

“USE DILATORY MEANS:” WILLIAM PYNCHON AND THE NATIVE AMERICANS

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William Pynchon, the immigrant entrepreneur, magistrate, and colonizer of Springfield, Massachusetts, had unique and extraordinarily positive relationships with Native peoples along the Connecticut River and elsewhere.

This was the case even from the beginning, when Pynchon and seven companions made their way up the Connecticut and Westfield Rivers in May, 1636 to the meadow where they intended to build a settlement, “Agawam,” named after the local segmentary tribe of perhaps 120 Natives. The area was “so incombred with Indians,” said Pynchon, that he was “compelled to plant on the opposite side to avoid trespassing of them.”¹ Relocating to the Springfield side of the Great River is a good first instance of the policy Pynchon consistently followed in relating to indigenous peoples: pragmatic respect for Native Americans.

In looking at William Pynchon’s exceptional perspective, I offer first, too few words about his remarkable life; then consideration of written evidence – deeds, letters, and the like; and, along the way, two incidents – the Pequot “War,” and what I call “The Case of the Quabogue Malefactors.”

I. WILLIAM PYNCHON, PIONEER

Pynchon embarked for America from his native Essex County in England with his wife Anna and their children on the Winthrop fleet in 1630. He was a gentleman, forty years old – an inheritor of farms in Springfield, near Chelmsford; a churchwarden of All Saints Church; a Puritan by conviction; and a long-time member of the Massachusetts Bay Company (repeatedly named in its royal charter). Settling first in Dorchester, then Roxbury, he was a founding member of the First Church in Roxbury with the Rev. John Eliot, the “Apostle of the Indians.”²

Pynchon's relocation to the frontier was loosely associated with migration to the Connecticut Valley in 1636, which included settlers from Cambridge who followed the Rev. Thomas Hooker to Hartford. Changing patterns in the fur trade drove Pynchon's move. Accessible stocks of beaver were being decimated rapidly, due in part to Pynchon's own success.³

II. THE INDIAN DEED TO SPRINGFIELD

Two months after arriving Pynchon devised a deed with the Agawam Indians.⁴ The July 15, 1636 agreement provides several examples of his remarkably conscientious approach to negotiations and transactions with Native peoples.

Comparison with the Indian deeds of other Puritan communities reveals how unusual Pynchon's approach really was. The only other even slightly similar document is Roger Williams' 1638 deed to Providence, Rhode Island, almost two years later. There are no original deeds to Plymouth, Salem, Boston, Hartford. The later texts are all simple property transfers modeled on the English pattern.⁵ They seem to have been made – or better, made up – retrospectively. For most Puritan colonists the King's charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company offered sufficient warrant to occupy land in New England.

Not for Pynchon. The deal he made was dramatically different. For Pynchon neither the charter, nor the commission issued by the Massachusetts General Court, was sufficient.⁶ Since Native occupants of the land were rightful “owners” from an English perspective, a legal purchase agreement had to be made.

The Springfield deed reveals several important facets of Pynchon's developing understanding of Indian culture.

First, it refers to mothers and wives. It mentions Kewenusk, mother of the Agawams' sachem, Cuttonus, as well as Niarum, wife of Coa. Inadvertently or not, Pynchon was showing respect for the matriarchal traditions which were so important to Native peoples.⁷

Second, the agreement guaranteed the local tribe certain privileges, including the rights they required to continue their hunter-gatherer way of life, at least in some measure. Specifically, it stated that

...they shall have and enjoy al that *Cotinackeesh*, or ground that is now planted; And have liberty to take Fish and Deer, ground nuts, walnuts, akornes, and *saschiminesh* or a kind of pease, And also if any of our cattle spoile their corne, to pay as it is worth; & that hogs shall not goe on the side of Agawam but in akorne time.

Third, the document included Algonkian words to specify what the deal entailed. Pynchon appreciated Indian language. In addition to place names, such as Masaksick, he included words for meadows, peas, cultivated ground, and wife.⁸ Incorporating these words offered a great advantage: upon hearing the deed read aloud, the Agawams would recognize some key terms.

