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3 • Natick

We have titled this section after the name of the first "praying town," Natick, established by Christian Indians and John Eliot some twenty miles west of Boston. The title acknowledges that no one traditional term fully represents the people included in this chapter. Unlike the groups named in the other sections of this anthology, Natick Indians have a specific colonial origin: The Natick Indian identity emerged in 1650, with the founding of Natick as the first praying town in New England. Although the inhabitants were drawn from the Massachusetts, the Pawtuckets, the Nipmuks, and other groups, they are most often associated with the Massachusetts. In time, the people who chose to live in Natick became a unified community, and the success of Natick as a missionary enterprise led nineteenth-century antiquarians and early ethnographers to designate Natick as the name of both a tribe and a language.

Although estimates of the numbers of "praying Indians" in New England in the seventeenth century range from sixty-four to eleven hundred, the cultural significance of these Christian Indians exceeded their numbers, since white colonists depended on them to help justify their existence to supporters in England. Missionaries could point to Natick as a tangible sign of their efforts to further Christ's kingdom on earth. For Native peoples of the region, Natick offered a strategy for survival, albeit perhaps one that required exceptional acculturation, as Eliot demanded that converts abandon most traditional lifeways.

Despite any accommodation to English demands, Natick was, as Jean O'Brien writes, "an Indian place." Founded on land occupied by John Speen and his family, Natick attracted inhabitants—Christian or not—because it was within their homelands, offered those whose immediate family had succumbed to war and disease the opportunity to associate with friends and other relations, and involved building a new Native community (albeit one within the "institutions of the imposed English colonial order)."[1] At least until the mid-eighteenth century—when residents were systematically dispossessed and dispersed—becoming a Natick Indian meant survival and persistence.

Because of their close association with Eliot's mission, Natick Indians were known from the beginning for their alphabetic literacy, and if Mohegan writ-

1. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, x.

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ers from the early colonial period are better known for their sermons, hymns, and letters, Natick Indians arguably made possible the alphabetic literacy of other Native peoples in the region. Natick Indians learned to read and write as a requirement of their Christian faith, but they used their literacy for their own purposes. Written texts range from marginalia in Bibles to wills, deeds, town and church records, and letters. Natick Indians became translators and printers, collaborating on the translation and publication of the first Bible ever printed in North America: *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God*. Although Eliot is listed as the author for most volumes in the "Indian library," he could not have produced its Massachusett-language primer, confession, logic primer, and religious tracts without the assistance of leading Christian Indians, most likely Natick residents. A few Natick Indians probably attended Harvard, where Christian Indians from Martha's Vineyard produced Latin compositions.

King Philip's War, from 1675 to 1676, was devastating for the Christian Indians of New England. Despite their decades of allegiance to the Bay Colony, Natick Indians became the objects of English suspicion and hatred, and they were subsequently rounded up with other converts and held on Deer Island in the Boston Harbor. After the war, Natick was reestablished, but within tighter colonial controls. Nevertheless, interest in print literacy continued, and a second edition of the Massachusett Bible was issued in 1685. Massachusett-language texts (although not necessarily written by Natick residents) would be produced well into the eighteenth century.

The continuing legacy of Natick includes the use of the Indian Bible as an invaluable resource for language revitalization. In particular, the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project has relied on, among other resources, the print legacy of the Natick Indians. In recent years the Praying Indian Tribe of Natick has worked to reestablish its community. In 2005 the group held a powwow—the first since the days of Eliot—and in 2006 the tribe held a Memorial Day ceremony to honor Christian Indians who fought in the Revolutionary War.

Suggested Reading

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Confession Narrative, 1656

Samuel Ponampam

This document is taken from John Eliot's *A Further Account of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England,*[2] one of a series of publications commonly known as the Eliot Tracts. These pamphlets, published in London, were designed to tout New England's Indian evangelism and solicit funds from English readers. Generally written in letter form by eye-witness observers, they recounted the attempt to convert Indians to Christianity. The letters were sent to the officials of the New England Company, an organization headed by prominent Englishmen and created to administer colonial missionary enterprises. Once in London, the letters would be edited into pamphlet form, usually with a preface or an afterword written by an interested observer in England rather than by a colonist. The pamphlets seem to have been popular reading. One bookseller listed *Tears of Repentance,* in which several other Indian confessions appeared, as one of his most "vendible" books.[3]

Ponampiam[4]

He was next called forth, and thus spake.

I Confess my sinnes before the Lord, and his people this day. While my Father lived, and I was young, I was at play, and my Father rebuked me, and said, we shall all die shortly.[5] [In private we asked him what ground or reason moved his Father so to speak? he answered, it was when the English were new come over, and he thinketh that his Father had heard that Mr *Wilson*[6] had spoken of the flood of *Noah,* how God drowned all the world for the sinnes of the people.] Then I was troubled, and thought sure what God saith, shall be, and not what man saith; but I quickly forgot this, and thought not of any good. That same Winter the pox came; all my kindred died, only my Mother and I lived, we came to *Cohannit,* by *Dorchester,* where I lived till I was a man, and married. All those daies I sinned, and prayed to all gods, and did as others did, there I

2. Eliot, *Further Account,* 54–57.

3. See London, *Most Vendible Books in England.*

4. Elsewhere in this tract, and more commonly, the spelling is Ponampam.

5. In an earlier confession in this tract, Ponampam reports that this incident took place when he was "about 8 years old" (Eliot, *Further Account,* 20).

