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The Human Hand in Northeastern Rock Art: Communicating with the Spirits

Edward J. Lenik

Abstract:

Handprint images are found on American Indian rock art sites and artifacts in southeastern Canada and the northeastern United States, or the Northeast. These unique images were produced by painting, pecking, pecking and rubbing, and incising on bedrock outcrops, ledges, boulders, and a portable rock slab found on lake shores, at river and various inland locations. These various images are illustrated and described and an interpretation of their meaning or function is suggested.

Introduction:

The portrayal of human hands is one of the most common rock art images found on petroglyph and pictograph sites in North America. They have been produced by painting, pecking, pecking and rubbing, and incising on rock surfaces in various locations and landscapes. Handprints are easily recognizable, usually realistic or nearly so, are highly symbolic and significant, but their meaning or function is enigmatic. They are important pieces of archaeological evidence that provide researchers clues to who made them, an individual or group, a shaman, the gender or stature of the painter or carver, their associated context, size, variability and whether they are stylized or representational.

Painted handprints are prevalent on pictograph sites in the Canadian Shield (see for example Dewdney and Kidd 1973; Rajnovich 1994). Vastokas and Vastokas (1973: 103), for example, reported on the results of a survey of one thousand pictographs in the Canadian Shield that some "one hundred or so" portrayed the human hand. These pictograph sites and images are not discussed in this paper.
The depiction of carved handprints on known petroglyph sites and artifacts in the Northeast region is limited. In this paper I focus on the handprint design motif found on petroglyph sites in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island in New England, and in New York and New Jersey. Their similarities and differences will be described along with their context and suggested cultural affiliation and meaning.

Kejimkujik Lake, Nova Scotia

Rock drawings produced by Mi’kmaq Indian people are found in great abundance on ledges along the shores of Kejimkujik Lake, Nova Scotia, Canada. There are more than 500 petroglyphs incised into large reddish-brown slate outcrops on the shore of the lake. The glyphs are fine-line engravings that illustrate Mi’kmaq culture and lifeways extending from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Recorded on the rocks are details of their economic activities, religious symbols, people in traditional dress, clothing, canoes, sailing ships, names, dates, hands, feet, structures, stars, suns, hearts, sexual symbols, fauna, smoking pipes, and geometric and abstract designs (Lenik 2002: 19-25).

Among the numerous images carved into the ledges at Kejimkujik Lake are 64 incised individual handprints, many showing such details as fingernails, knuckles, palm lines, and other features (Committee 1994). The following four examples will serve to describe such handprints and other elements of Mi’kmaq culture.

A naturalistic left hand with splayed fingers. A peaked hat with feather trim and a man’s derby-type hat with feather trim are present in the center of the palm (Figure 1 top left).

Two similar, adjacent and naturalistic right hand prints are present on a ledge in Fairy Bay. Both hands show finger details including nails, knuckles, and palm lines. One hand has a heart-shaped ring on its middle-finger and names within its palm (Figure 1, bottom).

Figure 1: Tracings of incised handprints with fingernails, knuckles and palm details. Kejimkujik petroglyphs site. Nova Scotia. Source: Committee for the Kejimkujik Petroglyphs 1994.

Also present on the ledge in Fairy Bay is a right hand with knuckle segments indicated on the fingers, fingernails, palm lines and a spiral symbol on the thumb (Figure 1, top right).

In summary, the handprints at Kejimkujik Lake represent an amazing collection of drawings. Here at one site we have the largest number, 64, of handprints found on any site in the Northeast. They are unique and important physical evidence that appear to represent the individual maker’s “picture” of his/her hand, features and culture. The images are full-sized and were made by adults.

Peterborough Petroglyph Site

The Peterborough Petroglyph site in Ontario, Canada contains more than 900 engraved images of anthropomorphs, animals, birds, reptiles, snakes,
boats, supernatural beings and abstract designs. These petroglyphs are pecked and ground into a large outcrop of white crystalline limestone which is criss-crossed by several seams and crevices. An underground stream was once present beneath the largest and deepest crevices. The petroglyphs at Peterborough were produced by Algonkians sometime between 900 and 1400 A.D. (Vastokas and Vastokas 1973: 8, 9, 27, 55; Vastokas 2004: 280).

There are three images of the human hand at the Peterborough Petroglyph site. One glyph is that of a full body human figure with a triangular body, long curved neck, triangular head and short legs akimbo. The figure’s right arm extends downward; its hand has only two widely spread fingers. Its left arm extends out from the body and is bent at the elbow and slightly raised upward. The left arm has a large over-size hand with five splayed fingers. Vastokas and Vastokas (1973: 69, 70) noted that this figure “is most likely that of a shaman.” This “gesturing” image may portray a sign of reverence, supplication or communication with spirits in the sky. A single isolated right hand print with splayed stylized fingers is also present among the array of glyphs at the site. The third image is that of an unusual-looking solitary right arm with a large hand and stylized fingers (Ibid 70).

The hands portrayed at Peterborough are unique and unlike any others at sites in the Northeast. They suggest to me an attempt by the carver to establish an intimate relationship with the world of the spirits in the rock and underground stream.

Woodbury, Vermont

Human hands are carved into a rock ledge adjacent to a rural road in the Town of Woodbury, Washington County, Vermont. This petroglyph site consists of two life-like hands, below which are a pair of equally life-like feet (Figure 2). The hands, a right and left, are incised into the vertical face of a dark-colored shale ledge located on the east side of a rural road. The left hand has naturally-formed four contiguous fingers, a large pointed thumb with an incised line extending from the base of the thumb diagonally into the palm, and a small wrist; it measures 23 centimeters (9 inches) in length from the tip of the middle finger to the edge of the wrist. The right hand also has naturally-formed four contiguous fingers, a large thumb and an extended wrist; it measures 24 centimeters (9½ inches) in maximum length. The right hand was carved slightly above and to the right of the left hand. The artist-carver utilized cracks in the rock surface as part of the design.

The pair of feet, left and right, are near each other, but unlike the incised hands above, were excised or sculpted into the rock surface. This method of production suggests to me that they were created by a different artist and at a different time. A report published in 1951 states that “lifelong residents of Woodbury tell of great, great-grandfathers who remember these strange prints as far back as 1800” (Hard 1951 5(2): i). The incised hands at Woodbury are problematic in terms of their origin. Hard (1951 5(2): i) also reported that
“almost a hundred years ago someone chiseled poorly done hands a few feet in advance of the footprints.” If this report is accurate, then the two handprints date to the mid-nineteenth century. At the time of my visit to this site in 1980, the hands had a weathered appearance and were covered with lichen to some extent, which suggests some antiquity for the carvings. They may have been created by an Abenaki Indian.

Middleborough/Lakeville, Massachusetts

The Towns of Middleborough and Lakeville in southeastern Massachusetts are located in the midst of numerous lakes, ponds, rivers and streams. The region’s web of waterways and trails provided the Indians with easy and convenient routes of travel to and from their settlements during seasonal subsistence rounds and for social, political and trade links to other Indian groups. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Indians in southeastern Massachusetts were known as the Pokanoket, who spoke an eastern Algonquian language called Massachusett (Salwen 1978: 161; Goddard 1978: 72). Four petroglyph sites containing handprints have been documented in the Middleborough and Lakeville area (Lenik 2002: 113-129).

Hand Rock

Hand Rock, a large glacially deposited boulder, stands alone on a knoll overlooking the Nemasket River in Middleborough. Carved into the center of its sloping southerly face is a single petroglyph, the image of a handprint and wrist (Figure 3). It was pecked into the rock surface and is a naturalistic representation of a right hand. It measures 26 centimeters (10 inches) in length from the tip of the middle finger to the edge of the wrist. The fingers are extended and splayed. According to historian Thomas Weston (1906: 77), an Indian was shot and killed on the rock by a colonist during King Phillip’s War, circa 1675. I propose that the handprint image was pecked by a shaman who marked the site as sacred, or perhaps to commemorate the death of the Indian warrior who died here.
a metal tool and may date to the Historic Contact period of Indian culture history. I suggest that it may have been intended to serve as a place or trail marker (Lenik 2002: 116-118).

