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Captain Pierce's Fight: An Investigation Into a King Philip's War Battle and its Remembrance and Memorialization

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CAPTAIN PIERCE'S FIGHT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO A KING PHILIP'S WAR
BATTLE AND ITS REMEMBRANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION

A Thesis Presented

by

LAWRENCE K. LaCROIX

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2011

Historical Archaeology Program

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ABSTRACT

CAPTAIN PIERCE'S FIGHT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO A KING PHILIP'S WAR BATTLE AND ITS REMEMBRANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION

December 2011

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On March 26, 1676 Native Americans from southern New England overran a company of Plymouth Colony militia, handing the English one of their worst defeats during King Philip's War. This study was concerned with the reconstruction of the Pierce Battle, as it has come to be known, and its eventual memorialization. The study's two main research questions were: First, to what extent did a complete and critical examination of the primary and secondary sources change, support, or add to the commonly accepted battle perspective? Second, in what ways did a contextual analysis of King Philip's War monuments in Rhode Island add to our cultural and social knowledge about how collective memory of an event is created, redefined, or forgotten?

DEDICATION

For my wife, Joyce, whose support and encouragement is boundless

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA	17
Providence Plantations and Rehoboth	19
The Lands in 1676	22
3. PIERCE BATTLE	27
Captain Pierce's Command	36
The Battle	47
Combat Behavior	56
Cause and Effect	60
4. REMEMBRANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION	68
Colonial Remembrance	70
Rhode Island Celebrations and Monuments	74
The Pierce Monument	79
Great Swamp Fight	89
Monuments Today	93
Native American Remembrance	97
A Narragansett Revival	102
The Narragansett Today	109
5. CONCLUSIONS	120
APPENDIX	
A. CAPTAIN ANDREW EDMONDS	127
B. NINE MEN'S MISERY	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY	141

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map of Rhode Island showing location of study area.	2
2. Map of Rhode Island, 1636-1659. (Cady 1937)	20
3. Dedication of Peirce and Hill Monument. (<i>Providence Journal</i> 1936)	88
4. Peirce and Hill Monument, Goddard Park. (Photo by author, 2008)	88
5. Pierce Monument at Macomber Field, Central Falls, RI. (Photo by author)	95

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By late March of 1676 the Indian conflict commonly referred to by English settlers as King Philip's War had been raging in southern New England for almost nine months.¹ During the preceding weeks, Indian attacks on colonial villages had occurred with such rapidity that it led the poet Benjamin Tompson to plead "when shall this shower of blood be over? When? Quickly we pray, oh, Lord!" (1999:229). On the twenty-sixth of that March, a combined troop of more than seventy colonists and their Indian allies, charged with protecting the western frontier towns of Plymouth Colony, pursued a small group of warriors across the Pawtucket River into the north woods of Providence Plantations. Company commander Michael Pierce appeared unaware or unconcerned that the enemy favored the tactics of stealth and ambush. The command was quickly surrounded and all but destroyed. With little remaining opposition, hostile

¹ Throughout this history dates have been modernized. Whether quotations are in original form or modernized depends on the source. Seventeenth-century place names that are no longer in use are followed in parenthesis by the current nomenclature. In addition, English speaking inhabitants are often referred to as English, which was common usage during the colonial period. The widely accepted term Indian is used to reference the Native population when tribal affiliation is questionable.

Indians burned the nearby towns of Rehoboth and Providence to the ground over the next three days.

After the sounds of battle subsided, one can only guess if any of the warriors responsible for such a stunning colonial defeat realized that this victory would be the last of significance they would ever celebrate. By August the Native population, heavily outnumbered and weakened by disease and starvation, had little choice but to accept the inevitable and throw themselves on the less than sympathetic mercy of the colonies.

King Philip's War began in southern Massachusetts in June of 1675 when the Wampanoag, under the leadership of Metacomet, rose up against the dominance of their English neighbors.² Before long other tribes, including the Nipmuck, Narragansett, Pocomtucks, and Abenaki joined the struggle (Lepore 1998:7). Responding to the hostilities, the colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth and Connecticut aligned themselves against the Indian threat (Malone 1993:2,105). Rhode Island and Providence Plantations generally managed to keep out of the conflict militarily and initially attempted to negotiate a more peaceful settlement.³ At least one author (Weeks 1920:245) has argued that this conciliatory approach would have minimized the uprising if more widely adopted. The colony's less than total commitment to the war did not, however, spare the inhabitants from the depredations of the ensuing conflict. As the war progressed, isolated

² Metacomet was commonly referred to as King Philip or simply Philip by the English settlers.

³ Rhode Island's official name is Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. During colonial times Providence Plantations consisted of the state's mainland and Rhode Island referred to the island of Portsmouth and Newport.

attacks and skirmishes forced most of the mainland inhabitants to seek shelter in the communities of Portsmouth and Newport. Such aggression eventually persuaded the colony to provide some unofficial naval and troop support to the military effort (LaFantaise 1988:726).

Battle histories have traditionally been popular subjects for historical research and study. Yet, most of King Philip's War battles remain poorly researched. The Pierce Battle, or the Battle of Seekonk Plain as it was first known, is an excellent example. Despite being one of the United Colonies worst defeats, the event elicited relatively minor consideration in the contemporary literature. In fact, Increase Mather (1999:113), who wrote one of the most noted chronologies on the war, devoted little more than a paragraph to the event. The causes contributing to the scarcity of documentation are relatively straightforward. A large part of the problem stems from the timing of the engagement. During the winter of 1676 the colonies were under great stress and despair from continuous attacks. Such hardship left little time to investigate each individual event before a subsequent tragedy presented itself. The resulting chaos also affected the quality of many of Plymouth Colony's town and government records. Invaluable documents, especially those related to troop movements and death records, were in many cases not accurately compiled or destroyed by the ravages of war. Over succeeding generations, historians of the war, when alluding to specific events surrounding the Pierce Battle, usually worked from these less than inclusive records and accounts. Little concerted effort has been made to more fully investigate and understand the battle by

incorporating more elusive primary source material such as personal letters, official correspondence, and town records.

Failure to continue document-based research has also enabled speculation and hearsay to make their way into various accounts. This proclivity to rely on local tradition to supplement gaps in the historic record was not uncommon, especially during the nineteenth century (Backus 1872; Bliss 1836). As one historian (Campbell 1978:67) has pointed out, once a myth becomes ingrained in the collective thought process as a truth, it is not easily rectified. Henry Gipson, in his history of the French and Indian War, was even more explicit when he wrote that “the supreme mission of the historian is to determine the truth of the past - in so far as this is humanly possible - and to do so with detachment. Behind this mission stands the assumption that in so far as tradition has turned its back upon reality, upon historical truth, it cannot be wholly good - and may be wholly bad” (1946:4).

It could be argued that the research problems endemic to the Pierce Battle were also responsible, at least in part, for the failure of King Philip’s War to attract earlier regional interest. Nonetheless, in the late nineteenth century a growing movement arose throughout southern New England to designate significant historical sites. It was during this period that numerous monuments were erected to celebrate the colonial victory over King Philip. The motivation and support influencing individual site selection varied. What they all held in common, however, was that the majority of the memorials were inconspicuous and consisted mostly of small plaques or markers (Schultz 1999).

Over the past decade, significant research has been conducted into the meaning and process of memorialization in reference to the United States' most popular battle sites (Linenthal 1991; Shackel 2000, 2002; Rubertone 2008). On the other hand, small marginal sites, such as those associated with King Philip's War, have received little academic attention. That a site may not hold a highly visible public profile does not necessarily imply that the fundamental processes of remembrance are any more linear or uncomplicated. It may, in fact, allow for a more intimate investigation into many fundamental and relevant questions dealing with the conceptual process of memorialization. Patricia E. Rubertone argues that even unexceptional monuments, through spatial overwriting, often serve to "construct certain memories at the expense of others, ostensibly curtailing the possibility of alternative and new experiences and memories coincident with the place of memorialization" (2008:15).

Despite inherent difficulties, the Pierce Battle contains important elements that contribute to studies concerning King Philip's War and the broader topic of memorialization. The major strength of the battle documentation is that it provides a detailed early example of the New England Indian's unique style of warfare. Such insight makes it possible to more fully address questions related to battle location, logistics, and warrior affiliation. The information may be used to challenge misconceptions, and evaluate local tradition. The battle's contributions to Native American history is further enhanced by the fact that in order for the Indians to execute their battle plan a very distinctive combination of salient features had to be present. This requirement allows site

specific references from the documentary record to be compared with the topography of the lower Blackstone River, therein enabling analysis at one level to assist in explanations at another.

Another particular benefit of the research lies in the opportunity to track the sequence of activity of both the English and Native American forces over the five-day period immediately preceding and following the actual battle. Such material adds insight into the examination of events related to the engagement, such as the continual misjudgment of colonial commanders in assessing their own strengths and weaknesses and the Native Americans' motivation for scouting the particular area around the towns of Rehoboth and Providence.

Evidence can also be found regarding the tactical adaptations the English made to their military strategy in an effort to counteract the stealthy manner of Native American warfare. Most notable was the fact that Captain Pierce's command was reinforced with friendly Indians, an option that only weeks earlier Plymouth Colony was reluctant to include. The ability of friendly Indians to locate enemy warriors in the backcountry allowed the colonists to adjust their earlier reliance on fortified houses and attempt to locate the warriors before they could besiege towns and capture livestock. This strategy forced warriors to stay on the move and made the procurement of food and shelter more difficult. Debate persists whether such changes were directly related to the gradual Americanization of the colonial army (Malone 1993, Starkey 1998) or, as Guy Chet (2003:xiv) argued, simply adjustments in a continuing reliance on European military

tradition. Nonetheless, they were critical to fully understanding how a war of attrition should be fought (Starkey 1998:68).

The establishment of a memorial to Captain Pierce affords the opportunity to expand the current body of knowledge concerning the dynamics upon which small installations are conceived and the collective memory that they are intended to convey. It also sheds light on the processes by which individuals and groups with diverse ideological convictions question and compete for symbolic ownership, as well as how the process of veneration affects the popular view of a place history. For example, the planning and installation process for the Pierce Monument was principally motivated by ancestral veneration, as evidenced by the selection committee that was composed largely of Michael Pierce descendants. The content of the dedication speeches was clearly meant to establish a collective memory of Captain Pierce as a commander who represented the gallantry of his company and whose values and sacrifices laid the foundation upon which the United States was eventually built (Bicknell 1908; Providence Journal [PJ] 1928:3; Department of Public Schools 1936:48). According to Paul A. Shackel (2001:2) it is this very practice of shaping and agreeing upon what to remember that builds collective memory.

While the selectivity of the founding members simplified commemoration, it was not without significant inherent problems. Such limited representation also placed greater responsibility on each individual to actively support and reinforce the collective memory. A failure to do so allowed the ideological goal of the initial speakers to become

ambiguous and created opportunities for diverse individuals and groups to successfully reshape, challenge, or ignore the monument's original intent.

The study of memorialization is further strengthened by the opportunity to contrast the Pierce Monument with that of the Great Swamp Fight, which also took place in Providence Plantations. On 19 December 1675 soldiers from the United Colonies attacked a Narragansett stronghold in what is today South Kingstown. Long celebrated as a great colonial victory, the episode has more recently been criticized for the questionable motivation behind the attack and the horrifying lack of compassion for non-combatants (Bourne 1990:159-160; Lepore 1998:88-89; Starkey 1998-76). The two installations were erected almost simultaneously and although championed by different interest groups, the foundational process at both sites was remarkably similar. A significant difference, however, exists in how Native Americans have elected to interact with the installations. At the Great Swamp Fight Monument the Narragansett have made a concerted public effort to redirect the memorial's symbolism to their advantage and therein establish a community consciousness. At the same time Native Americans have outwardly ignored any association with the Pierce site, although the absence of demonstration does not necessarily signify indifference to the battle monument or landscape. As Patricia Rubertone (2008:25-26) has recently suggested, the various reasons for appropriation are complex and public displays offer only a fraction of the possible ways by which Native Americans engage with a landscape.

This study is concerned with the Pierce Battle and its eventual memorialization. The study involves two main research issues. The first is concerned with the degree to which a critical reexamination of primary and secondary source material relating to the Pierce Battle supports or challenges currently accepted facts related to battle dynamics, warrior affiliation, and local tradition, and helps ferret out the movements and possible motivation of the two adversaries immediately preceding the battle. The second relates to the extent a contextual analysis of King Philip's War monuments in Rhode Island may add to our cultural and social knowledge regarding the inspiration behind which these memorials were conceived, the collective memory they intended to convey and the processes by which individuals and groups of diverse ideological convictions have questioned and competed for symbolic ownership of the memorials.

I researched the Pierce Battle using primary source narratives, autobiographies, governmental documents, town records, and personal letters. While some of this material was published during, or shortly after, the war and attracted a popular following, the major share did not come to light until the 20th century. The strength of the material lies in the fact that the evidence was collected from colonists who were well placed to have secured their information. Additional confidence is derived from the capacity to corroborate accounts, to varying degrees, with supporting evidence. Inconsistencies are noted as such and evaluated to the extent documentation would allow. Since the Native Americans left no written account of their experiences, the Pierce Battle was formulated exclusively from an English perspective. Consequently, biases such as personal agendas,

religious interpretations, condemnation of the enemy, cultural misunderstandings and assigning blame must be considered. Throughout the study I have attempted to single out such instances and provide relevant explanations and a historical perspective.

The most descriptive and frequently noted information on the Pierce Battle is found in William Hubbard's *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England*. Hubbard was one of the most prominent chroniclers of King Philip's War. His account of the Pierce engagement, while not complete, recounted details relevant to the makeup of the command, circumstances surrounding the ambush, battle details, and topographical landmarks critical to the battle's placement. Hubbard also praised the loyalty and contributions of the friendly Indians attached to the command and recounted a number of their escape strategies.

The extent of Hubbard's knowledge is not surprising. While Hubbard's (2002a: 16) statement that his information was "gathered out of letters, or taken from the mouths of such as were eye or ear witnesses of the things themselves" must be taken critically, his detailed account was the only one honored by the General Court at Boston (Mass Bay Records 1682:378.5). His narrative was first published in Boston in 1677 and a revised second edition was printed in London later that same year. It is imperative that in referencing the Pierce Battle one should consult the author's London edition, which corrects earlier printing errors and adds additional pertinent information. The most useful reprint is Samuel G. Drake's (1865) *The History of the Indian Wars in New England - From the First Settlement to the Termination of the War with King Philip, in 1677*.

Two additional sources supply important details not found in Hubbard's work, although the authors only briefly allude to the battle. The first is a letter written by a Boston merchant, Nathaniel Saltonstall, to an acquaintance in London during July of 1676. As well as offering battle particulars, Saltonstall describes how news of the defeat was first received in Boston by post from Dedham. It is most probable that the information contained in the letter from Dedham was obtained from company survivors (Native American and English) who had escaped to Woodcock's garrison, which was situated along the Old Post Road. Whether Saltonstall gathered his information directly from the dispatch, talked to participants, or received it second hand is impossible to tell.

Secondly, in 1716, Thomas Church, in assumed collaboration with his father Captain Benjamin Church, wrote *Entertaining Passages Related to King Philip's War*. Possibly the most popular account of the war, Thomas's narrative went through many editions, with later edited volumes credited to Benjamin (Dexter, 1865; Alan and Mary Simpson 1975). The biography did much to enhance the Captain Church's image and, no doubt, had much to do with his being considered the "father of the United States special forces" (Heffner 1989:3). Thomas Church wrote that his father was first offered command of Pierce's company but refused the commission when Plymouth's war council would not agree to his demands for additional soldiers and friendly Indians. His reflections provide insight into the organization of the company and offer clues as to Captain Pierce's movements after his departure from Plymouth. While Church may have embellished his account of this incident as a means of enhancing his own reputation, his

statements are fundamentally consistent with the records of Plymouth Bay and the eventual makeup of the command.

A collection of letters written by townspeople from Providence and Rehoboth adds information that sets the Pierce Battle apart from all others during the Indian winter offensive of 1676. The importance of the material lies in the fact that both towns were within three miles of the battle site (and each other) and that residents and information traveled frequently between the two. Roger Williams who was the founder of Providence and its elder statesman, wrote such a letter to his brother (Williams 1988:720-724). He describes the burning of Providence and a conversation he had with a number of Indian leaders in an effort to limit the pending damage. The letter outlines the size of the warriors' force, their intended strategy, the general location of the battle, and the names of warriors that might possibly have participated in that battle. The letter first became known in 1968 and although its authenticity has not been positively established (LaFantasie 1988:717), that a conversation took place is supported by Nathaniel Saltonstall (1913:87a) and Noah Newman (Bowen 1948:9).

William Harris, also from Providence, was a well known and influential figure in the colony's affairs. Sometime during the summer of 1676, Harris wrote two letters to acquaintances in London detailing the ongoing conflict. These letters were published by the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1902 and 1963 respectively (Harris 1902). Although Harris had probably removed himself to the safety of Newport, as did the vast majority of other residents, the author would have had ample time and opportunity over

the following months to communicate with people who had first or secondhand knowledge of the incident. Despite Douglas Leach's (1963:11) suggestion that Harris could well have had a selfish motive in writing the letters, the information he provided is largely supported by other primary accounts.

Indispensable to the battle examination are two letters that the Reverend Noah Newman wrote to a friend shortly after Pierce's defeat. Rev. Newman was the minister in Rehoboth, where Captain Pierce's command was garrisoned and where at least one soldier returned following the defeat. As a result, the reverend was able to recount the names of many of the soldiers, a brief skirmish on the evening of March 25, 1676, and the burial of the dead, an event in which he participated. Newman's letters remained in private hands until about 1831, when they were donated to the Antiquarian Society of Worcester (Newman 1676a; Bowen 1948:15-19). Unfortunately, to date no letter has been uncovered in which Newman describes the actual battle. Philip Walker, a town constable and a deacon in Noah Newman's church, also resided in Rehoboth. Walker wrote the lengthy poem *Captan Perse and his Coragios Company* sometime between March 26 and May 30, 1676, in which he criticized Captain Pierce's lack of experience.

Beginning in the mid 1800s, a number of documents and records were published that provide highly valuable information regarding the battle's history. These include the *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England* (1856), *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (1858), and the *Early Records of the Town of Providence* (1892). In addition, George Madison Bodge (1906) compiled an impressive

collection of primary source material which contains the correspondences of officers and military committees. Richard Bowen (1948) transcribed and printed many of Rehoboth's town records, along with many personal letters for the period under consideration.

Finally, more recent material indispensable to this study consists of critical overviews of the war (Leach 1995; Vaughan 1965; Bourne 1991; Lepore 1998; Philbrick 2006) and additional research in the areas of use and development of European military techniques (Starkey 1998), introduction of unlimited warfare (Grenier 2005; Starkey 1998), Americanization of warfare (Chet 2003), disparities in technology (Malone 1993), and military incompetence (Dixon 1976).

Site specific information pertaining to the planning, installation and early commemoration of Rhode Island's King Philip's War monuments was assembled principally from the publications of the Rhode Island Society of Colonial Wars, the Rhode Island Historical Society, and the *Providence Journal*. Accounts of the sale of Indian captives at the conclusion of King Philip's War were obtained from the *Early Records of the Town of Providence* (1892). Local histories of significance include works by John Daggett (1834), Leonard Bliss (1836), Thomas W. Bicknell (1893,1920,1908) and Sidney Rider (1904). More generalized studies of commemoration include Edward Tabor Linenthal (1991), Paul A. Shackel (2001), and Patricia E. Rubertone (2008). Specific publications that also influenced this study include Jill Lepore's (1998) *The Name of War*, which investigates how the English and Native Americans differed in their perception and interpretation of the war. Finally, a Native American perspective on the

commemoration process was gathered from the publication *Narragansett Dawn* (1935-36). More recent observations were drawn from yearly tribal commemorations held at the Great Swamp Fight Monument.

The next chapter presents a historical overview of the general area that is commonly associated with the Pierce Battle and its aftermath. Chapter three is concerned with an examination of the Pierce Battle using primary source material and more recent research. Chapter four investigates the memorialization of the Pierce Battle and other King Philip War monuments throughout Rhode Island.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

To make full use of the historic documents associated with the Pierce Battle, it is important to have a clear understanding of the settlements, demographics and general topography of the northeastern sector of Rhode Island as it appeared in June of 1675, at the onset of King Philip's War. Today this area encompasses the cities of Providence, East Providence, and Pawtucket along with the towns of Cumberland and Lincoln (Figure 1). It is difficult for anyone familiar with this sector of the Blackstone Valley, with its dense, urban development, to visualize that it once consisted of two small villages and a few scattered individual farmsteads.

The most notable topographical features of this study area are the Blackstone and Seekonk rivers that in 1676 divided Plymouth Colony on the east from Providence Plantations on the west.⁴ The Blackstone River rises near Worcester, Massachusetts and enters Rhode Island through the city of Woonsocket. For most of its journey it flows in a southeasterly direction toward the city of Pawtucket where, after surging over Pawtucket Falls, it merges with the Seekonk River. The Seekonk is a tidal river that eventually joins

⁴ During much of the early settlement years, the two rivers were collectively known as the Pawtucket River.

with Narragansett Bay just south of Providence, Rhode Island. It was this watery boundary that served to divide the Native American nations of the Narragansett and Wampanoag (Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission [RIHPC] 1978:5), although both nations may dispute the accuracy of such arbitrary limits.

The first English settler in this territory was William Blackstone (1595-1675), or Blaxton as William himself signed his name. Born in Durham County, England, Blackstone graduated from Emanuel College and was ordained into the Anglican Church. In 1623 the minister immigrated to New England, where he constructed the first permanent dwelling on Shawmut Peninsula, which is today the city of Boston, Massachusetts (Grieve 1897:15). Likely motivated by his preference for religious nonconformity and solitude, Blackstone relocated during 1634 to the western reaches of Plymouth Colony Patent along the river that presently bears his name. His property would eventually become part of the town of Rehoboth, when that particular community was expanded by the North Purchase in 1661 (Daggett 1973:5; Bowen 1950:2). Blackstone's home, which he called Study Hall, was not a settlement but an isolated farmstead. In 1650 William Blackstone (Early Records Town of Providence [ERTP] 1892:2.9) also acquired 60 acres of upland pasture on the opposite bank, which by that date was part of Providence Plantations. Such an arrangement was feasible because Blackstone's home was situated along a shallow section of river that, except in times of very high water, was easily forded.