6. The reference is to John Wilson, pastor at Boston Church.

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lived till the Minister came to teach us.[7] When I heard that they prayed, my heart desired it not. Sometime I prayed among them, and sometime I neglected it. I feared to pray because of the *Sachems*, therefore I put it off, for the fear of man. Afterward I considered in my heart, to pray to God, not because I loved the word, but for other reasons. I heard that Word, Mal. I. *From the rising of the Sun to the going down thereof, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering, for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.* Then I was troubled in my thoughts about running away, yet then I thought if I should go to another place, they must pray also, and therefore I cannot flie from praying to God, therefore I tarried, and when others prayed, I prayed with them, only I still feared man; after I heard the same word again, to perswade us to pray to God; and I did so, but not for Gods sake, only it was before man. I remembred the Sabbath, and I heard Mr *Mathews* also preach of it,[8] and therefore I thought I would keep the Sabbath, but still I feared man. Upon a Sabbath, they wished me to teach what I remembred, that the Minister had taught. I did so, and we had talk about what I said, and we fell out. Thereupon I went away, and left praying to God. I went into the Countrey, but I remembred my wife and children, and quickly returned, but not for Gods sake. Again the Minister preached on I *Chron.* 28.9. *And thou Solomon my son know the God of thy Fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind, for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imagination of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.* This greatly troubled me, because I had left praying to God, and I had deserved eternall wrath. Then I desired to pray, I begged mercy, but I knew not what to do, for my sins were many, my heart was full of originall sin, and my heart was often full of anger; but then I was angry at my self, for I found my heart quickly carried after sin. Afterward, through the free mercy of God, I heard that word, *He that penitently believeth in Christ shall be pardoned and saved*; then my heart did beg earnestly for pardon and mercy. I heard *Joh.* 15.[9] *Whatever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*; therefore my heart did now greatly beg for mercy in Christ and pardon. Afterward I heard *Mat.* 5. 28. *Who ever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery in his heart.* Then my heart was troubled, because many were my sins, in my eies, and heart, and actions too. My heart did love the having of two wives, and

7. The minister was John Eliot.

8. The reference is possibly to the Reverend Marmaduke Matthews, or it may be a misspelling that refers to Thomas Mayhew.

9. Here and later this refers to the book of John.

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other lusts of that kind:[10] Then Satan said to me, You are a great sinner, and God will not pardon you, therefore cast off praying and run away, it is a vain thing for you to pray. Here you want land, but in the Countrey there is land enough, and riches abundance, therefore pray no more. My heart did almost like it, but I heard that word, *Mat.* 4. *Satan tempted Christ, and shewed him the Kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof, and promised to give them to him, if he would worship him.* Then my heart said, that even thus Satan tempteth me to cast off praying to God; and therefore my heart desired to believe that word of Christ, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Then I prayed again, but still I was full of sin, and very weak I was, and I loved sin. Again I heard, *Joh.* 14. *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.* Then I fully saw that Christ only is our Redeemer, and Saviour, and I desire to believe in Christ; and my heart said, that nothing that I can do can save me, only Christ: therefore I beg for Christ, and a part in him. Then said my heart, I give my heart and my self to Christ, and my wife and children, let him do with us what he will. Then my mother and two children died, and my heart said, What Christ will do, so be it; I have given them to him, and I begged pardon and mercy, if God will please to pardon me a poor sinner, blessed be his name.

Temptation in the Wilderness
Samuel Ponampam's Confession

KRISTINA BROSS

"Literacy" in seventeenth-century New England had many meanings—to English colonists no less than to Native inhabitants. The ability to read did not necessarily imply the ability to write. Manuscript and print circulation posed various challenges to the colonial community as a whole, and oral traditions were bound up with print technologies just as surely for the Puritan taking notes at a Sunday meeting as for the "praying Indian" writing out copies of scripture in longhand to be read to new or prospective converts. It is in this nexus of reading, writing, thinking, and speaking that I locate the confession narrative of Samuel Ponampam.

Eliot, that central figure of colonial evangelism, began transcribing the con-

10. One of the cultural changes that English missionaries demanded of Christian converts was monogamous marriage.

This essay is adapted from Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons*, ch. 3.

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fessions of Christian converts in 1649 to persuade observers both at home and in London that his efforts were bearing fruit and that the praying Indians to whom he ministered were ready to gather together in their own church. This move would have had important religious and political effects. Since Bay Colony Christians were gathered in independent congregations, a praying Indian church would have unprecedented autonomy. Moreover, the Christian identity of some Algonquians was being used in legal arguments over land. Thus, there must have been a great deal of pressure on Eliot and others who were transcribing praying Indian confessions to represent their words as unimpeachably orthodox.

What would an "orthodox" relation of religious experiences have looked like in the 1640s and 1650s? Narratives of conversion as requisites for membership in Puritan churches have been documented as early as 1554, and by the 1630s publicly related narratives were an issue for serious debate in New England.[11] Notwithstanding any disagreement about the place and purpose of the confessions in Puritan churches, the contours of the genre can be discerned in the surviving narratives, and New England became a place where a successful confession opened doors to Christian communion—doors to social and religious belonging.

In general, the form of the confession, as Edmund Morgan has argued, had a flexible but clear "morphology," which included stages of intellectual understanding of God's word: "holy desperation" (which involves feeling one's sinfulness), grief for one's sin, and finally assurance of God's grace.[12] Charles Cohen has argued that praying Indian confessions—the earlier ones at least—lacked that final sense of assurance and were more concerned with the "legal" elements of conversion—Sabbath breaking, dress, deportment.[13] Here we are faced with the problems of mediation: If praying Indian confessions are distinct from those of other Puritans, can the differences be chalked up to individual agency, to a particular Christian Indian culture, or to Eliot's eccentricities as a minister, missionary, and translator? All three explanations most likely figure into any reading of praying Indian confessions. Nevertheless, even the transcribed and translated form of Ponampam's printed confession can be understood to reflect the dialogue between the convert and English missionaries. By attending to the context of the religious contact zone of the mid-seventeenth century and in particular by considering the impact of printed scriptures on the praying Indian community, we can better understand Ponampam's highly

11. See Caldwell, "Origins," in *Puritan Conversion Narrative*.
12. E. Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 90.
13. C. Cohen, "Conversion among Puritans and Amerindians," 233–56.

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mediated conversion narrative as an example of early Native rather than English colonial literature.

Mission literature records two attempts by Indian converts to form their own church. The first trial, in 1652, was conducted in the praying town of Natick and therefore required the several Puritan elders who came to hear testimony to travel. These logistics perhaps further emphasized the measure of praying Indian autonomy that an Indian church would create. Whether for this or other reasons, the trial failed. In 1659 a second trial of the "pillars" of an Indian church was held in the English town of Roxbury, Massachusetts. This time, the converts prevailed, and in 1660 the first praying Indian church was formed.

