# Samuell Gorton Biography

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# Biography

Samuell Gorton (ca. 1592-1677), an English colonizer, held religious views that made him a misfit in early New England and led him to establish his own settlement in Rhode Island.

Samuell Gorton was born near Manchester. Little is known of him before he left his work as a clothier in London to emigrate to Massachusetts. He expected to find toleration for his unique religious views in the New World but instead met with antagonism. He advocated a personal religious belief which denied governmental intervention, and he also challenged New England's political autonomy by asserting the supremacy of English governmental institutions.

Gorton arrived in Massachusetts at the height of the crisis surrounding heretic Anne Hutchinson and soon was forced to leave. He went to Plymouth briefly, then moved to Portsmouth. He left both communities chiefly because of his conviction for "contempt of court" in defending an accused servant. He settled in Providence, R.I., then journeyed to Pawtuxet and to Shawomet near Providence. There he bought land from the Native Americans and appeared to have found peace. But Massachusetts would not leave him alone. Gorton and his followers were ordered to appear in Boston to defend their land claims. When they refused, Massachusetts sent three commissioners and forty militiamen to Shawomet. After negotiations failed, the militia attacked, captured Gorton and eight others, and confiscated their cattle. The men were taken to Boston, where the proceedings against them resembled an inquisition. After political and religious examinations, they were convicted of blasphemy and of being enemies of the true religion. Placed in irons, they were dispersed among the communities of Massachusetts with orders not to continue their "errors." The men from Shawomet could not be silenced, however, and eventually they were banished.

Gorton took his case to England and applied for Parliament's protection against the encroachments of Massachusetts. He won his case and was granted the right to live unmolested at Shawomet, which he renamed Warwick in honor of the English earl who had been its protector. Once safe politically and religiously, Gorton became a respectable and useful, if less exciting, individual. The leading citizen of Warwick, he was active in the government of Rhode Island, serving in both houses of the Assembly and acting as its president in 1651. He died in 1677.