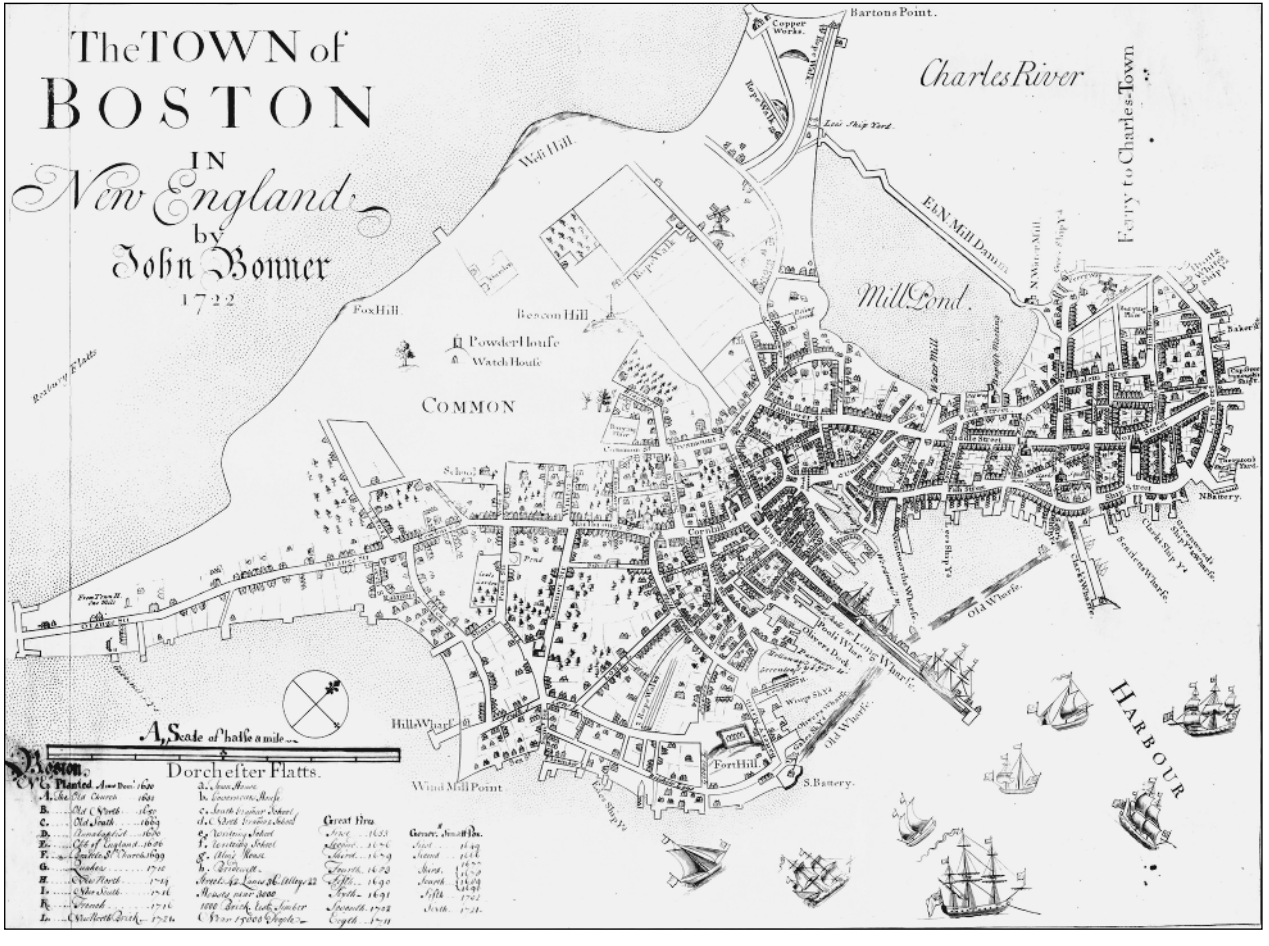
Part One

The Ancient Ideal of Seamen's Equality



Drafted by John Bonner in 1722, this map was the earliest map to show Boston's shape and street pattern. Bonner's previous occupations as navigator and shipwright are reflected in his attention to waterfront features and activities, such as the ships unloading at the "Long Wharfe." The fist-shaped North End (right) correctly appears as more crowded than the West End (center).

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The Maritime Origins of a Mutinous Town

The ambitious and well-connected British foreign service official Francis Bernard, who had served competently as the governor of New Jersey during the French and Indian wars, believed that to assume the governorship of prosperous Massachusetts would be to attain the pinnacle of his career. It was a post that he considered much deserved and quite in keeping with his talents. The appointment was arranged in 1760, that apparently wonderful year in which Montreal was captured and the French were totally defeated in North America. Little did Bernard know that the War of American Independence was only fifteen years in the future and that the elegant colonial capital to which he so expectantly moved with his wife and ten children–Boston–would be the locus of mob violence whose sparks would leave him scarred forever and would help to ignite the American Revolution.

It all happened with amazing speed. Within less than five years of his arrival, Bernard was writing home that in order to defeat the hated Stamp Act, Bostonians were "combining in a body to raise a rebellion." Not only did he see the aroused citizens of America's leading seaport as violent and savage and determined to destroy royal authority, but also he accused them of "general

Leveling"—that is, desiring to take away "the distinction of rich and poor." In an effort to alert the most powerful officials in the king's administration and to make himself appear the victim of more than a passing storm, he wrote ominously that "the real authority of government is at an end." Civilization itself was threatened.

