

Wethersfield's War: Hunger, Rumor, and the Cost of Battles Not Fought.

On June 8, 1771, the crusty Boston lawyer and future-President-of-a-future-United-States John Adams took a horseback ride. Exhausted and ill from the stresses of defending the British soldiers who had participated in the previous December's Boston Massacre, Adams had come for a little rest and recreation to the colony next door, a country escape for a weary patriot. He left Hartford just after breakfast and headed south for his next destination. Here's what he wrote about what he saw:

Rode to Wethersfield four miles, on the West side of the River – Here is the finest ride in America, I believe. Nothing can exceed the Beauty, and Fertility of the Country. The Lands upon the River, the flatt low Lands, are loaded with rich, noble Crops of Grass, and Grain, and Corn. . . . They have in Wethersfield a large brick Meeting House, Lockwood the Minister. A Gentleman came in and told me that there was not such another Street in America as this at Weathersfield. . . . Adams summarized the day's excursion in one sentence. "I have spent this Morning in riding through Paradise."

Many Connecticutans today share John Adams' view of Wethersfield. Prime contender along with Hartford, Windsor and Old Saybrook for bragging rights as Connecticut's oldest-town, Wethersfield is now as in Adam's day one of the nation's most beautiful places, rich in historical associations and streets lined with lovingly preserved Revolutionary-War-period architecture. It still looks much like the town where General George Washington met the French comte de Rochambeau, in May of 1781. to plan the campaign that led to the Revolutionary War's stunning final victory at the Battle of Yorktown. But ironically, a recent, at first seemingly non-descript find in an

archeological test pit, dug in the yard of the very home in which Washington and Rochambeau held their meetings – now Wethersfield’s Webb Deane Stevens Museum – has historians and archaeologists around the country excited, not about Wethersfield’s Revolutionary War past, but rather its participation in a different war that took place much earlier.

The test pit was being dug at the museum in advance of construction of a new education building. Museum officials needed to certify that the new building would not impinge on any previously unknown but significant archeological remains. As expected, because of the length of time the site had been occupied and its proximity to the Joseph Webb House, the archaeologists first uncovered a nice assemblage of late 19th and early 20th century glassware, followed by numerous 18th century artifacts – ceramic pieces, pipe stems ,a shoe buckle, etc. But then, instead of reaching undisturbed soil, they began to find numerous artifacts from the *seventeenth* century, including a coin dating to the earliest days of Wethersfield’s English occupation. This was exciting stuff. But the thing that created the “stop-the-presses” moment was the intersection of two long uniformly-wide dark brown stains in the otherwise light brown, sandy soil. *That* was breath-taking because what those two lines suggested – especially when considered in the context of the English and native American artifacts found in close proximity to the intersected lines – was that the archaeologists *might* be looking at a defensive wall or palisaded fort from New England’s very earliest Anglo-Indian war, the Pequot War, which had begun – at least as far as the English were concerned – in Wethersfield on a hungry early spring day in late-April 1637.

Right on the spot people associate with a colonial paradise, it looked like they had discovered the find we early-colonial-period historians heretofore had only dreamed of: real and tangible evidence of the time when this area was – for a lot longer than people have ever imagined – a kind of living hell. This chapter is about the war those intersected stains in a pit brought back to life, and the time when life in Wethersfield was a relentless struggle with fear, and the threat of danger.

Studies of war often seem to focus on a few essential themes: Causation – *why* did they fight?; Conflict – *where* and *how* did they fight?; and Outcomes – *who* won, and *what happened* because they did? Such questions are essential, and each of them – Cause, Conflict and Outcomes – can be analyzed in a multitude of richly productive ways.

Still, in the study of New England’s 17th century Anglo-Indian conflicts, especially the one that became a war right here in Wethersfield, there is one important aspect of war that a focus on cause, conflict, and outcomes usually leads historians to overlook. That is the high cost and widespread impact war has on people and resources far away from the scenes of conflict – the tremendous toll – economic, psychic and physical – that a war footing takes on those who either never, or only rarely, experience any part of the actual fighting. The biblical prophecy that “you will hear of wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6) has proved true in all times and places, yet historians almost always focus on the wars and not the rumors.

