

**THOSE LOOSE LADIES: AN EXAMINATION OF SCANDALOUS PURITAN
WOMEN IN MASSACHUSETTS FROM 1635 TO 1700**

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People today act like scandalous women are an invention of the twentieth century. For some reason it is widely believed that women were not promiscuous prior to the hippie days of the sixties or if they are being generous- the twenties. This idea could not be further from the truth because scandalous women have been part of American society since before it was even an “American” society. In fact, the Puritans who settled most of Massachusetts in the seventeenth century were incredibly scandalous people, even by today’s standards. Today there is a general assumption that Puritan women were boring, strict, religious people who wore black and never had any fun. This characterization is simply not true. Puritan women loved, laughed, and cried much like women do today. Many were full-fledged church members; they ran their households, and even left wills.¹ Puritan women had much more power than history has given them, and many of them were incredibly scandalous. Whether their crimes and sins were of a sexual, social, or religious nature, they were frequent and usually resulted in hefty fines or physical punishments. Puritan women were indeed scandalous people.

This paper will examine the phenomenon of scandalous women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1635 to 1700. Women who caused social scandals, religious scandals, and loose ladies who were generally promiscuous will all be considered. Murderers will not be included because they are more criminal than scandalous and neither will witches because that is its own unique area of study. The goal of this paper is to examine these scandalous women to help better understand the

¹ The Probate Inventory of Agnes Balch, 1657.

beginning of scandalous female behavior in Massachusetts, and put to rest the stereotype that all Puritans were tame and dull.

When the Puritans settled in New England, they had a vision of what their community should be. People would lead simple and devout lives where the goal was to stay pure and far from sin. The Puritans believed in predestination, the concept that not everyone was going to heaven. There were a select group of people who were preordained to get into heaven, but it was impossible to know who they were. They did not know who was going to heaven, so they all had to work as hard as they could to obey the laws of God and stay strong in their faith. Elizabeth Reis insists that “Puritan childhood lessons depicted a vengeful God, a persistent Satan, and an everlasting hellfire. By the time young sinners attended church and heard their ministers’ sermons, they were long familiar with the dire message.”² Puritans were obsessed with sin and they were taught to avoid it at all costs from a very young age. While they preached a sinless society, they hardly had one. Any crime in a Puritan community was a sin. Stealing, drunkenness, lying, and gossip were all considered sins, but those cases were usually brought to court and the sinner usually charged, or in some cases, whipped or jailed.

Sin was a serious problem in Puritan communities. Ministers preached about it, educated men wrote essays about it, and parents taught their children about it. An important part of understanding sin is understanding the concept of original sin, enunciated in certain strands of Western Christianity, and its importance in Puritan culture and teachings. Puritans believed they were the sons and daughters of the sinners

² Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 35.

Adam and Eve. While they recognized that both of them were sinners, Eve was somehow always considered worse. Eve was deemed weaker because the serpent beguiled her.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich writes of original sin stating that “From the time of Paul, Christian writers have used the story of Eve to justify a wide range of attitudes toward women.”³ In Western Christianity (particularly in Britain), women have always been daughters of Eve and were considered to be born inherently sinful. Reis states in her explanation of female sin that “Women, in contrast, more often achieved a darker wholeness that equated their transgressive behavior with a perceived basic depravity: repentance of particular sins was not sufficient to redeem their souls, for a woman’s sinfulness encompassed her entire being.”⁴ Although everyone believed that all women had sinful natures, they were expected to be pure, and chaste, and above all, virtuous.

One of the clearest summaries of Puritan ideas of women came from the pen of Cotton Mather, minister of Boston’s First Church. In 1692, Mather published *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, which is a manual for Puritan women to live by, teaching them how to behave properly. This book stresses the importance of virtue in women of all ages and examines the characteristics that make one virtuous. Mather’s ideal woman is unattainably perfect, but it did set a positive example for women to aspire to. He concludes his writing with a prayer, “I now praise thee, O my God, for thy assisting my endeavours to describe the praises of the virtuous woman; and rely upon thy grace in thy Son, that these my poor labours may be accepted and succeeded among the daughters of

³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in northern New England 165—1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 106.

