

The first recorded land transaction for land in Tiverton was a deed with Chief Massasoit . It was for grazing rights in South Tiverton, made by Clark and Coddington. For five fathoms they were given grazing rights along the Sakonnet in South Tiverton. The men were allowed to ferry sheep, cows and pigs from Portsmouth, across the Sakonnet, for grazing in the summer. arming for export of mainly salted pork became very profitable here, and cleared land became very valuable.

Soon there was pressure on the tribal leaders to sell more of the ancestral lands. The lands in Tiverton were of choice quality. For centuries they had been cleared, enriched and farmed, while Aquidneck Island was still largely covered by brush and trees. Soon Tiverton had its first settlers, among them John Almy, who in 1659 purchased land on Nanaquaket and Punkateest Neck. The tax, payable to the Plymouth colony was one British Pound. Slowly, more land passed from Indian ownership to the settlers coming to Tiverton, Within about a decade, most of the land was held by the newcomers, among them Benjamin Church.

With so much change it is of no surprise that skirmishes and misunderstandings between the Natives and newcomers would erupt. These would lead to what is known as the " King Philip Wars".

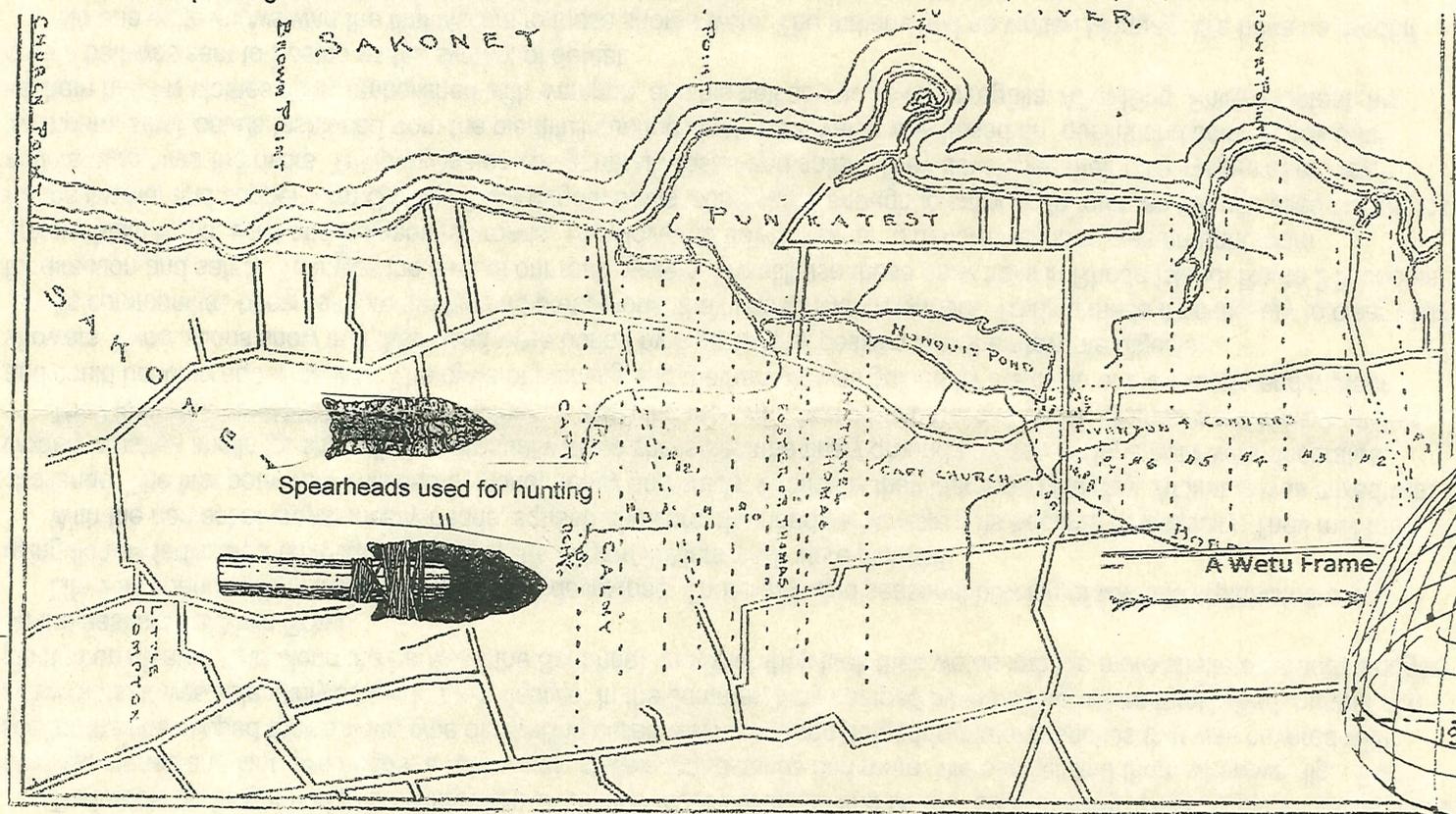
Phillip was the second son of Massasoit. He had succeeded his older brother Wamsutta as Sachem of the Wampanoags. Phillip was married to a sister of Weetamo, daughter of Corbitant, the local chief.

