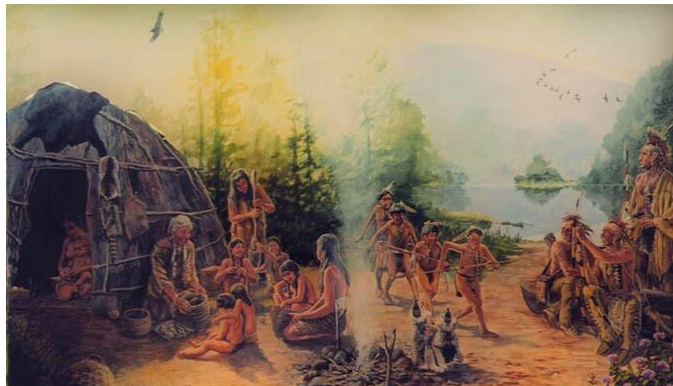


## Sowams Heritage Area Historical Overview



The Sowams Heritage Area is composed of eight communities that encompass the territory once occupied by the Massasoit Osamequin<sup>1</sup> and his tribes who first met the Pilgrims after their landing in Plymouth in 1620. Within it are over fifty locations that reveal aspects of the life of those First People as well as the process by which English colonists moved into that area and displaced the native inhabitants. It can be argued that Sowams was the pivotal place of cultural exchange between indigenous people and colonizing settlers in New England, yet little of that story is known by the general public. The Sowams Heritage Area Project is designed to increase an awareness of the importance of this unique piece of history and to argue for the continued preservation of the land and recognition of the people that the colonists first met.

### The People of Sowams in 1600



About four centuries ago, thousands of people had already been living along the shore of Narragansett Bay for at least 10,000 years. Two large rivers and many small streams flowed into the Bay from the north, serving its inhabitants as liquid highways. The Bay teemed with aquatic life that enriched the rivers and streams: sturgeon, striped bass, menhaden, white perch, eels, crabs, oysters, mussels, and clams were all found in great abundance. A deep forest covered much of the land around the Bay. Some of it was ancient, with massive trees, scant undergrowth, and occasional meadows cleared by spring and fall burnings. Oak, hickory, chestnut and pine abounded, and deer, squirrel, rabbit, opossum, raccoon, bear, fox, wolf, bobcat, and beaver were among the common mammals of the fields and watercourses.

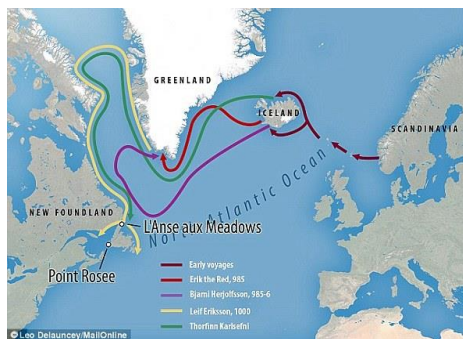
<sup>1</sup> Referred to herein as “Massasoit”, “Osemequin” or “the Massasoit Osamequin” depending on context

Archeologists estimate that prior to the arrival of Europeans, probably about 100,000 Algonquian Native Americans occupied what came to be known as New England. At least 10,000 of these people occupied Sowams, or the southern region bordering on the northeastern shore of Narragansett Bay. This area was marked by access to both fresh and salt water and a climate that was somewhat milder than northern inland regions. The abundance of edible resources, particularly fish and game, supported the largest concentrated population of the entire region. The cultivation of corn, squash and beans in the 500 years before colonization enabled more sedentary occupation and less dependence on inland hunting.

The native people who lived in the region had developed sophisticated societies with collective spiritual beliefs, oral history, performing arts, clearly defined systems of government, hunting and agricultural technologies, well-established trade routes, and extensive political and military alliances. Social structures and systems of historical agreements guided personal and intra-tribal interactions. A complicated web of trading networks among neighboring and far-flung tribes spread goods over hundreds of miles. Shared worldviews created a seamless culture that had no substantial external threats since coming into existence.

