

King Philip's War

After coming to anchor in what is today Provincetown harbor in the Cape Cod region of Massachusetts, a party of armed men under the command of Captain Myles Standish was sent to explore the immediate area and find a location suitable for settlement.

In December, they went ashore in Plymouth, where they found cleared fields and plentiful running water; a few days later the Mayflower came to anchor in Plymouth harbor, and settlement began.

When the Mayflower arrived at Plymouth Harbor on December 16, 1620, the Pilgrims settled in an area that was once Patuxet, a Wampanoag village abandoned four years prior after a deadly outbreak of a plague, brought by European traders who first appeared in the area in 1616. The plague, however, killed thousands, up to two-thirds, of them.

The English, in fact, did not see the Wampanoag that first winter at all, according to Tim Turner (Cherokee, manager of Plimoth Plantation's Wampanoag Homesite and co-owner of Native Plymouth Tours), "They saw shadows," he said. The first direct contact was made by Samoset, a Monhegan from Maine, who came to the village on March 16, 1621.

Peace Treaty between Wampanoag and the Pilgrims (1621)

In the spring of 1621, Ousamequin, the Massasoit (a title meaning head chief) of the Wampanoag Indians, made a treaty with the Pilgrims who settled at Patuxet (in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts).

Chief Massasoit (ca. 1581-1661) was born in present-day Rhode Island. As chief sachem of the Wampanoag nation, he befriended the Pilgrims at Plymouth, taught them farming methods, and joined with them in a 1621 thanksgiving feast. He was a cordial host to the original Pilgrim settlers.

Massasoit, who led the Wampanoags for about a half-century, is best remembered for this diplomatic skill and for his successful policy of peaceful co-existence with the English settlers.

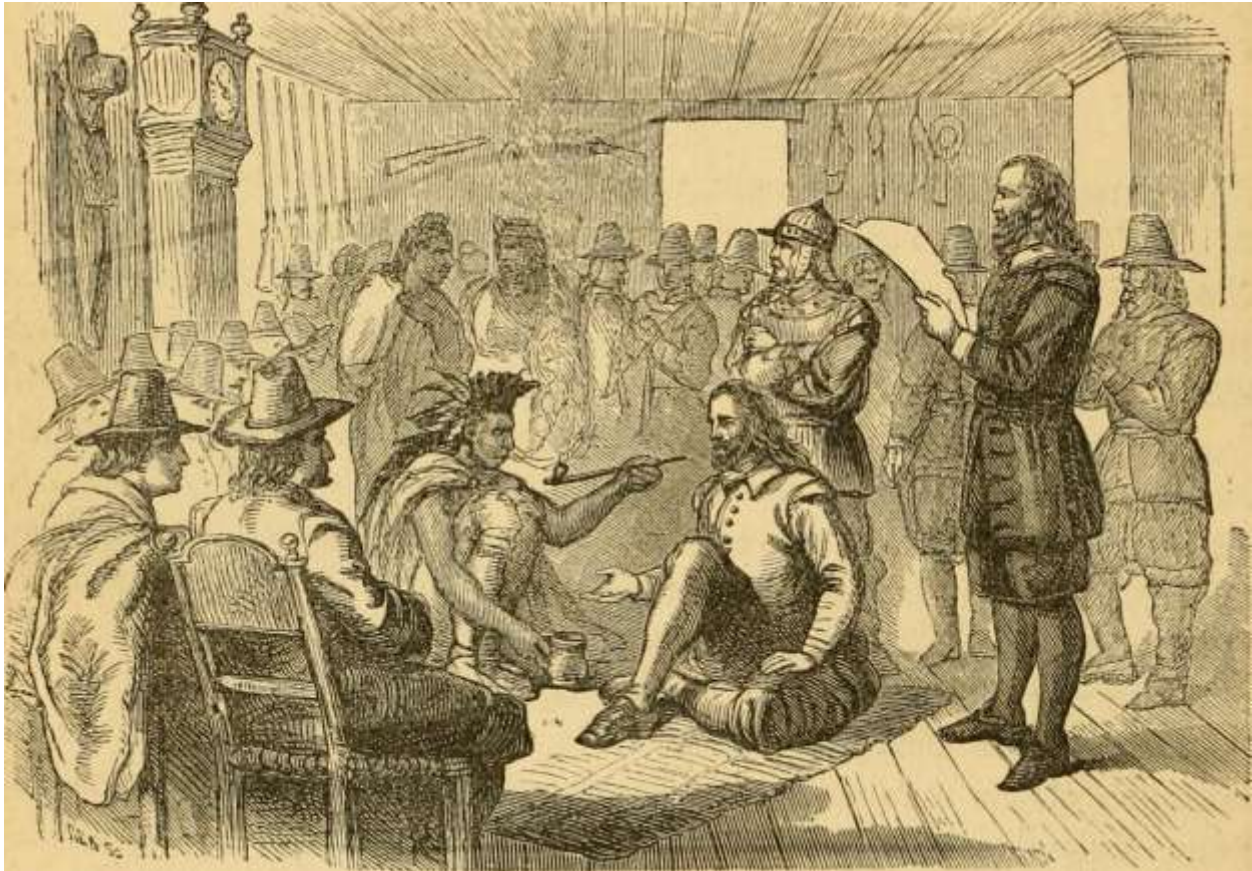
The Pilgrim-Wampanoag Peace Treaty was drafted and signed on March 22, 1621 CE between governor John Carver of the Plymouth Colony and the sachem (chief) Ousamequin (better known by his title Massasoit) of the Wampanoag Confederacy.

