

## Concise church biographies

### Squanto

Squanto [Tisquantum, c.1590-1622] was a Wampanoag<sup>1</sup> translator, guide, and go-between for the early Plymouth Colony, (colonial America).

The first Pilgrims arrived on the Mayflower in December in 1620 at Cape Cod and had a very hard winter; 50+% died. In March 1621 an Indian walked into the town called Samoset, who could speak some broken English learned from traders, sent by the Pokanokets and Nemaskets. Next day he brought an older Indian called Squanto who had been to England and spoke English well. He was a Wampanoag Patuxet Indian born near the New Plymouth, Massachusetts site.

Squanto was probably a prospective sachem (chief). He had met white traders there around 1605-1610, becoming an interpreter. European explorers, such as Samuel de Champlain, began trading with Patuxet in 1605 for maize and furs. Later he accompanied the white men to England where he lived with Charles Robbins. For a time he appeared in London theatres. Homesick, John Smith agreed to take him back home in 1614.

After helping Smith he returned to his village. However, he was later tricked by Thomas Hunt (Smith's deputy commander, left to fish for cod) and imprisoned with 20 other Indians at Cape Cod to be sold as slaves in Malaga, Spain. Some monks managed to free him in Spain and Squanto became a Christian. The monks then helped him to travel to England about 1616 where he lived for three years as a servant to John Slanie (or Slany), treasurer of the Newfoundland Company. Slanie helped Squanto to get passage back home in 1619, which he hadn't seen for about 12 years, sailing with Thomas Dermer, an officer under John Smith. Sadly his village, Patuxet, was abandoned due to a plague where all 2,000 villagers had died. He was the last. A Wampanoag chief called Massasoit, a Pokanoket sachem, invited him to live there. That was when they heard that white men were building a town near his old village. Squanto helped Massasoit to arrange a covenant with the Plymouth Pilgrims to live peacefully with the Nemaskets and Pokanokets; the treaty lasted over 50 years. Some rebel Nemaskets seized Squanto, who had to be rescued by Plymouth soldiers. Squanto then helped the colony establish treaties with other Wampanoag villages on Cape Cod and some Massachusetts Indians north of Plymouth. No Pilgrim was hurt by an Indian.

Squanto decided to stay with the Pilgrims and proved a great asset. He improved their houses to be warmer. He taught them how to plant corn in local conditions, how to use fish fertiliser, and how to cook it. He guided them on trading expeditions and acted as a go-between with other Indian tribes.

After 18 months he went back to the Wampanoag village and challenged Massasoit's leadership. Failing, he provoked anger and lived with the Pilgrims but died from a fever in 1622 soon afterwards.

There is no doubt that without Squanto the Pilgrims would not have survived. The families of the Pilgrims continued to honour him 400 years later. This was a remarkable providence of God to provide an Indian to help who could speak English and get the Pilgrims started.

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<sup>1</sup> A confederacy of American Indian peoples of SE Massachusetts. In Narragansett, literally 'easterners'.