

**“Hold Onto the Land”:
Maintaining the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation Through Identity, Culture, and
Autonomy**

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Preface

Writing from the position of a non-Pequot resident of Southeastern Connecticut, I am aware that all of my writing comes from the perspective of someone outside of the immediate community at Mashantucket. Any nuance in my perspective exists because members of the Pequot community were open to collaboration and community, even having experienced the misrepresentation of their oral histories and the failures of resulting scholarship from non-Pequot authors previously.

I cannot recall a time when I did not feel interested in the history of Mashantucket. Some of my earliest memories took place on the reservation, particularly at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, where I was a regular performer. Later, in high school, my interest in Mashantucket was furthered by my involvement as a member, then senior leader, in a club at my school titled More Than Words, which was founded to address unequal treatment of Pequot and other Native students in my school district.

Still, despite my awareness of the tribe throughout my childhood and despite growing up in the region, I was almost entirely unaware of the deeper history that surrounded the tribe. Unfortunately, it was not until I left the immediate area and came to Brown University to study history that I became aware that my town was the site of the Pequot War. I had been equally oblivious to the fact that a large proportion of the town names that I had spent twenty years saying were of Mohegan-Pequot origin. It had somehow slipped my notice entirely that there had to be a reason for the tribe's present state.

In working on the Stolen Relations project at Brown, first as an UTRA recipient, then as a research assistant, then finally as the research assistant coordinator, I was privileged to be a part of a project that deliberately and consciously prioritized relationships with present-day tribes

and nations across the Northeastern United States. Stolen Relations studies the institution of Indigenous unfreedom across the Americas between 1492 and 1900, and the individual experiences of the Indigenous people who were subjected to enslavement, servitude, and capture between these years. It also connects such institutions to the present day, as many tribes' present existences have been impacted by the dispersal of relations that is required by unfreedom. For this reason, the project is connected to twelve community partners representing tribes within the region. In maintaining relationships with these community partners, the Stolen Relations project is able to ensure that its work accurately represents the experiences that it studies and that all of the histories it uncovers are made accessible to communities of their possible descendents. I hope that I have also made this thesis as accurate as possible to the history I am considering and that through partnership with members at Mashantucket, my work is as connected to the relevant people and location as it could be.

Upon setting out to write a thesis, I knew that I wanted to center my study around the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, because having grown up around their community and on their historic land as a non-Pequot person, I feel that my understanding of their history is owed to them, as it is for anyone else living within the region. My interest was originally sparked by their language. Upon realizing that so many of the words gracing street signs and monuments in my town were derived from their language, I became interested in the changing Pequot interactions with their language over time. Knowing that a language revitalization process was ongoing based in my own county, I wondered how such a language reached its present state of both dormancy and perseverance as it had. Due to this curiosity, I decided that my thesis would center on development of Indigenous experiences in navigating language usage over time, as the Mohegan-Pequot language was pushed out of wide usage by evangelization and termination

policy, and as it was later reclaimed. However, as I set out to begin researching these experiences, it became clear to me that my own unfamiliarity with the Mohegan-Pequot language would relegate me to only considering English-language sources and the meager few non-English sources that had been translated. Though I believe that these could contribute to some understanding, I do not think they are capable of producing the most accurate or complete narrative of Pequot life through language. As a result, I decided to leave this study to a person better suited to consider the full range of Pequot experiences.

Instead, I turned my consideration to the period of cultural revitalization that created the environment allowing developments like the language revitalization process to take place and flourish. As I turned my gaze to this development, I became shocked by the existence of a period which all of my immediate sources told me had only one or two women holding down the land of the Mashantucket Pequot reservation, and following their deaths, a wave of other Pequots returning and undergoing a full cultural revitalization. This transition between eras of bare survival and success were never explained outside of a few short sentences in the vast majority of traditionally published articles that I read to try to solve this curiosity. I learned from this type of summary that finding a deeper motivation was essential to explaining the actual movement of people during this period and as a result, I needed to understand why a person would choose to return to the reservation, what exactly they would be gaining and losing in making such a choice, and how the two eras could possibly be connected.

Introduction

Today, the sovereign Mashantucket Pequot in Southeastern Connecticut nation boasts over a thousand members and an active and vital cultural practice that is celebrated in all parts of the lives of its members. Many of its members live on a beautiful and prosperous reservation, in community with the family that surrounds them. The history and culture of the tribe are permanently preserved in a 308,000 square foot museum constructed in 1998. Members are able to choose the life that they desire to live, whether that is on the reservation or away from it, as the nation is entirely economically self-sufficient and it provides for each of its enrolled members through the proceeds of a number of businesses that it has pioneered. However, for individuals involved in the reservation fifty years ago, its present state would have been an unfathomable dream for all except a few select members, and for those involved a full century before today, members would have been glad to see the reservation still existing at all. This presence was not always guaranteed as it is today, and the origins of this transformation are contested even today.

For too long, scholars have either ignored or misconstrued the revitalization of the modern Mashantucket Pequot nation. An example of this flaw in scholarship can be seen in “Learning from Foxwoods: Visualizing the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation,” by Bill Anthes, a piece attempting to analyze the development of the casino and museum associated with the tribe. The entire period between 1974 and 1992 is described in a two sentences and a paragraph, presented as two distinct eras for the Pequot people with no individuals able to cross the boundary line of 1974 on the reservation and with no established common identity across the two periods whatsoever:

By 1935 only forty-two Pequots remained on the reservation, and in 1974 the two remaining Pequot tribal members living on the reservation—two half-sisters, Martha

Ellal and Elizabeth George Plouffe—died. The state of Connecticut planned to turn the reservation into a park.

Plouffe's descendants, led by her grandson Richard "Skip" Hayward, quickly mounted an effort to save the reservation. With the assistance of the Native American Rights Fund and following recent precedents established by the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians of Maine, the Pequots successfully petitioned for remuneration for lands lost due to bad-faith actions by the state of Connecticut. Under the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Land Claims Settlement Act, signed by President Reagan in 1983, the tribe recovered lands that had been illegally sold in 1856 and was formally granted federal recognition. The swampy reservation as yet had no roads or permanent housing to speak of, and the few development schemes launched by Hayward, now tribal chairman (the harvesting of firewood, maple syrup production, a hydroponic greenhouse, a hog farm, and a pizza restaurant), had barely moved the tribe beyond a subsistence level. However, the tribe's new status as a federally recognized Indian nation made it possible for the Pequots to open a highstakes bingo hall in 1986, and in 1992, the quincentennial of Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, Foxwoods Casino opened its doors to capacity crowds. It has not closed since.¹

The issue with this telling of the history of the Pequots is that it is entirely incomplete. It describes several preliminary economic attempts by the nation and it integrates some consideration of legal status into this, but it neglects to consider a prerequisite question for moving between the first and second sentence of the second paragraph. What Pequots were present on the reservation to be able to drive this change? The original push was certainly led by Hayward and his immediate family, but this is not a large enough force to drive change at the rate that it occurred at. Who worked on the petitions and land claims efforts? Who harvested firewood or produced maple syrup? The story told above includes no effort to convince members of the Pequot diaspora to return to the reservation and thus, includes no migration of people back to the land and culture. In neglecting the people, it also neglects the maintenance of the Pequot culture. The success of the movement to return to the reservation could not have occurred without motivation, specifically, a continued connection to the Pequot culture and a desire to participate directly in it.

¹ Bill Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods: Visualizing the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation," *The American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2008): 209–10, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2008.0011>.

Overview

The revitalization of Mashantucket can only be understood through a throughline of continued identification with the label of Pequot and connection to the land of Mashantucket. At every stage, returns to Mashantucket came at a cost of the lives that were being lived off the reservation, yet in three separate eras, Alice Brend, Skip Hayward and his immediate family, and a large group of more distantly related Pequots all chose to move to the reservation because the benefit of community and connection to land was worth it for them. Every development at the reservation over the course of the century was done in the interest of making life livable at Mashantucket for those already there and those to come; the building of infrastructure, the establishment of an economy independent from the state and federal governments, and the obtainment of rights through political means were each pursued in order to ensure that a community that had previously been repeatedly and continuously separated by a low quality of life, lack of economic opportunity on the reservation, and persecution by the state was not unnecessarily fractured again. In each stage of development, individuals deliberately chose to return to Mashantucket and work to enhance what it could offer to others through whatever they themselves had to give to the community.

The Pequot people had already existed for thousands of years on Turtle Island, the land mass now known as North America, by the time they first came in contact with an arriving European colonizing power. Over the course of the start of the seventeenth century, disease diminished the numbers of Pequot people, and more importantly, warfare including the genocidal Pequot War decimated the nation. Over the course of the next fifty years, their original control over the land they had previously inhabited diminished and the colonial government of Connecticut pushed them onto two reservations. One, called Mashantucket, was established for

the Western Pequots. There, they held onto their land despite illegal land sales and governmental action causing reductions and additional federal and state action limiting their freedoms. By the middle of the twentieth century, their reservation had been diminished to a fraction of its original size, which itself had only been a fraction of their original territory and the number of people living on the reservation was the smallest it had ever been before (see Chronology, page).

Sisters Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt (legally Martha) Langevin were the only permanent residents of the Mashantucket reservation for much of their lives. However, they were not alone by any means. Kept connected to their community and ancestry by their practice of traditional Pequot medicine, artistry, hunting, and agriculture, they lived as generations of their ancestors had previously. They also regularly hosted Elizabeth's descendants, who gained a connection to the land of the reservation through their elders despite growing up away from it. Still other Pequots maintained their connections to the Pequot culture and identity from afar, and passed on their history to their own children, instilling a next generation with an understanding of what it meant to be a Pequot person even while unable to live on the land connected to that label. In order to have such a tangible connection to the land, Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin experienced constant antagonism from the state, both in opposing their practices, and in continuing to infringe on the reservation land, and a wider surrounding community that widely ignored their existence and viewed them a fully dead tribe. Still, they were not gone, and in 1969, the two women were joined by Alice Brend, a third sister, who chose to move back to the reservation after moving away in her young adulthood, to recover her community, culture, and connection to land, even at the cost of a battle with the state for the right to even set up her home in a trailer (Chapter 1).

In 1973, Elizabeth George Plouffe passed. While this could have reduced the reservation to only two residents, what it did instead was empower a community of her descendants to begin new life on the reservation, following through on their grandmother's lifelong goal of "hold[ing] onto the land." In this first movement of Pequots back to Mashantucket, a small community of relatives attempted to set up a life on the reservation that would not fall victim to the same forces that had pushed earlier Pequots into moving. Using a precedent set by other Northeastern Woodlands nations, they began to push for state awareness, then federal recognition and a return of the land that had been wrongfully taken in the preceding centuries. They also attempted to create permanent housing, while they themselves followed Alice Brend's example and lived in trailers for years. Residents attempted to create economic opportunity through the establishment of business ventures including a hydroponic greenhouse, maple syrup production, the raising of swine, and applications for funds from governmental and private bodies. Increasingly, the tribe established itself as one of many active tribes in a connected regional community (Chapter 2).

Receiving federal recognition allowed the Pequots to finally make steps towards a full recovery of their community, status, and land. Having improved the quality of life of residents of the reservation somewhat, those already there began to reach out along networks of family to encourage the return of all family members. They began to expand their offerings to a community through infrastructure and social service programs, including health services. They also began to form connections with the academic community outside of Mashantucket and obtain recognition for the reservation and wider territory as a site of interest for historians, archeologists, and anthropologists. They additionally began to plan for a permanent telling of their own history through a museum. They finally received the economic stability that they had been searching for since their first returns, through the creation of a high stakes bingo hall-turned

casino. Their survival was showcased by a celebration of Schemitzun (a traditional Algonquin harvest festival)—the first of its kind in generations at Mashantucket (Chapter 3).

Historiography

When I began to direct my interest specifically towards the period immediately surrounding the cultural revitalization and ensuing federal recognition of the Mashantucket Pequot reservation, my first sweep of research revealed a popular history titled *Without Reservation: The Making of America's Most Powerful Indian Tribe and Foxwoods, the World's Largest Casino* by Jeff Benedict. Though I was compelled by it when I first read its summary, it showed itself to be historically problematic within a single page. *Without Reservation: The Making of America's Most Powerful Indian Tribe and Foxwoods, the World's Largest Casino*, by Jeff Benedict, claims to be sourced mostly from 650 personal interviews, but the usage of each is highly unclear. No information is cited specifically, and all of the sources are clumped in a broad acknowledgement at the end of his narrative. In keeping all of his information unspecific, the author avoids all accountability for maintaining accuracy in his narrative. Though interviews and oral histories are more trustworthy than the traditional field of history gives them credit for, this only applies when they are treated as any other source and cited when used. When applied to an entire book without specific quotes, especially a book that attempts to get so granular with each word and thought experienced, it is impossible to take any of his information at face value.

This book was further proven untrustworthy by Jeff Benedict's ulterior motives for writing the history that he did. Made clear by his concluding thought, it is clear that Jeff Benedict never intended to write a fully neutral history, but a politically driven one derived from family history in Ledyard, Connecticut. The final line of his epilogue is as follows:

Congress never investigated before declaring that the Haywards were the Pequot tribe. It didn't so much as ask to see a single birth certificate, not even from the professed tribal chief Skip Hayward...And if an investigation determined that the people operating Foxwoods are not really the Pequot tribe, then Congress has a remedy: Amend the 1983 law and revoke the group's federal recognition status.²

If readers trust Jeff Benedict in setting this political goal as his ultimate reason for writing *Without Reservation*, one must conclude that everything he writes is to serve that ultimate purpose, making all of his individual claims suspicious to a reader, especially without any citation for the evidence that he provides for each.

Benedict questions the existence of identity, culture, government, and residence on the reservation, but as will be argued in the first chapter of this thesis, each was continuously present on the reservation (and importantly, in individuals identifying as Pequot while living away from Mashantucket, which does not negate this identity as he claims it should). However, Jeff Benedict's most provocative argument is buried halfway through his book and contradicted constantly in the pages before and after. With his entire argument centered around the claim that the Pequots have not earned their status of federal recognition, his justification for his belief is that the claim that the ancestors of Skip Hayward, and by extension, all of their descendents, have no actual Pequot heritage:

Martha Hoxie was born in Ledyard in 1867. On some of her children's birth records, Martha's race is described as "black," on others "red," and on still others "white"...historical records offer no proof that her parents were Mashantucket Pequot Indians. The same records do, however, explain why Martha Hoxie's race is described as black, white, and red. On her birth record, Martha's father, John Hoxie, is identified as "black" under the column "color"...Martha's birth record lists her mother as Jane Grant, an eighteen-year-old white woman from Ledyard.³

Firstly, this bears no consideration for the fact of Pequot membership being accessible to any of six Pequot families living on the reservation in 1900 and 1910. Martha Hoxie represented

² Jeff Benedict, *Without Reservation: The Making of America's Most Powerful Indian Tribe and Foxwoods the World's Largest Casino* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 353.

³ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 147.

a single one of these families, and Jeff Benedict fails to consider the genetic makeup of any of the others. However, his reasoning for invalidating Martha Hoxie as a Pequot is still imperfect, even past his ignorance of five families. Re-racing Native individuals, especially when multiracial, as Black or White depending on their phenotype, was a common practice historically. Benedict showed that there was inconsistency in this record-keeping going back to John Hoxie's father, not that this record-keeping was valid.⁴ Presented as infallible proof of a failure of Pequot connection, Benedict still discussed records showing that the Hoxie family had lived with the Narragansett tribe in Rhode Island as far back as 1770, claiming that this too, separated the family from Pequot identity.⁵ This analysis ignores the reality of the War for Connecticut, or Pequot War, in which Pequot people were placed with the Narragansetts or sought refuge there during the sieges of the Pequot community, and the movement of families to other tribal communities as the community at Mashantucket shrunk in the nineteenth century. Residence on Narragansett land did not negate Pequot identity for those individuals, and as the Hoxie family claimed Pequot identity, it is more likely for them to have descended from such Pequot people who happened to become part of the Narragansett community. Benedict's claims relating to Martha Hoxie are deliberately buried, with his first description of Elizabeth George Plouffe, Martha Hoxie's daughter, being "one of the last known living descendants of the old tribe."⁶ In this statement alone, he acknowledges her ancestry and the presence of others with similar ties.

Benedict also neglects to consider the consistent presence of Pequot culture in the Hoxies' family history, in both connection to land and practice. To the question of why an

⁴ 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): 437.

⁵ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 148.

⁶ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 32.

ostensibly non-Pequot person would live on the reservation, he argued that families of impoverished non-Native individuals occasionally moved to the reservation because they were unable to obtain another home. He never considered the question of cultural practice, which the Hoxies up to and past Elizabeth George and Martha Langevin followed in agricultural practices, medicine, art (including basket-weaving), and hunting. Purely utilitarian practices like medicine and agriculture could have been adopted for practical survival-based reasons, but artistic practices of basket weaving and regalia-making would have far less practical reasons to be taken up.

Moreover, though Benedict argued that this fraud was economically useful for the family in providing for them land to live on and that this hinged on their identification with an Indigenous tribe, generations of history before had proven that economic life on the reservation was far less profitable than life off. As proven by the necessity of movement off of the reservation for families in the early twentieth century, life at Mashantucket was not profitable and a struggling family would have fared far better economically by seeking work off the reservation, as a number of families on the reservation learned when they were forced to move. Clinging to the reservation as Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin did could not have been done for reasons of any kind of profit. Acknowledged even by Benedict (“Elizabeth’s loyalty to preserving the reservation had inspired her not to follow her siblings off the reservation and into a more comfortable home and all the conveniences that come with living in a town”), quality of life was not a reason to remain at Mashantucket.⁷

In his fourth chapter, Benedict also provides a claim of continued cultural engagement on the part of Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin, and by extension, engagement from the children who were sent to spend time with them on the reservation, including Skip Hayward. He

⁷ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 38.

attempts to argue that Skip only engaged with the label of the tribe as it was convenient for him, but he also discussed consistent engagement since childhood:

As a child Skip had always respected his grandmother's Native American culture. As a boy he had listened with interest to her renditions of the reservation's oral history and the tribe's ancient struggle to survive.⁸

Benedict also failed to understand the reality of life on the reservation in the era before Elizabeth George Plouffe's death. In repeatedly using possessive words to describe the reservation, including "her [Elizabeth's] property" and "her homestead" to describe Mashantucket, he considered the land as individually owned property, rather than land with a rooting in community.⁹ Despite Benedict claiming, "George...was the only person left on the reservation," there was never a single resident left on the reservation.¹⁰ Consistently inhabited by sisters Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin, and joined by temporary family visitors and a permanent resident, their sister, Alice Brend, in 1969, the land was not exclusively Elizabeth's; it housed a shifting community of Pequots. When she died in 1973, the reservation was not "completely unoccupied" at all, but still home to a tribe.¹¹ This is significant because in the event of Benedict's genealogy being disproven, he argued additionally that Elizabeth's residence was insignificant in its isolation: "Even the *Webster's Dictionary* defined *tribe* as 'a group...sharing a common ancestry, culture, language and name.'...And an individual does not make a tribe."¹² Whether or not going into the semantics of what "make[s] a tribe" was justified, it was unnecessary, because the reservation was never home to just one person.

As the book rose in popularity following its release, it was widely criticized by both Pequot and other Indigenous individuals, for having misrepresented the oral histories that it

⁸ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 57.

⁹ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 31.

¹⁰ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 32.

¹¹ Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 39.

¹² Benedict, *Without Reservation*, 83.

gathered under false pretenses and creating unwarranted anti-Native and anti-recognition sentiments. The book created enough anti-Pequot sentiment to force a Connecticut representative to call for a congressional probe into their recognition immediately after its release.¹³ This disapproval of the book was not limited to the tribe however, and other tribes in the region expressed fear that they would be next to have their legitimacy dangerously questioned: “Trudy Lamb Richmond, a Schaghticoke Indian from Kent, said Connecticut has other tribes petitioning the federal government for recognition. ‘When you get through with the Pequot, are you going to go after the rest of us?’ she asked.”¹⁴ Upon receiving such criticisms, Benedict expressed only happiness: “‘I’ve been called a racist, a liar and a conspirator...That’s what the Pequots are calling me. I’m here to tell you tonight that there’s something charming in that sound.’”¹⁵ When faced with criticism, his response was to not acknowledge it in any way, but only to revel in having created such a reaction.

Methodology

In writing this thesis, I largely set aside Benedict's book and conducted my own rigorous investigation based on a wide array of cited primary sources and personal interviews with contemporary tribal members, while also drawing from more academically rigorous secondary sources.

Secondary sources drawn in part from tribal partnership and expertise were a more helpful starting point in my research. I considered sources such as *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, edited by Laurence M. Hauptman

¹³ Brian Stockes, “Controversy continues over Pequot recognition,” *ICT News (Phoenix, AZ)*, July 12, 2000. <https://ictnews.org/archive/controversy-continues-over-pequot-recognition/>.

¹⁴ “Author Answers Pequot Criticism,” *Hartford Courant*, September 20, 2000. <https://www.courant.com/2000/09/20/author-answers-pequot-criticism/#content>.

¹⁵ “Author Answers Pequot Criticism.”

and James D. Wherry, which created ethnographic and archeological histories of Mashantucket in close partnership with members of the tribe for guidance, consent, and information-gathering purposes. This type of source became useful first as secondary sources, but far more importantly, as a primary demonstration of the academic history of the tribe. The book edited by Hauptman and Wherry set out to provide a complex history of the Pequots by a range of historical methods, each represented by an expert in their individual field, including ethnography, archeology, and traditional history. Its ethnography established some relevant information on the state of the tribe and the reservation, especially in establishing the connection between the Pequot traditions practiced by Matt Langevin and Elizabeth George Plouffe and similar practices that had occurred historically (epitomized by traditions of weaving and herbal medical practice), and providing brief blurbs on the projects being undertaken by the tribe immediately after receiving federal recognition. However, where the book was more immediately useful was as a primary source in itself for establishing the attitudes of non-Pequot authors in adapting their consideration of the people and land of Mashantucket to the situation of the tribe following its revitalization in the 1980s onwards.

Also crucially useful for the secondary sources it provided, the Mashantucket Pequot tribe created a museum to preserve its own culture and history, fulfilling a motivation originating with Elizabeth George Plouffe's vision for the tribe that she shared with her descendants when they visited her on the reservation.¹⁶ Because academic education has so often been made inaccessible to Indigenous people in the United States due to structural socioeconomic disadvantage, especially for those living on reservations, groups like the Pequots have historically lacked access to the education that acts as a structural barrier to producing published

¹⁶ "Theresa Hayward Bell, Executive Director The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

literature.¹⁷ However, the museum acts as an alternative route by which the Pequots can share their history without being halted by such barriers to entry in the field of history. The only true advantage of traditional publishing is that it provides a route by which information can be disseminated and validated by critique. Both of these goals are met by the institution of the museum, which makes information available to visitors, thus giving reviewers a route by which they can consider the accuracy and utility of the information provided. Having offered depictions of Pequot history to visitors since 1998, the museum is well-regarded and highly dedicated to its goal of making Pequot history and culture accessible.

The museum's almost thirty years of existence act as validation of its accuracy, with additional validation arising from partnerships with other academic institutions, including The Connecticut Science Center.¹⁸ The museum also has unique authority over their subject matter, being derived from Pequot experience as detailed by Pequot people. The most important resource for this thesis included in their archives was a computer interactive program produced to document the changing infrastructure of the reservation in different eras of its development. The state of the reservation was considered in 1936, 1973, 1983, and 1993 with each analysis of the impact of development augmented by collections of retroactive oral histories taken from tribal members and allies about their role and experiences around specific developments. I elect to believe their depictions of their own experiences, because any source attempting to show past experiences is going to be flawed due to the warping of memory over time and though oral histories are not exempt from this, they are not uniquely problematic in this either. I take the experiences of Pequots describing their own experiences with reasonable trust.

¹⁷ "1993" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

¹⁸ "Our Story," Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Accessed April 12, 2026.
<https://www.pequotmuseum.org/our-story/>.

To establish the primary facts of life for the Pequot people between 1950 and 1992, I relied on newspapers, published academic work, legal documents, maps, and oral histories. Each fulfilled a distinct purpose in establishing the history that I consider within this thesis.

Newspapers were a useful source in establishing the way the dominant culture interacted with the Pequots throughout the twentieth century. Though they are written by non-Pequot authors in many cases, and as a result, they do not represent the full experience of the people actually living on the reservation, they provide a complementary perspective. Written in the vast majority of cases by White authors within the community of Southeastern Connecticut, they represent the point of view of the surrounding community. Especially in earlier periods, a writer is not always cited. In these cases, the full perspective of an author is not comprehensible, but one can conclude facts about their sociopolitical position from their status as a newspaper writer and facts about their engagement with their community from their focus on local Indigenous news. However, many of the pieces considered within this thesis do have provided authors, in many cases, ones that repeat across spans of time, showing engagement with the Pequot community on a repeated basis, as in the cases of Barbara Reed and Patricia Sierman. In these cases, repeated engagement with the tribe provides these authors with the context necessary to understand their contemporary standing at each new development.

The dominant White perspective on the Pequots' existence impacted said existence. The Pequot community dealt with harmful opinions around their presence all throughout the twentieth century and before, meaning that such perspectives influenced those who identified as Pequot for most of their life. It is relevant to the Pequot experience that by 1953, their disappearance was presumed to be unavoidable, as printed in a newspaper article, and taken in conjunction with the Pequot perspective of survival on and off the reservation, it justifies their

financial, political, and social interactions with their immediate communities of both Pequot and non-Pequot actors. For this reason, newspapers can be taken as a useful but fallible source of both fact and opinion depending on their consistency with a retroactive Pequot telling of history in the earlier years of this thesis.

Especially as the Pequot people increasingly co-opted the newspaper as a means of disseminating information in the period around and following federal recognition, through offering quotations for publication, authoring their own opinion pieces, and placing advertisements in the newspaper to find both workers and consumers for their offerings, the newspaper can be considered as a source that has been, to some degree, approved by a Pequot perspective. Such Pequot opinion pieces are in some cases approved by non-Pequot opinion writers in response. This correspondence of Pequot and non-Pequot perspectives seems to justify this as a reliable source for the facts of the moment, and as a result, the majority of newspaper pieces considered within this thesis are considered to be of a relatively high degree of truth. When there is reason to question the validity of these pieces, coming from biased wording choice or unvalidated depiction of events, this skepticism is noted and explained. Advertisements in newspapers are treated as distinct from other information published in newspapers because they provide a different type of information. In most cases, they do not represent a non-Native perspective in their own right, but that of a corporation powerful enough to spend money to influence such perspectives. Thus, they are taken as a shaper of wider culture and an indication of a more elite perspective.

Published academic sources such as the book already discussed, *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, are utilized in the third chapter to establish the interactions of the academic sphere with the people at Mashantucket. Their actual

findings are often highly relevant for establishing a history of the Pequots before and immediately around the time of first contact with Dutch traders and English colonists, as in the case of attempting to place the Pequot War on a map, but in a study of the late twentieth century, they are more relevant as proof of increased engagement with Mashantucket from the outside, indicating a generally wider awareness of the tribe than in previous times, when a previous lack of academic interest showed conceptions of extinction relating to the Pequot people. Therefore, most of the provided analysis relating to these published works is considering their methodology and research goals, rather than any outcomes. It is the presence of research at all that marks a change from the preceding era.

Legal sources including pieces of legislation, court cases, and agency files (especially from the Bureau of Indian Affairs) are considered from both state and federal levels of government throughout this thesis, with particular emphasis in chapter two, as associated with the tribe's push for federal recognition. The history of their development and implementation provide insight into the living conditions of those impacted by such governmental actions. They are a mechanism by which it is possible to understand the change of experience for members of the Mashantucket Pequot nation. In each case where these sources are considered, it is because legal development acted as a mechanism for social change, and they are interpreted accordingly.

There are some occasional maps throughout this thesis, used to demonstrate a dominant cultural perspective of land. Because maps are a colonial tool of land control, they represent the way that land markings are arbitrarily determined by perspectives. With the reservation at Mashantucket being the same size since it was reduced in 1856 up to the year 1983, any change in its depiction in relation to the surrounding area is not determined by material change in size of land, but opinions of map makers, which are determined by the dominant narrative of land in a

region. As a result, maps can be used as a demonstration of wider opinion relating to the reservation.

My most important resource in telling the story at Mashantucket is a collection of oral histories that I was privileged enough to hear over the course of the last year. Going into this project, I knew that there was a high chance that individuals at Mashantucket would have no interest in speaking with me, because previously published works about the tribe have had such a negative impact and have been so mishandled by the bias of non-Pequot authors. Still, I believed that with so many people alive who experienced this period of development themselves who have not had the chance to tell their individual stories outside of their immediate communities, it would be a waste to not attempt to collaborate with them as much as possible. To find individuals who might have an interest in speaking with me about this period, I leaned on Karley Reising, a member of the tribe, who I had the honor of being the student of in high school and the advisee of in More Than Words, the club at my school founded around improving the treatment of Indigenous students, and Jason Mancini, Connecticut Humanities' Executive Director and the former Executive Director of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, who my advisor, Linford Fisher introduced me to. Both suggested that I speak with Josh Carter, the current Executive Director of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, who was present at the reservation during its revitalization as a child. He, in turn, introduced me to Michael Thomas, who works in the Cultural Resources Department for the tribe, and was present on the reservation as a young adult during the period of growth in the tribe. He then introduced me to Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, the Chairwoman for the Pequot Elders Council, who moved to the reservation in 1992 and was able to contribute much about the life of an adult Pequot living off the reservation and voluntarily moving back. Each of them consented to my recording of our

conversation in order for me to best remember exact wordings. I separately met Sharon Porter at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, where she works as a Museum Services Associate, and she agreed to tell me her family's history in return as a number of individual adults in the early 1980s. She preferred for me to not record her words but take physical notes on her story, and any inaccuracy as a result is entirely my responsibility.

These oral histories deal with incredibly personal histories for each person mentioned. They can each be taken to represent different aspects of the Pequot experience in moving to the reservation following the federal recognition of the tribe. With each being informed by a wide range of individual and community factors, they reflect the true range of ways that Mashantucket Pequot people exercised agency in deciding where to spend their lives and which community to spend them with. Taken as a sampling of hundreds of additional stories of identity, they are not meant to reflect a single combined Pequot experience but offer similarities as points of reflection that may be resonant for some individuals and not others. Each history-giver provided reflections on the way that their life differed living away from their tribal community and then with it, showing the general outline of social life and interpersonal interactions in a tribe with a constantly developing community upon their first arrival. These oral histories carry with them each a unique timbre and when placed side by side, they create a picture of life at Mashantucket, that in combination with the newspapers, published academic sources, legal sources, and maps, shows a true range of Pequot experiences in the later half of the twentieth century and the consistency of identity and autonomy across such experiences.

Pre-Chronology: The Pequot Context

Pre-Contact	The Pequot people lived in modern day Southeastern Connecticut and Rhode Island on 250 square miles of land between the Niantic River and Pawcatuck River. ¹⁹ They prospered through farming and fishing, in a society organized under a sachem. ²⁰
Early 1600s	Diseases resulting from European colonization reduced an existing Pequot population of approximately 13,000 by between 55% and 95%, with one notable Winter between 1633 and 1634 reducing the numbers of the tribe by half. ²¹
1614	The Pequots were met with European colonization for the first time through contact with Dutch fur traders from the Hudson River Valley. ²²
1631	The Pequot tribe split as a Sachem named Uncas and fifty families of his supporters chose to leave their former tribe to create the Mohegan tribe, resulting from disagreements with the Pequot Sachem Sassacus. ²³
1636-1638	The Pequot War, which arose from tensions between colonial and Pequot powers for control of the region, decimated the tribe, both in numbers and in legal status. A number of raids culminated in the Mystic Massacre of May 26, 1637, in which English, Mohegan, and Narragansett warriors burned a fortified Pequot village right before sunrise, killing 700 women, children, and elders. A series of counterattacks resulted in more deaths. ²⁴
1638	The resulting Treaty at Hartford attempted to reduce their status to below that of a tribe, in part by dispersing the tribe. ²⁵ Though the neighboring Narragansett and Montauk sheltered and absorbed some Pequots into their communities, the majority were either executed (for warriors), enslaved and sold in the West Indies or made servants to colonial households in New England (for women and children), or placed under the control of the Mohegan tribe (for the remainder). ²⁶
1650	The General Court of Connecticut created a collection of laws designating Native communities within the state as separate from the settler community, but placing them under Native leaders appointed by the state. The authority of

¹⁹ "Our History," Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.mptn-nsn.gov/history/>.

