



The mystery of “Pemtucket” on William Wood’s map of 1634

Since its publication in London in the early 17th century by Thomas Coates, for John Bellamy, bookseller, William Wood’s tale and accompanying map has been popular – republished a year after its first edition, and again in 1639. It has been reissued with introductions by various authors over the centuries, in the 18th and 19th centuries and as recently as 1977.

Wood’s map shows settlements ‘as planted this year 1634’ – and those European settlements with a church were marked with a circle and a cross. Large Indian settlements were marked with a trio of wigwams. The map suffers from a lack of proportion and modern scale, but given the surveying technique available at the time, and the harshness of the environment, it’s a fair representation. Wood includes in the back of his text “The names of the most noted habitations”. Pentucket (Pemtuckett) is not on the list. He also indicates “At what places be Rivers of note”, and notably Quasacunquen (Quasacumquid) is not on the list. This is surprising as both Pentucket and Quasacunquen are marked on the map.

Mr. Wrigley developed the theory that Pentuckett was a long lost English village. His premise was that William Wood himself (as Wrigley called him, “our hero”) founded a trading station in 1629 at present day North Andover (North Parish, Andover), along the Merrimack River, which moved away from the banks of river in 1634 to a more settled community (complete with windmill and church) at the location of present day Central Street in Andover MA. Mr. Wrigley wrote passionately that William Wood’s map shows his settlement of “Pemtuckett-upon-Merrimack”, located at Andover. While some

circumstantial evidence and speculation might lead one to this idea, there are no hard facts to back it up. There is more proof to suggest that it was not the case, perhaps most notably that in 1629 'Andover', as it would come to be known, was comfortably outside the land grant perimeter specified in the Charter of Massachusetts Bay, a fact mentioned by Wood in his book, still in force in 1634. The formation of New England's churches are well documented in General Court Records and contemporary journals and letters. It seems unlikely that no one would have mentioned a village of size so far inland, so early on, with a church. A final point is that Wood himself never spoke in his book about founding a trading station or inland settlement, in fact his movements are documented in the town records of Lynn and Sandwich MA.

A more likely scenario is that "Pemtucket" is simply a phonetic variant of what it says, Pentucket, which was a Native American village located at that spot. Pentucket was one of 30 Pennacook villages around the Merrimack Valley River area. It was the site of the new European town of Newbury, set out as a plantation by the name of Quasacunquen around 1634/5. The Quasachuquen River was later renamed Parker River, after Newbury proprietor Thomas Parker.

So if the location is where present day (West) Newbury is, it's possible to interpret the map as the circle and cross going with Quasacunquen, much as how the towns of Salem and Ipswich (Agawam) do not have their churches located exactly next to their names. Wood had already indicated the Quasacunquen River (not a river of note), and the former village of Pentucket (a former Indian habitation) perhaps the icon for the church was a 'hot off the press' indication of a newly covenanted church at Quasacunquen (Newbury). Wood had already written (a truncated) version of the name, why try and squeeze it in again? This is also speculation of course, but another way of interpreting William Wood's map. We may never discover (or agree) why "Pemtucket" was worthy of being included on the map, but not worth a mention in Wood's text.

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