Ethnohistorians and anthropologists have long focused on examining scholarly organizing principles such as “tribes,” “confederacies,” “nations,” or “extended family networks,” to gain a better understanding of Native American history. In the last two decades, some academics have begun to emphasize the value of focusing their studies on specific indigenous communities, such as towns and villages.¹ This strategy provides a useful path to improve our understanding of the fluidity and complexity of the impact that European colonization had on the world of Native Americans.

In the 1600s, the two Native settlements that could be found within the limits of what is today the city of Lowell were called Pawtucket and Wamesit. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, the town of Pawtucket was a major New England Indian settlement. The community was situated close to the falls, which today are named after the town. Typical for New England Native settlements, where town or village sites were not infrequently moved, Pawtucket’s location sometimes changed in the general area around the falls. In 1653, the Puritan missionary John Eliot lobbied for the establishment of a “praying town,” a community for Native “Christian converts,” called Wamesit. This community, located where the Merrimack and the Concord rivers meet, just a short distance down river from the settlement of Pawtucket, was in what is today downtown Lowell. Still, and while these two communities are widely mentioned in the historiography of Native New England, scholars have so far failed to explore their history in much detail.

This slight does not mean that the Native people of the Lowell area received no attention. Several local historians have studied their history. Much of this scholarship is in the tradition of “white settler historiography,” which was widely produced in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth and in the early decades of the twentieth

centuries. These accounts generally embraced the ideals of white supremacy prominent at that time. Reflecting the racism of their days, many early local historians felt that their writings required “but a brief account of the Indian inhabitants.” Wilson Waters, one of the greater Lowell area’s early historians, for example, argued the racist notion that the Native people of the region “were polytheists and polygamists, untruthful and fond of gambling.” Native Americans were denied “legal” ownership over the land, because they “can hardly be said to have had proprietary right to the land. They were nomadic, occupying certain territory as long as it afforded them a livelihood.”

Such misinterpretations became convenient narratives that justified the taking of Native American lands. Historians routinely overlooked that New England’s original inhabitants cleared wide swaths of land for agriculture and village sites. Native Americans in the region also actively managed the forests, cutting wood for fuel and construction, and burning the forest’s underbrush to make hunting more efficient. Early historians like Waters turned Native Americans into human caricatures, stressing that the natives of the Lowell area were “very hospitable and fond of extravagant dancing and reveling.” Early local historians also saw what they would describe as some redeeming qualities among Native Americans. “Their government possessed of some noble traits,” wrote Waters, and they “were grateful for kindness of all animals.” To the early historians of the Lowell area, however, Native Americans were little more than a vanishing race, mostly “wild” with some “noble” attributes. They had to make room for, what these writers saw as, a more advanced English civilization, one more deserving of the land. Thus historians like Waters, through the narratives they constructed, justified the ethnic cleansing of the area’s Native population.

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2 Early writings on Native Americans in the Lowell area depicted Indians through the prism of the “wild” or the “noble savage,” both popular historiographical and cultural perspectives among European Americans of native peoples in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wilson Waters, *History of Chelmsford, Massachusetts* (Lowell: Courier Citizen Company, 1917), chapter 1. Other writers emphasized the “vanishing” of “noble savages.” This view, however, also did not question or historicize the ethnic cleansing of the first peoples of the region. See Charles Cowley, *Memories of the Indians and Pioneers of the Region of Lowell* (Lowell, 1862); Cowley, “The Last of the Sachem,” in *Contributions of the Old Residents’ Historical Association*, v. 6, no. 1 (1904).

In the last 30 years or so, some scholars have again approached the native history of the greater Lowell area of the seventeenth century. In the 1970s, Frederic Burtt, a professor of mechanical engineering and an amateur archeologist, published a short essay on this topic. Though avoiding many of the racist assumptions and clichés of earlier works, Burtt’s article does not move our general understandings far beyond what earlier settler histories provided in terms of information on daily life and the general outlines of the history. The most comprehensive work on Native Americans in the Greater Lowell area is John Pendergast’s *The Bend in the River*. Pendergast, an amateur archeologist who taught in the English department at Middlesex Community College and at the University of Lowell, provides a narrative summary of the region’s early Native history geared toward the general reader. The study provides an introductory glimpse into the area’s early history and archeology.

