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978-0-521-56172-3 - Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick,  
Massachusetts, 1650-1790

Jean M. O'Brien

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According to Jean O'Brien, Indians did not simply disappear from colonial Natick, Massachusetts, as the English extended their domination. Rather, the Indians creatively resisted colonialism, defended their lands, and rebuilt kin networks and community through the strategic use of English cultural practices and institutions. In the late eighteenth century, Natick Indians experienced a process of "dispossession by degrees" that rendered them invisible within the larger context of the colonial social order, and enabled the construction of the myth of Indian extinction.

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# Dispossession by degrees

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For my parents, Gene and Mae O'Brien,  
and our extended family

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## Acknowledgments

I have accumulated many debts in completing this book, and am solely responsible for any errors that may remain in it. It grew out of my first seminar with Ted Cook in colonial American social history, a field then importantly shaped by community studies, at the University of Chicago. When settling on a research topic I thought: why not study an Indian community? Natick, so prominent in the literature as a missionary “experiment,” seemed a logical choice. When the time came to choose a dissertation topic, I decided to continue my investigation beyond King Philip’s War because there seemed to be so little existing literature that did so. As I struggled to pull together materials that could tell Natick’s story, I came to understand why it might be the case that its post-1676 history had been left largely untold. At Chicago, Kathy Conzen and Ray Fogelson joined Ted Cook on my dissertation committee, and generously encouraged my work. I am deeply grateful to all three of my mentors, who at Chicago and ever since have been supportive, generous, and unstintingly helpful.

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Crafting this book according to varying rhythms over the past fourteen years evoked strong resonance with me because, as I came to learn, Natick's history paralleled crucial aspects of my own family's history. In researching and writing this book, I have had frequent occasion to remember my maternal grandmother, Caroline Edna Wright Tonneson, who understood my halting Ojibwe when I came home to visit from college but chose monolingual English for her children. My grandmother and her extended family, very few of whom survived to perpetuate their lineages, witnessed the implementation of the federal government's allotment and assimilation policies first-hand. Like most Ojibwe people on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, they lost all of their land.