

HISTORY IN A NEW LIGHT

Illuminating the Archaeology

OF HISTORIC PATUXET
AND PLYMOUTH



On exhibit in the Shelby Cullom Davis gallery through November 2021

This exhibit was constructed thanks to the generosity of:

Catherine and Robert Brawer

Carlo and Kathryn Lamagna



PROJECT
400



research ♦ write ♦ share
dig ♦ discover ♦ compose
compare ♦ collaborate

History in a New Light demonstrates how the modern town of Plymouth has been shaped by the ways humans have lived along these shores for thousands of years, and how this land continues to reveal stories of a transcultural Indigenous-Colonial regional society. By using multiple lines of evidence, including archaeology, documentary research, oral history, and fine and decorative arts, the exhibition shows how each thread contributes something unique to Plimoth Patuxet Museums' understanding, re-creation, and interpretation of the past.



Rather than a traditional commemorative 400th anniversary exhibit, *History in a New Light* is forward-looking and invites visitors to consider how the past serves as a foundation for the future. It is also distinctive as the first major exhibit displaying artifacts from the Wampanoag

village of Patuxet and the site of the original 1620 European settlement, which were discovered in 2016 by Project 400 archaeologists. In addition to finding the first evidence of these overlapping settlements, this research has forced scholars to reevaluate their understanding of daily life in early Plymouth and the nature of colonial and indigenous interactions.

Stories from the Land

THE INTERWOVEN HISTORY OF
PLYMOUTH AND PATUXET

For more than twelve thousand years, the Wampanoag people have lived in Plymouth and the surrounding region. They named this place Patuxet, clearing the land to plant and harvesting resources from the coast and forests. In the 1500s, they encountered European traders who came to the area in search of furs, wood, cod, and other natural resources. Nearly 100 years later, in 1620, the English ship *Mayflower* brought 102 men, women, and children to this place. The Pilgrims, as they would later be called, constructed the town of Plymouth. The cultural encounters that happened here 400 years ago continue to shape the development of the United States.

In clearing land for growing food, building structures, and later diverting and damming rivers and constructing fences, both the Wampanoag people and the European colonists altered the landscape around them and were, in turn, changed by it. Today, much of our knowledge about the people of Patuxet and Plymouth comes from archaeology, primary source documents, and oral history.

Almost a decade ago, Plimoth Patuxet Museums embarked on Project 400 to see what the ground could tell us about 17th-century Patuxet and Plymouth. The results are now changing the way we teach history on our living history sites. We are still studying these excavations and artifacts, and new discoveries are still emerging.

The stories of these people are interwoven with the layered landscape on which they lived. Today, the legacy of Patuxet and Plymouth's stories is reflected in place names, memorials, parks, and in the ongoing research of archaeologists and historians.



Waterways as Highways

In the 17th century, the ocean and inland waterways were important highways for trade, communication, and travel.

Historic uses of waterways for travel have been well documented throughout time. Archaeologists working in and around Plymouth have found pottery from Europe and Indigenous tools made from stones sourced as far away as Pennsylvania. Oral tradition suggests that the trade networks might have extended even farther. Letters between Plymouth and England as well as books describing voyages provide written accounts of travel and trade.

A Native staff member at Historic Patuxet living history site burns out a mishoon.



Trade Networks

The Wampanoag had extensive trade networks across the Northeast.

How far did Wampanoag trade networks extend? The artifacts below were all found in Plymouth, Massachusetts, but archaeologists have found that some of the stone used to make them was acquired from as far away as present day Maine, New York, and Pennsylvania. Compare the tool to its associated number on the map to see where the stone sources have been found.



Nanepashemet

Wampanoag scholar Nanepashemet was influential in the development of Plimoth Patuxet's Indigenous living history interpretation. Despite evidence to the contrary in oral histories and documentary sources, scholars in the 1970s and 1980s began questioning whether the



Wampanoag planted with fish prior to the arrival of Europeans. Nanepashemet's collaboration with archaeologists demonstrated without doubt that the practice of fertilizing with herring had been carried out by Native people for generations before the English settled in the region.