**Great Sacred Rock**

In 2002, I reported the discovery of two handprints carved into the western slope of an outcrop of bedrock known locally as Great Rock in Middleborough, Massachusetts. I described the site and its surroundings as follows (Lenik 2002: 118):

“Great Rock is located in downtown Middleborough just a few hundred feet from roads, schools, homes, commercial buildings, and an apartment complex. A large outcrop of fine-grained granite bedrock, it is situated to the north of Mayflower Street and is a short distance to the west of Ne-masket River. Despite its urban location, the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the rock is undeveloped and relatively undisturbed. The rock is situated within a densely wooded area and is hidden by trees, brush, brambles, and poison ivy. A stone wall or fence line lies about 15 feet to the west of the rock and extends in a north-south direction.

Great Rock rises steeply from the ground along its north, east, and southeast sides. It is flat on top and slopes gently downward toward its western end. At its highest point, the rock is about 8 feet above the surrounding landscape, and it is about 100 feet long. The bedrock surface is moss-covered and patinated in some areas, smooth and worn by human feet; in others, it is cracked and rough in some spots, and partially covered with leaves and grass.”

In September 2012, two rock art enthusiasts, Steve DiMarzo, Jr. (personal communication 2012a) of Rochester, Massachusetts and his brother visited Great Rock in Middleborough to relocate and photograph the two incised handprints that I described and illustrated with drawings in my book *Picture Rocks* (Lenik 2002: 118-119). The field conditions at the site were apparently quite good, particularly with respect to light on the surface of the rock, which enabled them to get good pictures of the two handprints I had previously found. These two handprints are incised into the western slope of the bedrock surface, one hand above the other. The lower hand is larger and carved more deeply than the upper one. It is a naturalistic carving of a left hand and wrist with open extended fingers pointing easterly (Figure 5a). A wrist is indicated by an oval that suggests the hand was “cut off.”

![Figure 5: Five incised handprints on west facing slope of Great Rock, Middleborough, Massachusetts. Drawing by T. Fitzpatrick; no scale and positions are approximate.](image-url)
sible relationship to the Wampanoag chief Metacomet, whom the English called King Philip. In 1676, during King Philip’s War against the English, Metacomet was located and shot in a swamp near Mount Hope, Rhode Island. Following his killing, the vengeful English cut off his head and quartered his body, which were hung on trees (Calloway 1997: 1). The smaller or upper handprint is lightly incised into the rock and is difficult to see. A naturalistic left hand is portrayed with a wide palm and splayed extended fingers also oriented to the east (Figure 5b).

During their September 2012 visit to the Great Rock site, the DiMarzo brothers discovered two additional carved handprints on the rock surface. One was located below and slightly west of the large handprint described above. It is also the image of a left hand with four short splayed fingers; it measures about 7 inches (18 centimeters) in maximum length and is difficult to see (Figure 5c). The second handprint is located directly above and to the east of the two I previously found. An incised left hand is portrayed with splayed fingers and a somewhat triangular-shaped palm (Figure 5d).

On October 30, 2012 Steve DiMarzo, Jr., together with several other rock art enthusiasts, returned to the Great Rock site. A member of his group discovered a fifth handprint at the bottom of the rock (DiMarzo, Jr., personal communication 2012b). This image is of a right hand with short splayed fingers, a prominent thumb and a partial wrist; it measures 7 inches (18 centimeters) in maximum length (Figure 5e).

In summary, a total of five handprints have been carved into the surface of Great Rock, four representing a left hand and one a right hand (Figure 5). All five are aligned vertically one above the other from west to east. The positioning of the handprints in this manner appears to be deliberate and purposeful, but the reason for, or meaning of, this alignment is unknown. Their similar and realistic style including the splayed fingers and partial wrists, plus the method of carving, leads me to conclude that the five handprints are of Indian origin and most likely date to the Historic Contact-Early Historic period of the region’s cultural history.

Several interpretations of the handprints at Great Rock are possible. They are sometimes interpreted as personal signatures or marks of ownership, as a sign of death, or as a mark of reverence. They may be the work of shamans or other individuals who attempted to communicate with the spirits in the rock to derive power from the rock. Carving these pictures of hands created a connection between the person, the rock and the spirits within it (Nabokov 2006: xii). The left hand and wrist combination on one image plus the right hand with an amputated finger may represent a memorial to Metacomet (King Philip) and marking the rock as sacred.

Betty’s Neck, Lakeville, Massachusetts

Betty’s Neck is a parcel of land located along the south shore of Assawompsett Lake in Lakeville, Massachusetts. A large Indian village called Nahteawamet was once located here; the name means “the place at which the ancient ones lived” (Robbins 1980: 330; 1989: 65). In the early historic period the lands at Assawompsett were owned by several Indians including Pamontaquask, Tuspaquin, Soquontamonk alias “William,” Assowetoh alias Betty, her husband and father, and John Sassamon also known as “Felix.” The property deeded to Assowetoh became known as Betty’s Neck and remained in the possession of Assowetoh’s descendants until the mid-twentieth century (Weinstein 1983: 85).

Two large rocks containing petroglyphs are located on the south shore of Assawompsett Lake at Betty’s Neck. At the bottom of one of these boulders is a pecked left hand oriented vertically on the rock (Figure 6). The palm, thumb and fifth finger are nicely proportioned but the index, middle and fourth fingers are long and slender. The handprint measures 18 centimeters (7 inches) long at its maximum length. The placement of the handprint at the bottom edge of the rock is intriguing. It suggests that the boulder and its carved surface was more exposed and elevated at some time prior to my visit to the site in 1976. It appears that the water level of the lake has risen and sand has accumulated along the base of the rock. I speculated that this stylized handprint was produced by a shaman who marked this landscape as a sacred site (Lenik 1996: 30-32).
North Kingston, Rhode Island

In 1978, I examined an outcrop of granite that contained the image of a handprint located within an abandoned and overgrown farm field in North Kingston, Rhode Island. The rock outcrop was situated in a low swale surrounded by young trees; a small stream was present a short distance to the east of the handprint rock. The site was named for the Gardner family who once owned and farmed land north of the village for several generations (Turnbaugh 1977: 112).

A low-lying rock outcrop, it may be a partially buried glacial erratic. The rock contains an isolated human handprint which had been carefully and prominently pecked into the upper-central face of the rock which slopes to the east. The image was pecked with stone tools; there was no evidence to suggest that metal tools were used in its creation. The figure represents a human left hand in a natural style with its fingers fully splayed (Figure 7). It measured 21 centimeters (8.3 inches) in length from the tip of the middle finger to the edge of the palm (Lenik 2002: 154-155).

Henry R. Schoolcraft, first Indian agent in the Michigan Territory, made an extensive study of the Indian tribes in the United States in the nineteenth century. Schoolcraft (1851 I: 317) suggested that the splayed left hand image represented shamanistic power. In my analysis of the Gardner handprint including its landscape setting, I inferred that it represented an attempt by an Indian to make contact with spiritual beings while on a vision quest. Based on its similarity to other pecked and isolated handprints located in Middleborough, Massachusetts, Jericho, Long Island, New York and at the Minisink Island site in New Jersey, I suggested that the Gardner handprint dated to the Late Woodland/Ceramic period circa 1000 B.P. to 400 B.P. (Lenik 2002: 155).

Town of Jericho, Long Island

In 1974, I traveled to the Town of Jericho, Long Island, New York to locate and examine a large granite boulder that contained four petroglyphs carved on the top surface of the rock (Lenik 1976: 3-6). This boulder was split in two, the largest segment contained a pecked handprint and an incised star design while the smaller piece contained an
The handprint glyph represents a left hand and was pecked into the center of the larger segment of the boulder. The hand measured 23 centimeters (9 inches) long from the tip of the middle finger to the edge of the palm. The Indian-artist first pecked the four fingers and thumb then abraded and polished these digits. The index, middle and fourth fingers are elongated and slender while the fifth finger is short and thick or stubby.

The Jericho handprint with its three stylized elongated fingers resembles those on the Betty’s Neck handprint described above. In my opinion, the handprint was most likely made at some time during the Late Woodland/Ceramic period.

Minisink Island, New Jersey

In 1941, a slab of red sandstone containing two handprint images was found on Minisink Island located in the Upper Delaware River Valley in Sussex County, New Jersey. A surface collected artifact, this stone slab measures 30.5 centimeters (12 inches) in length and 29 centimeters (11½ inches) in width. The upper edges of the stone were broken off which removed portions of the third, fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand and the tip of the fourth finger of the left hand (Kraft 1969: 15-16; 2001: 198). The island is now part of the Minisink Historic District National Historic Landmark.

