

Land Title Origins

The first European to discover and sail up the Connecticut River, according to Alfred N. Chandler, as related in his chapter on Connecticut, was Adrian Block, a Hollander. The Dutch traded on this river for eighteen years before the river became known to the English.

Robert, Earl of Warwick, President of the Council of New England, granted on March 19, 1631 to a number of "lords and gents" and their heirs and assigns forever "all that part of New England in America which lies and extends from Narragansett River the space of forty leagues (120) miles, upon a straight line near the seashore to the west and southwest, from the Atlantic Ocean to the South Sea, and all the islands, mines and minerals; and north and south in breadth, reserving for his majesty, his heirs and successors, the one-fifth of all gold and silver found."

Rapid Settlement

In less than four years after the arrival of the first settlers on the Connecticut River, all the land in the immediate vicinity was privately appropriated, and as new settlers came in needing land, the inevitable speculation developed. New arrivals had to pay others for a place on and from which to live.

The three independent settlements in Connecticut were the nucleus of the Connecticut colony. In the fourth year they consisted of 160 families, comprising 800 persons.

The fort at Saybrook was planned and commanded by Lion Gardiner, an engineer who had served in Holland under the Prince of Orange. Johnston is quoted as having said, "The English settlement at Saybrook rested on a paper title which rested on nothing and was never perfected. The other settlements had not even a baseless paper title to rest upon. Both were perfect examples of squatter sovereignty."

Land Distribution Trick

Another trick widely practiced in land distribution in New England is illustrated by the division of land at Milford in 1805 (in one-and-two-thirds century after the founding of the place), when allotments were made to heirs based upon the list of landholders and the area held by each 119 years previously; the object being to confine grants to the descendants of the first families—thereby shutting out subsequent arrivals and their descendants, and tending to form a landholding aristocracy.

The English were so strong in numbers three years after their arrival in Connecticut, that they denied to the Dutch, the first Europeans, all title to any possessions on the river.

The allotting of land in many places in New England was proportionate to what each person invested in the adventure of making a new settlement. In fact, making these new settlements became what would be designated today as a racket, with some aspects of a lottery.

The assembly, in 1703, decreed that all land in the townships already granted should remain, with all the privileges and immunities therein granted, in fee simple to the promoter-proprietors, their heirs and assigns forever.

The people were thus for all future ages alienated from the land, except by purchase from those who had been born earlier and had gotten possession of it.

[Ed. Note: The foregoing is another in a series of extracts from "Land Title Origins" by Alfred N. Chandler, (1945), Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, \$3.00.]