The Memory Frontier: Uncommon Pursuits of Past and Place in the Northeast after King Philip’s War

Christine DeLucia

The runners set out before dawn. Traveling east from the rushing falls at South Natick, Massachusetts, they swept over cold earth and under mid-autumn stars, silhouetted by headlights cutting the dark. By the time they reached the river, the sun had risen just high enough to illuminate an astonishing sight. Three mishoonash, wooden dugouts fashioned by Wampanoag Indians, floated on the Charles River upstream from the Boston skyline and alongside crew teams stroking in dawn practice. Not since the days of King Philip’s War (1675–1678) had such vessels made the trip downriver to the harbor. The Sacred Run and Paddle, undertaken on October 30, 2010, commemorated one of the most wrenching chapters in King Philip’s War: the forced removal of Nipmuc and other Eastern Algonquian peoples from their homes to Deer Island in Boston Harbor, where they were confined during the winter of 1675–1676. Many of them died on that windswept spot and in other episodes of that colonial crisis, the Northeast’s “great watershed.” Giant digester eggs of a sewage treatment plant overshadow Deer Island today, and the land gives scant testimony to the island’s calamitous past. Yet memories of this violence were unquestionably alive that frigid October day, animating an unprecedented though long-coming reclamation of indigenous geographies altered but not erased by centuries of cross-cultural struggle. As the mishoonash pushed through the waves, they were more than maritime curiosities. They were politically charged agents of decolonization, making a provocative statement to Boston and transforming its urban heart into native space.¹

King Philip’s War reshaped the Northeast in three years, destroying English settlements and decimating or dispersing diverse native peoples from ancestral homelands, areas already affected by decades of colonial settlement and disease. Like the Civil War in the U.S. South and the Holocaust in Europe, the conflict has lingered in collective remembrance

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because it forces confrontations with fundamental pieces of identity. How do individuals and communities reckon with a past of almost unspeakable cruelties and dispossession, the effects of which have persisted through centuries of racialized thinking and policy making? How do they—we—conceive of ourselves as complicit in these violence, or as witnesses, victims, survivors of them? The war and its cultural legacies attained prominence with publication of Jill Lepore’s *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (1998). This Bancroft Prize–winning study aimed high in its assessment of the war’s consequences, discerning in them roots of a peculiarly “American” opposition of “Indian” and “English” identities and their supposedly concomitant practices of savagery and literacy.

In its aspirations to diagnose national mentalité and mythos, however, *The Name of War* slighted the more subtle shifts occasioned by this early modern convulsion: its effects on identity formation at the more modest levels of colony, state, town, tribe, reservation, family. Its intense focus on the rhetoric of war also marginalized the myriad ways that nonlinguistic dimensions of human experience such as material culture, bodily performance, and the physical environment have contoured grassroots senses of the past. Yet Lepore’s study, now an influential staple of early American history reading lists, has not been fundamentally challenged in the fourteen years since its publication—despite the fact that remembrance has been contested throughout the Northeast and transnationally in ways that the book’s paradigm can scarcely anticipate or accommodate and despite

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2 In lieu of “collective memory,” which implies a fully coherent, abstracted entity, the field of memory studies has used terms such as “remembrance,” insisting on the human agency and practice involved; or “collected memory,” referencing imperfect aggregations of many competing individual memories. For example, see Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, Eng., 2000), 9; and James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), xi. For a specific example regarding the war and its cultural legacies, see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (1998; New York, 1999).
resounding historiographical rejections of “Indian” generalizing in native and New England histories of identity and place, as well as in a cavalcade of tribal-specific histories and settler community studies. For more than three centuries, tribal members, amateur historians, custodians of public memory-sites, and even academics have engaged in practices of recall that bear little resemblance to elite print culture or concerns of the nation-state, yet hold paramount importance for local articulations of belonging and collective purpose. These “secret Americas,” as Mohegan tribal medicine woman Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel has called such underrecognized local expressions of historical consciousness and cultural identity, persist within the geographical corner of America most thoroughly mined by historians. Yet these lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) have eluded many scholars and publics.3

At the Deer Island gathering, not one participant identified foremost as Indian. They called themselves Nipmuc, Wampanoag (Mashpee or Aquinnah), Ponkapoag, Abenaki, Penobscot. Among non-natives, none were from New England or America primarily, but from particular states, towns, and families.4 In the realm of lived experience there has rarely been a coherent American identity, and certainly not a monolithic Indian one, but instead finer-grained levels of loyalty and comprehension where memories are plural and shifting. Groups can selectively mobilize essentialist American or pan-Indian identities for strategic purposes, of course. But historians of social memory can glean more by venturing closer to the ground, where identity is negotiated vis-à-vis actual human neighbors rather than abstract gazes at racialized Others. Recuperating regionalism might seem an antidote to the nation-state’s elisions, but even within New England subregional transformations have generated distinctive anxieties that refract perceptions of the colonial past in singular ways. The rise and collapse of mill towns; the hemorrhaging of farmers from agricultural areas in the 1800s; pervasive land loss among tribal communities, followed by resurgence and scattered casino gaming; and influxes of French Canadian, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, and other ethnic groups into formerly Anglo-American ports and cities: each of these occurrences has bred unhappiness, and each of these places has devised its own means of grappling with unsettling heritages such as the wreckage left behind by King Philip’s War. Moreover, while Anglophone archives of southeastern New England have dominated the historiography, the war’s landscape was much larger, encompassing New Hampshire/Maine, New France/Quebec, and a red Atlantic world of slavery and ethnogenesis stretching to Bermuda and North Africa. King Philip’s War resonates at all these points, and while a few motifs recur, the melody in each venue is distinct.

This essay revisits the Northeast to track how place has conserved or erased diverse local understandings of King Philip’s War. It approaches these chorographic links between time and space through what might be called “memoryscapes”: constellations of spots on the land that have accrued stories over time, transforming them from blank or neutral spaces into emotionally infused, politically potent places.5 Moving from the late seventeenth

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4 Site visit to Deer Island Sacred Run and Paddle, Oct. 30, 2010. Thomas A. Tweed uses the term “sacroscape” to reference the fundamentally sited nature of human experiences, particularly religious ones, finding that travel and ritual within specific landscapes are integral to the shaping of consciousness.

century to the early twenty-first and drawing upon methodologies from ethnohistory, environmental history, and material culture studies, it demonstrates that getting back into place—acknowledging that people produce history and memory in specific sites—is critical to understanding the divergences that distinguish community memories and identities; and the concrete repercussions for territorial control that are the bedfellows of *topophilia*, attachment to place. Lands and waters lay at the heart of colonial encounters as native peoples and European arrivals negotiated rights and fought openly for control of space. In the centuries since, these grounds have remained contested: adjudicated, managed, commodified, “improved,” moralized, aestheticized, and sacralized. The fallout has been monumental. Dislocated peoples have longed and labored to recapture ancestral geographies or install spatial orders that appear more just, using tactics conciliatory and radical.

