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FIRSTING AND LASTING

Writing Indians out of Existence in New England

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Author's Note on Sources

I used several principles of inclusion and exclusion in identifying the texts on which this book rests. I started by creating a comprehensive bibliography of local histories of all the towns and cities of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island published between 1820 and 1880, using the indispensable volumes produced by the Committee for a New England Bibliography.¹ I decided not to confine my search solely to volumes that announced themselves as histories of particular localities in single or multivolume form, but also included pamphlets that contained historical orations. Fourth of July orations, publications that grew out of local commemorations, and the like. I included in my bibliography the few items I found that were published before 1820, and I added some texts published after 1880, especially if there were no other texts available for that particular town, for places located near nineteenth-century Indian communities, or if the titles intrigued me.

Once I settled down to read the texts I noticed some patterns and further modified my list. Fairly early on I concluded, for example, that church histories, manuals, and anniversaries rarely included Indians; sermons or historical discourses delivered at churches also likely did not. I did include some of these, but for the most part I omitted them from consideration. I excluded genealogies (no real narratives there, except the implicit argument of the depth of non-Indian lineages in particular places); newspaper, journal, and periodical literature (far too much of it, usually topically aimed); publications devoted to topical themes that weren't likely to include Indians (for example, a history of the copper mines in Granby, Connecticut); histories of wars, unless they involved Indians (I discovered early that even accounts of the Boston Massacre, in which Crispus Attucks was killed, did not talk much about his Native descent); missionary histories, specifically Indian missionary histories (of course they include Indians); and the dedication of buildings (although I did include a few of these).

Two more items to note: At a certain point I culled out the towns that were incorporated after the seventeenth century, because few seemed to include Indians at all and because most grew out of older towns that somehow included these places in their story of colonialism. And by no means did I look at every Forefathers' oration delivered at Plymouth (although I did consult many of them).

In the end, there were a number of local texts from my bibliographies that I never managed to track down, perhaps a couple of dozen. I finally decided these few texts would not alter the story I saw emerging from the texts I already had consulted.

Introduction **Indians Can Never Be Modern**

The Story

On June 3, 1856, Harvard legal scholar Emory Washburn, fresh from a brief term as governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, stood to address the people of Bridgewater on the two hundredth anniversary of its legal incorporation.¹ They were gathered, he proclaimed, "to lay the offerings of cherished memories and honest pride upon altars which our fathers reared here in years that are past."² Washburn's account participated in a robust tradition of southern New England ancestor worship, and it grounded that story locally. The original inhabitants of the land that became Bridgewater barely registered in his address, although the way they did turn up is telling. Their first mention came when he named the committee that was appointed "to obtain the requisite title-deeds from the good old Massasoit, within whose jurisdiction this territory was situated."³ Washburn went on to note:

Tradition points out the spot where this act of purchase was completed, which once bore the name of "Sachem's Rock." But it is sad to think, that, of all that race who then peopled this region, nothing but tradition now remains. It is sad to recall in how short a time not a drop of the blood of the Sachem of Pokanoket, whose hand of friendship welcomed our fathers to these shores, was to be found in the veins of any living being.⁴

After having turned over legal possession of their lands to the newcomers, Indians receded from the scene in Washburn's account. Indians, he asserted, had so thoroughly vanished from the region that no physical trace of them survived in any living person. Mournful though it may be, Bridgewater people would have to settle for place-names and traditions when it came to knowing about the Indians their ancestors encountered.

We can only imagine how the hundreds of Indians who remained in their southern New England homelands might have received this sweeping claim.

In spite of more than two centuries of English colonialism that worked to displace them and make them disappear, New England Indians remained in their homelands. We know they were there because of a report produced by John Milton Earle, special commissioner to the Indians in Massachusetts in the 1850s, who enumerated Indian families and communities throughout Massachusetts.⁵ We know they were there because Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island maintained bureaucracies for Indian affairs at the time Earle was writing that offered additional archival evidence. We know they were there because their descendants are still there.

How could Emory Washburn have overlooked them? How could he have failed to know the larger and far more complicated story of Indian survival? These are not trivial questions: they get to the heart of crucial aspects of the racial dynamics of southern New England and indeed of the United States. The text that contained Washburn's historical account was one of hundreds that participated in the larger ideological project that this book takes up. My aim is to understand how non-Indians in southern New England convinced themselves that Indians there had become extinct even though they remained as Indian peoples—and do so to this day. I argue that these processes can be best understood by getting at the mind-set of ordinary non-Indians.

But why should we pay attention to southern New England, arguably the most overstudied area of the United States for matters ranging from history to literature to national identity and beyond? First, that region took the lead in this genre and writers there produced an enormous body of literature in the nineteenth century. New Englanders dominated this culture of print, obsessed over its self-fashioned providential history, and defined itself as the cradle of the nation and seat of cultural power. Part and parcel of this self-fashioning is the genre of local history writing that became crucial in defining Indians out of existence. Second, these histories narrate a rich Indian history for which they took some pains to account, though the histories they constructed fell short of full comprehension. Indians mattered to these authors because they were central to telling the story they wanted to tell. Third, the collective narrative these texts assert of Indian extinction is demonstrably false: Indian survival in New England (which sometimes appears as ruptures in these texts) makes it imperative to raise the question of how these local narrators could have gotten it so wrong.

Southern New England is the ideal place to locate this study because it was there that people made the boldest claims to "firsting," a central thematic of this book that in essence asserts that non-Indians were the first people to erect the proper institutions of a social order worthy of notice. Plymouth—

and southern New Englanders tied to that place in their imaginary—insisted on origin stories of the nation that were rooted in that place and its Indian history. Indeed, this body of literature is so vast, and the stories they had to tell so complicated, that I've chosen to focus on southern New England: Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island even though similar conclusions could be drawn for northern New England.⁶ Besides limiting the source material to a manageable size, this bounding of the project also limits the number of stories that I need to account for: while the strains of settler colonialism I find in southern New England resonate throughout the region, bringing in the north would entail even more peoples, places, and origin stories. The local historians of southern New England brought into being a practice of historical writing that historians from elsewhere drew upon, customized for their locality, and replicated across the landscape of the nation.

These dusty old volumes, so attuned to the minute unfolding of seemingly obscure stories, demand our attention because they constitute a vital vernacular history that shaped the ideological predispositions of nineteenth-century New Englanders. While the historical, ethnological, and literary output of the literati—Francis Parkman, George Bancroft, Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Henry Louis Morgan, James Fenimore Cooper, Lydia Maria Child, and others—deeply influenced the thinking of the time, the local texts that I analyze in this book reached large audiences as well. More important, while the emergent national literature that these luminaries produced certainly gave shape to an understanding of American history, culture, and identity, local texts grounded those stories in the concrete. Local narrators took up the histories of the exact places their audiences lived, and they rooted stories about Indians in those places. The overwhelming message of these narratives was that local Indians had disappeared. These local stories were leashed to a larger national narrative of the "vanishing Indian" as a generalized trope and disseminated not just in the form of the written word but also in a rich ceremonial cycle of pageants, commemorations, monument building, and lecture hall performance. They both served as entertainment and they inscribed meanings in particular places. More specifically for my purposes, these scripts inculcated particular stories about the Indian past, present, and future into their audiences. The collective story these texts told insisted that non-Indians held exclusive sway over modernity, denied modernity to Indians, and in the process created a narrative of Indian extinction that has stubbornly remained in the consciousness and unconsciousness of Americans.

In making this argument, I do not claim that this is an exclusively New England project. In fact, much of the narrative construct about Indians in New

England can be found in local histories elsewhere. Many local histories from New York to Minnesota and as far away in place and time as California and Washington would fit comfortably on bookshelves alongside those of New England in their inclusion of stories about firsts and lasts.⁷ And the entire construct of firsting and lasting that I posit in this book can be found everywhere—in tourist sites and public history venues, and in news stories of all sorts. But certain aspects of this story certainly are unique to New England. In particular, New Englanders insisted they commanded cultural power in the nation, and were morally superior vis-à-vis Virginia and the slaveholding South in general. Both of these assertions are rooted in New English claims about their modernity.

These obscure, largely forgotten authors engaged in an ideological project that involved working out a vision of American Indians that continues to shape, limit, and inhibit views of Indians even today. They inculcated on the microlevel a paradigm about the place of American Indians in U.S. history and the ongoing future of the United States that remains deeply influential. These texts help us understand how it is that a powerful mind-set of non-Indian modernity and Indian extinction unfolded in the mundane ideological transactions of the everyday world, and that this level of understanding is every bit as important as—if not more important than—the grand narratives of a Parkman, Cooper, or Child. I want to argue that the *local* narrative valence to the twinned story of non-Indian modernity and Indian extinction. Romanticized constructions of generalized Indians doomed to disappear were one thing; it was quite another thing to contemplate the “extinction” of Indian peoples who might instead have been your very neighbors. At the local level the problem of *recognizing* Indians played out as tangible reality for non-Indians and Indians alike.

The idea of “recognition” of Indians is central to my project in two fundamental ways. First, I am concerned with Indians in southern New England, some of whom are—and others who are not—at present recognized as tribal nations by the U.S. government. Most tribal nations in the former English colonies occupy a different position than those who engaged in treaty making with the United States that recognized their nation-to-nation relationship. The state governments recognized tribal nations in New England where their homelands were located during most of the chronological scope of this book, but the process of establishing recognition by the federal government had to wait until the late twentieth century. This is of enormous consequence, though the contemporary federal recognition process itself is not what this book is about. Second, I focus on the processes whereby non-Indians in the

nineteenth century failed or refused to *recognize Indian peoples as such*. Even though non-Indians had Indian neighbors throughout the region, and even when they acknowledged that these neighbors were of Indian descent, they still denied that they were authentic Indians. A toxic brew of racial thinking—steeped in their understanding of history and culture—led them to deny the Indianness of Indians. In other words, I am trying to sort out how it is that non-Indians convinced themselves that New England Indians had become extinct even though they had not, and how those who made the claim should have come to other conclusions if it were not for their assumptions that foreclosed full understanding.

