

The Lives and Identities of the Indians of ShelterIs.

Editor's Note: From the arrival of Nathaniel Sylvester in 1652, until the death of the last of the Manhasset in 1835, Native Americans were an important part of Shelter Island's population and economy. Exactly who these forgotten Islanders were, and how they lived is the subject of the following report published by Island resident and avocational archaeologist John Witek in the Spring 1992 issue of The Long Island Historical Journal.

Indians were a familiar presence on Shelter Island for 200 years after the arrival of Europeans. Those who weren't engaged in the East End's burgeoning whaling industry labored here in the fields of wealthy merchant planters such as Nathaniel Sylvester, William Nicoll, and George Havens. Although they are almost entirely forgotten now, Indians were once an essential part of Shelter Island's labor force. They comprised the bulk of the Island's population in 1680, and formed a substantial 18% as late as 1776.

Indian men planted crops, pressed cider, and split rails for fences while women cleaned homes, laundered clothes, carded wool, caned chairs, and sold baskets and brooms. Some bartered goods including fish, feathers, cranberries, and deer meat for merchandise such as lead shot, gunpowder, fish hooks, crockery, cloth, and nails. Cider and rum appear to have been the most popular commodities with

Native Americans.

Unique documents such as James Havens' ledgers, which contain records of business transactions with individual Shelter Island Indians, formed the basis for the author's research. A remarkable discovery that came to light in the East Hampton Free Library turned out to be the account book of Nathaniel Sylvester's eldest son, Giles, who recorded the names, wages, and other particulars concerning Indians who worked for him here.

When he is not engaged in local archaeology, John Witek is president of a leading TV direct marketing consultancy. Materials discovered by the author during his research have been donated to the Shelter Island Historical Society.

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1652-1835

By John Charles Witek

Editor's note: The Long Island Historical Journal is searching for the appropriate designation for Long Island's first inhabitants, Native American or Indian, each of which is semantically flawed. We use both terms in this article, and invite the response of readers.

The aptly named Shelter Island lies snugly in the bight between the North and South Forks of Long Island. First settled in 1652, this smallest of Suffolk's 10 towns was not a magnet for settlers, as were neighboring Southold and East Hampton. To the contrary, Shelter Island was, to a great extent, the domain of three families—the Sylvester, Nicolls, and Havens—throughout the colonial era. Although the history of Nathaniel Sylvester, William Nicoll, George Havens, and their families are well documented, very little is known about the aboriginal residents. The purpose of this article is to examine the culture and history of Shelter Island's Native Americans.

My research began with the fortuitous discovery of a spirit bottle, inscribed with what looks like an Indian's mark. I discovered this opaque, green glass bottle in August 1991, while measuring submerged prehistoric sites at Fresh Pond, Shelter Island's only deep, glacial kettle-hole lake. It was recovered as two non-connecting pieces, buried in sand under about two meters of water not far from the south shore of the pond. The specimen, 12.8 cm in diameter and more than 26 cm high when intact, has a long, tapering neck with a collared finish at the aperture. Its measurements are typical of the relatively symmetrical, hand-blown bottles manufactured in England during the second half of the 18th century.

A distinctive 5-by-3 cm mark, incised vertically down the bottle's shoulder, is made of meeting or intersecting scratches that terminate in three cruciform details. Although a search of contempo-

rary documents signed by Native Americans yielded no comparable example, elements of the inscription resemble Indian marks on a variety of deeds and contracts.

The mixed context in which the find was made consisted principally of glass and ceramic shards, dating mostly from the second half of the 19th century. Since Fresh Pond has served as a dump site for more than 200 years, analyses of finds made there need considerable qualification. In the present case, the site where the bottle was found would have been frequented by people residing at a house built by James Tuthill, in the 1740s. Although the design does not appear to be European or Colonial, it should be noted that from 1650 on, marks applied to the shoulders and sides of bottles made in England became an increasingly popular way to designate ownership, proprietorship, and origin.

More relevant is the fact that glass bottles were so esteemed by Native Americans that they were included as burial accompaniments. Three were recovered at the Montauk cemetery at East Hampton excavated by the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in 1917 and 1918. One bottle is inscribed on its shoulder with the name Wobetom, which also appears on early Montauk deeds and whaling indentures.

