

# 3 The English Colonies

## (1600–1775)

## KEY EVENTS

1629	Massachusetts Bay Company receives charter
1634	Maryland founded
1636	Connecticut Valley settled
1688	Glorious Revolution in England
1692	Witchcraft trials in Salem
1740	Great Awakening in colonies
1756–1763	Seven Years' War

## 1 Religion and the Settlement of New England

### Section Focus

**Key Terms** Puritan ■ Great Migration ■ commonwealth ■ covenant ■ General Court ■ freeman ■ New England Way ■ Fundamental Orders of Connecticut ■ dissenter

**Main Idea** The settlement of New England was undertaken by English people who hoped to establish a model society based on their religious views.

**Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. Why did thousands of English people choose to migrate in the 1630s?
2. How did the Massachusetts colonists structure their government and their society?
3. How did Massachusetts react to those who challenged the established views?

Each year the Plymouth Colony sent back to England a cargo of furs and lumber. But in 1628 the colonists sent back another kind of cargo. They sent their neighbor, Thomas Morton.

Morton had several years earlier settled north of Plymouth. Within a few years he was hunting, fishing, and trading guns to the Indians for furs. In his settlement, which he named Merrymount, Morton built an 80-foot Maypole around which he and his friends made merry with anyone who showed up.

The Maypole was a non-Christian tradition and as such was offensive to the Plymouth colonists. They might have left Morton alone, had the free-spirited adventurer not welcomed “the scum of the country.” How could one keep servants, Governor William Bradford of Plymouth complained, if they could flee to a haven such as Merrymount? How could settlers feel secure if the Indians had guns? Disturbed by Morton’s nest of mischief, Bradford ordered his arrest.

Although sent to England, Morton was back in Massachusetts a year later. By that time, however, boatloads of religious-minded colonists had settled on Boston harbor north of Merrymount. It was not long before they cut down Morton’s Maypole. His rowdy days were over. The message was clear: New England was for the godly.

### UNREST IN ENGLAND

During the 1620s the population of colonial New England had remained small, numbering only about 500. The population ballooned in the 1630s, however, because people were fleeing political, economic, and religious unrest in England.

Some of this unrest was caused by England’s struggle to shed its medieval ways. Wool had become the new route to wealth. To raise sheep, landholders fenced their land and evicted the peasants who had long lived there. The result was that thousands of people drifted into the cities looking for work and for a new life. The weavers

and merchants of woolen cloth at first had prospered, but when hard times hit the woolen market, they too found it hard to make ends meet. Throughout England it seemed that the rich were getting richer and the poor getting poorer and more numerous.

In 1625 England got a new king, Charles I. He only made things worse. Charles I was a stubborn ruler who did not really care what the people thought. In particular he insisted that everyone worship in the same way—his way.

One hundred years after the English Reformation, the nation was at odds over the direction the Church of England should take. Although the church was independent of Catholic control, it had kept much of the Catholic ritual and tradition. The **Puritans** desired to rid the church of such “Popish” traditions as the use of statues, paintings, and instrumental music. They also disapproved of such celebrations as Christmas and church marriage. They considered downright sinful the English practice of playing sports and games on Sunday. The Puritans held ministers in high



In 1630 John Winthrop led a large group of his fellow Puritans to New England, thus beginning the Great Migration. Winthrop became the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

**CULTURAL PLURALISM** What made Winthrop decide to go to America?

respect, but they resented the authority of the bishops. Why, they asked, could the church not return to the practices of the early Christians as described in the Bible?

“No way,” was the essence of the king’s answer. As Charles I viewed the matter, religion and the state were one. If people started to question the church authorities, next they might question the power of the king.

## THE GREAT MIGRATION

For devout Puritans the future looked bleak. Thinking that England was going to rack and ruin, many Puritans decided to emigrate to America. Thus in 1630 began the **Great Migration**. During the decade some 60,000 people poured out of England toward the Americas.

