

"The Narraganset Chief, or the Adventures of a Wanderer": Recovering an Indigenous Autobiography

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Abstract

This article introduces *The Narraganset Chief*, a recently recovered autobiography written by a Native American mariner and published anonymously in 1832. Portions of the original narrative are woven together with archival research and historical context to present a series of vignettes that illuminate the lives and experiences of three generations of one family from 1760 to 1832. First-person accounts from the authors (one a member of the Narragansett Tribe) also explore the process of recovery, interpretation, and reconnection. Illustrations depict the intersections and disconnections of gender, power, sovereignty, and the sea.

Keywords

Indigenous, reconnection, mariners, autobiography, slave trade, Narragansett Indian Tribe

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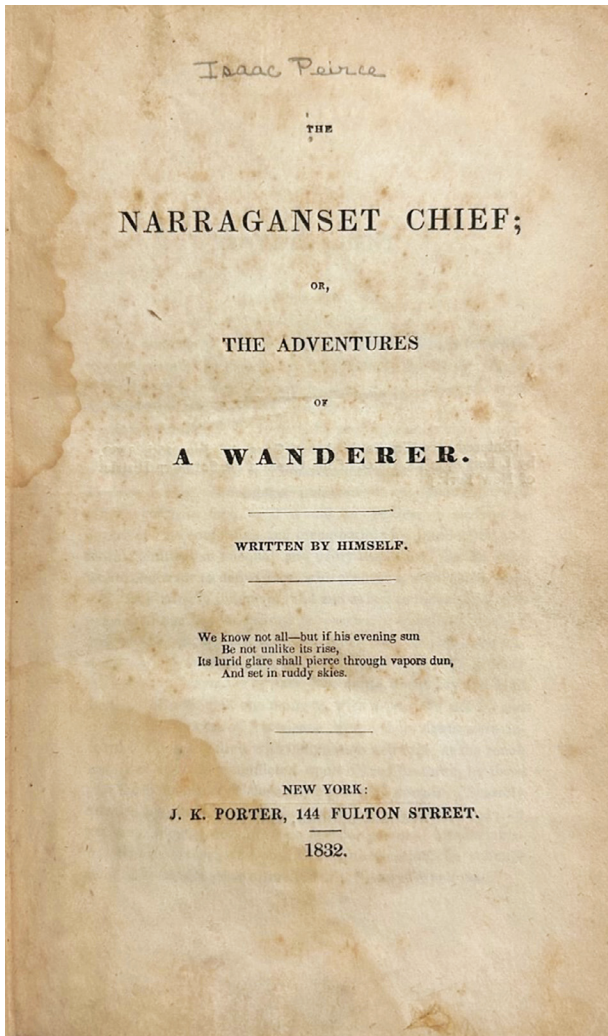


Figure 1. Title page of *The Narraganset Chief* with "Isaac Peirce" penciled in at the top (Mancini, personal copy)

More than nine million acres of Indian Country in southern New England and Long Island were reduced to less than thirty thousand acres before the American Revolution (1775–1783).¹ Following a series of devastating epidemics and genocidal wars, Europeans consolidated control not just over land, but also over legal and economic systems. Indians² across the region persisted, resisted, and adjusted in different ways to this rapidly changing world. One important and largely unseen shift involved the participation of Indian men in various forms of maritime labor—from shipbuilding to naval service to whaling. Thousands of Indians and those of Indian descent found work in the ports of New London, New Haven, Providence, New York, Sag Harbor, Boston, and New Bedford. The vessels on which these men worked soon connected them to ports around the world.

In popular literature, Tashtego, the Wampanoag harpooner from Martha's Vineyard in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), may be the closest most readers ever get to imagining Indians at sea. Only recently have scholars of maritime history begun to document and understand Indian presence and experiences on the waters of the world and other places far away from their homelands.³ New lines of inquiry emerge once Indians are untethered from their supposed place on the land—the reservations. For example, what variables influenced their labor and mobility? How do prolonged absences affect the individual, their family, and tribe? How are identity and race understood and negotiated in different contexts? How did Indians experience other places and other cultures?

Outside of the fragmented archives, oral histories, photographs, illustrations, and belongings (objects) that scholars meticulously weave together, the only known autobiography of a Native American mariner was published by Paul Cuffe, Jr., in 1839. A mariner of Pequot, Wampanoag, and West African descent, his *Narrative of The Life and Adven-*

tures of Paul Cuffe, a Pequot Indian: During Thirty Years Spent at Sea, and in Travelling in Foreign Lands provides a twenty-one-page sketch of his travels on some forty voyages to fifteen or more countries.⁴ It is a window that begins to give shape to the nuances of global travel, labor, and mobility of mariners of color. With Cuffe growing up as the son, namesake, and employee of a wealthy entrepreneur, one might ask if his account is an anomaly or if it is reflective of the experiences of the hundreds (though, more likely, thousands) of other Native mariners.

What if another account existed that allowed us to probe more deeply into the questions asked above? *The Narraganset Chief, or the Adventures of a Wanderer* (Figure 1)⁵ is one such text that has been right in front of us for over 190 years.⁶ Today, it is registered as a work of fiction by the Library of Congress, but when it was published anonymously in June 1832, it rang true enough to the editor of the Quaker publication *The Friend; or, Advocate of Truth*. In the July edition, he announced, “just received and for sale at this office, ‘the Narraganset Chief, or the Adventures of a Wanderer’—price 50 cents. This is a history of the life and adventures of one of the most singular and extraordinary characters of which I’ve ever read . . . His talents seem to be of the higher order, and the style would not disgrace the best classical scholar of the age.”⁷ Aside from this review, *The Narraganset Chief* does not seem to have gained much attention after it was printed in 1832. With 37 known copies in existence, no other mention of its printing or sale in abolitionist or other newspapers has been found.

So why has this book been overlooked for so long? And how can we untangle the mystery of authorship? *The Narraganset Chief* has been considered a picaresque novel, a fictional genre and an “early form of novel, usually a first-person narrative, relating the adventures of a rogue or lowborn adventurer (Spanish *pícaro*) as he drifts from place to place and from one social milieu to another in his effort to survive.”⁸ Perhaps one of the

more noteworthy examples of this style emerged only six years after *The Narraganset Chief* was published when Edgar Allan Poe wrote the fictional account of another young mariner’s adventures in his novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*.⁹

Complicating matters is the lack of clarity associated with attribution. On six pages of the *The Narraganset Chief*, the anonymous author references himself as “Charles.” Nothing more is made of this name but, at some point after publication, pencil notations on the title page of known copies of the book attributed authorship to Isaac Peirce. Peirce makes clear that he was responsible only for the editing, however. He also added a declaration of authenticity on the book’s “advertisement” page stating about the anonymous author,

The mysterious stranger, (for he does not wish at present, for reasons rendered sufficiently obvious in the sequel, to give his name to the public,) ¹⁰ claims descent from a noted chief of the Narraganset tribe of Indians. Ambition to elevate the character of his nation, and “to show the white man that an Indian can write a book,” ¹¹ are his avowed motives for preserving a record of his adventures. In relation to the genuineness and authenticity of the narrative, the editor will only observe, that many of the facts have been verified; many more are susceptible of it, if true; or of being disproved, if false. ¹²

Peirce’s connection to the author is best understood through mutual abolitionist sentiments. Based initially in Delaware and then New York City, Peirce was a leader in the region’s anti-slavery movement with mention in such antebellum publications as *Freedom’s Journal*, *The Liberator*, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and *The Emancipator*.¹³ He was also a founding officer in the Wilmington Society for the Encouragement of Free Labor and an active delegate in the American Anti-Slavery

Society.¹⁴ The anonymous author would have overlapped with Peirce's political circles since New York is where he occasionally shipped to and from and was his last reported destination prior to publication. If Peirce's claim that he was not the author is to be believed, we are left to wonder who was, in fact, "the mysterious stranger."

The single most important clue to deciphering the anonymous author's identity emerged a century later in a 1931 *New York Times* newspaper article with the headline, "Old Manuscript Tells of Lansing the Pirate."¹⁵ The story identifies the author as Charles Lansing. According to the article, the untitled—but edited—manuscript was found at the Kansas farm of Walter Peirce, Isaac Peirce's grandson. The article goes on to describe many details of Lansing's life that are reproduced in greater detail in *The Narraganset Chief*. The book, it seems, had long been forgotten as the *New York Times* story claims erroneously that the manuscript was never published. A search for the original manuscript has been, thus far, unsuccessful.

Charles Lansing's 195-page narrative spans fifteen chapters not including the preface and conclusion. His "wanderings" occurred over the course of twenty-five years (between 1806 and 1831). During this time, he sailed on three dozen voyages and further documented his time in twenty countries on five continents. While most of the book is a recounting of his personal experiences, he comes to learn more about the detail of his ancestry and his descent from the titular "*Narraganset Chief*" that expands the scope of events back in time to the 1760s.¹⁶ Through his story, we learn about three generations of men from one family (Figure 2) that illustrate how Native people responded to the maelstrom of empire and the associated acts of violence, disconnection, and racism of colonization. Even with such global turbulence, there was agency and opportunity. Often, as the reader will see, the sea and freedom are entwined.

Beyond authorship, validating Lansing's account presents many challenges that include:

establishing a basic timeline (given the absence of any dates in the narrative); accessing archives across global repositories, management systems, and languages; and understanding race and identity in the context of colonial systems and policies. More to the point, what available records can be used to confirm his "adventures"? Throughout the published book, he is loath to use dates but frequently recollects and describes events and people in varying detail.

Based on the available information provided in his text, one can reconstruct a rough timeline of events ranging from approximately 1760 to 1832. By carefully cross-referencing the author's clues with independent archival resources and scholarly works, a sequence of verifiable accounts emerges. Though key events in the narrative have been confirmed by independent archival sources, we remain cautious. That some of Lansing's narrative is chronologically out of order might be attributed to the editor, the process of recollecting and recording, or to an imperfect human memory.¹⁷ He also takes care not to reveal (or possibly obfuscates) certain information involving his criminal activities.¹⁸ Some details that have been validated in Lansing's narrative are so specific that only someone present could be aware.¹⁹ And yet, some contemporaneous crew lists do not name "Charles Lansing," a sign that Lansing may have been using an alias.²⁰

Having confirmed key parts of Charles Lansing's autobiography (in this essay, his presence on the USS *Guerriere*), we seek to share raw portions of this extraordinary account as well as some research that has progressed more substantially. In the subsequent accounts, we present a handful of the dozens of stories that, in varying lengths, comprise *The Narraganset Chief* as written by Charles Lansing. Where possible, this essay is lightly contextualized. The vignettes that follow are labeled with place and date headings and include our own experiences with the recovery and interpretation of *The Narraganset Chief*. We have reorganized Charles Lansing's narrative into four sections: PRISONER;

SACHEM (Charles' grandfather, whom we identify as William Sachem); SLAVE (Charles' father, who remains unnamed at the time of this writing); and WANDERER (Charles himself).