²⁰ Lee Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians," Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Connecticut, Accessed April 12, 2026, https://www.colonialwarset.org/1637_pequot_history.htm.

²¹ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 208-209; Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

²² Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

²³ "Sachem Uncas," Mohegan Tribe, Accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.mohegan.nsn.us/about/our-tribal-history/historical-figures/sachem-uncas>.

²⁴ "Our History."

²⁵ Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

²⁶ Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

	these leaders in enforcing these laws was inconsistently recognized. ²⁷
1651	The Connecticut colony, under John Winthrop Jr., gave the Pequots the ability to resettle in Morgan's Point in Noank, Connecticut, on a piece of reclaimed land under chief Cassasimamon ²⁸
1655	After years of exploitation under the Mohegan tribe, the Pequots were removed from their control by the English government in Connecticut and they split as a result. ²⁹
1661	Lt. James Avery and James Morgan were appointed by the Connecticut Court to act as counselors for the Pequots and overseers were selected by the tribe by its members under the approval of the court. ³⁰
1666	Land in the town of Noank was reclaimed by the colony and the reservation at Mashantucket was founded for the group known as the Mashantucket or Western Pequot and they moved there from their prior Noank camp. ³¹ In its original form, the reservation was 3,000 acres. ³²
1683	The reservation at Lantern Hill was founded for the group known as the Pawcatuck or Eastern Pequot. ³³
1761	The reservation at Mashantucket was reduced to 989 acres through land seizure by the Connecticut colony. ³⁴
1774-1800	Some sects of Christian Mashantucket Pequots joined the Brotherton movement to New York, then Wisconsin, along with members of six other Northeastern tribes. In choosing to leave Connecticut, the community at Mashantucket shrank. ³⁵ By 1800, more than half of the existing population had moved with the movement.
1790	The Indian Trade and Intercourse Act made it illegal to sell Indigenous lands without the consent of the federal government. This became a basis for future land claims lawsuits throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

²⁷ "Connecticut's Overseer System," Native Northeast Portal, Accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.nativenortheastportal.com/connecticuts-overseer-system>.

²⁸ "Our History."

²⁹ Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

³⁰ "Connecticut's Overseer System."

³¹ Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

³² "Our History."

³³ Sultzman, "History of the Pequot Indians."

³⁴ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 209.

³⁵ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 209.

1821	The Revision of the General Statutes was passed along with a new constitution for the state of Connecticut. Under it, overseers for Native tribes began to be appointed by county courts and they gained responsibility for accounting and land usage of the tribe. Under this policy, New London county gained authority over the management of tribal resources, and individual overseers gained the ability to rent and sell lots from Mashantucket. ³⁶
1856	The reservation at Mashantucket was reduced again to 213 acres through an involuntary land sale. ³⁷
1935	The often abusive overseer system was abolished by the state of Connecticut and authority over the lands of reservations temporarily shifted to the state Park and Forest Commission. ³⁸ The land of Mashantucket and the 42 Pequots living on it were one of several tribal communities impacted by this legislation.
1938	Much of New England, including the Mashantucket Pequot reservation, was wrecked by a highly destructive hurricane.
1941	Responsibility for the oversight for the Indigenous people of Connecticut including the Mashantucket Pequot shifted from to Connecticut's Welfare System. ³⁹

³⁶ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 209.

³⁷ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 209.

³⁸ "Connecticut's Overseer System."

Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 209.

³⁹ "Connecticut's Overseer System."

Chapter 1: The Disappearance of the Pequots: An Inevitability that Never Came to Pass

Nearly all the Indians who live off the reservations regard themselves as ordinary Connecticut citizens. In general, they are so regarded by their neighbors. Although most of their members of the four tribes which still hold lands take little interest in them, they retain their tribal rights to the land no matter where they live...The disappearance of the Indians as a people seems inevitable.⁴⁰

Since the time of the War for Connecticut, or the Pequot War, the colonizer perspective held that it was a foregone conclusion that the Pequot people would one day be extinguished, as would all other Native people in the United States. By 1953, this narrative was widely accepted enough to be discussed in publications like the *Hartford Courant*, a newspaper read throughout the entire state. In a piece called, “Indians Make Last Fight - - For Survival,” a non-Native man named David H. Fowler said that in total, only 31 Native people lived on reservations in the entire state, with another 130 living off of the reservations, integrated into average American life. As for the reservations, he spoke of them as small pieces of land, with the few homes that they did have being little better than shacks. He quoted the director of the Divisions of State Aid and Collections in calling the residents of reservations ““essentially a welfare problem,”” and encouraged them to assimilate into the communities outside of their reservations. In speaking specifically of the Mashantucket, or Western, Pequot tribe, near the area of Ledyard, Connecticut, he spoke of a once “warlike” people who were reduced to a four person tribe due to the oppressive force of the Pequot War (prefacing this description of them with an attempt to frame this event as war rather than genocide), the dwindling of their lands (notably stated in a passive voice that gives no actor who caused this loss of land for the Pequots), the poor land that was apportioned to them (once more without an in-section acknowledgement of the reason for

⁴⁰ David H. Fowler, “Indians Make Last Fight - - For Survival,” *Hartford Courant*, March 29, 1953, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/hartford-courant-1953-pequot-articlecou/34169199/>.

their specific residence), and the loss of their cultural presence (acknowledging even in the line that this was written in, that a pow-wow had been held mere years ago). To show the poverty and desolation of the present state of the tribe in 1953, he utilized a picture of one woman, who he named as Martha Langevin.⁴¹

David H. Fowler's frank, though biased, assessment of the state of the Pequots in the 1950s contained some particular truths, even if he was wrong in his overall assessment. The tribe was indeed living with incredibly reduced numbers on reduced land, and on the aforementioned land, housing was sparse. Though his framing of the problems facing the Pequots was indeed avoidantly worded and framed to depict the Pequots as victims without also establishing a perpetrator, he was correct that they had indeed been greatly impacted by centuries of warfare, destructive policy-making relating to land appropriation and reappropriation, and attacks on their culture perpetuated; he only forgot to acknowledge that these were the actions of the dominant White culture of Connecticut and the nation.

He was mistaken however about inevitability; the supposedly “inevitable” eventual disappearance of the Mashantucket Pequot nation never came to pass, and furthermore it was the very Pequots living off of the reservation that he had dismissed as entirely assimilated “ordinary Connecticut citizens” that were the ones who reasserted the presence of the reservation, its people, and its culture, and ultimately, ensured the survival of the Pequot identity. After all, as he did establish, though the Pequots living off of the reservation had done so for a range of reasons, their tribal rights to the land remained intact no matter how far they had gone. The reservation only awaited their choice to return when they were once again able. As memory and acknowledgement of the contemporary Pequot people by residents of the surrounding town and state more broadly was declining, Pequot identity remained consistent, both for the two (later

⁴¹ Fowler, “Indians Make Last Fight - - For Survival.”

three) women on the reservation who worked to preserve existing culture and maintain their connections to their family off the reservation for the rest of their lives, and for the Pequot people who had been forced off the reservation. The return of Alice Brend, a Pequot woman who had lived at the reservation for her first two decades of life and maintained her connection while away, in this period exemplifies the maintenance of Pequot identity and connection to the physical reservation, in spite of the opposition of the state and the years spent away from life there. In a display of determination and autonomy, she became the first to return to the reservation, laying the legal foundation for the returns of dozens more after her.

Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin on Preserving the Reservation

In 1965, on a section of land that was a mere 213 acres in area, two elderly women stood by themselves against the might of the state of Connecticut and the whole of the United States behind it. In the 1960s, Elizabeth reported having learned that the state planned to turn the reservation into a state park after its last two residents passed.⁴²

Elizabeth George Plouffe, known as “Iron Woman” after her death, and Matt (legally and formally Martha) Langevin are the two women who are today credited with the maintenance of Mashantucket from the start of the twentieth century to their deaths. Born in 1895 and 1902 respectively, the two shared a mother, Martha Hoxie George, a Pequot woman. Elizabeth’s father was Martha Hoxie George’s first husband, Cyrus George (known as Cy), who was also a resident of Mashantucket and of both Pequot and Narragansett heritage, though he was not registered as belonging to either tribe.⁴³ He lived on the reservation and worked on a nearby saw mill until he

⁴² “Hold Onto the Land” (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁴³ “Pequot Indian Murdered,” *The New London Day*, October 5, 1898, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/969706848/>.

died from heart failure in 1898.⁴⁴ He was remembered positively in the surrounding town, as reported in local newspapers: “He was everybody’s friend and except for domestic troubles apparently took life easily.”⁴⁵ When Martha remarried, it was to Matt Langevin’s father, Napoleon Langevin, a man who was born French Canadian, who nevertheless became deeply connected to the reservation and the identity at Mashantucket. He spent eighteen years after his wife’s death until his own passing continuing to live on the reservation in a time when many others were moving off of it, despite having no genealogical connection to it. He remained with his children and stepchildren on the reservation until 1946. When he eventually passed at Mashantucket, his obituary printed that he had died “at Home.”⁴⁶

Matt Langevin’s residence on the reservation was not without complication, relationally and in interactions with authority, but it was held dear to her regardless. Matt and her husband, a man from Preston, Connecticut, named Benjamin Ellal, were married in December 1934 and filed for divorce in February 1938 for reasons of “intolerable cruelty...since Jan. 15, 1936.” The couple produced no children.⁴⁷ In the place of children, however, Matt invested in a far-flung network of beloved nieces, nephews, and other family members who later recalled their “Aunt Matt,” as a strong-willed, yet reclusive person who defended the land and her family without hesitation. Though Matt originally resided in a permanent home, the damage to the house sustained as a result of a 1938 hurricane proved insurmountable over time. Living in a home that needed constant maintenance and being unable to perform these necessary repairs in her age, Matt came to the conclusion that she could no longer live in the remains of the house in the

⁴⁴ “George Died of Heart Failure,” *The New London Day*, October 4, 1898, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/969701429/>.

⁴⁵ “Pequot Indian Murdered.”

⁴⁶ “Leopold N. Langevin,” *The New London Day*, March 11, 1946, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary-for-leopold-n-langevin/140789389/>.

⁴⁷ “Preston Man Files Suit for Divorce,” *The New London Day*, February 7, 1938, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-preston-man-files-suit-for-divor/183140999/>.

1930s.⁴⁸ But her move to a second-hand trailer was not without its own difficulties. Enlisting the aid of her family members who periodically visited the reservation, she also had to perform a number of renovations on the mobile home before it was truly livable. Her grandnephew Skip Hayward recalled working with her to plug a leak in her room and build a foundation for the trailer to sit on.⁴⁹ However, because the town of Ledyard viewed the land of Mashantucket as within their jurisdiction, her repairs were met with a visit from the state overseer. Skip recalled the incident of the state learning of Matt's repairs: "I remember the state overseer coming by and scolding this old woman like she was a child for doing any of this without their permission."⁵⁰

Elizabeth George resided in the only house left standing on the reservation after Martha moved to her trailer, first with her family, then by herself. Elizabeth and her husband, Arthur Plouffe, were parents of seven and eventually, grandparents of 19. Arthur passed in 1957 and Alice outlived him.⁵¹ His obituary failed to provide reference to his residence at Mashantucket for decades of his life, eliminating the reservation from the public narrative of his life, and invalidating his presence as part of his memory. However, some uncertainty was evident in the writing of his obituary; from one paragraph to the next, the author changed his place of residence from the town of Gales Ferry to the town of Ledyard: "Funeral services for Arthur Joseph Plouffe, 64, of Gales Ferry, who died at Lawrence Memorial Hospital early yesterday morning, will be conducted in Norwich Thursday...Mr. Plouffe was born in St. Thomas Juliette, Canada,

⁴⁸ "The Homestead" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁴⁹ "Martha Langevin's Home" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁵⁰ "Martha Langevin's Home."

⁵¹ "Arthur J. Plouffe," *The New London Day*, August 19, 1957, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary/183162625/>.

the son of Dolphis and Celina Coutu Plouffe, and came to this country 57 years ago, residing all that time in Ledyard.”⁵²

The couple raised their children on the reservation, in the unmodified home that Elizabeth had also grown up in, but she was the home’s final resident. Her children and grandchildren recall the house to have been without many of the modern amenities that would have been present in the houses of the surrounding homes; the Plouffes got light from oil lamps and candles, water from a well, heat from woodstoves, and they had no bathroom in the house.⁵³ As Elizabeth raised her children and then took care of her grandchildren when their parents took them to Mashantucket, she watched each of them slowly age and be forced to leave the house and the wider reservation. However, despite her insistence on maintaining her presence on the reservation, she, herself, was not able to simply remain on the reservation. She preserved her residence, but she was forced to travel off of it to obtain work. In her young life, she traveled to Norwich, Connecticut, in order to work as a baker at the Wauregan Hotel and then, to do the housework of the Brown family in the same town.⁵⁴ Her husband also traveled for work, as a driver for a waste disposal company based in Norwich.⁵⁵ The family also traveled off the reservation for small stretches of time, as they did in 1940 to visit Arthur’s family in Canada.⁵⁶

Though the two women regularly housed family members as guests, they spent long periods of time alone together on the land, with only each other to ensure that they both remained alive and well. To check on each other, they would “coo-hoo” at each other from across the

⁵² “Funeral for Arthur Plouffe,” *The New London Day*, August 20, 1957, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary-for-arthur-plouffe/183163031/>.

⁵³ “The Homestead.”

⁵⁴ “Elizabeth George-Plouffe & Martha ‘Matt’ Langevin,” Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, Accessed October 17, 2025, <https://www.mptn-nsn.gov/history/elizabeth-george-plouffe-martha-matt-langevin/>.

⁵⁵ “Funeral for Arthur Plouffe.”

⁵⁶ George H. Griswold, “Mystic,” *The New London Day*, August 21, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-mystic/183163683/>.

reservation, as reported by the grandchild of Elizabeth, Charlene Jacobs, who remembered the practice of the two women firsthand.⁵⁷

Following the Pequot Way of Life

The two women maintained traditional ways of life until their deaths, in writing and in practice. They left written records of their traditions and a drafted constitution preserving the contemporary state of their tribal government as of the 1960s.⁵⁸ Importantly, they continued to perform subsistence farming on the reservation, preserving the practice in the memories of Elizabeth's children.

Rather than the land of the reservation being "Unfit for farming," as Fowler had claimed in his disappearance-focused newspaper article, the land yielded a range of plants to support the community. The two women used their agricultural yields for a range of purposes. Having only a regular supply of overseer-rationed flour, as was the case on many reservations nationally, the women adapted to a number of recipes with very few ingredients, aided by Elizabeth's experience as a baker; Skip Hayward claimed that, "The woman [Elizabeth] probably had 500 recipes for flour and water."⁵⁹ Any food that could be grown supplementarily filled in the nutritional gaps that a flour-and water based diet created for the women and their guests on the reservation. The crops they grew existed primarily as a source of food to supplement the regularly inedible food that arrived from the state departments that were supposed to provide for them. However, any excess crops that they themselves, or their family members visiting the reservation did not require for sustenance could be sold, in order to assist in paying for the few necessities that the women themselves could not produce or obtain from the state and the

⁵⁷ "Martha Langevein's Home."

⁵⁸ "Hold Onto the Land."

⁵⁹ "The Homestead."

frequent legal costs that the women incurred in maintaining their culture and life within a context that wanted its erasure. Having integrated into their farming practices plants traditionally native to Europe (turnips, cabbage, parsnips, and carrots) and European animals (cattle, pigs, and sheep) alongside plants Indigenous to the Northeastern Woodlands (corn, beans, and squash) centuries ago, the women benefited from a rich and varied agricultural system that came from generations of integrative practice.⁶⁰ Several of the native plants and herbs were also understood to have some type of medicinal value and they were used as such.

One could understand there to be some value in maintaining the ways of life that were being actively erased by the dominant culture as a form of resistance. Terry Bell, Elizabeth's granddaughter, remembered her grandmother loving the land without need for any deeper reason: "And she would always be out in her garden and working and just to pick up the dirt and put it in her hands and say, 'Gee, I love the smell of the earth.'"⁶¹

In order to supplement their funds as apportioned by either the state's county court system, Park and Forest Commission, or Connecticut Welfare System (with the body having oversight over the Pequots varying throughout the first few decades of the century), Elizabeth and Matt sought out additional funding from the sale of agriculture and art, as well as traditional employment. Whether by selling crops, selling handmade baskets, or laboring on farms in the surrounding towns, the Pequots survived through taking side jobs.⁶² Even before the two women were the only reservation residents left, they utilized this model as a necessity. A newspaper article from as early as 1931 demonstrated their need for supplementary funds: Arthur, Elizabeth's husband, a resident of the reservation, faced legal trouble in the year due to his

⁶⁰ "A Pequot Farmstead" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁶¹ "The Homestead."

⁶² "Life Off the Reservation" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

inability to fully pay off his debts from purchasing a coat.⁶³ Even being able to pay for necessities like clothing then were not certainties. As a result, the reservation residents turned to jobs outside the reservation and items that they could sell from Mashantucket.

Throughout her life, Matt regularly relied on these agricultural sales to provide for the reservation. As a child working with her father, she went door to door for miles with baskets of fruits and vegetables.⁶⁴ In her adulthood, she placed an advertisement in the *New London Day*, a southeastern Connecticut-based newspaper, on May 8, 9, and 10, 1934, to market strawberry plants for the low price of fifty cents for 100 plants. As this advertisement was placed in the papers in early May, despite the typical productive season of strawberry plants beginning in June, it is clear that the reservation had a supply of plants that they knew to be reliable enough to begin the work of selling them before they had even begun to bear fruit. Being able to spare many sets of 100 plants to a non-Pequot consumer base reveals Matt's expertise in growing the plants, but also the sparse numbers of individuals that the plants had to support. Due to the small population remaining on the reservation by the 1930s, the plants' primary consumers were indeed the surrounding town.

The placement of advertisements in the paper informs a reader of a certain level of familiarity between Mashantucket and the towns around it. For the purchase of an advertisement to be financially justified, town members must not have been so familiar that individuals would know to come to the reservation on a yearly basis in the spring and summer. However, with the advertisement providing only a very abbreviated location at which someone could purchase the strawberry plants from Matt Langevin ("R. F. D. No. 2, Mystic,") and no other place to go to get

⁶³ "Ledyard Man to Pay Balance on Overcoat," *The New London Day*, March 21, 1931, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-ledyard-man-to-pay-balance-on-ov/183164906/>.

⁶⁴ "Aunt Matt's Home" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

additional information, such as a phone number, as other advertisements in the same paper did, Langevin's name alone must have carried some familiarity with the town for the plants to have sold.⁶⁵

Both women utilized the herbs that they were able to grow on the reservation for healing. The plants were historically known to possess properties that could cure "cuts, bruises, muscle aches, skin rashes, fevers, coughs, and stomach troubles." Being native to the region, the plants had traditions associated with their usage coming from generations of practice. When Matt Langevin cooked the twigs of Speckled Alder to produce a liquid to rub onto the head to relieve headaches and to rub onto skin to alleviate the pain of sprains, she did this in the context of the Pequot people who came before her. However, adaptation was also a large part of the medicine historically and contemporarily utilized by Pequot people, as they were forced to move away from traditions as they were forgotten. It was in this context that Indigenous people, both Pequot, and those of other Northeastern Woodlands tribes, began to adapt healing around Speckled Alder liquid to apply it to sunburns and to utilize the inner bark of the tree to create poultices to ease any number of skin ailments.⁶⁶

An entire system of healing existed around the plants that grew on the reservation, both planted deliberately and foraged from the naturally growing flora, as preserved in an ethnography of Matt Langevin by Eva L. Butler in 1939.⁶⁷ Many remedies were not specific to the Pequots, but used by a broader Northeastern Woodlands tribal community. By breaking the stem of a jewelwood stalk, Matt could soothe poison ivy, skin rashes, and insect bites. By

⁶⁵ "Seeds—Plants—Flowers," *The New London Day*, May 8, 1934, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183173274/>.

⁶⁶ "Pequot Medicine" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁶⁷ William S. Simmons, "The Mystic Voice: Pequot Folklore from the Seventeenth Century to the Present," in *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James Wherry (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 154.

brewing tea from Boneset, colds and fevers could be lessened. A Sassafras tea had similar properties, but also worked to thin the blood. A powdered form of Sassafras worked to treat ulcers of the body. Witch Hazel was used to tighten the skin, reduce inflammation, and relieve pain, especially around arthritis and rheumatism. Pipsissewa was steeped in hot water and used on blisters. In a practice specific to the Pequot people, a Pipsissewa tea was used to treat the kidneys. For cuts and wounds, the Pequots before and Matt contemporarily used an antiseptic wash derived from boiled wild indigo roots. American Pennyroyal was brewed into a tea and Wintergreen leaves and berries were collected to ease various types of pain: headaches, stomach pain, menstrual pain. Wintergreen found a second usage in being chewed to ease toothaches and canker sores. Virginia Snakeroot was chewed as an antivenom for snake bites. With the reservation being home to a number of snakes, the women carried the root regularly as a form of protection.⁶⁸

It is possible that many of these medicinal innovations came from necessity as the women aged. Though their roots were certainly in historic Pequot usage, some of the remedies were also specific to Matt, such as the usage of Pipsissewa for treatment of the kidneys. Though many of the remedies target pain more broadly, the most specifically utilized medicines described above have specific emphasis on the maladies of age: arthritis, rheumatism, kidney failures. The two women growing old on the reservation had little to no access to the medicines used to treat the maladies of old age in the towns outside of Mashantucket, and these adaptations provided them with an alternative route by which to treat these conditions. Resultantly, the women did not have to leave the reservation to have access to a wide range of effective medicines whose use was informed by generations of previous use.

⁶⁸ “Pequot Medicine.”

Having preserved these remedies for future Pequots, Matt and Elizabeth provided for their descendants and other family members who later returned to the reservation, some of whom had lost their traditional Pequot practices since their families left the reservation. However, in preserving these remedies, Elizabeth and Matt showed their confidence that they would not be the last Pequots to use Pequot medicine, or the last Pequots to live on the reservation.

Matt Langevin also did not shy away from hunting as a source of protection or as a source of nutrition derived from traditional Pequot means. She carried a shotgun regularly around the reservation as a form of protection against the copperheads living on the land.⁶⁹ Against the wishes of the broader state of Connecticut, she also successfully continued her father's support of the tribe through hunting. Restricted to a small land mass and limited targets on the reservation, she ventured into other parts of the state. Beginning in 1935, the state of Connecticut publicly began to punish her hunting through a 1907 act mandating the purchase of a hunting license and an ambiguous ban on her method of hunting.⁷⁰ In November 1935, she collaborated with a man named Desmond Knight to bring down 22 deer in just a few weeks across the two towns of Ledyard and North Stonington. They utilized a new method, rather than a traditional one: jacklighting, or turning the headlights of their cars on in high volume feeding grounds in order to attract the deer and bring them down with guns.⁷¹ This method of hunting was a common issue in the state, with the state moving to legislate against it in a bill that was approved in 1937.⁷²

⁶⁹ "Elizabeth George-Plouffe & Martha 'Matt' Langevin."

⁷⁰ "BNR Historical Timeline," CT.gov, January 3, 2017, <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/BNR-150th-Anniversary/BNR-Historical-Timeline#>.

⁷¹ "Man, Woman Go to Jail For Jacklight Deer Hunt," *Hartford Courant*, November 12, 1935, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/hartford-courant-man-woman-go-to-jail-f/183172640/>.

⁷² "Cross Signs \$35,000 Bill for Building," *Hartford Courant*, June 23, 1937, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/370257583/>.

On November 11, the two hunters were arrested in the town of Pawcatuck, Rhode Island, and were both sent to jail from the North Stonington justice court. Both received fines additionally, with Matt's being lighter, at \$50 and the costs of the deer.⁷³ This was a standard fine, with other hunters accused of using the same method being made to pay the same price.⁷⁴ Despite the action not being made illegal through a bill yet, it was consistently punished. Still, without the means to be able to pay these costs, Matt and Desmond both were forced to receive their punishment in the form of time spent in jail.⁷⁵ Matt could have chosen to limit her hunting to the reservation, but she did not. This could have been because without significant roads, the strategy of jacklighting would have been less possible. However, it could have also been an act of protest against the drawing of reservation borders, as both Ledyard and North Stonington were contained within the historic lands of the Pequot people.

Matt's shotgun also served a secondary purpose: intimidation. Carrying it around regularly on the reservation, she deterred those who may have otherwise intruded on the land she and her sister lived on. In the words of her sister Alice's daughter, "...she didn't like anyone wandering around that she didn't know."⁷⁶ Because the reservation was surrounded by the town of Ledyard and the two women feared that the town wanted to convert the reservation into a national park, the boundaries of the reservation were not understood to be something that needed to be respected by the White residents of Ledyard. Nieces Belinda McKeon and Jodi-Ann Newman knew their Aunt Matt to be someone who did not hesitate to defend the land and the people living on it: "Somebody out there was messing around? She'd go right out the back door

⁷³ A. M. Stewart, "Man and Woman Sent to Jail For Deer Hunting," *The New London Day*, November 11, 1935. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-man-and-woman-sent-to-jail-for-d/183172934/>.

⁷⁴ Howard E. Rogers, "Jacklighting Hunters Get Fines, Suspended Jail Terms," *The New London Day*, February 1, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/969138897/>.

⁷⁵ "Man, Woman Go to Jail For Jacklight Deer Hunt."

⁷⁶ "Martha Langevein's Home."

and shoot that thing off. In the air, that thing would go;” “If she didn’t know you and didn’t think you belonged here, she’d tell you to leave...she wouldn’t hesitate to shoot you on sight.”⁷⁷

Elizabeth joined her in her absolute rejection of the imposition of non-Native people on the land. Known for her statement, “Hold onto the land,” she eventually empowered the Pequots to choose to return to the reservation after her own death. She followed this principle while alive as well. When her family came to the reservation for visits, she provided baked goods and her kitchen table for them to sit at, to discuss their past and their plans for the future.⁷⁸ However, when non-family came to the reservation to consider the land for its presumed later usage by the state, she did not sit and watch. She ripped surveying stakes from the ground and instructed her children and grandchildren to join her in doing so. When bulldozers were brought to the reservation, she did not wait for them to go after the land, but immediately stood right in front of the machines, saying, “You’re not going to plow out this ground. This is mine.”⁷⁹ When both women were offered places at retirement facilities in their old age, they denied them, believing that being removed from the land would have ended the continuous line of Pequot people living on the reservation, enabling its destruction and transformation into a state park.⁸⁰

The two women focused on the protection of specific pieces of land of spiritual and historical significance. One such site was the “Indian Burying Grounds” in Ledyard, which were known by a number of different names for different groups. Called the Peters Hill Cemetery by the Pequots and the Fanning Cemetery (named for an overseer of the reservation) by much of the rest of Ledyard, it contained different meanings for different groups. In 1970, the State Park and Forest Commission began “clean-up work” there.⁸¹ For Elizabeth, this clean-up functioned much

⁷⁷ “Martha Langevein’s Home”; “Aunt Matt’s Home.”

⁷⁸ “Hold Onto the Land.”

⁷⁹ “The Homestead.”

⁸⁰ “Elizabeth George-Plouffe & Martha ‘Matt’ Langevin.”

⁸¹ Barbara Reed, “Indian Rights at Issue Over Cemetery Project,” *The New London Day*, July 8, 1970,

as the name change had. It acted to remove the cemetery from the control of the Pequots and make it a site for Ledyard. Rather than being a resting spot for her ancestors, she worried that the site would become crowded by outsiders who would not respect the land or the people who were buried there, and certainly not their descendants who would come after. Elizabeth summed up her feelings on the matter, "I don't want outsiders to go up there with all kinds of people going in sitting and lying around. All my people are buried there and if it's going to be that way I don't want to be buried there."⁸² For her, a final separation from her family was preferable to eternal disrespect by non-Pequot residents of Ledyard.

Elizabeth George Plouffe also fought her share of legal battles with the state for her right to interact with the animals of the region as she chose. In April 1968, the *New London Day* reported that a state dog warden had issued her a fine upon discovering that her four dogs had not been licensed. She began to create a defense with the aid of attorney Ralph Bergman. Bergman argued that though an Indigenous person in the Western half of the country might not have any privileges tied to living on a reservation, a reservation in the East was not as strictly administered by the federal government. His opponent, George Cummings, of the Welfare Department, argued that despite the Pequots having usage of the land, it was "controlled and maintained by the state," and the people on it were supported by welfare as any other citizen of the United States was when needed.⁸³ Eventually, rather than cave to the demands of the state, she disposed of the dogs.⁸⁴

<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-indian-rights-at-issue-over-ceme/176484155/>.

⁸² Reed, "Indian Rights at Issue Over Cemetery Project."

⁸³ "Indian Woman Challenges State," *The New London Day*, April 4, 1968,

<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-indian-woman-challenges-state/183174140/>.

⁸⁴ Jack Campesi, "The Emergence of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, 1637-1975," in *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James Wherry (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 138.

As of April 5, less than a month after she had been charged on March 11, the charges for her offense were dropped in circuit court. Prosecutor Morris Globerman stated that he would not prosecute Elizabeth for the simple fact of her age, as she was 74 (though she was misreported to be 78) at the time.⁸⁵ Two reasons for this decision of *nolle prosequi* can be understood as possibilities retroactively. It is possible that Globerman was performing an act of mercy, as he may have believed that a legal battle would create undue stress for an older woman who did not have family to support her or the finances to pay for a battle. However, it is also possible that he elected to not prosecute for the simple reason of assuming that she would pass soon. If prosecution can be understood to have the dual purpose of punishing wrongdoers and creating an example so that others do not take similar actions in the future, the act of prosecuting Elizabeth would have little purpose. She did not have the funds to pay the fine and more importantly, in public conception, she had no kin who would be in a similar enough legal position to be able to benefit from this type of leniency, and the dogs were gone. Because the town understood the two women to be the last of the Pequots and the reservation to be something that would die with them, it did not matter if someone could keep a dog legally on the reservation without a license if the reservation would not exist within a few years.

The Return of Alice Brend

The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation History page lists Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin as, “the only residents of the Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Indian Reservation for most of the 1960’s and 1970’s.” “They are the ones who receive acknowledgement for having “inspired generations of Pequots to continue advocating for their Tribe and Reservation.”⁸⁶ Yet, a

⁸⁵ “Dog License Charges Dropped,” *The New London Day*, April 6, 1968, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-dog-license-charges-dropped/183174357/>.

⁸⁶ “Elizabeth George-Plouffe & Martha ‘Matt’ Langevin.”

third woman lived down the road in the same era in a trailer that she herself had moved there. Alice Brend (née Langevin), the half-sister of Elizabeth George Plouffe and the sister of Matt Langevin, had also been born and raised on the reservation at Mashantucket.⁸⁷ Alice grew up on overseer-controlled provisions, supplementarily hunted deer and squirrel, and carried a lack of hope for change that came with understanding Pequot identity to “bringing only poverty and prejudice.”⁸⁸ At least, that was the understanding of her early Pequot childhood printed in the *Hartford Courant* in 1994.

