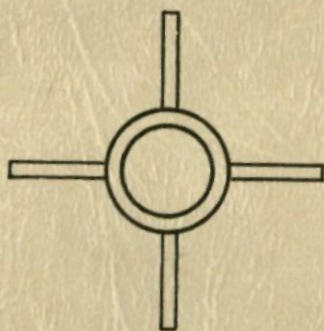


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Musical Expressions
of
Early Rhode Island Indians

By Mrs. Carl W. Kaiser
as told by Princess Red Wing



The Great Spirit
Is Everywhere!

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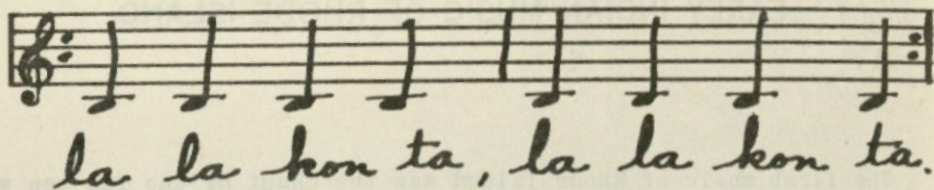
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EARLY INDIAN MUSIC OF RHODE ISLAND

The first music of Rhode Island was the chant of the red men who lived in the hills and valleys adjacent to the shores of Narragansett Bay. There are Indians living in South County to-day who still sing some of these songs which have been handed down to them through the centuries. Legend has it that music was the gift of the Great Spirit to a young brave as he stood on a verdant hillside with all of the glories of nature around him. His heart thrilled to the great beauty and he felt it beat one great thump. Gratefully realizing the gift of all nature to him, he heard the strong heartbeat of Mother Nature--thump-thump-one,two. He was aware that all of the natural wonder around him had been created by a great unseen spirit which he named "The Great Spirit". As he listened he heard the throbbing heartbeat of "The Great Spirit"--thump-thump-thump-one-two-three. After he had recognized the Creator of the Universe, he looked beside him and saw that all men were his brothers and heard their mighty heartbeats--thump-thump-thump-thump--one-two-three-four. Then he made a drum on which to beat these different rhythms and his feet moved in time with the beats. As the young brave hunted in the forest one day, he pulled his bow and as the arrow was wafted into the air, he heard a sound-tum. When he shot an arrow from a larger bow, he heard a lower pitched sound. In this way he found his harmony and created his songs in unison with his own heartbeats. His first musical instrument was a flute which he made from a willow branch. On this he played his first plaintive songs.

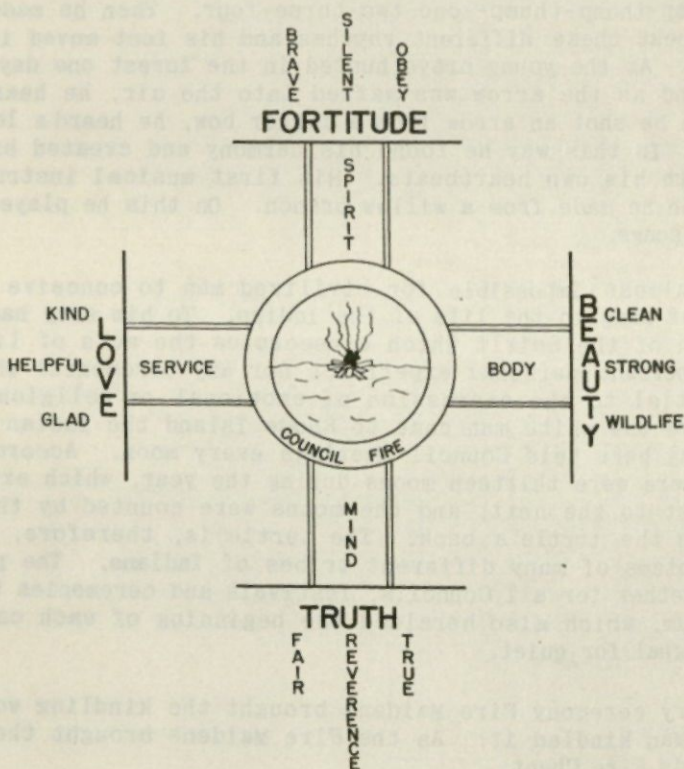
It is almost impossible for civilized man to conceive of the importance of song in the life of the Indian. To him song has ever been the breath of the Spirit which consecrates the acts of life. There was no important personal experience nor any ceremonial where it was not essential to the expression of emotional or religious feeling. Long before the white man came to Rhode Island the Indian tribes who were living here held Council Meetings every moon. According to the Indians there were thirteen moons during the year, which extended from one harvest to the next, and the moons were counted by the thirteen squares on the turtle's back. The turtle is, therefore, one of the special totems of many different tribes of Indians. The people were called together for all Councils, festivals and ceremonies by the beat of the drum, which also heralded the beginning of each ceremony and was the signal for quiet.

