

Anne Hutchinson's Story Comes to an End

From the 'Isle of Errors' to Her Demise

This is the fourth in a series of articles on the Colonial and Revolutionary History of Eastchester

By

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and

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Third in a series of articles on the colonial and revolutionary history of Eastchester.

The dominance of religious belief in 17th century America is very difficult for people today to comprehend. Patricia Bonomi, a prominent historian of that period, stresses that at this time, "In city, village, and countryside-the idiom of religion penetrated all discourse, underlay all thought, marked all observances, and gave meaning to every public and private crisis." A person's faith "gave a tone to everything they did in their collective and communal capacity."

Especially in colonial New England religion ruled. From its very inception, the Massachusetts Bay Colony was torn apart by the disarray within the Puritan establishment. Individuals like Anne Hutchinson, Thomas Hooker, and Roger Williams gained their followings because of the lack of trained ministers which led to intense debate and dissension.

Anne Hutchinson was only a resident for four years in Puritan Boston when she was put on trial for heresy. After a disruptive trial Anne Hutchinson and parts of her family were banished from the Massachusetts Bay into the Puritan wilderness. Anne had been excommunicated from the church, casting her into eternal damnation. In a six day April snow storm, Anne and her children made the long arduous journey to join her husband in Rhode Island.

In Rhode Island Roger Williams had established a colony that served as a refuge for people persecuted for their religious beliefs. There was a saying that if a person was too good for Massachusetts he went to Connecticut; if he was too bad he went to Rhode Island. Thus, Rhode Island was referred as the Isle of Errors.

Initially her stay in Rhode Island starting in 1638 added to her sadness. Ten months after her banishment, she suffered a terrible miscarriage. The governor of Massachusetts Bay, John Winthrop, saw this tragedy as divine retribution, validating her exile. But Winthrop still wanted Anne to recant and sent three emissaries to Rhode Island to exact a confession. Anne's reply was swift and decisive. She referred to the church of Boston as "the whore and strumpet of Boston, but no church of Christ."

It is said that Anne preached more in Rhode Island than she had in Boston. And then, tragedy struck again. The great love of her life, her husband Will Hutchinson, passed away. Will who always stood by his wife declared, "I do think of her as dear saint and servant of God." Anne was now in a precarious position. She feared that Massachusetts would take over Rhode Island and persecute her anew. Her last recorded revelation was that the Lord had prepared a city of refuge in what is today the Bronx in New York City, then called New Amsterdam. In eight years she had left England, then Boston, and now without her beloved husband to support her, Anne and her family were on the move again.

William Kieft, the Dutch governor of New Netherland, whose jurisdiction she fell under had a contentious relationship with the Indians in this area. He orchestrated vicious attacks on local tribes that precipitated Kieft's War that raged from 1643 to 1645. When Anne Hutchinson and her party showed up in Kieft's domain, he placed the Hutchinson's in a no man's land at the height of the Indian troubles. Less than a year after her arrival, the 52 year old woman, six of her children, and nine others perished in an Indian attack.

After the burning of her house, only her nine year old daughter, Susanna, survived. She lived as a prisoner of the Lenape Indians for a number of years. The Dutch government negotiated for her release and she reluctantly agreed to return to her family. Susannah had forgotten her own language and all her friends. Later Susanna married John Cole, moved to Rhode Island, had eleven children, and lived to the age of 80. In addition to Susanna, Anne Hutchinson was survived by five children who had remained behind. Eventually there were more than 30 grandchildren.

One of the sons who remained in Boston sired a line of powerful political figures including Thomas Hutchinson, royal governor of Massachusetts at the outbreak of the American Revolution. Presidents across the political spectrum can trace their lineage back to Anne: FDR was a sixth-great grandson. George H. Bush is a ninth great grand-grandson, and George W. Bush a tenth great-grandson.

The exact location of Anne's settlement is in dispute. Based on the records of the town of Eastchester and other historical account, Anne lived on the west side of the Hutchinson River in the vicinity of Co-Op City. And her legacy lives on.

Her memory survives not simply because a river, parkway, and three elementary schools bear her name, or because Eastchester was settle at the site of her house. Her courageous resistance to unjust authority and unmatched brilliance in defending her belief despite dire consequences place Anne Hutchinson at the forefront of great women in American history.

In the next article the saga of the fate of Native Americans from 1635 to 1675 and the role of the enigmatic Thomas Pell in the settlement of southern Westchester will be discussed.

Please contact us at historian@eastchesterhistoricalsociety.org about any comments or questions you might have about this column.