⁴ Reis, 42.

thy people.”⁵ Cotton Mather and ministers like him set near impossible standards for Puritan women, and it is not surprising that many failed to be so virtuous. While it is hard to imagine a man preaching about what it means to be a true and virtuous woman, one must remember that men were the leaders of the community in every way. In their minds, it was their place to help guide other Puritans and teach them how to live devout and meaningful lives.

There are many cases of what could be considered social crimes in the records of Massachusetts Bay. These are typically minor crimes such as vanity, slander, or drunkenness. Women brought to trial for these crimes usually were let off with a fine or some time spent in the stocks, but they were still regarded as sinners and criminals. Court records are full of examples of social crimes, more so than any other crimes for women. This offers historians insight into the minds of Puritans; it helps them understand society’s rules and how they were regarded by the public.

Vanity is an unpleasant characteristic, but in Massachusetts Bay it was regarded as a crime. Crimes of vanity were quite common for women, and the records are littered with instances of them. Mather warns against vanity stating “for a woman to wear what is not evidently consistent with modesty, gravity, and sobriety, is to wear not an ornament, but a defilement.”⁶ There are several cases in Massachusetts of women wearing silk hoods or fancy clothing, which were considered to be flashy and immodest. In a case presented at the Court of Salem on September 30, 1652,⁷ the wife of Austin Killum was

⁵ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (Delmar, New York, Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978), 116.

⁶ Mather, 60.

⁷ All of these dates are relative to the Julian calendar. Britain and its colonies did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752. For the purposes of this paper, these dates have not been altered.

presented for wearing a silk hood.⁸ In a similar case brought to trial on the same day, “Abigail the wife of Arthur Kippin was fined for excess in clothing and wearing broad bone lace.”⁹ These women were brought in for what seems like a minor crime but it was considered sinful. There are several of these cases in the Essex County Records¹⁰ and some of the women were fined but many were simply reprimanded and dismissed from court.

Another sin that often brought women to court was lying, especially if it involved gossiping about or slandering one another. At a trial held at the Ipswich Quarterly Court on June 3, 1651, Martha Fowlar was fined for lying because it tended to the “defamation of her own sister Dutch who she said had had criminal intercourse with a man Robert Filbricke who she also claimed to have been a criminal”¹¹ Judges took cases of lying and gossiping seriously because these cases could have led to some dramatic situations in towns. They believed dealing with cases of slander and lying in a timely and strict fashion was the best solution.

Drunkenness was a surprisingly common crime in Puritan Massachusetts and it can be seen in several towns and their records. Women were no stranger to drunkenness and their names came up in the court records almost as often as men. To Puritans, drunkenness was excessiveness and therefore sinful. In the case of Ann Linsford of Salem, she was fined for being found drunken in the way at Salem Court on September

⁸ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume One (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume One.

¹⁰ Any of the court records listed in this paper were accessed through the University of Virginia online archives. They have collected the Essex County Quarterly Court records and digitized most of them.

¹¹ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume One (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

24, 1653. Two years later she was fined for the same crime and it was her husband Francis who brought her to court for it.¹² This case is particularly interesting because Ann's husband brought her to court. There are several entries where family members agree to pay fines for their loved ones crimes, but not many occurrences of them taking their family to court.

Merriment was seen as excessive, a trivial pleasure that was unnecessary and unwanted in Puritan society. "There was once the common attitude to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we will die. This hedonistic enjoyment of the world and the present was in diametrical opposition to the deepest-felt Puritan attitudes."¹³ Alcohol was a necessity, but it was considered outrageous to partake in drunken behavior. A similar crime was the taking of tobacco in public which was looked down on in the same way drunkenness was. In a court held at Ipswich on April 17, 1662, Goodwife Lambert was presented for taking tobacco in public and confessed to it.¹⁴ What seems like a simple pleasure was criminal behavior in the Bay Colony. Drunkenness was something that was looked out for, and alcohol use and consumption were constantly regulated.

A case that seems almost ridiculous today, Diane Rapaport examines in her book *Naked Quakers: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England*. In a section titled "To Drive Away Melancholy", she shares the story of a card game gone wrong. During the winter of 1662, John Henryson started playing card games with other gentlemen in an effort to entertain his wife Martha who was pregnant and

¹² Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Three (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

¹³ Roger Thompson, *Sex in Middlesex: Popular Mores in a Massachusetts County, 1649-1699* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 152.