Painting a picture of anarchy let loose, a picture that might be compared with Dickens's later view of the French Revolution, Bernard went on to report that "Some of the principal ringleaders of the late riots walk the streets with impunity. No officer dares attack them, no witnesses appear against them, and no judge acts upon them."

Indeed, Bernard's lieutenant governor, Massachusetts-born Thomas Hutchinson, chose this moment in 1765 to resign timorously his secondary position as chief judge of the province. Hutchinson's mansion in the North End of Boston—a structure of Inigo Jones–style beauty, one of the peninsular town's few architectural gems—was viciously ripped apart as the Stamp Act riot burst all expectable bounds. The mob sweated for a full three hours before toppling the building's lofty cupola, after which they turned their frenzied, drunken attention to stripping and wrecking the interior, including the wine cellar. Hutchinson, in the years of unceasing riots that followed, seemed to join Bernard in abandoning all hope of ever restoring orderly, not to mention royal, government to the province. He had always loved Massachusetts Bay, but he had never comprehended the salty ways of its capital's people.

Violence and Consciousness on the Waterfront

Who could understand the contradictory citizens of Boston, with its excess of steeples and its Puritan ethos, now turning to violence? Who then or in subsequent generations had an adequate explanation or a rationale for these inbred, antiauthoritarian people whose Stamp Act riots exploded into the most damaging of all such protests staged throughout the American colonies? One purpose of this book is to provide an interpretation of their mutinous spirit, its roots and its consequences. And this chapter, with its brief introduc-

tion of Bernard and Hutchinson and others who will be portrayed more fully in later chapters, sets the scene for their extraordinary personalities and rebellious actions. The total of Boston's riots, which began near the end of the preceding century and lasted well into the 1700s, exceeded thirty—far surpassing comparable disturbances in all other colonial ports. Yet however earthshaking their results, they continue to appear as the quixotic actions of a very idiosyncratic, curiously stressed people. That was certainly the conclusion of Nathaniel Hawthorne, the deeply probing, deeply ironic writer who demonstrated his understanding of (as opposed to sympathy for) stressed New England characters in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne wrote a remarkable short story in 1837 called "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" that reveals his fascination with Boston's pre-Revolutionary mobs. This grotesque and cruel sketch of Bostonians in a tarring-and-feathering incident is drawn from historical research, as well as, presumably, from the author's tribal memory. Here is the most vivid part of the story:

> A mighty stream of people now emptied into the street, and came rolling slowly towards the church. A single horseman wheeled the corner in the midst of them, and close behind him came a band of fearful wind-instruments, sending forth a fresher discord, now that no intervening buildings kept it from the ear. Then a redder light disturbed the moonbeams, and a dense multitude of torches shone along the street, concealing by their glare whatever object they illuminated. The single horseman, clad in a military dress, and bearing a drawn sword, rode onward as the leader, and, by his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like war personified; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning which attends them. In his train, were wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastic shapes without a model, giving the whole march a visionary air, as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain, and were sweeping visibly through the midnight streets. A mass of people, inactive,

> except as applauding spectators, hemmed the procession in, and several women ran along the sidewalks, piercing the confusion of heavier sounds, with their shrill voices of mirth or terror.

Another Yankee who thought he understood the troublesome people of Boston, and one who lived at the actual time of the pre-Revolutionary events, was the rationalistic Congregational clergyman Jonathan Mayhew, heir to a long line of appropriately eccentric Massachusetts Bay colonists. In the pews of his affluent West Church sat such liberal-minded citizens as James Otis, Samuel Adams, and Robert Treat Paine (the last of whom would later prosecute the British troops on trial for the Boston Massacre and who would even later sign the Declaration of Independence). Paul Revere, in his younger years, had received a harsh parental whipping for attending Mayhew's church; the pastor had been judged by other Congregationalists as excessive in his view of human freedom. Although Mayhew was not one of the "New Light" enthusiasts in this era of individualistic Christian renewal that came to be called the Great Awakening, he dared to preach the novel message that civil and religious liberty were both mandatory and inseparable.

On the Sunday before the Stamp Act riots, it happened that Mayhew had delivered a particularly fiery sermon, basing it on the text "I would they were even cut off which trouble you, for, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty!" Yet on hearing of the wreckage of Hutchinson's house and other associated acts of violence, the preacher was immediately seized by a Puritanical guilt spasm, a reaction not unlike that of the town's well-to-do merchants, who, however much they may have disliked Hutchinson and his high-and-mighty manners, feared that something even more consequential than property destruction had occurred. They saw that the people involved in the affair had been of the lowest sort—fishermen and dockworkers and seamen.

In one voice, the merchants condemned this "licentious" action of the lesser orders, this outrageous presumption on the part of riffraff and outcasts that they could muscle their way into what was truly a grave political matter. The merchants' words echoed those of

their fathers back in 1747, when popular riots against the Royal Navy's impressment actions had impelled them to react conservatively against the rioters. They had heaped blame for what had truly been a community uprising on "Foreign seamen, Servants, Negroes, and other Persons of Mean and Vile Condition." Order, or the semblance thereof, must be preserved, whoever the disturbers might be. Such people must not mutiny against God's community.

