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978-0-521-84280-8 - Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600–1871

David J. Silverman

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Faith and Boundaries

It was indeed possible for Indians and Europeans to live together peacefully in early America and for Indians to survive as distinct communities. *Faith and Boundaries* uses the story of Martha's Vineyard Wampanoags to examine how. On an island marked by centralized English authority, missionary commitment, and an Indian majority, the Wampanoags' adaptation to English culture, especially Christianity, checked violence while safeguarding their land, community, and, ironically, even customs. Yet the colonists' exploitation of Indian land and labor exposed the limits of Christian fellowship and thus hardened racial division. The Wampanoags learned about race through this rising bar of civilization – every time they met demands to reform, colonists moved the bar higher until it rested on biological difference. Under the right circumstances, like those on Martha's Vineyard, religion could bridge the wide difference between the peoples of early America, but its transcendent power was limited by the divisiveness of race.

David J. Silverman is Associate Professor of History at the George Washington University. His several articles include “Indians, Missionaries, and Religious Translation,” which won the Lester J. Cappon award for best essay of 2005 in the *William and Mary Quarterly*. He completed this book as a Mellon Post-Dissertation Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society.

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*Colonists, Christianity, and Community among
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George Washington University



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To Linda, more than ever, with love

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Abbreviations

AAS	American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
AICRJ	<i>American Indian Culture and Research Journal</i>
BPL	Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston, Mass.
<i>Conquests and Triumphs</i>	Matthew Mayhew, <i>The Conquests and Triumphs of Grace: Being a Brief Narrative of the Success which the Gospel hath had among the Indians of Martha's Vineyard (and the Places adjacent) in New-England</i> (London, 1695).
Cotton Journal	"The Missionary Journal of John Cotton Jr., 1666–1678," Len Travers, ed., <i>Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society</i> 109 (1998), 52–101.
CPGNE	Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, Records, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Mass.
DCCF	Dukes County Court Files, Office of the Clerk of Courts, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
DCCP	Dukes County Court of Common Pleas, Records, Office of the Clerk of Courts, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
DCCR	Dukes County Court Records, Office of the Clerk of Courts, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
DCD	Dukes County Deeds, Dukes County Registry of Deeds, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
DCGSP	Dukes County General Sessions of the Peace, Records, Office of the Clerk of Courts, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.

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Abbreviations

- DCP Dukes County Probate, Records, Dukes County Registry of Probate, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
- Earle Report John Milton Earle, *Report to the Governor and Council, Concerning the Indians of the Commonwealth, Under the Act of April 6, 1859*, Senate Document No. 96 (Boston, 1861).
- Edgartown Records Edgartown Town Records, Edgartown Town Hall, Office of the Town Clerk, Edgartown, Mass.
- FNPR Farm Neck Proprietors' Records, 2 vols., Office of the Clerk of Courts, Dukes County Courthouse, Edgartown, Mass.
- Force Papers Dukes County, Mass., Records, MS 79–1773, 1712–1812, 173 items. Part of the collection of Peter Force Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- Gay Head Report* Richard L. Pease, *Report of the Commissioner Appointed to Complete the Examination and Determination of All Questions of Title to Land, and of All Boundary Lines between the Individual Owners, at Gay Head, on the Island of Martha's Vineyard* (Boston, 1871).
- GIP Guardians of Indian Plantations, Records, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.
- Glorious Progress* Edward Winslow, *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England* (London, 1649), Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., 4 (1834), 69–98.
- Good News* Edward Winslow, *Good News from New England: or a true Relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation of Plymouth in New England*, in Edward Arber, ed., *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1616–1623, A.D., as Told by Themselves, Their Friends, and Their Enemies* (1624; London, 1897), 509–98
- Hawley Journal Gideon Hawley Letters and Journal, 4 vols., 1753–1806, Congregational Library, Boston, Mass.
- “Historical Collections” Daniel Gookin, “Historical Collections of the Indians in New England,” Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 1st ser., 1 (1792), 141–227.
- “Indian Visitation” Grindal Rawson and Samuel Danforth, “Account of an Indian Visitation, A.D. 1698,” Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 1st ser., 10 (1809), 129–34.

