variola."[29]

During the seventeenth century most Europeans experienced smallpox as children, and those that survived were henceforth immune to the disease. Thus it is not surprising that early English explorers and migrants to New England, such as Vines and his men, could visit the natives during a smallpox epidemic and emerge unscathed. The natives, of course, were not so fortunate. After disseminating among the individuals in a

---

[29] Bratton, "Identity," 375, 379-80; Cook, *Born To Die*, 72; Crosby, "Virgin Soil Epidemics," 298; E. W. Stearn and A. E. Stearn, "Smallpox Immunization of the Amerindian," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 131 (1943): 610-11; J. F. D. Shrewsbury, "The Yellow Plague," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 4 (1949): 38; Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Medical Profession in Massachusetts" (1869), in *Medical Essays, 1842-1882*, vol. 9 of *The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), 315.

village, smallpox could then spread, along trade networks, from village to village within, and then between nations. Such a pattern of transmission is consistent with what was observed in the 1616 epidemic, which decimated the Abenaki, Pawtucket, Massachusett, and Pokanoket nations, which formed a regional trading network, but did not affect the inland Narragansett or Pequot nations, whose inhabitants did not interact regularly with the coastal natives. Clearly, trade between peoples offered myriad opportunities for the propagation of a highly infectious virus, especially an airborne virus with a long contagious period. *Variola*, of course, was just such a virus.[30]

In 1674, Gookin summarized his musings on the causative agent of the 1616 plague thusly: "What this disease was, that so generally and mortally swept away [the natives] . . . I cannot well learn. Doubtless it was some pestilential disease." Gookin's comment remains cogent, for modern scholars are no more able to offer definitive proof of the epidemic's etiology than he was. Nevertheless, the arguments favoring smallpox are far more robust than are those for any other potential pathogen. Compared to the other contenders, smallpox was better equipped to cross the Atlantic to New England, and once there, to cause widespread disease with stunningly high mortality. It could spread in the winter and would not cause significant disease among the English adventurers of this early period. Considering smallpox as the most likely cause of the 1616 plague hardly requires an intellectual leap of faith, for this virus was the leading killer of aboriginal inhabitants across the Americas throughout the era of colonization. Gookin's description

---

[30] Bratton, "Identity," 382. On the tendency of smallpox to follow trade routes, see, for example, McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 130-31; and Elizabeth A. Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), chap. 5-8.

was apt, for smallpox indeed was a "pestilential disease."[31] And it was almost certainly the cause of the 1616 New England epidemic.

*

Smallpox or otherwise, the 1616 epidemic triggered a variety of social, economic, and political consequences for New England's native population. For one thing, the widespread mortality and social disruption provoked a spiritual crisis among the surviving natives, who found themselves utterly powerless in the face of a devastating sickness that they could not comprehend. As Edward Johnson noted, neither their medicine men nor their gods seemingly offered any relief:

> Their Powwowes, which are their Doctors, working partly by Charmes, and partly by Medicine, were much amazed to see their Wigwams lie full of dead Corpes, and that now neither Squantam nor Abbamocho could helpe, which are their good and bad God and also their Powwows themselves were oft smitten with deaths stroke.

Understandably, fear was the dominant emotion among the natives. In 1621, Robert Cushman noted that the Massachusett natives "have their courage much abated, and their countenance is dejected, and they seem a people affrighted." According to Johnson, "Howling and much lamentation was heard among the living [natives]," due to their "being possest with great feare." The epidemic's spiritual impact is perhaps best illustrated in its effects on native burial rituals. Archaeological evidence indicates that sometime in the early seventeenth century, natives around Massachusetts Bay ceased burying goods with their deceased. Moreover, Bradford's and Morton's observations of skulls and bones littering the ground suggest that, at least in some cases, natives had neglected to bury their dead altogether. Morton knew that this was unusual, for

---

[31] Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 8.

“otherwise it is the custome of those Indian people, to bury their dead ceremoniously, and carefully.” This abandonment of burial rituals could indicate that the epidemic had destabilized native religious practices, lending support to Charles C. Mann’s assertion that the epidemic “shattered the Wampanoag’s sense that they lived in balance with an intelligible world.” It is also possible, however, that the unburied skeletons simply indicate that in some places the epidemic left no one alive to bury the dead.[32]

Over time, the epidemic’s impact could be discerned even in the land itself. Until 1616, the natives had actively managed the southern New England forest through the judicious application of fire. As the Puritan chronicler William Wood noted,

> the custome of the *Indians* to burne the wood . . . consumes all the underwood, and rubbish, which otherwise would over grow the Country, making it unpassable, and spoile their much affected hunting: so that by this meanes in those places where the *Indians* inhabit, there is scarce a bush or bramble, or any combersome underwood to bee seene in the more champion ground.

When the Pilgrims first explored the woods around Plymouth, they saw the effects of the natives’ forest management. Bradford and Winslow, for example, noted that “though the country be wild . . . yet the trees stand not thick, but a man may well ride a horse amongst them.” This was possible not because the trees naturally grew that way, but rather, as the environmental historian William Cronon describes, because native burnings eliminated small woody shrubs and bushes, as well as any fallen trees. Meanwhile, the chestnut, oak, and hickory trees that dominated southern New England forests “suffered little more than charred bark if subjected to ground fires of short duration.” Burning the undergrowth did more than simply facilitate travel through the woods. According to Cronon, the fires also

[32] Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 41; Cushman, “Discourse,” 258; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 106; Morton, *New English Canaan*, 24; Mann, *1491*, 61.

“increased the rate at which forest nutrients were recycled into the soil,” protected the larger trees from various pests and plant diseases, and, by removing smaller trees, allowed more sunlight to reach the ground. The ecological upshot of these changes can be capitulated in a phenomenon called the “edge effect”:

> By encouraging the growth of extensive regions which resembled the boundary areas between forests and grasslands, Indians created ideal habitats for a host of wildlife species. . . . Indian burning promoted the increase of exactly those species whose abundance so impressed English colonists: elk, deer, beaver, hare, porcupine, turkey, quail, ruffed grouse, and so on. When these populations increased, so did the carnivorous eagles, hawks, lynxes, foxes, and wolves.

Summarizing the impact of the natives’ forest management, Cronon writes, “Indians who hunted game animals were not just taking the ‘unplanted bounties of nature’; in an important sense, they were harvesting a foodstuff which they had consciously been instrumental in creating.”[33]

In the plague’s aftermath, however, no one was left to attend to the forest. The woods, no longer cleared by regular burnings, slowly became congested with undergrowth. Writing in the early 1630s, Wood noted that “where the *Indians* dyed of the Plague some foureteene yeares agoe, is much underwood . . . because it hath not beene burned,” and that in some areas, the forest had become “unusefull and troublesome to travell thorow . . . because it teares and rents the cloathes of them that passe.” As the forest reverted to its natural state, it could no longer support the large animal populations that the natives’ husbandry had fostered. These changes were gradual, and some of the long-term effects would not be apparent for decades. In the 1630s, Cronon notes, “the

---

[33] William Wood, *New Englands Prospect: A true, lively, and Experimentall Description of that Part of America, Commonly Called New England* (1634; repr., Boston: Prince Society, 1865), 17; Bradford and Winslow, “Relation, or Journal,” 467; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 50-51.

animals that had relied on the Indians to maintain their edge habitats were still abundant beyond English belief, but in many areas the edges were beginning to return to forest." The loss of edge habitats, combined with the effects of overhunting and competition from English livestock, led to the disappearance of the wild turkey from eastern Massachusetts by the end of the seventeenth century, along with sharp reductions in the white-tailed deer and other game animals. The loss of these fauna, in turn, reduced the natives' variety of dietary protein sources and forced them to consider alternatives to animal skins for their clothing. The natives continued to hunt, but now they did so primarily to obtain beaver and other fur pelts that they could trade for European fabrics, which "were lighter and more colorful than animal skins and nearly as warm." At one trading post in the 1650s, Cronon notes, "Indian transactions for textiles outnumbered transactions for metal goods more than fivefold." Eventually, European fabrics replaced animal skins as the principal components of native attire. For the natives, this change not only signified a departure from their traditional cultural practices, but also demonstrated their new reliance on European trade to provide them with the principal necessities of life, such as clothing. Thus the loss of edge habitats, itself a consequence of the 1616 epidemic, indirectly facilitated the integration of the New England natives into the larger economy of the Atlantic world.[34]

*

Beyond its demographic, social, and economic effects, the epidemic also portended significant political ramifications for the region's surviving natives. Because it did not affect all parts of New England equally, the epidemic caused radical shifts in the

[34] Wood, *New Englands Prospect*, 17; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 90-91, 93, 100-102.

balance of power among New England's indigenous nations. The plague spread along the coast from southern Maine to the eastern and northern shores of Narragansett Bay, never extending, in John White's words, "above twenty or thirty miles up into the land." Thus while it wreaked havoc on the coastal Pawtucket, Massachusett, and Pokanoket nations, it never penetrated the interior regions inhabited by the powerful Narragansett. As Bradford later explained, the coastal natives, looking across Narragansett Bay from the east, could see that "the Narragansetts lived but on the other side of that great bay, and were a strong people, and many in number, living compact together, and had not been at all touched with this wasting plague." The coastal nations thus not only faced the problems of death and social disruption within their own ranks, but they also confronted an inland enemy that had escaped the epidemic essentially unscathed. Exerting their new relative strength, the Narragansett laid claim to Pokanoket territory at the head of Narragansett Bay and forced the principal Pokanoket sachem, Massasoit, to humble himself before them. As Roger Williams later reported, Massasoit acknowledged his subordinate status to the Narragansett, but "affirmed that he was not subjected by war . . . but God, he said, subdued me by a plague, which swept away my people, and forced me to yield."[35] Thus the epidemic had seemingly set the stage for the Narragansett to establish political hegemony over southern New England. But then the *Mayflower* arrived, and everything changed forever.

[35] Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 102, 105-6; Cook, "Significance of Disease," 489-91; Spiess and Spiess, "New England Pandemic," 77; White, *Planters' Plea,* 25; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 87; Roger Williams, "Testimony of Roger Williams Relative to the Purchase of Lands at Seekonk and Providence" (1661), in Bartlett, *Letters of Roger Williams*, 316-17.

Although his people had suffered mightily, Massasoit managed to emerge from the epidemic as the single most powerful Pokanoket sachem. Now, in the spring of 1621, he must have looked on the fifty-three surviving English colonists settling into Squanto's former village of Patuxet with a certain degree of ambivalence. New England's natives had long enjoyed trading with Europeans, but they had never shown much tolerance for allowing them to settle in the region. In the wake of the 1616 epidemic, however, everything was different. With the coast now relatively depopulated, the colony at Plymouth stood a better chance of surviving than had previous colonial projects. Even so, although the epidemic had severely weakened the Pokanoket, it had not destroyed them. Rather, it was the colonists whose existence in New England hung by a slender thread in early 1621. The Pokanoket still fumed over Hunt's kidnapping of twenty-seven local natives in 1614, and they were still powerful enough to eradicate the Pilgrims' fledgling settlement. The colonists, suffering from disease and starvation such that "the living were scarce able to bury the dead, and the well not in any measure sufficient to tend the sick," could hardly have resisted a coordinated native assault. Indeed, they knew this. Cushman wrote that "when we came first into the country, we were few, and many of us were sick, and many died by reason of the cold and wet." While they had "not six able persons among us," the natives "came daily to us by hundreds . . . and might in one hour have made a dispatch of us." Winslow similarly noted that "if God had let them loose, they might easily have swallowed us up; scarce[ly] being a handful in comparison of those forces they might have gathered together against us." As the colonists later learned, at least some natives strongly considered doing just this. Bradford wrote that before the Pokanoket "came to the English to make friendship, they got all the Powachs [medicine

men] of the country, for three days together, in a horrid and devilish manner, to curse and execrate [the colonists] with their conjurations, which assembly and service they held in a dark and dismal swamp." At this point, had Massasoit simply given the word, Plymouth might well have gone the way of Sagadahoc and become just another "lost colony," a footnote in history.[36]

Massasoit had more to consider, however, than the threat posed by the Plymouth colonists on the coast; he also faced the specter of subjugation by the Narragansett on his western flank. In a sense, he had to decide which was the lesser of two evils: conquest by the Narragansett or an alliance with the English. He chose the latter. Instead of eradicating the colonists, he formed a military pact with them. Instead of allowing them to starve, he sent Squanto to teach them how to plant corn and otherwise procure food in the wilderness. Massasoit did not do these things purely out of a spirit of friendship, as has often been assumed. Rather, these were calculated decisions that were intended to optimize the Pokanoket's position in the new political milieu of post-epidemic New England. The Treaty of Plymouth, signed in March 1621, benefitted both the Pokanoket and the Plymouth colonists, at least in the short run. Both sides agreed, among other things, to assist the other should either be attacked by a third party. Clearly, Massasoit wanted the colonists' firepower on his side in the event of war with the Narragansett. The colonists, for their part, had no illusions as to why Massasoit desired a military alliance. As Bradford noted, "We cannot yet conceive but that he is willing to have peace with us. . . . And especially because he hath a potent adversary, the Narragansetts that are at war

[36] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 95, 84; Cushman, "Discourse," 258; Winslow, "Good News from New England," 514; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 85-96.

with him: against whom, he thinks, we may be some strength to him; for our pieces are terrible unto them."[37]

The Pokanoket alliance with the Plymouth colonists, born out of political expediency, achieved Massasoit's objective of preventing his people's subjugation by the Narragansett. Canonicus, the chief sachem of the Narragansett, recognized the new political calculus of southern New England and was less than pleased. In January 1622, Canonicus sent a messenger to Plymouth to deliver "a bundle of new arrows lapped in a rattlesnake's skin." As Squanto explained to the colonists, "to send the rattlesnake's skin, in that manner, imported enmity; and that it was no better than a challenge." Bradford was not naïve; he understood that the Narragansett wished "to domineer and lord it over" the Pokanoket, and that now they "conceived the English would be a bar in their way, and saw that Massasoit took shelter already under [the colonists'] wings." Refusing to be intimidated, Bradford responded in kind: he "stuffed the skin with powder and shot; and sent it back." Canonicus was reportedly horrified by this reply, "insomuch as he would not touch the powder and shot, or suffer it to stay in his house or country." Bradford's message was unmistakable: if the Narragansett wanted war, the English would be ready for them.[38]

In the short run, Massasoit's gambit proved successful. The Pokanoket-Plymouth alliance allowed Massasoit to retain his sovereignty and kept the Narragansett sphere of influence confined to the western side of Narragansett Bay. Nevertheless, Massasoit's decision to ally with the colonists had disastrous long-term consequences for all of New

---

[37] Bradford and Winslow, "Relation, or Journal," 458, 460.

[38] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 96-97; Winslow, "Good News from New England," 517-20.

England's natives, including the Pokanoket. Massasoit could have sent warriors to drive the colonists away, or he simply could have allowed them to starve to death. Instead, he assisted them, and in so doing, helped to ensure their survival. This was the pivotal turning point in the colonization of New England. The epidemic of 1616 had not only cleared space for the *Mayflower's* passengers to settle, but it had also created political conditions that facilitated their survival. After decades of failed attempts, the English finally had a beachhead in northeastern North America. Now, there would be no turning back.

Chapter 4

"A land, which none useth": English Expansion, Native Disease, and Smallpox in the "City on a hill," 1621-1634

> [W]hen I seriously consider of things, I cannot but think that God hath a purpose to give that land, as an inheritance, to our nation. And great pity it were, that it should long lie in so desolate a state; considering it agreeth so well with the constitution of our bodies: being both fertile; and so temperate, for heat and cold, as, in that respect, one can scarce distinguish New England from Old.
>
> —Edward Winslow[1]

Thanks largely to Squanto's assistance, the Plymouth colonists reaped a bountiful harvest of "Indian corn" in the fall of 1621. Edward Winslow described the celebration that followed:

> Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling; that so we might, after a more special manner, rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labours. They four, in one day, killed as much fowl as, with a little help besides, served the Company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our Arms; many of the Indians coming amongst us. And, amongst the rest, their greatest King, Massasoyt, with some ninety men; whom, for three days, we entertained and feasted. And they went out, and killed five deer: which they brought to the Plantation; and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain, and others.

This, of course, was the festival that modern Americans now commemorate as the first "Thanksgiving," a term bestowed upon the event by later generations of Americans. As Winslow later noted, the Plymouth colonists indeed had reason to be thankful: "How few, weak, and raw were we at our first beginning, and there settling; and in the midst of barbarous enemies! Yet God wrought our peace for us."[2]

The *Mayflower's* passengers would not be the only English settlers in New England for long. Soon after their harvest feast, the English ship *Fortune* landed in

---

[1] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 581.

[2] Bradford and Winslow, "Relation, or Journal," 489; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 90n8; Winslow, *Good News from New England*, 581.

