

# FOUR GENERATIONS

*Population, Land, and Family  
in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts*



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*Life and Death in a  
Wilderness Settlement*

By the time Andover was founded in 1646, all of the early settlers had successfully withstood the arduous process of transplantation from the old country to the new. Few had yet actually encountered the difficult circumstances inherent in an entirely new settlement, however, since most had been late-comers to the communities in which they first settled.<sup>1</sup> The environment which was to shape most of the remainder of their lives was still a wilderness when they first arrived during the 1640's and 1650's; Andover was rather remote from Boston, twenty miles or so to the south, and from Newbury, fifteen miles away on the coast. As an inland plantation, Andover was less marshy than a town like Ipswich or Newbury, but it was not clear at the outset whether it would prove to be a healthful place in which to live and raise children. The records which have survived, however, do provide a means of assessing some aspects of the quality of the environment and of the circumstances shaping the lives of the settlers. By examining the demographic experiences of the first two

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the process of settlement in Andover, see Philip J. Greven, Jr., "Four Generations: A Study of Family Structure, Inheritance, and Mobility in Andover, Massachusetts, 1630-1750" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1964), ch. 1, pp. 1-53.

generations, it is possible to establish the fact, which few historians have been willing to consider likely, that this new community proved to be a remarkably healthful place, conducive to the preservation of life and to the fecundity of the inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the settlers themselves, all of whom had been born in England, the majority of the children of first-generation families were born in the New World, either in the towns in which their parents first settled or in Andover itself. Fewer than one-third of the children were born prior to 1650, when the Andover records began to be kept. Of these, at least 20 were born prior to 1640, and at least 42 were born during the 1640's, with a probable maximum of about 82 children being born prior to 1650. The births of 201 children occurred after 1650, with nearly half (47.3 per cent) taking place during the 1650's and 1660's. Thereafter the number of second-generation births declined, with 47 births in the 1670's, 19 in the 1680's, and only one in the 1690's. In effect, the generational profile of births demonstrates that the critical decades of the 1650's and 1660's, when decisions were made regarding the distribution of town land, also happened to be years in which large numbers of the next generation were being born.

The distribution of births of the second generation must be distinguished from the total births recorded in the town records for the period, which include births of later-comers during the 1660's and 1670's as well as some births for the next generation. From 1650 to 1654, the town recorded the births of 28 infants; from 1655 to 1659, 32; from 1660 to 1664, 43; from 1665 to 1669, 44; between 1670 and 1674 the figure rose

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of sources and methods used in this study of the demographic history of Andover, see Chapter 1. For a complete series of data from 1650 to 1799 for births, marriages, and deaths, see the Appendix.

to 78, and to 90 between 1675 and 1679. This persistent increase in the numbers of births recorded suggests a growing population, but, unfortunately, the birth rate (the number of births per thousand of the population) cannot be estimated for this early period since neither a census nor tax lists survive to indicate the approximate total population.

It is possible, however, to determine the proportion of births to marriages during this period; this provides a useful index to fertility and thus indirectly indicates whether the birth rate itself was high or low. If the number of births for a decade are divided by the number of marriages for the decade which began five years earlier, the marriages during the dec-

Table 1. Births per marriage, 1650-1684

Marriages		Births		B/M
Years	Number	Years	Number	
1650-1659	13	1655-1664	75	5.8
1660-1669	23	1665-1674	122	5.3
1670-1679	38	1675-1684	215	5.7

ade 1650-1659 produced 5.8 births per marriage, and for 1660-1669 produced 5.3 births per marriage (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup> Since the proportion of births to marriages in Dedham, Massa-

<sup>3</sup> Several different methods have been used by historical demographers, this being the one suggested by J. D. Chambers, in his essay "The Course of Population Change," in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (Chicago, 1965), p. 333. For a different method, see D. E. C. Eversley, "A Survey of Population in an Area of Worcestershire from 1660 to 1850 on the Basis of Parish Registers," in Glass and Eversley, eds., *Population in History*, p. 403 (originally published in *Population Studies*, X [1957], pp. 253-279). One can also divide births and marriages recorded during exactly the same periods, but this method does not seem to be as useful as Chambers'.