At every ceremony Fire Maidens brought the kindling wood and the Medicine Man kindled it. As the Fire Maidens brought the wood they chanted this Fire Chant:



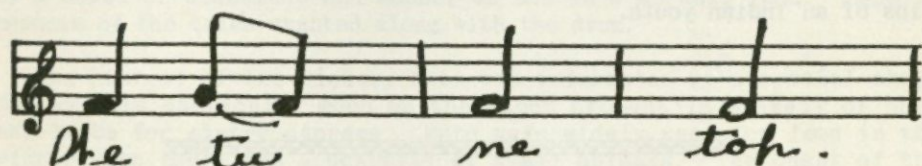
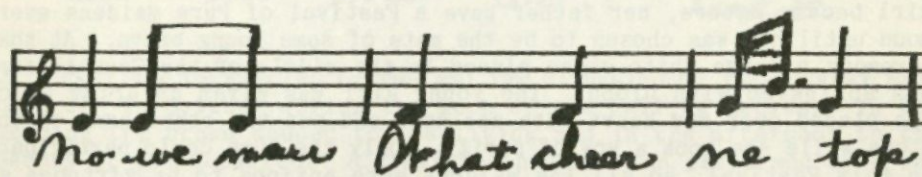
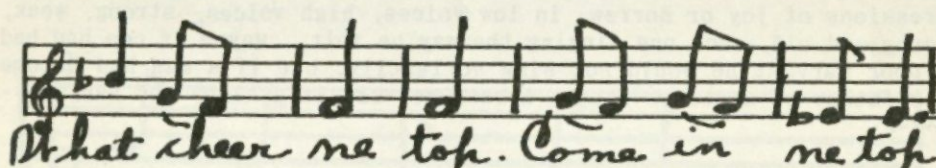
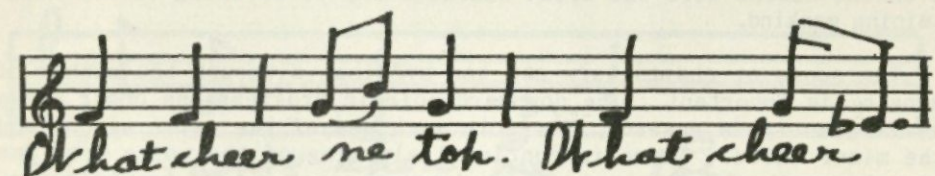
Ceremonial fires were lighted according to the size of the crowd. It is said that when Roger Williams and Queen Wawaloan with their party visited Governor Winthrop in the Connecticut Colony to settle differences between the two Colonies, two hundred Council Fires were lighted. Great historical significance is attached to the peaceful settlement reached around the Council Fires.

The Council Fire was the heart of every Ceremony and Festival. It embodied the great virtues which were advocated by the various Indian Tribes.



The Council opened with an appeal to The Great Spirit to come in and every Council Circle had an opening through which The Great Spirit could enter. The following chant was used at the beginning of all Ceremonies.

NARRAGANSETT GREETING SONG



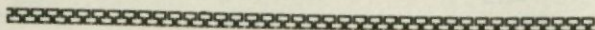
Every moon was the occasion of a Ceremony or Festival of thanks. All of the able members of the tribe participated in the singing and dancing which accompanied the many ceremonies, which were the Indian's way of talking to the Great Spirit and were prayers from their hearts to the Great Spirit for rain or sun, a bountiful harvest, good hunting, deliverance from illness, drought or pestilence and success in war. The Indians believed that the moon, sun, stars, flowers, animals, and even the storms were The Great Spirit's way of speaking to and maintaining mankind.

The songs or chants were not too precise, although the manner of singing is important. The downward melodic progressions occur twice as frequently as upward. There is much use of the major second and the minor third. There is continual slurring of the voice from one tone to another which produces an impression of out of tune singing. There was no harmony as we know it to-day. Some of the Festivals were:

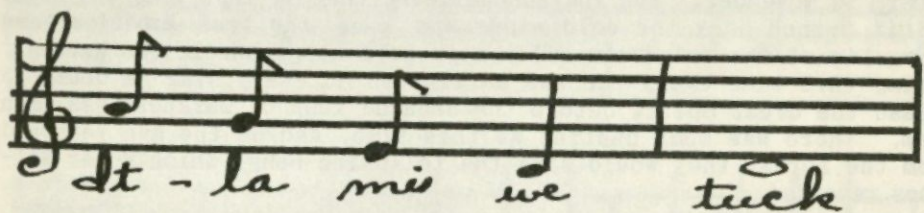
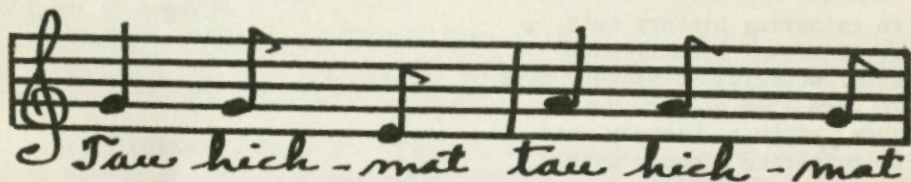
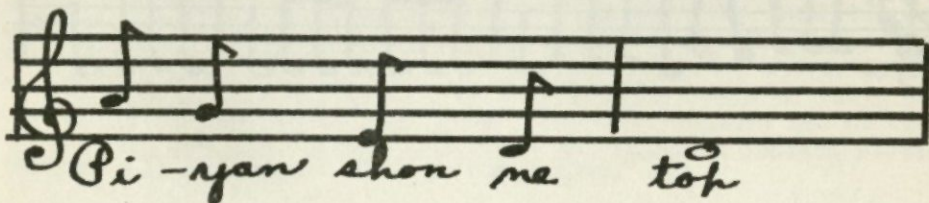
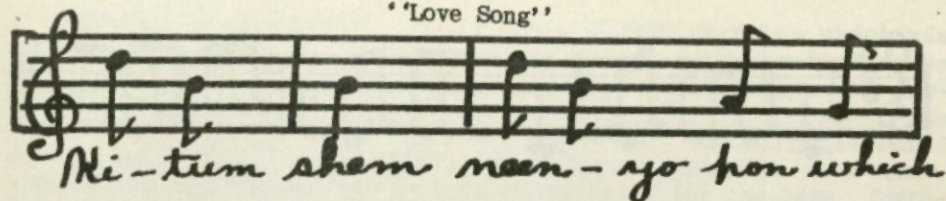
1. THE HARVEST FESTIVAL. This Festival, which was the largest of all the Festivals, was held in September during the MOON OF THE HARVEST. Sometimes three or four tribes congregated together to observe this great event. Time was marked on the time sticks and the ages of the children recorded. Time was figured so many harvests back or so many harvests in the future.

