

SAUNKSKWA, SACHEM, MINISTER

Algonquin kinship and
English church kinship
in 17th- and 18th-century
New England

Lori Rogers-Stokes
History Camp – July 2021

Hypothesis: There are significant ways in which New England puritan/English religious practice and identity in the 17th and 18th centuries were surprisingly similar to indigenous Algonquin reciprocal kinship relations/networks.

This opened my eyes to a potential point of connection between settlers and indigenous people that could have been a fruitful common ground for cooperation and respect—but was unfortunately lost.

...who knows how different the future of New England, and even the United States, may have been if this point of connection could have been recognized, honored, and used as a guide for collaborative settlement and nation-building?

Pursuing this hypothesis does NOT mean that I will:

- redefine the Algonquin lifeway as a universal concept that wasn't unique to them
- use the Algonquin lifeway as a jumping-off point to talk exclusively about the English religious practice
- hold up the English religious practice as evidence of English good faith
- claim that the similarities between Algonquin and English were evident to either group at the time
- speak for, or speak over, Algonquin people then and now

What I WILL do is:

- apply the knowledge I've gained from indigenous people to replace my inherited understanding of New England history
- see Congregational religious practice in a very new light and describe it in a new way
- make the Algonquin definition of a good society the norm and define English settler society in the context of that norm
- make a contribution to the ongoing work of prioritizing indigenous voices and history in canonical scholarship

There *is* a role for the non-native scholar in indigenous studies...

Lisa Brooks - *Our Beloved Kin:* *A New History of King Philip's War* (Yale University Press, 2019)

“If you come in the manner of a guest to the ‘place world’ I’ve created, and immerse yourself as I have in the documents and maps of our history, I hope your participation may be rewarded with the gift of seeing a world we all inhabit with greater insight and clarity.”

My goal is to see the world of Congregationalists with greater insight and clarity, and to put it in reference to—if not relation with—the Algonquin society surrounding it.

Yes, words have to be chosen carefully!

Our rubric for comparing Algonquin society with English settler society



Algonquins define society as a group of individuals connected through kinship ties, engaging in reciprocal relationships with each other to fulfill the obligations of kinship.



English settlers divided society into the civil and ecclesiastical, prioritizing the **civil/political**, which was defined as a group of individuals, operating in their own self-interest, compelled by the law to fulfill their legal obligations to each other.

Kinship relations in Algonquin society

A very rough guide/overview



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belonging is extended to newcomers, but with the understanding that kinship is a commitment: acceptance into relationship comes with responsibilities



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Native kinship/network of relations

Bonds of kinship are the framework on which governance rests.

People within the bonds of kinship have obligations to each other. People outside those bonds can be invited in if they accept those obligations. As Lisa Brooks says, “every pronouncement of kinship invokes a bond”.

Roger Williams noted that the Narragansetts called the English strangers—those who were not from here, and not kin. “The best way to make these strangers known was to forge relations with them, to draw them into the regional network as allies and friends.”

Lisa Brooks

Our Beloved Kin, ps. 20, 29-30, 78

The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast, p. 7

Native kinship/network of relations

”Indigenous rhizomatic system of kinship” (as opposed to the English hierarchical governance):

Authority in Algonquin society originates in all people bound by kinship, and flows through all people up to the saunkskwa or sachem.

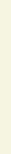
All parts of the network are nourished.

Horizontally

by people maintaining reciprocal kinship relations with each other

Vertically

by people entrusting their relationships to the saunkskwa or sachem, who then maintained them by leading wisely and ensuring just distribution of resources throughout the network of kinship relations



Legal relationships in English settler society

A very rough guide/overview



English settler CIVIL and POLITICAL SOCIETY

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Comparing English legal society with English Congregational church kinship

A very rough guide/overview



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Comparing Algonquin kinship with English Congregational church kinship

A very rough guide/overview



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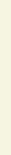
societies are led by a saunskwa or sachem – someone who derives authority from their representation of their people – not the exertion of their own will or power

the saunskwa or sachem manages relationships within kinship networks and ensures equal treatment while nurturing the bonds of kinship

belonging is extended to newcomers, but with the understanding that kinship is a commitment: acceptance into relationship comes with responsibilities

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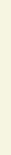
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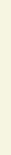
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The role of the saunkskwa/sachem compared with the role of the minister

A very rough guide/overview



The role of the saunskwa/sachem

The sogamo (sagamore or sachem) or sogeskwa (saunskwa) was the symbolic leader of a particular place and people, the protector of kinship relations and representative of their kin.