A close look at the several versions of each man's testimony—testimonies delivered ("rehearsed") more privately before church officials as well as testimonies given before a wider audience—reveals several common elements: references to family (both to the "heathen" status of parents and to the heartbreaking loss of children, spouses, friends, and kin to violence and disease) and, especially, the close and consistent use of scripture as inspiration for and proof of conversion. The latter element can help us place Ponampam's confession in a tradition of early Native literacy.

Praying Indians first encountered Christian scriptures in paraphrases used by Eliot in his proselytizing sermons, later in translations of scripture that circulated in manuscript form, and eventually in the first Bible printed in North America—a translation entitled *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God*. Eliot's initial scriptural paraphrases made a strong impression on those who heard them. In his confessions, Ponampam refers especially to Eliot's use of Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." This passage the missionary rendered as "From the rising of the Sun, to the going down of the same, thy name shall be great among the Indians, and in every place prayers shall be made to thy name, pure prayers, for thy name shall be great among the Indians."[14]

Ponampam found this scripture important, although probably not in the way that Eliot would have wished. In each of Ponampam's five recorded confessions, he refers to Malachi 1:11, and he paraphrases it in the first three.[15] Clearly,

14. Quoted in Winslow, *Glorious Progress*, 82.

15. See Eliot and Mayhew, "Tears of Repentance": *"That all from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, shall pray unto God"* (240); "But then I heard Gods free mercy in his word, call all to pray, *from the rising of the Sun to the going down thereof*" (241); "That al shal pray from the rising to the sitting Sun" (242).

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the verse held meaning for him. In the final transcribed confession, Ponampam reports that Eliot had preached on this text on more than one occasion: "I heard the same word *again*, to persuade us to pray to God; and I did so." Although Eliot believed the verse to be an effective evangelical tool, as Ponampam ponders the application of the scripture to his own soul he finds reason to doubt its truth on a personal level. Although he says that he was persuaded to pray, he registers the coercive elements of Eliot's translation. Ponampam's initial decision "to pray," it seems, meant that outwardly he would conform to Christian practices; however, he testifies in an earlier confession, "I considered whether I should pray, but I found not in my heart that *all* should pray." [16] Ponampam's accounts suggest that he took away from Eliot's preaching his message about the inevitability and totality of Indian Christianization (*all* shall pray) but that he doubted him. At best, Eliot's proclamation of universal conversion proved unsettling, as Ponampam reveals in his third recorded confession: Upon "considering of that word, that all shall pray, I was troubled." [17]

In Ponampam's last confession, we find an elaborate treatment of scripture and its application to his experiences. Whereas the bare bones of his later successful confessions are evident in the 1652 rehearsals, in the intervening years, he was able to flesh them out by attending Eliot's meetings and reading translated scripture. Scriptural literacy is even more important in the later confessions, and these accounts give us some sense of Ponampam as a reader and exegete. Ponampam was a lecturer in the praying Indian community, and the tracts record five versions of his confession (three from the first trial, recorded in *Tears of Repentance* [1653], and two from the final, successful trial, published in *A Further Account of the Gospel among the Indians in New England* [1660], the last of which is reproduced here). By the time Natick's leading Christians tried to form their own church in 1659, Eliot had translated a great deal of scripture. Although the Bible in full would not be printed until 1663, the New Testament was nearly complete (it was published in 1660). Ponampam seems to have received a copy in 1662, when he began to write his name and various dates in the margins, but as a lecturer at Natick, it is likely that he had access to manuscript materials. Moreover, Indian converts gave proof of their increased Christian understanding in sermons recorded in John Eliot's 1659 pamphlet *A Further Accompt of the Progesse of the Gospel*, published the same year that Ponampam's confession (along with those of his fellows) finally met with the approval of the English elders. (These confessions were published a year later in Eliot's *A Further Account of the Progress of the Gospel*.)

16. Quoted in ibid., 242, emphasis added.
17. Ibid., 242.

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Thus, it is not surprising that in both of his 1659 confessions, his version of Malachi 1:11 more closely conforms to the King James version than to Eliot's paraphrase. Ponampam explicitly identifies it by chapter and verse in the confession included here. As his quotation of Malachi comes closer to the standard English version, so too, in terms that are increasingly clear, do his accounts depict his troubled sense of Christianity and conversion as inescapable. In the first confession recorded in 1659, he reports his response to Eliot's sermon:

> My heart did not desire [to pray], but to go away to some other place. But remembring the word of God, that all shall pray to God. Then I did not desire to go away, but to pray to God. But if I pray afore the Sachems pray [that is, before Indian leaders convert], I fear they will kill me, and therefore I will not pray. But yet when others prayed, I prayed with them; and I thought, if I run away to other places, they will pray too, therefore I will pray here.[18]

The confession painfully describes not a spontaneous conversion upon hearing the Word, but the deliberations of a colonial subject with too few choices, in a world that Eliot's Malachi translation seems to fit all too well. Those who were not praying Indians literally had nowhere else to go—"from the rising to the setting Sun."

Ponampam is even more direct in his last confession: "Then I was troubled in my thoughts about running away, yet then I thought if I should go to another place, they must pray also, and therefore I cannot flie from praying to God, therefore I tarried." Of course, Ponampam is confessing a great sin—the desire, however swiftly quashed, to hide from God. He seems to be suppressing the desire because he foresees the fulfillment of Eliot's colonial prophecy that soon all Indians would "pray." Once again, his self-description reflects painful realities. Hemmed in by Christians, there is no escaping conversion.

