

# A STORY OF THIS PLACE

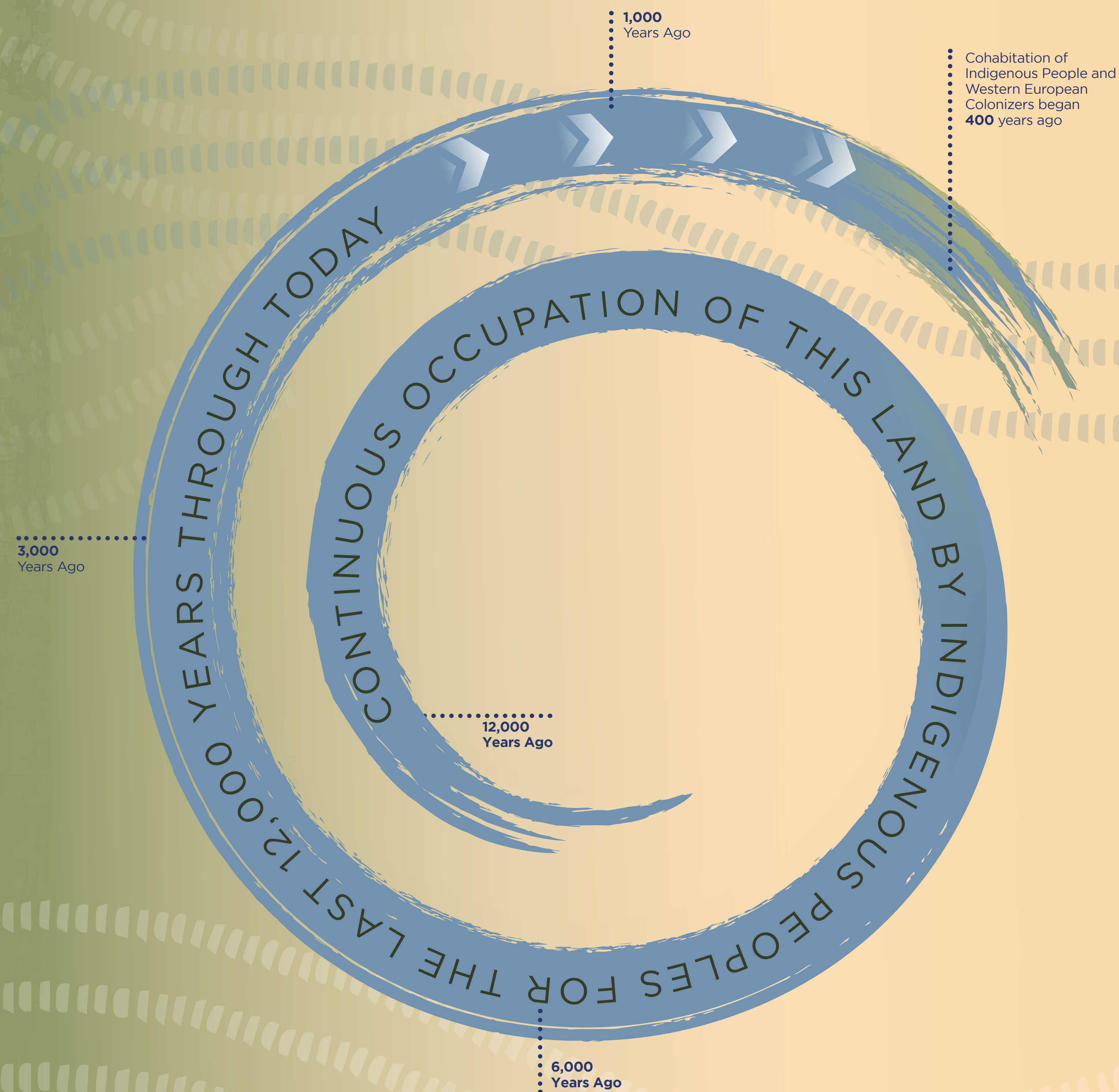
## MILLENNIA OF HABITATION

Cambridge, as we know it today, spans only a few centuries in the millennia-long habitation of this area. However, English colonial settlement that began in the 1600s profoundly changed both the lifeways of the original inhabitants and the landscape itself. This colonization took place in the midst of European cultural and political changes, including the commercial exploration of the world, the emerging concept of private property, the rise of chattel slavery, challenges to the power of monarchies, and tensions within Christian faith communities. These factors brought together, within what is now Cambridge, the Indigenous peoples who have been here for millennia, English traders and colonists, and people stolen from Africa and enslaved in the Americas.

**Native peoples have lived in Massachusetts for at least 12,000 years**, and archaeological studies confirm their continuous presence since the last glacial retreat formed the land as it now exists. Anthropologists believe that the earliest Native peoples were primarily hunters and gatherers.

