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## The development of local religious tolerance in Massachusetts Bay Colony/

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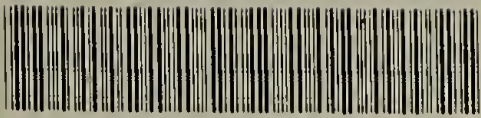
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE  
IN  
MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY

A Thesis Presented

by

ANDREW LEONARD SWEET

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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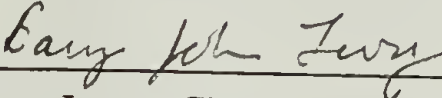
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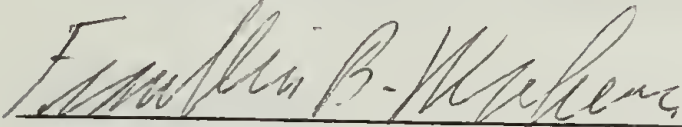
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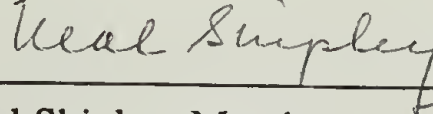
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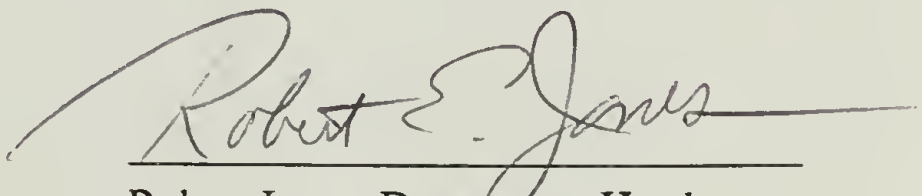
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## CHAPTER 1

### DISSENTING VOICES

A crowd of curiosity-seekers gathered before the Old Meeting House in Boston on a warm September day, 1651. The air invited memories of the summer season drawing quickly to its close, and few people in the crowd gave much thought to the rigors of living through the chill of the approaching New England winter. Three constables led a bound man through the crowd and tied him to a whipping post. One removed the prisoner's shirt as another announced the man's crime and its appropriate punishment. After a brief moment of uncomfortable silence, the third constable spit on his hands, firmly gripped his three-corded whip and began administering justice.

The man tied to the post yelled out to the people in the crowd as the lash cut into his back. "Though my flesh should fail and my spirit should fail," the offender cried, "yet my God will not fail."<sup>1</sup> His words fell on more than a few sensitive ears, for, but by the grace of God, some people thought, they could be that man. Thirty times the whip ripped open the skin and layers of flesh on the man's back. Even the governor, who had upheld the sentence and even now stood among the crowd, noticed the severity of the blows and commented on the "unmerciful manner" in which they were laid across the man's body.

The last blow struck, the magistrates untied the bloodied and visibly weakened man. Two people in the crowd offered him their help and sympathy, an act which brought them immediate arrest for contempt of authority. They later faced fines and imprisonment for their crime. As magistrates removed these fresh offenders from the scene, the man whose sentence was now complete addressed the remaining authorities, saying, "You have struck

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Nathan E. Wood, The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), p. 18.



me as with roses. Although the Lord hath made it easy to me yet I pray God it may not be laid to your charge."<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary accounts revealed that Obadiah Holmes, the whipped offender, suffered worse than he would admit to his persecutors. The governor, who watched the episode and followed Holmes' recovery, noted that for several weeks afterwards "he could take no rest, but as he lay on his knees and elbows, not being able to suffer any part of his body to touch the bed whereon he lay."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the severity of his treatment at the hands of the Massachusetts Bay authorities apparently convinced Holmes to return to his home in Newport, Rhode Island, where he had come from several months earlier. He did not visit his neighbors to the north for many years thereafter.

Holmes' prayer for his persecutors may have been granted in the eyes of the God to whom it was directed, but the unfolding of events and patterns of behavior in communities throughout the colony during the following years suggests that this episode, in both a real and a symbolic sense, exacted a punishment on the system that produced it. Obadiah Holmes was an anabaptist, and it had been for his religious convictions that he received the lash. Within a year after his whipping, a stirring account of anabaptists' sufferings at the hands of Massachusetts Bay authorities had been published in England by Dr. John Clarke, the pastor of Holmes' baptist church in Newport. Opponents of the Puritan Way prized Clarke's pamphlet for its censure of Oliver Cromwell and his earnest collaborators in New England.<sup>4</sup> Political tremors from the events surrounding the prosecution of Obadiah Holmes would be felt in New England for some years to come, particularly after Cromwell's death in 1659 and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>John Clarke, Ill Newes from New-England (London: 1652). Clarke, a graduate of Cambridge University, a respected physician and co-grantee in the charter for Rhode Island with Roger Williams, had been imprisoned with Holmes and John Crandall on the same charges.



Symbolically, the whipping of Obadiah Holmes sounded a death knell for the existing pattern of social and cultural development of Massachusetts Bay Colony, for it exposed some elemental inconsistencies in the manner which the political and ecclesiastical establishment attempted to manipulate that development. More specifically, it spoke to an inconsistency of policy, official and otherwise, which ultimately compromised the Puritan establishment's program against the growth of toleration for religious dissenters. First, although Holmes had at one time been a Massachusetts freeman, he received swift judgement due to his status as a visiting proselytizer. Very few if any resident anabaptists of a similar doctrinal stance received such an extreme form of spiritual persuasion. Second, magistrates brought Holmes' case before the governor and his council, which possessed a clear distinction as an institution of zealous men with a self-ordained mandate for maintaining social hegemony. The vast majority of resident anabaptists cited for legal impropriety, if legally challenged, stood before lesser bodies where the sense of purpose was not necessarily as strong. At the lowest levels of the legal ladder, the scattered communities where the idealism of colonial law met the utility of daily life, such purpose could at times be hard to find. Finally, among the crowd who witnessed Holmes' pain on that summer day numbered many who may have perceived a relative pettiness in his offense, and who themselves possessed differences of opinion from a strict interpretation of the Puritan Way. Making Holmes a public example had been intended to discourage others from assuming like errors of judgement. However, rather than effectively diverting a trickle of dissent, the actions of the Massachusetts Bay authorities opened an increasingly wider channel for the growth and toleration of dissent. The number of anabaptists in towns around Boston increased steadily after 1651, and after 1656, Quakers began making slow but lasting inroads into the life of several communities.

### Anabaptism Defined

Anabaptism has largely been defined by historians and theologians alike as a strain of radical Protestantism first associated with the German states of the sixteenth-century. While the beliefs and practices of groups branded "anabaptist" varied widely, most of them were greatly influenced by the theology of the French reformer Jean Calvin. The most notable common tenet in the groups' shared theology was that of "believer's baptism," which in effect stated that the only subjects worthy of baptism into the Christian church were those who could provide profession of belief. Children, therefore, particularly newborns, were considered unable to make a rational, thoughtful or sincere profession, prompting many parents to withhold their offspring from the practice. Such a step of *antipaedobaptism* brought stern condemnation from the established church. Many people extended that principle a step further, for, having themselves most likely been raised in either the Roman or reformed Protestant traditions, they considered the baptisms they experienced as infants unacceptable. They found it necessary to be baptized again, thus rendering the name *anabaptist*.

Apart from common views on baptism and a few other minor theological points, anabaptist groups travelled largely divergent paths. In fact, the confusion often faced in determining the theology and practice of different anabaptist groups stemmed from the increasingly indiscriminate fashion in which contemporaries applied the label. Thus, a brief historical review reveals a spectrum of belief so vast as to suggest that almost any group dissenting from an ecclesiastical norm was at one time or another lumped into the refuse heap called anabaptists. That dissent took many forms, and posed varying levels of perceived danger to the political, social and religious forms around them.

The orthodox church's fears played itself out in the German town of Muenster in the early 16th century, where anabaptists gained political and social control and attempted to set up a biblical utopia based on antinomianism (from the Greek "against law"). The effort



failed, and biblical antinomianism produced social anarchy. The experience of Muenster haunted the memory of civil and ecclesiastical leadership for generations to come, and provided a ready example to dissuade any who entertained ideas similar to those of the German radicals. The majority of European anabaptists, however, were as repulsed by the fanaticism of Muenster as their orthodox counterparts, and differed from those same counterparts on smaller matters of conscience.

Anabaptism in seventeenth-century New England appeared concurrently with a strong movement of General and Particular Baptists (the *ana* having been dropped) in England. These two groups differed on the issue of general redemption (as opposed to the strictly Calvinist doctrine of particular redemption, or election) and separatism, but few contemporaries drew a distinction. Particular Baptists favored a maintenance of a "semi-separatist" relationship with the established church, while General Baptists sought to withdraw from their former brethren altogether. Both groups encouraged greater lay participation in their gatherings, and denied the monopoly on preaching and pastoring exercised by trained, college-educated clergymen. Both groups also sought to restrict the power and place of civil authorities in judging on matters of personal faith and religious conscience. As an outgrowth of these movements, the emergence of anabaptists in New England, and particularly Massachusetts Bay Colony, brought with it all of these ideas.

The Puritan fathers who founded the early settlements of Massachusetts Bay Colony faced dissent from their prescribed system of ecclesiastical hegemony almost from the outset. The celebrated cases of Roger Williams in Salem and Anne Hutchinson in Boston, both within the first few decades of those communities' settlements, spoke to the presence of a level of sympathy, however small, with the voices of dissent in those communities. Williams and Hutchinson received sentences of banishment, but they did not leave the colony alone. Williams moved to what would become Rhode Island, and Hutchinson to England, with several followers in tow. Many of their sympathizers stayed behind, where the church "reformed" them or they maintained their heterodoxy in silence.

## Tolerance Revealed

When Obadiah Holmes visited Massachusetts Bay in July, 1651, his purpose was to minister, with fellow travellers John Clarke and John Crandall, to William Witter, a blind and aged member of his Newport baptist congregation then living in the town of Lynn in Essex County. Clarke, Crandall and Holmes were apprehended by magistrates while preaching to and baptizing some of Witter's neighbors, thus beginning their trial and Holmes' eventual whipping. Seventeen years later, on a Sunday in October, 1668, the constables of Charlestown in Middlesex County reported the presence of one "Obaddiah Hoames of Roade Island (as he saide hys name was)" at a meeting of anabaptists at the home of Thomas Gould.<sup>5</sup> Gould and several others had formed their own church there three years previously, and Gould, as its pastor, had been imprisoned with two other outspoken members of the group for several months. Holmes, whose Newport church maintained close correspondence with its Charlestown brethren, had returned to minister to a young congregation deprived of its leadership. On this occasion, however, he apparently met with little or no challenge from the colonial authorities. The spiritual climate in which Obadiah Holmes had once suffered had changed.

Lynn and Charlestown were neither the first nor the only towns in Massachusetts Bay to experience the growth of anabaptist sensitivities among its people. But their histories as recorded in church, town, county and colony records display remarkable similarities in the atmospheres of toleration that each community cultivated. The fact that Holmes' only two recorded visits to Massachusetts Bay after he moved to Rhode Island were to Lynn and Charlestown was not a mere coincidence. Likewise, the unique character of both towns produced some distinctions in their respective patterns of toleration. In Lynn, the dissenters met informally. Charlestown's group signed a formal agreement in 1665. Lynn began as a satellite settlement from Salem, and under Salem's influence it primarily operated. Charlestown inhabitants, on the other hand, settled Boston, and towards its soon dominant offspring the elder town generally gravitated. Nevertheless, both communities

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<sup>5</sup>Files of the Middlesex County Quarterly Court, quoted in Wood, p. 84.



provided fertile ground for the nurturing of two of the colony's most active groups of dissenting anabaptists.

### Tolerance in a Political Context

The dynamics that led to both towns' adoption of relative toleration of the dissenters in their midsts certainly reflected in some measure the constantly changing political climate in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay. The change in that climate passed through several phases, each with strong connections to the prevailing political mood in England itself. Prior to the apex of Puritan power under Oliver Cromwell during the 1650s, the persecution of dissenters in Massachusetts passed relatively unchecked by politicians in England. The colony's General Court successfully legislated several laws against anabaptists, the first significant one in 1644:

If any person within this jurisdiction shall either openly condemn or oppose the baptism of infants, or go about secretly to seduce others from the approbation or use thereof, or shall purposely depart the congregation at the ministration of the ordinance, or &c., and shall appear to the Court willfully and obstinately to continue therein after due time and means of conviction, every such person shall be sentenced to banishment.<sup>6</sup>

With the rise of Cromwell in 1648, the General Court had little to fear by way of reprisal from their own source of authority in England.

The political winds began to shift with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660. With Charles on the throne, English Puritans again found themselves among the religious dissenters to an Anglican majority. The king also voiced his displeasure at the persecution suffered by Anglicans living in Massachusetts Bay, and demanded a change in policy. In 1664, royal commissioners pressured the General Court into modifying its law stipulating that only full members of the colony's congregational

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Richard Frothingham, Jr., The History of Charlestown, Massachusetts (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), p. 131.

churches could receive freemanship, and by extension, the franchise.<sup>7</sup> For the orthodox congregational churches of Massachusetts, however, a crisis in their own neighborhood produced more damaging religious unrest and dissension. In 1662, a synod of church leaders adopted the Halfway Covenant, which permitted the grandchildren of church members to receive the ordinance of baptism. The fury unleashed over the Halfway Covenant reached its peak in 1669 when the First Church of Boston split over the issue. The arguments that raged over a definition of an appropriate subject for the privilege of baptism undoubtedly aided the cause of antipaedobaptists for whom that issue had long been of central importance.

Also in 1669, thirteen of England's leading Independent ministers, each with a large popular following and considerable political influence, wrote the governor of the colony. They advised him "to put an end unto the sufferings and confinements of the persons censured, and to restore them to their former liberty." They specifically addressed the plight of several men from Charlestown imprisoned for their convictions, but also addressed the question of tolerance in general.<sup>8</sup> These pressures and more produced eventual change in the colony's legal code, although in 1672 the earlier laws concerning anabaptists were strengthened and revised to include a broader range of "damnable heresies."<sup>9</sup> A succession of increasingly tolerant men in the office of colonial governor also reflected the swing in the political tide. When Governor Richard Bellingham, whose efforts had secured the 1672 revision, died later that same year, his replacement refused to enforce the new law. John Leverett gained a reputation as a remarkably tolerant man and an able governor.

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<sup>7</sup>"The Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668," William G. McLoughlin and Martha Whiting Davidson, eds., in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1964, vol. 76 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1965), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup>Letter of March 25, 1669, reprinted in full in Isaac Backus, A History of New England With Particular Reference to the Baptists, vol. 1 (Newton: Backus Historical Society, 1871), pp. 314-5.

<sup>9</sup>Court order quoted in Wood, p. 107.



The loss of the colonial charter and the installation of Sir Edmund Andros as governor of the combined "Dominion of New England" from 1686 to 1689 effectively marked the end of any significant, organized attempts to suppress heterodoxy in every form. It also marked the end of a colonial bureaucracy that had sought to preserve hegemony while battling changing political forces at home. Those influences helped construct an atmosphere of tolerance in the colony. But the dominant factor in the development of toleration were the constant social, cultural and religious forces at work in the lives of the members of local communities.

### Anabaptist Historiography

Historians have long studied the cases of Williams, Hutchinson and others like Obadiah Holmes, as a vital part of the early history of New England, and rightfully so. Long-held standard interpretations of their importance and impact on the Massachusetts Bay they left behind have generally come to the conclusion that the colony as a whole provided an environment ill-suited for the free expression of spiritual doctrine or practice that differed from the state-supported church, and that the changes for which Williams and Hutchinson lobbied were not visibly accepted for anywhere from fifty to one hundred years later. Massachusetts Bay possessed a highly intolerant society in that historical estimation; whereas the early settlers risked the dangers of an ocean voyage and an unknown land for a place to exercise their religious freedom, they were unwilling to grant similar freedom to anyone who strayed from their own modes of thought and action. Nathan Wood's History of the First Baptist Church of Boston, published in 1899, illustrates that school of historical interpretation.

A relatively small amount of scholarly effort has been expended during the past two or three decades on the practical development of tolerance in Massachusetts Bay, with two notable exceptions. This more recent historical work has begun to paint a different picture of the situation, however incomplete and fractured it yet remains. William McLoughlin of

Brown University, writing in the 1960s, undertook a study of New England dissent to determine how, when the dynamic heads of leadership represented by Williams and Hutchinson were being removed, the strains of dissent survived. For there was "no doubt," McLoughlin says, "that the social persecution by [the early dissenters'] neighbors and fellow church members was at least as potent a force in their suppression as the punishments meted out by the courts."<sup>10</sup> He allows an exception, however, with the growth of anabaptist sentiment among some of the settlers of Charlestown in the 1650s and 60s. While they faced certain persecution by colonial and local authorities, their ability to maintain both their beliefs and their residency in the town stemmed primarily from their character. As "God-fearing, hard-working, sober farmers, tailors, cobblers, and mechanics, most of them pious and faithful members of the Puritan churches," he notes, "the dissenters were in many respects the salt of the community."<sup>11</sup> Of particular importance in McLoughlin's view was the emergence of the first significant anabaptist leader in almost fifteen years, Thomas Gould of Charlestown, a man known and respected for his spiritual maturity and sober lifestyle. Finally, McLoughlin places the Charlestown group's unique status in perspective by acknowledging the growing religious unrest of the 1660s produced by the colony-wide adoption of a Halfway Covenant which granted baptism to the grandchildren of church members, and the rising tide of political pressure from England for the colonial authorities to more closely mirror the legal precedents for tolerance at home.

A second, brief treatment of the growth of tolerance in New England centers on the "Puritan adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay."<sup>12</sup>

Jonathan Chu, writing in the 1980s, acknowledges that Quakers were seen by

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<sup>10</sup>William G. McLoughlin, New England Dissent, 1630-1883. Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>Jonathan M. Chu, Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985). The quotation is the book's given subtitle.



contemporaries beginning in the 1650s as a new form of anabaptists, but their threat to the colonial order posed a more immediate and identifiable danger than did their dissenting predecessors. For unlike other anabaptists, Quakers often voiced strong objections to both the religious and political order, and received markedly harsher treatment as a result. However, Chu charts an obvious shift in the colony's official attitude toward Quakers through the rest of the century, pinning the ultimate responsibility for their gradual acceptance on two factors.

First, Chu points to the very legal system used to stop them. Colonial authorities, he said, wanted to maintain a legal separation of church and state, but church leaders continually deferred matters of dissent to their civil counterparts. Thus, when an eventual conflict arose between civil and religious polity, the court system ruled for the former. "The emergence of toleration in Massachusetts did not take place because Puritans learned to appreciate it as an end in itself," Chu writes, "but because circumstances made it preferable to sacrifice religious conformity for other social ends."<sup>13</sup>

Second, Chu develops an argument which considers the conditions of local life. Quakers visiting the colony were not tolerated and therefore expelled, he notes, whereas local, home-grown Quakers were allowed to remain, albeit under the closest scrutiny. Within the "dynamics of local life," Chu asserts, that level of scrutiny slowly diminished as daily living "altered the Puritan view of the sect and its believers."<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the growth of toleration at the local level produced an eventual movement towards the same throughout the colony.

Chu and McLoughlin both present well-argued cases from their research, but neither of them fully develops the parameters of their arguments. McLoughlin, while correct in noting the peculiarity of the Charlestown situation, incorrectly earmarks that group of

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

anabaptists as an exception to the rule of Massachusetts Bay intolerance. He also fails to fully present his case concerning the character of the anabaptists themselves. Chu, likewise, turns his attention to the local scene as the most consistent source of toleration, but also provides limited insight into the lives of the dissenters. His thesis would have been strengthened had he extended the timeframe of his study to include that of the earlier anabaptists. His conclusions may prove accurate for Quakers beginning in the 1650s and 60s, but many of those same themes explain the toleration of both separating and non-separating anabaptists prior to 1650.

### The Thesis Presented

Toleration for religious dissent developed from the relationships between people at the local level. In general, the nature of the relationships between neighbor and neighbor, dissenting and orthodox, grew not from the prevailing mood among the governor, his council or the descending strata of legal institutions designed to uphold their vision of the Biblical commonwealth. Nor were those relationships defined by leaders of the church. Rather, a broad array of considerations, both spoken and unspoken, guided the attitudes and pragmatic daily decision-making processes of the townsfolk. For some, a difficult choice existed between toeing the orthodox line or salvaging the life of the community as they knew it. For others, practical economic considerations outweighed the often purely ideological rewards associated with a strict hegemony. Likewise, matters of family, local influence, personal character, regional security and military service, among others, played varying roles in the drama of local life on a frontier of modern civilization. Independently, each of these issues determined the responses of different individuals to the perceived threat posed by religious dissenters. Taken together, they determined a communal response which displayed a progressively more lenient attitude in thought and action.



## CHAPTER 2

### LYNN'S HERITAGE OF DISSENT

When John Clarke, John Crandall and Obadiah Holmes walked onto William Witter's farm on the outer limits of Lynn on that Saturday in July 1651, their presence in the colony had already been cautiously monitored. A day or two earlier, while passing through Boston, the three men requested food and lodging at a house beside the road but were promptly refused. The colony's General Court had earlier passed a series of statutes prohibiting the entertaining of people like them, strangers whose welcome had simply worn out. Magistrates granted only one or two households in each community the right to operate a tavern and receive travellers. Such measures carried implied messages discouraging unsavory characters, particularly anabaptists, from tarnishing the sanctity of orthodox communities with their corrupting influence. At Witter's house, however, they met with a warm reception, for their arrival had long been expected.

Word of the three strangers' trek into town spread quickly, for Witter's house stood in Swampscot, a section of the community bordering Salem to the north. Witter's farm may have been fairly isolated from its neighbors. But the men, having walked from the south, used a road passing through the heart of the settlement. Two of the men, Crandall and Holmes, had lived in Salem a few years earlier, and may have been recognized by some of the local people who encountered them in town. Even if unrecognized, the three travellers would have raised certain suspicion. For although Lynn lay on the highway between Boston and Salem, these men had obviously not embarked on a day's hike. Their clothes displayed the effects of a longer journey, one in fact that had begun eighty miles distant.

Unlike its neighbors to the north and south, the vibrant and growing seaports of Salem and Boston, Lynn was a small, simple fishing and farming community. Travellers

between the two larger towns passed through Lynn regularly, and were probably greeted at their destinations with little fanfare. Few if any people actually stopped in Lynn. Thus, when an observant neighbor realized that the three dusty pedestrians had ended their journey in Swampscot and not continued on to Salem, he deemed it necessary to inform the local magistrate, Robert Bridges.

The next morning, "being the first day of the week," Clarke later wrote, and "not having freedom in our Spirits for want of a clear Call from God to go unto the Public Assembly to declare there what was the mind, and counsel of God concerning them, I judged it was a thing suitable to consider what the counsel of God was concerning ourselves."<sup>1</sup> Before Clarke finished preaching, two constables arrived with a warrant from Bridges for the three men's detainment. They disrupted the meeting, arrested the trio, and presented them to the local congregation then assembled for one of its Sabbath services. The visitors disturbed the town assembly by refusing to remove their hats, and Clarke addressed the crowd following the sermon, rebuking them for not following the "visible order of our Lord" by practicing infant baptism. The constables detained them overnight in the local tavern, but the next morning, Monday, they somehow eluded the authorities and held another meeting at Witter's home. When the constables came to remove them, they discovered Clarke and Holmes baptizing two or three Lynn residents, including Witter and Mrs. Sarah Bowdish.

