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Pathways of the Past: Part 3

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The Sandwich Path
Church Searches for Awashonks
by Maurice Robbins

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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 Bridgewaters, 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.
After the Great Swamp Fight in Kingston, Rhode Island in December 1676, Captain Benjamin Church retired to his Little Compton farm for a much needed rest. Not only was the captain physically exhausted by the winter campaign, but he was profoundly disturbed by what he considered to be military ineptness on the part of the English field commanders.

However, with the advent of spring when the Indians reopened active warfare, Church was unable to remain a bystander and resolved to rejoin the army. After his crops were planted he left his farm in charge of his wife and children, and set out for Plymouth. He arrived on Tuesday, June 6th, 1676 and found the General Court in session. They welcomed him with open arms; he had arrived at the most opportune moment. The Plymouth government had decided to raise an army to meet the Indian challenge. This force was to consist of about two hundred men of whom one hundred and fifty were to be English, and the balance would consist of friendly Indians.

The Court was in search of a field commander with experience in fighting Indians and offered the post to Captain Church. He agreed to accept the responsibility and proposed to go at once to Aquedneck Island to raise recruits. Many colonists from the Plymouth towns of Dartmouth, Swansea and Rehoboth had fled to that island after their towns had been destroyed the previous year and Church hoped that many of the men would volunteer to go with him to fight the Indians.

Church says that his journeys to and from Plymouth were made by water. Some have assumed that such a voyage required a rounding of Cape Cod and have questioned the amount of time Church allowed for the trip. However, it should be remembered that in 1676 the town of Sandwich extended from "bay to Bay" and included within its bounds what is now the town of Bourne. The Pilgrim trading post at Aptuxet was located on the Manomet River (eliminated by the canal) a short distance from its mouth in Buzzards Bay. Thus, to come and go from Narragansett Bay one had only to sail up Buzzards Bay, with the Elizabeth Islands appearing dimly through the fog to the east, go ashore at Aptuxet and take the Plymouth path across the base of Cape Cod and along the shore of Massachusetts Bay to the town of the Pilgrims. This is the route followed by the Dutchman, Isaac de Rasieres, when he visited Plymouth in 1627. In wartime this was much the safer way to get to Plymouth from Rhode Island.

Returning by this route, Church landed at Dartmouth where he hired two friendly Indians to take him by canoe to his home in Little Compton, intending to spend the night there with his family before crossing the river to Aquedneck. As they were passing Sogkonnet Point, a rocky headland that projects southward into the bay, Church noticed some Indians fishing from the rocks. Prior to the beginning of hostilities the previous spring, Church had visited Awashonks, the Squaw Sachem of Sogkonnet, and made a valiant attempt to persuade her not to join Metacomet (Philip) in the threatened war. He promised her at that time to return in a few days with firm proposals from his government. He was prevented from doing this by the sudden outbreak of the war. He had recently heard that Awashonks and her people, disillusioned with Philip and weary of war, had left the hostile camp and returned to their home at Sogkonnet. It was rumored that the Squaw Sachem was anxious to find some way of making peace with the English. It occurred to Church that if the
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On the day appointed for the meeting, Church with his two faithful Indians, set out by canoe to the meeting place. He took with him a calabash of rum and a store of tobacco. As they approached the appointed spot they saw an Indian on the shore awaiting them. Church sent one of his Indian companions ashore to make certain that the Indians agreed upon, with Awashonks, were there to meet with him. Honest George came to welcome Church ashore, and the Indians in the canoe stayed a bit off shore to see the event and to carry tidings should the Indians prove false.

Awashonks, with her son Peter and the counselor Nompash, were there to meet Church as agreed. Having solemnly greeted each other and shaken hands all around, they walked about a gun shot away from the shore to a convenient spot where they all sat down to talk. Much to the surprise of Church, "there at once rose up a great body of Indians, who had lain hidden in the tall grass, and gathered about him." All of the Indians were armed and painted for war. After a short pause to regain his composure Church told Awashonks that among the English it was customary when people met to treat of peace, to lay aside their arms, and not to appear in such a hostile form as her people had done. He would not continue to talk with her unless her warriors were to lay aside their guns. Whereup there was a considerable argument among the Indians, but at length they complied and laid their guns at some distance.

