

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FOUR GENERATIONS OF NIPMUC HISTORY

Hassanamesit Woods is now a tract of land set aside for hiking trails and outdoor education; however it was once part of a large 10,000 acre area of land inhabited by the Hassanamisco band of Nipmuc. In 1654, “Hassanamesit” or “land of the small stones” (Dough ton 1997) became the third of several praying towns founded by John Eliot to propagate the gospel. Beginning in 1646, John Eliot’s “praying towns” were set up in outlier communities to preach Christianity and establish “proper” English style congregations where Natives were expected to abide by English land practices, gender roles, and accept their place in the colonial social order (O’Brien 1997:27). The establishment of “praying Indian towns” under the General Courts act of 1652 paved the way for Indians to be brought into the “civility” of the English system via religious conversion, cultural indoctrination and general control and surveillance (Mandell 1991).

As it was, women were at the center of native daily life. The role of women was such that it encompassed not only child rearing and the majority of food staple production, but also native women held key economic roles as sachems, shamans, and traders. Perhaps most importantly however, women were the spiritual connection between the people and the earth (Richmond and Den Ouden 2003:183). Because the women of native society were so important, the missionaries’ first step towards destabilizing the community was to reduce their status (Richmond and Den Ouden 2003:183). They did so by imposing European restrictions on daily life. For example, native women were to be trained in “domestic” skills such as weaving and spinning. Their original roles as agriculturalists and leaders were suppressed, leaving the men to do the women’s jobs (Richmond and Den Ouden 2003:184). This role reversal was meant to set the community back on its heels and leave them vulnerable to the social and cultural change the missionaries had planned.

Along with the breakdown of gender identities within a native community, the missionaries also sought to isolate native converts from their normal socio-economic networks (Tinker 2003). Eliot tried to enforce the rejection of native lifeways, which meant, for the converts in the praying towns, total isolation from relatives in the home

village. John Eliot also took the isolation tactic one step further by separating the group from the colonial towns (Tinker 2003). The praying town actually acted as a buffer between the more hostile Indian groups and the English settlers (Tinker 2003:27). By the mid 17th century, Eliot's seven praying towns served to increase the security of the colony and extend colonial English Law into the western interior (Kawashima 1969:44)

The success of these praying towns was variable and Eliot's influence upon the people of such villages is still being researched. For example, when reporting on Hassanamesit, Daniel Gookin reports in 1674, "they have a meeting house for worship of God after the English fashion of building, and two or three other houses after the same mode; but they fancy not greatly to live in them...." (Doughton 1997). This quote shows that while historic documentation may claim a simple story of successful conversion, everyday life for those at Hassanamesit may have remained more traditionally Nipmuc than they were willing to show to their English guardians.

Hassanamesit and Natick were the only praying towns reported to have had churches; they served as centers for instruction for teachers who would later go to other villages. At that time Hassanamesit was 4 miles square, consisting of about 8000 acres. Because of its westerly position relative to other praying towns, Hassanamesit was considered a gateway to the frontier and acted as a buffer, protecting the English from Native forces to the west (Tritsch 2006). During King Philip's War, Hassanamesit, like other praying villages, was targeted by both English and Native factions. Shortly after hostilities reached a head in the summer of 1675, several leading figures from Hassanamesit including Joseph and Sampson, sons of Hassanamesit leader Petavit, retreated to Marlborough for English protection (Doughton 1997). During that time lawmakers at Boston decided that all Native sympathizers with the English should be confined to Natick, Punquapog, Nashobah, Wamesit and Hassanamesit (Doughton 1997). Only two months later, the English sacked Hassanamesit and burned the crops while leaving other non-praying villages alone (Doughton 1997). Perhaps 200 villagers were eventually taken from Hassanamesit by King Philip's troops over the summer and fall of 1675, others at Hassanamesit were evacuated to Deer Island by the English where they would face harsh winter conditions with little shelter or food (Doughton 1997). Those

possibly left in the area faced death if they were caught travelling the countryside (Doughton 1997).

In the period after King Philip's war in New England (the late 17th century), the Massachusetts Bay Colony made it a priority to secure the colony against powerful Native groups that had rebelled (Kawashima 1969). The lasting impact of the war caused the tightening of policies concerning native people and sought to isolate them within reservations in order to exercise increased surveillance and control over them (Kawashima 1969, M.A. Series 230, Vol. 31:11). Although Hassanamesit persisted as a praying town on paper, it was supposedly emptied, along with all other praying villages except Natick. Archaeological and documentary research concerning another of the seven original "Praying Indian" communities, Magunkaquoq, has demonstrated that it was not abandoned after King Philip's War. Hassanamesit is viewed as having been a larger and more cohesive community than Magunkaquoq so it is not surprising that it survived the vagaries of the conflict (Mrozowski, Herbst, Brown and Priddy 2005). This does not mean that they were free to move as they wished. Many former Hassanamesit residents, not being permitted to move about the countryside, were confined to the settlement at Natick (Doughton 1997:12), although they continued to claim rights to their former home.