In this same spirit of denial, Jonathan Mayhew penned a personal letter of regret to his neighbor Thomas Hutchinson. Deploring the action of the mob and wondering whether his own understanding of Bostonians of all sorts and conditions might have been in error, he wrote that henceforth he needed "to moderate and pacify [them rather] than to risk exciting so sensitive a people." By "sensitive," did the preacher mean "hysterical"? Mayhew's view of his fellow citizens was restrictively that of the pastor in his high pulpit looking down on the erratic sheep below. Much more attentive to God's wishes than to those of man or woman, he should perhaps be excused for not knowing much about persons of "Vile and Mean Condition"—Bostonians who lived on the edge of starvation, in terror of impressment, or at the call of brutal masters.

Yet a man of such aloof intelligence must have pondered, even as he castigated himself and consoled his neighbor, how people of that condition could have taken so fierce an interest in an international issue like the Stamp Act. As Hutchinson himself remarked, many of those in the mob—he called them the "cudgel boys"—never knew what a Stamp Act was. Were they not, by their rioting, really making a mockery of the exalted liberty that Mayhew advocated? Were they making Boston not a cradle of liberty but a cradle of violence and licentiousness? An exploration of their town's history may help reveal their intentions.

The Triumph of the Codfish Aristocracy

Boston, the high-rising peninsula that European explorers called Trimontaine for its three hills but that Native Americans called Shawmut for its "living fountains," was first beheld by English

settlers as they approached it in an open sailboat. That roomy little shallop, resembling a lifeboat, had sailed north from Plymouth along the shores of Massachusetts Bay in September of 1621, just ten months after the *Mayflower*'s landing. Aboard the shallop were thirteen men, ten Europeans and three Native Americans acting as their guides, one of whom was the linguistically talented Squanto. The whole party operated under the command of red-bearded Captain Myles Standish, whose purpose was not only to reconnoiter the coast but also, as Charles Francis Adams Jr. later wrote, "to establish trading connections with the inhabitants"—meaning to swap something of very little value for the Native Americans' much-needed produce, be it harvested corn or trapped beaver.

Because of shifting winds, the Pilgrim explorers could not quite reach land; they were required to spend the night on board. In the morning, they anchored in the lee of Thompson's Island and attempted negotiations with a party of Massachusetts tribesmen they met on shore. Reassured that the situation was not hostile, they reboarded the boat and sailed into what is now Boston's inner harbor. There they noted and admired many of the "plantations" glimpsed by the far-roving Captain John Smith seven years earlier. Now abandoned by Native American farmers who had been hit by European plagues, these sites looked well cleared and ripe for occupation.

Standish and his crew then rounded the tip of Boston's North End, anchoring at the mouth of the Mystic River. On landing, they heeded Squanto's advice that the chiefs of the region could be located and should be contacted in the interior. But instead of a Native American ruler, they encountered a countryside still recovering from recent attacks by the Tarratines from the north. Concluding nonetheless that the well-watered territory was pacified and available for European settlement, the explorers sailed home to Plymouth with good news.

Ten more years were required, however, before English settlers established themselves on the three-summited peninsula, and these settlers were not Pilgrims but Puritans. The distinction was not only one of faith—the Pilgrims believing that a total break with the ritualistic Church of England was necessary, the Puritans trusting that they, with their carefully wrought Calvinist credo, could reform and

reshape the church*–but also one of means. Whereas the Pilgrims tended to be families of farm-village background and modest expectations, the Puritans were regarded as gentlefolk "of consideration," provident townspeople whose servants and retainers would do the work in farm or forest that would let them go about their business as proper managers. Having moved from their initial landing site in Salem to what is now Charlestown in the late summer of 1630, they soon determined that the supply of spring water there was inadequate. So they floated across the harbor to the place of the rumored fountains, where they established themselves in tents and rude shelters. They numbered some five hundred settlers, including the gentle families' servants and workmen, all covenanting together under the authority of the king's Great Patent of New England (1620) and under the stern but creative direction of Governor John Winthrop.

Among the first acts of the governor's so-called Court of Assistance was to order "that Trimontaine shall be called Boston" (after the English church town of one of their backers, Isaac Johnson). Here they set about building a New Zion, a tightly controlled community of hard work and religious dedication whose intellectual brilliance and social harmony would be an example to the iniquitous Old World left behind. This "Cittie on a Hill" would embody and would demonstrate God's purpose on earth. The Puritans saw themselves as defined by their hardships, removal, and future mission. After the first winter of starvation, in which some two hundred of the colony died and many others vowed to take the first boat back home to England, inland farms began to produce bountifully. The survival of God's people seemed assured.

Word spread swiftly abroad that in a harbor of Massachusetts Bay was a safe and commodious haven for Englishmen of the Puritan persuasion (certainly not for others). Soon, emigrants fleeing from the wrath of God in the corrupt Old World arrived by the hundreds. Land sales and house-building were the prime businesses of those first challenging years, though certain would-be merchants strove to get a leg up by dealing in fur and timber. A retail store was

*Puritan magistrates did not declare the Massachusetts Bay Colony independent of the Church of England's ecclesiastical authority until 1648.

licensed and established by 1633. By 1640, a mere decade after Boston's founding, the population numbered twelve hundred. Some of the city's short streets followed the shoreline, some fanned out from the center of town, and many of them were named for basic needs (like Water and Milk streets). They soon set the irregular pattern that would forever identify Boston, to the confusion of visitors. Many historians have commented that the original 2.8-mile-long peninsula was shaped like a polliwog; one more geometrically inclined observer saw it as a diamond-shaped quadrilateral. However viewed, it measured little more than a mile at its widest, containing less than a thousand acres of solid land. Indeed, Boston's miniature size must be judged as inversely proportional to the extraordinary human energy that went into its development, as well as into its fundamental values.

