

How God Planted a New Colony

When I was about ten years old my Grandmother Hopkins told me I was a Mayflower descendant. I was just learning about the Mayflower voyage and Plymouth Colony. I was proud to know that my ancestors came over on the Mayflower and anxious to learn more. I didn't know the Society of Mayflower descendants existed. As I learned my history and found out about this society, I felt a responsibility to share what I learned so that others would appreciate what our forefathers sacrificed to give us the freedom of worship and the right to govern.

Like many of you, we visited Plymouth Massachusetts, Plymouth Plantation, and the Mayflower II. We marveled at how the 102 passengers and their crew survived the voyage to the New World and planted a new colony, but we feel that today many people don't understand the faith our forefathers had in God.

My ancestor, William Bradford, in his book "Of Plymouth Plantation", which was a compilation of his journals from 1590 until 1650, repeatedly states that it was the hand of God that saved them in many situations, set their course, and gave them guidance in the success of their journey.

The Pilgrims

The core group were Separatist Puritans, who later became known as Pilgrims when the name "Pilgrims" appeared in William Bradford's book "Of Plimouth Plantation" in 1651 and was not in popular use until it was used in a song composed for Founders Day in Boston December 22, 1798.

They were brought together about 1605 when they quit the Church of England to form congregations in Nottinghamshire, England, led by John Robinson, Richard Clyfton, and John Smyth. Their congregations held that true churches were voluntary democratic

bodies. As Separatists, they held that the differences with the church of England were irreconcilable and that their worship should be independent of the trappings, traditions, and organization of the central church.

Under the Act of Uniformity in 1569, it was illegal not to attend the Church of England services, with a fine of one shilling for each missed Sunday and holy day. The fines included imprisonment and larger fines for conducting unofficial services. John Penry encouraged his followers in London to emigrate to Amsterdam to escape persecution. In 1593 Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, and John Penry were executed for sedition, and plans were made to leave England and go to Amsterdam.

Many of them hoped that reforms and reconciliation would be possible when King James came into power, but the Hampton court of 1604 denied nearly all the concessions they requested – except for an updated translation of the Bible. That same year Richard Bancroft became bishop of Canterbury and launched a campaign against Puritanism and Separatists. He suspended 300 ministers and fired 80 more which led them to found more separatist churches. Robinson, Clifton, and their followers founded a Brownist Church, making a covenant with God “to walk in all His ways made known, or to be made known, unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatsoever it may cost them, the Lord assisting them”

William Brewster was a former diplomatic assistant to the Netherlands. He was living in Scrooby House Manor while serving as postmaster and bailiff to the Bishop of York. He began participating in the services led by John Smyth. After a time, he arranged for the congregation to meet privately at the Scrooby Manor house. Services were held beginning in 1606 with Richard Clifton as pastor, John Robinson as teacher and William Brewster as presiding elder. Shortly after John Smyth and the members of the Gainesville group moved

on to Amsterdam. Brewster was fined 20 pounds in absentia for his noncompliance with the church. This followed his September 1607 resignation from the postmaster position. About that time the congregation decided to follow the Smyth party to Amsterdam. Scrooby member William Bradford of Austerfield kept a journal of the congregation's events which was eventually published as "Of Plymouth Plantation".

William Bradford said:

"But after these things they could not continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted & persecuted on every side, so as their former affiliations but as flea-biting in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taking and clapped up in prison, others had their houses watched day and night, and hardly escaped with their lives: and the most had to flee from their homes and habitations, and the means of their livelihood."

Leiden

In 1607 and 1608 they fled to Leiden, Holland, a city of about 30,000 people, to avoid persecution and worship God freely.

William Bradford said:

"To leave their native lands, livings, and all their friends was a great sacrifice and wondered at by many. But these things did not dismay them, for their desires were set on the ways of God, to enjoy His ordinances; they rested on His providence, and in Whom they had believed."

Kent - You can see They had their hearts and minds trusting in God.

*"Sailing from Boston, England to Leiden in the Netherlands had its trials and tribulations. Their ship almost sank, and they cried **We Sink! we Sink!** Yet Lord thou can save! Thou can save! "Upon which the ship righted herself, but after the violence of the storm abated*

the Lord filled their minds with such comfort as but few can understand, and in the end brought them to their desired haven, where people became flocking, astonished at their deliverance, the storm having been so long and so violent.”

Kent – When we experience trials and tribulations, and trust in the Lord, coming through it, often we feel a comfort and peace in spite of the circumstances we experienced. For which we thank God.

William Bradford said about their decision to leave Holland and seek settlement in North America.