Most of these emigrants—40,000 of them—moved to England’s new colonies in the West Indies. The Caribbean was no longer a Spanish sea, and the new Atlantic sea powers were laying claim to islands unoccupied by the Spanish. By raising and exporting sugar, tobacco, cotton, and dyes, England’s West Indian plantations would form the most prosperous core of its emerging colonial empire.

Another 20,000 Puritan emigrants chose New England. In 1629 the Massachusetts Bay Company had been granted a royal charter to settle land in New England. Many Puritan merchants had invested in the company. It was only natural, therefore, that the company began to recruit new settlers from among the Puritans.

The leader of the Great Migration to New England was John Winthrop, a landed gentleman, an attorney, a pious Puritan. As part of the king’s crackdown on Puritans, Winthrop had been fired from his job as an attorney in the king’s courts. The leaders of the newly formed Massachusetts Bay Company recognized Winthrop’s leadership qualities and persuaded him to accept the position of governor. Winthrop set about recruiting prosperous Puritan families for the migration to New England.

In March 1630 the migration began. A fleet of 11 ships carried 700 passengers, 240 cows, and 60 horses. The arrival of the fleet more than doubled the existing white population of New England.

### MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY

As governor for most of the next nineteen years, John Winthrop helped set the course for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In a sermon on his flagship, the *Arbella*, he had expressed the hopes of the enterprise. Theirs would be a society, he said, of justice and mercy. It would be a **commonwealth**, a community in which people worked together for the good of the whole. It would be a model for the whole world:

For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.

**“For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill.”**

—Governor John Winthrop

The Massachusetts settlers believed they had a **covenant**, an agreement, with God to build a holy society. They further believed that they had a covenant with each other to work toward such a society. Covenants, whether written or unwritten, were important to the Puritans as a way to define and work for goals. The Mayflower Compact, for instance, was a written covenant.

With Winthrop at their lead, the Puritans set out to create their model society, their “city on a hill.” To give it form, they used the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company.

The Massachusetts Bay charter was really a business arrangement. The men who had invested in the company had absolute power to rule both company and colony as long as their laws did not contradict those of England. By charter, the investors were to meet in a **General Court** four times a year to make laws. However, once in Massachusetts the investors gave up such power. Instead, they granted membership in the company to all adult males who were church members. These **freemen** then elected the governor and the repre-

sentatives to the General Court. The result was a commonwealth controlled by male church members.

### THE NEW ENGLAND WAY

The basic unit of the commonwealth was the church congregation, which established a town. The focal point of each town was its meetinghouse. There, the inhabitants met for church services as well as for town meetings.

At the town meeting, people made laws that governed all aspects of life in the community. The meeting could grant land to newcomers, decide the fees for laborers, and determine the price for ale. It could appoint people to perform tasks necessary to the community—repairing fences, operating a ferry, serving in the militia. The laws required everyone, members and non-members, to attend church. Everyone also had to pay taxes to support the church.

Within the meetinghouse the pulpit was the most important feature. From the pulpit the minister delivered the sermons that were the core of the New England church service. Bonding the community spiritually and socially, the sermon provided instruction in the **New England Way**. This was the term used by the Puritans to describe both their beliefs and the society they were building. It was a society that emphasized duty, hard work, honesty, and moderation in dress and drink. It was a society fully aware of the temptations of both the flesh and the Devil. It constantly waged war against both.

The maintenance of the New England Way depended on education. The Puritans believed that the Bible was the source of truth. Therefore, each person should be able to read it. The General Court passed laws requiring that each child learn to read. (It was not necessary, however, to know how to write.) The society also depended on a well-educated ministry to explain Biblical teachings. To this end, Harvard College was founded in 1636.

The Massachusetts Puritans extended their influence by establishing towns in an ever-widening radius from Boston. Some Puritan congregations, however, started colonies independent of Massachusetts. In the quest for more fertile land, the

minister Thomas Hooker and his congregation moved in 1636 to settle in the Connecticut Valley. There they wrote and adopted a covenant, the **Fundamental Orders of Connecticut**. This covenant established the laws for the new settlement. In effect, it was a constitution, the first in the American colonies.