Like many of the earlier attempts to tackle the Native history of the greater Lowell area, Burtt’s and Pendergast’s accounts do not discuss the local developments in the larger context of New England. Both authors focus excessively on the Indian leaders Passaconway and Wannalancet, as well as the Puritan missionary John Eliot and his backer, the Superintendent of Praying Indians Daniel Gookin. Their studies are celebratory in tone and emphasize the roles that the four men played. Burtt and Pendergast reveal little new detail about the social history and culture of the seventeenth-century Native Americans, and fail to develop a more nuanced discussion of the Native settlements – Pawtucket and Wamesit – that existed in the area. To summarize, these accounts revisited the historic records examined by the settler historians, but provide little in-depth analysis of the larger forces that shaped Native lives in the northeast.

Admittedly, there are significant gaps in the historic record about the Natives in the Greater Lowell area. Archeological evidence and seventeenth-century writings provide only a limited perspective. Thus, reconstructing the story of the two seventeenth-century Native communities remains a challenge. This fact is likely the reason why historians who study Native history in New England have looked at Pawtucket and Wamesit with only a passing glance or ignored them altogether. Scholars have largely failed to explore the history of the two communities in any detail.

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Pawtucket and Wamesit: Two Pennacook Communities

The Native Americans who lived in the Greater Lowell area were Pennacook. The Pennacook settled in villages in the area we today call New Hampshire, northeastern Massachusetts, and southern Maine – mostly settling in the Merrimack River Valley and along its tributaries. Before, during, and in the aftermath of King Philip’s War from 1675-76, the Pennacook were ethnically cleansed out of the lower Merrimack River Valley by English colonists. Some Pennacook villages continued to exist along the upper Merrimack River until 1730. Yet, increasingly due to English pressures, most of the Pennacook moved north to join with the Abenaki in Maine or the Western Abenaki at St. Francois, also known as Odanak, in Quebec.

Pennacook is believed to be derived from the Abenaki word “penakuk” meaning “at the bottom of the hill.” According to several scholars, the term Pawtucket was and is also commonly used to describe the Pennacook Indians who lived on the lower Merrimack River. This name might have been derived from the town of Pawtucket, which some seventeenth-century European observers described as the “capitol” of the Native confederacy. Other names for the Pennacook were likely also Nechegansett, Opanango, Owaragee, and after 1680, St. Francois Indians.

The Pennacook were not politically and militarily unified and often acted independently from one another. Bert Salwen characterizes this relationship as “flexible multi-village alliances” of shifting and fluid coalitions. Different communities often pursued varying goals and interests, and could face internal divisions and strains. Thus, Native leaders needed to display flexible leadership, which allowed for disagreement on major concerns, and permitted people to pursue different choices and strategies within this system of fluid alliances – a crucial point in understanding the history of the settlements of Pawtucket and Wamesit.

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7 Salwen, 168; Bragdon, 23-25.
Linguistically, the Pennacook were Algonquian speakers. Their language was more closely related to their northern neighbors, the Abenaki, than to the Algonquian languages spoken by their neighbors in southern New England, such as the Massachusetts. For much of the seventeenth century, the Penacook acted politically independent from the Abenaki. Yet by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and as earlier mentioned, increasing English pressures on their homelands and the violence and wars with the English colonists from Massachusetts forced the Pennacook to seek refuge among the Abenaki and blend into this society.

The lifeways of the Indians at Pawtucket and Wamesit were similar to those of many of the Indian peoples in New England. Native life in the region followed the seasonal life cycles that influenced the procurement of food. Native Americans subsisted by farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering. Women and men both contributed to the survival of their community. Their tasks and contributions were often defined by gender – meaning that certain chores were done by women and others by men.

