



Chapter 3

Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children in Puritan Society



In sharp contrast to the privatism and individualism that marked seventeenth-century Virginia, a deep sense of cooperative commitment to building a new Zion characterized the society established in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Nowhere was the notion of communal responsibility more fully developed or more clearly illustrated than in the Puritan family. As you read the essay "The Godly Family of Colonial Massachusetts" by Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, note the innumerable ways in which Puritan family life affected and was affected by the larger social, political, and economic community. How would you compare the role of the family in Massachusetts with that in Virginia during the same period?

Although few today would find Puritan notions regarding marriage and relations between the sexes appealing, Mintz and Kellogg remind us that these people were not as devoid of warmth and feeling as the term "Puritan" often implies. As evidence, the authors refer to sentiments expressed in the poems of Anne Bradstreet, the first important woman writer in the colonies. The document that follows the

essay presents two of Bradstreet's poems, "To My Dear and Loving Husband" and "Before the Birth of One of Her Children"—works that evoke a sense of deep and abiding love in a Puritan marriage. The poet's husband, Simon Bradstreet, served two terms as colonial governor of Massachusetts (1679–1686, 1689–1692).

As the essay reveals, the Puritans considered the proper upbringing of children and the maintenance of a sound moral climate cardinal family responsibilities. They also believed that the state had a vital role to play in ensuring that families fulfill these obligations. The second document, an act passed by the colonial Massachusetts legislature, orders parents to educate their children. Such a legal step was highly unusual in the English-speaking world of the seventeenth century. Take note of all the items included under the term "good education" and the penalties imposed on parents who neglected their duties. The legislation in the third document describes the kinds of behavior deemed improper and the kinds of action deemed necessary to safeguard public morality. After reading these two documents, you should notice that the idea of a separation between church and state was totally absent from Puritan Massachusetts.

The final document is an excerpt from Eleazer Moody's *The School of Good Manners*, a well-known book of eighteenth-century children's literature. Which of the forty-two dicta that Moody lists might today's parents consider valid? Which, if any, would they likely reject? What conclusions can you draw regarding differences in attitudes toward children's behavior today and in colonial New England?

ESSAY

The Godly Family of Colonial Massachusetts

Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg

The roughly twenty thousand Puritan men, women, and children who sailed to Massachusetts between 1629 and 1640 carried with them ideas about the family utterly foreign to Americans today. The Puritans never thought of the family as purely a private unit, rigorously separated from the surrounding community. To them it was an integral part of the larger political and social world; it was "the Mother Hive, out of which both those swarms of State and Church, issued forth." Its boundaries were elastic and inclusive, and it assumed responsibilities that have since been assigned to public institutions.

Although most Puritan families were nuclear in structure, a significant proportion of the population spent part of their lives in other families'

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homes, serving as apprentices, hired laborers, or servants. At any one time, as many as a third of all Puritan households took in servants. Convicts, the children of the poor, single men and women, and recent immigrants were compelled by selectmen to live within existing “well Governed families” so that “disorders may be prevented and ill weeds nipt.”

For the Puritans, family ties and community ties tended to blur. In many communities, individual family members were related by birth or marriage to a large number of their neighbors. In one community, Chatham, Massachusetts, the town’s 155 families bore just thirty-four surnames; and in Andover, Massachusetts, the descendants of one settler, George Abbott I, had by 1750 intermarried into a dozen local families. The small size of the seventeenth-century communities, combined with high rates of marriage and remarriage, created kinship networks of astonishing complexity. In-laws and other distant kin were generally referred to as brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, and cousins.

Today spousal ties are emphasized, and obligations to kin are voluntary and selective. Three centuries ago the kin group was of great importance to the social, economic, and political life of the community. Kinship ties played a critical role in the development of commercial trading networks and the capitalizing of large-scale investments. In the absence of secure methods of communication and reliable safeguards against dishonesty, prominent New England families, such as the Hutchinsons and Winthrops, relied on relatives in England and the West Indies to achieve success in commerce. Partnerships among family members also played an important role in the ownership of oceangoing vessels. Among merchant and artisan families, apprenticeships were often given exclusively to their own sons or nephews, keeping craft skills within the kinship group.

