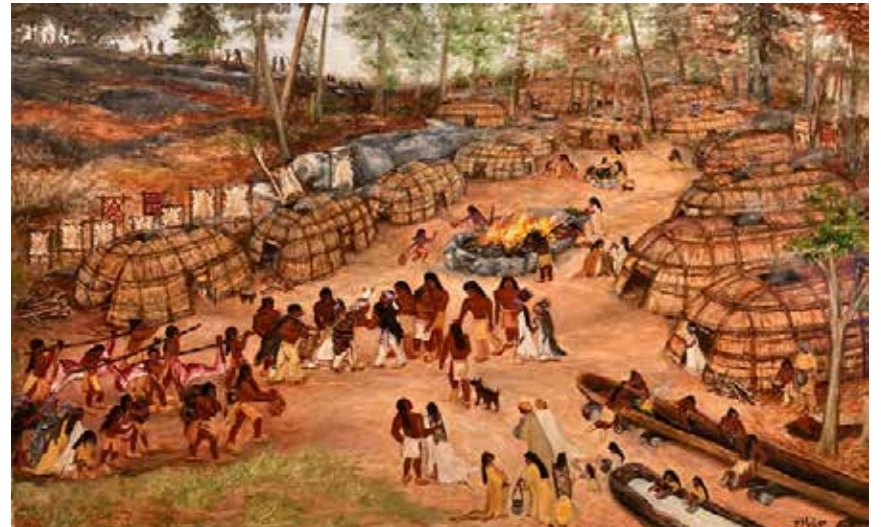


## reframing history

Ruth Major

2020-21



**“A Visit to Massasoit’s Winter Village, Pokanoket in Sowams, c. Fall, 1620”**

Oil on Linen

24” x 36”

by R. Major.

[rmajorarts@gmail.com](mailto:rmajorarts@gmail.com)

## REFRAMING HISTORY

When a community, such as Massasoit Ousamequin's, has been marginalized and fractured over time, referred to in derogatory terms, and had their customs criticized or mocked, it is imperative that **we study the past before going forward**. We must examine what has been written and consider history with new insights and research; then reframe the past in a more respectful, educated and unbiased manner. The truth is, there were very good reasons for the choices made by indigenous people of New England concerning their choice of community living sites, manner of dress and choice of clothing materials, hunting and fleshing practices, planting and harvesting techniques on land and sea, etc. Customs, legends, religious beliefs and practices were based on thousands of years of teachings learned by oral tradition from elders and hands-on experiences living in natural surroundings in dense New England forests that often reached the sea.

There are three main considerations when choosing a village site, then and now. - Is clean, fresh water available nearby? Can the location be defended in case of attack, and is food, fuel and materials for shelter available? There were several suitable fall/winter sites in Massasoit's territory called Sowams (which includes 7 Rhode Island towns today). Some are probable sites, including an area near Massasoit's Spring. Until archaeological studies are made, we cannot be certain which sites were actually used in colder months, but we know from early descriptions and Pokanoket history keepers that Massasoit made use of more than one winter site. Over a century ago, during a 1907 dedication of the Massasoit memorial plaque at Massasoit Spring, the words of Warren's "revered poet-historian" were read:

"Warren! where first beside the cradled Nation  
the old chief stood, we love thy storied past.  
Sowams is pleasant for habitation -  
'Twas thy first history - may it be thy last."

On October 25, 2020, my colleague Don Widdiss, member of the Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe, and I met Sowam's Heritage Area Coordinator, Dr. David Weed. We proceeded to Margaret's Rock where we met Dr. Keith Morton, a Providence College professor with whom I correspond. We were honored to have Pokanoket Sagamore, Po Wauipe Neimpaug, Tribal Sachem, Tracy "Dancing Star" Brown, Pokanoket Historian, Don Brown and his brother Ryan Brown, Tribal Videographer, join us for an on-site study of the area.