By 5000 years ago Native peoples in the area were engaged in intense domesticated agriculture and had established extensive and long-range trade and relationship networks with other Tribal communities. Politically complex communities moved seasonally to established local areas. Summers were spent on the coast tending the planting fields and catching and processing fish and other seafood; in winter, communities merged and moved inland along riverways to share knowledge, work, and food. The winter diet depended primarily on foods processed and stored during the summer supplemented by fresh game and gathered plants.

For centuries before European colonization, Cambridge (and the Greater Boston area) was and continues to be the home of the **Massachusetts Tribe**. When the English arrived, the Tribe was one of the region's major political entities with a territory that included all of modern Suffolk and Norfolk counties, the majority of Middlesex County, and parts of Bristol, Essex, and Plymouth counties. Significantly, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts takes its name from the Tribe. Currently the Massachusett are an active Tribal community living in and around their traditional homelands.



## EUROPEAN EXPLORATION AND COLONIZATION

Europeans began systematic exploration and documentation of the New England coast and waterways in the early 1500s. Published accounts of these voyages attracted trading and fishing expeditions seeking to profit from the region's abundant resources. However, increasing contact with Europeans exposed the Native populations to previously unencountered infectious diseases that had extremely high fatality rates within Indigenous communities. A pandemic from 1616-1619, called the "Great Dying," culminated in the deaths of 75%-90% of the populations of multiple New England Native communities, including the Massachusett. Periodic pandemics through the 17th and 18th centuries caused more Native deaths.

In 1620, immediately following the Great Dying, the Pilgrims, a group of

English religious dissidents, arrived on the Mayflower and established the first permanent European settlement in Massachusetts at Patuxet (now known as Plymouth), a former Native settlement that had been decimated in the earlier pandemic.

Eight years later, in 1628, Puritan leaders joined with English investors with commercial interests in the rich resources of New England to form the **Massachusetts Bay Company**. Its charter, issued by King Charles I, granted the men of the Company and their heirs unlimited control of the land, waterways, and resources between the Merrimack and Charles rivers and authorized them to establish English settlements and business enterprises. Neither the Crown nor the Company sought to establish an agreement with Indigenous

leaders for the use and occupancy of the lands outlined in the grant. While the legitimacy of the grant was dependent upon no other Christian monarch or state having claimed prior possession, the only mention of the original Native inhabitants was an admonition to the colonists.

*“to incite them to know and obey the true Christian God.”*

In the spring of 1630, nearly a thousand people sailed from England on eighteen ships to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony on **land already occupied** by the Massachusett Tribe. The lead ship, the Arbella, arrived at Salem in June carrying the governing council: Governor John Winthrop, Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley, and an advisory council made up of ten men. These men sought to create a **Christian commonwealth**, in which government, church, and family relationships would be modeled on Biblical principles. All government officials were necessarily leaders or members of the church. Neither religious nor secular dissent was tolerated. The non-Christian Native peoples were seen as savages.

More ships arrived later in the summer. The governing council first settled the colonists in Charlestown, but they quickly dispersed to found multiple settlements in and around what is currently Boston. Concerned that Boston's peninsula was vulnerable to attack by rival colonial powers, the leaders explored inland along the Charles River for what Winthrop called **“a fit place for**

**a fortified town.”** In December 1630 the council chose a low hill at present-day Harvard Square and signed an agreement to establish “Newtowne” as the permanent seat of colonial government Winthrop Square, **where you now stand**, became the central locus of the new settlement. By the spring of 1635 there were 35 colonial residences in Newtowne. In 1636 and 1637 the General Court, “dreading to leave an illiterate ministry,” appropriated funds for a ministerial college in Newtowne. In 1638 the name of the town was changed to Cambridge in honor of the English university where many leaders of the colony had been educated. In 1639 the school became Harvard College following the bequest by John Harvard of £700 and his library.



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Boston Rare Maps Inc., Southampton, Massachusetts.

John Smith, NEW ENGLAND The most remarkable parts thus named by the high and mighty Prince CHARLES, now King of great Britaine. London (1616, ninth state 1635). John Smith's map was the first to provide colonists with a recognizable depiction of the New England coast.

The 1629 Charter of Massachusetts Bay. The charter records the particulars of Charles I's agreement with the proprietors of the Massachusetts Bay Company and remained the basis of colony government until 1684, when Charles II revoked the original agreement and installed a Royal Governor to administer all the New England colonies.

## PEOPLE & PLACE

The **landscape** has altered significantly over the millennia that people have lived here. Around twenty thousand years ago, the mile-deep glaciers that covered the land slowly began to melt and retreat, forming riverways and massive areas of dry land extending into what is now

together in this place altered the landscape, the communities had **vastly different worldviews** and values, and they perceived and interacted with the environment and each other in very different ways.

that Native peoples lived lightly on the land. In contrast English colonists, grounded in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, believed that the natural world had been **created by God for the use and benefit of humankind**. People, particularly Christians, were rightly the **dominant force** in the world with a charge from God both to control and improve upon nature. These beliefs encouraged the view of New England's resources as commodities to be used solely in the interest of the colony. Puritans also believed in the doctrine of predestination, in which God foreordains and controls all that happens. Events that helped the colonists such as the pandemics that decimated Native communities were signs of God's favor.

