

## February 2024

### ***God, War, and Providence* by James A. Warren.**

February is the second month in the Bennington Historical Society's 4-year **Book of the Month** Reading Program, "The American Dream Revisited."

Designed to track the 250th anniversary celebrations of the founding of our Nation and State, the program launched in January with *The Seeds of Discontent, the Deep Roots of the American Revolution (1650-1750)* by J. Revell Carr.

The February book is *God, War, and Providence* by James A. Warren. It is a natural progression of our studies, celebrating our 250th.

*The Seeds of Discontent* traced the historic relationship between England and her most energetic colonial enterprise. J. Ravell Carr described the relationship as one of "benign neglect". But often, the relationship seemed to be one of "malign self-interest"—with England pulling the strings whenever her European Policies needed additional revenue. The tension between "neglect" and "self-interest" finally cracked its uneasy, mutual co-existence in the mid-1750s.

*God, War, and Providence* looks internally. It traces the internal tensions of both the colonial leaders and their indigenous neighbors. Neither the colonial leaders nor their neighbors were a homogenous collection of friends and enemies.

The colonial leaders were predominantly civic and ecclesiastical minded servants of the people. The civic leaders worked with the Royal Governors to bring law and order to the development of each colony. The Governors were appointed by England, but the colonial leaders were mainly of the people, focused on building new communities. Each colony had its own geographic and cultural boundaries. Each developed its own economy and traditions. *God, War, and Providence* focuses on the New England experiences.

*God, War, and Providence* describes the differences between the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the Puritains of the Bay Colony in their approach to separation of church and state, the development of community, and the basics of Christianity. William Bradford of Plymouth and John Winthrop of the Bay Colony led their respective settlements. It was the Puritan model of the Bay Colony that was followed in the movement westward into Connecticut, western Massachusetts, and finally Vermont.

Thomas Hooker led a group to Hartford in 1636 and wrote the *Fundamental Orders of Connecticut*, America's first Constitution. The pioneers of Vermont came through this branch.

Roger Williams, a vocal critic of the Puritan intolerances in the Bay Colony, was banned from Boston and led his followers to what is now the Providence area of Rhode

Island. In Providence, Willaims acquired several parcels of land from the Narragansetts, the most populous of New England's native tribes. Williams objected to both the Puritan's intolerances to its parishners and the Bay Colony's approach to dealing with the Narragansetts and their lands. He founded America's first Baptist Church.

The ecclesiastical leaders formed their own hierarchies. Although they may have looked to the Church of England for reference, they quickly established their own sense of order. The resultant *Cambridge Compact* embodied expectations for the local churches.

The indigenous neighbors already had histories of relationships, not only with traders from a far, but groupings of other indigenous villages, tribes and nations. Most relationships were friendly, but differences led to separation. Not unexpectedly, the Native groups divided in their loyalty and alliances with the different ever-more frequent European colonists.

King Philips War broke out in Rhode Island in 1675-76 and spread throughout southern New England, splitting the Indigenous Tribes along old and new divides. "King Philip" or Metacom was the son of Massasoit, the great sachem of the Wampanoags. The bloody battles ranged up the Connecticut River to Deerfield, Turners Falls, and Northfield. Warren describes the "roots of the conflict" and its consequences on the Narragansetts and New England.

For more information on the BHS Reading Program, go to the Bennington Museum website and click on the Programming tab, where Bennington Historical Society is listed.