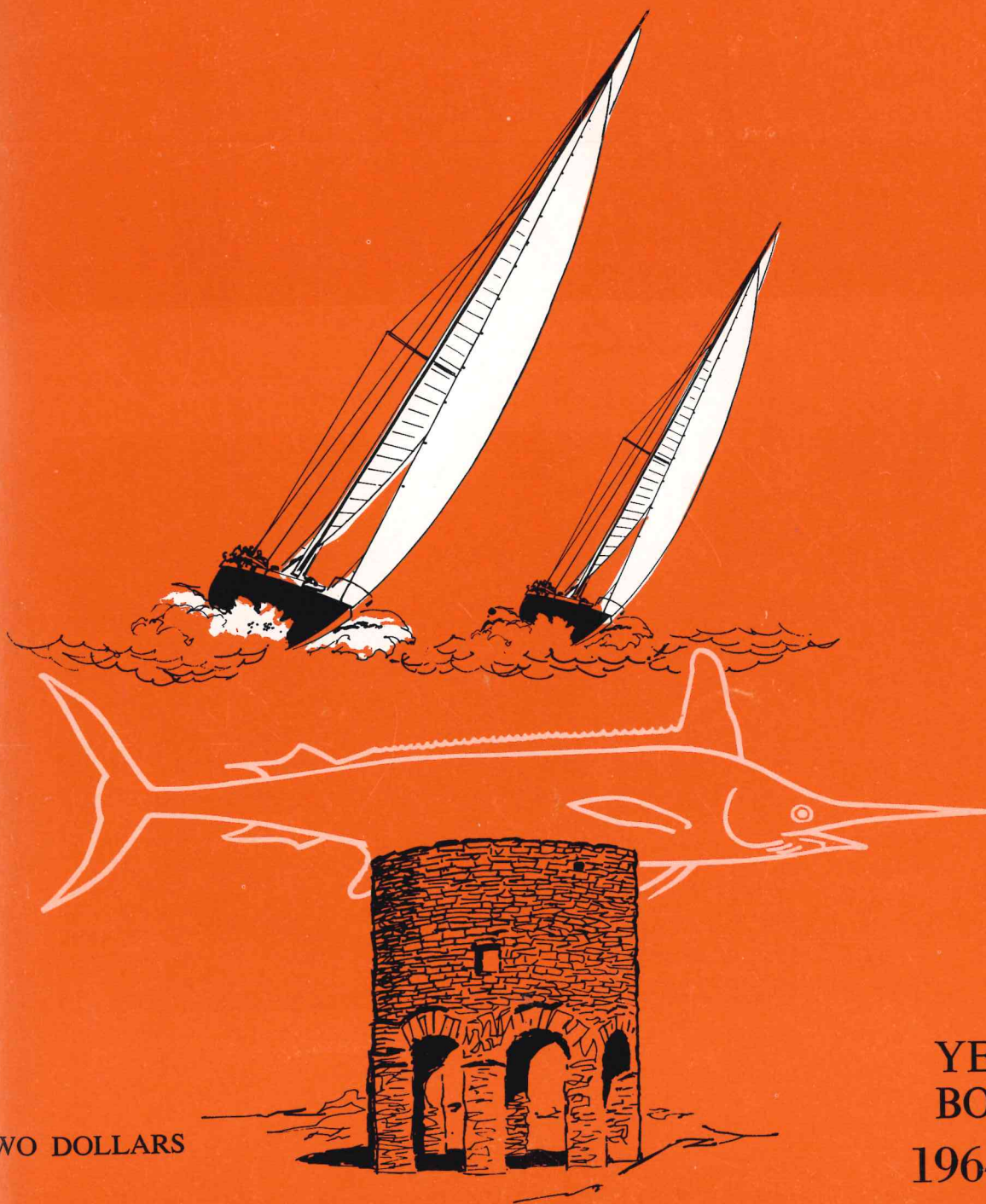


RHODE ISLAND

LAND OF LEGEND & LIVELY LIVING




TWO DOLLARS

YEAR
BOOK
1964-65

KING PHILIP'S WAR

By ROBERT V. SIMPSON

HE HELL THAT CAME TO BE KNOWN as King Philip's War broke out on a Sunday morning in June of 1675. On that day the village of Swansea, Massachusetts (part of the Plymouth Colony at that time), was attacked by the Indians. Some forty buildings were burned and almost the entire population massacred. The horribly mutilated corpses of men, women and children were found by those who had marched to the aid of the stricken village.

