

CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST DAYS

The Native Inhabitants and Their Lives. King Philip and Weetamoe. The Pocasset and Freemen's Purchases

Though the New World was discovered by Columbus in 1492 and the northern coast was skirted six years later, by Sebastian Cabot under the protection of the English King, thereby giving England some claim to the territory, it was not till the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in 1620 that any permanent settlement was made in New England. Till then the territory that now comprises the city of Fall River had been a part of the domain of the Wampanoag Indians, in whose possession it remained till shortly before King Philip's war, fifty-five years later, and with these original proprietors of the soil the history of the city properly begins.

The section had been visited by others before the Pilgrims came, however; though one cannot speak with absolute certainty of their names or the date of their coming. The Northmen, the hardy, sea-loving Vikings of many a tale, were of an adventurous disposition, and, according to their sagas, in 1008, a party of them, under Thorfinn, sailed up the Seaconnet River to Mt. Hope Bay, where they spent the winter. They "called the place Hop," whence some have thought to trace the name Mt. Hope. They traded with the natives and may have marked a curiously-traced stone found at Bristol, as well as Dighton rock. On this, however, critical historians are skeptical.

Far more thoroughly authenticated than this, and, indeed, a matter of accepted history, is the visit of Joseph Verrazzano, a Florentine discoverer, under French patronage, who in 1524, after calling at Block Island, entered Narragansett Bay, where he and his company of fifty men remained, probably at Newport, about fifteen days. He was greatly pleased with the natives, of whom he saw much, and described them and their customs at length in a letter to the king.*

"They were," he said, "the finest-looking

people and the handsomest in their costumes that we found on our voyage. They exceed us in size, and are of a very fair complexion; some of them incline more to a white and some are of a tawny color. Their faces are sharp; their hair is long and black, on the adornment of which they bestow great care. Their eyes are black and keen; their demeanor is gentle and attractive. . . . The women resemble them in size and are very graceful and handsome, and quite attractive in dress and manners. They had no other clothing except a deer skin, ornamented as were the skins worn by the men. Some had very rich lynx skins upon their arms and wore various ornaments upon their heads, braided in their hair, which hung down upon their breasts."

These were a part of the Wampanoags, long a powerful and populous people, able to call together 3,000 warriors, and the owners of nearly all of Southeastern Massachusetts. They were an important division of the Algonquin nation, but as the result of a terrible epidemic, possibly smallpox, about 1612, their numbers had been greatly reduced at the time of the Plymouth settlement, and they had been obliged to pay tribute to their ancient enemies, the Narragansetts, who dwelt on the west shores of the bay. It was this weakened condition of the tribe which was probably a potent factor in bringing the chief, Massasoit, early to make a treaty of friendship with the Plymouth settlers, through Indians who had learned English from chance traders, and to remain their firm friend till his death, forty years later. The treaty, too, was of great advantage for all, not only in trade, but as a shield for the whites against hostile natives, as well as for the Wampanoags against their foes. One sub-chief, Corbitant, who occupied this territory, was hostile to the whites, but he was restrained by Massasoit and died a few years after the Plymouth settlement.

*Bicknell's Barrington.

The good qualities of the Wampanoag Indians may, of course, be easily overestimated, and yet much could be said for their intelligence and hospitality, as well as for their generally superior qualities when compared with some other tribes. During the long reign of Massasoit, whose death occurred in 1660, they were consistently friendly to the Plymouth settlers, and it was not till he was gone and Wamsutta, his eldest

son, the settlers encroached more and more on his hunting grounds, nursed thoughts that had their vent in the historic war that bears his name. Though this raged about the present city, no important incident in the conflict took place within its limits. The end of the struggle was the practical destruction of the Wampanoags as a tribe, and the flight of most of the few survivors to the Penobscot Indians in Maine. Philip himself was killed, near Mt. Hope, August 12, 1676, and his wife and child sold into slavery in Bermuda.