The vast differences between the two cultural groups led to challenges when they began to occupy the same space. Native peoples would likely have seen the colonists as new inhabitants within the interconnected environmental whole, with equal privileges and responsibilities in relation to shared resources. The colonists considered the new land as theirs by right to occupy and use as they saw fit. Native peoples were viewed as spiritually deficient non-Christian savages who were not adequately utilizing the land's abundant natural resources. The **divergence in ideas** regarding land, water, and local resources was particularly stark. The colonists saw the environment as a repository of resources that could be possessed and profited from while the Native peoples saw all components of the environment as distinct entities with their own needs to be respected.

## COHABITATION: COLLABORATION AND DISCORD

Despite the profound differences between the two societies, the colonists and the Massachusetts interacted and initially shared space in what was to become Cambridge. Although the

A reconstructed plan of Newtowne in 1642, illustrating the "contrived streets" and "faire structures" described by William Woods in 1634. The meetinghouse stands in the center of the village at the corner of today's Dunster and Mt. Auburn streets. Solid lines show property boundaries that exist today and building footprints known from archeological evidence; dashed lines show boundaries and footprints derived from descriptions in deeds and probate records.



Source: Cambridge Historical Commission

English claimed that Native peoples did not "improve" upon the land, the colonists found and occupied existing large cleared and open tracts of land bordered by woodland. These were certainly the sites of carefully maintained Native planting fields, and their existence greatly facilitated colonial settlement by eliminating the need to clear sites for houses, religious and government structures, and grazing fields. Significantly, the survival of the entire colony was dependent upon the adoption of Native foodways, practices which were freely shared with the colonists. Colonists also utilized Native footpaths, water crossings, and fish weirs. The early town records clearly reference Indian planting fields, formal agreements with individual Massachusetts, and colonial habitation next to Indian lands.



Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company. The official seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company depicts a Native man holding a downturned arrow and saying a Biblical phrase, "come over and help us" (Acts 16:9). The imagery characterizes Indigenous peoples as both submissive and in need of assistance from the colonists. While the image was framed as a responsibility to bring Christianity to Native peoples, it denied Indigenous agency and self-determination while establishing the primacy of colonial authority and sovereignty.

The Harvard Indian College, founded in the 1640s, introduced a more formalized integration of local Native individuals into Cambridge's colonial structures. Established specifically to educate Native men for the Christian ministry, it brought youth and men into Cambridge from diverse local

Native communities. While only two Native men, Caleb Cheeshahteumuck and Joel Hiacoomes, both from Martha's Vineyard, completed the requirements for graduation, men from multiple Native communities studied at the College and worked with Rev. John Eliot and other colonists

to translate the English Bible into the Massachusetts language.

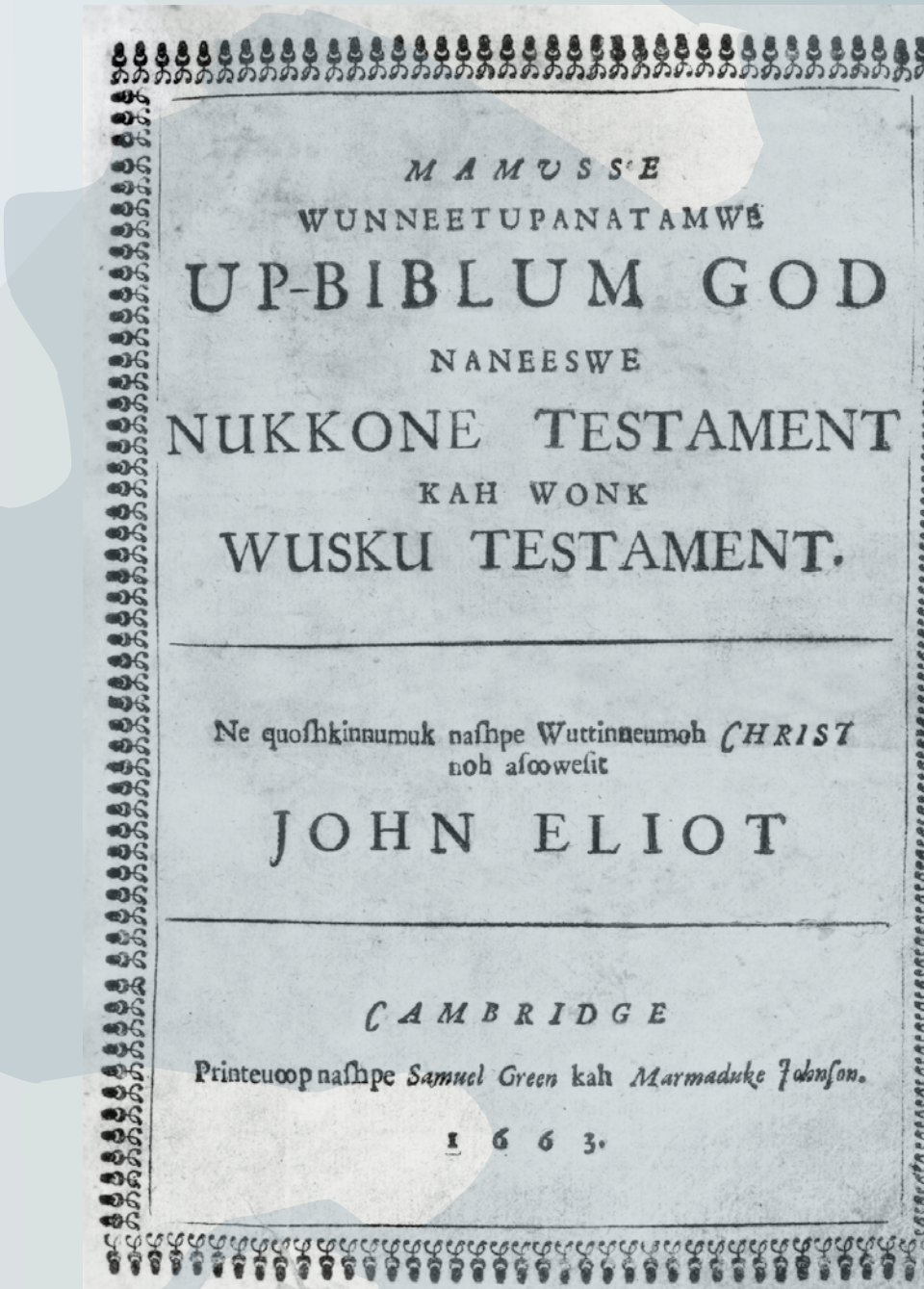
In 1661 the **New Testament in the Massachusetts language** was printed at the Indian College, the first Bible printed in British North America.