Fourth, the Springfield agreement was confirmed by payment of 18 fathoms of wampum, and eighteen each of coats, hoes, hatchets, and knives. Thirteen Indians signed by drawing personal symbols; nine settlers signed, two by making their marks.⁹

But that was not the end of the matter. A kind of codicil provided for an additional gift to one of the Indians, as if an afterthought: "Also the said Pynchon doth give to Wrutherna two Coates over & above the said Particulars expressed." As Pynchon was to discover, subsequent re-negotiations were often required in making land agreements with Native peoples. Deals were not immediately finalized. And Pynchon always acceded, even years later.¹⁰

In spite Pynchon's care in devising an understandable, acceptable document, the original Springfield deed also reveals a major misunderstanding when it speaks "for & in ye name of Cuttonus the right owner of Agaam...." Pynchon introduced and imposed an English conception of land

ownership. Native people did identify “owners” who had say-so over particular tracts; but such “ownership” seems to have offered much flexibility in sharing the use of the land.¹¹

III. ADVICE IN PYNCHON’S LETTERS

What the Springfield deed suggests – that from the beginning Pynchon was a proponent of maintaining good relations with Native Americans, and was a careful practitioner of that art – is still more explicit in advice he offered in letters. Early in 1636, even before his move to the Valley, Pynchon pressed Winthrop to “take careful informations” so that nobody would have any question that justice was done in a case regarding Indians who killed two settlers. His later counsel was grounded in experience: “Use dilatory meanes.” Go slow. Take it very easy. “For I perceive,” said Pynchon, “the nature of the Indians is upon every little occasion to be much provoked with the desyer of revenge, but if meanes of delay be used but a while the edge of their revengeful desyer will soon be cooled.” He urged restraint. “I hope the English will neuer put [the Indians] to the tryall, till they [the English] be more then a little provoked to it.” He praised Winthrop for keeping the peace: “[Y]ou had iust reason to decline the warr which others suggested and thought fit to proced in against the Naricanset [Narragansett]: the distraction of the land and the loss of so many younge men and cheife men will not agree to the cas of war.” And this strong statement, also addressed to the Governor:

I cannot but admire at the particullorre wisdom and prouidence of god that hath so overruled war as to make it the means of so hopefull an accord between Indians and English: if wars had proceeded as it was like: I apprehend it would have cost the liues of many English as well as Indians, partly by wars and partly by disordered hardship.... It seemes the Lord did not see sufficient ground as yet to shed so much blood as both sides intended, both of English and Indians..¹²

IV. THE PEQUOT “WAR”

Pynchon’s irenic and conciliatory approach to Native peoples affected his role in the Pequot “War” of the summer of 1637.¹³ As Francis Jennings remarked, “The whole story of the Pequot ‘war’ was one long atrocity.”¹⁴ That bloody conflict, an early chapter in the long history of clashes and

violated trust between English and Native Americans, occurred not even a year after Pynchon's plantation was settled. The traditional depiction of the "War's" most hideous moment, the May 26 massacre at the Pequot village near Mystic, is a perverse and strangely ordered drawing of a gruesome, chaotic disaster.

The conflict dealt a serious blow to Pynchon's enterprise. Springfield remained unaffected. But Pynchon's shallow was impressed for military service on Long Island Sound, a move that infuriated him. And to add insult to injury, over Pynchon's objections Springfield was charged £86 16 s. as its share of the war's expenses.¹⁵

Yet Pynchon did play a part in the hostilities – or rather in ending them. On August 5, 1637, he hurried overland to present Winthrop with seven scalps which the Mohawks had delivered to Pynchon (and not to the Connecticut authorities). One was the scalp of the sachem Sassacus, who had led the Pequot warriors. The Mohawks killed all the leaders as they fled, seeking refuge in New York.¹⁶ Pynchon's quick action spurred the Puritan government to recall its troops before any more blood was shed, and so the ill-conceived and ill-executed "war" and its awful violence came to an end.

V. THE CASE OF THE QUABOGUE MALEFACTORS

One letter Pynchon wrote to Winthrop at a critical moment in 1648 expressed his principles and methods quite clearly.