Weetamo and Awashonk, from Tiverton and Little Compton, joined Phillip in his efforts to return power and pride to his people. These battles and skirmishes took place in numerous locations including Warren, Bristol, Swansea and Dighton. One of the best known battles was the famed "Battle of the Peas Field" that was fought in Fogland cove. There, colonials led by Captain Benjamin Church defeated the Indians. King Phillip was finally defeated in August of 1676.

To this day, in terms of people lost, the King Phillip Wars remain the bloodiest in our history. It would take decades until the Colony would rebuild itself to its prewar prosperity. At the end of the conflict, the remaining native population was largely sold into slavery. The widow and son of Phillip are said to have been brought to Bermuda.

Tiverton's Wampanoag heritage is all around us. We are reminded of it when we walk in Weetamoe Woods, go to Pocasset School, visit Nanaquaket Pond and Punkateest Neck and Sakonnet the Indian name for " mouth of the stream" The Indian names are still here. We find arrowheads when digging in the soil. We drive on roads that began as Indian trails thousands of years ago.

These Wampanoag Indians were the first settlers of the land that became our Town, Tiverton, Rhode Island.



Tiverton's First Settlers..... The Wampanoags

Fifteen thousand years ago, the 20 square miles we call Tiverton did not exist. We were covered by a huge glacier. Slowly it melted and left the landscape which is familiar to us... the bays with forests lining the shores, the inlets and the marshes. About 3,500 years ago we would see the Sakonnet Bay and its banks rising in various spots. We would see the inlets, bays and marshes which are familiar to us...we would recognize our hometown, Tiverton.

This setting, as well as the moderate climate, invited an abundance of plant and wildlife...deer, bear, fox and rabbits. Birds soared in the sky and a variety of fish and shellfish filled the Bay and the marshes. It was an inviting setting for the nomadic tribes from the south to explore. The nomadic people discovered that food was so plentiful that instead of constantly searching, they could stay in one area, settle down and build a community. They were to become the Wampanoags. The name means "Easterners". Although their population probably was never more than 15,000, they played a vital part in the formation of colonial life.

Their tools no longer had to be lightweight and made mostly of shells and bone... easy to carry. They began to fashion tools from the stones and flint, axe heads, arrow heads, chisels, grindstones and more. We can still find them when we dig. For shelter they developed their unique type of dwelling called wetus, a round domed frame of branches that was covered with straw mats. It was splendidly suited to their lifestyle. In the summer, they camped by the shore where they fished, hunted and planted on cleared land along the banks of the Sakonnet. In winter they took their wetus into the more sheltered wooded ridges on the east side of Main Road.

