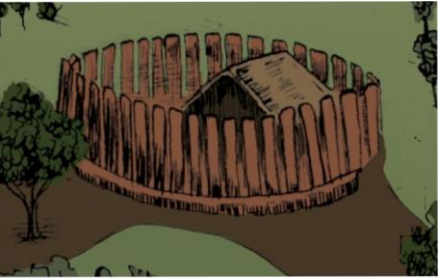


Natick was established in 1651 by the Puritan missionary John Eliot and his followers, a group of "Praying Indians". Natick is generally believed to mean "Place of Hills." The Speen Family owned much of the land in the Natick area and they deeded it to the Praying Indians taking house lots for themselves.

In the area now called South Natick, the Indians settled on both sides of the Charles River. Over the river they built a wooden bridge with a stone foundation and laid out three streets, now called Eliot, Union and Pleasant Streets. The Indians then built a meetinghouse with the help of an English carpenter. The two story building was used as church, school, and ware-



house, and as a place for Eliot on his fortnightly visits. The building, which stood about where the present Eliot Church stands, was palisaded with a circle of tall trees.

For more than twenty years Eliot instructed and preached to the Indians. A school was set up, a government established and the Indians were encouraged to convert to Christianity. Eliot learned their language and with the help of the Indians, who had no system of writing, transcribed the Bible into the Algonquin language. A copy of the 1685 edition is at the Natick Historical Society Museum.

The prosperity of the village was

destroyed when King Philip, son of the chief, Massasoit, attacked the white settlers. The attacks caused such fear among the settlers that in 1675 the Indians were first restricted to their villages, and then in October, over Eliot's protests, the General Court ordered the Natick Indians sent to Deer Island. Many Indians did not survive the lack of food and the cold and those who returned seven months later found their homes destroyed. The Praying Indians did not flourish after their return to Natick. Before Eliot died in 1690, he ordained the first Native American minister, Daniel Takawampbait, who carried on until his death in 1716. Two other Indians preached before the New England Company sent first Rev. Oliver Peabody and later, Rev. Stephen Badger to fill the Indian Church pulpit.

Thomas Sawin was one of the first white men to own land in Natick. The Indians asked him to build a grist mill and he was deeded land for this purpose. By 1725 the Indians had sold most of their land to pay their debts and many drifted away or succumbed to disease. Other families stayed, intermarried and adopted English ways. Several of these families remain in Natick today.

As more settlers moved into the central part of Natick, an area called the Needham Leg, the Meetinghouse Dispute erupted. Those in the more northern part of town wanted the church in the center rather than supporting the Indian church to the south. This dispute continued over a period of almost sixty years. The people in the "Leg" requested the Court to restore this area of the Natick Plantation to Needham. This was approved in 1761.

During the Revolution Natick sent 174 men out of a population of 534 to fight.

Eighteen Minute Men were raised under the leadership of Capt. David Morse on April 19 1775. Even so, when the Town Meeting voted to reject the Constitution in 1778 Natick's loyalties were questioned. Town leaders pledged their support to the new government in spite of their dissatisfaction with the output of the Continental Congress.

Attention turned once again to the Meeting house dispute. The church could not be relocated without the approval of the court so the parish petitioned to become a town, and to change the name to Eliot. The name change was not granted, but Natick became a town in February of 1781.

In 1796 it was voted to build the new meetinghouse in the center. The inhabitants of the southern part of town did not want to support the new church and petitioned to be separated from the town. The court resolved the issue in 1797 by restoring the "Leg" to Natick but the south and east sections



remained in Needham. The Indian Church dissolved as the congregation dispersed to other parishes and the building fell into disrepair. In 1828 the present Eliot Church was built, the fifth church on the site, and houses a Unitarian Universalist group today.

Originally a farming town, industries began to emerge in the late 18th century. Mills had developed along the Charles River with gristmills first and later nail-making, paper-making and wood-turning.

The shoe industry--which started as a cottage industry with piece work given out and picked up each day by runners--gradually became mechanized. By 1836 when the Boston and Albany Railroad came through, Natick became one of the largest producers of boots and shoes and by 1880

had 23 shoe manufacturers. During the early part of the 20th century the shoe



industry suffered and the last shoe factory in Natick, the Winchell Shoe Co. closed in 1971. H. Harwood and Sons developed the figure eight stitching for baseballs and was the first such company in the country.

Natick developed as three distinct villages, each with its own stage route from



Eliakim Morrill Tavern, S. Natick

Boston to Hartford. The original village in South Natick, to the north, Felchville, and in the center, Natick. In each village and along each coach route a tavern was built. Felchville Tavern to the north, the Morse tavern in the center the Eliakim Morrill Tavern in the south. These taverns were used as meeting places and inns. The Peletiah Morse tavern on Eliot Street is the last remaining tavern from this era.