Courtesy of
the Norman B.
Levanthal Map &
Education Center
at the Boston
Public Library

Map 805.2 [17-?] 2198
Ent Aug 4 1852

Transatlantic Exchange

Even before the arrival of the Pilgrims, people and goods were actively moving back and forth across the Atlantic between Europe and America.



Dutch tin-glazed earthenware tile of a merchant ship

When European traders came to New England, they brought a variety of items, customs, and languages with them. Likewise, ships returning to England carried valuable resources like fur and timber, whose stores had been depleted in Europe by this time. In addition to helping us understand how the world looked in the 17th century, archaeological evidence and written records help us understand how this exchange of goods, ideas, and relationships took place for generations.

Goods from New England

Documentary records indicate that the main exports from New England were raw materials like fur, timber, and cod, which were regularly sold to European merchants. Other items were sent back as novelties.



In case, from left to right: beaver skin, dried cod, eastern red cedar, oak, and white pine wood



Goods from Europe

When European traders and the Pilgrims came to New England, they brought a variety of familiar objects with them. Archaeologists working in Plymouth have found European coins and glass, as well as fragments of pottery from England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and the Netherlands. Some of these items are shown here.



Goods from Europe

When European traders and the Pilgrims came to New England, they brought a variety of familiar objects with them. Archaeologists working in Plymouth have found European coins and glass, as well as fragments of pottery from England, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and the Netherlands. Some of these items are shown here.

- Westerwald Jug
- Westerwald Fragment
- Bartmann Jug
- Bartmann Fragment
- Borderware Pipkin
- Borderware Pipkin Fragment
- Olive Jar

In case, from left to right: Borderware pipkin handle (English); Borderware pipkin (English); Westerwald fragment (German); Westerwald tankard (German); Olive jar (Iberian); Bartmann jug (German); Bartmann jug fragment (German); Wool; Linen



Tisquantum

A STOLEN LIFE

In 1614, mariner Thomas Hunt kidnapped twenty Wampanoag men from Patuxet and seven Nauset men from Cape Cod, transporting them to Spain to sell as slaves and curiosities.



Hunt's men may have sold Tisquantum in Malaga, Spain to men from Bristol, a port city on the west coast of England, or Tisquantam may have been freed by Spanish Jesuits and traveled to London in company with English traders. Tisquantum next appears in the historical record living in the household of John Slanie, a London merchant interested in colonial investments and the American fur trade. During his years in London, Tisquantum learned English and met Englishmen interested in starting colonies in New England.

He returned to Patuxet in 1619 with the merchant seaman Thomas Dermer. Tisquantum discovered that his people had been lost to plague two years earlier. The few survivors went to live in other Native communities. In 1621, as part of Massasoit's diplomatic entourage, he met the Plymouth colonists and would become a trusted adviser and translator. He died on Cape Cod in 1622 while on a trading journey.

“These people are ill affected towards the English, by reason of one Hunt, a master of a ship, who deceived the people, and got them under color of trucking [trading] with them, twenty out of this very place where we inhabit, and seven men from the Nausets, and carried them away, and sold them for slaves like a wretched man [...] that cares not what mischief he doth for his profit.”

—Mourt's Relation, 1622

Hydropower and Industrialization

By the 18th and 19th centuries, Plymouth's Town Brook was lined with factories using the falling water as a source of hydropower.

As early as the mid-17th century, the damming and diverting of Town Brook began to significantly change the landscape around Plymouth and impede the migration of the fish that had been so important in Wampanoag planting traditions and foodways. With the building of factories in the 19th century, Plymouth began manufacturing goods to be sold around the region and beyond.

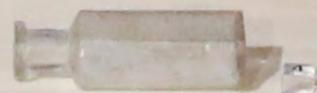
The factories along Town Brook were torn down in the early 20th century during urban renewal efforts in preparation for the 300th anniversary of the arrival of *Mayflower*.

Late 19th-century photograph of Town Brook. Notice the factory smokestack and what look like ship masts in the distance (2019.009).



Town Brook.