While Indians used bottles for various purposes, one cannot overestimate the role played by alcohol—mainly, Barbadian Rum—in the dissolution of Indian lives and Indian life. In 1659, when the English Quaker, John Taylor, visited Shelter Island, he found a "great many...friendly and sober" Indians living there. Only 13 years later, however, the situation seems to have changed. By 1672, the island's proprietor, Nathaniel Sylvester, found it necessary to petition the colonial court at Fort James for constabulary powers to arrest unruly Indians who "presumed in their Drink to breed disturbance and make commotions there." In keeping with the colonial custom

of often paying for labor in kind, instead of with money, Shelter Island's handful of merchant farmers paid Indians with liquor as a matter of course. Thus, Nathaniel Sylvester, in effect, contributed to the commotions he took measures to quell.

Neither the details of their lives, nor the number of Native Americans living on Shelter Island between 1640 and 1800, is understood precisely. Historians have written little to elaborate the statement made in a confirmatory paper dated March, 1652, and on file among the records of Southold, that the Manhasset sachem Yokee, "with all his Indians that were formerly to said Island of Ahaquatawamock (Shelter Island) did freely and willingly depart the aforesaid island, leaving the aforesaid Captain Nathaniel Sylvester...in full possession of the same."

While Yokee and some people close to him did leave Shelter Island, it is evident that some Indians remained there, and were joined by others. The newly arrived proprietor had a world to build from the ground up; given Taylor's account of Native Americans residing on Shelter Island by permission, it is inconceivable that Sylvester did not employ them to supplement his small work force of retainers and enslaved African Americans, especially for the seasonal demands of agriculture.

The Sylvester Account Book

Fortunately, several remarkable documents have come to light which, at last, illuminate the lives of Shelter Island's Indians during the colonial period. One of these is a slender volume, bound in sheepskin, in which Giles Sylvester, Nathaniel's eldest son, recorded his accounts for 1680, the year of his father's death, as well as for 1682, 1687, 1688, 1692, and 1701. This account book, housed in the East Hampton Free Library's Pennypacker Collection since the 1940s, is an invaluable primary source that, like the Havens store

(Continued on next page)

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ledgers discussed below, has been overlooked by professional historians.

This manuscript is the first that suggests how many Indians lived on Shelter Island in the 1680s, who they were, where they came from, what work they did, and how much pay they received. Thanks to this and the other records to be discussed, Shelter Island's Indians emerge as individuals, rather than as the merely generic examples of ethnicity to which anonymity consigned them. While some names may have belonged to black slaves, individual entries suggest that the preponderance represented Native Americans.

The more than 40 names include Abell, Abram, Allan, Ambusco, Anthony, Cato, Corna[e]lius, Dick, Govert, Guy, Harry, Honest Tom, Isaac, Japliott, John Indian, Black John, Jeffrey, Jaguano, Judas, Lawrence, Manhand [up], Mago, Mandansko, Mattahawood, Mohauk, Napandsson, Nianto, Neezanzaack Sag Indian, Pelo, Pandthom, Stephon, Shorto, Sunicutt, South Will, Turkeyman, Unkus his man, Wabua, Wianaquath, Wiamoxon, Wian, and Wanup. Giles' notes also include the names Papan[s?] Squaw, Squaw Hannah, and Judith. Other Indian women are referred to as 'the young squaw,' and 'the smith's squaw.' Certainly there were additional women and children. It would appear, then, that Indians formed the ethnic majority on Shelter Island at this time.

At least 11 of the men Giles recorded are mentioned in the colonial records of Southampton, East Hampton, and Southold, but to cross-reference them would oblige us to range beyond our Shelter Island perspective. Suffice it to say that contracts binding themselves to go whaling for various East End entrepreneurs were signed by Abell, Anthony, Isaac, and Jeffrey, as well as by Adam, Dick, Harry, John, Judas and Will. Tradition has it that Turkom's Neck, a peninsula on the south side of Shelter Island, was named for Turkeyman.

Most illuminating are references in town records indicating that Shelter Island Native Americans of the 1680s came from elsewhere. Barring a duplication of names, Abram (Abraham), Anthony, Dick, Harry, Isaac, Jeffrey, Judas, Stephon (Stephen), and possibly, Tom, are among the 52 males, 15 years old or more, enumerated as Shinnecocks in Southampton's 1698 census. Iago[e]'s name appears on a Montauk deed of 1687, and Ambusco, who signed several deeds concerning Southold, was the son of the Corchaug sachem Paucamp. Mohauk, Unkus his man, Neezanzaack the "Sag" Indian, and South Will must have been off-landers, too. John may be the son of the Montauk, Wobetom.

