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THE STOCKBRIDGE INDIAN MISSION: A HISTORICAL REAPPRAISAL

by
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From 1751–1758, Jonathan Edwards was a missionary to the Native American community in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a "praying town" along the Housatonic River at the frontier's edge. These years have not received the same kind attention the rest of Edwards's life has received,[2] and when they are discussed, these years are often depicted as a "quiet retreat" for Edwards[3] or even a seven-year holiday spent in "retirement and leisure."[4] Stockbridge was a "dot in the wilderness,"[5] it is alleged, where Edwards "could preach old sermons to a handful of Indians and a smaller handful of whites, close the door on his four-by-eight-foot study, and make up his mind about the freedom of the will."[6]

Behind each of these statements lies the perception that Stockbridge was a place of no great importance—just a backwater mission requiring a part-time attendant. The assumption immediately encounters a logical difficulty, of course, for to accept this notion we must believe that the man who occupied one of New England's most prestigious pulpits before moving to Stockbridge, and who became president of one of its leading educational institutions afterwards, was somehow relegated to obscurity during the interregnum.

But an even greater challenge to this view is the historical record itself. As this essay will show, the extant primary documents reveal

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[1]Dr. Crawford is Lead Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Marshall, MI. Of Dr. Compton he writes, "I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to my esteemed professor, Dr. R. Bruce Compton. Over the course of his long and productive ministry he has been a model of exacting biblical scholarship and warm evangelical piety. I count it a privilege to have studied under such a man."

[2]The words of John Smith, Harry Stout, and Kenneth Minkema in 1995 remain fundamentally true: "If there is one area of Edwards's life that has been consistently overlooked and understated by contemporaries and scholars alike, it is his role as Indian missionary and advocate for Indian affairs" (*A Jonathan Edwards Reader* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995], xxxvii).

[3]Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend Mr. Jonathan Edwards*, in *Jonathan Edwards: A Profile*, ed. David Levin (New York: Hilland Wang, 1969), 74.

[4]Sereno Dwight, *Memoir of Jonathan Edwards, A. M.*, rev. & corr. Edward Hickman (1834), 13.

[5]Ola Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards 1703–1758* (New York: Collier, 1940), 248.

[6]Ibid., 223.

Stockbridge to be a town of real historical importance, abiding at the nexus of colonial politics, military strategy, and missionary concern. Moreover, the men who founded Stockbridge were among the era's leading lights, including governors, military leaders, and prominent clergymen. On the Indians' side, the town's promoters even included a chief sachem. No, Stockbridge was not just a "dot in the wilderness." It was a frontier embassy.[7]

Early English Contact and Evangelization Efforts

The story begins with the Mohican Indians' first contact with European settlers. While some variation exists between the various accounts, the basic details agree: The Indians noticed an object approaching on the water. At first it looked like a great fish or a large canoe. As it approached, the Indians observed men on board. As the ship made landfall and the men began to disembark, their appearance "overwhelmed the senses." The new arrivals were different in color, dress, and manners from anyone the Indians had ever seen before. Observing the crew's pale skin, the Natives thought they must be sick. They made contact and offered their assistance. In the words of the Mohican diplomat Wannuaucon (1797–1855), "They were strangers, and we took them in—naked, and we clothed them."[8]

Initial Prosperity

That was in 1609. The body of water was the Hudson River, and the captain of that ship was Henry Hudson (1570–1611). Though an Englishman, he was then employed as a trader for the Dutch. As he explored this new world, he knew the pelts of the beaver and otter would be highly prized by Dutch consumers. Within five years a trading post was operating on Castle Island.[9] Before long, Dutch traders were colonizing both sides of the Hudson River and the southern tip of Long Island. This placed the Mohicans at the center of a "lucrative market." The Dutch introduced the Mohicans to their technological wonders, and in exchange the Mohicans kept them supplied with those coveted pelts. "For a time the Mohicans prospered, and the newcomers

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[7]The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines an embassy as "the group of people who represent their country in a foreign country" and an ambassador as "an important official who works in a foreign country representing his or her own country there, and who is officially accepted in this position by that country" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org).

[8]Wannuaucon the Muh-he-con-new, cited in *Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for the Years 1857 and 1858*, vol. 4 (Madison, WI: James Ross, 1859), 317. Additional versions of the first encounter can be found in Rachel Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 24; and E. B. O'Callahan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York: Procured in Holland, England, and France by John R. Brodhead*, vol. 6 (Albany, NY: Weed & Parsons, 1853–1887), 881.

[9]Dorothy Davids, *A Brief History of the Mohican Nation: Stockbridge-Munsee Band* (Bowler, WI: Stockbridge-Munsee Historical Committee, 2004), 2.

prospered even more."[10] Meanwhile, English colonists were beginning to disembark a little further south. After the failure of Roanoke in 1585, they successfully established Jamestown in 1607, Plymouth in 1620, Salem in 1629, Boston in 1630, Hartford and Providence in 1636, and New Haven in 1638.[11] Along the way, they established their own trading relationships with the Mohicans.

Inevitable Disruptions

As wave after wave of European migrants kept coming ashore, the tide began to turn against the Native inhabitants. European diseases were especially pernicious. The English and Dutch brought with them a lethal cocktail of smallpox, measles, diphtheria, and scarlet fever from the urban centers back home.[12] The Indians tried fighting off these diseases with their time-tested techniques, but these proved ineffective against the new microbes. Indians perished by the thousand. Sometimes whole villages were wiped out. "Where are the twenty-five thousand in number…who constituted the power and population of the great Muh-he-con-new Nation in 1604?" Wannuaucon asked. "They have been victims to vice and disease, which the white man imported. The smallpox, measles, and 'strong waters' have done the work of annihilation."[13]

Alcohol abuse was another of colonization's deadly consequences. Henry Hudson introduced the "strong waters" on his first visit. After just one taste, many Indians were hooked. "Indians who brought furs from the hinterlands to Albany might not get home with their earnings before pouring them out of a bottle."[14] Sometimes their European trading partners exploited this weakness. The Mohican sachem Aupaumut (1757–1830) explained how this happened in an early nineteenth-century speech to the government of New York:

> When our people come from hunting to the town or plantations and acquaint the traders and people that we want powder and shot and clothing, they first give us a large cup of rum. And after we get the taste of it crave for more so that…all the beaver and peltry we have hunted goes for drink, and we are left destitute either of clothing or ammunition.[15]

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[10]Patrick Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 4–5.

[11]Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

[12]Davids, *Brief History of the Mohican Nation*, 3.

[13]Wannuaucon, the Muh-he-con-new, cited in *Report and Collections*, 4:318. It is unclear whether Wannuaucon's statistic was based on empirical data or personal assumptions. Ted Brasser, relying on Dutch records, estimates the Mohican population in 1610 to be somewhere between 3,000 and 4,500 in *Riding on the Frontier's Crest: Mahican Indian Culture and Culture Change* (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 1974), 9.

[14]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 6–7.

