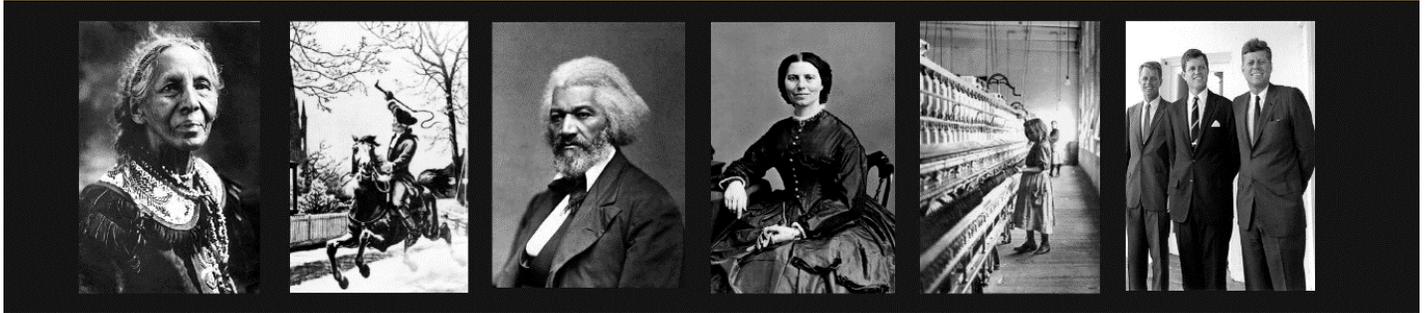


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William Pynchon (1590-1662)

(Courtesy of Louis Orr and the Ad Club)

William Pynchon, the Agawam Indians, and the 1636 Deed for Springfield

DAVID M. POWERS



Editor’s Introduction: *In this article, David M. Powers argues that the deed that William Pynchon negotiated for the land of Springfield, Massachusetts was remarkable for a number of important features. Pynchon recognized that the indigenous occupants of the land were its rightful “owners,” he guaranteed them certain rights and privileges, incorporated Algonquian words and language, and specified an actual payment. Powers argues that this was unique among Puritan land deeds. In contrast, he points out, most other Puritan colonists considered the “King’s Charter” to the Massachusetts Bay Company sufficient warrant to occupy New England properties.¹*

William Pynchon (1590-1662) was one of New England’s first and most business-minded settlers. A devout Puritan, in 1629 Pynchon was among the original twelve leaders from the Massachusetts Bay Company who committed to emigrating to New England. In 1630, he uprooted his family (wife Anna and four children) and sailed with John Winthrop to Massachusetts as part of the “Great Migration.” His choices once he reached the New World remind us that Puritans were also businessmen, and Pynchon was among the shrewdest and most successful.

When he arrived in Massachusetts, Pynchon settled first in Dorchester and then helped establish the town of Roxbury. Here Pynchon settled land near the narrow isthmus which all travelers had to cross in order to reach the Port of

Boston. As a result, all of Massachusetts' mainland trade needed to pass through his town. Unfortunately, Roxbury (originally named "Rocksbury" for its rocky soil) was a poor site for farming. In 1635, Pynchon headed west to scout out the fertile Connecticut River Valley for its best location to conduct business. Pynchon selected land just north of the Connecticut River's first large falls, the Enfield Falls. By founding his settlement here, he ensured that much of the Connecticut River's traffic would have to either begin, end, or cross at his settlement. The settlement was located equidistant to the key port cities of Boston and Albany, with Native paths already cleared in both directions. This northernmost settlement of the "Great River" enabled Pynchon to control trading links with upstream Native peoples central to the fur trade. The area was among the most fertile in New England, and the local Agawam Indians were initially friendly. The settlement could not have been better situated. (Originally referred to as "Agaam," it was later renamed Springfield after Pynchon's home in England.)

Over the next decades, Pynchon built Springfield into a thriving trading and commercial center and made a personal fortune. He believed that the Connecticut colony's adversarial stances towards Native peoples were not only unconscionable, but also bad for business. During the Pequot War (1636–1638), Pynchon refused to jeopardize his lucrative trade agreements with nearby Native American tribes, irritating those in charge of the war effort. Ultimately, the animosity between Pynchon and Connecticut authorities led him to sever ties with Hartford and to align the settlement under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Bay Colony when the two colonies redrew their lines in 1638.

Early Springfield was an unusually diverse, tolerant, and commercially-oriented community whose economic base rested on agriculture and fur trading. The fur trade depended upon mutually interdependent and friendly relations with Native peoples. Thus, although Pynchon may have been unique among Puritan settlers, his stance towards Native Americans reflected those of French fur traders in Canada and the Midwest. Historians have long noted that the French evidenced greater respect for Native cultures and relied more heavily on diplomacy than did their English rivals.²

Although Pynchon negotiated a deed which was unique among Puritans, some historians question the extent to which Native peoples realized that they were forever alienating themselves from their lands. Margaret Bruchac, a historian and anthropologist who has written extensively on local Algonquian peoples in Western Massachusetts, argues that:

Indian deeds are often cited as evidence of the sale of land, but it's doubtful that these documents were ever viewed by Native signers as quit-claims. In practice, they were negotiated like treaties and

*temporary joint use agreements, confirmed by the exchange of gifts, and reserved Native rights to hunt, plant, set up wigwams, etc. on land that was supposedly “sold.”*³

*These historical controversies make the following article all the more interesting. Author David Powers has written the first book-length biography of William Pynchon, titled *Damnably Heresy: William Pynchon, the Indians, and the First Book Banned (and Burned) in Boston (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015)*. This article is adapted from chapter four of that work (titled “*Canoes and Cotinackeesh*”) and is used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers (www.wipfandstock.com). It begins with an account of Springfield’s founding and focuses on Pynchon’s unique deed with the Agawam Indians.*⁴

* * * * *

In early May of 1636, eight explorers nosed their canoes westward into a tributary of the Connecticut, paddling about half a mile up the tree-lined river the Native peoples called Woronoco to the place they called Agawam (“the landing place”). A low-lying meadow there provided an open space on the river’s southern bank. An oxbow of stagnant water defined this field on its landward side, tracing an ancient bend in the river which dated from when the Woronoco River meandered along a long-forgotten prehistoric bed. On reaching their destination, the pioneers dragged their crafts up onto the muddy shore, unloaded their gear, and carted it into the lush, green meadow. They had come to stay.