Through these and other activities, Harvard College became both a foundation of and a model for the conversion of Native communities to Christianity.

The physical changes to the landscape initiated by the colonists had significant impacts on the Massachusetts, other Native communities, and the environment itself. Newtowne was the first English colony designed with streets laid out in a planned grid and in 1631 the colonists erected a stockade designed to protect the community from both wolves and Indians. These activities provided a physical and visual structure for the anticipated expansion of a permanent settlement protected from both the natural environment and the established Indigenous community. The colonial introduction of novel crops and farm animals led to both immediate and gradual **environmental changes**. For example, the importation of European crops competed with and sometimes displaced native plants. Introduced livestock combined with methods of English husbandry wreaked havoc on the planting fields essential to Native survival. The presence of livestock also encouraged predation and led to cash bounties on wolf pelts, altering long-established food chains by removing an essential predator.

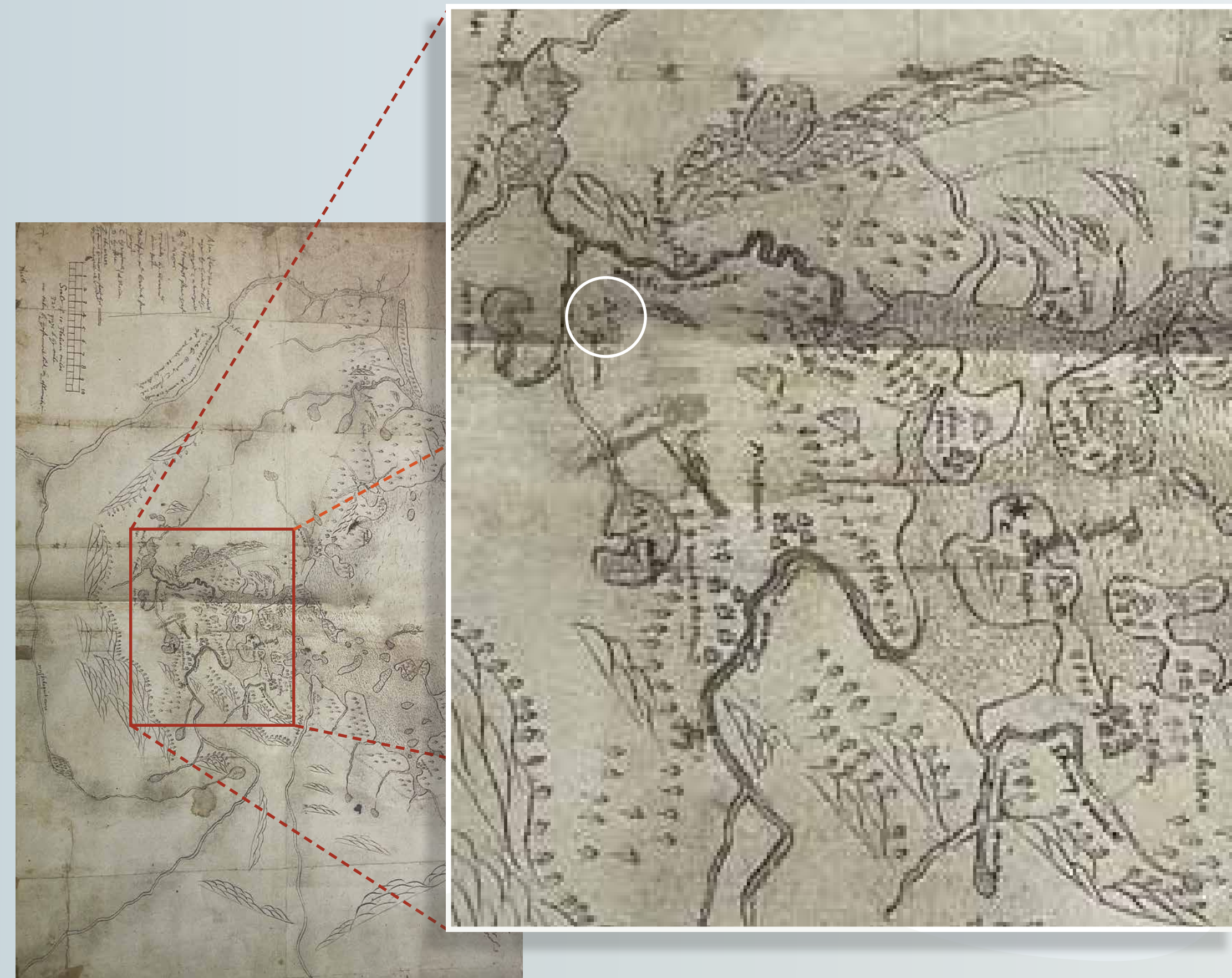
The rapid growth of colonial Cambridge, with its increasing enclosure of the land, disrupted the seasonal movement of the Massachusetts Tribe to traditional planting fields and the estuaries and ocean that were major sources of food. Salt marshes were dyked and tidal flats filled to create additional land, causing significant and permanent changes to local waterways and water systems. The eventual destruction of the Charles River Basin, one of the area's most important estuaries, ruined a source of

