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### Pathways of the Past: Part 1

Maurice Robbins

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A SERIES

# PATHWAYS OF THE PAST

*The  
Rescue of Tisquantum  
along the  
Nemasket-Plimoth Path*



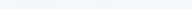
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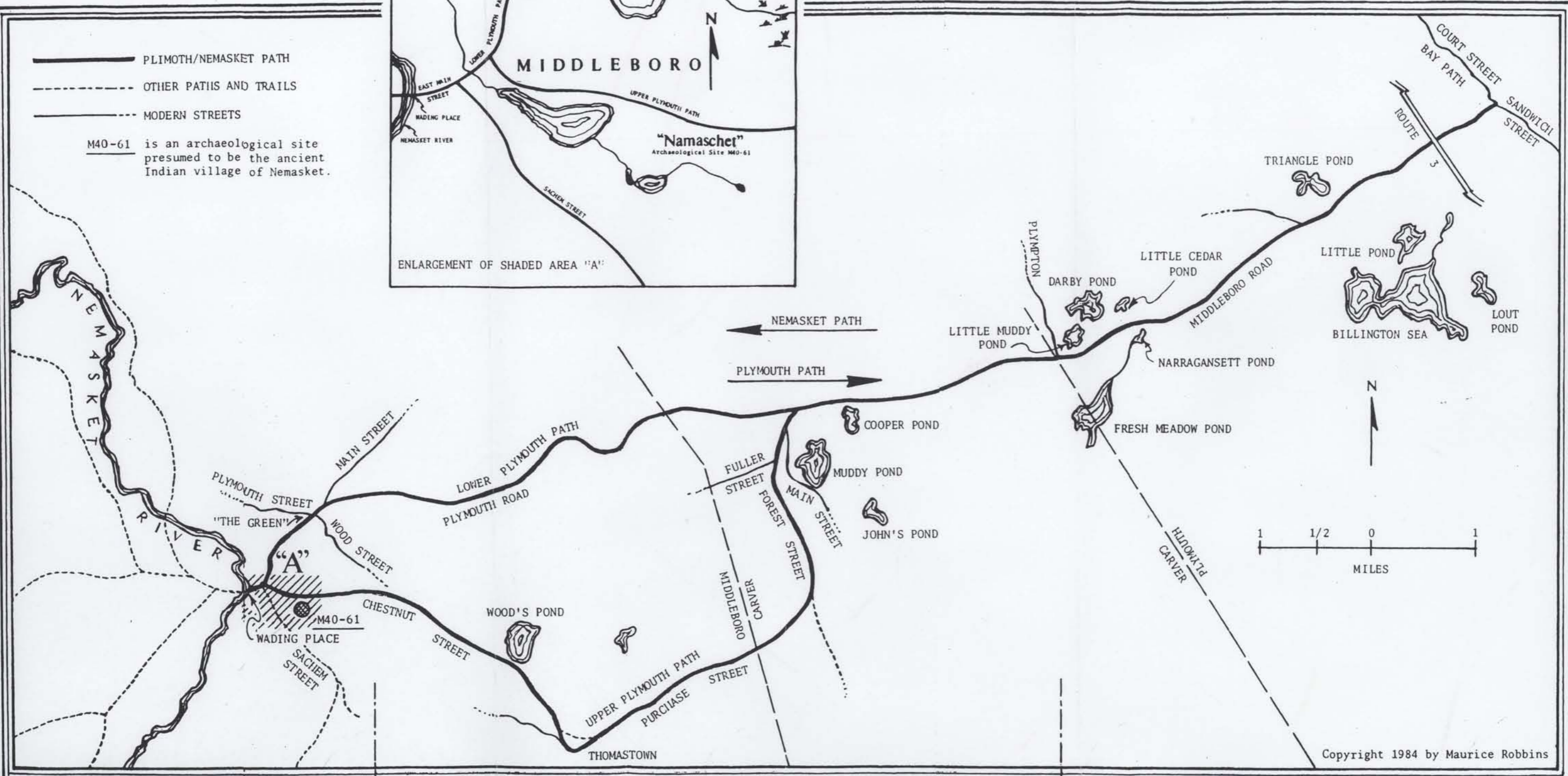
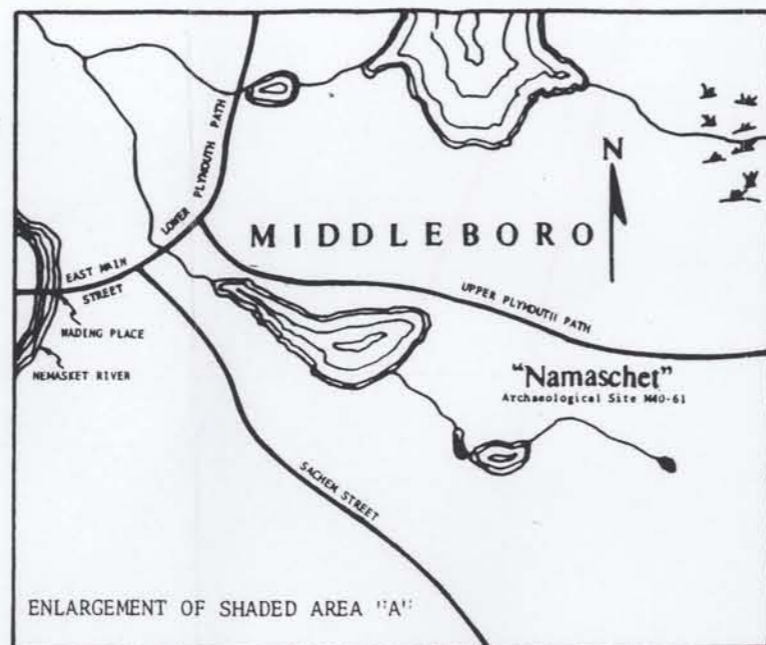
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-  PLIMOTH/NEMASKET PATH
-  OTHER PATHS AND TRAILS
-  MODERN STREETS