The following afternoon, Clarke, Holmes and Crandall appeared before Governor John Endicott in Boston, where Clarke passionately defended his views on believer's baptism. Such passion, however, alarmed the governor. Each man received a stiff fine -- Holmes, thirty pounds, Clarke, twenty and Crandall, five -- and a prison sentence until they paid the fines. Clarke and Crandall accepted the generosity of some anonymous wealthy benefactors, who paid their fines. Holmes, however, refused, and remained in prison until

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<sup>1</sup>Clarke, *Ill Newes from New-England*, reprinted in *Colonial Baptists, Massachusetts and Rhode Island*, a volume in the Arno Press Collection, The Baptist Tradition (New York: 1980), p. 104.



October when he paid his fine with the flesh of his back. Clarke soon travelled to London where he published his much-publicized appeal concerning the behavior of the Massachusetts Bay authorities. Curiously enough, the last recorded prosecutions of an anabaptist in the Essex County Quarterly Court occurred in 1652. One of those cases concerned William Witter, who, for his part in the events of that weekend received a small fine. The Lynn church summarily voted to excommunicate him from its fellowship, a punishment that produced little suffering for the old man. He had already chosen to separate himself from the assembly.

### Lynn Settled

That part of Lynn's character as a small, close-knit community which made the visit of three strangers such a notable occurrence in one sense mirrored the practical character of the colony as a whole. Outsiders were treated with suspicion and even open hostility, especially if their persons posed an obvious threat to the town's tranquility. But established, local residents who shared ideological or religious leanings identical to their alien friends experienced greater forbearance. Several factors unique to the settlement of Lynn and the development of its social life significantly contributed to the formation of that character, chief among them the town's relationship with neighboring Salem, problems within its own church body, the impact of several influential people on the life of the community, a rapid rate of demographic turnover and an equally rapid attrition rate among the town's core of established residents.

Lynn's first settlers, no more than a half-dozen families, arrived from Salem in June, 1629, calling their settlement "Saugust." Fifty more families settled the following year. Mostly farmers, with some skilled craftsmen, the residents of the new community achieved loose incorporation in 1630 when the General Court admitted Lynn freemen as members of its body. They possessed no royal charter of incorporation, like many of the earliest towns

in the colony, but in 1637 an act of the General Court officially naming the town stated that "Saugust is called LIN."<sup>2</sup> At first, several families attended church at Salem, but as new people continued to settle in the town, the need for a church of its own became evident. With the arrival of Rev. Stephen Bachiler from England in June, 1632, the town established its first church.<sup>3</sup> Many Lynn residents, however, continued to worship with the Salem congregation, an important factor in the development of tolerance and Lynn's heritage of dissent.

When the settlement at Lynn began in 1629, the church in Salem served as the sole source of spiritual nourishment for residents of the two towns. Lynn and Salem shared a common and quite nebulous border on the vast farm known as "Swampscot." Originally sold by the English crown to Mr. John Humfrey in March, 1628, Swampscot contained sections of land claimed by both towns. Early historians of the county, as well as the clerks of the quarterly court, often identified residents of Swampscot as residing in either town.<sup>4</sup> The two towns shared much in common. What often transpired in Salem affected the people of Lynn, and vice versa. Such was the case with the events in the Salem church, which weathered early crises involving the celebrated person of Roger Williams. Lesser known people such as John Crandall, one of those later persecuted in Lynn, also created problems for the church. Crandall, who lived in Salem as early as 1635, served as the pastor there before his adoption of anabaptist beliefs forced him from the church. Obadiah Holmes likewise settled in Salem upon his arrival from England in

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<sup>2</sup>Alonzo Lewis and James R. Newhall, History of Lynn, 1629-1864 (Lynn: George C. Herbert), p. 133. Lewis, the original author of the History of Lynn (1844), compiled the "Annals of Lynn" with all the available information on the town, year by year. In 1863, Newhall edited and expanded the history, including the Annals, using new documentation and further research. The most important addition was the only copy of the Town Records prior to 1691, which has since been lost. Information from those records appear only in Newhall's updated version of the "Annals."

<sup>3</sup>Lewis and Newhall claim the Lynn church was the fifth church established in Massachusetts, behind Salem (1629), Dorchester, Charlestown and Watertown (1630). *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>Lady Deborah Moody, a resident of Swampscot, an anabaptist and a member of the Salem church, was identified in some records as a resident of Salem; in others, a resident of Lynn. Sarah Bowdish received similar treatment, as did John Humfrey, the first owner of Swampscot.



1638, establishing a glass factory before removing to Rehoboth and then Rhode Island in 1646.<sup>5</sup> When the two men accompanied Clarke to Lynn in 1651, they most likely knew many of the people assembled at Witter's home from their years of residence in the county.

While Clarke and Holmes, therefore, played a role in the growth of dissent in Lynn and Salem, the contributions of their more prominent associate, Williams, overshadowed them. The historian Isaac Backus, writing in the 1770s, determined that Roger Williams preached at Salem for close to two continuous years between 1633 and 1635. Other scholars disagree as to the precise period, but few challenge the apparent brevity of his stay in Salem. Prior to his arrival there, Williams ministered to the church in Plymouth, where protest over his liberal sentiments concerning religious toleration and the authority of civil magistrates in matters of conscience led to his dismissal. Several members of the Plymouth congregation who adhered to his creed were dismissed as well and removed with him to Essex County. The ideas which caused trouble in Plymouth quickly produced agitation in the Salem and Lynn communities, for Williams urged his congregation to separate from the colony's other churches. One contemporary chronicler, Nathaniel Morton, noted that Williams had "filled that place with principles of rigid separation, and tending to anabaptism."<sup>6</sup> The eloquent young preacher evidently garnered the support of a majority of his parishioners, but in September 1635, the General Court, perturbed by the trouble he created, requested that Governor John Winthrop banish him from the colony.<sup>7</sup> The governor complied. The records of the General Court testified to its difficulty with

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<sup>5</sup>Ironically, genealogical study has shown that Crandall, Holmes, and William Witter, their host during the infamous Lynn persecution, were all distant cousins. They shared common ancestry in Francis Augustus Loveland of Surrey. Witter Genealogy, Georgia Cooper Washburn, comp. (New York: 1929), p. 229. Although Holmes apparently adopted anabaptist views while living in Rehoboth, it is likely he entertained them during his stay in Salem. p. 289.

<sup>6</sup>Nathaniel Morton, "Memorial," quoted in Isaac Backus, History of the Baptists in New England, vol. I (New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas A. Askew and Peter W. Spellman, The Churches and the American Experience (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 34.

Williams over his denial of the civil magistrates' right to govern in ecclesiastical affairs, and the propagation of that opinion among residents of the settlement.<sup>8</sup>

Several of Williams' followers followed him to what later became Rhode Island. Many remained in Salem, keeping alive the heritage of dissent in the church there. A few Salem residents later faced prosecution for anabaptism in the Quarterly Courts, while several Lynn residents who attended church in Salem faced a similar situation. In the years following the establishment of a church in Lynn, many Lynn residents continued to worship with the Salem congregation.<sup>9</sup> Court records also attested to other roles Lynn residents played in the lives of their neighbors in Salem, and vice versa. In 1645, the two towns displayed their solidarity by requesting the General Court to grant them permission to form their own independent militia. The court gave permission, and men from the two towns established "The Military Company of Lynn and Salem," with the liberty of assembling for military exercise in either town whenever they so desired.<sup>10</sup> Residents of each town displayed relationships with members of its neighboring community by signing as witnesses on each other's wills or estate inventories, and testifying in respective civil cases. Those relationships often included family ties. Salem church records noted one Lynn-Salem family connection in 1680, when George Keysar, a constable, selectman and leading citizen of Lynn, switched his church affiliation from Lynn to Salem. One of his sons, Eli, and his family, already belonged to the Salem congregation. Another Lynn resident and

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<sup>8</sup>From the records of the General Court, 8 July 1635: "It was laid to [William's] charge, that being under question before the magistracy and churches for divers dangerous opinions, viz.: 1. That the magistrate ought not to punish the breach of the first table [communion], otherwise than in such case as did disturb the civil peace. 2. That he ought not to tender an oath to an unregenerate man..." Quoted in Backus, vol. I, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup>Successful computation of an exact figure for the size of that group hinges on determination of the residency of church members, a task made virtually impossible by incomplete membership lists and unrecorded residencies. Aside from the few confirmed Lynn residents who worshipped in Salem, the survival of distinct Lynn family names in the Salem church records hints of a larger, yet indeterminate, number.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis-Newhall, "Annals of Lynn," p. 216.



one of its anabaptists, John Wood, had a brother in Salem.<sup>11</sup> Lynn residents, whether directly or indirectly, were familiar with the dissent frequently exposed in Salem's church life.

The congregation gathered at Lynn experienced similar controversy, although not as publicly visible as that of its neighbor. The eyes of public, and particularly legal, scrutiny closely watched the hotbed in Salem, affording Lynn a relative luxury of invisibility. The first conflict arose over the conduct of the church's first pastor, Rev. Stephen Bachiler, concerning whom the General Court rendered this decision on October 3, 1632:

Mr. Bachiler is required to forbear exercising his giftes as a pastor or teacher publicely in our Pattent, unless it be to those he brought with him, for his contempt of authority, and until some scandles be removed.<sup>12</sup>

The preacher apparently harbored the same opinions on the matter of civil intervention in ecclesiastical affairs that jeopardized Williams' ministry in Salem. The court removed its injunction after five months, but problems arose again in early 1635 when several members who protested Bachiler's conduct split to form their own church. The pastor excommunicated them after they refused to present their grievances in writing, but he eventually resigned under pressure from the court and removed to Ipswich in 1636.

Bachiler's preaching of separation of church and state, at the same time as his colleague, Williams, probably incited the anger of the court. But an entry in the diary of one of Lynn's earliest settlers, Obadiah Turner, revealed what probably served as the primary cause of conflict. Noting the pastor's age as more than "three score and ten yeares" when he left town, Turner continued, "Some scandal hath appeared against him, partlie in ye score of chastitie and partlie on ye score of temper."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in 1641, at the

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<sup>11</sup>Lewis and Newhall mention in their "Annals of Lynn" that John Wood, one of the first five settlers in Lynn, had a brother, William Wood, living in Salem. p. 113.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Lewis-Newhall, "Annals of Lynn," p. 140.

<sup>13</sup>Diary of Obadiah Turner, Dec. 7, 1636. Reprinted in James R. Newhall, Lin; or, Jewels of the Third

age of 80, Bachiler was excommunicated by the church in Hampton, which he founded and pastored, after soliciting a neighbor's wife. The same situation apparently existed earlier during his stay in Lynn. The sexual scandals associated with Rev. Bachiler undoubtedly did little to help bolster the popular image of other dissenters.

Rev. Samuel Whiting succeeded Bachiler in the Lynn pulpit in 1636, his presence effectively reuniting the congregation split by his predecessor. Whiting, an intelligent, peaceable and congenial man, was well-loved and respected by the town -- court, town and private papers recorded very few incidents of conflict between residents of Lynn and their pastor during his forty-three year tenure. In 1637, however, Lynn acquired an associate pastor, or "teacher," whose personality and style frequently clashed with those of many townspeople. Rev. Thomas Cobbet, a young, passionate and very articulate defender of Puritan theology, became a central figure in the debate between the established colonial church and its dissenters. He composed and published theological treatises at a prolific pace, each work revealing the rigid dogmatism with which he approached spiritual matters. His didactic orthodoxy evidently irritated many people. The Essex County Quarterly Court reproached several people for slandering Cobbet during his years at Lynn, including one Henry Walton for saying that "he had as LEEVE to hear a Dogg Barke as to heare mr Cobbett Preach."<sup>14</sup> Thomas Wheeler, convicted in June 1653 of "speakinge sinfull and reprochfull speechis agnst Mr Cobbett" (sic), apologized to the preacher and the court. He appeared the following June to answer identical charges, again apologizing for not being "more watchfull over my words and speechus."<sup>15</sup>

Cobbet entered the public foray against antipaedobaptism in 1648 with the publication of A Jvst Vindication of the Covenant and Church-Estate of Children of Church Members:

Plantation (Boston: 1880), p. 65.

<sup>14</sup>Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County Massachusetts, Dec. 27, 1643, vol. I (Salem: 1911), p. 59.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1653, p. 286; June 27, 1654, p. 360.



As also of their Right unto Baptisme. This lengthy work appeared at a time when anabaptism in the church at Lynn, or rather prosecution of anabaptists in the church, had reached its height. Cobbet wrote in reaction to the crisis in his own immediate experience. In 1653, the preacher concerned himself with another segment of the anabaptist movement: Those who opposed secular intervention in spiritual affairs. His Civil Magistrates Power In matters of Religion contained a "Brief Answer to a certain Slanderous Pamphlet called III Newes from New-England," in an attempt to vindicate the damaged reputation of the prosecutors in the John Clarke, et.al. fiasco. It also addressed the problems Lynn and Essex County magistrates faced in enforcing the laws of a Christian commonwealth.<sup>16</sup> Although the town population included a relatively small number of anabaptists, the tenacity with which they clung to their beliefs alarmed Cobbet. Like the potency of yeast in bread, the small germ of dissent in Lynn had the potential of producing a disproportionately powerful impact.

### Dissent Arises

Between 1642 and 1652, the Quarterly Court of Essex County heard charges of anti-paedobaptism brought against twenty-one different individuals. Sixteen of them lived in Lynn, four in Salem and one in Ipswich. In each case from Lynn, one or more witnesses "presented" the accused for the court's consideration. The specific content of the accusations included withholding infants from the ordinance of baptism, leaving a service when infants received baptism, expressing opinions against the ordinance, and being rebaptized. Of the sixteen Lynn residents accused of such crimes, four appeared in court because they refused to baptize their own children. The others appeared, often more than once, to explain why they withdrew from baptismal services or spoke against the ordinance. William Witter was the only person formally charged with the crime of rebaptism.

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<sup>16</sup>Both A Ivst Vindication and Civil Magistrates Power have been preserved on microfilm in the Wing Collection of Early English Imprints, numbers 4778 and 4776, respectively.

Punishments varied with the accusations, but remained fairly mild. In several instances, execution of corrective measures remained the responsibility of the pastors or elders of the church. In the case of Witter's first offense, "speaking against the ordinance of infant baptism," the court ordered him to "see light from speech of our elder, Mr. Norris...and ask Mr. Cobbet's forgiveness."<sup>17</sup> The court also sentenced many of the anabaptists to submit a public apology -- to confess their faith and admit their error before the church or the General Court. In most cases, however, the accused merely received an admonition to mend their ways, a mild rebuke that often proved less than adequate. Multiple court appearances, as well as eventual excommunication in some cases, witnessed to the ineffectiveness of the court's scoldings as a deterrent. As resident dissenters, these anabaptists received relatively soft treatment; none of them faced banishment, and the strongest deterrent -- excommunication -- was used sparingly.

The early strategy employed by the Lynn, Essex County and Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities in combating the growth of domestic anabaptism appeared to be as such: Remove the movement's leaders -- the charismatic and articulate people like Williams; contain the movement to its remaining followers; and encourage them to give up their false notions and rejoin the full fellowship of the church. This approach displayed itself in the treatment of Lady Deborah Moody, the first person confronted for her beliefs in the Quarterly Courts. A very wealthy and influential woman from an aristocratic family, Lady Moody settled in Lynn in 1639. She was the cousin of Sir Henry Vane the Younger, a powerful figure in Parliament and an early governor of the colony. Sir Henry displayed anabaptist sympathies himself -- while governor in Boston he had participated in one or more discussions made famous by their leader, Anne Hutchinson, and strongly supported Hutchinson's mentor, Rev. John Cotton. By 1642, however, Sir Henry had returned to England, removing the immediate protection afforded Lady Moody by his presence.

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<sup>17</sup>Records and Files, Feb. 28, 1642-3, p. 51-2.



Lady Moody joined the Salem church on April 5, 1640, and one month later received a grant from the General Court for 400 acres "where it may not hinder a plantation nor any former grant" near Lynn.<sup>18</sup> In 1641 she purchased 1,300 acres of John Humfrey's farm, Swampscot, for 1,100li, a transaction that apparently took most of her available resources. As owner of the farm she served as landlord to several Lynn residents who resided and worked on the land. That relationship soon factored in the development of anabaptist sentiments in the town, for Lady Moody possessed a dynamic personality in addition to her financial and aristocratic clout. But she also served as a dissenting link between Salem and Lynn, for she apparently developed her anabaptist tendencies while exposed to the controversy in the Salem church, and persuaded several Lynn residents to share her convictions. One Swampscot neighbor, William Witter, did not rent from Lady Moody, but nonetheless displayed the same opinion towards infant baptism.

The Quarterly Court summoned Lady Moody to appear at its session in Salem on December 14, 1642, along with two women who shared her opinion "that the baptising of Infants is noe ordinance of God."<sup>19</sup> The two women, identified as Elizabeth King and the wife of John Tillton, were summoned to court again two months later, and Mrs. King's husband (Daniel, of Swampscot) was presented in court for an apparently similar offense ten years later. The court, meanwhile, considered Lady Moody on December 27 of the same year "for not believing in infant baptism. But she did not appear, report being made that she was in a way of conviction before the elders."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the Salem church acted swiftly to control the influence Lady Moody exerted over other members of the congregation, particularly women. The elders excommunicated her from the church, and

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<sup>18</sup>Lewis-Newhall, "Annals of Lynn," p. 187.

<sup>19</sup>The "Annals of Lynn" mention this session of the Quarterly Court, which curiously does not appear in the published Records and Files of the same court. An editor's note affixed to the Salem court session of January 25, 1641 states that "the records for the next five years are abstracted from the 'Waste Book,' the original records for these years not having been preserved." Considering the published accounts dates the session Dec. 27, the latter of the two may have been due to early adjournment of the first. Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>20</sup>Records and Files, Dec. 27, 1642, p. 48.

by the summer of 1643, she relocated to Long Island to escape persecution. Despite her family background, she apparently received intense pressure from the leaders of the community -- enough to compel her to seek religious freedom among the more tolerant Dutch of New York. She retained ownership of her farm, however, and continued to act as landlord to several families, a few of them dissenters. Her tenants included Sarah Bowdish, one of the people baptized by John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes, and the King family.

Following Lady Moody's conflict with the church leaders in Salem, the General and Quarterly Courts heard an increasing number of cases concerning anabaptists until 1646. Of the thirty-one recorded "presentments" of anabaptists in Essex County's Quarterly Courts between 1642 and 1652, twenty-six occurred before August 1646. Of the remaining five, four (all Lynn presentments) occurred in the months immediately following the visit of Clarke, et.al. In each of the cases involving Lynn residents, the level of persecution did not necessarily warrant a relocation by the accused. Six of the sixteen Lynn anabaptists died in the town, as wills and inventories of their estates indicated. Only one anabaptist whose death was not recorded in Lynn or whose will was not probated in the county appeared in later county court documentation. Matthew West, after a 1646 court appearance for anabaptism, received mention in a deed proved in 1652 as a contemporary land owner in Lynn. Little mention of the remaining anabaptists appeared in any of the town or county records, suggesting that some of them eventually left town. Those that left were not necessarily forced to do so. On the contrary, they may have participated in the large amount of land speculation initiated by Lynn residents, and chose to relocate to one of many settlements begun by Lynn people elsewhere in Massachusetts and New York.



### Population Crisis

Seventeenth century Lynn experienced constant demographic change. As a coastal town situated between two major seaports -- Salem and Boston -- Lynn attracted large numbers of new settlers from England and Scotland. Lynn also boasted the first Iron Works in North America, an industry that provided capital to the local economy and an attractive employment opportunity for skilled émigrés.<sup>21</sup> Town officials did not maintain regular population figures after the first few years of the settlement, but the rise of business in the Iron Works and a subsequent rise in the birth and death rate within the town limits betrayed a steady influx of new people. Another testimony to Lynn's population growth, and a resulting demographic turnover, existed in Lynn's identity as mother town to a large number of new settlements. By 1652, Lynn residents served as "founding parents," either as initial proprietors or inhabitants, of no less than eighteen new settlements (see Table 1, page 26). The "Annals of Lynn" also recorded dozens of cases of early Lynn families removing to other established towns. Particularly after Lynn partitioned all of the land within its boundaries in 1638, the town provided little or no room for new settlers. However, the extent of population turnover allowed a continual transfer of land ownership and deprived the town of a stable demographic base. Lynn appeared to be more of a temporary residency for new settlers who eventually moved on.<sup>22</sup>

Within the first ten years of Lynn's settlement, six new towns were founded solely by residents of Lynn. One formed on the town's immediate border; three arose on Cape Cod, one in Connecticut and one in New Hampshire. One of the largest undertakings, however, began in 1640 when forty families left the town with the design of settling a new

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<sup>21</sup>Several Scotsmen immigrated specifically to work in the Iron Works. Most were single, but a few brought families.

<sup>22</sup>The "Annals of Lynn" present collective biographies of most of the initial (first 5-10 years) settlers of the town. I have not tabulated the exact figure for those who moved on from Lynn, but fifty percent is a conservative estimate.

Table 1: Towns with Roots in Lynn, Massachusetts<sup>23</sup>

<i>Settlements initiated by Lynn residents</i>	<i>Settlements in which Lynn residents were among first inhabitants</i>
Barnstable, Massachusetts(1639)	Easthampton, Massachusetts
Hampton, New Hampshire (1638)	Framingham, Massachusetts
New Haven, Connecticut (1638)	Flushing, Long Island
Reading, Massachusetts (1639)	Gravesend, Long Island
Sandwich, Massachusetts (1637)	Hempstead, Long Island
Southampton, Long Island (1640)	Jamaica, Long Island
Yarmouth, Massachusetts (1639)	Manchester, Massachusetts
	Oyster Bay, Long Island
	Salisbury, Massachusetts
	Springfield, Massachusetts

plantation.<sup>24</sup> After much difficulty in securing a grant from the Dutch, they finally planted a town on the eastern end of Long Island, calling it Southampton. The articles of settlement written by the proprietors of the new town apparently provided for a union of church and state similar to that in Massachusetts, but one passage hinted of greater leniency towards religious dissenters:

Lastly, wee the said undertakers, testify by these presents in our admitinge of inhabitants to our intended Plantacon that wee, without any kind of reservations leave euery man ffree to choose and determine all causes and controverseys arbitrary among themselves, and that whensoever it shall please the Lord, and he shall see it good to adde to us such men as shall bee fitt matter for a church, that then wee will, in that time, lay ourselves doune before ye constitutes thereof either to bee or not to be receaved as members thereof, according as they shall discerne the work of God to be in our hearts.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Compiled from Lewis-Newhall, “Annals of Lynn.”

