

Dividing the Land and Development of Towns

“There was no longer any holding them together, but now they must of necessity go to their great lots ... they must have land for plowing & tillage.” - William Bradford

After two harvests the colony itself had decided that the task of raising food for the settlers would prosper only if it was separated from that of earning profits for London. In 1623 a parcel of land was allotted to each man to till for his family and to maintain those who were exempt from agricultural employment because of other duties. Each family was given one acre per family member.

In abandoning the “common course and condition” everyone worked harder and more willingly. The food problem was ended, and after the first abundant harvest under individual cultivation, the Pilgrims did not have to endure the meager rations of the first years. The plots assigned them permanently in 1624 became privately owned in 1627.

Three heifers and a bull sent over by the adventurers in response to Bradford's request thrived and multiplied, so there was cattle to be divided among the households when the general stock was terminated. (McIntyre)

Plymouth Colony Division of Land, 1623

As noted by Bradford,

... they began to think how they might raise as much corn as they could, and obtain a better crop than they had done, that they might not still thus languish in misery.

At length, after much debate of things, the Gov' (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go on in the general way as before.

And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number for that end, only for present use (but made no provision for inheritance), and ranged all boys and youth under some families.

This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Govt or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn, which before would have been a weakness, and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression.

Plymouth Colony Division of Land, 1627

The division of the land for personal use was considered again, in 1627. It was decided,

The 3d of January, 1627. It was agreed in a full court, about division of lands, as followeth:

1. That the first division of the acres should stand and continue firme, according to the former division made unto the possessors thereof and to their heirs forever : Free Liberty being Reserved for all to gett fire wood [thereon] but the Timber trees were excepted for the owners of the ground.

2ly. That the 2 division should consist of 20 acres to every person and to Contain five in breadth and four in length and so accordingly to be di[vided] by lott to every one which was to have share therein.

3 ly. The Ground to be judged sufficient before the Lots were drawne and the rest to be left to common use.

4ly. This being done, th3:t for our better subsistance and convenience those grounds which are nearest the Town, in whose lott soever they fall shall be used by the whole for the space of 4 years from the date hereof : vizt. first that the Right owner make choice of twice that quantity he shall or may [use] within the said terme and then to take to him such neighbours as shall have need and he think fitt ; but if they cannot agree then the Governour and Councill may appoint as they think meet : provided that the woods [be] ordered for felling and lopping according as the owner shall appo[int :] for neither fire wood nor other timber either for building or fen[cing] or any other use is to be felled or caryed off of any of these without the owners leave and license, but he is to preserve [them] to his best advantage.

5ly. That what soever the surveighers judge sufficient shall stand wi[thout] contradiction or opposition and every man shall Rest Contented [with] his lott.

6ly. That after the purchasers are served as aforesaid ; that then such p[lan]ters as are heirs to such as dyed before the Right of the land was [yield]ed to the Adventurers have also 20 acres a person proportionable to their Right Layed out in part of their Inheritance.

7ly. That first they shall begin where the acres of the first division end and Lay out that to the Eele River so far as shall be thought fitt by the Surveighors, and Returne to the north side of the Tow[n] and so proceed accordingly, and that they leave all great Tim[ber] swamps for common use.

8ly. That Fowling fishing and Hunting be free :

9ly. That the old path ways be still allowed and that eve[ry] man be allowed a conveanient way to the water where [soever] the lott fall :

Lastly that Every man of the Surveighers have a peck of Corne for Every share of land layed out by them to be paid by the owner thereof when the same is layd out.

Livestock

The Pilgrims did not bring any large livestock animals with them on the Mayflower. In fact, the only animals known with certainty to have come on the Mayflower were two dogs, an English mastiff and an English spaniel, who are mentioned on a couple of occasions in the Pilgrims' journals.

Although not specifically mentioned, it seems likely that they had with them some chickens, because chicken broth was given by Mayflower passenger Edward Winslow to the Wampanoag sachem Massasoit when he was sick in early 1623; and it is also likely they brought some pigs. In 1623, Emmanuel Altham visited Plymouth and reported there were six goats, fifty pigs, and many chickens.

The first cattle arrived at Plymouth on the ship Anne in 1623, and more arrived on the ship Jacob in 1624. Onboard the Anne in 1623 were three cows, nicknamed the "Great Black Cow", the "Lesser Black Cow", and the "Great White-Backed Cow". By 1627, both the "Lesser Black Cow" and the "Great White-backed Cow" had calves.

Onboard the Jacob in 1624 were four black heifers (a heifer is a young female cow that has not yet had a calf.) The four black heifers were nicknamed "Least", "Raghorn", "Blind", and "Smooth-Horned". There was also a "Red Cow" that belonged to the poor of the colony, which had a red female calf around 1625, and a male calf in 1627.

