

## King Philip's War

*What caused tension between the American Indians and the English settlers? What triggered the hostilities in 1674?*

For years, mutual assistance and trade were fostered by both the early Massachusetts colonists and the Indian leader Massasoit, grand sachem of the Wampanoags. the Wampanoag chief Massasoit, who for nearly 40 years had been the first and staunchest ally of the Pilgrim settlers of Plymouth.

To Massasoit's two sons, Wamsutta and Metacomet, the English gave the names of Alexander and Philip, respectively (undoubtedly, a bit easier for the settlers to pronounce). Alexander succeeded his father as sachem, and in the same year, while in Marshfield, where he had gone to explain certain alleged unfriendly acts toward the English, he fell ill; he died on his way home. Philip, who succeeded Alexander, suspected the English of poisoning his brother.

In 1662 Philip formally renewed the treaties of his father, which he honored for some years. Yet he also vowed to resist further English expansion and attempted to organize a federation of tribes; eventually Metacomet won support from the Narragansett and almost all of the other New England tribes. Hostility eventually developed over the steady succession of land sales brought on the Native Americans by their growing dependence on English goods. Suspicious of Philip, the English colonists in 1671 questioned and fined him, and demanded that the Wampanoag surrender their arms. Philip consented, but his followers failed to comply, and measures were taken to enforce the promise. Philip thereupon went before the general court, agreed to pay an annual tribute, and to not sell lands or engage in war with other Indians without the consent of the Plymouth government. The English had grown stronger and more numerous, and had begun to meddle in the internal affairs of the Indians.

In December 1674, John Sassamon, a Christian Indian, reported to Plymouth governor John Winslow that Metacomet was preparing for war. The next month, Sassamon was found under the ice of a pond with a broken neck. In June, the Puritans seized three Wampanoags and charged them with Sassamon's murder. A Plymouth jury found the men guilty and executed them. Although done from a standpoint of preserving the security of their own colony, it was the first time the English had executed an Indian for a crime committed against another Indian.

### Outbreak of Fighting

The war actually resolved itself into a series of ruthless Indian raids on frontier settlements from the Connecticut River to Massachusetts and Narragansett Bay, followed by brutal retaliatory assaults on Indian villages by the colonial militia. The Native Americans in June, 1675, made a sudden raid on the border settlement of Swansea. Other raids followed; towns were burned and

many whites—men, women, and children—were slain. Unable to draw the Native Americans into a major battle, the colonists resorted to similar methods of warfare in retaliation and antagonized other tribes. The Wampanoag were joined by the Nipmuck and by the Narragansett (after the latter were attacked by the colonists), and soon all the New England colonies were involved in the war.

The Mohegan sachem, Uncas, supported the English as he had in the Pequot War as a way of preserving Mohegan autonomy and enhancing his own position. The powerful Narragansetts declared their intention to remain neutral, and many of Metacomb's followers sent their women and children to take refuge with them. In November 1675, the English declared war against the Narragansetts, interpreting their offer of sanctuary to noncombatants from other tribes as an act of hostility. The next month, an English army of more than a thousand men marched through deep snow and attacked the main Narragansett stronghold near Kingston, Rhode Island. Hundreds of Narragansett men, women, and children died in what became known as the Great Swamp Fight.

In February 1676, the Indians attacked and burned Lancaster, Massachusetts. They took two dozen prisoners, including Mary Rowlandson, who later produced a narrative of her experience as a captive with Metacomb's army as the war was slipping away from the Indians.

The Indians maintained a distinct advantage in the fighting until the spring of 1676, when their efforts were undermined by the threat of starvation after the destruction of their crops, and the English began to use "Praying Indians" (those who had converted to Christianity) as scouts. In the spring of 1676 it became evident that the Indian power was waning. The Indians were unable to plant crops, were weaker numerically and more poorly armed than the English; additionally, the English settlers had also made an alliance with the friendly Naticks and the Niantics.

