

from
A CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE
1677

----- *Quintin Stockwell* -----

During the French and English wars, Indians allied with the French captured hundreds of English settlers, including Quintin Stockwell, who was taken hostage in a 1677 raid on Deerfield, Massachusetts. Stockwell later wrote about the ordeals he experienced when he was forced by his captors to accompany them north to Canada. His account, published in 1684, is similar to other “captivity tales” that were bestsellers in both the American colonies and in England.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Identifying Problems

What does this narrative reveal about life in New England during this period?

In the year 1677, September 19, between sunset and dark, the Indians came upon us; I and another man being together, we ran away at the outcry the Indians made, shouting and shooting at some other of the English that were hard by. We took [to] a swamp that was at hand for our refuge; the enemy, espying us so near them, ran after us and shot many guns at us. Three guns were discharged upon me, the enemy being within three rod of me, besides many other before that. Being in this swamp that was miry, I slumped in and fell down; whereupon one of the enemy stepped to me with his hatchet lift up to knock me on the head, supposing that I had been wounded and so unfit for any other travel. I (as it happened) had a pistol by me which, though uncharged, I presented to the Indian who presently stepped back and told me if I would yield I should have no hurt. He said (which was not true) that they had destroyed all Hatfield and that the woods were full of Indians. Whereupon I yielded myself and so fell into the enemies' hands and by three of them was led away unto the place whence first I began to make my flight; where two other Indians came running to us, and the one lifting up the butt end of his gun to knock me on the head, the other with his hand put by the blow and said I was his friend.

I was now by my own house which the Indians burned last year and I was bound to build up again, and there I had some hopes to escape from them. There was an horse just by which they bid me take. I did so but made no attempt to escape thereby, because the enemy was near and the beast was slow and dull. Then was I in hopes they would send me to take my own horses, which they did, but they were so frightened that I could not come near to them. And so [I] fell still into the enemies' hands, who now took me and bound me and led me away. And soon was I brought into the company of captives that were that day brought away from

Hatfield which were about a mile off, and here methoughts was matter of joy and sorrow both, to see the company—some company in this condition being some refreshing though little help anyways. Then were we pinioned and led away in the night over the mountains in dark and hideous ways about four miles further before we took up our place for rest, which was in a dismal place of wood on the east side of that mountain. We were kept bound all that night. The Indians kept waking, and we had little mind to sleep in this night's travel. The Indians dispersed and, as they went, made strange noises as of wolves and owls and other wild beasts to the end that they might not lose one another, and if followed they might not be discovered by the English....

About the break of day we marched again and got over the great river at Pecomptuck River[']s] mouth, and there rested about two hours. There the Indians marked out upon trays the number of their captives and slain as their manner is. Here was I again in great danger. A quarrel arose about me, whose captive I was, for three took me. I thought I must be killed to end the controversy; so when they put it to me whose I was, I said three Indians took me. So they agreed to have all a share in me, and I had now three masters and he was my chief master who laid hands on me first. And thus was I fallen into the hands of the very worst of all the company....

It was afternoon when we now crossed that river. We traveled up that river till night and then took up our lodging in a dismal place and were staked down and spread out on our backs. And so we lay all night, yea so we lay many nights. They told me their law was that we should lie so nine nights, and by that time it was thought we should be out of our knowedge. The manner of staking down was thus: our arms and legs stretched out were staked fast down and a cord about our necks so that we could stir no ways. The first night of staking down, being much tired, I slept as comfortably as ever.

The next day we went up the river and crossed it and at night lay in Squakheag Meadows. Our provision was soon spent, and while we lay in those meadows, the Indians went an-hunting, and the English army came out after us. Then the Indians moved again, dividing themselves and the captives into many companies that the English might not follow their track. At night, having crossed the river, we met again at the place appointed. The next day we crossed the river again on [the] Squakheag side, and there we took up our quarters for a long time. I suppose this might be about thirty miles above Squakheag, and here were the Indians quite out of all fear of the English but in great fear of the Mohawks. Here they built a long wigwam.

