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2 • *The Narragansetts*

NOT TECHNICALLY part of New England in the original colonial sense, the Narragansetts were at the center of a network of Algonquian peoples, with the Pequots and Mohegans to their west, the Wampanoags to their east across Narragansett Bay, and the Nipmucks, Pawtuxets, and Massachusetts to their north.

According to Narragansett tradition, the deity Cautantowwit created humanity. Dissatisfied with his earlier stone creations, Cautantowwit broke the original man and woman and made a second version of humanity from a tree. From the great Cautantowwit, humans received corn and beans; Cheepi, a force of darkness, connected them to a spirit world and was therefore central to powwows or healers. Guided by a cosmography that shaped their world view, the Narragansetts lived for generations in a world defined by the interrelationship between spirits (or *manitou*), the people themselves and their neighbors, and the natural world, whose cycles shaped their annual movements from coastal to interior villages.

When the English arrived in the region in 1620, the Narragansetts, Pequots, Mohegans, and Wampanoags already had an extensive history of forming and dissolving alliances. When the Wampanoags befriended the English, the Narragansetts and the Pequots formed trading alliances with the Dutch. As English power in the region increased, however, Dutch influence declined. When the dissenting Puritan Roger Williams settled in the area of what is now Providence, Rhode Island, in 1636, perhaps he seemed a useful source of English trade to the Narragansett sachem Canonicus. In the spring of 1637, the Narragansetts threw in their lot with the English and their Mohegan and Niantic allies against the Pequots in a decisive (and devastating) battle that destroyed Pequot control of much of Connecticut. In 1643 the Mohegans and the Narragansetts narrowly avoided full-scale war after the Mohegan sachem Uncas killed the Narragansett sachem Miantonomi.

Initially, the Narragansetts took a neutral position in King Philip's war, but they were drawn into the hostilities (in what is now known as "the Great Swamp Fight" of late 1675) when the English destroyed a Narragansett winter camp. By the early eighteenth century, Narragansett settlements were limited to a few smaller communities in southwestern Rhode Island near Charlestown and North Kingston, which were often mixed with Niantic and other Native

peoples from New England and beyond. It was not until 1766 that the first schoolhouse was built to serve the Narragansett community, despite missionary efforts reaching back to at least 1733. The first Christian congregation on the Narragansett reservation was established in 1745 by the ordained Indian minister Samuel Niles, the first of several Native preachers to minister to the Narragansett community beginning in the eighteenth century. In fact, according to the tribal website, the three-acre tract of land on which the Indian Church is located “is the only original parcel of land that has never been out of the possession of the Narragansett Tribe.”¹

Today the Narragansett Indian Tribe is based in Charlestown, Rhode Island, with a Narragansett Indian longhouse as the center of tribal activities and a school and museum that form a core element of cultural continuity.

Suggested Reading

Herndon, Ruth Wallis, and Ella Wilcox Sekatau. “The Right to a Name: The Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era.” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 3 (1997): 433–62.

Narragansett Indian Tribe website. Available at <http://www.narragansett-tribe.org>. Accessed 30 June 2006.

Simmons, William S. “Narragansett.” In *Handbook of North American Indians*. Vol 15, *Northeast*, edited by Bruce G. Trigger, 190–97. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978.

Sweet, John Wood. *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

1. Narragansett Indian Tribe website.

The Case of Sarah Pharaoh

These three documents form part of a court proceeding for infanticide that was heard by the Superior Court of Judicature (the highest court) of the colony of Rhode Island in 1730. The depositions (testimonies given under oath) were copied from local court records onto sheets of paper included in the packet of file papers that make up the case record. They are archived in the Rhode Island Supreme Judicial Court Records Center in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. These evidences were taken by county justices of the peace called in to conduct an investigation into a suspected infanticide. Although written as statements, they were probably the result of questioning, which may have been conducted through an interpreter. Few Narragansetts were fluent in English at this time; therefore, interpreters were commonly employed in court proceedings. When an interpreter was used, however, the intervention was usually noted in the record, and none is specified in the depositions under examination.

Deposition of Mary Sambo (against Sarah Pharaoh)

The Deposition of An Indian Woman belonging To South Kingstown Called Mary Sambo being Stricktly Charged by Us the Subscribers to Speak the Whole Truth And to omit Nothing that was Meteriall to To [sic] Prove the Soposed Murder And She Said She Would Tell all She Knew About it & that Living in a house or Cottage on Coll. Christopher Allens Land an Indian Woman Called Sarah Faraoh came to her Cottage about Seven weeks agoe & there Tarryed a prette while and while she was there She perceived the said Sarah Faraoh To Look burley as She thought & charged her with being with Child. But She denyed being with child & Kept a blanked wraped about her, & Soon after She perceived her Shift Near her brest to be wet and She thoght with milk but could not say it was, & while She was there She saw by the fire in the place where She The sd Sarah had sat Several Cloders of blood and Then She went and Looked in the bed where She had Lain and perceived also the Same Sight there & then asked the sd Sarah the reason of it and what the matter was with her & whether it was Common for women to be so Said Sarah replied it was Common for women to be so that had not been well a great while as She her Selfe had Not and further saith Not Taken in South Kingstown in Kings County this 16th day of March A: D: 1729 Before Rowse Helme Assist: [Assistant]

Examination of Sarah Pharaoh (on the Reverse
of the Same Paper as the Sambo Deposition)

