A Question of Plain Dealing: Josiah Cotton, Native Christians, and the Quest for Security in Eighteenth-Century Plymouth County

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A Question of Plain Dealing: Josiah Cotton, Native Christians, and the Quest for Security in Eighteenth-Century Plymouth County

DOUGLAS L. WINIARSKI

"Behold ye Indians what Love what Care what Cost has bin used by the English here for the Salvation of your precious & immortal Souls," proclaimed the Plymouth civil magistrate and lay missionary Josiah Cotton, as he preached to a small assembly of local Native Christians during the winter of 1710. "It is not because we have expected any temporal advantage from you that We have bin thus concerned for your good; No it is God that hath caused us to desire his glory in your Salvation." John Eliot, the Wampanoag's first "Teacher," had yearned in his "Bowels" for their temporal and eternal happiness as well. Now, sixty years after the founding of the first "praying town" at Natick, the famed "Apostle to the Indians" stood in righteous judgment over his errant converts. If Eliot's spirit should "find you among the Wicked on the day of Judgment," Cotton warned his congregants, "He will then be a dreadfull Witness against you, & when the Lord Jesus passes that Sentence on you[,] Depart ye Cursed, . . . even your own Eliot will say amen to it all."


Josiah Cotton, Indian Sermon, Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. The biblical allusion is to Matthew 25:41. Cotton would have
When the English first arrived in New England, Cotton’s harangue continued, “The Indians were without the true God. They were Idolaters, & worshipped & served the Devil instead of God.” But Eliot and his eighteenth-century successors had “brought the knowledge of Christ & Salvation by him to You.” Cotton expected the Wampanoags to express their heartfelt thanks for such pious condescension by avoiding “any thing that is bad.” “Our Christ, our Religion,” he maintained, “teaches us good things to live Soberly righteously & Godly, but our wicked hearts make us do bad things.” How many times had Cotton warned them about drinking to excess? How many times had he cautioned them to live within their means and avoid greedy employers? If the Indians would only “follow an honest Calling,” asserted the lay missionary, nothing would hinder them from building estates as considerable as those of their English neighbors. But at present, his Native auditors were “poor, mean, ragged[,] starved[,] contemptible & miserable”—languishing in debt, vice, and violence; beholden to others for their very livelihood.2

At first glance, Cotton’s patronizing sermon appears to reinforce a familiar interpretation of Indian-Puritan relations. The Plymouth lay preacher differed little from earlier generations of ethnocentric missionaries who infiltrated Indian villages and succeeded in undermining the political, economic, and cultural autonomy of New England’s Native American population.3 And

referred to his 1710 preaching performance as a “lecture” or “discourse” rather than as a sermon, since his extant notes lack the formal conventions of the Puritan “plain style.” Most of Cotton’s Indian preaching notes include a mix of genres (sermons, lectures, discourses, and expositions), but the citations in this essay follow the conventions used by archives that typically list these various manuscripts as “Indian Sermons.”

2Cotton, Indian Sermon, Ayer Collection.

yet, an eager audience of perhaps two dozen Native Christians had assembled to hear him preach, and their religious and material circumstances differed markedly from those of Eliot’s earliest converts. These were no “wild Indians,” as Cotton himself recognized in another sermon; nor did they live in one of the famous praying town enclaves in eastern Massachusetts. Instead, the Plymouth magistrate preached for more than three decades in the wigwams of Indian tenant families who worked as wage laborers and indentured servants on his own farm a few miles north of town—an impressive plantation he had piously dubbed “Plain Dealing.”

Despite Cotton’s hostile moral assessment, evidence from the extensive records of his “Indian Business” and personal papers suggests that he supervised a vibrant and dynamic community of Native Christians. In fact, most Wampanoags in Plymouth County had converted to Christianity more than a generation before the judge embarked on his lay preaching career. Consider his host, Francis Ned. Perhaps donning a pair of spectacles as he listened intently, Ned may have taken up his handsome edition of the “Eliot Bible” and tracked down the scriptural verses that peppered Cotton’s sermon. He would have had ink, paper, and quills at his disposal for scribbling down sermon notes or marginal annotations. Ironically, Ned would have come by all of these items through the generosity of Cotton himself, who disbursed books, blankets, and other charitable contributions from the New England Company for the Propagation of the Gospel—the London-based missionary society that financed and supervised the Puritan mission program—to Indian families throughout Plymouth County.

In the wake of King Philip’s War (1675–76), Wampanoags throughout the “Old Colony”—Plymouth, Bristol, and Barnsta-
ble Counties in southeastern Massachusetts—struggled to pick up the pieces of a culture shattered by violence and warfare, riven with internal dissension, and plagued by economic exploitation and English racism. As several revisionist studies have shown, Indians like Ned turned to Christianity to combat the social and economic challenges confronting their communities during the first half of the eighteenth century, but they did so in complex and at times contradictory ways. The tenant families at Plain Dealing, for example, consigned their families to a life of servitude and debt peonage in exchange for steady employment opportunities and enhanced access to the charitable contributions of the New England Company. In the larger and


more established Indian communities at nearby Manomet and Herring Ponds, however, other Native Christian clans may have listened politely to Cotton's paternalistic efforts to deal "plainly" with the Indians in his impolitic sermons, but they clung tenaciously to their right to determine their own religious institutions, and they staunchly resisted any efforts to integrate their congregations with neighboring English churches. Although they often employed different strategies as they attempted to navigate the oppressive world of provincial New England, nearly all Native Christians in the region envisioned Christianity not as a wellspring of moral reform, as Cotton wished, but as a resource for promoting economic security and social autonomy.

Born in Plymouth in 1680, Josiah Cotton descended from a prominent Puritan clan. His father, John Cotton Jr., was the town's fourth minister and the eldest son and namesake of Boston's most venerable pastor and theologian. Virtually all of Josiah's uncles, brothers, and cousins pursued successful ministerial callings, while aunts and sisters married eminent country clergymen. Collectively, the Cottons formed an expansive network of social, religious, and cultural elites that extended from northern New England to Cape Cod. Graduating from Harvard College in 1698, Josiah served for several years as schoolmaster in the fishing community of Marblehead before returning to the town of his birth, where he filled the same post. In 1707, he married Hannah Sturtevant, the only child of a prosperous Pilgrim family. Through her, the young schoolmaster inherited his handsome "Countrey Seat at Plain Dealing" two years later. In the decade that followed, Cotton managed to secure a series of minor government posts, including clerk of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, Register of Deeds, Public Notary, and Keeper of the Old Colony Records. He served the Plymouth church in a variety of capacities and labored on behalf of the community as tithingman, constable, and moderator of its town meeting. On three occasions during the 1720s, Cotton was cho-
sen to represent Plymouth in the colonial legislature. Then, in 1729, Governor William Shute appointed him to the county judicial bench as a justice of the peace and quorum.8

As a civil magistrate, Judge Cotton rose to considerable heights, but in what he called his “Indian Business,” the lay missionary labored in the long shadow cast by his father. By the time he ascended to the Plymouth pulpit for the first time in 1669, John Cotton Jr. was already recognized as one of the New England Company’s most promising missionaries. Previously, he had ministered to well-established communities of Native Christians on Martha’s Vineyard. Arriving in 1666, Cotton quickly mastered the local Algonquian dialect, and he was renowned for his ability to preach without notes and pray extemporaneously. Yet he bristled at the repeated interventions of the island’s imperious proprietary family, the Mayhews, and welcomed an opportunity to remove to Plymouth three years later. There, he enjoyed “an Exclusive Diocess” that encompassed dozens of Indian communities.9

The elder Cotton made rapid inroads among the Native families living at Manomet and Saltwater Ponds—two small settlements located halfway between Plymouth and Sandwich (see figure)—and by 1674 he had gathered a church of more than forty “praying Indians.” Over the next two decades, Cotton gradually expanded the scope of his labors to include an area of more than a thousand square miles—virtually all of the Old Colony. He “cheerfully and constantly” preached to more than five hundred Indians a year and supervised perhaps half a dozen Native teachers. “[W]ithout any foolish boasting,” the

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ENGLISH AND INDIAN SETTLEMENTS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
PLYMOUTH COUNTY

Note: Numbered locations represent Indian settlements included in Cotton's 1726
"General Visitation."