The English had visited this particular place before. A colonists’ building already stood on the meadow. William Pynchon (1590-1662) had identified the site the previous fall, when he carried out a preliminary exploration of the area. He was accompanied then by John Cable, John Woodcock, and a Native interpreter. They put up some sort of simple structure at that time in the meadow, which the English ever after called “The House Meadow.”

Now they had come back to this field to take the first step towards founding a new “plantation” (the English term for a colony or settlement, it derived from the verb “to plant”). In typical Puritan fashion, they entered a covenant together when, on May 14, 1636, William Pynchon and seven others joined in a written agreement to create a new community. Their basic constitution listed thirteen resolutions and regulations, with the initial article acknowledging the bedrock requirement for any Puritan settlement: “We intend by God’s grace as soon as we can with all convenient speed to procure

some Godly and faithful minister with whom we purpose to Join in Church Covenant to walk in all the ways of Christ.”⁵

Other paragraphs specified that the new settlement would consist of forty families, or fifty at the most, and would include both rich and poor. Each family would have a house lot in “convenient proportion . . . for everyones quality and estate.” All would have shares in a pasture area north of the settlement, in the “Long Meadow” to the south, and in either meadow or planting lands in what is now West Springfield and Agawam, the site where the settlers first landed and where cattle and oxen were grazed. Pasturage was particularly important because “estate is like to be imp^oved in Cattel,” as the town record subsequently observed. (The names Longmeadow and Feeding Hills remain attached to the landscape to the present day.) House lots would be laid out along a primitive street which roughly paralleled the river. Every family would also receive a portion of the low-lying marshlands which ran along the eastern side of this street.

The Springfield covenant was crafted with careful attention to a Puritan core value, the “principle of equity.”⁶ Real estate taxes were to be levied proportionally; in fact, all was to be done “accordinge to every ones proportion,” including taxes on land “aker for aker.” The covenant’s underlying theme was fairness for all and its phrasing made it very clear that everyone was supposed to be treated right. That included granting extra acreage to three of the founding settlers—namely, Pynchon, his stepson Henry Smith, and Jehu Burr—as a reward for their continuing commitment to the venture “when others fell off for feare of the difficultys.”

Expenses for establishing the settlement were to be borne over time by all recruits to the community. Those costs included the price of two small boats (known as shallops) which were used for moving to the valley and a surprisingly inexpensive £6 expense for the original “House Meadow” shelter. Finally, any trees cut for timber and left on the ground for more than three months would be fair game for anyone. Within two days the settlers added a rudimentary scheme for dividing property into parcels and decided on generous minimum sizes for homestead lots. All eight of what Pynchon called the “first subscribers & adventurers for the plantation” signed, two by making their marks.⁷

The community’s founding document reveals that Pynchon had already scrapped his original plans. The “House Meadow” building was to have been the beginning of a settlement on the west side of the Connecticut, the “Great River.” The fact that it had been inadvertently built on land that flooded in the spring was only part of the problem. Pynchon found that his original choice of a location was “so encumbered with Indians” that a settlement

could not be built there. He wrote to John Winthrop explaining that he was “compelled to plant on the opposite side to avoid trespassing of them.”⁸

The Agawam Indians were what has come to be called a “segmentary tribe,” consisting of several extended families and numbering from 150 to 500, and possibly even more.⁹ They lived from hunting and fishing, cultivating crops such as maize, squash, and kidney beans, and gathering other foods. By the time the English arrived in any significant numbers, they had already survived a devastating smallpox epidemic in 1633-34. That tragedy decimated the Connecticut Valley watershed population to a fraction of the perhaps 12,000 Native people who had lived there previously. While largely independent, the Agawams shared an Algonquian language with other southern New England Indians. They occasionally formed alliances with neighboring communities when collaboration was mutually advantageous. This federation, which sometimes has been called the Pocumtuck tribe, occupied lands that spanned the Connecticut River watershed westward into the Berkshires, from northern Connecticut to northern Massachusetts. In addition to the Agawams, residents of a dozen villages comprised this alliance, including those in Woronoco (Westfield), Nonotuck (Northampton), Squakheag (Northfield), and Pocumtuck (Deerfield).¹⁰

Although the area where Pynchon intended to settle turned out to be directly west of Massachusetts Bay, it had been agreed that this new plantation would fall under the jurisdiction of a new confederation further down the Connecticut, centered on Hartford. A Commission granted on March 3, 1636 by the Massachusetts General Court had retroactively legitimated the expansion into the Connecticut Valley which had begun in 1635. The Commission’s authorization would be valid for one year. Pynchon, Roger Ludlow, and Henry Smith, among others, were given power to function as magistrates during that time, with control over “tradeing, planting, building, lotts, millitarie dissipline, defensive war, (if neede soe require,) as shall best conduce to the publique good.”¹¹ The point about defensive war would turn out to be of significance when hostilities between the English and Pequot Indians erupted the following year.

Most of the Connecticut settlers came from two Massachusetts churches which had planned for some time to migrate to the valley: the New Town (Cambridge) Church under the leadership of the Reverend Thomas Hooker and the Reverend Samuel Stone and the Dorchester Church under the leadership of the Reverend John Warham. In addition, nine others came from the Watertown Church, under the leadership of John Oldham. They went on to establish towns called, at first, by the names of their original

communities—though Newtown was soon rechristened Hartford, Dorchester became Windsor, and Watertown was renamed Wethersfield.

