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# The Advocate

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THE ILLUSTRATED FEATURE SECTION—September 26, 1931

BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN THE FEATURE SECTION

## MASSACHUSETTS'S FIRST ROYAL GOVERNOR WAS COLORED

Frederick R. Willard, White, Principal of English High School, Lynn, Mass., Wrote this Statement into the Massachusetts Ter-Centenary Program and Peeved New Englanders Could Not Make Him Recant.

By JOHN W. YOUNGBLOOD

"The First Royal Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, Sir William Phips, was a Negro boy who became rich by discovering a sunken Spanish treasure ship."

This simple sentence, excepting the words "Massachusetts Bay Colony," appeared intact in the Tercentenary Bulletin, issued in 1930, preceding the three-hundredth anniversary celebration.

It was issued as a memorial to the founders of the colony. The sentence is a statement clearly put and stripped of purposely ostentatious effect. It bears the hallmark of one wielding an accurate pen guided by a mind disposed to tell a simple truth.

At first very mild, very harmless, nevertheless the statement ultimately created a furore. The significance of it fomented confusion worse confounded and an endless controversy.

### True—False

Denials of the truth of the information were made by some people. Others said less blatantly, yet just as firmly, that it was correct. Perhaps in the belief of many the recording of this knowledge was not well timed and least of all desired under the circumstances which caused its revelation. Thus vehement denials were made, pronto, without basis of fact.

"The First Royal Governor, or any Governor, for that matter, a Negro! It cannot be! It must not be! It would be a parody on Puritan and Pilgrim history, anti-social, even anti-prelatical. Nonsense!"

This bit of history taken from a document carefully compiled by educators whose knowledge is reasonably assumed to be wide and varied because of their stations in life, was accepted as authoritative. It made excellent news copy, especially for our weekly papers. Reporters seized it hungrily; our press everywhere carried it; and not only was implicit confidence expressed in the integrity and honesty of the author, but the newspapermen were visibly elated to the extent such an honor would affect, even though they suspected that had Phips's Negro blood been generally known or visible at the time, he would never have been so honored. The thought gave them renewed inspiration. It removed them farther from the inferiority complex.

### Whites Protest

Following this animation, the white folk renewed their protest vigorously against those responsible for the statement. As a result an erratum slip has been pasted in on page 157 of the 222-page bulletin, which reads: "Sir William Phips was a Maine boy," etc., instead of "a Negro boy."

This correction fails to settle the controversy. It doesn't prove anything other than that the publishers have a yellow streak a yard wide, as subsequent events will show.

Thus the argument became more confusing. Librarians everywhere were besieged with requests for bio-

ographies and an autobiography on Sir William.

### Born in Maine

Extracts from Cotton Mather's "The Life of Sir William Phips" typifies the subject matter of other biographers. Briefly, they are as follows:

Sir William Phips was born in 1651 at Woolwich, Maine. He was a shepherd until he reached the age of 18. Later he was a ship-carpenter's apprentice for four years and learned to read and write while working at this trade in Boston. With a commission from the British Crown in 1687 he found, after a search of many years, a wrecked Spanish treasure ship of which he had heard on a voyage to the Bahamas. From it he recovered 300,000 pounds, of which he received 16,000 pounds as his share.

### Knighthood by James II

Sir William Phips went to England and was knighted by James II; upon his return, he was appointed sheriff of New England. Poorly educated and ignorant of law, he accomplished little. Back to England and thence to Massachusetts, in 1689, he at once entered the life of the colony. He was appointed commander of an expedition against the French in Canada, which sailed in April, 1690, and easily captured Port Royal. A

larger expedition led by him met disaster.

### Appointed Governor

In 1690 he again returned to England and urged, with Increase Mather, the colonial agent, a restoration of the colony's charter, annulled during the reign of Charles II. The Crown, at the suggestion of Mather, appointed Phips the first Royal Governor under the new charter. On his return in 1692, he found the colony in a very disorderly state. Though honest and persevering, he was unfit for the difficult position. He displayed great energy defending the frontier, but his policy of building forts was expensive, therefore unpopular. He did, however, succeed in suppressing witchcraft in the colony.

There were numerous complaints to the home government, resulting in his being summoned to England to answer charges. While in London awaiting trial, he died February 18, 1695.

### No Race Mentioned

Nowhere in the biographies so far read on the subject is mention made of Sir William Phips's race. This lack of historic sanction, however, did not lessen these newspaper men's belief in the truth of the Bulletin statement. Nor did the lack indicate a verdant claim. Moreover, these men

still cling to their convictions. They recall that many historians, surreptitiously, thoughtlessly or through ignorance failed to record that Maceo, the Cuban general and the hero of the Spanish-American War, was a Negro; that the Carthaginian Hannibal was of black Africa and that the negroid ancestry of King Tut is kept secret by many of the writers.

### Alexander Hamilton

It is generally agreed that Alexander Hamilton had Negro blood but there is no recorded historical proof. The black in Pushkin is mentioned infrequently and niggardly. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington are frequently referred to as being only half Negro and their genius is often attributed to the white half. Three hundred years from now their black half may be entirely submerged in the white.

### Morse, Hot and Bothered

Moreover, in further search of fact, news reporters called on Frank P. Morse, white, supervisor of secondary education and chairman of the Bulletin committee, to verify or deny the statement that Phips was a Negro.

The very Mr. Morse, all hot and bothered, nervously explained that a mistake had been made by his committee—the compilers of the Bulletin.

