Ethnohistory, the discipline devoted to reconstructing the past cultures of non-literate peoples through the use of documentary sources and historiographic techniques, has been responsible for correcting our view of the nature of native life in southern New England after European exploration and settlement. Recent ethnohistorical studies have emphasized both the previously underestimated effects of early peripheral contact with Europeans and other native peoples (e.g., Ceci 1982), as well as the enduring nature of native configurations of belief, perception, and behaviour (Simmons 1986).

Nevertheless, the nature of Indian life in the two centuries following contact with Europeans, and especially after their conversion to Christianity, is still poorly known. As the natives of coastal New England, known as the Wampanoag, were increasingly coerced and confined by English settlers, less was written by contemporaries concerning their daily lives, beliefs, and behaviour. With the exception of a small number of studies, 18th-century native life in southern New England has become "invisible" in historical writing as well, in spite of evidence from many sources that the Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket remained distinct from their non-native neighbors.

This paper reviews some of the ways in which such distinctiveness was maintained, with principal reference to economic practices, subsistence, and land-use throughout the 18th century.

The theoretical perspective taken to the question of these differences is one which has emerged within the last decade as an-
Anthropologists have grappled with the problem of ethnicity and the creativity of culture in the face of political and economic domination. Anthropologists studying the dynamics of interaction between Native Americans and European colonists in the New World have identified a number of the strategies employed by specific Indian groups to protect or conceal aspects of their corporate or individual cultural identity: processes such as "compartmentalization" (Spicer 1954) and "covering" (Braroe 1975:121-141).

As in these ethnohistorical and ethnographic studies of Native Americans in contact situations, much of the recent thinking on the subject of ethnicity has emphasized the contextual basis of its definition. Ethnicity is seen as an adaptive strategy for coping with conflict resulting from competition for valued and often limited resources and the unequal distribution of political power (A. Cohen 1969; R. Cohen 1978:391). Most recently, this general perspective has been elaborated upon as part of the attempt to develop a formal model of ethnic differentiation based upon the explicit use of ecological principles (Abruzzi 1982). These efforts have been directed toward explaining the conditions giving rise to ethnicity rather than the specific processes by which cultural identities are defined and maintained. Other scholars have focused on the latter problem, investigating, in particular, the role of symbols in defining and maintaining group boundaries in situations of real and perceived economic and social stress (i.e., Siegel 1970; Rowntree and Conkey 1980).

In understanding the dynamics of identity and group boundary maintenance among the Wampanoag of the Islands, stress is placed on the situational and selective nature of ethnicity and acculturation, with the recognition that the economic and political character of the contact situation often resulted in the strengthening or reaffirmation of traditional identities, redefined in new institutions and symbolic forms. From this point of view, the process of change affecting the Wampanoag is not seen as a necessarily progressive, unidirectional phenomenon which ultimately resulted in the abandonment or loss of cultural traditions and full acceptance and participation in the social institutions of the larger society. Rather, the concern of this paper is with identifying those institutions and practices which permitted the Island natives to maintain and even assert their cultural distinctiveness, a distinctiveness which survives to this day in communities such as Gay Head.
Among those aspects of culture most persistent in the face of assimilative pressure are "foodways", or, "the whole interrelated system of food conceptualization, procurement, distribution, preservation, preparation, and consumption shared by all members of a particular group" (Anderson 1971:2). Recent scholarship in anthropology and folklore has drawn attention to the importance of foodways in the dynamics of ethnic identity and ethnic group boundary maintenance (Keller Brown and Mussell 1984). Thus, this important dimension of cultural tradition provides a logical point of departure in examining the question of native cultural distinctiveness in southern New England during the 18th century.

Early visitors to the southern shore of Cape Cod, and the islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard were struck by the productivity of the native fields, and the abundance of the woods and waters. In 1605, Champlain found a village in Nauset Harbor surrounded by gardens planted with maize, beans, squash, tobacco, and root crops (1613:82-93). Reports of early visitors notwithstanding, archaeological evidence from the islands and similar maritime habitats on Cape Cod and in northeastern Rhode Island in the late Woodland period has documented very little evidence for agriculture (Luedtke 1980:17). The settlement pattern and population concentration reported by 17th-century observers seems to reflect native response to contact, rather than an aboriginal pattern, which was evidently more dispersed, and dependant on shellfish and wild foods (Ceci 1982:27).