chusetts, during the period 1636-1668 was 4.8, the relative height of the figures for Andover during the 1650's and 1660's would indicate that the birth rate itself was higher than normal during the early period following the settlement of the town.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of the population depended not only upon the birth rate, of course, but upon the death rate as well, since the proportion of infants surviving to adulthood was of critical importance in determining the growth of the town's population. During various periods of their history many communities in England and Europe had suffered from an excess of deaths over births, and throughout the seventeenth century the surplus of births over deaths was rarely sufficient to permit a significant increase in the total population.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Lockridge, "The Population of Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736," *EHR*, XIX (1966), 330. The relative height of the fertility index in Andover is also indicated by comparisons with the index of 5.8 births per marriage in Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, during the period 1676-1688, when the birth rate was "very high indeed"; see Peter Laslett and John Harrison, "Clayworth and Cogehoe," in H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard, eds., *Historical Essays, 1600-1750, Presented to David Ogg* (London, 1963), p. 173, and the Addendum, Table 2, which contains the data I used to determine the ratio of births to marriages. During the seventeenth century, the number of births per marriage in French villages around Beauvais ranged from 4.44 to 5.75, with the mean being 5.04 (Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730: Contribution à l'histoire sociale de la France du XVIIe siècle* [Paris, 1960], p. 37, table).

<sup>5</sup> For discussions of mortality in seventeenth-century England, see W. G. Hoskins, "The Population of an English Village, 1086-1801: A Study of Wigston Magna," in Hoskins, *Provincial England: Essays in Social and Economic History* (London, 1963), ch. 10, pp. 196-197. In Clayworth, deaths exceeded births during the period 1676-1688, with 190 baptisms and 197 burials (Laslett and Harrison, "Clayworth," Table 2, p. 182). In Colyton, the period from the 1640's to the 1730's was one "with burials normally more numerous than baptisms and population apparently falling" (E. A. Wrigley, "Mor-

experience of Andover during the early period of settlement and, indeed, throughout the entire seventeenth century fostered the rapid expansion of the population because of the remarkably low death rate during this period.

Few deaths were recorded in Andover during the early decades following its settlement. During the 1650's, seven deaths were recorded, five of them being children; during the 1660's, eighteen deaths were recorded, twelve of them children. Using data drawn from the family reconstitution forms, a total of nineteen deaths can be determined to have occurred between birth and nineteen years of age during these decades. This gives a mortality rate for children born to the settler families during the period 1640-1669 of 123 per thousand dying before nineteen years of age out of a group of 155 children whose ages at death can be determined with relative certainty, and a rate of 93 per thousand dying before nineteen years of age out of a total group of 204 children. This means that between 877 and 907 children out of every thousand born between 1640 and 1669 survived to the age of twenty, and between 890 and 917 children out of every thousand survived at least to the age of ten; these rates are astonishingly high. Even assuming that the mortality rates were double those found for these Andover families, about 754 out of every thousand children—three-quarters of those born in Andover during this period—would still have survived to the age of twenty years. Actually, though, the evidence seems to indicate that an even higher proportion of children survived to become adults. Given the fact that the deaths which were recorded during the 1650's were only 11.6 per cent of the births recorded during that decade, and the deaths during the 1660's were only 20.6 per cent of the births, the mortality

tality in Pre-industrial England: The Example of Colyton, Devon, over Three Centuries," *Daedalus*, Spring 1968, p. 556).

rates computed for the settler families appear to correspond rather closely to the proportion of deaths to births recorded in the town records.

The initial period following the settlement of Andover thus seems to have been one of exceptional healthiness. Even with allowances made for gaps in the records and underrecording of deaths, the fact remains that in Andover during the 1650's and 1660's there was an unusually high proportion of survivors among the infants and children born in the wilderness community. The second generation began its life auspiciously. Circumstances evidently combined to encourage a high birth rate and an exceptionally low death rate, a combination which produced a population that grew at a rapid pace. The numbers, of course, were still small, but the growth potential was immense. The chances of raising most of one's children to adulthood were far greater in Andover than in many similar villages in the Old World or some of the older communities in the New.

A study of deaths in Andover also suggests that those who did survive to adulthood could anticipate long and healthy lives. The average age of twenty-nine first-generation men at the time of their deaths was 71.8 years, and the average age at death of twenty first-generation wives was 70.8 years. Twenty-two of the men who settled permanently in Andover died after reaching their sixtieth year, five of them in their seventies, six in their eighties, three in their nineties, and one, according to the town records, at the remarkable age of 106. Similarly, fifteen of their wives also lived to be at least sixty years old, with four dying in their seventies, five in their eighties, one in her nineties, and one at the age of 100 years. The lifespans of their children were also impressively high, the average age at death of 111 second-generation men who had survived at least to the age of twenty-one being 64.2

years, and the average age of 58 second-generation women being 61.6 years.