Early in the autumn Philip went nearly as far west as Albany in an unsuccessful attempt to get aid from the French and the Mohawks and supplies from the Dutch traders. By 1676 the Narragansett were completely defeated and their chief, Canonchet, was killed in April of that year; the Wampanoag and Nipmuck were gradually subdued.

On the 1st of August 1676 Philip's wife and nine-year old son were captured, and on the 11th of August an Indian guide took the English to the sachem's hiding place in a swamp at the foot of Mount Hope (in what is now the township of Bristol, Rhode Island), where early the next morning he was surprised, and while trying to escape was killed. The head of Philip was sent to Plymouth and set on a pole in a public place, where it remained for a quarter of a century; his right hand was given to his slayer, who preserved it in rum and won many pennies by exhibiting it in the New England towns. The struggle was now over in southern New England, but it continued along the north-eastern frontier till the spring of 1678, and nearly every settlement beyond the Piscataqua was destroyed.

### *What were the results of the conflict?*

King Philip's War was one of the costliest confrontations in colonial history. Edward Randolph, an agent of the crown, estimated that some 600 Europeans and 3,000 Indians lost their lives. It is believed that more than half of the 90 English settlements in the region had been attacked and a dozen destroyed. The colony of Plymouth had incurred debts greater than the value of the personal property of her people.

The Indians suffered even worse: in addition to the large number of men, women and children slain, great numbers, among them the wife and son of Philip, were sold into slavery in the Spanish Indies and the Bermudas. Whole Indian villages were massacred and entire tribes decimated; indigenous refugees fled westward and northward. Thereafter settlers felt free to expand without fear into former Indian territory across southern New England.

The war, which was extremely costly to the colonists in people and money, resulted in the virtual extermination of tribal Native American life in S New England and the disappearance of the fur trade. The New England Confederation then had the way completely clear for white settlement.

## **Edward Randolph and King Philip on the Causes of the King Philip's War (1685)<sup>1</sup>**

[Edward Randolph was sent by King James II to investigate the violations of the Crown's colonial laws and to assess the overall state of colonial affairs, especially in New England.]

**Eighth Enquiry. What hath been the original cause of the present war with the natives. What are the advantages or disadvantages arising thereby and will probably be the End?**

*How were laws excessively enforced?*

Various are the reports and conjectures of the causes of the present Indian war. Some impute it to an imprudent zeal in the magistrates of Boston to christianize those heathen before they were civilized and injoyning them the strict observation of their lawes, which, to a people so rude and licentious, hath proved even intolerable, and that the more, for that while the magistrates, for their profit, put the lawes severely in execution against the Indians, the people, on the other side, for lucre and gain, entice and provoke the Indians to the breach thereof, especially to drunkenness, to which those people are so generally addicted that they will strip themselves to their skin to have their fill of rum and brandy, the Massachusets having made a law that every Indian drunk should pay 10 shillings or be whipped, according to the discretion of the magistrate. Many of these poor people willingly offered their backs to the lash to save their money; whereupon, the magistrates finding much trouble and no profit to arise to the government by whipping, did change that punishment into 10 days worke for such as could not or would not pay the fine of 10 shillings which did highly incense the Indians.

*What were priests suspected of doing?*

Some believe there have been vagrant and jesuiticall priests, who have made it their businesse, for some yeares past, to go from Sachim to Sachim, to exasperate the Indians against the English and to bring them into a confederacy, and that they were promised supplies from France and other parts to extirpate the English nation out of the continent of America. Others impute the cause to some injuries offered to the Sachim Philip; for he being possessed of a tract of land called Mount Hope, a very fertile, pleasant and rich soyle, some English had a mind to dispossesse him thereof, who never wanting one pretence or other to attain their end, complained of injuries done by Philip and his Indians to their stock and cattle, whereupon Philip was often summoned before the magistrate, sometimes imprisoned, and never released but upon parting with a considerable part of his land....