At least 80 species of fish and shellfish were mentioned in 17th-century descriptions of native fauna in southern New England, many of which the Indians exploited for food (Bennet 1955:385-6). Thirty kinds of birds, and at least ten types of animals were also part of the native diet. Table I summarizes the food sources available to the Wampanoag, according to season.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Food Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>fish, birds, wild plants, shellfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>fish, shellfish, old crop corn, beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>new corn, beans, meat, birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>stored grains, squash, pumpkin, meat, birds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The period of greatest scarcity would have been late spring and early summer, although shellfish and fresh-water fish should still have been plentiful in most areas. Stored grains and dried legumes and squash compensated for shortages of other foods in most coastal regions, and some native communities had enough stored surplus to trade (Winslow 1624:133; Williams 1936:95).

By the mid-17th century, and following their conversion to Christianity, most of the Wampanoag were settled into established “plantations” or “praying-towns” on Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, and elsewhere. Here they cultivated small gardens, and kept livestock, and were encouraged to acquire practical skills such as coopering, carpentry, weaving, and basket-making (Mayhew 1694).

Probate records of the island natives reflect the presence of limited agriculture, describing small tools, plow tackle, and stored seed corn, as well as domesticated animals (Little 1980). Linguistic acculturation among the Wampanoag, speakers of the eastern Algonquian language known as Massachusett, also reflected knowledge of English agricultural techniques, crops, and animals, from an early date (Bragdon 1981).

Yet the extent to which the natives of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket depended on agriculture in the late 17th and 18th centuries is unclear. The island soils, primarily of glacial till, could never have been as productive as those of the mainland, where the established presence of native agriculture is problematical as well (Ceci 1982).

Surviving native probate records suggest that many aspects of the transplanted English agricultural complex were ignored. Dairying, for example, was not a large part of the Christian native economy, nor was the keeping of poultry, or swine (Little 1980). Evidence from several sources suggests that the natives raised sheep and kept horses, and in general maintained small gardens for their own use, in which traditional native crops such as corn, squash, pumpkins, tobacco, and beans were grown (Freeman 1807a:35, 1807b:93; Allen 1720, Macy 1835:35).

As in the early contact period, native diet on the islands in the 18th century was heavily dependent on fish, both fresh and salt, shellfish, and wild animals and plants, all of which supplemented the cultivated crops, and later, purchased foodstuffs. These food sources were of course available only seasonally, and their continued
use ensured that the native subsistence practices resembled in many ways, the pattern of the early historic period.

Some documentation for this pattern is in the form of account books from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Beginning in the 1670s and 1680s, merchants on both islands employed Indians to provide commodities such as fish, feathers, and grains, which they in turn sold to English residents and off-islanders. Figure I summarizes patterns of native purchases of hunting and fishing equipment according to season on Nantucket, for the period 1680 to 1720, as well as the seasonal return of fish and feathers for that period. Figure II documents peak hunting and fishing seasons in spring and fall, similar to those described in the early contact period. The account books also demonstrate, albeit in a negative manner, that the natives had little dependence during the late 17th and early 18th centuries on purchased foodstuffs, and then only seasonally (see Figure II).

Most food purchases were of fresh meat in the fall and winter, and the heaviest purchases of grain were in the spring, and were presumably both seed grains and stores to tide them over until the first harvest. Beef and mutton provided additional animal protein to the native diet, which may have been deficient as early as 1680, as the supply of wild game on the island, never plentiful, diminished. Joanne Bowen, in a recent study of account books from Suffield, Connecticut, identified similar patterns of food purchase and exchange, and argues that these reflect adjustment to seasonal availability of resources, as well as a form of community insurance against times of scarcity (Bowen 1984).

These patterns began to change on Nantucket, and to a lesser extent on Martha's Vineyard, during the period of the development of the deep-sea whaling industry. Native labour became highly desirable for the long voyages, and for the more menial of the tasks associated with whaling. To conscript native labour, Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard merchants resorted to many stratagems, fair and foul (Vickers 1983; Byers 1983). During this period, native labour

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1 For this study five account books were examined, three from Nantucket, (Barnard 1706, Mary and Nathaniel Starbuck 1662-1757, and Richard Macy 1714-1733, and two from Martha's Vinyard (Allen 1730, Look 1780-1820). These account books were chosen both for their early dates — 1660 to 1820 — and because each was primarily concerned with Indian accounts. They describe accounts with roughly 300 individuals, many recorded by both month and year.
was also put to use for other purposes, merchants trading native labourers amongst themselves. Mary and Richard Starbuck's account book, for example, documents an almost yearly round of day-labour, sandwiched between whaling voyages, for several natives during the period 1726-1760.

