

Puritan Attitudes Towards Physical Recreation In 17th Century New England by: Peter Wagner Rohrbach, West Germany

When John Winthrop and his people arrived in New England, they immediately began building what was to be a city upon the hill to the unregenerate in this world. Such a task demanded time and energy, especially since it had to be accomplished in a "howling wilderness" where life meant a continuous struggle: "The early colonist was too occupied with the serious business of establishing himself and his family in an alien and inhospitable country to find time for the recreations he once enjoyed in the mother country."¹ "Pleasures and recreations were banned, even the sports . . . which were commended in the Bible were ignored."²

And when the severe frontier conditions occasionally yielded a small amount of leisure time, the very nature of the colonists' religion made all kinds of recreation — particularly physical recreation — virtually impossible. For the adherents of the Puritan religion were suspicious of, if not hostile to, sports and recreation: "an ascetic puritanism taught that pleasure was an offense in the sight of the Lord."³ "The Puritan, who held the concept that work and piety were synonymous, denounced any form of play as evil. Whatever was pleasurable had to be sinful."⁴ Hence one must conclude that in seventeenth century New England "sport grew up . . . like a flower in a macadem prison yard."⁵—

This is the colonial recreational scene in New England as it is portrayed in most of the existing literature about recreation in seventeenth century America.⁶ Apart from a predominantly negative view of Puritan attitudes towards recreation, what is

¹Charles W. Hackensmith, *History of Physical Education* (New York, 1966), p. 316.

²Norma Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education In the United States* (New York, 1942), p. 5. On the supposedly smothering influence of the frontier cf. also Foster Rhea Dulles, *America Learns to Play; a History of Popular Recreation 1607-1940* (New York, 1940), p. 41; Reynold E. Carlson/Theodor Deppe/Janet McLean, *Recreation in American Life* (Belmont, Cal., 1963), p. 28.

³Ralph H. Gabriel, ed., *The Pageant of America* (New Haven, 1929), p. 2.

⁴Carlson/Deppe/McLean, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵Robert H. Boyle, *Sport — Mirror of American Life* (Boston, 1963), p. 6.

⁶The discussion of the secondary literature is limited to the twentieth century and focuses particularly on the last 30 years. Only such works have been considered which treat the subject more extensively. For a chronological treatment of the historical analysis of colonial recreation over the last two centuries, including general historical works, see Thomas R. Davis, *Sport and Exercise In the Lives of Selected Colonial Americans Massachusetts and Virginia, 1700-1775*, (doct. diss., University of Maryland, 1970), pp. 1-25.

most striking in the majority of works is an abundant terminological vagueness. The words “physical education”, “sport”, “play”, “recreation (s)”, and “amusement” are used without proper definitions, nor is there any hint as to the meaning of those terms in the seventeenth century. Taking the viewpoint of the twentieth century, the authors charge that “a welter of rigid moral standards in colonial America accorded recreation, as we know it today, little acceptance.”⁷ But the Puritans did not and could not possibly know “recreation” or “sport” in the sense that we know them today. And it is highly improbable that any Puritan ever heard the word “physical education”. Seventeenth century social conditions were substantially different from those of our present industrial or post-industrial society, which saw the rise of a work-leisure distinction not known in previous centuries. But why blame the Puritans for social change and the concomitant etymological differences in the vocabulary?⁸ It is, in fact, one of the great fallacies of sport historians to project terms into an age in which they were either not known or denoted something different from the contemporaneous meaning of the word. To make conclusions on such a vague and frequently erroneous basis must lead to results which do not hold water, once they are subjected to a closer analysis.

The overwhelming amount of works stressing a supposedly negative attitude of Puritanism towards recreation deserves further attention.⁹ This phenomenon in the literature on recreation can only be partly explained by the specific genre that the various books belong to. Thus a ‘World History’ of sport and recreation has very little room for such a supposedly unpromising subject as Puritanism and will tend to adopt succinct judgments by previous authors. Since the published material on seventeenth century recreation is very scarce and a thorough study would prove too laborious, many authors quickly head for the more fertile eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, after having at least evoked and in some way varied the popular cliché of those stern, kill-joy Puritans.