In taking up this second sort of “recognition,” I analyze the ways in which local texts narrated Indian history and “extinction” in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island roughly between 1820 and 1880. I examined some six hundred local texts—broadly defined—roughly three-quarters of which contain material about Indians and Indian history. These include everything from standard single- or multivolume treatments, to smaller texts, even pamphlets, published in the wake of historical commemorations of all sorts. My aim is to analyze the narrative strategies that New Englanders used regarding the Indian past and that attempted to put Indians themselves in the past by asserting their extinction in subtle and not so subtle ways. Central to all of this is the construction of an origin myth that assigns primacy to non-Indians who “settled” the region in a benign process involving righteous relations with Indians and just property transactions that led to an inevitable and (usually, drawing on the Romanticism that conditioned nineteenth-century sensibilities) lamentable Indian extinction. Thus, the “first” New Englanders are made to disappear, sometimes through precise declarations that the “last” of them has passed, and the colonial regime is constructed as the “first” to bring “civilization” and authentic history to the region. Non-Indians stake a claim to being native—indigenous—through this process. In stark contrast to the narrative construction, New England Indians actually “last,” and remain vibrant peoples into the future.⁸

This book is also about how Indians have resisted their effacement, as they continue to do to this day.⁹ A rich and growing literature on Indian New England provides a different vantage point on the past than was available to nineteenth-century local historians. Crucial work has been happening within the tribes themselves, and a burgeoning community of Native and non-Native scholars promises to recast our understanding of this pivotal time and place.¹⁰ Emanating from a range of disciplinary perspectives, from archaeology to anthropology, ethnohistory, literary criticism, history, and more, this

literature has transformed our understanding of the past and it will continue to do so in the future. Throughout this book I interweave stories about Indian resistance and survival drawing from this rich and emergent body of scholarship.

I do not, however, attempt to include a point-by-point refutation of the extinction claim by presenting a detailed demographic reconstruction of Indian communities. Instead, I opt for an analysis of the ideological construct. I have made this choice for three reasons. First, there are no comprehensive accounts of nineteenth-century Indian New England to draw on: reconstructing this history is very much a work in process. Second, I want to avoid the trap that I think much of the literature falls into: giving credence to “census taking” as survival and going to “cultural retentions” as evidence of Indianness. A faithful demographic reconstruction of nineteenth-century Indian New England is impossible given the state of the archival record, and hewing too closely to a project of identifying “cultural retentions” carries the danger of insisting on cultural stasis that is so centrally embedded in the New England project of modernity. And third, finding a way to finally displace the stubborn, erroneous, and harmful myth of Indian extinction is essential to understanding Indian New England. In seeking to move the conversation into an entirely different direction, I am resisting making declarations about what is “true” because this whole project is really about contesting the “truth” that New Englanders are trying to make.

My position is in agreement with that of other scholars who have observed that demographic methods have historically been tools of colonialism used against New England (and other) Indian peoples. Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau found that in the Revolutionary era Rhode Island officials ceased identifying Indians as such in their dealings, instead “designating them as ‘Negro’ or ‘black,’ thus committing a form of documentary genocide against them.”¹¹ Thomas Doughton points out a “discourse of disappearance” in forging an “official story” that erroneously declared that Nipmuc people had vanished from central Massachusetts.¹² More recently, Amy E. Den Ouden has pointed out that by “counting Indians living within the bounds of reservation land as a means of evaluating that community’s social viability,” colonial officials in nineteenth-century southern New England objectified Indian bodies in insidious ways and undermined their land rights. This discourse linked the idea of eventual Indian “extinction” to land rights. Further, the practice of focusing their enumerations on Indian men failed to understand female presence and authority as well as ignoring the mobility of Indian men, who participated heavily in the newer Indian economy of military

service, whaling, and wage labor.¹³ The surveillance of racialized Indian identities and communities in connection with ideas about blood purity and the supposed “degeneration” of Indians as of “mixed ancestry.” Den Ouden argues, “emerged as a governmental tactic of control in the late eighteenth century.”¹⁴

Local Texts as (Unlikely) Sources

For all the preceding reasons, I rely principally on what might seem like an unpromising archive for Indian history: local texts produced mainly but not exclusively by male, non-Indian antiquarians who were generally preoccupied with forging dense chronicles of the origins and historical happenings of mostly small towns and often with connecting these small places with the project of forging Anglo-Saxon nationalism.¹⁵ As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued, to understand the relations of power in the *process* of historical production, we need to account not just for professional historians but also for “artisans of different kinds, unpaid or unrecognized field laborers who augment, deflect, or reorganize the works of professionals.”¹⁶ Local historians included scions of the Boston elite such as Edward Everett and Joseph Story, whose polished publications reflect their social position. But rural ministers such as Joseph B. Felt of Salem, and amateur history buffs such as Frances Manwaring Caulkins, whose family ran a female academy in eastern Connecticut, dominated the medium. These mostly middle-class authors participated in the institutionalization of the historical society movement, and they far outranked elites in the production of local literature.¹⁷ Their publications formed a vernacular-historical sensibility of enduring influence, as their work, however fanciful or downright erroneous, became blueprints for understanding the past. They frequently shared their work with one another, and it circulated throughout the nation as historical societies proliferated and collected these publications. They served as local experts where consolidated versions of the past were disseminated in print and in periodic public celebrations that included historical orations as a central feature of public entertainment. Local histories broadly conceived participated importantly in this project as locations of ideological production and consolidation.

Preoccupied as they generally were with the Anglo-Saxon origins of the nation, how can these texts serve as source material for Indian history? Because asserting a break from the past demanded the inclusion of stories about Indians, these texts operate as source material on multiple levels. They narrate events about Indians. They include Indian historical figures. They make judgments about the morality of their colonial history. They chronicle—often in great detail—the history of land transactions on which they based their claim

to a benevolent and just colonialism. They make claims about Indian fates and especially about Indian disappearance. And in the way they construct narratives about non-Indians, they implicitly make arguments about what counts as legitimate history, and who counts as legitimate peoples. Thus, even when the subject matter of local texts is not explicitly about Indians, it is frequently implicitly so. The implicit arguments of local narration will be a crucial theme in this book. These texts help us understand a larger narrative that cannot be dislodged from nineteenth-century sensibilities about Indians, race, and modernity. The texts themselves helped create a particular reality, but not one that adequately accounted for Indian lives, survival, or history.

Contemporary concerns with issues such as shifting patterns of immigration, industrialization, urbanization, abolitionism, and Indian affairs nationally were occasionally explicit reference points for local narrators, but even when such issues were not specifically referenced, their influence on perceptions are often in evidence. Of great importance in these local accounts was the massive out-migration of New Englanders to all points, and the rapid demographic, economic, and social transformations they witnessed—and frequently feared and lamented.¹⁸ Even while they anxiously asserted their centrality to the nation, New Englanders in the nineteenth century harbored fears about their declining power and influence, in part accounted for by the very out-migration that fueled Indian dispossession across the continent in the service of American nationalism. These narratives must be understood in this context, as cultural elites and local farmers alike desperately argued for the enduring importance of New England in defining the nation.¹⁹

As Lucy Maddox has argued about American literature, the policy of Indian removal as a solution to the “Indian problem” loomed large as a moral issue in the minds of nineteenth-century writers who “removed” Indians from their stories because of their supposed incompatibility with “civilization.”²⁰ For New Englanders, Indian removal had special resonance, given the prominent role its congressmen took in opposing the legislation on the basis that it would stain the honor of the nation. This prominence gave rise to the charge, “What happened to your Indians?” a challenge local historians generally took up with some degree of enthusiasm. The notion of forced removal of Indian peoples became the focus of vigorous debate by the 1820s, was first planned and imposed on the Five Tribes of the Southeast in the 1830s, then was reformulated and replicated across the continent, culminating in the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee.

Although it is not initially why I settled on the chronological bounding of this project, this broader preoccupation with the forces of Indian removal,

westward expansion, and national innocence between 1820 and 1880 stands as a crucial though largely implicit unifying theme of local texts in southern New England. I started by trying to take stock of the genre as a whole, noting that many local texts contained valuable material about Indians that either did not exist elsewhere or could be difficult to locate. After several years of collecting local texts in fits and starts, I spent almost a year systematically reading mainly in the unparalleled collections of the American Antiquarian Society and the Newberry Library, with side trips to the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Betnecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and, later on, a four-month stint at the Library of Congress. The sheer number of these texts available across the United States (and elsewhere) suggests the reach of this phenomenon. Over the course of several years, I have looked at every local text I could find that was published between 1820 and 1880 about Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, as well as many that were published in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.²¹

I begin in 1820 because even though there are a few brief locally focused publications from before 1820, that date roughly coincides with the beginnings of what would quickly become a vibrant enterprise (see Table 1).²² As has been frequently pointed out, cultural production beginning around 1820 participated in the assertion of American nationalism. Americans anxiously demonstrated their fitness as a separate and legitimate nation in the production of a uniquely American body of cultural work: language, art, literature,

Table 1. Local histories by decade (selective)

YEARS	CONNECTICUT	MASSACHUSETTS	RHODE ISLAND	TOTAL
1810s	1	3	0	4
1820s	1	16	0	17
1830s	7	34	2	43
1840s	10	33	2	45
1850s	18	50	5	73
1860s	9	37	1	47
1870s	29	87	19	135
1880s	6	45	8	59
1890s	4	18	2	24
(number of histories)	85	323	39	447

Note: This represents the numbers of local histories that contain Indian materials. The numbers from the 1880s and 1890s do not represent an exhaustive search of all published materials; I looked at titles in these decades selectively, especially including texts for places that did not have published accounts previously and texts that were located near nineteenth-century Indian communities.

history, and more. Also, the technology and distribution systems made possible the production of cheap books that could be printed and circulated broadly.²³ The explosion in local history writing fits squarely within this context. The year 1880 is a logical point to end, both because the genre itself transformed in that decade as local histories (and other sorts of local publications like histories of industries) lost their truly local flavor, through becoming standardized and commercialized, and because of the changing character of the increasingly industrialized, urbanized nation and shifting patterns of immigration.²⁴ As well, this end date provides for the inclusion of the great many publications that followed the U.S. centennial in 1876, partly due to a presidential proclamation that urged localities to publish their histories, and several historians paused to reflect on events during the bicentennial of King Philip's War in the same year. The year 1880 also marks Rhode Island's legislation terminating that state's official recognition of the Narragansett Nation, the culmination of the mythology-steeped political project that sought to legislate the tribe out of existence.