[15]E. B. O'Callahan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of*

Thirst for alcohol led Indians "to kill more game than was necessary to purchase only dry goods, thus hastening the serious ecological imbalance in their territories."[16] It also brought an increase in "mischief, vandalism, and more serious attacks on colonial buildings, livestock, and people, including other Indians," leading to even more deaths.[17]

Loss of Indian land was another consequence as the endless waves of new settlers required ever more territory. The problem was exacerbated by the Europeans' and Indians' "vastly different ways of conceptualizing and using the land." The Indians practiced "collective sovereignty" over their land holdings, and they moved about from one section of their land to another as tradition and seasonal changes dictated. For the English colonists, however, "If land was not visibly occupied or if its inhabitants were not using it in a seemingly profitable way," it was deemed available for settlement. Besides this, the colonists had a charter from their king granting permission to occupy the land, giving colonial land appropriations a veneer of legality.[18]

In time, however, even some of their own began speaking against the practice of taking land not properly purchased. Roger Williams was a particularly vocal critic of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, asking what right the King of England had to grant land "that was not his to give." In response, the colony opened a dialogue with surrounding Indian tribes and began acquiring new tracts of land through transfers of deeds, which the colonists would write up themselves and then ask the Indians to sign—a practice ripe for abuse.[19] Having nearly run out of beaver and otter pelts to sell because of overhunting, and with no other commodities prized by the colonists, the Indians often had little choice but to sell off land to meet their basic needs. By the 1670s, waves of deeds were passing into English hands.[20]

Insidious Wars

As one might expect under such circumstances, some Indians came to believe that their best hope for survival lay in a military victory over the colonists. Thus, in 1675, Matacom (alias "King Philip"), Chief Sachem of the Wampanoag people, launched a coordinated attack against ninety-two English colonial settlements, completely destroying at least sixteen of them and badly damaging many others. The colonists responded with counterattacks, burning whole Indian villages to the ground. The war raged for three long years. Hundreds of colonists died,

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New York, 15 vols. (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons, & Co., 1853–1857), 5:661–64.

[16]James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 260.

[17]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 6–7.

[18]Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening*, 22.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 25.

and their economy was ruined: "thousands of head of livestock had been killed, maritime trade was dormant, and colonial governments were deep in war debt."[21]

It was even worse for the Indians. At least seventy percent of the Natives who waged war against the English colonies were killed. Among the survivors, many had to flee to New France (Canada), while perhaps twelve hundred others were captured and enslaved by the English victors. Indians virtually disappeared from "the Connecticut River Valley, the Merrimac River Valley, the Buzzard's Bay watershed, and much of Rhode Island."[22] The few who remained found themselves thrust into abject poverty. Some "had no choice but to sell themselves and even their children into indentured servitude." Colonists did everything they could to enhance Indian misery by

> slapping Indians with frivolous lawsuits or extending credit lines that they knew the Indians could not pay. Courts provided Indians with no relief, routinely levying disproportionately high fines and jail fees on impoverished Indians and then forcing them to pay off the balance with years of indentured service. They even seized the children of Indian parents deemed to be incompetent and sold them into bondage.[23]

By 1700, the colonial population in Massachusetts alone had reached a new high of 55,000, while the population of Mohicans dwindled to a new low of just five hundred souls.[24]

Irreparable Loss

Then, in 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht was signed in the Dutch Republic. This ended the War of Spanish Succession in Europe, and with it, all serious colonial conflicts in the New World. With this obstacle to westward expansion overcome, a new wave of English settlers cascaded toward the Mohicans' last strongholds.[25] Within a decade, the Englishman Joseph Parsons and 176 others were petitioning the General

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[21]David Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 23.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., 26–27.

[24]Jean Hankins, "Bringing the Good News: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians of New England and New York, 1700–1775" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1993), 9. The colonial population estimate does not include African slaves. Estimates for the *total* Indian population (not just the River Indians) in Massachusetts at the time ranges from about 4,200 to 13,000.

[25]Daniel Mandell, "Behind the Frontier: Indian Communities in Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1992), 87; Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 35. According to Samuel Morison, the number of English colonists quadrupled, and the land occupied tripled, between the years 1713 and 1754. See his *The Oxford History of the American People*, vol. 1 (New York: New American Library, 1972), 196. The population explosion was caused by continued immigration, high birth rates, and lower death rates.

Assembly of Massachusetts for land along the Housatonic River to make room for new settlements. Permission was granted, and a committee was appointed to secure the Mohicans' land.[26] On April 25, 1724, for the price of £460, three barrels of cider, and thirty quarts of rum, a group of about twenty Mohican Indians transferred a huge swath of their land along the Housatonic to their English neighbors.[27] Several new towns would be established on this land. One of them would eventually be called "Stockbridge."

The main signatories of the 1724 land deal were Sunkewenaugheag, later known to the colonists as "Umpachenee," and the Englishman John Stoddard. Not much is known about Umpachenee. Even his position in the Mohican tribe is a matter of debate.[28] John Stoddard is a different story. Born in 1682, he was the tenth child of the famous Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, and thus belonged to that elite cadre of rural gentry in Massachusetts known as the "River Gods."[29] He was a lieutenant stationed in Deerfield when that town was attacked by

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[26]Electa F. Jones, *Stockbridge, Past and Present; Or, Records of an Old Mission Station* (Springfield, MA: Samuel Bowles & Co., 1854), 38.

[27]Harry Andrews Wright, ed., *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, MA: n.p., 1905), 116–18.

[28]Some, like Ted Brasser in *Riding on the Frontier's Crest* and Daniel Richard Mandell in "Behind the Frontier," state that Umpachenee was the sachem of Skatekook, near the village of Wnahtukook, where Konkapot was sachem. However, Rachel Wheeler has made a convincing case that Umpachenee was more likely "a local chief, or counselor, to the Mohican sachem." She writes, in part, "When the Moravians referred to Umpachenee by name, they most commonly used the term *captain* but also occasionally *governor* or sometimes *king*. They also mention the arrival of a runner in 1744 announcing a new 'governor' in Stockbridge, likely meaning a new chief sachem. The Moravian records contain references to the captain and governor traveling together, so it is clear it was not the missionaries' general practice to use governor and captain interchangeably" (*To Live Upon Hope*, 23).

Variant spellings of Umpachenee's name include Umpacheny, Umpacheney, Umpachane, Umpachanee, and Umpachene; also Sakowanahook, Sakowanakeek, and Sonkewenaukeek.

[29]Kevin Sweeney writes, "Up and down the Connecticut River Valley in such places as Deerfield, Hadley, Northampton, Wethersfield, and Middletown, members of these families and their kin rest under monuments that bespeak the wealth, provincial aspirations and bonds of kin that shaped the rural gentry of eighteenth-century New England. The Williamses, Stoddards, Porters, Partridges, Dwights, and their kin were notable for their longevity in public office, their close ties to the ministry, and their aristocratic hauteur. Bonds among families such as these and the resulting ties they forged among the clergy, magistracy, militia, the bench and bar, and 'respectable society' created what Henry Adams aptly called the cordial union: 'an organized social system, capable of acting at command either for offense or defense, and admirably adapted for the uses of the eighteenth century'" ("River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637–1790" [PhD diss., Yale University, 1986], 1–2). His quote comes from Henry Adams, *The United States in 1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955), 54.

For period use of the term "River Gods," see Daniel W. Wells and Reuben F. Wells, *A History of Hatfield, Massachusetts* (Springfield, MA: F. C. H. Gibbons, 1910), 278 and Mary E. Dewey, ed., *Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872), 49.