Intermarriage was also used to cement local political alliances and economic partnerships. Marriages between first cousins or between sets of brothers and sisters helped to bond elite, politically active and powerful families together. Among the families of artisans, marriages between a son and an uncle’s daughter reinforced kinship ties.

In political affairs the importance of the kin group persisted until the American Revolution. By the early eighteenth century, small groups of interrelated families dominated the clerical, economic, military, and political leadership of New England. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, the most powerful of these kinship groups was made up of seven interrelated families. The “River Gods,” as they were known, led regional associations of ministers, controlled the county courts, commanded the local militia, and represented their region in the Massachusetts General Court and Governor’s Council. Following the Revolution, most states adopted specific reforms designed to reduce the power of kin groups in politics by barring nepotism, establishing the principle of rotation in office, prohibiting multi-

ple officeholding, providing for the election of justices of the peace, and requiring officeholders to reside in the jurisdiction they served.

Unlike the contemporary American family, which is distinguished by its isolation from the world of work and the surrounding society, the Puritan family was deeply embedded in public life. The household—not the individual—was the fundamental unit of society. The political order was not an agglomeration of detached individuals; it was an organic unity composed of families. This was the reason that Puritan households received only a single vote in town meetings. Customarily it was the father, as head of the household, who represented his family at the polls. But if he was absent, his wife assumed his prerogative to vote. The Puritans also took it for granted that the church was composed of families and not of isolated individuals. Family membership—not an individual’s abilities or attainments—determined a person’s position in society. Where one sat in church or in the local meetinghouse or even one’s rank at Harvard College was determined not by one’s accomplishments but by one’s family identity.

The Puritan family was the main unit of production in the economic system. Each family member was expected to be economically useful. Older children were unquestionably economic assets; they worked at family industries, tended gardens, herded animals, spun wool, and cared for younger brothers and sisters. Wives not only raised children and cared for the home but also cut clothes, supervised servants and apprentices, kept financial accounts, cultivated crops, and marketed surplus goods.

In addition to performing a host of productive functions, the Puritan family was a primary educational and religious unit. A 1642 Massachusetts statute required heads of households to lead their households in prayers and scriptural readings; to teach their children, servants, and apprentices to read; and to catechize household members in the principles of religion and law. The family was also an agency for vocational training, assigned the duty of instructing servants and apprentices in methods of farming, house-keeping, and craft skills. And finally the Puritan family was a welfare institution that carried primary responsibility for the care of orphans, the infirm, or the elderly.

Given the family’s importance, the Puritans believed that the larger community had a compelling duty to ensure that families performed their functions properly. The Puritans did not believe that individual households should be assured freedom from outside criticism or interference. The Puritan community felt that it had a responsibility not only to punish misconduct but also to intervene within households to guide and direct behavior. To this end, in the 1670s, the Massachusetts General Court directed towns to appoint “tithingmen” to oversee every ten or twelve households in order to ensure that marital relationships were harmonious and that parents properly disciplined unruly children. Puritan churches censured, admonished,

and excommunicated men and women who failed to maintain properly peaceful households, since, as minister Samuel Willard put it, "When husband and wife neglect their duties they not only wrong each other, but they provoke God by breaking his law." In cases in which parents failed properly to govern "rude, stubborn, and unruly" children, Puritan law permitted local authorities to remove juveniles from their families "and place them with some master for years . . . and force them to submit unto government." Men who neglected or failed to support their wives or children were subject to judicial penalties. In instances in which spouses seriously violated fundamental duties—such as cases of adultery, desertion, prolonged absence, or nonsupport—divorces were granted. In cases of fornication outside marriage, courts sentenced offenders to a fine or whipping; for adultery, offenders were punished by fines, whippings, brandings, wearing of the letter A, and in at least three cases, the death penalty.

The disciplined Puritan family of the New World was quite different from the English family of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that had been left behind. In fact, it represented an effort to re-create an older ideal of the family that no longer existed in England itself.