A place-based approach also restores the multidimensional quality of remembrance overlooked in cultural histories reliant primarily on written records. Fishermen at Pemaquid in coastal Maine were scarcely literate, yet the war-torn character of that peninsula, razed by Wabanaki in 1676, has been conveyed to the present through other means, such as ruined foundation stones over which farmers stumbled for centuries thereafter (presently the delight of archaeologists). Yale College president Ezra Stiles (1727–1795) spent hours in his study reading histories but also cantering over the countryside, persuading inhabitants to tell him “traditions”: their knowledge, seldom written, of sites where they dwelled, including disturbing tangible relics of King Philip’s War strewn over hill and valley. Ordinary people across the region have persistently resorted to such practices to form idiosyncratic relationships with the past and its meanings, using voice, body, land, and objects. To recover this unstable milieu where land is a potent vector of memory production is to restore a dimension of cultural practice typically unseen and unheard. It is to access meanings not solely negotiated through texts and icons but also produced on the land through ephemeral activities such as walking, meeting, and speaking at salient points. “We must return memory to the world,” the philosopher Edward Casey has written, arguing that remembrance is an irreducibly emplaced phenomenon. For historians of memory, this return can begin by working longitudinally: digging deep in small places over long time spans and engaging an expansive source base of artifacts, dwellings, rituals, and other gestures of human expression that gather in specific contexts.6

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Scholars’ abiding interest in American roots, and their quests to identify the cultural origins of the American nation-state, resembles the cruise liners docked in Boston Harbor: massive, flashy, seldom rocked by small waves. But as it unfolds among intimate imagined communities, this search resembles the mishoonash: nimble, able to probe coves too negligible to be recorded on official maps. This essay steps aboard a historiographical mishoon, visiting three “minor” sites that illuminate vernacular geographies of remembrance, mourning, protest, and regeneration in an area still burdened with a strong self-image of historical innocence. Memory, the way individuals and groups conserve the past and mobilize it for present and future uses, is not treated here as an ersatz version of history. Memory has its own logic and faculties for recalling, forgetting, or silencing the past, and it merits serious consideration as a form of historical knowledge, particularly among communities that have valued nonwritten strategies for transmitting the past to posterity. Despite entrenched memoryscapes that endeavored to erase or denigrate native peoples and nations, these same natives—acting in unlikely coalitions with neighbors—have maintained alternative geographies that challenge conventional narratives about the meanings of colonial violence. Along the memory frontier, the real and metaphorical place where the past has presence, peoples of the Northeast have sought uncommon grounds.

The Narragansett Country

In June 1935 Theodore Dennis Brown, a Narragansett who had been only three years old when his community was forcibly “detribalized” by the State of Rhode Island and its
reservation dismantled (1880–1884), earned praise for his expertise as a tour guide. “Mr. Brown will be very helpful to any one seeking the historic landmarks of Rhode Island,” read his biography in the tribal magazine *The Narragansett Dawn*. “He knows the location of every interesting spot in South County and the full story, tradition or history of the place. He can direct or guide you, into Big Swamp, Royal Burying Grounds, old forts, Devil Paw Rock, Hannah Robinson Rocks, Crying Rocks and other interesting historic spots.” Locals and travelers had crisscrossed the lands of “the Narragansett Country,” or South County, Rhode Island, for centuries, aware that it had been the geographic epicenter of war in 1675–1676. Many gravitated to Great Swamp, the site of a massacre on December 19, 1675, in which colonial militia shot or burned to death hundreds of Narragansett warriors, elders, women, and children, along with Wampanoag refugees. Men of the Niantic sachem Ninigret descended there after the “Great Swamp Fight” to clean up bodies for their English allies; Ezra Stiles roamed among the brambles in May 1755 and “got some Bones”; and a parade of Rhode Island antiquarians, farmers, tribal members, and archaeologists continued the procession. Of all these itineraries, Theodore Brown’s stands out as a rare recorded instance of a Narragansett articulation of place, intricately embedding points of traumatic loss within wider geographies of survival and cultural reinvention.7

Brown’s tour expressed a modern Narragansett cultural geography, and it arose from protracted contests over land and memory in the years before and after King Philip’s War. The immediate aftermath was chaotic, with prisoners being sold into slavery, widows and children begging for subsistence, wounded and dead unaccounted for. One Narragansett, captured and sent for execution, was asked by Massachusetts officials in August 1676 to “say how many Indians were killed at the Fort-Fight” at Great Swamp: “He replied . . . that as to old men, women and Children, they had lost no body could tell how many.” Postwar conditions for surviving Narragansetts and Wampanoags were dire since Rhode Islanders with memories of conflict still fresh remained wary of their former antagonists. Local regulations prohibited them from wandering town streets at night, required that they have guardians, ordered that “no person shall suffer any Indian wigwam to be built upon his land,” and otherwise attempted to forestall unrest. Many Narragansetts were forced into servitude in colonial households or amalgamated with Niantics to the west, causing a realignment (though not undoing) of social groupings. No wonder a concerted Narragansett history of the war did not emerge in the postbellum period, akin to the detailed accountings of Increase Mather (1676) or William Hubbard (1677). The tribal networks that regulated oral transmission of knowledge had been severely challenged by Rhode Island legal strictures and dispersions that disrupted the community’s ability to collectively speak or recount; and the loss of elders, reservoirs and caretakers of cultural knowledge, would have been specially devastating to these practices.8


