



Squanto and Massasoit: A Struggle for Power

Author(s): John H. Humins

Source: *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Mar., 1987), pp. 54-70

Published by: [The New England Quarterly, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/365654>

Accessed: 04/09/2014 09:26

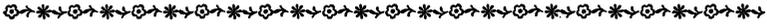
Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The New England Quarterly, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The New England Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>



Squanto and Massasoit: A Struggle for Power

JOHN H. HUMINS

CHIEF Massasoit's antagonist, Tisquantum, commonly known as Squanto, lay dead on the shore of Manomoyick Bay, located in a remote area of southeastern Cape Cod. Described by William Bradford, governor of Plymouth Plantation, as "a special instrument sent by God," Squanto had instead been sent to the Pilgrims by Massasoit, "great sagamore" of the Wampanoag Confederation. Betraying Massasoit's trust, Squanto had attempted to use his influence with the English religious separatists "to make himself great in the eyes of his [Indian] countrymen."¹ His quest to become the principal Indian middleman between the Indians and the English colonists challenged the leadership and upset the strategy of Massasoit, who had befriended the English haven-seekers in order to strengthen his position and ensure the security of his confederated peoples. Ironically, Squanto, who is credited in modern American popular culture as the hero of Thanksgiving and the "instrument" of Pilgrim survival, had in fact jeopardized the plantation's relationship with the Indians in his struggle for power with Massasoit, a struggle that has not been adequately noted in histories about the period.

Late in the winter of 1621, Massasoit had initiated contact with the strangers when he dispatched an envoy, who

The author wishes to thank Eric Hilberg for his research assistance.

¹ Edward Winslow, "Good News from New England: or a true Relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation in New England" (1624), in *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth from 1602 to 1625*, ed. Alexander Young (Boston, 1841), pp. 282–84; and William Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," in *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620–1647*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Knopf, 1952), pp. 81, 85.