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., "Annals of Lynn," p. 192.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., "Annals of Lynn," p. 194.



One of the signers, William Harcher, later stood before the court as an anabaptist, and others may have shared his sentiments. In addition to Southampton, the people of Lynn settled five more towns on Long Island at about the same time: Flushing, Gravesend, Jamaica, Hempstead and Oyster Bay.<sup>26</sup>

By 1642, the tide of immigration had ceased, but a continued exodus of families from Lynn produced a rapid decline in the town's population. In 1645, the population crisis in town provoked the selectmen to petition the General Court for a reduction in taxes. The court obliged them, requiring Lynn to pay only 25li for a tax on the value of its total estate. Twelve years earlier, while still in its infancy, Lynn had paid 36li for the same tax.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Iron Works, facing stiff competition from bigger and newer forges up and down the coast, lost much of its business and stopped attracting new families to town. Lynn, as a result of this problem, possessed relatively few families for the maintenance of a stable community. The constant demographic change in town produced a progressively smaller central core of established residents.

The large number of people who claimed temporary residency in Lynn, and the continual flux of faces on its streets, surely helped foster an atmosphere of tolerance in the town. An equally strong, if not stronger, factor in that tolerant attitude, however, proved to be the dwindling permanent community. The prosecution of Lynn anabaptists in the Quarterly Court ceased concurrent with the nadir of the town's population depression in 1645-6. Only after the celebrated case of its visitors from Rhode Island did Lynn resume persecution of dissenters, if only briefly. The town's permanent inhabitants may have displayed an intolerant attitude towards outsiders like Clarke, but they showed great patience with dissenting members of their own group. As that core grew smaller, its members were less likely to ostracize or persecute peers who differed from them on matters of conscience. Rather, cooperation among permanent residents continued unabated as

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., "Annals of Lynn," p. 196.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., "Annals of Lynn," pp.145, 214.

individuals put aside their spiritual differences. They aided each other in the formation of wills, the prosecution of civil suits, the fulfillment of town duties and the protection of economic security, regardless of religious conviction. With the social and economic vitality of their community threatened, most Lynn residents exhibited a willingness to tolerate their dissenting neighbors.

By the 1660s, after the initial impression made by a vocally dissenting minority was a distant memory, statements by two members of the community indicated the disparate views adopted by people on opposite ends of Lynn's social spectrum. Obadiah Turner, a Lynn farmer who faithfully maintained a diary during his life in New England, recorded his thoughts on the treatment of Quakers in the town. One may infer he responded similarly to people whose dissent took a less radical form. On December 10, 1663, Turner noted that

Mch distress hath been in ye churches about ye Quakers who be now rampant in ye land. Ye laws and ye magistrates be hard vpon them. Women as well as men have been stript and whipped at ye carts taile for manie miles from town to town. And some have been brought to ye gallows. Ye more peeple be put vpon for their belief ye more do they set theire faces against changing their ways. And besides, ones religion is a matter betwixt him and his God. He should be let alone so long as he injureth not and interfereth not wth others; wch keeping to themselves I am sorrie to say seemeth not always to haue been ye case with ye Quakers. Yet do I think yt our laws and our magistrates have been mch too hard vpon them, and vpon others that do not think alike wth vs. Surelie wee, of all people, ought to know how pretious libertie of conscience is, for manie of vs here haue suffered enow for its sake. And I do say yt a church yt cannot stand of its strength ought to fall...And so I end my says about ye matter.<sup>28</sup>

The lives and behavior of many other orthodox Lynn residents demonstrated at least a passive agreement with Turner's point of view.

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<sup>28</sup>Diary of Obadiah Turner, in Newhall, p. 83.



The attitude of civil magistrates and ecclesiastical leaders stood in direct opposition to the tolerance common to many of the residents in their charge. Rev. Thomas Cobbet, writing to Increase Mather following a debate with baptists from Charlestown in 1668, summarized the social dangers of the antipaedobaptist's theology. His words clearly marked the desire to continue the pursuit of people who adopted the doctrine. Cobbett had left Lynn in 1656 to assume the duties of pastor in Ipswich, but he spoke for most of his colleagues throughout the colony when he remarked that

Theyr very principle of makeing infant Baptisme a nullity, it doth make at once, all our churches, & our religious, Civill state & pölyty, & all the officers & members thereof to be unbaptized, & to bee no Christians, & so, our churches to bee no churches; & so we have no regular freemen, which by our laws, are to bee members of churches: & so we have no regular power to choose Deputies for any Generall Courts, nor to chuse any Magistrates; but all beeing, according to that pernicious doctrine, non members of any true church, and all our holsom lawes & orders made a nullity; & that hedge is pulled downe, & all left open to state destroyers...so that our very fundaments of civil & sacred order, here in New England, are at once thereby...overturned.<sup>29</sup>

The reaction of Cobbet's colleagues in the civil and ecclesiastical leadership to the appearance of open dissent in Charlestown demonstrated a passionate support for his opinion. But the difference between the statements made by Cobbet and Obadiah Turner indicated that the inhabitants of Massachusetts Bay had encountered a fork in the road to hegemony. As the experience of Charlestown would reveal, those two paths would remain forever separate.

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<sup>29</sup>Thomas Cobbet to Increase Mather, date unknown (after 1668), quoted in The Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668, William G. McLoughlin and Martha Whiting Davidson, eds., in Colonial Baptists, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, a volume in the Arno Press Collection, The Baptist Tradition (New York: 1980), p. 104.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN CHARLESTOWN AND BOSTON

By the time Obadiah Holmes visited a meeting of anabaptists in Charlestown in October, 1668, the local group to whom constables found him ministering had already survived a series of confrontations with local, regional and colonial authorities. Most recently, in April of that year, three men from the newly-organized Baptist church (they disliked the name Anabaptist, claiming their baptism as infants had not been true baptism at all), along with three brethren from their sister church in Newport, had met in Boston for a well-publicized debate with six leading members of the colony's clergy. The three resident laymen, Thomas Gould, John Farnum and William Turner, subsequently spent several months in prison. By the time of Holmes' visit, Farnum had recanted his views and returned home, but Gould and the desperately ill Turner remained jailed.

The fact that two local men faced continuing imprisonment while a visiting baptist, already notorious for his views and his eagerness to share them, received little if any persecution from the local authorities who discovered him represented a subtle shift in policy in the treatment of dissenters since 1651. For while the upper levels of colonial bureaucracy continued their harassment of dissenting residents, the once-diligent containment of dissent at the local level showed signs of weakening. In the case of the baptist congregation gathered at Charlestown, that development was due in some respect to a change in colonial attitudes. To a greater degree, however, the gradual increase in toleration stemmed from the character of the communities from which the members of that congregation came and the collective attitude of the town in whose borders it met.

Most of the anabaptists lived in Charlestown itself. Others maintained residences in surrounding communities, including Boston, Billerica, Cambridge, Malden and Woburn,



and travelled the distance to Charlestown for Sabbath worship services. In each town, elements of the community's unique experiences and needs played a vital role in determining a response to the dissenters in its midst. But none of those satellite communities faced the problems unique to Charlestown: namely, responding to more than a handful of resident anabaptists and dealing with the gathering of a baptist congregation within its territorial boundaries. Only some years later, when the Charlestown congregation had been forced to meet on Noddle's Island (now East Boston), did baptists gather regularly in Woburn. Boston did not meet that challenge until the Noddle's Island group felt safe enough to relocate to the capitol city in the late 1670s. By that time, however, the public demeanor towards anabaptists had changed enough as to render a straight comparison between the situations incongruous. Charlestown dealt with the issue while political pressure from colonial authorities to conform to a central policy on the subject of anabaptists passed through its peak.

### Charlestown Settled

A peninsula discovered by English fishermen in 1614, the land later to become Charlestown received its first settlers in early 1629, making it the third oldest town, after Salem and Dorchester, in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Robert Gorges, appointed Lieutenant-General of New England in 1623, received the peninsula as part of a royal grant the year before. In 1628, the Council of Plymouth Colony, which claimed Gorges' patent, sold the rights to the land to the Massachusetts Company. Seven or eight men, including brothers Ralph, Richard and William Sprague, petitioned Governor John Endicott for permission to settle there soon after he arrived in Salem in September of that year. Like Salem, Lynn and most other settlements in the colony, Charlestown did not possess an act of incorporation from the king when it organized in 1629. But with the steady influx of people newly arrived at Salem, a town nonetheless began to take shape.

As a small peninsula, Charlestown faced water in three directions. To its south flowed the Charles River. On its northerly and eastern boundaries, the Mystic River wound its way towards one of the finest deep-water harbors in New England. The only direction in which the town could experience possible growth lay to the west. As a result, the natural restrictions placed on the settlement by virtue of its topography provided little room for the number of people who desired land there. In 1630, several who had hoped to establish homesteads in Charlestown petitioned the General Court and were granted access to the land across the Charles River. They began the town of Boston. That same year, others received permission to move west to the base of the peninsula, beginning the township of New Town, later Cambridge. In many respects, Charlestown's early identity as the beginning point for other settlements did not change as the colony grew.

Much like Lynn, its neighbor ten miles to the north, Charlestown functioned as a temporary hospice for hundreds of Englishman who alighted on the shores of New England as part of the heavy migration beginning in the 1630s. As Boston's reputation as a center of colonial government, trade and economic opportunity grew throughout the following decades, Charlestown found itself welcoming more immigrants. John Eliot, an early minister to the Indians at Natick, southwest of Boston, called Charlestown New England's "haven-town," identifying its contemporary image as a place of refuge for recent arrivals to the colony.<sup>1</sup> Some of those travellers may have sought permanent residence in Charlestown, but most probably stayed only a short time while arranging for settlement elsewhere. As a result, Charlestown and its residents contributed in some fashion to the formation of many of the townships along the widening Massachusetts Bay frontier.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Vital Records of Charlestown, Massachusetts to the Year 1850, Vol. 1 (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1984), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>An exact computation has proved difficult to tally. Witness, however, Charlestown's maternal role in the founding of several towns northwest of Boston, including Malden and Woburn. The number of people who lived in Charlestown only temporarily before joining migrations to those and other communities is an even more elusive figure.



A town typical of that settlement pattern, Woburn alleviated the pressure placed on the limited land holdings of Charlestown's earliest residents. In May, 1640, the colony's General Court granted Charlestown a petition for a two square mile area of land on its northwest boundary, providing it did not encroach upon an earlier grant to Lynn (Lynn Village, later Reading). The town's original plans for the land involved creating a reserve of farm land for distribution to new settlers, thereby enlarging its own boundaries.<sup>3</sup> But in October, the court increased the grant to four miles square, prompting some residents to entertain ideas of using the land to start of a new town altogether. While town leaders gathered a committee to plan a Charlestown Village, the church, acting on the initiative to form a new township, called a commission to establish a new church there. By 1641, several house lots had been laid out, and in 1642, the church commission secured a minister for the new parish. Woburn became a separate entity that year.

During the 1630s, as the steady progression of new people passing through town continued, Charlestown faced the additional task of maintaining a stable community spiritual life in the wake of Anne Hutchinson's Antinomian controversy. Hutchinson lived in Boston, and a large part of her following came from the church there, but Charlestown's congregation was not afforded immunity from the effects of the conflict. Its own pastor, Zechariah Symmes, became a principal player in the effort to quiet the tempest. In 1634, while voyaging to Salem from England, Symmes confronted Hutchinson on the nature and content of many of her statements on spiritual matters. When prosecution against the woman began in 1637, Symmes' familiarity with her background enabled him to make significant contributions to the trial. Many of his parishioners, however, displayed opinions on parts of the General Court's conduct contrary to those of their pastor. For example, the court's actions included banishing Hutchinson's brother, the Rev. John

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<sup>3</sup>From Charlestown Records, quoted in Samuel Sewall, The History of Woburn (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, 1868), p. 10.

Wheelright, for “holding forth the covenant of grace.”<sup>4</sup> Many people throughout the colony submitted a petition to the court criticizing its treatment of Wheelright, an act that brought immediate reprimands to those who signed the document. Included in that list were twelve people from Charlestown. Ten of the twelve recanted their statements under pressure from the court; two others, Benjamin Bunker and James Brown, did not and received fines.<sup>5</sup> Symmes may have succeeded in discouraging the challenge of antinomianism from totally disrupting his congregation as it had in Boston, but his actions and views did little to encourage solidarity of sentiment among the members of the parish.

The differences between Symmes and some of his flock, a glimpse of which had been seen during the Antinomian controversy, did not often clash publicly until the advent of open antipaedobaptism in the mid-1650s. Even then, discussions on matters of theology limited themselves primarily to the interactions between Symmes and those who criticized infant baptism. Those occasions, however, provided a forum for the release of emotions long suppressed by other members of the congregation who did not dissent from church doctrine but resented the manner in which the pastor treated those who did. For after the experience of battling the Antinomians in the 1630s, Symmes apparently prepared himself for the arrival of dissent within his own arena. When it appeared, his first responses were swift and firm, and often revealed the depth of his conviction against what he perceived as dangerous heresy. As time progressed and the heretical challenge did not desist, his responses took on an increasing level of fury and irrational zeal born of frustration.

### The First Voices of Dissent

The turmoil over the baptism of infants which eventually led to the organization of a congregation of antipaedobaptists in Charlestown began quietly in 1655 when Thomas

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<sup>4</sup>General Court Records, quoted in Richard Frothingham, Jr., The History of Charlestown, Massachusetts (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 73.



Gould, a member of the church since 1640, refused to baptize his newborn child. He had baptized three of his children since 1641, "but God was pleased at last to make it clear to me by the rule of the gospel," he said, "that children were not capable nor fit subjects for such an ordinance."<sup>6</sup> A contributing factor in his adoption of that opinion may have been his friendship with Henry Dunster of Cambridge, the first president of Harvard College who would lose his position because of anabaptist sympathies.<sup>7</sup> When Gould met with the elders to explain his reasons for keeping his child from baptism, he expressed the opinion that there existed "no warrant for it from the word of God." In reply to Gould's admission, the church admonished him. In December, 1656 it determined that, as further punishment, "he should withdraw from the sacrament of the Lord's supper until satisfaction" be made of his repentance from the error.<sup>8</sup> That act of public repentance never came.

Both the Charlestown church and Thomas Gould produced written records of what transpired between them over the next ten years. Church records remained relatively spartan, revealing only those actions resulting from church votes. Gould's narrative provided more detail on the subject and tone of proceedings, albeit from his perspective. But in no instance did the two accounts contradict each other. Taken together, the two sources revealed much about the town's approach to anabaptism during this period prior to the formation of the baptist church in 1665. Town sentiment shifted somewhat after 1665, when it then faced the challenge of an organized body of anabaptists, but the ten years

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Gould's narrative of his discipline by the Charlestown church, reprinted in full in Isaac Backus, *A History of New England Particular Reference to the Baptists*, vol. 1 (Newton: Backus Historical Society, 1871), p. 290.

<sup>7</sup>Gould identified Dunster as a guest in his house on several occasions, including the day on which he was first requested to explain his child's absence from baptism. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>8</sup>During the debate between several Baptists and orthodox clergy in April 1668, an account of the proceedings against anabaptists by the Charlestown church was read to the assembly. "The Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668," William G. McLoughlin and Martha Whiting Davidson, eds., in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. LXXVI, January - December 1964 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1965), pp. 120-121.

during which Gould and others argued over the issue of baptism and church polity proved crucial in the formation of patterns of tolerance in the town. Those patterns included a growing disparity in the reactions to dissent registered by pastor Symmes and a sizeable portion of his congregation, and a decreasing reliance on civil courts to discipline offenders.

A minor misunderstanding between Gould and Symmes arose almost immediately in 1655. Although quickly resolved, it betrayed the hostility Symmes had already developed towards one whose offense to date was unproven. The misunderstanding concerned the contents of letters of correspondence. When church elders realized that Goodman Gould had failed to baptize his newborn child in 1655, they dispatched a note to his home asking him to meet them on the following day, or, if that was not possible, at his earliest convenience. He replied in writing that the next day would not be convenient, and asked the elders to appoint another day for meeting. Two months passed before Gould learned that pastor Symmes was telling the church how Gould had ignored his requests for a private meeting and the time for quiet correction had passed. The church as a whole, Symmes now said, must deal with Gould. Gould agreed to attend the church meeting, where he claimed that the note asked for a meeting at his convenience. Symmes immediately accused him of lying and began proceedings to punish him for that additional offense. Gould, however, refused to admit wrongdoing in the matter, further enraging the volatile pastor. The battle of wills continued for some minutes, with each man presenting different accounts of the contents of their correspondence. Finally, to everyone's amazement, Thomas Wilder, a member of the church who had been with Gould the day of his initial summons, produced the letter in question from the pocket of his coat where it had been placed months earlier. Mr. Russell, an esteemed member of the church, read the note aloud.



Greatly embarrassed, pastor Symmes acknowledged his mistake before presenting several arguments in defense of infant baptism that Gould was to answer. Gould stated his understanding of the purpose of the meeting as a chance for the church to “answer my scruples, and to satisfy my conscience by a rule of God, and not for me to answer his writing.”<sup>9</sup> But Symmes wanted to debate with Gould, and for close to five hours the men exchanged heated arguments. With little resolved, one of the church members observing the debate interjected a passage of scripture as means to settle the dispute in favor of pastor Symmes, but quoted only a portion of the passage. When Gould recited the remainder from memory, Symmes quickly accused him of blasphemy for adding to scripture. Accusations of blasphemy continued until Mr. Russell confirmed Gould’s memory. “Ay, it may be so in your Bible, saith Mr. Sims. Mr. Russell answered, Yea in yours too if you will look into it. Then he said he was mistaken, for he thought on another place.”<sup>10</sup> Symmes may have had a poor memory, but his ready willingness to brand Gould a heretic betrayed less than amiable intentions.

Symmes’ hostile carriage towards Gould began troubling many members of the church. During subsequent meetings held to correct Gould, some nondissenting members began defending him against the pastor’s tirades. Others sided with the pastor. As the church slowly divided over Gould’s treatment, and as its efforts to force the baptism of his child proved ineffective, Symmes agreed to defer judgement to the county court. The Middlesex County Quarterly Court summoned Gould in 1656 “for denying infant baptism to his child, and thus putting himself and his descendants in peril of the Lord’s displeasure.”<sup>11</sup> His

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<sup>9</sup>Gould’s narrative in Backus, p. 291.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>11</sup>Records of the Middlesex County Quarterly Courts, quoted in Nathan E. Wood, The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), p. 33. Wood, while offering much of his own historical narrative on the early life of the church, proves most valuable as a fine collection of almost all the primary resources available on the history of the church. Almost without exception, he chose to reprint all of those records in their entirety.

opinions unchanged, and his child unbaptized, the grand jury indicted him on the same charge in April, 1657. In June, Gould received a summons to stand before the Court of Assistants at Boston, and he also admitted to being questioned before the deputy governor during the same period.<sup>12</sup> After 1657, the church leaders ceased their appeals to the justices, for none of Gould's repeated court appearances convinced him to change his mind. Instead, they made one more effort to correct him themselves.

In June, 1658, Gould was "called forth to give an account of his long withdrawing from the public ordinances amongst us on the Lord's Day."<sup>13</sup> "Master Sims was very earnest for another admonition for schism," Gould said later, "which most of the church were against; but it seems he set it down for an admonition on a bit of paper."<sup>14</sup> With the church in disagreement on what to do with Gould, it offered no formal challenges on the subject until 1663. By then, the question concerning the baptism of Gould's child had been supplanted with that of Gould's responsibilities to the church as a covenanted member. Gould, as he later stated again and again in defense of his behavior during this period, chose to avoid baptismal services altogether rather than insult his neighbors by what he might say or do there. On those days, he travelled to a nearby community, usually Cambridge, for fellowship.<sup>15</sup> Gould's stated motives may have enhanced his status among the congregation, for other churches in the colony occasionally suffered uncomfortable situations when dissenting worshippers spoke their objections during a baptism or offered silent protest by turning their backs on the proceedings. The Charlestown church witnessed neither of those scenes as a result of Gould's actions.

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<sup>12</sup>"After this the Deputy Governor meeting me in Boston, called me to him and said, Goodman Gould, I desire you that you would let the church baptize your child. I told him that if the church would do it upon their own account they should do it, but I durst not bring out my child." Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 293.

<sup>13</sup>Records of the First Parish Church of Charlestown, quoted in Wood, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup>Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 294.

<sup>15</sup>Gould explained his actions again during the 1668 debate when he was accused by the assembly of being a scandalous separatist. Transcription of the Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668, p. 120.



Over the next several years, the church gently encouraged Gould to return to full communion by recanting his view on baptism. He attended Sabbath services, and even sat through baptismal services to ease the minds of his friends in the church who had been offended by his absence. But he continued to urge Symmes and other leaders in the church to show him in Scripture where authorization for the practice lay. The argument he heard each time rested on extension of the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision into the New Testament era and beyond.<sup>16</sup> Christ's work on earth had made most of the old requirements for salvation obsolete, they argued, while some had merely changed their form. The validity of infant baptism, then, was loosely inferred from Judaic law. Gould, however, "desired a clear rule for their baptizing infants: but they could not give it me."<sup>17</sup> He also began to chafe under the restriction placed on him from joining his Christian brothers in observation of the Lord's Supper. By 1663, when the church again admonished Gould for separation, or schism, his central line of defense asserted that he had been forced from the church by that restriction from communion.<sup>18</sup>

Gould's argument against his church spoke to what he saw as an inherent contradiction in the way it responded to his dilemma. His sole objection to the church's doctrinal statement concerned the sacrament of infant baptism. That he wished to remain an active member of the church was a desire displayed in his decision to sit through baptismal services even when his conscience objected.<sup>19</sup> The church, meanwhile, despite Symmes' suggestions, displayed a willingness to wait patiently while Gould sorted out the tension in

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<sup>16</sup>For example, in Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 293.

<sup>17</sup>Transcription of the Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup>Gould even went as far as to say that he no longer remained a member of the church, because it had broken its end of the membership agreement with him, and that it no longer had any power over him. Records of the First Parish Church of Charlestown, quoted in Wood, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>Interestingly, Gould's last appeal to rejoin the congregation in communion came in April, 1667, two years after he had been excommunicated. Why he entered the plea when he had already covenanted with others to form their own baptist church is unclear; it does, however, reinforce the argument that Gould continued to think as a nonseparatist anabaptist. Records of the First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1632-1789 (Boston: David Clapp and Son, 1880), p. 15.

his own mind. But by denying him access to the Lord's Supper as a manner of persuasion, the church erected a second barrier between itself and its lost sheep. In Gould's experience, being denied communion established a level of separation from the life of the church that he could not bear. He began to look elsewhere for fellowship, and in the process found affirmation in his views from people in surrounding communities.