¹⁴ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Two (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

feeling depressed at the time. Playing cards was illegal in Puritan communities and games were generally frowned upon. John was charged twenty shillings and Martha five shillings for having games held at their home.¹⁵ While a game of cards seems innocent enough, evenings were meant to be spent in prayer and most games and any kind of gambling were considered sinful.

These crimes are relatively small and might not seem very scandalous, and in comparison to some other common crimes in Puritan Massachusetts they were not. Crimes of a sexual nature, however, were rampant in this period and were considered incredibly shameful. The court records are littered with instances of fornication and bastardry. The main types of sexual crimes are fornication before marriage, adultery (for married citizens), and fornication resulting in a bastard child. These crimes were taken seriously as they affected the entire community. Sex was an act for the married, and unmarried women (and men) who partook in the act were punished harshly.

For Puritans, marriage was one of the most important things one could do in life. It was a sacred union that was expected of everyone and valued in Puritan communities. Ministers preached the importance of marriage and families encouraged it in their children. Mather wrote of a married woman that “She is a dove, that will sooner die than leave her mate; and her husband is to her. The covering of her eyes, at such a rate that she sees a disagreeableness in him, which she will not allow herself to behold or suppose in any other, neither will she look upon another.”¹⁶ Puritans had loving marriages and in most cases, young people chose their future partner out of affection. Sometimes, young

¹⁵ Diane Rapaport, *The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England* (Beverly, Massachusetts: Commonwealth Editions, 2007), 93.

¹⁶ Mather, 94.

couples were so passionate that they could not wait until they were married to have sex. Cotton Mather urged women not to enter the “snares of whoredom”¹⁷ but he was definitely ignored by many.

Premarital sex was extremely common in Puritan Massachusetts. In his book *Sex in Middlesex*, Roger Thompson notes that in Middlesex County, “one in every two hundred births was premaritally conceived.”¹⁸ Many couples admitted to premarital sex when they were confronted (or were caught having it) and were tried without the proof of pregnancy. If family members or town officials grew suspicious of a couple’s behavior, they would question them. Thompson also states “that the great majority of couples charged with premarital fornication confessed.”¹⁹

The records of the quarterly courts of Essex County are full of confessions of premarital sex or ‘fornication before marriage’. At the Salem Court on September 9, 1655, Henry Cowes and his wife Charity were fined forty shillings for fornication before marriage.²⁰ At the Salem Court a few years later on October 30, 1658, “Allester Mackmalen and his wife Elizabeth were fined forty shillings or to be whipped for fornication before marriage. A Mr. Batter (presumably her father) agreed to pay the fine.”²¹ After examining the records, it seems that the most common punishments for this crime involved the payment of a fine or a whipping. Most couples were given the choice of punishment. Mather frequently warned against premarital sex and places the duty on the woman “so neither will she permit much less invite the dalliances of any wanton

¹⁷ Mather, 48.

¹⁸ Thompson, 70.

¹⁹ Thompson, 55.

²⁰ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Two (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Volume Two.

creatures which may design anything besides what is honorable on her.”²² While virginity at marriage was ideal, it was often not the case.

What is interesting to see in these cases, is that men and women were punished similarly. They were seen to be equally at fault for the sin. N. E. H. Hull wrote in his book *Female Felons*, “It can be argued that criminal laws, particularly law against heinous crimes, do not regard the status, wealth, or sex of the accused and the victim, but express the shared anger and repugnance of an entire society.”²³ From this we can infer that to Puritans, females and males were equal in their acts of sin and crime because the community just wanted punishment for crimes and bad behavior.

In many cases, premarital sex led to marriage which was an ideal solution for an inappropriate problem. In a case she calls “The Wandering Wife” Diane Rapaport studies the reports of a fourteen-year old Faith Bridges of Topsfield. Faith had premarital relations with a Mr. Daniel Black against the wishes of her father. Courting without parental permission was illegal, and Black was jailed for the crime. In an interesting turn of events, he was released by Faith’s father soon after his jailing. The next time Faith was brought to court (for bad behavior) she was Mrs. Faith Black. The couple had their issues, but apparently resolved them, and later had several children.²⁴ Although they were both technically ‘sinners’, marriage was the best possible solution to their problem, and was a move clearly supported by Faith’s father when he released Mr. Black from jail. Marriage was the plan for every Puritan, even if the path to it was sometimes unconventional.