sustenance for all.



Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University

John Eliot and multiple Native collaborators, *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God*, [The Whole Holy His-Bible God, both Old Testament and also New Testament. This turned by the servant of Christ, who is called John Eliot.] Cambridge, 1663. The 1661 edition was the first Bible printed in English North America and the first Indigenous-language translation of the Christian Bible. The 1663 edition included both Old and New Testaments.



Source: The British Library Board

William Wood, *A chart of Boston and its vicinity, Massachusetts Bay; drawn on a scale of 2 1/3 Italian miles, by estimation, to an inch.* (detail) On this ca. 1633-37 map, the villages of Newtowne and Watertown (the latter in its original location near today's Gerry's Landing) are clustered on the north bank of the Charles River, less than a mile apart, while Boston and Charlestown face each other at the mouth of the river, downstream from Back Bay. The village of the Sunksqa, the widow of Sachem Nanepashemet and at this time the chief of the Massachusetts tribe, is shown at the confluence of Alewife Brook and the Mystic River (circled). Notations on the map are in the hand of Governor John Winthrop, a founder of the colony.

Boston Harbor. Over time, rising sea levels from the glacial melt transformed the dry land into a harbor. This change occurred outside direct human influence and forced all living things, including humans, to adapt and adopt new ways of interacting with the environment. **This was the landscape occupied by the Massachusetts Tribe and "discovered" by the colonists.**

Humans also make significant changes to the environment, and these adaptations are directly driven by the beliefs, values, and goals of the people who make them. While both the English colonists and the Native peoples who came

Traditional Massachusetts culture is based on establishing and maintaining **reciprocal relationships** with the entirety of the environment. This means that while the Tribal community depends upon the environment to live, all parts of the environment are seen as separate and important entities with their own privileges and needs. People are only one part of a large interconnected system, neither more nor less important than any other part. Each component is essential to the functioning of the "common pot" upon which all things depend. The oral histories of multiple local Tribal groups, as well as the archaeological record, demonstrate

## CLASH OF IDEAS AND BELIEFS

The colonists and Native peoples had very different and sometimes oppositional social structures and ideas regarding governance, gender, wealth, social position, and land.

