



Images from *New England Beginnings* Website

TEACHING RESOURCES

New England Beginnings: Commemorating the Cultures that Shaped New England

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Abstract: *New England Beginnings is a partnership to encourage and promote activities that commemorate the cultures that shaped early New England. The activities are designed to (1) tell the stories of the region in the seventeenth century to a wide, general public audience and (2) enhance accessibility of resources for future scholarship in the field. Partnership is voluntary and does not imply endorsement of member programs by the other members. Puritan scholar Francis J. Bremer, Professor Emeritus of History at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, serves as the coordinator. Their informative website is located at <https://www.newenglandbeginnings.org/>*

The first recorded anniversary celebration of the puritan errand into the wilderness occurred in 1730. Reverend Thomas Prince preached a centennial sermon at the annual colony elections, asserting that it was “extremely proper that upon the close of the first century of our settlement in this chief part of the land to look back to the beginning of this remarkable transaction.” He reminded his listeners that the “fathers of these plantations” had departed England, which was “a land of Egypt. . . [where] their lives were

made exceeding bitter with religious bondage.” God brought them to New England, where “shining figures” such as John Winthrop created a land with “greater civil and religious privileges than almost any others.”

While there was no recorded celebration in 1780 during the Revolution, from 1830 to the present, the city of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts have regularly observed their birthdays with parades, speeches, and various other programs. Similar events occurred to the south of Boston, where the arrival of the Pilgrims was commemorated starting with a speech by Daniel Webster in 1820. Through the nineteenth century, all of these events celebrated the contributions that the settlers of the region made to the development of the United States, which was in keeping with the filio pietistic view of the Pilgrims and puritans in the history books of the time.

This began to change in the twentieth century. The attacks on puritanism by historians of the Progressive era led to an uneasiness in celebrating their legacy. While there was some celebration of John Winthrop and the leadership of Massachusetts during the Tercentenary celebrations of 1930, more attention was paid to acknowledging the contributions that other groups had made to the history of the commonwealth over the previous 300 years, and uneasiness about the puritans was evident in the naming of the reconstruction of early Salem as the “Pioneer Village” as opposed to the “Puritan Village.” The celebration of those who came after the puritans became more evident in 1980. The official publications and news reports of Boston’s “Jubilee 350” during that year revealed no trace of John Winthrop and his fellow founders. It had become politic to forget the early puritans.

A similar dynamic was evident to the south, where the 350th anniversary of the settlement of Plymouth was the occasion for a counter-commemoration by the United American Indians of New England, who marked Thanksgiving with a “National Day of Mourning.” Wampanoag leader Frank James, also known as *Wamsutta*, recounted the opening of Native graves by the Pilgrims in their first year, their taking the Indians’ corn and bean supplies, and other offenses.

Awareness of the darker side of the English settlement—religious intolerance, offenses against the natives, and the witchcraft hysteria, among others—became part of popular culture. It was increasingly popular to diminish the importance of all the British colonies, instead claiming that America began in 1776. While twentieth-century historians and literary scholars have developed a more nuanced picture of early New England, their work has not done much to influence popular understandings of the Pilgrims and puritans. At the conclusion of the Massachusetts Tercentenary observations, the historian Samuel Eliot Morison lamented in an essay that

views of “Those Misunderstood Puritans” had not changed. They are still misunderstood. The approaching 400th anniversaries of 1620 and 1630 offer a chance to reevaluate the role of the English settlers and the Native population in shaping New England and America.

In 2015, a group of historical organizations in Boston and southeast Massachusetts as well as representatives of the native peoples came together at the Congregational Library and Archives to discuss ways in which they could develop programs that would both educate the public about the cultures (European and Native) that shaped early New England and make sources for the telling of that history more accessible for students of the period now and in the future. Christened *New England Beginnings*, as of July 2017, the partnership included twenty-one such organizations and groups, six ancestry organizations such as the Colonial Dames, six international institutions, and thirty-six participating scholars and authors. You can find the full list at www.newenglandbeginnings.org. The partnership’s focus is on programs that seek to promote a better understanding of the region’s history (for good and ill).

