Unsettling Natick:
The Rise and Fall of a Praying Indian Community

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I. Preface

Ethnohistorians studying New England have focused on the first fifty-six years of direct contact between Indians and English colonists, from 1620 to 1676. The colonial defeat of Metacom's great uprising (King Philip's War) in 1676 "terminated the Indians' military and political power . . . [they] found themselves relegated to the lower economic levels of the colonial society . . . generally they were simply ignored."[1] Indian groups remaining within the settled regions of southern New England no longer opposed provincial sovereignty, and most native communities entered a century of terrible depopulation and cultural, political, and economic travail. Simplifying the post-war situation as one of "subjection and debauchery," however, is to prejudice in an ahistorical manner a complex situation.[2] The Indians of southern New England, during the century between King Philip's War and the American Revolution, faced a wide variety of challenges and changes. In Connecticut and Rhode Island native communities began a long and disruptive transition from tribal unity to socio-political turmoil, from traditional

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1. Laura E. Conkey, Ethel Boissevain, and Ives Goddard, "Indians of Southern New England and Rhode Island: Late Period," in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), p. 177.

2. "Demoralized and dispirited remnants of formerly large Indian communities sank ever deeper into subjection and debauchery." Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 325.

religious forms to Christianity, from vestiges of a pre-contact economy to loss of land-base and servitude. The terrible troubles of transition did not affect the remaining colonial Massachusetts "Praying Indian" communities that had embraced English culture in the 1650s.[3]

In the decade prior to English settlement along Massachusetts Bay in the 1620s, the Indians of that area were decimated by epidemics introduced by European fur traders and explorers. The Massachusett suffered a mortality rate exceeding 90%, devastating kinship-based socio-political relationships and undermining traditional beliefs and practices. The Puritan colonists were welcomed as potentially powerful allies. The English colony grew, expending west and south, and became the primary power in the region after defeating the Pequot in southern Connecticut in 1636. During the same period disease again swept through Indian communities in southern New England, while whites remained unaffected. Like the Indians, Puritans saw their success (or failure) as the intervention of their God. In 1646 the Puritan missionary John Eliot began preaching to Massachusett remnants in their language. It seemed to many that Jehovah had overcome the native gods, certainly had more manitou, and that survival entailed adoption of the English God and His ways.[4]

Eliot's first success came at Nonanetum, an Indian village near the English town of Watertown. Waban, headman of the village, found the power of Eliot's God attractive. The Puritan's audiences grew, and Eliot began traveling between several Indian communities in the Boston area. Indian converts cut their hair, foreswore many old habits — from religious ceremonies to body greasing — and declared their dedication to the English path of righteousness. Waban requested a tract of land on which the Christian "Praying" Indians could build a new English-style town of their own. In 1651 a tract of 2000 acres straddling the Charles River, eighteen miles upriver from Boston and six miles from Dedham, was obtained from Dedham and given to the Indian converts. This site became known as Natick. In the fall of 1651 Praying Indians from Nonanetum and Concord moved to begin their new life. Natick, the first example of the transformation of "the heathen," became John Eliot's showpiece.[5]

3. Conkey, et al, "Indians," pp. 181-185; William S. Simmons, "Narragansett," in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 15, *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), pp. 193-196; Paul R. Campbell and Glenn W. LaFantasie, "Scattered to the Winds of Heaven: Narragansett Indians, 1676-1800," *Rhode Island History* 37 (August 1978):67-83; John W. DeForest, *History of the Indians of Connecticut From the Earliest Known Period to 1850* (Hartford, Conn.: Wm Jas Jammersley, 1853).

4. Jennings, *Invasion*, pp. 15-31, 231-238; Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 31 (January 1974):30-42. On disease and depopulation, see James L. Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 248-253, and generally Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

5. Daniel Gookin, "Historical Collections," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, (hereafter referred to as MHSC) ast Series, 1 (1792):180-181; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 247-252, 263-266; Jennings, *Invasion*, pp. 239-248; Susan L. MacCulloch, "A Tripartate Political System Among Christian Indians of Early Massachusetts," *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 34 (Spring 1966):64-66.

From the beginning the Natick community displayed a fascinating blend of native and English attributes. Eliot had house lots laid out for nuclear families in the English tradition, but on most of these lots "old fashioned [native] houses" were built due to their warmth and ease of construction (and destruction, when infested by fleas or other pests).[6] In August 1651, after the Indians built an English-style meeting house, Eliot assembled his flock and created a polity based on Exodus 18:20-22; the Indians chose first a "Ruler of an Hundred", then two "Rulers of Fifties", and finally ten rulers of ten.[7] This new system, however, did not change traditional deference; families which had provided leadership prior to the arrival of the English were inevitably put in positions of authority in Natick as well as the other misison towns.[8] Although English judicial mechanisms were adopted — magistrate, constable, and tithingman — native efforts to maintain civil order continued to reflect a traditional emphasis on communal harmony and stability. Waban, Natick's leader until 1685, is said to have resolved a dispute by ordering the whipping of both the accused and the witness. Though the colonists saw this as the action of an ignorant savage, it fits with traditional aboriginal ideas that "two contending parties are . . . violators of the community peace and stability."[9]

The traditional emphasis on communal solidarity overruled even the clarion call of their new white rulers. Indian children, special targets of missionary efforts to alter Indian life, were to be apprenticed as servants in English homes; the boys would learn a trade and the girls "good housewifery." Indian elders, however, resisted this program, even after a new coat was offered to the parents each year of the child's apprenticeship.[10] The religious behavior of the "newborn" Christian Natick Indians "suggests that they may have sought, albeit unconsciously, to invest the imposed religion with traditional meaning . . . what is striking in accounts of praying Indian church services is not the theological proficiency of the converts but the enthusiastic participation of all [in the group-level religious activity]."[11] This possibly unconscious effort to maintain an "Indian" community in an "English" world extended even into the grave. At least some of the dead Christian Indians were buried, after a Christian service, with

6. Gookin, "Collections," p. 181. William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776* (London: Longmans, 1961), p. 89.

7. MacCulloch, "Tripartate," pp. 66-71. Indian rulers were, of course, subject to a representative of the Massachusetts General Court, the Superintendent of Indians, who "designated the time and place of all court sessions . . . approved or vetoed all decisions . . . [and] exercised broad discretionary powers over the town's religious, moral, political, and educational affairs." Salisbury, "Red Puritans," p. 32.

8. MacCulloch, "Tripartate," pp. 66-71.

9. Vine Deloria, Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 198-201. The Waban whipping incident is related by Samuel G. Drake in *Biography and History of the Indians of North America From Its First Discovery . . .* 11th ed (Boston: n.p., 1856), pp. 179-180.

10. Salisbury, "Red Puritans," p. 46.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

wampum, spoons, beads, and other earthly items.[12]

In a perceptive essay, "To Pray or Be Prey," Elsie Brenner observes that mission towns helped Indians to regroup, to solidify a ravaged community. "I argue for praying Indian employment of strategies of self-determinism as a case example of the larger phenomenon of minority coping mechanisms . . . communities may be using 'tribal' customs as bonding mechanisms to maintain cultural integrity and self-determination."[13] Praying Indians administered their own day-to-day affairs, carried out raids at their own initiative against their Mohawk enemies, and followed traditional lines of leadership succession. While "strategies of self-determinism" may be an exaggeration, the evidence does show that the Massachusett Indian communities devastated by disease and colonial encroachment were able to strengthen social cohesion and maintain a distinct Indian identity within the safe confines of the "praying towns".

