

EARLY ENCOUNTERS

NATIVE AMERICANS
AND EUROPEANS
IN NEW ENGLAND

From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson

Delores Bird Carpenter





Early Encounters—Native
Americans and Europeans
in New England



Early Encounters—Native
Americans and Europeans
in New England

From the Papers of W. Sears Nickerson

Delores Bird Carpenter

Michigan State University Press
East Lansing
1994

Copyright © 1994 Delores Bird Carpenter

All Michigan State University Press books are produced on paper which meets the requirements of American National Standard of Information Sciences—Permanence of paper for printed materials ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan 48823-5202

02 01 00 99 98 97 96 95 94 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nickerson, Warren Sears, 1881-1966

Early Encounters—Native Americans and Europeans in New England : from the papers of W. Sears Nickerson / [edited by] Delores Bird Carpenter.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-87013-351-9 (alk. paper)

1. Indians of North America—New England—First contact with Europeans.
2. Indians of North America—New England—History. 3. New England—History—Colonial Period, ca. 1600-1775.

I Carpenter, Delores Bird. II. Title.

E78.N5N53 1994

974'.01—dc20

94-19500

CIP



*To thank Nick who understands why
and
To honor my Cherokee heritage*

Contents

Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1

Before the *Mayflower*: The Vikings and the French

The Wineland of Leif the Lucky	45
First Blood: The Death of the Carpenter of St. Malo	54
The Fight at Fortuné: Champlain at Stage Harbor	59

The Coming of the *Mayflower*

The Captain of the <i>Mayflower</i>	71
That Bright Dawn When <i>Mayflower I</i> First Sighted Cape	75
William Bradford's First Wife: A Suicide	88
The First Encounter	99
The <i>Sparrow Hawk</i>	102

The French, the English, and the Indians: War in the Colonies, 1690-1745

Mary Corliss Neff	109
How the Smiths Came to Cape Cod: Mary Smith of Oyster River	117
Honor Bright: Elizabeth Vickery and the French Privateers	123
Exploit of a Cape Cod Indian at Louisbourg, 1745	130

Life and Legend on Cape Cod

A Cape Cod Colonial: Uncle Elathun's House	137
The Wading Place Path	145
Pompmo and the Legend of Paw Waw's Pond	150
Old Maushope's Smoke: A Cape Cod Indian Fog Legend	157

Native American History and Genealogy

The Praying Indians of Lower Cape Cod	167
The Old Sagamore: Mattaquason of Monomoyick	193
Micah Rafe, Indian Man: Last Full Blood on Lower Cape Cod	221

Bibliography	247
Index	253

Illustrations

1. Champlain's drawing of the settlement on the island of Sainte Croix. By Permission of the Houghton Library. 55
2. The fight with the Indians on the 15th of October 1606, at Chatham. By permission of the Houghton Library. 63
3. The site of the discovery of the *Sparrow Hawk*. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Society, Plymouth, Massachusetts. 103
4. The *Sparrow Hawk*. Courtesy of the Pilgrim Society. Plymouth, Massachusetts. 105
5. Statue of Hannah Dustin. Photo by Robert J. Gibeau. Courtesy Trustees of the Haverhill Public Library. 111
6. Detail from *The Wading Place Bridge* (1890) painted by Elmer Crowell. Courtesy of The Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank and Heritage Plantation of Sandwich. 146
7. An Indian Rock. Cape Cod National Seashore. 148
8. Drawing from the papers of W. Sears Nickerson. Cape Cod National Seashore. 156
9. Drawing from the papers of W. Sears Nickerson. Cape Cod National Seashore. 159
10. *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 62 (1908): facing 139. 172
11. Mashpee's Old Indian Meetinghouse before restoration. Courtesy of the Mashpee Archives. 173
12. Micah Rafe's signature. With permission of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society. 222
13. Micah Rafe's country. With permission of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society. 223

Acknowledgments

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the many people who assisted in the research and preparation of this manuscript. I thank Charlotte Price, the curator of the William Brewster Nickerson Memorial Room at Cape Cod Community College, for calling my attention to the few pieces by W. Sears Nickerson in the Memorial Room. I am grateful to the daughters of W. Sears Nickerson for permitting me to prepare this publication based on their father's papers. I am especially grateful to his daughter, Jean C. Primavera, who shared with me her memories of her father and who followed through on my many requests. Mark Hertig, Museum Curator of the Archives of the Cape Cod National Seashore, South Wellfleet, Massachusetts, which houses most of the Nickerson material, gave total support to this project and was very tolerant of my many interruptions into his routine schedule. Thomas R. Doyle and Michael Whatley, also at the Cape Cod National Seashore, were likewise very helpful. I thank Elizabeth A. Little, editor of the *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Archaeological Society*, for giving me permission to reprint the two articles by Nickerson that appeared in the *Bulletin* and for introducing me to Great Moose (Russell H. Gardner) who sent me copies of his correspondence from Nickerson. Brian Cullity, Curator of the Art Museum at Heritage Plantation in Sandwich, Massachusetts, contributed the photo of the painting of "The Wading Place Bridge," which is used by permission of The Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank. Doug Flynn loaned me his collection of books on Native Americans and early settlers. David Still contributed to the formation of the title.

