

'Queen' Weetamoe came to a tragic end

By **MARC MUNROE DION**
Herald News Staff Reporter

FALL RIVER — The names of places and people used by Native Americans in this part of the United States are strange to all ears but our own.

Wampanoag. Quonset. Metacom.

And, of course, Weetamoe, sometimes spelled and pronounced "Weetamoo."

She was, we're told, an Indian "queen" or "princess," although the Native American system of government had little in common with the way royalty ran things in Europe. Whatever her proper title, she was a person of influence among the Wampanoag Pocassets, and she commanded much loyalty.

She lived from perhaps 1635 until 1676. We are certain of the year of her death because white men caused her death and were eager to record its date.

Weetamoe was the wife of Wamsutta, the eldest son of Massasoit, whose Wampanoag Pocassets sat down with the Pilgrims for what we call Thanksgiving.

The Wampanoag Pocassets' charity and willingness to share both seed corn and farming tips helped the Pilgrims stave off starvation during their first winters in America.

Fond of and trusting his white friends, Wamsutta asked the colonists to give him English names for his sons. The colonists gave Metacom the name Philip

and Wamsutta the name Alexander. Massasoit, friend of the English, died in 1661, and Wamsutta became chief.

Contemporary chroniclers remember Weetamoe as a proud and pretty woman who danced at gatherings and celebrations wearing a mix of English and native dress. She powdered her hair, painted her face and bedecked herself with jewelry.

The days of dancing were not to last. The whites brought illnesses to America — illnesses to which the Native Americans had no immunity. Decimated by European illnesses, the Wampanoags joined the English in a war against their traditional enemies, the Narragansetts. An argument between the English and the Wampanoags brought Wamsutta to the English settlements to talk peace. Wamsutta became sick and died soon after.

The Wampanoags never quite believed that the English were innocent in causing Wamsutta's death. Weetamoe and Metacom (Philip) joined forces against the English in 1675.

The tide of King Philip's War, as it came to be called, was against the Wampanoag. Weetamoe, who once danced in the firelight, was killed trying to escape across the Taunton River. Her corpse was mutilated and her head was cut off and displayed on a pike.

Marc Munroe Dion may be reached at mdion@herald-news.com.