



Pilgrims land at Plymouth 1620

Today we call them Pilgrims. A group of 19th-century historians gave this name to the 102 men, women and children who crossed the Atlantic on the *Mayflower* to honor their historic pilgrimage to the New World. Those individuals who made the crossing in 1620 would have found this title unfamiliar, since they thought of themselves as belonging to either of two groups, which they called Saints and Strangers.

In the beginning each group had its own goals and every person had special reasons for wanting a new life in the New World. But on that bleak December day in 1620 when they anchored off the coast of what became Massachusetts, they were united as they prepared to face the danger of the American wilderness.

Months earlier various circumstances had brought these two groups together. About forty of them were Separatists — religious dissenters from the Church of

England — searching for freedom of worship. They called themselves Saints. The remainder of the Pilgrims were misplaced people looking for economic opportunities and a chance to farm their own land. Because of their non-Separatist backgrounds, they were called Strangers by the Saints. Each of the two groups was too small to start a colony in the New World. However, by working together in full cooperation with each other, the Saints and Strangers had a chance for survival and even prosperity.

On September 16, 1620 the Pilgrims left Plymouth, England aboard the *Mayflower*. This crossing in itself was a major adventure. Originally, two ships were to carry them to America, but the *Speedwell* proved unseaworthy, and many of her passengers boarded the *Mayflower*. Overcrowded and storm-tossed for much of the 65-day voyage, the ship was battered so hard by massive waves that a main beam split nearly in two.

Determined to sail on, the Pilgrims and ship's crew used the large iron screw from their printing press to repair the broken beam. They even stuffed their extra clothes into cracks in the hull to stop leaks.

On November 21, the *Mayflower* dropped anchor for the first time in the New World. And on this day, the men aboard the ship entered into the first agreement of self-government made in America. The drafting and signing of the Mayflower Compact helped establish the principles of freedom and independence for which America was to become famous. After several weeks of taking short trips ashore to explore and attending to needed duties, including repairing the small boat carried on the *Mayflower*, all the Pilgrims landed on a sandy beach near a huge granite boulder to establish their colony. They called the site Plymouth after their port of departure, and the boulder became known as Plymouth Rock. Due to the great danger of maneuvering a boat in rough seas near a rock, it is most likely the Pilgrims did not land directly on Plymouth Rock, as is often believed. But its massive presence and strength have made it an honored symbol of the arrival of the strong-willed Pilgrims.

The weather was cold and damp, and supplies were low even though several bushels

of corn had been found on one of the early exploring trips. The Pilgrims built crude shelters of poles and twigs covered with mud to protect them from the cruel weather. These huts did not serve the purpose very well — more than half of the Pilgrims died during the remainder of the winter. Despite this tragedy, those who survived persevered, and with the arrival of spring they received unexpected help.

One morning an Indian, one of the very few encountered by the Pilgrims, walked into the village and spoke to them in English. He told the surprised Pilgrims that his name was Samoset and that he had learned to speak English from fishermen who sometimes visited his village. Samoset brought two more Indians — Squanto and Massasoit — to meet the Pilgrims. Squanto, who had lived in England for a while, did much to aid the new arrivals, as did Massasoit, the chief of the local tribe.

The Indians showed their neighbors how to plant corn and how to hunt in the game-rich forests. With this help, the Pilgrims were able to survive and build for the future. Seeing the progress made by the Pilgrims, other Englishmen followed them to America. Thus the success of the settlement at Plymouth helped start the growth of a great new nation.