Sometimes the singing did not take a formal pattern, but consisted of happy sounds of two syllables--hi ye--shouted as spontaneous expressions of joy or sorrow, in low voices, high voices, strong, weak, young and old, each one singing the way he felt. Maybe if one had had a poor harvest he would not sing so lustily, but if a man had become the father of a son or caught a bear he was extra happy and sang joyfully.

The Love Signal was also chanted by young braves at this large Festival where so many young men and maidens met. When a young Indian girl became mature, her father gave a Festival of Pure Maidens every moon until she was chosen to be the mate of some young brave. At that ceremony a large white stone placed in the middle of the Council fire was sprinkled with blood. The young girl was given an arrow which she placed over her heart with one hand and put the other hand on the stone while she took a vow of purity. Only the pure could participate in this Festival, so all the maidens were anxious to be virtuous so they would qualify as the mate for some young brave. At the Harvest Festival many a pure Indian maiden received the song of love from the lips of an Indian youth.

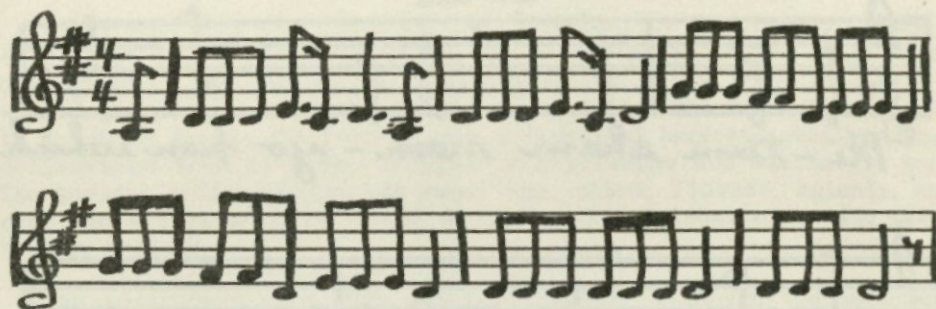


“Love Song”



2. FESTIVAL OF FALLING LEAVES AND THE GATHERING OF THE HICKORY NUTS occurred in October during the Moon of the Falling Leaves. In the morning the crowd danced to the living and in the afternoon to the memory of the departed. A great death dance was performed by a boy accompanied by drums. At first the boy lay prone on the ground, and then he personified his spirit awakening in the land of the hereafter by a dance of amazement and wonder as one in a strange land. Usually members of the tribe chanted along with the drum.

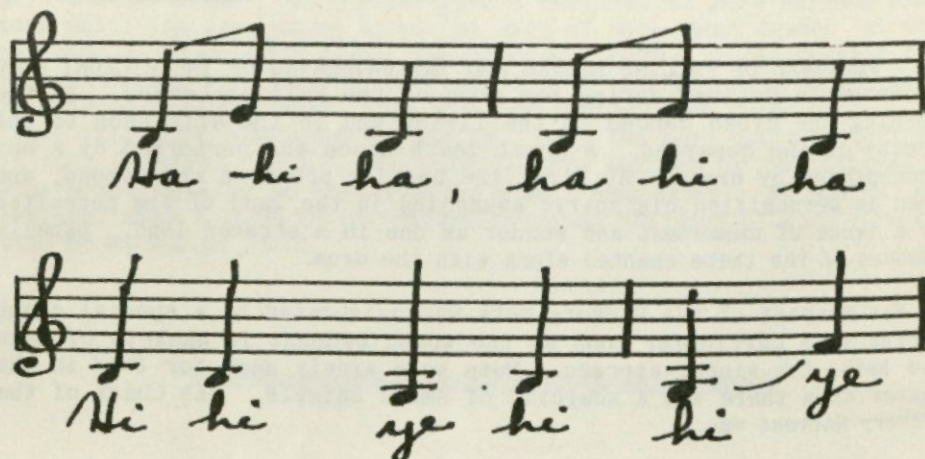
The Harvest of the Hickory Nuts was celebrated by a special chant during this particular moon as the women brought in baskets of nuts and herbs for winter storage. Nuts were widely used for food in the winter when there was a scarcity of small animals. The Chant of the Hickory Harvest was:



The English translation for this chant is:

We're gathering hickory nuts,
 We're gathering hickory nuts,
 Walnuts, butternuts, hickory nuts.
 We're gathering hickory nuts,
 Hickory, hickory, hickory nuts.
 We're gathering hickory nuts
 Our baskets are filled, our baskets are filled.

