



“A Peculiar Stampe of Our Owne”:
The Massachusetts Mint and the Battle
over Sovereignty, 1652–1691

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ESTABLISHED in 1652, the Massachusetts mint was a remarkably bold and unparalleled expression of de facto colonial sovereignty. Then, as now, the authority to issue money indicated political and economic self-determination, a prerogative reserved for monarchs, princes, and independent states. In 1651, for instance, Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, listed “the power to coyn Money” among the “Rights, which make the Essence of Sovereignty.” The right to mint coins, Hobbes argued, “belongeth to the Common-wealth, that is to say, to the Sovereign.”¹

Across the mint’s thirty-year career, prominent political and religious figures in Massachusetts Bay interpreted their colony’s coining of silver not simply as an act of economic expediency but as a gesture of political autonomy. Conflict erupted when the officials of a restored English monarchy came to recognize the effrontery of that second intention, which inaugurated a transatlantic battle over sovereignty after 1660. The Massachusetts mint became a focal point in this contest because the money suggested that the colony’s dominant political faction placed allegiance to Massachusetts above allegiance to England. This inversion of due fealty largely subsided following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, after which the former political justification for having a colonial mint shortly dissipated,

¹Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (London, 1651), pp. 92, 129–30.

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thus closing one of the most politically turbulent chapters in the colony's history.

Remarkably little has been written about the Boston mint, and that which has is largely antiquated, relegated mostly to sources dating back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² No historical work has yet fully examined the thirty-year dispute over the mint's existence, a pitched battle not only between Massachusetts and the English sovereign to which it owed allegiance but within the colony as well. Many historians have already detailed the empire's efforts to win and maintain colonial allegiance after 1688, but little on this matter has been written of the era preceding 1688, when colonial allegiance to England was sometimes far from given, especially in Massachusetts Bay. The Boston mint—and the extraordinary drama that unfolded from it—constitutes the most compelling evidence available to historians that a prominent and outspoken faction within the colony, before 1688, deemed themselves politically independent from England.



In the opening years of the 1640s, as King Charles I attempted to stave off Parliament's bid to enhance its authority, the Massachusetts Bay Colony plunged into a massive deflationary depression. Agricultural prices spiraled downward in the summer of 1640, and silver coin all but disappeared from the colony. As migration from England slowed to a trickle, so did the inflow of money that had once sustained Massachusetts' economy in the 1630s. "All our money was drained from us, and cattle and all commodities grew very cheap," John Winthrop remarked several months into the depression; "the scarcity of money made a great change in all commerce."³

²Charles McLean Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History*, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934–38), 1:519; George Bancroft, *History of the Colonization of the United States*, vol. 1 (1834; 14th ed., Boston, 1848), p. 433; John Gorham Palfrey, *History of New England*, vol. 2 (1860; rev. ed., Boston, 1876), p. 40.

³*The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630–1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 328, 339. For more on the deflationary depression of the early 1640s, see Marion H. Gottfried,

Although most rural settlers relied primarily on barter and country produce to mediate economic exchanges, colonial merchants required silver to purchase imported goods, linking the economic health of the colony to the overall supply of coin. Because there were no gold or silver mines in New England, money had to come from abroad. Some arrived with new settlers, but the main channel through which silver flowed was a favorable balance of trade, whereby the value of exported goods surpassed that of imported goods, with money making up the balance. "So long as our ingate exceeds our outgate," the General Court cautioned in 1646, "the ballance . . . cann leave us but little mony."⁴

The Court's call to improve the balance of trade, with the explicit goal of returning silver to the specie-strapped colony, met with dramatic success. Within a few years, Boston and Salem merchants were exporting record quantities of cod and lumber products across the Atlantic to the Iberian Peninsula and Wine Islands, for which, in part, they received large sums of silver. By midcentury, this money-begetting trade also extended to the Caribbean. As one New England almanac writer rhymed in 1648, "Some silver mine, if any here doe wish, they it may finde in the bellyes of our fish."⁵ Given the ready supply of lumber so near to hand, moreover, shipbuilding, of small and large vessels alike, became another cornerstone of New England's emergent economy. "The general fear of want of foreign commodities, now our money was gone, set us on work to provide shipping of our own," remarked Winthrop.⁶ Freed from expending precious coin to employ vessels built and owned abroad, merchants—and, by extension,

"The First Depression in Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly* 9.4 (December 1936): 655–78; Margaret Ellen Newell, *From Dependency to Independence: Economic Revolution in Colonial New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 52–55.

⁴*Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, ed. Nathaniel Bradstreet Shurtleff, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853–54), 3:92.

⁵Samuel Danforth, *An Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1648* (Cambridge, Mass., 1648), page for December.

⁶Winthrop, *Journal*, p. 353.

the colony—quickly achieved a remarkable degree of economic independence.⁷

By midcentury the Bay Colony had undergone a radical commercial transformation, culminating in the establishment of a mint house in Boston. On 26 May 1652, the Massachusetts General Court directed that all foreign coin then circulating within the colony be converted into new Massachusetts pieces of one shilling, six pence, and three pence. By doing so, the General Court reasoned, the colony's inhabitants—chiefly merchants and tradesmen—would finally enjoy a uniform currency without having to handle irregular foreign monies of differing weights and origins. The original stamp, as issued between June and October 1652, was exceptionally simple: a mere “NE,” for New England, on one side, and the denomination in Roman numerals on the other (fig. 1).⁸

In October 1652 the General Court arranged for a new, more comprehensive stamp, including, for the first time, a double ring on both sides to discourage clippers from shaving silver off the edges.⁹ On one face was a tree, encircled by the inscription “Massachusetts.” On the other, in the center, was 1652 in Arabic numbers, under which was the denomination in Roman numerals and the inscription “NEW ENGLAND” and “ANDOM,” for Anno Domini, circled within the coin's outer

⁷Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), pp. 10–18; James E. McWilliams, *Building the Bay Colony: Local Economy and Culture in Early Massachusetts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp. 54–55; and Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 83.

⁸*Mass. Bay Records*, 4.1:84–85. For secondary literature on the Massachusetts mint, see Andrews, *The Colonial Period*, 1:493–94, 519, 2:59; Newell, *From Dependency to Independence*, p. 116; Richard S. Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees: The Winthrop Dynasty of New England, 1630–1717* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 100–101; Walter Breen's *Complete Encyclopedia of U.S. and Colonial Coins* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 11–18; and Viola Florence Barnes, *The Dominion of New England: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (1923; repr. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 149–52. In 1720 Edward Wigglesworth discussed the mint in a pamphlet supporting Massachusetts paper currency: see his *A Project for the Emission of an Hundred Thousand Pounds of Province Bills* (Boston, 1720), pp. 11–12. The mint also receives prominent mention in Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of Massachusetts, from the First Settlement thereof in 1628, until the Year 1750*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1764 and 1767; 3rd ed., Salem, Mass., 1795), 1:164–65.

⁹*Mass. Bay Records*, 4.1:104–5.



FIG. 1.—A twelve-pence “NE” shilling, issued sometime between June and October 1652. Image courtesy of Stack’s Bowers Galleries.

edge (fig. 2). The species of tree varied throughout the mint's history: a willow tree, 1652–60; an oak tree, 1660–67; and a pine tree, 1667–82.¹⁰ It was during this latter period that the coins became known as “pine-tree shillings,” though they were also denominated “Boston shillings” or “Bay shillings.”¹¹

The founding of the mint in 1652 signified, first, the colony's tremendous economic growth in the latter half of the 1640s. The design of the Bay shilling, centered as it was on a simple tree, proudly celebrated the expanding shipbuilding industry, the main source of the colony's growing prosperity. The decision to stamp “New England” on the back of the coin, moreover, testified to the economic dominance of Massachusetts Bay throughout the region. By midcentury virtually all of New England received its European goods via the merchants of Boston, and they ultimately handled more Bay shillings than any other class in New England. The Boston merchant, in a very real way, *was* New England, and so was his money.