The multigabled wood-frame house of small windows and an overhanging second story that Governor Winthrop built for himself and his family in that first decade was notably sturdy; it stood fast down through the years until the severe winter of 1775–1776. Then, old and decayed and having served as the parsonage of the nearby Old South Meeting House, the house was torn down. The destruction was carried out not by rampaging mobs but by freezing British soldiers of the occupying force in search of firewood. "Old South," as Bostonians fondly called the venerable neighboring structure, had been built in 1669 and stood almost exactly at the center of the town.

Old North Meeting House had been built about twenty years earlier near the very tip of the peninsula at North Square (and thus near the still-standing Paul Revere House). It was surpassed in steeple height by a grander structure built on Salem Street in 1723—an Anglican church known as either Christ Church or North Church. It was from this lofty steeple that two lanterns would be displayed in 1775 to signal the secretive setting forth of British troops up the Charles River on their way northwest to Lexington. In either old or new form, this church served as the heart of the North End—a tightly congested and fiercely diverse community of merchants and whores, fishermen and townspeople, loyalists and revolutionaries.

Originally, before all the levelings and the landfills that reshaped Boston over the years, the North End seemed to exist as an island on its own, nearly cut off from the rest of the town by the canal running between Mill Pond and the harbor. It was in this remarkably insular North End (very similar to the human condition depicted in the movie *Mystic River*) that a mob of ruffians would coalesce in the next century, when the prosperity of early years was long past. This mob would combine with one or two others across the town to provide muscle for the riotous actions leading to the Revolution. The South End, less densely populated but home to many of the ropewalks and shipyards in which the maritime laborers worked, led to the Neck that joined the mainland. Both the North End and the South End fronted on the Great Cove, the crescent-shaped, quickly built-up harbor. Here one found the docks, the chandleries, and the counting houses that supported Boston's industry of the future–shipping–and that helped it become North America's richest colonial port in the years before 1750.

"Two strong arms reached out at either end of the Great Cove," explained an early guidebook. At the tip of the harbor's northern arm rose Copp's Hill, near which settlers built the North Battery (whose guns would lob cannonballs across at American soldiers at Breed's Hill in 1775). At the end of the southern arm was the even higher Fort Hill, at whose foot authorities established the much stronger South Battery. To build a secure haven between those two defense points, the settlers constructed a kind of breakwater out of timber and stones, the so-called Barricado. Its prime purpose was to prevent enemy fire ships from storming in against Boston's still primitive wharves. At certain points, breaks in the Barricado allowed the passage of ships, in or out. Not until 1710 was a major wharf built out into deep water from the waterfront. This was the famous Long Wharf, stretching out nearly half a mile in length, a wonder in its day. In 1768, British troops marched up it toward the town's center in order to calm down anticustoms rioters.

The British government's official presence in town had made itself known long before that. Winthrop's rival and eventual replacement, Thomas Dudley, had ordered the construction of an offshore battery for the king's emplaced commanders at Castle William

three miles south of town (now Castle Island, connected to the mainland). This outpost, for reasons forgotten long ago, always flew the royal flag, as opposed to the stripped-down version of the British flag flown by authorities in Boston. Out of that latter flag, the cross of St. George had been slashed by the sword of a particularly spirited Puritan forefather. Ship captains entering the harbor, on scanning the two flags and noting their differences, received a hint of Boston's bifurcated view of itself and its not quite autonomous identity.

By the time the Long Wharf was built, the harbor's ancient Barricado was falling apart, remaining little more than a hazard. Yet the line it once marked is still visible today as the course of Boston's Atlantic Avenue. Another heritage of those early Puritan days, along with savage intolerance and public schools, is the peculiar accent of Bostonians. This much-ridiculed, grating, chronic nasal condition—with the long *a* and the gone-missing *r*—may be traced back, linguistic experts say, to the speech of the town's first immigrants from East Anglia.

All too soon, the wealth-producing influx of land-hungry immigrants came to an end. This occurred partly because the success of Cromwell's 1644 seizure of power from the Stuarts had made life in England more secure for Puritans, and partly because the land resources of tiny Boston had been severely depleted. And so, in 1637, Massachusetts Bay Colony warriors, booted and spurred, rode out to win control of the region's fur industry, carrying out a brutal campaign against Connecticut's Pequot tribe. Although the war was successful in destroying the Pequots and in demonstrating the Puritans' inhumane attitude to Native American peoples, it accomplished little economically. The fur industry soon reached its apex; wampum would serve as the coin of trade for only a few more years. The town was forced to turn not to the land but to the sea for economic survival.

As far back as when Captain John Smith had surveyed the coast, he had urged that fishing outposts be established. The silver of the cods' glistening sides seemed to be the only metal of real value in this part of North America. And already certain coastal towns—Beverly and Marblehead among them, but not Plymouth,

which never seemed to get the hang of the art—were prospering as a result of fisher families' successful harvests. There were two difficulties about Boston developing itself on a seaward course, neither of them insoluble. The first of these was social: fishermen tended to be wandering, irreverent types, subject to multiple vices, and unwilling to live and work within the tight framework of Puritan governance. Winthrop and the colony's founders had conceived of Massachusetts Bay as a "commonwealth," with prices, wages, and the exchange of all goods strictly controlled by the authorities. Fishermen found ways to avoid such regulations, scorning even the concept of a public market; carelessly, they failed to pay taxes and attend worship service. For all that, they were so valuable to the town at this point that they, along with carpenters and very few others, were exempted from military duty. Surely, by dint of public pressure and communal norms, they could be controlled, as captains always controlled their crews—so thought the town's fish-rich elite.