Thus, we can see the influence of Eliot's paraphrase of Malachi on Ponampam's decision to remain a part of the praying Indian community. The verse convinces Ponampam to stay put, to remain with the Praying Indian community. However, it seems the verse had only qualified success as a tool of conversion—perhaps because Ponampam perceived Eliot's sermon as manipulative, if not at the time of delivery, then later when he had access to another version. Ponampam decided to pray "but not for Gods sake, only it was before man." In other words, he turned to prayer for political reasons, making an outward show "before man" in order to become a part of the praying Indian community. However effective the verse had been in convincing him that he could not flee from God, it was not instrumental to his heart-felt conversion:

18. Quoted in Eliot, *Further Account*, 20.

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He did not pray "for Gods sake." Moreover, Ponampam's words imply a connection between his understanding of the English settler's use of this text for the work of colonization and conversion, on one hand, and his recognition of the consequent political utility of "praying before man," on the other.

This perceptive account of the motivations for Eliot's use of Malachi 1:11 and of Ponampam's testimony as to its limited effect on him appears in the mission record only after the convert reportedly leaves off the scriptural paraphrase (which he must have learned from Eliot and which is described as accurately quoting from the King James Bible version of the verse). Even if initially Ponampam's encounter with scripture seems to have resulted in a confession of hypocrisy that ran counter to Eliot's many assurances of the Indians' true conversions, Eliot may have had good reason for describing Ponampam's "mistakes" in interpreting God's word. In other words, even as it seems to undercut Eliot's reputation as missionary, Ponampam's ability to work through his error and come to true faith certainly implies his readiness for full church membership. It is a conventional confession of error, and so the confession survives in the mission literature. Alternatively, however, we might read this statement as a direct challenge to Eliot's accounts of his missionary successes and a testament to Ponampam's discernment of the coercive tactics of colonization and conversion. His testimony comes close to casting doubt on the missionary's ability to separate sincere conversion from dissembling. The apparent convert saw through the tactics of evangelism and initially rejected them.

Indeed, it is not until Ponampam applies a different scripture of his own choosing to his desire for escape that he can report an experience of salvation. His testimony on the effects of Matthew 4 exemplifies the potential for Puritan Indians to illuminate their own experiences by reading the Bible and thus escape the control of colonial interpreters. Ponampam's confession describes a time when he considered moving to Connecticut to escape the rigors of the life of the converted Indians. While debating the move, he finds a verse to guide him: "This merciful word of God I heard, That *Satan led Christ into the wilderness to tempt him*, and so I thought hee would do me."[19] He elaborates his reading in another confession, imagining that Satan, speaking directly to him, says, "You are a great sinner, and God will not pardon you, therefore cast off praying and run away, it is a vain thing for you to pray. Here you want land, but in the Countrey there is land enough, and riches [in] abundance, therefore pray no more." This imagined offer strongly attracts Ponampam until he remembers a gospel lesson: "My heart did almost like it, but I heard that word, *Mat. 4. Satan tempted Christ, and shewed him the Kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof,*

19. Quoted in ibid., 22.

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and promised to give them to him, if he would worship him. Then my heart said, that even thus Satan tempteth me to cast off praying to God." Ponampam's confession of his temptation and his triumph over it must have been accepted by the English who heard him because it signaled to Puritan elders the successful repudiation of a traditional Indian lifestyle. Mission literature had impressed on its English readers that before colonization and evangelism Indians were wandering in the wilderness, both spiritually in their ignorance of Christ and literally as a nomadic people. Ponampam's application of Matthew 4 to his own temptations demonstrates his internalization of that assessment, and the elders took it as proof that they could now trust him with church estate.

Once again, however, Ponampam's interpretation also illustrates that he recognized how few viable choices were available to him in 1659. He sees that from a Puritan perspective the "Countrey" beyond English settlement is the site of the "wilderness" of sin. He is in the process of embracing Puritanism, so presumably he is prepared to accept that perspective. But there are reasons aside from the spiritual that also explain why Ponampam considers and then rejects removing to Connecticut. The "Kingdoms of the world" with which Satan tempts Ponampam are Indian lands. In offering him such "kingdoms," Satan, like so many English colonists, fails to register either kinship ties or hostilities among various Indian peoples. Thus, it is not surprising that this dialogue with Satan indicates Ponampam's separation from the English Puritans who seek to convert him while refusing to embrace him, who refuse his rights to Bay Colony land and tell him, "You are a great sinner and God will not pardon you," as they push him outside the bounds of New England to lands that are already claimed and occupied. In addition, the dialogue underscores his alienation from those who are not praying Indians and possibly from his own earlier life. He recognizes clearly that although the English audience might see Satan's alternative of running away to "the country" as a real possibility for "heathens," it is not a viable option for him. The "wild Indian" identity, assumed to be his by English magistrates particularly fearful of Indian apostasy, in no way belongs to Ponampam, who is settled in a praying town and beginning to embrace a Christian identity.

The most striking aspect of this passage in Ponampam's confession is how it seems to disturb the colonial mission's construction of the Christian Indian through "colonial mimicry."[20] New England Puritans demanded that praying Indians assume a Christian identity, but one that kept them perpetually in between—almost regenerate but never quite fully so—thereby necessitating continual infusions of money, goods, and missionaries from the metropolitan

20. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 86.

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center (whether London or Boston). As Ponampam inserts himself personally into scripture, however, he varies the pattern established by Puritan typology for praying Indians, reversing English colonial commonplaces and radically extending the message of Eliot's translation of Malachi 1:11. Note that in his confession, Ponampam creates his Puritan identity by casting his difficulties into recognizably Christian—and colonial—terms. In good Puritan fashion, he mimics the identity so central to the colonial articulations of New England, asserting his centrality within a Christian belief system that, when translated by English settlers into the colonial register, marginalizes him. In this way, Ponampam, in turn, translates Matthew 4 into a colonial text, but his version reflects his displacement, both physical and spiritual. Ponampam sees his encounters with Satan and his temptations as taking place not in the "wilds" outside but within the bounds of colonial charters.[21] In his translation of Matthew 4, English "civilization" becomes his personal "wilderness," in which he encounters Satan and risks temptation.