Within this sixty-year span, momentous historical events rocked the United States, with the Civil War standing at the center of this chronology. In spite of massive changes in the social, cultural, political, economic, gender, ethnic, and racial order of the United States, the local histories produced in this span of time read similarly in topic and intent, especially as they pertained to Indians. The events included obviously depend on the year of publication, but beyond the topical variation thus manifested, I do not analyze this material according to finer grains of time. In my reading of these texts, the larger narrative thread pulls through these years fairly consistently regarding the central theme of my book, namely, the production of modernity through purification of the landscape of Indians. Ironically, even as New Englanders were building an argument about Indian timelessness they were creating a timeless narrative of their own about Indians; that narrative doesn't change, really, until the late twentieth century and even then it isn't entirely effective in understanding Indians *in time*.

Because local texts form the core source material for this book, it is essential to note the ways in which they are conceptualized and used. Like all sources, these texts are both richly informative and limited in their utility. They frequently reproduce, in whole or in part, rare and sometimes lost documents that contribute significantly to the evidence of the past. Many of them collect in one volume much of the source base for early (especially non-Indian) history of a place for convenient access and dissemination. The best of them rely on meticulous archival research, even beyond the locality, that

at times compares favorably to newer social history in methodology. Their flaws begin with the racial (and other) biases that the authors brought with them and used to shape their narratives, and range widely across a spectrum of issues.

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot has pointed out, "Historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power."²⁵ I understand local texts to compose an archive that "set[s] up both the substantive and formal elements of the narrative" of Indian extinction in New England.²⁶ The archival power of local texts transformed what happened (a long and continuing process of colonialism and Indian survival) into that which is said to have happened (Indian extinction).²⁷ Local texts have been a principal location in which this false claim has been lodged, perpetuated, and disseminated. The extinction narrative lodged in this archive has falsely educated New Englanders and others for generations about Indians, and it has been—and is still—used as an archival source itself, sometimes to be taken as factual evidence of Indian eclipse. Still, we cannot and should not simply toss out this colonial archive. Instead, we need to find ways to use it judiciously. I hope this book will help with that problem.²⁸

Indians Can Never Be Modern

Why did local narrators tell Indian stories at all? Indeed, operating within relations of power would have permitted them to elide Indian history entirely. Drawing on the insights of Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*, I argue that New Englanders embraced Indians because doing so enabled them to establish unambiguously their own modernity. Non-Indians narrated their own present against what they constructed as the backdrop of a past symbolized by Indian peoples and their cultures. The master narrative of New England was that it had made a stark break with the past, replacing "uncivilized" peoples whose histories and cultures they represented as illogically rooted in nature, tradition, and superstition, whereas New Englanders symbolized the "civilized" order of culture, science, and reason. Modernity is predicated on exactly this sort of rupture.²⁹

The narration of Indian extinction in local texts proceeded along two important avenues. Insistence on "blood purity" as a central criterion of "authentic" Indianness reflected the scientific racism that prevailed in the nineteenth century.³⁰ New England Indians had intermarried, including with African Americans, for many decades, and their failure to comply with non-Indian ideas about Indian phenotype strained the credence for their Indianness in New English minds. Non-Indians thought about race and blood according to

a colonial calculus in which the possession of even a single drop of African American "blood" relegated one to the status of "Black" and "slave," whereas it demanded of Indians evidence of just the opposite: purity of blood. This calculus operated within the colonial order, on the one hand securing a labor supply in hereditary bondage, and on the other justifying the seizure of Indian lands on the basis of Indian "disappearance." This penchant for Indian purity as authenticity also found essential expression in the idea of the ancient: non-Indians refused to regard culture change as normative for Indian peoples. Thus, while Indians adapted to the changes wrought by colonialism by selectively embracing new ways and ideas, such transformations stretched beyond the imaginations of New Englanders: Indians could only be ancients, and refusal to behave as such rendered Indians inauthentic in their minds. Indians, then, can never be modern.³¹ These ideas provided fertile ground for the idea of extinction, a mythology that obliterated the fact of Indian survival and fostered the dominant ideology about racial formation in nineteenth-century New England and informed a developing national ideology about Indians.

In the process of asserting their modernity, local writers worked mightily to root the New English social order deeply. In effect, they claimed to be the first people who established cultures and institutions worthy of notice, thereby subtly declaring the invalidity of Indian ways of life. Indians serve the larger story line of establishing the primacy of the New English social order. Collectively, the effect of their ideological labor is to appropriate the category "indigenous" away from Indians and for themselves. They subtly argue for the sole legitimacy of New English ways, as the institutions and practices of non-Indians are posited as the epitome of modernity.

Further building on Latour, these constructs served to purify the landscape in particular ways. Not only did ideas about racial and cultural purity disqualify Indians of mixed descent for Indianness in the New England imaginary, but legal and bureaucratic processes operated against Indian "recognition" as well. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island all—in complex ways—took measures to "terminate" their recognition of the political status of tribes within their boundaries in the mid- to late nineteenth century. This drive for terminating the political status of the tribes can be best understood, I argue, as bringing racial expectations into alignment with political processes. New Englanders did not recognize the Indianness of Indians there, and they attempted to terminate their political existence to harmonize these racial and political expectations. This can be seen as completing what I have come to think of as the New England replacement narrative. They effect a stark break

from the past, with non-Indians replacing Indians on the landscape. These are processes of purification that are central to the ongoing production of modernity. These are also claims about purification that failed even while they were being made. This failure translates into the inconsistency and uncertainty of nineteenth-century narratives about Indians and has produced the historical backdrop for contention over New England Indianness into the present.

By taking up the narrative construction of Indian history in local accounts, this book aims to undermine its collective claim that modern New Englanders had replaced ancient Indians on the landscape. I hope to show the ways in which non-Indians actively produced their own modernity by denying modernity to Indians. I also want to expose the futility of these claims, as New England Indians continued to resist their effacement as tribal nations in the nineteenth century and beyond. It is this long-term ideological construct, I would argue, that shapes contemporary debates and confusion over the "authenticity" of New England Indians. I hope that by exposing these constructions, I can shed light on larger issues about Indianness, "authenticity," recognition, and modernity in the United States.

This book is composed of four chapters that explore crucial dimensions of this ideological process. These artificial categories, constructed to bring a semblance of organization to a mass of material, constitute a thematic ordering in order to make sense of the construction of the myth of New England Indian extinction, and the centrality of Indians to the New England project of modernity. Chapter 1, "Firsting," examines claims that local texts make about the primacy of English culture, institutions, and lifeways in the production of modernity in New England. I look at the precise ways that the production of local histories participates in the creation of modernity as the exclusive purview of Anglo Americans, and asserts the production of a new social order built on the ideas and practices of modernity. Local histories claim Indian places as their own by constructing origin stories that cast Indians as prehistory to what they assert as their own authentic histories and institutions.

Chapter 2, "Replacing," looks at the construction of what I call the New England "replacement narrative." The erection of monuments, the mounting of historical commemorations, local interest in amateur archaeology and place-names as well as claims to rightful ownership of the land show how local histories built a collective case that they had replaced Indians on the landscape of New England. Monuments to Indians propose their eclipse, and are juxtaposed with monuments to non-Indians that are intended to

assert English origins. Historical narratives and relic collecting place Indians in the past, and selective retention of Indian place-names is meant to commemorate Indian peoples and practices that are asserted as extinct. These elements of the replacement narrative participate in the purification of the landscape of Indians in the production of New English modernity.

"Lasting," chapter 3, takes up the narrative construct of Indian extinction through what I call the "last of the [blank]" syndrome, whereby local historians occasionally tell stories about people they identify as the last Indian who lived in places they claimed as their own. I analyze this ideological construct with reference to ideas about race, blood, and culture that fueled and rationalized these assertions. I also show how they used the construct of "lasting" to talk about other peoples, institutions, and practices in the ongoing production of New English modernity. This chapter ends with an overview of the various ways local texts made Indians disappear to complement the more extreme claim of the "last of the [blank]."

Chapter 4, "Resisting," focuses on the contradictions that are found even in single texts about Indian extinction and Indian fates. Because non-Indians failed to recognize the Indianness of New England Indians, and because they denied that Indians could be part of modernity, they produced narratives that failed to understand and account for Indian persistence. They displayed uncertainty about Indian fates, exposing cracks in their façade of New England modernity purified of Indians. Local texts reveal performances of this uncertainty when they included Indian participants at historical commemorations that purported to explain Indian extinction, and they collectively report an Indian geography of survival even if only incompletely. In this chapter I also take up the writings of the remarkable William Apess (Pequot) to look at the ways he wrote and talked back against colonialism and the ways that non-Indians sought to make Indian peoples and Indian versions of history disappear. Apess embodies the futility of the project of purification, defying non-Indian constructions of Indians as ancient in his writings, speeches, actions, and everyday life as a modern political thinker and activist. Finally, this chapter looks at the processes whereby New Englanders sought to "terminate" the ongoing political existence of Indians and how Indians resisted this process.

In the many years that I have been at work on this book, one image has long stood out as emblematic of the process I've been trying to understand. The frontispiece to Alonzo Lewis's *History of Lynn* (1829) is a finely honed etching in a coastal setting of a well-heeled Englishman handing over a set of garments to a feathered Indian man clothed in skins with a quiver of arrows



Figure 1. *Black William Selling Nahant to Thomas Dexter for a Suit of Clothes*. This lithograph, prepared for an 1829 history of Lynn, Massachusetts, encapsulates a replacement narrative, conveying the notion that non-Indians compensated Indians for their homelands, from which they then departed. Pendleton's lithograph, Boston, Frontispiece for Alonzo Lewis, *The History of Lynn* (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, 1829). Courtesy of the Newberry Library.

on his back. This illustration is titled "BLACK WILLIAM selling NAHANT to Thomas Dexter for a Suit of Clothes" (see Figure 1).³² Here is the replacement narrative in its most encapsulated form. Culture meets nature, culture re-places nature, and the landscape is purified of Indians in a stark break with the past. This illustration goes to the heart of colonialism and the replacement narrative by directing the viewer's focus squarely on the issue of whose land this is. This problem, as subsequent history and present-day circumstances tell us, could not be resolved as neatly as that.