The Native people used the Narragansett Bay and its tributaries for transportation, migration, communication, settlement and trade. The Bay served to link the coastal communities with other societies in the region, and a vast network of rivers and footpaths connected them with Indigenous groups as far away as the Great Lakes and Canada. Items of value were dug from the earth, derived from plants, and crafted from shells, including those used for the production of wampum, and then transported by canoe or on foot from one place to another. Each area had its own unique name, and historical memory which served to preserve a collective history.

### The First English Settlers and the Native People



A group of explorers from northern Europe entered this world as early as the 10th century. A settlement discovered in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nova Scotia confirms the presence of Viking explorers. Written accounts of explorations by Cabot, Pring, Champlain, Gorges, Smith, Dermer and Hudson in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century document attempts to explore New England and trade with Native people for valuable furs that brought high prices in Europe. But it was not until attempts by the Virginia Company of London, whose objective was to establish a colony in North America and exploit the resources there

for the benefit of its investors, that the idea of establishing a permanent foothold on the American continent was attempted, first in a failed attempt in Roanoke, Virginia in 1585 and then in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.

The newcomers to Jamestown, led by Captain John Smith who had explored the area, encountered the Powhatan Native population whose worldviews about the natural world could scarcely have been more dissimilar from the English who saw humans as a special creation separate from nature, and nature existed to be conquered and put into man's service. Collisions

and misunderstandings were inevitable. The English assumed that their religious, social, and political lives were essentially correct, and superior to the way of life of all others. The people called “Indians” were considered human, but perhaps not as fully human as the English. The explorers admitted that the natives had souls that might be saved through conversion to Christianity, they had information about the country that might be useful, and goods that were worth trading for or taking by force.

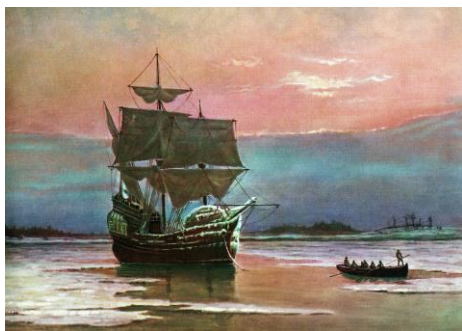


The tribes probably considered the Englishmen nuisances who might nonetheless prove helpful in countering hostile tribes and supplying useful trade goods, assuming that they survived or remained in the territory long enough to serve their purposes. The Native people, after all, had seen other Europeans come and go. Initially, the Powhatan gave the English newcomers hospitality and attempted to incorporate them into their political domain. They answered the

strangers’ questions, drew maps for them, and gave them feasts. They brought venison and corn to Jamestown and even took some of them into their towns and homes during the winter.

The English traveled throughout the Chesapeake Bay Area and encountered both conflict and cooperation with various tribes. They established alliances, and in some instances, they disrupted long-established networks of trade and politics through a variety of exploits. Lacking assistance from the Natives, the entire colony nearly starved to death in 1610. The Powhatan Natives then killed a third of the colonists in 1622. With the help of additional colonists from England, however, the effort eventually succeeded. Over time, some of the Englishmen who regularly interacted with the Native people developed a greater understanding of them and their culture. Clearly, the English settlers would not have survived without the assistance of the Chesapeake Native people, and would not have accomplished their mission without their aid.

### The Plymouth Experience



Not long after the Chesapeake experience, another group decided to attempt to establish a permanent colony on the North American coast. The motivation, however, was largely infused with an effort to seek an environment in which religious practices would not be subject to English law and extensive persecution. A band of Separatists who had first emigrated to Leiden in the Netherlands found that their children were being heavily influenced by the surrounding Dutch culture. Settlement in America seemed like the last best hope for creating a colony that could practice its faith without external influence.

