



## THE NARRATIVE OF PHINEAS PRATT

In 1662, Pratt presented to the General Court of Massachusetts a narrative entitled “A declaration of the affairs of the English people that first inhabited New England” to support his request for financial assistance. The extraordinary document is Phineas Pratt’s own account of the Wessagusset settlement and its downfall. Following is the text of Pratt’s narrative, taken from the pages of the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 4<sup>th</sup> series, Volume 4, 1858, with regularized spelling and punctuation [there are missing pieces, indicated by ... ]:

### A DECLARATION OF THE AFFAIRS OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE THAT FIRST INHABITED NEW ENGLAND

In the time of spiritual darkness, when the state [ecclesiasti...] Rome ruled and over ruled most of the nations of Europe, it [plea...] to give wisdom to many, kings and people, in breaking that spiritual [yo...]; yet, not withstanding, there arose great strife among such people that are known by the name of Protestants, in many cases concerning the worship of God; but the greatest & strongest number of men commonly prevailed against the smaller and lesser number. At this time the honored Estates of Holland gave more liberty in cases of religion that could be enjoyed in some other places. Upon which divers good Christians removed [the...] dwellings into the Low Countries.

Then one company that dwelt in the city of Leiden, being no well able outwardly to subsist, took counsel & agreed to remove into America, into some port northward of Virginia. The Dutch people offered them divers conditions to supply them with things necessary if they would live under the government of their state, but they refused it. This they did that all men might know the entire love they bore to their king & country; for in them there was never found any lack of lawful obedience. They sent to their friends in England to let them understand what they intended to do. Then divers [fr...] disbursed some monies for the furthering of so good a work.

It is [f...] to be understood that, in the year 1618, there appeared a blazing star over Germany that made the wise men of Europe astonished their [...]

Speedily after, near about that time, these people began to propose removal. They agreed that their strongest & ablest men should go [...] to provide for their wives & children. Then coming in England, they set forward in two ships, but their lesser ship sprung a leak & returned [...] England; the bigger ship arrived at Cape Cod, 1620, it being winter, then called New England but formerly called Canada. They sent forth their boat upon discovery. Their boat being returned to their ship, they removed into the bay of Plymouth & began their [planta...] by the river of Patuxet. Their ship being returned & safely arrived in England, those gentlemen & merchants, that had undertaken to supply them with things necessary, understanding that many of them were sick & some dead, made haste to send a ship with many things necessary; but some indiscreet men, hoping to encourage their friends to come to them, wrote letters concerning the great plenty of fish, fowl and deer, not considering that the wild savages were many times hungry, yet have a better skill to catch such things than English men have. The Adventurers, willing to save their monies, sent

them weakly provided of victuals, as many more after them did the like; and that was the great cause of famine.

At the same time, Mr. Thomas Weston, a merchant of good credit in London, that was then their treasurer, that had disbursed much of his money for the good of New England, sent forth a ship for the settling a plantation in the Massachusetts Bay, but wanting (lacking) a pilot we arrived at Damerill's Cove. The men that belonged to the ship, there fishing, had newly set up a Maypole and were very merry. We made haste to prepare a boat fit for coasting. Then said Mr. Rogers, Master of our ship, 'here are many ships & at Monhegan, but no man that does undertake to be your pilot; for they say that an Indian called Rumhigin undertook to pilot a boat to Plymouth, but they all lost their lives.' Then said Mr. Gibbs, Master's Mate of our ship, 'I will venture my life with them.' At this time of our discovery, we first arrived at Smith's Islands, first so called by Captain Smith, at the time of his discovery of New England, [... afterwards] called Isles of Shoals; from then to Cape Ann [...] so called by Captain Mason; from thence to the Massachusetts Bay. There we continued 4 or 5 days.

Then we perceived, that on the south part of the Bay, were fewest of the Natives of the country dwelling there. We thought best to begin our plantation, but fearing a great company of savages, we being but 10 men, thought it best to see if our friends were living at Plymouth. Then sailing along the coast, not knowing the harbor, they shot off a piece of ordinance, and at our coming ashore, they entertained us with 3 volleys of shot. Their second ship was returned for England before we came to them. We asked them where the rest of our friends were that came in the first ship. They said that God had taken them away by death, & that before their second ship came, they were so distressed with sickness that they, fearing the savages should know it, had set up their sick men with their muskets upon their rests & their backs leaning against trees. At this time, one or two of them went with us in our vessel to the place of fishing to buy victuals. 8 or 9 weeks after this, two of our ships arrived at Plymouth - the lesser of our 3 ships continued in the country with us. Then we made haste to settle our plantation in the Massachusetts Bay - our number being near sixty men. At the same time, there was a great plague among the savages &, as themselves told us, half their people died thereof. The Natives called the place of our plantation Wessagusset. Near unto it is a town of later time called Weymouth.