⁷Charles K. Brightbill, *Man and Leisure: a Philosophy of Recreation* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1961). P. 109.

⁸The term “sport” had different connotations in the seventeenth century. “Recreation” denoted intellectual and physical relaxation and diversion, also including theatrical performances, for instance. Cf. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. C. T. Onions, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1970), p. 1980, p. 1677 respectively.

⁹In addition to the above cited works see also John Durant/Otto Bettmann, *Pictorial History of American Sports: From Colonial Times to the Present* (no place, 1952), p. 2; D. B. Van Dalen/E. D. Mitchell/B. L. Bennett, *World History of Physical Education* (New York, 1953), p. 156; Poster Rhea Dulles, *In Detestation of Idleness*, in George A. Sage, ed., *Sport and American Society* (Reading, Mass., 1970).

Another favorite approach of the secondary literature seems to be the projection of the contemporary common meaning of "Puritan" into the seventeenth century — i.e., Puritan in the sense of prohibitive and austere. Thus the originally historical term loses its denotative value and becomes an emotional outlet for a prejudiced opinion. A whole wave of studies in the field of Puritanism, which is partly apologetic in character, seems to have gone unnoticed with the above mentioned authors.

The negative criticism of Puritan attitudes towards recreation in colonial New England has been traced back into the eighteenth century, where it apparently started with the publication of 'A *General History of Connecticut by a Gentleman of that Province*' (London, 1781) by Samuel Peters."¹⁰ Peters had to leave Connecticut in 1774 because of conservative political opinions and subsequently tried to "stigmatize the inhabitants of the Colony, which appears to have been his object throughout his whole history."¹¹ In 1656 Governor Eaton had compiled a list of the New Haven Colony laws which Peters then enlarged by a considerable number of falsified "blue laws", which — according to him — existed before 1656 but were never codified.¹² Although the history of Peters was not a success and contemporary as well as later historians knew about its more than obvious bias, it was nevertheless read and quoted by subsequent generations.¹³ Throughout the nineteenth century a generalizing, negative criticism of Puritan recreation prevailed, whenever historians treated the subject in their works. One had to wait until well into the twentieth century to detect new approaches which offered comparisons between different eras, countries, and classes.¹⁴

It is most surprising to notice that hardly anything has been written on recreation in seventeenth century New England, where such a subject ought to have been treated, namely in the field of Puritan studies. Scholars of Puritanism apparently think that it is a proper topic to be reserved for historians of recreation and religion. Hence the negative result, for there are few authors in these disciplines who have read enough

¹⁰ For a historical treatment of this criticism cf. Percy Scholes, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England* (London, 1934). p. 34 ff.

¹¹ Royal R. Hinman, *The Blue Laws of New Haven...* (Hartford, 1838) p. 125.

¹² On the origin and development of the term "blue laws" see James H. Trumbull, *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven and the false Blue-Laws Invented by the Reverend Samuel Peters* (Hartford, 1876). pp. 9, 24. The falsification of Peters are further discussed on pp. 301-309, and in Hinman, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-124.

¹³ See Trumbull's detailed account of these historians in his *op. cit.*, pp. 32 ff.

¹⁴ This period was hailed in by Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols., New York, 1927), vol. I, pp. 93, 123, 139-44.

about Puritans and especially from Puritans to understand the intricacies of the Puritan mind and religion. Such a renowned scholar as Perry Miller, one has to recall, took pains to explain the "Puritan mind" in more than one thousand pages.¹⁵

And indeed, the works are very scarce which try to do justice to the Puritans by not adopting the traditional cliché of "austerity of creed" and inquire into the essence of the Puritan faith and its impact on such an issue as recreation.¹⁶ Basically they come to the conclusion that "there is evidence enough to indicate that the Puritans were not opposed to diversion and recreation."¹⁷

