

## WILLIAM LEETE

**Governor of the Colony of New Haven, 1661-1665**

**Governor of the Colony of Connecticut, 1676-1683**

**Born:** ca. 1613, Dodington, Huntingdonshire, England

**College:** Possibly studied law at Cambridge University

**Political Party:** None

**Offices:** Clerk in Bishop's Court at Cambridge, England

Justice of the Peace, Guilford, Connecticut, 1642

Guilford Town Clerk, 1639-1662

Magistrate, Guilford, 1651-1658

Deputy, New Haven Colony General Court, 1643-1649

Commissioner, New Haven Colony, 1655-1658

Deputy Governor, New Haven Colony, 1658-1661

Governor, New Haven Colony, 1661-1665

Governor, Colony of Connecticut, 1676-1683

**Died:** April 16, 1683, Hartford, Connecticut

William Leete was born about 1613 in Dodington, Huntingdonshire, England, the son of John Leete and Anne Shute, daughter of Robert Shute, a judge of the king's court. His grandfather's legal experience may have influenced William to go into the practice of law. He became registrar for the Bishop of Ely's Court at Cambridge, England, which was investigating the activities of the Puritans, and became converted to Puritan beliefs. In May 1639, he, with his wife, Ann, and their young child, left England for Quinnipiac (New Haven) with the Rev. Henry Whitfield.

Leete was an original planter (settler) of Guilford, being one of the 25 who signed the covenant of the Whitfield Company on June 1, 1639 and among those who purchased Indian lands in 1639 and 1641. On June 19, 1643 he became one of the seven founders of the First Congregational Church of Guilford. In that year he also served as a representative from Guilford to a meeting in New Haven that led to the formation of the New Haven Colony.

William Leete's civic service continued through the following years. He served as Guilford Town Clerk for 22 years and was Magistrate of Guilford from 1651 to 1658. He was one of the Deputies from Guilford to the General Court of the New Haven Colony for every session between 1643 and 1649, and was Deputy Governor of the New Haven Colony from 1658 to 1661. While Leete was serving as Deputy Governor and Chief Magistrate of the New Haven Colony, royal agents sought his assistance in capturing Edward Whalley and William Goffe, two former English judges known as "regicides", wanted by King Charles II for signing the death warrant of his father, Charles I. Leete cooperated enough to avoid charges of obstructing justice but not enough to insure the capture of the fugitives.

William Leete became acting Governor of the New Haven Colony when Governor Francis Newman died on November 18, 1660. He was officially elected Governor of the New Haven Colony in May of 1661. In 1662, John Winthrop gained a charter from the Crown for the Connecticut Colony granting it lands from the Pawcatuck River westward to the "South Sea" (i.e., Pacific Ocean). The charter also merged the New Haven Colony with the Connecticut Colony. Neither colony had legal status). Leete initially protested to the United Colony commissioners in Boston. Many residents of the New Haven Colony were so upset by the union that they left for a new settlement at Newark, New Jersey. Lands were laid out for Leete there, but by the summer of 1663 he had begun to work towards the union of the New Haven and Connecticut Colonies. He ultimately chose to remain in Connecticut.

In October 1664, prior to the absorption of the New Haven Colony by the Connecticut Colony, William Leete received a provisional appointment as an Assistant to the Connecticut General Court. His efforts to insure that unification was done "in a righteous & amicable way" and willingness to serve in the unified colony's government helped dispel the concerns of many unhappy residents of the New Haven Colony. As a reward for his efforts in the unification, Leete was granted 300 acres "for a farm" by the Connecticut General Court in 1667.

Leete was reelected Assistant yearly until he was elected Deputy Governor of the Connecticut Colony in May 1669. He assumed some of the duties of Governor when

Governor John Winthrop went to Boston to attend meetings of the New England colonies and more of the duties later as Winthrop's health began to fail. At Winthrop's death in 1676, Leete became Governor of the Colony and was requested by the General Assembly to move to Hartford "to attend the occasions of the country as governor." There he faced issues related to the recent wars with Native Americans, adjustments to the border with Rhode Island, and the planning of countermeasures against New York Governor Edmond Andros' efforts to encroach on Connecticut's sovereignty.

William Leete married three times. While still in England, he married Ann Payne, daughter of Rev. John Payne of Southhoe on August 1, 1636. She bore him ten children and died on September 1, 1668. He then married Sarah, the widow of Henry Rutherford, on April 7, 1670. She died on February 10, 1673/4. His third wife was Mary, widow of Francis Newman (a governor of the New Haven Colony) and of Rev. Nicholas Street. She survived Governor Leete by a few months, dying on December 13, 1683. There were no children by the last two marriages.

Following his election as Governor of the Connecticut Colony, William Leete moved from Guilford to Hartford. He is buried in Hartford's Ancient Burial Ground. Leete's Island in Branford/Guilford is named for him.

#### **Bibliography:**

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**Portrait:**

There is no known portrait of William Leete.

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