English family life in the era of New World colonization was quite unstable. Because of high mortality rates, three-generational households containing grandparents, parents, and children tended to be rare. The duration of marriages tended to be quite brief—half of all marriages were cut short by the death of a spouse after just seventeen to nineteen years. And the number of children per marriage was surprisingly small. Late marriage, a relatively long interval between births, and high rates of infant and child mortality meant that just two, three, or four children survived past adolescence. Despite today's mythical vision of stability and rootedness in the preindustrial world, mobility was rampant. Most Englishmen could expect to move from one village to another during their adult lives, and it was rare for an English family to remain in a single community for as long as fifty years. Indeed, a significant proportion of the English population was denied the opportunity to *have* a family life. Servants, apprentices, and university lecturers were forbidden from marrying, and most other young men had to wait to marry until they received an inheritance on their father's death.

The English migrants who ventured to New England sought to avoid the disorder of English family life through a structured and disciplined family. They possessed a firm idea of a godly family, and they sought to establish it despite the novelty of American circumstances. Puritan religion had a particularly strong appeal to these men and women who were most sensitive to the disruptive forces transforming England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—such forces as an alarming increase in population, a rapid rise in prices, the enclosure of traditional common lands, and the sudden appearances of a large class of propertyless men and women who

flocked to the growing cities or took to the woods. To the Puritans, whose spiritual community was threatened by these developments, establishment of a holy commonwealth in New England represented a desperate effort to restore order and discipline to social behavior. And it was the family through which order could most effectively be created.

Migration to the New World wilderness intensified the Puritan fear of moral and political chaos and encouraged their focus on order and discipline. In the realm of economics, Puritan authorities strove to regulate prices, limit the rate of interest, and fix the maximum wages—at precisely the moment that such notions were breaking down in England. And in the realm of family life, the Puritans, drawing on the Old Testament and classical political theory, sought to reestablish an older ideal of the family in which the father was endowed with patriarchal authority as head of his household. Their religion taught that family roles were part of a continuous chain of hierarchical and delegated authority descending from God, and it was within the family matrix that all larger, external conceptions of authority, duty, and discipline were defined.

Puritans organized their family around the unquestioned principle of patriarchy. Fathers represented their households in the public realms of politics and social leadership; they owned the bulk of personal property; and law and church doctrine made it the duty of wives, children, and servants to submit to the father's authority. The colonies of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire went so far as to enact statutes calling for the death of children who cursed or struck their fathers.

Patriarchal authority in the Puritan family ultimately rested on the father's control of landed property or craft skills. Puritan children were dependent upon their father's support in order to marry and set up independent households. Since Puritan fathers were permitted wide discretion in how they would distribute their property, it was important that children show a degree of deference to their father's wishes. The timing and manner in which fathers conveyed property to the next generation exerted a profound influence upon where children decided to live and when and whom they decided to marry. In many cases fathers settled sons on plots surrounding the parental homestead, with title not to be surrendered until after their deaths. In other instances fathers conveyed land or other property when their sons became adults or were married. Not uncommonly such wills or deeds contained carefully worded provisions ensuring that the son would guarantee the parent lifetime support. One deed, for example, provided that a son would lose his inheritance if his parents could not walk freely through the house to go outdoors.

Such practices kept children economically dependent for years, delayed marriage, and encouraged sons to remain near their fathers during their lifetimes. In Andover, Massachusetts, only a quarter of the second-generation sons actually owned the land they farmed before their fathers

died. Not until the fourth generation in mid-eighteenth-century Andover had this pattern noticeably disappeared. In Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Windsor, Connecticut, fathers gave land to children on marriage. Among Quaker families in Pennsylvania, fathers who were unable to locate land for sons in the same town bought land in nearby communities. In order to replicate their parents' style of life, sons had to wait to inherit property from their fathers. In most cases ownership and control of land reinforced the authority of fathers over their children.

A corollary to the Puritan assumption of patriarchy was a commitment to female submission within the home. Even by the conservative standards of the time, the roles assigned to women by Puritan theology were narrowly circumscribed. The premise guiding Puritan theory was given pointed expression by the poet Milton: "God's universal law gave to man despotic power/Over his female in due awe." Women were not permitted to vote or prophesy or question church doctrine. The ideal woman was a figure of "modesty" and "delicacy," kept ignorant of the financial affairs of her family. Her social roles were limited to wife, mother, mistress of the household, seamstress, wet nurse, and midwife. Although there was no doubt that she was legally subordinate to her husband, she had limited legal rights and protections.