Surveying the whole bulk of literature pertaining to Puritan attitudes towards recreation in seventeenth century New England, one is faced with a paradoxical situation: the problem has two entirely contradictory solutions. These are represented by a large camp of authors who hold that the frontier situation and Puritanism itself were hardly favorable to recreation, and a comparatively small group denying that. The reason for this dilemma becomes obvious when one analyses the approach which both partisan groups have in common. They presuppose a more or less monolithic New England Puritanism with certain tenets that everybody adhered to. Then follows a deduction which is logically completely convincing, leading to a negative or positive conclusion, depending on what was chosen as Puritan "preconditions". Thus the *'World History of Physical Education'* selects three Puritan principles which supposedly nipped recreation in the bud:

"First the Puritanical religious sanction of labor and 'detestation of idleness' placed play outside the pale of approved social behavior. The ideal of serving God through steady application to work came to imply that any innocent or frivolous amusement was a waste of time and talents. Thus physical education could not survive unless it was devoted to economic goals.

Secondly, the Puritans' desire to eliminate any activity that was tintured with Catholicism also tended to

¹⁵Cf. *The New England Mind, The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939; paperback Boston, 1961). *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953; paperback, Boston, 1961), hereafter quoted as *The New England Mind*, I and II.

¹⁶See J. A. Krout, *Annals of American Sport*, in Ralph H. Gabriel, *op. cit.*, Samuel E. Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), and *Harvard College in the 17th Century* (2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1936); Percy Scholes, *op. cit.*; Carl Bridenbough, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban life in America, 1625-1742* (New York, 1938); David H. Flaherty, *Privacy in Colonial New England* (Charlottesville, 1972); Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in America. A Study in Four Dimensions* (New York, 1964).

¹⁷Robert Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 163. By indicating that both were condemned unless they were "truly refreshing . . . not a waste of time . . . not done in excess, and . . . not immoral or sensual", Lee points out the Puritans opposition to every kind of excess. (ibid).

purge traditional means of achieving aims of physical education.

Thirdly, the determination . . . to improve morals through continued spiritual espionage and external discipline was eventually accelerated into an ascetic orgy of condemning nearly every natural desire of man.”¹⁸

This is definitely inconsistent with, if not contradictory to, what such important Puritans as Richard Baxter, William Burkitt, Thomas Shepard, Jr., and Cotton Mather taught. The English Puritans Baxter and Burkitt were highly regarded in New England, and their works were widely read and frequently quoted by theologians. In ‘*A Christian Directory: or a Summ of Practical Theologie, and Cases of Conscience*’ Baxter referred to recreation, arguing that undoubtedly “some sport and recreation is *lawful*, yea *needful*, and therefore a *duty* to some men.”¹⁹ William Burkitt discussed recreation in chapter VI of his ‘*The Poor Man’s Help, and the Young Man’s Guide*’. Significantly for Burkitt, men’s lawful recreations are supposed to contribute to the glorification of God:

“It being impossible for the Mind of Man to be always intent upon Business, and for the Body to be exercised in continual labours, the Wisdom of God has therefore adjudged some Diversion or Recreation, (The better to fit both Body and Mind for the service of their maker) to be both needful and expedient, such is the Constitution of our Bodies, and the Complexion of our Minds, that neither of them can endure a constant Toyl without some Relaxation and delightful Diversion. As a Bow, if always bent will prove sluggish and unserviceable, in like manner will a Christian’s Mind, if always intent upon the best things. . . A wise and good Man perhaps could wish that his Body needed no such Diversion, but finding his Body jade and tire, he is forced to give way to reason, and let Religion choose such Recreations as are healthful, short, recreative, and proper, to refresh both Mind and Body . . .”²⁰

The New England ministers agreed with their English fellow preachers. When the son of Thomas Shepard, Jr. was admitted to Harvard College, his father sent him a letter which also contained some advice concerning recreation. Admonishing his son not to neglect his body, Shepard wrote: “I would not have

¹⁸Van Dalen/Mitchell/Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

¹⁹Published in London, 1673. The quotation is from p. 460.

