

OF MORTON, MERRYMOUNT, AND MAYPOLES

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B. A., Lake Forest College, 1966

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

Approved by:



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Bright were the days at Merry Mount, when the May-pole was the banner staff of that gay colony! They who reared it, should their banner be triumphant, were to pour sunshine over New England's rugged hills, and scatter flower seeds throughout the soil. Midsummer eve had come, bringing deep verdure to the forest, and roses in her lap, of a more vivid hue than the tender buds of Spring. But May, or her mirthful spirit, dwelt all the year round at Merry Mount, sporting with the Summer months, and revelling with Autumn, and basking in the glow of Winter's fireside. Through a world of toil and care she flitted with a dreamlike smile, and came hither to find a home among the lightsome hearts of Merry Mount.₁

Nathaniel Hawthorne who wrote the preceding in "The May-pole of Merry Mount" was not alone in his interest in Merrymount and its illustrious founder, Thomas Morton (1573-1646 ?). The historian John Lothrop Motley who should have known better tried his hand at a novel based on Morton, and numerous historians since then have spiced up otherwise dull chapters on early New England history with references to Morton and Merrymount. The reasons for this interest are not hard to find. Morton and Merrymount were an unholy blend of romance and ribaldry uncommon in New England and a striking contrast to the sober Bible commonwealths of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies.

While historians love to refer to Morton and Merrymount, surprising few have researched Morton in depth, and none since Charles Francis Adams in the late 1800's has fully or adequately treated his entire life. Morton is a deceptive man to present. It is easy to stereotype him as a martyr or a villain, easy to overemphasize his life at Merrymount to the detriment of his more important activities in England, and easy to pass off

Morton's life without recognizing that Morton and Merrymount represented forces battling in America against the Puritans and their narrow rule. C. F. Adams who was not sympathetic to Morton nevertheless avoided the forementioned traps,² whereas two other Morton biographers failed on one point or other. Henry Beston pictured Morton as the New England swain, the sane Elizabethan amidst fanatic zealots, and the happy sot;³ and B. F. DeCosta while more serious in tone than Beston ignored all evidence damning to Morton.⁴ Since the turn of the century, there has been little original work done on Morton except one very valuable study by Charles Edward Banks on Morton's early and legal lives in England.⁵ Banks scoured English archives and uncovered information which filled voids in Morton's life and upset the long held belief that Morton first came to New England in 1622.

In particular, Banks confirmed the old opinion that Morton descended from West England gentry. His father served as a soldier under Queen Elizabeth winning some distinction for his work. Early in the 1500's, the Mortons got a coat of arms, and the family seal sported a goat's head in the middle. Thomas Morton called himself "Gent." on a number of legal papers including his will which reflected the family's social position as determined by custom and law. He received a good classical education which he exhibited in his lively and urbane The New English Ganaan, first published in 1633.⁶ Even C. F. Adams who disparaged Morton's writing abilities and was normally hostile to Mor-

ton had to admit to Morton's keen mind and acquired knowledge.⁷

After his schooling, possibly culminating with a year or more at one of the universities, Morton became a lawyer. William Bradford sarcastically called Morton "a kind of pettifogger of Furnival's Inn," i.e., a quack lawyer.⁸ Actually, Morton was connected with Clifford's Inn (a minor and understandable error of Bradford as it was easy to confuse the various London Inns of Court), and he became a good and fairly well known lawyer. Sometime between 1616 and 1618 while working in West England, Morton met Dame Alice Miller. Her husband, George, died in 1616 leaving six children and a will that left his wife and only son, George, Jr., as co-owners of his sizeable estate at Swallowfield. The younger George was fond of wine, women, and money, was something of a delinquent, and was continually hounding his mother to give him full control of the estate. When Morton began to court Dame Alice seriously, George harassed his mother into signing a strange lease. Under it, George got control of the estate for fifty years unless Morton courted Dame Alice honorably for at least one year. George had taunted his mother that Morton courted her for her money and that a year would test Morton's feelings. During that year, George hid the lease with the intention of keeping all the estate no matter what and reduced his mother to abject servitude.⁹

Morton continued to court Dame Alice honorably until November 6, 1621, when the two were married. Some historians, George Willison in particular,¹⁰ have suggested that Morton

married the lady for her money but his long and decent courtship of her and his subsequent behavior which Banks has documented argue to the contrary. After the marriage, Morton promptly moved to recover the lease and assert his wife's rights by hiring some ruffians who forcefully persuaded George to hand over the lease. George sued Morton for this theft in June, and Morton countersued in July on the grounds that the lease had been exacted under duress. George had a good lawyer who won the case sometime in 1622. Dame Alice also died in 1622, George took over Swallowfield, and from that time on George was Morton's persistent enemy and a useful Puritan ally.¹¹

The general opinion at one time was that Morton was part of the Thomas Weston expedition to Massachusetts in 1622 as there was good evidence to presume this. Morton, himself, in The New English Canna wrote that "In the yeare since the incarnation of Christ, 1622, it was my chance to be landed in the parts of New England...."¹² Moreover, Morton showed familiarity with events at Wessagusset and later wrote about the famous hanging incident of 1623 in which a settler was hung for stealing corn from the Indians. The Indians had insisted that the settlers punish the malefactor which they did in short order and in a grimly amusing way. Since the crook was young and healthy, the settlers first decided to hang a sick old man in his place. But when one of the settlers denounced the injustice of this, the others chose another course of action. They told the crook that they would pretend hanging him. Willingly he let

his hands be tied, and to his eternal horror, he was actually hung.¹³ Morton probably picked up this amusing little story from one of Weston's men as Morton was in England embroiled in lawsuits in behalf of his wife and himself when it happened. If the hanging story Morton wrote about no longer serves as evidence of his presence there, it still had one major byproduct. Samuel Butler picked it up, twisted it to suit his anti-Puritan bias, and incorporated it in his "Hudibras:"

Our brethren of New England use
 Choice malefactors to excuse,
 And hang the guiltless in their stead,
 Of whom the churches have less need;
 As lately happened. In a town
 There lived a cobbler and but one,
 That out of doctrine could cut use
 And mend men's lives as well as shoes.
 This precious brother having slain,
 In times of peace, an Indian,
 (Not out of malice, but mere zeal,
 Because he was an infidel,
 The mighty Tottipotymoy
 Sent to our elders an envoy
 Complaining solely of the breach
 Of league, held forth, by brother Patch,
 Against the articles in force
 Between both churches, his and ours;
 For which he craved the saints to render
 Into his hands, or hang the offender.
 But they, maturely having weighed,
 They had no more but him of the trade
 A man that served them in a double
 Capacity, to teach and cobbler,
 Resolved to spare him; yet to do
 The Indian Hohegan Mohegan, too,
 Impartial justice, in his stead did
 Hang an old weaver, that was bed-rid.¹⁴

If Weston's venture no longer has the relevance to Morton's career in America as once thought, it still has a bearing on his life in England. Weston, like the Pilgrims before who he had helped finance, colonized under a patent from the Council for

New England. The indefatigable colonizer Sir Ferdinando Gorges had masterminded the establishment of the Council as a replacement for the defunct Plymouth Company of Virginia, and he obtained a charter from James I in 1620 for all the lands of New England. The Council promoted settlements like those of the Pilgrims and Weston in the dual intent of spreading English influence and making money. When Weston's colony at Wessagusset (an Indian name for present day Weymouth, Massachusetts) collapsed within a year of its founding, the Council gave Sir Ferdinando's second son, Robert, a patent to lands on the north side of Massachusetts Bay.