Puritan doctrine did provide wives with certain safeguards. Husbands who refused to support or cohabit with their wives were subject to legal penalties. Wives, in theory, could sue for separation or divorce on grounds of a husband's impotence, cruelty, abandonment, bigamy, adultery, or failure to provide, but divorce was generally unavailable, and desertion was such a risky venture that only the most desperate women took it as an option. Colonial statutes also prohibited a husband from striking his wife, "unless it be in his own defense." Before marriage single women had the right to conduct business, own property, and represent themselves in court. Upon marriage, however, the basic legal assumption was that of "coverture"—that a woman's legal identity was absorbed in her husband's. Spouses were nevertheless allowed to establish antenuptial or postnuptial agreements, permitting a wife to retain control over her property.

For both Puritan women and men, marriage stood out as one of the central events in life. Despite their reputation as sexually repressed, pleasure-hating bigots, the Puritans did not believe that celibacy was a condition morally superior to marriage. The only thing that Saint Paul might have said in favor of marriage was that it is "better to marry than to burn," but the Puritans extolled marriage as a sacrament and a social duty. John Cotton put the point bluntly: "They are a sort of Blasphemers then who dispise and decry" [women as a necessary evil,] "for they are a necessary Good; such as it was not good that man should be without."

For the Puritans love was not a prerequisite for marriage. They believed that the choice of a marriage partner should be guided by rational consider-

ations of property, religious piety, and family interest, not by physical attraction, personal feelings, or romantic love. Affection, in their view, would develop after marriage. This attitude reflected a recognition of the essential economic functions of the colonial family. Marriage was a partnership to which both bride and groom were expected to bring skills and resources. A prospective bride was expected to contribute a dowry (usually in the form of money or household goods) worth half of what the bridegroom brought to the marriage. Artisans tended to choose wives from families that practiced the same trade precisely because these women would be best able to assist them in their work. In New England the overwhelming majority of men and women married—and many remarried rapidly after the death of a spouse—because it was physically and economically difficult to live alone.

According to Puritan doctrine, a wife was to be her husband's helpmate, not his equal. Her role was "to guid the house &c. not guid the Husband." The Puritans believed that a wife should be submissive to her husband's commands and should exhibit toward him an attitude of "reverence," by which they meant a proper mixture of fear and awe; not "a slavish Fear, which is nourished with hatred or aversion; but a noble and generous Fear, which proceeds from Love."

The actual relations between Puritan spouses were more complicated than religious dogma would suggest. It was not unusual to find mutual love and tenderness in Puritan marriages. In their letters Puritan husbands and wives frequently referred to each other in terms suggesting profound love for each other, such as "my good wife . . . my sweet wife" or "my most sweet Husband." Similarly, the poems of Anne Bradstreet refer to a love toward her husband that seems deeply romantic: "To My Dear and Loving Husband/I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold." It is also not difficult, however, to find evidence of marriages that failed to live up to the Puritan ideal of domestic harmony and wifely submissiveness. In 1686, a Boston spinster, Comfort Wilkins, publicly spoke out about the "Tears, and Jars, and Discontents, and Jealousies" that marred many Puritan marriages.

Puritan court records further reveal that wife abuse is not a recent development. Between 1630 and 1699, at least 128 men were tried for abusing their wives. In one case a resident of Maine kicked and beat his wife with a club when she refused to feed a pig; in another case an Ipswich man poured poison into his wife's broth in an attempt to kill her. The punishments for wife abuse were mild, usually amounting only to a fine, a lashing, a public admonition, or supervision by a town-appointed guardian. Two colonists, however, did lose their lives for murdering their wives.

Even in cases of abuse, Puritan authorities commanded wives to be submissive and obedient. They were told not to resist or strike their husbands but to try to reform their spouses' behavior. Some women refused to conform to this rigid standard. At least thirty-two seventeenth-century Puritan women deserted their husbands and set up separate residences, despite such risks as

loss of their dower rights and possible criminal charges of adultery or theft. Another eight women were brought to court for refusing to have sexual relations with their husbands over extended periods. Seventy-six New England women petitioned for divorce or separation, usually on grounds of desertion, adultery, or bigamy.