The saunskwa spoke on behalf of a community, a gathering of extended families bound to each other through longstanding inhabitation, intermarriage, and interdependent relationship.

The saunskwa or sachem were not ruling “kings” and “queens” but rather ambassadors, diplomats who traveled to other nations, **carried their community's deliberative decisions**, communicated effectively and persuasively with other leaders, and traveled swiftly to return the wider deliberations home.

The role of the saunskwa/sachem

- Effective leaders facilitated the renewal of relationships and amelioration of disputes through diplomatic councils and annual ceremonies, where people of all ages participated in symbolic and material exchange... negotiating rights and responsibilities among contiguous communities, thus enabling social and ecological sustainability.
- A complex of belief, practice, story, and ceremony enabled them to sustain balance

Any act, whether destructive or creative, reverberates in the network of relations. When the network falls out of balance, everything else has to shift into action to create a new equilibrium.

The role of the Congregational minister

There are important similarities between the saunkskwa, sachem, and minister – these similarities constitute a single, stunning point of cultural connection that English records leave no trace of their comprehending at the time.

Both Algonquin leaders and English ministers were chosen with the mandate of representing and serving their people well by maintaining reciprocal, loving kinship relations amongst individuals gathered together as one people.

The relationship was not one of law and legal obligation but of love.

“Let them inflict on our white neighbors in Barnstable County... a preacher whom they neither love nor respect and do not wish to hear. Let them, in short, be treated just as the Mashpee tribe have been: I think there will soon be a declension of morals and population.” Pequot minister William Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 1833

The role of the Congregational minister

Rowley 1672 - ye power of regular [church] governmt is found in **ye pastor & brethren walking in communion**

Natick, 1730 - Upon Mature thought & Deliberation, Unanimously & very freely Came into the following Vote this was Read twice to the Church & then put to Vote & it **passed in the Affirmative by every brother**, & Consented & agreed to by me Oliver Peabody Pastor of the Church of Natick

Westborough, 1728 - For these Reasons The Chh that were present, voted six against five (Except **The Pastor, who refus'd to give his vote of either Side**)

Church records of:

Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips

NEHH, p. 11

Natick First Congregational Church, Natick Massachusetts – minister Oliver Peabody

NEHH, p. 8

Westborough Church of Christ, Westborough Massachusetts – minister Ebenezer Parkman

NEHH, p. 12

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

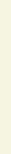
Kinship in English Congregational churches

A very rough guide/overview



Congregational church kinship ideal: the church is one living body

If we want to conjecture on how American society today would be different if the Congregational church kinship ideal had won out over the English civil society's legal obligation model, we have to really understand what that church kinship ideal was and how it was practiced.

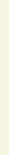


Congregational church kinship ideal: the church is one living body

- the individual is nothing unless they are part of the single body of the church
- individuals who stray harm the entire church body
- the entire church body must work to restore a member who is out of covenant

This is made clear by many references to stopping the church from taking communion when there was any division of or argument within the church body. Conflict broke the unified church body into individuals/pieces, and therefore "the church" could not commune with God – *there was no church where there were individuals.*

That said...



Congregational church kinship ideal: the church is one living body

Obvious Q: if the Congregational church was one living body, why weren't women allowed to join church meetings and church votes? why was it divided into two bodies, male and female?

A to take or leave: they did not see it as an invalid "division" to have men represent women

Obvious Q: if the Congregational church was one living body, why was it divided into two bodies, members (the church) and non-members (the congregation)?

A to take or leave: they did not see it as an invalid "division" – only those with God's grace were able to embody a church

Algonquin society does not have these inherently, inevitably destabilizing discrepancies in their definition of kinship.