Here they had a great dance (as they call it) and concluded to burn three of us and had got bark to do it with, and (as I understood afterwards) I was one that was to be burned, Sergeant Plimpton another, and Benjamin Wait[']s] wife the third. Though I knew not which was to be burned, yet I perceived some were designed thereunto, so much I understood of their language. That night I could not sleep for fear of the next day's work. The Indians, being weary with that dance, lay

down to sleep and slept soundly. The English were all loose; then I went out and brought in wood and mended the fire and made a noise on purpose, but none awakened. I thought if any of the English would wake we might kill them all sleeping. I removed out of the way all the guns and hatchets, but my heart failing me, I put all things where they were again. The next day when we were to be burned, our master and some others spoke for us, and the evil was prevented in this place. And hereabouts we lay three weeks together....

Whilst we lingered hereabout, provision grew scarce; one bear's foot must serve five of us a whole day. We began to eat horseflesh and eat up seven in all. Three were left alive and were not killed....

Still provision was scarce. We came at length to a place called Squawmaug River; there we hoped for salmon, but we came too late. This place I account to be above two hundred miles above Deerfield; then we parted into two companies, some went one way and some went another way. And we went over a mighty mountain. We were eight days a-going over it and traveled very hard, and every day we had either snow or rain....

We stayed here a great while to make canoes to go over the lake. Here I was frozen, and here again we were like to starve. All the Indians went a-hunting but could get nothing. [Several] days they powwowed but got nothing; then they desired the English to pray and confessed they could do nothing. They would have us pray and see what the Englishman's God could do. I prayed....The Indians reverently attended morning and night; next day they got bears. Then they would needs have us desire a blessing, return thanks at meals. After awhile they grew weary of it and the sachem did forbid us....

When I was frozen they were very cruel towards me because I could not do as at other times. When we came to the lake we were again sadly put to it for provision; we were fain to eat touchwood fried in bear's grease. At last we found a company of raccoons, and then we made a feast, and the manner was that we must eat all. I perceived there would be too much for one time so one Indian that sat next to me bid me slip away some to him under his coat, and he would hide it for me till another time; this Indian, as soon as he had got my meat, stood up and made a speech to the rest and discovered me so that the Indians were very angry and cut me another piece and gave me raccoon grease to drink, which made me sick and vomit. I told them I had enough so that ever after that they would give me none but still tell me I had raccoon enough. So I suffered much and, being frozen, was full of pain and could sleep but a little yet must do my work....

We went on upon the lake, upon that isle, about a day's journey. We had a little sled upon which we drew our load. Before noon I tired, and just then the Indians met with some Frenchmen. Then one of the Indians that took me came to me and called me all manner of bad names and threw me down upon my back. I told him I could not do any more; then he said he must kill me. I thought he was about it, for he pulled out his knife and cut out my pockets and wrapped them about my face, helped me up, took my sled and went away. And [he] gave me a bit of biscuit as

big as a walnut which he had of the Frenchman and told me he would give me a pipe of tobacco. When my sled was gone, I could run after him, but at last I could not run but went a foot-pace; then the Indians were soon out of sight. I followed as well as I could; I had many falls upon the ice. At last I was so spent I had not strength enough to rise again, but I crept to a tree that lay along and got upon it, and there I lay.

It was now night and very sharp weather, I counted no other but that I must die there. Whilst I was thinking of death, an Indian halloed, and I answered him: he came to me and called me bad names and told me if I could not go he must knock me on the head. I told him he must then so do: he saw how I had wallowed in that snow but could not rise. Then he took his coat and wrapped me in it and went back and sent two Indians with a sled. One said he must knock me on the head, the other said no, they would carry me away and burn me. Then they bid me stir my instep to see if that were frozen. I did so; when they saw that, they said that was *wurregen* [*wunnegen*, a good thing]. There was a surgeon at the French that could cure me. Then they took me upon the sled and carried me to the fire, and they then made much of me, pulled off my wet [clothes] and wrapped me in dry clothes, made me a good bed. They had killed an otter and gave me some of the broth and a bit of the flesh. Here I slept till towards day and then was able to get up and put on my clothes; one of the Indians awakened and, seeing me go, shouted as rejoicing at it.

Source: "An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences" by Increase Mather (Boston, 1684). Reprinted in *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724*, by Alden T. Vaughan & Edward W. Clark (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1981), pp. 80-86.