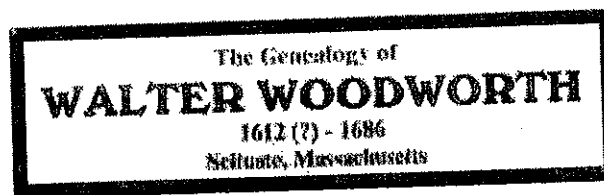


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## KING PHILIP'S WAR of 1675 - 1676

*Reprinted from a discontinued Medfield, MA community web page*

"The horrors and devastation of Philip's war have no parallel in our history. The revolution was a struggle for freedom; the contest with Philip was for existence. The war lasted only about fourteen months; and yet the towns of Brookfield, Lancaster, Marlborough, Medfield, Sudbury, Groton, Deerfield, Hatfield, Hadley, Northfield, Springfield, Weymouth, Chelmsford, Andover, Scituate, Bridgewater, and several other places were wholly or partially destroyed, and many of the inhabitants were massacred or carried into captivity. During this short period, six hundred of our brave men, the flower and strength of the Colony, had fallen, and six hundred dwelling houses were consumed. Every eleventh family was houseless, and every eleventh soldier had sunk to his grave." Charles Hudson: A History of Marlborough

### Background:

King Philip's War of 1675-1676 was a predictable Indian rebellion against continuing Puritan incursions into Native American lands. Though Indian attacks were vicious, they were no more so than those the Puritans had waged with less provocation.

In May of 1637, several hundred recent Connecticut Valley settlers led by English Captain John Mason, formerly of Boston's Dorchester settlement, surprised and torched a Pequot village while its warriors were absent. The Puritans surrounded the village and shot hundreds of women, old men and children attempting to escape the flames. An eyewitness account of that horror reads "It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the flames, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof, but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave the praise thereof God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them." John Mason wrote back to Dorchester that God had "laughed at his enemies and the enemies of his people, ... making them as a fiery oven."

### The English Enchroachment

By 1670 New England's European population was about 50,000 and the Colonists were thriving, living an average 20 years longer than their overseas counterparts. Their population would double by 1700. Conversely, Indians had been decimated by European-borne diseases in the plagues of 1616-21, and every passing year found them with less game and less land.

Younger Indians brooded over their losses, and took as their leader Metacomet, the son of Wampanoag Chief Massasoit, who ironically had fifty years earlier befriended and saved the original Plymouth Colony from starvation. Massasoit died in 1661, succeeded by Metacomet's older brother, Wamsutta (Alexander). When Wamsutta died a year later after being questioned by Plymouth officials, Metacomet, already a chief in all but name, became Chief of the Wampanoags, and known to the Puritans as King Phillip. In 1671, he too was questioned by Plymouth's administrators, and was released only after surrendering a cache of guns and promising to submit to English law. He vowed it would be his last humiliation.

Metacomet/King Philip would likely have led a war against the Puritans without further provocation. William Tilden, in his History of the Town of Medfield, Massachusetts, 1650-1886, writes that Metacomet had convened a large gathering of warriors at Wachusetts Mountain, 40 miles northwest of Medfield. But the

trigger was the hanging in June, 1675, of three Wampanoags charged with murdering a Christianized and Harvard-educated Indian, John Sassamon, after Sassamon warned Plymouth's officials of a pending Wampanoag rebellion. At the trial the officials produced an Indian witness who identified the three.

### **Wampanoags On The Warpath**

The next day the Wampanoags were on the warpath. They began their attacks on outlying Plymouth Colony villages, beginning with Swansea on June 24. In mid-July they destroyed Mendon, 15 miles west of Medfield. By autumn the Wampanoags were joined by the Nipmucks of southwestern Massachusetts and by Rhode Island's Narragansetts, and by November the entire upper Connecticut Valley was once again Indian territory. The rapidity and ferocity of Indian attacks, the vulnerability of the settlements, and the Colonists' inability to respond in kind surprised the Colonists. Wrote Missionary John Eliot, a dedicated Cambridge-educated missionary and translator of the Bible to Algonquin: "We were too ready to think that we could easily suppress the flea, but now we find that all the craft is in catching them, and that in the meantime they give us many a sore nip."

