



Who Were the Passengers of the *Mayflower*?

The story of the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the founding of Plymouth Colony is one of courage and perseverance, triumph as well as tragedy. 102 passengers, over half of whom were women and children, and approximately 20-30 crew members sailed from Plymouth, England on 6 September 1620 and endured 65 days of storm-tossed seas and increasingly cold weather aboard a small, aging vessel that was never designed for the open ocean. Crammed into tight, dank spaces with little privacy and almost no means of controlling the unsanitary conditions or the dwindling of supplies, sickness began to spread throughout the ship. By the time the *Mayflower* spotted land on 9 November 1620 two people were already dead and more were soon to follow. Before the first year of the colony had ended, more than half of those who arrived were dead, most during the first few months of the harsh New England winter.

Who were these people, why did they leave the world they knew behind them to carve out a new life in a mostly unknown wilderness, and who left descendants?

One-half to two-thirds of the passengers were part of a Separatist congregation in Leiden, Holland who had left England in order to practice their faith in a way that was not sanctioned by the Church of England. However, after ten years in Holland, the group decided that Leiden was no longer the haven they hoped it would be and decided to start their own colony across the Atlantic in the New World. This decision, while made primarily for religious reasons, was also influenced by a mixture of political, economic, social, and cultural factors. The remaining passengers, often referred to as “Strangers,” were primarily influenced by economic motives and the dream of opportunities not available to many in England.

Before the end of 1621, 54 of the 102 passengers had died, primarily from sickness made worse by the harsh conditions they endured, scurvy, and malnutrition. While few of the family groups remained unscathed and several entire families were wiped out, 51 passengers left at least one descendant to carry on the family name. The General Society of Mayflower Descendants allows membership into their organization for those able to prove lineage to these passengers.

If you have one of the following 25 surnames in your ancestry, you too may find one of these passengers in your family history [Note: There are multiple spelling variations for many of these surnames]:

- Alden
- Allerton
- Billington
- Bradford
- Brewster
- Brown
- Chilton
- Cooke
- Doty
- Eaton
- Fletcher
- Fuller
- Hopkins
- Howland
- More
- Mullins
- Priest
- Rogers
- Samson
- Soule
- Standish
- Tilley
- Warren
- White
- Winslow



Sources and Selected Resources for Further Research

Below are some of the many books written about the *Mayflower*, the Pilgrims, and the founding of Plymouth Colony. While far from comprehensive, this list provides a good starting point for research.

PRIMARY RESOURCES

- Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation*. (1651) – Written over a period of years by Plymouth Colony's second governor, this is a first-person account of the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the founding of the colony which has become one of the primary sources for the Pilgrim story.
- Winslow, Edward. *Good Newes from New England*. (1624)
- -----, George Morton, and others. *Mourt's Relation: A Relation or Journal of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New England*. (1622) – Winslow's writings, in addition to Bradford's, provide a rare first-person account of the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the earliest history of the colony.

GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES

- Anderson, Robert Charles. *The Mayflower Migration: Immigrants to Plymouth, 1620*. (2020) – Background information on who the passengers of the *Mayflower* were and why they came, with expanded biographical sketches from one of today's most preeminent Great Migration scholars.
- Bangs, Jeremy Dupertuis. *Strangers and Pilgrims, Travellers and Sojourners: Leiden and the Foundations of Plymouth Plantation*. (2009) – Bangs has uncovered significant, new details about the Pilgrims during their time in Leiden, Holland.
- *Caleb Johnson's MayflowerHistory.com* (website – <http://mayflowerhistory.com>)
- General Society of Mayflower Descendants. *Mayflower Families Through Five Generations: Descendants of the Pilgrims Who Landed at Plymouth, Mass., December 1620*. (1999+) – This multi-volume set, often referred to as the "Silver Books," provides some of the most authoritative genealogies for the descendants of the *Mayflower* passengers.
- The Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants. *The Mayflower Descendant* (journal).
- The Mayflower Society: General Society of Mayflower Descendants. (<https://www.themayflowersociety.org>) – If you want to know more about the passengers of the *Mayflower* or are a descendant interested in joining the society, this website is a great resource.
- The Mayflower Society: General Society of Mayflower Descendants. *The Mayflower Quarterly* (journal).
- Roser, Susan E. *Mayflower Births & Deaths*. (1992)
Mayflower Deeds & Probates. (1994)
Mayflower Increaseings. (1995)
Mayflower Marriages. (1990)

GENERAL RESOURCES

- Bunker, Nick. *Making Haste from Babylon: The Mayflower Pilgrims and Their World: A New History*. (2010)
- Fraser, Rebecca. *The Mayflower: The Families, the Voyage, and the Founding of America*. (2017)
- Milbrandt, Jay. *They Came for Freedom: The Forgotten, Epic Adventure of the Pilgrims*. (2017)
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. (2006)
- Silverman, David J. *This Land is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving*. (2019)
- Stratton, Eugene Aubrey. *Plymouth Colony, It's History & People, 1620-1690*. (1986)
- Whittock, Martyn. *Mayflower Lives: Pilgrims in a New World and the Early American Experience*. (2019)