Among the Native peoples of southern New England, horticulture played a central role in a community’s subsistence. Pawtucket and Wamesit were located in close proximity to farming fields situated along the Merrimack and the Concord rivers. Native women were the principal agricultural producers – though men aided in the creation of new fields. Women worked the fields planting corn, squash, pumpkins, and beans. The planting season for corn, the main food staple for the Pawtucket and Wamesit Indians, began in mid-April. Women weeded the corn in the spring using hoes made out of long sticks and a bone or freshwater shell at the end. By late June or early July, women horticulturalists also used these hoes to perform the task of hilling, which meant that they pushed a few inches of earth around the corn’s stem. These little earth mounds aided the corn to grow tall and straight. Furthermore, it enabled women to plant beans in the little earth mounds. Women and also children kept on weeding corn throughout the growing season. They also planted pumpkins, gourds, herbs, and squash. Women supplemented their families’ diets further by gathering roots, berries, and nuts, as well as medicinal herbs.

Fishing and hunting, performed by men, further sustained the diet of Pawtucket and Wamesit Indians. The Merrimack and Concord Rivers were abundant in fish. The falls were an especially popular fishing site during spawning season when many fish traveled upriver. Native peoples of various backgrounds, including the Pennacook
and Massachusetts, are believed to have converged on this site during the seventeenth century. They came to fish, but also to hold political and diplomatic council at Pawtucket. The Native inhabitants of Wamesit and Pawtucket also hunted for water fowl, turkeys, pigeons, and a variety of other birds, deer, and moose.\(^8\)

**Pawtucket, Wamesit, and European Colonization**

European colonization had a significant impact on the Native peoples of New England. Foremost, it led to the spread of disease, which led to a demographic catastrophe among Native American communities like Pawtucket. Native towns and villages experienced a severe decline in their population. Scholarship on disease emphasizes the destructive impact that alien pathogens had on Native Americans who had little immunity to “Old World” epidemics. Disease led to a population decline among Native Americans, as most experts estimate today, of about 90 percent. The 1616-18 and 1633-34 smallpox epidemics had particularly devastating impacts on the Pennacook Indians living in the lower Merrimack River Valley. Smallpox returned again in 1639. In 1647, it was followed by influenza. In 1649-50, another smallpox epidemic broke out in New England, trailed by diphtheria in 1659. In the long run, disease rendered the Penacook Indian lands vulnerable to English colonization.\(^9\)

It is, of course, impossible to reconstruct and determine the exact mortality rates and population numbers among the Pennacook in general and the settlement of Pawtucket in particular. Thus, we are left with estimates and approximations that provide merely a glimpse at what the demographic situation was like in the seventeenth century. The observations of Daniel Gookin, the supervisor of Massachusetts’ Native mission reservations in the mid-seventeenth century, about demographic developments among Native Americans in New England seem to confirm the general scholarship on aboriginal populations and disease. According to Gookin’s informers, the population of what he


called the “Pawktuckets,” likely referring to all Pennacook living on the lower Merrimack, but equally possible counting all Penacook Indians living in the river valley, or maybe counting even many other groups, had been reduced from 3,000 fighting men “to not above 250 men.”

Looking at the records of Thomas Dudley for the “Pawtucket,” Neal Salisbury writes that his “upper figure of 500 in 1631 represents only 17 percent of the 3,000 men reckoned by Gookin’s informants.” Daniel Mandell, on the other hand, estimates that in the early 1630s “the natives in the region, known as the Massachusett and Pawtucket tribes, had been devastated by the recent epidemic, and only about 200 remained.” It is hard to verify or calculate the accuracy of any of these estimates and depopulation rates – they are mere approximations. Yet, the numbers clearly underscore the dramatic impact that epidemics and English colonization had on Native settlements like Pawtucket.

Pawtucket, due to its shrinking numbers, was especially vulnerable to attacks from its neighbors. There were repeated raids by and conflicts with the Micmac, the Narragansett, and in later years with members of the Iroquois Confederacy. In its early years, Plymouth Colony also attacked several Pawtucket-Pennacook settlements. These conflicts reinforced the vulnerabilities of the Native communities on the lower Merrimack River. Weakened by disease and war, it is likely that Pawtucket desired to seek closer relations with the English as a potential powerful ally. Still the attacks continued. Throughout the 1650s, 1660s, and 1670s, as part of the warfare waged between Iroquois and New England Indians, war parties of the Mohawk nation, the eastern-most members of the Iroquois, harassed the Pennacook Indians in settlements like Pawtucket, as well as in New England praying towns like Wamesit. As the English did little to help to protect the settlements, the Natives of the greater Lowell area are likely to have built a fort as a defensive structure in the late 1660s or early 1670s on a hill overlooking the Concord River, in a part of Lowell that is now known as Fort Hill.

