

## CHRISTIAN INDIAN VILLAGES IN MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY

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Puritans began settling Salem, Massachusetts in 1629. The following year they extended their settlements to the area around present day Boston and Cambridge. This settlement was made under a Royal Patent which stated that "the principall Ende" of the new plantation called Massachusetts Bay Colony was to "wynn and incite the Natives of [the] Country, to the Knowledge and Obedience of the onlie True God and Savior of Mankinde, and the Christian Fayth" (Jennings, 1975, p. 230).

This paper examines the process by which expansion of English settlements overwhelmed the settlements of converted, or "Praying", Indians in Massachusetts Bay Colony in the seventeenth century. The changing policies of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay toward the Indians are related to the increase in the number of Puritan settlements and the amount of inhabited territory which was occupied by the Praying Indian Villages.

In order to understand how the expansion of English settlement led to the removal or withdrawal of the native Indians, basic factors related to the interaction of the two groups must be examined. First, who were the people who lived in the region in 1629 and how did these people allocate the land among themselves? Second, who were the English settlers and why did they come to this region? Thirdly, what were the English settlers' expectations and evaluations of the indigenous people, and how did they allocate the land among themselves and the previous inhabitants?

The inhabitants of eastern Massachusetts in 1629 were Nipmucks, Pennacooks, Naumkeags, and other members of the Agawam, Algonkian, and Massachusetts tribes (Perley, 1912). They gained their livelihoods from hunting, fishing, and growing crops. Among these Indian groups "land was a basic part of the nurturing environment, part of the universally shared created order that everyone held in common. It was not a commodity to be parcelled out in sections or controlled by individuals without reference to other members of their cultural unit" (Bowden and Rodna, 1980, pp. 11-12).

The settlers who arrived in this region after 1629 were of another culture, based on English, Christian ideals. Both the dissenting, or separatist, Pilgrims who settled Plymouth in 1620 and the nondissenting, or non-separatist, Puritans who settled in Massachusetts Bay, were hoping to build model communities which reflected their Faith. The claim of these people to the lands which they newly occupied were multifaceted. The English crown claimed control over a large portion of the continent. The King had granted parts of this land to the control of the Massachusetts Bay Company, which in turn granted parcels of land to individuals or groups (Leach, 1966). Within the patent which granted the lands to the Massachusetts Bay Company was the charter to conduct missionary activity among the Indians. This was in itself a ". . . justification for establishing towns on the seacoast and expanding into the interior" (Bowden and Ronda, 1980, p. 12). The sparsely occupied lands of the region were not organized by the Indians in a manner which was recognized as civilized by these English settlers. There were no well-tended fields set apart from their neighbors. The inhabitants were, moreover, heathen in their practices. According to the 'Puritans' sense of Holy destiny, heathens, pagans, or infidels were . . ." not among the heirs of God," and were, therefore, subject to being removed to make room for the English (Leach, 1966, p. 38).

In actual practice, English occupation of tribal lands usually involved payment and transfer of title. The General Court of Massachusetts Bay required that transfer of land be recorded on a title deed signed by both parties to the transaction and by two witnesses. Of course, a basic problem which was encountered here was that the Indians did not recognize individual ownership of land.

Efforts to convert the Indians were delayed in Massachusetts Bay for more than a decade for no clear reason. The most commonly advanced cause of the delay was the translating of the bible into a written form of local Indian language. During this period, the Puritans expanded their sphere of settlement by engaging in war with the Pequots and the Mohegans. The work of converting Indians to Christianity was begun in 1643 by John Eliot, minister at Roxbury, and was further encouraged by an act of the General Court in 1644. The authority to survey lands for grants to Indians was conferred by an act of the General Court in 1646, on a committee which

included the Surveyor General of the Colony and John Eliot. This act specified that such lands as were deemed fit by this committee were to be used "for ye incuragmt of ye Indians to live in an orderly way amongst us" (Shurtleff, 1853, p. 166).