8 Increase Mather, *Brief history of the war with the Indians in New-England, from June 24, 1675 (when the first Englishman was murdered by the Indians) to August 12, 1676, when Philip, alias Metacomet, the principal author and beginner of the war, was slain* (London, 1676), 46. William Hubbard, *A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New-England.* For data on local regulations, see Jan. 22, 1676/7, Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations, in New England, vol. II: 1664–1677 (Providence, 1857), 560–61.
Settlers' recollections of wartime violence sparked intercolonial tumult over disposal of lands. West of Narragansett Bay, Connecticut and Rhode Island colonists waged a vitriolic paper war over territorial spoils, pleading to Whitehall for arbitration. Quaker Rhode Island failed to defend settlers during “the late Indian warr,” so jurisdiction ought to revert to Connecticut, alleged Richard Smith (whose trading house had been partially burned by native forces during the war) and other petitioners from the bay area. They recalled that after denial of military aid, “their townes, goods, corne, and cattle were by the savage natives burnt and totally destroyed: whereby the petitioners are become great sufferers in their estates and fortunes.” Colony faced down colony, airing long-simmering religious grievances and charter controversies; the boundary in the Narragansett Country took decades to settle. Disposal of Mount Hope’s lands—Philip’s former seat—was equally embittered. The governor and council of New Plymouth wrote to England in 1679 about Mount Hope’s seven thousand acres, “part of it a good soil and much of it rocky, mountainous, and barren, which commends it and causeth them highly to esteem it and earnestly to beg that they may not be deprived of it, not only because they have fought and paid and bled for it,” but also because it would provide a harbor. Contending that the “profits of the war (except a few prisoners taken in the latter end thereof) were only land,” they invoked memory of violence to retain specific territory. “New Plymouth being the seat of the war suffered more in proportion than any, and therefore had Mounthope . . . for their part, by agreement of the confederate colonies.” Elsewhere in “the Narrhaganset and Niantick countries,” colonists received encouragement from representatives of the Atherton Company, a large landholder in the area, to settle lands “very pleasant and fertile, fit and commodious for plantation”—and considered safely vacant. Settler pursuits of native lands around the bay had commenced long before the 1670s, as a tangle of deeds attests, yet the war’s closure precipitated a novel phase of acquisition and expansion.

In the century following King Philip’s War colonists erected few formal, permanent monuments upon the land to marks sites of violence. This inaction stemmed from Protestant wariness about graven images and worldly veneration (as well as financial ruination by the war), and it resulted in a principally invisible commemorative landscape in which settler verbal accounts animated key points. Consider how William Harris of Pawtuxet com-
memorated the wartime death of his son, T olleration Harris. The elder Harris instructed in his will of 1678 that a piece of his farmland be renamed Mourning as a “monument of the death of my deare son.” Harris left no physical monument to this loss, only a name. Folk knowledge coalesced in Rhode Island around sites such as the “grave appletree” that sheltered a settler mass burial at Cocumscussoc (until it blew down in the unforgettable gale of 1815). Tradition held “that cows grazing in the yard would never eat grass on the

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Great Grave, even though covered with tempting clover blossoms.” John Callender’s *Historical Discourse* (1739) was the first major history written of Rhode Island, and while it related the “official” story of war sites in the text, its sprawling footnotes relayed ambivalent counternarratives maintained in settler oral traditions (some intensely sympathetic to Philip, also known as Metacom), betraying anxiety about which knowledge was authoritative. The Revolutionary War hit Rhode Island almost precisely on the centennial of King Philip’s War, and soldiers recalled the previous conflict’s geography. “We are now solacing ourselves in King Philip’s Country—about two miles from Mount Hope,” wrote a Connecticut officer, John Wyllys, in 1778. “We landed & formed upon the spot where, as the old men of the town said, Philip’s head was formerly elevated on a pole.” Such references to vernacular geographical knowledge are brief but revealing inroads to a vast early Anglo-American oral memoryscape that registered sites of Narragansett and Wampanoag defeat as well as of complex cross-cultural negotiation.  

Beginning in the early republic and gaining momentum in the nineteenth century, Rhode Islanders codified a memoryscape that recollected their area’s formative engagements with Narragansetts and Wampanoags, establishing mythologies competitive with the Old World’s. Zachariah Allen (1795–1882) exemplified these predilections. Born in Providence and educated at Brown University, Allen built his fortune through a steam engine valve and textile enterprises. Yet Allen remained devoted to the past. He became president of the Rhode Island Historical Society (founded in 1822), was a tireless speaker and writer on historical topics, organized group outings to notable sites, and was a principal architect of public memory during the state’s colonial revival. Allen’s attunement to the past might have been conditioned by the precariousness of the present, which struck home when his mills failed and bankrupted him in the panic of 1857. He continued, even intensified, his antiquarian works after that, perhaps taking solace in thick layers of heritage that seemed to lend themselves to narratives of triumph apart from capitalist accumulation. Allen loped across Rhode Island as a preservationist whirlwind, ensuring the colonial past remained visible. He paid homage to the gravesite of the “Indian fighter” Benjamin Church in Little Compton/Sakonnet, personally spending to have its crumbling inscription rechiseled; and to “What Cheer” rock where Roger Williams supposedly parleyed with Narragansetts on his flight-in-exile south, which Allen wanted reinforced to prevent sand from consuming it.


Allen led a convoy of two hundred antiquarians to Mount Hope in 1875, where they took a “tour of the localities of King Philip’s residence and death” before sitting down to a clambake. They debated whether “the Indians, under the circumstances to which they were reduced, [were] justifiable in resisting the encroachments of the Massachusetts people; when an unanimous vote was given in the affirmative.” On that note, which pleasingly demonized Massachusetts and vindicated Rhode Island, they took a steamboat home. Antiquarian pursuits reached a nadir during the bicentennial of King Philip’s War in Rhode Island (1875–1876), when Rhode Island Historical Society followers traveled to Great Swamp. The landowner J. G. Clarke “caused several furrows to be ploughed in different places, and the party was soon diligently engaged in searching for mementos of two centuries gone by. Their labors were rewarded by a few arrow heads and remnants of the conflagration in the form of charred wood.” The digging—looting of the massacre grounds, to name it directly—whetted appetites, and “an impromptu picnic followed in a cool and romantic grove near by.” All returned “feeling that a delightful day had been passed.”12

