

John Eliot (missionary)

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John Eliot (c. 1604 – 21 May 1690) was a Puritan missionary to the American Indians whom some called “the apostle to the Indians.”^{[1][2]}

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English education and Massachusetts ministry



Cuckoos Farm, Little Baddow, Eliot's home around 1629

John Eliot was born in Widford, Hertfordshire, England and lived at Nazeing as a boy. He attended Jesus College, Cambridge.^[3] After college, he became assistant to Thomas Hooker at a private school at Little Baddow, Essex.^[4] After Hooker was forced to flee to Holland, Eliot emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, arranging passage as chaplain on the ship *Lyon* and arriving on November 3, 1631. Eliot became minister and "teaching elder" at the First Church in Roxbury.

From 1637 to 1638 Eliot participated in both the civil and church trials of Anne Hutchinson during the Antinomian Controversy. Eliot disapproved of Hutchinson's views and actions, and was one of the two ministers representing Roxbury in the proceedings which led to her excommunication and exile.^[5] In 1645, Eliot founded the Roxbury Latin School. He and fellow ministers Thomas Weld (also of Roxbury), Thomas Mayhew of Martha's Vineyard, and Richard Mather of Dorchester, are credited with editing the Bay Psalm Book, the first book published in the British North American colonies (1640). From 1649 to 1674, Samuel Danforth assisted Eliot in his Roxbury ministry.^[1]

John Eliot



JOHN ELIOT.

Puritan missionary to Native Americans

Born	1604
	Widford, Hertfordshire, England
Died	May 21, 1690
Signature	

Roxbury and Dorchester, Massachusetts

There are many connections between the towns of Roxbury and Dorchester and John Eliot. After working for a short time as pastor in Boston as the temporary replacement for Mr. John Wilson at Boston's first church society, John Eliot settled in Roxbury with other Puritans from Essex, England.^[6] He was the teacher of their church for sixty years and was their sole pastor for forty years. For the first forty years in Roxbury, Eliot preached in the 20' by 30 'foot meetinghouse with thatched roof and plastered walls that stood on Meetinghouse Hill. Eliot founded the Roxbury Grammar School and he worked hard to keep it prosperous and relevant.^[7] Eliot also preached at times in the Dorchester church, he was given land by Dorchester for use in his missionary efforts. And in 1649 he gave half of a donation he received from a man in London to the schoolmaster of Dorchester.^[8]

Use of the Algonquin Language

The chief barrier to preaching to the natives was language.^[7] Sign language and pidgin English were used for trade but could not be used to convey a sermon. John Eliot began to study Algonquin (or Algonquian) which was the language of the local Indians.^[9] To help him with this task, Eliot relied on a young native Indian named "Cockenoe".^{[10][11]} Cockenoe had been captured in the Pequot War of 1637^[12] and became a servant of an Englishman named Richard Collicott^{[9][13]} John Eliot said, "he was the first that I made use of to teach me words, and to be my interpreter." ^[14] Cockenoe could not write but he could speak Algonquin and English. With his help, Eliot was able to translate the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and other scriptures and prayers.^[9]

The first time Eliot attempted to preach to the Indians in 1646 at Dorchester Mills,^[15] he failed and said that they, "gave no heed unto it, but were weary and despised what I said." ^[16] The second time he preached to the Indians was at the wigwam of Waban near Watertown Mill which was later called Nonantum, now Newton, MA.^[9] John Eliot was not the first Puritan missionary to try to convert the Indians to Christianity but he was the first to produce printed publications for the natives in their own language. This was important because the settlements of "praying indians" could be provided with other preachers and teachers to continue the work John Eliot started.^[16] By translating sermons to the Algonquin language, John Eliot brought the Indians an understanding of Christianity but also an understanding of written language. They did not have an equivalent written "alphabet" of their own and relied mainly on spoken language and pictorial language.^[17]

Missionary career

An important part of Eliot's ministry focused on the conversion of Massachusetts Indians. Accordingly, Eliot translated the Bible into the Massachusetts language and published it in 1663 as *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God*.^[18] In 1666, he published "The Indian Grammar Begun", again concerning the Massachusetts language. As a missionary, Eliot strove to consolidate Native Americans in planned towns, thereby encouraging them to recreate a Christian society. At one point, there were 14 towns of so-called "Praying Indians", the best documented being at Natick, Massachusetts. Other praying Indian towns included: Littleton (Nashoba), Lowell (Wamesit, initially incorporated as part of Chelmsford), Grafton (Hassanamessit), Marlborough (Okommakamesit), a portion of Hopkinton that is now in the Town

of Ashland (Makunkokoag), Canton (Punkapoag), and Mendon-Uxbridge (Wacentug). In 1662, Eliot witnessed the signing of the deed for Mendon with Nipmuck Indians for "Squinshepauk Plantation". Eliot's better intentions can be seen in his involvement in the legal case, *The Town of Dedham v. The Indians of Natick*, which concerned a boundary dispute. Besides answering Dedham's complaint point by point, Eliot stated that the colony's purpose was to benefit the native people.^[19] Praying Indian towns were also established by other missionaries, including the Presbyterian Samson Occom, himself of Mohegan descent. All praying Indian towns suffered disruption during King Philip's War (1675), and for the most part lost their special status as Indian self-governing communities in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, in some cases being paid to move to Wisconsin and other areas further West.^[20]

Eliot also wrote *The Christian Commonwealth: or, The Civil Policy Of The Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ*, considered the first book on politics written by an American, as well as the first book to be banned by a North American governmental unit. Written in the late 1640s, and published in England in 1659, it proposed a new model of civil government based on the system Eliot instituted among the converted Indians, which was based in turn on the government Moses instituted among the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 18). Eliot asserted that "Christ is the only right Heir of the Crown of England," and called for an elected theocracy in England and throughout the world. The accession to the throne of Charles II of England made the book an embarrassment to the Massachusetts colony. In 1661 the General Court forced Eliot to issue a public retraction and apology, banned the book and ordered all copies destroyed.