At the age of 64 Blackstone married Sarah Stevenson of Boston, a widow 30 years his junior. Sarah had five children by her first marriage but it appears only one son, John Stevenson, resided at Study Hill. Blackstone's marriage produced one son. Sarah died in June of 1673 (Lind 1993:45-48). Blackstone himself died in May 1675, just a month before the onset of King Philip's War.

Providence Plantations and Rehoboth

The first settlement in the area was established by Roger Williams and a small band of followers during the spring of 1636 (Figure 2). Roger Williams (1604?-1683) was born in London, where he was also ordained into the Church of England. He eventually became a dissenter and joined the Puritan movement before immigrating to Massachusetts Bay in 1631 (Grieve 1897:23). It wasn't long before Williams' radical religious views fell into disfavor with the authorities in his adopted home. During the winter of 1635-36, Williams left his home in Salem to avoid arrest and deportation and attempted to establish a settlement along the east bank of the Seekonk River, just five miles south of William Blackstone (Bicknell 1920:144). Plymouth Colony, equally unhappy with the dissenter, soon forced Williams out of its territory.

That spring the wandering band of nomads crossed over to the west side of the Seekonk River and founded the town of Providence along the Great Salt Cove, where the Providence and Moshassuck rivers merge (Bowen 1950:2). Providence, like many early townships, initially comprised large tracks of land that over the centuries were subdivided

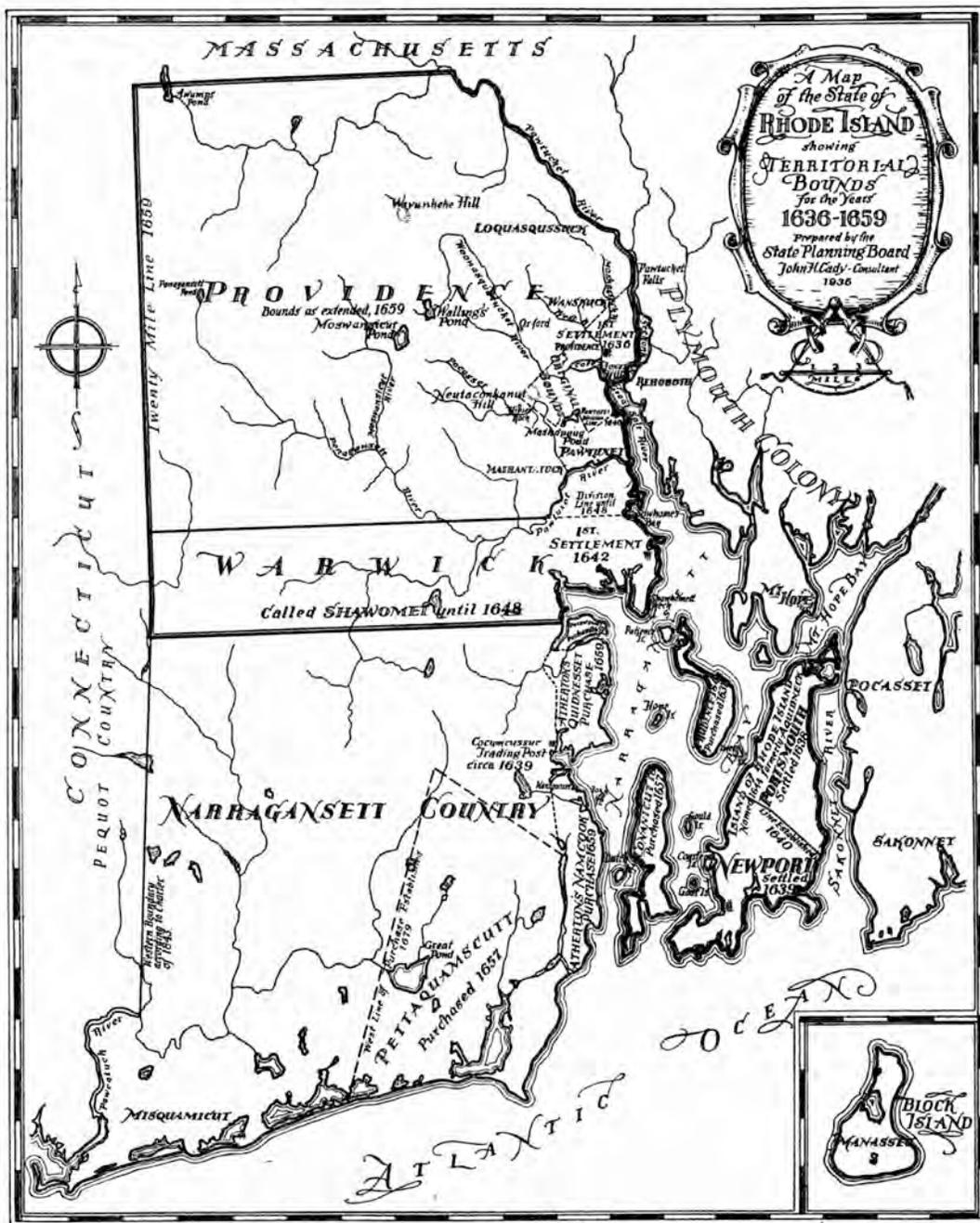


Figure 2. Map of Rhode Island 1636-1659. (Cady 1937)

into numerous municipalities. Included in these early land holdings were the “river and fields of Pawtucket” (Grieve 1897:25), which likely encompassed the area immediately surrounding Pawtucket Falls. Eventually all the land north of the falls to the border of Massachusetts Bay was deeded to Providence, at least in the right of pasturage (Grieve 1897:26).

The first successful settlement along the extreme western limits of Plymouth Colony was likely established in 1643, when Samuel Newman (1600-1663) and his group bought land east of the Seekonk River along the Mill River (Ten Mile River). The village was originally known by its Indian name of Seacuncke⁵ (Seekonk) but was changed to Rehoboth in 1645 (Bowen 1948:3). Although the exact boundaries of the land purchase changed throughout the century, it basically included much of what is now East Providence, eastern Pawtucket, Cumberland, and Barrington, Rhode Island, along with Seekonk and Swansea, Massachusetts (Bliss 1836:1). The community’s center was the town common, or Ring of Green as the inhabitants referred to it. This particular common was unusual in that it covered a distance of over two and a half miles in circumference. It would have been within the current boundaries of Holt, Pawtucket, and Bishop Avenues; Pleasant and Greenwood Streets; and Elm and Bourne Avenues (Bowen 1946:30).

A prominent landscape feature was a large flat plain that extended northerly from the village center to a disputed piece of land that at the time was known as Attleboro Gore, a distance of four miles. Described by a variety of names, (Seekonk Plaine,

⁵ There are over 29 different spellings for Seekonk in the town’s original deeds (Bowen 1946:11).

Rehoboth Plaine, Great Plaine, the Plaine) this unusual terrain was identified in the Rehoboth Town Meeting Records as early as 1643 (Bowen 1950:3). This designation remained in limited use into the twentieth century (Rhode Island Gazetter 1964:78) and even today, with continual development, it is possible to drive along Newport Avenue and get a feeling of the wide, flat nature of the Seekonk Plain.

The Lands in 1676

In the 40 odd years since William Blackstone first arrived, considerable changes had taken place throughout the valley. During much of the earlier settlement period, the entire length of the Blackstone and Seekonk rivers, from the Massachusetts Bay Colony border down to Narragansett Bay, was commonly referred to as the Pawtucket River. By the mid-17th century, however, the nomenclature slowly began to change. Random entries in the Providence Town Records (ERTP 1892:2.10) started to refer to that section of river below Pawtucket Falls as the Seekonk River. Despite this gradual change, the citizens of Rehoboth adhered to the traditional name into the 1700s, in a futile attempt to avoid confusion with the already overused place name (Bowen 1946:5). Even today many road maps still refer to that part of the river between Pawtucket Falls and the Providence line as the Pawtucket River.

Above the falls, Pawtucket River remained the name of choice, although here too there is evidence of a transition in nomenclature. By 1671 some portion of the upper river was occasionally alluded to as Blaxtons River or Blackstons River (ERTP

1892:3.201). Exactly which specific river section this included remains in doubt, although some deductions will be advanced in chapter three.

The towns of Providence Plantations and Rehoboth grew from their inauspicious beginnings to communities of between 350 and 500 citizens (Bowen 1945:1-24). Separated by a distance of less than four miles, the most direct route of travel between the two would have been to cross the Seekonk River by ferry at Narrow Passage.⁶ A somewhat longer, but still relatively easy trip would have been to wade the river by means of a shallow, rock strewn area slightly south of Pawtucket Falls, and approach either town from the north (Grieve 1897:14).

Along with the previously mentioned river crossing at Narrow Passage and the two wading places at Pawtucket Falls and William Blackston's farm, the Pawtucket River (Blackstone River) could also be traversed at one additional point. When Robert Williams sold acreage to William Blackstone in 1650, the deed read in part that the land was lying above the second Wading place north of Pawtucket falls (ERTP 1892:2.9). This statement clearly indicates that there was an additional wading place somewhere between Pawtucket Falls and William Blackstone's farm.

Archaeological evidence supports an early Native American presence along the entire lengths of the Blackstone and Seekonk rivers before the English settled in the area. A 2002 report by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (2002:51-57) lists four sites that date from about 9,000 to 3,600 BP, consisting of Twin

⁶ Narrow Passage is located immediately south from the present day Henderson Bridge.

Rivers (RI 165), Walker Point (RI 653), Cumberland Quarry (RI 55), and Smithfield (RI 163). Later examples from the 9th (early Woodland period) into the 17th century include Woonsocket (RI 215), Kettle Point (RI 1731), and Providence Covelands (RI 935).

Recovered artifacts from the Late Woodland (1000-1600) sites mentioned above suggest the presence of small interior hunting and gathering areas. These findings are consistent with Elizabeth Chilton's (2005:138-160) assertion that there is little evidence of permanent settlement or intensive agriculture in New England throughout this period. Instead, she argues, the Algonquian people employed a diverse foraging approach, exploiting a variety of land, air and aquatic animals. Also, while the Native peoples may have depended on some domesticated plants, it was apparently only as a dietary supplement, a practice which Chilton refers to as mobile farming. That such a varied subsistence practice extended into the early 1640s is demonstrated by Roger Williams (1936:88-117) account of such diversity.

Paul Robertson, the Rhode Island State archaeologist, suggests that considering the absence of any newly published research specific to northern Rhode Island, the above conclusions (also Dincauze 1990:19-32) are appropriate. He cautions, however, that recent investigations into pre-contact coastal sites along Narragansett Bay have demonstrated the presence of domesticates (Largy and Morenon 2008:73-86). Of particular interest is ongoing research at Point Judith Pond (RI 110) at which over twenty structures and large quantities of maize have been recorded. According to Robertson, this evidence points to large coastal villages and agriculture being well established by at least

1300 AD (Paul Robinson 2011, pers. comm.). Just what implications such research will have on our future understanding of the Blackstone Valley can only be speculative.

In addition to the pre-contact history, colonial documentation points to a scattering of Native American settlements throughout the region. Richard Bowen (1946:11-19), based on his research of the Rehoboth town records, concludes the existence of three Indian villages within the almost ten square mile original land purchase acquired from the Wampanoag sachem Ousamequin. However, by the 1640s, disease and the danger of Narragansett raids had severely reduced the population. The land on the west side of the rivers appears to have been populated longer into the colonial period. Roger Williams (1936:3), writing in 1643, reported that the Narragansett occupied a dozen villages of various sizes within 20 miles of Providence. The Blackstone and Seekonk rivers also comprised a major fishing and transportation corridor for Native people moving between Narragansett Bay and the interior (RIHPHC 2002; E RTP 1892:2.28). Such usage resulted in a network of well-worn Indian paths that crisscrossed the surrounding countryside (Williams 1936:68).

By 1675, many of the major Indian trails had been improved to the point that travelers had reliable, if not always comfortable, pathways for travel. Two of the best known were the Pequot Path and the Boston to Newport Road. The Pequot Path extended from Boston, fording the Pawtucket River at William Blackstone's farm, continued southward along the western shore of Narragansett Bay and eventually reached Connecticut. The Boston to Newport Road, or Old Boston Post Road, bisected the

Seekonk Plain (Newport Avenue and Route 1) and connected Rehoboth village to points north and south (Handsman 2008:165; Hallett 1956:45). Farther along the Old Boston Post Road, 11 miles north of Rehoboth Village, was John Woodcock's garrison. Built in 1669, the garrison was a convenient stopping point for many of the Massachusetts Bay soldiers during the war. The original building has been replaced by a circa 1720 structure that still stands close to the original foundation at the intersection of routes 1 and 1A in North Attleboro (Schultz 1999:109).

On the eve of King Philip's War both Rehoboth and Providence, despite their growth and proximity to each other, remained relatively isolated. They were surrounded by large tracts of wilderness with numerous swamps, and located at the intersection of the Wampanoag, Narragansett and Nipmuc (Nipmuck) tribal boundaries. These circumstances left them vulnerable to attack and difficult to defend, a situation which Native Americans would repeatedly take advantage of during the following months.

CHAPTER 3

PIERCE BATTLE

King Philip's War began during June of 1675 when a townsman from Swansea fired into a group of Wampanoag Indians who were looting abandoned houses. While the incident in itself would seem of minor importance given the long list of Native American grievances, it was sufficient to ignite one of the most costly wars (in terms of lives and property) in colonial history (Drake 1999:1). Historians of the war have long debated the central elements that contributed to the outbreak of hostilities. Traditionally some authors argued that conflict between "advanced" and "backward" races was inevitable (Fiske 1900; Ellis and Morris 1906; Morgan 1965). More recently, however, historians have distanced themselves from such simplistic and ethnocentric conclusions and instead turned their attention to the demands imposed on Native American groups which eventually forced a choice between cultural extinction or bloodshed. Although the specific issues and their importance have been debated, Jill Lepore (1998: xiii,7) convincingly argues that the fundamental problems centered on ever increasing English land expansion, disruption of traditional systems of trade and agriculture, and the effort to eradicate the influence of native rulers and religions.

The question of land acquisition appears most central to the Indians' discontent (Malone 1993:2; Braddon 2001:50; Richter 2001:100-101). Russell Bourne notes that Algonquian subsistence practices required up to 20 times the acreage as those of the English settlers and that aggressive land grabs by Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colony left tribal groups with "less capital, less power, less chance to be on their own" (1991:90). The problem was further magnified both by demographic changes, such that by 1675 the ratio of the English had increased to five to one, and a decline in the value of wampum, a commodity upon which local Native American prosperity was built (Richter 2001:100-101; Starkey 1998:64).

Closely aligned with the land problem was the colonists' failure to control the free grazing of their farm animals. The tendency for English farm animals to destroy Indian crops drove a wedge between the two groups. By June of 1671 the situation had become so volatile that the Plymouth General Court was appointed to evaluate the problem (Ranlet 1988:90; Bourne 1991:99; Lepore 1998:95).

Another major point of contention was the fact that the English expected the Indians to conform to the body of law under which the colonists themselves lived. The Indians maintained their testimony was given little weight under this system and Philip claimed the English would take the word of one dishonest Indian over 20 honest ones, if it pleased them (Lepore 1998:115). Whether one accepts the conservative or revisionist view of the fairness of the English court system, it is important to understand that many Native Americans believed they did not receive equal justice (Leach 1995:18-19).

Attempts by Christian missionaries to convert Indians also served to complicate alliances. According to a 1674 census, shortly before the war almost 1,600 Indians from Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay had turned to Christianity and were residing in Christian towns (Lepore 1998:37). Richard Slotkin writes that such work would have been perceived as a threat to the “the ties of kinship and the unity of political and religious thought and behavior that characterize tribal societies” (1973:28).

According to Philip Ranlet (1988:100) the war was not unavoidable, and Philip, far from being the aggressor, was a dedicated and cautious leader. Yet, in the end, growing settler distrust and hostility toward Native Americans, their economic subservience, and the accelerating cultural change fueled growing pressure from younger Indians to fight the English. By 1675 Philip may well have realized that if there was to be a war, it would have to be fought before a further imbalance in demographics made any such decision untenable (Ranlet 1988:87, 97-98; Starkey 1998:70; Leach 1995:20, 22).

Despite the above causes and their consequences, not all Native Americans sided with Philip. Religious alienation, fighting among tribal leaders over land sales, economic dependence, traditional inter-tribal disputes, and attempts to consolidate a trading position with the English all served to direct some Native American loyalties to the colonists (Bourne 1991:161). Such allegiances not only deprived Philip of much needed warriors but often accounted for a share of the colonial forces that marched against him. This percentage increased toward the end of the conflict, as formerly neutral tribal groups

increasingly sided with the colonists (Bourne 1991:124-186). More importantly, as English allies they also provided essential services as guides and scouts. The Indians' abilities in such capacities received high praise from the chroniclers of the time (Hubbard 2002a:175; Mather 1999:143; Church 1865:132).

The early stages of the conflict were poorly fought by both sides. The Native Americans were tentative in their initial confrontations and within the first month Philip allowed himself to become entrapped in Pocasset Swamp. The colonists, equally hesitant to respond, let Philip escape across Seekonk Plain into Massachusetts Bay (Bowen 1947:79-112). By December, he and his warriors had made their way to New York, where he recruited additional followers among the Mahicans. Unfortunately for Philip the Mohawks, at the urging of Governor Edmund Andros of New York, sided with the United Colonies against the Algonquian tribes. Retreating from the Mohawk threat, Philip and his party returned to the upper Connecticut Valley, where many of the Nipmuck and Narragansett had wintered (Leach 1995:155-163).

On 29 February 1676 the Plymouth Council of War convened at Marshfield (Church 1865:66-69).⁷ The council's primary concern was the current outbreak of hostilities in neighboring Massachusetts Bay Colony. Most recently, enemy forces attacked Lancaster on 10 February, burning much of the town and inflicting heavy casualties. On the twenty-first of that same month, more than forty buildings in Medfield were destroyed, and four days later Weymouth was stormed (Leech 1995:160).

⁷ Although there is some confusion in Church's text as to the exact timing of the council's meeting Henry Dexter (1865:66) argued that it was to Marshfield that Church had been summoned.

Confronted with such alarming evidence, the council fully understood the gravity of the situation and feared, rightfully so, that it was only a matter of time before such hostilities would escalate to the outlying settlements of Plymouth Colony (Church 1865:67). In response to the anticipated threat, the council first issued an order that, in the hope of preventing “great damage and prejudice,” none of the inhabitants within the jurisdiction of Plymouth Colony shall abandon their towns under the penalty of forfeiture of their personal estates (Plymouth Colony Records [PCR] 18565.185). Although the safety of its inhabitants was certainly an issue, the government’s uneasiness was tempered by its need to maintain a strong line of defense. If desertions became too widespread, the colony could possibly have been reduced to a few fortified coastal strongholds. There was also the apprehension that many of the refugees might not later return to their former communities. Even with these restrictions, it was not until twenty years after the conflict that southern New England was fully resettled (Leach 1995:187-188, 246; Dexter 1865:69).

A second council directive addressed concern over the enemy’s ability to conduct successful surprise attacks against villages and towns. Such acts of aggression were often magnified, despite government warnings, by negligent town watches. To combat such behavior, individual town councils, in coordination with the commissioned officers, were granted the power to organize guard duties and arrange for patrols to be sent into the countryside so that the citizenry would be better alerted to impending danger (PCR 1856:5.185).

Finally, in its most aggressive action, the Plymouth Council offered Benjamin Church the command of 60 or 70 colonists, with the stipulation that his force would be garrisoned in Rehoboth and other western towns to counter any actions taken by the enemy (Church 1865:67). Church, a carpenter by trade, was born in Plymouth in 1639. He was in his mid-thirties when war broke out and quickly gained considerable experience in wilderness warfare (Simpson 1975:36-37). Church replied that the Indians could be expected to return in large numbers and that to send such a small force against Philip's combined forces "would be but to deliver so many Men into their hands, to be destroyed" (1865:68). He suggested instead that the Council commit 200 soldiers, along with 100 friendly Indians to the border's defense, and stipulated that this force should not wait at any garrison, but instead live and fight in the woods, as the enemy did. He added that if such a unit went forth, they should expect to march for six weeks, which was long enough for men to spend in the woods.

Benjamin Church's insistence on the inclusion of friendly Indians was understandable. It was no secret that to date the English had been unsuccessful in locating the enemy on their own. In a letter to Massachusetts Bay Governor John Leverett, John Pynchon complained that "we are endeavoring to discover the enemy; daily send out scouts but little is effected; we sometimes discover a few Indians and sometimes fires, but not the body of them, and have no Indian friends here though we have sent to Hartford for some to help us" (1982:154-155).

After consideration of Church's recommendations, the council explained that the colony was already in debt and would never be able to pay such a large force as well as deciding against the use of Indian allies (Church 1865:68-9). In retrospect, the decision was not surprising. By the winter of 1676 the United Colonies and Rhode Island were feeling the financial strain of protecting their villages and towns. This was a burden that by the war's end seriously disrupted New England's economy and forced the levy of heavy taxes on its townspeople (Leach 1995:244).

For the most part the colonial defensive strategy consisted of building garrisons or fortifying existing houses, where the townspeople could spend the nights or muster during an assault. Garrisons, if used correctly, were surprisingly successful in protecting lives. They failed, however, to prevent the burning of unoccupied homes and buildings and the theft or destruction of crops, livestock and equipment (Chet 2003:40, 58). In an effort to limit such loss, towns considered most prone to possible attacks were reinforced by military units assigned to garrison duty at the government's expense (Leach 1995:183). Despite such effort, relaxed vigilance and the government's slow response in deploying adequate troop support brought about unnecessary suffering at the hands of enemy attackers. Such lack of organization was so common it spurred a running joke among many of the friendly Indians that the colonists divided most of their time between eating and drinking, and when another attack occurred the colony would send their condolences along with a few more soldiers (Harris 1963:35).

It is likely that money was not the only reason Church's demands were dismissed. Richard Slotkin (1999:468) argues that conducting warfare in a manner similar to the Indians went against Puritan ethic. In fact, the Indian's preference for avoiding direct confrontation was so distasteful it impelled the Reverend William Hubbard to write that the Indians "durst not look an Englishman in the Face in the open Field, nor ever yet were known to kill any Man with their Guns, unless when they could lie in wait for him in an Ambush, or behind some Shelter, taking Aim undiscovered" (2002a:115).