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Randolph's report: Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *American History Told by Contemporaries* (New York, 1898), volume 1, 458-60. King Philip's testimony: *History of Swansea*. Archaic spellings have been modernized.

## The Role of Weapons

With many such reasons, but whatever be the cause, the English have contributed much to their misfortunes, for they first taught the Indians the use of armes, and admitted them to be present at all their musters and trainings, and shewed them how to handle, mend and fix their muskets, and have been furnished with all sorts of armes by permission of the government, so that the Indians are become excellent firemen. And at Natick there was a gathered church of “praying Indians,”<sup>2</sup> who were exercised as trained bands, under officers of their owne; these have been the most barbarous and cruel enemies to the English of any others. Capt. Tom, their leader, being lately taken and hanged at Boston, with one other of their chiefs.

*Though a Law in 1633 banned the trading of arms to Indians, what did a law of 1657 do?*

That notwithstanding the ancient law of the country, made in the year 1633, that no person should sell any armes or ammunition to any Indian upon penalty of £10 for every gun, £5 for a pound of powder, and 40 shillings for a pound of shot, yet the government of the Massachusetts in the year 1657,... did enact that no person should trade with the Indians for any sort of peltry, except such as were authorized by that court, under the penalty of £100 for every offence, giving liberty to all such as should have licence from them to sell, unto any Indian, guns, swords, powder and shot, paying to the treasurer 3 pence for each gun and for each dozen of swords; 6 pence for a pound of powder and for every ten pounds of shot, by which means the Indians have been abundantly furnished with great store of armes and ammunition to the utter ruin and undoing of many families in the neighbouring colonies to enrich some few of their relations and church members....

### **King Philip also explained what led to the uprising:**

The English who came first to this country were but an handful of people, forlorn, poor and distressed. My father was then sachem [chief]. He relieved their distresses in the most kind and hospitable manner. He gave them land to build and plant upon. He did all in his power to serve them. Others of their country men came and joined them.

Their numbers rapidly increased. My father's counselors became uneasy and alarmed lest, as they were possessed of firearms, which was not the case of the Indians, they should finally undertake to give law to the Indians, and take from them their country. They therefore advised him to destroy them before they should become too strong, and it should be too late. My father was also the father of the English. He represented to his counselors and warriors that the English knew many sciences which the Indians did not; that they improved and cultivated the earth, and raised cattle and fruits, and that there was sufficient room in the country for both the English and the Indians. His advise prevailed. It was concluded to give victuals to the English. They flourished and increased.

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<sup>2</sup> “Praying Indians” was a term used by colonists to refer to Indians who had converted to Christianity.

Experience taught that the advice of my father's counselors was right. By various means they got possessed of a great part of his territory. But he still remained their friend until he died. My elder brother became sachem. They pretended to suspect him of evil designs against them. He was seized and confined, and thereby thrown into sickness and died. Soon after I became sachem they disarmed all my people. They tried my people by their own laws and assessed damages against them which they could not pay. Their land was taken.

Sometimes the cattle of the English would come into the cornfields of my people, for they did not make fences like the English. I must then be seized and confined till I sold another tract of my country for satisfaction of all damages and costs. But a small part of the dominion of my ancestors remains. I am determined not to live till I have no country.

