OUSEMEQUIN, THE SAVIOR OF THE ENGLISH

Ousemequin was born in 1580 in Pokanoket territory, a part of today's Rhode Island. He inherited the title of Sachem of the Pokanoket from his father Wasanegin.

Ousemequin also inherited the title "Massasoit" or "Great Sachem" because the Pokanoket were regarded as the leaders of a confederacy of more than 60 Tribes.

From 1616 to 1619, an epidemic, brought by European traders, decimated the Massachusett (in the territory around today's Boston), the Pokanoket and their confederated communities, the Pawtucket (north of the Massachusett), and other New England Tribes. The epidemic could have been smallpox, yellow fever, the plague or leptospirosis. It may have killed as many as 90% of the Massachusett, the Pawtucket and the members of the Pokanoket confederated communities.

Having survived the epidemic, Ousemequin married Saunka in 1620.

On March 22, 1621, Ousemequin and the Pilgrims met in Plymouth for the first time. This led to the negotiation of a peace treaty that lasted until the beginning of King Philip's War in 1675.

This is what the Treaty provided, according to the English:

1. That neither he [Ousemequin] nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of our people.
2. And if any of his did hurt to any of ours, he should send the offender, that we might punish him.
3. That if any of our tools were taken away when our people were at work, he should cause them to be restored, and if ours did any harm to any of his, we would do the like to them.
4. If any did unjustly war against him, we would aid him; if any did war against us, he should aid us.
5. He should send to his neighbor confederates, to certify them of this, that they might not wrong us, but might be likewise comprised in the conditions of peace.
6. That when their men came to us, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them, as we should do our peace when we came.
7. Lastly, that doing thus, King James would esteem of him as his friend and ally.

(See https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/03/the-treaty-that-made-thanksgiving/#:~:text=This%20is%20how%20the%20English,that%20we%20might%20punish%20him.)

Plymouth was built where the former community of Patuxet had been. That community may have been a part of the Massachusett Tribe (see *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* by Salisbury), but it had been deserted because of the epidemic from 1616 to 1619. This allowed Ousemequin to step

in and assert jurisdiction on behalf of the Pokanoket. His Treaty with Plymouth reinforced that assertion.

In addition to agreeing to the Treaty, the Pokanoket helped the Pilgrims grow corn, beans and squash and permitted the Pilgrims to use native land to establish their community and grow their crops. Without that help, the poorly prepared Pilgrims might not have survived.

Although the Pilgrims were on the verge of extinction when Ousemequin saved them, he could have seen that their technology could make them powerful allies once they recovered. Ousemequin needed an ally to help him defend his confederacy after it had been decimated by the epidemic.

In the fall of 1621, the First Thanksgiving was celebrated by the Pilgrims and the Pokanoket, including Massasoit. He brought ninety warriors with him, which would have been a little intimidating. The Pokanoket provided five deer for the feast. Although the pilgrims provided many “fowl”, it’s not clear that any turkey was served. The Pilgrims and Pokanoket both provided vegetables and probably seafood. (See page 100 in *Of Plymouth Plantation* by Bradford.)

The good relations between the natives and all the English in southern New England that flowed from Ousemequin’s support for many decades was very important to Timothy and his family. It is likely that Ousemequin would have met one or more members of Timothy’s family, especially Humphrey Atherton, Timothy’s father-in-law, who was sent on many expeditions to deal with the natives, He was eventually appointed by the Massachusett Bay Colony as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

In 1623 Mooanum was born to Ousemequin and Saunka. Mooanum was their eldest child. He changed his name to Wamsutta when he succeeded his father as Sachem and then changed it again when he asked the Pilgrims in Plymouth to give him a name. They named him Alexander after Alexander the Great.

In 1627, Meoneamie was born to Ousemequin and Saunka. She became the wife of Tuspaquin to help cement the relationship of the Assawompsett-Nemasket to the Pokanoket as a part of the confederacy of communities led by the Pokanoket. A number of the Wampanoag communities surviving today are descended from Meoneamie and Tuspaquin.

In January, 1636, Roger Williams, later the leading founder of Rhode Island fled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the protection of Ousemequin as Williams was about to be arrested for his ideas, including the ideas that English settlements should always pay the natives for the land they took, that church and state should be separated and that there should be freedom of religion.

From 1636 to 1638, Ousemequin kept his confederacy out of the Pequot War.

In 1639, Metacom was born to Ousemequin and Saunka. Like his brother Mooanum, he later asked the Pilgrims in Plymouth to give him a new name. They named him Philip

after the brother of Alexander the Great. He became one of the most renowned and influential of the native Sachems in New England, He was one of the native leaders in King Philip's War.

In 1642, Sunconewhew, another son, was born to Ousemequin and Saunka.

From 1645 to 1657, Ousemequin kept the Pokanoket confederacy out of the disputes between their neighbours, the Narragansett, and the English.

From 1646 to 1657, Ousemequin avoided the conversion of his confederacy to Christianity.

On March 23, 1649, Ousemequin sold land for the town of Bridgewater to Myles Standish, John Alden and others from Duxbury. Duxbury was about ten miles north of Plymouth. Bridgewater was about twenty miles west of Duxbury. The establishment of these towns was necessary to accommodate the growing population of the Plymouth Colony.

Ousemequin sold fourteen miles square for Bridgewater - extending seven miles north, east, south and west from the fishing weir on the Satucket. In payment, the sachem received "7 coats, . . . 9 hatchets, 8 hoes, 20 knives, 4 moose skins, anyd 10 and a half yds of cotton."

(see
https://sowamsearlyhistory.org/sachems-rock-where-osamequin-traded-with-myles-standish-for-satucket-lands-in-1649/)

In 1657, Ousemequin stepped down as Sachem to let Mooanum become Sachem.

In 1661 Ousemequin died at age 81.