In contrast, the pioneers who joined Pynchon's adventure further upstream were a mixed lot from various places and social backgrounds. John Woodcock, who had accompanied Pynchon on his exploratory expedition in 1635, was a Roxbury neighbor; he would figure in many legal scrapes with his fellow residents in the magistrate's court. Jehu Burr, also from Roxbury, was unable to write his name. John Cable came from Watertown, where he was punished in 1631 for teaming up with two others to steal three pigs.¹² Henry Smith, Pynchon's stepson, was also his son-in-law, since Henry and Pynchon's eldest daughter Ann married about this time. Diversity would continue to characterize immigrants to Springfield over the coming years. Some would be recruited from Barnet near London. A surprising number came from the West Country of England and towns nearby in Wales.¹³

Linking the Agawam colony to the Connecticut Valley venture made sense. Certainly, transporting freight was much more practicable via the Connecticut River. Pynchon's move to Agawam meant a sea voyage around Cape Cod and into Long Island Sound, then a journey up the Connecticut. So he rented two boats in July 1636 from John Winthrop, Jr. (1606–1676). One was the *Batchelor* and the other the *Blessing of the Bay*, a thirty-ton bark which had been constructed in Medford and was the second seagoing craft ever built in New England. Forty tons of supplies for the new colony were loaded aboard and transported as far as Wethersfield. The cost was £82. Pynchon recorded that the fare for "my Son Smyth and 3 daughters and 1 maid" amounted to £2 10s.¹⁴

THE DEED

In addition to this migration to the valley, the month of July saw another momentous event: the signing of the deed to Agawam and Springfield on July 15, 1636. This contract was made by thirteen individual Agawam Indians, who signed by drawing personal symbols such as bows and arrows, and by nine settlers who signed their names or their marks. The payment of eighteen fathoms of wampum and eighteen each of coats, hoes, hatchets, and knives served to confirm it. Interestingly, in a deal which reflected the perceived value of the land for farming, but not the subsequent economic developments in the area, Pynchon paid more than twice as much for what is now Agawam and West Springfield than he did for the area of present-day Springfield and Longmeadow.¹⁵

The 1636 “Agaam” deed for Springfield (as it is spelled in the original) was remarkable and noteworthy for a number of important features. Its provisions were at the time unique and broke new ground for relations with Native peoples. It set a solid standard for clarity, flexibility, and even generosity. In the first place, Pynchon recognized that Native occupants of the land were its rightful “owners” from an English point of view. Unlike most other Puritan leaders, he did not accept the so-called *vacuum domicilium* argument—a “nobody lives here” view—namely, that if there were no residents to be seen the land was up for grabs. In 1622, the Pilgrim Robert Cushman had offered that rationalization in his section of what is called *Mourt’s Relation*, titled “Reasons and considerations touching the lawfullnesse of removing out of England into the parts of America.”¹⁶ In a brief 1629 treatise on “Generall considerations for the plantation in New England,” the future Governor John Winthrop (1587/88–1649) responded in the same way to a question concerning what right the would-be colonists had to take the Indians’ lands. Winthrop wrote:

This savage people ruleth over many lands without title or property; for they inclose no ground, neither have they cattell to maintayne it, but remove their dwellings as they have occasion, or as they can prevail against their neighbours. And why may not christians have liberty to go and dwell amongst them in their waste lands and woods (leaving them such places as they have manured for their corne).

John Cotton (1585-1652), teaching pastor of the Church of Boston, had expressed the same conviction to the departing Winthrop company back in England. As the colonists prepared to set sail from the Isle of Wight, in a farewell sermon, “God’s Promise to His Plantation,” Cotton exhorted them:

Where there is a vacant place, there is liberty for the sonnes of Adam or Noah to come and inhabite, though they neither buy it, or ask their leaves . . . it is a Principle in Nature, That in a vacant soyle, hee that taketh possession of it, and bestoweth culture and husbandry upon it, his Right it is.

Pynchon’s neighbors in the valley put it even more starkly. The Connecticut General Court spoke of maintaining “our right that God by Conquest hath given to vs.”¹⁷

But Pynchon held a different view. His perspective seems to have emerged in part from studies of English law and from his service as a magistrate.¹⁸ For Pynchon, standards of fair treatment applied to everyone. Natives, in fact, won both of the cases they brought against English colonists in Pynchon's court—complaints which were probably lodged at Pynchon's behest.¹⁹ His views on Natives' rights would have been shaped not only by his understanding of the law but also by his personal convictions, including the Puritan "principle of equity" so evident in the Springfield covenant, which, as historian David H. Hall points out, involved "strong hopes for even-handedness . . . [e]xpecting fairness and reason to prevail."²⁰

In any case, Pynchon maintained that a legal purchase agreement had to be made with the Indians. To be sure, this involved introducing and imposing an alien concept of land "ownership" that was not precisely in keeping with Native ways—although Roger Williams reported that Natives appeared to practice land sales and purchases among themselves.²¹ Still, reaching agreements with indigenous people in such a conscientious way was rarely a consideration for other English settlers.

Moreover, Pynchon's agreement was careful to guarantee certain rights to the Agawam Indians by providing that:

they shall have and enjoy al that Cotinackeesh [an Agawam word for cultivated ground], or ground that is now planted; And have liberty to take Fish and Deer, ground nuts, walnuts, akornes, and sachiminesh 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 Agaam but in akorne time.