Robert, like his more famous father, was fired with enthusiasm over the prospect of setting up his own colony. He grandly embarked in 1623 with a full retinue of servants and settled on the site of Weston's old town. Wessagusset was south of the area where Robert had hoped to plant his town but it did not matter as Robert's colony foundered within a year. Robert got frozen out as he had failed to plan or provision his town well.¹⁵ Most of the settlers left with Robert but some were still at Wessagusset when Morton came over a year later.

There was in these years a bitter dispute between the Council and Weston over Weston's conduct. Weston has come down through history primarily known as the unscrupulous London merchant who foully cheated the Pilgrims. This as well as other repugnant activities like diverting guns intended for New England to the Spaniards upset the Council and won Weston their animosity.

Robert Gorges and Weston met in Plymouth at one point and Robert had Weston arrested on the gun-diverting charge.¹⁶ The Gorges family and Weston had a running battle in England; and in this battle, Morton worked for the Gorges interests. His cunning and craft as a lawyer as well as experience in the profession put him in good stead for the job.

In 1625, Morton became involved in the Wollaston venture which chronologically was a follow-up to Weston's and Robert Gorges's. It was more akin to Weston's in purpose, exploitation of New England's fishing and trading possibilities, with little interest in large scale colonizing as in Gorges's case. Fish always brought a good price in Europe and boats plied the Atlantic every year for well over a century to fish the Grand Banks. Fur was in vogue in the early 1600's; beaver, for example, brought about twelve shillings a pelt and both Morton and the Pilgrims and the Puritans later fought for control of the market.¹⁷ Unlike Weston or Gorges, Wollaston apparently had no grant to the lands he settled on as they belonged to Robert Gorges. Morton, however, may have made some arrangement with Gorges on behalf of Wollaston.

Of Wollaston, little is known, not even his first name. C. F. Adams neatly capsuled his life: "A veritable bird of passage, he flitted out from an English obscurity, rested for a brief space upon a hillock on the shore of Boston Bay, giving to it his name as a memorial forever, and then forthwith disappeared into the oblivion from which he came."¹⁸ Bradford made

scant mention of him except to note that after failing to profit from his colony, he went to Virginia where he sold off his servants, and that Captain Wollaston was "a man of pretty parts."¹⁹

Why Morton emigrated is uncertain, nor is it known what role he played in Wollaston's enterprise. The Pilgrims and Puritans took frequent relish in slandering Morton and a favorite slur was that Morton fled England to avoid arrest for the murder of one of his creditors. The charge appeared in several Pilgrim histories including those of Nathaniel Morton and William Bradford.²⁰ John Winthrop claimed that he had an English warrant against Morton on this charge but never used it or gave tangible proof of the warrant's existence. Banks found no evidence in English records of the charge and there certainly would have been some had it been true.²¹ The Puritan-Pilgrim explanation therefore seems to stem from a desire to find just grounds for persecuting Morton.

A better explanation for Morton's emigrating is that Morton was fired by the same impulses that led other Englishmen like Gorges to America, adventure, profit, patriotism, and a desire to spread civilization and the gospel. Wollaston's undertaking gave Morton an opportunity to fulfill these goals as well as serving the interests of the Gorges family and the Council.

As for Morton's role in the trip, Bradford implies that Morton's position among the settlers was so low that he "had but little respect amongst them, and was slighted by the meanest servants."²² Bradford, however, was clearly downplaying Morton

who probably had a financial stake in the venture, who had connection with some influential Englishmen, and who was a man of some social standing. Bradford and the Puritans would never have treated him as gently as they did in comparison with other less prestigious dissenters had this not been so.

Wollaston built his post at Passonagessit (in present day Quincy, Massachusetts), an area with limited accessibility, surrounded on three sides by various streams and swamps, but in a strategic position for trading as there were water connections to the inland regions and a good harbor for oceanic vessels nearby. The buildings were set on a little hill with a good view of Massachusetts Bay to the east. Wollaston, something of an egotist, quickly renamed the place Mount Wollaston, and he stayed there from summer, 1625, to the following spring. Thoroughly chilled by one of New England's notorious winters and finding initial fur-trading profits small, Wollaston sailed off for Virginia leaving a contingent of men behind under Lieutenant Fitcher. The contingent was composed mainly of settlers who have remained nameless ever since, plus Morton, Edward Gibbons, and Walter Bagnall. Gibbons was a jolly follower of Morton at Merrymount but later repented, settled near Boston, and became a successful Puritan merchant and land speculator.²³ Bagnall became a successful trader in Maine, greatly despised by Winthrop, but untouchable there, and lived until 1631 when the Indians killed him. Prior to his death, Bagnall got a niece

grant of land with Morton's aid.²⁴

Either late in the summer of 1626, or early that fall, Wollaston ordered Fitcher to bring the rest of the contingent to Virginia. There is some debate over the nature of the group. Bradford claimed that most of it was composed of indentured servants who would be sold in Virginia. Morton persuaded them that they would be happier as free men under him at Merrymount and together they ousted Fitcher who fled to Plymouth where he gave an attentive Bradford his version of the story.²⁵ It is fairly certain, however, that the men who stayed with Morton were not indentured servants as Wollaston surely would have lodged complaints or legal proceedings to regain such valuable people.

Morton organized his post thoroughly and efficiently after Wollaston's departure, putting it on a sound financial footing. His friendship with the Indians won him a lion's share of the fur trade from his rivals at Plymouth and other trading posts scattered along the New England coast. Most of these posts were composed of non-Separatists but co-operated with each other in an informal league of sorts to deal with Indian threats. Morton, in contrast to them, had little reason to fear the Indians as the tribe around Mount Wollaston, the Massachusetts, had been decimated by smallpox earlier and Miles Standish had killed off most of the remaining strong men in 1623. G. F. Adams estimated that there were only about seventy of them left by 1626 and their days were numbered.²⁶ Morton used these remaining Massachusetts effectively as hunters, training them in the use of

the guns he sold them, and making friends with tribes all along the coast clear down into Maine.