Local "strategies of self-determination," however, were swamped by the great wave of the Wampanoag rebellion in 1675. Metacom (King Philip) led his warriors in successful raids, burning one English town after another. Though the Natick Indians, along with other Massachusett Christianized Indians, fought with the colonists against Metacom, the English came to associate all Indians with the revolt. Colonists confiscated the guns, cattle, and other property of the Christian natives. Finally, later in the year, all of the Christian Indians remaining loyal to the colonists were incarcerated for two years on a small island in Massachusetts Bay. When they were finally allowed to leave, decimated by disease and hunger, the Massachusetts General Court limited all of the Indians in the colony to four reservations: Punkapaug, Wamesit, Hasanimesit, and Natick.[14]

Historians examining Indians in Puritan New England tend to depict King Philip's War as the Indian Waterloo. A typical view relates how "demoralized and despirited remnants of formerly large Indian communities sank ever deeper into subjection and debauchery." Those "with more will to self-preservation" fled the region.[15] While many did leave, and native political autonomy certainly declined in the wake of Metacom's defeat, Indian communities disrupted by detention on Deer Island soon reestablished themselves under the few new restrictions. In Natick an essential communal stability is indicated by a continuity in community leadership. The population level of 180 in 1698 surpassed the approximate figure of 145 given in 1674 by Daniel Gookin.[16] Decline did occur, but not until the

12. William Biglow, *History of the Town of Natick, Mass.* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, & Lyon, 1830), pp. 15-16.

13. Elsie Brenner, "To Pray or Be Prey," *Ethnohistory* 27 (Spring 1978):140.

14. Vaughan, *New England Frontier*, pp. 314-320; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston, 1854), 5:56-57, 136, 327-328; Biglow, *History*, pp. 36-37.

15. Jennings, *Invasion*, p. 325.

16. The figure for 1674 is given in Gookin, *Collections*, p. 180. The Rev. Mr. Grindal Rawson and Rev. Mr. Samuel Danforth reported the 1698 figure in "Account of an Indian Visitation," MHSC 10 (1809):134.

middle of the eighteenth century. Developments in Natick during the century between King Philip's War and the American Revolution deserve closer inspection.

II. Natick Polity

Natick socio-political leadership, during the century between the establishment of the Indian mission town in 1651 and end of the Indian government in 1746, experienced both continuity and change. Though the evidence is spotty, most native families in leadership positions prior to King Philip's War retained their prominence as town officers in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. At the same time the form of Natick government appears to have changed with the century, and with the change certain leading families ended (at least officially) their leadership roles.

Pre-contact Massachusett socio-political structure remains largely unknown. The individual village-bands and kinship-centered clans were the primary relationship units, the former usually an extended family and the latter a more complex inter-band organization.[17] Evidence indicates that the larger "tribal" groupings — political alliances of many communities within all or part of a linguistic region, each led by a coordinating sachem advised by elder counselors — resulted from the circumstances of the pre-colonial fur trade with Europeans. In each region a particular community leader came to control the area's fur market. The resulting power and prestige (manitou) allowed the construction of a "political" network which replaced the pre-contact kin-ordered production mode with a more authoritarian tributary mode.[18]

17. Dean Snow, *The Archeology of New England* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 16-17, postulates a patrilineal descent, but Kathleen Bragdon, in " 'Another Tongue Brought In': An Ethnohistorical Study of Native Writings in Massachusetts," (PhD dissertation, Brown University, 1981), pp. 92-94, more thoroughly explains the existing uncertainty concerning descent.

18. On linguistic regions in New England, see Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 41-43. On changes that came with the fur trade, see Jennings, *Invasion*, pp. 15-31; see also generally Salisbury, *Manitou*, and Martin, *Keepers of the Game*.

Eric Wolf, in *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), postulates the analysis of evolving forms of material relations as the best means to examine the development and organization of interlinked human societies. These relations, growing out of the social relations between homo sapiens and imposed by the demands of nature, were termed *production* by Karl Marx. The primary method of arranging production within a society Marx called the *mode*. Wolf bypasses Marx's modes and narrows the categories to three — capitalist, tributary, and kin-ordered — in order to examine "the spread of the capitalist mode and its impact on world areas where social labor was allocated differently." (p. 76)

Wolf notes in his analysis of kin-ordered production that labor systems differed *within* the kinship mode depending on whether resources were open to all or restricted within a tightly bound and defined circle of group membership. Agrarian economies usually (and this was certainly true of southern New England) are of the latter type. Kinship under the conditions of closed resources gave rise to a structured nonegalitarian group with the top rank acting as "an incipient class in the tributary mode." (p. 97) The limitations of kinship relations however, could be transcended only if the leaders could hold a monopoly on a reliable supply of significant resources. When this occurred social labor shifted into a definite tributary mode. This model accurately reflects what happened in southern New England as a result of European contact.

The terrible epidemics of the early 1600s severely weakened or destroyed Massachusett tribal power, giving the English settlers a political opening in the region. The English soon obtained sovereignty over all Indian-white relations. Indians accepting Christianity put the colonists firmly in control. The leadership structure changed to please the English generally and Eliot in particular. Eliot introduced the Biblical arrangement of one ruler of 100, two rulers of fifty, and ten rulers of ten. This sytem, first introduced to Natick in 1651, soon spread to all of the "Praying Towns". At the same time a legal code drawn up by Eliot — which forbade many traditional practices, from pre-marital sex to long hair and cracking lice — was adopted by each town, further indicating that "tribal legal mechanisms developed over centuries had suddenly been destroyed [by disease]" to be replaced by the Puritan Way. Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities, moreover, insured English control by appointing a white magistrate to call the Indian magistrates to session and monitor their decisions.[19]

Change, however, is never absolute. Pre-mission community leaders who accepted Eliot's way retained their prominence in the new system "as though the old hierarchy emerged under the guise of 'democratic' elections."[20] Local traditional ruling families — Speen and Waban at Natick — filled the leadership positions of the Praying Towns as the familiar elite became more important in the sea of change.[21] Kathleen Bragdon, who with Ives Goodard will soon publish translations of all known texts in the Massachusett language, notes that many of the Massachusett terms for the new positions of authority reflected the perceptions and duties of native institutions prior to the missions.[22] Elements of the pre-mission governing process survived, notably the emphasis on concord and dislike of community conflict. Town decisions or requests delivered to the General Court inevitably reflected community consensus and unity.

The disruptions of King Philip's War appear to have had little immediate effect on Natick's socio-political leadership. In 1674, one year before the war, Daniel Gookin reported that Waban headed the Indian community, and that other notable town leaders were Nattous, Piam Boohan, and the "grave and pious" teachers Anthony and John Speen.[23] Waban also headed "The Principal Men of Naticke" in May 1682, five years after their return from exile on Deer Island.[24] A void of records between 1674 and 1712 makes it impossible to determine whether Eliot's Biblical structure survived the war. Extant Natick town records in the Massachusett language begin in 1712 with the election of town officials in the New England

19. Salisbury, "Red Puritans," pp. 32-37; Jennings, *Invasion*, pp. 239-244.
20. MacCulloch, "Tripartate," p. 67.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69.
22. Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," pp. 134-135. John Eliot developed a written form of the Massachusett language and taught this to his converts.
23. Gookin, "Collections," p. 184.
24. Shurtleff, *Records*, 5:361-365. This is from a document deeding part of Nipmuc territory to Massachusetts Bay. Twenty-three men affixed their marks, and Waban put his at the top. The name "Pyamboho" is second, and is probably a different spelling of "Piam Boohan".

manner: selectmen, jurymen, constables, and highway overseers. Thomas Waban, son of the late "Ruler of 100", was one of the two selectmen as well as the town clerk, and retained the family's prominance until his death in 1726. The Speen family (which had originally deeded the land on which Natick was built) also reappeared in the roster of town officers and remained a strong force in the Natick community into the late eighteenth century.[25] Aspects of Natick leadership patterns survived the upheaval and losses of King Philip's War.

