

Building Brothertown

From Farmington To Brotherton

1772-1785

The bulk of credit for the formation of the inter-tribal community of Brothertown, (“in Indian, Eeyawquittoowauconnuck”¹), is often laid at the feet of its most famous participant, the Reverend Samson Occom (Mohegan/Brothertown). Other times, it is credited to Occom’s brother-in-law, David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown) or to his son-in-law, Joseph Johnson (Mohegan/Brothertown). While, in truth, countless people contributed, none lent more to the building of the Brotherton community than the Indians of Tunxis Sepus (meaning “bend in the little river”²) and their respected teacher, Joseph Johnson.

On November 18, 1772, *three* miles outside of Hartford, Connecticut, 21-year-old Joseph Johnson found himself standing at a crossroads. Should he continue on towards Farmington where the Reverend Samson Occom suggested he seek a teaching position amongst the Tunxis Indians? Or should he follow his own inclinations and go on to Mohawk country? Unable to decide, Johnson enlists the help of *three* passersby who point out that Farmington is not really out of his way. At about *three* o’clock in the afternoon, Johnson later notes in his journal, he reaches Farmington and dines with a Native man there by the name of Elijah Wampey. He then asks Wampey to call the Indians of that place together so that he might read them a copy of the sermon that Rev. Occom had recently preached at the execution of Moses Paul. Thus,

¹ Occom, Samson, and Joanna Brooks (ed.), *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan [/Brothertown]: Leadership and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Native America*, Oxford; (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

² Bickford, Christopher P., *Farmington in Connecticut*, (Canaan New Hampshire: Phoenix Publishing for The Farmington Historical Society, 1982), p 1.

inconspicuously, was the stage set and the characters put into place. Before winter had time to settle in, Johnson's arrival in Farmington would prove to be the spark that birthed a nation.

If Johnson provided the spark, then the Farmington Indians provided the kindling. Tunxis Sepus was a mixture of people from a number of tribal groups who, since at least the 1600s, had come—not all at once but here and there³—and been absorbed into this “closely knit community.”⁴ There were Wangunk families like David and Sarah Tousey (YIPP via auctioned letter); Quinnipiac like the John Adams family (Love; p 335); and the family of Elijah Wampey, who were descendants of the Golden Hill Paugussett tribe (“Petition of Elijah Wampey and Others Regarding the Estate of Sarah Wampey,” 1793.10.15.00). Subsequently, Brotherton would also reflect this blending of citizens from many different Native nations into one distinct community.

In addition to the melding of a multi-national citizenry, many other Tunxis features would come to be reflected in Brotherton as well. This included semi-permeable borders, common to Native communities, which allowed people to come and go or to return again after an extended absence (Murray); a subsistence on agriculture; and an emphasis on education. Further, the overwhelming majority of citizens of both of these nations were also practicing Christians. Julius Gay, in his *Farmington Papers*, recounts that, in 1751, the local Ecclesiastical Society let the Indians “build a seat in the gallery in the Meeting House [the church which local area whites attended].”⁵ He goes on to

³ “DeForest's Description of Tunxis Country,” 1630.00.00, and “General Court Order Regarding Tunxis Habitation,” 1658.08.18, in Paul Grant-Costa and Tobias Glaza, eds., *The Native Northeast Portal*, nativenortheastportal.com. All subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text by title and document number.

⁴ Murray, Laura J., *To Do Good To My Indian Brethren*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), p. 89. All subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Gay, Julius, *Farmington Papers*, (Privately Printed, 1929), p228-229. All subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

include the names of a couple of Native individuals who joined the church in the 1760s: Solomon Mossuck, in 1763, and his wife, Eunice, two years later (p228-229). Laura Murray reports that, at least by 1774, the Tunxis Indians were all “active Christians” (p89).