The native self-governance that characterized early native plantations effectively came to an end with the 1694 act for the "Better Rule and Government of the Indians" that targeted the "flaw" of allowing native people to rule themselves (Kawashima 1969). It assigned groups of three English settlers "guardianship" over Native plantations to "inspect and care" for the native people (Kawashima 1969). Coupled with the 1702 law that prohibited native people from selling their land without the consent of the General Court (Mandell 1991), the paternal guardian system was in full swing. The newly appointed guardians were tasked with moral policing, such as keeping liquor from being sold or consumed by native people, as well as a host of other civil and judicial responsibilities (Kawashima 1969).

Although little documentation exists for Hassanamesit during this period, it is clear that as early as 1698, Hassanamesit families, including that of James the Printer, began returning to Hassanamesit (Doughton 1997). Residual hostilities kept many

English from continuing their settlement of the frontier in the wake of King Philip's War (Tritsch 2006), however not all settlers were deterred. Within months of the passing of the 1702 law described above, the General Court began to receive petitions by white settlers to purchase, occupy and found a town within the lands of the Hassanamesit reservation (M.A. Series 230, Vol. 113). By the mid 1720's the General Court had declined several petitions to lease or buy native lands within the plantation (M.A. Series 230, Vol. 113) however despite restrictions, between 1654 and 1727, 500 acres of the original 8,000 had already been sold to English settlers. By 1724, those at Hassanamesit had been encroached upon to the extent that they filed a complaint with the General Court against the English settlers who were "boxing" all their timber (a process which involved cutting a large hole in the base of the tree to collect sap), effectively ruining the trees for timber harvest (Tritsch 2006). It seems that by the mid 1720s the land at Hassanamesit had come into high demand. As interest began to rise, the Court sent scouts to reassess the land at Hassanamesit. With favorable findings and recommendations for an English town, the Native people found themselves increasingly more entangled with colonial forces.

In 1727 the people of Hassanamesit were approached by the colony to sell their land. In return for the sale of their 7,500 acre property, the colony of Massachusetts established a Trusteeship under the purview of the General Court like those described in the 1694 legislation above, consisting of three men to oversee the affairs of the Hassanamisco Indians (M.A. Series 228, Vol. 113 :679). The court set-aside 1,200 acres for the private ownership of seven known Hassanamesit families, all of whom could be traced back to leaders amongst Eliot's praying town community. These families were expected to embrace English styles of land ownership in severalty, and "improve" their parcels in such a way that was satisfactory to the Trustees by clearing, fencing, or altering the natural landscape. One Hundred acres were also set aside for the general use and improvement of the entire Native group. The proceeds from the sale of the land, totaling 2500 pounds, were to remain in the hands of these Trustees, with the understanding that the yearly interest of the total sum would be divided and allocated out to the seven Native families. The remaining 6,200 acres of Hassanamesit land were divided between 40 English families who settled in the area.

Legally, or at least in theory, the responsibility of the Guardians and the General Court was to secure native land in the face of white encroachment (Kawashima 1969:50), however the Court's arrangements, coupled with the readily available trust fund, and an unfortunate economic climate proved to be an unfortunate situation for the Hassanamisco people. Firstly, legislation stipulated the parceling out of land to male heads of household. This practice ran contrary to Hassanamesit and Nipmuc tradition, and greatly reduced the amount of land to which the Hassanamesit families were entitled. By Doughton's (1997) accounts, Nipmuc women probably outnumbered Nipmuc men during this period by two to one (Tritsch 2006). Secondly, the General Court's instructions gave the Trustees a right to invest monies earned from land sales (Mandell1996). Over time, this right would lead to corruption, embezzlement, faulty investments, and the eventual disappearance of much of the original fund (Mandell 1998). Furthermore, the rural economy of the mid 18th century caused the depletion of land value along with the increase in the price of consumer goods (DOI 2001). These conditions proved to be the undoing of several family inheritances throughout the years.

However, Native residents were not completely without recourse. It is interesting to note that although these trustees had much control over the lives of the native people, the Nipmuc were able to engage the colonial legislation on their own by lodging complaints against the Guardians with the General Court (Kawashima 1969:47). These complaints were seriously considered at least part of the time, as some petitions resulted in the dismissal of Guardians and the appointment of replacements at Hassanamesit and elsewhere (Kawashima 1969:47, DOI 2001). It is not impractical to consider these complaints as dialectically hindering and enabling native people, as it may have allowed for "better" Guardians to be appointed, but may have also precipitated the desire to exercise further suppression of the upstart and vocal native dissenters.

One of the original seven parcels to be set aside for Hassanamisco families was the Peter Muckamaug and Sarah Robins property, the focus of our archaeological investigations over the past three years. The name used to identify the parcel in English documents and maps reflects the male centered legal system it engendered. The Native reality was different. Land was passed down through the female line in Nipmuc society

and that actuality is borne out by a history of female headed households on the property. Their story is one of accommodation, resistance and cultural continuity.