But there was also an additional, political component to the coin, and it signified the degree to which Massachusetts leaders thought themselves empowered to conduct their own affairs. By neglecting to acknowledge English authority on the face of its money, the Massachusetts government in effect asserted its own sovereignty. And the coinage was not the only act that circumvented English authority. That same year, 1652, the General Court decreed that all settlers take an oath of fidelity to the colonial government, with, again, no mention whatsoever of any political ties to England.¹² Parliament had executed Charles I three years earlier, and Cromwell would not become Lord Protector until the following year; Massachusetts' leaders, in the meantime, took advantage of the political ambiguities and assumed one of the key defining characteristics of independent statehood.

¹⁰Breen, *Complete Encyclopedia*, pp. 12–16, and Sylvester S. Crosby, *The Early Coins of America, and the Laws Governing Their Issue* (Boston, 1875), pp. 30–76.

¹¹Sarah Kemble Knight, a traveler to the region, later confirmed that the coins went by the name “Boston or Bay shillings” (*The Journal of Madam Knight* [1704; Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1920], pp. 40–41).

¹²*Mass. Bay Records*, 4.1:80.



FIG. 2.—A twelve-pence pine-tree shilling, issued sometime between 1667 and 1674. Image courtesy of Stack's Bowers Galleries.

Keeping the Bay shilling within Massachusetts often proved an arduous task. Boston and Salem merchants, on occasion, clandestinely exported Massachusetts coin when purchasing imported goods, despite a 1654 law banning the export of Bay shillings from the colony.¹³ The colonial governments on Montserrat and Nevis soon recognized the circulation of “New England Monies,” as did the assemblies of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Carolina at a later date.¹⁴ The coin even appeared as far east as the Canary Islands and Mediterranean, a visible manifestation of Boston’s integration into an Atlantic commercial network.¹⁵

The Bay shilling exhibited the colonists’ pride and confidence in their political and economic condition, but the mint was also established during a period of great religious uncertainty. In the decade previous, the English Civil War had seemingly provided a grand opportunity for New England’s Puritans to spread their particular brand of church and state to the homeland, particularly after the dissolution of the Church of England in 1641. Indeed, between 1641 and 1643, many English reformers considered Massachusetts church polity a pattern worth emulating. By the mid-1640s, however, English reformers came to realize that only a broad Protestant coalition would ensure victory for Parliament. The reluctance of the New England church to compromise principle for expediency soon marginalized it back home, even among those who had actively supported emigrating Puritans in the 1630s. By the late 1640s few, if any, English reformers seriously advocated the Massachusetts model.

¹³Mass. Bay Records, 4.1:197–98.

¹⁴*Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Island of Montserrat; from 1668, to 1740* (London, 1740), p. 20; Assembly of Nevis, 1672, Colonial Office 154/1, p. 4, National Archives; *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland*, ed. William Hand Browne, Clayton Colman Hall, and Bernard Christian Steiner, 72 vols. (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883–1972), 7:532, 14:142–43; *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, ed. H. R. McIlwaine and Wilmer L. Hall, 5 vols. (Richmond, Va., 1925–45), 1:45; *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, from 1682 to 1801*, ed. James T. Mitchell et al., 17 vols. (Harrisburg, Pa., and New York, 1896–1976), 1:152; *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, ed. Thomas Cooper and David James McCord, 10 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1836–41), 2:163.

¹⁵Herbert L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 153.

The case worsened in the early 1650s. Privileging political over religious conformity, the victorious Commonwealth tolerated any Protestant loyal to the cause. English men and women were largely free to pursue a wide range of Protestant creeds, including Quakerism, and even to bring their Books of Common Prayer out of the drawer and back into their devotionals. In 1652, Sir Richard Saltonstall, a founding member of the Massachusetts Bay Company and a former resident, shockingly urged Boston ministers to practice religious inclusivity within their own colony.¹⁶ The shifting priorities within the transatlantic Puritan movement sparked a crisis of identity in Massachusetts, one that just happened to coincide with a tremendous commercial boom in New England.¹⁷

Economics was, of course, the mint's *raison d'être*, but the date of its founding—1652—suggests that something far deeper may have been at stake. English reformers had publicly scorned the Massachusetts mission to spark religious revolution across the English world, after which the colony's religious influence seemed to collapse. The Boston coinage offered a degree of psychological support: a refreshingly confident promulgation that helped to retain the colony's dignity and influence on the Atlantic stage, despite the supposed avarice of former supporters back home. For this reason, mainly, the colony's radical Puritan ministers—most notably, Increase Mather—were soon among the mint's most passionate defenders, even as they simultaneously lambasted the growing primacy of wealth acquisition over spiritual concerns.¹⁸

From the mint's founding in 1652, then, the Bay shilling meant different things to different people. Commercial expediency was foremost on the minds of most merchants; independent clergymen and legislators, on the other hand, were more

¹⁶Sir Richard Saltonstall to John Cotton and John Wilson, 1652, in *The Saltonstall Papers, 1607–1815*, ed. Robert E. Moody, cited in Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 147.

¹⁷Pestana, *English Atlantic*, pp. 53–83, 123–48; Perry Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 10.1 (January 1953): 15–18.

¹⁸Increase Mather to Thomas Gouge, 21 November 1683, Colonial Office, 1/65, no. 73iv, p. 329; [Increase Mather], *New-England Vindicated* (London 1689), pp. 2–3.

concerned with the coin's political and cultural significance. Political autonomy was essential if Massachusetts was to retain its spiritual purity under pressure from opportunistic Protestants in Commonwealth England and, later, closet papists in Restoration England. In their support of the Boston mint, the grasping merchant and the radical Puritan cleric made strange bedfellows, but the partnership rested upon their common desire for autonomy, whether commercial, religious, or political. As the most powerful, tangible symbol of the colony's quest for autonomy—whatever the kind—the mint enjoyed near-universal support in the 1650s.

Cromwell, for his part, made no mention of the mint in any of his writings. No evidence exists that he was aware of it; if he was, the coinage apparently gave him no offense. The Caribbean was Cromwell's primary consideration on the western periphery of the Atlantic; New England was barely an afterthought. The General Court had declared its formal allegiance to the Commonwealth. Cromwell was satisfied. During the period of his ascendancy, Massachusetts Bay enjoyed a degree of autonomy unsurpassed at any other point in its history, and monetary sovereignty naturally proceeded therefrom. There was no particular reason to acknowledge Commonwealth authority on its money, and to do so would have displeased many.

The colony's relationship with England at midcentury was cordial but tenuous and distant. As John Hull, master of the Boston mint, recorded in his diary the day news of Cromwell's death hit Boston, the Lord Protector was "one that sought the good of New England; though he seemed to be much wanting in a thorough testimony against the blasphemers of our days."¹⁹ Not until 1660 would the Massachusetts coinage encounter any real objections from England, and when it did, the problem lay not in the economic rationale but in the subversive, political challenge inherent within the coin's very stamp.

¹⁹John Hull, Diary, 25 February 1659, in *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 3 (Worcester, Mass.: AAS, 1857), pp. 186–87. Cromwell died on 3 September 1658.



Charles II assumed the throne in May 1660. By October, New England's colonists had learned that he planned to reinstate the Church of England. Mint master John Hull held a private "day of humiliation at our house, for the state of our native country . . . the church countenancing the old liturgy, and formalities again to be practised."²⁰ Boston officials, who had little choice otherwise, dutifully accepted the return of the English monarchy, although they hoped that political transformations in London would continue to have little effect on their peculiar form of government.²¹

Massachusetts would soon be drawn out of its political isolation. Samuel Maverick, former resident of the colony, launched the opening salvo in a late 1660 pamphlet entitled *A Briefe Discription of New England*. No oaths of fealty had been taken in Boston since the king's restoration, he wrote; officials were, instead, just "swearing their subjects to submit to lawes made only by themselves." "Indeed to Alleage a Statute Law of England in one of their Courts would be a ridiculous thing," he continued, "[and] they likewise long since fell to coyning of monies, melting downe all the English Coyne they can gett."²² In 1661, the Privy Council received word that the mint had treasonously allowed "the King's Coyne to be bought and melted downe in Boston of the Massachusetts Bay to be new coynd there."²³ The rules regulating the mint prohibited the conversion of English into Boston coin, but consistent allegations of the practice suggest that Hull rarely turned away royally minted money.²⁴

²⁰Hull, Diary, 21 November 1660, cited in Pestana, *English Atlantic*, p. 218.