The two hands on this petroglyph were pecked and then rubbed into the stone to an average depth of 7 millimeters (¼ inch). Both hands have long slender stylized fingers. The left hand measures 17 centimeters (6¾ inches) from the tip of the middle finger to the base of the palm, and the right hand was of similar size. The handprints are beautifully formed; a considerable amount of artistic skill and effort went into its production. There is a linear groove located between and below the two palms that measured 9 centimeters (3½ inches) in length and 7 millimeters (¼ inch) in depth. Archaeologist Herbert C. Kraft (1969: 15) suggested that the groove “may have served as a shaft smoother.”

The stylized left hand print resembles the Jericho image described above. The hand on both of these petroglyphs was pecked and then rubbed into the stone and both have long slender fingers. A basic difference, however, is that all of the fingers on the Minisink stone are long and slender, whereas the thumb and little finger on the Jericho boulder are short, wider or “stubby” (see Lenik 2002: 183, Figures 148, 149).

Archaeologist Herbert C. Kraft (1969: 16) suggested that the Minisink Island handprints were “remarkably like mica and copper hands found on some Hopewell mounds” and that they have “some resemblance to a painted hand of the Mississippian tradition from Moundsville, Alabama.” Furthermore, archaeologist William A. Ritchie (1965: 235) reported the discovery of a cremation burial on Minisink Island that contained artifacts which “suggested Hopewell influence.”

In 2002, I wrote that archaeological ethnohistoric and historic data strongly suggested that the Minisink site was a sacred place in the Late Woodland-Ceramic and early Historic culture periods and that the site, which includes the island, was the locus of natural and spiritual forces, a mortuary and religious center. I proposed that the stylized handprints on the Minisink Island spirit stone are those of a shaman who marked the area as a sacred site (Lenik 2002: 212, 214).

Reflections:

What is the meaning of the hand motif? Several rock art researchers and authors have suggested various interpretations for the common handprint image. Here is a sample summary of their proposed interpretations:

1. “Among several Indian tribes (Ojibwa, Hidatsa, and Arikara) a black hand on a garment or ornament means ‘the wearer has killed an enemy’ (Malley 1893: 711).”

2. “The hand prints were probably a form of signature and where great numbers are found together, may have represented some sort of identi-
6. George E. Lankford (2004: 212, 213; 2005: 230, 238) has suggested a celestial interpretation for the hand motif in the Mississippian Culture and, today, among the Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow and Lakota: Several stars representing a hand constellation are located adjacent to the Milky Way. The hand constellation sets in the west “just before the Milky Way falls like a wall below the horizon.” It is a “portal into the sky, an entry point onto the Path for the souls that have moved west.”

3. Dewdney and Kidd (1973: 13-14) reported that the Ojibwa believe the Maymaygwayshi, described as “little men,” live behind waterside rock faces. At Rainy Lake in Ontario, Canada the Maymaygwayshi “reached their hands out of the water to leave the red (ochre) hand prints on the rocks.”

4. “Although the interpretation of hands and arms on individual shaman’s bark records (among the Ojibwa) depends upon their content in a particular narrative, all denote gestures of reverence, supplication, or communication with the sky and more specifically to the Great Spirit, Kitchi-Manitou” (Vastokas and Vastokas 1973: 70).

5. Additionally, Vastokas and Vastokas (1973: 69, 70-71), speaking of the Ojibwa, concluded that the full bodied human with its upraised gesturing arm and splayed hand at “the Peterborough Petroglyph site is most likely that of a shaman,” who is attempting to “make contact with the Great Spirit.”

6. George E. Lankford (2004: 212, 213; 2005: 230, 238) has suggested a celestial interpretation for the hand motif in the Mississippian Culture and, today, among the Mandan, Hidatsa, Crow and Lakota: Several stars representing a hand constellation are located adjacent to the Milky Way. The hand constellation sets in the west “just before the Milky Way falls like a wall below the horizon.” It is a “portal into the sky, an entry point onto the Path for the souls that have moved west....”

Archaeological excavations at two Late Woodland and early Historic Contact period Indian burial sites in Rhode Island have identified a southwestern orientation of the bodies in the graves. In 1966-67, fifty-eight historic period graves were excavated at the Narragansett Indian cemetery located on Conanicut Island. Known as the West Ferry site, the cemetery was dated to 1620-1660 A.D. Forty-four individuals were oriented, i.e., pointed to the southwest, and four to the south. The orientation of the rest could not be ascertained (Simmons 1970: 64, 69-160; Robinson et al 1985: 124).

In 1982-83, the skeletal remains of fifty-six individuals were uncovered at the Narragansett Indian cemetery, Site RI-1000, in North Kingston, Rhode Island. Site RI 1000 was dated to between 1650-1670 A.D. At this site, the burial orientation of forty-six individuals pointed southwest and one pointed south; the rest were not determined (Robinson et al 1985: 124; Rubertone 2001: 129, 198). The southwestern orientation of the graves at these two sites strongly indicate the Narragansett Indian belief that the souls of the deceased returned to Cautantowwit’s (the creator) house. The journey of the soul was a passage between two states of existence, on earth and in the sky (Simmons 1978: 192).

Similarly, in New Jersey, archaeologist H.C. Kraft (2001: 345) reported that numerous Late Woodland period Minisink Indian graves uncovered at sites along the Upper Delaware River indicated that the deceased were oriented to the west or southwest. Kraft noted that the historic Munsee Indians believed that the dead traveled to the west when they died, and that the land of the spirits lies to the southwest.

Conclusions:

In my own study of the handprints described in this paper, I proposed several conjectural interpretations of their meaning. For example, I suggested that handprints based on their context and style may be the work of shamans who marked the site as sacred or special including the Woodbury, Vermont, Middleborough and Lakeville, Massachusetts sites, Jericho, Long Island, New York and Minisink Island, New Jersey. At the Chestnut Street site in Middleborough, I suggested the glyphs represented a place or trail marker, while at North Kingston, Rhode Island the handprint was an attempt to make contact with spiritual beings and derive power from the rock.

Several other interpretations are also possible. Handprints may in some instances represent personal signatures. For example, there are two handprints at Kejimkujik Lake in Nova Scotia, one of which has the tips of four fingers missing and the second an apparently amputated pinky finger.
These depictions may be those of grieving or mourning individuals.

Finally, the individual handprints in the northeast region described here were full-sized, indicating they were made by adults; however, their gender could not be determined. Most of the glyphs depicted were those of left hands and nearly all glyphs were located near bodies of water, i.e., river, stream, spring or lake. All handprints with their fingers were naturally oriented upward which suggests to me a sense of gesture and communication between the individual and the spirits above in the sky.

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A Brief Overview of the Bogastowe Fort Dig Project
in Millis, Massachusetts, from 2009 to 2012

Paul C. LaCroix

Introduction:

What began as a relatively unremarkable quest to find the elusive remains of the Bogastowe Farms stone house back in 2005 has snowballed into one of the most intriguing archaeological investigations in Massachusetts history, encompassing no less than four separate elements of national importance. Recently unearthed colonial artifacts that have lain beneath the hay field just north of South End Pond in Millis, Massachusetts for more than three and a half centuries are only now beginning to give up their secrets. Consequently, the dissemination of information from these diagnostic artifacts has allowed for a whole new and more scholarly interpretation of the facts concerning this area’s history, while both clarifying and debunking much long held tradition in the process (See Site Plan, Figure 1).

According to Jameson in his History of Medway (1886: 26-29), the Bogastowe Farms stone house, a.k.a., George Fairbanks’ palisade, which was built through the collective efforts of the area farm-
ers during the mid-17th century, was the earliest structure to be erected in what would eventually become the Town of Medway in 1713, then later Millis in 1885. George Fairbanks is credited with overseeing the project. This same George Fairbanks was the second son of Jonathan Fairbanks, Senior, immigrant to Dedham (Fairbanks, 1991: 14), who is in turn credited with the building of the renowned Fairbanks house in Dedham, ca. 1640s, where he and his family resided (Cummings, 2003: 1). Based on this information in combination with his vital statistics (Joseph, 2012: 165), George probably spent the last years of his minority age living in the Dedham Fairbanks house. So from an early colonial architecture perspective, no more classic example of vernacular architecture exists than this pair of known-to-be-linked mid-17th century structures. Further examples of note linked to Bogastowe’s stone house are discussed below.