Sarah Robins

It was one such prominent Nipmuc family that first inhabited the “Muckamaug Parcel”. Sarah Robins, the matriarch of the property, is perceived to have been the daughter or granddaughter of one of the leaders in the praying village, the Sachem Petavit (who’s alias was “Robin”) (Gookin 1674:191, Earle Papers 1:1). In the first allotments of Hassanamesit property in 1728, Sarah Robins’ entitlement was postponed to a later date due to her absence (Earle Papers, 1:2). She and her husband, Peter, who may have been Narragansett (Mandell 2004) or a Nipmuc from Natick, probably lived in or near Providence, Rhode Island during the late 17th century hostilities in New England (Mandell 2004). Although it is unclear where they met, we do know that Sarah and Peter had a son, George, in 1714 (Records of Grafton, MA 1743-1948, Vital Records). They also had a daughter (birth date unknown) who’s name was also Sarah. It is not clear whether they had been dividing their time between Hassanamesit, Providence and elsewhere, or if they had stayed in one place for the duration of King Philip’s War and aftermath.

When Peter and Sarah returned to Hassanamesit in 1729 to claim their plot of land (Earle Papers 1:2) they did not bring either of their children along with them. It seems that Sarah was apprenticed in Providence at the time (Mandell 1998), and little is known of George’s history. Because of her position in the community, Sarah Robins and Peter were allotted about one Hundred acres to “improve” on the eastern slope of Keith Hill. A 19th century map shows the “Muckamaug right of way” connecting their property to the main route to

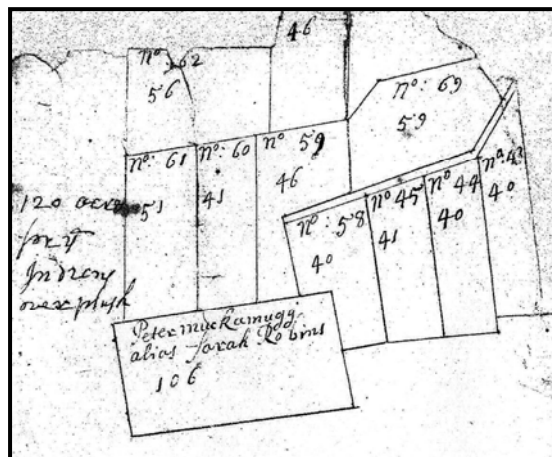


Figure 1 Historic Map of Muckamaug and other parcels.

Mendon over the crest of Keith Hill (19th Century survey map of Keith Hill with Deed research, Author undetermined).

Upon Sarah Robins return to Hassanamesit, colonial records show that she and her husband Peter became active members of the Native community. When Moses Printer (a Native neighbor at Hassanamesit) passed away in 1729, his children were orphaned. Although the older children were let out to the trustees as apprentices, Sarah and Peter agreed to look after one of his younger children (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1).

Also in 1729, John Hazelton of Sutton agreed to lease 2 meadows that belonged to Sarah and Peter. He paid the Trustees, “for the use of the said Peter and his Squaw Twenty Shillings per Annum for four years” (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1) under the terms that the Trustees would make allowances should Peter care to “improve any part of the grass for his own use” (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1). This agreement, like many others made at the same time with other Native proprietors at Hassanamesit, included the installation of a “good four rail fence” which, at the end of the four-year term, would be left in good condition for the future use of the owner. Interestingly, the same John Hazelton proposed a similar deal with Christian Misco for the use of her meadow and orchard yard. He proposed to fence the area, care for the apple trees, and yield to Misco’s right to any apples, “as she shall have occasion to use for her own eating” (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1). He also agreed with the Trustees to apprentice Moses Printer’s daughter Elizabeth until her 18th birthday. In return for her care, Hazelton agreed, “to teach [Elizabeth] to Read English and to Learn her the Catechism” (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1).

This tradition of caretaking, whether of land, or of people, has a long history at Hassanamesit and indeed throughout Colonial New England. It reflects the colonial belief that the Native people could not take care of themselves or their land in a “proper” way. This will be discussed below in detail; however at this time it is of interest to note the language that was used to record these various transactions. In the records kept of these proposals by the Trustees the deals described above were, “Consented to and Concluded on between the Trustees and the Several Patrons before named respectively” (Earle Papers: Octavo Vol. 1). This wording is problematic because the word “patron” has many definitions. A “patron” can be a “proprietor”, a “customer”, or simply a

“supporter of a cause” according to Princeton’s Cognitive Science Laboratory (2006). It could mean that the *Native proprietors* (the “patrons”) had consented to the agreement, or it could mean the *English caretakers* (the “patrons”) had made the agreement with the Trustees, or it could mean that all parties involved (the “patrons”) had agreed. Because the wording is so ambiguous, and because there are no records of any contracts or leases being signed by any of the parties involved, it may be impossible to ever know if the Muckamaugs and the other Native landowners ever consented to the use of their land.

