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Wampumpeag| The impact of the 17th century wampum trade on native culture in southern New England and New Netherlands

George R. Price

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Wampumpeag: 
The Impact of the 17th Century Wampum Trade on Native Culture in Southern New England and New Netherlands

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B.S., University of Oregon, 1981

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Director: Kenneth A. Lockridge

Before the arrival of Europeans to the region now known as New England and New York, the native people of that region manufactured or traded for wampum beads. Those beads were made primarily by the coastal Algonquian-speaking tribes from three types of shellfish shells that are common to those coasts. The inland Algonquian tribes and the Iroquoian-speaking people of northern New York acquired wampum beads primarily through ceremonial exchange and trade.

Contrary to popular belief, the indigenous people of northeastern America did not originally assign a monetary value to wampum beads. Their primary uses for wampum were in ceremonial exchange and for symbolic communication. When Dutch fur traders and explorers first became aware that the natives of the Hudson river valley and the area around the Long Island Sound exchanged wampum beads with each other (c.1613), they mistakenly assumed that the beads were the natives' money.

Soon after that, the Dutch began to acquire quantities of wampum from the coastal tribes in exchange for European manufactured goods, and trade that wampum to the inland tribes for furs. That "wampum trade triangle" grew and spread for about ten years, at which time the English began to participate in the trade, expanding it even further. Both the Dutch and the English made wampum legal tender, assigning it fluctuating monetary values equivalent to the currency of their native lands.

This new non-traditional use of wampum, as a mundane commodity rather than a sacred, ceremonial, symbolic artifact caused significant impacts on the cultural traditions of all of the tribal nations involved in the wampum trade. The pressure placed on the coastal tribes to rapidly increase the production of wampum beads affected them economically, politically and socially. The inland tribes, being the recipients of unprecedentedly large quantities of wampum in exchange for trapping inordinate quantities of beaver, were affected politically also, as well as in various other ways. Native religious beliefs and practices remained intact for most Indians in the region, but the full extent of the cultural impact of the wampum trade is yet to be discovered.
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How Whelk and Quahaug Shells are Made into Wampum Beads.... 14
I. Pre-Contact Use of Wampum: sacred, symbolic, and ceremonial

When most American people hear or see the word "wampum", they usually associate it with the concept of "Indian money". This phenomenon is easy to understand, if we consider what historians have usually taught us about wampum, from grade school social studies up to most undergraduate early American history courses. What they teach us is what they themselves have been taught- that the only history of American Indians (and other non-white Americans) that really matters are the stories about how they interacted "significantly" with Europeans and Euro-Americans.

Within about ten years after first contact with Dutch and English colonists in the lower Hudson River region and in Southern New England, wampum beads were indeed transformed into something that was widely understood to be Indian money. But what most teachers and historians do not seem to know is that, before significant interaction with Europeans, wampum was not considered by Native American people to be a money, as money is defined in western cultures. Although Indians did use wampum as an exchange item, those exchanges were primarily of a political and ceremonial, rather than monetary, nature. The western concept of money, a physical object with the abstract value of being good for nothing else than to trade for things of real natural or cultural value, was a foreign concept to the native peoples of northeast America. When Native Americans did come in contact with European coins they would often use them for buttons or other personal adornments, even after they had begun to participate in
the Euro-American cash economy. What most western historians have done, when trying to describe wampum, is to assign it the same symbolic meaning that is given to European money, rather than seeking to understand the symbolic meanings that Indians gave to wampum.

What was wampum then, before it became known as money? In order to better understand the pre-Contact uses of and relation to wampum among the tribal nations of the land that became New England and New Netherlands, it would be helpful to first explore briefly the context in which wampum was first developed and used: native culture, religion, politics, education and economics, as well as the physical environment in which these cultures were formed.

Pre-Contact Subsistence/Barter Economics

Human economic systems evolve out of the ways that particular social groups of people relate to the earth, their immediate geographic/material environment, each other, and whatever they believe are the forces of Providence. This is not an argument in support of the theory of environmental determinism, which claims that environmental factors are the primary determinants of how cultures are formed. In contrast to that view, I would argue that human reasoning and decision-making processes, the processes in which people form beliefs about their environment and the nature of the world in which they live, are probably equally important, or possibly even more important to the formation of cultures and economic systems than the environment itself. But, since the earth and its various ecosystems existed long before humans began
to form beliefs about them, those environments must be considered as at least a significant causal factor in the formation of early economies. However, depending on the decisions that a human society makes concerning how they are going to interact economically with the natural resources available in their particular geographic region, very different sorts of societies and cultures could possibly evolve in the exact same environment. As human social existence proceeded through time, of course, human cultures, including Native American tribal societies also had a causal effect on environmental change as well. Mutually modifying and transforming relationships between human cultures and their environments have always existed.

The economic systems of most pre-Contact Native American societies were variations on what are called "subsistence economies". In a traditional subsistence economy people are dependent on maintaining close, harmonious, reciprocal relationships with the land and all of its inhabitants: animal, mineral, vegetable, ethereal - the whole thing. Besides keeping up such relationships with the natural world, it is also a universal rule in subsistence societies that harmonious, reciprocal relationships be maintained with the supernatural or spirit world. All Native American societies had at one time (and many Indians still do) some variation on the belief that each object of nature, including humans, has a guardian spirit: a guide and protector that must be appeased in some way in order for the benefits of that object to be released and enjoyed. Out of that type of belief system comes the need for reciprocity. In order to con-
continue to receive material sustenance from the bounty of the earth from year to year, each being—animal, vegetable or mineral—must give something back in return. The people would give back something to the material object itself—as in fertilizing the ground with small fish, or burning the underbrush in the forest—and give something to the spirit of that object as well. Such gifts to the spirits usually took the form of an offering of an object considered especially sacred by the people, such as tobacco, wampum or a valued hand-made artifact.

People who live in traditional subsistence economies often live in the same geographic region where their ancestors have lived for many generations, in some cases even thousands of years. Any society that remains cohesive, in the same region or location, for such a length of time, accumulates a very detailed wealth of knowledge about the land in which they live and all of its resources. That type of intimate, technical knowledge of the land and all of its inhabitants is the primary source of wealth, besides the earth itself, for a societies with subsistence economies. But the people within such a society, with the accompanying belief systems that such people usually adhere to, might argue that their spiritual attitude towards their environment is actually more significant than their technical knowledge of the environment. With such attitudes, combined with such knowledge, indigenous peoples have subsisted for thousands of years in such "forbidding" environments as the Kalahari Desert, the Mohave Desert, or the Arctic regions. People can not only subsist, but live well in such environments, spending an average of much less
than 40 hours a week at survival-related labor. 1

In 17th century Northeastern America, at the time of first contact with Europeans, subsistence living was relatively easy, due to the usually abundant natural resources of the region and moderate population levels of the native tribes. Of course there were occasional times of reduced provision, due to droughts, floods, pestilences, or to the epidemic diseases from Europe that in some cases struck Indian villages after off-shore trading encounters, before any Europeans had even set foot on the mainland. Nevertheless, the old traveler's accounts of the late 16th and early 17th centuries are nearly unanimous in describing America as a bounding paradise of resources, and various natural wonders. Henry Hudson, in 1609, describing the land around the great river that was later named after him said, "The land is the finest for cultivation that I ever in my life set foot upon, and it also abounds in trees of every description." A more detailed description of the same region is offered by Johannes de Laet, who was a director of the Dutch West India Company, in 1625:

Our countrymen who first explored this river, ... describe the wonderful size of the trees, (a good proof of the luxuriance of the soil,) suitable for edifices and vessels of the largest class. Wild grape vines are abundant, and walnut trees, the fruit of which differs from ours, being smaller and the shell harder and smoother. This is also the case with other trees, shrubs and plants that grow spontaneously; but when cultivated with the labor and industry of man, maize or Indian corn, for example, yields a prolific return. So with various kinds of pulse, especially beans,... pumpkins of the finest species, melons, and similar fruits of useful character; so that nothing is wanting but human industry....There is a great variety of herbaceous plants, some of which bear splendid flowers, and others are considered valuable for their medicinal properties. 2

De Laet goes on to describe the wildlife:
The forests everywhere contain a great variety of wild animals, especially of the deer kind, and other quadrupeds that are indigenous to this part of North America. Innumerable birds are also found here, both large and small, those that frequent the rivers and lakes, as well as the forests, and possess plumage of great elegance and variety of colors. In winter superior turkey cocks are taken, very fat, and with flesh of the best quality. The rivers produce excellent fish, such as the salmon, sturgeon, and many others.

Many colonists of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay claimed that during the spawning runs of alewives (herring), the streams were so thick with fish that one could nearly walk across the water on their backs without getting the feet wet.

Observations such as those above, along with the several accounts of John Smith, William Wood, and others, were not told without some bias, of course. The agents of trade and colonization organizations, such as the Dutch West India Company and the Virginia Company had a vested interest in encouraging other Dutch and English people to make the voyage to America. They needed large numbers of people to help control resource bases, and to supply a growing market in Europe for American products. So, the traveler's accounts of neverbefore-seen abundance may be exaggerated and therefore to some degree unreliable. William Cronon calls our attention to the fact that another reason why it is somewhat difficult to create an accurate picture of the early 17th century North American environment is that these early European accounts tend to focus only on the objects in the environment that Europeans would consider to be marketable commodities. Unlike the Native Americans, Europeans did not see all objects in nature as having intrinsic value within themselves, but, rather only assigned value to them based
upon their usefulness to humans. "But, there was one European perception that was undoubtedly accurate," William Cronon states, taking the above factors into consideration, "and about it all visitors were agreed- the incredible abundance of New England plant and animal life, an abundance which, when compared with Europe, left more than one visitor dumbfounded."

Besides the natural abundance of resources available to subsistence societies in that region at that time, another aspect of the situation that made the Indians' life relatively easy and also more interesting, was the variety of ecosystems in the area and the semi-nomadic habitation and land-use patterns that were common among those tribes. Typically, a coastal New England tribe would: plant gardens about five to fifteen miles inland from the shore and gather wild plant foods in the spring; tend their gardens, gather fish, seafood, more wild plant foods and medicines in the summer, spending more time close to the ocean; harvest the gardens, hunt, fish, and dry food for storage during the fall; and in the winter they would move to their winter village sites, approximately ten to twenty miles inland, at which time they would engage in toolmaking, artwork, and various educational, spiritual and social activities. This pattern would repeat itself, with occasional minor variations, year after year.

People who live in mobile or semi-nomadic lifestyles, who have a successful (or sustainable) subsistence relationship with the land upon which they live, find it unnecessary, and even undesirable to accumulate more material possessions than what they can easily carry with them on their seasonal journeys. Since
they expect that everything that they need will always be found in its usual location, during the season that it is usually gathered, they have no need to stock up more goods than what they can use in the next three or four seasons ahead. Such people believe that as long as they maintain the proper, reciprocal, give and take relationship with all of the various elements of their environment, both physical and spiritual, they will always have plenty of everything that they need. In cases of drought, pestilence, or the other occasional natural disasters, they might rely upon a friendly neighboring tribe for some sort of assistance, through trade or barter, or simply giving—with the understanding that the tribe in need would reciprocate someday, if the situation is ever reversed. These types of cooperative agreements would help to prevent intertribal conflicts and preserve regional social and economic stability. In such a system, when natural resource supplies were still generally abundant, there was little stress or anxiety over future provisions.

It was difficult for 17th-century Europeans, when first observing a traditional Indian exchange of wampum beads for food, furs or other items, to not perceive of the shell beads to be anything else but a form of money. It is still difficult for some non-Indians today to understand such non-monetary forms of exchange. In the course of the rest of this chapter, I hope to facilitate a better understanding of those non-monetary uses. Before describing those traditional Indian non-monetary uses of wampum in detail, however, it is necessary that I digress for a
Tribal and Colonial Locations
1610—1660

present state boundaries
moment here in order to provide some relevant background information on the origins and manufacture of wampum beads among the tribes that this study is concerned with. Then we will return to a thorough description and discussion of traditional uses.

**Origins and Production of Wampum**

Wampum beads were made by many coastal tribes during the 16th and 17th centuries, from the northern coast of Maine down to the Chesapeake Bay region where what is now Maryland and Virginia meet. In order to answer the question of which tribe or tribes made wampum first we must consult the archeological evidence, and the Native historical records. The archeological material, taken mostly from ancient Indian burial sites and village sites, indicates that the oldest known manufacture of wampum occurred on the shores around the Long Island Sound, as well as on the southern shores of Long Island, during the mid-16th century. Similar types of shell beads have been found in digs of the Hopewell moundbuilding cultures, dated as far back as the Middle Woodland period (c. 300 B.C. to 700 A.D.). The tribal nations whose beads, shells, drills and filing stones were found at the New York and New England sites were the Shinnecock, Montauk, Massapequa, Naticook, Setauket, Manhasset, Narraganset, Pequot, and Niantic. The first six tribes lived on Long Island, and the other three lived on and near the shores of southern New England. Of all of the above-mentioned tribes, only the Shinnecocks, Narragansetts, and Pequots are still organized as tribes. The Delaware (Unami Lenape) were also an early producer of wampum beads, possibly as early as some of the Long Island tribes.
There are only a few stories of the origin of wampum that have been preserved from the oral histories of the tribes that were involved in the 17th-century wampum trade that have been widely told and published. The confederated Iroquois tribes of upstate New York, and the Abenaki tribes of New Hampshire and Maine have very similar accounts, that, taken with other documented information, would suggest an origin of use, and possibly also manufacture for those tribes, around the mid-to-late 16th century. The Iroquois stories imply that their use of wampum began, independently of knowledge of other wampum-using tribes, at about the same time that their confederation of five tribes was formed (c.1570). Most of the wampum origin stories involve intertribal peacemaking and the forming of alliances and tribal confederations, with wampum being the binding ceremonial instrument. In the Iroquois confederation story, Hiawatha (the real Hiawatha, a 16th-century Onondaga) found shells for making wampum in a dry lakebed, from which he fashioned the famed Hiawatha wampum belt, which tells the story of the League of Five Nations (called the "Haudenosaunee" in the Iroquois language). In other Iroquois and Abenaki wampum origin stories, the wampum is delivered into the hands of their people through the efforts and skill of a youth from an enemy tribe who had been taken captive. (To make a long story short, the young man shoots a giant, wampum-bearing bird in a contest, and thus wins the hand of the chief's daughter in marriage and brings peace to the two tribes.) The symbolism in these stories suggests wampum being brought to their tribes from another, possibly distant tribe. (A Wampanoag
elder during the 1970's told a version of the Iroquois story, in which the captive youth was a Wampanoag).^9

It is certainly problematic to try and determine the origins of wampum production and use from the scant evidence available to this point in time. Various types of shell beads have been uncovered in archeological digs all over the eastern United States, dating back to several prehistoric cultural eras, including the Adena, Hopewell, and Mississippian moundbuilding cultures.10 But, for the type of shell beads used in the 17th century wampum/fur trade in New England and New Netherlands, a summary of the evidence described above indicates that wampum probably originated with one or more of the above-mentioned tribes from the Long Island/southern New England area, at least as early as 200 A.D.. The Iroquois, Abenakis, Mahicans and other inland tribal groups, who we know used and sometimes made wampum after contact with Europeans, probably acquired their first (pre-contact) wampum from the coastal tribes through trade, or through dominant actions, such as warfare and treaty-making. Intertribal warfare was not nearly as frequent before the European invasion as it became afterwards, in part, because of the abundance of material supply, and also because of the traditional Native American beliefs in the right of all beings (including other humans) to live in the place that the Creator put them. Accordingly, it stands to reason that, before Contact, the inland tribes acquired their wampum mainly through trade. After Contact, and the advent of the European-controlled fur and wampum trade, the situation became much different, as we shall see later.
Wampum beads were made from three kinds of seashells, that were most commonly found on the shores around Long Island and the coasts of southern New England. Periwinkle and whelk shells were the earliest and most common types of shells used to make wampum. From those types of shells, beads of white color, sometimes tinged with a little pink, orange or yellow, were made. The other kind of shell that was commonly used was the quahog (pronounced "ko'-hog" in New England) clam shell, from which the Indians produced beads of a wider variety of colors, ranging from a dark, nearly black shade of blue to medium and lighter blues, to shades of purple and red. The beads were small, usually tube-shaped, but sometimes disc-shaped, with some moderate variation in size, before Contact. After Contact with Europeans and the transformation of wampum into a European currency, the size and shape of wampum was, by necessity, standardized to tubular beads only, one eighth of an inch in diameter and one quarter of an inch in length.

