

The New England Colonists: The Pilgrims and Puritans

In the month of September in the year 1620 a ship called the Mayflower, that was docked at the English port of Plymouth, loaded on for a long voyage. For the ship had to be ready to carry 102 people across the Atlantic Ocean to America; half of these people were religious rebels who we now call the pilgrims.

But why did the pilgrims want to travel to such a far distant land?

The answer is they wanted to start a colony where they could freely practice their religion.

But the pilgrims belonged to a group called the separatists, who felt they needed to separate themselves from the Church of England to worship God as they saw it.

Ten years after they started the Plymouth colony in New England, the pilgrims were joined in America by another religious group called the puritans. The puritans wanted the Church of England to be poorer and simpler than it was, but they didn't want to separate from it.

The puritans and the separatist pilgrims had many of the same ideas about religion, but they were also different from one another. Still, both groups were very important to the history of the United States, because their ideas and ways of doing things helped to shape how our country developed.

Now let us return to the Europe of 500 years ago and learn about the great changes in religion that brought about the strict beliefs of puritans and pilgrims, beliefs that finally made them come to America.

The first thing to know about the puritans and pilgrims is that they were Protestants, but 500 years ago, all the Christians in the western part of Europe were Roman Catholics. But some Roman Catholics wanted to change their Church; these people became known as Protestants and the changes they brought about came to be called "the Protestant Reformation".

The Protestants thought the Catholics were wrong about a lot of things. For instance, Catholics believed that their leader, the pope, could make important religious laws, but the Protestants did not, believing that only the Bible could be trusted for such things.

English Protestants belonged to the Church of England and this religion was quite a bit like the old Roman Catholic faith and later on, some people thought this was wrong.

In the 1530s, around the same time that this man, King Henry VIII, started the Church of England, a French man named John Calvin was busy creating a third protestant faith and it was Calvin's ideas on religion that had the most to do with shaping the beliefs of the puritans and pilgrims.

John Calvin started what we call the reformed churches and these churches were found only on the mainland of Europe, not in England.

People who joined the reformed churches thought that the Roman Catholics were not following the plan that Christ had in mind for his believers. That was why they destroyed religious objects such as statues, steel glasses windows, because they believed that Christ wanted his true religion to be simple and very strict.

In England, certain people really liked Calvin's ideas on religion and they decided they wanted to follow his example and purify the Church of England by getting rid of all traces of the Catholic faith. This is the reason why they started to be called puritans.

Most puritans didn't want to leave the Church of England. Instead, they hoped that by working as church members they could change all the things they found wrong with it, such as religious artwork, priests and Catholic ceremonies.

But one group of puritans felt they had to separate from the Church of England to follow their religious beliefs. They were called separatists, the people than later became known as the pilgrims. Many separatists, including most of those who started the Plymouth colony in what is today the state of Massachusetts, came from a few tiny farming towns not far from here, in the misty northern part of England.

In fact William Brewster, the man who led the congregation of the Plymouth colony, attended this church in the tiny village of Scrooby 50 years before he led his first religious services in New England. And the man who became the second governor of the Plymouth colony, William Bradford, was baptised in this church in a village nearby.

In 1603, after the queen died, the English people got a new ruler, king James I.

Right after he was made king, James ordered all private religious services to stop and made it a crime not to belong to the Church of England.

The puritans and the separatists beg the king to allow them freedom of religion, but he swore he would drive them out of England if they didn't obey his command.

Because of this, many separatists were forced to leave their churches and meet secretly in houses such as this one, in the English town of Gainsborough.

But, after they got caught having an illegal religious service, many separatists decided to sell off their homes and move to Holland, where they could worship God as they saw it.

So, in 1607 the pilgrims set off on foot across 60 miles of open countryside, beginning an amazing journey that finally ended up 13 years later in America.

