

Chapter VI

SKETCHES OF THE LIVES OF WEETAMOE AND AWASHONKS

Weetamoe

There are many facts relating to the activities of Weetamoe which are not previously referred to, and also much detail concerning the activities of Awashonks, who was a squa-sachem of the Sakonets during the Indian war. These are important to our story because Weetamoe was ruler over the tribe which occupied the Fall River territory, and Awashonks was until the end of Indian occupation ruler over the adjoining Sakonet tribe.

Weetamoe and her sister Wootonekanuske are generally deemed to be the daughters of Corbitant. Weetamoe had married Alexander (Wamsutta) the overlord (after his father Massasoit) of the Pokonoket nation, and Wootonekanuske married Philip (Wamsutta's younger brother) who succeeded him to that power.

Weetamoe died on August 6, 1675, at the age of forty-four years, but there is no record relating to the activities of Corbitant after 1623, so that there is no record which relates to any ruler of the Pocasset tribe for a period of ten years. In 1623 Corbitant was in disgrace on account of his hostility to Massasoit, hence his later life may have been of little public importance though he may have lived many years thereafter. To many the absence of record has seemed to indicate that he had died before Weetamoe was old enough to assume leadership. There may have been an interregnum but I adopt the general view that she was Corbitant's eldest daughter and succeeded him when the male line of inheritance had failed; that she inherited from him his hostility to the then dominant white race. She upheld the reputation of her race as a clever dissembler, and we find no overt act

of hers which upon careful analysis discloses a voluntary attempt to favor the development of the colonies.

Weetamoe was described in April 1675 as a "severe and proud dame, bestowing every day in dressing herself neat, as much time as any gentry of the land, powdering her hair and painting her face, going with necklaces, with jewels in her ears, and bracelets upon her hands, and when she had dressed herself her work was to make girdles of wampum and beads". Her love of finery overcame her purpose to overcome colonial advancement. When she sold the "Freeman's" lands (Freetown and part of Fall River) in 1659, a portion of the purchase price was her indebtedness for and the furnishing of new items of personal adornment by John Barnes, a Plymouth merchant. We would not suppose that these elaborate toilets were prepared solely for her personal satisfaction but rather to heighten her dignity and attractiveness to her warriors and male associates, as an incident of her superior position. In these matters Weetamoe was very successful and her divorces and marriages were more speedy and varied than the most liberal Courts of today would allow. During the twenty-five years of her adult life she had many husbands, and shared at least one of them with other squaws. She was known by several names, viz: Namumpum, Tetapanum and Weetamoe, the latter spelled in a variety of ways.

Miss Virginia Baker, late of Warren, R. I. studied the life of Weetamoe and wrote an article thereon which is published in Vol. 54 of the *New England Historical & Genealogical Register*. Miss Baker was a careful historian and records discovered by her show that at the age of eighteen (about 1651) Weetamoe was the wife of Weequequinequa: that at the age of twenty-three (about 1656) she had become the wife of Wamsutta; that at the age of thirty (about 1662) she was the wife of Quinquequanchet; that very shortly after that she was the wife of Petownonowit (Peter or Benjamin),¹ while in the fall of 1675 she had become the concurrent second or third wife of Quanopin. As the wife of Wamsutta she executed a deed on June 9, 1659 under the name of Tattapanum² and on June 3, 1662 she filed a petition in Plymouth as Namumpum, wife of Quinquequanchet. It seems that at this last date Wamsutta was still alive. The records place his death as having occurred between June 13 and August 16, 1662. (N.S.)³

We know little about Weetamoe's first marriage (the marriage of youth) but as wife of Wamsutta (alias Moonanam, alias Alexander Sopo-

¹ Capt. Church speaks of meeting Peter Nunuit, husband of Weetamoe, on June 17, 1675.

² Fall River Reg. Deeds, C. R. book 1, p. 361; R. I. & Prov. Plant. Book of Land Ev. p. 211.

³ Goodwin, (p. 543); Ply. Col. Book IV, pp 16, 25. Cf. June 3d o. s.

quit or Pokonoket etc) Weetamoe was squa-sachem of the Pokonoket nation. She was a dozen years younger than her husband and likely shared his wigwam with other wives.