An integral part of converting Indians to Christianity was the changing of cultural values and initiation into "civilized," therefore, European, ways. Eliot attempted to accomplish this by gathering converts and prospective converts together in the same villages.

Mr. Eliot's first petition for lands was granted by the General Court in 1651 and the Village of Natick was then settled by Praying Indians. Settled in a similar manner during the 1650's and early 1660's were the villages of Punkapaog (Stoughton), Hassanamesitt (Grafton), Okommakamesit (Marlborough), Wamesit (Tewksbury), Nashobah (Littleton), and Magunkaquoog (Hopkinton), respectively. These towns received grants of land from the General Court and are referred to by Daniel Gookin, the General Court's Superintendent of Christian Indians, as the ". . . old towns of Praying Indians" (Gookin, 1792, pp. 180-189).

It appears from Gookin's descriptions of the Indian villages that, allowing for local variation, the lands were of similar quality to those settled by Puritans. The area occupied by both the white settlers and the Praying Indian villages extended from the coastal lowlands into the eastern uplands. The agricultural potential of the entire area was affected by a growing period of one hundred forty to one hundred seventy days and by the rocky remnants of glaciation (Wright, 1933).

General Gookin's (1792) detailed description of these towns provide the following information: several of the Indian villages had access to relatively large streams or rivers. Natick, on the Charles River, was described by Gookin as having good soil and water, and being productive of ". . . plenty of grain and fruit." Punkapaog, situated south of Boston, contained a large spring and 6,000 acres, ". . . some of it is fertile, but not generally so good as in other towns." Hassanamesitt, situated about forty miles west of Boston, supported about sixty inhabitants on approximately 8,000 acres. Gookin's enthusiastic description of this village compared it favorably with the others. "This village is not inferior unto any of the Indian plantations for rich land and plenty of meadow, being well tempered and watered" (Gookin, 1792, p. 185). It was a

producer of grain and corn, possessed several orchards which produced fruit, and provided good support for cattle and swine. North of Hassanamesitt, adjacent to the English town of Marlborough, was the Indian village of Okommakamesit. This village supported approximately fifty people on 6,000 acres. This village also produced corn and fruit, and contained well-watered meadows.

The northernmost of the villages, Wamesit, occupied 2,500 acres at a neck of land formed by the joining of the Concord and Merrimac Rivers. At this place the land yielded corn and the rivers yielded, in season, "salmon, shads, lamprey eels, sturgeon, bass, and divers other" (Gookin, 1792, p. 186). Located to the southwest of Wamesit and containing meadows, woods, and fish ponds, lay Nashoba, a village of fifty people. According to Gookin (1792, p. 189) this land was also fertile and was good for planting corn. The last of the Indian villages to receive a grant of land was Magunkaquog. The fifty-five residents of this village also grew corn and kept "some cattle, horses, and swine for which the place is well accomodated."

Although these descriptions must reflect some measure of favorable bias on the part of their author, the mention of meadowlands, woodlands, and access to water is consistent in all of them, and is not likely to be inaccurate. Corn, a basic element of the Indian diet, is well suited to the area and widely grown. Orchards to provide fruit are common to the hillsides, which are not suitable for growing corn or grain. The nearness of the Puritan settlements and the willingness of the Puritans to settle in the very same locations upon the decline of the Indian populations, suggest that the lands granted to the Indians were comparable to those kept by the Puritans.

Also settled as villages of Praying Indians during the late 1660's, and served by Eliot or his converts but not granted lands by the General Court, were Manchage (Oxford), Chabanakongkomun (Dudley), Maanexit (northeast Woodstock), Quantisset (southeast Woodstock), Wabquissit (southwest Woodstock), Pakachaog (Ward/ Worcester), and Waentug (Uxbridge). These villages were visited by Eliot and Gookin during 1670 to 1674. Two other villages which contained only a few Indians, and therefore were not counted by Gookin, were Weshakim and Quabaug, both in Brookfield.

