
A New Heaven in a New Earth

On Sunday, April 25, 1638, the ships bearing John Davenport and his fellow adventurers sailed into the broad estuary on the northern shore of Long Island Sound that was Quinnipiac Harbor. Before them was a plain situated between a rampart of hills to the west, north, and east. The plain itself was cut by three rivers—the West, Mill, and Quinnipiac, as they would be named—that flowed into the estuary. This was the southern terminus of the Central Valley of Connecticut, which had been carved by geological forces and by the glacial activities of the Ice Age. The two most notable hills were West Rock and East Rock, large traprock formations with north-south axes that loomed over the landscape. The southern side of each rises almost vertically from the plain. Both of the rock formations have considerable iron in their composition, and erosion leaves a coating of rust, creating a reddish-brown hue to their faces. In 1614 a Dutch explorer named Adrian Block had sailed into the harbor and named it Roodeberg for the red hills that dominated the landscape.¹

The harbor itself was four miles long, with a width that varied between one and two miles. Shallow though it was, there was nevertheless a channel that was at least seven feet deep at low tide, sufficient for the vessels of that time. The location on Long Island Sound offered protection from major Atlantic storms. The sound also affected the climate of the region. Since the waters heat up slowly in the spring and stay warmer in the fall, summers are cooler and winters warmer than in the inland regions of New England, which results in a typical growing season of 195 days. The milder climate also made heavy snowfalls less common than in the interior of the region.²

As they sailed up the channel, the ships passed encampments of the Quinnipiac, the group of Algonquian Indians that lived in the region. A