

## PURITAN NEW ENGLAND

"Pilgrims" are people who make a journey for religious reasons. But for Americans the word has a special meaning. To them it means a small group of English men and women who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in the year 1620. The group's members came to be called the Pilgrims because they went to America to find religious freedom. Sometimes Americans call them the Pilgrim Fathers. This is because they see them as the most important of the founders of the future United States of America.

The Europe that the Pilgrims left behind them was torn by religious quarrels. For more than a thousand years Roman Catholic Christianity had been the religion of most of its people. By the sixteenth century, however, some Europeans had begun to doubt the teachings of the Catholic Church. They were also growing angry at the wealth and worldly pride of its leaders.

Early in the century a German monk named Martin Luther quarreled with these leaders. He claimed that individual human beings did not need the Pope or the priests of the Catholic Church to enable them to speak to God. A few years later a French lawyer named John Calvin put forward similar ideas. Calvin claimed that each individual was directly and personally responsible to God. Because they protested against the teachings and customs of the Catholic Church, religious reformers like Luther and Calvin were called "Protestants." Their ideas spread quickly through northern Europe.

Few people believed in religious toleration at this time. In most countries people were expected to have the same religion as their ruler. This was the case in England. In the 1530s the English king, Henry VIII, formed a national church with himself as its head. In the later years of the sixteenth century many English people believed that this Church of England was still too much like the Catholic Church. They disliked the power of its bishops. They disliked its elaborate ceremonies and the rich decorations of its churches. They also questioned many of its teachings. Such people wanted the Church of England to become

more plain and simple, or "pure." Because of this they were called Puritans. The ideas of John Calvin appealed particularly strongly to them.

When James I became King of England in 1603 he warned the Puritans that he would drive them from the land if they did not accept his ideas on religion. His bishops began fining the Puritans and putting them in prison. To escape this persecution, a small group of them left England and went to Holland. Holland was the only country in Europe whose government allowed religious freedom at this time.

The people of Holland welcomed the little group of exiles. But the Puritans never felt at home there. After much thought and much prayer they decided to move again. Some of them – the Pilgrims – decided to go to America.

First they returned briefly to England. Here they persuaded the Virginia Company to allow them to settle in the northern part of its American lands. On September 16, 1620, the Pilgrims left the English

### The Mayflower Compact

When the Pilgrims arrived off the coast of America they faced many dangers and difficulties. They did not want to put themselves in further danger by quarreling with one another. Before landing at Plymouth, therefore, they wrote out an agreement. In this document they agreed to work together for the good of all. The agreement was signed by all forty-one men on board the *Mayflower*. It became known as the Mayflower Compact. In the Compact the Plymouth settlers agreed to set up a government – a "civil body politic" – to make "just and equal laws" for their new settlement. All of them, Pilgrims and Strangers alike, promised that they would obey these laws. In the difficult years which followed, the Mayflower Compact served the colonists well. It is remembered today as one of the first important documents in the history of democratic government in America.



*The Pilgrim Fathers landing in America.*

port of Plymouth and headed for America. They were accompanied by a number of other emigrants they called “Strangers.”

The Pilgrims’ ship was an old trading vessel, the *Mayflower*. For years the *Mayflower* had carried wine across the narrow seas between France and England. Now it faced a much more dangerous voyage. For sixty-five days the *Mayflower* battled through the rolling waves of the north Atlantic Ocean. At last, on November 9, 1620, it reached Cape Cod, a sandy hook of land in what is now the state of Massachusetts.

Cape Cod is far to the north of the land granted to the Pilgrims by the Virginia Company. But the Pilgrims did not have enough food and water, and many were sick. They decided to land at the best place they could find. On December 21, 1620, they rowed ashore and set up camp at a place they named Plymouth.

“The season it was winter,” wrote one of their leaders, “and those who know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent with cruel and fierce storms.” The Pilgrims’ chances of surviving were not high. The frozen ground and the deep snow made it difficult for them to build houses. They had very little food. Before spring came, half of the little group of a hundred settlers were dead.

But the Pilgrims were determined to succeed. The fifty survivors built better houses. They learned how to fish and hunt. Friendly Amerindians gave them seed corn and showed them how to plant it. It was not the end of their hardships, but when a ship arrived in Plymouth in 1622 and offered to take passengers back to England, not one of the Pilgrims accepted.

Other English Puritans followed the Pilgrims to America. Ten years later a much larger group of almost a thousand colonists settled nearby in what became the Boston area. These people left England to escape the rule of a new king, Charles I. Charles was even less tolerant than his father James had been of people who disagreed with his policies in religion and government.

The Boston settlement prospered from the start. Its population grew quickly as more and more Puritans left England to escape persecution. Many years later, in 1691, it combined with the Plymouth colony under the name of Massachusetts.