M40-61 is an archaeological site presumed to be the ancient Indian village of Nemasket.



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## INTRODUCTION

Prior to the English occupation of New England the area was covered by a network of trails running from one native town to another or leading to a favorite hunting or fishing camp. These narrow forest trails avoided steep grades and swampy areas, crossed rivers at shallow places, but otherwise followed the shortest route between destinations. With some exceptions the major trails were inland rather than coastal as the rivers are widest at their mouths and are difficult to cross at flood tide.

Both the Indians and the English selected sites for villages with the same characteristics in mind--good drinking water, cleared land for planting, etc. Consequently, many English settlements occupied the sites of former Indian towns, and thus the original trails were continued in use. At first the English traveled on foot as had the Indians, but as horses became available, trails became bridle paths and were widened. Eventually, wheeled vehicles were introduced for inter-village travel and, as the traffic increased, the old footpaths were again widened to permit their use. Two-wheeled vehicles came first, but were quickly replaced by four-wheeled carts that could carry greater loads. Now the trails became roads, were straightened at some spots, widened to allow for passing, and abrupt turns, difficult for four-wheeled wagons to negotiate, were eliminated.

As the unoccupied areas between towns were laid out and occupied as farms, houses and buildings appeared by the roads, and resistance to any change in location of the right-of-way stiffened. This situation tended to maintain the "status quo" of the early network of roads. After all, what farmer would welcome a new piece of road that cut through his cultivated fields or pasture, who was willing to have his land cut in two simply to straighten a road?

Another development which also tended to perpetuate the road system was the growing use of paths to delineate boundary lines. In those days it was costly and difficult to run long lines through the virgin forest. It was much easier to make use of an established path. For example, the "Five Men's Purchase" (in Middleboro) was bounded on the north by the Lower Plymouth Path and on the south by the Upper Plymouth Path. Such instances made possible the definite mapping of a portion of an old path.

The paths or trails shown on the accompanying map were established by a very careful research of available records. Town and County documents and maps, references in town meeting minutes to highways and bridges (building and maintenance), various accounts of journeys in diaries, letters, and military movements, were among the many sources used. Whenever available, the older residents of an area concerned were questioned, often with surprising results. Many of these old paths and roads are still in use and some retain their ancient names. There is a Plymouth Road in Middleboro and in the Bridgewater, a Rhode Island Road in Middleboro and Lakeville, and a County Road in nearly every southern New England town.