The governor named a committee of six Puritans to "consult and advise" him on the financially and socially tricky business of "setting forward and managing the fishing trade." By 1653, that committee had grown to a full-fledged commission; its laws attempted to maintain standards of quality in the marketing of fish and to prevent the taking of cod and mackerel during the spawning season. Official encouragement and flexible regulations seemed the only way to manage the infant industry and its contentious personnel.

The second problem was technical: how to construct a fleet of fishing vessels large enough to bring the harvest to port and carry it out to wider markets? Just one year after Governor Winthrop's arrival, he had built a small ketch of thirty tons' burden (probably some forty feet long) on the banks of the Mystic River, naming her *Blessing of the Bay*. Records indicate that she had two masts, the forward one rigged with square main and topsail, and the mizzen mast rigged most likely in the lateen mode (meaning with a long, slanting spar that held a loose-footed, triangular sail). In a coincidence that might be called providential, she was launched on July 4, 1631, just 145 years to the day before the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Winthrop realized that ships far more commodious than the *Blessing* would be needed if the town were to compete with New England's other seafaring communities. By 1640, a shipbuilder in Salem had built a craft of 300 tons' burden (more than a hundred feet long). Challenged, Winthrop urged public investment in shipyards and the recruitment of talented carpenters. Captain Nehemia Bourne responded with a trading vessel named *Trial*–the first commercial ship built in Boston–which, at 160 tons, was a respectable beginning. In building the *Trial*, Bostonians of all ranks seem to have pledged themselves to work together for the common purpose. That attitude declares itself in Winthrop's diary: "The work was hard to accomplish for want of money, &c, but our shipwrights were content to take such pay as the country could make."

Gradually, Boston constructed and acquired a fishing fleet. The ships of all sizes that were built in shipyards like Gillian and Company's in the North End provided work for hundreds of carpenters, caulkers, and riggers. Like the building of *Trial*, this was a community enterprise. The Puritans' shrewd manipulation of factors that included private enterprise and government regulation allowed Boston to surpass other towns, both in fishing and in allied maritime industries.

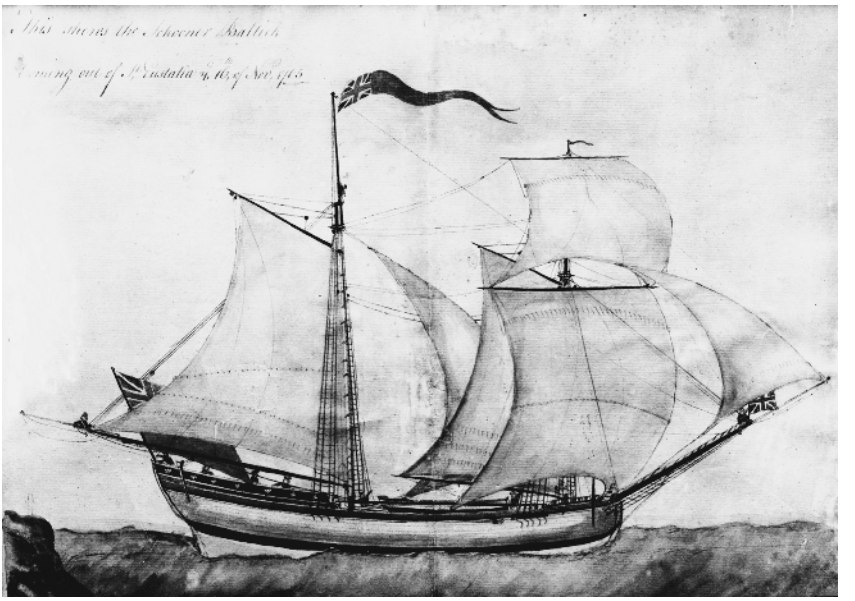
Many of Boston's craft were rather primitive, open boats for coastal work; others were more ocean-worthy, developing into the large-sterned, blunt-bowed ketches and pinkies and sloops that are shown in paintings of New England harbors at this time. Later would come the schooners and the brigantines–originally, "brigandines," named after the brigands who extended fishing and fish-shipping into piracy aboard sleeker, faster ships–that crowded New England harbors in the Revolutionary era.

An important point about the fishermen who worked in these early craft was that they functioned as a team but in a highly individualistic spirit. That is, they were paid not in wages (as sailors on merchantmen would be) but in shares of the entire crew's combined catch. Of the four men aboard the smaller fishing vessels–namely, the master, the midshipman, the foreshipman (their ranks indicating the position of their fishing stations), and the cook–each and every

one "hauled his own line" (a phrase of the day), teaming with the others but on his own. On going to sea, the master or captain would forge a consensual decision with his men about course and destination, a decision that would affect all of their lives and fortunes. It was a regular and unquestioned process, with unsuspected political consequences for later generations. Having sailed back to Boston with their catch, the fishermen would argue about which fish were whose and what the promised share had actually been, creating frequent dockside uproars. Flocking fisher wives added their opinions and passion to the debate: the voice of the people could be heard on the waterfront.