The main terms of the treaty: the Wampanoag promised to defend the Plymouth settlers against hostile tribes. The settlers promised to step in if the Wampanoag were attacked.

The Plymouth settlers honored the treaty later that summer by coming to Ousamequin's rescue when they thought he had been captured by enemies.

The treaty established peaceful relations between the two parties and would be honored by both sides from the day of its signage until after the death of Massasoit in 1661 CE.

Although the treaty reads as though it favors the settlers, the provisions were understood as applying to both sides even when not specified.



The Pilgrim-Wampanoag Peace Treaty between Plymouth Colony governor John Carver & Wampanoag chief Massasoit, 1621 CE.

Some highlights of the agreement include:

- That neither he nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of our people.
- And if any of his did hurt to any of ours, he should send the offender, that we might punish him.
- That if any of our tools were taken away when our people were at work, he should cause them to be restored, and if ours did any harm to any of his, we would do the like to them.
- If any did unjustly war against him, we would aid him; if any did war against us, he should aid us.
- He should send to his neighbor confederates, to certify them of this, that they might not wrong us, but might be likewise comprised in the conditions of peace.
- That when their men came to us, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them, as we should do our pieces when we came to them.
- Lastly, that doing thus, King James would esteem of him as his friend and ally.

The agreement, in which both parties promised to not “doe hurt” to one another, was the first treaty between a Native American tribe and a group of English colonists in North America.

According to the treaty, if a Wampanoag broke the peace, he would be sent to Plymouth for punishment; if a colonist broke the law, he would likewise be sent to the Wampanoags.

The peace treaty lasted for more than 50 years.

Then, War ...

After Massasoit's death in 1661, his eldest son Wamsutta, later named Alexander, succeeded him. In 1662, the English arrested Alexander on suspicion of plotting war. During questioning, he died, and Metacom (also known as Philip) came to power.

In January 1675, Christian Indian John Sassamon warned Plymouth Colony that Philip planned to attack English settlements. The English ignored the warning and soon found Sassamon's murdered body in an icy pond.

A jury made up of colonists and Indians found three Wampanoag men guilty for Sassamon's murder and hanged them on June 8, 1675. Their execution incensed Philip, whom the English had accused of plotting Sassamon's murder, and ignited tensions between the Wampanoag and the colonists.

"This affair was the signal of war. The two parties had suspected each other so long, that all ties of friendship had been dissolved."