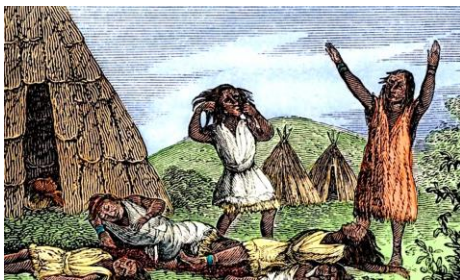
Unfortunately for the Separatists, when it came time to sail from Plymouth, England, finances required that these “Pilgrims” accept an almost equal number of voyagers who did not share their beliefs. As it turns out, these fellow passengers actually ensured the very survival of the group

given their specific skill set. Setting out as they did in early September and encountering unexpected ocean currents off of Cape Cod, however, forced them to abandon their original plans to settle in Virginia and cast them upon the Atlantic shore north of Cape Cod in an area that had been previously explored and mapped by Captain John Smith just a few years earlier.

Finding an abandoned native village with areas that had previously been planted brought them hope, though they failed to understand that the unburied and bleached bones of the villagers were evidence of a contagious epidemic of staggering proportions. Taking this as a sign that God had prepared a place for the English to settle, they anchored ship and sought to simply survive the treacherous winter. Just over half of their numbers were alive in the following spring. On March 23, 1621 they were greeted by Massasoit, chief of chiefs over the Pokanoket Tribe, with fifty warriors from the tribes who occupied the outlying lands.

Accompanied by Tisquantum or “Squanto”, a native who had been taken captive by Dermer in 1614, prior to the village plague, and had recently returned able to speak English, the Pilgrim leaders met with the Massasoit Osamequin and struck an agreement. The so-called “Wampanoag Treaty” specified that neither would do harm to the other and each would come to the aid of the other if attacked by an outside enemy. This agreement made perfect sense to the Massasoit who feared being overtaken by the Narragansett Tribe to the west given the recent decimation of his warriors in the plague. Though the English were not well equipped for Native warfare, they came equipped with muskets, cannons and swords with steel blades, giving them an advantage in warfare.

For the English, the alliance with the Pokanokets was also critical. They knew little about how to hunt, fish or grow crops in this new land, and their own food supplies were nearly gone. Native tribesmen and women eagerly shared with them the knowledge and skills they had acquired from thousands of years of successfully living from the land and water. By the following fall, the abundance of their food supplies was evident in a celebration that has historically been called “the first Thanksgiving”, though it is likely that many such gatherings had taken place at harvest time.



While there is a great deal of written documentation of historical events in the forty years that followed, at least from the English point of view, one can only surmise how the Native population experienced that period of time, since they left no written record and oral narratives are scant. Historians who have heavily researched the English documents, however, have begun to paint a less than favorable view of events for the Indigenous people. Cited in this literature are some of the following points:

- The loss of a huge proportion of the Native population in the epidemics of 1616-1618 left them vulnerable both to being taken over by other tribes and also dominated by the growing numbers of English colonists. These losses also decimated much of their cultural knowledge and survival skill sets since many elders had succumbed to illness.

- While the Natives rapidly embraced the use of English tools, such as knives and guns, within a generation or two they became almost completely dependent on them for survival. Those that knew how to fashion tools from stone or shell had passed away, leaving a younger generation locked into trade for English goods and tools that they themselves could not produce.<sup>2</sup>
- Contagious disease continued to take its toll on a large percentage of Native people. An outbreak of what may have been smallpox in 1632 took the lives of large numbers. Later outbreaks in the newly established “praying towns” set up by the English to convert the “heathen” to Christianity continued to lead to population decline. The English population, on the other hand, was exploding. The Great Migration of the 1630s brought over 10,000 people to the Massachusetts Bay Colony around Boston, and by 1675 there were over 50,000 English people living in New England.
- The rapid importation of cows, pigs, sheep and goats from England resulted in the frequent devastation of Native crops as farm animals escaped from their enclosures. Some even speculated that the English deliberately freed their animals in order to acquire some of the favored Native crop lands. Native people could not understand how an animal could be someone’s property, unlike the wild animals that they had hunted for eons. Only after their natural sources of hunting lands had diminished did the Native people turn to raising livestock of their own.
- Though the original Wampanoag Treaty called for each side to mete out justice for their own wrongdoers, the English began to impose direct punishment of Natives for infractions of English law, leaving Native people infuriated and forced to break their long held traditions. The legal system that the Native population had developed over eons resulted in little in the way of significant crime and little need for punishment. Most matters were settled within the extended family of the tribe, and only occasional action was required of chiefs and elders for the most grievous actions such as murder. The English, who noted, and occasionally admired, these tribal ways, began to insist more and more that they adjudicate all criminal activity, including such matters as trapping or killing of livestock, theft, or acts of violence.<sup>3</sup>
- Trade for furs that Native hunters supplied to the English sustained both sides well for thirty years, but a sudden change in the fashions in Europe in the 1650s resulted in an absence of demand, especially for beaver, which had been a lucrative business for both sides.
- Lacking anything else of value to the Europeans and being totally dependent on them for important goods, the Massasoit, and later his sons Wamsutta and Metacom, began trading off land. While the Tribe received remuneration in the form of English money or Native wampum which could be used to purchase English goods, their understanding was that the trade was for the use of land and not European style exclusive ownership.
- Spiritual beliefs and the role of religion in each culture were in conflict from the beginning. Native people understood the Creator and the natural world as one, each deserving of reverence and respect. Plants, animals and the natural environment were to be left as is, and man was to adapt to it. Europeans made a distinction between man and

