

## SERGEANT, JR., JOHN

**Last Name (variants):** Sajant; Sargent; Serjant; Sargeant

**Honorific(S):** Mr.

**Birth:** 1747 in Stockbridge, MA

**Death:** September 9, 1824 in New Stockbridge

**Affiliation**

Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge

**Faith**

Christian

**Nationality**

Anglo-American

**Occupation**

minister

**Residence(S)**

- Stockbridge, MA (from 1747 to 1824)
- New Stockbridge, NY (from 1788 to 1824)

**Marital Status**

Married to Mary Codner Sergeant.

**Biography**

John Sergeant Jr., like his father, served as a minister in Stockbridge, MA. In 1773, Stephen West, the minister to the Stockbridge Indians since 1757, decided to leave his post and turned over ministering duties to John Sergeant Jr. Stockbridge, MA, which John Sergeant Sr. helped establish, failed as a Christian Indian town when the Stockbridge Indians lost ownership of their land. When the Oneida Tribe offered the Stockbridgers land in central New York after the American Revolution, many of them moved to the Brothertown and New Stockbridge settlements. The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge funded Sergeant Jr. in 1787 to continue serving as a minister to the Stockbridge Indians who moved to New York. Sergeant travelled from Stockbridge, MA, to New Stockbridge every year to serve as their minister. In 1788, the Stockbridge Indians at New Stockbridge were divided in their support for Occom or John Sergeant as the town's minister. Mohican sachem Hendrick Aupaumut led the community members who favored Occom. According to Sergeant, 30 members of the Tribe were in favor of Occom while 50 were in favor of him (later, half of Occom's supporters defected to Sergeant). The relationship between Sergeant and Occom was contentious, with Occom disliking Sergeant's manner of preaching. Occom moved to Munhegunnack or New Stockbridge in 1791 and suggests in a letter that many of Sergeant's supporters were shifting support to Occom. In his sermons, Sergeant blamed the Indians' loss of land on what he described as their drunkenness and idleness. He

suggested that the whites' encroachment on their lands was God's punishment for their sins. Sergeant remained the New Stockbridge minister until his death in 1824.

[Documents written](#)

[Documents received](#)

[All related documents](#)

### **Sources**

Fisher, Linford D. *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print. Silverman, David J. *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. Print. <http://www.geni.com/people/John-Sergeant-Jr/6000000008343943266>. Ed. Joanna Brooks. *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Web.

### **About John Sergeant, Jr.**

John Sergeant, Jr., son of the first missionary to the Mohican Indians at Stockbridge, MA, was also appointed missionary to the tribe, although this was after ministers Jonathan Edwards and Stephen West performed this duty for several years, and John Sergeant, Jr., was not actually an ordained minister. [Frazier, p. 190]

Patrick Frazier. (1992, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, U of Nebraska Press) relates some of Rev. John Sergeant Jr.'s activities:

"In 1667 the New England Company authorized the commissioners to pay him to teach the mission school, and he probably assumed his duties the following year. John, who resembled his father, was then nineteen, and having grown up in Stockbridge he knew Mohican. Sergeant was considered to be of the yeoman class, however, and seemed to have no great ambitions. Stephen West surmised that he was 'a man well disposed, and of peculiar steadiness and industry.' Another contemporary described him as 'not of college education but an ingenious, sensible and worthy man.' [Frazier, p 190. Kellaway, "New England Company," p. 276; West to Eliot, May 9, 1767, Large MSS, Mass. Historical Soc.] Sergeant resembled his father in other ways. He was not ultraorthodox in his religious sentiments. He did not gain full membership in the Stockbridge church until 1771, and he later confided in his missionary friend Samuel Kirkland that he had heard from Boston that 'my sentiments in religion will be a bar in the way of my ever taking the mission,' At the time he thought it just as well, 'for I am altogether unworthy; and an unlikely means of doing any good in the Lord's vineyard.'" [Sergeant to Kirkland, Feb 22, 1773, Kirkland Correspondence, Burke Library, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY]

"Despite Sergeant's religious views the company commissioners supported him as West's replacement. Early in 1774 Sergeant reported that the Indians were attending two meetings each Sabbath, and were becoming friendlier toward him, partly because of

his assurance that he would soon be translating his sermons into Mohican." [Frazier, p. 190]

He wrote January 11, 1774, after talking with some of the old Stockbridges: "They tell me that they are more wicked now than they were in my father's time." [Frazier, footnote 12, chapter 14; John Sergeant, Jr., to Andrew Eliot, Jan. 11, 1774, Andrew Eliot Papers, 41.F.113, Mass Historical Soc.]