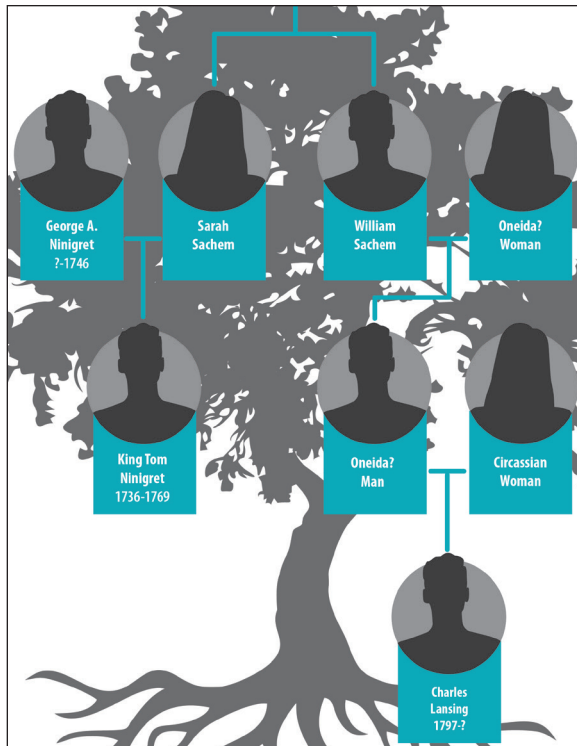


Figure 2. Charles Lansing family tree showing his descent from William Sachem (whom we propose is the Narragansett Chief) and connection to King Tom Ninigret. Graphic by Arleen Andersen, Mystic Seaport Museum

Dodge City, Kansas. 1931.

With a dateline from Dodge City, Kansas, the *New York Times* reported on March 4, 1931 the discovery of an “Old Manuscript Tells of Lansing the Pirate—Found in Kansas Farmer’s Home, It Describes Adventures of Ruthless Freebooter” (Figure 3).

The Reno County farmer, Walter Peirce, found the manuscript, titled *Adventures of a Wanderer*, “while going through old volumes formerly owned by Isaac Peirce, his grandfather, who was once a publisher and bookbinder in Philadelphia” (Figure 4).²¹ At the time of this discovery, Peirce

OLD MANUSCRIPT TELLS OF LANSING THE PIRATE

Found in Kansas Farmer's Home, It Describes Adventures of Ruthless Freebooter.

Special Correspondence, THE NEW YORK TIMES.

DODGE CITY, Kan., March 4.—A manuscript written by Charles Lansing, pirate and slave trader, for publication by Isaac Peirce, Philadelphia publisher, but never printed because of the author's arraignment of Christian civilization, has been found in the home of Walter Peirce, Reno County farmer and grandson of the publisher.

The manuscript is bound and edited as if the publisher had changed his plan of publishing it at the last minute.

Lansing, the son of a Narragansett Indian chief and a Negro slave, began his career of freebooting in 1806. In the ensuing twenty-five years as pirate and soldier of fortune he saw many ports, witnessed many crimes and developed a bravado consonant with his career.

According to his story, when he was 10 years old he shipped on a French brig after running away from Troy, N. Y. The ship was captured by a privateer and the men were carried to La Guayra, Venezuela, where they had their choice of death or serving with the rebels. Lansing preferred life and became a cabin boy on the General Santander. The ship turns privateer, and at the close of the voyage, the boy's share of the loot is \$480.

Back in Troy, his relatives sent him to an academy to be educated for a missionary. In a few weeks he ran away to sea, was captured by a pirate who was contented to rob the passengers and leave them on their ship. Lansing next shipped on the Saratoga, a slave trader. Of this adventure he writes vividly of downing thirty-eight Negroes to avoid capture by a British warship.

Lansing joined a pirate ship after the slave ship returned to Cuba and admits he became proficient in black flag technique. Near Cape San Antonio the ship was attacked by three American cutters. Lansing fired the charge that killed a marine officer. The Americans overcame the pirates, but Lansing and three companions escaped. In Havana he was arrested, but released on promise to serve on a Spanish frigate.

After many narrow escapes Lansing wound up in Cadiz, where he was held as a pirate. He found his father in prison as an Anti-Royalist. There is nothing in the manuscript to indicate the fate of Lansing. He returned to the California coast, served in the American Navy a year, tried his hand at piracy again and occasionally returned to New York laden with loot.

Figure 3. *New York Times* article, March 8, 1931—the first to report the discovery of the manuscript written by Charles Lansing.²² Reproduced by permission from The New York Times Company

was operating a “general farm” in Lincoln Township with his wife and son.²³ The report of his “prized antique”²⁴ soon made it to the newspapers 1500 miles (2400 km) away in New York and, a week and a half later, in Rhode Island—in part because of the story’s ties to these places.²⁵

The whereabouts of the manuscript remain unknown.

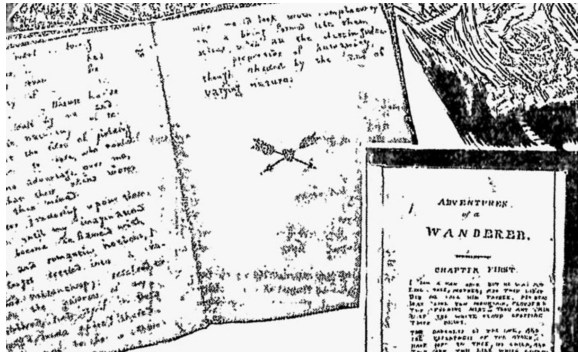


Figure 4. *Youngstown Vindicator* story, May 10, 1931—a more expansive account with photographs of the first page and last page of Chapter 1 (page 9 and page 14) of *The Adventures of a Wanderer*.²⁶

Westerly, Rhode Island. 1980.

I (Silvermoon Mars LaRose) am Narragansett. I was born in Westerly, Rhode Island, and raised in Charlestown within the boundaries of our tribal reservation. My family’s land, where I grew up, is part of a very small portion of acreage that has never left Native hands. That is what I was always told. This land is important and keeping it in our family is part of a legacy we leave to future generations, an unbroken tie to our traditional homelands. Through centuries of connivance and deceit, our homelands were slowly dispossessed. The few families lucky enough to hold on to these sacred spaces have the burden of fighting to maintain these ancestral ties. It is a constant fight to keep our homelands.

Our tribal nation has always been led by the voice of the people. Our leaders were representing the interests of the community. A sachem acted as the governing head and this individual (male or

female) could be born into that position of leadership, a legacy passed down generationally (Figure 5). However, they had to earn the right to lead by proper representation and service to their community. A sachem could be removed from leadership if the community deemed them inadequate and chose another to lead in their place.

You were only a leader so far as your community followed you. Additionally, the sachem did not act alone, that person would be surrounded by a council of leaders, sub-chiefs if you will, that gave counsel in all matters. The elders of the community acted as advisors, providing insights into past events to inform future decisions. Leaders amongst the women, who controlled matters of home, garden, and food stores, would also be consulted. When I think of leadership in our tribal community, it has always been a collective effort. These communal systems of governance were disrupted by colonization. European invaders equated our Sachems to their Kings, monarchs with power over their citizens. Throughout early colonialization, they sought out leaders to side with them and ignored our structures of government that were meant to keep rogue actions in check. They manipulated, threatened, and even cheated individuals to their will, to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands. This history saw a breakdown in traditional forms of government, pitting leadership against community. In the late eighteenth century, amongst the Narragansett, there was a community movement away from the hereditary Sachem leadership to a body elected council, led by an elected Sachem. This may appear to be a change in tradition, but I see it as a return to traditional values. A government once again led by the people, empowering the voice of each community member, and limiting a governing rule that acts on self-serving interests or can be manipulated by outside influence. However, it is an unfortunate truth of history that this change came too late to stop the misappropriation of our



Figure 5. *The Sachem Ship*, © 2023 Silvermoon Mars LaRose

homelands. And so, we do our best to hold on to every meaningful acre we can.

Pequot Indian Reservation—Mashantucket, Connecticut. 2005.

Four years into my role as Senior Researcher at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, I (Jason Mancini) finally began to understand why there were such large gaps in the records of Pequot men on the reservation. The following year, as a newly minted Cuffe Fellow at Mystic Seaport, I began a new phase of my research that eventually became the Indian Mariners Project. The project focused on customs records that, when aggregated, revealed Indians were not only significant to New England's maritime industries but formed expansive and global social networks around maritime labor.²⁷ These labor networks contributed to the survivance²⁸ of tribal communities through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time when tribes were being deliberately erased from local records.²⁹ While I could document the presence of Native men at sea, and was building an archive of their stories, belongings, and images,

there were few firsthand accounts of their experiences that provided the texture of their lives as they traveled the waters of the world.³⁰

Searching through digitized historic newspaper archives, I found the 1931 *New York Times* article above. It was here, in the first story I ever encountered about him, that Charles Lansing was fashioned an Indian pirate. It fascinated me. In graduate school, I read Marcus Rediker's *Villains of All Nations* and thought hard about how little was known about the "all nations" part of piracy. The exploits of pirate captains such as Bartholomew Roberts, Edward "Blackbeard" Teach, William Kidd, Samuel Bellamy, Charles Vane, Edward Low, and "Calico" Jack Rackham are both celebrated and reviled in popular histories and media. That the stories' subjects are white and English comes as no surprise. What is overlooked is that estimates of 50 to 60 percent of pirate crews were people of color—Black and Indigenous.³¹

Astonished by an account of an Indian pirate, I began calling historical societies across Kansas in hopes of locating this reportedly unpublished and annotated work—to no avail.

As I continued with my research, I made a number of presentations about my findings to the public and to the region's tribal communities. One presentation in particular, around 2010, was attended by some of my Mohegan friends. After the talk, Faith Davison, a Mohegan tribal elder and archivist (with an encyclopedic memory) approached me to ask if I had ever heard of a book called *The Narraganset Chief*. I had not but found myself so intrigued that I googled the book as soon as I got home. Indeed, as noted above, the manuscript had been published, albeit anonymously! My path soon crossed with Charles Lansing's, as I began a nearly twenty-year effort to untangle this story and return it to the Narragansett Indian Tribe.

PRISONER

San Sebastian Prison—Cadiz,, Spain. 1823.

Of all of the stories Charles Lansing evokes in *The Narraganset Chief*, it is his time in a Spanish prison that is the most dramatic and foundational to this essay. For, in the waning pages of his book, Lansing writes of the time in his life when he felt his luck ran out. Along with his shipmates, he was among the newest inmates incarcerated at San Sebastian, a castle-like prison located on a tiny spit of land pointing into the eastern Atlantic Ocean, just outside of the Bay of Cadiz, Spain.

He had spent the prior months along Cape de Gatte on the Argentine privateer, *Young Constitution*, pursuing English ships loaded with Spanish cargo and looting Spanish galleons. Unable to ignore the disruption to commerce, the Spanish navy caught sight of Lansing's ship one evening and began pursuit. The *Young Constitution* ran.