### Governance

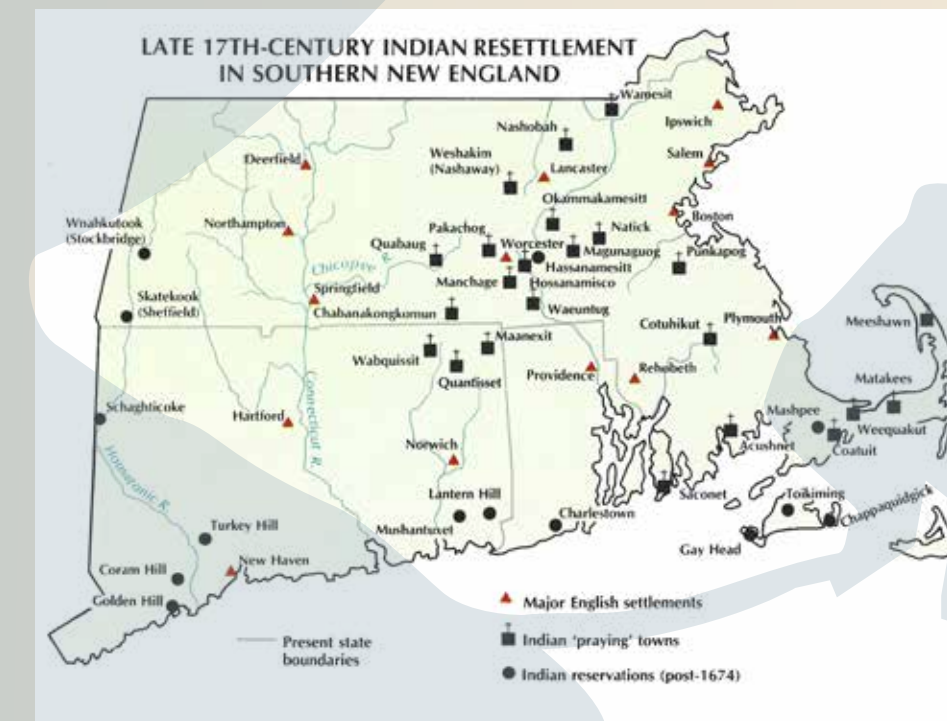
Local Tribal communities embraced inclusive and participatory governing structures in which consensus was highly valued. **Both men and women served as leaders, and their ongoing authority** was directly dependent upon the support of the entire community. In contrast, colonial governing structures were both hierarchical and exclusive. Church and society were inseparable: only land-holding free (white) men who had been formally admitted to the church could assume leadership roles.

### Private Property

One of the most consequential aspects of European settlement for Native peoples was the establishment of privately owned and heritable property. In 17th century Europe it was

newly possible for untitled, non-royal persons to purchase land, but the laws of heredity severely limited the broad population's access to ownership. By contrast, private and exclusive ownership of land was a **foundational premise** of the Massachusetts Bay Company's charter. Land was seen as plentiful and could be allocated to multiple classes of Englishmen (in proportion to their social standing and contribution to the community) to buy and leave to their descendants. This opportunity for economic prosperity and independence became a strong incentive for decades of massive immigration from England to Massachusetts Bay.

For Native peoples, who followed the underlying principle of common resources open to all, the



Historical Atlas of Massachusetts, University of Massachusetts

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*Late 17th Century Indian Resettlement in Southern New England.* Starting in 1657, John Eliot established multiple Indigenous "praying towns" as part of the colonists' efforts to convert Native peoples to Christianity. These communities, which constituted America's first reservations, were segregated from colonial settlements and managed by colonial overseers. The inhabitants were expected to give up their way of life - communal family living, seasonal migrations, freedom of movement - to adopt English dress, lifeways, and farming practices in addition to their conversion activities. Despite their restrictions, the praying towns provided an opportunity for Native peoples to maintain land-based communities in the face of colonial land appropriation.

concept that any person or entity could own and control land or resources to the exclusion of others was unimaginable.

These differences in beliefs resulted in conflicting interpretations of early agreements. What one party saw as an understanding to share common resources, the other party believed to be a permanent and irrevocable transfer of control and ownership. Land agreements ultimately forced both communities to alter their long-held practices.