Church then produced his calabash of rum and offered the Squaw Sachem a conch shell full of the firey liquid. She appeared reluctant to drink, apparently suspecting it to be poisoned. Church, perceiving the reason for her hesitation, handed the shell to a "little ill-looking Indian" who seized it readily enough and took a hearty drink. Seeing that he suffered no ill effects, Awashonks then partook of the rum and passed it about among her counselors. Then Church opened his bag of tobacco and distributed it among the Indians. Having thus broken the ice, and established a more friendly, less suspicious atmosphere, they disposed themselves in comfortable fashion and began to talk.

Awashonks referred to their meeting of the previous spring and chided Church for failing to return as he had promised. She said that had he kept his word she would not have joined Philip in the war and that many of her people now dead would be alive and well. Church replied by pointing out that Philip's sudden attack on Swansea had caught them all by surprise and prevented his return to Sogkonnet. At this point he committed an almost fatal error by intimating that his punitive expedition at Punkatees Neck in July of the previous year had been a peaceful attempt to keep the promised meeting with her. At the mention of the fight at Punkatees Neck a great commotion arose among the assembled Indians. One "great burly fellow" snatched up a war club and rose up as if to attack Church. Some of the others prevented him. The interpreter explained the sudden interruption by telling Church that the brother of the man who instigated the commotion had been killed at Punkatees Neck and that the Indians well knew that his intent at that time had not been peaceful. They pointed out that Church had only a
moment before said that the English, when they would treat of peace, left their arms behind, and certainly the English who fought with them at Punkatees were armed.

Peter Awashonks saved the day by commanding his Indians to be silent, reminding them that it was in their own interest to "forget the past and make peace." Church then asked Awashonks to state her terms so that he might have something definite in the way of proposals to present to the Plymouth government. He told them that he did not have the authority to make peace by himself, but that he would gladly act as their mediator with the English and attempt to persuade them to agree to her terms if they were reasonable.

A lengthy discussion took place with much consultation between Awashonks and her counselors. She finally told Church that if the English would firmly engage that all of their wives and children should have their lives spared, and that none of them should be transported out of the country, they would subject themselves to the English and serve them in any way they were able. Church answered that these terms seemed reasonable to him and that he would place them before the Plymouth government and urge that they be accepted. Peter Awashonks then arose and told Church, "If you will be pleased to accept me and my men, and will lead us, we will fight for you and help you to Philip's head before the Indian corn be ripe."

Upon the suggestion of Church, five Sogkonnet Indians were chosen to go with him to Plymouth. The Indians were agreeable to this and the five men were selected. However, Awashonks pointed out that five Indians accompanied by an Englishman traveling through the woods to Plymouth would be considered fair game by any of the several bands of hostiles known to be between them and their destination. Should Church be killed the whole design would come to naught. Finally it was decided that Church should return to Aquedneck and hire an English vessel that should pick up the Sogkonnet delegation at the Point and take them up the bay to Aptuxet whence they could proceed to Plymouth overland through friendly Nauset territory. Church saw the wisdom of this argument and agreed, promising to come back as soon as he could find a vessel to transport them.

Returning to Aquedneck, Church met with great difficulty in securing a vessel to make the journey. Church says that he met with "unaccountable disappointments, sometimes by the falseness and sometimes by the faintheartedness of the men that he bargained with, and sometimes by wind and weather." At length he met with a Captain Anthony Law who agreed to undertake the voyage. They set sail the next morning, but unfortunately ran into high winds and "a great swelling sea."

Although the five Indians were waiting for them at Sogkonnet Point, the surf made it impossible for them to take them off. Only Peter Awashonks was able to get on board by the help of an "old broken" canoe. By this time the storm had increased in intensity and the vessel was forced to "round about the Island to Newport" taking Peter with them. Landing at Newport, Church was in a quandary. Major Bradford with his army was momentarily expected to arrive at Punkatees and if this occurred while Church was absent at Plymouth, there might be trouble between the English under Bradford and them. Bradford was not too ready to treat with Indians and Church feared that all their plans would be defeated.

Church solved the problem by writing a long letter to Governor Winslow at Plymouth, outlining Awashonks' terms and the articles agreed upon by him. This letter was given to Peter Awashonks. On Sunday, June 11, Peter returned
to Sogkonnet by canoe, where he was joined by the five Indians chosen, and they proceeded overland to Plymouth.