Alice had a childhood and young life that was traditional for the town of Ledyard in some ways. She attended Cider Hill School, where she had experiences like winning the fifty-yard dash in 1919.⁸⁹ When she graduated from high school in 1921, she spoke at her graduation, reading an essay titled, “Why Go to High School.”⁹⁰ Alice was married twice, to Joseph Guevremont, then Carl Brend. Her first marriage, to Joseph Guevremont, began August 21, 1923.⁹¹ Alice and her first husband, Joseph Guevremont, had their daughter, Regina Kirchner in 1924, when Alice was 19, with their son, Joseph Brend, Junior, the following year. Both were raised on the reservation in their youngest years and they attended the Cider Mill School, as their mother had.⁹² However, Alice and her children were abandoned by Joseph in 1929.⁹³

⁸⁷ “Alice Brend’s Trailer” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁸⁸ Hilary Waldman, “A New Life for a Forgotten People,” *Hartford Courant*, May 22, 1994, <https://www.courant.com/1994/05/22/a-new-life-for-a-forgotten-people/>.

⁸⁹ “Ledyard School Has Graduation,” *The New London Day*, June 12, 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-ledyard-school-has-graduation/183174948/>.

⁹⁰ “Gales Ferry,” *The New London Day*, June 11, 1921, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-gales-ferry/183175136/>.

⁹¹ “Alleges Desertion in Petition for Divorce,” *The New London Day*, July 20, 1935, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-alleges-desertion-in-petition-fo/183175380/>.

⁹² “Alice Kirchner Obituary,” *Norwich Bulletin*, April 23, 2010, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/norwichbulletin/name/alice-kirchner-obituary?id=21743613>.

⁹³ “Alice Kirchner Obituary.”

Without Joseph, Alice was forced to consider alternative means of financial survival for herself and her children. In 1933, Gilbert S. Raymond, the Pequot overseer, indicated in his records that the tribe was entitled to \$5,409.29, with which to support the nine members currently living on the reservation, including Alice and her two children. However, the records from the overseers were rife with misinformation, being inaccurate in facts of the reservation as easily verifiable as the housing available at Mashantucket.⁹⁴ Having lived through a childhood purportedly supported by the overseers, Alice knew that this support was not something to rely on. As a child, Alice's mother had received rotten provisions of salt pork and beans in the place of their entitled monthly payment of \$6.50.⁹⁵ The system of overseers was abolished by 1935, but the state's administration of the finances of the tribe continued under the control of the State Park and Forest Commission, then the Commissioner of Welfare, and Alice remained skeptical of each.⁹⁶

In the 1930s, it became clear that work would not come to Alice at Mashantucket and the payments from the overseers would not suffice, and resultantly, she would be unable to support her family there. The family packed up and traveled down Route 214 to a new life, away from the reservation. They settled ten miles Southeast, in Norwich, Connecticut.⁹⁷ While there, Alice sought a divorce from her husband by the superior court of divorce in June 1935. Having had to raise her children for six years by herself, she also sought custody of Regina and Joseph.⁹⁸ She

⁹⁴ "Judge Allyn L. Brown Enters Five Orders Governing Two Tribes of Pequot Indians," *The New London Day*, June 19, 1933, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-judge-allyn-l-brown/140773595/>.

⁹⁵ Waldman, "A New Life for a Forgotten People."

⁹⁶ "Life at Mashantucket: 1900-Present" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁹⁷ "Pequots Off the Reservation" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

⁹⁸ "Alleges Desertion in Petition for Divorce."

received both in December under the judgement of Judge Allyn Brown.⁹⁹ Alice began to do domestic work for a number of White, Norwich households in order to support her young family as its sole provider.¹⁰⁰ Alice remarried in November 1940. Her new husband, Carl Brend, was a Norwich-based second hand dealer.¹⁰¹ She and her children, still young, took on his name. Their new family member proved to be a dangerous one when charges of misconduct against an 11 year old girl were brought against him in 1946.¹⁰² Though the children attended the local Norwich Free Academy and received the education of the dominant culture in the 1940s, Alice continued to instruct them on Pequot history and culture, including the traditional art of Pequot basketmaking.

Her practice of basketmaking connected Alice's family to their heritage and culture across generations. Alice had learned from her mother, and Alice's own mother, Martha Hoxie, had learned Pequot basketmaking from hers, Jane Wheeler. The learning of the practice involved instruction in the art of weaving splints of wood into baskets, but also the selection of black ash and oak wood with which to make these baskets. Martha believed that despite being present in much of New England, the best materials could only be found in one place. When she sought out pieces of black ash for basketmaking, she took it from "where [her] mother used to go and get them, right on this reservation."¹⁰³ The art of Pequot basketmaking provided a cultural link to Mashantucket, as well as a constant reason to return to the reservation. Because the materials with which to craft were best there, an expert basketweaver, as Martha had raised Alice to be,

⁹⁹ "Judge Brown Gives Three Divorces," *The New London Day*, December 24, 1935, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183177191/>.

¹⁰⁰ "Jane Wheeler and Martha Hoxie Pequot Basketmakers" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Howard E. Rogers, "Montville," *The New London Day*, November 12, 1940, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183178075/>.

¹⁰² "Norwich Man Held on Morals Charge," *The New London Day*, July 30, 1946, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183178347/>.

¹⁰³ "Jane Wheeler and Martha Hoxie Pequot Basketmakers."

always had reason to return for the materials necessary for her craft. When Alice's daughter, Regina, passed in 2010, some of the most lasting impacts of her life, as described, were the baskets that she had crafted for all of the people important to her life.¹⁰⁴ In this way, she carried on the tradition of generations of her female ancestors, even in her time living away from the reservation.

As her children had children of their own, Alice maintained her role as an educator, even as her life became increasingly complicated. To her children and grandchildren, Alice provided a fundamentally different understanding of what it meant to be Pequot than the description of suffering that was assigned to her in the *Hartford Courant*. Her grandchildren knew of their history through her experiences. Bruce Kirchner, grandson of Alice, learned much under her tutelage that he would have no way of knowing without her, having grown up in predominantly non-Native communities: "My grandmother instilled in me a sense of history, as far as the tribe goes. I learned things from my grandmother that weren't taught in school, weren't well known, or even talked about in the neighborhoods I lived in. How to make baskets, plants that could be used as medicine. Who lived here, what the people were like. What was done to them."¹⁰⁵

Though the *Hartford Courant* publication certainly was incorrect on its statement of what it meant to Alice to be Pequot, Bruce's narration of Alice's lessons make it clear that it was not taken lightly to be a Pequot person and the very act of existing as Pequot was an act that meant something radical, in the context of what they had survived up to that point. Bruce separated the pieces of knowledge that define what it meant to be a pequot into three distinct categories in his phrasing.

¹⁰⁴ "Alice Kirchner Obituary."

¹⁰⁵ "Alice Brend's Trailer."

He stated that being a Pequot was a matter of performing the physical practice of the culture. As numbers of Pequot people decreased, Pequots were forced to diversify their practitioners of cultural norms in order to maximize the number of possible carriers of knowledge that would pass the culture along to the next generation. Increasingly, Pequot people were taught elements of the culture outside of that which someone with their combination of identities would have known historically. Bruce, as a man, would not historically have had a place among Pequot basketweavers, as the making of baskets was perceived as a feminine project.¹⁰⁶ Even in the previous generation, Elizabeth, Matt, and Alice were instructed in basketweaving by their mother, while their brother, Amos, was not included in these lessons. The escalating dispersal of so much of the reservation meant that they could no longer afford to segregate knowledge by gender as was previously done. In much the same way that Bruce took on basketweaving as a man, Matt stepped into traditionally masculine roles on the reservation when no men were present to fill them, in behaving as a hunter. Across the diaspora, small families of Pequots had fewer individuals to fulfill each role and as a result, they were forced to adapt and learn the skills that others would have known in a larger group where individuals could afford to specialize in certain skills with the knowledge that others would do the same.

Healing of serious conditions would have also historically been restricted to a certain class of people. Rather than this separation being a gendered one, healing was done by the elderly and the sacred: a single older individual who was regarded as a spiritual leader, known as the Powwaw. Though herbs were used in lower stakes situations requiring healing, and this class of healing was not restricted based on gender, age, or status, it was only the Powwaw, who specialized in the use of “herbs, smoke and breath,” who could draw out illnesses of a more

¹⁰⁶ “Jane Wheeler and Martha Hoxie Pequot Basketmakers.”

serious nature. This was assisted by non-sacred individuals in the tribe who participated in song and prayer, but this was all done under the guidance and expertise of the Powwaw.¹⁰⁷

The type of medicine taught to Bruce by his grandmother was not made specific in wording. It would not necessarily have been restricted to only the lower stakes levels of healing. In instructing a grandchild on the use of herbs to heal illness, it is implied that one expects the child to be alone when they must heal. One also expects that this knowledge will follow their line, so only the knowledge that an individual has learned in their own childhood from their own elders (in a case where they will likely not meet any additional knowledge-holders as they age) will be transmitted to their children and grandchildren for their own times of need in the future. The range required of this preparation then must span both the herbal remedy side of healing, which would have not been a change for a child to be made aware, to the spiritual side of healing required by complex and serious maladies.

This range cannot be established as a binary of serious healing as compared to the more accessible, purely herbal side of healing, as even the widely known and understood herbal remedies were done with the knowledge that one was being healed by the “spiritual forces that inhabited [the herbs],” rather than the herbs by themselves.¹⁰⁸ All types of healing practiced by the Pequot people were spiritual in nature. As sicknesses operate along a spectrum of seriousness, so too must types of healing. The result of this was a democratization of healing knowledge and an increased awareness of a wider range of herbal healing practices among the youth, as educated by elders like Alice, as compared to what they might have earlier been culturally allowed to understand.

¹⁰⁷ “The Powwaw” (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ “Pequot Medicine.”

The second class of knowledge as described by Bruce Kirchner was knowledge relating to identity. In learning about the people that lived on the land and what they were like as a part of an education in being a Pequot, one learned about their predecessors. To learn about oneself required knowledge of those who came before. However, the phrasing of this selection of knowledge implies to some extent that the prior Pequot people were understood as a somewhat separate group of people from the contemporary Pequot people, and a group whose way of being could not easily be returned to. To be a Pequot was then defined by knowing that you could not fully live life as a Pequot would or should have lived. The reason for such separation was given last in Bruce's list of what it meant to be Pequot, as a third class of knowledge. To be a Pequot according to Alice was, in part, about understanding and carrying with you the violence and harms that were performed upon and that had not stopped being performed upon the Pequot people. "What was done to them," is a neutral phrasing in that it does not directly speak to the results of what was done. However, what is directly said in this statement is that the Pequots were unable to stop what was done to them.

As Regina and Gary grew up and left her and her husband behind, Alice gained more freedom of movement, though her freedom was not a peaceful one. Having married, she and her husband did not settle in a single location. When her sister, Flora, passed, Flora's obituary established Alice to be living in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1962.¹⁰⁹ However, by 1964, her husband had returned to Connecticut, where he acted as Auctioneer at Carl Brend's Antique Shop.¹¹⁰ Alice must have followed, but she did not stay at the Norwich shop for long. The pair had moved to Groton by 1964. Beginning to use her maiden name once more (in doing so,

¹⁰⁹ James McKenna, "Mrs. Stenhouse Dies in 68th Year," *The New London Day*, June 19, 1962, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/182654944/>.

¹¹⁰ "Auctions," *The New London Day*, November 10, 1962, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183178915/>.

providing an additional tether to her family at Mashantucket), Alice sought legal separation from Carl on the grounds of cruelty.¹¹¹ By herself, Alice traveled back to Mashantucket along Route 214, in then Ledyard, Connecticut, the road she had once taken to leave the reservation behind.

In 1969, Alice reunited with her sisters and set up permanent residence on a section of land that the town of Ledyard claimed was theirs, but that she knew to be Indian land.¹¹² Alice matched her sisters' dedication to the reservation immediately, joining Elizabeth's call to "Hold onto the land." Though she had planned to use the lumber from the cottage that she had lived in during her first marriage to build a new home, she was forced to pivot after a fire made this unfeasible. When an opportunity arose to purchase a trailer to live in as alternative housing, she took it and transported it to the reservation, then parked it in the middle of a road branching off from Route 214, Shewville Road.¹¹³ The road was a seldom-used dirt road; one grandchild, Charlene Jones, recalled creating a tennis court in the middle of the road to play with her family on as a child without interruption.¹¹⁴

The trailer did not pose a logistics problem, due to the low traffic Route 214 experienced, but it did act as a direct challenge to the authority of the state and the town in regulating Indigenous land usage. Reunited with her home and her sisters, it mattered little to Alice that the local authorities demanded a \$100 fine for each day that the trailer remained on the road. Just as Elizabeth had engaged in a legal battle for her right to keep her dogs as she saw fit a year before, Alice now had her own battle to fight about what was and was not allowed at Mashantucket, on lands not owned by the state or town. She resolved to simply not pay the bill: "You can charge

¹¹¹ "38 File Petitions for Divorce," *The New London Day*, August 28, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/180630870/>.

¹¹² "Pequots Off the Reservation."

¹¹³ Barbara Reed, "Statements Branded Lies by Mrs. Brend," *The New London Day*, July 25, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183179380/>.

¹¹⁴ "Route 214" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

me if you want to, but I'm not paying it...If you want this bill paid, you pay it."¹¹⁵ To Alice, her right to set up her home on land she perceived as being part of Mashantucket was unquestionable. To help with her defense, she enlisted the help of an attorney in Hartford, Jerome Griner.¹¹⁶ Jerome was, at the time, a mere two years into the eventual 27 year project of demonstrating the continued presence of the Mohegan tribe in Uncasville, Connecticut, in a project that eventually led towards federal recognition.¹¹⁷

The Legal Battle to Define Land Usage

The surrounding town of Ledyard was less certain about the legality of her action or the justification that she had provided. For them, it was not a foregone conclusion that she would remain on the land, unmoved by the state. By September 30, the town, as it was reported in the *New London Day* by Stanley DeCoster, seemed certain that her removal would occur in a matter of days: "It will be approximately 10 more days before the town can force a showdown with Mrs. Alice Brend..." In Stanley DeCoster's eyes, the only barrier to her immediate removal had been an unfortunate mistake by the Zoning Enforcement Officer, Herbert A. Dalton, who had sent the order for the removal of the trailer to Alice's once husband. However, Alice and Jerome refused to act on the letter sent to Carl, who had no ownership claim to the trailer, and thus, no say on what would happen to it. They forced another order to be sent to Alice, while also beginning to piece together a legal argument of discrimination. The town of Ledyard denied the claim of discrimination, and argued that trailers were not to be placed anywhere within the town limits as a rule of zoning.¹¹⁸ However, when the question raised was not of what would be

¹¹⁵ "Alice Brend's Trailer."

¹¹⁶ Stanley DeCoster, "Indian Reservation Showdown Days Away," *The New London Day*, September 30, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183183561/>.

¹¹⁷ "Jerome Griner," *Hartford Courant*, April 16, 2005, <https://www.courant.com/obituaries/jerome-griner-west-hartford-ct/>.

¹¹⁸ DeCoster, "Indian Reservation Showdown Days Away."

tolerated in Ledyard, but what would be done in Mashantucket, the town did not have the final say.

Alice's legal battle gained supporters outside Mashantucket. John C. Goodrich, a resident of Mystic with no connection to Mashantucket, was one of several who came to see the matter as a case of not "special treatment, but one of simple justice." In a letter to the editor in *The New London Day* on September 26, John wrote of a new "Indian War" between Alice and Ledyard as a continued failing of Ledyard to fulfill its "moral debt in land, blood, agony and tears that can never possibly be repaid." Much like Alice herself, he understood the question to be whether or not she could do as she liked on reservation land, a place where Ledyard no longer had ultimate control. He used Alice's situation to illustrate the usefulness of mobile homes in general, as an cost-effective alternative to the conventional housing options which were out of reach of many. He argued for the ability of people to use these homes without any hindrance from the unjust zoning laws from past years.¹¹⁹ The Pequot nation soon made wide use of this proposed housing alternative.

This letter provided a platform for Alice herself to respond in the paper. Rather than her situation being described by an outside reporter, she herself wrote to the editor on October 9, the day that Stanley DeCoster had predicted would be the one to force her into a final confrontation with the town and off of the road permanently. She thanked John Goodrich for his letter. Rather than addressing the legal situation as a reader might have anticipated, she wrote of the atrocities of the last "Indian War" involving the Pequots, "the first and worst war ever waged against the American Indians." She wrote of the death of mothers and children in the War for Connecticut, the destruction of their homes, the displacement of the survivors, and the current state of Native

¹¹⁹ John Goodrich, "A Case of Simple Justice," *The New London Day*, September 26, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183183855/>.

people as “hangers-on in the vile alleyways of a mushroom civilization.” Her final sentence was a plea for equal citizenship under the Constitution of American Indians. Her response was not one of desperation, but a clear statement of past violence at the hands of the state, offered as a parallel to the proposed destruction of her home and the subsequent displacement that was sure to follow if the zoning laws were enforced against her.¹²⁰

She had no need for desperation, as a full nine days later, her home remained on Shewville Road. Stanley DeCoster once more reported on her continued presence. With the deadline long passed, town officials elected to not take action for another two weeks against her. Herbert Dalton, the officer who had ordered the removal, was confined to the hospital with pneumonia. No other official rose in his place against Alice, choosing to wait for his return to point them in a direction of action. Alice and Jerome Griner did not wait for his return to take action however; they had decided that, “the mobile home will not be removed and the case may have to be settled in court.”¹²¹ By November 10, Herbert Dalton (freshly recovered from his pneumonia) and the town of Ledyard had come to the same conclusion of the necessity of a legal battle. Dalton presumed success, as did a new author for the *New London Day*, Barbara Reed, whose piece argued that a legal battle would bring that conclusion to the saga that much of the town had been expecting: “The alternative now is to take the matter to court and ‘have the regulations enforced by the court.’” With the trailer having been stationary for 2 months, still without an occupancy permit, the Zoning Ordinance of 1963 enabled the town to begin threatening Alice with a daily fine of \$250 for her willful violation. Attorney Orrin Silverberg,

¹²⁰ Alice Brend, “What the American Indians Want,” *The New London Day*, October 9, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183184033/>.

¹²¹ Stanley DeCoster, “Action Delayed on Reservation Mobile Home,” *The New London Day*, October 18, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183184179/>.

speaking for the town of Ledyard, continued to deny the case as being one of discrimination.¹²² Still, Alice's suit was rapidly becoming one of local interest. The article's final line announced that Official Dalton and Attorney Silverberg would be meeting that afternoon to decide on their course of action. Rather than push back the news another week, it was reported on as an urgent update. Also importantly, Alice Brend was no longer referred to as a neutral, undescribed woman, but as a Pequot Indian in name. By her refusal to conform to the town's will, she became marked by it as a distinctly outside actor. In doing so, the paper affirmed her cause and her connection to the reservation. In no future updates did it consider her neutrally again.

November marked the start of the fracturing of the state in its opposition to Alice's residence. The newspapers still insisted that a settlement was surely soon to come and that the case was "finally nearing decision." In a formal legal action, Herbert Dalton swore an affidavit and filed it with the Circuit Court Prosecuting Attorney Harold Dean.¹²³ By December, a new warrant was created to be delivered to Alice, but it never arrived. Though the "last remaining step was the serving of the arrest warrant," State Trooper Paul Johnson failed to deliver it on the grounds that it was the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Further investigation was ordered to determine responsibility. One involved official, Chairman Thomas Vivirito, became hesitant about the legality of such a warrant when the State Welfare Department informed him that the land was owned by the state and that individuals of at least an eighth Native heritage were entitled to residence there.¹²⁴ Alice met this blood quantum according to

¹²² Barbara Reed, "Indian's Mobile Home Issue May Go to Court," *The New London Day*, November 10, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183191824/>.

¹²³ Barbara Reed, "Mobile Home Issue May Go to Court," *The New London Day*, November 22, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183191987/>.

¹²⁴ Barbara Reed, "Serving of Warrant Delayed By Unsolved Legal Questions," *The New London Day*, December 4, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183192111/>.

public opinion as shown by *The New London Day*.¹²⁵ This hesitance showed an increased belief by non-Pequot people that the land Alice chose to park her the trailer on had always been, as Alice had been sure of from the start, not land of Ledyard, but land of Mashantucket. Despite Dalton's claim that the land of Shewville Road had been ceded at the end of the nineteenth century by a single Pequot, First Selectman J. Alfred Clark noted a distinct lack of deeds giving the state ownership over the land; he concluded that this rendered Mashantucket lands the responsibility of the Health Department's jurisdiction.¹²⁶

The conclusion came down to not the legality of an action, but the designation of the land, as Ledyard or Mashantucket. A newspaper article from December 26, 1969, showed the approval of Griner on the matter of the case becoming a legal one and his equal urgency in pursuing an end to the matter. He claimed the lack of conclusion was due to himself and the Ledyard town attorney "missing each other" in terms of trying to contact each other.¹²⁷ Ambiguously phrased, it is unclear whether he intended to say they were missing each other in terms of scheduling meeting times, or the seemingly more probable problem that had plagued them since Alice had parked her trailer, that they were missing each other due to an understanding gap and a severe ideological separation. He and Alice had not changed their stance that the zoning laws did not apply to reservation land, after all. If anything, the discussions had only confirmed their belief that the case was a matter of constitutional rights and jurisdiction that was not regional, but national.

Despite maintaining her conviction, Alice was forced to change her strategy when her means changed. On January 21, 1970, the case was reported on in a second-page article titled,

¹²⁵ Barbara Reed, "Town-Indian Rights Battle Flares Anew," *The New London Day*, July 7, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183192316/>.

¹²⁶ Reed, "Serving of Warrant Delayed By Unsolved Legal Questions."

¹²⁷ Barbara Reed, "Indian's Trailer Poses a Problem," *The New London Day*, December 26, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183192608/>.

“Pequot Indian Case Won’t Go to Court.” Though the other pieces had been hidden in the late pages of the newspapers, in regional news and letters to the editor, news on the case was becoming important to the town. Griner had written to Silverberg stating that Alice no longer had the “means to retain legal counsel” and believed that as a single beneficiary, she should not have to pay attorney fees. Griner resultantly pulled back from his previous stance about the necessity of legal action. Ernest H Halstedt, assistant attorney general, was contacted, in order to obtain action from the State Welfare Department within its role as the overseer of Indian Affairs, in order to settle the problem of the trailer without court action.

Following a silence in the case for just over six months (as Alice temporarily left for Florida and Japan), Alice debuted a new strategy for receiving approval for her home. On July 7, Alice reported that she had returned from her absence “to straighten things out.” Rather than just living in the trailer, as she had in the previous winter, she made active attempts to shape it into a more permanent home. Having tried and failed to obtain a permit for installing a septic system on more than one occasion, Alice was undeterred: “They’re trying to discriminate against me, drive me off, and stop me from having health facilities. I’m going to have them if I have to dig the hole myself.” She had also not stopped her correspondence with Griner on the legal side of her battle, despite being unable to pay him. Dalton continued his visits to inform her of her violations, but eventually ceded control of the case to Silverberg and the state Welfare Department, who unsuccessfully continued to attempt to remove the trailer.¹²⁸

Alice persisted but officials continued to fatigue in their fight against her. They stepped away for vacations in July. By July 24, Daniel Czuk, an official of Indian Affairs in the State Department of Welfare was her newest opponent. Czuk cited a new complaint against her, that she would have been only permitted to live there if she signed a written agreement and installed

¹²⁸ Reed, “Town-Indian Rights Battle Flares Anew.”

a septic tank and well, both of which remained undone. No acknowledgement was made in this piece of her continued attempts to obtain these developments in the months between January and July. Czuk however, did believe that the land by deed belonged to the Pequots. His new reason for why she could not continue to live there was that the Pequot Indian tribe “no longer exists.”¹²⁹

Czuk’s claim against the existence of the tribe did not prove to be very successful, considering that the papers had been referring to Alice as a member of the tribe for more than half a year at this point. Only a day later, Alice responded to the “untruths” of Czuk. Her response contained both rebuttal to his invalidation of the existence of the tribe and resultantly, his attempt to erase her own identity, and a continuation of her attempt to establish her claim to her residence. These points were connected through her statement that she “was born and raised on an Indian reservation.”¹³⁰ Through establishing her connection to the reservation, she argued that the tribe very much did still exist. Still, the reality that the speaker for the Connecticut Department of Welfare, which had been given responsibility for oversight of the tribe in 1941, could be public in his disbelief of the tribe’s persistence was indicative of the degree to which the Pequots were believed to be gone even as they continually asserted their presence.

Alice Brend denied that any agreement relating to a septic system had ever been made and further, that the creation of a septic system for her trailer had been a goal she had been pursuing until she was refused a permit. She shared with the public her original plans for a cottage and her turn to a trailer on short notice in the interest of remaining on the land that she

¹²⁹ Barbara Reed, “Decision on Trailer Still Pending,” *The New London Day*, July 24, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183192842/>.

¹³⁰ Reed, “Statements Branded Lies by Mrs. Brend.”

had been born and raised on.¹³¹ Still, she had not given up on turning the trailer into a feasible permanent home.

December 31 was the day that Ledyard reported having lost its legal battle to Alice. In a second symbolic victory for the tribe, Ledyard's champion, Herbert Dalton, announced his resignation from his post. The land itself was no longer eligible for dispute about ownership, as the trailer rested on part of a tract of seven acres returned to the Pequots in the later half of the year. Having constructed a sub-surface sewage system and a driven well, Alice was in accordance with state health codes. Silverberg, having lost control of the case as the Ledyard attorney reported only confusion: "[The state Welfare Department] have indicated on several occasions that they were going to have Mrs. Brend leave the premises. They haven't done that. Why, I don't know."¹³² The year 1970 was the last one where Alice had to fight for her presence. Though she continued to have to defend the land against state imposition as her sisters did in the years leading up to and during her fight, she was able to remain with them, on her family's land, for the next few years until their deaths.

Alice was the first Pequot to truly return to the reservation. She won her legal battle and remained in her trailer. Forced to move away from her family in her young adulthood and assimilate into nearby White society to some degree in order to survive financially, Alice's story reflects many that were experienced in the years after her arrival. She maintained her culture privately in practice and belief amongst herself, her children, and her grandchildren. Once she understood a return to Mashantucket to be possible, she acted. In a multi-year long battle that spanned town, state, and federal jurisdictions, she fought for her right to safe and permanent housing. For later residents of Mashantucket, trailers were also sites of life, for the simple reason

¹³¹ Reed, "Statements Branded Lies by Mrs. Brend."

¹³² Barbara Reed, "Stalemate Remains in Controversy Over Trailer on Indian Property," *The New London Day*, December 31, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day/183193048/>.

that the Homestead of Elizabeth George Plouffe was the only house left standing and more could not be produced immediately, particularly without funding. In laying the groundwork for the placement of these mobile homes to be legal, Alice enabled more people to come back with the knowledge that some form of housing existed that they would not have to constantly fight for.

Alice's return was not a simple and easy one but one that required monumental amounts of effort and sacrifice; she ran out of the funds to even maintain an attorney to assist her in her battle against Ledyard far before the battle finished. As opposition changed speakers constantly and new jurisdictions tried to remove her from the land that she had claimed, only Alice remained firm in her actions and their justifications. Her actions speak to a deep base of personal identity that motivated her actions at every step. Speaking on the significance of Alice's return after the revitalization of the tribe, her daughter argued that this battle and its victory served as all the proof that the tribe needed that a larger victory against the encroachment of the town and its culture was still possible: "I think my mother coming here and settling was an indication that maybe the tribe *could* come back and be together."¹³³

The Pequots Who Could Not Yet Return

Yet, not all who moved away from the reservation were able to return, in either body or recognition. Though many settled in the surrounding towns, others who had tribal connections to the Narragansett people moved to Rhode Island and began to increasingly identify with that portion of their culture. Living in a pan-Indian neighborhood of rented and boarded homes in Westerly, with Eastern Pequot, Narragansett, Montauk, Wampanoag, and Nipmuc family, and joining associations like the American Indian Federation based in Westerly, many identified with

¹³³ "Alice Brend's Trailer."

being Indigenous over being specifically Pequot.¹³⁴ Others, especially those who wanted to distance themselves from their existence as Pequot and the struggles that came with that identity, moved as far as New York City or beyond.¹³⁵ For all, “life was about getting by while staying connected to the land and each other.”¹³⁶ The degree to which they had to distance themselves from being Pequots in order to survive in a non-Pequot world was the variable that existed between people. For those who moved away, it was not irregular for them to join communities with many Pequots in order to maintain their relationships, as the Pequots who gathered at the Ledyard Baptist Church did.¹³⁷ Many followed the precedent set by the wider American Indian Movement beginning in 1968, which united urban Indigenous communities across the entire United States. Having moved to cities off of reservations due to the financial necessity that was increasingly existing in the United States, as the Pequot people had, many people experienced extreme emotional and physical separation from their communities, who were not guaranteed to have settled in large numbers in the same cities that they had. Building community in churches, community centers, and universities, Indigenous people were united by shared experiences and by critiques of American identity and its place in the wider world that were incomprehensible to non-Native neighbors without such experiences.¹³⁸ One Indigenous activist, LaNada Boyer, described the comfort taken in the presence of community with any other Native people, “We began our new lives in the cities, socializing primarily with our own people. On the reservations,

¹³⁴ “An Urban Indian Neighborhood” (Wall Panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998); “Staying Connected: Our Tribal Identity and the American Indian Federation” (Wall Panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

¹³⁵ “Life Off the Reservation.”

¹³⁶ “Push and Pull of Pequot Life” (Wall Panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

¹³⁷ “Push and Pull of Pequot Life.”

¹³⁸ Alexandre Guilherme da Cruz Alves. “The Alcatraz Occupation and the American Indian Movement, 1969–1971,” *The Journal of American History* 111, no. 4 (2025): 738–739. doi:10.1093/jahist/jaae269.

it was easy to divide Indians against Indians; but in a major city, we are so glad to see other Indians, we don't care what tribe they are. They are natives, and that's all that counts.”¹³⁹

Though half-sisters Matt Langevin and Elizabeth George Plouffe maintained their presence, and Alice Brend maintained identity until she too could reside at Mashantucket, other family members who were born on the reservation lived and died off of it, often in spite of their desires and their hopes to return one day. For Eunice Mitchell's father, believing that he would one day return was a necessity. Having kept a wall of boxes in their house for years for the day when they would move back home, he refused to accept the possibility of life away from home forever. Yet, at the time of his death, Eunice stated that the boxes had never been used and he had never managed his return.¹⁴⁰

Flora Elsie George Steinhouse was born at Mashantucket in 1894. She moved away and lived in nearby Mystic, Connecticut, and became a part of the Westerly congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. She passed at 67, on June 18, 1962, with no children and her husband having passed four years prior. The *New London Day* published her obituary, in which her Native identity was recognized in only a single line: “She was a descendent of Scattaup, last chief of the Pequot Indians.”¹⁴¹ This was an interesting claim of erasure, as the newspaper also proclaimed her survived by her two siblings, two of whom the author claimed to live in Ledyard. This usage of this place name, the same one used to refer to her birthplace (which must have been Mashantucket, as this is where her parents resided and birthed all of her siblings) shows an attempt to erase the continuous 213 acres that were still labeled as Mashantucket in this period.

¹³⁹ LaNada Boyer. “Reflections of Alcatraz,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (January 1, 1994): 88. <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.18.4.w702677000p21x30>.

¹⁴⁰ “Pequots Off the Reservation.”

¹⁴¹ McKenna, “Mrs. Stenhouse Dies in 68th Year.”

Worse, for a fifth sibling, Amos Everett George, his 1967 *New London Day* obituary did not include any reference at all to any Pequot ancestry. It did also place him in the broader town of Ledyard at the time of his birth in 1882 and connect him as a sibling to “Liza” Plouffe and Martha Langevin, both of “Ledyard,” as well as Alice Brend in Norwich, but this information, as in the case of Flora, does not actually reflect the truth of his birth or his family in excluding recognition of their real home place and community. Amos’ life in his obituary was reduced to his residence in Simsbury, Connecticut (sixty miles from his birthplace), his work as a conservationist, and his descendants.¹⁴² Though he lived on non-Pequot land for much of his life and was buried there, as well, he pursued work as a conservationist for many years, showing a continued attachment to the land that could have originated from the cultural value of land protection that he was raised with. However, Amos was denied the honor of being listed as even a “descendent” in his obituary, as his younger sister, Flora, was. In a context where whiteness was the presumption, as it was in the towns of Ledyard and Simsbury, the result was that Amos was perceived to be part of this majority. Though descendency from an erased line is also inaccurate to the family’s continued presence, any acknowledgement at all would have been better than the neutral obituary that he received, as without a racial indicator, readers likely presumed him white, or at the very least, not Indigenous.

