

To Governor John Leverett or Governor
Josiah Winslow, 16 October 1676

Providence 16. 8. 76 (ut vulgo)

Sir

With my humble and lo. [loving] respects to your selfe and other honrd friends etc. I thought fit to tell you what the providence of the most high hath brought to my hand the evening before yesterday: 2 Indian children were brought to me by one Tho. Clements who had his howse burnt on the other side of the River.¹ He was in his Orchard and 2 Indian Children came boldly to him, the boy being about 7 or 8: and the guirle (his sister) 3 or 4 yeare old. The Boy tells me that a youth one Mittonan brought them to the sight of Tho. Clemments and bid them goe to that man and he would give them bread. He saith his Father and Mother were taken by the Pequits and Monhiggins above 10 weeks agoe as they were clamming (with many more Indians) at Cowwesit: that their dwelling was and is at a place calld Mittaubscut: that it is upon a branch of Pawtuxet River,² to Cowwesit (their neerest salt Water) about 7 or 8 mile: that there is about 20 howses. I can not learne of him that there is above 20 men beside Women and children: that they live on Ground nuts etc. and deare: that Aawaysewaukit is their Sachim: and 12 days agoe he sent his Son Wunnawmeneeskat^[a] to Onkus with a present of a basket or 2 of Wompam.³ I know this Sachim is much related to Plymmouth to whom he is said to subject, but he said (as all of them doe) [he] deposited [i.e., laid aside] his land. I know what bargains he made with the Browns and Willets and Rode Iland and Providence men and the Controverses [Controversies] between the Nahigonsiks and them about those

lands.⁴ I know the talke abroad [i.e., around] of the right of the 3 united Colonies (by Conquest) to this Land: and the plea of Rode Iland by the Charter, and Commrs [Commissioners].⁵ I humbly desire that this party may be brought in:⁶ the Countrey improved (if God in mercy so please) the English not differ about it and Complaints run to the King, (to unknowne trouble[,] charge and hazard etc.) and therefore I humbly beg of God that a Committee from the 4 Colonies may (by way of prudent and godly wisdom) prevent many inconveniences and mischiefs.⁷ I write the Summ of this to the Govrs of Conecticut and Rode Iland, and humbly beg of the Father of mercies to guide You in mercy.⁸ For his mercy sake Sir Your unworthy

R.W.

Excuse my Want of Paper.

This boy saith there is anoter [another] Towne to the northeast of them with more howses then 20: who as tis like correspond to the Eastward.

[RW's marginal note:]

[a] Wunnawmeneeskat

ALS, Mass. Arch., CCXLI, 292. Transcribed from a photostat of the original in "Letters and Papers" (1924).

1. Thomas Clemence had built his house on the west side of the Providence River rather than along the town street on the east bank. On the destruction of Clemence's house see also RW to [Robert Williams?], 1 Apr. 1676.

2. That is, on the south branch of the Pawtuxet River.

3. The Indian sachem and his son have not been identified. For several months after Metacom's assassination on 12 Aug. 1676, which marked the end of King Philip's War, the problem of Indian refugees confounded the colonial authorities. In Rhode Island, where Indians probably thought the colony's official neutrality would protect them from the vengeful clutches of the United Colonies, the magistrates proved unable to establish a coherent policy toward Indian fugitives. Some refugees quietly found sanctuary among Indian bands, such as Ninigret's Niantics, who had remained friendly with the English during the war; others hid on the islands in Narragansett Bay or attempted to reestablish themselves on lands they had possessed before the conflict began. The Rhode Island authorities ordered fugitives rooted out, enacted measures for bounty payments to citizens for their efforts, and took care to deliver certain enemy Indians to the United Colonies. Although the colony convicted and executed a few Indians for treason against the king, and although it passed legislation authorizing the involuntary servitude of other captives, it also sought to protect refugees who were willing to submit themselves to the Rhode Island government. See Hough, *Narrative of the Causes*, 173-190; *Recs. of R.I.*, II, 548-553; Leach, *Flintlock and Tomahawk*, 224-228. Furthermore, the colony took no steps to prevent fugitives from joining Ningret's community of Niantics in the southern reaches of the colony.

4. The Browns and the Willets, who were related by marriage, were leading

families in Rehoboth and hence residents of Plymouth colony. On the controversy over lands in Cowesett see RW to General Court of Massachusetts Bay, 12 May 1656. The various "bargains" that Aawaysewaukit had struck with Rehoboth, Providence, and Aquidneck Island men are not known.

5. Throughout the war, the United Colonies had solidified its claims to the Narragansett Country and had taken advantage of the presence of its armed forces in Rhode Island to protect its jurisdictional interest over Indian lands. Once the war was over, Connecticut boldly reasserted its right to the Narragansett territory. In August 1676, the Connecticut colony used three separate justifications—its charter rights, the theory of *vacuum domicilium*, and the right of conquest—to declare that all persons, English and surviving Indians, who "have or shall pretend to any right or possession there, upon the sayd deserted or vanquished lands in that country . . . shall make their application to the government of this Colony, for such grants, leave and liberty to take up and possesse such and so much as they shall see cause to grant and allowe them." The colony also prohibited all Indians from settling in the territory. See Trumbull, ed., *Public Recs. of Conn.*, II, 473-474.

6. By "brought in," RW probably meant that he hoped these Indians would be rounded up and turned over to the Rhode Island authorities. His own participation in two companies of Providence men who sold Indian captives into involuntary servitude suggests that he expected the colony to sell Aawaysewaukit's followers for its own benefit or for the private gain of whomever managed to bring them in. See "Indian Slaves of King Philip's War," *R.I. Hist. Soc., Pubs.*, I (1893), 234-240; John A. Sainsbury, "Indian Labor in Early Rhode Island," *NEQ*, XLVIII (1975), 378-393; Paul R. Campbell and Glenn W. LaFantasie, "Scattered to the Winds of Heaven—Narragansett Indians, 1676-1880," *R.I. History*, XXXVII (1978), 69-70. A few unpublished records relating to RW's role in these companies may be found among the Prov. Town Papers.

7. RW's idea for a four-colony committee to arbitrate existing jurisdictional controversies was rejected by Rhode Island, which preferred to answer Connecticut's claims to the Narragansett Country directly by informing its chief rival in October 1676 of its intentions to appeal to the king for satisfaction in the dispute. See *Recs. of R.I.*, II, 556-558. Over the next year, as the squabble between the two colonies worsened, RW repeated his plea for a committee to work toward an equitable solution. See RW to Special Court of Commissioners, 18 Oct. 1677.

8. The letters to the Connecticut and Rhode Island governors have not been found.