Archaeological and historical evidence indicates that those were the most common dimensions at the time of first contact, leading the Dutch and English to designate that form or style of wampum to be "proper wampum". 11

The quahog shells are much harder than whelks or periwinkles, too hard to drill the tubular shaped beads with traditional Indian stone drills. So, before the advent of iron drill bits from Europe, the colorful quahog shell beads were disc-shaped, and other odd shapes that were easier to drill. 12 This simple fact brings us some very important historical connotations regarding the pre-Contact and post-Contact uses of wampum. For one thing,
A broken whelk shell, found by the author on a shore of Narragansett Bay near Mount Hope. Part of the col lumella can be seen, where the outer shell has broken away.

traditional white wampum

collumella

Quahog shell

quahog shell blanks

Shell blank wedged in a large rock, as dr illing.

Drilled blanks shaped and smoothed on stones G.P. 96
it helps in determining dates for wampum articles made from quahog shells, since tubular quahog shell beads were probably made after 1609, when Henry Hudson first traveled up the Hudson River. Only disc-shaped, or other non-cylindrical shaped quahog shell beads can be determined with any certainty to have been produced before about 1609, unless somehow steel drill bits found their way to the southern New England/Long Island area earlier, perhaps by way of Virginia, or, after 1606, from the north after Champlain first explored the St. Lawrence River region. There is also a slim chance that iron drill bits could have been acquired by the Wampanoags from Verrezano during his brief exploratory visit to the Cape Cod area in 1524.

To create the intricate designs found in ceremonial and mnemonic wampum belts, the small cylindrical beads must be used. A belt would have to be extremely large to form such intricate designs with the larger, generally irregular-shaped, pre-Contact quahog beads. It was relatively easy to make the small, tubular wampum beads with whelk or periwinkle shells, using stone drill bits during pre-Contact times. Besides the relative softness of those shells, when compared to quahogs, the shells have a natural cylindrical center, like a spine which the rest of the shell is wrapped around (called "columellas" by archeologists). After trimming away the rest of the shell, an artisan would simply complete the process by cutting the cylindrical "spine" into the appropriate lengths, file or grind them, and then polish them. Only with the very large whelks and periwinkles would there be material in the rest of the shell (around the "spine") that woul
be thick enough to cut and drill in the manner in which quahog shells were worked.

Although the beads made from whelks and periwinkles were generally referred to as "white wampum", enough color could be found in some of those shells to make belts with intricate designs. The colors would not be nearly as vivid or contrasting as those found in quahog shells, but it is theoretically possible that such belts could have been made then. Since most wampum artifacts that I have seen, on display in museums, or photographed in books, have not been accompanied by information that indicated from which type of shell the wampum was made (although the quahog beads are generally obviously quahog), I can only assume that it is possible that some of the paler, less colorful items were made from whelks and/or periwinkles. Taking all of these factors into consideration, I would conclude that any pictographic or intricately designed wampum belts that were made before about 1600, were probably made from whelks or periwinkles. If the belts were made with quahog shells, which can generally be identified by the deeper hues of blue, black, purple or red, then they were probably made sometime after 1600, when iron drill bits became widely available. 14

Most of the magnificent Iroquois ceremonial and mnemonic wampum belts appear to have been made from quahog shell wampum. The Hiawatha wampum belt in the New York State Museum, definitely looks like a quahog shell wampum belt. Considering all of the above-stated facts and suppositions, the question is raised as to how that belt could have been made in the mid to late 16th
century using stone drill bits. However, it would be disrespectful to say that it was impossible for 16th-century Iroquois to drill cohaug shells with stone bits. We do not know what levels of skill and dexterity they had attained in the use of stone drills. The evidence against the production of such a pre-Contact quahog wampum belt is not entirely irrefutable and there is certainly room for much more investigation into this topic.

The tribes that produced and used wampum in 17th century northeastern America spoke various dialects of the Algonquian language, with the exception of the Iroquoian-speaking nations of upstate New York (New Netherlands). The Iroquoian word for wampum is anakoha, although they have always also used the Algonquian word, wampum, especially when speaking with people outside of their communities. The Algonquian word wampum, is probably of Wampanoag and/or Narragansett origin. The root word wamp, or wampi means white or light. Wampum literally means white beads, and it originally referred only to the beads produced from whelk and/or periwinkle shells. The dark and colorful beads produced from the quahog shells were called suckauhock, which, roughly translated means "black or dark-colored beads made from quahogs". In the Wampanoag and Narragansett languages sucki means black, and poquauhock is the word for quahogs. Wampumpeaq means "wampum beads strung together", peaq being one of a few Algonquian words that translates into string. The Dutch called wampum "sewan", which was probably a mispronunciation of the word for wampum used by some of the Algonquian-speaking people of the Hudson River region of New Netherlands. After the English became involved in
the wampum/fur trade, in 1627, about ten years after the beginnings of Dutch involvement, they simply used the words wampum, wampumpeage, or just "peage" for all of the different colors of wampum. Since the English soon became the dominant group in the region, and they preferred to have the Indians learn English, rather than bother themselves to learn much or any of the native languages, the English way of calling all of the beads wampum became common practice. 16

The Narragansett word for "one who makes wampum" is natouwompitee(a)(s). The word has alternative male or female endings, which implies that in the Narragansett cultural tradition either men or women were allowed to make wampum. Among the various coastal Algonquian tribes there were differing customs concerning who in the tribe could be the designated wampum-makers. Since wampum was a sacred ceremonial object, its production was regulated to some degree, and people had to be authorized and taught the proper techniques for creating it. In the Delaware (Lenape) tribe the old men and women were the designated wampum-makers, and it is said that an individual could produce 40 to 50 beads in a day. 17 The Wampanoag tradition was that the elder men would gather the shells and the women (young and old) would make the beads. 18 During the peak years of the wampum/fur trade, the heavy European demand for wampum forced the Indians to abandon these traditional labor roles and recruit all available men, women and older children into the wampum-making labor pool. That change will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapters. At this point we should return to the subject of traditional Indian uses of
wampum before the arrival of Europeans.

**Traditional, Pre-Contact Uses of Wampum**

There was occasional bartering between tribes in the northeast, for the purposes of maintaining peaceful intertribal relations and to acquire goods not readily available or not plentiful in their home regions. Although such exchanges were economic as well as political in function, the tribes of the northeast did not have an object that carried the same symbolic meaning as European money. Wampum did indeed have several different symbolic meanings, with some symbols commonly shared and understood between tribes, while other symbols, such as the stories told on Iroquois mnemonic wampum belts, were understood only within the tribe that created the symbols. Unlike European money, no abstract numerical value or weight was given to wampum. No evidence has come to light to this point of any such assessments or valuations of wampum being made by Indians prior to the advent of European trade. Nor was its use and purpose limited to only being an exchange or trade item. In tribal economic systems in which, normally, everything that the tribe needed for comfortable subsistence could be gathered or grown locally, within the tribe's seasonal territories, there was little need for trade and even less need to develop a monetary system.¹⁹

The traditional, pre-Contact uses of wampum were ceremonial (religious), social (including decorative uses), economic, political, and educational. All of these categories of usage involved using wampum to communicate symbolically. At this point we will look at examples of several specific types of uses within each of
the above-listed use categories.

I. Social Uses

Personal Adornment and Ornamentation: necklaces, bracelets, hair ties, earrings and other jewelry, headbands, belts, waistbands, armbands, cross-belts (a belt or band that is attached to the front and back of a waistbelt, crossing diagonally across the body and over one shoulder), as part of a headdress (a type of crown) worn by sachems, and other members of the royal families as a sign of status (also called "regalia"), tassels, fringes, decorations sewn onto buckskin clothing (comparable to the beadwork on buckskin done by the tribes of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains), decorations applied to tools and personal artifacts, such as bows, hatchets, war clubs, staffs, canoes, paddles, etc. 20

Most sources, when mentioning the use of wampum adornments as a status symbol, quote William Bradford, the governor of Plymouth Colony, who stated that he had not noticed much use of wampum among the Indians in his domain, except for "..a few sachems and special persons who wore a little of it (wampum) for ornament." Bradford also notes how that usage changed after the English entered the wampum trade, which shall be addressed in the next chapter. Roger Williams also mentions that he noticed varying levels of wealth and status among the Narragansetts, but his observations were made between 1636 and 1643, which was at least 14 years after the Narragansetts first became involved in the white/Indian wampum/fur trade. 22

Other Social Uses: as one of the prizes in native sports con-
tests, gambling and games (similar to our trophies); given as a sign of hospitality when welcoming visitors and strangers (the Dutch and English explorers and traders were often the recipients of such gifts), as a gift to a medicine person in appreciation for services rendered, as part of giveaway feasts (similar to the northwest coast potlatch), as a pledge between individuals (including in marriages, which also fits into the ceremonial and political category, as described below), as gifts between friends and relatives, and on any occasion when gift giving was called for.

II. Ceremonial and Political Uses: peacemaking, forming alliances with other tribes, to form a confederacy of several tribes, conflict resolution and restoring unity within a tribe, to seal or confirm a political decision made by a tribal council, as the "royal seal" when an important message was sent from one sachem to another, as a "letter of introduction" or "certificate of authority", to declare war or ask for a peace treaty council, in marriage ceremonies and proposals, as an atonement for a serious offense, and in funeral ceremonies and burials.

In most tribal societies marriages were arranged by the parents of the couple, and among the royal families these marriages usually served a diplomatic purpose. Such purposes included forming friendly alliances with neighboring tribes and healing family or clan feuds within a tribe.

III. Educational Usage: The primary educational use for wampum was as a mnemonic device, a way of recording part of the oral history of a tribe to enhance the experience of telling and hearing that
history. The first Indian nations to use wampum in this way were the five united tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. This confederacy, the Haudenosaunee (as mentioned earlier) had the Hiawatha wampum belt, which pictographically depicts five nations joined together, as if they were holding hands, to remind them of the story of their coming together as one mighty nation of states. Several Algonquian tribes of New England began using wampum belts as historical mnemonic devices later in the 17th century, following the Iroquois example. The Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Ninigret had such belts, which are shown in their portraits, and the Wampanoag sachem Metacom (a.k.a., "King Philip") had such a belt that was nine feet long. Late in the century, four of the Abenaki (also called "Wabenaki") tribes of New Hampshire, Maine, and New Brunswick formed a confederacy like that of the Iroquois and made mnemonic belts to mark the event. Those four tribes were the Penobscot, Passamaquaddy, Micmac and Malicite, and they had learned of the Haudenosaunee through contact with the Mohawks.

The educational process revolving around the use of mnemonic wampum belts consisted of regular ceremonial meetings on important dates throughout the year, but more frequently in the winter. At these meetings, usually, the entire tribe would gather to hear a sachem or other tribal leader tell the stories that were "written", pictographically, in the belts. Certain peace and alliance belts, such as the famous "Hiawatha Belt" use symbols such as figures standing side by side with their hands joined. Belts with reddish colored beads in the background were used to declare war.
The peace belt figures were usually white on a dark blue background. Teaching with wampum belts was an important method of maintaining tribal cohesiveness, a sense of purpose, common heritage, and tribal unity. This was also one way of ensuring cultural continuity, from generation to generation.

**Economic Uses:** Much mention has already been made earlier in this study of the economic, but non-monetary, use of wampum in facilitating trade. Much more on the subject will be said in the next chapter, which describes the transition of wampum use among the northeastern tribes during the 17th century; from the uses described on the previous pages to its use as a European currency dominating an American economy for the first time in history.

In addition to the economic purposes already mentioned, much emphasis needs to be made on the importance of peace-making and the formation of alliances to the traditional tribal economy. Peace and social stability were very instrumental in maintaining the sustainability of the relationship of a tribe to its natural resource base, which, as previously mentioned, was the basis for the tribal economies. Prolonged warfare could seriously reduce a tribe's labor force and also separate a tribe from its resource base if territory was lost to another tribe. Belief in the solemnity, or sanctity of a pact sealed by the ceremonial exchange of wampum was a very significant sustaining agent for tribal cultures and their socio-economic stability.

In closing this chapter, I only need to add that it is easy to understand how an observer from outside of early 17th-century northeastern native culture could perceive wampum to be "the
Indian's money", as so many early observers called it. They could see wampum being exchanged for other goods among the various tribes of the region. Any person who lacked knowledge of the various other uses, values, and symbolic meanings attached to wampum by the indigenous people of the region, and of their complex, cultural view of trade exchanges, could easily jump to the commonly-held conclusion. As we observe the evidence of the changes that occurred in use and value of Indian wampum after the arrival of European merchants and traders, in the course of chapter two, the differences between traditional Indian wampum and colonial wampum money will, hopefully, become much clearer.


(2) de Laet, Johannes The New World, or Description of West- India (in which the quote from Henry Hudson is also found), in Jameson, J. Franklin, Narratives of New Netherland, 1609-1664 New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909

(3) Ibid.


(6) Molloy, pg.11


(8) There is some debate as to whether Hiawatha was an Onondaga or a Mohawk. Carl Waldman, in Atlas of the North American Indian, New York, Facts on File Publications, 1985, pg.93, calls him a Mohawk. So does Dr. Duane Champagne, in his more recent work, Native America: Portrait of the Peoples, Detroit, Visible Ink Press, 1994, pg.511 (on that same page,
Dr. Champagne also dates the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Haudenosaunee, as "...before the landing of Columbus in 1492."). In another book from 1994, Colin G. Calloway's *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices From Early America*, Boston, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994, pg.24 Hiawatha is referred to as an Onondaga. In the Mid-June 1996 issue of *News From Indian Country: the Nation's Native Journal*, vol.10, no.11, Mohawk journalist Doug George-Kanentiio, in an article entitled, "Wampum Use Among the Iroquois", refers to Hiawatha (by his allegedly proper name "Aiionwatha") as an Onandaga, in what appears to be the most complete Iroquois account of the origin of the Haudenosaunee and the Hiawatha wampum belt that I have ever seen. Mr. George-Kanentiio does not venture a date for the event, however.