Sarah Robins and her husband Peter lived on their parcel together until Peter’s death in 1740 (M.A. Series 228, Vol 31:294). At some point after Peter’s death, probably around 1744, young Sarah returned from Providence to help care for her elderly mother (Mandell 1998). Sarah Robins continued however to collect her interest independently, appearing on several accounts of the Trustees with her mark as “Sarah Muckamaug”. By 1746 Sarah Robins had met and married Thomas English. Very little is known about English, it is unclear where Sarah met her new husband. From then to her death in 1748/9 she appeared frequently on the books as “Sarah Robins alias English”.

Before she died, Sarah Robins and her fellow community members once again petitioned the General Court in Boston in 1744. To the dissatisfaction of the Native Proprietors, it seems that the Trustees were asking the Indians to travel to the Trustees to get their money. The petitioners asked with deference for new Trustees, claiming, “that one of the Honorable Trustees (in the affair of our money) is Dishonest from said Trust and the other two are desirous to be dismissed” (M.A. Series 228, Vol 31:476). They begged further that the new Trustees be, “nearor to us” so that they “may come at [their] money without such Great expence of Time and Travel” (M.A. Series 228, Vol 31:476). Finally they informed the General Court that they had not received their interest money, “all most two years last past by which means [they] have ben great sufferers” (M.A. Series 228, Vol 31:476). For elderly community members like Sarah Robins, it seems likely that a long journey to collect her income would have been taxing and even detrimental to her health. This collective act by the Hassanamesit community shows solidarity among its members as well as a continued working knowledge of colonial law and their recourse within the system. The resolve was later passed by the General Court and new Trustees were appointed (M.A. Series 228, Vol. 31:476).

By the time of this petition in 1748, four out of the seven petitioners were women. This statistic speaks to the continuing trend of absence of Native men.

Sarah Muckamaug

Sarah and Peter's daughter, Sarah Muckamaug, had a decidedly different life from her parents. As a young adult in Providence in the early to mid 18th century, Sarah had little contact with her parents, and certainly, being indentured at a young age, probably had little chance to return to Hassanamesit for visits. We know that she worked for the prominent Brown family as a servant. We also know that she had several children with an African American man named Aaron Whipple. Whipple belonged to Colonel Joseph Whipple of Providence as his slave (Mandell 1998). They were reportedly married in the home of William Page around 1728, however town records show no such marriage in Providence. Although their marriage was disputed, it is clear that the two had several children. It is recorded that Sarah's daughters Rhoda and Abigail and her son Abraham were indentured to the Brown family as well (Earle Papers 1:4). The two also had a son, Joseph, born in Providence, with the help of a midwife named Hallelujah Olney (Earle Papers 1:4). Sarah and Aaron reportedly had their differences and parted as a result of her return to Hassanamesit. It is recorded that Sarah left Providence, possibly with her baby Joseph, to return to her mother.

Along her route to Hassanamesit, she stopped at the Wilkinson Farm in Smithfield, Rhode Island where Mary Wilkinson attested that she asked to build a "hut" which she then lived in "for some time" (Earle Papers 1:4). It seems that although Aaron visited Sarah at the Wilkinson's farm, he did not live there with her (Earle Papers 1:4). Israel Wilkinson remembered Aaron Whipple visiting Sarah and "having some difference with her" and Mary also understood that Aaron had come and quarreled with Sarah, whereupon Sarah had come to Mrs. Wilkinson, "complaining of his abuse to her" (Earle Papers 1:4). Mary Wilkinson further recalled a time when she came upon a very upset Sarah. Crying, Sarah confided in Mrs. Wilkinson that Aaron, "refused to live with me any more neither would he help to maintain the children" (Earle Papers 1:4). Mrs. Wilkinson remembered that Sarah had said, "He promised to do well by me...but he

would not” (Earle Papers 1:4). Sarah went on to tell Mary Wilkinson that Aaron, “further sayeth that he had got another Squaw he lov’d better.” (Earle Papers 1:4).

This record of a rocky relationship between Aaron Whipple and Sarah Muckamaug is a unique and important history of a young Indian Woman. It speaks to her independence and fortitude, as well as her connection to her family and Native traditions. Despite her geographical distance from Hassanamesit, Sarah Muckamaug knew how to build a semi-temporary shelter. She also demonstrated knowledge of her familial obligations. Perhaps her mother had written her and asked her to return home to claim her land rights, perhaps she felt an obligation to care for her mother in her old age, maybe she needed to return home for her own well-being and support. Regardless of her reasons for returning home, it is important to note that without the foresight of Sarah Muckamaug, Sarah Robins’ land may have been swallowed up by other surrounding parcels and the family legacy may have been forever lost.

Sarah Muckamaug and perhaps baby Joseph returned to Hassanamesit around 1741 (Mandell 1998). It is not known whether she lived with her mother, or had somewhere else to stay however, within 3 years of her return to Hassanamesit, Sarah Muckamaug had met and had one child with African-American Fortune Burnee (Mandell 1998:97). In the family tradition, Sarah Muckamaug named this child Sarah. With this name would come the responsibility to uphold the family land. Sarah, thusly named for her power of inheritance, exemplifies Nipmuc matrilineal “willing” of land proprietorship and the powerful connection between these Native women’s identities and their land. In considering Sarah Muckamaug’s choice of names for her other daughters, it is interesting to note that it was not her first-born girl, but her last, the only child born on the family land, who received the honored name.