### CHALLENGES TO THE PURITANS

The Puritans did not bring freedom of religion to New England. They came to the Americas to worship their own way, and they grew intolerant of **dissenters**. A dissenter is someone who challenges the dominant vision of church or society.

The first important dissenter was Roger Williams, minister of the Salem congregation. Massachusetts leaders thought it bad enough when Williams said that the king of England had no right to give away Indian land. They found it intolerable, however, when he asserted that government should have no authority over religious matters. That challenged the very heart of the commonwealth. As a result, the General Court ordered him shipped back to England.

Before the order could be carried out, Williams slipped away in the winter snows to Narragansett Bay. With a small group of followers, he founded a colony there that would become Rhode Island.



Anne Hutchinson was put on trial in Massachusetts because she openly disagreed with Puritan teachings. After the Puritans forced her to leave the colony, she founded a settlement in Rhode Island dedicated to religious freedom. **RELIGION** How did Hutchinson's teachings threaten Puritan authority?

Williams's group was the first in America to embrace the newly established Baptist religion.

Soon Massachusetts faced another radical dissenter, Anne Hutchinson. Respected for her skill as a midwife and for her knowledge of herbal medicine, Hutchinson was also a spiritual leader with persuasive powers. In weekly meetings at her home, she explained her belief that a person could find inner truth and divine guidance without the help of the ministry. By challenging the religious authority of the ministry, however, Hutchinson was also challenging the basis of the common-

In the spring of 1636, Thomas Hooker and his followers left Massachusetts for Hartford, Connecticut. Landscape artist Frederick Edwin Church painted Hooker's journey 210 years later. **CULTURE** If the artist had described Hooker's journey in words instead of a painting, what do you think he might have said?



wealth. For this treason she was brought to trial. At trial, and pregnant with her sixteenth child, Hutchinson defiantly upheld her views.

The court ordered her banished from the colony. In 1638 she left with her family for Rhode Island. Rhode Island, called “Rogue’s Island” in Massachusetts, had become a refuge for anyone wishing to exercise freedom of conscience.

A generation later the commonwealth was again challenged. This time it was the Quakers, a radical Puritan sect that had arisen in England in the 1650s. The Quakers believed that each person could know God directly through an “inner light.” Because all people were equal before God, they said, there was no need for the authority of either ministers or the Bible.

Such beliefs caused the Quakers to be persecuted both in England and in Massachusetts. In Massachusetts the laws against Quaker missionaries were harsh. When whipping, imprisonment, banishment, cropping their ears, and boring their tongues with a hot iron did not stop the Quakers, Massachusetts began to hang them. The king himself had to order the practice stopped.

The Puritan commonwealth lasted just three

generations. In 1691 the Crown forced a new charter on Massachusetts. From now on, the governor would be appointed by the Crown. In addition, property—not church membership—would determine who voted. Massachusetts was also forced to extend religious tolerance to Anglicans, Baptists, and Quakers.

## SECTION REVIEW

**1. KEY TERMS** Puritan, Great Migration, commonwealth, covenant, General Court, freeman, New England Way, Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, dissenter

**2. PEOPLE** Charles I, John Winthrop, Thomas Hooker, Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson

**3. COMPREHENSION** What kinds of economic and religious unrest led to the Great Migration?

**4. COMPREHENSION** What was the importance of the town meeting in New England?

**5. CRITICAL THINKING** Why were the Puritans, who had migrated for religious freedom, intolerant of religious dissenters?

## 2 New Colonies, New People



### Section Focus



**Key Terms** indentured servant ■ proprietor



**Main Idea** The colonies that became part of England’s expanding American empire were distinct in many ways.



**Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

**1.** How did geographical factors influence life in the Chesapeake Tidewater?

**2.** How did New Netherland pass from Dutch to English rule?

**3.** What new English colonies were created?

By the mid-1600s, there were two clusters of English colonists in America: those of the Chesapeake Tidewater (the lowlands around the Chesapeake Bay), and those of New England. The population of each was about the same. The Chesapeake had

about 23,000 people, and New England about 22,000. A New Englander visiting the Chesapeake, however, might ask where the people were. In the Chesapeake, people did not live in towns as in New England.