Colonial revival practices such as these affirmed a landscape of Anglo-American sacrifice and victory and of Narragansett or Wampanoag erasure. A host of local organizations designed and installed memorial plaques to colonial casualties throughout Rhode Island, giving tangible, seemingly permanent form to visions of ancestral martyrdom. The Canonicus Memorial and Fort Ninigret monument commemorated the supposed decline of local tribes, as did the obelisk installed at the Great Swamp site in 1906 by the Societies of Colonial Wars. “The vanished Indian, once all powerful here, stands forth in memory as we survey the scene,” Rowland Hazard intoned at Great Swamp during its dedication in 1906, which transferred site ownership from the Hazard family to the Rhode Island Historical Society. “But let us not judge too harshly. The weaker race gave way to the stronger. Surely the sons of the strong can afford to be generous.”13

These conservative place-claiming maneuvers were partially responses to the immigration of swarthy “whites” into Rhode Island. Asserting Yankee heritage distinguished nativist Rhode Islanders from ethnic arrivals fresh from the Mezzogiorno or Cape Verde, mill workers and urban laborers who could claim no ancestral links to the exploits of the seventeenth-century Indian wars. This filiopietistic compulsion produced an efflorescence of antiquarian researches aimed at ultralocal readerships, publications that countered grand popular histories of the U.S. nation-state that omitted local pasts or sneered at them as parochial.

“Local history is the A B C of all political and general history,” opined the Narragansett Historical Register in 1882: “It is frequently said that the subjects are ‘too trifling.’ Granted; but it is these trifles that make up the whole. It’s the trifles; families and villages that form the towns, and the towns that form the counties and finally the state, and the states that form our great united nation and glorious republic.” The authors acknowledged


the nation-state’s cultural significance yet resisted homogenizing into an undifferentiated “American” fold. They clung to heterogeneity by articulating nativist versions of Narragansett identity, derived from the peculiar happenings, personages, and spots of South County.¹⁴

Nativism had weighty consequences for actual (indigenous) Narragansetts as Rhode Island critics disputed their ability and right to maintain a land base in South County. Narragansetts had been struggling since King Philip’s War and earlier to maintain that base: settler purchases and encroachments, westward emigration to the Brothertown Indian community, decline of tribal monarchy, vesting of trusteeship in the state, and a subsequent requirement for state assembly approval of land sales all transformed tribal coherence and control over land use. Popular accounts from the Victorian period tended to link Narragansett people to the land itself, representing both as frozen atavisms. A “bit of Virginia set down in New England,” South County’s rural saltwater ponds, swamps, and plantations accrued peculiar mythos, imagined as primitive zones cut off from modernity. A *Providence Press* correspondent took a driving tour in 1869 to observe Narragansetts in their habitat:

“You’re the first person I ever saw who seemed to care anything about these Indians,” [my driver] said, as we were rapidly making our way through the rocky country. “Most of the folks round here don’t trouble their heads much whether they live or die. They go down in their swamp and buy the right to cut wood in the winter, so that their own can grow; and that’s about all they have to do with them. You won’t find much Indian blood among ’em. You see they’ve got so mixed up with the negroes that it’s hard to tell which is Indian and which is negro. They are a lazy set any way!”

Such commentaries expressed widespread suspicions that intermarriage with peoples of African descent had diminished “pure” Narragansett blood, making the Narragansetts miscegenated pretenders. “Living mostly by themselves,” continued the travel account, “even when but little Indian blood was in their veins, they have had no energetic life from without, and are in consequence nearly exhausted. Their lands were originally good, but are now almost worthless from lack of or bad cultivation.” On the way out the journalist and his driver passed “a stray Indian but lonely looking and drear and without signs of life.” This view of the Narragansetts as a moribund people blocking land development also surfaced in “last of the Narragansetts” stories that confirmed the dying out of the “race.” Political diminishment of the tribe culminated in the state’s 1880 “detribalization act,” which dissolved tribal relations and permitted Rhode Island to acquire reservation lands, granting $5,000 in compensation. Each tribal member received $15.43, a sum acutely remembered by recipients and their heirs.¹⁵

The turn of the century marked a political ebb for Narragansetts. It would be easy to infer from their constrained legal status and the proliferation of Anglo-American place

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claims that Narragansett memoryscapes had been dismantled. Important practices that resisted these attempts at erasure were being maintained, however, by surviving tribal members. Articles in the *Narragansett Dawn* (ca. 1935–1936) energetically conveyed cultural geographies that critiqued or simply sidestepped nativist constructions. Theodore Brown penned the essay “Narragansett Territory,” noting that unless “you have a guide who knows the route,” it was difficult to access the area’s historic grounds. Brown’s tour included Great Swamp near the beginning of his presentation, described as the place “where the Narragansetts, under King Philip, made their last big stand for their homes. Back in the woods from the monument is the old Indian Fort, the Indians stronghold, until Capt. Church broke it.” Yet Brown did not linger there. The rest of his itinerary roved to the Narragansett church and school, both critical structures in the life of the community, and to a rich constellation of places with long-standing significance. Brown and numerous other *Narragansett Dawn* correspondents who described meaningful places acknowledged sites of traumatic loss, but they embedded them within dense geographies that incorporated locales crucial to contemporary survival and ancestral memory (the cedar swamps, for example). These descriptions exemplify a broader characteristic about the parameters of remembrance. While colonial communities have zeroed in on discrete sites and episodes of violence, using them to encapsulate narratives about the alleged final destruction of Algonquians, many native-centered interpretations have contextualized such sites within the *longue durée*—millennia-long histories of native habitation and persistence in the shadows of colonialism, which encompass far more capacious homelands.16

Commemorative pilgrimages to Great Swamp took place throughout the twentieth century, transforming massacre grounds into a venue for radical protest and traditional sociability, even a place with sacred import. In 1945 the program honored World War II veterans and ended with a rendition of “God Bless America.” The gathering was advertised as free and open to the public in 1968. The 1972 event dissolved into honking car horns when “Tall Oak” Weeden delivered remarks that some of the three hundred attendees found controversial. These emotional annual rituals contradicted the erasure narrative propounded by colonial memorial stones proclaiming the Narragansetts had “made their last stand” at the Great Swamp; the rituals also kept the swamp alive in community consciousness. “When I go to the Great Swamp, I have an odd feeling,” Emeline Thomas Colbert reflected in 1979. “I couldn’t explain that to anybody, the kind of feeling that I personally have when I go to the Great Swamp. It’s just like a vibration or an overall feeling of something around.”17

