

Duxbury – Plymouth Colony's Second Town

Mattakeesett ('place of many fish', some also reference it as 'the place of no high water') was inhabited by Native Americans as early as 12,000 to 9,000 BC. At the time European settlers arrived here, the region was inhabited by the Wampanoags .

In 1620, the English settlers known as the Pilgrims established their colony in Plymouth. Per the terms of their contract with financial backers in London, they were required to live together in a tight community for seven years.

Communal Life

Annie Russell Marble writes (in part) – in *The Women Who Came in the Mayflower*,

In *The Mayflower* and at Plymouth, ... the women were thrust into a small company with widely differing tastes and backgrounds. One of the first demands made upon them was for a democratic spirit, - tolerance and patience, adaptability to varied natures.

The old joke that "the Pilgrim Mothers had to endure not alone their hardships but the Pilgrim Fathers also" has been overworked . These women would never have accepted pity as martyrs. They came to this new country with devotion to the men of their families and, in those days, such a call was supreme in a woman's life

The family, not the individual, characterized the life of that community . The father was always regarded as the 'head' of the family .

Good harvests and some thrilling incidents varied the hard conditions of life for the women during 1621-2 . Indian corn and barley furnished a new foundation for many " a savory dish" prepared by the housewives in the mortar and pestles, kettles and skillets which they had brought from Holland. Nuts were used for food, giving piquant flavor both to "cakes" baked in the fire and to the stuffing of wild turkeys.

The fare was simple, but it must have seemed a feast to the Pilgrims after the months of self denials and extremity.

Before the winter of 1621- 2 was ended , seven log houses had been built and four "common buildings" for storage, meetings and workshops. Already clapboards and furs were stored to be sent back to England to the merchant adventurers in the first ship .

The seven huts, with thatched roofs and chimneys on the outside, probably in cob-house style, were of hewn planks, not of round logs.¹ The fireplaces were of stones laid in clay from the abundant sand.

An important change in the policy of the colony, which affected the women as well as men , was made at this time [1623].

Formerly the administration of affairs had been upon the communal basis. All the men and grown boys were expected to plant and harvest, fish and hunt for the common use of all the households. The women also did their tasks in common .

The results had been unsatisfactory and, in 1623, a new division of land was made, allotting to each householder an acre for each member of his family.

This arrangement, which was called "every man for his owne particuler," was told by Bradford with a comment which shows that the women were human beings, not saints nor martyrs.

He wrote: "The women now went willingly into ye field, and tooke their little -ones with them to set corne, which before would aledge weaknes and inability; whom to have compelled would have bene thought great tiranie and oppression."

After further comment upon the failure of communism as "breeding confusion and discontent" he added this significant comment:

"For ye yong-men that were most able and fitte for labour and service did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense. . . . And for men's wives to be commanded to doe servise for other men, as dresing their meate, washing their cloathes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slaverie, neither could many husbands well brooke it."

Great Migration

After 1623, there were few other large groups of passengers for Plymouth. In the next five years, only a handful of colonists arrived, generally aboard ships bringing supplies to the area.

By 1629 and 1630, numerous ships came to the Massachusetts Bay bringing approximately 1,000 settlers for that colony. In these two years, Plymouth also got an additional influx, ten or so aboard the Mayflower (not the 1620 ship) and 35 aboard the Talbot in 1629, and about 60 in the Handmaid in 1630.

Many of them were Leiden Separatists. Some people moved from Massachusetts Bay Colony to Plymouth and vice versa, seeking a more congenial home. Small numbers of additional Plymouth colonists trickled in during the next three years.