Ponampam's appropriation of Puritan tropes and genres disrupts the colonists' understanding of themselves as claiming either a vacant wilderness or the devil's territories. Ponampam so successfully adapts the conventions of the confession genre to his experiences that he and others like him threaten to displace the English elect as saintly colonists.[22] His decision not to run away seals his own claim to a physical place in the colonies, to lands set aside for praying towns, even as his repudiation of Satan seals his claim to a Christian identity. The radical extension of the disturbance suggested by Ponampam's confession will be the appropriation of prayer, psalm singing, and scripture to their own ends by Indians warring against English settlers during King Philip's War.[23]

To be sure, Ponampam's reading of Matthew 4 is itself not a "point of revolution" in which he overturns the colonial mythology so central to Puritan New England.[24] After all, as Robert Allen Warrior has argued, Canaanites, not Israelites, are the readier type for Indians displaced by English settlers.[25] Nevertheless, it is with such readings that "praying Indians" created Christian

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21. Robert Naeher, quoting James H. Merrell, argues that in the face of European colonial invasion, "native Americans came to view their world as 'every bit as new as that confronting transplanted Africans or Europeans' " ("Dialogue in the Wilderness," 363).

22. Bhabha characterizes such disruptions as undermining what the colonizer has assumed to be immutable. Ponampam's narrative may "so disturb the systematic (and systemic) construction of discriminatory knowledges"—such as the identification of the elect by public confession of faith—"that the cultural, once recognized as the medium of authority, becomes virtually unrecognizable" (*Location of Culture*, 115).

23. See Bross, "Satan's Captives," in *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons*.

24. The term "point of revolution" is from Cheyfitz, *Poetics of Imperialism*, 125.

25. Warrior, "Native American Perspective," 285.

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identities that served their needs and through which they performed a Native Christianity potentially unrecognizable to their English proselytizers.

For his part, Ponampam created a narrative that called into question those English observers who doubted the sincerity of the praying Indians and feared that their "unsettled" lifestyle might tempt them to "escape" English law and religion by running away to Connecticut or other "kingdoms of the world." In Ponampam's interpretation of Matthew 4, only a Satan would see such an escape as possible for a praying Indian. Through this use of the Indian Bible, Ponampam has fully "translated" himself into the gospel experience—or, rather, translated the gospel into his own experiences—and appropriated one of the most cherished English Puritan tropes: New England as Israel in an American wilderness. Indeed, he chooses the antitype itself for his own identity. Like Christ, he has encountered Satan in the wilderness, and like Christ he emerges triumphant.

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Natick Indian Petition, 1748

The Natick people's petition in defense of their fishing rights, housed in the Massachusetts Archives, is available on microfilm. The two-page manuscript document is composed of a preamble that addresses Massachusetts governor William Shirley, identification of the petitioning party, the body of the petition, and thirteen signatures or marks of Natick Indian men. The document itself thus conforms to the typical style of petitions submitted to the Massachusetts General Court and is formulaic in those respects. It appears that nine of the Indian men signed their own names to the document (their penmanship suggests a range of familiarity with English writing). The actions taken by the governing bodies are noted at the end of the document. Apart from several inkblots that make deciphering the content somewhat challenging, the eighteenth-century orthography is fairly legible. The petition is housed in the Massachusetts Archives Collection, Collection at Columbia Point, Boston (v. 31, pp. 574–75).

To his Excellency William Shirley Esqr. Capt. Genll. and Governor in Chief, in and over his Majesties Province, of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England, To his Majesties council, and House of Representatives in [the] Court assembled,[26]

The Petition of the Indian Inhabitants of the Parish of Natick in the County of Middlesex in Sd Province[27]

Humbly Shows

That although all possable care was taken by the Genll Court of Sd Province at the first, to give and grant unto us the great Priviledges of Fishing, by ordering our Sittuation so as that certain Ponds, Convenient and good for Fishing, are included within the Bounds of sd Parish, which Ponds have been of great advantage to us, and supplyed us with Fish of various Sorts, Especially with Ale-wives in plenty, whereby our families have been in a great measure

26. Original spelling and punctuation have been retained. Shirley was the colonial governor at the time the petition was filed.

27. Natick is located about sixteen miles west and south of Boston. Parish status carried particular political rights and responsibilities, such as levying taxes and sending representatives to the General Court.

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To his Excellency William Shirley Esqr. Capt. Genll. and Governour in chief in and over his Majesties Province of the Massachusetts Bay, in NewEngland, To his Majesties council, and House of Representatives in Genl. Court Assembled,

The Petition of the Indian Inhabitants of the Parish of Natick in the County of Middlesex in sd Province, " " " " " " Humbly Shews

That although all possable care was taken by the Genl. Court of sd Province at the first, to give and grant unto us the great Priviledges of Fishing, by ordering our Scituation So as that Certain Ponds, Convenient and good for Fishing, are included within the Bounds of sd Parish, which Ponds have been of great advantage to us, and Supplyed us with Fish of Various Sorts, Especially with Ale-wives in plenty, whereby our families have been in a great measure Supported, yet notwithstanding the Said Ponds are in the lands now in our possession, Ebenezer Feltch and others, English Inhabitants of sd Parish, (without our consent, and against our wills) have of late So far Trespassed upon our Said priviledges, as to take Possession of our best fishing ground, [illegible insertion] (being the neck of Cochittuate ponds, So called) and have Entered into articles of agreement, in writing, Provided a Saine &c: which we very much dislike and therefore apply our Selves to Your Excellency and this Honble. Court for relief, Praying that our sd Priviledges may not be taken away, by such persons or means That So we may Still have our old and Vallueable liberty of fishing continued to us

We therefore most humbly Pray that Your Excellency and this Honble. Court will by Your authority order the Said Ebenezer Feltch and others to Stop their proceeding and resign up to us, Said neck, and fishing ground, [and all our other fishing grounds] which if Your Excellency & and this Honble. Court Shall in Your great wisdom and goodness se meet to Grant, Your Petitioners as in Duty bound Shall Ever Pray &c " " " " " "

Natick March 28th 1748

Dea: Joseph his x mark Ephraim
Jacob Chalcom
Joseph Commecho
Isaac Ephriam
Daniel Thomas
Jeremiah Comecho
Peter Ephraim
Thomas his + mark Deagon
Eleazar Paugnit
Joseph Paugnit
Josiah his & mark Speen
Moses his mark Speen
Nathaniel Coochuck

Figure 3-1. Natick Indian petition, 1748. (Courtesy of the Massachusetts Archives.)

