

One awful scene shaped Roger Williams' whole life. It was in England about 1611. When Roger was eight, he saw a man burned at the stake.

The man was a heretic—one who did not agree with the Church of England. For that, he paid with his life.

At that time the English could not work as they wished. Those who did could be thrown in prison. They might be whipped. Their faces might be branded or their ears chopped off.

Roger Williams dreamed of a land where such things could not happen.

The Williams family lived near the London docks. Roger often watched the ships come and go. He heard grand tales about the New World. Perhaps, he thought, that was the land he was looking for.

In 1630 he had a chance to find out. He sailed for Massachusetts.

The Puritans ran that colony. They did not burn men at the stake. But they had strict ideas of right and wrong. And their word was law.

Roger was not happy there. And the Puritans were not happy to have him. His ideas bothered them. For one thing, he did not think that men should be whipped for not working. And he thought the white men were unfair to the Indian. They should not

just take the land, he said. They should buy it.

"New ideas! Dangerous ideas!" said the Puritan rulers. And they drove him out in 1635.

Roger set out through the wild land. It was deep winter. Was there no place that he could call home?

At last he found an Indian town where he had friends. He spent the winter there. A few friends joined him. In the spring they all sailed south. There they bought land from the Indians and founded Providence.

The Providence settlers took great care in the laws they made. From the start they agreed to make none about religion. But should they make any at all? Should people obey a government? Yes, said Roger Williams. He put it like this:

Suppose there are lots of people on one ship. They can't do just as they wish. For safety they must all obey the captain. But the captain should not force them all to pray as he does.

Roger Williams' ideas worked. Providence became a center of freedom. There were few places like it in the world.

Providence later became Rhode Island. And freedom of religion later became part of the Bill of Rights. Today it is accepted as the American way of life.

**CHECK YOUR READING**

1. **The scene that shaped Roger Williams' life was that of a man being**
  - A tarred and feathered
  - B hanged from a tree
  - C burned at the stake
  
2. **The man was being punished for**
  - A not agreeing with the church
  - B stealing from a church group
  - C burning a church building
  
3. **The country in which this event took place was**
  - A Germany
  - B France
  - C England
  
4. **Roger Williams heard a lot about the New World because he**
  - A traveled about the country
  - B lived near the docks
  - C wrote to friends there
  
5. **The people who ran the Massachusetts colony were called**
  - A Puritans
  - B Pilgrims
  - C Partisans
  
6. **Roger believed that**
  - A lazy men should be whipped
  - B Indian land should be bought
  - C colony laws should be broken
  
7. **The rulers in Massachusetts thought that Roger's ideas were**
  - A interesting
  - B selfish
  - C dangerous
  
8. **Roger spent the winter of 1635 in**
  - A a fishing village
  - B an Indian town
  - C a mountain cave
  
9. **The Providence settlers decided that no one should have to**
  - A worship in a certain way
  - B obey a government's laws
  - C buy land from another person
  
10. **Providence later became**
  - A New Hampshire
  - B Rhode Island
  - C South Carolina