With the passage of time, native foot paths became bridle paths, cart paths, stage roads and, finally, highways. The Indian wading places were bridged where the rivers had been crossed on stepping stones or with the help of poles driven into the stream bed. Main roads were widened so that vehicles might pass at will, and road beds were "hardened" within the limits of towns, to prevent rutting and dust. Finally, with the advent of the motor vehicle



and the demand for ever greater speed, the roads were paved. We live now in the day of the super-highway, with its multiple lanes and median strip, driven straight as a string through the countryside regardless of natural impediments. Even today, however, there is in certain instances a great reluctance to change; many a rural land owner raises objection to an invasion of his land and the dispute must be settled in the courts.

If one's objective is to reach a given destination in the shortest possible time and the consumption of a minimum amount of fuel, today's super-highway is the answer. Instead of being constantly alert for a possible Indian ambush, one must be aware of the radar speed trap and give attention to the 55 miles per hour road sign. Things never completely change; there are still road hazards.

On the other hand, it is relaxing to follow the twisting, wandering of an old country road, traveling at a leisurely pace and recalling the scenes and events of yesteryear. It is interesting to view the spots that can be pointed out at which some historic event took place, and perhaps take a picture or two for one's collection. It is restful to leave behind the "hustle and bustle" of modern travel and follow in the footsteps of the earlier Americans.



## THE NEMASKET/PLIMOTH PATH

Maurice Robbins

The Nemasket Path was probably the first Indian path known and used by the Pilgrims. This well-trodden path led inland from their seaside settlement at Plimoth to an area abounding in fresh water streams and ponds known to the Indians as Namaschet "the place of fish."

Not being too familiar with the Eastern Algonkian tongue at that early date, the English understood the name to be that of a particular Indian town located somewhere in the vicinity of the "wading place," a ford on a small river now known as the Nemasket. At this shallow place on the river, the Nemasket Path connected with several trails leading north, west and south to various Pokonoket towns.

Because there were several native towns near the wading place, it is difficult today to determine which one of these was the particular village that the English called Nemasket. A study of contemporary accounts, Bradford in particular, who tells us that Nemasket was about fourteen miles from Plymouth, points to a site just off Sachem Street in Middleboro as the town at which the incident which follows took place.

To add to the pleasure of those reading about our retracing of the routes of these native paths which our ancestors knew and used, we will recount in this series of booklets some of the historical events associated with each trail. In order that the reader may understand better the story first recorded by Isaac Allerton of Plymouth, regarding a punitive expedition undertaken by the English in August of 1621, it is necessary that the reader be introduced to some of the leading native characters he mentioned.

Caunbitant, or as it is sometimes written, Corbitant, was the sachem of Pocasset when he first became known to the English. He was one of the more prominent sub-sachems of the Pokonokets. His territory was a large one, including the present towns of Fall River, Somerset and Swansea in Massachusetts and Tiverton in Rhode Island. As one of the councillors of the sachem Ousamequin (Massasoit) he was opposed to that sachem's policy of making an alliance with the English. A later account by Edward Winslow ("Mourt's Relation") speaks of Caunbitant as the "probably successor to Ousamequin."

Caunbitant had two daughters who figured prominently in later colonial history. The elder of the two, Weetamo, succeeded him as squaw-sachem of Pocasset. She was the wife of Wamsutta (Alexander), son of Ousamequin, who was sachem of Pokonoket in 1662. The younger sister, Wootonekanuske, married Metacomet, the younger son of Ousamequin, who succeeded his brother Wamsutta as sachem of Pokonoket upon Wamsutta's untimely death in 1662.

You should also be acquainted with Tisquantum (Squanto), Tokamahamon and Hobomok, three of Ousamequin's subjects. The famous Tisquantum is well known to all who have read Bradford's history of the early days of Plymouth colony. This celebrated Indian, if we are to believe all that has been written concerning him, led a singular life, especially for a red man. According to James Rosier ("A True Relation of the Voyage of Captain George Waymouth His Voyage - 1605"), Tisquantum was one of five Indians kidnapped by Waymouth and taken to England. At a later date Captain John Smith returned Tisquantum to his home at Patuxet, now Plymouth. Again in 1614 Squanto is said to have been kidnapped by Captain Thomas Hunt, who took him to Málaga, Spain where he was sold as a slave.

