

Salem to Sudbury: Whom the first settlers knew, and what they thought

Edmund Rice 1638 Association annual meeting

September 27, 2025

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The objective here was to get a
sense of the people in Edmund
Rice's world, 1630 - 1663

Some points made last year...(1)

- Edmu(o)nd Rice must have been a yeoman—he owned (and farmed) land and made at least 40 shillings a year, which meant that he wasn't landed gentry (who lived off rents and/or inheritance)
- Yeomen served as jurors, were sent to grammar schools and (with money or sponsor) could attend college, serve as aldermen, justices of the peace, and in other civil roles
- Yeomen could inherit, which enabled many to buy land and even become a squire (living exclusively off rents and inheritance) or enter commerce
- Rise of Puritan influence and Puritan political power were strongest in East Anglia (counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincoln & Cambridge)
- The new king, Charles I, acted vigorously to impose semi-Catholic church services and punish interactions with the clergy; search for resistors intensified by William Laud, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633

Some points made last year....(2)

- Traditional (back to Anglo-Saxon times) land tenure was land “held of the [someone owning the land]” —which provided a common area for pasture & tracts of land assigned for plowing (assigned at annual meetings of the village or manor—but not necessarily the same plots every year)
- “Fee title” was a new and coming thing—owners holding fee title could sell or will title it to others, especially strong trend in East Anglia (Edmund’s home turf)
- Fad of landowners enclosing land for raising sheep forced farmers to leave, to starve, move into towns, or join roving bands of “sturdy beggars”
- Before Edmund left the mother country, Norwich (in Norfolk) was the 2nd largest & wealthiest city in England thanks to the wool trade centered there—which also had strong commercial ties to Holland (home of Calvinists, separatists, free-thinkers of many stripes, and publishers)
- Bottom line: more yeomen were becoming more prosperous, with civic power—and exposed to more influences from beyond English shores

At last, some new material...

Toward the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony

- Henry the Eighth banished the Catholic church, confiscated Church property (quite a lot—monasteries, church buildings, wealth) in 1535
- His 1535 Act made the king of England the head of a new Church of England, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as its leader
- Lavish spender Henry needed money, much of which he got through selling confiscated Church property
- A rising gentry (having acquired wealth) could buy the emptied properties
- Adam Winthrop, grandfather of the future 1st governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, was one of those
- He bought Groton Manor in Suffolk—formerly owned by the Abbey of Bury St Edmund—Edmund married in St. Mary's Church, Bury St. Edmund)
- Adam's grandson John Winthrop, being a squire, had income—then became a vigorous supporter of emigration to New England, eventually the 1st governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company

