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Propositions relating to Indians, 1640

Governor William Coddington and Narragansett chief Miantonomi drafted laws to regulate the activities of Native people on Aquidneck Island. In many cases, the proposed laws reflect the fundamentally different lifestyles of the Native people and the settlers, and in many cases the former could not read the rules to which they were "agreeing." Fines for the offences outlined here were payable with shell beads, also called wampum or peage. The "Island" referred to in the document is Aquidneck Island.

Certain propositions made interchangeably on the 7th of July 1640

By Mr. William Coddington Governor with the rest of the Assistants

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Miantonomi, Sachem of the Narragansett with the rest of the sachems, and agreed upon.

That no Indian whatsoever under his jurisdiction shall either winter or summer kindle or cause to be kindled any fires upon the lands, but such as they shall put forth immediately again upon their departure, provided that no harm or damage be done thereby upon or after the kindling of the said fire, or if it so fall out that hurt or damage be done by their kindling of fire, then the damage to be adjudged and they to be tried by our law.

That in lieu of a boar that belonged to the Island, killed by an Indian, the said Indian shall pay 10 fathom of beads at harvest next.

That no traps or engine be set by them upon the Island to take or destroy the deer or other cattle thereon.

That if any Indian shall be unruly or will not depart their houses when they are bidden, they are to carry them to the Governor or other magistrate and there shall be punished according to their demerit, and further that for any common or small crime he shall receive the punishment according to the law; and for any matters of greater weight, exceeding the value of 10 fathom of beads, then Miantonomi is to be sent for, who is to come and see the trial; but if it be a sachem that hath offended though in smaller matter, then he is also to be sent for and to see his trial and judgement, who hath promised to come.

This transcript is intended to capture the substance of the document.

For details of capitalization, punctuation, spelling and spacing, we recommend consulting the original document.

That no Indian shall take any cannon from the English neither from their boat side or shore side, and the like not to be done to them.

That upon their trading and bargaining, having agreed they shall not revoke the said bargain or take their goods away by force; and that they be not idling about nor resort to our houses, but for trade, message or in their journeys.

Ratified at General Court
August 6th 1640

Those two leaves was torn out by the General Court March 16, 1641, and these two foregoing contain the same orders being again written

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, C#206 Records of the Isle of Rhode Island, p. 14.