Keith described the natural features of the area in detail and agreed that the place was likely a site where Massasoit and his people set up a Fall/Winter Campsite. The Pokanoket leaders agreed. History tells us that use of village sites was rotated for several good reasons including the fact that the indigenous people did not wish to deplete local materials needed for their homes and campfires. Photos and conversations, coupled with months of research, followed by weeks of drawing, painting, tribal and expert reviews of the painting, responses, and documentation have resulted in this document and the finished, image of Warren's oil painting:

"A Visit to Massasoit's Fall/Winter Pokanoket Village in Sowams, c. October, 1620"  
Commissioned by the Warren Preservation Society, Warren, Rhode Island, 2020

Dedicated to Po Wauipe Neimpaug, 2021  
Sagamore, Pokanoket Tribe of Sowams, RI

The moving rock, manned by men, sounds across the centuries and  
echoes down the Sound.  
It tells us here on our fair isle, the Pokanoket are still here! RM

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Thanks to Jay Barry Cultural Arts and the Idalia C. Whitcomb  
Charitable Trust for supporting this project

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With Gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Charles McCoy, land-owner,  
Margaret's Rock and ledge, for granting us permission to survey his  
historic property.

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Painting © 2021, Warren Preservation Society, Inc.

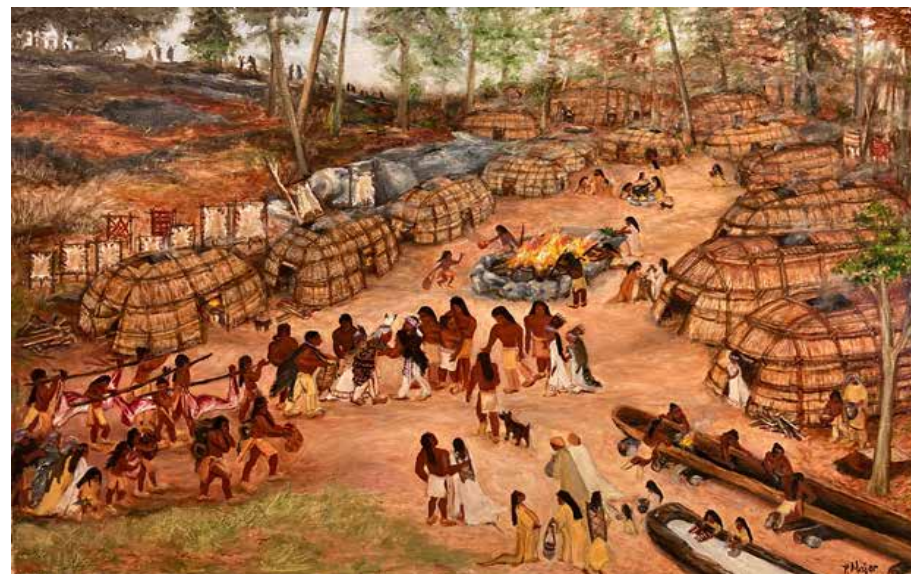
Booklet © 2021, Ruth Major

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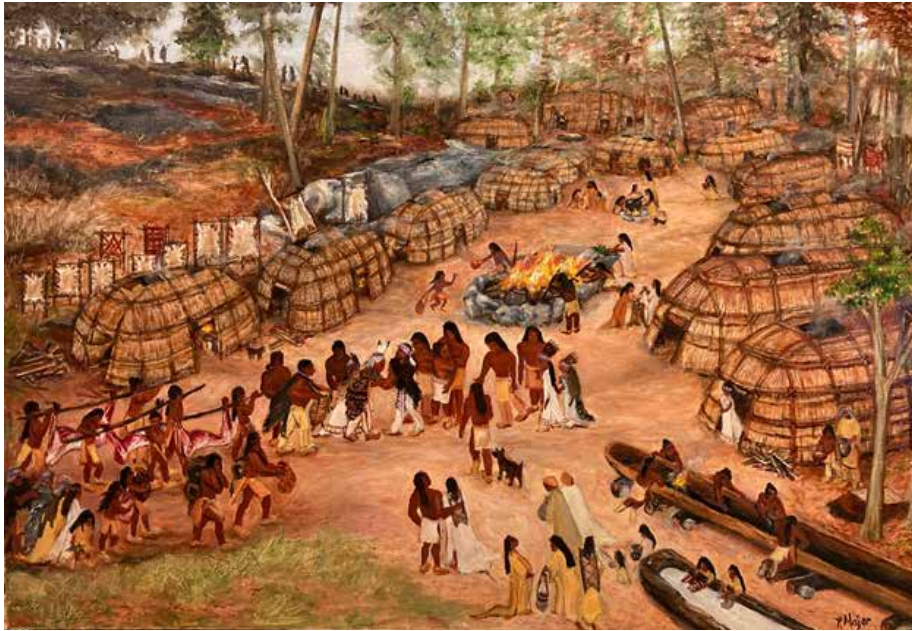