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Coombs, Address at the 375<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Newman Church, East Providence, RI, November 4, 2018

<sup>3</sup> Kawashima, Yasuhide (2001) Igniting King Philip’s War, The John Sassamon Murder Trial. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

nature and saw nature as something to be conquered to serve the needs of the people. There were few limits on what one could do in the natural world as long as people would appear to prosper. Though there were systematic attempts beginning in the 1650s to convert large numbers of native people to the practice of the Christian religion, as well as to English clothing, manners and culture, few native people abandoned their core cultural beliefs to adopt European ways.

Following the death of the Massasoit Osamequin in 1661 and the apparent murder of his oldest son, Wamsutta, a year later, his younger son, Metacomet, (later to be named “King Philip” by the English) became the tribe’s Massasoit. Philip had been born and raised entirely under English domination and never knew the pre-English world that his father experienced for the first thirty years of his life. As such, he understood the conflicts and pressures that the colonists were placing on the Native people. He struggled against the perceived injustices that his people experienced at the hands of the English but rarely expressed his outrage. While people in his tribe talked of going to war, at first he counseled against it, much as his father would have done. But when three of his people were accused of murdering a “praying Indian” who sided with the English on scant evidence and without investigation, he secretly discussed alliances with other tribes in a plan to drive the English out.



It was his warriors, however, who pushed Philip to launch the first attacks on the English in what later became the Town of Warren. On June 20, 1675, a band of Native warriors looted and set fire to several English homes in Swansea.<sup>4</sup> Suspecting that war was on the horizon, colonists retreated to garrison houses at the Myles Bridge and in Mattapoissett (Swansea), and an army of over 300 men was assembled by Massachusetts Bay Colony militia in Boston and sent to the former location. Following a first unsuccessful attempt, the army soon marched along

the native trail that is now Market Street in Swansea toward Philip’s settlement at Mount Hope in today’s Bristol. By then Philip was already on the move. Having left the heads of seven Englishmen on pikes along the route, his warriors followed Philip and his tribe across what is today Mount Hope Bay into present day Tiverton. When Col. Benjamin Church, who led the English troops, arrived at Mt. Hope, Philip had been gone for several days.