- 1. They were servants to the Dutch, they had to learn a new language and culture.*
- 2. They were drawn to a mindset in danger to their souls to the grief of the parents and dishonor of God and they saw their children were in danger of becoming degenerate and corrupt.*
- 3. They cherished a great hope and inward zeal for laying good foundations, or at least making some headways towards it, for the propagation advance the gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in the remote parts of the world, even though they should be but steppingstones to others in so great a work.*

In 1609, Stephen Hopkins, also my ancestor, who had made the ill-fated voyage on the Sea Venture, having returned to London in 1617, after the shipwreck in a storm near Bermuda and surviving Jamestown. He returned with John Rolfe and his wife Rebecca, better known by her native name Pocahontas. His wife Mary had passed away and he came back to two children, Constance, and Giles, He remarried to Elizabeth Fisher at the home parish of Randall Thickens, one of the leading Leiden congregation members who was married to pastor John Robinson’s sister. Having met some of the members of the Leiden congregation and learning that they needed investors

and experienced adventurers. Stephen decided to join the Leiden group considering the benefits for him and his family.

Decision to Go to New England

In 1617 the Decision was to make New England the place of settlement instead of Guiana or Virginia was to endeavor to obtain a patent from the king of England because they felt Guiana or Virginia would be under the Government of those who already moved from England, and they would be in danger of persecution of their religion.

A letter from John Robertson & William Brewster to the King's Council:

1. "We verily leave and trust that the Lord is with us, and to whom and whose service we have given ourselves in many trials; And that he will graciously prosper our endeavors according to the simplicity of our hearts therein."

2. "We are well weaned from the delicate milk of our mother country, and inured to difficulties with strange and hard land, which by patience we have largely overcome."

3." We are knit together as a body in a most strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord, of the conviction that we make great confidence, and by virtue whereof we hold ourselves straightly tied to all care of each other's good."

4:" Lastly, we are not like some, whom small things discourage and to wish themselves at home again. We know what we can expect both in England and in Holland, and we shall not improve our material well-being by our departure, and should we to be forced to return, we would not hope to regain our present position, either here or elsewhere during our lives."

” These motives have been boldly put to you, and to any other of our friends of the council. We your worship, we take our leave, committing you to the guidance of the Almighty.”

On July 1st, 1620, a large grant was obtained from the king for the northerly parts of Virginia company's patent, but wholly separated from its government, and to be called by another name, New England.

Plans with conditions were made for the new colony as follows:

- 1: Every person 16 and over would invest 10 pounds.
- 2: That all the persons transported, and the adventurers continue their joint stock and partnership together for seven years, during which time all profits and benefits by any person or persons should remain in the common stock until the division.
- 3: That upon their arrival there they should choose out the number of fit persons to man their ships and boats at sea; employing the rest in several facilities upon the land, such as building houses, tilling the land, planting the ground, and making commodities useful for the colony.
- 4: At the end of seven years, the capital and profits, the houses, lands, goods, and chattels should be equally divided among the investors free of any debt to any other of them arising from this adventure.
- 5: Whoever comes to the colony here hereafter shall contribute to the stock, and at the end of seven years be allowed to proportionally share according to his time served.

6: Children who are under the age of 10 years will have no share in the division but receive 50 acres of unmanured land.

7: Persons who die before their seven years are expired will have their executors partition their share proportionately to the time of their life in the colony.

8: All persons part of this colony, are to have their food, drink, clothing, and provisions, shared out of the common stock and goods of the colony.9: All persons should have two days a week for their own private employment, for the greater comfort of their families.

Departure from Leiden

June 11th, 1620

The Speedwell was hired to move those who wished to go from Leiden to Southampton to prepare for the voyage to the new colony.

Not all the congregation were able to depart on the first trip. Many members were not able to settle their affairs within the time constraints, and the budget was limited for travel and supplies. The group decided that the initial settlement should be undertaken primarily by younger and stronger members with the remainder to follow when they could. Robinson would remain in Leiden with the larger proportion of the congregation, and Brewster was to lead the church in America to be run independently.

With personal business matters agreed upon the pilgrims' procured supplies, the Speedwell was to bring some passengers from Netherlands to England, then on to America where it would be kept for fishing purposes. The crew hired for support services during the first year. The largest ship, Mayflower was leased for transport and exploration services.

As they departed on this voyage William Bradford wrote:

“My object is our children may see what difficulties their fathers had to wrestle with in accomplishing the first beginnings; And how God ultimately brought them through, notwithstanding all their weaknesses and infirmities; And that some use may be made of them later, by God.”