Joseph Johnson’s mother, Elisabeth (Betty) Garrett Johnson, had also been a Christian. Elisabeth had her son baptized as an infant and, after his father’s death in the French and Indian War, sent him, at the age of seven, to Eleazar Wheelock’s Moor’s Indian Charity School to receive a Christian education. When he was fifteen (Murray p.xv), Wheelock sent him to Oneida to assist David Fowler, another Charity School alumnus, in teaching school. Resigning from teaching in his late teens, Joseph went to work on a whaling boat for a year and a half until finally returning to Mohegan in October of 1771. Here, on his family’s farm and amidst constant labors, he spent months soul-searching, writing in his journal, praying, and seeking God. “Awake O my soul”, he wrote on January 31, 1772, “and consider your latter end. Pray, desire, seek, long; and wait for the work of God’s spirit within you (Murray p133).” During this time, Johnson also met frequently with Reverend Occom; sometimes with only a day or two between visits (Murray pp114-134). On May 24, 1772, having come to a decision, he wrote a formal dedication of himself to God. Freed from the guilt of his past deeds and shortcomings, at last he is prepared to face the future with a reliance on Divine Providence. “Farewell world,” he ended his dedication, “...neither hast thou any Joy like those in yonder world to which I am bound (Murray, p148).” By the time he lands in Farmington, Johnson is primed and ready to find, and fulfill, his purpose in life.

Reverend Occom had been correct; the Indians at Farmington were very eager for Joseph to remain with them and teach their children. After passing an exam given by Overseer, Reverend Timothy Pitkin, and attended by the Tunxis headmen, Johnson became the town's teacher. Opening and closing the school day with prayer, he not only taught the academics, but, twice a week in the evenings, led community members in a "[hymn] singing school." Johnson also provided the Tunxis and several local whites with [hymn] tunebooks to sing from, which he himself made — a process known as "pricking out gamuts." On Sunday evenings, which the tribe had set aside for communal worship, they read edifying books, sang, prayed, and/or exhorted. Despite not receiving his license until August 25th, 1774, Johnson also acted as a preacher and spiritual leader for the community (Murray, p152-157).

The Tunxis Indians, in turn, housed and fed Johnson and showed him great respect. In the December 2, 1772 entry of Johnson's diary, he tells the story of a "crazy" "Spanish Indian" who wanders into town. While the locals seemed intent on making sport of the man, Joseph, remembering stories from the Bible, advised them to behave as "rational creatures or Christians." The men promised to "not abuse him" and to "hearken to all" of Joseph's advice. As he left the building and proceeded on his way, one of the chiefs followed him and began talking about Johnson's father. He told him that he had served under Captain Johnson in the French and Indian War. Afterwards, writes Joseph, "he acquainted me most freely the special regards he had for me also, and assured me that I had more that loved me now, truly than ever I had my lifetime before." The unnamed man goes on to admit that the community had talked about him privately and they were all pleased that he had stopped to spend the winter with them.

By clearly showing Johnson that they trust, admire and support him, the inhabitants of Farmington gave him a strong sense of worth and confidence which quickly bore fruit (Murray p153-155).

While Johnson himself claims credit for initiating the idea for the Brotherton movement in his June 2, 1774 letter to Governor Trumbull (Murray, p 234), when exactly the idea was first discussed amongst them is not specifically recorded. It could not have been very long after Johnson's arrival in Farmington, however, as the seven Native communities (Tunxis, Mohegan, Montauk, Narragansett, Niantic, and Eastern and Western Pequot) met in centrally-located Mohegan on March 13, 1773—less than four months later. Letters and visitors went back and forth between Oneida and New England for over a year and a half. Johnson, fully invested in the project, stayed busy taking care of the many details. In February of 1774, having recently returned from yet another trip to speak with the Oneida (this time about the amount of land needed), he reached out to the inhabitants of New Haven, Connecticut to solicit donations saying, "I Have exerted myself, used my uttermost endeavors to help my poor brethren in New England; to bring them out of bondage as it were: and to lead them into a land of liberty where they and their children might live in peace." In the dangerous climate surrounding the buildup and fighting of the Revolutionary War, these last words ring ironic. The very next, however, would prove sadly prophetic. "And to bring about this grand design I have cheerfully given my all..."(Murray p225).

