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Laws relating to property, hunting, and harvesting, 1641

Colonists had laws about land ownership which included preventing anyone, including native people, from taking resources from privately owned land. In many cases, the laws reflect the fundamental difference between the native and colonial understanding of land ownership.

The tenure of the Lands of Aquethneck [Aquidneck]

It is ordered, established and decreed, unanimously, that all men's properties and their lands of the Island, and the jurisdiction thereof shall be such, and so free, that neither the state nor any person or persons shall intrude into it, or molest him in it, to deprive him of any thing whatsoever, or shall be within that or any of the bounds thereof, and that this tenure and propriety of his shall be continued to him or his, or to whomever he shall assign it for ever.

The Orders & Laws made at the General Court held at Newport the 17th of September, Anno 1641

Whereas there was certain records, to wit eleven in number, made & entered into this Book of State, which records are since found to be imperfect by wanting of that which was intended both for the bounds, quantity, & tenure; it is therefore ordered that it shall be lawful to transcribe & rectify the said records according to perfect rules & orders in that case provided.

The order made for the restraint of killing deer at the last court is repealed.

It is ordered & agreed that no English man or other shall set any traps for deer upon the Island under pain of forfeiting five pounds, except it be within his own enclosed grounds.

It is also ordered that no Indian shall fell or peel any trees upon the Islands, and that if any be found so doing, or carrying of bark (so peeled upon the Islands) away, it shall be lawful for all that so finds them to bring or cause to be brought the parties so offending, before the magistrates, who shall order and punish them according to the law.

*This transcript is intended to capture the substance of the document.
For details of capitalization, punctuation, spelling and spacing, we recommend consulting the original document.*

Whereas there was a difference in the understanding of the order made [by] the last court concerning the election of military commanders, it was explained by the authority of the court that the freemen of the town according to order shall confirm one to each office... [laws not included in this transcription continue on next page]

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, C#206 Records of the Isle of Rhode Island, p. 37.