(mirrored text on the back of the photograph)



Plymouth's Industrial Past

These items depict some of the goods being produced by Plymouth factories and businesses in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

1. Soda Bottle

Produced by Plymouth Bottling Works
1880s - 1920s
1000000

2. Slag

Produced by Plymouth
Slag is the material left over by a steel furnace after the burning of steel. When
and is then, parts of it melt and crystallize to form a glass-like substance.

3. "B. Hedge, Plymouth Mass." Brick

Produced by B. Hedge
1880s - 1920s
1000000

4. Pharmaceutical Bottle

Produced by Plymouth
1880s - 1920s
1000000

In case, from left to right: Plymouth Bottling Works bottle; Slag; Plymouth Pharmacy bottle; Hedge Company brick



Restoring Town Brook

The once plentiful herring migrations up Town Brook had all but stopped by the end of the 19th century.

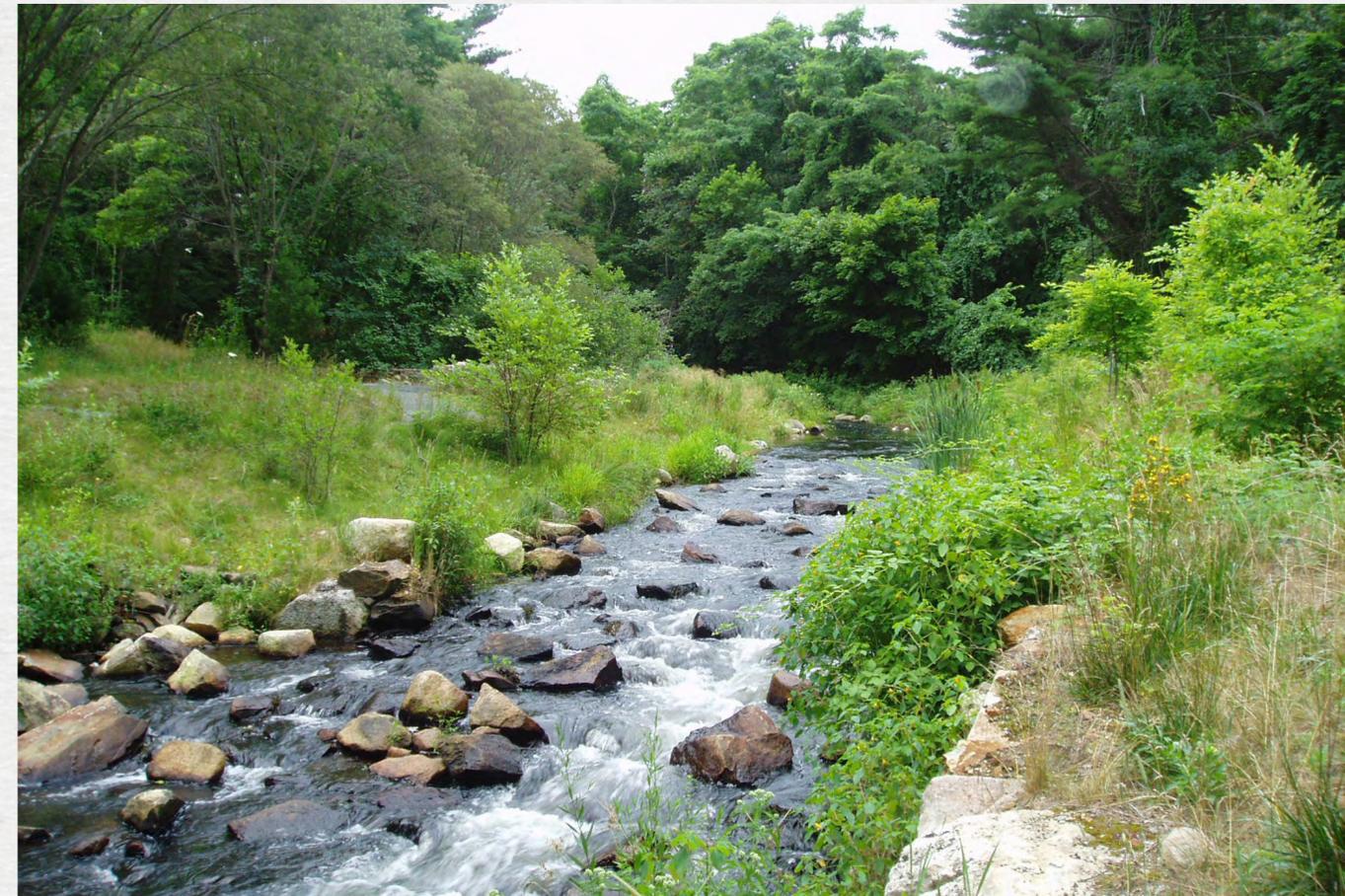
It took decades before they could be restored.