## Bacon's Declaration in the Name of the People<sup>3</sup>

July 30, 1676

1. For having upon specious [false] pretences of public works raised great unjust taxes upon the Commonality for the advancement of private favorites and other sinister ends, but no visible effects in any measure adequate, For not having during this long time of his Government in any measure advanced this hopeful Colony either by fortifications Townes or Trade.
2. For having abused and rendered contemptible the Magistrates of Justice, by advancing to places of Judicature, scandalous and Ignorant favorites.
3. For having wronged his Majesties prerogative and interest, by assuming Monopoly of the Beaver trade, and for having in that unjust gain betrayed and sold his Majesties Country and the lives of his loyal subjects, to the barbarous heathen.
4. For having protected, favored, and emboldened the Indians against his Majesties loyal subjects, never contriving, requiring, or appointing any due or proper means of satisfaction for their many Invasions, robberies, and murders committed upon us.
5. For having when the Army of English, was just upon the track of those Indians, who now in all places burn, spoil, murder and when we might with ease have destroyed them: who then were in open hostility, for then having expressly countermanded, and sent back our Army, by passing his word for the peaceable demeanor of the said Indians, who immediately prosecuted their evil intentions, committing horrid murders and robberies in all places, being protected by the said engagement and word past of him the said Sir William Berkeley, having ruined and laid desolate a great part of his Majesties Country, and have now drawn themselves into such obscure and remote places, and are by their success so emboldened and confirmed, by their confederacy so strengthened that the cries of blood are in all places, and the terror, and inflammation of the people so great, are now become, not only a difficult, but a very formidable enemy, who might at first with ease have been destroyed.
6. And lately when upon the loud outcries of blood the Assembly had with all care raised and framed an Army for the preventing of further mischief and safeguard of this his Majesties Colony.
7. For having with only the privacy of some few favorites, without acquainting the people, only by the alteration of a figure, forged a Commission, by we know not what hand, not only without, but even against the consent of the people, for the raising and effecting civil war and destruction, which being happily and without blood shed prevented, for

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<sup>3</sup> Spelling has been mercifully modernized. "Constimation" in section 5 has been changed to "inflammation," as the former is an archaic term for an affliction.

having the second time attempted the same, thereby calling down our forces from the defense of the frontiers and most weekly exposed places.

8. For the prevention of civil mischief and ruin amongst ourselves, whilst the barbarous enemy in all places did invade, murder and spoil us, his majesties most faithful subjects.

Of this and the aforesaid Articles we accuse Sir William Berkeley as guilty of each and every one of the same, and as one who hath traitorously attempted, violated and Injured his Majesties interest here, by a loss of a great part of this his Colony and many of his faithful loyal subjects, by him betrayed and in a barbarous and shameful manner exposed to the Incursions and murder of the heathen, And we doe further declare these the ensuing persons in this list, to have been his wicked and pernicious councilors Confederates, aiders, and assisters against the Commonality in these our Civil commotions.

*Sir Henry Chichley, William Claiburne, Junior Lieut. Coll. Christopher Thomas, Hawkins Wormeley, William Sherwood, Phillip Ludwell, John Page, Clerke Robert Beverley, John Cluffe, Clerke Richard Lee, John West, Thomas Ballard, Hubert Farrell, William Cole, Thomas Reade, Richard Whitacre, Matthew Kempe, Nicholas Spencer, Joseph Bridger*

And we doe further demand that the said Sir William Berkeley with all the persons in this list be forthwith delivered up or surrender themselves within four days after the notice hereof, Or otherwise we declare as follows:

That in whatsoever place, house, or ship, any of the said persons shall reside, be hid, or protected, we declare the owners, Masters or Inhabitants of the said places, to be confederates and traitors to the people and the estates of them is also of all the aforesaid persons to be confiscated, and this we the Commons of Virginia doe declare, desiring a firm union amongst our selves that we may jointly and with one accord defend our selves against the common Enemy, and let not the faults of the guilty be the reproach of the innocent, or the faults or crimes of the oppressors divide and separate us who have suffered by their oppressions.

These are therefore in his majesties name to command you forthwith to seize the persons above mentioned as Traitors to the King and Country and them to bring to Middle plantation, and there to secure them until further order, and in case of opposition, if you want any further assistance you are forthwith to demand it in the name of the people in all the Counties of Virginia.

Nathaniel Bacon General by Consent of the people.