This story does a little bit of both, but it focuses on those rumors and how to incorporate their impact into our understanding of conflict. The reason is simple: The greatest expenditure of resources – human, material, and psychic – in most conflicts – is exerted by people defending

themselves from things that they fear will happen but don't. Yet these ancillary costs are often forgotten by historians, which makes war seem more concentrated and dramatic, and far less of a drain on capacities, than it actually is.

A good place to begin this look at the cost of wars *not* fought is with the start of one that was – the Connecticut Colony's May 1st, 1637 order to launch an offensive war against the Pequot Indians. Tensions between the English settlers along the Connecticut River and the powerful Pequot tribe had been escalating for well over a year, but an incident just eight days earlier that happened within an arrow or musket shot of the recent archeological discovery made war not just inevitable, but mandatory.

On April 23, 1637 a force of from 100 to 200 Pequot and Wangunk warriors launched a surprise attack on Wethersfield. Six English men and three women were killed and two young girls – the oldest was 16 – were taken captive, most while out working in their fields. Why choose Wethersfield as the place to start a war? Geography was one reason. Wethersfield was the southernmost of the three English Connecticut River plantations, which made post-battle withdrawal an easy canoe-paddle for the Pequot and Wangunk warriors. Population, too, was a factor. Wethersfield was the smallest of the three river settlements, with an estimated population no greater than 200 people, probably significantly less, most of them children. The biggest reason Wethersfield was targeted for attack, though, was that settlement's track record of cultural belligerence when dealing with the native Wangunk tribe, whose land the English had settled on.

The Wangunk sachem Sowheage, who lived at Pyquag – the site the English would rename Wethersfield – when the English trader John Oldham and friends first arrived to scout the territory in 1633, initially welcomed and encouraged the English to settle in the region. He reasoned that they would be a useful ally in the Wangunk's competition with the aggressive Pequot tribe, who

had long sought domination over all the native bands along the Connecticut. Sowheage made an arrangement whereby he would sell the English land near his village, and they would live side by side in a kind of mutual cooperation and defense alliance. No one knows the details behind what happened, but soon after Oldham and the ten original families took up residence, they forced Sowheage and his people, who were by then seriously weakened by decimating exposure to smallpox the year before – to leave Pyquag –which the English had already named Watertown, which they would soon change to Wethersfield – for one of the other Wangunk villages at Mattabeeset (today’s Middletown). Driven from his own home by people he had welcomed as friends and allies, Sowheage seethed with resentment.

The Wangunk, not about to relinquish their homeland without a fight, reversed course. This time, they allied with their former enemies the Pequots to take on the English. That led to the April 23rd attack on Wethersfield – one terrible morning; six men and three women dead, and two daughters of one of the town’s most important men, William Swayne, taken captive and God-knows-what-is-happening to them. It was an assault that called for a whole-scale response. That response was Connecticut’s May 1st declaration of war.

The colony’s war orders reflected plans hurriedly arrived at in the days after the attack. Collectively, the Connecticutans would put a force of ninety English militia into the field. Based on the relative size of each plantation, Hartford would provide forty-two men, Windsor thirty, and the still-reeling Wethersfield eighteen. The force would be commanded by Captain John Mason of Windsor, an experienced veteran of the early seventeenth-century Dutch Wars, and Lieutenant Robert Seeley of Wethersfield, presumably a man with a score to settle. Twenty of the soldiers were to be fully armored – furnished with the back and breast plate, neck gorget, and loin guards

that rendered most vital body parts impervious to arrows. Every man was to bring from his personal stores a pound of gunpowder, four pounds of shot, twenty bullets and a musket. Painfully aware that an army travels on its stomach, the colony ordered each town to provide two bushels of corn for each of its soldiers – half of it baked into biscuits, the rest ground into meal – and to do so quickly using “any means it can.” Presumably that meant assigning most of the women in every town to biscuit-making as a contribution to the war effort. In addition to corn as the dietary staple, each town also had a specialized list of additional food requirements. Hartford was to furnish suet, butter, oatmeal, peas, five hundred fish, and salt; Windsor fifty pieces of pork, rice, and four cheeses; Wethersfield, again reflecting its straitened condition, one bushel of Indian beans. Good beer, sack – that is, fortified wine – and strong waters were to be provided for the Captain, Rev. John Stone, the Army’s chaplain, and sick or injured men.

