THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN ELIOT'S NATICK [1]

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The fact that this name, so closely identified with Rev John Eliot's life, survives to designate the scene of his mission, now a prominent town in Massachusetts, as well as to indicate one of the leading dialects of the Algonquian language, of which he has left some monumental examples, is deemed of sufficent importance to justify the appearance of this brief paper.

Deacon Joseph Ephraim, an Indian of the Natick tribe, who lived in the latter half of the eighteenth century, is reported to have given the meaning of the name "*Natick*" as a "place of hills." This was accepted at the time, and has been handed down in histories and biographies to the present day. It has been said, however, that Deacon Ephraim understood very imperfectly his native tongue. For that reason his interpretation has not been regarded as of much value by those who have made the language a study.

There is a village in Rhode Island bearing the same name, and mentioned in Dr Parson's Indian Names of Places in Rhode Island, as "*Natick* falls and village, *Natchick* hill." In a note on the subject, written in 1894 by Hon Amos Perry,[2] secretary of the Rhode Island Historical Society, he says: "Its Indian name was *Nittauke*, which, stripped of its superfluous letters (one *t* and the final *e*) and anglicized, became *Natick*." Its meaning is given in Roger Williams' Key to the Indian Language,volume 1, Rhode Island Historical Society's Collection, page 86, as follows: "Auke signifies earth or land; Nittauke signifies my land."

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[1] Read before the A. A. A. S., Section H, at Detroit, Mich., August, 1897.
[2] Book of Minutes of Col. John Jones, of Dedham, Mass., p. 13.

In a letter dated April 22, 1894, in same publication and fol-
lowing Dr Perry's remarks, Dr D. G. Brinton doubts the *Nittauke*
derivation and " votes in favor of the native red man as against
his scholarly white teacher." Accepting the meaning given by
Deacon Ephraim, " a place of hills," and believing " the name
Natick to be simply a shorter form of *Ma-natuck*, explained in
Trumbull's Indian Names in Connecticut, page 21, as that of
various prominent hills in that state, and signifying ' a place of
observation or lookout '—as a place of observation probably some
knoll near Natick, R. I., was prominent enough to receive the
appellation."

In one of his letters connected with the Rhode Island State
census of 1885, of which Dr Perry was the superintendent, Dr
J. Hammond Trumbull expressed dissatisfaction with the Indian
explanation as given in the foregoing, and also a desire to see the
Indian records of the town of Natick, R. I., in the hope of being
able to shed light on the mooted question.[1]

The publication of the foregoing by Dr Perry led to a letter
from Mr C. A. Downs, of New Lebanon, N. H., which was printed
in the publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society for
January, 1895,[2] as follows: " *Natick*—R. W. gives *Nit-tauke*, my
land, but he does not seem to use it as a name of a place. The
idea embodied in this application of it to a locality was beyond
the Indian mind. I agree with Dr D. G. Brinton in your Jones'
pamphlet so far. I do not find in the word the least suggestion
of a hill, neither syllable nor letter.

" The late Judge Chandler E. Potter, of Manchester, N. H., a
good Indian scholar, makes the following note: '*Natick* means
a clearing or place free of trees, from the Indian words *naa*, bare,
and *auke*, a place, the *t* being euphonic.'

" Rasle's vocabulary gives: '*Nate*, bare or cleared; *Na-t-auke*, a
clearing.' Rev Edward Ballard, in Geographical Names on the
Coast of Maine, Coast Survey Report, 1868, gives *Naddock*, writ-
ten *Nuttake*, the same derivation, and cites a Penobscot Indian
as using the word *Nātuah* as meaning an interval. All this is
reasonable—a probable source and meaning of *Natick;* but, know-
ing the literalness of the Indians in their names, I was not quite
satisfied without some evidence that Natick, in whole or part,

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was a clearing, which no one seems to have undertaken to prove, so I began my search in this direction.   In an account of the settlement I find this : ' In this place the grass was cut and timber felled,' etc.   This shows that there was a clearing, for otherwise there would be no grass ; and, so far as I am concerned, the question is settled—*Natick* means a clearing.   This meaning rests on etymology and facts.   No other does."

