

Dominion of New England

Following the period of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth in England, the 'Restoration' in 1660 marked the return of Charles II as king, who had been in exile in Europe and then reclaimed the crown of England. The bishops were restored to Parliament, which established a strict Anglican orthodoxy. (Britannia)

After the Restoration, Charles II cast a doubtful eye on the Massachusetts Bay Colony that sometimes ignored English civil law if it conflicted with biblical demands. (Brooks)

In 1683 Charles insisted that they revise its charter to weaken the influence of biblical teachings and eliminate the stringent voting requirements. The Massachusetts government said no. With that, Charles revoked the charter. Massachusetts remained in political limbo until 1685, when James II came to the throne. Then conditions grew far worse. (Brooks)

In an effort to centralize administration of his growing American empire, King James decided on a reorganization of the colonies. He combined several of the northern colonies into one large unit under direct loyal control. (Brooks)

King James II chose Sir Edmund Andros to govern the Dominion. Andros had previously served as the governor of New York and New Jersey from 1674 to 1681. (Brooks)

In his April 7, 1688 Commission to Sir Edmund Andros. James stated, in part:

James the Second by the Grace of God King of England, Scotland France and Ireland Defender of the Faith &c. To our trusty and welbeloved Sr Edmund Andros Knt Greeting:

Whereas by our Commission under our Great Seal of England, bearing date the third day of June in the second year of our reign wee have constituted and appointed you to be our Captain Generall and Governor in Chief in and over all that part of our territory and dominion of New England in America known by the names of our Colony of the Massachusetts Bay, our Colony of New Plymouth, our Provinces of New Hampshire and Main and the Narraganset Country or King's Province.

And whereas since that time Wee have thought it necessary for our service and for the better protection and security of our subjects in those parts to join and annex to our said Government the neighboring Colonies of Road Island and Connecticut, our Province of New York and East and West Jersey, with the territories hereunto belonging, as wee do hereby join annex and unite the same to our said government and dominion of New England.



Wee therefore reposing especiall trust and confidence in the prudence courage and loyalty of you the said Sir Edmund Andros, out of our especiall grace certain knowledge and meer motion, have thought fit to constitute and appoint as wee do by these presents constitute ...

... and appoint you the said Sr Edmund Andros to be our Captain Generall and Governor in Cheif in and over our Colonies of the Massachusetts Bay and New Plymouth, our Provinces of New Hampshire and Main, the Narraganset country or King's Province, our Colonys of Road Island and Connecticut our Province of New York and East and West Jersey ...

... and of all that tract of land circuit continent precincts and limits in America lying and being in breadth from forty degrees of Northern latitude from the Equinoctiall Line to the River of St. Croix Eastward ...

... and from thence directly Northward to the river of Canada, and in length and longitude by all the breadth aforesaid and throughout the main land from the Atlantick or Western Sea or Ocean on the East part, to the South Sea on the West part, with all the Islands, Seas, Rivers, waters, rights, members, and appurtenances, thereunto belonging (our province of Pensilvania and country of Delaware only excepted), to be called and known as formerly by the name and title of our territory and dominion of New England in America.

And for your better guidance and direction Wee doe hereby require and command you to do & execute all things in due manner, that shall belong unto the said office and the trust wee have reposed in you ...