In 1749 Sarah Robins died and left her daughter the family property. That same year, Sarah Muckamaug petitioned the General Court for herself and her husband, asking for permission to sell some family land that was “distant and remote from the homestead”, a “full three miles” (M.A Series 228, Vol. 31:694). She hoped to fetch 200 pounds for the sale, with which she and Fortune wanted to build, “a house on the homestead” and maybe even buy, “a cow or two”(M.A. Series 228, Vol. 31:694). The petition was accepted and the land was sold in two pieces one year later. Hezekiah Ward

bought 46 acres of Sarah's land and Abraham Temple bought 30 acres. A portion of the money Hezekiah Ward paid the Trustees for the land was then given back to him for building a new house for Sarah and Fortune, and for buying a gown for Sarah (M.A. Series 228, Vol. 32:247).

The circumstances surrounding Sarah Muckamaug's death in 1751 illustrate a common problem among Native landholders in the 18th century. As Native people across New England began owning land privately, in the English style, land was also becoming scarcer. English settlers began targeting Indian proprietors in an effort to acquire their land. Strategies included threatening, trickery, crop sabotage, and perhaps most often, placing native people in situations where they became financially indebted (O'Brien 1997). There were several ways in which the English would indebt the Indians to them including but certainly not limited to imposing fines, and providing services for Native people. Often English neighbors would promise to educate or provide medical care for Native people and expect repayment. The popularity of "caretaking" especially for medical expenses rose dramatically during the mid 18th century (O'Brien 1997). In this period epidemic and disease plagued New England's communities. Payment for funeral expenses also made up the pleas of many English petitions. When those in debt could not pay, all assets were liquidated, often resulting in the loss of large amounts of land (O'Brien 1997). These occurrences went unchecked during the colonial period and were responsible for the loss of countless Native properties.

In the case of Sarah Muckamaug, Hezekiah Ward, the same neighbor who had just purchased 46 acres of Sarah's land and helped build her house, took care of Sarah in her last sickness. She was placed in his care by the Selectmen of the Town of Grafton, despite the fact that she had her own house and her husband to care for her. At this point in our research it is not clear why she was relocated by the town. Upon Sarah's death, Ward and the town asked the state for re-imbusement for her care knowing full well that protocol stipulated the further liquidation of Sarah's assets to repay her debt (O'Brien 1997:174). With no other way in which to repay him, Fortune Burnee was forced to sell more of the family's lands to pay for his wife's "long sickness" (M.A. 32:592) and her burial.

Sarah Burnee and Joseph Aaron

At the time of Sarah Muckamaug's death in 1751, young Sarah, then aged 7, was too young to claim her inheritance. It seems that if Joseph had returned to Hassanamesit with Sarah Muckamaug, it was at this time that he was sent back to Providence to make his own way as a servant (Earle Papers 1:4). This being the case, it would be 17 years before young Sarah would again see her older half-brother.

After her mother's death, Sarah Burnee was in the care of her father Fortune Burnee, and also, a network of native community members. Documentation tells of Sarah's father Fortune Burnee accepting payment for interest on the land in the name of his daughter. Sarah Burnee apparently grew up in her late mother's new house as the sole inheritor of the remainder of the property (Mandell 1999:81). Six years after Sarah Muckamaug's death, Fortune Burnee married another woman from the Hassanamesit community, Abigail Printer. For several years, Fortune Burnee collected interest for his late wife Sarah, his present wife Abigail, and his daughter Sarah. Finally in 1765 at the age of 21, Sarah Burnee declared her independent status and sole ownership of what remained of her family's land (Mandell 1999:81, Earle Papers 1:3).

After serving as an apprentice in Providence since the age of 12 or 13 (Earle Papers 1:4), Sarah's half brother Joseph Aaron arrived in Grafton from Providence in 1768. With presumed childhood ties to his Hassanamisco community and family, Joseph was welcomed back and the siblings lived together on the Muckamaug farm (Mandell 1999: 82). One year after Joseph's arrival, Sarah married, appearing as "Sarah Prince" in the accounts of the Trustees (Earle Papers 1:3). Sarah and her new husband, "Prince Dam", an African American man from Woodstock, Connecticut had been married in Smithfield, Rhode Island by justice of the peace, Stephen Arnold (Earle Papers 1:4).

