

**Puritans and Sport:
The Irretrievable Tide of Change
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Year after year the historical, or hysterical, battle has raged over the New England Puritans and their sport. Did they, or did they not sport? Did they forbid others within society to sport? Upon what bases did they accept or reject sport? To answer such questions, historians have frequently relied upon evidence provided by certain individuals who lived at distinct times within the colonial period. Newspapers, legal sources, and sermons, as well, have rendered valuable, if limited, information.

Too often, however, these historians have insufficiently considered the perspective of the sources. They have ignored or underrated the importance of chronology and the role in which his society had cast that individual. Thus, historians may have ascertained the scope of participation of selected individuals within Puritan society, and they may have isolated the attitudes toward sport of discrete portions of the population. They have not, however, produced a comprehensive analysis of sport reflecting the dynamic totality of Puritan society. In fact, the failure to acknowledge the perspective of the evidence has frequently obscured the changes evident in the course of Puritan society, particularly in light of the vast research of the last two decades detailing the transformation of that society in America.

A developmental examination of sport within the first century of Puritan society in Massachusetts Bay can perhaps more adequately provide the necessary societal perspective. In Massachusetts Bay, the initial Puritan enterprise in the new world, three generations appeared in the course of the first one hundred years, 1630-1730. During this century a transformation occurred within the value system as structured and interpreted by those Puritans. Initiated as a Puritan attempt to preserve

the visible church, the colonial enterprise coalesced as a mercantile outpost of the British empire.¹

As a behavioral form defined in terms of the seventeenth century,² sport becomes a vehicle for the observation of changes in societal attitudes and institutions. Thus, the habits of participation and attitudes in Massachusetts Bay achieve greater clarity as these emerge within the context of that dynamic society, and as they represent similarities and differences among three generations.

THE PLAN FOR SOCIETY, 1630-1730

The initial generation of Puritans who settled in Massachusetts Bay resolved to establish a society dedicated to the preservation of the visible church and bound by a philosophy which clearly defined man's role and niche in the world. As descendants of Adam, the Puritans recognized themselves as corrupt men who had been given a second chance to achieve salvation. To escape the experiences of the disorderly, ungodly world, the Puritans established a "city upon a hill" in Massachusetts Bay.³ John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company in the new world, identified for his colonists the values which God had ordained for all his creations. Hierarchy, inequality, mutuality, variety, and order were all observable in nature.⁴ Conformity to the rest of God's works demanded the implanting of these values in society. Only through self-consciousness of one's emotions and attitudes toward behavior could a Puritan hope to entertain a godly mind.⁵

A few years before the journey to New England, John Downname advised his congregation of the lifetime service

¹Particular treatments of the change in Puritan society to which one should refer include: Paul Conkin, *Puritans and Pragmatists* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1968); Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way: The Puritan Social Ethic in the First Century of Settlement in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); David Hawke, *The Colonial Experience* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966); Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town; The First One Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970); Robert Middlekauff, *The Mothers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1597-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972); Gary Warden, *Boston, 1689-1776* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970); and Larzor Ziff, *Puritanism in America* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).

²Sir John Murray, *Oxford English Dictionary*, reprint of *New English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), X, 665-667. Broadly stated in seventeenth century terms, sport connotes (1) a pleasant pastime, entertainment or amusement; recreation, diversion; (2) to amuse, entertain, or recreate oneself, especially by active exercise in the open air; to take part in some game or play; to frolic or gambol; (3) to deal with in a light or trifling way. Further limitations on the term appear within the literature of the Puritans.

³John Winthrop, "Modell of Christian Charity," in *Winthrop Papers* (6 vols. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929-1947), II, 295.

⁴*Ibid.*, 282-283.

⁵Robert Middlekauff, *op. cit.*, 6.

required by God and, though possibly inadvertently, of the place that sport might hold in the Puritan value system:

Wee must constantly and continually, in everything, and at everytime, performe service unto God in all our actions and throughout our whole course and conversation . . . in the meanest duties of the basest calling, yea even in our eating and drinking, lawful sports and recreations, when as wee doe them in faith.⁶

Sport might thus be as mutually beneficial to man as eating and drinking, especially if pursued in lawful forms and attentive to order.

In a later publication Downname emphasized the necessity of "due recreation." He acknowledged the fatigue and dissatisfaction bred by dull constance in one's calling and encouraged moderate participation in ". . . allowable Sports as best fit with mens severall dispositions for their comfort and refreshing."⁷ Downname suggested, as well, that sport was a dichotomous concept, implying both conformance and non-conformance to the Puritan value system.

About the same time in Massachusetts Bay, Winthrop struggled with the occurrence of sport in his life:

When I had some tyme abstained from suche worldly delights as my heart most desired, I grewe melancholick and uncomfortable, for I had been more careful to refraine from an outward conversation in the world, than to keepe the love of the world out of my heart, or to uphold my conversation in heaven . . . I grewe unto a great dullnesse and discontent: which being at last perceived, I examined my heart, and findinge it needfull to recreate my minde with some outward recreation, I yielded unto it, and by a moderate exercise herein was much refreshed . . .⁸

Abstention had created disorder in Winthrop's life; melancholy and discomfort had detracted from his attention to God. Yet to ensnare his "heart so farre in worldly delights" forced him to cool "the graces of the spirit by them."⁹

⁶John Downname, "Guide to Godlynesse" (London, 1622), 164.

⁷John Downname, "The Christian Warfare," (London, 1634), 969-990. Puritans used the term calling in three senses, in each of which God always calls to man. Most broadly, God called man to commit himself in any given right action. Secondly, God called man to be saved; thus the "general" or "effectual" calling. Finally, God summoned man to a worldly occupation, the "particular" calling for one's own subsistence and that of the public good. Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), 69-70.