When the church called Gould before itself in 1663 to answer to further charges of schism, pastor Symmes operated on the assumption that he and the church could deal with him on their own. "We are a church of Christ ourselves," he replied to Gould's suggestion of allowing other area churches to assist in settling the issue, "and you shall know that we have power to deal with you ourselves."<sup>20</sup> That attitude extended into the church's posture towards the civil realm. For whereas the church had previously referred Gould to civil courts to force him to baptize his child, it approached this new phase of its dispute with the man as an in-house affair. Such insularity may have succeeded in removing the black sheep from the flock, but it essentially undermined the legal agenda for religious dissenters established by the colonial bureaucracy. Granted, the church saw judgement for schism as its own responsibility, and recognized the civil authorities' role in handling anabaptism. But in Gould's case, the two issues remained inseparable, the strands of each constantly weaving around the other. For the church to address Gould's absence from its midst as purely a matter of schism was to deny the obvious existence of its accompanying cause. Not until Gould participated in the formation of the baptist church did the orthodox church, and primarily Symmes, consciously refocus its attention on his anabaptism and call for civil intervention. But by then, the church's self-reliance on the issue of schism had fostered an atmosphere in which its members no longer deferred to higher legal mandates in determining their own judgements on the issue of Thomas Gould's anabaptism.

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<sup>20</sup>Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 295.



### Growth of Anabaptist Sentiment

"Now God did give me an opportunity to gather into society with those that were of the [like] apprehension and judgement," Gould later recalled. "The Lord had brought some out of England of that judgement: and others here that were of the same mind."<sup>21</sup> Among that group of sympathizers, two members of the church, Thomas Osborne and his wife, Sarah, attended meetings at Gould's house on the Sabbath. After discovering them, the church voted to admonish the Osbornes and to rebuke Gould in November, 1663, but not without considerable debate among the congregation.<sup>22</sup> The debate stemmed primarily from pastor Symmes' growing impatience with Gould, which several members perceived as an improper personal grudge. Gould claimed it was the last time he appeared before his old congregation, a fact which may well have proven in Symmes' favor. For while the pastor's patience with Gould had clearly stretched to the point of breaking, the congregation's patience with their pastor appeared to be wearing almost as thin.

After opening the meeting by questioning Gould's membership, Symmes demanded the congregation vote to excommunicate Gould. Richard Russell, a leading laymen and the town's civil magistrate, quickly responded in Gould's defense. "We have not gone the right way to gain this our brother," Russell said, "for we have dealt too harshly with him."<sup>23</sup> Still Symmes pushed for excommunication, but on further challenge from Russell, asked only for an admonition. At that suggestion, Solomon Phipps, another respected church member, stood up and said, "You may clap one admonition on him upon another, but to what end, for he was admonished about seven years ago!"<sup>24</sup> Symmes

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<sup>21</sup>Transcription of the Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup>"Nov 18, 1663. Bro. Thomas Osborn being leavened with principles of Anabaptisme was (the brethren consenting) admonished for frequent irregular withdrawing himself from the publick worhip of God...On the same day also, it was consented to by the brethren that his wife, leavened with principles of Anabaptisme and Quakerisme, should receive an admonition..." Records of the First Parish Church of Charlestown, quoted in Wood, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup>Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 295.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

turned his ire towards Phipps, scolding him for taking the admonition of a heretic so lightly. Phipps answered "it was a hard matter to prove a man a heretic, for every error doth not make a man a heretic."<sup>25</sup> Then the meeting wandered into an argument on the date of Gould's last admonition, for Symmes had recorded more church admonitions against Gould than had actually been voted. With that revelation, the agitation among the congregation increased, forcing Symmes to close the meeting.

Meanwhile, weekly baptist meetings continued, alternating their sites between Gould's and the Osborne's homes. In February 1663-4, the orthodox church approved more admonitions for the Osbornes, but their ineffectiveness in pulling the offenders back to the church stopped the proceedings once again. Church records remained silent on the subject of anabaptism for the next eighteen months, even though the Osbornes posed a new and possibly more dangerous threat. For unlike Gould, the Osbornes had not been denied fellowship with the congregational church. They made a deliberate decision to separate from the body to which they had joined in 1644. And unlike Gould, they openly voiced their opinion that the colony's orthodox churches were illegitimate.<sup>26</sup>

### The First Baptist Church in Massachusetts Organized

When town constables first found Thomas and Sarah Osborne involved in a clandestine meeting at Thomas Gould's house in 1663, they also discovered several other people whom Gould described as "of the same mind" as himself. Their presence there undoubtedly caused a measure of alarm with the authorities. Some of the dissenters had travelled from surrounding villages, while a few lived in Charlestown itself. None of them, however, aside from the Osbornes, had joined themselves to the local church. The church, therefore, had little or no recourse to sanction their activities on a purely spiritual

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>26</sup>Sarah Osborne received admonition also for "denying our churches to be true churches, and denying her membership with us, and, also, the churches power over her..." Records of the First Parish Church of Charlestown, quoted in Wood, p. 40.



basis, as it had done with Gould and would do with the Osbornes. And it showed little interest in confronting the spiritual lives of those who were not part of its body. In effect, the church concerned itself solely with the opinions held by members of its own fellowship and the impact those opinions would have on its own spiritual life. The life of the community as a whole remained a matter outside its jurisdiction. If anabaptists who were not partakers of the congregational polity were to be confronted at all, the source and place of confrontation would be outside the church. Those dissenters had broken no specific church covenant for which they could be charged. But the colony had enacted legislation forbidding open opposition to infant baptism, and under that authority the civil leadership in town possessed the power to challenge spiritual dissenters regardless of church membership. That power, however, remained wholly passive, for no civil challenge to anabaptists from Charlestown, other than Gould and the Osbornes, appeared before a court until 1665.

On May 28, 1665, nine people in Charlestown “commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists were gathered together” and officially “entered into fellowship & communion each with other, Ingaiging to walke togather in all the appointments of there Lord & Master the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Four men, Thomas Gould, Thomas Osborne, Edward Drinker and John George were baptized at the meeting, and signed a covenant with five people who had been members of baptist churches in England: Richard Goodall, William Turner, Robert Lambert, Mary Goodall and Mary Newell. Of the last five, only Mary Newell lived in Charlestown. Turner, who presumably baptized the first four, lived in Dorchester, while Lambert resided in Boston and the Goodalls travelled south from distant Salisbury. Gould, Osborne and Newell also belonged to the fellowship of the congregational church in town, while the others had not joined a church in the colony. For more than a year prior to their official organization, they met at Gould’s or Osborne’s house on Sabbath days, so their identities were probably common knowledge to the town’s civil and ecclesiastical

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<sup>27</sup>Quoted from the church covenant, reprinted in Wood, p. 56.

leadership. But none of them faced civil prosecution for their anabaptism, despite the colony's legal mandate.

The act of incorporation the nine people signed that day in May immediately changed their status in the eyes of the colony's civil authorities. Thomas Gould admitted they had formed their society "knowing that it was a breach of the law of the country; that we had not the approbation of magistrates and ministers, for that we suffered the penalty of that law, when we were called before them."<sup>28</sup> For he and the Osbornes, it also changed their standing before their old congregation, which had been effectively crippled in the fight against dissent by divisions among itself. With newfound strength, orthodox church leaders renewed their pursuit of Gould and the Osbornes, this time on the basis of the charge that they had "embodied themselves in a pretended church way."<sup>29</sup> In July of that year, Symmes and the church's deacons sent several requests to Gould and Osbornes that they answer to the charge. Three times the church waited for their appearance, each time waiting in vain. On the last occasion, July 30, 1665, all three received a sentence of excommunication in absentia. No audible vote was cast. Silence indicated a vote in the affirmative, releasing any church member from the discomfort of having to renounce their friends and neighbors. As a result of excommunication, the Goulds and Osbornes no longer faced organized persecution from their old church, which had "delivered" them "up to Satan." Nor did they receive concerted pressure from the local community. But their identity as members of a renegade church marked them for continued harassment by the colony's legal and judicial authorities.

### Dissenters and the General Court

In September, 1665, Gould, Osborne, Drinker, Turner and George, all freemen of the colony, presented themselves as requested to the Court of Assistants in Boston where they

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<sup>28</sup>Gould's narrative in Backus, p. 296.

<sup>29</sup>Records of the First Parish Church of Charlestown, in Wood, p. 41.



laid out a concise confession of faith.<sup>30</sup> The Court of Assistants warned them of the danger they faced because of their actions, and deferred a ruling to the colony's highest court. The General Court summoned the five men on October 11, and the baptists repeated the same confession before that body. In response, the court convicted each of them for "schismatical opposition to the churches of Christ here settled and of profaning the holy appointments of Christ."<sup>31</sup> Their crimes included unlawful baptism and the administration of the Lord's Supper by an excommunicate (Gould). For sentence, each lost his franchise in the colony. In addition, the court stipulated, if any of them were convicted by any court in the colony for the same offense, their sentence would be immediate imprisonment.

Undaunted by the courts' warnings and the severity of their punishments, the men continued to meet with the rest of the new church until April of 1666, when the county's grand jury called all five to the Suffolk County Quarterly Court at Cambridge. Gould, Osborne and George received fines of four pounds each and an order to appear before the next Court of Assistants. They refused to pay the fine and found themselves in prison as previously promised. The three did not remain imprisoned for long, and in June, 1667, the constable of Charlestown, acting on instruction from county magistrates, fined Gould, Osborne and another member of the baptist church, Mary Newell, for their continued absence from orthodox worship. The orthodox church itself no longer called for their return or objected to their absence; colonial magistrates, on the other hand, necessarily saw only the illegality of a covenant broken regardless of the church's decision to cut off the offending parties.

The colony's court system continued to harass the person it considered the leader of the baptist community, Thomas Gould. The tactic had proven successful with strong resident dissenting groups in the past, most notably that gathered around Roger Williams and Anne

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<sup>30</sup>Wood has reprinted the confession in full. At the bottom of the text appears the words, "This was delivered to the Court of Assistants" in "the seventh month 1665." Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>31</sup>Records of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, October 11, 1665, quoted in Ibid., p. 67.

Hutchinson. On March 3, 1668, the Court of Assistants heard an appeal from Gould on the judgement of the last Quarterly Court session for Suffolk County. That judgement apparently concerned a heavy fine or the threat of further imprisonment. Gould's appeal reached sympathetic ears among the jury, who voted to overturn the lower court's decision. The court officers, however, rejected the verdict and demanded reconsideration. After being duly chastised, the members of the jury handed in another verdict upholding the county court's ruling, and court officers affirmed the judgement. But the difficulty in securing an acceptable decision troubled Governor William Bellingham, and convinced him to pursue another course of action concerning the anabaptists. He agreed to sponsor a debate between orthodox clerics and dissenting laymen.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE DEBATE OF 1668

Perhaps more than any other single event in seventeenth century Massachusetts Bay, the proceedings and aftermath of the debate of April, 1668 epitomized the colony's conflict with anabaptist dissenters. Other occurrences which may have stood out as particularly important -- the trials of Clarke, Crandall and Holmes, for example -- spoke to peripheral parts of the conflict. But the manner in which the attending clerics conducted the debate, as well as the events directly resulting from the meeting, distilled the true nature of that conflict. The tension between orthodox and dissenting modes of thought did not reach any significant level in the lives of common freemen and women who sought peace with their God and their neighbors. It existed primarily in the minds of colonial magistrates who feared the loss of political order and imagined the breakdown of social hegemony, and in the fears of educated clergy who foresaw their loss of monopoly on the spiritual life of the communities. The debate of 1668 exposed the conflict for what it was: A crusade by civil and ecclesiastical authorities to retain their vision of the Christian commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

#### A Debate Proposed

The first verdict passed at the Court of Assistants on March 3, 1668 prompted Governor Richard Bellingham on March 7 to propose a debate with members of the

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Danforth, an influential Woburn resident and magistrate, recorded the proceedings of the debate in short-hand. He provided a surprisingly detailed account of the dialogue, as well as much of the flavor of the contemporary manner of speech. He apparently tired of his chore in the middle of the second day, as the text abruptly stops almost mid-sentence. Three-quarters of the debate, therefore, is most likely represented in his transcription. The document was not translated until the 1950s, after which it was presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society. "The Baptist Debate of April 14-15, 1668," William G. McLoughlin and Martha Whiting Davidson, eds. Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, vol. LXXVI, January - December, 1964 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1965).

dissenting anabaptist church from Charlestown. He set a date for Saturday, April 14 and Sunday, April 15, and arranged to use the meeting-house of the congregational church in Boston. He chose several clerics as prosecutors: John Allen of Dedham, Thomas Cobbet (then in Ipswich), Samuel Whiting of Lynn, John Higginson of Salem, Samuel Danforth of Roxbury, Thomas Thacher of Weymouth, Jonathan Mitchell of Cambridge and Zechariah Symmes and Thomas Shepard of Charlestown. Rev. Allen and Rev. Whiting would also serve as moderators. Bellingham and his council, he noted, would function as mere observers. For the defense, Bellingham instructed Gould to appear with other members of his congregation.

In the record that survived, Gould and nine other anabaptists made contributions to the discussion. Eight of them worshipped with the baptist church in Charlestown, though not all of them had joined as full members.<sup>2</sup> The tenth dissenting participant was John Crandall, the same man imprisoned with John Clarke and Obadiah Holmes seventeen years earlier. At the time of the debate, he served as pastor of an offshoot of the Newport baptist church in Westerly, Rhode Island. Three other members of the Newport church may have joined the meeting, but made no recorded contribution. For the orthodox side, the governor allowed two respected Charlestown men, Daniel Gookin and Richard Russell (he who had defended Gould against Symmes' tirades), to participate, as well.

### An Exchange of Words, a Revelation of Motives

The debate's significance as a condensed historical statement on the nature of the conflict involved several contributing factors. One, it revealed the duplicity with which colonial leaders treated those they had invited for discussion. On the surface, it appeared that the meeting would be the first time representatives from both sides met to attempt

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<sup>2</sup>Benanual Bowers and John Trumbull of Charlestown worshipped with Gould's church but never joined it. Aside from Gould, the other members of the baptist church in attendance were Edward Drinker, John Farnam, Sr., Isaac Hull, Thomas Osborne, John Johnson and William Turner. Compiled in *Ibid.*, p. 106-107.



rational discourse. All previous requests by anabaptists for an organized discourse had been denied. But the dissenters found themselves at a marked disadvantage, for the civil magistrates in attendance readily flashed their trump -- prosecution for blasphemy -- and prosecuting clergy clearly followed their own agenda.

Rev. Allen's opening words, delivered from his position as moderator, betrayed the true intentions of those who had organized the debate. "The scope of this meeting is to reduce those that have gone out of God's way to Anabaptism," he said. "It is hard to turn men from their opinion: but yet such a sinner may be converted: and may it please God to save one soul from death by this day's work."<sup>3</sup> After summarizing his own defense for infant baptism, he addressed Gould and company: "Your work is to give the reason of your separation from the people of God: and setting up a meeting in the way of Anabaptism: and whether this commonwealth is to allow it."

Gould, sensing that he and his friends had in some fashion been misled, responded by directing his first comment to the governor. "We are here in his magistrate's name by warrant to appear here this day," he said. "I should desire to know whether we as appear are before a court or no."<sup>4</sup> The governor avoided the question.

"Another thing I would speak," Gould continued on another tack. "It is in the writing a free debate. Then we should desire and I hope it will be so; that what passeth from us we may not lie under the penalty of any law."

That brought a reply from Bellingham.

"You may speak so offensively against God and man that you can't be suffered therein," he said.

Gould then addressed Rev. Allen, whose opening monologue had cast his objectivity as moderator into doubt.

"Have not we liberty to choose moderators?" he asked.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

Thomas Cobbet bluntly fielded the question, his tongue as usual stripping away pretense and hitting the heart of the matter.

"You come not on equal terms," he said, "but as a delinquent: to answer for what you have done. You come not here to choose moderators."<sup>5</sup>

Gould, true to his past experiences with the governor, colonial magistrates and members of the clergy, had rightly sized up their intentions. But the opportunity presented him to lay his case before an assembly of his persecutors apparently proved too good to waste. Other dissenters followed Gould's cue and likewise shared potentially damaging thoughts and opinions. The dialogue that followed, however bridled by the dissenters' wish to avoid further prosecution, contained moments of heated exchange. In those moments, the line between orthodox cleric and dissenting layman became more clearly defined. Contrary to a contemporary statement by Mary Gould that the governor and his court "would not suffer them" nor grant them "liberty to speak," the anabaptist dissenters found more than ample opportunity to speak their minds.<sup>6</sup>

A second important factor in determining the debate's larger significance was the dominance of the clerics' individual and group agendas in setting the course of discussion. As the debate continued through Saturday afternoon and into Sunday morning, different dissenters made repeated requests to read prepared statements of faith and doctrine. The moderators granted some of them permission to do so, but they often received little response. Dissenting participants also put forward several questions, but many of those received similar silence in return. The clerics, it appeared, wished to discuss only the matter they had presented -- namely, that of justification for schism. When Gould, Turner and Trumbull pressed for discussion on the scriptural basis for infant baptism, the moderators quickly returned to separation, the one issue for which the dissenters could then be held accountable.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>6</sup>Account of Mary Gould in the Archives of the First Baptist Church of Boston, reprinted in Backus, vol. 1, pp. 305-308.



The clergy's eagerness to prosecute schism showed itself on several occasions, the most notable being the argument against those dissenters who had not joined any church in New England. Technically, only members of a congregational church in the colony could be prosecuted for schism from that church. Edward Drinker pressed that point in his own defense. "For my own part I have lived [here] many years," he said, "but in the conclusion I did not see the way and order of these churches to be so according to rule of the gospel as the pattern laid down by Christ Jesus: and therefore how am I chargeable with schismatical rendering from you?"<sup>7</sup> Rev. Mitchell of Cambridge replied, "He that professeth himself to be a Christian he separates by refusing to join as well as by breaking away after he hath joined... You make yourself a separatist by joining with those that are so."<sup>8</sup> The dissenters retorted that even they, the orthodox believers, had separated from Anglican churches in England. Rev. Allen, the moderator, quickly suppressed that argument.

In summary, the clerics succeeded in keeping the debate focused on the central issue of schism, which magistrates viewed as civil and religious revolution. On the baptist side, three distinct approaches to answering that question emerged, consequently exposing their own lack of solidarity. For the orthodox side, all three of those approaches, regardless of tone or content, constituted lawlessness. The first anabaptist response, held by Gould, Drinker and Trumbull, insisted they had not separated from the orthodox churches and still did not wish to do so. Danforth, Shepard and Mitchell argued intently that the anabaptists had separated from the only visible body of Christ, and were therefore apostate. Gould, Drinker and Trumbull repeated that they had been forced out, and cited their present faithfulness to the baptist church as proof of their innocence of the charge.

The insightful Rev. Cobbet at this point interjected. "There is the pinch," he noted. "They think you speak not to them because they forsake not their own assemblies."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

A good portion of the second day's discussion involved Gould's defense of his actions in the life of the Charlestown congregational church. He repeated his assertion that he had been forced from church life by his restriction from the communion table, and stressed that Symmes and the church had dealt with him improperly. William Turner joined him in arguing that their alleged act of nonconformity was no different from that of the colony's founders, who had left England for liberty of conscience. That the orthodox churches were legitimate was a point they willingly conceded, despite their differences on what they considered minor matters of conscience. Gould continued the point by arguing that he need not have joined another church at all had the congregational church only broadened its view of the Christian experience.

The second line of argument came from Turner and John Johnson, who openly admitted to separation. "Three things I separate from you for," Turner said. "One, baptizing infants. Two, denying prophecy to the brethren. Three, a spirit of persecution of those that differ from you."<sup>10</sup> He and Johnson also called for the right to form parallel denominations of Puritan churches. Although each could differ on smaller points of contention (like baptism), they would all share common essential theology within the same Puritan system. Taking baptism as an example, they stressed that the reality of its potential divisiveness made it too dangerous to leave choice of opinion up to each member of a congregation. Trying to keep everyone together in one church would create too ripe an opportunity for repeated clashes, they said. As a safeguard, the commonwealth should allow sister churches to form along lines of conscience.

The third view forwarded, primarily by John Crandall and Benannual Bowers, called for complete separation. Bowers was already well known to civil magistrates for his radical views, as he and his wife had appeared before them in court on several occasions. In this forum, Bowers asserted that the established churches were nullified by virtue of their reliance on infant baptism, and were even unchristian. Bowers and Crandall revealed their

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 116.



thoughts in very limited fashion, undoubtedly for fear of reprisal. Instead, they carefully lobbied for a more general religious liberty. The closest Bowers came to inciting the wrath of the authorities against him followed his statement that “the spirit of God in every Christian tells them whether” a church was rightly assembled. To sensitive ears, that sounded very much like a reference to the Quakers’ concept of the “inner light.”

To that point in the discussion, no talk of toleration had been introduced. But the orthodox clerics forced the issue when voicing fears of anarchy produced by complete religious freedom. References to Muenster anabaptists and their practices abounded in the speech of several clergymen, perhaps as a debating tool intended to tarnish the images of their opponents. By allowing dissent, they claimed, they would open a potential floodgate for other, more radical religious groups. The spirit of individualism inherent in many of the dissenters’ arguments drew a similar response. William McLoughlin, the scholar who supervised the transcription of the short-hand records of the debate, commented that individualism played a central role in the debate. In his estimation, the debate appeared to be a meeting between the medieval world and the modern. The clerics, he said, were relics of a world still reliant on a corporate Christian state, and could not deal with the prospect of a state of free individuals who relied on their own judgement.<sup>11</sup> McLoughlin’s judgement may have ascribed too much credit to the anabaptists’ thinking, but it certainly highlighted the virtual incompatibility of the two sides’ points of view.

After the governor had first proposed the debate, members of the clergy afforded the coming event a large amount of publicity in their parishes. Intended initially to provide as many people as possible the opportunity to see and hear the anabaptists refuted once for all time, that publicity worked to the dissenters’ favor. It also revealed the civil and ecclesiastical leaderships’ ignorance as to the strength of anabaptist sentiment in the colony. They misjudged both the depth of dissenting conviction and the level of popular support

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

they could expect in trying to uproot it. Their behavior during the course of the discussion did not necessarily test the patience of the orthodox community, but their treatment of the dissenters following the debate created a groundswell of sympathy for the “heretics” that took them by surprise.

### Public Sympathy and a Favorable Petition

Several weeks after the close of the debate, on May 7, the General Court called Gould, Turner and Farnam to respond to whether the discussion had changed their opinions. All of them answered in the negative. The court then declared “it necessary that they be removed to some other part of this country, or elsewhere, and according doth order that they remove themselves out of this jurisdiction before July 20th next.”<sup>12</sup> If the offenders failed to banish themselves by the assigned date, they risked immediate imprisonment. With that sentence pronounced, the court released the men to prepare for their required departure. But all three returned to their homes and former practice, with little or no intention of ceasing or leaving the colony. On July 20, magistrates cast all three into prison in Boston. Gould, Turner and Farnam remained in prison twelve weeks before dispatching a letter to the General Court, dated October 14, asking for mercy and their liberty. They did not recant their views on baptism or repent of schism, but said they were waiting for God to give them understanding.<sup>13</sup> Their request was denied.