Shortly after the arrival of Joseph and Prince Dam, relations in Sarah's household began to sour. In 1771 Aaron attempted to divide the 154 acre property, claiming (in keeping with the Anglo-American values with which he had been raised by his master) that his working of the land entitled him to ownership (Earle Papers 1:4). The Trustees and the General Court then initiated an investigation into Aaron's claims as Sarah

Muckamaug's son. Depositions were taken from several members of the Providence community attesting to Joseph Aaron's relationship to Sarah Muckamaug and Muckamaug's relations with Aaron Whipple. It was eventually decided that Joseph was in fact Sarah Muckamaug's son. It seems that this ruling threatened to sever Sarah's property. Prince Dam then initiated a further investigation into the legitimacy of Joseph Aaron's birth. Several depositions requested by Prince Dam attest that Sarah Muckamaug and Aaron Whipple were in fact never married, however another document claims the two were married in the home of William and Mary Page (Earle Papers 1:4). The General Court eventually approved the equal division of the family parcel between Joseph Aaron and Sarah Burnee.

This division of land seems to have favored Sarah however, leaving her the house, "the olde Barne" and several of the rye and wheat fields that Joseph had worked during his stay with Sarah (Earle Papers 1:4). The court ordered that Joseph deliver to Sarah one quarter of the rye each year after it had been, "Thrashed and cleaned up" (Earle Papers 1:5), and further ordered that Joseph "move out of the House in three monthes" from June 4th 1771 (Earle Papers 1:5).

Being very upset by the division, Joseph Aaron enlisted the help of his former "master", David Daniels. Interestingly, Daniels and neighbor Hezekiah Ward co-signed a document protesting the "unfair" division of lands. Together they claimed, "the Committee [had] overlooked the directions given in the affair" (Earle Papers 1:4). They claimed that Sarah had been given the house and "by far the best part of the present profits", while, "Joseph (who being the Eldest and the Son too)" had never benefited from the income of the estate and was being denied the fruits of his recent labor on the land (Earle Papers 1:4). Their argument revolved around the fact that because Joseph "had been at the sole cost of raising whatever grew there" he was entitled to claim the better portion of the land (Earle Papers 1:4).

This is a very interesting example of colonial tension in which the colonized appropriate the laws of the colonizer to further their own personal gain. It also sets up a very interesting point of departure in which Native men and Native women are set against each other and new concepts of cultural practice are injected into the situation. The lawsuit that ensued because of Joseph and Sarah's differences left a trail of complaints

and testimonies that speak to the struggle between Joseph and Sarah's contradicting ideas of land rights and entitlement. This struggle represents a clash between Anglo-American values of ownership and power and those practiced among community members at Hassanamesit.

On June 3rd of 1771, Timothy Paine suggested the two siblings work out their differences and make the best of the land while they had it. It seems the depositions had revealed two more children, those of Sarah Muckamaug's deceased daughter Abigail, who were entitled to their portions of the land as well, should they request it (Earle Papers 1:4). The very next day Joseph and Sarah signed the deeds agreeing to the initial arrangement. After that day they appeared separately in the accounts of the Trustees, each collecting their own share of the family's interest. Joseph Aaron went on to serve in the Revolutionary War, possibly in the Navy (Forbes 1889, Earle Papers 1:5, Earle Papers 1:4) and returned to Grafton where he became a trusted and respected man in the Native Community. In an unfortunate turn of events, Joseph and his wife Deborah could not maintain the land they had inherited, nor had they any children who could inherit the property. By the time of Joseph's death in 1808, his portion of the family parcel had been completely sold, reducing the family landholdings by half (Earle Papers 1:5).

The Revolutionary War period marks a time of general discontentment at Hassanamisco. In 1776, acting on a petition from the Native community, the General Court found that absentee Trustee Artemus Ward had lately been employed in the "Continental Service" while the other two entrusted Guardians had "neglected to relieve these Indians" (Earle Papers 1:1). As such, new Guardians were then appointed. In 1785, the community at Hassanamesit was again unhappy with the service entrusted to their supposed Guardians. Together, Sarah Burnee, her father Fortune Burnee, and Sarah's half brother Joseph Aaron, along with three other Native community members petitioned the General Court in Boston for a review of the accounts of the Trustees (Earle Papers 1:5). They claimed that over the past six or seven years they had, "not received one quarter part of [their] interest so due to [them]" (Earle Papers 1:5). A general review of the books was ordered on their behalf, however there is no indication that the records were ever actually presented at Court (Earle Papers 1:1). In 1788 the matter was re-opened, and the Court found that, "said Trustees have done as well in all respects by the

said Indians as the nature of the matter would admit of” (Earle Papers 1:1). Although that investigation was inconclusive, John Milton Earle later reported in his findings that by 1841 over 1,300 dollars of the trust fund had been lost, stolen, or otherwise misspent during the years in which the Trustees were responsible for the Hassanamisco trust fund (Earle Report 1861:96).

Sarah’s first marriage to Prince Dam produced no children and it is not clear what became of Prince Dam. In 1786 Sarah Burnee remarried to a man named Boston Phillips. Boston Phillips was a legend in some local lore as being, “a real full blooded Indian” claiming descendance from “the Great King Philip” (Tritsch 2006). Other accounts describe Boston Phillips as a former slave (Forbes 1889:177); however neither of these claims are further supported by archival research to this date. Sarah and Boston had two children, Ben and Sarah, before Phillips died in 1798 (Mandell 1998). This Sarah would come to be called “Sarah Boston”. It is not clear when the children were born. If they were born during Sarah’s ten year marriage, Sarah would have been in her early 40’s (Tritsch 2006). It is quite possible that Sarah and Boston had been together for some time before their marriage.