The savages seemed to be good friends with us while they feared us, but when they saw famine prevail, they began to insult, as appears by the sequel; for one of their Pineses, or chief men, called Pecksuot, employed himself to learn to speak English, observing all things for his bloody ends. He told me he loved English men very well, but he loved me best of all. Then he said, 'you say French men do not love you, but I will tell you what we have done to them. There was a ship broken by a storm. They saved most of their goods & hid it in the ground. We made them tell us where it was. Then we made them our servants. They wept much. When we parted them, we gave them such meat as our dogs eat. One of them had a book he would often read in. We asked him what his book said. He answered, it says, there will a people, like Frenchmen, come into this country and drive you all away, & now we think you are they. We took away their clothes. They lived but a little while. One of them lived longer than the rest, for he had a good master & gave him a wife. He is now dead, but has a son alive. Another ship came into the bay with much goods to truck (trade), then I said to the Sachem, I will tell you how you shall have all for nothing. Bring all our canoes & all our beaver & a great many men, but no bows nor arrows, clubs nor hatchets, but knives under the skins that abut our lines. Throw up much beaver upon their deck; sell it very cheap & when I give the word, thrust your knives in the Frenchmen's bellies. Thus we killed them all. But Monsieur Finch, Master of their ship, being wounded, leaped into the hold. We bid him come up, but he would not. Then we cut their cable & the ship went ashore & lay upon her side & slept there. Finch came up & we killed him. Then our Sachem divided their

goods & fired their ship & made a very great fire.' Some of our company asked him 'how long it was ago since they first see ships?' They said they could not tell, but they had heard men say the first ship that they see, seemed to be a floating island, as they supposed, broken off from the mainland, wrapped together with the roots of trees, with some trees upon it. They went to it with their canoes, but seeing men & hearing guns, they made haste to be gone.

But after this, when they saw famine prevail, Pecksuot said, 'Why do your men & your dogs die?' I said, 'I had corn for a time of need. Then I filled a chest, but not with corn & spread corn on [...him] come opened the cover and when I was sure he had seen it, I put [dow...] as if I would not have him see it.' Then he said 'No Indian [so...] You have much corn & English men die for want.' Then they [h...] intent to make war, they removed some of their houses to [th...] a great swamp near to the pale (palisade) of our plantation. After this [yer...] a morning, I saw a man going into one of their houses, weary with traveling & galled on his feet. Then I said to Mr. Salisbury, our Chirurgeon, surely their Sachem has employed him for some intent to make war upon us. Then I took a bag with gunpowder and put it in my pocket, with the top of the bag hanging out, & went to the house where the man was laid upon a mat. The woman of the house took hold of the bag, saying, what is this so big? I said it is good for savages to eat, and struck her on the arm as hard as I could. Then she said, Matchet powder English men, much matchet. By and by Aberdikes bring much men, much sannups, & kill you & all English men at Wessagusset & Patuxet (Plymouth). The man that lay upon the mats, seeing this, was angry and in a great rage, and the woman seemed to be sore afraid. Then I went out of the house and said to a young man that could best understand their language, go ask the woman, but not in the man's hearing, why the man was angry, & she afraid? Our interpreter, coming to me, said 'these are the words of the woman - the man will [...] Aberdikes what I said & he & all Indians will be angry with me [...] This Pecksuot said, 'I love you.' I said 'I love you.' I said 'I love you as well as you love me.' Then he said, in broken English, 'Me hear you can make the likeness of men & of women, dogs & deer, in wood & stone. Can you make [...]' I said, 'I can see a knife in your hand, with an ill-favored face upon the haft.' Then he gave it into my hand to see his workmanship & said, 'This knife cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot speak, but by & by it can eat. I have another knife at home with a face upon the haft as like a man as this is like a woman. That knife cannot see, it cannot hear, it cannot speak, but It can eat. It has killed much, Frenchmen, & by & by this knife & that knife shall marry & you shall be there [...] knife at home he had kept for a monument, from the time they had killed Monsieur Finch;' but as the word went out of his mouth, I had a good will to thrust it in his belly. He said, 'I see you are much angry.' I said, 'Guns are longer than knives.'