²¹Pestana, *English Atlantic*, p. 217, and Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 16.

²²Samuel Maverick, *A Briefe Discription of New England and the Severall Townes Therein* (1660), in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., vol. 1 (Boston, 1884-85), p. 241.

²³John Giffard to Secretary Nicholas, 1661, Colonial Office, 1/15, no. 45, p. 96.

²⁴The General Court allowed Hull one shilling in payment for every twenty shillings minted. Over a century later, according to the editor of the third edition of Thomas

The mint's greatest offense, however, was not its occasional melting down of English coin—most melted money was Spanish—but, rather, its symbolic import. Robert Mason, proprietor of New Hampshire, and Edward Godfrey, governor of Maine, acknowledged as much in a petition to the king in 1662. The Bay Colony had “for these many yeares together past endeavoured to model and contrive themselves into a free state,” they alleged, listing the “coining of money with their own stamp and signature” as evidence thereof.²⁵ Mason and Godfrey, of course, had their personal agendas: both were notoriously jealous of Boston's hegemonic influence across New England. But a more neutral observer, Director-General Peter Stuyvesant of New Netherland, reached the same conclusion when he reported to the Dutch West India Company in October 1660 that though other New England settlers remained “good Royalists,” Boston “remains faithful to its old principle a free state.”²⁶

Of course, the Boston mint violated the royal prerogative, an understandably sensitive issue throughout the restored Stuart regime. The king's wrath, however, could still be managed by clever courtiers, as a 1662 royal audience with Sir Thomas Temple demonstrates. Temple, proprietor of Nova Scotia, met with Charles II and his Privy Council to discuss the “state of affairs in the Massachusetts.” “In the course of the conversation Sir Thomas took some of the money out of his pocket, and presented it to the King.” The money was none other than the Boston shilling. Upon seeing the coin, Charles displayed “great warmth against that colony; among other things he said, they had invaded his prerogative by coining money.” Temple, “a real friend to the colony” who had lived in Boston in the

Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts*, “the mint master, John Hull, raised a large fortune from it” (Hutchinson, *History of Massachusetts*, 1:165n).

²⁵Report of Robert Mason and Edward Godfrey to the King, 15 February 1662, Colonial Office, 1/16, no.18, p. 37. According to Mason and Godfrey, there were some in the colony who “have said that before their province should submit to any appeals to England they would sell their Collony to the King of Spaine.”

²⁶Peter Stuyvesant to the Directors of the West India Company, 19 October 1660, in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, ed. E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, 15 vols. (Albany, 1856–87), 14:484.

1650s, rushed to the mint's defense, claiming that economic reasons alone had required its founding. "The colonists had but little acquaintance with law," he insisted; "they had no ill design, and thought it no crime to make money for their own use."

Taking a second look at the coin, Charles then "inquired what tree that was." Temple replied that it was the "royal oak" (the Bay shilling was stamped with an oak between 1660 and 1667), the same material reportedly used to build the ship that carried young Charles across the Channel into exile following his defeat by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. "The Massachuset's [*sic*] people," continued Temple, "not daring to put his Majesty's name on their coin during the late troubles, had impressed upon it the emblem of the oak which preserved his Majesty's life." Temple thus admitted a political rationale regarding the coin, but he ingeniously turned that meaning on its head. Rather than flaunting Charles's prerogative, the Bay shilling had, albeit surreptitiously, declared the colony's support for it, he argued. Temple's explanation was entirely disingenuous and false—Massachusetts had firmly supported Parliament during the Civil War—yet the story "put the king into good humour, and disposed him to hear what Sir Thomas had to say in their favour." As Temple proceeded to defend Massachusetts, Charles grazed the Bay shilling between his two fingers, chuckling as he "called them a parcel of honest dogs."²⁷

In the age of empire building, however, whereby the king personified the rising nation-state, coining money without royal

²⁷The account of the exchange from which I have been quoting dates a century after its occurrence, in a 1768 letter to Thomas Hollis (*Memoirs of Thomas Hollis, Esq.*, vol. 1 [London, 1780], p. 397). Confirmation that it in fact took place can be found in a letter from the Massachusetts General Court, 30 October 1684, to London claiming that "in 1662, when our first Agents were in England, some of our Money was showed by Sir Thomas Temple at the Council-Table, and no dislike thereof manifested by any of those right honourable Persons: much less a forbidding of it" (*Massachusetts Archives Collection*, vol. 56, no. 336, quoted in Crosby, *Early Coins*, p. 76). See also S. F. Haven, "The Coinage of Massachusetts," in *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 3 (Worcester, Mass., 1857), pp. 292–93; and Rogers Ruding, *Annals of the Coinage of Great Britain and Its Dependencies*, 2 vols. (1817; 3rd ed., London, 1840), 1:416.

permission transgressed the rights not only of the king, who seemed not to be terribly concerned about the issue, but those of the kingdom as well. And so, even though the mint's opponents employed the *language* of royal authority, they were also defending the rights of Parliament as much as—or, especially in the later years of the controversy, even more so than—those of the king.

In 1665, Charles sent a royal commission to New England, accompanied by nearly four hundred troops, to survey the territory with a particular eye for colonial infractions of the Navigation Acts. The commissioners trekked through Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Plymouth Colonies, where the governments “made great promises of their Loyalty and obedience.” When the king’s representatives arrived in Boston, however, the General Court promptly declared the commission illegal, refused all cooperation, and, according to the commissioners, “proclaymed by sound of Trumpet that the Generall Court was the Supreamest Judicatory in that Province.”²⁸

The commissioners were not cowed, and they shortly issued a host of royal demands to the Massachusetts government, including that the “mint house . . . be repealed, for coyning is a royall prerogative.”²⁹ Massachusetts Captain James Oliver and his wife Mary testified that one of the commissioners told the couple “we were both rebels and traitors for minting money and printing, which was treason for the country to do.”³⁰ Dominated by independent, radical Puritans, the General Court utterly rejected the commission’s injunction to abolish the mint; to do so, it proclaimed, was contrary to “the liberties of Englishmen, so wee can see no reason to submit thereto.”³¹

²⁸George Carr to Secretary Lord Arlington, 14 December 1665, Colonial Office 1/19, no. 143, pp. 334–338.

²⁹*Mass. Bay Records*, 4.2:211.

³⁰Affidavit of Captain James and Mary Oliver, 1666, Mass. Archives, vol. 106, nos. 125 and 139.

³¹Petition of the Massachusetts General Court to Charles II, 1 August 1665, in *Documents and Records Relating to the Province of New-Hampshire, from the Earliest Period of its Settlement: 1623–1776*, ed. Nathaniel Bouton, 7 vols. (Concord, N.H., 1867–73), 1:295.

The Massachusetts charter derived its authority from the Crown, to be sure, but the General Court insisted that the charter had granted the Bay Colony's founders quasi-autonomous powers to manage Massachusetts as they saw fit. The only requirement they recognized—not just regarding the coinage, remarkably, but regarding *anything*—was that the colony pay the customary “Royal Fifth” to the king if gold or silver mines were ever to be discovered within Massachusetts territory, an extremely unlikely event. The king's commissioners, for their part, were in no frame of mind to soften their report of the colony's bold rejection of Charles II's authority. “They of this Colony say that King Charles the first gave them power to make Lawes,” they noted, “and that so long as they pay the fifth of all Gold and Silver Oar which they shall get, they are free to use their priviledges . . . [and] are not obliged to the King but by civility.”³²

Understandably incensed, Charles ordered the General Court to send agents to London at once. The General Court contemplated an overtly defiant letter, but a growing faction of moderates begged the body to refrain from such a rash course. Indeed, the younger generation of New England merchants, many of them not Puritans or, at least, not devout, had increasingly come to despise the hardline, commercially insensitive, clerical faction that dominated the General Court. Royal intervention, the merchants thought, might be just the counterforce that was needed.³³ Declining to send agents to London, the General Court nonetheless offered the royal navy a gift of “two very large masts,” a gesture of appeasement.³⁴ Charles and his Privy Council elected not to pursue the matter, and from 1666 to 1674 all official communication between Old and New England ceased.³⁵

³²George Carr to Secretary Lord Arlington, 14 December 1665, Colonial Office, 1/19, no. 143, p. 339.