It was the midnight cries from aloft, warning of breaking waves visible only to the lookout, that came too late. The Baltimore-built brig on which Lansing sailed struck a reef. As the currents pushed the vessel higher onto the rocks, the masts shattered, and sailors abandoned ship. Grabbing onto

whatever they could, they became fish in a barrel. The Spanish opened fire. Lansing documented the fate of the few survivors, noting,

They took us in tow. Many of us were mortally wounded, and others bleeding to death for want of medical aid. The frigate sent her boats to take charge of the wreck. We were all bundled on board of the first brig, which immediately set sail for the city of Cadiz. We were allotted a small portion of the birth [sic] deck, where we who were able were allowed to bind up the wounds of our less fortunate shipmates as well as we could, no other succor being granted.

We arrived at Cadiz. We were ironed two and two, and conveyed to prison. Those of us who could walk, were hurried forward, while the disabled were carried in the arms of the soldiers. Although some of the latter might have survived had aid been extended to them, yet a number bled to death in prison. This prison was a large stone building, with a tiled roof and floor, surrounded by a strong wall. It is called St. Sebastian. The ward in which we were confined was about fifty feet by thirty-six. We could have communication with the other wards by gratings. Four sentinels stood at our door, who were regularly relieved. Famished and faint, we threw ourselves upon the pavement, and fell asleep.³²

Spain was in turmoil by the early 1820s. It had been for over a decade, since Napoleon destabilized the Spanish monarchy in 1808 and installed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as king. The impact was far-reaching as Spain's colonies on the other side of the Atlantic soon pursued independence and openly rebelled against the crown. The Spanish navy was combatting rebel privateers (on which Lansing served) in fronts in the eastern Mediterranean and along the Argentine coast.

On land, the Constitutionals, under the guerilla leader General Francisco Mina, had just suffered a stinging defeat.³³ Many of his captured rebel army found themselves sent to San Sebastian.

While in the prison yard with the men who served under Mina, Lansing noticed that:

amongst the rest of this rude band, I had observed a man of very peculiar manners and appearance; always pensive and solitary; wandering apart from his fellows, absorbed in gloomy reflection. He seldom spoke to any one, but when he did speak, his delivery was cogent, perspicuous, and graceful. He had an accurate knowledge of the English tongue. His swarthy complexion, long straight hair, and dark piercing eyes, bespoke him a North American Indian, and although his forbidding aspect gave no encouragement to New England curiosity, I felt an indescribable interest in him, and a sort of thrilling sympathy ran through my heart as often as I looked upon him.³⁴

Eventually, the two began a conversation and inquired about one another. Quickly, almost unbelievably, they realized that they were father and son! It had been twenty years or more since they were last together. Lansing was a young child when his father left home so had no memory of him, only stories from his mother. In this most unlikely place, they enjoyed a fortuitous, but brief, reunion. And, though they engaged as combatants in different theaters, they fought towards a common purpose—not just for independence, but against absolute power of European sovereigns.

As they shared more about their experiences, Lansing soon learned about his grandfather. His father related that:

my father was one of the greatest Chiefs belonging to the Narragansett tribe of Indians.

Although he had long been forced to leave his native soil, and flee far to the west, still he possessed sufficient power and interest to secure him a peaceful possession in the western wild; this spot, however, attracted the attention of those white speculators who had warred upon us from the beginning.³⁵

With his luck turned, this improbable, yet entirely possible, meeting connected Lansing to his people and to a different time.³⁶ It was the key to unlocking his identity and a roadmap in his search for others like him.

SACHEM

Narragansett Indian Reservation—Charlestown, Rhode Island. 1772.

Charles Lansing's chance encounter with his father was revelatory. As the search for prisoner records continues, even the most doubtful reader must wonder, what more can be made of this unnamed Narragansett chief and how does the arc of his life connect to the clues in Lansing's narrative? My (Mancini) research took me through many archival sources that contained lists of Narragansett names—sometimes hundreds of names. They appear in the Colonial Records of Rhode Island, census records, Papers of Sir William Johnson, Ezra Stiles Itineraries, letters and records associated with the Wheelock School, Brothertown migration history, Charlestown (Rhode Island) Land Records, local histories, and more.³⁷ Throughout this search, the clues guided me to eliminate the following: women (obviously); men who died before or after key dates established in my timeline; enlisted men who died during the French and Indian War or the American Revolution; men who migrated away from Narragansett homelands and later returned; men who died in Rhode Island; converts to Christianity; literate men; and, men

who were not in positions of authority. This process focused my attention on a critical and transformative time in Narragansett tribal history: the sachemship of Thomas Ninigret, the role of his councilors or chiefs, and the rise of the anti-sachem party within the tribe.³⁸

Over the course of months of searching, one name emerged from hundreds: William Sachem. What follows is the backstory to *The Narragansett Chief*.

It was by December 1772 that William Sachem had had enough. Sachem, as his surname suggests, was a member of the extended “royal” family of the Narragansett Tribe. Confronted with signing another deed transferring Narragansett lands out of tribal possession, he refused.³⁹ As one of the principal councilors or “chiefs” of the tribe, he was in the unenviable position of settling the estate of the recently deceased Thomas Ninigret or “King Tom,” late sachem (leader) of the Narragansett Tribe of Indians.

King Tom ascended to the leadership of the Narragansett tribe a quarter of a century earlier, in 1746, after his father passed away. By King Tom’s time, the tribal reservation of approximately ten thousand acres was a mere residue of what Narragansett homelands had been when Europeans first arrived in the region. Here, in the southern coastal town of Charlestown, is where the Narragansett Indian reservation was located and where tensions over the power and rights of the sachem soon divided the tribe.

At his ascension, when he was an impressionable child of ten years, young Tom was separated from his peers and sent away to schools in Newport, Rhode Island and at Oxford University in Oxford, England. In these places, among powerful elites and far from his “royal” parents, he learned to live a privileged and ostentatious life. These early experiences proved formative and starkly disconnected from the needs and inter-

ests of the tribe. This upbringing eventually came at great expense to both Ninigret and his tribe.⁴⁰

After returning from his education in England, Tom set his mind to building an English-style estate on the reservation, later known as “King Tom Farm.” He lavishly entertained guests and commissioned the building of a personal sailing vessel. Such splendor was not free. Through the 1750s, as he accumulated material wealth, he also acquired numerous creditors. Beginning in 1759, those creditors came calling. As he learned from his father, to settle debts, he began to sell the one thing of value to the English and also what mattered most to his tribe—the land. Between 1759 and 1766, King Tom sold nearly 5500 acres—roughly half of the remaining Narragansett land—to settle his “just debts.” These sales resulted in the removal of Narragansett families from their homes, limiting access to the salt ponds they used for fishing (a critical part of tribal subsistence).⁴¹

As panic began to set in among members of the tribe, an anti-sachem party led by Samuel Niles emerged. (Niles was a tribal member and Christian minister who established and led an independent Narragansett church.⁴²) This faction of the tribe petitioned the Rhode Island General Assembly for an intervention. Unsuccessful, they brought their case to the attention of Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the American Colonies.⁴³

By 1767, Ninigret’s life began to unravel. Following a public divorce from his wife, “Idleness and intemperance soon reduced him to poverty and wretchedness. His authority was denied him; his friends deserted him; and, in brief, most of his property passed out of his hands to cancel his debts.”⁴⁴ All of his fortunes had evaporated and he was now alone. As it was noted in a *Historical Sketch of Charlestown, Rhode Island*, “his wife [Mary], and Thomas Ninigret, his only son, left him and emigrated to the West.”⁴⁵ After a decade

of tumult, fatefully, perhaps suspiciously, Thomas Ninigret met his end, reportedly by falling off a horse late in 1769.

Tom Ninigret's council, which enabled much of his behavior earlier that decade, was now responsible for cleaning up the mess and clearing his debt. The council was composed of five men, all "chiefs" or principal men of the tribe.⁴⁶ Of these men, only William Sachem had an especially important relationship with "King Tom"—he was Tom's maternal uncle (see Figure 2). This uncle-nephew relationship in Narragansett country was precious and central to the governing authority and structure of the tribe.⁴⁷ In fact, what stands out in the midst of the flurry of Ninigret's land sales to white "yeomen" is a parcel that he transacted in July 1767 "in Consideration of ye love good will and Effectation I Have and do bare unto my beloved Uncle William Sachem," and his children and grandchildren.⁴⁸ Of the thousands of acres of land Ninigret sold away from the tribe, the 181.5 acres granted to William Sachem was the only land privately granted to another tribal member/family.

William Sachem and the council were now in control and went about completing the unfortunate business of selling Narragansett lands to satisfy Tom's creditors. It was King Tom's farm that William refused to sell. Rhode Island authorities noted the act as an obstruction, albeit temporary. The last known land transfer aimed at settling Ninigret's debts occurred in January 1773 without William Sachem's mark (signature).⁴⁹ Four years later, Sachem vanished from Rhode Island records.⁵⁰

According to my research in the historical archives of Rhode Island, William Sachem's last act in the colony was one of defiance. If, for now, we can hypothesize that the Narragansett Chief was indeed Sachem, then we might just see a connection in the prison yard story that Lansing shared in his book. In the dying words of the Narragansett Chief, he remained defiant. As remembered by his son and memorialized in his grandson Charles

Lansing's book, he gasped: "I am going away to those fair regions which lie beyond the setting sun. Remember the last words of your father: Never forgive, never unite with the whites; but injure them whenever it lies in your power."⁵¹

SLAVE

To date, with a paucity of supporting documentary evidence about Lansing's father, we are left to interpret clues about his life from the second-hand account related in *The Narragansett Chief*. The search for corroborating archives and oral histories continues.

Oneida/Haudenosaunee homelands, New York. Ca. 1783.

During his time with Lansing in San Sebastian prison, Lansing's father recounted his own story, claiming, "'Ere I was born, the contractors had so far overcome my father's scruples as to gain his approbation of selling part of the land to the United States."⁵² In the immediate aftermath of American victory in the American Revolution, the state of New York and land companies learned from their predecessors in New England and accelerated the process of dispossession through the legal and political processes. The expropriation was so rapid that in the thirteen-year period between 1784 and 1797, the Haudenosaunee lost control of the western half of New York and northwestern Pennsylvania. This included, on one day in 1787, approximately 13 million acres.⁵³

As Native people migrated and relocated across the region, the Oneida worked to secure what remained of their homelands and to maintain a strong Indian presence. Earlier in the century, they welcomed the Tuscarora from the region that is now North Carolina, and following the American Revolution, they invited members of New England tribes, such as the Stockbridge Mohican (from western Massachusetts) and Brothertown

(from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Long Island, New York) to join them.⁵⁴

After the sale of tribal land, Lansing's father goes on to say that

at the same time they proposed, that at my birth, (my mother being then pregnant,) I should be taken to the seaboard, and trained up and educated in the English style. In a weak hour, they likewise prevailed with him to join in the cause of civilization!⁵⁵ Accordingly I was brought up and educated among the whites, and early imbibed a sufficiency of their manners and customs to believe that they were in the right and we were in the wrong.⁵⁶

Following generations of praying towns, Christian missionaries, the Wheelock school, and others, this was part of the Indian education experience before the Federal-era Indian boarding schools that sought to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man."⁵⁷

Later in their exchange, "hearing of a legacy left me by my father, I [Lansing's father] ventured to show myself, and was commissioned to go to Congress."⁵⁸ This clue in the text points to Oneida lands in central New York. By the late 1790s, the only land claims or reparations available at the time to Indians were through provisions laid out in the 1794 treaty between the United States Congress and the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Stockbridge Mohican.⁵⁹ In spite of all else, this was an acknowledgment of their service to the United States, when all other Haudenosaunee fought alongside the British.