New family names did appear in documents as Natick leaders following the War. Zeckary Abraham, Peter Ephraim, and Eleazar Peagan (or Pegan) signed the 1682 deed and their relatives and descendents were town officers in the early to mid-eighteenth century. Joseph Ephraim appears first in the records as juryman in 1715, and by 1735 as deacon of the church he became the community's leader. Towards the middle of the eighteenth century the socio-political hierarchy seem to have become more open to individual qualities and less influenced by family prestige; this may have resulted from the upheaval of the French wars and subsequent increased migration in and out of the town, or because of population losses form wars an ddisease. Jacob Chalcom by 1730 had moved to Natick, acquired substantial landholdings and become an important man in town. In 1749 he was one of four men signing the Indian census report. No other Chalcom served the town in a position of leadership. Similarly Nathaniel Coochuck suddenly appears in the Natick documents in 1735 as a juryman and subsequently signed several town petitions to the General Court; before his death in 1753 he had become one of the town leaders. Nathaniel was the first and last Coochuck in the town records.[26]

One aspect of socio-political change is shown by the seeming decline of one leading family. Half of the top six names on the 1682 deed were Awassamogs. Three years later, at about the time the first Waban died, the aged John Awassamog ("not like to continue long before his decease") named his son Thomas as his heir and granted him power of attorney "to sell, bargaine, and alienate any of that land the Indian title of which do yet belong to me, according X the sagamore title."[27] The sachemship, with all of its authority, seems to have remained with

25. Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," p. 208; Biglow, *History*, pp.26-28.

26. For town elections, see Biglow, *History*, pp. 26-28. Information on Jacob Chalcom is derived from land-sale petitions in the Massachusetts *Archives*, see Chapter IV. For the 1749 census report see MHSC 10 (1809):134-136. Petitions filed with the Massachusetts General Court on behalf of the entire community include: a 1723 petition to confirm twenty acres to the Rev. Mr. Oliver Peabody for the minister's house lot: Massachusetts, House of Representatives, *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1715-* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1919-1981) (hereafter referred to as JHRM), 4:117; a 1738 petition [filed with similar complaints from neighboring towns] protesting the impact on fishing of the Watertown dam (JHRM, 16:49); a 1736 request to sell land and use the interest earned to support their schoolmaster (JHRM, 14:130-131); a 1748 petition protesting white settlers' interference with their fishing rights (JHRM, 31:574); a 1753 request to sell land in order to settle the Rev. Mr. Stephen Badger as their pastor (MA, 32:345-346); and a 1760 petition, signed jointly with white Natick residents, concerning the high value of a local mill (MA, 33:143).

27. Shurtleff, *Records*, p. 531; 21 April 1685.

the Awassamog family, descending from John to Thomas.[28] Yet the Awassamog family name never appeared in another document, though Thomas and Thomas Jr., and their families, were listed in the 1749 town census.[29] This seems to show a complete change in Natick socio-political leadership, as Awassamog by the early eighteenth century vanished as a prestigious family. Such a complete loss of authority, however, seems unlikely. This change seems to me instead to indicate two tiers developing in the Natick polity, as in many twentieth-century American Indian tribes on reservations, where one tier is the "official" council acting as the intermediary with the white world, and a second tier consists of the traditionally recognized leaders not elected to tribal offices.[30] The prestigious Awassamog family, if it indeed fit into the "traditional tier," would have disappeared from the records but not lost their prestige or authority.

Aside from the "disappearance" of the Awassamogs, community leadership translated into representation in the Natick town government after the Indians began recording their adoption of the New England system. Natick's board of selectmen, which as in most towns acted as executive authority between the annual town meetings, shows a definite consistency at least until the 1720s. In the period between 1712 and 1719, an eight year spread with two years missing, seven individuals shared selectman powers. Thomas Waban, son of the Waban who led the Natick settlement from its origins until his death around 1685, signed the 1685 deed, and served as selectman four of the six years for which I have records.[31] Literate in both English and Massachusett, Waban also acted as town clerk until his death in 1726. Samuel Abraham, who did not appear in the 1685 deed, also served as selectman four of the six years and as town judge during the other two.[32] He did not appear in the town records after 1719, nor in any petition to the General Court, though he did not die until 1745.[33] Womsquon served

28. One month later, in January 1685, five "Principall men of Nataicke" — John and Samuel Awassamog, John Mooqua, Peter Ephraim, and Eleazar Peagan — signed over to Thomas Awassamog all their interests in a section of land adjoining Natick and the Charles River "descending to us from the cheife [sic] sachem Wuttawushan, uncle to the said John Awassamoag, Senior, who was the cheife sachem of said land, and nearely related to us al [sic]." See Shurtleff, *Records*, pp. 531-33.

This deed to Thomas Awassamog indicates a change in the descent of traditional leadership. Kathleen Bragdon notes that "Massachusett texts lend weight to the argument that the office of the sachem descended directly from father to son [patrilineal descent]", yet other sources indicate a matrilineal descent of authority. See Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," p. 126. The document of 1685 shows that the sachem's authority was passed on from Wuttawaushan to his nephew, a succession probably though not necessarily matrilineal, but that John passed the office onto his son Thomas in a clearly patrilineal manner. The decade following King Philip's War may have been the period in which patrilineal descent became the dominant line of kinship, authority, and inheritance for the Natick Indians.

29. [no author], "A List of the Names of Indians . . . Which Live in, or Belong to Natick; Taken June 16, 1749," MHSC 10 (1809):134-136.

30. Deloria, Jr., and Lytle, *Indians*, pp.107-108.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 208; Biglow, *History*, pp. 26-28. Unfortunately I have access to the town records only from 1712 through 1716, 1719, and 1735. For a short sketch of the Waban family, see Bragdon, pp. 153-154.

32. Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," pp.208-210; Biglow, *History*, pp. 26-28.

33. For a short sketch of the Abraham family, see Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," pp. 147-148.

as selectman in 1712, 1713, 1714, and then disappeared from the records. Whether ill health or death brought about his retirement is uncertain.[34]

Substantial alterations occurred in the Natick polity between 1720 and 1735. Community leaders prior to 1720, including Thomas Waban, Samuel Abraham, Samuel Ephraim (selectman in 1716), Solomon Thomas (selectman in 1715 and 1716), Joseph Tapamaso, James Wiser, and Benjamin Tray, disappeared from the documents after 1723. Both Thomas Peagan and Josiah Speen, who held an assortment of town posts between 1712 and 1719, seem to have gained prestige after 1720. New names appeared in the documents as important men in the community; Nathaniel Coochuck and Jeremiah Comecho held town offices in 1735 and signed several town petitions to the General Court in the 1730s and 40s.[35] Non-native leaders appeared in Natick. The first resident white minister, Oliver Peabody, preached at Natick for the first time in August 1721.[36] A year and a half later the Indian proprietors granted him and his heirs a parcel of land in the town, and Peabody was officially ordained minister of Natick in 1729.[37] When Peabody took Joseph Ephraim as deacon (whether selected by the minister or chosen by the Indian congregation is uncertain) sometime before 1735, Deacon Ephraim became the leader of the Natick Indian community. He would serve as the head of the Indian community into the 1750s.[38]

The first and only detailed Natick Indian census, with names given and tallied for each residence, was taken on 16 June 1749 and signed by four Natick Indian leaders.[39] Deacon Joseph Ephraim's name heads this roster — his last appearance on a town document. Six years later, when asking permission to sell land, the Deacon noted that he was over eighty years old and unable to support himself.[40] Jacob Chalcom, who signed under Deacon Ephraim, was not born in Natick but purchased land and became a successful farmer and leading citizen of the town. Chalcom's only previous "appearance" is in a town petition from 1748 complaining that the Indian fishing rights in Natick were being ignored.[41] Likewise Daniel Thomas, fourth of the four signatories of the census, had signed the fishing petition. John Ephraim, probably the son of Deacon Ephraim, made his first "public appearance", putting his name third under Chalcom's.

