



PLIMOTH  
PLANTATION

Contact: Nicole K. Logan  
(508) 746-1622 x8206  
[nlogan@plimoth.org](mailto:nlogan@plimoth.org)

## Mayflower II Background, 2010

Over fifty years ago, the concept of building a *Mayflower II* became a reality at the hands of a consortium of individuals dedicated to a range of aims: stimulating interest in the icon of American History that was the *Mayflower* of the Pilgrims; reinvigorating Anglo-American cultural relations after World War II; celebrating the venerable ship-building tradition of the English West Country; and, pushing limits in the emerging field of experimental archaeology. The then-new living history museum, Plimoth Plantation, and an English organization, Project *Mayflower*, Ltd. negotiated the idea of building a reproduction of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century merchant ship, sailing it from England to America, and exhibiting the vessel in Plymouth. Through the mid-nineteen-fifties, crews on both sides of the Atlantic were drawn into the massive effort to design, build, fund and promote this unprecedented project. International interest was piqued by press coverage of the preparations for the voyage, the individual stories of many of the sailors, and the more dramatic moments of the sail itself.

Now sailing only occasionally, but still with much fanfare, *Mayflower II* spends most of her days docked at the State Pier in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where she plays host to hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. In a highly interactive program, costumed role-players tell the story of the passengers and crew of the 1620 *Mayflower* from a seventeenth-century English perspective, addressing diverse topics: in-Colony politics and gossip, reasons for immigration, shipboard food and health, and recent adventures on Cape Cod, to name a few examples. Other guides fill in the narrative from a modern perspective, addressing the broader sweep of European colonization of Native lands, the fate of Plymouth Colony, the building and sailing of *Mayflower II*, and historic sailing and navigation technologies. Often on hand are the skilled artisans who must carry out a continual restoration of the ship's antique hull, spars, and rigging; this challenging work connects *Mayflower II* to New England's centuries-old maritime tradition.

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### About the 1620 Colonists

*Mayflower II* is a re-creation of the famous ship that in 1620 brought colonists to what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. Compared to the other European sea-faring nations, England had been sluggish about establishing or even investing in colonies in the Americas. By the time



*Wampanoag Homesite*



*Mayflower II*



*1627 English Village*

[www.plimoth.org](http://www.plimoth.org)

P.O. Box 1620  
Plymouth, MA 02362

tel. 508-746-1622  
fax 508-830-6024

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of the *Mayflower*, Spain, Portugal, and France had decades of experience exploiting the resources and peoples of the "New World". Some of their colonial efforts were a century old by the time the English colony at Jamestown, Virginia, got its shaky start in 1607.

At about the same time that the Virginia Company was organizing its initial voyage, the group that would ultimately form the political core of the *Mayflower* passengers was first stirring up trouble in Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, England. This small group of religious dissidents treasonously gathered together to establish their own church, separate from the national Church of England. These Separatists, often referred to today as "the Pilgrims", chose to leave England to seek refuge under the more tolerant government of the Netherlands.

Life in Holland was a struggle for immigrants, and these in particular foresaw with dread the assimilation of their children into Dutch culture and the decline of their community into utter poverty. After twelve years in exile a faction sought to move once again; they gained financial backing from some London merchants or "adventurers" (speculators) to set up a colony in America. With permission from King James I, the Virginia Company granted them a charter to establish a fishing colony near the mouth of the Hudson River.

The London investors recruited other potential colonists, acquired shipping, and provisioned the voyage. After many troubles and delays, *Mayflower* departed Plymouth, England on September 6, 1620. A stormy passage was concluded as Cape Cod was sighted on November 9, and two days later *Mayflower* anchored at what is now Provincetown Harbor. An attempt to sail around Cape Cod to make for Hudson River was rebuffed by the dangerous sailing conditions. With winter coming on, it was decided to settle locally, even though it meant an abrogation of their charter. This conclusion was not without controversy among the colonists, and resulted, after some "mutinous speeches", in the signing of the politically binding document now known as the "Mayflower Compact". Groups of men were sent out on foot and by boat to explore the region for a safe haven. Eventually they selected the seemingly vacant site of the Wampanoag town of Patuxet for settlement, and began construction work on New Plymouth on December 25, 1620. *Mayflower* remained anchored in Plymouth Bay throughout a terrible winter in which half the passengers and crew died of sickness. Also during the winter, the Wampanoag leader Massasoit, whose people had recently suffered an

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even more terrible decimation by disease, established contact with Plymouth through intermediaries. *Mayflower* departed for her return voyage to England on April 5, 1621.