"Add to this the steady extension of the English, and consequent limitations of the Indians; the disputes about land, the death of Alexander, the mortifying 'examinations' to which Philip was subjected, and the increasing excitement both amongst colonists and Indians, occasioned by the rumours of war, and we may perceive that the opposing elements required but a single further act of aggression on either side to result in an explosion." (Pictorial History of King Philip's War)

"A second cause of war was the frequent demands of the settlers for the purchase of his lands. Philip was too wise not to discover that if these continued he would not have a home in all the territories which his father had governed. From a period long before the death of Massasoit, until 1671, no year passed in which large tracts were not obtained by the settlers."

"At length he made a kind of informal agreement with the Plymouth authorities, to sell no more land for seven years. After this, they endeavoured to entice him before the court, hoping that they could succeed better in negotiating with him there than in his own country."

"Philip evaded their invitation, but afterwards he sold several portions of land. All this was calculated to cause discontent among his people, and to arouse the suspicions of the chief as to the ultimate designs of his neighbours." (Pictorial History of King Philip's War)

"But King Philip's War was obviously not just a Civil War putting Indian against Indian. The English and the Indians, as part of the same society with their polities interwoven, fought a civil war by fighting one another. Looking closely at the political culture of the Indians and the English, we see that Philip sought to preserve his people's sovereignty by incorporating them into the English political system."

"The English, in turn, viewed Philip and his followers as subjects, traitorous ones after they waged the war in 1675. Thus King Philip's War was not just an 'Indian civil war' but, more broadly, a civil war." (King Philip's War: Civil War in New England, 1675-1676)

Previously, 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.

In addition the Native Americans formed their associations that resulted in the various sides:

Native-American Tribes:

Wampanoag tribe, led by King Philip against the English
Nipmuck tribe, allied with King Philip
Narragansett tribe, allied with King Philip
Pocumtuck tribe, allied with King Philip
Mohegan tribe, allied with the English
Mohawk tribe, allied with the English

English Colonies:

New England Confederation: which was an alliance of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, New Haven Colony, Plymouth Colony and Connecticut Colony.

(The colony of Rhode Island remained neutral in the war.)

Between June 20 and June 23, 1675, the Wampanoag carried out a series of raids against the Swansea colony of Massachusetts, killing many colonists and pillaging and destroying property. English officials responded by sending their military to destroy Philip's home village of Mount Hope, Rhode Island.

The war spread during the summer of 1675 as the Wampanoag, joined by Algonquian warriors, attacked settlements throughout Plymouth Colony.

On September 9, 1675, the New England Confederation declared war against "King" Philip and his followers.

A week later, around 700 Nipmuc Indians ambushed a militia group escorting a wagon train of colonists. Almost all colonists and militia were killed in the fighting, known as the Battle of Bloody Brook.

Hoping to prevent a spring Indian onslaught, Plymouth Colony's Governor Josiah Winslow gathered the colonial militia and attacked a massive Narragansett and Wampanoag fortification near the Great Swamp in West Kingston, Rhode Island.

"On the 8th of December, the Massachusetts forces marched from Boston, and were soon joined by those of Plymouth. The troops from Connecticut joined them on the 18th, at Petaquamscot."

"At break of day the next morning they commenced their march, through the deep snow, toward the enemy, who were about fifteen miles distant in a swamp, at the edge of which they arrived at one in the afternoon."

"The Indians, apprized of an armament intended against them, had fortified themselves as strongly as possible within the swamp. The English, without waiting to draw up in order of battle, marched forward in quest of the enemy's camp."

"The Indian fortress stood on a rising ground in the midst of the swamp, and was composed of palisades, which were encompassed by a hedge, nearly a rod thick. It had but one practicable entrance, which was over a log, or tree, four or five feet from the ground; and that aperture was guarded by a block-house."



Attack on the Narragansett fort on December 19, 1675

“Falling providentially on this very part of the fort, the English captains entered it, at the head of their companies. The two first, with many of their men, were shot dead at the entrance: four other captains were also killed.”