Wealth and the apportioning of it were and would forever be a discomforting ethical problem for this Puritan town, pulled in different directions as its leaders were by their communal principles and by their desire to do well unto themselves. The Puritan administration sought to ensure that all merchants charged a "just price," but that covenant was often honored in the breach. Take the famous example of waterfront storekeeper Robert Keayne, who won fame as the first entrepreneur (or, by a modern analogy, the first executive officer) to have the law book thrown at him for having tried to grab too much. Governor Winthrop charged that in some of his dealings, Keayne had taken "above six pence in the shilling profit"; in others, "above eight pence. And in some small things, above two for one." It should be remembered that there were twelve pence in the shilling (twenty shillings in the pound), so the charge that he was getting a monstrous 50 percent profit seems accurate. Keayne survived this encounter with the colony's finger-wagging governor sufficiently well to bestow upon the town, in his will of 1665, three hundred pounds for a market shelter—an indication that he, like many contemporaries, was a community-minded Puritan through and through but also a profit-directed businessman looking for whatever advantage he could take.

Even before the first decade of Boston's life had concluded, Francis Higginson, the chief clergyman of the community, was scolding his contemporaries for their tendency toward commercialism. He reminded them of the Puritans' "Original Errand" of a



Although Boston's earliest fishing and merchant vessels were crude and limited in range, its shipyards were producing ships for overseas trade before 1700. This handsome schooner, the Baltic*, sketched by an unknown artist as she headed out under full sail from the island of St. Eustatius in 1765, is typical of Boston's successful but not necessarily legal West Indies traders.*
Photograph courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum

Christian commonwealth. Increase Mather continued this theme after his installation as the pastor of Old North Meeting House in 1664. But by then, a perceptible change had taken over the town: the commands of the fish-shipping merchants could be heard more loudly than could the commandments of the divines. This had happened in large part because of the gradual mastery by a few Boston families of the American colonies' trade with the West Indies. On the strength of that trade, the city had set forth on its period of greatest success and expansion, to the apparent benefit of one and all. But, in fact, the intermarrying group that came to be called the "Codfish Aristocracy" (a term that by no means embarrassed its members) dominated the people of the town, its members feeling themselves mighty enough to pursue aristocratic pretensions and to abandon no-longer-pertinent Puritan precepts.

The Lure of the Triangle Trade

As if they were all parts of a single body, Bostonians from old and new merchant families responded at once to the discovery that the route to the Caribbean islands was the fastest way to riches. To Barbados and Hispaniola and the islands beyond, they shipped a variety of goods, including second-class fish for the slaves working the plantations. And from those islands they brought back sugar and molasses, basic ingredients for the New England distilleries. When to this pattern they added trading voyages to Europe (raw materials to England; first-class fish to Spain) and Africa, the outlines of the famous Triangle Trade were established. As Benjamin W. Labaree pointed out in the stirring book *New England and the Sea*, the vessels sailing forth from Boston often had several owners who shared the risks and the profits. Merchants generally gave shipmasters wide discretion in the sale of their cargoes; even when a bit of smuggling or illegal dealing with outlawed islands was involved, the merchants shared knowingly with the skippers in returns from the ventures.

New England boomed as a result of its seafaring daring; Boston was on its way to becoming the richest city in the New World, with as many as five hundred vessels clearing the port each year. The so-called lords of trade in England smiled benignly on their prospering colony, disinclined to interfere with its somewhat independent-minded practices. Although Parliament passed successive Acts of Trade and Navigation during the 1600s—acts that generally restricted American traders, commanding them to operate only between British-controlled ports—the regulations were enforced with notable laxity. This was because English merchants were benefiting from the Triangle Trade, too. The fact that some of the cargoes contained forbidden materials and involved forbidden ports seemed a forgettable detail. Fortunes were being made, the face of Boston was changing as more wharves were thrust eagerly seaward, as ships grew ever larger, and as stylish merchants' mansions replaced run-down seamen's shanties.

Along with the new wealth went both an increased willingness to take any risks to augment family fortunes and an aggressive intention to protect the port of Boston at all costs. In 1662, at the time of

Cromwell's downfall and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy, the General Court of Massachusetts felt that it must make that intention clear to all, even to the Crown itself. It issued a remarkable statement, declaring that Massachusetts would defend itself by force of arms against "any who should attempt destruction, invasion, detriment, or annoyance" of the Bay Colony's government. Although this was not at all a declaration of independence, it certainly demonstrated an autonomous turn of mind; it might be likened to a manifesto issued by the rulership of Taiwan at the time of a regime change in Beijing.

Yet despite its posture of confident defiance, Massachusetts was by no means secure. A tectonic economic shift would soon shake Boston more powerfully than any hurricane could. Just as in other parts of the Western world, where centuries-old agricultural economies were about to be challenged and superseded by industrial economies (including mercantilism), so here on Massachusetts Bay the local business of fishing was gradually overpowered by the predominance of transatlantic trade. As cosmopolitan Boston boomed, fishing, which had sustained the old ethos of the town, went elsewhere, to smaller and more older-fashioned ports like Marblehead and Beverly. And with the departure of fishing went the oligarchal assumptions and social prescriptions that had kept Boston so tightly controlled for so many decades.