I gratefully acknowledge the host of librarians who helped along the way. I can always count on the staff at the library at Cape Cod Community College: Greg Masterson, the director; Adrienne Latimer,

Jeanmarie Fraser, Nancy Kiehnle, Patricia Fisher, and Mary Sicchio, reference librarians; and Kathleen Kersey in inter-library loan. Alexa Crane, reference librarian at the Sturgis Library in Barnstable, Massachusetts, which has the Stanley Smith Collection, was very helpful. Other librarians whom I wish to acknowledge are the following: Gregory H. Laing, Haverhill Public Library; Florence Fitts, Falmouth Historical Society; Dottie Hanson, Yarmouthport Public Library; Patrick Flynn, Virginia Smith, and Catherine Craven, Massachusetts Historical Society; Ernestine Gray, Mashpee Archives; Mary Reynolds, Fall River Public Library; Lee Regan, Plymouth Public Library; Randall Mason, Sturgis Library; Paul Cyr and Tina Furtado of the Special Collections at the New Bedford Free Public Library; Jennie Rathbun and Roger Stoddard at the Houghton Library; and Jane Fiske at the New England Historical Genealogical Society.

Gretchen Widegren, Graphics Technician at Cape Cod Community College, took many of the photographs, including those courtesy of the Cape Cod National Seashore.

A number of people helped with entering primary material into the computer, with photocopying, or with proofreading. I thank Connie Connell for typing some of the pieces. I am indebted to Connie Connell and Kathleen Malenky Bent for indexing and to George Daniel Bent, Jr., six weeks old, who permitted his mother to work at this task. The following Project Forward students under the supervision of Delynda Walker entered some of the primary material into the computer: Elizabeth Tazewell, Anusha Piyasena, Eric Wexler, and Allen Northcutt. I thank Manuel Silveira, Carol Call, and Dick Northrop for photocopying; Dick, who heads Cape Cod Community College's Copy Center, on several occasions dropped whatever he was doing to fill my requests. I am grateful to Frederic Keith Carpenter and to Keith William Bull who helped with proofreading. Also, Frederic Carpenter introduced me to Sandra Rodrigues.

Sandra Rodrigues, a historian with special interest in European expansion, Canadian and French exploration, and the Plymouth Colony, entered the project as I just passed the half-way mark. She served as a researcher, doing much of my "footwork," locating sources for articles where no citations were made, looking up primary sources that were cited, and checking the accuracy of the text against these sources, always furnishing me a photocopy or the text, itself, for my verification. She grouped the works for the table of contents and wrote most of the first draft of pages 8-16 of the introduction which placed Nickerson's accounts in historical context. Not only did she enable me to finish the project sooner but she also gave me new insights into the material.

I thank Dean Hosni Nabi, Associate Dean Bruce Bell, and Dr. Lore Loftfield DeBower for granting me release time to finish this book.

I cannot imagine doing the project without the help of E. Carleton Nickerson, President Emeritus of Cape Cod Community College and nephew to W. Sears Nickerson. Nick's contributions to this book, which were almost daily, were so consistent, so numerous, so varied in nature, and so broad in scope that it would be impossible to list them all. He was my cheerleader all the way.

I am grateful to Fred C. Bohm, Director of the Michigan State University Press, who made many suggestions, especially toward the improvement of the introduction, and to Julie L. Loehr, Editor in Chief, and Kristine M. Blakeslee of the MSU Press for their roles in editing and production. I would also like to thank Michael Brooks, who designed the cover and the text, and Jane Latham for all her work behind the scenes at the Press.

Introduction

Columbus: The First Encounter

In 1986 D. W. Meinig¹ called attention to the dual meaning of the word “encounter.” “In the benign sense, it means ‘to meet unexpectedly.’ But in its root sense, it means ‘to meet in conflict.’”² W. Sears Nickerson through his historically-based accounts of first encounters between Native Americans and Europeans in New England encompasses both these meanings, whereas the current revisionist views of Columbus, the man credited with *the* first encounter, have stressed the root meaning. Since there is a tendency (however illogical) either to credit or to blame all that has taken place since 1492 on Columbus’s landing and since all other landings have shared many similarities and have bred parallel consequences, it is helpful to compare and contrast subsequent contacts with that most celebrated (albeit notorious) model. The plethora of books on the subject of Columbus in the wake of the Quincentenary speaks to our need to once and for all “set” history straight on the matter. As the numerous writers have no doubt realized, this is no easy task.

