

Letters of William Bradford

to Governor John Winthrop

To our Worshipful Friends Mr. Winthrop Governor of the Massachusetts and the rest of the Council there.

Gentlemen, and worthily beloved friends,

We have now at length returned an answer to your letter dated the 26 of July (the reason we have so long deferred the same, is because we have had no court till the last month being January). The sum whereof is this: that we are willing to correspond with you in this, or any other neighborly course, so far as may no way be prejudicial to any, or swerve from the rules of equity. How far Mr. Winslow expressed the agreement you intimate we know not (seeing he is absent) but our meaning, and former practice, was and hath been, only of such as come to dwell, and inhabit, whether as servants, or free men; and not of sojourners which come but for a season, with a purpose to return, yet if any abuse should grow hereby; we shall agree to any good order for the preventing or redressing of the same; provided the way be left open for poor men to relieve their wants, and for mutual help to both plantations. We have therefore given warning in open court to all our people; not to receive any as servants, or other dwellers with them, but to acquaint us first therewith that we may enquire of their certificates or dismissions; but we have set no penalty upon it as yet, because we hope there shall be no need if there be we have liberty to punish such things at our discretions; if that will not serve; when we understand what penalty you appoint in the case, we shall do the like, or that which shall be equivalent unto it. As for the instances you give; we find that John Phillips when he came was sick and if he had not been by some received to house he had been in danger to have perished, he alleged he was sent by his master to seek a service; yet as a servant he was not entertained by any; till his master came and sold his time, (not to him that gave him house room) but to him that would give most, so he had no cause to complain, for John Pickworth he came but as a sojourner to work for a few weeks, in which time he got a wife, and so is long since returned double, and hath no cause to complain, except he hath got a bad wife. Richard Church came likewise as a sojourner to work for the present; though he is still here resident longer than he purposed; and what he will do, neither, we nor I think himself knows; but if he resolve here to settle we shall require of him to procure a dismissal; but he did affirm to us at the first, that he was one of Mr. Webb's men, and freed to go for England or whither he would, the which we the rather believed because he came to us from Wessagussett upon the falling out with his partner; for others intimated, we know none (though we have enquired) but they had a dismissal either to come hither, or go for England. Now there are diverse gone from hence, to dwell and inhabit with you, as Clement Briggs, John Hill, John Eedy, Daniel Ray, etc. the which if either you, or they desire their dismissions; we shall be ready to give them; hoping you will do the like; in the like cases, though we have heard something otherwise. This with our prayers to the Lord for your prosperity, as our own, and our hearty salutations unto you all we rest,

Your assured loving friends,

Plymouth, Feb. 6, 1631.

Samuel Fuller

John Alden

William Bradford Governor

Myles Standish

Thomas Prence

To the Right Worshipful Mr. John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts, these be.

Beloved Sir,

I thank you for your letter to Mrs. Hutchinson; I heard since of a monstrous, and prodigious birth which she should discover amongst you; as also that she should retract her confession or acknowledgement of those errors, before she went away; of which I have heard many various reports. If your leisure would permit I should be much beholden unto you, to certify me in a word or two, of the truth and form of that monster, etc. Upon the information and complaint of our neighbors at Scituate, I am requested by our assistants to write unto you, touching a late partition, or limiting of confines, between you and us: of which we heard nothing till of late. Wherein we understand you have entrenched far upon those lands, which we have conceived to belong to us by right divers ways: as first by commission, and ancient compact with the natives to whom the right and sovereignty of them did belong, which did extend as far as Cohasset, which was the bounds between the Sachems of the Massachusetts, and those of these parts. 2ly. It since hath been confirmed unto us by a patent from His Majesty's authority. 3ly. Hereupon we have possessed it, and planted it some years ago. We desire you will give us a reason of your proceedings herein; as also that there may be a fair and friendly decision of the controversy; that we may preserve peace and brotherly love amongst ourselves, that have so many enemies abroad. There was not long since here with us Mr. Coddington and some other of your people, who brought Mr. Williams with them and pressed us hard for a place at, or near Sowams, the which we denied them. Then Mr. Williams informed them of a spacious Island called Monachunte, touching which they solicited our good will, to which we yielded, (so they would compound with Woosamequin,) the which we heard was ill taken by you, but you may please to understand that it is not in our patent, (though we told them not so) for it only was excepted out of it. And we thought (if they like it) it were better to have them, (though they differ in opinions) than (happily) worse neighbors, both for us, and you. We think it is also better for us both to have some strength in that Bay. Thus commending you, and your affairs to the Lord; with my love remembered to yourself, and the rest of my worthy friends with you, I take leave and rest,

Your unworthy friend,

William Bradford

April 11, 1638.