Metacomet concentrated his attacks in what today is known as the Tri-Valley region between Providence and Boston, no more than twenty miles from either city. Panic ensued, and the Colonies passed America's first draft laws, calling for all males between 16 and 60. Except for small garrisons in large population centers, there were few standing military units, and fewer under any coordinating authority. Most arms-bearing residents remained close to home, forming local militias and requesting officers and artillery from the garrisons.

### **Kingston -- A Gruesome Massacre**

But when a large number of Indians were observed gathered near Providence, the Colonies came together and formed an army of about 1000 men. Six companies of Massachusetts militia marched from Dedham on December 10, and were joined at North Kingston, R.I., by troops from the Plymouth and Connecticut Colonies. They destroyed the Indian's fortified village on the morning of December 19 after a three-hour fight. Eighty Colonists were killed and 150 wounded. Indian losses were reported as "about 1000 killed" (no wounded) most of whom may well have been women and children.

The Indians' loss of shelter and supplies in the midst of winter increased their desperation. They raided now in smaller, uncoordinated bands. Their most devastating raid, against Medfield on February 21, 1676, left 17 Medfielders dead and 32 homes destroyed.

The raids continued through the spring and summer of 1676. An attack a few miles north of Medfield, in Natick, was repulsed with the help of that community's friendly "Praying" (Christianized) Indians. Tilden reports that on 25 July men from Medfield and Dedham, assisted by friendly Indians, fought with Pomham, the sachem of Shaomet (Warwick, R.I.) and, next to Philip, the most dreaded of the chiefs. Fifteen Indians were killed, including Pomham ("slain like a wild beast"), and 35 taken prisoner.

### **The End Nears**

The end came not from military prowess but from disease and famine. Philip's faltering support bottomed when the Mohawks, potentially strong allies, refused to join with him, preferring not to relinquish their short-term fur-trade profits. Other tribes soon surrendered or moved westward. By the summer of 1676 Philip's staunchest supporters saw his cause was hopeless.

Lurking about Mount Hope, Philip put one of his -warriors to death for advising him to surrender. The brother of the man, fearful for his own life, fled to the English and informed them of Philip's swamp camp. A Captain Church of Milton surrounded the place and rushed the camp. Philip fled, only to encounter an Englishman and an Indian. The Englishman's gun misfired; however, the Indian sent a bullet through Philip's heart. This was the same Indian, Alderman, whose brother had been killed earlier by Phillip and who had led Captain Church to the encampment. Church ordered Philip to be beheaded and quartered. The Indian pronounced a warrior's eulogy: "You have been one very great man. You have made many a man afraid of you. But big as you be, I will now chop you up in little pieces." Philip's head was carried to Plymouth, where it was displayed for 2 years, and his wife and son were sold into slavery in the West

Indies. Monaco, a subchief believed to have led the raid on Medfield, was hanged in Boston in September.

The war was a disaster for both sides, but especially so for Indians, as the Colonists used the war to remove even some "Praying Indian" communities. For each Colonist killed, three or more Indians died, if not from bullets, then from starvation, disease and exposure. Of some 90 Puritan towns, 52 had been attacked and 13 leveled. At least 600 Colonial men and as many as 2,000 women and children were killed, and 1200 homes destroyed together with 8,000 cattle. The total cost of the war exceeded the value of all personal property in New England. Only a few small Indian communities survived in semi-isolated areas. And for nearly half a century what had been rapid New England expansion was halted.

*Sources:*

*History of the Town of Marlborough, Charles Hudson, Boston, 1862*  
*History of the Town of Medfield (<http://www.medfield.com>)*  
*History of Essex County, Ipswich, D. Hamilton Hurd, Philadelphia, 1888.*

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