By May 1627, there were 16 head of cattle and at least 22 goats living in Plymouth. The exact arrival of the first sheep in the colony is uncertain (likely some time before 1629). The first horses and oxen did not begin arriving until the 1630s, most being brought to the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the north. (Caleb Johnson's MayflowerHistory)

As More Pilgrims Came to Plymouth, More Wanted to Come

As Bradford noted,

... the people of the plantation begane to grow in their owtward estats, by rea[son] of the flowing of many people into the cuntrie, espetially into the Bay of the Massachuset; by which means corne and catle rose to a great prise, by which many were much inriched, and commodities grue plentiful; and yet in other regards this benefite turned to their hurte, and this accession of strength to their weaknes.

For now as their stocks increased, and the increse vendible, ther was no longer any holding them together, but now they must of necessitie goe to their great lots; they could not other wise keep their katle; and having oxen growne, they must have land for plowing and tillage.

And no man now thought he could live, except he had catle and a great deale of ground to keep them; all striving to increase their stocks. By which means they were scatered all over the bay, quickly, and the towne, in which they lived compactly till now, was left very thine, and in a short time allmost desolate.

And if this had been all, it had been less, thoug to much; but the church must also be devided, and those that had lived so long together in Christian and comfortable fellowship must now part and suffer many divissions.

First, those that lived on their lots on the other side of the bay (called Duxberie) they could not long bring their wives and children to the publick worship and church meetings here ...

but with such burthen, as, growing to some competente number, they sued to be dismissed and become a body of them selves; and so they were dismist (about this time), though very unwillingly. But to touch this sadd matter, and handle things together that fell out after ward.

To prevent any further scatering from this place, and weakning of the same, it was thought best to give out some good farms to spetiall persons, that would promise to live at Plimoth, and lickly to be helpfull to the church or comonewelth, and so tye the lands to Plimoth as farmes for the same; and ther they might keepe their catle and tillage by some servants, and retaine their dwellings here.

And so some spetiall lands were granted at a place generall, called Greens Harbor,' wher no allotments had been in the former divission, a plase very weell meadowed, and fitt to keep and rear catle, good store.

But alas! this remedy proved worse then the disease; for within a few years those that had thus gott footing ther rente them selves away, partly by force, and partly wearing the rest with importunitie and pleas of necessitie, so as they must either suffer them to goe, or live in continuall opposition and contention.

And others still, as they conceived them selves straitened, or to want accommodation, break away under one pretence or other, thinking their owne conceived necessitie, and the example of others, a warrente sufficente for them.

And this, I fear, will be the ruine of New-England, at least of the churches of God ther, and will provock the Lords displeasure against them. (Bradford, 1623, History of Plymouth Plantation, 293-294)

By 1633, the population of Plymouth Colony was approximately 400 individuals. The colonists expanded beyond the bounds of the town of Plymouth. A few moved across Plymouth Bay to Mattakesett, which became Duxbury. Some men were granted land at Conahasset, known as Green's Harbor (and later Marshfield), in 1632. (Plimoth-org)

Great Migration

The Puritans in England knew the Plymouth Colony experiment worked, and others decided to replicate it.

They left England for America to escape religious persecution. They hoped to establish a church free from worldly corruption founded on voluntary agreement among congregants. This covenant theory governed Puritan social and theological life, including the annual elections in which all free men, or church members, could vote.

A rage of emigration swept through the eastern and midland counties of England, arousing in the authorities an apprehension which was to be shared by many other local officials of Europe during the next two and a half centuries.

A "great giddiness" to depart prevailed; "incredible numbers" sold their lands; and debtors attempted to get away under the pretext of religion. (Hansen)

Most of the Puritans who came to New England came from prosperous middle-class families. They differed from the poor, single male immigrants who dominated immigration to other regions of America. They had skills and they could read, unlike the immigrants to Virginia, 75 percent of whom were servants. (New England Historical Society)