The question of why some villages received grants of land and some did not is fundamental. The grants of land for Praying Indian villages were in keeping with the purpose of converting the Indians to Christianity and the English way of life, but it has been suggested that there were other motives behind the grants. Neal Salisbury (1984, p. 31) has stated that the organization of Christian Indians into villages occupied "a subordinate position in an Indian policy that was primarily military." He continues this argument by saying that, since the missionaries followed behind the path of white settlement rather than preceding it, the concentration of Indians who remained behind the settlement frontier merely served to open up even greater areas of land for use by whites, and to further secure the safety of these settlers. Although these were the results of the establishment of Praying Indian villages, the statements of the General Court and the primary missionary, John Eliot, contain no substantiation of this motive (Powicke, 1931).

Friction between Indian and white groups was present from the very beginning of English settlement. The establishment of Natick was specifically opposed by the residents of nearby Dedham. The residents of Marlborough also protested the establishment of Okommakamesit. Salisbury (1984, p. 40) cites these incidents as evidence of "both the settlers' land hunger and their fear of proximity to 'savages,' even those striving to convert."

According to Douglas Leach (1958), the main cause of this friction was land. Although he maintains that the Indians were not "cheated out of their land by fraud," he does state that friction between the English and the Indians during the period from settlement through to the 1670's was "almost constant" (Leach, 1958, pp. 14, 18-19). The root of the problem, according to Leach, "was the fact that the English were gaining control over more and more land which had formerly belonged to various tribes, thereby pushing the Indians into an ever-decreasing extent of territory" (Leach, 1958, p. 18-19).

Ellis and Morris (1905, pp. 23-24), on the other hand, maintain that one of the foremost causes of Indian unrest was the effort "to convert them to Christianity," which was seen by the Indians as a method "devised to weaken and break up their tribal relations, while it strengthened the whites."

By the early 1670's the Praying Indian villages were, in fact, dispersed among the English settlements. The growth in numbers and the spread of English settlements, between the establishment of Natick in 1651 (Figure 1) and the period during which the "New Towns" were refused grants of land (Figure 2), was substantial. Although some new settlements were established at peripheral, coastal locations, many were located at interior sites. Since Eliot's "New Towns" were all located east of the Connecticut River, they, too, were inside the frontier of English settlement.

That friction between the white settlers and the Indians did exist is a fact verified by the outbreak of King Philip's War in June of 1675. The existence and location of the "Old Towns" became very important at this time. This relationship is most notable when contrasted with the most populous English communities. On 30 August, 1675, an order was published at Boston which required that any Indians who were not hostile gather in the villages of Natick, Punkapoag, Nashoba, and Hassanamesitt (Gookin, 1792). This order was especially significant because it grouped together all Indians who remained friendly to the English, regardless of their religious status.

Additionally, according to this order, any Indian found more than a mile from these four villages could be shot on sight (Brigham, 1883). This creation of what has become known as a "free fire zone" effectively cancelled the land grants which had been made to the three other villages. During November of 1675 an encounter with hostile Indians near the village of Hassanamesitt, the westernmost of the remaining villages, led to an attack on that village and the dispersal of the population, leaving only three villages legally occupied by any Indians (Lincoln, 1883; and Brigham, 1883).

During the course of the war, all of these Indians were relocated to an island in Boston harbor where Gookin and Elliot were hard put to maintain the necessities of life for them. Although the legal concept of providing lands to Indians who converted technically survived King Philip's War, the actual practice of converting them did not. A few converted Indians remained in English settlements during much of the colonial period, but the movement of English settlement into the interior and the subsequent relocation westward of surviving Indian groups became a matter of course.

