

Martyrs' fight for religious freedom

QUAKER Mary Dyer was hanged yesterday after re-entering the Massachusetts Bay Colony against the orders of Puritan authorities, *writes our senior chronicler, June 2, 1660*. Claiming to be on a mission from God, she showed little emotion after being sentenced to death for her acts.

Last year she had resisted being banished from the state, but escaped hanging after her son pleaded with the authorities. Two fellow Quakers were not so fortunate—they were hanged on Boston Common for re-entering the colony. Although Dyer was spared the first time, she was told never to return—an order she has ignored.

In the early years of the colony, the Puritans often did not accept people whose beliefs differed from their own. They limited voting rights to male colonists who were church members.

Preacher Roger Williams was accused of “new and dangerous opinions” and was forced to flee the colony for present-day Rhode Island in 1636. He established a new colony where people were free to worship as they pleased.

Later, Anne Hutchinson defended her right, as a woman, to preach the Gospel. She clashed with John Winthrop, who had been re-elected governor and was outraged to learn of her controversial preaching in Boston.

Hutchinson was tried before Puritan elders, and sentenced to banishment. She sought sanctuary in present-day Rhode Island.

After moving further south, Hutchinson and many of her children were later massacred by a group of Siwanoy warriors during Kieft's War, a conflict between Dutch settlers and Native peoples.

Many believe Dyer and Hutchinson will one day be important symbols of religious freedom in America.