Of Brothertown's seven Native parent communities, Farmington, by far, was the most active throughout the entire nation-building process and gave the largest percentage of its tribal membership as citizens of the new settlement. The Tunxis

helped with the planning, wrote letters, accompanied Johnson on his journeys, and followed him to Oneida early on to become the original settlers. Some of these individuals and families included “old Uncle Cornelius”⁶, John and Sarah Adams (“Connecticut General Assembly resolve appointing a committee to dispose of property,” 1776.10.00.00; “Deed from John Adams to Timothy Root,” 1776.10.10.01; and “Memorial of Hezekiah Wadsworth,” 1776.10.13.00), Andrew and Abigail Currycomb, Daniel Mossuck, Samuel Adams, Luke Mossuck, and several more (see Love’s appendix).

One Tunxis man in particular, however, should be noted: Elijah Wampey. Besides being the man Johnson “dined with” on his first day in town and one of several residents who took turns boarding him, Wampey was an active and key player in both Farmington and Brotherton and at every step along the way. As a Tunxis chief, together with Solomon Mossuck and Samuel Adams, Wampey helped to write and sign letters with Johnson to encourage the participating tribes to send men to travel and meet with the Oneida (October 13, 1773). In December, they wrote to let the communities know how the trip to Oneida had gone (December 23, 1733). On May 19, 1774, Wampey, again, was one of three headmen who wrote to Governor Trumbull asking to sell their lands in Tunxis Sepus in order to obtain money for the move to Oneida where there was “ample land” and they could “advance the kingdom of Christ among the heathen nations (“Memorial of Elijah Wampey, Solomon Mossuck, Samuel Adams and the Rest of the Tunxis,” 1774.05.19.00).”⁷ As a Tunxis headman,

⁶ Love, William deLoss, PhD, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, (Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1899), p 262. All subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

⁷ At the bottom of p 230 of *To Do Good To My Indian Brethren*, Murray notes a sermon Johnson preached in Farmington on May 8th from Mark 16:14-20: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” and from Genesis 45:8 on May 23: “So now it was not you who sent me hither, but God”.

Wampey's signature can also be found on a majority of land deeds and petitions in Farmington from the 1760s to 1784. Several of these petitions relate directly to the establishment of the new community—for example, the request to the Connecticut Assembly for a book of town laws on May 25, 1774 (“Memorial of the Tunxis with regard to Obtaining a Law Book,” 1774.05.25.00). This book was requested as a means of helping to plan and guide the upcoming community. On October 25th, 1773, and again in early January, 1774, Wampey accompanied Johnson on trips to speak with the Oneida about obtaining land (Murray, p 229). Wampey not only did much to help plan the town and facilitate the move, but he and his family were among its very first inhabitants (“Land deed from Elijah Wampey to Thomas Lewis,” 1777.02.05.00).

A section of land along the Oriskany Creek was selected for the new town. On October 4, 1774, this land was deeded by the Oneida to the “New England Indians and their posterity forever.”⁸ While the bulk of the emigrants had to wait for the sale of their land and homes before they could afford to move, the ablest men went on ahead to begin laying out the new town. On March 13, 1775, a number of them, Wampey included, left for Oneida territory where they “set about building log huts..., making gardens and planting corn-fields (Love, p 225).” By April of 1775, the Tunxis had received permission, and assistance, to sell their lands in Farmington (“Deed from Elijah Wampey, Solomon Mossuck, and Samuel Adams to Timothy Root,” 1775.04.07.00). More would remove to Oneida territory as these lands sold.

According to David Fowler in April of 1775, suspicions and dangers surrounding the Revolutionary War initially kept many of the Indians from moving to upstate New

⁸ <https://brothertowncitizen.com/2017/10/04/on-this-date-in-brothertown-history-october-4th-1774>.