⁸John Winthrop, *op. cit.*, I. 201-202.

⁹*Ibid.*

Moderation, Downname had called the key to order in one's life. Winthrop discovered a similar sense of sobriety when "outward recreation" was necessary. The mind dominated God's gifts to man, but activities of the body might refresh an overworked mind. The maintenance of order necessitated mutual operations between mind and body. Moderation in sport, in its recreative sense, provided a balancing factor ordained by God.

Unfortunately for the reputation of sport, not all of the Puritan immigrants shared Winthrop's conceptions of values. Even as the earliest settlers embarked from English shores, the Reverend John White of Dorchester noted a diversity present among the voyagers:

As it were absurd to conceive they have all one minde,
so were it ridiculous to imagine they have all one scope.
Necessitie may presse some; Noveltie draw on others,
hopes of gaine in time to come may prevaile with a
third sort; but the most and most sincere and godly
part have advancement of the Gospel for their maine
scope I am confident . . . ¹⁰

Members of the Company realized that men were corrupt and that few, if any, could adhere to the strict behavioral code every moment of his life. To this end the Puritans employed the civil government, wherein elected magistrates covenanted with freeholding church members to govern according to "God's laws and man's."¹¹ The people had the liberty to do what was good, just and honest, as exemplified by right thinking men.

As the epitome of right thinking men and guardians of the churches, the magistrates had to insure the sanctity of the Sabbath. The Court of Assistants in 1630 ordered that John Baker ". . . shalbe whipped for shooteing att fowle on the Sabbath day."¹² The implication is that the Court punished Baker for his inattention to the Sabbath, rather than for his fowling. Within five years all person absent from church meetings faced fines or imprisonment.¹³ The records indicate that church absentees engaged in sport less frequently than

¹⁰John White, "The Planters Plea: or the Grounds of Plantations Examined and Usual Objections Answered" (London, 1630), n. p.

¹¹John Winthrop, "Remarks on Liberty," in Russell Nye and Norman Grabo, editors, *American Thought and Writing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), I, 59-61.

¹²*Records of the Governor and the Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, edited by Nathaniel B. Shurtleff (Boston: William White Press, 5 vols., 1853), I, November 30, 1631, 82. Hereafter cited as *Massachusetts Records*. For the purposes of the paper the colonial practice of double dating the months of January-March has been deleted, and those months on included as the first and third of each new year.

¹³*Massachusetts Records*, I, March 4, 1635, 140.

they drank, labored unnecessarily, or traveled. Sport apparently maintained its position in the delicate hierarchy on the Sabbath.

Magistrates similarly restricted sport, or more precisely the occasion for sport, when this detracted from the economic success of the colony and social order. Perhaps the underlying theme of the first generation was the promotion of the public good. Thomas Hooker warned against the designs and devices of individuals whose selfish activities would precipitate “the distraction and desolation of the whole” and “prejudice the publike good.”¹⁴ In a society without institutions to care for the poor, the criminals, and other societal malcontents, the magistrates had to prevent such unstabilizing germs, rather than wait to treat the products.

Initially the magistrates assumed that the family, the cornerstone of society since Biblical times, would establish and maintain social order. To the master reverted the responsibilities of maintaining a financially successful calling and insuring proper behavior.

When heads of families failed in their duties, the General Court enacted legislation providing for the disposition of the poor, and for constables to “search after all manner of gaming, singing and dancing” and “disordered meetings” in private residences.¹⁵ Magistrates regulated occasions for vast expense of money and time and those conducive to disorderly conduct. They apparently perceived that gaming with cards, dice, or tables threatened the financial security of both individuals and colony, and they placed the burden of responsibility predominantly upon the family head.¹⁶

In many respects the inns and common houses of entertainment disrupted the orderly arrangement of society. Though necessary for the housing of travelers, these houses encountered rigid surveillance of visitor tenure, volume and price of liquors and tobacco, and activities permitted on the premises. The General Court scrutinized the taverns primarily because:

. . . it hath appeared unto this court, upon many sad complaints, that much drunkenness, wast of the good creatures of God, mispence of precious time, & other disorders have frequently fallen out in the inns . . . whereby God is much dishonored, the pfession of

¹⁴Thomas Hooker, “A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline” (London, 1648), 188.

¹⁵Massachusetts Records, II, 70, 180.

¹⁶Massachusetts Records, I, March 22, 1631; November 5, 1639, 280.

religion repoched, & the welfare of this comonwealth greatly impaired, & the true vse of such houses (being the necessary releefe of travellers) subverted . . .¹⁷

Owners who disregarded these laws lost their licenses, while offenders faced fines and corporal punishment.

Since people could not legally enjoy gaming in their own residences, apparently some traveled to the inns for that opportunity. Not until 1647 did the General Court outlaw shovelboard, and shortly after bowling and gaming in general, "... whereby much pcious time is spent unfruitfully, & much wast of wine & beare occasioned thereby . . ."¹⁸ The delay in banning these games, as well as the emphasis on unprofitability and drunkenness, suggest that the magistrates did not intend to denounce the nature of the game, but rather to attack over-spending and inebriation.

Aside from the desire, in varying degrees, for economic stability and order in society, sport reflected other values and habits of Puritan life. In 1639 the first military company organized and depended upon physical exercise, marksmanship and athletic contests, and mock battles as the core of the training day.¹⁹ Competitive matches emerged as tests of skill.

Military leaders sometimes restricted other occasions for sport. Near Salem in 1636, three men vacated their posts to go fowling. Instead of being happily diverted by birds, they fell prey to lurking Indians. Only one man returned to face the wrath of the lieutenant whose orders had been countered.²⁰

Sport provided a means by which some men could support both the hierarchical composition of society and the public welfare. On the *Arbella* Winthrop had announced that "... in all times some must be rich, some poor; some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection."²¹ In the first decade alone two men seemingly tried to replicate the English game preserve. In 1632 John Perkins reserved two areas in which he could "... take Fowle wth netts."²² From the town of Salem in 1639, Emmanuell Downing received five

¹⁷*Massachusetts Records*, I, November 30, 1637, 213.

