converts. Mayhew opened a school and sought support from others for the work. In 1655, in his early thirties, he set sail for England to publicize the work there. But he was lost at sea, leaving behind a wife and young children.

When it became apparent that his son would not return, Thomas Mayhew Sr., the seventy-year-old governor and landlord of Martha's Vineyard, took over the mission work. Though not a minister himself, he was respected by the Indians because he had honored their land titles and social structure. With a grave sense of responsibility, he assumed his son's duties and served as a missionary for twenty-two years until he died at the age of ninety-two. His grandson, John Mayhew, was also associated with the work. And after his death, Experience Mayhew, the fourth generation of Mayhews, took over the work for thirty-two more years.

David Brainerd

The most well-known missionary to the American Indians is David Brainerd, an heir of New England Puritanism and a product of the Great Awakening. Bringing the gospel to scattered wandering tribes of Indians was his single mission. He spent his life for that cause. However, his place in history is based largely on the inspiration his personal life has had on others. His journal, diary, and biography, published by Jonathan Edwards, are classics of Christian literature; and missionaries through the centuries, including William Carey and Henry Martyn, have been deeply influenced by his life. Brainerd's methods of evangelism, which differed markedly from those of his great missionary predecessor to the American Indians, John Eliot, have been questioned, however; and in spite of the intensity of his efforts, the results of the work were meager. At the age of twenty-nine, after a mere five years of missionary work, he died as a result of his strenuous labors.

David Brainerd was born in 1718 in Haddam, Connecticut. His father was a country squire who lived with his wife and nine children on a substantial estate overlooking the Connecticut River. When David was eight years old, his father died, and six years later his mother also died. Death was thus very real to him, and in many respects he missed the joys of a happy, carefree childhood. He was sober and studious and deeply concerned about the condition of his soul. From his youth, his spiritual journey took him from peaks of lofty spirituality to valleys of mortifying despair. At the age of twenty, after living with his sister and working on a farm for a time, he returned to Haddam to study in the home of an elderly minister, who counseled him "to stay away from youth and cultivate grave, elderly people."[14]

In 1739, at the age of twenty-one, Brainerd enrolled atYale College at a time when the school was in transition. When he first entered the school, he was distressed by the religious indifference, but the impact of George Whitefield and the Great Awakening soon made its mark, and the atmosphere changed. Prayer and Bible study groups sprang up overnight—often at the displeasure of school authorities, who were fearful of religious "enthusiasm." It was in this atmosphere that Brainerd made an intemperate remark about one of the tutors, commenting that he had "no more grace than a chair," and judging him to be a hypocrite. The remark was carried back to the school officials, and Brainerd was expelled after he refused to make a public apology.

This was an unfortunate situation for Brainerd, causing him distress for years afterward and contributing to his melancholy disposition. Despite his own efforts and those of influential friends, he was not reinstated or allowed to graduate. During his student days, however, he had heard Ebenezer Pemberton deliver a stirring message about the opportunities for missionary work among the Indians. He never forgot that message, and in November of 1742, following his expulsion from Yale, he met with Pemberton to discuss mission opportunities. Pemberton was an American minister who also served as field secretary for the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. Only recently had the society inaugurated its work among the Indians, and Brainerd was being considered as one of two missionary appointees whose ministry would be funded.

Although Brainerd viewed himself as unworthy of the task, the commissioners saw otherwise and enthusiastically offered him the appointment. After several months of itinerant preaching, he was assigned to work among natives of the Bay Colony. His mission outpost was a day's travel from Stockbridge, where veteran missionary John Sergeant was serving with his wife Abigail. "There was much that Brainerd could learn before taking the forest trail to his new station," writes David Wynbeek. "But he did not tarry."[15] Independent and eager for his own converts, he plunged into the task alone.