French and Indian warriors in 1704, and he barely escaped with his life. He spent the rest of his life working to safeguard the English frontier "through trade, military might, and missionary efforts."[30] Ten years later, Umpachenee and John Stoddard would meet again to establish the Stockbridge mission.

Summary

As the colonial era wore on, life became increasingly difficult for the Mohican Indians. Land and game were disappearing and "traditional healing practices could do little to fend off the epidemic diseases."[31] "Drunkenness, with its consequent family and social disruption, increased as the stress of radical change took its toll."[32] The Mohicans' spiritual leaders, yea, even their gods, appeared unable to save them.[33] Meanwhile, their English neighbors were prospering. They were enjoying good health, increasing wealth, and military victories. The situation was probably inevitable: "The Puritans were politically united (in most cases), militarily strong, culturally aggressive, and rapidly increasing in numbers," while "The Indians—in a relative, not an absolute sense—were politically fragmented, militarily weak, culturally tolerant."[34] As the Mohicans observed the good fortunes of their English counterparts, some of them "could not help but notice that those New Englanders who had the most material goods attributed their abundance to the blessings of a god who spoke to them through their Bibles."[35] By the 1730s, the Mohicans were in the throes of a social *and* a spiritual crisis.

English Efforts at Evangelization

Nearly all the English colonial charters cited the evangelization of the Indians as their principal *raison d'être*. As first envisioned, it would be evangelization by attraction. Englishmen assumed that America's Native inhabitants would be so taken with the alleged superiority of English religion and culture that they would flood into the colonies *en masse* to learn about the Englishmen's God.[36] But as James Axtell has

[30]Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 19–20. See also "Stoddard's Journal," *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 5 (Jan 1851): 21–42.

[31]Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 33–34.

[32]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 9.

[33]Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 34.

[34]Alden Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620–1675* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 323.

[35]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 13.

[36]The charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony offers one example: "…for the directing, ruling, and disposing of all other matters and things, whereby our said people, inhabitants there, may be so religiously peaceably, and civilly governed, as their good life and orderly conversation, may win and incite the natives of the country, to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Saviour of mankind, and the christian faith, which in our royal intention, and the adventurers free profession, is the

noted, "the early English encounters with the Indians of Roanoke, Virginia, Connecticut, Cape Cod, and Maine made it obvious" that this assumption had been "the product of armchair explorers and missionaries who had never met the Indians on their own ground."[37] Throughout the early decades of the colonial era the Indians showed interest in some of the material artifacts of their English neighbors, but they remained persistently uninterested in adopting the English Puritan faith.[38]

Since evangelization by attraction was proving fruitless, a small cadre of colonists began striking out into Native territory in search of converts. For English Puritan missionaries, this would prove a difficult task. Unlike their French counterparts, who drew a distinction between Christian faith and European culture, Puritan missionaries believed the two were inseparable, even symbiotic: Christian thought had created modern English civilization, they believed, and modern civilization furnished the systems which facilitated Christian discipleship. To become good Christians, then, Indians would also need to become good Englishmen. As the Puritan William Crenshaw explained, "Civilitie for their bodies" would have to accompany "Christianitie for their souls."[39] Or, to use the popular phrase, the Indians would need to be "reduced to civility."[40] They would need to give up their traditional way of life,

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principal end of this plantation" (*The Charters and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay: Carefully Collected from the Publick Records and Ancient Printed Books* [Boston: T. B. Wait & Co., 1814], 14–15). John B. Carpenter has written about this phenomenon in "The New England Puritans: The Grandparents of Modern Protestant Missions," *Missiology* 30 (Oct 2002): 519–20.

[37]Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 304.

[38]This was not owing to any ignorance of Puritan Christianity on the natives' part. Fisher notes that many Indians worked as "laborers, servants, and slaves in English households, [and] would have had ample opportunity to observe the rhythms of English religious practices in person, [yet] such exposure produced few baptisms or professions of faith, or few that were publicized, at least" (*The Indian Great Awakening*, 23).

[39]William Crenshaw, *A Sermon Preached in London before the Right Honorable the Lord La Warre…Febr. 21, 1609* (London, 1610), cited in Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 45. Such statements were common at the time. Sir William Johnson (1715–1774) said that missionaries would have to "civilize Savages before they can be converted to Christianity…in order to make them Christians, they must first be made Men." In 1633, James Hopkins said to Governor Winthrop, "If you can first civill the natives, and then bringe some of them to know god…you shall have cause to rejoice" (*Winthrop Papers*, *Volume III: 1631–1637* [Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1942], 106). Governor Belcher of Massachusetts said to John Sergeant, "to civilize, will be the readiest way to christianize them," quoted in Jones, *Stockbridge: Past and Present*, 54. In 1743, John Sergeant wrote to Benjamin Coleman that the Indians must learn the "Christian way of living" before they could be made receptive to Christian doctrines (*A Letter from the Revd. Mr. Sergeant of Stockbridge, to Dr. Coleman of Boston* [Boston: Rogers & Fowle, 1743]).

[40]The concept of "reducing" the Indians to civility appears frequently in period literature. See, for example, William Hubbard, *The Present State of New England* (London: 1677), 86; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, in New England* (New York: AMS Press, 1855–1861), 10:285–86; Clayton Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland, 1633–1684* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1910), 20, 84, 90.

which allegedly hindered Christian discipleship, and begin settling down into English-style towns where they could raise families, manage homesteads, grow crops, learn to read and write, and develop all of the other systems (legal, social, and otherwise) that would transform them into a Christian people.

Methodology

In practice, this meant that Puritan missionaries worked to build Christian towns, not just Christian churches. "If some one could stop the wanderings of the Indians, and give authority to one of them to rule the others, we would see them converted and civilized in short time," they believed.[41] Besides this, it was hoped that transferring prospective converts from their Native settings into these new towns would shield them from the influences of pagan Indians and unscrupulous colonists, increasing the odds of success still further.[42]

A Christian town would need Christian laws, of course, so as soon as a mission town was chartered the missionary would begin building a legal apparatus designed to move Indians from pagans to Christian disciples. This included morality codes against powwowing, gaming, fornication, long hair on men, short hair on women, body-greasing, polygamy, and even mourning the dead "by howling."[43]

As soon as they had the resources, missionaries would also work to construct a public meetinghouse so proper worship services could begin. Indians who showed signs of spiritual conversion might be baptized immediately, though it could be some time before the missionary judged an Indian's lifestyle acceptable for admittance to the Lord's Supper.[44]

Along with the church, a day school for children would be established. It would include a robust curriculum designed to instill both Christian doctrine and English civility. Subjects would include English grammar, Latin, Greek, arithmetic, skilled trades, and a Christian catechism. Indian children would learn "a new way of civilized life and, at least in theory, [be] given the means of supporting themselves. Farming in its various phases, carpentry, blacksmithing, shoemaking, coopering, and other crafts [would be] taught the boys and men, while girls and women [would learn] spinning, weaving, sewing, house keeping, and gardening."[45] To encourage attentiveness in the classroom, reprimands

[41]Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 63.

[42]Ibid., 267.

[43]Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 346–47. See also Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (Jan 1974): 33.