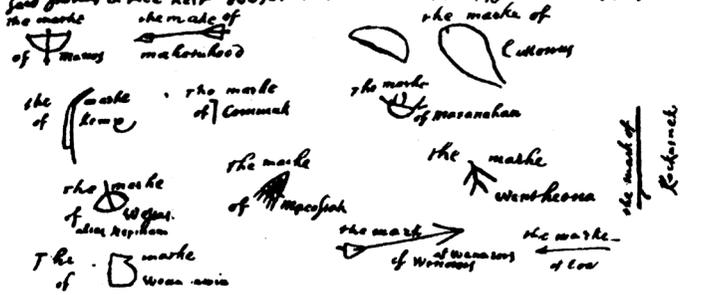
This agreement reveals Pynchon's developing respect for Native culture in a number of ways. Indeed, his carefulness in dealing with Indians began at the very outset of the settlement when he abandoned original plans to settle on the site of present-day Agawam, on the river's west bank, in order to leave the indigenous community there intact. The agreement went on to guarantee the local tribe certain privileges. It specified rights they required to continue their way of life, at least in some measure. It acknowledged their hunting, agricultural and foraging traditions. It also made pointed references to particular women by specifically naming Kewenusk, the mother of the Agawam's chief sachem, Cuttonus, and Niarum the wife of Coes (or Coa), who seem to have been mentioned at the Agawams' insistence because of the roles they played in the tribe. Whether inadvertently or not, Pynchon was

A copy of a deed whereby the Indians at Springfield made sale of certain land on both sides the great River at Springfield to William Pynchon Esq: in Henry Smith & John Burr, for the Town of Springfield for ever. (19)

Agawam
this Agawam: This fifteenth day of July, 1636

It is agreed between Commucke & Matanchar ancient Indians of Agawam Springfield
nam for & in the Name of all the other Indians & in particular for & in the Name of
his mother Kewanush the Tamaheom or wife of Agawam, & in the Name of
his wife of Coa to & with William Pynchon Henry, But their heirs &
assignes for ever. to touch & sell at their ground & muchequitray or me =
on the side of Agawam. except Cominackest or ground that is now planted
for ten fathom of Wampam. Ten Coats, Ten Rows, Ten baskets, &
Ten knives: and also the said ancient Indians with the Consent of
the rest. & in particular of the Consent of Mery & Wababona & Mo =
dampnam. do touch & sell to William Pynchon Henry Smith & John
Burr. & their assigns for ever. at what ground on the East side of Quin =
nawet River called Wiganaw to Naybet reaching about four or five miles in
length from the mouth of Mofakinda up to Chickopee River for four fa =
thom of Wampam. four Coats, four Rows, four baskets, four knives. Also
the said ancient Indians Doe with the Consent of the other Indians, &
in particular of the Consent of Masketahed Wenepawm, & Moshmoo
make & sell the ground & muchequitray, & grounds adjoyning called Ma =
shucke for four fathom of wampam. four Coats, four baskets & four knives
before himself.

And the said Pynchon hath in hand paid the said eighteen fathom of
wampam, eighteen coats, 18 baskets, 18 Rows, 18 knives & the said
Commucke & Matanchar. & doth further condition with the Indians,
that they shall have & enjoy all what gottinackest, or grounds that is now
planted; And have liberty to take Fish & Deer. ground nuts, walnuts, &
cherries, & such more or a kind of pease, And also if any of the said spoils
& hair come, to pay as it is worth, & that they shall not goe on the side of
Agawam within three time: Also the said Pynchon doth give to Wra
thema, over & above the said Particulars expressed, & in Witness hereof the two
said Indians & the rest doe set to their hands. this fifteenth day of July, 1636



TEXT OF THE “AGAAM DEED”

A copy of a deed Whereby the Indians at Springfeild made Sale of certaine lands on both sides the great River at Springfeild to William Pynchon Esq. &c:

mr Henry Smith & Jehu Burr, for the Town of Springfeild for ever.

Agaam alias Agawam this fifteenth day of July, 1636

It is agreed between Commucke & Matanchan ancient Indians of Agaam for & in the name of al the other Indians, & in particular for & in the name of Cuttonus the right owner of Agaam & Quana, & in the Name of his mother Kewenusk the tamaham or wife of Wenawis, & Niarum the wife of Coa, to & with William Pynchon, Henry Smith & Jehu Burr their heires & associates for ever to trucke & set at that ground & muckeosquittaj on medow, accomsick viz: on the other side of Quana; & at the ground & muckeosquittaj on the side of Agaam, except Cottinackeesh or ground that is now planted for ten Fatham of Wampam, Ten coates, Ten howes, Ten hatchets, & Ten knives; and also the said ancient Indians with the Consent of the rest, & in particular with the Consent of Menis & Wrutherna & Napompenam, do trucke & sel to William Pynchon, Henry Smith & Jehu Burr, & their Successors for ever, al that ground on the East side of Quinnecticot River called Usquaiok & Nayasset reaching about four or five miles in Length, from the north end of Masaksicke up to Chickuppe River, for four fatham of wampam, four coates, four howes, four hatchets, four knives: Also the said ancient Indians Does with the Consent of the other Indians, & in particular with the Consent of Machethood Wenepawin, & Mohemoos trucke & sel the ground & Muckeosquittaj, & grounds adjoyning, called Masaksicke, for four fatham of wampam, four coates, four hatchets & four howes, & four knives.

And the said Pynchon hath in hand paid the said eighteen fatham of wampam, eighteen coates, 18 hatchets, 18 howes, 18 knives, to the said Commucke & Matanchan, & doth further condition with the Said Indians, that they shal have & enjoy all that Cottinackeesh, or ground that is now planted; And have liberty to take Fish & Deer, ground nuts, walnuts akornes, & Sasashiminesh or a kind of pease,

And also if any of the cattle spoile their corne, to pay as it is worth; & that hogs shal not goe on the side of Agaam but in akorne times: Also the said Pynchon doth give to Wrutherna two coates over & above

the said Particulars expressed, & In Witnes hereof the said Indians & the Rest, doe set to their hands, this present 15th day of July, 1636.

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| The marke of X Menis | The marke of X Macassack |
| The marke of X Kenix | The marke X of Wineawis |
| The marke of X Ussessas alias Nepineum | The marke of X Cuttonus |
| The marke of X Winepawin | The marke X of Matanchan |
| The marke of X Machetuhood | The marke of X Wrutherna |
| The marke of X Commuk | The marke X of Coa |
| The marke X of Keckusnek. | |

Witnesse to all with in expressed that they understood al
by Ahaughton an Indian of the Massachusett

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| John Allen | The marke of X John Cownes |
| The marke of X Richard Everet | |
| Faithful Thayeler | Thomas Horton |
| The marke of X Ahaughton | Joseph Parsons |

Joseph Parsons a Testimony to this Deed did at the Court at Northampton, March 1661: 62 : testify on oath that he was a witness to this bargaine between mr Pynchon &c & the Indians as attests Elizur Holyoke Recorder. July: 8th 1679 entred the Records for ye County of Hampshire by me John Holyoke Recorder.