Sources: Josiah Cotton, "Service among the Indians, 1716–1717," Ms. L., MHS; Cotton,
"Some Inquiries . . . Made among the Indians in the General Visitation," 9 September
1726, Curwen Family Papers, AAS; Cotton Diaries, 1733–74, Cotton Families Collection,
Pilgrim Hall Museum; Laura E. Conkey, Ethel Boissevain, and Ives Goddard, "Indians of
Southern New England and Long Island: Late Period," in Handbook of North American Indians,
James W. Bradley, Historic and Archaeological Resources of Southeast Massachusetts
(Boston: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1982); Robert Steven Grumet, Historic Contact: Indian People and Colonists in
Plymouth minister asserted with confidence in a letter to Increase Mather, "I cannot believe any man did or doth take halfe other bodily paines I doe with them in all the travelling part of the yeare." Cotton’s missionary successes so impressed his contemporaries that a brief account of a fast-day ceremony he conducted at Manomet Ponds in 1690 was deemed “worth Mentioning” in the sole issue of Publick Occurrences both Forreign and Domestick, Boston’s first newspaper. But in the wake of John Cotton Jr.’s scandalous dismissal from his Plymouth pastorate six years later, the local Indians at Manomet and Saltwater Ponds suddenly found themselves without a regular preacher; for the next decade they would struggle to maintain their fledgling church.¹⁰

This was the situation in which young Josiah found himself in 1705, the year he returned to Plymouth and began his long ascent to gentry status. Yet unmarried and seeking to supplement his scant schoolteacher’s salary, he initiated an intensive course of study in the Massachusetts language under the tutelage of his elder brother, Rowland, the minister at Sandwich and an occasional preacher to the Indians at Mashpee. For the next two years, Cotton poured over his father’s missionary records and labored to develop what he called his “Indian Nomenclature.” In a small manuscript volume, he inscribed nearly three thousand translations of various Massachusetts words and phrases. The entries were neatly organized into a taxonomic scheme that ranged from the names of birds and animals to colloquial phrases and figures of speech. At the end of the manuscript, he

¹⁰John Cotton Jr. to Daniel Gookin, 14 September 1674, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1st ser., vol. 1 (Boston, 1792), pp. 199–200; John Cotton Jr. to Increase Mather, 23 March 1693, Americana Papers, Mark and Llora Bortman Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University (I thank Len Travers for providing this transcription); Publick Occurrences both Forreign and Domestick, 25 September 1690.

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appended pious aphorisms and mock dialogues between the author and a fictionalized Indian. In time, Cotton was able to compose sermons in Massachusett and read them aloud; later, he learned to pray in the Algonquian dialect with the aid of a written "Form." While he never fully mastered the language as his father had done, Cotton eventually became a competent linguist, subsequently translating Cotton Mather's sacramental handbook A Monitor for Communicants (1716) into Massachusett.¹

By 1707, Cotton was ready to test his new skills, and he petitioned the New England Company for an appointment. He preached twenty sermons "in Indian" that year, and soon he was working every other sabbath. An early record of these bi-weekly engagements provides important data on his missionary activities. In the space of twelve months—from October 1716 through September 1717—Cotton preached more than sixty sermons on a total of forty-two sabbaths at more than a dozen different locations throughout Plymouth County. His scattered audiences included isolated Indians living as indentured servants in English households, struggling Native families in small neighborhoods engulfed by the colonists' expanding farms, and large ethnic enclaves with entrenched extended clans and strong indigenous leadership.²

Like his father before him, Cotton traveled extensively. On 28 October, he journeyed eight miles to preach at Manomet Ponds, then rode four miles further to meet with Indian families living along the shore of Saltwater Pond. The following week, he read two sermons at Mattakeesit, a Native enclave located within the bounds of Pembroke, thirteen miles north of Plymouth. On 11 November, he was back in town preaching at Esther Cunnitt's wigwam, but in the intervening days, he had interviewed more than a dozen Indian families living in Scitu-

ate, Duxbury, Marshfield, and Bridgewater. With the onset of winter, Cotton curtailed his gospel travels, but he continued to conduct regular sabbath exercises at numerous locations within a five-mile radius of his home at Plain Dealing. It was a relentless pace—a commitment, it would seem, that extended beyond the modest £30 per year that the Boston commissioners paid him for his efforts.13

Over time, Cotton settled into a more comfortable routine. By the mid-1720s, he had stopped preaching at Mattakeset, in part because of the distance but also because “it seemed as if the Indians made too much of a Frolick” of his infrequent visits. With a new cohort of ordained Indian preachers staffing the Native plantations at Manomet Ponds, Assawamset, and Titi-cut—congregations once served by his father—Cotton found himself working almost exclusively with the small cluster of tenant families who lived and labored under his watchful eye at Plain Dealing. Both the weekly record of his “Indian Service” and the notations appearing on his manuscript sermon notes reveal the same pattern (see table 1). Prior to 1732, Cotton traveled a lengthy mission circuit, preaching at Manomet Ponds, Eel River, and numerous Indian houses within the borders of the town of Plymouth as well as small Native neighborhoods throughout the county; but from 1732 until the end of his career in 1751, the judge conducted more than ninety percent of his biweekly sabbath meetings in the homes of Francis Ned, Nathan Hood, Daniel Robin, and James Ned—all tenants at Plain Dealing.14

At the height of his missionary career in the mid-1730s, Cotton preached an average of twenty weeks a year (see table 2); on a dozen other sabbaths, he read scripture, led the assembly


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sabbath Locations (From Cotton Diaries)</th>
<th>1716–1717</th>
<th>1732–1744</th>
<th>1745–1751</th>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>Plymouth, Other Locations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingston, Jones River</td>
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<td>Middleborough–Bridgewater, Titicut</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pembroke, Mattakeesit</td>
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<td>15.32</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekday Locations (From Cotton Diaries)</td>
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<td>1732–1744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth, Plain Dealing (Cotton’s Farm)</td>
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<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth, Manomet Ponds</td>
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<td>18.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth, Other Locations</td>
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<td>Duxbury</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingston, Jones River</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middleborough–Bridgewater, Titicut</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembroke, Mattakeesit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scituate</td>
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<td>9.09</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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</table>


*Cotton’s “Indian Service” records cover 28 October 1716–15 September 1717 and 30 July 1732–6 January 1751. No data are provided for 28 March 1736–5 November 1738.*

*Sermon notes contain references to preaching performances in years not included in “Service among the Indians” or the Cotton Diaries.*
in singing psalms, or, when numbers were thin, offered a short homily, lecture, prayer, or exhortation. The judge’s Indian business occupied his weekdays as well. By means of informal pastoral visits, Cotton maintained contact with Indian families throughout the county—especially in times of trouble. In a sixth-month period during the spring and summer of 1738, for example, he offered pious advice to consumptives in Kingston and Duxbury, prayed with “ancient” widows at Eel River, attended an Indian funeral, and consoled a grieving mother who had recently lost her son. On another occasion, he ventured down to the Plymouth jail to counsel an Indian man charged with murder. These weekday encounters, moreover, provided opportunities for Cotton to distribute the charitable contributions of books and blankets that he regularly received from the New England Company as well as the cash salaries owed local Indian preachers and schoolteachers. On such occasions, he also performed various scribal duties, drafting wills, deeds, and various memorials on behalf of local Indians. The day-to-day details of Cotton’s missionary labors rarely found their way into the record of “remarkables” that he penned every year on his birthday; yet his account book, legal papers, and mission records amply reflect the depth of his commitment to the Native American families of Plymouth County.¹⁵

Especially noteworthy were the two “General Visitations” that Cotton conducted during his career. Once in 1714, and then again twelve years later, the Plymouth magistrate spent a full month traveling to every Indian residence in his territory—a circuit of eight settlements strewn across Plymouth County. On these occasions, he took stock of his mission field, noting the total number of Indian families at each settlement, the specific number of church members and baptized children in each

¹⁵Records of his charitable and financial disbursements to local Indians are scattered throughout Josiah Cotton’s Diaries, 1733–74, Cotton Families Collection, Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Mass.; and the New England Company’s Commissioner’s Minutes, 1699–1784, and Commissioner’s Accounts, 1657–1731, New England Company Records; and Commissioner’s Accounts, 1729–41 and 1741–71, NEHGS. A number of memorials, deeds, and probate records that were written by Cotton on behalf of local Indians families have survived. For one example (discussed below), see Cotton’s “Indian Call of Joseph Moses,” 28 September 1729, Curwen Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. (hereafter AAS).
## TABLE 2

### Josiah Cotton’s Indian Service Activities, 1716–1717, 1732–1751

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sabbath Activities</th>
<th>1716–1717</th>
<th>1732–1744</th>
<th>1745–1751</th>
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<td>Leading Prayers</td>
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<td>48 4.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lectures, Discourses, &amp; Exhortations</td>
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<td>21 2.14</td>
<td>16 2.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalm Singing</td>
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<td>13 1.32</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Scripture</td>
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<td>22 2.44</td>
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<td>Sermon</td>
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<td>182 18.53</td>
<td>14 2.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting &amp; Counseling Sick</td>
<td>5 5.67</td>
<td>7 0.71</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1745–1751</th>
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<td>Election Day</td>
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<td>Fast/Thanksgiving Day</td>
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<td>3 0.31</td>
<td>1 0.17</td>
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<td>Funeral</td>
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<td>3 0.31</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
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<td>1 1.13</td>
<td>12 1.22</td>
<td>1 0.17</td>
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<td>Lectures, Discourses, &amp; Exhortations</td>
<td>1 1.13</td>
<td>1 0.10</td>
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<td>Reading Scripture</td>
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<td>Securing Indian Preacher</td>
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<td>2 2.27</td>
<td>3 0.31</td>
<td>0 0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting &amp; Counseling Sick</td>
<td>9 10.20</td>
<td>55 5.60</td>
<td>1 0.17</td>
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</table>


*Column totals greater than those in Table 1 because Cotton often performed multiple missionary functions on a single day.

household, and the literacy skills of his adult and youthful Native congregants. In addition, Cotton interviewed dozens of Indians to “Discover what Knowledge they had, & Perswade them to that which is Good.” Field notes from these surveys formed the basis of his official reports to the commissioners of the New England Company, who rewarded him for his “extra-Service” with a small stipend.16

Still, the heart of Cotton’s Indian business lay in his biweekly preaching performances. More than a dozen carefully written sermons in the judge’s hand have survived, and these manuscripts provide important information about his preaching tactics and theology. Most conformed to the typical structure of the Puritan plain style, with its text and doctrine followed by enumerated uses, reasoned arguments, and scriptural supports. The lay missionary also delivered thematic lectures and discourses on topics such as fasting or family prayer, short expositions of scriptural passages, and brief spiritual exhortations (see table 2). Like most New England preachers, Cotton recycled his sermons from year to year, and he often read from the same manuscript at different locations in the same month. Each sermon, moreover, included a full set of English notes with Massachusetts translations interlineated or inscribed on the facing leaf. But it is clear that Cotton rarely read the English version alone; instead, he preached almost exclusively in the Algonquian dialect until the last years of his career (see table 3).