[44]See Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England…In Seven Books* (London: Bible & Crowns, 1702), 5:84.

[45]Pierce R. Beaver, "Methods in American Missions to the Indians in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Calvinist Models for Protestant Foreign Missions,"

would be quick and severe. As the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock (1711–1799) explained, "Evils so obstinate as those we may reasonably expect to find common in the Children of Savages, will require that which is severe."[46]

Models

The most successful of the early English missionaries was the Rev. John Eliot of Roxbury, Massachusetts (1604–1690), who concentrated his efforts on the remnants of the Massachuset, Nipmuc, and Pennacook tribes living under English colonial jurisdiction—peoples who had been devastated by European diseases and land loss and were already economically dependent on the English.[47] From 1646 to 1675, Eliot successfully established fourteen "praying towns" among these Indians. The towns were near-perfect replicas of the English colonies and included "churches, schools, jails, homes, farms…shops" and "English-style laws." In every way, from "their dress, hygiene, eating habits, names, sexual and marital mores, and…their hairstyles," these Indians became "Red Puritans."[48]

John Eliot published his successes in a series of pamphlets known as the "Eliot Tracts," which were read voraciously by the Puritans in England. To encourage further missionary efforts among the Indians, a group of prominent ministers and businessmen in England established The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England in 1649. Their charter was revoked after the Restoration in 1660, but two years later a charter was granted for a new organization, led by the same men, called the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England; or, more popularly, the "New England Company."[49] The organization's financial affairs were handled by a Board of Governors that met in London; however, the day-to-day work of the company was managed by a Board of Commissioners headed by the governor of

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Journal of Presbyterian History 47 (June 1969): 140–41.

[46]Quoted in Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 67.

[47]John Eliot's ministry is catalogued in Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book 3, and in the contemporary work by Ola Winslow, *John Eliot: Apostle to the Indians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968). John Eliot expresses his vision for his missionary activities in his *The Christian Commonwealth: Or, the Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ* (Boston: 1660).

[48]Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 267. The term "Red Puritan" comes from Salisbury. Another missionary, Thomas Mayhew Jr. (1618–1657), began working in Martha's Vineyard among the Wampanoag people at about the same time. A contemporary record of his ministry can be found in Edward Winslow, *Glorious Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London: 1659).

[49]A modern reprint of *The Eliot Tracts* is available. See Michael Clark, ed., *The Eliot Tracts: With Letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003). The best single volume on the New England Company is William Kellaway, *The New England Company: 1649–1776* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962). The records of the New England Company are currently held at Guildhall Library in London.

Massachusetts. For years the New England Company functioned as a quasi-governmental body in New England as it provided financial and logistical support for virtually every Puritan missionary effort through the eighteenth-century, including the work in Stockbridge.

Assessment

Regarding the Indians' decision to participate in Eliot's praying towns, Alden Vaughan is surely correct when he asserts that "the American Indian was being neither weak nor disloyal to his own heritage" when he adopted Puritan ways.[50] Before the first Europeans arrived, the eastern woodland tribes already had a practice of appropriating aspects of one another's culture, such that "tribes in contiguous culture areas…came to share a large number of religious traits."[51] As the first Europeans began arriving and contact was established, the tradition continued as Indians cultivated trading relationships and military alliances with the new arrivals and began selectively appropriating European material artifacts. As Indian tribes began suffering extreme losses to European diseases, vices, and land acquisitions, some of them saw wisdom in "the selective use of Christianity" as well. Welcoming missionaries would strengthen their political and military bonds with European powers and even bring an influx of much-needed material resources like food and blankets.[52]

Some of those in particularly vulnerable circumstances decided it was in their best interests to accept the Puritan program in full. In their thinking,

> Even though their conversion entailed wholesale cultural changes, it preserved their ethnic identity as particular Indian groups on familiar pieces of land that carried their inner history. At the cost of a certain amount of material and spiritual continuity with the past, their acceptance of Christianity…allowed them not only to survive the present but gave them a long lease on life.[53]

And while their total embrace of Puritanism did not occur until their very survival was in question, this does not necessarily imply that their motives were wholly pragmatic. Crisis circumstances in life are often accompanied by a personal crisis of faith as individuals come to believe that their present object(s) of faith are inadequate to meet the pressing demands of the times. Under such circumstances, sincere conversions can, and sometimes do, take place.

In any event, these praying towns were not to last, for King Philip's War (1675–1678) brought them to ruin. Puritan Indians were

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[50]Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 333.

[51]Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 82.

[52]James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 85.

[53]Ibid.

suspended between two worlds and were looked upon with suspicion by Natives and colonists alike. As the war raged on many of them were killed, others were imprisoned, and still others were scattered. By the end of the war only four of Eliot's fourteen praying towns remained, and these were in a state of disintegration.[54] The war also brought new political realities as terrified English colonists labored to ensure their future safety by expanding their land holdings and keeping their Indian neighbors confined to manageable geographic zones.[55] Mission efforts suddenly took a backseat to the more urgent priority of Indian containment.

A New Appeal

However, by the third decade of the eighteenth-century, many of the more mission-minded Puritans had become frustrated with this turn of events. This was especially so in Massachusetts where leading ministers wanted to make good on their charter to win Native Americans to the Christian faith. At the same time, their public appeals also betrayed some highly temporal motives. The 1723 sermon by the Rev. Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, *Whether God Is Not Angry with the Country*, illustrates the point.[56]

Stoddard believed that God was indeed angry with the country. What else could explain the rise in "*Epidemical Diseases*," "*Devourers*," and Indian bands rising against them? They had failed to live up to their covenant with God and he was judging them for it, Stoddard explained. The Indians were partly to blame, of course, for "Indeed we gave the Heathen an Example; and if they had not been miserably besotted, they would have taken more notice of it." But it was also the colonists' fault, because "the Country has been at very little Cost for the Conversion of the Heathen."[57]

Stoddard offered a whole litany of reasons to resume missions work among the Indians. In addition to the important matter of covenant faithfulness, he also noted that "the Papists" (i.e., the French and Spaniards) were spreading rapidly across the western hemisphere, closing in on every side, and posing an existential threat to the English. "If [the Indians] continue *Heathens,*" Stoddard said, "they will be apt to fall in with the *Papists;* if they continue *Heathens,* they will carry it Provokingly; if they be contentious, they will be ready to Arms, and avenge themselves by making War: but if they be brought to Religion, then there

[54]Lion G. Miles, "Red Man Dispossessed: The Williams Family and the Alienation of Indian Land in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, 1736–1818," *The New England Quarterly* 67 (Mar 1994): 46–47; Salisbury, "Red Puritans," 54; Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 31.

[55]Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, 320.

[56]Solomon Stoddard, *Question: Whether God Is Not Angry with the Country for Doing so Little Towards the Conversion of the Indians?* (Boston: B. Green, 1723).

[57]Ibid., 8–9.

will be Hopes of a Durable Peace."[58] Ironically, before King Phillip's War some Indians had adopted Puritanism as a means of survival. Now, English Puritans were calling for the conversion of the Indians as a means of ensuring *English* survival.