Congregational church kinship ideal: the church is one living body

Communion = community... *for real*

A divided church could not hold communion

Rowley 1671 – minister Samuel Phillips writes to the church at Newbury, which is wracked with division but still holding communion. The “church” at Newbury had written to “the church” at Rowley “in Justification of their practise in comeing to the Lords table notwithstanding the sad divisions among them.” Phillips replied in the name of the church at Rowley:

“It is true god will have his holy ordinance attended, wch you strongly plead, but **he is willing to stay his service till we be reconciled one to another... church reformation, not onely personal Examination, is required** before we partake in that ordinance, otherwise we might expect to hear from God of his displeasure more than we have already felt.”

The church must be healed and whole again before it can be in true communion before and with God.

Church records of Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley
Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips, NEHH, ps. 5-7

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Congregational church kinship ideal: the church is one living body

Rowley 1674 - ...it was declared to those brethren that hindred Br Rem from seing his unchristian dealing that it was left at yr door to answer for hindering our dealing wth an offender who hinders ye church from coming to ye Sacramt wch was to have bin.

...and even the weather could pose a disunifying threat:

Westborough 1741 - March 8. This was by appointment to have been Communion Day, but the Chh pasd a Vote yt by Reason of ye unusual Difficulty of ye season (and the Small Number present) ye Administrn of the Lords Supper Should be deferrd untill the Next Lords Day.

Church records of:

Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 10-11

Westborough Church of Christ, Westborough Massachusetts – minister Ebenezer Parkman
NEHH, p. 57

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore

An example of a minister working like a saunkskwa or sachem to maintain relationships and networks of connection when an individual threatens the covenant bond of the church

If civil disputes had been settled the way church disputes were, according to the obligations of loving kinship relations (the Algonquin model), we might have a different America today.

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Records of church meetings erase the cartoonish lines that “the Puritans” are usually drawn with, to create the stereotype of a harsh, strident, accusing people who lived only to punish people.

Instead, these records of church meetings offer a more accurate and intimate picture of sisters and brothers of the churches striving to live together in love and harmony, and to solve problems through long-term, patient, intensive, and personal care and intervention.

One example stands for many: the saga of Thomas Miller at Rowley.

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

In November 1666, Rowley minister Samuel Phillips made the first of many entries in the church records regarding Thomas Miller's adultery with a woman working in his house. Contrary to the popular vision of puritans eager to punish, excommunicate, and ruin an adulterer, the Rowley records show us the extreme lengths that two churches went to in order to carry out what I call "**rebuke-repent-restore**": *rebuke* a sinner, then help them to authentic *repentance*, in order to *restore* them to the church without lingering resentments or shame.

I'll let the records tell the story, with my own comments where needed. This is a much-reduced summary of the Miller story, which ran from November 1666 to September 1674, and takes up 14 pages when pasted into a Word document.

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

November 4, 1666

The Church of Xt here at Rowley, of wch you yet remayne a member, having some time since heard sad tidings concerning your fall into scandalous Evill of Uncleanesse, we were not a litle grieved for it... And especially, we are grieved that we heare nothing, neyther from your Self, nor none else touching any Sound Repentance

Repentance has to be real and it has to be the result of long-term work on one's own, through prayer and scripture reading, **and with others**, including the parties that were wronged and the church, which has also been harmed. Congregational church records make clear that an ideal church was not a collection of individuals but one living body. That's what living in covenant meant. The crimes or troubles of one part of that body impaired the whole organism, which could only be healed through the repentance of the sinner and their restoration—NOT by casting them out.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 67-69

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Miller's reply to this letter of November 5, 1666 arrives in Rowley six months later, on May 25, 1667.

...my Impoverisht condition of wch my sin hath bin ye chief occasion hath put me under many occasions ingagemts of work for my Necessity, wch I think I cannot Lawfully neglect to performe. Besides yt, wch the providing for My family wch I am bound to, are Inconsistent wth such a journey in my Age: I desire therefore if it may be yt ye Rule of Satisfaction can be attended without my coming down to you that this Journey may be abated me.