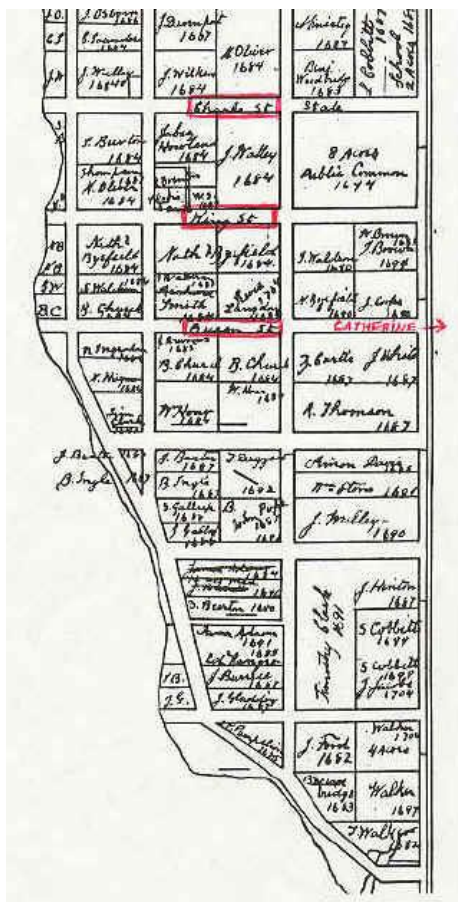
Within the next few weeks, Philip’s men had begun to systematically burn houses and barns for a hundred miles into present day Massachusetts, reaching as far east as Dartmouth and as far west as Deerfield. Over the first five months using guerilla tactics, the warriors succeeded in driving the English people back to the coastal towns. Some even retreated to England. When the English moved into Narragansett territory in December and burned over 400 men, women and children trapped in a swamp, the Narragansett Tribe joined Philip. However, with Native food and ammunition running short by the spring, things began to turn in the colonists’ favor. Philip’s men were forced to retreat as Church began to adopt their guerilla tactics that he had learned from Natives who sided with the English. By August, with few men at his side, Philip retreated to

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<sup>4</sup> Schultz, E.B. & Tougas, M.J. (1999) *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict*. Woodstock, VT: The Countryman Press, p. 39.

Mount Hope in present day Bristol, only to be gunned down there by a Native working on Church's side.

When the war in Southern New England had ended a month later with the killing of Philip's chief captain, Anawan, life for the remaining Natives was changed forever. Those who were not killed in the war were captured and sent into slavery in Barbados, which already had a thriving slave trade, to support sugar production. Others escaped to live among other tribes in New York and Maine. A few, primarily women and children who spoke English and were accustomed to living among the colonists, were indentured and provided labor in homes and on farms. None were allowed to live as they always had in settlements among their own or even to speak their native language. Instead, Native people were now referred to as "Wampanoag" to describe those tribes who joined the alliance with Philip<sup>5</sup>, and the name Pokanoket stopped being used on maps and other documents. Natives who remained neutral in the war or fought on with the English, such as the Mashpees on Cape Cod and the Pocasset in Fall River, were assigned to live on reservations.



By 1680, King Charles II had granted all lands formerly occupied by Native people to be accessible to the English. The Town of Bristol, formerly the last land exclusively used by the Pokanokets and King Philip, was laid out as a colonial village (see map at left). The Town of Warren was laid out on Brook's Pasture west of the small settlement of houses that had been on the Kickemuit River. The Town of Barrington was later split off from that land. Villages in Providence, Rehoboth and Swansea were rebuilt after being burned in the War. The towns of Seekonk and East Providence were separated from Rehoboth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leaving eight colonial communities where Sowams territory once lay.

While fear of Native people who gathered in any numbers continued to exist for a century or more, so few had remained in and around Sowams that they essentially disappeared as a cultural entity over that time. Books written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century rewrote the history of the area to refer to English settlements as the "first" as if native people had never lived there. Stories of the "last Indian" throughout the century confirmed the supposed disappearance of the people who had lived in the Area for thousands of years.<sup>6</sup> By the early twentieth century, people of European descent began to celebrate "Indians" by incorporating them into historical pageants,

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs (2020) *New Light on the Old Colony: Plymouth, the Dutch Context of Toleration, and Patterns of Pilgrim Commemoration*, p.83

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, Jean M. (2010) *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England (Indigenous Americas)*, University of Minnesota.

describing them in inaccurate and two dimensional ways that celebrated their past existence and assumed disappearance. When the Town of Warren built its Town Hall in 1890, they incorporated a large bas-relief profile of the Massasoit Osamequin, the word Sowams, and the 1621 date of the treaty with the English over the front entrance.