Source: Hampden County Records, Liber A-B, fol. 19

The original of this copy of the deed (which internal evidence suggests was made at least three years later than the 1636 execution date of the deed itself) is reproduced and transcribed in Mason Arnold Green. Springfield 1636-1886, History of Town and City (Springfield, MA: C.A. Nichols, 1888), 11-14.

showing respect for the matriarchal traditions which were so important to Native peoples.

Furthermore, by including Algonquian words to clarify precisely what the agreement entailed, the deed indicated Pynchon's appreciation for Indian language. Pynchon seems to have understood the rudiments of the Agawam dialect, certainly well enough to communicate on daily matters; by one report he was reputed to be "best exercised in the Indian language" among those in the valley.²² In addition to place names, such as Masaksick (long meadow), Accomsick (land on the other side of the river), Usquaiok (the end of the land), Nayasset (at the corner), the deed uses the words muckeosquittaj (meadows), sashiminesh (peas), cotinackeesh (cultivated ground), and tamaham (wife). The advantage of including such language was clear: the Indians would recognize some key terms on hearing the document read aloud, which could lead to greater trust.²³

It is important to emphasize that only the two deeds signed by William Pynchon, for Springfield and for Chicopee, contained all these features—a specified payment, rights for Natives, women's names, and words from the Native language.²⁴

William's son and successor, John Pynchon (1625-1703) continued his father's practice of including rights requested by the Natives in the deeds with which he was involved throughout the seventeenth century. He acquired land through at least twelve deeds, in all of which Indian rights were specified, even in two deeds which were devised when trust was at an all-time low after the devastating King Philip's War of 1675-1676.²⁵ So the pattern of land transactions established by William Pynchon had a long-lasting impact throughout the seventeenth century in western Massachusetts.

A comparison with Indian deeds of other Puritan communities, such as Boston, Salem, and Hartford, makes it very clear that Pynchon's approach was at the time unique. The closest parallel was the March 24, 1638 deed to Providence, Rhode Island, dated less than two years after the Springfield deed. It was a memorandum referring to an earlier (and apparently unwritten) agreement made between Roger Williams and the sachems Canonicus and his nephew Miantinomo. However, the Rhode Island text simply identified the lands the Indians ceded to Williams, without mentioning a purchase price.²⁶

Plymouth Colony did keep a "Book of Indian Records for Their Lands," beginning in 1664. Like the Providence deed, the earliest document in it simply conveyed total ownership to the buyer; no price was specified, and there were no stipulations of any rights or privileges or acreages reserved to the Indians. The earliest Plymouth deed which contained Native names

related to Barnstable on Cape Cod, and was dated 1641; but that deed also included no Native words and no purchase price. Moreover, there is no deed for Plymouth itself. 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 record in Commonwealth sources of any earlier document. Like the 1670 “renewal” deed to Hartford, made as a “replacement” of a long-lost 1636 pact with Sunckquasson, or the 1686 deed to Salem, the surviving, later texts are all straightforward property transfers modeled on the English pattern.²⁷ They seem to have been made—or perhaps better, made up—retroactively. Most of the earliest Puritan colonists appear to have considered the King’s charter to the Massachusetts Bay Company sufficient warrant to occupy New England properties. Pynchon demanded more.

Pynchon stated his views clearly in a letter to Governor Winthrop on July 5, 1648:

I grant they [the Natives of Brookfield] are all within the line of your patent, but yet you cannot say that therefore they are your subject or yet within your Jurisdiction until they have fully subjected themselves to your government (which I know they have not) & until you have bought their land: until this be done they must be esteemed as an Independent free people.²⁸

In making this claim Pynchon agreed with Roger Williams, who expressly articulated his opposition to using the charter to justify taking Indian lands. Williams traced his principles back to qualms he first experienced in Salem in 1632. Commenting on what he called “the sinne of the Pattents”—namely, that Christian kings “(so calld)” are empowered “to take and give away the Lands and Countries of other men”—Williams recalled that:

before his [own] Troubles and Banishment, he drew up a Letter (not without the Approbation of some of the Chiefe of New-England, then tender also upon this point before God) directed unto the King himselfe, humbly acknowledging the Evill of that part of the Pattent which respects the Donation of Land, &c.²⁹

In light of his later stance it seems particularly likely that one of “the Chiefe of New-England” who agreed with Williams was Pynchon.

Did the Pynchon deeds hold up and were Indian rights respected over the decades which followed? After hostilities escalated with King Philip’s War, and Massachusetts imposed increasingly repressive and inhumane

restrictions on Natives, by the end of the century it became a serious question (as Margaret Bruchac has pointed out) whether “the English actually intended to honor Native rights in the long run.”³⁰ Still, the agreements specified in the Springfield deeds do seem to have been honored for decades. Court cases through the 1660s reflected the original deed’s stipulations, including those regarding crops. Springfield property grants to English settlers in 1665 and 1666 were made with the repeated condition that there be “noe wrong to the Indians” and no hindering “theire taking of their Pease.”³¹ One historian has remarked that “Indians [in Massachusetts] who owned land at the end of the seventeenth century had a clearer and stronger claim to the land than their ancestors in the 1630’s.”³² Natives continued to seek redress in John Pynchon’s court, where they won the only two suits they initiated.³³ But as a result of easily available English credit, from 1660 to 1662 a distressing number of Natives were forced to forfeit their land in the valley through “mortgage deeds,” when they were ultimately unable to repay what they had borrowed.³⁴

Pynchon’s positive relationships with Native peoples were surely affected to a considerable degree by his commercial interests. Indeed, the very exercise of trade created an interdependent Indian – English market which could stimulate “individuals in both societies to reach an accord on other matters.”³⁵ Though Pynchon held no exalted or romantic views of those he would have considered his nonchristian neighbors, he was clearly concerned that hostility between Indians and settlers would be very bad for business. And he simply did not want to see any blood shed on either side, “English as well as Indians.”³⁶

Still, as one historian has observed, “The manner in which Springfield and its founder William Pynchon related to and viewed its Indian neighbors was very uncommon in Puritan society.”³⁷ Pynchon made it his business to know and understand Indians. He mentioned individuals he knew by name.³⁸ He did not disparage Natives with prejudicial words such as “wild” or “savage” or “heathen.” It seems quite reasonable to conclude that Indian-English relationships in early colonial New England, and perhaps even thereafter, could have followed a much more humane and productive course if William Pynchon’s principles and practices had prevailed.