John Ephraim and Jacob Chalcom both appear on the last measure of Natick's Indian hierarchy. In 1753 the Natick Indians petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for permission to sell land in order to settle the Rev. Mr. Stephen Badger

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-210; Biglow, *History*, pp. 26-28.
35. For sources, see footnote 26.
36. Biglow, *History*, pp. 31, 53-55; Kellaway, *New England Company*, pp. 237-238.
37. Kellaway, *New England Company*, pp. 237-238; Biglow, *History*, pp. 53-55.
38. Joseph Ephraim shows up in the records as Deacon Ephraim for the first time in the 1735 board of selectmen. The previous extant town election records, 1719, do not show Ephraim as a church official.
39. "List," pp. 134-136.
40. Massachusetts *Archives* (hereafter referred to as MA), 32:614-615.
41. MA, 31:574.

as their pastor.[42] Of the six names on the petition, aside from Ephraim and Chalcom only Jeremiah Comecho appeared on previous documents. Nathaniel Hill (second on the petition), Samuel Abraham, Jr. (fourth), and Hosea Abraham (fifth) show up only on this document. It appears that Jacob Chalcom gained authority in the middle of th eighteenth century, that John Ephraim was positioned to replace his father, and that a new set of Abrahams were set to claim community leadership.

The growing white political dominance of Natick in the late 1740s and 1750s seems to have eliminated the relevance of Indian leadership, or at least our knowledge of that leadership hierarchy. The first white settlers, the Sawins, were invited in 1720 to set up a mill on Speen family land.[43] In 1729 a committee from Harvard and the New England Indian Commission visited Natick and found eight English and thirty Indian families living there.[44] White men first served as town officers in 1734, though until 1746 only Indians were selectmen.[45] In 1743 white residents of "Hog End", a leg of Needham territory extending deep into the middle of Natick [which was shaped like a C], petitioned to be annexed to Natick, primarily because Natick's meetinghouse was three to five miles closer than Needham's. Annexation, granted in 1744, put "over fifty" white families inside Natick, compared to about forty Indian families.[46] An epidemic which struck the Indians between 1741 and 1745 killed over forty-five natives (while hardly touching the Anglos), firmly established the whites as the majority in Natick.[47] During the ten years after 1734, according to the Rev. Mr. Stephen Badger, who took the Natick post in 1753 after Peabody's death, as land sales within Natick to Englishmen increased, "the Indians were dispirited . . . became more indolent and remiss in their attention to the improvement of their lands . . . and in some degree lost their credit; their civil and military privileges were gradually lessened, and finally and exclusively transferred to the English inhabitants."[48]

42. MA, 32:345-346.

43. Biglow, *History*, pp. 8-9; Michael J. Crawford, "Indians, Yankees, and the Meetinghouse Dispute of Natick, Massachusetts, 1743-1800," *New England Historical and Geneological Register* 132 (October 1978):282; JHRM, 4:130.

44. "Report of ye Comittee of ye Honble Comissioners for ye Indian Affairs and of ye Corporation of Harvard College . . . Oct. 23. 1729," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 16 (1925):575-577.

45. Biglow, *History*, pp. 28-29; Crawford, "Meetinghouse," pp. 282-283.

46. Crawford, "Meetinghouse," pp. 283-284.

47. See the demographic chart. Crawford, in "Meetinghouse," pp. 283-284, writes that between 1745 and 1746 "an epidemic took the lives of forty Indians, and the General Court turned the government over to the whites, now in the majority, by making Natick a parish."

48. Rev. Mr. Stephen Badger, "Historical and Characteristic Traits of the American Indians in General, and those of Natick in Particular," MHSC 5 (1798):39.

In contemporary Stockbridge, further west near the border with New York, English settlers moved into the Indian mission town, first dominating the town government and later setting up a separate English precinct.[49] Natick's white citizens petitioned the General Court in December 1744, "praying to be incorporated into a [separate] Township, for the Reasons mentioned."[50] I do not have access to the petition, and the *Journals* contain no details, but the Natick English inhabitants "took every advantage of them [the Indians] that they could under colour of leagal authority, and without incurring its censure, to dishearten and depress them."[51] Similar petitions by the Stockbridge whites usually stressed the degeneracy and burden of the town's Indians.[52] A little over a year after the initial petition, on 4 January 1746, the Massachusetts General Court transformed the Natick Indian plantation into a precinct or parish.[53] For some reason, unlike the results in Stockbridge, this act abruptly ended any Indian control of the town. Afterwards no Indian ever served in a Natick town office. Instead of setting up their own independent parish, as in Stockbridge, the Natick white settlers took control of the town government in a legal coup d'etat.[54]

Disfranchisement did not end Indian influence in town affairs. Normally the town majority, now white, could have ignored the Indian meetinghouse and built its own nearer the north-central center of white populace. At the annexation of Hog Leg to Natick, however, the General Court stipulated that the provincial legislature had to approve any change in the location of the meetinghouse. Since the church building belonged to the Indians their favor became critical when the town divided into two factions over the meetinghouse issue. While the southern white faction (led by David Morse) featured Indian signatures on their petitions to keep the meetinghouse at its southern location, the north-central faction argued that the Indians as well as whites would be better served by a more centrally located meetinghouse. The southern white-Indian coalition frustrated north-central efforts to move the church. Continued decline in the Natick Indian populace, however, with white increases in the north, undermined even this influence in the town. Though Hog Leg was returned to Needham in 1760, by 1778 the central faction seized control of the town meeting. When the issue of moving the meetinghouse resumed the Natick Indians were mentioned by neither faction. The depopulation of Natick's Indians served to first undermine their political control of the town, and finally eliminated altogether the natives as a factor in Natick's affairs.[55]

49. Daniel Mandell, "Change and Continuity In a Native American Community: Eighteenth Century Stockbridge" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1982), pp. 21-30.
50. JHRM, 21:119.
51. Badger, "Traits," p. 39.
52. See the petitions of 1752, 1758, and 1761, described in Mandell, "Stockbridge," pp. 25, 27.
53. JHRM, 22:140-141.
54. Biglow, *History*, p. 29; Crawford, "Meetinghouse," pp. 283-284.
55. Crawford, "Meetinghouse," pp. 283-292.

III. Demographics.

One measure of the social stability of a community is the rise and fall of population. The fate of Natick is reflected in the few demographic figures available today. In 1674, before the disruption of King Philip's War and internment on Deer Island, Daniel Gookin recorded twenty-nine nuclear families, estimated five persons per family and drew a figure for Natick of approximately 145 people.[56] Twenty years after the Indians returned to Natick they were visited by two white ministers who reported fifty-nine men, fifty-one women, and seventy children under sixteen years of age: a total population of 180.[57] Instead of a decline from the "discouragement" of the war, the Natick community may have gained population from the residential limitations put upon Indians in the wake of King Philip's War.