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In the House of Repres April. 22. 1748

Read and Ordered that the Petrs serve Ebenezer Felch with a copy of this Petn that he shew cause if any he hath on the first fryday of the next May Session why the Prayer thereof should not be granted. Sent up for concurrence

T Hutchinson Spkr

In Council April 23d 1748

Read & Concurred

J Willard Secry

Consented to

W Shirley

Petition of the [illegible] of Natick April 22. 1748

25.

Supported Yet, notwithstanding the said Ponds are in the lands now in our possession—Ebenezer Feltch[28] and others, English Inhabitants of Sd Parish, (without our consent, and against our wills) have of late so far Trespassed upon our Said priviledges, as to take Possession of our best fishing ground, where we sett our weirs[29] (being the neck of Cochittuate ponds, so called) and have Entered into articles of agreement, in writing, Provided a Saine,[30] &c: which we very much dislike—and therefore apply our selves to Your Excellency and this Honrd Court for relief, Praying that our Sd Priviledges may not be taken away, by such persons or means—That so we may still have our old and valluable liberty of fishing continued to us We therefore most humbly Pray that Your Excellency and this Honrd Court will by Your authority order the said Ebenezer Feltch and others to stop their proceeding and resign up to us, said neck, and Fishing grounds, and all our other Fishing grounds which if your Excellency & and this Honrd Court Shall in Your great wisdom and goodness Se meet to Grant Your Petitioners as in Duty Bound Shall Ever Pray &c.

Natick March 28th 1748

Deac Joseph Ephraim [his mark][31]
Jacob Chalcom
Joseph Commecho
Isaac Ephraim
Daniel Thomas
Jeremiah Comacho
Peter Ephraim
Thomas Peagon [his mark]
Eleazar Pognit
Joseph Pogenit
Josiah Speen [his mark]
Moses Seen[32] [his mark]
Nathaniel Coochuck

28. Ebenezer Felch arrived in Natick by 1744 at the latest and served for nineteen years as surveyor and sometimes clerk for the Indian proprietors of the town. The fact that just four years prior to this petition he had petitioned the General Court to defend Indian rights to the community wood supply suggests the complexity of relationships in Natick. (See O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 169–71.)

29. Weirs are fish traps commonly used by the Indians in New England.

30. The reference is to a large fishing net.

31. Unless otherwise indicated, all names were signed.

32. This is most likely *Speen* rather than *Seen*.

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In the House of Reprs April.22.1748
Read and Ordered that the Ptrs serve Ebenezer Felch with a copy of this Petn that he shew cause if any he hath on the first fryday of the next May Session why the Prayer thereof should not be granted. Sent up for concurrence
T Hutchinson [____][33]
In Council April 23rd 1748
Read & Concured
J Willard [____][34]
Consented to
WShirley

"Our Old and Valluable Liberty"

A Natick Indian Petition in Defense of Their Fishing Rights, 1748

JEAN M. O'BRIEN

In 1748 thirteen Natick Indian men endorsed a brief yet revealing petition to the Massachusetts General Court. Created nearly one hundred years before, this most "successful" of "praying towns" became a hotly contested terrain that pitted Indians against aggressive English people who had become their neighbors. All but exclusively an Indian place until the middle decades of the eighteenth century, Natick at midcentury included ever more English people as Indian landowners sold off portions of their individually owned land in order to raise capital to make improvements on their farms, put money at interest to earn a livelihood, or (increasingly) discharge debts that left them to the mercy of English legal entanglements. The changing demographic and geographic situation of Natick both represented particular Indian visions for securing a place in the social order of English colonialism and produced the conditions whereby Indian struggles for autonomy within that order would be undermined in the community. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Indian power within the town would be challenged, as English people worked aggressively to control the land base, the resources, and the political and religious institutions of the town.[35]

33. This indicates an illegible abbreviation for *speaker* (speaker of the House of Representatives).
34. This indicates an illegible abbreviation for *secretary*.
35. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*.

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Petitions to the Massachusetts General Court are an important resource for understanding Indian responses to English colonialism in Natick and other Indian communities. In Massachusetts, petitions to the court constituted a standard means of pleading a cause to the colonial governing body. Indian access to this process can be understood as part of the larger assimilation project, which sought to impose English ways on Indians brought within the colonial social order as "friend Indians."[36] The Massachusetts Archives includes hundreds of petitions written by, for, or on behalf of Indian people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Natick petitions are conspicuous in this important body of evidence. Most of the Natick petitions, especially petitions from the eighteenth century, concern Indian land. These land petitions were produced in compliance with colonial regulations that governed Indian land transactions, which required General Court approval for any land transaction that involved Indian sellers.[37] Adopted, ostensibly, to provide protection for Indians from the fraudulent activities of the English, such bureaucratic mechanisms preserved the notion of propriety and legality in Indian dispossession. Because the bureaucratic process required Indians to provide reasons for selling their land, court records also often richly reveal the dramatic cultural transformations that Indians underwent as they resisted the physical and cultural encroachment of English colonialism. Land petitions frequently provide graphic descriptions of Indian lifeways—including economic pursuits, material culture, religious and cultural choices, and demographic situations.

How should we read Indian petitions produced in colonial Massachusetts? What do we make of Indian uses of literacy in English in an imposed bureaucracy that sought to secure the English social order? What can we know about Indian uses of English forms of writing given the surviving record?[38]

On the most general level, Indian participation in the English bureaucracy plots power relationships as they had been transformed in the colonial context. Crudely speaking, the very fact of Indian participation tells us whose regulations would govern relationships between Indian and English people. Whose language becomes the official language of diplomacy and governance reveals much about who holds the balance of power. One might interpret Indian petitions as evidence that they had succumbed to the colonial order and placidly accepted the imposition of the institutions that upheld that colonial order.

