John Endecott Biography

John Endecott

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Biography

John Endecott (1588-1655) was one of the English founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and later its governor. He often used harsh measures against the colony's enemies.

Born in Devon, John Endecott may have seen some military service. He early became interested in colonization through the influence of John White, a Puritan clergyman. Endecott was included among the six patentees of the New England Company because he was willing to emigrate as the director of the Cape Ann settlement.

Appointed "chief-in-command" and commissioned to prepare the way for more colonists, Endecott arrived at Salem, Mass., in September 1628. Under his directorship Salem became a Puritan beachhead in New England. He sent two brothers who continued using the Anglican Prayer Book back to England as undesirable colonists, and he chopped down Thomas Morton's frivolous maypole at Merrimount. Both actions indicated his impulsiveness and partisanship. He later had the cross of St. George removed from Salem's militia flag because of its papal connotation and was reprimanded by the legislature for his political indiscretion.

In 1629 the New England Company was reorganized as the Massachusetts Bay Company, and when Governor John Winthrop arrived in 1630 Endecott relinquished his leadership, although he remained among the colony's public servants. Endecott's lack of restraint was demonstrated again in 1637, when he led an expedition against the Pequot Indians to avenge the murder of a trader. After destroying one Native American settlement, Endecott and his men went to another. Ignoring pleas for caution by Connecticut settlers, Endecott continued to destroy Native American canoes and villages until, satisfied, he returned to the safety of Boston and Salem, leaving Connecticut to suffer the reprisals of the Native Americans in the Pequot War. Later, as governor of Massachusetts during the Quaker intrusions of the 1650s, he bore much of the responsibility for the inhuman treatment of the Quakers--ranging from imprisonment and banishment to execution. King Charles II eventually rebuked Massachusetts and Governor Endecott for their cruelty.

Despite his strictness and narrowness, Endecott served the colony as best he could. His election to colonial offices attests to his honesty and willingness to serve the common good. In addition to minor posts, he served 5 yearly terms as deputy governor and 15 as governor, filling the governorship longer than anyone else. If he was overzealous in defending the truth as he saw it, he was like many others in an overzealous age.