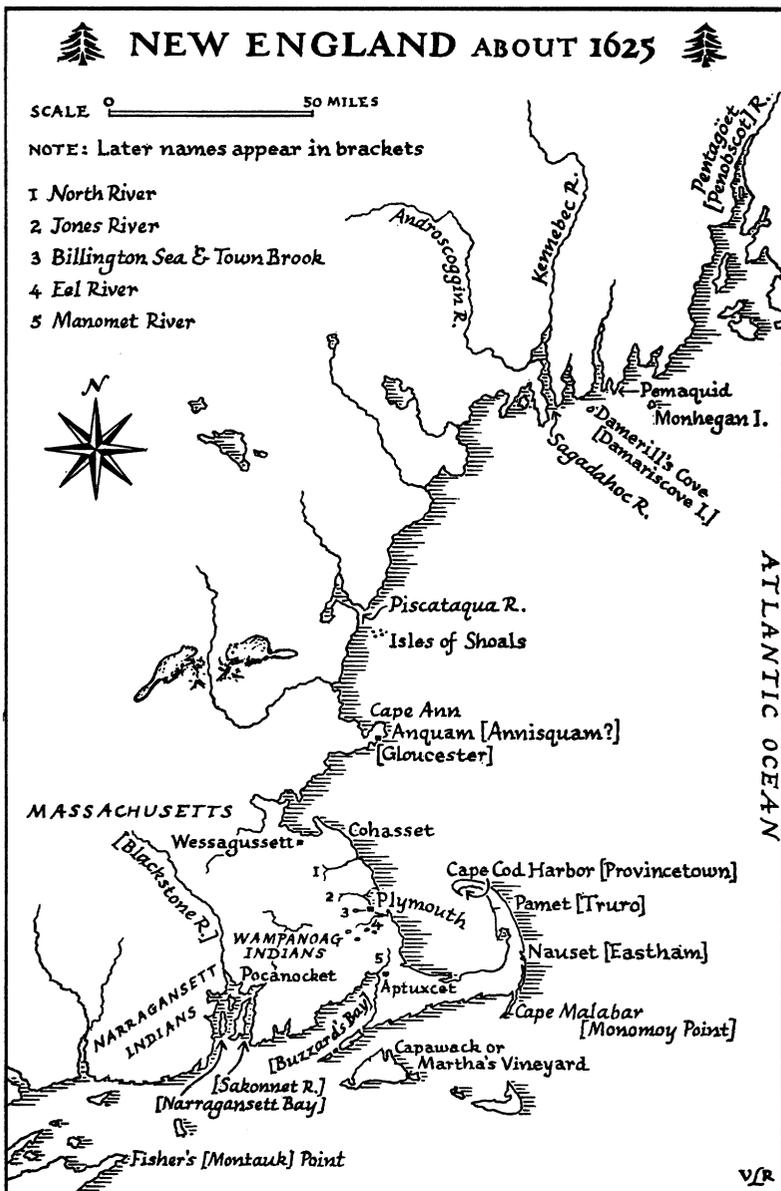


FIG. 1. New England about 1625. From *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth*, ed. Sydney V. James (Plymouth: Plimoth Plantation, 1963), frontispiece. Courtesy of Plimoth Plantation, Inc.

“boldly” went among them, saluted, and bade them welcome in English. Notably, the envoy carried a bow and two arrows, one headed, the other “unheaded,” which symbolically conveyed the purpose of his mission: to ascertain whether the strangers wanted war or peace. He introduced himself as Samoset, a sachem from the northeast, sent by the grand sachem of a confederation of about twenty villages. He also informed the planters that the local area had been depopulated during a great sickness. The following day he departed, but he returned a few days later with Squanto. Together, they introduced Massasoit’s policy of peace and friendship by presenting gifts and indicating that their “great Sagamore, Massasoit,” was nearby and eager to meet the newcomers. Edward Winslow, delegated by the Pilgrim leaders to deal with the Indians, received the Wampanoag chieftain and gave him gifts.² Demonstrating his need for greater military security, Massasoit then gestured toward English firearms and expressed a strong interest in obtaining them. Politely, Winslow expressed his “unwillingness” to part with any.³

A formal council was then held by the respective leaders and a friendship pact negotiated and agreed upon. In addition to opening trade, the pact specified that Massasoit and his people should not “injure or . . . hurt” the English; that if an incident occurred, Massasoit “should send the offender, that [the Pilgrims] might punish him” and the English would do the same; and that “if anything was stolen,” each “should cause it to be restored.” More significant was the provision that “if any did unjustly war against” Massasoit, the Pilgrims “would aid him; [and] if any did war against them, he should aid them.” Furthermore, Massasoit pledged to notify his con-

² John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, “The Sixth Booke: The Generall Historie of New-England” (1624), in *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith*, ed. Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1910), 2:754–55.

³ “Mourt’s Relation: A Relation or Journal of the English Plantation Settled at Plymouth in New England” (1622), in *A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*, ed. Dwight B. Heath (New York: Corinth Books, 1963), pp. 55–56. Edward Winslow and William Bradford coauthored this account.

federates of “the conditions of peace” so that when the Indians came to see the English, “they should leave their bows and arrows behind them.” The English implicitly agreed to follow a similar policy. The reciprocal nature of this accord clearly reflected Indian custom and Massasoit’s friendly intentions, as did the seeds he sent for the English communal gardens.⁴

This treaty was a bold move by the Wampanoag sagamore, who, as a result, bolstered his economic, military, and political control. He may well have assumed that the pact made the newcomers members of his confederation. In any case, by granting security to the struggling English settlement, he had gained prestige and power as a “friend and ally” of the English king.⁵ In formulating his policy, Massasoit had known from his scouts just how precarious the newcomers’ settlement was and how easily it could be overrun. After a long ocean voyage, the English had arrived in a weakened condition, low on supplies, to face the rigors of winter. Makeshift quarters were built on shore, and many had to share unhealthy quarters on the *Mayflower*. Exposure and hunger were common. By late winter, half the Pilgrims had died, many were ill, and all lived in constant fear.⁶ In making a peace pact with this group of about fifty men, women, and children, Massasoit knew that they would be eager to trade.

As the sagamore of the confederation, Massasoit could influence his people’s relationship with the English, but his own position was not entirely secure. Residing at Sowans, a village located near his people’s greatest enemy, the Narragansetts, he was conscious of his confederation’s vulnerability, especially since it had been greatly weakened by the smallpox epidemic of 1617–18. The plague had wiped out a few Wampanoag coastal villages and decimated others, but it had not affected the Narragansetts, who subsequently held an intimi-

⁴ Winslow and Bradford, “Mourt’s Relation,” pp. 56–57; Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 80; and Smith, “Generall Historie of New-England,” p. 755.