Peaceful relations in the region did not last long and, as the United States began to assert control over more and more land, conflict became inevitable. For all Indian nations, the incursion into their homelands was a grave and intolerable affront.

Northwest Indian Wars. Ca. late 1780s–mid-1790s

Lansing continued reporting his father's story in *The Narraganset Chief*. While at school in the East, he learned of a "disturbance upon the western frontiers" and set out to visit his father's [the Narragansett Chief] village. "After a weary journey, I arrived at the spot where late my father and all his friends had been driven from their homes now chased farther into the wilderness towards the Pacific surges."⁶⁰ He arrived soon after "a band of murderers, under the sanction of the United States government, had that evening surrounded the defenceless village, burned, murdered, and plundered it. I met a party of Indians retreating before the troops of captain Boltworth."⁶¹

The expansion of American empire across Indian Country was just the beginning of the long "trail of broken treaties."⁶² The succeeding dispossession and dislocation soon saw Indian peoples occupying the world's stage.

Napoleon's Army—Acre [now Akko, Israel]. 1799.

In despair, Lansing's father recalled that "seeing all my prospects ruined in America, I fled to Europe; I went with Napoleon to Egypt; and at the battle of Acre⁶³ was taken prisoner, and carried to Constantinople, thence to Algiers, where I remained a slave."⁶⁴ Constantinople,⁶⁵ the capital of the Ottoman Empire, drew in the survivors of Napoleon's defeated army and then dispersed them across its vast Mediterranean reach. Algiers, the capital city of the North African country of Algeria, was a key port city in the Ottoman trade networks and a home base of the Barbary pirates that threatened American and European commerce.

I fell into the hands of a humane master, who entrusted me freely with his affairs, and allowed me considerable liberty. He had several other slaves, amongst whom were a Circassian lady, with a beautiful daughter. Between them I soon contracted an intimacy. I

became attached to the daughter, and she soon showed some partiality for me. I resolved to effect my escape, and to carry off the fair creature with me.

My master had a small schooner, in which he had made several trips to Gibraltar, and although he had once ventured to take me with him, I saw no opportunity to make my escape. Another voyage was now contemplated. On the night before our departure, I prevailed on a Moor, whom I had bound to my interest, to convey my dulcinea on board the schooner, and secrete her below deck. We sailed early the next morning. The wind proved favorable. In the course of several days we reached the coast of Old Spain, and Cape Palliser hove in sight. "Now," said I to Sidi the Moor—"now is our time, if we would regain our liberty." My master, with two Moors, was then asleep below, and there was not a breeze upon the wave. We took some fire down into the hold and kindled a blaze, jumped into the boat with my girl, and pulled for the shore.⁶⁶

Freedom. For a time . . .

WANDERER

Near Pittsfield, Massachusetts. 1806.

"Nine winters had passed over me," Charles Lansing (b. ca. 1797) begins his story about becoming aware that he was different.⁶⁷ Until that moment, "I had not perceived, in all that time, that I was other in form, feature, or complexion, than my associates."⁶⁸ Raised in a remote town in rural northwestern Massachusetts, he remembered the moment clearly: "I was a schoolboy. My playmates first taught me to repine. It was an afternoon in the month of May, when I ran home to my mother, and in the anguish of my spirit, begged to know if I was indeed stigmatized by that stamp, which had

procured me the derision of my school-fellows."⁶⁹

Dispirited, Lansing remembered of his mother:

she caught me in her arms, and, affected by the artless simplicity of my question and manner, burst into tears. She told me, that I was indeed distinguished from my fellows, by a darker hue than that which now marks the lords of the soil, but that the original inhabitants of the country wore the same swarthy complexion and sable straight hair which was condemned by the usurpers of this fair region.⁷⁰

I was—"a [fucking] Indian."⁷¹

Of the nearly 34,000 inhabitants of Berkshire County in 1800, only 494 were Black (less than 1.5 percent). Though Indians weren't counted, there were almost certainly fewer at that point, as the remaining Mohican lands at Stockbridge were overrun by white settlers. Most of the tribes' members had sold their remaining land allotments by 1790 and relocated to New Stockbridge in Oneida homelands 150 miles (240 km) to the west in central New York.

Beyond that, local contempt of Indians lingered long after the 1704 massacre of white settlers by the French and their Mohawk, Wyandot (Huron), and Abenaki allies in nearby Deerfield. Most Natives who remained in western Massachusetts (such as William Apes, Sr., a Pequot who moved his young family between Colrain, Massachusetts, and Colchester, Connecticut) were itinerant tradespeople such as cobblers and basket makers making and selling their wares to local white farmers.⁷²

Contemptuousness didn't come from all quarters, however. Lansing distinguished white people by their treatment of him, noting that "I experienced more respect and consideration from persons of standing and respectability, than I did from the most debased class of white men."⁷³ Lan-

sing's self-awareness and disconnection grew as his mother consoled him. The pale-skinned daughter of a Circassian woman,⁷⁴ displaced from her own homelands on the edge of the Black Sea:

She said the only relation in America of whom I could boast, was herself; that my father, whom she had married while in slavery in Barbary, was far away; that his career had been wayward—he had followed in the train of Napoleon—but that now she knew not the place of his abode. Yet, she assured me, that I might confidently rely upon her protection, although my color differed from her own.⁷⁵

It wasn't enough. On one early mid-summer morning, Lansing left home. In so doing, he proclaimed that:

the reader is now to behold me a solitary wanderer over the world's wide stage; commencing my recreant course even in childhood, without a friend to direct, or a protector to soothe—a voluntary exile from my home, banished by my own unyielding pride, and only supported by the reflection that I was alone on the earth, and that as nobody cared for me, I must care for myself, and maintain what little respect I still had for my own character, until I might be called to the land of darkness, where we should be all of a color.⁷⁶

He was nine years old.

New Orleans, Louisiana. Between 1813 and 1816.

Lansing first arrived in New Orleans a year or so after Louisiana was admitted to the Union in 1812. His was a brief, relatively uneventful trip. With a pocketful of prize money from his service on a Venezuelan privateer, he had returned to the United States intending to visit his mother. But, rather quickly, he remembered:

I had formed associations in Boston, especially with a certain gambler, a notorious villain, who paid me great attention. He was about setting out for New-Orleans, and, in a weak hour, prevailed upon me to accompany him to that place. He paid my passage, and I arrived with him safely in New Orleans. Upon our arrival, He set up a shop, and I attended the bar. My patron used me well, apparently, and I remained satisfied with my situation.

In this place, I learned more of mankind than I had ever done before; and became quite an adept in worldly policy. In the course of a few months, I had learned sufficient with respect to my friend, to know self-interest was the main spring of all his actions.⁷⁷

From French possession to American, the Louisiana Territory (sold by Napoleon in 1803) soon put America on the path to empire. Upon completion of the sale, the United States had more than doubled its size and was eager to assert control over millions of acres of land. Indeed, the lower Mississippi River was soon flooded with American traders and settlers.

As with the interior, the United States also needed to assert control over the Gulf Coast and its maritime economy. By April 1812, Louisiana had become the country's eighteenth state and less than two months later, the United States declared war on Great Britain for its frequent disruption of American commerce, including in its southern waters.

Near the mouth of the Mississippi River, New Orleans was the principal port of commerce in the South and it soon became one of its largest cities. As with the United States and Canadian borderlands in the North and the heaths of west London where Lansing spent some of his formative years, the limits of governmental control were constantly tested. Rapid growth in this cultural crossroads, coupled with an underdeveloped administrative

structure, created fertile ground for those willing to flout the law and participate in the region's black markets.⁷⁸ Those who knew intimately the meandering waterways and bayous could simultaneously evade customs officials and subject unsuspecting passenger boats to the ways of the river bandit (careful, of course, not to disrupt commerce on the river and raise the ire of the merchants).

Lansing soon calculated his departure to "the sickly season coming on," when "I embraced a favorable opportunity to escape from his clutches; and leaving him, by stealth, embarked for New York, which place I reached in good health, and in good circumstances."⁷⁹ In New Orleans, the "sickly season" meant the onset of yellow fever, also called the "saffron scourge."⁸⁰ With major outbreaks in 1809 and 1811, it remained a perennial threat to the health of the city, especially between August and November.⁸¹ Well before germ theory provided an explanation for the causes of epidemic disease, mortality rates in excess of 10 percent gave rise to New Orleanians' enduring belief in ghosts, vampires, witches, and haunted spaces.⁸²

Not long after his first trip to New Orleans, Lansing returned to the port city. But this visit (in 1814 or 1815) was different for the sailors aboard the arriving schooner. For those made apprehensive by the area's lore, enough was enough. Lansing confessed that

I had previously heard of haunted houses and haunted vessels; I was now on board of one. Singular noises were heard in the hold at the hour of midnight, but when a light was taken to the spot, nothing could be seen. How to account for these things, I do not know. I never saw a ghost, but I am sure if there is any such thing, I heard them at loggerheads in that schooner's hatchways.⁸³

The men with whom Lansing sailed were already a superstitious lot, and consequently, the

author noted, "When we arrived at New Orleans, the crew determined to sail no longer with their ethereal shipmates, and we all deserted together one night, leaving their shadowships in full possession of the forecastle."⁸⁴ Alas, the mighty sailor was no match for the moanings of the haunted vessel.

A sailor's pay on the relatively short voyage from New York to New Orleans would not amount to much and was often spent on clothing, tools, food, and lodging. Upon his arrival, Lansing acknowledged that when he wrote, "My cash account was by this time nearly closed," but he needed a room at a boarding house and food. Lansing was young but a quick study and absorbed many lessons from the more seasoned criminals he encountered in his travels. Noting that "I had recourse to some of the pedler's arts to obtain 'the needful,'"⁸⁵ he turned to pickpocketing and petty theft.

With sticky fingers, he soon "had considerable change in my pocket" and, with that, he "went to Natchez in a pole-boat."⁸⁶ Natchez, Mississippi, is 240 miles (386 km) upriver from New Orleans. Only four steamboats navigated the Mississippi River in the period from 1811 to 1814, so pole boats were the most prominent mode of upstream transportation. Lansing doesn't specify, but at ten miles per day of push-poling, it would have taken almost a month to ascend the river.