His first days as a missionary were lonely and depressing: "My heart was sunk…. It seemed to me I should never have any success among the Indians. My soul was weary of my life; I longed for death, beyond measure." Though he later was assisted by an Indian interpreter from Stockbridge, for several weeks he attempted to preach to the Indians without an interpreter. His efforts were fruitless and his life was miserable:

> I live in the most lonely melancholy desert…. I board with a poor Scotchman; his wife can talk scarce any English. My diet consists mostly of hasty-pudding, boiled corn, and bread baked in ashes…. My lodging is a little heap of straw laid upon some boards. My work is exceeding hard and difficult: I travel on foot a mile and a half, the worst of ways, almost daily, and back; for I live so far from my Indians.[16]

The following summer Brainerd built his own hut near the Indian settlement, but his attempt to evangelize the Indians remained unsuccessful. His first winter in the wilderness was one of hardship and sickness. On one occasion he was lost for a time in the woods, and on another he "was very much exposed and very wet by falling into a river." In March of 1744, after a year of mission work, he remained deeply discouraged. But despite offers from established churches to serve as their pastor, he "resolved to go on still with the Indian Affair."[17]

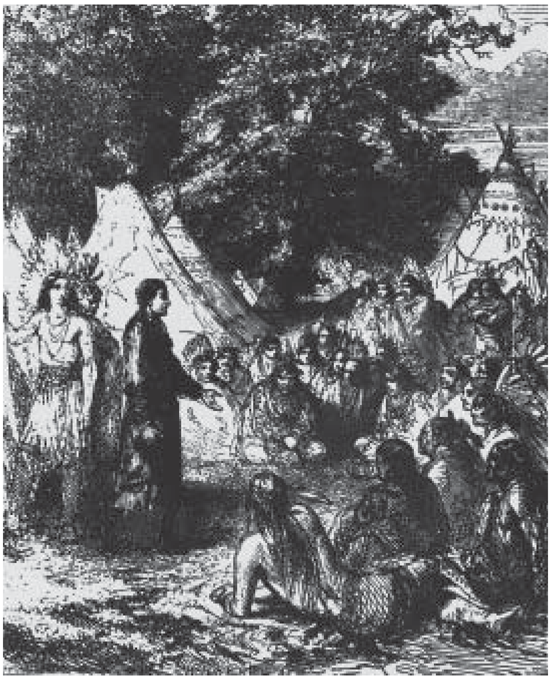
Brainerd's next assignment was in Pennsylvania, north of Philadelphia within the Forks of the Delaware River. Here he was well received by the Indians and was often allowed to speak to them in the chief 's house. Progress was slow, however. His new Indian interpreter, Tattamy, had a serious drinking problem, and Brainerd viewed his own prospects for winning converts "as dark as midnight."

After several months at the Forks of the Delaware, he traveled west to reach Indians along the Susquehanna River. "We went our way into the wilderness; and found the most difficult and dangerous traveling by far, that any of us had seen; we had scarce anything else but lofty mountains, deep valleys, and hideous rocks to make our way through." To make matters worse, his horse fell and broke a leg, which left Brainerd with no alternative but to kill it and continue on to the nearest house some thirty miles away. After preaching with little success, he returned to the Forks of the Delaware where, except for frequent travels, he remained during his second year of missionary service.[18]

Illness and depression continued to plague him. His high hopes of revival among the Indians had long since dimmed. With the exception of Tattamy and his wife, who had been converted and were apparently making remarkable spiritual progress, he regarded his year at the Forks of the Delaware a loss. He was guilt-stricken, believing he had accomplished nothing for his pay, and he was tempted to quit. His "self-preoccupation was so intense," writes William Hutchinson, "that his Indian charges and their problems figured as little more than intrusions."[19]

Brainerd blamed himself for his lack of success, but he also blamed the Indians. He found them “brutishly stupid and ignorant of divine things” and given to asking “frivolous and impertinent questions.” Yet, in hindsight, their questions appear astute. Why, for example, was Brainerd seeking to convert them to Christianity when the Christians behaved so much worse than did the Indians? The Indians reasoned that the whites were seeking to convert them in order to take their land and enslave them. Brainerd’s private reflections were that they were “some of the most jealous people living, and extremely averse to a state of servitude” and that they regarded their own way of living as “vastly preferable to the white people.” They, likewise, had no desire to go to the white man’s heaven, but rather preferred “to go with their fathers when they die.”[20] In summing up Brainerd’s attitudes toward Native Americans, Hutchinson writes: “Modern readers may wonder … whether Yale College in officially expelling Brainerd for rudeness may actually have sought to rid itself of one of its dimmer scholars.”[21]