An additional government concern might have been apprehension regarding the ability to contact Church if the need arose. During a meeting on 10 March 1676 the Plymouth Council (PCR 1856:5.189) granted its president and certain of its members the power to immediately recall troops if such a deployment led to any inconvenience. It is not unreasonable to assume that if Church (1865:67) had been allowed to "lye in eh Woods as the Enemy did" it would have been at best difficult to contact the command, and at worst impossible.

Finally, although the use of friendly Indians as guides and scouts had proven valuable to the Massachusetts Bay forces, there remained considerable uneasiness on the part of some of the Bay officers as to their reliability (Leach 1995:162; Malone 1993:110). This mistrust may have been more intense in Plymouth Colony, where Indians had been used only sparingly throughout the war's early stages. Such resentment was not limited only to the military. Colonists frequently accused the friendly Indians of supplying the enemy with gun powder and intelligence and aiming over warriors' heads

during skirmishes (Malone 1993:110-11; Rowlandson 1999:353; Harris 1963:65-7; Pray 1923:22-3). All of these factors may have contributed to the government's reluctance to placate Church on even this demand.

With no immediate military obligations, and understanding the potential danger to his family, Benjamin Church (1865:69-70) soon requested and received a special allowance to relocate his family from Duxborough (Duxbury) to the farm of Captain John Almy in Rhode Island (Portsmouth). One can sense the urgency in Church's decision when he stated that despite the imminent birth of a child and opposition from relations who thought the family would be perfectly safe at Clark's garrison, just a few miles southeast of Plymouth, he remained determined to make the 50 mile journey to Rhode Island.

Benjamin Church (1996:67) and John Almy apparently developed a friendship in 1674 during a land transaction in which Church purchased land in Sakonnet (Little Compton) just across the Sakonnet River from Almy. Church had begun to set up a farm at the site, with plans to eventually relocate his family to their new home, when the war interrupted his work. Even if he had managed to finish the project, Sakonnet by his own admission, was full of Indians and would have presented a far greater risk than remaining at Duxborough. Portsmouth, on the other hand, was more easily secured than most other sites. This feature attracted many fearful colonists throughout southern New England.

The governor's rationale for granting Church such a permit immediately after restricting much of the population from doing that very thing is a matter of speculation.

It is possible that since Benjamin Church had no intention of remaining in Duxborough after the war, the government saw little need to restrict his movements. Church (1865:69) simply defended his actions by stating that under the existing conditions the colony might require his specialized fighting knowledge sometime in the future and he would be no less serviceable by being on that side of the Colony.

With Church temporally withdrawing from any immediate military service, the council, also at the February 29, 1676 meeting, ordered “that the soldiers now under the presse from the southern townes be att Plymouth on Weddensday, the eight of this instant, in order unto a further march, and with them 20 or 30 of the southeren Indians, whoe, together with the other whoe are under presse, to goe forth under the comaund of Captaine Michael Peirse and Leiftenant Samuell Fuller” (PCR 1856:5.187). It is of considerable interest that before the council concluded business at Marshfield, they reversed their earlier objection against the inclusion of at least some friendly Indians. Whether this was brought about on the strength of Benjamin Church’s conviction or as a means of saving money was not recorded.

Captain Pierce’s Command

Captain Michael Pierce (Peirse, Peirce), a soldier and public servant, was born in England in 1615. He immigrated to Plymouth in about 1645. He moved to Hingham in 1646 and eventually purchased land in Scituate. The Scituate Militia attempted to ratify Pierce as a lieutenant in 1666, but the promotion was rejected by the Plymouth Court

because his experience was unknown to the court. He was eventually commissioned a captain in the local militia in 1669 (Cutter 1996:38-9; Bodge 1906:347), although in 1673 when Plymouth Colony sent a force against the Dutch under Miles Standish, Pierce served only as an ensign (Carter 1930:3).

Since we have no additional sources that chronicle Captain Pierce's combat experience, we are left with only the subsequent battle to judge his capabilities as an officer. Still, there is sufficient evidence to concede that Pierce, as well as his contemporaries, were different from the first generation of New England military commanders, who, like Miles Standish, were trained European veterans. The officers after 1650 were not professional soldiers and were for the most part inexperienced in the fundamental concepts of military strategy. This inexperience also extended to the soldiers these officers commanded. With no standing army in any of the colonies, civilians were recruited when needed from local farmers and fisherman (Chet 2003:3, 61-62).

Guy Chet (2003:61-62) points out that despite this deficiency, there appears to have been no serious attempt to provide these men with military schooling. The only instruction these troops usually received was on militia training days that were held four times a year. By the time King Philip's War broke out, these days consisted mostly of drinking, eating, smoking and public games.⁸ Such an attitude did not, however, preclude soldiers from gaining experience the hard way. One unnamed colonial soldier (Leach

⁸ In Rhode Island during October of 1675 the council (CRRI 2:555) passed a law that no training band should be compelled to conduct exercises above two days in one year.

1966:58) argued that he learned more in a few short months of service against the enemy than from 40 years of town training exercises.

As ordered, Captain Pierce took command of his company at the town of Plymouth and pulled out for the colony's western border on or about 8 March 1676. Although we have no description as to how the soldiers on this particular expedition were outfitted, we may assume that it was similar to how troops were sent to the Swamp Fight in December of 1675 "well fitted with clothing necessary for the season, and provided with knapsacks and amunition, according to order, viz, halfe a pound of powder and 4 pound of bulletts to each man" (PCR 1856:5.183).

There has been some confusion as to the exact number of soldiers under Pierce's direction. The Reverend William Hubbard (2002a:173) wrote that the company first marched with a force of approximately 50 English soldiers and 20 Christian Indians. Other sources suggest that the number may have been slightly larger. According to William Harris (1963:41), Captain Pierce was in command of as many as 100 men, but stationed 30 of his soldiers at various weak points along the western border. Harris' troop count is supported in a letter dispatched by the Massachusetts Bay Council (1676:68.191) to Major Savage on 1 April 1676. The letter stated that Captain Pierce was in command of 100 English and Indians when he engaged a great body of Indians. While the two letters differ as to whether or not the command was divided, they agree as to its overall strength.

Benjamin Church and Captain Pierce may have departed Plymouth at roughly the same time since the two parties meet in Taunton on the 9 March 1676. Captain Pierce apparently feared for the safety of Church's small family group, who were about to venture almost directly through Philip's home territory. He extended an invitation to redirect some of his men, including one of his relatives, to escort the family the remainder of the way to Portsmouth. Church (1865:70) would later write that for good reasons he did not accept the offer.

This was not the only instance when Benjamin Church (1996:121) turned down an offer of additional protection, and the incident adds considerable insight into Church's confidence and ability to navigate the hostile backwoods of Plymouth Colony. Despite the imminent dangers, the Church family continued their journey toward Rhode Island, and reached Captain Almy's farm on March 10th or 11th. Within days of their arrival, Clark's garrison (near Plymouth), imagined by Church's relatives to be completely secure, was attacked and burned, resulting in the death of 11 people (Drake 1840:178).

After Taunton, for the most part we lose track of the company's movements for the next several weeks. We know, however, that no later than 25 March 1676, Captain Pierce quartered his troop in the town of Rehoboth because, according to the town's minister Noah Newman, on that date "Cap. Peirce went forth wth a small party of his men & Indians wth him, & upon discovery of the enemy fought him wth out damage to himself, & Judged that he had Considerably damnifyed them. yet he being of no greater force Chose rather [to] rtrete & go out ye next morning with a recrute of men" (1676b:

1.3). The Massachusetts Bay Council (1676:68.191) corroborated this account and added that the scouting party had skirmished with a contingent of 50 Indians. Since neither Newman nor the Massachusetts Bay Council mentioned injuries on the English side or a warrior body count, one might speculate that the engagement took place over some distance and no ground was gained, at least on Captain Pierce's part. According to William Harris (1963:41-43), the engagement occurred at a place usually called Blackston's River just before nightfall, a factor that figured into the captain's decision to return to the garrison.

The motivation for reconnoitering in this particular sector is not known. William Harris (1963:41-43) noted that the party was specifically ranging the woods searching for Indians that might attempt to target isolated men or cattle, a strategy that followed a mandate from the Plymouth Council of War for all towns to send forth scouts to secure the additional safety of the inhabitants. There is also the possibility that word of Indian activity in the vicinity of Pawtucket Falls was relayed to Rehoboth from an inhabitant of Providence. In an earlier incident, Providence (Bowen 1946:48) informed Rehoboth that wigwams had been spotted not far from their town (Providence) and Rehoboth might be able to surprise the enemy that night if a party was sent over Narrow Passage.

Returning to the Rehoboth garrison on the evening of 25 March, Captain Pierce would have had little time to formulate a course of action. Considering the unlikely probability of being reinforced (Leverett 1676:6.89), I speculate that it would appear the captain had only two general options. First, he could continue to adapt his defensive

ground plan. He had already possibly reinforced certain “weak points” (Harris 1963:41), and could deploy the remainder of his patrol in strong fortified positions throughout the town in an attempt to limit the damage to settlers, livestock and buildings. At the same time he could continue to scout the area in the hope of countering a surprise attack. Such a strategy would have had little chance of complete failure. Time after time, Indian raids had proven unsuccessful against strong defensive positions that were supplemented by massed fire power (Chet 2003:63).

A second alternative would be to launch an offensive sortie against the suspected enemy encampment. This type of operation, however, carried considerably more risk. In addition to leaving the town inadequately manned, it would nullify what little training his command might have received. The English military system was predicated upon maintaining close and rigid formations while turning over constant heavy firepower against a strong defensible position. Offense, on the other hand, is based on mobility and the ability to close the distance between the two forces in a coordinated formation. Such a strategy requires a high degree of troop reliability, discipline, dependable intelligence on enemy troop strength and movements and knowledge of the existing topography. These were qualities the English failed to cultivate (Chet 2003:54-67).

Captain Pierce chose the latter plan of action. Any number of circumstances could have influenced his decision. No doubt there were strong points in the make-up of the command and the timing of such an action that would have been appealing to the captain. The friendly Indians attached to the company were part of the scouting party

that just hours before had successfully intercepted enemy warriors. March was also the ideal time of year to attempt to locate the enemy in heavily wooded areas, such as were found throughout Rehoboth and Pawtucket. So proficient were the Indians at forest warfare that the English were wary about military actions when trees were in foliage. William Harris (1963:29) lamented that the Indians would creep behind natural cover in groups of up to three warriors. When the time was right, they would commence firing and then swiftly run away. Such was the fear that on many occasions the soldiers would fire into the bushes even when they could see none of the enemy. At the time Captain Pierce was making his fateful decision, there was still more than a month before the colonists would again be at such a disadvantage.

Pierce might also have felt some degree of pressure from a number of colonial leaders who argued for more aggressive winter campaigns. One such man was John Pynchon (1982:159), who early in October of 1675 wrote to Governor Leverett suggesting this course of action.⁹ That same month Roger Williams warned the opposition that “we would pursue them with a Winter War, when they should not as Muskeetoes and Rattlesmakes in Warne Weather bite us” (1988:705).

It appears certain that Captain Pierce made his decision under the assumption that his command was of sufficient size and adequately equipped to press such an engagement. According to William Hubbard (2002a:173), the captain understood a large

⁹ John Pynchon (1626-1703) was a wealthy and distinguished merchant and landowner in western Massachusetts. He left numerous letters and documents concerning the economic and social development of that section of the colony (Bridenbaugh 1982:xxiii-xxxix).

enemy force had gathered in the area and possessed the resolute courage to engage the Indians but would never have done so if he had any advance knowledge of the enormity of the opposition. George Bodge (1909:348) theorized that Captain Pierce perhaps believed an enemy body twice that of his own were at large. While Bodge's conclusion is unproven, we can nonetheless draw inferences from his statement that based upon the 50 warriors who participated in the Saturday skirmish, and factoring in non-warrior family members, Captain Pierce might well have anticipated a hostile camp of approximately 200 to 300 total Indians. Certainly striking at an enemy force of such a size was known. Just two months later along the same stretch of river, Thomas Brattle, with a troop of 50 horse soldiers, successfully attacked a fishing camp of over 300 Indians (Bowen 1948:24).

A number of sources bolster Hubbard's assertion that Captain Pierce formed a low assessment of the enemy's strength. The first is a poem written by Philip Walker, a resident of Rehoboth from 1643 until his death in 1679. Walker wrote the *Captan Perse and his Coragios Company* sometime between 26 March and 30 May 1676, the first verse of which is:

It ffel unlucky yt thi march wos Soner
then thi apoynted time to yt meroner
in thy picaring thou Lacks thos muskitters
and his experianc gaynd mongst Buckaneers (quoted in Bowen
1948:34)

Richard LeBaron Bowen (1948:34), author of *Early Rehoboth*, argues Walker was critical of Captain Pierce's decision to undertake such an offensive action before being reinforced by Captain Samuel Mosely. Bowen contends that this fact should carry significant weight considering Walker's position as a town official (Bowen 1948:35).¹⁰

A second piece of evidence that attests to Captain Pierce's misjudgment of the magnitude of the enemy force is included in a letter written by the Massachusetts Bay Council and addressed to the Council of the Colony of Connecticut. In the postscript, council secretary, Edward Rawson recounted details concerning the Pierce Battle and added: "Capt. Pearse not contenting himself with the success God Gave him on Saturday 25 agt the enemy proceeding to follow & pursue the enemy near to M^c Blackstones ..." (1921:10). It was uncommon for colonial officials to so publicly second-guess a commander's strategy during King Philip's War. Yet the Massachusetts Bay Council apparently did so when they pointed out the consequences of Captain Pierce's decision to continue pressing the attack.

Finally, sometime before Captain Pierce's command departed Rehoboth on the morning of the twenty-sixth, the captain penned a timely request to Providence to provide additional troop support (Hubbard 2002a:174). William Harris (1963:41) recounted that through careless neglect the letter was not sent. William Hubbard wrote that the letter

¹⁰ At the time of the Pierce Battle, Captain Mosely was still 100 miles distant (Bodge 1906:101).

had been sent but “whether through Sloth or Cowardice, it is not much material, this Message was not delivered to them it was immediately sent” (2002a:174-5).¹¹

Only three possible scenarios can be inferred from this information. One, the request never left Rehoboth; two, a courier attempted to reach Providence, but failed; or three, the message arrived at Providence but no action was taken. There are a variety of likely explanations why the message might not have left Rehoboth or failed to reach Providence, such as the fear of Indian ambush, or the absence of available transport across the Seekonk River.¹² The most logical explanation, however, focuses on the inability of Providence to support any type of military action. On 29 March, three days after the Pierce Battle, Providence was attacked and burned. Both William Hubbard (2002b:47) and Nathaniel Saltonstall (1913a:86) wrote that at the time of the attack most of the homes had been abandoned because the inhabitants had previously removed themselves to the island of Newport for protection. This claim is supported by the Providence Town Records (ERTP 1892:8.12-13) that noted during the assault there were only 27 men defending the town. It also appears that at the time there were only two small houses in Providence deemed capable of serving as garrisons (Greene 1886:42).

To date, there is no direct evidence as to the precise nature of the evacuation.

Whether it came about quickly and involved a large number of residents or small gradual

¹¹ Over the past centuries a number of authors (Backus 1872:335-336; Bliss 1836:90; Haley 1936:76-77) have identified the addressee of Pierce’s request as Capt. Andrew Edmonds of Providence. See Appendix A, Captain Andrew Edmonds.

¹² The flat-bottom boats that were pulled across the river were destroyed by Indians sometime before 8 November 1675 making the crossing problematic (Williams 1988:705).

departures over a longer span of time is unclear. However, a review of the circumstantial evidence suggests that the townspeople would have been highly motivated, both by the escalating hostilities and pressure from the governor, to abandon Providence weeks, and perhaps months, prior to the Pierce Battle. From the very outbreak of the war, Providence experienced such depredations that many townspeople were prompted to seek more secure locations to wait out the hostilities (Leach 1995:188; Williams 1988:695, 702). Also, unlike Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Colony, where early attempts were made to protect the towns and prevent their abandonment, the government of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations (residing in Newport) accepted the fact that the colony's limited resources prevented affording protection to the mainland. In lieu of assistance, they actively encouraged their citizens to relocate to the safety of Aquidneck Island (Leach 1995:188; Rhode Island Colonial Records 1857:2.532-534; Staples 1843:162-163).

More important than the fate of the letter is the obvious conclusion that Captain Pierce marched his company out of Rehoboth knowing that he would not be supported by Providence, or at least without any assurance what degree of assistance, if any, he could expect. It can thus be inferred that Pierce, although he wrote the letter, did not envision additional support a very important component to the overall success of the mission.

The Battle

On the Sunday morning of 26 March 1676 Captain Pierce assembled his full recruit of men on the Rehoboth village green. Having ascertained an approximation of the enemy's whereabouts the previously evening, the entire troop marched across the Seekonk plain toward the Pawtucket (Seekonk) River (Hubbard 2002a:173). The company, according to Noah Newman (1676b:1.3), consisted of 2 officers, 5 guides recruited from the town who were familiar with the surrounding area, and a minimum of 49 soldiers and 11 friendly Indians. A letter from the Massachusetts Bay Council (1676:69.191) to Major Savage noted that Pierce's company was also supported by two pack animals loaded with supplies.

Although there is no record of the specific route taken that Sunday morning, we do know that there were a number of trails and wagon paths from Rehoboth Village that paralleled the Pawtucket River or bisected the Seekonk Plain (Johnson 1984:xix). The countryside throughout this area was lightly populated (Bowen 1950:70; Grieve 1897:42-44; Daggett 1834:38) and there was a strong possibility that the few homesteads they might have come across had been destroyed at the onset of the conflict (Hubbard 2002b:47; Williams 1988:702).

Upon reaching the Pawtucket River (Blackstone River) the command continued north toward Abbott's Run, a small tributary of the Pawtucket River that enters from the east less than two miles above Pawtucket Falls (Hubbard 2002b:47). By following the eastern riverside the troop would have commanded the higher ground which in many

places rises from 20 to 30 feet above its counterpart. In addition, with a minimum of foliage and river vegetation during March, the company would have had a clear view to the west. This view would have been further enhanced once the troop approached Abbott's Run, where the western landscape begins a gentle climb to a central ridge one-half mile distant.

In his study on the psychology of military incompetence, Norman F. Dixon (1985:30) notes that the preoccupation with a decision, in combination with positive reinforcement, often creates a hazardous situation. He argues that when a commander gradually accumulates information in support of his decision, he becomes progressively less inclined to accept contrary evidence. In Captain Pierce's particular situation, his low estimation of the enemy's strength was quite possibly supported by the feeling of security the commanding view of the surrounding landscape afforded. Such a combination may well have created a situation in which Pierce found the acquisition of additional facts unnecessary, and explains, at least in part, his subsequent aggressive command decisions.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Abbott's Run, the colonial force came upon a group of four or five Indians who, upon seeing that they had been discovered, attempted to flee. The English gave chase and managed to keep the enemy within sight. The English were aided in their pursuit, at least in part, by the fact that one or more of the warriors was limping, as if wounded or lame. Their progress at one point actually came to a halt. Finally, the small band of warriors, obviously desperate to avoid death or capture, jumped

into the river and forded across to the western bank. The English, fully committed to the chase, followed closely behind (Hubbard 2002:173-174; Saltonstall 1913a:84).

The crossing was not a particularly easy one. The river, cold and often at its highest in March, was severe enough that part of the company's gun powder was rendered useless by the moisture (Hubbard 2002a:180). Scrambling up and away from the river, the English continued to give chase. Suddenly, a body of about 500 warriors who had been hiding in wait revealed themselves (Saltonstall 1913a:84).

At this point in the confrontation, a very fierce fight began. Captain Pierce must have done an exemplary job in keeping his command from fragmenting during the chase because their initial volleys forced the Indians into a retreat, although apparently the ground gained by the English was negligible. Before long the main body of Indians was strengthened by an additional 400 combatants. At this point the trap had been successfully sprung and the majority of the colonists had only a few hours to live (Saltonstall 1913a:84-85).

Considering the typical Indian ambush, the participation of almost 1,000 warriors would seem overstated (Malone 1993:27). Still, what little evidence remains supports such a number. Later that same day English battle survivors sent word to Boston that “the enemy was about a thousand” (Leverett 1676:6.89). In addition, during the attack at Providence on the 29th of March, Roger Williams (1988:722) wrote that they numbered about 1,500. Just how reliable these estimates are remain open to debate. Neither source specified whether their counts included non-combatants. One also has to consider

inaccurate estimations due to the stress of battle, attempts to justify defeat, and other colonial biases. Still, the reports cannot be entirely dismissed. Douglas Leach notes that during this time there appears to have been at least two large concentrations of Native American conducting simultaneous raids east of Mt. Wachusett and throughout Rhode Island and Plymouth Colony (Leach 1995:165).

After the colonial advance had been rebuffed and halted, Captain Pierce, in order to secure the best possible position against such overwhelming odds, had his command fall back to the river with the hope of preventing the company from becoming surrounded. This was a standard military maneuver and initially a sound decision by the captain. However, during or shortly after the retreat, Indians crossed over the river to the east, a move which effectively eliminated any further retreat while allowing the warriors to harass the colonists from all directions. So Pierce's strategy, one he thought would be to his greatest advantage, "proved his Overthrow" (Hubbard 2002a:174).

William Hubbard (2002:173-175) claimed that even at this juncture the command had the opportunity to better its position if not for the fact that Captain Pierce had sustained a crippling wound to his leg or thigh early in the engagement. The injury was severe enough that the captain could no longer stand. This left the English with few options but to remain and fight or abandon their leader. While the colonists chose the former, there apparently were ongoing deliberations regarding their tenuous position (Tompson 1999:229).

In his analysis of Indian warfare, Patrick Malone (1993:27) points out that this type of ambush was a favorite tactic in their covert manner of warfare. If a war party could ascertain colony troop movements, they would set an improvised ambush along the impending route or use decoys to draw the enemy into a trap. Ideally they would try to surround their enemy or select terrain with natural features that limited the possibility of escape. When setting such a trap, the warriors were careful to conceal themselves until the last possible moment before firing from behind rocks, trees, bushes or whatever nature afforded them.