The colonists of southern New England may have been horrified by the attack, but they were certainly not surprised, for they had been hearing the rumblings of an Indian War for some time.

Massasoit, the staunch friend of the Plymouth colonists, left two sons on his death. Wamsutta, whose English name was Alexander, was the older of two brothers. He inherited the leadership of the Wampanoags.

With the exception of some trouble with the Pequots in Connecticut, the colonists had enjoyed fairly good relations with the Indians for a number of years. However, the expansion of the settlements began to be viewed with suspicion by the Indians. During his lifetime Massasoit kept things in check. However, when Alexander became Chief of the Wampanoags, rumors started to trickle back to Plymouth that the Indians were getting restless, gathering arms and sharpening their weapons. To determine the accuracy of these rumors, the magistrates of Plymouth summoned Alexander into Plymouth for a hearing. Unfortunately during his return trip, Alexander died of either a fever or an overdose of rum. The younger brother Metacom, or Philip, succeeded his brother as chief of the Wampanoags. Philip was suspicious of the circumstances surrounding Alexander's death and felt that there had been foul play. He was determined to avenge his brother's death and to halt any further expansion of the English settlements. To assure success, he formed an alliance with the powerful Narragansetts and the Nipmucs, a lesser tribe who inhabited the lands in the northern part of Rhode Island and south central Massachusetts.

With the alliance formed and the plans completed, the Wampanoags attacked Swansea and the war was on.

The English meanwhile had formed a federation which included the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Plymouth Colony, Connecticut and those villages along the upper Connecticut River. The Colony of Rhode Island was conspicuous by her absence from this federation. Her rather liberal religious beliefs were not looked on with favor by her sister colonies, and for this reason she had not been invited to be a part of the New England Federation. However, with the peaceful Quakers settled on the island of Rhode Island and the peace-loving friend of the Narragansetts, Roger Williams and his followers settled at the Providence Plantations, there seemed to be little to be feared from the Indians. In view of their relative security, the Rhode Island colonists at first did not feel particularly chagrined at being left out of the federation. The Narragansetts did not attack the Rhode Island villages during the early