At a time very shortly after Weetamoe's birth, viz: on September 25, 1633, Massasoit and Wamsutta appeared before the Court at Plymouth and jointly renewed the ancient treaty of peace and fealty. Wamsutta was very young at that time, but from and after that time he began to assume the duties of a junior sachem.⁴ During the score of years which elapsed before he made his union with Weetamoe, Wamsutta's habits, aims and methods had become well fixed. They did not materially change after he fell under Weetamoe's influence and charm; their married life was not altogether peaceful. While acting as joint ruler with his father, he had come to know that the Courts at Plymouth were always open to his race, and he had seen swift justice meted out whenever his people were wronged.

Wamsutta seemed very anxious to turn his Indian lands into cash and not only sold his own land but he also sold lands belonging to his wife and to subordinate chieftains, and this caused resentment on their part. Weetamoe was opposed to sales of her lands by him to the colonists. After the death of Massasoit and Wamsutta, Philip questioned the extent and efficiency of many of these deeds and caused some of them to be revised. Weetamoe however gave immediate notice of her disapproval of sales which had been made, and she petitioned the Plymouth Court with reference to the Freeman's Purchase (deed of June 1659); she admitted that she had renounced her title, but claimed she received none of the purchase price, and she secured a compromise of her claim in the form of a court order that she should receive new merchandise equal in value to a third of the price to compensate her for moving the Indians from the land.

On June 13, 1660 Wamsutta appeared at the Plymouth Court and representing that his father was lately deceased⁵ desired to change his name and that of his brother according to the custom of the Indians. The Court ordered that thereafter he be known as Alexander Pokonoket and that his brother be named Philip.

It seems that years earlier Massasoit had set apart certain lands within the Pocasset territory as a residence for certain Narragansetts, "on condition that they should live under him and always observe his orders and customs".⁶ These Indians were sympathetic with Weetamoe and undesirables

⁴ E. G. Canonicus and Miantonomi; Massasoit and Quadequina (See Goodwin, p. 152). Probably Philip performed some governmental functions under Alexander. See also Verrazani's narrative of 1542. (Bicknell Vol. 1, p. 65 and seq.).

⁶ This was probably not true. See Drake's book II, p. 103 note.

so far as Alexander and Philip were concerned. Their tribal connections were with the anti-English or war faction of the Narragansett nation, for in the Narragansett country as well as in Pokonoket divergent opinions were entertained with reference to the colonists. There was a peace party headed by Canonicus and Ninigret, while the disgruntled and warlike section was headed by Canonchet, the son of Miantonomi and by his uncle Co-jon-o-quant and after death of the latter by Cojonoquant's son Quonopin. The presence of this faction in his territory as well as his alliance with Weetamoe, led to rumors that Alexander was plotting against the whites, and Captain Thomas Willet asked him to appear at Plymouth on June 3rd, 1662 (o. s.)⁷ in order that the matter might be cleared. Willet at that time was one of the Governor's assistants, a man of excellent repute both with the whites and the Indians. He had adjusted several troublesome issues between them to their mutual satisfaction. So judicious in temperament and so fair was Willet that he was selected to accompany the King's Commissioners on their tour of the colonies when they arrived to study and report on intercolonial relations. When New York was taken from the Dutch, he was made the first English Mayor of Manhattan at the request of the Dutch residents,⁸—in fact after the delivery of the message to Alexander, Willett went to New York and was so long in returning that Alexander, who had waited to confer with him again before appearing at Court, had gotten no further than Monponset ponds in Halifax when the Plymouth Court had convened. Weetamoe had, however, been present at the Court in Plymouth on June 3rd and the fact that she had resumed her former name of Nannumpum in the petition addressed to the Court complaining that Wamsutta had sold certain of her lands without her consent and that she was joined in a similar petition by a Sakonet Indian, Tatacomuncah,⁹ who alleged a similar infraction by Wamsutta, indicates to the writer that Weetamoe was much displeased with Alexander not only on account of indiscriminate sales of land,¹⁰ but also because he had determined to satisfy the Pilgrims as to his alleged activities. On that account she then married Quinquequanchet (who was one of her own tribal captains), and returned with him to her Pocasset home. The Court record of June 3rd makes no mention of Alexander, making it clear that no official demand had then been made upon him. Contrary to the custom of holding

⁶ Ply. Col. Book 4, p. 24.

⁷ Drake, III, 5 "He was asked to attend Court for their satisfaction".

⁸ Goodwin, p. 60 note. See also p. 543.

⁹ Ply. Col. Vol. 4 pp 16 and 17.

