

YOUR WEEKLY DOSE OF TOWN HISTORY

By **Richard Forliano, Eastchester Town Historian**

Anne Hutchinson, Eastchester, and the Founding of Harvard

Anne Hutchinson was not only the first European inhabitant of Eastchester but also was one of the most courageous and prominent figures in the growth of human freedom. Anne was forced to sacrifice everything in return for the right to follow her own conscience, free from the interference of the state. But what made Anne, mother of 14 children, so great a person?

Boston and the Massachusetts Bay Colony in which the Hutchinson family lived were completely controlled by a theocracy of Puritan ministers. The ministers, believing their colony to be a community of saints, were given complete control over every aspect of the lives of their people. Ministers like John Winthrop used terribly cruel punishments to force people to lead good Christian lives. If people disagreed with the teachings of the Church, the ministers put them on trial for the most serious crime that a person could commit, heresy (the teaching of non-Christian ideas). The punishment for heresy was either death by hanging or exile into the wilderness.

Anne Hutchinson was a brilliant scholar who believed in the theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin. She pointed out at meetings held in her home after Sunday services that salvation could only be found through God's grace, not simply by following the dictates of the ministers who governed the colony. The governor of the colony ordered Anne Hutchinson to recant her beliefs and to stop her meetings or face imprisonment and a trial for heresy. Unwilling to bend to the authority of the ministers, Anne refused to take back her view that God gave his love without question and that a person didn't have to go to Church to achieve salvation.

At this time and place women were considered to be foolish and sinful creatures and were ordered to be obedient daughters, wives, and mothers. Anne had the audacity to continue her

meetings and was imprisoned and put on trial. In jail, pregnant and alone, Anne was given a simple choice: keep quiet or face possible death or banishment. Her beliefs and subsequent trial were challenging the stability of the colony and the authority of the ministers to rule with an iron hand.

As most every school child knows, Anne did not back down to the ministers who conducted the trial against her. In 1638, she along with most of her family was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. One of the major reasons why Harvard College was founded was to better train ministers to avoid theological disputes that threatened to rip the colony apart during Anne's trial.

Anne Hutchinson feared that after the death of her husband in Rhode Island, she would be brought back to Boston and hung as a witch. She settled in what used to be part of Eastchester, along the river named after her, in the Dutch colony of New Netherlands. A brutal massacre of Native Americans by the Dutch governor forced the indigenous population to go on the warpath. In 1643 Anne Hutchinson was massacred along with almost all of her family.

But what makes Anne Hutchinson so great a person? Not only did she risk death for her religious beliefs but she and her family were forced to move not once but three times. She was one of the first women to prove woman had ideas that must be listened to and respected. She is considered by many to be a martyr for the cause of religious expression.

An excellent book to learn more about Anne Hutchinson is the 2004 best seller written by Eve LaPlante, [American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson, the Woman Defied the Puritans](#). Eve is a direct descendant of Anne Hutchinson.