In Spain Squanto was redeemed by the Friars and sent to England where he is said to have lived for some time with a John Slaine, Treasurer of the Newfoundland Company.



Slaine, at length sent Squanto on some service to Newfoundland. Captain Thomas Dermer then brought Squanto back to England and then, as a guide and interpreter, back to America. Squanto found that his native town of Patuxet had been heavily affected by a plague in 1616 or 1617, all of his people were deceased, and the town had been abandoned.

Tisquantum apparently established himself at Nemasket and was living there when the Pilgrims arrived in 1620. Thus, if we accept all these accounts as valid, Squanto was a much traveled Indian. He had crossed the Atlantic at least four times, had lived in England for some time with a prominent family, spoke English quite fluently, and was well acquainted with the ways of the English.

The role of Squanto with the English is usually depicted as that of a loyal friend and of immeasurable value to the Pilgrims. Yet there are some who question his sincerity and cast him in a somewhat different light. Drake ("The Aboriginal Races of North America," page 103) says of him, "There is little doubt but that Squanto was in the interest of Caunbitant and lived among the English as a spy." Squanto was probably an opportunist and, while he may well have been a confidant of Caunbitant, his real interest was to further his own career. Even Bradford came to distrust Squanto, but he was so useful as an interpreter that he was always welcome at Plymouth.

Hobomok was one of Ousamequin's counselors and one of those who agreed with that sachem's policies toward the English. Concerning him, Bradford says, "And then there was another Indian called Hobomok come to live amongst them, a proper lusty man, and a man of account for his value and parts amongst the Indians and continued very faithful and constant to the English till he died." As a supporter of the pro-English faction at Pokonoket, Hobomok had earned the enmity of Caunbitant, who considered him to be a traitor to his people. Hobomok became a Christian or Praying Indian, was given a home lot outside the palisade at Plymouth, where he lived with his family until he died sometime in 1642.

We know very little about Tokamahamon. He must have been well considered at Pokonoket and was probably another of Ousamequin's counselors. Winslow relates in his account of his 1621 journey to Pokonoket ("Mourt's Relation") that Ousamequin attempted to replace Tisquantum as his ambassador at Plymouth saying that he was "retaining Tisquantum to 'send from place to place to obtaine trucke for us'; and appointing in his place another called Tokamahamon, whom we found faithful before and after upon all occasions."

We should also say something concerning the political situation among the tribes of southern New England during the early 1600's, as this is crucial to understanding the position taken by Ousamequin and the reactions of Caunbitant and the English.

During the period from 1615 to 1621, the balance of power among the Indian tribes of southern New England had been completely upset. The Pokonokeuks and Massawachuseuks had been decimated by the plague which had raged among them for several years. The ability of both these tribes to maintain their independence had been practically destroyed. On the other hand, the Narragansseuks had hardly been affected by the plague and, except for danger of attack from the rear by the war-like Pequots, were free to invade the territory of Pokonoket. In fact, the Narragansseuks had already indicated that this was their intention.

Most contemporary accounts stress that relationships between the Pokonokeuks and the Narragansseuks were strained. Bradford and Winslow refer to the hostility which existed between them, and Allerton in "Mourt's Relation" says, "We understand that the Narragansetts had spoyled [killed or wounded] some of Massasoit's men, and taken him."

It should be understood that these so-called "warres" among the natives were not the all-out conflicts which were called "wars" in the Old World. Roger Williams ("A Key



into the LANGUAGE of AMERICA") says, "Their warres were farre lesse bloody and devouring than the Cruell Warres of Europe; and seldom twenty slaine in a pitch field; partly because when they fight in the woods every tree is a Buckler. When they fight in a plaine they fight with leaping and dancing, that seldom an Arrow hits, and when a man is wounded they soon retire and save the wounded; and yet having no Swords or guns, all that are slaine are commonly slain with great Valour and Courage; for the conqueror ventures into the thickest and brings away the head of his enemy. They are much delighted after a battell to hang up the hands and heads of their enemies." Wood ("New England's Prospect") tells us that war among the natives, "was more for a pastime than to conquer and subdue enemies."

