Ezekiel Cheever (1615 – 1708)

“We generally concur in acknowledging that New England has never known a better teacher”

~Cotton Mather, Pupil of Ezekiel Cheever

Ezekiel Cheever was born on January 25, 1615 in London, England. He was educated at Christ’s Hospital and later studied classics at the University of Cambridge. Cheever came to America in 1637 as a Puritan seeking religious freedom. Ezekiel died on August 21, 1708 in Boston, Massachusetts.

Sometime before 1650, Ezekiel wrote what was probably America’s first school book, “Latin Accidence; A short Introduction to the Latin tongue.” This book was used as the authoritative teaching text in the colonies for the next one hundred years. The only other contribution he made to literature was a volume of essays entitled “Scripture Prophecies Explained.”

However, Ezekiel was best known for his 70-year occupation as a teacher, 38 of which were served as Headmaster of the Boston Latin School. Ezekiel Cheever was invited to become Headmaster on December 29, 1670. Many of the colonies’ leading citizens were pupils of Ezekiel’s Boston Latin School. Boston Latin School is the oldest public school in the country and is still operating today. (On the left is a drawing of the old Boston Latin School and a current picture is on the right).

In addition to teaching children at the school, Ezekiel had quite a few children of his own. He had 6 children with his first wife, Mary (last name unknown), who passed away. He and his second wife, Ellen Lanthrop also had 6 children.

Ezekiel Cheever contributed almost his entire life to education in the colonies. He is perhaps the first true “teacher” in America. It is evident that his pupils admired and appreciated his respect for education. Ezekiel Cheever led the way for public education in America.

Sources:
Encyclopedia Britannica
http://xenia.media.mit.edu/~kristin/fambly/cheever/EzekielCheever.html
http://www.bartleby.com/227/1610.html
http://famousamericans.net/ezekielcheever
http://bls.org/crml/l3tmpl_history.cfm

Kristen Kell
March 1 2004