Natchez was also the capital of the Mississippi Territory, with a population that exceeded 1,500 people.⁸⁷ Cotton agriculture rooted the local economy⁸⁸ and, following New Orleans, it soon became the second largest slave-trading center in the South. Upon his arrival, Lansing "had good success in gambling, and obtained about three hundred dollars." He seemed content with the action in this budding metropolis, but "after being two months in this town, I got into a squabble one night, was robbed of every farthing, and pitchpoled neck and heels out of a window, which fall injured me considerably." Perhaps it was his young age,

his race, his intellect or arrogance, or his “pedler’s arts” and a history of scrapping that brought him to this unfortunate outcome. But, he recalled, “As I could get no assistance in Natchez, I resolved to return to New Orleans, and falling in with a boatmate, he took me with him to the city. I went into the hospital, where I soon recovered.”⁸⁹

After his recuperation, Lansing’s adventures brought him to more distant locations: time in Venezuela and involvement in the Spanish American wars for independence (1808–1833); service in the Mediterranean sea on privateers and on U.S. naval vessels during the Greek War for Independence (1821–1832; and two encounters with Lord Byron!); on a pirate ship in the Straits of Florida; to Burma [Myanmar] during the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826); to China on a hospital ship; to South Africa, witnessing an elephant hunt; and a mutiny on a whaleship and subsequent stranding in the Galapagos Islands.

All throughout his travels, he seems to reflect on a common thread: the meaning of sovereignty, of independence, and of freedom. For Lansing, it was a familiar, intensely personal, and occasionally unavoidable journey, beginning with the trauma in childhood that motivated him to leave home to the trauma he endured during his service on a slave ship.

Rio Pongo, Guinea. ca. 1827–1828.

Sometime in 1827 or 1828, according to Lansing’s narrative, thirty-eight enslaved Africans were chained in the cargo hold of the Brig *Saratoga*.⁹⁰ The *Saratoga*, anchored in the channel of Rio Pongo, was more than 60 miles (96 km) into the West African country of Guinea, awaiting an additional cargo of 140 enslaved people. After approximately six days in darkness, unnourished, laying in their own urine and feces, the enslaved people heard the shouts of an unfamiliar language and rushed movements above them. The captain and the mate finished their consultation and two orders

were given. First, bring the Africans on deck and pinion them together in pairs. As one of the crew members following these orders, Charles Lansing observed that “they came willingly on deck, seemed pleased with the change in their situation, caressed the crew, and very quietly submitted to be pinioned.”⁹¹ Then the second order came: “Sling a stand of grape to every couple, and throw them overboard.”⁹²

The void of humanity that followed left Lansing aghast. In his telling that describes the horror,

One couple was cast overboard, before the devoted wretches knew their fate. A panic seized the survivors. They fell on their knees, begged for mercy, kissed our hands and feet, and asked why we would kill them, for they were willing to go to America. They asked if they had committed any crime, or whether they had been remiss in the discharge of any duty. No answer was given them; but still the work of death went on. Couple after couple was plunged into the black waters, and the scream of agony rose above the fiery wave.⁹³

Indeed, as the British anti-slavery patrol clipper HMS *Black Joke* bore down on the *Saratoga*, “This was the last hope left us of saving our necks from the halter.”⁹⁴

Only months earlier, in 1826, while in Havana, Lansing joined the crew of “a large and rakish brig,” referring to the *Saratoga* which was anchored near Morro Castle on the northeastern side of the port’s entry.⁹⁵ With 14 guns, it presented as a ship of war and the crew was led to believe they were “setting out on an expedition,” the details of which were initially concealed.⁹⁶

By the time of Lansing’s account, the Atlantic slave trade was three centuries in the making and Havana, Cuba, was a key landing and distribution port of enslaved Africans. Over 1,100 slave ships had landed in Havana⁹⁷ with little done to

stem the demand for, or the supply of, free labor from Africa.

The captain, an American from Baltimore, harangued the eighty-five mostly American and English crew, offering that “we were engaged in a hazardous business, that our liberty and lives were at stake.”⁹⁸ He reminded the crew that “as we had good wages ... if successful [we] would receive an extra compensation.”⁹⁹ Success depended on preparation and training with the ship’s cannons, so the captain “wished to accustom us to the exercise of the guns, and fit us for action.”¹⁰⁰ He proclaimed that they must “unite in the prosecution of such measures as would most redound to the general good, the success of the voyage, and defence against the cruisers with which the African coast was lined.”¹⁰¹

In fact, Britain had deployed the West African Squadron as an anti-slavery patrol along the African coast. The frigate HMS *Sybil* and its tender, the clipper *Black Joke*, were feared and reviled by all engaged in the trade.¹⁰²

Following combat training, Lansing observed,

In good time we arrived on the coast of Africa, and made Cape Mount.¹⁰³ Here we traded with the natives, and got considerable gold dust. We then proceeded up the coast, passed [*sic*] Sierra Leone, and run in at Mount Serado, (now called Liberia).¹⁰⁴ There were some Americans here at this time, who suspected our intentions, and gave us to understand that we were not welcome; but, as the place was not fortified, we disregarded their grim countenances.¹⁰⁵

Awaiting a second group of enslaved Africans, the *Saratoga* lay anchored in the channel of Rio Pongo.

The captain said that as we should be obliged to wait for these slaves, and as there were many English and French cutters cruising up

and down the coast, it would be best to set a watch. Accordingly the long boat was victualled, armed, and manned, and sent to the mouth of the harbor to row guard, and keep a sharp look out for sails.

About four days after the departure of the boat, we heard the report of muskets at midnight, which the captain understood to be signals from the boat. “Something is in the wind!” cried he; “call all hands!” Just as the crew came on deck, the long boat was pulled alongside. The men were much exhausted; and the mate said that the English frigate *Cybele* [*sic*] lay at the mouth of the river, that her boats were in chase of him, and could not now be more than four or five miles distant.

Hereupon the captain and mate held a short consultation; for short it must be. They well knew that if we were caught with slaves on board, the rigor of the law would be exerted against us. Set them on shore we could not, for want of time, as the splash of the Englishmen’s [*sic*] oars was now heard.¹⁰⁶

Lansing’s life must have flashed before him. And then came the awful, unimaginable choice that he faced: their death or his? As described above, the most brutal crime against humanity ensued.

For a reader in the 1830s, this was another piece of literature that called attention to mounting evidence of the brutality and inhumanity of the slave trade. For Charles Lansing, at the moment he stepped off the *Saratoga* in Havana, he was resolved: “I would engage in any expedition excepting a voyage to Africa.”¹⁰⁷

USS *Guerriere*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 1829.

Following an accusation of mutiny aboard a Yankee whaleship and subsequent stranding in the Galapagos Islands, Lansing found his way to Brazil, which

was in turmoil under the reign of Emperor Pedro I. In the final paragraph of his autobiography, he expeditiously recorded, "As it would enlarge this narrative beyond all reasonable limits, were I to mention all our adventures in Rio Janeiro, I will only say, that I shipped on board the U. S. ship *Guerriere*, under Commodore Thompson, and went to the Pacific Ocean."¹⁰⁸

In fastidious pursuit of all available evidence to corroborate Lansing's claim, I (Mancini) located the logbook of the *Guerriere* in the archives of the New York Public Library. Indeed, it showed the vessel in "Rio Janeiro" from April 8 to 12, 1829. And, having previously located the crew list of the *Guerriere* in the National Archives (Figure 6), one can clearly see that Charles Lansing, "ordinary seaman," joined its crew on April 11, 1829.¹⁰⁹ Over the course of the next two months, the ship rounded Cape Horn and voyaged into the Pacific Ocean and up the coast of South America to Callao, Peru, where a contingent of United States naval vessels were stationed.¹¹⁰ On return, the *Guerriere* anchored in Norfolk, Virginia, before completing its journey to New York.

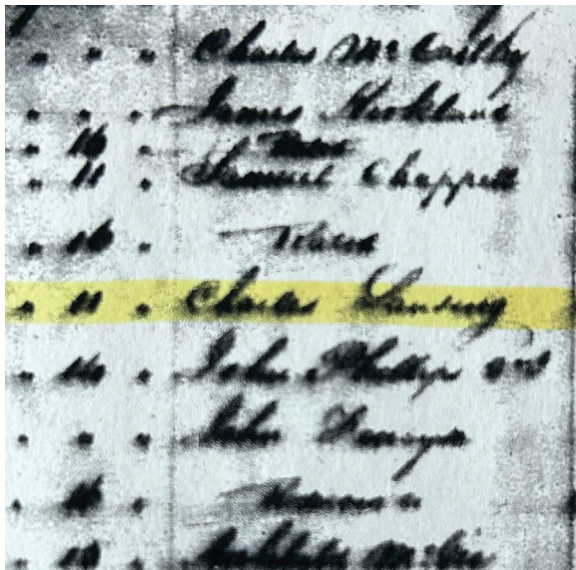


Figure 6. 1829 Crew List from the *Guerriere*, Commodore Thompson (U.S. Naval Records, National Archives)

U.S. Naval Hospital. Norfolk, Virginia. 1831.

The *Guerriere*, on its return voyage from the Pacific Ocean, anchored in the port of Norfolk, Virginia. A number of its crew were suffering from ailments such as rheumatism, smallpox, chronic diarrhea, and inflamed eyes. On December 10, 1831, Charles Lansing, "ordinary seaman," was admitted to the U.S. Naval Hospital suffering from scrofula, a form of tuberculosis affecting the lymph nodes. His condition, while uncomfortable and rendering him unfit for service, was not life threatening. Ultimately, it landed him in the hospital for 107 days.¹¹¹ It was almost certainly during these three and a half months that he penned the manuscript he would later hand to Isaac Peirce.

He was discharged from the naval hospital on March 26, 1832, and returned to the *Guerriere*, which was destined for New York. Only three months later, *The Narraganset Chief* was published.

Tomaquag Indian Museum. Exeter, Rhode Island. 2023.

As a citizen of the Narragansett Indian Tribe, I (Silvermoon Mars LaRose) am a descendant of the history Charles Lansing relates. My ancestor, James Niles, was the brother of Rev. Samuel Niles (noted above), the first minister of the Narragansett Indian Church and instrumental in opposing the sale of our tribal lands by "King Tom" Ninigret (Charles Lansing's father's first cousin).¹¹² As far as I know, prior to its recovery, my family and my tribal community were unaware of this book and its contents. What follows are my thoughts and reflections about *The Narraganset Chief*.

Charles Lansing's early experience of racial identity speaks to me. The realization that you're different from others based on your skin color is something most brown and Black children in America cannot escape. It is something of a rite of passage. I remember my own awakening in

kindergarten—the stares, the confusion, the comments, the embarrassment, singled out as the only brown face in a classroom of white students. At a very early age, children of color are introduced to the nuances of race and forced to navigate these complexities; enduring micro-aggressions before developing the language for defense; exposed to stereotypes and discrimination. It is a complete double standard when white children are shielded from these conversations and our children don't have a choice. Reading of Lansing's racial awakening makes me think little has changed in the nearly two hundred years between his childhood and mine.