Some time after this their Sachem came suddenly upon us with a great number of armed men; but their spies seeing us in readiness, he & some of his chief men turned into one of their houses a quarter of an hour. Then we met them outside the pale of our plantation & brought them in. Then said I to a young man that could best speak their language, 'Ask Pecksuot why they come thus armed.' He answered, 'Our Sachem is angry with you.' I said, 'Tell him if he be angry with us, we be angry with him.' Then said their Sachem, 'English men, when you came into the country, we gave you gifts and you gave us gifts; we bought and sold with you and we were friends; and now tell me if I or any of my men have done you wrong.' We answered, 'First tell us if we have done you any wrong.' He answered, 'Some of you steal our corn & I have sent you word times without number & yet our corn is stolen. I come to see what you will do.' We answered, 'It is one man which has done it. Your men have seen us whip him divers time, besides other manner of punishments, & now hear he is, bound. We give him unto you to do with him what you please.' He answered, 'That is not just dealing. If my men wrong my neighbor Sachem or his men, he sends me word & I beat or kill my men, according to the offense. If his men wrong me or my men, I send him word & he beats or kills his men according to the offense. All Sachems do justice by their own men. If not, we say they are all agreed & then we fight, & now I say you all

steal my corn.'

At this time, some of them, seeing some of our men upon our fort, began to start, saying 'Machit Pesconk,' that is 'Naughty Guns.' Then looking round about then, went away in a great rage. at this time we strengthened our watch until we had no food left. In these times, the savages oftentimes did creep upon the snow, starting behind bushes & trees to see whether we kept watch or not [...times] I having rounded on our plantation until I had no longer [...nth]; then in the night, going into our Court of Guard, I see one man dead before me & another at my right hand & another at my left for want of food. O, all the people in New England, that shall hear of these times of our weak beginning, consider what was the strength of the arm of flesh or the wit of man; therefore in the times of your greatest distress put your trust in God.

The offender being bound, we let him loose, because we had no food to give him, charging him to gather ground nuts, clams & mussels, as other men did, & steal no more. One or two days after this, the savages brought him, leading him by the arms, saying 'Here is the corn. Come see the place where he stole it.' Then we kept him bound some few days. After this, two of our company said, 'We have been at the Sachem's house and they have near finished their last canoe that they may encounter with our ship. Their greatest care is how to send their armies to Plymouth because of the snow.' Then we prepared to meet them there. One of our company said, 'They have killed one of our hogs.' Another said, 'One of them strikes at me with his knife;' & others say 'They threw dust in our faces.' Then said Pecksuot to me, 'Give me powder & guns & I will give you much corn.' I said 'By & by men bring ships & victuals.' But when we understood that their plot was to kill all English people in one day when the snow was gone, I would have sent a man to Plymouth, but none were willing to go. Then I said if Plymouth men know not of this treacherous plot, they & we are all dead men; therefore, if God willing, tomorrow I will go. That night a young man, wanting wit, told Pecksuot early in the morning. Pecksuot came to me & said in English, 'Me hear you go to Patuxet; you will lose yourself; the bears and the wolves will eat you; but because I love you I will send my boy Nahamit with you; & I will give you victuals to eat by the way & to be merry with your friends when you come there.' I said, 'Who told you so great a lie, that I may kill him.' he said, 'It is no lie, you shall not know.' Then he went home to his house. Then came 5 men armed. We said, 'Why come you thus armed.' They said 'We are friends; you carry guns where we dwell & we carry bow & arrows where you dwell.' These attended me 7 or 8 days & nights. Then they supposing it was a lie, were careless of their watch near two hours in the morning. Then said I to our company, 'Now is the time to run to Plymouth. Is there any compass to be found.' They said, 'None but them that belong to the ship.' I said, 'They are too big. I have born no arms of defense this 7 or 8 days. Now if I take my arms they will mistrust me.' Then they said, 'The savages will pursue after you & kill you & we shall never see you again.' Thus with other words of great lamentation, we parted. Then I took a hoe & went to the long swamp nearby their houses & dug on the edge thereof as if I had been looking for ground nuts, but seeing no man, I went in & ran through it. Then looking round about me, I ran southward til 3 o'clock, but the snow being in many places, I was the more distressed because of my footsteps. The sun being clouded, I wandered, not knowing my way; but at the going down of the sun, it appeared red; then hearing a great howling of wolves, I came to a river; the water being deep & cold & many rocks, I passed through with much ado. Then was I in great distress - faint for want of food, weary with running, fearing to make a fire because of them that pursued me. Then I came to a deep dell or hole, there being much wood fallen into it. Then I said in my thoughts, this is God's providence that here I may make a fire. Then having made a fire, the stars began to appear and I saw Ursa Major & the [...] pole yet fearing [...] clouded. The day following I began to travel [...] but being unable, I went back to the fire the day [...] sun shone & about three o'clock I came to that part [...] Plymouth Bay where there is a town of later time [...] Duxbury. Then passing by the water on my left hand [...] came to a brook & there was a path. Having but a short time to