²⁰The oldest extant version is the second edition, London, 1694. Reprinted Boston, 1725. The quotation is from pp. 35-39.

you neglect seasons of recreation a little before and after meals.²¹ And Cotton Mather made it altogether clear that religion stood not in the way of recreation or diversion:

“Men and Brethren, We would not be misunderstood, as if we meant to insinuate, that a due Pursuit of Religion is inconsistent with all manner of *Diversion*: No, we suppose there are Diversions undoubtedly innocent, yea profitable and of use, to fit us for Service, by enlivening & fortifying our frail Nature, Invigorating the Animal Spirits, and brightening the Mind, when tired with a close Application to Business.”²²

In addition, important public figures, such as Samuel Sewall, took an active part in recreational life.²³ And one colony even provided recreation by law.²⁴

It would be equally wrong, however, to maintain categorically that Puritanism favored recreation in New England. The Reverend Michael Wigglesworth, for instance, was highly suspicious of it. He never seems to have indulged, apart from a few times when it was necessary for reasons of health, and he continuously complained about his students in Haryard who “sought recreation too much”, at least for his taste.²⁵ Cotton Mather, too, if one can believe his own words, hardly ever diverted or recreated himself physically.²⁶ And enough prohibitive laws have already been quoted in the historical literature on recreation to indicate what might be termed a Puritan suspicion of recreation. A thorough explanation as to why these laws were enacted and whether they were enforced is, however, still missing.²⁷

The extant literature on Puritans and recreation which tries to assess Puritan attitudes with the deductive procedure as shown above sooner or later runs into a problem. Although the attitude which is finally filtered out may have existed in the Puritan movement — as indeed the positive and negative

²¹See *A Letter . . . to his son at his admission into the College* (written shortly after 1670), in Perry Miller/Thomas Johnson, *The Puritans*, 2 vols. (New York, 1963), p. 716.

²²Cotton Mather, *A Serious Address to those who unnecessarily frequent the Tavern* (Boston, 1726). P. 10.

²³See *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, 3 vols., Colls. Mass. Hist. Soc., ser. 5, vols. 5-7 (1878-82), passim.

²⁴Cf. *the Records of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation* (Providence, 1856-1865), vol. 1, pp. 279-280.

²⁵See *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth 1653-1657*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York, 1965), p. 27 and passim.

²⁶See *The Diary of Cotton Mather, 1681-1724*, 2 vols., Colls. of Mass. Hist. Soc., ser. 7, vols. 7-8 (1911-1912), vol. 8, p. 366. Mather talks about his rare recreational activities in connection with his accident at Spy-Pond.

²⁷See F. R. Dulles, *In Detestation of Idleness*, loc. cit., pp. 5-7; Robert B. Weaver, *Amusements and Sports in American Life* (Chicago, 1939); Norman Schendener, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

standpoints can be easily traced — it is, however, not *the* Puritan attitude. As soon as it is given such an absolute meaning, which it never had, it becomes falsified.

The crux of the matter lies in the subtle and sophisticated structure of Puritan religion and philosophy. “This philosophy was not a deliberate or intentional creation. No committee ever gathered round a table and drew up a syllabus, no one ever wrote a comprehensive treatise upon its whole aspect. It cannot be defined in one sentence. It was the result of much disputation, many sermons, long experience with heresies, manifold discoveries of what consequences flowed from what premises, careful interpretations and reinterpretations of the Bible, critical studies of the great theologians, years of study in the colleges. Few Puritans ever agreed on every feature of it, and on some essential questions there was always difficulty in framing a formula satisfactory to all the orthodox.”²⁸ What Miller wants to explain here is something which his successors say he neglected too much — the pluralistic aspect of Puritanism. As Michael McGiffert justly pointed out, however, Miller was always aware of the great diversity within the Puritan coherence.²⁹ But historians of recreation still stress the monolithic findings of Miller and disregard the post-Millerian criticism. Since Perry Miller’s death in 1963 scholars like Darrett B. Rutman, John Demos, Kenneth A. Lockridge, David H. Flaherty, and others have considerably changed the landscape of New England historiography.³⁰ This field can today be praised more for its welter of scholarly enterprises than for coherence. The picture of the Puritan ideology and, to a much greater extent, that of Puritan everyday life as seen in the light of recent studies is that of a complex, pluralistic movement with many currents.