Plymouth's first environmental wardens were appointed in the 1660s to oversee the spring fish migrations over the dams using ladders erected by the early mill owners. By the mid-19th century fish passed through seven industrial dams along the short mile-and-a-half flow of Town Brook from Plymouth Harbor to Billington Sea.

Billington Dam in 2002 before restoration (photo by Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center).



After the removal of Billington Dam (photo by Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center).





Plimoth Patuxet Museums employee Darius Coombs fishing in Town Brook (photo by Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center).

By 2002, almost all industrial use of water on Town Brook had ceased, leaving behind decaying mill sites and stretches of water few fish could pass through. Environmentalists began to work with community representatives to remove the dams along Town Brook and upgrade the ladders and passages used by migrating fish.

Thanks to these efforts, in 2018, the annual herring run was estimated at 185,000, up significantly from lows of only 40,000 at the end of the 20th century. Experts estimate that in time we may once again see runs of one million herring in Plymouth's Town Brook. This success has led the Town Brook project to become a national model for waterway reclamation.



Volunteers counting fish on the dam above the Plimoth Grist Mill during the herring run (photo by Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center).

Project 400: Excavations in Downtown Plymouth



Archaeology is a unique way to create a “biography of a landscape,” a series of historical images of a specific place. Since 2012 the University of Massachusetts Boston, Plimoth, and the Town of Plymouth have been undertaking a collaborative project to explore the archaeology of 17th-century Plymouth Colony.

This project has excavated a series of sites in downtown Plymouth and re-analyzed artifact collections from earlier excavations, discovering new information about Wampanoag Patuxet and Plymouth Colony.

Wampanoag artifacts are widespread across modern Plymouth, reflecting thousands of years of people hunting, fishing, foraging, and planting crops in Patuxet. The archaeological evidence for 17th-century Plymouth Colony encompasses new downtown discoveries, including the remains of two houses, yard spaces outside the buildings, and a section of the wooden post palisade wall that surrounded the town. The artifacts from these sites connect us to the people of the past and show ways their actions shaped the history and landscape of Plymouth.



While significant changes have come with the last 400 years of development of the Town of Plymouth, the artifacts and sites studied give us new insights into the many ways human activity has shaped the local landscape.





Archaeological Field School

Most archaeologists are trained to be archaeologists by attending one or more field schools.

As students, they learn all about the different techniques they will need for excavating and recording in the field and cleaning and processing artifacts in the lab. Field school students also often have reading and assignments just like in regular school!

Since 2011, Plimoth Patuxet Museums has partnered with Project 400, an archaeological research project and field school run by the Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston. This video, filmed by field school students, gives you a sense of what the experience is like and the exciting discoveries being made in downtown Plymouth with Project 400.