¹⁸*Massachusetts Records*, II, May 26, 1647, 195; III, June 19, 1650, 201.

¹⁹*Massachusetts Records*, I, March 13, 1639, 250; John Winthrop, *Journal*, edited by James K. Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2 vols., 1908), II, September 15, 1640, 42; Norma Schwendener, *A History of Physical Education in the United States* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1942), 6.

²⁰John Winthrop, *Journal*, *op. cit.*, I, October 8, 1636, 192.

²¹John Winthrop, *Papers*, *op. cit.*, II, 282.

²²*Massachusetts Records*, I, April 3, 1632, 94.

hundred acres for the “. . . taking wild foule by way of duck coy.” The General Court, “. . . being desiros to encourage the & others, in such designs as tend to publike good . . .”, forbade all others to shoot within a half mile of the pond.²³

The experience of Downing and Perkins suggest that sport provided some occasions for society to focus upon the individual, especially when the needs of the individual and the community coincided. By 1641 the rights of freemen appeared printed as the Body of Liberties. One of the articles insured householders of their rights to fish and fowl for sport or livelihood within the limits of their towns.²⁴ Six years later concerns for horses as property and the rights of their owners instigated a law against “. . . a very evill practice of some disordred psons . . . who do use to take othr mens horses . . . & ride them at their pleasure . . .”²⁵ This did not ban horseracing, and was only intended to protect the rights of horseowners.

Thus, in the first two decades of Puritan life in Massachusetts Bay, the occurrence of sport was very real, reflecting both values and diversity within that society. Frequently the occasions for sport detracted from societal values, at least as conceived of by magistrates. Magistrates sought to limit these occasions and, in effect, may have restricted participation. Yet, when Samuel Maverick described Boston, he noted that its streets were lined with “. . . good shoppes well furnished with all kinds of merchandize . . .” and “. . . full of Girles and Boys sporting up and down, with a continued concourse of people.”²⁶

IMPOSED HOMOGENEITY, 1650-1690

Maverick’s approving comments on the progress of society do not in any way predict the crisis which befell the Puritans after mid century. As members of the second generation came of age, fewer of them joined the congregations. In their failure either to experience or relate conversion experiences and thus become baptized members, they threatened the original mission of the colony to preserve the church. Ministers and magistrates reacting to the decline in membership, which reached a record low in the 1650’s and continued through the 1680’s, transformed

²³*Massachusetts Records*, I, September 6, 1638, 236; Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem: by the author, 1926), II, 25-27.

²⁴“Body of Liberties of 1641,” number 16. in Edwin Powers. *Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts, 1620-1692* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1966), 535.

²⁵*Massachusetts Records*, II, May 26, 1647, 195; “Body of Liberties,” number 92, *Op. Cit.*, 544.

²⁶Samuel Maverick, “A Briefe Description of New England and the Severall Townes therein,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, Second Series, I (1885), 238.

their mission into one of preserving an entire people.²⁷ They isolated groups within society and attacked heterogeneous attitudes. In a miscalculated effort to resurrect the supposedly homogeneous society of the first generation, they succeeded only in arousing hostility, some guilt, and greater diversity.

Ministers believed that the key to the survival of the pure church lay within the grasp of the children. If the children failed in their demonstrations of conversion, God would vent his wrath upon the entire plantation. Magistrates, by virtue of their guardianship of the churches, ordered all family masters and town officials to prevent:

. . . soundry abuses and misdemeanors, comitted by soundry persons of the Lords day, not only by children playing in the streetes and other places, but by youths, majds, and other persons, both straungers and others, uncivilly walking the streets and feilds, travailing from toune to toune, going on shipboard, frequenting comon howses and other places to drincke, sport and otherwise mispend that pretjous tyme . . .²⁸

Youths over the age of fourteen and strangers, “. . . the reputed great provokers of the high displeasure of Almighty God,” apparently seized upon sport and other socializing activities as alternatives to Sabbath solitude.

The General Court decried the youths who took the “. . . liberty to walke & sporte themselves in the streets or feilds . . .”, disturbed the religious preparations of others, and “. . . too frequently repajre to publique houses of entertainment & there sitt drinking . . .”²⁹ Apparently the Court sought to enforce a rigid homogeneity within a society which had already become diverse. In an effort to preserve the efficacy of the congregations, the Court legislated against religious disturbances and excessive drinking. Many people did not carefully discriminate places or times for their participation, at a time when the colony’s leaders had chosen to preserve the plantation from the fire and brimstone of God.

²⁷Stephen Foster, *Op. Cit.*, 177. Boston’s First Church entered 265 in 1630, 31 in 1650’s; 39 in 1680’s; Charleston entered 98 in 1630’s, 26 in 1650’s, and 39 in 1680’s; Roxbury entered 112 in 1630’s, 21 in 1650’s, and 49 in 1680’s. Other congregations substantiated similar declines, at a time when the population increased fourfold. Further discussions of the facts and the affect on the quantity of the freeman electorate may be found in: Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 88, 104-105; Richard C. Simmons, “Freemanship in Early Massachusetts: Some Suggestions and a Case Study,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 19 (1962), 422-428; Simmons, “Godliness, Property, and the Franchise in Puritan Massachusetts: an Interpretation,” *Journal of American History*, 55, (1968-1969), 495-511; Robert E. Wall, Jr., “The Massachusetts Bay Colony Franchise in 1647,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 27 (1970), 136-344.

²⁸*Massachusetts Records*, IV part I, August 30, 1653, 150-151.