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<i>Indian Converts</i>	Experience Mayhew, <i>Indian Converts: Or, Some Account of the Lives and Speeches of a Considerable Number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard</i> (London, 1727).
JAH	<i>Journal of American History</i>
JER	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
JMEP	John Milton Earle, Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
<i>Light Appearing</i>	Henry Whitfield, <i>The Light appearing more and more towards the perfect Day. Or, a farther Discovery of the present state of the Indians in New-England, Concerning the Progresse of the Gospel amongst them</i> (London, 1651), Massachusetts Historical Society, <i>Collections</i> , 3d ser., 4 (1834), 101–47.
<i>Mass. Acts and Resolves</i>	<i>The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay</i> , 21 vols. (Boston, 1869–1922).
Mass. Archives	Massachusetts Archives Series, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.
MHSC	Massachusetts Historical Society, <i>Collections</i>
<i>Mass. House Journals</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1715–1766</i> , 43 vols. (Boston, 1919–73).
Mass. House Report No. 68	D. L. Child, H. Stebbins, and D. Fellows Jr., <i>Report on the Condition of the Native Indians and Descendants of Indians, in This Commonwealth</i> , Massachusetts House Report No. 68 (Boston, 1827).
Mayhew Papers	Mayhew Papers (1648–1774), Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, Boston, Mass.
NBFPL	New Bedford Free Public Library, Special Collections, New Bedford, Mass.
NCD	Nantucket County Deeds, Registry of Deeds, Town and County Building, Nantucket, Mass.
NCR	Nantucket County, Records, Registry of Deeds, Town and County Building, Nantucket, Mass.
<i>Native Writings</i>	Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon, eds., <i>Native Writings in Massachusetts</i> , 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1988).
NE Co. MSS	New England Company, Records, Guildhall Library, Corporation of London.
NEHGR	<i>New England Historic Genealogical Register</i>
NEQ	<i>New England Quarterly</i>

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- PLP Passed Legislation Packets, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.
- Plymouth Records* Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth*, 12 vols. (Boston, 1855).
- Report of the Commissioners* F. W. Bird, Whiting Griswold, and Cyrus Weekes, *Report of the Commissioners Relating to the Condition of the Indians*, Massachusetts House Document No. 46 (Boston, 1849).
- RSCJ Records of the Superior Court of Judicature, 1686–1700, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.
- Senate Doc. No. 14 *Report of the Committee of the Legislature of 1869, on the Condition of the Gay Head Indians*, Senate Doc. No. 14 (Boston, 1870).
- Some Account of those English Ministers* Thomas Prince, *Some Account of those English Ministers who have Successfully Presided Over the Work of Gospelizing to the Indians on Martha's Vineyard and the Adjacent Islands* (London, 1727), appendix to Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts*.
- Some Correspondence* John W. Ford, ed., *Some Correspondence between the Governors and Treasurers of the New England Company in London and the Commissioners of the United Colonies in America, the Missionaries and Others between the Years 1657 and 1712* (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1896).
- SPGNA Society for Propagating the Gospel in North America, Papers, Philip's Library of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.
- Strength Out of Weaknesse* Henry Whitfield, *Strength Out of Weaknesse; Or, a Glorious Manifestation of the further Progresse of the Gospel among the Indians in New England* (London, 1652), Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., 4 (1834), 149–96.
- Suffolk Files Suffolk Files, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.
- Tears of Repentance* John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew Jr., *Tears of Repentance: Or, a Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians in New England* (London, 1653). Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, 3d ser., 4 (1834), 197–260.
- ULRIA Unpassed Legislation Relating to Indian Affairs, Massachusetts State Archives, Boston, Mass.

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WMQ
ZHP

William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser.
Zachariah Howwoswee Papers, MS America, John
Carter Brown Library at Brown University,
Providence, R.I.

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Preface

Do Good Walls Make Good Neighbors?