It took ten days to prepare, gather, and stow provisions aboard the three vessels hastily requisitioned for the campaign. The English citizen-soldiers gathered to receive a war blessing from Hartford’s minister Thomas Hooker, and sailed off for Saybrook accompanied by seventy-five Mohegan warrior allies under the sachem Uncas. Most historians of the Pequot War board those boats with them, and the resulting accounts of the conflict they tell are primarily tales of the battles that followed.

That story is for the most part clearly delineated. Within two weeks, a combined Massachusetts and Connecticut, Mohegan and Narragansett force killed some four hundred to seven hundred Pequot people in an early morning surprise attack on a palisaded Pequot village near present-day Mystic. Stunned by the wholesale carnage, the Pequots fled their homeland, but were defeated again in July in a swamp battle near Fairfield, Connecticut. The Pequot sachem Sassacus escaped the swamp but was found and executed by Mohawks and Mohegans at

a cave known as Stone Church in today's Dover Plains, New York, just over the state line from Kent. By August 1st, only two months after it was declared, the Pequot war was effectively over – at least for the historians.

But rather than follow those historians on their war paths, this account of the Pequot War stays at the water's edge in Hartford after the soldiers have sailed, to assess what has just happened and consider the effect the ensuing war had on the three English river towns, and others like them, far removed from the actual fighting. For them, the Pequot War lasted much longer, was much more uncertain, and far more terrifying than the historians accounts show. Because these towns, even those far distant from any fighting, lived for more than a generation in fear of attacks that never came, and for which they felt terribly ill-prepared. Theirs is a story of unremitting vulnerability, caused by hunger, mistrust, history, and the persuasive power of rumor during war and its aftermath.

One thing easily overlooked in the battle-focused accounts is that the troops' departure left the River towns both hungry and virtually unmanned. The ninety men pressed into service represented nearly three-quarters of the new plantations' adult males, and every able-bodied one. This so concerned the mission commander John Mason that when a Massachusetts force of nineteen men showed up at Saybrook, he immediately sent twenty of the Connecticut men back home, where they were needed both for defense and the desperately important work of spring-planting.

Hunger was a driving force behind the Pequot war. The two-year period leading up to the Pequot War was a time of widespread food scarcity, of “dearth and desperation” in New England. Plain hunger,” one historian recently noted, “lay at the core of the frenzied English stumble into war.” “Our Commons were very short,” wrote the English commander John

Mason, “there being a general scarcity throughout the Colony of all sorts of provision, it being upon our first arrival at the place.” The Pequots also faced pressure on their corn stocks, from the effects of devastating epidemics, destruction by English troops, and the loss of subject tribes who formerly paid the Pequots tribute in maize.

Given New England’s extended food shortages, early spring was the worst possible time to put an army in the field. Spring was when families began counting heads and measuring provision barrels’ contents to see how much they might have to ration to make it till first fruits. It was also time for men to bend their efforts to the plow and get the spring plantings in. A third year of poor harvests threatened to undermine the whole New England project. The Pequots and Wangunks understood this, which is why they planned their attack on Wethersfield during the late April planting. It also explains why eight of the nine people killed at Wethersfield were attacked while working in the fields. Significantly, the Indians also killed twenty cows and a mare, a clear sign the Pequot-Wangunk war strategy was to target the planters’ already tenuous food security.

By factoring hunger into our strategic analysis, it becomes easy to see that the Connecticutans May 1st declaration of War was an act not only of retribution, but also of desperation. Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield used food they could not spare to send a critically needed labor and defense force off to fight a distant, though, mobile enemy. But it was also an enemy known to have large corn stores cached in underground granaries. Before sending the soldiers off, Rev. Hooker had told them “The Pequots should be bread to us,” a statement he meant literally as well as metaphorically. And it was a message not just for the troops, but for all those women who had worked to turn so much of their families’ own remaining corn into soldiers’ biscuits. Grain, without doubt, was the most important of the spoils John Mason hoped to acquire when he attacked the

Pequot Fort at Mystic. But that's a different story. Our story remains here in Wethersfield. The army has departed; and in its absence, there is hunger perhaps, and fear for certain.