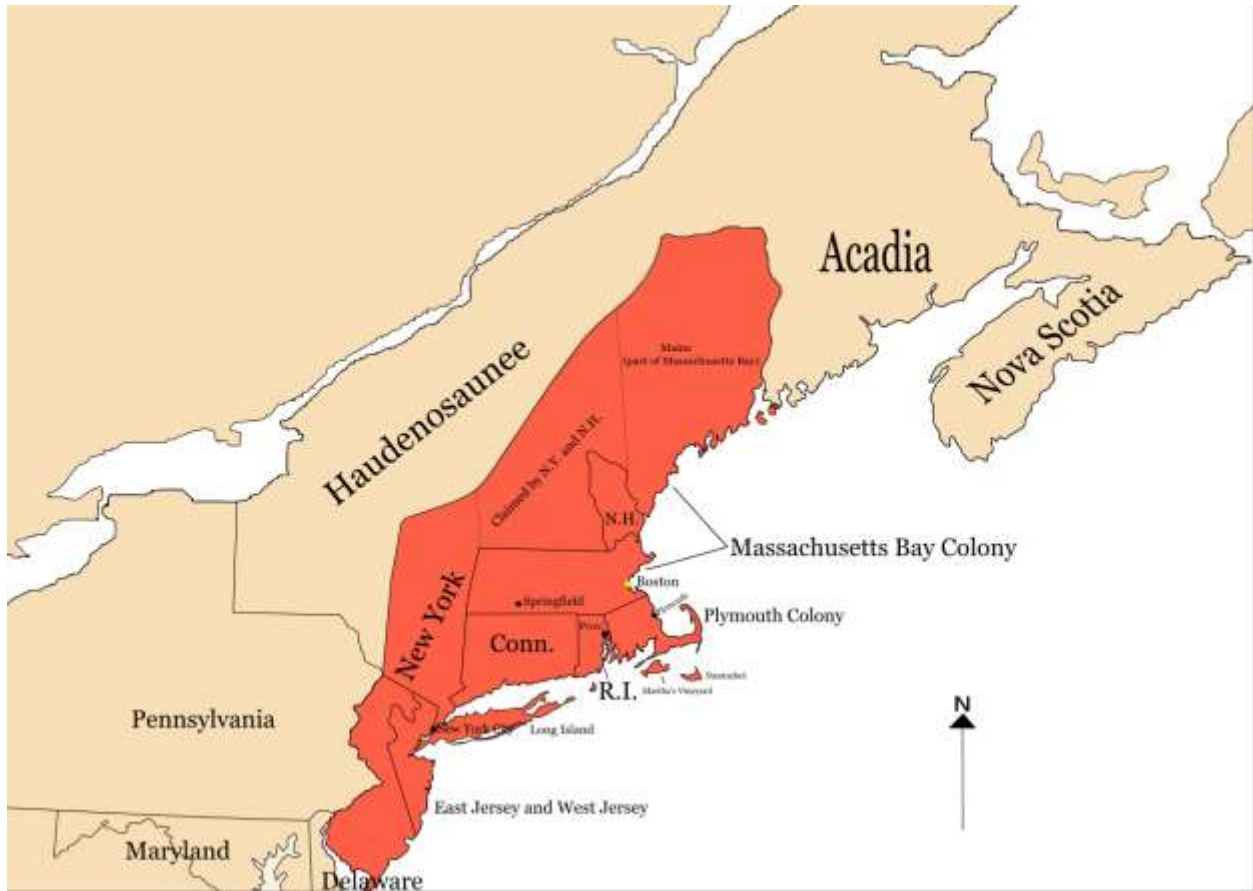
And Wee do hereby give and grant unto you full power and authority to suspend any member of our Councill from sitting voting and assisting therein, as you shall find just cause for so doing. ...

And Wee do hereby give and grant unto you full power and authority, by and with the advise and consent of our said Councill or the major part of them, to make constitute and ordain lawes statutes and ordinances for the public peace welfare and good governmt of our said territory & dominion and of the people and inhabitants thereof ...

And Wee do by these presents give and grant unto you full power and authority by and with the advise and consent of our said Councill, or the major part of them, to impose assess and raise and levy rates and taxes as you shall find necessary for the support of the government within our territory and dominion of New England ...

And our further will and pleasure is, that all publick money raised or to be raised or appointed for the support of the government within our said territory and dominion be issued out by warrant or order from you by & with the advise and consent of our Councill ...

And Wee do likewise give and grant unto you full power and authority by and with the advice and consent of our said Councill to agree with the planters and inhabitants of our said Territory and Dominion concerning such lands, tenements & hereditaments as now are or hereafter shall be in our power to dispose of, and them to grant unto any person or persons for such terms and under such moderat Quit Rents, Services and acknowledgements to be thereupon reserved unto us as shall be appointed by us.



Which said grants are to pass and be sealed by our Seal of New England and being entred upon record by such officer or officers as you shall appoint thereunto, shall be good and effectual in law against us, our heires and successors. ...

And Wee do hereby require and command all officers and ministers, civill and military and all other inhabitants of our said Territory and Dominion to be obedient aiding and assisting unto you the said Sr Edmd Andros in the execution of this our commission and of the powers and authorities therein contained ...

