

## Phillip Pinckney and Richard Shute

### Article # 2 on the Founding of Eastchester

By

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The men and women who settled Eastchester between 1664 and 1682 left no written accounts of why they left Fairfield, Connecticut. They would establish a village called Eastchester eighteen miles from Manhattan, still under the control of a foreign nation, Holland. Fortunately, history does provide us with fascinating insights along with interesting stories about a few of those people who founded the town of Eastchester in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

Let us first look at Eastchester's oldest and most precious document, the Eastchester Covenant. Eastchester's founding document envisioned a society based on good will to all, kindness, equality, honesty, shared burdens, and economic sensibility.<sup>1</sup> The Covenant signed by 26 of the male heads of households between 1665 and 1682 served as a mission statement or blueprint on what type of community Eastchester expected to be. This document offers a rare glimpse into the lives of Eastchester's early residents. Let us look first at two of those individuals.

The first person to sign the Covenant was Phillip Pinckney. Pinckney at age 47 along with James Everts signed the deed from Thomas Pell acquiring almost 7000 acres of land that became Eastchester.<sup>2</sup> All three men were residents of Fairfield. In England the Pinckney family was famous for its scholars in many walks of life.<sup>3</sup>

One can only imagine the dialogue between Pell and Pinckney convincing him and nine other families to take the risk to start a settlement in a wilderness filled with savage animals, in disputed territory, and near what to the Puritans were a degenerate culture in Manhattan that was diametrically opposed to their values of order, proper behavior, and upright character. Both Pell and Pinckney came from the English upper class. Pell's brother John was a highly respected mathematician and linguist who in the 1650's became a trusted advisor of Oliver Cromwell, the ruler of England responsible for the execution of King Charles I. Pinckney was the second son of a prominent English minister and the brother of an influential banker.

Pinckney proved to be a born leader. He along with the other people who founded the town was unhappy to a varying degrees with their financial condition and the spiritual condition of his church. A year after signing the deed to acquire the settlement, he was the first person to sign the Eastchester Covenant. Highly respected for his piety he would serve for years as a bible reader for the newly formed community. He was picked by the people of the town to negotiate with the Indians over claims to the land, deal with the royal governor along with others over disputes with the nearby town of Westchester, and agitate for the need for a New York colonial legislature similar to that of other self-governing colonies.<sup>4</sup> Twice in 1681 and 1683 he would be elected to the position of overseer, a position that after his death would be changed to town supervisor.<sup>5</sup>

But Philip Pinckney was only one person among equals. According to article # 7 of the Eastchester Covenant, 'No that one shall have more than fifteen acres, until all have that quality.' In Fairfield, the town from which they came, each family had two and a half to three acre home lots around the town square. But in Eastchester home lots were at least five times as large with available farm and pasture land

plentiful in the surrounding country side.<sup>6</sup> According to the Eastchester Town Records as of March 9, 1666 home lots for families including the Pinckney's were all 10 acres.<sup>7</sup>

Why is so much known about the early beginnings of Eastchester? A man named Richard Shute was selected as the first recorder or town clerk. Shute meticulously detailed the resolutions from Eastchester town meetings until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His greatest legacy was his recording of the Eastchester Covenant. But his detailed description of town records leaves Eastchester with some of the oldest archives in America. These priceless records might have been lost forever if it wasn't for two Eastchester women, Harriet Bianchi and Phyllis Knowles, who devoted years of study and analysis in transcribing, with original spelling and punctuation, hundreds of pages of Eastchester's hand written records dating back to the 1660's<sup>8</sup>

It has been only recently brought to our attention that Harriet Bianchi who was responsible for preserving out priceless archives is a direct descendant of Richard Shute. The largest number of the direct descendants of the original settlers who still live in Eastchester and lower Westchester are all descendants of Richard Shute and his wife, Sarah Sanford.

The next article will focus on the fascinating story of Sarah Sanford Shute, Nathaniel Brewster, Eastchester's first minister, and the reaction to the witchcraft hysteria that was rummaging through New England in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Please contact us at [historian@eastchesterhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:historian@eastchesterhistoricalsociety.org) about any comments or questions you might have about this column. Any questions about sources of information will be answered.

Many thanks to Regina Baio for her extensive research, documentation, and written analysis from which much of the material in this article is taken. Regina Baio is the author of "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville (1664-2014)* and David Tompkins for his pioneering research and writing in his book published in 1997 entitled *Eastchester Village: Colonial New York: 1666-1698, Maps and Inhabitants*.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Schechter *Roots of the Republic: American Founding Documents Interpreted*, ed. Stephen L. Schechter (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: A Madison House Book, 1990), 36, 41 and 42; Regina Baio, *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Inc.) 54.

<sup>2</sup> Eloise Morgan, "Evolving Borders" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Inc.) 20; According to the 1197 Colles map Eastchester was 6,919 acres.

<sup>3</sup> Earl Pinckney *History of the Eastchester Pinckney's from France to America* (Quarryville, Pennsylvania: [EarlandmarionPinckney@yahoo.com](mailto:EarlandmarionPinckney@yahoo.com) , June 15, 2015) 25, 29, 33, 35, and 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Inc.) 12-14, 16, 54-59. 60, 64-65, 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> "Community leaders throughout the years" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Inc.) 308.

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<sup>6</sup> David A. Tompkins *Eastchester Village: Colonial New York: 1666-1698, Maps and Inhabitants* (Eastchester, New York: Eastchester Historical Society, 1997) i and 14. Home lots were 20 acres and available farm and pasture land as much as 78 acres.

<sup>7</sup> David A. Tompkins *Eastchester Village: Colonial New York: 1666-1698, Maps and Inhabitants* (Eastchester, New York: Eastchester Historical Society, 1997) 14.

<sup>8</sup> Regina Baio, "The 1665 Covenant: Life in Seventeenth-Century Eastchester" *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of Eastchester, Tuckahoe, and Bronxville, 1664-2014* (Eastchester 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Inc.) 56.