The anxious settlers were living on edge. Hyper-vigilance led to daily alarms of impending attacks. All proved false, but they stretched the towns' human resources to the breaking point. "Our people are scarce able to stand upon their legs," Windsor's Roger Ludlow wrote. He used a harvest metaphor to describe Connecticut's straitened condition. "Our plantations are so gleaned by that small fleet we sent out, those that remain are scarce able to supply our watches, which are day and night." Gleaned meant to go into a field after it had been picked or harvested and scrape up what was left, which in terms of both available men and sustenance was a painfully accurate description.

Fear kept settlers away from their fields, close to home, not just in Wethersfield but all-over New England. "What we plant," Ludlow reported, "is before our doors, little anywhere else." Asked to send men up the river to Springfield to help defend the threatened settlement there, Ludlow regretfully declined, saying, "If the case be never so dangerous, we can neither help you, nor you us."

Faced with the likelihood of having to defend themselves with only the few and feeble men and military resources left after the troops departed, Wethersfield settlers used vital planting time to construct fortifications instead. Early Wethersfield historian Henry Stiles believed that at least one palisaded fort or garrison house – a home specially reinforced to resist attack – was built in the northern part of the village, along what today is Wethersfield's State Street, once called Fort Street. But a fort built to defend settlers in the northern part of the settlement would have left those in the southern part, people with even more potential exposure to attack from the Wangunks further to the south, all but undefended. So logic would suggest, and the intersecting stains in the

archeological test pit seem to confirm, that a second fort or garrison house was built in the southern section of the village, too. This supposition gains more credibility from the fact that the archeological feature is located on land that was the homesite of Clement Chaplin, one of early Wethersfield's most important men. If this working hypothesis is confirmed by the more extensive site excavations currently (Summer 2019) in the planning stages, these palisade stains merit the excitement they have generated, for they take us back to the very beginnings of Wethersfield, of Connecticut, and of America, and one of the most important moments in Anglo-American & Native American history. A very dark moment, too; when everyone slept with one eye open, and listened to every sound on the night air. Not just in Wethersfield, but in every village and town in New England.

One reason the Wethersfield attack spread fear so quickly to all places, English and Indian alike, is that no one – native or English – knew for sure who they could trust. One piece of advice Roger Ludlow gave to leader of Springfield to whom he could not send assistance was, “I would desire you to be careful and watchful that you not be betrayed by friendships.” Anglo-Indian alliances were confusing, fluid and tenuous to all parties, subject to unilateral revision or termination, and based on agreements almost always subject to conflicting interpretations. The very agreement Wethersfield's settlers made with the sachem Sowheage, which the English repudiated as soon as they arrived, was a textbook example of this. Such actions, which occurred on both sides of the cultural divide, made any Anglo-Indian alliance a source of anxiety to all involved.

This tenuous nature of alliances fed a historic specter too, that gave the report of any Indian attack region wide significance. That specter was the 1622 attack of the Powhatan confederation

on English settlements up and down the James River of Virginia, that had left one-fourth of that colony's population dead in a single morning. That event was seared into the consciousness of all New England planters, who feared nothing as much as a pan-Indian alliance against them. Any Indian attack was seen as a potential harbinger of coordinated multi-tribal assaults to come.

For all these reasons, news of the Wethersfield attack spread fear like wildfire among the English. And as it spread, it generated additional, even more fearful rumors. In Boston, word of the raid was augmented by another report – subsequently proved false – that sixty men had been killed in an Indian attack on Springfield. After a subsequent rumor surfaced that the Narragansetts – southern New England's largest indigenous group – were being actively courted by the Pequots to join an anti-English confederation, fear gripped the Bay Colony as firmly as it held Connecticut.

Towns were put on the highest alert. The Massachusetts Governor's Council ordered that “none should go to work, nor travel, no, not so much as to church without arms.” A guard of fourteen or fifteen soldiers was appointed to watch every night, and sentinels were set in convenient places about the plantations. Plymouth ordered a guard of 12 musketeers to accompany and protect the Governor everywhere he went. The Bay colony and Plymouth joined Connecticut's river towns, waiting anxiously for attacks that never came.

These fears of attacks were reinforced and amplified by the rumors that flew like projectiles across New England that year, and for many years thereafter.