²² Mather, 82

²³ N. E. H. Hull, *Female Felons: Woman and Serious Crime in Colonial Massachusetts* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 19.

²⁴ Rapaport, 20.

Having children out of wedlock was a serious crime in Puritan communities, and one that affected the entire community. If a child was born that a parent could not afford to care for, the towns' taxes would go to the care of the child, and another family would typically take the child in. Bastards were taken care of in Puritan communities, but their parents were usually shunned not unlike Hester Prynne was in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Punishments for this crime were much harsher and usually public. In these cases the townspeople demanded action, if they had to pay for a child that was not their own, they were hoping to see someone punished for that.

In Salem, on April 27, 1665, Rebecca Armitage was brought to court for 'uncleanness', or having a son born out of wedlock and was sentenced to be whipped or pay a fine.²⁵ In a similar case, at the Salisbury court on February 10, 1666, Margerite Griffin was brought forward for fornication. She was ordered to be whipped twelve stripes after the birth of her child immediately after a lecture.²⁶ These women were presented at court for their crimes and accepted their punishments. From the documents, it does not seem as though any public scenes were caused and they were relatively private matters.

This unfortunately, was not always the case. Elizabeth Osgood of Salisbury was presented at court in Salisbury on February 11, 1654, for fornication and having a child out of wedlock. She was to be whipped thirty stripes and a man Barnabus Lamson was bound to support the child. He was ordered to be whipped twenty-five stripes for the

²⁵ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Three (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume Three.

fornication.²⁷ Elizabeth returned to court in Hampton on August 3 of the same year for the same issue. She was still refusing to claim Mr. Lamson as the father of her bastard and the town of Salisbury threatened to jail her if she refused. The town was forced to pay for the child as she had not declared a father and was unable to support the baby herself. The matter was settled when she finally recognized Mr. Lamson as the father.²⁸ At that point, it can be assumed that she admitted it to avoid being sent to prison, as that was the next logical punishment.

The case of Elizabeth Due²⁹ of Salem is even more scandalous. She was first presented at the Salem Court on April 30, 1654, for “a pernicious lie in saying that Mr. Zerbell Endecott was the father of her child, and at other times saying it was Cornelius Hulett’s” (she was also being presented at the same time for fornication with that Mr. Hulett). She was sentenced to be whipped twelve stripes.³⁰ Later on September 2 of the same year, Elizabeth was back in court now as Mrs. Hulett. She was presented to court for slanderous speeches against the same Mr. Zerababell Endecott in “fathering her child upon him”. She was ordered to be whipped twenty stripes on a lecture day and have a paper pinned to her forehead with this inscription in capital letters: “A slanderer of Mr. Zerobabell Endecott.”³¹

This is a rather intense sequence of punishments. By the end of the ordeal (her name did not appear again in the records), she was whipped thirty two times and was

²⁷ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume One (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

²⁸ Ibid., Volume One.

²⁹ The spelling of Elizabeth’s last name varies with entries as either ‘Due’ or ‘Dew’ in the two Essex County records about her. Due is how it was first listed and how it is presented in this paper.

³⁰ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume One (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

³¹ Ibid., Volume One.

publically shamed with the paper on her forehead. The leaders in Salem were not about to let a whore slander anyone and this was their method of keeping the peace. This method of public humiliation as a punishment seemed to have worked because Mrs. Due does not appear in the records again.

Ms. Osgood and Mrs. Due are present in two of the most extreme cases of sexual sins from the Essex County records. They were unmarried women who were unlucky enough to have children, and once they had those children, would not give the fathers names. This intensity of their punishments says a lot about the ideals of what a Puritan family should be. Ministers expected a mother *and* a father to raise children, except of course in the case of death. These ladies' antics were not to be tolerated and they were heavily punished for them. Whipping is the most common form of punishment for this crime and it was usually set for a lecture day and intended to be in front of the community. As these were crimes that involved the community and disturbed the public, it was considered fitting that the punishments would be as well. This public punishment served as a lesson for the criminal, but also for the onlookers. Puritan leaders always made examples out of sinners.