²⁹*Massachusetts Records*, IV part I, October 19, 1657, 347.

One must realize, however, that within society a common acceptable focus on sport must have existed. Without a sporting vernacular and some recognized values, there would have been no basis for the apparent divisions which arose. John Cotton and Increase Mather concurred that one's perspective determined the efficacy of the activity.³⁰ In nearly the same breath in which he denounced gaming, the second generation Mather admitted that "For a Christian to use Recreation is very lawful, and in some cases a great Duty . . ."³¹

Ministers generally applied to sport the dictates of service to God. Some Puritans observed that sport provided desirable opportunities for socialization, for military preparedness, or for recreation and catharsis. Whether in London or Boston, Samuel Sewall swam, fished, and recognized bowling greens.³² In 1679 John Richardson exhorted the militia men to attain greater skill:

Victory is the Mark that skill aims at; Skill of hand,
Strength of body,³³ & Courage of mind do make a com-
pleat Champion.

Harvard College officials even allotted a minimum two and one-half hours for sport among their students after 1655.³⁴

A man relaxed and refreshed through sport could function more efficiently in his calling. If this calling fulfilled the needs of the community, the benefit to all was obvious. Puritans continued to respond to the communal ideal so obvious during the first twenty years in Massachusetts Bay. However, the degree of commitment to that response varied. Whereas once Winthrop had to judge only for himself and record in his own diary how much sport he might enjoy, now Cotton defined and printed for others similar limitations.³⁵ Ministers at training days seemingly cajoled, or at least challenged, recruits to strive for skill and to distinguish the play of boys from that of men³⁶ Yet, no longer did they act and speak simply to vindicate their own actions. They could not stamp out the heterogeneous attitudes toward sport. Even the Reverend Peter Thatcher of

³⁰John Cotton, "A Practical Commentary, or An Exposition with Observations, Reasons and Uses upon the first Epistle General of John" (London, 1656), 125-128; Increase Mather, "A Testimony Against Several Profane and Superstitious Customs" (Boston, 1688), 37.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674-1729*, Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Fifth Series, 1878-1882 (New York: Arno Press, 3 vols., 1972), I, July 8, 1689, 264; July 12, 1687, 182.

³³John Richardson, "The Necessity of a Well-Experienced Soldiery" (Cambridge, 1679), 10.

³⁴*Harvard College Records* (Boston: Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 3 vols., 1935), III, 330-333.

³⁵John Cotton, *op. cit.*, 125-126.

³⁶John Richardson, *op. cit.*, 10, Samuel Nowell, "Abraham in Arms" (Boston, 1678), 19.

³⁷Increase Mather, *op. cit.*, 37.

Milton purchased “ ‘a pack of ninepins and bowle’.”³⁸ Soldiers on active duty during King Philip’s War in 1675 lost their arms while gaming.³⁹

Those who attempted to dictate the acceptable values of sport probably did not fear that men would sport, but rather certain occasions for sport and the aftermath of some of these. The laws and sermons of the second generation anticipated God’s wrath, for the most part, because of the largely misunderstood decline in church membership. By instilling order, a sense of conforming order ascertained by more and more artificial officers and institutions, these leaders hoped to return their people to the path of God. The gradual increase in population, Indian threats to a more distant frontier, and vacillating periods of economic expansion and contraction presented new problems to second generation leaders.

In an attempt to enforce uniformity, Harvard College had actually reacted in a positive sense by permitting sport on campus and not allowing students to venture off campus.⁴⁰ Magistrates, however, did not so readily solve the problems of filling the churches and preserving the communities. Taverns continually irritated those who tried to order society. Leaders among the second generation became ever more concerned about the opportunities these taverns provided. Shuffleboard and bowling had already become forbidden, at least partly because of the gaming element. In 1651 the General Court forbade dancing at weddings in taverns because “. . . there are many abuses and disorders by dancing in ordinaries . . .”⁴¹

It is quite possible that dancing itself was not the target of the Court. John Cotton and, later, Increase Mather, accepted dance, although Cotton favored its mixed form, while Mather, unmixed.⁴² The abuses and disorders may, in fact, have arisen not from dancing but from the assemblage of a crowd, the containment of which posed grave problems for the few constables and selectmen. Dancing and drinking, when enjoyed together, enabled people to perpetrate actions which threatened the lives around them and elicited God’s wrath.

³⁸Alice M. Earle, *Custom and Fashions in Old New England* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 237-238.

³⁹*Massachusetts Records*, V, October 13, 1675, 50.

⁴⁰*Harvard College Records*, *op. cit.*, 330-331.

⁴¹*Massachusetts Records*, II, May 7, 1651, 224.

⁴²John Cotton, “Letter to R. Levett,” quoted in E. D. Hansom, editor, *The Heart of the Puritan* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917), 177; Samuel Foster Damon, *The History of Square-Dancing* (Worcester, Massachusetts: The Davis Press, Inc., 1952), 64.

The Essex County Court arrested Thomas Wheeler in 1653 for “. . . profane and foolish dancing; singing and wanton speeches, probably being drunk . . .”⁴³ Wheeler’s crime actually lay in his “speakinge sinfull and reprochfull speeches” against Reverend Cobbett of Lynn. His imbibing had probably supplied the impetus for “profane dancing.” The court records are replete with cases involving drunkenness, fornication, and lewd behaviors, not with dancing.