There are many difficulties in obtaining a fair historical reading of Columbus’s explorations. Surviving accounts are often difficult to assess after the passage of time. Columbus was secretive and could be vague, contradictory, and self-serving in what he wrote. His elevation to heroic stature has further distorted the history. The Columbian Quincentennial saga is incomplete because that is the nature of history. “All works of history . . . are interim reports. . . . History is not only what happened long ago but it is also the perception by succeeding generations of those events and those people.”³ It is this organic aspect of history that was experienced in the Quincentenary.

The world was changing . . . and so was Columbus's reputation in history. World war and relentless strife, tyranny and greed, widespread poverty amid plenty, and economic expansion that ravages nature without necessarily satisfying basic human needs—modern life was making disbelievers of many who once worshipped at the altar of progress. If they now doubted progress, they also came to question Columbus, who had been the icon of progress. . . . The Columbus of 1992 is the post-colonial and demythologized Columbus. He has been stripped of the symbolic cloak of optimism and exposed as a human being whose flaws were many and of reverberating consequence. The imagery imposed on him is now more apt to be that of pessimism concerning the human condition. Another Columbus for another age.⁴

It is generally agreed that Columbus was motivated by wealth, fame, and hereditary titles.⁵ A religious desire to provide riches for crusades in conquest of Jerusalem is also evident.⁶ Also, using the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery, Columbus sought to increase the monetary benefits of his voyages by enslaving the native populations.⁷ His exploitative attitude was fixed at the outset,⁸ as was also noted by John Noble Wilford in *The Mysterious History of Columbus*, who wrote, "Not for anthropology had he sailed across the ocean, and increasingly his journal entries reflected an interest less in the people as they were than in what they and their land could mean for Spain."⁹

In judging Columbus, one should be reminded that "Uncritical adulation and (equally uncritical) lambasting . . . are both unhistorical, in the sense that they select from the often cloudy record of Columbus's actual motives and deeds what suits the researcher's Twentieth Century purposes. That sort of history caricatures the complexity of human reality by turning Columbus into either a bloody ogre or a plaster saint."¹⁰ Perhaps, the best assessment of Columbus is that "he was a consummate mariner . . . but his skill and fortune deserted him on land."¹¹

No doubt of greater significance than the issue of "ogre" or "saint" is that "Today the world is even more closely linked than it became in October 1492. This, then, may be the most significant result of Columbus's voyages—not that he discovered 'a new world' but rather that, from his time on, two 'old worlds' merged into one. In this new world we must learn the intricacies of living interrelated lives."¹²

Indisputably, the arrival of Columbus produced a clash of cultures further hampered by death by disease, by cultural oppression, by disrespect for native culture or traditions, by colonization, by violent usurpation of native lands, and by brutalization of native inhabitants.¹³

The subsequent explorers of occupied shores, with goals as varied as those of Columbus, invariably encountered vast cultural differences.

Anthony Pagden observed, “the traveller, the discoverer, the settler, the immigrant, the missionary and the colonist: all such people came to America with battered ambitions, different expectations and different objectives. But if they were at all sensitive, they all in time came to see that, culturally at least, incommensurability was inescapable.” They wanted to transform unfamiliar cultures of which they had no prior understanding, into something recognizably like their own.¹⁴

Atrocities

Verbal communications between Europeans and Indians collapsed on fundamental cultural and philosophical differences.¹⁵ With these cultural clashes, the resulting atrocities and the pattern of revenge or retaliation were set in motion. With Columbus, the tenor of his milieu is often recalled to show how ingrained violence was.

What Huizinga calls “the violent tenor of life” in the fifteenth century was so pervasive—death was so daily, brutality so commonplace, destruction of the animate and inanimate so customary—that it is shocking even in our own age of mass destruction. . . . At the simplest level there was the violence of everyday life. . . . At another level there was the sanctioned violence of local authorities whose punishments were meted out on a daily basis on the scaffolds of the public squares in almost every town and city. . . . On a higher level still, there was the Church-sponsored violence known as the Inquisition . . . under whose jurisdiction countless millions were imprisoned, by whose decree countless hundreds of thousands were killed. . . . Then, finally, there is the violence of nation-states such as Spain, just then forming in Europe, and the principalities, duchies, margravates, republics, seigneuries, dominions, earldoms, and noble factions and royal families of all sorts, each one struggling to determine which should dominate in that formation and how wide its scope should be. To them, deadly violence was nothing less than the daily stuff of politics.¹⁶