Church remained at Sogkonnet to await news of the Major's arrival. About midnight on Monday the 10th of July, an express arrived from Major Bradford announcing that he with his army had arrived at Pocasset. Church immediately repaired to the rendezvous and acquainted the Major with the situation and what he had done in the matter. Bradford did not appear to be too pleased with the proceedings but was under orders to cooperate with Church, so he agreed to meet with Awashonks, but said she must come to him.

Accordingly, Church went back to Awashonks' camp at Sogkonnet, informed her that the English army was at Pocasset, and that they would not harm her but that she must "call all her people down into the Neck lest they should be found straggling. She was told that on the day following some of them would come to speak with her and "give her further orders." Bradford appears to have assumed that Awashonks had submitted to the English although her terms had not yet been agreed upon.

On the 13th of July the English marched as far as Punkatees and Church was sent to order Awashonks to come up with her counselors to talk with Major Bradford. Awashonks agreed with some reluctance, and about noon of the 14th, she appeared at Punkatees. Church again outlined his proposal that the Sogkonnets be accepted as allies and offered to take command of the Indian contingent under the overall command of Bradford. Bradford would have nothing to do with the Indians and peremptorily ordered Awashonks and all her people to go to Sandwich and to be there within six days at her peril. Bradford apparently intended to place Awashonks and her people at a distance from the rest of the hostile Indians, in an isolated position, which would prevent her from rejoining Philip if the Plymouth government did not choose to accept the terms which she had proposed.

Awashonks was very disappointed with this development and was inclined to refuse to follow Bradford's orders in spite of the consequences. Church, however, counseled her to submit temporarily to these orders and go to Sandwich, while he would go to Plymouth and attempt to settle the matter in a more satisfactory manner with the governor. Finally, after considerable discussion, Awashonks agreed to place her trust in Church and to take her people to Sandwich. As will later appear; she apparently had no intention of isolating herself and her people in Nauset territory, but agreed in order to achieve a peaceful withdrawal from Punkatees Neck. A friendly Cape Indian named Jack Haven was sent with her "to march in front carrying a flag of truce in his hand and a letter from Major Bradford in case they should meet with other English soldiers on the way."

The next morning the English army returned to their Pocasset camp and then went on to Rehoboth. While Church was still with them a messenger arrived with the news that another body of hostile Indians, composed of some Narragansetts together with most of Weetamoo's people, were near Swansea. It was rumored that Philip himself might be with them. They were said to be short of ammunition and vulnerable to attack.

Much to the disgust of Church, the Major refused to attack this band, saying that his orders were to go to Mount Hope, to the fort that had been built there the previous spring. The fort was to be his base of operations from which he was to attack Philip and he did not feel at liberty to disobey
these orders in the slightest way. To Church this was just another instance of English lack of military logic.

Having promised Awashonks that he would shortly join her at Sandwich, Church obtained horses at Rehoboth and with Sabin as his pilot, departed for Plymouth, where he arrived the next morning without encountering difficulty. Meeting with the Governor and Treasurer Southworth, Church recounted his experiences with the Major and requested that his agreement with Awashonks be given serious consideration. The governor replied that he had read and considered the letter that Honest George had delivered some days previous and that he was well satisfied with all of the terms proposed by Awashonks and would confirm this decision in writing over his signature. He would also accept the offer of the Sogkonets to serve in the field against Philip and would commission Church to lead them.

Taking with him six mounted men, among whom was Jabez Howland, who had served with Church on previous occasions, he left for Sandwich, where he expected to find Awashonks and her people. Arriving there late in the day, he was disappointed not to find the Sogkonets. After spending the night at Sandwich, with a slightly enlarged company, Church took the Sandwich Path westerly early in the morning. He had hoped to find Awashonks at a well known camping spot of the Wampanoags on the Wanaquinguoah River (in what is now Wareham). However, there were no Indians at the site when Church arrived. The Sandwich contingent, which had joined Church that morning, now decided that it was too dangerous for so small a force to proceed further into hostile territory, and returned to their base. Church, with his faithful half-dozen, determined to press on until they found the Sogkonets.

When they came to the fording place on the Sippican River, Church noted that Lieutenant Howland, who was not a young man, was showing signs of fatigue. He ordered him to remain concealed at the ford with two of his men, "for a reserve at the river, that if he should meet with enemies, and be forced back, they might be ready to assist him in recrossing the river." Continuing on with the other two men, Church says he crossed another river (now called the Matteipoisett) and finally came out on a great bay at the seaside.