Following the winter of 1626-1627, Morton decided to liven things up at his post. First he changed the name of Mount Wollaston to Ma-re Mount, a bastardization of the Latin noun for sea, mare. Then to celebrate the change of name and the coming of spring, Morton ("mine Host" in The New English Canaan) chose to celebrate May Day in the time honored English fashion. The revellers brewed a barrel of beer, got other liquors, and set up a Maypole. Contrary to what some historians have written, this was not New England's first Maypole as others had been set up by fishermen since 1622. Morton gleefully described his Maypole: "A goodly pine tree of 80 foote longe, was reared up, with a peare of buckshorns nayled one, somewhat neare unto the top of it: where it stood as a faire sea marke for directions; how to finde out the way to mine Host of Ma-re Mount."²⁷ He wrote one of his poems for the occasion entitled "The Poem:"

Rise Oedipus, and if thou canst unfould,
 What means Caribdis underneath the mould,
 When Scilla solitary on the ground,
 (Sitting in forme of Niobe) was found;
 Till Amphitrites Darling did acquaint,
 Grim Neptune with the Tenor of her plaint,
 And caused him send forth Triton with the sound,
 So full of Protean formes, that the bold shore,
 Presented Scilla a new paramore,
 So strange as Sampson and so patient,
 As Job himselve, directed thus, by fate,
 To comfort Scilla so unfortunate.
 I doe profess by Cupids beautilous mother,
 Heres Scogans choise for Scilla, and none other;
 Though-Scilla's sick with greife because no signe,
 Can there be found of verture masculine.
 Esculapius come, I know right well,

His leboures lost when you may ring her Knell,
 The fatall sisters doome none can withstand,
 Nor Cithareas powre, who poynts to land,
 With proclamation that the first of May,
 At Ma-re Mount shall be kept hollyday. 28

"The Poem," as Morton explained, is an involved riddle symbolizing the settlers desire for women, although it is barely understandable today. And if his poem were not enough for the day, he composed a song entitled "The Songs:"

Drinke and be merry, merry, merry boyes,
 Let all your delight be in the Hymens ioyes,
 Iſ to Hymen now the day is come,

About the merry Maypole take a Roome.

Make greene garlons, bring bottles out;
 And fill sweet Nectar, freely about,
 Uncover thy head, and feare no harme,
 For hers good liquor to keep it warme.

Then drinke and be merry, etc.

Iſ to Hymen, etc.

Nectar is a thing assign'd,
 By the Deities owne minde,
 To cure the hart opprest with greife,
 And of good liquors is the cheife,

Then drinke, etc.

Iſ to Hymen, etc.

Give to the Mellancolly man,
 A cup or two of't now and than;
 This physick' will soone revive his bloud,
 And make him be of a merrier moode.

Then drinke, etc.

Iſ to Hymen, etc.

Give to the Nymphe thats free from scorne,
 No Irish; stuff nor Scotch over worne,
 Lasses in beaver coats come away,
 Yee shall be welcome to us night and day.

To Drinke and be merry, etc.

Iſ to Hymen, etc. 29

With song and drink, the happy transplants swirled about the Maypole, consorting with frisky squaws. Morton wrote that it was all quite innocent as the young men were hoping to have wives brought over from England and were trying to stay happy until then. The Pilgrims who had wives could not grasp this

little bit of subtlety, he added.³⁰

This May Day celebration has been Morton's symbol ever since and a delusive one. Most casual readers fail to see that Morton's life in America was composed of only a few May Days and that he never would have become the successful trader and feared opponent of the Puritans were this not so. In the Elizabethan vein, he played as boisterously as he worked, giving judicious proportions to both, and he loved the land that nurtured the play and the work.

The New English Canaan echoes the wonder of a man who had found his paradise. Morton saw New England as a friendly and hospitable land: "...this Country of new England is by all judicious men, accounted the principall part of all America, for habitation and the commodiousness of the Sea..."³¹ He roamed throughout the region to areas never seen before by white men, catalogued the wide assortment of fish, fowl, and animals the avid sportsmen could prey on, exclaimed that "Canaan came not neere this Country,"³² and in a burst of poesy sang:

If art & industry should doe as much
As Nature hath for Canaan, not such
Another place, for benefit and rest
In all the universe can be possest,
The more we prove it by discovery,
The more delight each object to the eye
Procures as if the elements had here,
Bin reconciled, and pleased it should appeare
Like a faire virgin longing to be sped
And meete her lover.....³³

There is never the feeling in The New English Canaan as with many Puritan and Pilgrim works that the author is at odds with

the land. New England is not a land to be attacked and conquered, it is not a dangerous adversary, and its prominent color is not grey but green.

On a more mercenary note, Morton claimed that there were sources of copper, lead, vermillion, loadstone, silver, and gold in New England. John Endicott ("Captain Littleworth" as Morton dubbed him) scoured the land looking for these minerals to little avail. About all the Puritans ever found were some poor iron deposits which they tried to exploit in the short-lived Lynn and Saugus iron works. Morton showed less interest in the mineral possibilities than in the reality of an abundant fur supply of beaver, otter, and martin.

Besides his love of the land and its climate, Morton had a genuine respect for the natives. Here he resembled those thinkers of the 18th century who argued that the uncivilized savages were often more civilized than the so-called civilized people of Europe: "According to human reason guided only by the light of nature, these people leads the more happy and freer life, being voyde of care, which torments the minds of so many Christians; They are not delighted in baubles, but in usefull things."³⁴ He felt that colonies should be planted in New England so as to preserve and benefit the natives, and consequently he condemned the harsh measures Plymouth and the Bay Colony took against them. Morton was an uncommon Englishman in his open attitude towards cavorting with and marrying squaws.

The Pilgrims did not favor such cavorting with the Indians

and denounced the idea of celebrating May Day. May Day was of pagan origin, celebrating the Roman deity Flora, and a favorite orgy day of the Stuarts. Cavalier poets competed in composing saucy lyrics for the day culminating in Herrick's "Corinna's Going A Maying." May Day always assumed a drunken quality interspersed with all varieties of sex, especially in America where women were sometimes in short supply.

Some non-Separatists had previously shocked Bradford when they celebrated Christmas with games and drinking, assuming that Christmas was a happy day to be observed accordingly. Bradford's complaint went unheeded and he had neither the legal power nor the presumption to assume the power to stop it. But this was nothing compared with Morton's May Day celebration and Bradford reacted furiously; "They also set up a maypole, drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together like so many fairies or furies, rather; and worse practices."³⁵ In reading Pilgrim-Puritan detailed denunciations of Morton's libertine habits, the contemporary reader can sense a little envy on their part. It is much the same psychology under which men want to ban pornography and sit on the committee that does it.

There was nothing the Pilgrims could do about Morton's wilderness bacchanales for they broke no English law and Morton was on lands belonging to Robert Gorges. While the Pilgrims grumbled about Morton, they were usually less eager than the

Puritans to meddle in other peoples' business and they rarely exhibited the savage vindictiveness of the Puritans. The Pilgrims moved against Morton only when his actions directly threatened their colony.

Life at Merrymount was not as ribald as Bradford implied. Morton set up an Anglican Church using the book of Common Prayer. The settlers spent most of their waking hours trading and herein lay Morton's downfall. The Indians wanted guns and rum above all and it was legal to sell them the former but not the latter. James I, prodded by Sir Ferdinando Gorges and complaints in 1622 about the conduct of Weston and his men, had issued on November 6, 1622 "A Proclamation Prohibiting Interloping And Disorderly Trading To New England In America" forbidding the sale to the savages of "Swords, Pikes, Muskets, Fowling Peeces, Match, Powder, Shot, and other warlike weapons" as well as teaching the natives how to use these weapons.³⁶ Plymouth and the string of posts along the coast obeyed the law religiously, realizing the danger to their existence if the Indians were armed. Morton who had little reason to fear the Indians, gladly traded guns for pelts, and as a result his share of the fur trade grew to the point where he dominated the market. In a short time Bradford and the rest of the Pilgrims denounced this illegal gun trade:

O, the horribleness of this villainy! How many both Dutch and English have lately been slain by those Indians thus furnished, and no remedy provided; nay, the evil more increased, and the blood of their brethren sold for gain (as is to be feared) and in what danger

all these colonies are in is too well known. O that princes and parliaments would take some timely order to prevent this mischief and at length to suppress it by some exemplary punishment upon some of these gain-thirsty murderers, for they deserve no better title, before their colonies in these parts be overthrown by these barbarous savages thus armed with their own weapons, by these evil instruments and traitors to their neighbors and country!³⁷

Considering the relatively few Pilgrims and the large number of Indians around the tiny colony, one of the few equalizers the Pilgrims had were their guns. If the Pilgrims lost this advantage, there can be little doubt that their existence would have been seriously jeopardized.