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12 Mandell, 12.

13 Salisbury, 105, 109, 121, 144, 156, 180, 183, 204-5, 209.
Relations between Native peoples and the English colonies were generally initiated through the trade in fur. Passaconaway, the influential Pennacook leader who resided for much of the year at Pawtucket, and who in the early 1630s led a faction that was about 400 to 500 fighters strong, had been an active participant in the region’s fur trade. For the Pawtucket, as for many of New England’s Native people, trade was at least as much a way to establish diplomatic ties and relations of reciprocity with neighbors, as it was an economic interaction. Pawtucket’s involvement in the fur trade likely led the Native settlement to pursue closer contacts with the English. It is important to acknowledge that this relationship was not without tensions. In 1642, for example, colonial authorities had tried to disarm and arrest Passaconaway, sending 40 soldiers in his pursuit. They fired at the fleeing sachem and arrested his wife and child. Still in 1644, due to threats and fears from attacks by the Narragansetts as well as other neighboring groups, the Pawtucket decided to move under the authority of the General Court in Boston. It appears likely that the Pawtucket saw rivalries with neighboring nations as a more dangerous threat to their survival and sovereignty than English expansion.

The Pawtucket’s path of accommodation with the English was limited. For example, Passaconaway and the Pawtuckets do not appear to have converted to Christianity despite pressures to do so. While the local historians of Native-white relations have described the sachem as a “great friend of the whites,” Passaconaway’s actual motivations likely were not so simplistic. Like many Native American leaders before and after him, Passaconaway had to make difficult decisions about the survival of his people. He became a firm believer that militant resistance to English colonization would be a failed and costly strategy. In a speech in 1660, he told his people:

I was as much an Enemy to the English at their first coming into these Parts, as any one whatsoever, and did try all Ways and Means possible to have destroyed them, at least to have prevented them sitting down here, but I could in no way effect it; . . . therefore I advise you never to contend with the English, nor make war with them.17


Many of the Indians who lived in Pawtucket would embrace this strategy. Others, however, would abandon their leader and the area around the falls and move north, farther away from the reach of the colonists. There they would join communities and leaders who pursued a less reconciliatory stance toward the English. Passaconaway’s son, Wanamancet, who became the leader of Pawtucket after his father, pursued a similar strategy, and faced similar opposition among the town’s increasingly shrinking membership.18

When animal pelts became sparse due to Native American over hunting and the increased ecological pressures brought on by English settlement, Indian-white economic interactions in New England often shifted to the sale of land. This led to dramatic changes. Peter Leavenworth, who studied the history of Penacook-Pawtucket land sales, writes that “European trade goods, some of which replaced traditional native implements,” became “part of the fabric of everyday native life. At first Indians considered non-essential land an acceptable variation on customary exchange.” Over time, however, Penacook-Pawtucket leaders would eventually turn “to land sales to maintain their consumption levels . . . This consumer activity was largely supported by traders offering liberal credit, a practice common among the English.” The increasing pressure on Native land certainly had an impact on the Native people of the Greater Lowell area. By the second half of the seventeenth century, due to the expansion of the white population in the region, agricultural land became increasingly scarce and demands on Native leaders to surrender their land intensified. As a consequence, both Passaconaway and Wanamancet sold land rights to the settlers.19

Elliot and Gookin

Much of the scholarship on the Native peoples of the greater Lowell area has underscored the roles played by John Eliot and Daniel Gookin. The two men indeed played central roles in New England’s Native American mission history – and thus in the historiography of seventeenth-century New England. Historians of New England, however, disagree over Eliot’s impact on Native Americans. Scholars like Francis Jennings

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view Eliot and his allies as agents of empire who aided in the political and economic subjugation of the Natives of New England. Others, like Richard Cogley, argue that Eliot viewed the mission primarily as a program for instructing Indians in ‘civility’ and ‘religion’ so that some natives could experience ‘conversion’ and ‘full’ church membership … Once he became better acquainted with the Indians and more sympathetic to their problems, he regarded the mission as a way of protecting Native Americans, whether Christian or not, from land grabbing settlers and from Indian marauders.

