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Scholarship

25 February 2016

Role of Massasoit in the Mayflower Pilgrims Story

Often, when one thinks of the first Thanksgiving, there is a scene imagined of a tribe of Indians feasting with the colonists. This description might not be too far off from reality. The Wampanoag tribe in that region aided the colonists of Plymouth. At that time, Massasoit ruled alongside his brother as sachem, or chief. Chief Massasoit, often called Ousamequin, Wassamagoin, or Yellow Feather, played a pivotal role in the success of the Plymouth colony. Many are unaware of how devastating times could have been for the colonists without the aid of the Wampanoag and Massasoit. The settlers owed their survival to Massasoit. Not only did he give food and drink to the starving new colonists, but he also aided in the teaching of agriculture, negotiated a peace treaty, and gave warning to the colonists of a dire attack from a neighboring tribe.

At first, Massasoit was skeptical of his new neighbors. As winter was approaching, the sachem would already have had his plate full with preparing the Wampanoag Confederacy for the harsh and bitter cold that the region faced. Times were already hard for Massasoit. By the time the Plymouth colonists had arrived, nearly two thirds, or 45,000, of the Wampanoag Nation had fell to diseases brought by other Europeans who explored the area (Gilio-Witaker). He soon realized that the English would make powerful allies against the enemies of the Wampanoag. The only

trouble was the upcoming winter and the lack of agriculture to feed the Pilgrims. This would severely hinder the Plymouth colonist's ability to survive, much less aid the Wampanoag. As Ojibwa states, "In 1621, Massasoit had two of this people-Hobomok and Squanto-teach the Pilgrims agricultural techniques". The supply of food by and the teachings of the Wampanoag enabled the colony to survive, creating a threshold for English colonization in the coming decades.

They soon began peace negotiations, Massasoit and the leaders of Plymouth. In signing such a treaty, the Wampanoag would gain not only allies against their enemies, but also access to European trade goods, most importantly, firearms. Pressure was mounting for the Wampanoag as many of the surrounding tribes sold to or allied with European nations, many of which were either English Puritans or Dutch. The relationship blossomed after several Peace talks; Massasoit and the Plymouth colony became strong allies. Massasoit also negotiated a treaty between the English and the Pocasset (Ojibwa). As many tribes warred to the South and West of the Wampanoag, their alliance with the Plymouth colony reaped benefits almost instantly. Wars with the Narragansett were ended with the support of the colony alongside the Wampanoag. Both parties gained from the alliance.

This alliance was shaken when Massasoit fell sickly ill in the winter of 1623. Without Massasoit's strong leadership, the Wampanoag were able to offer little aid to the colonists that winter. When word reached Plymouth, Edward Winslow decided to make his way to Pokanoket, where Massasoit lived, to offer aid. He reached Massasoit, despite being told that Massasoit had already died. Winslow nursed the now blind Massasoit back to health, even scraping his swollen mouth, which had prevented him from either eating or drinking (Mayflower History). Upon recovering, "Massasoit then revealed to the Pilgrims a conspiracy plot by the Massachusetts

Indians to attack them and the Wessagusett Colony, and the Pilgrims led by Myles Standish, with the help of some of Massasoit's men, defeated the plot before it could materialize” (Mayflower History). While the alliance was mutual at it’s creation, it ultimately proved detrimental to the Wampanoag, and to the benefit of the Plymouth Colony.

Though his people did not entirely benefit from the alliance with the Pilgrims, Massasoit played a pivotal role in the success of the Plymouth Colony. Certainly, without the help of the Wampanoag, Plymouth would never had survived as a colony or created a success story for English colonization. Massasoit helped teach the colonists agriculture, signed a peace treaty, and he even save them from a decisive attack. Many today, would not be alive, had the Wampanoag and Massasoit not acted how they did. The implications of the successful colonization of New England reach as far as the United States today, paving the way for a new wave of immigration to the New World.

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