“When the troops had effected an entrance, they attacked the Indians, who fought desperately, and compelled the English to retire out of the fort; but after a hard fought battle of three hours, they became masters of the place, and set fire to the wigwams, to the number of five or six hundred, and in the conflagration many Indian women and children perished. The surviving Indians fled into a cedar swamp, at a small distance; and the English retired to their quarters.”

“Of the English, there were killed and wounded about two hundred and thirty; and of the Indians, one thousand are supposed to have perished.” (The History of the United States of North America)

It is estimated that 300 Indians, including women and children, were either killed in the attack or died from exposure to the winter elements; some were burned alive at the stake. The battle forced the weakened Narragansett, who had tried to remain neutral, to join King Philip’s fight under the leadership of Chief Canonchet. (History-com)

Attacks and counterattacks continued into 1676.

Fear of Enslavement

“In early January 1676, during the height of King Philip’s War in New England, colonial magistrates sent two Christianized Indians into enemy territory as spies. The war had dragged on for more than half a year, and both sides were tired and possibly ready for peace.”

“In particular, the English magistrates wanted these spies to suggest to enemy native groups the possibility of peace and submission to the English, to gauge their openness to such an arrangement.”

“Accordingly, Christian Indians James Quannapaquait and Job Kattenanit set out on a dangerous, month-long trek from Deer Island in the Boston Harbor west into native territory. When they returned, they were full of information regarding the provisions of the “enemy” Indians, their numbers, and their whereabouts.”

“But with regard to the question of surrender, the news did not favor the English.”

“Quannapaquait reported that ‘he understood by the cheefe men & old men [that] they were inclinable to have peace again with the English, but the young men [who are their principal soldiers] say we wil have no peace wee are all or most of us alive yet & the English have kild very few of us last summer why shall wee have peace to bee made slaves, & either be kild or sent away to sea to Barbadoes &c. Let us live as long as wee can & die like men, & not live to bee enslaved.’”

“In this short report, Quannapaquait captured one of the most difficult realities of King Philip’s War for native populations fighting against the English: slavery, whether actual or threatened.”

“Unlike most enslaved Africans, who were largely unaware of their destination when they were shipped out from the West African coast, New England Indian captives not only knew where they might be sent, but they often stated it outright: Barbados.”

“And Barbados was not the only destination. The paper trail of New England natives who were enslaved and sent overseas suggests that they arrived in Barbados, Bermuda, Jamaica, the Azores, Spain, and Tangier, in North Africa, among other places.³ But Barbados often stood in for being sold overseas more generally.”

“Being shipped out of the country as a slave was perhaps the worst possible fate, but even local slavery and servitude struck fear into the hearts of Indians and threatened to undermine the entire social fabric and kinship networks of regional communities.”



An Indian sent into Slavery.

“Hundreds, if not thousands, of natives turned themselves in to local English governments or English-allied native leaders, hoping to avoid slavery at all costs.”

“But these “surrenderers” often found themselves subjected to similar treatment as enemy Indians, ranging from being sent out of the country, resettled to new, designated areas, forced to serve in English homes as slaves and servants, and having their children forcibly placed as servants in English households.”

“The threat of enslavement weighed heavily on the psyche of New England’s natives, particularly during King Philip’s War. Far from being a minor consideration, the threat of enslavement was one of the key factors when it came to natives fighting and - later in the war - surrendering.”

“And such fears were not unfounded. New England colonial records routinely and very matter-of-factly report large and small shipments of Indians being sent to Barbados, Bermuda, and Jamaica or, more generically, ‘out of the country.’”

“For example, during the winter of 1675–1676, the Newbury, Massachusetts, minister James Noyes noted that a group of Indians had been ‘sent to Barbados,’ without any further explanation given (or, apparently, needed).⁸ And because some such episodes occurred early in the war, the word spread quickly to natives.”

“The threat of foreign enslavement drove some natives deeper into resistance against the English, as when James Quannapaquait reported to the English in early 1676 that some young Indian warriors had stated, ‘why shall wee have peace to bee made slaves, & either be kild or sent away to sea to Barbadoes.’” (Fisher)

Summer 1676 Sees the End of King Philip’s War

By the summer of 1676, fighting was slowly drawing to a close but King Philip still remained at large and the war would not end until he was captured.