While some sites from King Philip’s War have been razed or dwarfed by modern construction, Great Swamp has remained apart. A sensitive ecosystem composed mostly of wetlands and forest cover, its more than three thousand acres have been valuable, but not for intensive habitation or development. The swamp’s unique ecology has been a natural caretaker for the massacre grounds, keeping them relatively undisturbed though difficult to monitor for littering or defacement. John Brown III, the current tribal historic preservation officer for the Narragansett Indian Tribe and medicine man in training, resists doing anything more at the site at present to enlarge its presence on Rhode Islanders’ cultural radar, partly because the contextualizing groundwork that would make such actions meaningful does not yet exist (substantive education among non-natives about Narragansett history and culture, for example). He also insists on the continuity of tribal remembrance about the event. “How could we not remember?” he asks of this cataclysmic rupture in the life of the Narragansett people. His question critiques historians’ reliance on the documentary record to assess indigenous traditions about violence and its places, and it disputes the notion that equates documentary silence with community amnesia. 18

Reexamination in Rhode Island is underway at the site known as Nipsachuck. Said to be a long-sacred place, as well as a two-time battleground during King Philip’s War, Nipsachuck now anchors a multilateral preservation project. Multiple tribes (Wampanoag, Narragansett, Nipmuc, Mohegan, Pequot), state offices, and the Blackstone Valley Historical Society are collaborating to research its past with support from the National Park Service’s American Battlefield Protection Program. Woods and swampland made the site a poor prospect for

agricultural development in the postwar period, so it—and the hulking stone cairns scattered across it, possibly memorial or sacred constructions—lay undisturbed for centuries until murmuring of development catalyzed landowners, tribes, academics, and the state to initiate conversations. The work has brought new communities into being as stakeholders gather around the planning table, and Narragansetts come with renewed clout for shaping the terms of historical interpretation. They gained federal recognition in 1983 and have consolidated preservation resources to manage investigations more directly. Nipsachuck is an imperfect social process rather than a completed product. It nevertheless conveys the value of revising the canon of war sites to include locales that are nonplaces in official historiography but that bring to light connectivity, multiple uses, and palimpsestic senses of place—layers upon layers. Zachariah Allen and his peers believed they had comprehensively marked the morscape of King Philip’s War, but their heirs have birthed new geographies. Memory formations around Narragansett Bay cleave even more minutely than can be discussed here, yet even this survey shows how ultralocal variables created a distinctive milieu: Rhode Island ideals of tolerance, “black Narragansetts,” aggressive place marking by nativists who well remembered the biggest (and final) “Indian War” to directly sear their grounds. Travel north, however, and the specter of King Philip’s War infiltrates memory in altogether different fashion.¹⁹

Garrisoned Piscataqua

In the sun-starved days of late October 1915, Daniel Chesley, a contractor in Dover, New Hampshire, took on an unusual job. At the direction of local museum trustees he went out to the rural Back River district with a horse and roller and hitched them to an old house of rough-hewn timber. Painstakingly, workmen hauled the structure three miles up undulating Dover Neck to a resting spot downtown. The late seventeenth-century garrison house must have been a sight to remember: a creaking ghost of colonial times lurching into Dover’s industrial heart, a trace of a violent past being dragged into the halcyon days before U.S. entry into World War I. The community dedicated this “relic of old Indian days,” known as the Drew or Damm garrison, on July 26, 1916. Today the garrison is invisible from the street, lurking beneath a white gazebo near traffic spiraling around the Cocheco Mills. A colonial throwback amid remnants of an industrial past that dominate the Great Bay and Piscataqua River watershed, it remains a crucial site of memory. Dover has billed itself as the Garrison City since the 1950s, drawing on the symbolic resonances of these unsettling antiques for identity. Through happenstance and concerted public efforts, this garrison has also become the principal local vehicle for publically telling histories of the northern chapters of King Philip’s War. Compare this garrison, meticulously conserved and interpreted, with the garrisons of King Philip’s War in South Berwick just across the state line in Maine. There the Tozier and Plaisted sites are well recognized by local historical enthusiasts, yet the buildings are no longer intact. Old timbers and cellar walls of the former were incorporated into new structures, and the grounds

of the latter appropriated for a modern dwelling—creatively frugal recycling that epitomizes the intermingled quality of the region’s historical landscape traces.20

The northeastern frontier of King Philip’s War sinks to the footnotes in most histories of the conflict. King William’s War (1689–1697) and later French-Indian conflicts loom larger in northern consciousnesses—more casualties, more protracted violence. Whereas King Philip’s War was the final Indian war in Narragansett Country, it was only the first of many in the North, where English habitations clung precariously through the mid-eighteenth century. Yet violence seared coastal New Hampshire and Maine between 1675 and 1678, and Dover and South Berwick present unique circumstances of memory formation: King Philip’s War being superseded by King William’s; comeuppance for colonial players such as Richard Waldron, killed by Wabanaki in the second war in apparent reprisal for his duplicity in the first; and the prominence of colonial garrison houses as conduits of heritage. Moreover, no active tribal community of lineal descendants has resided nearby within the recent past—the closest may be the Penobscot nation hours north at Indian Island—so there has never been concerted impetus from tribal interests for revision of local narratives, monuments, or curricula. Locals have not dwelled alongside visibly Wabanaki neighbors for centuries and have formed memories largely within their own cultural circles rather than dialogically.

The signal event of King Philip’s War in Dover, then known as Cocheco, was the “sham fight” staged by Richard Waldron, the settlement’s commander. In September 1676 native peoples from southeastern New England traveled north to seek refuge among the local Pennacooks, who maintained peaceable relations with the English. Waldron implemented a ploy to snare the arrivals, belligerent “stranger” Indians who had been active in the war in southern New England. He offered to participate in a pretend battle with this native group that would give the illusion of a legitimate engagement while not incurring casualties. The “fight” took place, and Waldron sprang his trap. He had hostile natives taken prisoner, sent to Boston for trial, and executed or shipped off to slavery. The moral complications of this episode led critics to produce voluminous commentary over the next three centuries, debating whether Waldron was justified. Direct repercussions came much sooner, however. Natives attacked Cocheco in 1689 during the early days of King William’s War. As the story long was told, they did not forget Waldron’s treachery; they bided their time, and thirteen years later exercised revenge. Waldron fell among the casualties, and attackers sliced off his nose and ears, stuffed them in his mouth, and supposedly declared, “I cross out my account” as they slashed his breast, referencing his allegedly fraudulent trading practices. Unlike the Swamp Fight, the sham fight left no outstanding material traces: no mounds of bodies, burned wigwams, or bushels of corn. Colonial remembrances thus gravitated to imaginative reconstructions.21

