



# WOMPATUCK NEWS

## New England before the Pilgrims

By Jim Rose,

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Although Chief Josiah Wompatuck was born six years after Plymouth's First Thanksgiving, he more than likely later became friends with Wompanoag and the English participants.

Today, many New Englanders believe New England was a vast wilderness inhabited only by Native Americans before the Pilgrims arrived in 1620. However, the French established a trading post in Castine, Maine in 1613. Today, the charming coastal town is considered the oldest in New England.



*Town history plaque in Castine, Maine*

Likewise, the Dutch founded New Holland at present day Hartford, Connecticut in 1614.

The first Native American contact with Europeans may have occurred along the New England coast a little over 1,000 years ago.

Norsemen from Scandinavia landed in northwest Newfoundland in 986 AD. In 1957, a silver Norwegian coin was found in Brooklin, Maine

that was minted 1067 – 1093 AD. Archeologists believe the coin was brought down from Newfoundland through Native trade. No other Norse artifacts were found at the site.

Many New England locations also claim Viking landings but, so far, Newfoundland is the closest site to be authentic.



*Silver Norwegian coin*

The first white man to map the New England coast was Giovanni da Verrazzano. In 1524, he explored the Atlantic coast between Florida and New Brunswick, including Narragansett Bay and Massachusetts. He discovered Cape Cod Bay; his claim being proved by a map of 1529 that clearly outlined Cape Cod.

During the 1500s and early 1600s, European fishermen and fur traders made sporadic contact with Native Americans along the New England coast.

In 1602, Captain Bartholomew Gosnold secured financial backing to establish an English colony in the New World.

On May 14, 1602 Gosnold made landfall at Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The next day, he sailed into Provincetown harbor, where he is credited with naming Cape Cod, for the abundant fish.

Following the coast for several days, he discovered Martha's Vineyard. Gosnold named it after his deceased daughter Martha and the wild grapes growing everywhere.

From there they sailed about several islands now called Elizabeth and Cuttyhunk Island.

Fearing they would not have enough provisions to survive winter, Gosnold and the English settlers decided to return to Britain on June 17th.



*Captain Bartholomew Gosnold*

In 1605 and 1606, Samuel de Champlain from France explored the North American coast as far south as

Cape Cod, searching for sites for a permanent settlement. Skirmishes with the Nauset tribe dissuaded him from the plan of establishing one near present day Chatham. He named the area Mallebar ("bad bar" in French).



*Self-portrait of Samuel de Champlain. It is the only one known to exist.*

Other pre-1620 failed attempts at settlements in New England were at Saint Croix Island, Maine in 1604 by Pierre Dugua Siuer de Monts of France; Monhegan Island, Maine by George Weymouth of England in 1605 (he was the explorer who kidnapped Squanto, the interpreter for the Pilgrims); and the Popham Colony at Phippsburg, Maine in 1607.

Interaction with the early explorers and the Native Americans were sometimes violent. In 1608, a French trading vessel was burned and sunk by the Wessagussett tribe off Peddocks Island near Hull Gut, killing the entire crew.



*French trading vessel sunk north of Peddocks Island off Hull Gut*

Fifteen years later, Captain Miles Standish of Pilgrim fame eventually

killed the leader of the raid, Chief Pecksuot along with five tribesmen.

In 1614, Captain John Smith of Pocahontas fame, explored the Maine and Massachusetts coast. He ranged the coast in a small boat and made a map of the coastline and named the region "New England." During the trip he visited many Native American villages, one of which was named Quanoassit, the original name from which Cohasset has come. The name means "long, rocky promontory."



*Smith's 1616 map of New England*

But Smith did more than map the coast. He was the first white man to shed blood in Cohasset. While exploring at the Cove, Smith and his men angered the Indians for some reason. Four of them shot arrows at them from the rocks. Smith's men returned fire with their muskets, killing one and wounding another.

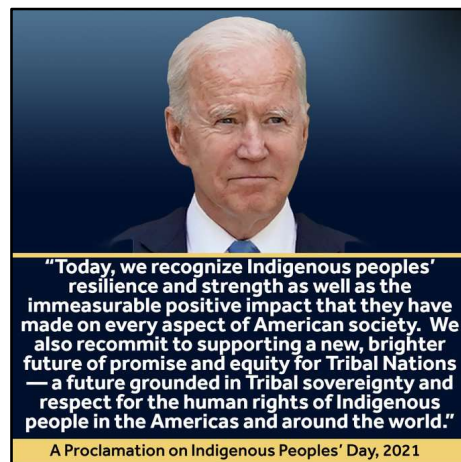


*Cohasset plaque honoring Captain John Smith in Cohasset Harbor*

The site of this skirmish is believed to be on Hominy point, now named Smith's Rock. A present-day plaque commemorating the event can

now be found at water's edge in Cohasset Harbor.

Soon after Captain John Smith's departure, three epidemics swept across New England between 1614 and 1617 destroying three-fourths of the original native population. In 1620, the pilgrims found most of the Wompanoag villages abandoned. When Puritans first settled in Boston, only 500 of the Massachuset tribe were still alive. Small pox decimated most of the tribe in 1633.



*President Biden speaking at proclamation ceremony.*

Today, President Biden has designated the second Monday of October as Indigenous People's Day. The proclamation from the White House reads:

"Now, therefore, I, Joseph Biden J.R., President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim October 10, 2022, as Indigenous Peoples' Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities. I also direct that the flag of the United States be displayed on all public buildings on the appointed day in honor of our diverse history and the Indigenous peoples who contribute to shaping this Nation."