⁵ Winslow and Bradford, “Mourt’s Relation,” p. 56.

⁶ Winslow and Bradford, “Mourt’s Relation,” pp. 19–20, 22, 26, 28–29, 52.

dating position in southeastern New England.⁷ A sachem of at least thirty years of age, Massasoit became the confederation's sagamore (civil chief) in the wake of the plague, when social chaos, military weakness, political uncertainty, and personal misery beset his people. Indeed, Massasoit had compelling reasons to befriend the English settlers, but his actions were not without risk. Two of the confederation's powerful chiefs, recalling incidents of kidnapping, rape, and murder which had punctuated relations with the Europeans who preceded the Pilgrims, were strongly opposed to an alliance with the strangers.⁸ In spite of such active opposition, Massasoit resolutely pursued a policy of peace and cooperation with the English, whose numbers were not awesome but whose weapons were.

As a sign of continuing good faith toward the English, Massasoit directed Squanto to live with them and serve as a liaison between them and the Indian confederation. Squanto, reputedly the lone male survivor of the Patuxet, had had extensive contacts with Europeans, particularly the English. Kidnapped in 1614 by Englishmen from the shores of Cape Cod Bay, sold as a slave in Spain, and later redeemed from bondage, he was then taken to England. He traveled to the New World on a trading venture in Newfoundland and was again returned to England.⁹ Very probably an indentured

⁷ Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," pp. 51, 58, 66; see also Captain Thomas Dermer to Samuel Purchas, 27 December 1619, in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose & Sons, 1906), 19:129; and Nathaniel Morton, *New Englands Memoriall* (1669), ed. Howard J. Hall (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1937), pp. 31, 33-34.

⁸ Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," p. 52; Smith, "Generall Historie of New-England," 2:698-99, 719; and Ferdinand Gorges, "A Briefe Narration of the Original Undertakings of the Advancement of Plantations into the Parts of America; especially . . . that of New-England," in *Sir Ferdinand Gorges and his Province of Maine*, ed. James Phinney Baxter, 3 vols. (Boston, 1890), 2:22-24. Massasoit (c. 1580-1661) was described by one visitor to Plymouth as "the King of the country, who is a great emperor among his people. . . . He is very subtle for a savage." Emmanuel Altham to Sir Edward Altham, September 1623, in *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth: Letters about the Pilgrim Settlement in New England during its First Seven Years*, ed. Sydney V. James, Jr. (Plymouth: Plymouth Plantation, 1963), pp. 29-30.

⁹ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 81; Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," p. 55; Smith, "Generall Historie of New-England," pp. 698-99,

servant, he may have been earning a return to his homeland when he began serving Ferdinand Gorges, an active proponent of English colonialism in New England. Assigned to be the guide and interpreter for Captain Thomas Dermer, an explorer-trader in Gorges's employ, Squanto once more sailed the Atlantic. In the spring of 1619, he finally saw his homeland, only to learn of his people's fate. Able to speak English with "a sufficient command," Squanto offered Chief Massasoit an important means of communicating with Europeans and in particular with the English religious dissenters who landed on the uninhabited lands of the Patuxet in December 1620. Yet there is evidence that Squanto did not have Massasoit's complete trust, and it is highly probable that he remained committed to Gorges's colonial designs in New England.¹⁰

Once he arrived at Plymouth Plantation, Squanto quickly gave substantial proof to the English that Massasoit's promise of aid was sincere. The Patuxet became a man for all seasons as he taught the settlers Indian farming and food gathering techniques, and established important trade contacts with local tribal groups, through which the Pilgrims obtained animal pelts which could be used to reimburse their London mercantile benefactors and pay for the transportation of fellow separatists and essential goods to the plantation. As the middleman in these local trade transactions, and as a guide and interpreter, Squanto had made himself indispensable to the Pilgrims.

754–55; John Pory to Earl of Southampton, 13 January 1622/23, in *Three Visitors to Plymouth*, p. 12; Gorges, "Memoir" and "A Briefe Relation of the Discovery and Plantation of New-England," both in *Gorges and His Province of Maine*, 1:67–68, 103–4, 2:212, 215. Gorges related in his "Memoir" that Squanto had "acquired a sufficient command of the English tongue."