Plymouth Bay with "a new Supply of thirty-five persons." These, however, were more of a burden than a reinforcement, as "they neither brought arms, nor other provisions with them, but wholly relied on us." Over the ensuing winter, while the colonists exhausted their "store of victuals," they started to hear whispers that several native villages were conspiring to strike against them. By the summer of 1622, Winslow noted, "The Indians began again to cast forth many insulting speeches; glorying in our weakness, and giving out how easy it would be ere long to cut us off." Thus the colonists set to work fortifying their town.[3]

In late June, Plymouth's situation was further undermined by the arrival of two English ships with "some fifty or sixty men" sent over by Thomas Weston. These men were of no help to the Plymouth colonists; instead, as Winslow noted, "The little store of corn we had, was exceedingly wasted by the unjust and dishonest walking of these strangers." Weston's men sailed on and established their own colony at Wessagusset, in Massachusetts Bay. Before long, relations between the new settlement and the local natives soured. According to Winslow, "They had not been long gone from us, ere the Indians filled our ears with clamours against them; for stealing their corn, and other abuses conceived by them."[4]

As the English established themselves in Masachusetts, epidemic diseases continued to sporadically erupt among the remaining coastal natives. Phineas Pratt, one of the Wessagusset settlers, noted that even while Weston's men "made haste to settle our plantation . . . . there was a great plague among the savages, and . . . half their people

[3] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 517, 530-31.

[4] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 531-33.

died thereof." The Plymouth colonists made similar observations as they traversed the region trading for corn. In November 1622, Winslow remarked that in the villages around Massachusetts Bay, "they found a great sickness to be amongst the Indians; not unlike the plague, if not the same." Later that winter, the colonists saw that disease had struck the native village of Nemasket. This was notable chiefly for the inconvenience it caused, for the corn purchased at Nemasket "was brought home partly by Indian women: but a great sickness arising amongst them, our own men were inforced to fetch home the rest." But while the widespread disease was remarkable, the illnesses of two individual Pokanoket natives were particularly important to Plymouth. The first of these was Squanto, who in November 1622 "fell sick of an Indian fever, bleeding much at the nose . . . and within a few days died . . . of whom we had a great loss."[5] The other was the chief Pokanoket sachem, Massasoit.

In March 1623, Plymouth's leaders learned that Massasoit had fallen dangerously ill and "was like[ly] to die." Immediately, Winslow organized a party of colonists to travel to the sachem's village of Sowams. There they found that Massasoit was indeed very sick; Winslow noted that he had "understanding left, but his sight was wholly gone." Though he confessed to "being unaccustomed and unacquainted in such business," Winslow proceeded to nurse Massasoit back to health. First, he served the sachem "a confection of many comfortable conserves," which, on his knife, he "could scarce get through his teeth." This was the first substance Massasoit had swallowed in two days. Then Winslow "washed his mouth, and scraped his tongue; and got abundance of

[5] Phinehas Pratt, *A Declaration of the Affairs of the English People that First Inhabited New England* (1662), ed. Richard Frothingham (Boston: Little, Brown, 1858), 479; Winslow, "Good News from New England," 537, 540; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 114.

corruption out of the same" and then "gave him more of the confection; which he swallowed with more readiness." Massasoit responded nicely: "Within half an hour, this wrought a great alteration in him, in the eyes of all that beheld him. Presently after, his sight began to come to him: which gave him and us good encouragement." Winslow then served the sachem a broth of "broken corn," strawberry leaves, and sassafras root "which he drank; and liked very well. After this, his sight mended more and more: also he had three moderate stools; and took some rest." While the sachem recovered, Winslow then went "amongst those that were sick in the town" to wash their mouths and serve them broth, as he had done for Massasoit. The success of these ministrations duly impressed the Pokanoket. While Winslow "blessed God, for giving his blessing to such raw and ignorant means: making no doubt of [Massasoit's] recovery," the sachem acknowledged the colonists as "the Instruments of his preservation." Upon regaining his health, Massasoit declared, "Now I see the English are my friends, and love me: and whilst I live, I will never forget this kindness they have shewed me."[6]

Winslow's efforts on behalf of Massasoit further cemented the alliance between Plymouth and the Pokanoket—a development which, in turn, portended further political consequences for the region. For as Massasoit recuperated from his illness, he also confirmed the colonists' fears of a "plot of the Massachusetts . . . against Master Weston's colony; and so against us." Massasoit told Winslow that native bands across New England, including "the people of Nauset, Paomet, Succonet, Mattachiest, Agowayam, and the Isle of Capawack were joined" with the Massachusett in a scheme to eradicate the English settlements at Plymouth and Wessagusett. For his part, Massasoit

---

[6] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 550-55.

claimed that although he had been "earnestly solicited" to join the conspiracy, he had refused to participate. The Pokanoket sachem now advised the colonists "to kill the men of Massachusett; who were the authors of this intended mischief."[7]

Winslow returned to Plymouth to discuss Massasoit's revelations with the other colonial leaders. As it turned out, Bradford had also heard rumors of the impending native conspiracy from another local sachem. Plymouth's leaders realized that Weston's men had brought trouble upon themselves, for by the end of February 1623, "they had spent all their bread and corn, not leaving any for seed," and they had taken to robbing natives' corn stores to satisfy their immediate needs. Bradford had previously cautioned the Wessagusett men against using violence to obtain corn from the natives, noting that the Plymouth settlers "were enforced to live on groundnuts, clams, mussels, and such other things as naturally the country afforded, and which did, and would, maintain strength, and were easy to be gotten." Apparently, this advice had been ignored, and now the Massachusett natives had "concluded to ruinate Master Weston's Colony: and thought themselves, being about thirty or forty men, strong enough to execute the same." But the Massachusetts' principal sachem, Wituwamat, had delayed his strike against Wessagusset

> till such time as they had gathered more strength to themselves, to make their party good against us at Plymouth; concluding that if we remained, (though they had no other arguments to use against us), yet we would never leave the death of our countrymen unrevenged; and therefore their safety could not be, without the overthrow of both Plantations.

Wituwamat was, in Winslow's words, "a notable and insulting villain," but he was absolutely correct in this regard. Their low opinions of the Wessagusset settlers

---

[7] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 555.

notwithstanding, Plymouth's leaders would not leave them to whatever fate Wituwamat might design for them. As Winslow grimly concluded, "we knew no means to deliver our countrymen and preserve ourselves, than by returning [the natives'] malicious and cruel purposes upon their own heads." And that was precisely what the colonists did.[8]

Miles Standish, Plymouth's military commander, organized a party of eight Englishmen to "to take [the natives] in such traps as they lay for others." At Wessagusset, Standish and three other colonists managed to trap four Massachusett natives, including Wituwamat, in a room. The colonists killed three of the natives with knives and had the fourth, Wituwamat's brother, hanged. Standish then "sent word to another Company, that had intelligence of things, to kill those Indian men that were amongst them. These killed two more." The colonists then "went to another place; where they killed another." Thus, in less than a day, Standish had killed or ordered the deaths of seven Massachusett natives. Weston's colony was disbanded; some of the settlers traveled to Monhegan to gain passage back to England, while some others were taken to Plymouth. Standish and his men returned to Plymouth with Wituwamat's head, which they posted outside the fort "that it might be a warning and terror to all of that disposition." Upon viewing the sachem's head, a Massachusett native who had been held captive at Plymouth "confessed the plot." Standish then sent the captive to Obtakiest, another truculent Massachusett sachem, to deliver this message:

---

[8] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 544-45, 558-59, 561-62. It is unclear whether Wessagusset and Plymouth truly were the intended targets of a Massachusett-led conspiracy, for it is also possible that Massasoit invented the alleged plot to further his own political ends. Salisbury has argued the latter, claiming that "a specific grievance of a few Indians against a few Wessagusset men dovetailed with a less focused anti-English resentment among a larger number of Indians. The result was the appearance of a conspiracy that Massasoit exploited to regain his position as Plymouth's only dependable Indian friend and that Plymouth itself used for conducting its armed intervention." See Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 129-32.

> That, for our parts, it never entered into our hearts to take such a course with [the Massachusett], till their own treachery enforced us thereunto; and therefore [they] might thank themselves for their own overthrow. Yet, since he had begun; if again, by any [of] the like courses, [Obtakiest] did provoke him, his country should not hold him; for [Standish] would never suffer him, or his, to rest in peace, till he had utterly consumed them; and therefore [Obtakiest] should take this as a warning.

Standish's brazen attack, and his warning of additional violence should the Massachusett further "provoke him," sent shock waves through the region. Local natives were horrified to see how the colonists lashed out violently, not to mention preemptively, in response to a perceived threat to their countrymen, even those that they didn't particularly like. The "sudden and unexpected execution" of Wituwamat and his confederates left the natives "so terrified and amazed," Winslow wrote, that "they forsook their houses, running to and fro like men distracted, living in swamps and other desert places."[9]

Compounding the natives' difficulties, the raid on Wessagusset was immediately followed by a new round of disease outbreaks in native villages around Massachusetts Bay. As Winslow put it, the natives had "brought manifold diseases amongst themselves, whereof very many are dead . . . . And certainly it is strange to hear how many of late have [died], and still daily die amongst them." Among the dead, significantly, were the sachems of Manomet, Nauset, and Mattachiest. To the natives, it must have seemed as though the English had the ability to unleash epidemic diseases upon opponents at their will. In fact, Squanto had already convinced many local natives that this was indeed the case, having told them that the Plymouth colonists "had the plague buried in our Storehouse: which, at our pleasure, we could send forth to what place or people we would, and destroy them therewith, though we stirred not from home." When

---

[9] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 563, 568-69, 572-74.

Hobbamock, one of Squanto's confederates, later asked whether this was true, Winslow answered, "No. But the God of the English had it in store: and could send it at his pleasure; to the destruction of his and our enemies." If anything, this explanation may have been even more unsettling to Hobbamock, for certainly it must have seemed as if the colonists were drawing assistance from a powerful supernatural force. Before he died, the sachem of Mattachiest reportedly said that the "God of the English was offended with [the natives]; and would destroy them in his anger." The continued disease epidemics seemingly proved that this English god could severely punish natives who opposed the colonists' presence in New England—even while he spared the life of their friend and supporter, Massasoit. As the dying sachem's comment indicates, epidemic diseases continued to transform the spiritual landscape of New England in the years following Plymouth's establishment.[10]

The continued effects of epidemic diseases also contributed to fundamental changes in the natives' economic world in the years following Standish's raid. In 1623, Winslow noted that the natives around Massachusetts Bay had been so weakened that they "set little or no corn, which is the staff of life; and without which, they cannot long preserve health and strength." The colonists, meanwhile, were becoming more adept at growing corn and began to enjoy bountiful harvests. By 1624, they had, Bradford wrote, "with a great deal of patience overcome hunger and famine." By the middle of the decade, Plymouth was growing so much corn that it was not only self-sufficient, but had begun exporting it to regional native groups. In 1625, for example, they traded "a boat's load of corn" to the Abenaki in exchange for "700 pounds of beaver, besides some other

[10] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 574, 528.

furs." Squanto was gone, but his assistance had paid a sizeable dividend. Plymouth, which had once depended on native corn supplies to avoid starvation, was now a net food exporter.[11]

Seeking to extend its economic hegemony over the region, Plymouth opened a trading post to its south, at the native village of Manomet (on the Manomet River, near the entrance to Buzzard's Bay), and another to its north, at the mouth of the Kennebec River (at the site of present-day Augusta, Maine). With the post at Manomet, the colonists gained direct access to Narragansett Bay, and the rest of the southern coast of New England, without the need to sail over the dangerous shoals off Cape Cod. In seeking to expand their influence into this region, the Plymouth colonists inevitably came into contact with the Dutch of New Netherland, who from their base at Fort Orange on the Hudson sought to control trade along both coasts of Long Island Sound. From the Dutch, the Plymouth colonists first learned of wampum, strings of small beads made from the purple and white seashells that the southern coast offered in abundance. Wampum had long been used by natives throughout the northeast for a variety of ceremonial purposes, but after the influx of Dutch traders into the Hudson River region in the preceding decade it had evolved into a commodity of exchange. Specifically, wampum provided the Pequot and Narragansett with a currency that could be traded for furs from inland natives or for European goods from Dutch traders. As Neal Salisbury explains, Dutch intervention in native exchange networks in and around the Hudson River valley eventually precipitated a "wampum revolution," which by the late 1620s had spread into the northeastern interior:

---

[11] Winslow, "Good News from New England," 574; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 144, 178, 181-83; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 143-45.

> By the end of the decade [the Dutch] were purchasing large quantities of wampum, which they exchanged for furs at Fort Orange, their post on the Hudson. By offering it among their trade items, they drew Indians form as far away as the St. Lawrence, whose French traders had no access to the treasured beads. The wampum revolution pervaded native culture to the extent that, by the late 1620s, Indians on both sides of Long Island Sound had made the manufacture of wampum their principal winter activity.

The opportunistic Plymouth colonists realized that they could extend this "wampum revolution" to areas within their own trading sphere, where it had not yet penetrated. At first, the process was slow; Bradford reported that after the colonists first purchased £50 worth of wampum, "it was two years before they could put off this small quantity." But once it caught on, the natives "could scarce ever get enough for them, for many years together." As wampum became the preferred medium of exchange along the Massachusetts coast, Plymouth was able to "cut off [the natives'] trade quite from the fishermen, and in great part from other of the straggling planters" who had recently arrived in New England. Thus Plymouth's ability to acquire and control the flow of wampum in its trading sphere enhanced its status as the region's economic juggernaut.[12]

The 1620s, then, were a decade of ascendancy for Plymouth. Thanks to immigration and natural increase, the colony had grown from a struggling band of fifty-three settlers in 1621 to a thriving community of nearly fifteen hundred inhabitants in 1630. Throughout this decade, the English failed to exert any significant influence in the interior and coastal regions west of Narragansett Bay, where the Dutch-allied Narragansett and Pequot held sway. But to Plymouth's north, in the area around Massachusetts Bay, things unfolded differently. There, as early as 1623 it became

---

[12] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 192-93, 200-203; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 147-53; Mark Meuwese, "The Dutch Connection: New Netherland, the Pequots, and the Puritans in Southern New England, 1620-1638," *Early American Studies* 9 (March 2, 2011): 298-99, 307, 310.

apparent to the natives that Plymouth was willing to intervene, using military force if necessary, to protect its perceived regional interests. And while the English grew in strength and numbers, epidemic diseases continued to wreak havoc upon the natives around Massachusetts Bay. Consequently, during the 1620s Plymouth came to dominate the politics, culture, and economy of the New England coast from Cape Cod to the Kennebec River. Moreover, English migrants to the region kept coming, and those who did not settle in Plymouth built homes and planted fields elsewhere within the colony's zone of influence. By the middle of the decade there were, according to Salisbury, "about a hundred English residents scattered along the coast between the colony and its Kennebec outpost," and nascent communities had been established at the present-day locations of Quincy, Salem, and Portsmouth.[13] By this time, it must have been abundantly clear to the natives that the English, and their dreadful diseases, were not going away. In fact, they were just getting started.

*

For many people living in Great Britain, the prospect of migration to America looked more promising than ever at the end of the 1620s. This had been a difficult decade in England, one marked by poor harvests, economic depression, and periodic resurgences of bubonic plague. Conditions were particularly hard in Kent and East Anglia, where small producers, tradesmen, artisans, and tenants found themselves increasingly unable to achieve financial independence for themselves and their families in the unstable market economy of early modern Europe. Many of these people, in the southeast and elsewhere in England, found a spiritual outlet for their frustrations in the burgeoning Puritan

---

[13] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 310; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 152-54; Winslow, "Good News from New England," 579; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 138.

movement. As Salisbury has noted, those attracted to Puritanism tended to view their tenuous economic status "in terms of a profound sense of sin in the world[,] which they sought to separate themselves from and to contain." Indeed, when English Puritans looked at the state of their country in the 1620s, they saw a nation doomed by its spiritual transgressions. They particularly objected to the persistence of apparently Catholic rites and ceremonies in the Anglican Church, which they saw as both corrupt and morally bankrupt. Moreover, as historian Alan Taylor explains, the Puritans "depicted England as awash in thieves, drunks, idlers, prostitutes, and blasphemers," and they "blamed the unruly and the indolent—and indulgent authorities—for all the social and economic troubles of the realm." For these sins, the Puritan leader John Winthrop was convinced that "God will bringe some heavye Affliction upon this lande, and that speedylye." Indeed, Winthrop seemed ready to welcome God's impending punishment, which would "be a meanes to mortifie this bodye of corruption, which is a thousand tymes more dangerous to us then any outward tribulation." At the same time, however, he held out a ray of hope for his fellow Puritans, noting that "[i]f the Lord seeth it wilbe good for us, he will provide a shelter and a hidinge place for us and others, as a Zoar for Lott, Sarephtah for his prophet, etc.: if not, yet he will not forsake us."[14]

There could not have been much question that New England offered the "shelter and hiding place" that Winthrop envisioned for his fellow Puritans. In New England the saints would be free to practice their brand of strict Calvinism, unfettered by the harassment of blaspheming Anglican clergymen and politicians. Indeed, they could build

---

[14] Kupperman, *Jamestown Project*, 292; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 168-70; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 162; John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, May 15, 1629, in *Life and Letters of John Winthrop, 1588-1630*, ed. Robert C. Winthrop (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), 296.

upon the spiritual groundwork that had already been laid, in large measure, by their Pilgrim brethren who had migrated there a decade earlier. Perhaps equally important, New England offered land in abundance, and thus economic opportunity, to those who were willing to work for it. John White, a Dorchester clergyman and chief architect of the Puritan emigration to America, argued that this land would have a spiritually cleansing effect upon his followers. For White considered it

> evident to any man . . . that the husbanding of unmanured grounds, and shifting into empty Lands, enforceth men to frugalitie, and quickneth invention . . . and the taking of large Countreys presents a natural remedy against covetousnesse, fraud, and violence; when every man may enjoy enough without wrong or injury to his neighbour.

