

from
**THE BOOK OF THE GENERAL
LAWS
1685**

----- *The Inhabitants of New-Plimouth Colony* -----

By 1685, the Plymouth settlement had grown from 100 to nearly 7,000 inhabitants, and laws were enacted to help govern public and private behavior. In New Haven, Connecticut laws similar to these were printed on blue paper and were subsequently known as “blue laws.” Examples of blue laws include closing stores or restricting the sale of some items on Sundays, and in some American communities these laws continue to be in effect.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Forming and Supporting Opinions

Do these laws reflect values that were important to the Puritans? If so, what values appear to be important?

CHILDREN’S EDUCATION

Forasmuch as the good Education of Children and Youth is of singular use and benefit to any Common wealth; and whereas many Parents and Masters either through an over-respect to their own Occasions and Business, or not duely considering the good of their Children and Servants, have too much neglected their Duties in their Education whilst they are young and capable of Learning.

It is Ordered; That the Select men of every Town, shall have a vigilant Eye from time to time over their Brethren and Neighbours, to see that all Parents and Masters do duely endeavour by themselves or others, to teach their Children and Servants as they grow capable, so much Learning as through the blessing of God they may attain; at least to be able duely to read the Scriptures, and other profitable Books Printed in the *English* Tongue; and the knowledge of the Capital Laws; and in some competent measure, the main Grounds and Principles of Christian Religion, necessary to Salvation; by causing them to learn some orthodox Catechisme without book, or otherwayes instructing them, as they may be able to give a due answer to such plain and ordinary questions as may by them or others be propounded to them concerning the same. And further, that all Parents and Masters do breed and bring up their Children and Apprentices in some honest lawful Calling and Imployment, that may be profitable for themselves and the Country. And if after Warning and Admonition given by any of the Select Men unto such Parents or Masters, they

shall full remain negligent in their duty, in any of the particulars aforementioned, whereby Children or Servants may be in danger to grow Barbarous, Rude and Stubborn, and to prove Pests in stead of Blessings to the Country; That then a Fine of *ten shillings* shall be Levyed on the Goods of such Negligent Parent or Master to the Towns use, except extream poverty call for a Mitigation of the Fine. And if in three Months after that, there be no due Care taken, and continued for the Education of such Children and Apprentices as aforesaid, then a Fine of *twenty shillings* to be Levyed on such Delinquents to the Towns use; except as aforesaid. And lastly, if in three Months after that, their be no Reformation of the said Neglect, then the Select Men, with the Advice of two Magistrates shall put such Children to Apprentice; Boyes till they come to *twenty-one*, and Girls eighteen years of Age, where they may be Educated according to the Rules of this Order.

INDIANS

It is Ordered by this Court and Authority thereof; that no *Indian* which shall dwell or come into our Jurisdiction, shall presume at any time to *Pawwaw* or perform outward Worship to the Devil, or other false God, under the penalty of five pounds, or severe Corporal punishment, both of said *Pawwaw* and of such other as shall procure or abett him therein.

And that no *Indian* shall resort to any *English* house on the Lords day, especially when any of the People thereof are gone to Meeting, unless upon extraordinary occasion, under the penalty of *ten shillings* or Corporal punishment by Whipping, as the matter may be circumstanced; and that no *Indian* under the like penalty, prophane the Lords day, by Hunting, Fishing, Fowling, Travelling with Burthens, or doing any servile work thereon.

And forasmuch at sundry Burglaries, Thefts and other Mischiefs and Injuries have been by sundry Indians in the night; for prevention whereof;

It is Ordered by this Court, &c. That no *Indian* or *Indians* shall walk about in the Night without necessary occasion, especially at unseasonable Times thereof, under the pain of being Convicted thereby, at least as one Evidence of his or their being guilty of any such mischief or injuries as may happen to be done or committed in such Night, unless such *Indian* or *Indians* can rationally clear themselves thereof...

It is Ordered by this Court, That whosoever shall sell or give, directly or indirectly any Arms, as Guns, Sword, Pistols, &c. unto any *Indians* without License first obtained from the General Court shall forfeit five times the value thereof; and whosoever shall lend any Gun to art *Indian*, or sell any Powder, Shot or Lead to them, shall forfeit twice the value thereof, if such person have not first obtained Licence of some one of the Magistrates who are hereby impowered to give Licence to any *English* to lend a Gun for a Month or two in a Year, and to sell some small quantity of Powder and Shot, not exceeding half a

pound of Powder, and proportionable Shot at one time to such of our friendly *Indians*, as he shall give a Certificate under his hand.