So complete was the destruction, of the Indian power that in the Governor's Thanksgiving proclamation in December it was stated: "Of those several tribes and parties that have hitherto risen up against us, which were not a few, there now scarce remains a name or family of them in their former habitations, but are either slain, captivated or fled into remote parts of this wilderness, or lie hid, despairing of their first intentions against us."*

One of the best, if not the very best, documents setting forth the Indian attitude toward the whites about 1670, and more especially that of King Philip, is his reply to John Borden, of Portsmouth, following the receipt of a complaint from the council at Plymouth, just before the outbreak of the war. This reply, which was prepared and probably delivered at Mt. Hope, sets forth the grievances of the Indians most simply and yet forcibly, and is a notable example of Indian eloquence. It is as follows:

"The English who came first to this country were but an handful of people, forlorn, poor and distressed. My father was their sachem. He relieved their distresses in the most kind and hospitable manner. He gave them land to build and plant upon. He did all in his power to serve them. Others of their own countrymen came and joined them. Their numbers rapidly increased. My father's counsellors became uneasy and alarmed, lest, as they were possessed of firearms, which was not the case with the Indians, they should finally undertake to give law to the Indians, and take from them their country. They, therefore, advised him to destroy them, before they should become too strong, and it should be too late. My father was also the father of the English. He represented to his counsellors and warriors that the English knew many sciences



King Philip

son, had succeeded him, that the whites began to question their good faith. Wamsutta's humiliating treatment by the English, and his death of fever possibly brought on by this, which the Indians suspected was poisoning, did not improve a feeling already growing tense. Philip, the second son, known to his followers as Metacomet, became chief, and as matters grew worse and

*Memorial History of Boston. I:325.

which the Indians did not; that they improved and cultivated the earth, and raised cattle and fruits, and that there was sufficient room in the country for both the English and the Indians. His advice prevailed. It was concluded to give victuals to the English. They flourished and increased. Experience taught that the advice of my father's counsellors was right.

"By various means they got possessed of a great part of his territory. But he still remained their friend till he died. My elder brother became Sachem. They pretended to suspect him of evil designs against them. He was seized and confined, and thereby thrown into sickness and died. Soon after I became Sachem, they disarmed all my people. They tried my people by their own laws, and assessed damages against them which they could not pay. Their land was taken. At length a line of division was agreed upon between the English and my people, and I myself was to be responsible. Sometimes the cattle of the English would come into the cornfields of my people, for they did not make fences like the English.

"I must then be seized and confined till I had sold another tract of my country for satisfaction of all damages and costs.

"Thus tract after tract is gone. But a small part of the dominion of my ancestors remains.

"I am determined not to live till I have no country."

Of the habits of the Wampanoags a fairly complete picture has come down to us. They were considerably advanced in civilization, cultivating corn, beans, pumpkins and squashes, preparing food by no means unpalatable, with the aid of fire, dressing bark for their canoes, and weaving mats of rushes and grasses for their wigwams. They made cooking utensils of stone and clay, and other rude articles of shell, stone and bone, and prepared skins for clothing. They were accurate in their observations of the weather, and had names for the constellations. They worshipped various gods, but believed in one supreme being and the immortality of the soul. Their weapons were the familiar stone tomahawk and the bow with arrows tipped with sharp stones.

Their lives were wandering, though with permanent haunts, which can be traced to-day by heaps of shells or stone implements. The summers they spent near the ponds or shore, where they could most easily obtain fish and shellfish, both of which, as well as

game of many kinds, were abundant, and in winter they retired to sheltered valleys or dense swamps. Their residence was always where the means of obtaining food were easiest and life the most comfortable. The soil was fertile, and though this section was heavily wooded with oak, walnut and pine, they had cleared some places for gardens, three of which are known to have existed within the limits of the present city, in each case where the presence of water on one or more sides made fencing against wild animals easiest. One of these garden spots was on the flats near Slade's ferry, another near the Fall River Iron Works, where a neck of land now occupied by the print works ran out with tide water on three sides, and a third where the Quequechan River makes out from the ponds. As elsewhere among Indians, the women cultivated the crops, dug the clams, carried burdens and in general did the drudgery, while their lords hunted and fished. They had learned to fertilize their corn by placing fish in the hills, a custom which they taught the whites and which is still practiced.