New England Beginnings has no funding and functions as a partnership of groups that are themselves underfunded and understaffed which seek to exchange ideas, provide advice to one another, and promote the programs that members develop. It is working to commemorate the encounter of cultures that met in Plymouth four hundred years ago but also sees its efforts advancing to include the settlement of other communities during the 1620s, the “founding” of Massachusetts in 1630, and even beyond.

A number of efforts have been undertaken or are in progress by partners in *New England Beginnings*. For example, The Congregational Library and Archives has produced a free app—*Puritan Boston Tests Democracy*—that opens on a phone or tablet with a map and links to “Events,” a sequence of entries that relate the development of Boston and New England from English roots to the first Boston revolution (1689) and the legacy of puritanism in our history. Entries in this sequence discuss aspects of everyday life, the treatment of Native Americans and African Americans, the importance of literacy, and how the colonists dealt with dissent. A tab along the bottom of the app lets the user find information on “People” with separate entries concerning more than thirty men and women who shaped Boston history, including John Winthrop, Anne Hutchinson, Mary Dyer, John Endecott, and the Mathers.

Yet another tab opens to a list of entries on “Places” in an around Boston, with over thirty-five locations described and pinpointed on the app’s map. They include the homes of John Winthrop, John Cotton, Anne Hutchinson and Robert Keayne, among others; the sites of the various meetinghouses;

Deer Island, where Christian Indians were interned during King Philip's War; and the actual site of the town gallows. And yes, Benjamin Franklin's Boston birthplace makes an appearance. Numerous "Events" can be explored on the app as well, from the granting of the Massachusetts Bay Company charter to Boston's first revolution against a British governor.

While one can consult the app from the comfort of one's living room chair in order to learn more about the people, places and events of puritan Boston, a visitor to the city might also use it as a guide while traveling from place to place, either following the directions on one of the "Tours" it lays out or plotting a personal course with the help of its map. The app also offers a mini-course in the town's puritan history. Did the puritans celebrate Christmas? What was their attitude towards sex and alcohol? When was the first Thanksgiving? How did they interact with Natives and Blacks? Were the Pilgrims puritans? These and other topics are answered by clicking on a tab asking "Did You Know?" that opens a set of entries exploding myths and exploring various unknown aspects of the culture of puritan Boston.

Want to know where to learn more about the puritans? In an exciting new initiative, over twenty experts on the cultures of early New England are participating in a program that will make their views on the subject available in an unprecedented form to high school students, college classes, and community groups. The scholars are members of *New England Beginnings*, a partnership to plan efforts to commemorate the events and peoples that shaped the region from the arrival of the Pilgrims in 1620 through the expansion of New England through the seventeenth century. The scholars have agreed to make themselves available for a modest fee for talks and discussions via teleconferencing, Skype, Face Time or similar technologies.

High schools can use technology to bring an expert into their classroom to talk about aspects of Pilgrim and puritan New England, Native cultures of the region, or how early New England shaped modern America. University courses can be enriched by the presence of scholars discussing their most recent works. Churches can ask an expert questions about their religious heritage. Civic groups can learn what light the latest scholarship sheds light on how their region developed in the seventeenth century and the role of various individuals in shaping those developments. The speakers have agreed to waive their normal fees in lieu of a modest payment to *New England Beginnings* for the support of its expenses. High schools will be asked to pay \$100 and all other groups \$200 for an "appearance" lasting up to one and a half hours, including a question-and-answer period.

The Colonial Society of Massachusetts has placed all its publications online and is sponsoring a new online edition of William Bradford's history

Of Plymouth Plantation with commentary by a team that includes the director of the Leiden American Pilgrim Museum in the Netherlands and a member of the Massachusetts Wampanoag tribe. The Partnership of Historic Boston will continue its annual Charter Day Programs, discussion groups, public talks, and Boston tours.

The Leiden American Pilgrim Museum is developing an exhibit in the Leiden Municipal Museum that will illustrate the Pilgrims' world of ideas as represented by fifty books from private libraries that colonists took with them from Leiden and England to New England. The ideas in these books influenced their interactions with the environment, the Natives they met, and the other colonies around them. A special emphasis will be on the Dutch influences on the Pilgrims as embodied in the society they created in their new home, Plymouth Colony. A major example is the introduction of the Dutch practice of civil marriage. In addition, the exhibition will call attention to parallels that connect the experiences of the Pilgrims, refugees in Leiden, and newcomers in America with the motives and experiences of modern refugees. But the main emphasis will remain on the Pilgrims. The exhibit will be brought to America in 2020-2021.