The Examination of An Indian Woman belonging to South Kingstown Called Sarah Faraoh being Examined on Suspition of Murdering of A Certaine young Child Which was found Dead on Collo Christophr Allens Land in sd Town Who Declairs that the Child was None of hers and that She had Not bin with Child Sence her Boy was Borne, Which She Sayeth Was Above Four Yeares Agoe: And further She Sayeth that Some Time the last Spring She Told An Indian that She was with Child and that She Wanted to Drink Some Rum but She Now Declares that What She Told sd Indian Was only Jeasting Talk Taken in South Kingstown in Kings County this 16th day of March A: D: 1729 Before Rowse Helme Assist: and Christopher Allen, Justice of the Peace

Deposition of Indian Hannah

Indian Hannah Who Commonly Lives With Robert Potter in South Kingstown being an Old Indian Woman Who Was Called before Us the Subscribers to Declair the whole Truth of What She Knew Concerning Sarah Faraohs being With Child And She Declared that Sarah Faraoh Come to her . . . in the Latter Part of Last Mowing Time² And told her that She was Not Well and was Much out of Order and Desired sd Hannah to Get Some Roots for her to Take but sd Hannah says She Made her this Reply & Told her She Thought She was with Child and if so The Taking sd Roots Would Kill the the [*sic*] Child and She must be Hanged for It She Further Says that Indians Often Use that Sort of Roots When they Are in Travil³ Which Soon Cause them to be Delivered/Taken in South Kingstown this 18th Day of March A: D: 1729 before Rowse Helme Assist/ Christo Allen Justice of the peace



2. "Mowing Time" refers to late summer or fall, when hay is being mowed for winter.

3. "Travil" signifies "travail," "labor," or "childbirth."

The Dreadful Case of Sarah Pharaoh

Finding Native Women's Voices in an Eighteenth-Century Infanticide Case

ANN MARIE PLANE

Mary Sambo, who was called to testify in a case of infanticide in 1730, "Said She Would Tell all She Knew About it." Two other Indian women, "Indian Hannah," a healer, and Sarah Pharaoh, the accused, gave testimony as well.⁴ Although additional witnesses in this southern Rhode Island community were also called, it is the involvement of the three examined here that makes this case particularly useful to scholars of Native American women's history, American colonial legal history, and Native American speech and literacy in early America.

It is arguable that these documents are out of place in a collection that focuses on Native literacy. After all, other than the mark (a vertical line) that Sambo placed, in lieu of a signature, on a bond for her appearance, none of these women can be said to have written a word—not here and, as far as we know, not at any time in their lives. That, however, is precisely the dilemma that faces scholars who are interested in women's writing in general and Native American women's writing in particular. Of the few documents that reveal aspects of women's lives in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, all but a handful were written by men. Of the documents that speak to the experiences of Native American women—certainly among the records I combed for a larger study of Native American marriage in southeastern New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—not one was actually penned by a Native American woman.⁵ Thus, although purists may wish to adhere to a strict definition of "women's writing," doing so both elides and erases women in general and Native women in particular from the pages of history.⁶ Such distortion of the past has dominated understandings of the colonial world for several centuries, but with the dawn of the twenty-first century, this myopia has been challenged with great force and ingenuity.⁷ Accepting a broader definition of "writing," therefore, let us take a look at what Mary Sambo, Indian Hannah, and Sarah Pharaoh have to say.

What brought these three Indian women into court was a shocking discovery. Benjamin Lad and three of his friends, all boys about fourteen years old,

4. See *R. v. Sarah Pharaoh*.

5. See Plane, *Colonial Intimacies*, 10–11.

6. Ulrich, "Of Pens and Needles," 200–207.

7. Merrell, "Colonial Historians and American Indians," 94–96.

had been sent by Christopher Allen “A Looking for fox holes in order to dig after them, it being a place known to be Plenty of foxes.” They came across what they called “an Indian barn,” a large pit dug into the ground, which was used by New England Natives to store maize over the winter—by safely tucking it, protected by layers of sand and woven mats, into the “barn”—until it was needed for food or seeds. At the side of this unused pit, however, they saw fresh marks. “Looking therein, We Saw Something, which we soon discovered to be a dead Infant Child being Naked.”⁸ They removed the body, and hurried away to report their discovery to Allen, the landowner.

It was common in this part of southern Rhode Island for land to be divided into huge acreages under the control of a few wealthy landowning families. With the other residents in some way beholden to these great families, this landholding pattern was quite different from that found in most of the rest of colonial New England. Nevertheless, these farms were not devoid of a diversity of people. Although a few white men held most of the lands, a variety of tenants and laborers populated the region. In addition to being home to English-speaking smallholders, artisans, and tenants, King’s County, Rhode Island—whose workforce was one of the most diverse in New England—included an unusually high concentration of African and African American slaves, Irish farm laborers, Indians, and people whose parents hailed from more than one of these groups.⁹ Thus, although each woman was, where possible, identified by the white landowner “with whom” she lived, it is clear from reading the depositions that Sambo and Hannah did not live as dependents within a white household; they maintained their own independent residences. (Hannah is described as one “Who Commonly Lives With Robert Potter,” while Sambo is described as “Living in a house or Cottage on Coll. Christopher Allens Land.”) Most important, although the white guardians of Charles Ninegret, the Narragansett sachem, played a large “advisory” role and regularly arranged for much of his acreage to be rented out, Ninegret was still—legally speaking—autonomous, retaining title to substantial portions of the county.¹⁰ The three women were probably Narragansetts, although during this period the term *Indian* applied to other New England Natives and even sometimes to imported Spanish Indian servants.