Game, fish, scallops, oysters and clams, the latter baked much as in the clambake to-day, together with corn and nuts, were their staple foods. The corn was parched, pounded to meal in a mortar and baked, sometimes with the addition of berries, which were abundant. The latter, notably strawberries, were often bruised and added to the bread to make a primitive shortcake. Shad roes, boiled with acorns, were another favorite dish. Nuts of all kinds were gathered for winter stores and acorns for the hair oil they would produce, as well as for their nutriment.

For protection against the winter they built easily transported wigwams, made of thick and well-woven grass mats thrown around poles meeting at the top. These coverings were double, with the finer inside. A small mat could be thrown over the top to retain the warmth, and another was used to close the entrance, which was about three feet high. Mats were also used for beds.

The leaders did not encourage efforts of missionaries to convert their followers, to Christianity. It is told of Philip, for example, that on hearing of such work across his borders he positively refused to entertain the preachers, to listen to their teaching or to allow his subjects to be approached by it. He spoke bitterly in contempt of the English creed, and on one occasion, taking hold of

Elliot's coat button, told him he cared no more for his religion than for that.*

The sharpness of the native intellect and their acuteness in framing difficult questions may be seen in some of the queries the Indians about Boston put to Elliot.† He had told them they were the children, not of God, but of the devil, and they were naturally most interested in the latter. They asked: Whether the devil or man was made first? Whether there might not be something, if only a little, gained by praying to the devil? Why does not God, who has full power, kill the devil that makes all men so bad? If all the world be burned up, where would hell be then?

Their language was easily learned, by the whites, at least sufficiently for most purposes, but was difficult to put in writing. It was extremely guttural, and often the words were of great length, sometimes running to more than forty letters each, with thirteen or even fifteen syllables. Though the dialects varied considerably, it was the same tongue as that spoken throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island and the greater part of Connecticut. The natives soon came to understand the English language, though they were not so quick to acquire the ability to speak it.

Many of the implements of the Indians have been found in various parts of the city, and some notable private collections have been made. The Indian names have largely been preserved in the titles of banking and manufacturing corporations and clubs within the city, as well as in the name of the Quequechan River and in the designation of scores of near-by sections.

Until the war which wrought the extermination of the Wampanoags, there had been no white settlers within the bounds of the present city, though the title to the section north of the Quequechan had passed to the English in 1659 by what is known as the Freeman's Purchase. This extended from the Quequechan River on the south to Stacey's Brook, the present northern boundary of Freetown, a distance of eight or nine miles, and easterly from the Taunton River about four miles. It had been granted to the twenty-six residents of Plymouth who were its purchasers by the general court there July 3, 1656, and was conveyed by the Indians in accordance with a written

promise made by Wamsutta, eldest son of Chief Massasoit, to John Barns, of Plymouth, to whom he was in debt, December 24, 1657. In addition to satisfying this debt, the English paid the Indians the various articles named in the deed, which was as follows:

"Know all men by these presents that we, Ossamequin, Wamsutta, Tattapanum, Natives inhabiting and living within the government of New Plymouth, in New England in America, have bargained, sold, enfeoffed and confirmed unto Captain James Cudworth, Josiah Winslow, Sr., Constant Southworth, John Barns, John Tesdale, Humphrey Turner, Walter Hatch, Samuel House, Samuel Jackson, John Daman, Mr. Timothy Hatherly, Timothy Foster, Thomas Southworth, George Watson, Nathaniel Morton, Richard Moore, Edmund Chandler, Samuel Nash, Henry Howland, Mr. Ralph Partridge, Love Brewster, William Paybody, Christopher Wadsworth, Kenelme Winslow, Thomas Bowen and John Waterman, the son of Robert Waterman, and do by these presents bargain, sell, enfeoff and confirm from us, our heirs, unto James Cudworth, Josiah Winslow, Senior, Constant Southworth, John Tesdale, &c., and they and their heirs, all the tract of upland and meadow lying on the easterly side of Taunton River, beginning or bounded towards the south with the river called the Falls or Quequechand, and so extending itself northerly until it comes to a little brook, called by the English by the name of Stacey's Creek; which brook issues out of the woods, into the marsh or bay of Assonate close by the narrowing of Assonate Neck, and from a marked tree, near the said brook at the head of the marsh, to extend itself into the woods on a northeasterly point four miles, and from the head of said four miles on a straight line southerly until it meet with the head of the four-mile line at Quequechand, or the Falls aforesaid, including all meadow, necks or islands lying and being between Assonate Neck and the Falls aforesaid (except the land that Tabatacason hath in present use) and the meadow upon Assonate Neck, on the south side of the said neck, and all the meadow on the westerly side of Taunton River from Taunton bounds round until it come to the head of Weypowset River, in all creeks, coves, rivers and inland meadow not lying above four miles from the flowing of the tide in, and for the consideration of twenty coats, two rugs, two iron pots, two kettles

*Memorial History of Boston, I:264.

†Ibid, 269.

and one little kettle, eight pair of shoes, six pair of stockings, one dozen hose, one dozen of hatchets, two yards broadcloth and a debt satisfied to John Barnes which was due from Wamsitta, unto John Barnes before the 24th of December, 1657, all being unto us in hand paid, wherewith we, the said Ossamequin, Wamsitta, Tattapanum, are fully satisfied, contented and paid, and do by these presents exonerate, acquit and discharge (here all the grantees are again named) they and either of them and each of the heirs and executors of them forever. Warranting the hereof from all persons, from, by or under us, as laying any claim unto the premises from, by or under us, claiming any right or title thereunto, or unto any part or parcel thereof, the said (grantees) to have and to hold to them and their heirs forever, all the above upland and meadow as is before expressed, with all the appurtenances thereunto belonging from us, Ossamequin, Wamsitta and Tattapanum, and every of us, our heirs and every of them forever, unto them, they, their heirs, executors, administrators and assigns forever, according to the tenure of East Greenwich, in free soccage and not in capte nor by knights' service. Also the said Ossamequin, Wamsitta and Tattapanum do covenant and grant that it may be lawful for the said (grantees) to enter the said deed in the court of Plymouth, or in any other court of record provided for in such case, in and for the true performance whereof Ossamequin, Wamsitta and Tattapanum have hereunto set our hands and seals this 2d day of April, 1659.

WAMSITTA. his X mark. [Seal]

TATTAPANUM, her X mark. [Seal]

Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of

THOMAS COOKE,
JONATHAN BRIDGE,
JOHN SASSAMON.

Chief Massasoit (Ossamequin) never signed the deed. He was already aged and may have declined business or delegated it to his eldest son, Wamsutta, on account of his advanced years. Wamsutta's wife Weetamoe (or Tattapanum), who had succeeded her father Corbitant as squaw sachem of the Pocasset, raised strenuous objections to signing the document, on the ground that the territory was her own property, which her husband had no right to sell. A settlement was finally made with her and her signature obtained by the payment in addi-

tion of twenty yards blue trading cloth, two yards red cotton, two pairs shoes, two pairs stockings, six broad hoes and one axe. She has been described by a white woman who lived some time among the natives as "a severe and proud woman, . . . bestowing every day in dressing herself nearly as much time as any of the gentry, powdering her hair and painting her face, going with her necklace, with jewels in her ears and bracelets upon her hands." She was drowned at Slade's Ferry during King Philip's war, while fleeing from the English.