In addition, the Massachusetts Historical Society has put the early volumes of the Winthrop Papers online for easy access. Details on these and additional programs and opportunities can be found on the "Event" page of the *New England Beginnings* website at the URL: <https://www.newenglandbeginnings.org/>

TEACHING RESOURCES: Podcasts, Videos & Apps

Salem's Trials: Lessons and Legacy of 1692. On June 10, 2017 Salem State College hosted a symposium on Salem witchcraft to mark the 325th anniversary of the execution of Bridget Bishop. C-Span filmed and aired the sessions. In the opening session, Emerson Baker of Salem State University summarized the many reasons for the witchcraft episode that have been argued in histories of the trials as a way to elucidate the various forces at work at that time. The second session is a stunning master's class in data mining and contextualization for the surviving documents that make up the historic record, presented by Margo Burns, co-director of the Salem Witch Trials Legal Documents Project. The third session was a panel discussion of how this chapter of the town's history was employed to make Salem into the "Witch City" of popular imagination today.

Salem Surprise: Myth Busting about the Witch Trials. Lori Stokes is interviewed about myths about Salem witchcraft as well as other aspects of puritan Massachusetts.

A History of Puritan Boston. Professor Robert Allison of Suffolk University created a valuable online course on the History of Boston. In this first part he discusses various aspects of the native and Puritan cultures that shaped the region.

A Tale of Two Bostons: The History of Boston, England & Boston, New England. Rose Doherty, President of the Partnership of Historic Bostons, one of our partners, discusses that organization and its activities.

Anne Hutchinson: Puritan, Rebel, Founding Mother. Eve LaPlante, biographer of Anne Hutchinson, discusses Hutchinson in a podcast done for the Commonwealth Archives.

Ravishing Affection: Debunking the Myths of the Puritans and Sex. Dr. Francis J. Bremer's talk at the Old South Meetinghouse is now available online as part of the WGBH Forum Network.

Where and When Does America Begin? Professor Abram Van Engen of Washington University of St. Louis discusses American origins and the importance of John Winthrop's famous "Christian Charity" sermon and the importance of Winthrop's call for the colonists to be as a "City upon a Hill."

Home Remedies of 17th Century New England Housewives. Tufts University School of Medicine professor Lori Lyn Price talks about the homemade remedies created and used by 17th century New England housewives.

Brenton Simmons discusses 2020. Brenton Simmons, president and CEO of the New England Historic Genealogical Society talks about the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrims and other topics.

SmartPhone App: Puritan Boston Tests Democracy

Anyone who has been to Boston in recent years will have found it hard to avoid the sight of the duck boats rolling through the streets with their sound systems blaring out the story of the Boston Massacre or the Boston Tea Party. It is hard to get away from the Revolution in Boston, whether you are visiting Faneuil Hall, the “cradle of liberty” or another stop on the Freedom Trail. And yet the history of Boston doesn’t begin with John and Samuel Adams and their friends. Boston was a hundred and forty-five years old when Paul Revere watched the steeple of the North Church to see the signal that would tell him if the British advance on Lexington.

Some visitors seeking to learn about the Boston of the Winthrops and the Mathers take a tours organized by the Partnership of Historic Bostons, but that only touches on 17th-century Boston’s “greatest hits.” However, the challenges of touring the town’s “Puritan trail” have now been answered. With a grant from Mass Humanities Council and financial assistance from Park Street Church, the Congregational Library & Archives has produced an application for smart phones and tablets that can guide those interested to sites of puritan interest, or that can be used at home to learn more about the early history of the town. The app has over seventy images, many from the Massachusetts Historical Society. Its title is “Puritan Boston Tests Democracy.”

Guest Speakers

Scholars have agreed to make themselves available for a modest fee for talks and discussions via teleconferencing, Skype, Face Time or similar technologies. High schools, colleges, churches and civic groups can all utilize the program. The speakers have agreed to waive their normal fees. Those wishing to engage one of the scholars should contact Francis J. Bremer at Francis.Bremer@millersville.edu