Ever the civil magistrate, Cotton stressed the lawyerly theme of obedience to divine will in his Indian sermons. The goal of the Christian life, as the judge defined it, was to “Strive to get to Heaven.” The path may be narrow, he acknowledged, but “God has promised to give Heaven to those that strive for it.” “If you don’t get to Heaven,” he continued, “It is not because you cannot but because you will not.” Occasionally, Cotton described salvation as a “Gift” bestowed by God on “whom he pleases,” but more often he encouraged his Indian congregants to abstain from sin and pursue their devotional routines with

17I have identified seventeen individual preaching units composed by Cotton. In addition to two sermons (now lost) that were published in an appendix to Cotton’s “Vocabulary,” pp. 249–57, these manuscripts are located in the following collections: Cotton, Indian Sermons, Cotton Family Sermons, AAS (1 sermon; 2 expositions; 2 discourses); Cotton, Indian Sermons, James Davis Papers, MHS (2 sermons); Cotton, Indian Sermon, Ayer Collection (1 discourse; Massachusetts text in a second hand). Another sermon in Cotton’s hand (Ms. S-138) at MHS has been attributed instead to his brother, Rowland. Seven previously unidentified sermons by Josiah Cotton may be found in the Nicholas Gilman Papers (3 sermons; 1 exhortation) and Experience Mayhew Papers, MHS (2 sermons; 1 discourse), respectively. I thank Michael MacDonald for drawing my attention to this last collection.
diligence so that God would “love you & bless you & make you happy.” Whether or not the Indians were “willing to be Saved,” however, was another matter. Rarely did Cotton fail to enumerate the perennial sins to which Native Christians—in his ethnocentric opinion—were all “too prone”: idleness, drinking, lying, and stealing. Such antisocial behavior at once exposed them to providential afflictions, left them open to the economic exploitation of greedy English creditors, and diverted them from those Christian “duties” that would eventuate in their eternal happiness. Echoing the words of Cotton Mather’s popular devotional manual *Bonifacius* (1710), Cotton urged his Indian congregants to “learn to be Good & Do Good.” Fundamentally, then, his preaching was driven by a theology of social control that was designed to compel the Wampanoag to change their ways and live sober, industrious lives in the fashion of their English neighbors.18

From the start, however, Cotton’s missionary enterprise was vulnerable. Unlike John Eliot, the Mayhews, and his own father, he had no settled pastorate. Instead, he spent the majority of his time preaching to isolated Indian families and indentured servants living in the very midst of English society. An average of fewer than ten Indians attended Cotton’s biweekly meetings at

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Cotton, Indian Sermon, Ms. S-138; Cotton, Indian Sermon, Ayer Collection; Cotton, Indian Sermons, John Davis Papers.

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<th>Language</th>
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<th>1732–1744</th>
<th></th>
<th>1745–1751</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusett</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>97.44</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>90.86</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>52.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 4
AVERAGE NUMBER OF INDIANS ATTENDING SABBATH MEETINGS AT SELECTED LOCATIONS IN SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preacher</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton, Josiah</td>
<td>Plymouth County</td>
<td>1716-1717</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Various Locations)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton, Josiah</td>
<td>Plymouth, Plain Dealing</td>
<td>1732-1751</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Cotton’s Farm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton, Josiah</td>
<td>Plymouth, Manomet Ponds</td>
<td>1732-1751</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osborne, Samuel</td>
<td>Harwich, Putnumecut</td>
<td>1728-1742</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Timothy</td>
<td>Nantucket, Miacomet</td>
<td>1728-1742</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Plain Dealing between 1732 and 1751 (see table 4). This was a far cry from the audiences of twenty or forty who appeared at the judge’s infrequent services at the larger Wampanoag village at Manomet Ponds, and it represented a significant drop in attendance from the earliest years of his career. Nor did Cotton’s work compare favorably with that of his father or his contemporaries. John Cotton Jr. reported preaching to large Indian assemblies at his home in Plymouth during the 1670s. Decades later, two of Josiah’s missionary colleagues—Samuel Osborne and Timothy White—also took note of the size of their congregations; in both cases, the Indians who gathered to worship in the villages of Putnumecut in Harwich and Miacomet on the island of Nantucket nearly tripled the younger Cotton’s tiny flock.

Yet the judge stubbornly defended the limited scope of his ministry in a 1732 letter to the Boston commissioners. “There are 5 families on this [the north] Side [of] Ele River,” he noted, “besides Several Indians, Whose Occasions call them to Town,

They being Fishermen, & so are commonly in on the Lords Days, & sometimes Attend the Meeting that has been kept at Nathan Hoods.” Most understood English “pretty well,” he maintained, and, as a result, some of these local Indians occasionally attended sabbath meetings in Plymouth or Kingston—established English churches lying within several miles of most Native families in the area. The thrust of Cotton’s letter was clear: Indians like Francis Ned, Nathan Hood, and the other tenants at Plain Dealing participated in the larger social world of Plymouth County; they spoke English and were eager to receive the gospel; and they lived and worked alongside other Plymouth residents in the town’s fledgling maritime economy. Though a scattered remnant, the small cluster of Indians who resided on his farm both desired and needed his Christian ministry as much as the families living in larger enclaves such as Mashpee or Manomet Ponds.20

Like their English neighbors, the Native Christians at Plain Dealing and elsewhere in Plymouth County represented a broad spectrum of popular religious beliefs and practices. Most individuals could trace their religious pedigree back through the generations to John Cotton Jr.’s early mission congregation at Manomet Ponds; and nearly all of these earliest Native Christians were related through marriage. Yet individual commitment to the traditions of Reformed Protestantism may have differed dramatically. During his 1726 “General Visitation,” Cotton met with nearly one hundred Indians “great & Small.” To his dismay, only one in ten were communicants at a local Indian church, though others “had thoughts” of joining and more had been baptized. Literacy—the foundation of Reformed spirituality—also varied from family to family. In 1710, Cotton counted more than half of all adult members of the Manomet Ponds congregation as readers, though a much smaller percentage of them could write; women and children’s literacy tended to lag further behind. A Bible owned by Plain Dealing tenants Francis and Josiah Ned, moreover, contained marginalia reveal-

ing an active devotional life that included exhortations, private meditations, and an intensive program of scriptural study. At the same time, other families living in the more remote corners of the Old Colony continued to participate in a traditional Algonquian cosmology, and some even peddled their clandestine occult knowledge to an English clientele. In short, Plymouth’s Native Christian population closely mirrored their English masters in religious matters, running the gamut from devotional virtuosos to “horse-shed” backsliders.1

Still, one stark barrier remained: Francis Ned and the other tenants at Plain Dealing never joined the Plymouth church. In fact, not a single Native American was admitted to full communion in any English parish in the Old Colony prior to 1740.2 In the hierarchical world of provincial New England, local Indians typically found themselves sequestered in the upstairs galleries alongside African bondsmen; other families preferred to worship apart from the English in churches staffed entirely by Native preachers. As the century progressed, this racial stigmatization would extend outward to all aspects of life, as Cotton’s Indian congregants sank to the lowest rungs of the social ladder.

