THE REVEREND JOHN SASSAMON, “INDIAN JOHN” OF HARVARD

“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY
“Indian John”

**Sassamon**

Sassamon served with the English forces in the Pequot War.

1637
Sassamon became a schoolmaster in the Natick settlement.
Sassamon was accepted as a student at Harvard College.

Do I have your attention? Good.
July: Sachem Wamsutta of the Wampanoag, known to the English as “Allexander,” the older son of Ousamequin Yellow Feather the Massasoit, had hired the Harvard-educated Reverend John Sassamon to interface with the English—and with their written word—on his behalf. Major Josiah Winslow with a body of eight or ten well-armed colonial soldiers arrested the sachem and the colonists required him to appear before them at Duxbury to answer charges concerning his supposed plot to attack them. After dealing with these accusations and eating a meal, the sachem was visiting Josiah Winslow at Marshfield when he was taken suddenly ill and was treated by a Dr. Fuller by the administration of a “working physic,” or what today we would describe as a strong laxative. Some, including his wife Weetamoo, believed him to have been poisoned, but there is no great amount of evidence to indicate this and the accounts indicated that he had been well received by the Winslows. It was not uncommon in this era for people to die of sudden illness, and it is hard to imagine what advantage a poisoner might have hoped for. If what was causing Allexander’s stomach pain was appendicitis, then it would have been this “working physic” that would have ruptured his appendix, filled his body cavity with toxins, and killed him while on his journey back home. (On the other hand there are records of the Plymouth Council having taken note of an expense at the time for poison “to rid ourselves of a pest,” although it is possible that these records were entirely innocent and routine and dealt merely with agriculture or sanitation.) He would be succeeded during the following year by his brother Metacom (or Pometacom, or Tasomacon, or Wewesawanit), known to the English as Phillip. Phillip would reaffirm all previous agreements with the Plymouth colony, but joined in the general suspicion that the white people had caused his brother’s death.

This plaque is mounted on a boulder near the shore of Monponsett Lakes, inland from Cape Cod.
August 6, Saturday (Old Style): *Metacom* was summoned to Plymouth Town to provide reassurances against accusations that he had been plotting to do harm to the English.¹

There are no authentic period depictions of this person.

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¹ While serving as a scribe and translator for sachem *Metacom* in this year, *Sassamon* was teaching him to read.

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT
The Reverend John Sassamon became the minister of Namasket, and was deeded land there.
Late January (1674, Old Style): The Reverend John Sassamon took information as to native preparations for war to the Plymouth settlement — where the whites would not believe him. He asked for protection, which was of course not extended to him.

January 29, Friday (1674, Old Style): The Reverend John Sassamon, or Indian John, either was murdered or fell though the ice of Assawampsett Pond. He had been behaving, prior to his demise, one might say, in a manner to provoke suspicion. This man had been a Christian schoolteacher in Natick, known among the whites as a “very cunning and plausible Indian, well skilled in the English Language, and bred up in the Possession of Christian Religion, employed as a Schoolmaster at Natick, the Indian town.” He had, however, defected to become one of Metacom’s counselors, and then re-defected and attempted to return to his Christian community of Natick, “where he was baptised, manifested publick Repentance … and made a serious Profession of Christian Religion.” Not only had this indecisiveness raised the suspicions of the white people, it had caused him to be suspected as a double agent by the Native American government. In fact, just before he had disappeared that winter, he had informed Governor Josiah Winslow that he had come to believe that the sachem Metacom now regarded him as having divided loyalties, and that indeed he feared for his life.

Jill Lepore comments on her page 43 that “[I]n some ways, Eliot’s missionary program died with Sassamon.”

Although Rhode Island colonists would attempt an arbitration between the Pokanoket and Plymouth to avoid a race war, Plymouth would resolve to use force to conform Philip.

“Indian John”

“Stack of the Artist of Kouaroo” Project
About five or fix Years fince, there was brought up (amongft others) an Indian in the Colledg at Cambridg, named Sofoman, who after fome time he had fpent in Preaching the Gofpel to Unkus, a Sagamore Criftian in his Territories, was by the Authority of New-Plimouth, fent to Preach in like manner to King Philip, and his Indians: But King Philip (Heathen-like) inftead of receiving the Gofpel, would immediately have killed this Sofomon, but by the perfwafion of fome about him, did not do it, but fent him by the hands of three of his Men to Prifon; who as he was going to Prifon, Exhorted and Taught them in the Criftian Religion; they not liking his Difcourfe, immediately Murthered him after a moft Barbarous manner: They returning to King Philip, acquainted him what they had done. About two or three Months after, this Murther being Difcovered to the Authority of New-Plimouth, Jofiah Winflow being then Governour of that Colony, care was taken to find out the Murtherers; who upon fearch were found and apprehended, and after a fair Trial were all Hanged. This fo Exafperated King Philip, that from that day after, he ftudied to be Revenged on the Engliſh, judging that the Engliſh Authority have nothing to do to Hang any of his Indians for killing another.
February (1674, Old Style): The body of the Reverend John Sassamon was found beneath the ice of Assawampsett Pond near his home. It was not clear whether he had been murdered, or had fallen through the ice.

Soon after March 1, Monday (1674, Old Style): Three native Americans came to be suspected of the murder of the informing Reverend John Sassamon.

June 1, Tuesday (Old Style): The three native Americans who were suspected of the murder of the informing Reverend John Sassamon were formally charged.

Their names (as would later be recalled in a stage comedy in which they would function as three buffoons) were Wampapaqan, Mattashunannamo, and Tobias.
June 8, Tuesday (Old Style): Three Native Americans were being hanged one after the other at Plymouth on suspicion of having murdered the Reverend John Sassamon, or Indian John of Harvard.

There was at the very least this proof of their guilt, that one other native had testified against them, and also that when the three suspects had been brought near the corpse of their victim, the corpse had begun again to bleed. And then there would be a last-minute willingness to talk, after a frayed cord had parted while the last one of this trio of suspect natives was hanging and strangling, while the white people were readjusting the noose to try again: this third to leave our stage, Wampapaquan, attempted to save himself by a report in which he implicated, among others, the sachem Metacom. (This would save his life for a week or so and then he would be shot.) The white people felt they had obtained all the evidence they needed.2

According to Friend John Easton of Rhode Island, sachem Metacom would list among his reasons for having gone to war that

if 20 of there onest indians testefied that an Englishman had dun them rong, it was as nothing, and if but one of ther worst indians testefied against ani indian or ther king when it plesed the English that was suffitiant.

2. Having the strangle-cord part in this manner does not seem to have saved this pleading third party’s life, for although they spared him temporarily while his information was being discussed, he was “afterward shott to death within the same month.” But perhaps confession was good for his soul, who can tell?
“It’s all now you see. Yesterday won’t be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago.”

- Remark by character “Garin Stevens” in William Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust*

Prepared: January 29, 2014
This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.
Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology — but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.
“INDIAN JOHN”    SASSAMON