All the usual geographic features that the student of Native American encampments has come to look for at such sites are also in place (Connole,
For example, the area combines utility with such sublime beauty as to instill awe in aborigine, colonist and contemporary man alike. A natural upland spring which gushes copious amounts of remarkably pure water at all times of the year is located less than 100 meters uphill to the north of the dig site. Hard by to the south by roughly the same distance is South End Pond (formerly Fairbanks Pond, ca. 1793), an expansion of Bogastowe Brook created by an ancient beaver dam whose only outlet, which is navigable by canoe, leads directly to the upper Charles River after about a ten minute paddle (See Figure 2). The Charles River is one of only three major navigable rivers of the Massachusetts interior to empty into Boston Harbor - an important channel of travel and commerce undoubtedly used by the Indians for millennia, but only more recently by the colonists involved in southern New England’s Contact period trade (Buffinton, 1916: 169).

**Methodology**

Since it was the author, as President of the Millis Historical Society, Inc., who discovered the site of the Bogastowe Farms stone house in 2008 after three years of searching, and who subsequently obtained permission to conduct an archaeological investigation from the owners of this private property, it was the author who would ultimately be looked upon by the property owners as the responsible party. Logically, then, it followed that he should also assume the role of project manager. The Licensed Site Professional who would provide our group with the necessary archaeological training was John A. Thompson, Professional Geologist, LSP. John had received his archaeological field training from Frederica Dimmick, past President of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society.

Initially, it was a passage found by the author in 2005 in the *Handbook of Medway History* (Mason, 1913: 81), regarding the Bogastowe garrison that ultimately served as the impulse, or dangling carrot as it were, for this project. To wit, “. . . the last vestige of it has been removed.” Not likely, given Morse’s description of “. . . a spacious and regular fortress . . . superior to any similar structure on the then frontier . . . 65 or 70 feet long, two stories high, all of faced stone . . .” with “a double row of port holes on all sides . . . To this place of security our ancestors for more than two generations, were accustomed to flee in times of alarm” (Morse, 1856: 24).

Armed with nothing more than a shoestring budget and facing a very limited window of opportunity (as far as anyone knew), the volunteers for the avocational archaeological investigation, soon to be coined the Bogastowe Fort Dig (BFD) project, first met at the headquarters of the Millis Historical Society in February of 2009. Volunteers were chosen for either what they brought to the table regarding archaeological expertise, or their interest in the history. Once it was made clear to all in attendance at this first meeting that metal detectors would not be allowed at the site and that all archaeological activity would adhere strictly to the best practicable technology available given the unique constraints of the task before us, and held to the highest practicable standards, our original pool of volunteers dropped by nearly a third almost immediately. This left us with a six member core group of diggers consisting of the author and Jay Ela of Franklin, Betsy Johnson of Sherborn, and Paul Hogan, Cheryl O’Malley and John Thompson of Medfield. As some volunteers gradually became inactive with the passage of time, others would sign on to fill the voids. These included Charlie LaCroix of Franklin, Bryan Buckler and Elise Bullen of Sherborn, and Mitch Bobinski of Millis.

Permission to dig was ultimately obtained through sensitive negotiations and was to be strictly conditional. First, the project must be of a small-scale and very low-key, i.e., only BFD volunteers would be venturing onto the property. Next, the first hint of regulatory agency involvement by any branch of government would mark the immediate and permanent shutdown of the project. Third, a clearly defined list of objectives must be submitted and strictly focused on so things didn’t spin out of control. Fourth, only after an end-of-each-season progress report was submitted by the author to the owners and it was deemed of significant historical interest to continue, would any of us know if the project would be continuing for an additional season or not. Fifth, before finally walking away from the site, all excavated areas would ultimately be backfilled and the field returned to its original
state. And lastly, the issue of who would be assuming ownership of the artifacts, should any be unearthed, needed to be decided. It was agreed that the Millis Historical Society, Inc., would come to own any and all artifacts found during the prosecution of the BFD project.

At the outset of the dig in April of 2009, therefore, we were given little choice but to consider time as a potentially limiting factor. Another limiting factor was the project’s budget – essentially there wasn’t one. Equipment used, such as stakes, buckets, screens, trowels, tape measures, plastic bags, etc., were purchased by the author prior to the first dig season or loaned by other volunteers. From the outset, volunteers were discouraged from spending their own money.

The methodology used during the dig was a combination of both the biased and random techniques, where ground penetrating radar was substituted for a metal probe, and sketches of the plan view of the bottom of each and every 10 cm level were substituted for photographs. The dig grid was made up of 1 meter x 1 meter units and the screen mesh was quarter inch (See Figure 1). Strictly speaking, the stratigraphic method of digging was not employed during this project. Having said that, good notes on soil type, color, striations, and interfaces of differing soil types from both plan and profile views were kept. The entire dig grid was surveyed by Mr. John Anderson, PLS, of Walpole, who was also responsible for determining numerous datum reference points across the excavated area.

**Results:**

Almost immediately after the dig phase of the Bogastowe Fort Dig (BFD) project began in the spring of 2009, several English kaolin clay tobacco pipe fragments datable to the period 1620-1650 (according to original Harrington/Binford formula) were found (Oswald, 1975: 92). As the later limit of this period - 1650 - predated the traditionally accepted date of the earliest colonial activity in this vicinity of 1657 by seven years, emotions ranged from surprise and pleasure over this unexpected discovery, to confoundedness shortly thereafter. Though the busiest period of colonial activity in the area based upon tobacco pipe stem fragment bore diameter (a strictly statistical analysis) was determined to be 1680-1720 (6/64” dia., or 0.24 cm), by the end of our fourth and final dig season of 2012, no fewer than fifty wide bore stem fragments, 8/64” and 9/64” dia. (0.32 cm and 0.36 cm dia., respectively) suggesting colonial activity or influence at the site dating to 1620-1650, had been unearthed at the site. According to Emerson Baker, Professor of History at Salem State University, in the final analysis, the site’s temporal context may tentatively be estimated to be from ca. the 1650s (possibly 1640s) to the 1760s (Baker, 2016).

The list of possibilities that might serve to explain why we were finding such early evidence in such quantities is a short one. Initially we could come up with only three theories that might explain our findings: Either the Bogastowe area was the site of unrecorded colonial settlement prior to 1650; or Contact period trade had taken place; or both. Soon, however, colonial mineral speculating would represent a fourth item on this list. It wasn’t long before diagnostic artifacts were unearthed at the BFD site that would serve as direct evidence for both Contact period trade and early colonial ironworking (a possible example of mineral speculating).

A brief inventory of colonial artifacts found at the stone house site include: Six coins (five of whose dates may be determined; three of these pre-dating 1700; one a “pie-slice” section of an “oak tree” shilling); eighteen flints (mostly English; two amber in color; all showing signs of use as “strike-a-lights”; Brain, 2007: 79); tobacco pipe fragments (over 400 of kaolin clay, 12 of earthenware); hundreds of obviously very old wrought iron nails of all lengths, 60 pounds (27.2 kg) of slag (some of which has been determined by Bob Gordon of Yale to have derived from early bloom smelting activity); twelve primitively wrought iron rods (believed to be nail stock; Gordon, 2015: 1); hundreds of pounds (more than 100 kg) of bricks and brick fragments (evincing several different sizes of bricks); numerous specimens of nearly every type of imported ceramics typical of such a New World site context (Baker, 2015); over 100 farm animal teeth (Hawkes, 2015), which essentially located a stall area for us; window glass, bottle glass, the head of a wrought iron tack hammer; an early brass candle holder; domestic artifacts (such
as what appears to be a pressed copper brooch, several cuff links, various style buttons numbering more than a dozen; and a garter buckle); much charcoal; some coal; and a bone-handled utensil.

Contact period trade evidence consists of a single broken trade bead, a small Native American stone disc with hole through center drilled with metal drill bit (Hoffman, 2015), in addition to a very rare “peace pipe pendant” of either pewter or silver (Brain, 2010).

More than one-hundred Native American artifacts have been unearthed from the BFD site, only about one-third of which has been archaeologically excavated. Artifacts from this collection that can be approximately dated with confidence span nearly the entire temporal spectrum of known aboriginal activity in New England, including:

- Late Paleoindian/Early Archaic period (10,000 - 8,000 yrs B.P.)
- Late Archaic period (6,000 - 3,700 yrs B.P.),
- Transitional Archaic period (3,700 – 2,700 years B.P.)
- Early Woodland period (2,700 - 2,000 yrs B.P.),
- Late Woodland period (1,000 - 400 years B.P.),
- Contact (400 - 150 years B.P.)
  (Boudreau, 2008: 8; Hoffman, 2015).

