Chapter II

LOCAL INDIANS — LIFE OF EARLY INHABITANTS — INDIANS

The Indian tribes and their various subdivisions occupying southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island have been treated in Fascicle I. That they occupied this region for a long time and in considerable numbers is evidenced by the numerous stone implements that have been found scattered about. They roamed the countryside hunting and fishing and also occupied more or less permanent camping places where they raised their corn, beans, pumpkins and squashes. Each of our Indian tribes seems to have occupied a permanent or principal camping site, with seasonal camping places in other portions of their territory, nearer to their gardens, hunting places and fords. Weetamoe's main camp was along the banks of the Quequechan River, presumably near Hartwell Street where the skeleton in armour was found. Several other camps have been rather definitely located near the Brightman Street bridge, on the land now occupied by the Firestone Rubber and Latex Products Company, along the shore of South Watuppa Pond near its outlet, in the vicinity of Ruggles Park where at one time there was a sizable spring on the hillside, at the "Wigwam Lot" mentioned in Fascicle I, page 94, in the Blossom Road section near King Philip's Brook also mentioned in Fascicle I, page 87 and over the line in Tiverton at Eagleville.

The main camp was usually in a spot of rare beauty. No vestige now remains of our river camp, due to changes in the level of the stream and the use of the land for business purposes. The Sakonet main camping place at Wilbur Woods in Little Compton is in its original state of preservation. (See Fascicle I, pp. 54-55.)

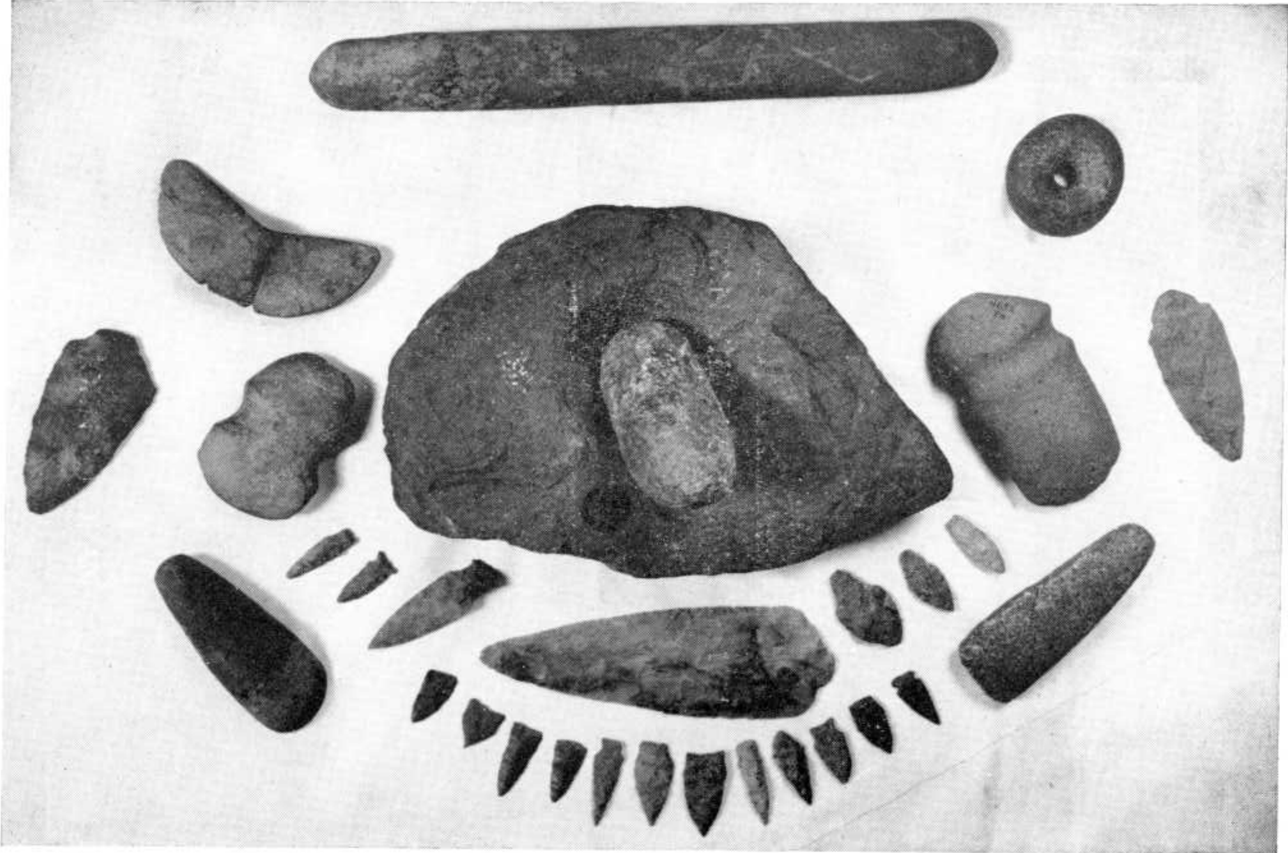
Fall River was a part of Plymouth Colony. If we consider what happened in Plymouth before the date of Freeman's Purchase and later when the northern part of Fall River was a part of Freetown, we must remember