³³Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, pp. 112–14, 143, 159–60, and Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, pp. 9–10.

³⁴*Mass. Bay Records*, 4:2:317–18.

³⁵For more on the failed commission, see Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, pp. 119–26; Michael Garibaldi Hall, *Edward Randolph and the American Colonies, 1676–1703* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 11–15; Dunn, *Puritans*

The Boston mint survived for the time being. The English state had far greater concerns at the moment than picking a fight with a colony that, relative to the tobacco and sugar plantations, contributed little to the imperial economic system. In the years following the commission's journey, England suffered through the Great Plague of London (1665–66), the Great Fire of London (1666), two additional years of warfare with Holland, and a third Anglo-Dutch War in 1672–74. The controversy over the mint paled in comparison. Edicts from the Crown, in this early period of the Restoration, generally required a certain degree of voluntary compliance from the entity being commanded, for the king lacked sufficient wherewithal to enforce his will in all cases. So rather than expending valuable time, money, and resources, the Crown grudgingly tolerated a headstrong, politically jealous Massachusetts government. As colonial administrator Mathias Nicolls conceded in 1666, the task remained "to find out a way to bring downe the pride of the Massachusetts."³⁶



A decade later, the Crown was finally ready to address the New England question. In 1675 Charles II established the Council of Trade and Plantations, or Lords of Trade, a nine-man standing committee within the Privy Council explicitly charged with keeping a close eye on colonial affairs. The Lords of Trade soon commissioned an upstart courtier named Edward Randolph to convey the king's instructions to Massachusetts to send agents to London immediately. Randolph arrived in Boston in June 1676. Self-important and often pompous, he quickly earned a reputation among his opponents as a meddling busybody. The Massachusetts Court of Assistants, the upper house of the General Court, hastily dismissed him but, shortly

and *Yankees*, pp. 151–63; Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, pp. 7–8; and Andrews, *Colonial Period*, 3:63–68.

³⁶Colonel Mathias Nicolls to Secretary Lord Arlington, 9 April 1666, Colonial Office, 1/20, no. 42, p. 82.

thereafter, dispatched two agents to call upon the Lords of Trade.³⁷

Randolph, in the meantime, journeyed across the colony on an information-gathering junket. To his delight, he found a motivated merchant minority eager to wrest political control from the parochial, Puritan-led majority. These cosmopolitan merchants, who thirsted for power of their own, believed that the colony's dogged independency threatened a profitable commercial engagement with England as well as the social distinction that would flow from it.³⁸ Voicing the opposite view, which also prevailed among the rest of the governing leadership, Governor John Leverett, a former captain under Cromwell, shockingly insisted that "the Laws made by Our King and Parliament obligeth them in nothing but what consists with the Interest of New England."³⁹

When he returned to London in October 1676, Randolph submitted a lengthy, confidential report to the Lords of Trade. Lambasting Massachusetts on nearly every page, he settled on the Boston mint as the most prominent instance of all that was wrong with the colony. "As a marke of sovereignty they coin money," he wrote, "stamped with inscription Massachusetts and a tree in the center, on the one side, and New England, with the year 1652 and the value of the piece on the reverse."⁴⁰

³⁷Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 21–24, 30–31; Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, pp. 13–15; and Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees*, pp. 214–16.

³⁸Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, pp. 112–14, 143, 159–60, 168–69; Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees*, pp. 217–19; J. M. Sosin, *English America and the Revolution of 1688: Royal Administration and the Structure of Provincial Government* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 30; Richard S. Dunn, "Imperial Pressures on Massachusetts and Jamaica, 1675–1700," in *Anglo-American Political Relations, 1675–1775*, ed. Alison Gilbert Olson and Richard Maxwell Brown (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 63; and Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, p. 44.

³⁹Quoted in Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, p. 155.

⁴⁰Edward Randolph, "An answer to severall heads of enquiry concerning the present state of New-England," 12 October 1676, in *Edward Randolph: Including his Letters and Official Papers from the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies in America*, ed. Robert Noxon Toppin and Alfred T. S. Goodrick, 7 vols. (Boston, 1898–1909), 2:229. Even before Randolph departed for Boston, the Lords of Trade exhibited great hostility toward the mint. See Minutes of the Committee for Trade and Plantations, 1 December 1675, Colonial Office 1/35, no. 50, p. 269. Two other petitions to the Crown, one from Robert Mason, a proprietor of New Hampshire and the other anonymous, also addressed the issue, in May 1675 and July 1676. See Observation on the State of New

The 1652 stamp was a bit of a mystery. A quarter century after the mint had begun operating, the date pressed into the back of newly minted coins remained 1652. Randolph gladly offered his own explanation. "All the money is stamped with these figures, 1652," he wrote, "the year being the aera of the commonwealth, wherein they erected themselves into a free state . . . which year is still commemorated on their coin."⁴¹ No doubt many colonials looked back on the 1650s as a time of greater political autonomy than the inhabitants enjoyed at present, and because neither mint nor government officials bothered explaining the 1652 stamp, Randolph's explanation was certainly compelling. Five years earlier, in 1671, the former, weaker Council of Trade offered a slightly different explanation. "They still continue to coine money there but putt the date of 1652 on the stamp of it, that they might not seeme to trespass on his Majesties Prerogative."⁴² The remark had a distinct ring of truth about it. The year 1652 was still eight years distant from Charles II's coronation, and so there was no royal prerogative to violate; a 1676 stamp, on the other hand, would have constituted a more flagrant assault on the ancient monarchical right.

Certainly much had changed since 1652. By 1676, as the ministers saw it, New England was almost unrecognizable. Greed, fornication, materialism, Sabbath-breaking, apostasy, pride, and disobedience had supplanted the first generation's piety and independence, and a devastating Indian war and an invasive Crown plagued the colony. "New-Englands Calamity," Increase Mather called it. In one of his many jeremiads, Mather cited 1652 as a time of greater godliness. After reading a letter of

England, May 1675, Colonial Office 324/3; *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial Series, America and the West Indies, 1574–1738*, ed. W. Noel Sainsbury, J. W. Fortescue, and Cecil Hedlam, 44 vols. (London, 1860–1969), vol. for 1675–66, p. 156; Petition of Robert Mason to the king, July 1676, in *Documents of New-Hampshire*, 1:325.

⁴¹Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 2:229. The Massachusetts agents who later responded to Randolph's accusations commented simply, "As for the year 1652 there was no alteration then made in the Government." See William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley, "Answer to Mr. Randolphs Narrative of the state of New England," 28 June 1678, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:9.

⁴²Minutes of the Council for Foreign Plantations, 21 June 1671, Colonial Office, 1/26, no. 78, p. 200.

that year from his now-deceased father, Richard, celebrating a successful ministry among the Indians, Mather admonished his congregation: "How would he mourn if he were here at this day to behold the strange degeneracy that is in the spirit of the present Generation."⁴³ Like Israel, New England had forsaken its original mission and turned to worldly pursuits. Calamity was fast approaching. There was a strangeness in using money to hearken back to a spiritual era—money was a corrupting force—yet the 1652 shilling, wittingly or unwittingly, reminded money holders that a greater spiritual purity had once prevailed. Though he never explicitly addressed the retention of the 1652 stamp in his defense of the mint, Mather may well have seen it as conveying a nostalgic, cultural import that recalled the glories of the colony's founding generation even as it reasserted the self-determination they had sacrificed so much to achieve.

Although the Lords of Trade delayed launching a formal investigation into Randolph's charges, they finally did so in July 1677. Out of the twenty-four alleged "crimes" Massachusetts had committed, the *first* listed was none other than the Boston mint. "They have erected a publick Mint in Boston and Coined money with their own Impress," the charge read, portraying the mint as a grand affront to the monarch and nation-state more generally, encompassing as it did such other transgressions as the colonists' refusal to take oaths of allegiance and supremacy to the king and having "declared themselves a Common Wealth."⁴⁴

The Boston agents, upon their arrival in London, faced a merciless round of questions. Regarding the mint, the Lords of Trade asked "whether Treason be not herein Committed" and, if so, whether the treason was enough to have the Massachusetts Bay "Corporation dissolved and Charter forfeited?"⁴⁵

⁴³Increase Mather, *An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New-England* (Boston, 1676), pp. 1 and 22. See also Miller, "Errand into the Wilderness," pp. 3–32.