When I read from this account, I hear the story of a man, “a wanderer,” disconnected from his tribal community and cultural heritage. This is a story known to many Indigenous people. Separated from his father, his direct connection to his tribal identity, he grew up a stranger to his culture. For many tribal communities, tribal affiliation follows the mother's line. I heard so often growing up, “You are what your mother is.” It would stand to reason that if the Narragansett chief, William Sachem, had a child (Charles Lansing's father) as we suspect by an Oneida, or more broadly, Haudenosaunee woman, his tribal affiliation would follow from his mother. And we know Lansing's mother was Circassian, a non-Native woman. So, while Lansing was “Indian” through his father, his birth affiliation would be neither Narragansett nor Oneida/Haudenosaunee. Lacking a direct maternal tie to any tribal community, however, it is most likely that his paternal grandmother would have adopted him into her clan family. These nuances, often overlooked by scholars and the public who don't know or understand our tribal kinship ties, provide us the means to interpret Lansing's identity in other ways.

Indigenous people of the Dawnland, the East Coast, were on the front lines of European colonization. The dispossession of our ancestral lands

led to a diaspora of our community members. The decrease in land base would have made it impossible to continue living in a traditional manner. There simply would not have been room or resources for all of our community members to continue their cultural practices undisturbed. Some traveled westward to seek refuge among other tribal communities less disturbed (at that point in time) where they could continue as a collective.¹¹³ Others, by force, choice, or necessity, assimilated into colonial society, to find employment and self-sufficiency. Despite the challenges, others remained within Narragansett enclaves in Shannock (Charlestown), Westerly, Providence, Quonset, or in the Peace Dale (Wakefield) area,¹¹⁴ trying to hold on to a communal way of life as their land base and sovereignty were increasingly challenged and snipped away. This disruption to community is directly responsible for the losses to our language, oral history, and spiritual and cultural practice. It's more difficult to pass on Indigenous knowledge when your community has dispersed. Nevertheless, we have survived (Figure 7).

Stories like *The Narragansett Chief* reveal the personal traumas experienced by our kinfolk during a time in our history when foreign people and systems were hell-bent on dismantling our identities, cultural practices, and socioeconomic connection to tribal community. For our tribe, the period covered in this narrative is remembered as a huge transition for our ancestors. Nearly a hundred years after King Philip's War (1675-1676), our community had suffered enslavement, displacement, dispossession of land, racism, and enforced caste (even by our own sachem!), resulting in trauma that would be passed on generationally.

Lansing's search for those like him, a tribe as it were, began before he stepped aboard any vessel. He noted that:

notwithstanding these kind assurances [of my mother], I now began to feel myself an insu-



Figure 7. *Moshup* © 2023 Silvermoon Mars LaRose

lated being. Circumstances, in which I had no agency, had severed me from the society of my equals. I wondered why nature had so unkindly dealt by me; and my spirit, naturally high, recoiled at the idea of yielding precedence to those who could boast no advantage over me, save that their skins were paler than mine. . . I at length. . . resolved to leave the partners of my childhood, and try if in the world's wide sphere there might not be found those who would look with complacency on a being formed like themselves, with all the distinguishing properties of humanity, though shaded by the hand of varying nature.¹¹⁵

The Narraganset Chief relates our history through the travels and experiences of men. But, in our Tribal nations, women are the gathering place, holding our families together. When I look historically at the governance of our people, there were many great Sauncksquûaog, female leaders, who guarded our

communities.¹¹⁶ These women were leaders who negotiated and fought for the protection and security of their people. They were the nurturers who sought to preserve our culture and communities, keeping us together, tied to our lands, as colonists threatened our existence. Women hold the community together, ensuring our survival, passing on tradition, teaching us who we are. It was this sense of belonging that Lansing was in search of.

Even to this day, there are many great matriarchs in the Narragansett tribe. These are the women we gather around for love and learning. So many in my own lifetime are directly responsible for the cultural educator I am today. This includes the late Dr. Ella Sekatau, a tribal historian and medicine woman, whose legacy preserved and passed on traditional arts, language, culture, and ceremony. There is also Alberta Wilcox, a beloved elder, who for years has passed on traditional knowledge and arts to the community. These two women are directly responsible for educating many of us who

took their cultural classes as children, including Tomaquag Museum's director Lorén Spears, my professional mentor. My paternal grandmother, the late Laura Fry Mars, a historian and genealogist, along with my grandfather and others, started the Charlestown Historical Society to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous history within the town. The late Grace Babcock Brown Spears, my maternal grandmother, was the most beautiful soul, known for her open door and open heart. A highly intelligent woman with a gift for gab and hospitality, everyone was welcomed at her door, fed magnificently, and sheltered gracefully. She passed her knowledge of edible and medicinal plants on to me through my mother, and her daughter, Starr Lee Spears Mars. These women taught me to be like our Nukhasahkee, our earth mother, to be a nurturer, to feed, heal, and care for others. These and so many others, are the Matriarchs who raised me, ensuring that I grew up within my community, and safeguarding the transfer of traditional knowledge for future generations.

The recovery of stories like *The Narraganset Chief* provides an opportunity to hear from and reconnect with our ancestors. These first-person accounts help us understand the personal impact of colonization on our tribe. Exploring these narratives with one another kickstarts the work of unpacking and dismantling the cycles of trauma still affecting our community today.

Conclusion

Charles Lansing is alone in the canon of American literature: his autobiography has been misattributed to the book's editor, Isaac Peirce, and subsequently defined for 190 years as a work of fiction. He is both a man without a country¹¹⁷ and, for more nuanced reasons, an Indian without a tribe. He has written a firsthand account, a first draft, of global history from below—one that documents the circuitry of empire as much as it details

the black markets functioning in borderlands and unregulated or contested seas.

The stories presented above are extracted from a larger book project that includes more rigorous inquiry and contextualization. Even beyond its classification as a picaresque novel, the recognition of the *Narraganset Chief* text as an autobiographical narrative presents interpretive challenges. The erasure of Native histories and the obscured significance of women, coupled with the global scope of Lansing's experience, makes the process of archival recovery and validation extremely difficult. While research is ongoing, archives associated with this story will be truly global in nature and rely on others to contribute their knowledge and expertise. So, we invite readers to identify and share with us any clues relating to "the adventures of a wanderer" and remain hopeful that the publication of this essay will lead to new information about Charles Lansing's life.¹¹⁸

Our collaboration wraps a community's arms around an obscure book. And the scattered archives naming Narragansett ancestors coupled with community memory/oral history reanimate the book and allow us to travel across time to compose our story. This embrace allows us to navigate an inherent juxtaposition we encounter in Lansing's narrative. It is access to the sea that provides freedom for men but that brings to bear a broad disconnection from community, from place, land, and identity, and from femininity and female power, as well as a sense of belonging, connection, and community—EVERYTHING that Lansing is seeking in his wanderings.

As a Native American autobiography, *The Narraganset Chief* emerged along with the works of the Pequot minister and activist William Apes, who published his own autobiography in *A Son of the Forest* (1829, 1831) and later experiences concerning civil rights violations while living among the Mashpee Wampanoag in *Indian Nullification of*

the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe, or, The Pretended Riot Explained (1835). Similarly, as previously referenced, the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Paul Cuffe: A Pequot Indian: During Thirty Years Spent at Sea, and in Travelling in Foreign Lands* (1839) offers a companion for understanding the maritime careers of Indian men. Lansing's account bears witness to this displacement of Indians from the land and their shift towards the sea. *The Narraganset Chief* text is, chronologically, the first autobiography to expand the scope of maritime literature to American Indian maritime experience and literary tradition.

The Narraganset Chief should also be considered along with the American abolitionist literary genre, at the very beginning of the "golden age" of the slave narrative (1830-1860). Registered as a publication on June 15, 1832, *The Narraganset Chief* emerged—seemingly without much fanfare—between the establishment of the New England Anti-Slavery Society (January 1, 1832) and the New York Anti-Slavery Society (January 1, 1833). While it chronicles the "wandering" life of the author, the book relates his earliest experience of racism and discrimination, and later, his participation on a slave ship in which living enslaved people were thrown overboard to avoid capture by an anti-slaving patrol.

When contextualized and understood as an autobiography, *The Narraganset Chief* reveals a much more complicated and nuanced picture of lives and experiences of Native people who existed at the intersection of empire. The stories related in this narrative are not generic events, but an accumulation of specific moments, each of which compromises the identity, sovereignty, and freedom of people. Throughout are the behaviors and voices of Native peoples, African peoples, South Asian peoples, etc. that illuminate persistence, resistance, and agency. The settler-colonial enterprise seeks to divide and disperse, separating Native people

from documentation about Native people. The recovery of texts like this begins to repair the archival harm done over centuries and reconnects past voices with tribes today, helping to plant seeds of self-determination for tomorrow. The recovery of, and research into, this book releases silenced voices and returns them to their people across the globe. The ancestors are indeed still speaking.

Acknowledgments: This work is dedicated to Narragansett ancestors and gifted to Narragansett grandchildren. Taûbotneanawáyeay (thank you) to all who have contributed to this work over the years, including Katie Raia, Deb Jones, Bill Starna, Kevin McBride, Elysa Engelman, Akeia de Barros Gomes, Michelle Turner, Everett "Tall Oak" Weeden, Faith Davison, Chrystal Mars Baker, Lorén Spears, Cassius Spears, Jr., Ramin Ganeshram, Gregg Mangan, Kathy Foulke, Jaqueline Veninger-Robert, Rich King, Linford Fisher, Chris Newell, endawnis Spears, Tony Bogues, and to the many members of the Narragansett Tribal Community who have generously shared their insights and supported this project. We are also grateful to the Tomaquag Museum, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mystic Seaport Museum, and Brown University Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice—all have been key partners and supporters of this project.

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Endnotes

1 About 0.3% of the total land mass.

2 The use of the term "Indian" is deliberate but problematic and must be contextualized. Tribal specific labels are preferred, though often "Native" and "Indigenous" are used now in place of "Indian" as generalized descriptors. In the United States, the term "Indian" has legal and political significance to tribes and how they manage their relationship with state and federal governments. "Indian" is codified in the U.S. Constitution and in subsequent "Federal Indian Law" and the "Bureau of Indian Affairs." Historically, "Indian" people were legally excluded from the federal census (1790-1860) or relabeled using other race categories like "mulatto" or "colored" that resulted in their erasure from colonial, state, and federal records, a process that Native people describe as "documentary genocide." Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau, "The Right to a Name: The Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era," *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 3 (1997): 433-62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/483031>. Some tribal individuals today self-identify using the term "Indian," including some members of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. Keeping this in mind, to better connect readers to the historical documents that serve as the foundation of this article, the term "Indian" is used to describe the Indigenous peoples of New England (and their descendants) when specific tribal labels are not applicable.

3 There is a growing body of scholarship that has begun to reveal the presence and experiences of Indians at sea including: Daniel Vickers, "The First Whalemens of Nantucket," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (October 1983): 560-583; Russel L. Barsh, "'Colored' Seamen in the New England Whaling Industry: An Afro-Indian Consortium," in *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America*, ed. James F. Brooks (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 76-107; Jason R. Mancini, "Beyond Reservation: Indians, Maritime Labor, and Communities of Color from Eastern Long Island Sound, 1713-1861," in *Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Power in Maritime America: Papers from the Conference Held at Mystic Seaport, September 2006*, ed. Glenn S. Gordinier (Mystic: Mystic Seaport Museum, 2008), 23-46; Jace Weaver, *The Red Atlantic: American Indigenes and the Making of the Modern World, 1000-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalemens and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

4 Paul Cuffe, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Paul Cuffe, a Pequot Indian: During Thirty Years Spent at Sea, and in Travelling in Foreign Lands* (Vernon, NY: Horace N. Bill, 1839).