When the *Mayflower* appeared in Cape Cod Bay and dropped her anchor in the harbor at Provincetown, the Indians were carefully watching her every move. It was apparent to them that these newcomers were not just fishermen or traders, as there were women and children in the company. Several well armed parties seemed to be searching for an appropriate place to build a village. Their movements and the implications of their actions were discussed in council. All this information, together with an Indian version of the "first encounter" at Eastham, was quickly brought to Pokonoket and reported to the sachem, Ousamequin.

When the *Mayflower* got under way again and crossed the bay to Patuxet (Plymouth), the problem for Ousamequin became more acute. Observers from Pokonoket kept close watch, but the white men were blissfully unaware of the presence of the Indian scouts. The conclusion arrived at by the Nausets was soon confirmed. These Englishmen were settlers and seemed to have found at Patuxet a place to their liking.

Anxious discussions took place about the council fires at Pokonoket. The tribal leaders were not of one mind. One faction, probably led by Caunbitant, favored immediate action to drive off the white intruders before they could establish a bridgehead on Pokonoket territory. Reciting the many instances in which these Englishmen had mistreated the Indians, cheating them at trade, carrying them off as captives, killing them without provocation, and probably bringing the sickness which had so recently afflicted them, they urged immediate hostilities to eliminate the foreigners.

But others among Ousamequin's counselors cited the weakness of the tribe due to the high mortality suffered in the plague, pointing out the superiority of the Narraganseuks and the evident intent of their sachems to take advantage of the situation. They argued that if they could make friends with the settlers and obtain their assistance, the power balance would be in their favor.

The weapons of these Englishmen were irresistible. The Pokonokeuks allied with them could not only maintain their own independence but might well become the dominant tribe of the area. Night after night the council fires burned bright at Pokonoket and the arguments continued. Ousamequin, anxious to maintain his sachemdom and independence, favored an alliance if it could be arranged, while Caunbitant and his followers preferred to accept Narraganseuk domination, for among them were many of their friends and relatives, rather than join with the foreigners against their own people.

To Caunbitant, all who consorted with the English, assisted them in their adjustment to life in America or adopted their religion were traitors. To him, Tisquantum, Hobomok and Tokamahamon were worthy of death for betraying their own flesh and blood. But the will of the great sachem prevailed and Samoset was sent to make the initial contact. He was successful in gaining the friendship of the Pilgrim authorities and made the arrangements that resulted in the visit by Ousemaquin (Massasoit) and the signing of the offensive-defensive treaty that was to last for some forty-odd years.

Caunbitant was far from satisfied by this arrangement nor was he prepared to accept it as the solution to the problem. He resolved to attempt to frustrate the plans of Ousamequin, even to the extent of overthrowing him if necessary, and he seems to have



found Squanto ready to cooperate with him in this endeavor. Possibly Squanto saw himself as the chief counselor to the great sachem if Caunbitant was successful.

The authorities at Plymouth were only dimly aware of the power struggle that was taking place among the Indians. They had been told that the Narragansseuks were hostile to both them and the Pokonokeuks, their friends, and they were greatly pleased with the peace treaty with their nearest neighbors and were determined to fulfill their treaty obligations to the letter.

Rumors came to Plymouth that Caunbitant was visiting the various Pokonoket villages, seeking support for his policies and pointing out the dangers which he claimed were inherent in the treaty with the English. We may be sure that Hobomok kept them well informed. With good reason he feared that should Caunbitant succeed in this attempt to overthrow Ousamequin that he, as a friend of the English, would be in great personal danger. It is possible that it was Squanto who persuaded Hobomok and Tokamahamon to come with him to Nemasket where he had a house, so that Caunbitant could dispose of them and thus deprive the English of their services.

It is certain that there was some sort of an affair at Nemasket in which the three Plymouth Indians were involved and during which threats against their lives were uttered by Caunbitant. It would appear that Squanto was included, in order to protect his cover as a friend of the English. Allerton, who recorded the episode, says that, "Hobomok, being a strong and stout man broke away from them and came to New Plymouth, full of fear and sorrow for Tisquantum, whom he thought to be slain."