Bradford also argued with good reason that Morton's self-proclaimed autonomy and lawlessness set a bad and ominous precedent which had to be summarily stopped lest it lead to more and worse Merrymounts: "all the scum of the country or any discontents would flock to him from all places, if this nest was not broken."³⁸

Many Pilgrim and Puritan writers later charged Morton with harboring fugitive servants. The colonists valued their servants highly, paid a good price for them, and kept many lawyers busy prosecuting cases against runaway servants and newspapers full of advertisements for their capture. The lack of any legal proceedings against Morton for servant snaring strongly suggests that the charge was false and malicious in intent.³⁹

Confronted with these charges, Morton countered that a royal proclamation did not have the power of a law, that the

power of a proclamation died with the king (James I died in 1625 and Charles I did not reiterate the substance of his father's proclamation until 1630), and that he was beyond Pilgrim jurisdiction. Morton had no apparent legal basis for his first two claims and only some basis for the last. The question with the last is that under the ill-defined rights given with a patent the problem of who could enforce the King's laws was not answered. The Pilgrims felt that they could not enforce their own laws outside their lands but could enforce the King's laws if Plymouth Colony was directly affected by an illegal act like Morton's. Morton rebutted by arguing that his gun-trading did not injure the Pilgrims except to win the fur trade away from them, and he pictured himself as a precursor of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, bringing high church Laudian Anglicanism to the Indians. As events turned out, the Pilgrims prudently chose a middle course; they arrested Morton but sent him to England for trial.

Prior to arresting Morton, the Pilgrims warned him several times and acted only when Morton haughtily rebuked all warnings. Then the call went out from Plymouth to Maine for a mustering of forces to attack Merymount. A special war tax was requested and the following towns and people contributed to the tiny war chest: ⁴⁰

Plymouth	2	10	0
Naumkeag	1	10	0
Piscataqua	2	10	0
Mr. Jeffry and Mr. Burslem	2	0	0
Nantasket	1	10	0

Mrs. Thompson
 Mr. Blackstone
 Edward Hilton

0	15	0
0	12	0
1	0	0
<u>12</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>

40

In May, 1628, Miles Standish organized the troops, all eight of them, in what was the first co-operative venture in New England and a forerunner in miniature of the New England Confederation. Getting faulty intelligence reports, Standish marched on Merry-mount only to find that Morton had gone to Wessagusset. Re-tracing his steps, Standish trapped Morton there. Morton was defiant and threatened ferocious resistance. Here the ver-sions of the story part. Bradford, restating what Standish told him, wrote that Morton was caught at Merrymount, not Wessagusset, in a house with some of his compatriots. Standish ordered them to come out which they refused to do. As time passed, Morton's band got increasingly drunk and abusive. When the group finally came out, armed and ready to fight, they were too drunk to hold their heavy weapons. Bradford reached one of his rare amusing moments in telling the rest: "Himself [Morton] with a carbine, over-charged and almost half filled with powder and shot, as was often found, had thought to have shot Captain Standish; but he stepped to him and put his piece and took him."⁴¹

On the other side, Morton said that he was alone at Wes-sagusset when Standish took him by surprise. The Pilgrims held him overnight where they had a little orgy in celebration of their conquest. After they fell asleep, Morton who had stayed

Eastern Massachusetts Prior to 1650



sober slipped out and fled to Merrymount under cover of night and a severe thunder storm. The embarrassed Standish marched on Merrymount and trapped Morton there. In a noble gesture, Morton offered to give himself up less blood be shed. Standish and his cohorts expressed their appreciation by roughing up Morton.⁴²

Most historians since C. F. Adams have taken a middle road in describing what actually happened. The events probably occurred substantially as Morton said though Morton was not as gracious and as noble as he immodestly claimed. There is little reason to suspect that Morton spared Standish some of his notoriously vivid language. Bradford, either in ignorance or deference to Standish, neglected to note Morton's escape from Wessagusset. And Morton failed to write that the force at Merrymount he so nobly saved from bloodshed consisted of three men, himself, one man who wisely fled on Standish's arrival, and another who got drunk.⁴³

After Morton's capture, the Pilgrims treated him decently. Standish and a few others wanted to hang him, but Bradford and other doves carried the debate and decided to send Morton back to England for trial. As there would be no ship going back to England before spring that would take Morton, the Pilgrims imprisoned Morton on the Isle of Shoals (off Portsmouth, New Hampshire). Morton grumbled that "these Worthies [Pilgrims] set mine Host upon an Island, without gunne, powther, or shot, or gogge, or so much as a knife, to get any thinge to feede

upon or any other cloathes to shelter him with at winter then a thinne suite which hee had one at that time."⁴⁴ Life, however, was not too harsh on the Isle of Shoals as the Indians kept their friend supplied with liquor and necessities.

The Pilgrims sent Morton to England in the custody of John Oldham. Oldham had come to Plymouth in 1623 and became involved in a scheme with John Lyford, a disreputable Anglican minister, to establish the Anglican Church and take over the government of the Plymouth Colony. He was banished by Plymouth but taken back in after a while. Later in his life, he colonized in Connecticut and his murder by the Pequots touched off a bitter Indian war. His fiery and eccentric personality won him the name "Mad Jack" from Morton. Oldham took two letters with him stating the charges against Morton, one to the Council for New England, and one to Sir Ferdinando Gorges. Remembering Gorges's former attitude on gun-trading with the Indians, the Pilgrims expected a speedy trial and punishment of Morton.

To the immense chagrin of the Pilgrims, English officials did nothing to Morton. Sir Ferdinando was reluctant to prosecute an ally, friend, and money-maker for the Council. Gorges needed Morton in his growing battle with the Massachusetts Bay Company and Morton aided his own cause by playing the growing religious differences.⁴⁵ Morton wrote that Oldham spared no effort or expense in prosecuting the case against him, but such was not the case. Oldham spent most of his time conniving to get for himself a patent for a fur-trading company and a choice tract of land.⁴⁶ Amidst the web of London politics and Oldham's greed, the case against Morton died.

London politics of 1629-1630 were critical for Massachusetts history and Morton in a number of ways. First, Robert Gorges died in 1629 and his lands passed to his brother John who was not as interested in colonizing. Second and vastly more important, the Massachusetts Bay Company received a royal charter to Massachusetts excepting Plymouth's lands on March 4, 1629. This company had its antecedents in John White's Dorchester Company which collapsed in 1626 to be revived in 1628 as part of the New England Company. The New England Company got a patent to lands between the Charles and Merrimack Rivers in Massachusetts from the Council for New England and sent over John Endicott and eighty settlers as a vanguard in the summer of 1628. Not content with patent rights under men they hated, the Puritans who ran the New England Company fought for a charter. This directly conflicted with lands granted to Robert Gorges and passed on to John Gorges as well as the entire Council for New England Charter. And it came at a time when tensions were growing between the King, the Puritans, and the Puritan dominated House of Commons. Charles felt at the time that chartering a Puritan colony would rid England of these obnoxious people who opposed his grasp for total power and high church beliefs. In addition, the Earl of Warwick and other influential Puritan allies pushed the cause of the Massachusetts Bay Company at court.