KING PHILIP'S CHAIR

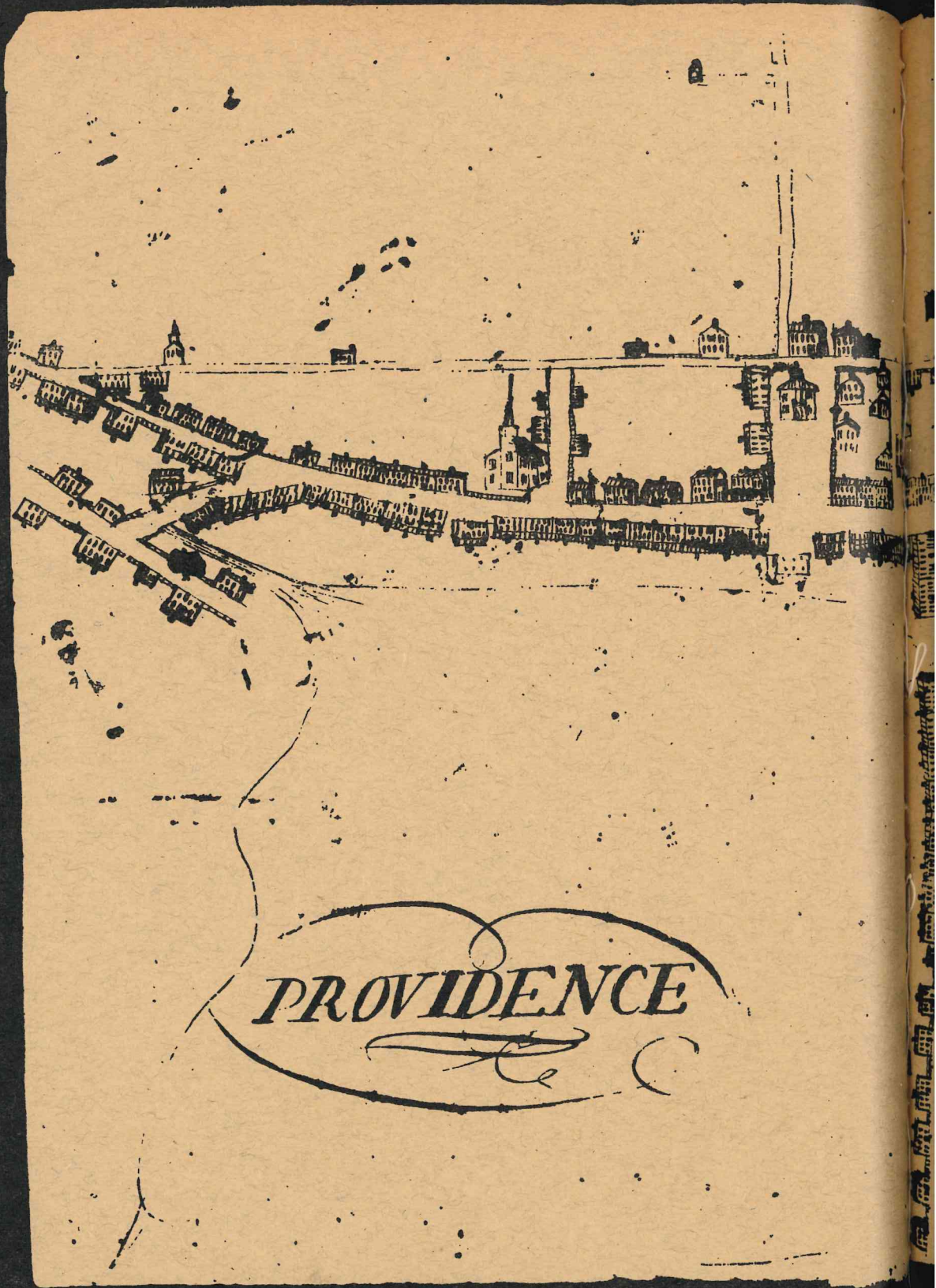
Near by the Haffenreffer Museum in Bristol is the natural amphitheater known as "King Philip's Chair." Here, at the base of a high cliff and close by Mount Hope Bay, the Sachem assembled his council and followers to decide major issues.

days of the war—a fact which further strengthened Rhode Island's laissez-faire policy toward the war.