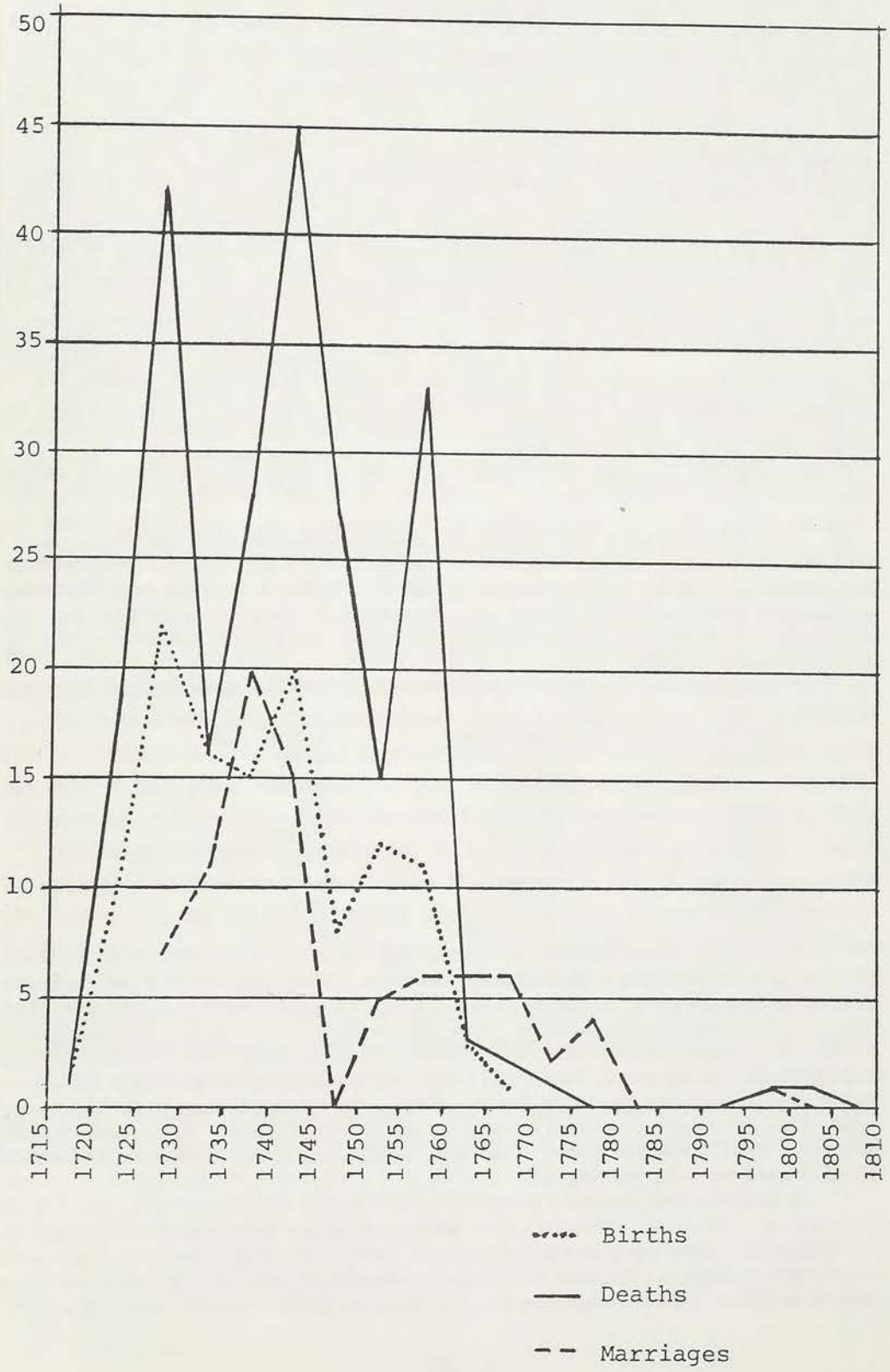
A trend towards demographic instability at mid-century (though only a slight decline in population) is demonstrated by the detailed census submitted by the Natick Indian leaders in 1749, three years after the loss of political control of the town to the growing white population. The census of 1749 showed 167 Indians, including nineteen families, twelve widows, and seventy-nine children. This reflects the disruptive loss of male heads of households, probably from the wars with hostile natives in Maine.[58]

The loss of political control in Natick was soon echoed by terrible population losses. ". . . [I]n the several wars that took place, between 1754 and 1760, many of them [Natick Indians] were engaged in the service; not a small number died while in it; others returned home, and brough contagious sickness with them; it spread very fast, and carried off some whole families. This was in 1759. In the space of about three months, more than twenty of them died, all of the same disease, which was a putrid fever."[59] In 1762, during hs trip to Cape Cod, the Rev. Mr. Ezra Stiles surveyed Natick and Hassinamisco (Grafton) together and found only fifty Indians.[60] Between the census of 1749 and the figures for the early 1760s fundamental social changes occurred in Indian Natick which meant an end to the sedentary life chosen by the original Natick settlers.

When a graph is created from Natick's birth and death data one aspect of the problems faced by the Natick Indians becomes obvious: births lagged far behind

56. Gookin, "Collections," p. 180.
57. Rawson and Danforth, "Visitation," p. 134.
58. "List," pp. 134-136.
59. Badger, "Traits," pp. 40-41.
60. Franklin B. Dexter, ed. *Extracts From the Itineraries and other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, 1755-1794* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), p. 60.

Natick Indian Demographics, 1715-1810



deaths.[61] In fact, if one considers only the period of substantial Indian inhabitation of Natick (prior to the 1764 population of thirty-seven), the mean number of births — 11.8 every five years or 2.4 annually — is just over half the mean figure for mortality of 22.4 deaths every five years or 4.18 annually. Given the relative stability of the Indian population of Natick (180 in 1698 and 166 in 1749) it seems either that many births were not reported or recorded, or that a steady immigration of Indians into Natick occurred during the period 1720 - 1760 (and possibly before). Given the attentive presence of the Puritan ministers Peabody and Badger it is unlikely that births or deaths occurred without their notice. The evidence therefore shows that during the period normally depicted as a decline the Indian community of Natick was strengthened by an influx of newcomers. Support for this might be seen in the marriage statistics for the same period. A large number of marriages — 30.5% — took place between a member of a well-established Natick Indian family and a newcomer whose family name appears nowhere else in the Natick records. Some of these must have been newly-arrived whites or blacks, but I believe it safe to assume that most had bronze skins.

Conversely the precipitous plunge from 166 at mid-century to thirty-seven

61. *Nataick Vital Records to 1850* (New England Geneological Society, 1910. This includes church, town, and county records relating to Natick births, marriages, and deaths. All of the listings were by family; "Births" listed first names of the parents and date of birth; "Marriages" were listed under both spouses's family names, and "Deaths" gave the name of the parents of the deceased, date, and occasionally cause of death. To trace Indian demographic trends I sought births and deaths under family names identified as Indian.

After examining the *Vital Records* and other evidence I identified the following family names as Indian:

Abraham	Awassamug	Awroncomott
Babesook	Brooks	Brand
Commecho	Coochuck	Ephraim
George	Henery	Hill
Lawrence	Obscow	Paugenet
Pagan	Pitimee	Rumnemarsh
Sooduck	Scoggin	Speen
Thomas	Tom	Tray
Waban	Wamsquam	Weebucks

Occasionally a person identified as "Indian" appeared in a family name not identified in any other way as Indian; for example Mary Battle is identified as "Indian", but she is the only Battle thus labeled, and the Battle name never appeared in any other document as Indian. I did not count Mary Battle nor any other questionable individual. There are other problems with the *Vital Records*. Records in Natick were not kept until the 1720s; the first recorded birth occurred in "172-" and the first death in 1716. The sudden appearance of records in Natick parallels the appointment of Oliver Peabody as the first non-Indian minister residing in Natick, and may signal a cultural change in the Natick community. Once demographic events were recorded, the vast majority of "Births" were actually recorded as baptisms. In a few instances ages at baptism were recorded; most were not and I assumed that the individual was born in the year baptized.

