

INDIAN TRAITS AND CUSTOMS

SOME three hundred years ago, at the time when the first white men were beginning to arrive in extensive numbers throughout New England, the Rhode Island Narragansetts were at the height of their power. Numbering nearly 20,000 members in all, with a ready contingent of over 5,000 fighting men, they had grown in power since the arrival of the first whites and were at the time the most formidable of all New England tribes. Yet, in the course of a few years, the Wampanoags, the Nipmucs, Aquednecks, Niantics, and other tribes which had been subordinate to the Narragansetts began to break away, leaving the once powerful tribe to decay slowly, until, after the fierce fighting in 1676, it was completely annihilated. It seems little short of astounding that a tribe could gain its ascendancy and then pass into oblivion within a half-century. Yet, once entrance was made through the vast undeveloped lands of the West, the Indians of the prairies and western wildernesses dwindled away with equal rapidity, only a tiny proportion of their vast numbers remaining to inhabitate the reservation set apart for them by their white conquerors. Now it is indeed rarely that we think of Indians at all, mainly because for most of us there have been few things in our lives to call them vividly to mind.

Some Niantics, Wampanoags, and scattered members of a few other tribes who survived in Rhode Island after 1676, were driven southward and gathered together in a reservation in Charleston which was under governmental control. Here refugee blacks mingled with them, intermarrying until there was not a pure-blooded Indian left, and much degeneracy resulted. Close by, on a small hill, was the burying ground of the Narragansetts. But in 1881 the state sold the lands in the reservation, although preserving the burial ground, and the remaining Indians were granted citizenship. Of course we may still find Indians in the

western reservations, joining with the whites in round-ups and rodeos. And there are the Navajos in the southwest, living in their adobe huts, making their rich pottery, and weaving their gorgeously colored blankets. But we of the East only confront the once-feared red men when the circus comes to town, when we again look at their pictures in our children's story books, or when we suddenly come upon some stalwart survivor standing before an old time cigar store. Consequently it may prove to our interest, and probably to our advantage as well, to give over a few moments to a consideration of some of the personal traits and tribal customs of these first Americans, and, of course, particularly those of Colonial Rhode Island.

Our own Roger Williams, who perhaps more than any other man became thoroughly conversant with the intimate tribal life of all Rhode Island Indians, has left the best descriptions of their customs and characters. The hospitality which they invariably extended to him, and to others was one of their innate virtues, only despoiled through closer contacts with the general run of white men. However poor they were the Indians could be depended upon to share their frugal fare with those who came to visit them, offering the shelter of their wigwams as well, even though the observance of such generosity often meant that they themselves had to sleep with only a tree for shelter. They were for the most part an eager, simple folk, anxious to gain the latest bit of news and more than delighted when a traveler who could speak their dialect came among them. For a while it was perfectly safe for a white man to travel among them without fear, though practically unarmed, and for Williams and others of his nature it was never necessary to take precautions for personal safety.

Their home life was languid and closely attuned to the passing seasons. All their belongings, including their wigwams, were of a sort which could be easily moved and had doubtless been developed to fit their nomadic temperament. With the first warm

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days of spring and summer they set up their encampments near open fields where the squaws might easily plant and cultivate the corn and beans that formed the greater part of their diet. Then with the first warnings of the winter, coming in the whiteness of the early frosts and the scattering of the fallen leaves before the keen north winds, they would swiftly gather their belongings and in one day or night be gone into the quiet and sheltered recesses of the thick forests. During the winter, their stores of food would consist of corn and beans ground into a coarse meal, augmented by dried berries, nuts, and meat, which, like the thriffter animals among the nature folk, they had stored away against the long bleak months.

Though polygamy existed to some extent among the various tribes, its practice was not a matter of male indulgence but something of a purely economic nature, for squaws as workers, were an asset. As a matter of fact, though the whole tendency of these rude inhabitants of the forests was to go scantily clothed and to live together in a nearly naked condition, such practice did not encourage any wantonness among them. In this, as in many other respects, their ideas and customs were by far more praiseworthy than those of the whites whose civilization was in theory held to be totally superior.

The males among the tribes were not idle all the time, although in comparison with the heavy work done by the squaws their efforts toward the upkeep of their families seemed sadly deficient. Yet the men took upon themselves a goodly share of activity. They scoured the forests for game, trapped birds and animals and shot them with bows and arrows, fished with short lines and rude bone hooks or with sharp-pointed spears, and even aided their women in the digging of such special delicacies as clams. And, of course, the complete defense and counsel of the tribe was entirely a male affair, something the females of the tribes considered in itself sufficient recompense for their daily drudgery. With such defense in view, there were always many male individuals who devoted themselves at all times to the fashioning of new arrowheads and tough ashen bows, while others spent their

time in felling and hollowing out the trunks of trees to make the log canoes.