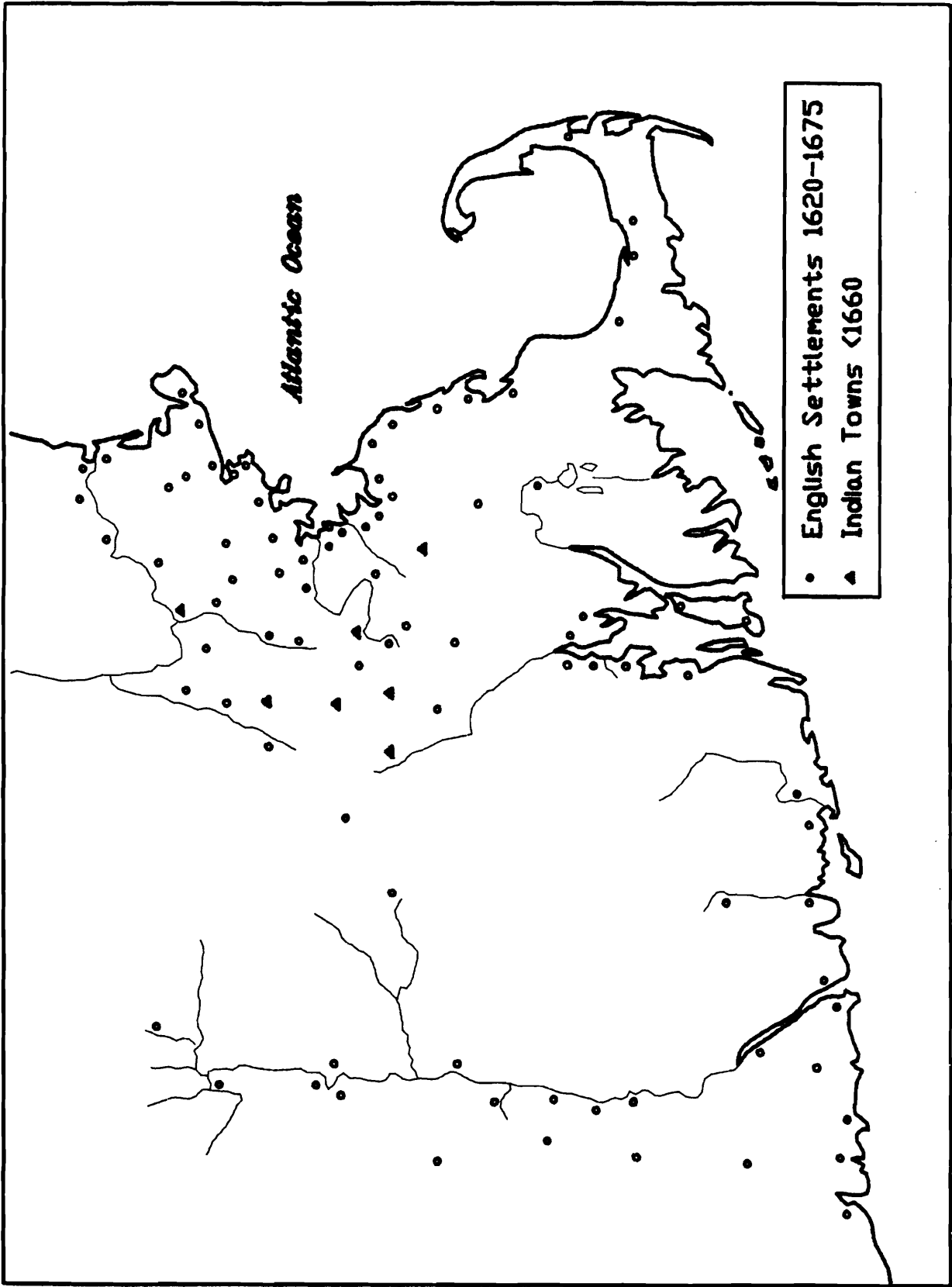


Figure 1: "Old Towns" and Existing English Settlements

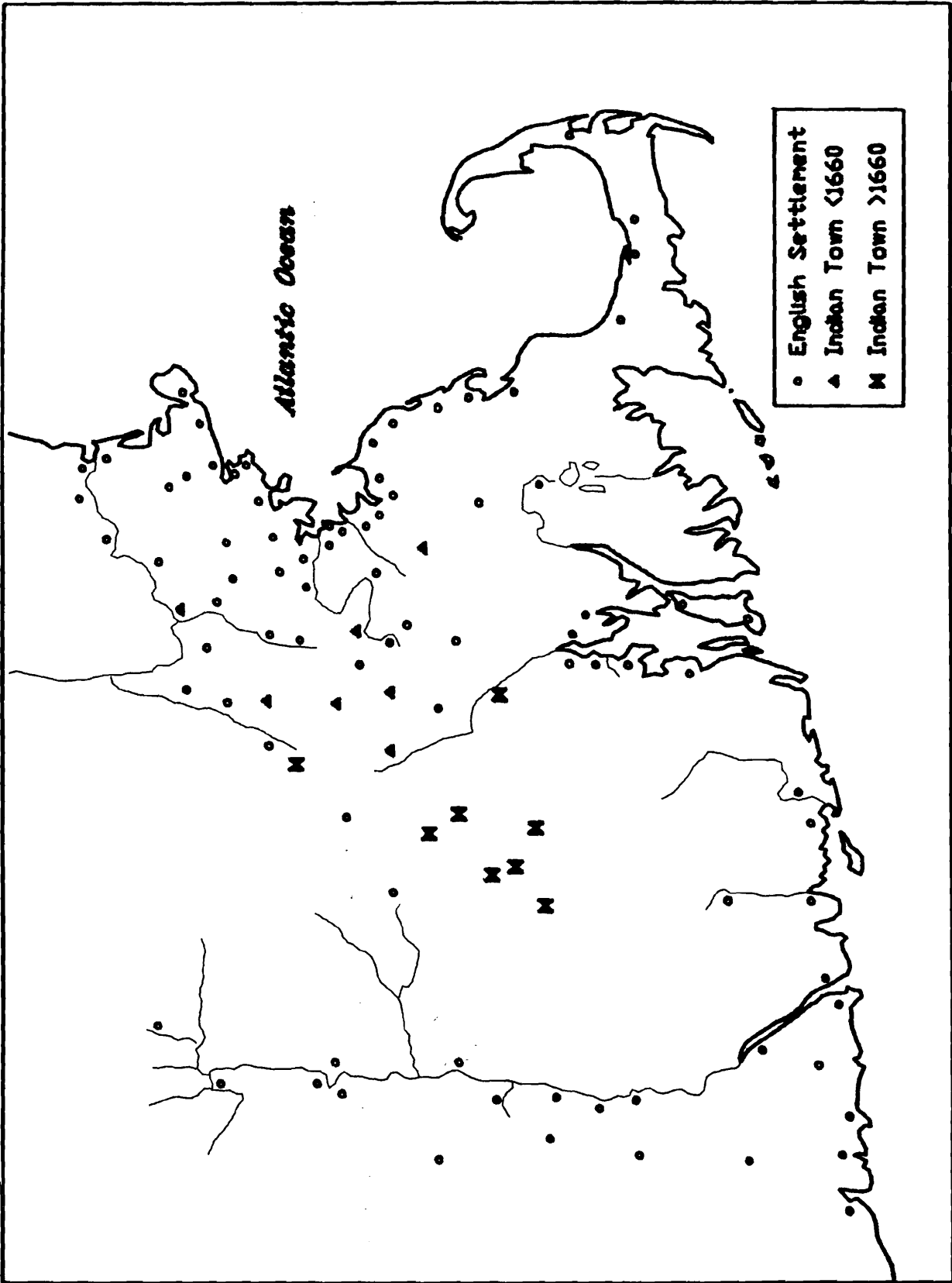


Figure 2: "Old Towns", "New Towns" and Expanded English Settlements



The early practice of gathering Indians together, begun by missionaries, evolved into establishing reserves or reservations which were to have been exempt from European and, later, American settlement (Kawashima, 1969). Dominance in terms of numbers and technology increased with time and even these reservations were found to be only temporary havens by many.

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