The social psychologist Robert H. Knapp, who was in charge of rumor control for the Massachusetts Committee of Safety during World War II, theorized the influence of rumors in that war in ways that are useful when thinking about the Pequot War. War conditions are especially productive of rumors, Knapp argued, because military secrecy makes reliable information both intensely valued and extraordinarily scarce. Rumors fill war's information gaps, even as they give

voice to the emotional insecurities or aggressive feelings of the rumor spreaders. Rumored information beats no information at all, and most rumors, though spread by word of mouth, are imbued with trappings – such as attribution to a high-ranking source – that make them seem highly credible. At the same time, they also clearly reflect and reinforce the anxiety, aggressive feelings, or wishful thinking of the rumor mongers. Some rumors are primarily informational; others primarily expressive; most, though succinct enough to travel by word of mouth, contain both information and an emotionally charged interpretive slant.

Knapp posited the usefulness of three classifications of rumors: 1) anxiety or fear-producing rumors; 2) pipe-dream, or wishful-thinking rumors; and 3) wedge-driving, or aggression rumors, that express latent hostility and cause disunity. All three types of rumors figured prominently in the whirlwind of misinformation that accompanied the Pequot war and its aftermath, and none of the War's victors – Connecticut, Massachusetts, the Narragansetts or the Mohegans – were immune from rumor-mongering.

Roger Williams, the Massachusetts exile at Providence plantation, was a frequent reporter of Pequot war rumors. Between May of 1637 and the summer of 1638. Williams passed along thirty-five rumors he gathered from English leaders, native sachems, and a cast of characters in transit. Eight of those rumors were the kind that fed colonists darkest fears and reinforced their expectations of attack, such as the report that there had been a far greater slaughter than the Wethersfield attack at one of the other Connecticut plantations; or another that “the Pequots have entered into a league with the Man-Eating Mohawks.” Considering that Williams was only one among literally thousands of conduits for rumors, the climate of fear created by these rumors was intense, and the resources expended in responding to fears of possible attack extremely costly in both material expense and diverted agricultural labor. Knapp found that such fear-inducing rumors

are the most powerful of the three classifications of rumor, because of the potential dangers involved in ignoring them. In the climate of continuous fear rumors that swept New England in 1637 and 1638, colonial towns *and* Indian villages had little choice but to remain on highest alert.

Williams was aware of the value of rumors as propaganda, and on at least two occasions he deployed rumor to serve English goals. In one instance, he deliberately passed along a fear rumor that “the Mohawks and Pequots had slain many English and natives at Connecticut” to Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop, even though he didn’t believe it. He did so because he knew Winthrop could use such news to mobilize additional defensive resources in the Bay Colony. On another occasion, Williams simply manufactured a wishful-thinking rumor, and told it to Narragansett leaders to calm their fears in response to a rumored English defeat. A large English force in the field had not been heard from for some time, and a rumor had circulated that the English had been ambushed by a Pequot war party. Though Williams had no idea what had happened to the English troops, he confidently told the Narragansetts that the English force had returned to Connecticut for provisions.

If fear rumors help explain the prolonged war-footing of the colonists during the Pequot War, the even more numerous and persistent wedge-driving rumors help explain the chronic states of military mobilization that characterized the post-war years. Wedge driving, or aggression rumors divide groups by calling into question the loyalty of allies. Their essential motivation, according to Knapp, is aggression against or hatred of the group targeted by the rumor. Roger Williams passed along wedge-driving rumors more than twice as often as fear rumors. Twenty-one of his thirty-five rumor reports contained information reflecting negatively on one or another of the Pequot War’s allies, compared to the eight merely fear-inducing reports he transmitted. The

disproportionate degree of wedge-driving rumors is an indicator of just how deeply the supposed allies in the Pequot War disliked and distrusted each other.

Conditions specific to the Pequot War made it fertile ground for the fabrication of wedge-driving rumors. Though the English sought in the wake of their victory to capture all Pequot combatants, blood bonds linked many Pequots to other regional tribes including the Wangunks. So, it was not unusual for a Pequot fighter to seek temporary shelter with family members from another tribe to avoid English detection, especially since the English had pre-sentenced all Pequots who had participated in the fighting to death. In this fluid environment, it was not easy for the English to determine *where* the enemy was, or at times, even *who* was the enemy. Native groups used this English confusion to undermine tribes with whom they were in conflict by suggesting those tribes – even if they claimed to be English allies – were actually aiding and abetting the Pequots by offering them shelter and concealing their identities.