First, they headed here to Boston, on the English seacoast, where a ship was supposed to take them across the North Sea to Holland. But the shipmaster turned them over to the police; they were jailed in this building, the Boston Guildhall, and their leaders were kept here for one month before being released. But the pilgrims did not give up easily, so they tried again. And in 1608 headed to Holland. That they really nervous felt at home here. So after only nine years the pilgrims decided to move to England's new America colony of Virginia, where they could have more freedom to follow their religious ideas, speak their own language that have a chance to gain economic security. And soon the pilgrims got a company of merchants from here in London to give them the money they needed to start their new community. But in return, they had to agree to give the company; happen everything being made during their first seven years in America. Once everything was ready. The pilgrims left Holland in their ship the *speedway* and headed back to England to meet up with the second ship the *Mayflower*; that was supposed to carry other colonists. People who were separatist to Virginia. But the *Mayflower* had to be specially prepared to carry both groups have colonists; because the speed will eat soap and it wasn't certain. Finally, all the work was done and in September 1620, the *Mayflower* was ready to (?) and head off from (?) to America. It was stormy crossing the Atlantic Ocean, it took two months. And because the ship sailed further north than planned, the first land the pilgrim saw was not Virginia at all, but the Cape Cod in New England. When they realized they had come to a place for English laws were not obeyed, they decided to establish their own government and make their own laws. It was while a (?) not far from here in Cape Cod Bay, that 41 men in the ship signed what we now call the *Mayflower compact*. In it for the first time in the history of America, people agreed to a simple kind of democratic self-government. In the compact they sign before ever going ashore, they agreed to make and obey just and equal laws; that would be in the overall best interest of the Plymouth Colony. Because the colonists landed in November, it was too cold to plant crops right away and during that first winter, half of them died because of the poor living conditions. Later in the spring, they begin to farm. A few native people those who had survived the diseases earlier European visitors brought with them. Showed the pilgrims how to grow corn and how to fertilize the seeds with small fish they caught in the bay. In the autumn of 1621, the Plymouth Colony celebrated their excellent crops and the colonies great progress with a three-day festival including games and a feast. Such harvest feasts were nothing new to the Plymouth colonists, but when they were farmers back in England, they always celebrated harvest home festivals after the year's crops were in and this is where the idea for our modern day holiday Thanksgiving came from. Today we think that the Thanksgiving meal as having Turkey as its main course and while it's true that the pilgrims ate turkey at their first harvest feast; they also

served up ducks and seafood from the base such as clams, eels and fish. Plus their meat, brought by the native people who attended the feast and from the corn they had just harvested, they made cornbread. It is interesting to know that 168 years later President George Washington passed a law that made November 26th a day of national Thanksgiving, partly to honour the memory of the Plymouth pilgrims. The Plymouth Colony still little houses like beans that looked a lot like those they had known back home in England. Logs cut from the forest nearby were carefully measured and shaped into strong wooden beams for the frames at the house is; now other logs were pried apart to make the boards used for the walls of the houses that helped keep the rain and snow away. Their houses had thatched roofs, made from the reeds that the colonists cut from the marshes and laid out carefully to dry. On the inside, their houses were cosy and fairly comfortable, but very small. New Plymouth was well defended for all the houses were built behind tall walls sharpened logs. Overlooking the town, this building, a combination fort in meetinghouse, held cannons ready to defend the colony from attack; well its first floor was simply one big rumour town meetings, trials and religious services were held. On Sunday everyone had to attend religious services, they sat in front of this pulpit and listen to sermons; services could last up to 8 hours and on the Lord's Day the village was very quiet as all activities even cooking stopped. The pilgrims strict believes did not even allow them to celebrate Christmas, but except for Sundays New Plymouth was a busy place; it was not unusual to find men building new houses, feeding the animals, breaking out pins and putting up log fences. All women working in gardens keeping an eye on their children as they played nearby, as the laundry dried in the sunshine. Well others passed the time of day simply sharing stories with one another and so it was that by 1627 New Plymouth had become home to 180 souls. Two years later, in the year 1629, a new king, Charles the first, ruled in England; he did not like the Puritans, but still he allowed them to start a second colony just to the north of New Plymouth's, along the wooded sure Massachusetts bay. Soon a great migration puritans began, they poured into New England hoping to find freedom to follow their religious ideas and to build a model community for all the world to see. Ten years later while 2500 lived at the pilgrim colony. Applying 20000 lived at Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony. By 1650, the colonies of Connecticut New Heaven and Rhode Island had sprouted in New England as well in all these colonies. People's lives were watched over very closely by strict ministers and if they did something sinful, the ministers served as judges as well and believing it was a sign that God's grace was with them. The Puritans and separatist colonist worked harder than most other people and this help make their colonies strong here and sergeants. Just outside Boston the Puritans started the first factory in America, that made things with iron, the sagas ironwork used water power to keep the fighters needed to know the iron is hot as possible and water power was also used to look the huge him a used pair only hired into special shapes. As time went by her puritanism, power got weaker and weaker but in Salem Massachusetts in the year 1692, its strict laws were still stronger enough to bring about Henan deaths, a 19 women. Puritan's judges had convicted bean which is you may wonder whatever happened to the separatist in Puritan. The fact is over the next few centuries they changed and their religion that was now called congregation Alison, got a lot less stripped and it is interesting to know that many of the beautiful wait steeple Congregational Church are found in New England Terms today can trace their beginnings back to return when they were separatist and Puritan meeting houses.