Chapter 1 *Firsting* **Local Texts Claim Indian Places As Their Own**

From Its First Settlement

Enoch Sanford named his 1870 narrative *History of Raynham, Massachusetts, from the First Settlement to the Present Time*.¹ Sanford's title for his fifty-one-page survey of local history resembled those given many other histories. Slight variations on this formulaic approach to naming abounded in nineteenth-century local texts. Take, for example, Myron O. Allen's *The History of Wrentham, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from Its Settlement in 1639, to 1860*, Abiel Abbot's *History of Andover, from Its Settlement in 1629, to 1860*, Elias Nason's *A History of the Town of Dunstable, Massachusetts, from Its Earliest Settlement to the Year of Our Lord 1873*, and Sidney Perley's *The History of Boxford, Essex County, Massachusetts, from the Earliest Settlement Known to the Present Time, a Period of about Two Hundred and Thirty Years*.² Although they differ in subtle ways, each of these titles reveals much about the assumptions about Indians and non-Indians, "history" and "settlement" its author brought to his project. Adding two more titles to the mix provides additional perspectives on often unspoken assumptions that drove the implicit narratives these texts framed. Instead of leaving the reader guessing about when these places "first" came to be (as some of the aforementioned titles do), John Murdock Stowe's *History of the Town of Hubbardston, Worcester County, Mass., from the Time Its Territory Was Purchased of the Indians in 1686, to the Present with the Genealogy of Present and Former Resident Families* and David Wilder's *The History of Leominster, or the Northern Half of the Lancaster New or Additional Grant, from June 26, 1701, the Date of the Deed from George Tahanto, Indian Sagamore, to July 4, 1852* offer indisputable clues as to their perspectives on origins.³

More is at stake in the naming of these texts than mere marketing. Although these histories of small places likely were intended for local and limited audiences, the project in which they participated was grand and helped produce grave consequences for Indian peoples whose places they claimed as

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More is at stake in the naming of these texts than mere marketing. Although these histories of small places likely were intended for local and limited audiences, the project in which they participated was grand and helped produce grave consequences for Indian peoples whose places they claimed as

their own. The claiming is present in the very process of naming. The histories of Raynham, Wenham, Andover, Dunstable, and Boxford argue implicitly that authentic history begins with the arrival of English people in the place that came to be called New England, and further, they might even be taken to suggest that these places remained unpeopled until these momentous "settlements" came to be. The histories of Hubbardston and Leominster announce through their titles that the relevant accounts of those places begin with the "legal" transfer of land title from Indian to English hands. Even though Indian peoples are acknowledged as historical actors in these formulations, their possession of their homelands is mundanely dispensed with as preliminary to the real history that began with the advent of English transformation of the land. Nowhere is this semantic maneuver more direct than in an 1880 history of Derby, Connecticut. In this volume, the authors used roman numerals to distinguish the Indian history of the town, and expressed surprise that this story was so rich and extensive it needed xvii pages to tell.⁴ Conflict, colonialism, and contestation are subtly elided in the benign establishment of New English places on Indian homelands, at least as far as can be detected from these titles.

Other local narrators acted more imaginatively in naming their works, and some even acknowledged Indians in their titles, such as Josiah Howard Temple and George Sheldon in their *A History of the Town of Northfield, Massachusetts for 150 Years, with an Account of the Prior Occupation of the Territory by the Squakheags; and with Family Genealogies*.⁵ This inclusion helps make the point: Indians were "prior occupants"—their supposed disappearance constituted a preface to the authentic history of Northfield, a place that claimed to participate in the production of New English modernity. Reflecting back, the vast majority of local historians saw a process of Indian decline and extinction that paved the way for the replacement of "traditional" Indian peoples with modern New English people. Indeed, operating within relations of power would have permitted them to elide Indian history entirely. Instead, New Englanders embraced Indians and used them to establish unambiguously their own modernity.

In spite of New English claims about being "first," indigenous peoples in New England lived rich and complex lives long before the English and other Europeans arrived. By the time Europeans stumbled on to the eastern seaboard of North America—the Norse around the year 1,000 and then other Europeans in the late fifteenth century—New England Indians had been forging their own histories and destinies for tens of thousands of years. The Wampanoag, Massachusetts, Nipmuc, Pocumtuck, Pequot, Mohegan, Schaghticoke,

Paugussett, Niantic, Narragansett, and other indigenous peoples shared closely related Algonquian languages and northeastern woodlands cultures, and their village-based geographies were defined by both alliances cemented through strategic intermarriage and occasional enmity. Their sociopolitical systems were village-based chieftainships that operated in diplomatic relations with one another. Rather than exerting coercive power, Indian leaders—called sachems in New England—led by persuasion and displays of generosity. Inter-marriage between high-status families facilitated alliance building and helped weave the sociopolitical fabric.⁶

Indian peoples reaped the riches of the northeastern woodlands in seasonally mobile and gendered economies that embraced female agriculture and gathering of wild foodstuff with male hunting and fishing in the interior and coastal waterways. Dense networks of trade connected them to each other and to Native peoples from elsewhere. Common group ownership of the land helped define Native senses of identity and of place, and a complex usufruct system whereby needs shaped land usage without conveying outright ownership of the land to individuals. Indians possessed deeply rooted histories transmitted principally in the oral tradition that tied them to their homelands, elaborate cultures that made them distinctive, and a rich spiritual and ceremonial calendar that defined their place in the created world.⁷

But even when elements of this longer and complex history are included in local narratives, the larger argument displaced Indians in favor of a landscape that is exclusively claimed by non-Indians. At work in these constructions is the collapsing and selective telling of thousands of years of human history in what came to be called New England. Narrating the story of modernity in New England required the inclusion of an Indian presence. The collective argument of local narratives asserted a stark break with a past rooted in nature, tradition, and superstition symbolized by Indian peoples and their cultures. The master narrative of New England, based on the minute evidence of local narration, involved the replacement of "uncivilized" peoples whose histories and cultures they interpreted as illogically rooted in nature, tradition, and superstition, whereas New Englanders symbolized the "civilized" order of culture, science, and reason. According to Bruno Latour,

Modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists, yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective "modern" designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word "modern," "modernization," or "modernity" appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past. Furthermore, the word is always being thrown into the middle of a fight, in a quarrel where

there are winners and losers, Ancients and Moderns. "Modern" is thus doubly asymmetrical: it designates a break in the regular passage of time, and it designates a combat in which there are victors and vanquished.⁸

The modernity New Englanders claimed as their hallmark depended upon breaking with an Indian world they interpreted as rooted in nature, tradition-bound, and confounded by superstition. The dramatic tensions between Indians, resisting English incursions, and the English, heroically struggling to triumph over their "savage" foes, stood at the center of local narration in the nineteenth century. In this narrative the English triumphed and the Indians were vanquished and replaced on the landscape.

Furthermore, and still following Latour, asserting modernity involved a process of "purification"—clarifying the advent of modernity by negating the continuing presence of tradition as so perfectly symbolized in North America by Indians. As the residents of Stamford, Connecticut, heard during the bicentennial celebration of the incorporation of the town, "They came—and a wilderness was changed into the abode of civilized man."⁹ William Cothren's history of Woodbury, Connecticut, said more:

Less than two hundred years ago, these pleasant hills and sunny valleys, now teeming with life, intelligence and happiness, were one vast solitude, unvisited by the cheering rays of civilization. . . . Everything now is changed. The desert waste that met the first gaze of our pioneer forefathers, has been made to bud and blossom as the rose. Where once were but scattered huts of the former race, are now enterprising and busy villages.¹⁰

This mind-set lent itself perfectly to the construction of a myth of Indian extinction that bolstered the heroic claims of New English modernity.¹¹ In their minds, in the histories they constructed, and in the stubborn reproduction of ideology, Indian peoples became forever ancient—mired in the static past. Deemed inauthentic if they did not comply with the expectation that they be persistently ancient, the collective project of local narrations cast Indian peoples as teetering on the brink of extinction if they did not relegate them explicitly to the past by declaring them extinct.

The scripting of "inauthenticity" of New England Indians operated most boldly in two critical dimensions. Relying on the scientific racism that posited separate and pure races organized in a strict hierarchy, non-Indians invoked notions about "blood purity" as essential to "authentic" Indianness. This constituted a literal embodiment of the obsession over purification Latour associates with the production of modernity. Because of a long history of

intermarriage for New England Indians, they did not all "look Indian" to those who interpreted the racial terrain according to stereotypical notions of "pure races." Likewise, the obsession over purification found expression in ideas about change. New England Indians had dramatically altered their lifeways in dialogue with the new peoples and cultures brought by English colonialism. As they had for centuries before, Indian peoples changed over time. However, invoking ideas about a stable and indelible culture for the ancient peoples of the Americas, New Englanders refused to regard culture change as normative for Indian peoples. Indians who changed did not comply with non-Indian expectations of their authenticity. These ideas produced a lethal brew: non-Indians insisted that Indians could only be ancients, they could never be modern. This ideological construct produced the idea of Indian extinction as critical to racial formation in New England.¹²

The extinction narrative emerged out of the collective process of storytelling at the local level and participated in broader ideas about blood purity and cultural stasis. The texts drew upon these notions that were in common circulation and they rooted them in particular places. The minutiae of individual community stories thus coalesced into a master narrative of New England Indian extinction that became overwhelmingly pervasive and persuasive. Ordinary New Englanders who learned about their local history from these narrators were instructed that Indians had vanished from their vicinities. The collective end product purified New England of its Indian past on the imaginative level.