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### Religion

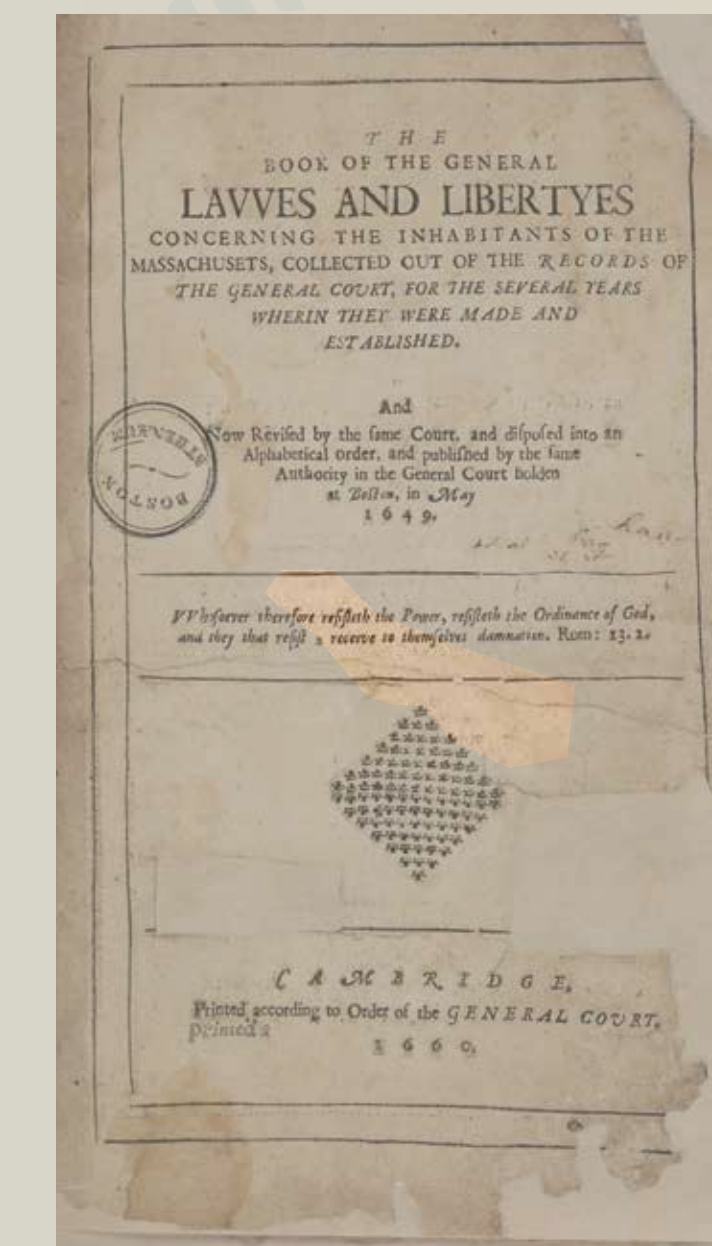
The colonists' certainty that Christianity was the only valid belief system and the conviction that God had led them to New England provided a the justification for their acquisition of more and more land and the eventual expulsion of the Massachusett Tribe from most of their homelands. In collaboration with the church and the colonial government, Rev. Eliot led a crusade to convert Native peoples to Christianity and to move the entire population into Christian "Praying Towns" that were separate from colonial settlements and controlled by colonial "guardians." Fourteen Praying Towns were established between 1651 and 1675 and inhabited by local Native peoples who were forced to adopt English dress and customs. The confinement of Native peoples in **Praying Towns** intentionally blocked the possibility of assimilation into colonial society, and, because the towns were designed as permanent, year-round settlements, disrupted the traditional seasonal

movements of Tribal communities and their associated food production practices. In essence, the Praying Towns became the first Indian Reservations.

### Slavery

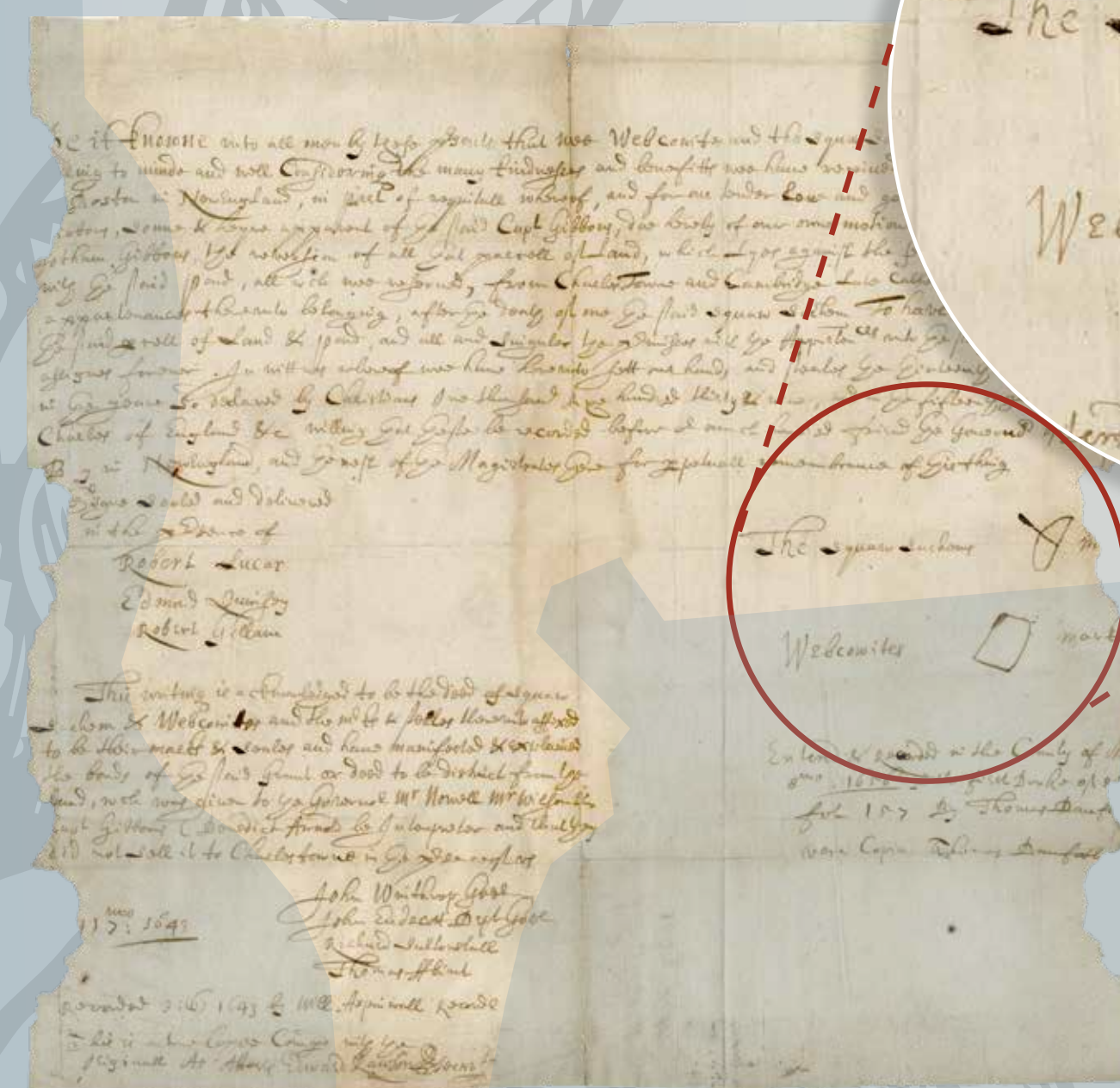
The first English colonies in the Americas were established on the islands of the Caribbean, where their success was totally dependent on slave labor. The close commercial and familial connections between the New England and Caribbean colonies facilitated the transfer of enslaved Natives and Africans between the two colonies. The right to own and sell human beings in the Massachusetts colony was formalized into law in the **1641 Body of Liberties**, the colony's first