On other occasions as well, sport constituted a threat to the safety of the colonists and to the order of society in general. In Boston the selectmen and the council reacted to the dangers of foot-ball :

Forasmuch as sundry complaints are made that several persons have received hurt by boys and young men playing at football in the streets, these are therefore to enjoin that none be found at that game in any of the streets, lanes, or enclosures of this town, under penalty of twenty shillings for every such offense.⁴⁴

By 1662 cases of “violent rideing in the streets” of Boston occurred so frequently that the General Court railed against the effect of “. . . indaingering the bodies and lives of many persons . . .”⁴⁵ Apparently, by 1672, the danger had not abated. Coupled with the economic disasters attendant upon horse racing for money, the Court of Assistants cited the “Hazard of their limbs and lives” as reasons for refusing to permit this sport within four miles of any town.⁴⁶

Men carrying cocks offered an exciting pastime for some Bostonians. Samuel Sewall described one such incident:

Jos. Maylem carries a Cock at his back, with a Bell in ’s hand, in the Main Street; several follow him blind-fold, underpretence of striking him or ’s cock, with great cartships strike passengers, and make great disturbance.⁴⁷

Judge Sewall ordered the constables to “. . . take effectual care to suppress and dissipate all unlawful Assemblies or tumultuous gatherings . . .” arising from “. . . Shailing or throwing at Cocks and such like Disorders, tending to the disturbance of their

⁴³Essex Quarterly Court Records (Boston: Essex Institute, 8 vols., 1911-1921), I, 286-287.

⁴⁴“Second Report of the Boston Records Commissioners,” In *The Memorial History of Boston, 1630-1880*, edited by Justin Windsor (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1880), 229.

⁴⁵“Massachusetts Records, IV part II, October 8, 1662, 59-60.

⁴⁶*Massachusetts Court of Assistants Records, 1630-1692* (Boston: published by the County of Suffolk, 3 vols., 1901), II, April 9, 1672.

⁴⁷Samuel Sewall, *Diary*, I, February 15, 1687, 167; February 16, 1686, 122.

Magesties liege People, and breach of the peace.”⁴⁸ Governor Bradford himself signed the order. Though the magistrates uttered not a word against cock scaling itself, they condemned the dangers to the community inherent in the situation.

Perhaps the concept of gaming most adequately represents the diversity in attitude present within Puritan culture. During the first twenty years of settlement, gaming emerged as an illegal activity, primarily as a result of economic necessity. After 1650 gaming seemingly attracted more numerous proponents and opponents.

Concurrent with the unfavorable decline in church membership, John Cotton pictured the enmity of religion to card games. Since the distribution of cards lay in the hands of God, he argued “. . . to appeal to him and his providence for dispensing these ludicra, seemeth . . . a taking of God’s name in vain.”⁴⁹ Nearly thirty years later, Increase Mather deplored the lottery even more adamantly:

Now a Lot is a serious thing not to be trifled with; the Scripture saith not only (as some would have it) of Extraordinary Lots, but of a Lot in general, that the whole Disposing (or Judgement) thereof is of the Lord He that makes use of a Lot, wholly commits his affair to a Superior Cause than either nature or art, therefore unto God. But this ought not to be done in a Sportful Lusory way.⁵⁰

Mather’s son Cotton, while deploring the further fallen state of young people, even more viciously attacked the “Scandalous Games of Lottery.”⁵¹

The ministers’ outcries must have fallen on many deaf ears. In 1662 the Pyncheon Court heard testimony from John Henryson who, along with five others, played cards because “. . . I was willing to have recreation for my wife to drive away melancholy.” He admitted that “. . . he was willing to do anything when his wife was Ill to make her merry.”⁵² Paul Parker, a two time gamester, was finally convicted for “. . . being a very ill example to the youth”⁵³

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, March 4, 1690, 312-313.

⁴⁹John Cotton, *op. cit.*, 177.

⁵⁰Increase Mather, *op. cit.*, 30.

⁵¹Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather*, edited by Worthington C. Ford (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 2 vols., 1911), I, July 30, 1690, 202.

⁵²*Colonial Justice in Western Massachusetts, 1639-1702: Pyncheon Court Records*, edited by Joseph H. Smith (Cambridge University Press, 1961), March 20, 1662, 257. Hereafter cited as *Pyncheon Court Records*.

⁵³*Court of Assistants*, III, March 1, 1669, 201; *Massachusetts Records*, IV part II, May 31, 1670, 453.

By 1670 the General Court noted the great increase in gaming and issued yet another law on the basis that:

Whereas the great sin of gaming increaseth wth in this jurisdiction to the great dishonour of God, corrupting of youth & expending of much pretjous time & estate⁵⁴

Into the preamble of this law, the Court bound all the major concerns of the colony's leaders: sin, wayward or less than ideal youth, and economy, both of time and money.

It is quite possible that gaming was more popular and widespread than the General Court would have liked to have believed. Both civil and military personnel continued to play cards. Masters, innkeepers, and servants alike played cards and used dice.⁵⁵ Nor did the Court succeed in halting the importation and sale of devices for gaming. In a single court session in Suffolk County, five ships inventoried packs of cards sold for three shillings apiece.⁵⁶

Two primary factors appeared to negate, or at least limit, the effectiveness of the laws and the desired conformity to first generation values. The first of these was the declining ability of the family to instill discipline and thus preserve social order. To offset this decline, magistrates had to instill more artificial institutions and officers to carry out what were once family responsibilities. By 1655 the General Court had established houses of correction.⁵⁷ It empowered constables and selectmen to “. . . take notice of comon coasters, unprofitable fowlers, and other idle psons . . .”, as well as to restrain the “Vnreuerent carriage and behavior of divers young psons.”⁵⁸ Within the next twenty years tithingmen replaced the heads of families as executors of Sabbath discipline and, shortly thereafter, could interfere in all family disorders.⁵⁹ The poor, the unbridled, and the indolent faced rehabilitation within the militia, jails, homes of esteemed families, and minor alms houses.⁶⁰

The second emanated from inconsistencies within the calling doctrine and stewardship of wealth concept. Some Puritans envisioned financial gain to be derived from sporting ventures.

