

Pequot War

To control the fur and wampum trade during the 1620s, the Pequot attempted to subjugate other tribes throughout Connecticut and the islands offshore. By 1635, the Pequot had extended their control through a tributary confederacy of dozens of tribes created through coercion, warfare, diplomacy and intermarriage.

For a time, the Dutch and Pequot controlled all trade in the region which resulted in short-term stability, though potentially volatile situation, as many Native tribes were resentful of their tributary status to the Pequot. The arrival of English traders and settlers in the Connecticut River Valley in the early 1630's shifted the balance.

The arrival of the English in the Connecticut River Valley resulted in intense competition and conflict for control of trade and tribes wrested themselves from Pequot subjugation – resulting in the outbreak of the Pequot War.

“Capt. Standish was of a lower Stature, but of such a daring and active Genius, that even before the Arrival of the Massachusetts Colony, He spread a Terror over all the Tribes of Indians round about him, from the Massachusetts to Martha’s Vineyard, & from Cape-Cod Harbour to Narragansett.”

“Capt. Mason was Tall and Portly, but never the less full of Martial Bravery and Vigour; that He soon became the equal Dread of the more numerous Nations from Narragansett to Hudson’s River.”

“They were BOTH the Instrumental Saviours of this Country in the most critical Conjunctures: And as we quietly enjoy the Fruits of their extraordinary Diligence and Valour, both the present and future Generations will for ever be obliged to revere their Memory.” (Mason)

“[I]n the Year 1633, & 1634, several Englishmen arriving from England, at the Massachusetts, went up in the Western Country to discover Connecticut River; the next Year began to remove thither; and by the Beginning of 1637, Hartford, Windsor and Weathersfield were Settled, besides a Fortification built at Saybrook on the Mouth of the River.”

“At that Time there were especially three powerful and warlike Nations of Indians in the South Western Parts of New-England; which spread all the Country from Aquethneck, since call’d Rhode Island, to Quinnepiack, since called New-Haven; viz, the Narragansetts, Pequots and Mohegans.”

“The Narragansetts reached from the Bay of the same Name, to Pawcatuck River, now the Boundary between the Governments of Rhode-Island and Connecticut: And their Head Sachem was Miantonimo.”

“The Pequots reached from thence Westward to Connecticut River, and over it, as far as Branford, if not Quinnepiack; their Head Sachem being Sassacus.”

“And the Mohegans spread along from the Narragansetts thro’ the Inland Country, on the Back or Northerly Side of the Pequots, between them and the Nipmucks; their Head Sachem being Uncas.” (Mason)

Pequot

Within this territory during the early 17th century lived some 8,000 Pequot men, women and children (4,000 after the smallpox epidemics of 1633-1634), residing in 15-20 villages of between 50 to 400 people. These villages were located along the estuaries of the Thames, Mystic and Pawcatuck Rivers and along Long Island Sound.

“[The Pequot] had earnestly solicited the Narragansetts to engage in their Confederacy: very politickly representing to them, That if they shou’d help or suffer the English to subdue the Pequots, they wou’d thereby make Way for their own future Ruin; and that they need not come to open Battle with the English; only Fire our Houses, kill our Cattle, lye in Ambush and shoot us as we went about our Business; so we should be quickly forced to leave this Country, and the Indians not exposed to any great Hazard.”

“Those truly politick Arguments were upon the Point of prevailing on the Narragansetts: And had These with the Mohegans, to whom the Pequots were nearly related, join’d against us; they might then, in the infant State of these Colonies, have easily accomplished their desperate Resolutions.”

“But the Narragansetts being more afraid of the Pequots than of the English; were willing they shou’d weaken each other, not in the least imagining the English cou’d destroy them; at the same time an Agency from the Massachusetts Colony to the Narragansetts, happily Preserved their staggering Friendship.”

“And as Uncas the Great Sachim of the Moheags, upon the first coming of the English, fell into an intimate Acquaintance with Capt. Mason”. (Mason)

“The most terrible of all those Nations were then the Pequots; who with their depending Tribes soon entered on a Resolution to Destroy the English out of the Country.”

“In 1634, they killed Capt. Stone and all his Company, being seven besides Himself, in & near his Bark on Connecticut River.”

“In 1635, they killed Capt. Oldham in his Bark at Block-Island; and at Long-Island they killed two more cast away there.”

“In 1636, and the following Winter and March, they killed six & took seven more at Connecticut River: Those they took alive they tortured to Death in a most barbarous Manner. And on April 23, 1637, they killed nine more and carried two young Women Captive at Weathersfield.” (Mason)

War

In late August 1636, Massachusetts Bay organized a force of 90 soldiers under the command of Colonel John Endicott. This group launched a punitive expedition against the Manisses of Block Island in retaliation for the murder of trader John Oldham.