The inspiration for this study came, innocently enough, with a walk along a stone wall. Linda, my fiancé (now my wife), and I were on a late May vacation after I had finished my first year of graduate school. Short of money and in desperate need of some time outside, we were lucky to have a week at a ramshackle timeshare on the island of Martha's Vineyard, just off Cape Cod in Massachusetts. I wanted this trip to be a diversion from my studies of early America, and when the island greeted us with glorious sun and lilac-perfumed sea air I knew it would not disappoint. No sooner had we set down our bags than we ventured out for a hike, unwilling to watch the day pass. An arbitrarily chosen trail led us winding through scrub pine and oak trees, past the weed-choked foundations of a colonial-era farmstead, and up a gradual peak, until it ended at a boulder split by a deep diagonal crack sitting atop a wooded hill. This landmark, our tourist literature explained, was called Waskosim's Rock and figured prominently in the oral tradition of the island's Indians, a group that I mistakenly assumed – as I soon discovered much to my embarrassment – had disappeared several generations ago, leaving whatever stories they once told about this monument to conjecture now.

A classic New England stone wall extending from the boulder into the forest added a poetic element to the scene. Although it was not until the nineteenth century that stone walls became a common feature of the New England landscape, in the popular imagination they symbolize the pluck, piety, and permanence of the region's colonial stock, and the supposedly inevitable demise of the Natives. The story goes that Puritans sailed to America's "howling wilderness" resolved to fulfill God's dictate in Genesis 1:28 to subdue the land, only to discover that New England's craggy ground made their new Israel not unlike the desert of old. No matter: a Protestant work ethic of legendary proportions impelled them to hitch up their oxen, plow the earth, and transform overturned rocks into sturdy farm walls. The stones, once barriers to cultivation, now demarcated private property and hemmed in domestic animals, clear signs of civilized living. Faced with

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Preface

generations of such stubborn rivals, Indians lost one tract of territory after another, until finally their unwillingness to discard beloved hunting ways for the dominant order led them either to put up a futile resistance or fade into the western woods. The Natives' destiny, in other words, was death or migration, a subtly sinister but pervasive myth that makes Indians who have adapted to their times invisible to the broader public or somehow inauthentic. They were not supposed to have a place in a land of stone walls.

My naiveté came to an abrupt end that afternoon. With the hilltop juncture of Indian and English symbols piquing my imagination, at first opportunity I asked a "Vineyarder" about the place, sparking a conversation that went something like this: "Oh, the wall," he answered, "that's the Middle Line." "The Middle Line?" "That's right. It divided whites and Indians in the old days. We built half," he said, referring to the colonists, "they," the Indians, "built the other. Before that, the rock divided two tribes." "You know," he digressed, "we never had an Indian war here on the island." Because this was as much news to me as the Middle Line, I followed up, "well, what happened to the Indians?" Clearly I was from the mainland, or as some Vineyarders call it, America. The man leaned forward in his chair, pointed down the road, and explained matter-of-factly, "most of them live at Gay Head." I was incredulous: "Now?" "Sure enough," he responded, trying not to look bemused, "and if you're interested in Indians, down the way follow the signs to Christiantown. That's where the Mayhews used to preach to them."

I had read a bit about the Mayhews from scholars of Christian missions, most of whom use the tolerant methods of this proselytizing Puritan family as a counterpoint to the more demanding "civilizing" program of a Boston-area evangelical named John Eliot. Curious, we followed the man's directions, parked, and then followed a narrow path leading to an overgrown graveyard of unmarked headstones and a replica of a tiny eighteenth-century meeting-house. According to a plaque, these were the places of rest and worship for some of the Mayhews' "praying Indians," who, the surroundings implied, had found little refuge in their Christianity. However, another nearby sign crushed that old chestnut too, for *currently* maintaining the site was the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah (or Gay Head). As it turned out, they boasted the oldest Protestant Indian congregation in continuous existence in North America.

Vacation or not, my mind was spinning: here, away from the centers of colonial population, power, and trade, were Indians who built stone walls, worshipped Jesus, and buried one another in marked graves; Natives and newcomers who erected boundaries rather than breastworks to address their differences; people who spoke about historical populations as "we" and "they"; a New England Indian community that refused to vanish. This was something special. So on the first rainy day I poked around the island's town and county archives and the local historical society. In these places I

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found a treasure trove of documents relating to and occasionally penned by Indians, sometimes in their own Wampanoag language. Many of these gems lay covered in dust, bound in twine, or in a few cases, hidden, having fallen untold years ago behind office filing cabinets. Historians of American Indians commonly bemoan the lack of source materials. Yet contained within the unassuming walls of Martha's Vineyard's institutions were piles of records that shed light on a supposedly inaccessible population. A story that *should* be told *could* be told.