20 Dedication Ceremonies on July 26, 1916, the Annie E. Woodman Institute at Dover, New Hampshire (Concord, 1916).
The output of Cochecho’s print culture paled next to that of Massachusetts, and though residents must have spoken about the history of violence as they built and rebuilt over war-torn grounds, it was not until the early republic that concerted assessments took form. Jeremy Belknap resided in Dover while composing *The History of New-Hampshire* (1784–1792), which remained the definitive account of New Hampshire’s history for years and arguably the earliest history based on original sources and manifesting modern historiographical sensibilities. Its marginally sympathetic treatment of Wabanaki motivations was endlessly excerpted, reprinted, and retold by local commentators, who transformed the published *History of New-Hampshire* into lived memory with little compunction. Alonzo Quint, a ubiquitous orator in Dover in the mid-nineteenth century, promoted a viciously racialized view of the past that deplored savage depredations in King Philip’s and King William’s Wars against innocently entrepreneurial settlers, claiming that these trials by fire forged a distinctive New Hampshire “race,” another iteration of ever-popular anti-Massachusetts sensibilities. Dover’s violent past provoked elaborately racist performances of vengeance wrought by “greasy red niggers” and smug but oft-thwarted attempts to physically mark the grounds of Waldron’s garrison, grave, and sham fight. Residents of Dover staged numerous reenactments and parades of the Indian-settler past and above all remained fascinated by the sites of the town’s many old garrison houses, as attested to by repeated mapping projects that attempted to specify the locales of those structures. Yet “Dover does not begin to make the most of itself,” lamented the town librarian Caroline Harwood Garland. “A Western town with half its historic wealth would make itself heard all over the land and pilgrimages would be made to it from far and near. With us not a spot is labeled, not a site marked.”

Local aspirations to galvanize interest in Dover heritage received a boost when Daniel Chesley’s team dragged the old garrison house into the downtown in 1915. Dover resident Annie Woodman had bequeathed a portion of her estate for a museum that would showcase local history and be “a constant and active factor in the intellectual life of Dover.” The Rounds family had conserved the old Damm/Drew garrison, while other garrisons had long since disintegrated. Trustees of Woodman’s estate convinced Ellen Rounds to gift the structure to the Woodman museum, and since the estate had not left quite enough money to construct a bespoke museum, the new museum assumed residence on the grounds of two Federal-style houses downtown. There the transplanted garrison—never actually attacked in any Indian war—became the tangible vehicle for dramatizing the seventeenth century. Gun apertures “to defend it from Indian attacks,” long closed up with plaster, were reopened for visitors’ edification. The Woodman Institute Museum (founded at Annie Woodman’s request) channeled wider currents of American antiquarianism in its modes of display (including collections of “Indian relics,” an assortment of locals’ antiques and family memorabilia, and natural history specimens), but the local forms these assumed were distinctive, and the circumstances that led to their emergence nonreplicable. In

1973 the garrison provided the stage for an ill-advised kindergarten reenactment of the sham battle. The “Saucy Squaws” (a social group of Dover women) also organized that year, a tellingly careless imagination of colonialism in the 1970s, a period of rising consciousness about American Indian political protest and activism.

In Dover and the neighboring Berwicks of Maine, collective sensibilities about colonial heritage were strongly shaped by a set of women who derived knowledge partly from insatiable reading of standard documentary records but also from repeated visits to haunts of local renown. Their social networks enabled them to access family lore about structures and grounds that might otherwise have gone unrecorded in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mary Thompson composed *Landmarks in Ancient Dover* (1892), a subtle, geocentric survey that recuperated spots such as Blind Will’s Neck at the confluence of the Cocheco and Isinglass Rivers, where Mohawks killed a native ally of the English in March 1677, and where his ghost’s moans disturbed residents for years after. Up the road in

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South Berwick, the celebrated local-color writer Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909), born in that town, published an influential short history in 1894 that musingly wandered past the Plaisted and Tozier burial sites, acknowledged locally as the resting places for King Philip's War casualties. These trips fed her desire to memorialize in literary print culture such “ancient graves, which are so nearly forgotten; even their very stones are covered deep into the green field out of sight and mind.” While elite historians of that period tended to narrate the colonial past through chronological schemas, Jewett’s principal point of entry was through place. “I have never taken greater delight than in my rides and drives and tramps and voyages within the borders of my native town,” she wrote. “There is always something fresh, something to be traced or discovered, something particularly to be remembered. One grows rich in memories and associations.”

As conventional as Jewett tended to be in her gravitation toward landscapes notable for settler happenings, she occasionally captured more complex vistas. In a personal letter from 1890 she wrote to her friend “Loulie”:

You would have laughed one day when my nephew Theodore and I were far out of town among the pastures, and began to play at scouting for Indians which much occupy his eleven year old mind. You can imagine how we saw feathered heads peering over the hills and rode for our lives, and then discovered the campfire of these deadly savages and were relieved at discovering that they were not a war party but had their squaws with them and were on their way to the mountains to cut tent poles, their own, fastened to their ponies, being worn to stubs!!

Likely Penobscots selling baskets near York and Ogunquit, as they did seasonally, these families maintained Wabanaki geographies in the modern Northeast. They often walked out of view of the “native New Englanders” but periodically startled them into recognition that noncolonial human landscapes persisted. In the late twentieth century, Norma Keim, a volunteer at the Old Berwick Historical Society, perpetuated such multilayered understandings of the terrain by leading well-attended public walking tours that narrated the place as Newichawannock, a Wabanaki homeland. She also related the story of Cononchet’s wife and child, captured while fleeing across Salmon Falls River, and pointed out the likely spot for their crossing. A barely known story of Narragansett continuance in the northern parts gleaned from a 1676 entry in the diary of Samuel Sewall, a Boston-based magistrate who had traveled extensively through New England as a circuit judge, this esoteric archival data about this “Squaw and Sonne” circulated back into lived community memory through Keim’s efforts. Described as the conscience of South Berwick for her insistence on making present marginalized pasts, Keim may not earn formal recognition as a historian; nor do Jewett and Thompson. Yet their sensitivities to place as a vehicle of remembrance and their skills as storytellers and educators have strongly shaped the area memoryscape and terms of community engagement with it.