My answer to this letter (which I showed to the Deputy) was to this effect: that before we did anything we acquainted Mr. Hatherley and had men of either part to set out the bounds, but they not agreeing, etc., I told Mr. Winslow and wished there might be some friendly course in settling the same, so as might neither strengthen Scituate nor Hingham. He answered, that what our patent gave us we must have, and it was all one to them whither Scituate fell to them or to us, etc.; and advised us to set out our boundaries, etc.: which we did accordingly etc. but have need to act upon it, nor disposed anything to Hingham, etc: ergo we see not why we should be called to give a reason of; etc; that this was upon some misinformation or want of information; that we would be sorry that matter of jurisdiction should bring our peace and love into question: that if we had come hither for land or if we had feared that our friends of Plymouth would have bounded us to 3 or 4 miles of Natascot, we could have more easily have enlarged our grant than theirs. For the king's confirmation I suppose it a mistake—the king doth not use to confirm Indian's grants. For their purchase of the Indians, it was the 1st I heard of it, and it would be hard to make their title good, and as hard to prove their grant to them. For Mr. Hatherley's company: we thought it were better for us both, if they were further off: we had not to do with it but we were persuaded they would not have furthered them etc., before they had advised with us; and they might have expected the like correspondency from us. Conclusion for a friendly division, etc. April 16, 1638.

To his worthy and much honored friend Mr. John Winthrop Esquire these be.

Sir,

Not knowing of this conveyance till they were ready to go, I thought good to scribe a word or two by candle light, rather than not to advertise you of so serious a matter; I am informed by good intelligence that the Narragansetts have made a great collection amongst there people; and sent a great present, both of white and black beads to the Mohawks, to entreat their help against you, and your friends, if they see cause. And they Mohawks have received their present, and promised them aid, bidding them begin when they will, and they will be ready for them, and do encourage them with hope of success. The thing is true, but I may not reveal the author. It would cost the lives of some if it should be known, neither would I have it vulgarly known that it came from hence, least it should be suspected; their own common people do not know it. I fear they are too well furnished with pieces by too much remissness. Thus in haste I take leave, with my hearty salutes to you and yours, and many thanks for my kind entertainment when I was last with you.

Your ever loving friend,

William Bradford

Plymouth, 29 of 4 month 1640.

I pray you remember my love to the Governor, and acquaint him herewith. And if you have any special news from England I would be glad to know it.

To his worthy and beloved friend Mr. John Winthrop Esquire these be.

Worthy Sir,

I most kindly thank you for your love and pains in acquainting me with the news from our own country; the Lord be merciful to them, and us, and teach us to make that use thereof that is befitting so sad a condition. I had sundry courantoes came to my hand out of Holland; in one whereof (bearing date in November last) there is mention made of an inquisition, and search made through all England of all the papists in the land, and the number given to the King were above two hundred thousand families; and of them were found to be 16000 of the spirituality (as they call them). What may be the reason of this search is not expressed, but is not hard to be conjectured. We hear a rumor that our friends of Connecticut intend to begin a war with the Narragansetts speedily. If you know any certainty thereof, I desire you would be pleased to acquaint us with it, that we may the better look to our own defense. I wish they may go upon good grounds, lest they bring evil upon themselves and their neighbors; but if justice or necessity compel them, they shall not (in my judgment) do well to linger so long as to give them time to gather in their corn. But the Lord direct them to do, and you to counsel them, as may be for the best in so weighty a case. Thus with my humble thankfulness unto you for your love; which I esteem precious, I rest

Your unworthy friend,
William Bradford.

Plymouth, 16, 6 month 1640.

To his much honored friend Mr. John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts, these.

Beloved Sir,

Having so fit an opportunity, I thought good to salute you with these few lines. We were much troubled when we heard you kept watch in your towns the sharp weather, and so much the rather because we could not hear the reason thereof, nor understand anything from the Indians of our quarters. We have heard since of some messengers that have been sent unto you; if there be anything material concerning our common safety, I desire you would be pleased to inform us in a word or 2 how things stand about the Narragansetts or Mohawks. We also conceive that our time of payment to you, about Mr. Andrew's money is expired, and therefore have charged a bill on Mr. Hill to make this payment unto you. I pray you let us hear a word of your acceptance. Sundry have been sick amongst us this winter, and some still are. God hath taken away Mr. Atwood¹, and Mr. Jenny² by death; Mrs. Atwood's state being but low is entangled to Mr. Seawell of Ipswich, by a bond of £1000. She prays me on her behalf to crave your advice whether she had best administer or no, her husband having made her executrix; and if she refuse whether she may not have her thirds; there will be sufficient she conceives to satisfy any account of money due to him, and something for herself, but by the bond the title of the land is to be testored to him, and Mr. Atwood hath sold it to Mr. Sherley, but he told me it was only in trust, as he had it, but he took no writing under his hand that so it is. Thus commending you and all your affairs to the Lord, with salutations, I rest, in haste,

Your loving friend,

William Bradford.

[1644]

¹ John Atwood. His large and complex estate inventory is found in the Plymouth Colony probate records at volume 1 pages 46-49. John Atwood died sometime between 20 October 1643 and 27 February 1643/4.

² John Jenny died sometime between 28 December 1643 and 25 May 1644.

To his much honored friend Mr. John Winthrop Deputy Governor of the Massachusetts these be.

Sir,

I am requested to write these few lines unto you, in the behalf of some Indians of Yarmouth; who complain that Mr. Offley owes them 6 coats of trading cloth, and a pair of small britches, for service they did him, in taking of sturgeon. Some of them affirm that they were loath to have left their hunting, when he importuned them to help him, and now not to pay them for their labor they take it very ill; and take occasion thereby to scandalize all the English. I am informed by Mr. Freeman that many of the neighbors know these debts to be due, and are yet unsatisfied. Having not else at present with my best love remembered unto you, I take leave and rest

Your affectionate friend,

William Bradford

Plymouth, 11 (10) 45.