Ulrich argues that "within marriage, sexual attraction promoted consort; outside of marriage, it led to heinous sins. For this reason, female modesty was essential."³² This certainly was the case in Essex County. There are an overwhelming number of cases of just plain fornication where it is not known if the woman who committed the crime was married or not. Their marital status does not particularly matter as fornication outside of marriage was always frowned upon. There are several entries like that of Sara Buffum

³² Ulrich, 108.

who was presented at Salem Court on September 25, 1662, for “committing fornication, was ordered to be whipped not exceeding ten stripes or to pay fifty shillings.”³³ Sara’s name was only entered in Essex County this one time, so it can be assumed she accepted one of her punishments and learned her lesson.

Sexual crimes were a serious problem in Puritan Massachusetts and were treated as such. These women were seen as scandalous and a shame to their communities. These were the characters Cotton Mather no doubt warned young women about in his writings and teachings. Sex was not taboo for Puritans and it was encouraged in marriage. The enthusiastic encouragement of sex in marriage and the disgrace of it outside of marriage seemed to confuse some people. How could an act that is so wonderful and important in marriage be so evil and corrupt outside of it? This is an issue that many Puritan women could not seem to reconcile, and these cases are proof of that fact.

It is not surprising that in a society as strict and religious as the Puritans’, there were many types of religious crimes and many occurrences of such crimes. These crimes involve church attendance, appropriate behavior, and ideas of self-expression. One of the most famous Puritans in history was a religious criminal, a leader of the Antinomian Crisis, Mrs. Anne Hutchinson. These women truly horrified the church because they directly affected the church and everything it stood for. These criminals were brutally punished more so than any other type of criminal in Massachusetts during this period (except for of course, the murderers and the witches).

³³ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Three (University of Virginia), <http://salem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

Church attendance was essential to the community, it was mandatory and important. Showing up for weekly meetings was not optional and it was an integral part of Puritan life. The entire week revolved around Sunday meetings. Prayers and study the following week were usually about what was presented in meeting the week prior, so attendance was mandatory. Sundays were solemn days and saved for meeting and prayer. It was acceptable to miss a meeting here and there for illnesses or emergencies, but repeated absences were noted, and offenders were often brought to court.

At the Salem Court on October 10, 1658, “John Kitchin’s wife, Robert Buffums wife, John Smith’s wife, Jon Sothwick’s wife, and Samuella Shattuck’s wife, were fined five shillings a day for the sixteen Lord’s days they missed meeting on.”³⁴ This was a hefty fine that ended up being about four pounds per offender. Because courts were in session only a few times each year, this sentence was harsh but it encompassed months of absences. Ten years later on January 26, 1668 the court dealt with another case of absence, but this case turned out differently. The wife of Robert Wilson was presented for frequently absenting herself from the public ordinances, but was dismissed because the court was informed that she was ‘distempered in her head’.³⁵ Back again this day, were the wives of John Kitchin and John Smith who were presented for frequently absenting themselves from “the public worship of God on the Lord’s days” and were fined and were to be whipped if they neglect to pay those fines.³⁶ It is not clear what their fines were to be, but as they were repeat offenders, one can assume that they were significant.

³⁴ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Four (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

³⁵ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Four (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Volume Four.

Most Puritans were not wealthy people, and these women ended up owing several pounds for their absences. One cannot understand why they were disregarding the rules so often, or what they chose to do with their Sundays at home. Even though we do not understand why they skipped church, they serve as interesting cases in understanding religious scandal.

Skipping church was one thing, but showing up to the meeting house or anywhere in town naked was a whole other level of sin, and apparently a common one. Streaking today is not uncommon, but it is still considered bizarre and inappropriate. Imagine that behavior, in a church, surrounded by Puritans. In looking at cases of female crime in Essex County alone over the course of fifty or so years, there are several entries about women who walked into the meeting house naked. Whether this was some kind of political stand or brief periods of insanity one cannot be sure, but it shocking nevertheless.