And lastly, our will and pleasure is that you the said Sr Edmund Andros shall and may hold exercise and enjoy the office and place of Captain Generall and Governor in Cheif in and over our Territory and Dominion aforesaid, with all its rights members and appurtenances'whatsoever, together with all and singular the powers and authorities hereby granted unto you, for and during our will and pleasure. (Commission of Sir Edmund Andros for the Dominion of New England. April 7, 1688, Yale)

The constitution of the Dominion of New England was determined by the commission and instructions which were issued to Governor Andros and modeled on those given to the governors of the first royal colony, Virginia. (Barnes)

This was called the Dominion of New England, included Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Plymouth Plantations, New Jersey and New York, both newly acquired from the Dutch. (Brooks)

The formation of the Dominion of New England was the most complete expression of the British colonial policy in the seventeenth century. (Barnes)

By it England attempted to define the status of the New England colonies, to bring them into a closer relationship with the mother country, and to reform the colonial policy in matters of trade and defense.

The establishment of Dominion government was variously received by the different parties and factions. The moderates, although supporting it at the outset, objected to the great concentration of power in the hands of the governor and council and to their extensive interference with long-established precedents and traditions.

The strict Puritans hated it because it destroyed their theocracy and brought a remodeling of their institutions on the English pattern. (Barnes)

According to the book *The Imperial Executive in America*, it was the lack of local legislatures that became the biggest source of strife in the Dominion:

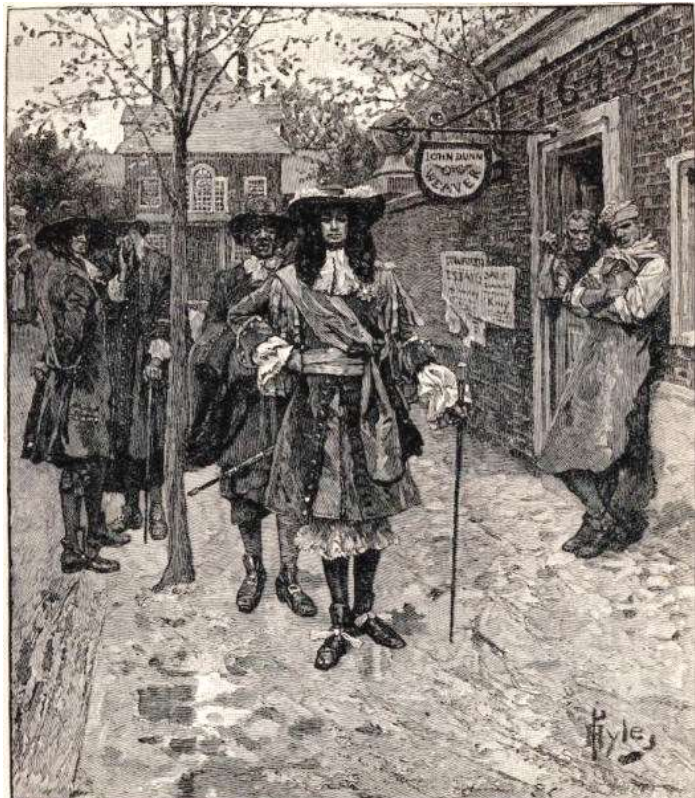
The Dominion of New England did not have a representative assembly. All legislation would be adopted by the governor and council subject to the approval of the king.

Unlike Andros own experience in New York, in New England he would attract significant opposition because representative government had been the rule there for several decades.

William Blathwayt's assistant, John Povey, accurately surmised that it "will put Sir Edmund to his utmost dexterity" to govern Massachusetts without a representative body.

Andros himself had no aversion to an assembly and in New York had requested the duke to permit him to call such a body. The absence of an assembly was probably the chief reason underlying unrest in Massachusetts.

Even before Andros arrived, [Edward] Randolph had warned the Privy Council that he found "the country dissatisfied for want of an Assembly of Representatives ... with power to raise money, and make laws, etc." Randolph's suggestions to provide representative government fell on deaf ears.



Boston was chosen as the headquarters of the Dominion of New England. Andros arrived in Boston on December 20, 1686 and immediately took control of the Dominion.

Town meetings were severely restricted, the local legislatures were disbanded and a council was created to assist Andros in governing the colony. (Brooks)

Andros' council was based in Boston and distance made it difficult for many of the council members, who were not paid for their service or compensated for their travel expenses, to attend the meetings. As a result, Andros often passed legislation that the council had not even voted on.

One of the first things Andros did as Governor of the Dominion was find a way to raise revenue. In March of 1687, Andros proposed a penny per pound tax for imports, estates and poll taxes. The council opposed this measure but discovered shortly after that Andros had signed it into law without a vote.

