

Old Deluder Satan Law (1647)

Historical Background of document:

The Old Deluder Satan Act was passed in Massachusetts of 1647. It was one of America's first education acts, and it required that all towns of 50 or more families to provide an elementary school, where teachers were required to teach, not only reading and writing, but the bible as well. Towns that held 100 or more families were required to have grammer schools. This was a school where students focused mostly on latin and greek. The puritans believed that if their children read and studied the bible enough, then they would be able to resist evil temptations, and avoid sinners.

This act was a way for the local community to ensure that education was passed from one generation to the next. Puritans, also, wanted to avoid having a generation of poor and unintelligent people, and in order to keep that from happening, they made sure that every citizen got enough education to read so that they could understand the laws and read the bible. Life in the 1600's was based on religion and their laws came from the bible.

Text of document: (spelling from original)

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these later times by perswading from the use of tongues, that so at least the true sense and meaning of the Originall might be clouded by false glosses of Saint-seeming deceivers; and that Learning may not be buried in the graves of our fore-fathers in Church and Commonwealth, the Lord assisting our indeavors: it is therefore ordered by this Court and Authoritie therof;

That every Township in this Jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty Housholders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read, whose wages shall be paid either by the Parents or Masters of such children, or by the Inhabitants in general, by way of supply, as the major part of those that order the prudentials of the Town shall appoint. Provided that those which send their children be not oppressed by paying much more then they can have them taught for in other towns.

2 And it is further ordered, that where any town shall increase to the number of one hundred Families or Housholders, they shall set up a Grammar-School, the Masters thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the Universitie. And if any town neglect the performance hereof above one year then everie such town shall pay five pounds per annum to the next such School, till they shall perform this Order. [1647]