Hobomok's dramatic appearance at Plymouth, "out of breath and sweating profusely" together with his chilling story of Caunbitant's threats, the possible death of Squanto, and the imminent attack by the Narragansseuks on their new ally Ousamequin, including his capture, created a major crisis at Plymouth.

The Governor immediately called an emergency meeting of his counselors to consider Hobomok's report and what their reaction ought to be. Obviously something must be done and quickly. They must take some decisive action to fulfill their new treaty obligations with Ousamequin or their reputation among the Indians would be seriously damaged. They had no intention of being a paper tiger. The council decided, probably with the advice of Captain Standish, who was noted for positive action, to send ten heavily armed men under the command of Standish, and with Hobomok as their guide, to Nemasket. Standish was instructed to bring back the head of Caunbitant if it was found that he had actually killed Tisquantum, as Hobomok had alleged, and to arrest Nepeof, another sachem under Caunbitant, to be held as a hostage until it became more clear what had happened to Ousamequin.

The next day the expeditionary force set out from Plymouth traveling along the Nemasket Path in a pouring rain. Standish intended to mount his attack upon Nemasket about midnight, when the inhabitants of the village would be asleep in their wigwams. After plodding through the rain-soaked wilderness for several hours, their guide announced that they were within three or four miles of the town and might soon expect to meet some of the inhabitants.

To keep their presence a secret until the time they planned to attack, they went off the path into the woods to await the coming of darkness. If our assumption that the village the Pilgrims called Nemasket was the site just off Chestnut Street in Middleboro, they must have come by the Upper Plymouth Path and their hiding place could have been in what is now Waterville. During this rest the Pilgrims ate the food they had brought with them, recharged their pieces which had become damp in the rain, and prepared for the coming encounter.



Just before midnight they laid aside their knapsacks and excess baggage and moved out. About this action Allerton makes a surprising statement and one that is most difficult to accept. He says, "By night our guide (Hobomok) lost his way, which much discouraged our men, being we were wet and weary of our armes; but one of our own men, having been before at Nemasket, brought us into the way again." Could it be possible that Hobomok, who had lived all his life in the vicinity and who had only the previous day followed the Nemasket Path to the Plymouth settlement, would now lose his way? It is even more difficult to accept the fact that an Englishman could recognize his surroundings in the darkness and guide them back to the path. It seems much more logical to conclude that Hobomok, having had time to consider his action and his story, and realizing that Tisquantum and Tokamahamon were probably unharmed and among the sleeping inhabitants, feared the consequences when his tale of woe would be proven to be grossly exaggerated. What would happen to him when Standish, the fiery little captain, realized that the long night march in the rain had been in vain, or worse still, what if some Englishman should be injured in the attack? In panic Hobomok sought to avoid the confrontation he had brought about by "losing his way in the dark."

Be that as it may, the expedition developed according to plan; the English arrived at the outskirts of the village about midnight, the Indians were sleeping, no guards had been set. The Pilgrims surrounded the house in which Caunbitant was said to be staying, without any alarm being sounded. Allerton, describing the event, says, "those that entered [the house] demanded if Caunbitant were there: but fear bereft the Savages of speech.. We charged them not to stir for if Caunbitant were not there, we would not meddle with them; if he were, we came principally for him, to be avenged upon him for the supposed death of Tisquantum, and other matters: but, however, we would not at all harm their women and children. Notwithstanding some of them passed out at a private door and escaped, but with some wounds."

The account written by Allerton some days after the event fails to present a true picture of what happened. What a traumatic experience this must have been for the Nemasket Indians. If we retell the story from the point of view of the Indian, a totally different impression is conveyed. It is midnight and the people of Nemasket are quietly sleeping in their wigwams. They had no reason to expect an enemy attack. Suddenly the door burst open to admit a crowd of armed men shouting commands in unintelligible language. Instinctively those nearest to an exit made a dash for safety and were promptly fired upon. Allerton says, "in this hurly-burly we discharged our pieces at random." Three Indians who had been wounded now added their cries to the uproar. Hobomok, terrified by the results of the English reaction to his story, climbed to the roof of the house and shouted loudly for Tisquantum and Tokamahamon, demonstrating that he well knew they had not been harmed. Allerton, in describing this, says that the two supposed victims of Caunbitant arrived quickly and that, "they knew not our end in coming," Here is a definite indication that Hobomok's story was either pure imagination or was highly exaggerated.

