The Digital Archive of John Wompas

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Swindler Sachem: The Nipmuc Indian Who Sold His Birthright, Dropped out of Harvard, and Conned the King of England

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Data Description: The Digital Archive of John Wompas, by Jenny Hale Pulsipher

In the course of writing my book on John Wompas, Swindler Sachem: The Nipmuc Indian Who Sold His Birthright, Dropped out of Harvard, and Conned the King of England (Yale University Press, 2018), I gathered a great deal of information on such subjects as Indian slavery, Native land sales, the Atlantic maritime trade, and Native education in Massachusetts. This information contributed to the book by providing historical context for Wompas’s life, but most nitty-gritty details were tangential to the book’s purpose so do not appear in it. Because those details could help other scholars working on more narrowly focused books or articles, I have placed them here where they can be accessible to anyone who has the URL.

I also built this archive as a teaching resource. For many students starting out in the field of history, historical research is a mystery. Students read books that make arguments, but they don’t always understand how the author moved from the evidence to the claim. For a book like Swindler Sachem, which pulls bits of evidence from a multitude of archival, printed, and nontraditional sources, arriving at a conclusion may appear even more mysterious. By placing photos and transcriptions of my sources on a digital archive, paired with a timeline, I provide students with a chance to examine the evidence themselves, come to their own conclusions, which they can compare to mine. They can also examine the tables of information I have gathered, organized below under "Data on Indian Slavery and Servitude," "Data on Indian Land Sales in New England," "Data on Maritime New England," "Data on Indian Literacy and Education," and "Data on Native Female Property Ownership."

I. Timeline
   Timeline, with links to photos and transcriptions of relevant documents

II. Data on Indian Slavery and Servitude
   A. Captives in the Pequot War, 1637 to 1676
   B. Fates of Individual Captives in the Pequot War
   C. Slaves in King Philip’s War
   D. Indian Children put to service in King Philip’s War

III. Data on Indian Land Sales in New England

   In order to find all of John Wompas’s land transactions, I searched land deed collections throughout New England. I also wanted to test my belief, based on scattered and anecdotal evidence, that the price English people paid Indians for unimproved land was significantly lower than the price unimproved land sold for between English buyers. To do this, I began filling in tables of land sale prices, particularly in Nipmuc Country in the last quarter of the seventeenth and the start of the eighteenth century. I gathered enough data to confirm my initial judgment.

   While I stopped far short of compiling all Indian land sales, I believe such a compilation could yield very interesting information. For instance, it could reveal whether particular Native groups or individuals were able to consistently command better prices for their land. It could reveal which English individuals or communities paid higher or lower prices for Indian land and
what the consequences of those patterns were. It could also allow scholars to examine patterns
of Native land use across time, by tabulating instances where Indians reserved traditional land
uses, where women signed deeds as owners of land, where sachems signed deeds signifying
their traditional right to distribute land, etc. With a complete compilation of land sale data,
scholars could move beyond anecdotal evidence of patterns to draw well supported
conclusions, as well as nuanced discussions of divergences from patterns.

A. Connecticut Indian Deeds
B. Fairfield Indian Deeds
C. Massachusetts Indian Deeds
D. Middlesex County Indian Deeds
E. Suffolk County Indian Deeds
F. Plymouth Colony Deeds
G. Quinsigamog Deeds
H. Sutton Deeds
I. Hampden County Deeds
J. Land Transactions of John Wompas and Ann Prask Wompas, 1662-1679
K. Sample of Prices paid for improved and unimproved land, Sutton, MA

IV. Data on Maritime New England
   A. Ships and sailors
   B. Indians at Sea
   C. Ships Trading to Boston

V. Data on Indian Literacy and Education
   A. Marks and Signatures of Native People of Massachusetts, 17th Century
   B. Indian Scholars Chart

VI. Data on Native Female Property Ownership
   A. Inventory of the Estate of Ann Wompas
   B. Ann Wompas Inventory compared to estates of white women