

John Sergeant and Stockbridge Indians

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Konkapot, chief of the Mahicans of Massachusetts, came to a hard decision. Since he could not [hope](#) to defeat the white invaders who were pressing on his lands, he would join them. His tribe would become Christians. In 1734, he asked for missionaries.

After negotiations, the [Puritans](#) responded by sending John Sergeant. John took a deep interest in the fortunes of this declining tribe who needed much more than spiritual assistance. One of his first efforts was to open a school for their children. When he returned east to complete his own education, he took two Mahicans with him to further theirs.

Then the Yale graduate returned to work among the Indians. At that time they lived as two bands many miles apart. He and his assistant Timothy Woodbridge were exhausted traveling between them. He suggested the two groups unite in a central location. In this way they founded Stockbridge, Massachusetts and he built the first house there.

The Massachusetts colonial government funded a school and a meeting house. Although the missionaries lived separate from the Indians, the town

government did become integrated, with Indians and whites sharing power. Using English methods, the Indians harvested bumper crops. Interested Englishmen contributed funds for the success of the experiment.

However, unscrupulous whites began to seize land that was promised to the Indians in perpetuity. Among them was John's father-in-law. He had married Abigail Williams, daughter of the Rev. Ephraim Williams. Ephraim did much harm to the Mahicans.

John died on this day, July 27, 1749. With his passing, the Indians lost their champion and the terms of their settlement were increasingly violated. A general who was appointed to manage the town married John's widow and sold liquor to the Indians.

John is little remembered today. However, his legacy of concern for the Indians lived on when Jonathan Edwards took over the mission post for a few years.

But John's legacy found its most ardent expression in the young man who hoped to become the son-in-law of Jonathan Edwards. Many have heard of David Brainerd, the missionary to American Indians who died young but bequeathed a spiritual journal to posterity that has inspired dedication in countless later Christians. His inauguration as a missionary was owing to John Sergeant. John had visited Indians along the Delaware River and asked the Scottish Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) to send them a missionary. Brainerd was the result.

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