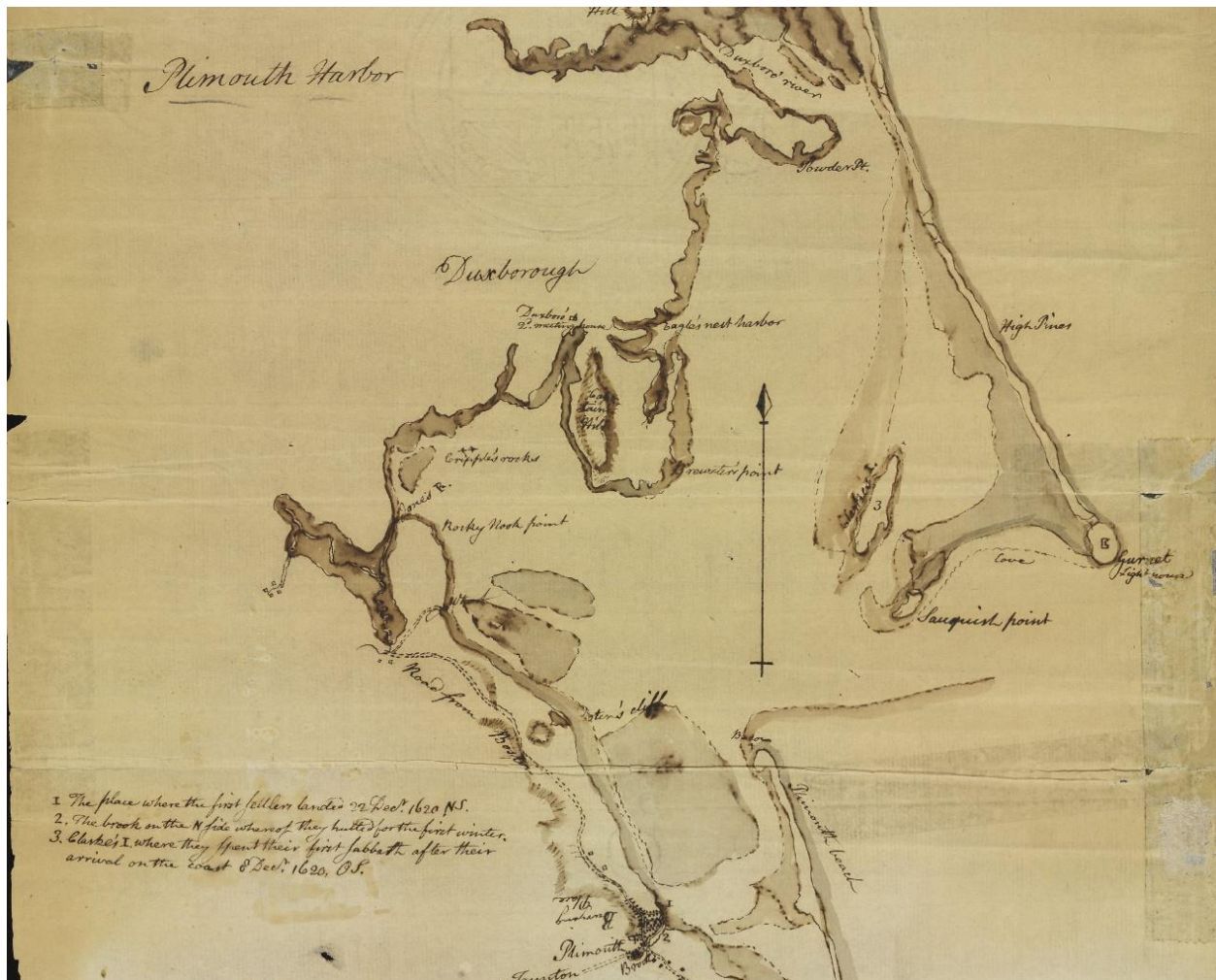
By 1633, the population of Plymouth Colony was approximately 400 individuals. The colonists expanded beyond the bounds of the town of Plymouth. (Plimoth-org)

Granting of Farms at Duxbury as noted in Bradford's 'History of Plymouth Plantation'

Land along the coast was allotted to settlers for farming. Each man was given twenty acres for himself and an additional twenty for each person in his family. Thus, the coastline from Plymouth to Marshfield was parceled out and many settlers began moving away from Plymouth.

The first area to grow (and the second town – after Plymouth – in the Plymouth Colony) was Duxbury. Bradford described what happened,

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



Early Map of Plymouth Harbor noting Plymouth (noted as Plimouth) in bottom center and Duxbury (noted as Duxborough)

For now as their stocks increased, and the increase 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 divisions.

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 shuch 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 afterwards. To prevent any further scatering from this place, and weakning of the same, it was thought best to give out some good faroms to spetiall persons, that would promise to live at Plimoth, and lickly to be helpfull to the church or comone-welth, 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 themselves 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, broak away under one pretence or other, thinking their owne conceived necessitie, and the example of others, awarrente sufficente for them.

And this, I fear, will be the mine of New-England, at least of the churches of God ther, and will provock the Lords displeasure against them. (Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation, 151-153)