The ideas of the Massachusetts Puritans had a lasting influence on American society. One of their first leaders, John Winthrop, said that they should build an ideal community for the rest of mankind to learn from. “We shall be like a city on a hill,” said

Winthrop. "The eyes of all people are upon us." To this day many Americans continue to see their country in this way, as a model for other nations to copy.

The Puritans of Massachusetts believed that governments had a duty to make people obey God's will. They passed laws to force people to attend church and laws to punish drunks and adulterers. Even men who let their hair grow long could be in trouble.

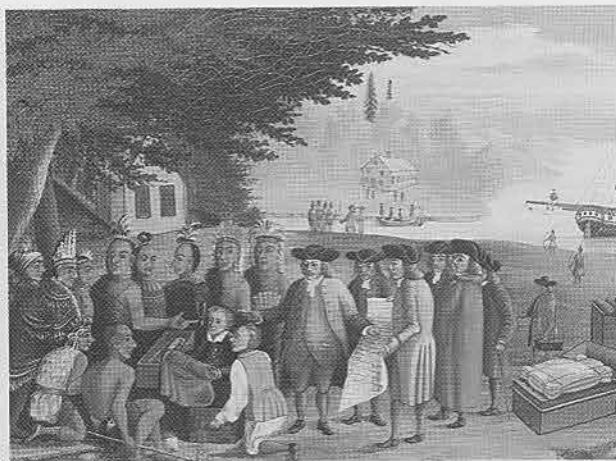
Roger Williams, a Puritan minister in a settlement called Salem, believed that it was wrong to run the affairs of Massachusetts in this way. He objected particularly to the fact that the same men controlled both the church and the government. Williams believed that church and state should be separate and that neither should interfere with the other.

Williams' repeated criticisms made the Massachusetts leaders angry. In 1535 they sent men to arrest him. But Williams escaped and went south, where he was joined by other discontented people from Massachusetts. On the shores of Narragansett Bay Williams and his followers set up a new colony called Rhode Island. Rhode Island promised its citizens complete religious freedom and separation of church and state. To this day these ideas are still very important to Americans.

The leaders of Massachusetts could not forgive the people of Rhode Island for thinking so differently from themselves. They called the breakaway colony "the land of the opposite-minded."



*Plymouth Puritans going to church.*



*William Penn signing a treaty with the Amerindians.*

By the end of the seventeenth century a string of English colonies stretched along the east coast of North America. More or less in the middle was Pennsylvania. This was founded in 1681 by William Penn. Under a charter from the English king, Charles II, Penn was the proprietor, or owner, of Pennsylvania.

Penn belonged to a religious group, the Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers. Quakers refused to swear oaths or to take part in wars. These customs had helped to make them very unpopular with English governments. When Penn promised his fellow Quakers that in Pennsylvania they would be free to follow their own ways, many of them emigrated there.

Penn's promise of religious freedom, together with his reputation for dealing fairly with people, brought settlers from other European countries to Pennsylvania. From Ireland came settlers who made new farms in the western forests of the colony. Many Germans came also. Most were members of small religious groups who had left Germany to escape persecution. They were known as the Pennsylvania Dutch. This was because English people at this time called most north Europeans "Dutch."

New York had previously been called New Amsterdam. It had first been settled in 1626. In 1664 the English captured it from the Dutch and re-named it New York. A few years later, in 1670, the English founded the new colonies of North and South Carolina. The last English colony to be founded in North America was Georgia, settled in 1733.



## Thanksgiving

Every year on the fourth Thursday in November Americans celebrate a holiday called Thanksgiving. The first people to celebrate this day were the Pilgrims. In November, 1621, they sat down to eat together and to give thanks to God for enabling them to survive the hardships of their first year in America.

*The first Thanksgiving.*



The Pilgrims were joined at their feast by local Amerindians. The Wampanoag and Pequamid people of the nearby forests had shared corn with the Pilgrims and shown them the best places to catch fish. Later the Amerindians had given seed corn to the English settlers and shown them how to plant crops that would grow well in the American soil. Without them there would have been no Thanksgiving.

## Minuit buys Manhattan

In the 1620s settlers from Holland founded a colony they called New Netherlands along the banks of the Hudson River. At the mouth of the Hudson lies Manhattan Island, the present site of New York City. An Amerindian people called the Shinnecock used the island for hunting and fishing, although they did not live on it.

In 1626 Peter Minuit, the first Dutch governor of the New Netherlands, "bought" Manhattan from the Shinnecock. He paid them about twenty-four dollars' worth of cloth, beads and other trade

goods. Like all Amerindians, the Shinnecock believed that land belonged to all men. They thought that what they were selling to the Dutch was the right to share Manhattan with themselves. But the Dutch, like other Europeans, believed that buying land made it theirs alone.

These different beliefs about land ownership were to be a major cause of conflict between Europeans and Amerindians for many years to come. And the bargain price that Peter Minuit paid for Manhattan Island became part of American folklore.