⁴⁴Objections against the Massachusetts Charter, July 1677, Colonial Office, 1/41, no. 35, p. 85.

⁴⁵Memoranda concerning New England, July 1677, Colonial Office, 1/41, no. 32, p. 75.

The agents replied that “they were necessitated to it [the mint], about the yeare 1652, for the support of their Trade, and have not, hitherto, discontinued it, as being never excepted against, or disallowed by His Majesty.” This final point was entirely false; the 1665 commission had explicitly demanded the mint’s repeal. Adopting a conciliatory stance, the agents proceeded to “beg pardon if they have offended” and promised that oaths of allegiance and supremacy would henceforth be taken by government officials.⁴⁶ The agents’ strategy was straightforward: spare the coinage by persuading the Crown that the sole rationale for the mint was economic, not political.

After taking the matter under advisement for several days, the Lords of Trade affirmed the absolute “necessity of bringing those People under a more palpable declaration of their obedience.” Among the more egregious offenses, the colony “had transgress’d in presuming to Coyne Money, which is an Act of Sovereignty, and to which they were by noe Grant sufficiently authorized.” Still, the Lords recommended that the king lead the way toward a face-saving compromise that would redound to the benefit of all. If the General Court were simply to “sollicit his Majesties Pardon for the offence that is past,” then “upon due application,” the King might allow the colony to continue the mint under *his* authority, thus maintaining the royal prerogative and preserving the mint’s economic utility while neutralizing its political offensiveness. Of course, the Navigation Acts must also be “religiously observed.” Obey these and sundry other instructions, the body promised, and “His Majestie will not destroy their [Massachusetts] Charter, but rather by a Supplemental one to bee given them, set all things right that are now amiss.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶Journals of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 19 July 1677, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 2:276.

⁴⁷Journals of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 27 July and 2 August 1677, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 2:277–79 and 283. See also Lords of Trade to Charles II, 19 July 1677, Colonial Office, 1/41, no. 30, p. 66, where the committee advised that the king “pardon them for coining” and thereafter “grant them a license for coining.” For more on the investigation by the Lords of Trade, see Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 36–39, and Dunn, “Imperial Pressures,” p. 63.

The Lords' final judgment, which utterly rejected Randolph's insistence on a revocation of the charter, was surprisingly moderate. Imperial sanction of the Boston coinage, together with an apology and a new stamp, would enhance royal authority while avoiding any resentment or resistance that might arise from completely abolishing the mint. Having a distinctive medium of exchange in Boston, now directly proclaiming the king's authority, would no longer contradict the greater political agenda from London but would, rather, complement it. The mint would be transformed from a competing political-economic institution into one that supported the Crown's agenda, from a symbol of peripheral autonomy into one of imperial strength and power. Naturally, the 1652 stamp would have no place in this revamped, Crown-approved mint. The relieved agents proceeded to "humbly Implore his Majesty's gracious Pardon" for the "extreamely usefull" mint, expressing their gratitude that the coinage "may be continued to them under," of course, whatever "Impress He pleases."⁴⁸

Had the General Court followed their agents' advice and apologized for the mint, the entire character of the coinage would have been dramatically, and irrevocably, altered. The mint would continue to exist but it would do so not by the agency or prerogative of the Massachusetts government—for which due apology would have been made—but by the express permission of the king. In disregarding the agents' recommendation, the General Court proudly insisted that when the king "shall truely be informed of the symplicity of our actings, the publicke joy thereof to his subjects here, and the great damage that the stoppage thereof will inevitable [*sic*] be to our necessary commerce . . . his majesty will not account those to be freinds to his crowne that shall seeke to interrupt us therein." The matter of the stamp was not negotiable. "Wee shall take it as his Majesty's signall ouning of us," the General Court chided its agents, "if he will please to order such an impresse as shall

⁴⁸Answer of the Agents of the Massachusetts, 20 July 1677, Colonial Office, 1/41, no. 31, p. 71.

be to him most acceptable.”⁴⁹ Independence was a precious commodity, and it was not to be relinquished in fact or in form. The Bay shilling would not announce that the colonists were “owned” by their king.

The mint controversy was a battle over symbols, one waged not only between England and Massachusetts but also within the Bay Colony. The Lords of Trade recognized that for royal authority to assert itself properly in Massachusetts, the mint must be reclaimed for the Crown. The independent faction of the General Court, which resisted such a move, exposed the mint as the political institution that it truly was. From the perspective of the moderate faction, of course, such intractability was manifestly absurd, risking as it did the very existence of an economically useful institution.

When they learned of the survival of their charter, most of the colonists jubilantly partook in an official day of thanksgiving.⁵⁰ Now that fear of a royal takeover had passed, Massachusetts went about its business as before, ignoring virtually all of the Lords’ demands; presumably expecting English officials to acquiesce as they had in 1665, the General Court issued neither apologies for the mint nor oaths of allegiance to the king.⁵¹ Trade was the only matter on which the General Court partially relented, and even so, its members still managed to assert their own legislative authority by pushing through a colonial statute quite similar to the Navigation Acts.⁵²



Celebrations were premature. The following year, Randolph happily notified the Lords of Trade that the General Court had neither taken the necessary oaths nor “suspended the worke of their minte.” By passing a law nearly identical to the Navigation Acts, the General Court, he insisted, “doe encourage” the colonists “to beleive that noe Acts of Parliament . . . are in

⁴⁹Massachusetts General Court to William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley, 10 October 1678, in *Mass. Bay Records*, 5:202–3.

⁵⁰*Mass. Bay Records*, 5:163.

⁵¹Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 39–41.

⁵²*Mass. Bay Records*, 5:155.

force with them.”⁵³ Furious about the colony’s noncompliance, the Lords of Trade appointed Randolph collector, surveyor, and searcher of the customs for all New England, the first imperial officer to serve full-time in the Bay Colony.⁵⁴ The agents begged the Lords to grant them “liberty to recommend a person,” calling Randolph “a person extremely obnoxious” who had “notoriously trespassed upon truth” and was “not likely to continue unbiased,” but the body would hear none of it. In September 1679, after some delay, Randolph sailed again for Massachusetts.⁵⁵

Randolph suffered a predictably hostile reception upon his arrival in Boston in January. A poem soon circulated sardonically saluting the “wicked” Randolph’s return to the Bay Colony: “Welcome now back againe; as is the whip, to a foolles back; as water in a ship.”⁵⁶ “I am received at Boston more like a spy, than one of his majesty’s servants,” he wrote the governor of Plymouth; they “have prepared a welcome for me, by a paper of scandalous verses, all persons taking liberty to abuse me in their discourses.”⁵⁷ Never one to back down, Randolph set to work prosecuting alleged offenders of the Navigation Acts, bravely boarding suspicious vessels in defiance of violent threats and harassment. All the while, the mint continued to turn out coins with neither apology nor imprint of the king.⁵⁸

⁵³Report of Edward Randolph to the Lords of Trade, April 1678, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 6:72–75.

⁵⁴Journals of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 8 April 1678, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 2:294–95; *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series*, ed. W. L. Grant and James Munroe, 6 vols. (Hereford, U.K.: 1908–12), 1:843. See also Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 42–46; Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, p. 158; Dunn, “Imperial Pressures,” p. 62; Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, p. 16; and Dunn, *Puritans and Yankees*, p. 216.

⁵⁵William Stoughton and Peter Bulkeley to the Lords of Trade, April 1678, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 6:75.

⁵⁶“Randolph’s Welcome Back Againe,” January 1680, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:61–64.

⁵⁷Edward Randolph to Governor Josiah Winslow, 29 January 1680, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:65.

⁵⁸Edward Randolph to Sir Edmund Andros, 3, 4, and 7 January 1680, Colonial Office, 1/44, no. 31, pp. 75–76. See also Abstract of Letters from Edward Randolph, 1682, Colonial Office, 1/48, no. 112, pp. 347–51.