3. FESTIVAL OF INDIAN SUMMER was held during the MOON OF THE HEAVY FROST in November. The Indians believed that at that time the Great Spirit turned back the cold winds and gave the less ambitious and energetic of the tribesmen a few more days to gather in the harvest. During this time every one was careful to do everything he could to please the Great Spirit before the dreaded Moon of Darkness was upon them. There was much hunting at this time, and as the men returned from the forest they would sing the following song, which Roger Williams recorded.

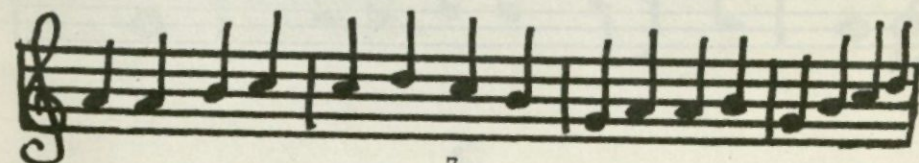
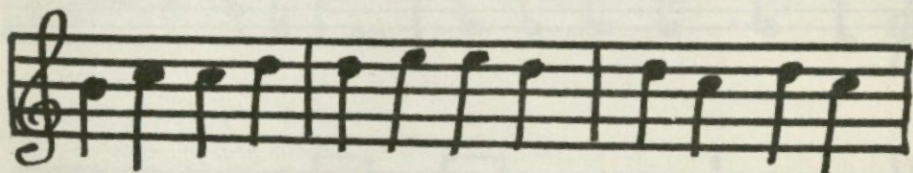
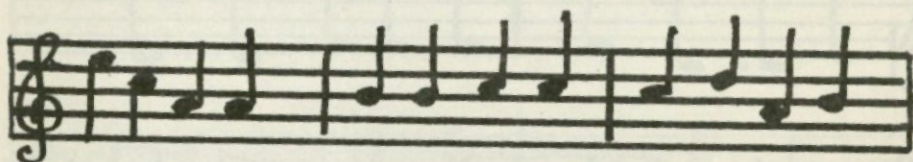
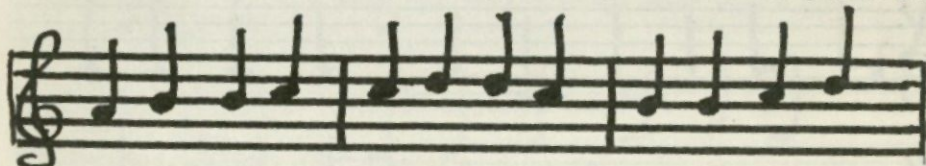


4. **FESTIVAL OF NISQUANEM.** This was a solemn ceremony which was held in December during the **MOON OF DARKNESS**. When the first snow covered the fir trees, the Indians moved from their homes along Nar-ragansett Bay back into the forest. They believed that Nisquanem, the Spirit of Mercy dwelt in the fir trees and that the fir tree would protect them. The ceremony held at this time corresponded, in a sense, to our Christmas. Every one brought an offering for the less fortunate of the tribe. As they sang and danced in a circle, each one placed his donation of food, totems, leather clothing, amulets, wam-pum belts and shell beads on the medicine stand. At this time prayers were offered to the Great spirit for protection from the evil spirits of cold and darkness during the winter season when many of their number passed into the Hereafter. Roger Williams recorded one of these ceremonies, and reports having counted one thousand Indians participating in it. Singing was often extemporaneous.

5. **FESTIVAL OF JANUARY.** The ceremonies accompanying this festival occurred during the **MOON OF THE GREAT WHITE SILENCE**. and were similar to those of December.

6. **FEBRUARY FESTIVAL.** This festival took place during the **MOON OF STORY TELLING**. At this time the best story tellers told long stories around the individual fires or in the Council House.

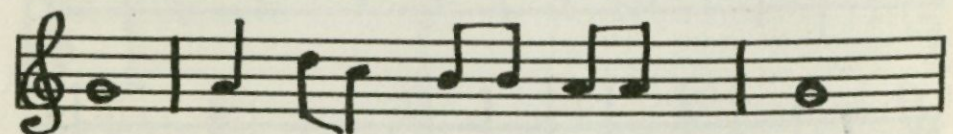
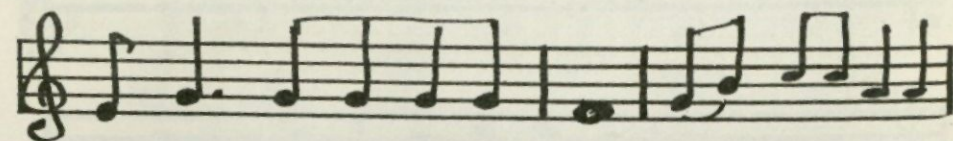
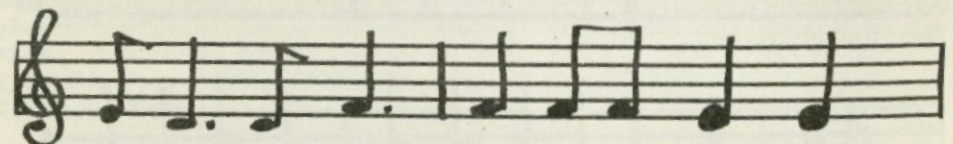
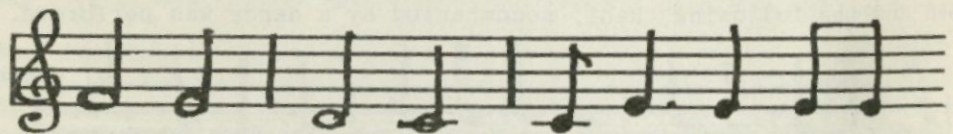
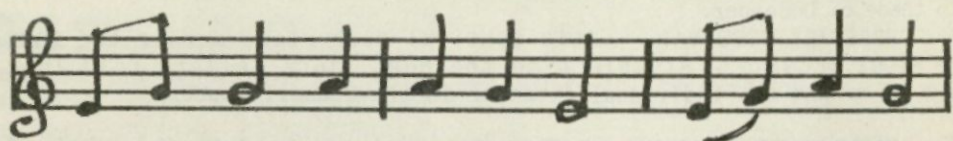
7. **MAPLE SUGAR FESTIVAL.** This festival was held in the month of March during the **MOON OF THE HEAVY WINDS**. The maple trees were tapped and the following chant, accompanied by a dance was performed.