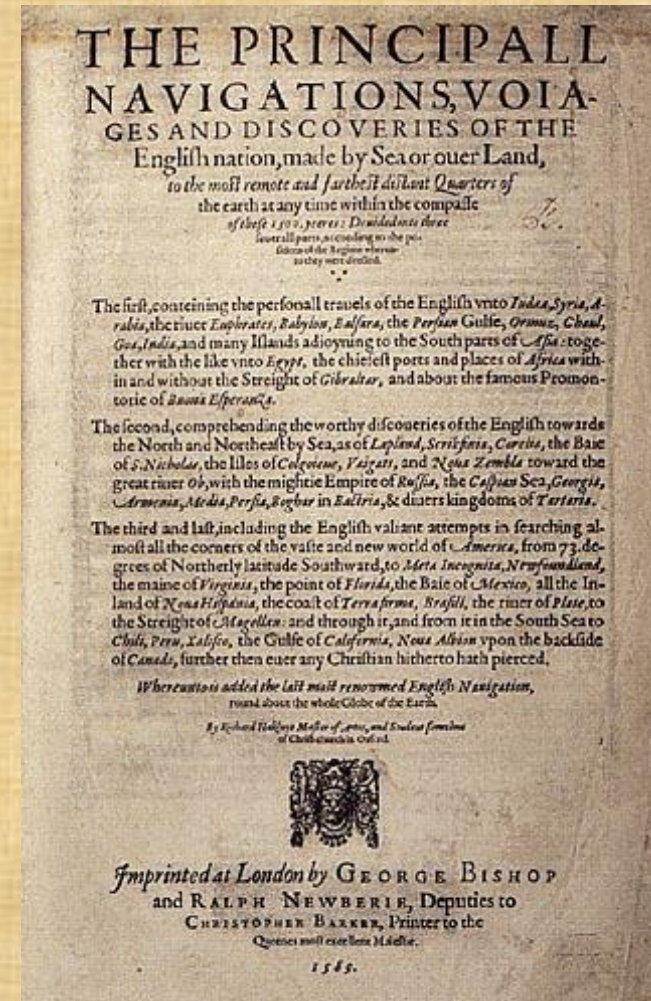
Backstory

- Richard Hakluyt opened eyes of English shipowners and encouraged them to take advantage of North American resources through accumulated accounts of explorers in his 1589 *"The Principall Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, made by the Sea or Overland to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth, at any time within the Compasse of these 1500 yeares"*—greatly expanded in his last edition (1616)
- In *"Builders of the Bay Colony"*, Samuel Eliot Morison observed that the only things that England wanted from North America in the 16th century (1500's) were to plunder the French and Spanish there or to find a passage through it to the Orient—that is, Englanders had no interest in colonizing
- Captain John Smith really stimulated interest in New England (with a bit of taunting) in his popular *"A Description of New England"* (1616)
- Reverend John White in Dorchester read both, developing the idea that emigration to New England could solve the sturdy beggar problem and deal with crowding of the desperate poor in the region—and vigorously promoted the idea

Richard Hakluyt



His book



Captain John Smith



His book

A DESCRIPTION of *New England*:

OR

THE OBSERVATIONS, AND
discoveries, of: Captain *John Smith* (Admirall
of that Country) in the North of *America*, in the year
of our Lord 1614: with the successe of sixe Ships,
that went the next year 1615; and the
accidents befell him among the
French men of warre:

With the prooffe of the present benefit this
Countrey affoordes: whither this present yeare,
1616, eight voluntary Ships are gone
to make further tryall.



At LONDON

Printed by *Humphrey Lownes*, for *Robert Clerke*; and
are to be sold at his house called the Lodge,
in Chancery lane, over against Lin-
colnes Inne. 1616.

Failure leads to success

- Reverend White helped fund the “The New England Planters’ Parliament of Dorchester Adventurers”, which established a colony (fishing station) near Cape Ann in 1624—meant to be self-sustaining year-round
- Colony failed in 1626 (should have known....fishermen won’t farm, farmers make poor sailors; they didn’t like one another)
- Roger Conant chosen leader in 1626, stayed 2 winters after being urged in a letter from White, and moved survivors down to future Boston
- Back in East Anglia, a “New England Council” was formed by many strong-willed Puritans who were talking up emigration, but it had no money and no clear title to New England land
- The New England Council issued a “patent” dated March 19, 1628 to the “New England Company for a Plantation in Massachusetts Bay”, with boundaries overlapping with patents owned by others—which led to court challenges

Only 10 years passed from the patent issue to Edmund Rice's arrival in New England (but a lot happened during the decade...)

The Massachusetts Bay Company

- To gain & keep clear ownership, the new Massachusetts Bay Company set out to get a royal charter for their land
- The treasurer for the Dorchester Adventurers--John Humfrey--and Reverend White had been in London seeking investors for West Country adventurers at that time, and linked up with the East Anglians
- Massachusetts Bay Company shareholders included attorneys and wealthy merchants with standing in London, who secured the royal charter, signed March 4, 1629
- At the same time, most of the future MBC leaders met with the Earl of Lincoln, then met in Cambridge to sign the Cambridge Agreement

The key to the success of the Massachusetts Bay Company

The new charter did not specify the location of charter or where its governing board would meet