that there were no white men living in that part of Fall River, which is south of the mill stream, until after the Indian war.

There was evidently not the same effort of the ecclesiastics to teach the few English children in Freetown that there was to convert and educate the Indians in Freetown and the Pocasset lands.

John Eliot, pastor and teacher in Roxbury, was very active in extending Christianity among the Indians and incidental to that, the Indians received considerable schooling. He and Mr. John Cotton frequently travelled among and preached to the Indians, and set up a project of translating the Bible and other works, such as the grammar, primer and singing psalms, into the Indian language. He taught the Indians who were gathered together in the English towns (then called praying Indians) to read, to attend school under English schoolmasters and to learn not only English but Latin and Greek, to the end that they might preach to their countrymen. Several attended the Indian college at Cambridge which was authorized in 1651. The college building was a strong, substantial, though not capacious building, costing approximately four hundred pounds, and large enough to receive and accommodate about twenty scholars, with convenient lodgings and recitation rooms. It was built and finished at the expense of the "Corporation for the Propagating of the Gospel in New England". It was a part of the Harvard Corporation.

It seemed easier to enable the Indians to acquire an education than to make them sincere converts to Christianity. However friendly Massasoit may have been to the colonists at Plymouth, he consistently opposed the adoption of Christianity by the Indians. He had an inner conscience comparable to the inner light of the Friends, not a "light of convenience" but one of pure love, and he seemed to do justice to his tribe and to his associates. He seemed to see this spirit of love in everything in nature, believing that the things which he could not understand were the God-like spirit to which he paid homage. It has been said that Indians worshiped the roar of the running brook, the rustling of the leaves in the forest and the seasons of the year. It is hard to believe that they idolized these particular things, but it is clear that they would be to them the revelation of some Power which they could not understand. It is more natural to believe that they were inclined to revere the causation of the things which they could see, rather than to believe that they should worship a spirit which could not be clearly evidenced to their senses, and so it was that the leading Indians were never converted to Christianity and that the "praying Indians" followed Christianity as a convenience to their liveli-



INDIAN RELICS FOUND IN OR NEAR FALL RIVER

From the Athearn Collection

hood and their associations with the English. Most of them were still loyal to their Indian chiefs and if they were disloyal, they expected punishment.[1]

At the close of King Philip's War, only friendly or supposedly friendly Indians were allowed liberty within the Old Colony. Land was set aside for those who remained in this area, in what is now the Stafford Road section, in 1704. Later, at their request, they were transferred to land on the east side of North Watuppa Pond. (See Fascicle I, p. 84.)

Life of Early Settlers

The purchase of Freetown in 1659 seems to have been a speculative enterprise, for not one of the original purchasers became a settler. Some of their heirs however established homes within the present boundaries of Fall River. The settlements along the Quequechan and of the Pocasset lands have been considered in Chapters XI and XII of Fascicle I and in connection with several topics in Fascicle II.

Many of the early settlers were direct or indirect descendants of the Mayflower passengers or of those, who at a very early period joined the Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay colonies. A considerable number were Quakers or Baptists; demanding the separation of church and state.

Little is known and there was probably very little to record about community action during the first one hundred years. It was a period of toil and adventure. Neighborliness was essential in the thinly settled region and bigotry and intolerance were not developed, as in the larger settlements of the Massachusetts Bay Colonies.

Mediums of Exchange

The colonists were not treated as loyal subjects of England. Little assistance was afforded them in establishing commercial relations and insufficient currency was available. Inasmuch as it would be treason to coin money, they were dependent on barter as a means for exchange. In Virginia, tobacco would purchase any valuable commodity. One hundred fifty pounds of it bought many a good wife. In rural New England pelfry, (chiefly obtained from the Indians for mere trifles), wampum and farm products were accepted in payment of taxes. By order of the General Court, "muskett bulletts of a full boare" passed currently for farthing pieces.