John Robinson wrote:

“Lastly, you are to become a body politic, administering among yourselves civil government, and are furnished with persons of no special eminence above the rest, from whom you elect some to take the office of government, that your wisdom and godliness appear, not only in choosing such persons as will entirely love and promote the common good, but also in yielding them all in due honor and obedience in their lawful administrations; not beholden in them their persons, but God's ordinance for your good; Nor being like the multitude, who honor a colorful coat more than either the virtuous mind of the wearer or the glorious ordinance of the Lord.”

His words would well to be applied today

“I do earnestly commend under your care and conscience, joining with my daily incessant prayers unto the Lord, that he whose Providence is over all his works, especially over all his dear children for our lead by the hand of his power, that both you and we may praise his name all the days of our lives.”

Departure from Southampton

On July 27th, 1620, they Departed from Southampton, England with two ships, the Mayflower, and the Speedwell. The Speedwell took on water and they put in at Dartmouth to have it mended, which was done at great expense, loss of time, and a fair wind. She was thoroughly mended from stem to stern, and it was believed she might be able to proceed without danger. So, with good hope they set to

sea again, thinking they would go comfortably on without any more hindrances. But after they had gone 100 leagues beyond Land's End the captain of the Speedwell complained that she was so leaky that he must bear up or sink at sea, for they could scarcely keep her afloat. So, they consulted again and both ships resolved to bear up again and put into Plymouth which accordingly was done. No leak could be found but it was judged to be the general weakness of the ship and she would not prove equal to the voyage. Upon which it was resolved to dismiss her, and only part of the passengers proceed to America with the Mayflower, which caused great discouragement.

In his journals Bradford observed that the Speedwell seemed overmasted, thus putting strain on the hull, and he attributed her leaking to crew members who had deliberately caused it, allowing them to abandon their yearlong commitments. Passenger Robert Cushman wrote the leaking was caused by a loose board.

Finally departing from Plymouth, England Sept 6th, 1620

The Mayflower put to sea again with 102 passengers and a prosperous wind, which continued for several days. It was an encouragement to them, though many were afflicted with seasickness.

Governor Bradford wrote: *"I must not omit to mention here a special example of God's Providence. There is an insolent and very profane young man, one of the sailors, who is always harassing the poor people in their sickness, and cursing them daily, he did not hesitate to tell them he hoped to throw half of them overboard before they the journeys end. If he were gently reproved by anyone, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half the sea over, to smite the young man with a grievous disease, of*

which he died in a desperate manner, and so he was the first to be thrown overboard. Thus, the curses fell upon his own head which astonished all his mates for they saw this was the just hand of God upon him.”

He also shared:

“Once, as they were tossing in a terrible storm, a strong young man, named John Howland (also my ancestor), coming on deck was thrown into the sea; but God saw that he caught hold of the top sail halyards which hung overboard and ran out at length. He kept his hold, though he was several fathoms under the water, till he was hauled up by the rope and then boat hooked into the ship and saved. Though he was somewhat ill from that he lived many years and became a profitable member of the church and Commonwealth. In all the voyage only one of the passenger’s died, and that was William button, a youth and servant to Samuel Fuller when they were nearing the coast.”

Initially the trip went smoothly, but underway they met with strong winds and storms one of these caused the main beam to crack, and the possibility was considered to turn back even though they were more than halfway to their destination. However, they repaired the ship efficiently to continue, by using a great iron screw bought along by the colonists, (probably a Jack used for either house construction or cider press).

Stephen Hopkins wife Elizabeth had a baby boy born on board the Mayflower enroute between September 6th and November 9th. His name was Oceanus. Now there were 103 passengers on the Mayflower. He survived the first winter in Plymouth but died in 1627.

They Arrived in the New World November 11th, 1620

After a long beating at sea, connecting with Cape Cod, at which they were very joyful. But, due to the delayed departure of the Mayflower from Plymouth, England and the prevailing winds and storms which blew them off course they arrived north of their planned route to the land grant near Hudson Bay. They turned and headed South, right into Pollock's Rip, a stretch of dangerous sea just off southern Cape Cod. They nearly shipwrecked but after a day and a half of tense and dangerous maneuvers managed to break the Mayflower free and get the ship turned around and headed north again. They were happy to get out of danger before night overtook them, and by God's Providence they did. They next day they got into the bay where they rode in safely.

They anchored near what is now Providence Town and having found a good haven and being brought safely insight of land, they fell on their knees and blessed the God of heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean and delivered them from perils and miseries, again to set their feet upon the firm and stable earth.