This book is my attempt to explain the uneasy, often troubling, yet permanent Wampanoag–English coexistence on Martha's Vineyard, and to determine why some Wampanoag communities survived the colonial period and beyond, while others did not. Islands “are a catalogue of quirks and superlatives,” one scholar has observed, which makes the relevance of their histories suspect.¹ Yet exceptions to the pattern of total Indian dispossession and removal in the face of Anglo-American expansion need to be studied in order to critique the widespread assumption that this outcome was inevitable. Telling isolated stories of a shared America provides a better understanding of lost opportunities in other times and places. As I learned from my encounter with an aging stone wall, tales from unexpected sources can breathe new life into places we think we already know.

Crafting a book is similar to building a stone wall. One must survey the historiographical ground one wants to enclose, dig up the source materials, and then carefully piece them together. Over the last several years, the gracious assistance I have received from others has made this enterprise less toil and more a labor of love.

Two mentors guided me through the landscape of early American history, inspired me with their own research, and offered sage advice at every turn. When I first returned from Martha's Vineyard flush with excitement about my latest research topic, James Axtell encouraged me to pursue the idea. Long after I finished my M.A. work under his tutelage, he continued to read my materials, applying his renowned sharp pen and puckish humor to make my prose into intelligible history. I count myself fortunate that he stayed with me to the end.

John Murrin has been an ideal advisor from the start. Beginning at Princeton through our time together at the American Antiquarian Society, he provided unequivocal moral support and helped me to see the larger context by asking questions rather than giving answers. Equally important, he has provided me with a model of historian, colleague, and friend, and passed

¹ Philip Morgan, “Encounters Between British and Indigenous Peoples,” in Mary Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 55.

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along several priceless tips about the arts of hitting a softball and delivering a bad, bad pun. I cannot thank you enough, John.

Several institutions opened their doors and coffers to make this book possible. The Center for the Study of New England History's W. B. H. Dowse Fellowship introduced me to the Massachusetts Historical Society's goldmine of manuscripts. In graduate school, I was able to focus on this study without distraction because of the consistent financial generosity of Princeton University. During the main stage of writing, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation provided me with a Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and timely requests for progress reports. The American Antiquarian Society's Mellon Post-Dissertation Fellowship was a year of uninterrupted thinking, reading, and revising, aided by a magnificent staff and academic community. I extend special thanks to Wayne State University's Department of History and especially to its indefatigable department chair, Marc Kruman, for permitting me to indulge in this special opportunity, to Caroline Sloat for making my time in Worcester so productive, and to my fellow Fellows, including Pat Cohen, Benjamin Reis, Joanne Radner, Daniel Mandell, Robert Gross, Karsten Fitz, Bridget Ford, and Eliza Richards for serving as lunch-time sounding boards and good chums.

The munificence of the above organizations enabled me to indulge my fondness for archival research in some of early Americana's great repositories. Along the way, I received courteous assistance from the staffs of the Alexander Library of Rutgers University, American Antiquarian Society (Worcester), Boston Public Library, Congregational Library (Boston), Connecticut Historical Society (Hartford), Connecticut State Archives (Hartford), Chilmark Town Hall, Dukes County Superior Court, Edgartown Town Hall, Guildhall Library (London), Houghton and Pursey Libraries of Harvard University, John Carter Brown Library of Brown University, Massachusetts State Archives (Boston), Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, Newberry Library (Chicago), Philips Library of the Peabody-Essex Museum (Salem), Edouard A. Stackpole Library and Research Center of the Nantucket Historical Association, Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Nantucket Superior Court, Rhode Island State Archives (Providence), and especially Princeton's Firestone Library. I extend warmest appreciation to the good people of the Dukes County Registry of Deeds, led by Jean Powers, and the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, particularly Jill Bouck, who gave me more liberty to explore their rich collections than I had any right to expect. I will always warmly recall my time in their company. Thanks are also due to Michael Fickes, Holly Mitchell, Ann Marie Plane, and Daniel Mandell, who called my attention to manuscript collections and provided me with copies of items that I otherwise might have missed, and to Ives Goddard, who translated two Wampanoag language documents that I found in the archives. At a later stage of writing, genealogist Andrew Pierce's

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David J. Silverman

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detailed memory saved me from a number of errors and steered me toward sources I had overlooked. Students of New England history will benefit handsomely from his painstakingly researched, co-authored genealogical study of the Vineyard Wampanoags. I only wish I had access to it from the start.