Yokee's departure created a void that was filled by Indians whose proprietary interest in Shelter Island was less than that of the people we have come to call the Manhansetts. It may reflect the peripatetic behavior of even such relatively sedentary groups of hunter-gatherers as those on eastern Long Island. More specifically, it may have marked the increasing mobility of Native American men involved with the East End shore whaling companies. These men, whose skills were in great demand, frequently moved back and forth from Shelter Island and the whaling stations in the towns of Southampton, East Hampton, and Brookhaven.

The estate that Nathaniel Sylvester bequeathed to Giles and his four other sons included orchards, a cider mill, wheat fields, and livestock, maintained by an unknown number of slaves supplemented by Native American day laborers. Practically all of the Indians listed above worked for Giles on an occasional basis of anywhere from a day to a month, for what appears to be a standard payment of one shilling's credit for one day's work.

The nature of the work is only faintly sketched. The account book credits Indians for going to what was known as "the main"—the farm fields attached to a manor. Indians cut wood, for which they received a yard or two of the coarse cloth called "duffles"; they split logs, at the rate of a pint of rum for every 100 rails produced; and they were employed at reaping, threshing, and cider making.

The account book shows little more than a month's employment for any one Indian, with many down for only a few days. According to one current writer, these were people who

simply did not constitute a reliable work force. With no motivation for acquisition, the Calvinist work ethic of the English was a total puzzlement to the Indian. He worked for enough of life's necessities to insure survival, shared what he had, and that was that.

Wages were not made in specie, which was scarce. Instead, except for a few yards of cotton, broad cloth, and 'duffles,' all payments were in the form of intoxicants. The most popular was the manor's cider, followed by Barbadian rum, which was more expensive. A gallon of cider was worth two shillings, or two days work. Diluted "Water Cider" was half that price, rum was three shillings a quart.

Colonists must have felt ambivalent about supplying Indians with liquor. Doing so led to violent outbursts that were universally dreaded, but liquor made Indians tractable. Both whaling companies and plantation owners depended on Native American labor to turn a profit, both used alcohol as an "en-

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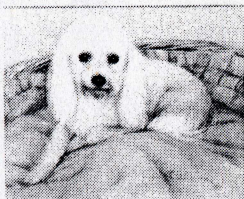
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couragement," and both complained bitterly to the government when the Indians they needed became unavailable. Official measures were taken in 1671 to strengthen laws prohibiting the sale of liquor to Indians; however, Governor Francis Lovelace, who drafted the legislation, related his order to whaling entrepreneurs who enlisted Indians crews by plying them with brandy and rum. Nathaniel Sylvester's request to arrest drunken Indians the following year may have been a result of the Governor's liquor loophole. It is equally likely that Sylvester, himself, used liquor to keep Indians on the farm. His son Giles certainly did, and young Giles was less canny about business than his father. In any event, Giles' account book indicates that farmers, like whalers, got labor with liquor—a pattern that continued well into the 19th century.

In colonial times, Shelter Island was one point on a commercial triangle of goods between England, the Caribbean, and New England. The rum trade incorporated resources from all three points: sugar was cultivated in Barbados; white oak for barrel staves was obtained and shipped from Shelter Island; glass bottles were made throughout England, mainly in London and Bristol. Ultimately, the rum that entered the Colonies was dispensed to call comers in various ways, despite efforts by settlers and Indians alike to limit the sale of alcohol to Native Americans, upon whom its effect was disastrous.

The Havens Store Ledger

From 1765 until 1810, most of the rum on Shelter Island was dispensed by a combined store, tavern, school, meeting house, and boarding house. Originally a residence known as "Heartsease" when completed by William Havens in 1743, it was converted into a commercial operation some two decades later by Havens's son James.

James Havens's ledgers confirm his reputation for honest dealing, as well as showing that he extended credit without interest, not infrequently allowing a year or two to pass before collecting a debt. Although Native Americans are not listed in the Shelter Island censuses of 1771, 1776, and 1790, James Havens's ledgers record transactions for a dozen of them, listed by name. The two hidebound volumes, together with the memoirs of

a later Shelter Island Havens, Lodowick, provides further evocative glimpses into the Native American way of life on Shelter Island in colonial times, and offer some basis for demographic assumptions concerning them.

Imperfect reflections of eight Indian family units, and six other individuals, are available through James Havens's ledgers and Lodowick Havens's memoirs. They are the Conocs—Sam, his wife Lisse (Lissy), and Peter; the Tobefyls—Sarah, Betty, and "children"; Indian Daniel, Daniel's Jeffrey, Jeffrey's mother Ginny, and his wife Ketziah; and a Mol Daniels who, reported Lodowick, drowned her child in a well. References are also made to Jack, his wife Sabina, and their six children; Cuffee Cuff and his wife Sarah (Toby?) and two children; Adam and Hezekiah; Harry Indian and wife; Sip; Bet (Betty) Stephen; Joe Pot...eg; and Isaac Indian. The list represents at least 30 formerly untitled individuals who, when added to the 1776 census of 171 people, increase Shelter Island's population to 201, of which Native Americans represent 18 percent.