Amos’ burial and funeral both took place in his town of residence, sixty miles from his place of birth.¹⁴³ Amos’ obituary ensured that he was not remembered as Pequot in his immediate geographic community and that any Pequots seeing his obituary did not know that he was a family member that should be mourned. Due to this physical distance and the lack of connection to his family created by his obituary, it is less likely that his Pequot family who remained at

¹⁴² “Amos E. George,” *The New London Day*, January 18, 1967, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary-for-charles-george/183193520/>.

¹⁴³ “Amos E. George.”

Mashantucket or in Southeastern Connecticut were able to mourn him in person, as they were able to do for a closer relative, such as Flora. It was not abnormal for a Pequot individual or family living off of the reservation to travel to the events of their family members at this time if they were aware of their occurrence. Remembering this period of life for the Pequots, Josh Carter spoke of the lengths that individuals often visited family:

I mean, we had a ton of stories, oral stories and written documentation, of family, you know, traveling great distances to go visit other families whether they were, you know, Schaghticoke all the way in the Northwestern portion of Connecticut or Golden Hill in the middle, the Paugussett relatives, and when you sit with what that took for those relatives in that time, to be able to make that travel? It wasn't simple.¹⁴⁴

In spite of this imposed distance, Amos Everett George is remembered at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum very differently from how he was remembered by Ledyard more broadly. Remembered as one of many who was forced off of the reservation to find work in a non-Native family, Amos worked at the estate of a Republican governor, George Payne McLean, beginning at age 11. Amos and his wife raised their children in their own house, where Amos tended a garden of crops including his favorite, strawberries, and raised his children to follow his path, down to his career at the McLean estate.¹⁴⁵ This narrative of his life acts as a parallel story of continuation with the lives of his sisters at Mashantucket, who also maintained gardens of native plants, including strawberries, and instructed their children in following these traditional ways of life.

For all the Pequots who did maintain their identity, some others were forced to give up identification as a Pequot for the sake of their reputations in the communities that they moved to. For Phyllis M. Waite, who moved to a Jewish neighborhood in New York, she wryly remarked about the cultural homogeneity in the community, "In fact, I don't think I knew that I wasn't

¹⁴⁴ Joshua Carter, oral history to Mary Clarke, August 8, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ "Life Off the Reservation."

Jewish until I was I don't know how old." Even upon realizing that her family was not Jewish, she identified with her French heritage, at first due to her mother never discussing their family history, then in the interest of minimizing the hate she might face as a result of having a Native identity: "I was getting older, I thought that it would be better if they didn't know, because I thought people looked at you differently." Similarly, another Pequot, Jo-Ann Isaac described her mother as "ashamed of who she was," resulting in her children being emotionally separated from their culture and their family. Eva Pearson recalled being reduced to "Injuns...dirty Injuns," and refusing to listen to her mother who she said would have discussed her history with her if she had been more open to it.¹⁴⁶ For the Pequot children who were born and raised away from the reservation, the amount that they identified with being Pequot was determined by their connection to their elders. For individuals like Jo-Ann Isaac and Phyllis M. Waite, Pequot identity came later in life when they were able to understand it as a less stigmatized label. However, for children like Laura Porter, active cultural Pequots shaped her identity: "I think it was through [Aunt Matt], when I was a small child, I knew I was a Pequot Indian, and I've always been proud of that."¹⁴⁷

The Erasure of Mashantucket by Ledyard

Whether consciously erased by the individual people of the surrounding town or not, memory of the tribe's presence, geographically speaking, was certainly waning by the 1960s. The obituary of Flora that erased the land of Mashantucket was written by James McKenna, a 41-year old White man from Mystic, CT. Though he had been writing as the Mystic reporter for *The New London Day*, he was likely to be as educated as any other White resident of the

¹⁴⁶ "Pequots Off the Reservation."

¹⁴⁷ "Aunt Matt's Home."

surrounding towns on the contemporary Pequot peoples in the region.¹⁴⁸ As mapmaking shifted from an individual, independent business venture to a corporate one throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Pequots stopped appearing on maps, demonstrating the wider writing of them out of the narrative of the region.

In 1846, when the reservation was still just under 1,000 acres, maps of Connecticut included the region. An 1846 map (Figure 1-2) was produced by a Philadelphia based mapmaker to chart the roads of Connecticut. It made note of several tribal presences, including the Pequots and the Mohegans. Written just under Ledyard, in smaller, italic letters, is “Pequot.” In a move that proved prophetic, the word Pequot appears crossed out by the road system. When just ten years later, the reservation was shrunk to a fifth of its 1846 size, mapmakers began to neglect its presence, collapsing its land into the single town of Ledyard.

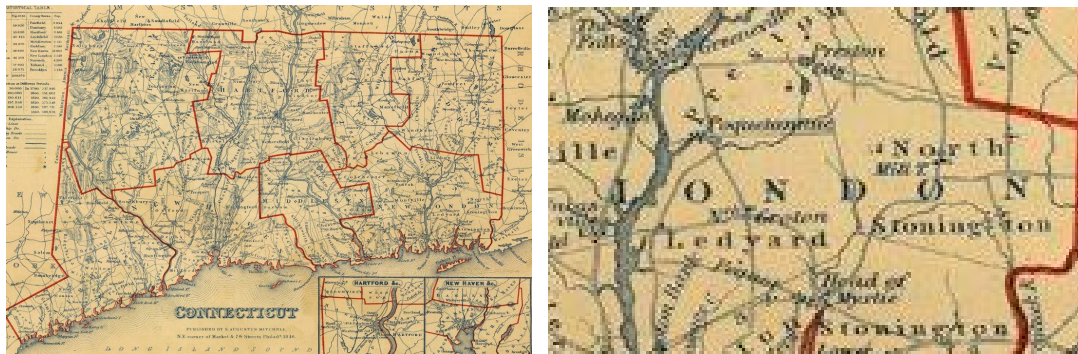


Figure 1: *Connecticut* (Philadelphia: Samuel Augustus Mitchell, 1846), a map labelling the towns and roads of Connecticut.

Figure 2: The same map, enlarged to show only the area of Ledyard and its surrounding towns.¹⁴⁹

In comparison, a map produced in 1953, after a century of land and population loss, did not make note of the presence of the Pequot people (Figures 3-4). Many of the place names from 1846 are otherwise maintained, albeit in somewhat changed places as a result of increased

¹⁴⁸ “James McKenna Obituary,” *The New London Day*, May 14, 2006, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/theday/name/james-mckenna-obituary?id=26030982>.

¹⁴⁹ Samuel Augustus Mitchell, “Connecticut,” Map, *Global Gallery*, Accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.globalgallery.com/detail/295632/mitchell-connecticut-1846>.

definition of town lines from a century of development. However, Stonington, North Stonington, Ledyard, Groton, Mystic, and Uncasville remained pieces of acknowledged Connecticut geography. In fact, in some instances, additional place names are defined, with Mystic being split into West Mystic, Mystic, and Old Mystic, and the towns of Gales Ferry, Quaker Hill, New London, and more being placed on the map. The acknowledgement of Mohegan land also remained, near Uncasville. However, Pequot was no longer placed on the map. The area around Ledyard was crowded with the place names of North Stonington, Allyns Point, and Gales Ferry, but not a single mention of the still active tribal nation was placed on the map.

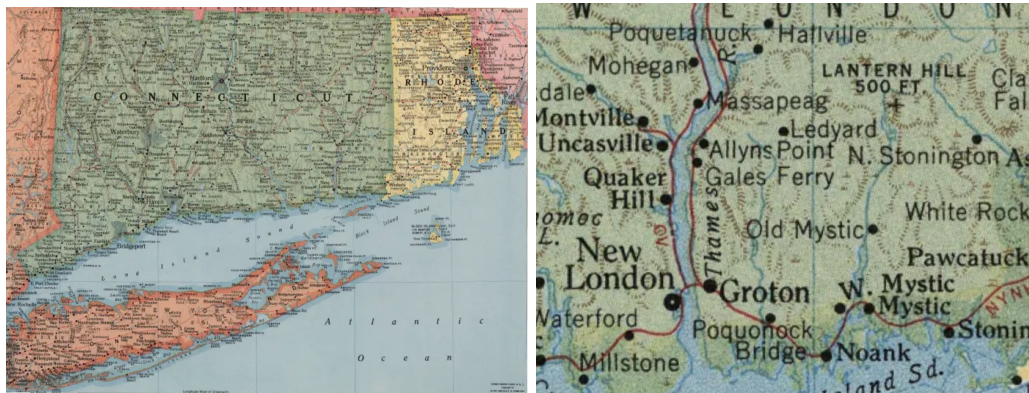


Figure 3: *Cosmo Series Conn. & R. I.* (Rand McNally & Company, U. S. A: 1953), a map labelling the towns of Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Figure 4: The same map, enlarged to show only the area of Ledyard and its surrounding towns.¹⁵⁰

The continuation of acknowledgement of Mohegan presence indicates that this was not a statement of ignorance of Native people in general, but a specific statement against the Pequot people. Mohegan had also experienced centuries of land loss, but in contrast to the continued communal ownership of land, at Mashantucket, the land of the Mohegan tribe had been subdivided amongst the Mohegan people in the 1870s. It is possible that this Americanized system of individualistically interacting with land as property made the contemporary Mohegan

¹⁵⁰ Rand McNally, "Cosmo Series Conn. & R. I.," 1953, Map, *Container Corporation of America*, https://www.oldmapsonline.org/en/Appalachian_Mountains?gid=8b6aed55-8c32-536f-a6f4-9bc2c9f1fc78#position=11.1708/40.5927/-71.2598&year=1953.

people appear more legitimate (at least in terms of their right to land) in the eyes of non-Native people who did not understand the system of communal land usage at a more traditional reservation, like the one at Mashantucket.¹⁵¹ Such individual ways of managing land were also taken as a sign of assimilation into the dominant American culture. Still, the greater state of Connecticut did not doubt the presence of Mohegan land as they did for the Pequot reservation.

Who Was Left?

Elizabeth passed away in 1973. Unlike many of her Pequot family members, and despite her multiracial heritage, she was cited by the *New London Day* as the “oldest living Pequot Indian on the Ledyard Indiantown Reservation.” With her husband, Arthur, gone, she was survived only by her sisters, Matt Langevin and Alice Brend, and her children and grandchildren.¹⁵² With the latter survivors living off of the reservation, the state now believed it had one less woman to outlast. When Matt died in 1978, she was claimed to have only been survived by Alice.¹⁵³ Where Elizabeth had been spoken of as a Pequot living on the reservation, Matt was just a resident of “Shewville Road.” In the eyes of the state, the tribe had already ceased to exist when Elizabeth left Matt and Alice alone.

However, what had been forgotten was that Elizabeth’s and Alice’s children and grandchildren might still have some stake in the lands and the culture that was so carefully preserved by Elizabeth, Matt, and Alice after all, and that as established in the paper, “they retain their tribal rights to the land no matter where they live.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Fowler, “Indians Make Last Fight - - For Survival.”

¹⁵² “Elizabeth Plouffe,” *The New London Day*, June 8, 1973,
<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary-for-langevin-plouffe/140789917/>.

¹⁵³ “Martha Langevin,” *The New London Day*, May 15, 1978,
<https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-day-obituary-for-martha-ann-langevin/140788866/>.

¹⁵⁴ Fowler, “Indians Make Last Fight - - For Survival.”

Chapter 2: Obtaining Sovereignty Through Conceptions of Home

There's just something in them, in the Indian, that wants to go home. It's deep rooted. The blood, heart and sweat of our ancestors are in the soil. If someone doesn't do something about it in each generation, it will be lost forever.¹⁵⁵

After having spent his childhood on and off on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation and uprooting his adult life to return to the reservation once more, to pursue the same development and change that his grandmother and great aunts had devoted their lives to, Skip Hayward's statement about the inherent drive of Pequot people and Indigenous people in general reflected a deep personal experience of attachment to land and family history. However, it also showed the precarity of Indigenous experience and identity, especially in relation to how that identity was connected to land. As the Pequots migrated back to the Mashantucket Pequot reservation in the years following the death of Elizabeth George Plouffe, they attempted to improve the circumstances of life there, in terms of legal position, financial opportunity, and quality of life, at each point receiving resistance from state and federal entities, as well as non-Native residents of neighboring Connecticut towns.

Later depictions of the time period released by the Mashantucket Pequot stated that, "From the 1930s to the 1970s, Mashantucket was the place untouched by time."¹⁵⁶ Though these forty years were not in fact as uniform as this quote suggested, the 1970s were indeed the decade that marked the sharpest change in Pequot life in recent history. In a push for change ushered in by the death of one of Mashantucket's last history-keepers, Elizabeth George Plouffe, in 1973, a family moved back to the reservation at Mashantucket, originally from the surrounding areas of Connecticut and the broader Northeastern United States, then began seeking the financial independence from state and federal support and the federal recognition that would allow the

¹⁵⁵ Tom Connery, "Pequots Have Visions for Land..." *The New London Day*, June 25, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970056591/>.

¹⁵⁶ "The Homestead."

reservation to become livable for the other family members that they anticipated the arrival of in the future. Many of their cultural developments at this time were enacted through political or economic means, as it was these developments that were most essential to make life livable for future Pequots. In the early twentieth century, there was a movement away from the Mashantucket Pequot reservation for reasons including the lack of jobs available on the reservation, the discomfort of housing on the reservation, and most of all, the harsh interactions with the government that made reservation life untenable. The years of first return to Mashantucket saw individuals attempt to resolve each of these problems in order to make life possible long-term on the reservation for future Pequots, even while living in the discomfort of such conditions themselves for just under a decade.

Indigenous-Federal Relationships from the Constitution to The Twentieth Century

Recognition of tribes in the United States as autonomous, self-governing entities with certain rights and responsibilities existed only theoretically for much of the twentieth century. Historically, recognition of Indigenous nations came from agreements that existed between specific tribes and the federal government, in a manner very different from that which evolved in the twentieth century. Recognition was not awarded bureaucratically but by treaty. However, they were still taken as serious acknowledgments of the sovereignty of Native nations, though in a limited sense. As the United States extended its bounds, some of these relationships were strained by the federal government. In the 1970s and 1980s, federal Indian policy saw a shift towards reenabling tribal sovereignty by legal means. Of the acts that impacted the Mashantucket Pequot people of Connecticut in the last three decades of the twentieth century, one of the most foundational was Public Law No: 93-638, or the Indian Self-Determination and Education

Assistance Act, formally decided on January 4, 1975, after just two years of discussion in the Senate. It was summarized as follows:

To provide maximum Indian participation in the Government and education of the Indian people; to provide for the full participation of Indian tribes in programs and services conducted by the Federal Government for Indians and to encourage the development of human resources of the Indian people; to establish a program of assistance to upgrade Indian education; to support the right of Indian citizens to control their own educational activities; and for other purposes.¹⁵⁷

In its more complete version, its wording was both liberating from federal control in permitting Native tribes to escape the “domination of Indian service providers,” and also paternalistic in continuing to insist upon a relationship between the Native people and the federal government that gave some strength to the former power in their interactions, but only for those tribes that were able to justify to the federal government that they had earned that privileged status: those that were “recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians...”¹⁵⁸ However, despite the goal of the act being the end of “domination” by such providers, it did not eliminate the domination that the Pequots or other Indigenous peoples of the United States experienced. Instead, it created a definition of Indigeneity that only it could make judgments around, therefore enabling its ultimate domination of Indigenous identity, and the resultant protections that the people of a tribe were entitled to.

This decision continued a pattern demonstrated by a court case that had been decided a year previously. In *Morton v. Mancari*, in 1974, a plaintiff in New Mexico who was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who did not identify as an Indigenous American, sued the organization for being racially discriminatory in their hiring, for their preference to hire

¹⁵⁷ *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act*, Public Law 93-638, 93rd Cong. (1975).
<https://www.congress.gov/93/statute/STATUTE-88/STATUTE-88-Pg2203.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act*.

Indigenous people. Though he found New Mexico courts sympathetic to his claim, the Supreme Court reversed the decision and declared that the hiring preference was not on racial grounds but a criterion derived from the applicants' abilities to respond to the needs of those that the organization served. In doing so, the Court set a precedent of separating Indigenous identity from racial identity; "In this case, the Supreme Court interpreted 'American Indians' as a legal, not a racial category."¹⁵⁹

On June 1, 1978, The Bureau of Indian Affairs published a standardized procedure for determining the federal recognition status of the tribes and nations in the United States, especially for those who had never previously been recognized by treaty.¹⁶⁰ It was specifically concerned with defining the separation between an "Indian Group" and an "Indian tribe" and establishing the bureaucratic way that one could move between such labels, as a reaction to an increased number of recognition requests arising at the time. It set the standard that to be an Indian tribe, a group must possess evidence of "one or more" of the following:

(1) Repeated identification by Federal authorities; (2) Longstanding relationships with State governments based on identification of the group as Indian; (3) Repeated dealings with a county, parish, or other local government in a relationship based on the group's Indian identity; (4) Identification as an Indian entity by records in courthouses, churches, or schools; (5) Identification as an Indian entity by anthropologists, historians, or other scholars; (7) Repeated identification and dealings as an Indian entity with recognized Indian tribes or national Indian organizations.

These qualities were required to be continuous since first contact and accompanied by constant proof, in the form of records of population in specific areas, proof of political influence, a governing document, and a list of membership consistent with federal standards for Indian citizenship, as proven by descendency rolls, state or federal records, enrollment at churches or

¹⁵⁹ Joanne Barker. "Recognition," *American Studies* 46, no. 3/4 (2005): 147, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40643894>.

¹⁶⁰ Barker, "Recognition," 135.

schools, or affidavits from tribal elders, in cases where the others were not accessible.¹⁶¹ In December of the year, the Bureau of Indian Affairs distributed a list of guidelines to assist tribes planning to file for recognition.¹⁶² They claimed that they had not changed these guidelines from how they had been written in the original document, but this was untrue; one major change was that now, “A petitioner must meet all seven of the criteria” listed above, rather than simply “one or more.”¹⁶³ In the next year, a letter sent out by the Department of the Interior affirmed that understanding the level of detail to provide was indeed a point of difficulty for many tribes.¹⁶⁴

One important guideline set was that the people behind the petition were not permitted to be members of any other Native tribes and they encouraged Individuals to not leave other groups to reestablish a connection with one that they might have previously had ancestors be members of.¹⁶⁵ This had a significant impact in sharply reducing the number of individuals who could identify with an unrecognized tribe. In New England especially, connections between nations were common, especially in light of the recent shared history between the Mashantucket Pequot,

¹⁶¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Regulations, Guidelines and Policies for Federal Acknowledgment as an American Indian Tribe* (Washington, D. C.: Federal Register, 1978), 39363, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

¹⁶² U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Interested Party Letter of December 19, 1978* (Washington. D. C.: Federal Register, 1978). https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

¹⁶³ U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Guidelines for Preparing a Petition* (Washington. D. C.: Federal Register, 1978), 3. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

¹⁶⁴ U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Policy Letter of May 19, 1979* (Washington. D. C.:Federal Register, 1979), 44. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

¹⁶⁵ U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Guidelines for Preparing a Petition* (Washington. D. C.: Federal Register, 1978), 17. https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

Eastern Pequot, Mohegan, and Narragansett people. The Pequots had been somewhat dispersed, as the somewhat more consistent populations living on other reservations attracted individuals by offering them a way to preserve their own Native identities.

Importantly, the sources of evidence that this system recognized as the most legitimate were those arising from high-status non-Native knowledge holders and entities, whether those with political power (like membership lists formed by federal standards of identity) or records of population in specific areas (like government-performed censuses) or those with cultural power (like church records of membership.) The lowest status and least valid forms of evidence were the only ones dictated only by tribal knowledge. Oral histories in general were seen as only useful as a potential manner of finding other records: “The petitioner should not rely entirely on oral evidence. Information gathered from interviews can be a valuable means of locating useful documentary sources by suggesting where and when the group had contact with government officials, missionaries, schools, etc.”¹⁶⁶

Similarly, recognition was, in majority, derived from Native interactions with settler presences, rather than interactions within a tribe or with other tribal powers. In order of importance, tribal identity necessarily required a relationship with one’s country, one’s state, one’s local government, the educational and religious institutions that one attended, scholars, and lastly, other Indigenous people in other tribes. A group’s status as Native or not in the eyes of the federal government, and the country resultantly, was almost exclusively determined by their historical interactions and ability to justify their presence to past governments.

¹⁶⁶ U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Guidelines for Preparing a Petition* (Washington. D. C.: Federal Register, 1978), 20.
https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

As the Pequot set out to affirm their historical and contemporary presence through the new political means laid before them, they were met with a legal system that did not prioritize tribal knowledge. Though the new standards for federal recognition set a system by which tribes could increase their status, showing that the government was at least symbolically more willing to return some degree of sovereignty to tribes like the Mashantucket Pequot, who had existing relationships with the federal government, it was not immediately accessible to many tribes because of the high burden of evidence demanded by the process. The Pequot people carefully considered the context set by such federal action, then expanded their vision to the precedent being set by sister nations as inspiration.

Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Precedent

As the Pequots in Connecticut began to work towards recognition by the state and the opportunities that came with such a status, they looked to other nations around them for a model in both the process of achieving recognition and the action of economically capitalizing on the opportunities that came with such a status. Having maintained some degree of connection with their Northern Algonquin relatives, they looked to the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes in Maine, who were in the process of achieving recognition and creating some degree of financial independence for themselves, in a highly connected process. Having achieved economic self-sufficiency twelve years before the Pequots and federal recognition three years before the Pequots, it was the precedent set by the tribes of Maine that created a world in which the Pequots could also envision achieving such distinctions. Through association with the Maine tribes, they gained insight into how to achieve such feats, as well as perceived validity in their cause from surrounding residents of Connecticut who were familiar with the history of the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot.

The Penobscot tribe first filed a claim for two thirds of the state of Maine on July 17, 1972. Though to a lesser degree than at Mashantucket, they existed in diminished form by the twentieth century, with the 1890 census noting only 400 members. However, they also maintained their Indigenous identity through cultural practice and connection to community, and sought revitalization of their nations. Having had their lands settled by treaty in 1769 and reduced by land sales managed by the states of Massachusetts and Maine in which colonists believed to be purchasing the land outright and the tribes believed to be selling use rights, the tribes alleged that these sales were invalid. They argued that their lands had been placed under the protection of the federal and state government as tribal land by treaty, and since, it had been wrongfully converted from land under the tribes to private land. The Nonintercourse Act of 1790 set the foundation for their suit, as it stated that the land of tribes that had a relationship with the federal government could not be sold without the consent of the federal government. Only the states had been involved in the land sales of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy. Still, the act had historically only been applied to tribes that had received a more recent form of federal recognition. In 1975, the federal case *Passamaquoddy v. Morton* was decided in favor of the tribes as the court argued that the very existence of the Nonintercourse Act created a relationship between the tribes and the federal government, setting a landmark precedent that the 1790 act applied to tribes like the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy despite them not being yet federally recognized. It also provided them with said formal recognition.¹⁶⁷ Following the receipt of this recognition, they continued to exercise their sovereignty by maintaining their mission to regain their land and achieve a financial status permitting them to protect their own land in the future.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ *Joint Tribal Council of the Passamaquoddy Tribe v. Morton*, 528 F.2d 370 (1st Cir. 1975).
<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/388/649/2313203/>.

¹⁶⁸ Annette Kolodny. "Saving Maine for the Indian: The Legacy of Joseph Nicolai's 'The Life and Traditions of the Red Man,'" *MELUS* 34, no. 2 (2009): 82-86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20532680>; "Tribal Timeline," Penobscot Nation, Accessed April 10, 2026,

In the interest of achieving autonomy in all aspects of life for the tribe, they launched a business venture that created economic self-sufficiency to complement the political sovereignty that they were en route to receiving. The Penobscot Nation began its attempts at financial independence through high stakes bingo in 1973. As the first tribe in the United States to pursue such an opportunity, they received business from both Americans in the Northeast and Canadians. Their “Original Indian Bingo” marked a departure from all reliance on powers outside of the Penobscot Nation. Remarking on its significance, the tribe wrote, “For the first time since colonization we were able to provide for ourselves. We no longer had to beg government for grants or funds. We had a brief glimpse of what economic self-sufficiency was like.”¹⁶⁹ However, their self-sufficiency remained operational only under the continued agreement of the state, which the tribe believed functioned economically with the goal of preventing “the tribes from profiting from an enterprise they could not control.”¹⁷⁰

For the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, political sovereignty came at the cost of their original version of economic success. In 1980, the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act was signed into law under the consent of the Penobscot, ending the long debate over the 1972 court case. Primarily, it functioned to reapportion land in Maine and eliminate contested land claims and aboriginal title, through funding the repurchase of land.¹⁷¹ However, it also mandated that the Indigenous people living on the land follow state and federal law—a stipulation that was understood differently by lawmakers and those that were subject to the regulation. For the

<https://www.penobscotnation.org/departments/cultural-historic-preservation/historic-preservation/tribal-timeline/>.

¹⁶⁹ Maine Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs, *An Act to Authorize the Operation of Slot Machines on Indian Island in Old Town*, H. P. 532, 123rd Cong. (2007): 2. https://www.maine.gov/legis/lawlib/lldl/casinogambling/elegrec_2007-06-15_hp_ph0804-0809.pdf.

¹⁷⁰ *An Act to Authorize the Operation of Slot Machines on Indian Island in Old Town*.

¹⁷¹ U. S. Congress, *Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act*, H. R. 7919, 96th Cong. (1980). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/7919>.

Penobscots, the gaming ventures were needed to finance the tribal government, and resultantly, they were an “Internal Tribal Matter.”¹⁷² However, this essential source of funding in the form of bingo was closed in 1983 as a violation of the 1980 law, to the Penobscots and the wider Indigenous community. In the 1987 decision, *California v. Cabazon Band of Indians*, the Supreme Court once more opened up this stream of funding to two bands of Indigenous people in California, and the wider country as a result, but the Penobscot were exempt from this possibility.¹⁷³ Though the Penobscot people were not able to immediately return to operating their High Stakes Bingo hall, other tribes who had not been previously prevented were permitted to begin their own operations.

In the wake of the historic victories of the Maine tribes, wider acknowledgement of the status of Indigenous people in America, both realistic and aspirational, began to circulate. Those who witnessed the success of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy peoples began to realize that similar feats were possible for other tribes. A newspaper piece on land claims listed ten land claims from along the eastern coast as equal in status: for Maine, the homelands of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, for Massachusetts, areas in Mashpee and Gay Head claimed by Wampanoags, for New York, areas in Big Moose and Oneida claimed by the Mohawks and Oneidas respectively, for South Carolina, an area around Rock Hill claimed by the Catawbas, for Rhode Island, an area in Charleston claimed by the Narragansetts, and for Connecticut, an area in Kent that was claimed by the Schaghticoke, and an area in Ledyard claimed by the Pequots.¹⁷⁴

This article by Mary Costello, a non-Native resident of Southeastern Connecticut, showed some level of immediate apprehension for this new unified struggle, opening with the

¹⁷² *An Act to Authorize the Operation of Slot Machines on Indian Island in Old Town.*

¹⁷³ *California v. Cabazon Band of Indians*, 480 U.S. 202 (1987)
<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/480/202/>.

¹⁷⁴ Mary Costello, “Indians Take to Warpath with Lawbooks,” *The New London Day*, April 19, 1977,
<https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/970065259/>.

line, “Indians are on the warpath again,” to refer to Indigenous people utilizing the American legal system to seek recourse.¹⁷⁵ This is the right of any other citizen of the United States, yet it was framed as distinct and violent when done by Native people, and the usage of the word “again” hints at a perception of histories of violence done not against Native people, but by them. The piece closed with two paragraphs on the ambiguous worries of those with perceived legal ownership over the land, both in Maine and outside. It did not state exactly what their worries were, but it listed the possible affected parties as “non-Indian land owners, real estate agents, bankers and state and city officials,” showing that their fear was that non-Indian land could be taken from them against their will, as Indian land had been taken historically. The final paragraph neatly summarized the perspective. Indigenous land claims were not a wrong reaction to historical injustice, but their action in doing so was still a threat to non-Indian land ownership. Indigenous perseverance posed a risk of dispossessing them of the land that they now felt a claim over:

The big problem that the courts and Congress will have to face in dealing with these claims is how to rectify the historical wrongs done to Indian tribes without inflicting new injustices upon non-Indian landowners and businesses. Tribal leaders in Maine and elsewhere have said repeatedly that they have no wish to dispossess individual property owners. But they have also made it clear that they intend to press their claims to the rights they believe they have been denied.¹⁷⁶

For the broader United States, the success of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy land claims pursuit marked something vaguely threatening to their way of life that their government had to attempt to evade. For the Pequots and other Indigenous people who watched and waited, it represented proof that not only were their goals achievable, but they were living in an era where it was possible to see real progress.

¹⁷⁵ Costello, “Indians Take to Warpath with Lawbooks.”

¹⁷⁶ Costello, “Indians Take to Warpath with Lawbooks.”

The Interim Governance of Elder Pequots

Even as Pequots in Connecticut watched these developments to the north, they focused on creating the foundation for such development themselves by building the reservation population and reforming existing systems of self-organization. In the year following the death of Elizabeth George in 1973, the reservation received a number of new residents, and with them, new questions arose about how to govern the reservation and its inhabitants. Elizabeth, Matt, and Alice had theoretically operated under an established but never formalized agreement that was drafted in the 1960s by a partnership of Elizabeth and Amos A. George. However, with only two or three permanent residents in the years following the creation of the agreement, the women had little use for formality in their making of rules surrounding how to live on the reservation and interact with each other.

In the absence of Elizabeth, Matt and Alice somewhat disappear from the historical record in the years following their sister's death. They were two of several Mashantucket Pequot people who objected to the appointment of Helen Le Galt, a Paucatuck or Eastern Pequot, as representative to the Connecticut Indian Affairs Council in October of 1973, however.¹⁷⁷ Demonstrably, they were still somewhat engaged in Connecticut Indian affairs in the year that their sister passed and their larger family returned to the reservation. However, after this point, Matt did not appear in newspapers or any of the sources produced by the tribal nation retroactively to document their move back to the reservation for five years. Her next appearance in the historical record was her brief 1978 obituary. Though she died at a hospital, after eight

¹⁷⁷ U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence for Final Determination in Regard to Federal Acknowledgment of the Paucatuck Eastern Pequot Indians of Connecticut as a Portion of the Historical Eastern Pequot Tribe*. (Washington, D. C.: Federal Register, 2002), 146.

https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/petition/113_pkeapq_CT/113_fd.pdf.

days of treatment, her home was given as Shewville Road.¹⁷⁸ Evidently, she did not move away from the reservation in the five years between her sister's death and her own, but continued to live alongside her family. Still, she had no interest in stepping into power herself or demonstrating her presence. Elizabeth is considered broadly to be the last resident of Mashantucket before Skip Hayward and his immediate family returned in 1974; writing of the reservation in that year, Hilary Waldman wrote, "The reservation itself had no permanent residents. The last one, Hayward's grandmother, Elizabeth George Plouffe, had died a year earlier."¹⁷⁹ Possibly, the author was considering Matt as a non-permanent resident due to her home being a trailer rather than a house.

