

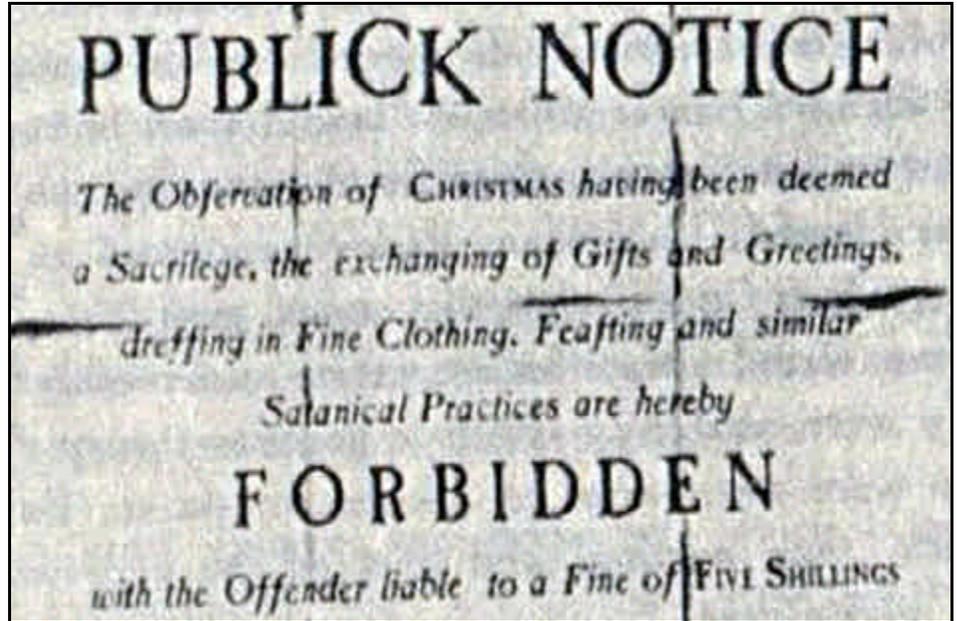


WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Taming of Christmas

Boston Globe Editorial from 2008

The Puritans of Massachusetts had no use for Christmas. “Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like,” declared the General Court in 1659, “either by forbearing of labor, feasting or any other way...shall pay for every such offense five shillings, as a fine to the country.”

The law lasted on the books for 22 years, and resistance to the holiday continued for a century longer, until Puritanism evolved into a less rigid creed.

In the 17th-century England from which the Puritans emigrated, Christmas was a multi-week bacchanal. A remnant of the pre-Christian past that had been imperfectly tamed by the church, Christmas marked the time of year in agricultural society

when work slowed, cattle were slaughtered, beer was brewed, and inhibitions were fettered. Men would dress in women’s clothing, and vice versa. Crowd singers would roam from house to house demanding food and drink. This custom is recalled today in songs about “wassailing,” a word from the 17th century that has lost its coercive connotation.

The Massachusetts Puritans, eager to stamp out this behavior, made sure that December 25 was an ordinary day. Their yearly almanacs noted that courts were in session and other business was conducted. But the spirit of disorder could not be contained. Cotton Mather, the famous Puritan clergyman, noted in 1711: “I hear of a number of young people of both sexes, belonging, many of them, to my

flock who have had on Christmas night this week a Frolick, a revelling feast, and Ball.”

By 1750, Anglicans and members of other less rigorous denominations had moved into Massachusetts. The almanacs referred to December 25 as Christmas, and young people began to mimic the riotous behavior of their English cousins on a more elaborate scale. Wealthy Bostonian Samuel Becket reported on the depredations of the Antics, masked revelers who forced their way into homes - wassailing without music. “The only way to rid of them,” he wrote, “was to give them money and listen patiently to the foolish dialogue between two or more of them.”

Christmas as we know today had vanquished the lords of misrule. ■

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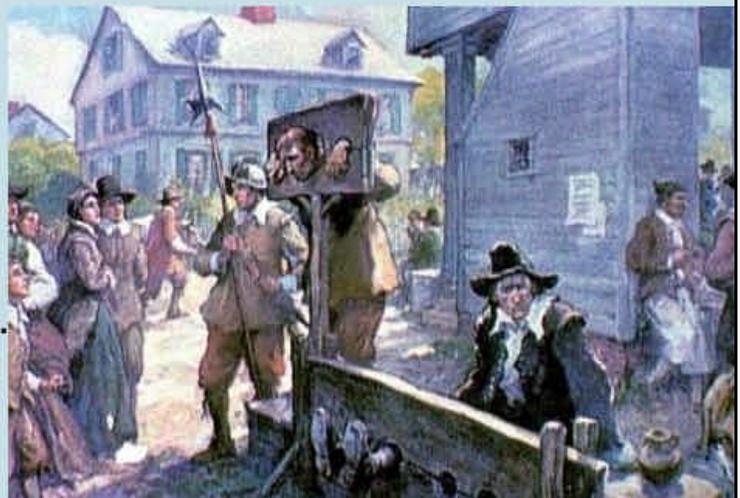
Puritan Family

- Women were responsible for making sure children grew into good Puritan adults.
- Puritans were strict parents who loved their children very much. They used mental discipline and love but, if it didn't work, they would use physical force.
- The practice of "sending out" was used. Children often were sent to stay with other families for training, discipline, apprenticeship, etc.
- Puritan parents were discouraged from showing affection so the children would be ready to obey God's laws.



Government in Massachusetts Bay Colony

- The General Court that ran the colony was a legislature with representatives who made laws.
- Each town sent two representatives to the Court.
- Government leaders had to be Puritans.
- Only white, male church members who owned property could vote.



**Bad Puritans went to the stocks.
How embarrassing!**