The input of scholarly audiences, colleagues, and friends has made this a better book. I presented draft chapters and related works-in-progress before the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, the annual meeting of the American Society of Ethnohistory, the 31st Algonquian Conference, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, an Annual Meeting and Colloquium of the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, the New England Seminar at the American Antiquarian Society, and history department brown bags at Wayne State University and the George Washington University. Good citizens Barry O'Connell, Nancy Shoemaker, Len Travers, Pat Cohen, John Hench, and Caroline Sloat charted a clear path to revision by reading an early version of the manuscript and then trenchantly, but kindly, explaining what hard choices I had to make. Neal Salisbury and Fred Hoxie prodded me to extend my reach in later drafts and showed the way how. Daniel K. Richter gave an essay version of Chapter 5 his expert editorial critique, while Virginia Anderson, Christopher Grasso, Jenny Hale Pulsipher, Alden T. Vaughan, and Douglas Watson helped me fine-tune articles containing this book's theses. My thanks to *Explorations in Early American Culture* (now *Early American Studies*), *New England Quarterly*, and *William and Mary Quarterly* for permission to reprint portions of those articles that have appeared in their pages. Hans Hummer, Andrew Isenberg, Chris Johnson, Marc Kruman, Kenneth Mills, Jon Parmenter, Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe, Stanley Shapiro, Sandra Van Burkleo, and my perpetual partners in crime, Denver Brunzman and Jarbel Rodriguez, have also provided me with friendly, constructive criticism (some of which I have even accepted). Needless to say, I take all responsibility for errors of fact and interpretation.

The most penetrating exchanges have come in discussions with several members of the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah, among them, Ryan Malonson, Helen Manning, June Manning, William Derwood Vanderhoop, Gladys Widdiss, Beverly Wright, and time and time again, Tobias Vanderhoop. My Wampanoag colleagues have taught me valuable lessons about how people's actual lives are influenced by family, community, cultural norms, historical and racial consciousness, and the universal challenge of making ends meet. They have also exposed the assumptions I brought to my research, raised numerous questions that would never have occurred to me, and reminded me that scholars of the Indian past carry an extra obligation to be sensitive in their writing and thorough in their research. I am grateful to the individuals listed above, as well as to others whom I might have forgotten, for taking the time to speak with me. I also appreciate Nan Doty for helping to arrange our meetings and for countless other contributions along the way.

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Preface

My family has been a rock of support during the construction of this book. My parents, Richard and Julia Silverman, secured me a place to stay on Martha's Vineyard while I rummaged through the archives, and then kept me on track till completion by babysitting and hinting that even academics should have deadlines. My children, Aquinnah and Bela, just by being here, have taught me more than any work of history about the sacrifices people will make for the younger generations – If there is a humanistic tone to this book, I owe it to them.

Above all, I thank my wife, Linda. She has lived with this project since its inception, and even suggested an early version of the topic. As I've lugged book boxes and furniture during our several moves, I've often teased her that among Indians, women were responsible for carrying nearly all of the family's goods and children during their people's seasonal migrations, while the men went relatively unencumbered. Nevertheless, she has certainly shouldered her own burdens because of this study. She has never been anything but encouraging throughout my seemingly endless research trips and compulsive bouts of writing and rewriting, even though she has been overloaded with her own responsibilities of work, graduate school, and, now, motherhood. She has read every line of this book, often several times, and kept me ever mindful that I should be writing for an audience of educated nonhistorians. Her strength during the trying times has been a constant reminder to not lose sight of what drew me to historical scholarship in the first place – pursuit of the quiet drama of everyday lives. I will never be able to thank her enough for her loving devotion to me and our children. But as one small gesture of my enduring gratitude, admiration, and affection I dedicate this work to her.

Montgomery Village, Maryland

D.J.S.

March 2004