

John Winthrop to Nathaniel Rich

Massachusetts, May 22, 1634.

Autograph letter signed, 2 pages.

Worthye Sr

That you are pleased among your many and weighty employments to spend so much serious thoughts and good wishes upon us, and the work of the Lord in our hands, I must needs acknowledge it among other the special favours of God towards us, and an undoubted testimony of your sincere Love towards us: which makes me the more careful to satisfy your desire, of being truly informed of our estate (this being the first safe meanes of Conveyance since I received yours in October last) you may please therefore to understand that first, for the number of our people, we never took any survey of them, nor do we intend it, except enforced through urgent occasion (David's example sticks somewhat with us) [some Protestants interpreted the Bible as forbidding a census] but I esteem them to be in all about 4000 souls and upward: in good health (for the most part) and well provided of all necessaries: so as (through the Lords special providence) there hath not died about 2 or 3 grown persons, and about so many Children all in the last year, it being very rare to heare of any sick of agues or other diseases, nor have I known of any quartan Ague amonge us since I came into the Countrye. For Our susistence here, the means hitherto hath been the yearly access of newcomers, who have supplied all our wants, for Cattle, and the fruits of our labours, as board, pale, smiths work etc: If this should fail, then we have other meanes which may supply us, as fish viz: Cod, bass and herring, for which no place in the world exceeds us, if we can compass salt at a reasonable rate: our grounds likewise are apt for hemp and flax and rape seeds, and all sorts of roots, pumpkins and other fruits, which for taste and wholesomeness far exceed those in England: our grapes also (wherewith the Countrye abounds) afford a good hard wine. Our ploughs go on with good success, we are like to have 20 at work next year: our lands are aptest for Rye and oats. Our winters are sharp and long, I may reckon 4 months for storing of cattle, but we find no difference whither they be housed or go abroad: our summers are somewhat more fervent in heat than in England. Our civil Government is mixt: the freemen choose the magistrates every year...and at 4 courts in the year 3 out of each town (there being 8 in all) do assist the magistrates in making laws, imposing taxes,

and disposing of lands: our furies are chosen by the freemen of everye town. Our Churches are governed by Pastors, Teachers ruling Elders and Deacons, yet the power lies in the whole Congregation and not in the Presbytery [not in a larger council of churches] further than for order and precedence. For the natives, they are near all dead of the smallpox, so the Lord hath cleared our title to what we possess.