The Founding of a Frontier Embassy

Then came the Connecticut Valley revivals, which began in 1734 under the preaching ministry of Jonathan Edwards. These revivals introduced the Housatonic-Mohicans to a new brand of Protestant Christianity—one that provided space for ecstatic religious experiences, direct communion with the Holy Spirit, and as much concern for orthopathy as for orthopraxy. It was not long before Mohican curiosity and renewed English interest in missions began coming together. As English colonists settled into their new land along the Housatonic that year, some of them became acquainted with Pophnehonnuhwoh, the Chief Sachem of the Housatonic-Mohicans. Nicknamed "Konkapot" by the English, he made it known that he was inclined to embrace the Christian faith.[59]

The eastern woodland Indians had attributed spiritual power to Europeans since first contact. "Only spiritual power could explain the newcomers' stunning technology, such as ships, firearms, knives, woven cloth, magnets, magnifying glasses, compasses, and more."[60] The Indians also could not help but notice how the whites seemed to fare much better with disease than Natives and how they won every war. All this lent support to the idea that the Christian God was different not just in degree, but in kind from the Indians' gods.[61] Perhaps the Christians' God had placed a curse on the Indians, not to be lifted until they turned to him in faith. Missionaries could teach the Mohicans how to worship God rightly and invite his blessings. They could also teach the Indians how to read and write, essential skills at a time when "account books, court documents, and land deeds could determine the fate of

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[58]Ibid., 10–12.

[59]For ease of reading, this paper will utilize the name "Konkapot" for the remainder of the study. Variant spellings of the name include Concopot, Con:ke:pot, Cuncaupot, Kunkapot, and Konapot. A summary of his life is available in Philip Suave Colee, "The Housatonic-Stockbridge Indians, 1734–1749" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Albany, 1977), 123–28. See also Samuel Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs, Relating to the Housatunnuk Indians* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1753), 2.

[60]Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 13. Thomas Harriot, an early settler in Virginia, wrote that English technology "so farre exceeded [the Indians'] capacities to comprehend…that they thought they were rather the works of gods than of men, or at the leastwise they had been given and taught us of the gods," cited in *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*, in *The First Colonists: Documents on the Planting of the First English Settlements in North America, 1584–1590*, ed. David B. Quinn and Alison M. Quinn (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1982), 70.

[61]Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 15.

individuals and communities."[62] By taking the lead in this effort, the Mohicans could also position themselves as cultural intermediaries between the English colonies and Native tribes, a role they traditionally played between Indian tribes already.

On the other hand, perhaps the Mohicans' gods were cursing them for drifting away. "The beliefs that the Creator or different Creators had made Indians and whites distinct and that Indians' attempts to become like whites drew divine punishment grew in popularity in the mid- to late eighteenth century at an even faster rate than Indian Christianity."[63]

Another complication was the conduct of New England Christians. According to Konkapot, their behavior often seemed worse than that of the "heathen" Indians.[64] He also knew that the English kept slaves, including their ministers. Would they enslave the Mohicans? The way the English treated their orphans, widows, and indigent, "crowding them into an almshouse with little social or sexual separation from vagrants, prostitutes, and the insane" was also alarming, that, and their debtors' prisons.[65] And even if all these problems might be avoided, could the Mohicans give up their freedom of movement and live in settled towns like the whites? Back in 1714, the Mohegans of Connecticut had spurned Experience Mayhew for these very reasons, telling him that "the difficultys of the Christian Religion were such as the Indians could not endure."[66]

In the end, however, the success of the English Puritans and the misery of the Housatonic-Mohicans could not be disputed. The Mohican sachem Aupaumut (1757–1830) made this the centerpiece of his argument to the Delaware Indians in 1803. He told them that the Indians who refused to change were now "extinct from the earth," while those who had embraced Christianity "were blessed."[67] He also asserted that "the arts of civilization and Christian religion" really were "the best

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[62]Ibid., 52.

[63]Ibid., 64. See also Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745–1815* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 27–33; and Alfred A. Cave, *Prophets of the Great Spirit: Native American Revitalization Movements in Eastern North America* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 11–22.

[64]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 2.

[65]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 15–16.

[66]Experience Mayhew, "A Brief Journal of My Visitation of the Pequot and Mohegin Indians," in *Some Correspondence Between the Governors and Treasurers of the New England Company in London and the Commissioners of the United Colonies of America, the Missionaries of the Company and Others, Between the Years 1657 and 1712, To Which are Added the Journals of the Rev. Experience Mayhew in 1713 and 1714* (London: Eliot Stock, 1897), 119.

[67]In "Extract from the Indian Journal, being the 6th Speech that was delivered to the Delaware Nation residing at Waupekummekut, or White River, on the 15th day of April 1803," *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* (April 1804): 468.

way…to live, and much easier than the ancient way." "I don't desire you to forsake your hunting, nor any of your wholesome customs" he assured them, but to flourish they had to become Christians:

> I must plainly tell you this simple truth, that if you will now, as a nation…follow that straight path, the great and good Spirit will bless you, that you will become a wise people, and you shall increase both in number and substance; consequently you will be happy indeed in this life and the life to come: and you will be able to hold your lands to the last generation.[68]

All of this and more must have been on Konkapot's mind as he pondered his options in 1734. Time was short, and a decision had to be made. His people's ancestral lands were slipping away. Their population was declining. Their ancient ways were not working anymore. Even their powwows confessed that they were no match for English Christians. Perhaps the time had come to try a new path. His people would not have to give up their Indian identities, and they could maintain their "wholesome customs." And most importantly, their children and grandchildren could have a future. Konkapot feared that his people might reject him. He might be reduced from a sachem to a pariah. But finally he made up his mind. He would lead his people to adopt the Puritan faith.

Word of Konkapot's decision reached Samuel Hopkins (1693–1755). He was pastor of the Congregational church in West Springfield, a relative of Jonathan Edwards, and the future chronicler of the Stockbridge experiment. Hopkins in turn reached out to John Stoddard, who met with Hopkins on March 11, 1734, to discuss the possibility of establishing a new praying town. Stoddard was elated by the prospect. Nothing like this had been attempted for decades, and "the *River Indians* were the largest *Tribe* of any near the *English* settlements." Better still, they had not yet come under the sway of the French. An English missionary could embed himself in the Mohican community and evangelize whole families at a time. "Children might be taught to read, and write, and be led into a Knowledge of the Principles of *Christianity*."[69]

There were other factors in play as well. Gathering the Housatonic-Mohicans into a praying town would open even more land for new English settlement. It would also provide a buffer between those new English settlements and the "French Indians" just beyond Mohican territory. And if the Mohicans should ever decide to switch allegiances and join with the French, they would be much easier to manage if their presence was confined to a single town, rather than being scattered up and down the entire river valley.[70] In short, "Bringing Christianity to

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[68]Ibid., 469.

[69]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 2–3.