(9) Weeden, Tall Oak; a contemporary Wampanoag/Pequot elder and tribal historian; interviews in June, 1995, and June, 1996, in Charlestown, Rhode Island


(11) Molloy, pp.13,14. Trigger, pg.217


(13) I use the word "probably" here because I can not completely disregard the possibility that an extremely skilled Native artisan could possibly have drilled tubular beads out of quahog shells with a stone drill bit. But, since I tried to drill cylindrical wampum beads myself out of quahog shells, first with carbide steel drill bits, then with diamond-tipped steel bits, I have to conclude that it is somewhat unlikely. I say that also based upon the testimonies of some contemporary wampum-makers that I met in New England, as well as on the archeological and historical evidence.

(14) Speck, pp. 17,18

(15) George-Kanentiio, pg.18A

(16) Williams, Roger *A Key Into the Language of America* London, 1643, pg.155. Williams was the founder of Rhode Island, "the colony of the outcasts", and one of the very few Englishmen who bothered to learn much of the Algonquian language. After spending about seven years befriending and learning from his Narragansett neighbors, he wrote this Narragansett/English dictionary on a voyage to England. Also; Weeden, William B. *Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789* New York, 1890, pg.32
(17) Herman, Mary W. "Wampum as a Money in Northeastern North America" Ethnohistory vol.3, 1956, pg.22

(18) Travers, Milton The Wampanoag Indian Federation of the Algonquin Nation, Indian Neighbors of the Pilgrims Christopher Publishing House, Boston, 1961, pg.34


(22) Williams, pg.42


(25) Same sources as in previous note.(Ibid.?)

(26) Benjamin Franklin learned of this confederacy from a Mohawk named Canassetego, in 1744. Ten years later, Franklin spoke at a meeting of his revolutionary-minded compadres and told them, basically, that the Iroquois idea of a union of states with a united representative government might be something that they also should try.

(27) Speck, pp.32,68.

(28) Speck, pg.38, Tooker, pg.423
II. The Wampum Trade Triangle: cultural collision

Evidence that a profound change in the native use of wampum occurred in the early to mid 17th century can be found in both the archeological and historical records. Throughout the northeast, when European trade goods are found in archeological dig sites of tribal camps and villages, the number of wampum beads found goes up, proportionally. In older, pre-Contact village sites shell beads were no more common than several other types of native artifacts, and not as common as carved stone pipes or stone arrowheads. If the Native American people of New England, before Contact, had regarded wampum in the same manner that Europeans regard their money, we would expect to find some large caches of it in dig sites from that period. Another difference between the wampum findings in pre-Contact and post-Contact sites is the differing shapes of the beads. In the pre-Contact findings there are many disc-shaped and irregular shaped beads, but where European trade goods are found the wampum at such sites is commonly found to be the standard tubular shape and size that was ordained by the Dutch and English as currency. So where volume increases we also find standardization— the appearance of "legal wampum" (which shall be explained in more detail later).

If wampum had indeed been an Indian money before European contact, what we would not expect to find in archeological dig sites would be large numbers of whole and partially broken whelk and quahog shells in native trash heaps. But that is exactly what archeologists often find. If such shells could have been made
into money, why would they be discarded? In what human societies, now or ever, has it been common practice to throw their money into the trash? To my knowledge that is unheard of.\(^3\)

One of the best pieces of evidence from the historical record concerning this change in the Native American use of wampum comes from William Bradford, the longtime governor of Plymouth Colony. In the following passage, Bradford describes what limited use of wampum he had observed among the Wampanoag and Massachuset Indians before the European mode of wampum trade was introduced there in 1627, and how much the situation changed in just a few years time:

..And strange it was to see the great alteration it (wampum) made in a few years among the Indeans themselves; for all the Indeans of these parts (Wampanoags in Plymouth Colony), and the Massachusetts, had none or very little of it, but the sachems and some spetiall persons that wore a little of it for ornaments. Only it was made and kepte amonge the Nariganssets, and Pequents (Pequots), which grew rich and potent by it, and these people (the Wampanoags and Massachusetts) were poore and beggerly, and had no use of it. Neithere did the English of this plantation, or any other in the land, till now that they had knowledg of it from the Dutch, so much as know what it was, much less that it was a commoditie of that worth and valew. But after it grew thus to be a commoditie in these parts, these Indeans fell into it allso, and to learn how to make it; for the Nariganssets doe geather the shells of which they make it from their shores. \(^4\)

In the seven years that Bradford had spent observing and interacting with the Indians, prior to the introduction of European use of wampum among them, he had not noticed any remarkable use of wampum by them, except for the fact that some of the higher status individuals decorated their fancier garments with it. If those tribes had been using wampum as a form of money, all of the Pilgrims in Plymouth would have most likely been aware of
that.

William Bradford's nephew, Nathaniel Morton, wrote the first published history of New England, *New England's Memoriall*, published in 1669 (Bradford's history was not published until 1856, although it had been used as a primary source by several historians who published works during the nearly 200 years before then, including Morton). In writing this history, Morton drew heavily from his uncle's manuscript. About one-third of the "Memoriall" is simply a paraphrase of Bradford. In Morton's version of the introduction of the European wampum trade to the Plymouth/Massachusetts Bay region, he states, "...when as they (the Indians) learned to make store of wampam, they furnished themselves with Guns, Powder and Shot." The significance of the words, "...learned to make store..." is that they confirm what the archeological record has also told us; that there was no hoarding or significant accumulation of wampum in New England Indian societies until after the English entered the wampum trade and communicated to the Indians that Europeans valued wampum, first as a trade commodity, and later as a money.

In the rest of this chapter we will trace the history of the process through which wampum became a European commodity and money, and how the Indians adapted to these new attitudes towards wampum in their own lives and cultures.

**First Contact on the Hudson River**

In September of 1609, the first known European ship to do so, sailed up the Hudson River past what is now Albany, New York, until the water was too shallow for it to go any further, and then
turned around and left. They entered the Hudson on a hot September 12th, and left the river on October 4th. During those twenty-three days, they sailed about 140 miles upriver, stopped several times to explore the land, to explore the river ahead in a small boat, to socialize and exchange gifts with the Indians, to wait for the tide to raise the river so they could be freed when they were grounded in shallow water (that happened several times), to gather wood to do a small remodeling job on their ship, and to begin the long and painful process of letting the native people of America know what to beware of, concerning people such as themselves.

Six days and about 130 miles into their journey upriver, when they had gone almost as far north as their ship could go, they met some Indians who gave them some "...stropes of Beades..", which were most likely strings of wampum. The Europeans had come into Mahican country, but the Indians that they met may or may not have been Mahicans. The written account makes no mention of the name of a tribe, and it is likely that the twenty sailors never found out. The Indians could have been Mahicans, or Munsees (the Mahican's neighbors to the south), or they could have been from some tribe that was wiped out long ago, before their name was ever written down. On the first day of their meeting, September 18th, a tribal elder, who seemed to be "..a Governour of the Countrey..", or sachem, invited the first mate to his house and "..made him good cheere..". The next day, many Indians came on board the ship and gifts were exchanged. The Indians gave the sailors grapes, pumpkins, beaver hides and otter
hides. The sailors gave them knives, hatchets, beads and "trifles".

Two days later, on the 21st, the captain and first mate took ". . . some of the chiefe men of the Countrey . . . " and the wife of one of them into the ship's cabin to see " . . . whether they had any treacherie in them." The sailors gave the Indians wine, and they all became "merrie", but, reportedly, only one of them got drunk, " . . . and that was strange to them; for they could not tell how to take it." They allowed the Indians to stay overnight, and on the next day some of their people came on board, at about noon, and were happy to see that their kinsmen were allright. It was after that visit that the Indians decided to offer the strangers some wampum, which they brought to the ship later that day, along with many other gifts, including tobacco and food for a great feast. The nature and significance of the wampum gift is better understood when seen in the context of the order and manner in which the gifts were offered:

. . . at three of the clocke in the after-noone they came aboard, and brought Tabacco, and more Beades, and gave them to our Master, and made an Oration, and shewed him all the Countrey round about. Then they sent one of their companie on land, who presently returned, and brought a great Platter full of Venison dressed by themselves; and they caused him (the captain) to eate with them: then they made him reverence, and departed all save the old man that lay aboard (the one who had gotten drunk). 8

When looking at this entire scenario from a native point of view, it seems quite possible that what the Indians were doing was conducting a welcoming ceremony specifically for the European sachem, the captain, or, as it appeared to them, sachem of the sailors. As explained previously, peaceful relations with other
tribes, even strange "tribes" that they had never seen or heard of before (i.e., these Dutch), was extremely important to maintaining economic stability. Therefore, the usual native practice when approached by or when encountering strangers was to make gestures and offerings of peace. Another familiar example of this was the Wampanoags friendly reception of the Pilgrims in 1620. The idea was that if the strangers' intentions were good, then they would respond in kind; if not, the negative intentions would presently be revealed.

Four days later, on the 26th, when the sailors were returning south from having gone as far upriver as their ship could go, two old men, two old women, and two teenaged girls from that same tribe paddled toward their ship in two canoes. One of them was the old man who they had gotten drunk at their previous meeting, and they had come to give the sailors another wampum welcoming ceremony:

He brought another old man with him, which brought more stropes of Beades, and gave them to our Master, and shewed him all the Countrey there about, as though it were at his command. So he made the two old men dine with him, and the old mans wife: for they brought two old women, and two young maidens of the age of sixenee or seventeene yeeres with them, who behaved themselves very modestly. Our Master gave one of the old men a Knife, and they gave him and us Tabacco. And at one of the clocke they departed down the River, making signs that wee should come downe to them; for wee were within two leagues of the place where they dwelt.

In this passage it becomes even more clear that what is meant by the phrase, "...shewed him all the Countrey there about..." is that one or more of the Indians made a sweeping gesture, pointing towards their surrounding environment, a gesture that probably
meant something like "Welcome to our home. Visit with us in peace Tell us about your world, and we will show you ours." Charlie Hill, the Oneida comedian, might interpret their gestures and gifts to have meant something more like, "This land is our land. We like it just the way it is. If we give you some more fabulous prizes, would you promise to go away and live someplace else? How about Florida? After you've been here awhile you'll probably want to move down there anyway, at least for the winters." All kidding aside, the body of evidence, including what is known of Native American traditions of hospitality towards, and curiosity about, strangers, indicates that the interpretation that this was a demonstration of a welcoming attitude is more likely. Again, the Indians were trying to avoid negative relations that could lead to social disruption, economic instability, and needless suffering. There was also a concern with protecting their territorial resource base.

On the first day of October, as the ship and its crew were approaching the end of their journey back down the river, they met some more Indians near what is now the town of Stony Point, New York (about 15 miles south of West Point). The Indians, possibly of the Munsee or related tribes, boarded the ship and engaged in friendly trade with the crew, "...skinnies... for Trifles". Later on that day, as the ship continued on its way, a lone Indian in a canoe followed them, staying close under the stern of the ship for some time. After a while, the Indian reached into a cabin window and took out a pillow, two shirts and two "Bandeleeres". For that offense, the first mate shot him in the
chest and killed him. Then a few of the sailors got into their boat to go and retrieve the stolen objects from the Indian's canoe. An Indian who had been watching this incident from a short distance away, swam up to their boat and grabbed the edge of the boat with his hand and started rocking it, apparently in an attempt to cause them to capsize. One of the sailors (the ship's cook) lopped off the Indian's hand with his sword, thus causing him to drown. The next day, according to Juet, a large group of Indians from the same tribe caught up with them and began to shoot at them with arrows, from canoes and from the shore. Of course, the ship's crew shot back with muskets, and Juet was using some sort of firearm called a "Falcon". By Juet's count, when the shooting was over, nine or ten (Juet's estimate) Indians were dead, with no casualties reported on the European side. Two days later they were gone, heading back to Europe. 11

The captain of this ship was, of course, Henry Hudson, an English "pilot", who was hired by the Dutch East India Company to try and find a water route across North America by which ships could reach the East Indies (that old familiar quest). 12 Hudson failed in his mission, and on his next attempt, the following year, 1610, his crew, including Juet, mutinied, setting him adrift to die in a very large bay in what is now Canada. Both the river he explored in 1609, and the bay where he died in 1610 now bear Hudson's name. Robert Juet died of an illness on board the ship, sometime between the mutiny and when the ship docked in England in 1610. 13

The native peoples of the lower Hudson River area could have
raised several important questions, from those experiences of first (probably) contact with Europeans described above. In Native American societies, the only times that groups of men traveled together without women, children or very old people, was when they were on hunting or military expeditions, although some women would occasionally accompany such groups. When the Mahicans or Munsees (or whoever they were) first saw the strange-looking group of men, floating by them in a boat that looked something like a longhouse without a roof, they must have wondered whether they were hunting or looking for a fight.

The northernmost tribe, who had generally friendly interactions with the strangers, probably concluded that the men were hunting and foraging, and seeking to trade for the material things that they lacked in their own land. It must have appeared that the Europeans lacked fur-bearing animals in their homeland, since they were so enthusiastic about acquiring furs and hides. Why, the Indians might have wondered, did these men have to travel so far (the general perception being that the stranger a newcomer appears, the farther he must have traveled to get there) from their homeland to find the things that they need? Had they treated their own world badly? Had they offended the spirits of their animals, trees and foodplants, and destroyed the reciprocal balance in their homeland? Or, maybe they had been driven out by a stronger tribe. But, if so, where were their women and children? And, for the tribe on the southern end of the river, whose interaction was much more painful, the obvious questions would have been, "How do they kill so easily?", and, "Where do
they get such power?"

It did not take long, after that first encounter for the native people of the Hudson River valley and the coasts of the surrounding area to the east and southwest of there, to find opportunity to learn much more about the strange men from far away. Although real Dutch colonization did not begin until 1623, with the founding of the city of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island, many merchants and traders passed through the territory and set up trading posts on the shores, between 1610 and 1623. A fort was established in 1614 Fort Nassau, by a northern shore of the Hudson River, near present-day Albany, in Mahican country. That fort was abandoned in 1617, and Fort Orange was established on the opposite shore of the river in 1623, at the exact site where Albany now exists. The forts were set up as trading posts, strategically located between the Iroquoian and Algonquian people (see map on pg.9). What the Dutch hoped to gain from the trade, primarily, was furs for the European fashion industry. The Indians sought to gain useful technology that would make their lives easier. The introduction of new weapons, particularly firearms, eventually created concerns among the Indians about using the European trade to strengthen the territorial integrity of their own individual tribes. (This shall be described in more detail later.)

The Development of the Wampum Trade Triangle

The earliest documentary indication of Dutch interest in wampum, as a commodity, comes in the form of a map that was published in 1614 by Captain Adrien Block. On that map there
appear to be notations marking the locations of the primary wampum-producing tribal villages, on the southern shores of New England, and all around Long Island.\textsuperscript{14} We know from the accounts of the Hudson expedition that the Dutch knew at this time that wampum was a valuable and important item in at least some of the native tribal societies. They also knew that furs could be acquired from the tribes upriver, and other inland tribes, in exchange for beads, and other European goods.