consider [...] fearing to go beyond the plantation, I kept running in the path; then passing through James river I said in my thoughts, now am I as a deer chased [...] the wolves. If I perish, what will be the [condit...] of distressed English men. Then finding a piece of a [...] I took it up & carried it in my hand. Then finding a [...] of a jerkin, I carried them under my arm. Then said I in my [...] God has given me these two tokens for my comfort; that now he will give me my life for a prayer. Then running down a hill [J...] an English man coming in the path before me. Then I said down on a tree & rising up to salute him said, 'Mr. Hamden, I am glad to see you alive.' he said, 'I am glad & full of wonder to see you alive: let us sit down, I see you are weary.' I said, 'Let [...] eat some parched corn.' ;Then he said, 'I know the [caus...]. Come. Massasoit has sent word to the Governor to let him [...] that Aberdikes & his confederates have contrived a plot hoping [...] all English people in one day here as men hard by making [canoe...] stay & we will go with you. The next day a young [...] named Hugh Stacy went forth to fell at tree & saw two [...] rising from the ground. They said Aberdikes had sent [...] the Governor that he might send men to truck for much beaver, but they would not go, but said, 'Was not there an English [...] come from Wessagusset.' He answered, 'He came,' [...] They said he was their friend and said come and see who [...] But they turned another way. He said, 'You come to let us [...]' Providence to us was great in those times as appears [...] after the time of the arrival of the first ship at [Pl...] forenamed Massasoit came to Plymouth & their made a [co...] peace, for an Indian called Tisquantum came to them & spoke English [...] They asked him, how he learned to speak English? He said that an Englishman called Captain Hunt came into the harbor pretending to trade for beaver & stole 24 men & their beaver & carried & sold them in Spain. & from thence with much ado, he went into England & from England with much ado, he got into his own country. This man told Massasoit what wonders he had seen in England & that if he could make the English his friends then [...] enemies that were too strong for him would be constrained to bow to him; but being prevented by some that came in the first ship that [...] recorded that which concerned them, I leave it.

Two or 3 days after my coming to Plymouth, 10 or 11 men went in a boat to our plantation, but I being faint was not able to go with them. They first gave warning to the Master of the ship & then contrived how to make sure of the lives of two of their chief men, Wattawamat, of whom they boasted no gun would kill, and Pecksuot, a subtle man. These being slain, they fell upon others where they could find them. Then Abordikes, hearing that some of his men were killed, came to try his manhood, but as they were starting behind bushes & trees, one of them was shot in the arm. At this time an Indian called Hobbamock, that formerly had fled for his life from his Sachem to Plymouth, proved himself a valiant man in fighting & pursuing after them. Two of our men were kill that they took in their houses at an advantage [...] this time [pl...] were instruments in the [...nds] of God for [...] their own lives and ours. They took the head of [...] & set it on their fort at Plymouth at [...] 9 of our men were dead with famine and one died in the ship before they came to the place where at that time of year ships came to fish - it being in March. At this time, ships began to fish at the Isles of Shoals and I having recovered a little of my [...th] went to my company near about this time [...] the first plantation at Piscataqua the [...] thereof was Mr. David Tomsen at the time of my arrival at Piscataqua. Two of Abordike's men came there & seeing me said 'When we killed your men, they cried and made ill-favored faces.' I said, 'When we killed your men, we did not torment them to make ourselves merry.' Then we went with our ship into the bay & took from them two shallops loading of corn & of their men prisoners there as a town of later time called Dorchester. The third and last time was in the bay of Agawam. At this time they took for their castle a thick swamp. At this time one of our ablest men was shot in the shoulder. Whether any of them were killed or wounded we could not tell. There is a town of later time, near unto that place, called Ipswich. Thus [...] plantation being deserted, Captain Robert Gore [cam...] the country with six gentlemen. Attending him & divers men to do his labor & other men with their families. They took possession of our plantation, but their ship's supply from England came too late. Thus was famine

their final overthrow. Most of them that lived returned to England. The overseers of the third plantation in the bay was Captain Wolleston & Mr. Rosell. These seeing the ruin of the former plantation said, we will not pitch our tents here, lest we should do as they have done. Notwithstanding these gentlemen were wise men, they seemed to blame the overseers of the former companies, not considering that God plants & pulls up, builds & pulls down, & turns the wisdom of wise men into foolishness. These called the name of their place Mount Wolleston. They continued near a year as others had done before them; but famine was their final overthrow. Near unto that place is a town of later time called Braintree. Not long after the overthrow of the first plantation in the bay, Captain Louis came to their country. At the time of his being at Piscataqua a Sachem or Sagamore gave two of his men, one to Captain Louis & another to Mr. Tomsen, but on that was there said, 'How can you trust these savages. Call the name of one Watt Tyler & the other Jack Straw, after the names of the two greatest rebels that ever were in England.' Watt Tyler said, 'When he was a boy, Captain Dormer found him upon an island in great distress.'