Whereas fishing was based, as previously noted, on the tradition of "lay"* payments, with each fisherman getting his own proportionate share of the total income, merchant shipping and all of its accrued wealth were based on the work of seamen earning weekly or monthly wages per contract. Seventeenth-century commercial shipping was therefore, as Marxist and other historians have pointed out, the first of the industrial systems to assert itself on coastal populations. Seamen—that is, those of them who had to give up their fishing positions for posts aboard merchantmen—were supposed to become mere cogs in wheels, following orders without question, rather than contributing to an onboard consensus. That was particularly true as the merchant

*The men's take was part of the master's, which was one-third of the total, the shipowner claiming two-thirds.

vessels grew larger, their crews increasing to twenty or thirty from an old fishing vessel's five or six hands. Yet the fact remained that seamen and their extraordinary ability to carry out high-risk tasks under the stormiest of circumstances were of fundamental importance to the shipping enterprise.

By 1690, seamen involved in merchant shipping constituted a growing portion of Boston's male population (increasing from 5 to 10 percent), a notable fraternity among the town's then total population of seven thousand. Theirs was, always had been, and always would be an incomparably dangerous calling, even more deadly than that of the fishermen. More than half of New England mariners died between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine years. Only a small number survived their youthful years, to die, on average, in their forties—as opposed to artisans and gentlemen, who lived into their fifties and sixties. No wonder that Benjamin Franklin's father beat him when he expressed the desire to go to sea.

Yet there was that strange and eternal appeal of the sea—the chance to get away from grinding poverty ashore and take a chance beyond the blue horizon. This existed despite knowledge that service on board a merchant or a naval vessel was often likened to slavery or imprisonment. In writings of the day, whalers were singled out particularly as "refuges" for runaway servants and escaped slaves. Indentured servants and black slaves existed on the lowest step of the long ladder leading up to Boston's merchant mansions. Benjamin Labaree wrote that "Historians of early New England have been slow to recognize how much of the region's prosperity depended upon the institution of slavery. Black servants were employed as carpenters in shipyards, as longshoremen and truckmen along the waterfront, and as mariners aboard vessels."

When the number of slaves and freed blacks then engaged in maritime occupations (about eight hundred) is added to the variety of indentured European immigrants then landing in Boston, one begins to gain a vision of a much more racially mixed, economically and socially repressed dockside populace and to lose sight of the conventional social profile. Unfortunately, demographers have had difficulty identifying the precise number of African American and immigrant families in Boston at this time, for the simple reason that

most of them had to live in nonregistered boardinghouses or in the homes of established whites.

Even so, this new diversity hardly made for a social scene of harmonious heterogeneity. Regrettably, Puritans had always had difficulty accepting people unlike themselves and their (most often) male leaders into their society. With extraordinary passion they persecuted whatever Quakers, Roman Catholics, and freethinkers happened to land on their shores. Independent-minded women, particularly those who expressed themselves unguardedly, were a special problem. The cases of the hanging of the witches of Salem and the banishment of the antinomian Anne Hutchinson (an ancestor of Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson) are too well known to need repeating here. Less well known or remembered are the uncalled-for murder of female and male Native Americans by Plymouth's militaristic Myles Standish at Wessagussett (Weymouth) in 1622 or the Puritans' ardent warfare against the Pequot Indians in 1637. That continuing, unsaintly bellicosity against Native Americans not only nearly cost the Massachusetts Bay Colony its life in the so-called King Philip's War of 1675 but also, even more grievously, set the tone for American discrimination and warfare in future generations.

Although almshouses, schools, and work programs for the poor existed in early Boston, these were for the Puritans' own people—and their purpose was not purely charitable. In 1657, the Bay Colony government issued a series of orders designed to protect the working people from unfair dismissal from their jobs. This and various attempts to control wages and prices can be seen either as evidence of the Puritans' noble "commonwealth" concept or as artifices to keep everyone at work, thereby preventing the town from having to pay for the support of the poor and the unemployed. However it may have been applied or interpreted, a central doctrine of Puritan government had always been that each community was required to grant subsistence to its own indigent folk.

Many of these possibly altruistic measures began to fall by the wayside as Boston's population grew and as the character of its employment changed. In the old days of fishing, shipyards were small enterprises with five or six workers. As orders for larger and larger merchant ships came in, yards grew, too, employing upward

of two dozen carpenters, caulkers, shipwrights, and other trained personnel. The associated ropewalks were even larger, with teams of fifty to do the tricky "rope dance" and handle other phases of that very stressful, very necessary work. Boston, having displaced the old fisher economy with the new merchant economy and having committed itself and its workers to this grand task of creating America's busiest, most creative port, was unfortunately unprepared to address socially or politically the forthcoming, consequential periods of depression and deprivation.

Large numbers of unemployed people—a problem that would soon be visited upon Boston—have caused disruption in many historic cities over eons and have been seen as the origin of many social upheavals. In this port, even before the problem became acute, the maritime laborers and the servants assigned to shipyard work (along with the transient population of seamen, fishermen, and unskilled workers) lived a chancy existence and posed an unsuspected danger. Although they were vitally present and numerically strong among other, more accepted groups in the cramped streets and the public houses of the town, they were to some extent alienated, often resentful, and generally disregarded.

John Adams, in looking back at these early times, made the point that the poor man was simply not visible, adding, "he is not disapproved or reproached, *he is only not seen*" (Adams's italics). They were viewed, if at all, as non-Bostonians. Many of them either had been "warned out" of villages in the interior (because they, as charity cases, represented a drain on that place's resources) or belonged to the "strolling poor" of some other race or origin. They had but a minimal stake in the status of Boston; when driven to desperate extremes by poverty and repression—in short, with very little to lose—they had little reason to withhold their fury. With a certain turn of events, they might indeed become Hawthorne's garish rider with a sword.