That the women had some spare time and energy is evident in the hand-woven rugs which decorated the inner walls of the wigwams. These, and reed baskets, clothing of skins, and other domestic necessities were mostly the products of the lighter hours of recreation. Some of them, although more often it formed a male occupation, spent time in the procuring of shells, white and black, from which they formed the bits of wampum used as currency and as a rich decorative material. This was strung on thin rawhide sinews and made into wide belts and other ornaments. For quite a while the English settlers used the wampum, too, as money, for it facilitated trade with the red men, but its use gradually died out with the minting of silver coins.

Though the Indians were for the most part a silent, and to those who feared them, a grim and foreboding race, they were not always as stern and austere as they have been frequently pictured. In the intimacy of their family circles they could relax as well as any body of whites and take the greatest enjoyment in games and social intercourse. Fond of their families, the elders were often over-indulgent toward their children, suffering the latter to play all kinds of pranks and even to be disobedient without reprimand.

Smoking had been a favorite indulgence among them long before the coming of white men, and in their travelling about the males carried their pouches of tobacco about their necks with as much care as they carried their wampum. The tobacco which they smoked was not like that in current use today, being a much coarser and stronger variety, but from it they derived great satisfaction and enjoyment. The fashioning of richly-carved pipes was an art among them. The use of intoxicants was unknown before the coming of the whites, and they were made the victims of its evils, being unaccustomed to its effects and not learning any of its advantages.

While this is a wholly brief and inadequate account, being merely a fragmentary sketch of some of the activities of these natives, it may show them as being more than mere bloodthirsty savages. Their

decline was totally due to the coming of the English, the enervating effects of white civilization being disastrous to these people whose strength lay in the pursuit of a simple existence. It seems tragic that they, who were such an integral part of the

forests they loved, had to perish. They never fully realized just what it was they were fighting. It was not the whites in themselves but white civilization, intangible to their undeveloped minds and inevitable in its consequences.

BUILDERS OF PAWTUCKET

AMONG the names listed in the annals of the neighboring city of Pawtucket, that of the Jenks family stands out prominently. It is not only because Joseph Jenks, Jr., was the founder of Pawtucket but because his sons and daughters continued to carry the name to even greater heights. The indomitable pioneer spirit and genius of the first Joseph Jenks, the original settler who came from England to Massachusetts in 1642, expressed itself in new fields of endeavor through his sons and grandsons.

The first Joseph Jenks was famed for his skill in working in brass and iron in England and was brought to the Colonies by Governor Winthrop, the younger, to establish iron works here. Specimens of the bog-iron, found in the swamps of Saugus, Massachusetts, had been taken to England and analyzed, and a company called the "Company of Undertakers for the Iron Works" formed to develop these natural resources. Joseph Jenks came to superintend the construction of buildings for the industry and became the first worker in iron and brass in the colonies. The iron works, under his competent tutelage, developed rapidly and supplied many of the domestic implements used by the neighboring settlers. He was an inventor as well as an expert craftsman, and made the moulds and castings for many new tools and machines with his own hands. In 1646, he obtained a patent for an improved type of waterwheel. This was the first patent granted in this country.

Five years after he had arrived in New England, he set up his own shop and forge near the iron works and started to specialize in the manufacture of scythes and other tools requiring a fine edge and temper.

It was he who made the dies for the famous "Pine Tree" shillings. But it is not this man with whom we are especially concerned, for he never came to Pawtucket.

While he had been making a success of the iron works in New England, his two sons Joseph and William, had been living with their grand-parents in England, for his wife had died. The older of these two boys, Joseph, who was born in 1632, in Colebrook, just outside of London, came to join his father in the new world in 1647. He worked in his father's foundry inasmuch as he had a natural aptitude for the craft. In about 1668, he married Esther Ballard, of Lynn, Massachusetts, and in the following year he went south to the Colony of Rhode Island taking his young family with him. Here, he first settled in Warwick, where it is on record that he served as foreman of the jury in the case of a drowning accident in 1670. In the previous year he had been granted land on either side of the Pawtuxet River, upon which to set up the sawmill and machinery he had brought with him from Lynn and to begin to cut pine, chestnut, and oak for Warwick customers.

However, chancing to observe the water power which existed at the falls in Pawtucket, in 1670 he bought about sixty acres of land in their vicinity from Abel Potter, with the additional right of commonage. Then, moving his family and workshop, he built his new forge just below the falls. Men who had come with him from his father's iron works helped to set up his sawmill, carpenter shop, and foundry later on. Iron ore was obtained near Mineral Springs, and timber was cut from the surrounding forests and hauled to the mill to be cut into lumber for houses of new settlers. Nearby his forge Jenks built his own

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