At issue was how to arrest three Indians from Quabogue (Brookfield) suspected of murdering five others near Barre. The respected sachem Cutshamoquin had gotten to John Eliot in Roxbury, and convinced him to urge the English to intervene; Eliot lobbied Pynchon to assist in the manhunt.¹⁷

But Pynchon was cautious. Unlike most of his contemporaries he respected the separate status of Native peoples. In his view, Indians who remained outside the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Bay, in their own tribes, belonged to another nation. He explained,

I grant they are all wthin ye line of yr pattent, but yet you cannot say that therefore they are yr subject or yet wthin yr Jurisdiction vntill they have fully subjected themselves to yr government (wch I know they have not) & vntill you have bought their land: vntill this be done they must be esteemed as an Independent free people.

From his vantage point on the river Pynchon was a careful observer of inter-tribal relationships.¹⁸

Consequently he was wary of being caught in an untenable position between feuding tribes and the Puritan government. As he reluctantly agreed to help bring the fugitive Indians to justice, he wrote, “I look upon this service . . . as a difficult & troublesome service...” The colonists should not get involved in Native American affairs on their own initiative: “[I]t may be of ill Consequence,” he said, “to ye English that intermeddle in their [the Indians’] matters by a voluntary rather [than] by a necessary calling.”¹⁹ Pynchon’s extreme reluctance persuaded Winthrop to drop the project.

The 1648 letter also reveals that Pynchon depended on his Native interpreters. He understood the Agawam dialect well enough to trade and communicate on daily matters; fellow English settlers admired him for that. But Pynchon confessed that he could not follow the negotiations between his translator, Nippumsait, and the Quabaug sachem, Quacunquasit. Translators were so crucial for Pynchon’s enterprises that the first to accompany him was specifically named in the Springfield deed. He was Ahauton of the Massachuset tribe.²⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

Pynchon applied his principles consistently and evenhandedly. He made it his business to know and understand Native peoples.²¹ He included Indian leaders in any delicate negotiations and encounters concerning any Indians wanted for criminal activities.²² Natives won the recorded cases they brought to William Pynchon’s magistrate’s court.²³ Whereas the Connecticut General Court voted in 1638 (surprisingly, with Pynchon present) “to compel [the Woronoco Indians] to come by violence” – in order to explain, of all things, “the reasons why they saide they are affraide of vs” – in 1650 Pynchon sent a constable to retrieve a suspect from Woronoco, “but in case you cannot make him come by [persuading

him and pushing him forward],” said Pynchon, “then you shall not use violence but Rather leave him.”²⁴

The contrast in approach is striking. Indeed, it seems quite reasonable to conclude that Indian–English relationships in early colonial New England could have followed a much more humane and productive course if William Pynchon’s principles and practices had prevailed.

William Pynchon, lay Puritan theologian, author of *The Meritorious Price of Our Redemption*, the first book banned – and burned – in Boston,²⁵ co-founder of two New England churches, had respectful relationships with Native peoples.

Curiously, unlike his pastor, John Eliot, Pynchon never sought to Christianize his Indian neighbors. But that’s another story.²⁶

APPENDIX I – EARLY INDIAN DEEDS

The earliest Boston deed dates to March 19, 1685, and while it purports to recap an agreement made when Winthrop first arrived, there is no mention in Commonwealth sources of any earlier document. See comments by Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975), 138. The 1670 so-called “renewal” deed to Hartford, given in Nathaniel Goodwin, *Descendants of Thomas Olcott* (Hartford, 1845), 62-63, was made allegedly as a replacement of a long-lost 1636 deed with Sunckquasson. The 1686 deed to Salem was also an alleged replacement for an earlier deed.

Plymouth Colony did record a “Book of Indian Records for Their Lands,” which has been reprinted in David Pulsifer, *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, 1620-1651* (Boston, 1861), vol. 12, 225-244. The earliest deed is dated 1664. It conveys total ownership to the buyer; there is no mention of price; and there are no stipulations of any rights or privileges or acreages reserved to the Native people. Moreover, there is no deed for Plymouth itself.