¹⁰ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," pp. 81–83; Dermer to Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, pp. 129–30; Gorges, "A Briefe Narration," 2:29; and Gorges, "Memoir," 1:109. For a general sketch of Squanto's fascinating life, see Neal Salisbury, "Squanto, Last of the Patuxets," in *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America*, ed. David G. Smith and Gary B. Nash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 228–46. Also, see Salisbury's *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500–1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), for another interpretation of Pilgrim-Indian relations. Evidence of Massasoit's lack of full trust in Squanto can be seen in the fact that Samoset, an Abnaki sachem from Pemaquid, and not Squanto, opened relations with the English.

Squanto's significance became apparent to all interested parties in mid-summer 1621, when Massasoit sent Hobamok, a trusted councillor and renowned warrior, to live at the English plantation as well.¹¹ Since Hobamok seemingly duplicated Squanto's function as Massasoit's representative, the sagamore must have had an unstated motive for placing him among the settlers. Another confederation sachem, angered by Squanto's activities, may have prompted Massasoit to provide protection for the Patuxet. Since Squanto's enhanced role among the English was also worrisome to Massasoit, Hobamok may have been dispatched more as spy than bodyguard.

Shortly after Hobamok's appearance, a rumor spread at the plantation that Massasoit was the prisoner of Corbitant, sachem of the Pocasset, who was a powerful confederation leader and probably its war chief. Corbitant had reportedly become allied with the Narragansetts because he was upset with Massasoit's relations with the English intruders. Reacting to the rumor, Squanto, Hobamok, and another confederation member, Tokamahamon, ventured to Nemasket, Corbitant's principal village, to determine his intentions. They learned that Massasoit had not been captured, but they were themselves seized. The Pocasset leader threatened to kill Squanto, but Hobamok managed to escape and carry his tale to the English. Captain Miles Standish and several militiamen hastily marched the fourteen miles to Nemasket and charged the village at daybreak, wounding several Indians. They found Squanto and Tokamahamon unharmed and Corbitant gone.¹²

It is curious that Corbitant did not kill Squanto, the Pilgrim's "tongue," who had helped assure the despised newcomers' survival and increased their power through trade and diplomatic activities. The sachem may have lacked sufficient

¹¹ There is no exact date for Hobamok's arrival among the Pilgrims, but it occurred sometime during June or July 1621. He had a reputation as a "pniese," i.e., a highly esteemed warrior who had spiritual powers; as a courageous warrior, he was also a councillor to Massasoit. See Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, p. 130.

¹² Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," pp. 73-76. Corbitant's challenge to Massasoit can be seen in the revealing statement that he "sought to draw the hearts of Massasoit's subjects from him."

support from other confederation sachems to risk undermining his own position, or he may have feared the military power of the Pilgrims, who clearly would retaliate with their awesome weapons. In an effort to create better relations, Massasoit negotiated a peace, although it remained an uneasy one, between the English and Corbitant.¹³

Meanwhile, Squanto's importance continued to grow. During late summer and early fall 1621, he and Hobamok established peace and opened trade relations with the Massachusetts Indians, a group of several villages to the north. Not a part of the Wampanoag Confederacy, these loosely confederated peoples had a stable agricultural and commercial economy, but they also had been severely affected by the smallpox epidemic. Peaceful relations were also secured with the Nausets and other Cape Cod bands of the Wampanoag Confederation who were promised compensation for food seized by the Pilgrims when they first arrived in the area.¹⁴

By fall 1621, the Pilgrims had made great strides in founding their colony, mostly because of Massasoit's peace policy and Squanto's assistance. Better dwellings were constructed, and crops which Squanto taught them to cultivate had provided a bountiful harvest. Consequently, they could face winter with confidence, especially since their Indian allies would provide any additional food they might need. To celebrate their good fortune, the Pilgrims planned a great feast of thanksgiving, which was as much a diplomatic act as it was a harvest celebration. The Pilgrims invited Massasoit but were quite surprised, if not alarmed, at his large escort. Ninety warriors—probably including the sachems and other headmen of the confederation's villages—it is recorded, attended the celebration with him. This display of strength by Massasoit was matched by the Pilgrim militia, who executed a few maneuvers and discharged their guns. After thus impressing each other, the Pilgrims and the Indians celebrated their

¹³ Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," p. 74.