Interrogated by Cotton and his fellow magistrates, Nias Half Days recalled the grisly details of a tragic incident that unfolded at Manomet Ponds in the fall of 1755: “I was at a Trough pounding Apples in order to make Cyder [at] about one of the


2J. M. Bumsted asserts that “less than ten Negroes and Indians per decade are mentioned in all the church records in southeastern Massachusetts” prior to 1740 (The Pilgrim’s Progress: The Ecclesiastical History of the Old Colony, 1620–1775 [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986], p. 309, n. 84), but even this statement overestimates the situation. Researching the membership lists of English congregations located near substantial Indian populations (Yarmouth, Harwich, Middleborough, Plymouth, and Sandwich), I have uncovered no Native Americans admitted to full communion and only a handful of black covenant owners.
Clock,” he explained, when the widow Hester Sachemus “Came to me as I was at work and Struck at me with a peice of Bord several times.” Fending off his attacker, Half Days was quickly joined by Joshua Sachemus, who had been picking apples in the orchard nearby. Joshua angrily “told Hester to go away, for She must not Come there fighting,” and he “Shoved her Down.” In turn, Joshua’s wife, Betty, rushed to the scene, picked up the board, and proceeded to strike her husband.23

Meanwhile, Hester’s niece, Sarah Robin, looked on with growing alarm from the doorway of a nearby wigwam. The owner of the dwelling, Mary Hood, “Begged her not to go” and join in the melee; but Sarah “Said She would not See her Aunt [Hester] . . . Served So,” and she “flew out” of the wigwam to her kinswoman’s defense. For a brief moment, Half Days turned away from the fracas, only to hear the sickening sound of a wooden cider maul crashing into Robin’s skull. She fell to the ground immediately, and a “Bloody froth Came out of her mouth & Nose.” Half Days “looked about,” he later remembered, and saw Joshua holding the massive, four-foot wooden hammer “in his Hand.” During the confusion that followed, Joshua inexplicably returned to picking apples, while Half Days and the three Indian women carried Robin into the wigwam. The eyewitnesses maintained that Joshua and his wife appeared to be sober and that he later expressed remorse for his actions, claiming that he did not intend to hurt her and that “he must go and gett a Docter.” Sarah Robin died at sunset.24

Recording the sordid affair in his memoirs, Judge Cotton called it a “Sad Accident” as he reflected on the perpetrator and his victim. Joshua Sachemus was a “good Natured Indian,” a leader in the Manomet Ponds church who often assisted him in distributing blankets donated by the New England Company; Sarah was the second wife of Daniel Robin, a former tenant at Plain Dealing who had hosted Cotton’s worship services on more than one hundred and fifty occasions during the 1740s.25

23Superior Court of Judicature, Suffolk Court Files: 75829, Massachusetts Archives, Boston.
24Suffolk Court Files: 75829.
Her brutal murder at the hands of a fellow Native Christian reflected the mounting social problems that plagued Plymouth's Wampanoag residents during the first half of the eighteenth century. Indeed, Native Christians throughout the region faced a host of social ills, ranging from physical abuse at the hands of unscrupulous masters and substandard living conditions to legal troubles, poor health, debt, alcoholism, violence, and the constant encroachments of land-hungry white neighbors.

A few Indians aspired to, and on rare occasions succeeded in securing, all the trappings of a yeoman competency. For example, during the early years of his career, Cotton occasionally preached at the home of Samuel and Hannah James of Titicut. The Indian couple owned a prosperous farm complete with a barn, two looms, a herd of cattle, a diverse crop of European grains and grasses, and "a high House of the English Fashion." Their family included six children, all of whom could read. By Cotton's estimation, the James family lived "the best of any Indians in America." Their neighbor, Abraham Simon, owned a gun, books, a horse and saddle, and an impressive set of blacksmithing tools. In the adjoining town of Plympton, Samuel and Dorothy Senowet managed to secure rights to a two-hundred-acre tract of meadowlands as well as hunting, fishing, and turpentine production concessions within the undivided commons near Sampson Pond; in 1719, they divided their extensive land holdings among their several children. So, too, did Will and Jacob Hedge, two of Plymouth's original praying Indians. At the time of their deaths in 1715, the father-and-son pair owned hundreds of acres of uplands, fields, and orchards at Manomet Ponds—enough lots to settle six different Native families, all of whom were parishioners at the local Indian church.26

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Yet these were isolated success stories. Few Native Christians owned the capital-intensive tools necessary to practice a trade, engage in extensive farming, or conduct offshore fishing and whaling expeditions. Instead, a deep socioeconomic fissure divided Plymouth’s Indian residents from middling English colonists. Surviving probate inventories indicate that most eighteenth-century Native families managed to accumulate only a few farm animals, light farming implements, stray pieces of furniture, and a limited assortment of cooking vessels and utensils. While a few owned Bibles and other religious books, most Indians never acquired the material amenities and consumer goods that had slowly filtered down to even the meanest provincial households by mid-century. And while the Indians of Plymouth County fared somewhat better than their impoverished kin at Natick, they failed to reach the surprisingly high standard of living evident in the inventories of Wampanoag whalers on Nantucket. Robin Wapenit’s estate may have been typical. In addition to his small parcel of land at Herring Pond, the husband of the Manomet Ponds schoolmistress owned a horse, chest, barrels, planks, and a wigwam. Most of these items were designated as “old” on the inventory taken by assessors after his death in 1724, and the entire estate amounted to less than one-tenth the value of the average English yeoman’s holdings.27

Increasingly entangled in the rapidly developing market economy of provincial New England, Native Christians soon

found themselves trapped in exploitative debtor relationships with wealthy creditors. Indian families purchased a range of consumer items—primarily tools, cloth, farming and hunting equipment, and building supplies—with the credit liberally extended to them. When they failed to clear their financial obligations, however, Native debtors landed in court. Between 1700 and 1755, more than forty Wampanoags were brought before Judge Cotton and his judicial colleagues to answer civil charges relating to credit problems; most were Native Christians. English yeoman John Morton sued Plain Dealing tenant James Ned for an account book debt of £2 spent on pork, corn, and other staple provisions; Ned’s brother, the Bible-owning Josiah, defaulted on a bond valued at £16 in 1726. Micah Sepit and Thomas Felix, two Native preachers employed by the New England Company at Titicut and Assawampsett, were involved in debtor suits, as was William Deerskins, who occasionally hosted Cotton’s sabbath meetings. Indian debt was so prevalent, in fact, that Cotton devised a mock dialogue in his “Nomenclature” to address the issue. “I am forced to be worse than my word,” explained the fictionalized Indian character; “I am in debt” to “a great many [Englishmen] and they force me to stay and work with them.”

Backed by the authority of the courts, local creditors discovered a powerful mechanism for conscripting Indian labor. The practice of debt peonage was particularly brutal in southern New England’s evolving maritime economy. By 1730, most regional whaling and merchant vessels were manned by crews of indebted Indians who transferred their wages directly to local creditors at the end of each voyage. Born into a prominent clan of Native Christians at Manomet Ponds, Sion Hood received payments from the New England Company during the 1740s for allowing local missionaries to preach at his house. Two

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decades earlier, the young indentured servant toiled for Plymouth "Gentleman" James Warren as a "Stearman" in a whaleboat crew. Warren owned no whaling vessels, but he rented his Native servants to those who did; and when Plymouth whaler Jonathan Barnes refused to pay Hood’s share after returning from a successful voyage to the coast of North Carolina in 1729, Warren sued the captain for the considerable sum of £60.29

By mid-century, there were countless ways for Indians to fall under the economic control of their English creditors. Juda Porrage, a Middleborough laborer, was sued by an elderly widow after he failed to compensate her for "attendance, Necessarys, Nursing, and houseroom" during an extended illness. Court appearances, too, created financial hardships. Even settling the estate of a family member could prove costly. At the time of his death in 1727, William Symonds, the Native preacher at Assawampsett, had amassed a modest estate valued at £63; yet his debts, combined with funeral expenses, reduced his children’s inheritance by more than eighty percent. In 1709, the Massachusetts Bay General Court enacted legislation designed to protect Native debtors from economic exploitation. Poorly enforced and gradually softened over the next three decades, the act did little to halt the growing epidemic of Indian debt.30

For many Native Christians, only two paths remained: wage labor and indentured servitude. Burdened by financial liabilities and unable to practice traditional subsistence routines on their shrinking land holdings, Indians throughout the Old Colony increasingly turned to their white neighbors for employment. A majority of the Indians who can be identified by occupation in surviving legal records are listed simply as "labourers." Men worked for daily wages in Plymouth’s maritime industries and in the local farming economy; women served as domestics


30Plymouth Court Records, 5:301; Plymouth County Probate Records, 6:28, 176; Silverman, "Impact of Indentured Servitude," p. 637.
in English homes. Impoverished Indian families, moreover, were forced to indenture their children to English masters, thus extending the cycle of poverty to the next generation. In fact, by the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, a majority of Native Americans no longer resided in Indian villages, enclaves, or small neighborhoods; instead, they lived and worked as servants in English households. Two out of every three individuals listed on a 1704 roster of Native soldiers mustered out of Barnstable County, for example, served English masters. In neighboring Rhode Island, Anglican clergyman George Berkeley claimed that “nearly all” Indians in the region were “servants or labourers for the English.” The situation was the same in Plymouth. During his 1726 general visitation, Cotton noted that a significant portion of his mission field consisted of indentured servants who lived “Scattered About in English Houses.”