⁵⁴*Massachusetts Records*, IV part II, May 11, 1670, 449.

⁵⁵*Pyncheon Court Records*, March 20, 1678, 289; *Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671-1680* (Boston: Published by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2 vols., 1933), I, October 2, 1672, 184; April 29, 1673, 259, 263; II, January 27, 1680, 1162. Hereafter cited as *Suffolk Court Records*.

⁵⁶*Suffolk Court Records*, I, January 30, 1672, 58.

⁵⁷*Massachusetts Records*, IV part I, May 23, 1655, 222.

⁵⁸*Massachusetts Records*, IV part I, Mar 17, 1658, 325; IV part I, October 19, 1654, 200.

⁵⁹Larzor Ziff, *op. cit.*, 193.

⁶⁰*Massachusetts Records*, I, June 6, 1639, 264; II, November 4, 1646, 179-180; V, June 1, 1677, 144.

Yet the speculation involved in gaming or providing dancing lessons was not recognized by the authorities as a legitimate and fruitful economic venture. As long as men with economic success sat in judgment of the colony, they ruled against the elements of chance in sport, its apparent unprofitability, and disorder. At least two dancing masters left Boston in a state of financial insolvency, while a tavern owner was prevented from renting a room to a man “to shew tricks in.”⁶¹

The second generation society, at least the Puritan leaders among them, did not preserve a Christian utopia in Massachusetts Bay, nor did they succeed in impressing a homogeneous character upon the ruled. By singling out distinct groups, the ministers marked an actual fragmentation in society. Laws involving sport illustrate the merging of concerns for sin, economy, and order.

For many members of society, sport retained much of its original essence. Sport provided diversion, recreation, competitive skill training, and healthful exercise. Henryson even rationalized that an illegal sporting activity might indeed provide the same essential benefits. Others began to envision economic opportunities.

THE FRACTURING OF SOCIETY, 1690-1730

As the second generation merged with the third, this fragmenting process continued. A new English administration and interference with Massachusetts introduced several variables into the predominantly Puritan culture of Massachusetts. More direct colonial contact with England and greater proximity to British society at home and abroad helped to diversify colonial society.⁶² As a result of both external and internal factors, Massachusetts society generated a greater degree of attitudinal and role change than it ever had previously. Sport was both affected by and reflected this transformation. Opportunities for the recreational and economic functions of sport increased, while positive and negative attitudes solidified. Newspaper advertisements of sporting events appeared and laws regulating sport as a behavior declined in frequency.

After 1690 external factors enhanced the religious fluctuations within Massachusetts. In the aftermath of the Glorious

⁶¹Sewall, *Diary*, I, November 12, 1665, 103-104; December 17, 1685, 112; July 28, 1686, 145; December 4 1687, 196; *Court of Assistants*, I, 1681, 197.

⁶²Gary B. Warden, *op. cit.*, 36; Stephen Foster, *op cit.*, 92-93; David Hawke, *op cit.*, 342-344

Revolution, the English parliament had passed the Act of Toleration. To the Anglican population and other sects in Massachusetts, coupled with a franchise based on financial qualifications, this meant greater freedom from Puritan religious restraint. Ministers reacted intensely to their loss of domination and to the failures of their own congregation members to exhibit conversion experiences. The treatment of sport by the ministers illustrates their confused and frequently reactionary opinions and attitudes.

At militia trainings, always a natural forum with an isolated audience, ministers frequently used metaphors of sport to praise, inspire, and harangue the men. The Christian soldier, who vigilantly protected his god and his society, warranted great praise. "Indeed men of Martial Spirits and Skill ought to be Encouraged. These Trainings and Exercises are very commendable . . .", emphasized Peter Thatcher.⁶³ Benjamin Wadsworth cited biblical injunctions and maneuvers for artillery men and grenadiers. More importantly, however, Boone differentiated between classes in society. He warned the private soldier to avoid drunkenness and gaming, but to gentlemen and commanders he spoke in terms of "healthful Exercise", so becoming to their stations in life.⁶⁵

Joseph Belcher reminded his listeners of the spiritual purpose of one's calling. He urged his comrades to battle effectively, to win the prize, and to obtain victory, and he portrayed the Apostle Paul as the epitome of the ultimate victor in heaven. Possibly Belcher believed that the utilization of talent and training for success in one's particular calling had finally superseded the societal goal of unity and the attainment of heaven. "You are not called to quit your pleasures, only change the objects of them," Belcher advised the militia.⁶⁶

The militia sermons and attitudes toward training days represent a mingling of concerns. At times the ministers appeared as a conservative force trying to revitalize the essence of community with God as the focus. Sport was useful to them as a medium for instilling discipline, cooperation, and the will to struggle. Almost simultaneously however, they recognized other, more personal interpretations of the same elements which

⁶³ Peter Thatcher, "The Saints' Victory" (Boston, 1696), 37.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Wadsworth, "Good Soldiers A Great Blessing" (Boston, 1700), 8, 21.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Boone, "Military Discipline: The Compleat Soldier" (Boston, 1701), 55, 57.