The Pharaoh court case involved many of these different elements of King’s County society. The record of the investigation gives an unprecedented glimpse

8. Depositions of Benjamin Lad, Ichabod Sheffield Jr., Samuel Potter, and Nathaniel Sheffield, March 16, 1729/30.

9. E. Channing, *Narragansett Planters*, 10 n. 1. See also Plane, *Colonial Intimacies*, 123.

10. Plane, “Customary Laws of Marriage,” 186–87.

into the webs of kinship and connection that linked individuals and families to the land and to one another in unusually rich and otherwise largely invisible ways. The case file is not large. There is a summary of the charges in the Superior Court record book for the March 1730 session. Because the modern calendar was not adopted until later in the century, the new year began in mid-March, so although the depositions are dated 1729, the whole investigation took place locally between 15 and 18 March 1729/1730 (i.e., 1730) and was forwarded to the superior court in Newport for its session beginning on the last Tuesday in March 1730, after the new year had turned.¹¹ In addition to the indictment, the depositions by the three Indian women, and the deposition by Lad and his friends, there is a warrant for a coroner's inquest, the verdict of the coroner's jury, Sambo's bond to appear and give testimony, and the order to the constable to transport Pharaoh to jail in Newport. It appears that the superior court in Newport dismissed the case, as the back of the formal indictment is marked simply "ignoramus 1730." Sambo, Pharaoh, and Indian Hannah do not appear elsewhere in the Rhode Island court record, although they may have made a mark in the lengthy account book reckonings that large landowners—such as Colonel Allen—kept with their long-term tenants.

Even so, this cache of documents is a remarkable find. It is rare enough to have a fully realized deposition from a single Indian deponent; to have multiple sources in which the individuals paint a picture of their daily lives, describe their interactions, and contradict one another is a historian's veritable gold mine. The words of Sambo, Indian Hannah, and Pharaoh are, of course, constrained by the conventional forms of eighteenth-century legal testimony. Thus, although Sambo begins by noting that she will "Tell all She Knew About it," this was surely a formulaic response, since she was "Stricktly Charged" by her examiners "to Speak the Whole Truth And to omit Nothing that was Meteriall to . . . Prove the Soposed Murder." Each woman gave her testimony before Rowse Helme, one of the governor's assistants (representatives) for the county. Colonel Allen was most likely also present for all three cases. He is noted in two of the depositions; and although the Sambo document itself refers to "us the subscribers" (seemingly more than just Helme), he is not listed by name in Sambo's case. Perhaps the two officials decided that it would be better for Allen not to sign off on the examination of his own tenant. Whatever the legal niceties, another document makes the practical implications clear—Allen stood "as surety" for Sambo's later appearance in court as a witness. If she failed to give testimony, Allen would have to forfeit his money, and she would owe Allen. Her freedom to speak openly about what she knew was, therefore, limited in

11. *R. v. Sarah Pharaoh*, File Papers: Indictment.

some significant ways by her prior obligation to her landlord. Indian Hannah and Sarah Pharaoh could not have failed to experience similar constraints on their own testimony.

Despite the constraints, the experiences of these three Indian women—along with their individual circumstances, concerns, opinions, and disagreements—emerge forcefully in these documents. Clearly, Pharaoh wants something specific from Sambo and Indian Hannah. Clearly, the two women want to absolve themselves of any responsibility for wrongdoing. Sambo's interactions with Pharaoh are related in a way that foregrounds her suspicions of Pharaoh's pregnancy and the due investigation of her suspicions in the way that any English woman would have recognized. Midwives and ordinary women of child-bearing age were expected by English courts to keep a watchful eye on younger or less protected women and bring suspicions of note to the authorities.¹² Midwives and healers (and it would appear that Indian Hannah was known for such talents) were expected to use their knowledge to ease suffering, not to abet abortion or infanticide (actions for which, as Hannah reports, Pharaoh "must be Hanged"). Did these Indian women understand their responsibilities under English law? Or, what is more likely, did the process of developing a statement—a process that might involve considerable give-and-take between examiners, witness, and such intermediaries as a landlord, a relative, or (even at this late date) a translator—create the appearance of diligent investigation when, in fact, ignorance, indifference, or even outright collusion might have been the truer characterization of the relationship between Pharaoh and each of her Indian neighbors?

Even if the full truth of Sambo's and Hannah's reactions to Pharaoh can never be known, each deposition reveals much about the day-to-day world in which these women lived. This was a world in which it was not unusual when an Indian woman "Tarryed a prette while" in the home of another Indian family, in which Indian women were frequently the householders, separate from any menfolk; in which some women, like Indian Hannah, became known as especially talented healers, herbalists, and midwives; in which the signs of pregnancy and parturition—a "burley" physique, postpartum blood clots, breast milk leaking onto a linen shift—were telltale signs of a familiar narrative. This was a world in which an Indian woman had to support herself by her own labor. Children were as much a hindrance as a help as she struggled to keep her head above the mountain of debts that dogged most eighteenth-century workers. One or more children might better be bound out as household labor to an English family—which, in fact, many Native parents found themselves obliged

12. Ulrich, *Good Wives*, ch. 4; Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 149–52.

(by circumstances, finances, or the law) to do.¹³ Tellingly, there is no mention of the presence of Pharaoh's four-year-old boy—only the assertion that she had not been with child since his birth.