'The maple trees stand tall and straight
They are the friend of man, their roots caress dear Mother Earth.
Their branches give to little things, a sweet and lovely birth.
The shade is cool in the Thunder Moon
They sway and sway in the Wind and Rain
They gather nectar all day long which later man may drain.

The Indians were the first to make maple syrup and maple sugar,
and today their original process is still used commercially.

8. FESTIVAL OF SPRING THANKSGIVING. This seasonal ceremony of thanksgiving in the spring of the year celebrated the conquest of the powers of light over those of darkness and was an expression of gratitude to The Great Spirit for deliverance from the long cold winter. It occurred during the MOON OF MANY RAINS. Among the traditional songs at this festival was "Mother Earth".

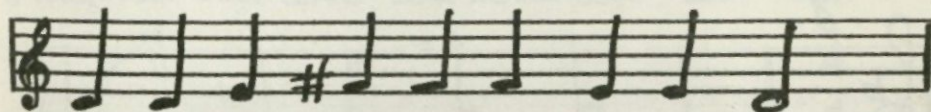
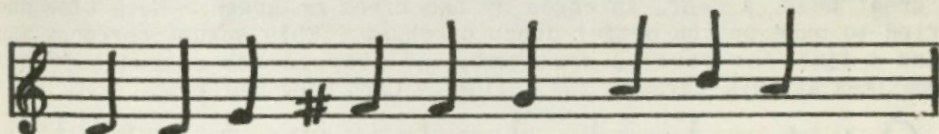


The translated chant is:

Mother Earth, thy children tend, while
To Heaven our thanks we send,
To you whence comes the daybreak,
To you whence comes the daybreak.
Great Spirit, breathe on us
North Wind, cool our fevered land.

9. FESTIVAL OF PLANTING. In the month of May was held this festival during the MOON OF PLANTING. The dances and chants used for this ceremony were very dramatic, especially the Corn Dance. The movements illustrated the planting of the seed and patting the earth and the prayers for rain. At this time of the year the Indians moved to the open country along the Bay where they could plant their crops.

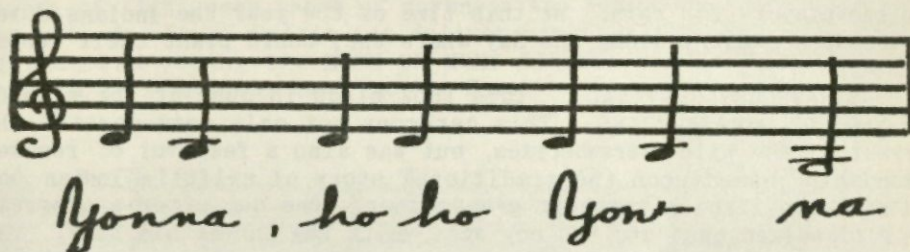
10. STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL. This took place in June at the time of the MOON OF STRAWBERRIES. This ceremony not only commemorated the harvest of the wild strawberries, but was also a festival of renewed friendship, based upon the traditional story of a little Indian boy and girl who lived with their grandmother. One day after a quarrel, the girl walked east and the boy west, with the sun at his back. The girl, sorry for her unkind words to the boy, called on the Great Spirit to forgive her, and asked for a peace offering, which she might present to her brother. Suddenly, at her feet, she saw that the ground was covered with bright red strawberries, -and ever after, this festival was celebrated with the Wuttominneck Moon Dance Chant. The translated chant is:



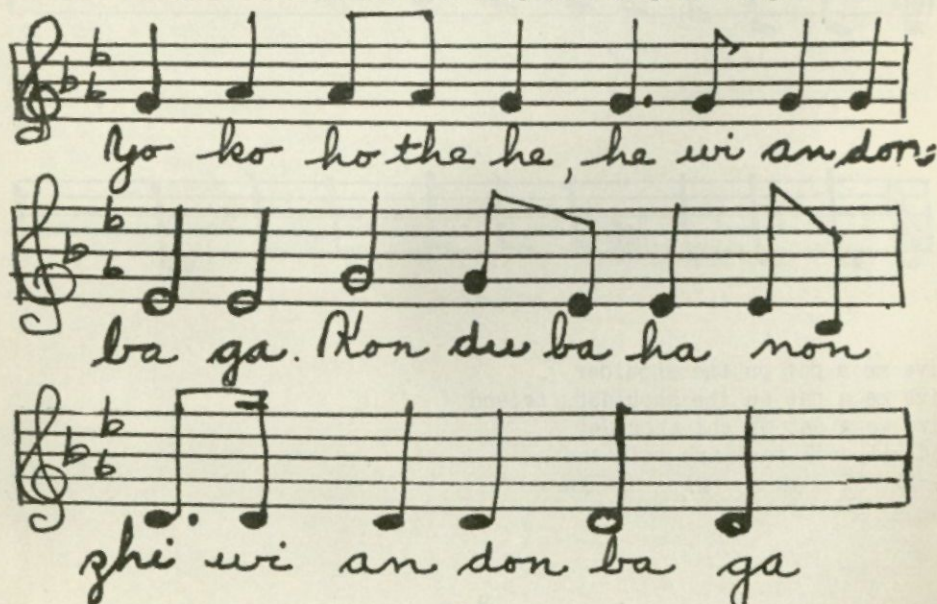
Give me a pat on the shoulder
Give me a pat on the shoulder, friend
Give me a pat of the shoulder
And all evil feelings will end
H - ii - i - yu - Hi - u - yu.

Squaws have gathered the strawberries
 Squaws have gathered the strawberries, friend
 Come and feast to your heart's content
 And all evil feelings will end.
 Hi - i yu Hi - i - yu.

11. FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS. This Festival was held in July during the MOON OF FLOWERS AND BERRIES. Some of the tribes on the eastern seaboard of the United States still observe the Thanksgiving of the String Bean, accompanied by the String Bean Dance in which everyone follows the leader and all join in the happy sounds of Hoo, yonna.



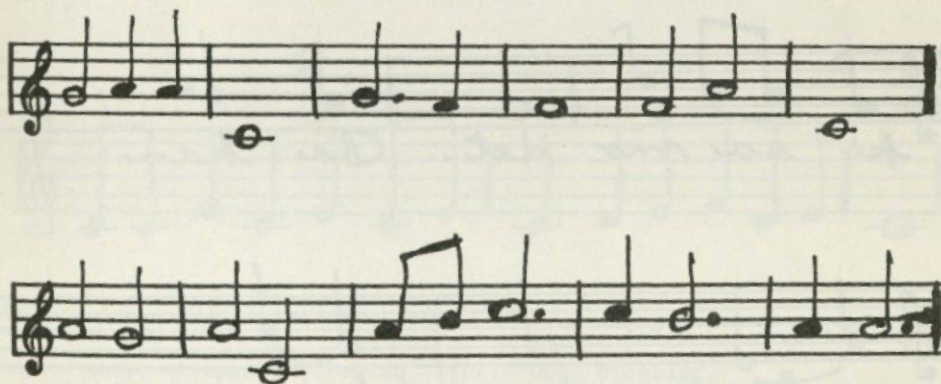
12. FESTIVAL OF SUMMER. This important festival occurred in August during the MOON OF THUNDERS and was a large gathering which featured religious ceremonies, water sports and ball games with as many as a hundred on each side. Everybody sang his own spontaneous chant describing something he or she had done, or presenting a picture of a great bear, a deer, an eagle or the trees or grass. Each time one tried to make up the better dance or chant. This August ceremony was also a time for resting from work, and prayers for a good harvest. Sometimes at this ceremony the following Corn Song was sung.



The English translation of some of the verses of the Corn Song is as follows:

Oh hasten. Behold with four roots I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with one leaf I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with one joint I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with clothing (leaves
wrapping around the corn) I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with light glossy hair I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with yellow hair I stand.
Behold me!
Oh hasten. Behold with dark hair I stand.
Behold me!

Another important ceremony was held when a new baby was named, at which time the mother and godmother sang the following chant from the hilltop at dawn.

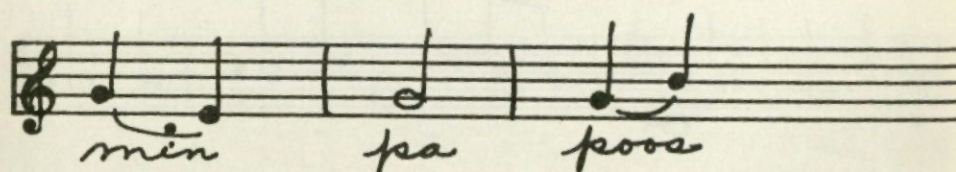
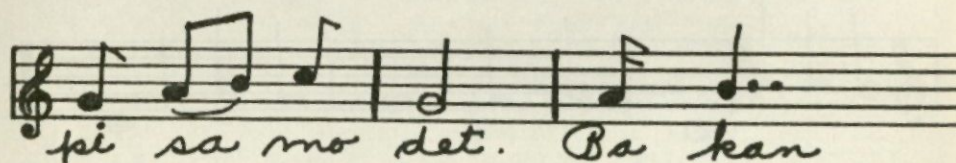
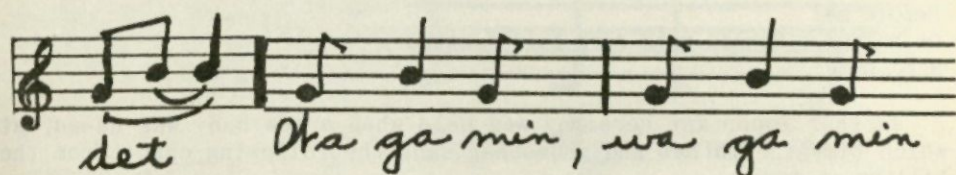
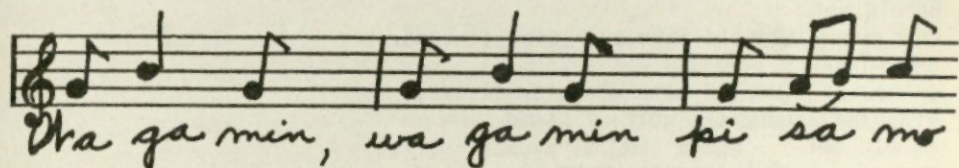


