

First Church History Role Fact Sheet: John Allin

1596: Allin is born in Colby, England. His father was a rich farmer.

1612: Allin attended Caius College at Cambridge University and earned a master's degree in theology. He was "a hard student, a good scholar, and an excellent preacher."

1622: Allin married and took up a minister's position of St. Mary's on the Quay Church in Ipswich, England.

1637: Because of persecution by Church of England officials on account of his Puritan views, Allin boarded a ship in disguise and sailed to Massachusetts. He "entertained" the ship's company with two sermons a day for the duration of the voyage.

July 18, 1637: Allin joins the original Dedham proprietors and signed the community covenant for a town they initially intended to call Contentment. (The Massachusetts General Court renamed the town Dedham.) By signing this Covenant, townsmen agreed to base their society on love, "to seek the good of each other", and to settle all disputes by means of mediation.

1639: After spending more than a year "in loving discourse" at the houses of potential church members, Dedham male settlers selected a core of "visible saints" for church membership. Allin was made minister of First Church presiding over a congregation of around 70 members.

1640: Allin and the other proprietors had been granted the land east and south of the Charles River. In exploring that river they found that it ran down to the border of Rhode Island and encompassed some 200 square miles. As proprietors moved out to good farmlands in this region, it became clear that they were too distant from Allin's church to attend services or town meetings. Thus they began to carve out the first of what was to be 15 towns by establishing Medfield in 1651.

1642: Dedham town meeting voted to set aside some land, and later dedicated property taxes, to support the creation of the first publicly supported school in America. The first classes met in Reverend Allin's meeting house. By 1648 a schoolhouse was constructed, but students still regularly trooped to the meeting house to receive religious instruction from Allin.

1646: Allin led Massachusetts ministers in writing the "Paper marking the just limitations of colonial allegiance and imperial right" defending the Commonwealth from accusations of mismanagement by the English Parliament. He defended colonial government from this attempted English takeover "in a manly and decided tone" and ultimately thwarted Parliament's plan.

1648: Allin, along with John Eliot, was appointed by General Court to set aside land in Dedham for Christian Native Americans. He and Eliot found a "praying Indian" town in an area of Dedham called Natick. Eliot translated the Bible into the Indian language, Algonquin, and set up an Indian church and school in Natick.

1653: After his first wife died, Allin married Katharine, the widow of Governor Dudley.

1656: Allin was named an overseer of Harvard. Of all the towns in Massachusetts, Dedham had been most generous per capita in the funds it donated to Harvard College.

1662: At a meeting of Massachusetts ministers, Allin defends the right of all children to be baptized, not just the children of church members.

1664: Allin and other ministers noted that second generation Massachusetts citizens were less and less likely to join their towns' churches because they could not prove that they were God's Elect, His "visible saints." Allin and others argued that these younger Puritans should nevertheless be allowed to join their church and in that way have the benefit of church teachings which might one day lead to conversion experiences. The only restriction on these provisional church members, according to the so-called Halfway Covenant, was that such church members could not receive communion until they could prove that God had redeemed them.

1668: Allin's congregation rejected his more liberal ideas about less restrictive rules about church membership. In fact, congregants opposed lowering the requirements for church membership for almost a decade because they feared that this practice would weaken the church.

1671: Having completed 32 years of ministry in Dedham, John Allin gave his last sermon and shortly afterwards passed away. Afterwards, First Church had difficulty finding a new minister because of their reputation for resisting Allin's ideas. Congregants then apologized for opposing Allin, saying "we acknowledge the fault to be ours, not that of our pastor who brought us up properly and showed the way and the Word clearly and long."