The clash between Gorges and the Puritans involved more than a battle for control of Massachusetts; it involved a personal and religious battle. On the first part, the Puritans

hated Gorges for failing to support the Earl of Essex in 1601. Gorges, a friend and associate of Essex, denied him at his trial. For the Puritans who looked on Essex as one of them, this paralleled Judas's denial of Jesus. On the second point, the Puritans representing low church Anglicanism and the position of Commons fought the high church Anglicans led by Archbishop Laud. Laud had been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by Charles, bordered on Roman Catholicism in his high church position, and strongly influenced his good friend and ally, the King. The Massachusetts Bay Company represented the former group and the Council for New England and Gorges the latter. Morton and Laud became sufficiently close during this general period that Morton was able to get Laud to have Edward Winslow arrested in 1635 for performing a marriage in Plymouth, an act Laud said only ordained Anglican ministers could perform.⁴⁷ The arrest was less based on principle than on Morton's desire to retaliate against a Pilgrim he did not like.

While Morton was aiding the Gorges interests against the Puritans after his first ouster from Massachusetts, he was also trying to get back to New England and working on behalf of Isaac Allerton, an agent for the Pilgrims. In the winter of 1628-1629, Allerton was in London trying to get a new patent for the Plymouth Colony along with additional lands on the Kennebec River in Maine, and he was trying to get a royal charter for the colony from Charles. He shrewdly hired Morton to deal with the Council for New England and the move paid off with the

desired patent. But neither Morton's influence nor Allerton's resources were enough to coax a charter from Charles.

Allerton repaid Morton by taking Morton with him back to Plymouth in 1630 and employing him as a scribe. Morton lived with Allerton until as Bradford wrote happily "he [Allerton] was caused to pack him away."⁴⁸ Here Bradford was too modest as it was his effort along with that of most of Plymouth that forced Morton out. Morton meandered back to Merrymount where life was no longer so merry. Standish had cleared the worst men out in 1628, and Endicott had descended on the place in 1629, cut down the Maypole, and renamed the place Mount Dagon after Dagon, god of the Phillistines.⁴⁹ Under the new Puritan charter, Merrymount fell under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Mindless of the new realities, Morton casually resumed his old habits and fur-trading enterprise. He again cornered the market and ran afoul of Endicott in Salem. Endicott complained "of the profane and dissolute living of divers of our nation, former traders to these parts, and of their irregular trading with the Indians."⁵⁰

In response to Morton's threat, Endicott called an assembly at Salem in the summer of 1629 to which Morton was invited and attended although he later wrote that Endicott had no authority to issue the warrants calling for the meeting. The Assembly put on an initial stance of piety when it decreed: "That in all causes as well Ecclesiasticall, as Politicall, wee should follow the rule of God's word."⁵¹ Morton retorted with an unwel-

come addition: "So as nothing be done contrary, or repugnant to the Lawes of the Kingdome of England."⁵² The Assembly then decreed a general fur monopoly in which all men would have a share. Endicott invited Morton to join and in so doing stretched company instructions that "none be partakers of privileges and profits, but such as be peaceable men, and of honest life and conversation, and desirous to live amongst us, and conform themselves to good order and government."⁵³ Moreover, the impractical idea of a communal company was not Endicott's idea but the Company's. Morton denounced the plan as a scheme that would hurt him and other industrious entrepreneurs to the benefit of the plodding Puritans and refused to join it. In the short run, Morton's judgement was sound as he piled up profits while the Puritans lost money through mismanagement.⁵⁴

In the long run, Norton's disregard for Endicott's authority backfired. He unwisely expected full support from Gorges and the Council, not realizing that the Council was impotent to help him in a battle across the Atlantic against forces it could not defeat at home. Consequently, when Endicott decided to arrest Morton late in 1629, Morton had no one to turn to for help and had to flee to the woods while Endicott sacked his house and stole his corn and accumulated pelts.⁵⁵ The rest of Morton's winter passed quietly as Endicott was too busy setting up the colony to bother with Morton.

At the end of summer, 1630, with the Massachusetts Bay Company snugly settled in its new headquarters at Boston, the Puritans

met to deliberate the question of non-conformists like Morton. They voted for harsh and immediate action, and on August 23, 1630, the Court of Assistants which included John Winthrop, Endicott, and Sir Richard Saltonstall ordered "that Morton, of Mount Woolison, should presently be sent for by pesse."⁵⁶ Sometime between August 23rd and the following September 6th, the Puritans caught Morton and took him before the magistrates.

Morton asserted that he was acting in no way contrary to English law, to the rules of the Council for New England, and that he was under Council jurisdiction by virtue of living on lands belonging to John Gorges. This argument had deterred the Pilgrims from trying him in 1628, or so he thought, but had little effect on the Puritans. If anything, the Puritan magistrates became more determined than before to assert their power and proceeded to punish Morton as severely as they dared. On September 7, 1630, the Court of Assistants decreed:

It is ordered by this present Court, that Thomas Morton, of Mount Wooliston, shall presently be sett into the bilowes, & after sent prisoner into England, by the ship nowe returneing thither; that all his goods shallbe seized upon to defray the charge of his transportacon, payemt of his debts, & to give satisfaction to the Indians for a cannoe hee uniustly tooke away from them; & that his howse, after the goods are taken out, shalbe burnt downe to the ground in the sight of the Indians, for their satisfiscon, for many wrongs he hath done them from tyme to tyme.⁵⁷

The last charges dealing with the Indians were absurd and without substantiation. Morton and the Indians were always friends and Morton told the truth with melodramatic embellishments when he described his departure for England:

The harmless Salvages (his neighbors) came the while, greived poore silly lambes: to see what they went about; and did reprove these Eliphants of witt for their inhumane deede the Lord above did upon their mouthes like Balams Asse, & made them speake in his behalfe sentences, of unexpected divinity, besides morrality; and tould them, that god would not love them, that burned this good mans howse: and plainly sayed, that they who were new come would finde the want of such a howses in the winter; so much themselves to him confest.⁵⁸

Morton enlivened the departure by refusing to board the boat taking him back to England. Consequently, the Puritans hoisted him aboard with hoist and tackle. Before that, another complication arose when the captain of the boat the Court of Assistants intended Morton to be carried on, Captain Broak, refused to carry Morton for fear of antagonizing English authorities. It was a good three months before the Puritans could find a captain who would carry Morton. Morton had little respect for this captain and mimicked him: "In comes Mr. Weathercock a proper Mariner; and they said; he could observe the winde; blow it high, blow it low, he was resolved to lye at hull rather than encounter such a storme as mine Host had met with; and this was a man for their turne."⁵⁹

Morton was jailed at Exeter for a while in England but released shortly afterwards. There was no solid charge he could be tried on and it is questionable if the Puritans expected him to be tried as they had more than adequately punished him already. One can applaud the Puritan efficiency in ridding their colony of upsetting elements like Morton and yet question their methods. The whole proceedings had an inquisition scent to

them. At his trial, for example, Morton was allowed no defence and could not get a clear statement of what law he had violated. He was told that the magistrates knew what law he had broken and this was enough. Morton was lucky not to be punished as severely as another dissenter Philip Ratcliffe who was whipped, his ears cut off, fined forty pounds, and banished. Needless to say, such punishment of dissenters who happened to be good Anglicans did not sit well with those in power in London. It was one thing for the Star Chamber to usurp due process, quite another for degenerate Puritans.