In fact, all three women exhibit considerable sophistication in their understanding of the uses of their testimony. Pharaoh recognized that denial was her best option, and, given the level of oppression that the women faced, her response represents a significant challenge to colonial authorities. Since confession might well lead her to the hangman's noose, she steadfastly denied that she had been with child—despite the considerable evidence (requests for abortifacient roots, telltale spots of blood and milk, the dead body of a baby) and the willingness of her compatriots to testify against her.¹⁴ Sambo's testimony was assembled into a coherent narrative by the English justices, but her deposition still bears traces of the original questions and answers of her interview. She comes across as a diligent, responsible matron, questioning Pharaoh's "burley" shape, examining the places where she had lain or sat, and questioning Pharaoh as to "the reason of it." Similarly, Indian Hannah seems well aware of the colonial laws governing midwifery—either she or her examiner made it clear that she refused to obtain certain roots for Pharaoh, knowing full well that they might cause her to run afoul of the colonial authorities, for whom infanticide was a capital crime.

These depositions reveal both the many voices and the unique circumstances of Native women. At the same time, they expose their subjects' inevitable enmeshment in colonial legal structures. The literacy of the Native women is one steeped in familiarity with colonial hierarchies, legal institutions, and labor systems. These are not conventional forms of literacy, of course; rather, they are very specific forms, forged only after long acquaintance with the dangers posed by colonial authority. There is no single voice here; there is a multiplicity of voices, rising together—each with disparate strands—to forge a single chorus.



13. See Murray and Herndon, "Markets for Children in Early America," 356–82.

14. See Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers*, 60–64. On abortion during this period, see also Dayton, "Taking the Trade," 19–49.

Letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 1769

SARAH SIMON

Sarah Simon's letter is in the Dartmouth College Archives among the papers of Eleazar Wheelock. It is written on one sheet of paper, measuring approximately 12 inches by 7.5 inches, which is folded in half to produce four surfaces for writing. The last side is addressed as follows:

For—
The Re^{end} Mr Elezer Wheelo^k_{DD}
Att
Lebanon

The letter is marked throughout with inkblots and misspellings, signaling the lack of experience of the writer. In addition, words spill off the left-hand side of the page, many words are hyphenated, and (where the author reached the end of the sheet of paper and opted to finish at the beginning of the next line) some words are simply cut off. There is a great deal of space between the lines—enough for Simon to insert revisions and corrections above the sentence in question. The handwriting is generally neat, but the letter concludes rather abruptly, with lines spaced more closely and a signature squeezed into the final line of the letter, which is written at the very bottom of the page.

Lebanon Crank¹⁵ ye
16th 1769

Re^{end} and Honrd Sir

I have been this some time back thinking upon things of Religion, and I think thay do not look so {^plain to me}¹⁶ as I have seen them {^and} I have grat many wicked thoughts and I do not knowe what I Shall do if I do not ask Somebodys advise about it for I feel very bad about it; I have thought a grte while that I would Come and talk with {^the} Dr but then I thought again that

15. "Lebanon Crank" is the name of the area of Lebanon in which Moor's Charity School was situated and the area in which most of the students boarded. Today it is the town of Columbia, Connecticut.

16. I have left the spelling as it appears in the original, and I have marked the author's inserted passages with a caret in curly brackets, {^}. In the original, the caret is written under the line and the inserted word or words (which are shown here in curly brackets) appear above the line.

Lebanon Frank 9th 16th 1769

Dear Sir

I have been this some time busily
 thinking upon things of Religion, and I think they
 must be plain to me
 and I have seen them, I have great
 my wisest thoughts and I don't know what I
 shall do if I don't ask some body else about
 it for I feel very bad about it; I have thought a great
 deal to write that I would come and talk with you
 but then I thought again that it will not do me
 any good, for I have talk'd with the St. great many
 times and I don't mind them since that has
 been already said there I shall have the more to say
 for you, so I thought I would not go further to
 have any thing more off my mind about it

Lebanon
 16th 1769

Figure 2-1. Sarah Simon, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 1769. (Courtesy of Dartmouth College Archives.)

but I fear it is the work of Satan, and I have mind
it till I am undone for ever and I believe that
Satan is better with us than any body else in
this world here when I go to Read he takes all
my thoughts away upon something else
and every temptation he has before me I thought
I never would not till any body of it but as
I was at home this afternoon all alone I was
thinking upon these things and wondering
what I should do, and I thought of a boy when
Read says that when any one was set left
about any thing they must go to their
minister and inquire of them and then
lead you into it, and then I think it is my duty
to come and take your wife, and ^{what} go out to know

is this unmovable or fast, the Devil is just
Rely sometimes to ^{tempt me} thing that he says I have
made a perfection and don't ^{know} keep upright.
and it seems to me all the true Christian men
meets with such a struggle with Satan so
I do, and so that makes me fear that I am
a Christian because the Devil is so beset
me now then he is with any one less found
en I go to try to pray he will me that I
will not do any good within will I never
any thing so he says every thing to put
me back and I what shall I do I seem
to me I could mind all this night to you
if it would do any good but I fear it will
not. — So I desire to forbear it my
Self you might have been and the
Duty but I fearment I am not