In compiling these statistics I grouped all of the data into five-year intervals, from 17x1 to 17x5 and from 17x6 to 17x0. Within each range the data was pegged at the midpoints 17x3 and 17x8. This leads to some short-range distortion — for example, the Rev. Mr. Badger noted over twenty deaths from a sudden epidemic in 1759, about ⅔rds of all the Indian deaths during the five year interval which I pegged at 1758 — but on average, five year intervals seem the most accurate categories possible.

only fifteen years later did not result from war or disease alone but also from a sudden and substantial exodus. During this period twenty-six births and fifty-one deaths were recorded in the *Vital Records*; a net loss to Natick of twenty-five individuals. This leaves over one hundred (104) Natick Indians unaccounted for: 63% of those reported in 1749. An average of seven per year — about the size of a family — vanished from the town each year between 1749 and 1764. Why? A significant clue appears with the figures given in 1763 and 1797. With the former was attached the qualification "in this return, probably the wandering Indians were not included."[62] This is the first such description of Natick natives since the town was first settled over a century before. All previous reports on the Indian community depicted a stable community which had foresaken seasonal migrations for an English-style permanent settlement. Now, with a sudden drop in reported population appears the characterization "wandering Indians".

It seems that *most* of the Natick Indians resumed the rambling ways of their forefathers. Intermarriage also played a significant role in the Indian "disappearance". Badger reported in 1797 that the "Indians are also strangely disposed and addicted to wander from place to place . . . Some of them, after an absence of near twenty years, have returned to their native home . . . They have not infrequently taken infant and other children with them in their journies, which they generally perform very leisurely."[63] Badger also noted that "It is difficult to ascertain the complete number of those that are not here [in Natick], or that belong to this place, as they are so frequently shiftig their place of residence, and are intermarried with *blacks*, and some with whites, and the various shades between these, and those that are descended from them, make it almost impossible to come to any determination about them. I suppose there are near twenty clear blooded, that are now in this place, and that belong to it."[64] This stands in stark contrast to the assured and detailed census reported by Indian community leaders in 1749.

The change from settled community to seemingly aimless gypsies was caused by problems both within and without Natick. Inside Natick the Indians were eliminated from the town government after 1746. The growing white populace — in 1765, as the Indian population stood at about thirty-five, the provincial census registered 474 Natick residents — scorned the Indians as ignorant, lazy, drunken heathens. Outside Natick the never-ceasing northern wars with both the French and their Indian allies pulled many males out of the community to die or be crippled.[65] The repercussions were not only a loss of populace, but increasing indebtedness as crippled veterans, or widows trained in proper English housekeeping, were unable to keep farms operating. Coincidentally the Natick soil, like many areas of southern New England brought under English-style cultivation,

62. "Note," MHSC 10 (1809):136.
63. Badger, "Traits," pp. 39-40.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
65. *Vital Records*, p. 3.

became overworked and declined in fertility.[66] Forced by debts to sell critical farmland, suffering from disease and facing an ever-increasing white majority, having recently lost political control and gained the gall of racism, it is no wonder many Natick natives sought better lives elsewhere or solace on the road in the way of their ancestors.

IV. Land and the Economic Situation

Seventeenth century New England colonists noticed that the native women did the "real" work — growing crops — while the men seemed lazy and slothful in the village, engaged only in the "sport" of hunting and fishing. Changing traditional sex-work roles to encourage permanent settlement became the first goal of white missionaries, including John Eliot. Christianity must come with the yoke of civilization: "Indian men would learn the value of sweaty 'labour', free their wives for spinning and housekeeping . . . and require much less land than aboriginal hunters, the surplus of which could be sold or given to their ambitious English neighbors."[67]

White historians until recently saw the effort as worthless; the inflexible, archaic socio-economic habits of the "savage" could not be altered. In 1948 Frederick Weis wrote of the Natick Indians that "when civilization closed around them . . . they became shiftless and lazy. Ownership of land meant little or nothing to them and, indeed, wilderness land was of small value in its undeveloped condiiton. So they sold their lands to the English who with great effort and labor turned those wild acres into productive farmlands. Hemmed in more and more by spreading farms, the Indians took to a wandering life, neglected or abandoned their small plots of land, or bartered them for rum or firearms. Thus they became a dependent race and lost their self-respect."[68]

This stereotype echoes one colonial impression of the Indians, a view which included a contempt shading into racism. The neighboring town of Dedham in 1680 accused the Natick natives of living "altogether idly, not planting corn for themselves, & refusing to work for the English except on unreasonable terms."[69] Whites who actually lived and worked among the "Praying Indians", however, had a different view of their adoption of English agrarian customs. John Eliot

66. Willliam Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), pp. 153-153.

67. Axtell, *European and Indian*, p. 267.

68. Frederick Weis, "The New England Company of 1649 and Its Missionary Enterprises," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Transactions* 38 (1947-51):180-181.

69. Petition to the General Court, quoted by Kathleen J. Bragdon, "Crime and Punishment Among the Indians of Massachusetts, 1657-1750," *Ethnohistory* 28 (Winter 1981):27.

recorded at Natick the construction of English-style houses and barns, and the adoption and success of animal husbandry and English crops.[70] Similar success occurred among the Indians who formed the mission of Stockbridge in the 1720s.[71] A static view of Indian culture has blinded many (until the recent ethnohistorical movement) to the existence of a complex chain of conditions in New England. Stephen Badger, the Natick minister from 1753 until his death in 1799, noted in 1797 that the Natick natives had adopted "a regular and uniform attention to the practice of industry . . . an almost total change of their old customs and manners."[72] Yet "where there have been strong and promising appearances of the genuine influence and effects of it, they have been far from durable; and they have gradually, and in great measure, returned to their old customs and habits of indolence and improvidence."[73]

As we have already seen in examing the political and demographic changes in Natick, the Indian community had collapsed by 1765. It is not yet clear what role, if any, economic circumstances played in this decline. Neither political records nor vital statistics provide this kind of information. Documents in the *Massachusetts Archives*, however, do shed some light on changing Indian fortunes in Natick. In 1702 the General Court passed an act mandating that every Indian land sale to whites be submitted for its prior approval or rejection.[74] Most of the petitions, with the decision of the court, are preserved in the *Archives.* These papers invariably give background to each proposed sale: the size of the plot of land involved and the reasons for the transaction. Massachusetts law required only that Indian-white land transactions be inspected; therefore these documents give some indication of Indian economic conditions, and of the increasing presence of white landowners in Natick, but reveal little of Indian-Indian transactions or the movement of Indians in and out of the town.

The petitions provide testimony of socio-economic changes in the Natick Indian community, particularly the acceptance of English agrarian practices, animal husbandry, and other cultural characteristics. Samuel Abraham, a leading Natick Indian, submitted the first land sale proposal under the 1702 law (undated, but prior to 1730). Abraham noted "a great desire to Live more like my Christian English neighbors . . . being weary of Living in a Wigwam, it being also now very difficult getting materials anywhere, near us, where with to build wigwams . . . one lasting but a few years, which put me under great difficulty as to living here at Natick, which is surrounded with English Towns, & whereas I have a

70. Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 37-38.

71. *Boston Post Boy*, 3 September 1739; Samuel Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs Relating to the Houssatunnuk Indians (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1753), pp. 137, 153-154.*

72. Badger, "Traits," p. 35.

73. Ibid., p. 35.

74. Massachusetts, *The Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, From November 28, 1780 . . . to February 28, 1807* (Boston: Thomas & Andrews and Manning & Loring, 1807), Ch. 58.

great desire to Live more like my Christian English neighbors . . . being weary of Living in a Wigwam, it being also now very difficult getting materials anywhere, near us, where with to build wigwams . . . one lasting but a few years, which put me under great difficulty as to living here at Natick, which is surrounded with English Towns, & whereas I have a great desire to continue under the Gospel, which I hope I should be able to do with more Comfort & Satisfaction, if by any means I could be able to build such an [sic] house, as sd English live in (as well as some of my Indian neighbors).''[75] Vacant land was Abraham's only commodity, and he received permission from the General Court to sell twenty-two acres in order to finance his house and ''household stuff or stock or other things''.