In addition to their dependence on Indians to establish themselves as modern, New Englanders posited a stark break with the irrational feudalism of Europe as a bedrock of their claims to be modern. As David Noble has argued, historical narration between 1770 and 1830 became crucial in asserting "the vision of history as progress, of history as a ritual of purification. . . . These historians were celebrating the liberation of their nations from the suffocating complexity of the medieval world."¹³ Following their invasion of Indian places, the English equated Indians with the medieval world of Catholics and Jews, living in traditional worlds based on generational transmission. English individualism rejected the medieval world of reciprocity that rooted the social order in personal exchanges, and enshrined the marketplace as the epitome of modernity. Bourgeois nationalism rejected feudal orders as irrational and transformed subjects into citizens operating in new states of nature governed by Newtonian physics, Protestant theology, and citizenship in nations whose cultural and physical boundaries coincided in harmony and uniformity. "Each nation's middle class had symbolically

replaced the homes of peasants and aristocrats and the homes of indigenous peoples with its own home."¹⁴

In the process of asserting their modernity, local writers performed the political and cultural work of rooting the New English social order deeply, which is visible in the very structuring of historical accounts and the claims they make. Indians, a necessary presence in the vast majority of local texts, advance the argument that the New English social order is primary. Indeed, these texts go even beyond this presumptuous claim: the result of this political and cultural work is to appropriate the category "indigenous" away from Indians and for themselves.¹⁵ The overarching device in this construction is what I will call "firsting," a straightforward scripting choice that subtly argues for the sole legitimacy of New English ways. Furthermore, the practice of firsting implicitly argues for the inherent supremacy of New English ways, as the institutions and practices of New Englanders are posited as the epitome of modernity.

What is firsting, and how does it work? An 1882 history of Northampton, Massachusetts, offers a compelling example. Chapter 6 of Rev. Solomon Clark's volume is titled "Some of Northampton's First Things." The chapter begins, "The first settlement commenced 1654," and proceeds to instruct the reader about its first name (Nonotuck), marriage, meetinghouse, birth, death, minister's house, court, temperance measures, minister, accidental death, militia, bridge, interment, school, public highway, Indian attack, death at the hands of an Indian, college graduate, and prison, among other things: "The foregoing are some of the First Things of Northampton during the first fifty years of its history."¹⁶ Clearly, the "first settlement" Rev. Clark has in mind is English, not Indian, and even its previous Indian appellation has been supplanted. Further, this construction implicitly argues that Indian peoples never participated in social, cultural, or political practices worthy of note, and that history began only with the gathering of English people in a place they renamed "Northampton." And although some of the notable firsts included here involve calamities and even Indian hostilities, most of them suggest that Northampton steadily and mightily built institutions of value that constituted the modernity of a place that could not have reached its pinnacle of rationality under Indian regimes of tradition and nature.

Although mainly devoted to a listing of Civil War soldiers, *Foundation Facts Concerning Its Settlement, Growth, Industries, and Societies*, published by the town of Haverhill, Massachusetts, begins with a fascinating four-page exercise in firsting. On this list, the only items that are not firsts concern Indians, specifically, the purchase of the land from Indians in 1642, the capture

of famous captive Hannah Duston in King Philip's War, and a 1708 "mas-sacre" by Indians.¹⁷ These firsts served to bolster Haverhill's modernity (imposing English rules for property ownership) and highlight Indian "savagery" (warfare and captivity). The title of the thirty-nine-page text sums up the impulse and intent of firsting nicely: a chronicling of the steady and sure production of modernity through its social development and the entrenchment of capitalism from colonialism toward the industrial age.

Few historical accounts devote a separate chapter to firsting. Instead, most use the device as the most natural framework for a survey stretching from the past to the present, and some texts are laced through from beginning to end with firsting. Texts that take up the annuals format do not lend themselves to "firsting," cataloging as they do a year-by-year accounting of peoples and events, but even this format implicitly builds a story about the forging of modernity.¹⁸ And while not all historical texts engage in firsting, the vast majority do (see Table 2).

No place could rival Plymouth in the process of firsting, as is abundantly evident in James Thatcher's *History of the Town of Plymouth, from Its First Settlement in 1620, to the Present Time: With a Concise History of the Aborigines of New England, and Their Wars with the English, &c.*, reprinted and expanded in 1835 after the 1,250 copies of the 1820 edition quickly sold out.¹⁹ As the place that could make a generally accepted claim about primacy in the "permanent establishment" of New England, Plymouth could boast a plethora of firsts vis-à-vis any other New English place.

Some of these firsts could be unique to Plymouth: where else could a contest ensue over whose was the first foot of the first white person to land in the first permanent English settlement in New England? Descendants of John Alden and Mary Chilton quarreled over the distinction in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Thatcher's volume detailed the dramatic event of the first landing and

Table 2. Themes appearing in local histories (by number and percentage)

	CONNECTICUT	MASSACHUSETTS	RHODE ISLAND	TOTAL
Epidemics	5 (6%)	86 (27%)	9 (23%)	100 (22%)
Firsting	53 (62%)	245 (79%)	20 (51%)	318 (71%)
Indian landscapes	55 (65%)	189 (58%)	23 (59%)	267 (60%)
King Philip's War	40 (47%)	192 (59%)	27 (69%)	259 (58%)
Land transfers	70 (82%)	213 (66%)	32 (82%)	315 (70%)
Missionary outreach	30 (35%)	126 (39%)	11 (28%)	167 (37%)
Pequot War	34 (40%)	63 (19%)	7 (18%)	104 (23%)
Other conflicts	60 (71%)	217 (67%)	16 (41%)	293 (65%)

went on to claim that “this, then, is to be considered as the first stepping on the Rock of the Pilgrims from the shallop belonging to the Mayflower, and this is the *birth day of our nation*,” a claim that certainly might have been contested—and was—by Jamestown.²¹

But wait. Much later in Thatcher’s volume, the issue of first landings reemerged:

Clark’s Island is the first land that received the footsteps of our fathers who formed the exploring party from Cape Cod. It received its name from Clark, the master’s mate of the Mayflower, who first took possession of it with the shallop, December 8th, 1620. There is a tradition that Edward Dotey, a young man, attempted to be the first to leap on the island, but was severely checked for his forwardness, that Clark might be the first to land and have the honor of giving name to the island, which it still retains. My authority for this tradition is Mr. Joseph Lucas, whose father was the great-grand-son of Edward Dotey. The anecdote has been transmitted from father to son, so tenaciously that it need not be disputed.²²

What can account for relegating the exploring party to the end of the narrative, which clearly made it secondary to the Alden and Chilton dispute? I would suggest that this more transient landing could not fully symbolize the permanency that lay at the roots of firsting. Exploring is not settling. Plymouth, not Clark’s Island, was destined to attain primacy in the mythology of the nation. It is interesting that this narrative scripted competition over primacy of people and place as part of the actual events rather than a contest of memories. Further, the authorities invoked in both disputes are oral history—memory transmitted from generation to generation—here endorsed as reliable beyond dispute, an endorsement Indian oral traditions never received. The stakes in this special first are evident in other narratives; although they could not enter the contest for first setting foot on Plymouth Rock, one historian asserted that “we are not sure but *Falmouth* may yet claim the honor of being the first spot on the main land of America on which an Englishman ever trod.”²³

Plymouth, too, could claim “the first English child born in New England” (the formerly famous Peregrine White),²⁴ and could muse over the March 6, 1621, encounter with Samoset, who purportedly greeted the new arrivals “cheerfully in broken English—‘Welcome Englishmen, welcome Englishmen.’” Samoset reputedly learned some English from fishermen in what was to be renamed Maine, which calls into question the novelty of the encounter. Thatcher tells us that “this was the first savage with whom the whites had obtained an interview,” at least in Plymouth.²⁵ Less amiable encounters

mounted by Captain Myles Standish ensued later, yet peace with the Indians came to prevail. A map of Plymouth Village in 1832 forms the frontispiece to this volume, on which Watson’s Hill is depicted as the place where the first Indian treaty was made (about which, more later). This location apparently remained an important landmark for Plymouth, a place to be remembered as significant throughout time: “The stone arch bridge was erected over the town brook in the year 1812, at Spring hill, precisely at the spot where the colonists had their first interview with Massasoit, in 1621. The hill where the sachem with his train of 60 men appeared, was called Strawberry hill by the first planters, now Watson’s hill” (see Figure 2).²⁶

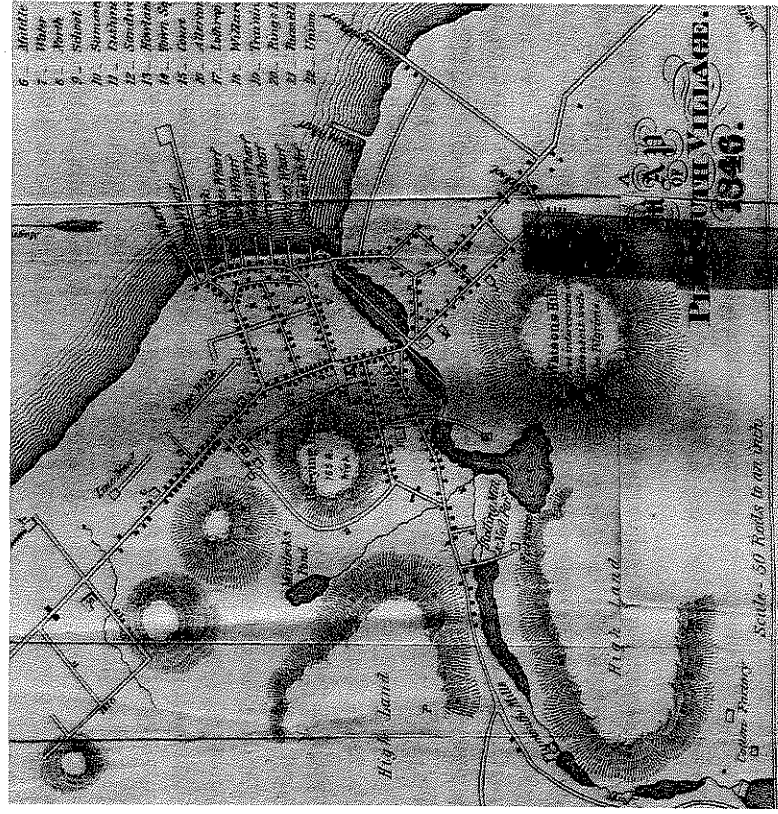


Figure 2. A Map of Plymouth Village, 1846. This map of Plymouth Village posits the exact location where the first treaty between Massasoit and the English was negotiated. Pendleton’s lithograph, Boston. Promptsiece for James Thatcher, *History of the Town of Plymouth, from Its First Settlement in 1620, to the Present Time: With a Concise History of the Aborigines of New England, and Their Wars with the English*, 5c, 2nd ed. (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1835).