Little Indian babies were sung to sleep with this quaint lullaby, the translation of which is:

Oh, great sun,
Shine to-day!
Morning Star, fade away.

My child I name to-day.
My son, I name to-day.

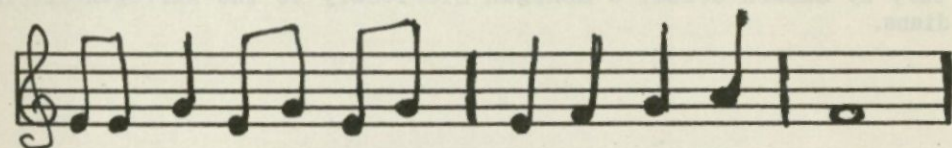
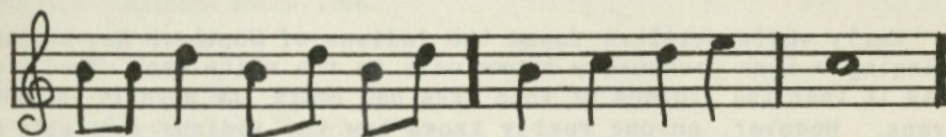
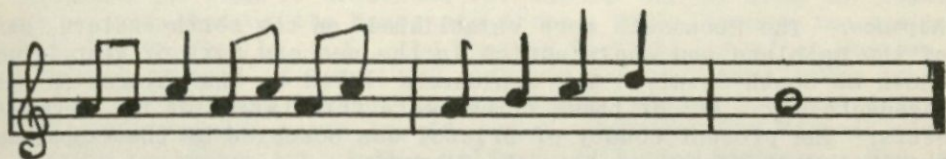
The following song was used by Indian children in a game where one child was "it" and had to catch the others.



The English words of this song are:

Crooked ear, crooked ear, walking at night.
 Crooked ear, crooked ear, walking at night.
 Stop, little old one and run not away.

Another game song enjoyed by Indian children in Rhode Island was the Life Song in which the children dramatized the four stages of the life cycle: the baby, the child, the youth and the old man.



The English words of this song were:

Little ones, creeping, creeping, little ones creeping.

Little boys, running, running, little boys running.

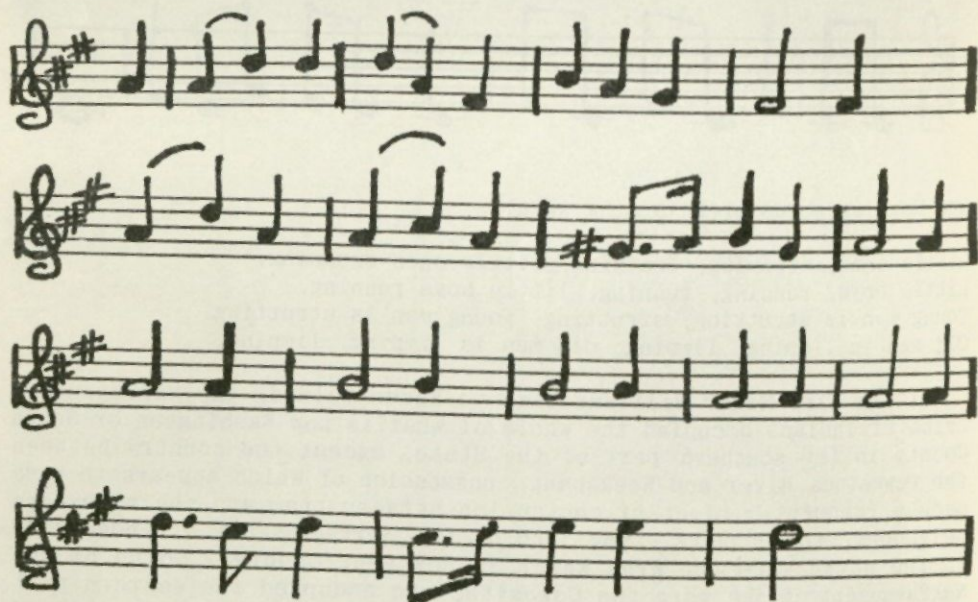
Young man is strutting, strutting, young man is strutting.

Old man in limping, limping, old man is limping, limping.

At the time Roger Williams came to Rhode Island, the Narragansett tribe of Indians occupied the whole of what is now Washington or South County in the southern part of the State, except the country between the Pawcatuck River and Weekapaug, possession of which appears to have been a frequent subject of contention between them and their western neighbors, the Pequots. The land of the Narragansetts extended also to the north into the area which is now Kent County. North of the Narragansett tribe were the Cowesits, who occupied the eastern part of Kent County, while in the northwestern portion of the State lived the Shawomet or Warwick tribe, and along the fresh water ponds, the

Nipmucs. The Pocassetts were established on the north-eastern part of the mainland and the Niantics in the western part of what is now known as South County. The Aquidnecks lived on the islands in Narragansett Bay. All of these tribes were tributaries of the Narragansetts. The present county of Bristol was occupied by the Wampanoags and their tributaries, such as the Sakonnets.

