

Book Review: Native Writings in Massachusetts, by Goddard and Bragdon, 1988. In Nantucket Inquirer and Mirror, Nantucket MA 02554, June 29, p. 12b.

— Book review —

By Elizabeth A. Little

With the publication of the two volume set, *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1988), by Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon of the Smithsonian Institution, Massachusetts historians have an important new tool to help them discover the culture the Native identity of the Native Americans of eastern Massachusetts. The Massachusetts language, previously called the Natick language (J.H. Trumbull, 1903, *Natick Dictionary*, Smithsonian Institution) and the tongue in which John Eliot's Bible was written, is the language of the Native Americans who lived from the north side of the Charles River drainage to Narragansett Bay and Cape Cod and the islands in the 17th and 18th centuries.

It has not been generally known that Native Americans of eastern Massachusetts were literate in their own language in the 17th century. Between 1642 and 1674, Indians of the islands were taught to read and write at Martha's Vineyard by Thomas Mayhew Jr., Peter Folger and at least nine native teachers (including Nantucket sachems), and at Nantucket by John Gibbs (Assassamooagh), Caled (Weekochisit), Joseph and Samuel. Eliot's Massachusetts Bible publish-

ed in 1663 provided a significant impetus to literacy.

As shown by the 159 documents transcribed and translated here, Indians of southeastern Massachusetts were writing deeds, wills, depositions, petitions, etc., in their own language from at least 1663 onward. Documents written by Indians in English, as early as 1660 (Adam 1660, Nantucket Historical Association Research Center), are not included in this study. Goddard and Bragdon have located 56 documents written in Massachusetts from Martha's Vineyard, 51 from Natick, 29 from Nantucket, nine from Plymouth, six from Dartmouth and three from Mashpee, which constitute the body of this important new work. A noteworthy item is that Richard Macy and Richard Mitchell of Nantucket in 1802 donated seven Nantucket Indian language documents to the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston for preservation.

The documents are presented as photographs, followed by a catalogue description, a transcription and a translation. An introductory chapter provides the cultural context of the documents, sketches the histories and governments of these Christian Indian Towns and describes the content and

creation of the documents. The political and social roles of the sachems, the chief men and the common people are derived from the documents as well as some history, biography and a glimpse into the everyday workings of Native American communities during the early historic period in Massachusetts.

The second volume of the work consists of a grammatical sketch, which although difficult for a non-linguist, contains much of interest for the scholar and serious amateur. This is followed by an index of all the Massachusetts words in the documents, with translations where possible, and an English index of subjects, personal names (with biographical data) and place names. An appendix provides transcriptions of some contemporary translations and related documents.

Dr. Goddard, originally from Rhode Island, has a Ph.D. from the department of Linguistics, Harvard University, where he taught for a number of years before joining the Smithsonian Institution as a curator in the Department of Anthropology. He has done fieldwork in Delaware, Southern Ontario and Oklahoma. He specializes in American Indian Languages,

especially of the Northeast, and is linguistic editor of the *Handbook of North American Indians*, 1978-1989, which is published by the Smithsonian Institution.

The new publication, *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (which may be ordered through Mitchell's Book Corner) is a major and welcome addition to the sources available to students of American history. These texts in the Massachusetts language together with native writings in English, court records, account books and memoirs, all together provide a rich documentary background for a long-neglected part of Massachusetts' and Nantucket's history.

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