[70]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 40.

the Housatonic Indians would be a victory for Massachusetts, for England, for Protestantism, and for Christ."[71]

Plans are Made

Encouraged by his meeting with Stoddard, Samuel Hopkins reached out next to the Rev. Stephen Williams of Springfield (1693–1782). Williams had firsthand experience with the Indians. As a young boy, he was among the captives taken at Deerfield in 1704. His mother was killed by the Indians *en route* to Canada. His younger sister, captured at just five years of age, grew up with the Indians. She married an Indian man and lived among them for the rest of her life.[72]

Williams wrote a letter to the Board of Commissioners of the New England Company in Boston, which was headed by the Governor of Massachusetts, Jonathan Belcher (1681–1757). In reply, Belcher and the Company told Williams that he and his colleagues should schedule a meeting with the Mohicans to find out how serious they were about receiving an English missionary.[73] As a show of goodwill, the Governor also decided to award Konkapot and Umpachenee with commissions in the colonial militia—the former granted the rank of captain, and the latter, lieutenant.[74]

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[71]Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 33; See also Colee, "The Housatonic-Stockbridge Indians," 70, 87, 122–23; Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 177. Jonathan Edwards addressed some of the political considerations involved in the Stockbridge mission in his 1752 letter to the London merchant Joseph Paice. Edwards wrote, in part, "The English have not only greatly failed of their duty in so neglecting the instruction of the Indians, but we have been extremely impolitic, and by our negligence in this matter have brought the whole British America into very difficult and dangerous circumstances, which I am much more sensible of since I have been in this place, where I have been now for about a twelvemonth, during which space I have had much acquaintance with many of the Iroquois or Six Nations (as we call them); and have had frequent conversation with some of their chiefs, who have a great acquaintance with the state of those nations, and the nations beyond them. While we have been asleep, our most dangerous and inveterate enemies, the French, have been awake; they have discerned and taken the advantages which we have overlooked and neglected, to our unspeakable, and as 'tis to be feared, irreparable damage" (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. George S. Claghorn [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998], 16:434–37).

[72]Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 17.

[73]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 3. Governor Belcher would have been pleased with the news. As early as 1730, he had suggested that the New England Company "ask the Massachusetts government to grant it a tract of land for a township 'that should be sufficient to receive a good Number of English & Indian inhabitants, & this Town to be settled at the Charge of the Company." He envisioned a town where a minister and schoolteacher would be employed for the spiritual and academic instruction of Indian youth and where various trades would be taught. "By these means they would soon be Civilized & more easily brought into the knowledge & esteem of the true Christian Religion," he said. On March 20, 1730, the Company accepted his idea and set aside £600 for building a church and school, £300 to encourage settlers, and additional money for the salaries of the minister and schoolteacher—significant sums of money at the time. See Kellaway, *The New England Company*, 269.

[74]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 3. Miles suggests this was done as a show of the colony's "good faith" ("The Red Man Dispossessed," 48). Colee suggests it may have

To receive their commissions, Konkapot and Umpachenee would need to travel to Springfield. There, on May 22, 1734, the newly minted Captain and Lieutenant met with Hopkins and Williams to discuss the possibility of establishing an English Puritan mission. It appears that Hopkins and Williams were able to allay some of Konkapot's concerns at the meeting, and even to spark his enthusiasm. By the end of their talk, Konkapot was "very desirous" to receive a missionary and was especially eager to see Mohican children begin learning the English language. Umpachenee maintained his reservations but determined he would not stand in the way. Both said they would need to confer with their tribe before rendering a final decision, however, so Hopkins and Williams agreed to visit again later that summer.[75]

Stephen Williams and the Rev. Nehemiah Bull of Westfield (1701–1740) visited Konkapot's village in July, and on July 8 met with Konkapot and Umpachenee to learn of the tribe's decision. The Indians requested four more days to deliberate, which their English visitors granted.[76] A letter from Williams to a Boston reader dated June 24, 1735, offers some insight into the Indians' discussion during those days of deliberation. Apparently, the Indians were deeply divided over the matter. Some were eager to try the Christian religion, while others wished to retain their ancient faith. In the end, the argument of an Indian called "Ebenezer" won the day: "Since my remembrance…there were Ten Indians, where there is now One: But the Christians greatly increase and multiply, and spread over the Land; let us therefore leave our former Courses and become Christians."[77]

On the fourth day, the Indians presented themselves to Williams and Bull to formally accept their offer of a Christian missionary. The Englishmen answered with a gift—a belt of wampum—as a token of their agreement.[78] Williams then went to Boston to meet with

been a reward for services rendered to the colony at some point, or perhaps it was a gesture designed to gain the favor of Mohicans ("The Housatonic-Stockbridge Indians," 128–29). Starna believes it was an "attempt to infuse direct rule over the Indians" (William A. Starna, *From Homeland to New Land: A History of the Mahican Indians* [Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013], 187). Unfortunately, no extant primary documents are available to answer the question definitively.

[75]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 3–4.

[76]Ibid., 4. Hopkins had contracted an illness shortly before the scheduled trip, so Nehemiah Bull took his place.

[77]Letter from Stephen Williams to a Boston reader, June 24, 1735, quoted in Nathaniel Appleton, *Gospel Ministers Made Fit to the Master's Use, and Prepared to Every Good Work, If They Would be Vessels unto Honor* (Boston: S. Kneeland & T. Green, 1735), iv. There does not appear to have been any discussion about the factual truthfulness or falsehood of the Christian gospel. Rather, every discussion centered on the perception that the Christian God was prospering his people, while their own gods were failing them. This offers an important insight into the Housatonic-Mohicans' worldview. Matters of religion were not decided on the basis of their perceived truthfulness or falsehood as in Puritan culture, but on perceived efficacy or inefficacy.

[78]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 4. Gifting a belt of wampum was a common gesture among the Mohicans for sealing a compact.

Governor Belcher and the Commissioners. On August 16, 1734, the secretary of the New England Company issued a letter to Williams and Bull on behalf of all the Commissioners. It instructed them "to use their endeavour for obtaining a suitable person to go & wride there as a Minister to instruct them & their children in Religion & in Reading & to preach the Gospel to them on the Sabbath."[79]

A Missionary is Chosen

Williams and Bull were immediately directed to John Sergeant, who was a former student of Jonathan Edwards, the valedictorian of the Yale class of 1729, and then employed as a tutor at Yale.[80] Sergeant was reported to have said "that he had rather be employ'd as a *Missionary* to the *Natives,* if a Door should open for it, than accept a Call any *English* Parish might give him."[81] They met him in New Haven in September to discuss the Mohican mission. Sergeant's response indicates that he was willing, but apprehensive, about the project. He would live among the Mohicans for three months, he said. If things went well, he would move there permanently.[82]

The Trial Run Begins

The Commissioners in Boston agreed to Sergeant's proposal and signed him up for a three-month trial period. Sergeant departed New Haven on October 8, 1734, rendezvoused with Nehemiah Bull in Westfield, and three days later headed with Bull to the Housatonic.

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[79]*At a Meeting of the Commissioners for the Indian Affairs at the Council Chamber in Boston, 1734, Aug. 16* (Edward E. Ayer Digital Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL).

[80]In his valedictory address, Sergeant said, "If…we have attained to any knowledge in the art of speaking, if our language be at all polished, if words drop from our tongues with smooth and easy cadence…to you [Jonathan Edwards] we owe it. If our reasoning power be at all improved, if we can think, if we can judge or reason justly of things, or, if lastly, we can cast our thoughts into a proper method and range them in just order, this is an evidence of your own skill in these things and of your faithful care in teaching us." And, "To you, dear sir, we owe, we acknowledge, our best acquirements." See *A Valedictorian Oration, by John Sergeant, Delivered at Yale College, In the Year 1729* (New York: Henry W. Turner, 1882), 23–24.

