

BOOK REPORT on John Sassamon, Igniting the King Philips War

Terry Meyer, July 25 '23 for David Weed's LLC class

This book report is About the murder and trial of the Wampanoag Indian -John Sassamon. He was a Praying Indian a teacher within the Plymouth Christian colony and also a longtime translator for Wampanoags, including King Philip..

Did this trial really ignite King Philip's War" as Kawashima author of this book IGNIGHTING KING PHILIPS WAR The John Sassamon Murder Trial writes?.

Let me sketch out a few relevant events that build up to the trial..
. Who was John Sassamon? to the Indians, to the colonists?

What are the circumstances around his death?

What happened at the Trial?

How did Indian and Colonial laws differ about this trial

lets start with WHO WAS JOHN SASSAMON?

Who was Sassamon?

Sassamon was an Indian Orphan.,adopted by colonists, in his early teens- when his parents died of small pox. He was raised a Christian, and taught to read write and speak English

He was mentored by the Christian missionary John Eliot, who even sent Sassamon briefly to Harvard Indian School. Later, Eliot hired Sassamon to teach and preach at his 'Praying Indian school in Natick, reserved for Native Americans who had converted to Christianity. Then there was a big falling out. : Sassamon aggravated Eliot after a drinking spree, - he left Natick and transitioned back with his Wampanoag tribe. .

He spent years with Sachems Massasoit, Wamsutta and Philip as their scribe and translator. With Philip, he was even the witness and advisor to Philip's dealings with the British. Such as his Oath of loyalty to the crown.

However, Sassamon is disloyal to King Philip on three major occasions

1. The first incident.

After the birth of Philip's first son, Sass was asked to write Philip's will. He abused this confidence by Pretending to write down what Philip dictated . . Instead, Sass wrote in the will that he was Philip's heir. After Phillip finds out , , Sass flees the tribe and goes back to the preacher Eliot.

2. **Second act of Betrayal** : occurred in 1671, when Plymouth Colony forced Philip to accept a new treaty. This was substantially different from the Treaties of 1621 and 1639. Now The Tribe must accept the jurisdiction of the Plymouth Government over Indian law, .

They must give up all their guns.!!!

Governor Winslow sends Sassamon to Sowams , Philips home base, to make sure he got the message to give up his guns. While there, Sassamon witnesses Philip meeting with sachems from other tribes. TO PLAN WAR.

Sassamon returns to Plymouth to report this intel to colony leaders.

3. **Last act of Betrayal**

In the fall of 1674 , Philip sent Sassamon to convince the Sakonnet tribal chief to support the impending war against the English.

The Sakonnet chief was about to unite with Philip, when Sassamon rounded up some local colonists who convinced her to stay neutral. Phillip was likely furious.

In January 1675, Sassamon tells Plymouth colony Governor Josiah Winslow about the impending Indian attack by Philip and other tribes.

Governor Winslow does not believe the native Sassamon even when Sassamon feared for his own life for relaying this message.

Sassamon leaves the Governors office,

Segue to THE Plymouth Murder Trial

Here are the 'facts'. Listen with an Indian ear, and a colonists ear.

1. A few days after his meeting with Governor Winslow, our Sassamon disappears.
2. About a week later, A group of Indians discovered an Indian body under the ice at Assowamsett Pond. On top of the ice, there was a 'hat/gun/a brace of ducks. As customary to tribal laws, They did not examine the body, but took it the shore and buried it.
3. Friends of Sassamon reported him missing to Plymouth authorities in Late January 1675.
4. Now Gov Winslow remembers Sassamon's fear. He is suspicious of foul play. And instructs his constable to investigate the case,
5. A dead man's buried body is found. And it's found to be Sassamon.
6. At first, the English Constable thought that the body had drowned by accident while fishing. However, upon his further examination he decided the body was murdered . The body had a swollen head, cuts on the neck. Because No water came out of the body's stomach, the Constable concluded that Sassamon was not drowned, but was thrown into the water after he was killed.
7. Foreshadow! There was no official post mortem. No doctors called in. and you need two witnesses in British law to confirm a murder.
8. The Plymouth constable then found ' Patuckson", an Indian who testified to having seen three of King Philips men murder Sassamon and then shove his body into the icy pond. He identified the Indian men as Tobias, Wammpapaquan, and Mattashunamo, all tribal counselors of Philip.
9. Even though they only had the **one witness**, Massachusetts general court set up the trial at Plymouth. . June 1675 , Presiding over the case was **Governor Josia Winslow**. The jury was 12 Colonials and 6 praying Indians. They formally accused the three Wampanoag men, of murder . The men pleaded

innocent. They were all sentenced to death by hanging.