Less than a week later, the General Court received another petition. This request for clemency, however, proved most surprising to the officers of the court. For it did not originate from the confines of a prison cell. Rather, it bore the signatures of sixty-six influential freemen, almost without exception solid members of orthodox churches.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Records of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay, quoted in part in Wood, p. 81. Also in Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, pp. 216-219. Reprinted in full in Backus, vol. 1, pp. 302-303.

<sup>13</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, pp. 220-220a.

<sup>14</sup>McLoughlin claims that some of the signers were involved in the schism from the First Church of Boston over the halfway covenant. “It seems fair,” he says, “to conclude that the divisions over this schism contributed to the confusion over how to treat the Baptist schism from the Charlestown Church.” William G. McLoughlin, New England Dissent, 1630-1833, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,



Two men, Joshua Atwater of Boston and Benjamin Sweetser of Charlestown, themselves anabaptists, circulated the petition among the people of Charlestown, Boston and other surrounding communities. The support they received may have surprised themselves, as well, for affixing one's name to a petition could potentially carry a great responsibility. That proved particularly true in this case.

The petitioners apparently felt vexed by the harsh conditions imposed on Gould, Turner, Farnam and their families by the General Court's sentence. They made no statement concerning the righteousness of the court's judgement on the men, but noted that the three were "disabled to govern or to provide for their families, to their great damage and hastening ruin, how innocent soever." Their lament continued:

Beside the hazard of their own lives, being aged and weakly men, and needing that succor a prison will not afford; the sense of this, their personal and family most deplorable and afflicted condition, hath sadly affected the hearts of many sober and serious Christians, and such as neither approve of the judgment or practice; especially considering that the men are reputed godly, and of a blameless conversation; and the things for which they seem to suffer seem not to be moral, unquestioned, scandalous evils, but matters of religion and conscience; not in things fundamental, plain and clear, but circumstantial, more dark and doubtful, wherein the saints are wont to differ, and to forbear one another in love, that they be not exposed to sin, or to suffer for conscience sake. We therefore most humbly beseech this honored Court, in their Christian mercy and bowels of compassion, to pity and relieve these poor prisoners; whose sufferings (also being doubtful to many, and some of great worth among ourselves, and grievous to sundry of God's people at home and abroad,) may crave a further consideration, whereby perceiving this Court not likely to effect the end desired, but rather to grieve the hearts of God's people.<sup>15</sup>

The list of names inscribed below the text of the petition represents a telling cross-section of the colony's populace.<sup>16</sup> Some of the people whose names appeared were of

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1971), pp. 71-72.

<sup>15</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, p. 221. Also reprinted in Backus, vol. 1, p. 304.

the region's lowest classes: Poor, uneducated yeoman and farmers. For members of that group, this record may have been one of few or the only written acknowledgement of their presence in the colony. Several signators simply made their mark, their full names added by Atwater or Sweetser with the prefix, "The mark of..." Some of the signers were themselves anabaptists or entertained anabaptist sympathies. John Russell, Sr. of Woburn, soon to become a deacon in the baptist church, and John Pierce of Billerica, an avowed dissenter, signed the bill. Also among the signators numbered some who had voiced their disdain for the treatment of anabaptists on previous occasions. Most notable in that group was Charlestown's Solomon Phipps, who had earlier defended Gould from Rev. Symmes' wrath while being questioned before the assembled congregation. Samuel and Jonathan Shrimpton of Boston, two signers, evidently shared the sympathies of their father, Henry, a man of property and honorable standing whose will probated two years earlier had provided ten pounds sterling to Gould's church "as a token of my love."<sup>17</sup>

Many of those who added their names to the list were members of the colony's more prominent classes -- wealthy businessmen, civil servants and military officers. Notable examples of this group included Hezekiah and John Usher, the Shrimptons, William Howard, Phipps, Thomas Grubb, Richard Way, James Cary, Randall Nichols, Captain James Oliver, Elisha Hutchinson and Captain Edward Hutchinson. Another person of influence, FreeGrace Bendall of Boston, also signed the petition. Bendall's name stood out as highly noticeable, for as recorder of the Suffolk County Court of Probate for most of the second half of the century, his distinct, flourishing signature also appeared below the record of hundreds of probate actions. The most striking signature, however, belonged to one "T. Temple," marking its owner as a person of obvious refined style. The only record

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<sup>16</sup>Of the petition's sixty-six names, I have been able to decipher all but a dozen or so. Had the scope of this study warranted it, a more detailed look into the identities and lives of those whose names appear would have proven of great interest. However, a few representative examples will suffice.

<sup>17</sup>Will of Henry Shrimpton, dated July 17, 1666, in the Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, quoted in Wood, p. 70.



of a person in the region surnamed Temple during this period was a will probated following the death of "Sir Thomas Temple, knight and Barronett" in the summer of 1674. Attached to the will, a general inventory of the man's estate priced his worth in the thousands.<sup>18</sup> Gould, Turner and Farnam apparently had friends in high places.

For the most part, however, the men who signed the petition in favor of the three dissenters came from the largest segment of the colony's population. Like the men for whom they begged compassion, they were neither exceedingly prosperous nor dirt poor. Rather, they provided a comfortable home for their families, worked as farmers or tradesmen in their local communities, and participated in the regular life of the local parish church. Together with their neighbors, both simple and influential, they astonished the General Court with their written request.

The court responded swiftly to what it undoubtedly perceived as a dangerous affront to its authority. Having received the petition on October 20, it issued a written proclamation the following day describing its stern rejection of the request.<sup>19</sup> The court continued to convene for the next several days, all of its business committed to containing and rebuking those responsible for the alarming statement. Its response of October 21 demanded an apology and repentance from all involved. In particular, the court singled out the most prominent members of the group, save for Thomas Temple. Nine men received warrants to appear before the court to answer for their behavior. They included Captains Hutchinson and Oliver and Solomon Phipps. The next day, October 22, all nine signed another petition pleading for the court's forgiveness.<sup>20</sup> The court chastised them for their impropriety, but released them with no further punishment. For the two men who wrote and circulated the incendiary document, however, the court's pardon proved a commodity

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<sup>18</sup>Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, vol. 6, p. 59. Reprinted on microfilm, Reel 2 of the collection.

<sup>19</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, p. 222.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., vol. X, p. 223.

more difficult to procure. After a lengthy hearing in early November, the court assessed each a fine of ten pounds.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, Gould, Farnam and Turner remained in prison, but the rest of their congregation continued to meet at Gould's house. Aware of their presence there, and still in the throes of its own consternation, the court dispatched a warrant to the constables in Charlestown on October 24 to obtain the names of the offending dissenters.<sup>22</sup> One day later, a constable discovered nine people, including the ubiquitous Obadiah Holmes, gathered at Gould's home. Also in attendance were Thomas and Sarah Osborne, Benanual Bowers, Jonathan Bunker (of the Charlestown family of later Bunker Hill fame), Stephen Baker, and Enoch Sr., Mary and Enoch Greenleaf, Jr. of Malden.<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, the same constables served a much-belated warrant to Mary Gould, Thomas Osborne, Baker and Greenleaf, Jr. to appear before the Middlesex court.<sup>24</sup> That last group of offenders had met on June 6, while a court order for the immediate apprehension of any assembled anabaptists was still in effect (the fallout from the debate being at its thickest). But the constables, John Wayman and Richard Lowden, though aware of continued meetings, failed to serve summons. With the renewed General Court crusade threatening their own well-being for failure to perform their duty, however, Wayman and Lowden suddenly remembered a past offense to placate the court's desire.

For the prisoners, life contained the prospects of a difficult winter ahead. Perhaps that consideration led John Farnam, on October 27, to petition the General Court for his individual release.<sup>25</sup> Farnam, a resident of Boston, had been a member of Increase Mather's Second Church (also dubbed "Old North Church," fabled in Longfellow's Paul Revere poem), but received discipline in 1665 for anabaptist sympathies. In the summer of

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., vol. X, pp. 225a-225b.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., vol. X, pp. 224-224a.

<sup>23</sup>Records of the Middlesex County Quarterly Court, quoted in Wood, p. 84.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>25</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, p. 224b.



1666, he left Mather's church to join with Gould's company in Charlestown, and was publicly excommunicated from the Boston congregation. In late 1668, however, his strength of conviction met a difficult test. The rigors of prison confinement proved more of a burden than he could bear. In his subsequent petition to the court, Farnam promised to return to his former church as a regular worshipper if the court released him. On November 4, the court granted his wish.<sup>26</sup>

Gould and Turner remained in prison through the winter, all the while making repeated requests for their own release. Finally, on March 6, the Court of Assistants granted them each three days freedom to attend to household business. The court also hoped a few words with their orthodox neighbors would provide "further convincement of their many irregularities in those practices for which they were sentenced."<sup>27</sup> On Sunday, March 7, however, the constables charged with observing the furloughed prisoners interrupted Gould, Turner, Turner's five children and twelve other adults in the middle of a service of worship in Gould's house.<sup>28</sup> Turner and Gould fled to Noddle's Island with their families, where the court appeared content to leave them. Every sabbath day for the next five years, Gould and the rest of his church met on the island, many others having also taken up residence there. The Middlesex County Quarterly Court, meanwhile, spurred on by the directives of its superior courts, pursued the rest of the people discovered at Gould's house that day in March, and succeeded in prosecuting most of them.

Colony court records contained numerous other cases prosecuted against members of the baptist congregation centered on Noddle's Island over the next several years, each instance reinforcing the courts' role as the enforcing agency of the colonial leadership's will. But of those cases, only one produced a significant response from the orthodox community. That case, solely involving William Turner, carried greater significance in later years, as well.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., vol. X, p. 225.

<sup>27</sup>Records of the Court of Assistants, quoted in Backus, p. 315.

<sup>28</sup>Records of the Middlesex County Quarterly Court, quoted in Wood, p. 90.

William Turner, a tailor who moved to Dorchester from Dartmouth, South Devonshire and joined the Dorchester church in 1642, enjoyed relative prosperity from his trade. He had been a member of a baptist church in England, but settled into his new community as a quiet and responsible man. He was granted freemanship in 1643 and chosen bailiff of his town in 1664.<sup>29</sup> His life changed with his decision to again join a baptist group in 1665. After escaping to Noddle's Island with his family in 1669, Turner made the mistake of returning to his house in Boston in January, 1670, supposedly to retrieve belongings for his new home on the island. Several warrants had been issued for his arrest, however, and Boston's constables confronted him before he could slip away undetected. He was again cast into prison.

On October 27, 1670, after several months in jail, Turner submitted a petition to the General Court for his release. He noted the court's original sentence against him in 1668, and added, "your poor prisoner doth therefore humbly beseech you to consider that by virtue of that sentence I have already suffered above thirty weeks imprisonment."<sup>30</sup> Turner's appeal, which also included admission of his body's sickly state, reached some sympathetic listeners. Governor Bellingham and his council voted to keep Turner in prison, adhering to the same principle by which Farnam achieved his release: Only by recanting his opinions could Turner gain his freedom. The court's deputies, however, voted to release Turner on the condition that he agree not to create further disturbances.<sup>31</sup> The governor's will prevailed, as the deadlocked court reached no concrete decision. Turner remained imprisoned (no record of his release survived), but news of the deputies' softening attitude towards him created renewed hope in the hearts of Turner's friends.

Edward Drinker, writing to the brethren at the baptist church in Newport in November, 1670, expressed that hope. He tempered it, however, with a realistic appraisal of Turner's

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<sup>29</sup>George M. Bodge, Soldiers in King Philip's War (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), p.232.

<sup>30</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. X, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., vol. X, p. 228a.



condition. For still battling frail health resulting from his previous term of imprisonment, Turner appeared to be on the verge of death. "I fear he will not trouble them long," Drinker said; "only this is our comfort, we hear if he dies in prison, they say they will bury him." He also described the General Court's dispute over how to handle Turner's petition. Most interestingly, however, he revealed that many people in the Boston congregational church, including its pastors, had attempted to intervene on Turner's behalf:

The town and country is very much troubled at our troubles; and especially the old church in Boston, and their elders, both Mr. Oxonbridge and Mr. Allen have labored abundantly, I think as if it had been for their best friends in the world. Many more gentlemen and solid Christians are for our brother's deliverance; but it cannot be had; a very great trouble [is it] to the town; and they had gotten six magistrate's hands for his deliverance, but could not get the Governor's hand to it.<sup>32</sup>

The governor and his council may still have been conducting their crusade against dissent, but what limited popular support their policy ever enjoyed continued to erode.

### The Baptist Church Firmly Entrenched

For most of the following two decades, the congregation of baptists first gathered in 1665 faced continued pressure from the legal system designed to suppress it. Its members also faced limited pressure from the local communities in which they lived, usually in the form of attempts by orthodox clergy to utilize the General Court's legal mandate. But that harassment proved a minor threat, as Gould and his fellow baptists felt secure enough to return from their self-imposed exile. In 1674, the congregation left Noddle's Island, relocating its weekly meetings to a rented house in Boston. By this time, the baptist church's membership numbered in the dozens, and offshoot cells began to form in nearby communities. Thomas Gould died in 1675, but the church he helped initiate and for whose sake he suffered repeated persecution, continued to grow rapidly without him.

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<sup>32</sup>Edward Drinker, letter to the Newport Baptist Church, November 30, 1670, in the archives of the First Baptist Church of Boston. Reprinted in Backus, p. 316-317.

For Charlestown, the inconvenience of having a regular meeting of anabaptists in its midst had passed. Many of the people from its community who had been instrumental in founding and preserving the life of the dissenting church had moved, some to Boston, others to Woburn, Billerica and Cambridge. Most of its large dissenting population remained in the town. But the town's atmosphere of tolerance fostered during the years of heavy anabaptist persecution at the hands of the courts provided a relatively safe environment for those dissenters to lead peaceful lives. Like its sister town to the north, Lynn, Charlestown's growing reputation as a "haven-town" no longer solely marked it as a refuge for recent immigrants. Both communities had provided shelter for those of its members who needed moments of reprieve from the General Court's aggressive crusade against dissent.



## CHAPTER 5

### LOCAL LIFE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOLERANCE: ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS

Scarcely more than three hundred years separates the modern student of history from the first century of colonial experimentation in Massachusetts Bay Colony: A small fraction of time in the scope of world experience; a vast, august gulf to modern sensibilities. Nowhere more, perhaps, than in our ability to secure a vision of the importance of community in the sensitivities of early colonial life does that chasm pose its greatest challenge. For the modern reader raised in the spirit of western individualism, the reliance on community as a primary source of personal security may seem an outdated vestige of feudalism. For that person, grasping the inverse significance of the role personal relations played in determining the stability of local community life proves as difficult a task. But both reciprocating themes -- communal stability seriously influencing the lives of local people, and the quality of relations between local folk providing a community's source of stability -- played a leading part in the development of tolerance for religious nonconformists in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay.

The popularization of a "frontier" interpretation of North American history at the turn of the last century focused attention on the rigors of life on the edge of contemporary civilization as a guiding force behind the continent's unique past. Many of the assumptions affiliated with that outlook have since been spurned as myth, but elements of its creed still ring true. Included in that list is the corollary which recognized the way people relied on friends, family and neighbors for the fulfillment of needs essential to basic survival. For those historical personages bent on preserving and promoting European culture, establishing a stable economic base for local and regional trading, keeping the engines of

the local political process running smoothly, or providing a ready and efficient defense from military threats, that relationship became even more important. The time of trials for religious dissenters in seventeenth-century Massachusetts occasioned an opportunity for the display and refinement of communal interdependence. In turn, that interdependence dictated the patterns and rates of growth of practical tolerance for dissent.

In the community of Lynn, which faced the first formidable challenge to religious and social polity by dissenting laymen, and in the town of Charlestown, which, along with nearby Billerica and Woburn, provided the majority of members in the first organized baptist church in the colony, the personal interdependence that produced community toleration revealed itself in three ways: In economic, social and military considerations. Culturally, one of the few quantifiable explanations for tolerance, aside from expressed religious conviction, was personal influence due to wealth, social involvement or military service. Each of the three considerations, therefore, necessarily included cultural factors.

### Personal Wealth

One of the peculiar things about the emergence of anabaptist sentiment in the minds and actions of Massachusetts Bay colonists was its character of economic universality -- an almost total disregard for the personal wealth of its proponents. Its roots found life in the fertility of lives regardless of their economic standing. Witness Lady Deborah Moody of Lynn, born of a wealthy, poised, aristocratic family, and John George of Charlestown, indentured as a servant to Governor John Winthrop in exchange for the fare of transport to the colony. Both people stood before the colonial courts to defend themselves against charges of anabaptism. Between those two people on opposite ends of the economic spectrum ranged others at different levels of prosperity, from the educated elite, through the prosperous merchant classes and the comfortable yeomen, to the poor dirt farmer. Each may not have received completely equal treatment in local circles as result of their dissent.



But the respect and deference accorded wealthier dissenters undoubtedly aided the cause of their less-prosperous brethren.

In the eyes of the General Court, and judging by records kept by it and lower courts, dissenters faced prosecution consistent with their spiritual convictions, not their appraised estate values. Fines for spiritual offenses were based on the severity of the alleged crime, not on a defendant's ability to pay them. Nor were legal judgements on matters of religion tailor-fit to allow greater lenience for wealthier members of the dissenting group.<sup>1</sup> On the common local scene, however, such unilateral judgements on a person's character, completely devoid of bias produced by the power of mammon; were not the norm. Several local institutions, including the congregational church, contained organizational elements based on their members' individual net worth. Land distribution to residents of a community that received grants of additional acreage operated on the basis of each person's previous land holdings and real estate value.<sup>2</sup> In the church itself, seating arrangements in the meeting house hinged on a family's wealth, with the choicest pews saved for the town's elite. Thus, a loose deferential framework already existed when communities began facing the challenge of increasing dissent, even from wealthier members of the community. In determining their responses to the social challenge from anabaptism, local people displayed little deviation from the previously installed system of social and economic courtesy.

Many of the colony's dissenters were people of some considerable property. In Lynn, Lady Deborah Moody provided the most visible example of personal wealth, but her extraordinary status prompted a more vigorous reply from colonial authorities. Under

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<sup>1</sup>On more than one occasion, several dissenters faced prosecution for anabaptism as a group. Each person received identical fines. For some, the fine represented pocket change; for others, it imposed more of a hardship. Examples include the experience of Thomas Gould, Thomas Osborne, John George, Edward Drinker and William Turner in late 1665 before the Suffolk County Quarterly Court, the Court of Assistants and the General Court. Recounted in Wood, pp. 64-68.

<sup>2</sup>Discussion of land distributions in Lynn in 1638 and Charlestown's "Mystick side" in 1658, among others, is included below.

pressure from the General Court in 1643, she withdrew to Long Island where she eventually became a Quaker.<sup>3</sup> Other Lynn dissenters, though not of Lady Moody's rank, nonetheless possessed above average estates. Most notable among them was the family of Daniel and Elizabeth King. The Kings lived in Lynn as early as June, 1641, when Daniel appeared before the county court as a defendant in a civil case regarding debt.<sup>4</sup> The Kings apparently rented a farm from Lady Moody in Swampscot, and Elizabeth struck a friendship with their influential landlord. Their acquaintance became so strong, in fact, that Elizabeth soon adopted Lady Moody's views on infant baptism. The Essex County Quarterly Court admonished her for antipaedobaptism in December 1642 and February 1642-43, but she probably did not relinquish her newly formed opinions.<sup>5</sup> Ten years later, on July 1, 1652, in the last case of anabaptism prosecuted in the Essex County court, Daniel King received admonition for his absence from public ordinance (baptism) and being found at a "private unwarrantable meeting" with a known anabaptist.<sup>6</sup> By that time, however, Daniel's large and prosperous farm had enabled him to accumulate a sizeable amount of capital, and he was among the town's wealthiest inhabitants.

Daniel's frequent trips as a litigant to the county court sessions provided a glimpse of a man earnestly pursuing his business and farming practices. On two occasions in 1644-45, the court fined King for putting his cattle in the town's common before its crop had been harvested. Both times, he paid damages for the crops his cattle consumed.<sup>7</sup> By the time the court admonished him for anabaptism in 1652, King had filed suit and was sued many times. In one instance, he complained to the court in 1646 that fifty shillings worth of goods had been taken from him by the captain of the local militia, "for supposed neglect of

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<sup>3</sup>Cyrus M. Tracey, ed. Standard History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston: C.F. Jewett & Co., 1878), p. 249.

<sup>4</sup>Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, vol. 1 (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1911), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 48, 52.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 258.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 75, 81.



training, he being lame.”<sup>8</sup> The court acknowledged King’s infirmity, excusing him from military service in exchange for an annual fee of ten shillings.

King’s most notable legal case, however, displayed the extent of his capital holdings and an example of his business savvy. By 1651, he had gathered enough wealth to purchase his 500-acre farm from Lady Moody, but stalled in making the 500-pound payment (a substantial sum, and presumably the full price of purchase). King and Lady Moody’s agent, Edward Browse, apparently had a disagreement on the terms of the sale. Finally, in November, 1651, Lady Moody sent her brother, Sir Henry Moody, Knight, to the court to secure the settlement. Sir Henry and King reached a compromise -- 155 pounds, a quick solution to the Lady’s current financial woes and a bargain for the Lynn farmer.<sup>9</sup> King probably possessed the resources to pay the full price had he wished.

After King’s prosecution for dissent in 1652, he continued to amass what became a small fortune. As one of the wealthiest men in town, he released some of his financial resources in the form of loans to help revive the ailing local iron works. But securing repayment for those loans proved a difficult task, as the iron works had been losing business to other foundries along the coast. In June, 1655, King filed suit against the works’ proprietors, Mr. Jonathan Beckes and Company, for non-payment of debt.<sup>10</sup> No settlement was recorded, but when King died in May, 1672, his estate was valued at more than 1500 pounds. No other Lynn estate probated prior to 1681 exceeded it in value.

Other dissenting members of the Lynn community also possessed wealth above the town’s average. When the town partitioned its common land in 1638, it split 8740 acres between 103 proprietors.<sup>11</sup> Of that number, 74 people received 60 acres or less, the overall average allotment totalling between 30 and 40 acres. Assuming that town residents received portions determined by their previous estate size or prominence in town, those

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted from court records in the “Annals of Lynn,” Lewis-Newhall, p. 220.

<sup>9</sup>Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, vol. 1, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>11</sup>Information on 1638 land distribution compiled from a list in the Town Book of Records of Lynn, reprinted in the “Annals of Lynn,” Lewis-Newhall, pp. 171-2.

people who would soon surface as dissenters fared rather well. John Wood, the man who led the first contingent of settlers to Lynn from Salem in 1629, received 100 acres. That grant proved the fourth largest, behind those made to the church pastors (Rev. Whiting and Rev. Cobbet) and a member of the aristocracy (a "Lord Brook"). Wood faced prosecution for anabaptism in 1645-46. Joseph and Jane Floyd, Wood's immediate neighbors in that section of town called "Woodend" (so named after Mr. Wood), also received one of the largest grants: 70 acres, placing them firmly among the town's top third in affluence. Still other dissenters, including Joseph Rednap and George Taylor, received lesser shares, but nonetheless above the town's average.