The single piece of evidence from the Late Paleoindian/Early Archaic period (see Figure 3, plate B, bottom row center) was a pristine projectile point of felsite, which was quickly identified by the Robbins Museum staff by the clear use of fluting evident on both faces of the point. The qualifying conclusion that it had been reworked resulted from the observation that the fluting reached closer to the tip than was probably original, coupled with the fact that the edges of the point were more extremely arced toward the tip than is typical.

The other artifact that warrants special attention is the seven-sided phyllite pendant (see Figure 3, plate E), which is 0.35 cm thick, roughly 2 cm across and extremely smooth on both faces. Upon close examination by Dr. Curtiss Hoffman of the Robbins Museum staff, the hole drilled through the center of this stone disk was too smooth and of uniform diameter to have been made by anything other than a metal drill bit, something the Indians would not have had access to prior to Contact. As such, this artifact represents a “smoking gun” for Contact at the BFD site.

The lithic types of the Native American artifacts that make up the BFD collection, i.e., white quartz, crystal quartz, argillite, felsite, chlorite, phyllite, sandstone, hornfels and chert, are characteristic of the area, representing no particular clues in and of themselves as to other area influence (Hoffman, 2015). Collectively, however, they do represent an important addition to southern New England’s database of such artifacts.

Among the hundred or so BFD stone artifacts identified as being of Indian origin by Dr. Curtiss Hoffman are five pristine projectile points and five broken projectile points (Figure 3, plates A + B), a gouge (Figure 3, plate D), several knives or knife blades, a pestle fragment (Figure 3, plate G), several scrapers (Figure 3, plate I), three wedges, a complete gorget (Figure 3, plate C), a celt fragment (Figure 3, plate H), an exhausted blade core, two spokeshaves, in addition to numerous stone flakes. This suggests that, collectively, this eclectic array of Native American artifacts, all of which were found in an area no larger than 25 meters x 25 meters, is indicative of an encampment that had probably been used, at least seasonally, by countless generations of Native Americans for millennia.

Though not unexpected, the significance of this news was not lost on this investigator. Some will undoubtedly look upon it as anti-climactic, as the area had already been prematurely placed on the list of Massachusetts Indian encampments back in the late 19th century by Mr. Charles C. Willoughby (Willoughby, 1911: 570). These findings, however, were come upon through the use of colonial earthworks as evidence of aboriginal activity, a methodology found to be flawed during the prosecution of the BFD.
Discussion:

One of the most rewarding facets of the BFD investigation is the claim that may now be made that Contact period trade was taking place at the site just north of South End Pond. Artifacts from the dig, trail maps (Connole, 2001: 22; Chase, 1919: 199-210; USGS topo map, 1938; Morse, 1856: 273; Jameson, 1886: 18-36) and other documentation have combined to allow for this very exciting scenario.
Coincidentally, the BFD site also happened to sit squarely in the middle of the most extensive system of earthworks (concentrated about the hilly area near the center of Figure 2) in the country, outside of the Ohio Valley (Willoughby, 1911: 568). Originally attributed to the Vikings by Prof. Horsford of Harvard by 1889 (Davis), then to the Native Americans by Willoughby twenty-two years later (Willoughby, 1911: 568), the mystery of the Millis earthworks has now been laid to rest through the research efforts connected to the BFD project in favor of an early colonial origin (Suffolk 1727:14).

Hitherto unrecorded plans to establish an early ironworks at the colonial level pre-dating the Saugus Ironworks and linked to Bogastowee’s ironworking facilities have been uncovered (LaCroix, 2016). Aside from this, the strong evidence in favor of Contact period trade represents (in the author’s opinion) probably the second most exciting facet of the project. The plan shown in Figure 2 shows the location of the BFD site amidst the surrounding terrain, which by itself speaks volumes if one knows what to look for.

In the 166th year commemoration address delivered to the Town of Medfield by Dr. David Sanders in 1817 (Sanders, 1817: 19), Sanders inexplicably combined two bits of area history previously considered separate: Namely, the long known existence of a stone house (or at least ruins of it) just north of South End Pond (Biglow, 1830: 21), and the well documented fact of a garrison at Bogastowe farms, known as George Fairbanks Palisade, which was laid siege to by King Phillip’s warriors as part of the attack on Medfield on February 21, 1676 (Hubbard, 1677: 83). One glaring and long recognized incongruity, that bodes ill for this example of unfounded tradition begun by Sanders, is the twenty-five foot (7.6 meter) high bluff just two and a half rods (12.6 meters) west of the site in question. Such a geographic feature so close to the stone house could have afforded a dangerous military advantage in elevation to a would-be band of Indian attackers, which would have been obvious to Sergeant George Fairbanks of the Massachusetts Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, Bogastowee’s recognized leader in all things military (Fairbanks, 1904: 6).

Collectively, evidence revealed during the BFD investigation that the stone house was not the Bogastowee garrison, combined with even stronger evidence pointing to a nearby site as a much more likely alternative, have tentatively settled several long standing inconsistencies concerning some rather important points of 17th century history in the area in a very convincing fashion. Our alternate garrison site is about a quarter mile southwest of the BFD site (See Figure 2). Also shown in Figure 2 is the direction of Bogastowe Brook’s flow as it enters South End Pond, then discharges into the Charles River. Unfortunately, throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, most of the extremely interesting features represented by the earthworks were utterly obliterated through the exploitation of the area’s subsoil aggregate as a gravel pit. We are able to show these hills in Figure 2 because the topo map used is dated 1938. Fortunately, a pretty complete record of these earthworks was generated by Harvard’s team of anthropologists, map makers and surveyors back in the late 1800s, and remains on file at the Peabody Museum archives in Cambridge today, including a 3-D plaster casting of the area of the earthworks in Millis.

Conclusion:

Though the BFD site is now completely backfilled, probably the best way to get a quick visual handle on what the site had to offer is to go on-line to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmMs4NVRVxs to view a 38 minute video of the author talking about the various exposed features at the open site. Artifacts from the site will soon be on display at the new Niagara Hall headquarters of the Millis Historical Society, Inc.

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An Unusual Bone-handled Knife from Martha’s Vineyard

William E. Moody

Over the last several thousand years as sea levels rose following the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier (Oldale 1992:39), many coastal archaeological sites in southern New England have been under constant onslaught from the unrelenting forces of the Atlantic Ocean. This has been especially the case along Cape Cod and the nearby islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard. Normal wave action, strong onshore currents, and the many damaging storms have all combined to send many archaeological sites to a watery grave. Numerous fragile shell middens that were left behind in pre-European times, and which had often been situated in close proximity to the shorelines where the shellfish were gathered, processed, and consumed, have long found themselves particularly vulnerable to erosion and loss.
Along the coast of Martha’s Vineyard, many significant ancient shell middens have long been noted in the archaeological record. As early as 1940, Douglas Byers and Frederick Johnson had written, “Shell heaps scattered over the Vineyard, Nantucket, and the Elizabeth Islands bear witness to the rather dense aboriginal population of the group” (Byers and Johnson 1940:1). Later, William Ritchie’s important archaeological efforts on the Vineyard were largely based on an original research plan that focused on shell middens: “Martha’s Vineyard, an island off the Massachusetts coast, although virtually unknown archaeologically [at the time--WM], is reported to have shell midden sites, presumably of a stratified nature, still in a comparatively undisturbed condition since much of the land is in private estates.” (Ritchie 1969:v). Clearly, some of those midden sites that were professionally excavated forty to seventy-five years ago are now no longer in existence. Even over the past decade, personal observations of the

![Figure 1. Shell midden on south coast of Martha’s Vineyard, photographed 2008 after significant erosion had occurred.](image)

author have given witness to the natural destruction by the ocean of several noteworthy sites.