¹⁰ Ply. Col. IV, p. 8 "He sold land also to strangers".

monthly meetings, however, a second June session convened one week later. By this time Alexander had deceased, and Philip, as sachem of Sowams, appeared before the Court making specific claim¹¹ that Quinquequanchet and Namumpum (Weetamoe) his wife were entertaining the Narragansett Indians "against his good will and liking". The correct story of Alexander's death is undoubtedly that which was stated by Major Bradford (who was with Winslow at Monponset), and Hubbard's story that violence and incivility towards Alexander were suspected by the Indians is entirely without foundation.¹² It should be added that the lands concerning which Weetamoe had complained were located at Punkatest, at the place where Capt. Church later had his encounter with the Indians, then called by him "Almy's pease-field". Tatumuncah's lands were in Sakonet, and at a later time legal proceedings were instituted in the Plymouth Courts between Mamanuah and his mother Awashonks, the squa-sachem of Sakonet, as to who was entitled to the purchase price of the Sakonet lands. After two jury trials and two reviews it was held that Mamanuah had the "chiefest right".¹³ Suit was also brought against Philip by Peter Talmon of Rhode Island with reference to some lands which he claimed to have been sold by the Indians to him, but the plaintiff failed to recover any damage.

We find no facts in Weetamoe's life with Alexander which justify Miss Baker's conclusion that as a result of his death she "dedicated her life to the sacred purpose of avenging his untimely end". It is a fact as stated by Miss Baker that Quequequanchet was Weetamoe's husband but that name appears for only a short time. He may have deceased, but it is probable that he changed his name to Petownonowit, the next known name among her husbands. He was generally known to the English as "Peter" or "Benjamin".¹⁴ He had some education, could speak some English and was rather inclined to favor the colonists. When, in 1675, Philip was in conference with the Narragansett warriors and engaged in a "pow-wow" at Mt. Hope, at which Weetamoe's warriors were also present, Peter Nunuit left the conference and returned to Weetamoe,¹⁵ who was encamped near the falls river. There Capt. Church met and conversed with them both. Peter gave him much information, while Wee-

¹¹ Ply. Col. Vol. IV, p. 24. under date of October 8.

¹² Goodwin, p. 545. 4. See my "Sakonet and Punkatest" collections.

¹³ Pl. Col.—VII—p. 191.

¹⁴ Peter was rewarded for his pro-English feelings. After the war he was put in charge of the prisoners. (Drake III, p. 3). He may have been the Indian who led the English to the "great swamp" fort. (Church, p. 57).

¹⁵ Church, p. 27.

tamoe dissembled.¹⁶ Miss Baker properly concludes that inasmuch as this fourth husband did not rally to her support, and allied himself with the English, she "disdainfully repudiated him". In the war which followed she became "next to Philip in respect to mischief done".