Like Giles Sylvester, James Havens used a double entry system, recording debits on left hand pages, credits on the right. Purchases made by Shelter Island Indians between 1765 and James's death in 1810 demonstrate increasing acculturative change. They include coffee, tea, sugar, molasses, snuff, shot, flints, fishhooks, scissors, nails, a padlock, a knife, earthen crockery, a punch bowl, shoe buckles, cloth, a spelling book, "sundries," and, at the not inconsiderable cost of six shillings, six pence, a volume of Isaac Watts' *Songs and Hymns*.

By and large, however, the most popular item was rum, which James Havens sold by the gill (one-quarter pint), dram, half-pint, pint, quart, half-gallon, and gallon. He sold "pink rum," "cherry rum," plain "rum," and locally produced cider. In 1768, Jeffrey Indian is debited one shilling, six pence for a "bottle and rum." This is the only entry for a Native American that mentions a bottle, and unless Jeffrey's mark comes to light on some document of the period, it is as close as we will probably come to connecting our bottle to a particular Shelter Island owner.

The earliest ledger entries, including those for Bet Stephen in

1765, Jeffrey Indian in 1767, and Sam Gonoc in 1768, are practically all for rum. Purchases entered in the 1770s are more diverse, but rum still predominates. The records for Lissy Gonoc, Sarah Toby, and Ginny Jeffreys—they bought mostly coffee, tea, and molasses—suggest that women were less in alcohol's thrall than were men.

Cash was scarce in colonial times, for settlers and Native Americans alike; while Indians sometimes settled their debts with small amounts of cash, they paid mostly with goods and services. They paid for rum and shot with raccoon skins, sea fowl, feathers, fish, bay tallow, cranberries, huckleberries, corn, handmade brooms and baskets, and other products, as well as in exchange for working at hoeing, reaping, spinning, washing, and carding flax.

In 1776, Indian Isaac was credited with two shillings for digging a grave. Sam Gonoc received four shillings for a day's work reaping, and 13 shillings, nine pence for five and one-half days of hoeing corn. In 1771, Lissy Gonoc earned nine pence for a day's work washing, and one and six for the sale of a corn basket. In 1772, Sarah Toby paid her previous year's debts by bot-toming a chair for 10 pence, and a 'great chair' for one and six. She also traded a hog for an amount that is illegible, and surrendered a gold locket valued at six shillings, eight pence.

For the most part, Indian debts were forgiven by wealthy estate owners who, we can assume, employed Indians as field hands on a *per diem* basis. The Haven's ledgers attest to the payment of Indians' debts by William Nicoll, his nephew, William, and William's son, Samuel B. Nicoll, all of whom, in turn, managed the 3,000-acre Nicoll plantation on Sachem's Neck, the part of Shelter Island where most Indians lived until more than half of their tightly clustered "huts and wigwams" were destroyed by fire in 1790.

Before he died, in 1768, William Nicoll paid Indian Jeffrey's debt of one pound, one shilling, and Sam Gonoc's debt of one pound, four shillings, eight pence. Four years Samuel B. Nicoll, who inherited the estate of his unmarried uncle, paid three pounds, 12 and six, for Sam Gonoc's debts, and, in 1774, three pounds, two and six, for

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Jeffrey's. If Native American men averaged between two and four shillings for one day's work in the second half of the 18th century, as the Haven's accounts suggest, then the wages paid by William Nicoll in the 1770s must represent a month or more of work in the fields by Sam and Jeffery. More than a century after the coming of Nathaniel Sylvester, the Native Americans still were working for liquor.

The Sylvester accounts and the Havens store ledgers reflect a Native American way of life consisting of seasonal farm labor and whaling, together with their traditional hunting and gathering, probably supplemented by gardening. It was a poor life, exacerbated by alcoholism and its blighting effects—among them fetal alcohol syndrome, malnutrition, and disease. Although some of Shelter Island's Indians may have drifted away unnoticed to the Brothertown settlement in Oneida County, New York, probably most were laid to rest in the as yet undiscovered burial grounds mentioned in Lodowick Havens's memoirs. Accompanying the dead would be found a few items that might have come from the Havens's store—perhaps a kettle, a cup, a knife, and, possibly, a bottle or two that at one time held rum.