Linda

MASS

ENTER

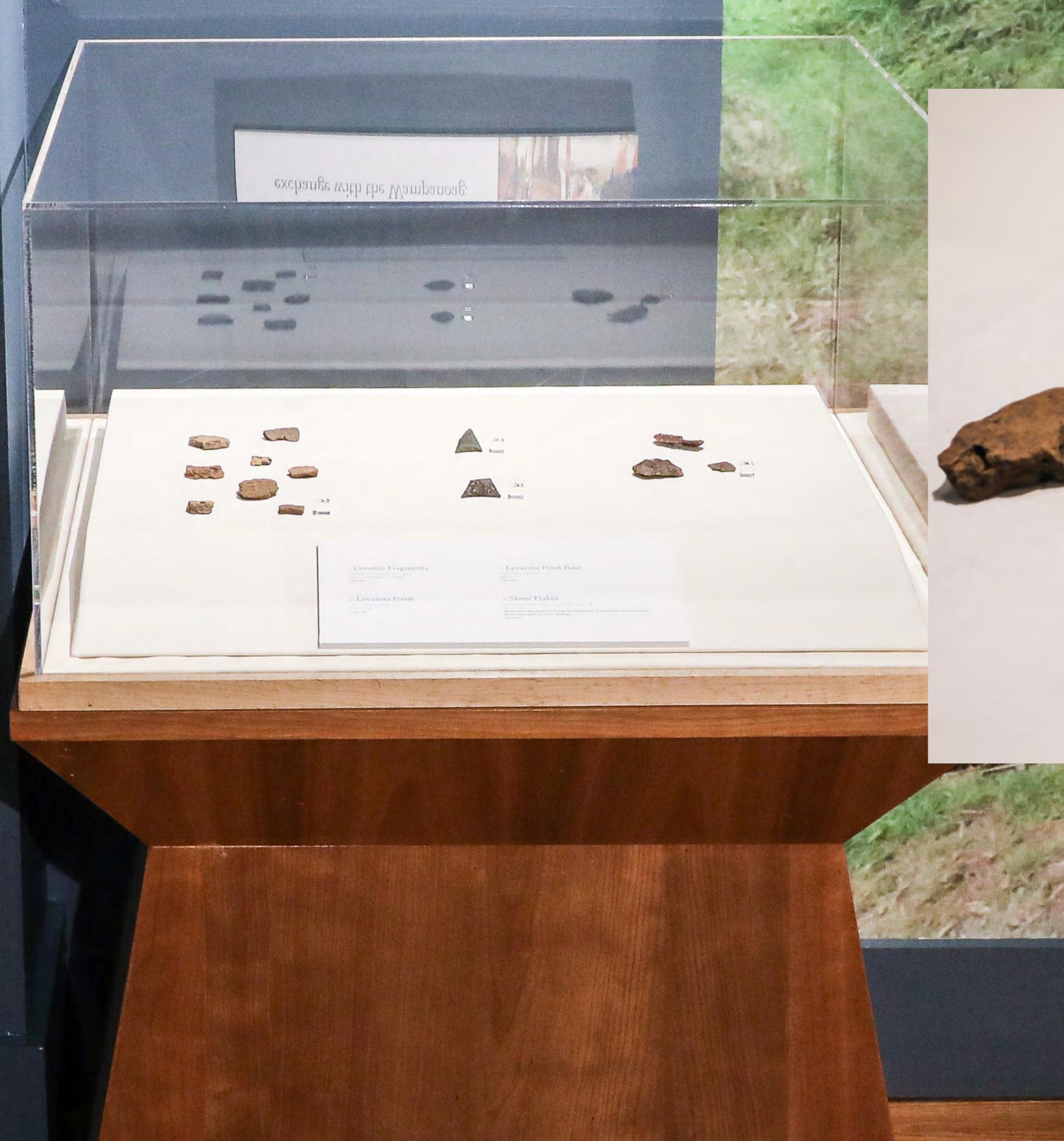
An Indigenous
Settlement Near
New Plymouth



The Pilgrims settled on the site of the Wampanoag village of Patuxet, which had been hit by an epidemic shortly before *Mayflower's* arrival. The Wampanoag continued to occupy Plymouth alongside the colonists, planting crops along Town Brook and visiting the town to trade.



The Wampanoag knowledge of the land around Patuxet/Plymouth was crucial, as they taught the colonists where to catch fish and how to plant and grow corn. The survival of the early colony depended on trade and exchange with the Wampanoag.



From left to right in case: fragments of Wampanoag pottery; Rhyolite Levanna points; Rhyolite flakes from making stone tools

Small Finds from
the 17th Century



The smallest artifacts
often tell big stories.
“Small finds” hint at
much larger ideas of 17th-
century colonial economy
and personal identity.