At one such site on the south coast of the island, an especially vulnerable midden situated on an ex-

![Figure 2. Group of bone tools and fragments washed out of midden](image)
posed bluff approximately 5 meters above the normal high water mark has been ravaged year after year by storms. The midden, when first observed by the author in the autumn of 2003, contained a layer of very black, greasy soil somewhat less than a meter thick, along with a band of shell, consisting primarily of quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) and oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) shells. The band of shell was some 50 cm thick. It has been communicated to the author by local residents that the exposed midden was considerably larger in earlier years. Today, the site is virtually non-existent. (Figure 1)

After one hard-hitting storm in the spring of 2005, which approached from the due south with extremely high winds that crashed against the top of the bluff at high tide, a number of deer bone tools were washed out from the shell layer. (Figures 2-6) Due to the high acidity of New England soils, good preservation of bone at ancient sites rarely occurs outside of shell middens, where the natural alkalinity of the shell helps to neutralize the corrosive effect of the surrounding soil acidity. As Ripley Bullen rightly noted of projected outcomes prior to his excavation of a shell midden in Ipswich, Massachusetts, “It was also expected that the bone constituent of material culture, absent at nearby inland sites due to the acidity of the soil, would be present to supplement lithic and ceramic traits” (Bullen, 1949:95). Bullen’s excavation amply demonstrated his earlier expectations. So, at the disappearing Martha’s Vineyard midden, it was deemed important to retrieve any bone fragments and tools that had fallen to the base of the bluff before they could be completely lost to the ocean.

It is apparent that the bone specimens collected here generally conform to Bullen’s overall description of the manufacture of similar bone implements retrieved at the Ipswich site, which were “reduced in size by sawing and splitting... or by sawing and breaking. Implements were further formed by scraping and finished by grinding or polishing” (Bullen 1949:125). (Figures 2-6)

Along with the several pieces of bone that were mixed in the dirt, shell, and gravel at the bottom of the bluff, the author also noticed a rounded chunk of the black soil, including some exposed shell fragments, which had tumbled down from the midden. The ball of soil was approximately 30 cm in diameter and had split open. Within the center of this soil mass was the unusual artifact that is the
subject of this report. What the author discovered was a tanged stone knife blade made of felsite, in its original deer bone handle. (Figure 7) The tan felsite would have been readily obtained locally in the lithic resources available from glacial drift material. And the importance of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) to the early native inhabitants as a food, clothing, and tool source has been commonly reported in both early Colonial documents and from professional excavations on the island (Ritchie 1969:5-7).

The felsite stone blade measures 6 cm in length. (Figure 8) The bone handle is also 6 cm long and appears to be made from an upper tibia of the white-tailed deer. When socketed, the total length of the implement is 10 cm. As noted above, good preservation of faunal remains at ancient sites in New England is noteworthy. Even more uncommon and noteworthy is the discovery of a complete stone implement along with its accompanying bone haft element.

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At the end of August of 1675, in response to attacks on settlements across Plymouth Colony, the Council at Boston passed an order aimed at controlling the Indian population in Massachusetts Bay Colony. The provision required all Indians within the jurisdiction to retire to one of five praying Indian towns. The law also suspended commerce with the English, restricted hunting in the woods, and prohibited travel of more than one mile from town centers. The penalty was to be counted an enemy of the English (Saltonstall 1833:16-17, Gookin 1836:450).

Three months later, Massachusetts Bay Colony Treasurer John Hull, under the authority of Governor John Leverett, approved the sale of seven Indians to merchants Lancelot Talbot and Joseph Smith. The merchants were authorized to deport the Indians out of the country and into the transatlantic slave trade. The transaction was entered into the record by Freegrace Bendall and included the names of seven Indians: George, William, Hawkins, Great David, Rouley, John Indian, and Tommoquin (Whitemore 1902:48). All of these men were non-combatants. There is no evidence any had been convicted of conspiring against the English or firing a single shot in the war.

Great David was the Sagamore at Quabaug in the area of today’s Brookfield, Massachusetts. He was suspected by English residents of allegedly shooting a young indentured servant boy in Marlborough. Captain Samuel Moseley also believed David had information about the August 1675 attack on Lancaster that killed seven colonists. Moseley tied David to a tree and replicated a method of interrogation and torture that he had used just two weeks earlier on David’s brother and nephew. Both of those interrogations had ended with executions (Saltonstall 1833:25).

Under obvious duress, Great David falsely implicated the Okommakamesit Indians in the attack on Lancaster. Following his confession in open court to the false accusation, Great David was sentenced to be sold into slavery, despite the pleadings of a member of the Okommakamesit community on Great David’s behalf (Gookin 1836:456-459). David’s wife chose to accompany her husband only if the sentence was to be served in England. Great David’s elderly mother chose to remain behind in Massachusetts Bay Colony and was sent, with the other women and children, to Brewster Island (Hathorne et al. 1675).

Indian John was also known as John Umphry. He was married to Great David’s sister (Hathorne et al. 1675). In the common court language for all prisoners at the bar, Indian John was indicted in the attack on Lancaster, “not having the feare of God before his eyes” (Noble and Cronin 1901:53). Indian John was found not guilty, and it is presently unknown why he was sentenced to slavery. He had been exonerated in a murder trial three years earlier and may have been regarded as a troublemaker (Noble and Cronin 3 1928:223). His kinship with Great David was probably an additional factor. Umphry’s wife agreed that she and their small child would accompany her husband into slavery (Hathorne et al. 1675).

It is not clear that John Umphry ever entered into the transatlantic slave trade. He may have served out his sentence in Massachusetts Bay Colony. According to letters written in 1690 by fur trader Jon Pynchon, John Umphry lived with Topsfield resident John Gould until 1686, probably as his slave (Spady 1995:188).

No further information has been uncovered concerning either Rouley or Tommoquin. These entries appear to be the only references to these names found in the historical records to date. Gookin wrote that a total of fifteen Indians had been arrested at Marlborough. Eleven of those Indians were from Okommakamesit and had been falsely accused by Great David. Hence, John Umphry, Tommoquin, Rouley, and Great David round out the total taken in that incident (Gookin 1836:456).
Will Hawkins had been working around Salem and went to Wamesit with his elderly wife when fighting began. He was taken into custody along with Sagamore George, and thirty-one others at Wamesit, when they were accused of burning the haystack of James Richardson at Chelmsford. While most of the Wamesit Indians were exonerated in the arson case, Will Hawkins was judged to be a stranger to Wamesit and was sold into slavery (Gookin 1836:474, Shurtleff v.5 1856:58). Will Hawkins’s wife elected not to accompany her husband into slavery (Hathorne et al. 1675).

Although the evidence is circumstantial, the William listed on the document may have been William Tuspaquin, also called Mantowapuet. His name otherwise disappeared from the historical records after May 14, 1675 (Hurd 1884:295). Why he was at Wamesit and what crime he may have committed is presently unknown. His father was the pnieuse Old Watuspaquin from Nemasket and Assawompset and his mother was King Philip’s sister Amie. William and his father gifted land to John Sassamon (Pulsifer and Shurtleff v.12 1861:230), the Indian preacher whose murder at Assawompset Pond (as well as the subsequent trial and execution of three Indians for the crime) have often been ascribed as the catalyst events that intensified hostilities at the start of King Philip’s War (Glaser 2014:86, Kawashima 2001:2).

William and his father were very welcoming to the Christian Indians. In addition to giving land to John Sassamon, they also gifted land to Sassamon’s daughter Betty, also known as Assowetough, as well as her husband Felix (Pulsifer and Shurtleff v. 12 1861:230, 235). But following the murder of John Sassamon, Old Watuspaquin and his son must have felt deeply divided. They put up their land as collateral for the bond of Tobias, one of those accused and subsequently executed for Sassamon’s murder (Pulsifer and Shurtleff v.5 1856:159). Notably, however, there is no evidence that Old Watuspaquin committed any hostile acts until the Spring of 1676 (Drake 1837:58). He eventually became a major figure in the fight against the English (Hubbard 1814:232). His motivations for ultimately turning against his former Christian allies appear clearer with the revelation that his son may have been sold into the transatlantic slave trade without just cause.

Finally, the Indian listed as George was most likely Sagamore George, also known as George Rumneymarsh and Wenepoykin, and he is the primary subject of this investigation. He was the youngest son of Nanepashemet, a principal sachem in Massachusetts who was killed near present-day Medford in 1619 by a raiding party of Abenaki enemies (Bradford et al. 1865:127). As a result of repeated attacks from enemies, combined with the New England pandemic of 1616–1622, native power structures were in a state of transition, and the native population was in distress, when English colonists arrived at their shores (Bradford et al. 1865:127).

Following Nanepashemet’s death, his wife would inherit his territory and become leader over a greatly reduced federation with populations devastated by disease (Dermer 1890:219-220). Her name has never been found in historical records. We know her only by her pidginized title Squaw Sachem or, “woman who rules” (O’Brien 2005:7, Goddard 1977:39). Sagamore George was her youngest son, and in 1629 he was in his early teens with a guardian (Perley 1912:12).

