

KING PHILIP, a son of Wampanoag sachem Massasoit, was killed near the Pokanoket council seat yesterday, ending one of the bloodiest conflicts on New England soil. Metacom—who became known as “King Philip”—united many Indigenous peoples to defend their lands and traditional way of life against European settlers.

King Philip’s War, which began over a year ago, has left thousands of people either dead or wounded. At one time, it looked as if the English would be driven out, after their towns were destroyed across the region. But colonial militias eventually defeated Native soldiers, burning their towns and villages.

Metacom’s head will be impaled on a pike—to be displayed in Plymouth for

violent clashes between Native Americans and European settlers in the area. But tensions have been rising ever since the settlers arrived.

Some blame Massasoit for allowing ancestral lands to be given away to colonists. They say King Philip realized what was happening and tried to curb their expansion. Others talk of a huge misunderstanding: Native Americans believed their lands were being offered “for use” to colonists; the colonists, on the other hand, thought they were selling “ownership.”

The “Praying Towns” of John Eliot and

other Puritan missionaries sought to extinguish Native American traditions and culture. Converted to Christianity, “praying Indians” have been expected to give up their ancient way of life. Hundreds of them have been interned in the war, their future uncertain. Not all Native peoples have sided with King Philip. Some fought alongside the English or stayed neutral.

John Sassamon, one of the first Wampanoag people to study at Harvard, was an interpreter to Metacom. He was found dead in suspicious circumstances last year, possibly for acting as an English informant. Did the controversial trial and execution of the Native Americans accused of his murder spark the conflict?

King Philip’s death marks a turning point