

= Wessagusset Colony =

Wessagusset Colony ( sometimes called the Weston Colony or Weymouth Colony ) was a short @-@ lived English trading colony in New England located in present @-@ day Weymouth , Massachusetts . It was settled in August 1622 by between fifty and sixty colonists who were ill @-@ prepared for colonial life . The colony was settled without adequate provisions , and was dissolved in late March 1623 after harming relations with local Native Americans . Surviving colonists joined Plymouth Colony or returned to England . It was the second settlement in Massachusetts , predating the Massachusetts Bay Colony by six years .

Historian Charles Francis Adams , Jr. referred to the colony as " ill @-@ conceived , " ill @-@ executed , [ and ] ill @-@ fated " . It is best remembered for the battle ( some say massacre ) there between Plymouth troops led by Miles Standish and an Indian force led by Pecksuot . This battle scarred relations between the Plymouth colonists and the natives and was fictionalized two centuries later in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 's 1858 poem The Courtship of Miles Standish .

In September 1623 , a second colony led by Governor @-@ General Robert Gorges was created in the abandoned site at Wessagusset . This colony was rechristened as Weymouth and was also unsuccessful , and Governor Gorges returned to England the following year . Despite that , some settlers remained in the village and it was absorbed into the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 .

= = Origins = =

The colony was coordinated by Thomas Weston , a London merchant and ironmonger . Weston was associated with the Plymouth Council for New England which , fifteen years earlier , had funded the short @-@ lived Popham Colony in modern Maine . During the period when the Pilgrims were in the Netherlands , Weston helped to arrange the colonists ' passage to the New World with help from the Merchant Adventurers . Historian Charles Francis Adams , Jr. writing in the 1870s glowingly called him a " sixteenth century adventurer " in the mold of John Smith and Walter Raleigh and that his " brain teemed with schemes for deriving sudden gain from the settlement of the new continent " . In later years , Plymouth Governor William Bradford called him " a bitter enemy unto Plymouth upon all occasions . "

The primary purpose of Weston 's new colony was profit , rather than the religious reasons of the Plymouth settlers , and this dictated how the colony would be assembled . Weston believed that families were a detriment to a well @-@ run plantation and so he selected able @-@ bodied men only but not men experienced in colonial life . In total , there were several advanced scouts and fifty to sixty other colonists . The final complement also included one surgeon and one lawyer . The party was outfitted with enough supplies to last the winter .

= = First Wessagusset colony = =

An advance team of several settlers arrived at the Plymouth Colony in May 1622 . They had voyaged to the new world on board the Sparrow , an English fishing @-@ vessel which was sailing to the coast of modern @-@ day Maine . After arriving at the coast of Maine , they traveled the final 150 miles ( 240 km ) in a shallop with three members of the Sparrow 's crew . These colonists stayed only briefly in Plymouth before scouting the coast in their shallop to find a site for their colony . After finding one , they negotiated with the sachem Aberdecest for the land and returned to Plymouth , sending the shallop and her small crew back to the Sparrow , and awaited the remainder of the colonists .

The main body of colonists set off from London in April 1622 on board two ships , the Charity and the Swan . Richard Greene , Thomas Weston 's brother @-@ in @-@ law , was the initial leader of the group . The group arrived in Plymouth in late June and moved into their settlement the following month . By the end of September , the colony was established , the Swan moored in Weymouth Fore River , and the Charity returned to England .

At first , the relationship between the two groups was cordial and the men of the Wessagusset

assisted Plymouth with their harvest , but they were accused of stealing from the elder colony . Shortly after relocating to Wessagusset , angry Indians complained to Plymouth that the colonists were stealing their corn . In response , Plymouth could only send a " rebuke " to the new colony . Because of the disorder of the colony , as subsequently reported by Plymouth 's Governor Bradford , Wessagusset was consuming food too quickly and it became apparent that they would run out before the end of the winter . In addition , Plymouth was also low on supplies due to spending additional time during the growing season building fortifications , rather than growing crops . To prevent hunger or famine for both colonies , Plymouth and Wessagusset colonists organized a joint trading mission with the natives with goods brought by the Wessagusset colonists . That trading mission was somewhat successful and the two colonies split the proceeds . In November , Greene died and John Sanders was made governor of the colony . By January , the colonists continued to trade with the natives for food , but at a severe disadvantage . This drove up the barter @-@ price of corn and they were forced to trade their clothes and other needed supplies . Some colonists entered a form of servitude , building canoes and performing other labors for the natives , in exchange for food . Ten colonists died . After an incident where one settler was caught stealing by the natives , the colonists hanged him in their view as a show of good faith . However , sources disagree whether the man hanged was the culprit and the colonists may have hanged an older , possibly dying man , instead . The legend that the Wessagusset colonists hanged an innocent man was later popularized by a satirical depiction of this event in Samuel Butler 's 1660s poem *Hudibras* . In February , Sanders petitioned to Plymouth for a joint attack on the natives , but this was rejected by Plymouth 's governor .

#### = = = Killings at Wessagusset = = =

Throughout the winter , tensions continued to build between the settlers at Wessagusset and Plymouth and the natives . Perhaps in response to the Wessagusset thefts against them , there was at least once instance where a native was caught stealing from Plymouth . Near the end of the winter , the natives near Wessagusset moved some of their huts to a swamp near the colony . At least some of the colonists felt that they were under siege .