[81]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 5. It is possible that Jonathan Edwards himself relayed this information to Hopkins, Williams, and Bull.

[82]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 6–7. In his private journal, recorded in Hopkins, Sergeant wrote, "I was rather desirous…though I was sensible, I must not only lose a great many agreable Amusements of Life, especially in leaving my Business at *College,* which was the most agreable to me that could be; but also expose myself to many Fatigues and Hardships, and I know not to what Dangers, among a barbarous People. For indeed I should be asham'd to own myself a *Christian,* or even a *Man,* and yet utterly refuse doing what lay in my Power, to cultivate Humanity among a People naturally ingenious enough, but for Want of Instruction, living so much below the Dignity of human Nature; and to promote the *Salvation* of *Souls perishing in the Dark*, when the *Light of Life* is so near them."

They spent the first night of their journey under the stars and arrived the second day just before nightfall. According to Sergeant, they had travelled through "a most doleful Wilderness, and the worst Road, perhaps, that ever was rid."[83] Sergeant held his first meeting with the Indians on October 13. About twenty Mohicans gathered to hear him. Ebenezer served as translator. Sergeant noted that Konkapot was attentive throughout his sermon and that Umpachenee seemed pleased with it as well.[84]

Later that week Sergeant and Bull met in Umpachenee's wigwam where Bull examined Ebenezer's Christian profession. Ebenezer said that "he would rather burn in the Fire than forsake the Truth," signaling his strong commitment to the Christian faith. After a brief homily from Sergeant and a prayer from Bull, Ebenezer was baptized by Bull. He was the first baptized convert among the Housatonic-Mohicans.[85]

The following week, the Indians built a "*publick House*" to accommodate a church and school. From November 5 onward, Sergeant taught the children on weekdays and delivered sermons on Sundays. At the end of the first month, the Commissioners in Boston sent a full-time schoolteacher, Mr. Timothy Woodbridge—a great-grandson of John Eliot—to take charge of the school.[86] The Company also hired Ebenezer to serve as the official translator for Sergeant and Woodbridge at a salary of £15 per annum.[87] By mid-December, Sergeant's ninety-day trial period was over. He returned to New Haven and mailed a

[83]Ibid., 8. A road had been cut through the wilderness to the Housatonic after the English colonists had purchased the land from the Mohicans. However, as Sergeant's comments indicate, it was not yet a well-travelled road as western Massachusetts was still part of the frontier.

[84]Ibid. Unfortunately, Sergeant's first sermon to the Mohicans is not extant. We simply have a journal entry, recorded in Hopkins, which says, "I adapted my Discourse, as well as I could, to their Capacities and Manner of Thinking."

[85]At his baptism, Ebenezer offered the following testimony: "Through the Goodness of God towards me, in bringing me into the Way of the Knowledge of the Gospel, I am convinc'd of the Truth of the Christian Religion, and that it is the only Way that leads to Salvation and Happiness. I therefore freely, and heartily, forsake Heathenish Darkness, and embrace the Light of the Gospel, and the Way of Holiness. And do now, in Presence of Almighty God, the Searcher of Hearts, and before many Witnesses, seriously and solemnly take the Lord Jehovah, to be my god and Portion, Jesus Christ his Son to be my Lord Redeemer; and the Holy Ghost to be my Sanctifier and Teacher. And do Covenant and Promise, by the Help of divine Grace, that I will cleave to the Lord with Purpose of Heart, believing his revealed Truths, as far as I can gain the Knowledge of them, obeying his Commands, both those which mark out my Duty, and those that forbid Sin, sincerely and uprightly to the End of my Life" (Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 9). The wording suggests that it was probably written for him by Sergeant or Bull, and then he recited it.

[86]Woodbridge used Isaac Watts's catechism for religious instruction. See "Letter from Stephen Williams to a Boston reader," in *Gospel Ministers*, iv. On Woodbridge's connection to the "River Gods" and to John Eliot, see Louis Mitchell, *The Woodbridge Record: Being an Account of the Descendants of the Rev. John Woodbridge, of Newbury, Mass.* (New Haven, 1883), 32, 59–60.

[87]Colee, "The Housatonic-Stockbridge Indians," 152.

report to the Boston Commissioners. He reported thirty persons attending worship on Sundays and twenty-five students attending school on weekdays.[88] Sergeant was encouraged, and so were the Commissioners.

A Decision is Reached

While Sergeant was away, the Mohicans held a meeting with the leaders of their confederacy to share what had been taking place. Against precedent, the Housatonic-Mohicans had not consulted with their kinsmen along the Hudson, nor with any of the other neighboring tribes before welcoming a Christian missionary. This was a breach in protocol that risked fracturing their entire alliance. Some Indians were so upset that "a Design" was allegedly afoot "to poison the *Captain* and *Lieutenant*."[89]

Even so, Konkapot, Umpachenee, and most of the other Housatonic-Mohicans decided to continue moving forward, and on January 15, 1735, they met with Stephen Williams, Samuel Hopkins, and Jonathan Ashley of Westfield (1678–1749) to make the arrangement permanent. A letter from John Stoddard was read to the Indians, their questions and concerns were addressed, and a final decision was reached: a Mohican praying town would be established. The Mohicans would be gone from February through March "to make the Year's Stock of *Sugar,*" but they promised to return by the end of April.[90]

In May, Konkapot, Umpachenee, and several other Mohicans travelled to New Haven to visit Sergeant, who gave them a tour of Yale College. Sergeant accompanied the Indians back to the Housatonic on May 10, preached on the 11th, and said goodbye again as the Indians left for the summer to plant corn and beans. In a letter dated June 3, 1735, Sergeant told the Boston Commissioner Benjamin Coleman that he was ready to devote his life to the Housatonic-Mohicans. He also expressed his wish to retain Woodbridge as schoolteacher, to receive a pay increase, and to be ordained so he could start administering the sacraments.[91] Coleman wrote back to Sergeant in a letter dated June 18. He said, "You are high in the Heart of Governor *Belcher*, and to all the *Commissioners.*" He let Sergeant know that he would likely receive a pay raise and would be ordained.[92]

After graduation exercises at Yale, Sergeant made the journey to the Housatonic once more. Konkapot was the only person to attend religious services for several weeks as many of the Mohican men were in New York harvesting crops for the Dutch. On August 13th, Sergeant received a letter from the Boston Commissioners informing him that he

[88]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 16–18.

[89]Ibid., 21.

[90]Ibid., 25. The reference is to maple sugar, a staple of the Mohican diet.

[91]Ibid., 29.