In May 1743 Samuel Abraham again petitioned the Court to sell ten acres. Sick and old, unable to labor as before, during the winter he had lost one of his oxen to distemper and was forced to sell the other for subsistence. Now he needed ''to procure some creatures to spend [?] His Hay also to Enable him to Build his Chimneys new and so be a means of making the remainder of his life comfortable.''[76] Petitions to sell land to whites thus provide enough information to show expanding or declining economic fortunes.

Petitions indicative of improving circumstnaces invariably show debts incurred when developing English-style farms. Jacob Chalcom wrote in 1730 that he had ''with great pains & diligence procured Money to purchase some quantity of Lands in Natick, (none being given by the Proprietors) on part of where of he had built a very good house, & having purchased a horse, oxen, & cow for his Convenience, which have cost him.'' Sickness kept him from paying his ''just Debts'', and he still stood ''in great need of a Barn, & husbandry tools'', so Chalcom asked for permission to sell thirty-six to thirty-eight acres of land.[77] Though other debts may have been paid, his barn continued to be an elusive project. Chalcom sold land in 1739 and 1741 (thirty-five acres in all) to finance a building ''to secure his Hay & Corn''.[78] Six months after the last sale he wrote that he had paid all his debts and raised the frame to his barn, but needed to sell another ten acres in order to finish the building to store his hay.[79]

Similarly Deacon Joseph Ephraim, the leader of the Indian community, asked in 1738 to sell thirty acres in order to build a barn ''which he much needs'', to finish a partially built house, and help two of his sons complete their houses.[80] Six years later Deacon Ephraim wrote that one of his sons ''hath purchased lands built a house and barn (in English form) and hath for some years had a Horse a Yoak [sic] of oxen, one or more Cows, etc, and now as and [sic] obedient child begs my help in Purchasing a parcel of Meadowland which he greatly needs to

75. MA, 31:135.
76. MA, 31:453.
77. MA, 31:175.
78. MA, 31:263,345.
79. MA, 31:403.
80. MA, 31:219.

Provide Hay for his Stock.''[81]

These bits of evidence show that debts resulting from the adoption of English homes, agrarian practices, and animal husbandry affected leading Natick Indian citizens in the late 1730s and early 1740s. What does this say about when the English practices were actually adopted? There seems to be no documentation, though the Samuel Abraham petition, with the lack of other land sale petitions between 1702 - 1729 and 1731 - 1739, indicates changes in the 1720s and 20s. Construction of Natick's first gristmill in 1720, by a white man, is further evidence for an increase of English agrarian practices in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Yet John Eliot noted the adoption of English customs in the middle of the previous century. It may have been that a rebirth of native housing and agrarian habits, along with other elements of ''traditional'' culture, came from exile during and reestablishment following King Philip's War. English houses took a great deal of time to build, and such energy was probably better turned to other tasks. Tools necessary for English agriculture — particularly domesticated grazing mammals and the plow — were expensive to buy and maintain. The end of direct assistance from misisonary societies would certainly have encouraged a return to pre-contact subsistence patterns. A ''renaissance'' of this sort seems to have occurred in Ponkapog, one of Eliot's ''Praying Towns'' whose inhabitants shared exile on Deer Island with those from Natick. In 1700 the New England Commissioners for Indian Affairs gave fifty shillings to the Ponkapog Indians ''to forward them in ploughing up their Ground: that so they may be Encouraged to a more Neighabourly, and fixed habitation.''[82] Natick and Ponkapog followed parallel courses from the 1650s; there is ample ground to hold that the residents of Natick similarly had abandoned European habits.

Colonial encouragement, including the settlement in 1720 of Oliver Peabody as the first English minister and presence in Natick since Eliot's death, seems to have inspired the Natick Indians to renew English agrarianism. A substantial element, if not the primary factor, in this revitalization — and, ironically, in its not-so-distant failure — was the ecological transformation of southern New England. The surrounding growing English towns discouraged hunting and gathering expeditions, and English intensive single crop agricultural practices eliminated forest cover and forage for game animals east of the Connecticut River. Natick Indians must have been forced to rely more on their crops as the hunting and fishing catch decreased toward the end of the seventeenth century. Having chosen a sedentary existence the Natick community could no longer easily abandon fields where fertility declined and crops became unreliable.[83] The adoption of European livestock (initially as a source of meat to supplement failing game) forced large sections of land out of crop production and into pasture. As a result of

81. MA, 31:617.
82. Quoted in Kellaway, *New England Company*, p. 236.
83. Cronon, *Changes*, pp. 159-160.

these pressures "subsistence practices which had never before had deleterious ecological consequences began gradually to have them . . . From an ecological point of view, Indian subsistence practices were in many ways more and more like those of European peasants."[84] The adoption of intensive European agriculture would have seemed a necessity as the Natick Indians compared their declining fortunes with that of their ever-increasing white neighbors. Samuel Abraham's petition shows that English-style houses were needed as native building materials dwindled. Ecological changes in the region probably forced members of the Natick community once again to build English structures and English farms.

Adoption of English technology, however, proved no salvation. Oxen did allow the tillage of larger acreage, but oxen were expensive to buy and consumed pastureland. Plowing "destroyed all native plants species to create an entirely new habitat populated mainly by domesticated species", so English crops became commonplace in Natick.[85] The purchase of necessary husandry tools and animals forced the Indians to borrow capital from outside sources. Further debts were incurred (as Jacob Chalcom found) when storage buildings became necessary for the monocultural crop surpluses. Soaring inflation between 1720 and 1750 increased the costs of tools and other commodities.[86] Though the first few harvests with the new methods and materials were probably rich ones, the thin New England soil became exhausted quickly by intensive cultivaiton. Petitions to sell lands to cover farming debts, submitted by leading Natick citizens, indicate that efforts to "improve" their lives became a liability. The resulting land sales brought English settlers into the town, outnumbering the Indians within twenty years.

The most common cause given for selling Natick land to whites was not debts directly resulting from economic expansion (though that may have been a contributing factor) but debts from long period of illness. Disease continued to stalk the Indians of Massachusetts; though the morality rate never again approached the 90% occurring at initial contact, death rates skyrocketed every fifteen years as new epidemics swept through Natick. The death of family members increased the economic burden of survivors as debts were inherited and needed manpower decrased. Many who did not die were incapacitated for extended periods of time, reducing the family income while increasing their debts. Ironically the cost of English medicine seems to have been the most difficult burden to bear; doctor bills were the most common types of debts cited in land sale petitions, particularly after 1750.

In 1743 Deacon Joseph Ephraim petitioned the Court for permission to sell twelve acres of land. I am growing old, he wrote, and am little able to labor anymore. He "designed to settle one of his sons . . . with him to assist him

84. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
86. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 62-63, 82-83, 113.

in his old age'' but this son recently had become lame and would be confined to bed for the rest of his life. Medical bills and the loss of his son's labor left him with debts that could be met only by selling his oxen ''which would undo him as to his Husbandry Business'', or selling some land ''of which he had yet a Considerable quantity.''[87] The Waban brothers, Moses and Joshua, the only remaing descendents of the first Natick ''Ruler of 100'', were forced for the first time to sell family property in 1742. In order to build an English-style house for their aged and infirmed mother, and pay debts incurred by Moses' disabling illness, they asked to sell twenty acres.[88] A year later they sold another twenty acres for the same reason.[89] Also in 1743 William Thomas was forced to sell ten acres, as due to sickness in the family great debts existed, and with his own lamesness from gout, he could not labor.[90] When he became well he joined the army. During his absence of six years his wife died of consumption, leaving their young child with a wet nurse for the nine remaining months of its life. When Thomas returned he fell sick for nine months. ''Greatly indebted and reduced in circumstances'', he asked to sell twenty acres.[91] Seemingly all of the leading Indian families of Natick suffered indebtedness from illness.