Despite the fact that thousands of native people continued to live in New England, they did so by maintaining a low profile. Many intermarried with enslaved African people or, in some cases, with the English. People frequently denied having Native ancestry and “passed” as “white” for many generations as they watched state governments deal with the “problem” of remaining Native People assigned to live on reservation land in Narragansett, Rhode Island, and Mashpee and Aquinnah, Massachusetts. Efforts were made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to completely eradicate native tribes by declaring them United States citizens and taking away their separate status. This pattern was repeated across the nation as tribes were driven out of ancestral lands and onto reservations on land for which non-natives had no use. Thus, how Native people were treated in Sowams may have set the pattern for how our nation dealt with Native People all the way to the West Coast.

Only in the latter half of the twentieth century did the Native People remaining in Rhode Island and Massachusetts begin to self-identify and “come out” as Native Americans with a growing sense of pride. As Native history began to be rewritten in books/ such as Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart in Wounded Knee*, the larger population began to understand the injustices of the past. As the civil rights movement grew in the 1960s, recognition of the rights of Native People also began to grow, and long-extinct tribal associations began to form. Powwows and seasonal festivals were held for the first time in Bristol, encouraging native people to appear in public and demonstrating to the surrounding population that they continued to exist.



Though deprived of any land ownership since the close of the King Philip War in 1676, the Pokanoket Tribe began to reconstitute. Some whose ancestors had escaped slavery in Barbados returned to live in the United States. Tribal families who had been scattered to Connecticut and other parts of New England began to return to Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and some took up residence on former tribal land in Barrington, East Providence, and Rehoboth. Sagamore William Guy, the tenth generation direct descendent of the Massasoit Osamequin, began to gather tribal members into a Council and started to

provide education to local school children about native culture. In September, 2017, the Sagamore led an occupation of former sacred land at Mount Hope in Bristol that had been donated by the Haffenreffer family to Brown University in the 1950s. That action led to discussions between the tribe and Brown University over the ownership of the land for the first time in 341 years.



## Current Evidence of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century in the Sowams Heritage Area

Evidence of 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial history is evident throughout the Sowams Heritage Area but remains largely unmarked and difficult to discover. Unlike in communities like Boston, with its Freedom Trail, and in the Essex Heritage Area north of there, and the Town of Plymouth with its recreated Plimoth & Patuxet village, visitors to the Sowams region are not made aware of most of these historic locations. Though Providence contains a small memorial park run by the



National Park Service that celebrates Roger William’s original settlement, no 17<sup>th</sup> century structures remain extant in that city. Several interpretive markers at India Point Park point to the location where Williams first landed after crossing the Seekonk River to found Providence but fail to point out the history of the port that was established there by John Brown in 1680 to trade with the East and West Indies. The only government-sponsored artifact from that early period is a small exhibit in the Rhode Island State House displaying the 1663 Charter (see figure) given to Roger Williams by King

Charles II that granted him the right to govern much of what is now Rhode Island. Several privately-owned late 17<sup>th</sup> century houses are located outside of the Sowams Area in towns north and south of Providence and are often open to the public.

East of Providence, however, one can find a small unremarkable marker at the location of Roger Williams’ original settlement in what is now the City of East Providence. Nearby is one of two 17<sup>th</sup> century houses in East Providence as well as a cemetery and church that have their roots in the 1643 settlement by Rev. Thomas Newman. A bronze tablet tells a bit of the history but lacks a more complete description of that early settlement. A stone marker along a major route in the Riverside Area of East Providence denotes “Sowams, 1620, Wannamoisett bought by John Browne, 1645” but gives no indication of its significance. Congregational churches in Swansea, Massachusetts, and in Bristol, Rhode Island, that were organized in 1680 following the King Philip War, have continued to meet since that time, and one has a few artifacts from that period that are occasionally displayed to the public.

Exploring 17<sup>th</sup> century remnants in the other towns of Rehoboth, Swansea and Seekonk, Massachusetts and the adjacent Rhode Island towns of Barrington, Warren and Bristol takes much more persistence. In Barrington, the location of the first Baptist meeting house for the region, then in Swansea, Massachusetts, is marked with a small bronze plaque as is the location of the Myles Garrison House where the King Philip War began, but no other interpretive information exists on those sites. Springs and woodlands in Barrington once used by native people for thousands of years are named “Sowams”, “Hamden”, and “Osamequin” but provide no visible clues about their original inhabitants. Martin House, an early 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse in Swansea, with portions constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and open to the public on summer Sundays, is the only location where one can learn a bit about the King Philip war from the volunteer docents. Even the seven other pre-1700 houses in the area in private hands remain unmarked though their exteriors can be easily seen.