In 1614, the government of the Netherlands, in an attempt to encourage trade and further exploration in the American lands in which they had interest (large areas of South America, as well as northeastern North America), issued an ordinance proclaiming that they would provide limited monopolies of trade (four voyages or three years worth) to all "discoverers of new lands". In that same year the Dutch merchants who had been financing the adventures of Adrien Block and a few other explorers received a charter from the Dutch government granting them such privileges of monopoly as described above, for the lands that they had already been exploring. In that charter, the government gave to those lands the name of "Nieu Nederlandt", or New Netherlands.\textsuperscript{15} According to Block's map of 1614, New Netherlands ambitiously laid claim to all of the land from what is now eastern New York state, up to the Canadian border, over to the east coast of Maine, and down that coast, encircling all of what later came to be known as New England.\textsuperscript{16} If it is possible to pin down a date for the origin of the wampum trade triangle, 1614 would be a likely point at which it began.
As it emerged in the ensuing years, the three points of the wampum trade triangle were: the coastal, wampum-producing tribes; the Europeans, with their trade items and new technology; and the inland, fur-gathering tribes. The way that the triangle worked was simple; the wampum-producers would trade wampum to the Europeans for European-manufactured goods and the Europeans would trade the wampum to the inland tribes for furs. This trade was first carried on by the Dutch, who would acquire the beads from the tribes on Long Island and the southern New England coast and then take the beads north up the Hudson River to Fort Nassau, which was located at the edge of Mahican territory, but not far from the Mohawk lands to the west. From Fort Nassau, the Dutch could trade with those tribes and others. The Mohawks would then take the beads home and give or trade them to the rest of the tribes in their confederacy. It is from this period that the earliest Iroquois belts, along with evidence of increased accumulation of wampum beads throughout the northeast begins to appear in the archeological record.

Although the earliest known written description of the Dutch participation in the wampum trade triangle does not appear until 1626, an incident that occurred in 1622 provides some evidence that the trade was possibly going on as early as then. Nicolaes Van Wassenaer's account of that incident follows:

The Sickenanes (Pequots) dwell toward the north, between the Brownists (Puritans) and the Dutch. The chief of this nation has lately made an agreement with Pieter Barentsz. not to trade with any other than him.Jaques Elekes imprisoned him in the year 1622 in his yacht and obliged him to pay a heavy ransom, or else he would cut off his head. He paid one hundred and forty fathoms of Zeewan, which
consists of small beads they manufacture themselves, and which they prize as jewels. On this account he has no confidence in any one but this one [Barentsen] now. 18

From the above passage, we learn several facts, but, in order to more clearly understand this, a little more information must first be provided. Jaques Elekes (a.k.a., Jacob Eelkes) was an employee of the Dutch West India Company, former Commander of Fort Nassau, and, at the time of the above-described incident, Commander of Fort Orange. He was later dismissed by the D.W.I. Co. for misconduct, and then went to work as a guide for some English traders. Evidently, in 1622 Elekes held a Pequot sachem for a ransom of 140 fathoms of wampum. A fathom of wampum was the amount of beads that could be strung on a string one fathom in length. On a six-foot fathom string, approximately 280 beads could be strung. Pieter Barentszen was Commander at Fort Orange at the time that the above account was written (1626). 19

Measuring wampum by the fathom was the way that the Dutch and English preferred to count it, after wampum became legal currency in 1636. But, apparently, that was common Dutch practice long before wampum became legal tender, as early as 1622. The fact that the Pequots paid a ransom for their sachem's life in fathoms of wampum, gives us cause to speculate on several possibilities. Had the Pequots already become accustomed to dividing their strings of wampum into fathoms, to satisfy specifications of some Dutch merchants, long before this ransom demand? Or, did Jaques Elekes take the time to teach them what a fathom was, during the tension and stress of a kidnapping? Did the Pequots come up with the figure of 140 fathoms, or did
Elekes? Wassenaer's account does not say. The geographic location of the Pequot territory, in what is now southeastern Connecticut, was advantageous in allowing them access to a bountiful shellfish supply and a prime position in the Dutch wampum trade. Were the Pequots already the most powerful tribe in the Connecticut River valley region in 1922, as they would be ten years later? Did Elkes pick on them because they were rich in wampum? Since they had recently lost between one-third to one-half of their tribe during the epidemic of 1616-19, they were probably still somewhat vulnerable in 1622. But, even then, they did greatly outnumber the Dutch, who did not begin a serious colonization effort in New Netherlands until the following year, 1623.

Why Jaques Elekes kidnapped the Pequot sachem is hard to determine, and may possibly never be known. But the fact that he demanded a ransom in fathoms of wampum is significant. Also significant is the fact that Pieter Barentszen was able to secure a trade monopoly with the Pequots for Fort Orange and the Company, in 1626. Those two events together establish a pattern that was to repeat itself throughout the 17th-century wampum trade years: the use of violence, by Europeans and Indians, in attempts to control the wampum trade, or at least turn it to their own advantage. Elekes action, whether he meant it to or not, may have had a beneficial effect for the Dutch fort. The Pequots had probably been somewhat terrorized by Elekes, and the idea of entering into a monopolistic trade agreement was certainly more desirable than paying ransoms. Whether or not Barentszen used any similar tactics is not recorded.
By 1626, when Isaack de Rasieres wrote to his employers, the directors of the Dutch West India Company, and described for them the fortuitous success of the wampum trade triangle, wampum production had already become the primary winter activity of the coastal tribes of the Long Island/Connecticut/Rhode Island region. The process of cultural disruption and transformation of the native peoples of northeast America was well under way. What was occurring for these Native Americans, at this time, was their traditional subsistence economies were being mixed with the burgeoning capitalist market economy of Europe. This relatively new, global, internationally competitive, market economy had sprung forth upon the world largely as a result of the Europeans' newfound awareness of the existence of the western hemisphere of our planet, and their ability to extract enormous amounts of natural resources therefrom. In the process of removing large quantities of the natural resources of the ecosystems of the Americas, and transporting them to Europe, the Native Americans had had very little voluntary participation up to this point. Most of the Indian labor that had been used thus far to extract the riches of the land had been forced or slave labor. This had occurred primarily in South and Central America, and mainly involved the extraction of gold and silver, but other resources and regions were involved also. In the Caribbean Islands and in Brazil, Indians had already been enslaved, along with Africans, on the sugar plantations for over one hundred years, by then.

In 1626, European participation in the North American fur trade, that Native Americans had been engaged in for thousands of
years, had only been going on for about twenty three years (if we disclude the 1524 expedition of Verrezano, and the 1534 and '35 expeditions of Cartier as being isolated, discontinuous examples, and not a part of the continuous fur trade that began with Samuel de Champlain in the northeast in 1603). If we include the Russian fur and fish trade that began in the far Pacific Northwestern region in 1550, then European participation in the trade would be that much older. Include what you will, nevertheless, the point is that, in 1626, voluntary North American Indian participation in the labor involved to send American resources to Europe was relatively new.

As mentioned before, pre-Contact intertribal trade was carried on primarily to supplement their subsistence economies and to maintain positive intertribal relations. Therefore, their trading was relatively small-scale, compared to what developed later with European participation in the trade. The two primary reasons for the increased volume of trade with the advent of European participation were; the high level of European demand for North American furs, and the high level of Indian demand for certain European trade goods. Prior to the European entry into the fur trade, Indians were trading with each other for items that they had long been familiar with. Some of these items were available in their home territories, but not in the quantities that they needed or desired. In contrast, the European goods were generally completely unfamiliar, or else they were similar to Indian native objects but made from unfamiliar materials (like iron versions of stone instruments). The reciprocal benefits of the
trade, to Europeans and Indians, coupled with issues of balance of power and economic control (which shall be detailed in the course of this chronological narrative), stimulated a very rapid expansion of the trade in the northeast throughout the first half of the 17th century.

The immense amount of labor that was exerted by the Algonquian-speaking tribes of the New England and New Netherland coasts, in the production of wampum from 1622 to 1660, provided a very significant contribution to the entire process of generating European wealth and power. But how much of the 17th century native wampum production in New England and New Netherlands was voluntary? In the early years of the trade, it certainly was, and the Indians enjoyed a great amount of benefit from the trade. The coastal Algonquians enjoyed the receipt of useful European technology (in Chapter III we will see how not all European trade goods and technology were deemed useful by the Indians) and products, especially cloth, iron and steel tools, firearms and some other materials that they could use to create or enhance their own products. The Iroquois, who lived to the northwest, outside of what actually was New Netherlands, received voluminous amounts of wampum, with which they were able to greatly enrich and enhance their ceremonial and cultural traditions. But, the situation soon changed for the Algonquian, wampum-producing tribes. By the late 1630’s the pressures imposed upon those tribal peoples, to spend more and more of their time producing greater and greater quantities of wampum, put some of them in a situation very similar to indentured servitude. (To keep this
narrative in a chronological order, the details of this situation will be laid out later.)

The two major events that led to taking all of the fun out of wampum-making were; the entrance of the English into the wampum trade, and the turning of wampum into money—legal currency, recognized in New Netherlands, New England and by many merchants and others in Europe.

The English Enter the Trade

In the year 1627, Isaack de Rasieres, who was at this time the Secretary of New Netherlands, a position second only to the governor, visited William Bradford at Plymouth Colony. Among the several products and materials that Rasieres brought with him from New Netherlands, both as gifts and to sell to the English, the most significant item was, according to Governor Bradford, 50 English pounds worth of wampum, for which the Pilgrims paid that amount. Bradford's account of this event, the introduction of the English to the use of wampum as an instrument for trading with the Indians, is as follows:

But that which turned most to their (the Pilgrims) profite, in time, was an entrance into the trade of Wampampeake; for they now bought aboute 50 li. worth of it of them (the Dutch); and they tould them how vendable it was at their forte Orania (Fort Orange); and did perswade them that they would find it so at Kenebeck (mouth of the Kennebec River, near present-day Brunswick, Maine) 22

A natural question to ask at this point would be, why did Rasieres bring 50 Li. worth of wampum to the English, and also tell them something of its value as an item for trade with the Indians? Would not he want to keep the English out of the wampum
trade, to avoid the inevitable heavy competition that their entrance therein would cause? In a letter to Samuel Blommaert, a Dutch merchant and co-director of the West India Co., in which he describes what he knew concerning the Plymouth colonists' adventures and explorations beyond Plymouth Bay, Rassieres gives us an explanation of his thinking on this matter:

"...Here also they have built a shallop, in order to go and look after the trade in sewan, in Sloup's Bay (Narragansett Bay) and thereabouts, because they are afraid to pass Cape Mallabaer (?), and in order to avoid the length of the way; which I have prevented for this year by selling them fifty fathoms of sewan, because the seeking after sewan by them is prejudicial to us, inasmuch as they would, by so doing, discover the trade in furs; which if they were to find out, it would be a great trouble for us to maintain, for they already dare to threaten that if we will not leave off dealing with that people, they will be obliged to use other means; if they do that now, while they are yet ignorant how the case stands, what will they do when they get a notion of it?" 23

Apparently, Rassieres thought that if the English could purchase large quantities of wampum from the Dutch, and if they took his advice and only traded it with the Indians in their northern frontiers (Kennebec), then they would not go snooping around the Dutch wampum-gathering territories, and, more importantly to him, they would not find out about the wampum-for-fur trade. The Narragansett Indians were the second leading supplier of wampum to the Dutch at that time, second to the Pequots, who, mainly because of their advantageous geographic location, had become the dominant wampum-producing tribe in the region.24 The Narragansett homeland was along the western shores of Narragansett ("Sloup's) Bay, and inland from there, what is now the state of Rhode Island. Narragansett Bay was possibly the best, certainly one of
the best, locations in the region for gathering quahog shells.
The demand for quahog wampum, "suckauhock", was rapidly increasing, due mainly to its usefulness to the Iroquois for making pictographic, ceremonial wampum belts. It is not likely that the Plymouth colonists were actually looking for "sewan" on their sojourns into Narragansett Bay, since Bradford stated that they knew nothing of wampum's usefulness as a trade item before this meeting with Rassieres (see pg.28). The fear of the possibility of English entry into the wampum fur trade, via the Narragansetts was probably the primary inspiration for Rassieres' trip to Plymouth, and subsequent offer to provide the English with wampum. He wanted to detour them away from searching for wampum on those shores, to protect the Dutch monopoly on the wampum/fur trade in that region. 25

Probably to the delight of Rassieres and the Dutch, the English used the wampum that they had acquired from him to begin trade with the Indian tribes to the north of them, instead of venturing into the Dutch territory in the east (that would begin a few years later). As Bradford said, they began by offering the wampum to the "...Indians of these parts..", the Wampanoags and Massachusets, after which they expanded their trading to include the Nipmucs, Pennacooks, Abenakis, Penobscots and Passamaquoddys. 26

It was during those outward and northward trading expeditions, of 1627 to about 1632 that the English became involved in the wampum/fur trade. Through that trade, the English discovered that the Indians often preferred wampum to European trade goods,
which was fine with the Plymouth colonists, since those European goods were usually in short supply among them in those years. At that time, the Wampanoags began to produce more wampum, after seeing that their English neighbors now valued it as a trade item. To the Wampanoags, producing more wampum became another means for acquiring European trade goods. That provided the English with another means of acquiring wampum, besides buying it from the Dutch. No records have yet appeared that show if any subsequent purchases of wampum were made by the English, from the Dutch. But English use of, and trade in wampum continued to increase in the 1630's. According to William Cronon, the Penobscots, Abenakis, and Passamaquoddys were "initially reluctant to acquire wampum (from the English), (but) within two years it had become the single most important commodity Plymouth had to offer."27

In 1630, Massachusetts Bay Colony was established, right in the path of the Pilgrims' northern trade routes! Suddenly, the Plymouth English had other English in their neighborhood to compete with. The Massachusetts Bay Puritan English outnumbered the Pilgrim English of Plymouth Colony soon after their arrival. The Bay colonists were also wealthier and had more influential supporters in England than the Pilgrims did.28 Both the Puritans and Pilgrims had been outcasts in England, but the Pilgrims were a little further off the beaten path of Anglican orthodoxy than the Puritans were, which probably explains, in part, why they were a much smaller group. With their greater numbers and wealth, the Massachusetts Bay English soon dominated the Indian trade in
their region (the Bay colony also included what is now New Hampshire and Maine). They ventured into the Connecticut River valley in 1634, and soon replaced the Dutch as the dominant force in that trade locale. The detailed story of that expedition shall unfold later in this chapter, but to conclude this summary of the speed of English "progress" subsequent to entering the Indian wampum/fur trade, by 1635 Englishman William Pynchon's trading post on the Connecticut River had become, according to historian Peter Thomas, "By all accounts, barring Ft. Orange and the Canadian posts, the leading center for the fur traffic in the Northeast."29

**The Prelude to Legal Tender Status: 1632-1637**

In the Indian world of the early 1630s northeast, intertribal, and, occasionally, even intratribal competition was becoming an ever-increasing part of daily life. The trade in large numbers of new materials (European products), unusual amounts of old materials (wampum, furs), and the influx of more and more people who were culturally very different from themselves, was beginning to have a variety of major impacts. Sometimes the impacts seemed to be positive, and then, often suddenly and unexpectedly, the situation would become very negative. The negative situations were usually connected to the issue of control of the wampum trade.