The foregoing conclusions would be acceptable and the question settled if it were based, as Mr Downs states, on "etymology and facts ; " but, alas ! he is mistaken in his premises, for his authorities are, without an exception, in error or misconstrued.

In the first place, it would be well and highly desirable to learn in which Algonquian dialect can be found *naa*, "bare," and where in Father Rasle's Dictionary of the Abnaki appears "*nate*, bare or cleared; *Na-t-auke*, a clearing"?[1] The most diligent search through the principal grammars and vocabularies of the family fails to reveal any Algonquian radical with such meaning, and in fact there are grave doubts as to its existence.

Again, the Penobscot *nātuah*, quoted by Ballard, while it may be freely translated " an interval"—a localism in some parts of the United States and British provinces specifically for a low, level tract of land, a meadow between a river and upland, between hills, etc.—does not literally refer to " a clearing," but actually to a " place between " or " in the middle."   The same elements, the *t* and *s*, being alternating letters or sounds, are found as components of place-names in varying forms throughout the whole Algonquian area—such as *Nashua*, *Ashawah*, etc.   It also appears in the name of Eliot's fifth praying-town " *Nashope* " or "*Nashobah*," of which further mention will be made; hence any etymology founded on this word, as illustrated by Mr Downs, must be necessarily erroneous as far as Natick is concerned.

In the second place, the supposed identity of the Rhode Island *Natick* with that of John Eliot's *Natick* must be eliminated from the question, for the reason that the two were not originally of the same origin and derivation.   Since Dr Trumbull " expressed a desire to see the Indian records of the town of Natick. R. I.," an early notation has been brought to light and published.   It is

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[1] " Nate " was probably misconstrued from " *Nètek8*, lieu de bois franc " (see Rasle's Dictionary, in Mem. Amer. Acad., vol. 1, pp. 386, 396), the main theme of which, as the succeeding word, *Neteg8ické* (= Otchipwe, *Mitigwaki*, " forest ") bears witness, connotes a " tree," and not " bare or clear."

displayed on the "plat of the land comprised in the original purchase of the Providence Plantations," made about 1677,[1] in the form of *Na-cheek*, and in a "declaration" made same year, "a place called by ye Indians *Natick* or *Nachick*."[2] This indicates positively to students of the language that "*Na-cheek*" was nearer to the true native pronunciation than *Natick*—a notation, in this instance, probably copied colloquially from the sounds of the better known name for ease of utterance, for at that period John Eliot's *Natick* had acquired considerable celebrity throughout New England on account of his labors there.

The Narragansett *Na-cheek* or *Nachick* is the equivalent of the Massachusetts *Nashik* (Eliot, Jer. 49 : 32), "a corner," and was bestowed on Rhode Island soil because the locality was "a boundary place "—" a corner " where the lines met in some conveyance of land by the Indians to the whites, or else was "a corner" on some Indian path or trail.[3]

In discussing the true significance and etymology of the name *Natick* or *Natik*, the two variations as written and applied by Rev John Eliot to designate his most celebrated Indian praying-town, and as retained in the first form to the present day, one main factor regarding the problem has never been taken into consideration. that factor being found in the circumstance that the names of some of Eliot's praying-towns, so called, while they are in the main from the dialect with which he was familiar, are not framed in accordance with aboriginal ideas or their method of constructing place-names, but are appellatives made up from the native language or altered from an original name, as some are by Eliot himself, in order to indicate some religious expression or other sentiments connected with the early building of the towns. In this peculiarity, if we may so term it, he undoubtedly followed the example of the Hebrew patriarchs, as is exemplified in the nomenclature of their ancient cities—*Hebron*, for instance, which in the Hebrew signifies association or friendship.