This signaled the start of what is now known as the Pequot War, a Euro-centric interpretation of a conflict that was as much Native vs. Native as it was English vs. Native.

A number of skirmishes took place.



Then, there was an attack on the Pequot fortified village at Mystic on June 5, 1637. John Underhill was second in command to John Mason and the attack left over 400 Pequot men, women and children dead in less than an hour, many of them burned to death.

“The fort is located on the top of Pequot Hill in Groton approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ west of the Mystic River. Pequot Hill is the highest hill in the area and is very defensible because of the steep sides. The fort was described by Philip Vincent in his narrative of the Pequot War (his account was published in London in 1638):”

“They choose a piece of ground dry and of best advantage, forty or fifty foote square. (But this was at least 2 acres of ground.) here they pitch close together, as they can young trees and halfe trees, as thicke as a mans thigh, or the calfe of his legge.”

“Ten or twelve foote high they are above the ground, and within rammed three foote deepe, with undermining, the earth being cast up for their better shelter against the enemies dischargements. Betwixt these pallisadoes are divers loope-holes, through which they let flie their winged messengers.”

“The doore for the most part is entred side-waies, which they stop with boughes or bushes as need requireth. The space within is full of Wigwams. The attack began at dawn on May 26th (Old Calendar – June 5 New calendar) when the English surrounded the 2-acre village and fired a volley through the gaps in the palisade.”



Engraving depicting the attack on the Pequot fort at Mystic, from John Underhill *Newes from America*, London, 1638

“The force of 77 English, 60 Mohegan and 200 Narragansett surrounded the fort and the English fired a volley through the palisade walls.”

“Mason and Underhill, with twenty men each, entered the fort through entrances on the northeast and southwest sides. Their objective was to ‘destroy them by the Sword and save the Plunder’ (Mason). “

“Unknown to the English the fort was reinforced the night before by 100 warriors from other villages, bringing the total number of warriors inside the fort to approximately 175.”

“Within 20 minutes English inside the fort suffered 50% casualties. It was then that Mason said: ‘We should never kill them after that manner: We Must Burn Them!’”

“The English retreated outside the fort and surrounded it to prevent anyone escaping from the fort. Their Native allies formed a second line outside the English”.

“The fire quickly spread from the northeast to the southwest forcing everyone in the fort to cluster in the southwest quadrant of the fort. Pequot warriors continued to battle the English from behind the palisade and the English fired at them through the gaps in the palisade.”

“Captaine Mason entring into a Wigwam, brought out a fire-brand, after hee had wounded many in the house, then hee set fire on the West-side where he entred, my selfe set fire on the South end with a traine of Powder, the fires of both meeting in the center of the Fort blazed most terribly, and burnt all in the space of halfe an hour; ...”

“... many couragious fellowes were unwilling to come out, and fought most desperately through the Palisadoes, so as they were scorched and burnt with the very flame, and were deprived of their armes, in

regard the fire burnt their very bowstrings, and so perished valiantly: mercy they did deserve for their valour, could we have had opportunitie to have bestowed it ...”

“... many were burnt in the Fort, both men, women, and children, others forced out, and came in troopes to the Indians, twentie, and thirtie at a time, which our souldiers received and entertained with the point of the sword ...”

“... downe fell men, women, and children, those that scaped us, fell into the hands of the Indians, that were in the reere of us; it is reported by themselves, that there were about foure hundred soules in this Fort, and not above five of them escaped out of our hands”’. (Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Tribal Nation)

The English suffered over 50% casualties (men killed and wounded) during the course of the battle. Men who were severely wounded were carried after the battle. Mohegan, River Indian and Narragansett casualties are unknown, although one account identified forty Native casualties and another described several Narragansett killed by the English who mistook them for Pequot. (pequotwar-org)

The English and their Native allies established a temporary camp just to the south of the Mistick Fort to gain a view of Long Island Sound. The English ships were intended to meet the force in the Pequot (Thames) River and carry them to the safety of Saybrook Fort. As the ships had not yet been seen from Pequot Hill, the English were unsure how to proceed.

Shortly after the camp was established, hundreds of Pequot warriors from nearby villages mounted a series of counterattacks against the English allied forces still waiting on Pequot Hill. Captain John Underhill with 14 soldiers and an unknown number of Native allies advanced a short distance to meet the first counterattack.