Furthermore, the saints' religious mission justified, at least in their minds, their taking of this land from its native inhabitants. For example, Robert Cushman had invoked Biblical references in asserting English claims to this "spacious land, the way to which is through the sea":

> Their land is spacious and void, and there are few [natives]: and [they] do but run over the grass, as do also the foxes and wild beasts. They are not industrious: neither have art, science, skill, or faculty to use either the land, or the commodities of it; but all spoils, rots, and is marred, for want of manuring, gathering, ordering, etc. . . . [S]o is it lawful now to take a land, which none useth; and [to] make use of it.

Cushman did not mention that the paucity of native inhabitants, and their consequent inability to use the land, were the results of their decimation by infectious diseases. His point of emphasis was simply that "the land lay idle and waste," and that therefore the English were acting within their natural rights to "take a land, which none useth."[15]

---

[15] White, *Planters' Plea*, 3; Robert Cushman, "Reasons and Considerations Touching the Lawfulness [Rightfulness] of Removing out of England into the Parts of America" (1621), in Arber, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 503, 499-500.

Thus to many Puritans, the contrast in circumstances on either side of the Atlantic could not have been sharper. England was overcrowded, economically depressed, and, owing to the sinful behavior of its populace, doomed to suffer God's wrath. New England, on the other hand, offered abundant land that was theirs for the taking. Viewing matters in this context, it is not surprising that many English Puritans came to view emigration to New England as an ideal solution to their economic and spiritual troubles. The process started in 1628, when White secured a charter from Charles I granting his Massachusetts Bay Company rights to establish settlements and govern territories in New England. That same year, White sent John Endecott to assume the governorship of Salem, which was then a small community of "not much above fiftie or sixtie persons." The next year, the first wave of Puritan settlers arrived in Salem, in five ships carrying "about three hundred persons . . . with a convenient proportion of other Beasts." Then the floodgates opened. In1630, nearly a thousand Puritans emigrated to Massachusetts Bay. Over the next three years, three thousand more arrived. The Great Migration, which would bring more than twenty thousand English settlers to New England by the end of the 1630s, had begun.[16]

The massive influx of Puritan immigrants in the early 1630s transformed the region around Massachusetts Bay in several important ways. For one thing, the thriving new city of Boston eclipsed Plymouth as the epicenter of political, cultural, and economic activity in New England. Meanwhile, the few hundred or so remaining Massachusett and Pawtucket natives, who had already been drawn into the Plymouth's economic sphere in

[16] White, *Planters' Plea*, 43; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 163-64; Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 136.

the 1620s, now found themselves vastly outnumbered by the English settlers who started building homes and planting fields on what had once been their land. The region's spiritual landscape also changed, as English Calvinism supplanted the ancient native religions to become the dominant belief system around Massachusetts Bay. John Winthrop, the longtime governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, articulated his vision of the godly community the saints would build in New England in his sermon, "A Modell of Christian Charity":

> Thus stands the case between God and us. We are entered into a Covenant with Him for this work. . . . For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of other's necessities. . . . So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. . . . For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.

In their quest to realize Winthrop's vision of building "a City upon a hill," the Puritans brought more than their Calvinist faith to New England; they also brought their families. The Great Migration differed from previous European relocations to North America not only in its sheer magnitude, but in the large number of young children that were involved. Before the 1630s, most immigrants to the New World were over seven years old and therefore had probably already survived bouts with smallpox and several other European childhood infections. But the Puritans brought vast numbers of young children to New England—and in so doing, they inadvertently launched another wave of infection across the Northeast.[17]

*

[17] *Life and Letters of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, 18-19; Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 26-28.

The Great Migration provided smallpox with an unparalleled opportunity to travel from Europe to New England. With so many families crossing the Atlantic simultaneously, large numbers of susceptible children were clustered together aboard ships. Thus if smallpox broke out in just one child during the crossing, it could readily spread to any of several other previously uninfected children on board. This marked a stark contrast with the earlier period, when virtually everyone aboard ships crossing the Atlantic had experienced smallpox as a child and was therefore immune to the disease. Then, the survival of the smallpox virus on a transatlantic voyage depended on the unlikely occurrence of it finding multiple susceptible shipboard persons or, more probably, on its ability to remain viable on the clothes or linens of infected persons who survived. Now, with so many young, previously uninfected children aboard ships, the odds of the virus surviving the crossing dramatically improved. Another factor that favored smallpox's transmission to the New World was the faster speed with which ships crossed the Atlantic by the end of the 1620s. Whereas the *Mayflower* had made the passage from England to Cape Cod in sixty-five days, a voyage in 1630 required only "six weeks and three days," a reduction of over 30 percent. Thus in the 1630s smallpox had more susceptible hosts available to infect aboard ships that could cross the Atlantic in roughly two-thirds the time the *Mayflower* did.[18]

Sure enough, smallpox broke out among Puritan migrants to New England from the first years of the Great Migration. On May 17, 1629, Francis Higginson, aboard the *Talbot*, reported that "my two children, Samuel and Mary, began to be sick of the small

---

[18] Francis Higginson, "Higginson's Journal of his Voyage to New England" (1629), in *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, from 1623 to 1636*, ed. Alexander Young (Boston: Little, Brown, 1846), 235.

pox . . . which was brought into the ship by one Mr. Browne, which was sick of the same at Gravesend; whom it pleased God to make the first occasion of bringing that contagious sickness among us, wherewith many were after afflicted." Mary died two days later. On June 1, Higginson further reported that "some of our men fell sick of the scurvy, and others of the small pox, which more and more increased; yet, thanks be to God, none died of it but my own child." Another migrant, writing to his father in England, described his harrowing voyage in 1630: "We were wonderful sick, as we came at sea, with the small pox. No man thought that I and my little child would have lived. My boy is lame and my girl too, and there died in the ship that I came in 14 persons." When these and other disease-stricken vessels arrived in Massachusetts Bay, infection rapidly spread among persons on shore. Describing conditions in Salem in 1629, Bradford wrote that "by infection that grew amonge the passengers at sea, it spread also among them ashore, of which many died, some of the scurvy, other of an infectious fever which continued some time amongst them, though our people [in Plymouth] through God's goodness escaped it." During the summer of 1630, Plymouth received further word of pestilence among the Massachusetts Bay colonists. One letter, "from the Governor Mr. John Winthrop," reported "the hand of God to be upon them and against them at Charlestown, in visiting them with sickness, and taking divers from amongst them, not sparing the righteous but partaking with the wicked in these bodily judgments." In another letter, Samuel Fuller reported, "The sad news here is that many are sick and many are dead, the Lord in mercy look upon them."[19]

---

[19] Higginson, "Higginson's Journal," 222-26; — Pond to William Pond, March 15, 1630, in *Remarkable Providences: 1600-1760*, ed. John Demos (New York: George Braziller, 1972), 75; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 223; Edward Winslow and Samuel Fuller to Bradford,

Despite the importation of European diseases, the English population in Massachusetts Bay exploded in the 1630s. By 1634, the Bay Colony had grown to include some 4,000 inhabitants; in 1638, its population numbered 11,000.[20] The occasional intrusion of smallpox was "sad news," to be sure, but for the colonists it was of only trivial demographic significance. For the natives, however, it was a different story.

*

As we have seen, from 1616 to 1623 repeated waves of epidemic disease afflicted native populations along the New England coast from Cape Cod to Maine. Then, after 1623, the natives seem to have been largely spared further devastation from infectious disease for the ensuing ten years. Doubtless occasional outbreaks must have occurred in some native villages during this period, just as they did among the colonists, but none were deemed significant enough to deserve mention in the journals of Bradford, Winslow, or Winthrop. Considering the biology of infectious diseases, the absence of large-scale native epidemics in coastal New England for most of the 1620s is not surprising. Epidemics cannot be sustained without large numbers of susceptible individuals, and by 1624 most coastal natives had either been killed in the epidemics of 1616-23 or had suffered disease and recovered. Of course, this did not mean that the native population was permanently immune to further disease outbreaks. After enough new susceptible individuals were added, either through birth or immigration, the coastal natives would again be ripe for widespread destruction by a European pathogen. Even

---

July 26, 1630, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 235; Samuel Fuller to Bradford, August 2, 1630, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 235-36.

[20] Dennis, *Cultivating a Landscape*, 136.

more significantly, areas of New England west of the English colonies were densely inhabited with natives who had not been affected in the epidemic waves of 1616-23. Despite their occasional contacts with the English and frequent interactions with Dutch traders, the Narragansett and Pequot had managed to remain free from the effects of European diseases for two decades. Thus by the early 1630s, southern New England contained a recovering coastal native population, which was increasingly susceptible to new disease outbreaks, and a thriving inland population that had no prior experience with European diseases. Taken as a whole, the New England native population was more vulnerable than ever to the devastating effects of European diseases. With so many English children coming into the region, it was only a matter of time before smallpox would spread to the natives. When that finally happened in 1633, it ran through them like wildfire.

During the summer of 1633, Bradford wrote, “an infectious fever” broke out among the Plymouth colonists, “of which many fell very sick and upward of 20 persons died,” including their physician, Samuel Fuller. Though Bradford did not specify the cause of the colonists’ illness, both its considerable death toll and subsequent events strongly suggest that it was smallpox. In any event, “towards winter it pleased the Lord the sickness ceased.” At least, it ceased for the colonists; the natives were not so fortunate. Bradford specifically linked the illness in Plymouth to the calamitous epidemic that subsequently broke out among the region’s natives, stating, “This disease also swept away many of the Indians from all the places near adjoining.” The pestilence quickly spread through the natives along the coast, recapitulating the disaster of 1616. In a November journal entry, Winthrop tersely summarized the natives’ situation: “A great

mortality among the Indians. Chickatobot, the sagamore of Naponsett, died, and many of his people. The disease was the smallpox." He subsequently noted that "[t]his infectious disease spread to Pascataquack [the Piscataqua River, near modern Portsmouth], where all the Indians (except one or two) died." In a December entry Winthrop noted that two Pawtucket sachems, who were friendly toward the colonists and had adopted English names, had died in the epidemic: "John Sagamore died of the small pox, and almost all his people; (above thirty buried by Mr. Maverick of Winesemett in one day). . . . James Sagamore of Sagus died also, and most of his folks."[21]

By winter smallpox had spread to the interior of New England, where the pestilence flourished among the immunologically naïve Narragansett. A party of Massachusetts Bay colonists, dispatched to the Connecticut valley in November, returned in January with this report:

> They informed us, that the small pox was gone as far as any Indian plantation was known to the west, and much people dead of it, by reason whereof they could have no trade. At Narragansett, by the Indians' report, there died seven hundred; but, beyond Pascataquack, none to the eastward.

As was true in the 1616-19 epidemic, not all of these native deaths were directly attributable to smallpox itself; for starvation, dehydration, and cold also contributed to the natives' mortality. As Bradford noted:

> The condition of this people was so lamentable and they fell down so generally of this disease as they were in the end not able to help one another; no not to make a fire nor to fetch a little water to drink, nor any to bury the dead. But would strive as long as they could, and when they could procure no other means to make fire, they would burn the wooden trays and dishes they ate their meat in, and their very

[21] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 260; John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal, History of New England, 1630-1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1908), 1:111, 1:114-15.

> bows and arrows. And some would crawl out on all fours to get a little water, and sometimes die by the way and not be able to get in again.[22]

Struck by the natives' suffering, many colonists were moved to offer what assistance they could. According to Bradford,

> those of the English house, though at first they were afraid of the infection, yet seeing their woeful and sad condition and hearing their pitiful cries and lamentations, they had compassion of them, and daily fetched them wood and water and made them fires, got them victuals whilst they lived; and buried them when they died.

Winthrop claimed that some natives "were cured by such means as they had from us." Usually, however, the colonists' ministrations were futile. As Bradford noted, "very few of [the natives] escaped, notwithstanding [the English] did what they could for them to the hazard of themselves." Many colonists also intervened on the natives' behalf by taking in children whose parents had died in the epidemic. Unfortunately, as Winthrop noted, these orphans were far from safe in English homes: "Such of the Indians' children as were left alive were taken by the English, most whereof did die of the small pox soon after." Though their actions were usually ineffective, Bradford believed that the natives appreciated the colonists' attempts to render assistance. As he put it, "this mercy which [the colonists] showed them was kindly taken, and thankfully acknowledged of all the Indians that knew or heard of the same."[23]

If the natives were impressed by the colonists' generosity on their behalf, they must have been amazed by their apparent lack of vulnerability to smallpox. While the natives perished in droves, the disease was far less damaging to the colonists. Bradford claimed that "not one of the English was so much as sick or in the least measure tainted

---

[22] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:118; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 271.

[23] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 271; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:111, 1:119.

with this disease," despite their frequent close contact with the ill natives "for many weeks together." The true extent of disease among the English was certainly greater than Bradford claimed, especially if the twenty deaths at Plymouth in 1633 are included. In addition, Winthrop reported that a young boy had "died of the small pox which are very rife at Newtowne." Nonetheless, Bradford's overly sanguine assessment reflected a larger point that was obvious to anyone living in New England at the time: compared to the natives, the English were largely spared from the disastrous consequences of smallpox. Bradford's explanation of this phenomenon was, not surprisingly, that the colonists were protected "by the marvelous goodness and providence of God." Indeed, the colonists' relative immunity to disease, along with their good works on behalf of the natives, underscored the apparent omnipotence of the English God, who was clearly in control of events in New England. This was enough to lead some natives to cast their spiritual lots with the English. For example, Winthrop reported that when the Pawtucket sachem John Sagamore became ill, he "desired to be brought among the English, (so he was;) and promised (if he recovered) to live with the English and serve their God." Sagamore did not recover, but he "died in a persuasion that he should go to the Englishmen's God." And in the epidemic's wake, Sagamore's conversion was just one of many among the region's natives:

> Divers of them, in their sickness, confessed that the Englishmen's God was a good God; and that, if they recovered, they would serve him. It wrought much with them, that when their own people forsook them, yet the English came daily and ministered to them; and yet few, only two families, took any infection by it.

Thus the 1633-34 smallpox epidemic contributed to the larger spiritual trend, underway in New England since the early 1620s, toward the dominance of English Puritanism over traditional native beliefs.[24]

Just as Puritanism was the ascendant spiritual power in New England in the 1630s, so smallpox was the region's dominant biological force. The 1633-34 epidemic decimated natives throughout New England, erasing any population recovery along the coast and depleting heretofore unscathed populations in the interior. The precise demographic impact of the 1633-34 epidemic is difficult to quantify, but it was certainly a major component of the overall native population collapse in the first half of the seventeenth century. According to Snow's estimates, the total New England native population fell from 126,700 persons in the first decade of the seventeenth century to just 12,570 by the middle decade of that century—a decline of 90 percent. Impressive as this might seem, it was only part of a much larger story, for in the 1630s smallpox did not remain confined to New England. Within a year it had spread west of the Hudson River. In December 1634, a Dutch trader reported that in the Mohawk fortress at Onekagoncka, "a good many of the savages here in the castle died of smallpox." At another Mohawk village in January 1635, this same reporter noted that "more than forty fathoms of seawan [money] were divided among [the natives] as the last will of the savages that died of the smallpox." Smallpox was no less destructive to the Mohawk than it had been to the New

[24] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 271; John Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., December 12, 1634, quoted in Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America*, 44; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:115.