“A Visit to Massasoit's Winter Village, Pokanoket in Sowams, c. Fall, 1620”

By R. Major - rmajorarts@gmail.com - ruthmajor.com Oil on Linen • 24” x 36”

The historical painting scene above depicts a visit to Massasoit Ousamequin's Pokanoket Village in October by Quaboag Nipmuc Sachem, Nattawayhunt and his family, all kin of Ousamequin on his mother's side. Paniese (warrior-protectors and counselors) from both tribes keep close watch over the leaders and their families. The Pokanoket villagers will celebrate the arrival of their Massasoit's guests and be treated to many gifts of food they bring, which are always shared with the community.

## Detail Images and Descriptions



### Detail Showing:

- Quaboag Nipmuc relatives pay a visit to Massasoit Ousamequin at Pokanoket.
- Paniese protect the Nipmuc Sachem and Massasoit as well as their families, and accompany them wherever they travel outside their home communities.
- Massasoit extends a welcome to his wife's people.
- Sachem Nattawayhunt of the Quaboag Nipmuc extends a greeting to Massasoit.
- A pet dog follows his master, one of several Paniese protectors and warriors attend from both communities.

### List of Collaborators

Descendants of Massasoit Ousamequin and Massasoit Metacom  
Pokanoket Sagamore, Po Wauipe Neimaug  
Pokanoket Sachem, Tracy "Dancing Star" Brown  
Pokanoket Tribal Historian, Donald Brown  
Pokanoket Videographer, Ryan Brown  
Pokanoket Tribal Council

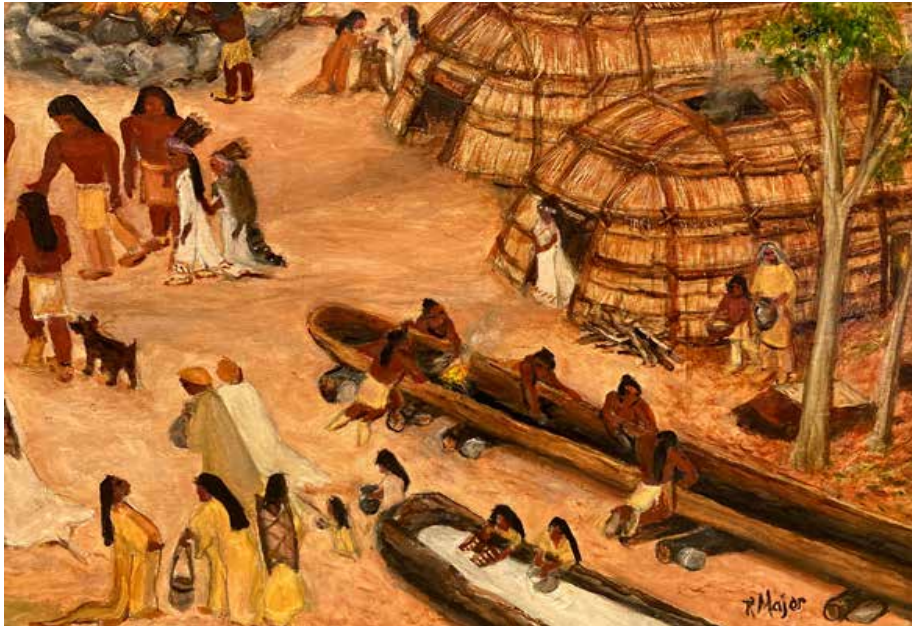
Don Widdiss, Wampum Fine Artist, Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribal Member and Former Tribal Chairman and Program Director,