Williams reported sixteen wedge-driving rumors asserting that various tribes were secretly giving sanctuary to Pequots. The largest number of these aggression rumors were lodged by the Narragansetts against the Mohegans and their sachem Uncas, whom the Narragansetts hated.

Although the Narragansetts and Mohegans had worked together as allies to defeat the Pequots in the war's initial conflict, once that tribe was brought down, they competed fiercely with each other to assume the Pequots former regional dominance. Similarly, Connecticut and Massachusetts had allied together against the Pequots, but they too, like the Narragansetts and Mohegans, competed fiercely in the war's aftermath, for control over the former Pequot lands. This produced a four-way power struggle involving two distinct cultures. In this power play, each party recognized that there was value in having close relations with a cross-cultural partner

and used wedge-driving rumors to try to create such alliances for themselves or break them apart for others.

The Narragansetts sought to advance their status with Massachusetts through wedge driving rumors intended to undermine positive English perceptions of the Mohegans and their leader Uncas. Such rumors claimed, for example, that Uncas was offering protection to 300 Pequots and their allies, or that “Uncas himself took part in killing English men at Saybrook.” Several of the aggression rumors delivered to Massachusetts authorities cast doubt on Connecticut’s actions as well. Williams reported, among other things, that Connecticut officials were accepting “mighty bribes” of wampum from Uncas, and that Connecticut knowingly allowed him to harbor a Pequot warrior who had killed and tortured Englishmen.

While Williams and the Narragansetts were disseminating negative rumors about Uncas and the Mohegans to Massachusetts, Connecticut and the Mohegans were spreading the same kind of rumors against the Narragansetts. Reports from Connecticut claimed that the Narragansetts had offered sanctuary to a large number of refugee Pequots, and that the Narragansett sachem was personally plotting to kill Connecticut’s most important native language interpreter Thomas Stanton.

Massachusetts was not immune from spreading wedge-driving rumors either. The Bay Colony’s rumor-mongering, however, seems not to have been targeted at Indian tribes as much as at Connecticut. In a blistering letter John Winthrop received in late 1638, an outraged Rev. Thomas Hooker accused Massachusetts of having waged an aggressive, concerted rumor campaign to discourage new settlers from going to Connecticut. Massachusetts had told potential Connecticut emigrants – among other equally slanderous things – Hooker claimed, to “Goe any whither, be anywhere, choose any place, any patent, Narragansett, Plymouth only goe not to Connecticut . . .

Their upland will bear no corn, their meadows nothing but weeds, and the people are almost starved.” Hooker’s outraged letter (it went on for many pages) reveals and underscores the intensity of the distrust and competition between the two English colonies that was an often-overlooked consequence of the Pequot War and its aftermath.

How did such a climate of fear and rumor-mongering affect the people who built, or *may* have built, the palisade in Wethersfield? Very directly, and with lasting consequences. Throughout the war, tensions between the Wethersfield settlers and the Wangunk people under their sachem Sowheage remained deeply conflicted, with “divers injuries offered by some of the said English to Sowheage and likewise diverse outrages and wrongs committed by Sowheage and his men upon the English.” Predictably, Sowheage became the focus of the same kind of fear-mongering and wedge-driving rumors as the Mohegans and Narragansetts. He was said to be harboring many of the warriors who had killed settlers in the Wethersfield attack, and later, to be allying with the Narragansetts to launch a coordinated multi-tribal regional war. Given his continued fury at the double-dealing he had experienced at the hands of the incoming settlers, few believed his protestations of innocence. English reports noted that Sowheage and his people continued to commit repeated “insolencies” against the English well after the Pequot War’s supposed conclusion at the 1638 Treaty of Hartford, and in September, 1639, because of his continued refusal to turn warriors suspected of participating in the Wethersfield attack over to the English for execution, the Connecticut General Court voted to raise an army even larger than the one sent against the Pequots to force Sowheage to comply. Only the refusal of New Haven colony to join in the planned English assault kept a second war from breaking out, and though that war never happened, a continuous cold-war to brink-of-war state of affairs would characterize English-Indian

relations in Wethersfield and across New England right up until 1675, when that long dreaded pan-Indian alliance to drive the English out of the land known as King Philip's War finally occurred.

