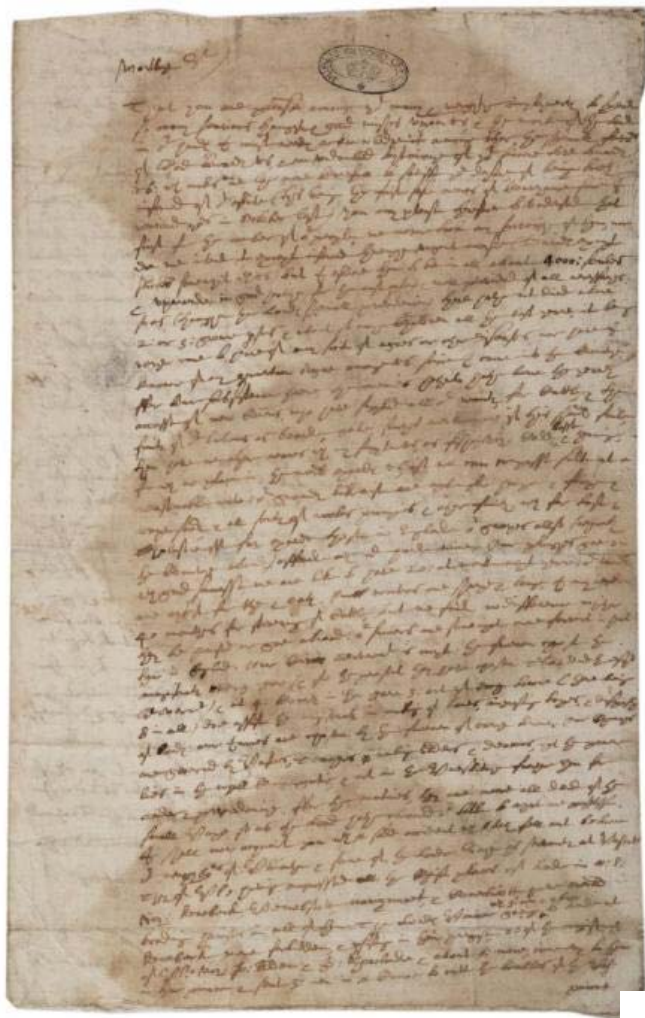


Winthrop, John (1588-1649) to Nathaniel Rich



Gilder Lehrman Collection #: GLC01105

Author/Creator: Winthrop, John (1588-1649)

Place Written: Boston, Massachusetts

Type: Autograph letter signed

Date: 22 May 1634

Pagination: 2 p. 31 x 20 cm

Summary of Content: Reply to an October 1633 letter from Sir Nathaniel Rich inquiring about conditions in the colony. Describes Boston and the local Native Americans and mentions Royal Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony Thomas Dudley, Mr. Parker, John Alden, and John Howland, the last two in reference to an altercation on the Pascataqua River. Written just after Winthrop's first term as Royal Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

People: Winthrop, John, 1588-1649., Alden, John, 1599-1687. , Dudley, Thomas, 1576-1653.

Historical Era: Colonization and Settlement, 1585-1763

Full Transcript: Worthye Sr, That you are pleased among your many and weighty employments to spend so much serious thoughts and good wishes upon us, and the work of the Lord in our hands, I must needs acknowledge it among other the special favours of God towards us, and an undoubted testimony of your sincere Love towards us: which makes me the more careful to satisfy your desire, of being truly informed of our estate (this being the first safe meanes of Conveyance since I received yours in October last) you may please thereforeto understand that first, for the number of our people, we never took any survey of them, nor do we intend it, except enforced through urgent occasion (David's example sticks somewhat with us) [some Protestants interpreted the Bible as forbidding a census] but I esteem them to be in all about 4000 souls and upward: in good health (for the most parse) and well provided of all necessarys: so as (through the Lords special providence) there hath not died about 2 or 3 grown persons, and about so many Children all in the last year, it being verye rare to heare of any sick of agues or other diseases, nor have I known of any quartan Ague amonge us since I came into the Countrye. For Our susistence here, the means hitherto hath been the yearly access of newcomers, who have supplied all our wants, for Cattle, and the fruits of our la[b]ours, as board, pale, smiths work etc: If this should fail, then we have other meanes which may supply us, as fish viz: Cod, bass and herring, for which no place in the world exceeds us, if we can compass salt at a reasonable rate: our grounds likewise are apt for hemp and flax and rape seeds, and all sorts of roots, pumpkins and other fruits, which for taste and wholesomeness far exceed those in England: our grapes also (wherewith the Countrye abounds) afford a good hard wine. Our ploughs go on with good success, we are like to have 20 at work next year: our lands are aptest for Rye and oats. Our winters are sharp and longe, I may reckon 4 months for storing of cattle, but we find no difference whither they be housed or go abroad: our summers are somewhat more fervent in heat than in England. Our civil Government is mixt: the freemen choose the magistrates every year...and at 4 courts in

the year 3 out of each town (there being 8 in all) do assist the magistrates in making laws, imposing taxes, and disposing of lands: our furies are chosen by the freemen of every town. Our Churches are governed by Pastors, Teachers ruling Elders and Deacons, yet the power lies in the whole Congregation and not in the Presbytery [not in a larger council of churches] further than for order and precedence. For the natives, they are near all dead of the smallpox, so the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess.

Keywords/Subjects: American Indian History, Government & Civics

Sub Era: Early Settlements, The 13 Colonies

Background: In a letter written in Boston four years after its founding, John Winthrop (1606-1676) explains the difficulties of establishing a self-sustaining, self-governing settlement and describes the colonists' mounting conflict with the Indians. , Compared to the Southeast, it was much more difficult for native peoples of New England to resist the encroaching English colonists. For one thing, the Northeast was much less densely populated. Epidemic diseases introduced by European fishermen and fur traders reduced the population of New England's coastal Indians about 90 percent by the early 1620s. Further, this area was fragmented politically into autonomous villages with a long history of bitter tribal rivalries. Such factors allowed the Puritans to expand rapidly across New England. , Some groups, notably the Massachusetts, whose number had fallen from about 20,000 to just 750 in 1631, allied with the Puritans and agreed to convert to Christianity in exchange for military protection. But the migration of Puritan colonists into western Massachusetts and Connecticut during the 1630s provoked bitter warfare, especially with the Pequots, the area's most powerful people. In 1636, English settlers accused a Pequot of attacking ships and murdering several sailors; in revenge, they burned a Pequot settlement on what is now Block Island, Rhode Island. Pequot raids left about 30 colonists dead. A combined force of Puritans and Narragansett and Mohegan Indians retaliated by surrounding and setting fire to the main Pequot village on the Mystic River. , In his History of Plymouth Plantation, William Bradford described the destruction by fire of the Pequot's major village, in which at least 300 Indians were burned to death: "Those that escaped from the fire were slain with the sword; some hewed to pieces, others run threw with their rapiers [swords]....It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fier, and the streams of blood quenching the same." The survivors were enslaved and shipped to the Caribbean. Altogether about 800 of 3,500 Pequot were killed during the Pequot War. In his epic novel Moby Dick, Herman Melville names his doomed whaling ship The Pequod, a clear reference to earlier events in New England.

LOC Search Terms: 17th Century., Pequod., Puritans., Indians.

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