published legal code. Deputy Governor and Cambridge resident Thomas Dudley was one of the authors of this document, which legalized slavery in Massachusetts Bay for "... lawful Captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us." Relatively few enslaved Africans were present in the colony, but people from local Tribes, captured in English raids on their communities, were enslaved both in Boston and Cambridge. By the early 18th century, Massachusetts Bay had become an economic engine of the transatlantic slave trade, and the prosperity of the entire colony was highly dependent on the trafficking of humans. At that time many Cambridge households included enslaved people of African descent, and their increasing presence influenced the future history of the colony.



Boston Athenaeum

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*The book of the general lawes and libertyes concerning the inhabitants of the Massachusetts, collected out of the records of the General Court, for the several years wherein they were made and established; and now revised by the same Court ... in May 1649.* A compilation of the laws of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1630 onward. The laws pertaining to "Indians" stipulated rules of property; forbade the sale of weapons, liquor, and boats to the Indigenous residents; prevented trade between foreigners and the Native population; and forbade powwaws with healers or spiritual leaders or outward worship of "false gods," or the devil.



< *"Deed" of land on Mystic Pond, 1643.* In 1639, the Sunksga (the Squa Sachem), the leader of the Massachusetts tribe and the widow of the previous leader Nanepashemet, signed an agreement with the colonists regarding lands in Cambridge, Charlestown, and Watertown in return for an annual gift of a winter coat and other goods and materials. She reserved a life occupancy of her settlement overlooking the Mystic Ponds, where she died about 1662. The sachem and her then-husband, Webcowites, endorsed this later agreement with their marks. It was also signed by prominent colonists, including Gov. John Winthrop and Sir Richard Saltonstall.

Massachusetts Archives

## BRINGING IT TOGETHER

Ultimately, the social structures and belief systems of the two societies were not just different but often diametrically opposed. The Indigenous practice of considering and integrating the needs of all, including the colonial newcomers, into the common pot resulted in most Native communities attempting to cohabit the land peacefully with the colonists. English colonists, grounded in Christian exceptionalism and a perceived right to expand, viewed Native individuals and communities, even those in Praying Towns, with suspicion, fear, and frequently overt contempt and hostility. Given the vast differences in beliefs, coexistence would have required significant adjustment and compromise from both. The development of robust colonial structures coupled with the increasing flood of English immigrants, lessened and ultimately eliminated the colonists' need to accommodate the needs of the Massachusetts and other Native communities. It was the Native peoples who, overwhelmed by the growing colonial state, were forced to accommodate via the migration of most Native communities away from shared land, resources, and interests.

The **interactions of cultures** in Massachusetts Bay launched a series of significant changes to the environment and lifeways of Native peoples, English colonists, and enslaved Africans that continue to mark our present lives and landscapes. The English adoption of and adaptation to Native lifeways and food practices continue to influence our current society. Colonial changes to the environment that began in the 1600s still shape our use of land and waterways for private and institutional development and commercial profit. Today, Cambridge is home to the descendants of the African, English, and Native communities that shared this space in the 1600s. Our interactions continue to evolve and are joined and influenced by residents from around the world, who represent diverse communities and bring fresh perspectives.

*“To the best of our ability, we have lived with this place by honoring and respecting the many relatives who share this space with us. Our relatives are both human and more than human. Some are breathing and others have never taken breath. They are those who move and those who are grounded in one place. Some have what we call “life” and others do not. All have spirit.”*

~ Massachusetts Tribal Elder