¹⁴ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 89; and Winslow and Bradford, "Mourt's Relation," pp. 24, 60–61.

friendship for three days, during which Massasoit's escorts demonstrated the reciprocal nature of Indian society by hunting, fishing, and gathering for the feast.¹⁵ Amity prevailed, but the relationship was soon to be tested.

A pivotal event occurred in January 1622 when the English separatists received a bundle of arrows wrapped in a snakeskin from the Narragansett chief, Canonicus. Although the winter season made it an unlikely time for war, the Pilgrims were concerned enough to reinforce their settlement. Furthermore, in their alarm, they acted on Squanto's advice and sent a bag of powder and shot to their declared enemy. By doing so, the Pilgrims committed a major diplomatic blunder: they ignored Hobamok's urgings to confer with Massasoit before responding.¹⁶ As a result, Massasoit had good cause to worry about Squanto's boldness and the Pilgrim's ill-considered act. Indeed, the English had broken the spirit, if not the terms, of the friendship pact.

Secure in his position and confident about his status with the Pilgrims, Squanto had begun to act in his own behalf and to challenge Massasoit's power. During late winter, while probably serving as a middleman in the fur trade for the Pilgrims, he started to convince neighboring Indian groups that the English had a "plague" (i.e., gunpowder) in their storehouse which could be used against them. Capitalizing on "his nearness and favor" with the Pilgrims, he sought, through such threats, "to make himself great" in the eyes of other natives. According to Winslow, many of the area's Indians began to hold Squanto in "greater esteem than many of their sachems." Furthermore, Indian peoples who previously "were wont to rely on Massasoit for protection, and resort to his abode, now . . . began to leave him and seek after Tisquantum." Writing years later, Governor Bradford underscored the notion that Squanto's actions "did much to terrify the Indians and made them depend more on him, and see more to him, than to

¹⁵ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 90.

¹⁶ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 282–84. It is said that Canonicus refused to accept the powder and shot and that the bag was sent from village to village.

Massasoit.”¹⁷ Having learned the importance of the middleman in trade relations between English and Indians, Squanto also openly challenged Massasoit by directing Pilgrim trade toward the Massachusetts Indians, who controlled commerce up the Charles River, where fur-bearing animals were plentiful.

Meanwhile, a rivalry developed at Plymouth between Squanto and Hobamok. Governor Bradford noted it when he wrote of the “emulation” (a word at that time signifying “jealous rivalry”) between the two.¹⁸ Through Hobamok, Massasoit told the Pilgrims that the Massachusetts and Narragansetts “were joined” in a confederacy against them and further “intimated” that Squanto had “some private whisperings” with those Indians.¹⁹ The rumor was credible because Squanto was then expanding his relations with the Massachusetts, who lived to the north around modern-day Boston and needed allies to strengthen themselves against the periodic plunderings of the Abnaki. Hobamok and his chief understood that increased trade contacts between the English and the Massachusetts, who were not members of the Wampanoag Confederation, would undercut Massasoit’s position.

In April, Hobamok failed in his attempt to stay a Pilgrim expedition led by Squanto to trade with the Massachusetts. No sooner had the English shallop sailed out of sight, however, than “an Indian belonging to Squanto’s family came running in seeming fear” and informed the English that the Narragan-

¹⁷ Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 282–84; and Pory to Earl of Southampton, in *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth*, pp. 12–13. Pory, a former secretary to the governor of the Virginia Colony, visited Plymouth on his return to England and wrote about Squanto’s rivalry with Massasoit: “When Tisquanto was earnestly required to be sent home by the great king [Massasoit], they [the Pilgrims] chose rather to hazard a falling out with him than to break their faith and promise with Tisquanto, who had been sure to have gone to the pot if they delivered him up.” See also, George F. Willison, *Saints and Strangers* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1945), p. 202.

¹⁸ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 99; Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 289, 292; Smith, “Generall Historie of New-England,” p. 758; and Morton, *Memoriall*, p. 34. Writing many years later, Morton referred to the “jealousie between them,” i.e., Hobamok and Squanto.

