

Today in Our History

The Voyages of Your Pilgrims

One hundred and twenty-five Pilgrims, as they are known today, left England in 1608, leaving behind their friends, families and customs. The Church of England was also the government of England and had been for a few years. In other words, their ruler, King James I, was in charge of both the country and the church and he really loved himself. If one did not belong to the Church of England, one would be breaking the king's law.



King James I of England, 1603-1625

The group left England, *separating* themselves from the church, therefore, called Separatists. They chose to move, a few at a time, to a country named Holland, a place that would allow them to worship the way that they wished. They sang psalms, not the hymns selected by the king. They continued to use the Geneva Bible, not the King James version of the Bible. They would no longer be punished for worshiping in their home in Scrooby, England. They were looking for freedom from the king, the freedom of worship.



The English settled in Leiden, Holland, The Netherlands. The Pilgrims did enjoy the freedom of worship in Leiden, but life there was not perfect. The Pilgrims had difficulty making money in the city of Leiden. There also were so many other immigrants in Leiden. If the Pilgrims found a job, they worked from early morning until dark, six days a week and were paid very little. A bell on the square rang to let them know that it was time to work and rang again when they could stop working. The Pilgrims' children also had to work to help support the family. They were growing up in a country without the values they were taught at home, enjoying Dutch customs and speaking a strange language, for example:



The Feast of Saint Nicholas, by Dutch Master, Jan Steen, 1665-1668

Can you say: *Ik mag een drankje van water hebben*

Translated into English, you just asked: *May I have a drink of water?*

The Pilgrims decided again to move to another new country, a New World, which was called America. After careful thought and discussion, the Pilgrims decided to leave Holland to establish a farming village in the northern part of the Virginia Colony, where New York City is today. They would live under the English government but still would have their *separate* church in this new land.

They did not have money to make this voyage on their own, so they found English groups called Merchant Adventurers, to help them make the trip. The arrangement required the Pilgrims to pay the groups back within a set time. The groups would loan them a ship, tools and supplies. The Pilgrims agreed to work hard to pay them back, using timber, fur and fish as payment, which would be sent back to England. After many disagreements between them, the Pilgrims were able to leave for America on a small ship named *Speedwell*. They left from Delftshaven, Holland on July 22, 1620, for Southampton, England to meet another ship, the *Mayflower*. The cargo ship *Mayflower*, had been hired by English investors who were hoping to make money in the new world.



Delftshaven, Holland

On August 5, the *Mayflower* and *Speedwell* set sail for America. The *Speedwell* leaked so badly that both ships turned back to Dartmouth, England. After sailing for 6 days, the *Speedwell* had to turn



back again, this time to Plymouth, England, and it was then left behind. The only way to continue the trip to the New World, would be on *Mayflower*. The Pilgrims and strangers finally left Plymouth, England on September 6, 1620. The overcrowded ship carried 102 people in the tiny 'tween deck, on the 66 day voyage.



A cross section of the cargo ship, the *Mayflower*

The trip was rough: people were sea sick, a main beam cracked, a man fell overboard, a man died, a baby was born and a bad boy nearly blew *Mayflower* out of the water when he fired a gun near gunpowder! One thing about it, it was not a boring trip, just a long one. But, think about the trip like this: you leave on a 50 year old ship with many strangers, there is very little food, there is no bathroom and you share a cold, wet and smelly room ...

for 66 days! That is about the same number of days between the first day of school and your Thanksgiving holiday. Be thankful for your ancestors' endurance, otherwise we descendants would not be here!

When they finally neared the coast of America, the *Mayflower* could not continue traveling along the uneven coast because of fading winds and sandbars called shoals, so the voyagers agreed to sail toward Cape Cod. The strangers onboard quickly realized they were not arriving in Virginia as planned, and were very angry.

The Mayflower Compact was signed by 41 of the English travelers aboard the *Mayflower* on November 11, 1620, and is the first written document of government in what is now the United States. It was written to prevent disagreements among the *Mayflower* strangers and Separatists, but also became an inspiration for our United States Constitution.



The writing and signing of the Mayflower Compact aboard the *Mayflower*

<http://leidenamericanpilgrimmuseum.org/index.htm>
<http://www.mayflowercompact.org/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trQPPEERPk0>