Archaeological evidence of ancient habitation of Sowams lands has been discovered at locations in Barrington, Bristol, East Providence, and Warren Rhode Island, and Rehoboth and Swansea, Massachusetts. Public access to these findings, however, is limited to a small display in the Charles Whipple Green Museum at the George Hail Library in downtown Warren and a larger display on loan from the Robbins Museum of Archaeology in Middleboro, Massachusetts, to the

Carpenter Museum in Rehoboth (see Tobey Site arrowheads, below). The other ancient woodlands sites that have been explored remain unmarked out of concern for looting and desecration. Of course, dozens of early cemeteries throughout the Sowams Heritage Area contain the graves of early colonists. Ten sites pre-date 1700 and include some of the colonists who fought or were killed in the King Philip War, as well as one in East Providence where Elizabeth Tilley Howland, who came over on the Mayflower, lived through the King Philip War, and died in Swansea in 1687, is buried.

Locations that are known to have significance to Native populations have been identified, such as Abrams's Rock, King's Rock and Sachem's Knoll in Swansea, Though accessible to the public, they are not marked leaving thousands driving by them every day without knowing their significance. A 17<sup>th</sup> century Native American burial site that was exhumed in 1913 sits in a town park in Warren. Remains from 42 graves were returned to the site and reburied by members of the Mashpee Tribe in 2017. A large stone marker honoring the Massasoit Osamequin now sits on the location and an NPS-style interpretive marker describes the history of the site and its significance to the tribal people, but the site is not marked by a historic location sign along the main route through town directing people to that location. Other significant Native locations include an ancient gathering place now on public lands on Neutaconkanut Hill in Providence and Mount Hope lands in Bristol, RI, site of King Philip's Seat. The latter remains the property of Brown University and is the subject of ongoing discussions with the Pokanoket Tribe about creating public access to it. The location of "Margaret's Cave" where Massasoit is said to have sheltered Roger Williams in the winter of 1636 is located on private property in western Swansea, Massachusetts, but is only open occasionally for small groups to tour.

### **Natural History of the Sowams Heritage Area**

While the original lands and waterways that the First People in the area occupied since the retreat of the glaciers in the last ice age 12,000 years ago remain, only a few remnants of that time exist relatively undisturbed. Despite their desire to live in harmony with natural forces, the Native People who lived here are known to have had an impact on the land. Though they lacked wheeled vehicles and draft animals, the region was crisscrossed with trails throughout the land. Waterways served as major transportation routes for carrying both people and goods long distances in canoes (mashoons) made from hollowed out logs that made little environmental impact. Large and small animals as well as fish were captured using traps and weirs constructed in forests and streams, though none of these structures are known to remain. Traveling eighteen miles into the interior of Narragansett Bay in 1524, Verrazano saw "vast plains 'entirely free from trees or other hindrances 'for twenty-five or thirty leagues in extent', suggesting the region

had been heavily managed by its native inhabitants.”<sup>7</sup> Fields for planting and forests for hunting were routinely burned in spring and fall seasons to keep them free of weeds and underbrush giving the Sowams Area the park-like appearance noted by Myles Standish during his first visit there in the 1620s.

Upon their arrival, the colonists quickly began significant transformations of the land. The use of steel axes and saws and constant demand for lumber and firewood resulted in the removal of large trees that continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Old growth forests gradually disappeared and more open cropland became grasslands for grazing cows, horses, sheep and goats. Nearly all of the original hundred square miles of Rehoboth forested land, for example, was transformed into farm land in less than a century. Only in the past fifty years have forests begun to reclaim some of that open land, though not with the old growth chestnut, hickory, cedar and oak. Wild game that had been abundant for eons soon began to disappear with the arrival of domesticated farm animals. Native trails were soon widened and cleared for the use of horses and oxen pulling wheeled wagons and for driving animals to market. Bridges were quickly constructed over streams and rivers to facilitate commerce. In a land that had seen no permanent structures for over 10,000 years, hundreds of wooden houses, barns and meeting houses were built in the Sowams Area both before and after the King Philip War. By the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was estimated that over 10,000 English people were living on Area land and using its resources.

