

**AN ADDRESS, DELIVERED AT THE  
OPENING OF THE TOWN-HALL IN  
SPRINGFIELD, MARCH 24,  
1828: CONTAINING SKETCHERS OF THE  
EARLY HISTORY OF THAT TOWN, AND  
THOSE IN ITS VICINITY**

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An Address, Delivered at the Opening of the Town-hall in Springfield, March 24, 1828:  
Containing sketchers of the early history of that town, and those in its vicinity by George Bliss

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**GEORGE BLISS**

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TOWN, AND THOSE IN ITS VICINITY.

**WITH AN APPENDIX.**

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BY GEORGE BLISS.

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PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE TOWN.

SPRINGFIELD.—TANNATT & CO.

1828.

## ADDRESS.

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OUR assembling this day, in this Hall, is a subject for mutual congratulation. That the town has, with so much unanimity and concord, undertaken and completed a building, so convenient for the transaction of public business, evinces in the inhabitants, a spirit of liberality and harmony, highly honorable to our society. This building, so ornamental to the place, has been completed, without accident and without contention.\* The occasion suggested a wish to have an historical account of the town. Such a history will, probably, be peculiarly interesting to the inhabitants; but it is also important to the community in general. This was the earliest settlement, in the western part of the state, and itself the parent of many others. It was a colony from the settlements about Massachusetts Bay, begun and carried on while those settlements were yet in infancy. It was an important post against the Indians; and being adjacent to Connecticut, and the only town bordering on that colony, it was long involved in great and violent disputes with that government.

The means of compiling such an account are not over ample; but some care has been taken to collect what remains. Many facts now known, may soon be lost; many which might have been found half a century ago, are now irrecoverably gone. Very few traces of the ecclesiastical history of the town can be found.

Several of those who were here at the first settlement, came from England, when the governor and company came over, in the year 1630. How many I am unable to ascertain.

William Pynchon, Esq. who may properly be called the father of the town, was one of the patentees in the colony charter, named in the deed of 1627, and the charter of 1628. He was appointed

\*See Appendix A.

a magistrate and assistant in Oct. 1629, in England, when the governor and other officers were appointed. He came from England with governor Winthrop, and first settled at Roxbury. The number who then came to Massachusetts, cannot be given; but it is said there were 2000 in 1630, and in 1633, a large addition, bringing with them several distinguished ministers.

The discovery of Connecticut river, was, probably, not made so early as that of some other streams, less important, owing to Long Island stretching along before its mouth. But in 1631, a bark which had been to the south, sailed up the river some distance. The Plymouth colony had sent to build a trading house, and the Dutch began a settlement at Hartford. But it is said, that the first dwelling house built on the river, by an European, was at the mouth of Windsor Little river, by William Holmes, in Oct. 1633.

The information given of the favorable situation of that river, induced many of the inhabitants about Boston, to make strenuous efforts to remove. The General Court had prohibited any persons removing without their consent. This prohibition was grounded on their being engaged in a joint undertaking, to make improvements for the common benefit; and if every one were at liberty to desert it when he pleased, it might not only prevent a beneficial improvement, but endanger the lives of those who remained. For one or two years, applications to remove to the Connecticut, were unsuccessful; but this did not hinder exploring parties from going out and making arrangements for settlements. This was the case in regard to Wethersfield, Hartford and Windsor. There is a tradition, that some of those that came to Wethersfield, in the year 1634, remained through the winter.

Early in the year 1635, the people of Watertown, and Dorchester, and afterwards those at Newton, obtained the consent of the General Court, that they should remove to the Connecticut river. In May, 1635, Mr. Pynchon, and the inhabitants of Roxbury, had also liberty granted them to remove themselves to any place that they should think meet, not to prejudice any other plantation, provided they continued under the government of Massachusetts. A similar condition was annexed to the leave given to the other towns. In the latter part of the year 1635, the Dorchester people, with their minister, Mr. Wareham, came to Mattaneaug, at first called Dorchester, and afterwards Windsor. Those from Newton, or Cambridge, came to Suckiang, called by them Newton, and since Hartford; those from Watertown, to Pauquiaaug, called Watertown, now Wethersfield.