The Indian's expertise in the use of firearms was also conducive to this mode of warfare. By the beginning of King Philip's War, many Indians were equipped with flintlock rifles and in most cases their familiarity with the weapon far exceeded that of the colonists. Hunting was still an important component in their subsistence strategy and as such provided them with a variety of forest skills that were easily transferable to the battlefield. On the whole, they gained considerable practice in moving quietly through the woods, using natural cover, snap-shooting at moving targets, and firing from a variety of different positions. Adding to the effectiveness of their superior marksmanship was their fondness for loading their weapons with multiple lead shot, a practice that increased the likelihood of hitting their target. The Indians also showed little hesitation in aiming at a specific target, usually an officer, a practice that alone could affect the outcome of a battle (Malone 1993:67- 87).

Following their retreat, the troops cast themselves into a circle that was double-double distance all around (Saltonstall 1913a:85). Once again Captain Pierce, or whoever was then in command, made a solid tactical decision. A recurring problem with the United Colonies' manner of forest warfare was that soldiers often grouped too closely together. This was a fact not lost on one Indian who observed that often "it is as easy to hit them as to hit a house" (Church 1975:140). By spreading his troops the command would have presented a more formidable profile to the enemy while at the same time helping to prevent his soldiers from bunching together. A similar strategy had been used earlier in the war with great success by Benjamin Church (1996:83-90) at the Pease Field Fight.

While the soldiers were hurriedly putting together their defensive placements, Noah Newman (1676:1.3) related that they were slowly being enclosed by a great multitude of the enemy. Nathaniel Saltonstall (1913a:85) wrote that "the Indians were as thick as they could stand, thirty deep". This description of the enemy being 30 deep tends to convey the impression that the enemy immediately launched a massive assault on the colonists, one in which the Indians were virtually stumbling over one another to reach the English. Such a tactic would have gone against the Indian concept of successful warfare. It is well documented that during the King Philip's War, Indians tended to approach the colonists in such a manner that the possibility of sustaining heavy casualties was drastically reduced (Slotkin 1999:368-369). For example, following the Sudbury Fight on 18 April 1676, there was little rejoicing in the Indian camp, for

although they had achieved a decisive victory, they had lost five or six of their warriors (Rowlandson 1999:354)

With retreat no longer an option, the company's best chance of survival was to prevent the enemy from moving within this effective killing distance by maintaining a heavy and consistent rate of fire. And, at least for a time, their initial salvos checked the Indian threat (Saltonstall 1913a:85). Still, the gravity of the situation could not have eluded many of the soldiers. They were outnumbered, unable to better their position, and their captain, severely wounded in the opening fire fight, would have been of little use in rallying his command. Adding to the soldiers' stress was the Indian practice of keeping up a constant stream of yelling and shouting across the battlefield. This was a practice that was commonly used during a siege for intimidation and possibly to force their opponents into the open (Malone 1993:17; Hubbard 2002a:117-118; Newman 1676:1.3). That just such an episode occurred during the Pierce Battle is evidenced in a letter from the Plymouth Council of War to Governor Leverett. The council wrote that:

Certain intelligence given by some of our soldiers, (that escaped from the slaughter made on Capt. Pierce and his men) of their hearing the noise and crying of women and children, a good space distant from the fight,...Besides, some of our Indians, that escaped from that last fight, say that the Indians calling to them, to know what they were, who answered them from Plimouth, the enemy saying, then, they would knock them of the head, told them, also, when inquired

by ours who they were, that they were some both of Nepmuggs, Coweeset, Seconet, &c, [?].¹³ (Morton 1826:439)

The English persisted in their defense for perhaps as long as two hours (Saltonstall 1913a:85). Finally, conditions reached a point such that the company's defense was no longer effective. "Then the Indians, perceiving this, ran upon them, killing some and seizing others. Others of the soldiers fought their way through the Indians and, although struck by bullets, ran away and got home" (Harris 1963:43). From Harris' description we learn that at least part of the company did not hold the skirmish line until the last man. The weight of the final assault induced disintegration within some of the command, sending those combatants fleeing for their lives. That the battle ended in such confusion received confirmation from a number of additional sources.

William Hubbard (2002a:175-180) noted four different incidents in which the friendly Indians were able to trick the enemy by the use of what Hubbard referred to as subtle devices. In the first episode Amos, the head of the friendly Indian force, stood over Captain Pierce who had been severely wounded early in the battle and "charging his gun several times, fired stoutly upon the enemy" (Hubbard 2002a:175).¹⁴ After a time Amos

¹³ Edward Rawson (1921:12), secretary of the Colony Of Massachusetts Bay, specified those who had attacked Rehoboth, Providence and Captain Pierce were "Narrygansets [,] Nipmuck [,] Wampanooges [and] Quabeoogs".

¹⁴ Amos was a Wampanoag Indian from Cape Cod who remained loyal to the English. He was in charge of the company's friendly Indians and served as guide to the whole command (Bodge 1906:348). Capt. Amos' sir name may have been Lawrence (Freeman 1869:308).

realized that there was no possibility to save the captain and his remaining any longer would only result in his own death as well. At that point Amos proceeded to color his face with blacking, which he carried with him in a pouch, so that he resembled the enemy.¹⁵ With his disguise in place, the impostor went charging through the bushes in the pretense of hunting for the colonists until the time presented itself to escape into the thicket and distance himself from the battle scene.

A second friendly Indian managed not only to save himself but one of the English soldiers as well. Wielding a hatchet and pretending to be one of the enemy, he chased after one of the colonists as if he were about to kill him. Eventually both managed to escape the carnage. Another clever act of subterfuge occurred when one of Pierce's Indians took refuge behind a large rock. In order to deceive a warrior that had him pinned down, the friendly Indian placed his hat on a stick and slowly raised the false head until the enemy discharged his rifle at the target. Once the advantage was his, the friendly Indian jumped up and shot his adversary, after which he had ample time to "march away with the Spoils of his Enemy" (Hubbard 2002a:177). The final escape proved successful when a friendly Indian managed to shield himself behind the roots of a tree that had recently been uprooted. Boring a hole through the earth and roots he waited for his pursuer to show himself. When the time was right he shot him.

A more poetic finale to the last horrific moments of the battle was written by Benjamin Tompson (1999:229). Tompson, a schoolmaster and physician from

¹⁵ Face painting was a common practice among southern New England Indians during war (Williams 1936:191; Josselyn 1865:113; Church 1996:114).

Massachusetts Bay Colony, published his lengthy poem *New England's Crisis* in Boston during 1676. The work is a narrative of King Philip's War, and one section the "Seekonk Plain Engagement", deals with the Pierce Battle. A part of this section is as follows:

Foolhardy fortitude it had been sure
Fierce storms of shot and arrow to endure
Without all hopes of some requital to
So numerous and pestilent a foe.
Some musing a retreat and thence to run,
Have in an instant all their business done,
They sink and all their sorrows' ponderous weight
Down at their feet they cast and tumble straight.
Such who outlived the fate of others fly
Into the Irish bogs of misery. (Tompson 1999:229)

Combat Behavior

As part of his research at the Little Bighorn Battle Field, Richard Fox (1993:38-62) developed a theoretical model of combat behavior. The premise of this model is that during combat, troop actions are predictable and will fall into one of two resulting patterns: stability or disintegration. Stability is best achieved and maintained by a number of critical factors including strong leadership, adequate supplies, troop support, tactical training and adherence to training methods when under fire. Once stability begins to break down, disintegration can manifest itself in a number of individual or collective behaviors. These behaviors include individuals not returning fire if not under direct supervision, or soldiers beginning to crowd together, (usually around a person of

authority, piece of equipment, or even what they feel is a secure natural feature). Finally, the shock of an enemy attack may cause some men to stop fighting completely and accept pending death, while others will break from the troop and run.

Fox differentiates between what he sees as legitimate flight, as when a situation is hopeless and the certainty of impending death is imminent, and when flight is the result of confusion or shock. He argues, however, that legitimate flight is rarely reached because battle stress usually overpowers the actual reality of the situation. That legitimate flight existed during King Philip's War, and apparently carried with it little dishonor, was clearly demonstrated at the Pease Field Fight during July of 1675. Benjamin Church and a group of about 20 soldiers had been forced into a position similar to that of the Pierce's command. Realizing the gravity of the situation "some of the men that were lightest of foot began to talk of attempting an escape by flight, until Captain Church solidly convinced them of the impracticableness of it" (Church 1996:88).

With the minimal information we now have it is impossible to know with any certainty whether the disintegration at the close of the Pierce Battle was a result of shock and confusion, a conscious attempt to avoid the inevitable conclusion, or some combination of the two. However, the fact that some of the friendly Indians who escaped retained their weapons and composure, with one even taking the time to divest a dead warrior of certain items, indicates that at least a portion of the survivors chose opportunistic flight.

The only reference to any type of torture being carried out on survivors comes from William Harris who wrote:

Pierce's soldiers were very valiant, brave men, and slew many Indians. But we have heard lately, from some Indian captives taken by the English, that the Indians took two of the seventy alive. They tied them to trees, and the Indian women whipped them almost to death, and then cut off some of their flesh, and put hot embers in the wounds in a most cruel, barbarous manner. (Harris 1963:43)

Noah Newman (Bowen 1948:15), who attended some of the burials, and later described them in a letter to the Reverend John Cotton, failed to mention the condition of the victims. Whether such acts of torture never occurred or were omitted out of respect to the families of the deceased we do not know. A word of clarification is appropriate at this juncture. During King Philip's War documented examples of torture are infrequent, although both sides appear to have occasionally practiced such behavior (Bragdon 1996:226; Starkey 1998:81; Lepore 1988:6). The difference was that the English demonstrated what Richard Slotkin (1999:373) referred to as a Puritan prejudice toward the Indians. He argues that they denounced any such acts by the enemy, while at the same time did not show a similar revulsion when performed by whites.¹⁶

¹⁶ For a good discussion of torture read Jill Lepore (1998).

With the almost complete ruination of Pierce's force, and no other colonial patrol of significant size in the immediate area, the Indians would have had unrestricted time to survey the aftermath of their victory and gather up any items that might be of use in the months ahead. According to the Massachusetts Bay Council (1676:68.191) the most prized spoils taken away were two pack horses loaded with provisions, and most of the company's rifles and other assorted weapons. The victims might also have been stripped of some, or all, of their clothing as frequently occurred throughout the conflict (Hubbard 2002a:115; Rowlandson 1999:323,354; Drake 1867:156).

The inhabitants of Woodcock's garrison were probably among the first to hear news of the colonial defeat. Later that same morning, or early afternoon, three colonists and an unspecified number of friendly Indians who had managed to escape the battle carnage made their way to the fortified farmhouse some eight miles northeast of the Blackstone River (Leverett 1676:6.89). The information was relayed to the town of Wrentham and on to Boston, where Governor Leverett immediately dispatched a letter to Plymouth informing Governor Winslow of the disaster that had befallen his troops. Governor Leverett could only offer his condolences explaining that the "towns are so drained of men, we are not able to send out any more" (1676:6.89). Nathaniel Saltonstall (1913a:84) wrote that word of the event reached Boston around five o'clock that afternoon by the post from Dedham. It is probable that the dispatch from Wrentham made its way the 27 miles up the Old Post Road through Foxborough, Dedham, Roxbury and onto Boston.

The full magnitude of the defeat was first viewed later that same day when: “by Accident only some of Rehoboth understanding of the Danger, after the Evening Exercise (it being on the Lords Day, March 26, 1676) repaired to the Place; but then it was too late to bring help, unless it were to be Spectators of the dead Carkases of their Friends, and to perform the last Office of Love to them” (Hubbard 2002a:175). The exact nature of the accident that William Hubbard cited was not recorded. It is clear, however, that the burials did not take place at this time nor was there any attempt to count the dead. This conclusion is based on the fact that on 27 March 1676, the day after the battle, Noah Newman (1676:1.3) wrote that the enemy killed 52 English, along with 11 friendly Indians. However, when the burials were undertaken, sometime before 19 April 1676, Newman (Bowen 1948:15-19) revised his totals to 42 or 43 soldiers and 5 friendly Indians. He reported that the bleak task took place over three days, with the majority of the responsibility falling on Rehoboth, although they did receive help from Dedham and Medfield on the final day. He added that the burial party had searched for the missing bodies, but with no success, deducing that “some might wander & perish in the woods being strangers”.¹⁷

Cause and Effect

Considering the absence of Native American accounts, it is impossible to know with any certainty what their intended strategy was as they moved into the Blackstone

¹⁷ The most plausible reason for Newman’s initial miscalculation was that he compiled his list from a roster that was drafted before the company left Rehoboth and not directly from the battle field.

River area, and how the skirmish of 25 March supported, or changed, their objectives.

What can be determined is that while the confrontation drew Captain Pierce's command toward a more suitable landscape for the warriors' preferred style of warfare, it also provided sufficient time for the inhabitants of Rehoboth to secure themselves in the safety of the town's multiple garrisons. This situation, when considering the Native Americans' limited success against breaching fortified positions, provided some assurance of survival (Leach 1995:159; Newman 1676:1.3; Starkey 1998:78).

At the same time, such a defensive plan left the town's recently unoccupied buildings and much of the community's food supply vulnerable. The Indians took full advantage of this situation. The Plymouth Council of War (Morton 1826:438) wrote that on the day following the battle (27 March), Indians came to Rehoboth to steal cattle and remained in the vicinity the rest of the night. The following morning the town was plundered and burned, with the possible exception of perhaps five garrison houses (Bowen 1948:17). John Kingsley (Bowen 1948:20), a resident of the town, noted that in addition to killing cattle and carrying away the hind quarters, Indians drove off the remaining livestock, burned mills, broke grindstones and burned cart wheels. Noah Newman added that after they were finished at Rehoboth, the Indians "drew aside in the evening & pitcht their Camp by the side of ye towne, rose up at day light the next morning tooke their walke over to providence" (Bowen 1948:17). Using a similar strategy as the day before, the warriors left the garrison houses for the most part

unmolested while burning the deserted buildings and stealing food stuffs (Harris 1963:45-47).

The described scenario would probably not have surprised many English settlers. Since the onset of the conflict, Indians had sent out small parties to secure their opponents' farm animals (Church 1996:74; Rowlandson 1999:323). As the war progressed, however, the employment of this particular practice intensified. Evidence of such was dramatically described to Roger Williams (1988: 722-723) when on 29 March 1676, as he stood and watched Providence being burned to the ground, one of the assailants boasted that the Indians' principal destination was the towns about Plymouth and that they were not interested in planting, but "they Would live upon us, and Dear".

In investigating the motivation behind the near destruction of Pierce's command and the town of Rehoboth, a critical question involves whether the Indians' search for food was essential or opportunistic. We know that during the months preceding March the acquisition of food had taken on a greater importance. The problem was partly seasonal, as food resources were usually less predictable during the winter. To compensate, Native American groups traditionally dispersed into small groups during the colder months to better take advantage of the limited resources. However, increasing colonial aggression had forced Native groups to become larger and more mobile, which would have made hunting more problematic and forced the Natives to intensify alternative food procurement strategies (Church 1996:74; Leach 1963:207, 222, 243; LePore 1998:175; Melvoin 1989:101; Starkey 1998:76, 79, 168).

Adding to the already fragile condition was the colonial practice of targeting Native crops and food reserves. Such a tactic was due in part to the inability of the colonial army to effectively engage an enemy who did not fight in the accepted European style of warfare. A convincing argument can also be made that such disregard for non-combatants was an integral component of total war and possibly extermination (Chet 2003:66; Drake 1999:111; Grenier 2005:21; Slotkin and Folsom 1999; Starkey 1998). Armstrong Starkey (1998:81) contends that this type of strategy removed any claim to an English moral superiority.

One should not assume, however, that raiding was the Indians' only available option. Dena Dincauze (1990:31-32) argues that for Native Americans, hunger was not unknown and their reliance on agriculture was always tempered by circumstances. A good example, she suggests, is the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson which, according to Dincauze, demonstrates the degree to which wild foods remained an important element in their regional culture. Dincauze's assessment is supported by a variety of sources. Skeletal remains from fifty-six individuals, ranging in age from three to more than sixty years, excavated from a Narragansett cemetery (RI 1000) and dating between 1600 and 1640, indicate that horticulture was only one of many subsistence strategies employed in southern Rhode Island (Bragdon 1996:89; RIHPHC 2001:66). Also, Roger Williams (1936:88-117), in his *Key to the Language of America*, devoted almost 30 pages of vocabulary and customs of the local native populations to food production, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Examples of Williams' observations include

comments such as “they kill abundance of Fowle. being naturally excellent marks-men; and also more hardned to endure the weather, an wading, lying, and creeping on the ground, &c.” (1936:90); “These Akornes they drie, and in case of want of Corne, by much boyling they make a good dish of them” (1936:95); and “frequently they lay their naked bodies many a cold night on the cold shoare about a fire of two or three sticks and oft in the night search their Nets; and sometimes goe in and stay longer in frozen water” (1936:116).

Further proof of the Indians’ ability to overcome insurmountable challenges with resourcefulness was demonstrated in the aftermath of the Great Swamp Fight, which took place only three months before the Pierce Battle in southern Rhode Island. Despite the devastating loss of warriors, lodging and winter food reserves, the Narragansett managed to recover and remain a formidable fighting force. Armstrong Starkey (1998:77) argues that while the Great Swamp Fight certainly weakened the Narragansett, it did not destroy them, as they were capable of great endurance.

Given the above, it is likely that while procuring food was an issue to Native Americans during the winter of 1676, raiding weakly fortified towns was an additional alternative to their already diverse strategy. This plan would have been all the more attractive considering the colonists’ inclination to retreat into garrisons, which often left a substantial food supply available at minimal risk.

Regardless of the warriors’ intent or tactics, there is strong evidence that the causes for the colonial defeat rest predominately on factors that preceded the actual

battle. Captain Pierce in his assessment of the initial intelligence, whether obtained from an unidentified source or his own observations during the previous day, was convinced that although the Indian presence in the North Woods would be numerically stronger, his command would be able to secure a victory. This assumption so influenced his perception of the situation that every subsequent decision only served to compound his error.

That such was the case receives strong support. First, Pierce chose not to secure a conservative posture to defend Rehoboth. Instead he went on the offensive, a strategy for which the colonial forces in the latter half of the seventeenth century were ill trained. Second, if Richard Bowen's argument is correct, the command departed for Pawtucket without waiting to be reinforced by Captain Mosely. Third, when Captain Pierce began his ill-fated march, he had to understand either his company would not be supported by Providence, or was unaware of the fate of his message for assistance, in which case the possibility of reinforcements was purely speculative. Fourth, despite the severity of the river crossing, and the resulting damage to the company's powder supply, the company continued to press the attack. Finally, the most serious matter of culpability was that Pierce, in defiance of even the most rudimentary rules of warfare, apparently made no adequate reconnaissance to discover the enemy's strength and position or the terrain over which they would be moving.

Still, to place the full responsibility of the colonial defeat entirely on overconfidence is to lose sight of other prefatory factors that might have also played a

significant role in the defeat. Most notable is the distinct possibility that Captain Pierce, like many second generation military leaders, was not adequately trained or have the experience to successfully command such an operation. Norman Dixon (1985:152), who studied this aspect of warfare, composed a checklist of the common patterns that traditionally identified a lack of military competence. Among Dixon's characteristics are those clearly demonstrated by Captain Pierce, including a lack of reconnaissance, underestimating the enemy's ability while overestimating those of his own soldiers, neglecting to make use of surprise or deception, and either disregarding or failing to understand the underlying causes of previous colonial defeats.

The fact that this was the situation should not have been unexpected. Guy Chet (2003:39,66) argues that compared to earlier conventionally trained leaders, the colonial military leadership in the King Philip's War reflected a decided degeneration. As a result, English officers were consistently leading their troops into engagements that downplayed their own tactical strengths. This was especially apparent during offensive actions when the English were undermined by inadequate leadership, training, organization and scouting.

It cannot be over-emphasized that all the officers of the United Colonies, including Pierce, should have had a functional knowledge of the Indians' preferred tactics. Within the first two months of the war, similar ambushes had occurred at Pease Field, Pocasset Swamp and Quaboag. Also, in October of 1675, Roger Williams had informed Governor John Leverett of Indians' plans "to drawe C. Mose [Capt. Mosely]

and other of your forces (by training and drilling and Seeming flights) into such places as are full of long grasse, flags, Sedge etc. and then environ them round with Fire, Smoke and Bullets” (1988:705). Still, time after time commanders continued to lead their troops into compromising situations. Such was the propensity for this type of mistake that in the aftermath of Pierce’s defeat, the Massachusetts Bay Council (1676 69.191) still felt there was sufficient need to alert Major Savage against the Indians’ use of stratagems and being drawn off by decoys into an ambush.

However, to simply conclude that the colonists lost the battle is to detract from the Indians’ accomplishment. Virtually undetected, they had moved a substantial fighting force into an area of southern New England that was largely undefended by colonial forces. Using colonial weaknesses and the available landscape to great advantage, they selected a battlefield that played to their strengths while forcing the colonists into an indefensible position. In so doing the warriors eliminated the only barrier that stood between themselves and the complete destruction of Rehoboth and Providence. In the final evaluation it might well be, as George Bodge (1906:438) wrote, that Captain Pierce was simply “out-generalled”.

CHAPTER 4

REMEMBRANCE AND MEMORIALIZATION

For much of their history, the battlefields of King Philip's War have not been popularly embraced. Poorly documented, many were not marked or commemorated until the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, when organizations such as the Society of Colonial Wars and various local historical societies commissioned the installation of numerous memorials throughout much of southern New England (Schultz 1999). This movement, no doubt influenced by the United States' earlier preoccupation with the construction of a complex patriotic landscape (Linenthal 1991:2-3), was predominantly directed at the installation of monuments to memorialize colonial victories, such as Turner's Falls or Talcott's Massacre. Others, like Wheeler's Surprise or Bloody Brook, served to celebrate their sacrifices.

The dedication of a granite boulder commemorating the Pierce Battle was in many ways typical of those installations. Small and inconspicuous in design, the monument, due to the absence of archaeological evidence, marked a traditional location rather than the actual battle site. In addition, the various forms of veneration that predominated this period of commemoration perceived the colonists as heroic figures,

whose ideals and sacrifices not only sanctified the ground on which they made their stand, but were critical to the formation of the Union and its continued expansion.

