

**Comments made by Dr. Alison Vannah
at the dedication of
Pynchon's Grist Mill Preserve
November 1, 2014**

I was thrilled when Dick Rossman sent me a pledge form for the preservation of the Pynchon Grist Mill site, and I am thrilled today that the project has come to fruition. Besides being 'history on the ground', this mill was built by people I consider my 17th century 'friends'.

The town of Brookfield, originally the Quaboag Plantation, was attacked and abandoned in 1675, as one of the first casualties of King Philip's War and it is for that event in history that Brookfield is now known. So I would like to take a few minutes to tell you of the success of the Quaboag settlement.

Quaboag Plantation began out of adversity. The core group of the 6 or 7 families that came here were the families of John Warner, William Prichard, and John Ayres. Tenants on large farms in Ipswich in the Bay Colony, they had been excluded from commonage rights there. Without commonage rights, you couldn't send your cattle with the common herd during the growing season, or pasture your livestock on the common fields after harvest, or gather firewood from the common lands of the town or, most drastically, you wouldn't be eligible for future divisions of the common lands of the town. The economic future of the families of these 3 men would have been bleak – so in 1665 they trekked out to build a new community at Quaboag. The other family in this core group was that of Richard Coy. Formerly a servant in Ipswich, he had been the tenant of an ordinary, or tavern, in Wenham just prior to his removal, and his lease was up. This core group of settlers welcomed a contingent from Gloucester much as the early inhabitants of Ipswich had welcomed settlers who had already tried out other towns.

Just as Old World practices had been tempered by New World needs and experiences in the original towns of the colony, so the settlers in the new wilderness would adapt their experiences of their old New World communities to the demands of the new community:

The physical layout of the town, with houses along a main street running over a hill; with the meetinghouse at the crest of the hill; the allotments of different kinds of land – marsh, meadow, and arable lying back from the houses – all this was very similar to that in Ipswich. Within a couple of years, they were selling cattle, fed on the grasses of the meadow and marsh, just as they had in Ipswich. In good Ipswich fashion, too, John Ayres refused to pay to the minister's rate, and had his pewter distrained, or seized, as a sort of bond for his appearance in court. Daniel Hovey, who came after the original group, served the church as deacon. John Ayres served the settlement as constable. William Prichard and Samuel Kent, one of the Gloucester contingent, served as selectmen. A train band, or militia, was formed, with Richard Coy as corporal, and John Ayres and William Prichard as Sergeants. Never opposing parties in suits brought to the county court in Ipswich, once these settlers were housed as "near neighbours" in Quaboag, they found they had differences and crotchets among themselves as they worked to bring order to the wilderness, just as the early settlers in Ipswich had done.

While there is a certain irony in building a close replica of the community which had barred these men from the economic life of the town, one could also say that the parent town and its

offspring shared the same collective world view that had been evolving during the time they had lived in the old town, New England replicating itself in a new wilderness.

The big difference between Quaboag and off-shoot towns just in from the coast, was John Pynchon. Usually, when a splinter group from an original town moved to start a new town, the General Court granted them a tract of land, and they divided it up among themselves – free land, with first comers getting the largest shares. Pynchon ran Springfield and the Connecticut River Valley as his Bailiwick. In Quaboag, the eastern-most point in his empire, the settlers bought their land from Pynchon, albeit at a tiny fraction of the price of land in Ipswich by that time. Pynchon had purchased the Quaboag land in 1659 from the local tribe, at a bargain basement price, of course, and, in addition to reaping profits from the sale of the land to the settlers, he also charged them for the re-imbursement of his original outlay in 1659. Scattered throughout his account books are payments he received from the settlers for “my purchase of Quaboag.” Also throughout these account books, you can see how the inhabitants of Quaboag had begun commerce among themselves, knitting themselves into a community.

Pynchon acted as the company store – and you wouldn’t believe the quantities of sugar they bought from him! – Richard Coy, for example, bought up to 6 to 8 pounds a week! It took the settlers several years to make headway enough to supply themselves with basic foodstuffs, however, so they bought it from Pynchon. Soon they were paying him in pork and cattle but, even as the mill was under construction in 1669, they were still buying corn from him [to 17th century Englishmen, corn simply meant a cereal crop] – and then they had to pay him to mill it, since Pynchon owned the Springfield mill.

The attack of 1675 must have obliterated any records the town may have kept. I’m sure records were kept: for one thing, the settlers bought many quires of paper from Pynchon and, for another, Puritans, fortunately for historians, loved to record everything. So Pynchon’s account books provide most of the details of Quaboag’s mill – the quantity of iron required, the pieces fabricated from the iron, and even the number of nails to be used. I’m still not sure whether the impetus for building the mill came from Pynchon or from the settlers, but, with a diet heavily reliant on corn, the building of a grist mill would be a boon both to the subsistence needs of the town and to its success.

The account books indicate that the settlers paid for the materials for the mill, and Pynchon paid for the labour of specialized tradesmen in the building of the mill. He supplied the blacksmith, John Stewart. By 1670, he was paying Quaboag men for “digging gravel at the mill”. In 1671, Pynchon paid his mason, Rowland Thomas, to dig the “trench”, or sluiceway – and, finally, after almost 3 years, the mill was ready for operation. Things took a long time in the 17th century. Pynchon owned the mill, and, in 1672, he ‘agreed’ with John Ayres as the miller for one year. A miller charged a “tole” for his services. Ayres was to charge a “tole” of a ½ peck out of every bushel of corn. There are 4 pecks to a bushel. Of the ½ peck “tole”, Ayres could only keep a 1/3; the other 2/3’s went to Pynchon! Perhaps he was reimbursing himself for whatever monies he had laid out towards the building of the mill, just as he had for his purchase of the land. So, even with a mill in Quaboag, the settlers still paid Pynchon for their grist – but at least they didn’t have to travel as far to do it! Arrangements must have changed after that first year of operation, because, by the time of his death in 1675, William Prichard had acquired a ¼ share in the mill, valued at only £20 because of the abandonment of Brookfield.

By 1673, the Quaboag plantation had grown enough to warrant incorporation by the General Court as a township. With the requisite 20 families and a settled minister, Quaboag became Brookfield. Pyncheon, claiming that he had not had an interest in Quaboag for a long time, concurred in the court's decision.

The commonage right John Ayres had pleaded for repeatedly in Ipswich was finally granted to him in 1668. He hedged his bet and held on to the commonage right. If he sold his right, he couldn't go back, and in 1668 success in Quaboag must not have been all that clear. 4 years later, in 1672, he obviously considered the new town a success, with its new mill and his new occupation as miller, and he sold his commonage right in Ipswich. From tenants excluded from the rights of the town of Ipswich, he and the other men in the core group had become leading men in a new town.

So, while the destruction of King Philip's war is permanently attached to the history of Brookfield, the preservation of the mill site should be a physical reminder of the success these families, my 'friends', achieved here.