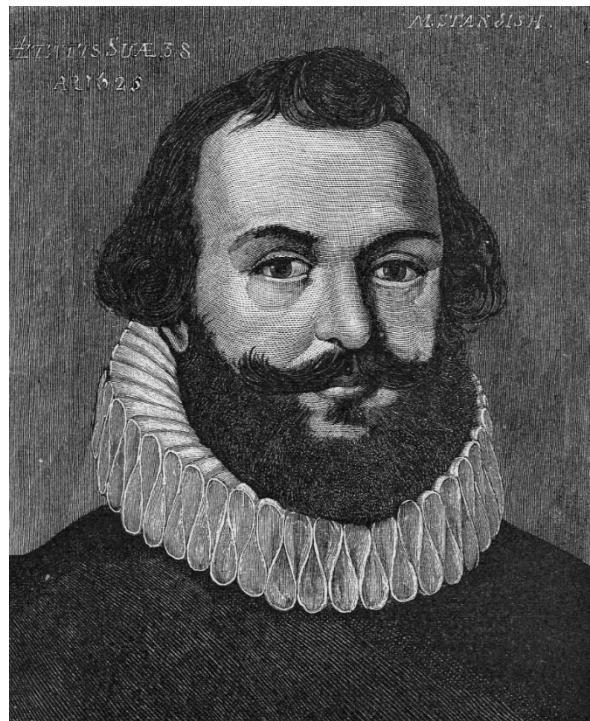
Mayflower Pilgrims Founded Duxbury

Some of the most influential men in the colony received grants in Duxbury (sometimes spelled Duxborough) and became its first leaders. Captain Myles Standish, the military leader of the colony, lived in "the Nook," an area now known as Standish Shore.

Elder William Brewster was for many years the religious leader of the colony. He probably led services in Duxbury until it received its own minister in 1637. John Alden was another important settler, Assistant Governor of the colony for fifty years.

At first, those who settled in Duxbury came to work their new farms just in the warmer months and returned to Plymouth during the winter.

Originally, the land farmed by the settlers at Plymouth was held in common to be commonly worked and the profits commonly used to repay the backers in London.



Myles Standish

It was not long, however, before they began to build homes on their land, and soon requested permission from the colony to be set off as a separate

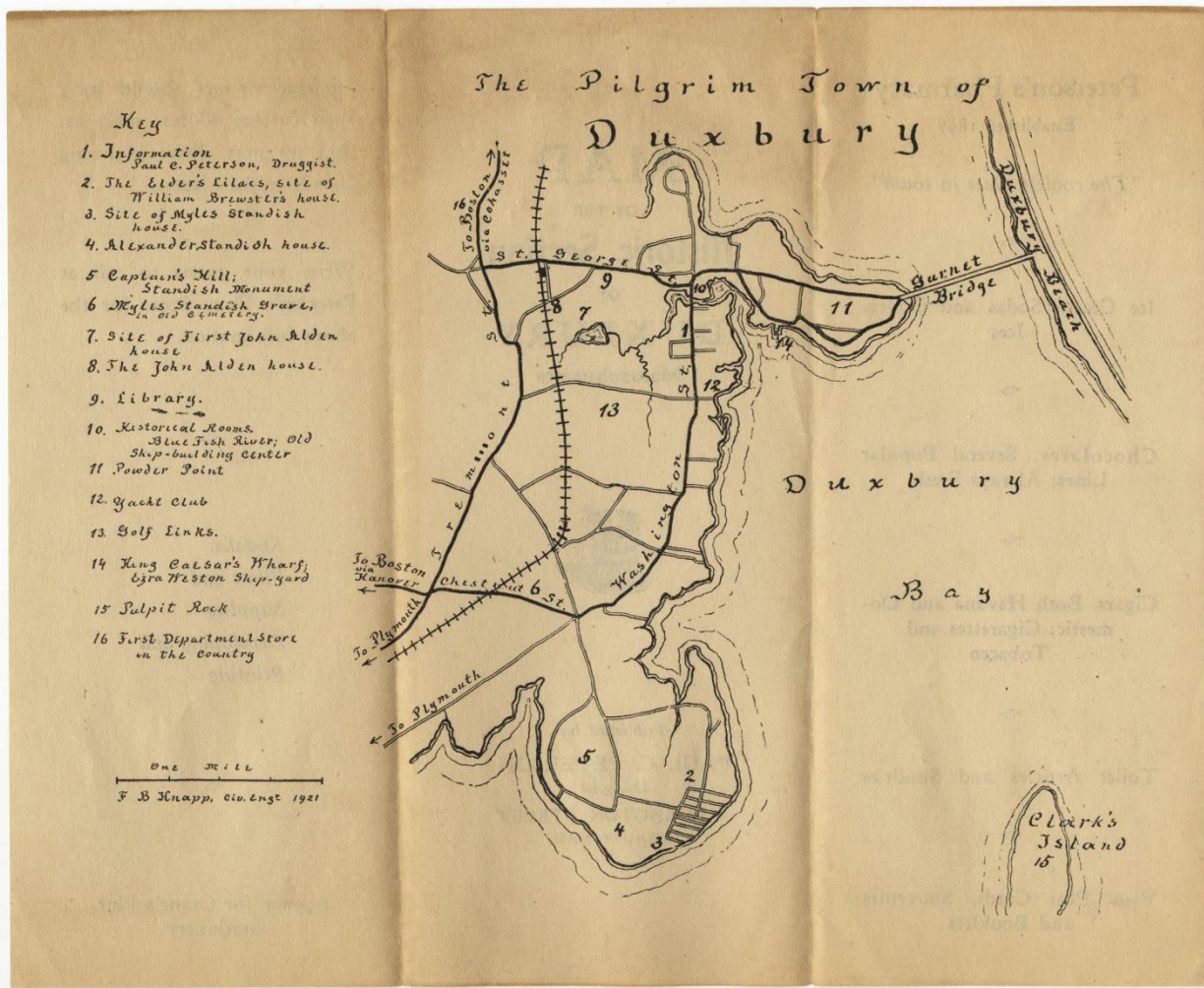
community with their own church. Duxbury was incorporated in 1637 (June 7, 1637, old style, or June 17, 1637, new style) and became the second town in the Plymouth colony.