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A tantalizing site is presently surfacing in South Berwick. The archaeologist Emerson “Tad” Baker directed an excavation at the Chadbourne House, a long-running project (1995–2007) that engaged hundreds of community volunteers, unearthed forty thousand artifacts, and gave the Old Berwick Historical Society an uncommon critical edge. Most work focused on the 1690 destruction of the house and its ties to Wabanaki campaigns in King William’s War, but one slice of the dig may have revealed traces of a King Philip’s War–era attack. This would be significant because written records from the period are relatively silent about the character of the violence and the specific home sites and families involved. At this point, the hypothesis can go no further given the reticence of the documentary record and the nature of the material remains. We have reached the limits of our knowledge for now, Baker has said. Uncertainty must persist. Archives and romance, walking tours and trowels have all been used to recuperate the “forgotten” frontier of King Philip’s War. Contemporary absence of tribal neighbors has decisively inflected practices, however, and the Piscataqua/Great Bay region has not seen the dialogic and multilateral decolonizing revisions that characterize the Nipsachuck site. “Someone’s got to tell it,” Baker has said of this Wabanaki history, now in the custodianship of non-natives. History-telling duties have been handed off, an ironic, perhaps only provisional transference to the heirs of colonial players or transplants “from away.”

The Red Atlantic

Geographically distant from Narragansett and Great Bays but conceptually linked is Red Hole, a fitting final stop on the memory tour for the way it confounds orthodox notions of indigenous community and geography. At this cove at the easternmost tip of Bermuda, where the island of St. David’s meets the Atlantic Ocean, islanders and tribal members from New England gathered in June 2002 to lay commemorative wreaths. Wampanoags, Pequots, and Narragansetts had traveled seven hundred miles from southeastern New England to connect with “relations” in Bermuda, said to have been shipped there during the colonial period as prisoners of war and sentenced to labor out their lives as slaves far from tribe, kin, and homeland. King Philip’s wife and nine-year-old son were among the transports, according to tradition. More than three centuries after the end of King Philip’s War, this dispersion, one of the seminal catalysts of an Algonquian diaspora, came into open view. At Red Hole, on the island where the densest concentration of “Indian” affiliates resides, the wreaths sent out to sea were efforts to heal wounds sustained in the early modern era but still raw in the twenty-first century.

St. David’s and its New England counterparts are nodes in a red Atlantic world, a diasporic space through which indigenous, colonial, and African peoples circulated by choice or force. Indian slaves had arrived in Bermuda from the Americas, north and south, since the early seventeenth century to work in domestic or maritime capacities, and they labored throughout the archipelago, not solely on St. David’s Island. The years between the 1600s and the present brought complicated shifts in their presence and perception: intermarriage


with other natives and non-natives and eventual submergence into the paper trail as “Negroes,” as well as accretions of stories that made St. David’s Islanders appear as Pequots, Mohawks, or direct lineal descendants of Metacom himself. New Englanders added to the confusion by remarking widely though vaguely on the Bermudan fate of native war captives. Thomas Hutchinson reported in his *History of the Colony of Massachuset’s Bay* (1765) that after King Philip’s death “most of the rest were sold, and shipped off for slaves to Bermudas and other parts.” The story of the transport of Philip’s relations to Bermuda was heavily repeated in nineteenth-century popular histories, which were based on little research of their own. In the early 1900s the writer, clergyman, and historian Edward Hale of Massachusetts wrote to Anna Maria Outerbridge in Bermuda, telling what he had heard of Indians in Bermuda and seeking more information. Outerbridge was respected as a historian of Bermudan lore, and she shared what she knew—including an oral tradition that recollected the presence of a female descendant of the King Philip line. Hale vowed to commemorate this past and proposed that a marker be installed in Bermuda and similar
ones in New England, especially if the house site where Philip’s son wintered during the war could be identified. He desired to affirm this dark yet strangely redemptive narrative of survival on the ground, making visible a striking transoceanic affiliation that had languished in obscurity. A Rhode Island schoolteacher named Virginia Baker picked up this thread of correspondence a few years later (Hale died in 1909). None of the proposed monuments came to fruition, but interest persisted. Historians, ethnographers, and tribal members continued inquiries in the late twentieth century, and in the past several decades active connections have been made.

Today the islander St. Clair “Brinky” Tucker gives a remarkable tour of the Indian and slave past. It weaves by the slave market in St. George’s, now the town square and a culturally sanitized tourist destination; Gibbet Island, where “Indian John” was hanged and quartered in 1681 for his role in fomenting a slave insurrection; and the slave graveyard to the side of St. Peter’s Church, where graves of nonwhites were historically segregated from the main burying ground. Tucker relates traditions about places where King Philip’s wife and son were said to have resided and highlights material culture artifacts, such as a throw blanket from the reconnection rituals, collected in the Carter House museum in St. David’s. This memoryscape condenses an anticolonial sense of place that insists on the presence of stratified, forced labor systems amid an often-idyllic Anglo-American public history vista. It indicates how deeply enmeshed local understandings of the indigenous slave past have become with specific locales tucked along the twisting island roads.

Disparities between archival records and contemporary traditions do seem to exist, regarding whether the Algonquian slaves from King Philip’s War wound up in Bermuda or perhaps on other islands (as English colonists’ use of “the Bermudas” was possibly a shorthand reference to a range of island plantations). These traditions might appear ahistoric or mythic, more resonant with the desires of contemporary communities than beholden to critical views of the past. But such a critique would miss the traditions’ larger