At the Salem Quarterly Court held on September 9, 1662, the wife of Robert Wilsoon was presented for her “barborous and unhuman goeing naked through the Towne.”³⁷ In a case of extreme punishment, she was ordered to be “tied at a carts tayle with her body naked doward to her waist, and whipped from Mr. Gidneyes gate till she come to her owne house, not exceeding thirty stripes.”³⁸ From the records, it seems that she was assisted or accompanied in some way by her mother and her sister who were ordered to be tied with her onto the car to be paraded through town. The language of this record is harsh, not surprisingly. Nudity was sinful in public, and for a woman to walk

³⁷ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume Three (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Volume Three.

brazenly through town *completely* naked was disgraceful. The leaders of the town acted harshly, but the community probably demanded that of them. Thirty stripes is by far the harshest punishment as this was a crime of common decency.

Lucky for Mr. Wilsoon, she only walked through the streets naked and did not actually enter the meeting house. At the Ipswich Court on May 5, 1663, Lidia Wardell was presented for going naked into the Newbury Meeting House. She was ordered to be “severely whipped” and pay costs to the Marshall of Hampton. There are a few instances in these court cases where a woman was ordered to be ‘severely whipped’. It is hard to be sure how many stripes constitute a “severe whipping”, but it can be assumed that it was a lot if it was anything like Mrs. Wilsoon’s punishment.

The Puritans were conservative people and they dressed conservatively. While they did not wear all black like people today imagine they did, they were thoroughly covered. Décolletage was never shown, hair was covered in a cap, and arms and legs were covered in clothing no matter the month. Skin was a distraction, and clothing was worn for the sole purpose of covering the body. Showing up naked anywhere was considered distracting, rude, and disgusting. With ideas like this, the punishments seem harsh but fitting (by their standards) to a crime they considered severe.

Puritans were not tolerant people. They established Massachusetts Bay to be a *pure* and devout religious colony specifically for Puritans. Of course, over time other people settled the area, but with respect to religion, they were not tolerant of others.³⁹ When the ‘other’ became someone within their own church and community, problems

³⁹ Darrett B. Rutman, *American Puritanism* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970).

arose. Anne Hutchinson was one of the church's biggest problems and in turn, is one of the most famous Puritans in history.

Anne Hutchinson was born in Lincolnshire, England in 1591 to an Anglican Minister and his wife. She grew up in England and married a man from her hometown, John Hutchinson. The couple began working closely with and listening to the Minister John Cotton whom they eventually followed to Boston in 1634. Anne was a midwife and a prominent member of her church and community. It was not long before she started meeting with other women (and some men) in her Boston home to discuss the word of God. They read scriptures and spoke their thoughts and beliefs freely, which was seen as a rather unorthodox approach to Puritanism. Many historians have argued about whether this was cause for concern because Anne was a woman, or because the gatherings were not sanctioned by the church.⁴⁰

During these meetings, Anne grew comfortable directly criticizing many Puritan leaders in Boston and pointing out their flaws to her followers. Winnifred King Rugg points out in her book *Unafraid: The Life of Anne Hutchinson* the issues on feminine power and the implications that arose from Hutchinson's behavior. She argues that these meetings "gave women a chance to express themselves. She [Anne] herself never stopped talking, and it is no wonder that the women drew a new life from her vigorous strength, so generously expended."⁴¹ Women gathering to discuss social, political, and religious issues was certainly cause for concern in Boston. The resulting uproar from these meetings is commonly known as the Antinomian Crisis.

⁴⁰ Winnifred King Rugg, *Unafraid: A Life of Anne Hutchinson* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1930).

⁴¹ Rugg, 84.

Marilyn J. Westercamp states that “Her marvelous intellectual abilities (so unusual in a seventeenth-century woman), her popularity among Boston men as well as women, and the powerful political and theological implications of her challenge render Hutchinson a force that must be explored if colonial Massachusetts is to be understood.”⁴² Anne was of gentile birth and was highly intelligent; she was, in her own way, a theologian. While the Puritans wanted all of their children to have a basic education regardless of gender, theology and religious study was field for men. Women did not attend University so they did not have the education to preach. While Anne was well educated she did not have the authority to hold meetings the way she did or to share her ideas in a formal religious setting.

