

**JOHN HOPKINS UNIVERSITY STUDIES
IN HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL
SCIENCE; SECOND SERIES, VIII-IX;
INDIAN MONEY AS A FACTOR IN
NEW ENGLAND CIVILIZATION**

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Indian Money as a Factor in New England Civilization by William B. Weeden

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WILLIAM B. WEEDEN

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1883.

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VIII-IX

INDIAN MONEY

AS A FACTOR IN

New England Civilization

"Gold all is not that doth golden seem."—*Spenser.*

Wampum—"Coyns, monedeb, from the English money."—*Eoger Williams.*

The issue was civil government or savagery, and the Puritans won it.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY STUDIES
IN
HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

HERBERT B. ADAMS, Editor

History is past Politics and Politics present History — Freeman

SECOND SERIES

VIII-IX

INDIAN MONEY

AS A FACTOR IN

New England Civilization

BY WILLIAM B. ^{Barrett}WEEDEN, A. M.

BALTIMORE

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INDIAN MONEY

AS A FACTOR IN

NEW ENGLAND CIVILIZATION.¹

COMMERCE abides by great waters, and the sea shore has been its natural home from very early times. New England owed much to the sea, and especially to the fish which her skilful hand drew from its deep waters; but there was a marine treasure, of the shore and already at hand, which has not received the attention due to it, in considering the development of our early history.

All new communities suffer for a currency. Capital must be scarce, but a circulating medium is yet rarer. The increasing wants of a new life constantly send off the valuable medium and tend to deprive enterprise and industry of the needed stimulus of money. This marine treasure was in the Indian money—"coyne, Monèash, from the English money," as Roger Williams² quaintly terms it. These beads made from sea shells strung, or embroidered, on belts and garments, were the coveted treasures of Indian life. Tradition gives to the Narragansetts the honor of inventing these valued articles, valuable both for use and exchange. This tribe was one of the most powerful, and it is asserted that their commercial use of wampum gave them their best opportunities of wealth. The Long Island Indians³ manufactured the beads in large

¹ This paper was presented to the Historical and Political Science Association of the J. H. U. November 9, 1883, and is an important chapter in the Economic History of New England, to which Mr. Weedon is now devoting special attention.—ED.

² R. I. Hist. Coll. I, 1827, Key, p. 128.

³ In this and other details I have freely used Dr. Woodward's interesting essay on Wampum, Albany, 1878.

quantities and then were forced to pay them away in tribute to the Mohawks and the fiercer tribes of the interior. Furs were readily exchanged for these trinkets, which carried a permanent value, through the constancy of the Indian desire for them. The holder of wampum always compelled trade to come to him.

WAMPUM A LEGAL TENDER.

After the use of wampum was established in colonial life, contracts were made payable at will in wampum,¹ beaver, or silver. It is not the presence and free interchange of this shell currency, significant as it is, which chiefly interests us. This curious article, half natural, half artificial, getting its value from labor on the one hand and the desires fomented by the rude civilization of the barbarians on the other, played back and forth between the greedy Indian and the poor colonist for a long period. The use began in New England in 1627. It was a legal tender until 1661, and for more than three quarters of a century the wampum was current in small transactions. For more than a century, indeed, this currency entered into the intercourse of Indian and colonist, and therefore affected the whole development of that industry and commerce which we are studying. We must remember that, though Indian barbarities were cruel and destructive, they generally occurred on the frontiers. If we except the Pequot and Narragansett wars, the daily life of the settled portions of the colonies and provinces of New England was very little disturbed by Indian difficulties during long periods. In every day life, English and natives managed to live peacefully. The Indian was often brought into the colonial courts for minor offences, was fined, and generally paid his penalties when he had personal effects wherewith to pay. In 1673 the courts made him work out debts in daily labor. The Narragansett war was then gathering.

¹4 Mass. Hist. Coll., VII.

National and tribal civilizations have never dwelt long together. The political power of the nation necessarily dominates the lesser civilized force of the tribe, and finally subverts the race which lingers in the ruder form, however humane individuals of either polity may be.

WAMPUM AND INDIAN LABOR.

We have seen that money or currency is necessary to a new people. Another element is needed yet more. Labor¹ is a chief factor in civilized society² and the labor of the Indian³ was made available through wampum. As Winthrop⁴ shows, 10,000 beaver skins⁵ annually came to the Dutch from the Great Lake. The chase was the primitive form of Indian industry and furs were the most conspicuous feature of foreign trade, as gold is to-day, but wampum played a much larger part in the vital trade of the time. Wampum, or the things it represented, carried deer meat and Indian corn to the New England men. Corn and pork went for fish; fish went for West India rum, molasses, and the silver which Europe coveted. West India products, or the direct exchange of fish

¹E. Downing to Gov. Winthrop, 1637/8, 4 Mass. H. C. VI, p. 65: "I do not see how wee can thrive untill wee gett into a stock of slaves sufficient to doe all our business for our children's children will hardly see this great continent filled with people, see that our servants will still desire freedom to plan for themselves, and not stay but for verie great wages."

²This was not so easily comprehended at first. Plymouth in 1646 repealed an order against employing Indians. Col. Rec., 1646, p. 64.

³"The Narragansetts, the most numerous people in those parts, the most rich also and the most industrious," . . . "they employed most of their time in catching of beavers, otters and musquashes, which they traded for English commodities, of which they make a double profit, by selling them to more remote Indians, who are ignorant." Wood's New Eng. Prospect, p. 2, ch. 3, 1634.

⁴I., 113.

⁵Cal. St. Papers, Colonial, 1690, p. 144. "It is reported that they have exported thence (Manhatan) to Holland this year, 1632, 15,000 beaver skins, besides other commodities." These were partly from New England.