In proof of this characteristic of Eliot, his first town, founded in 1646, in the township of Newton, near Roxbury. Mass., was purchased by a committee appointed by the general court of

1 See fac-simile, Rider's R. I. Hist. Tract, 2d series, No. 4, pp. 100, 101.
2 Ibid., p. 86.
3 Roger Williams remarks: "Obs.: It is admirable to see what paths their naked, hardened feet have made in the wildernesse in most stony and rockie places."

Massachusetts, " for y* incouragmt of y* Indians to live in an
orderly way amongst us . . . & further, to set downe rules
for their impre* & enioying thereof."

This place was called *Nonantum* or *Noonatomen* by Eliot, which
signifies in English "rejoicing." The word, according to Dr
Trumbull, means literally "I rejoice" or "I am well minded."
The form *Noonatomen* (or *Nonantomum*) is plural, " we rejoice."[1]
Dr Trumbull, in his " Names in Connecticut," modifies this, but
without much difference, as "*Nonantam, i. e.,* he blesses." It is
well to observe that no Indian would have applied such a name
to a locality, for the reason that their own names are invariably
descriptive in one way or another of the place designated. *No-
nantum* was afterward abandoned and *Natick* became the first
praying-town in the list as handed down by Eliot in his letters.

The second town in order was *Ponkipog,* varied as *Pakeunit* or
Pakemit; the third was *Hassunnimesut;* the fourth, *Okommaka-
mesut;* the fifth, *Nashope* or *Nashobah,* was situated about twenty-
five miles west-northwest of Boston. In this term we find the
equivalent of the Penobscot *Nātuah* (= *Nashua*), as quoted by
Ballard, signifying " in the middle." The sixth town was *Wame-
sut,* or *Pawtucket;* the seventh, *Panatucket,* " is the upper part of
Merimak-Falls, so called because of the noise the water makes; "
the ninth, *Quanatusset.* The names of these towns, with few ex-
ceptions, possibly, seem to be framed in accordance with Indian
custom, but for our purpose, as they have not been critically
analyzed, it is unnecessary to refer to them further.

The eighth town, *Magunkaquok,* or *Majunkaquog,* was situated
at the remotest bounds of Natick. This town was a gathering
together of some of the Nipmuk Indians, who left their own
places and sit together in this place and have given up them-
selves to pray unto God.[1] Dr Trumbull[2] says: "*Magunkahquog,
Makunkokoag, Magunkook* (Nip'm),—a tract of land of about 300
acres, principally in Hopkinton, Mass., which was granted by
Massachusetts to be occupied by the praying Indians. Gookin
(1674) writes the name of the Indian town *Magunkaquog,* and says
that the signification of the name is · a place of great trees.' This
would be decisive were it not that Eliot, who could not be mis-
taken as to the meaning of the name of a town that he had a

1 Algonquian Bibliography, Pilling, p. 177.
2 Names in Connecticut, pp. 18, 19.

chief hand in planting, wrote, in 1669,[1] '*Magɔoonkkomuk*,' which
means ' the place (or town) of the gift '—*i. e.*, ' granted place,' from
Magɔoonk, 'gift,' and *komuk*, ' place.'   Possibly this, the original
name, had, when Gookin wrote, been changed by the Indians
themselves to the more familiar and more easily pronounced
Magunkook, ' place of the great tree,' or the plural *Magunkakook*
(= *Mogkunkak-auke*), ' place of great trees.' "

Natick now presents itself for our consideration and analysis.
In examining the materials of the structure of Algonquian place-
names, in order to translate them it may be stated that when one
is obliged to account for the insertion of a supposed superfluous
letter by euphony, that translations so arrived at are generally
incorrect and worthless.   In the present case it is absolutely cer-
tain that as Eliot was the principal agent in the baptism of the
town, he did not insert the *t* for euphonic reasons, but because
it belonged there as a part of the primary root or stem by him
employed.   This Algonquian verbal root *nat* has the meaning
of " searching," " seeking," " fetching," " going after something; "
and not only is it constant in all dialects of the family, but it
preserves its independent significance, however combined, as reso-
lution of its synthesis by analysis plainly teaches.