However, it is also possible that this is one of many pieces of historical writing that wrongly attribute her death to the year 1973, along with her sister. These pieces include the official website of the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation, which wrongly places both deaths before 1974, "Following the deaths of Martha and Elizabeth, some 50 Tribal members from around the United States returned home to the reservation. In 1974..."¹⁸⁰ This error is reproduced in *Two Models to Sovereignty: A Comparative History of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Navajo Nation*, by Henry Sioux. This piece claims, "Amos George became the tribal leader after the deaths of Plouffe and [Langevin]."¹⁸¹ The author is correct that Amos stepped into power in 1974, but it was not as a result of the only other residents passing. In the period where he was living away from his sisters, he was also considered to be somewhat of a leader for the tribe, though he himself disputed this title: "Amos A. George of Simsbury, whom some

¹⁷⁸ "Martha Langevin."

¹⁷⁹ Waldman, "A New Life for a Forgotten People."

¹⁸⁰ "Our History."

¹⁸¹ Harvey Sioux, "Two Models to Sovereignty: A Comparative History of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Navajo Nation," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (1996): 157, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6f58c2fz>.

factions of the Pequots consider their grand sachem said he knows nothing about the local situation...He added he does not consider himself grand sachem of the Pequots.”¹⁸² Living in Simsbury, in the Northwest of the state, it made sense that he did not feel entirely connected to the events of the reservation, despite maintaining his connection to Pequot customs as he did. However, retired from his life in Simsbury, he returned to the Southeast of the state after his sister’s death and accepted the title of tribal chairman.

This inconsistency in the published timeline of this era is problematic because it creates gaps in the continuity of Pequot life on the reservation. If Matt Langevin’s death is wrongly cited as five years earlier than its real date, and Alice Brend’s residence is not considered to be on Pequot land, there is arguably a year in which the reservation stood empty. Similarly, if Amos taking the position of tribal chairman appears random and not warranted by earlier perceived leadership, there are similar gaps in tribal leadership. Because establishing both leadership and reservation presence is required by the process of federal recognition application, such inconsistencies if repeated provide the means that some could use to question the sovereignty of the Pequots. However, neither is warranted by the historical record, because presence and leadership were continuous within the tribe in all years of existence, including between 1973 and 1974 (albeit in a more limited form than before), and complemented by rapid changes in other parts of the country that prepared the reservation for a more formal presence and leadership.

The first meeting of the new Mashantucket Pequot tribe took place in 1974, as organized by Skip Hayward and Alice Brend to rally their relatives into a return. Relying on existing networks of Pequots in the surrounding towns and wider state, the two called their relatives for a meeting at Mashantucket. For individuals like 25-year old Bruce Kirchner, who had never visited the reservation, and had a life very separate from the reservation as a mental health hospital

¹⁸² Reed, “Indian Rights at Issue Over Cemetery Project.”

caretaker in Norwich, such an invitation was a source of curiosity, but not necessarily one of familiarity. It was the call of his family that motivated his attendance at the meeting, with Alice Brend being the one to reach out to him specifically. Despite Skip being only a “distant cousin,” Bruce described the meeting with remembered optimism: “[Kirchner] had never met Skip Hayward before, but something made him believe in him...Kirchner thought Hayward was a dreamer. But maybe his dreams weren’t so far-fetched.”¹⁸³ Alice approached the meeting with more doubt, according to writer Hilary Waldman, despite having agreed to collaborate with Skip to call it: “[Alice] had asked Kirchner to work with the young nephew she called Skipper. Truly, though, she didn’t believe it would do much good.”¹⁸⁴

In 1974, at this meeting called by Alice and Skip, the governing document from the 1960s was adapted into a new form and membership was established formally.¹⁸⁵ A tribal Constitution was created and approved by those who had newly chosen to be enrolled as members of the reservation.¹⁸⁶ Though it was Alice and Skip who had organized the meeting, it was Amos A. George who signed 55 certificates adding individuals to the tribal roll, one for each person who proved that they had an ancestor listed on the 1900 census. Though many of these people did not immediately opt to move onto the reservation, they did not consider this membership as insignificant. Being given physical evidence of their membership and their community in the form of these certificates marked a departure from previous decades of dismissal of identity and as a result, the certificates were highly valued; discussing the certificates with the Hartford Courant twenty years later, Alice said, “I have it in my pocketbook today.”¹⁸⁷ Still, the members dispersed until the next year.

¹⁸³ Waldman, “A New Life for a Forgotten People.”

¹⁸⁴ Waldman, “A New Life for a Forgotten People.”

¹⁸⁵ “Our History.”

¹⁸⁶ Campesi, “The Emergence of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe,” 137-138.

¹⁸⁷ Waldman, “A New Life for a Forgotten People.”

In 1975, Amos A. George passed away, leaving an opening in the leadership at Mashantucket. Skip Hayward stepped into the role of tribal chairman after an election at Mashantucket during their next annual tribal meeting.¹⁸⁸ This was a significant move for unity, as the acting head of Mashantucket had been up for debate for years before Amos had stepped into the role for a year, and he himself had denied the role for many years. Skip chose to take on the role voluntarily, acting as the first willing and recognized leader in decades, and he also elected to do it from closer to home than his predecessor, even at the cost of his previous way of life. Stepping away from his former existence away from Mashantucket, he moved to the reservation with a number of other family members, all of whom were also choosing between their earlier employment, residences, and communities, and a new life at Mashantucket with their community.¹⁸⁹

Negotiating State Recognition

Skip Hayward's childhood was defined by his consistent, powerful connections with his Pequot family members, and through them, his continuous identification with Pequot identity. However, much of his childhood was spent away from the reservation and even away from his birthplace of New London, Connecticut, as his father's position in the navy took the family all over the United States. Still, Skip became close to his grandmother and great-aunt, Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin, in the periods where his father's work took him overseas and he and his nine siblings were entrusted to their relatives' care. He did not choose to immediately move to the reservation full time once he was an independent adult, but he did not lose his

¹⁸⁸ "Tribal Office" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998); Campesi, "The Emergence of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe," 137-138.

¹⁸⁹ Steve Kroft, "Are Pequots Really Pequots?" *CBS News (New York, NY)*, May 23, 2000, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/are-pequots-really-pequots/>.

memories of the experiences he had there either. After graduating from high school, he settled in Groton, Connecticut, to work as a pipefitter at Electric Boat.¹⁹⁰ Having borne witness to the state's treatment of his family, especially in regards to housing and land, and participating in resistance at the behest of his grandmother, his youthful experiences shaped his perspective on state-led life on the reservation: "It was one of the most humiliating things that I've ever seen anybody put through. And, I just couldn't—right then, it was like it set off a fire inside of me."¹⁹¹

Skip Hayward maintained the struggle of his grandmother, Elizabeth George Plouffe, and great-aunt, Matt Langevin, for recognition of the continuance of the Pequot people and their connection to the land at Mashantucket. However, where much of the elder women's resistance was staunchly unapologetic in its questioning of federal power over tribal, Skip's resistance took a somewhat more conciliatory tone. Jackson King, the Norwich-based general counsel for the Pequots during and after their period of settling land claims, described Skip as using mildness in his approach to dealing with non-Pequot governmental actors, in order to that create goodwill:

Governmental officials that met him seemed to like him very much and he was always modest in his requests. I mean, he would never go up and say, 'I demand this,' or 'I demand that,' or 'We have these rights.' He'd go up and try to explain what the ambitions of the tribe were, what the hopes were, what the history was, and see where they could help.¹⁹²

Yet, this goodwill did not erase the fundamental fact of tribal autonomy being in opposition with federal authority and it did not coerce the state to permit the Mashantucket Pequot people to easily and quickly recover their land and rights. It was only a dynamic

¹⁹⁰ Hayward, Richard A. "Richard A. 'Skip' Hayward and the Mashantucket Community," Eastern Wind Productions, August 20, 2017, video, 0:19-0:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EK65IRMnLt4>.

¹⁹¹ "Martha Langevin's Home."

¹⁹² "Jackson King, Mashantucket Tribe's Top Attorney, Dies," *The New London Day*, June 7, 2016, <https://theday.com/news/348741/jackson-king-mashantucket-tribes-top-attorney-dies/>; "Lobbying for Recognition" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

combination of modesty and persistence that won Skip and the Pequots their allies in the non-Pequot government.

One of the biggest roadblocks to Pequot people returning to the reservation was the lack of both housing and land to build on, and their inability to build without state impingement. As a result, one of the first projects taken by those who returned in the first wave of children and grandchildren of Elizabeth was the establishment of a housing project. However, in the previous era, Matt had been punished for trying to modify an existing house to make it more livable and Alice had been punished for moving a new form of housing onto the land, both before and after she attempted to make changes to it. The state's involvement continued for the next generation of Pequots. Their housing project was soon impacted by existing state regulations as dictated by Governor Ella Grasso, in Hartford, Connecticut. She was not a political actor that was convinced by Skip's first mild attempts at diplomacy, but a person who brought out a more convincing forceful side from him.

Due to their persistent connections with land across generations, the Pequots moved past Elizabeth's statement of "Hold onto the land," to reach back through time to reclaim the land that they had been unable to hold onto legally to in the nineteenth century. In 1976, they began the work of attempting to reobtain 800 acres of land and obtain federal recognition.¹⁹³ These 800 acres were crucial to the development and maintenance of Pequot identity at Mashantucket for a number of reasons. By sextupling the size of the reservation, they would be able to open its doors to a greater number of Pequots who otherwise would not be able to exist on 200 acres. For two women, such a size of land was livable, but for a whole community, more was required. Additionally, with such land, the Pequots would have more land on which they could operate

¹⁹³ "The Mashantucket Pequots' Fight for Federal Recognition" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998); Campesi, "The Emergence of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe," 137-138.

businesses to generate profit and jobs, thereby financially liberating the Pequot people who would otherwise be dependent on outside jobs for their financial stability. Finally, beyond this view of land centered on what it could provide, the Pequot people understood it to be legally theirs, as its removal from Mashantucket had not been consented to by them or the federal government, meaning that it violated the same 1790 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act that the Maine tribes used to reobtain their own land.¹⁹⁴

Originally, nine Pequots, including Skip Hayward, attempted to create an agreement with Ella Grasso by letter. They argued that the state had an obligation to aid them in their goal of land reclamation, as the land would not have been taken without the authorization of the Connecticut General Assembly. In the land claim that they filed, they did not directly name the state as an involved party, but instead sued 28 Ledyard landowners. For this reason, State Attorney General Carl R. Ajello, speaking for the state, at the request of Ella Grasso, felt justified in ignoring the Pequots calls for help, as reported by the *Hartford Courant* on July 10, 1976.¹⁹⁵

In the tribe's continuing interactions with the governor in the following year, they found her a much more willing collaborator when contacted more directly. Learning from the failure of the letters, Skip attempted to travel to Hartford to meet with Ella Grasso and communicate the needs of the tribe. His travels to visit Grasso's office and attempts to build a relationship with her were repetitive; he went to Hartford "if and when his car worked."¹⁹⁶ Bob Birmingham, recounting the story of Skip's relationship with the governor, said that once, she made Skip wait for a meeting that was repeatedly being delayed in an act of disrespect of his time, and Skip

¹⁹⁴ "The Mashantucket Pequots' Fight for Federal Recognition."

¹⁹⁵ "State Shuns Land Suit," *Hartford Courant*, July 10, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/368456639/>.

¹⁹⁶ *Bringing the People Home* (1998; Mashantucket: Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center), 70mm film.

became fed up and left, slamming the door to the Statehouse on his way out. It was only after this display that Ella Grasso became interested in Skip and offered to meet him. Having heard the slam, she inquired to an aide in her office about the cause and upon hearing about Skip, replied ““Oh, let me meet that man.”” The next day, Skip returned to her office to sign a “cooperation agreement” between the Pequots and the Connecticut Statehouse. There, Skip and Ella Grasso had what Skip described as “one of the nicest conversations I have ever had with anybody.”¹⁹⁷

This “cooperation agreement” was an act of state recognition of the Mashantucket Pequots as a governing body and a promise to deal with them as was fitting for such a group. They became “a unit of local government within the state,” and as a result, became eligible for certain classes of funding that they had previously been denied, including federal revenue sharing and loans.¹⁹⁸ The Pequots also formed their Housing Authority and Constitution over the course of a five hour meeting in February 1977, completing the “necessary, burdensome and formal [next] step[s] towards becoming a federally recognized Indian tribe,” and enabling their requests for funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.¹⁹⁹

On May 17, 1978, the *Connecticut Post* reported that their agreement and conversation had bore fruit in terms of direct financial support. Having received permission to develop their housing, the Pequots were also awarded an immediate \$3,000 grant specifically to be used for the creation of a housing office on the reservation to guide future developments, as part of a larger project of Indigenous land development within the state.²⁰⁰ With this funding, the Pequots set a plan to build 15 homes on the reservation and an access road to connect them with Ledyard,

¹⁹⁷ “Lobbying for Recognition.”

¹⁹⁸ Jacky Flinn, “Pequot Tribe Fights for Identity,” *Hartford Courant*, November 12, 1978, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/368193524/>.

¹⁹⁹ Patricia Sierman, “Pequots Approve Own Constitution, Housing Authority,” *Hartford Courant*, February 22, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240748493/>.

²⁰⁰ “Indians to Get Aid for Housing,” *Connecticut Post*, May 17, 1978, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/1250375570/>.

marking a sharp departure from the previous sole connection between the reservation and the surrounding town being Route 214. It also represented a substantial increase in quality of life for those living on the reservation, who were previously residing in trailers. This was also not a distant project that the federal government promised to fulfill eventually, but a project that was rapidly occurring; architects had been hired and they were creating designs by the time this project was announced in the *Hartford Courant*. These designs were to be ready to be implemented by builders after only a short few months, by spring 1979, so that they could hold people after two more seasons.²⁰¹

This grant positioned the Pequots as a nationally significant body in several different ways. First, the funds coming directly from the government proved that the tribe was seen, for the first time in centuries, as a sustainable community that was worth preserving in its own right. Second, these funds were not just coming towards Mashantucket, but to a number of Indigenous nations concurrently. The Mashantucket Pequots gained a common legal standing with each of these other tribes, generating legal and cultural relationships between these groups. Third, the new positioning of the tribe was being accepted by a broader audience than just their surrounding town. Matt and Elizabeth were only ever discussed in the *New London Day*, a newspaper meant to convey current events to only the residents of New London County, and moreover, they were frequently placed deep within the pages, in the local Ledyard section of the newspaper. This new generation of Pequots was featured instead in the *Connecticut Post* and the *Hartford Courant*, which were circulated throughout all of the state, signalling to the readership of the papers that the tribe was of significance to all.

Furthermore, they were depicted favorably in these much more visible publications, with justifications for their efforts that connecting them to the Pequots' historical presence: "Three

²⁰¹ Flinn, "Pequot Tribe Fights for Identity."

hundred years later those trails, once defined by the feet of many Indians, are Ledyard's highways, but the Mashan[t]ucket Western Pequot Indians remain with the land they love as they struggle to survive."²⁰² They were also permitted to speak for themselves in these publications, rather than their depiction being entirely dictated by the perspective of the writer of such a piece, with Skip Hayward being quoted in the same piece: "'The Indian has always lived close to Mother Earth and we have a strong sense of the land being our provider,' he says."²⁰³ Earlier pieces often did not seek out the perspective of their subjects. It was evidence of the Pequots' increasingly recognized presence that they were solicited for quotes in this new era. In earlier times, there was some evidence that non-Pequot people were to some extent aware of the residence of Matt and Elizabeth. For example, their bare bones address in advertising products in newspapers indicated that their names alone carried some recognition in the wider community. However, for Pequots to have been sought out for quotes, rather than passively recognized, was proof of increased awareness of their presence and association with them as an active Indigenous tribe. Being given their own voice in such sources permitted them to increasingly shape the narrative of their own community.

Re-Adapting to Reservation Life in the Interim

In the time between when Skip Hayward and his family returned to the reservation and when their efforts gained traction with the government, they joined Martha Brend in living on the land of Mashantucket without making any of the modifications that would be required to be able to live comfortably. Their presence and housing was only tolerated as it was as a result of the resistance of Martha previously. Before housing could be afforded, the tribe resided in a

²⁰² Flinn, "Pequot Tribe Fights for Identity."

²⁰³ Flinn, "Pequot Tribe Fights for Identity."

collection of second-hand, single-width trailers, in lots that they themselves had cleared in the forest. They did not implement expensive electrical systems or a well, but improvised by extending the single active system on the reservation to the trailers. Elizabeth's house became equipped with a number of extension cords to provide electricity and garden hoses to provide running water, each connecting to a trailer.

This was not a foolproof system, and it did not make for a comfortable existence for those who relied on it; "In winter the hoses often froze; in order to thaw them out, one tribal member used water heated in her coffeemaker." As an accidental fire demonstrated in 1976, the Pequots were still forced to be reliant on state services. The fire consumed much of their cleared land and gave minor burns to the new residents, and was stopped only by four fire companies in surrounding towns traveling to the reservation.²⁰⁴ The Pequots who lived in these trailers hoped that this stage of revitalizing the reservation would be short, but it carried on for several years, until such alternative housing could be invested in by the residents of the reservation.²⁰⁵

However, the Pequots who did not yet return to the reservation were also involved with the housing troubles and general culture of the reservation, with Skip Hayward reaching out to family in times of scarcity. As one family member noted, "We would get calls from Skip sometimes that they really needed money just to pay the electric bills and the trailer for the tribal office."²⁰⁶ They also offered visits to the reservation to people of Pequot heritage living away from Indigenous family or living with other tribes, in an attempt to encourage families to consider joining them in moving back and increasing the number of residents on the

²⁰⁴ "Fire Scorches Indian Land," *Hartford Courant*, June 6, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368330827/>.

²⁰⁵ "Trailer Living" (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

²⁰⁶ *Bringing the People Home*.

reservation.²⁰⁷ Skip stated that such visits fueled hopes for those off the reservation, as they witnessed the land experiencing “something alive...something spiritual” through the new residents in their trailers.²⁰⁸

It was this feeling that drove new families to seek to join the Pequots who had already moved to the reservation, even though trailer life was not feasible for many. Though 26 were living at Mashantucket by 1976, Skip reported to the *Hartford Courant* that, “We have 15 families who are ready to move onto the reservation as soon as we have units for them to live in.” Those committed families were unaware of the type of housing that was available, as even the Pequots on the reservation were still receiving consultation and forming a housing authority at the time.²⁰⁹ Still, the promise of housing at all made the idea of life on the reservation suddenly livable for more than double the number of people who had originally returned.

Financing the Future of Mashantucket

As individuals moved back to the reservation, it became necessary for them to establish not just political self-sufficiency, but also the financial means to be able to continue to pursue that sovereignty and make life on the reservation sustainable. Terry Bell described this goal as complex; it was not just about making life more possible for those already on the reservation, but also those who could come later: “Plus we could...make money. Maybe enough where people could start coming to work on the reservation.”²¹⁰ Thus, the tribe began the work of establishing employment on the reservation, to create financial stability for both individual members and the

²⁰⁷ “Indians Out to Increase Tribe’s Size,” *The Morning Record and Journal* (Meriden, CT), April 5, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/675874940/>.

²⁰⁸ *Bringing the People Home*.

²⁰⁹ Pat Sierman, “Indians to Discuss Housing Authority,” *Hartford Courant*, November 19, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/241016014/>.

²¹⁰ “Garden and Greenhouse” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

larger tribe. To accomplish this work, they turned first to productive tasks that had been successful on the reservation in years past, with attempts to scale them up to be profitable.

One project that arose by the late 1970s was the Maple Sugar Project, as inspired by Elizabeth George Plouffe's production of maple syrup from tapping the maple trees on the reservation, then boiling their sap on her kitchen stove. In 1976, they began expanding her operations at a site called the Sugar Shack, with the usage of an evaporator purchased using an American Indians for Development grant of \$2,500, as well as the funds provided by a 1976 powwow.²¹¹ The relative success of the Maple Sugar Project, according to Skip Hayward, was due to the commitment of those who worked on the project: "Sometimes, it was kind of difficult to get people out to work in the garden [a later project] but when it came to making the syrup, usually we had more people show up." This became a multigenerational project, as older Pequots began training the children who had moved back to the reservation with their parents to aid in the work. As adults took on the task of carrying the heavy buckets of sap, Skip taught the children to do the tapping themselves.²¹² This had the dual effect of creating more sets of hands to do the work while also giving some of the children their first tastes of tribal traditions and customs.

It was a polarizing project among tribal members. Charlene Jones, who recalls being seven or eight years old while working on the project described it as "labor intensive to say the least." Belinda McKeon, who was in her 20s throughout the project, was less diplomatic: "The maple sugar, you know the tapping of the trees, I hated that. I hated that with a passion. Because of carrying the buckets of sap up the hill."²¹³ Still, for Josh Carter, who recalled being five and

²¹¹ Patricia Sierman, "Indians Get Grant for Vegetable Garden," *Hartford Courant*, November 18, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368392558/>.

²¹² "Maple Sugar Project" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

²¹³ "Maple Sugar Project."

visiting his grandmother, Phyllis M. Waite, at the reservation, going to the sugar shack was “this amazing adventure.”²¹⁴

Still, it did not fail to produce the profit that the Pequots had hoped to achieve from it: “It sold very well. We could not make enough syrup and keep it in house.” In the seasons that it was feasible to produce maple syrup, the tribe continued to do so, and at a considerable profit when sold locally. They channelled much of their effort into the production, in order to not waste the season. For Tammy L. Shraws, who recalled being a child during the project, her life and the lives of the people around her during productive seasons were somewhat centered around the project: “There was a loft up on top of the Sugar Shack. They’d have us kids down there till late at night. It was pitch black out and it seemed far away then. We’d be up there with our sleeping bags on, cuddled up, trying to keep warm.”²¹⁵ However, in the seasons in which maple syrup could not be produced, Mashantucket required another source of income.

Their second attempt at creating a consistent source of profit was their community garden, or an expansion of the growing of produce that Elizabeth and Matt lived off of. Using the same grant in 1976 that had financed the expansion of their maple syrup production, the Pequots bought seeds and rented bulldozers.²¹⁶ For labor, Hayward intended to use that of both resident and commuter Pequots: ““There are about 50 persons now included in our tribal list, and about 29 Pequots now living on the reservation — we ought to be able to get help in the project from a lot of these people.” In exchange for this work, anyone who worked the farm would be permitted to “reap all the crops he needs when they are ready.”²¹⁷ However, this project hit a roadblock within a couple of months when the Pequots realized that the land was too rocky to support a full

²¹⁴ Carter, oral history.

²¹⁵ “Maple Sugar Project.”

²¹⁶ Sierman, “Indians Get Grant for Vegetable Garden.”

²¹⁷ Sierman, “Indians Get Grant for Vegetable Garden.”

farming project to support more than a handful of mouths. In the words of Phyllis M Waite, who had moved back to the reservation in 1980, from Providence Rhode Island, “it looked as if the rocks were growing like mad, because when you clear them, there would always be more to get cleared.”²¹⁸ For the 85 Pequots who had aided in this project, the community garden represented a site of community building and a source of food, but not one that could truly be monetized with any significant success.²¹⁹

Seeing that farming the ground was not sustainable, the tribe instead experimented with the construction of a hydroponic greenhouse, as financed by a range of state, federal, local, and private funds, from “knocking on everybody’s doors.”²²⁰ This work began when they received approval to begin applying for federal funds totaling \$59,404 and a Campaign for Human Development grant of \$140,000 in 1979.²²¹ Though they had anticipated receiving the funds by the end of the season and they did not (with the Campaign for Human Development Funds falling through altogether), they kept working and by 1981, they had received \$92,404 from federal Community Development Block Grants and an additional \$5,000 from Aetna Life & Casualty, an insurance agency.²²² These funds also went towards hiring four full time employees to work on the reservation for the first time, who were trained by a private consultant. With this greenhouse, the tribe began to produce 10,000 heads of lettuce per week, with the hope of producing \$30,000 within a year of development.²²³ However, their success in growing did not

²¹⁸ “Maple Sugar Project.”

²¹⁹ Jacky Flinn, “State’s Indians Turning to Hydroponics to Raise Cash Crops,” *Hartford Courant*, March 8, 1981, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368750337/>.

²²⁰ Carter, oral history; “Garden and Greenhouse.”

²²¹ Jacky Flinn, “Preliminary Approval Granted to Fund Pequots’ Greenhouses,” *Hartford Courant*, May 30, 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368586220/>.

²²² Flinn, “State’s Indians Turning to Hydroponics to Raise Cash Crops.”

²²³ Flinn, “State’s Indians Turning to Hydroponics to Raise Cash Crops.”

equate to success in marketing; they were unable to find success in selling these heads of lettuce to any commercial buyers, and they were forced to once more, pivot to a new business scheme.²²⁴

However, the lasting importance of this project was not in the hope of profit that it provided, brief as it had been, but in the proof that it provided that Mashantucket was able to provide jobs to tribal members on the reservation and that the Pequots could pursue a project like this with some level of success. Furthermore, it provided evidence of changing tides in opinion towards the Pequots; as the recipients of almost \$100,000 in grants, mostly from governmental sources, their presence could not be ignored financially or politically. Finally, it represented a community based project that was shared across the state of Connecticut by two Native tribes, furthering a sense of community between the two tribes located within Ledyard and Kent respectively, who were in an increasingly similar position in terms of cultural, political, and economic presence within their respective regions. The plan to farm by greenhouse was not only pursued by the (now 85) Mashantucket Pequot people who were placed on the tribal list, but also the Schaghticoke people, on the Western side of Connecticut.²²⁵ However, this commonality also created competition between the tribes. When asked about the Schaghticoke's plans for their own greenhouse, his comment was that, ““We’ve got plans for a solar hydroponic greenhouse that will be 36 feet longer than this one [the greenhouse at Mashantucket],”” despite their funding being a quarter of that of the Pequots.²²⁶

In another unsuccessful attempt at establishing a tribal business that would prove fruitful throughout the year, the Pequots also considered raising swine “from piglets to package” in a commercial livestock operation.²²⁷ Their difficulty was not in raising the piglets, but in

²²⁴ “Garden and Greenhouse.”

²²⁵ “Garden and Greenhouse.”

²²⁶ Flinn, “State’s Indians Turning to Hydroponics to Raise Cash Crops.”

²²⁷ “Swine Project” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

packaging them. They obtained eighteen piglets at four months old. As they grew up, they became the responsibility of a number of Pequot individuals, but especially the secretary of the chairman, who shared her office trailer with them in the mornings to keep them warm, even in spite of their escape attempts: “They would hold the office door open and throw the pig in and ask me to pigsit. We would take them and we would put them in a feedbag so that they couldn’t run around. We would cut little holes in the bottom so the four little feet would stick out.” They proved to be an expensive investment, with the grain required to feed them coming not from official funds apportioned for tribal development, as in the case of several of the other projects that Mashantucket had pursued, but from tribal members’ own dollars. However, the investment was never returned, as the pigs’ caretakers grew attached to them as pets and refused to butcher them; Loretta Libby, who had worked on the swine project, described the group-wide attachment to the pigs: “We couldn’t kill the animals. We could feed them. We could grow them bigger than anybody else but we had a hard time when it came to butchering them, because we fell in love with the animals.”²²⁸

Cross-Country Solidarity and Opposition

Increasingly, the Mashantucket Pequots worked to establish recognition of their presence amongst their diaspora and among non-Native people. Included in this work was placing markers of their presence throughout the state of Connecticut and beyond, both physically and through community ties. One such physical marker was achieved through public lobbying for monuments of historically significant Pequot figures, including Sassacus, the Pequot sachem at the time of the Pequot War, to counteract the already existing monuments to the historical figures who had

²²⁸ “Swine Project.”

caused the Pequots harm, like John Mason, who led the Mystic Massacre, and was memorialized on a street in Groton named Pequot Avenue.²²⁹

In Mashantucket's time of need, a number of other tribes from all throughout the country stepped up to champion the Pequot's cause. In 1976, they hosted a powwow in the Groton Municipal Building, a town away from Ledyard, and it was attended by 50 Native people from ten tribes, as well as 100 spectators from the town. The event served multiple purposes. Its most surface-level goal was fundraising. The Pequots collected donations and individuals from all tribes sold art pieces including jewelry and blankets to finance the Mashantucket Pequot maple syrup project. However, the powwow was also a site of cultural celebration and continuance. Though the *Hartford Courant* piece that was written by Jane Sudol about the powwow in December 1976 framed the acts of the powwow as a "demonstration of Indian dances and songs for 100 spectators," these traditions carried great importance for the people that they were demonstrated by. Rather than being for the sake of the spectators as the author assumed, it is much more likely that they participated in these dances, chants, and lighting of a peace pipe for the purpose of the practice of their own religion and culture, and raising awareness amongst spectators was only an additional benefit.

The powwow also facilitated political statements and acted as a statement in its own right. Speaking on the significance of the event, Chief Joseph Yellow Paint, a man of Lakota and Choctaw identity, spoke of the current state of Indigenous identity, land claims, and reservation life nationally, across both Eastern and Western states: "Indians are depicted as savages and killers, when actually they were only retaliating against the destruction of their nation by

²²⁹ "Committee Established for Center for Seniors," *The New London Day*, June 7, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970042092/>.

Europeans...Forty-eight states were carved out of the Indians' land, and now our dignity is deteriorating daily on reservations which are nothing more than prison-of war camps."²³⁰

More than the cultural practices, these statements were made for the benefit of the spectators, who were less likely to understand the history described and less likely to have experienced the conditions on the reservations that he described; it was their worldview and thus actions that could change as a result of Joseph Yellow Paint's remarks. Though the Pequots broke even on the powwow, having spent money mostly on renting the building and providing prizes for dance competitions, and only making \$2 per adult and \$0.75 per child on admission, they proved that the financial side of the event was less important than the cultural, as they pledged to hold the event again in the following year.²³¹

Also constructed from a mélange of Eastern and Western Indigenous American cultures, the Yei-Bechi Trading Post opened in Groton in 1976, under the ownership of Fred and Betty Blanchard.²³² Marketed specifically as an Indian-owned business in the *New London Day*, it offered, "Indian Jewelry, Indian Artifacts, Beads, Pottery, Rugs, Bead Work and Silver Findings."²³³ The business owners also offered a demonstration of jewelry making, to further introduce their audience to Native arts, in December of the opening year.²³⁴ Though non-specific in terms of what tribes they were selling the art of, the name Yei-Bechi is likely an alternative spelling of the Diné word Yeibichai. The Yeibichai were dancers who impersonated gods, or Yei. In the twentieth century, the word came to represent a new style of weaving created by a Navajo

²³⁰ "Powwow Fails to Raise Funds for Indians," *The New London Day*, December 6, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970071790/>.

²³¹ "Powwow Fails to Raise Funds for Indians."

²³² "Trading Post Opens in Groton," *The New London Day*, October 7, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970019813/>.

²³³ "Yei-Bechi Trading Post," *The New London Day*, October 1, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970017636/>.

²³⁴ "Library Displays," *The New London Day*, December 31, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970088893/>.

medicine man and weaver.²³⁵ Though it was unclear to what tribe or nation Fred and Betty belonged to, they utilized a word with meaning to a Western Native audience to appeal to the mainly non-Native consumer base that was accessible through advertising in a mainstream town newspaper. However, whatever tribe Fred and Betty may have had a connection to, they utilized their Southwestern Indigenous art focused business to support the Mashantucket Pequot, as they co-sponsored the powwow held in 1976.²³⁶

In the 1970s, Native identity became decreasingly marketable, when not connected with actual Native culture or people. It was not abnormal in the decades prior to the movement for companies in Connecticut to use the name and imagery of the Pequots, often as a mark of expertise in industries related to the environment, to market their products. In the same decade as Fred and Betty advertised their business, a small Connecticut-based department store named Star's in Wallingford, Connecticut, offered "Pequot" Muslin sheets.²³⁷ Similarly, the towns of Glastonbury, Windsor Locks, and Manchester, all in Connecticut, supported a company named Pequot Spring Water Co., which explicitly capitalized on characterized and non-specific Indian imagery to sell spring water and other beverages, as advertised by the *Hartford Courant* in 1970.²³⁸

Though the department store, Star's, utilized the name of the Pequots, the spring water company much more explicitly attempted to capitalize on Pequot Indian identity through their mascot, Pequot Pete, a man with a large ethnic nose and long, dark hair, wearing feathers in his

²³⁵ Rebecca M. Valette, "Woodcarver," in *Clitso Dedman, Navajo Carver: His Art and His World* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8500749.13>.