- The governing board feared that the Crown would seize the charter—as it did from Plymouth Colony and the Virginia Colony, so there is speculation that someone bribed the official who drafted the document
- At a court (board) meeting July 28, 1629, Governor Matthew Cradock--wealthy shipowner/merchant in London—proposed the move
- Importantly, London governors ignorant of New England conditions and needs could not dictate activities and decisions—as they did to Plymouth & Virginia
- The Cambridge Agreement included a commitment to take a large group of settlers to New England by March 1630
- John Winthrop was voted governor for the year and leader of the migration

Leaders of the Company

- The charter specified a governor, deputy governor, & 18 assistants (directors)
- These 20 were elected each year by the freeman at a General Court (held in Boston after 1630)
- At 1st, these 20 were elected by freemen but no freemen came over that weren't assistants (tricky...)
- Settlers demanded to be named freemen, so a General (annual) Court approved 108 freemen in October 1630
- Over 50 years, only 35 new names became officers; the electorate clearly trusted and respected those chosen, almost all educated

Leaders of the communities

- New communities quickly chartered after 1635
- General Court moved to allow each town to send 2 representatives to the court and vote there
- Representatives not required to attend Boston meetings, but almost all did—so court (and Boston) news quickly spread throughout western Massachusetts (and Connecticut & Rhode Island)
- Edmund Rice was never a representative, but as a freeman did submit petitions to the General Court twice (so he was clearly in the info loop)

Education also introduced people to one another, and thoughts

- Grammar schools were common throughout southern England, where boys learned to read English and Latin (essential to read the Bible, still only printed in Latin)
- The Massachusetts General Court voted to require any town with 100 or more families to establish and pay for a grammar school
- Puritans regarded education as essential so that the Bible could be read and understood without a priest as intermediary to the Lord—and to understand sermons
- Puritans did not want an ignorant preacher “who only read from the Prayer Book”
- Cambridge University was near East Anglia, and many of the early leaders and preachers attended
- A charter to establish a college in the Boston area was passed 1636, the school built by 1639, named Harvard after the death of its big donor
- A Harvard degree was accepted in England as equal to one from either Oxford or Cambridge
- Henry Dunster was named president in 1640, from whom Edmund Rice leased land from, and eventually bought land from
- Edmund must have known a lot of people in Cambridge, as well as nearby Watertown

Motivating emigration

- Puritans strongly disturbed by rich becoming richer, poor poorer trend
- Nouveau gentry no longer content with “saddled horses and shabby servants”; they were going for the latest models of coaches, liveried (uniformed) servants, & extravagant parties—quite distasteful for Puritans
- Arrests and summons for court appearances by Puritan preachers increasing, with heavy fines—John Winthrop kicked out as attorney for Court of Wards & Liveries—thus a paying job
- Because of suspended Parliament (which votes money), King was taxing lords of manors, nobles directly—many of whom supported Puritan beliefs

Dominating thought

- Puritanism was a unifying, omnipresent, powerful tie among the settlers...except for the servants, who were $\sim \frac{1}{4}$ of the immigrants
- East Anglians were strongly separatist—believing that the corrupt Church of England and its “popish practices” could not be reformed; preaching and learning the Bible must be done through a separate church
- West Country people were mostly “conforming Puritans”, that could practice and preach Puritan beliefs without a formal break with the Church
- Towns sought highly-regarded preachers for their church, most of them Separatists—provided something to think about and argue about for everyone
- Disputes were serious; both strongly religious Henry Dunster & John Winthrop would be forced from office over religious principles—even while remaining revered & beloved throughout the colony

All the foregoing relates to Edmund Rice...how?

- Prominent Puritan preachers that emigrated preached in churches near Edmund
- Edmund received a small award from London courts that likely involved representatives of the Massachusetts Bay Company & details of “what it took” to get things from “the system”
- Edmund at 44 in 1638 would have been steeped in religious arguments, heard about threats to preachers and Puritans in general, the king’s anti-Puritan views
- The amazingly fast preparation for the 1630 Winthrop fleet and later emigrants reveals a very organized communication network throughout southern England
- Clearly a social extrovert and connector, he readily fit into a familiar community and government structure
- Edmund knew or knew of most of the assistants running the Company and most of the opinion-leading preachers—and they likely knew of Deacon Rice

More on this next year!