The time had come for drastic reform within the government. “There is an absolute necessity of Erecting a Great Councill” and “Generall Governor,” Randolph adamantly avowed to Sir Edmund Andros, governor of New York.⁵⁹ The following year, Randolph, still in Boston, again petitioned the Crown. Never one to mince words, he declared that the “unparrallell’d misdemeanors & contempts”—including the coining of money—amounted to “no lesse than High Treason.” “United under one generall Government,” he reasoned, New England “will be more serviceable to the Crown,” for such an arrangement would instill “dependance and Submission.” The mint alone constituted a “great crime & misdemeanor,” one of several offenses “sufficient to void their Charter.”⁶⁰ Randolph reiterated the charge in 1682. “They call the money coyned in this colony, New England coyne,” he wrote, “engageing the whole plantation in the matter of their mint and thereby bespeaking the influence this small government would have over all the neighbouring colonys.”⁶¹

The Lords of Trade likewise persisted in their Bay shilling assault. “They still carry on their mint without permission,” the body reported nine months after Randolph’s arrival, “and obstruct the working of the Acts of Trade and Navigation in every possible way,” taking “not the least notice” of royal instructions.⁶² Late in 1681, the Lords again berated the colony for the “great crime you are answerable for in coyning money,” for “fresh complaints” of smuggling, and for the denial of religious liberty to Anglicans. “You presume to continue your Mint without regard to the penalties thereby incurred,” they warned the General Court, threatening

⁵⁹Edward Randolph to Sir Edmund Andros, 4 January 1680, Colonial Office, 1/44, no. 31, pp. 75–76.

⁶⁰Petition of Edward Randolph to Charles II, 6 April 1681, and Edward Randolph to Sir Leoline Jenkins, 30 April 1681, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:90 and 6:89.

⁶¹Edward Randolph to the Earl of Clarendon, 14 June 1682, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:159.

⁶²Report of the Lords of Trade to Charles II, 15 September 1680, Colonial Office, 5/904, pp. 87–94; *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. for 1677–80, p. 598.

finally to revoke the charter if instructions remained unheeded.⁶³

The incessant demands beg the question: why was the mint still operating as late as 1682? Besides the aforementioned distractions of 1665 through 1674, the Crown faced a host of troubling developments in the latter half of the 1670s, including the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis of 1678–81, when proto-Whigs in Parliament sought to exclude the heir apparent, the Duke of York, Charles II's younger brother and future James II, from later claiming the throne. A pressing political crisis on the all-important island of Jamaica, moreover, demanded the Lords' utmost attention from 1675 through 1682. The New England matter was one the Crown could afford to defer. Once these calamities had eased, which they mostly had by 1682, the Crown had more attention to spare for New England.

Sensing a political shift in London and worried that the charter was now truly at risk, the moderate faction in Massachusetts, led by Governor Simon Bradstreet, pled with the independence-minded members of the General Court to cooperate fully. The independent faction still controlled the judicial system and lower house of the General Court, yet in February 1682, the moderate faction finally persuaded the lower house to instruct its agents to "begg pardon for the fault of coining."⁶⁴ Three months later, in May 1682, John Hull's contract as mintmaster expired, and there was no talk of renewing it. Hull died the following year, and whether or not the mint continued after May 1682 is unknown, though nothing in the records suggests that it did.⁶⁵ In June 1686, Joseph Dudley claimed that the mint "hath [been a] long time discontinued," and so it likely expired with Hull.⁶⁶

⁶³Report of the Lords of Trade to Charles II, October 1681, Colonial Office, 1/47, no. 79, pp. 188–90.

⁶⁴Instructions to Joseph Dudley and John Richards, 15 February 1682, Colonial Office, 1/48, no. 32, p. 147.

⁶⁵*Mass. Bay Records*, 5:43–44.

⁶⁶Dudley Council, 2 June 1686, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., vol. 13 (Boston, 1899–1900), p. 244.

Following a series of protracted back-and-forth exchanges with the General Court and Massachusetts agents, the Lords of Trade recommended a writ against the charter in June 1683.⁶⁷ Randolph had recently submitted seventeen “articles of high misdemeanour” against the colony, and in the draft version, the recently deceased mint was first among them.⁶⁸ Yet the General Court still had room for compromise. One month after the writ recommendation, Charles II stipulated that the charter might survive if the Crown were invited to regulate and revise its specific articles. If the General Court declined that offer, the attorney general would bring suit against the colony, judicial proceedings that would almost certainly return a finding that the charter was null and void. “We in Boston are threatened with a Condemnation of our Charter and consequently the Loss of all our Priviledges,” including the “necessity of Coyning money with a peculiar stampe of our owne,” Reverend Increase Mather lamented in November 1683.⁶⁹

Impassioned debate soon erupted between the moderate and independent factions, Massachusetts moderates angrily maintaining that it was sheer madness to continue resisting the imperial impulse for consolidation. Nevertheless, despite the moderates’ pleadings, in December 1683, the lower house voted to reject Charles’s proposition and vowed to fight their king in his own courts. The effort miscarried—indeed, it was never implemented because the attorney for Massachusetts failed to arrive on time for trial—and on 23 October 1684, the Crown vacated the Massachusetts charter.⁷⁰



With the charter now dissolved, the moderates threw their support behind Randolph and the new prospective

⁶⁷Hall, *Edmund Randolph*, pp. 61–83; Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, pp. 20–21; and Philip S. Haffenden, “The Crown and the Colonial Charters, 1675–1688: Part I,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 15:3 (July 1958): 300–307.

⁶⁸For the draft and final version of the articles of high misdemeanor, see Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:229–34.

⁶⁹Mather to Gouge, 21 November 1683.

⁷⁰Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 79–83; Haffenden, “Colonial Charters, Part I,” p. 307; and Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, pp. 22–24.

government.⁷¹ Details were still sketchy. Dudley, for his part, recommended that the Crown “betrust the Government wholly to persons among us,” so that the new government might carry greater legitimacy in the eyes of the people.⁷² Until May 1686, the General Court, still dominated by the independence-leaning coalition, continued to sit as if nothing had happened, making no official acknowledgment that the charter had, in fact, been nullified.⁷³

The fate of the recently defunct Boston mint was, much like that of the General Court itself, unknowable. No details were forthcoming as to whether the Crown would resurrect it in altered form. In November 1684, just a month after the charter’s revocation, the secretary of the Lords of Trade asked the Commissioners of the Royal Mint to recommend whether the king “shall continue the mint in Boston for his own use or abolish it.”⁷⁴ Either the mint should remain closed, they replied, or its coins should be brought to the same silver weight as the English shilling. The 1652 stamp, however, tended to sway the commissioners against reopening the Boston mint. “It may also be observed,” they noted, “that though they have continued this unwarrantable way of Coyneing of Money ever since the year 1652, yet there is noe alteration of date [as it] appears upon their Coynes.”⁷⁵ A Boston mint under royal direction would not retain the old charter stamp, of course, but even so, the mental linkage between Massachusetts sovereignty and coining money might still persist, they argued. The Massachusetts shilling, for three decades, had represented the colony’s most virulently independent political aspirations; a mere change in the imprint, they feared, though significant, might not fully obliterate this association. Not yet persuaded, the Lords of Trade were

⁷¹Hall, *Edward Randolph*, p. 86.

⁷²Joseph Dudley to Edward Randolph, 1 December 1684, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 3:336.

⁷³Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 97–99, and Dunn, “Imperial Pressures,” p. 65.

⁷⁴William Blathwayt to Henry Guy, 22 November 1684, Colonial Office, 5/904, p. 218.

⁷⁵Commissioners of the Mint to the Lords of the Treasury, 15 January 1685, Colonial Office, 1/60, no. 88iii, pp. 262–63.

still mulling over the matter when the empire took a sudden turn.

On 6 February 1685, Charles II suffered an apoplectic fit. Having died with no legitimate children, his throne passed to his Roman Catholic brother James, the Duke of York. Seven months later, James II announced the commission of a grand council to preside over all of New England, of which Joseph Dudley would be council president. There was no provision for an elected assembly.

