

ROBERT TREAT

Governor of the Colony of Connecticut, 1683-1698

Born: ca. 1624, Pitminster, Somerset, England

College: None

Political Party:None

Offices: Surveyor of Milford Lands, 1639-1640, 1652

Tax Collector, Wethersfield, 1647

Deputy, New Haven Colony General Court, 1653,1655-1659

Chief Military Officer of Milford, 1654

Magistrate, New Haven Colony, 1660-1664

Town Clerk, Newark, New Jersey, 1666-1667

Newark Delegate to New Jersey Legislature, 1667-1672

Assistant, General Court of the Colony of Connecticut, 1673-1676

Deputy Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1676-1683, 1699-1709

Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1683-1698

Died: 12 July 1710, Milford, Connecticut

Robert Treat was baptized February 25, 1624/5 at Pitminster, Somerset, England, the son of Richard and Alice (Gaylord) Treat, and was one of ten children. His family immigrated to Watertown, Massachusetts about 1638, and by 1639 was in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Robert, then 16 years old, had moved on to Milford by November 1639 and is listed in the town records as one of those designated to survey lands, an unusual honor for his age. He returned to Wethersfield after the survey and was elected ratemaker (tax collector) there in 1647. In that same year, he married Jane Tapp, the daughter of Edmund Tapp. According to tradition, they were married at the Tapp house at a spinning bee on Christmas night. However, no record of the marriage appears in the State Library's Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital Records or Church Records Index.

By 1649 the couple had moved to Milford, which was part of the New Haven Colony. There, with the lands he had purchased and with lands received from his father-in-law, Robert Treat became a holder of extensive properties. The residents of Milford elected

him, on several occasions, to buy and divide public lands. He became known as a person who had a talent for settling boundaries and other disputes between people. He also served as a trustee, an executor of wills, and an appraiser of property, with his name in many of the early probate records.

Robert Treat was a Deputy from Milford to the General Court of the New Haven Colony in 1653. He served as chief military officer of Milford in 1654 and then four more years as Deputy, 1655-59. In 1660 he was appointed as a Magistrate of the New Haven Colony. Robert and Jane Treat's seven children were born in Milford.

Charles I, King of England, had been condemned and beheaded in 1649 during Oliver Cromwell's rule. The judges of the Parliamentary Court that passed the king's death sentence were known as regicides. Charles II, Charles' son, was restored to power in 1660. He received information that two of the regicide judges, William Goffe and Edward Whalley, were hiding in the New Haven Colony. Charles II sent an order to the New Haven Colony in 1661 to find and arrest these judges. The New Haven colonial legislature ordered all officials of the colony to comply and make thorough searches in their home areas. Robert Treat ordered the Milford search, but Goffe and Whalley were not found. They did, however, stay there for some time afterward, and were reported to have had Robert Treat as a friend.

Settlement of both the Colony of Connecticut and the New Haven Colony had started without official charters, at a time when there was much political upheaval in England. Conditions stabilized when Charles II was restored to the throne. Charles II began to interest himself in matters concerning the American colonies, one issue being the legality of the Colony of Connecticut. Connecticut realized that if it did not send a representative to the king, penalties and unfavorable conditions could be imposed upon it. In 1662 the Colony of Connecticut sent John Winthrop, a consummate diplomat, to England to obtain a charter. The New Haven Colony did not send anyone. The king, in listening to Winthrop, decided to grant a charter, but merged the New Haven Colony with the Colony of Connecticut.

The merger came as a surprise to most inhabitants of the New Haven Colony, and many of them were unhappy with the situation. Robert Treat, although upset, continued serving in his position as magistrate for four more years. Treat served briefly in the General Court of the newly-merged Colony of Connecticut but in 1666 moved to New Jersey, where he and several others purchased land for what became the town of Newark. He served as the Newark town clerk for a year and as Newark's delegate to the New Jersey colonial legislature from 1667 until 1672.

In 1672, Robert Treat returned to Connecticut. He was immediately made second-in-command of the New Haven forces that were mustering for a war with the Dutch. From 1673-1676, he was elected as an Assistant to the General Court of the Colony of Connecticut. The year 1675 saw an uprising of Native American tribes throughout New England, known as King Phillip's War after the English name for the Wampanoag Indian chief, Metacomet. Robert Treat was made Major and Commander-in-Chief of the Connecticut forces, which, under his leadership, helped save the town of Springfield, Massachusetts from destruction.