Women who refused to obey Puritan injunctions about wifely obedience were subject to harsh punishment. Two hundred seventy-eight New England women were brought to court for heaping abuse on their husbands, which was punishable by fines or whippings. Joan Miller of Taunton, Massachusetts, was punished "for beating and reviling her husband and egging her children to healp her, biding them knock him in the head." One wife was punished for striking her husband with a pot of cider, another for scratching and kicking her spouse, and a third for insulting her husband by claiming he was "no man." How widespread these deviations from Puritan ideals were, we do not know.

Within marriage, a woman assumed a wide range of responsibilities and duties. As a housewife she was expected to cook, wash, sew, milk, spin, clean, and garden. These domestic activities included brewing beer, churning butter, harvesting fruit, keeping chickens, spinning wool, building fires, baking bread, making cheese, boiling laundry, and stitching shirts, petticoats, and other garments. She participated in trade—exchanging surplus fruit, meat, cheese, or butter for tea, candles, coats, or sheets—and manufacturing—salting, pickling, and preserving vegetables, fruit, and meat and making clothing and soap—in addition to other domestic tasks. As a "deputy husband," she was responsible for assuming her husband's responsibilities whenever he was absent from home—when, for example, he was on militia duty. Under such circumstances she took on his tasks of planting corn or operating the loom or keeping accounts. As a mistress she was responsible for training, supervising, feeding, and clothing girls who were placed in her house as servants.

Marriage also brought another equally tangible change to women's lives: frequent childbirth. Childlessness within marriage was an extreme rarity in colonial New England, with just one woman in twelve bearing no children. Most women could expect to bear at least six children and delivered children at fairly regular intervals averaging every twenty to thirty months, often having the last child after the age of forty. The process of delivery was largely in the hands of women and took place within the home. Labor was typically attended by a large number of observers. When one of Samuel Sewall's daughters gave birth in January 1701, at least sixteen women were in attendance in the lying-in room to offer encouragement and give advice. Often a midwife would intervene actively in the birth process by breaking the amniotic sac surrounding the infant in the uterus, steering the infant through the birth canal, and later removing the placenta.

Death in childbirth was frequent enough to provoke fear in many women. It appears that almost one delivery in thirty resulted in the death of the mother. Among the complications of pregnancy that could lead to maternal death were protracted labor, unusual presentation of the infant (such as a breech presentation), hemorrhages and convulsions, and infection after delivery. The sense of foreboding that was felt is apparent in the words of a Massachusetts woman, Sarah Stearns, who wrote in her diary, "Perhaps this is the last time I shall be permitted to join with my earthly friends."

After childbirth, infants were commonly breast-fed for about a year and were kept largely under their mother's care. Not until a child reached the age of two or three is there evidence that fathers took a more active role in child rearing.

Unlike marriages in contemporary England—where a late age of marriage and short life expectancy combined to make the average duration of marriage quite short—colonial unions tended to be long-lived, even by modern standards. A detailed study of one New England town found that an average marriage lasted almost twenty-four years. The extended duration of New England marriages gave such unions a sense of permanence that contrasted sharply with the transience characteristic of English marriages. In contrast to the pattern found today, however, the death of a spouse did not usually lead to the creation of households composed of a widow or widower living alone. Single adults of any age living alone were very unusual, and lifelong bachelors and spinsters were a rarity. Remarriage after the death of a spouse was common, particularly among wealthier men, and even individuals of very advanced ages (into their seventies or eighties) often remarried. Among those least likely to remarry were wealthy widows. If these women did remarry, they generally made an antenuptial agreement allowing them to manage their own property. The remarriage of a spouse often led to the rearrangement of families; the fostering out of children from an earlier marriage was not uncommon.

The experience of widowhood did give a small number of colonial women a taste of economic independence. Legally, a widow in seventeenth-century New England was entitled to at least a third of her husband's household goods along with income from his real estate until she remarried or died. Actual control of the house and fields—and even pots and beds—usually fell to a grown son or executor. But, in a number of cases, widows inherited land or businesses and continued to operate them on their own, assuming such jobs as blacksmith, silversmith, tinsmith, beer maker, tavernkeeper, shoemaker, shipwright, printer, barber, grocer, butcher, and shopkeeper—occupations and crafts usually monopolized by men.