In Charlestown's case, an even higher percentage of the confirmed dissenting community displayed affluence above the norm. No one of the influence of a Lady Moody numbered among its ranks, but several dissenters came from just as reputable if not nearly as wealthy families. Jonathan Bunker, the sixth and youngest child of George Bunker, grew up in one of the town's wealthiest families. George Bunker, in 1638, the year of Jonathan's birth, owned more land in Charlestown than any other person.<sup>12</sup> By the time he died in 1664, George had dispensed most of his estate to the oldest children, but his will divided a sizeable remaining inheritance among the two youngest sons -- Jonathan and brother Benjamin, a Harvard graduate and promising orthodox preacher.<sup>13</sup> Jonathan died of smallpox at a fairly young age -- 40, in 1678 -- and left a comfortable estate valued at over 600 pounds. Although not nearly as affluent as his father and older siblings, Jonathan Bunker's net worth placed him among the town's wealthier inhabitants.<sup>14</sup> Of all the known dissenters in the Charlestown baptist church who probated wills or inventories prior to 1700, only two left estates of greater value. And only one of them, Thomas Gould, lived in Charlestown.

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<sup>12</sup>Bunker owned 22 lots, including the section known as "Bunker Hill." Wyman, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>14</sup>Had the scope of this study permitted, a more thorough study of estates probated from Charlestown and their values would have been undertaken. The relative disorganization of Suffolk and Middlesex County probate records, compared to those of Essex County, makes the task quite formidable.



Gould's estate inventory, probated in 1674, assigned a value of over 900 pounds to the dissenting leader's worldly possessions. After debt, Gould's value rested at 782 pounds sterling.<sup>15</sup> Much of that wealth was invested in real estate, but the inventory detailed a rather comfortable household, as well. Aside from owning three valuable feather beds and their accouterments, Gould possessed a large supply of valuable linen, cotton and wool cloth and a finely stocked wardrobe. Among other farm animals, he owned eighty sheep. Other valuable items inventoried included ingredients and a large number of storage vessels for beer and ale. Gould's inventory, however, does not make mention of any tools or supplies for his profession -- wagonmaker and wheelright -- only those of a prosperous farmer. Presumably his earlier evacuation to Noddle's Island forced him to abandon his craft and invest his resources elsewhere. His inventory includes acknowledgement that he shared ownership in the ketch "Endeavor," which plied the trade routes between Boston and other ports on the New England coast. His will, meanwhile, mentions an indentured servant, Thomas Blanchard, as one of the recipients of estate division.<sup>16</sup> Other records indicated that Gould's affluence did not come only in the latter years of his life. In 1658, when Charlestown divided its public meadows at "Mystick side" among 212 households according to each unit's current value, Gould received the twelfth-largest portion.<sup>17</sup> Gould apparently enjoyed a prosperous life despite his many troubles with colonial authorities because of his religious convictions; a life which, after leaving the trade that had brought him financial security, afforded him the opportunities to use his capital towards other ends.

One other Charlestown dissenter stood out as an affluent member of the community. Benjamin Sweetser, whose estate was not inventoried by probate officers upon his death, may have been the wealthiest of all the dissenters in town. Sweetser arrived in

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<sup>15</sup>Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, record no. 682. Microfilm files, vol. 7, pp. 362-5.

<sup>16</sup>Will and inventory recorded together in *Ibid.*, record no. 682.

<sup>17</sup>Wood, p. 31.

Charlestown when he was no older than five years of age. His father, Seth, lived in town as early as 1637. The elder Sweetser was himself an anabaptist, and probably had belonged to a baptist church in his home county of Hertfordshire, England.<sup>18</sup> In 1639, Sweetser's professed anabaptism kept him from sharing in a division of the town's common lands and other privileges of a freeman of the colony.<sup>19</sup> Seth Sweetser left an estate valued at only 270 pounds in 1662.

Benjamin inherited his father's house and land, as well as his dissenting opinions. But when the town again partitioned commons in 1658, it did not discriminate against him as it had his father nineteen years before. He received 22 acres, below the town's average.<sup>20</sup> By the time he died in 1718, however, Sweetser was a very wealthy man. Whether through farming or his well-respected ability as a lastmaker -- producing molds for shoe production -- he accumulated enough land and cash to give away hundreds of pounds-worth of property. His will liberally showered land, cash and possessions on his wife, children, friends and the ministers of several baptist congregations in the colony, as well as the pastors of a few orthodox churches. The will also stipulated an equally liberal allowance for purchasing the provisions for Sweetser's funeral, including fine gloves for his "special friends," and "good wine" and "some good books of Mr. John Flasel or Mr. Edward Pearse's preparation for death" for distribution to the mourners.<sup>21</sup>

Other participants in the baptist gathering in Charlestown, although less ostentatious in their display of wealth than brother Sweetser, nonetheless possessed financial fortune close to his. Of that group, William Turner and John Farnam, Sr. of Boston and George Farley of Billerica arose as notable examples. Turner and Farnam, both imprisoned for relatively lengthy periods by the General Court, probated estates of considerable worth. In Turner's

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<sup>18</sup>Wyman, p. 921.

<sup>19</sup>Philip F. Gura, A Glimpse of Sion's Glory, Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>20</sup>Frothingham, p. 153.

<sup>21</sup>Records of the Middlesex County Court of Probate, record no. 21998.



case, that wealth may have been due largely to the estate left his wife upon the death of her first husband. In any case, he and his wife, Mary, apparently maintained a privileged life. In 1676, shortly before her second husband, William, would die at the hands of Wampanoag and Narragansett warriors during King Philip's War, Mary Turner petitioned the court for assistance. She "humbly sheweth" that

whereas your petitioner's husband voluntarily and freely offered himself unto and now is in your service far from home together with his son and servants leaving only one servant with me which God in his providence hath bereaved me of so that I am at present wholly almost left destitute of maintenance for myself which calls upon me to crave of your honours' consideration of my present condition and order the payment to me of the whole or what part your honours think fit of wages due for the time my husband son and servants have been in the service of the country.<sup>22</sup>

The governor and his council approved Mrs. Turner's petition, awarding seven pounds for her use. That she had little or no cash to support her lifestyle while William was away at war suggests an ability on his part to provide for his wife as her needs and desires demanded. They had a budget large enough to afford several servants. But most or all of the value of her first husband's estate lay in real estate holdings. And with William's flourishing tailoring business on hold during his absence, Mary was left with a fine home, nice clothes and an abundance of other property, but little means of feeding the household.

John Farnam, a miller, also enjoyed a prosperous life. When he died in 1702, his estate included ownership of three homes, two of which were occupied by sons Jonathan and David. A household inventory revealed a relatively comfortable lifestyle. He enjoyed, among other things, a good-sized wardrobe and fine furniture. Of most interest among the inventoried items, however, were several wharves and a warehouse used in his business pursuits. The total value of his estate exceeded 700 pounds.<sup>23</sup> George Farley, meanwhile, enjoyed several years as one of the wealthiest men in Billerica. A clothier and

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<sup>22</sup>Massachusetts Archives, vol. CXVIII, p. 225.

<sup>23</sup>Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, record no. 2722. Microfilm files, vol. 14, pp. 59-60.

tailor by profession, Farley lived in Woburn prior to purchasing a section of the 1500-acre farm at Shawsheen owned by Governor Thomas Dudley. An original proprietor of the town that became Billerica, Farley undoubtedly profited from subsequent sales of that land to other people seeking a place to settle. When assessing costs for maintaining the ministry of the town's church and its minister, Samuel Whiting, Jr. (son of Lynn's senior pastor, Samuel Whiting, Sr.) in 1663 and 1664, the town charged Farley the third largest of fifty-two fees. His cost of three pounds, two shillings was more than twice the average fee assigned, suggesting the size of Farley's estate compared with those of his neighbors.<sup>24</sup> His fortune may have declined in later years, a possible trend indicated by the tax assessed against his estate in the 1679 collection. While the average assessment totalled 4s 8d, Farley paid only 4s 6d.<sup>25</sup> His financial status at the end of his life in 1693 remained uncertain.

### Local Economic Activity

Not all dissenters in Lynn or the Charlestown congregation possessed such wealth, and therefore did not necessarily enjoy the deference often afforded people of that distinction. Less-prosperous dissenters may very well have benefited from the presence of their more affluent brethren, but many may just as likely have gained the towns' tolerance by their individual and collective value to the local economies. In some cases, dissenting residents may have been the sole providers of important goods or services to the communities in which they lived. In other instances, particularly in Charlestown with its large dissenting population, to have expelled or heavily ostracized dissenters, compelling them to leave the community, would have eliminated a significant part of the town's economic base. In either situation, dissenters secured their place in the economic life of the community.

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<sup>24</sup>Henry A. Hazen, History of Billerica, Massachusetts (Boston: A. Williams and Co., 1883), p. 165.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 193.



The experience of Charlestown, Woburn, Billerica and other towns from which people involved in the Charlestown congregation came provides an abundance of examples in illustration of the first scenario. Thomas Gould, the most visible of Charlestown's dissenters, worked as a wagon-maker and wheelright. In the years of the town's infancy, he alone provided that service, as town and county records identify no one else in Charlestown with that occupation. John George worked as a chimney sweep, while Christopher Goodwin established himself as a skilled mason.<sup>26</sup> Thomas Skinner of Malden, who was 52 when he married Thomas Gould's daughter Marie in 1669, contributed to his community as a "victualler" or inn-keeper.<sup>27</sup> John Farnam, Sr. of Boston ran a successful grain milling operation. In Woburn, John and Matthew Johnson, dissenting brothers in one of the town's most prominent families, each made significant contributions to securing the community's economic stability. While their older brother, Major William Johnson, a leading political figure in the colony, amassed real estate holdings of almost 1000 acres in town and developed into the colony's most skillful surveyor, John and Matthew quietly established successful careers of their own. John owned and operated lucrative grain milling and lumber businesses, although the last years of his life beginning about 1710 brought poverty and poor health. He died in 1720. Matthew made a comfortable living as a skilled carpenter.<sup>28</sup>

Two other Woburn men, John Russell, Sr. and his son, John Jr., also contributed significantly to the economic life of their town. John Sr. developed a reputable leather tanning business, and may also have served as the town cobbler. His son certainly filled both roles, as well as that of an active dealer in leather products in the town and surrounding communities.<sup>29</sup> John Jr. assumed a central role in the life of the baptist

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<sup>26</sup>Wood, p. 58; Wyman, p. 414.

<sup>27</sup>Wyman, p. 869.

<sup>28</sup>Samuel Sewall, The History of Woburn, Middlesex County, Mass. (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, Publishers, 1868), p. 618.

<sup>29</sup>Wood, p. 105.

church, and was ordained its second pastor in 1679 after it had moved to Boston. Russell also moved to Boston that year, but he died only one year later. Just prior to his death he wrote a pamphlet, published in London, entitled "A Brief Narrative of Some Considerable Passages Concerning the First Gathering and Further Progress of a Church of Christ in Gospel Order in Boston in New England, commonly (though falsely) called by the name of Anabaptists."<sup>30</sup> Russell wrote in response to several nasty rumors circulating in the colonies about his congregation. His pamphlet prompted a written response from Samuel Willard, pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, entitled *Ne Sutor Ultra Crepidam* ("Cobbler, stick to your last").

Many of the people involved in the baptist congregation simply farmed the land on which they lived. Their immediate value to the local economy therefore became more difficult to quantify. As individuals, they may not have warranted special consideration as people to be tolerated due to an economic determinant. On the other hand, they may have possessed extraordinary virtues in other realms of local life (to be discussed later). In plain economic terms, though, many of the dissenters displayed nothing special. But here again, as in town deference probably showed towards affluent dissenters, these simple folk may have indirectly benefitted from the treatment given those more readily identifiable as providers of valuable commodities. Characteristics common to different members of the dissenting congregation -- including personal wealth and local business interests -- served not only to immunize those individuals from local persecution; the status they acquired by virtue of individual value to local economic life influenced community attitudes towards the dissenting group as a whole. As a result, those members of the group who did not necessarily deserve any special privilege in the eyes of their neighbors nonetheless enjoyed the fruits of that privilege.

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<sup>30</sup>Reprinted in full in Wood, pp. 149-172.



The same may also have been true in Lynn, where, in addition to a few relatively wealthy members, the group of dissenters contained people who filled distinct economic needs for the community. William Harcher, in addition to living as a farmer, worked in the fishing trade out of Nahant, an isthmus on Lynn's coastline whose shores teemed with an over-abundance of fish. James Hubbard, who eventually joined the town exodus to Long Island, may have owned one of the fishing craft, as he participated in a 1642 civil suit contesting the title of a boat shared by he and two fishermen in town.<sup>31</sup> Joseph Rednap, one of the most persistent, fearless, outspoken and disrespectful of the Lynn dissenters, also participated in the industry surrounding the town's vibrant fishing trade. In 1635, the town granted him and a few other freemen the "liberty to plant and build at Nahant, and shall possess each man land for the said purpose, and proceeding in the trade of fishing."<sup>32</sup> Having been a wine-cooper in England, Rednap continued to make barrels in his New England home. In Lynn, however, local industry used barrels for packaging fish for transport inland or along the coast. Rednap, if he did not attend the nets offshore, probably used his land to dry and salt the catch, as well as build and cure the barrels in which the fish would be stored.

Information on the occupations of Lynn residents revealed that only one other dissenter worked at something besides subsistence farming. Joseph Floyd, one of the wealthier people in town, apparently farmed in addition to maintaining a second career as a lawyer. In all probability, he served litigants in the courts at Salem and Boston. One of his sons, John Floyd, remained in Lynn and followed his father's footsteps, becoming one of the colony's most prominent barristers in the latter half of the century.

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<sup>31</sup>Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup>Lewis-Newhall, "Annals of Lynn," p. 148.

### Regional Economic Activity

The third economic characteristic common to several members of the dissenting community, primarily that centered at Charlestown, was their integral role in developing and maintaining the health of the larger regional economy. Certainly those of the nonconforming group who served the immediate needs of their neighbors achieved special consideration. That same attitude extended to the men whose wider business pursuits directly or indirectly benefited their own community. And, in turn, their involuntary contributions to the cause of tolerance resulting from that economic consideration reaped additional benefits on those of like mind who did not enjoy the same particular status.

Among the Charlestown residents whose trades involved business ventures outside the town itself, Edward Drinker left the most information about the potential value other people placed in his craft. Drinker was a potter by trade, and held extensive trading interests in pottery wares throughout New England.<sup>33</sup> Many of his products reached markets frequented by ships travelling between Boston and other ports of call including New Haven and the towns of Long Island. Edward arrived in Charlestown with his parents in 1635 when he was only 13 years old, and twelve years later he inherited his father's house, garden, adjoining land, a kiln and the family business.<sup>34</sup> He was earnestly pursuing his trade in April 1669 when he was arrested, tried and imprisoned for participating in a meeting at Thomas Gould's house the previous month. Imprisonment produced immediate hardship for Drinker, but not for weakness of body. Rather, he was in anguish over the pottery town constables forced him to abandon when they arrested him. On April 6 he petitioned the General Court to consider

the casualty of it, if not burnt, but more especially the great want the country stands in of it. My request to the honoured Court is that you would please

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<sup>33</sup>Wood, p. 57.

<sup>34</sup>Wyman, p. 309.



to grant me but two days Liberty to perfect that work upon giving security to the keeper and returning to the prison every night.<sup>35</sup>

No record of the fate of the petition's favor or the pottery's well-being survived.

Several other people associated with the Charlestown baptist society made contributions to regional trade, many of them through marine interests. Richard Goodall, who with his dissenting wife Mary settled in Salisbury, worked as a shipmaster. He commanded a ketch or freighting boat which sailed between Boston and New Haven.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Andrew Newell of Charlestown, whose wife Mary was one of the original nine members of the organized baptist church, operated a merchant ship out of Boston.<sup>37</sup> Abiell Shipley of Charlestown, another woman active in the baptist congregation, was married to a mariner, as well. Joseph Shipley, however, did not share his wife's sentiments.<sup>38</sup> John Trumbull of Charlestown, himself a ship captain, participated as part-owner in three vessels. "Blossom" he personally captained after 1662, and he also maintained ownership in two other ships, including the "Richard and Michael." In 1655, he had commanded the "Mary" on its runs between Boston and Barbados.

Other dissenters plied trades less treacherous than those involving a life at sea. Philip Squire of Boston ran a lucrative brewing house that enabled him to leave his wife a comfortable estate after his death in 1693. Aside from the still and supplies for the brewery, household goods, land and other real estate, Squire's inventory included two Negro slaves valued at twelve pounds apiece.<sup>39</sup> Benjamin Sweetser's skill as a last-maker undoubtedly attracted business from cobblers and other interested parties in the area, as did John Russell, Jr.'s business as a leather dealer out of Woburn. Boston's John Farnam,

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<sup>35</sup>Quoted from Records of the General Court of Massachusetts Bay in Wood, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup>Wood, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup>Wyman, p. 698.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 854.

<sup>39</sup>Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, record no. 2007. Microfilm files, vol. 13, pp. 210-11.

Sr. owned several wharves adjacent to his mill and grain warehouse, suggesting that his operation involved business arrangements outside the immediate area. Joseph Floyd's dealings as a barrister in the courts at Salem and Boston placed him in this group of merchants with regional interests, as well.

On an individual level, not all dissenters possessed personal wealth or provided goods and services vital to local and regional economies. For many, toleration resulted from other considerations, some visible to the eyes of an historian, others obscure. One's economic status certainly did not guarantee a favorable reaction to an admission of nonconforming religious convictions. In isolated instances throughout the colony, dissenters of affluence or active in business may have provoked persecution as a result of something peculiar to their personal character or unique to the social atmosphere of the community in which they lived. No confrontation of that sort, however, arose in Lynn, Charlestown or its satellite communities. For not only were members of their dissenting populations essential to successful maintenance of the towns' economic life, many of them played equally important roles in keeping the social and political machinery of each town running smoothly. And here again, the social and political services that a few unorthodox individuals provided to their communities increased the harvest of tolerance for themselves and their less-active brethren.



## CHAPTER 6

### LOCAL LIFE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOLERANCE: SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

Massachusetts Bay's colonial authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical, possessed an effective arsenal for their use in the struggle to squelch spiritual nonconformity. Like the apostle Paul, who described the Christian's spiritual armor in his letter to the church at Ephesus, the architects of colonial hegemony fit their living institution with defensive clothing. Its belt of truth, a Calvinist interpretation of the Bible, circled its waist and held all other defenses in place. A defined Puritan church doctrine, its breastplate of righteousness, assured the clergy of its own propriety and served as the standard of judgement in each case of dissent. The readiness of magistrates to intervene in matters of conscience, like Paul's advice to wear shoes of "preparation of the gospel of peace," introduced a civil line of defense.<sup>1</sup> When dissenters began challenging the established order, the institution found safe haven from the dangerous arrows of anabaptism behind a shield of faith, legal accountability. As its final and most important defense, a helmet of salvation, hegemony required local communities to follow their leadership's example with consistency. That protection proved illusory, its absence exposing the most vital and sensitive part of the organism.

Without realizing they had entered the battle with incomplete armor, the protectors of colonial hegemony quickly wielded their sole offensive weapon. Like Paul's double-edged "sword of the Spirit," hegemony's blade had two sides. From the church, the maximum threat flashed before dissenters' eyes was the danger of excommunication. In many cases, however, excommunication posed very little if any real hardship, particularly considering

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<sup>1</sup>Ephesians 6:15 (King James' Version).

many nonconformists had not joined an orthodox congregation in membership. From the state, on the other hand, offensive blows to dissent often struck deep and caused lasting wounds. Fines levied in court may have created financial hardship for some. Many dissenters faced extended periods of imprisonment, accompanied by resulting physical discomfort and illness for themselves and additional hardship for abandoned families. The General Court stripped several men of their freemanship and the privileges it entailed. It banished some and pursued others to the point where they chose voluntary exile rather than live under such a level of persecution. The rapid spread of slanderous rumors about Massachusetts Bay dissenters among the colonies, a repeated occurrence the General Court did little to discourage, suggested that the colonial leadership's efforts to discredit its nonconforming foes extended past the bounds of official censure.

Despite those attempts to reform or remove dissenting residents, hegemony's offensive might caused little damage to the strongest part of the nonconformists' defense -- the strength of their social character and local reputation. Combined with their capacity for economic participation, these local social considerations provided dissenters with a fairly reliable insurance policy against a hostile community response to their dissent. Nonconformists in Lynn and the Charlestown area displayed four social characteristics that became crucial determinants in the development of tolerance in the towns: Their longevity, family relationships, legal relationships, and service to the community. Few dissenting individuals exhibited examples of all four characteristics in their lives, but every individual undoubtedly possessed a noticeable manifestation of at least one. Each expression of local social value added to the dissenters' collective security.

### Residential Longevity

The instability of local demographics in Lynn and Charlestown as previously discussed greatly contributed to the emergence of longevity as a trait of particular social importance.



With a whirlwind of residential flux constantly sweeping around them, established townsfolk increasingly relied on those who shared their commitment to the community. The large percentage of people who adopted dissenting opinions but never left their communities spoke as much to the tolerance they enjoyed as to their contentment in and commitment to the towns. In Lynn, nine of the sixteen people confronted for anabaptism before 1652 lived the remaining years of their lives in the town.<sup>2</sup> None of the five dissenters from Boston identified as active in the Charlestown baptist congregation during the first three years of its organization moved from the community before their deaths. Only two baptists from both Woburn and Billerica left their towns, but they merely exchanged homesteads.<sup>3</sup> In Charlestown itself, over eighty-five percent of the dissenting population living there prior to 1668 remained in town until their deaths.<sup>4</sup> Those ratios, however rough, suggested a level of commitment to the local community among dissenters.

As communities faced the challenge of religious dissent during those peoples' lives, therefore, an important factor in determining the growth of tolerance was the actual length of time the dissenters had lived in town. Certainly no one could claim to know the decisions any of them would make concerning their residency in the years to come. But many of the people identified as anabaptists numbered among the towns' first settlers or belonged to families who participated in the founding of their communities.

Stephen Baker of Charlestown belonged to one such family. His father, William, settled in town in 1633 and was admitted to the congregational church on August 24th of that same year. Stephen was born in Charlestown in 1641 and baptized in February, 1641-

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<sup>2</sup>Compiled from death records in Vital Records of Lynn, Massachusetts, 2 vol. (Salem:The Essex Institute, 1905, 1906).

<sup>3</sup>William Hamlet of Billerica and Caleb Farley of Woburn swapped properties in 1679. Hamlet had formerly lived in Woburn, and Farley's family resided in Billerica. Henry A. Hazen, History of Billerica, Massachusetts, with a Genealogical Register (Boston: A. Williams and Co., 1883). Register, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup>Of fourteen Charlestown people active in the church by 1668, twelve apparently died in town. Thomas Gould and John George, the two people missing from town death lists, moved to Boston. Several women, including Abigail Sweetser, left town upon remarrying following the death of their spouse. Compiled from town vital records and Wyman.

42. William Baker died in 1658, leaving his teenaged son with an estate valued at 176 pounds.<sup>5</sup> Stephen more than likely remained in town until his death, for although he sold some of the land he had inherited from his father, most of it remained in his possession.

