

Land evidence record, 1636-37

According to this document, Canonicus and Miantonomi (spellings varied for both of these names), chief sachems of the Narragansett, sold the island called Aquidneck to William Coddington. The document also includes "agreements" between Wanamatuamemit and Ousamequin and Coddington. The State Archives has many "deeds" and "agreements" between English settlers and Native Americans, all of which must be read with a critical eye; in many cases, the Indigenous signers did not read or write English, and the contents of the "agreements" often do not reflect the cultural practices of Native peoples.

White beads, also called shell beads, wampum or peage, were commonly used as currency in exchanges between Native people and colonists. Bartering with goods was also common.

[The top part of the document, an inventory of goods, has not been transcribed]

The 24th of the 1st month called March, In the year (so commonly called) 1637.

Memorandum that we Cannonnicus and Miantunnomu the two chief Sachems of the Nanhiggansitts, by virtue of our general command of this Bay, and also the particular subjecting of the dead sachems of Acquidneck and Kitackamuckquutt, themselves and land unto us, have sold unto Mr. Coddington and his friends united unto him, the great Island of Aquedneck [Aquidneck] lying from hence Eastward in the Bay, as also the marsh or grass upon Quinunicutt and the rest of the Islands in the Bay (excepting Chibachuwesa [Prudence Island] formerly sold unto Mr. Winthrop, the new Governor of the Massachusetts and Mr. Williams of Providence); also the grass upon the rivers and coves about Kitackamuckquutt, and from these to Paupausquatch, for the full payment of forty fathom of white beads, to be equally divided between us. In witness whereof we have here subscribed.

Item. That by giving by Miantunnomu's hand ten coats and twenty hoes to the present inhabitants, they shall remove themselves from off the Island before next winter. Witness our hands

In the presence of
The mark of Yotesh
Roger Williams
Randall Holden
The mark of Assotemuet

The mark of Caunnonicus

The mark of Miantunnomu

The mark of Mishammoh
Caunnonicus his son

This witnesseth that I, Wanamatuanemit at present sachem, inhabitant of the Island, have received five fathom of wampum and do consent to the contents. Witness my hand

In the presence of
Randall Holden

The mark of Wanamataunewit

Memorandum. That I, Ousamequin freely consent that Mr. Willliam Coddington and his friends united unto him shall make use of any grass or trees on the main land on Powakasick side, and do promise loving and just carriage of myself and all my men to the said Mr. Coddington and his English friends united to him, having received of Mr. Coddington five fathom of wampum as gratuity from himself and the rest.

Dated the 6th of the fifth month, 1638

Witness
Roger Williams
Randall Halden

The mark of Ousamequin

A true copy per me, Francis Brinley, Recorder
A true copy per me, William Lytherland, Recorder

This primary source comes from C#0204 - Rhode Island Colony Records, Part 1, 1646 – 1669, p. 45-47.