5 The official and recognized spelling of Narragansett is with two 't's at the end. With one exception, the name throughout the book is spelled with one 't'. The spelling in the book will be maintained in italics; elsewhere, the official name will be used.

6 *The Narragansett Chief; or, The Adventures of a Wanderer* (New York: J.K. Porter, 1832), accessed November 20, 2023, <https://books.google.com/books?id=ByAeAAAAAAJ&pg=PA3#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

7 *The Friend; or, Advocate of Truth* [New Series] 1, no. 7 (1832): 111.

8 Britannica, "picaresque novel," accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/art/picaresque-novel>.

9 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838).

10 Criminal activities described in the book include counterfeiting, theft, smuggling, piracy, murder, mutiny, desertion, and slave trading.

11 The author is apparently unaware that the Pequot minister, Rev. William Apes published his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apes, a Native of the Forest, Comprising a Notice of the Pequod Tribe of Indians*, three years earlier.

12 *Narragansett Chief*, vi. Interestingly, and reminiscent of Peirce's "advertisement," the preface of Poe's *Pym* references a "half-breed Indian" as a sole source of evidence to validate his account, stating:

One consideration which deterred me [from writing my account] was, that, having kept no journal during a greater portion of the time in which I was absent, I feared I should not be able to write, from mere memory, a statement so minute and connected as to have the *appearance* of that truth it would really possess, barring only the natural and unavoidable exaggeration to which all of us are prone when detailing events which have had powerful influence in exciting the imaginative faculties. *Another reason was, that the incidents to be narrated were of a nature so positively marvellous, that, unsupported as my assertions must necessarily be (except by the evidence of a single individual, and he a half-breed Indian), I could only hope for belief among my family, and those of my friends who have had reason, through life, to put faith in my veracity—the probability being that the public at large would regard what I should put forth as merely an impudent and ingenious fiction.*

Poe, *Pym of Nantucket*, i-ii, (emphasis added).

13 Described as member of Delaware Free Labor Society of Wilmington, *Freedom's Journal* (New York, NY), February 1, 1828; mentioned as attending American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, February 22, 1828; *The Liberator* (Boston, MA), May 17, 1839; May 24, 1839; Obituary, April 2, 1858; *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York, NY), September 22, 1842; Obituary, April 3, 1858; mentioned as delegate of the National Anti-Slavery Convention meeting in Albany, *The Emancipator* (New York, NY), August 8, 1839.

14 Ruth Ketring Nuernberger, *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery* (Durham, NC: 1942), 13; <https://archive.org/details/NuernbergerTheFreeProduceMovementAQuakerProtestAgainstSlavery/page/n10/mode/1up>; American Anti-Slavery Society, Executive Committee, *Annual Report* (New York: William S. Dorr, 1838), 4.

15 "Old Manuscript Tells of Lansing the Pirate," *New York Times*, March 8, 1931, <https://nyti.ms/4605iAw>.

16 Cuffe's pithy 21-page account of his experiences at sea covers 40 voyages in approximately 15 countries.

17 The same can be said for Paul Cuffe, Jr. (Pequot/Wampanoag/African), a contemporary of Lansing, whose 1839 autobiographical account is widely accepted despite some anachronisms. Cuffe, *Narrative*.

18 He does not name any of his associates from a counterfeiting and horse stealing gang; he does not reveal the name of the U.S. naval vessel that he deserts from; and, similarly, he does not name the pirate vessel on which he served.

19 For example, on page 143 of the book, Lansing states, "At Plymouth [England], 'the [HMS] Boadicea got under way with a convoy of East Indiamen, bound to Madras, Bombay, &c. On the third day after our departure, we sprung a leak. We made water so fast that all three pumps could scarcely keep her free. We put about and ran into Spithead; hoisted signals of distress, and two steamboats were immediately sent out to us, and by them we were towed into dock. We were overhauled and repaired, and in two weeks ready for sea. Nothing remarkable occurred during the

passage to Madras, except that we touched at Rio Janeiro." Validation of this account comes from the logbook of the HMS *Boadicea* itself which states, "Remarks &c. H.M. Ship Boadicea Monday [February] 14th [1825]...A.M Light airs and hazy weather 7.15 [warning] from the hulk and towed to Spithead by the Lighting Steam Boat 8.50 moored at Spithead"; "Remarks &c Friday April 8th 1825...bore up and made sail for Rio Janiero..."; "Remarks Thursday June 16th...At Single Anchor at Madras Roads." The National Archives of the UK (TNA), ADM 52-4055.

20 Crew lists for two voyages that Lansing describes contain the name John Warner or Wardner, which could be an alias he used (HMS *Boadicea* and USS *Ontario*).

21 Roy Buckingham, "When Pirates Roved the Yankee Main," *Youngstown Vindicator* (Youngstown, OH), May 10, 1931, <https://books.google.com/books?id=5I9cAAAAIAJ&pg=PA45&dq=charles%20lansing%20the%20Narraganset%20Chief&pg=PA45#v=onepage&q=charles%20lansing%20the%20Narraganset%20Chief&f=true>.

22 "Old Manuscript," <https://nyti.ms/4605iAw>.

23 U.S. Census Bureau, 1930, Lincoln Township, Reno, Kansas.

24 Buckingham, "When Pirates."

25 "A Pirate of Our Own," *Providence Journal* (Providence, RI), March 20, 1931, Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

26 Buckingham, "When Pirates."

27 Jason R. Mancini, "Beyond Reservation: Indian Survivance in Southern New England, 1713-1861" (Ph.D. Diss, University of Connecticut, 2009); Mancini, *Gender*, 23-46; Jason R. Mancini, The Indian Mariners Project, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://indianmarinersproject.com/>; Jason R. Mancini, *Connecticut Indian Mariners*, Mystic Seaport Museum, accessed December 4, 2023, https://educators.mysticseaport.org/sets/ct_indian_mariners/.

28 The Decolonial Dictionary, s.v. "survivance (n.)." <https://decolonialdictionary.wordpress.com/2021/04/15/survivance/>

29 Herndon and Sekatau, "The Right to a Name," 433-462; Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

30 One exception, of course, is Paul Cuffe, Jr.'s *Narrative*.

31 Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 38-59.

32 *Narraganset Chief*, 163-164.

33 The reference to Mina appears in Charles Lansing's account, *Narraganset Chief*, 186.

34 *Narraganset Chief*, 169.

35 *Narraganset Chief*, 182. "White speculators" appears to be a reference to the land companies in New York that rapidly accumulated Haudenosaunee lands across the new state in the aftermath of the American Revolution. Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 142-202.

36 Perhaps difficult to comprehend, chance meetings are not unknown. For example, Paul Cuffe Jr. was living on Raiatea (Society Islands) in a remote area of the Pacific Ocean for five months when, as he noted, "I accidentally found a ship at the harbor which belonged to Martha's Vineyard, in the United States. This was the first vessel which I had seen since I had been here. The Captain's name was Toby. After getting acquainted with this man, he proposed my going home with him. He said I had not better stay among the natives any longer—that my folks at home would be glad to see me, I finally concluded to go with him." Cuffe, *Narrative*, 20; Olaudah Equiano's account of being enslaved and separated from his sister only to encounter her again: "...while I was journeying thus through

Africa, I acquired two or three different tongues. In this manner I had been traveling for a considerable time, when, one evening, to my great surprise, whom should I see brought to the house where I was but my dear sister!" Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (London: T. Wilkins, 1789), 59.

37 John R. Bartlett, *Census of the Inhabitants of the Colony of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations 1774* (Lambertville, NJ: Hunterdon, 1984); *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*. Vol. 6, 1757-1769, ed. John R. Bartlett (Providence, RI: Knowles, Anthony, & Co., 1861); *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*. Vol. 7, 1770-1776, ed. John R. Bartlett (Providence, RI: A. Crawford Greene, 1862); *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*. Vol. 8, 1776-1779, ed. John R. Bartlett (Providence, RI: Cooke, Jackson, & Co., 1863); Itineraries, 1760-1794, Ezra Stiles Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven; William Johnson, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1921-1965): Vol. 4: 152-164, 588-595, 659-663, 690-693; Vol. 5: 490-492; Vol. 11: 412-414, 431-435; William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1899); James D. McCallum, *The Letters Of Eleazar Wheelock's Indians* (Hanover: Dartmouth College, 1932); Town of Charlestown, Rhode Island, Land Records, <https://i2l.uslandrecords.com/RI/Charlestown/D/Default.aspx>; Narragansett Indian collection, c. 1735-1970's, Rhode Island State Archives, https://catalog.sos.ri.gov/repositories/2/digital_objects/924/; Mildred M. Chamberlain, *The Rhode Island 1777 Military Census* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1985); William F. Tucker, *Historical sketch of the town of Charlestown in Rhode Island: from 1636 to 1876* (Westerly, R.I.: G.B. & J.H. Utter, 1877).

38 John W. Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 20, 44-49; Linford Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 153-154.

39 "Whereas, two of the council of the Narragansett tribe of Indians, in this colony, are dead, and William Sachem (one of the said council), refuseth to sign the deeds, for the sale of the lands of Thomas Ninegret, deceased, late sachem of the said tribe." *Records of the Colony*, Vol 7, 202.

40 Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening*, 144; William S. Simmons, "Red Yankees: Narragansett Conversion in the Great Awakening," *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 2 (1983), 253-71; Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. 1981. Historic and Architectural Resources of Charlestown, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report, 10, 45-46.

41 Town of Charlestown, Land Records, <https://i2l.uslandrecords.com/RI/Charlestown/D/Default.aspx>. Based on a search of various spellings of Ninigret (including Ninigrett, Ninegret, Ninigrett, Ninigreat), 59 land transactions between 1758 and 1773 were part of satisfying King Tom's creditors.

42 Fisher, *Indian Great Awakening*, 113-117.

43 See Johnson, *Papers*, Vol. 4: 152-164, 588-595, 659-663, 690-693; Vol. 5: 490-492; Vol. 11: 412-414, 431-435.

44 Tucker, *Historical Sketch*, 51; see also Letter from Eleazar Wheelock to Sir William Johnson, Oct. 21, 1765, noting Narragansett complaints of "drunken Sachem who has got in debt and is selling their lands fast to the English," in James N. Arnold, comp., *A Statement of the Case of the Narragansett Tribe of Indians, as Shown in the Manuscript Collection of Sir William Johnson* (Newport, R. I., 1896), 43.