Likewise, Jonathan Bunker's parents, George and Judith, settled in Charlestown in 1634 and established one of the town's most prominent families. Jonathan was born in Charlestown, the youngest of six children, and baptized April 8, 1638. Jonathan, the only known dissenter in the family, did not necessarily tarnish its reputation. He probably endured repeated comparisons with his more accomplished siblings, most notably older brother and respected preacher Benjamin. But all those siblings apparently moved from town, leaving Jonathan as the sole protector of his family's vast property holdings and cherished reputation. He died in 1678, but later grants of town commons and other land named only Jonathan and his father George as the patriarchs of the family to whom liberal portions were accorded because of its status.

Edward Drinker, the Charlestown potter whose wares commanded a healthy trading practice, also settled in the community during its formative years. He arrived in town in 1635 with his parents, Philip and Elizabeth, when he was 13 years old. Like young Baker and Bunker, Drinker grew up before the eyes of his neighbors. He inherited his father's skill at the potter's wheel, as well the established business (1647) that secured his place in the town and his commitment to the community. To have moved the whole operation, including kilns and production areas, to another town would have required a large, unnecessary expense. He died in town in 1700. A fourth Charlestown anabaptist who belonged to an established town family, Benjamin Sweetser, also spent his early years in the community. The eldest son of Seth Sweetser, Benjamin was five years of age when his parents moved to Charlestown in 1637. He, too, died in Charlestown, in 1718 at the age of 86.

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<sup>5</sup>Wyman, p. 47.



A relative new-comer to the colony, George Farley settled in Cambridge sometime in the late 1630s. He subsequently moved to Woburn, but upon buying a farm at Shawsheen, Cambridge's land grant northwest of Woburn, moved his family again. His third son and fourth child, Samuel, born in Shawsheen in 1654, held the distinction as the first recorded birth of a child in the area.<sup>6</sup> In 1655, he and twelve other Shawsheen inhabitants signed a petition to the General Court asking for permission to incorporate themselves into a new town, Billerica.<sup>7</sup> But Billerica did not yet have a church of its own, prompting Farley to worship with the congregation at nearby Chelmsford.<sup>8</sup> In 1658, he joined an agreement with several other Billerica residents to support the ministry of a new church in their town. The church called Samuel Whiting, Jr. to be its pastor. Farley, as one of the founding members of the church, continued to play an active role in the life of the congregation. He frequently took on new responsibilities, including a term as deacon, and remained a pillar of the church until his decision to join the baptist congregation at Charlestown in 1669.<sup>9</sup> He died in Billerica on December 27, 1693.

Farley's close friend, Billerica neighbor and fellow baptist, William Hamlet, led a similar life. A Cambridge resident when the town divided its property at Shawsheen in 1652, Hamlet received sixty acres for a farm.<sup>10</sup> He probably moved his family to Billerica soon after the town's incorporation and assumed an active role in the community. Having agreed, like Farley, to support the ministry of Samuel Whiting, Jr., he paid one pound, eleven shillings, three shillings above the average fee, for the minister's upkeep in 1663 and 1664.<sup>11</sup> When the new town divided commons in 1658, Hamlet received three lots. He also joined 22 other men in the purchase of the remainder of Governor Dudley's

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<sup>6</sup> Hazen, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>Recorded May 23, 1655. Lucius R. Paige, History of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1630-1877, with a Genealogical Register (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1877), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup>Chelmsford's pastor, Rev. John Fiske, mentioned Farley as a worshipper in his parish. Hazen, p. 156.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

original 1500-acre farm outside town. But Hamlet did not stay in Billerica. In 1679, he exchanged property with George Farley's oldest son, Caleb, who had removed to Woburn. Hamlet outlived his wife, Sarah, who died in 1688-89 at the age of 90.

Several dissenters residing in Woburn likewise numbered among the town's earliest settlers. Most notable among that small group were John and Matthew Johnson, the two oldest sons of Captain Edward Johnson. Often identified as the "father" of the town, Edward's influence in the General Court secured the town's incorporation in 1642.<sup>12</sup> He also served the town as clerk from 1640 until his death in 1672. Matthew, five years old when his parents settled in Woburn, and John, only a few years older, spent most of their childhood years in the town. They had several other brothers and sisters, most of whom shared their father's commitment to the community in their adult years. John, Matthew and younger brothers William and Edward, Jr. all enjoyed the benefits of their family's prestige, and each died in Woburn.

Two other Woburn baptists, John Russell, Sr. and his son, John Jr., also moved to Woburn during the first years of its settlement. John Jr. was a small child when his father acquired property in the area in 1640. John Sr. developed his leather trading business and cobbler's shop while John Jr., born of his father's first wife, played with the children who would later be his virtual protectors from the full force of General Court persecution. The two men, having joined with Thomas Gould's dissenting church by 1669, travelled to Charlestown for several years for worship. However, when Gould removed to Noddle's Island, making the trip from Woburn a greater inconvenience, the Russells held meetings at their own homes. John Sr. died in Woburn in June, 1676, by which time his son had moved to Boston to assume the pastorate of the baptist congregation. John Jr. died December 21, 1680.

In Lynn, where dissent surfaced a decade or more before appearing in the Charlestown area, the tenuousness of local life produced a similar respect for residential longevity. Like

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<sup>12</sup>Samuel Sewall, The History of Woburn (Boston: Wiggin and Lunt, 1868), p. 618.



their brethren in Billerica several years later, nonconformists in Lynn belonged to a small circle of established residents. They formed a central link with the community's past and belonged to the group best suited to maintain a vision for its well-being in the future. One such man, John Wood, led the expedition party that embarked from Salem in 1629 and settled in the "fair playne" that became Lynn.<sup>13</sup> A section of the town, Woodsend, was named as such because of his residency there. John Wood was an elderly man when he settled in Lynn, and more than likely died soon after his prosecution for anabaptism in 1645-46.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of his spiritual convictions, Wood undoubtedly commanded great respect in the town.

Several other Lynn dissenters moved to town during the first years of its settlement, many of them also remaining there until their deaths. William Witter lived in Swampscot as early as 1630. Two of his children, Josias and Hannah, were among the first children born there. Witter died in Swampscot in 1659 at 75 years of age. Matthew West first appeared in Lynn town records in 1638, was prosecuted for anabaptism in 1646, and maintained his Lynn residency until his death. George Taylor's name also receives mention in 1638 town records, 1646 court proceedings, and 1668 death and probate records -- all while he lived in Lynn. Joseph Rednap settled in Lynn in 1630, stood before magistrates in 1644, and died in town on January 23, 1685-86. Daniel and Elizabeth King moved to Lynn in the mid-1630s, faced prosecution during the 1640s and 50s, and both died in Lynn in the 1670s. Finally, William Harcher also settled in Lynn prior to 1638, answered charges of anabaptism after 1642, but remained in Lynn until 1661, when he died a wealthy man.

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<sup>13</sup>Alonzo Lewis and James R. Newhall, History of Lynn, 1629-1864 (Lynn: George C. Herbert, 1890), p.113.

<sup>14</sup>His son, William Wood, one of the earliest historians of New England, published New England's Prospect in London in 1634. William and his wife joined fifty other Lynn families in establishing Sandwich on Cape Cod in 1637. William died in 1671 at the age of 86, suggesting that his father was close to that age in 1646, twenty-five years earlier.

## Family Relationships

Perhaps the most significant social contributor to the development of tolerance, and certainly the most complex in nature and extensive in scope, inter- and intra-family relationships largely defined the parameters of individuals' lives in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay. Family relationships influenced almost every other aspect of colonial life: Business, occupation, wealth, religious conviction, political involvement and much more. Considerable historical attention has been focused on the family in recent years, with specialized studies conducted on marriage and birth patterns, attitudes towards children and household structures and functions, among others. The results have led to increased recognition of the role family life played in the development of early American culture, politics and society. This study of religious dissent, although not as extensive or definitive as other, more family-oriented endeavors, operates on and supports that historical assumption.<sup>15</sup>

Presenting a full description of complete family relationships among unorthodox residents and their orthodox neighbors would itself demand a lengthy narrative. And evidence for a case examining the ties between family life and individuals' emotional lives poses an elusive target. Several telling examples, however, indicate the depth of family relations between dissenters and other people in their towns. They also suggest some general principles in determining the connection between family and tolerance. First, the age of a community influenced the level of intra-family commitment. The earliest family units were largely self-inclusive, having immigrated together from England. Tolerance that developed in those communities based itself on determinants other than family relations. Second, as successive generations matured and expanded the web of intermarriage, family units lost their insularity. As a result, the communities in which they thrived supported an

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<sup>15</sup>Unfortunately, the scope of this study, which has prohibited me from pursuing the extensive research necessary to present a more definitive set of results, has produced what I consider to be only the "tip of the iceberg." Nonetheless, the examples here presented adequately portray a group of dissenting people strongly tied to their own and other extended families in the region.



increasing number of extended families. People with dissenting relatives became more numerous, and showed greater tolerance for what they considered minor and mostly personal matters.<sup>16</sup> The strength of family relations, therefore, was critical in the development of tolerance in those communities.

Most or all of the early anabaptists at Lynn moved to the community with family contacts already established. Most of them were married in England, and few if any had children of marriageable age at the time of their prosecutions. At least one dissenter immigrated with other family members who settled elsewhere, suggesting that such a case may have been true of other early Lynn inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> Many nonconforming Lynn folk, however, saw their children grow to marry the children of orthodox neighbors. An account of William Witter's life by a sixth generation descendant noted that Witter, "in his voyage from old England to America with his wife, his son Josiah and daughter Hannah, arrived at Lynn in the Massachusetts Bay, where Josiah married Elisabeth Wheeler and Hannah married Thomas Bardan."<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Wheeler's parents, Thomas and Mary, were among Lynn's first inhabitants. Joseph and Jane Floyd's son, John, who became a prominent barrister, married a Lynn girl and remained in town the rest of his life, even though his parents had removed to Chelsea in 1666. Daniel and Elizabeth King had at least two sons and three daughters who survived to adulthood. The two boys, Daniel Jr. and Ralph, married sisters, Tabitha and Elizabeth Walker respectively. The Walker girls belonged to family that remained in Lynn for several generations. Ralph King, who rose to the rank of captain in the colonial militia, became a wealthier man than his father. He served as town selectman and on the General Court, and died in 1689 with an estate valued at more than 2300 pounds. Finally, Joseph Rednap produced nine children, several of

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<sup>16</sup>Some other possible trends I have identified but have not gathered sufficient evidence to report as necessarily significant concern the amount of children in a family, the number of children who choose spouses from their own communities and the number of children who adopt a parent's unorthodox views.

<sup>17</sup>John Wood had a brother, William, who lived in Salem.

<sup>18</sup>Witter Genealogy, Georgia Cooper Washburn, comp. (New York: The National Historical Company, 1929), p. 13.

whom lived to marry Lynn people. Daughter Sarah married Thomas Laughton, Jr. of Lynn, and son Thomas married a Lynn girl and became a deacon in the Lynn congregational church before dying in 1713.<sup>19</sup>

By the time cases of dissent began appearing regularly in Charlestown, Billerica and Woburn, many of the families of those charged with the spiritual offense had passed through at least one generation in the towns of their residence. Their network of familial support, therefore, afforded them a manner of tolerance not afforded the first generation of dissent in Lynn. If they were not themselves second generation residents, the nonconformists in most instances had children who had married by the time they were confronted for their dissent. Friends, relations and acquaintances of their own generation also had children who were marrying or approaching marriageable age. By the time the towns' dissenting populations experienced rapid growth in the 1670s and 80s, virtually every member of the towns' established families may have been related in some fashion to a nonconforming person.

For Charlestown, examples of those trends appeared in abundance. Jonathan Bunker married a Charlestown girl, Mary Howard, and produced seven children. At least two sons, Jonathan and Benjamin, took local spouses.<sup>20</sup> His own numerous brothers and sisters also married, many of them to Charlestown residents. Christopher Goodwin's son Christopher Jr. married Mercie Crouch of Charlestown, and Christopher Jr.'s son named Christopher also married a Charlestown girl, Mary Griffin.<sup>21</sup> John Trumbull's son John also married into a Charlestown family when he took Mary Jones for his wife in 1665.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Information compiled from Vital Records of Lynn, Massachusetts and Lewis-Newhall.

<sup>20</sup>Wyman, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup>Vital Records of Charlestown, Massachusetts to the year 1850, Roger D. Joslyn, ed., vol. 1 (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1984), pp. 86, 205.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 51.



Thomas Gould had five children of his own and at least three step-children by his second wife, Mary's, first marriage.<sup>23</sup> Most of them consented to marriage with Charlestown residents. Daughter Mehitabel married one of Christopher Goodwin Sr.'s sons, Charles, and step-daughter Mary married into the Bunker family. Step-daughter Abiel married Joseph Shipley of Charlestown. Shipley, a mariner, was the son of Nicholas Shipley, a prosperous marine captain and an active member of the community. Abiel Shipley joined her step-father as one of the founding members of the Charlestown baptist church. Another Gould daughter, Mary, married Thomas Skinner. Captain Edward Johnson of Woburn, father of anabaptists John and Matthew, officiated at their wedding ceremony. Skinner resided in Malden, but shared his wife's family's dissenting opinions. Thomas and Mary Skinner's two sons, Thomas and Abraham, married girls from Malden and lived out their years in that town.

Families of nonconformists from Woburn and Billerica practiced the same general marriage practices. George Farley married a Woburn woman with the distinctive name of Christian Births, with whom he had seven children. They eventually settled in Billerica, but their oldest son, Caleb, moved back to Woburn. Thomas Foster of Billerica and his wife Elizabeth produced several children. One of them, son Hopesill, married Elizabeth Whittemore of Billerica and rose to great prominence in the colony.<sup>24</sup> John Russell, Jr. of Woburn also married a woman from his town. He and Sarah Champney exchanged vows on October 31, 1661.

The Johnson family of Woburn provided the most extensive example of intra-family networks. Dissenting brothers John and Matthew both married women from their town, as did their brothers William and Edward Jr. Matthew's second wife, Rebecca Wiswall, was

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<sup>23</sup>Gould named all his children and step-children in his extensive will, probated April 30, 1674. Each of them received cash or property of considerable value. Records of the Suffolk County Court of Probate, record no. 682. Microfilm files, vol. 7, pp. 362-365.

<sup>24</sup>Woburn Records of Births, Deaths, and Marriages from 1640 to 1873, part III (Boston: Winship, Daniels & Co., 1891), p. 101.

the sister of William Johnson's wife Esther Wiswall.<sup>25</sup> All of the Johnson brothers had six or more children, many of whom married people from the community. For the unorthodox members of the clan, that rapidly growing family-community tree provided a source of toleration. They also benefited from the family's continued prestige in the colony. The most prominent brother, third son Major William Johnson, assumed his father's post as town clerk from 1672 until 1688. While his older brothers tested the resolve of colonial authorities with their open profession of dissent, William expanded the family's prominence. He rose to a leading rank in the colonial militia, served on the General Court in 1674 and again from 1676 to 1683. From 1684 to 1686, he sat as a member of the Board of Assistants, losing his seat only after Sir Edmund Andros acquired the governorship of the combined New England colonies. With William of Orange established on the throne of England in 1689, William Johnson resumed his position of authority in Massachusetts Bay.<sup>26</sup> Although he strictly adhered to an orthodox faith, William Johnson's influence in the community and colony probably influenced the manner in which local people responded to his unorthodox brothers.

### Legal Relationships

One manifestation of a community's interdependence and the personal and intra-family relationships formed between people in a community were the legal relationships recorded in wills, inventories, deeds and other probate actions. Virtually every dissenting inhabitant of a town called on orthodox neighbors to witness the signing of legal documents, execute the directives in his or her will or assess the value of an estate. At the same time, those same nonconformists performed similar favors for other people in town. A constant flow of personal property transactions, primarily involving land, housing and farm animals, also strengthened the ties between neighbors. One's personal spiritual convictions remained an

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<sup>25</sup>Sewall, p. 618.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.



irrelevant issue when an exchange or sale of property needed settling. As a result, these venues for further personal interaction contributed to the development of tolerance in the community.

Although many dissenters died intestate, an occurrence not out of step with the rest of the population, several left detailed wills for the partitioning of their estates. In most cases, regardless of the community in which they lived, those people asked orthodox friends and neighbors to witness the will's signing and defend its authenticity. In Lynn, five anabaptists left wills probated in Essex County prior to 1681; all five were witnessed by at least one nondissenting person from town.<sup>27</sup> Eleven of the people involved with the baptist congregation at Charlestown prior to 1669 signed wills. Nine of those documents were witnessed by at least one person from the community who was not involved with the baptist church. Many of the wills were signed by orthodox and unorthodox witnesses alike. Only John George and Thomas Gould relied on baptist witnesses alone, presumably because both composed their wills while living in self-imposed exile on Noddle's Island. In appointing executors or overseers for the will, most individuals turned to immediate family members. Three of the eleven wills, however, named unrelated people to perform that function. Two of them entrusted the task to brethren in the baptist church. One, Benjamin Sweetser, assigned four overseers, two of whom were not involved in his church.<sup>28</sup>

Of the remaining wills, two merit special mention for the character and reputation of the people asked to serve as witnesses. Benanual Bowers of Charlestown, probably the most irascible of the resident dissenters, dated his will October 5, 1693. He asked four men to witness to his soundness of mind. All were graduates of Harvard College. One of them, John Leverett, later became president of Harvard. The other three, William Brattle, Isaac

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<sup>27</sup>Compiled from The Probate Records of Essex County, Massachusetts, 3 vols. (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1916).

<sup>28</sup>Compiled from probate records of Suffolk and Middlesex counties. George's will probated in Middlesex County, record no. 9017; Gould's will probated in Suffolk County, record no. 682; Sweetser's will probated in Middlesex County, record no. 21998.

Chauncy and Joseph Baxter, all became respected orthodox ministers in the colony.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Foster of Billerica also recruited two prominent men to witness to his will in April, 1682 -- Jonathan Danforth, Sr. and his son, Jonathan Jr.<sup>30</sup> The Danforth family, one of the colony's most accomplished, included Jonathan Sr.'s brothers Samuel Danforth, the esteemed pastor in Dorchester, and Thomas Danforth, deputy-governor of Massachusetts Bay for thirteen years. Jonathan Sr.'s résumé included a captain's commission in the militia and a long career as one of the colony's two most respected surveyors (William Johnson, brother of Matthew and John, the other).

The heirs of several people involved with the baptist church before 1669 included inventories of estate holdings when submitting wills for probate. Ten such inventories appeared in the records of Suffolk and Middlesex counties. Seven of them were compiled by at least one person who did not participate in the life of the dissenting congregation. Although individuals chosen for the task of inventory may have been selected for an ability to assess an estate with impartiality, the association of those orthodox townsfolk with the heirs of dissenting neighbors strongly suggests the existence of friendly and trusting relationships between themselves and the deceased. When relationships of that nature developed between people representing opposite sides of a theological issue, tolerance for each other's opinions would undoubtedly soon follow.

The number of orthodox people involved as witnesses, overseers or compilers of dissenters' wills and inventories was naturally restricted by the fact that each estate probated posthumous documents one time only. A correspondingly limited number of relationships could be identified through those documents. The many opportunities for dissenters to participate in the formation of wills or inventories for orthodox folk, however, greatly increased the visibility of their personal affiliations.<sup>31</sup> For example,

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<sup>29</sup>Records of the Middlesex County Court of Probate, record no. 2264.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., record no. 8272.

<sup>31</sup>That abundance of opportunity also greatly increased the scope of their potential involvement. But the



Richard Rooten of Lynn appointed dissenting neighbor George Taylor as one of two overseers to his will in November, 1663. A few months later, in March, 1664, evidence of Taylor's relationship with Lynn's Robert Mansfield surfaced when he signed as a witness to Mansfield's will. In April, 1669, Lynn anabaptist Joseph Rednap and his orthodox neighbor, Andrew Mansfield, witnessed to the will of Christopher Lindsey. Twenty-two years earlier, in 1647, Rednap had executed the will of Richard Woodman of Lynn. And when James Axey's will received a challenge in court in November, 1670, Rednap testified as one of the will's sworn witnesses. Anabaptist William Harcher also testified in court concerning the disposal of an orthodox neighbor's estate after his friend Philip Kertland at sea.<sup>32</sup> Other dissenters in Lynn and the Charlestown baptist church did likewise.

Finally, the most common form of a legal relationship, but perhaps the least valuable for making determinations of the depth of people's personal relationships, were the hundreds of property transactions between members of a community. Almost without exception, every person with dissenting opinions bought from, sold to or traded property with people who strictly adhered to congregational polity and practice. Those exchanges did not necessarily reflect a personal friendship between the involved parties. They did, however, represent opportunities to develop mutual respect and an increased awareness of the nonconformists' sober lifestyle and respectable character. Examples of people creating these situations included Jonathan Bunker, who, being part of a family with a large land endowment, made frequent real estate transactions. He sold land to a minimum of five different Charlestown men and bought land from at least two others.<sup>33</sup> Christopher Goodwin, Sr. sold land to four men, none of them fellow baptists.<sup>34</sup> Thomas Osborne also submitted property deeds to the probate court following numerous transactions with

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task of locating and reading every pertinent document in the vast probate files of three different counties placed a more definitive look at this trend beyond the realm of the possible for this study. A few representative examples shall suffice.

<sup>32</sup>Compiled from The Probate Records of Essex County, Massachusetts.

<sup>33</sup>Estate proceedings condensed in Wyman, p. 151.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 414-5.

orthodox neighbors. Three times Benjamin Sweetser bought land in Charlestown, each time from a man who did not share his convictions. He sold property four times under similar circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

### Community Service

The fourth and final social determinant in the development of tolerance concretely illustrated the level of commitment many dissenters had made to their communities. Residential longevity suggested an unspoken commitment, while family and legal relationships provided both an explanation and showcase for it. The desire to actively participate and assume leadership in the daily affairs of town life represented commitments in action. In the eyes of the General Court and other colonial offices intent on suppressing dissent, social and political participation may have posed a minor deterrent from making a full pursuit of certain individuals. For local people whose respect the spiritually heterodox had earned from previous and present years of service, that sociability demanded a reciprocal act of service in the form of practical toleration.

The most common avenues for community service included selection to town offices such as constable or selectman, assisting in the construction and maintenance of public property, performing duties as a member of a jury or other judicial bodies, and supporting other community-wide efforts. Activity in a town's militia and on behalf of regional defense, a fifth mode of service that proved of particular significance for dissenters in Massachusetts Bay as a whole, merits special consideration and is explored in its own chapter below.