The local historians make a similar argument. In Burtt’s and Pendergast’s narratives of the Native peoples of the greater Lowell area, Eliot and Gookin have a central and even a celebratory role. They are described as converting the Native peoples to Christianity and are portrayed as the central protectors of the Indian communities, a deed described as a great achievement.

In 1653, Eliot’s work contributed indeed to the creation of the “praying town” of Wamesit. Still, there is a problem with this focus because the earlier scholarship on the Native people of the greater Lowell area broadly overstated the missionary influence. In fact, Eliot’s impact was rather limited as he and even his Native helpers rarely visited Pawtucket and Wamesit. The distance from Roxbury, Eliot’s place of residence, and from Natick, the major New England Indian praying town, to the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord rivers, proved to be too far to establish permanent and consistent connections. The issue of limited missionary influence was further reinforced by the linguistic barrier as the Penacook and Massachusetts Indians spoke a different language. Eliot did not know Penacook. In fact, Wamesit and Pawtucket were two of only a very few settlements among the Penacook Indians where Puritan missionaries made any inroads. Through its early days, Wamesit consisted of about 15 families, all in all maybe 70-80 “converts.” It did not grow much further in later years. Thus, the overall missionary impact was quite limited. Eliot had to supervise a growing number of praying towns, which led him to even further neglect the missionary efforts among towns farther in the interior like Pawtucket and Wamesit. In addition, the missionary enterprise was under-funded since the Massachusetts Bay Colony would not fund the praying towns. In fact,

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21 Cogley, 4.
only a few expenses were covered by the General Court, including the costs related to the surveying of the Native mission settlement of Wamesit in 1653. At 2,500 acres, it was the smallest of New England’s praying towns.22

The creation of Wamesit aided in Native American dispossession. The establishment of the reservation coincided with the founding of Billerica in 1653 and of Chelmsford in 1656, the two towns that would become the neighboring white communities to Wamesit and Pawtucket. Judging from the historical record, neither the Pawtucket nor the Wamesit were reimbursed for the creation of these two settlements on their lands, suggesting that the General Court deemed the 2,500 acres granted to the Indians in the area as adequate compensation.

**Missing Elements**

Decisively missing from the earlier historical accounts of Pawtucket and Wamesit are Native American perspectives – a real challenge for anyone trying to reconstruct the history of the two communities. For example, it is difficult to find information that provides insights into the relations between the two settlements. It is likely that the Natives of Wamesit relocated for the most part from Pawtucket, but we do not know that for sure. What we do know is that the Wamesit, like the Pawtucket, spoke Pennacook. Eliot and Gookin generally attempted to visit Wamesit in the spring, a time when many Indians came to Pawtucket to hold council. These meetings motivated the two Englishmen to come to the greater Lowell area to recruit new followers for their missions – largely a fruitless effort. The two also complained about the corrupting and harmful impact that the visiting Indians at Pawtucket had on the Wamesit Indians. Gookin displayed a high level of frustration when he described many of the Native visitors as “divers vitious and wicked men and women.”23

A further challenge is to figure out the Native American motivations to join the “praying town” at Wamesit. Was this a sign of polarization among the Pennacook? Did different groups among the Pennacook not get along and therefore decided to start a new community? Did they believe that the embrace of Christianity might provide them political advantages with the English and lead to a closer alliance? Or did the Christian

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faith have genuine appeal to the Natives? The historic record is quiet on these issues. Since both Eliot and Gookin rarely stayed or even visited Wamesit, what role did native community leaders play in the settlement? And how did the Wamesit understand their “conversion,” and their position in regards to Pawtucket as well as the colony?