⁶⁶ Joseph Belcher, "A Victory Over Those Habits of Sin Which War Against the Soul" (Boston, 1698), 4-8.

could and did exist. The ministers helped to consummate a class society by speaking to gentlemen in a different tone than to others. They advocated rational thought and efficiency of body, mind, and spirit.⁶⁷

The minister's treatment of the family and children is similarly reflective of the struggle to accommodate the style of a fluctuating society to the values of their fathers and grandfathers. For some, such as Cotton Mather and Benjamin Wadsworth, sport provided a medium through which they could regulate and educate their children. Mather even translated sporting phrases into Latin for his son Sam to study.⁶⁸

The society did recognize that childhood represented a stage in maturity distinct from that of youth or adulthood. Benjamin Wadsworth urged parents to distinguish between the play of children and that of youth.⁶⁹ Henry Gibbs, by 1727, noted that too many parents cared more for the worldly circumstances of their children than for their spiritual fulfillment, just as the former did for themselves.⁷⁰

In 1709 Increase Mather authored a simmering "Advice to a Young Man" distinguishing between lawful, moderate sporting and the indulgence in "sinful sports and pastimes".⁷¹ William Cooper published an entire sermon dedicated to "How and Why Young People Should Cleanse Their Way," while Thomas Foxcroft admonished impenitent youth to ". . . abandon evil Company, Forsake the foolish, and live."⁷² Daniel Lewes vigorously condemned the "waste" among the young and ministered to youth as an impersonal state of being, an "it".⁷³

The impersonality and harsh tones present within Lewes' sermon seem to indicate a more complete ministerial isolation from society. Rather than to comply with the values of a changing society, many of these ministers chose to follow the paths established by predecessors. They could not meet the needs of the society by developing constructive sermons, so they splintered the flock into distinct groups and criticized those. Azariah Mather attacked travelers and sailors who, he believed,

⁶⁷Ebenezer Pemberton, "The Souldier Defended and Directed" (Boston, 1701), 15, 17-18.

⁶⁸Cotton Mather, *Diary*, II, 1712, 144; II, Jan. 29, 1716, 340.

⁶⁹Benjamin Wadsworth, "The Well-Ordered Family" (Boston, 1712), 47.

⁷⁰Henry Gibbs, "Godly Children Their Parents Joy" (Boston, 1727), 26, 28.

⁷¹Increase Mather, "Advice to a Young Man" (Boston, 1709), 28; "Meditations on the Lords Day" (Boston, 1711), n. p.

⁷²William Cooper, "How and Why Young People Should Cleanse Their Way" (Boston, 1716), 11; Thomas Foxcroft, "The Secure and Impenitent Youth Exhortations and Directions to Young People" (Boston, 1721), 20.

⁷³Daniel Lewes, "The Sins of Youth Remembered" (Boston, 1725), 5.

refused to observe the sanctity of the Sabbath when absent from Massachusetts.” Cotton Mather, as well, viewed returning seamen as being detrimental to the moral code which the ministers advocated.⁷⁵

As had been the practice of their fathers and grandfathers, the ministers after 1690 turned to magistrates for legitimate support of their position on behavior. The General Court retained its duty to protect the churches throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth. “An Act for the better Observation and Keeping the Lords-Day,” published a minimum of four times between 1692 and 1727, prohibited people from engaging in any unnecessary aspects of their ordinary callings, to travel, or to “. . . use any Game, Sport, Play or Recreation.”

The frequency with which this law appeared, the appearance of penalties for second offenders in 1716, and the additions of proscribed activities suggest, among other ideas, that the laws were disobeyed, ignored, or unknown. These factors may help to explain the continuous appearance of lotteries, sport, and drinking at taverns.

By 1719 the General Court concluded that the popularity of private lotteries, “Mischievous and Unlawful Games,” had increased among those who would least afford these diversions. The Court illegalized all private lotteries because:

. . . the Children and Servants of Several Gentlemen, Merchants, and Traders and other unwary People have been drawn into a vain and foolish Expence of Money, which tends to the utter Ruin and Impoverishment of many Families, and is to the Raproach of this Government, and against the Common Good, Trade, Welfare and Peace of the Province.⁷⁷

While public lotteries may have promoted the public welfare, private lotteries did not. Yet, continue they did. Three months after the law’s passage, Samuel Sewall entered in his diary confirmation of four newspaper advertisements for private lotteries⁷⁸

⁷⁴Azariah Mather, “The Sabbath-Day’s Rest Asserted” (Boston, 1709), 37-39, 67,

⁷⁵Cotton Mather, “The Sillour’s Companion” (Boston, 1709), 37-39.

⁷⁶*Acts and Laws of the Massachusetts General Court, 1684-1730, June 8, 1692, 17; 1714, 15; 1716, 279-280; November 22, 1727, 380-381.* Hereafter cited as *Acts and Laws*.

⁷⁷*Acts and Laws, May 27, 1719, 319.*

⁷⁸Samuel Sewall, “Letter to William Dummer,” August 12, 1719, in “Letter-book,” Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Sixth Series, II, 102-103.

Inns and taverns continued to be closely scrutinized by the General Court. To limit incentives for people to mispend or misuse time and money, the magistrates prohibited “. . . Dice, Cards, Tables, Bowles, Shuffleboard, Billiards, Coyts, Cales, Logats, or any implements used in Gaming.”⁷⁹ Unfortunately for the gamesters, who now bore the brunt of fines and punishment, many could not afford the luxury of gaming, while the state could not bear the expense of paupers. Magistrates legislated against the root causes of poverty and indolence and assured the colonists that if they did not make the proper choices, the choices would be made for them.

This idea of proper choices permeated society and became a very personal consideration when one's safety became endangered. Citizens of Boston, in reacting to the bodily harm inflicted by young boys sporting in the streets, restricted opportunities for throwing foot-balls, squibs, snowballs, and long bullets. Throwing the long bullet, made of iron, lead, brass, wood, or stone, resulted in “. . . divers Inconveniencies and may be of the Pernicious Consequence . . .”⁸⁰

The disapproval of foot-ball seems to relate directly to the site of its occurrence. Away from the confines of town streets and yards, players presumably did not endanger spectators or passersby. John Dunton, an English traveler, described the circumstances of such a game in Rowley:

. . . there was that day a great game of Foot-ball to be play'd with their feet, which I thought was very odd: but it was upon a broad Sandy Shoar, free from stones, which made it more easy. Neither were they so apt to trip up one anothers heels and quarrel, as I have seen 'em in England.⁸¹

The players maintained a sense of fair, competitive play and apparently had chosen to disallow any raucous behavior.