Dr. Kieth Morton, Author and Professor, Providence College, Interests: Community development; service; reflection; practice of non-violence and land stewardship

Dr. Jeremy M. Campbell, Political and Environmental Anthropologist, Roger Williams University, Professor and Author of *Conjuring Property*, Roger Williams University, Director of Honors Program

Dr, David Weed, Author, Videographer and Presenter, Coordinator, Sowams Heritage Area Project, Warren, Rhode Island and six surrounding communities

Ruth Major, Author/Fine Artist, Vineyard Haven, MA, [rmajorarts@gmail.com](mailto:rmajorarts@gmail.com), [ruthmajor.com](http://ruthmajor.com). Co-Author, Connecticut River Shipbuilding, Former High School Program Developer, Curriculum Writer and Instructor



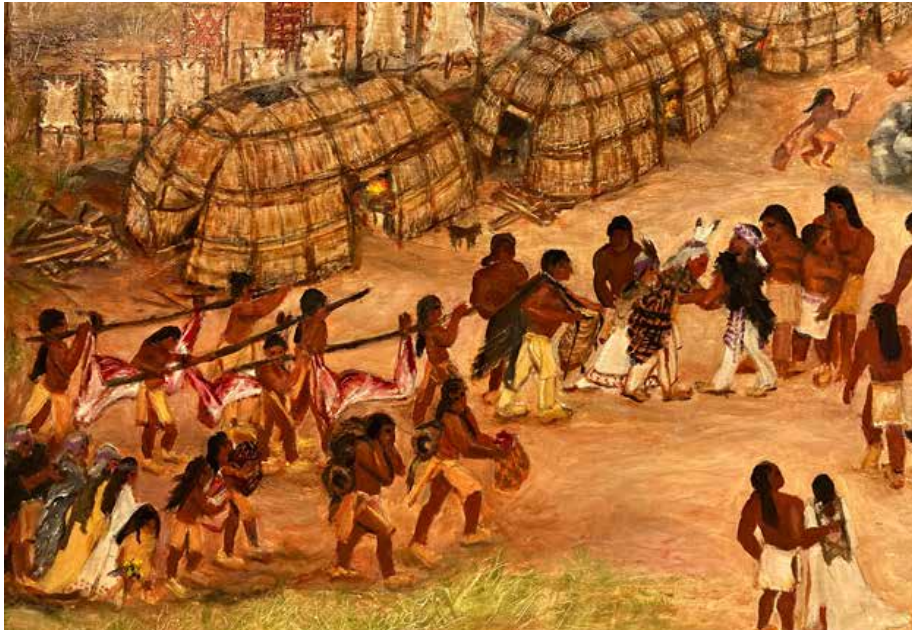
#### Detail Showing:

- Earth-covered, mat-lined storage pits near the longhouses hold baskets of dried corn.
- One of several water troughs holding fresh water from nearby kettle holes and streams.
- Girls getting water in pottery jug and birchbark containers.
- Nearly finished longboat being scraped and burnt out.
- Pregnant women talking. Young mother with infant safe in back carrier.
- Massasoit's daughter waits by one of two of their longhouses.
- Two young women let others know they are ready for marriage by wearing woven hats.
- Paniese escort Massasoit's primary wife and her grandmother to greet the visitors.
- Ousamequin's wife holds her grandmother's hand.
- A grandfather and grandson carry food prepared in their home.