Interestingly, although they did not name this place "Massasoit hill," they could still locate the place where the "first interview" occurred. And momentarily, Plymouth could claim the Mayflower Compact and insist it constituted the "first essay in the civilized world to found a republican constitution of government." This entitled Plymouth to make the claim of establishing "the foundation of all the democratic institutions of America," thus engaging in a dubious reading back of history.²⁷

Other firsts noted by Thatcher included the first Sabbath, "first English town built in New England," "first offence committed and punished," "first prison," "first marriage ever solemnized in New England" (Susannah White and Edward Winslow), first record of horses, first division of lands, "first notice of a bell . . . probably the first used in New England," first church, Ralph Smith, first pastor of the first church, and the first mention of a wharf (see Figure 3). All of these firsts relate in one way or another to the establishment of institutions New Englanders regarded as central to their identity, and as essential elements in the modernity of their social order. Whether it be institutionalized religious practice, the implementation of legal codes governing everything from marriage to civil and criminal offenses, economic development, or political establishments, New Englanders scripted themselves as modern people looking to the future, creating order out of chaos and forging modern societies and cultures that broke from the past. This story implicitly argued that Indians and Indian ways could not be acknowledged as legitimate, ongoing, and part of the landscape of the future.²⁸

Such is the message of the scattered etchings of places and events that found their way into some local texts. A Truro, Massachusetts, text included perhaps the most fascinating of these, a fine etching with the caption "The First Washing-Day at Cape Cod" (see Figure 4).²⁹ Here, English women stoically go about the process of laundering clothes while armed men stand guard, presumably awaiting Indian foes that might put a halt to these domestic activities. A poem by Margaret J. Preston accompanied the illustration:

And there did the Pilgrim mothers,

"On a Monday," the record says,

Ordain for their new-found England,

The first of her washing-days.

And there did the Pilgrim fathers,

With matchlock and axe well slung,

Keep guard o'er the smoking kettles

That propt the croches hung.

For the trail of the startled savage

Was over the marshy grass,

And the glint of their eyes keep peering

Through cedar and sassafras

For the earliest act of the heroes

Whose fame has a world-wide sway,

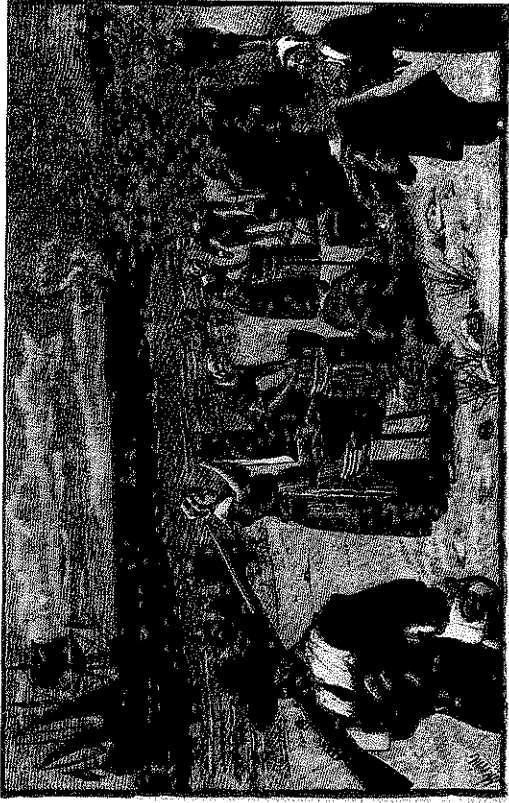
Was—to fashion a crane for a kettle,

And order a washing-day.

Such depictions suggest that the English brought cleanliness and domesticity with them to a place where they never existed before, and these illustrations inscribe a particular gender order of femininity and masculinity that is being initiated through their mundane activities. So too is gender inscribed in the etching of the mythological "First Thanksgiving," which depicts English and Indian men at table being served by English girls (see Figure 5).³⁰ Taken together, such depictions suggest that the very institution of home life properly ordered by gender never existed prior to the arrival of the English.

If they couldn't match Plymouth's precise catalog of firsts, other places could still replicate the practice of firsting by merely qualifying events as firsts for that particular locality. Even if Woonsocket, Rhode Island, could not claim the Mayflower Compact as a local event, it could point out that its "first public demonstration in Woonsocket, that is worthy of mention, took place in 1833," and thus assert its political activism while it celebrated the centennial of the nation.³¹ And the firsting script mutated constantly, as particular localities chose different firsts to note, though the most common included first settlers, births of first white children (especially males), first marriages, first town meetings and town officers, first meetinghouses and ministers (numbered on into the present), first divisions of land, first newspapers, first schools, first bridges, mills, and other public works that symbolized modernity. Many communities also carefully detailed their first actions in the American Revolution, the quintessential break from the past (and the irrationality of Europe), especially participation in the first battle with the British at Lexington and Concord, and interestingly, citizens of Concord expended much ink in attempting to wrest primacy of their place over Lexington as the place of first bloodshed.³² Lexington, sure of its firstness, did not reciprocate.

Some narratives that engage in firsting densely weave the themes into richly descriptive paragraphs. A thumbnail sketch from Rev. Myron Dudley's *History of Cromwell: A Sketch* blends present and past in a picturesque commentary on a momentous and inevitable trajectory toward modernity:



THE FIRST WASHING-DAY AT CAPE COD.

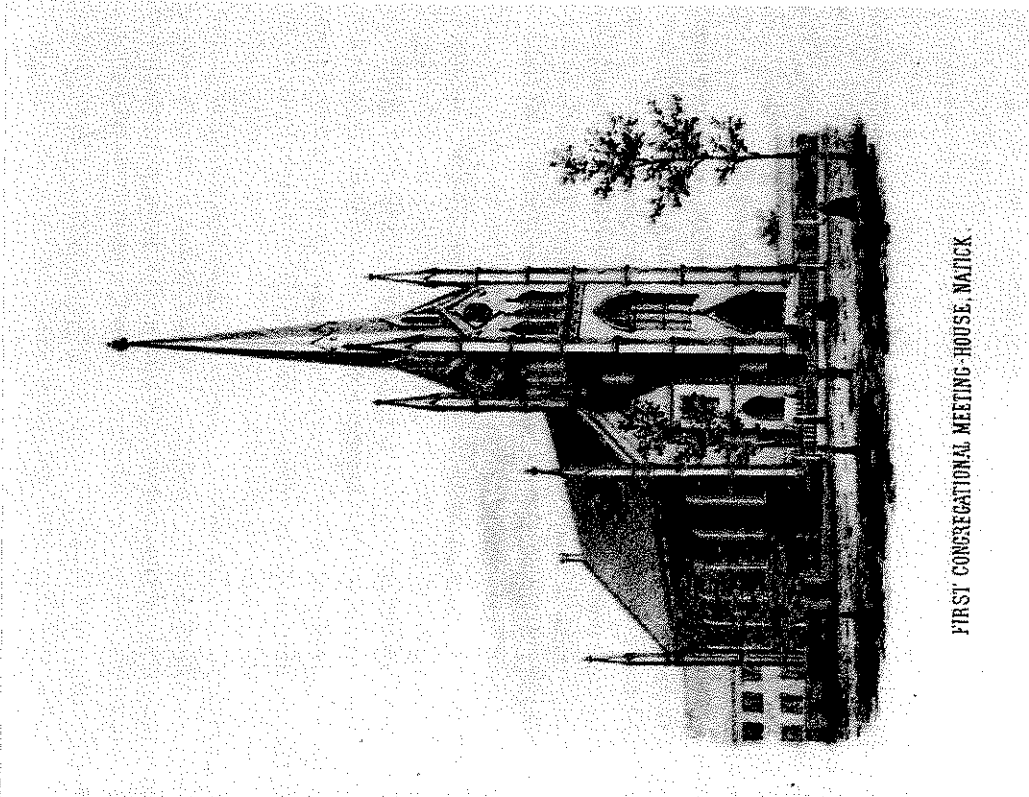
Figure 4. *The First Washing-Day at Cape Cod.* Note the armed men standing guard over the women as they engage in the supposed first washing day on Cape Cod. Unknown engraver. From Shebnah Rich, *Triuro—Cape Cod, or, Land Marks and Sea Marks* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1883), [57].

The first English explorers, in passing up and down the river, saw upon the high ground, not far from the corner of Washington and High Street in Middletown, the Castle of Indian Sachem Sawheag, chief of a tribe who occupied the surrounding hills in Maromas, Durham, Middlefield, Westfield, Cromwell, Chatham and Portland, then known by the Indian name Mattabesett, afterwards included within the limits of Middletown. . . . Chief Sawheag was unfriendly to white strangers.

These two reasons, the pre-occupancy of this region by unfriendly Indians and the low swampy condition of the alluvial, delayed settlement something like twenty years or more after the regions above had been occupied.

This is the first picture of life in this section. . . . The first settlements by the ancestors of the present occupants were made in 1650. This date is pretty sure. There may have been a few pioneers two or three years earlier, but this present year of 1876 marks the two hundred and twenty-sixth anniversary of the white man's permanent establishment upon these lands.³³

Dudley explicitly asserts that Indian possession of their homelands constituted a "pre-occupancy" of the lower Connecticut River Valley, and thus suggests that it is a lesser sort of ownership. (Could it be that Dudley was importing Anglo-American legal language from the 1823 U.S. Supreme Court case



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL MEETING-HOUSE, NATICK

Figure 3. *First Congregational Meeting-House, Natick.* This etching erroneously asserts that this building represented the first congregational meetinghouse in Natick, Massachusetts. The actual first congregational meetinghouse was built entirely by Indians, who officially gained congregational status in 1660. Unknown engraver. Frontispiece for Oliver N. Bacon, *A History of Natick, from Its First Settlement in 1651 to the Present Time; with Notices of the First White Families* (Boston: Damrell and Moore, 1856).