[92]Ibid., 30–31.

would be ordained in Deerfield later that month. The site of an infamous massacre would now become the commissioning site for a new Indian praying town.[93]

A Treaty is Ratified

The proceedings began on Wednesday, August 27, 1735. A large tent was erected for the week's festivities. The British flag waved outside, and a large table was set inside. Governor Belcher, members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and a number of spectators gathered inside the tent.[94] On August 28 they met with Konkapot and a contingent of Housatonic-Mohican Indians. Governor Belcher said to them, "I look upon you as my Children, and hope you are good Subjects of King GEORGE. I shall always take the same Care of you as of the English, and take you under my protection at all times." Konkapot replied, "We are come here to pay Our Respects to the Governor, and hear what the Governor has to say to Us." A few more words were exchanged, and then they all drank to King George's health.[95]

On Friday, August 29, Belcher met again with Konkapot and the other Mohican representatives. Konkapot requested that the day's deliberations be transcribed in "short sentences" so they could have a permanent record of their conversations. Konkapot may have been eager to welcome a Christian missionary, but experience had also taught him to be wary of the Massachusetts government. After the governor agreed, Konkapot began to speak: "We thank Your Excellency as Our Father, that we have received Your Kindness and Love, and we would express Our Duty and Subjection to Our Rightful Sovereign King GEORGE, whom we pray GOD long to preserve." "We are desirous to receive the Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST; and hope that Our Hearts are in what we say, and that we don't speak only out of our Lips."[96]

Konkapot also expressed his concerns for his people. How would they be treated by the English? Would they be subjected to debtors' prisons? Would their children be enslaved? He insisted that the governor promise, in writing, that their children and grandchildren would not be mistreated. Belcher pledged to give Konkapot his answer the next day. In the meantime, Belcher hoped they would accept "a parcel of *Deer Skins*" as a show of his good faith. He closed by telling the Indians that avoiding strong drink would also protect them from "being imposed on or defrauded by any body."[97]

Governor Belcher, Konkapot, and the other Mohicans met again

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[93]Ibid., 32.

[94]*At a Conference Held at Deerfield in the County of Hampshire, the Twenty Seventh Day of August 1735* (Boston: 1735), 2.

[95]Ibid., 4–5.

[96]Ibid., 10.

[97]Ibid., 11–12.

on Saturday, August 30. Belcher responded to the previous day's concerns by explaining that the English had laws on the books already to protect the Indians against injustice. If a grievance ever did arise, they should take it up with John Stoddard. Belcher also said,

> It rejoices my Heart above all things that you are desirous to know and understand the Gospel of Our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is GOD as well as Man, and the only SAVIOR of all Men; by the Knowledge of His Glorious Gospel, and by living in Obedience to it, you will become good Subjects to the KING of Kings, and be led in the Way to be happy here, and eternally so in a better World.[98]

He also informed Konkapot that he was petitioning the Massachusetts General Assembly for a parcel of land where the Mohicans could settle "more conveniently and compact." Konkapot replied, "We can't but thank you for the Love and Care you have taken of us as to Our Knowledge of the Gospel." After drinking to King George's health, the meeting was adjourned.[99] An ordination council was held for John Sergeant to determine his fitness for gospel ministry. The council judged him fit and recommended his ordination.

An Ordination is Conducted

August 31, 1735, was both the Lord's Day and John Sergeant's ordination day. Attendees included Governor Belcher, members of his council, a contingent of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and several spectators. The Mohicans all sat together in the gallery of the Deerfield meetinghouse with representatives from several other Indian tribes present as well. The Rev. Nathaniel Appleton (1693–1784) preached the ordination sermon. His message was based on 1 Timothy 2:21 and entitled, "Gospel Ministers Made Fit to the Master's Use."[100] Addressing Sergeant directly, he said, "Don't be ashamed of the outward meanness of the apartment the master has assigned you in his house: and don't be discouraged at the difficulties you may have in the prospect of; but let those gracious words of Christ, LO I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS be a comfort to you." To the Indians, he said,

> Behold the man, the messenger of the Lord of hosts, that is coming unto you…. See then that you love him, and that you esteem him very highly in love for his works sake; and that you come to him to be instructed by him: that you hearken to his counsels, and observe his directions, and follow his example wherein he follows Christ. And this is the way for you to be happy here, and for ever hereafter.[101]

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[98]Ibid., 14–15.

[99]Ibid., 15–16.

[100]The sermon was subsequently published as Nathaniel Appleton, *Gospel Ministers Made Fit to the Master's Use, and Prepared to Every Good Work, If They Would be Vessels unto Honor* (Boston: S. Kneeland & T. Green, 1735).

[101]Appleton, *Gospel Ministers*, 26–27. Frazier notes that the total cost of the

The Experiment Begins

The months following Sergeant's ordination were a flurry of activity. Konkapot was baptized on November 2 and given a new name: John.[102] His wife was baptized and named Mary, and his eldest daughter was baptized too. Five days later, Sergeant performed a Christian wedding ceremony for Ebenezer and Sarah, who had already been married according to Mohican custom but were eager to show their commitment to English Puritan ways. On Sunday, November 9, the rest of Konkapot's family members were baptized, as was Ebenezer's son. Umpachenee was finally baptized on November 16 and given the name Aaron. His wife was baptized and named Hannah. By the end of the year, roughly forty Housatonic-Mohican Indians had been baptized and added to the church.[103] The mission was underway.

Conclusion

This essay has recounted how English Puritanism gained a foothold in the Mohican community that would form the core of the Stockbridge mission. It revealed that the Mohican Indians themselves took the initiative, through their leader Konkapot, upon realizing that the *status quo* was no longer tenable for the Mohican people. While their first missionary was selected by Massachusetts, both sides were agreeable to the arrangement such that the trial period ended with a mutual decision to move forward with a permanent praying town. Mohican Indians attended Sergeant's ordination service at Deerfield and within months a Christian congregation was meeting for worship with several dozen baptized Indians in attendance. These Indians also began sending their children to school for English and catechetical instruction, and some Indians, like Ebenezer and his wife, began selectively appropriating elements of English Puritan culture. In short, by 1735 a community was taking shape in western Massachusetts which was determined to be both Christian *and* Indian, with a decidedly Puritan orientation.

More to the point, this essay has demonstrated that Stockbridge was no mere "dot in the wilderness," as some early Edwards scholars alleged. To the contrary, the mission was a matter of great colonial interest. Not only was the evangelization of Indians part of the Massachusetts Bay

Deerfield conference came to £3000. "If cost were an indication of the importance attached to the treaty," he writes, "the Indians had reason to be impressed" (*The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 35).

[102]Colonial missionaries were quick to give Indians new Christian names, typically at the time of their baptism. There were philosophical as well as practical reasons for this. Philosophically, it was part of the larger program of "civilizing" the Indians. Practically, the English colonists found Indian names difficult to pronounce. As far as the Indians themselves were concerned, "if assuming a short European name would make it easier to deal with the increasingly dominant invaders, many natives were willing to make the change, especially if around their own fires they were still known by their Indian names" (Axtell, *The European and the Indian*, 55).

[103]Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs*, 34–38.

charter, but many colonists also considered it vital for receiving divine favor and securing the English foothold in the New World. The fact that Stockbridge was the first real Indian evangelization effort in decades only added to its importance.

Stockbridge's significance is further established by the fact that the Governor of Massachusetts himself, along with members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and leading figures like John Stoddard personally participated in its launch. Given these realities, it is an error to interpret Edwards's 1751 move to Stockbridge as "a great step down in the world." Instead, it should be understood as a move consistent with a man of his standing. Though not as large as his Northampton parish, Stockbridge was at the nexus of colonial politics, military strategy, and missionary endeavor in the New World and was thus a place not only worthy of an eminent minister but also one where that minister would be expected to give his best effort.