*** Editor’s Note:** To read more about this intriguing figure, see David M. Powers’ full biography of William Pynchon, *Damnable Heresy: William Pynchon, the Indians, and the First Book Banned (and Burned) in Boston* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

AFTERWORD: PYNCHON SOURCES & HISTORIOGRAPHY

(This afterword is excerpted from David Powers' Introduction to *Damnable Heresy: William Pynchon, the Indians, and the First Book Banned (and Burned) in Boston*, pages xvi-xix.)

The story of William Pynchon, a colonial entrepreneur, Puritan magistrate, and unorthodox theologian, is not only a study in heretical discourse. It also highlights factors which proved formative in shaping community in early New England. The Pynchon case illuminates the development of politics, both ecclesiastical and political—the forms of governance which Puritans developed on these shores. Francis J. Bremer has identified as one of the Puritan enterprise's basic challenges “how and where to position the perimeter fence dividing what was acceptable from what was not.”³⁹ Set loose from the traditional givens of monarchical government, the state-sanctioned Episcopal Church, and centuries-old village institutions in England, the immigrants to New England had to take on the task of establishing a godly society of their own devising. William Pynchon spent much of his life in New England doing just that, helping to define the boundaries of that society—until one day he found himself on the wrong side of the fence. His story culminated in his condemnatory treatment at the hands of the Massachusetts legislature, and in his subsequent responses to public censure.

A handful of relatively concise publications in past decades have presented portions of William Pynchon's story. Ezra Hoyt Byington's “Sketch of William Pynchon” appeared in the *Andover Review* in 1886; it summarized the scholarship then available and was included in rewritten form as the chapter “William Pynchon, Gent.” in Byington's 1897 *The Puritan in England and New England*. Historian Samuel Eliot Morrison presented a lecture in the 1930s on “William Pynchon, The Founder of Springfield,” which he later recast as a supplemental chapter in *Builders of the Bay Colony*. Ruth A. McIntyre's 1961 booklet for the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, titled *William Pynchon, Merchant and Colonizer 1590–1662*, paid particular attention to commercial aspects of his life.

More recently Philip F. Gura included a chapter in his 1984 volume, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660*, entitled “William Pynchon,” in which he sought to identify Pynchon's intellectual antecedents and connections. Michael P. Winship's 1997 article, “Contesting Control of Orthodoxy among the Godly: William Pynchon Reexamined” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* detailed the tensions between and among Puritan thinkers which were exemplified by Pynchon's case. Marty O'Shea's article on “Springfield's Puritans and Indians: 1636–

1655,” in the *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* (1998), highlighted unusual factors in Pynchon’s relationships with Native peoples. These all offered either basic introductions to Pynchon’s life or insights into his theology; none exceeded forty pages.

In addition to these articles, Peter A. Thomas’ unpublished 1979 dissertation for the University of Massachusetts, “In the Maelstrom of Change: The Indian Trade and Cultural Process in the Middle Connecticut River Valley, 1635–1665,” provided much helpful information on economic and intercultural factors at work in the Connecticut River Valley in the seventeenth century. And Stephen Innes’ 1983 book, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth Century Springfield*, applied anthropological and sociological insights to William Pynchon’s story, as well as the much longer story of his son John.

While past studies have laid down a foundation and have as well suggested various possible directions for the lines of inquiry I have pursued, my approach to the Pynchon story has required concentrated focus on primary sources. Reconsidering the original data has led to several adjustments and revisions in the received interpretation of Pynchon’s achievements. I have examined a wide array of documents from that era. An untranslated Latin theological treatise, English manorial court minutes, land transfers, official Colony records, bills of lading, minutes of British Parliamentary maneuvers, and a paper trail of Pynchon’s writings, his Springfield Court Record, and personal letters, all came into play and served to situate him and his intriguing story in its own time and place. Other details helped to complete the picture: Puritan booksellers in London and their wares, the exchange rate for wampum, changes in the local price of corn, the weight of a beaver’s hide.

Part I is titled “A Puritan’s Journey.” It presents Pynchon’s life through a series of chapters; each begins with an incident that exposes an arena of Pynchon’s life. From his origins in Essex County during the waning days of Elizabethan England, the story winds through his involvement with the Massachusetts Bay Company and immigration to America in 1630. It then traces his emergence as a respected leader and businessman in the Bay Colony and the founder of a plantation at the western frontier of the English presence, on the Connecticut River. It considers Pynchon’s relationships with Native peoples, which were unusually constructive for the era. Then, following the appearance of his problematic theological treatise and its fiery condemnation, the account charts his struggles with the Massachusetts General Court, return to England, and subsequent writings.

Part II, titled “The Plight of William Pynchon,” offers an analysis of the various ecclesiastical and political dynamics at work around his case. His

aristocratic assumptions, for one, led to a divergent view on the nature of the church; he assumed a single national church structure as the norm, with a privileged role for magistrates like himself in ecclesiastical affairs. His lack of involvement with the colony's political processes resulted in a growing distance from emerging democratic trends which led to expansion of the franchise. Though Pynchon was an opponent of "liberty of conscience," in an ironic twist he was charged with publishing unacceptable ideas of his own—yet a minority in the Massachusetts legislature voted to support him.