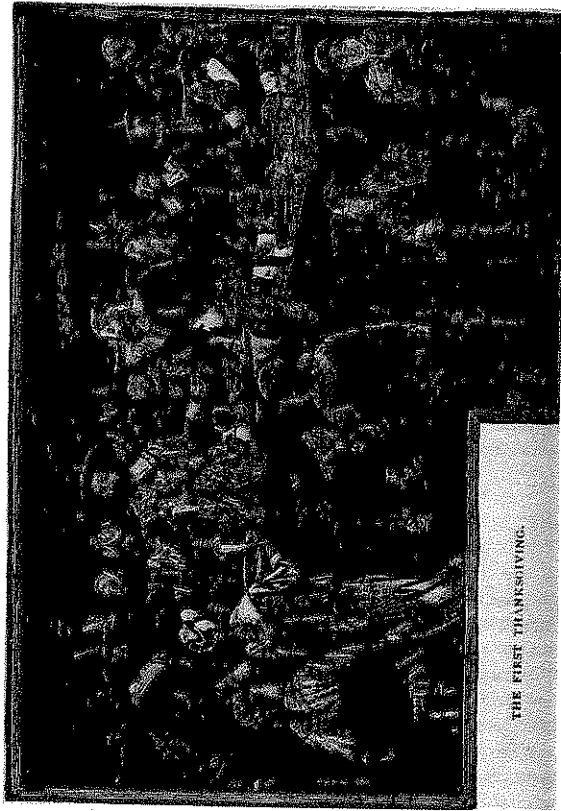


Figure 5. *The First Thanksgiving*. This depiction of the supposed first thanksgiving inscribes an English gender order on the proceedings. Unknown engraver. From Shebnaah Rich, *Primo—Cape Cod; or, Land Marks and Sea Marks* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Co., 1883), [77].

Johnson v. M'Intosh that characterized Indian land tenure as “mere occupancy” rather than outright ownership?) Further, he anachronistically superimposes present-day markings of Indian lands by using New English street and town names in describing the area. And the advent of permanent English presence on the land marks the “first picture of life in this section.” This semantic maneuver effectively scripts all previous human history in this place as a dead end—as incongruent with the modern Euro-American order that now begins as English pioneers begin the heroic process of erecting English institutions in the region.

Particular “firsts” became occasions for public gatherings devoted to historical commemoration. On June 11, 1855, for example, citizens of Charle- mont, Massachusetts, gathered to commemorate a special first in the town’s history. Joseph White provided the centerpiece of the occasion by delivering his oration, later published, *Charlemon as a Plantation: An Historical Discourse at the Centennial Anniversary of the Death of Moses Rice, the First Settler of the Town*. Near the beginning of his oration, White offered up the story line in this pithy passage, which neatly summarizes the common thread of nineteenth-century firsting narratives:

This quiet valley, now so beautiful with its garniture of green, and these guardian hills, still bore up the ancient forest. But the time appointed for a wonderful change was at hand. The axe was now to be laid at the root of giant trees; the blue smoke was now to curl from the low cabin of the pioneer; and the voice of industry, and the notes of prayer and praise, were now to arise; and the long, dark reign of wild beast, and wilder man, not without a bitter struggle, was soon to cease forever. The first settler—the patriarch of the valley—was on his way. In the spring of 1743, if not, indeed, in the previous autumn, Moses Rice of Rutland, in the County of Worcester, removed with his family to the town, and settled upon the tract which he had previously purchased.³⁴

Like Dudley in the case of Cromwell, this author waffles over dates even while he strives for precision in the mapping of origins. With Moses Rice’s arrival in 1743, or perhaps even 1742, the modern order was set in motion, initiated by his manly boldness in venturing out to the wild beyond populated by nameless Indian foes whose violent resistance was destined to fail, and preceded by his presumptively lawful yet unspecified purchase of Indian lands.

White’s listeners then heard rich descriptions of the bloody incursions, as “the little band of hardy adventurers” felled the forests and turned them into fields, even while they coped with “the hardships of frontier life,—the fear of the tomahawk and scalping knife,” with local Indians regularly joining forces with Canadian Indians in their forays.³⁵ Yet the title of White’s account completely obscured the drama that was to come. Having fled from Charlemon during King George’s War (1744–48) only to return and rebuild his farm, which had been destroyed, Rice finally met his fate in 1755 while plowing in a cornfield along with his son, grandson, and other men from the town.³⁶ A small party of Indians attacked them, scalping and mortally wounding Rice, and carrying his grandson into captivity in Canada, which ended six years later with his ransom. Moses Rice was buried on a hill near his dwelling. White expressed the hope that the town “will see to it that the sacred spot, set apart by him as a burial-place forever, and the hallowed depository of his mortal remains and those of his children’s children, shall be guarded by an appropriate enclosure, from the intrusive ploughshare, and the unhallowed feet of cattle and swine.”³⁷ His rhetoric effectively canonized Rice, who was elevated to esteemed status by his very firstness, and the ground that held his remains recommended to the populace as a sacred site. Anonymous Indian resistance to English incursion is scripted in this rendering as irrational, savage, and doomed.

This episode closed the chapter on Indian conflict, and constituted the final mention of Indians in White’s forty-eight-page sketch. He ends by musing

on the importance of history and its preservation, even while lamenting the startling lack of early records for the town. His final paragraph is a classic expression of the ancestor veneration that is so typical of nineteenth-century narratives and a richly subtle example of firsting:

We are descended from men of no common mould. They were worthy sons of the men who first landed on these shores. These fathers of our fathers, were indeed a peculiar people. They were the seed-wheat, sifted by the winds of persecution from the chaff of the old world, and wafted across the sea, to be sown broadcast on the virgin soil of the new world. They were educated men. . . . They acknowledged the claims of the future, and manfully strove to pay the debt. And, as were the fathers, so also were the sons whom we this day commemorate. . . . True, also, to the future, they sowed that we might reap; they labored, that we might enter into their labors; they purchased with blood, that we might inherit in peace. May ours be the high privilege, as it is the solemn duty, to transmit this rich inheritance, unimpaired, to the generations to come. So shall we best honor the memory of the Fathers.³⁸

From generation to generation, the principled, educated men who had been driven from a backward old world—a world mired in tradition—engaged in a masculine struggle to forge the foundations of the modern world. The denizens of present-day Charlemon owed it to their honorable ancestors to maintain those ideas and values and secure their transmission into the future.

Originaly Places

Others shared the angst over lost or incomplete records of origins expressed by the residents of Charlemon as well as the reverence they attached to their ancestors and their originaly deeds. Although frequently frustrated by fragmentary and disorderly archives, local historians nonetheless worked diligently to document precisely the people and events that set their modernity in motion. As an account of North Providence posed the issue, “It is pleasing to be able to answer the questions, Who felled the first trees of the primeval forests within its borders? Whose plowshare turned the first furrow? Whose hoe broke the first sod? Whose cabin sheltered the first residents?”³⁹ In Medford, Massachusetts, “the records of the first forty years are lost,” and so its first major historian reconstructed the evidentiary base from other sources: General Court records, town histories, and circulars returned by town residents who provided genealogical information. He fretted over the indifferent results of the project, lamenting that “these registers of early families in New England will contain the only authentic records of the true Anglo-Saxon blood existing among us; for, if foreign immigration should pour in upon us

for the next fifty years as it has for the last thirty, it will become difficult for any man to prove that he has descended from the Plymouth Pilgrims.”⁴⁰

Of course Plymouth served (and for many continues to serve) as the quintessential originaly place, the birthplace of the nation. Many other localities in addition to Medford, however geographically or genealogically distant, joined Medford in connecting their story to the “Plymouth Pilgrims.”⁴¹ By the 1770s, New Englanders invented the tradition of Plymouth Rock as the mythic site of origins, and organized themselves into New England societies that proliferated throughout the nation.⁴² Their annual Forefathers’ Day celebrations, complete with historical orations by famous dignitaries, spawned a large body of texts lauding the rock as the originaly place of the nation.⁴³ As claimed by William S. Russell:

Forefather’s Rock, so attractive to the curiosity of visitors, excepting that part of it which is now enclosed within the railing in front of Pilgrim Hall, retains the same position it occupied two hundred and thirty years ago, when the founders of New England first landed on our shores, and introduced the arts of civilization, the institutions of religion, civil government and education, upon the basis of just and equal rights, which from that memorable day to the present time, have secured the general good of the whole community, to an extent probably unexampled in any equal period of human experience.⁴⁴

Thus could Plymouth Rock as an originaly place symbolize modernity and become a place of pilgrimage throughout the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first.

Local historians found plenty of other larger themes of colonialism with which to frame their narratives. Christopher Columbus is frequently featured, and some writers push further: “it is now definitely settled that a bold and hardy Norwegian seaman crossed the stormy Atlantic to colonies in Greenland, in the year 985, discovering Nantucket on that voyage, naming it *Nau-ticon*,” thus preceding Columbus by centuries.⁴⁵ Luminary antiquarian Samuel Gardner Drake offered a thorough discussion of European forays to North America before arriving on page 12 at the story of Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, “the first Englishman who had come in a direct course to this part of the continent, and the first of any nation who thus reached any part of what is now the United States, except Verazzani.”⁴⁶ This firstness is called into question by the description that followed: Gosnold encountered “eight Indians, two of whom were dressed partly in European costume. These Indians came from a rock, which, from this circumstance, was called Savage Rock; the first spot on the shores of New England that received an [ironic] English

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name."⁴⁷ (Where did they get those European costumes?) Prominently featured also is Captain John Smith, who named New England.⁴⁸ Prior to that time, a historian of Gloucester tells us, "our Cape still remained without a name"—a dubious proposition given the rich Native nomenclature of Indian New England.⁴⁹ Not until chapter 8 did Drake arrive at the subject of his 840-page volume: Boston. At the bicentennial celebration of the arrival of Governor Winthrop held in Charlestown in 1830, Edward Everett paused to remember the exile of Puritans to Leyden.⁵⁰ Towns in Connecticut occasionally referenced the Dutch who preceded them.⁵¹

Those narrators who reached back to these early interactions between Indians and non-Indians hinted at a long and complex story that more recent scholarship tells us transformed New England even before the more dramatic changes that followed the permanent arrival of Europeans. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, periodic encounters occurred between Europeans exploiting the Grand Banks and other fisheries. Eventually explorers and traders began to make incursions into Indian New England and points north and south. By their nature fleeting and episodic, such interactions did not necessarily entail major disruptions for indigenous peoples. Rather, mutually beneficial trade relations rooted in Native notions of diplomacy tapped into existing networks of exchange that emerged from nonpermanent European ventures. Indians exchanged furs, pelts, and other Native goods for metal, cloth, and assorted trade goods, incorporating these items into their lives in Indian ways. As a result, Indian material culture and artistic expression changed through the inclusion of new items—though not necessarily in the ways Europeans might have expected. For example, Indians pounded out kettles to make arrowheads, and Native jewelry crafted out of metals appeared as grave goods alongside glass beads and Indian goods such as wampum (made out of quahog shells). Native clothing styles changed as woolen jackets and shirts that came through the trade complemented the leather leggings and moccasins of Indian origin and design.⁵² Such changes attest to the dynamic nature of Indian cultures just as the relations of trade that underwrote these transformations are evidence of a complex international diplomacy at work for more than a century before the English arrival at Plymouth.

