



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 29

Name: Dyer, “Mary” Marie Barrett

Dates: (1611-31 May 1660)

Colonial Society: RI

Date added to ROA: 2018

Service: Founder, Portsmouth 1638, Newport 1639, RI Colony on Aquidneck 1640

Authority: Bicknell, Thomas Williams, *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*,

Volume III (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc. 1920), 1149

Biography:

Mary Dyer was born in England. The exact location has yet to be determined. It is known that she married William Dyer in London in 1633. Both Mary and William were Puritans who were determined to reform the Anglican Church from within instead of leaving it. As head of the Church of England, King Charles I persecuted the Puritans throughout England which initiated a mass exodus of Puritans to the New England British colonies in the early 1630's. Mary and William arrived in Boston in 1635 and joined the Boston Church, a Puritan Church.

While in Boston Mary and William began following the teachings of Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright who were considered “heretics” by the Puritan elders. William was disenfranchised from the church and subsequently moved his family to establish a new religious colony on Aquidneck Island (later Rhode Island).

In 1651 Mary sailed to England and stayed for over five years. While there she converted to Quakerism. To the Puritans of Massachusetts, Quakers were the worst of all heretics and enacted laws against them. Upon returning to Boston, Mary was immediately imprisoned and then banished because she was a Quaker in a Puritan town.

Defying banishment Mary returned to Boston and was eventually publicly hanged.

Mary was one of four executed Quakers who became known as the “Boston Martyrs.” Upon being sentenced to death by the Boston officials, the simple response of the mother of six children was, “Yea, and joyfully I go.” According to literary scholar Anne Myles, the behavior of the colonist Mary Dyer serves as “a richly legible text of female agency, affiliation, and dissent”. In 1959 by authority of the



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Massachusetts General Court, which had condemned her nearly 300 years earlier, approved a bronze statue to be erected in her memory on the grounds of the State House in Boston.