it will not do me any good, for I have talkd with the Dr grant many times and If I do not mind them words that has been alraday said to me I shall have the more to answer for; so I thought I would not go {^no} where to here any thing {^or} no ask any qu ns about any but I fear it is the works of Saton; and I have missed it till I am undone for Ever and I believe that Saton is besser¹⁷ with me than any body els in this world Even when I go to Read he taks all my thoughts away upon something Els and many temptation he las before me I thought I never would not till any body of it but as I was at home this after noon all alone I was thinking upon these things and wondering what I should do and I thought of a book I have Read onse that when any one was at last about any thing they must go to thare minister and inquire of them and these {^will} lead you into it, and then I think it is my duty to Come and take your advise. And I {^what}¹⁸ want to know is this am {^I} uncureable or not, the devil is jest Redy sometimes to {^make me} think that because I have made a perfertion¹⁹ and do not {^alwas} keep upright. and it seems to me all the true Christan never meats with such a struggle with Saton as I do and so that maks me fear that I am a Christan because the devil is so bese with me more than he is with any one Els for when I go to try to pray he till me that it will not do any good nither will it merat any thing so he trys Every thing to put me back. and o what shall I do it seam to me I Could writ all this night to you if it would do any good but I fear it will not. —So I Desire to subscrib my Silfe your most humble and Ever Duty full searvent Sarah Simons



Writing Back to Wheelock

One Young Woman's Response to Colonial Christianity

HILARY E. WYSS

The mid-eighteenth century saw increased possibilities for Native education, as religious enthusiasm spread in both Anglo-American and Native circles. Communities of Mohegans, Niantics, Narragansetts, Pequots, Montauks, and others all hired schoolteachers who generally taught girls as well as boys. And

17. Possibly “busier.” See the passage later in the letter where the word “bese” seems to echo this sentence in that “the devil is so [busy] with me.”

18. “What” seems to be inserted in the wrong place: The passage is probably meant to read, “And what I want to know is . . .”

19. It is unclear what the perversion is that Sarah Simon refers to here. Wheelock’s students repeatedly confessed to such sins as drinking, fighting, and lewd behavior, but there is no further record of what Simon considers (or thinks Wheelock will consider) “a perfertion.”

while missionary societies were often focused on the education of Native boys, Native communities—many of which had far more girls than boys available for anglicized schooling practices—were clearly interested in tending to their female students and employing Native women as educators. As one observer reported of the Pequots of Stonington, “They generally inclined to have a *school mistress*, and an *Indian*; Urging that their children were chiefly *Girls*. I knew not whether this wd be agreeable to Commissioners, however, allow’d them to make trial. Several were propos’d, but they could not unite in any.”²⁰

Native girls had other educational possibilities as well: In the eighteenth century, they were also included in plans for boarding schools such as John Sergeant’s Stockbridge Boarding School and Eleazar Wheelock’s Charity School in Lebanon, Connecticut (albeit hardly on an equal footing with their male counterparts).²¹ Indeed, at Wheelock’s co-educational school, Native girls attended class only one day a week; the boys, in contrast, were in class at least five days a week. Whereas boys generally lived at the school, girls spent most of their time boarding with local families, learning the art of housewifery.²² Even so, Wheelock’s female students learned to write: Approximately six letters clearly authored and written by female students from the Connecticut school have been preserved among the hundreds of letters by and about Wheelock’s Indian students, and Wheelock’s ledger books indicate regular purchases of paper for “the female school.”²³

Yet writing, the symbolic system most intimately attached to English power structures, was not self-evidently of benefit to Native women. Whatever educational opportunities were available, the reality for Native women was that they had very few opportunities to participate in English colonial structures to their fullest abilities. As wives, daughters, and servants on Anglo-American terms, Native women—unlike in most Native communities—were accorded virtually no political or legal rights.²⁴ Indeed, although women were increasingly included in writing instruction through the eighteenth century, colonial presumptions about its suitability for “masculine” pursuits such as business,

20. Joseph Fish to Andrew Oliver, 5 November 1757. See Love, *Samson Occom*, 188–206, for more specific information on schoolmasters and Native communities.

21. In the first in a series of tracts describing his school, Wheelock explains his plan to educate Native missionaries to prepare them to serve not only as ministers and teachers with distant tribes but also as examples of proper (that is, English-style) living. As part of that plan, he explains, “a Number of Girls should also be instructed in whatever should be necessary to render them fit, to perform the Female Part, as House-wives, School-mistresses, Tayloresses, etc.” (*Plain and Faithful Narrative*, 15).

22. Szasz, *Indian Education*, 222.

23. Wheelock’s ledger books, Dartmouth College Archive.

24. See Plane, “Putting a Face on Colonization” 140–65; Bragdon, *Native People*, 170–83; O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 100–101.

ministry, and politics meant that, as a consequence of their gender, women were barred from its most obvious economic benefits.²⁵

In the missionary circles through which Native women received their literacy instruction, the boarding school was the environment that most emphatically positioned them as secondary figures—lesser, certainly, than the Anglo-Americans who controlled their access to education but also lesser than their male counterparts. Women were expected to be appendages whose primary function was to aid their spouses, a perspective that Wheelock repeatedly emphasized to his students, particularly the seventeen or so girls who spent time at Moor's Charity school in the decade during which it was in operation in Lebanon, Connecticut. Their own needs and desires were irrelevant to the situation. For at least some young Native women, the double abjection of their position was untenable; many left Wheelock's school after only a few months, and only one student, Hannah Garret, ever fulfilled Wheelock's plan, by marrying one of the male students of his school.