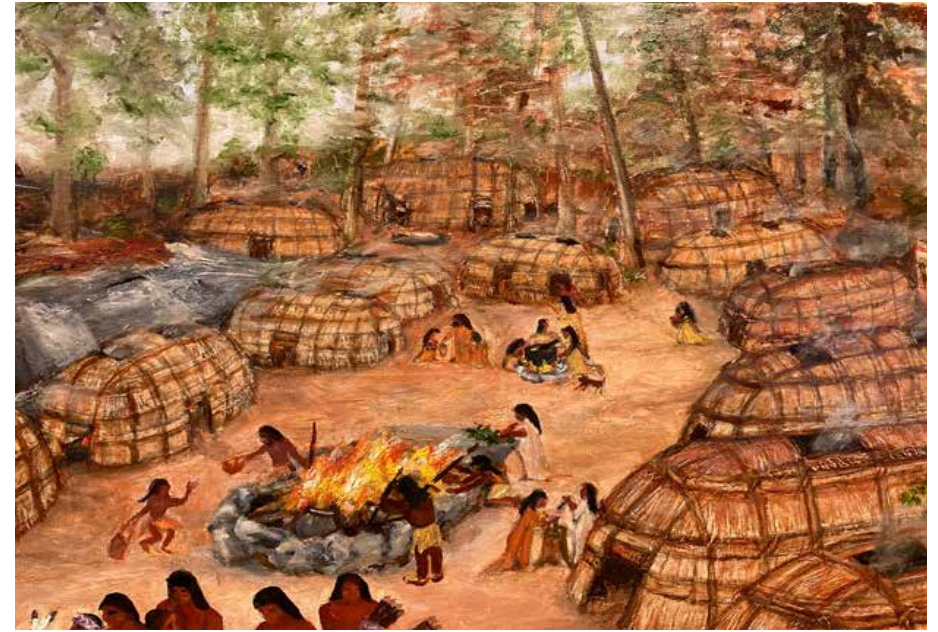
#### Detail Showing:

- Pokanoket Warriors and Paniese on the high rock ledge keeping watch.
- Animal skins with tails stretched to dry, smoke and tan. In colder weather, women wear 2 skins sewn together, the fur side in; men wear one as a cape. Both wear breech cloths, leggings with stirrups and moccasins of moose skin.
- Two mats for decorating the inside of the longhouse are in the process of being woven with dyed sedges and reeds on hand spun warps of materials like native hemp and milkweed.
- Smoke drifts from longhouse through smoke holes in the roof above the fire pits within.



#### Detail Showing:

- Arrival of the Quaboag Nipmuc bearing gifts. Massasoit Ousamequin greeting the Great Sachem Nadawahunt and his wife.
- Wives and others who could afford trade items, wear hand decorated brain tanned white moose skins, made soft and supple. (No hair)
- People carry woven bags and baskets filled with gifts of fresh berries, dried fish, nuts and herbs.
- Three deer are brought in as gifts to Massasoit, their skins rolled up and carried in with tails on.
- Men carry the rolled deerskins.
- Some people wear capes made of skins of animals with tails hanging down or of feathers made by the old men.
- A child brings a gift of flowers.



#### Detail Showing:

- The far end of the village shows 12-14 longhouses per 250-300 persons. I painted 14. The village has recently lost a great number of people due to an illness that lasted from 1615-1619.
- Fires burning in wetus 24/7.
- Fire-pit for community drying of fish etc and roasting of meat or large fish
- An iron kettle obtained in trade is filled with samp, a corn porridge, and simmered in the back smaller pit.
- Older boys tend the fire and women cook, prepare and serve food.
- Women grind green and dried corn in a hollowed out tree stump or stone bowl.
- Large amounts of corn are ground by Pokanoket women using rolling stones with a dowel running through, like a rolling pin. Harvested corn was dried and ground nearby on King's Rock. The "grinding place" had three 25' long grooves dug into the stone ledge.