As a native of Springfield, Massachusetts, I have long had an interest in its earliest days, and particularly the part the Pynchons played in shaping its life. From a map of the early days of Pynchon's settlement in a book by Springfield historian Harry Andrew Wright, which I discovered in the attic of my uncle's home on Westfield Street in West Springfield, to a paper for C. Conrad Wright's "American Church History" class at Harvard Divinity School, to extensive research since retirement in both New England and Old, I have explored as much of the story as I could, wherever the trail might lead. I am pleased to share the results of that journey with you.

HJM



"Mr. Pyncheon and the Settling of Springfield," 1937 WPA Mural, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State Office Building (formerly the original Post Office, Springfield, MA)

Umberto Romano Mural

Umberto Romano's highly imaginative 1937 mural, "Mr. Pynchon and the Settling of Springfield," seems to have been designed to evoke phenomena related to Springfield's earliest days. Although details in the painting's background reflect the architecture of a much later era, they point to the Puritan ethos in which Springfield was founded. Native American men and women are pictured as passive, almost childish onlookers, endorsing common stereotypes. One sits in a dugout canoe while looking at himself in a mirror. A Native American woman sits fully naked with her buttocks exposed, which bears no resemblance to local native clothing styles.

The scene also endorses stereotypes of the Puritan venture, including two instances of physical punishment and a fanciful witch on a broom in the sky. The swashbuckling figure at the center, dressed in a rose-pink suit, raises some questions. He is usually identified as William Pynchon, and the facial features bear some resemblance to the historic portrait of Pynchon; but in addition to his foppish clothing and Cavalier's hat and sword, he is wearing as well what seems to be long hair -- not the garb or haircut favored by Pynchon. The figure just behind him, on the other hand, is dressed more appropriately and may even be holding a bolt of cloth. Pynchon stocked both yard goods and mirrors in his store.

Born in Italy, muralist Umberto Romano (1906-82) moved to the U.S. at the age of nine and was raised in Springfield, where he completed some of his earliest art training. Romano then attended the American Academy in Rome. In 1934, he became the head of the Wooster Art Museum School. In 1937, he completed six mural panels in the Springfield Post Office. Romano's semi-abstract style is visible in the distorted human proportions and confusing sense of depth. Pynchon stands proudly in the center of the scene, orchestrating the movements of the many different people surrounding him. The mural is a mosaic of images. Although Native Americans are at the forefront of this scene, they steadily fade from view throughout the ensuing mural panels, and from the history and landscape of Springfield. Romano's work is held in prominent museums throughout the U.S.

Notes

1. In 1629, the Massachusetts Bay Company had obtained from King Charles I a charter empowering the company to trade and colonize in New England between the Charles and Merrimack Rivers. Although the Crown's intention was to create and authorize a commercial company, the Puritan leaders decided to transfer the management and the charter itself to Massachusetts and came to interpret it as a political constitution for a new government.
2. On the more egalitarian nature of Franco-Indian relations, see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). White defines the "middle ground" as a process of mutual accommodation between Algonquian-speaking Indians and French, British, and Americans. White argues that several conditions are necessary for this process: a relatively evenly-balanced distribution of power between peoples, the inability of one side to effectively use force over the other, and the need or desire to interact with one another (such as for trade goods) that encouraged relationships of mutual dependency.
3. Margaret M. Bruchac, "Native Presence in Nonotuck and Northampton," in Kerry W. Buckley, ed. *A Place Called Paradise: Culture & Community in Northampton, Massachusetts 1654-2004* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 24.
4. The brief biography in this introduction drew from the following sources: Stephen Innes, "The Pynchons and the People of Early Springfield," article posted on the website of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (Deerfield) at www.americancenturies.mass.edu (accessed 3/18/2017); Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton University Press, 1983); and Stephen J. Cote, "The Real William Pynchon: Merchant and Politician," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 4:2 (1975), 8-19. Cote concludes that Pynchon was a "classic example of the mercantile colonist" (12) who came to the New World to "seek his fortune" and succeeded (19).
5. See Henry Martyn Burt, *The First Century of Springfield* (Springfield, MA: 1898), 1:156-160, for the text of the original May 14, 1636 covenant which created the community, and the addendum of May 16, 1636, from which details in this and the next paragraph are drawn.
6. David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 143.
7. Details on the Springfield covenant in this and the previous paragraph are drawn from Burt, *First Century*, 1:15 and 156-160.
8. Pynchon to John Winthrop, letter in Allyn B. Forbes, ed., *Winthrop Papers* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1947), 3:267.
9. For an explanation of the term "segmentary tribe," see Marshall Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968). Peter A. Thomas and Margaret Bruchac also use the term in describing Algonquian peoples of the Pioneer Valley (see next endnote for citations).