The changes in Nantucket whaling technology, and in the market for its products, were responsible for the change in the relationship between the natives and the merchants, both because native labour was now more valuable than the previous products of that labour had been, and also because the merchants themselves became more specialized, concentrating more of their resources in the maritime industries, and less on the sale of goods to the islanders. The specialized nature of Nantucket economy in the 18th century severely affected the natives' ability to maintain a traditional seasonal subsistence pattern. After 1726, there is little evidence that any natives were employed regularly in supplying fish, feathers, and grain. At the same time, the Indians enmeshed in debt-peonage to the merchants were forced to depend to a greater extent on purchased food supplies, as well as upon hired labour to plow and tend their own fields.

The disruption of the native economy, especially on Nantucket resulting from these changes was exacerbated by concerted efforts on the part of the English to dispossess the Indians, and to circumscribe their mobility and independence. Native men were forced to endure long absences from home, and women were also forced into domestic servitude in expiation of debt and misdemeanor. Inability to maintain a balanced, mixed subsistence base year round led to increased dependence on purchased goods, driving many unfortunate natives further into debt.

The effects of this vicious round on the native community on Nantucket must have been severe, although not easy to document. Absence of men for long periods left families to fend for themselves. Heavy farm work, and fishing, two male tasks in the 17th century, were necessarily neglected or left to hired help. Women's absence from the home put a strain on their ability to provide clothing for their families, resulting in greater dependence on purchased goods. As historian Daniel Vickers (1983:581) has noted, the natives were vulnerable to exploitation, and the very nature of their relationship with non-natives reinforced their domination.
Vickers's convincing analysis of the institutionalization of debt peonage among the Indians of Nantucket, emphasizing the strategies employed by the English, is less complete in describing native response. For many of the natives of Nantucket, and of Martha's Vineyard, life during the great expansion of deep sea whaling probably continued much as before. Even at the peak of native participation, no more than one out of three adult males among the native Nantucketers appear to have been actively engaged at sea, and the others participated in ancillary industries on shore. Based on the surviving account books from Nantucket during that period, the absolute number of Indians associated with particular traders decreased through time, even as the percentage of time spent in expiating debt increased per individual. Table II summarizes the numbers of natives recorded in Mary and Richard Starbuck's account book by decade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1680-1700</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700-1729</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1722-1740</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740-1760</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part of this decrease reflects the general decline of population among the Indians, from approximately 800 in 1700, to 358 in 1763 (Macy 1835:58). Yet it also seems to reflect the increased specialization of the whaling merchants, and their decreased involvement with the wider native population.

Coincidental to this process was the development of patron-client relationships between the wealthy whaling merchants and a number of natives, such that some were able to maintain long overdue debts which the traders forbore to collect on, no doubt because of their desire to control the skills of the natives involved. The accounts of the native Eben Smugg, for example, were often as much as 40 pounds overdue per year, a situation which Starbuck seems to have

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2This figure is based on surviving records of whaling crews, pro-rated by total native populations on the islands for the period 1730-1800. Sources include Freeman (1807b:94), Macy (1792b:159), as well as Vickers's own figures (1983:569).
tolerated in exchange for control over Smugg’s skills as a joiner and carpenter (Starbuck 1666-1757:19, 37). This personalized form of clientage was, as Stephen Innis found in 17th-century Springfield, “restrictive, but not destructive” (1983:66), and allowed the client natives some latitude in debt.

Even in the face of great economic pressure, strategies employed by the natives to maintain a measure of autonomy, to preserve a sense of community identity, and to resist absorption into the lower classes of Anglo-American society included the maintenance of traditional foodways. Account books from Martha’s Vineyard document the continued use of native crops (Allen 1720), and probate records list a varied inventory of productive goods employed by the natives in the mid-18th century in the pursuit of fish, game, and wild foods (Little 1980; Bragdon 1979).

In addition to continuities in foodways, the Indians retained native language and native language literacy, preserved the viability of the native church, adhered to certain aspects of traditional social and political structure, and maintained strong kin ties. Native language use on Nantucket is well-documented in the 18th century (Crèvecoeur 1782:104; Goddard and Bragdon 1986). Massachusett was also the language of the native church service. Indeed, many of the English on Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard were fluent or semi-fluent speakers of the native language, and much interaction between them and the Indians was probably in the native tongue (e.g., Macy 1792b:157). Remnants of island bilingualism survive in whaling vocabulary, and testify to the native contribution to that industry (Crèvecoeur 1782:122).