In the same year, Mr. Pynchon, Henry Smith, Jehu Burr, and probably, some others, came to this place, called by the Indians

Aggawam, and began to build a house, on the west side of the river, on the Aggawam, in the meadow, called from that fact, Housemeadow.\* The Indians, seeing this, and being perfectly friendly, informed them that the house would be exposed to the flood, and they abandoned it, and came and built a house on the east side of the river; probably, on the lot afterwards owned by Mr. Pynchon, and still possessed by his descendants. It is supposed they returned to Roxbury in the fall. Mr. Pynchon, at the spring election after, was chosen a magistrate, as he had been years before; but it is noted on the record, that he was absent at the time of election.

In the spring of the year 1636, Mr. Pynchon, with a number of other persons, with their families, removed from Roxbury, and came to this place. How long they were on the journey, or in what course they came, is now unknown. It is mentioned that some that went from Hartford, in the winter before, were ten days in getting to Boston. It is not easy for those who dwell at ease, and are in the enjoyment of civilized society, and the various domestic comforts which we possess, to conceive of the difficulties, perplexities, and distresses, attending a new settlement, among hordes of savages and wild beasts, at a distance of a hundred miles from civilized society, and a wilderness, interspersed with mountains, rivers, ponds, and marshes, intervening. It is rare that new settlers go a great distance without having something of a road by land or water. It is not common that they put themselves so far from neighbours. Ordinarily they continue under the protection of a government able and willing to repel aggression and redress their wrongs.

When Mr. Pynchon, and those who accompanied him, came here, they made an agreement, the original of which is in the first book of records of the town, subscribed by them. It is dated May 14, 1636, and consists of fifteen articles. The first of which provides for the settlement of a minister. The second limits the number of families to forty, and not to exceed fifty. The other articles provide for the rule and mode of division, and defraying the expenses of the settlement.† This agreement has the signature of only eight persons, though there is internal evidence that there were twelve concerned. The names of those who subscribed it are, William Pynchon, Matthew Mitchell, Henry Smith, Jehu Burr, William Blake, Edmund Wood, Thomas Ufford, and John Cabell. Jehu Burr and Thomas Ufford, did not write, but made their mark. The other four who were united with them

\*Appendix B.

†Appendix C.



were, Thomas Woodford, John Reader, Samuel Butterfield, and James Wood. It is worthy of remark, that not one of the first adventurers died here ; and, I believe, none but Mr. Pynchon left descendants here. Several of them gave up their allotments to the company. This was the case with Blake, Ufford, Mitchell, the two Woods, Reader, and Butterfield. Burr remained here two or three years, and then removed into Connecticut. Cabell, in 1641, sold his lot to the town. Mr. Pynchon, in 1652, and Smith, in 1653, went to England, and died there.\* All, except Pynchon, Smith, and Cabell, gave up their interest, and it was afterwards granted to other persons. The first allotment was so different from the actual settlement, that it is not easy to trace it.

It was of the first importance, situated as the early planters were, to prevent persons deserting the undertaking, while in its infant state, to guard against the admission of improper associates, and to prevent the property from accumulating in two or three hands. They, therefore, ordered, in January, 1638-9, that a person who had a lot, should not sell to one who was already provided. When a person was desirous of removing, he was bound to give the plantation notice ; and if they disallowed the sale he was about to make, the plantation was to take the lot, if they chose, at an appraisement. If no measures were taken after 10 days notice, the first bargain might proceed. In making the actual settlement, the following was the most general course : to allow each inhabitant a house lot on the west side of what is now called Main street, eight rods wide, from the street to the river ; a like width in the meadow, in front of his house, to the foot of the hill ; and a wood lot of the same breadth, extending, at first, eighty, and afterwards, an hundred rods, nearly to the top of the hill ; and, when practicable, an allotment in the interval on the west side of the river, of the same width, as near as might be directly against his lot. This was the ordinary course ; there were a few instances where the lots were wider ; but, I believe, only one narrower †

The original limitation to fifty families, may seem strange and extraordinary to us, at this day. But it is apparent that those who made that agreement contemplated, at first, having their house lots all on the west side of the street, within the compass of two miles. When this limitation was made, the house lots were to be much wider than they afterwards established them. The marsh, or meadow, on the east side of the street was considered unfit for building ; and the upland east of it, was reserved for

\*Appendix D.

