

## Hidden Treasure-Historical Truth Squanto

By Katherine Bone

One hundred and two English colonists first landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. Newly separated from the Church of England, these brave men and women, known today as 'puritans', had previously fled to Holland where they lived in the Dutch settlement of Leiden before sailing to the new world. Financed independently of the Plymouth Company, they could not know their lives would drastically change when they reached what is now Providence Harbor and formed an acquaintance with an Indian who surprisingly spoke English. Through the Plymouth Company, which dispatched Captains George Weymouth, Sir Ferdinando Gorges and John Smith on explorations off the coasts of Penobscot, Maine and Massachusetts, a man named Tisquantum, also known as Squanto, had been groomed for such a feat. His fascinating life journey had placed him in the Pilgrim's path precisely when they needed him most.

Known as Tisquantum, Squantum, and Squanto, Squanto hailed from the Wampanoag community of Patuxet, a village which held two thousand tribal members and stood exactly where the pilgrims would later erect their homes. During his adolescence, explorers began to make contact with his tribe and being considered a sachem or potential sachem, spiritual leader, he was probably one of the first to meet them. French colonizer Samuel de Champlain was one of the first adventurers to trade with the Patuxet in 1605 and 1606. And in turn, the Patuxet were awestruck by European muskets, brass kettles, sharp knives and ax heads, piercing needles and fishhooks, and were encouraged to barter surpluses of maize and fur in exchange.

Not all early interactions with Europeans were peaceful however. Captain Weymouth was eager to prove his exploration prowess. He wanted to show his English backers the *new world* was ripe for the taking and, in order to do so, kidnapped five Indians, two brutally and three through bribery, before sailing back to England with them on board. The captured were Manida, Skidwarres/Skettawarros, Nahanada/Dehanada, Assacumet and Tisquantum. After visiting with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, two of the five were returned home, Nahanada by ship under Captain Thomas Hanham's command in 1606. Captains George Popham and Raleigh Gilbert returned Skidwarres in 1607.

While Gorges continued to outfit ships for trade and exploration, Squanto was taught English so Gorges could learn more about tribes, chiefs, harbors, fishing, animals for skins, foods Indian's grew and crops English settlers might grow once they arrived. Trained as a guide and interpreter, Squanto now played an important role for the English, most notably to Captain John Smith who promised to return him to his home when his work was done. When Smith eventually returned to England, leaving Captain Thomas Hunt in charge, Squanto and nineteen other Indians left behind were kidnapped by the malicious Hunt and taken from Cape Cod to Malaga, Spain, where Hunt planned to sell them into slavery for twenty pounds each. Saved by Christian monks, Squanto and the others were taken to a monastery and spared Hunt's intended plot.

It is unclear what Squanto did during this time, but about two years later he somehow found his way to London where he found lodgings with Sir John Slaney, the treasurer of the Newfoundland Company in Cornhill. There he immersed himself in English culture and language, and on an expedition to Newfoundland, became reacquainted with Thomas Dermer, one of John Smith's officers in 1614. Dermer took

Squanto back to England to meet with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, upon whom he made a good impression. Pleased with Squanto's ability to learn, his loyalty and tribal standing, Gorges agreed to let Dermer take Squanto back to his people.

In 1619, Squanto returned to his beloved New England coastline but fused with the scent of pine was an eerie quiet. No welcoming arms awaited the prodigal son's return. Instead, he found his village abandoned and his homeland haunted by the dead. Through the Wampanoag he learned that in 1617, his people had succumbed to a horrible plague, one which had annihilated nearly eighty percent of the Indian tribes in southern New England. Many told him his people 'died like rotten sheep and their bodies, before and after death, were exceedingly yellow'. Though survivors banded together to fight the healthy Narragansetts and Micmacs, he would soon learn the horrible truth. He was the only known Patuxet left alive.