Life was splendid. Farming techniques were developed. These included seasonal burning of fields to replenish the soil, using fish as fertilizer, a technique copied by the Pilgrim settlers. Fish were plentiful.

With the harvest of crops, mostly beans, squash and corn, the need for storage pots became a necessity. They met that challenge. The first pots were chiseled of stone, heavy and crude. Gradually they learned to fire clay. At first, it was mixed with crudely crushed shells for strength, but gradually these shells became finely ground powder, and the pots were decorated.

They formed a society of leaders or sachems, medicine men who healed and gave counsel. Women were always valued and could become equal leaders. The cycle of planting and the harvest was guided by the cycle of the planets and meteor showers. Excavations show that their dead were buried by ritual in fetal position with their favorite objects.

As communities became more settled and prosperous, they traded with neighbors. Trading made it necessary to clear trails for direction and safety. This was the start of our road system. We still use these early trails in Rhode Island. Route 2 is one, as are our Main Road, East and Bulgamarsh roads. They loved to travel. Jasper, a decorative stone, was brought from Pennsylvania, and copper from Canada. Their dugout boats, some large enough to carry up to fourteen people, plied the shores and ventured into the rivers. Travel by water was generally faster and safer. They developed their own system of money, Wampum, small beads fashioned from the plentiful quohog shell. Their value was based on quality and color. A powerful sachem had his clothes richly embellished with wampum, and his belt served as royal regalia. After King Phillip's defeat, his ornate belt was sent to Boston as the symbol of defeat.

No one quite knows who the first visitors to these shores were. The Indians had no written language. We have no proof if the Vikings or Crusaders stopped by.

Our first visitor to leave a record was very much impressed. His name was Verrazzano, a seafarer from Italy. The King of France had sent him to see what the so called "New World" had to offer. He sailed into Newport's safe, deep water harbor in 1525. He anchored there and began to explore the surrounding bays and waterways. He writes of the warm welcome he and his men received. Natives in dugout boats met him, offered food, gifts and hospitality. Verrazzano was impressed by their healthy appearance. He further noted that there were two distinct tribes. One on Aquidneck Island and west, and one taller and of lighter skin, found on the eastern shore of the Sakonnet. He identified Mt. Hope as being the headquarters of the Wampanoags.

In the hundred years following Verrazzano's departure, Europeans started to trade with the native Americans. The Europeans had a need for furs, mostly beaver, used to make their fashionable hats. The waters and woods here were teeming with beaver. Trade began, mostly out of Newport. There was an active barter where the natives became familiar with European goods such as flintlock. The overseas merchants accepted Wampum as legal currency. Some Natives learned to speak English. When the Pilgrims landed they were able to communicate. Unfortunately, disease from Europe also came to this shore. The native population had no immunities and were often times decimated by these germs. Whole villages were wiped out. The Narragansett population which had been about 40,000, was greatly reduced, as was the Wampanoag tribe.

The Pilgrims landed in Plymouth in 1620. It was the homeground of the Wampanoag. To this day they have a site located adjacent to Plimouth Plantation. From the accounts by William Bradford, the Governor of the Colony, we know his scouts stumbled on villages where the native Wampanoags had been struck by disease so suddenly, their winter food supplies were still in storage. This food helped sustain the newly landed Pilgrims in their first winter on these shores. The leader of the Wampanoags at the time of the Pilgrims arrival was Massasoit. He and his tribe helped the newcomers.

William Bradford visited Mt. Hope and this area in 1621. He "found" the tribe to be "weak and wasted". It comes as no surprise that they would sell land to the expanding Plimouth Colony. It must be remembered that before Tiverton became Rhode Island it was a part of Massachusetts. The Plymouth Colony from early on, enacted a law that any land transaction had to be approved and recorded by the court. It was to safeguard both the Natives and the newcomers.