Coerced servitude quickly evolved into a repressive system of social control through which town officials and greedy employers sought to corral and exploit a captive work force. Most indentures were extracted involuntarily—either in payment for debts or as an enforced form of Indian poor relief. Few masters complied fully with the stipulations of their contracts, and some brazenly sought to exploit their Native wards. Plymouth’s Native Christians chafed under the corrupt system. Samuel Wickett, for example, agreed to work for a seedy Plymouth bricklayer named Quentin Crymble for a period of three years, and he indentured his three children as sureties for the perfor-

mance of his labors. After two years, however, Wickett moved to New Hampshire and bought out the remaining year of his contract with a £90 note from his new master. Seeking to exploit the terms of the original agreement, the crafty bricklayer approached the Plymouth court and sued to have Wickett's children surrendered to his service. Learning of Wickett's payment, Cotton and his fellow justices denied the fraudulent claim. As Alice Sachemus came to realize, however, Indian servants often were not able to thwart the underhanded dealings of unscrupulous masters. Bound over to a Barnstable creditor in 1723, Sachemus was sold to Plymouth merchant and real estate speculator Consider Howland two years later; he, in turn, transferred her out of the colony altogether when he sold her indenture to a Killingley, Connecticut, man. Given such abuses, it is not surprising to discover that some Native servants openly and often violently defied their masters. Amy Wattnum—sister to Indian minister Thomas Felix—and David Chassuck of Marshfield, for example, burnt their indenture contracts, while others, such as James Mohcage, James Cheppes, and Solomon Zachari, simply ran away.32

Other Indians—including several members of Cotton's mission congregation—slipped into the ranks of Plymouth's discontented, rowdy underclass. In 1721, Isaac Cunnitt, the son of Esther Cunnitt, at whose wigwam Cotton frequently preached, was haled into court for purchasing alcohol from another Indian. Plain Dealing resident Joshua Hood broke out of the Plymouth jail while being held for an unspecified offense several years later. Although Betty Tom's name appears on Cotton's list of Indians attending the Manomet Ponds meeting, she appears to have forgone regular church attendance by 1729. Over the course of several sabbaths that summer, Tom managed to steal a substantial quantity of clothes and household items from her Kingston and Plymouth masters, including

silk handkerchiefs, aprons, petticoats, stockings, a pair of "Black Calf Skine Shoes," "one pair of Holland Mittens," two silver shirt buckles, six copper pennies, and several shillings' worth of paper currency. Among the items pilfered by a Kingston Indian spinster named Susanna Sachemus was a large family Bible valued at 18 shillings. And when Mercy Ned failed to return the petty goods she had lifted from the Plymouth residence of Thomas Foster, the courts bound Cotton's former tenant over to the plaintiff for a staggering twelve years! Even the Plymouth judge was not insulated from the rebellious behavior of his Indian congregation: Desire Pequin stole 17 shillings' worth of clothing from his house as she fled from her master in 1725.33

In addition to alcohol violations and petty theft, violence was rife among Plymouth's Native Christians. Magistrates indicted another member of the Sachemus family, Joseph, and two English cronies for instigating a street brawl with Seth Doggett and attempting to liberate Sachemus's brother George from the Plymouth jail. Samuel Wickett broke up Thomas Weatherell's barn, stole the Plymouth innkeeper's horse, and rode fifteen miles to Middleborough; along the way, he pilfered from Zephaniah Swift one bottle of "Syrup of jilliflowers," twenty pounds of pork, two quarts of hard liquor, gunpowder, a powder horn, a shot bag, and six pipes. Samuel Quacknum was charged with the attempted murder of Quentin Crymble after he allegedly chased the unscrupulous bricklayer all the way "from Plymouth to Eell River and on the Highway by a Stone or some other Instrument of Death cut him through both Hat and Wigg even to his very Scull with sundry other wounds on his face and throat." Much to the chagrin of Crymble and the Plymouth authorities, Quacknum escaped trial by shipping out to sea on a merchant vessel. Then, in 1755, Joshua Sachemus brutally bludgeoned Daniel Robin's second wife to death with a four-foot cider maul.34 Virtually all of these offenders came from Plymouth County's extensive network of Native Christian families.

33Plymouth Court Records, 2:21, 66, 83, 98–99, 118, 189.
34Plymouth Court Records, 2:87, 128, 150; Suffolk Court Files: 75829.
The social, legal, and economic adversities plaguing Cotton’s congregants are dramatically illustrated by the fate of migrant Indian laborer Jeremiah Attequin. In May 1735, Attequin was convicted of stealing a silk hood, neckcloth, silver ring, jack knife, and two pipes from a widow in Falmouth, as well as £24 in paper currency from Barnstable merchant Timothy Crocker. For these crimes, Attequin was fined, whipped, and bound in Crocker’s service for eight years. Remarried in 1736 after the sudden death of his first wife, Attequin was brought before Cotton’s court again a year later, this time to answer charges of stealing feathers from Plymouth merchant Thomas Howland. Convicted a second time, Attequin was unable to pay his fine, and the court increased his indenture by two and a half years. In an interesting turn of events, Cotton preached at Attequin’s residence on at least six occasions between 1737 and 1739; and one of these performances included a scathing indictment of the very sins that had plagued his host’s recent days. Had the twice-convicted burglar renounced his sinful ways and pledged himself to the Christian god? The historical record tells us only that Attequin was murdered by another Indian in the summer of 1741.35

Debt, poverty, servitude, petty theft, alcohol abuse, and violence impinged on the everyday lives of most Native Americans in the Old Colony during the early decades of the eighteenth century. To be sure, social malaise was common in rowdy seaport communities like Plymouth, where transience, greed, and impersonal market forces combined to undermine the stable functioning of social institutions. Yet Indians were disproportionately represented in indictments for debt, theft, battery, and murder, and they often received unequal punishments for the same crimes committed by their English counterparts.36


Legal troubles, moreover, contributed to emerging racial stereotypes that identified Indians as lying, drunken idlers who posed a direct threat to provincial society. New England presses responded by publishing several sensational accounts of notorious offenders who offered “dying Advice” to an English audience already primed to think the worst of their seemingly debauched Indian neighbors. Despite his paternalistic dedication to his Native charges, Judge Cotton, far from disdaining such racialized language, frequently indulged in it, continually upbraiding his wards at Plain Dealing for the “vices to which Indians are given” and which would “bring the wrath of God and men upon you.”

While they could hardly have been pleased with such characterizations, Native Christians living and working in the volatile world of eighteenth-century Plymouth County frequently gathered under the protective canopy offered by Judge Cotton and the New England Company. Among the most resourceful and resilient Indians in the region were Nathan Hood—the principal host of Cotton’s biweekly worship exercises for nearly twenty years—and the several tenant families who worked at Plain Dealing. In 1710, Nathan, his first wife, Patience, and his six children were living at Manomet Ponds on lands “that Came to him from his father.” Apparently he ranked among the leaders of the local Indian church, for two years earlier his name headed the list of petitioners who urged the Boston commissioners to allow Jacob Hedge to serve as their minister. In fact,


Cotton, “Vocabulary,” p. 243, and Indian Sermon, Ayer Collection. For examples of execution sermons and other publications involving Indians from the Old Colony, see The Last Speech and Dying Advice of Poor Julian (Boston, 1733), and Samuel Moody and Joseph Moody, A Faithful Narrative of the Wicked Life and Remarkable Conversion of Patience Boston (Boston, 1738).
Cotton’s 1710 roster of Indian congregants at Manomet Ponds included twenty-seven related Hoods from at least five distinct families. Collectively, they comprised nearly one quarter of the congregation, and in each family, at least one individual could read. In short, Nathan Hood stood at the center of a large network of core Christian Indian families who were in the process of consolidating the power of their clan in the decades that followed King Philip’s War.38

For a brief time, Hood and his family appear to have prospered. While Indians throughout southeastern New England were selling off their land holdings at an alarming rate, in 1711 Nathan managed to purchase an additional ten acres of prime meadow near his farm at Manomet Ponds. He paid the £15 sales price in cash, and the deed listed his occupation as “yeoman,” rather than the “Indian labourer” that appeared with such frequency in court records. It was a promising sign that Hood was winning the battle to provide for his family in the new provincial economy. Fortune, however, soon frowned upon the aspiring farmer. Less than a year later, Nathan, along with his brother Robin, became gravely ill. An English settler named John Barnes provided the Hoods “with what was nedfull in theer sicnes,” but the brothers faced soaring medical debts. In the winter of 1712, Nathan and Robin petitioned the town of

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38Records of the Town of Plymouth, 2:216–17; New England Company, Commissioner’s Minutes, 1699–1754, 11 October 1708; Cotton, “Account of Monument ponds Indians.” Fragments of genealogical evidence suggest two possible scenarios for Hood’s ancestry. The name Hood may have evolved from “How Doe Yee”—the affable appellation of an Indian from Little Compton, Massachusetts, whose name appeared on the 1677 roster of families “whoe have approved themselves faithfull to the English during the late Rebellion.” Alternately, Nathan may have descended from Hope Hood, who served as commander of all Indian forces during the ill-fated Phips expedition against Canada in 1690; and it is likely that this same “Hope Indian” served with the other “most indifferentest, gravest, and sage” jurors in the famed John Sassamon murder trial. Either way, the available evidence suggests that the Hoods ranked among those Native American families who perennially had cooperated with the new English government in Plymouth Colony. For genealogical evidence connecting Nathan Hood’s family to “How Doe Ye” and Hope Hood, see Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, ed. Nathaniel Shurtleff and David Pulsifer, 12 vols. (Boston, 1855–61), 5:168, 225; Plymouth County Probate Records, 3:119–21, 4:127; Plymouth County Deed Records, 1665–1900, 799 vols., Plymouth County Registry of Deeds, Plymouth, Mass., 12:145; Massachusetts Archives Collection, 1629–1799, 328 vols., Massachusetts Archives, Boston, 33:477–78, 35:326.
Plymouth to mortgage ten acres of land to Barnes, but later that spring, they were compelled to sell the land outright.39