APPENDIX II – PYNCHON DEEDS IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

In addition to the unique features in Pynchon's Indian deed for Springfield, and in fact in all the William Pynchon Indian deeds, and the later Hampden County deeds which were affected by the pattern he began, we should note as well what was not present in his 1636 document, but found in subsequent documents, especially those made under the restored Stuart sovereigns. In the Pynchon deeds there are no references to royal dating, and there is no religious terminology. "Anno Domini" appears for the first time, apparently, in the assignment of the October 28, 1664 deed to Westfield; "the year of our Lord" in the October 19, 1672 deed to part of Whatley and Conway; the words "Christian People" in the greeting of a November 24, 1673 deed to Westfield; and the sovereign's name, Charles II, in the March 16, 1681 deed to Enfield and surrounding areas in Connecticut. The first to include "Christian People," "year of our Lord," and the name and year of the king (George II) was a full century after Pynchon's Springfield deed: the June 2, 1737 deed to Tyringham and surrounding areas. See Wright, *Indian Deeds*.

William Pynchon's son and successor, the "Worshipful Col. John Pynchon" (as he came to be known), continued, to some degree at least, his father's unusual if not unique practice of identifying and accommodating Indian claims as he systematically bought up Western Massachusetts in the course of his long life. The September 1653 deed for parts of Northampton, for example, was signed on the condition that "the said Pynchon shall plow up or cause to be plowed up for the Indians Sixteene acres of land on ye East side of Quinotticott River wch is to be done sometyme next Summer 1654." (My guess is John "caused" it to be plowed!) And ten years later in the deed for Hadley and surrounding areas "ye Indians aforenamed & in Particuler Quonquont Doth reserve & keep one corne feild about twelve, sixteene or twenty acres of Ground... And alsoe they reserve libertie to Hunt Deare, fowle &c And to take fish, Beaver or Otter &c." Similar retention of fishing, hunting, and trapping rights was guaranteed in Western Massachusetts deeds with Indians as late as 1681. That was after the painful,

trust-breaking experiences of the so-called “King Philip’s War” of 1675, when all except three homes in Springfield were burned. But this practice does not seem to have continued in John Pynchon’s final years, or to have survived after his death at the age of 78 in 1704.

APPENDIX III – WILLIAM PYNCHON AND CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM

One important observation about William Pynchon’s relationship with Native Americans presents a puzzling anomaly. In spite of the fact that Pynchon was keenly interested in theology, there is no indication in anything he did or said that he was ever concerned to Christianize Native Americans.

Clearly Pynchon was a committed Puritan Christian: he had a hand in founding churches at Roxbury and Springfield; he preached on occasion – we have his son’s notes on one of his sermons; and he wrote a volume on the Atonement, *The Meritorious Price of our Redemption*, which, upon its arrival in Boston, became the first book banned (and burned) in British North America in 1650. That condemnation led ultimately to his return to England, where he published five more volumes, all on Christian theology.

But he did not share the missionary enthusiasm of his own one-time pastor in Roxbury, the Rev. John Eliot. Both Pynchon and Eliot were deeply interested in Native Americans. Both studied the indigenous languages. Both sought to treat Indians with respect, and advocated for Native rights. But Pynchon did not ever mention the Indians in his theological treatises, not even when he dealt with non-Christians; his references at that point were to the “Turk” (Muslims). While Eliot’s six “praying Indian” towns, such as Natick, Nonantum, and Nashoba, as well as the Wampanoag mission in Mashpee, and the later Stockbridge Church all had Native American participation and even leadership, the church in Pynchon’s community seems to have been for English settlers only.

ENDNOTES

¹ Allyn B. Forbes, ed., *Winthrop Papers* (Boston, 1947-), 3:267, and Henry Martyn Burt, *The First Century of Springfield* (Springfield, 1898), 1:18.

² For more on William Pynchon's life, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004), 45:642.

³ On Pynchon and the fur trade, see Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Fur Trade* (Norman, OK, 1961) 1:113-145, especially 135.