¹⁹ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 98; and Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 285–86.

setts, Corbitant, “and he thought also Massasoit, were coming against them.” Believing that an attack was imminent, Bradford had his people stand guard and fired a cannon to summon the shallop, which quickly returned.²⁰ While vigilance was maintained, Hobamok argued that his sagamore had only friendly intentions and that the accusations were false. Hobamok’s squaw was sent to report on Massasoit’s movements; when she returned, she stated that “all was quiet.”²¹ The expedition, once underway, was successful, and the Massachusetts were asked to plant crops for future commerce. While the Massachusetts were taking on greater significance in Squanto’s designs, Massasoit was reacting sharply to his attempt to portray him as an enemy of the Pilgrims.

The Wampanoag chieftain demanded that Squanto be sent to him for punishment. Acknowledging Massasoit’s need for retribution, Bradford “reproved” Squanto, but because the Patuxet was “so necessary and profitable an instrument,” he would not abandon him. Shortly thereafter, Massasoit demanded Squanto’s head. Bradford responded that, although Squanto “had deserved to die,” he did not know “how to understand [Massasoit] or any other Indians without him.” Massasoit countered that Squanto, “being one of his subjects,” could not be retained by the Pilgrims, and he offered “many beaver skins” to change Bradford’s mind. Massasoit’s messengers even presented the Plymouth governor with his “own knife” to “cut off” Squanto’s “head and hands,” which were to be brought to the sagamore. Bradford told the messengers: “It was not the manner of the English to sell men’s lives at a price.” The fortuitous arrival of a group of English traders, members of Thomas Weston’s company, gave the Pilgrims an opportunity to delay.²² By harboring Squanto, however, the

²⁰ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 98; Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 287–88; and Willison, *Saints and Strangers*, pp. 201–2. Squanto’s “family” may refer to followers as well as clan relatives.

²¹ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” pp. 98–99; and Winslow, “Good News,” p. 288.

²² Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 290–91, 292–93; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Story of the “Old Colony” of New Plymouth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 89; and Willison, *Saints and Strangers*, p. 203.

Pilgrims violated the terms of the peace pact, which angered Massasoit and deeply strained relations with the Indians.

English-Indian relations only worsened as Weston's company, composed of about sixty adventurers camped approximately twenty-five miles north of New Plymouth, stole food from and abused the neighboring native peoples, especially the Massachusetts. By thus alienating the Massachusetts, the Indians most crucial to Squanto's plans, Weston's men had further complicated Squanto's already vexed situation.²³

During late spring, Massasoit continued "privately and openly" to seek the life of the rebellious Patuxet, thus forcing him to "stick close to the English." Also showing his coolness toward Squanto's protectors, the sagamore "neither came [nor] sent to [them] as formerly."²⁴ In addition, he stopped English trade with confederation members, thereby putting pressure upon the Pilgrims' meagre food supply and leaving them, their "godsend," and the troublesome Weston group to fend for themselves. To drive home his message, Massasoit simultaneously pursued a policy of harassment. His warriors made "many insulting speeches" mocking New Plymouth's "weakness" and exclaiming "how easy it would be . . . to cast [the settlement] off." For the Pilgrims, this state of affairs "occasioned further thoughts of fortification," and with great anxiety they began erecting a fort that they hoped "would utterly discourage the savages from . . . rising against [them]."²⁵

Massasoit's actions and the growing concern for survival at Plymouth divided the English planters. Bradford wrote that as the rivalry between Squanto and Massasoit developed, he "seemed to countenance the one, and . . . Captain Standish the other"; that is, Bradford favored Squanto while Standish

²³ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 296-99; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," pp. 108, 113, 114-15, 117. Thomas Weston, a merchant, was a member of the London Company and a supporter of English colonization efforts.

²⁴ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 99; and Winslow, "Good News," p. 295.

²⁵ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 111; and Winslow, "Good News," p. 295.

preferred the sagamore. Standish, a professional soldier, was responsible for protecting the colonial investment of the London Associates and for defending the plantation. As captain of the Pilgrim militia, he understood that Plymouth's security rested more firmly with Massasoit's confederacy than with an aggressive individual whose schemes jeopardized its survival. In Standish, Massasoit had an important ally, but Standish was not instrumental in shaping the Pilgrims' position on Squanto during the spring and summer of 1622. His low profile can be explained by his preoccupation with strengthening Plymouth's defenses as rumors of Indian plots and word of a Virginia massacre made the English hasten their fortification efforts.²⁶ In addition, because Standish was not a religious separatist, his judgments about Squanto were probably listened to and then disregarded as Bradford, who led the separatist colony, persisted in protecting the "godsend."