George had two older brothers, Sagamore John (Wonohaquaham) and Sagamore James (Montowampate), and a sister named Abigail (Yawate). John, James, and George were sagamores who led villages of families loosely related through alliance and patrilineal kinships. Squaw Sachem’s main residence was by the Mystic Lakes near the present site of the Winchester Country Club (Frothingham 1845:66-67). John’s primary village was reportedly near Winnisimmet (Chelsea). James lived at ancient Saugus (Lynn), and George with his guardian led a village at the Naumkeag River (Salem, MA) (Dudley 1846:306-307; Perley 1912:12).

George lived his formative years during tumultuous times. Following his father’s death, his family survived devastating epidemics. (Johnson 1910:40-41, 79-80, Winthrop v.1 1853:142-143) They repelled repeated attacks by their Abenaki enemies. (Winthrop v.1 1853:71) Relations with Massasoit’s Wampanoag were strained. (Bradford 1865:126; Dudley 1846:307) Allies Pecksuot, Wituwamat, and
others were killed in an attack by Miles Standish and his men at the ephemeral colony of Wassaguset (Pratt 1858:6-15; Winslow 1996:50; Morton 1883:252-253). Officials from Plymouth Colony burned Thomas Morton's trading post at Merrymount to the ground (Noble and Cronin 2 1904:4; Morton 1883:336), and graves were desecrated and robbed by the colonists (Morton 1883:247).

Of all Squaw Sachem's sons, John was the most esteemed by the English (Sabin 1865:5-6). He gave permission for colonists to settle Charlestown in 1628 (Frothingham 1845:14). But over the next five years, Sagamore John and his kin would sue his neighbors seeking redress for seasonal wetsus having been burned by an English servant (Dudley 1846:337-338), Indian crops having been eaten by English cattle (Noble and Cronin v.2 1904:26, 29, 49), beaver pelts that were forcefully stolen by an Englishman (Winthrop v.1 1853:59), and settlers who encroached on his land (Mather 1864:110).

In 1631, tensions boiled over when Captain Richard Walker at Lynn was shot by two arrows from an unknown assailant. Neither arrow injured Capt. Walker but both shot through his coat. According to Increase Mather, the incident against Capt. Walker coincided with disputes over land boundaries with Sagamore James. But Mather would write, "God ended the controversy by sending the Small-pox amongst the Indians at Saugust" (Mather 1864:110-111). The disease was pernicious and the results were horrific. Both Sagamore James and Sagamore John would be dead from the disease by 1633. Entire families were killed -- an infant found suckling at its dead mother's breast and bodies left unburied. Attempts were made by the English to save Indian children, but most of them died too (Johnson 1910:79-80, Winthrop v.1 1853:142-148).

Pressures on Squaw Sachem, her son Sagamore George, daughter Abigail, and their remaining people continued unabated throughout the 1630’s. The fur trade collapsed, corn rapidly deflated in value, colonists flooded the wampum market with commercial manufacture, and a surge in immigrant labor forced wages downward. Moreover, circulated currency increased in the colonies from expanded foreign trade and shipping (Newell 1998:52-57). Squaw Sachem was left with only one asset of any value; her land. And in the 1630’s she began to sell it (Shattuck 1835:6, Frothingham 1845:66-67, Hurd v.1 1890:8).

In 1644, Squaw Sachem and two of her kinsmen, Masconomo and Cutshamekin—along with two more allies from Wachusett Mountain — signed an agreement with colonial officials that submitted them to English rule. They further consented to allow their people to be instructed in the Christian religion (Winthrop v.1 1853:189). But there was one very notable name that did not appear on the document: Sagamore George.

According to a deposition from Richard Church in a lawsuit over her former land (Scarlett vs. Gardiner) Squaw Sachem died in the year 1650 (Gleason 1921:78). Her daughter Abigail married Nipmuc John Awassamug and together they lived at John Eliot's praying Indian village at Natick (Temple 1887:99). But Sagamore George rejected Christianity. Eliot wrote in September 1649, "Linn Indians are all naught save one . . . and the reason why they are bad is, partly and principally because their Sachim is naught, and careth not to pray unto God" (Eliot 1833:88).

Refusing to relinquish his sovereignty and to convert to Christianity were not the only troubles that Sagamore George presented colonial officials. In July of 1642, George filed his first petition in Salem court over disputed properties. George and another Indian named Ned sued Francis Lightfoot for encroaching on their land. The Salem court refused to hear the case and referred George to the court at Boston (Lewis and Newhall 1865:203). Whether there was ever a resolution to the case is unclear. On May 13, 1651, George was at Boston petitioning the general court for land unjustly withheld from him at Rumney Marsh. The court again refused to hear his case and instead ordered George to bring action, “in some inferior court” (Shurtleff v.3 1853:233, Shurtleff v.4[1] 1853:52).

Five months later, on October 14, 1651, the colonists at Rumney Marsh filed their own suit seeking relief from, “unjust molestation,” by Sagamore George. They further claimed George’s title to the land was invalid. The general court found in favor of the petitioners but on the condition that they lay out 20 acres of good planting land, “in some
convenient place . . . for Sagamore George to make use of.” (Shurtleff v.4[1] 1853:68-69). George was prohibited from selling those 20 acres without approval from the colonists.

But the English residents of Rumney Marsh refused to follow the court’s order. George was back in Boston ten days later on October 23rd. The court took no action against the colonists except to issue a warning; If the colonists at Rumney Marsh refused to lay out 20 acres, then George was, “permitted the benefit of the law to recover what right he hath to the land” (Shurtleff v.3 1853:252). Whether the 20 acres were ever set aside for George or not remains a mystery.

In 1654, an unnamed Indian, who may have been George, petitioned the court with a claim to Thompson Island (Shurtleff v.4[2] 1853:364). Once again he was referred to a lesser court. On May 21, 1657, George was back again petitioning the general court. This time it was for the return of Powder Horn Hill in Chelsea, formerly owned by his brother John. Again his case was stalled and he was referred to another court (Lewis and Newhall 1865:242). In 1669, George again petitioned the court over land, and again the court ruled that it was not in their jurisdiction to hear the dispute. The court, perhaps out of patience with George, gave him no further legal recourse and left the dispute to the proprietors of the land, “to give him as they & he shall agree” (Shurtleff v.4[2] 1853:428). There is no evidence that this case was ever settled.

By 1669, even George’s family at Natick was encroached on all sides by settlements. John Eliot petitioned the general court on behalf of his praying Indians. Eliot claimed the colonists at Dedham had infringed upon the boundaries of Natick, prevented the Indians from planting crops, removed rails for fencing, and even sold portions of the Natick lands to others (Bacon 1856:13). The tertiary stages of certain subspecies of the bacterium were associated with a facial deformity called saddle-nose (Sauer 1920:432-436). The deformity was so infamously associated with syphilis that no-nose clubs and nose-less societies were formed as dark humor support groups starting at the turn of the 18th Century (Ward 1896:23).

In 1672, more than three decades after he filed his first lawsuit in Salem, Sagamore George appeared for the final time in a court of law over a property dispute. George was in Natick testifying in a deposition that he had given the lands around Marblehead to his nephew James Rumneymarsh (Quannapohit). George agreed to draw up a deed for the land if he received one-half of the money, but the instrument was never completed. However, this deposition was important for another reason: It was the first time in the historical records that George was referred to as, “Georg. Sagamore with no nose” (Perley 1912:52).

How Sagamore George lost his nose is not certain. The most likely cause was a spirochete bacteria called *Treponema pallidum*, known by the English as the French disease or syphilis. Paleopathologists have theorized that in the 17th century mutations of this bacterium may not have required sexual contact for transmission (Aufderheide and Rodriguez-Martin 1998:167).

In 1643, Roger Williams wrote that the Narragansett Indians used sweat-houses to cleanse their skin and purge their bodies of syphilis in particular (Williams 1643:189). The tertiary stages of certain subspecies of the bacterium were associated with a facial deformity called saddle-nose (Sauer 1920:432-436). The deformity was so infamously associated with syphilis that no-nose clubs and nose-less societies were formed as dark humor support groups starting at the turn of the 18th Century (Ward 1896:23).

But history is so far silent about how Sagamore George lost his nose. The 17th Century was a dangerous time. The historical records are replete with references to accidents and incidents that maimed and disfigured their victims. Sagamore George’s nephew Thomas Rumneymarsh (Quannapohit) lost the use of his right arm when his musket accidentally discharged (Gookin 1836:444-445). Without further evidence, no one can conclude with certainty how George’s face became disfigured.