Here were Indians in plenty, fishing, clamming, and employed at various tasks. Awashonks had gone as far toward Sandwich as she intended, regardless of the orders of Bradford, in whom she placed very little trust. Until her terms had either been accepted or rejected by the Plymouth authorities, as she told Church, she would go no further. She or her captains apparently understood Bradford's purpose in isolating them in Nauset territory, out of contact with other hostile bands, and had determined to remain in Wampanoag country in a position to rejoin Philip should Plymouth reject their proposals.

Concealing their horses in the bushes, Church and his companions observed the scene from the top of the bluff. Eventually Church thought that he recognized some of the Indians and, taking his life in his hands, called out to them to know who they were. Some of the Indians came a bit closer to see who it was that called to them and recognizing Church's voice, came up to speak with him. As Church had hoped, these were the missing Sogkonets. They confirmed that Awashonks was there and that Jack Haven, who had been sent by Bradford, was still with the company. Church sent for Haven, who quickly came, and told him to go to Awashonks and tell her that Church had come, but that he must go back to fetch the rest of his company and would return to "sup with her that night."
Taking a number of the Sogkonnet warriors whom he had enlisted. By that time the Governor had
as he saw occasion to fight the enemy. He then presented him with a very fine
one swearing in of them. And having in that manner all engaged to fight with
their parts, the Captain of the guard stepped up to Church, thanked him for
the news that the Governor had accepted their terms, and told him that they
and mistrusted the truth."

Church now brought Lieutenant Howland up-to-date on events and the
reunited party proceeded to Awashonks' camp on the Bay, arriving about
sunset. In the interval the Indians had prepared to receive Church by
erecting an open-sided booth of branches facing a sort of amphitheater, in the
center of which they had made a great pile of combustible material, pine tree
tops, etc. and a dance floor.

First they all sat down to a supper of various kinds of sea food
supplemented by some cow beef that Church had brought with him, much to the
delight of the Indians. After the meal they proceeded to enact a typical
Indian ceremony which is again best described by Church in his own words: "By
the time supper was over, the mighty pile of pine knots and tops were fired;
and all the Indians, great and small, gathered in a ring about it. Awashonks
with the oldest of her people, men and women mixed, kneeling down made the
first ring next to the fire; and all the lusty stout men, standing up, made
the next, and then all the rabble in a confused crew, surrounded the outside.
Then the chief Captain stepped in between the rings and the fire, with a spear
in one hand; and a hatchet in the other, and danced around the fire, and began
to fight with it, making mention of all the several nations and companies of
Indians in the country that were the enemies of the English. And at the
naming of every particular tribe of Indians, he would draw out and fight a new
firebrand; and at the finishing of his fight, with each particular brand would
bow to him, and thank him; when he had named all the several nations and
tribes, and fought them all, he stuck down his spear and hatchet and came out,
and another stepped in and acted over again the same dance with even more fury
that the first; and when about a half a dozen of their chiefs and thus acted
their parts, the Captain of the guard stepped up to Church, thanked him for
the news that the Governor had accepted their terms, and told him that they
were now making soldiers for him, and that what they had been doing was all
one swearing in of them. And having in that manner all engaged to fight with
him for the English that he might call them forth, or any of them at any time,
as he saw occasion to fight the enemy. He then presented him with a very fine
fire-lock."

Church accepted the offer, told them that he had been made their chief
leader by the English governor, and that now all was well and that they could
proceed to Sandwich where their women and children would be safe from all harm.

The next morning Awashonks and her people started for Sandwich. From
Sandwich Church hastened on to Plymouth with a fairly large delegation of
Sogkonnet warriors whom he had enlisted. By that time the Governor had
assembled a requisite number of English soldiers, which, joined with the Indian volunteers, made a goodly company. As promised, the Governor commissioned Church to lead the army, and the same night they set out for Middleboro, where Church had determined to base his operations.

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THE SANDWICH PATH AND THE ROUTE TAKEN BY CAPTAIN CHURCH FROM SANDWICH THROUGH BOURNE, WAREHAM, ROCHESTER, MATTAPOISSETT, AND FAIRHAVEN TO AWASHONK'S CAMP AT POPE'S BEACH IN WHAT IS NOW EAST FAIRHAVEN.