By mid-summer, Massasoit's strategy of isolating Plymouth had ominous implications for the planters. A drought from late May to mid-July dried up gardens, and the few, shriveled edibles were often stolen by Weston's men. If not for the easily gathered shellfish, the settlers "might have perished."²⁷ By late summer, the meagre harvest forecasted a gloomy winter and underscored the Pilgrims' dependence upon the Indian corn trade.

The crisis continued into October, when "peace" was reportedly restored between Massasoit and Squanto.²⁸ A rapprochement between a grand sachem and a traitor is a most curious turn of events. Interestingly, neither Bradford nor Winslow, the two chroniclers of Plymouth's first years, leave any details about this improbable event. Moreover, a few days after the "peace" and under distinctly intriguing circumstances, Squanto was dead.

²⁶ Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," pp. 99, 111; and Winslow, "Good News," p. 295. Given his predilection toward military strength, Standish was probably a leading advocate of befriending and tolerating Weston's men, even though they were straining relations with area Indians.

²⁷ Morton, *Memoriall*, pp. 37, 39; and Winslow, "Good News," pp. 294–97.

²⁸ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 292–95; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," pp. 110–12.

Squanto had ended his isolation to participate in a trade expedition. Captain Standish was expected to command the expedition, but at the last moment he became “sick of a violent fever” and Bradford had to replace him. Bradford and Squanto were joined by a few other Pilgrims and several of Weston’s company.²⁹ With Squanto as “interpreter and pilot,” the expedition sailed around to the remote southeastern shore of Cape Cod to “traffick” with area Indians. At first, the local Indians tried to hide, but gradually they indicated interest in their English visitors. Still showing fear, however, these Indians used the night to flee, but Squanto persuaded them the next morning to return and trade. After several hogsheads of corn and beans were obtained, the expedition moved on through Manomoyick Bay in search of a channel that, reportedly, offered a short-cut through the cape.³⁰

At this stage of the journey, Squanto suddenly and mysteriously died. Winslow wrote that “God had . . . struck Tisquantum with sickness, insomuch as he there died.” Bradford, the expedition commander, wrote that “Squanto fell sick of an Indian fever, bleeding much at the nose . . . and within a few days died there.” During his last moments of consciousness, Squanto bequeathed “his things” to “English friends” and expressed, Bradford relates, his desire to “Go to the Englishmen’s God in Heaven.”³¹ Tradition has Squanto dying of smallpox, but there is no evidence to support the contention. Writing years after the fact, Governor Bradford curiously stated that heavy bleeding from the nose was considered by Indians as “a symptom of death.” This explanation suggests that Squanto, who had “an Indian fever,” may have died of witchcraft, since, according to Indian belief, there is profuse bleeding from the nose when an evil spirit exits its victim.

²⁹ Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 299–300; and Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 114. The group sailed in Weston’s vessel, the *Swan*, with the plantation’s shallop in tow.

³⁰ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 114; and Winslow, “Good News,” pp. 300–301.

³¹ Bradford, “Historie of Plymouth Plantation,” p. 114; and Winslow, “Good News,” p. 301. Gorges once wrote that Squanto may have been instructed about Christianity by friars while in Spain; see Salisbury, “Squanto,” p. 235.

Whatever the cause of his death, and it may never be known conclusively, Squanto passed from the scene in a sudden and dramatic manner. By the time of his death, the situation in southeastern New England had become so complicated that it would take several months for Indian-Pilgrim relations to normalize.

After burying Squanto, the trade group ventured on, even though they were without a guide, unfamiliar with the region, and fearful of the "very tempestuous" season. Driven by the need to obtain additional food supplies, they sailed back around the cape and went among the Massachusetts Indians, "who, upon English request, had planted much corn for them." No trade was conducted, however, because the Massachusetts had "a sickness," that is, they were angry with the English.³² Doubtless, Squanto's death and the rapacious acts of Weston's men fueled their anger and reluctance to trade. Still in search of supplies, the English proceeded to the southern and western shores of Cape Cod Bay to deal with the Nausets and Mattakiests for more beans and corn. These peoples of Massasoit's confederation traded with the English without incident. After concluding his business, Bradford boldly left the expedition and, with an unknown Indian guide, walked forty miles back to Plymouth. Enroute, he noted, he received "all [the] respect that could be [gotten] from the Indians."³³