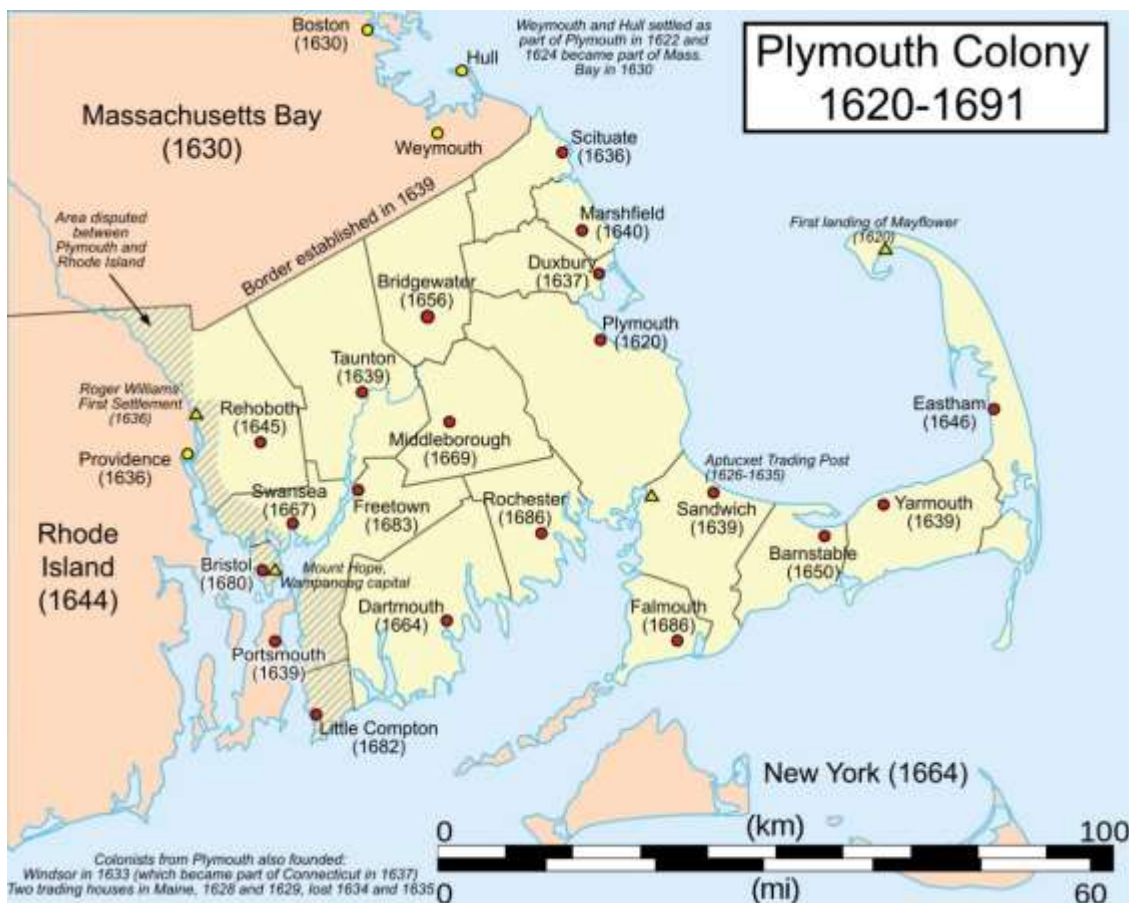
Emigration fever spread beyond southern England. When John Winthrop, Jr., in 1635 traveled through Ireland, Scotland and the north of England, he found that the contagion preceded him. “Everywhere he stopped, eager inquirers sought him out,” Hansen wrote.

The Great Migration began to take off in 1630 when John Winthrop led a fleet of 11 ships to Massachusetts. Winthrop brought 800 people with him to New England; 20,000 followed him over the next 10 years. (New England Historical Society)

In the ensuing decade, more than 200 ships transported about 20,000 Puritans to Massachusetts, which thrived almost from the beginning. In rapid succession, the towns of Boston, Cambridge, Watertown, Charlestown, and 18 others were founded. Other Puritans went to the West Indies in this, the largest mass exodus of Englishmen in history. (NPS)

English migration to Massachusetts consisted of a few hundred pilgrims who went to Plymouth Colony in the 1620s and between 13,000 and 21,000 emigrants who went to the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1630 and 1642. (History of Massachusetts Colony)

Towns Pilgrims Formed in/around Plymouth



As colonists sought more land for their large and growing families, and more people were coming to New England, new towns were formed within Plymouth Colony.

Plymouth (1620)	Rehoboth (1645)	Little Compton* (1682)
Scituate (1636)	Eastham (1646)	Freetown (1683)
Duxbury (1637)	Barnstable (1650)	Falmouth (1686)
Sandwich (1639)	Bridgewater (1656)	Rochester (1686)
Taunton (1639)	Dartmouth (1664)	[* now in Rhode Island]
Yarmouth (1639)	Swansea (1667)	
Marshfield (1640)	Bristol* (1680)	

Other English colonies were founded as well.

Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630s)
“Providence Plantations” (Rhode Island) (1636)
Connecticut colonies were founded soon after

The population in New England had gone from 4,000 in 1630 to 50,000 in 1640.

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young