Hence, if the Puritan attitudes towards such an issue as recreation are to be determined, one cannot disregard the pluralistic aspect of the New England Puritan movement. The different New England plantations as a frequent result of dissent (cf. for example, Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, and Thomas Hooker) are just one manifestation of this pluralism

²⁸Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* I, pp. 90-91. A short and excellent explanation of the Puritan theology and its difference with Anglicanism is given by Perry Miller in Miller/Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 41, 64 (vol. I). See also Miller’s longer essay, *The Marrow of Puritan Divinity*, in *Publs. of Col. Soc. Mass.* 32 (1935), pp. 247-300, republished in *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Harvard University Press, 1956; also New York, 1964), pp. 48-99.

²⁹Michael McGiffert, *American Puritan Studies In the 1960’s*, *William & Mary Quarterly* 27 (1970), p. 42.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 59.

which in England led to the various sects. So far the Puritan religious ideology served as a starting point for exploration. It was left to the individual author which Puritan principles and dogmas to select for his purposes. To these he could then give an overriding value and even “prove” them with the fitting quotations from a Puritan author or law, or — adopting Puritan practices — from the Holy Writ. Such an approach must needs exclude differing or extreme attitudes and thus falsify the historical picture. A more promising attempt would be the objective analysis of the writings of several Puritan authors who exerted influence on the colonial public, such as ministers, judges, jurymen, selectmen, and university graduates.

With very few exceptions, the New England Puritans who are today being studied by scholars of various disciplines had an excellent education for their time. They were in the majority ministers who “could look back upon a classical training acquired by seven years of grammar school study, concluded by four college years wherein the students were intensively drilled in rhetoric.”³¹ Both grammar school and college influenced the students in their choice of recreation, making them — perhaps unconsciously — more inclined towards intellectual recreation by exposing them to the delicious bait of Greek, Roman, and Christian authors. Intellectual recreation was principally the domain of the educated few in New England. And Harvard was the college which bred them. The spoken and sometimes pseudo-dramatized words of the sermons, literature in prose and poetry, and music — these were the field which the well educated New England Puritans had at their disposition for intellectual recreation.

Above all the clergy devoted nearly all their leisure time to this kind of recreation. Increase Mather, for instance, “slighted the pastoral functions, visiting the sick and catechizing the young, in favor of studying and preaching.”³² His leisure time went into his hobbies: astronomy, geology, and medicine³³; even there he searched, like so many other Puritans, for God’s secret design behind every thing. His son Cotton tried hard to outdo him in this respect; he had a sixteen hour day after the completion of his education which was exclusively intellectual, concentrating on Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and theology.³⁴

³¹Perry Miller/Thomas Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 665 (vol. II).

³²Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York, 1971), p. 88.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 140.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 192-95.

Cotton's schoolmates, who seemed to prefer other activities — and whom New England's Jeremiah rebuked therefore — “thrashed him with their fists.”³⁵

Of course the Mathers and their colleagues with a similar taste could not force their opinion on the people who indulged the flesh rather than the spirit; but there always was an underlying wish — which is particularly evident in the sermons — that the laymen follow the motto “carpe diem” and also recreate themselves intellectually. Theoretically the ministers recognized man's natural need of physical recreation. But during their education they were introduced to and finally preferred intellectual recreation. Hence it is understandable that they could not be unbiased when, in turn, they were supposed to explain the implications of recreation to their flock. The battle between body and mind had been decided for them; as intellectuals and deeply religious people they first satisfied the mind, if recreation was to be, and then — time permitting — they considered the needs of the body. While this solution perfectly met their own needs and was even helpful to their work, the laymen were, as evidence indicates, rather hesitant, if not unwilling, to adopt such an interpretation of recreation.

A thorough analysis of the diaries, letters, and sermons of three Puritan leaders in seventeenth century New England discloses that no such thing as “a puritan attitude or opinion” existed.³⁶ The Puritans' attitudes towards physical recreation were determined by their religious doctrines and secular laws. The supremacy of the Bible was unquestioned, particularly in Massachusetts where the laws were framed in accordance with Mosaic law. Within these prescribed limits, however, there was still enough freedom left to take distinct, if not controversial positions on such a question as physical recreation. It could be accepted as a means of staying healthy, it could be allowed only under certain conditions; or it could be fully welcomed as not only a necessity, but a pleasure-yielding human activity as well.