Additional questions emerge that further complicate the picture. How real was the division between the two communities? Was the split between “Christian” Wamesit and Pawtucket really as dramatic as the white missionary writings might suggest, or might this separation have been artificially emphasized by Eliot and Gookin, who wanted to give the impression that their missionary efforts were successful at separating the “Christian” Indians from others? Or might the Pawtucket Indians have seen the presence of the “praying town” strategically as an asset in their efforts to maintain friendly relations with the colony, without, however, having to be directly associated with Christianity themselves?

The Pawtucket Indian leaders had to play a cautious balancing game. They walked a tightrope needing to appease their followers at Pawtucket as well as the English. Eliot’s and Gookin’s efforts to convert Wannalancet exemplify these tensions. Gookin described the Pawtucket leader as “a sober and grave person” in his 50s or 60s.

He hath been always loving and friendly to the English. Many endeavors have been used several years to gain this sachem to embrace the Christian religion; but he hath stood off from time to time, and to yielded up himself personally, though for four years past hath been willing to hear the word of God preached, and to keep the Sabbath. A great reason that hath kept him off, I conceive, hath been the indisposition and averseness of sundry of his chief men and relations to pray to God; which he foresaw would desert him, in case he turned Christian.

Thus, conversion to Christianity, despite some potential political advantages that it might have brought to a Native leader, also could mean the potential loss in standing among one’s followers. This possibility was at least in part why Passaconaway and Wannalancet were reluctant to convert. As Gookin reminded us in the same document, another sachem in the region, after converting to Christianity, was abandoned by his people.24

24 Gookin, 186-8.
Wannalancet, according to Gookin, finally “converted” to Christianity in the early 1670s. Gookin wrote that Wannalancet spoke to the effect that

I have, all my days, used to pass in an old canoe … and now you exhort me to change … and embark in a new canoe, to which I have hitherto been unwilling. But now I yield up myself to your advice and enter into a new canoe, and do engage to pray to God hereafter.

The “conversion” of an important Indian leader, while certainly a propaganda coup for Eliot and Gookin, also lost Wannalancet numerous followers and powerful allies at Pawtucket and beyond.25

Wannalancet’s decision to embrace Christianity is again difficult to assess from the historic record and provides historians with what is likely to be an unsolvable puzzle. Was it a spiritual decision? A political calculation by Wannalancet, done out of hope that conversion to Christianity would improve Pawtucket’s position in the region, provide protection, guarantees for land, or access to more trade goods? Or, was he simply placating the missionaries?

On the evidence, Christianity’s impact on the Native people of Pawtucket and Wamesit is hard to assess. Certainly being a member of a praying town like Wamesit meant a more formalized alliance with the English. Praying towns at least provided a limited promise to preserve land and access to English goods to Native “converts.” On the other hand, being a member of a mission town required Native Americans to change at least some of their behavior and to follow a new set of rules.26 But it is extremely difficult to reconstruct how much of this was taking place at Wamesit from the limited sources we have available. Due to little missionary oversight, it seems that the Wamesit Indians had more of a leeway to pursue the lives they wanted. In fact, in 1670, John Eliot wrote that the Wamesits “have not much esteem for religion.”27 Gookin as well complained about the “converts” in this community who he considered indolent. He complained about their failure to raise livestock and to adopt European forms of agriculture.28 As mentioned earlier, Wamesit is likely to have been run by the Natives. Thus, control stayed with Native

25 Gookin, 186–8.


28 Gookin, 184–9.
American leadership. The Indians there, as the missionary complaints suggest, seemed resilient about maintaining their cultural traditions and lifeways. Wamesit in many ways served as a place where Native Americans attempted to maintain their land basis, independence, sovereignty, and autonomy.

**King Philips War and the Ethnic Cleansing of Wamesit and Pawtucket**

Despite missionary rhetoric, conversion to Christianity did not mean English protection for the people of Wamesit, nor for Wannalancet and his followers at Pawtucket. Conflict and tensions emerged, for example, during King Philip's War in the 1670s. Wannalancet and many of his followers, including what must have been a good number of Wamesit Indians, fled north fearing attacks from the colonists. Some of the praying towns – though not Wamesit – sided with Metacomet, who the English called King Philip. Metacomet fought a war against colonial domination, and gained support among a number of New England Indians who felt oppressed by English colonization and subjugation. Still, many Indians, especially in the established praying towns, remained friendly with the English. This strategy, however, failed to benefit Native groups and could even lead to greater suffering.