Apparently public recalcitrance to other sport forms diminished as some patrons of horse racing, bear baiting, and billiards removed these from the streets and taverns.⁸² Particularly after 1715, newspapers advertised rules, weights, wagers, and prizes, often to “gentlemen and others.” The designs of racing

⁷⁹*Acts and Laws*, June 8, 1692, 16-17; May 25, 1698, 275-276.

⁸⁰*Orders and By-Laws of the Inhabitants of Boston*, 1701, 11; 1719-1724, 27.

⁸¹Albert Bushnell Hart, *Common Wealth History of Massachusetts* (New York: The States History Company, 5 vols., 1927), II, 280.

⁸²*Boston News-Letter*, August 22-29, 1715; May 22-29, 1721; *Boston Gazette*, May 22, 1721, May 23-30, 1726; *New England Courant*, April 30, 1722.

competition became increasingly complex, as exemplified by this notice in the *Boston Gazette* in 1725:

This is to give notice to all gentlemen and others that there is to be Thirty Pounds in Money run for . . . by Six Horses, Mares or Geldings, Two miles . . . to carry 9 stone Weight, the Standard to be 14 hands high . . . Each one that Runs to have their Number from 1 to 6, to be drawn, and to run by 2 . . ., the 3 first Horses to run a second Heat . . .⁸³

The colonists who wrote and read this and other notices apparently knew how to organize sporting events and understood a concept of competition. Horses of fairly equal stature frequently ran for symbols of wealth and esteem, not merely for money purses. The prize signified the achievement of status for a single winner, an individual who relied upon his own talents to his own benefit rather than always for that of the community.

Some members of the third generation seized the opportunities provided by sport among the people to achieve financial gain in legitimate business ventures. Merchants in Salem and Boston stocked children's playthings, at times supplied by privateers.⁸⁴ Dancing masters taught for fees in Boston, where the popularity of dancing and balls among British officials probably helped to sway public opinion in their favor.⁸⁵ Cabinet makers fashioned card tables for sale to wealthy colonists, as indicated in estate inventories.⁸⁶ A farmer sold his orchard in 1712 to the Harvard College Corporation, which designated the land as “. . . a place of recreation and exercise for the scholars.”⁸⁷

A 1714 advertisement in the *Boston Newsletter* of a bowling green includes several intriguing comments about the society of that day. Daniel Stevens, the owner of the British Coffee House, invited men according to their position in society, “. . . all Gentlemen, Merchants, and others, that have a mind to Recreate themselves, shall be accomodated . . .”⁸⁸ By accommodating these men Stevens apparently sought to provide a service, in the form of recreation, to three distinct and recognized social

⁸³*Boston Gazette*, April 19-26, 1725.

⁸⁴Sidney Perley, *op. cit.*, III, 127; Alice M. Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York: The Mac-Millon Company, 1899), 361.

⁸⁵*Boston News-Letter*, March 1, 1713; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 176-177; Sewall, *Diary*, III, November 29, 1716, 111; January 7, 1718, 158; September 8, 1718, 193.

⁸⁶George Dow, *Everyday Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Boston: Published by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1935), 112, 115.

⁸⁷*Harvard College Records*, *op. cit.*, I, 401.

⁸⁸*Boston News-Letter*, April 26-May 3, 1714.

groupings. Further, as the owner of the British Coffee House, Stevens was not bound by laws regulating sporting activities in inns or taverns. Either the laws did not apply to coffee houses, or they were simply ineffective.

The Stevens' case is only one of many that reveals how far in practice the third generation had strayed from the ideal values established by the first. Economic success and social position, rather than the authority of God, reckoned the hierarchical organization of society. Individual initiative and a worldly competitive spirit replaced the older sense of mutuality, as the welfare of the individual superseded that of the community in many instances. Rational thought, particularly in matters of economic stability and personal safety, not revelation, helped to transform the concept of order. Men relied upon themselves rather than God for the plan of society.

Even the ministers could not stem the tide of change. Verbal vengeance became their weapon against practices which they did not completely understand or for which they assumed primarily negative consequences. To them the contraction of family responsibilities in maintaining order meant only that the family unit was disintegrating and negating its function in society. Few, if any, ministers realized that this transformation within the family might actually produce a more stable one, with members bound by love rather than fear.

Both Puritans and non-Puritans within the first century in Massachusetts Bay did sport and, undoubtedly, with increasing frequency as the century progressed. Several primary factors have arisen to at least partially explain this phenomenon. Perhaps the most obvious is that the Puritans were human and, as such, they demanded refreshment, relaxation, socialization, and competition, all of which sport provided. Secondly, is the fact that from the onset of the colony the immigrants never formed a uniform society, either in purpose or in action. Consequently, the interpretations of values and social mores varied widely among those possessing authority and those without such. Time and money served both God and men; however, the use of such by men did not always conform to religious dictates or civil enactments. What was idleness to some apparently represented the economic use of time to others.

Throughout this century the initially Puritan-oriented society diversified ever further. Non-Puritan immigrants speeded changes within towns and countryside. Massachusetts gradually

turned to the world, especially to that of mercantile Britain. The occasions for sport now fit the needs of the world of Daniel Stevens rather than that of John Winthrop.

Thus, the enigmatic status of sport in Puritan society emerges slightly less puzzling when viewed in the perspective of the first century society in Massachusetts Bay. Diverse sporting habits and attitudes existed because of the demands placed on sport and the roles devised for sport by the Puritans themselves. As a behavioral form, sport mirrored developments within Massachusetts Bay and, in turn, was affected by the transformation and diversification of that society. Individuals sported and groups sported, but only in the context of the entire society do their activities and attitudes begin to fit as pieces of an interlocking puzzle.