Sarah Simon (Narragansett), one of the few eighteenth-century Native girls for whom a set of self-authored ruminations on self and identity has been preserved, serves as a dramatic example of the difficulties of being a Native girl in Wheelock's school. The surviving writing of Simon, who entered Wheelock's school in December 1765, is a poignant reminder that whatever promise education held out to young Native women in the eighteenth century, in the end it offered a structure through which they could define only what they would not be rather than what they could be. Sarah was one of five children sent by their mother (also named Sarah Simon) from the Narragansett community of Charlestown, Rhode Island, to Wheelock's school; she was one of the approximately sixteen pupils who were Narragansetts. Letters to and from these students indicate that they remained close and generally looked out for one another. Letters also suggest that Sarah and the other pupils went back and forth between the school and the Narragansett community (Sarah was home, for example, for at least part of 1767). Yet life in Charlestown, Rhode Island, was not easy for Natives in the mid-eighteenth century, and the connection with Wheelock's school removed them from tensions involving an increasingly unpopular schoolmaster, devastating legal battles, religious feuding, and a town government aggressively working to erase evidence of its Native population.²⁶

Simon's writing reveals a rather tortuous relationship with all that Whee-

25. As E. Jennifer Monaghan points out, because the *presumption* in colonial New England was that writing was better suited to boys, it was construed as a masculine activity ("She Loved to Read," 507; "Literacy Instruction," 66–67).

26. Herndon and Sekatau, "Right to a Name," 437, 452–54; Simmons, "Narragansett," 195–96; Simmons and Simmons, *Old Light*, xxxii–xxxvii, 126–29.

lock's charity school offered her. Clearly, at least part of the transition for young Sarah must have been the shift from a home in which women dominated to a school in which men did. Although evidence is sketchy, scholars suggest that Narragansett society may have been organized along more or less matrilineal lines; certainly, the Simon home, headed by the widowed Sarah Simon, was dominated by a matriarch.²⁷ The letters between Wheelock and the widow Sarah Simon suggest that Sarah the daughter initially fulfilled a role as her mother's deputy.²⁸ Her reports persuade her mother to send along the boys. (Her mother writes, "I've great satisfaction, in the account my daughter Sarah has given me of Your pious care of those Children which are under Your tuition," and at another point Wheelock writes to Sarah's mother, "I receivd your James not to please myself but at your earnest Desire by your Daughter Sarah, who told me you had given him to me to bring up and dispose of as my own Son").²⁹ Sarah also seems to have mediated for her brothers early on, as they made their way through the school. Yet she receives little reward for this role, and as her brothers become increasingly important members of Wheelock's school, her own role diminishes substantially.

Certainly as a pupil in Wheelock's school, Sarah would have been expected to engage in the practice of writing; from the moment of their first arrival, Wheelock's students signed confessions, documents, and letters, whether or not they were able to write them. One hapless young woman was required to put her mark to a document on the very day of her arrival, confessing the sin of drinking at a tavern several days before—an act, according to the confession, that is "much to the dishonour of god & very prejudicial to the design & Reputation of this school."³⁰ Writing was intimately connected to Wheelock's disciplinary system; through signed confessions, Wheelock monitored his students, controlled their actions, and demanded that they reconceptualize their thoughts and deeds in terms of sin and damnation.

Throughout her letters—in all there are three, although she is mentioned in other letters as well—Sarah Simon's tone is consistently humble and submissive. Her first surviving letter—written in May 1768, two and a half years after her arrival—tells Wheelock that she is unwell and that perhaps some sea air (her home in Rhode Island is on the water) might do her good. She closes

27. For more on the role of women in Narragansett society, see Simmons, "Narragansett," and Herndon and Sekatau, 442, 445.

28. Edward Deake, the schoolmaster for the Narragansetts from about 1765 to 1776, was probably the scribe for several letters from the Simon family (McCallum, *Letters*, 225, 227, 231). For information on Deake, see Love, *Samson Occom*, 195–96, and Simmons and Simmons, *Old Light*.

29. Quoted in McCallum, *Letters*, 227, 225.

30. *Ibid.*, 232.

with “but then if the Docktor [Wheelock] is not willing I have nothing more to Say for I would not do any thing to displeas Mr Wheelock not for nothing at tall.”³¹ No response is recorded, but approximately a month later Edward Deake, the schoolmaster for the Narragansetts, warns Wheelock that one of his former students “has been some time among ye Indians in this place” and that he is spreading rumors about Wheelock’s mistreatment of his pupils—namely that “Mary Secutor, & Sarah Simon have been kept as close to work, as if they were your slaves, & have had no privelidge in ye School Since last Fall, nor one Copper allow’d ym for their labour” and that James Simon is being bound out to a farmer rather than educated in the school.³² In a rage, a few days after his receipt of this letter, Wheelock writes the widow Sarah Simon a long, defensive letter in which he justifies his treatment of her children and then imperiously concludes, “Your Daughter Sarah carries herself very well, but I think it not best she should come home to visit you till the Fall.”³³