†Appendix E.

wood lots. But the manner of cultivation is also to be considered; it was very different from that of the present day. It is very evident, from the early history, that it was extremely difficult and inconvenient for any considerable number to gain a subsistence together. They had very strong inducements, not only for their mutual accommodation, but more than that, for their self-defence and self-preservation, to keep in compact settlements. Yet, neither their fears, nor public prohibitions, could prevent their wandering and scattering themselves abroad. It may be stated, with truth, that to some, a roving, unsettled disposition, was a sufficient cause for wishing to remove. This, however, could not generally be the case. The manner of cultivation gives the only and full solution of the difficulty. They generally had their farms in common. Partition fences were a work of much labor and time. It is apparent, from the places selected for the first settlement, that the principal dependence was upon the intervals and cleared lands. They took only the natural grass for their cattle, and the land which was clear of timber, for their planting grounds. To fell the forests, and clear land for a crop of wheat or corn, was a work of much labor, and one to which they had been but rarely accustomed before their emigration. Potatoes, which now afford so much aid in a new settlement, were then unknown. Tradition has always represented the house lots as originally a birch plain. The above considerations unquestionably operated upon the first associates at this place.

When the settlement was made here, there were no white inhabitants on the east side of the river nearer, in any course in which they would travel, than Watertown. A settlement had, indeed, been begun at Concord, a short time before. On the west side of the river, the only settlements were those towns which had been commenced the year before. These places, at first, bore the names of the towns which they respectively left.

The first settlers came, indeed, as did all the other plantations, under the license, and the professed authority and protection of Massachusetts; but they were so separated from the towns on the Bay, as to be obliged, principally, to rely on themselves. Agawam was at first united with the other towns below, on the river, as no distinction had been made in the license to remove; all being subject to the same restriction.

The license, in one instance, mentions towns, and in others plantations on Connecticut river. A joint commission for their government, for the term of one year, was made, containing regulations as to the mode of administering justice. In this commission there was a saving of the rights of those who had just obtain-

ted the patent of Connecticut.\* It appears by the Connecticut record, that under this order, at a court holden at Newton [Hartford] Nov. 1636, Mr. Pynchon was present, with the other magistrates. In the year 1637, Mr Pynchon was again appointed, with Mr. Ludlow, and others. In 1638, it is stated on the town record, "that there was a free choice according to the order from Mr. Ludlow, by the plantation, of two committys for the general court, to be holden at Hartford, April 4, 1638, and the partys chosen are Mr. George Moxon and Jehu Burr." And it appears that both Pynchon and Burr attended.

Aggawam was also assessed with the towns in Connecticut, to furnish its quota of troops, and to pay a portion of the expense of the Pequot war. The number of men required of them, was seven, and the amount of tax they were to pay, was £86. 16s. sterling, the whole being £550. Dr. Trumbull, in his history of Connecticut, observes that this place did not furnish the troops, but paid the assessment. I should have come to a different conclusion, were it not for his authority. I find no evidence of any payment or assessment, on our records; and the Pynchon minute book gives no hint respecting either troops or money for that purpose. When the leave was given to come here, the General Court loaned to the adventurers, certain military stores and ammunition, to be furnished by the towns of Watertown, Dorchester and Roxbury.†

This place did not long continue united with the other towns on the river. The three towns formed a voluntary constitution, in February, 1639, in which no mention is made of Aggawam. The inhabitants of Aggawam believing themselves to be within the jurisdiction of Massachusetts, Feb. 14, 1638, came into a voluntary agreement, and appointed William Pynchon, Esq. a magistrate, with extensive powers, and directed the proper course of proceeding, till they should receive orders from Massachusetts. This regulation, most clearly shews the wisdom and prudence of the people; and is as pure a specimen of democratic legislation, as is extant.‡ It has been suggested that Mr. Pynchon was dissatisfied with some proceedings at Hartford, in which he was personally concerned, and that he joined with Massachusetts on that account. I find no evidence of this; but I do find that the south line of the colony of Massachusetts had been run, and it was then supposed to be ascertained that the line passed between Springfield and Windsor. From the time of making the last mentioned order, Springfield continued within the jurisdiction of Massachu-

\*Appendix F.

†Appendix G.

‡Appendix H.