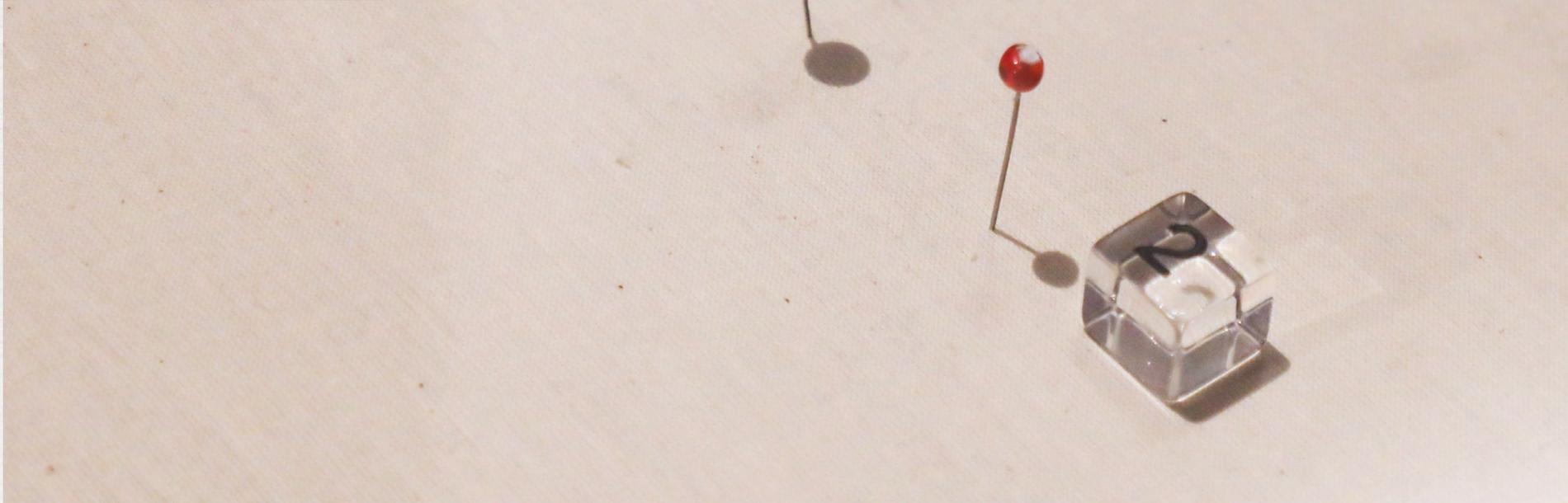
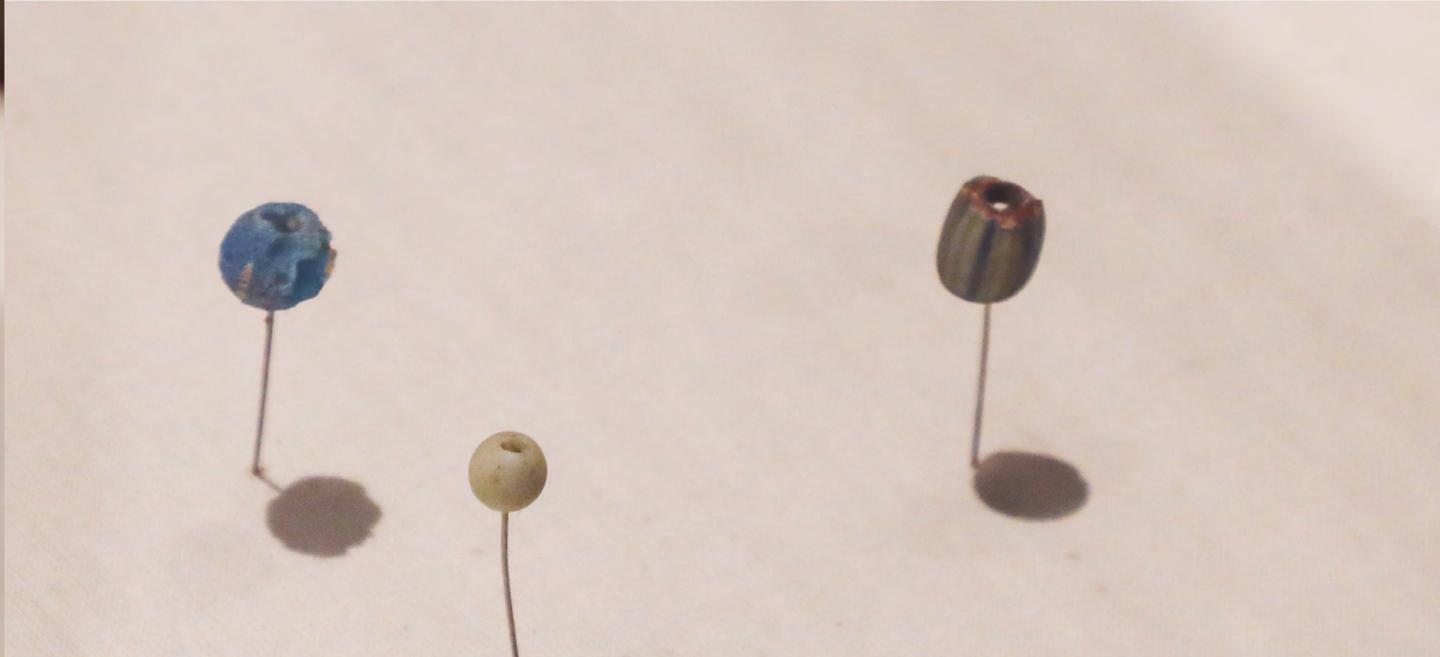
Along with larger goods like cloth and those made from glass, brass, and steel, coins and beads were common items at the center of 17th-century trade. Europeans commonly gave the Wampanoag/Native traders beads in exchange for goods like furs. The presence of a Spanish Cob coin (possibly from Mexico) at the site might inform archaeologists about other colonial powers the English colonists traded with, but it could also be related to an English ship that came in to Plymouth in 1646 with captured Spanish cargo.