Events thereafter proceeded at a painstakingly slow pace. The royal commission for Dudley and his unelected councilors did not even arrive until May 1686, whereupon the bitter and defeated General Court finally adjourned.⁷⁶ According to the king's commission, the Dudley council—dominated by the most prominent merchants of Boston, loyal to Randolph and the Bay moderates—was granted full and sole authority to govern until such time as Sir Edmund Andros, the recently appointed governor of the prospective Dominion of New England, were to land on its shores, whereafter Dudley and the councilors would assume a mere advisory role.⁷⁷

Suddenly, without any warning whatsoever, Randolph reversed himself on the matter of the mint, lobbying the Lords of Trade about the absolute “necessity” of a Boston coinage. “Since they have Ceased coining,” he stated, “their money is every day shipd off for England. . . . Tis a hard matter to gett £100 in silver.”⁷⁸ For ten years Randolph had railed against the colony's mint, but now that his allies held the reins of power, a Dominion mint under royal authority might well be desirable. The Spanish operated mints in Mexico and Peru; the Dominion of New England could do the same. The Dudley council also

⁷⁶Philip S. Haffenden, “The Crown and the Colonial Charters, 1675–1688: Part II,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 15.4 (October 1958): 452–60, 465–66, and Sosin, *English America*, p. 12.

⁷⁷Hall, *Edward Randolph*, pp. 90–99; Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, p. 175; Barnes, *Dominion of New England*, p. 24; Sosin, *English America*, pp. 66–67; and Dunn, “Imperial Pressures,” p. 65.

⁷⁸Edward Randolph to Secretary William Blathwayt, 29 May 1686, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 6:172.

saw the value of Randolph's reasoning; for many years its members had supported a mint primarily for the economic benefit of having a uniform currency. "Our Trade for want of money is much perplexed and decayed," the council now petitioned the king, humbly imploring "his Majestys Licence, direction and Impress . . . for establishing a Mint in this his Dominion."⁷⁹

Notwithstanding this support for a coinage, the Commissioners of the Royal Mint reiterated their opposition in a second report, sent to the Lord Treasurer in July 1686. Recollecting that a 1678 proposal for a Jamaican mint had been "found impracticable," the mint commissioners insisted that a Boston coinage of any sort remained inadvisable. Nevertheless, the commissioners agreed to come up with "some other Inscriptions more agreeable to the Kings Prerogative to be Stampd upon the Coyne of New England, if a Mint be settled there."⁸⁰

Andros, still in London and obliged to weigh in on the matter, sided with Randolph and Dudley. Foreign "Peices of Eight," he argued, are of "unequal weight and value," and so imposing some regularity on the currency seemed wise. In fact, such a consideration had prompted the founding of the mint in 1652, a decision Andros defended to the Lords, although this time the mint would "be performed by his Majesty's Officers, and the profit that shall arise by the Coinage, applied to his Majesty's use."⁸¹ Andros's recommendation, however, may have been less generous than self-serving. Andros almost certainly understood that a mint at the seat of his North American empire would enhance his power and prestige; indeed, he may have even fancied that the prospective coinage would bear his image. Notwithstanding the Andros endorsement, though, the Lords

⁷⁹Dudley Council, 2 June 1686, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2nd ser., vol. 13 (Boston, 1899-1900), p. 244.

⁸⁰Commissioners of the Mint to the Lord Treasurer, 15 July 1686, Colonial Office, 1/60, no. 88ii, p. 260.

⁸¹[Sir Edmund Andros], "Reasons for a Mint in New-England," 23 October 1686, Colonial Office, 1/60, no. 88v, p. 266. For the official response from the Commissioners of the Royal Mint to Andros, delivered on the same day, see Colonial Office, 1/60, no. 88vii, p. 269.

of Trade formally advised against the idea in late October 1686, a recommendation the king chose to follow.⁸² In order to fully vanquish all vestiges of an independent Bay colony, the symbol of that independence—the Bay shilling—had to be eradicated, not amended.



On 18 April 1689, after news arrived that the Stuart dynasty had been overthrown, Bostonians of virtually all political persuasions rose up against the Dominion regime, arrested Andros, Randolph, and, later, Dudley, and pledged their utmost loyalty to William III. Many inhabitants wished to reestablish the old Bay Colony government, but some of the more prominent moderates argued, with success, that the best course was to establish a Committee of Safety, with Simon Bradstreet serving as provisional governor, and await orders from England.⁸³ Early in the new year, Bradstreet instructed Massachusetts' agents in London to pursue two key objectives: "You are to sollicite that the liberty of coinage may be allowed us," he wrote, as well as the "Confirmation of our ancient Charter and all its Rights and Priviledges."⁸⁴

Those in England who opposed renewing the charter—Randolph as well as the Lords of Trade and William III's Privy Council—warned that to do so would court a resurrection of the mint. Another battle over political sovereignty might soon follow. One writer, for instance, anonymously complained that "They Act as a Free and Independent Commonwealth." As proof, he remarked, "Now to show the unlimited Authority

⁸²Journals of the Lords of Trade and Plantations, 23 October 1686, Colonial Office, 391/6, pp. 19–27; Lords of Trade and Plantations to James II, 13 October 1686, Colonial Office 5/904, p. 325; and *Calendar of State Papers*, vol. for 1685–88, pp. 257, 262.

⁸³Edward Randolph to the Governor of Barbados, 16 May 1689, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 4:265–66.

⁸⁴Instructions from Governor Simon Bradstreet to Massachusetts Agents, 24 January 1690, in *The Andros Tracts: Being a Collection of Pamphlets and Official Papers Issued During the Period Between the Overthrow of the Andros Government and the Establishment of the Second Charter of Massachusetts*, ed. William H. Whitmore, 3 vols. (Boston: Prince Society, 1868–74), 3:60.

they pretend to . . . 1. They took upon them to coyn Money in the Name of the Commonwealth as they call it.”⁸⁵

Flip-flopping yet again, Randolph reiterated his initial opposition to the mint in a May 1689 letter to the Lords of Trade. Not only had the former government violated the royal prerogative by “coining money without His Majesty’s permission,” he wrote, but the overwhelming desire to reestablish the mint, he contended, was among the five primary motivations that had incited Bostonians to overturn Dominion rule in April 1689. Randolph’s claim, of course, was patently absurd, but he was correct in asserting that many colonists resented the mint’s closing. Randolph resumed his assault on the mint later that year, this time in a letter to Parliament, wherein he listed “their assuming the Regal Power of Coyning” as one of several “weighty considerations” for the revocation of the old charter in 1684.⁸⁶

Reverend Increase Mather, now in London to lobby for a reinstatement of the old charter, had no choice but to defend the coinage. Not surprisingly, he concentrated on its economic benefits. Given the irregularity in foreign money, he argued, a mint in Boston was still advisable. On the prickly matter of the royal prerogative, he insisted, there was no treason involved, because “the Mint was set up in 1652, when there was no King in England.” “As to what is objected about Coyning,” he continued, “many Goldsmiths in London can testifie, that the Money coyned in New-England is as good as that of England.”⁸⁷

King William III issued a new charter to Massachusetts Bay in 1691. Though the new government was in significant ways an improvement upon the Dominion regime—most important, it allowed for a representative assembly—Massachusetts’ erstwhile autonomy would be severely constrained. The Crown would henceforth appoint the governor of the new province, and no coinage of any sort would be permitted therein.

⁸⁵A *Short Discourse Shewing the Great Inconveniencies of Joyning the Plantation Charters with those of England in the General Act of Restoration* (London, 1689), p. 2.

⁸⁶Edward Randolph to the Parliament, 1689, in Randolph, *Letters and Official Papers*, 5:12.

⁸⁷Mather, *New-England Vindicated*, pp. 2–3.

