



John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island, 1638-1750

Sydney James

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John Clarke and His Legacies is the first full-length biography of John Clarke (1609–76), a principal founder of colonial Rhode Island. Although Roger Williams usually gets most of the attention, Sydney James shows that Clarke made a lasting contribution to the colony—perhaps more so than Williams. Williams was the first Baptist minister in America, but he left his church after a very short time. And although Williams won the first charter for Rhode Island, the charter soon had to be replaced. Clarke, however, founded the first Baptist church in Newport, where he continued to contribute to the Baptist community. And in 1663 he procured the royal charter that would remain the foundation of government in Rhode Island until 1842.

This inquiry into Clarke's life engages a variety of intriguing topics. It surveys a formative stage in American Baptist history, one that spurned dependency upon government more thoroughly than any part of the United States does today. Through the experience of Clark, we see pioneering American religious volunteerism, problems of church-state relations, and the peculiar nature of colonial relations with the parent country.

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