England natives. Snow's analysis of archaeological evidence, for example, "indicates that the Mohawk population declined by 63% in less than a year."[25]

After decimating the Mohawk, smallpox subsequently broke out among the other nations of the Iroquois confederacy and then spread to the Huron, Ottawa, and other tribes across throughout the Northeast in a series of destructive outbreaks that lasted until the early 1640s. In describing the situation at Huronia in 1637, a Jesuit correspondent wrote that "hardly one of the savages escaped last year the infection of a certain plague, by which very many were destroyed." Similar scenes of devastation doubtless littered the landscape in a vast triangle stretching from New England to the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. Whether all of these outbreaks can be directly linked to the 1633-34 epidemic in New England is unclear, for it is possible that smallpox was introduced to the Northeast on multiple occasions in the 1630s. As Sherburne F. Cook has noted,

> Intercommunication between New England and both the Hudson and St. Lawrence River valleys was sufficiently free and copious to account for the rapid extension of the disease. On the other hand it is very difficult to find the necessary documentation for a point-to-point dating of the spread of the epidemic.[26]

In the final analysis, determining the exact sequence by which smallpox spread across northeastern North America is less important than assessing the impact of the disease. What is clear is that by the middle of the seventeenth century, European epidemic diseases had transformed the Northeast, winnowing the land of native inhabitants and preparing it for subsequent invasion and colonization by English, Dutch, and French

[25] Snow and Lanphear, "European Contact and Indian Depopulation," 24; "Narrative of a Journey into the Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635," in *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1909), 141, 156; Dean R. Snow, "Michrochronology and Demographic Evidence Relating to the Size of Pre-Columbian North American Indian Populations," *Science* 268 (June 16, 1995): 1601-4.

[26] Jean de Brébeuf to Mutius Vitelleschi, 1636, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 11:9; Cook, "Significance of Disease," 492-93.

settlers. Throughout the region, no native groups were spared. But perhaps none were so gravely affected as the Pequot.

Chapter 5

"They die like rotten sheep": Pox, Puritans, and Pequot, 1633-1637

> Sometimes the scripture declareth women and children must perish with their parents. Sometimes the case alters; but we will not dispute it now. We had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings.
>
> —Captain John Underhill[1]

Throughout the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the Pequot were firmly established as the dominant political and economic entity in what is now the state of Connecticut. The epidemics that caused so much death from Cape Cod to the Kennebec River between 1616 and 1623 never reached the southern coast of New England, perhaps because the Pequot, like the Narragansett to their east, did not participate in the trade networks that ostensibly spread disease among the Pokanoket, Massachusett, Pawtucket, and Abenaki. And just as the Narragansett sought to dominate the region around Massachusetts Bay, the Pequot extended their own control over neighboring native groups, including wampum-producing natives on both shores of Long Island Sound. By the 1620s, wampum had become the key to the Pequots' dominance: they extracted it from coastal natives as tribute and traded it to agents of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in exchange for European goods, including the metal drills that enabled mass wampum production and the metal arrowheads that facilitated the Pequots' subjugation of their neighbors. The Dutch, in turn, traded this wampum to other northeastern natives,

[1] John Underhill, "Newes from America; or, A New and Experimental Discoverie of New England" (1638), in Charles Orr, *History of the Pequot War: The Contemporary Accounts of Mason, Underhill, Vincent, and Gardener* (Cleveland: Helman-Taylor, 1897), 81.

including those of the Iroquois confederacy, for the prized furs that European markets demanded.[2]

Backed by their trading alliance with the Dutch, and facing no substantial opposition from surrounding native groups, the Pequot were the economic and political juggernaut of the southern coast of New England in the 1620s. The growth of Plymouth was of some concern, but the English colonists did not pose any real threat at the time. In the 1620s, Plymouth's zone of influence was limited to areas where natives had been winnowed by epidemic disease; it certainly did not extend to the region now known as Connecticut. For one thing, the English could not effectively challenge the far more numerous Pequot. Furthermore, the English were powerless to restrict the activities of Dutch traders and settlers on and east of the Hudson, in part because James I "needed [the Netherlands] as an independent power in mainland Europe to occupy the more dangerous Spanish." Indeed, relations between Plymouth and New Netherland were cordial, if not downright friendly, during this early period. It was the Dutch, for example, who introduced wampum to the English in 1627.[3]

The political and economic stability of Pequot-dominated southern New England, which characterized the 1620s, began to unravel in the early 1630s. For one thing, the rapid growth of the Massachusetts Bay colony represented a threat far beyond that posed by Plymouth in the preceding decade. The arrival of so many Puritan families placed immense pressure upon the agriculturally useful land around the bay, and consequently

---

[2] Wampum was as critical to Dutch ambitions as it was to those of the Pequot. As one historian has noted, "without wampum, the Dutch could not obtain pelts from the Indians. The Great Seal of the New Netherland colony displayed a beaver encircled by wampum." Cave, *Pequot War*, 51.

[3] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 305-6.

English families sought to build their homes and plow their fields increasingly further inland. In particular, they came to covet the fertile land of the Connecticut River valley, which lay in the heart of territory controlled by the Pequot. Some of this valley's native inhabitants, displeased with their subjugation by the Pequot, recognized that the growing English population presented an opportunity to undermine the Pequots' hegemony over the region. Bradford noted that "a company of banished Indians, that were driven out from [the Connecticut] by the potency of the Pequots . . . often solicited [the English] to go thither and they should have much trade." Winthrop's journal provides details of one proposed native scheme—and also of the colonists' skeptical response. In 1631,

> Wahginnacut, a sagamore upon the River Quonehtacut . . . brought a letter to the governor from Mr. Endecott to this effect: That the said Wahginnacut was very desirous to have some Englishmen come plant in his country, and offered to find them corn, and give them yearly eighty skins of beaver, and that the country was very fruitful, etc., and wished that there might be two men sent with him to see the country. The governor entertained them at dinner, but would send none with him. He discovered after, that the said sagamore is a very treacherous man, and at war with the Pekoath (a far greater sagamore).

Also in the early 1630s, the Pequot faced an insurrection from the Mohegan, a closely related people that "grew so great and proud that upon hunting they quarelled with the Pequots." The Pequot responded to the Mohegan challenge by driving the leading Mohegan sachems into exile; they found refuge with the Narragansett. Meanwhile the Narragansett sensed an opportunity to expand their own trade prospects at the expense of the Pequot. Acting quickly, the Narragansett made peace with the Massachusett natives and English, then launched their own war against the Pequot.[4]

[4] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 258; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:61, 1:76; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 205-6; Cave, *Pequot War*, 67-68; Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 310-11.

By the early 1630s, then, the Pequot found themselves in a precarious political and military situation. Not only were they at war with the Narragansett, but they also had to suppress uprisings by the Mohegan and other tributaries, even while they sought to keep the land-hungry English out of the Connecticut valley. To make matters worse, they soon learned that their alliance with the Dutch, while useful for purposes of trade, did nothing to enhance their security. For one thing, the total Dutch population in the region was rather small, numbering only around three hundred individuals, for New Netherland had not experienced anything resembling the population growth of the English in Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay. Emigration from the Netherlands had been slow, and many Dutch emigrants became disenchanted with the colony's governance and returned to their homeland in the early 1630s. Furthermore, as subsequent events would show, the Dutch were less interested in promoting Pequot ambitions than they were in expanding their own trade prospects. This became evident after the WIC, with Pequot approval, opened a fortified trading house on the Connecticut River (near present-day Hartford) in June 1633. The Dutch named their post Good Hope—a rather ironic choice, as it turned out, for Dutch hopes conflicted with those of the Pequot. The WIC envisioned Good Hope as a place where the Dutch could trade freely with various native groups, including not only the Pequot, but the Narragansett and their tributaries as well.[5] The Pequot, meanwhile, sought to maintain their monopoly on the Dutch trade, and they were willing to use violence to enforce it.

Soon after Good Hope opened, Pequot warriors attacked and killed a group of natives coming to trade at the fort. Just who the victims were is uncertain, but they

---

[5] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 311-12, 322; Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 207.

certainly did not belong to the Pequot or any of their tributaries. The Dutch traders at Good Hope were furious, and they resolved to punish the Pequot. Accordingly, a contingent of WIC personnel kidnapped the Pequot principal sachem, Tatobem, and demanded a bushel of wampum in exchange for his release. After the ransom was paid, they killed Tatobem anyway. In retaliation, the Pequot might have launched an all-out assault on the Dutch and eradicated Good Hope, but they did not; in keeping with native custom, their reprisal was limited. To avenge Tatobem's death, a group of Pequot warriors attacked and killed the crew of a trading vessel on the Connecticut River. Apparently the warriors did not realize that the captain of the vessel, John Stone, and his crew were not Dutch, but English. The Pequot may have believed that Stone's murder was justified, given his history of kidnapping two natives on the Connecticut, despite their mistake in assessing his national identity. Nor does it seem that the loss of Stone, a noted smuggler and privateer, prompted any substantial mourning among the English. Still, this murder did nothing to enhance the Pequot's standing with the English—or the Dutch, for that matter. Indeed, by this point relations with the WIC had soured completely. Bradford reported that when a party of Pequot attempted to reopen trade at Good Hope, "it was not long before a quarrel fell between the Dutch and them." Subsequently, the fort's inhabitants "slew the chief sachem with the shot of a murderer [cannon]." Now the Dutch, erstwhile allies of the Pequot, were responsible for the deaths of two Pequot sachems. Amazingly, in the space of just a few years the Pequot had managed to alienate not only their own tributaries, including the Mohegan, but also the Narragansett and both European powers in New England.[6]

---

[6] Cave, *Pequot War*, 58-60; Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 313-15; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 269-70.

Faced by hostile adversaries on multiple fronts, and having lost their valued European trading partner, the Pequot were in an unenviable position in late 1633. Still, they remained a powerful and proud people, and their problems, though appreciable, probably did not seem insurmountable. In their internecine wars, they sought to obtain and maintain control over tribute-paying villages and to expand opportunities to trade with other natives and Europeans. These were important objectives, but it was not as though their very existence was at stake. But then smallpox struck, and suddenly the Pequots' world began falling apart.

*

In September 1633, Plymouth opened its own trading post on the Connecticut River, upstream from Good Hope. From this vantage point the colonists had a firsthand view of the devastation smallpox wrought upon the Pequot nation during the winter and spring of 1633-34. In relating "some strange and remarkable passages . . . in the River of Connecticut," Bradford described in gruesome detail how the natives "died most miserably":

> For usually they that have this disease have them in abundance, and for want of bedding and linen and other helps they fall into a lamentable condition, as they lie on their hard mats, the pox breaking and mattering and running one into another, their skin cleaving by reason thereof to the matts they lie on. When they turn them, a whole side will flay off at once as it were, and they will be all of a gore blood, most fearful to behold. And then being very sore, what with cold and other distempers, they die like rotten sheep.

At one village, Bradford reported, "it pleased God to visit these Indians with a great sickness and such a mortality that of a thousand, above nine and a half hundred of them died, and many of them did rot above ground for want of burial." Indeed, with so many natives dying "like rotten sheep," the Connecticut Valley must have resembled a

slaughterhouse. As it spread across southern New England, smallpox decimated the Pequot. By the spring of 1634, they had lost between 80 and 90 percent of their population.[7]

In the wake of the epidemic, the Pequots' political and diplomatic tribulations took on new dimensions. The Narragansett, despite having suffered greatly in the epidemic themselves, continued their war against the Pequot. By 1634, the Pequot had lost control over much of the Connecticut Valley, as several villages once in their orbit defected to the Narragansett sphere. As Neal Salisbury notes, "while Tatobem had alienated many of the Pequot allies, his son and successor, Sassacus, was unable to hold together even those that were nominally Pequot." Sassacus was not his father's equal, but poor leadership was only part of the reason for the Pequots' loss of dominance in the valley. Devastated by smallpox, the Pequot's military strength was only a fraction of what it had been in the summer of 1633. Given this circumstance, even a strong leader would have been hard pressed to keep the Pequot tributaries under control.[8]

Sassacus was in a difficult position. He knew that if he could not maintain order in what was nominally Pequot territory and provide his remaining people with access to European goods, he would likely be deposed from his position as their principal sachem. Even worse, the Pequot nation itself faced the prospect of subjugation by the Narragansett. In this regard, the Pequot's situation was remarkably similar to that of the Pokanoket following the epidemic of 1616-19. And like Massasoit a dozen years earlier, Sassacus turned to the one party in New England powerful enough to protect his people

---

[7] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 313, 316; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 258-59, 270-71.

[8] Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 210.

from the Narragansett: the English. In November 1634, Pequot envoys arrived in Massachusetts Bay bearing a gift of wampum and seeking to establish an alliance with the colonists. The English, for their part, understood the Pequots' situation perfectly. As Winthrop noted,

> The reason why they desired our friendship was, because they were now in war with the Narragansetts . . . and likewise with the Dutch, who had killed their old sachem and some other of their men . . . and by these occasions, they could not trade safe any where. Therefore they desired us to send a pinnace with cloth, and we should have all their trade.

Sassacus wanted more than just a trade partnership with the Puritans, however. According to Winthrop, his ambassadors "offered us also all their right at Connecticut, and to further us what they could, if we would settle a plantation there." Such an offer would have been inconceivable just a year earlier. Now, with the Pequot destabilized by the epidemic and weighed down by internecine struggles, Sassacus saw English intervention as his last, best hope for defending his nation.[9]

Unlike Massasoit in 1621, however, Sassacus could not negotiate from a position of relative strength in 1634, for the English did not need the Pequot as much as the Pequot needed the English. The Puritans sensed weakness in the Pequots' offer of friendship, and they accordingly drove a hard bargain. The English demanded that the Pequot "deliver us the two men, who were guilty of Capt. Stone's death . . . ; to yield up Connecticut; to give us four hundred fathom of wampompeage, and forty beaver and otter skins." If the Pequot would do these things, the colonists "should presently send a pinnace with cloth to trade with them, and so should be at peace with them, and as friends to trade with them, but not to defend them, etc." This last clause is important, for it

---

[9] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:139-40; Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 316; Cave, *Pequot War*, 69-71.

indicates that while the Massachusetts Bay colonists were willing to trade with the Pequot, they had no intention of intervening in their military struggles against the Narragansett, Mohegan, or Dutch. In any event, the Pequot leadership viewed the English terms for establishing a trade agreement as egregiously high. Sassacus had wanted a strategic partnership with the English; what he received instead was, in essence, an invitation to become a tributary to Massachusetts Bay. This he would not accept, any more than he would tolerate subjugation by the Narragansett. In March 1635, the Bay colony, intending to keep its end of the agreement, sent a pinnace up the Connecticut to trade with the Pequot. Once there, however, the colonists "put off but little commodity, and found [the Pequot] a very false people, so as they mean to have no more to do with them." The Pequot would have neither a military alliance nor a trade partnership with the English. Sassacus and his beleaguered people were on their own.[10]

With no European ally to lean upon, and beset with their own problems, the Pequot were now powerless to keep the land-hungry English colonists out of the Connecticut River valley. As Bradford noted, the Bay colonists, "hearing of the fame of the Connecticut River, had a hankering mind after it . . . [;] and now understanding that the Indians were swept away with the late great mortality . . . they began to prosecute it with great eagerness." Residents of Newton, Roxbury, Watertown, and Dorchester were particularly dissatisfied with their agricultural prospects in the Bay colony and desperately sought access to the valley's fertile meadows. Winthrop was disinclined to allow his colonists to migrate westward, as he feared that such a move "should expose them to evident peril, both from the Dutch . . . and from the Indians." Winthrop also

[10] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:140; Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 317; Cave, *Pequot War*, 71-72; Winthrop to Bradford, March 12, 1635, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 291-92.

believed that those who would move to Connecticut "ought not to depart from us, being knit to us in one body, and bound by oath to seek the welfare of this commonwealth," for, as he put it, "The removing of a candlestick is a great judgment, which is to be avoided." But the lure of the valley's rich soil proved ineluctable, and in the spring of 1635 the Massachusetts General Court reluctantly authorized emigration into the valley. Soon thereafter, a contingent of Dorchester families packed up and settled on the land around Plymouth's trading house on the Connecticut River. In July, Jonathan Brewster, the fort's commander noted, "The Massachusetts men are coming almost daily, some by water and some by land." These colonists, who had purchased their titles to the land from Mohegan and other former Pequot tributary sachems, organized themselves into the town of Windsor. Similarly, residents of Watertown purchased titles to their Connecticut River settlement, which became the town of Wethersfield, from another disaffected River Indian sachem. Further upriver, in what is now southern Massachusetts, a group of Roxbury inhabitants founded the town of Springfield in 1635. Then, in May 1636, Winthrop noted in his journal that "Mr. Hooker, pastor of the church at Newton, and most of his congregation, went to Connecticut. His wife was carried in a horse litter; and they drove one hundred and sixty cattle, and fed of their milk by the way." Hooker and his flock settled between Wethersfield and Windsor, establishing the town of Hartford.[11]

While migrants from the Bay colony occupied portions of the upper Connecticut River valley, another party of Puritan settlers from England built a coastal settlement,

