

Roger Williams



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出版者:Oxford Univ Pr on Demand

出版时间:2005

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780195183696

The founder of Rhode Island and of the first Baptist Church in America, an original and passionate advocate for religious freedom, a rare New England colonist who befriended Native Americans and took seriously their culture and their legal rights, Roger Williams is the forgotten giant among the first English colonists. Now, Edwin S. Gaustad, a leading expert on the life of Roger Williams, offers a vividly written and authoritative biography of the most far-seeing of the early settlers--the first such biography written for a general audience. Readers follow Roger and Mary Williams on their 1631 journey to Boston, where he soon became embroiled in many controversies, most notably, his claim that the colonists had unjustly taken Native American lands and his argument that civil authorities could not enforce religious duties. Soon banished for these troubling (if farsighted) views, Williams wandered for fourteen weeks in bitter snow until he bought land from the Narragansett Indians and founded Providence, which soon became a sanctuary for religious freedom and a refuge for dissenters of all stripes. The book discusses Williams' journey back to London, where he sought legal recognition of his colony, spread his enlightened views on Native Americans, and (alongside John Milton) fought passionately for religious freedom. Gaustad also describes how the royal charter of Rhode Island, obtained by Williams in 1663, would become the blueprint of religious freedom for many other colonies and a

foundation stone for the First Amendment. Here then is a vibrant portrait of a great American who is truly worthy of remembrance.

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