York (Murray p 259-261). In fact, of those who did make the move, most, fearing for their lives, left the new settlement, first, for a time in June of 1775 (Murray p264-265) and, later, en-masse, in 1777, to temporarily take up residence with the Stockbridge in Massachusetts (“Memorial of Connecticut Indians at West Stockbridge,” 1780.10.13.00.AT_Print).^{9,10} From here, they begged for assistance from the Connecticut Assembly stating that they had been “lately driven” from their settlement “by the enemy and sustained great damage” and were forced to leave everything behind (Ibid). Both times, Elijah Wampey elected to remain in the area although he did eventually join the others in West Stockbridge.

During the War, Joseph Johnson, a messenger of neutrality to the Six Nations at the behest of General George Washington, died under unknown circumstances some time between mid-1776 and May of 1777 (Murray, 286).^{11,12} While his story ends here, thankfully, the story of the new settlement does not; what Johnson had sparked and worked so diligently for would continue on through the efforts of the Tunxis Indians, Reverend Occom, and many others.

At the end of the War¹³, when some semblance of normalcy had begun to re-emerge, the displaced emigrants were ready to return to their settlement. Yet, with no money to make the trip, Wampey and the other chiefs were forced to reach out from their temporary asylum in Massachusetts to the Assembly in Connecticut once again (“Petition of Brothertown Indians from Connecticut for Relief,” 1783.05.08.00). Their

⁹ Jones, Pomroy, *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County*, (Rome, NY; published by the author, 1851), p 248.

¹⁰ Some went to fight in the War while others, like Wampey, initially stayed behind at Ft. Stanwix to keep an eye on their town.

¹¹ <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-03-02-0249>.

¹² Wampey became antagonistic towards him shortly before Johnson's death (See Murray p 268). Years later, Wampey leased Brothertown land to whites—a problem Occom could not get him to understand until too late. Eventually, he saw the error of his ways.

¹³ Preliminary peace articles were drafted and signed November, 1782 although the War did not formally end until the Treaty of Paris was signed September 4, 1783—<https://www.historyonthenet.com/when-did-the-revolutionary-war-end>.

request for financial assistance was granted in May of 1783 (“Resolution on the Memorial Of Elijah Wampey, David Fowler, and Samuel Adams,” 1783.05.00.01). At long last, on another crisp November day, thirteen years after Johnson had first stepped foot in Farmington, Reverend Samson Occom, from the land of the “New England Indians” in upstate New York, wrote in his journal entry for November 7, 1785,

But now we proceeded to form into a Body Politick,— We Named our Town by the Name of Brotherton, in Indian Eeyawquittoowauconnuck— J: Fowler was chosen clerk for this town Roger Waupieh, David Fowler, Elijah Wympey, John Tuhy, and Abraham Simon were Chosen a Committee or trustees for the Town, for a Year and for the future, the Committee is to be Chosen Annually,— and Andrew Acorrocomb, and Thomas Putschauker were chosen to be Fence Viewers to Continue a Year
(<https://collections.dartmouth.edu/occom/html/diplomatic/785554-diplomatic.html> p15v-16r)

While Brothertown and its parent tribes continue today as independent sovereign nations, the Tunxis Tribe is the exception. Like their respected teacher Joseph Johnson, the Native community of Tunxis Sepus gave its lifeblood to establish Brothertown in the hopes of preserving a substantive future for all Native generations. Descendants of these pioneer Tunxis are still found within the Brothertown tribe today—our current Chairwoman, Phyllis Tousey, is among them. Brothertown is forever indebted to these ancestors and we keep the Tunxis flame alive when we introduce ourselves as descendants of the “Christian Indians of the Mohegan, Pequot, [Stonington

and Groton], Niantic, Narragansett, Montaukett, and *Tunxis* tribes” while the seven feathers in our tribal logo extend a nod to each of these seven communities.¹⁴

Although the roots of Brothertown can be traced back to many different people, the convergence of Joseph Johnson and the Indians of Tunxis Sepus were the spark and kindling that birthed our nation. Due to the respect and support that the Natives of Tunxis Sepus showed to Johnson, along with their example of a close-knit multi-national community and the work they did to create and populate the Native-led settlement, Brothertown became a reality. Brothertown also became a clear reflection of Tunxis Sepus with its semi-permeable borders, subsistence on agriculture, emphasis on education and Christianity, and a citizenry comprised of many tribal nationalities fused together to become one Native nation. Eeyawquittoowauconnuck!