It is also Ordered, That whatsoever *Indians* who have or shall have Guns, or other Arms, that have or shall manifestly appear to be unfaithful and treacherous to us, shall forfeit their Arms, and not suffered to have or carry any Arms until they shall have Licence from the County Court.

It is also Ordered, That whosoever shall any wayes sell, hire or give to any *Indian* or *Indians* any kind of Boat, Barque or other Vessel of burthen, or Sail or Tackling to fit up any such like Vessel, shall forfeit twice the value of it.

It is also Ordered by this Court and the Authority thereof; That no Person, whither Inhabitant of this Government or other, shall Purchase, Hire, or receive of Gift of any *Indian* or *Indians*, any Lands that lie within the Line of this Colony, without the Order and Allowance of this Court, on pain of forfeiting for every Acre, so Bought, Hired, or any wayes obtained of them *five pounds* to the Colonies use: and if the Fine or Forfeiture cannot be obtained, the Lands so procured, shall be forthwith seized for the Colonies use. [1643, & 1671.]

Neither shall any person Buy, Hire or Receive any Wood, Timber, of the *Indians*, without the Courts allowance, on pain of forfeiting five times the value thereof to the *Colonies* use.

It is also Ordered; That no person within this Government, shall give or sell any Mare to any Indian, on pain of the forfeiture of every such Mare, or the value thereof; and that no *Indian* keep any Mare on like pain of the forfeiture of every such Offence....

S A B B A T H

This Court taking Notice of great abuse, and many misdemeanours committed by divers Persons many wayes, prophaning the Christian Sabbath, or Lords Day, to the great Dishonour of God, Reproach of Religion, Grief of the Spirits of Gods People;

Do therefore Order and Enact, That whosoever shall Prophane the Lords Day by unnecessary servile work, unnecessary travelling by Land, or passing by Water, by bearing Burthens, carrying of Packs, or by Buying or Selling, or by Sports or Recreation, shall for the first Offence pay *ten shillings* fine to the Town, or be committed to Prison, or safe custody till the next Day, and then sit in the Stocks two hours: and for the second Offence shall pay *twenty shillings* fine to the County or be Whipt; and so from time to time as often as they shall be Convicted of the like Transgression afterwards.

It is Ordered, That if any Person henceforth, either on the *Saturday* Evening, or on the Lord's Day Evening after the Sun is Set, shall be found sporting in the Streets or Fields of any Town in this Jurisdiction, drinking, or being in any publick House of Entertainment (unless Strangers or Sojourners in their Lodgings) or uncivilly walking, and is duly Convict; such Persons so Offending,

shall for every Transgression pay *five shillings* fine to the Town, or sit in the Stocks, not exceeding two hours.

It is Ordered by this Court and the Authority thereof, That in no case shall any Person Travail further on a Sabbath Day than from the place where he lay the Night before to the next Town on his way, nor shall he have liberty, unless it be where there is no allowed Meeting in said Town, *Bona fide*, to go to the Meeting that is at the next Town, and so order it as to be there before the beginning of the Morning Exercise: and if any person shall presume to Travail on the Sabbath, from the place he took up his Lodging on the *Saturday* Night, unless, as aforesaid, or shall pass through the next Town before the Sabbath be ended, he shall be proceeded with for Breach of Sabbath, as is by Law provided, unless it appear it hath been in case of Life and Death, or that he hath a Licence from some Magistrate or one of the Selectmen of the Town; and it shall be lawful for the Constable or any other person to stop and bring before Authority any person suspected for the Breach of this Law: and if any person hath obtained a Licence to Travail by a false pretence, he shall any time in a twelve Month be liable to be apprehended and punished for his Breach of Sabbath, and *ten shillings* besides, as a fine to the Town.

Ordered, That in Towns, Villages or other Places, if any Person or Persons shall be found Walking or Riding about the Town, or Visiting of the Neighbours, or upon any other occasion from their own Families, or place of abode on the Sabbath Day, unless it appear it was upon account of some Act of Piety, Mercy or Necessity, such persons so offending shall be proceeded with as Sabbath-Breakers.

Source: *The Book of the General Laws of the Inhabitants of the Jurisdiction of New-Plimouth* by The Inhabitants of New-Plimouth Colony, 1672 & 1685. Reprinted in *The Laws of the Pilgrims* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977), pp. 12–13, 37–39, 56–58.