These troubled decades between the Pequot and King Philips War were as fearful and difficult for the indigenous tribes as they were for the English; probably much more so. In addition to the ever-present threat of hostility from both the English and other tribes, a continuously shrinking land base and declining resources, native people also experienced the unremitting toll inflicted through their exposure to European diseases for which they had no immunity. Yet through it all, native people and English people continued to find ways to meet, trade, and interact on something other than a hostile basis. We know they were doing this because the written records of the English tell us they did, and such reports are confirmed by the combination of English and native artifacts found in Connecticut's seventeenth-century archeological sites. Was this an effort to find a peaceable middle ground between cultures? Trade exchanges between people who didn't like each other, but needed each other's resources? Or, perhaps, the efforts of minority factions on both sides to go against a tide of increasing division and hostility to try and create a path forward together? We don't know yet, but the most exciting thing about those intersecting brown stains in Wethersfield is that with time and effort, the discoveries made there may well give us answers to a time about which we have so many questions, and right now, so relatively few answers.

Here is the great colonial irony. Though the outcome of the Pequot War was decided decisively in the summer of 1637, there was to be no real peace in New England for two generations. Wethersfield felt the effects of this simmering rumor-fueled hostility more than most. Its population lagged behind that of the other river towns for decades. And many who came to settle there did not stay. After Connecticut's failed effort to field an army against Sowheage and

the Wangunk people in 1639, two groups of early settlers abandoned Wethersfield and went off to start the towns of Stamford in 1641 and Branford in 1644.

The son of Reverend Henry Smith, whose father came to Wethersfield in 1637, fought in the Pequot war and became the minister who built the town's meeting house, wrote a description of life here in Wethersfield during the years he grew up. Only a fragment of his original account survived when it was transcribed in the early 1900s, but that fragment is revealing, for it shows how rumors, distrust, and continuous intercultural friction made life during those decades most historians record as peaceful, anything but peaceful. (Consider as you read, too, that the only full-scale Indian attack on Wethersfield ever recorded took place on April 23, 1637, the first day of the Pequot War.)

“Concerning the early days [in Wethersfield] I can remember but little save hardship. My honored Father . . . did help to reare both our owne house and the First Meeting House of Wethersfield, wherein he preached. . . [It] was solid made, to withstand the wicked onslaughts of ye red skins. Its foundations was laid in the Fear of the Lord, but its walls was truly laid in fear of the Indians for many and grate was the terrors of them. All the able-bodied men did work therat and the old and feeble did watch in turns to espie if any salvages was in hiding neare, and every Man kept his musket nighe to his hand.

I do not myself remember any of the Attacks mayde by large bodyes of Indians whilst we did remayne in Wethersfield, but did often times heare of them.” Several families which did live back a ways from the river was either Murdered or Captivated in my Boyhood we all did live in constant feare of the like.”

There is so much we do not know about those early colonial Connecticutans. We know their lives were hard, and we know they lived in a steady state of anxiety, caused by fears of things that almost always did not happen, the very real and very high cost of battles not fought. What we don't know is how those anxious people actually dealt with their hardships, handled their fears, and how these same survivors of an embattled and fear-burdened land went on to become the builders of the town John Adams would a century later call “paradise.” The real story of Wethersfield and of

early America, in all its complexity, confusion, wonder, and inspiration, may be waiting for us to discover in the ground around an archeological test pit at the Webb Deane Stevens Museum.

Further Reading:

Several recent scholarly works include significant discussion of the Pequot War and its aftermath. See for example, Julie A. Fisher and David J. Silverman, *Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantics and Narragansetts* (Ithaca, NY Cornell University Press, 2014); Katherine Grandjean, *American Passage* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015); Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015); James A. Warren, *God, War, and Providence* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2018); Walter W. Woodward, *Prospero's America* (Chapel Hill, Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2010). An older but more detailed account of the war is Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1996). The key primary source narratives of the Pequot war by English participants are assembled in Charles Orr, *History of the Pequot War* (Amazon.com, 2018). An excellent primary and secondary teaching resource of the Pequot War is at "Pequot War" on CThumanities connecticuthistory.org website.