



G·A·L·W·A·Y JOURNAL

PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Massasoit, the Indian “King” Who Welcomed the Pilgrims ~ Wayne R. Brandow

Looking towards the sea and overlooking the bay at Plymouth stands a tribute to the nobility, magnanimity, and strength of character of the American Indian. It is the statue of Massasoit, the “King” of the Wampanoag tribe, the designation the English settlers gave to him out of respect.¹ Despite unjust treatment by the English prior to the 1620 arrival of the Pilgrims, Massasoit (c. 1581 – 1661) welcomed them, and the two groups lived in harmony for the remaining years of Massasoit’s life (40 + years).

We hear much in our day about the ill-treatment and exploitation of the Native Americans, but sadly overlook those times in the history of our nation when there was a mutual respect and friendship fostered between those who came to America’s shores and the original inhabitants. One such period was the relationship between Plymouth and the Wampanoag tribe, another is local to our area in the relationship between the Mohawks and Sir William Johnson. Whereas Johnson figures prominently in the local narrative, it is Massasoit who is the major catalyst to harmony between the two different races in the early history of New England, if only for a season.



In the latest issue of *Yankee Magazine* in celebration of the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Mayflower at Plymouth, it mentions that, though the living interpreters that represent the English at Plimoth Plantation must stay in character by representing the year 1627, the Native American interpreters in the Wampanoag Homesite outside of the palisaded village do not. In this way, they can rightly speak about the injustices and indignities against the American Indian. However, if they stayed in character historically to the period as a Wampanoag, they would have much good to say about their English neighbors in Plymouth due to Massasoit, based upon well-documented eyewitness accounts.² The Pilgrims saw the friendliness of the Indians as a kind providence of Almighty God, and they responded in kind.

The Pilgrims, who came to the new world that they might worship their God unmolested, first sited land on November 9, 1620 (off Cape Cod). Not all the Mayflower passengers were Pilgrims. Of the 41 male signers of the Mayflower Compact, (Nov 11, 1620), 24 were non-Pilgrims, and 17 were Pilgrims (also called Separatists).³ The estimated breakdown of the passengers on the Mayflower were “50 adult men, 19 adult women (18 married with three being

¹ A chapter in *A Relation or Journal of the Beginning and Proceeding of the English Plantation Settled at Plymouth in New England* (known as *Mourt’s Relation*), published in 1622, is titled, “A Journey to Pokanoket, the Habitation of the Great King, Massasoit.”

² *Mourt’s Relation* (this gives many fascinating stories of the friendship forged between the Indians and Plymouth), 1622; William Bradford, *Of Plimoth Plantation* (an eyewitness journal of the Pilgrims, from Scrooby, England to Holland, and then to the New World up to the year 1647, by the one who became the second Governor of Plymouth); and John Winthrop’s *Journal, History of New England, 1630–1649*. A good compilation of original sources is George F. Willison, *The Pilgrim Reader: The Story of the Pilgrims as Told by Themselves & Their Contemporaries Friendly & Unfriendly*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1953).

³ William P. Muttart and Linda R. Ashley, *One Hundred & Eleven Questions & Answers Concerning the Pilgrims*. (Plymouth, MA: Powder Horn Press, 2009), 18.

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pregnant) and 33 children; 14 aged between thirteen and nineteen, and 19 under the age of thirteen.”⁴ This was a ship full of families! Can you imagine brining your family to such a desolate place as the wilds of New England?

Their first encounter with Native Americans was at Eastham, Cape Cod on December 8th. About 30 Indians shot a volley of arrows at them, and the Pilgrims returned fire, picking up 18 arrows from the beach afterwards. No one was harmed on either side. The attackers were from the Nauset tribe. We can understand their warlikeness, as previously, an English sea captain named Hunt had kidnaped Native Americans and sold them as slaves. One such victim of this slave trade was a Native American named Squanto, who, upon being released from slavery, made it home to New England, finding whole villages vanquished due to diseases passed on by the European fur traders and fishermen. He made his way to the Wampanoag, to Massasoit.

The Pilgrims in their initial search of the land, found numerous empty Indian villages. They finally came ashore to settle Plymouth on December 19, 1620. Snow had already arrived and before them was a harsh New England winter. Of the 102 passengers on the Mayflower, half of the passengers and crew died that first winter, leaving only seven well enough to care for the sick. They saw Indians in the distance throughout that time and could see their campfires at night. They knew they were vulnerable to annihilation by the Indians, and so far, the only encounter with them had been hostile. However, on March 16, 1621, an Indian walked right into their settlement, and to their astonishment, he spoke English! He was Samoset. The Wampanoag tribe, under the leadership of Massasoit, sought peace, so, Massasoit sent Squanto, who also spoke English, to them. Massasoit’s friendship was rewarded in 1623, when he was near death. Edward Winslow rushed to his aid, gave him medicine, and nursed him to health. Upon his recovery, Massasoit said, “Now I see the English are my friends and love me, and whilst I live, I will never forget this kindness they have shewed me.”⁵

The rest of the story is fascinating and sometimes humorous as the two cultures began to get to know each other. *Mourt’s Relation* is a great read concerning this, published in 1622. Regrettably, once the population swelled, the cooperation and peace did not last, along with the curiosity and appreciation of each other and the differences in their cultures.

Looking Ahead - Be Sure to Mark Your Calendar!

GPS Member meetings will resume with a Zoom meeting on Monday, February 1, 2021 at 7 PM. Topic: “Puritan Mothers” with Priscilla Wong, an account of the experience of the Mayflower mothers.

A Tribute to Leah “Lee” Olendorf ~ Arlene Rhodes

GPS member Lee Olendorf died in late September. Lee never held an office in GPS, and she did not regularly attend meetings; nevertheless, her contributions to our society were substantial. During the past thirty years Lee donated many items to the GPS archives, including photographs, Galway school event programs and publications, letters and ephemera related to local businesses and community organizations. Lee presented two programs to our society, a history of the Hunter store on North Street in the Village, owned and operated by her father James Hunter, and another on the stage curtain at the old IOOF Hall for which she researched the businesses advertised on the curtain. When Galway Postmaster John Krasnicki asked GPS to provide materials for the display cases at the post office, Lee shared her collection of photographs, news clippings and related ephemera which were used to tell the story of the James Hunter Post Office. These items are still on display. Lee was a valuable resource for our photographic book committee. We reached out to her on numerous occasions to identify people and events in photographs and to provide details on life in Galway during the thirties and forties. We are especially grateful to Lee for donating primary source materials to our archives and for sharing her wealth of knowledge about the history of the Town of Galway. Gifts like hers help us to fulfill our mission as a historical society chartered with the NYS Education Department. These are lasting gifts to our society and to our community.



⁴ Muttart and Ashley, *101 Questions & Answers Concerning the Puritans*, 14. Estimated because some birth dates are unknown.

⁵ Edward Winslow, *Good News from New England*, ed. Kelly Wiscup (1624; repr., Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 84. Note: This is another eyewitness, primary source document.