This is the record of the enactment by the Governor and his Council of the Plymouth Colony.

It is enacted by the Court that Ducksborrow shall become a township, and unite together for their better security, and to have the privileges of a town, only their bounds and limits shall be sett, and appointed by the next Court.

The population has greatly varied at different times. As early as 1643 it was supposed to be about 400. In 1710, also by supposition, about 1,100. In 1770 — 1,152; 1790 — 1,454; 1800 — 1,664; 1810 — 2,201; 1820 — 2,403; 1830 — 2,716; 1840 — 2,798; 1850 — 2,679; 1860 — 2,597; 1880 — 2,196; 1890 — 1,908; 1895 — 1,966.

Duxbury was primarily a farming community throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. It's quiet history in the 18th century was interrupted only by the Revolutionary War. In the years leading up to the war, the community was solidly rebellious and had little tolerance for loyalists.



Myles Standish Monument in Duxbury

It is said that Duxbury was named by Myles Standish and that the name Duxbury, though spelled in various ways, probably came from Duxbury Hall, one of the country seats of the Standish family in England. The Indian name for the area is Mattakeeset. Duxbury is located on Cape Cod Bay, 35 miles south of Boston on the South Shore.

In 1871, a monument was erected to commemorate Standish and is a prominent landmark. The spot chosen for the monument is Captain's Hill, on what had been the old Standish Farm, where Captain Standish lived and died. This Farm was given him by the colony about 1630, and remained in the family till the middle of the last century.



The hill is one hundred and eighty feet high, and overlooks Plymouth and Duxbury Bays, and is now much used as a sighting point to navigators in entering Massachusetts Bay.

In the 1870s, a crowd of 10,000 climbed to the top of Captain's Hill in Duxbury to watch the cornerstone being laid for the Myles Standish Monument. The Massachusetts state government and private individuals, including President Ulysses S. Grant, contributed to the memorial. It took 28 years to raise all the money needed.

When it was finally finished in 1898, the 116-foot tall shaft, with a 14-foot statue of Standish at the top, was rivaled only by the Washington Memorial as a U.S. monument to an individual citizen. (When the tower is open, visitors can climb 125 steps to a small viewing area at the top.)

Later, Duxbury Focused on Shipyards

Immediately after the Revolution War, the newborn nation was granted fishing rights on the Grand Banks. Several families took advantage of the new opportunity and began to build large fishing schooners.

Soon, as foreign nations began to ease trade restrictions, Duxbury mariners found that they could trade all over the world. The schooners built in the 1790s gave way to larger brigs and eventually three-masted ships. The builders of fishing vessels soon became owners of merchant fleets, and Duxbury prospered.

By the 1840s, Duxbury boasted about 20 shipyards and was the largest producer of sailing vessels on the South Shore. With an average of ten vessels built every year between 1790-1830, the accomplishments of the Duxbury shipbuilding families rank among the more significant in Massachusetts maritime history.

During this period of industrial activity Duxbury furnished not only ships, but men to sail them. Nearly every Duxbury-built vessel was officered by men who had been born within the sound of axe and mallet, had served an apprenticeship at sea from boyhood, and knew a ship 'from keelson to truck.'

The shipbuilding era in Duxbury ended as quickly as it began. By the 1850s sailing vessels were made obsolete by other modes of transportation such as steamships and railroads. There are few physical traces of this industry remaining today.



The National Historic Landmark Alden House Historic Site is the ancestral home of Mayflower Pilgrims John & Priscilla Alden in Duxbury. The museum is open seasonally for visitors and offers guided tours.

A lot of the information here is from *Historic Duxbury in Plymouth Massachusetts* by Laurence Bradford; Myles Standish, with an account of the exercises of consecration of the monument ground on Captain's hill, Duxbury, Aug. 17, 1871 by Stephen M. Allen; The Duxbury Rural & Historical Society; MassMonuments-org; the Town of Duxbury Massachusetts website

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