Awashunkes

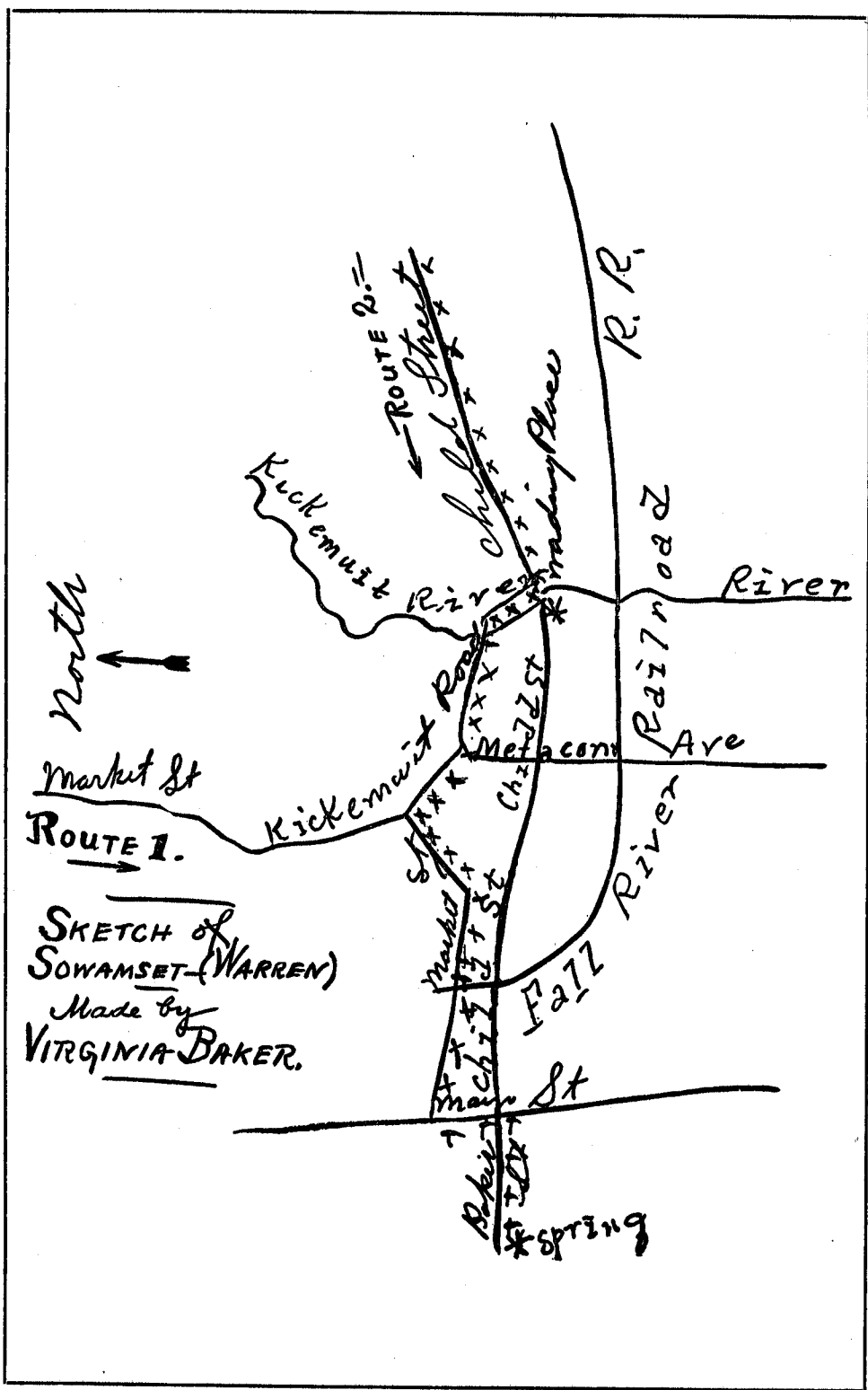
The word *Awashunkes* may be properly divided into two separate names. The English interpreted the word "Awa" as being the equivalent of Alice, and the Indian word "Shunkes" conveyed the idea of grandeur—of a person of importance (we have heard its equivalent "shooks" in English). We first hear of "Alice the Great" in the year 1671. At the July session of that year the Court sent two messengers to *Awashunkes* and five other sachems at Sakonet, requiring them to appear at Court and "engage for their future fidelity".

In 1662 *Wamsutta* (alias Alexander) the husband of *Weetamoe* and son of *Massasoit* had died. This caused considerable unrest among the Indians, culminating in action by the Court in July 1671 (*Colonial Records* book 5, page 62), when all the fire-arms possessed by Indians were confiscated and ordered to be returned to the Court. On July 6, 1671 the colony had voted to raise a force to be sent to the Indians at Sakonet "to fetch their arms, and in default thereof their persons".

On July 24, 1671 *Awashunkes* came into Court, executed an agreement for a partial alliance. She agreed to give up her arms, pay fifty pounds for her default and receive a limited protection from Indians who were hostile to her submission. She returned to Sakonet and early in August addressed a note to the governor,—giving a list of the Indians who had agreed to her submission, and asking his protection against Indians who were opposed to her submissions; she reported that her tribe had six guns; that she had sent in four, but that the other two were too large to carry; that she had offered to surrender one of them to Mr. Almy (which he had refused to take), and that the other one had been stolen from her wigwam by an Indian named "Broadfaced Will" who had carried it to Mount Hope.

The list of persons returned to Plymouth as being faithful to the English did not include *Awashunkes'* two sons nor her brother. In October 1671 Gov. Prence wrote her a letter of disappointment because she had succeeded no better with her own kin, but suggesting that upon her application the guns returned might be loaned to her for use during the coming season.

¹⁶ She said that her warriors had gone to Philip's dance against her will. (*Drake*, III, p. 31).



In 1661 the general Court, the Plymouth Court, had voted to purchase lands at Sakonet from the Indians and to provide there a settling place for servants or men "put to service" who were entitled by their covenant of service to have lands apportioned to them. In 1662 a deal was made with Wamsutta (Volume 4, page 16) for selling Sakonet neck, and both Tatacomunah and Nanumpum (a name of Weetamoe) complained to the Plymouth Court that they owned or had an interest in these lands. In March 1674 Mamanuah claimed to be chief sachem of the neck lands, but when he attempted to give possession to the English, Awashunkes with help of many assembled Indians forceably prevented delivery, so he brought an action against her which was tried before a jury in Plymouth resulting in a verdict that so far as these lands were concerned Mamanuah had the chiefest title.