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[1] Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College from 1795 to 1817, in an analysis of the religion of the Indians wrote,—"Their religion was a compound of a few truths, traditionally received, and the dictates of ignorance and superstition." He said they believed in two spirits, one good, the other evil. Most of their prayers and petitions were directed to the evil one they feared, although the good spirit was considered superior. They had a low scale of morals. They were insincere, treacherous and lewd. "Travels in New England and New York". London, 1823. Vol. I, pp. 93-95.

Massachusetts, in 1642, was the first to coin money and it was done in defiance of the royal treasury. The only markings on the crude coins first issued consisted of N. E., for New England on one side and Roman numerals on the reverse, to indicate the value in pence. These markings were placed as near the edge as possible, to prevent paring. The coins were soon followed by those of a more elaborate design known as "Pine-tree" money. This money was issued until 1686, when the colony was forced to desist by order of the Royal Exchequer. There was no further coinage in Massachusetts until one cent and half cent copper coins were minted by authorization of the Colonial Congress. The order for the establishment of a national mint was approved by George Washington, President of the United States, on March 3, 1791.

The mother country discouraged the establishment of industries. The colonies were planted to provide markets for English manufactured goods in return for such commodities as the homeland might need. Because this section of New England could not supply desirable return cargoes, there were times when the early settlers suffered not a little, from want of proper clothing and other necessities of life. Yankee ingenuity developed early and gradually overcame many difficulties. New settlers brought sheep with them. The spinning wheel and hand loom were found in nearly every home and in spite of all objections and difficulties, manufacturing plants were established in colonial times and after the Revolution rapid progress was made.

The trees of the forest in this section provided hard and soft woods from which many of the household and farm utensils were improvised. Two species of trees, the canoe birch with its waterproof bark and the sugar maple[2] with its yield of sugar, lumber and firewood which were of great value to the settlers to the north and west were evidently not indigenous.

Red maples must have been abundant for they are now one of the more common forest trees; although not as valuable as the sugar maples, the wood was suitable for cabinet work and the fabrication of household utensils such as spoons, ladles, bowls, rolling pins, dolly pins and scrubbing sticks. The abundance of white oak and white pine was in a large measure accountable for the establishment of the ship building industry, in this community, particularly in Somerset.[3] In the late summer and fall, hard or pitch pine knobs were collected to be used for lighting out of doors. The

[2] We cannot be sure there were no sugar maple trees in the primeval forest hereabouts. If there were, they became extinct years ago. There is a very large sugar maple tree near Steep Brook Corners which old settlers once claimed was a seedling of a native tree.

[3] See William A. Hart's "History of Somerset," pp. 81-106 and 225-244.

flaming knobs, in round iron baskets on poles were used to attract deer and fish. The settlers learned from the Indians how to prepare ash and hickory for the weaving of baskets of required size and shape. The trees were cut in the spring when the wood was porous and full of sap; cut lengthwise, into four or more parts, then pounded with a mallet called a beetle. The lengths were then cut in strips and placed in water generally in a brook and when needed taken from the water and cut in desirable sizes. Many a farmer added to his scant income by making hoops for barrels and kegs.

"The Age of Homespun"[4]

During the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries, most of the necessities of life were produced in the home. "The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker" were to be found only in the larger towns. The shoemaker travelled from village to village and from house to house. Pardon, "the progenitor of the Fall River Branch"[5] of the Davol family was a cordwainer as was his great-grandfather, who settled on his large "holdings in the vicinity of the lower end of South Watuppa and the Davol and Sawdy Ponds", now a part of the town of Westport. Pardon, soon after his marriage to a Freetown lady built a home and a shoe shop on North Main Street in the vicinity of the present North Burial Grounds. He employed several workers in addition to his sons and not only supplied the local trade but shipped shoes "South" and to the West Indies. Pardon's son Abner, who was the father of Stephen and William C. Davol prominent cotton manufacturers was one of the six householders, on North Main Street, in "the village", in 1803. (Fascicle I, p. 73.) Abner was also a shoemaker. His home and shop were burned in the fire of 1843. He spent the closing years of his life with his son Stephen in the house now standing, next north of the First Baptist Church.[6]

Where there was water-power, saw, grist and fulling mills were operated. Individuals, here and there carried on their trades. The sound of the fishmonger's horn and the jingle of the bell on the peddler's cart could be heard on the highways and byways.