Richard Johnson, in ''The Search for a Usable Indian'', describes the employment of Indians in the armed forces of New England in the early eighteenth century.[92] Indians from Connecticult, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island served as indispensible scouts and fighters on the eastern frontier. For the natives this service was not only an important source of income, but ''in contrast to such alternatives as apprenticeship, whaling, and domestic service, it allowed young men to earn their manhood in traditional ways frowned upon by a surrounding white society.''[93] It may also have seemed an important part of their socialization into the New England nation, and provided essential capital when family farms declines and debts threatened. Johnson neglects, unfortunately, the negative effects of this service on the Indians of New England. For Natick natives it meant in the end decline from death, disease, and intermarriage with blacks and whites.

The Rev. Mr. Badger described the terrible losses suffered both directly (fighting in the war) and indirectly (disease) by Natick Indians during the French and Indian War between 1754 and 1760. This was not the first service by Natick men in the colonial forces. The limited information offered by the land sale petitions show that Benjamin Tray, William Thomas, and Thomas Awunsemuck served

87. MA, 31:440.
88. MA, 31:385.
89. MA, 31:442.
90. MA, 31:459.
91. MA, 31:656.
92. Richard Johnson, ''The Search for a Usable Indian: An Aspect of the Defense of Colonial New England,'' *Journal of American History* 64 (December 1977):623-651.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 644.

for varying lengths in the early 1740s.[94] Both Tray and Thomas lost their health (and ability to labor), and Awunsemuck never received any pay; all three were forced to sell land as a direct result of their experiences. The large number of widows listed in the 1749 census, while the number of deaths recorded in the Natick records declined from forty-five between 1741 and 1745, to twenty-seven between 1746 and 1750, indicates that many Natick men may have died in border skirmishes on the eastern frontier.

The Natick land sale petitions show a dramatic increase during the French and Indian War of individuals seeking simple support (instead of funds to improve their farm or home) because of disabilities, widowhood, or orphanage.[95] Nearly 80% of the petitions filed between 1756 and 1760 named necessary support as their primary need, whereas up to that period only 21.6% of all petitions from Natick showed such need. After the War began nearly half of the Natick Indian land sale petitions asked to sell unlimited parcels of land for necessary support. The first such petition was filed in August 1754 by a white guardian for the late Sarah Waban's orphans. Ten months later Deacon Joseph Ephraim noted his advanced age (eighty years), explained that he could not support himself, and asked to sell as much land as necessary without needing to petition in the future.[96] At the same time Daniel Thomas petitioned to sell as much land as needed: he was quite ill, his wife had died the year before, and two small children were with nurses who would continue to need payment.[97] The mid-1750s seem to have been the twilight years for many leading Natick Indian families.

The Natick Indian community failed after mid-century to survive in the colonial economy. Failure was not, however, because "they became shiftless and lazy".[98] Indeed, their strenuous efforts to adopt English ways brought increasing debts and declining productivity. These problems were multiplied by the disease, loss of manpower, and communal disruption caused by war. Three women — Leah Chalcom, Esther Sooduck, and Hepzibeth Pegun — asked in October 1759 to sell their combined holdings of forty-six acres. The three, "being brought up to Household business are incapable of improving said lands"; having "successfully" adopted colonial sex-work roles, along with other values, they were unable to work their land.[99] In three generations the native agrarian skills

94. MA, 31:295, 398, 656.

95. In April 1758 Sarah Tray, in her petition to the General Court, noted that she had been widowed for seventeen years. Sixty years old and blind in one eye, unable to labor, Widow Tray asked to sell half of her twenty acres for support. (MA, 33:106) Samuel Morse, a white Englishman who acted as guardian for serveral Indian orphans, asked in August 1754 and again in June 1756 to sell land belonging to the late Sarah Waban in order to support her child. (MA, 32:564) In 1765 Morse also petitioned to sell land belonging to the orphan Hezekiah Comacho in order to support that child. (MA, 33:338-339)

96. MA, 32:614-615.

97. MA, 32:620-621.

98. Weis, "New England Company," p. 180.

99. MA, 33:106-107.

dominated by women had been lost, replaced by the intensive and destructive English-style agriculture. That which was to have been their salvation was in the end their destruction.

V. Conclusion.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw the end of the Natick Indian community. The last recorded Indian birth in Natick occurred in 1768, and the last marriage involving an Indian took place in 1798. A few "full blooded" survived into the nineteenth century. Jonas Obscow died on November 13, 1805.[100] In 1821 Hannah Dexter, "known to many now living [in 1830] as 'a *doctress*, well skilled in adminstering medinical (sic) roots and herbs' . . . came to a tragical end", meeting a fiery death in a "riot" at her house.[102] She left a grandson, Solomon Dexter, "now the only full blooded survivor of the tribe, unless we reckon a small number, who reside in or near Mendon, in the County of Worcester, who occasionally visit this place, as the land of their ancestors."[102] The native community died, however, long before the last native individual expired.

A benchmark of community extinction, aside from their terrible demographic, political, and economic losses, was the decrement of important cultural elements. In particular the last half of the eighteenth century brought a striking decline of the Massachusett language. The native language was used exclusively for town and church business until Oliver Peabody became the Indian's pastor in the 1720s. Kathleen Bragdon, who completed an exhaustive study of Massachusett, notes that until mid-century "we know that Massachusett was still in everyday use among most of the native population in southern New England."[103] By 1797, however, Badger noted that none of the Natick Indians "retain the knowledge of the language of their progenitors, so as to speak it. One aged woman, a church member, of good character, daughter of the good deacon [Joseph Ephraim] mentioned before, has told me, she could understand it when spoken by others; but of this she had not lately had a trial."[104] Use of their native tongue provided an important sense of Natick community continuity, solidarity, and cultural autonomy.[105] Declining use of the Massachusett language therefore marks a highly significant decline in the community of Natick natives.

100. *Vital Records*, p. 1.
101. Biglow, *History*, pp. 83-84, *Vital Records*, p. 212.
102. Biglow, *History*, p. 84.
103. Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," p. 163.
104. Badger, "Traits," p. 43.
105. Bragdon, " 'Another Tongue'," pp. 28-30, 162-165.

The timing of Natick's declension is the key to understanding why the Indian community ultimately failed. The community survived the disruptions of King Philip's War, changes in socio-political leadership and in property ownership and descent. Decline seems to have directly followed the loss of political control of Natick to the white newcomers. The native community could have survived the problems of epidemics and war at mid-century — similar problems had been confronted and transcended before — were it not for the disrupting presence of the growing white population.

Whites were brought into Natick by the increasing number of land sales after 1735; these transactions stemmed from the adoption of intensive expensive agriculture, which has been stimulated by ecological changes in the region. Environmental alterations, moreover, were made by the ever-increasing market-oriented white populace.[106] Left alone, with some technological and capital assistance, the Natick natives could have survived: even prospered. With white dominance of the town, however, "racism, disease, lawlessness, and hypocrisy" could not be avoided.[107] After 1746 these forces probably seemed triumphant. Similar currents swept the Stockbridge Indians as a group west after the Revolutionary War.[108] At Natick the process was more of a slow hemorrhage, but the results were the same. By the turn of the century Indians were but a forlorn oddity in the town which they had created.

106. Cronon, *Changes In The Land*, pp. 159-170.

107. James Axtell, "Some Thoughts on the Ethnohistory of Missions," *Ethnohistory* 29 (January 1982):38. Axtell's complete thought is: "If racism, disease, lawlessness, and hypocrisy eventually spelled the demise of many Christian Indian groups — as they certainly did, Natick, Massachusetts, being a prime example — the *initial* effectiveness of the Christian mission program cannot be denied for those Indians faced with accommodation or annihilation."

108. Mandell, "Change and Continuity," pp. 24-30, 42-22.