45 Tucker, *Historical Sketch*, 51.

46 Narragansett tribal members also use the term subchiefs to describe these other leaders.

47 Note the earliest accounts of Narragansett leadership during the era of the Pequot War describe an avuncular relationship between the chief sachem Canonicus and his nephew Miantonomi. See Anne Marie Plane, *Colonial Intimacies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 164; Kathleen Joan Bragdon, *Native People of Southern New England, 1650-1775* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 60; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 28. 48 Town of Charlestown, Land Records (July 20, 1767), 2:341. This included William's son Thomas Sachem and his wife, Esther Ninigret (King Tom's sister), William Sachem Jr., William's daughters, Sarah and Damaras, and William's grandchildren.

49 Town of Charlestown, Land Records, 3:151-152.

50 William Sachem does not appear in the 1774 Rhode Island Census, though there are some Narragansetts noted and not others. In July 1776, William Sachem sold the land Tom Ninigret gave him to a neighboring English "yeoman." He repurchased the same parcel in October 1776 and was noted as a "laborer." The following year, whether present or not, William Sachem was listed in the 1777 Rhode Island military census (age 60+). William Sachem does not appear in military enlistments for service during the American Revolution (he was now over 60 years old and not eligible for combat). He is not listed in the 1782 Rhode Island Census, and no death record or probate record for him has been located in Rhode Island.

51 *Narragansett Chief*, 184. The reference to the setting sun may reflect the Narragansett belief that upon death, one returns to "Kautantowwit the great South-West God, to whose House all soules goe." See Roger Williams, *A Key into the Language of America* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, [1997], 1936), 124.

52 *Narragansett Chief*, 182.

53 Taylor, *Divided Ground*, 166-168, 171. For reference, the entire state of New York today includes 34.9 million acres.

54 Brothertown was a Christian Indian community formed by Mohegan minister Samson Occom just before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. The new tribe migrated to Oneida homelands beginning in 1785 and consisted of Pequots, Narragansetts, Niantics, Mohegans, Montauks, Tuxis, and other Indian peoples. See Love, *Samson Occom*; Craig Cippola, *Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013); David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

55 Meaning prior to this that the "Narragansett Chief" did not farm the land (thus not a yeoman).

56 *Narragansett Chief*, 182-183. Currently, his education, referred to as at a "seminary," remains unknown. This school would postdate the Wheelock School (1754-1769) in Lebanon (now Columbia), Connecticut and predate the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut (1816); distance from the "seaboard" would preclude Dartmouth College and Hamilton-Oneida Academy.

57 R.H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," in *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections at the Nineteenth Annual Session Held in Denver, Col. June 23-29, 1892*, ed. Isabel C. Barrows (Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis, 1892), 46, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-resources/CIS-Resources_1892-PrattSpeech.pdf.

58 *Narragansett Chief*, 186.

59 The latter two tribes, living in Oneida homelands. See treaty provisions, accessed December 5, 2023, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/one1794.asp.

60 *Narragansett Chief*, 183-184.

61 *Narragansett Chief*, 183-184. This is likely in the Northwest Territory (Ohio and areas north and west to the Mississippi River) the United States Congress of the Confederation created in 1787. The territory was governed by Major General Arthur St. Claire in anticipation of white settlement of the region. After St. Claire's defeat in the Northwest Indian War (near Fort Recovery, OH) in 1791, President George Washington recruited General "Mad Anthony" Wayne to command the newly formed Legion of the United States in 1792, a precursor of the U.S. Army. Various military campaigns against a confederation of tribes resulted in the destruction of a number of Indian towns or villages.

62 "The Trail of Broken Treaties," National Park Service, accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/trail-of-broken-treaties.htm>.

63 March - May 1799.

64 *Narragansett Chief*, 184.

65 Now Istanbul, Turkey.

66 *Narragansett Chief*, 184-185.

67 *Narragansett Chief*, 10.

68 *Narragansett Chief*, 10.

69 *Narragansett Chief*, 13.

70 *Narragansett Chief*, 13.

71 *Narragansett Chief*, 19. Lansing's text is redacted with an asterisk and an editor's note below that states: "(*)Vulgar and offensive expletives, however characteristic of those who use them, it is deemed best, for the sake of juvenile readers, to omit.-ED.)" "Goddamn" is another possibility.

72 Mancini, *Beyond Reservation*, 149-151; see also William Apess, *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot*, ed. Barry O'Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Drew Lopenzina, *Through an Indian's Looking-glass: A Cultural Biography of William Apess, Pequot* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017).

73 *Narragansett Chief*, 19.

74 The series of news articles in 1931 (*New York Times*, *Providence Journal*, *Youngstown Vindicator*) referenced earlier infer incorrectly that Charles' enslaved mother was "a Negro slave." In fact, his account describes her as "the daughter of 'a Circassian lady'" (*Narragansett Chief*, 184), a Caucasian ethnic group from the eastern Black Sea region.

75 *Narragansett Chief*, 13-14.

76 *Narragansett Chief*, 15.

77 *Narragansett Chief*, 41-42.

78 Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

79 *Narragansett Chief*, 42.

80 Transmitted by mosquitos, symptoms of the virus include "fever, chills, headache, backache, and muscle aches; Three to six days after they are infected. About 12% of people who have symptoms go on to develop serious illnesses: jaundice, bleeding, shock, organ failure, and sometimes death. "Yellow Fever," Travelers' Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/yellow-fever>.

81 Jo Ann Carrigan, "The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905," Ph.D. Diss., Louisiana State University, 1961, 31, 40, https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1665&context=gradschool_disstheses.

82 Leah Donella, "How Yellow Fever Turned New Orleans into the 'City of the Dead,'" *NPR Code Switch*, October 31, 2018, accessed November 28, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2018/10/31/415535913/>

how-yellow-fever-turned-new-orleans-into-the-city-of-the-dead.

83 *Narraganset Chief*, 99.

84 *Narraganset Chief*, 99.

85 *Narraganset Chief*, 99.

86 *Narraganset Chief*, 99.

87 The population of Natchez reported in the 1810 Census was 1511.

U.S. Census Bureau, 1810, Natchez, Mississippi.

88 "History of Agriculture in Mississippi," Mississippi Genealogy, https://mississippigenealogy.com/uncategorized/history_of_agriculture.htm.

89 *Narraganset Chief*, 99.

90 No vessel with the name *Saratoga* exists in the Slave Voyages database: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>; similar names such as *Zaragoza* do not align with the timeline of events described by Lansing.

91 *Narraganset Chief*, 112.

92 *Narraganset Chief*, 112.

93 *Narraganset Chief*, 112–113.

94 *Narraganset Chief*, 112.

95 *Narraganset Chief*, 107.

96 *Narraganset Chief*, 107.

97 See the Slave Voyages database.

98 *Narraganset Chief*, 108.

99 *Narraganset Chief*, 108.

100 *Narraganset Chief*, 108.

101 *Narraganset Chief*, 108.

102 The instigation of the anti-slavery patrols was rooted in British public sentiment which had turned against the "peculiar institution" in the wake of the Zong Massacre that occurred some 45 years earlier. The incident that occurred in late November 1781 involved the crew of the slave ship *Zong*. Hundreds of miles west of Jamaica, having miscalculated both location and water supply, they threw overboard 132 living stolen Africans. Faced with this, others committed suicide. Rather than suffer financial loss, the ship's owners made an insurance claim that was refused and taken to court. Though insurance claims often involved injured or sick Africans who were thrown overboard, it appears that no incident like this had been recorded until Charles Lansing published his account in 1832. James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

103 County in northwestern Liberia bordering Sierra Leone.

104 Cape Mesurado, also called Cape Montserrado (now Monrovia), Liberia.

105 *Narraganset Chief*, 108–109. This is a reference to the nascent colony of Liberia established by the American Colonization Society in 1822. See "Colonization," The African-American Mosaic, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html>.

106 *Narraganset Chief*, 110.

107 *Narraganset Chief*, 118.

108 *Narraganset Chief*, 193.

109 USS *Guerriere*, Commodore Thompson - 1829 crew list; No. 519 | Date of Entry - April 11, 1829 | Name - Charles Lansing | Station - ord. seaman (U.S. Naval Records, National Archives Miscellaneous Records of the Office of Naval Records and Library), Publication Number: T829, Roll 53 - Muster Roll, 1813–1831, *Guerriere*.

110 Including the USS *Brandywine*, USS *Vincennes*, and USS *Dolphin*. John M. Berrien, 1829. U.S. Navy Logbooks *Guerriere* and *Brandywine*, New York Public Library Special Collections.

111 Department of the Navy, Record Group 52. Records of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery. Case, Files for Patients at Naval Hospitals and

Registers Thereto: Registers of Patients 1812–1929 (1831 Entry for Charles Lansing), Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/98318:9268?tid=&pid=&queryId=e7362d20-2b27-485d-bcc0-6c632817e472&_phsrc=Nma235&_phstart=succesSource.

112 The community appointed Samuel Niles to be their leader, a minister who could neither read nor write but who committed the word of God to memory, interpreting meaning through vision and dreams as traditional medicine keepers had always done. The influence of Baptist Church leadership sought to dispose of him and install another minister of their choosing, Simon James aka James Simon (records unclear), a Pequot minister steeped in Baptist doctrine. The Narragansett community rejected this usurpation of the pulpit and left the church they had built in protest until they were successful at removing Simon from the post and reinstalling Samuel Niles, who would forever after be remembered as the first minister of the Narragansett Indian Church; see also Fisher, *Indian Great Awakening*, 115.

113 See also the story of James Chaugham in Kenneth Feder, *A Village of Outcasts: Historical Archaeology and Documentary Research at the Lighthouse Site* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994). The Narragansett migration to Brothertown is discussed in Love, *Samson Occom*; Silverman, *Red Brethren*; Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown*. See also a footnote in Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington City: The Smithsonian Institution, 1871), 219n: "In the year 1862 I met on the Mississippi River a half-blood Narragansett woman, with two Pequots, her grandchildren, then on their way to Kansas, where they resided. She was descended, on the mother's side, from the Narragansetts, amongst whom descent as well as nationality follows the female line. This made her a Narragansett. She further informed me that both the Pequot and Narragansett dialects were now extinct."

114 Gladys Tantaquidgeon, Bureau of Indian Affairs Report (678-1935), 1935. Re Location, History, Government, Language, etc. of the Narragansett Indians. Indian Office File No. 150, National Archives.

115 *Narraganset Chief*, 14.

116 Awashonks of the Sakonnet was placed in a leadership position by her community as a result of her excellent skills in diplomacy and negotiation. Weetamoo of the Pocasset commanded an army of warriors, fighting alongside them. Quaiapen of the Niantic led warriors against the colonists and was killed protecting her people. Weunquesh of the Niantic drew the Narragansetts and Niantics together and petitioned to stop territorial encroachments. Ester of the Niantic petitioned for the building of a school to educate her people and ensure their future.

117 According to his father, Lansing was born in Tangiers, Morocco. *Narraganset Chief*, 185.

118 For example, prison records for San Sebastian prison in Cadiz, Spain; crew lists for H.B.M. Don Pedro (flagship of the Brazilian Navy); Indian student enrollments at a seminary at "the seaboard" ca. early 1790s.