The next year marked the beginning of King Philip's war, and at that time Philip sent six of his chief men as messengers to Awashunkes to engage her in the war. She artfully called all her people together for a great dance, but sent secret word to Capt. Church inviting his presence.

Church, accepting her invitation, went with an interpreter and found hundreds of Indians assembled from all her dominion; she, in a foaming sweat was leading the dance. Hearing that Church had come she stopped short and sat down, then ordered her chiefs into her presence and subsequently called Church. She told Church that Philip had sent six men to urge her into the war; that Plymouth had raised a big army to invade Philip's country and asked if it was so. Church denied it and asked her if she thought he would have come to Sakonet and brought his goods to settle there if such were true. She pretended to believe the truth of Church's statement and then ordered the six Pokonokets into her presence. Their presence was imposing,—faces painted, hair like a cock's comb; the balance of the head shaven. They had powder horns and shot bags. She told them what Church had said, whereupon a warm discussion followed. She told Church that Philip had sent word that unless she joined him, he would send to burn all the houses and kill the cattle of the English, and the English would think that she had done it. The warriors said that their bullets were to shoot pigeons. Church advised her to kill the six Indians and to shelter herself under the English, whereupon one of them became very enraged. His name was "Little Eyes" and he tried to get Church apart from the rest of them so that he could kill him. Awashunkes told Church that she had decided to put herself under the English and sent two men to his house to act as guides. They urged him to remove his goods but he declined and

told one of them to keep the goods safe in case of war. He immediately left for Plymouth, arriving there on June 7, 1675.

On his way he met Weetamoe who had just returned from Mount Hope and she confirmed Philip's intention. The war started before Church could return and Awashunkes was carried away in the tide of Philip's success. The battle in Almy's pease field occurred while Church was trying to get back to Sakonet from Plymouth. It is impossible to believe that Awashunkes did not know of it. Early in the war Church was severely wounded, felt that he was not well treated by the Plymouth men and retired to Rhode Island, but in May 1676 he returned to the war, and on his return to Rhode Island from Plymouth he sailed around Sakonet Point where he saw two Indians fishing on the rocks,—one of whom was George whom he had asked to guard his goods. Church went near the shore and George told him that Awashunkes had deserted Philip and was in a swamp three miles away; so he sent word to her and her son Peter, her chief captain, to meet him two days later at the lower end of Richmond Farm.

Awashunkes' retreat was at a well known Indian encampment now known as the Wilbour Woods, and it can now be seen in its yoretime splendor. The whole tract has been recently conveyed to the Town of Little Compton, and is maintained as a public park by the town, open to visitors during the day time. The wigwam lot is maintained in its primitive surroundings and nearby is the "Wigwam Pond" which has been artificially dammed, so that the outflowing brook can be controlled to its normal height. The native shrubbery and trees are still there.

Church went to Rhode Island and urged Awashunkes to come to him there, but her warriors would not allow it, so he took two Indians and his own men, a bottle of rum and some tobacco and kept his appointment at the Richmond farm, where he found Indians, and he went back approximately fifty yards from the shore to meet Awashunkes. All at once many Indians arose from the high grass and entirely encompassed him. They were painted and their hair trimmed in complete military array. Church told Awashunkes that George had said that she wanted to see him and thought it proper for her men to lay aside their arms while he and she talked of peace. Seeing that this caused much displeasure among the Indians he said that they need lay aside only their guns, which they did, and then came and sat down. He drew out his rum and asked her whether she had forgotten its taste. She insisted that Church drink and then asked him to drink again. He told her it was not poisoned and he lapped more up from the palm of his hand, whereupon she drank and passed it around and

then they began to talk. Awashunkes asked why he had not returned as promised the year before, saying that if he had done so she would not have joined Philip. He said he had tried but at Puncatest he was stopped by a multitude of Indians and forced to retreat, whereupon the warriors set up a great murmur and one gigantic fellow waved his club as though to kill Church, but others restrained him saying that his brother had been killed at Puncatest.

Awashunkes finally agreed to serve the English if she and her men and their wives should be spared and not transported. Then the chief captain stepped up and said if you will accept me and my men and will lead us, we will help you and will have Philip's head to you before the corn is ripe. Church wanted to take a few of them to Plymouth but Awashunkes thought it hazardous to go by land, so they agreed to go by water, but after some delay only Peter Awashunkes went with Church.