Forced to accept this horrible revelation, Squanto sought to build bridges between Indians who blamed the English for their miseries and English who set their eyes upon land and trade. In the meantime, he continued to sail with Dermer, helping him map out resources off the New England coast. He also served as Dermer's interpreter while venturing into Pokanoket territory. There, he intervened on Dermer's behalf in a meeting with Massasoit, the Wampanoag's Pokanoket sachem, whose real name was *Wasamegin*, meaning Yellow Feather. Once assured that good relations with Massasoit would continue, he and Dermer began to explore the coast again but were attacked by the Nausets. This time, Dermer was taken hostage forcing Squanto to negotiate his release. Once reunited, the two men set out on an expedition to Martha's Vineyard but Squanto was captured there and returned to the Pokanokets. During the subsequent melee, Dermer was mortally wounded and died shortly after reaching Virginia.

In November of 1620, nearly a year later, the Pilgrims arrived. Pleased with the land, they decided to settle upon the haunted/cleared ground that once housed Squanto's Patuxet village; a village Captain John Smith had previously renamed Plymouth. Two months later, Samoset, a local sachem, walked right into the colony and began to speak to the wide-eyed English. After conversing with them day and night, and trading with the Pilgrims several times, Samoset returned to Massasoit and told him that the Pilgrims wanted to make peace. Massasoit, being a wise diplomat, sent Squanto, who spoke more fluently in English than Samoset, to the Pilgrims as his interpreter. Squanto met with the Pilgrims for the very first time on March 22, 1621, and was successful in negotiating a peace between Massasoit, the Wampanoag, John Carver and the Pilgrims.

What Squanto learned from the Pilgrims saddened him. Half had perished that first winter. In order to correct this, he began to teach the English how to use fish fertilizer, how to plant maize, beans and pumpkins, by mixing seeds in the same hills. He taught them to use cornstalks as supportive structures for their beans and showed them how legumes added nitrogen to the soil. He also showed them where to catch eels and fish, and acted as their interpreter and guide for many years, always with Samoset at his side.

Power makes men do strange things. After a time, Squanto began to show signs of superiority or perhaps became jealous of Hobbomok, a Panseis and Sagamore Indian who lived permanently with the English. In the end, he instigated a great fear within Indians for the English. He often told them the English kept barrels of plague buried underneath a storehouse and threatened to have the English unleash their toxic power

should the Indians not do as they were told. Indeed, these barrels did exist, but they were barrels of gunpowder not plague. Nevertheless, their existence gave credence to Squanto's story. Hobbomok, on the other hand, confided to some settlers that he had heard rumors about a plot against the English and that Squanto was at the heart of it. Governor Bradford investigated the complaint and Massasoit appeared in the settlement to clear his name of any wrong doing while accusing Squanto of assisting in spreading the rumor, a punishment befitting death by Indian law. As sachem, Massasoit demanded that Squanto be turned over to the Wampanoag. Governor Bradford, having depended upon Squanto for so long would not relinquish his friend even though Miles Standish trusted Hobbomok and believed his accusations.

With the disappointment of a second harvest and a long winter ahead, the Pilgrims set off in January, 1623, to search for corn taking Squanto with them as their guide and interpreter. Governor Bradford led the expedition around Cape Cod with every intention of meeting with the Nausets to trade for corn and beans, and did so, for a time, with great success. Tragedy struck amidst the peaceful negotiations however. Squanto, 'bleeding much through the nose', died of Indian fever. Before succumbing to death, he asked Governor Bradford 'to pray for him, that he might go to the Englishmen's God in heaven'. Squanto, according to Bradford, 'was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died'.

Like Homer's Odysseus, Squanto was restless, clever, even tricky, and possibly, if you believe Hobbomok, an inventor of lies. Like the Odyssey, his tale teaches us about the human journey, fate, assimilation, and crossing boundaries. More importantly, without him and his adventurous spirit, Thanksgiving might not be as we know it today.