#### What is Known of the Original Vessel

William Bradford, in his History of Plimoth Plantation, gives the *Mayflower* and her passage very short shrift, stating only that a ship "was hired at London, of burthen about nine scoure". Fragments of further information about the ship and voyage emerge from the text,

however. For example, the report that one of the passengers, upon falling overboard during a storm, caught hold of a topsail halyard, confirms that the ship was rigged with topsails, and indicates that all the passengers did not spend the entire voyage closed up in the hold of the ship. The account of a boy's mischief with gunpowder in his family's "cabin" reveals that partitions were made below decks to house and protect passenger groups.

A few key pieces of information – the names of the ship and her master – aided in identifying the colonists' ship in Port of London records as *Mayflower* of Harwich, whose master was Christopher Jones. Notations in the Port Books also indicate a little about *Mayflower's* career before 1620. She went on at least one voyage to Norway, carrying hats, hemp, Spanish salt, hops, vinegar and Gascon wine, returning to London with tar, pine planks and herring. More frequently, she carried cloth to Rochelle in France and returned with wine.

After *Mayflower's* return to England in May of 1621, she was again involved in trade between London and France. The last mention in the Port Books occurred on October 31, 1621 and her master, Christopher Jones, is known to have died in early 1622. On May 26, 1624, an application was received by the High Court of Admiralty from *Mayflower's* remaining owners (including the widow of Christopher Jones), declaring the ship to be "in ruinis" and requesting an appraisement. She was valued at 128 English pounds, 8 shillings and 4 pence. This was the last recorded reference.

#### A Re-Creation: The History of *Mayflower II*

In 1951, Plimoth Plantation commissioned plans for a *Mayflower II* from naval architect William A. Baker of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Baker's meticulously accurate plans had been completed, and a waterline model of the hull had been built, when an English organization called Project *Mayflower* contacted Plimoth Plantation with a proposal. By the spring of 1955, the two organizations were agreed to a mutually advantageous agreement: in exchange for the use of Mr. Baker's design and advice, and a guarantee that Plimoth

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Plantation would permanently maintain and exhibit the vessel, Project *Mayflower* agreed to build *Mayflower II*, sail it across the Atlantic and turn the ship over to the museum.

Construction of *Mayflower II* was undertaken at Upham shipyard in Brixham, Devonshire, England. Her keel was laid on July 27, 1955, and William A. Baker was sent by Plimoth Plantation to consult with the builders and observe the progress of the ship's construction. Under the direction of Stuart Upham, West-Country ships' carpenters employed their traditional skills to build a vessel that would reflect Mr. Baker's thorough research and could sail the Atlantic as securely as the original ship had. Great pains were taken to make the ship as accurate as possible, from the carefully selected English oak timbers to the hand-sewn linen canvas sails, true hemp cordage, hand-forged nails and Stockholm tar of the sort used on 17<sup>th</sup>-century ships.

The hull of *Mayflower II* was launched on September 22, 1956, and the finished ship departed Plymouth, England on April 20, 1957. Under the experienced command of Captain Alan Villiers, *Mayflower II* made her transatlantic crossing entirely under sail, without an engine and unescorted. In the interest of time and safety, Captain Villiers chose to take a more southerly route than that of the 1620 voyage, and in compliance with regulations, he deployed a modern wheel, binnacle, generator, and radio.

Well-documented in both *National Geographic* and *Life* magazines, *Mayflower II's* eventful voyage included a becalming in the lower latitudes, and a violent storm off Bermuda. The ship sailed safely by Nantucket Lightship on June 11, and arrived at Provincetown on the tip of Cape Cod the following day, where the first *Mayflower* had spent her first month in New England. *Mayflower II* finally arrived at Plymouth before noon the morning of June 13, to the excitement of the great crowd of eager spectators. The historic 55-day voyage was over.

Since 1990, Plimoth Plantation has laid greater emphasis on *Mayflower II* as an active sailing vessel, developing an ongoing restoration plan for the ship and training volunteers in sailing and other maritime projects. In July of 2007 *Mayflower II* celebrated her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a memorable afternoon sail in Cape Cod Bay. Onboard were 7 members of the original 1957 crew who sailed the ship to America from England over 50 years ago. When the ship returned to Plymouth, the shoreline was packed with thousands of well-wishers to welcome home the jewel of Plymouth Harbor.