⁴ An early handwritten copy of the original deed with the Native Americans is reproduced and its text transcribed in Mason Arnold Green, *Springfield 1636-1886, History of Town and City* (Springfield, 1888), 12-14. The text, along with those of many other deeds, may be found in Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, 1905).

⁵ See Appendix I on Early Indian Deeds.

⁶ The "Commission" to the settlers from the Bay Colony emigrating to the Connecticut Valley is in Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, M.D., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1854), 1:170-171.

⁷ References to women as partners in the transactions continue prominently in later Indian deeds from Western Massachusetts. With the exception of a few landed widows there is no mention of English women in deeds of the era; and while the Indians' mothers are sometimes named, there is certainly no corresponding mention of Pynchon's mother, Frances.

⁸ All Algonkian terms are given as Pynchon spelled them. Native words in early Pynchon deeds include: *muckeosquittaj* = meadows (in Roger Williams, *A Key to the Language of America* [London, 1643], 96, "*Micuckaskeete*"); *saschiminesh* = peas; *cotinackeesh* = cultivated ground; *tamasham* = wife; *wiskheeg* - or perhaps better, *wussuckwheke* = writing (Williams, 192, "*Wussuckwheke*"); and *weakshackquoock* = candlewood or pitch pine.

⁹ Pynchon paid more than twice as much for what is now Agawam and West Springfield than he did for what is now Springfield and Longmeadow.

¹⁰ Agreements entail relationships, and relationships are always ongoing works in progress. Secousk, the widow of Kenip, came to Pynchon in June, 1644, three years after Pynchon purchased land through a deed in which she was named and to which she had agreed. When she asked him for an adjustment in the price, "he gave her a childe coate of Redd Cotton" and a glass and a knife, worth more than ten hands of wampum altogether. In Pynchon's words this "fully satisfied" her and her present husband, Janundua. Worthington Chauncey Ford, "Letters of William Pynchon," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 48 (1915):52.

¹¹ See Appendix II on Pynchon Deeds in Western Massachusetts. Indigenous people did adapt to the newly-introduced English notions, coming to understand that whoever claimed property ownership would be given money and goods when the colonists wanted to make any deed, and that after the deed the land was no longer open to them as before.

¹² Forbes, *Winthrop Papers*, "careful informations" - 3:254 (April 22, 1636); "dilatatory meanes" - 4:443-444 (February 19, 1644); "more then a little provoked" - 4:444 (February 16, 1644); "just reason" - 5:115 (October 27, 1646); "particular wisdom" - 5:45 (September 15, 1645). This final letter concerned an inter-tribal conflict between Narragansetts and Mohegans which nearly involved the Bay Colony on the side of the Mohegans. The Massachusetts General Court had made elaborate preparations for war just a month earlier; see Shurtleff, *Records*, 3:39-43.

¹³ On the Pequot "War" see Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America* (Chapel Hill, 1975), 202-227; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians 1620-1675* (Boston, 1965), 122-154; a reassessment of Jennings' study by Steven Katz, "The Pequot War Reconsidered" in *New England Encounters* (Boston, 1999) 111-135; and another reconsideration by Alfred A. Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, MA, 1996). See also Cave, "Who Killed John Stone? A Note on the Origins of the Pequot War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 49 (1992):509-521, and Katherine A. Grandjean, "New World Tempests: Environment, Scarcity, and the Coming of the Pequot War," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 68:1 (2011):75-100. On the Pequot "War" in general, see Winthrop, *History*, 1:265-281, and Marty O'Shea, "Springfield's Puritans and Indians," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 26:1 (1998):65-67.

¹⁴ Jennings, *Invasion*, 226. The Native American practice of individual retaliation to right any wrongs clashed with the English insistence on corporate responsibility. Puritan policy legitimated only "defensive war, (if neede soe require)," as was explicitly stated in the Massachusetts Bay "Commission" to the settlers in the spring of 1636. Shurtleff, *Records*, 1:171. Fighting with the Native Americans was to be undertaken only reluctantly, for self-protection. But that did not prevent needless provocations to justify military interventions. From the Wethersfield attack on April 23, 1637 to the "War's" conclusion that August, deep-seated suspicions, mismatched perceptions, a mélange of prejudices and mistrusts, easy resort to violence, and presumptions of divine right to the land all played a part in the conflict.