Meanwhile a big storm came up and Church and his men were driven into "Pocasset Sound"¹⁷ and thence toward Newport on the west side of the island. Meanwhile Philip's war had slumped and Capt. Bradford had come to Pocasset so that Church met him there and two days later they went to Puncatest and met Awashunkes with her warriors. She had expected that her men would be added to the Indian army but Bradford ordered them all to go too and to be there in six days. At that time Church went to Buzzard's Bay and met her and spent the night in her tent and dined with her. She had three dishes for supper, — a curious young bass in one dish, eels and flat fish in another and shell fish in the third. After supper the warriors brought many pine knots and made a big fire. Awashunkes made a ring around the fire and sat nearby with Church. All her lusty, stout men formed in the next ring, leaving the rabble in a third ring on the outside. First the chief captain danced around the fire with a hatchet and began fighting the fire by reciting the name of all the tribes who were opposed to the English; then another chief did the same until six in all had danced, being all her chief men; then Awashunkes told Church that they were all engaged to fight for the English and she presented Church with a very fine gun.

On the following day, July 22nd, Church sailed with a number of her men and went with them to Plymouth where he secured a command and was joined by some English men and thus began a series of expeditions in which the Sakonets bore a conspicuous part and which ended in the death

¹⁷ Church apparently refers to Mt. Hope Bay.

of King Philip and his chief warrior Annawan, one at Mount Hope and the other on his retreat from there, at the Annawan Rock in Rehoboth.

Toloney was the first husband of Awashunkes and by him she had three children, Mamanuah, Betty and Peter. We know little about Toloney except that he was killed in war while his children were yet young. The Sakonet tribe seemed to have a far different line of succession than others; the tribe itself was composed of the followers of many families under separate chieftains, who segregated into camps of their own. Prior to the Indian war Mamanuah's camp was near the Dartmouth line along the upper waters of the Paget brook (See Colonial Record VI-73), while Awashunkes' camp was at the Wilbour Woods, and then living with her there were her daughter Betty and her son Peter. Even at that time Awashunkes had some family difficulties, as is shown by reference to the Court records of July 1683 (Book VI, 113), and also because the son Peter, otherwise called Quequsha, who had attended grammar school and so had some knowledge of both English and Latin, had suffered an attack of palsy when he was about to enter the Indian school at Harvard. Although several records exist with reference to Peter after that time, there are none of importance.

Awashunkes' second husband was Wewayewitt as I find from the Court record of July 7, 1674 (VII-191). Both he and Peter signed a certificate for perpetual record on October 27, 1682 (VII-257). The husband then signed under name of Wayewett.

Mamanuah was apparently too young to join with his father Toloney in governing the Sakonet tribe so there was no apparent or trained successor to that sachemship when Toloney died. Tribal government therefore passed to Awashunkes. It was apparently a custom, if the circumstances warranted and if the chieftains did not interfere, that the sachemship would pass to the female line if no male heir was available. Plymouth Colony recognized Awashunkes as the squa sachem of the Sakonet tribe as appears from record of July 24, 1671 (book V-75), but when Awashunkes contracted to sell her lands for colonization Mamanuah brought a petition against her, claiming that he was the chief Sachem of those parts. Record of July 14, 1673 (cited by Drake at page 251) indicates that Mamanuah had proved to the satisfaction of the Plymouth Court, in behalf of himself and his brethren, sons of Toloney, and of his kinsman Anumpash, son of Pokattawagg, that they were the chief proprietors and sachems of Sakonet, although Takamunna and Awashunkes and those of that kindred were of the same stock and had some, though more remote, rights. As a matter of fact (See Strook p. 36)

Tatuckamua (or Tokamona) was Awashunkes' brother, and their claim arose on account of their near kinship to Chief Sachem Massasoit. On November 3, 1671 (see Vol. V-80) Takamunna and Philip appeared before the Court at Plymouth, the former as sachem at Saconet, and the latter as chief sachem, and submitted themselves to the colonial laws, and agreed to pay tribute. (one wolf's head a year). The Court advised a compromise which was agreed upon, whereby a "convenient proportion" of the land was settled upon the claimants. For further reference see the records in book VI at pages 44 and 73, whereby some of these lands were subsequently granted to others.

No written record exists as to facts surrounding the death of Awashunkes, but her grave, with graves of many of her chieftains, is located in the "Wilbour Woods".