There is, however, more to the story than that. From a different angle, Indian

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36. Ibid., 65–90.

37. Ibid., 71.

38. On Indian literacy in New England, see Goddard and Bragdon, *Native Writings in Massachusett*; L. Murray, "'Pray Sir, Consider a Little,'" 15–41; Nelson, "'(I Speak Like a Fool),'" 42–65; and Wyss, *Writing Indians*.

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participation in the colonial bureaucracy can be viewed as proactive: Indians selectively adopted particular aspects of English culture in order to resist their complete effacement by an aggressive and expansive English presence. This Indian petition offers a rich and subtle example of Indian resistance within the potentially suffocating constraints of English colonialism.

The document is written in English, and it appears that whoever took down the text also wrote Deacon Joseph Ephraim's name, the first to appear under the main body of the text. Ephraim's mark, which he left on the document in place of a signature, is identical to those that he left on other documents—it somewhat resembles a capital "E" slanted diagonally between his first and last names.[39] Three other Indians also made marks within their names, but the handwriting differs from that of the body of the text. Nine of the thirteen petitioners signed their own names to the document, which demonstrates that they had at least some competence in writing in English and suggests that at least some could read enough to understand and thus authorize the content of the petition. It is impossible to know definitively who wrote the document; nowhere is the author identified. A cursory glance strongly suggests, however, that none of the Indian signatories was the writer, since their signatures do not resemble the handwriting of the main body. The additions to the document tell us that the petition was read in the House of Representatives, whose members decided a course of action to which the council and then the governor subsequently consented.

In some of these respects, the 1748 petition resembled other petitions emanating from Natick. They are all penned in English, most likely by a number of different English scribes. The petitions include a smattering of signatures by Indians, but in contrast to this particular petition, the overwhelming majority left their marks on the documents. During the course of the eighteenth century, at least twenty-two Natick Indians attached their signatures to petitions to the General Court; the number of signatures on this petition would suggest a higher degree of familiarity with writing than the full set of petitions reveals. Of the wider group of signatories, only two, one of whom is represented on this document, signed petitions with handwriting that even vaguely resembled the signatures they attached to them.[40] In reading these documents, it is crucial

39. See, for example, Massachusetts Archives Collection, v. 31, p. 136, 1726 (hereafter cited as MA) and MA v. 31, p. 574, 1748.

40. I have standardized the spellings of Indian names. Examples of signatures are Jacob Chalcom, Joseph Comecho, Isaac Ephraim, Daniel Thomas, Jeremiah Comecho, Eleazar Paugenit, Joseph Paugenit, and Nathaniel Coochuck (MA v. 31, p. 574, 1748); Daniel Speen, Samuel Paugenit, and Uriah Coochuck (MA v. 32, p. 90, 1750); Samuel Lawrence (MA v. 32, p. 607, 1755); Benjamin Tray (MA v. 31, p. 136, 1726); John Ephraim (MA v. 31, p. 375, 1742); Jeffrey Henry (MA v. 31, p. 389, 1741); William Thomas (MA v. 31, p. 459, 1743); Ebenezer Ephraim (MA v. 31, p. 488, 1743/4);

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to know that they are heavily mediated in these ways. Nevertheless, they reveal much about the experiences of Indian people in New England.

In its structure and form, this petition—and many other petitions—might support the notion that Indians and their Indianness had been eclipsed. Written in English, mostly likely by an Englishman, the petition also follows the conventions of address of individuals of low status addressing a governing body in a rigidly hierarchical society. It begins with formulaic language of address, acknowledging the official structure of power in the colony and summoning the attention of the colonial governor, William Shirley, and the two houses of the legislature that would hear and act on the petition. The "Indian Inhabitants" situate themselves as residents in a place defined in English terms: the "Parish" of Natick in the "County of Middlesex in Sd Province." The salutation indicates their technical position of submission to a colonial regime. Their petition "Humbly Shows" their reasons for addressing the court, and it ends similarly, by humbly praying that the court take action to address their grievance against English encroachment on their rights in Natick. The final phrases of the text employ the standard language of submission and compliance, leaving determination of the dispute to "your Excellency & and this Honrd Court [who] Shall in Your great wisdom and goodness Se meet to Grant Your Petitioners as in Duty Bound Shall Ever Pray &c."

Evidence from the body of the petition might also be used to support the notion of Indian submission. At the beginning, the petitioners point out that the General Court had purposely situated Natick's land to Indians "to give and grant unto us the great Priviledges of Fishing" by including "certain Ponds, Convenient and good for Fishing . . . within the Bounds of sd Parish." This construction semantically locates the power to regulate land possession with the English governing body—it is the court that grants Indians the "priviledges of Fishing" and the possession of the ponds where Indian families take the fish that "in a great measure" support them. Furthermore, by the very act of petitioning, the defenders of Natick's fishing rights signal acceptance of the court as the final arbitrator in their dispute.

A closer look, however, yields a more complex story. Further into the body of the text, the petitioners describe their fishing rights as an "old and valluable liberty" rather than a gift in the form of a specific grant from the General Court. Although such language does not directly controvert the notion that Indian fishing rights originated with the English, it might be read as an assertion of

Benjamin Wiser (MA v. 31, p. 557, 1747/8); Peter Brand (MA v. 32, p. 312, 1752); Samuel Abraham (MA v. 32, p. 243, 1753); and Cesar Ferrit (MA v. 32, p. 429, 1753). Those whose signatures resembled the body of the text somewhat are Nathaniel Coochuck (MA v. 31, p. 471, 1743) and Benjamin Wiser (MA v. 31, p. 557, 1747/8, and MA v. 33, p. 55, 1758).

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Aboriginal rights that long antedated the arrival of the English. This subtle turn of phrase can be interpreted as an affirmation of Indian precedence as the grounds for Indian complaints against encroaching English people, whose access to Indian fishing grounds could hardly be regarded as an "old and valluable liberty." Yet by foregrounding the English "grant" of these grounds and rights, they announced the security of those rights within the colonial order.