Indian Names and Nomenclature

Eastern Long Island Native Americans names are tantalizing to study, but their significance will not be fathomed until adequate glossaries of local dialects come to light. Cultural factors also complicate efforts to derive meanings from names, because low-ranking Indians frequently went without them. Women and children tend to be referred to generically, or as another person's spouse or offspring. A man might change his name, or have several names for a variety of reasons.

A few early documents state the original Algonkian names of 17th-century people encountered by Shelter Island's first white settlers. These include the Island's sachem, Yokee. Yokee is also known as Unkenchie, Pogaticut, and, due to the vagaries of phonetic spelling, Youghco, Youco, Yocoo, and Yocow. His name also appears as Yovowan, and his wife's Aswa, in the 1639 deed conveying Gardiner's Island to Lion Gardiner.

By 1680, after white settlers had occupied Shelter Island for a generation, the records show a mixture of Indian names about half of which

are Algonkian, half are English. Govert, a Dutch name, may reflect Indian contact with Govert Lockmans, who traded with them in 1648. After more than a century of English occupation, the settlers' records cease to use Algonkian names for Shelter Island's Indians. For the most part, these names are now English first names, surnames are uncommon, and appear to be in the formative stage at this time.

Conclusion

The Havens's store and tavern ledgers reveal a process leading to the creation of surnames that is analogous to the way many such names developed in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance: the possessive case, indicating a spouse or a child, becomes appended to that person's first name (for example, John's wife Mary becomes Mary Johns). The ledgers have entries for a Ginny—Jeffrey's. Another entry, under the heading of Jeffrey Indian, describes a debt incurred for "Sundries by your mother, Ginny." The name Mary Harry may have been used for a female relative of Harry Indian. Surnames also seem to stem from intermarriage between Native and African Americans. The names Cuffee Cuff and Sabina, used by Lodowick Havens to identify two Shelter Island Indians, may have black connotation; Cuffee may have been both a personal and a generic name for an African American.

Latinate names like Sabina and Caesar were given commonly to slaves, although Indians possessed them, as well. William Nicoll, who held 10 or more slaves on Shelter Island in 1776, owned men named Cuff, a variant of Cuffee, and Caesar. If Cuffee Cuff can be shown to have been a manumitted slave living with Indians, or the son of a slave named Cuff and an Indian mother, we would have a Shelter Island example of African-Native American marriage, like those among the nearby Montauk and Shinnecock peoples. Shelter Island blacks and Indians labored side by side in the fields of the Nicolls and the Sylvesters, and resided in the same environs. Sharing land and a similar lot in life probably encouraged such marriages.

Like Cuffee, the name Betty Tobs Caesar suggests intermarriage. The Havens's ledgers contain an accounting for an Indian named Sarah Tobe, and Lodowick Havens re-

called Indians named Sarah and Betty Tobs. A sermon delivered in 1856 by the Rev. Daniel Lord recounts the final days, some 20 years earlier, of a Betty Tobs Caesar, reportedly the last Native American born on Shelter Island. This woman, according to Lord, died at an advanced age of "more than foreshore [sic] years," after her conversion to Christianity. Tobs is probably a misprint for Toby, and Caesar may hark back to the slave with that name owned by William Nicoll (although there were Montauk Indians named Cesar and Toby).

The incised bottles that prompted the writing of this report served more as a touchstone than an artifact for analysis. However, it encourages further study of the theme of liquor as a catalyst between settlers and Native Americans. The evidence for Shelter Island illustrates the use of intoxicants by planters to secure Indian labor, and the historical persistence of this practice.

The historian Norman H. Clark observes that the colonial period in America was "precisely the period during which English-speaking people were integrating the use of distilled spirits into their way of life." Hard liquor was indispensable to hospitality, it

tightened the gravity of oaths and contracts, enriched the mysteries of birth, marriage, and death. It softened the edges of sorrow and fatigue, eased the burden of poverty, glorified king or republic. And it did this to the pace of an accelerating social phenomenon, that of private and public drunkenness.

Before encountering Europeans, Long Island's Native Americans were unfamiliar with strong drink. Once they were introduced to it, alcohol took a terrible toll on their families and their communities. Colonial whalers, merchants, and farmers used alcohol as a business tool, despite Dutch and English ordinances regulating its sale.

It has been argued that Indians were genetically predisposed to alcoholism, and that their culture avowed mind-altering drugs. The evidence from Shelter Island demonstrates a simpler, more familiar syndrome; that hard labor, poverty, and cultural dislocation tend to be accompanied by what, today, is known as "substance abuse."

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