The following year, when these taxes failed to raise enough revenue, Andros also raised levies on wine, rum and brandy, which again went against the wishes of many of the councilors.

Also, because the old charter was revoked, all the old land titles were brought into question. All landowners were informed that the titles to their land had been voided. The land now belonged to the king and the landowners were required to petition the government for new titles. (Brooks)

Other measures Andros took involved cracking down on the smuggling of imports and goods that arose after the passage of the Navigation Act and, due to King James II Declaration of Indulgence, holding Anglican services in the local churches for the first time.

In 1686, Andros founded the King's Chapel congregation, which was the first Anglican church in colonial New England.

In addition, although the puritan ban on Christmas was lifted in 1681, the puritans still disapproved of Christmas and were offended when Andros attended Christmas services, with sixty redcoats following behind him, the first month he arrived in Boston.

According to the New England Historical Society website, Andros committed a similar offense again on Good Friday:

On March 23, 1687, the Wednesday of Passion Week, Andros ordered his agent to ask for the keys to the Old South Church (then the Third Church) for Anglican services. He was rebuffed. A Puritan delegation visited him to explain why they couldn't allow it.

On Good Friday, he ordered the sexton to throw open the doors of Old South and ring the bell for 'those of the Church of England.' Whether the sexton was persuaded or coerced is not known, but the doors were open, the bell rung and the service held.

It was an affront the Puritans would not forgive. Andros wife, Mary Craven Andros, died soon after arriving in Boston. Andros added insult to injury by holding her funeral service at Old South on Feb. 10, 1688, with the pomp and ritual so abhorrent to Puritans.

In 1688, when the puritans in Boston refused to sell land to the congregation to build a church on, Andros directed King's Chapel to be built on public land in the corner of an old puritan burying ground on Tremont street. (In 1749, the original small wooden church built there was eventually replaced with the large granite church that still stands there today.)

The British government also issued a Royalist flag for the Dominion: A white flag with a red cross and a gold crown embossed with the letters J.R.

When New York was added to the Dominion in 1688, the Lieutenant Governor of New York at the time, Thomas Dongan, was dismissed and Andros was sent to New York that summer to establish his commission.

The colonists strongly resented the Dominion of New England and Andros, whom they viewed as greedy and arrogant. Andros offended the puritans when he established the Church of England as the official religion of the colony. He also alienated the non-puritans when he completely abolished the local legislatures, which they had struggled to be included in for years.

When Andros instituted the new taxes, both puritans and non-puritans refused to pay them. The colonists were also angered by the presence of Andros' small army of soldiers whom they accused of teaching people to "drink, blaspheme, curse and damn."

The Dominion was disbanded after the Glorious Revolution took place in England, during which James II was pressured to abdicate the throne in December of 1688 after England was invaded by James II's son-in-law, William of Orange.

On February 13, 1689 his Protestant daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, became King and Queen of England. The news sparked a mob to rise up in Boston and overthrow Andros, according to the book American Pageant:

When the news of the Glorious Revolution reached America, the ramshackle Dominion of New England collapsed like a house of cards. A Boston mob, catching the fever, rose against the existing regime.

The insurgents seized Andros on April 18 and set up a Council for Safety, which was led by Simon Bradstreet and included Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne, who later became judges in the Salem Witch Trials.

The council handled affairs in the colony for a few months until official confirmation of a new regime came from William and Mary.

On May 22, the council voted to return the colony to its former puritan-run government. This prompted the other colonies that had been included in the Dominion to assert their independence and reinstate their old charters as well.



The Dominion of New England forever changed the culture of the New England colonies from a strict puritan society independent of Britain into a much more secular royal colony.

Following the failure of the Dominion of New England, in the late-1690s and early-1700s the British government began to follow a policy of salutary neglect, during which it relaxed its enforcement of laws and trade regulations in the colonies.

This came to an end though after the Seven Year's War in 1763 when the government, saddled with debt from the war, began passing new laws and taxes in the colonies, causing the colonist's lingering resentment to build until it erupted in the American Revolution in the late 1770s. (Brooks)

Information here is from *The Imperial Executive in America: Sir Edmund Andros, 1637-1714*, Lustig; *Commission of Sir Edmund Andros for the Dominion of New England*, April 7, 1688, Yale; *History of Massachusetts*, Rebecca Beatrice Brooks; *The Dominion of New England a Study in British Colonial Policy*; Viola Florence Barnes

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young