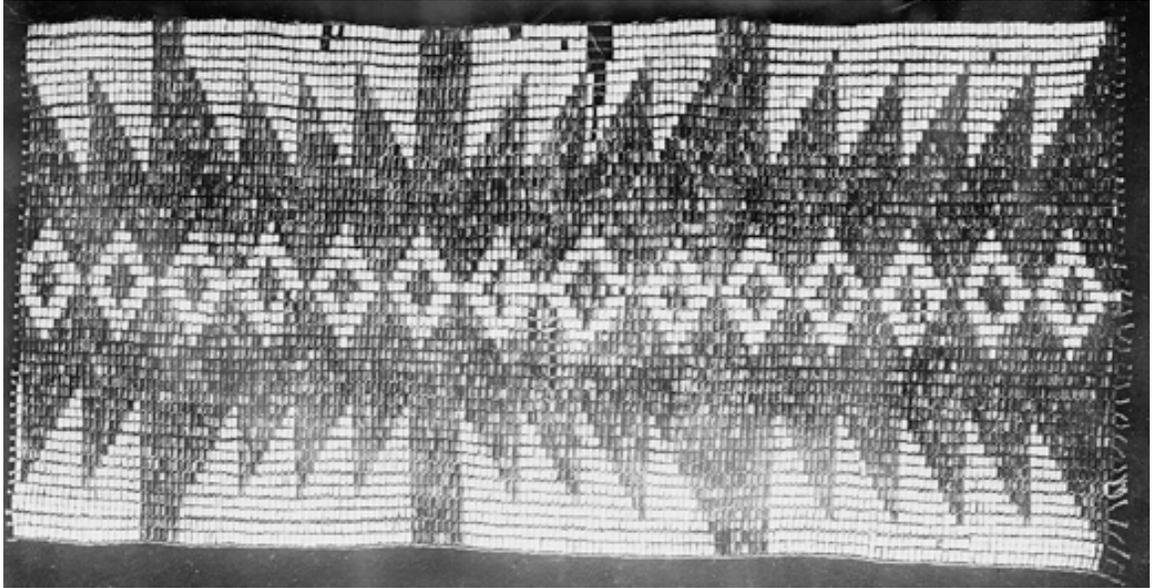


Part I: Uncas, the Mohegan Tribe, and the Founding of Norwich

By Faith Damon Davison

In the early 1600s, Tatobem was the Pequot sachem. He also led a group of tribes that had banded together. Tatobem controlled all trade between the native peoples and the Europeans in Eastern Connecticut.



The Pequots and their allies bought beaver pelts from the inland tribes with wampum and European goods. They sold the pelts to European traders for metal tools, iron pots, cloth, and beads. These goods were valuable to the Native Americans because they did not have the raw materials to make them.

In 1632 Dutch traders built a trading post. They built it on the Connecticut River near where Hartford is today. The Dutch wanted to trade directly with inland tribes.

Things soon went terribly wrong. The Dutch tried to trade without Tatobem. Tatobem's men killed the native traders. The Dutch then attacked some Pequots. They killed Tatobem and two other Pequot men by mistake.

The Pequots needed a new leader. Sassacus and Uncas vied to become sachem. Sassacus was the son of Tatobem. Uncas was married to Tatobem's daughter.

Sassacus was chosen as the new great Sachem. Uncas did not accept the tribe's decision. He and his followers rebelled against Sassacus. They were banned from the tribe. Uncas apologized and pledged his loyalty to Sassacus. They were allowed to return. But Uncas challenged Sassacus again and again.

Finally, Uncas and his followers were exiled to Shantok. Shantok was Uncas's father's hunting grounds. It was on the west side of the Thames River. This was the beginning of the separation of the Mohegan Tribe from the Pequot Tribe.

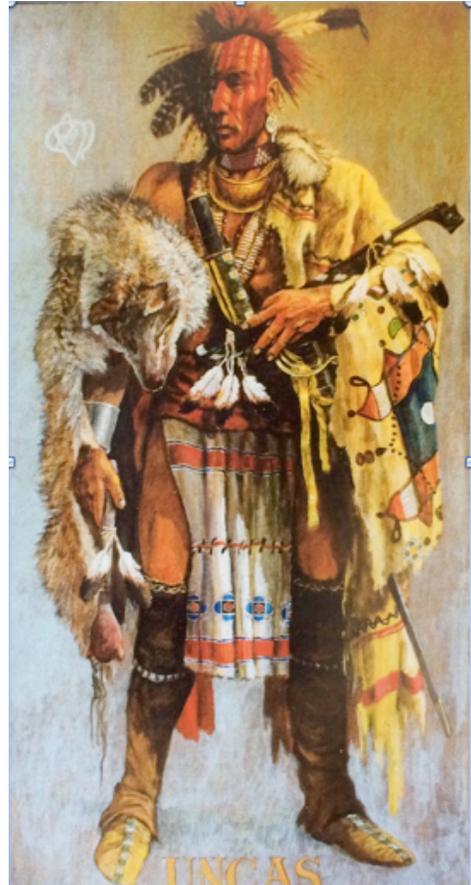
The Mohegan Tribe

Uncas needed to be strong against Sassacus and other tribes. He decided to become an ally of the English. Uncas and the Mohegans fought alongside the English during the Pequot War. The Pequots were badly defeated.

Who would now control the fur trade with the English and the Dutch? The Mohegans and the Narragansetts of Rhode Island fought each other for control of this trade. They fought for almost 40 years.

In 1643, 1,000 Narragansetts attacked the Mohegans. Uncas won when his men captured Narragansett chief Miantonomo. Uncas surrendered the chief to colonial leaders. They would decide his fate.