On July 6, 1774, sixty delegates from several Berkshire towns met in Stockbridge for two days. They passed resolutions that declared the tea tax illegal and the abolishment of trial by jury unconstitutional and oppressive. Timothy Edwards and Erastus Sergeant (John Jr's older brother) were members of a committee that forged an agreement to boycott British goods. The agreement also provided for a boycott of any trader or shopkeeper who refused to sign the agreement. Anyone who did not sign the agreement was to be treated with all due neglect. [Frazier, p. 193] John Sergeant Jr. espoused the rebel cause, and urged his Mohican flock to support it too. Many Stockbridge Indians enlisted as Minutemen.

When they were stationed in the vicinity of Boston, John Sergeant Jr. visited the army encampment in the middle of August, perhaps to smooth over any difficulties or simply to serve as a religious conscience for those tempted by unsavory influences around Boston. [Frazier, p. 200] Some subsequently served under General Washington in New York and New Jersey, while others served in upstate New York.

When the Tories in charge of paying John Sergeant's salary decided to cut off those funds, Sergeant petitioned the Continental Congress to maintain him as a missionary, citing the Stockbridges' loyal service and his own role in advising them. The congress chose to fund other missionaries, but not this one, perhaps because in order to keep potentially unfriendly Indians content rather than placating those already loyal.

John Sergeant Jr. wrote to Congress in November, 1776:

"Far from desiring to remain neuter in the dispute between Great-Britain and America, [the Mohican Indians at Stockbridge, aka the Stockbridges] have made themselves acquainted with the merits of the controversy, and have taken an active part in our favor, inlisting [sic] their young men in our Army, while their counsellors and sachems have carefully sent belts of wampum by their messengers to the Six Nations, to the Canada Indians, and to the Shauwanes, on the Ohio, addressing them in such terms as they judged would have the greatest tendency to attach them to the interests of the United States." (quoted in *The American Revolution in Indian Country* by Colin G. Calloway; Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 95.)

A scarcity of clothing and other supplies was a constant problem. In June of 1777 John Sergeant, Jr., went to Boston to buy blankets with the money the Indians had entrusted with him. The merchants who usually supplied the Indians had none, and Sergeant soon found that no private suppliers had any either. he then petitioned the provincial congress, which allowed him to purchase twenty from the government supply. [Frazier,

p. 216; Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, June 16, 1777, pp. 26-27, ESR; Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts Bay 20 (chap. 72): 35.]

Up to this point, the Stockbridges were the Americans' only active Indian allies in the Revolution. The patriot commanders were satisfied with this arrangement, since their primary concern was that the Indians remain neutral in the conflict. [Frazier, p. 217]

In 1780, between the war effort, the winter weather, the poor harvest the previous fall, and the cutoff of charity from England, times were harsh in Stockbridge. John Sergeant was also feeling the pinch, although the New England Company until this year had honored his bills for missionary expenses. Sergeant asked the state congress to exempt him from future taxes that might be imposed to support the war, since the war had already cost him half his own support. Later that year he successfully petitioned to be exempted from all taxes and from military duty while he continued as missionary. He claimed that patriotism had moved him "to use great exertions" with the Stockbridges and that he had subjected "himself to considerable expenses in attending councils, consultations &c, in order to engage and secure their friendship and services in favor of the United States of America, in which he flatters himself he has not been unsuccessful.' Further, Sergeant said, he had devoted nearly all his time to this matter, neglecting other business 'that might be more lucrative.'" [Frazier, p. 230; MA, 186:149, 275, 329; Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts, 1780-81, chap. 51, p. 160]

Following the British surrender at Yorktown, and the cessation of fighting, the Stockbridges decided to move from Stockbridge to upstate New York. The proportion of non-Indian settlers in the Stockbridge area had gradually become too great for their comfort. They told the Massachusetts legislature they wished to sell their lands, and the state appointed John Sergeant, Jr., and one of Joseph Woodbridge's sons, and another resident as commissioners to review any deeds to ensure that the Indians were not cheated. Samuel Hopkins maintained that "by the just treatment they for a course of years have met with from the government, from Mr. Sergeant, Mr. Woodbridge and others, they are become our hearty friends." [Frazier, pp. 244-45; Samuel Hopkins, Historical Memoirs Relating to the Housatonic Indians, NY: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1972. Reprint of extra issue no. 17 of Magazine of History (1911), p. 184.]

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Missionary to the Stockbridge Indians during 36 years.