By 1691, however, the need for a mint was not so pressing as previously. Less than a year before the new charter arrived, the colony adopted a paper currency, and the so-called bills of credit effectively supplanted the pine-tree shilling as the primary medium of exchange. The provisional government authorized the first emission in the context of a 1690 land and naval expedition led by Sir William Phips against the French at Quebec. The government, still awaiting news of the charter, anticipated that the plunder secured during a victorious attack would finance the expedition. News of the intended invasion leaked, however, and reinforcements from Montreal helped Quebec deliver Phips a crushing defeat. Phips returned to Boston on 19 November, with the soldiers “upon the point of Mutiny,” expecting their promised wages. Unable to borrow enough money in the immediate short term, the colony issued paper bills of credit to secure the needed funds.⁸⁸

The December 1690 paper emission amounted to £7,000 face value. The smallest denomination was 5s, the largest £5, and the bills measured $4 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. On the face of the bill were printed the words “shall be in value equal to money” (fig. 3). Three months later, because its debts far exceeded £7,000, the colony allowed the treasurer to print as many bills as necessary. Not until May 1691 did the colony establish a limit on the emission, in the amount of £40,000.⁸⁹ In 1692 the bills became legal tender for private debts, and further emissions followed through the remainder of the 1690s and onward.⁹⁰ For the next sixty years, paper currency became perhaps the most

⁸⁸Quotation from [Cotton Mather], *Pietas in Patriam: The Life of His Excellency Sir William Phips* (London, 1697), p. 44.

⁸⁹Andrew McFarland Davis, ed., *Colonial Currency Reprints, 1682–1751*, 4 vols. (Boston: Prince Society, 1910–11), 1:23–27. See also Jennifer J. Baker, *Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, and Writing in the Making of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 6–8 and 27–29; Elizabeth E. Dunn, “‘Grasping at the Shadow’: The Massachusetts Currency Debate, 1690–1751,” *New England Quarterly*, 71.1 (March 1998): 54–56; Bushman, *King and People*, p. 145; and Bailyn, *New England Merchants*, pp. 188–89.

⁹⁰*The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay*, 21 vols. (Boston, 1869–1922), 1:35–56.

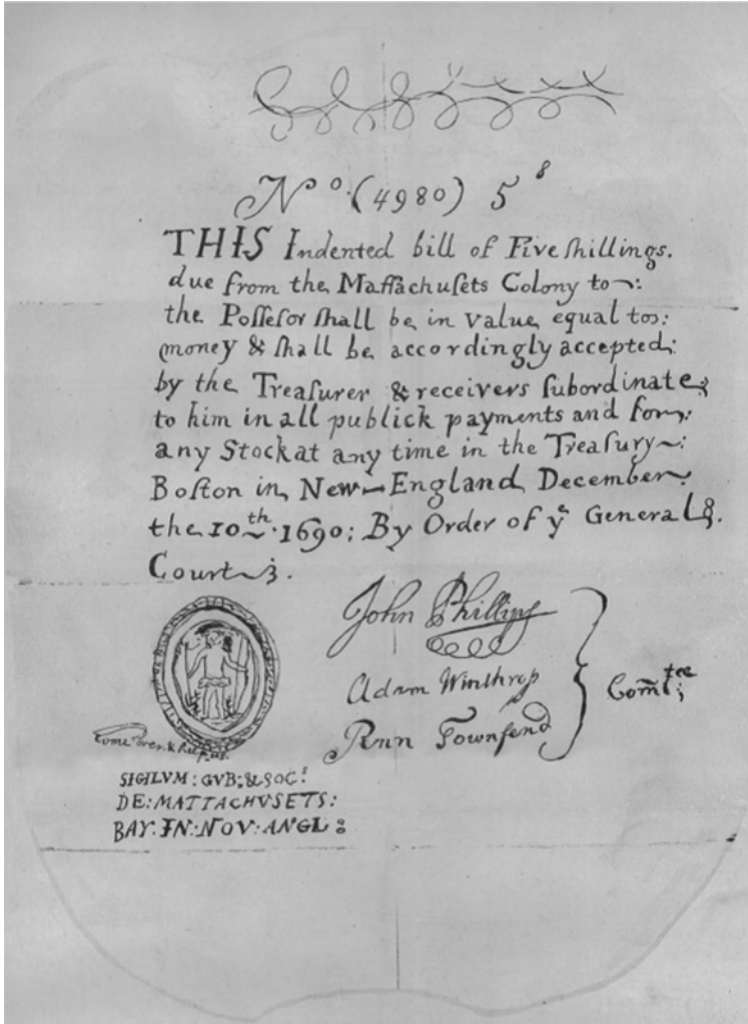


FIG. 3.—The original emission was printed, not handwritten, but the only surviving copy of the 1690 bill of credit is the above pen-and-ink sketch. Reprinted from *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st ser., vol. 6 (Boston, 1862–63), p. 428. Image courtesy the Massachusetts Historical Society.

politically charged issue in the colony's history. The former mint was all but forgotten.

English officials, though spurning the Boston mint, accepted paper bills of credit, at least at first, for three reasons. First,

according to the conventional view, bills of credit were entirely separate from *money*; therefore, they did not violate the royal prerogative. Bills of credit, in this conception, were mere certificates, promissory notes indicating that the colony was in debt to the noteholder, who “redeemed” the notes by using them in place of silver coin to pay taxes.⁹¹ Bills of credit were “in value *equal to money*”; silver and gold, when coined, *were* money. Second, England allowed—often even encouraged—bills of credit when used by colonial governments to finance wartime expeditions. This policy remained more or less intact as late as the Seven Years War. Third, unlike the Bay shilling, Massachusetts bills of credit acknowledged English authority: on the lower left-hand corner of the bill were printed the royal arms of England. Few in England at the time, moreover, could possibly have imagined that the 1690 emission would usher in a new era of North American currency. Not until the 1720s and 1730s did the Crown pressure Massachusetts to curtail its use.

Beyond the rise of paper currency, however, the demise of the Boston mint can also be attributed to shifting political realities following the Glorious Revolution. A Protestant monarchy was firmly in place after 1688, one New Englanders could fully embrace. Parliamentary supremacy now limited the king’s power, and no one harbored suspicions that William and Mary were closet Papists. War against the Catholic, absolutist French further helped unite New Englanders behind the Protestant throne, and the sovereign heads of state had graciously permitted representative assemblies to return to Massachusetts. The English Crown offered its colonial subjects protection in exchange for allegiance, and although the leaders of Massachusetts would henceforth bicker and bargain over the precise terms of this contract between “king” and “people”—as

⁹¹As Cotton Mather put it, “These Bills . . . did confess the Massachuset-Colony, to be Endebted unto the Person, in whose Hands they were. . . . the Sailors and Souldiers put off their Bills, instead of Money, to those, with whom they had any Dealing, and they circulated through all the Hands in the Colony, pretty Comfortably” (Mather, *Pietas in Patriam*, pp. 43–44).

Richard Bushman calls it—there was no question that fealty to England was an absolute necessity.⁹²

In such a world, then, the Bay shilling was neither necessary nor relevant. The economic justification had disappeared with the advent of paper currency, and the political justification vanished with the new monarchical arrangement. The General Court once feared the loss of all self-government during the mint controversy, but that alarm had long since dissipated. Under Stuart rule, radical Puritans and independence-minded members of the General Court rejected the very essence of the “protection-allegiance formula,” even going so far as to challenge the king in his own courts. Allegiance in their reigning triumvirate belonged first to God, second to New England, and third to England. The moderate faction, which recognized the efficacy of the protection-allegiance quid pro quo even under the Stuarts, placed allegiance to the Crown before allegiance to New England. With the accession of William and Mary, the interests of radicals and moderates came into alignment, and both agreed, although in differing ways and to differing degrees, that the Protestant monarchy deserved allegiance above New England. The political rationale for a sovereign mint was thereby undermined, and no effort to restore the Bay shilling of earlier fame was ever again made.⁹³



In an 1857 article entitled, “The Coinage of Massachusetts,” New England historian S. F. Haven remarked, “The subject [of the mint] has never been treated with the respect or interest it deserves.”⁹⁴ The same might be said over a century and a half later. Nevertheless, with the welcome rise of material culture in the historiography, perhaps money will attract attention once more, not only as a medium of central

⁹²Bushman, *King and People*, p. 4.

⁹³Bushman, *King and People*, pp. 24, 16, and Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 7, 29–30, 40–41.

⁹⁴Haven, “Coinage of Massachusetts,” pp. 281–82.

economic importance but also as an artifact possessing multi-faceted cultural and political meanings. Given those inherent tensions, money has always been and ever will be a battleground on which competing interests enact their conflicting understandings.

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