Inland waterways were quickly dammed and used for the construction of mills for preparing everything from lumber to flour from grain. The dams that beaver had constructed throughout the area were soon removed as the animals were hunted nearly to extinction to fuel the fur trade with Europe. After the start of industrialization, manufacturers began to use rivers to dump dyes and other chemical for removal, leaving rivers heavily polluted by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sewage and industrial pollution of waterways that drain into the Narragansett Bay watershed reached critical proportions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and only recently have begun to slowly recede with the installation of combined sewer overflow and stricter environmental regulations.

Roads were paved, reservoirs constructed and pipes laid, increasing run-off and changing the hydrology of the area and drying up thousands of natural springs in the area. With the loss of available wood for heating, the importation of coal, oil and natural gas began to change the atmosphere and soon contributed to local as well as world-wide climate change. Whales were hunted to near extinction in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century for the lamp oil they provided until kerosene and natural gas replaced it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The installation of electric power lines in the past century resulted in poles and wires that are now visible in practically every part of the land. Power plants, including the massive Brayton Point facility and its cooling towers in nearby Somerset had dumped tons of particulate matter from burning coal into the atmosphere for half a century until its recent demolition. In addition, global warming has begun to raise Narragansett Bay water levels for the first time since the retreat of the glaciers.

Less than ten percent of the original Sowams Heritage Area land remains undisturbed from colonial times. These areas largely consist of wetlands unsuitable for construction and a few areas set aside for conservation, often by private landowners. Systematic efforts to conserve land

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<sup>7</sup> Pastore, Christopher L. (2014) *Between Land and Sea: The Atlantic Coast and the Transformation of New England*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press, pp. 18-19.

only began thirty years ago in the Somans region. Local conservation commissions were set up as part of town governments and given the task of protecting public land. Non-profit land trust organizations worked to encourage private land owners to put their farmland in trust agreements that prevent future development. Statewide funding created in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts helped to purchase conservation land. Currently, Warren, Rhode Island, has 170 acres out of a total land area of 3,968 acres (less than 5%) now in conservation trust. The other seven communities have even smaller percentages of their land under similar agreements. No town funds are dedicated solely to the maintenance of these properties, leaving many of them neglected and competing for scarce funding.



While some conservation areas are open for public recreation, including those set aside for hunting and fishing, they are poorly identified and are rarely used. Other locations that are well marked, such as the Sowams Woods and Osamequin Nature Trail in Barrington and the Turner Reservoir and Brigham Farm in East Providence, get almost continual use both from local residents and out-of-town visitors. The provision of dedicated parking areas and highly visible signage contribute to this high utilization, as do maps and clearly marked trails. On the other hand, some public and many

of the private conservation trust lands are inaccessible to the public except for occasional open days. While this makes good sense from the point of view of conservation, it also leads to a lack of public awareness and support for these resources, especially when it comes to raising public funding for their purchase or maintenance. Voluntary labor can contribute much, but dedicated public funds are more likely to ensure that the lands will survive in good shape over the coming decades.

The Sowams Heritage Area is nationally significant because of the unique history that it commemorates the early exploration and ultimate exploitation of the abundant natural resources that existed prior to colonization. The process of colonization greatly affected native inhabitants by disrupting the Native Peoples' culture and by establishing the primacy of English culture in the region and beyond. English settlement in the region also marked the beginning of significant negative influences on the natural environment leading to significant stress on both land and water resources.

The overall purpose of the Sowams Heritage Area Project is to interpret the 17<sup>th</sup> century history of the Area, to share the history of the First People who continue to live within it, and to support the preservation of the lands and waterways that continue to exist largely undisturbed. The Heritage Area will provide new opportunities for education, recreation, eco-tourism, and heritage tourism in the region and foster the protection of natural resources for future generations.

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