For the next several years, Hood must have struggled to wrest even a meager subsistence from his remaining six acres of property. Then, in the spring of 1720, Isaac Wannoo and a group of ten leading Indians from Titicut sent a written memorial to Plymouth informing the town officials that Hood had been granted a plot of twelve acres within their plantation. The Titicut men traded on their Christian affiliations, stating that they had “land to spare” and were willing to grant a house lot and farm acreage to any Indian who consented to live in an “orderly way” and “uphold the Worship of God amongst or with us.” This agreement promised to put Hood’s family on a sound economic footing, especially since the Native proprietors pledged to provide Nathan’s children with additional shares of undivided commons in the future.40

Despite the enticing settlement offer, however, it is unclear whether Hood and his family ever removed to Titicut. In their 1720 petition, the Indian proprietors hinted that Nathan had visited the small enclave and expressed his “Willingness to live amongst us.” The strong religious tone of the document, moreover, suggests that Wannoo and the other leaders were courting Hood to serve as their minister. But the Titicut petition was not recorded in the Plymouth town record book for more than two years, during which time Hood remained at Manomet Ponds. In the interim, he petitioned the local authorities “sundrey Times . . . To grant him librty to sell his land . . . neere The grat fresh pond,” and, by 1722, he had received a second “offer of a parcell of land sufficent for his use on free cost” from an unidentified group of residents in Scituate. Citing Hood’s “Importunity” and the “advantage” of his multiple settlement options, the Plymouth town fathers finally acceded to his request, and Hood sold the remains of his tiny farm at

40Records of the Town of Plymouth, 2:216.
Manomet Ponds later that year. Yet he inexplicably chose to re-
locate neither to Titicut nor Scituate. Rather, by June of 1722,
the Hoods had arrived at Plain Dealing, where Cotton
preached the first of more than a hundred sermons in the fam-
ily’s wigwam.  

Over the next eighteen years, “Old Nathan” and the Ply-
mouth judge formed a productive partnership. The Hoods lived
on the grounds of Cotton’s farm, where they worked a variety
of odd jobs for the lay minister. He and his son, Nathan Jr., pro-
vided Cotton with alewives, building supplies, and occasional
farm produce; they slaughtered his livestock and even searched
for mineral deposits on his property. In addition, Hood’s wife
and daughter contributed to the family’s income by performing
domestic chores. In return for their services, Cotton loaned
money to various Hood family members or advanced them
credit at local shops, and he occasionally allowed Nathan to uti-
lize the labor of his African slave, Quominuk. Daniel Robin,
Hood’s son-in-law and the host of Cotton’s biweekly religious
meetings from 1740 to 1744, also worked for the missionary as
a handyman, mending broken doors, fixing ax handles, and con-
structing barrel hoops.  

Further aiding his tenants’ subsistence efforts, Cotton man-
aged to divert to them additional financial and material re-
sources from the New England Company. In 1727, for ex-
ample, Hood received a substantial payment of £10 in
compensation for the “use of his house for public worship,” and
later that year, the Boston commissioners allocated 30 shillings
for his son’s education in “an English School at Plymouth.” The
judge recorded disbursements of books, paper, and inkhorns to

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41 Records of the Town of Plymouth, 2:216–17; Plymouth County Deed Records, 25:93. The earliest reference to Hood’s presence at Plain Dealing (17 June 1722) ap-
ppears in Cotton’s Indian Sermons, Mayhew Papers. Some evidence suggests that Titicut
did not have a settled minister in 1720; while there were several Native preachers active
within the bounds of Middleborough, none appears to have been associated with the
Titicut plantation on a regular basis until 1729 (Jean Fittz Hankins, “Bringing the Good

42 Cotton Diaries, pp. 4, 23, 27, 36.
Nathan and his family as well, while Hood’s neighbor, Francis Ned, received educational books, devotional literature, and a valuable copy of the Eliot Bible. Over the next two decades, moreover, “Old” Francis and his wife Margery received occasional “charity” from the missionary society in the form of direct cash payments. And when the commissioners sent Cotton a yearly supply of blankets, the judge rarely failed to distribute them to the Indians on his farm before sending the rest down to Manomet Ponds.\textsuperscript{43}

As a long-term subsistence strategy, Hood’s decision to relocate to Plain Dealing proved a mixed blessing. The judge provided a place to live, a steady income, credit in Plymouth’s merchant shops, and direct access to the charitable resources of the New England Company. As other Indian families moved onto the farm, a small, tightly knit community of devout Native Christians formed. These families probably maintained their ties with kin living at Manomet Ponds, and some evidence hints that Nathan remained a communicant in the local Indian church until his dying day. Shielded from an increasingly hostile English society, Hood and his family may have rediscovered a sense of stability, community, and place. But economic security came at the expense of personal freedom. Never again would Nathan own his own land or aspire to English yeoman status. In return for land tenancy and daily wages, he subjected himself and his family to a lifetime of debt, servitude, and dependence—at times with devastating results. Hood, Francis Ned, and the other tenants were forced to place their children in Cotton’s service, and several of their sons met with untimely deaths as a direct result. It is unclear whether Daniel Hood and Joseph Ned returned safely to Plymouth after fighting with other Native servants on the northern New England frontier during Dummer’s War (1722–26), but Cotton recorded the

\textsuperscript{43}The examples cited in this paragraph have been assembled from the New England Company’s Commissioner’s Accounts, 1657–1731; Commissioner’s Minutes, 1699–1784, 24 October 1727; Commissioner’s Accounts, 1729–41, NEHGS; and Cotton’s Diaries, pp. 30, 31, 35, 46, 50.
premature death of Nathan Jr. "upon Our Land" a decade later. Even worse, James Hood was lost at sea en route to Jamaica just three months before his contract was due to expire, while James Ned was crushed under a cart while in the employ of Scituate lawyer John Cushing Jr., Cotton's son-in-law.44

While Nathan Hood labored independently to provide for his family, the Native Christian community that he left behind at Manomet Ponds struggled to retain control over its own religious institutions. An Indian church had flourished in this remote coastal village for more than fifty years following John Cotton Jr.'s first visit in 1670, nurtured, in part, by a spirit of cooperation between the Wampanoag and Plymouth's white settlers. Many of the region's earliest praying Indians had been headmen under the leadership of the seventeenth-century sachem Quachattasett, who ruled the Wampanoag lands from Buzzard's Bay to Manomet Ponds, and from the beginning, they staunchly supported the colonial government. Of the five jurors who served in the John Sassamon murder trial that sparked King Philip's War, four were praying Indians from Manomet Ponds; other leading members of the original congregation signed a formal statement in which they pledged to support the English during the conflict.45 Their loyalty was rewarded. While Philip and the vast majority of hostile Natives were killed outright during the war or sold into slavery in the West Indies, the friendly Wampanoag at Manomet Ponds retained their lands.

Though a distinct community, the Ponds Indians were part of a larger regional network of Native Christian settlements. In 1693, Thomas Tupper, the New England Company's desig-
nated inspector and lay missionary in the neighboring town of Sandwich, listed thirteen families from Manomet Ponds among the 226 Indians who attended his sabbath meetings. Tupper's roster included the surnames of families who regularly appeared in town and court records as well as Cotton's mission papers. Over the next few decades, Manomet Ponds seems to have emerged as a central gathering place for surviving Wampanoag families throughout the region. Inspectors for the New England Company discovered only ten Native Christian families living in the area in 1698, but Cotton counted more than one hundred Indians attending weekly worship exercises in the Ponds meetinghouse a decade later, a third of whom had joined the church as full members. Thus, while a few Indians followed Nathan Hood's lead and removed to other parts of Plymouth County, many more appear to have relocated to the Ponds. Moreover, the Native congregation also included a large contingent from neighboring towns. According to Cotton, an additional 136 individuals traveled to the meetinghouse from the Indian enclaves at Assawamsett, Titicut, and Sampson Pond as well as smaller settlements in Duxbury and Kingston—all over ten miles distant.46

In 1729, local Indian leaders summoned Judge Cotton to Manomet Ponds and asked him to settle a dispute. For several years, the Native church had struggled to fill its pulpit with a suitable preacher. Joseph Wannoo had served the community for more than a decade as schoolmaster, magistrate, and minister, but now in his advancing years, the elderly convert—one of John Cotton Jr.'s first praying Indians—had scaled back his activities. Into the breach flowed a steady procession of potential successors, all of whom failed to establish themselves. A local Indian named John Deerskins assumed responsibility for