One colonist at Wessagusset , seeing these signs and other indications of hostility , fled to Plymouth to bring word of an imminent attack . Adding to his desperation and the perception of imminent hostility , he was pursued by natives during his flight . Arriving at Plymouth on March 24 , he met with the Governor and town council . It is unclear whether this colonist 's report was the tipping point , or whether Plymouth had already decided to mount a preemptive attack . Plymouth 's Edward Winslow had recently been warned by Massasoit , a sachem whose life he saved using English medicine , of a conspiracy of several tribes against Wessagusset and Plymouth . The threatening tribes , he was told , was led by the Massachusett but also included the Nauset , Paomet , Succonet , Mattachiest , Agowaywam , and Capawack tribes from as far away as Martha 's Vineyard . In either case , Plymouth colony sent a small force under Miles Standish to Wessagusset . They arrived there on March 26 .

Standish called all of the Wessagusset colonists into the stockade for defense . The following day , several natives including the local chief , Pecksuot , were at Wessagusset . Historical sources give different accounts of the killings . In some manner , four of the natives , including the local chief , were in the same room as Standish and several of his men . One source , from the 1880s , suggests that it was the natives that arranged to be alone with Standish to allow them to attack the colonist . Others sources state that it was Standish who had invited the natives into the situation on peaceful pretenses . When four of them , including the local chief , were in a room within the village , Standish gave the order to strike , quickly killing Pecksuot with his own knife . Several other natives in the village were attacked next ; only one escaped to raise the alarm . As many as five Englishmen were also killed in the brief battle and one native 's head was cut off , to be displayed in Plymouth as a warning to others .

In 1858 , Henry Wadsworth Longfellow included a fictionalized depiction of the killings in his epic poem , *The Courtship of Miles Standish* . In his version , the Indians are depicted as begging for

weapons to use against other tribes . Standish responds by offering them bibles . After being the target of boasts and taunts by the Indians , Standish attacks first :

= = = Aftermath = = =

Following the brief conflict , Standish offered to leave several soldiers to defend the colony , but the offer was rejected . Instead , the colonists divided : some , including John Sanders , returned to England in the Swan , while others remained behind and joined the Plymouth colony . By spring of 1623 , the village was empty and the colony was dissolved . Thomas Weston arrived in Maine several months later , seeking to join his colony , only to discover that it was already failed . Some of his former settlers apparently had gone north to Maine , and were living on House Island in Casco Bay in a home built by explorer Capt. Christopher Levett , who had been granted land to found an English colony . ( Levett 's settlement also failed , and the fate of Weston 's men is uncertain . )

Due to the fighting at Wessagusset , Plymouth trade with the Indians was devastated for years . Local tribes which had previously been favorable to Plymouth , began to forge bonds with other tribes in defense against the English . This latent hostility would eventually boil over during the Pequot War and later , King Philip 's War . Historians differ on whether the conflict could have been avoided or the colony saved . Some historians saw the preemptive strike as a necessary one , " saving the lives of hundreds " , while others see it as a sad misunderstanding . Speaking shortly after the 150th anniversary of the colony , historian Charles Francis Adams summarized the Wessagusset experience as " ill @-@ conceived , " ill @-@ executed , [ and ] ill @-@ fated " .

= = Second Wessagusset colony = =

At approximately the same time , the Plymouth Council for New England was sponsoring a new colony for New England . A patent for a settlement covering 300 square miles ( 780 km<sup>2</sup> ) of what is now north @-@ east of Boston Bay was given to an English captain and son of Sir Ferdinando Gorges , Robert Gorges . This settlement was intended to be a spiritual and civil capital of the council 's New England colonies . Gorges was commissioned as Governor @-@ General with authority over Plymouth and presumably future colonies . His government was also to consist of a leadership council , of which Plymouth 's Governor Bradford would be a member . Unlike Weston , who had brought only working men , Gorges brought families intending for a permanent settlement . And unlike the Puritans , Gorges brought the Church of England with him , in the form of two clergymen who would oversee the spiritual health of the region .

Gorges arrived in Massachusetts in September 1623 , only four months after Weston 's colony collapsed . Instead of founding his colony at the location described in the patent , he instead chose the abandoned settlement at Wessagusset for his site . It was rechristened Weymouth after Weymouth , Dorset , the town where the expedition began . Over the following weeks , he visited Plymouth and ordered the arrest of Thomas Weston who had arrived in that colony in the Swan . This was his only official act as Governor @-@ General . Weston was charged with neglect in his colony and with selling weapons were supposed to have been used for the defense of the colony . Weston denied the first charge , but confessed to the second . After consideration , Gorges released Weston " on his word " and he eventually settled as a politician in Virginia and Maryland .

After wintering in Weymouth , Gorges abandoned his new colony in the spring of 1624 due to financial difficulties . Most of his settlers returned to England , but some remained in as colonists in Weymouth , Plymouth , or Virginia . The remaining Weymouth settlers were supported by Plymouth until they were made part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 . Massachusetts Bay Governor John Winthrop visited the settlement in 1632 . In time , the location of the original settlement was lost to history and development . The location of the original fort was not rediscovered until 1891 .