

## 17 Praying Indians (and Indian Line Farm)

OK, today, before we get to “Blue Hills History” we need to take a look at the history of the Massachusetts area before, and during, the arrival of the Europeans. This will then let us talk about a specific Blue Hills History event to which we will all be able to more directly relate. So, back in time to when the first Europeans visited the area...

Before the Europeans arrived, there were multiple Native American tribes in southern New England. The Wampanoag tribe was in southeastern Massachusetts and part of Rhode Island. The Massachusett tribe inhabited valleys of the Charles and Neponset Rivers including what is now Boston and the suburbs. The Nipmuck tribe lived primarily in central Massachusetts and adjoining Rhode Island and Connecticut. These tribes competed with each other, and sometime fought among themselves.



In the present pandemic situation, we can relate to the first bit of inter-continental history. Captain John Smith mentioned contact with the Native Americans when he explored the coast of New England in 1614. Europe had had many plagues over the years. Not so America, which had been isolated by the Atlantic Ocean. Apparently, some of Captain Smith's crew were sick, as after their visit there were multiple pandemics among the Native Americans between 1614 and 1617. Because none of the Native Americans had *any* immunity to this disease or diseases, and of course no idea of germs or how diseases were transmitted, this killed off 75% to 90% of all of the Native Americans.

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Then came the Pilgrims. Most of us grew up hearing the story of Plymouth Plantation, and how the settlers arrived, and were helped by the Native Americans, who taught them how to plant corn (fertilizing it with a fish), and they had their first Thanksgiving, and everyone lived happily ever after. Well, that isn't quite the *whole* story. Let's look a bit more deeply at some of the things that happened.

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## Squanto

**Tisquantum** (c. 1585 (±10 years?) – late November 1622), more commonly known by the diminutive variant **Squanto** was a member of the Patuxet tribe best known for being an early liaison between the Native American population in Southern New England and the *Mayflower* Pilgrims who made their settlement at the site of Tisquantum's former summer village. The Patuxet tribe had lived on the western coast of Cape Cod Bay, but they were wiped out by an epidemic infection.

Tisquantum was kidnapped by English explorer Thomas Hunt who carried him to Spain, where Hunt sold Squanto in the city of Málaga. He was among a number of captives bought by local monks who focused on their education and evangelization. Tisquantum eventually traveled to England. He then returned to America in 1619 to his native village, only to find that his tribe had been wiped out by the epidemic infection; Tisquantum was the last of the Patuxets. When his tribe died, he went to live with the Wampanoags.

The *Mayflower* landed in Cape Cod Bay in 1620, and Tisquantum worked to broker peaceable relations between the Pilgrims and the local Pokanokets.<sup>ii</sup>

So, the only way the Pilgrims could work with the Native Americans was via one of them that had been kidnapped, taken to Europe, and luckily for him, was bought by monks and eventually got back to America. Sort of ironic, isn't it.

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When the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, they found signs of occupation... but no inhabitants (because so many Native Americans had died recently from the pandemics). They did find buried corn, which, because they were short on food, they stole. (Eventually they did apologize and compensate the owner.) After a while they made contact with the reluctant Native Americans. (After what happened the last time they had interacted with the Europeans, can you blame them for being reluctant? They were just practicing 'social distancing'.)

Eventually they got together, and things went... 'ok'. Sometimes well, sometimes not so much. There were lots of differences. The Native Americans thought of this as 'their land', which belonged to all of them, to be used as needed. The Europeans thought of it as their 'promised land', and didn't really want the Native Americans around. The Pilgrims believed in the individual ownership of land. And if the Native Americans were going to stay, they should at least become 'civilized' like the Europeans. Toward that last goal...

"In the 1640s Reverend John Eliot began his missionary work among the natives in the area. Eliot learned their language and began the momentous task of translating the entire Old and New testaments into a phonetic version of the Massachusetts language, titled *Mamusse Wanneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God*.

In 1646, the General Court of Massachusetts passed an "Act for the Propagation of the Gospel amongst the Indians." The new Christian converts were gathered into 14 villages of "Praying Indians" to serve as an outlying defense for the English colony. The Indians built a church and meeting house in Natick. Eliot ordained a Nipmuc named Daniel Takawambait as the first Native American preacher. Committed to strict rules of Puritan conduct, tribal traditions gradually started to die away."<sup>iii</sup>

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**John Eliot** was a Puritan missionary to the American Indians who some called "the apostle to the Indians" and the founder of Roxbury Latin School in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1645.<sup>iv</sup>



[Aside: The Roxbury Latin School, which was founded in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston under a charter received from King Charles I of England, is the oldest school in continuous existence in North America. Since its founding in 1645, it has educated boys on a continuous basis.<sup>v</sup>]

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The Blue Hills connection:

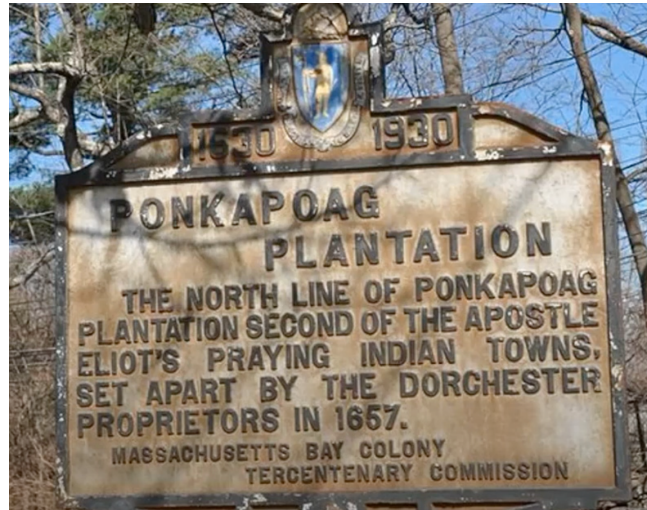
The one "Praying Indian" settlement related to the Blue Hills was at Ponkapoag, where in 1657, Canton town records show a committee was appointed to lay out a 6,000-acre Indian Plantation at Ponkapoag. This was the second of seven "praying Indian plantations" in Massachusetts.<sup>vi</sup> This included the southern half of Ponkapoag Pond, although their land didn't extend to the Neponset River. Soon after this land was provided to the Praying Indians people started looking for ways to get their hands on it. It started with people leasing the land, but eventually the land was just taken away from the Praying Indians.

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By the mid-1670s 1/5 of all the local Native Americans were living in Praying Towns. Then came King Philip's War, during which some of the Native Americans rebelled against what was happening to 'their' world. Some of the Praying Indians left and joined Philip, others supported the English and worked as scouts. However, the English didn't trust those that remained in the Praying Towns, so they were rounded up and transferred to Deer Island in Boston Harbor. Approximately half of those sent to Deer Island died of disease and malnutrition before the war ended.<sup>vii</sup>

King Philip's War resulted in many deaths on both sides. Those Native Americans who survived lost property rights and individual liberties, and many were sold into slavery. After the war no organized Massachusetts tribe are known to have survived.

At the conclusion of the war in 1677, only seven of the original 14 praying villages and 300 Praying Indians survived.



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## Indian Line Farm

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Indian Line Farm. Founded by Albert Whittier in the 1920's, the name refers to the northern boundary of Ponkapoag Plantation which passes through the property.

Albert, brother of C.W. Whittier, a noted Boston realtor, developed Indian Line Farm into a state-of-art dairy, truly a show place of well-maintained barns, fields and stone walls. Upon Whittier's death in the 1940's, Tobe Deutschmann purchased the farm. About the same time, the MDC took a portion by eminent domain to expend the Ponkapoag Golf Course.

On August 22, 1957, the large dairy barn with its sixty-foot silo, burned to the ground in a spectacular blaze. Embers from this firestorm landed on homes over half a mile away. The barn and silo were not rebuilt.

Under Tobe's ownership, the Farm served a multitude of uses: the growing and selling of corn on site, the housing of an electronics manufacturing business in outbuildings, several large horse shows, even for a time in the 1950's, operation of a roadside restaurant. This restaurant is perhaps best remembered for its tall "Indian Line Farm" sign featuring an Indian in full neon war bonnet.

In the 1970's, a firestorm of quite another sort enveloped the farm as Tobe advanced various large scale development schemes for his property. These included a shopping mall and a business park. The Town defeated them all.

Tobe sold the Farm in the 1980's and almost immediately the MDC took it by eminent domain to include it in the Blue Hills Reservation. Today, as nature takes its inevitable course, it is hard to believe that this property was once a farming show place.

Immediately behind Indian Line Farm is the Ponkapoag Golf Course, Canton's largest course.<sup>ix</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts#/media/File:Tribal\\_Territories\\_Southern\\_New\\_England.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts#/media/File:Tribal_Territories_Southern_New_England.png)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squanto>

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- iii <https://www.patriotledger.com/article/20130610/NEWS/306109519>
- iv [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Eliot\\_\(missionary\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Eliot_(missionary))
- v [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roxbury\\_Latin\\_School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roxbury_Latin_School)
- vi [http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass\\_%20Historical%20Society,%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book,%20Chapter%201.htm](http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass_%20Historical%20Society,%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book,%20Chapter%201.htm)
- vii <https://www.patriotledger.com/article/20130610/NEWS/306109519>
- viii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9qM3eTaJcw>
- ix [http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass\\_%20Historical%20Society,%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book,%20Chapter%201.htm](http://www.canton.org/canton/Canton%20Mass_%20Historical%20Society,%20Canton%20Bicentennial%20Book,%20Chapter%201.htm)