The records do tell us something about how the disfigurement may have affected George as a leader. Beginning in 1672, nearly every document that mentioned Sagamore George referred to his facial deformity. The term, “no-nose,” was presumably
not one of respect. It was likely a source of constant ridicule. The appellation may have served the colonists by emasculating George as a sovereign leader.

When the Council at Boston passed its order in August of 1675 requiring all Indians into one of five praying Indian towns, Sagamore George was with his wife at Wamesit. In a 1704 deposition, George’s grandson David Kunkshamooshaw described the residences of his grandfather, “sometimes of Rumney Marsh and sometimes at or about Chelmsford of the Colloney of the Massachusetts so called, sometimes here and sometimes there” (Perley 1912:68-69). David’s testimony did not describe a wandering Indian, but instead referred to the seasonal movements and complex kinships of his grandfather.

So when Sagamore George was found at Wamesit in September of 1675, it was likely that the English did not understand his kinships or acknowledge his multiple residences. They may have concluded that he did not belong at Wamesit. Since he had not converted to Christianity or relinquished his sovereignty, the laws of Massachusetts Bay Colony at the time made him an enemy (Saltonstall 1833:16-17, Gookin 1836:450).

George’s ties to the Pawtucket village of Wamesit stretched back at least as far as his mother Squaw Sachem, who was very closely related to Masconomo and his sister Joanna Quannapohit. Squaw Sachem may have been their sibling. Joanna’s son was James Rumneymarsh (Quannapohit), to whom Sagamore George gifted all the land at Marblehead. James was a major figure in George’s life.

James was a Christian Indian from Natick who was educated by the English (Figure 1) and worked as a scout and spy for the colonial forces. James became one of the most celebrated Indian spies of King Philip’s War (Barton 1917:38). In September of 1675, on the day George was being arrested at Wamesit, James was testifying in defense of the Okommakamesit Indians in the attack on Lancaster. Then on October 13th, on the very same day that George was transported to Boston court from jail in Charlestown, James and all of George’s kin at Natick, including George’s sister Abigail and her family, were moved under armed guard to be interned on Deer Island in what became one of the darkest chapters of the brutal war (Shurtleff v.5 1854:57-58, Lepore 1998:15).

Sagamore George was approximately 60 years old in November of 1675 when he was shipped to Barbados. Exactly how long George remained in slavery is unknown, but he returned to Massachusetts Bay Colony some time before his death. In a deposition given in 1686, Natick Pastor Daniel Tookwompbait and praying Indian Thomas Waban testified that, “Sagamore George when he came from Barbados he lived Sometime and dyed at the house of James Rumley Marsh” (Perley 1912:10).

So far no evidence has surfaced concerning how George made his way back from Barbados. Some historians have conjectured that John Eliot may have paid for George’s return, but that was unlikely. John Eliot did procure the return of an Indian named Joseph Robin from Jamaica. But Joseph Robin was a minister at Eliot’s Hassanamesit praying village (Drake 1837:29). Sagamore George rejected Christianity (Eliot 1833:88).

The most likely party to pay for Sagamore George’s return was George’s own family—his sister Abigail and his kin James Rumneymarsh (Quannapohit). But they probably sought help transporting him back home, and one Englishman stands out as the most likely candidate to have helped George’s family return him from slavery: Nicholas Paige.

Paige was a wealthy merchant and the largest land-owner in Rumney Marsh, having acquired an estate through his wife Anna, who was the granddaughter and sole heiress of Robert Keayne (Trask et al. v.13 1902:281-282). Lawsuits over Paige’s Rumney Marsh property dragged on for years (Chamberlain 1908:664). However, Paige’s...
Another claim that was often repeated by historians was that Sagamore George died in 1684 (Felt 1845:18, Chapman 1936:13), sometimes adding that he returned from slavery, “sad and broken-hearted, to die in a lone wigwam” (Lewis and Newhall 1865:264). But in December of 1681, Sagamore George’s wife Joan gave a deposition for a quit-claim deed to lands allegedly belonging to Thomas Savage in Lynn, Rumney Marsh, and on Hogg Island. In that deposition, George’s wife was listed as a widow (Trask et al. v.13 1902:190-191). So George died some time before December of 1681.

Moreover, there is no evidence that he died sad or alone. In fact, he died at Natick a free man under the care of his nephew James Rumneymarsh (Quannapohit). He died in the village of his surviving family members—from his sister to his nephew. Sagamore George likely died surrounded by family. While the story of Sagamore George was certainly one of hardship, tragedy, and suffering, it was much more a story about perseverance, survival, resilience, and strength in the face of injustice. It was a story symbolic of the courage and steadfastness that continues to characterize native people in New England to this very day.

Despite 400 years of racism and oppression, there is still a Wampanoag Tribe at Aquinnah and Mashpee, still a Narragansett Tribe in Rhode Island, still yearly powwows at Natick, and still Pequot, Mohegan, Micmac, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot Tribes in the original New England colonies. For many Indians in New England, the struggles have continued as they fight against persistent racism, for the protection of their sacred lands, and as they resist the oppression that has left their people at a perpetual disadvantage in a society that promises equal opportunity for all. It has been an uninterrupted human hardship that has lasted for four centuries (UAINE 2016, USET 2010).

Sagamore George was one of that struggle’s greatest heroes. He signed a single deed to Lynn Village in 1640 with his sister Abigail and never signed another (Lewis and Newhall 1865:182). He never converted to Christianity or relinquished his sovereignty. Despite a sentence of slavery, there is no
evidence he broke a law or committed any criminal act. George died with his sovereignty intact in the village of his family.

As a result of the revocation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony charter in 1684, colonists scrambled to validate their deeds to the strict satisfaction of English law (Connole 2001:241). Sagamore George’s wife and other descendants would sign quit-claim deeds to properties all over Massachusetts Bay Colony, today comprising dozens of cities and towns from Boston to Lowell to Ipswich (Figure 2). The payments must have seemed like a windfall for a family that had fought in English courts with little justice for five decades. In the end, no other Indian family signed more quit-claim deeds in Massachusetts Bay Colony than the descendants of Sagamore George (Trask et al. v.13 1902:190-191, 281-283, 365, Perley 1912:12, 68-69).

Figure 2. Highlighted section represents approximate land area sold by descendants of Sagamore George. (Hinton 1780)

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**Edward J. Lenik** is regional archaeologist whose research interest is firmly focused on the human history of the northeastern United States and Atlantic Canada. For over 30 years he has operated Sheffield Archaeological Consultants, doing CRM work and archaeology for historical and other local groups. He is the author of many articles and several books, most notably a series on the Ramapough Lenape Indians of northern New Jersey and southeastern New York and a series on Native American rock art in the Northeast. New books in each series will be published in 2016.

**Bill Moody,** a graduate of Tulane University, has been a member of MAS for over thirty years, served as a past Trustee, and has contributed a number of articles to the *Bulletin,* as well as to other archaeological publications. He has had nearly four decades of field and research experience in southern New England.

**James D. Porter** lived in New England for 36 years and has been an amateur historian for two decades. He now lives in Arizona where he founded a non-profit educational organization that produces reenactments of historic events for Arizona schoolchildren. James works full-time for Major League Baseball.
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For shorter manuscripts (5 pages or less), texts may be submitted as paper copies. Longer manuscripts should be submitted as electronic files (preferably MicroSoft Word .doc or .docx files, or .rtf files). All text should have margins of 3 centimeters (1¼ inch) on all edges. For electronic files, do not insert artificial spaces between lines; instead, use the Format/Paragraph/Line Spacing function and select “Double”. Proper heading and bibliographic material must be included.

Bibliographic references should be listed alphabetically by author’s last name and presented as follows:

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All illustrations and tables, called figures, should be submitted as separate electronic originals. If a large number of figures is involved, authors may use DropBox to send them to the Editor. Tables should be submitted as separate Excel (.xls or .xlsx) spreadsheets and not incorporated into the text. Figures should be submitted as .tif files, high resolution (600 dpi minimum), in greyscale. Each figure should fit within the space available on a Bulletin page, which is 17 cm by 23 cm (6½ x 9 inches), allowing for margins. Full, half or quarter page figures should be planned carefully. Width dimensions for one-column images are 3.35 inches (8.5 cm). Space must be allowed for captions. Captions should be in title case and should accompany the text in a separate section, in order and numbered to correspond to the figures.

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