The continuation of earlier Indian ways of belonging on the land is also visible in the petition, offering further evidence of Indian resistance against the English regime. The fact that Indian families "have been in a great measure Supported" by the "Fish of various Sorts" suggests the persistence of an Indian economy quite different from the English inland agricultural economy. English inhabitants might have included fishing as a marginal activity, but in no English communities other than ports and fishing villages would fishing be a principal economic focus. Also important is the fact that the petitioners portray their fishing rights as collective: The English are trespassers on "our Said priviledges, as to take Possession of our best fishing ground." They call on the court to protect their "old and valluable liberty of fishing" by forcing the English to give up their pretentious seizure of "said neck, and Fishing grounds, and all our other Fishing grounds."

The very fact of the petition's existence underscores Indian resistance. In spite of the formulaic language of submission, the angry and resilient tone of the complaint is unmistakably present in the text. The petitioners stridently argue that in spite of the protections of their rights put in place by the commonwealth, "Ebenezer Feltch and others . . . (without our consent, and against our wills)" have trespassed on their fishing grounds at the neck of Cochituate Pond. The culprits in this injustice are boldly flouting Indian rights in Natick. They "have of late so far Trespassed upon our Said priviledges, as to take Possession of our best fishing ground . . . and have Entered into articles of agreement, in writing, Provided a Saine, &c: which we very much dislike." The petitioners cast the behavior of the trespassers as audacious. They attempt to bolster their physical seizure of Indian fishing grounds through the use of literacy, in the form of "articles of agreement" that presumably authorize their seizure.

This literary self-authorization is countered, however, by the Indian petitioners' own knowledge of the power of writing. Even though, in the technical sense, the document was most likely produced by an Englishman, its explicit intent is to use the institutions of English colonialism to defend Indian rights. We can only speculate on the scribe's motives: Was it a local person knowledgeable about political matters, who earned a few shillings for his work, or one of the government-appointed guardians of the Indians honestly discharging

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his responsibilities, or perhaps a scheming neighbor who envisioned his own enrichment somehow resulting from his advocacy of the petitioners in this case? We simply do not know. Although we probably cannot know the precise context that produced the text, however, we can certainly recognize that the Indian petitioners understood the power of the written word as a weapon in a continuing legacy of Indian resistance in New England.

Who were these savvy petitioners? By gathering information from other Massachusetts General Court petitions; town, church, and vital records; land transactions; and other governmental records, we can learn a great deal. The petitioners were all landowners in Natick, and all but two were either descended from or original proprietors or freeholders when an English-style land system was initiated in the town in 1719. The other two had married into proprietary families. At least half actively engaged in the market economy, buying and selling land in order to establish English-style farms. Seven of the thirteen had been baptized, and four had attained full communion in the congregational church. Joseph Ephraim, who was born around the time of King Philip's War, in 1675, had been selected as a deacon in the church and raised a large family in Natick. Peter and Isaac, two of the signatories, were his sons, and another, Jeremiah Comecho, had married his daughter Sarah. The Speens were descendants of a founding family whose members relinquished their traditional ownership of Natick's lands for the founding of the community in 1650. Other kin ties connected the signatories with one another and with many other families.[41] In sum, the petitioners represented important Natick families. Significantly, even while their own lives embraced many English cultural, religious, social, and economic practices, they wrote to defend communal fishing rights for Indian people as central to the sustenance of Natick.

Taken as a whole, the text resembles what Laura Murray found in her analysis of the correspondence of the Indians David Fowler and Hezekiah Calvin with Eleazar Wheelock, their teacher and erstwhile benefactor. Their posture was an "elaborate combination of deference and defiance that is determined by the specific and immediate conditions of their writing as well as by the overall

41. Original Indian Record Book (hereafter cited as OIRB), Morse Institute Public Library, Natick, Mass. (proprietors and freeholders); Thomas W. Baldwin, comp., *Vital Records of Natick, Massachusetts to the Year 1850* (hereafter cited as *NVR*) (Jacob Chalcom married Leah Thomas, daughter of proprietor Solomon Thomas; Nathaniel Coochuck married Mary Tabumso, descendant of proprietor Hannah Tabumsug); O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 151–62 (market economy); Peabody and Badger Records, Church of Natick, 1725–1795, Typescript copy, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass. (baptisms/church membership); *NVR* (Joseph Ephraim's family); MA v. 32, p. 614, 1755 (Joseph Ephraim's age); OIRB (Speen grant); O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 126–67 (kinship in the community).

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lines of their relationship with Wheelock."[42] Like Wheelock's students, Natick Indians balanced protest with prostration in defending their rights within the colonial relationship. Struggling within a colonial regime that threatened to overwhelm them, New England Indians in Natick and elsewhere resisted the aggressions of their neighbors by understanding and using the power of literacy in English and using English forms of deference to push for individual and collective Indian rights.

What came of the dispute? The official record is mute. Neither the Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts Council nor the Journals of the House of Representatives reported a response from Felch. If we take the summons for Felch to explain why the petition of the Indian inhabitants of Natick should not be granted at face value in combination with Felch's apparent failure to answer, then we must conclude that the Indians prevailed in the dispute. Did Felch understand that he had no grounds to counter the petitioners' accusations? Did he decide that the Indians were powerless to stop the audacious violation of their property rights even with the weight of the colonial establishment stacked against him? We cannot know. The proprietors' records of Natick do, however, allow us to flesh out this story of Indian fishing rights into the 1760s. The Indian proprietors of Natick had retained collective ownership of much of the land on the edges of Cochituate Pond even as they had, by that time, divided into individual ownership nearly every acre in Natick. This fact suggests that the Indians continued to regard their "old and valluable" fishing rights as a communal good that was not subject to ideas of individual ownership and that they could best protect this resource by the continuation of collective ownership. In 1763, however, Felch finally got his way. When the Indian proprietors made a final division of their few remaining common lands, they gave Felch 10.25 acres bordering on Cochituate Pond "for [his] nineteen years Service as their Survyer."[43]

42. L. Murray, "'Pray, Sir, Consider a Little,'" 32.
43. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees*, 168–71.

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