Before wampum became legal tender, in 1637, the native peoples of the region were able at times to exert much influence on the directions that the trade took. Tribes such as the Pequots, Narragansetts and Wampanoags, whose territories included
some of the best shell-gathering locations, were often in a position of advantage over other tribes, as well as in their dealings with the English and the Dutch. Other tribes had prime shell gathering locations, such as the Shinnecocks and Montauks of Long Island, and the Miantics of Connecticut, but because of their smaller size they became tributaries of the Narragansetts and Pequots. These tributary relationships were usually also protectorates, so there was a reciprocal benefit to the relationship. But the dominant tribes enjoyed a measure of control of the supply and distribution of both wampum and shells. By monopolizing the supply and distribution of wampum in large regions around their home territories, the dominant tribes could force the English and Dutch to come to them for wampum when they were trading within those large, controlled regions. During the three years before wampum became legal tender, the control of the trade shifted much more in favor of the English.

Long before wampum became legal tender, it was actually being used as money, all over New England and New Netherlands. Besides the examples previously given, from 1622 and 1627, there are plenty of others. In 1632, a social outcast named Thomas Morton, who lived outside of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, further inland, and closer to the Indians than to his fellow Englishmen (in more ways than one), wrote that the use of "wampampeak" by the English as a currency was already widespread by that date. The following refers to both the English and Indians:

..they barter for such commodities as they have, and have a kinde of beads in steede of money, to buy withall such things as they want, which they call Wampampeak.
Morton also reveals an even more interesting fact; the English had also been trying to make their own, counterfeit, wampum and the Indians would consistently reject it "...because the Indians can always tell the difference and do not value the beads made by the English, considering them inferior."31 It is possible that the native people, those who still believed wampum was sacred, also considered the English beads to be improper, since they could not have been made with the proper prayers and rituals, and, therefore, rejected the beads on that basis.

The fact that there was a shortage of European coins in both the English and Dutch colonies, during the early to mid 17th century has already been widely reported and well-documented. Before the introduction of wampum as a currency, the Plymouth colonists often used Indian corn, and, occasionally other commodities, as a type of money, both in trade with Indians and with other Europeans, as well as among themselves (after they ended their communistic economic arrangement, in 1623).32 It was this shortage of coins, plus a desire to put standards and controls on the wampum trade, that led to the legalization and standardization of wampum as a currency, both in New England and New Netherlands. By this means, both the Dutch and the English could legally set, revise, and reset the value of the beads, to match the changing value of beaver, and other pelts, as determined by the demand and other irregularities of the European market economy. They could also, of course, apply this system to any particular commodity that they desired to, and set whatever price, in wampumpeag, that they wished, or that the market would allow. The fluctuating
wampum values that were placed on such commodities as furs, changing sometimes from season to season, caused some discontent and bewilderment among the tribal nations. Indians were used to the concept of each object in nature having its own innate, long-held traditional value, that was not measured with numbers. When prices and values for wampum changed, Indians sometimes questioned the honesty of the European traders.33

Besides the obvious financial reasons for wanting to control the wampum trade, another reason that motivated the English was an extreme distaste for any sort of economic dependence on Indians. The fact that 17th-century English were, as a rule, very ethnocentric, or "cultural chauvanists" (to use some more recent terminology) is widely known, but some primary source documentation of the fact should be helpful. Nathaniel Morton provided us with an account of one such distasteful economic situation encountered by the first colony of English to try and establish themselves in Massachusetts Bay, in 1623. This non-Pilgrim group was led by Thomas Weston and they were in a dire condition of improvidence and starvation during their first winter in America, similar to the condition that the Pilgrims had been in two years before. Morton describes their circumstance as follows:

..after they came into want, many sold away their Clothes and Bed-coverings; others were so base as they became servants to the Indians, and would cut them Wood, and fetch them Water for a Cap full of Corn.34

In Morton's opinion, for an Englishman to be employed by Indians was about as low as an Englishman could stoop. In the minds of people who considered the indigenous people of America to be
nothing more than "heathens" whom God saw fit to remove from their path either by plague or sword, as the Pilgrims often professed, Weston's group had reversed their proper, God-given position on the human hierarchy chart with the Indians. This was the commonly-held point of view in 17th-century New England. It is no surprise that the English would do just about anything to avoid ever being put into such a "debased" position.

The four years that preceded the establishment of wampum as an international currency, for the purpose of better facilitating the beaver trade, were marked by three key events and several relevant circumstances. During this period (1633-37), trade competition among and between native tribes and Europeans intensified and power relations and trade relations themselves became more unstable.

The sequence unfolds beginning in 1633 with the first major event, a smallpox epidemic that decimated several of the New England tribes, including the biggest wampum producers, the Pequots and the Narragansetts. It is not certain how many people that the Pequots lost in that particular epidemic, but the estimate of their population at time of first Contact is approximately 13,000, and, after the combined effect of the epidemics of 1616-19 and 1633, their population was about 3,000.

As a consequence of that epidemic, the second significant occurrence was that, upon hearing of the Indians' devastation and weakened condition, the English and the Dutch seized the opportunity to step up their explorations of the lower Connecticut River valley, which was in the heart of Pequot and Mohegan
territory, and also the home of several smaller tribes. The Dutch were seeking Indian allies, to help preserve their trade monopoly in the region. The English were seeking ways that they could possibly establish a trade monopoly of their own there, through setting up forts and establishing colonies. In the winter of 1634-5, the English created a settlement on the western shore of the Connecticut River, a few miles south of present-day Hartford, and named it "Pyquag" (later changed to Wethersfield). In 1635, they built Fort Saybrook at the mouth of the river, a strategic location for monitoring and attempting to dominate local trade. During the next year, 1636, colonists from Massachusetts Bay began flocking to that valley, establishing three more settlements, expanding their presence over a 70-mile stretch along the river. The Dutch were also attempting to begin new settlements and trading posts in the same region, sometimes even on the exact same locations, at the same time, through purchasing "deeds" to the lands from local sachems, but the English generally prevailed.

A third important event, the Massachusetts Bay/Pequot Treaty of 1634, was actually part of a series of related incidents that led to the two main events of 1637: the ordination of wampum as legal tender, and the Pequot War. Before describing the treaty, and the circumstances surrounding it, some background information on prior developments in intertribal relations is in order. One of the culturally disrupting effects of the wampum/commodity trade on the New England/New Netherlands area tribes, was the creation of highly disproportionate levels of wealth, power and influence among those tribes. The old, traditional relationships
of reciprocity and mutual respect, though not completely removed, had indeed been altered. Tribes with greater access to shells and furs, and with larger, more productive labor forces, prospered, while smaller, less well-situated tribes were forced to become tributaries to the larger ones. The tributary tribes would provide resources, such as wampum or furs to the larger tribes, and in return receive protection from other aggressors, regardless of whether the aggressors were European or Indian. Thus, early in the 1630's several of the smaller, wampum-producing tribes on Long Island and the Connecticut coast, and some of the fur-rich tribes of the upper Connecticut River valley, became tributaries to the Narragansetts, Pequots, and Mohegans. Intertribal skirmishes and conflicts became more common in the 1630's, especially between the tribes who were seeking to dominate the wampum trade.

In 1634, the year that the Massachusetts Bay/Pequot Treaty was made, and the same year that English explorations and settlement in the Connecticut interior began, the Massachusetts Bay English discovered that a few different tribes on Long Island were tributaries to the Pequots and made regular, large payments in wampum to them. They had already heard that the Pequots were rich and powerful, first from Rasieres, and later from others, but now the Pequots seemed to them to be even wealthier, and more powerful than they had previously thought them to be. So, the Massachusetts Bay leaders were utterly delighted when a Pequot delegation, led by their sachem, Sassacus, came to them, in Boston, and asked for their help. The Pequots had just
experienced the devastating small pox epidemic in 1633, and had been involved in several violent encounters with the Narragansetts, the Dutch, and, most recently, with an English pirate from the West Indies named John Stone. The Dutch had cut off their trade with the Pequots, in 1632, in retaliation for the Pequot murder of some Narragansetts who had been trading with the Dutch. Stone had kidnapped some Niantic Indians, who were tributaries of the Pequots, in an attempt to get a ransom. The Niantics escaped and killed Stone along with his crew, killings for which the Pequots were later blamed by the English. What the Pequot delegation wanted from the Massachusetts Bay government was; for them to establish trade with the Pequots, and build trading posts in the Connecticut River valley, to offset their loss of the Dutch trade and to be their ally against possible Dutch aggression; for the English to facilitate a peace and reconciliation between the Pequots and the Narragansetts, with whom they had been in conflict since the murders of 1632. The Pequots were also aware of the growing strength of the Narragansetts, who had since acquired the local monopoly in the Dutch wampum trade.

The Massachusetts Bay government, under the leadership of Governor John Winthrop, Sr., wrote up a treaty, in which they agreed to the Pequot's simple requests; to establish trade with them in the Connecticut valley, and to broker peace for them with the Narragansetts. In return, the Bay government made some demands, to which they would add others, later. First, and most importantly to the English, they demanded a tribute to be paid to them by the Pequots of two bushels of wampum. That amount was la-
ter, unilaterally, changed by the English to be 400 fathoms, which they called an "indemnity", which, in this case, seems to mean "extortion". In addition to that, the English also demanded forty beaver and thirty otter skins. Later on that year, long after the treaty had been signed and ratified, the English again unilaterally added to that treaty the demand that the Pequots turn over to the Massachusetts authorities the men who had killed the pirate and kidnapper, John Stone. When the Pequots heard that this demand had been added, they protested that the men in question were not Pequots, but Niantics, and therefore not subject to Pequot authority. Being an Indian tributary tribe did not mean being in complete subordination to the authority of the dominant tribe.

If measured by the monetary standards that were later set by the Dutch and English for wampum money, in 1637, 400 fathoms was quite a large amount of money. It was equal to between 180 and 200 English pounds. When combined with the beaver and otter hides, computed at the market price for such hides at that time, the entire tribute amount comes to about 250 pounds sterling. Translated into its present-day American dollar value, it comes out to about $150,000. The total amount of English taxes levied on the colony for the year of 1634, was 600 pounds. So, the tribute was nearly half of the colony's tax bill.

After the ratification of that treaty, and its subsequent, unilaterally added amendments, the Pequots position of local dominance in the trade began to gradually subside. But they did not suffer alone. A "domino effect" occurred as the Pequots began
to demand more wampum and shells from their tributary tribes on Long Island and in the Connecticut River valley so that they could pay the heavy tribute (or "indemnity") that the English now required of them.

The Peguot War and the Making of a European Currency

A violent incident occurred in 1636 on Block Island, that was used a year later by the English as one of their excuses to declare war on the Pequots. Block Island is located south/southwest of Narragansett Bay, and was inhabited by a band of Niantic Indians who were sometimes tributaries to the Pequots and sometimes to the Narragansetts. It is also possible that at times they were tributaries to both tribes simultaneously. A man that the Bay Colony sent to Connecticut to conduct trade and settlement in the area, Captain John Oldham, was killed by some Narragansetts, while on an exploration of the island. No Pequots were involved in the incident, but they still got the blame. The reason for that was, the English were looking for a reason to declare war on the Pequots, and remove them from being what they considered to be the last obstacle to total English domination of the wampum/commodity trade in the Connecticut and Rhode Island region. Unlike the pirate, John Stone, John Oldham was one of the pillars of the Massachusetts Bay community, making his killing an even more serious offense in their eyes. However, when the English eventually, in full, righteous indignation, cried out against the Pequots for justice, "Captain" Stone was painted to be nearly as virtuous a citizen as Captain Oldham. 41

In the mid-1630s both the Dutch and the English were
profiting more than ever from their trade in Indian wampum. The idea of making wampum a legal currency was making an increasing amount of sense to them. Wampum was lightweight, easily transportable, and readily available from a bountiful natural resource. As shown by the Massachusetts Bay/Pequot Treaty of 1634, if wampum were made into a legal currency it could easily be acquired in large quantities by the colonial governments through the imposing of tributes, penalties, and fines on Indians (as well as on non-Indian lawbreakers), all payable in wampumpeag. Of course that would be an easier, and much less expensive way to accumulate stores of wampum than trading European manufactured goods for it. Several of the colonial government officials were also merchants and/or shipowners, who profited considerably from the wampum trade triangle, such as John Winthrop and John Winthrop Jr. of Massachusetts Bay, and Edward Winslow of Plymouth Plantation. Lynn Ceci calls this new, easier means of acquiring wampum a "more advantageous English trade triangle." This newer means of acquiring wampum for use in the fur trade actually can be traced back to 1622, and the kidnapping of the Pequot sachem for a large wampum ransom. The above-mentioned techniques for acquiring wampum were not much different than that. If wampum could become a legal means of satisfying all debts, and it could simply be acquired through brute force, or the force of an authorized institution, like a colonial government, then making it legal tender was an inevitable course of action.

When wampum finally was made legal, just a few months before
the outbreak of the Pequot war, in 1637, standards of valuation were established, in New England, as well as New Netherlands that gave twice as much value to the darker, more colorful, quahog beads than to the white wampum beads. The reason for such a difference in value was that the quahog shells, being a much denser, harder material than periwinkle or whelks, required very careful and skillful drilling, which made those beads much more difficult to produce. The values fluctuated somewhat over the next 25 years, but, at the time of legalization the rate of exchange stood as follows:

Dutch: 8 white beads = one styver
4 dark beads = one styver

English: 6 white beads = one penny
3 dark beads = one penny

In 1635, a fathom (about 260-280 beads) of white beads was worth about 10 shillings, or a half a pound. Two years later, at time of legalization, the value of a fathom had gone down to 5 shillings. The white beads were used for money more often than the dark beads, especially in New Netherlands, where quahog shells were less plentiful. There was a great demand among the Iroquois for the dark beads, since they were necessary for making pictographic, ceremonial belts. Other tribes made belts as well, and the quahog beads (suckauhock) were more popular for decorating clothing, for jewelry, and for other ornaments.

The English were not very comfortable with the idea of having a wealthy, powerful, occasionally aggressive tribe of Indians (usually called "savages" by the writers of that time) in their midst. As previously illustrated by the example of the Weston
colony in 1623, as well as the dependence of the Pilgrims upon the Wampanoags during their early years of colonization, the idea of "savages" controlling the New England money supply was probably just as repulsive to them as having to depend on Indians for food and other resources was. As the English population of Connecticut rapidly grew, between 1634 and 1637, the Pequots traditional homeland became closer to the geographic center of New England, rather than out on the frontier, as they had been previously. The most direct, legal method available to the English for ridding themselves of this perceived threat and menace was to declare war on them, militarily destroy them, and then, as a sort of bonus, confiscate all of their wampum through fines and/or tribute. That, in a summary view, was the real purpose of the English declaration of war against the Pequots. The English wanted to live in a world where the Pequots did not exist, which is evident from a particular clause in the Treaty of Hartford, which concluded the war, and which shall be described later.