---

[11] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 280; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:132-33, 1:180-81; Jonathan Brewster to William Bradford, July 6, 1635, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 280; Henry Morris, *Early History of Springfield, 1636-1675* (Springfield, Mass.: F. W. Morris, 1876); Cave, *Pequot War*, 87-96; Michael Leroy Oberg, *Uncas: First of the Mohegans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 47.

which they called Fort Saybrook, at the river's mouth on Long Island Sound. Led by John Winthrop, Jr., son of the Bay colony's governor, the Saybrook colonists came equipped with a patent from the earl of Warwick granting them sovereignty over the Connecticut river and adjoining territories. Indeed, Saybrook's jurisdiction extended northward to include the upriver communities at Wethersfield, Hartford, and Windsor. To gain legal title to their lands, the upriver settlers accepted Winthrop, Jr. as governor of all of Connecticut. In exchange, the younger Winthrop agreed to allow the Massachusetts Bay emigrants to settle on lands included within the Warwick patent. This agreement received legal sanction from the Massachusetts General Court, which on March 3, 1636 granted commission "to severall persons, to govern the people at Connecticutt." In reality, however, the governor at Fort Saybrook had little control over events upstream. As Francis Jennings has wryly noted, Connecticut thus "presented the curious spectacle of a substantial colony upriver, pretending to have a governor, and a fortified governor downstream, pretending to have a colony."[12]

Intricacies of colonial politics notwithstanding, the burgeoning English presence throughout the Connecticut River valley increased pressure on both the Dutch and the Pequot. By 1636, the small contingent of Dutch traders at Good Hope was encircled by a vastly larger number of English settlers. But the biggest losers in the struggle for control over Connecticut were unquestionably the Pequot, who found themselves increasingly constrained in a vise between English interlopers and their native rivals. The Mohegan sachem Uncas, for example, aroused English anxieties by spreading rumors of an

[12] Cave, *Pequot War* 89-93, 96-97; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:164-65; J. Hammond Trumbull, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1850), 1:iiin; Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 198.

impending Pequot attack on English settlements in Connecticut. Such reports received serious attention from colonial authorities, for given the Pequots' precarious situation in 1636, it certainly seemed plausible that they might "out of desperate madnesse . . . sett both upon Indians and Englishmen jointly." Nonetheless, there is no credible evidence that the Pequot actually planned to launch a preemptive strike against the English in 1636. As historian Alfred A. Cave has noted,

> Despite Uncas's story, there were no verified incidents of Pequot aggression against the English after their visit to Boston in 1634. They took no advantage of the many opportunities they had to strike at English trading parties and settlers on the isolated trails leading into the Connecticut valley, nor did they actually interfere with commerce on the river. . . . If one discounts rumors and stories spread by nervous Englishmen and by Indians hostile to Sassacus, it would appear that the Pequots had honored fully their promise concerning English occupation of Connecticut.

Uncas further undermined Pequot-English relations by reporting to Puritan authorities that the murder of John Stone had not been a case of mistaken nationality, as Pequot leaders had claimed, but an organized plot engineered by none other than Sassacus himself. Like his warnings of an imminent Pequot attack, it is impossible to know whether Uncas's claims regarding Stone's murder were actually true. It seems clear, however, that in relaying these reports to the English, Uncas sought primarily to advance his own people's drive for independence from Pequot hegemony.[13]

Uncas's machinations contributed to a steady decline in relations between the Pequot and English throughout 1636. In July, Henry Vane, governor of the Bay colony, ordered Winthrop, Jr. to meet with Pequot leaders to demand that they turn over Stone's murderers and the wampum payment specified in the 1634 Boston agreement. Winthrop,

---

[13] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 317; Cave, *Pequot War*, 99-100; Jonathan Brewster to John Winthrop, Jr., June 18, 1636, quoted in Cave, *Pequot War*, 99.

Jr. was also instructed to ask the Pequot what role, if any, they played in the murder of two Englishmen on Long Island and in an allegedly planned attack on a Plymouth trading bark. “Of all these things,” Vane wrote,

> we desire you to take the relation from their owne mouths, and to informe us particularly of their severall answers: giving them to understand that it is not the manner of the English to take revenge of injury untill the partys that are guilty have beene called to answer fairely for themselves.

Finally, Vane concluded, if the Pequot “shall not give you satisfaction according to these our instructions, or shall bee found guilty of any of the sayd murthers, and will not delivver the actours in them into our hands,” then Winthrop should “declare to them that we hold ourselves free from any league or peace with them, and shall revenge the blood of our countrymen as occasion shall serve.” In other words, the Pequot were to comply or face the prospect of an English war. Pequot representatives did meet with colonial leaders at Saybrook in July, but little is known of what was concluded there. What is known is that shortly after this meeting, the younger Winthrop fled Saybrook, leaving Lieutenant Lion Gardener to deal with the colony’s increasingly deteriorating situation with regard to the Pequot. A subsequent trade mission, led by the younger John Winthrop’s brother Stephen, ended abortively when the Saybrook colonists suspected that they were being drawn into a Pequot ambush. Reflecting on this latest development, Gardener “saw [the Pequot] plotted our destruction” and concluded “I durst not trust them.” Doubtless many of his compatriots harbored similar feelings.[14]

*

---

[14] Cave, *Pequot War*, 100-103; Henry Vane and John Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., July 4, 1636, in Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 113-15; Lion Gardener, “Relation of the Pequot War” (1660), in Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 125-26.

It was against this backdrop of deteriorating English-Pequot relations that the murder of another Englishman brought matters to a crisis. The body of John Oldham, "a member of Watertown congregation, who had been long out a trading," was discovered in his trading bark off Block Island "stark naked, his head cleft to the brains, and his hands and legs cut off." Colonial leaders quickly ascertained that Oldham's killers were Narragansett, not Pequot. Upon questioning a native captured on Oldham's bark, "we found that all the sachems of the Narragansett, except [principal sachems] Canonicus and Miantunnomoh, were the contrivers of Mr. Oldham's death; and the occasion was, because he went to make peace with the Pekods last year." Subsequently, Roger Williams wrote to Vane that his own investigations had revealed that at least three natives involved in the killing were Narragansett sachems, while at least two others "were hired by the sachem of Niantick," a Narragansett tributary. Gardener, moreover, reported seeing physical evidence linking the Narragansett to Oldham's murder:

> The Narragansets that were at Block-Island killed him, and had £50 of gold of his, for I saw it when he had five pieces of me, and put it up into a clout and tied it up all together, when he went away from me to Block Island; but the Narragansets had it and punched holes into it, and put it about their necks for jewels; and afterwards I saw the Dutch have some of it, which they had of the Narragansets at a small rate. [15]

Given their obvious culpability in Oldham's death, one might have expected the English to have vented their wrath upon the Narragansett; but instead, the colonists' response was measured. In August, the Bay colony sent envoys Edward Gibbons and John Higginson, along with the principal Massachusett sachem, Cutshamekin, to meet with Canonicus "to treat with him about the murder of John Oldham." As Winthrop noted, the meeting was anything but acrimonious:

---

[15] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:183-84; Gardener, "Relation of the Pequot War," 139.

> They [Gibbons and Higginson] returned, being very well accepted, and good succes in their business. They observed in the sachem much state, great command over his men, and marvellous wisdom in his answers and his carriage of the whole treaty, clearing himself and his neighbors of the murder, and offering assistance for the revenge of it.

Thus it would seem that the elderly Narragansett sachem had somehow managed to persuade the colonial emissaries to excuse his people's involvement in Oldham's murder. It is possible that the envoys came away from the meeting believing, as Bradford reported, that "some of the murderers of Oldham fled to the Pequots," and that the Pequot were therefore complicit in his killing. In actual fact, however, the issue of who was responsible for the murder was probably of secondary importance to the colonists, for this question apparently served as a mere pretext for the diplomatic mission to Canonicus. According to Edward Johnson, "The English sought by all meanes to keepe [the Narragansett] from confederating with the Pequods, and understanding by intelligence, that the Pequods would send for them to that end, endeavored to prevent them." Apparently, the prospect of a Pequot-Narragansett alliance was frightening enough to cause the English to overlook the relatively trivial matter of Oldham's murder. The real purpose of the colonists' visit to Canonicus, then, was to shore up relations with the Narragansett. In this they were successful. As Johnson reported, Canonicus told the envoys "that he did willingly embrace peace with the English," while he also "was well advised of the Peaquods cruell disposition and aptnesse to make War." Thus Gibbons and Higginson returned to Boston, "having gained the old Kings [Canonicus's] favour so farre, as rather to favour them [the English] then the Pequods." Ironically, the Pequot

were destined to bear the brunt of the colonists' vengeance for a murder commissioned by the Narragansett.[16]

Officials in Massachusetts Bay were determined to make sure that the murder of Englishmen did not go unanswered. As Captain John Underhill wrote, "The blood of the innocent called for vengeance." Accordingly, Governor Vane sent forth "a hundred well appointed soldiers," under the command of John Endecott, to conduct a punitive raid against the natives. On August 22, Endecott's men reached Block Island, landing on the shore with "arrows flying thick about us." But the natives subsequently proved elusive, as they "retired into swamps, so as we could not find them." Unable to kill or capture any of the island's natives, the colonists "burnt and spoiled both houses and corn in great abundance" and "destroyed some of their dogs" before returning to their ships. Then Endecott turned his attention to the Pequot.[17]

Endecott brought his small army to Saybrook, and, in Gardener's words, "made that place their rendezvous or seat of war." Gardener was less than pleased with this development, for he told Endecott "you come hither to raise these wasps about my ears, and then you will take wing and fly away." Ignoring Gardener's protestations, Endecott led his force up what is now the Thames River, into the heart of Pequot territory. Upon

---

[16] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:186; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 292; Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 161-63. As historian Alfred Cave has noted, "There is neither evidence nor likelihood that Oldham's killers took refuge among the Pequots." Cave traces the popular myth that the Pequot were responsible for Oldham's death to the Puritan historian William Hubbard, who reported in 1677 that "those that murdered him . . . fled presently to the Pequods, by whom they were sheltered, and so became also guilty themselves of his blood." See Cave, *Pequot War*, 107-8, and Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England* (1677; repr., Stockbridge, MA: Herman Willard, 1803), 19-20.

[17] Cave, *Pequot War*, 109-13; Underhill, "Newes from America," 51-53. After Endecott's raid, the natives of Block Island submitted to English authority and began sending annual wampum payments to Massachusetts Bay.

seeing the arriving colonists, the Pequot quickly ascertained that this was no trading mission. According to Underhill, the natives on the shore called out, "What, Englishmen, what cheer, what cheer, are you hoggery, will you cram us? That is, are you angry, will you kills us, and do you come to fight?" Endecott subsequently informed a Pequot envoy "that the governors of the Bay sent us to demand the heads of those persons that had slain Captain Norton and Captain Stone, and the rest of their company" and that "if they desired their own peace and welfare, they will peaceably answer our expectation, and give us the heads of the murderers." But instead of answering the English demands, the Pequots stalled for time. Endecott's men landed on the shore and prepared for battle. As Underhill noted, "Marching into a champaign field we displayed our colors; but none would come near us, but standing remotely off did laugh at us for our patience." The English, suspecting they were being drawn into a trap, "suddenly set upon our march, and gave fire to as many as we could come near, firing their wigwams, spoiling their corn, and many other necessaries that they had buried in the ground we raked up, which the soldiers had for booty. Thus we spent the day burning and spoiling the country." The following day, Endecott's forces landed on the other side of the river, in the territory of the western Niantic—who were themselves subjects of the Pequot. There they found that "no Indians would come near us, but run from us, as the deer from the dogs." Once again the English satisfied themselves with destroying native homes and corn, and then "having burnt and spoiled what we could light on, we embarked our men, and set sail for the Bay." In the course of Endecott's raids on the Pequot and western Niantic, the English suffered but one casualty, "one man wounded in the leg," whereas the Narragansett reported to Winthrop "that thirteen of the Pequods were killed, and forty wounded." By

this point, as Gardener noted, English-Pequot relations had deteriorated beyond repair, "and thus began the war between the Indians and us in these parts."[18]

*

If Endecott's goal was to terrify the Pequot and their tributaries into submission, then his campaign of destruction failed to achieve this objective. Instead, Gardener's fear that the Bay colonists' raid would only "raise these wasps about my ears" was confirmed. Shortly after Endecott departed the scene, a party of Saybrook men went upriver to gather hay from a meadow in Pequot territory. As Gardener reported, "the Indians presently rose out of the long grass, and killed three, and took the brother of Mr. Mitchell, who is the minister of Cambridge, and roasted him alive." A couple of weeks later, Pequot warriors ambushed a group of colonists who had gone out fowling "and shot them all three; one of them escaped through the corn, shot through the leg, the other two they tormented." Alarmed, Gardener sent letters to request reinforcements from the Bay colony and to warn the towns upriver that Pequot attacks were imminent. He also cautioned that unarmed ships should stay out of the Connecticut River. The English trader John Tilley, ignoring Gardener's advice, went ashore a few miles upstream of Saybrook, "not suspecting the bloody-mindedness of those persons." According to Underhill, the Pequot

> fell upon him and a man with him, whom they wickedly and barbarously slew; and, by relation, brought him home, tied him to a stake, flayed his skin off, put hot embers between the flesh and the skin, cut off his fingers and toes, and made hatbands of them; thus barbarous was their cruelty!

---

[18] Cave, *Pequot War*, 113-19; Gardener, "Relation of the Pequot War," 126-27; Underhill, "Newes from America," 55-60; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:189-90. A subplot of Endecott's raid against the Pequot involved the Massachusett sachem Cutshamekin, who participated in the attack. As Winthrop noted, Cutshamekin "had crept into a swamp and killed a Pequot, and having flayed off the skin of his head, he sent it to Canonicus." This delighted the Narragansett sachem, who showed the scalp "to all the sachems about him, and returned many thanks to the English, and sent four fathom of wampum to Cutshamekin." Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:189.

Through these and similar incidents, the Pequot made it clear that they would now violently resist the incursion of the English into their territory.[19]

Shortly after Endecott's raid, Roger Williams, the banished Puritan nonconformist who remained friendly with various native groups, wrote to Winthrop that the Pequot and their western Niantic allies had resolved "to live and die together, and not yeald one up" to the English. But despite their determination to disrupt the colonists' presence in Connecticut, the epidemic of 1633-34 had reduced the Pequots' military strength to the point where they could no longer dictate the course of events in the Connecticut valley. Running out of options, Sassacus did what could only have been heretofore unthinkable: he sought an alliance with the Narragansett. As Bradford noted, the Pequot "sought to make peace with the Narragansetts, and used very pernicious arguments to move them thereunto: as that the English were strangers and began to overspread the country, and would deprive them thereof in time, if they were suffered to grow and increase." Upon learning of the Pequots' entreaties to the Narragansett, Williams again wrote to Winthrop, reporting "that the Pequods and Naragansetts were at truce, and that Miantunnomoh told him, that the Pequods had labored to persuade them, that the English were minded to destroy all Indians." Now, colonists across New England were confronted with the menancing prospect of a Narragansett-Pequot alliance. Realizing that such an alliance could endanger their very existence, the Bay colony's leaders resolved to disrupt it. First they implored Williams to employ his "utmost and Speediest Endeavors to breake and hinder the league labored for by [the Pequot]." Accordingly, Williams met with both

---

[19] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:192; Gardener, "Relation of the Pequot War," 128-29; Cave, *Pequot War*, 130-35; Underhill, "Newes from America," 66-67.

Canonicus and his nephew Miantonomi, who would soon succeed Canonicus as principal sachem of the Narragansett. Williams was, among other things, a skilled negotiator; and, after consulting with him, the Narragansett leaders declared their neutrality in the expanding English-Pequot conflict. Then Governor Vane sent for Miantonomi, who came to Boston in October with a host of other Narragansett leaders and the Massachusett sachem Cutshamekin. The negotiations that followed resulted in a diplomatic victory for the colonists. As Winthrop noted, Miantonomi declared

> That [the Narragansett] had always loved the English, and desired firm peace with us: That they would continue in war with the Pequods and their confederates, till they were subdued; and desired we should do so: They would deliver our enemies to us, or kill them . . . : That they would now make a firm peace, and two months hence they would send us a present.