"Historical Material Suggested for Use in the Schools," etc.

Hard pressed for a more reasonable explanation why so gross an error could have passed unnoticed by editors, proofreaders, publishers and his committee in a book compiled for historical material for use in schools, the chairman referred the reporters to Frederick R. Willard, white, principal of the English High School, Lynn, a member of the committee and author of the chapter in which the statement is contained.

### Willard, a Yankee

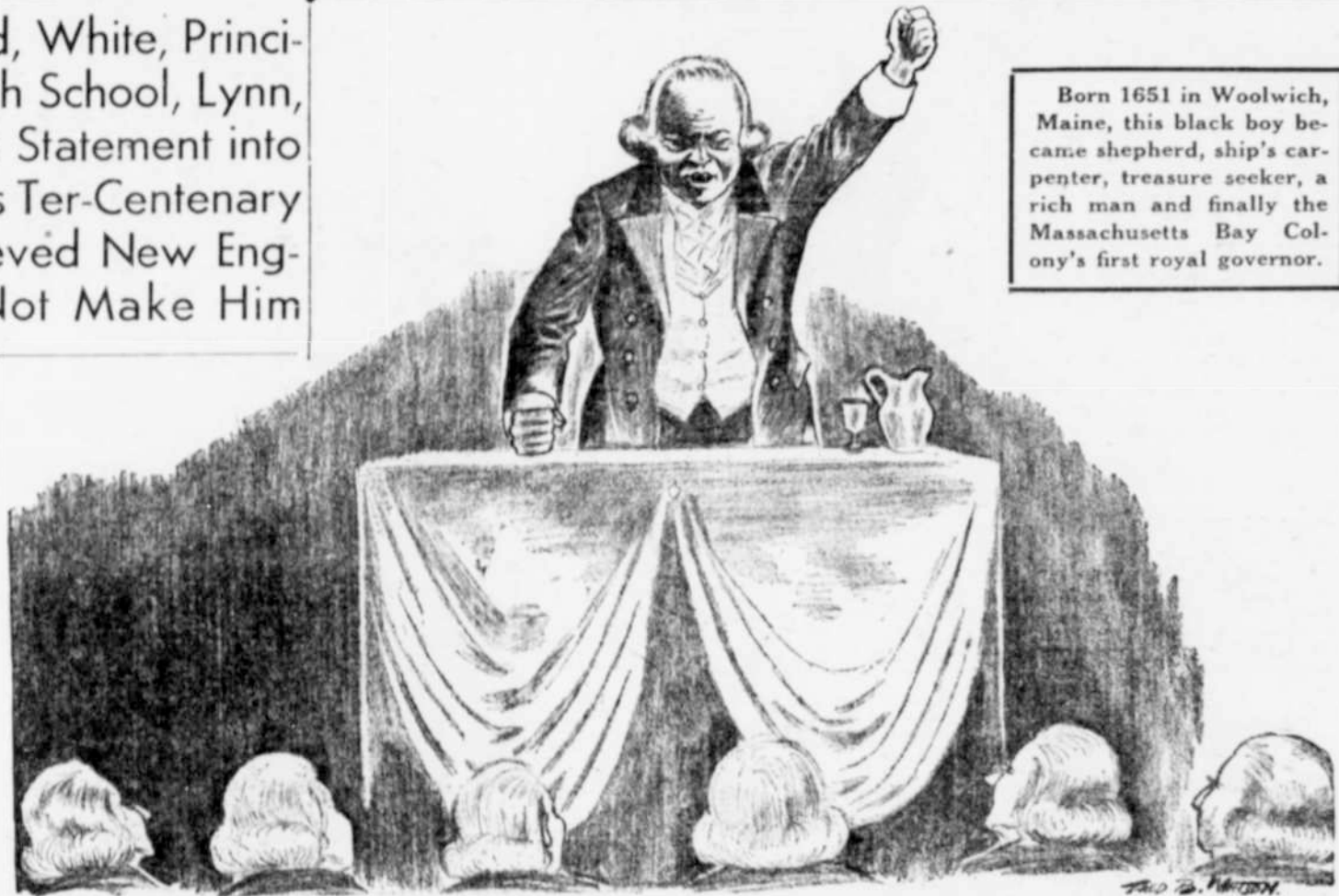
A native of the state of Maine, educated in the schools and colleges of New England, Mr. Willard received the reporters with customary Yankee courtesy. He showed little concern about the effect of his writing on the subject and expressed no alarm over the controversy which his statement had created. He did show, however, that he had been warned of the reporters' coming. He had very artfully erected a fortress against their inevitable barrage of questions.

Question: Mr. Willard, we have been informed that you are the author of the chapter in the Tercentenary Bulletin under the caption, "The Times in Which The Puritans Lived." Is that a fact?

Answer: I am.

### Says He Erred

Question: You made a statement in the chapter that "the first Royal



Born 1651 in Woolwich, Maine, this black boy became shepherd, ship's carpenter, treasure seeker, a rich man and finally the Massachusetts Bay Colony's first royal governor.

Drawing by Watson from photograph of Sir William Phips in American Cyclopaedia of American Biography by John G. Wilson and John Fiske, Vol. 4.

Announcement to this Effect on 300th Anniversary Program Caused Furor Even in Staid Old Boston---The Author Confesses His Information Comes from an Eminent Authority who Knows the Whole Truth.

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This magazine is a small education in itself. You cannot afford to miss a single column.