The grant from the Plymouth government under which the Freeman's Purchase was made was later confirmed in a deed from the Plymouth officials.

That part of the city lying south of the Quequechan, as well as the present town of Tiverton, was designated as the Pocasset Purchase, from the name of the sub-tribe of Indians from whom it was taken in King Philip's war. It extended from the Quequechan to the Puncatest and Dartmouth bounds on the south and easterly from the bay from four to six miles. The price, as given in the deed from the Plymouth government, was £1,100. The text of the instrument is as follows:

"To all to whom these presents shall come, Josiah Winslow, Esq., Governor of the Colony of New Plymouth; Major Wm. Bradford, Treasurer of the said Colony; Mr. Thomas Hinckley and Major James Cudworth, Assistants to the said Governor, send Greeting; and whereas we, the said Governor, Treasurer and Assistants, or any two of us, by virtue of an order of the General Court of the Colony aforesaid, bearing date November, A. D., 1676, are impowered in said Colony's behalf to make sale of certain lands belonging to the Colony aforesaid, and to make and seal deeds for the confirmation of the same, as by the said order remaining on record in the said court rolls more at large appeareth; now, know ye that we, the said Governor, Treasurer and Assistants, as agents, in behalf of the said Colony, for and in consideration of the full and just sum of one thousand and one hundred pounds in lawful money of New England, to us in hand, before the ensealing and delivery of these presents, well and truly paid by Edward Gray, of Plymouth, in the Colony aforesaid; Nathaniel Thomas, of Marshfield, in the Colony aforesaid; Benjamin Church, of Puncatest, in the Colony aforesaid; Christopher Almy, Job Almy and Thomas Waite, of

Portsmouth, in the Colony of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations; Daniel Wilcox, of Puncatest, and William Manchester, of Puncatest, in the Colony of New Plymouth aforesaid, with which the said sum, we, the said agents, do acknowledge to be fully satisfied, contented and paid, and thereof do acquit and discharge the said (grantees) and their heirs, executors, administrators and assigns forever; by these presents have given, granted, bargained, sold, aliened, enfeoffed and confirmed; and by these presents for us and the said Colony of New Plymouth, do freely, fully and absolutely give, grant, &c., to the said (grantees) all those lands situate, lying and being at Pocasset, and places adjacent in the Colony of Plymouth aforesaid, and is bounded as followeth: Northward and westward by the Freeman's lot, near the Fall River; westward by the Bay or Sound that runneth between the said lands and Rhode Island; southward partly by Seaconnet bounds, and partly by Dartmouth bounds, and northward and eastward up into the woods till its meets with the lands formerly granted by the Court to other men, and legally obtained by them from the natives, not extending further than Middlebury town bounds and Quitquissett ponds." (Several small reservations previously sold are here named, and the deed proceeds in the usual form, and adds): "That is to say, to the said Edward Gray nine shares or thirtieth parts; to the said Nathaniel Thomas five shares or thirtieth parts; to the said Benjamin Church one share or thirtieth part; to the said Christopher Almy three shares and three quarters of one share; to the said Thomas Waite one share; to the said Daniel Wilcox two shares; to the said William Manchester five shares." (The rest of the deed is in the usual form of a warrantee deed.)

Signed, sealed and delivered in the presence of witnesses, March 5, 1679-80.

JOSIAH WINSLOW, Governor;
WM. BRADFORD, Treasurer;
THOMAS HINCKLEY,
JAMES CUDWORTH, Assistants.

The Freeman's Purchase was incorporated in 1683 as the town of Freetown, then a part of the Plymouth Colony. Two years later the lands under the control of the Plymouth government were divided into the three counties of Bristol, Barnstable and Plymouth, and Freetown, as well as the Pocasset Purchase, became a part of Bristol

County. In 1692 the three counties were united with Massachusetts and the Plymouth Colony government, which then included Tiverton, came to an end.