In the treaty of friendship that emerged from this meeting, the English and Narragansett agreed, among other things, to "free trade between us," and that neither party would "make peace with the Pequods without the other's consent." Moreover, the English promised to notify the Narragansett "when we go against the Pequods," at which time the Narragansett would "send us some guides."[20]

Now completely isolated and outnumbered by hostile rivals, the Pequot continued their campaign of small-scale assaults on colonists in and around Saybrook. In February 1637, four colonists were killed when a party of Saybrook men were ambushed by fifty natives. Later that spring, Gardener reported that Pequot warriors attacked an English shallop in the Connecticut river and killed two men, "one whereof they killed at Six-mile Island, the other came down drowned to us at our doors, with an arrow shot into his eye

[20] Roger Williams to John Winthrop [October 24, 1636?], quoted in Cave, *Pequot War*, 123; Williams to John Mason and Thomas Prence, June 23, 1670, quoted in *Cave*, Pequot War, 124; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 294; Cave, *Pequot War*, 123-25; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:193.

and through his head." Cogently summarizing the colonists' situation in early 1637, Bradford wrote: "the Pequots fell openly upon the English at Connecticut, in the lower parts of the river, and slew sundry of them as they were at work in the fields, both men and women, to the great terrour of the rest." Despite the growing restlessness of colonists on the frontier, the Bay colony was slow in responding to Gardener's requests for assistance. Finally, on April 10, Winthrop noted that "Capt. Underhill was sent to Saybrook, with twenty men, to keep the fort . . . for fear any advantage should be taken by the adverse party, through the weakness of the place."[21]

On April 23, 1637, the Pequot launched on attack on the town of Wethersfield. Accounts of the English casualties vary, but according to Winthrop, the natives "killed six men, being at their work, and twenty cows and a mare, and had killed three women, and carried away two maids." This event, more than any other, galvanized the river towns and the Bay colony to escalate the war against the Pequot. The Bay colony sent Captain John Mason and forty men to join Miantonomi in a planned raid on a Pequot island, then commissioned "one hundred and sixty more after them to prosecute the war." Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield, together comprising a total of some 250 inhabitants, organized an army of ninety men to wage war against the Pequot. On May 22, Winthrop received word from Miantonomi "that Capt. Mason, with a company of English on the river, had surprised and slain eight Pequods, and taken seven squaws." Two days later, a letter from Roger Williams indicated "that Capt. Mason was come to Saybrook with eighty English and one hundred Indians; and that the Indians had gone out there, and met with seven Pequods; five they killed; one they took alive, whom the English put to

[21] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:192, 1:208, 1:212; Gardener, "Relation of the Pequot War," 129; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 294.

torture; and set all their heads upon the fort."[22] But these losses paled by comparison to what the Pequot were about to suffer.

*

In May 1637, Mason led a force of seventy-seven Englishmen, sixty Mohegan, and roughly two hundred Narragansett warriors to the Thames River and surrounded the fortified Pequot village of Mystic. Shortly after daybreak on May 26, the colonists attacked the fort, whereupon they encountered spirited resistance from its inhabitants. Perturbed by the slow pace of the battle, Mason concluded, "We must burn them." He then "brought out a Firebrand" from one of the natives' wigwams, "and putting it into the Matts with which they were covered, set the Wigwams on Fire." The colonists withdrew and once again surrounded the fort. Within minutes, the entire village was ablaze. As Mason later recounted, the flames "did swiftly over-run the Fort, to the extream Amazement of the Enemy, and great Rejoycing of our selves." From within the burning village, native warriors fired a barrage of arrows at the besieging colonists; in turn, the English "repayed them with our small Shot." About forty "of the Stoutest" natives made it out of the fort, whereupon they "perished by the Sword." Thus in less than two hours, Mystic was transformed from a fortified village teeming with native inhabitants to a grisly inferno of death. Mason estimated that some "six or seven Hundred" Pequots were killed in the blaze, while "only seven [were] taken captive, and about seven escaped."

---

[22] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:213, 1:218-19; Cave, *Pequot War*, 136. The two English maids captured at Wethersfield were "well used by the Pequods, and no violence offered them." They were redeemed by the crew of a Dutch sloop and returned to the English in late May. See Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:219; and Cave, *Pequot War*, 142-44. Despite Winthrop's pleas, Bradford was reluctant to provide assistance for the war against the Pequot. Eventually, Plymouth agreed to send fifty men, but they did not arrive until after the fighting had ceased. See Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:213-14; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 294-95; Cave, *Pequot War*, 137-39.

Winthrop reported a somewhat lower overall death toll, which included "two chief sachems, and one hundred and fifty fighting men, and about one hundred and fifty old men, women and children." English losses at Mystic, in contrast, amounted to two men killed and twenty wounded.[23]

The willingness of the English to employ total warfare against the Pequot, slaughtering not only combatants but also women, children, and the aged and infirm, left a deep impression on the region's other native groups. As Underhill recorded, the colonists' native allies "much rejoiced at our victories, and greatly, admired the manner of Englishmen's fight, but cried Mach it, mach it; that is, It is naught, it is naught, because it is too furious, and slays too many men." The Puritans, meanwhile, viewed matters differently. For his part, Mason saw the burning of the village at Mystic not as an act of genocide, but as a manifestation of divine Providence:

> Thus was God seen in the Mount, Crushing his proud Enemies and the Enemies of his People: . . . burning them up in the fire of his Wrath, and dunging the Ground with their Flesh: It was the Lord's Doings, and it is marvellous in our eyes! It is He that hath made his Work wonderful, and therefore ought to be remembered.

Apparently, Mason's attitude toward the wholesale destruction of the Pequot was shared by many of his contemporaries. For on June 15, Winthrop noted, "There was a day of

---

[23] Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 320; Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 23-25, 157n74; John Mason, "A Brief History of the Pequot War," in Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 28-31; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:220; Cave, *Pequot War*, 146-52. Estimates of the total Pequot death toll at Mystic vary from 300 to 800. See Cook, "Interracial Warfare," 7; and Cave, *Pequot War*, 151. In the confusion of the battle, English-allied natives also suffered casualties from friendly fire. According to Winthrop, "Divers of the Indian friends were hurt by the English, because they had not some mark to distinguish them from the Pequods, as some of them had."

thanksgiving kept in all the churches for the victory obtained against the Pequods, and for other mercies."[24]

The Pequots' world, which had been teetering on the brink of collapse since 1634, utterly disintegrated after the massacre at Mystic. According to Mason, Sassacus's counselors "concluded there was no abiding any longer in their Country, and so resolved to fly into several Parts." Desultory fighting continued for several months, but eventually most of the remaining Pequot were killed or captured by the English—or by other natives. As Mason noted, "The Pequots now became a Prey to all Indians. Happy were they that could bring in their Heads to the English: Of which there came almost daily to Windsor, or Hartford." Those Pequot that escaped decapitation were sent into servitude in various places: many went to the Narragansett or Mohegan, some were sent to Massachusetts Bay, and a few were sent to the West Indies. One Pequot slave was given to a "Mr. Cutting to carry into England." Winthrop commented that some Pequot slaves, who had been sent to Boston "ran away and were brought again by the Indians our neighbours, and those we branded on the shoulder." In late July, Winthrop reported that "we have slain 13 [Pequot] sachems," though Sassacus remained alive and had "fled to the Mohawks." Then on August 5, Winthrop reported receiving "a part of the skin and lock of hair of Sassacus and his brother and five other Pequod sachems," who had been "surprised and slain, with twenty of their best men" by their Mohawk hosts. As to why the Mohawk decided to execute the Pequot chief sachem, Bradford confessed his uncertainty: "whether to satisfy the English or rather the Narragansetts (who, as I have

[24] Underhill, "Newes from America," 84; Mason, "Brief History," 35; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:222.

since heard, hired them to do it) or for their own advantage, I well know not." Whatever their motive, Bradford continued, "thus this war took end."[25]

With Sassacus dead and his people all but vanquished, the English quickly consolidated their control over southern New England. The region's remaining native tribes pledged alliegance to Massachusetts Bay, proving their loyalty by supplying both wampum payments and the body parts of slain Pequots. In August, Winthrop noted that the sachems of Long Island had sent in "many Pequods' heads and hands," along with a substantial tribute of wampum. Later that month, the English received from the Narragansett "the hands of three Pequods,—one the chief of those who murdered Capt. Stone." In November, Winthrop wrote that Miantonomi had come to Boston and "acknowledged that all the Pequod country and Block Island were ours, and promised that he would not meddle with them but by our leave." The Mohegan, recognizing the power of the English juggernaut, cultivated particularly close ties with their new overlords. In April 1638, a Mohegan sachem "brought a present of eighteen skins of beaver" to the Bay colony, and then in June, Uncas came to Boston bearing "a present of twenty fathom of wampom." During his visit, Uncas promised "to submit to the order of the English" and pledged his fealty, telling his hosts,

> This heart (laying his hand upon his breast) is not mine, but yours; I have no men; they are all yours; command me any difficult thing, I will do it; I will not believe any Indians' words against the English; if any man shall kill an Englishman, I will put him to death, were he never so dear to me.

---

[25] Mason, "Brief History," 35-36, 39-40; Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:221, 1:225-26; Winthrop to Bradford, July 28, 1637, in Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 398; Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 297. Regarding a shipment of Pequot slaves intended for Bermuda, Winthrop wrote: "We sent fifteen of the boys and two women to Bermuda, by Mr. Peirce; but he, missing it, carried them to Providence Isle [off the Nicaraguan coast]." Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:227-28.

In November 1638, leaders of the English, Narragansett, and Mohegan concluded the Treaty of Hartford, which proclaimed that the Pequot nation no longer existed and provided legal sanction for the colonists' occupation of their former territory. The treaty divided the roughly two hundred remaining Pequots between Miantonomi and Uncas and declared they "shall no more be called Peaquots but Narragansetts and Mohegans." Moreover, the Mohegan and Narragansett agreed that they would neither "suffer [the Pequot] to live in the country that was formerly theirs but is now the Englishes by conquest" nor "possess any part of the Peaquot country without leave from the English." For practical purposes, the treaty simply codified what was already apparent on the ground: by 1638, the English were the undisputed masters of New England.[26]

*

The Pequot War is the subject of a vast historiography, which Alfred A. Cave has characterized as "often more polemical than substantive." Too frequently, modern analyses of the conflict have focused on the question of whether the colonists or the natives were primarily responsible for the outbreak of hostilities.[27] In actual fact, the

---

[26] Winthrop, *Journal*, 1:231, 1:238, 1:269, 1:271; "Treaty of Hartford," September 21, 1638, reprinted in Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 340-41. Dutch influence in southern New England declined precipitously in the aftermath of the Pequot War. Their trading post at Good Hope endured, however, until it was taken by the English during the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652-54. Meanwhile, with the Pequot removed, Miantonomi and Uncas each sought to gain the upper hand in southern New England. The Mohegan sachem prevailed. In 1643, with the colonists' assent, Uncas killed Miantonomi "with a sharp blow to the head." See Meuwese, "Dutch Connection," 320-21; and Cave, *Pequot War*, 164-67.

[27] On the historiography of the Pequot War, see Cave, *Pequot War*, 2-7. Among recent historians, Frances Jennings is the prototype of those who hold the Puritans primarily responsible for the war. Jennings, in fact, eschews the term "Pequot War" and instead refers to the conflict as "The First Puritan Conquest," which he describes as "one long atrocity" on the part of the colonists. See Jennings, *Invasion of America*, 178-79, 226. Other recent anti-Puritan analyses include Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building*, 3rd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), viii-ix, 49-61; and Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 112-15, 276-77. On the other hand, the most prominent defender of the Puritans in

Pequot War resulted from a complex interplay of factors, and no one group bears sole responsibility for the conflict. Before 1637, both natives and colonists declined opportunities to defuse tensions and forestall the coming confrontation. The Pequot could have delivered the killers of John Stone to Boston and acceded to the colonists' demands for wampum and furs, but these were terms they were unwilling to accept. By the same token, the colonists could have pursued a mutually beneficial trade relationship with the Pequot, but instead they sought to humiliate the natives—first by asking them to pay tribute to the English, and then by sending an armed force to burn and pillage their homes and fields. Thus it is fair to say that both sides demonstrated more intransigence than flexibility. But it also seems likely that concessions, by either party, would have accomplished little more than postponing the conflict. Eventually, land-hungry emigrants from Massachusetts Bay were going to seek to settle on lands the Pequot were determined to protect. Given this, and considering that both parties wished to control trade on the Connecticut River, it seems likely that conflict between the English and the Pequot was, eventually, inevitable.

While concentrating on the question of which party should be blamed for the Pequot War, scholars have devoted considerably less attention to another important factor in the conflict's genesis: the smallpox epidemic of 1633-34. Before 1633, the Pequot were a thriving, populous people who controlled an extensive (if disgruntled) network of

---

this debate has been Alden T. Vaughan, who in the first edition of *New England Frontier* (1965) described the war as "the attempt by the Puritan colonies—supported by the bulk of the Indians—to curb the militant Pequot tribe." In the introductions to subsequent editions of this work, however, Vaughan has apportioned somewhat more blame to the colonists. See Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 3rd ed., 134-38, xxvii-xxix, lx-lxi. Other recent works espousing a relatively sympathetic view of the Puritans include Adam J. Hirsch, "The Collision of Military Cultures in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of American History* 74 (1988): 1187-212; and Stephen T. Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered," *New England Quarterly* 64 (1991): 206-24.

tributary native villages. They dominated southern New England politically, culturally and economically. Had the English tried to attack them at that time, the Pequot could have responded by bringing hundreds, if not thousands of warriors into the theater of battle, launching reprisals from Plymouth to the Bay colony. However much the Puritans might have desired access to the Connecticut River and its surrounding valley, they could not have attempted to displace the Pequot without endangering their own existence in the region. And even as the English grew stronger, the Pequot could have responded by negotiating with them from a position of relative strength—like Massasoit did with Plymouth in 1621—and thereby retained some semblance of sovereignty, at least for a while. But that was not how it happened. When smallpox struck in 1633 and 1634, it ruined the Pequot, depleting their ranks of warriors, women, and children. It was in this weakened state that the Pequot had to face revolts from their erstwhile tributaries and all-out war with the Narragansett and Mohegan. Thus when the Pequot turned to the English for assistance in 1634, they were but a mere shadow of the powerful nation they had once been. They were unable to negotiate an acceptable agreement with the Bay colony, and they could not keep English colonists from migrating to the Connecticut valley. It was in this state of affairs that the murders of various Englishmen, including Stone and Oldham, prompted Massachusetts Bay officials to issue humiliating demands to the Pequot leadership, then to launch a full-scale war upon the Pequot in an effort to bring order to the Connecticut River valley.

To say that the 1633-34 smallpox epidemic caused the Pequot War would be to oversimplify matters, in much the same way as assigning the lion's share of blame to either the colonists or the Pequot misses the point. But it is quite reasonable to assume

that had the epidemic not occurred when it did, then the history of the English conquest of Connecticut would have unfolded very differently than it did.

Conclusion: Providence and Pestilence

> Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone to many, yea in some sort to our whole nation; let the glorious name of Jehovah have all the praise.
>
> —William Bradford[1]

To the New England Puritans, the English triumph in the Pequot War was a sure sign of God's Providence. John Mason, who helped secure the Pequots' defeat by burning several hundred of them alive at Mystic, exemplified the Puritans' providential view of native mortality. Mason ascribed the English victory not to his own exploits, but to divine will:

> Thus the Lord was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder Parts, and to give us their Land for an Inheritance: Who remembered us in our low Estate, and redeemed us out of our Enemies Hands: Let us therefore praise the Lord for his Goodness and his wonderful Works to the Children of Men!"

Furthermore, Mason's comment about the Puritans' receipt of the Pequots' "Land for an Inheritance" is telling. Indeed, from the earliest days of English settlement at Plymouth, the colonists interpreted the natives' widespread demise as an indication that God approved of their occupation of formerly native lands. Assessing the effects of the 1616 epidemic, John Smith wrote that "it seems God hath provided this Country for our Nation, destroying the natives by the plague, it not touching one Englishman." Similarly, Daniel Gookin noted that through the epidemic "divine providence made way for the quiet and peaceable settlement of the English" in what had been the territory of the Pokanoket. Edward Johnson, providing a more nuanced explanation, wrote that by sending this "sore Consumption" among the natives, "Christ . . . not only made roome for

---

[1] Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 236.

his people to plant; but also tamed the hard and cruel hearts of these barbarous Indians insomuch that halfe a handfull of his people landing not long after in Plimoth-Plantation, found little resistance." Gorges asserted that the epidemic left the land "without any [people] to disturb or appease our free and peaceable possession thereof, from when we may justly conclude, that GOD made the way toe effect his work." To Winslow, the conclusion was obvious: "when I seriously consider of things, I cannot but think that God hath a purpose to give that land, as an inheritance, to our nation."[2]

When smallpox struck the New England natives in 1633, Puritan commentators again saw divine Providence at work. Winthrop was particularly adamant in arguing that disease among the natives indicated God's support for the Puritans' mission in America. As he wrote to John Endecott, "if God were not pleased with our inheritinge these parts, why did he drive out the natives before us? and why does he still make roome for us, by diminishinge them as we increase?" Later that year, Winthrop stated the case even more succinctly: "For the natives, they are all near dead of the small-pox, so as the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess." Such sentiments must have been widely shared by the Puritan migrants who, in the wake of native epidemics, moved in and seized the land. A pamphlet, published in 1643, exemplified the prevailing Puritan attitude by attributing English control of New England to "the good hand of God," which had "favored our beginnings . . . [by] sweeping away great multitudes of the natives . . . that he might make room for us."[3]

---

[2] Mason, "Brief History," 44; Smith, *Advertisements*, 20; Gookin, *Historical Collections*, 8; Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, 41-42; Gorges, "Briefe Narration," 2:77; Winslow, "Good News from New England," 581.