¹⁵ Simeon Baldwin, "The Secession of Springfield from Connecticut," *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, February 1908, XII, 63. Pynchon wrote to Roger Ludlow on January 19, 1638, "I did expect that you would not charge me for the war.... this answer as I remember was made that if we would look to ourselves you would expect no more at our hands:... Besides I have been rated to [i.e., taxed for] the war in the Bay for my hole estate." Charles Lemuel Nichols, "Letter of William Pynchon, 1638," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 58(1925):387,388. The bill seems to have been paid eventually, if reluctantly.

¹⁶ Green, *Springfield*, 32. The site, which Pynchon called "Paquinay," was a stone gorge in Dover Plains, New York. It is now known as "Dover Stone Church."

¹⁷ Eliot cited a text from the Bible: Deuteronomy 19:20 - “And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.”

¹⁸ In February 1644 Pynchon told Winthrop that fears that the Mohawks in the Hudson Valley would help Sequassen, the sachem of western Connecticut, were unfounded. He added, “I do not certainly heere whether they will aid the Naricanset [Narragansett] Sachim, but as far as I can understand they reject him also: But whereas you writ that you thought the Naricanset Sachim would be content to sit still: my intelligence from the Indians of the River is otherwise.” Likewise, following a war scare in September 1645 Pynchon reported that the Mohegans trusted the sachem of their enemies, the Narragansetts, but were suspicious of the Niantic sachem, and expected trouble the next spring. In the 1648 letter he remarked, “the Naunutuk [Northampton] Indians are desperate Spirites, for they have their dependance on the Mowhoaks or maquas who are the Terror of all Indians.” The February 1644 and September 1645 letters are in *Winthrop Papers*, 4:443 and 5:45. The July 5, 1648 letter is in J. H. Temple, *History of the Town of North Brookfield* (North Brookfield, 1887), 35-38; the original is in the Massachusetts State Archives.

¹⁹ Temple, *North Brookfield*, 36, 37

²⁰ Burt, *First Century*, 1:18.

²¹ In his 1648 letter Pynchon named no less than nine individuals, all known to him: the prominent Massachuset sachem Cushamokin, the Quinipiac sachem Sequassen, his own translator Nippumsait, the Nonotuck sachem Chickwallup, the Quabogue sachem Quacunquasit, Wottowan, Reskeshonege, Pamshad, and Wawhillam.

²² In 1650 Pynchon had his constables arrest and temporarily “bound ... with their cords” an Indian named Munnuckquats who was wanted for robbery and had fled to Woronoco (Westfield). The suspected bandit was then turned over to Attumbesund, the Woronoco sachem. Even though the accused was from a distant tribe, the sachem released him and let him escape. Pynchon accepted this disappointing outcome. But Pynchon expected Attumbesund to make amends by paying five fathoms of wampum the next time he came to Springfield. Smith, *Colonial Justice*, 223-224.

²³ Pynchon ordered Francis Ball to pay damages for hitting the wife of Coa. Ball’s defense, that he had struck her lightly with a small stick on her bearskin coat, did not get him off. Ball proved obstinate, however, and in a pique of pigheadedness, or racism, let himself be hit two times rather than paying the Native. Pynchon sentenced the repeat offender Thomas Miller to fifteen strokes of the lash for striking the translator Nippumsait “with the butt end of his gunn.” Miller chose to pay four fathoms of wampum instead of taking the whipping. Smith, *Colonial Justice*, 217, 223.

²⁴ J. Hammond Trumbull, editor, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford, 1850), 17. Smith, *Colonial Justice*, 223.

²⁵ See David M. Powers, “William Pynchon and the Meritorious Price: The Story of the First Book Banned in Boston and the Man Who Wrote it,” *Bulletin of the Congregational Library*, Boston, Spring 2009, 4-13.

²⁶ See Appendix III on William Pynchon and Christian Evangelism.