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46“Account of Mr. Tupper's Congregation of Indians,” 28 March 1693. Pilgrim Hall (document transcription available online at "In Their Own Write"); "Account of an Indian Visitation, A.D. 1698," Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1st ser., vol. 10 (Boston, 1809), p. 133; Cotton, “Account of Monument ponds Indians.” Cotton later noted that there were only 103 “adult praying Indians” spread among five Native churches (Manomet Ponds, Jones River, Mattakesit, Titicut, and Assawamsett) in Plymouth County in 1703 (“Vocabulary,” p. 244).
preaching to the Ponds congregation in 1724, but he died unexpectedly a year later. The Sepit brothers—David and Micah—followed, but because they were both struggling day laborers, their sabbath schedules were erratic. Lazarus Nummuck, a respected member of the nearby Indian congregation at Herring Pond, preached temporarily in 1729, as did an outsider named Joseph Moses. In fact, four different candidates rotated through the Ponds pulpit in a brief but confusing two-year period.\textsuperscript{47}

Arriving in the village, the judge inquired after the desires of the church members. Then, taking a weathered old envelope from his pocket, he composed a formal statement: “We Indians Dwelling in Plymouth are willing & desirous that Joseph Moses Indian Should preach to Us, & keep School in the Winter.” It was simple for Cotton to draft a petition endorsing Moses’s candidacy, but it was an act few of the document’s signers could have performed. Nine church members representing virtually all of the prominent clans in the congregation subscribed to the petition: four men, followed by five women; one signature, followed by eight marks.\textsuperscript{48} The community of Native Christians had spoken—with Cotton’s help—and he, in turn, presented their views to the commissioners of the New England Company. It was the first skirmish in what quickly became a pitched battle involving land rights and institutional autonomy.

By the third decade of the eighteenth century, the Christian Indians at Manomet Ponds were facing new pressures from English families who had migrated south from the center of town in search of farmland and pasturage. For more than two decades, local Wampanoag families had watched with growing concern as aggressive white yeomen snatched up Indian lands with alarming rapidity. By 1732, these English outlifters had organized themselves into a proprietary association and were moving to establish a church for their new precinct. They knew

\textsuperscript{47}Hankins, “Bringing the Good News,” pp. 530–42. For financial disbursements to Indian preachers at Manomet Ponds during the 1720s, see the New England Company’s Commissioner’s Accounts, 1657–1731; and Commissioner’s Accounts, 1729–41, NEHGS.

\textsuperscript{48}Cotton, “Indian Call of Joseph Moses.”
that obtaining formal legal status for Plymouth's second church would be difficult. Dozens of towns across New England had squabbled over diluted tax bases and clergymen's salaries; some recalcitrant hamlets in the Old Colony resolutely refused to settle a minister at all. How could Plymouth support two? The proprietors seized upon a bold but simple plan. Having colonized the Indians' land, they would infiltrate their church. And so, on 1 July 1734, the proprietors "voted that Samuel Ellis [should] go to Boston to the honourable Commissioners [of the New England Company] who have the care of the Indians in this province, to know what encouragement they will give towards the Indians being joined with us, carrying on the public Worship of God." The integrated congregation would meet in the existing Indian church, and funds from the New England Company would help defray the salary of the newly appointed English minister. It was an effective plan, and one that seemingly had the potential to divide the Ponds congregation against itself.

For a brief moment, Cotton may have entertained the Manomet proprietors' power play as a unique opportunity for his Indian wards to participate fully in provincial society as spiritual equals of the English. The Boston commissioners, too, must have weighed the merits of the proprietors' petition carefully, since at that time they were considering joining several newly formed mission outposts in southern Connecticut with existing English churches. But for the Indians at Manomet Ponds, it was an ominous turn of events. Just a few score miles to the north, a similar experiment was underway at Natick, and,

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50 "First Precinct Records of Monument Ponds," 1732–94, trans. Nathaniel Clark, Pilgrim Hall Museum (microfilm, Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1972). In the winter of 1732, a group of unidentified Ponds families petitioned the New England Company requesting "to be joined with a new Precinct lately set off." The Boston commissioners tabled the motion and did not reconsider the matter until 1737. No evidence suggests that the Indian petitioners continued to support the proprietors' consolidation scheme after the arrival of Solomon Briant the following November (New England Company, Commissioner's Minutes, 1731–47, 1 February 1732, NEHGS).
from a Native perspective, the results were proving disastrous. After a similar succession crisis following the death of the Indian preacher John Neesnumin in 1716, the New England Company integrated John Eliot's original praying Indian congregation and summoned Oliver Peabody to serve as its minister. The young Harvard graduate's appointment signaled the end of the once autonomous Indian church. Preaching exclusively in English, Peabody labored to attract white families to settle in the former praying town, and he actively encouraged Native families to alienate their lands. In 1729, representatives from the New England Company reported that Natick's Native Christians "generally uphold the worship of God in their families praying and reading the Scripture"; yet while a few of the younger Indians were satisfied with Peabody's ministry, members of the older generation preferred to observe the sabbath privately in their homes. Natick's last Native deacon was appointed in the first year of Peabody's ministry; between 1729 and 1740, incoming English church members outnumbered Indians by a ratio of nearly three to one; and in 1747, the town—now dominated by white proprietors—voted to move the meetinghouse itself to a location that was more convenient to its non-Native residents. By mid-century, the Natick praying Indians had completely lost control of the very institution that once was designed to facilitate their integration into English society.51

With a storm of religious dispossession brewing on the horizon, the Indians at Manomet Ponds sought shelter where they had done so for decades in times of economic difficulty and political uncertainty: with the New England Company and its designated inspector in Plymouth County, Judge Cotton. When Samuel Catskins was called to account for his £6 debt to a local

English mariner, he had asked Cotton to help settle the case out of court. When the Ponds meetinghouse needed repairs in 1716, Cotton wrote the memorial that secured funding from the New England Company. When charitable contributions from the Boston commissioners arrived in Plymouth, Cotton distributed them to needy Indian families. Indeed, for over forty years he took pride in serving the Indian families of Plymouth County as a kind of surrogate sachem: a leader who redistributed wealth in the form of blankets, books, and preachers’ salaries, provided his own lands for local families to work and dwell upon, forged consensus in times of conflict, and negotiated legal issues with his peers among the provincial authorities.

And yet, a fundamental difference remained between the lay missionary and the sachems of Manomet’s past, a fact reflected in the simple reality that the Ponds congregation never invited Cotton to serve as their preacher. It is unclear whether he would have accepted an ordained position of leadership over the assembly of praying Indians that his own father had gathered in the 1670s, but he apparently was never asked. In fact, the lay missionary preached only a handful of times at Manomet Ponds between 1732 and 1751—roughly once every other year (see table 1). Local families eagerly sought out his services as a legal advocate; they may have exploited his role as a patron and benefactor; they may have suffered through his moralizing fast-day sermons; they may have valued his advice in times of illness and misfortune; and a few—like Francis Ned and Nathan Hood—may have loved him as a father. But when it came time to select a minister for the church at Manomet Ponds, Plymouth’s Native Christians were resolute: only an Indian preacher would do.

With Cotton acting as their advocate and liaison to the New England Company, the Ponds congregation managed to retain control over their pulpit. On 27 October 1737, the Boston commissioners turned down the proprietors’ request to integrate

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the Indian and English congregations. By that time, the experienced Indian minister Solomon Briant had been preaching to the Ponds congregation and serving as their schoolmaster for more than four years. Cotton welcomed him and made sure that the underpaid and impoverished Native preacher received his annual salary as well as access to credit in Plymouth's shops. Briant remained in the village until 1741, then left for Mashpee. On more than half a dozen occasions during the early 1740s, the judge traveled to Manomet to inquire after the fragile state of the ministry in the Indian church (see table 2); in October 1744 he rode fifteen miles to secure the services of Native preacher Will Samson, who filled the Ponds pulpit for a decade.\(^53\)

In 1767, eleven years after the judge's death and nearly a century after the founding of the Manomet Ponds congregation, agents for the New England Company reported that Isaac Jeffry was preaching to the tiny remnant of Native families who lived in the area. Listed among the dependents on Cotton's 1710 roster of praying Indians, Jeffry, like Nathan Hood, hailed from a leading Christian clan. "He bears a good character," explained the visiting New England Company delegates, "and would merit a larger allowance, if his usefulness could be rendered more extensive." But Jeffry seemed content in his labors among his dwindling flock of only two men and perhaps eight women, and he appears to have upheld the congregation's perennial mandate for a Native-speaking minister. While the neighboring inspector and lay preacher Elisha Tupper claimed the Ponds as part of his mission field, Jeffry steadfastly maintained that he had not seen his English colleague in more than twenty years!\(^54\) Whether this was due to Tupper's negligence or the Indians' active intervention remains unclear. Regardless, the Indians at Manomet Ponds managed to resist integration and to supply their small church with Native preachers from

\(^{53}\) New England Company, Commissioner's Minutes, 1731-47, 27 October 1737, NEHGS; Cotton Diaries, pp. 2, 6-7, 22, 30-32, 35.