People of such background made contacts with natives (who had their own violent confrontations with other native groups and their own methods for meting out justice within their own groups) which initially were friendly. Such honeymoons were short-lived as some incident invariably happened, potentially having its roots in cultural ignorance, no doubt oftentimes rooted in insensitive natures with possibly evil motives. This set up a never-ending chain of retaliations. The eye for an eye theology of revenge became a vicious cycle. Only a few of many examples will suffice to illustrate this pattern.¹⁷

Las Casas described an incident in 1502 in the time of Nicolás de Ovando. The Spaniards then enjoyed friendly relations with Indians on Saona Island, near Santo Domingo, and frequently visited them to get Cassava bread. On one visit, tranquillity was shattered when a dog, for a laugh, was told to attack the chief, whereupon the dog, tearing the chief's intestines out, killed him. Revenge followed, as was often the case, on those who had nothing to do with the incident.¹⁸

In New England, it should have been no surprise when natives met their unfamiliar visitors with hostilities. In 1602, when Bartholomew Gosnold came into Elisabeths Isle on Buzzard's Bay, some natives helped the English dig sassafras and feasted with them, yet within less than two weeks four natives attacked two crewmen. Perhaps the natives' change in attitude had something to do with Gosnold's stealing a canoe that four men had abandoned in fear. Or perhaps they resented Gosnold's group being amused at their response to hot mustard which they could have thought to be poison. In 1603, English sailors on a voyage under Martin Pring were digging sassafras at a barricaded post on the tip of Cape Cod when Pring's party stole a large birch bark canoe and released, when they tired of the natives' eager company, their two great mastiffs. Such friendly beginnings often ended in tragedy.¹⁹

Therefore,

what the Pilgrims called "The First Encounter" was not, except for them. Fresh from European ports, the Pilgrims could not know that the natives who received them so ungraciously were not acting out of some atavistic racial hatred or primitive xenophobia but from a well-founded sense of revenge for injuries inflicted by earlier European visitors. By 1607 or 1620, when most textbooks before the '70's began the American story, many of the native peoples of the Atlantic seaboard had experienced fifty or a hundred years of contact with European ships, men, and erst-while colonies. Predictably, many of those contacts ended in suspicion, fear, and conflict.²⁰

Nickerson's account of "The First Encounter" is a classic example of this animosity. The Native Americans made a surprise attack on the Pilgrims as they were breaking camp, though this should have been expected based on the behavior of the Pilgrims on two previous explorations when they took a kettle, all the ears of corn they found, and as much loose corn as they could carry. Later, they returned to "Cornhill" and found the rest of the corn which they had buried and took it as well. They also dug into some graves, suspecting from the beginning that they were graves.

Nickerson's story "First Blood: The Death of the Carpenter of St. Malo" relates the death of a white man in a skirmish over a kettle. This

account, however, has a positive note in that the problem was not with the group of friendly Nawsets who had previously greeted them, and Champlain, Captain in Ordinary to the King and Royal Geographer, believed the Nawset Sachem when he said that his men had not killed the carpenter; therefore, Champlain released his hostage who proved to be a friendly Nawset.

Nickerson's "The Fight at Fortune—Champlain at Stage Harbor" is quite another story. After several friendly encounters with the native population, the tide turns, this time over the issue of a hatchet. A series of retaliatory horrors follow.

Nowhere is the retaliation cycle more vividly illustrated than in Nickerson's account of "Mary Corliss Neff" where grisly details of the massacre by the Native Americans under French leadership is followed by paralleled horrors perpetrated primarily on native children by two white mothers and a young lad.

Isolation Versus Technology

Since American Indians developed their ways of life in very nearly complete isolation, the growth of their civilizations was hampered and their defenses against the major Old World diseases, especially smallpox, were weakened.²¹ "Spanish military technology—ships that used sails as well as oars, arquebuses, cannon, metal armor and swords—was formidable. Effective, too, were their four-footed compatriots—the mastiffs and the horses."²²

Other explorers had similar technological advantages. "The ships coming to the Americas carried soldiers, merchants and missionaries. The missionaries' role of pacifying and evangelizing the indigenous peoples in the Americas was indispensable. With this process completed, the seizure of the land and mineral wealth was made easier."²³ The church legitimized racism. Words like "heathen" and "pagan" made it acceptable to cast aside legal and ethical norms in dealing with native people. Such a usage of the church continued into Nickerson's life, as is evidenced by a letter to Nickerson from Warren K. Moorehead about the Tercentenary in Boston in 1930. Moorehead, who was in charge of the Stone Age village to be managed by descendants of the New England Indians wrote, "I would prefer to have Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians because an assistant to the priest who has them in charge could come down and maintain discipline."