²³⁶ Jane Sudol, "Indians Powwow in Area," *Hartford Courant*, December 6, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240536695/>.

²³⁷ "Star's January White Sale," *Meriden Journal*, January 2, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/675503895/>.

²³⁸ "Beat the Heat with Pequot Pete," *Hartford Courant*, January 27, 1970, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/236733970/>.

hair, a necklace, hair accessories, and little other clothing (Figure 3). This specific mascot had appeared in the Hartford Courant since 1954, with few edits being made to his image in the next two decades.²³⁹ Meant to call to mind imagery of the historical use of the natural spring used by the company, “first, by Pequots of the area and later, by Colonial settlers” as stated by their president in 1966, Pequot Pete was an inherently historical, not modern character.²⁴⁰



Figure 5: An advertisement featuring Pequot Pete in 1954.

Though not appearing again in the paper until the early 1960s, this mascot appeared in the papers on holidays in 1964, to wish Christmas celebrators “Season’s Greetings” while riding a deer in 1963, and to offer “Valentines Greetings” to a new character named Pequot Pat (with a long fringed dress, the same hairstyle and feathers as her love interest, and a heavily made up face).²⁴¹ Pequot Pat continued to be printed the next year, beckoning consumers to join the

²³⁹ “‘Pequot Pete’ Proudly Announces his Appointment as Central Conn. Distributor for the Complete Line of Kelvinator Electric Water Coolers,” *Hartford Courant*, May 2, 1954, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/370075182/>.

²⁴⁰ “Courant Events,” *Hartford Courant*, July 26, 1966, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/371275084/>.

²⁴¹ “Season’s Greetings from Pequot Pete,” *Hartford Courant*, December 28, 1963, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/371655030/>; “Valentine Greetings from Pequot Pete to Pequot Pat,” *Hartford Courant*, February 11, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/367942458/>.

Pequot Spring Water Beverages' "happy tribe of satisfied Indians."²⁴² Doris Grody Quint, president of the company, even discussed winning a Citation from the Newspaper Advertising Executives Association for Outstanding Newspaper Advertising in 1966 for "Our little Indians, Pequot Pete and his family."²⁴³ By 1969, the familiar characters were carrying a sign that read "Attention Warriors, Squaws and Papooses in the Windsor Locks Reservation may now send smoke signals directly to Pequot Pete and Pequot Pat by dialing 623-9195," directly beckoning consumers to identify with racial epithets for the group.²⁴⁴ However, their last appearance was in the 1970s, despite the company not being acquired by Crystal Rock Water Co. for another twenty years.²⁴⁵

In the time that the real Pequots moved back to the reservation and visibly positioned themselves as an alive people, unlike the elderly women who had previously been viewed as almost gone altogether, those that had previously used Indigenous imagery for profit took a step away from the familiar derogatory marketing strategy. Such cases of advertising were publicly opposed by the Pequots. In 1979, John "Rolling Cloud" Hamilton, posing as the "acting grand sachem" of a group of tribes including the Mashantucket Pequots, attempted to use such a label to build a business of "traditional Indian sermon[ies]" at weddings. To the Pequots, as reported by Skip in a public response printed in the *Hartford Courant* to Hamilton's offerings, the proposed ceremony was not just a publicity stunt done by an imposter Indian, but a liability to the Pequot's ability to receive the status needed to make them self-sufficient.²⁴⁶

²⁴² "'Refreshment at Your Doorstep,'" *Hartford Courant*, December 8, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/237680209/>.

²⁴³ "Courant Events."

²⁴⁴ "Springwater Makes the Difference," *Hartford Courant*, September 22, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/242916890/>.

²⁴⁵ "Crystal Rock Acquires Rival Firm," *Hartford Courant*, December 10, 1996, <https://www.courant.com/1996/12/10/crystal-rock-acquires-rival-firm/>.

²⁴⁶ Jacky Flinn, "Pequot Chief Urges Hearst To Keep 'Sachem' From Wedding," *Hartford Courant*, February 8, 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/241125157/>.

In contrast to the non-Native marketers who acted against the interest of Mashantucket, some Native allies specifically supported projects pursued by the Pequots in the interest of solidarity. Shortly after the Pequots were unable to do more than break even in fundraising through their powwow, they also lost another source of funding, as the Department of Energy Protection utilized its control over the release of Indian Fund money to halt the sending of money to Mashantucket. In its place, the *Hartford Courant* reported that the Mashantucket Pequot people received a loan of \$2,300 from Malcolm Robertson, a builder from Avon, Connecticut, which was the cost of the machinery they required for their business. Malcolm Robertson claimed Passamaquoddy identity, though the *Hartford Courant* emphasized that this identity was only partial. However, it was his Native identity that motivated his aid of Mashantucket; the newspaper article quotes Malcolm on his rationale for providing the loan as follows: “I’m not beating any drum, but I felt bad that the Indians might miss a chance to get a good deal on a piece of evaporating machinery just because the state is doing a slow job of releasing their Indian Fund money.”²⁴⁷

Federal Recognition and The Work That Remained

The 1978 state recognition through the signed cooperation agreement with the state government and funding funneled through the state of Connecticut did not mark the end of the Pequots’ work, nor had they planned for it to be such a conclusion. Having begun in 1976, by suing the 22 Ledyard-based owners of the 800 acres of land that had been unlawfully sold in the centuries before, due to being unable to sue the state directly, the Pequots were aware that their efforts had resulted in a “hackles up” attitude in the wider town, but they were also aware that

²⁴⁷ Patricia Sierman, “Indians Offered Loan to Start Own Business,” *Hartford Courant*, January 26, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240625975/>.

such a public, visible move would result in more individuals without a connection to Mashantucket following their cause, including Tom Tureen, who had worked with the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy in years prior.²⁴⁸

The case brought by Mashantucket was recognized as valid in its claims, but universally worrisome nonetheless for the non-Indigenous people currently living on the land. In 1977, a Democratic state senator and a Republican state representative, Mary Martin and Kenneth Stober, came together to propose a bill to support the defendants, regardless of outcome. The bill held the state accountable for the legal fees of the defendants and a reimbursement of the costs of the land in the case of a legal loss of the residents, while also proposing that “the state be held liable for making the deeds of the 22 landholders valid.” The situation was described in a newspaper article titled, “Bill Aims to Help Residents,” including a report that the state did not rebut the claims of those at Mashantucket, except in claiming insufficient evidence of wrongdoing. The bill was ultimately rejected due to concerns that it would be forced to provide too much: “[Senator Mary] Martin said the act died because, ‘It is not known if the Indians will win the suit, and if the Indians win, the state will have to pay some kind of financial settlement.’”²⁴⁹ Still, the view of those outside of Mashantucket was clear; though the Pequots were also residents of the state, they were not included in the residents that needed help; Jackson King reported in the article that the defendants had been forced to spend \$9,000 in responding to the lawsuit brought by Mashantucket with the free legal service of the Pine Tree Legal Assistance Association, in Maine.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ *Bringing the People Home*.

²⁴⁹ Patricia Sierman, “New Bill on Indian Suit Viewed Unlikely,” *Hartford Courant*, March 7, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240843141/>.

²⁵⁰ Patricia Sierman, “Bill Aims to Help Residents,” *Hartford Courant*, January 13, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240564141/>.

Moreover, King's defense rested on the refutation of the Mashantucket Pequots being a tribe at all, due to his uncertainty about what outcome to expect if he relied exclusively on the case for land rights: "The 20 landowners' attorney, Jackson King of Norwich, has said he hopes the land ownership claims Indians made against his clients will be thrown out of court if he can refute the Mashantuckets' claim to be a legitimate tribe."²⁵¹ The residents were also unsure of their chances of winning, as in 1977, many sought tax exemptions for the land that was being sued for, claiming that "because the outcome of the Indian's land suit is not known, 'the fair market value of the land approaches zero,'" while also unsuccessfully trying to sell the land before a decision could be made.²⁵²

The case became significant on a national level in April 1977, when President Jimmy Carter appointed William Gunter as a special representative to consider the land claim and make a report back on the degree to which the national Congress should be involved in such land claims. However, the impact of Maine in recent years was great, with one Connecticut senator, Abraham A. Ribicoff, believing that the other state's land claims constituted a precedent that should be applicable to the situation in Connecticut, and considering adding the Mashantucket Pequots' land claims to any other land claims settlement decided by Congress.²⁵³ The Pequots remained firm in their own representation of the suit and their reasons for pursuing it, with Skip Hayward printing in 1977 in *The New London Day* a full history of the land's seizure, followed by a statement that, "The tribe was forced to sue the property-owners because they were the title holders, not the state. The state of Connecticut is at fault and is responsible, due to the

²⁵¹ Sierman, "Pequots Approve Own Constitution, Housing Authority."

²⁵² Patricia Sierman, "Owners Refused Exemption," *Hartford Courant*, March 17, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240916253/>.

²⁵³ Patricia Sierman, "Ribicoff to Consider Action," *Hartford Courant*, April 6, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/240999800/>.

underhandedness of politicians trying to rid themselves of the burdensome problems of the Indians and their lands.”

Ten miles away, the Mohegan Nation, seeing the successes of nations including the Mashantucket Pequot, elected to sue for their own lost 600 acres of land. In 1980, their right to pursue their claim was validated by a Hartford federal judge. Acting as additional leverage with the decision in parallel circumstances in Maine, the sanctioning of the land claims pushed Ledyard residents to settle the claims that had been in question for years. By January 1980, both Tom Tureen, representing the Mashantucket Pequots through the Native American Rights Fund, and Jackson King, representing the defendants and land owners in Ledyard, publicly agreed that a compromise through settlement was a “reasonable” outcome for the suit.²⁵⁴ By October 1981, the settlement was reached, with \$1 million being offered to the home owners and the now 132-member Nation moving to re-adopt the entire 800 acres of land.²⁵⁵

By February 1982, the land claims were close to being resolved for Mashantucket; Hayward reported that the case was “expected to be settled by the end of the month.” In this success, however, opposition arose in the form of President Ronald Reagan, who did not offer the tentative consideration of his predecessor, President Jimmy Carter, but instead worked to abolish land claims wholesale. The work of the Pequots was called into question by a bill proposing the elimination of all such claims across the entire Eastern coast. Offering only a payment for such lands equivalent to the value of the lands when they were first removed from Indigenous usage, the bill would have eliminated the possibility of receiving land back at all.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Jacky Flinn, “Montville Indian Ruling May Clear Other Claims,” *Hartford Courant*, January 20, 1980, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/367371174/>.

²⁵⁵ “Business Briefs,” *Bridgeport Telegram*, October 23, 1981, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1250656507/>.

²⁵⁶ “Land Claims Bill Draws Opposition,” *The New London Day*, February 9, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970423786/>.

Tom Tureen, arguing for the Mashantucket Pequots, stated that this resolution was entirely in violation of the 1790 Non-Intercourse Act, the entire basis of the Pequots' land claim. Even Jackson King, the representative of the land owners, though the law would resolve the case in his favor, did not offer a complete endorsement of it: "'I'm sure if the problem goes away it would be very satisfactory to them (his clients)...Is it fair? It's hard to talk in terms of fairness.'"²⁵⁷

In July of the same year, as Congress began to form the settlement into a bill, Reagan's interest narrowed in on Mashantucket and he came out in opposition to the settlement and recognition of the tribe broadly, regardless of the testimonies given by Skip Hayward, Tom Tureen, and even the Ledyard clients through Jackson King, on the validity of the Pequots' claims.²⁵⁸ His disapproval did not stop the House Interior Committee from unanimously approving the bill on August 11, nor the House unanimously approving the bill on October 1, nor the Senate on December 17; as its sponsor, Sam Gejdenson, said, "All parties involved are pleased with the settlement. I think this bill sets an excellent precedent for future land claims in Connecticut and in other Eastern states."²⁵⁹ Even with his outspoken dislike of the act, political commentators anticipated Reagan approving the bill when it hit his desk.²⁶⁰ However, when a slight wording change resulted in a Pennsylvania house member posing a new objection, the decision was pushed to the new year.²⁶¹ By January 26, it was newly brought before Congress as

²⁵⁷ Karen Clarke and Maria Miro Johnson, "Indians Optimistic in Claims Battle Despite Congressional Investigation," *The New London Day*, February 10, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970424236/>.

²⁵⁸ "Administration Opposing Land Purchase for Pequots," *The New London Day*, July 15, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970440072/>.

²⁵⁹ "Committee Passes Bill to Settle Indian Claim," *Hartford Courant*, August 12, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368776071/>; Bea Andrews, "House Passes Pequot Land Claim Legislation," *The New London Day*, October 2, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970510907/>.

²⁶⁰ "Indian Claims OK'd by House," *Sunday Bulletin*, October 3, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1226803718/>.

²⁶¹ Louis Peck, "Pequot Land-Claims Settlement Dies," *Norwich Bulletin*, December 21, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227087303/>.

“one of the most amicable agreements in Indian land history.”²⁶² By March 24, the Pequots were also confident that the bill which had easily gone through Congress once more would be signed into law, in the same way that the Passamaquoddy and Narragansett tribes had received bills for settlement under Carter; Skip Hayward gave his prediction to the *New London Day*: “It probably would be very unusual for a president to veto a bill that had unanimous consent from both houses. And it’s not a very large bill.”²⁶³

Yet, that is exactly what happened in early April 1983. Defending his veto, Reagan claimed that the federal government was not responsible for the situation at Mashantucket and should have no ability to determine recognition for Indigenous nations.²⁶⁴ As Congress moved towards overriding Reagan’s veto, Reagan was forced to reconsider this choice due to the likelihood of his veto being overturned. He turned his attention instead to increasing state responsibility within the settlement in order to place comparatively less burden on the federal government and split the responsibility more equally for the wrongful land seizure. In June, Connecticut committed to add an additional \$200,000 to the payment, accepting a piece of the responsibility for the wrongful land seizures, as Reagan had hoped for.²⁶⁵ In 1983, the work of the Pequots finally saw fruition in the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Claims Settlement Act, which formally recognized the tribe as the “sole successor in interest to the aboriginal entity generally known as the Western Pequot Tribe which years ago claimed aboriginal title to certain lands in

²⁶² “Mashantucket Indian Bill Gets Fast Start in Congress,” *The New London Day*, January 26, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970448332/>.

²⁶³ “Indians are Confident Reagan Will Sign Bill,” *The New London Day*, March 24, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/971669356/>.

²⁶⁴ Jim McGann, “Indian Settlement Vetoed,” *Norwich Bulletin*, April 6, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227080045/>; Sam Gejdenson, “100 Years After the Land Grab, It’s Time to Settle With the Pequots,” *Hartford Courant*, May 2, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368827821/>.

²⁶⁵ Barbara T. Roessner, “Weicker Says Reagan Rethinking Pequot Claim Veto,” *Hartford Courant*, April 30, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/368848004/>; Ken Koepper, “Extra \$200,000 From State Sweetens Indian Land Claim,” *The New London Day*, June 21, 1983, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970492824/>.

the State of Connecticut.”²⁶⁶ It formally resolved the previous lawsuits made by those living at Mashantucket and ceded an additional 20 acres of previously state-owned land to the tribe.

With federal recognition, a recovered parcel of land, numerous attempts at financial independence, and a growing population, Mashantucket moved into an entirely new status of viability and promise. “If someone doesn’t do something about it in each generation, it will be lost forever,” had been Skip’s statement about why he sought the change that the Pequots worked for in the decade since returning to the reservation.²⁶⁷ A vulnerable time, in which one of three final residents’ passing could have destabilized the tribe and permanently disconnected them from the land that they claimed instead became the decade in which the Pequot community was reunited on a single land, and worked to eliminate the financial, political, and logistical barriers to the future returns of their family in the decade to come.

²⁶⁶ U. S. Congress, Mashantucket Pequot Indian Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 98-134, 98th Cong. (1983). <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/98/s1499/text>.

²⁶⁷ Connery, “Pequots Have Visions for Land...”

Chapter 3: New and Familiar Arrivals to the Community

With federal recognition having been achieved, housing being legally permitted and constructed to enable new arrivals, and a government in place that was ready to moderate life on the reservation, the Pequots on the reservation turned their focus to making their network of relations aware of the work that had been done and the new possibility of life on the reservation. Federal recognition came to a tribe that still numbered only a fraction of its former population in the start of the 1980s. The work of Elizabeth George Plouffe, Matt Langevin, and Alice Brend had cemented the history and culture of Mashantucket. The first wave of Pequots to arrive at Mashantucket in the 1970s worked with such histories of Pequot life to create a modern, yet historically rooted identity and ensure that it would remain connected to the physical location of the reservation. However, for all the apparent stability that had been ushered in by federal recognition, the individual stories of each person who chose to return to the reservation in the years immediately after were full of rapid change, as Pequots negotiated identity and community, often at the expense of the type of life that they had lived away from the reservation.

On a larger level, the individual choice of many Pequots, Native community members, and non-Native allies permitted new and constant development of the resources of the reservation, creating new opportunities for fulfillment in many aspects of life including financial, social, and physical. As families were encouraged by their community elders to return to the reservation, they brought their own expertises and willingness to contribute, as well as their connections to additional family members who had not yet been made aware of the developments at Mashantucket. By 1992, the tribe had multiplied itself by three and was home to 300 members, with a number of others connected to the community from the outside.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Sam Libby and Hilary Waldman, "Family with Pequot Ties Finds Roots Run Too Deep," *Stamford Advocate*, August 28, 1995, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1287314634/>.

Mashantucket was home to a community under constant expansion, as described by one member who was growing up with the reservation, Josh Carter:

And so we were consistently meeting new relatives and I would say post-1985 that every couple of months, we had a new family come through and it was like, ‘Oh, look a little cousin! What’s your name?’...And so, it was like, as a young person even, I started to notice how we were not just growing in numbers but we were *growing*.²⁶⁹

With their new growth in numbers also came a growth in what the tribe could contribute to the lives of its members. Employment within the tribe had existed early in the process of return, as the lack of such work had been the force that had originally driven so many of the families of the reservation to be forced to leave its boundaries. The tribal leadership made employment as available as possible through the agriculture project, maple sugar project, and swine project, but jobs were still highly limited, in proportion with the still marginal resultant profits of such projects. In 1986, the implementation of a bingo hall changed Pequot life in terms of economic possibility, and with this development came new stability in terms of what the reservation could offer its members. Community inside and outside of the bonds of blood grew rapidly through deliberate attempts at connection through events including Schemitzun and deliberately wide-reaching programs, like the Pequot Health Services program. The quality of life on the reservation became a site of constant improvement, with safety improving through newfound independence of community services and recreation being enabled through the creation of community sites. With the new status of the tribe came an increased interest and involvement from the outside communities that had historically denied the existence of the Pequots, especially in the academic sphere; this interest spawned a new ability for the Pequots to tell their stories completely themselves, for the first time in the historical record.

²⁶⁹ Carter, oral history.

The consolidation of the Pequot people after federal recognition was a historical phenomenon consistent with Pequot practices of engagement and community building that had existed for generations. The bingo hall acted as a means to an end, as the somewhat successful money-making projects before them were; the goal of the Pequots was community and survival. Though the reservation's development has historically been viewed as culminating with the creation of the Pequot Bingo Hall-turned Foxwoods Casino in 1992, its history is defined by constant attempts at growth, both before and after this singular event.

A New Drawing of the Boundaries of the Reservation

The Mashantucket Pequot Indian Claims Settlement Act brought unfamiliar uncertainty to the boundaries of the reservation that the Pequots were entitled to. With the state and federal government having set aside just under one million dollars for the Pequots to use to buy back land as part of the settlement, the United States Senate wanted to ensure that the land claims and resultant buying-back would only stretch as far as the former lands of the reservation before it was diminished by state action, rather than stretching to other parts of Connecticut and the Northeast that the Pequots could feel some hypothetical claim to. The five committee members responsible for the act demanded a map showing the exact boundaries that the funds would be applied to. The act of determining the boundaries fell to those associated with Mashantucket who had been most involved in the land claims process: Jackson King (the attorney of the non-Pequots defendants of the land suit in Ledyard), Tom Tureen (the attorney of the Pequots through the Native American Rights Fund), and Skip Hayward. Using a historical assessors' map

of the region and a felt marker, the team of three drew out the former boundaries of the reservation.²⁷⁰

This historical yet contemporary map was acted on immediately after the approval of the act, as several of the homeowners took the opportunity to immediately sell the land that had been under litigation since 1976 back to the Pequots. Within a single week of the act's passing, Jackson King facilitated almost ten closings between the Pequots and the residents who had collaborated to pass the act: "Immediately after the settlement act was passed, 8 or 9 of my clients who probably owned a total of 1000 acres were ready to sell and in fact, they were anxious to get their money and anxious to close it. So we just lined up a whole bunch of closings. That reservation did grow from 200 acres to probably 1200 acres in a matter of days."²⁷¹

Individual, Yet Collective, Stories of Return

In the years after federal recognition was achieved, many of the families who had been forced to leave by federal policy or financial need began to move back. Having overcome the limitations of the historical illegality of creating housing, the lack of jobs to support those living on and near the reservation, and the unstable legal position of the tribal nation in relation to the local community, the state, and the federal government, the tribe now utilized its networks of family to bring individuals and families back to rejoin the newly sustainable tribe. For some families, this was the culmination of generations of maintained connection. Some had previously stated their commitment to a return once they could be sure that they would not be moving back to empty land and no support system. As Skip reported to a newspaper in 1976, "We have 15 families who are ready to move onto the reservation as soon as we have units for them to live

²⁷⁰ "Settlement Boundary" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

²⁷¹ "Land Purchases" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

in.”²⁷² With the acquisition of such units, such families became able to choose to begin a new life at Mashantucket or somewhat maintain their former lives, at their discretion. Many other Pequots who had been separated from their origins by assimilation off the reservation rediscovered their Pequot family history and became the first in generations to move back to Mashantucket and be amongst family on such a scale.

The option of a return to the land at Mashantucket was opened formally in 1984 by the new constitution and bylaws to a select number of individuals with Pequot ancestry. Since 1975, the tribe had accepted individuals on the grounds of family ties as facilitated by existing members reaching out to family, but the new constitution established a formal procedure by which additional members could be added to the tribal roll. Under this new structure, membership at Mashantucket was made available to individuals who were able to prove lineal descent from six Pequot families who were verifiably living on the reservation at the start of the century, according to the 1900 or 1910 censuses.²⁷³ These bylaws did not provide for the construction of a blood quantum, instead prioritizing the familial connections that had drawn the existing population of Pequots back to the reservation. Under this new system, the population at Mashantucket entered began to expand.

Many of those who were aware of the Pequot history and recent struggle in relation to themselves were living in relatively close proximity to the reservation itself. For Josh Carter (the current Executive Director of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center), having grown up in Kingston, Rhode Island, within regular visiting distance of the reservation, meant the move of his family in the 1980s represented somewhat of a continuation. Having previously lived on Narragansett land and identified with that part of his heritage, visiting the reservation

²⁷² Sierman, “Indians to Discuss Housing Authority.”

²⁷³ Libby and Waldman, “Family with Pequot Ties Finds Roots Run Too Deep.”

regularly upon his grandmother's return was an opportunity to connect with another aspect of his heritage and another part of his family, especially those that he previously had only been able to see on rare occasions:

In my childhood, there was nothing better than spending time with cousins. It was just the best. You know, they were like the siblings you only get to see once in a great while, so you didn't fight with as much. And so some of the cousins that were here, I was always in relationship with, but some were new because they were Pequot relatives that I hadn't met yet.²⁷⁴

Still, with his first memories there being from before federal recognition, he noted a stark difference in being at Mashantucket before and after recognition. When his father moved back to the reservation full-time after recognition, he and his four brothers began to spend full summers at the reservation and experienced rapid change in real time. He was most excited about the new housing and amenities that were constructed. He was also surprised by the influx of people and their reasons for arrival, once he was old enough to understand what they had been: "Once I was a little bit older, I was made aware of the fact that a lot of the rematriation, or bringing folks back to Mashantucket, had to do with the fact that the tribe was able to provide jobs and homes, when those things were pretty hard to come by where the family had currently resided."²⁷⁵

He imagined the conversations between the family who was living at Mashantucket before federal recognition and their closest family members that they reached out to through existing ties of kinship that had motivated the first large move back to the reservation being shaped around a highly practical argument: "Look, your living condition is no better than what we've got here on the reservation. We have these jobs available and you can be working with your family. You know, working with and for your family. Not some random business owner, not some other town or government, but for your own people."²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Carter, oral history.

²⁷⁵ Carter, oral history.

²⁷⁶ Carter, oral history.

His cousin, Michael Thomas (who today works in the tribe's Cultural Resources Department), saw Mashantucket for the first time at the age of 15, when his grandmother determined that the whole family should return. For him, the reservation was an entirely new experience upon arrival and through its dynamic changes over the next few years. Despite having been taken to Eastern Pequot gatherings several times a year in his earlier childhood, being on "this side of the pond," at Mashantucket, was an entirely new experience even though it was associated with a place his family had always been aware of. His own childhood had been spent in the Narragansett tribal community. This was an experience common to Pequots with multiple tribal heritages, as their ancestors had regularly moved away from Mashantucket to other communities in order to maintain some degree of tribal identity. Though the experience of tribal community was not new to Michael Thomas, the size of Mashantucket was difficult to adjust to. He was unexcited about Mashantucket upon first arrival, but he trusted his family on the significance of their move, nonetheless:

It was the most boring place I had ever been as a fifteen year old. And for me growing up in the Narragansett tribal community, raised by hundreds of elders, running around on thousands of acres of land with dozens of other kids my age from the tribe, and then coming to a place with twenty relatives, and so I wasn't necessarily thrilled on a personal level but I understood the importance of it because my grandmother talked about trying to bring back a community here like the one that I've always known over there.²⁷⁷

Michael Thomas remembered an original community of about 25 members that were surviving still mostly on agriculture. He recalled walking on the untamed weeds of Mashantucket to see the new houses that were being erected. Though he remembered getting to interact with the relatively small, elder community at Mashantucket, including two of his favorite elders, both named Earl Colebut, he also remembered building relationships with an increasingly permanent community of young families whose connection to Mashantucket was in some cases very new.

²⁷⁷ Michael Thomas, oral history to Mary Clarke, February 10, 2026.

As he and his family welcomed the new wave of newcomers to the reservation, he noted the presence of both those connected by Pequot ancestry and those outside, who were brought by their Pequot loved ones.²⁷⁸ The growing community included many familiar faces from the Narragansett tribe in Rhode Island, who came to the new community in order to support their spouses or find work on the reservation, in spite of federal regulations establishing in 1978 that it was not advisable for tribal members of multiple identities to move between reservations. They were motivated in spite of this guidance by the strength of their own Pequot identity, and they continued to maintain connections to their Narragansett community through periodic returns to their reservation and a highly connected diaspora.

Many of the new non-Pequot arrivals to Mashantucket who arrived alongside Pequot family members devoted themselves to the construction of new opportunities on the reservation, as their Pequot family members did. In Michael Thomas' first summer at Mashantucket, he worked for a sand and gravel company, under the guidance of one such non-Pequot tribal spouse, Jim Walker, alongside about a dozen other employees, including operators, mechanics, and truck drivers. For non-Pequot members of the community like Jim Walker and Wayne Prince who married into the tribe, it was insignificant that they were not ancestrally Pequot, because they shaped and were shaped by the community around them.²⁷⁹

As the reservation continued to develop and provide opportunity to its residents, non-Pequot people in the broader Indigenous community of the Northeastern United States and Canada, traveled to Mashantucket to take construction jobs, where they were offered priority hiring, due to the formation of Indigenous as a political identity. While working, some formed families and became involved in the community traditionally; at least in one case, a non-Pequot

²⁷⁸ Michael Thomas, oral history.

²⁷⁹ Michael Thomas, oral history.

person who came to the reservation for work found significance in becoming a traditional singer within the tribe.²⁸⁰

Through those Pequots who returned to Mashantucket knowing it and their place there, their more distant family also became aware of the new option of life on the Mashantucket Pequot reservation. For the family of Sharon Porter (a Museum Services Associate today), who identified as Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, and Mohegan, the choice to move back to Mashantucket was not one made by a parent on behalf of their family, but one made continuously by different adult members of a family at different points of their life. Sharon Porter's mother, Laura, grew up in Connecticut, where she found what her daughter described as her true love on the nearby naval base, though he was often shipped out. Sharon was born in 1952, and her family soon grew by two sisters and one brother. When her father got the opportunity to stay in one place for longer periods, the family chose to move to New Jersey to start a new life. While there, her mother who "loved reading and knowing" taught her children about their history from afar and maintained her relations with those back home, especially a first cousin, Skip Hayward, who Sharon described as "two of a kind" with her mother in terms of their shared devotion to Pequot identity.²⁸¹

As the Pequots began regrouping in Connecticut, the now grown Porter family heard the call to return. When Skip Hayward reached out in the early 1980s to propose a move back along with the other family who was returning, Sharon's mother and sister returned home and soon reached out to the remaining siblings to encourage their subsequent move back to Connecticut. Once back in Connecticut, Sharon spent a difficult year meeting the family that she had grown up away from, and by the time recognition came, she still described feeling that she did not truly

²⁸⁰ Michael Thomas, oral history.

²⁸¹ Sharon Porter, oral history to Mary Clarke, August 29, 2025.

know her family. Still, as she found a job at the new high stakes bingo operation (where she remained for the next thirty years after its transition to a casino, until the COVID-19 pandemic), as a director of a small exhibition on Pequot history there. She also married and had a family. Being at Mashantucket with her family, in a position of work that felt genuinely significant to her, allowed her to raise her children and put them through school, in a close family that she cherished. It also let her and one of her sisters support her mother, who had so wanted the family to return home, at Mashantucket as she aged and passed.²⁸² In the previous generation of Pequot people, one throughline of the stories that are told is the difficulty of having to watch a parent pass away from Mashantucket, after years of hoping to return home. The new generation was able to care for their aging parents in a community of family, in a place that felt like home, and know that they had not been denied the desire to return home by the structural problems that Mashantucket previously suffered that barred returning residents. The significance of a loved one passing at Mashantucket, at peace amongst community, was not an insignificant one to other members of the tribal nation, including Marjorie Colebut-Jackson.

For Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, the chairwoman of the Elders Council as of 2026, even visiting the reservation for the first time, since her parents moved to New York in her youth to find jobs to support her and their nine other children, was a less than ideal option. She felt deeply connected to her culture through her Pequot father, but the concept of Mashantucket was not yet appealing to her in 1992 when the idea of moving back was first proposed. Having spent her childhood learning her history and culture in New York from her father (who himself had learnt the most about his own culture while away from the reservation and traditional school, on the road with his truck driver father, Earl Roy Colebut), she felt particularly connected to her Pequot ancestry. Practicing her culture through making traditional crafts with her siblings under her

²⁸² Sharon Porter, oral history.

father's tutelage, and attending powwows when able, she was used to being Pequot without a larger community around her and bearing the burden of being the first Pequot that the people around her knew. Her childhood was shaped by many instances of being forced to educate her peers, even as a child, about being Pequot. When in third or fourth grade, months of her craft work around the kitchen table had produced her first pair of moccasins, her father suggested she wear them to school, where she was immediately bullied to such an extent that she had to be picked up from school in tears, saying "I don't want to be Indian no more." However, her father approached her teacher and arranged for her to talk to her entire class the next day about the long process of making the moccasins. Afterwards, she remembered everyone wanting to be her friend and know more about her culture, despite their unkindness a single day before. She knew then and now the importance of such a thing; the students who had once bullied her would be kinder to the next Pequot that they met, and they would speak of her memory when she was not present to speak of it herself:

Now, when somebody says, 'what's a Pequot?', they will be your voice when you are not there. They will say, 'I know a Pequot. I met this Pequot girl, she used to wear her moccasins.'... Because you taught them about your culture. You taught them about what those moccasins meant to you. And they will know that not all Indian people are bad, not all Native Americans are bad...And now, when somebody says, 'Oh, Native Americans are this and that,' they will speak up and go, 'Well, I know a Native American girl. She wasn't like that.'²⁸³

In adulthood, Marjorie took up work as a traveling nurse, and by the 1990s, her home was in Hawai'i, where she genuinely enjoyed her work and life. However, when her father developed a fast-acting cancer and moved back home to Mashantucket for his last year of life to connect with the family that previously been unknown to him, after years of having his luggage packed to return (as his father had before him), Marjorie Colebut-Jackson was entreated to return home and bring her siblings with her. She consented to one month back home in Mashantucket,

²⁸³ Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, oral history to Mary Clarke, February 10, 2026.

but made her father understand that she still liked her life in Hawai'i. After a month of learning about her father's upbringing and connecting stories to their physical locations, as well as bearing witness to the rapid changes of the reservation occurring around her, he went with her to the airport to return to Hawai'i, and gave her an insight that stayed with her:

'When you go back to Hawai'i and do your nursing, I want you to remember this. That you will go out there and you will take care of everybody else. You will help everybody else get better. You will tell them about your culture, you will tell them about who you are. And you'll probably be happy about that.' But he says, 'One thing I could tell you, the difference about you going back to Hawai'i and living and being here on the reservation,' he says, 'You go out there and practice your nursing, and you help everybody else. But when you come here to your reservation and your ancestral land, the difference between here and there is that when you practice here on your reservation and you teach your kids who they are and they live on the land of their ancestors, everything that you share with them and teach them and even your nursing, it will last for generations. Generations will prosper for what you teach and what you provide to them. But when you do that in Hawai'i, it will disappear. Because people will hear about it, but they won't practice it. They're not Native. They won't practice it, they won't learn it. They will probably remember you. But that's the difference about working and providing your education, your culture, your traditions on reservation versus off reservation. On reservation, generations will learn from you. You will have something to give back. Off reservation, it stops right there with the person you're speaking to. It does not go anywhere.' So he says, 'You make the decision.' He says, 'Because I did my job teaching you about your culture, about your traditions, about your history. Now it's up to you,' he says. He says when he's dead and gone, his job is done but he always wondered who was going to pick up that torch when he lays down to rest.²⁸⁴

She boarded her plane and returned to her life away from Mashantucket, but her father's words stayed with her and when she returned back home for his funeral, she chose to remain, to pick up the torch that needed a new carrier: "My dad was right. I had to pick up the torch. He taught it to my generation, which is my brothers and sisters, and now the torch gets passed on to my children and to my grandchildren." She knew that she could choose to continue to educate those around her on her culture for her entire life, and they would gain a surface-level understanding of Mashantucket through her, and that this would not produce an unhappy life for her. She would be able to practice her vocation of care anywhere in the world. However, she was

²⁸⁴ Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, oral history.

also made aware of the limitations that did exist in only interacting with her culture through those outside of it. Any understanding that this produced external to her would be cut off after a generation. She knew that specifically, the community of Native people from Hawai'i that she had been engaged with in her life away from Connecticut would carry her history as learners, but their own descendants would be more concerned with the maintenance of their own histories.²⁸⁵

At Mashantucket, she too could be part of the maintenance of her community and she did not have to do it alone. Originally, the choice to return to Connecticut for a month was exclusively for the benefit of her father. With him having passed, the decision to stay was not for him, but for herself, for her community, and for those that she could impact in the world. Listening to the advice of her father, she made trips to her dispersed family in Florida, California, and New York, and convinced each of her brothers and sisters to return home with their families. While at Mashantucket, she used her nursing experience to become the president and CEO of the Pequot Pharmaceutical Network, and she later became involved with the government of the tribe as a tribal council official.²⁸⁶

Building the Infrastructure of a Community

The period before federal recognition was dedicated to many projects centered around the development of the necessary facilitators of life in a community; housing, employment sources, and systems of government had to be developed in order to make life possible at Mashantucket without dependence on the surrounding town and state. The first housing on the reservation was trailers, but by 1990, a complete thirty acres of the land of the reservation was dedicated to twenty single family units and ten multifamily units in two apartment buildings, as partially

²⁸⁵ Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, oral history.

²⁸⁶ Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, oral history.

funded by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.²⁸⁷ With this need increasingly being met by the tribe, as facilitated by the independent status granted by federal recognition, the people of Mashantucket were able to turn their attention to the smaller markers of a community, both those that facilitated long-term independence and those that simply facilitated joy.

Since the reservation had been placed under the jurisdiction of Ledyard, the public services provided to its people were often neglected. Demonstrated in 1976, when an accidental fire burned down sections of painstakingly cleared land and burned several Pequots, and was only stopped by four departments after a delayed arrival, the Pequots could not depend on the surrounding companies.²⁸⁸ With an increase in people and land associated with Mashantucket that was under the protection of the wider Ledyard fire department, there arose new questions around what Ledyard was responsible for: “There was a big confusion with the town of Ledyard on who was going to respond.”²⁸⁹ However, as more people arrived and the risk for fire scaled with the new arrivals, it was no longer acceptable to Mashantucket’s residents to be safe only at the whim of the Ledyard fire department. In 1986, the *Norwich Bulletin* printed that the reservation was not under the jurisdiction of Ledyard, and Ledyard constables were not strictly permitted to respond to calls from inside its boundaries. Mayor Mary McGrattan, speaking for the fire department, said they still recognized a moral obligation to serve the reservation, but they did also place a cost on such a service and demand an eventual service contract with Mashantucket. The cost that this moral obligation placed on Mashantucket was unclear:

²⁸⁷ James D. Wherry, Afterword to *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James Wherry (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 217.

²⁸⁸ “Fire Scorches Indian Land.”

²⁸⁹ “Fire House” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

“Whether the town intends to charge the Indians for each emergency call is undecided, McGrattan said.”²⁹⁰

Formed in 1986, the Pequot fire company provided an inconsistent safety, but as a company fundamentally created to serve the Pequots, it still was a better alternative than Ledyard. It was originally pieced together from only one firetruck and two drivers on constant standby, without a formal fire station for the service to be centered at. Because the Mashantucket Pequot Fire Department originally existed without any other complimentary security services, one woman named Belinda McKeon became responsible for the deployment of the two firemen, her husband, Gary McKeon, and Jimmy Walker: “There was no police department, there was no EMS, there was myself. And when anything happened on the reservation, they called me.”²⁹¹ Becoming interested in emergency services after witnessing the response to a 1983 accident, she completed EMT school and was appointed Director of the Emergency Medical Service for the tribe within a single year. She and only one other employee continued to serve the tribe there for the next two years, until bingo increased the need for emergency medical services.²⁹²

With only two firefighters available to resolve all non-health related emergencies on the reservation, and a lack of a police force until 1992, the training of additional firefighters became a necessity.²⁹³ By June 1986, the tribe’s numbers of potential responders to calls had risen to seven, with each having completed 400 hours of training and the process of receiving state certification.²⁹⁴ In the same year, the tribe began to plan to hire a state trooper and several

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Rau, “Ledyard Firefighters Ready if Tribe Calls,” *Norwich Bulletin*, June 27, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227216828/>.

²⁹¹ “Fire House.”

²⁹² “Safeguarding the People” (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

²⁹³ “Safeguarding the People.”

²⁹⁴ Rau, “Ledyard Firefighters Ready if Tribe Calls.”

constables to supplement the eight security guards who worked at the bingo hall.²⁹⁵ In April 1986, Richard Hayward reached out to newspapers to find contractors to build a firehouse as a station for the seven-member force. In August, the tribe began to look for a pumper fire truck through an advertisement placed in the *Norwich Bulletin*.²⁹⁶

A water tower that was built through a loan from the Farmers Home Administration and Department of Housing and Urban Development provided the water system necessary for the work of the fire department, including a 100,000 gallon standpipe and a number of watermains intended to prevent fire.²⁹⁷ Being growth-minded, Skip Hayward aimed for a larger tank than was strictly necessary for the ten houses that were on the reservation at the time. Jack Campisi recalled a debate around the construction: “And he kept saying, ‘I’m going to build a water tower.’ And I’m saying, ‘But Skip, that thing holds like millions of gallons. We only got ten or eleven houses on the reservation.’ ‘Yeah, but,’ he said, ‘We’re going to need the water.’”²⁹⁸ Despite his hopes for a 250,000 gallon tank, the “conservative[s] and rationalists” within the tribe pushed back and reduced the size of the tank to 100,000 gallons.²⁹⁹ Still, just years after the water tower was completed, it needed to be upgraded in size because of the new homes and offices that were continuously being constructed at Mashantucket.³⁰⁰

By 1988, the fire department was established enough within the region to be responding to calls from outside of the reservation and fulfill its desire stated in 1986 to be in a mutual aid agreement with the Ledyard fire department, as the other independent fire departments within the

²⁹⁵ Elizabeth Rau, “Indians Make Own Rules for Hall,” *Norwich Bulletin*, January 23, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1228305071/>.

²⁹⁶ “Mashantucket Pequot Indian Reservation Invitation to Bid Fire Truck Acquisition,” *Norwich Bulletin*, April 7, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227166975/>.

²⁹⁷ Wherry, Afterword, 217.

²⁹⁸ “Water Tower” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

²⁹⁹ “Water Tower.”

³⁰⁰ “Water Tower.”

region were.³⁰¹ When a landfill at Colonel Ledyard High School caught fire in September and the Ledyard Center tanker broke down after over a day of battling the fire, Mashantucket was called to bring in its own tanker to fight the fire.³⁰²

The fire department added an element of safety to the reservation, making them independent from the departments outside of their immediate community that claimed moral obligation to serve them but also considered charging them for each call and had arrived late to emergencies before. Importantly, the creation of an independent fire service was symbolic of the new position of the tribe as separate from Ledyard; John Holder described what the fire service meant to the Pequots even in the years when it was two people, one receiver, one truck, and no firehouse: “The firehouse was important because it’s part of building a community.”³⁰³

Another such marker of community was the softball field that was constructed in 1986. As the community considered hosting a powwow, they cleared a flat field that could feasibly host such an event. However, finding that the powwow required additional work that they would not be able to complete within their time limit, they instead decided to convert the cleared land into a softball field, as designed and laid out by tribal member John Holder.³⁰⁴ When complete, it was dedicated to Martha Hoxie, the mother of Elizabeth, Matt, and Alice, who was viewed as a common ancestor to everyone living on the reservation. The field was not meant to be for professional use, as demonstrated by its wet season tendency to turn into a pond and become home to families of frogs. Still, it provided access to leisure for many Pequots when it was not in pond form, especially those who lived in the apartments directly in front of it. Terry Bell,

³⁰¹ Rau, “Ledyard Firefighters Ready if Tribe Calls.”

³⁰² Bea Andrews, “Fire Burns on at Town Landfill,” *The New London Day*, September 18, 1988, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970597308/>.

³⁰³ “Fire House.”

³⁰⁴ “Softball Field” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

Elizabeth's granddaughter and one of the first to return to Mashantucket, described benefits for all; the athletes of the tribe gained a place to theoretically practice their craft, the recreationally inclined gained a place dedicated to fun activity, and those without interest in softball gained a picnic ground.³⁰⁵ In practice, the children of the tribe often did not have the equipment to use the site for its intended purpose, but it provided them with a site that felt significant as a status marker. Josh Carter described the use that the ball field found in his own childhood: "It was tremendous, obviously, used it for anything and everything outside of playing baseball. We didn't always have baseballs and bats to play baseball with, but we found things to play with."³⁰⁶

The Martha Hoxie Softball Field was significant for its symbolic value, both as a tribute to the woman who had created the community of the Pequots through ancestry, but also as a non-essential creation for the Pequots. It was a luxury that showed their status through their new ability to think outside of the establishment of immediate necessities. It was not a significant motivation for the Pequots whose arrival was anticipated and it did not liberate the tribe from the influence of the wider county and state, but it was constructed purely because there was enough money through grants to finance it and the council hoped to create joy in the community; Josh Carter summed his childhood feelings on the ball field: "I mean, it was like we were rich, you know? Had our own ball field."³⁰⁷

The Creation of Health Services for the Wider Community

Beginning immediately after recognition, in 1984, Mashantucket turned its focus to community services, and the first health clinic on the reservation was constructed. In a tribe which had previously dedicated much effort to the ethnographic preservation of Pequot medical

³⁰⁵ "Softball Field."

³⁰⁶ Carter, oral history.

³⁰⁷ Carter, oral history.

technology and technique, Matt Langevin's effort was not spurned, but added to by the implementation of more traditional American health technologies. The first form of the reservation health clinic was exclusively for the use of those considered to be part of the tribe. However, for many of the other Indigenous peoples in the region, the same barriers to care existed that had existed for the Pequots before 1984. The Pequots sought to expand the reach of the organization to especially the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy people in the region who were otherwise unable to afford health benefits, due to Maine tribes' impact in acting as a precedent that set the Pequots on the right path to be federally recognized. As a number of members of these tribes had been forced to leave their tribal communities for work, in the same way many Pequots had been, Mashantucket deliberately chose to offer aid to such members within with the wider Algonquin community in Connecticut. Seeking funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs resulted in the expansion that the Pequots had hoped for. They achieved a dual success from this; they both increased access to crucial healthcare services for individuals who were otherwise without options for this type of care, and they also made Mashantucket Pequot a more recognizable name. Some who came to benefit from this care had never heard of the Pequot people before they were brought in as beneficiaries of a Pequot system.³⁰⁸ Using federal healthcare funding in the form of a tax-exempt bond issue of \$137,500, this system was formalized through the construction of a permanent site of care. The Health Administration Building opened its doors on September 18, 1985.

The administration of the tribe increased its accountability for the needs of the Pequot and other Native communities of New London County by providing constantly expanding community services. Starting with adult education, a tribal clerk's office, road maintenance, and

³⁰⁸ "Pequot Health Department" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

forestry, and expanding to vocational training, cultural resources, community fire protection, and higher education grants by October of the same year, the community was able to use its profits from the industries that they managed to establish themselves in to create tangible difference in the lives of the community around the reservation, by providing resources its members otherwise lacked access to.³⁰⁹

However, this access was in part limited by the financial situation of the tribe. Phyllis M. Waite, who had moved back to the reservation to campaign for federal recognition, acted as the founder and President of the Pequot Pharmaceutical Network after having achieved recognition.³¹⁰ She described the early capabilities of the program as a result of the financial limitations of the tribe in the years before economic self-sufficiency was achieved: “The Indian Health Service was usually working on death, dying, those situations.” It worked in a complementary system with the emergency medical system, as pioneered by Belinda McKeon, to cover as many health-related situations as was feasible.

In the years after the tribe became economically self-sufficient, the Indian Health Service gained funding, and it became an additional site of employment for Pequot people. It also became increasingly dependent on this continued flow of money from the tribe itself. Though the Bureau of Indian Affairs had originally supported the creation of the program, their support decreased over time and the tribal nation became responsible for picking up where their federal programming stopped, and even expanding past what they had previously been capable of providing care for. It increased its primary and preventative care options as the tribe’s financial success made this a possibility.³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Wherry, Afterword, 217.

³¹⁰ Carter, oral history.

³¹¹ “Pequot Health Department.”

For Josh Carter, before he was spending long periods of time on the reservation, Indian Health Services was his link back to the tribe. His mother regularly took him and his three brothers to Mashantucket to go to doctor's and dentist's appointments that the tribe funded for them, because care was available and accessible on the reservation in a way that it simply was not off the reservation, due to the efforts of his grandmother.³¹² In those years before his return, the health services became a major link between the place and him, as they motivated physical visits to the reservation. In the case of Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, the existence of such services was a draw to return to the reservation, not to make use of them herself, but to contribute her care to them for the sake of her community. As a nurse by profession off the reservation, she found significance in continuing her practice for the sake of people who could directly benefit from it and know what it meant to her. Becoming the CEO and president of the Pequot Pharmaceutical Network was only a possibility for her because the Pequot Pharmaceutical Network was borne from earlier attempts at making social services available in the region through Indian Health Services. As this care expanded, Pequot and non-Pequot community members alike continued to find significance in both the giving and receiving ends of the system.

The Academization of Pequot Identity

In a period defined by an increased fervidity in seeking non-Pequot and non-governmental acknowledgement of Pequot presence, as well as increased interest in Pequot affairs in the surrounding towns as promoted by the regular reporting on them in local and national newspapers, the residents of Mashantucket gained a new route to recognized authenticity in the form of academic recognition of Pequot history, and resultantly, identity. Such academic awareness was of federally recognized importance for establishing the validity of a

³¹² Carter, oral history.

tribe, with one crucial component of recognition being derived from “Identification as an Indian entity by anthropologists, historians, or other scholars.”³¹³

Though news about the Pequots was disseminated in greater form in the years leading up to federal recognition, it did not fully counteract the narrativization about Pequot extinction that had been spread by the local educational system’s focus on the Pequot War as the last site of relevant Pequot history. Even for author Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., whose childhood in Greenboro, Connecticut, did not deter him from going on to study Indigenous American history centered around the Western half of the United States, contemporary Indigenous peoples in Connecticut did not exist in his original conception of the world: “Some thirty-six years ago, when the world was younger and more innocent...I wandered into a museum in my hometown of Greenwich, Connecticut, and was informed, regretfully but authoritatively, by a curator who had the mournful look of an undertaker, that all Indians in Connecticut were extinct.”³¹⁴

Even for those engaged with Indigenous history within the area, the myth of extinction was ubiquitously and unquestionably integrated into their interactions with the Pequots. Kevin McBride, who received a doctorate from the University of Connecticut in 1984 for his work in Indigenous archeology, described his own lack of awareness of the modern Pequot people until he was face to face with the head of the Pequots: “I knew very little, in fact, I knew very little about it, sorry to say, until I met Skip Hayward and I became more actively involved. I was clueless, in spite of the fact that I was a professional and making my livelihood from learning

³¹³ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Regulations, Guidelines and Policies for Federal Acknowledgment as an American Indian Tribe* (Washington, D. C.: Federal Register, 1978), 39363, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/assets/as-ia/ofa/admindocs/25CFRPart54_1978_InitGuidelines.pdf.

³¹⁴ Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., “New England Indians Then and Now,” in *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*, ed. Laurence M. Hauptman and James Wherry (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 5.

about and teaching about Native people, I had no idea what was, what was literally in my backyard.”³¹⁵

Kevin McBride’s earlier interactions with the archeology of the region demonstrated his lack of awareness of the active presence of the Pequots. In 1977, by which point there had been permanent residents at Pequot for 2 years and active attempts to increase awareness for almost as much time, McBride went looking for lithic tools from New England in order to create a reference collection for his university’s anthropology department. Rather than seeing any tribes as a potential source of these tools, he instead wrote to the *Lithic Technology* journal to obtain the support of other academics in obtaining such materials, and assisted at a mandatory pre-construction dig in Montville with University of Connecticut professor Jean Aigner, who had stated an expectation of finding artifacts of the Pequot or Mohegan tribes who “may have settled there.”³¹⁶ As he continued his education, he found evidence of Pequot presence on their historical land through the mandatory digs that accompanied construction projects. Done theoretically to stop the covering of Pequot historical sites, the finding of arrowheads and ceramic shards in two separate campsites in 1982 did not stop construction of apartments for the elderly occurring on the site.³¹⁷ In practice, though these digs did unearth some artifacts and pieces of evidence of historical Pequot presence, they were largely symbolic in nature and meant to show an unwillingness to cover over Pequot history with American construction. However, construction often occurred regardless.

³¹⁵ “Ethnography Project” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

³¹⁶ “Requests for Information,” *Lithic Technology* 6, no. 1/2 (1977): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43799078>; “Archeologists to Dig at Camp,” *The New London Day*, April 8, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970058799/>; “Dig Fails to Find Indian Artifacts,” *The New London Day*, April 13, 1977, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970061153/>.

³¹⁷ “Dig Site Reveals Indian Campsites,” *The New London Day*, March 17, 1982, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970464361/>.

Kevin McBride was forced to move past his self-proclaimed cluelessness, as he became involved in a major project housed at the Mashantucket Pequot reservation attempting to recover lost connections through archeological research in 1983. To commence their ethnography project, Mashantucket invited Kevin McBride to visit Mashantucket and perform the first ever archeological survey done on the reservation. Though sites all over the state were fertile for discovery of artifacts and sites, those at Mashantucket and the Gray Cedar Swamp were particularly fruitful due to their lack of colonial European or American layers of building obscuring the deeper Pequot archeological record of the region.³¹⁸ Financed by a \$25,000 grant from the Connecticut Historical Commission in 1984 and another \$18,000 grant from the same organization the following year, as well as funding directly from Mashantucket arising from its newly active industries, the archeological project boasted eight months of work, fifteen engaged archeologists (mostly from the University of Connecticut's archeology graduate school), and a plan for the next ten years of work to happen on Pequot sites, by September 1984.³¹⁹

McBride, his team of student archeologists, and their partners at Mashantucket began this work with a survey of a graveyard that was used by the Pequots in Ledyard, and that had been transferred to the Pequots that very month, included within 1,000 acres of settlement land.³²⁰ Their purpose there was severalfold. Established directly after the Pequot War, the graveyard was expected to hold pottery and grave goods that could provide valuable cultural information. However, their mapping of location of graves also opened up the graveyard for continued use by contemporary Pequots, as it ensured that they would not "be hitting any graves" as they continued to inter community members. Pequot involvement with the project was described in

³¹⁸ "Ethnography Project."

³¹⁹ Clare Collins, "\$18,000 Grant Awarded for Study of Indians' History," *The New London Day*, February 7, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/971621694/>; Clare Collins. "Ancient Burial Site Returned to Pequots." *The New London Day*, November 29, 1984. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970523579/>.

³²⁰ Collins, "Ancient Burial Site Returned to Pequots."

the newspaper at every level. For the purposes of the archeologists involved, their work was only made possible by contemporary Pequot oral histories revealing the location of the graveyard. Their methodology was impacted by considerations of ethics likely encouraged by the Pequot people, as in the case of their avoidance of directly opening graves.

Their explicit collaboration was noted by Skip Hayward in a newspaper piece on the digs in the area: “‘We can read about what happened to the people here, but to have it hands-on and visual, it makes it all come alive,’ said Richard Hayward, chairman of the Mashantucket tribe, which is cooperating with the project.”³²¹ Though the piece in the *Hartford Courant* was valuable for raising local awareness of the ethnography project, author Kristi Vaughan’s chosen language around cooperation confounded the source of the project; Pequot “cooperation” implied a non-Pequot source, meaning the reality discussed by Kevin McBride of having been approached by the Pequots was obscured.³²² Even after a year on the project, with great success in locating sites, studying a housing history around wigwams, and establishing an understanding of early colonial Pequot material culture as impacted by European material culture, McBride described the depth of Pequot knowledge as greater than his own in practice and motivation: “‘You rarely meet a group of Indians so concerned with finding out about their own culture. I spent a year going over documents and I think I know as much or more than most people about all this—until I talk to a Mashantucket. It’s almost as if they have to know.’”³²³

By April 1985, the research of the Pequot graveyard proved significant in terms of impact on contemporary land politics, as the precedent of grave appearance set by the study of the original graveyard was used to justify the purchase of another 60 acres of land containing

³²¹ Kristi Vaughan, “UConn Survey Team Digs Up Information on Indian Tribe,” *Hartford Courant*, September 4, 1984, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/243116322/>.

³²² “Ethnography Project.”

³²³ Clare Collins, “Indian Land Revealing Tribe’s History,” *The New London Day*, November 1, 1984, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970508161/>.

hundreds of presumed graves. The land would have otherwise been bulldozed for the purpose of residential development.³²⁴ In March 1986, Mashantucket paid \$204,000 for the land containing the graves, stating that they would have gone to court over the land settlement over it had not been possible.³²⁵ As represented by their Tribal Economic Advisor, James Wherry, this was a non-negotiable act of protection: ““Buying the land will protect those graves...It’s part of their being, their ancestors, their blood.””³²⁶ The Pequots continued to protect gravesites as they were found in routine excavations that normally preceded construction of private property. In 1990, when between forty and fifty burials were disturbed by such an excavation, the Pequot people and their allies in scholarship methodically catalogued all which had been disturbed and then reburied everything with proper ceremony the following year at the Long Pond Cemetery.³²⁷

McBride’s research team began to release their findings along a number of academic routes for the benefit of both the Pequots and the historical community in Connecticut. As early as 1985, McBride’s unpublished data was cited as influencing the work of another regional scholar, Curtiss Hoffman, in his piece, “Revising the Late Archaic Period in Southern New England,” for his remarks on the use of quartz in tools used in the region.³²⁸ Still, such findings were presented apolitically and as separated from the present in their delivery, even as usage of McBride’s data demonstrated that Hoffman’s work was not insignificantly dependent on the data of contemporary Indigenous groups. The Hoffman article did not refer to any present-day nations

³²⁴ “Indians to Buy 60 Acres,” *Norwich Bulletin*, April 3, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1226898037/>.

³²⁵ Gerald Bishop, “Indians Pay \$204,000 for Old Burial Ground,” *The New London Day*, February 1, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970449455/>.

³²⁶ Jake Henshaw, “Indians Call for Burial of Remains on Display,” *Norwich Bulletin*, February 7, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1228254921/>.

³²⁷ “Long Pond Cemetery” (Wall panel, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

³²⁸ Curtiss Hoffman, “Revising the Late Archaic Period in Southern New England,” *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 13 (1985): 60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40914252>.

such as the Mashantucket Pequot, but only “Late Archaic groups” broadly and without present day analogs. Even with new data arising from the Pequots impacting contemporary archeology outside of the tribe, without their involvement in the presentation and analysis of such data, such work was made vague, impersonal, and unconnected to its historical context.

Outside of the realm of archeology, a collection of historians and scholars relied on oral histories from the tribe to create *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation*. Intended to showcase the full range of Pequot history, from prehistory to 1975 and the contemporary moment, it was another piece of scholarship that existed due to direct contact with individuals at Mashantucket as the work of eight years of collection and writing. The idea for it arose collaboratively and the product eventually came to fruition because of the careful and considerate practices of ethnography practiced by the thirteen participating scholars and a willingness to contribute by the Pequots that they worked with.³²⁹ Relying on oral history and personal communication as sources for Pequot life at all points, the book came to exist only through Pequot involvement at all points, because its very point of innovation was its refusal to work from only traditionally-prioritized written documents.

From The Massacre to the Museum: Presentations of Continuity

The research team led by Kevin McBride had in 1984 announced an intention to create a museum to house the artifacts that they were finding and the history revealed by such findings by June 1987, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Mystic Massacre.³³⁰ The idea was not a wholly new one. Members of the tribe who had interacted with Elizabeth George Plouffe remembered her hopes to have such a museum erected for the Pequots before anyone even

³²⁹ Laurence M. Hauptman and James Wherry, Preface to *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), xviii.

³³⁰ Vaughan, “UConn Survey Team Digs Up Information on Indian Tribe.”

moved back home fully; for Theresa Bell, who had regularly visited the reservation and Elizabeth there in her childhood, the hope to construct a museum was incredibly familiar: ““Sometimes, my brother Skip and I would camp out in the Cedar Swamp and we would go treasure hunting, to find artifacts and things for the museum we were going to build someday; my grandmother always said we’d have a museum.””³³¹

The Pequots and their associated research team began planning more concretely for such a presentation of changing history and culture to connect the prehistoric to the present in December 1985, in a four day brainstorming session around the logistics of cost and appearance that was attended by anthropologists, officials, and museum experts. Expecting to finance the project with municipal bonds, the tribe, as represented by Skip Hayward in the talks, expressed little concern for the cost of the project due to its significance: ““If we’re going to do this thing and do it right, money should not be the subject.””³³² The predicted \$1 million cost of the museum rose to a possible \$3.5 million in the year before its anticipated opening, a rise accounted for by a new plan to seek a loan from the federal Farmers Home Association or local banks as a secondary option. The loans in turn were anticipated to be repaid with 20% of the yearly profits from the bingo hall that was constructed in 1986.³³³ However, the legal complications associated with the creation of such a system halted this development until 1998.

Instead, in 1987, McBride organized a one-day public lecture in a larger symposium hosted by the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford. His talk, titled *Reconstructing Pequot Indian Culture*, centered on the findings of the archaeology and ethnography performed over the

³³¹ “Theresa Hayward Bell, Executive Director.”

³³² Gerald Bishop, “Planners Begin Talks for Pequot Museum,” *The New London Day*, December 28, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970500581/>.

³³³ Gerald Bishop, “Profits from Bingo to go Into Museum,” *The New London Day*, February 11, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970453066/>.

last four years.³³⁴ Having located through their research three separate but simultaneously-occurring communities on the reservation, and established community roles of tribal members from the seventeenth century to 1930, they announced an intention to continue their research specifically with the goal of locating the site of the Mystic Massacre in 1637 and identifying practices related to agriculture, foodways, and housing norms.³³⁵ Significantly, such information was placed in the advertisement for the event that was provided to the *New London Day*, in the county of the tribe, perhaps on the basis that the readership would be compelled by a reference to the most widely known piece of Pequot history in the area, the Pequot War.

Broader Connecticut-based newspapers did not have this historical reference to rely on to draw interest, so they instead turned to the modern Pequot tribe, which had made the news for its recognition battle four years prior. Advertising for the event placed in the *New York Times*' Connecticut Guide specifically was not based around the findings of the archeological record, but around the broader implications of such findings for a modern community. Specifically referencing the common "knowledge" of the annihilation of "all 5,000" Pequots in the Pequot War, the advertisement made it clear that the talk was concerned with dispelling the myth of the extinction of the Pequots and drawing attention to the presence of modern-day Pequots at Mashantucket as "presumably descendants of the original tribe."³³⁶ This marked a distinction made between McBride's work as partnered with the Pequots and the archeological work produced prior, including his own; the ethnography project was not just concerned with establishing the history of the tribe, but connecting it explicitly to the presence of a modern

³³⁴ "Museums," *Connecticut Post*, April 2, 1987, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1251311039/>; Bishop. "Planners Begin Talks for Pequot Museum."

³³⁵ "Pequot Culture to be Topic," *The New London Day*, April 6, 1987, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970560893/>.

³³⁶ Eleanor Charles, "Connecticut Guide," *New York Times*, April 5, 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/05/nyregion/connecticut-guide-852287.html>.

nation and explaining the implications of such a history on the world for a contemporary community. By naming the tribe impacted by the study, it also provided credit for the data to the community.

The Creation and Development of the Bingo Hall

Mashantucket had long followed a similar trajectory to that of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, in Maine, as demonstrated by their federal recognition attempts under subsequent administrations. Being under the authority of different state governments, they were not in the same position of rights and abilities all of the time, but the federal policy that applied to one applied to the other. The Penobscot attempted to finance financial independence for the tribe through high stakes bingo since the 1973 construction of “Original Indian Bingo.” However, this route to economic development was barred to them in 1983 and it remained inaccessible as a result of the exact wording of their sovereignty agreement, even as bingo once more became a feasible option for all other tribes through the 1987 decision permitting bingo to be operated tribally, *California v. Cabazon Band of Indians*.³³⁷ The Pequots, who did not have a prior history of operating bingo, were witness to the historic success of such enterprises in the Northeast, as well as the American West, and the new availability of them to create profit for federally recognized tribal communities. Still, the decision to open operations of such a sort was not taken lightly at Mashantucket. For three years after federal recognition was decided at Mashantucket, debate raged around whether the prosperity that bingo could bring would be worth the damage it would sneak in as hidden costs; Terry Bell remembered such debates: “We were very concerned about different kinds of things that it might bring here: crime, prostitution,

³³⁷ *An Act to Authorize the Operation of Slot Machines on Indian Island in Old Town; California v. Cabazon Band of Indians.*

and all the bad things that you hear, even today, that go along with gaming.”³³⁸ Still, the danger of being dependent on state and federal aid overpowered the potential danger of bad actors being drawn to the bingo hall, and construction began.