Early white settlers found the Indians of Southern New England singing a hymn presumably known only to the white man. Tradition has it that the Indians of this area had heard the song in the heavens. However, no one really knows how the Indians were able to learn it before the coming of the white man. It is believed that this song was the following one, recorded in the seventeenth century by Samson Ockum, a Mohegan missionary to the Narragansett Indians.



Princess Red Wing is descended through her mother from the Royal House of Pokanoket of the Wampanoag tribe. She attended the public schools of Burrilville, R.I., the Teacher Training School at Westown, Pa., and the School of Industrial Arts in New York City. She is an historian, writer and teacher, having taught Indian lore and crafts in childrens' summer camps for 28 years. Princess Red Wing is also a lecturer on Indian Art, Indian welfare and Indian Missions. She is Head of the Child Guidance Committee of the League of North American Indians and has received Honorable Mention for her work from UNICEF. She has also been a member of the Speakers' Research Committee of the United Nations since 1946.



Red Wing of 7 Crescents

ROYAL HOUSE OF POKANOKET

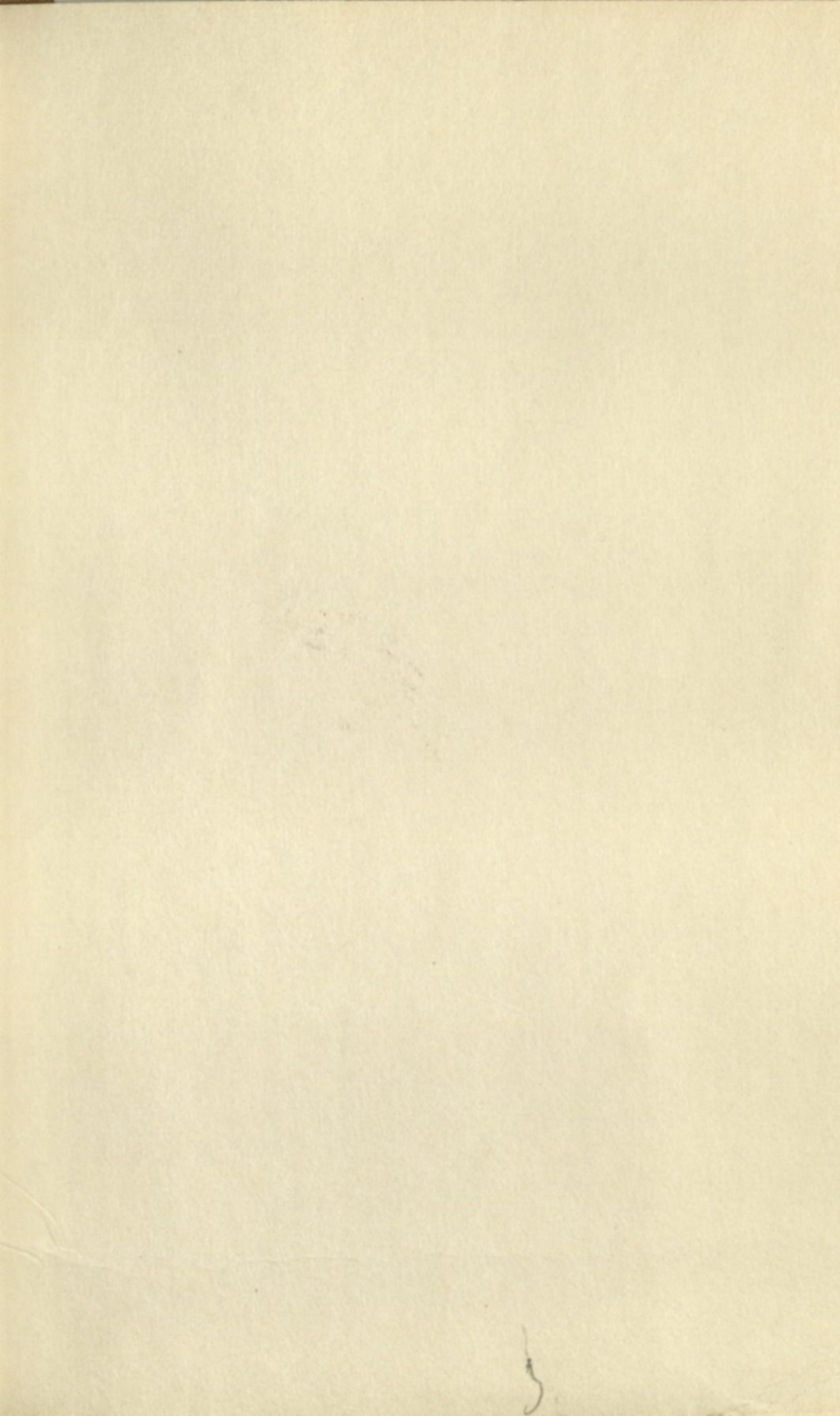
WAMPANOAG NATION AND THE
NARRAGANSETT TRIBE

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Red Wing of America
Royal Warranted
ESTABLISHED 1850
NEW YORK

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