To justify their declaration of war, the English accused the Pequots of the murders of John Stone and John Oldham, of failing to pay the tribute that had been added on to their treaty of 1634, and of raiding their frontier settlements in Connecticut. The Pequots actually did raid a settlement at Wethersfield, killing nine people, in retaliation for what they perceived to be serious mistreatment of one of their sachems by the people there. It was the raid at Wethersfield that the Connecticut colonists considered to be the "last straw", three of the dead being women (the Pequots were not the first to kill women in a
raid or battle), therefore, they declared war themselves, without waiting for authorization from Massachusetts Bay. 46

Another new experience that the wampum trade brought to the Native Americans was learning how different it was to make an alliance with the English, compared to the old intertribal alliances that were sealed with wampum in sacred ceremonies. The sachems of the tribes who were the Pequots' strongest Indian competitors in the wampum trade triangle, Uncas, of the Mohegans, and Miantonomo of the Narragansetts, allied themselves with the English against the Pequots. Their motives were a combination of revenge, and ambition: there were still great possibilities for profit in the trade triangle, even under English domination, or so they thought. Miantonomo offered the English 40 fathoms of wampum, as a pledge of loyalty and alliance (an example of the old, ceremonial method of forming alliances still in tact), which, of course, they accepted. Uncas, when offering his services and having their value questioned by a Connecticut colonial official, shot and killed four Pequots who happened to be passing by the place where they were standing, to prove both the sincerity and worthiness of his offer. Uncas later allied himself with Massachusetts Bay against the Narragansetts in 1643, refused to help Metacom ("King Phillip") in 1675, and was considered by the English to be a "good Indian".

But what was Uncas' reward? In his very old age, in 1705, Uncas got someone to petition the queen of England on his behalf, requesting her to have the colony of Connecticut set aside a little land for him and his people, from what little was left of
"Indian Country". A counter-petition was sent to the queen by a certain Henry Ashhurst Bart, "...on behalf of the colony of Connecticut..", claiming that the whole territory of Connecticut belonged to the queen, "...by right of conquest..". To Uncas' appeal that he receive consideration in recognition of his aid to the English during the Pequot War, Bart answers that the only help that Uncas had provided them during the war was as"...a pilot to steere their vessells upon the waters in those parts..", which, of course, was not true. Apparently, Uncas' petition was never granted. 47

A wide variety of accounts of the Pequot War of 1637 are already in existence, often contradicting each other, and varying in quality. It is not my purpose here to recount the entire war, but, instead, only those aspects of it that might shed a little light on the nature and impact of the wampum trade, and on the resulting cultural changes for the native peoples involved. That being the case, the remainder of this account of the war will describe just a few examples of incidents that illuminate such impacts.

The massacre at the Pequot coastal village of Mystic Fort has been often written about, especially since the mid-1970's, after the publication of Jenning's exhaustive account. But none that I know of have raised the issue of whether or not Mystic was one of the Pequots' wampum production sites, or possibly also a wampum storage site. It was the closest Pequot village to the ocean. The commander of the brutal attack, Captain John Mason, in his own account of the Pequot War, says, concerning their plans for the
Mystic Massacre, "We had formerly concluded to destroy them with the Sword and save the Plunder." But during the actual attack, Mason decided that they, "...must burn them...". Mason gives no explanation why. The wampum-related questions that arise here are; what did they hope to plunder, and why did they change their minds? It would be interesting to learn what archeologists have dug up at that site, and whether any evidence points to a wampum-related hypothesis.

What the Narragansetts learned about the English while accompanying them during that horrible massacre, probably became an often-told part of their oral history. Mason wrote that after it was over, some of the shocked Narragansetts said to him, concerning the English manner of "fighting", "It is naught (root word of 'naughty'), it is naught, because it is too furious and slays too many men." What they had seen, and participated in, was unlike anything they had ever seen or heard of before. The attack was carried out before dawn, while the people in the village were sleeping in their beds. The warriors were away from the village at the time, pursuing other English in the war, which the Narragansetts knew of before-hand, and told Capt. Mason. Having never fought in a war with the English as allies before, the Narragansetts had no idea what horror their information would lead to. Perhaps they thought that they were just there for the plunder, and maybe also to take some women captive. Most of the Narragansetts who understood Mason's plans left in disgust before the attack. Out of the 400 warriors who were originally with the group, two or three hundred left. The Indians who remained were
told to "...stand aside and watch the English fight." 48

They made two concentric circles around the circular village fence, with the English in the inner circle, and the Narragansetts in the outer circle. Some Englishmen then went into the wigwams, grabbed burning sticks out of their firepits, and set their homes ablaze. The soldiers in the inner circle were told to shoot any one who escapes and runs out of the village. The two English who were killed in the incident, were possibly shot by their own men. Nathaniel Morton wrote that the Pequots could not shoot back because, "(the fires) burnt their Bow-strings and made them unserviceable." The Narragansetts were told to only shoot if anyone got past the English. It is estimated that 400 to 700 women, children and elderly or infirm Pequots were killed there.

The treaty made up by the Connecticut colonists after the end of the war (Treaty of Hartford, 1638) declared that the Pequot nation no longer existed, and that no Indians may call themselves by the name of Pequot any longer. About 2/3 of the Pequot tribe (2,000 people) survived the war, and then were removed from their homeland to be taken in by the Mohegans and Narragansetts, in some cases as slaves. Some Pequots were sold into slavery in the West Indies, and some became indentured servants or slaves to the English colonists. The Mohegans and Narragansetts who took Pequots into their tribes were ordered to pay tributes in wampum to the colony, yearly, for the privilege of keeping them. With the Pequots now out of the way, land in the Connecticut River valley was much easier for the English to take.

In 1642, Miantonomo was having serious doubts about whether
maintaining an alliance with the Massachusetts Bay English could produce enough benefit to the Indian people to make the stresses caused by the English presence worth enduring. After eight years of ever-increasing English incursion and settlement in Connecticut and his native Rhode Island, and after witnessing the Pequot annihilation, and subsequent harsh treatment by the English of their Indian allies, Miantonomo contemplated taking drastic action against the English to protect his people from potential disaster. Besides the above complaints, economic difficulties were beginning to increase for the Indians, due to the diminishing natural resource supplies and the growing demand for wampum. By the early 1640s, the amount of time that the Narragansetts, and other tribes whose territories included the shores around the Long Island Sound, were being pressured to spend making wampum beads was taking them away from their normal subsistence activities and forcing them to become more dependent on trade. Although some Pequot "slaves" had been added to the Narragansett labor force, the English and Dutch hunger for more wampum seemed to be insatiable. In the words of Lynn Ceci, the wampum-producing tribes of that area had become "...laborers who could never quite satisfy their creditors." 49

The following statements, attributed to Miantonomo, were probably not made in the presence of Englishmen, but were reported to a Connecticut colonist, Lieut. Lion Gardener, allegedly by Uncas, who had been in constant conflict with Miantonomo and the Narragansetts, and frequently tattled to the English about them:

You know our fathers had plenty of deer and skins, our
plains were full of deer, as also our woods, and of tur-
kies, and our coves full of fish and fowl. But these En-
glish having gotten our land, they with scythes cut down
the grass, and with axes fell the trees; their cows and
horses eat the grass, and their hogs spoil our clam banks,
and we shall all be starved. 50

Miantonomo's answer to the question of what to do about it fol-
lowed. He called for a united, pan-Indian, decisive military ac-
tion against the English:

...for so, are we all Indians as the English are
(one people), and say brother one to another; so must
we be one as they are, otherwise we shall be all
gone shortly. 51

Then he proposed that they ambush the colonists, "...and kill men,
women, and children, but no cows." The reason for sparing the
cows was so that they could have some meat, while they waited for
the deer population to recover. 52

The appalling circumstances surrounding Miantonomo's death,
in 1643, provide us with another illustration of the changing at-
titude towards the meaning of wampum in the lives of New England
Algonquians. During one of the on again-off again skirmishes be-
tween the Narragansetts and the Mohegans, which were rooted in
competition for advantage in the wampum trade, Miantonomo was
captured by Uncas and his men. The Narragansetts sent 40 English
pounds worth of wampum (about 160 fathoms) to ransom their sachem
back, which was a normal and very adequate amount of wampum for
that purpose. Uncas accepted the wampum, which, in the old tradi-
tion, would have meant that an agreement had been reached, the
prisoner would be returned, and they would live in peace again.
But, instead of returning Miantonomo to his people, Uncas turned
him over to the English, apparently hoping to please the English,
and gain some sort of favor with them. The newly-formed United Colonies of New England, which excluded only the "disorderly" colonies of outcasts, Rhode Island and Providence Plantation, put Miantonomo's fate at the top of the agenda for their first official meeting. They considered the matter carefully, and decided that, although they had no proof that Miantonomo had committed a crime, that he should not be allowed to live. They had heard a rumor of his plans to organize a unified Indian resistance, and they resented a recent sale of some land in Rhode Island that he had made to one of the enemies of Massachusetts Bay, Samuel Gorton. Since they had no legal cause to execute Miantonomo (he had not been charged or tried), they requested that Uncas take him to a place on the frontier, outside of the jurisdiction of the United Colonies, and "..take away the life of Myantenomo...according to justice and prudence." 53 The United commissioners also sent English observers to make sure the execution was carried out, and added to their instructions, "..meddle not with the head or body at all.", since this would not be an appropriate time to engage in the English custom of displaying the severed heads of important vanquished enemies.54

In the year after Miantonomo's murder, 1644, the Narragansetts sought justice and protection from the exploits of the United Colonies by a method that had not been tried by any other Indian tribe, up to this point; they appealed directly to the king of England, Charles I, through a formal, written "Act of Submission". An impressive legal document, the Act: expressed their loyalty to the throne of England; their sovereignty as
nations "from time out of mind"; how they refused to submit to any authority besides the king; claimed status as nations equal to the colonies; and requested the king's protection from "...some of His Majestie's pretended subjects" (implying the colonists, of course). If the king had not had some very serious troubles of his own to deal with at that time, the Narragansetts might have received some help. 55

Upon hearing about this "Act of Submission", the United Colonies were outraged and infuriated that the Indians would "go over their heads", and, even worse, proclaim their sovereignty and independence from any authority of the colonies. The colonies quickly declared war on the Narragansetts, accusing them of insubordination, and several false charges, as well. Anticipating the probability that the United Colonies would employ Uncas as an ally, and if possible, treat them even more ruthlessly than they had treated the Pequots, the Narragansetts surrendered without a shot being fired.56

Although by this time, 1644, the acquisition of land was becoming more important to the rapidly expanding English colonies than the acquisition of wampum, the terms of the treaty which followed the Narragansett's surrender reveal that the wampum trade was still a vital issue. The first article of the treaty calls for a fine of two thousand fathoms of wampum, to be paid in four installments. The Narragansetts, along with one of their tributary tribes, the Niantics, were also asked: to maintain peaceful relations with Uncas and all of their neighbors, both Indian and English; to come to Boston soon for a trial before the
commissioners, to "...give a full hearing of both parties...concerning allegations and proofs..." about the previous hostilities with the Mohegans; and to send them the sons of four sachems or sagamores (who are all named in the treaty) to be kept by the English as "hostages", until the full 2,000 fathoms of wampum were paid in full! The terms of this treaty brought the Narragansetts into subjection, and prevented them from being any threat to the colonies for the next 30 years. The amount of wampum that they were now forced to produce, or procure, or both, if they ever wanted to see their children again, placed them in a position of indentured servitude, if not slavery. This involuntary servitude was not only an economic hardship upon the native people of New England. It also diminished the effective sovereignty of the tribal nations, by transforming them into something more like colonized subject nations.

By way of explaining further the English colonists motivation for continuing to seek maximum quantities of wampum, it should be noted that the coin shortage had actually worsened by the 1640's. As evidence of that fact, historian William Weeden noted that from examinations of colonial graves and burial records of the 1640's and early '50's it was revealed that an increased number of colonists were buried with wampum, rather than the traditional coins during those years. Since wampum was a more common form of currency during those years, it is quite understandable how such a situation increased the temptation for the English to acquire "free money" by assessing fines on Indians for every imaginable type of offense, from breaking the Sabbath, to practicing their
own Indian religious beliefs, or failing to pay a previous fine on time. 58

Lynn Ceci directs our attention to the fact that all of those little payments in wampum, by Indians, for various petty crimes, as listed in colonial court records, add up fast. She states that:

..the records do indicate that payments between 1634 and 1664 to English colonists amounted conservatively to over 21,000 fathoms of wampum—almost 7 million beads. This total means that beads worth about 5,000 pounds in English currency entered colonial coffers during this period, more if double-valued purple beads were included. 59

Since most merchants in Europe who did business with colonists in America accepted wampum as payment from them, a large part of the indebtedness incurred in the process of creating the colonies, was paid off with wampum. So, much of the Indian labor that went into producing the wampum was paying for what made it possible for them to become indentured wampum-makers in the first place.

Not surprisingly, some Indians found shortcuts in the wampum-producing process. When it was still possible to trade wampum by the bushel, back in the 1630's, some Indians would trade or sell beads that had not been drilled (suckauhock, usually). That is why merchants began to require that wampum be put on strings before it could be traded, thus the common measurement in fathoms and the popularity of the term "wampumpeag(k)(e)". But that widely accepted rule was never codified, as far as I have been able to determine. Another old Indian trick was to dye white beads blue or purple to double their value. That is probably why, in the Narragansett Treaty of 1645, they specifically ask for "good
white wampum", and will only accept up to 1/3 of the payment to be in "black wampumpeage". It was not until the late 1640's that "quality control laws" began to pop up with increasing frequency. A sample of such a law follows:

It is ordered, that if the Indians shall offer to putt away upon exchange or barter, their false peag for good, and warrant it so to be, and it be found otherwise, it shall be confiscated to the Public Treasury.

The Decline and Fall of the Wampum Trade Triangle

In the late 1650's the supply of European silver and gold coins began to rise in the colonies, due largely to increasing trade from the Caribbean Islands, including trade in African slaves. Newport, Rhode Island became one of the biggest ports for that trade, towards the end of the 17th century. Also, a new type of currency, the "Pine-Tree" Shilling began to be minted in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1652 until 1682. This silver coin was also called the "Boston Shilling" and the "Bay Shilling", and it was also made into three-penny and six-penny denominations.

Another important economic development of that decade that contributed to the declining value of wampum was the increasing prosperity of colonial agriculture. The Pilgrims and Puritans had come a long way from the starvation days of the 1620's, having put the knowledge that they had received from the Wampanoags and Massachusets concerning the growing of corn, beans and squash to good use. Corn, in particular, had become a profitable commercial crop for them. Animal husbandry, especially cattle raising, had also become a prosperous enterprise in New England by then.