10. On June 8, 1675, Tobias and Mattashunnamo were hanged first. Next up for the noose - was Wampapaquan. As he was strung up, the rope broke. Wampapaquan – clearly traumatized, and under extreme duress, confessed to the crime and implicated the two others. The Plymouth authorities accepted his guilty plea – as there are now two witnesses to the crime. Wampapaquan was shot by firing squad later that week.

What's wrong with this Picture?

The accused had no benefit of lawyers.

The body wasn't seen for a post mortem, and no doctor's opinion was sought.

Who should have legal jurisdiction over this case?

Who has the right to try Sassamon.

Depends on who you ask!

Remember the Charters between Massasoit and the original Colonists?

INDIAN LAW

According to the Charter signed in 1621 and 1639, between Massasoit and the Colonists

.. Indian Law applies to all Indians outside of colonial Plymouth.

Therefore this death was not in the jurisdiction of the British.

And Sassamon's death should be handled by his relatives.

.. The Law ruling the Wampanoags society was a personal and clan matter. It did not involve a third party./institution or state. One clan compensated or punished another clan for injury or loss. A wrong was remedied by revenge sought by the aggrieved party.

Different types of wrongs (agreements, assault, murder theft,) required different compensation.

This was bound by tribal custom and sanction. If either party sought revenge after this, it was subject to counterretaliation. Intention was not important, only conduct.

Pawtuckson, the witness, was a known gambler and owed the three suspects money For gambling debts. He was Not a creditable witness.

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BRITISH/Colonial Law

The Colonials thought they had jurisdiction, Because Sassamon was a “Praying Indian” and a minister to an Indian Church in the colony,. Therefore he could be tried in the Plymouth Court and according to its rules.

In their 1621 and 1639 treaties The colonists make sure that **The Indians recognized English law In the boundaries of the settlement** . Now with the new treaty, the Indians were under colonial law even when on their own land.

Murder in English law is defined as an act against the state. The Law had the power and duty to apprehend, try, convict and punish a crime, and with the new treaty, it applies to the neighboring Indians as well

Is it Possible for us to know the truth? Was it possible for the trial jurors to know the truth?

Some asked? was Sass a spy for Elliot all along?

After the Trial:

Even before the verdict was given, both the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Metacomet's tribe were mobilizing their forces for war.^[21] Fighting broke out later in June when the Wampanoags began looting homes in the Plymouth town of Swansea. But I read that the The British drew blood first.

After King Philip's war, the name *Pokanoket* was outlawed by colonial gov. forcing survivors to re-identify as Wampanoag or risk death. (East BayRI.com) This makes impossible for the Pokanokets to become a nationally recognized tribe – as a qualifier is continuous existence demonstration

THOUGHTS

John Easton, wrote in that era “RI “A relation of the Indian war, 1675, suspects that Ris suspected that Mass Bay might use the war as a pretext to extend her borders into RI Territory. Maybe, Sassamon had merely fallen thru the ice and drowned. Such a cover up drama was not somethings the Indians would do. It was a pretext for a land grab. He thought John Easton was a political Leader in RI: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Easton

In the years before extensive European contact, 25.000 Algonquin speaking Indian peoples inhabited the woodlands and coastal plains of south and central NE.

By 1680, after 60 years of contact, only 14,000 native americans remained, whereas the number of white settlers soared to 66,000.

The Death of John Sassamon: an exploration in Writing and NE History RONDA

Middlemen In History

Ultimately, Sassamon came to embody the fundamental discord between the Wampanoags and the Puritans. (Jill LePore)

What other historical figures spanned the culture divides in their areas. Most of them seem to be **disliked and distrusted by both groups.** .