The election of dissenters to town offices offered a strong indication that many people valued their wisdom and leadership. Several nonconformists were active in town government only prior to their confession of dissent, while others continued service after the public acknowledgement of their heterodoxy. Edward Drinker of Charlestown served

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 921.



as one of two town constables in 1652, and as the man responsible “to see to swine” in the town during 1654.<sup>36</sup> George Farley of Billerica performed the duty of a “titheing-man” in 1677, with seven families in town under his care. He also served as a town selectman for seven years nonconsecutively between 1661 and 1688.<sup>37</sup> Billerica residents also chose Thomas Foster to be a selectman for eight years, beginning in 1660.<sup>38</sup> Even Thomas Gould had served as a selectman, in Charlestown in 1652.<sup>39</sup> Other dissenters who shared that office included William Hamlet of Billerica (1662-64), Matthew Johnson of Woburn (1680-86, 1688, 1691, 1696), and John Russell, Sr. of Woburn (1652-56). Baptists who toiled in other elected capacities included the elder and younger John Russells as the “Sealer of Leather” for most of their adult lives, and William Turner as bailiff in Dorchester in 1664.

Many baptists provided other public services that may have nurtured greater appreciation in the minds and hearts of their congregational neighbors. Those services involved surveying, constructing, maintaining or repairing important public fixtures, such as town boundaries, local roads and town bridges. People with practical expertise undoubtedly proved most useful in those situations. Billerica’s George Farley served on a committee responsible for determining the cost of a new meetinghouse in 1659 and the most equitable method of collecting funds from the town’s inhabitants. William Hamlet, as a member of another committee, managed the building’s construction in 1661. Farley also aided in laying out the town’s boundaries in 1659, and in the following year mapped out a road from Billerica to Concord. In 1663 he assisted with the construction of a road to Lexington. His neighbor and fellow baptist, Thomas Foster, contributed his talents, as well. In 1663, the town appointed Foster to inspect its fences, and in 1664 asked him and Hamlet to make necessary repairs to the “great bridge” crossing into Chelmsford. Foster

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 309.

<sup>37</sup>Hazen, pp. 190, 305.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>39</sup>Wood, p. 31.

and two other men laid out a road in town in 1666, while Hamlet served on the committee to oversee construction of another important road in town in 1659.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to those jobs done in the local community, wider opportunities for service at the county or colony level presented themselves on several occasions. Each post was not necessarily filled voluntarily, but spiritually orthodox and unorthodox people alike performed their duties with dedication. Many dissenters obliged the same legal system used to exact persecution on their own persons by serving on numerous juries and grand juries. Joseph Floyd of Lynn sat on the jury for Salem's quarterly court in 1639, 1640, 1644 and 1645. In 1643 and 1644, he also functioned on the county's grand jury. Other Lynn anabaptists on the Essex County court jury circuit included James Hubbard, Daniel King, Joseph Rednap, George Taylor and Matthew West.<sup>41</sup> None of those men served in that role after prosecution for anabaptism, but their activity prior to prosecution contributed to their reputations as responsible freemen. Dissenting men involved with the baptist church at Charlestown and Boston also responded with diligence to jury duty in their counties, many of them serving after knowledge of their spiritual convictions had become widely known.

Other community activities in Lynn or Charlestown did not produce written records or receive mention in contemporary town or personal correspondence, so the names of people presumably involved were lost to history. But evidence from the lives of other communities suggests that life in most towns provided more occasions for meaningful personal interaction than records indicate. One example of an occasion when people of different religious leanings put aside their differences for the benefit of a greater purpose was a town petition circulated among the inhabitants of Billerica in October, 1664. The petition, destined for the consideration of the General Court, asserted the town's support

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<sup>40</sup>Compiled from town history recorded in Hazen.

<sup>41</sup>Compiled from Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, 7 volumes (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1911).



for the newly restored Stuart throne and England's present king, Charles II. Massachusetts Bay Colony, because of its Puritan kinship with Oliver Cromwell and his interregnum administration, was responding to parliamentary political pressure intent on avenging the death of Charles I. Billerica, therefore, joined many other communities in affirming their patriotic commitment to the throne. George Farley signed the document, as did Thomas Foster and William Hamlet.<sup>42</sup> A common cause, around which English subjects rallied as a statement of their common nationality, tended to trivialize arguments over minor points of personal theology.

### Conclusion

The advent of open religious dissent among members of a Massachusetts Bay community may have tested the strength of the relationships formed during the early years of its settlement. As the experience of Lynn, Charlestown, Woburn and Billerica have demonstrated, however, those interpersonal ties formed a base for mutual understanding and general tolerance. Colonial authorities, meanwhile, pursued an hegemonical ideal with vigor and assumed local people would follow their example. They did not, depriving hegemony of a vital part of its necessary defense. Its head exposed, hegemony nonetheless continued the battle. But the same forces at work to strip hegemony of its helmet had been constructing additional defenses for its foes. One of the most potent offensive weapons the bearers of hegemony had from time to time released from their arsenal were accusations, grounded in the experience with the radical anabaptists of Muenster, that dissent produced anarchy and sacrificed legitimate government. That weapon was soon to be made obsolete.

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<sup>42</sup>Hazen, p. 185.

## CHAPTER 7

### SECURING TOLERANCE: MILITARY MEN AND KING PHILIP'S WAR

In the autumn of 1679, the religious and civil leaders of Massachusetts Bay were still organizing efforts to eliminate heterodoxy in the colony. On September 10, a synod of orthodox congregational pastors gathered to determine the sources of evil in the colony and ways to deal with it. Led by Dr. Increase Mather, the synod found spiritual dissent among the leading causes. They particularly identified Quakers and anabaptists, and declared that "it must needs be provoking to God, if these things be not duly and fully testified against by every one in their several capacities."<sup>1</sup> The synod's judgement supported charges leveled against the colony's dissenters in a pamphlet published earlier in the year by Dr. Mather, entitled "The Divine Right of Infant Baptism." In it, Mather produced eight accusations aimed primarily at the Boston baptist congregation. The General Court, by endorsing the synod's decisions, backed Mather's assault on the Boston church, as well.

John Russell, Jr., the baptist church's pastor, responded to Mather almost immediately. In March, 1680, he published "A Brief Narrative of some Considerable Passages Concerning the First Gathering and further Progress of a Church of Christ, in Gospel Order, in Boston in New England, Commonly (though falsely) called by the Name of Anabaptists: For clearing their innocency from the Scandalous things laid to their charge." He answered each of the charges with evidence from the life of his church.<sup>2</sup> Most of

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Wood, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup>Mather's claimed the baptists were: 1. Schismatical; 2. Scandalous; 3. Disorderly; 4. Disturbers of the peace; 5. Underminers of the churches; 6. Neglecters of the public worship of God on the Lord's Days; 7. Idolaters; 8. Enemies to civil government. Compiled from Russell, "A Brief Narrative," reprinted in Wood, pp. 149-172.



Mather's accusations and Russell's replies were repetitions of the dialogue from the debate in Boston in 1668. Russell's reply to the last charge, however, was noticeably different. Mather had finished his case against dissent by once again appealing to the memory of Muenster's anarchic experience, claiming that all anabaptists were necessarily enemies of the civil government. In past confrontations, dissenters had little concrete evidence to disprove that charge. A life of quiet submission to civil authority may have bought tolerance from local communities, but it failed to impress zealous leaders who were convinced that the anabaptists hid like wolves in sheeps' clothing. On this occasion, Russell provided testimony that settled the issue: The diligent military service of baptists during King Philip's War and the death of the captain of their company, William Turner.

#### Local and Regional Defense: Dissenters in the Colonial Militia

Long before the Pokanoket sachem Metacomet, called Philip by English settlers, sought to drive the English out of New England in the mid-1670s, dissenters served as dutiful members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's system of defense. On the local level, the involvement of a community's heterodox inhabitants in the town militia established one more social determinant for the development of localized religious tolerance. Not only did participation in a town's military affairs bring dissenters a certain amount of respect, it provided another important venue for personal interaction with their orthodox neighbors.

Daniel King of Lynn served in his town's militia until 1646 when the county court excused him from the training exercises because of a physical infirmity. In Billerica, several baptists figured prominently in the town's defense. Thomas Foster was a sergeant of the company for two decades until his death in 1682.<sup>3</sup> The town elected William Hamlet to the militia in 1661.<sup>4</sup> George Farley and his son Timothy drilled with the

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<sup>3</sup>Vital Records of Billerica, Massachusetts to the Year 1850 (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1908), p. 361.

<sup>4</sup>Hazen, p. 64.

company, as well. Boston's Philip Squire served in his town's militia, as did Edward Drinker of Charlestown. In Woburn, Matthew Johnson was the his company's sergeant until 1691, when he received promotion to lieutenant.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Skinner, meanwhile, maintained the rank of sergeant in the Malden militia until his death in 1704.<sup>6</sup>

The agitation among the native tribes in Massachusetts Bay during the first months of Metacomet's organized assaults on English settlements in 1675 alarmed the towns along the colony's frontier. In Billerica, the peoples' heightened anxiety illuminated their dependence on the local militia and the heterodox members of the company. On August 13, 1675, the town gathered for a public meeting to arrange for added protection and devise a plan of defense. Of particular concern was the nearby Wamesit tribe. The Wamesits lived peacefully on the town's northern border, and were not allied with Metacomet. But in the minds of most Billerica residents, the Wamesits' presence created a potential threat to the town's security. As a result, the people voted to "prepare a place of safety for women and children, and that all persons and teams shall attend the said work until it be finished."<sup>7</sup> Sergeant Thomas Foster was one of four men appointed to oversee the project.

In October, the selectmen and officers of the militia responded to an order from the governor's council requiring towns to organize into garrisons. They appointed several homes as garrison houses, each responsible for the defense of its part of town. The houses of Sergeant Foster and George Farley numbered among those selected. Foster's house protected six households on the south end of town, while Farley's house was "allowed for garrison and to entertain more as it may be capable in time of extremity."<sup>8</sup> The men of each household assigned to a garrison received instructions from the selectmen to provide

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<sup>5</sup>Sewall, p. 618.

<sup>6</sup>Deloraine P. Corey, comp. Births, Marriages and Deaths in the town of Malden, Massachusetts, 1649-1850 (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 377.

<sup>7</sup>Billerica town records, quoted in Hazen, p. 110.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 111.



for its fortification. Each man brought his family with him to the garrison house or sent them to live in towns closer to Boston. The selectmen's directive ordered each man to work on their garrison's fortifications, clearing brush, stocking corn and keeping round-the-clock watches. In addition to these defenses, each garrison received a dispatch of two or more soldiers from a nearby military company, probably located in Woburn. The town remained under this state of alert until the end of the conflict in August, 1676.

Although no occasion for testing the effectiveness of its defenses arose, Billerica suffered the inconvenience of a lost or greatly diminished planting season and incurred substantial costs for the fortification of garrison houses. In October, the selectmen petitioned the General Court for relief from the normal taxes, as the town was unable to collect from its inhabitants. Billerica's financial losses from King Philip's War, therefore, amounted to an uncomfortable sum. But for the town's dissenters, the time of crisis proved profitable in that it demonstrated their commitment and value to the community and the level of trust the community placed in them.

### The Battle of Turner's Falls

The role Billerica's heterodox residents played in their town's defense during King Philip's War primarily affected their relationships with their neighbors. The story of Captain William Turner, however, influenced a wider audience. The significance of Turner's experience led John Russell to rely on it as his final and irrefutable argument in defense of his church's virtue and upstanding character, as follows. "In a word," Russell wrote,

Both our Persons and Estates are always ready at command to be serviceable in the defense of the Authority, and Country, yea and have been voluntarily offered on the high places of the field in the time of the Country's greatest Extremity; we have not thought our lives too dear, to put in our hands in the defense of the Country. For diverse of us did with some others, freely offer ourselves for the service of the Country against the

Indians, even in the time of their greatest distress; Among whom was William Turner, whom they pleased to make Captain of that Company, who had been one of the greatest Sufferers among us, for the profession of Religion. He was a very worthy man for Soldiery; and Edward Drinker, who had been another Sufferer, whom they pleased to make Lieutenant; And by the presence of the Lord with them, they were made instruments of the preservation of the Town from the rage of the Heathen, who did violently beset it, and break into it, but they being there, beat them out, and after this by Captain Turner (who was Commander in Chief at the time) as an Instrument in the hand of the Lord, was the greatest blow given to the Indians of any that they had received; for after this they were broken and scattered, so that they were overcome, and subdued with ease. In his Fight did good Captain Turner lose his life. Here it is to be observed that those who had suffered so much from the Country, and have been Scandalized as Enemies to the Country, and their Privileges, freely offering themselves in the Service of the Country, have been (through the Lord's presence with them) some of the principal Instruments to subdue the Barbarous Heathen, and so deliver the Country from its great distress, which may stand as a witness of our Fidelity to the Government to the World's End.<sup>9</sup>

Russell's estimation of Turner's importance in the progress of the military campaign against Metacomet was not necessarily exaggerated. Increase Mather, in his own contemporary history of the war, recognized the significance of Turner's victory at "the Town."<sup>10</sup> But while Russell's account provided plenty of commendations for Turner and his men, his history lacked narrative details.

Metacomet, the second son of the great sachem Massasoit, assumed control of all the tribes between Boston and Narragansett after the death of his older brother, Wamsutta (or, "Alexander"), in 1662. Massasoit had developed a cordial relationship with the English, and Alexander followed his father's precedent. By the time Metacomet came to power, however, the size of the Wampanoag territory had been greatly reduced by English expansion. Metacomet sold and surrendered additional land to the English until 1672. At

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<sup>9</sup>"A Brief Narrative" in Wood, p. 167.

<sup>10</sup>Increase Mather, A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New-England (London: Rose and Crown, 1676), pp. 148-250.



that time, with only the Pokanoket region in Plymouth Colony left to provide for his tribe's fishing and hunting needs, Metacomet devised a plan to reclaim land lost to the European settlers. Over the next three years, as pressure on Wampanoag territory and Metacomet's list of grievances against the English grew, the sachem allied himself with tribes to the north and west. Finally, in June, 1675, when the English tried and executed two Wampanoags for carrying out a death sentence on a Christian tribesman whom Metacomet judged a traitor, Metacomet put his plan into action.<sup>11</sup>

Metacomet and his allies met with early successes. The sachem's forces greatly outnumbered the English defense, and the scattered pattern of European settlements made many of them easy targets. Massachusetts Bay, Connecticut and Rhode Island mobilized their militias and consolidated control of southeastern New England, but they remained virtually powerless to stop the allied tribes from their continuous assaults along the colonies' fringe settlements. Several English units made half-hearted attempts to battle Metacomet along the frontier, but their presence in the towns along that perimeter served a purely defensive purpose. In the spring of 1676, isolated English units camped along the Connecticut River and waited for Metacomet's next move.

William Turner, a man who had served with distinction in the king's army, had gathered several volunteers for the formation of a militia company soon after open hostilities with Metacomet's forces began in 1675. He petitioned the General Court for a commission and permission to join the campaign in the west. His request met a stiff refusal, for his reputation at the General Court still suffered from his obstinate refusal to recant his religious convictions. The historian Isaac Backus noted that the court also discouraged Turner from submitting further petitions on the knowledge that most of his volunteers came from the rank and file of the baptist church in Boston.<sup>12</sup> But as the destruction of the war continued to escalate, and Metacomet's ability to strike at will

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<sup>11</sup>Summary compiled from George M. Bodge, Soldiers in King Philip's War (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 24-27.

<sup>12</sup>Backus, vol. 1, p. 335.

continued relatively undiminished, the General Court reconsidered Turner's petition. It asked him to accept a commission. Turner, however, objected, claiming that the men on whom he could call as able volunteers had dispersed. Most had already enlisted in other companies. The court promised to provide him with a company, and Turner finally accepted a commission as captain in February, 1675-6.

On February 21, Turner and several volunteers marched from Boston to Medfield, where others joined them the following day. An accounting of Turner's company at Medfield listed 38 men plus officers, all of whom were volunteers from Boston and vicinity. Of that group, Turner and four other men were members of the baptist church. Edward Drinker served as the company's lieutenant, Phillip Squire as a corporal, and Thomas Skinner as clerk. William Turner, Jr. numbered among the enlisted corps. From Medfield, the company marched to Marlborough, where Turner received the "recruits" promised by the court. Eighteen men, all impressed by the court, added their names to the roll in Marlborough.<sup>13</sup> On March 1, the company arrived at Brookfield and received 35 more men from other units. By the time Turner reached Hadley on March 8, he commanded a force of 70 men plus officers.

From Hadley, Turner moved his men across the Connecticut River to Northampton to join Major Thomas Savage's force. Their purpose was to defend against raids from Hatfield to the north. Two units from Connecticut came under Turner's command there, as well. On March 14, a large Indian raiding party fell on Northampton but met a stronger defense than it had expected. Turner's men pursued their foes into Hatfield, and appeared to be securing the area from the threat of further assaults. But on April 1, all but 150 men received orders to return home for the spring planting season. Savage left Captain Turner in command of the town's defense and a force comprised of single men, boys, servants

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<sup>13</sup>A list of Turner's company is preserved in the Massachusetts Archives, vol. 68, p. 158. Included in the list are 18 men "cleared at Marlborough," a term Bodge identifies as an indication of impressment. Bodge, p. 234.



and apprentices.<sup>14</sup> Turner's company as it then stood was poorly trained and ill-equipped to hold the frontier if Metacomet's allies should reappear. On April 25, Turner wrote to the governor's council to explain his predicament and plead for relief.<sup>15</sup> A post-script to his letter notes intelligence recently received that pinpointed a very large Indian force fishing on the river at Deerfield.

That force was divided into three sections at the Connecticut's "upper falls," and was led by Metacomet himself. With his promised speedy victory over the river towns not yet realized, Metacomet faced a disintegrating alliance with the Nipmuck and Pocumtuck tribes. Those two tribes, who disliked the war's progress into their own valley north of Springfield and Metacomet's increasing reliance on them for supplies, were quickly being reduced to starvation. They sued for peace with the English leadership at Hadley. Metacomet, meanwhile, finding the supplies at Northampton under heavy guard, continued to stock provisions before renewing the offensive. On May 12, he sent a detachment to stampede cattle from Hatfield. News of the raid reached Turner, who decided to act swiftly before Metacomet had time to complete his recovery.

On the evening of May 18, Captain Turner gathered his force at Hatfield. Under darkness, he marched his troops towards the falls, twenty miles distant. They managed to evade Narragansett and Wampanoag outposts, and in the cover of heavy thundershowers forded the Deerfield and Green Rivers. As daylight broke, Turner and his men hid themselves on a slope directly above one of Metacomet's three sleeping camps. Contemporary accounts claimed that the Indian camp had celebrated with a great feast the previous night, and was uncharacteristically slow in rising.<sup>16</sup> At any event, Turner's men completely routed Metacomet's force, killing between two and three hundred of the enemy

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<sup>14</sup>Bodge, p. 237.

<sup>15</sup>He claimed to have only one-eighth of the supplies his men required. Massachusetts Archives, vol. 68, p. 228.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Bodge, p. 246.

while destroying its camp and the forges set up for arms repair.<sup>17</sup> The rest of Metacomet's men, having camped on the river's opposite bank, now converged on Turner's company and sent them into a hasty retreat.

Captain Turner led the retreat while Captain Samuel Holyoke of Springfield commanded the rear guard. As the company approached the Green River, a rumor that Metacomet was approaching with a force of over 1000 warriors sent the men into a panic. Turner and a small group of men continued to push southward, and most of the remaining company fractured into similar cells. Increase Mather reported that the English "were unhappily circumvented by a parcel of the enemy, who slew...upwards of thirty" men, "although not without the loss of three hundred of their own."<sup>18</sup> Most notable among the English dead was Captain Turner himself, who was shot while attempting to ford the Green River.

Had William Turner survived the retreat from the battle at the falls which soon after bore his name, his resulting fame would most likely have been only slightly diminished. Both Increase and Cotton Mather ascribed great significance to Turner's success in battle. Other historians, including George Bodge, judged Turner's battle as producing a demoralizing effect on Metacomet's force, which afterwards appeared only in small wandering parties. Turner secured the river towns from the danger of further raids and certain destruction. The battle at the falls was the last major confrontation in the Connecticut River valley. Turner's swiftness of action deprived Metacomet of stores essential to his tribes' basic survival. Greatly intimidated by the English blow, and discouraged at Metacomet's inability to defend against a strike to his own camp, his allies quickly divided. Metacomet returned to his own land in Plymouth Colony, where he was killed August 12.

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<sup>17</sup>Bodge quotes "contemporary accounts" who claimed 300 Indian dead to only one English, and that by "friendly fire." Ibid., p. 246. Increase Mather's history records Turner's men as having killed, "as was judged, about an hundred on the spot, and they drove as many more into that ancient river, that swept them away." Mather, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup>Mather, p. 150.



Perhaps the greatest tribute to Turner's role in the war was offered in 1736 when the General Court drafted a list of all who fought at Turner's Falls. The court granted the descendants of Turner's men the right to claim land in a grant established as a belated reward for service to the colony. By 1741, ninety-nine of 135 available claims had been settled by descendants of men in Turner's company. The town they established, north of the falls and initially called Fall Town, became Bernardston, Massachusetts.<sup>19</sup> The village of Turner's Falls, immediately south and west of the falls, became part of the town of Montague, Massachusetts.

Turner's death not only insured his place in the history of King Philip's War, it elevated him to martyrdom for the cause of religious heterodoxy in New England. Other people associated with baptist societies had displayed civic responsibility by bearing arms during the war, and a few lost their lives. Timothy Farley of Billerica had been killed while fighting the Narragansett at Quaboag in the first few months of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> But William Turner's case proved particularly noteworthy because of his previous sufferings at the hands of Massachusetts' magistrates. When John Russell called on Turner's example to refute the charge of opposition to civil government, he recited evidence that was very likely already well-known throughout the colonies. Ironically, Turner lost his life in service to the very government that had only a few years earlier nearly taken it from him. For the people in seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay Colony, however, his death was less an irony than it was further reason to tolerate the dissenting group he represented.

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<sup>19</sup>Bodge, p. 250. Also in introduction and notes to Increase Mather, A History of King Philip's War, Also a History of the Same War by Rev. Cotton Mather, to which are added an introduction and notes by Samuel G. Drake (Albany: J. Mansell, 1862), p. 79.

<sup>20</sup>He died August 2, 1675. Hazen, p. 112.

## Conclusion

William Turner's death by no means stopped the persecution of all heterodox residents of Massachusetts Bay. Quakers fought a battle largely their own, as did many other brands of dissent. But for those people whose consciences objected to the baptism of infants, selective ordination to the ministry and other secondary points of church doctrine, the victory was close at hand. They had endured repeated hardships induced by the power of local, regional and colonial authority figures. Those authorities, however, followed a narrow vision not shared by a majority of their subjects. Several communities exhibited tolerance for doctrinal dissent despite mandates from political and church leaders to behave otherwise. Borne partially of characteristics unique to those towns, toleration blossomed in the personal and public relationships between orthodox and dissenting inhabitants. Dissenters earned their neighbors' sympathies through open displays of honest, sober and God-fearing lifestyles. As a group, they possessed moderate wealth and influence in the business, legal and political arenas. People on both sides of the theological fence shared common needs, experiences and desires. They also shared close family ties and important roles in preserving the fragile life of their young communities. Any danger perceived from the growth of subtle doctrinal differences posed less a threat than the potential disruption of local life produced by constant persecution. Hegemony was an ideal that ultimately proved impractical and ill-suited to the demands of local life.



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