Shortly thereafter, diplomatic relations between Massasoit and the Pilgrims formally resumed. Hobamok returned to the English plantation to act as the liaison with local Indians, as Squanto had done formerly, but without posing a challenge to his sagamore's position.³⁴ Troubles persisted, however, since Weston's men continued their marauding. By late winter, several local tribes, particularly the Massachusetts, were hostile toward as well as unwilling to trade with the English. Another crisis loomed when word arrived at Plymouth that

³² Winslow, "Good News," p. 302.

³³ Winslow, "Good News," p. 303.

³⁴ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 310-11.

Massasoit was sick and close to death. Pilgrim paranoia was also triggered by a report that Dutch traders were at the sagamore's village. Winslow and Hobamok sped to Sowans and found the grand sachem "very sicke" from acute constipation. Recovering quickly with the aid of medicine Winslow administered, Massasoit told the English diplomat that a conspiracy led by the disgruntled Massachusetts was afoot. The Massachusetts, who were motivated by a deep distrust of the English and "the continual injuries" done to them by Weston's company, were joined by the Nausets and several other villages of the Wampanoag Confederation in an attack against Weston's men.³⁵

Massasoit also warned Winslow that the conspirators then planned to destroy Plymouth because they feared the Pilgrims would "revenge" the deaths of Weston's men. Since the plot threatened the sagamore by dividing his confederation, challenging his leadership, and jeopardizing his policy of befriending the English planters, he advised Winslow "to prevent it" as quickly as possible. By the time Winslow returned to Plymouth, the action against Weston's company had already begun.³⁶

With Massasoit's advice and consent, Captain Standish led the English militia on a strike against the Massachusetts, thereby saving most of Weston's men and ending the threat. This bold action also brought about a satisfactory fulfillment of the terms of the peace pact of March 1621.³⁷ The rebellious Indians were brought back into the English trade orb and Massasoit's leadership, with its policy of peace, was restored. Shortly thereafter, to assure continued accord, the Pilgrims

³⁵ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 313–24; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 117. Other Wampanoag villages involved in the spring 1623 grand conspiracy were the Paomet, Suconet, Mattachiest, Manomet, and Agowaywam, along with the bands of the Isle of Capawack (Martha's Vineyard).

³⁶ Phineas Pratt, "A Declaration of the Affairs of the English People that First Inhabited New England," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 4th ser., vol. 4 (Boston, 1858), p. 484; Winslow, "Good News," pp. 324–25; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 118.

³⁷ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 327–29; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 118.

rounded up Weston's motley remnants, fed them, and sent them off to the fishing grounds to the northeast.³⁸ Thereafter, as long as Massasoit lived, peaceful relations prevailed between the Wampanoags and the settlement at New Plymouth.

Despite Massasoit's efforts and policies, Squanto's role has been celebrated in American culture, and he has been elevated to the status of "noble savage."³⁹ Consequently, the historical understanding of a very complicated situation has become distorted and oversimplified, and Massasoit's role and policies, in turn, have been obscured. A politically astute leader, Massasoit devised a diplomatic plan to provide greater security for himself, his weakened confederation, and the English plantation; but this plan was disrupted by Squanto, an individual bent on becoming the Indian chief for the English newcomers. Squanto's bold actions temporarily thwarted Massasoit's strategy and led to an intense rivalry which ultimately jeopardized the Indian-Pilgrim relationship. After a struggle lasting several months, Squanto was dead, and Massasoit's restored policy of cooperation and friendship assured Pilgrim survival and ushered in a new epoch in New England.

³⁸ Winslow, "Good News," pp. 329-30, 341-42; and Bradford, "Historie of Plymouth Plantation," p. 118.

³⁹ Willison, *Saints and Strangers*, p. 183. Willison, in his popular treatment of early New Plymouth, wrote that the plantation "owed its survival" to Squanto, thus giving credibility to a myth that has been retold to countless thousands of students in our nation's schools.

John H. Humins, *currently with the New York City Board of Education, wrote this article while an assistant professor of history and ethnic studies at Michigan State University.*