Morton arrived in England at a propitious moment to raise the anti-Puritan banner. Charles had already dissolved Parliament and was bent on running the country alone, and he and Laud were moving against the Puritans on all levels. Laud was routing ministers like John Cotton out of their pulpits and driving thousands of Puritans to America. The canny Puritans foiled the King and Laud on one matter; they transferred the headquarters of the Massachusetts Bay Company to Boston and took the charter with them. While this made it hard for the King to seize the charter, the King could still move to revoke it.

The battle to revoke the charter began in earnest in 1631. ... Gorges and other West England leaders who saw their claims in Massachusetts quashed united in attack. They were aided by Massachusetts refugees including Morton, Ratcliffe, and Sir Christopher Gardiner. Gardiner, a Catholic, came to Massachusetts in 1630 with two servants and "a comely young woman whom he called his cousin; but it was suspected she, after the Ital-

ian manner, was his concubine,"⁶⁰ or so Bradford thought. As it turned out, Gardiner had left two wives in England who complained to Winthrop about their mutual husband. In response to the complaints, the Court of Assistants ordered Gardiner's arrest, but he fled to the woods and it took a month to capture him. Meanwhile Winthrop had intercepted a letter from Gorges to Gardiner which linked the two men.⁶¹ Gardiner was held for a while and then released. The Puritans did not dare treat a man of Gardiner's position harshly and Winthrop preferred to keep him in New England where he would be less dangerous than in England. Gardiner lived in Maine for around a year before going back to England and joining the attack on the Bay Colony's charter. Gardiner expressed his opinion of the Puritans in a sonnet published by Morton:

Wolfe in Sheeps clothing why will ye,
 Think to deceave God that cloth see,
 Your simulated sarity.
 For my part I doe wish you could,
 Your own infirmities behold,
 For then you would not be so bold,
 Like Sophists why will you dispute,
 With wisdoms so, you doe confute,
 None but yourselves; for shame be mute.
 Least great Jehovah with his powre,
 Do come upon you in a howre,
 When you least think and you devoure.⁶²

Gardiner, Morton, Ratcliffe, and Gorges petitioned the Privy Council to have the Massachusetts Bay Company's charter voided on the grounds of personal injuries, activities against the Church of England and the state, and illegal seizure of lands formerly granted by the Council for New England.⁶³ There

was debate before the Privy Council while the real battle took place behind the scenes where the wealthier Puritan faction had a distinct advantage. One reason for the consistent inability of the Council to found a large colony was its continual lack of money. As a result of Puritan influence, the Privy Council on January 19, 1633 ruled in favor of the Massachusetts Bay Company.

Developments late in 1633 and early 1634 corroded this initial Puritan victory. In the first place, Charles I shifted his policy of encouraging Puritan emigration to one of impeding it. Charles and Laud feared that Massachusetts would serve as a haven and seedbed for opposition if its growth and autonomy continued and their fears came to a head when the Privy Council asked to see the Bay Colony's charter. The colony's agent in London, Matthew Cradock, told the surprised Privy Council that the charter was in Massachusetts. The Privy Council on February 21, 1634 ordered the Massachusetts Bay Company to present the charter for their examination. Governor Thomas Dudley and the Governor's Council stalled as best they could, first claiming that only the General Court could order the return of the charter and that it would not meet until September.⁶⁵

A second, concurrent, and connected development took place within the Council for New England. The Council was in a wretched condition spiritually and financially. Many of its friends like Morton and Gardiner had been hounded out of Massachusetts and the Council was in danger of losing its lands in

New Hampshire and Maine to the covetous Puritans. The only strong, active colonizer the Council had left was Captain John Mason who was not faring too well in New Hampshire. And to complete the misery, the Council for all intents and purposes was broke.

To revive the Council's fortunes and connect it more closely with the King, Gorges and the others in the Council concocted an ingenious scheme. The Council would return its charter and patent rights to the King who, in turn, would parcel out surrendered lands back to Council members and appoint a governor, presumably Sir Ferdinando Gorges, for the King's new domains. The Council would also push for a royal commission to investigate and handle colonial affairs as well as restore old Council power and rights in Massachusetts.⁶⁶

With Laud's and the Council for New England's support, Charles officially sanctioned a royal commission under Laud's leadership on April 28, 1634. Charles gave the commission broad powers and in a sweeping provision decreed:

Notwithstanding, it shall be for you, or any five or more of you, as is aforesaid, although those laws, constitutions, and ordinances shall be proclaimed with our royal assent, to change, revoke, and abrogate them and other new ones, inform aforesaid, from time to time frame and make as aforesaid; and to new evils arising, or new dangers, to apply new remedies as it fitting, so often as to you it shall seem expedient.⁶⁷

Thomas Morton assumed that the creation of this commission and its subsequent investigation of Massachusetts immediately thereafter meant that the Massachusetts charter was repealed. He mixed

all his feelings, hopes, and frustrations into one long letter to William Jeffry (a Wessagusset farmer) which Jeffry turned over to Winthrop:

If I should commend myself to you, you would reply with this proverb, *propria laus sordet in ore*, but to leave impertinent salutes and really proceed, you shall hereby understand, that altho' when I was first sent to England, to make complaint against Ananias and the brethren, I effected the business but superficially (thro' the brevity of time) I have at this time taken deliberation, and brought the matter to a better pass, and it is brought about, that the King hath taken the matter into his own hands. The Massachusetts patent, by an order of council, was brought in view, the privileges therein granted well scanned, and at the council board, in presence of Sir R. Saltonstall and the rest, it was declared, for manifold abuses therein discovered, to be void. The King hath reassured the whole business into his own hands, and given order, for a general governor for the whole territory, to be sent over. The commission is passed the privy seal, I saw it, and the same was sent to my Lord Keeper, to have it pass the great seal, and I now stay to return with the governor, by whom all complaints shall have relief. So that now, Jonas being set ashore, may safely cry, Repent ye cruel schismatics, repent, there are yet but 40 days. If Jove vouchsafe to thunder, the charter and the kingdom of the separatists will fall asunder.--My lord of Canterbury, with my lord privy seal, having caused all Mr. Craddock's letters to be viewed and his apology for the brethren particularly heard, protested against him and Mr. Humfries [a Bay Colony agent] that they were a couple of imposturous knaves, so that, for all their great friends, they departed the council chamber in our view with a pair of cold shoulders. I have staid long, yet have not lost my labour. The brethren have found themselves frustrated, and I shall see my desire upon mine enemies.--Of these things I thought good, by so convenient a messenger, to give you notice, lest you should think I died in obscurity, as the brethren vainly intended I should. As for Ratcliffe, he was comforted by their lordships with the cropping of Mr. Winthrop's ears [Morton is speaking figuratively here as Winthrop was safe in Massachusetts at the time] which shews what opinion is held, amongst them, of king Winthrop with all his inventions and his Amsterdam and fantastical ordinances, his preachings, marriages, and other abusive ceremonies, which exemplify his detestation of the church of England, and contempt of his Majesty's authority and wholesome laws. 68