Other authors rejected the very murkiness of much of this early history in favor of a vastly circumscribed precision. Wallingford, Connecticut's historian, Charles Henry Stanley Davis, started right off in chapter 1 with the "Purchase of Indian Lands." He then expounded on the exceptional nature of the defensible claims of precise origins that set the nation apart:

There is nothing in which our nation is more peculiar, than that it records its own origins. There is no other nation that does this, the Jews excepted. No one of the present nations of Europe can tell in a word of their earliest ancestors, or even specify the century in which their territory was first taken possession of by them; but all is involved in obscurity, as are the years before the flood. But it is far different with our early history as a nation. We know the men who said they would be free, and who laid the foundation of this mighty republic. We know whence they came, the object for which they came, the spot to which they came, and the year, the month, and the day they took possession. Our nation owes a lasting debt of gratitude to our ancestors for their fidelity in recording the incipient steps taken by them in settling this new world.⁵³

This passage stakes a claim to American exceptionalism (excluding the Jews) about the exact moment of origins as well as the actual names of those who arrived in order to forge a free republic down to the very day they "took possession" of the land. Davis made a virtue of the clean break rooted in precise origins that marked the colonial state. The ability to clearly demarcate the beginnings of what came to be the nation is celebrated, juxtaposed with the shadowy origins of Europe's time immemorial. Davis elevated the very act of writing about those very first actions—of producing the records that enabled the claim—to heroic feats for which posterity owed its ancestors a debt of gratitude.

Judge Joseph Story shared this mind-set. In his oration celebrating Salem he declared, "Our history lies far within the reach of the authentic annals of history."⁵⁴ The origins of the modern nation—a free republic—could be dated to the day of taking possession of "the spot to which they came." James Dimon Green pushed the point further in addressing the questions of origins:

No cloud of uncertainty envelops the subject. As a people, a constituent part of a commonwealth, or a community of nations, we have not to go back for our origins to a period of ignorance and semi-barbarism, when there were no letters, no records, but such as existed in the memory of uncivilized men,—vague and varying traditions handed down from father to son, through successive generations. We have our literal records,—family, town, and state records,—of all transactions interesting and important.⁵⁵

The nation is distinguished from unnamed ignorant and semibarbaric others by a precise documentary record that symbolizes civilization. The unreliable foundation of tradition and memory—of oral history—could not support a modern, civilized nation.

Implicit in the foregoing constructions is the contrast between non-Indians and Indians, who one can only imagine were readily invoked in discussions of semibarbarism and the lack of "civilization." A historian of Manchester, Massachusetts, brought Indians explicitly into the picture and rooted his originary claims in the idea of how history is made:

The history of America begins with the advent of Europeans in the New World. The Red Men in small and scattered bands roamed the stately forests and interminable prairies, hunted the bison and the deer, fished the lakes and streams, gathered around the council-fire and danced the war-dance; but they planted no states, founded no commerce, cultivated no arts, built up no civilizations. . . .
*They made no history.*⁵⁶

And in Lynn: "The history of the red men remains in impenetrable obscurity. They had no books to contain their laws, exhibit their polity, or record their achievements; no written language."⁵⁷ Both of these constructions conjured up the stereotype of lazy, wandering, ignorant Indians living in lawless chaos and confusion without a written language with which to record their feats on a land they could not truly claim to own. According to this calculus, Indian peoples did not make history and therefore could not become the foundation of modern nations.

Famous First Indians

These notions about origins called into being a peculiar phenomenon: famous first Indians. Ordinary places depended on famous first Indians to authorize their origins and inaugurate the production of modernity. Plainly, the only thing that makes these Indians "firsts" is their role in a narrative whereby they are to be replaced. Here is where first Indians depart dramatically from their non-Indian counterparts. Rather than gaining their fame as firsts who will be a part of an enduring modernity, they are famous because they set into motion the processes that are the beginning of their end. Most notable in this respect are Indian leaders who entered into diplomatic relationships with the English, thus in one way or another authorizing the English presence in Indian homelands. Even though part of non-Indians' claims to Indian places rested in the argument that Indians "made no history," in their depictions of famous first Indians we learn that Indians *did* do diplomacy.

Trade, diplomacy, and conflict over power and land followed the arrival of the English, with different groups assessing the motivations and power of the others and attempting to forge alliances within the new geopolitical realities. Indian sachems such as Massasoit negotiated terms of coexistence with the

newcomers at Plymouth, concluding a treaty with Plymouth in 1621.⁵⁸ The Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi likewise treated with Roger Williams for peaceful coexistence following Williams's banishment from Massachusetts Bay in 1636.⁵⁹ At the same time, the enigmatic Mohegan sachem Uncas engaged in diplomacy with everyone in order to secure his own ends.⁶⁰ All of these figures became the subject of narrative after narrative, securing their positions in history as famous first Indians.

Not surprisingly, stories about Plymouth and its pivotal figures attained a centrality in this firsting process. The primary and secondary source matter for narrating Plymouth's story is relatively abundant, and the frequency with which localities from all over southern New England linked their stories to Plymouth meant these stories found wide circulation. Of the iconic figures of early Plymouth, the trio of Samoset, Massasoit, and Squanto gained the most notice as firsts. The life stories of these individuals signify a particular story of colonialism.

Witness Rich's account of Truro, Massachusetts:

Another circumstance as clearly providential as any event in history, and without which we cannot see how the Pilgrims could have survived, was the friendship of Samoset, Squanto, and Massasoit [*sic*]. As subjects of rare historical interest, honesty and nobility of character, they are an honor to their race, and worthy a niche in the temple of fame. From savage tribes, thinned by pestilence, and basely betrayed by the white men, came these three men from different channels, and differing widely in offices, yet with a unity of purpose to serve the Englishman in his weakness and necessity.⁶¹

Rich singled out this trio because of their "honesty and nobility of character," because of their concerted efforts to "serve the Englishman," which secured them a spot in "the temple of fame." The base white men in question included Englishman Thomas Hunt, who seized twenty-seven Pokanoket (or Wampanoag) men and women in 1614 and sold them as slaves in Malaga in an episode that would carry long-standing implications for Indians and Europeans alike. Most famous of the enslaved was none other than Squanto, who made his way back to his homeland in the company of Thomas Dermer only to discover that his village had disintegrated in the wake of a disastrous epidemic. Squanto became a cultural broker between the powerful Wampanoag sachem Massasoit and the English before meeting his demise under shadowy circumstances in 1622.⁶²

In February 1621, weeks after the first landing, the English had failed to establish relations with Indians. By then, "a general meeting was called to

establish some military arrangements, and Myles Standish was chosen Captain."⁶³ But it was not until the sixteenth of March that

much surprise was excited by the appearance of an Indian who boldly walked to the rendezvous, and cried out cheerily in broken English—"Welcome Englishmen, welcome Englishmen." This was Samoset, a Sagamore, who had come from Monhegan, (District of Maine,) where he had learned something of the English tongue from the Captains of the fishing vessels, on that shore, and he knew by name most of those commanders. This was the first savage with whom the whites had obtained an interview. No incident could have diffused greater joy in the hearts of the disconsolate . . . He said that the place they now occupy is called Patuxet, and that about four years ago all the natives died of an extraordinary plague; that there was neither man, woman, nor child remaining in the territory, of which the English had now possessed themselves.⁶⁴

The remarkable providence of an Indian hailing the English in English (however halting) bode well for the English. Intermittent visits and exchanges with other Indians ensued after this "first interview," which paved the way for something much more momentous. Samoset returned to the fledgling settlement on April 2 with other Indians, including Squanto, "the only surviving native of Patuxet," in tow. They came to trade and to announce the imminent arrival of "their great Sagamore, Massasoit . . . with Quadequina, his brother, and all their tribe." With Squanto acting as intermediary, Massasoit and Edward Winslow exchanged preliminaries on Watson's Hill, which included greetings from the king of England, and overtures for trade and peace extended by each side. With military precautions also taken on each side, Myles Standish guided Massasoit and a contingent of his group to Governor Carver, after which a treaty was negotiated.⁶⁵

Leaving aside the terms of the "treaty" and the degree to which a thorough and shared understanding governed its negotiation, the author of this account inserted this footnote to the proceedings: "This treaty, the work of one day, being honestly intended on both sides, was kept with fidelity as long as Massasoit lived, but was afterwards (1675) broken by Philip, his successor;" a quote taken from Jeremy Belknap's *American Biography*.⁶⁶ Others put it differently:

With him [Massasoit] their first treaty was concluded. In an unfinished building near Plymouth, the floor spread with a rug and cushion to give dignity to the proceedings, were conducted the simple negotiations which are memorable as the beginning of American diplomacy. The treaty was one of alliance, and not one of subjection . . . He lived to see his territories melt away before the steady inroad of the whites . . . But he remained to the last true to the compact he had made.⁶⁷

Even before a proper building could be finished to dignify the negotiations, the English entered into a treaty of alliance (not subjugation) with the Indians. Thus did the trio of Samoset, Squanto, and Massasoit set into motion the grand tradition of American diplomacy and set the stage for more than fifty years of peaceful relations horribly violated by Massasoit's own son, King Philip. And in this single family Plymouth scripted both the noble and the ignoble savage, the excellent and friendly Massasoit, whose dignified commitment to amiable interaction and exchange was destined to be betrayed by his ignoble son. One history summed up the first part of the story succinctly in its index, which included an entry for "Friendly Indians—Massasoit, Samoset, and others."⁶⁸