In her next letter, written a year later, Sarah begs Wheelock to allow her to go home, for, she says, “I wont very much to See my Mother I understand she has mete with trouble latly and She wants to see me and she is not able to come to See me. . . . I do not think that she is long for this world . . . for she is very weekly and always Sick. My parent is very near and Dear to me: and being I do not desine to Ever to go home and live with hir again, I desire to beg that favour to go and see hir as ofen as the Doctor is willing I should for I don’t want to ofand the Doctr in the least. But I feel willing to do any thing Sir that you think is bast for me.”³⁴

Through these letters, Sarah Simon is using writing in the way she is meant to: With all the markers of humility and deference appropriately deployed,

31. All of the letters from Wheelock’s students cited here, including Sarah’s, are available in their original form on microfilm from the Eleazar Wheelock Collection at Dartmouth College. They are also included in McCallum’s *Letters*, from which they are cited.

32. Quoted in *ibid.*, 65. John Daniel, a Narragansett parent, had pulled his son Charles from the school in November 1767 after learning that he was to “live with a good farmer a year or two” (quoted in *ibid.*, 209). He writes in a fury to Wheelock, “I always tho’t Your School was free to ye Natives; not to learn them how to Farm it, but to advance in Christian Knowledge . . . but to work two Years to learn to Farm it, is what I don’t consent to, when I can as well learn him that myself and have ye prophet of his Labour, being myself bro’t up with ye best of Farmers” (quoted in *ibid.*, 231).

33. Quoted in *ibid.*, 226. Although it is unclear whether Wheelock’s former student was mischaracterizing the treatment of his students, it is worth noting that at no point did Wheelock refute the facts of the case—that the girls were getting little instruction and that both the boys and the girls were spending much of their time in labor. Wheelock, unlike his students and their increasingly alarmed parents, seems to have felt that this was the most appropriate training for the young Native people put in his charge.

34. Quoted in *ibid.*, 229. Sarah Simon the mother lived on; she is recorded as having received a blanket from missionary Joseph Fish in 1771 and again in 1773 (Simmons and Simmons, *Old Light*, 73, 97).

Sarah's writing suggests that along with literacy skills, she has learned her proper place in the world. Even so, she does not fully accept her place; she is quite literally asking for permission to resituate herself or to reposition herself in her community. The fact that she is even asking suggests that she holds out hope that one way or another she can reconcile the various elements of her life and that through skillful negotiation she can work out a way to retain her connections to her home while fulfilling Wheelock's expectations for her.

The final document from Sarah that we have—the one reproduced here—is another letter to Wheelock, three smudged and blotted pages written in 1769, in which she seems to be admitting her defeat at the hands of Satan. Unlike the “confessions” that Wheelock was in the habit of requiring periodically from his pupils, clearly written by Wheelock, signed by Native students and witnessed by Anglo-American men, this is no perfunctory apology. It is instead a heartfelt questioning of all that Wheelock's school represents, and despite Sarah's concluding phrase, “So I Desire to subscrib my Silfe your most humble and Ever Duty full searvent Sarah Simons,” it reads far more like a critique of his ability to help her in any way. As a record of her own reading and writing habits (she tells Wheelock of a book she once read; she spends an afternoon alone at home drafting a letter), the letter is simultaneously marked by her inexperience as a writer (in the most literal sense of the inkblots and the occasional awkward phrasing) and by her ongoing struggle to incorporate literacy skills into her life in a meaningful way. Ironically, underneath her despair over the state of her soul is a declaration of independence, a terrified and heart-wrenching realization that she is not meant to participate in the world that Wheelock has created.

Perhaps the most striking element of the letter is the absence of any reference to the Bible. In her spiritual crisis, Sarah Simon does not refer to the Bible as a source of comfort—a revealing oversight for a young woman who has spent the previous four years in a charity school whose stated purpose is to bring Indian children just like her to a clearer sense of Protestant Christianity. She does tell us that when she tries to read, Satan “taks all [her] thoughts away upon something Els and many temptation he la[y]s before [her].” Reading, she suggests, leads one away from piety—a view that is a far cry from Wheelock's insistence on literacy as a precondition for true religion. Even when she does actually refer to a book, it directs her away from reading and toward verbal exchange. She tells us, “I thought of a book I have Read onse that when any one was at last about any thing thay must go to thare minister and inquire of them and these {^ will} lead you into it, and then I think it is my duty to Come and take your advise.”

Her experience with Wheelock, however, has led her to believe otherwise.

She writes, “I have thought a grte while that I would Come and talk with {^the} Dr but then I thought again that it will not do me any good, for I have talkd with the Dr grant many times and If I do not mind them words that has been alrady said to me I shall have the more to answer for.” Despite the advice from her book, her strong inclination is that verbal exchange will not work—perhaps because Wheelock talks *at* her instead of actually addressing the problems as she sees them. Whatever the case, it seems clear to her that a meeting is out of the question—it will only compound her problems or give her “the more to answer for.”

The production of this text was clearly no small task for Sarah Simon. Her unsteady handwriting, the inkblots throughout, the phonetic spelling of certain words, and even the way the words seem to run off the edge of her pages suggest that, despite her years at Wheelock’s school, she was not an experienced writer. Indeed, she tells us that she wrote the letter under very specific (and probably quite unusual) circumstances: She was alone, she had an afternoon stretched before her, and she was clearly in spiritual crisis. She tells us that she originally had no intention of revealing her struggle to anyone, but she felt that she was morally obliged to reach out to Wheelock. Her document very clearly delineates the ways in which she is willing to do so.