The combined effect of the increasing supply of European cur-
rency, the minting of the Pine-Tree Shilling, the prosperity of colonial agriculture, plus a decline in the availability of beavers, on the Indian wampum trade was, basically, to make it no longer as vital to the colonial economy, except in the frontier regions, such as Maine, western New Netherlands, and the Susquehannock/Delaware region. Without the wampum trade, New England whites found the Indians to be no longer useful to them, in this respect, and treated them accordingly. When the acquiring of land became the primary aim of the colonists, Indians were generally only needed to sign land deeds. Thus, the stage was already being set for "King Philip's War", of 1675-6.

The colonial laws of the late 1650's reveal a rapid drop in the value of wampum to the penny. In Rhode Island, in 1658, white beads went down to 8 beads per penny, from six beads per penny the previous year. By 1662 wampum was no longer legal tender in Rhode Island, or the United Colonies of New England. The Dutch still had a mild coin shortage, so it stayed legal there until after the English took New Netherlands, in 1664, and turned it into New York. 64

As of September 5, 1661, the United Colonies stock of wampum amounted to 796 fathoms, divided among them as follows: Massachusetts, 464 fathoms; Connecticut, 147 fathoms; Plymouth, 105 fathoms; and New Haven, 80 fathoms. Even though it was no longer officially legal tender, people still occasionally traded with each other in wampum well into the 18th century. Many colonial families kept a little supply of wampum beads stored away in a chest or jewelry box, "just in case" European coins became scarce
The ceremonial use of wampum never completely disappeared among the Indians. It has always been a strong tradition among the various Iroquois tribes, especially as a mnemonic device for education and cultural preservation. Many of the Algonquians of the Abnaki Confederation were still using wampum in marriage proposal ceremonies in the 1890's, with such use by the Passamaquoddys recorded as late as 1919. There has also been a revival of use of wampum among all of the remaining tribes of New England and New York, as part of the general Indian cultural revival that has occurred over the last 25 years or so, especially for personal adornment.


(3) Slotkin and Schmitt, pp.224, 225. Burggraf, pp.54,55


(6) Ceci, Lynn The Effect of European Contact and Trade on the Settlement Pattern of Indians in Coastal New York, 1524-1665, 1990, New York, Garland Press, pp.161-171. Ceci provides some evidence for possible earlier contact on the lower Hudson, between 1595 and 1608, but it is somewhat circumstantial. The voyage of Hudson up the river in 1609 is the earliest well-documented contact and trade at that location.

(8) Juet, pg.23

(9) Juet, pg.24

(10) The Native American traditional curiosity about visiting strangers, or new residents in the tribal community, is generally manifested in a manner somewhat different from the normal European or Euro-American approach. Rather than asking a series of probing, pointed or veiled questions - the Euro conversational method - Indian people tend to observe the newcomers, very closely, over a long period of time. Also, Indians test the character of newcomers by teasing them, sometimes even ridiculing them (although not in a mean spirit - more in jest), and then observing carefully the newcomer's response.


12) After Hudson returned to Europe, he claimed that his real mission was to find sources of furs - an after-the-fact statement apparently designed to make the adventure look like more of a success. Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg.53

(13) Jameson, pp.3-5,13-15. Hudson's crew was composed of about 20 sailors. Most of them were Dutch, the rest were English.

14) Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry pp.54-55. According to Ceci, earlier interpreters of the Block map did not understand the notations ("X"-marks) to be indicators of wampum production sites. Since the Xs are drawn slightly offshore, they assumed that they were indicators of offshore hazards, such as large rocks or shoals. Says Ceci, "Comparison of the X locations against modern charts for the same offshore areas (U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Geological Survey) does not support earlier interpretations. If Block meant the X to show dangerous rocks or shoals, he would have had to mark hundreds of such symbols the length of the New Netherland coast." There are 14 such Xs on the map, corresponding roughly to the number of wampum-producing tribes in the region and their probable locations at that time.


16) Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg.56.

17) Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg.58 It is from this passage that I first heard the term "trade triangle" applied to a description of the wampum trade. Although Ceci does not actually use the phrase, "wampum trade triangle", the concept is clearly described.
Van Wassenaer, pg. 86. The Dutch usually called the Pequots "Sequins". "Sickenanes" is an unusual spelling, but creative spelling was the norm in those days. "Zeewan" is, of course, synonymous with "sewan", the Dutch word for wampum.

de Vries, David Pietersz. "From the 'Korte Historiael Ende Journaels Aenteyckeninge'", in Jameson, pg. 187, 187n., 188. Van Wassenaer, pg. 85. Ceci, pg. 231n. Ceci says here that, "Eelkens (Elekes) had also been involved with the ransom of Indians for 'beads' earlier in 1620 near Long Island." She gives no reference for that statement.

Salisbury, pg. 149. Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg. 59.

For a more thorough treatment on the Native American contribution to the world economy, from 1492 to the present, see; Weatherford, Jack Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World New York, Fawcett Columbine, 1988.

Bradford, pg. 203.

de Rasieres, Isaack "Letter of Isaack de Rasieres to Samuel Blommaert, 1628(?)") in Jameson, pg. 110.


A note concerning the amount of wampum sold to the Pilgrims, 50 fathoms, and its price, 50 pounds. Eleven years later, after the Pequot War and the making of wampum into legal tender, a fathom of wampum was worth about ten shillings, or half of a pound—about half the price that the Pilgrims paid Herman, pg. 25


Jennings, pg. 187.


Morton, Thomas New English Canaan London, 1632, pg. 29

Morton, Thomas pp. 29, 106.

in general, concerning the planting of our English people in other Countries. London 1624 (no page numbers). Cronon, pp. 94, 95.

(33) Williams, pg. 154  Molloy, pg. 27

(34) Morton, Nathaniel pg. 41

(35) Morton, pg. 28  Such statements can also be found in Bradford and countless others.

(36) Hauptman, Laurence M. "The Pequot War and Its Legacies", in Hauptman and Wherry, pg. 71; Starna, William A. "Pequots in the Early 17th Century", in Hauptman and Wherry, pp. 45, 46; Morton, Nathaniel, pg. 92

(37) Jennings, pp. 188, 189

(38) Jennings, pp. 188-191; Vaughn, pp. 125, 126; Morton, Nathaniel, pg. 96.

(39) Vaughn, pg. 125

(40) Jennings, pp. 192, 193, 193n.

(41) Hubbard, William A Narrative of the Troubles with the Indians in New England. 1607 to 1677...etc." Boston, John Foster, 1677, pp. 4, 5; Jennings, pp. 206-209; Hauptman, pg. 72.

(42) Jennings, pp. 188, 189, 191, 192

(43) Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg. 61

(44) Molloy, pg. 27

(45) Jennings, pg. 192n.

(46) Jennings, pp. 215-218, and footnotes.

(47) Vaughn, pg. 132; Jennings, pg. 218; Bart, Henry Ashhurst "An Appeal made by Henry Ashhurst Bart on behalf of the colony of Connecticut to the Queen", in Petitions regarding Mohegan Indian land sales in Connecticut, 1705-06", Boston, the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (unpublished); Morton, Nathaniel, pg. 99.

(48) Mason, John A Brief History of the Pequot War 1736, March of America Facsimile Series, No. 23, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1966, pp. 7, 8 Underhill, John Newes from America... London, 1638 pp. 42, 43

(50) "Leift Lion Gardener His Relation of the Pequot Warres" Massachusetts Historical Society Collections, 3rd Series, vol.3 1833, pp.154-5, found in Cronon, pp.162-3; and Calloway, pp.79-80. Calloway informs us that the speech was made to a group of Montauk Indians, of Long Island. The Montauks had formerly been tributaries of the Pequots, before the war, and at this time may have been under the Narragansettts protection.

(51) Ibid.

(52) Ibid.


(54) Ibid.

(55) Johnson, pg.162; Calloway, pp.80-82; Jennings, pp.272-276.

(56) Ibid.

(57) Johnson, pp.162-164.

(58) Weeden, William, pg.41.

(59) Ceci, in Hauptman and Wherry, pg.61

(60) Bradford, pg.437 (in the Samuel E. Morrison edition); Weeden, William, pp.41,42; Bowen, Richard L. Rhode Island Colonial Money and its Counterfeiting, 1647-1726 1942, pg.4

(61) Bartlett, John Russell, ed. Records of the Colony of Rhode Island, vol.1, 1636-1663 Providence, 1856, pg.155,#33 This law was passed in 1647.


(64) Weeden, Wm., pg.44; Bartlett, pg.474; Molloy, pg.37

(65) Bowen, pg.4; Molloy, pp.37,38; Weeden, pg.44

(66) Speck, pp.27,49
III. Impact of the Trade: cultural change and adaptation

While it is certain that some cultural changes and adaptations occurred among the native peoples of New England and New Netherlands, during the approximately fifty years (1614-1664) in which the wampum trade triangle was going on, it is sometimes difficult to tell which changes were due to this trade in particular. Some effects of the trade are obvious, such as the change in frequency of use as a trade item in proportion to the frequency of its other uses, while other effects can be attributed to a wide variety of causes. As is usually the case when seeking out the causes and nature of social and cultural change, in any society, more questions may be raised here than answered.

An important question, to ask initially concerning this topic is, how much cultural change actually occurred during those fifty years? Cultural traditions that are many thousands of years old, as are the cultures of the Native Americans, do not change very much over a period of only fifty years, unless they are confronted and challenged by some very powerful forces. Other factors that help to determine the speed and degree of cultural changes are found within the culture itself, such as; how successful their traditions have been in meeting the wide range of human needs; how effectively they transmit their values and technical knowledge from one generation to the next (in other words, the effectiveness of their educational system); how harmoniously they interact with their natural environment, and
protect their natural resource base; and the effectiveness of their means for resolving interpersonal conflicts that may arise from the exercise of personal liberty and individual initiative (this would involve the society's political, legal, and religious systems). Of course other influential factors could be added to that list, but those are some of the most basic to determining the success and durability of any society or culture. Were the native cultures of the New England/New Netherlands region successful enough, strong enough, or durable enough in all these respects to go through the fifty year period while being confronted and challenged by the powerful forces described in the previous chapter, and come out of it with their traditions, values and cultural essence still in tact? A comparative look at the historical evidence found in descriptions of these Native American people and their cultures, as they appeared before and after the wampum trade era, might help to provide some answers to that question.

Since a detailed description of Indian culture, values, and economic life before Contact and the wampum trade was offered in the first chapter, at this point we need to look at the post-wampum trade evidence. In A Description of the New World..., written by an Englishman named George Gardyner, in 1651, which was towards the end of the wampum trade era, Gardyner claims that the Indians on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (Wampanoags), were still subsisting through hunting and fishing. During the next two centuries, the Wampanoags were still well-known for their fishing and whaling skill, and they were, in part, the
inspiration for Herman Melville's popular 19th-century novel, *Moby Dick*. Gardyner also describes all Indian religion as being what he perceived to be "Devil worship". No particular tribes are named, but his observations all seem to refer to Algonquians, judging by the names and locations of individuals. When taken into consideration along with other late-17th century descriptions of indigenous religious beliefs and practices, and other data described below, it seems that, for a large number of Indians, their traditional religious beliefs were still intact.¹

As a help in measuring the impact of the wampum trade years on native religious practices, we must ask, "How large was the number of Indians who still held or practiced their traditional beliefs in the 1650's and '60's, compared to the number of Indians who had been converted to Christianity by that time? A study done by Henry Bowden and James Ronda on the impact of Christian evangelizing of Indians in the 17th century, reveals that it was not as widespread as most people seem to think. Most Puritans were not even sure if it was possible for Indians to be converted. Part of the reason for that was that Puritanism was a very difficult religion even for an English person to convert to, since the preliminaries to being accepted into that church were extremely rigorous. Besides that, most Puritans were not at all interested in having any Indians attend their churches, and only about twenty Puritan ministers evangelized the Indians, before the revival movement that began in 1742. When Indians were converted to Christianity in Massachusetts, between 1650 and 1742, they were almost always segregated onto village-type
reservations, called "praying towns". In 1674, the peak year of native conversions in the 17th century, there were 14 such "praying towns" in Massachusetts and Plymouth, inhabited exclusively by Indian converts and their families.  

There were usually two ministers who traveled to all of the towns on a circuit, John Eliot and a series of his assistants, or associates. The bulk of the work, by far, was done by Eliot. During the entire 17th century, less than 10% of the Indians in the entire colonies of Massachusetts and Plymouth were converted. In addition to that fact, many of the "conversions" were merely social or survival-related gestures, and Indians would often simply add only the elements of Christianity that appealed to them onto the traditional beliefs that they already had. For example, Cutshamekin, a "converted" Massachuset sachem, stated that he only became a Christian in order to acquire a position of authority in the praying town, and thereby regain some of the honor he had lost through cultural disruption.  

Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Netherlands had no ministers who were as fervently evangelical towards their Indian populations as John Eliot was in Massachusetts and Plymouth. The overwhelming majority of Indian conversions that occurred there, were through his ministry among the Massachuset tribe. Assuming then, that the number of Indian conversions that occurred in the above-named other colonies was probably less, and certainly no more than those in Massachusetts and Plymouth, we could safely say then that only about 6 to 8% of the Indians were converted by 1674. Since the likelihood of any of the Indians being atheists
would be miniscule, considering their long-standing tradition of belief in the supernatural spirit world, even though their sixty years of suffering through the European invasion may have produced some doubts, I would conclude that at least 90% of the native peoples of New England and New Netherlands still held on to their indigenous spiritual and religious beliefs in 1674, ten years after the end of European participation in the wampum trade.

Since religious beliefs usually were the basis for personal and social values in those days, in both Native American and European societies, it would be likely that most of the traditional Indian values were still widely adhered to by most Indians in the region. Those values generally included maintaining stable, peaceful relations with other neighboring tribes. On the other hand, how are we to regard the frequent intertribal strife that occurred, mostly in Connecticut, but also in other places, in the context of intertribal competition in the wampum trade triangle? The Mohawks, a wampum-receiving Iroquoian tribe at the other end of the triangle, were almost constantly engaged in aggressive action against other tribes in their region, in pursuit of limited and diminishing beaver supplies, from the late 1620's through the 60's. The conflicts between the Pequots, Mohegans and Narragansetts were described in chapter II. Clearly, the traditional relationships of mutual respect and reciprocal giving between different tribes were some of the greatest cultural casualties of the wampum/commodity trade. The relative intertribal peace that was the norm before Contact and
the advent of the wampum trade, was based on the fact that it was to the mutual advantage of all tribes that each tribe was allowed to keep and maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment of their traditional homelands. As evident in the archeological record, stable societies, enduring for long periods of time in the same locations were common throughout New England. The stability and peace were based on harmony with a bountiful environment and intertribal cooperation; conscious effort on the part of the tribal peoples to maintain balanced and reciprocal relationships. That peace and balance was lost when Indians began to trade with Europeans for things that they could not find in their home environments, nor could they get those things through trade with other Indians, unless the other Indians had traded with the Europeans first, and were willing to let some of those goods go. Desire for the European goods, followed in many cases by dependence on those goods, brought a spirit of competition between tribes that eventually overcame the spirit of cooperation. As Francis Jennings said, "...competition (became) a greater source of advantage than cooperation." 