The Pequot would not venture within range of the English guns, and Underhill ordered the Mohegan and Narragansett to continue the fight so the English could observe Native combat. After a short time, Underhill returned to the main body still positioned on Pequot Hill just south of the destroyed fort.

A group of fifty Narragansett warriors, fearing the English were critically low on ammunition and unable to defend them against future Pequot counterattacks, left the group to ford the Mystic River and head east to the safety of Narragansett country.

Not far from base camp, they were attacked by Pequot warriors from villages on the east side of the Mystic River. A runner returned to Mason and Underhill seeking assistance, and in response Underhill with 30 soldiers aided the Narragansett and battled the Pequot for an hour. Meanwhile, Captain John Mason waited with the wounded and awaited their return.

The Pequot counterattacks inexplicably stopped two miles from Pequot (Thames) River, perhaps because they had lost so many warriors in the counterattacks. The English marched to the top of a hill overlooking the river ‘with our colours flying’ and saw their vessels at anchor (Mason in Prince 1736: 12). (pequotwar-org)

In the weeks following the destruction of Mistick Fort the remaining Pequot villages (estimated at 18-20 communities and 3,500 people) abandoned their territory for fear of additional attacks by the English.

Many Pequot sought refuge among the Narragansett, Montauk and other Native tribes in the region fleeing the English. Sassacus and Mononotto, the remaining chief sachems, elected to continue the fight against the English and Narragansett.

Sassacus reportedly burned Weinhauks before he abandoned Pequot territory to seek allies and support to continue the fight against the English and Narragansett. Sassacus, with five or six sachems and perhaps two hundred men, women, and children, made their way west along the Connecticut coast intending to seek refuge and support from their allies and tributaries at Quinnipiac (New Haven) and Sasqua (Fairfield). (pequotwar-org)



It was not until late June and early July that the English organized another campaign against the remaining Pequot. This force consisted of 100 English soldiers and an unknown number of Native (Narragansett/Mohegan/Montauk) allies embarked from Saybrook Fort.

The Pequot and Sasqua spotted the English at the same time and fled into the swamp for safety.

Following a brief skirmish, Sassacus' group made their way to Paquage in late July (west of Danbury, CT) where they were surprised in their wigwams by the Mohegan and Mohawk. Sassacus was killed immediately and the few Pequot who managed to escape were quickly found and executed.

The Mohawk sent the "locks" to Agawam (Springfield) and Hartford, reaching Boston on August 5, 1637 effectively ending all Pequot resistance.

The Pequot War ended where it began, on Block Island. On August 1, 1637 Israel Stoughton pursued refugee bands of Pequot, and sailed to Block Island with a small force to seek satisfaction from the Manisses. Stoughton and his men killed several Manisses and burned several wigwams before the Manisses submitted to English authority.

The Treaty of Hartford ratified by the English, Mohegan and Narragansett on September 21, 1638 was the official end to the Pequot War. The treaty stipulated that the surviving Pequot were to be dispersed among the Mohegan and Narragansett, and no longer to be called Pequot. The treaty also stipulated that the surviving Pequot would never be allowed to live in their former territory.

“Puritan chroniclers freely admitted that their military offensive against the Pequot Indians was highly punitive, deliberately intended to inflict the maximum number of casualties.” During the yearlong conflict, the English killed over 700 of the approximately 4,000 Pequot and enslaved many more.

The colonists and their allies killed many of the male captives. The women and children who could not escape were to “be disposed aboute in the townes” of New England, or sold into slavery in colonies as far away as the Caribbean and Nicaragua. (New England Historical Society)

Based on the Pequot War experience, the New England colonies of Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut and New Haven realized the need to form a military alliance to defend against future enemies. After much debate, they formed the New England Confederation on May 19, 1643.

Part of the rest of the story ... those Pequot placed under the rule of the Mohegans eventually became known as the Mashantucket (Western) Pequots. By 1774, a Colonial census indicated that there were 151 tribal members in residence at Mashantucket. With the assistance of the Native American Rights Fund and the Indian Rights Association, the Tribe filed suit in 1976 to recover its land. The state responded, and the Connecticut Legislature unanimously passed legislation to petition the federal government to grant tribal recognition to the Mashantucket Pequots and settle the claim. With help from the Connecticut delegation, the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Land Claims Settlement Act was enacted by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Reagan on Oct. 18, 1983. It granted the Tribe federal recognition, enabling it to repurchase and place in trust the land covered in the Settlement Act. Currently, the reservation is 1,250 acres. (Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Tribal Nation)

Information here is from Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*; New England Historical Society; Mason; Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Tribal Nation; pequotwar-org

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young