In illustration of this constancy of form and significance in
the Cree of the far northwest, Howse[2] gives us *Nátik*, " fetches
he," *-ik*, being the terminal or inverse form of the third person
singular, which,[3] while having the same spelling as one of Eliot's
forms, *i. e.*, *Natik*, is not grammatically the same.   Eastern Cree
(Lacombe), *Nât* (Rac.), "*Aller quérir, chercher, aller après*," etc.,
Nipissing (Couq.), *Nat-*, *voy Nadj et naj;* "*aller quérir;* " Abnaki
(Rasle's), *ne-nat-ȣ'-hȣbé*, "*Je cherche à boire;* " Otchipwe (Baraga),
Nad-in, " to fetch."   In the Massachusetts (Eliot and Cotton)
it is of frequent usage in many cluster-words, such as *Nat-ineah*
(Gen. 37 : 16), " to search, to seek," *i. e.*, " to go after something
by seeing, observing, or marking ; " *Nat-au-wuhae* (Jer. 23 : 12),
" their visitation," *i. e.*, " their seeking rest; " *Nat-au-wompu*
(Gen. 22 : 13), " he looked," *i. e.*, " he searched round about."
(Compare Delaware, *Nattawoapin*); Delaware (Brinton), *Nat-en*,

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1 MS. Petition, in Library of N. Y. Hist. Society.

2 Cree Grammar, pp. 52, 53.

3 This grammatical form is frequently used by Eliot, as in Psalms 27: 5, *nut-adtash-uk*,
" me hides he ; " *nuk-quenashh-uk*, " me sets up he."

"to fetch;" "properly, to go after something" (Anthony). These illustrations could be extended to a much greater degree from all the foregoing[1] and other cognate dialects. Enough, however, are displayed in their synthesis to indicate beyond a shadow of doubt the primary significance of the verbal root *nat*, as well as to prove that it is the main theme of Eliot's *Natick*, which, with its locative case ending *-ick*, signifies "the place of search" or "the place of (our) search."[2] In most remarkable confirmation of this interpretation, Eliot, in a letter written in the summer of 1650, the year of the planting of the town, relates the progress of his mission and their difficulties in seeking for a suitable town site in the following words: "But I declared unto them how necessary it was that they should first be civilized by being brought from their scattered and wild course of life into civill Cohabitation and Government . . . and therefore I propounded unto them, *that they should look out some place to begin a towne* into which they might resort, and there dwell together, enjoy Government and be made ready and prepared to be a People among whom the Lord might delight to dwell and Rule. . . . We accordingly attended thereunto *to search for a fit place*, and finally after sundry journeyes and travells to severall places, *the Lord did by his speciall providence and answer of prayers, pitch us upon the place where we are at Natick.*"[3]

Surely nothing but an actual translation of the name by Eliot himself could be any stronger than these words of his which, after nearly two and one-half centuries of time, come forward to corroborate this linguistic study.

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[1] Compare especially the various compounds given under *Nät* in Lexique Langue des Cris, Lacombe.

[2] There is another curious relation in connection with this subject, if a suggestion may be permitted, although it may be in error, but as far as our studies have progressed it is not, is that *-atin, -adin, -adn,* or *-atin,* as it is dialectically varied, and which in composition signifies "a hill or mountain," may be possibly a derivative from the same root, so derived perhaps because "a hill or mountain" was "a place to seek for something from;" hence "a place of observation." If this suggestion is worthy of thought, it becomes evident that Deacon Ephraim could see "a hill" in the name, but owing to his lack of knowledge of the primary significance of the root, he did not comprehend the true inwardness of the term as used by his forefathers, and as Dr Perry remarks in the work before quoted, "He spoke according to the light that was in him."

[3] Algonquian Bibliography, Pilling, p. 178.