[3] Winthrop to John Endecott, January 3, 1634, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1871-1873* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1873), 345; Winthrop

It is hardly surprising that the English Puritans saw the natives' suffering, and their own resulting success in New England, as events ordained and sanctioned by God, for this belief was entirely consistent with their providential worldview. Scholars of more recent generations, on the other hand, have looked at these events through the lens of post-Enlightenment scientific understanding, which tends to discredit explanations that depend on divine intervention. Nevertheless, modern scholars would agree that the English colonists did receive assistance from a powerful but invisible ally. Indeed, throughout the early colonial period, a potent cadre of inadvertently imported pathogenic microorganisms facilitated the English conquest by removing thousands of natives and profoundly altering the cultural and political worlds of those who survived.

*

Before the arrival of Old World epidemic diseases, the English were unable to establish permanent settlements in New England. This was not because of any inherent shortcomings of the land or climate, but rather because the continent's indigenous inhabitants, while happy to trade with Europeans, would not allow them to stay too long on the shore. In this regard, the Viking Thorvald Eiriksson surely spoke for many prospective European settlers in northeastern North America when he said of the Vinland colony: "There is fat around my belly! We have won a fine and fruitful country, but will hardly be allowed to enjoy it." According to Norse oral tradition, these were Eiriksson's

---

to Sir Nathaniel Rich, May 22, 1634, in "Report of the Mss. of His Grace the Duke of Manchester," pt. II of *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1881), 49; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 90; *New England's First Fruits: With Divers other Special Matters Concerning that Country* (1643; repr. New York: J. Sabin, 1865), 36-37.

last words, uttered just before he died with a Skræling arrow protruding from his belly.[4] Native resistance also spelled disaster for the Cartier-Roberval settlement venture on the St. Lawrence in 1542, just as it did for the well-financed English colonizing expeditions to New England in the first decade of the seventeenth century. So long as the northeastern natives remained largely unaffected by European epidemic diseases, they would be powerful enough to essentially preclude European colonization of their lands. But even though European diseases did not make substantial inroads into northeastern North America during the sixteenth century—the experience of the St. Lawrence Iroquoians notwithstanding—the northeastern natives' luck could not hold out forever. By the early seventeenth century, smallpox, measles, and influenza had already been ravaging native populations in Spanish America for decades. When these and other diseases began infiltrating the Northeast, the natives found that their capacity to resist European colonization, along with so many other aspects of their economy and culture, was destroyed.

Even before the Pilgrims contemplated emigrating to the New World, an infectious disease began preparing the ground for their arrival by decimating the Pokanoket, Massachusett, and Pawtucket natives that had previously occupied the coast of present-day Massachusetts. As we have seen, the responsible disease was almost certainly smallpox, for no other malady would have been as likely to cause such devastating disease, even among a previously unexposed population, after a transatlantic voyage to New England in the early seventeenth century. But whatever its cause, the disease was essential to the Pilgrims' survival, and eventual success, in New England.

[4] "Eirik the Red's Saga," 185.

Their settlement, Plymouth, was built on the ruins of what had been the native village of Patuxet. Beyond that, the epidemic changed the political balance of power among the regional native nations, creating conditions in which the Pokanoket found it in their interests to ally with the colonists, rather than driving them away. As Plymouth extended its zone of influence northward, sporadic epidemics continued to break out among the natives around Massachusetts Bay. These outbreaks, occurring among populations still reeling from the 1616 plague, enhanced both the colonists' economic control over the region and the natives' impression that they were defenseless before the powerful and capricious English god. And this was just the beginning.

When Puritan migrants began pouring into communities around Massachusetts Bay in the 1630s, they brought unprecedented numbers of young children with them. These children, many of whom had not yet experienced smallpox, provided that most dreaded scourge of Native Americans with an extraordinary opportunity to travel to North America. Not surprisingly, smallpox began breaking out among the Puritans in Massachusetts from the earliest days of the Great Migration. When *Variola* inevitably spread to the natives in 1633, it did so with devastating effects, particularly among the thriving Narragansett and Pequot nations that had been unaffected by the epidemic of 1616. Besides killing thousands of natives across New England, the social disruptions that attended the epidemic of 1633-34 accounted for such seemingly unlikely scenes as the Puritan conversion of a Pawtucket sachem and the adoptions of orphaned native children by well-meaning colonists. Moreover, as was true of the 1616 epidemic, the 1633-34 smallpox outbreak inaugurated a wave of political implications for the region's surviving natives. Things went especially badly for the Pequot, who even before the

epidemic found themselves overburdened by insurrections from the Mohegan and other discontented tributaries and at war with the Narragansett over access to European trade. Then, after the Pequot lost most of their population in 1634, their world imploded. As Puritan families moved into Connecticut, the Pequot tried to reach a negotiated agreement with the English in Massachusetts Bay. When that failed, they reached out, in desperation, to the hated Narragansett—only to see that nation, along with the Mohegan, join with the English in a powerful anti-Pequot alliance. From that point, the Pequots' fate was sealed. The consumption of hundreds of Pequot souls in the inferno at Mystic, and the codification of the Pequot nation's elimination in the Treaty of Hartford, represented culminations of a process that had been made inexorable by the 1633-34 smallpox epidemic.

*

Smallpox remained an omnipresent force in New England throughout the seventeenth century. Even after the 1633-34 epidemic subsided, the English colonies were never entirely free from disease. Major outbreaks killed dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of colonists and caused serious social disruptions in 1636-38, 1648-49, 1666-68, 1677-78, 1688-91, and 1697-1702. As one author has written, "For 180 years smallpox was responsible for more deaths than any other one cause. Almost always sporadically present, coming in epidemic form every few years, few indeed escaped its ravages." Epidemics in Boston forced the Bay colony to move its General Court to Cambridge (and then to Roxbury) in 1636 and to Charleston in 1659. In the midst of particularly severe epidemics, authorities proclaimed days of fasting in hopes of averting

further punishment from a seemingly wrathful God. But despite their divine supplications, the danger of smallpox remained unavoidable.[5]

The colonists were not the only people in New England who sought the English God's assistance in delivering them from smallpox. As the missionary John Eliot wrote of his "Praying Indians" during the 1649-50 outbreak, "it please God to work wonderfully for the [Christian] Indians who call upon God in preserving them from the small pox, when their prophane neighbors were cut off by it." For most northeastern Native Americans populations, however, smallpox exerted disastrous demographic consequences that far exceeded its impact on colonial populations. The Huron, as we have seen, were devastated by smallpox during the late 1630s; one author estimates that by 1640, the epidemic had reduced their population by 50 percent. Over the ensuing decade, the continued effects of disease and repeated attacks by the Iroquois combined to drive the Huron to the brink of extinction. Smallpox was no less a scourge for the nations of the Iroquois confederacy than it was for the Huron, however. Writing of an outbreak among the Iroquois in 1662-63, a Jesuit scholar noted that smallpox "has wrought sad havoc in their Villages and has carried off many men, besides great numbers of women and children; and as a result their Villages are nearly deserted, and their fields only half-tilled." European infections also attacked native inhabitants of the islands off the southern New England coast, as in 1658 when half the Montauk population on Long Island died in an outbreak. By examining native population losses on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, Sherburne F. Cook has determined that "introduced diseases" reduced native populations on these islands by about 80 percent between the early seventeenth and early

[5] Samuel Bayard Woodward, "The Story of Smallpox in Massachusetts," *New England Journal of Medicine* 23 (June 9, 1932): 1182-83; Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America*, 44-48.

eighteenth centuries. Many additional examples could be cited. In all, northeastern North America was struck by at least two dozen separate epidemics of European diseases, most of them caused by smallpox, during the seventeenth century.[6]

The cumulative impact of these recurrent epidemics on native population levels was devastating. As one Anglican missionary in New York wrote in 1705, the natives "wast away and have done so ever since our first arrival amongst them (as they themselves say) like Snow against the Sun." Considering "that very probably forty years hence there will scarce be seen an Indian in our America," the missionary concluded that "God's Providence in this matter seems very wonderful."[7] Anglicans and Puritans disagreed on many things, to be sure; but even the most steadfast Calvinist in New England would have concurred with this assessment of the natives' demise.

*

Each November, citizens of the United States pay homage to the intrepid Plymouth colonists with a national day of thanksgiving. On this holiday, many Americans are likely to pause, at least briefly, to reflect on the hardship and suffering the Pilgrims endured, first during their transatlantic voyage, and then during their miserable first winter in the New World. It is safe to assume that far fewer Americans spend any

---

[6] John Eliot, "Manifestation of the Further Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New England" (1651), *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 3rd ser., 4 (1864): 165-68; Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History* (Chicago: University Press, 1983), 235; Hierosme Lalemant, "Relation of what occurred in the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in the country of New France, from the Summer of the year 1662 to the Summer of the year 1663," in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 48:79; Sherburne F. Cook, "Significance of Disease," 493, 501-5; Noble David Cook, *Born to Die*, 198.

[7] Mr. Moor to the Secretary, New York, November 13, 1705, quoted in Duffy, "Smallpox and the Indians in the American Colonies," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 25 (1951): 330. Sherburne F. Cook calculated the annual average native population losses at 1.59 percent for Martha's Vineyard from 1642 to 1764, and 1.45 percent for Nantucket from 1659 to 1792. On native losses from measles, typhus, and dysentery, see Cook, "Significance of Disease," 494-95.

appreciable time considering what the natives of coastal New England had already experienced by the time the Pilgrims settled in Squanto's depopulated village of Patuxet, let alone the holocaust that would befall natives across the region in the ensuing decades. Clearly, such a tale of death and devastation does not resonate with the optimistic tone of the Pilgrim myth, at least as it has been absorbed by generations of American schoolchildren. Moreover, it is difficult to mentally juxtapose the image of Squanto, the quintessential "friendly Indian," teaching the colonists to plant corn, alongside that of the Mystic inhabitants "burning . . . in the fire of [God's] Wrath, and dunging the Ground with their Flesh."[8] Yet both pictures represent crucial stages in the evolution of English-native relations in early colonial New England, and neither scene could have occurred as it did if not for the effects of epidemic diseases.

Epidemic diseases, particularly smallpox, played a central role in the English conquest of New England. Disease cleared space in which the colonists could land and build their initial settlements; altered indigenous political conditions to facilitate their survival; and enhanced their military, political, economic, and spiritual dominion over the region. Even so, the natives were not simply passive participants in the colonization process. Indeed, it is only by considering the devastating effects of infectious diseases on native populations that agency is restored to the "friendly Indians" of New England. When native decisions are examined in this context, it becomes clear that Massasoit, Canonicus, Sassacus, and Uncas, among others, acted in their own perceived interests. Indeed, the natives frequently sought to draw the English into their own games of power politics, with varying degrees of success. Infectious disease was not the only factor

---

[8] Mason, "Brief History," 35.

determining the nature of English-native relations in New England, to be sure, but it was the most important one. Throughout the early colonial period, the interactions of “saints” and “savages” were shaped, above all else, by smallpox.

Bibliography

"Agreement between Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Sir George Peckham and George Peckham, 28 February 1583." In *Voyages and Colonising Enterprises of Sir Humphrey Gilbert*, edited by David Beers Quinn, 2:341-47. London: Hakluyt Society, 1940.

Alchon, Suzanne. *A Pest in the Land: New World Epidemics in a Global Perspective*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003.

Allen, John L. "From Cabot to Cartier: The Early Exploration of Eastern North America, 1497-1543." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82 (September 1992): 500-521.

Anderson, Marsha S., Mary P. Glodé, and Arnold L. Smith. "Meningococcal Infections." In *Feigin and Cherry's Textbook of Pediatric Infectious Diseases*. 6th edition. Edited by Ralph D. Feigin, James D. Cherry, Gail J. Demmler-Harrison, and Sheldon L. Kaplan, 1350-66. Philadelphia: Saunders, 2009.

Appleby, John C. "War, Politics, and Colonization, 1558-1625." In *The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Nicholas Canny, 55-78. Vol. 1 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, edited by Wm. Roger Louis. Oxford: University Press, 1998.

Arber, Edward, ed. *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-1623, as Told by Themselves, their Friends, and their Enemies*. London: Ward and Downey, 1897.

Archer, Gabriel. "The Relation of Captaine Gosnol's Voyage to the North Part of Virginia." In Levermore, *Forerunners and Competitors,* 1:43-54.

Ashburn, P. M. *The Ranks of Death: A Medical History of the Conquest of America*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1947.

Axtell, James. "At the Water's Edge: Trading in the Sixteenth Century." In *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*, 144-81. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Bancroft, George. *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent*. Vol. 1. Boston: Little, Brown, 1876.

Biard, Pierre. Pierre Biard to Christopher Balthazar, Port Royal, June 10, 1611. In Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations,* 1:138-83.

———. Pierre Biard to the Reverend Father Provincial, Port Royal, January 31, 1612. In Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 2:45-47.

———. “Relation of New France of its Lands, Nature of the Country, and of its Inhabitants.” 1616. In Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 3.

Black, Francis L. “An Explanation of High Death Rates among New World Peoples when in Contact with Old World Diseases.” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 37 (Winter 1994): 292-307.

Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. London: Verso, 1998.

Bragdon, Kathleen Joan. *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*. 1648. Edited by Samuel Eliot Morison. 1856. Reprint, New York: Knopf, 1952.

Bradford, William, and Edward Winslow. “A Relation or Journal of the Beginning and Proceeding of the English Plantation Settled at Plymouth in New England.” 1622. In Arber, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 395-505.

Brandt, Anthony. *The Man Who Ate His Boots: The Tragic History of the Search for the Northwest Passage*. New York: Knopf, 2010.

Bratton, Timothy L. “The Identity of the New England Indian Epidemic of 1616-19.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62 (1988): 351-83.

Brébeuf, Jean de. Jean de Brébeuf to Mutius Vitelleschi. 1636. In Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 11:9.

Brereton, John. “A Briefe and true Relation of the Discoverie of the North part of Virginia.” 1602. In Winship, *Sailors’ Narratives of Voyages*, 33-50.

Brewster, Jonathan. Jonathan Brewster to John Winthrop, Jr., June 18, 1636. Quoted in Cave, *Pequot War*, 99.

———. Jonathan Brewster to William Bradford, July 6, 1635. In Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 280-81.

Carlson, Catherine C., George J. Armelagos, and Ann L. Magennis. “Impact of Disease on the Precontact and Early Historic Populations of New England and the Maritimes.” In *Disease and Demography in the Americas*, edited by John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker, 141-53. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Cantino, Albert. Alberto Cantino to Hercules d'Este, October 17, 1501. In *America from Concept to Discovery: Early Exploration of North America*, edited by David B. Quinn, 148-49. New York: Arno Press, 1979.

Cave, Alfred A. *The Pequot War*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

Champlain, Samuel de. *Voyages of Samuel de Champlain, 1604-1618*. Edited by W. L. Grant. 1619. Reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.

———. "The Voyages to the Great River St. Lawrence by the Sieur de Champlain, Captain in the Royal Navy, from the Year 1608 until 1612." 1613. In *The Works of Samuel De Champlain*, edited by Henry Percival Biggar, 2:1-309. 1925. Reprint, Toronto: University Press, 1971.

Chet, Guy. *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Cook, Noble David. *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Cook, Ramsay, ed. *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*. Toronto: University Press, 1993.

Cook, Sherburne F. *The Indian Population of New England in the Seventeenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

———. "Interracial Warfare and Population Decline among the New England Indians." *Ethnohistory* 20 (Winter 1973): 1-24.

———. "The Significance of Disease in the Extinction of the New England Indians." *Human Biology* 45 (September 1973): 485-508.

Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.

Crosby, Alfred W. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972.

——— . "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 33 (April 1976): 289-99.

Crosby, Molly Caldwell. *The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic that Shaped our History*. New York: Berkley Books, 2006.

Cushman, Robert. "Cushman's Discourse." 1621. In *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth, 1602-1625*, edited by Alexander Young, 253-68. Boston: Little and Brown, 1841.

———. “Reasons and Considerations Touching the Lawfulness [Rightfulness] of Removing out of England into the Parts of America.” 1621. In Arber, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 495-505.

———. Robert Cushman to Edward Southworth, Dartmouth, August 17, 1620. In Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 54-57.

Darwin, Charles. *The Voyage of the Beagle*. Edited by Millicent E. Selsam. 1845. Reprint, New York: Harper and Row, 1959.