Uncas was ordered to execute Miantonomo. English soldiers went to see that it was done. Wawecus, brother of Uncas, struck the fatal blow with an ax.



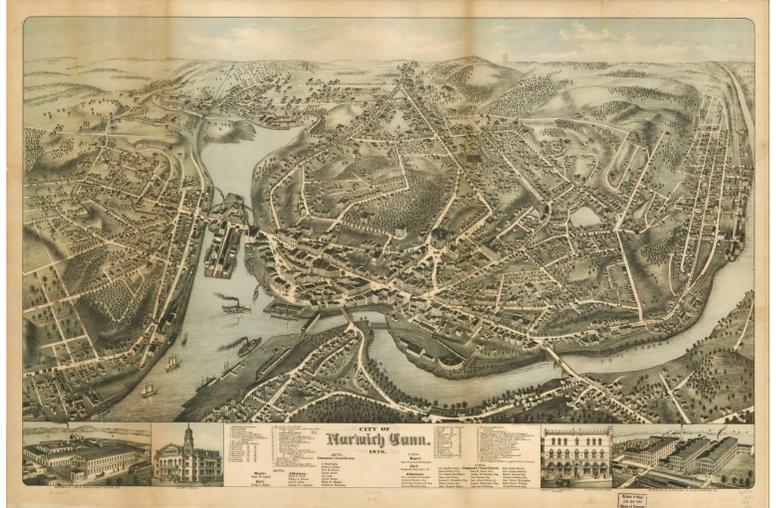
In 1645, the Narragansetts tried again to defeat the Mohegans. This time they surrounded the Mohegans and tried to starve them into surrendering. All seemed hopeless. But a Mohegan was able to get away. He slipped by the enemy in the dead of night. He took a boat down the Thames River. He made his way to Fort Saybrook to ask the English for help.

Lieutenant Thomas Leffingwell hastily gathered his troops. The soldiers grabbed their weapons and supplies, and set off. Legend has it that once they arrived, the Mohegans ran a haunch of beef up a pole. This proved that they still had plenty to eat. The Narragansetts signed a peace treaty with the English. The Mohegans were grateful to their English rescuers.

Some of the English soldiers stayed at Shantok to see that the Narragansetts kept the peace. Perhaps this is when the English realized it was a good spot for an English settlement.

The Founding of Norwich

Just north of Shantok, the Shetucket and Yantic rivers empty into the Thames (or Mohegan) River. The location looked promising. The rivers made transportation easy. The power of the swift moving river water could power mills. The rivers were a source of fresh water, too. There was good land to plant crops. New London, an English settlement, was down river.



In June 1659, a group of men from Saybrook purchased land from Uncas. They purchased nine square miles where the three rivers meet for £70 in coin and trade goods. This settlement would become Norwich and surrounding towns.

The English settlers arrived the next spring. Major John Mason was one of the founders of Norwich. Mason and Uncas were friends. Mason and Uncas were allies during the Pequot War. They continued their friendship for many years.

Other settlers included Reverend James Fitch, who wanted to preach his Christian religion to the Mohegans, and Thomas Leffingwell. The settlement of Norwich enjoyed peaceful relations with the Native Americans.

But they did not have such luck with the rivers. Year after year, the rivers flooded in the spring with the winter snow melt. The flooding damaged their settlement.

Uncas and King Philip's War

King Philip's War broke out in 1675. Metacom, chief of the Pokunoket, led Wampanoags, Nipmucks, Pocumtucks, and, later, Narragansetts against the English. They wanted to drive the English settlers out of New England.

Uncas swore a new oath of friendship to the English. Three hundred Mohegans and Pequots fought alongside the English militia against Metacom's warriors. Connecticut militias fought along side militias from Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The war lasted a little more than a year. It was the most costly war that New England would ever bear. At least 10 per cent of the white male population was killed in the war. Many English settlements were abandoned. Connecticut saw little fighting but Simsbury was burned to the ground in 1676.

A New Sachem

Uncas died in 1683. Oweneco, his eldest son, became the new sachem of the Mohegans. He sold and gave away more land to settlers than Uncas had. Governor Saltonstall gave Mohegan land called Kittermaug to English settlers. That was the beginning of a long legal case. The Mohegans made their case to the English Crown. For more than 50 years the Mohegans fought to get their land back.

Norwich grew to be a bustling port. Goods came to town from the countryside. They were shipped to places all along the east coast and the Caribbean. Plentiful forests fostered a shipbuilding industry.

The population grew and game became scarce. The Mohegans adapted their ways while keeping their culture strong. Some men joined the colonial labor force. They worked building ships, as commercial fishermen and sailors. Men and women continued to sell their crafts in basketry and brooms.

When the American Revolution broke out, Mohegans helped build the Continental ship the *Confederacy*. Mohegans served aboard the *Putnam*, the *Shark*, and the *Oliver Cromwell*.

Mohegan men marched with General Israel Putnam and fought in major battles along side Connecticut troops. Samuel Ashbow was a Mohegan preacher. His three sons died in the war. A Mohegan woman lost her husband in the French and Indian War and all five sons in the American Revolution. The Revolution lasted eight years.

Faith Damon Davison is a Mohegan tribal elder and Nonner, an honorary title. She was archivist for the Mohegan Library and Archives, the rare books, documents and map collections.

Images:

Page 1: Wampum belt, North American, date unknown. Library of Congress

Page 2: Artist's depiction of Uncas, by David Wagner. Used by permission Connecticut State Library

Page 3: Map of Norwich, 1868. Library of Congress