Such patriotic veneration is an example of what Paul Shackel (2000:vii) maintains is the way special interest groups define a usable past. Such rhetoric is also exclusionary. The Native Americans, who conceived and executed an almost flawless battle, were either vilified in an attempt to justify conquest and inflate English accomplishments, or marginalized by ill-informed proclamations of extinction. In so doing, a dominant public perception was created that went largely unchallenged until the 1960s.

However, the simple patriotic inspiration these original dedications advanced was not to be realized. The installation of a permanent monument enabled future generations the opportunity not only to accept the dominant view but also to consider alternative interpretations. Paul Shackel (2001:3) writes that objects and landscapes have different meanings to different people at different times. As such, the memories associated with highly visible objects, such as monuments, are not static but instead are constantly being reconstructed.

The purpose of this chapter is to construct a contextual analysis of the cultural significance that was originally assigned to the Pierce monument. Also addressed are the dynamics of the political and social processes by which individuals and groups of diverse ideological convictions have competed for symbolic ownership of the memorial and in the process have venerated, rededicated, redefined, ignored, defiled, or questioned its symbolism.

Colonial Remembrance

The opening stages of King Philip's War were poorly conceived and executed by both adversaries. In June of 1675 the Wampanoag conducted a surprisingly weak opening offensive. Soon afterwards Philip allowed himself and some of his men to be trapped in Pocasset Swamp, where only through the incompetence of the colonial forces were they able to escape through Rehoboth, across the Blackstone River and eventually on to New York. Their retreat allowed the warriors time to regroup and by the winter of 1675-1676 various Indian factions carried out a series of successful raids across Massachusetts Bay and into Plymouth Colony (Bowen 1948:79).

At the end of March the Indians won a dramatic victory over Captain Pierce, which strategically might well have been one of the most skillfully executed battles of the Indian wars. This triumph also allowed the warriors enough time to destroy the nearby towns of Rehoboth and Providence. By the middle of April the Indians had advanced to Sudbury, which was only 17 miles west of Boston (Leach 1995:172-175).

By many accounts the months surrounding the Pierce Battle were most distressing. It is likely that William Harris, one of Providence's leading citizens, spoke for many New Englanders when he wrote "but for some time they did much damage, and messengers like Job's came close on each other's heels, telling of the enemy burning houses, taking cattle, killing men and women and children, taking others captive, and

exulting and boasting that God had abandoned the English to support the Indians” (1963:19).

Notwithstanding these successes, the English were slowly beginning to take the advantage. Better organized and aided by the increased use of Indians who were friendly to their cause, the colonies were able to maintain a continual harassment of the enemy. Such a strategy made it difficult for the Indians to plant or obtain enough food to fight off starvation. For example, at Pawtucket Falls during May 1676, Captain Thomas Brattle surprised a party of Indians that had been fishing along the river, killing some of them. The troops captured arms, supplies, horses and great stores of fish (Bowen 1948:24). Disease, the necessity to fight on a second front against the Mohawks, and differences in strategy within the Native alliance contributed to a sharp drop in Indian offensive actions (Leach 1995:181). In August of 1676 the United Colonies struck the pivotal blow when Philip (Metacomet) was run down in a swamp and killed, effectively ending King Philip’s War in southern New England.

With the gradual waning of hostilities during the summer of 1676, the colonists’ most immediate recollections of the carnage that had occurred over the previous 18 months must have been the loss of family and friends, as well as the economic hardships the war had brought upon them. The evidence for such a conclusion is considerable. In proportion to population, the number of fatalities made King Philip’s War one of the bloodiest conflicts to take place on North American soil. Compounding such suffering

were the difficult conditions which arose from the destruction of numerous towns and the damage to New England's economic base (Calloway 1997:1; Leach 1995:143-144).

Beyond the immediate concerns of rebuilding both lives and homes, there were also constant reminders of just how tenuous the peace was. In northern New England open hostilities continued into 1677. In addition, confrontations between settlers located along the frontier borders and various Indian groups did not entirely subside until the French and Indian War concluded almost 100 years later (Lepore 1998:177). Furthermore, the end of warfare does not necessarily conclude animosities between two adversaries. The hostilities had undoubtedly altered some colonists' views of their neighbors. Kathleen J. Bragdon (2001:192) observes that after the war, English descriptions of the Indians emphasized their cruelty and savagery. In some instances such resentment turned physical. One example is the case of Benjamin Hernden, who in 1681 was tried by the Rhode Island General Assembly for shooting at an unidentified Indian who had refused to stand still upon Hernden's command. Although Hernden avoided prosecution, the General Assembly found sufficient justification to pass an act with the hope of preventing outrages against the Indians (Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:70)

Despite the psychological anguish, the colonists developed a number of diverse symbolic measures to reflect and commemorate the war. One macabre gesture was the placing of warriors' heads on stakes within colonial towns, in some instances remaining for a number of years. The most notable decapitation involved Philip. Shot to death in a

Mount Hope swamp, Philip's mud-caked body was quartered and his head removed and carried to Plymouth. Captain Benjamin Church (Drake 1840:126), who had commanded the successful raid, would later write that he had received only thirty shillings for Philip's head, which he thought was "scanty reward, and poor encouragement" for such an accomplishment.

So as not to forget the anniversaries of important war events, publications such as Foster's Almanac reminded colonists of significant anniversaries to commemorate (Lepore 1998:181). Printed material, however, went far beyond casual reminders. According to Lepore, the most enduring colonial observances of the war were contained in the large output of written material that followed in the aftermath. Through 400 letters and 20 different printed volumes, New Englanders "expressed their agonies, mourned their losses, and, most of all, defended their conduct" (LePore 1998:xiii). Russell Bourne came to a similar conclusion when he wrote that, despite all the prose, "not one word [appeared] about how the Puritans might have done something ugly to the natives and might now revise that attitude. The near loss of the war drove them not toward greater acceptance and tolerance but in the direction of harsher religious and civil strictness" Bourne 1990:38).

It is noteworthy that *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England* by William Hubbard, and Benjamin Church's *Diary of King Philip's War*; two of the most noted and widely distributed King Philip's War narratives, were reissued during the Revolutionary War. Lepore (1998:187) claims that they were revived as a propaganda

tool. By comparing the British to the Indians of 1676, writers had a source of patriotic rhetoric to use against their enemy. The reissues also reinforced the message that the colonists, because of their miseries and hardships, were the proper possessors of the land (Bourne 1990:4).

Rhode Island: Celebrations and Monuments

For the people of Providence Plantations, the first civic commemoration for the war's end probably occurred when the townspeople gathered for the sale of Indian prisoners. According to town records (ERTP 1892:15.151-154), Providence authorized two auctions (August 1676, January 1677) for the purpose of selling Indian captives into servitude. An Indian's length of bondage varied according to age. For older Indians this might total seven years. For children under the age of five the length of service lasted until their thirtieth birthday.¹⁸

Besides placing Indians into subjugation, additional punishments handed down by the town council included execution and banishment. For example, Potucke, one of the Narragansett warriors who had spoken to Roger Williams during the burning of Providence, was first "secured and well used" (Bartlett 1857:548) in Newport until the governor saw cause to send the prisoner to Boston, where he was later executed (LaFantasic 1988:726). Beyond accounts of retribution, the Providence Town Records, which are among the best preserved for the King Philip's War period, provide little

¹⁸ Margaret Newell (2003:128) reported that throughout New England many hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of Indians were enslaved.

information about additional civic celebrations or remembrances. Less formal efforts cannot be ruled out.

This lack of documentation also encompasses the colony's major battle sites. Today the only remaining contemporary remembrance of the Pierce Battle is a small gravestone in Old Rehoboth's south cemetery that is inscribed with the name of John Reed, Jr. Reed was one of four townspeople who had been attached to Pierce's command and died during the ensuing battle. Since the town's records clearly indicate that none of the four were brought back for burial, the gravestone most likely is a family's act of memorializing a fallen son. It is also possible that at some point during the three days it took to bury the command's soldiers, the townspeople of Rehoboth erected some form of visible remembrance to honor their neighbors' sacrifices. According to Russell Handsman (2008:170) such local memorials become celebrated through the life cycles, experiences, and histories of the people who lived around them.

Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that if the Pierce Battle landscape ever achieved a sense of place among the residents, it quickly lost its importance. Published in the *Proceedings of the Commissioners for Settling the Eastern Boundary Between Rhode Island and Massachusetts* (Bowen 1946:12-13) were testimonies obtained from a number of Rehoboth residents in which they described important landmarks along the Seekonk and Pawtucket rivers. The informants were in their 60s and 70s and had lived in Rehoboth for all, or most, of their lives. Since evidence was taken during 1741, the men would have been born shortly before or after the battle and grown

up less than five miles from the general battle location. Nonetheless, while prominent features such as William Blackstone's home site, Pawtucket Falls, Abbott's Run and various other streams and farms were cited, there was no mention of the Pierce site. One could surmise that 65 years after the engagement, the battlefield, if remembered at all, was not an important landmark or destination for civic veneration by the townspeople of Rehoboth, despite having lost four of their soldiers during the engagement.

There are a number of possible explanations for the absence of any specific form of enduring veneration. First, considering the destruction that occurred throughout the area, it is conceivable that the rebuilding of homes and food production consumed the principal share of the colonists' time. In addition, many inhabitants had retired to more secure locations and were slow in returning after the war's end, if indeed they returned at all. Furthermore, one element that the major battle sites in Rhode Island all had in common was that they were fought in obscure woody places and swamps that were probably unfamiliar to the vast majority of settlers. Even the supposed location of the Pierce Battle, which was fought within five miles of Providence and Rehoboth, was described as "wild, bleak, and barren" (Grieve 1897:18). Demographic changes would have diminished much of the appeal for local residents to keep and honor the sites. Few local inhabitants had any direct involvement in the engagements.

Lastly, there is the question of exactly when the celebration of battlefields became prevalent. According to Paul Shackel (2001:9-10) "citizens of the early American Republic resisted the development of an American collective memory and frowned upon

the commemoration of a sacred past.” He continues, “In the antebellum era, Americans saw the United States as a country with a future rather than a glorious past worth commemoration. They believed in the value of succeeding without patronage or family influence” (Shackel 2001:9-10). Edward Linenthal (1991:2) concludes that it was not until the early to mid nineteenth century that the United States began to construct a patriotic landscape in which memorializing its battlefields became important.

Linenthal’s estimation coincides nicely with the development of the public’s contemporary perception of the Pierce Battle. Starting in the second quarter of the 19th century, a number of writers began researching and publishing histories of towns that played important roles during King Philip’s War. Three of these labors directly affected the Pierce Battle. In 1831 Samuel Deane published a history of the town of Scituate which was located in Plymouth Colony and was the home of Captain Pierce and seventeen additional colonists from the ill-fated company. Three years later, John Daggett wrote a *History of Attleborough*. The lands of Attleboro were originally included in a land grant that was ceded to Rehoboth as part of that town’s North Purchase. Lastly, in 1836, Leonard Bliss issued his *History of Rehoboth*, a town which during King Philip’s War included most of the land along the eastern border of the Blackstone, Pawtucket and Seekonk rivers.

While these authors collected much of their war related information from the most widely available sources, the process of presenting a broader combination of accounts created a more full and interesting narrative that reintroduced readers to a largely

forgotten chapter of Rhode Island and Massachusetts colonial history to. A comparison of these three local histories with later publications also demonstrates the influence these authors carried with subsequent writers. One notable, frequently replicated theme to emerge from these works was the patriotic veneration ascribed to Captain Pierce's company. Leonard Bliss wrote that the company "fought and bled, with a valor of which the annals of history, ancient or modern, can seldom boast" (1836:87). Deane (1831:122) compared their bravery to the ancient warriors of Thermopylae. John Daggett (1973:50) noted that it took more courage to fight and die on such an obscure ground that was once the domains of another race of men, who have long since passed away, than on the plains of Waterloo with all the "pomp and circumstances of a glorious war".

John Daggett, in particular, remained active in his quest to elaborate upon the historical value of the Pierce Battle. For example, he delivered a keynote address at a commemorative celebration in Seekonk (formally part of Rehoboth) twenty-three years (1860) after publishing his *History of Attleborough*. At that time Daggett proclaimed that the early Pilgrims who settled this land were men of faith and courage who acted with great moral power and valued conscience above all other things. He then proceeded to compare Captain Pierce's company to those Plymouth founders and argued that due to their devotion to such principles, the ground upon which those men lived, fought, and died was sacred and was the land to which history would look for the foundations of their institutions and the seeds of great events (Newman 1860:86). Such a viewpoint is understandable. In his essay on the importance of Thanksgiving, Robert Knox (2007:B6)

notes that in our national narratives, Americans need to see themselves as standing for something good. Consequently, they chose the “godly, family-based, hardworking, literate, plucky, community-oriented, adaptable, successful band of religious rebels as the people who gave us a start in life” (Knox 2007:B6).

The Pierce Monument

The first published voice that specifically lobbied for the creation of a monument honoring the Pierce Battle can be traced to Joseph Ballard Murdock (1902:91-104). Murdock, a descendent of Captain Michael Pierce, wrote an essay in 1899 entitled “The Rehoboth Fight, 1676” which was subsequently printed in the *First Record Book of the Rhode Island Chapter of the Society of Colonial Wars*, an organization of which the author was a member.

The Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island was organized in December of 1897 to commemorate important military events in the early colonial history of the United States. More specifically, descendants of those early colonists, a lineage that was a prerequisite for membership into the society, were required to:

Perpetuate the names, memory or deeds of those brave and courageous men...to inspire among the members and their descendants the fraternal and patriotic spirit of their forefathers, and to inculcate in the community respect and reverence for

the acts and principles of those indomitable men, which made the freedom and unity of our country a possibility. (Society of Colonial Wars [SCWRI] 1902:10)

Murdock wrote that his objective in submitting the paper was to bring to the attention of the society important facts relating to the little known occurrence of Pierce's Battle. He added that, in keeping with the organization's mission, nothing could be a more appropriate reminder of the actions of those early heroes as to place a monument on the ground where they made their good fight. He went on to suggest that the Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island could act as agents in the collection of funds for such an undertaking. Murdock apparently thought it critical to clarify two important points to achieve his objectives. He first had to place the general location of the battle, which until this point had received only limited attention. He next had to confront historical allegations that Captain Pierce demonstrated poor judgment in allowing his company to be entrapped by the enemy, a contention that if not specifically stated in the primary sources was certainly implied.

To address his first concern, Murdock opted for a literal translation of William Hubbard's statement that the action took place by a small brook called Abbot's Run. Today the tributary is located in the town of Cumberland, Rhode Island along the eastern bank of the Blackstone River. After establishing a location, Murdock next went about mending Captain Pierce's reputation. Damage control was essential, because Captain Pierce could not be regarded as having exercised poor judgment, for then the dead could

well be viewed, not as soldiers in battle reminiscent of Thermopile, but more simply as victims of an ambush. According to Edward Linenthal (1991:12) this type of conclusion often has a negative effect on the popular perception of sacrifice. If, however, the Captain's actions could be justified, then the company would have sacrificed their lives for the common good.

Therefore, the author maintained that the day was lost not because of a trap, but instead the Captain recognized the ploy for what it was and drove the enemy with such ferocity that the Indians were pushed back into a reserve force which had not been foreseen. Consequently, it was not the captain's failure as a tactician that lost the day, but his belief that he had defeated the entire Indian force, when in reality he had engaged only a part. This error, the author believed, would have been compensated for if the captain's letter for assistance from Providence had not been delayed, a delay which the author considered the primary cause of the slaughter.

Murdock used superlatives such as dying in a bed of honor, patriot, willingness to die for their colony, sold their lives dearly, courage, discipline, and cool heroism in describing the company's actions. He also made note of the enemy's resolve, which would have been a requisite in affirming the bravery of the colonists, as there would have been little honor to be gained in being defeated by an enemy who was weak. The author ended his paper by writing:

It was a gallant deed of brave men, and the more its details are known and studied, the more fully we feel that we can through all generations study on this battlefield the courage, spirit, and resolution which have made our country what it is, and hope that when confronted by problems of its own, the same qualities in its citizens will enable it to meet its destination as proudly and as gloriously as our forefathers faced their trials and foes in days gone by. (SCWRI 1902:104)

It is not known if the Society of Colonial Wars ever seriously considered Joseph Murdock's proposal for a monument to the Pierce Battle. We do know that during the same time the society instead erected a significant granite obelisk honoring the Great Swamp Fight. In 1903 Murdock transferred from the Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island into the Massachusetts chapter (SCWRI 1914:67). We can only speculate whether his move was motivated by convenience or a falling-out over monument choices.

It is also unknown to what degree, if any, Murdock's writing influenced events relative to the eventual installation of a monument to the Pierce Battle. Whatever the motivation, on 15 October 1904 a memorial service was held for the fallen officers and soldiers from Captain Pierce's company at the Congregational Church on High Street in Central Falls. The service, in large part, was essentially a forum to fund the future installation of a monument.

Thomas W. Bicknell (1908:5), president of the Bristol County Historical Society, and author of the lengthy poem read at the 1893 Rehoboth celebration, wrote that the

society was engaged in the work of awakening interest in historical places and events, and placing memorial stones with bronze inscriptions over well identified historical sites. He went on to report that the Pierce battle was selected as the Bristol Historical Society's first challenge in deference to the great number of descendants of those men desirous of the placement of a suitable remembrance.

At the conclusion of the service, a motion was passed that authorized the selection of a chairman and committee to make plans for a suitable monument to be placed at some future date in the city of Central Falls, Rhode Island. The appointed committee was composed largely of descendants of Michael Pierce including: Alonzo E. Pierce, Frederick P. Pearce, Addison P. Munroe, Amasa Eaton, Edward E. Pierce, Edwin C. Pierce, and John H. Pierce (Bicknell 1908:7).

This groundwork came to fruition when on 21 September 1907 a granite boulder fitted with a bronze tablet was dedicated in Central Falls. The monument, which measured five feet high by four feet wide by three feet thick, was donated by a farmer, while the moving of the stone and the bronze plaque were paid by donations raised by the committee.¹⁹ The monument was placed along the east side of High Street, near its intersection with Aigan Street, on a small patch of land that was deeded to the state of

¹⁹ Stone boulders were the preferred choice for commemorating colonial era events (Rubertone 2008:201). Whatever the underlying philosophy might have been, an important determinant might simply have been that, thanks to the most recent Ice Age, suitably sized examples were plentiful and cheap.

Rhode Island by the Harris Steam Engine Company. According to Byron Richards (1938:10), the original plaque was stolen and replaced by one that reads: ²⁰

Pierce's Fight
Near This Spot
Captain Michael Pierce
And His company Of
Plymouth Colonists
Ambushed And Outnumbered Were
Almost Annihilated
By The Indians
March 26, 1676

The keynote address was delivered by Edwin C. Pierce (Bicknell 1908:18-25), a direct descendant of Captain Michael Pierce and prominent Rhode Island attorney, legislator, and businessman. Mr. Pierce's oration differed from Joseph Murdock's earlier discourse on two important points, specifically the placement of the battle location and the circumstances surrounding the company's entrapment.

As to where the battle was fought, Mr. Pierce accepted the conclusions of James Whitney (1889:1) who, through his intimate knowledge of the general area, made a case for the main thrust of the battle being fought on the west side of the Blackstone River. Concerning the question of an ambush, the speaker speculated that such an experienced fighter and commander such as Captain Pierce would have known of the enemy's proclivity for entrapment and sent an advance scouting party ahead to reconnoiter. It was

²⁰ The current inscription is the same as the original with the exception of the first line which read "Here Captain Pierce..." (Bicknell 1908).

this misplaced faith in his scouts that beguiled the captain into the very situation he had been determined to avoid. As the enemy swarmed down, the command's fate was sealed, except in the hope that Captain Edmonds would shortly arrive with his company of soldiers from Providence.

Like others before him, Edwin Pierce remarked that the fortitude and valor demonstrated by the company were unsurpassed in the annals of warfare made more impressive by the consideration that they fought without the fanfare of many larger military engagements. By having done so, the speaker judged that Captain Pierce should be compared to Miles Standish, the chivalric captain of early Plymouth, in his ability and courage. Instead of praising the Indians' fighting ability, as did Murdock, Edwin Pierce instead chose to add to the courage of the colonists by vilifying the warriors. He portrayed of the battle scene as being rent with savage cries, tomahawks being hurled by powerful savages, enemy swarming down, the colonists lying dead on the ground covered with arrow wounds that disable but do not immediately kill, and torture to those captured alive.

In the closing address Thomas Bicknell proclaimed that the historic value of the memorial was to honor the heroic sacrifice the brave group of colonists made in defense of their homes, brethren, and country and by having done so the company should be enrolled among those at Thermopylae, Bull Run, Gettysburg or any other number of famous battles. Men of such spirit, he noted, never die and their struggle made:

Defense a common cause and united diverse people for mutual protection. The New England confederacy was a direct result of Philip's Bloody War, and the Union of New England colonies was the preparatory work for the larger union of the thirteen colonies for defense in the American Revolution, and still further the particle and vital reason for the Federal Union. We are the united people of today for the trials that cemented the hearts and hopes of the American colonists two and a half centuries ago. (1908:38)

The Pierce Battle is unique among King Philip's War memorials in that two additional installations were erected to honor the sacrifices of Captain Pierce and his company. The first is Nine Men's Misery (1925), which is the name assigned to an outcrop of rock located on land formerly occupied by the Cistercian Monastery in Cumberland, Rhode Island and currently owned by that town. According to tradition, at the conclusion of the Pierce Battle nine colonists were taken alive and removed some miles to the north where they were tortured, clubbed to death and scalped. When the bodies were discovered, the slain men were buried in a common grave that was marked with a cairn of stones.

The public perception of the past can be influenced by any number of factors, including the time in which an event is studied, individual and group prejudices, personal beliefs, the number and scope of available resources, and myth. Myth is often camouflaged as folklore or tradition. And according to Paul Campbell and LaFantasie

(1978:67) once a myth becomes ingrained in the collective thought process as a truth “these truths die hard”. Today, research has shown that there is absolutely no evidence, written or archaeological, to support an association between Nine Men’s Misery and Captain Pierce.²¹ Nonetheless, the episode has worked its way into many mainstream accounts (Greene 1886:42; Murdock 1902:99; Ellis and Morris 1906:191-192; Whitney 1889:1; Philbrick 2006:299) and has only served to reconfigure the battle.