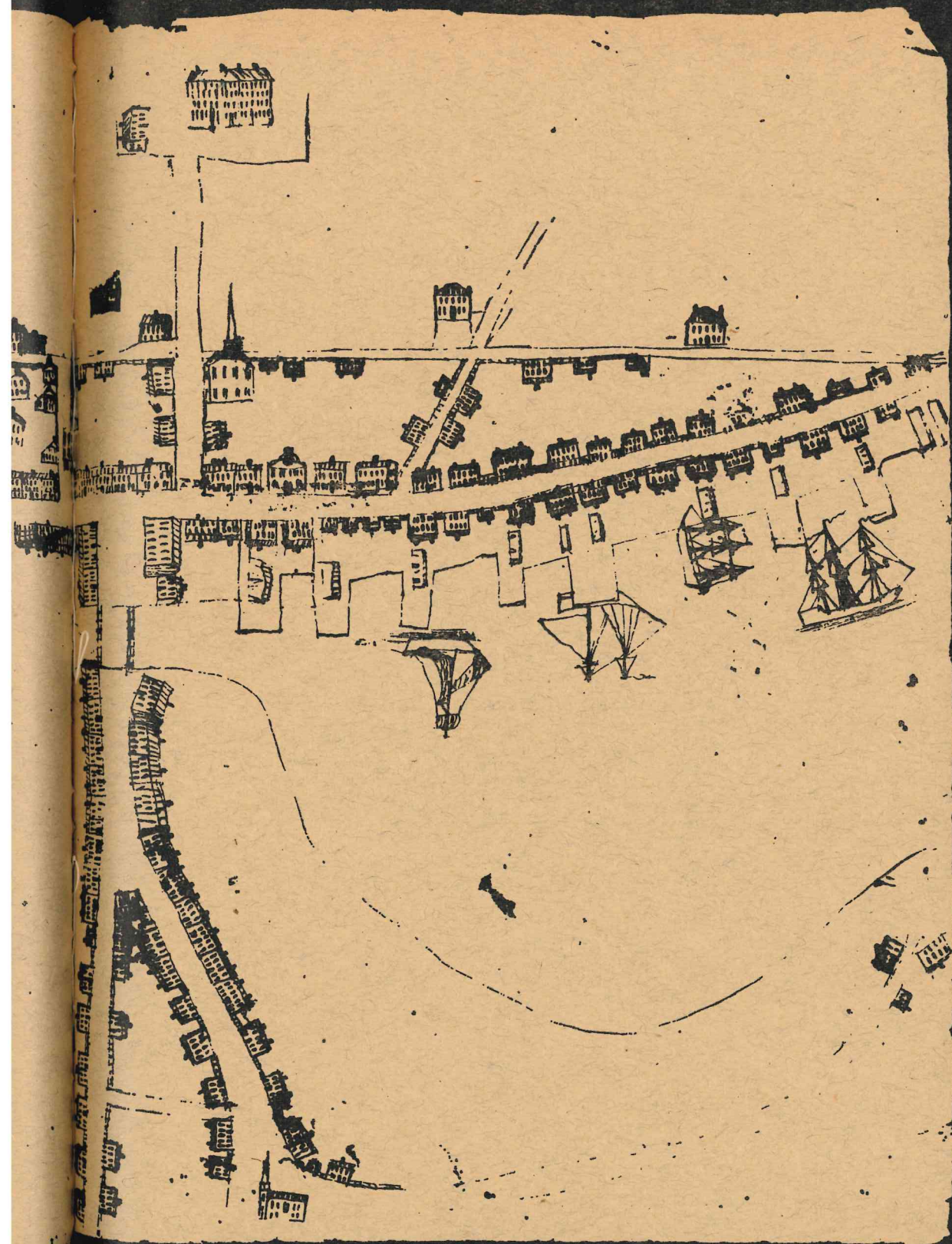
After Swansea, an attack was made on the village of Dartmouth. The scene of the war then shifted to western Massachusetts towns of Brookfield, Greenfield and Deerfield. With the approach of winter, the Indians went into winter quarters with the Narragansetts in their stronghold in the Great Swamp which lay west and a little bit south of what is now Kingston, Rhode Island. Information of this reached the New England Federation and they resolved to attack the Indians in their winter camp. It is curious to note that the Federation planned to attack the Indians at their camp in Rhode Island in spite of the fact that Rhode Island was not a member of the Federation and her charter forbade encroachment on her territory by the other colonies. Massachusetts, Plymouth and Connecticut troops arrived in Rhode Island and assembled at Smith's blockhouse near what is now Wickford, Rhode Island. From this point they left early in the morning on the 19th of December 1675, arriving at the Indian encampment in the late afternoon. A furious battle was waged before the colonial troops gained access to the fortified camp of the Narragansetts. The torch was applied to the camp; women and children as well as the braves were killed in the colonists' desire to eliminate their red enemies. Some of the Narragansetts made their escape but all of their winter stores had been destroyed. The battle was over.

Many braves, as well as women and children were killed. The camp was set afire and the Indians' winter supplies destroyed. The colonial troops had fought a furious battle after a long march without rest. The leaders of the troops decided that the return march would be made immediately. The return to Smith's blockhouse was made during a severe blizzard in which many of the wounded died along the way. Benjamin Church, the noted Indian fighter, was among the wounded. He was evacuated to Newport to recover from his wounds. Confident that the spirit of the Narragansetts had been broken in the Great Swamp fight, the colonial troops returned to their respective homes. Their departure left Rhode Island to receive, without protection, the full vengeance of the guerilla-type warfare at which the Indians excelled.