The strength of the native church-communities of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard is evident from contemporary descriptions of native church service (e.g., Macy 1792a:254). The Bible, Psalter, and other religious works translated into Massachusett by John Eliot, Experience Mayhew and others, constituted the bulk of reading material available to the natives, and held an important place in their lives (Crèvecoeur 1782:104, 156). Church services were conducted in the native language and in English, often by native ministers. As such, they provided a regular opportunity for reaffirming community ties, and reemphasizing cultural distinctiveness (Bragdon 1986). Significantly, the natives of Nantucket did not adopt Quakerism (Freeman 1807a:37), but retained the Presbyterian faith of the first Indian con-
verts. This represented both resistance to the dominant culture of the island, and the maintenance of traditional native religious practice.

In common with Indians of many tribes to the present day, the natives of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard preferred to seek the highest authority — in their case, the colonial government of Massachusetts Bay — to redress wrongs done them by the English islanders. They became skilled in the art of petition writing, and many of those that survive have the ring of formulaic protest which may have been aboriginal in origin (Goddard and Bragdon 1986).

The Quaker ethic of non-interference, and the fact that cultural change was implemented among the island Indians through the medium of native cultural institutions (Simmons 1979:217), resulted in the survival of a number of traditional elements of native political organization, which may have helped to preserve the native sense of distinctiveness even in the mid-18th century. Aboriginally, the common people, subject to the sachem, were obliged to pay tribute in exchange for land-use rights and the privileges of community membership. This custom seems to have survived in an altered form into the 18th century as well. At least three accounts recorded in Mary and Nathaniel Starbuck’s book refer to labour performed by particular individuals, the payment for which was credited to the account of the sachem Ben Able (Little 1980:28). What Able did in return for this credit is not recorded. Perhaps his role as community representative in disputes with the English was rewarded in this way. Kin ties continued to play an important role in the native communities of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard as well. Each member of the tribe, and all spouses and children, were admitted to all privileges of community membership, regardless of the length of their absence (Freeman 1807b:94).

Underlying these customs and institutions which helped the natives to interpret their experience, and guided action in the social world in which they found themselves was the importance of land. The significance of land to the Wampanoag went far beyond its products. Aboriginally, the basic political units of the Wampanoag, known as sachemships to the English, were centered around a known territory over which each sachem maintained jurisdiction. Membership in a sachemship was inherited, and was accompanied by land-use rights, distributed by the sachem. Community and individual identity were thus intimately tied to land. Later Massachussett texts document the
survival of the concept in a restricted form when individuals referred to their land holdings as “sachemships” (Goddard and Bragdon 1986, doc. No. 69).

Despite the increasing depletion of soils on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard in the 18th century, and the resulting decline in agricultural productivity, the natives continued to combat dispossession and pressures towards individual allotments, even at the expense of maintaining hereditary leadership. In 1741, for example, the natives of Nantucket wrote:

_We Sakedan Town Indians at Nantucket meet with great trouble by Benjamin Able for selling our land from us . . . and then we Town Indians at our place of counsel together then we all Greed as to put down the foresaid Ben Able not to be sachem over us any more (M.A. 31:390)_

Land, then as today, had symbolic significance to the Wampanoag, and their success in maintaining tribal holdings has been one of the principle sources of community strength in the 20th century as well.

All of these strategies, institutions, and symbolic structures, which made up the private and domestic side of native life in the 18th century, were in fact non-aggressive, safely-channeled modes of resistance, which the dominant society of the islands was not likely to challenge. Yet the study of these aspects of native life is not a denial of the existence of domination and oppression (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 1983:197), but rather an effort to understand the material and sensory quality of life as the natives themselves experienced it. Placing emphasis on the private, domestic, and material in native life in southern New England in the 18th century, and reconstructing the way in which these domains preserved Indian ethnic identity, provides a needed corrective to the neglect of this period in native history, a period no less important to them than the time in which they ruled both the lands and waters off Cape Cod.

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FIGURE I: SEASONALITY ON NANTUCKET
1680—1720 (N = 20)

PURCHASES OF HUNTING EQUIPMENT (SHOT, ETC.)

PURCHASES OF FISHING EQUIPMENT

CREDIT FOR FEATHERS

CREDIT FOR FISH
FIGURE II: NATIVE PURCHASES OF MEAT AND GRAIN
1680 – 1720 (N = 20)