Events in England in 1635 both discouraged and encouraged those pushing for a revocation of the Massachusetts charter. By late 1635, it appeared that only a large force would be able to reduce the Bay Colony. Massachusetts had not only stalled but had vigorously prepared for hostilities. The Puritans fortified Boston harbor, set up an armed watch, and built a navy. They balanced this with professions of loyalty to Charles but these were confounded by tactless John Endicott when he cut the red cross out of the royal banner, a relic of popish times he felt.⁶⁹ The General Court admonished Endicott for the stupid act which anti-Puritans used as propaganda. On the encouraging side, the Council for New England mounted a two-pronged assault on the Massachusetts charter. First the Council officially surrendered its charter and lands on June 5, 1635, and second it retained Thomas Morton to push its legal case; Council records of May 5, 1635 note:

Thomas Morton is now entertained to be Solicitor for confirmation of the said deeds under the great seal, as also to prosecute suit at law for the repealing of the patent belonging to the Massachusetts Company; and is to have for fee twenty shillings a term.⁷⁰

Morton well earned his fee, for late in June, the English government formally moved for a revocation of the Massachusetts charter, filing suit that the charter never existed. The King's lawyers shrewdly guessed that Massachusetts would never send the charter back to England to disprove the charge as Charles would then be in a position to seize it. The court case dragged on until July, 1637 when the charter was voided and Charles declared that he was

in charge of the colony.

Charles took over the colony de jure but could do nothing to make his rule de facto. He had no money to raise an army with, and was too busy at home to seriously consider an invasion of Massachusetts. To make matters worse for the Council, its last ambitious project, Mason's New Hampshire colony, fell apart when Mason died late in 1635. Morton had nothing to do but hang around London and work for the Council or any others who would hire him. There is very little information on Morton for the years 1635-1643, particularly in connection with a debate over whether Morton broke with Gorges before he came back to New England in 1643. C. F. Adams speculated that he did not, basing his judgement on evidence linking Morton with Gorges in the chartering of Agamenticus (a proposed town in Maine) in 1641.⁷¹ The final answer probably lies in the London archives and these have yet to be scoured on this matter. It is certain, however, that Morton's position and wealth declined in the half-decade or so prior to 1643.

The final part of Morton's life centers on his third and last return to New England. In 1643, possibly sensing the defeat of royalist forces and possibly wanting to spend his last days in New Canaan, Morton set his affairs in order. He registered his will in London on August 23rd. Though there is no record of any land grants from the Council to Morton, he nevertheless left claims to the following lands to his heirs:

...in the province of Carlile, New England, 5000 acres

on the East side of the River Quilleprock and 5000 on the west side extending four miles along the river, in the province of Ligonis, 2000 acres in Casco Bay near the River Pesumskogg, the two Clupp Board Islands in Casco Bay, Martin's Vyneyard Island on the Southern side of Cape Codd nere Narohiganses Bay.⁷²

In Morton's absence, Robert Gorges's old lands at Mount Wollaston had fallen to Puritan expansion. The General Court had granted lands there starting in 1635 and many tracts fell into the hands of key Antinomians, John Wheelwright, William Hutchinson, and his more famous wife Anne.⁷³ If Morton knew how much trouble these people caused, he must have been pleased. And he would have had a good chuckle to know that his old drinking spot was not wanting for good spirits as the General Court declared on May 22, 1639 that "Martin Saunders is allowed to keep a house of intertainment at Mount Woolaston."⁷⁴

Morton wisely tried to avoid Bay Colony lands when he sailed for New England in the fall of 1643. He landed at Plymouth, surprised the Pilgrims, and put them in a quandary deciding what to do with him. Morton was a very old man and not the threat he once was. Moreover, he was somewhat impoverished and content, in Bradford's words, to live "meanly at four shillings per week and content to drinke water, so he [might] dyat at that price."⁷⁵ He angered Miles Standish by hunting the marshes about Plymouth, and, as several historians have claimed, trying to induce men to settle with him on lands near New Haven.⁷⁶ The Pilgrims (except a few like Standish) had little desire to persecute Morton, nor did they want him around to foully influence

their children and pollute their society. Consequently, they let him stay at Plymouth during the fall and winter of 1643-1644 with the understanding that he would leave come the following summer.

After leaving Plymouth, Morton sailed to Gloucester hoping to avoid the Puritans. Winthrop had known since December, 1643 that Morton was in New England and kept a lookout for him.⁷⁷ Endicott, too, wanted to catch Morton, had a warrant issued for Morton's arrest when he learned Morton was in Gloucester, and moaned: "It is most likely that Jesuits or some that way disposed have sent him over to do us mischief, to raise up our enemies round about us both English and Indian."⁷⁸

Somehow the Puritans caught him in 1644 and charged him with slandering Massachusetts and attacking the Bay Colony in London and in The New English Canaan. The Massachusetts leaders led by Winthrop had long held that it was illegal to protest one of their decisions to English authorities or in English courts. The precedent was set in 1632 when the Court of Assistants declared that "Thomas Knowler, was sett in the bilbowedes for threatening the Court that, if hee should be punnist, hee would have it tryed in England wither hee was lawfully punnist or not."⁷⁹ Winthrop also dug up the old letter of 1634 to William Jeffry, and he used this and other letters against Morton. Morton, in November, 1644, went before the Court of Assistants and pleaded:

Your petitioner craveth the favour of this honorable

Court to cast back your eyes and behold what your poor petitioner hath suffered in these parts. First, the petitioners house was burnt, and his goods taken away. Secondly, his body clapt into Irons and set home in a desperate ship, unwittled, as if he had been a man worthy of death...Now the petitioner craves this further, that you would be pleased to consider what is laid against him-taking it for granted to be true-whether such a poore worme as I had not some cause to crawle out of this condition above mentioned. Thirdly, the petitioner craves this favoure of you, as to view his actions lately towards New England, whether they have not been serviceable to gentlemen in the country.⁸⁰

The pleas fell on deaf ears and Morton shivered through winter in a Boston jail while Winthrop waited for evidence against him from England and debated what to do with the old man. After about a year in jail, Morton was released. Winthrop wrote with a pious tone of charity:

He was a charge to the country, for he had nothing, and we thought not fit to inflict corporal punishment upon him, being old and crazy, but thought better to fine him, and give him his liberty...⁸¹

Samuel Maverik who opposed the Puritans, but more careful than Morton not to offend them too greatly, later protested the twisted proceedings against Morton.⁸² He like Morton assumed justice rested on laws, not on men, a gross misjudgement of Massachusetts realities and John Winthrop who cringed at the concept of a government of laws.

Released, Morton went to Maine to spend his last two years. Morton had helped patent Agamenticus (near York, Maine) in 1641, and had known about the grandiose plans to make it into a splendid city. Thomas Gorges, a cousin of Sir Ferdinando, went there in 1641 to head the colony but pulled

out within two years. The place was degenerating when Morton went down there and not the gay city complete with two fairs a year and many a paypole. Morton's health had been broken by the year in a Boston jail and he died there in 1646 or 1647. Presumably, he was buried on the hill Agamenticus stood atop with a good view of the ocean to the east.