With the appearance of Tisquantum, who explained to the frightened Indians what the English were trying to tell them, that as long as they had found Tokamahamon and he was unharmed and Caunbitant gone, there would be no further trouble, the excitement died down somewhat. The English took possession of the house they had raided and stood their guard the rest of the night. There is no mention of what Standish said to Hobomok; perhaps he was too stunned to say anything. At any rate there must have been considerable chagrin among the English when it became clear that Caunbitant had long ago departed and was at his home town of Mettapoissett, while Tisquantum and Tokamahamon were alive and well.

In the morning they "marched into the midst of the town and went to breakfast to the house of Tisquantum...but all of Caunbitants faction had fled away." Of course Caunbitant had not fled away from anyone. He had simply gone back home to Mettapoissett, probably arriving there long before the English had set out from Plymouth.



So the comic opera ended. Standish and his army returned home along the Nemasket Path, taking with them the three wounded Indians to be treated by Dr. Fuller. Allerton concludes his tale, saying, "by God's good Providence wee safely returned home the morrow after we sett out." This time Hobomok did not lose his way.

**THE PLYMOUTH OR NEMASKET PATH.** (From Plymouth through East and West Carver to the wading place on the Nemasket River in Middleboro.)

This path originated at the junction of Court Street and Middleboro Road in downtown Plymouth. In 1620 this was the junction of the path which ran from the lower Cape to the great Massawachusett Bay and the inland path to Nemaschet.

To follow this ancient path one should take Middleboro Road westerly from Court Street, passing under the modern highway (Route #3) and over Sparrow Hill, passing south of Clear Pond and north of Narragansett Pond into Carver, a distance of approximately five miles from Plymouth. (Note: In early colonial times the present Carver was known as Lakenham.)

At the Plymouth-Carver town line Middleboro Road becomes Plymouth Road, illustrating the old custom of naming a path or street for the town to which it led. Thus the inhabitants of Middleboro knew the path as the Plymouth Path while to the traveler from Plymouth it was the Middleboro Path.

Continue along Plymouth Road westerly, passing Gate and Center Streets, almost seven miles from the start of the path. In North Carver the old path divides at the junction of Plymouth Road and Main Street into two paths called the Upper and the Lower Plymouth Paths. Sometimes the Upper Path was referred to as "through the woods to Plymouth," while the Lower Path was "the shorter way to Plymouth." Here the traveler must make a choice of routes.

Because the Indian town which we believe to have been the Namaschet of the Pilgrims is on the Upper Plymouth Path, it is probable that this was the route taken by Standish and his expeditionary force in 1621.

If travelers choose to follow the Lower Path they must continue westerly on Plymouth Road, north of Asnemscot Pond in Middleboro, to the junction of Plymouth, Plympton and Wood Streets near "the Green," approximately twelve miles from Plymouth. From this point the old path followed what is now East Main Street and rejoined the Upper Path near Sachem Street, just before coming to the Wading Place on the Nemasket River. [There is an historical marker at the Wading Place.]

To follow the Upper Path, take an abrupt left on Main Street in Carver, about seven miles from Plymouth, and follow Main Street for about one mile to the junction of Purchase and Fosdick Streets. Purchase Street makes a wide swing from Forest and Fosdick Street in a southerly direction, and then bears westerly to Thomastown, some twelve miles from Plymouth.

At Thomastown the old path passed through the woods just north of the junction of Thomas and Chestnut Streets. Today, the traveler must follow Thomas Street to its junction with Chestnut, then turn abruptly north on the latter street, passing Woods Pond on the right, and rejoining the Lower Path at East Main Street, some fourteen miles, as Bradford said, from Plymouth. From here it is only a few hundred feet to the Wading Place on East Main Street.