10. Peter A. Thomas, "Bridging the Cultural Gap: Indian/White Relations," in *Early Settlement in the Connecticut Valley* (Historic Deerfield, 1984), 5-21; Peter A. Thomas, "Contrastive Subsistence Strategies," *Ethnohistory* 23:1 (1976): 5-7; and Peter A. Thomas, "In the Maelstrom of Change: The Indian Trade and Cultural Process in the Middle Connecticut River Valley, 1635-1665" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1979), 10. For more on the Native inhabitants of the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts, see Bruchac, "Native Presence in Nonotuck and Northampton"; Margaret M. Bruchac, "Revisiting Pocumtuck History in Deerfield: George Sheldon's Vanishing Indian Act," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 39:1 & 2 (2011), 30-77; Peter A. Thomas, "Into the Maelstrom of Change," in Buckley, ed., *A Place Called Paradise*, 5-17; and Margaret M. Bruchac and Peter A. Thomas, "Locating 'Wissatinnewag' in John Pynchon's Letter of 1663," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 34:1 (2006), 56-82. (Bruchac and Thomas argue that the village of Wissatinnewag was situated on the Housatonic, rather than the Connecticut River.) In addition, although she doesn't focus on the Connecticut River Valley, Kathleen J. Bragdon discusses common features and significant differences among the Pawtucket, Massachusett, Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, Narragansett, Pokanoket, Niantic, Mohegan, and Pequot Indians in *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).
11. The "Commission" is in Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, M.D., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay* (Boston: William White, 1854), 1:170-171. For brief accounts of the founding of the earliest Connecticut settlements on the Connecticut River, see Robert J. Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut - A History* (Millwood, NY: KTO, 1979), 6-10, and Mary Jeanne Anderson Jones, *Congregational Commonwealth, Connecticut 1636-1662* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 26-35.
12. The Cable case is in Shurtleff, *Records*, 1:85.
13. Bernard Bailyn, *The Barbarous Years: The Peopling of British North America: The Conflict of Civilizations, 1600-1675* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 421, 422, indicates that nearly half the settlers from Windsor north along the Connecticut River were from the West Country of England. For an account of indentured servants from Barnet, see Joseph H. Smith, *Colonial Justice in Western Massachusetts (1636-1702) - The Pynchon Court Record* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 224-226.
14. Mason Arnold Green, *Springfield 1636-1886, History of Town and City* (Springfield, MA: C.A. Nichols, 1888), 4; *Winthrop Papers*, 2:285-286, 314. On the Blessing of the Bay, see John Robinson and George Francis Dow, *The Sailing Ships of New England 1606-1907* (Salem, MA: Marine Research Society, 1922), 11-12.
15. The original deed with the Indians is reproduced and its text given in Green, 12-14. At the time of the purchase, Pynchon's band included eighteen men, several of whom did not stay very long, and all of whom (including Pynchon) eventually moved from Springfield.
16. *Mourt's Relation* (full title: *A Relation or Journal of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New England*) was a compilation written

between November of 1620 and November of 1621. It describes in detail the Pilgrim's landing at Cape Cod, their settling at Plymouth, and their relations with Native Americans. *Mourt's Relation* was first published in London in 1622, presumably by George Morton (the "Mourt" of the title).

17. William Bradford, ed. *A Relation or Journall ...* ("Mourt's Relation") (London: John Bellamie, 1622), 68; John Winthrop, "Generall Considerations," in Thomas Hutchinson, *A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay* (1769; reprint, Carlisle, MA: Applewood, 2009), 30; John Cotton, *God's Promise to His Plantation* (London: John Bellamy, 1630), 4, 5; and J. Hammond Trumbell, ed., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (Hartford: Brown & Parsons, 1850), 1:10 (entry for June 2, 1637).

18. Pynchon favored two legal texts: Sir John Fortescue's volume on constitutional law and Michael Dalton's *The Countrey Iustice*. Two months after he wrote to Governor Winthrop about the Dalton volume, the General Court bought two copies to have "better light for making & proceeding about laws." (Shurtleff, Records, 2:212)

19. For cases brought by Coa against Francis Ball (May 4, 1648) and Nippinsait against Thomas Miller (June 10, 1650), see Smith, 217, 223.

20. Hall, 147.

21. Roger Williams quoted in Howard M. Chapin, ed., *A Key into the Language of America* (1643; reprint, Carlisle, MA: Applewood, 1997), 95.

22. Worthington Chauncey Ford, "Letters of William Pynchon," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 48 (1915), 42-43.

23. For the texts of Pynchon deeds see Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hampden County* (Springfield, MA, 1905). Other Algonquian words are found in deeds by both William and John Pynchon, including weakshackquock (candlewood or pitch pine). All spellings are from the originals.

24. *Ibid.* The Chicopee deed includes the word for "swamp" – *pissak*. All spellings are from the originals.

25. See the deeds to Hampden (1678) and Enfield (1681) in Wright, 89-92 and 94-96.

26. For the text of the Williams deed, see John Russell Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England, 1636-1663* (Providence, RI: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856), 1:18. The original is preserved in the Rhode Island State Archives.

27. For Plymouth, see David Pulsifer, *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth, 1620-1651* (Boston: William White, 1861), 12: 225-244. On the Boston deed, see Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 138. The Hartford Renewal Deed is given in Nathaniel Goodwin, *Descendents of Thomas Olcott* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1845), 62-63. For other jurisdictions, see Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, *Indian Deeds: Land Transactions in Plymouth Colony, 1620-1691* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002) and Sidney Perley,

The Indian Land Titles of Essex County, Massachusetts (Salem, MA: Essex Book and Print Club, 1912).

28. J. H. Temple, *History of North Brookfield, Massachusetts*. (North Brookfield, MA: Town of North Brookfield, 1887), 36.

29. Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody* (London: Giles Calvert, 1652), 276, 277.

30. Bruchac, "Revisiting Pocumtuck," 44.

31. Burt, *First Century*, 1: 342, 346, 352; also 363, 385.

32. Christopher W. Hannon, "Indian Land in Seventeenth Century Massachusetts," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 29:1 (2001).

33. Smith, 243, 268. Indians (whose names were not recorded) were awarded compensation for corn trampled by cattle (September 27, 1659) and for the damage fifteen young people and children did to a canoe when they took it for a joyride (June 22, 1664).

34. Wright, 40 (Westfield), 46-47 (Springfield), 48 (Hadley), and 49 (Agawam).

35. Thomas, "Maelstrom of Change" (dissertation), 201. "Where the boundaries of power domains were being contested, and where relative social isolation was maintained, economic exchanges furnished a forum for discussion and a bridge to compromise."

36. Forbes, *Winthrop Papers*, 5: 45 (September 15, 1645).

37. Marty O'Shea, "Springfield's Puritans and Indians," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 26:1 (1998), 46.

38. In his October 8, 1644 letter to Stephen Day he mentioned Ta-mug-gut. Pynchon's 1648 letter named no less than nine individuals, all known to him: the prominent Massachusetts sachem Cutshamokin, the Quinnipiac sachem Sequassen, his own translator Nippinsait, the Nonotuck sachem Chickwallup, the Quaboag sachem Quacunquasit, Wottowan, Reskeshonege, Pamshad, and Wawhillam. Many others are listed in Pynchon deeds and in entries recorded on unnumbered pages at the back of his account book in the Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

39. Francis Bremer, *First Founders: American Puritans and Puritanism in an Atlantic World* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), 5.