The final memorial consisted of a 9,500 pound granite rock, which was fitted with a plaque, and dedicated to the memory of King Philip’s War participants Captain Michael Pierce and Sergeant Samuel Hill during the 1936 Rhode Island Tercentenary Celebration (Figure 3). Based on what can be deduced from the available information, the memorial was conceived by Colonel Thomas J. Hill Peirce who was a descendant of both soldiers.²² Sometime after the dedication the plaque was removed (or stolen) and recent investigations at the park ranger station and maintenance garage indicated that none of the employees, some with more than 30 years of service, were cognizant of the monument’s origin (Figure 4). The existence of the memorial has also been lost to some, and perhaps all, Pierce family descendants. Thomas J. Hill, Jr., the 11 year old boy who presented the memorial to the governor of the state, died over 20 years ago. In a recent conversation, his widow (Mrs. T. Peirce October 19, 2007, pers. comm.) stated that she had no knowledge that the event had ever occurred.

²¹ See appendix B, Nine Men’s Misery

²² Thomas Peirce used a variation of the Pierce name.

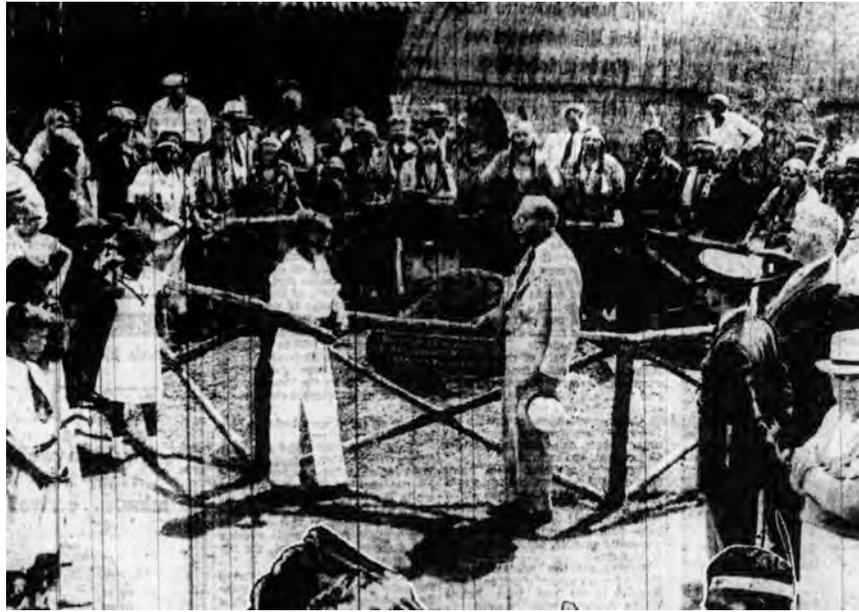


Figure 3. Dedication of Peirce and Hill Monument. (*Providence Journal* 1936)



Figure 4. Peirce and Hill Monument, Goddard Park. (Photo by author, 2008)

Great Swamp Fight

During the approximate time that the Pierce Memorial was under consideration, the Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island was involved in the planning and installation of a monument to honor the Great Swamp Fight. The Great Swamp Fight took place on 19 December 1675 when troops from the United Colonies attacked a Narragansett stronghold in South Kingstown. The engagement proved costly to both. Although accounts vary, the battle resulted in the death or wounding of over 200 colonists and possibly 300 Indian warriors, along with numerous Indian women and children (Bodge 1906:174). For the colonies, any satisfaction gained from the action was offset by their high number of casualties and by the realization that the incident encouraged the Narragansett, the most powerful tribe in southern New England, to enter the conflict on Philip's side.

The monument to the Great Swamp Fight was dedicated on 20 October 1906 by delegations from the Massachusetts and Rhode Island chapters of the Society of Colonial Wars. The memorial consisted of a large granite shaft approximately thirty feet in height, encircled by four granite boulders. The event held many similarities to that of the Pierce Monument, constructed a year later. The rhetoric of the principal speakers helped to create the idea of a patriotic past that was intended to be an inspiration and model, not only for those in attendance, but also for future generations (SCWRI 1914:59-77).

The celebration was attended by approximately 100 people consisting mainly of delegates of the Society of Colonial Wars, with additional observers from the Rhode

Island Historical Society, interested individuals, and several Narragansett Indians. The first order of business was the passing of the deed for the locality from the Society of Colonial Wars to the Rhode Island Historical Society, followed by the unveiling of the monument by three members of the Narragansett tribe. The inscribed central bronze plaque read:

Attacked
Within Their Fort Upon This Island
The Narragansett Indians
Made Their Last Stand
In King Philip's War
And Were Crushed By The United Forces Of
The Massachusetts Connecticut
And Plymouth Colonies
In The "Great Swamp Fight"
Sunday 19 December 1675
This Record Was
Placed By The Rhode Island Society
Of Colonial Wars 1906

William M. Bodge (SCWRI 1906:4-6), a chaplain in the society, then delivered words of dedication. He pronounced that membership into the society was restricted to descendants who could trace their lineage from men who served in the colonial wars and that the monument that stood before the gathered crowd represented a "perpetual memorial of the stern purpose and high valor of our forefathers". In describing the individual components of the monument, he pronounced that the granite shaft represented the rugged and unadorned Pilgrim and Puritan of 1675 and offered a prayer in the hope

that all would remain as loyal to our ideals as they were to theirs. The boulders, he continued, which were oriented to the cardinal points, were representative of the colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut and Rhode Island and symbolized the “indestructible record of a rugged race” (SCWRI 1906:5).

Bodge, apparently out of respect for the Indians in attendance, stated that in the light of present times the religious intolerance and treatment of the native population during those troubled early years appeared unjust. Still, he argued, his forefathers were steadfast in their loyalty to God’s will as they understood it and it was that devotion that led them to fight against what they perceived as a threat to their families, homes, and colony. In conclusion, he cited that today the society joins together with descendants of the almost vanquished Narragansett as a token of lasting peace.

Heavy rain shortened the ceremonies, but the public was invited to attend a meeting of the Society of Colonial Wars that was held later that day at Memorial Hall in Peace Dale, Rhode Island. At that gathering Rowland Hazard (SCWRI 1906:9-53) delivered a lengthy summary of King Philip’s War. Before commencing with the historical account, however, Hazard offered a sympathetic reminder that the Narragansett people were brought into the conflict only when the United Colonies yielded to internal forces and attacked the Indian stronghold, based solely on their refusal to surrender some Wampanoag who were encamped with the Narragansett. He also cautioned those in attendance that the Indian side had rarely been presented. He emphasized that the chroniclers of the late war were English and, even when sympathetic to the Indian’s

plight, did not produce entirely objective accounts of the causes, engagements, or of the Indians themselves.

Yet, having drawn attention to the shortsightedness of the colonial view, Hazard's (SCWRI 1906:53) own prejudices were all too apparent. Using excerpts from the very accounts he had previously drawn attention to, Hazard went on to portray New England Indians as savage, simple-minded in character, and superstitious with few redeeming traits. He emphasized his points by stereotypically mimicking their broken English speech. Finally he noted that "the vanished Indian, once all powerful here, stands forth in memory as we survey the scene. But let us not judge too harshly. The weaker race gave way to the stronger. Surely the sons of the strong can afford to be generous" (SCWRI 1906:53).

Dedications in honor of Rhode Island's colonial past, such as the one just described, were fairly standardized during the 19th and 20th centuries. Granite boulders, speeches, prayers, poems, and unveilings were all common elements of a well-organized program. Also representative of the time was the limited participation allotted to Native Americans (Rubertone 1998:198). This arrangement appears to have remained consistent even when the installation was designed to honor the state's Narragansett heritage. For instance, Patricia E. Rubertone (1998:198-212) noted that at both Memorial Rock and the Canonicus monument, newspaper accounts describe a mostly white audience and minor Native American involvement.

Since the monument's inception, the Society of Colonial Wars has taken little additional advantage of the site. Such neglect at first appears problematic. The Great Swamp Fight monument was not erected to venerate a single individual but was representative of a unified colonial effort. While time and changes in membership often makes onsite commemoration difficult to sustain, the society continues to have a strong presence in the state. The lack of celebration is further compounded by the apparent contradiction to the chapter's Article Ten (SCWRI 1902:14) which stipulates that the members of the Society, when practicable, shall hold celebrations in each year commemorative of the death of King Philip and the Great Swamp Fight.

This discrepancy, however, is easily explained. In a conversation with Bruce Macgunnigle (August 2007, pers. comm.), past chapter historian, he noted that currently the society does indeed holds two celebrations (meetings) yearly, consisting of a cook out in August and a more formal gathering in December. Nonetheless, while the meeting dates correspond to the Swamp Fight and Philip's death, they are in no way governed by, or limited to, the aforementioned happenings. In fact, Mr. Macgunnigle stated that while topics concerning the colonial wars are a priority, the meetings often focus on more modern times.

Monuments Today

In the decades immediately following the monument building phase in Rhode Island, there is little evidence that much attention was paid to the individual sites or the

anniversaries of the events themselves. Searches of numerous archives uncovered only two instances directly concerning the Pierce Monument. The first occurred sometime after August of 1954 when the Pierce Monument, which until that time was located on the eastern side of High Street (Blackstone Valley sewer district, sheet 5), was moved almost directly across the street within the confines of the Central Falls Municipal Ball Park, which has since been renamed Macomber Field. During this period the monument's bronze plaque was also transferred to a more conventional grave marker that was erected directly in front of the now unmarked granite boulder (Figure 5).

The reasoning behind these decisions has not yet been uncovered. Logically, however, the relocation makes perfect sense. The field is a securely fenced area that has spared the monument the usual encounters with vandalism. The move also eliminated the need for the Rhode Island Historical Society to hold a deed on a very small parcel of land.

Transferring the monument onto city property also transformed the installation into a more recognizable civic memorial. Such a supposition received some confirmation when in 1976, on the 300th anniversary of the Pierce Battle, a ceremony was held by the faculty and students at Central Falls High School. At that time a paper was presented by William Jennings (collection of author), a history teacher at the school, in which he set forth a more balanced assessment of the underlying causes of the war and the battle's significance to the city.

In 1992 a large area near the Pierce Memorial was dedicated as the Pierce Park and Riverwalk by the city's mayor Thomas Lazieh. At that time a granite boulder with a



Figure 5. Pierce Monument at Macomber Field, Central Falls, R.I. (Photo by author)

bronze plaque was placed less than 300 feet from where the original monument currently stands. The inscription reads:

Pierce Park and River Walk

Due to land disputes and broken treaties between the local natives and early English settlers, King Philip's War took place for fourteen months during 1675 and 1676. Captain Michael Pierce's fight with the natives occurred on this spot in March of 1676. From Dexter's Ledge (now the site of Cogswell Tower in Jenks Park) native scouts saw Pierce's troops approaching. One hundred natives and seventy settlers perished in the battle. Ten

settlers escaped to what is now the Monastery Grounds in
Cumberland. Only one lived to tell the tale.
Placed by the City of Central Falls
Honorable Thomas Lazieh, Mayor
1992
Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor

This celebration was decidedly different from earlier ones that occurred in the first quarter of the twentieth century. No emphasis was placed upon the glorification of the cause, the consecrated ground upon which it occurred, the sanctification of the English troops, or traditional patriotic rhetoric that ignored the Native American account. Instead the events were conducted by individuals with community connections who redefined the event and the site, not as sacred or enshrined, but as a balanced historical community event based upon recent research rather than ancestral association.

For the community, this process of redefinition was not only important in interpreting the city's early history, but in the instance of the Pierce Riverwalk, enabled the site to be placed upon tourists maps (Navigator 2006) as a significant location along the Blackstone Valley National Corridor. This benefit has served to extend the importance of that history to a wider regional audience. According to Shackel (2001:10) the ability to construct heritage is essential for creating community and cultural continuity.

Native American Remembrance

Whereas sources of colonial veneration of the war are limited, examples of Native American memorialization are meager at best. We do know that the Indians removed body parts from their victims. While dismembered parts might have served temporarily as war trophies, it appears more likely that the majority were taken to intimidate English troops (Lepore 1998:179). Narragansett historian Ella Wilcox Sekatau (Herndon and Sekatau 1997:115; Davis 2003:B1) writes that some oral history exists regarding the period, but little has been made public.

The scarcity of information may be attributed to a variety of determinants. Certainly, the aftereffects of the war were many times more significant for the Indians than they were for the English. Besides those casualties directly related to various engagements, there were also heavy losses through disease and starvation. James Drake (Davis 2003:B1) estimates that by the war's end the Indian population in New England, which had previously accounted for a quarter of the region's population, had been reduced to a tenth. Compounding these losses was the fact that the Indians, as the losers, were also subjected to the reprisals of the United Colonies and Rhode Island. Such punishments included execution, imprisonment, slavery, and expulsion which further decimated and fractured their population.

Aside from the actual reduction in Indian population, the fear of continuing retributions persuaded many individuals and families to abandon traditional tribal

enclaves and seek the safety of more distant tribes or clans. The Narragansett population continued to decline during the 18th century, as some members joined a widespread Christian exodus to Brothertown, New York, with the promise of free land and less white involvement. A second withdrawal to Wisconsin in the 1830s and 1840s further depleted the group (Bragdon 2001:192; Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:74-77; Lepore 1998:183).

Those Narragansett who chose to remain in Rhode Island found some relief in the seclusion of what is today Charlestown and Westerly by integrating with the Niantics who, under the leadership of Ninigret, had remained neutral during the conflict. Over time, these lands increasingly shrank as the area became more sought after by a variety of interested parties, including private land concerns such as the Atherton Company. In 1709 the state of Rhode Island negotiated a deal with the Narragansett in which the state took control of much of their land while setting aside eight square miles as reserved land (Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:70). Ella Wilcox Sekatau (Herndon and Sekatau 1997:115) adds that while the arrangement provided for future land protection, it also signaled the end of free movement of the native people over their ancestral lands. Campbell and LaFantasie (1978:71) argue that the arrangement was far more costly. By surrendering the greater part of their lands, the Narragansett had symbolically relinquished political autonomy to the colonial legislature and accelerated the downward trend begun by King Philips War.²³

²³ Nearing the close of the 18th century, whites outnumbered Indians in South County by twenty to one (Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:71).

Not all Indians resisted such change. Some individuals accepted the post-war transformations, including the concept of self-sufficiency, although such acceptance often had an isolating effect (Plane 2000:180). Most were restricted to the lowest economic level and the few commonly available jobs fragmented families. It was necessary for natives to be continually on the move searching for employment. They generally had to work and live as servants in white households or enter the seafaring trades, which often required long periods of absence. Those who resided off tribal lands frequently reduced their profiles by relocating to the outskirts of settlements or to racially mixed neighborhoods, thus forming closer associations with other marginalized individuals (Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:75; Cottrol 1982:22-23; Herndon and Sekatau 1997:123; Lepore 1998:185; O'Brien 1997:150-151).

Whether Native Americans integrated into the wider white community or retained more traditional lifestyles, considerable intermarriage occurred between them and free blacks. Plane and Button (1993:593, 588) note that whites in Massachusetts interpreted such intermarriages as indicative of the disappearance of pure-blooded Indians. In Rhode Island, by the second half of the 18th century, officials stopped identifying Native Americans as Indians in the legal records and instead began to designate them as Negro or Black. One historian (Calloway 1997:118, 124-125) argues that this decision was in actuality a form of documentary genocide.

By the 19th century, the perception of a southern New England landscape strikingly devoid of an Indian population was commonplace. J. Hector St. John

Crevecoeur (Bragdon 2001:192), who traveled throughout the eastern United States wrote “they are gone, and every memorial of them is lost; no vestiges whatever left of those swarms which once inhabited this country.... They have all disappeared”. Similarly, John Adams, in an 1812 letter to Thomas Jefferson noted that in Massachusetts “we scarcely see an Indian in a year”, adding that “the Girls went out to Service and the Boys to Sea” (Cappon 1959:311). This concept of the vanished race, or what Campbell and LaFantasie (1978:68) call the “white man’s myth”, extended into the 20th century when at the Pierce Battle and Great Swamp Fight dedications, various speakers declared that New England Indians were only a wisp away from extinction.

Thomas L. Doughton, a Nipmuc historian, argues that such an attitude was misplaced. In his study of Native American peoples in central Massachusetts, he demonstrates through a variety of records that while many certainly remained isolated, a good representation were stable residents rooted in area towns and publicly recognized as Indian. He maintains that it was only due to Eurocentric assumptions that writers and historians failed to recognize Native Americans as evolving:

On the one hand, the meaning of “Indian” was constructed for Euro-Americans in cultural terms advocated by early ethnographers, and, on the other hand, “Indian” was viewed in the biological terms of an emerging Euroentric “race science.” The new “science” codified notions of red, black, and white “races” in such a way that the only real Natives were racially distinct and “clear-blooded” (1997:207-221)

As a result, many historians and the general public were unable or unwilling to fully comprehend the effects and adaptations associated with social and political upheaval.

Ann Marie Plane (2000:180), who also studied Massachusetts Indians' post King Philip's War adaptations, explains that although a percentage of natives embraced enfranchisement, and its accompanying opportunities, many others upheld the importance of tribal sovereignty and the independence it denoted. And while these groups may not have conformed to conventional notions of what an Indian should be, they nonetheless attempted to create and maintain a distinctive cultural identity. Some examples of this include: upholding the importance of tribal sovereignty, associating land holdings with group survival, declining citizenship, and refusing to acknowledge outsiders living on tribal lands as full proprietors (Plane and Button 1993:589-599). Defending traditional marriage traditions, such as polygynous tendencies, ease of divorce, and the relative autonomy of married women, also represented an effort to maintain a direct line of continuity with the past (Plane 2000:176-177).

Similar to their Massachusetts counterparts, the Narragansett never completely vanished but were not highly visible for a considerable time. This situation was reinforced by early overstatements of war casualties, state laws restricting rights to group assembly, the natives' inability to retain ownership or earn a living off the tribal land, and numerous other post war adaptations (Calloway 1997:4-6; Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:7, 70-72).

Conditions for the Rhode Island Natives continued to deteriorate during the 19th century. In 1879-1880, under continued pressure from a variety of factors, the state of Rhode Island detribalized the Narragansett and purchased what remained of their reservation.²⁴ Based on the final tabulations of the land sale, there were 324 individuals with Narragansett tribal affiliation scattered throughout the United States. Of those, only 81 lived in the Charlestown area. Gideon Ammons, president of the Indian council, speaking in 1884 described the ramifications of the detribalization for the Narragansett when he said “our tribe now has no legal existence, and no person can be found to represent the Indian race” (Campbell and LaFantasie 1978:80).

A Narragansett Revival

In the dedications and celebrations that accompanied the King Philip War monument building period in Rhode Island we see vestiges of the descriptive language that had commonly been used to portray New England Indians throughout the centuries. For example, speakers often described the Native Americans by employing exaggerated claims of savagery. This conclusion not only magnified the accomplishments of the colonists but, according to Paul Shackel (2001:4), also dehumanized the Indians as a means of justifying conquest.

Also evident, in what Edmund Morgan (1965:3) credits to a misguided interpretation of Darwinism, was the 19th century perception that Indians were an

²⁴ The Narragansett were detribalized without federal approval (Calloway 1997:114).

inferior race that eventually, and inevitably, gave way to a superior civilization. Most detrimental, however, was the common consensus that the Indian population had vanished or at least was insignificant. Such a viewpoint served to limit the inclusion of a Native American voice. This philosophy was also nonverbally reinforced by relegating those tribal members who were allowed to participate in several memorial services to the menial role of uncovering the monuments or passing out small gifts.

One of the first Native American voices to publicly contradict such biases was a Pequot Indian from Connecticut by the name of William Apess (Apes). Between 1829 and 1836 Apess published five books which explored Euro-American racism and Native American civil and religious rights. In addition, because of his verbal and organizational skills, he was a primary leader in the Mashpee Revolt of 1833 (O'Connell 1992:xiii).

William Apess's last published piece was entitled *Eulogy of King Philip*. The eulogy, which was first presented as a speech, focused, in part, on the fact that Philip was not the savage spirit portrayed by white histories but a noble martyr who died for the glorious cause of his people. Apess wrote:

As the immortal [George] Washington lives endeared and engraven on the hearts of every white in America, never to be forgotten in time-even such is the immortal Philip honored, as held in memory by the degraded but yet grateful descendants who appreciate his character; so will every patriot, especially in this enlightened age, respect the rude yet all accomplished son of the forest, that died a martyr to

his cause, though unsuccessful, yet as glorious as the *American* Revolution.

Where, then, shall we place the hero of the wilderness? (O'Connell 1992:277)

Apess also condemned the inhumanity of the treatment of Indians, both during Philip's time and more recently.

It is said that in the Christian's guide, God is merciful, and they that are his followers are like him. How much mercy do you think has been shown toward Indians, their wives, and their children? Not much, we think. No. And ye fathers, I will appeal to you that are white. Have you any regard for your wives and children, for those delicate sons and daughters? Would you like to see them slain in heaps, and their bodies devoured by the vultures and wild beasts of prey, and their bones bleaching in the sun and air, till they molder away or were covered by the falling leaves of the forest, and not resist. (O'Connell 1992:308)

It is not known to what degree William Apess influenced New England's perception of Native Americans. However, despite the existence of negative rhetoric throughout various dedications, one can also detect occasional observations that reflect those of the self proclaimed *Son of the Forest* (O'Connell 1992:3). For instance, on King Philip's Day, the warrior is eulogized as patriotic in his defense of his land and people. A

similar sentiment can also be noted at the 1907 Pierce dedication when Edwin Pierce suggested the battle site should be shared with both factions since the Indians made similar sacrifices.

Although many Anglo-Americans were not unhappy with the eventual outcome, acknowledging that the Native Americans may also be credited with a patriotic past makes it more difficult to exclude their story in creating a public memory of the event (Shackel 2001:6). Lepore (1998:225-226) explains that such a change in perception set the stage for a new generation of Indian activists to take control of Indian revivals and protests. Not coincidentally, a Narragansett resurgence coincided with the end of white memorialization of the war in the state.

