**DAILY LIFE IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND**

Life in the New England Colonies was hard. Every family member helped with the chores. Even though the colonies had poor soil, most people farmed. Most farms were either too small or too poor to have slaves. Families grew a variety of plants like: corn, rye, peas, squash, and pumpkins. The animals they raised were: chickens, sheep, cows, and pigs. On the farm, men did the hunting and planting. The women made clothes, candles, soap, corn meal, preserved vegetables and meat, and did the cooking.

A puritan, John Winthrop, became governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and said their society would be made of mercy and justice. Winthrop wanted to set a goal for the rest of the world.

The settlers believed in honesty and by this, it helped them work together.

Towns were built around fields. Towns consisted of a congregation. In the town were family homes and public buildings. Each day farmers would work in fields and then return in the evening.

In the middle of the community was the Puritan church. This was also known as the meeting house. Meetings were held here to decide laws, fees for workers, price for ale, and to assign people to certain tasks for the community. Church services were held here every Sunday all day long and, by law, everyone had to attend. Some churches locked the doors so no one could leave. One who spoke out or acted wrongly would be punished in front of all.

The community helped each family if their crops failed, or if there was a field fire. Neighbors also helped others build barns or farm equipment. If the population was too large they would divide and make a new town.

In this society, games and fun were considered sin and hard work was emphasized. Puritans believed in knowing the Bible and being able to read it, but not needing to know how to write.

Homes in Colonial New England

The first houses in New England were simple wooden huts. They had timber frames covered in clapboard with thatched roofs. Rather than glass windows had sheets of paper soaked in oil. The first chimneys were logs covered in plaster. The earliest houses were crowded, dark and drafty.

People soon built better houses. As they grew, they added new rooms.

In the late 17th century the main room in a New England home was called the keeping room. It was used as a living room and a dining room. In it carpets were placed on tables (they were too valuable to put on the floor!). Chairs were a luxury and often only dad had one. The rest of the family sat on benches. They used chests for storage.

Colonial Food and Drink

In the 17th century it was not safe to drink water, it was too dirty. At first, colonists were forced to use corn to make an alcoholic drink. Later beer and cider were common. For the wealthy wine and brandy were imported. For ordinary people rum became a popular drink in the late 17th century. Later, tea became popular.

Colonists relied mainly on corn for food. It was made into bread or mush or was eaten with beans in a meal called succotash. Later in the 17th century other grains like rye, wheat and barley were grown. Colonists also grew vegetable like onions, turnips, parsnips and carrots. If meat was available stew was a popular meal.

Few people used forks although they became common in the 18th century. In the 17th century it was common for two or more people to share a wooden plate called a trencher.

Clothing in Colonial New England

Men wore starched collars called ruffs. Women wore frames made of wood or whalebone under their dresses. Men wore knee length garments called breeches. They also wore stockings and boots.

On the upper body men wore linen shirts. In the early 17th century they wore a kind of jacket with a cape on top. Men wore their hair long. They also wore beards.

Women wore a linen garment called a shift. Over it they wore long dresses.

Work in Colonial New England

Most people in New England lived by farming. It was back breaking work and usually lasted from dawn to dusk. In North America there were the same craftsmen found in Europe such as carpenters, coopers, tanners, millers and blacksmiths. There were also apothecaries who sold drugs.

17th Century Medicine

During the 17th century operations were performed by barber-surgeons. Their knowledge of anatomy improved. Medicine also improved. In 1628 William Harvey published his discovery of how blood circulates around the body. Doctors also discovered how to treat malaria with bark from a tree.

However medicine was still full of wrong ideas about the human body. Most doctors still thought that there were four fluids or 'humors' in the body, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. Illness resulted when you had too much of one humor. Nevertheless during the 17th century a more scientific approach to medicine came about and doctors began change their practices.

The average life span in the 17th century was shorter than today. Average life expectancy at birth was only 35. That does not mean that people dropped dead when they reached that age. Instead, many of the people died while they were still children. Between one third and one half died before the age of about 16. However if you could survive to your mid-teens you would probably live to your 50s or early 60s. Even in the 17th century some people did live to their 70s or 80s.

Puritan Life

New England life seemed to burst with possibilities.

The life expectancy became longer than that of Old England, and much longer than the Southern English colonies. Children were born at nearly twice the rate in Maryland and Virginia. It is often said that New England invented grandparents, for it was here that people in great numbers first grew old enough to see their children bear children

Literacy rates were high as well. Massachusetts law required a tax-supported school for every community that could boast 50 or more families. Puritans wanted their children to be able to read the Bible, of course.

Massachusetts Bay Colony was a man's world. Women did not participate in town meetings and were excluded from decision making in the church. Puritan ministers furthered male supremacy in their writings and sermons. They preached that the soul had two parts, the immortal masculine half, and the mortal feminine half.

It was believed that women who were pregnant with a male child had a rosy complexion and that women carrying a female child were pale. Names of women found in census reports of Massachusetts Bay include Patience, Silence, Fear, Prudence, Comfort, Hope, and Be Fruitful. This list reflects Puritan views on women quite clearly.

Church attendance was mandatory. Those that missed church regularly were subject to a fine. The sermon became a means of addressing town problems. The church was sometimes patrolled by a man who held a long pole. On one end was a collection of feathers to tickle the chins of old men who fell asleep. On the other was a hard wooden knob to alert children who giggled or slept. Church was serious business indeed

The Puritans believed they were doing God's work. Hence, there was little room for compromise. Harsh punishment was inflicted on those who were seen as straying from God's work. There were cases when individuals of differing faiths were hanged in Boston Common.

Adulterers might have been forced to wear a scarlet "A.” Public whippings were commonplace. The stockade forced the humiliated guilty person to sit in the public square, while onlookers spat or laughed at them. Puritans felt no remorse about administering punishment. They believed in Old Testament methods. Surely God's correction would be far worse to the individual than any earthly penalty.

**DAILY LIFE IN COLONIAL NEW ENGLAND**

1. Why didn't the framers of New England have slaves?

2. Which group had the power to make rules and decisions in New England?

3. What kind of activities took place at a town meeting?

4. Describe the importance of religion in New England.

5. What did early New England houses look like?

6. What the main food relied upon by the people of New England?

7. Detail the demographics of the birth and death rates.

8. What steps were taken to insure high literacy rates?

9. Why was reading so important to these colonists?

10. What happened if you missed church or you fell asleep during a sermon?

11. Why do you think punishments were help publicly?