Even before the bingo hall was a certainty, the planning for it was enmeshed with the planning for a cultural museum. As early as 1985, the Pequots were planning to create their museum of history and culture derived from concurrent anthropology and ethnography, and they anticipated the location of such a museum to be proximate to the location of the bingo hall, perhaps as a means of attracting visitors to the museum for excursions.³³⁹

The bingo hall came into existence due to the aid of tribal family in the Seminole, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy tribes, who each had previous experience with industry from their own bingo enterprises. To Michael Thomas, who worked at the bingo hall at Mashantucket, the modern Pequot economy was born not on Mashantucket, but in the Sockalexis Bingo Palace on Indian Island, in Maine.³⁴⁰ Due to the Penobscot people being permitted to continue running their own bingo operation, they became involved with the operation at Pequot through management and a busing contract amounting to \$12,000.³⁴¹ The Mashantucket bingo project was conceptualized as a completely partnered venture between the Pequot and Penobscot peoples. Though there was initial hesitancy to open operations on the Pequot side, due to a desire to be certain that they had fully considered all of their options for economic development, the Penobscots were publicly committed to the plan as early as November 1983 with as much excitement as the state of Connecticut had apprehension for the plan.

³³⁸ “Bingo” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

³³⁹ Bishop. “Planners Begin Talks for Pequot Museum.”

³⁴⁰ Michael Thomas, oral history.

³⁴¹ Jeanne Curran, “Tribal Governor Charges Predecessors with Mismanagement,” *Bangor Daily News*, January 24, 1989, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/665238868/>.

The day after the Pequots had announced that they were considering implementing bingo on the reservation in February 1986, Connecticut's Attorney General, Elliot Gerson, announced the state's preparedness to consider the illegality of such operations in light of anti-gambling laws. However, for Penobscot Lieutenant Governor Joseph Francis, Connecticut's relative lack of such legislation was a major motivator of the collaboration. The Penobscot tribe, having lost their own ability to host bingo to the Supreme Court a second time that very week due to their agreement with the state that had permitted federal recognition, was excited by the prospect of the creation of a \$2.5 million bingo hall at Mashantucket, as financed by outside investors, and collaboratively designed by the Penobscots. They hoped it would provide sufficient profit for both tribes to be able to thrive. Unlike managing a bingo operation in Maine, the Penobscot people being invested in another in Connecticut was entirely permissible under their agreement with the federal government.³⁴² They were also glad to be collaborating with a long-standing tribal partner: "Love [the Penobscot Governor] said the two tribes, both of Algonquin Indian stock, have been closely aligned for 15 years... 'We're relatives, the same people.'"³⁴³

Rather than giving an immediate commitment to the project, Mashantucket fully considered its existing business ventures and attempted to find a way to obtain self-sufficiency without bingo. New industries arose on the reservation, in the form of a sand and gravel company and pizza parlor, but neither gave the tribe the economic position it sought. Under Jim Walker, the tribe opened a gravel pit in March 1985, and after four months, a bank loan enabled them to invest in sand and gravel mining equipment, including a hydraulic excavator, front-end loader, and portable screening plant, resulting in a moderately profitable mining project.³⁴⁴ The

³⁴² David Collins. "Is the State Game for Pequot Bingo?" *The New London Day*, November 4, 1983. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970496939/>.

³⁴³ Kyn Tolson, "Indian Bingo Laws in Works," *The New London Day*, July 3, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970451683/>.

³⁴⁴ Wherry, Afterword, 216.

gravel company provided significant employment for certain individuals within the tribe, but it could not finance a sovereign nation. The pizza parlor, Mr. Pizza, was purchased with part of the \$300,000 provided to them by the federal government in 1983 for tribal economic development. It was successful up to a certain point, providing in the words of Terry Bell, “A steady cash flow, something that the tribe was not used to having.” This cash flow was impermanent though. The restaurant was more useful to the tribe as an alternative meeting spot to the trailer housing the tribal office: “In the end, Mr. Pizza proved more successful as a tribal meeting place than a business venture.”³⁴⁵ When the restaurant shut down, other ventures had to be considered, and one such venture that was adopted was the creation of the bingo hall.

Though the Penobscot Lieutenant Commander had been intent on the operation of the hall within the year, ““as soon as we can start pouring the concrete slab,”” actual operations did not begin for years due to political complications.³⁴⁶ By 1985, the attorney general had indeed concluded that high stakes bingo operated out of Mashantucket was illegal, as it was in the rest of the state. The bingo operation ran into problems with the state due to its plans to offer prizes in excess of the state limit of \$500. If they held to this plan, the chief state attorney’s office threatened them with arrest. Still, the bingo hall planned to offer prizes up to \$12,000.³⁴⁷ Thomas Tureen, representing the Mashantuckets, disagreed on the claims of illegality on the grounds of national precedent: ““We respectfully disagree with his (McGuigan’s) conclusion and would only point out that it is at odds with every court in the country which has addressed this question in a

³⁴⁵ “Mr. Pizza” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

³⁴⁶ Collins, “Is the State Game for Pequot Bingo?”

³⁴⁷ Bishop. “Planners Begin Talks for Pequot Museum.”

similar question,” as in Florida, California, Wisconsin, and Washington. He promised an appeal for their ability to operate bingo.³⁴⁸

The sentiment of the attorney general was echoed throughout the state’s non-Pequot peoples, however. One anonymous newspaper opinion piece in February of the same year argued that the situation in Connecticut was fundamentally dissimilar to that of the other states, in part because of a history of attempted non-tribal gambling operations, all spurned by the legislature, in an “expression of public principle.” Furthermore, it argued that the gambling operation was a truly temporary operation relying on an inconsistent public taste, that would only benefit the out-of-state Penobscot people.³⁴⁹ Others within the state were opposed, but rather than being on moral grounds, they feared that the operation at Mashantucket would cut into their own bingo operations’ revenues due to Mashantucket’s uniquely high stakes.³⁵⁰

The element of illegality did not halt operations at Mashantucket, where both construction and a legal suit against the attorney general on the grounds of a violation of constitutional rights were underway by March 14, 1985. Having voted on whether the operation should be opened within the tribe, the matter was settled for them. They intended for the over-30,000 square foot building to open to customers by Independence Day of that year.³⁵¹ By October, those aligned with the tribe were more hesitant about its prospects, but not defeated. James Wherry, the socio-economic development specialist for Mashantucket, began to propose that in the event of a failure to win in the ongoing court case, the partially-constructed shell of

³⁴⁸ Clare Collins, “Pequots’ Planned Bingo Termed Illegal,” *The New London Day*, January 26, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970990996/>.

³⁴⁹ “In Our Opinion: Problems in Pequot Bingo Plan,” *Norwich Bulletin*, February 5, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227459610/>.

³⁵⁰ Elizabeth Rau, “Caution, Optimism Greet Bingo Ruling,” *Norwich Bulletin*, January 23, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1228305071/>.

³⁵¹ Jamie Beckett, “Pequot Bingo Parlor Work Defies Chief State’s Attorney,” *Norwich Bulletin*, March 15, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227134076/>.

the hall could exist as a convention center. However, he also viewed the state's actions as fundamentally wrong, in part because he argued that they were uniquely acting against the action at Mashantucket, and turning a blind eye to other ostensibly illegal "gambling" operations that were in the same position, including one on the Groton-based naval submarine base.³⁵²

In November, it was federal action that saved the Pequots' operations. Ronald Reagan's administration, despite previously opposing the federal recognition of the Pequots, did not oppose the high stakes bingo operation. Rather, he proposed to the House Interior Committee that the bingo be allowed to exist if placed under federal supervision by a Regional Indian Gaming Commission.³⁵³ Acting on his proposal, in February, 1986, the tribe designated a previously-existing three-member commission within the tribe, to perform the supervision of records, profits, employees, complaints, and game rules proposed by Reagan, until a federal body was put in place in summer. The Pequot commission was joined by five Penobscot individuals who moved to Mashantucket as part of the management of their 20% of the bingo hall.³⁵⁴ By 1986, construction was cleared to continue after a federal court affirmed the right of the Pequots to operate.³⁵⁵ Additionally, before the tribe had even opened the doors of the hall, it began preparing for additions to the bingo hall. In May, it began negotiating with homeowners in property abutting the land around the bingo hall, at least two of whom were immediately willing to enter talks.³⁵⁶

³⁵² Joyce A. Venezia, "Indian Bingo Hall's Fate Rests in Hands of Judge," *Connecticut Post*, October 13, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1251472574/>.

³⁵³ Elizabeth Rau, "Pequots Will Play Bingo with Reagan," *Norwich Bulletin*, November 16, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227993101/>.

³⁵⁴ Rau, "Indians Make Own Rules for Hall."

³⁵⁵ Rau, "Caution, Optimism Greet Bingo Ruling."

³⁵⁶ Gerald Bishop, "Pequots Plan to Acquire 200 Acres," *The New London Day*, March 14, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970495796/>.

The impact of bingo on the community was considerable, for the constant employment that it offered to the Pequots and non-Pequot community members that took work there, and for the resources that it offered to the community in terms of self-presentation, in often connected ways. Though previously, the agricultural programs had been viewed as a means by which the tribe was able to find employment for its members within the reservation, operations like the hydroponic greenhouse crucially did not produce enough money to support more than a few select employees and often were more useful to the tribe in concept than in practice. The openings for work at the bingo hall were great enough that advertisements for a range of jobs at the site were placed in regional newspapers beginning in April 1986, before it even opened.³⁵⁷ In spite of the fears from residents that bingo was only a profitable enterprise for the Penobscot tribal nation, immediate opportunity was provided to Ledyard residents, both Native and not.

With the ribbon cutting at Mashantucket on June 28 (as attended by 300) and public opening on July 5 (as attended by 1,700, at full-capacity for the new building), the promise of financial independence at Mashantucket was finally delivered on: “Love said that the opening is an economic independence day for the tribe. ‘In a sense it is,’ Hayward agreed. “With the revenues generated here, we will be able to build a museum and invest in other businesses.”³⁵⁸ By the end of the first month, the bingo hall was receiving just under 1,000 customers four nights per week and had earned \$400,000 in net profits.³⁵⁹ By November, profits were sufficient to engage with the needs of the wider community charitably, as they hosted a night whose profits

³⁵⁷ “Mashantucket Pequot High Stakes Bingo Help Wanted,” *Norwich Bulletin*, April 25, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227641495/>.

³⁵⁸ Steven Rosenbush, “Gaming Hall is Nearly Finished,” *The New London Day*, June 20, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970528929/>; Steven Rosenbush, “Bingo Hall Looking Like a Sure Winner,” *The New London Day*, June 20, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970530865/>; Matthew Kauffman, “1,700 Join Big-Buck Bingo Game,” *Hartford Courant*, July 6, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/369273146/>.

³⁵⁹ Steven Rosenbush, “Bingo Hall Receipts Top \$1 Million,” *The New London Day*, September 8, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/971075758/>.

were donated to the local charity, United Way.³⁶⁰ Citizen Terry Bell described the impact on the community: “From the bingo money, the tribe for the first time really got to build the tribal infrastructure. Centralized water system, better electrical throughout the reservation, and all tribal members would have a job. You could serve our own people for the first time in bingo.”³⁶¹ Beyond just permitting construction on the land, the profits of bingo financed the purchase of land to continue commercially developing and providing land for the tribe to live on.³⁶² The tribe managed to increase their land from 213 acres in 1983 to 1,021 acres in 1984 through a \$900,000 development fund to 1,638 acres in 1989 through the profits raised through bingo.³⁶³ For employees like Sharon Porter, Indian gaming was a direct route to both cultural education and economic success, as it provided a site for cultural education both before the museum was a fully viable option and after, for visitors who were less likely to make a separate trip from the gaming establishment to the museum built in 1998. Working as the director of a small exhibit at the hall, she emphasized that her position allowed her to support her close family, work with her larger family, and honor her culture and history.³⁶⁴

Michael Thomas worked under the Director of the Bingo Hall, Bruce Kirchner, since 1986, and proclaimed him “one of my best bosses ever.” The crew of the hall, who acted as a family, provided enough support and joy within the job for Michael Thomas’ memories of the work experience to be overwhelmingly and exclusively positive, even as he remembered busloads of visitors coming all the way from Canada in their bingo-driven intensity to terrorize the staff: “Those mean old ladies would have our waitresses crying in the freezer, the walk-in

³⁶⁰ “United Way Will Benefit from Bingo,” *Norwich Bulletin*, November 26, 1986, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1228290533/>.

³⁶¹ “Bingo.”

³⁶² “Ledyard,” *Norwich Bulletin*, January 18, 1987, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227185393/>.

³⁶³ Wherry, Afterword, 216-217.

³⁶⁴ Sharon Porter, oral history.

cooler. And so, bingo ladies can be terrifying, I did not know that before working at a bingo hall! These old ladies with six cards in front of them.”³⁶⁵

In 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act permitted the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, amongst others, to move past bingo into more profitable versions of gaming, including table games and slot machines. The Pequots, attempting to capitalize on the opportunity the act provided to expand their operations, sought funding to grow beyond the single building of the bingo hall. They were rejected from the Wall Street investors they originally sought to partner with, so they turned instead to a southeast Asia-based businessman named Lim Goh Tong, who had experience with the gaming industry from his prior involvement in developing Genting Highlands, a casino in Malaysia.³⁶⁶

The resultant casino, Foxwoods, which was named for the Pequots’ identity as “Fox People,” was birthed from the success of the bingo hall. Yet, it marked itself as distinct in its impact. The Foxwoods opening in February 1992 was met with anticipation and excitement from the community of existing bingo patrons, as well as new customers. One tribal member, Bob Birmingham, recalled the first day of operations as a day with shockingly many customers: “Lines of cars were backed up miles down Route Two away from the facility. People were parking on the street, as I recall. People being frustrated with not being able to get on the property just shut off their car in the middle of the street and jumped out and walked out to the casino.” The members of the nation had anticipated success at some level, but nowhere near the amount that they received.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Michael Thomas, oral history.

³⁶⁶ Anthes, “Learning from Foxwoods,” 205.

³⁶⁷ “Foxwoods” (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

By 2008, Foxwoods had grown from its original setup as a bingo hall into a casino home to 7,400 slot machines, 380 table games, and amenities including restaurants, hotel rooms, and entertainment venues, providing the tribe with true self-sufficiency that enabled the survival of the tribe, cultural and otherwise. The tribe never lost sight of its original goals of cultural survival. It consistently used the casino as a means by which it could ensure its members were sufficiently provided for so they were not forced to disperse again. However, it also used the casino as a location from which it could forge relationships outside the tribe and obtain wider recognition for its culture and history through a design emphasizing reconstructions of Pequot mythology and history.³⁶⁸

The Revival of Schemitzun in '92

The year 1992 marked several separate displays of cultural survivance for the Pequots. As the quincentennial of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World, the year could have been a reminder of the violence and erasure that had been weathered by the Pequots for half of a millennium. However, it instead marked two major changes for the tribe. The opening of Foxwoods is the more historically recognized of these events and its creation permitted the tribe to enter the world stage economically and obtain a site at which they were able to show their culture and history to a non-academic audience for the first time. However, it occurred in tandem with another display of culture and development for the tribe.

In 1992, the Pequots established themselves within a system of sovereign nations, both Indigenous and otherwise, by hosting what they called an “international ‘gathering of nations’” in an event titled “Schemitzun ‘92.” The event positioned Indigenous nations on the same level of guests as the American government itself, offering invitations to nations like the Wampanoag

³⁶⁸ Anthes, “Learning from Foxwoods,” 206.

and Eastern Pequots, and President Bush, alike. The name of the event promised both a connection to past and future practices of gathering for the tribe. Named for the Algonquian celebration, Schemitzun, or in English, “green corn feast and dance,” it was planned as a revival of a historical harvest festival. Through traditional practice of food offerings, dialect of song, and creation of regalia and beadwork, the event was a direct echo of historical practice. It also acted as an acknowledgement of what it had taken to achieve “revival,” with a demonstrative archeological dig at Haddam Meadows State Park planned, to show recent research into the tribe.³⁶⁹ The event was not intended as a single and final moment of acknowledgement, but a display to be repeated annually at Mashantucket.³⁷⁰

By September, the Pequots expected attendance of 2,000 each day in 1992, due to their limited housing for guests, but were already looking forward to the next year, when they hoped that the Foxwoods expansion project (the transformation of the bingo hall into a full-fledged casino) would enable attendance of up to 100,000; Joey Carter, a spokesman for the tribe, spoke of the 1992 feast as a preview: ““We want to give the people a taste of what’s going to happen next year.”” They positioned the event not as a powwow, for its lack of dance competition, but a cultural gathering nonetheless.³⁷¹ The festival was also understood to have unique artistic value, as traditional musicians planned to preserve the first instances of recorded drumming and traditional Southern Algonquin dialect-based singing over the course of the four days of the festival.³⁷² This marked one of the first times that such a usage of language could coincide with

³⁶⁹ Gail Braccidiferro, “Indians Will Gather this Weekend in Haddam for Powwow,” *The New London Day*, August 19, 1985, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/970500894/>.

³⁷⁰ Susann Viafora, “Indians Will Host Harvest Gathering,” *Norwich Bulletin*, September 23, 1992, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227666441/>.

³⁷¹ Susann Viafora, “Indian Festival Brings Cultures to Footlights,” *Norwich Bulletin*, October 22, 1992, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227299317/>.

³⁷² Viafora, “Indians Will Host Harvest Gathering.”

digital recording technology, as a result of the recent Algonquian language restoration project that Mashantucket acted as a collaborator in.³⁷³

Their advertising for the festival in October utilized a Pan-Indian tone rather than one centered around Mashantucket. It beckoned visitors to experience the work of “Native American artists” and eat “Northeastern Native American Foods,” to appeal to a wider Native audience and acknowledge their contributions to the offerings of the day.³⁷⁴ The same advertisement appeared in 21 separate newspaper articles across Connecticut, in newspapers based in the four Connecticut cities of Norwich, Hartford, Putnam, and New London.

The festival was a source of community, for those that arrived with or without connection to the Pequot people. Marjorie Colebut-Jackson remembered exchanging histories with tribal members from the western half of the United States at the first Schemitzun event, and her conversation partners being simultaneously surprised to not see the Pequots “wiped out,” and excited to explain their newfound connections. For one tribe in Minnesota, learning about the presence of the Pequots in Connecticut let them better understand a geographic feature in their own territory, which had been named Pequot Lakes in honor of a Pequot woman who had moved there and married a member of the community.³⁷⁵

Though attendance at the event was less than hoped for, it was nevertheless a site of community building with those inside and outside Mashantucket. For one teacher from Solomon Schechter Academy in New London, Dianne Zimmer, whose class visited Schemitzun, the event provided her children with an important cultural education: “We’re doing a Native American theme and this fit in with the class...It’s just exciting for the kids to be here, seeing people who

³⁷³ Viafora, “Indians Will Host Harvest Gathering.”

³⁷⁴ “The Mashantucket Pequot Nation Presents Schemitzun ‘92,” *Norwich Bulletin*, October 5, 1992, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227293924/>.

³⁷⁵ Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, oral history.

are obviously Native American.”³⁷⁶ Having moved in public conception from extinct to a population of under a dozen to a vibrant community of contemporary Native people, Schemitzun was an opportunity to show the real development around identity that had occurred among the Pequots, especially between federal recognition and 1992. The Pequot people had become “obviously Native American,” after decades of struggle to be perceived socially, legally, and culturally as they were. Having pursued significant economic engagement, infrastructure, social protections, academic acknowledgement, and most importantly, the return of community members and the welcome of newcomers, Schemitzun marked the Pequots’ arrival as a fully-formed, continuous community who promised to continue their development into the future.

³⁷⁶ Susann Viafora, “Crowds Small at Foxwoods Indian Festival,” *Norwich Bulletin*. October 23, 1992, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1227299624/>.

Conclusion

In 2025, I attended my first Schemitzun. As I watched dancers of all ages and wandered through lines of vendors, I saw the prospering version of the tribe that I had grown up around. Still, I could see that the memory of the tribe that had struggled and persevered was alive all around me, in the tribe's commitment to sharing the history of the tribe through dedicated stands about the museum and a historically accurate recreation of a village. The Schemitzun of 2025 was not the same as the one in 1992. Having followed through on their commitment to repeat the event in the years to come, it has become an event that, as the tribe reports, receives more than 3,000 Native performers and artisans every year, and more nations than the Gathering of Nations, at Albuquerque (the single largest powwow in the country).³⁷⁷ The tribe has increased the offerings at Schemitzun, now hosting traditional dance competitions and thus, it is now considered a powwow.

Schemitzun is not the only place where the Mashantucket Pequot nation has expanded since 1992. The present state of the Mashantucket Pequot tribe is one of great success and autonomy. Rooted in the progress of the 1970s, the sovereign tribe now possesses the means to drive its members into a hopeful future that does not negate the harms of the past but offers them a very real opportunity to move past them as much as possible and ensure that they are not repeated in the decades to come. In the nation's present form, it sits on 1,250 acres of land, with more acres in reserve under the state. It contains a population of over a thousand enrolled members, with a wider community of Pequot and non-Pequot family and friends contributing in meaningful ways to the nation from outside the reservation. Finally, it is fully self-sufficient, to such an extent that it is able to offer housing, education, and health programs to their community

³⁷⁷ "Schemitzun" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

members, as financed through the tribe.³⁷⁸ Mashantucket has never halted the growth of its community through familial connections to increasingly dispersed sections of their community. As of Summer 2025, Josh Carter spoke of a family of Pequot relatives that had only recently made the journey from New Zealand to Mashantucket after generations of living in the Maori community.³⁷⁹ They were not a part of the original waves of individuals traveling to the reservation in the late twentieth century. However, the arrivals that did occur in those times enabled a larger network of Pequot people, who carried with them their own relationships with those who may have otherwise not known about the developments at Mashantucket, to learn from their family about Mashantucket. In describing the constant connections being reformed through such networks, Josh Carter said, “The process still hasn’t ended. Beautiful.”³⁸⁰

The tribe has also continued to use financial success as a means for cultural survival. Mashantucket has consistently sought out new business ventures in order to financially support its members and ensure that the success that came to one generation of Pequots is available to the next. Having invested in other opportunities including a pharmaceutical company, construction company, and a possible high speed ferry, Mashantucket has refused to be dependent exclusively on their casino; Charlene Jones, a current citizen, has stated that this expansion is a necessity: “Trying to secure that future by diversifying is a big concern, not only for the tribal government but for the tribal people. No one wants to rely on gaming.”³⁸¹ Still, the tribe has managed to achieve their current self-sufficiency through the casino. Today, citizens of Mashantucket are assured comfort and opportunity in life through health care, child care, safety departments,

³⁷⁸ “Mashantucket Pequot Tribe of Connecticut,” University of Nevada Las Vegas Special Collections and Archives, Accessed April 11, 2026, <https://special.library.unlv.edu/taxonomy/term/12996>.

³⁷⁹ Carter, oral history.

³⁸⁰ Carter, oral history.

³⁸¹ “1993.”

housing, annual stipends, and all levels of education that they desire, all financed from the profits of Foxwoods, and as a result, they are able to act autonomously in shaping their own lives and they are not forced away from the reservation by economic necessity as their ancestors were.³⁸²

In addition to funding social services for the members of the tribe, the proceeds from Foxwoods were also channeled into the construction of a museum and research center dedicated to the tribe's history, as ancestors of the current nation dreamed of a century ago. Having planned for the creation of such a museum since the 1970s and delayed its construction in order to fulfill the large vision that Skip Hayward and other tribal members held for it, its final form when it was constructed in 1998 was monumental.³⁸³ Costing \$193 million to construct the 308,000 square foot site, it is strategically positioned a short bus ride from the casino, attracting visitors who may have originally traveled for the casino, and allowing the casino and museum to act as complementary partners in the mission of raising awareness of Pequot history and culture.³⁸⁴

At each stage of development in the Mashantucket Pequot nation, from when the tribe was populated by three elders in person and dozens from afar, to when the immediate relatives to the women returned and sought federal recognition and the possibilities provided by that status, to when a wider community was able to return or visit the reservation for the first time and use their diverse and varied life experiences to flesh out all elements of life at Mashantucket, the revitalization of Mashantucket was a process that relied on multigenerational attachment to the land and identification with the Pequot culture. Pequot culture survived because elders on and away from the reservation transmitted it where possible and their descendants identified with it enough to feel called to return to the reservation to merge their own experiences with those

³⁸² Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 210.

³⁸³ "Museum and Research Center" (Computer Interactive Program, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Mashantucket, CT, August 11, 1998).

³⁸⁴ Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods," 210.

preserved historically by Pequots including Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin, and preserve the combination for their own descendants. At every stage of the thirty years between 1960 and 1992, progress was slow-moving, due to the influence of local, state, and federal actors, who viewed the Pequots as either nonexistent or a threat. In Alice Brend's time, just under two years elapsed between her original purchase of her trailer in 1969 and the state's eventual acquiescence to her residence on Route 214. In the next decade, her sacrifice of time, funds, and quality of life permitted more Pequots, like Skip Hayward, to come to the reservation and use the same type of temporary housing to make life livable in the short term. They, themselves, followed her lead in fighting a legal battle spanning several years in order to acquire federal and state recognition between 1976 and 1983, thereby providing the tribe with an avenue to economic and political self-reliance, and enabling the return of more Pequots to the land by making the quality of life available at Mashantucket of much higher caliber without severing original connection to land or people. This, in turn, enabled those who had always maintained identity from afar to practice their identity in community by returning to Mashantucket and helping with the development of social services, infrastructure, and economic development, as driven by a motivation to see the tribe that had shaped them become sustainable long-term.

In the oral histories of Josh Carter, Sharon Porter, Michael Thomas, and Marjorie Colebut-Jackson, it is possible to see simultaneously the tribe that was, which struggled for its continued survival but pushed through by virtue of its members' persistent ties to the land and each other, and the tribe that exists today. The usage of oral history as a tool of historical understanding serves as recognition of the very present community that exists with connections to more distant histories. Though it would be possible to consider the history at Mashantucket in the later half of the twentieth century exclusively through newspapers and academically

published sources, this would be an incomplete history. A history that is so alive and well, both in terms of the individuals who lived through it and the events that continue to be of extreme relevance to the daily lives of everyone at Mashantucket, deserves recognition of these factors through the manner in which it is studied.

The history at Mashantucket is not unique in this; many of the modern histories that are studied today could be better understood if the memories of those who remember them firsthand are given the weight that they deserve. The act of these histories being told orally and after the immediate moment when they were experienced both contribute additional knowledge to the cases where they are used. An oral format offers a unique avenue by which sentiment can be expressed. This is primarily true for the obvious reason that the tone that one speaks in conveys emotion in a way that is generally more understandable than text, but also, the immediacy of such conveyance gives less opportunity for a person to edit and make neutral their genuine feelings about their experiences. The tone that one writes in is emotional in nature, but it is also one that can be considered for as much time as a writer desires and one that can be modified with ease even after it is put into words. An oral history, comparatively, is delivered over the course of a single conversation, and it prompts emotion without any time being set for modification of that emotion. Also, crucially, a written history only permits engagement from one side of the conversation. The reader can always engage with what the writer has made, but only through reacting with what they have chosen to put out, rather than being able to ask questions of their own. However, the writer has no way of reacting to the way that their story is being viewed and in many cases, they are unaware that it will be used in a historical study at all. An oral history is fundamentally conversational, permitting engagement in both directions and an opportunity for the study of a history to consent to their own inclusion. It was only when newspapers began

viewing Pequots as a source of information and seeking quotes from them that they began to tell the actual stories of the Pequots. Without this development, they would have continued to tell only their version of history. Similarly, it is only when we consider the Pequots a dependable source on their own history that we can fully engage with their experiences.

Histories centered around major historical figures fill an important role in historiography. These major actors create change in the world around them, thereby hypothetically impacting a great number of people. In this way, the story of a major historical figure can, to some degree, show the history of a great number of people in the broadest strokes, through a contemplation of what can change in one's life when change at a wider level is promoted. However, when one considers the story of a lesser-known individual, one can also find significant places of autonomy and choice that greatly impact one's own life and the lives of those around them. Skip Hayward is a verifiably major actor in history. As an inductee into the National Gaming Association's Hall of Fame, he is an individual with national significance.³⁸⁵ Similarly, though to a lesser degree, Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin were posthumously inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame.³⁸⁶ These distinctions, though certainly not recognizable universally, come with significance to relevant communities. These recognitions are valid and truly earned by the three named individuals. Skip Hayward importantly chose to return to the reservation in a very frontward facing position and pursue the political change that enabled others to return after him in, through state and federal lanes. Elizabeth George Plouffe and Matt Langevin chose to continue to educate Elizabeth's children and grandchildren on Pequot tradition and history, to protest the encroachment of the state, and to stay on the land even at great personal cost. They

³⁸⁵ "Tribal Gaming Pioneer Richard 'Skip' Hayward Joins Gaming Hall of Fame," *ICT News (Phoenix, AZ)*, September 21, 2016.

<https://ictnews.org/archive/tribal-gaming-pioneer-richard-skip-hayward-joins-gaming-hall-of-fame/>.

³⁸⁶ "Elizabeth George-Plouffe & Martha 'Matt' Langevin."

were each individuals who were structurally denied autonomy due to their identity as Native in the United States and the economic positioning that they lived within, as a result. For their choices that enabled a future, they are worthy of consideration and remembrance.

However, even in a group that has been structurally denied autonomy, it is remarkable the extent to which autonomy was nevertheless practiced continuously and deliberately by all Pequots. Each case of practiced autonomy came with corresponding ripple effects on the community of Pequot people and non-Pequot allies who eventually chose to maintain or reawaken connections with Mashantucket. This trait is not so unique to the major actors whose choices have been awarded with recognition. Sharon Porter's mother, Laura Porter, is not a person who in her life had news stories about her published or quotes from her mouth appear in published journal articles, as the three more recognized Pequots were. Still, each of her choices were impactful and ones that created the future we live in. By continuing to educate her children on Pequot culture, as the more recognized Elizabeth George Plouffe did, she created a new generation of involved Pequots who themselves were able to exercise true choice and return on their own terms to their community.³⁸⁷

For Marjorie Colebut-Jackson's father and the dozens of other Pequots who left the reservation in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as those who moved away from the reservation earlier, such moves away were not assertions of autonomy. They were acts of desperation caused by a state that continuously and deliberately devalued Pequot identity and made life on the reservation untenable, mostly due to a lack of employment opportunities in the region and a lack of education to facilitate opportunity. The choice to leave was a false choice between survival and death. Still, his story was not concluded with his forced departure. As a single working father for much of his children's lives, the choice to continue their education on

³⁸⁷ Sharon Porter, oral history.

Pequot culture was a sacrifice. Fighting for his children when they experienced discrimination from their peers was a choice. Finally, returning himself when he was able and entreating his children to do the same was an act of reclaiming identity from the state that had originally chosen to not protect it. His move away also facilitated the education and employment of his daughter, resulting in her being able to choose to return as a full, practicing nurse who could contribute her expertise to the tribe in its Indian Health Services program. His education of his children and encouragement for them to return was not functionally different from that of Elizabeth George Plouffe. However, in the contours of each individual story, one can find significant differences in terms of lived experience that enable a better understanding of a collective Pequot experience of life, progress, and futurity. A less visible position does not render his story less valuable or less worthy of consideration. The same applies for every other individual considered within the pages of this thesis.

The present state of the Mashantucket Pequot tribe is owed not to the singular choices of Skip Hayward or Elizabeth George Plouffe or Matt Langevin, but the millions of small choices of the many Pequots who became involved. This includes these three certainly, but their stories are not the entire Pequot story. The entire Pequot story cannot be so easily boiled down because it is not actually a single story at all. It is also a story that fundamentally lacks a conclusion, because the nation, the reservation, and the community depend entirely on future Pequots and the millions of small decisions that await them.

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