Morton died a relatively unimportant man, and it is hard to see how New England history would have been much different had he never existed. With the exception of his year at Merry-mount, he was usually a cog in someone else's wheel and historically was most important when serving as a cog. But while historians will hammer away that the knowledgeable man should think in terms of Morton, Gorges, and the Council for New England, popular fancy will think of Morton, Merrymount, and maypoles. Tales of cogs create less fancy and interest than tales of the first naughty New Englander and his jolly haunt.

Morton, however, may have had one long term effect on Massachusetts history, namely, to harden and perpetuate Puritan orthodoxy. In their first confrontation with dissenters to their rule, the Puritans felt it necessary to react with extreme toughness and it set a pattern or rigidity not broken for decades. In his striking contrast to the Puritans, Morton may well have had made it more striking and in his own way was as unbending as the Puritans. What options did his conduct leave the Puritans? Herein lay the problem, the nature of the confrontation, and the grist of a good short story, a bad novel, and many historical references.

FOOTNOTES

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- 3 Henry Beston, The Book of Gallant Varabonds (New York, 1925).
- 4 B. F. DeCosta, "Morton of Merry Mount," Magazine of American History, VIII (February, 1882), pp. 81-94; hereafter cited as DeCosta.
- 5 Charles Edward Banks, "Thomas Morton of Merry Mount," Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings, Series 3, Vol. 18, pp. 148-196; hereafter cited as Banks.
- 6 Thomas Morton, The New English Cansan, in Force's Tracts, vol. 2, Peter Force ed. (Gloucester, 1963); hereafter cited as NEC.
- 7 TE, I, pp. 169-172
- 8 William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1952), p. 205; hereafter cited as Bradford.
- 9 Banks, pp. 150-152.
- 10 George F. Willison, Saints and Strangers (New York, 1945), p. 275; hereafter cited as Saints and Strangers.
- 11 Banks, pp. 151-159.
- 12 NEC, p. 15.
- 13 NEC, pp. 74-75.
- 14 Samuel Butler, "Hudibras," Part 11, Canto 11, ll. 409-436, cited in TE, I, pp. 81-82.
- 15 Bradford, pp. 133-136.
- 16 Bradford, p. 135.
- 17 NEC, p. 93.
- 18 TE, I, p. 162.
- 19 Bradford, pp. 204-205.

- 20 Bradford, p. 216; and Nathaniel Morton, "New England Memorial," Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers, ed. Ernest Rys (New York, nd), p. 93.
- 21 Banks, p. 157.
- 22 Bradford, p. 204.
- 23 Darrett Rutman, Winthrop's Boston (Chapel Hill, 1965), p. 199.
- 24 TE, I, pp. 351-352.
- 25 Bradford, p. 205.
- 26 TE, I, p. 104.
- 27 NEC, p. 89.
- 28 NEC, p. 90.
- 29 NEC, p. 91.
- 30 NEC, pp. 91-92.
- 31 NEC, p. 4.
- 32 NEC, p. 63.
- 33 NEC, p. 10.
- 34 NEC, p. 40.
- 35 Bradford, p. 205.
- 36 British Royal Proclamations Relating To America 1603-1783, ed. Clarence S. Brigham (Worcester, 1911), pp. 33-34.
- 37 Bradford, pp. 207-208.
- 38 Bradford, p. 208.
- 39 DeCosta, pp. 82-83.
- 40 Bradford, p. 208.
- 41 Bradford, p. 210.
- 42 NEC, pp. 93-96.
- 43 TE, I, p. 206.

- 44 NEC, p. 97.
- 45 TE, I, pp. 222-223.
- 46 TE, I, p. 223.
- 47 Bradford, p. 274.
- 48 TE, I, pp. 223-224.
- 49 Bradford, pp. 205-206.
- 50 Lawrence Mayo, John Endicott (Cambridge, 1936), p. 18; hereafter cited as Mayo.
- 51 NEC, p. 106.
- 52 NEC, p. 106.
- 53 TE, I, p. 226.
- 54 NEC, pp. 106-107.
- 55 NEC, pp. 107-108.
- 56 Records of Massachusetts Bay in New England, Vol. I, ed. Nathaniel Shurtleff (Boston, 1853), p. 74; hereafter cited as Records.
- 57 Records, I, p. 75.
- 58 NEC, p. 109.
- 59 NEC, p. 120.
- 60 Bradford, p. 247.
- 61 Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, ed. James Hosmer (New York, 1908), p. 64; hereafter cited as Winthrop.
- 62 NEC, p. 122.
- 63 Winthrop, I, p. 101.
- 64 For full document, see Bradford, Appendix XII, pp. 421-422.
- 65 Winthrop, I, p. 129.
- 66 TE, I, pp. 276-278.

- 67 Bradford, Appendix XII, p. 424.
- 68 Winthrop, II, pp. 194-196.
- 69 Mayo, p. 84.
- 70 Cited in John Palfrey, History of New England, Vol. I (Boston, 1865), p. 401.
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OF MORTON, MERRYMOUNT, AND MAYPOLES

by

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1968

Among colonial Americans, few have aroused as much fancy as Thomas Morton of Merrymount, immortalized in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Maypole of Merry Mount." From 1625 to 1644, Morton was a constant irritant to the Pilgrims and Puritans both in New England and in England before the Privy Council and the court. He capped his career with a most delightful autobiography and description of New England in The New English Gentleman.

Recent research has discovered conclusively that Morton was of the West England gentry, a man of some socio-economic stature. He first achieved note in a suit on behalf of Dame Alice Miller against her son over a disputed will her husband left. His skill and craft as a lawyer, his chosen profession, moved him up in England. He became close to the Gorges family and a cog in the Council for New England.

Morton came over to America as part of the Captain Wollaston venture and stayed when Wollaston left. He organized Merrymount and made it a jolly and prosperous place. The jollity was best exemplified in Morton's May Day celebration of 1628, complete with Maypole, liquor, and friendly squaws. The celebration lasted several days and upset the more somber Pilgrims. The jollity was one thing, the prosperity another as it resulted from selling guns to the Indians. This forced Plymouth to act against Morton lest the colony be endangered by armed savages. In moving against Morton, the Pilgrims operated under a proclamation by James I in 1622 forbidding gun

trade with the Indians. The call went out from Cape Cod to Kennebec for a mustering of forces to oust Morton, a war tax levied, and Miles Standish organized his army of eight in the summer of 1628. After an embarrassing campaign, Morton was finally taken and shipped to England for trial.

In England, Morton escaped trial and returned to Merry-mount in 1629. This time he had to deal with the firmer John Endicott and did not fair as well. When Morton refused to join the official fur trading company, Endicott tried to arrest him. Morton fled in time but failed to evade the Puritans in 1630. Before a council composed of John Winthrop, Endicott, Dudley, and Saltonstall, he was tried and convicted. He was sent back to England, his house burned, and all his property seized. Back in England he fought with the Council for New England against the Puritans but this proved a losing cause. Nearing the end of his life, he returned for the last time to New England in 1643, but was hounded out of the Bay Colony to Maine where he died shortly thereafter.

Morton in his wayward life brought some comic relief to Massachusetts history as well as representing the losing side in a conflict over which direction Massachusetts colonization would take.