Politics on the Waterfront

Just as Boston's maritime workers—those men who risked their lives to bring ships home with profitable cargoes—were not present in the

social consideration of their "betters," so were they excluded from the political process. Although Boston was truly notable among other colonial ports for having at its political heart the town meeting, a uniquely Puritan institution, that gathering of franchised citizens was open only to white men of property. Indeed, to think that Boston's original town meeting was a yeasty matrix for an emergent political structure that would one day express the democratic will of the people would be to grant it something more than it deserves. Treasured though it might have been in local hearts, the town meeting of colonial times was designed as, and functioned essentially as, an institution for the election of traditional and expected delegates to the lower house (the Assembly).

That house, in which sat representatives from the province's towns, had the particular duty of nominating higher-ranked gentlemen to the upper house, or Council. Those gentlemen, however, were actually approved or disapproved by the governor. Massachusetts, way back in the time of Winthrop, had chosen to give a rather confusing collective name to the two houses, the General Court. In the time to come, when riots were getting out of hand and some gentlemen were siding with, if not directing, the rioters, John Hancock, a member of the General Court, had the distinction of being nominated to the Council. It gave Governor Francis Bernard pleasure to ignore the nomination and choose a more dependable loyalist. Unintentionally, he thereby made a "martyr" of Hancock, making Boston's political situation all the more tense.

Yet the Town Meeting of Boston, in a way quite unanticipated by either the Puritan fathers or the later royalists, did serve increasingly as a forum in which people of the "middling sort" presumed to express their opinions. When the seventeenth century merged into the eighteenth and as the spirit of that enlightened century encouraged the liberalizing of tongues, these town meeting members—artisans and tavern owners, small merchants and retailers—even organized themselves into pressure groups or "caucuses." Deacon Samuel Adams, and later his son Samuel Jr., would take lead roles in that development. But, of course, only white males possessing some property could serve as or vote for representatives. In 1690, for example, from the entire population of seven thousand, only six

hundred "freemen" actually cast ballots. Even as the role of the town meeting increased and its influence on the General Court grew stronger—an influence that the successive governors deplored—the propertyless people of the waterfront remained without a political voice. Except for their riots, that is.

Yet, notably, there were *no* "tumults and alarums" in all the years from the founding of the city until near the end of the seventeenth century. And this was definitely not the result of a heavy-handed police force or a military presence. Not at all; those elements were entirely lacking. Only seven constables, the night watch, and the governor's guard were on deck to keep the peace. For the community remained extraordinarily united, even as merchant wealth made for a widening gap between rich and poor and as bonded foreigners arrived by the shipload. Although the whipping post and public stocks had long since lost their power, the very real power of public demonstrations to shame malefactors and to correct those who strayed from the accepted norm remained in effect. Woe unto ladies who kept houses of ill repute or to storekeepers who charged excessively or hoarded food in hard times. They would receive visits from "the body of the people," enforcing the communal conscience. As the years would demonstrate, this popular moral force had the might to topple kings. For the moment, however, it expressed itself in such pesky ways as boys throwing mud at the passing carriages of the ostentatiously wealthy or fishwives insulting some wandering Indians.

Given this generally peaceful, self-controlled scene, one must ask, what went astray? Was it the shift from old cultural ways to a more capitalistic system that caused the unease? In fact, the explanation of why Boston's maritime laborers went from a condition of disregarded servitude to a pattern of successful rebellion is far more complex than the mere sum of this community's commercialization and religious decline. It had to do with the habits, the mores of these maritime people themselves.

It also had much to do with a cataclysm brought down on the people of Massachusetts and Plymouth by their own aggressive actions, the previously mentioned King Philip's War (1675–1678). As this war between land-grabbing settlers and aggrieved tribesmen

exploded across southern New England, burned-out farmers and townspeople streamed across the Neck into Boston, reduced to the role of hapless refugees. Wives now widows and children now orphans sought public shelter, of which there was precious little to be found in the cramped capital. These pathetic wards of the state were, however, among the more fortunate victims of the war. Others who had not escaped were led off into Indian slavery—a condition that matched in horror the slavery imposed by the English settlers on their captives. The death toll on both sides reached nearly nine thousand, the greatest loss of life, proportionately, in all of America's wars.

One-third of those killed were English; two-thirds were Native Americans. Of New England's ninety-two towns, fifty-two had been attacked, twenty-five overcome and pillaged, and seventeen razed to the ground. Massachusetts's war debt exceeded £1,000; Plymouth's share was larger than that colony's total property valuation. As the days of March 1676 turned into April, and Boston quailed in the face of further expected attacks, it was evident that the bold light in the Cittie on the Hill might be blown out. A deep economic and spiritual depression gripped the town, particularly severe for the stricken and starving families of the unemployed maritime workers. Their overcrowded shacks nurtured a rampage of smallpox and intestinal diseases.

Riding onto the scene as yet another fury, royal inspectors and imperial officials arrived to give special treatment to the impotent, no longer autonomous town. The destiny of Bostonians of high rank and low would no longer be completely in their own hands; they had let it escape them. From this time forward into the next century, the Puritans' shattered experiment in independent colonial living would be overhauled and reshaped by British administrative and mercantile policies. It was only when the mobs burst forth and when the descendants of the original Puritans learned to work with the strengths of those violent waterfront personalities through inventive, homemade political systems that the bonds of British control would be broken.