The war ended in August of 1676, when King Phillip was killed. Treat was then elected as Deputy Governor of the Colony of Connecticut, filling in the remainder of the term of the preceding Deputy Governor, William Leete, who had been advanced to the governorship when Governor John Winthrop had died. Governor William Leete died in April of 1683. Robert Treat became acting governor, and then was elected to the post annually for the next fifteen years.

One major problem that Robert Treat inherited as a new governor in 1683 was Sir Edmund Andros. Governor of New Jersey and New York until 1683, Andros had claimed since 1675 that his jurisdiction included much of Connecticut. He had sent armed forces to enforce the claim, but Connecticut turned them back. Connecticut appealed to England, but nothing was settled.

By 1683, Andros had been made Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and Thomas Dongan was the new governor of New York. Dongan continued Andros' policies by claiming all lands west of the Connecticut River for New York. Governor Treat and

members of the Court of Assistants met with Dongan and, through diplomacy, were able to settle the matter with only the loss of the town of Rye to New York. However, the following years saw several writs issued against the Connecticut Colony in an attempt to divide Connecticut between New York and Massachusetts.

Charles II died in 1685 and his brother, James, no friend of Connecticut, came to the throne. It was James' plan to unite all the New England colonies, and he appointed Andros as Governor of the Dominion of New England. Andros demanded that Connecticut give up its Charter.

The Connecticut General Assembly was alarmed, for the Charter of 1662 was a generous one, and members of the Assembly feared that Andros would take away some of the liberties of the citizens of Connecticut. Governor Treat responded by diplomatically delaying the legal proceedings, over many months, on the grounds that some legal processes had not been done correctly and that Connecticut's appeal to the king should receive a response. But on October 31, 1687, Edmund Andros came to Hartford in person to receive Connecticut's Charter.

An afternoon meeting was the main feature of Andros' visit. Governor Treat took the opportunity to speak of how the Colony of Connecticut had been built with hard work and sacrifice and what the Charter meant to the citizens. It was an era when speeches of several hours were not uncommon. According to legend, Treat spoke throughout the afternoon and into the evening, when the candles were lit. The Charter was on the table. Suddenly there was a rush of wind from a door, blowing the candles out. By the time they were relit, the Charter was gone, hidden in an oak tree (later known as the Charter Oak) until the danger was past.

Andros never physically possessed the Charter of 1662, but still took control of Connecticut. Governor Robert Treat was made one of fifty advisors to Andros, and did what he could to maintain favorable conditions. King James was deposed in 1688, and Andros was thrown out of power in 1689. The Colony of Connecticut resumed its former government, with Robert Treat as governor. However, in 1692 a political crisis for Connecticut arose when the new governor of New York, Benjamin Fletcher, arrived

with an appointment that gave him full power to command Connecticut's militia as well as the military forces of New York. Robert Treat refused to transfer command. The General Assembly of Connecticut voted to send Fitz-John Winthrop, the son of John Winthrop, Jr., to England to obtain a decision as to whether the Charter of 1662 was still valid, and 2,200 of 3,000 freemen backed up that vote. Winthrop left for England late in 1693 and made his case before the King and Queen early in 1694. A report prepared by the royal attorney and solicitor-general confirming the validity of the Charter of the Colony of Connecticut was ratified by the crown on April 19, 1694. The Charter formed the basis of Connecticut's government until a new state constitution was written in 1818.

Robert Treat was seventy-six in 1692, and ready for someone else to serve as governor. Fitz-John Winthrop was elected in 1693, and Robert Treat was elected to the position of Deputy Governor, where he served for the next ten years.

Robert Treat died July 12, 1710 in Milford and is buried in the Milford Center Cemetery. His first wife, Jane, died October 31, 1703. He had married again on October 24, 1705, to Mrs. Elizabeth (Powell) Bryan, the daughter of Elder Michael and Abigail Powell of Boston. She was twice widowed before marrying Gov. Treat. She died January 10, 1706.

The grandson of Governor Treat's oldest son, Samuel, was Robert Treat Paine, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Bibliography:

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Portrait:

There is no known portrait of Robert Treat.

Prepared by the History and Genealogy Unit, Connecticut State Library, April 1999.