29 Site visit with St. Clair “Brinky” Tucker, Aug. 10, 2010, audio recording and notes (in DeLucia’s possession); DeLucia conversations at Carter House museum with Ronnie Chameau and Richard Spurling, Aug. 2010, notes, ibid.; St. Clair “Brinky” Tucker, St. David Island, Bermuda: Its People, History, and Culture (Winnipeg, 2009). St. David’s underwent tremendous upheaval when the U.S. military received permission to construct a base there during World War II. That project displaced numerous islanders and reshaped the island’s topography. It is well remembered today. See documentation in the St. David’s Island Committee Board of Arbitrators, 1940–1944, papers (Bermuda Archives). Bermuda’s history of slavery has been treated more openly in public spaces in the past several decades: the Bermuda Maritime Museum includes a major exhibition; a statue showing the burning at the stake of the enslaved woman Sally Basset stands in a prominent spot in downtown Hamilton; and the African Diaspora Heritage Trail guides visitors to key locales. Site visits, Aug. 10–30, 2010.
ethnohistorical significance. The reconnections are expansive expressions of kinship whereby New England tribal communities have extended their circles of belonging to St. David's Islanders and have, in turn, been welcomed. Their understandings of affiliation can encompass peoples in far-flung places, beyond formal reservation boundaries. There is an essential truth in these reconnections, too, a realization that indigenous presence in Bermuda and other Atlantic sites has long gone unrecognized or been subsumed in more prominent claims of Afro-Caribbean descent and public history tendencies to discuss slavery in biracial (white/black) rather than tripartite (white/black and Indian) terms. Moreover, the “Indian” component is complicated: the St. David's community, for example, identifies links with the heritage of Powhatans, Cherokees, and Indians from Central and South America. Most potent for historians, the connections dramatize memory's capacity to speak where the archive remains mute, incomplete, ambiguous. So many of the red Atlantic's human dispersions are irretrievable through colonial written records, yet descendant communities seek ways to commemorate these losses, bridge these voids, and re-member peoples torn asunder by circum-Atlantic violence.

The St. David's ties are weighty counterpoints to the all-but-forgotten Algonquian prisoners of King Philip's War sent to labor in galleys at Tangier in North Africa. Capt. Thomas Hamilton pleaded repeatedly in 1675 and 1676 with the Admiralty in England for material aid to the thirty sick and starving New England Indians aboard his ship. At least nine of them left their bones in this place, more than three thousand miles from their northeastern homelands. No community has yet reclaimed that eastern node in the red Atlantic that so compellingly inverts orthodoxies about transatlantic slavery.

Brinky Tucker anchors a long lineage of place walking and storytelling about King Philip's War, suited to the company of the Deer Island runners and canoeists, and thousands of others who have produced historical geographies across the extended Northeast. Place makers, past keepers, tenders of the memory houses: for purposes progressive as well as reactionary, they have kept these spaces and the significances of King Philip's War from becoming static or overdetermined. Hundreds of other sites, artifacts, and stories tied to King Philip's War persist across the Northeast, many of them contained in minor archives—town historical societies and public libraries, tribal museums, family attics—and still beneath the radar of historians. Nipsachuck, Pemaquid, Cochecho, Odanak–St. Francis, Monhantic, Shetucket, Missisquoi: these are the places that resonate intimately

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30 A. C. Hollis Hallett, ed., *Bermuda under the Sommer Islands Company, 1612–1684* (3 vols., Bermuda, 2005), esp. 258–332; Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680–1783* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 62, 94, 102–3, 227–28. Whether Philip's wife (Wooonekanuske) was sent off into slavery like her son, or met another fate, does not appear to have been documented. See Lepore, *Name of War*, 150–51.

with everyday people as they confront the Northeast’s colonial legacies. In these places community members call upon traumas of the late seventeenth century not to articulate generic Indian or American identities but to shore up highly localized senses of heritage and geography: the meanings of family, tribe, town, and kinship network. This wider landscape is transnational and multiracial—French Canadian, Afro-Caribbean, Iroquoian, as well as Algonquian and Anglo-American—and its inhabitants’ memory work is malleable, authorizing everything from militant resistance to cross-cultural healing.

As idiosyncratic as local remembrances have been, broader sociocultural shifts have also recontoured praxis. Iconoclastic, debt-strapped Puritans shied away from erecting monuments, but their secularized heirs in the colonial revival had no such qualms. Red power jump-started a decolonizing intellectual-political reformation across Indian country in the 1960s–1970s, while the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and emergence of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices granted institutionalized clout to native preservationists. Despite notable metamorphoses in methods and ethics of interpreting indigenous pasts, the public effect of these revisitations is debatable. Pan-Indian kitsch such as toy tomahawks and oversized bronze Indian statues along the Mohawk Trail (Route 2 in western Massachusetts) remains the immediately visible “trace” of native presence in that part of the state, for example, even as unprecedented reconciliation ceremonies have taken place at nearby Peskeemskut/Turners Falls. (That riverbank became one of the war’s worst massacre sites at dawn on May 19, 1676, when Capt. William Turner’s troops shot or drove hundreds of natives to their deaths over the falls.) Cross-culturally legible reanimation of native memoryscapes is scarcely a fait accompli given their ongoing invisibility to neighbors and critics, victims or agents of profound amnesia about the region’s past who take at face value the messages of colonial inscriptions.32

Whether non-native publics have absorbed revised messages and geographies may be incidental, however. Internal consolidations of community energies, generation of cross-cultural dialogues, and planting seeds of critical consciousness about colonialism in a region still steeped in innocence about its past are themselves notable transformations. Making sense of colonial trauma is an unfinished, dialectical process involving amicable as well as antagonistic negotiations among tribal cultural authorities, academics and institutional research agendas, state officials, and local enthusiasts and landowners. And while remarking and renarrating are vital components, so too are invisibility and silence. There are sites in the Northeast where astonishing material traces relevant to this topic are known to exist, but tribal members, officials, and academics conceal them for fear of looting and desecration.

They perpetuate silence for ethical reasons, demonstrating that regard for ancestral remains and sensitive grounds can trump desires for exhaustive, transparent knowledge and access.

“What I’d like to do is to be able to walk on the land,” Narragansett Charlie Thomas told Rhode Islander magazine in 1979, before the tribe had resecured its reservation: “I’d like that, to be able to walk anywhere you want to go. Hunt and fish and trap, I would enjoy that. They take that right from you. What right do they have to do that? That’s what I remember doing as a child, all my life until I came back from the service, and now it’s getting so intense that you can’t do anything.”

Memory and its grounds are emotionally and politically momentous forces in the Northeast, where even the most basic premise of what qualifies as a historically important place remains disputed. The seventeenth century still weighs on the present, heavily so for Algonquian communities grappling with federal recognition, language loss, and economic marginalization, all of which mobilize the colonial past in courtrooms, newspapers, and other public forums. In the nineteenth century Yankee antiquarians aspired to lock down the meaning of colonial violence by etching their versions of history in stone. But so long as lands and rivers can be traversed, talked about, and reinscribed, such closure will be circumvented and alternative voices and pasts kept present.