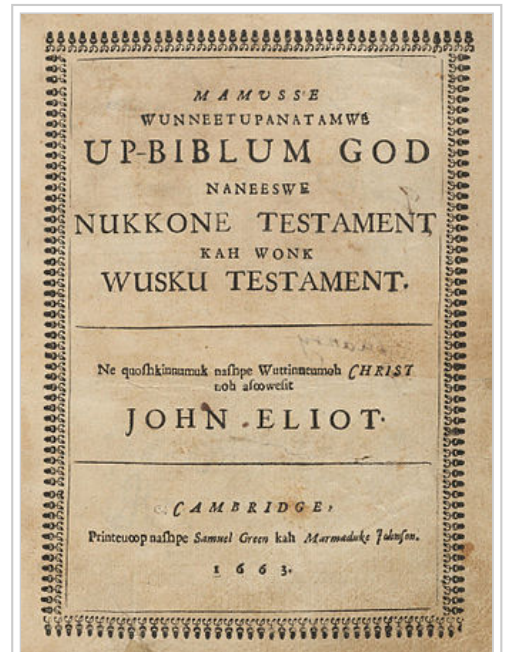
In 1709 a special edition of the Algonquin Bible was co-authored by Experience Mayhew and Thomas Prince with the Indian words in one column and the English words in the opposite column. The 1709 Algonquin Bible text book is also referred to as The Massachusetts psalter. This 1709 edition is based on the Geneva Bible, like Eliot's Indian Bible.^[21]

Family

John Eliot married Hanna Mumford. They had six children, five sons and one daughter.^[22] Their daughter Hannah Eliot married Habbakuk Glover.^[23] Their son, John Eliot, Jr., was the first pastor of the First Church of Christ in Newton,^[24] Another son, Joseph Eliot, became a pastor in Guilford, Connecticut, and later fathered Jared Eliot, a noted agricultural writer and pastor.

Death and Legacy

Rev. Eliot died in 1690, aged 85, his last words being "welcome joy!" His descendants became one branch of a Boston Brahmin family. Natick remembers John Eliot with a monument on the grounds of the Bacon Free Library.^[25] The Eliot Elementary School in Needham, Massachusetts, founded in 1956, is named for him.^[26] The liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church (USA) remembers Eliot with a feast day on May



First Bible printed in New World, 1663

21. Puritan "remembrancer" Cotton Mather called John Eliot's missionary career the epitome of the ideals of New England Puritanism.^[27] William Carey considered Eliot alongside the Apostle Paul and David Brainerd (1718–47) as "canonized heroes" and "enkindlers" in his groundbreaking *An Enquiry Into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (1792).^[28]

In 1689 John Eliot donated 75 acres (30 ha) of land to support the Eliot School in what was then Roxbury's Jamaica Plain district and now is a historic Boston neighborhood. Two other Puritans had donated land on which to build the school in 1676, but boarding students especially required support. Eliot's donation required the school (renamed in his honor) to accept both Negroes and Indians without prejudice, very unusual at the time.^[29] The school continues near its original location today, with continued admissions of all ethnicities, but now includes lifelong learning.^[30]

Works

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- Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England, in the Year 1670 (<http://www.bartleby.com/43/12.html>)
- The Harmony of the Gospels in the holy History of the Humiliation and Sufferings of Jesus Christ, from his Incarnation to his Death and Burial.

See also

- John Eliot Square District
- Roxbury, Boston
- Roxbury Latin School
- Praying Indian

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11. John Eliot's first Indian teacher and interpreter, Cockenoe-de-Long Island: and the story of his career from the early records (<http://jesus.cam.ac.uk/about-jesus-college/old-library-archives/exhibitions/john-eliot/promoting-and-propagating-the-gospel/>)
12. www.colonialwarsct.org/1637.html colonialwarsct (<http://www.colonialwarsct.org/1637.html>),
13. of Dorchester, Massachusetts. (<https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0806303786>)
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- *The Eliot Tracts: with letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter* (London, 2003)
- "Massachusetts Town Vitals Collection 1620-1988" record for Habbacuke Glover

External links

- Color oil portrait of Rev. John Eliot, by unidentified artist, 1659, from the Natick Historical Society site (http://www.natickhistoricalsociety.org/john_eliot.html)
- Cambridge University - John Eliot Biography (<http://www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/college/history/eliot.html>)
- Cambridge University - John Eliot Exhibition (<http://www.jesus.cam.ac.uk/college/history/eliotexhib.html>)
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