In the late winter and early spring attacks were made in Mendon, Massachusetts, and Warwick and Providence in Rhode Island. Most of the residents of Warwick and Providence had fled to the safety of the island of Rhode Island. Every dwelling in the village of Warwick was burned, with the exception of a stone house which stood until late in the 19th century. In the spring the Indians made many raids, including one in Weymouth and another in Medfield, Massachusetts—villages quite close to Boston. The colonial authorities dispatched several bodies of troops to find and destroy the small bands of Indians conducting these raids. One of these groups, under the leadership of Captain Michael Pierce and composed of approximately 60 white troops and 20 Cape Cod Indians, set out from Rehoboth Village to contact and annihilate an Indian raiding party reported to have been active near Attleboro Gore. On Sunday morning the 23rd of March 1676 Pierce's body of men made contact with a small group of Indians at a point on the Blackstone River near the site of the present Waypoysett Stadium. Pierce ordered his men to give chase to the enemy, but upon reaching the middle of the



The Oldest Map of Providence in Existence
... courtesy of R. I. Historical Society



fording place he found that he had been baited into an ambush and was at that moment opposed by a superior force of the enemy. Pierce immediately formed his men in a circle and prepared to make a stand. He also dispatched a messenger to Rehoboth Village (Rumford) requesting help. The messenger arrived at the village shortly after worship services had begun. Being fearful of interrupting the divine services, he waited outside the meeting house until their completion before delivering Pierce's message. Meanwhile at the river, Pierce and the troops were, with few exceptions, massacred. Not more than one half dozen of the English escaped. It has been said that the Indians captured nine men, took them northward to a spot in what is now Cumberland, and there put them to death. The bodies of these nine men were later found and the site has since been called "Nine Men's Misery." A heap of stones on the land now owned by the Order of "Our Lady of Atonement" marks the burial place of these men.

Shortly after the Captain Michael Pierce massacre and within a mile and one half of the site, Canonchet, the Narragansett chieftain was captured. Most historians seem to agree that he was captured while wading the Blackstone River at a point near the present Whipple Bridge. His capture was executed by a group of Connecticut men under the leadership of Captain George Dennison. Friendly Indians had reported that Canonchet was in the vicinity. It is believed that the troops recognized him by his ermine cape. In any event, Canonchet and his braves attempted to cross the river and make their escape. However, the Narragansett chieftain slipped in the water and was seized by his enemies.

Among the many legends arising from this period is the one about the Jillsons who had established a homestead in the northwestern part of Cumberland. Mrs. Jillson was in the cabin with her baby while her husband was some distance from the home clearing land. Mrs. Jillson spotted the band of Indians approaching her home. Without hesitation she grabbed the child and made her escape by the rear exit. The Indians burned the Jillson home to the ground. Mr. Jillson seeing the smoke ran home to find his cabin in ashes, and his wife and child gone. He must have been in despair as he made his way to the garrison in Rehoboth. His spirits were certainly lifted when he found that his wife and child had reached the safety of Rehoboth just ahead of him. That the Jillsons were endowed with a full measure of fortitude is evidenced by the fact that they returned in the late summer and rebuilt their home on the same site.

In the northeastern part of Cumberland, Burnt Swamp Road received its name from an incident which occurred in the later stages of King Philip's War. In this area of Cumberland there is a large swamp area extending into Massachusetts. Legend has it that the colonists, hearing that the Indians were encamped in the center of this swamp, took advantage of a very dry season, applied a torch to the swamp and drove the Indians from the area.

Although the colonies of Plymouth, Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay had suffered severe losses during the war, Rhode Island, not a member of the Federation and almost a non-combatant, certainly felt the effects of the war. It should be remembered that no losses were suffered by Rhode Island residents until after the wrath of the Narragansetts had been aroused by the Great Swamp fight.