William Brewster led them in reading Psalm 100 as a prayer of Thanksgiving.

On November 18th, 1620, less than a month later, while her husband was ashore exploring, Dorothy Bradford tragically drowned in the freezing waters of the harbor after falling overboard from the Mayflower. Dorothy had a three-year-old son while living in the Netherlands and boarded the Mayflower in 1620 ready to sail towards a new life. All her hopes and dreams for a bright future were snatched away in one tragic moment that would leave her husband, William, a widower, and her son without a mother.

In 1623 William Bradford remarried to Alice Southworth (Carpenter) and the couple had three children, William, Mercy, and Joseph, all of whom survived to adulthood and married.

On Nov 26th, 1620, The Mayflower Compact was signed.

The patent gave the company the right to govern a colony of Virginia. But did not give them the right to govern a colony in New England. If they did not have the authority to govern a colony, what would stop the colonists from picking up and leaving? Without the right to govern the company and the colony, they could not move forward.

The pilgrims arrived at a very novel solution since their authority to govern could not be securely established by the rights granted to them by the English crown, they would draw up a legal contract that every adult male in the colony would sign to acknowledge and authorize their governors and government. They would individually agree and sign to recognize that government. Then nobody could deny the authority of the colonies elected governor and council. This document has come to be known as the Mayflower compact, which states:

“For the Good of the Colony unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.” The Compact organized them into was called a civil body politic, in which issues could be decided by voting, the key ingredient to democracy. John Carver was chosen as the first governor. It was John Carver who chartered the Mayflower and his is the first signature on the Mayflower Compact.

Continuing, their shallop sailed for Plymouth harbor, they were caught in a violent storm in which the rudder was ripped off and the mast broken. But as God’s providence would have it they were able to use oars to ground the shallop on what is known as Clark’ Island. Named after the shipmaster, John Clark, whose efforts saved them.

Dec 16th, 1620

The Founding of Plymouth Colony

After much searching and attacks by Indians, they discovered a harbor, took a view of the land, in what is today called Plymouth Colony, named after their final departure port of Plymouth, England. They resolved where to pitch their dwellings; and on Dec 25th, 1620, Christmas Day, they began to construct the Common House, which was completed on January 9th, 1621. Then each family built their own dwelling. Supplies were brought ashore, and the settlement was mostly complete by early February. When the first house was finished it immediately became a hospital for the ill pilgrims. 31 of the company were dead by the end of February, with deaths still rising. Cole's Hill became the first cemetery, on a prominence above the beach, and the graves were allowed to overgrow for fear that the Indians would discover how the weakened settlement had become.

Between the landing and March, only 47 colonists had survived the diseases they contracted on the ship. During the worst of sickness, only six or seven of the group were able to feed and care for the rest. During this time half of the Mayflower crew also died.

Gov. Bradford said:

"I cannot help but think of conditions these poor people faced having crossed a vast ocean, and a sea of troubles, they had no friends to welcome them, no Inns entertain and refresh their weather-beaten bodies, no houses, or towns to welcome them."

William Bradford became governor upon the death of John Carver. On March 22nd, 1621, the pilgrims of Plymouth colony signed a peace treaty with Massasoit of the Wampanoags.

The First Thanksgiving

Success followed and following a bumper harvest the colonists decided to celebrate with a three-day festival of prayer in the autumn of 1621. The 47 surviving settlers invited their Native Americans friends to join them for a huge feast in what was to become known as the first Thanksgiving.

By Edward Winslow's account

"Our corn did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth gathering, for we feared they were too late sown. They came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom. Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

The Fate of Plymouth Colony

The patent of Plymouth colony was surrendered by Governor William Bradford to the patent holders in 1640, minus a small reserve of three tracks of land. Governor Bradford was elected 31 times, served for 11 consecutive years, only missing 5 years until his death in 1657.

Eventually the patent holders went on to found their own communities and the colony began to struggle. The King Phillips war with the Indians did not help, and after a colonial governor was appointed to rule over New England in 1692, Plymouth was absorbed into Massachusetts.

In his book "Plimouth Plantation" William Bradford writes:

"What, then, could now sustain them but the spirit of God, and his grace? Are not the children of their fathers right when they say: our fathers were Englishmen who came over the great ocean and are ready to the perish in the wilderness. They cried to the Lord, and he heard their voice and stilled at their adversary. Let them therefore praise the Lord because he is good, and his mercies endure forever. He let those who have been redeemed by the Lord show how he has delivered them from the land of their oppressor. When they wandered forth into the desert wilderness, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty their soul is overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before the Lord his loving kindness His wonderful works before the sons of men!"