## Robert Beverley<sup>4</sup> on Bacon's Rebellion

*What type of cause would have created such a fanfare?*

The occasion of this rebellion is not easy to be discovered: but it is certain there were many things that concurred towards it. For it cannot be imagined, that upon the instigation of two or three traders only, who aimed at a monopoly of the Indian trade, as some pretend to say, the whole country would have fallen into so much distraction; in which people did not only hazard their necks by rebellion, but endeavored to ruin a governor, whom they all entirely loved, and had unanimously chosen; a gentleman who had devoted his whole life and estate to the service of the country, and against whom in thirty- five years experience there had never been one single complaint. Neither can it be supposed, that upon so slight grounds, they would make choice of a leader [Nathaniel Bacon] they hardly knew, to oppose a gentleman that had been so long and so deservedly the darling of the people....

*What four causes did Beverly detect for the Rebellion?*

Four things may be reckoned to have been the main ingredients towards this intestine commotion, viz., First, The extreme low price of tobacco, and the ill usage of the planters in the exchange of goods for it, which the country, with all their earnest endeavors, could not remedy. Secondly, The splitting the colony into properties, contrary to the original charters; and the extravagant taxes they were forced to undergo, to relieve themselves from those grants. Thirdly, The heavy restraints and burdens laid upon their trade by act of Parliament in England. Fourthly, The disturbance given by the Indians. Of all which in their order.

First, Of the low price of tobacco, and the disappointment of all sort of remedy, I have spoken sufficiently before. Secondly, Of splitting the country into proprieties.

*Originally men settled as homesteaders in Virginia, owning and occupying their land, but later, King Charles II assigned that land to other individuals, who could then charge rent to the men who had been farming it all along.*

King Charles the Second, to gratify some nobles about him, made two great grants out of that country. These grants were not of the uncultivated wood land only, but also of plantations, which for many years had been seated and improved, under the encouragement of several charters granted by his royal ancestors to that colony.... They were kept dormant some years after they were made, and in the year 1674 begun to be put in execution. As soon as ever the country came to know this, they remonstrated against them; and the assembly drew up an

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Beverley, Jr. (1673 – April 21, 1722) was an important historian of early colonial Virginia. He was born in Virginia and died in King and Queen County, Virginia. He was also a substantial planter of the time as well as an official in the colonial government. Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia*, published originally in London in 1705, is considered by many to be the most important and accurate history of early life in the Virginia colony. Some spellings and archaic terms have been modernized.

humble address to his majesty, complaining of the said grants, as derogatory to the previous charters and privileges granted to that colony, by his majesty and his royal ancestors.... And the better to defray that charge, they laid a tax of fifty pounds of tobacco per person, for two years together, over and above all other taxes, which was an excessive burden. They likewise laid charges of seventy, fifty, or thirty pounds of tobacco, as the cause was on every law case tried throughout the country.... Which taxes and charges fell heaviest on the poor people, the effect of whose labor would not clothe their wives and children.

*Additionally, there were taxes laid on tobacco, even if it were simply exchanged from one plantation to another, and never exported.*

Thirdly, Upon the back of all these misfortunes came a law of 1673, for better securing the plantation trade. By this act several duties were laid on the trade from one plantation to another. This was a new hardship, and the rather, because the revenue arising by this act was not applied to the use of the plantations wherein it was raised: but given clear away; nay, in that country it seemed to be of no other use, but to burden the trade, or create a good income to the officers; for the collector had half, the comptroller a quarter, and the remaining quarter was subdivided into salaries; till it was lost....

These were the afflictions that country labored under when the fourth accident happened, viz., the disturbance offered by the Indians to the frontiers. . . .

This addition of mischief to minds already full of discontent, made people ready to vent all their resentment against the poor Indians. There was nothing to be got by tobacco; neither could they turn any other manufacture to advantage; so that most of the poorer sort were willing to quit their unprofitable employments, and go volunteers against the Indians.