The first owners of the Freeman's Purchase divided it among themselves by lot into twenty-six shares, each having a frontage of about 100 rods on the river and extending easterly about four miles to the eastern boundary of the strip purchased. These lots were numbered consecutively, beginning a few rods north of the Quequechan River. Thirteen full lots and a part of the fourteenth fell within what is now the city of Fall River.

The first lot, nearest the Quequechan, was drawn by Timothy Foster and sold in 1679 to William Earle, John Borden and David L. Lake, all of Portsmouth, for £140. Much of it was sold to the Bordens and remained in that family for generations. The second was drawn by Humphrey Turner, and passed through various owners till 1731, when the west end of it became the property of Benjamin Durfee, at whose death it passed to his son, Thomas, who had also acquired the north half of the first lot and was thus the owner of all the land from Elm street to Turner, and from the river to the ponds. Christopher Wadsworth drew the third lot; Edmund Chandler, the fourth; Samuel House, the fifth; John Howland, the sixth; George Watson, the seventh; Ralph Partridge, the eighth; Timothy Hatherly, the ninth; Love Brewster, the tenth; Richard Moore, the eleventh; William Hatch, the twelfth; Thomas Southworth, the thirteenth; and William Paybody, the fourteenth. The divisions and transfers from these early owners to the present day can be traced by the curious at the registry of deeds without much difficulty.

The Pocasset Purchase was likewise divided among the proprietors, by a committee consisting of Christopher Almy, Job Almy, William Manchester and Nathaniel Thomas, appointed at a meeting of the purchasers April 11, 1681. The first twelve lots were within Fall River, and with the exception of seven, eight and nine were fifty-two rods wide. A strip thirty rods wide adjoining the Quequechan was owned in common. The others were called "great lots" and extended from the bay one mile eastward to Eight Rod Way, now Plymouth avenue, which was ordered laid out in 1696. They were numbered beginning thirty rods south of the Quequechan and were drawn as fol-

lots: Lots 1, 2, 4, 8 and 12, Edward Gray; 3 and 5, William Manchester; 6, Benjamin Church; 7 and 9, Christopher Almy; 10, Daniel Wilcox; 11, Job Almy.

A second division was made later of the land between Plymouth avenue, Watuppa pond and the Quequechan River, which was laid out in 120-acre lots, called "six-score-acre lots," with Richard Borden, John Cook, William Corey, Job Almy, Thomas Corey, Lidy Gray, Christopher Almy, Nathaniel Southwick, Joseph Wanton, Seth Arnold and Edward Gray as the first owners. A third division of land near the pond was made in 1697 and included the section between the Quequechan River and Bedford street, now known as Flint Village. It extended westward nearly to Twelfth street.

The original grand deed of the Pocasset Purchase has been carefully preserved, and is now in the possession of the family of the late Cook Borden. The original deed of the Freeman's Purchase is believed to have been lost. The records of the Pocasset proprie-

tors are still preserved and show that house lots with gardens in the rear were laid out at Stone Bridge, where a ferry lot and a ministry lot were also set aside, evidence that it was there the original owners expected the settlement would be made. The spelling is curious for its marked variation from present styles, sometimes greatly shortened, as in the form "Xofer Allmy" for Christopher Almy, and sometimes lengthened by the addition of apparently unnecessary letters, as in "att" and "lott." Two small "f's" were used instead of a capital and a small "w" in nearly every case. The records pertain almost entirely to the land, but there are occasionally other matters, like the vote that those who had not paid their share should not have the right to draw for sections, and another vote, May 29, 1792, that "Levi Rouncifull of Freetown and Joseph Durfee of Tiverton be appointed agents by this proprietee to forbid all and every person from taking iron ore out of any fresh pond or ponds."



The Old Slade House, formerly at S. W. Corner of North Main and Elm Streets