Even within the relatively coherent group of the New England clergy a spectrum of attitudes existed which can be traced all the way through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. Azariah Mather preached as late as 1725 that

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁶ Objects of this analysis, the results of which are given in this paper, were the diaries of Michael Wiggleworth (1653-1657), Cotton Mather (1681-1724), and Samuel Sewall (1674-1729) as well as letters and sermons of Cotton Mather.

“the work of our particular calling is more justifiable than Sports and Pastimes. *Austin* said well, when he said, it was better *Arare* than *Saltare*.”³⁷

He thus voiced a conviction which both Wigglesworth and the representatives of his own family had upheld nearly three quarters of a century ago. But there were also ministers of Peter Thacker’s ilk, who noted in his private diary on April 29, 1679 :

“this evening was the first time of our playing at nine pins in our alley.”³⁸

While the Mathers definitely preferred intellectual recreation, some of their colleagues used their leisure for bowling, hunting, and even card playing.

The fact that the Mathers published enormously and became outstanding figures even in their own day naturally makes them very attractive as objects of historical studies. But they alone do not represent the New England Puritans, and relying largely on their works would not yield an accurate picture of the Puritan movement. Together with Wigglesworth they were extremists — not only in matters of recreation — and they succeeded in voicing their opinions much better than people of Peter Thacher’s caliber. As intellectuals the Mathers knew how to interpret recreation to their best personal advantage. But those clergymen and the other members of the leading class who did not share the same opinion very often failed to say so. They merely lived their “way”, but did not advocate it. The historian overwhelmed by Cotton Mather’s theological publications, has to avoid the fallacious conclusion that the New England Puritans are adequately represented by their most outstanding writers. He is faced with the task also to give credit to the more silent group of Puritan leaders who did not stand in the limelight of their time. Doing such, he will discover enough divergence within what seems to be a very coherent group at first glance.

The term “Puritans” does not only allude to the leaders of the movement — although various workers imply this — but also includes the ordinary laymen or church members. Did the Puritan theology as propagated by the ministers and the leading class influence the majority of laymen in their attitudes

³⁷Azariah Mather, *Sabbath-Day’s Rest Assorted* (Boston, 1725), p. 7.

³⁸See *The Private Diary of Peter Thacher, April 1679-February 1699*, In A. K. Teek, *The History of Milton, Mass.* (Boston, 1887). Appendix B, p. 641.

towards recreation? In other words, did New England every day life reality correspond to the ideational level? In this context the jeremiads (New England election and fast-day sermons) offer themselves as a tool to explore the recreational life of the Puritan church members. To the grief of their shepherds the laymen were, already in the very first decade, too worldly minded and neglected their religious duties. They did not live up to the ideals which the clergy cherished. The ministers, in turn, developed the jeremiad both to rebuke their erring sheep as well as to show them a way out of their calamity. A careful interpretation of the jeremiads, which takes into account both their tradition and rhetorical function, discloses that the impact of dogmatic theology upon the population has been vastly exaggerated. The evidence of some of Thomas Shepard's sermons in the early 1640's all but destroys the halo which the clergy of the later generations built around the founders of New England.³⁹ Hence the idea of a morally declining New England ought to be relinquished. The Great Migration and the subsequent growth of wealth and social security with its concomitant increase of leisure brought about social changes which the jeremiads distorted to declension. Yet the symptoms of irreligion and worldliness as manifested in disobedient and pleasure-loving church members had been there for a long time and were only becoming more overt. In fact, one of the most valuable results which the study of the jeremiads yields is the reiterated statement that there was no discernible difference of behavior between the church members (also called "saints") and the non-members ("strangers" or "unregenerate"). This assertion is implicit in Michael Wigglesworth's jeremiad-poem and is mentioned expressis verbis by Joshua Moody, Urian Oakes, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Willard.⁴⁰ In 1679 a church synod had to be held in New England which had one single task to face, namely what to do about the sad "corrupt" and "worldly" state of New England. In a publication entitled *The Necessity of Reformation* the synod issued what might be termed an ultra-jeremiad, giving ample evidence of how the "sinful" diversions and amusements of the church

³⁹ See Thomas Shepard, *The Parable of the Ten Virgins Opened & Applied* (1636-1640), ed. by Jonathan Mitchell and Thomas Shepard, Jr. (London, 1695), pt. II, p. 5; and *Wine for Gospel Wantons*, preached 1645 (Cambridge, Mass., 1688), p. 13.