Would it make sense, however, that many Indians would utterly put aside their values and beliefs (i.e., reciprocity, respect, cooperation), when in pursuit of economic interests, with the same ease that a European "Christian" merchant or entrepreneur could, while making excuses, such as, "But this is business!", or "I have to compete with people who would do the same thing to me, so I might as well do it to them first"? Indians did not traditionally operate in the mode of thinking that allows a
person to compartmentalize his/her spiritual side of life away from the active, material side. In most native belief systems, the two are inextricably intertwined; spiritual source causes physical action, and physical action can produce a spiritual result. At what point does a person who was raised in such a deeply-held belief system find the ability to make exceptions to the rules, to excuse actions that just do not fit within the belief system? Is it simply a universal human phenomenon, and, given the right (or wrong) set of circumstances, anyone can go there? 5

Perhaps it would be good at this point to leave these larger questions open, and look at some cultural changes that actually did occur. The first impact on Indians of trade with Europeans was the acquisition of new technology, as well as new raw materials for their own technology. Most people in Western societies, when considering this topic assume that the European goods were universally preferred by Indians to the Indian technology for doing the same things. For example, an Indian would prefer a steel knife to an obsidian or antler knife, a gun to a bow and arrow, an iron kettle to baking in the ground or cooking in a hollow stump. However, as mentioned briefly in chapter I, it was not universally so. Not only did Native Americans prefer some of their tools, like the quahog-shell garden hoe, and, in many cases, at first, the bow and arrow, they also nearly universally preferred their own type of clothing to the uncomfortable-looking clothes of the 17th century Europeans (18th and 19th-century too, as far as that goes). According to
Peter Thomas, when Indians possessed European style clothing in the mid-17th century they would usually wear the European garments only when interacting with the European colonists, and then would change to their traditional clothing when back among their own people. 6

Evidence in Connecticut River Valley trader William Pynchon's account books for 1645 to 1650 (towards the end of the peak wampum trade triangle years), shows that even after 20 years of trade with the English, there was no great demand for metal tools by the Indians in that region. Out of 77 items traded to the Indians between April, 1648 and January, 1651, there were 3 knives, 3 hatchets, and 1 hoe. Less than one tenth of the trade items sought by the Indians were metal goods. Instead, the vast majority of items desired were cloth (a raw material) or clothing (especially "blew coats"). 7

When Indians first saw the enormous floating houses that the whites used for boats, they did not abandon their canoes and say "I've gotta have a ship!". Canoes were much more practical for negotiating the waterways of their homeland, and they could travel much further inland than the European ships could. Giovanni da Verrazanno, in his account of his 1524 encounter with the Wampanoags and Narragansetts, describes dugout canoes that could hold 14 or 15 men. 8 Daniel Gookin described dugouts of up to 50 feet in length among the Pequots and Mohegans, that could carry up to 20 people. Archeologist Dean Snow says "..other sources report canoes carrying twice that number." 9

Nevertheless, when European goods were preferred, some vary-
ing degrees of cultural change took place. For example, whenever the traditional antler and sharp stone knives were abandoned in favor of the steel knife, not only did an old traditional craft and its accompanying skills begin to become lost, but, also, some of the quality in inter-generational family relationships was gradually lost. In the old days the elder men would teach their grandsons or nephews how to make and care for these and other tools, and the young men would respect and appreciate them more for helping them in that way. When the need to teach and learn those skills no longer existed, an opportunity for earning respect was lost for the elders. The same would be true when a young woman preferred to use the European iron kettle to learning the very complex techniques for cooking in underground ovens, or when a person preferred, or believed it to be necessary, to switch from the bow and arrow to the firearm. The respect was then transferred to the people who could bring them the desired new goods, including both the Europeans, and the tribal members who were most skilled at procuring those goods from the Europeans. Added respect also went to those native individuals who first mastered the use of the new technology and could teach those skills to other members of the tribe.

Even so, more than one European colonist or explorer was compelled to write about the remarkable amount of respect that young Indians had for their elders. Thomas Morton, writing in 1632, said that, "..the Indians have more respect for their elders than is commonly found among the English.", and he went on to indicate that he hoped the English youths would be ashamed of
that. Not only were European trade goods not universally accepted at first sight, but the idea of the use of wampum as a commodity for trade was not immediately accepted by some Indians, either. After the English received their first wampum from Rasieres, and began to trade it with the tribes to the north of them, it took about two years for the trade to catch on. Neal Salisbury, in *Manitou and Providence*, says that, "The acceptance by Algonquians of wampum as a trade commodity did not occur quickly. They hesitated because up to that point (1627) wampum had only been used by high status individuals... Ordinary tribal members only used wampum for marriage proposals and to pay medicine people." As Bradford said, concerning the Massachusets, and possibly other tribes to the north of them, wampum had previously only been used (as far as he knew) as an ornament for the clothing of high-status, "spetiall" [sic] persons. It could possibly also have been fancy, or ceremonial dress for persons of normal status.

The hesitancy spoken of here, concerning the new use of wampum as a commodity, could very well be indicative of two very important traditional Indian values at work: humility, and respect for the sacredness of all objects, especially objects used in ceremonies. It goes against most Native American traditions for an individual to promote or exalt himself or herself as being above others, or deserving of an honor that the tribe or the leaders had not previously acknowledged or bestowed. To wear wampum in a tribe in which only sachems or people who had earned the right to could wear it, would be disrespectful, and
show a lack of humility. In that case, were Indians who quickly adopted wampum as a commodity lacking in cultural values? Not necessarily so. Since there are a wide variety of particular tribal customs concerning the use of wampum— who can make it, who can wear it, who can handle it, who can read the belts, etc.—wampum protocol depends on which tribe a person belongs to. But protocol there was, and still is. 12

The vast extent and volume of the 17th-century wampum trade probably had some effect on status and gender roles within New England Algonquian societies. Before the new English colonies became involved in the wampum trade, in the late 1620's, the Indians traded corn, beans, squash and other food commodities to them, in exchange for European trade goods, and in hopes of maintaining peaceful relations. Since, in most New England Algonquian tribal societies women had primary responsibility for, and authority over, the garden plots, they most likely attained a higher level of status and respect during those years. After the English began trading wampum to the tribes in their sphere of influence, those status relationships leveled out a bit, since it appears that both sexes were equally involved in making wampum in most tribes. Over time, due to increasing numbers of Indians becoming involved in wampum production, and because of increased access to wampum among Indians at all status levels, there was, perhaps, a general levelling out of access to wealth and status. Thomas theorizes that the elimination of large numbers of high status individuals after epidemics swept through a tribe probably increased the likelihood of the levelling out process occurring,
as individuals would move up socially to fill high status vacancies. However, in tribes that were more hierarchically oriented, who gave greater importance to the position of sachem, and in which sachems and their immediate families monopolized ownership of and the wearing of wampum, as a symbol of their status, such positions could have been strengthened through European participation in the wampum trade.

One of the biggest changes that took place in Algonquian New England and New Netherland tribal cultures, during and after the wampum/commodities trade years, was a change in where they lived. Archeologists would call it a change in "settlement patterns". As described briefly in chapter I, the coastal Algonquians were semi-nomadic or semi-sedentary, living in about three different locations during a year, and repeating the location pattern at the same seasons every year. These seasonal relocations generally followed the various food sources: fish, deer, plants, berries, gardens, etc. After the wampum/fur trade began, the amount of time that a tribe would spend in their summer, beachside location gradually increased, because of the need to spend more time gathering shells, and the need to protect shell-gathering areas from their competitors. By the 1640's some tribes made such locations into permanent, year-round villages.

These relocations and changes in settlement patterns meant considerably more to those original Americans than a move or re-location means to Americans today, since there was a much greater impact on all aspects of their lives, inwardly and outwardly. Not only were these tribal groups being transformed from semi-nomadic
people to sedentary village, or sedentary full-time farming people; their economic systems were being transformed from natural, ecologically-symbiotic, subsistence economies, to something more like European capitalist, market economies. By the 1640's producing wampum and small-scale farming were becoming the primary vocations for northeastern Algonquian people. (This transformation occurred earlier for tribes living in close proximity to English or Dutch settlements than for those who were further away and who had less frequent contact or interaction with European colonists.) Although most of the region's native people still held their traditional beliefs towards nature, for some Indians, their relationship with the earth, was being slowly altered.

Changing physical practices and subsistence activities contributed to the gradual erosion of some Indian cultural values. Instead of thinking of their natural home environments as a symbiotic group of interdependent living entities, each one having an equal right to life, a common life that they all shared, some Indians began to think like the European capitalist merchants: the natural world consisted only of commodities and "discommodities". To the capitalists, commodities were the things in nature that humans could use, as well as sell to others in the market. "Discommodities", a word that was actually used in a few of the early explorer's and merchant/traders reports on the "new world", meant things in nature that were useless, or even a nuisance to humans. In their new, European-styled market economy, which was different from a Native American subsistence/barter
economy, some Indians went from being people who understood and knew how to do many things well—in other words, people with multiple survival skills—to becoming economic "specialists"; people who just do one thing "for a living", meaning that they get paid for it. That one thing which many New England area Indians were doing, fulltime, after about 1640, besides farming, was making wampum. 15

Thus, the impact of the economic change entailed in the increased wampum production was greater than the impact of the technological additions were, because such change was more than just an economic change. To a traditional Native American, in 1640's New England, becoming a full-time wampum maker, an economic specialist, meant losing the part of his/her culture that allowed them to learn a variety of life skills and to do several things well. There was a risk in this new form of "occupation" of losing traditional relationships with the many facets of life that people became intimately acquainted with in the traditional subsistence economy. Eventually, by the turn of the 19th century, many, if not most, of the New England Algonquians earned their primary sustenance as economic specialists; through participating in the Euro-American market economy as skilled and semi-skilled craftspersons and tradepersons.

On the other hand, the new tools and material goods from Europe did not require the Indians to have a completely new world view in order to use them. In fact, none of those objects had to be used in the same way that the English or Dutch used them. Unlike wampum, those new items had no history of sacred,
ceremonial use among the tribes; they had no traditional uses for them at all. They were free to use them any way they saw fit, within the context of their traditional belief systems. If someone wanted to take a wrecked or abandoned European ship and make it into a longhouse, they could probably do that, with no offense to their cultural traditions. If a man wanted to turn a musket into a staff, or a wardance stick, he could do that, without offense to his native culture. Making wampum into a commodity and removing any sacred connection or traditional symbolic meaning from it was a violation of traditional value, by definition. But many Indians were able to keep their traditional symbolic relationships with wampum while engaging in the European-dominated wampum trade triangle at the same time. Adaptations were made, and for some acculturation also occurred, to varying degrees, depending on the spiritual strength of individuals and the strength of their traditions.

Further questions arise: did the innocent act of making wampum beads become converted into a cultural violation, or an instrument of cultural change, by the influence of European trade alone? Or was it because of the personal imbalance experienced by individual Indians that was created by almost exclusively occupying their time with the making of wampum beads, and not taking enough time to attend to the other joys and duties of life? Living a balanced life, in harmony with the rest of our world is a very important traditional Indian spiritual value. The tremendous increase in the demand for wampum that occurred during those 15 to 20 years in which wampum was used as legal money,
pushed many Indians out of that balance. To what extent was the personal imbalance, cultural disruption, and gradual socio-cultural transformation that occurred during and after the peak years of the wampum trade a sign of changing inner values? Or was this labor simply accepted with resignation in the face of the necessity of engaging in certain physical activities for the sake of survival— not only personal survival, but the survival of the tribe— while still holding to their traditional values with all of the tenacity that they could muster?

Although it is certain that most Indians participated willingly in the initial stages of the wampum trade, and seemed generally to benefit from it, at a certain point their participation was mostly imposed upon them against their will, by means of fines, tributes, ransoms, and increasing financial indebtedness to the colonists. The resulting changes in occupation and settlement patterns did not necessarily result in abandonment of tribal cultural values for all of the individual Indians involved, although varying degrees of cultural devaluation were experienced by some. Perhaps, resentment against the colonists, for forcing them into exorbitant wampum production and for the colonists segregationist, supremacist attitudes towards the Native Americans, actually may have helped the native peoples of New England and New Netherlands to cling even more tenaciously to their traditional cultural values.

Ultimately, the answers to these questions must be found within the framework of each individual's tribal background and personal experience. Anyhow, the evidence that some individual
Indians who were deeply involved in the wampum trade consequently took a lesser, or less than traditional view of the value of wampum exists. Uncas was a prime example. Refusing to accept a 160-fathom wampum ransom, and a request that he unite the Mohegans with the Narragansetts against those who should have been their common enemy, Uncas showed that his true allegiance was with the English and, even moreso, with their European capitalist market economy. And, certainly, Uncas was not the only Indian to be so moved.

In light of the facts presented to this point, concerning the impact of the wampum trade on the native cultures of the regions under consideration here, one thing that can be said with certainty is that the effects varied, both in positive and negative ways. Probably, the greatest impact was the transformation of the coastal, wampum-producing tribes from a semi-nomadic, subsistence economic lifestyle to a sedentary or semi-sedentary participation in the European capitalist market economy. Another obvious and widespread impact of the trade was the advent of economic specialization: the change in occupation and manner in which time was spent, due to increasing pressure to produce inordinate amounts of wampum, from 1634 until about 1655. That pressure and coercion was equivalent to a state of indentured servitude, or even slavery, for the coastal Algonquian people who were so affected. Concerning the 90% of the tribal people of New England who had not become Christians by 1674, it is uncertain what percentage of them still retained all or part of their traditional belief systems. The likelihood is that, for
most of those native people, their essential belief systems remained intact.

The inland, Iroquoian people of the upstate New York area, who had participated with the English and the Dutch in greatly increasing the demand for wampum, and the northern Algonquians of the area that later became New Hampshire and Maine, generally experienced more positive effects during the wampum trade since they were wampum-receivers in the trade triangle. Receiving large amounts of wampum meant, for those tribes, that they could strengthen their ceremonial traditions and form new alliances. 16

Many more possible avenues of inquiry concerning this topic remain to be investigated. For example, an interesting question to explore would be, how did the official cessation of the use of wampum as legal money affect the tribes who had been involved in the trade? Did the devaluation of wampum in the minds of the Europeans cause the Indians to also attach less value or importance to it? Or, on the other hand, did the Indians see it as a sort of victory, that wampum would be no longer defiled but, instead, returned to its proper Native American sacred and ceremonial domain? We know that some Algonquians began to make and acquire wampum belts, of the Iroquois style, after the trade had been long under way. Did the southern New England Algonquians assimilate the Iroquoian confederation practices and wampum ceremonies, as the northern, Abenaki Algonquians later did? Did Metacom (King Philip) use wampum in trying to form tribal alliances before the war of 1675-6? All of these questions, and more, could provide worthwhile topics for future studies.
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(3) Ibid.

(4) Waldman, pp.20-22; Jennings, pg.95.


(6) Thomas, pg.183

(7) Ibid., pp.188-190

(8) cited in Snow, pg.?

(9) Ibid.

(10) Morton, Thos., pp.24-5

(11) Salisbury, pg.151

(12) Bradford, pg.203; Salisbury (1982), pg.151

(13) Thomas, pg.181


(15) Salisbury (1982) pg.141

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