This is not promising: Miller claims that he is too busy working to go to Rowley, and plays the martyr, saying he is too dedicated to supporting his family to leave them... after breaking up his family through his own adultery. He also hopes a letter will do, but the Rowley church does not agree:

*...**the church** had farther Discourse about it [and] it was objected his Letter was an insufficient Evidence to show his Repentance. It was thought that he was able to prforme a journey, & his presence being necessary **for ye church to prforme yr Duty to Him...***

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 69-70

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

On September 22, 1667, the church at Rowley read two letters: Miller's reply to the June letter, and a letter from the pastor of the Middletown church Miller then attended. The Middletown pastor wrote:

We cannot but with much thankfullnesse take notice of ye faithfullnesse & Love towards Him as we wish his welfare; & your truly Xtian tendernesse towards us yr in, Wherein your selves are (thro: Gods grace) pleased to contrive for or future peace, with truth & holynesse,

Rowley's efforts to bring Miller to true repentance and full restoration are recognized by Middletown as not just benefiting Miller but the Middletown church itself—it can't have an unrepentant sinner in its midst, someone who has broken the unity of the Rowley church body; this will inevitably harm the Middletown church body as well. The puritans believed that the actions of one person in covenant truly affected everyone else in that covenant.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 14-16

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

The Middletown letter also reveals the core problem with Miller's confession:

...two of us went to Him... we wish we could say we find Him truly broken under sight & sense of his sin, especially that he could come of more freely wth respect to his breach of his 6th commandmt, in wch he seemes much to hesitate, rather blaming his former Yokefellow then Himselfe: we dare not say we judge him fit agayn to be received into ye boosome of Church-fellowship...

Miller's sin was not just committing adultery, but the terrible harm his adultery caused his wife Isabel, who seems to have succumbed to illness because it made her so depressed. Miller not only refused to even acknowledge this, but actually *blamed his wife* for his adultery. It's powerful to see that adultery itself is not the horrible crime to these puritan churches—it's the inhuman lack of love and loving-kindness Miller showed for his wife when she was alive, and even after her death. Until Miller admits that his actions hurt his wife even more than they hurt him, and that he should not only fear God's punishment for his adultery but for his lack of love and compassion for his wife, his confession and his repentance are not authentic, and cannot open the way to restoration.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 14-16

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Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Miller states this in his own letter:

*...you are pleased to charge me wth mercyles & Cruel carriage to my wife while she lived, **whereof I cannot charge myself. in ye full extent of it**, yet thus farre I doe own & bewayle my breach of covenant wth Her, wch did & that justly cause sore grieffe of heart to her to see me sin so heynously agaynst God & to violate those bonds wch I ought to have maintayned wth her self & **I cannot but conclude it was matter of bodily weaknesse to her, God alone knows whither it did hasten her end yea or no.***

Here Miller acknowledges that his sin harmed his wife, but rejects both the idea that his behavior toward her was “merciless and cruel”, and that he was really to blame for “hastening her” to her death. The Rowley church could not accept this as true repentance. Until Miller is sorry for the harm he did his wife, and not just the harm he did himself in God’s eyes, his repentance is incomplete and he can’t be restored.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 14-16

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Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

At last, on October 6, 1667, the Rowley church votes to excommunicate Miller—he is no longer part of their church body:

We doe in ye name & authority & by ye powr of ye Ld Jesus ye great King & Law-giver of ye Church , & by ye Consent of this Church , cutt of the sayd Thom: Miller – Afterward prayr was made that God would ratify the sentence, & let loose Satan on Him —

The rebuke of the church had not been enough to bring Miller to the right sense of his guilt; therefore, Satan must be set upon him. This seems like the church washing its hands of Miller, but as we will see, it was vanishingly rare for a Congregational church to permanently reject someone. The hope of and for restoration was ever-present, even in the worst of circumstances.