The Narragansett, like many of other New England tribes, were plagued by what Terry Polchies describes as “back-stabbing, finger-pointing, jealousies, clan and personal rivalries, conflict and confusion” (Gaines 1989:3). The tribe’s determination to overcome these and related problems was first publicly evidenced in May 1935 when tribal members, under the leadership of Princess Red Wing (Ella Peek), began publication of a newsletter entitled *Narragansett Dawn*. It included a blend of heritage, history, language lessons, social notes, tribal news, poetry, sports, and advertisements. According to Jill Lepore (1998:235) this newsletter, although only published for seventeen issues, best dates the cultural revival of the Narragansett. In addition, it offered a rare look into the condition and motivation of the tribe at the time when the monument building phase to King Philip’s War was soon to be concluded in Rhode Island.

In the initial editorial, Princess Red Wing (ND 1935:2-3) wrote that since the 1800s, when the Rhode Island General Assembly detribalized her nation, the Narragansett had lain dormant. She noted that one of the primary objectives of the publication was to confront the tribe's problems with kindness, honesty, and brotherly love. The expectation was that such an approach would usher in a new dawn for the tribe and that coming generations may find and not forget their heritage. The validity of Princess Redwing's concerns was evident throughout many of the articles in the first issue. For example, the newsletter noted that before the initial publication, the Nation had located and registered only 259 persons with tribal affiliation. Elsewhere, an announcement notified members of the first tribal meeting in 53 years and the authoritative source for the accompanying Narragansett language lessons was a treatise written by Roger Williams, one of the founders of Providence, in 1643.

Surprisingly, the earliest statewide indication of a Narragansett resurgence would come from a young Indian who had little to do with tribal politics. A small paragraph in the sport section of the May publication (ND 1935:29) made a passing note that a young local Indian by the name of Ellison "Tarzan" Brown had some success at recent road races. Starting in the first quarter of the 20th century, road racing (foot races) had become a popular sporting event throughout New England and a number of the Narragansett, such as Clearwater Stanton, excelled at the discipline. Still, it would be Tarzan Brown who would rise above the others, earning victories at the Boston Marathon and representing the United States at the 1936 Olympics. Because of his

accomplishments, Tarzan Brown became a New England sport legend and for many of his fans he was the only evidence that the Narragansett were still a functioning entity. It may have been this publicity and the pride he brought to his people on the onset of their revival that was his greatest success.

The most informative article in the first issue of *Narragansett Dawn* that was relevant to the tribe's participation in King Philip's War and their eventual efforts to redefine the Great Swamp Fight memorial was written by Fred B. Brown (1935:9-11). Entitled "The Broken Treaty," the article described the events that led up to the Great Swamp Fight and the subsequent alignment of the Narragansett with Philip's cause.

For the most part, Brown's article was a synopsis of the events drawn from William Hubbard's (1677) earlier publication. However, the author included two oral histories that would come to play a role in future celebrations. The author first maintained that the United Colonies attack on the Indian fort was caused by the Narragansett refusal to surrender a number of Wampanoag Indians that the Narragansett had been harboring at their winter quarters. Canonchet (Narragansett) refused to surrender the Indians because "hospitality to a guest was a sacred consideration" (Brown 1935:10). The second argument focused on those killed and wounded during the fight. Brown (1935:11) stated that while the suffering of the colonial troops had been recounted too many times to repeat, little attention has been given over the centuries to the "heaps of butchered and burned women and children many left to die in the wintry blast without shelter or care".

The Narragansett resurgence additionally benefited from a pronounced change in how historians approached their colonial research investigations. Well into the 20th century the relationship between the English and Indians was written from a white, and Puritan, point of view (LaFantasie and Campbell 1978:15). However, James Drake (Davis 2003:B1) notes that by mid-century historians recognized the important role the Native Americans played in the region's economical, social, and political climate.

The cornerstone of such change in the historiography of King Philip's War can be traced back to three scholarly and popular publications, *Flintlock and Tomahawk: New England in King Philip's War* by Douglas Edward Leach (1995), *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* by Alden T. Vaughan (1965), and Francis Jennings' (1976) *The Invasion of America*. The three authors, while writing in similar time periods, came to decidedly different conclusions. Leach, while placing blame on the Indians for starting the conflict, acknowledged that mitigating circumstances, such as land issues and lack of perceived justice, also played a role. Vaughan, meanwhile, defended many of the Puritans' actions, arguing that the Puritans attempted to implement a fair policy with the indigenous peoples (LaFantasie and Campbell 1978:15). Jennings (1976:v), on the other hand, was adamant in his anti-Puritan viewpoint. In his introduction the author states that the Puritans, anticipating questions directed at the morality of their enterprise, "made preparations of two sorts: guns and munitions to overpower Indian resistance and quantities of propaganda to overpower their own countrymen's scruples".

While the pros and cons of these arguments could be weighed, the importance to the Narragansett is that since these publications appeared, historians have deconstructed the political atmosphere that persisted into the early 1900s. Colin G. Calloway (1997:2) credits such propensity to a new generation of scholars that have “developed new methodologies and asked new questions...to create a more richly textured and multidimensional picture of the Indian past and of Indian-white relations”.

Tall Oak, a respected artist and advocate, has taken a more philosophical attitude. He has called Indians the conscience of America. The lesson, he stated, “is to realize the value of an alternative perspective. And that is why we are here. That is why the Creator allowed some of us to remain, in spite of all the attempts to destroy us” (www.bluecorncomics.com).

The Narragansett Today

The mission of the Narragansett Tribe is to “continue to promote and develop awareness among Tribal members the importance of education, culture, and family life within their own tribal community” (www.narragansett.org). This statement has been little modified since June of 1935 when Princess Redwing penned her first editorial.

Still, dramatic changes caused by a variety of more external confrontations have had a profound effect on the Narragansett during the past half century. Some of these changes have come about due to decisions in court cases. For instance, in 1975 the Tribe filed a land claim suit against Rhode Island for the return of 3,200 acres of undeveloped

land. This suit eventually awarded the Tribe 1,800 acres. In addition, in 1978 the Narragansett filed a petition with the Department of the Interior for Federal recognition. The petition was eventually granted in 1983.

Other changes have been the result of grassroots efforts in conjunction with a more public political awareness of Indian rights and their place in the state's history. For example, for the better part of the past two generations, representatives of the Narragansett Tribe have gathered at the site of the Great Swamp Fight memorial in South Kingstown. They are not there to assist members of the Society of Colonial Wars as they did in 1906, but to redefine common perceptions of the battle, question the credibility of the speeches presented at the 1906 instillation, and challenge the symbolic dominance attributed to the monument by rededicating the site as the Great Swamp Massacre. A major goal of these gatherings is to communicate their position to all tribal members and to greater southern New England (Wyss 1995:A16).

A number of these celebrations, which are conducted each September, have been recorded (Wyss 1995:A16; Davis 2003:B1; Lepore 1998:237) and on the whole they have each followed a similar pattern. First, those members of the Narragansett tribe who are in ceremonial dress form a sacred circle surrounding the memorial. From within the sacred circle a variety of rituals are enacted including cleansing of the earth, honoring the four directions, wailing for the dead, and the lighting of ceremonial fires. Interspersed throughout are numerous dances. Some are to welcome the guests or for tribal unity

while others honor the sacred pipe, the sitting council members, and finally all the children.

The most revealing part of the celebration, at least from a non-Native American point of view, is the speeches. For example, in 1992 John Brown, a council member, declared that there were few whites who thought their Nation would exist at almost the turn of a new century. Yet, this monument was built not to their memory but to their slaughter. The councilor next acknowledged the four boulders that represented the United Colonies and Rhode Island and then the large granite shaft that was erected in the center to the "stern purpose and high valor" of the colonial soldiers. However according to Brown, to the Narragansett people it was a symbol that their people were again in the middle looking out at all of them (Lepore 1998:237-238).

The subject of tribal survival has been a prominent theme. According to Ella Wilcox Sekatau (Davis 2003:B1), the Narragansett not only did not vanish but their numbers are increasing. When the Narragansett were detribalized between 1880 and 1884 there were only 300 members. Today, according to Sekatau, there are between 2,500 and 3,000 with tribal affiliation. While the yearly celebrations at the Great Swamp Fight memorial are more recent, the topic of tribal survival can be dated at least as far back as Rhode Island's Tercentenary in 1936. In an editorial printed in *Narragansett Dawn* Princess Redwing wrote:

The weary struggling years of history of Rhode Island have been lived and re-lived in this Tercentenary Year of the State's foundation, in which the Narragansetts have been featured and re-featured. In these great celebrations by white Rhode Island, Narragansetts have been called upon to do their part from the days of Canonicus to Queen Esther. Rhode Island can show no great pageant of her historic years of the past without her Indians. In the many programs of the year, only a pleasant, bright and cheerful side of the Narragansetts have been portrayed. Always the Indian is giving up to the pale face. In the long run - "giving" brings a reward. We have given what we had to give in the past. In the present we gave of our members for entertainment and enlightenment into historic facts. Our Reward is - Rhode Island knows now - The NARRAGANSETT TRIBE STILL EXISTS! (Redwing 1936:2)

Most revealing of tribal intentions are the comments offered by the various council members who were allowed to speak after the lighting of the council fire in 2007. It is obvious that despite the emphasis placed on the more organized intent, the symbolism of the ceremony differed among these individuals. For one council member the ceremony consecrated the holy ground where his ancestors sacrificed their lives to protect all Indians both present and future. To another official it represented the sacrifice his people made rather than betray the ancient and sacred tradition of protecting a guest. In 1675 the Narragansett had allowed Philip to send some Wampanoag women and

children to the fort. Their refusal to surrender their guests cost the tribe dearly during the Great Swamp Massacre. For one last council member, who rejected the wearing of the traditional regalia, it was a reminder to all Indians of the battles still to be fought, not in the fields, but in the courts over tribal rights and respect (author, September 23, 2007).

The Narragansett fully understood the historical and personal veneration the Society of Colonial Wars had bestowed upon the Great Swamp Fight memorial when the tribe selected that site to redefine the causes and consequences of the events that transpired in December of 1675. Like Society members, the Narragansett believed the ground was sacred but for entirely different reasons. To the Narragansett, their ancestors, who until that point were not involved in the war, had been unfairly attacked solely for their refusal to surrender Wampanoag guests, an act that went against their sacred consideration of hospitality. Herein was an opportunity to honor those relatives that were shot, burned to death, or left to freeze or starve in a wintry blizzard as a result of the massacre inflicted on them by the United Colonies.

The tribes' symbolic choice to use the monument to publicly deconstruct colonial sources was not desecration of a sacred site but its redefinition. Such a philosophy is consistent with Linenthal's (1991:40) observation that "the struggle for symbolic ownership of a battle site and its message usually involves attempts by those traditionally excluded from the story, or those who played the role of villain in the story, to redefine not only the history but also the meaning of the battle".

Whether such a challenge is successful usually depends upon the political strength and perseverance of the people who appropriate ownership (Shackel 2001:4). In this particular situation the celebrations have induced neither violence nor public counterattacks. In fact, while the Society of Colonial Wars has discussed the circumstances surrounding the Great Swamp Fight memorial at their annual meetings, they have decided not to challenge the issue but rather to relinquish control to the Narragansett (Bruce MacGunnigle August 2007, pers. comm.).

While there were no specifics as to what prompted the Society of Colonial Wars to make such a decision, a number of assumptions can be derived from the available evidence. Most prominent is the fact that the Society, over the past half century, has no history of public commemoration at the site. To suddenly become interested in this type of activity would be out of character. Secondly, while there appears to be a time-honored historical view of the events leading up to the battle, more recent research suggests that the colonial victory may not have been the triumphant story that the monument first came to symbolize. One also has to acknowledge, or even expect, that many of the current society members might well share a more rounded view.

Finally, while the Narragansett ceremonies at the site hold various meaning for tribal members, it is inarguably a rallying point for tribal dissent. Considering the current public awareness of the tribe's growing political profile and collective energy, challenging the Narragansett, even if the Society of Colonial Wars wanted to, would be of little positive value. Concern that criticism of the Narragansett protests would have

instigated immediate reprisals would be well founded. Over the past several decades the Native Americans from southern New England have become more vocal in protesting issues that currently or historically affect their people. For instance, at a ceremony honoring Benjamin Church as the first army ranger, Wampanoag Indians and others voiced objection over his needless mutilation of King Philip (Heffner 1989:A1). More recently, Narragansett tribal officer John Brown (Pina 2007:A2), challenged preservation decisions that affected Native American history.

In contrast to the Great Swamp Fight, the Indians of southern New England have not publicly expressed any interest in the Pierce Battle or the monument site. This is somewhat surprising, given clear evidence that the area's Native American population had a long and significant historical connection with the Blackstone River and it figured predominately in their awareness of landscape, or what Russell Handsman (2008:170) has called a deep history (see chapter 2).

Although Native population in the area had decreased prior to King Philip's War, the river continued to play an important role throughout the ensuing conflict. In July of 1675, Philip escaped from the Pocasset Swamp (Mt. Hope) and made his way across the Seekonk Plain, fording the Blackstone River in the vicinity of Pawtucket Falls before moving north (Bowen 1948:91). Over the next 18 months, the Pierce Battle, the capture of Canonchet, and Captain Brattle's raid on an Indian fishing party all took place between William Blackstone's homestead and Pawtucket Falls. After 1676 the Native American population was further reduced, due in large part to the consequences of and adaptations

to the English victory. However, according to Thomas L. Doughton (1997:210-215), a variety of documentation indicates that by the 19th century Native Americans lived along the entire length of the Blackstone Valley Corridor. Many of them continued to work family farms, hired out as day laborers, or found employment in the numerous textile mills. Today, those Native Americans with the closest geographic relationship to the Pierce Battle site are the Seaconke Wampanoag. The Seaconke are a Massachusetts state-recognized tribe organized in 1995, deriving its territory from the portion of land that formerly encompassed much of Old Rehoboth. Tribal membership is composed of people who are of Wampanoag heritage and can trace their ancestry to this specific area before 1925.

A recent study (Zhadanov 2010) which correlated genetic data with genealogical and historical information allowed researchers to reconstruct the Seaconke tribal history back to the early 18th century. Researchers concluded that while the Seaconke never completely abandoned the Blackstone River area, their numbers were significantly reduced. Most lived on the outskirts of nearby towns and helped to work the area's numerous farms, an adaptation that continued into the 20th century. Genetic analysis indicates a complex mixture of maternal and paternal lineages of Native American, Melanesian, African, and European derivation. The authors suggest that the high frequency of nonnative haplotypes in this population, along with the paucity of Native American haplotypes, demonstrates the substantial changes in the genetic composition of the Seaconke Wampanoag tribe in post-contact American history. The study highlights

the impact European colonization had on this population, including the mixing of persons of geographically separated indigenous communities through slavery, employment in the shipping and whaling industries, and other economic activities.

Population decreases and assimilation has also had a profound affect on the cultural, linguistic, and memory of place for the Seaconke (Michael Markley 2010, pers. comm.). Such loss is reflected in the Tribe's mission statement, which proclaims that the purpose of the Seaconke Wampanoag Tribe is to "seek out our past" and "rediscover and develop our native heritage" (www.katell461.tripod.com). In pursuit of this objective, the tribe has recently filed land claims to various sections of Cumberland and Woonsocket, Rhode Island and issued public statements at a number of potential ancestral sites including King Philip's Cave in Norton, Massachusetts and Nipsachuck Woods in North Smithfield, Rhode Island.

I have sought information from Native American individuals, including tribal officers, regarding the seeming detachment from the Pierce Battle area but failed to elicit a response. However, a number of hypotheses have recently been investigated which could explain the lack of interest in the site. For instance, the inattention might simply be a matter of tribal priorities. Other sites or time periods may be more representative of how local Native Americans wish to define themselves. It is also possible that the area encompassing the Pierce Monument might be a private place and that the sharing of tribal remembrances may not be an appropriate option. As Patricia E. Rubertone, who has recently studied small monuments, argues "publicly vocal demonstrations represent only

a small fraction of the possible ways Native Americans may actively engage such sites and “what is made known to outsiders has all too often excluded, suppressed, and devalued histories of place still shared by insiders” (2008:14,25).

There is also the possibility that the current representational design of the Blackstone Valley has made it difficult for Native Americans to conceptualize the past. Historically, the Blackstone Valley, except for place names, has been configured to symbolize a distinctive European American identity, focusing primarily on industrial archaeology and its preservation. Such an unbalanced summary has all but erased any Native American presence in the area. According to Patricia Rubertone (2008:17), the choice of a singular archaeological phase quite often serves to alienate Native Americans from an ancestral landscape.

While failure to acknowledge the Pierce Battle site may reflect differences in commemoration or landscape memory, it is also possible such silence may denote a disassociation with the event brought about by battle descriptions that do not coincide with tribal beliefs. For instance, many established accounts have long portrayed the battle as having been an entirely Narragansett affair (Haley 1936:75; Murdock 1902:98; Chet 2003:46). This research, however, suggests that while the Narragansett accounted for a percentage of warriors, the Wampanoag and Nipmuck, along with a number of sub-tribes, also participated. Consequently, there may be future opportunities for a greater number of southern New England tribes, such as the Seaconke, to use the installation to advance tribal objectives.

Another factor related to this question concerns a number of unauthenticated battle-related traditions. These include a letter sent by Captain Pierce to Providence requesting additional support and the capture and torture of colonial survivors at Nine Men's Misery. Over time, these traditions have been organized into logical narratives. While such speculation may add to the popular appeal of the battle, it may also serve to discourage Native Americans from publicly associating with the site. The first tradition suggests that the Indians could not have achieved such a victory if not for the consequences of an errant letter to Providence, while the second portrays the Native Americans as barbaric and merciless. What effect, if any, these long-established accounts may have had on tribal groups is unknown. Nevertheless, their dominance in conventional accounts interferes with a proper historical perspective and may unfairly bias readers' perceptions of Native Americans and limit the possibility of alternative memories.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The Pierce Battle took place during a critical stage of King Philip's War and provided Native Americans with their most decisive military victory. The goals of this research were to investigate the Pierce Battle and examine its eventual memorialization. The first objective was advanced by locating more inclusive primary source material that was not readably available or had been overlooked by earlier researchers. Such material made it possible to more fully address logistical questions such as troop size, warrior affiliation, casualties, and battle location. Also significant to this phase of the study was the ability to coordinate the documentary record with recent scholarly studies concerning the analysis of battle disintegration, psychology of leadership, and Indian technology and tactics. Such an approach provides insight into the qualities of effective leadership, factors that influence decision making, and the ramifications of battle disintegration.

The material affords the opportunity to analyze a classic example of the Indians' unique style of warfare, which proved so successful during much of the King Philip's War. This strategy was described by Roger Williams (1988:706) as one of limiting their attacks to ambushes and fighting in swamps and other areas of great advantages, while

attempting to kill as many colonists as possible. This type of guerilla warfare was carefully studied and adopted by Benjamin Church during this war and later refined and popularized by Robert Rogers throughout the French and Indian War. Stephen Brumwell noted that although this mode of action did not replace the conventional English battle style, it “held a distinctive-niche in American Military History” (2004:76).

The research also provides insight into broader historical questions associated with colonial warfare. The most obvious example is the variety of weaknesses it exposed in the colonial employment of a part-time militia as opposed to a more professionally trained army. This weakness proved so significant that through the mid-eighteenth century, colonial magistrates were forced to compensate for these shortcomings by a greater reliance on British-trained forces (Chet 2003:3).

Another area of study concerns questions related to the Native Americans’ ability to wage war over a prolonged period. From the start of the war, the Indians enjoyed decided military advantages over the colonists. The warriors were experienced in navigating woodlands, considerably more mobile, and, in many instances, better armed. While the results of the Pierce Battle did little to diminish such a viewpoint, tracking the Indians’ movements over a period of days reveals a number of problems regarding coordination, discipline and strategy. Notably, at both Rehoboth and Providence, despite fielding a numerically superior force, the warriors made no attempt to assault the garrison houses. Also, at Providence tribal leaders could not curtail the rampage during talks with Roger Williams or assure his safety (LaFantaise 1988:722-723). During the same talks

with Williams, one warrior boasted they would continue to live off the towns all the way to Plymouth. The Indians, however, did not turn east toward their stated objective but instead broke up into tribal units “to return to their home territories, each to find its own way as it could” (Jennings 1976:316).

While it is possible to draw different conclusions from the above, a number of authors (Drake 1999:59; Jennings 1976:316; Starkey 1998:168) contend that such examples are representative of political and social structures that limited the Native Americans’ ability to present a unified front. Rivalries among tribal units were often hostile, as old animosities and the use of different strategies for protection or advancement often resulted in serious conflicts. Even bonds of kinship were not always strong enough to dissuade group members from dividing social alliances, which further diminished their collective response.

In addition, the battle research allowed for a sequential outline of the battle’s narrative development. Such a chronology provided significant insight in determining the political and social climate which gave rise to specific forms of veneration and the values underlying them. Just as importantly, the framework also highlighted elements that those same individuals or groups chose to ignore and in so doing promoted, or discouraged, participation in the memorialization. The research moreover provided a baseline for identifying when, and from what source, undocumented traditions were introduced, the value to be placed upon each, and the impact such material had on remembrance.

The memorialization of King Philip's War battlefields was not inevitable. In fact, the celebration of our country's battlefields was not prevalent throughout its formative years (Linenthal 1991:2; Shackel 2001:9-10). In Rhode Island, it was not until the early 20th century, when a brief King Philip's War monument-building phase occurred throughout southern New England, that the Pierce Battle and the Great Swamp Fight were enshrined with granite markers. Although the markers were meager by modern standards, their subsequent histories have provided the opportunity to address critical questions concerning how even small-scale monument building may affect the popular view of history.

The inceptive processes for the two monuments were strikingly similar. Although historical organizations were involved in the process to a degree, the major incentive and economic support were motivated by ancestral glorification. The patriotic adulation that accompanied the dedications celebrated the sacredness of the land and drew parallels between the ideology of the Plymouth founders and the moral values and sacrifices of the colonial soldiers. This is the very process by which, according to Paul Shackel (2002:2), a collective memory is developed. While such rhetoric helped to establish a patriotic past, it came at the expense of the Native Americans. Often vilified to justify conquest, they were also marginalized by premature declarations of extinction. Still, the very act of memorializing a public space eventually allowed individuals and groups of various ideological persuasions to compete for the symbolic ownership of the sites. The scope of

these transformations is significant and has included rededication, defilement, appropriation, and ignoring the popular message.

