

EARLY BRICK LAWS IN MASSACHUSETTS

by Orville W. Carroll*

Massachusetts-Bay Company was chartered as a private stockholding corporation by Charles I of England on March 4, 1629. Its owners, referred to as "freemen," elected at annual meetings a Governor, Deputy Governor and "Assistants," collectively called "Court Of Assistants." The freemen and assistants gathered together yearly as a "Great and General Court" to transact their business. Their first formal meeting in Massachusetts was held in Charlestown on October 19, 1630.

Records as early as 1667 indicate that there was a need in the Massachusetts-Bay colony to standardize the size of bricks. In October of that year a committee was appointed to "...bring in some order for the regulating brick makers to make their bricks of a suitable size...."¹ Twelve years later the first brick law was passed.

The Great and General Court of the Massachusetts-Bay Company meeting in Boston on May 28, 1679, passed a law regulating the digging and turning of clay deposits and the dimensional size of bricks. The size of bricks was to be 9" x 2½" x 4½". The brick molds were to be well shod (lined) with iron, but it is not stated whether the molds had bottoms or not. The law of 1679 in its entirety reads as follows:

"IT is Ordered by this Court and the Authority thereof, that clay to make Bricks fhall be digged before the firft of *November*, and turned over in the Moneth of *February* and *March* enfuing a moneth before it be wrought; and that no Perfon temper their Bricks with falt or brackifh water; and that the fize of Bricks be nine inches long, two and a quarter inches thick, and four and an half inches broad; and that all moulds ufed for making of Bricks be made according to thefe fizes, and well fhod with iron: And what perfon or perfons foever, fhall make Bricks in any refpect contrary to this Order, in the feveral particulars of it, fhall forfeit the one half of fuch Bricks to the ufe of the Treafury of the Town where they are made."²

Meeting on September 10, 1684, the Great and General Court of Massachusetts-Bay Company passed an addendum to the law of 1679 in an attempt to control the quality of bricks to be sold. The size of bricks was to remain

*Mr. Carroll is a Restoration Architect with the North Atlantic Regional Office, National Park Service, Boston.