The age distribution at death for ninety-two men born between 1640 and 1669 and surviving at least to the age of twenty also indicates the longevity of the men born in Andover during its early period (see Table 2): nearly four-

Table 2. Age at death of persons born between 1640 and 1669 and surviving to age 20

Age	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
20-29	13	14.1	2	4.5
30-39	4	4.3	5	11.4
40-49	2	2.2	5	11.4
50-59	10	10.9	9	20.5
60-69	16	17.4	6	13.6
70-79	25	27.2	9	20.5
80-89	19	20.6	4	9.1
90-99	3	3.3	4	9.1
100 and over	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	92	100.0	44	100.1

fifths lived to be at least fifty years old (79.4 per cent) and slightly more than half (51.1 per cent) reached the age of seventy. Although the age at death can be determined for only forty-four women born between 1640 and 1669 and surviving to the age of twenty, the distribution of their ages at death as shown in Table 2 nevertheless suggests that women also tended to reach advanced ages in appreciable proportions during this period: nearly three-quarters of these women lived to be at least fifty years old (72.8 per cent), more than half reached sixty years (52.3 per cent), and more than one-third reached seventy years (38.7 per cent). It is also suggestive that only 15.9 per cent of these women died be-

tween the ages of 20 and 39—years of childbearing and high risk for life; this figure was higher among the men, 18.4 per cent of whom died during their twenties and thirties. If the lifespans of this sample group of women are at all representative of those of the entire group born during this period, then it appears likely that both men and women born in Andover during the early decades following its settlement enjoyed longer lives after surviving the normal hazards of childhood and youth than previous studies of colonial America have indicated.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson, for instance, stated baldly that "the death rate was very high" during the Puritan era in New England (*The Puritans* [New York, 1938], p. 389). Perhaps Arthur W. Calhoun's views in *A Social History of the American Family* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1917), I, 105-106, have shaped most modern assumptions about the colonial family. According to Calhoun: "It was difficult at first to rear children in the new country. In the bareness and cold of Massachusetts, mortality of infants was frightful." More recently, Oscar Handlin has reasserted these assumptions, stating that "a high death rate remained constant and throughout the [seventeenth] century embittered the personal relationships of the colonists" ("The Significance of the Seventeenth Century," in James Morton Smith, ed., *Seventeenth-Century America: Essays in Colonial History* [Chapel Hill, 1959], p. 8).

The few recent demographic studies of Massachusetts towns point toward conclusions similar to those for Andover. John Demos, for example, found that the inhabitants of seventeenth-century Plymouth were healthy and long-lived, and that "the rate of infant mortality in Plymouth seems to have been relatively low" ("Notes on Life in Plymouth Colony," *WMQ*, XXII [1965], 270-272). In Dedham, Lockridge found that the probable death rate was low ("Population of Dedham," pp. 332-333). In Hingham, too, the life expectancy for the inhabitants in the seventeenth century was high, with 105 out of 827 people living to the age of 80, with the "average life of the married women of Hingham" being about 61.4 years, and with the average age at death for 818 of their children being 65.5 years—very similar to the data for Andover during the second generation (Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The First Americans, 1607-1690*

Further confirmation of the longevity of Andover's women is to be found in the evidence on remarriage. The data for the first generation obviously are unreliable for the period before their settlement in Andover, although genealogists have tried to determine as much as possible about some of them prior to the 1650's. Out of thirty-four first-generation men, twenty-three or 67.6 per cent appear to have had only one wife during their lifetimes, with nine or 26.5 per cent marrying twice, and two marrying three times. None are known to have married more than three times. The proportion of second-generation males marrying only once proved even higher, with sixty-six out of a total of eighty-nine marrying only once (74.2 per cent). If the four whose remarriages are uncertain are excluded, a total of 77.6 per cent of these second-generation men had only one wife during their lifetimes. Of the second-generation men who married more than once, sixteen married twice, two married three times, and one married four times. Marriages broken by premature deaths clearly were the exceptions, not the general rule, since both men and women lived much longer than many of us have realized.<sup>7</sup>

The combination of circumstances which tended to prolong life and those which evidently fostered an unusually high birth rate had very important implications for the families

[New York, 1929], pp. 184-186). Barbados in the 1670's experienced an "appallingly high mortality rate" (Richard S. Dunn, "The Barbados Census of 1680: Profile of the Richest Colony in English America," *WMQ*, XXVI [1969], 24).

<sup>7</sup> In view of the Andover evidence, there is reason to doubt Oscar Handlin's generalization: "It was rare in this century that a husband and wife should live into old age together. The frequency of remarriages by widowers and widows showed how familiar a factor in life was death" ("Significance of the Seventeenth Century," p. 8). In England during this period the high rate of mortality evidently did cause a high rate of remarriages (Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* [New York, 1965], pp. 99-100).