The shape of this document is that of a letter; there is a date in the upper right hand corner, the opening salutation “Rev^{end} and Honrd Sir,” and a closing phrase followed by her signature. The condition of the letter—folded and addressed on the outer page—indicates that it has been sent rather than personally taken to Wheelock. To frame this document as a letter is to imply a very different kind of exchange from the verbal exchanges she has read about in her book. Like a verbal exchange, a letter presumes a response; a confession, in contrast, is a statement rather than a conversation. A letter, however, also presumes that each party will have the opportunity to say what he or she has to say. On one level, then, writing provides Sarah Simon the only real possibility of voicing her position to Wheelock—especially since that position is clearly quite different from what Wheelock has in mind for her. In a startling departure from her previous letters, which are filled with flattery for Wheelock and self-abasement for Sarah, here there are no apologies, and no negotiations—only a single question, one to which Simon seems to already foresee Wheelock’s answer: “And I {^what} [what I] want to know is this am {^I} uncureable or not.”

Indeed, what this document most vividly suggests is that for Sarah Simon, religion is constructed as a battle between Satan and Wheelock for her soul. God is absent from the equation; there is no positive force that drives the Christianity that Wheelock has offered her, only the possibility of failure, of

sin and damnation. The stern and unforgiving Wheelock presents her with directives that she cannot follow, advice that she cannot take, and rules that are too rigid; Satan, on the other hand, offers her seductive arguments and behaviors that feel comfortable to her. Satan is always there, listening to her, guiding her, conversing with her, whereas Wheelock is so distant that her best hope of communicating with him is to mail him a letter.

As Sarah Simon's afternoon of writing and contemplation turns into night, she becomes increasingly despondent: "O what shall I do it seem to me I Could writ all this night to you if it would do any good but I fear it will not," she reports bitterly. Finally, despite its promise to give her a voice to speak to Wheelock, writing has failed her. The exchange between Wheelock and Sarah must be framed in his terms, but those terms provide only a vocabulary for what she cannot be, not what she is.

Whereas Simon's letter announced her failure as a Christian on Wheelock's terms, her home community offered a strikingly different version of Christianity. An observer writes of a Sabbath meeting "at Narragansett" in 1768 (a year before Sarah Simon drafted her letter to Wheelock), in which Native "exhorters," or lay ministers, "attempted generally to describe the christian life, & did it, by giving a relation of their own religious experiences, which were mostly visions, dreams, impulses & similitudes." Speaking in both "English & . . . Indian," these Native preachers "were all very earnest in voice & gesture, so much so that some of them . . . seemed transported with a kind of enthusiasm." The emphasis throughout seems to have been on the forgiveness of sins and on the joyful attainment of heaven by Christians. The description continues, "One of the Exhorters addressed me . . . & said 'this is the way that we Indians have to get to Heaven. You white people have another way. I don't know but your way will bring *you* there, but I know that our way will bring *us* there.'"³⁵ Indeed, one of the long-standing tensions in the Narragansett community was between the white missionary Joseph Fish, who insisted on the importance of literacy and rigorous training in "true" religion, and Samuel Niles (Narragansett), a nonliterate preacher whose version of Christianity celebrated a more intuitive understanding of grace.³⁶ Sarah Simon's rejection of reading and writing as solutions to her religious crisis echo the sentiments of the Narragansett religious community to which she may well have returned. The Christian practices of the Native ministers, rooted in oral expression and indigenous lifeways, stood in stark contrast to those of Wheelock and Fish. Although leaving Wheelock's

35. Maclure, *Diary*, 189–90.

36. Simmons and Simmons, *Old Light*, xxviii–xxix; xxx–xxxii.

school may have curtailed Sarah Simon's economic prospects, we can only speculate on what religion held out for young Sarah, who by 1769 was so clearly ready to abandon Wheelock's rules.

There is no record of what happened to Sarah Simon thereafter. In terms of the archives, she simply disappeared into silence, having recorded her disillusionment with the power of words—written or spoken by a Native woman within an English power structure—to bring her any sort of satisfaction. Her last letter is dated 1769, and although the month in which the letter was written is unknown, Wheelock's daybook records boarding expenses for Sarah Simon ending in May or perhaps November 1769.³⁷ The last mention of Simon by name is a charge on 27 January 1770 for hiring a horse for a journey to Narragansett—possibly Sarah Simon's final journey home from Wheelock's school before he moved it from Connecticut.³⁸



37. The November 1769 notation in Wheelock's daybook mentions boarding expenses for unnamed "hired girls," in contrast to the "Indian girls" he refers to before this date, who were boarded by David Huntington and his family (Wheelock's daybook, Dartmouth College Archive).

38. Wheelock's ledger book has a note on 6 November "To the Journey of Mr Allen's Horse to Narraganset to carry Sarah Symons home July 12th" and immediately below that a record of payment for "cash and expenses of Peter & for her" on the same date. At the bottom of the same page, posted for 27 January is a notation for cash paid to a Jo Hunt "for 2 Journies of his Horse to Narraganset by Hez Calvin & Sarah Symons." It is unclear when these journeys actually took place, but after November 1769, although Wheelock continued to pay off outstanding debts associated with the "female school" for up to a year, he ceased recording new charges for it.