With the advent of cotton manufacturing, a market was opened for farm products and larger opportunities for merchandising arose.

In 1789, Massachusetts authorized the establishment of school districts (Fascicle II, p. 48). When spelling books became available spelling bees

[4] The editor borrowed the phrase from a scholarly article by the late Eric P. Jackson of Fall River published in a bulletin of the Geographical Society of Philadelphia.
[5] "The Davol Genealogy" by William M. Emery.
[6] See footnote, Fascicle II, p. 11.

were popular and these mental contests largely took the place of the athletic contests of today. It is almost exactly one hundred years ago when my father began his schooling in a district school, attending from the age of five, whenever the weather and transportation allowed. From his description of early schooling, it seems that many social functions were held in the district school houses, which were a sort of a "civic center" for the farm people who composed the inhabitants at that time.

Farming life was then very monotonous, especially in the winter time. When supper dishes were cleaned away, grandmother would take her place on one side of a little square table on which was an oil lamp and would take up her knitting, while grandfather would take his seat on the other side of the table and attend the fireplace, which was fitted to burn cord wood and supplied, except for the kitchen stove, the heat for the house. Children, servants and guests would complete a circle around the fireplace, with the grandchildren at one end of the line in the corner. Almost exactly as the clock struck nine, grandmother would rise and take her lamp into her own chamber; grandfather would, as soon as the wood had burned to charcoal, gather the coals together and cover them with ashes for the night, after which he and the other members of the household retired to their rooms, in order that the master of the house might have six hours of needed rest, the lady of the house seven hours and the children eight. All except the one who was to sleep in the little kitchen bedroom would go "up stairs", undress quickly and snuggle into the feather bed until morning. Somewhere between three and four o'clock grandfather having completed his six hours of rest would take his lantern to the barn to see that the stock were safe, call the hired man, rake the ashes from the fireplace and start a new fire from the old live coals. An hour later grandmother would appear and begin preparations for breakfast. We children would jump out of bed in our flannel nightgowns and run for the fireplace with our clothes in one hand, our shoes in the other, though if I occupied the kitchen bedroom, grandmother would let me sleep until the rooms were warm. With milking completed, a hot breakfast stowed away, the working guests would begin their day's work which lasted from sunup to sundown, with the dinner period out. The cobbler would be the guest on some occasions and he would measure the master for his boots, the mistress for her shoes, sew the tops and peg the soles, as the different branches of the trade were reached and when the work on the family shoes was completed his yearly visit to the farm would be ended.

The hired man took care of the barn and the poultry. Grandfather would repair to his workshop where he would perhaps be making new wheels for the wagons and carts and repairing farm tools and barn equipment during the winter, so that an extra supply would be available for summer use. If he had to go to the blacksmith for a new tire or for the sharpening or repairing of tools, the children would bundle in with him on their way to school. Grandmother had her spinning wheel, spun her own yarn, dipped her own candles and at the proper season dried or preserved her own fruits and vegetables. In the fall, a tierce of mackerel and other salt fish would be placed in the cellar; a beeve would be killed and the beef salted. The pork barrel would be replenished with new brine and refilled with pork. The winter days were very dreary; the evenings very long. Politics and social questions were discussed around the fire.

Social and business trips were infrequent during the winter but in the milder seasons and on holidays and special occasions there were days and evenings of relaxation away from home. Then it was the district schoolhouse came prominently into use. The advanced scholars and the graduates of the school gathered there for spelling bees, debates and oratorical efforts. I am told that my father (Mark Phillips) and his cousins were proficient in individual and social sketches and that they were invited to furnish entertainments in other districts. At the end of these entertainments, a collection was sometimes taken to defray expenses. One of my father's cousins, Nathaniel Porter[7] by name, is mentioned and his portrait published in the history of Freetown because he was the dancing teacher of the town. At periodical times, he would walk from East Bridgewater to Freetown, teach the dancing classes there during the evening and walk back to East Bridgewater the following day, a distance each way of approximately twenty-five miles. Square dances were then in vogue and they were ordinarily held in the district schoolhouses.

Men of prominence addressed their constituency in these places, sometimes political rallies were held and there the district members met to vote on district policies, including the election of teachers and officials to care for the public property. It is therefore small wonder that when the legislature at the urgency of the educators, who felt that the district schools interfered with their program, passed a law abolishing the district system in 1850, the farmers objected so strenuously, that the abolition was repealed during the same year. Ten years later the system was finally abolished.

[7] See Fascicle I, p. 90.