A determination drawn from this research is that while many people may assume monuments reflect a general public attitude, in actuality they often celebrate the beliefs of individuals and groups that have expended the energy to dominate public perception. For example, although Pierce family descendants were the most vocal supporters of the 1907 monument, their failure to continue to advocate for the ideals set forth at the dedication ceremony eventually allowed for a fluid and uncontested redirection in ownership. Today, promoted by local schools, political leaders, and community-centered organizations, the site is central to Blackstone Valley's growing tourism movement.

The failure of the Society of Colonial Wars in Rhode Island to continue advocacy of the Great Swamp Fight Monument has also allowed its original meaning to be challenged. While membership in the Society is strong, the group's continued support for the site has not remained a priority. Over time, the memorial has been slowly resurrected as a platform for Narragansett protest. It is from this stage that the tribe continues to acknowledge its survival, redefine the battle, question the monument's symbolism, and voice current concerns. The energy exerted by Narragansett participants has been, in part, responsible for the Society of Colonial Wars' decision not to contend for control of the popular memory. Failure of the Society to actively oversee the site, which has encouraged graffiti and the continual removal of the plaques, also has served to minimize the monument's intended message. While any deeper meaning behind the damage is

often incomprehensible to the majority of visitors, Patricia E. Rubertone (2008:30) argues that careful study of the vandalism that periodically defaces the monument could offer additional insights into the Narragansett continuing efforts to struggle with issues of cultural loss and survival. The author also suggests that a like consideration should be extended to other sites where such behavior is usually condemned.

Unlike the Great Swamp Fight, the Pierce Battle has received no public attention from the region's Native Americans. While a number of suggestions have been advanced for this lack of recognition, such as differences in the commemoration process and landscape recognition, the battle research suggests another possibility. Over time, a number of traditions have made their way into Pierce Battle accounts which have become so indelibly linked to the event that few modern studies fail to include them. While such inclusions often add to a more colorful local history, in this particular instance, they not only significantly changed the documented battle specifics but also vilified Native Americans and minimized their accomplishments. It is possible that such speculation has served to alienate regional tribes from demonstrating any public association with the site or its surrounding landscape (Rubertone 2008:15).

Today, the Pierce Monument has been integrated into the greater Blackstone Valley's tourism plan. While the move has rescued the site from relative obscurity, the current interpretation remains unchanged from its original conception and continues to reflect the attitudes and values of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In spite of the fact that Native Americans have chosen to ignore this outdated account, such lack of

acknowledgement does not guarantee future stability. Recently, two Native American bands, the Wauchaunat Band (Narragansett) and the Seaconke Wampanoag, have organized in the immediate area and although there is no reason to suspect they have designs on the monument, such proximity creates the potential for a clash of cultures similar to the ongoing conflict at the Great Swamp Fight memorial. As Arjun Appadurai notes “as any object moves through realms of the production, distribution, and consumption it can be subject to radically different interpretations along the way” (Phillips 1999:17).

The research presented in this paper adds to the current knowledge of the Pierce Battle and the Indian winter offensive of 1676, one of the most critical stages of King Philip’s War. It also examines the exclusionary actions which dominated the memorial’s building process and demonstrates how even small-scale monuments may influence our historical perspective. It further highlights the importance of understanding that struggles for symbolic control of monuments should be anticipated, if community and state organizations wish to avoid domination by a single point of view. Whatever the future may hold for the Pierce Memorial, any future attempts to interpret, assign rightness, or celebrate people or values must be sure to include a Native American voice.

APPENDIX A

CAPTAIN ANDREW EDMONDS

Over the past centuries a piece of local tradition has made its way into the Pierce Battle history which has served to obscure the true underlying causes of the tragedy. Isaac Backus, writing in 1777, is the earliest source to identify a man by the name of Captain Andrew Edmonds (Edmunds) as the recipient of Captain Pierce's request for military support from Providence. Backus disclosed that Pierce:

Sent the letter by a person who was going over to Providence meeting, but who did not deliver it till their worship was done at noon. As soon as Captain Edmonds had read the letter, he gave the bearer a sharp reprimand, for not delivering it before, and expressed his fear of the consequence as it proved; for Captain Pierce engaging the enemy alone. (Backus 1872:335-336)

Subsequent histories have often reprinted Backus's story, some even supplying additional details. Leonard Bliss (1836:90), for example, ascribed the event's origin to a tradition in Seekonk (Old Rehoboth). Another author (Haley 1936:76-77) depicted the captain, after having received the belated request for assistance, arriving too late at the battle site to render any assistance. Such pronouncements convey to the reader the presumption that Captain Edmonds had the capability and preparedness to provide

support if and when word arrived. That such was the situation is highly suspect. As discussed earlier, there is persuasive evidence that points to Providence having been largely abandoned before the battle on 26 March. Subsequently, the few remaining inhabitants would have been in no position to provide military assistance. In addition, the likelihood that Captain Edmonds was among those that had removed themselves to Newport receives solid support from a number of sources.

Overall, little is known of Capt. Andrew Edmonds' involvement in King Philip's War. William Hubbard (2002a:90) specified that he was in command of a small group of Providence volunteers that aided in the pursuit of Philip across Rehoboth and Providence during July 1675.²⁵ More than a year later, Captain Edmonds is listed as the captain of Newport's 2nd Company (Smith 1900:8) and, along with his men, was credited by the Rhode Island General Assembly (RICR 1857:533-534) with the capture of 35 Indians.

Edmonds' movements between these two duties is more speculative. Evidence from the Providence Town Records (ERTP 1892:8.12-13) confirms that Captain Edmonds was not in Providence on 29 March, the day the town was attacked and burned, as he was not listed among the defenders of the city.²⁶ In addition, he did not receive any portion of shares in the sale of Indian prisoners of war that was staged, in part, to compensate those men who lent service to the town during that troubled period. Since

²⁵ Benjamin Church (1996:92) wrote that Captain Edmonds was in pursuit of Philip and might well have inflicted some damage if he had not been called down by a superior officer.

²⁶ The last record of Edmonds still being in Providence before the Pierce Battle was on October 14, 1675, when he married Mary Hearnden of that same town (ERTP 1892:5.259).

less than full shares were distributed to men not listed among the defenders of Providence, it must be assumed that consideration was advanced not only for defending the town, but also for services associated with that period in time (ERTP 1892:15.154). It seems probable that if Edmonds had rendered any support to his community, whether in command of the town's defenses in the time immediately surrounding the Pierce Battle or aiding in the evacuation of remaining townspeople to Newport, he most certainly would have received appropriate consideration. Yet, the records are silent.

The most telling description of the captain's war service comes from Andrew Edmonds himself. In March of 1679, Andrew Edmonds (LaFantasie 1988:785-786) wrote a letter to the town council in which he explained he had heard talk that he, and his company of volunteers, who had fought at Nipsatteke and Warwick during the past war, were to be compensated for their assistance to the colony.²⁷ If this were indeed the situation, the captain continued, "my desire is to be neer the water and there fore if you can furnish me with an Acre or two more or less about the Narrow passage I will (if God will) there build my howse". His request was granted on 3 March 1679 (ERTP 1892:8.44). It would seem fairly certain that the captain, considering his motive, would have attempted to present himself in the most favorable light. Inarguably, if Edmonds had in any way provided further assistance to the town, in addition to those noted above, he would have included such in his statement of service.

²⁷ In North Smithfield about ten miles north of Providence.

While we do not know with absolute certainty Captain Edmonds' location at the time of the Pierce battle, it is most revealing that a soldier is conspicuously absent in the records during a major enemy offensive. The most logical conclusion is that the captain was no longer residing in Providence preceding Pierce's defeat. He most likely had previously removed himself to Newport to aid in the defense of the island and the multitude of settlers, including many from Providence, who had relocated there.

APPENDIX B

NINE MEN'S MISERY

Nine Men's Misery is the name assigned to an outcrop of rock located on land formerly occupied by the Cistercian Monastery in Cumberland, Rhode Island and currently owned by that town. According to tradition, at the conclusion of the Pierce Battle nine colonists were taken alive and removed some miles to the north where they were tortured, clubbed to death and scalped. When the bodies were discovered, the slain men were buried in a common grave that was marked with a cairn of stones.

This tradition first appeared in John Daggett's (1973:51-52) 1834 *History of Attleborough*. The writer reported that although he had never seen notice of any such occurrence in history he had been able to construct the incident from facts supplied to him by local Informants. The basis of his narration was that nine men, who were in advance or strayed from their company, were surprised and surrounded by a large group of Indians. The men placed their backs to a large rock outcrop and fought with desperation until their deaths. The main party, having heard the gun shots, rushed to their comrades' aid but arrived too late to render any assistance but to bury the dead. Although none of his informants had any idea as to the timing of the slaughter, Daggett wrote that he had some reason to believe it took place at or about the time of the Pierce Battle.

John Daggett (1973:52) was convinced of the authenticity of the event because at some later date the bones of the nine men were exhumed by physicians for anatomical

purposes, although the remains were eventually reburied due to local uproar. During the exhumation one of the skulls was ascertained to be that of Benjamin Bucklin, a casualty of the Pierce Battle, because of a set of “double front teeth which he was known to possess”.

Two years later Leonard Bliss (1836:94-95) recounted John Daggett’s version of the incident and added two additional scenarios. The first suggested that the men were in advance of a relief force sent from Providence in response to Captain Pierce’s message for help. This group was surprised and slain in a manner similar to Daggett’s account. A second explanation, the one in which the author put the most credence, was that the men were part of Captain Pierce’s command who were taken prisoner and removed to Cat Swamp (Nine Men’s Misery) for torture. The enemy launched into a war dance, but unable to agree on a manner of torture, dispatched the colonists with tomahawks. Bliss explained that this account was related to the English by an Indian war captive, but the author did not reveal the source of his information.

Leonard Bliss also described the disinterment episode and furnished additional proof that one set of bones was indeed that of Buckland. In the Rehoboth Town Records, he explained, are the names of four individuals, John Reed, Jr., John Fitch, Jr., Benjamin Buckland, and John Miller, Jr., who were recorded as having died on March 26, 1676. However, inserted between the first two names and the last two were the entries of seven additional people who had died at later dates. This evidence suggested to the author that

the bodies of Buckland and Fitch were recovered sometime after their comrades and their listings in the town records reflect their delayed burial.

George Bodge (1906:464-465) defended Bliss's rendering of the incident and added a final piece of evidence. Bodge observed that the names Benj. Buckland and John Reed, Jr., had not been among the Rehoboth fatalities mentioned in the letter written by Noah Newman just after the battle, although the names later appeared in the town's death records. Bodge reasoned that the bodies of these two soldiers must not have been recovered with those of Captain Pierce's company, but sometime later at Nine Men's Misery after Noah Newman had sent off his dispatch recounting details of the first disaster.

Nine Men's Misery gradually gained acceptance as excerpts from the above writers began to be reproduced in area publications (Greene 1886:42; Murdock 1902:99), several of which indicated that the men had also been tortured (Ellis and Morris 1906:191-192; Whitney 1889:1). The site officially became part of the Pierce narrative when on November 12, 1928, the Rhode Island Historical Society dedicated a memorial tablet at the site in Cumberland, Rhode Island.

The historical address was delivered by Addison P. Munroe (1928:M10), the vice president of the Society, and was printed in the November 11, 1928 edition of the *Providence Sunday Tribune*. In his remarks, Addison accepted Leonard Bliss's interpretation of the tradition and reaffirmed the connection between the Pierce Battle and Nine Men's Misery. The author also noted that, except for the Battle of the Little Big

Horn, it was the worst massacre of whites by Indians in American history. He added that Captain Pierce and his men in fighting to the very end against such overwhelming adversity upheld all that was “finest in Anglo-Saxon tradition”.

Unlike the Pierce Monument, where family descendants strongly influenced the process, there is no evidence that such was the case at Nine Men’s Misery. Instead, the installation was decided upon by the Committee On Marking Historical Sites, a subcommittee of the Rhode Island Historical Society, which was directed at marking the state’s significant historical sites (PJ 1928:3).

Still, there are indications that the decision might also have been influenced to some degree by more personal agendas. Addison P. Munroe (SCWRI 1902:67-69) was also a member of the Society of Colonial Wars and a descendant of Benjamin Church. His address was reminiscent of the discourses of Joseph Murdock and Edwin Pierce both of whom were Society members. Much like those earlier speakers, he defended Captain Pierce’s reputation on the issue of the ambush and spoke of unsurpassed bravery and courage. While Mr. Munroe, no doubt, took his duties as vice president seriously, it is possible that ancestral veneration may also have influenced his decision.

The monks of the Cistercian Monastery may have had reasons of their own to encourage belief in the tradition. Before the dedication, members of the order had furnished materials for and constructed the stone cairn to which the memorial plaque was attached (Rhode Island Historical Society 1929:22). One could certainly suspect that the

monks were predisposed to such generosity by their sense of association with the history of the event and its location.

Sidney S. Rider (1904:198), writing in 1904, was the first to publicly scrutinize the events surrounding Nine Men's Misery and concluded that the episode was "wholly legendary". Rider reported that he had interviewed John Daggett, at which time he had inquired as to the sources the author had used to fashion his story. Mr. Daggett subsequently presented Mr. Rider with a detailed manuscript that he had compiled on the event.

Essentially the report revealed that Mr. Daggett had visited the site in about 1830, where he located and described a pile of memorial stones that marked the grave of nine men. After having spoken to local residents concerning the particulars of the incident, he compiled his narrative which he later published in his *History of Attleborough*. Mr. Rider (1904:198) reported that he himself also observed the grave site in 1866, at which time the memorial stones were located on the farm of Elisha Waterman, one mile south of its present location. This prompted the critic to speculate that apparently "legends and locations are migratory".²⁸ John Daggett's manuscript also told of the skull of Buckland (Bucklin) being identified by a double set of teeth. Rider thought it more than coincidental that an identical story had been popularized in the press about that time. According to the *Niles' Register* (1827:146) "the body of a man, which had evidently

²⁸ The *Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Preliminary Survey Report for the Town of Cumberland* (1977:27,34) verifies that Elisha Waterman's farm was indeed one mile south of the former Monastery.

been long in the water, and thought from the peculiar construction of his teeth, being ‘double all round,’ and other circumstances, to be that of William Morgan”.

The John Daggett manuscript which Sidney Rider alluded to is located in the John Hay Library at Brown University. The text is a five page letter that Daggett forwarded to Sidney S. Rider in 1884. The letter is worth reproducing in its entirety in that it demonstrates the tenuous historical data upon which the tradition was founded. The letter is as follows:

Attleborough Mar 20, 1884

Dear Sir,

I sent you some historical materials about “Nine Mens Misery.”

Yours truly,
John Daggett

On Sunday March 26th 1676 occurred that terrible battle between the Plymouth Colony forces and the Indians, the first under command of Capt. Pierce of Scituate, usually called “Pierce’s Fight”, on the banks of the Pawtucket now the Blackstone River. His force was composed of men from Scituate, Marshfield, Duxbury, Sandwich, Barnstable, Yarmouth Eastham, and Rehoboth. 4 of the latter were killed, and one Thos. Man, Sorely wounded but survived. I had the existence of “Nine Mens Misery” communicated to me on personal inquiry by intelligent men in the neighborhood of the locality, who were descendants of those that settled and lived near the spot, and had been familiar with its existence during their lives. As to the main fact, I felt there was no doubt, for such an event as the slaughter of nine men at one time and in a body, during that war, and their burial in such a place, would naturally produce deep impressions on the minds of the inhabitants, and be transmitted to succeeding generations, and preserved in memory, especially as some of the victims were their own friends and neighbors. The existence of the Large Rock and the artificial pile of small stones, in oblong form, on the mound, all tended to strengthen the connection of the truth of the tradition.

But since the publication of the History of Attleboro furnishing in it some account of “Nine Mens Misery” some circumstances have come to my knowledge, and remarkable discoveries have been made, which seem to afford decisive evidence of the correctness of the tradition.

A letter of Rev. Noah Newman of Rehoboth, who was the minister at the time of the battle, living at the "Ring of the Town" a few miles from the scene and dated the next day, 27 March, addressed to his friend, Rev. John Cotton of Plymouth, has been discovered in which he gives the names of all the whites killed-which must be considered the best contemporary evidence. He was probably with his parishioners when they went that afternoon, to the assistance of their friends, but only in season to bury the dead found on the field of battle. In this letter he names two of those from Rehoboth who were "Slain", but the part of the letter containing the two other names, is accidentally torn off. In the Record of deaths kept for this vicinity these names are supplied. The first two were entered together - John "Fitch Jr. John Read Jr. "Slain 26th March 1676"

Some distance below (several names entered in the interval) as if found afterwards, as together, are these: "Benjamin Buckland (now Bucklin) Slain 26 Mar 1676"

There was also a tradition prevailing in the neighborhood, that some medical students, from curiosity, or to verify the facts about "Nine Mens Misery" visited the locality, opened the mound indicated by the oblong pile of stones and there found the bones of the nine men, disinterred them and, after examination, returned them to the place from which they had been taken, and restored the ground and surroundings as near as possible to the condition in which they were found.

In this examination a remarkable discovery was made, that one of the nine was Benjamin Buckland of Rehoboth, from his large and wide frame, and also from the extraordinary fact, that he had a "set of double teeth all around". What occurred afterwards, in this chain of facts, is still more remarkable. Not long after the publication of the Hist. of Attleboro I met a distinguished physician to whom I was introduced who informed me he has read my account of "Nine Mens Misery" in the thirty [?], entered into conversation on the subject, and told me that he knew it was substantially correct and stated the circumstances of the exhumation and examination. This was from his own life (of course I do not publish his name).

Those statements seem to prove by the best evidence that there is such a place as "Nine Mens Misery" in "Camp Swamp" in Cumberland; that Nine Men were buried there; that two of them belonged to Rehoboth; that they were all slain on the day of the battle; and were soldiers in Pierce's Army. The incident attached to the tradition may not be reliable as they were not supported by anything but mere report.

Now, on these known facts, what is the probability? I am inclined to the belief of these modern discoveries that these men were some of the survivors of the main Fight and when they saw the battle lost, overwhelmed by numbers, attempted to escape in this direction and retreated to this locality in "Camp Swamp" in hopes of concealing themselves from the enemy in woods and thus escaping, but were discovered and pursued by them and surrounded at this Rock, and there slain. That the people of Rehoboth on learning the critical condition of Capt. Pierce immediately went first to the scene of the

battle, to render them assistance, but too late; then buried the men found on the field, and afterwards discovered the nine at a distance from the main field and buried them on the Spot where they fell; and thus this was ever called “Nine Mens Misery” men who had so nearly affected their escape, but were thus met and slaughtered.

P.S. Various accounts in different chronicles are conflicting as to the number engaged or killed. Some say Capt. Pierce’s men numbered 50 with 20 Cape Indians others 63 - and that all were killed. But it is now known that there were just 52 of the English and 11 of the Indians killed, in all 63. A few escaped. (Daggett 1884:1-5)

Additional evidence relating to Nine Men’s Misery is also suspect. Richard Bowen (1948:47), who has studied the Rehoboth Town Records in detail, acknowledged that the death records for the years 1675-76 were haphazard and not in consecutive order, but argued that there was a logical explanation. In 1680 William Carpenter, the town clerk, mentioned the disorder and clarified the problem by noting “lett none maruell att the premiscuous and disorderly setting downe of the names of such as are or may be married, or doe or may be born, or may dye; for they are sett as they were brought to mee, as disorderly as they are sett down”. As way of example, Bowen (1948:47) remarked on the deaths of Rachel Man and her infant daughter who had been killed by Indians on the same day, yet were separated in the records by 22 entries. Without additional documentary evidence, such testimony negates any reliability in assuming other underlying causes for the disorder.

Finally, George Bodge’s (1906:464-465) assertion that the deaths of Buckland and Fitch were not listed in Newman’s letter is also easily explained. The original Noah Newman (1676:3.1) letter dated 27 March 1676 is located in the Antiquarian Society in

Worcester, Massachusetts. Both names are indeed inscribed on the letter, although Benjamin Buckland's last name is torn.²⁹

A myth may have some semblance of truth. In this particular instance it appears skeletal remains were unearthed somewhere in Cumberland approximately one mile south of their present location. At some point, probably in the late 18th century, the remains were re-interred at, or close to, their present location. Sometime after the Cistercian Monastery acquired the Cumberland property in 1900 the remains were again unearthed, either for religious reasons or concerns of safety, and placed at the John Brown House which is owned by the Rhode Island Historical Society. During this time the Cistercian monks continued to mark the grave site with some form of stonework. In 1976, possibly March, the remains were taken from the basement of the John Brown House and delivered to their present location and reburied in a ceremony coordinated by Steve Adams, chair of the Cumberland Bicentennial Committee (Al Klyberg, 21 November 2007, 18 December 2007, pers. comm.). Twenty-six years before the reburial the Cistercian monks had sold the monastery property after a fire destroyed their church.

Most importantly, as research has shown, there is absolutely no verification to support an exact location or context under which the remains were originally unearthed. Furthermore, there is no evidence, written or archaeological, to support an association with Captain Pierce, the King Philip's War, or even the 17th century. The motives behind Leonard Bliss' and John Daggett's introduction of the episode, while not entirely clear,

²⁹ Also see Bowen (1948:14).

might simply have been an attempt to appease local residents or to make the local history more interesting and dramatic. However, by the time Edwin Pierce dedicated the Pierce monument the tradition had slowly become more ordered. As Mark Walker (2003:66) writes of time and tradition, “as the present becomes the past, people impose narrative structure where before there was none. Their confusing, contradictory, and disparate memories and experiences are filtered, ordered, and disciplined to create coherent and meaningful narratives”, and so it is with the Pierce Battle.

Today, most recent battle histories contain the association of Nine Men’s Misery and the Pierce Battle, including the Rhode Island Preservation Report on Central Falls (1978:6) and the Blackstone Valley Tourism Maps (2006). Such authoritative sources, by recounting the association without qualification, have unknowingly served as the final bridge in perpetuating a myth that reinforces nineteenth century public attitudes toward patriotic inspiration, obstructs the construction of a more factual battle account and unfairly biases readers’ perceptions of Native Americans.

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