Of all the differences that distinguish the seventeenth-century family from its present-day counterpart, perhaps the most striking involves the social experience of children. Three centuries ago, childhood was a much less

secure and shorter stage of life than it is today. In recent years it has become fashionable to complain about the "disappearance of childhood," but historical perspective reminds us that—despite high divorce rates—childhood is more stable than it was during the colonial era. For a child to die during infancy was a common occurrence in colonial New England; more deaths occurred among young children than in any other age group. In Plymouth, Andover, or Ipswich, Massachusetts, a family could anticipate an infant death rate of one out of ten; in less-healthy towns such as Salem or Boston, three of every ten children died in infancy. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that high infant death rates did not necessarily make parents indifferent toward their young children. Cotton Mather, who lost eight of his fifteen children before they reached their second birthdays, suggests the depth of feeling of parents: "We have our children taken from us; the Desire of our Eyes taken away with a stroke."

Not only were children more likely to die in infancy or to be orphaned than today, they were raised quite differently. In certain respects young children were treated, by our standards, in a casual way. Child rearing was not the family's main function; the care and nurture of children were subordinate to other family interests. In colonial New England newborn infants of well-to-do families were sometimes "put out" to wet nurses who were responsible for breast-feeding, freeing mothers to devote their time to their household duties. As in Europe, new babies were sometimes named for recently deceased infants. In contrast to Europeans, however, New Englanders did not wrap infants in tightly confining swaddling clothes, and carelessly supervised children sometimes crawled into fires or fell into wells.

The moral upbringing of Puritan children was never treated casually. The Puritan religion taught that even newborn infants were embodiments of guilt and sin (traceable to Adam's transgression in Eden), who, unless saved by God, were doomed to writhe in Satan's clutches for eternity. This belief in infant depravity and original sin exerted a powerful influence on methods of child rearing. In their view the primary task of child rearing was to break down a child's sinful will and internalize respect for divinely instituted authority through weekly catechisms, repeated admonitions, physical beatings, and intense psychological pressure. "Better whipt, than damned," was Cotton Mather's advice to parents.

Although Calvinists could be indulgent with very small children, among many parents their religious faith led to an insistence that, after the age of two, any assertion of a child's will be broken. A Pilgrim pastor eloquently defined a parent's responsibility to combat the inherent evil of a child's nature: "Surely," he affirmed, "there is in all children (though not alike) a stubbornness and stoutness of minde arising from naturall pride which must in the first place be broken and beaten down so the foundation of their education being layd in humilitie and tractableness other virtues may in turne be built thereon." A child's willfulness could be suppressed through

fierce physical beatings, exhibition of corpses, and tales of castration and abandonment—techniques designed to drive out "the old Adam" and produce traits of tractableness and peaceableness highly valued by Calvinists. The Puritans would strongly have rejected the twentieth-century "progressive" child rearing advice that the goal of parents should be to draw out their children's innate potentialities.

Without a doubt the most striking difference between seventeenth-century child rearing and practices today was the widespread custom of sending children to live with another family at the age of fourteen or earlier, so that a child would receive the proper discipline its natural parents could not be expected to administer. Children of all social classes and both sexes were frequently fostered out for long periods in order to learn a trade, to work as servants, or to attend a school. Since the family was a place of work and its labor needs and its financial resources often failed to match its size and composition, servants or apprentices might temporarily be taken in or children bound out.

If childhood is defined as a protected state, a carefree period of freedom from adulthood responsibilities, then a Puritan childhood was quite brief. Childhood came to an end abruptly around the age of seven when boys adopted adult clothing (prior to this both boys and girls wore frocks or petticoats) and were prevented from sleeping any longer with their sisters or female servants. By their teens most children were largely under the care and tutelage of adults other than their own parents. They were fostered out as indentured servants or apprentices or, in rare cases, sent to boarding schools.