The Stockbridge Indians (Native Americans) Massachusetts were granted a six-mile land grant in upstate New York. They migrated there and named it New Stockbridge, Madison County, New York. John Sergeant Jr. was ordained their pastor. He spent six months out of every year with them until 1796, when he then moved his family there.~We CREATED THIS MEMORIAL IN 2016.

The Silhouette Cut-Out of ABIGAIL WILLIAMS SERGEANT & JOHN SERGEANT SR., PARENTS of JOHN SERGEANT JR. is provided to C.R. SAYLES by the people who take care of the John and Abigail Sergeant house in Stockbridge, Mass. Thank you to that organization and to all who have supported our work with photos and information.

BIO: John Sergeant Jr. was born in Stockbridge, Mass to John Sergeant Sr. and Abigail Williams. John Sergeant Sr., who had graduated from Yale in 1729, left his prestigious position of teaching at Yale to establish the community of Stockbridge for the protection of Native Americans—who became known at that time as the Stockbridge Indians.

John Jr. was only 2 years old when his father died. His mother, Abigail Williams Sergeant married Colonel Joseph Dwight of neighboring Great Barrington. She accepted him with the understanding that she would be buried next to her first husband, John Sergeant Sr. in Stockbridge. And, indeed, her body lies next to John Sergeant Sr.

John Jr., the youngest of three children Abigail Williams Sergeant had with John Sergeant Sr., also had half-siblings by his mother's second marriage.

Upon graduation from Princeton University, John Sergeant Jr. returned to Stockbridge, Mass where he had grown up; and in 1775, John Jr. took charge of both the famous Mission and the School, which were both founded by his father.

The Stockbridge Indians (Native Americans) in Massachusetts were granted a six-mile land grant in upstate New York. They migrated there and named it New Stockbridge, Madison County, New York. John Sergeant Jr. was ordained their pastor. He spent six months out of every year with them until 1796, when he then moved his family there.

He married Mary Codner and their daughter, Harriet Elizabeth Sergeant married WELCOME SAYLES, a Physician in Vernon, Oneida Co, NY in 1806. Their grandson from that marriage was JOHN SAYLES, ATTY, a professor of Baylor Law School from the first day and the first Author of Texas Law.

John Sergeant Jr.'s Uncle (half-brother of his mother Abigail Williams) is Ephraim Williams Jr., founder of Williams College in Williamstown, Mass.

We greatly appreciate diligent contributor, Andrew L., for notifying us that that John Sergeant Jr. is buried in the Sergeant Cemetery in Vernon, Oneida, NY. Even though John Sergeant Jr's name is not listed among the graves of the Sergeant Family Cemetery by Kathleen Last and Virginia Ackerman, who transcribed the graves; we believe it is likely he is buried there; and in Andrew L.'s honor we have changed the burial site as he suggested.

There are inscriptions for two wives, both named Mary with different maiden names and parents and identified on inscriptions as wives of John Sergeant; and these 2 women died a short time apart. Mary Codner Sergeant died first.

The Sergeant Cemetery owes a lot to the work of Kathleen L. Last and Virginia Ackerman who scrupulously identified every grave in the small family cemetery by Jul 31, 2004. and gave instructions to get there. In her words, Kathleen wrote that "from the center of the town of Vernon, take Peterboro Road to Arquint Rd, turn south for about 3 miles and the cemetery is just before you reach the intersection with Wright and Norton Roads." Thank you, Kathleen and Virginia for your wonderful work.\* Reference: [Find A Grave Memorial](#) - [SmartCopy](#): Sep 12 2022, 2:34:57 UTC

• Reference: [Find A Grave Memorial](#) - [SmartCopy](#): Sep 12 2022, 2:38:48 UTC  
[view all 15](#)

### John Sergeant, Jr.'s Timeline

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|------|---|
| 1747 | <sup>1747</sup> <a href="#">Birth of John Sergeant, Jr.</a><br>Stockbridge, MA, United States |
| 1777 | <sup>1777</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Mary White</a>   |
|      | <sup>1777</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Mary White</a>   |
| 1779 | <sup>1779</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Abby Judd</a><br>Massachusetts, USA                      |
| 1781 | <sup>1781</sup> <a href="#">Birth of John Sergeant</a>  |
| 1782 | <sup>1782</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Elizabeth Dixon</a>                                      |
| 1783 | <sup>1783</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Elizabeth Dickson</a>                                    |
| 1784 | <sup>1784</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Harriet Sargeant Sayles</a><br>Smithfield, Rhode island  |
| 1787 | <sup>June 4, 1787</sup> <a href="#">Birth of Sara Sergeant</a>                                |
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