Note: The audio version of this file contains a singing clip of “Old Indian Hymn” recorded at Yale by Seth Wenger in February of 2018.

¹⁴ <https://brothertownindians.org> (accessed 10/22/22).

Building Brothertown Timeline 1772-1785

- 1723** Birth of Samson Occom
- 1743** Occom, a Mohegan Councilman, attends hearings on the Mohegan/Mason land case
- 1751**-birth of Joseph Johnson
- June 3, 1751** Baptism of Joseph Johnson
- September 4, 1758**-Joseph Johnson Sr. dies in French and Indian War
- December 1758**-Joseph Johnson goes to Wheelock's Moor's Indian Charity School
- August 29 & 30, 1759** Ordination of Samson Occom
- 1760** Elisabeth (Betty) Garrett Johnson, mother of Joseph, dies
- November, 1765** Occom leaves home for Boston in preparation for his missionary trip to England to collect funds for Wheelock's Indian Charity School
- December 23, 1765** Occom leaves for Great Britain aboard The Plackett
- February 3, 1766** Occom arrives in England
- Mission trip over; Occom delays his departure to visit the Privy Council's hearing on the Mohegan/Mason land case
- May 20, 1768** Occom arrives back in North America
- December 7, 1771**—death of Moses Cook at the hands of Moses Paul
- March 29, 1772**—Johnson pens open letter to Moses Paul which, published between March 29th-April, makes him the 1st Native American ever published
- May 24, 1772** Johnson commemorates his dedication to Christ
- Sept 2, 1772**—execution of Moses Paul (Wampanoag); Occom delivers a sermon which is published at home & abroad making him the first internationally published Native American
- November 18, 1772**—Johnson arrives in Farmington
- March 7, 1773** London's Royal Courts make final decision against Mohegans in land case
- March 13, 1773**—meeting of 7 communities in Mohegan to discuss removal
- October 13, 1773** letter asking the tribes to send men to talk to Oneida
- Oct 27, 1773** Elijah Wampy and Joseph Johnson go to Oneida
- December 2, 1773** Joseph marries Tabitha Occom
- December 23, 1773** letter to the emigrating tribes regarding the Oneida trip
- 1773 or '74** the Oneida came to Farmington, according to Elijah Porter (Julius Gay, p230-231), celebrating with "*a very large fire and the two tribes joined hands and set to running around this fire singing and shouting and sounding the war whoop so loud as to be plainly heard a mile.*"
- January 6, 1774** Occom writes of 4 Indians (Murray, p 205) going again to Oneida
- February 20, 1774** General George Washington sends Joseph Johnson a message for the Six Nations (<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-03-02-0249>)
- May 25, 1774** petition for a Law book (Wimpy, Mossuck, Adams, and Moses—Yale digital collections)
- August 25, 1774** Johnson is certified to preach to the Indians
- Sept. 2, 1774** Birth of Joseph & Tabitha's 1st son William (Love, p 350)
- October 4, 1774** Oneida land grant officiated by Guy Johnson
- March 13, 1775** first emigration to NY-includes Elijah Wampy
- April 8, 1775** A 2nd group arrives in the Oneida area-includes David Fowler & Samuel Niles
- June 21, 1775** Due to war dangers, many return to New England including John Skeesuck (Narragansett), James Shattock, and Samuel Tallman (Delaware)—(Murray p264-265)
- around June 3, 1776** Birth of Joseph & Tabitha's 2nd son, Joseph
- June 10, 1776-May 1777** Joseph Johnson dies under unknown circumstances
- 1777-1780** seeking safety, the settlers temporarily relocate to Stockbridge, Massachusetts
- October 13, 1780** petition to CT Assembly requesting \$ to pay their teacher D Simons (request denied)
- May 1783**—request \$ from CT Assembly to return to Oneida territory (1783.05.00.01) (request granted)
- November 7, 1785**—the formal founding/naming of Brotherton/Eeyawquittoowauconnuck