The biggest problem that ministers had with Anne was her belief that she had a direct relation with God; this is why Westercamp in her article, *Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order*, argues that Hutchinson was in fact a mystic (someone who believes they have a direct connection with God). In Puritanism, nobody had a direct relationship with God. Everyone was a servant of God, and they were not privileged to *know* God.⁴³ Her ideas were blasphemous in the eyes of the ministers she was destroying everything they had worked so hard to create in Boston, the “city upon a hill”.

After much debate, Anne Hutchinson was banished from Massachusetts Bay in 1638. She was officially charged with slandering ministers and holding illegal meetings. She was excommunicated from Massachusetts Bay by Governor John Winthrop. She was

⁴² Marilyn J. Westercamp “Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order,” *Church History* 59, no. 4 (1990): 492

⁴³ Rutman, 31-51.

removed from the church where she had her hearing, and was sent to pack and leave. She packed up and moved with seven of her fifteen children to Rhode Island in the hopes of living in a colony known for religious tolerance.⁴⁴

Anne is the ultimate scandalous Puritan. She was outspoken and refused to back down to church officials. It is not surprising that she is one of the most famous Puritans in history because she was certainly one of the loudest. Anne bared her soul in church, and others just went completely bare. These women chose to be scandalous in a religious way, and for that they were severely punished. Studying these types of scandals is particularly interesting because they arose in a community so aggressively religious. “Hutchinson was a heretic in a society that places a premium upon orthodoxy.”⁴⁵ These ladies challenged the very foundation of life in Massachusetts Bay, and they became notorious in American history.

Puritan scandal came in many shapes and sizes, and it arose in many different ways. The socially scandalous women, the hood wearers like Alice Flint⁴⁶ and Mrs. Wenham⁴⁷ acted inappropriately. The card player Martha Henryson blatantly broke the rules and the drinkers disgraced their communities. The more promiscuous ladies Charity Cowes, Faith Black, and Elizabeth Due challenged the Puritan concept of marriage and for that matter, their ideas of sex. Their scandals threatened ideals and the teachings of their church. The naked ladies and Anne Hutchinson disturbed the church- the core of

⁴⁴ Rugg, 216.

⁴⁵ Westercamp, 483.

⁴⁶ Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Volume One (University of Virginia), <http://saalem.lib.virginia.edu/Essex/index.html>.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Volume One

Puritan life. While there is a great variety in their crimes, none of them were particularly malicious, simply scandalous.

Scandalous Puritan women existed in great numbers. They were wild, lewd, and sometimes naked. They challenged ideals, rules, and leaders of Massachusetts Bay. These women were present in Puritan towns all over the area, and they acted out early on in the colony's development. Anne Hutchinson and her family were some of the earliest Puritans to arrive in this new Colony, and she established a long line of outspoken women. It is incorrectly assumed that women were somehow purer or more perfect "back in the day". The seventeenth century was the proverbial "day" and the women were far from perfect. They acted in ways that would make people blush, even now.

Women did not first begin acting out in the twentieth century. They simply continued on the path of many scandalous women throughout American History; and some of its earliest history in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The stereotypes of Puritans in modern society, have led to this belief that women in history were dull until the suffrage movement, and that women were chaste until their skirts were shortened in the 1920's. Puritan women carved the path for women to commit all sorts of crimes and sins. Indecent exposure, infidelity, slander and libel, and they did it in a society much stricter than America is today. The stereotypes of Puritan women today, have led to the shaming of women in present day America. How could women today behave so inappropriately? How could these teenage girls sneak out with their boyfriends? Well, people have been asking these questions for hundreds of years. Women have always thought outside of the boxes men have put them in, and they will continue to do so in the future, with or without their shirts on.

Scandalous women today walk brazenly past Beacon Hill in Boston and stroll right by the bronze statue of Anne Hutchinson. They move past her in a hurry, not truly understanding her significance. Puritan women were scandalous, and in order to understand American women today, we must first understand them in how they helped us establish the American Woman as we consider her today, lascivious behavior and all. Women today are no more scandalous than the women in Massachusetts Bay were in the seventeenth-century.

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