Congregationalism was about unanimity: if one part of the church body was cut off, the entire church was maimed and incomplete. Excommunication was ideally never permanent, but simply a ramping up of rebuke in order to spur repentance and make restoration once again possible.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 17-19

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Miller responds 6 months later, on November 3, 1672, to share his progress toward repentance, but doesn't begin well, as he once again states that it is impossible for him to return to Rowley “without endangering the comfort of myself and family”. Despite describing excommunication as being “forever deprived not only of your compassions here, but of the bosom fellowship of God, father, son and holy ghost throughout all eternity”, Miller still judges it impossible to take time off from work to rectify the situation. After talking again about his sense of endangering his own soul through sin, Miller at last addresses his sin against both of his wives:

...under the sence of which both of my horrid sin that I am not onely guilty of my self, but the instrumental cause of drawing her that is now my wife to alsoe; likewise the heart sorrow it brought to my wife deceas'd wch Covenant I ought alsoe to have kept pure:

He acknowledges that he has led the woman he slept with into sin, and caused his first wife “heart sorrow”. Yet Miller will not say that this caused her untimely death. He closes by hoping he can be readmitted to the church body he broke covenant with.

Church records of:
Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips
NEHH, ps. 36-7

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Two years passed before Miller reappeared in the Rowley church records. But when he did, on September 4-6, 1674, it was big news: he returned to his church to appear in public and make his repentance.

Tho: Miller came to Rowley to seek for reconciliation wth & readmission into the Church of Christ therin, & brought letters testimoniall from the Reverend Pastor & several brethren of the church of Middletowne wher his abode Is

The letter from Middletown stated that *His confession of his great Evills was something weak & confused yet soe farr as we could judg sincere & hearty; he has in those particulars wherin he formerly fell Short Shoun some measure of true Repentance soe farr as we can iudg... Upon the consideration also of his carriage to his foremer wife, he has acknowledg'd that he sined greivously filling her heart with much greif to the shortning of her life as may be justly feared; & soe he begd prayers that God would pardon his breach of ye 6 comand as well as of other comands violated by him*

Church records of:

Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips

NEHH, p. 58

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

Rebuke – repent – restore: the story of Thomas Miller of Rowley, 1666-1674

Finally, after 8 years of denying that he shortened his wife's life, Miller admits to this "grievous sin." As a result, Middletown has already received Miller "into memberly relation with us", and now asks Rowley for a formal dismissal of Miller so he can be formally admitted to Middletown. This can only happen if Rowley lifts its excommunication, recognizes Miller as a member, and dismisses him. Will the church agree? Phillips wrote to Middletown in the name of the church:

*By these you may be pleased to understand That Tho: Miller who for soe many years has bin under yt awfull sentence of excomunication out of ye church of Xst at Rowley **is now received into brotherly relation with the sayd church, their acceptance of him being manifested by a full & unanimous vote...** the Church did by their unanimous vote express their consent to grant his desier; soe that if you shall accordingly proceed to receive him, **we doe resigne & dismiss him to your holy fellowship, hoping & praying that ye lord will inable him the rest of his time to shew forth ye life & Efficacy of fayth which purifies the heart, & to bring forth those good fruits that are meet for repentance.***

Church records of:

Rowley First Congregational Church, Rowley Massachusetts – minister Samuel Phillips

NEHH, p. 58

NEHH = New England's
Hidden Histories

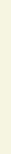
Lost Congregational identity, lost opportunity

The ideal Congregational process of rebuke-repent-restore has been completed at last, and saved not only one soul but two church bodies.

I find this process repeated over and over, not just at Rowley but at every church I have studied where the minister and the church pursue the ideal of covenanting together to become one living body.

It's inspirational, and the fact that it did not remain the norm is disheartening. The march of time and its gradual dilution of the Congregational ideal represents a loss for early New England settler society, which became progressively less invested in restoration overall, and for the American nation that would follow—the body of the nation was never whole, and never fully included in the national covenant.

While Algonquin people maintained their identities and their kinship relations over time, Congregationalists utterly lost theirs.



Lisa Brooks - *Our Beloved Kin:* *A New History of King Philip's War* (Yale University Press, 2019)

“This conclusion seeks to open the tributaries of our history, in the hope that informed history-makers might follow their courses, in collaboration with continuing community-based research, to discern new and ongoing interpretations that will decolonize and expand our collective understanding...”

My goal is to see the world of Congregationalists with greater insight and clarity, and to put it in reference to—if not relation with—the Algonquin society surrounding it.

SAUNKSKWA, SACHEM, MINISTER

Algonquin kinship and
English church kinship
in 17th- and 18th-century
New England

Lori Rogers-Stokes
History Camp – July 2021