

Christmas in New England 17th Century

Christmas celebrations in New England were illegal during part of the 1600s, and were culturally taboo or rare in Puritan colonies from foundation until the 1850s. The Puritan community found no Scriptural justification for celebrating Christmas, and associated such celebrations with paganism and idolatry. The earliest years of the Plymouth Colony were troubled with non-Puritans attempting to make merry, and Governor William Bradford was forced to reprimand offenders. English laws suppressing the holiday were enacted in the Interregnum, but repealed late in the 17th century. However, the Puritan view of Christmas and its celebration had gained cultural ascendancy in New England, and Christmas celebrations continued to be discouraged despite being legal. When Christmas became a Federal holiday in 1870, the Puritan view was relaxed and late nineteenth-century Americans fashioned the day into the Christmas of commercialism, spirituality, and nostalgia that most Americans recognize today.

Not All People Agreed

“Those stubborn English were just not ready to give up Father Christmas in 1652, when the Puritans decreed that the nation would give up their traditional Christmas celebrations. It is amazing how much like today's Santa looked in the middle of the 17th century.”

*Behold the Majestie and grace!
Of loveing, cheerfull, Christmas face.
Whome many thousands, with one breath:
Cry out, let him be put to death.
Who indeede can never die:
So long as man hath memory.*



Settlers in New England went even further, outlawing Christmas celebrations entirely in 1659. Anyone caught shirking their work duties or feasting was forced to pay a significant penalty of five shillings. Christmas returned to England in 1660, but in New England it remained banned until the 1680s, when the Crown managed to exert greater control over its subjects in Massachusetts. In 1686, the royal governor of the colony, Sir Edmund Andros, sponsored a Christmas Day service at the Boston Town House. Fearing a violent backlash from Puritan settlers, Andros was flanked by redcoats as **he prayed and sang Christmas hymns.**



“And now for something completely different”

Sacred or secular, we all have the freedom to celebrate as we wish. I am thankful that we may pray and sing Christmas hymns without armed guards.

Reconnecting with family and friends is good.

We wish our extended Clough families a blessed and peaceful holiday season however you worship and celebrate.

Best wishes for the new year!



Happy Holidays