⁴⁰ See Michael Wigglesworth, *God's Controversy with New England* (1662), in Miller/Johnson, *The Puritans*, pp. 612-13; Joshua Moody, quoted by Parry Miller, *The New England Mind I*, p. 472; Urian Oakes, *New England Pleaded With* (Cambridge, Mass., 1673), p. 27; Increase Mather, *The Day of Trouble is Near* (Cambridge, Mass., 1674), p. 22; Cotton Mather, *Things for a Distressed people to think upon* (Boston, 1696), pp. 17, 21; Samuel Willard, *The Peril of the Times displayed* (Boston, 1700), partly reprinted in Miller/Johnson, *The Puritans*, p. 375.

members had grown. The following years were to prove, however, that the synod's call for reformation was as ineffective as all the previous jeremiads had been.⁴¹

Some sermons make specific references as to how and when the church members looked for recreation. Thus the *'Testimony of Evil Customs'* lists ordinations of pastors, weddings, lecture-days, training days, huskings, commencement days, and court meetings as occasions which the Puritan laymen gladly used for all kinds of diversions and entertainment; and even that sanctum of Puritan theology, the Sabbath, was not excluded.⁴²

At first glance this picture of a pleasure-loving Puritan laity ignoring the wholesome advice of its ministers must come as a surprise, particularly in view of the fact that in Massachusetts, for instance, very strict laws and ordinances were passed to curb an overindulgence in diversion. But the Boston Town Records as well as the colony records of Connecticut and Massachusetts provide many examples of the ineffectiveness of the laws because of a rampant lack of enforcement.⁴³ Several towns had difficulties enforcing the laws because their inhabitants refused to serve as constables or because of constables neglecting their duties.⁴⁴ It is also worth noting that, if some laws — such as those against gaming, for example — were enforced and people were fined, the fines were in many cases subsequently remitted.

The evidence of the jeremiads gains even more credibility with the diaries and travel reports of non-Puritan visitors who comment on the seventeenth century New England scene. John Josselyn, John Dunton, and Edward Ward all but corroborate the picture of a New England Puritan laity who knew how to recreate themselves and found enough occasions to do so despite the injunctions of laws and religion.⁴⁵

The historiography of American sport will have to reconsider some of the judgments passed on the early Puritans in New

⁴¹The synod's result was published in Boston, 1679.

⁴²Published by Cotton Mather et al., Boston, 1719, pp. 2-3. See also Cotton Mather, *A Black List of Evil Customs*, annexed to his *Advice from the Watchtower* (Boston, 1713).

⁴³See Boston Town Records, loc. cit., vol. I, p. 145; *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), vol. III, pp. 147-46; Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), vol. I, pp. 212, 213, and vol. IV, pp. 469-470.

⁴⁴See David H. Flaherty, op. cit., pp. 16, 167, 190, 195, 215.

⁴⁵See John Josselyn, *An Account of Two Voyages to New-England*, (second edition, London, 1675), repr. in Colls. of Mass. Hist. Soc., 3rd ser., vol. 3 (1833), pp. 211-355; John Dunton, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (first printed in 1818, New York, 1969), passim; Edward Ward, *A Trip to New England* in 1699, in George P. Winship, ed., Boston in 1682 and 1699: *A Trip to New England by Edward Ward. A Letter from New England by J. W.*, (Providence, 1905), passim. Ward's 'Trip' was first published in London in 1699.

England. In addition, it would be fruitful if some further attempts were made in the field of New England Puritanism itself in order to get a better idea of what was happening in the recreational sector in the seventeenth century. For a host of questions remain to be answered: Did the New England Puritans know the same recreations as the English Puritans? What was typically "American" in the recreational life of the New World? Did the same classes practice the same recreations, or did the frontier contribute to a levelling of class distinctions? In toto, then, seventeenth century New England and its recreational life still offer a plethora of unsettled issues which are waiting to be explored by historians of sport and recreation.