In November of 1795, Sarah and Boston built or substantially repaired the house in which they were living. Receipts detail 180 feet of pine boards, 219 feet of clapboards, nails, hinges, spikes and other services rendered (M.A.C. Guardians of the Indians, Accounts and Correspondences.47). Unfortunately, Fortune Burnee’s death in 1796 and Boston Phillips’ death in 1798 put her in a difficult economic situation. Of note is the fact that Boston Phillips was not forced into the care of neighbors as Sarah Muckamaug had been. Instead, Sarah was made to shoulder the financial burden of her husband’s death unaided. With two young children to care for and only her interest money as income, Sarah Burnee was forced to sell more of her land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to cover her debt. In 1797 Sarah petitioned to sell 20 acres in the southwest of the property to pay for repairs to her house and the support of her children (Earle Papers 1:5). As a result, she sold a portion of land the next year to Nathaniel Batcheller, and another bit of her meadow to Silas Fay as well (Earle Papers, Octavo Volume 1). As was customary, she did not receive that money, rather the Trustees took the money, paid her debt, and gave her one year’s interest on the sale, keeping the rest in

trust. The land sold for \$286 altogether, however Sarah only collected around \$4.20 per year thereafter as a result of the sale (Earle Papers 1:3). Sarah continued to count on her English neighbors to help repair her house, loan her money, or just buy everyday household needs. Whenever the Trustees ran out of money with which to reimburse her expenditures, Sarah would sell more of her land. Although this trend seemed to have little relief for Sarah, it abated slightly with the maturation of her children, Sarah and Ben.

Sarah and Ben Boston

The remaining parcel of the family's original property passed to Sarah "Boston" Philips. "Sarah Boston", as she was apparently locally known, is renowned in local histories as the "last of the Nipmucs" and the "last descendant of King Philip", presumably because of her father's ancestry. She was the last matriarch of her family's plot on Keith Hill. Her history is unique in that her presence in the official archive is perhaps the weakest, however her presence in Victorian memoirs and recollections is remarkable. It seems that Sarah made quite an impression on the town of Grafton, so much so that stories about her survived several generations to be written in the Victorian era and even later. Local and published documents alike describe Sarah, retelling anecdotes, describing her house, her physique, even her cooking. While these documents are invaluable for the project, the context in which these various histories were written must be taken into consideration. Just as *this* history will someday be considered a product of its day, so must earlier recollections of Sarah Boston be viewed in the same manner.

With that said, Sarah's personality comes into sharp relief when the body of memories are examined as a whole. Sarah Boston was a free spirit and in some cases a staunch resistor to the colonial values and restrictions put upon her. She stood out to her contemporaries, and continues to be remarkable today.

As children, Sarah and her brother Ben lived with her mother, Sarah Burnee Phillips, in their newly renovated home on Keith Hill. Local histories recall Sarah in her youth swimming competently in, "the deeper part of Misco Brook" (Tritsch 2006). Several accounts also mention that Sarah learned to practice herbal medicine from her mother. Her brother was known for his fishing abilities (Tritsch 2006). It is possible that as Sarah and her brother became older, they were able to help their mother with debt and everyday expenses. Sarah was known locally to sell baskets throughout the region, help farmers with their work, and even tell fortunes to young people (Forbes 1889). As Sarah matured, it seems that she gained quite a large stature, possibly reaching 6 feet and weighing nearly 300 pounds (Warren 1922:10). This may be an exaggeration. Laura Thatcher Ulrich (2001) makes a point worth quoting at length with regard to the reputations of women who walked the countryside, selling their wares:

"Stories about Indian basket makers describe women who defied white notions of appropriate gender behavior. They were towering figures, outsized in manner if not in

body, and impossible to ignore. Molly Hatchet was six feet tall. Lydia Francis carried a large butcher's knife under her shawl and always traveled with 'a big brindle dog, as ugly as his mistress.' Tuggie Bannocks, who 'was as much Negro as Indian and was reputed to be a witch,' had a 'full set of double teeth all the way round, and an absolute refusal ever to sit on a chair, sofa, stool, or anything that was intended to be sat upon.' In white eyes, these women often possessed male attributes" (Ulrich 2001).

Sarah Boston was no exception to this phenomenon; she was described in local accounts as being "gigantic", wearing men's clothing and being capable of "men's work" (Forbes 1889). Her ability to maintain a seasonally mobile lifestyle in order to sustain herself was unique among women of the time, as traveling was considered to be men's business.

Although it is known that Sarah sometimes took her pay in hard cider, her labors obviously helped relieve the family's burden in other ways as well. One anecdote in the local histories tells of Sarah calling in a favor from Mr. Batcheller, the local storeowner, and her neighbor. In repayment for helping to quickly unload a cart of hay before an impending storm, Sarah not only took a helping of cider, she helped herself to a bolt of cloth at the store, calling behind her to Mr. Batcheller, "you remember that load of hay?" (Fiske #11 [n.d.]: 28). This story is noteworthy because it shows that although Sarah may not have been working for money, at times she was able to negotiate within the local market, and bend accepted gender roles to acquire what she needed. In this way she was able to avoid selling even more of her family's property.