Then, in August of 1676, an Indian deserter told Church and his troops that Philip had returned to an old Wampanoag village called Montaup near Mount Hope.

On August 12, Church led a company of soldiers to the area and found Philip’s small camp of warriors near the spot that later came to be known as King Philip’s seat.

Philip tried to flee but a native named John Alderman, an Indian soldier under Church, opened fire on Philip.

“Capt. Church with his company fell upon them; Philip attempted flight out of the swamp, at which instant both an Englishman and an Indian endeavoring to fire at him, the Englishman’s piece would not go off, but the Indian presently shot him through his venomous and murderous heart ...”

“... and in that very place where he first contrived and commenced his mischief, this Agag was now cut into quarters, which were then hanged up, while his head was carried in triumph to Plymouth, where it arrived on the very day that the church there was keeping a solemn thanksgiving to God. God sent ‘em the head of a leviathan for a thanksgiving feast.” (The History of King Philip’s War)



Alderman sold Philip's head to Plymouth authorities for 30 shillings, which was the going rate for Indian heads during the war, and it was placed on a stake in the village where it remained for 25 years.

One of Philip's hands was sent to Boston for display and the four quarters of his mutilated body were strung up in four trees where they hung until they wasted away.

The war didn't immediately end with the death of Philip though. In the summer of 1676, the war had spread to Maine and New Hampshire, where the Abenakis attacked some of the towns where colonial traders had cheated them.

Random raids and skirmishes continued in northern New England until a treaty was signed at Casco Bay in April 1678. (Fisher)

Scope and Scale of the Impacts of King Philip's War

"The Pilgrims had come to America not to conquer a continent but to re-create their modest communities in Scrooby and in Leiden. When they arrived at Plymouth in December 1620 and found it emptied of people, it seemed as if God had given them exactly what they were looking for."

"But as they quickly discovered during that first terrifying fall and winter, New England was far from uninhabited. There were still plenty of Native people, and to ignore or anger them was to risk annihilation."

"The Pilgrims' religious beliefs played a dominant role in the decades ahead, but it was their deepening relationship with the Indians that turned them into Americans. By forcing the English to improvise, the Indians prevented Plymouth Colony from ossifying into a monolithic cult of religious extremism."

“For their part, the Indians were profoundly influenced by the English and quickly created a new and dynamic culture full of Native and Western influences. For a nation that has come to recognize that one of its greatest strengths is its diversity, the first fifty years of Plymouth Colony stand as a model of what America might have been from the very beginning.” (Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War)

“Without Massasoit’s help, the Pilgrims would never have survived the first year, and they remained steadfast supporters of the sachem to the very end. For his part, Massasoit realized almost from the start that his own fortunes were linked to those of the English.” (Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War)

“Philip’s local squabble with Plymouth Colony had mutated into a regionwide war that, on a percentage basis, had done nearly as much as the plagues of 1616–19 to decimate New England’s Native population.” (Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War)

“During the forty-five months of World War II, the United States lost just under 1 percent of its adult male population; during the Civil War the casualty rate was somewhere between 4 and 5 percent; during the fourteen months of King Philip’s War, Plymouth Colony lost close to 8 percent of its men.”

“But the English losses appear almost inconsequential when compared to those of the Indians. Of a total Native population of approximately 20,000, at least 2,000 had been killed in battle or died of their injuries; 3,000 had died of sickness and starvation, 1,000 had been shipped out of the country as slaves, while an estimated 2,000 eventually fled to either the Iroquois to the west or the Abenakis to the north.”

“Overall, the Native American population of southern New England had sustained a loss of somewhere between 60 and 80 percent.” (Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War)

Information here is from Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*; *The History of King Philip’s War*; Fisher; Puglisi; *Mayflower400*; Messina; *Pictorial History of King Philip’s War*; *The History of the United States of North America*

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