Davies, Arthur. “Prince Madoc and the Discovery of America in 1477.” *Geographical Journal* 150 (November 1984): 363-72.

Davies, James. “The Relation of a Voyage unto New England, Began from the *Lizard*, ye first of June 1607, By Captn. Popham.” In Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 35-76.

Denevan, William M. *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*. 2nd ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Dennis, Matthew. *Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Dermer, Thomas. Thomas Dermer to Samuel Purchas, May 19, 1619. In Levermore, *Forerunners and Competitors*, 2:579-84.

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. 1997. Reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.

Dobyns, Henry F. “Disease Transfer at Contact,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993): 273-91.

———.“Estimating Aboriginal American Population: An Appraisal of Techniques with a New Hemispheric Estimate.” *Current Anthropology* 7 (September 1966): 395-449.

———. *Their Number Become Thinned*: *Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983.

Drinnon, Richard. *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building*. 3rd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.

Duffy, John. *Epidemics in Colonial America*. 1953. Reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.

———. “Smallpox and the Indians in the American Colonies.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 25 (1951): 324-41.

"Eirik the Red's Saga." In Jones, *Norse Atlantic Saga*, 163-87.

Eliot, John. "Manifestation of the Further Progress of the Gospel among the Indians in New England." 1651. *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 3rd ser., 4 (1864): 165-68.

Fenn, Elizabeth A. *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.

Fuller, Samuel. Samuel Fuller to William Bradford, August 2, 1630. In Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 235-36.

Gallatin, Albert. *A Synopsis of the Indian Tribes within the United States east of the Rocky Mountains, and in the British and Russian Possessions in North America*. 1836. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973.

Gardener, Lion. "Relation of the Pequot War." In Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 116-49.

Gookin, Daniel. *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England*. 1674. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1972.

Gookin, Warner Foote. *Bartholomew Gosnold, Discoverer and Planter: New England—1602, Virginia—1607.* Edited by Philip L. Barbour. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963.

Gorges, Ferdinando. "A Briefe Narration of the Originall Undertakings of the Advancement of Plantations into the Parts of America, Especially, Shewing the Beginning, Progress, and Continuance of that of New-England." 1658. In *Sir Ferdinando Gorges and His Province of Maine, Including the Brief Relation, the Brief Narration, His Defence, the Charter Granted to Him, His Will, and His Letters*, edited by James Phinney Baxter, 2:1-81. Boston: Prince Society, 1890.

———. Ferdinando Gorges to Sir Robert Cecil, February 7, 1608. In Thayer, *Sagadahoc Colony*, 137-39.

Hakluyt, Richard. *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent*. 1582. Edited by John Winter Jones. London: Hakluyt Society, 1850.

Hayes, Edward. "A report of the voyage and successe thereof, attempted in the yeere of our Lord 1583 by sir Humphrey Gilbert . . . ." In *The Principall Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation* . . . , edited by Richard Hakluyt, 8:34-77. 1589. Reprint, New York: August M. Kelley, 1969.

Henige, David P. *Numbers from Nowhere: The American Indian Contact Population Debate*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

Higginson, Francis. "Higginson's Journal of his Voyage to New England." 1629. In *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, from 1623 to 1636*, edited by Alexander Young, 213-38. Boston: Little, Brown, 1846.

Hirsch, Adam J. "The Collision of Military Cultures in Seventeenth-Century New England." *Journal of American History* 74 (1988): 1187-212.

Hirschmann, J. V., and Gregory J. Raugi. "Adult Scurvy." *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 41 (December 1999): 895-906.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "The Medical Profession in Massachusetts." 1869. In *Medical Essays, 1842-1882*, Vol. 9 of *The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, 312-69. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892.

Hoornbeck, Billee. "An Investigation into the Cause or Causes of the Epidemic which Decimated the Indian Population of New England 1616-1619." *New Hampshire Archaeologist* 19, no. 7 (1976-1977): 35-46.

Hopkins, Donald R. *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History*. Chicago: University Press, 1983.

Hubbard, William. *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England*. 1677. Reprint, Stockbridge, MA: Herman Willard, 1803.

———. *The History of the Indian Wars in New England, From the First Settlement to the Termination of the War With King Philip, in 1677.* 1677. Edited by Samuel G. Drake. 1865. Reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2002.

Jennings, Francis. *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonists, and the Cant of Conquest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Johnson, Edward. *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England*. Edited by J. Franklin Jameson. 1654. Reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910.

Jones, David S. "Virgin Soils Revisited." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 60 (October 2003): 703-42.

Jones, Gwyn. *The Norse Atlantic Saga: Being the Norse Voyages of Discovery and Settlement to Iceland, Greenland, and North America*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Katz, Stephen T. "The Pequot War Reconsidered." *New England Quarterly* 64 (1991): 206-24.

Kerr, Richard A. "Is Battered Arctic Sea Ice Down For the Count?" *Science* 318 (October 5, 2007): 33-34.

Kroeber, Alfred Louis. *Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America*. Vol. 38 of *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, edited by A. L. Kroeber, R. H. Lowe, and R. L. Olson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939.

Kupperman, Karen Ordahl. *The Jamestown Project*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007.

Lalemant, Hierosme. "Relation of what occurred in the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in the country of New France, from the Summer of the year 1662 to the Summer of the year 1663." In Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. 48.

"A Latine Copie of the Letters Patentes of King Henrie the Seventh, Graunted unto John Cabote and his three Sonnes, Lewes, Sebastian, and Santius, for the Discovering of Newe and Unknown Landes." 1594. In Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, 19-22.

Levermore, Charles Herbert, ed. *Forerunners and Competitors of the Pilgrims and Puritans*. 2 vols. Brooklyn, 1912.

Lorimer, Joyce, ed. *English and Irish Settlement on the River Amazon*, 1550-1646. London: Hakluyt Society, 1989.

Macy, Zaccheus. "A Short Journal of the First Settlement of the Island of Nantucket, with Some of the Most Remarkable Things That Have Happened Since, to the Present Time." *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections* 1st ser., 3 (1792): 155-60.

Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York: Knopf, 2005.

Marr, John S., and John T. Cathey. "New Hypothesis for Cause of Epidemic among Native Americans, New England, 1616-1619." *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 16 (February 2010): 281-86.

Mason, John. "A Brief History of the Pequot War." In Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 1-46.

Mather, Cotton. *Magnalia Christi Americana, or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England From Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698, in Seven Books*. Vol. 1. 1702. Reprint, Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus, 1855.

McGhee, Robert. "Contact between Native North Americans and the Medieval Norse: A Review of the Evidence." *American Antiquity* 49 (January 1984): 4-26.

McNeill, William. *Plagues and Peoples*. 1976. Reprint, New York: Anchor Books, 1998.

Meuwese, Mark. “The Dutch Connection: New Netherland, the Pequots, and the Puritans in Southern New England, 1620-1638.” *Early American Studies* 9 (March 2, 2011): 295-323.

Mooney, James “The Aboriginal Population of America North of Mexico.” *Smithsonian Historical Collections* 80, no. 7 (1928): 1-40.

Morgan, Philip D. “Africa and the Atlantic, c. 1450 to c. 1820.” In *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, edited by Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, 223-48. Oxford: University Press, 2009.

Morris, Henry. *Early History of Springfield, 1636-1675*. Springfield, MA: F. W. Morris, 1876.

Morton, Thomas. *New English Canaan*. 1637. Reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969.

“Narrative of a Journey into the Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634-1635.” In *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664*, edited by J. Franklin Jameson, 135-62. New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1909.

New England's First Fruits: With Divers Other Special Matters Concerning That Country. 1643. Reprint, New York: Joseph Sabin, 1865.

Newman, Marshall T. “Aboriginal New World Epidemiology and Medical Care, and the Impact of Old World Disease Imports.” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 45 (1976): 667-72.

Oberg, Michael Leroy. *Uncas: First of the Mohegans.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Orr, Charles. *History of the Pequot War: The Contemporary Accounts of Mason, Underhill, Vincent, and Gardener*. Cleveland: Helman-Taylor, 1897.

“Over the Top.” *Science* 326 (October 2, 2009): 25.

Palfrey, John Gorham. *History of New England*. Vol. 1. 1858. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1966.

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. New York: Viking, 2006.

Pond, —. — Pond to William Pond, March 15, 1630. In *Remarkable Providences: 1600-1760*, edited by John Demos, 73-75. New York: George Braziller, 1972.

Pratt, Phinehas. *A Declaration of the Affairs of the English People that First Inhabited New England*. Edited by Richard Frothingham. 1662. Reprint, Boston: Little, Brown, 1858.

Pring, Martin. "A Voyage Set out from the Citie of Bristoll . . . in the Yeere 1603 under the Command of Me Martin Pring." In Levermore, *Forerunners and Competitors*, 1:60-68.

Quinn, David Beers. "Columbus and the North: England, Iceland, and Ireland." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49 (April 1992): 278-297.

———. *England and the Discovery of America, 1481-1620: From the Bristol Voyages of the Fifteenth Century to the Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth; The Exploration, Exploitation, and Trial-and-Error Colonization of North America by the English*. New York: Knopf, 1974.

———. "Martin Pring at Provincetown in 1603?" *New England Quarterly* 40 (March 1967): 79-91.

———. *North America from Earliest Discovery to First Settlements: The Norse Voyages to 1612.* New York: Harper and Row, 1975.

Ramenofsky, Ann F. *Vectors of Death: The Archaeology of European Contact*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987.

Raoult, Didier, and Véronique Ross. "The Body Louse as a Vector of Reemerging Human Diseases." *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 29 (1999): 888-911.

Reinhard, Karl J. "Archaeoparasitology in North America," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 82 (1990): 145-63.

Rosier, James. "A True Relation of the most prosperous voyage made this present yeere 1605, by Captaine George Waymouth, in the Discoverie of the land of Virginia." 1605. In Winship, *Sailors' Narratives of Voyages*, 101-51.

Salisbury, Neal. *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Schuenemann, Verena J., Kirsten Bos, Sharon DeWitte, Sarah Schmedes, Joslyn Jamieson, Alissa Mittnik, Stephen Forrest, Brian K. Coombes, James W. Wood, David J. D. Earn, William White, Johannes Krause, and Hendrik N. Poinar. "Targeted Enrichment of Ancient Pathogens Yielding the pPCP1 Plasmid of *Yersinia pestis* from Victims of the Black Death." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 108 (September 20, 2011): E746-52.

Seaver, Kirsten A. *The Frozen Echo: Greenland and the Exploration of North America, ca. A.D. 1000-1500*. Stanford, CA: University Press, 1996.

Shrewsbury, J. F. D. "The Yellow Plague." *Journal of the History of Medicine* 4 (1949): 5-47.

Smith, John. *Advertisements For the unexperienced Planters of New England, or anywhere* . . . . 1631. Reprint, Boston: W. Veazie, 1865.

———. *A Description of New England: Or, The Observations, and Discoveries, of Captain John Smith (Admirall of that Country) in the North of America* . . . . 1616. Reprint, Boston: William Veazie, 1865.

Snow, Dean R. *The Archaeology of New England*. New York: Academic Press, 1980.

———. "Michrochronology and Demographic Evidence Relating to the Size of Pre-Columbian North American Indian Populations." *Science* 268 (June 16, 1995): 1601-4.

Snow, Dean R., and Kim M. Lanphear. "European Contact and Indian Depopulation in the Northeast: The Timing of the First Epidemics." *Ethnohistory* 35 (Winter 1988): 15-33.

Soncino, Raimondo di. Raimondo di Soncino to the Duke of Milan, December 18, 1497. In "John Cabot (c.1450-1499): Voyage to North America, 1497." Internet Modern History SourceBook. http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1497cabot-3docs.html (accessed February 23, 2012).

Spiess, Arthur E., and Bruce D. Spiess. "New England Pandemic of 1616-1622: Cause and Archaeological Implication." *Man in the Northeast* 34 (Fall 1987): 71-83.

Stannard, David E. *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Starna, William A. "The Biological Encounter: Disease and the Ideological Domain." *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (Fall 1992): 511-19.

Stearn, E. W., and A. E. Stearn. "Smallpox Immunization of the Amerindian." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 131 (1943): 601-613.

Stewart, T. D. "A Physical Anthropologist's View of the Peopling of the New World." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 16 (1960): 259-73.

Strachey, William. *The Historie of Travaile into Virginia Brittania: Expressing the Cosmographie and Commodities of the Country, Together with the Manners and Customes of the People.* c. 1618. Edited by R. H. Major. London: Hakluyt Society, 1849.

[Sullivan, James.] "A Topographical Description of Georgetown." *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 1st ser., 1 (1792): 251-56.

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Thayer, Henry O., ed. *The Sagadahoc Colony, Comprising The Relation of a Voyage into New England; (Lamberth Ms.) with an Introduction and Notes*. Portland, ME: Gorges Society, 1892.

Thornton, Russell. *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, ed. *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791.* 73 vols. New York: Pageant Book Co, 1959.

"Treaty of Hartford." September 21, 1638. In Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 340-41.

Trigger, Bruce G. *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976.

Trigger, Bruce G. and James F. Pendergast. "Saint Lawrence Iroquoians." In *Northeast*, edited by Bruce G. Trigger, 357-61. Volume 15 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, edited by William C. Sturtevant. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1978.

Trumbull, J. Hammond, ed. *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*. Vol. 1. Hartford, 1850.

Underhill, John. "Newes from America; or, A New and Experimental Discoverie of New England." 1638. In Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 47-92.

Vane, Henry. Henry Vane and John Winthrop to John Winthrop, Jr., July 4, 1636. In Orr, *History of the Pequot War*, 113-15.

Vaughan, Alden T. *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*. 3rd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995.

Verrazano, Giovanni da. “Cellère Codex.” 1524. Translated by Susan Tarrow. In *The Voyages of Giovanni da Verazzano, 1524-1528*, edited by Lawrence C. Wroth, 133-43. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

———. “Relation of John Varrazanus, a Florentine, of the lande by him discovered in the name of his Majestie . . . .” 1524. In Hakluyt, *Divers voyages*, 55-71.

Warrick, Gary. “European Infectious Disease and Depopulation of the Wendat-Tionontate (Huron-Petun).” *World Archaeology* 35 (October 2003): 258-75.

Webster, Noah. *A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases with the Principal Phenomena of The Physical World*. Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799.

White, John. *The Planters' Plea; Or, The Grounds of Plantations Examined, and Usual Objections Answered*. 1630. Reprint, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968.

Wiechmann, Ingrid and Gisela Grupe. “Detection of *Yersinia pestis* DNA in Two Early Medieval Skeletal Finds from Aschheim (Upper Bavaria, 6th century A.D.).” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 126 (January 2005): 48-55.

Williams, Herbert U. “The Epidemic of the Indians of New England, 1616-1620, with Remarks on Native American Infections.” *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* 20 (1909): 340-49.

Williams, Roger. Roger Williams to John Mason and Thomas Prence, June 23, 1670. Quoted in *Cave*, Pequot War, 124.

———. Roger Williams to John Winthrop [October 24, 1636?]. Quoted in Cave, *Pequot War*, 123.

———. Roger Williams to John Winthrop, June 1638. In *Letters of Roger Williams, 1632-1682, Now First Collected*, edited by John Russell Bartlett, 99. Vol. 6 of *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963.

———. “Testimony of Roger Williams Relative to the Purchase of Lands at Seekonk and Providence.” 1661. In Bartlett, *Letters of Roger Williams*, 316-17.

Williamson, James A. *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII*. Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1962.

Winship, George Parker, ed. *Sailors’ Narratives of Voyages along the New England Coast, 1524-1624*. 1905. Reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1968.

Winslow, Edward. Edward Winslow and Samuel Fuller to William Bradford, July 26, 1630. In Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 235.

———. “Good News from New England.” 1624. In Arber, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 517-600.

Winthrop, John. John Winthrop to John Endecott, January 3, 1634. In *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1871-1873*, 343-45. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1873.

———. John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, May 15, 1629. In *Life and Letters of John Winthrop, 1588-1630*, edited by Robert C. Winthrop, 296. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864.

———. John Winthrop to Sir Nathaniel Rich, May 22, 1634. In “Report of the Mss. of His Grace the Duke of Manchester.” Part II of *Eighth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, 49. London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1881.

———. John Winthrop to William Bradford, July 28, 1637. In Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 396-98.

———. “A Model of Christian Charity.” 1630. Quoted in *The Life and Letters of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, edited by Robert Charles Winthrop, 18-19. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867.

———. *Winthrop’s Journal: History of New England, 1630-1649*. Edited by James Kendall Hosmer. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908.

Wood, William. *New Englands Prospect: A true, lively, and experimentall description of that part of America, commonly called New England*. 1634. Reprint, Boston: Prince Society, 1865.

Woodward, Samuel Bayard. “The Story of Smallpox in Massachusetts.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 23 (June 9, 1932): 1182-83.

Zinsser, Hans. *Rats, Lice, and History*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1935.