In the summer of 1745 Brainerd’s spirits brightened. He heard about a group of Indians eighty-five miles to the south, in Crossweeksung, New Jersey, who were more open to the Christian message. Once again, he pulled up stakes and moved on. But this time his fortune would improve. The Indians in New Jersey were more eager to hear the gospel. Soon Indians as well as whites were coming from miles away to hear him preach. Anxious for results, he baptized twenty-five converts within a matter of weeks, and the following winter he organized a school.



David Brainerd preaching to the Indians.

Later that summer, Brainerd witnessed a revival among the Indians. Although he still depended on an interpreter and the Indians understood only the most elementary tenets of Christianity, they responded to his preaching in the emotional and physical ways that were so characteristic of the Great Awakening. His diary shows that this was an exhilarating time for him as he witnessed the visible results of the people to whom he was preaching:

> August 6. In the morning I discoursed to the Indians at the house where we lodged. Many of them were then much affected and appeared surprisingly tender, so that a few words about their souls’ concerns would cause the tears to flow freely, and produce many sobs and groans.

> In the afternoon, they being returned to the place where I had usually preached among them, I again discoursed to them there. There were about fifty-five persons in all, about forty that were capable of attending divine service with understanding. I insisted upon 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love." They seemed eager of hearing; but there appeared nothing very remarkable, except their attention, till near the close of my discourse. Then divine truths were attended with a surprising influence, and produced a great concern among them. There were scarce three in forty that could refrain from tears and bitter cries.
>
> They all, as one, seemed in an agony of soul to obtain an interest in Christ … and the more I invited them to come and partake of His love, the more their distress was aggravated, because they felt themselves unable to come…. It was very affecting to see the poor Indians, who the other day were hallooing and yelling in their idolatrous feasts and drunken frolics, now crying to God.[22]

In the spring of 1746, Brainerd convinced the scattered Indians in New Jersey to settle together at nearby Cranbury, and soon thereafter a church was established. More revivals followed, and his converts numbered more than a hundred. But Brainerd's health was broken. His fourth and final journey back to the Susquehanna, though more successful than previous preaching tours, was too much for his frail constitution. He was dying of tuberculosis. His missionary work was over.

After spending the winter in the home of a friend in New Jersey, Brainerd traveled to Northampton, Massachusetts, where he spent his last months in the home of the great preacher and scholar Jonathan Edwards, whose daughter, Jerusha, he hoped to marry. This dream, however, was never realized. For nineteen weeks Jerusha tenderly nursed him, but to no avail. He died on October 9, 1747. The following Valentine's Day Jerusha joined him, dying of consumption that she apparently contracted from him.

Eleazer Wheelock

If Brainerd was disorganized and lacking direction in his ministry, there were others among his contemporaries who presented developed strategies for Native American missions. Among them was Dr. Eleazer Wheelock, a minister and educator who graduated from Yale in 1733. Ten years later, in 1743, he brought an Indian youth, Samson Occum, into his home and spent four years educating him. His success with Occum led him to develop a concept that historian R. Pierce Beaver has termed "the most original scheme of operations in the entire history of New England missions to the Indians."[23]

Wheelock's plan was to bring Indians and whites together for training in missionary service. In the process, the white students would learn the language and culture of the Indians, and the Indian youths would receive a classical education and learn the ways of whites. Both would be trained for Indian evangelism, though there would be an emphasis on recruiting natives who would not have to cross cultural barriers and who could live and work on far less financial support than their white counterparts.

Wheelock opened his school in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1754 with two Indian students sent by John Brainerd, who had succeeded David at the New Jersey mission (and was a far more successful missionary than his famous brother). The school met in a house donated by Joshua Moor, and the institution became known as Moor's Training School. At its peak there were twenty-two students enrolled, and Wheelock's missionary work was the most extensive of any in New England. Altogether he trained nearly fifty Indian students, and approximately one-third of those returned to their home communities to serve as evangelists or teachers.