While childhood ended early and abruptly, adulthood did not begin right away. Around the age of seven, young Puritans entered into a prolonged intermediate stage of "semi-dependency" during which they were expected to begin to assume a variety of productive roles. Young boys wove garters and suspenders on small looms, weeded flax fields and vegetable gardens, combed wool and wound spools of thread, and were taught to be blacksmiths, coopers, cordwainers (shoemakers), tanners, weavers, or shipwrights. Teenage girls received quite different training from their brothers. They were taught "housewifery" or spinning, carding, sewing, and knitting. Girls customarily helped their mothers or another mistress by hoeing gardens, spinning flax and cotton, tending orchards, caring for domestic animals, and by making clothing, lye, soap, and candles. Like their mothers, teenage girls might also assist their fathers in the fields or in a workshop.

For both young men and women, marriage, economic independence, and establishment of an independent household would come much later. For young men, the transition to full adulthood only occurred after they had received a bequest of property from their father. Marriage took place relatively late. The average age of marriage for men was over twenty-five years, and few women married before the age of twenty.

For New Englanders, migration across the Atlantic gave the family a significance and strength it had lacked in the mother country. In the healthful environment of New England, family ties grew tighter than they had ever been in the Old World. The first settlers lived much longer than their contemporaries in England and were much more likely to live to see their grandchildren. Marriages lasted far longer than they did in contemporary England, and infant mortality rates quickly declined to levels far below those in the old country. Migration to the New World did not weaken paternal authority; it strengthened it by increasing paternal control over land and property.

Even when individuals did move around in New England, they almost always migrated as part of a family group. Few sons moved farther than sixteen miles from their paternal home during their father's lifetime. Contrary to an older view that the New World environment dissolved extended family ties, it now seems clear that the family in early-seventeenth-century New England was a more stable, disciplined, and cohesive unit than its English counterpart in the Old World.

~~DOCUMENTS~~

~~Two Poems, 1678~~

~~To My Dear and Loving Husband~~

~~If ever two were one, then surely we;
If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can,
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.~~

~~My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay;
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live in love let's so persevere
That when we live no more we may live ever.~~

~~Before the Birth of One of Her Children~~

~~All things within this fading world have end,
Adversity doth still our joys attend;~~

LOVE FOR HER HUSBAND.

READ WITH LOVE

SOURCE: Anne Bradstreet, *Poems of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet* (Boston, 1758).

~~No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet
But with death's parting blow are sure to meet.
The sentence passed is most irrevocable,
A common thing, yet, oh, inevitable.
How soon, my dear, death may my steps attend,
How soon it may be thy lot to lose thy friend,
We both are ignorant; yet love bids me
These farewell lines to recommend to thee,
That when the knot's untied that made us one
I may seem thine, who in effect am none.
And if I see not half my days that are due,
What nature would God grant to yours and you.
The many faults that well you know I have
Let be interred in my oblivion's grave;
If any worth or virtue were in me,
Let that live freshly in thy memory,
And when thou feelest no grief, as I no harms,
Yet love thy dead, who long lay in thine arms;
And when thy loss shall be repaid with gains
Look to my little babes, my dear remains,
And if thou love thyself, or lovedst me,
These oh protect from stepdam's injury.
And if chance to thine eyes shall bring this verse,
With some sad sighs honor my absent hearse;
And kiss this paper for thy love's dear sake,
Who with salt tears this last farewell did take.~~

* PLEASURE
* PAIN

LOVE/HATE
REASONS

MOTHER
DIED
8/11/10

~~A Law for "the good education of children," 1642~~

~~Forasmuch as the good education of children is of singular behoof and benefit to any commonwealth, and whereas many parents and masters are too indulgent and negligent of their duty in that kind:~~

~~It is ordered, that the selectmen of every town, in the several precincts and quarters where they dwell, shall have a vigilant eye over their brethren and neighbours, to see, first that none of them shall suffer so much barbarism in any of their families, as not to endeavour to teach, by themselves or others, their children and apprentices, so much learning, as may enable them perfectly to read the English tongue, and knowledge of the capital laws: upon penalty of twenty shillings for each neglect therein.~~

SOURCE: The Charter and General Laws of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay (Boston: T. B. Waite and Co., 1814), 73-74.