

The Memory and Legacy of the Pequot War

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After more than 370 years, the Pequot War remains one of the most controversial and significant events in North American Colonial and Native history. The Pequot War forever changed southern New England's political and social landscape, and influenced Colonial and American policies toward Native peoples for centuries. The massacre of over 400 men, women and children at Mystic on May 26, 1637, and the subsequent execution and enslavement of Pequot survivors are arguably the first, but not the last, act of genocide perpetuated on the indigenous peoples of English speaking America.

Irrespective of the war's historical significance, it continues to live on in the individual and collective memories of southern New England's Native and non-Native inhabitants. Each year members of the Pequot Tribe gather on the anniversary of the Mystic Massacre for a "First Light" ceremony to commemorate and honor the more than 400 Pequot men, women and children who perished at Mystic Fort in 1637. The John Mason monument, erected in 1889 at the site of the Mystic Massacre, has been repeatedly vandalized both before and after its removal to Windsor, CT, Mason's home at the time of the Pequot War.

In recognition of the Pequot War's historical and contemporary significance, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center (MPMRC) and the University of Connecticut have embarked on a long-term research project funded by the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program to study and document the sites, battlefields and historiography of the Pequot War. This initiative grew out of ongoing Mashantucket Pequot interest in the war and its consequences – particularly in regard to descendant communities of Pequot slaves in Bermuda and in the Caribbean. The developing relationships between the Pequot and Wampanoag tribes of southern New England and the descendant communities of Native American slaves in the St. David's Community of Bermuda are testimony to the enduring emotion, memory and legacy of the Pequot War.