The ancient town of Sandwich, settled in 1637, extended the full width of the Cape from Massachusetts Bay on the north to Nantucket Sound on the south. Its western bound was the irregular contour of Buzzards Bay and on the east the town shared a common boundary with Barnstable.

In 1914 the construction associated with building the Cape Cod Canal so altered the early road network and changed the topography of the area to such an extent that it is no longer possible to trace precisely the route of the old Indian path east of the Bourne bridge. Two rivers, the Scusset which flowed easterly into Cape Cod Bay and the Manomet which drained westerly into Buzzards Bay were eliminated by the canal. Their sources were about mid cape and separated by nearly three quarters of a mile. Near the mouth of the Herring River are the vestiges of a large Indian village (M/41/S.E./43) which was practically destroyed by construction. The subsequent relocation of the roads wiped out all traces of the original Cape or Sandwich Path on the eastern side of the canal. We have chosen then to take our departure from that Indian village on the north side of the canal.

From this point the Sandwich Path followed Bournedale Road to Head of the Bay Road (approx. 2 miles) where a side trail led southward to the Pilgrim trading post at Aptuxet (on the further side of the canal). Leaving this trail on one's left follow Head of the Bay Road north of Buttermilk Bay entering Wareham on Red Brook Road and continuing along Elm Street to East Wareham and the wading place on the Agawam River (approx. 10 miles). Follow Main Street to the wading place on the Wanaquinquoah River near Parker's Mills (approx. 11 miles). This, the earliest highway to be laid out in Wareham, runs nearly due east and west. The Indian path crossed the Wanaquinquoah River on stepping stones (Glimpses of Early Wareham).
Immediately west of the Wanaquinquoaeh wading place another side trail leads north through Carver via Tihonet Road to Plymouth. This may be the route usually followed by travelers from Rhode Island to the Pilgrim settlement.

From this wading place the Sandwich Path followed Main Street and Mary's Pond Road into Rochester and the wading place on the Weweantic River at Horse Shoe Pond (approx. 11 miles). Poles driven into the river bed assisted the foot traveler across this swiftly flowing river. Just south of this ford was a large Indian village near Conant's Hill (M41/SW/83) which was excavated by the Sippican Chapter of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society, Inc. (see report on file with the Mass. Hist. Comm.). The construction of an 18th century mill with dam, raceway, etc. so disturbed the immediate area that our location of the wading place is conjectural. It is probably flooded by the mill pond.

Immediately after passing Mary's Pond in Rochester (on Mary's Pond Road) the Sandwich Path made an abrupt turn south to avoid a low area (since filled in and drained to accommodate the highway--approx. 13 miles from Sandwich). The old Path is now a series of wood roads that meanders through the country for about two miles and rejoins Mary's Pond Road. It is suggested that one should follow the main road (marked "detour" on the map).

About half way between Mary's and Leonard's Pond, County Road crosses the Sandwich Path. This road was also an Indian path and later the stage road to the county seat (Plymouth). This was one of those old paths that was used as a boundary to separate Wareham and Rochester.

The wading place on the Sippican River (approx. 13.5 miles) is on the Hiller Farm. The immediate area has been greatly disturbed by the building of a dam, sluiceway, and mill. The old wading place was probably north of the present bridge and is now flooded. This is the place that Captain Church left Lieutenant Howland and two of his men to "guard the crossing."

After crossing the Sippican River the Sandwich Path turns north on Clapp Road to Nemasket. Here, in 1676, Captain Church left the Sandwich Path and took the Indian trail which led westerly toward Dartmouth. This is now Perry Hill Road. Proceeding along this trail they "crossed another river" (the Mattapoisett River at approx. 16 miles). Continue along Perry Hill Road (for about 2 miles) to Mendall Road where the trail turned south to Hathaway Road and then south again on Earle Road to Boston Hill Road in East Fairhaven. At this point we must again leave the old path momentarily (where it runs through the woods to Alden Street) and turn right onto Boston Hill Road to Alden Road and then left on Alden Road rejoining the Church route (after a detour of about a mile). Continue south on Alden Road crossing Washington Street to Pope's Beach where Church at last found Awashonks' camp. It is approx. 26 miles from the Indian village in Sandwich where we started our journey.