Sometime in Sarah and Ben's early adulthood, after the death of their mother, Ben and Sarah split the family land once again, leaving Sarah the house and setting apart a separate parcel for Ben to "improve" (Earle Papers 1:5). Sometime thereafter, Ben's whereabouts became somewhat of a mystery. Legend tells that Ben "thought he killed Bets Hendricks when he knocked her down, so he ran away" (Fiske #11 [n.d.] 7). The story goes, however, that Bets Hendricks and Ben Boston were both drunk at the time, and she had "lain for dead till she recovered consciousness and then was as well as ever" (Fiske #11 [n.d.] 7). Unfortunately, it seems that Ben never returned to Hassanamesit while the land was still owned by the family. A fund was left for him when the last of the land was sold, should he ever return (Fiske #11 [n.d.] 7).

Sarah took good care of the homestead. She was known to have had an exceptional garden, which she took great care in maintaining (Forbes 1889:179). She also owned a handsome cherry tree that grew right by her house. One summer she became fed up with the local boys who would raid the tree. It is said that Sarah chopped down the tree to spite the troublemakers. Perhaps she did not like the idea of the children trespassing. Perhaps she was concerned that the tree would make her land even more attractive to her neighbors, nevertheless, Sarah cut the tree in its prime, claiming that it shaded the house to the extent that, “she couldn’t read her bible” (Forbes 1889:179). In spite of this anecdote, Sarah was also known for her hospitality. An elderly community member recalled a day when he and his mother had visited Sarah’s house for tea. They had “hoe cake and pickerel, cooked by the open fire place, and nothing ever tasted better” (Fiske #11 [n.d.]:6). Another local memory describes Sarah’s house in substantial detail, accompanied by the following sketch:

“Low and little, black and old and faced Kittville. The East door above at the end of front. In the middle of the room on the opposite side as one entered was the big chimney with all the things around it, no cupboard, cooking utensils, stools, no chairs. Small loft accessible by ladder. Indians just slept around. Set the table in the middle. Windows faced out toward the valley, and were little. When the door was shut it was quite dark.” (Fiske #11, [n.d.] 6).

Although this description of Sarah’s house deserves careful scrutiny, especially in the archaeological record, the orientation and layout could prove to be helpful for future excavations of the house foundation.



Figure 2 Sketch of Sarah Boston's house from Fiske local history (Fiske #11, [n.d.] 6).

It seems that Sarah Boston petitioned to sell portions of her land three times over the course of her life. It was only after she began to have children that she began having more difficulty supporting herself. Her two boys, Stephen and Joseph, were born in 1815

and 1813 respectively, her daughter, Sarah Mary was born in 1818 (Tritsch 2006). The first time, in 1815, she needed to repair the house (Earle Papers 1:5). The second time, in 1816, the sale was for the repayment of her debts incurred “for her support” (Earle Papers 1:5) and the third petition, filed in 1821 was co-written by an “Otis Newman”. It asked permission to sell an unspecified amount of land for “their support” (Earle Papers 1:5). Otis Newman is also in the accounts of the trustees as a Native Land proprietor, however it is unclear how the two are connected. Perhaps Otis is the father of Stephen, Joseph and/or Sarah Mary. It does not seem as though the two were married, at least not formally. Not much is known of Sarah Boston’s children. Her daughter Sarah Mary was sent to work in Worcester at an early age, she married Gilbert Walker, a well known man of Worcester who owned a barber shop (Fiske #11 [n.d.]: 7).

From time to time Sarah Boston’s name appears in the account books, collecting her dues, appealing for sundry items or medical expenses. At the time of Sarah Boston’s death in 1837, her family’s original 106-acre plot had been whittled down over the years to less than 20 acres. Stephen collected compensation for caring for her in her last sickness (Earle Papers 1:1). By the time of her death in 1837 she had accumulated a large amount of debt which was passed down to her daughter along with the remaining parcel of land. Sarah Mary held onto the land for almost twenty years after her mother’s death, but in 1850 she petitioned through the trustees to sell the final twenty acres of land to pay her own debts and those left by her mother (Earle Papers 1:5).

After Sarah Boston, two more generations of Sarah’s manifested this persistent matrilineal naming tradition, although the land rights that came with the name were lost. The female control of this Nipmuc land into the 1850’s is of note, however the result is sadly familiar. Sarah Mary sold what remained of the land held by her family in 1854, ending the female Nipmuc control and occupation of the parcel. Interestingly, the documentation relating to Sarah Mary and her daughter, Sarah Ellen dries up at this point, as the colonial scrutiny abated once no more land was held. Having been displaced from the original land parcel meted out in 1728, the Sarah’s disappear from the Grafton, Worcester and greater Massachusetts records.