King Philip’s War left a bloody mark on New England. Numerous white settlements were attacked during the conflict, and several were totally destroyed by Native forces allied with Metacomet’s cause. During the war, Indian hating in New England also reached a peak, and colonists often did not differentiate between friend and foe among the Natives.

While the war was a disaster for the English population, it was even more devastating for the Native Americans of New England. Many of the Christian Indian allies of the colony ended up on Deer Island where they were put into an internment camp despite their friendly stance toward the English. They suffered under extremely poor conditions and a high mortality rate. To make matters worse, at the end of the conflict, many of the survivors were sold into slavery alongside the colony’s alleged and real Indian enemies. According to Gookin, numerous innocent Wamesit and Pawtucket people were among those sold into slavery in the Caribbean.

At Wamesit too, the conflict had a devastating impact. In the fall of 1675, Chelmsford settlers rounded up the 145 Native men, women, and children who at that time remained in Wamesit, probably some of them Indians from Pawtucket who had not
wanted to leave the area. They were forcefully marched to Boston. Although most Indians were eventually allowed to return to their homes, the situation remained tense. Only a short while after this incident, a group of Chelmsford settlers barged into the Native village and killed a boy and injured several women. Afraid of further attacks, the Wamesit Indians fled into the forests. Suffering from the cold temperatures and lack of food, they returned to their settlement in December and lobbied the Massachusetts government to provide protection. When the government refused, they fled north to meet up with Wannalancet, leaving several elderly and sick persons behind who were unable to travel. In an act of cruelty, settlers massacred about a half dozen people when they burned down the settlement. Colonists took over the Indians’ fields by the spring.29

King Philip’s War had a destructive impact and proved a decisive turning point for the Native peoples of this region. It was a major factor in undermining the continued existence of Native communities in the greater Lowell area. While Wamesit was set aside as only one of four Native reservations that were allowed to continue to exist in Massachusetts, the pressures of Chelmsford settlers on Native land continued. Despite the official recognition, the “praying town” pretty much vanished from the historic record. The few Native Americans who remained led a marginal existence, moving in and out of the area. Wannalancet and some of his followers, who had returned to the greater Lowell region after King Philip’s War for frequent stays, eventually sold their lands to white settlers by the mid-1680s. Eventually most of the descendants of the survivors and evacuees of Pawtucket and Wamesit merged with their northern neighbors, the Abenaki, many of them settling on the St. Francis River in Quebec at the native settlement of Odanak.30

Native Americans in the Greater Lowell Area after King Philip’s War

With King Philip’s War, the Native settlements of Pawtucket and Wamesit had ceased to exist. Still, even a short examination of their history, can provide new perspectives on the life of Native Americans in New England. Certainly there remain many intriguing and unanswered questions about the history of the two communities. This is in large part due to the limited sources available to historians. Yet, by reassessing

29 For the Wamesit and Pawtuckets during King Philip’s War, see Gookin, 471-92.
30 Burtt, 8; Pendergast, 82-5.
and reexamining the literature and the historic record of these two settlements, we can get a glimpse at the confrontations and challenges that colonial expansion brought to the Native peoples of the greater Lowell area.

The end of Pawtucket and Wamesit did, however, not mean the end of Native life in the greater Lowell area. As in other parts of New England, the end of conquest and subjugation did not mean that Native Americans just disappeared. Throughout the eighteenth, the nineteenth, and the twentieth centuries, Native Americans continued and continue to have a presence in the region. In the eighteenth century, various accounts were recorded of Native Americans who traveled the Merrimack River and at times visited white friends and relations. In the nineteenth century, Native American women were among the mill workers. Most noted among them was Betsey Chamberlain, who wrote for the *Lowell Offering* and the *New England Offering*.

Today, the Greater Lowell Indian Cultural Association is a Native American community group which remains active in the region. Pawtucket’s and Wamesit’s legacies of survival, adaptation, accommodation, resistance, and resilience thus continue to remain a part of Lowell’s cultural mosaic today.

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