John Cotton Jr.'s removal in 1696 through the 1760s—thanks in no small part to Josiah Cotton's staunch advocacy and the support of the New England Company. It was a remarkable achievement for a congregation composed of only a few impoverished Indian families.

Early in his career, Josiah Cotton expressed his hope that in time, "when a few of the Old People are gone off," local Indian families would "Unite with the English" and assume their rightful places in local Congregational churches. It was a common aspiration among eighteenth-century ministers and lay leaders of the New England missions. As New England Company secretary Samuel Sewall once stated, "the best thing we can do for our Indians is to Anglicise them in all agreeable Instances." From English language acquisition and clothing styles to subsistence routines and devotional practices, Puritan missionaries had attempted to "civilize" the Indians of southern New England for decades. But the results were mixed, and Native Christians themselves remained divided over the relative benefits and drawbacks of adopting English ways. "Though some of their aged men are tenacious enough of Indianisme," Sewall noted in a letter that amplified Cotton's own sentiments, "Others of them as earnestly wish that their people may be made English as fast as they can."55

Over the course of the eighteenth century, this missionary ideal would prove untenable—both to the Indians and to their English masters and creditors. In the end, Cotton's paternalism and the material resources of the New England Company were not enough to stem the tide of epidemic disease, legal harassment, economic exploitation, and racial hostility. In fact, Cotton's missionary work declined precipitously following the death of Old Nathan Hood in the winter of 1740. Though

Hood’s widow and son-in-law assumed responsibility for hosting the worship exercises at Plain Dealing, the number of Indians attending the biweekly meetings dwindled to a mere handful. Within a few years Cotton was preaching only to Daniel Robin’s immediate family. Over time, the judge retreated from his engagement with his Native wards. Now in the twilight of his career, he preached fewer formal “Indian” sermons, electing instead to offer a short exhortation or discourse on a passage from Psalms. Increasingly, he conducted these informal worship activities in English, not Massachusett. And he spent less time visiting with Native families or supervising the Indian school and church at Manomet Ponds (see tables 2–4). The nadir of his career came in 1744, when he was forced to cancel four meetings after his Native congregants failed to appear. The commissioners were concerned with the disturbing downward trend, noting in their minutes that the “Indians, who used to attend Mr. Cottons preaching are of late grown very backward in their attendance.” And so they voted to discharge him from their service “& thank him for his past labours.”

The judge managed to hang on for another seven years, during which time he periodically visited and prayed with the few Indians who remained at Plain Dealing. He even convinced the commissioners to compensate him for his occasional gospel labors. But it was clear that the times had changed. Looking back over four decades of diligent service, more than seven hundred sermon performances, and countless informal visitations to counsel, catechize, and comfort the scattered Christian Indians of Plymouth County, Cotton bitterly lamented the failure of his Indian business. “Oh how Little Good have I done as to the Main End thereof,” he complained toward the end of his service. “Will not the Guilt of the Bloud of Souls ly at my Door? God in his Mercy forgive my wretched Mismanagements, & let Me be Humble very Humble that I have been so Negligent & Successless.” Throughout his career, he continually criticized

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56New England Company, Commissioner’s Minutes, 1731–47, 15 November 1744. NEHGS.
his tenants for their irregular church attendance, their apparent apathy, their uneven mastery of Reformed Protestant doctrine, their public drunkenness and rowdy behavior. By 1747, most of them were gone, having abandoned Plain Dealing after fifty years of continuous residence.57

With the dissolution of Cotton's Indian business came the bittersweet recognition that he had been undermining his own employment with the New England Company all along. With each attempt that he made to secure another Native preacher for the Manomet congregation, Cotton was forced to choose between an autonomous Native American Christianity and his previously stated goal of shepherding his scattered Indian flock into the fold of local English churches. His Indian sermons promoted the retention of Native linguistic skills in a time when the Massachusett language was in acute decline. He provided a cloistered space for separate Indian worship in the several wigwams that his tenants erected on his farm. And while he supervised and inspected the Indian church at Manomet Ponds, Cotton rarely interfered in tribal politics. Instead, he lobbied to secure Native preachers like Solomon Briant and helped to channel financial and material resources into the village. All of these activities, in short, assisted Plymouth's diffuse Indian population in their struggles against brutal economic exploitation, frequent violence, and persistent demographic stress. Perhaps, he mused in more sanguine moments, the dissolution of his missionary work was "a Favour rather than a Judgment."58

While Cotton lamented his declining fortunes, neighboring missionary Eldad Tupper reported surprising progress among the Sandwich Indians in a 1740 letter to the Connecticut evangelist Eleazar Wheelock. "I Believe I have had the help of your Prayers," he explained, "seing since I have held a Corespondeance with you, I have had Remarkable success in my Labours and the Indians have been attended with Remarkable Mercyes

and Blessings." Neither Tupper nor Cotton fully understood the demographics underlying their observations. During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, Indians from across the Old Colony began to relocate to larger Native enclaves on Cape Cod. The families at Plain Dealing were among them. Stalwarts like Old Francis and Margery Ned departed for Herring Pond in the late 1720s; members of the rising generation, including Daniel Robin, James Ned, and their families, moved to the Manomet and Herring Pond settlements two decades later.

Retreating from tiny neighborhoods at places such as Plain Dealing, Eel River, Jones River, and Duxbury, migrating families of Native Christians sought greater access to land, economic opportunity, clan fellowship, and ethnic solidarity. Located in a remote corner of Plymouth, the three-thousand-acre Herring Pond reservation proved a worthy sanctuary—at least for a time. One 1778 report suggested that the “large Tract of Land” was “convenient for fishing & planting” and was stocked with “plenty of Wood.” Here, the migrating Indians resettled in small family clusters, and some returned to traditional subsistence routines. Not surprisingly, a few of the Herring Pond Indians threw off their Christian heritage altogether. The “Indians Inhabiting the Easterly and Southerly Parts of Plymouth generally Dwell Ten or more miles from any Justice of the Peace,” remarked Elisha Tupper, the Indians’ inspector and the latest in a long line of Tupper family missionaries, “and many Disorders Contrary to law Prevale among them many of them not attending the worship of god in Publick on the Saboth.”

On the other hand, the pious descendants of Nathan Hood and Francis Ned quickly discovered that Herring Pond provided an opportunity for them to worship as the Manomet Ponds Indians had for generations: in an autonomous Native

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59 Eldad Tupper to Eleazar Wheelock, 21 June 1740, Eleazar Wheelock Papers, #740371, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, N.H.
60 Abraham Williams to Andrew Eliot, 20 January 1778, box 3, folder 61, New England Company Papers, NEHGS; Elisha Tupper to Spencer Phips, 15 November 1751, Massachusetts Archives, 32:228; Mandell, Behind the Frontier, pp. 123-24, 178.
Christian church. Like Judge Cotton a generation earlier, the Tppers received a steady stream of annual annuities and material resources from the New England Company which they distributed to the Indian congregation; and when the company funds ran dry, the Tppers occasionally dipped into their personal estates. They sent memorials to the commissioners on behalf of the congregation and, in concert with local authorities, looked after the legal interests of the reservation families. Under their careful administration, the Herring Pond congregation thrived. By the mid-1760s more than one hundred Indians—including several families from Plain Dealing—were gathering to worship in a newly constructed meetinghouse; that figure stayed relatively constant over the next two decades, owing in part to an impressive indigenous birthrate. And yet, like their neighbors at Manomet Ponds, the Herring Pond Indians refused to settle an English minister and continued to provide their own schoolteachers. Prior to the arrival of Ephraim Ellis in 1770, the Tppers preached to the Herring Pond congregation only once a month.61

The Indians of Plymouth County would continue to strive for spiritual and economic autonomy well into the nineteenth century, though the later acts of this protracted drama unfolded far from the small cluster of wigwams on Cotton’s farm at Plain Dealing. Driven out of provincial society by the time of the American Revolution, the Indians who gathered in the emerging ethnic enclaves at places like Herring Pond, Gay Head, and Mashpee would soon merge with free blacks and migrant Indians from across New England. Resolute in their desire to wor-

61 Elisha Tupper, “Names and Numbers of Indians who Belong to or attend the Indian meeting in Sandwich,” 16 October 1761; and Tupper, “Memorial of Elisha Tupper,” 19 November 1761, Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts, MHS; “Report of a Committee on the State of Indians in Mashpee,” p. 15; Hankins, “Bringing the Good News,” p. 565; Williams to Oliver, 20 January 1778. The New England Company’s Commissioner’s Accounts, 1657–1731; and Commissioner’s Accounts, 1729–41 and 1741–71, NEHGS, contain hundreds of references to the Tppers’ financial disbursements to the Indians at Herring Pond and elsewhere in the region; see also the entries relating to their Indian service in the Commissioner’s Minutes, 1699–1784, and Commissioner’s Minutes, 1731–47, NEHGS.
ship in a manner of their own choosing. Native Christians in the early national period began to develop the uniquely syncretic mix of tradition and innovation that would become the hallmark of indigenous spirituality in William Apess’s world.

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