Some small artifacts hint at objects that are rarely found because they degrade too quickly in the ground, such as clothing and other textiles. Bolts of trade cloth were marked with lead bale seals to keep track of information, including the cloth's place of manufacture, quality and size. Buttons, straight pins, and beads provide evidence for the presence of different types of clothing. Objects related to dress and adornment were a major part of the colonial economy and can also tell us about how people in the past presented themselves to others.



From left to right in case: Spanish cob coin; Buckle fragment; Couprous straight pins; Pewter button; Glass beads; Lead baling seal



Domestic Life in
17th-Century
Plymouth



Artifacts recovered from people's houses and yards provide clues to the conditions of daily life in 17th-century Plymouth.

Because the early colonists had relatively few belongings in their houses, most artifacts found relate to daily tasks like cooking and storing food. In 17th-century Plymouth, people discarded their household trash in small piles and pits in the yard around their houses. Archaeologists find these artifacts during excavation, and study them to understand the conditions of daily life.



From top to bottom and left to right in case: Borderware vessel fragments; Tin-glazed earthenware vessel fragment; North Devon gravel-tempered ware fragment; Green glass bottle finish; White clay pipe fragments; Possible gun part; Lead shot; Redware milk pan rim; redware milk pan fragment; Earthenware pot with green lead glaze interior

So you want to be an
archaeologist?



While archaeology can be really exciting, it seems like a lot of work to get started! Professional archaeologists receive many years of special training and education to become experts, but this doesn't mean that archaeology is off-limits to non-professionals. A lot of communities have archaeological societies that you can join. Many archaeological digs also accept volunteers to help them with their work.

Volunteering with an archaeological dig is a great way to connect with history, but archaeology should always be done ethically. Before joining an archaeological dig, be sure to ask questions like:

Is the dig working with professional archaeologists?

Is research going to be done with the objects?

Is there a place for the artifacts to be stored after the dig is over? Can other researchers see them?

Can you be sure none of the artifacts are going to be sold?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” this dig might not be happening ethically and you should be careful about taking part.

Check out these organizations to learn more
about archaeology and getting involved!

Massachusetts Archaeological Society

Society for Historical Archaeology

Society for American Archaeology

Archaeological Institute of America

Passport in Time

Thank you!

For more information on collections at Plimoth Patuxet
Museums or to view the exhibit online, please visit

plimoth.org/collections