



JOHN WINTHROP 1588-1649

John Winthrop was born into a wealthy English family and grew up as a Puritan. In the 1500's Puritans at that time were intent on reforming their society and were often at odds with the monarchy and aristocracy with its excesses and waste. As a young man, Winthrop had a sincere devotion to God and while pursuing a law career, became convinced that England was in trouble at the cost of the souls of men. Puritans were often persecuted in England at the time, and Winthrop struggled with the decision to abandon his homeland. However, he became intrigued by a new venture, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a commercial enterprise that offered the chance for religious freedom in the New World.

When Winthrop decided to emigrate, he was chosen to serve as governor of the future Puritan colony. However, like Nehemiah in the Bible, who had left a comfortable life in Babylon to migrate to Israel, he was keenly aware of the hardships, hostility, sickness and isolation that lay ahead. Yet he believed that God was calling him to leave his homeland and establish a godly colony in the New World.

On the voyage to America, Winthrop delivered a sermon titled "A Model of Christian Charity," also known as "A City upon a Hill," based on Matthew 5:14. In it he encouraged his fellow travelers of their purpose to increase the Body of Christ and to preserve their families from the corruption of the evil world. Their goal was to establish a model Christian commonwealth they hoped would serve as an example that England and all of Europe would emulate. He encouraged the colonists to "bear one another's burdens," and to view themselves as a "Company of Christ" bound together by love.

During the next twenty years, thousands of Englishmen voyaged to America and half of them settled in New England. Winthrop was repeatedly elected governor of Massachusetts, and under his leadership, the colony was able to prosper and maintain civic and social order, as well as religious conformity. He banished religious and political dissidents who eventually established other New England colonies. He died of natural causes in 1649.

John Winthrop's descendants number thousands today and generations of his family continue to play an active role in New England politics, including Secretary of State, John Kerry. Winthrop's reference to the "city upon a hill" has become an enduring symbol in American political discourse. Many leading American politicians since revolutionary times, have cited Winthrop's ideas in their writings or speeches, especially the idea of American exceptionalism, that God has blessed this country so that the people can reflect His glory.