



## **Leading Business Men of Westerly, Stonington, and Vicinity: Embracing Mystic River, Mystic Bridge, Noank and Ashaway (Classic Reprint)**

*Unknown Author*

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Excerpt from *Leading Business Men of Westerly, Stonington, and Vicinity: Embracing Mystic River, Mystic Bridge, Noank and Ashaway*

The south shore of Rhode Island, at that time called Misquamicut, was inhabited at the close of the 17th century by the Niantics, a rich and peaceful tribe, as were most of the Rhode Island Indians. They were on good terms with their neighbors, the Narragansetts, but were troubled by occasional incursions of the fiery Pequots, who lived to the west of them. To protect themselves from these unquiet aboriginal brethren, they had erected a great fort, just at this point on the Paweatuck liver. They seem to have been quite well advanced into the nomadic or pastoral stage of civilization, and to have possessed such crude elements of the arts as existed among the best class of Indians. They naturally made much of the sea and its finny and shell inhabitants, also of the fine grazing facilities of the country. Their kings were the Ninigrets famous through New England for their sagacity and kindly hospitable disposition. This tribe never seems to have had any unpleasantness in their relations with the English, though they took but slowly to the latter's christianizing and civilizing influences, and as they did take to them gradually went the way of all the other Indians. The last king, George, was a nominal Christian, and gave quite a large gift of land for the erection of a chapel. After and since his death the government of the tribe was intrusted to a president and council elected by the tribe, the only restriction on whose action was that it must not conflict with that of the state authorities. A scanty remnant of the tribe still exists on a reservation near Charlestown.

The first Europeans to visit Misquamicut were the Dutch who soon after their settlement at New Amsterdam, began to send out trading expeditions along the shores of Long Island Sound. In 1614, Adrian Block in his little bark, the *Restless*, penetrated as far as Misquamicut. He was accompanied by a Dutch geographer who made a map of this region. If this was perfectly accurate there must have been great changes along the shore since, and no doubt in the last two hundred and eighty years the fierce coast storms have wrought many transformations.

About as tradition has it, there occurred a very interesting and romantic incident connected with the settlement of Westerly. John Babcock, a young Englishman, came to the house of Thomas Lawton of Newport, then recently colonized. He was employed by the latter and soon took occasion to fall in love with his employer's beautiful daughter Mary, which being reciprocated by her, there ensued some infelicity in the family log cabin. As her father was absolutely implacable the young couple went through the usual method of procedure in a rather unusual way.

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