



The Pilgrim Fathers

The arrival of 102 settlers in Plymouth, Massachusetts on December 11, 1620 is one of the legendary stories of US history. These men, women, and children are lauded as the Pilgrim Fathers, the founders of what became the United States. Yet they were by no means the first Europeans to settle in the country.

the English who first attempted colonization of the eastern seaboard. In 1584 the English adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh established a settlement on Roanoke Island, but lacked the resources to sustain it. The settlement is believed to have been destroyed by the local Croatoan Indians in 1590. By then the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (see pp. 260–61) gave the English the incentive to attempt to intervene in the relatively undefended and undercolonized continent of North America. In 1607 the Virginia Company of London took advantage of this, and set up a colony in Jamestown, Virginia.

The Pilgrims

The men and women who settled Jamestown came to acquire land and hopefully wealth. Those that landed at New Plymouth in 1620 came to escape religious persecution in Europe. Often described as Puritans, they were more accurately religious dissenters who had left England for the Netherlands in 1608, but then decided to build their own society in a new land. Armed with a Virginia Company land grant, they set sail in the *Mayflower*. After a two-month voyage, they arrived in the New

BEFORE



HOCHELAGA

The first Europeans to visit America were adventurers rather than settlers.

FRENCH CANADA

Frenchman Jacques Cartier explored the St. Lawrence River from 1535 to 1542, and renamed Hochelaga, Mont Réal (Montreal). Fishermen and fur traders followed.

Permanent French settlers arrived later—after the foundation of Québec in 1608.



ALGONQUIN INDIANS

SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES

To survive in this new and hostile environment, the French formed alliances with local tribes, notably the Algonquin Indians. The Iroquois tribe later became allies of the British.

In the century after Columbus arrived in the Americas (see pp. 228–29), European contact with North America was remarkably limited. The Spanish, obsessed with gold and conquest, concentrated on exploiting the wealthy empires of Central and South America. To the north, the French explored the rich fishing and fur-trapping regions of the St. Lawrence River. Those European navigators who did visit America were more concerned with finding a route around it to Asia than exploring the continent itself.

While the Spanish established bases to protect their bullion fleets, such as St. Augustine in Florida, and the French traded in Canada to the north, it was



The Mayflower

This painting shows the 12-year-old *Mayflower* in Delft Harbor at the start of its voyage to the Americas. It was a merchant ship with a crew of 25–30, and was previously used to transport wine.

Plymouth area. A year later, the settlers celebrated their first successful harvest with a dinner, an event still celebrated every November as Thanksgiving.

The settlers, who called themselves “Saints” or “Strangers” depending on their religious beliefs—the name “Pilgrims” was applied later—received help initially from two American Indians, Samoset and Tisquantum (Squanto), who spoke English as well as their native language, Algonquin. Indeed, Squanto had been taken to England in 1605 by an English seafarer and stayed for nine years. The Pilgrims were not the first Europeans to settle live in the area, as the seaboard was well known to English fishermen from the early 1500s, many of them wintering on its sheltered coast and gathering stocks of food for the journey home.

Religion and trade

Many English colonies on the eastern seaboard were religious in origin: Puritans settled in Massachusetts in

1630, Catholics in Maryland in 1634, religious freethinkers in Rhode Island in 1636, and Quakers in Pennsylvania in 1682. Other colonies, notably the Carolinas, were given by the English king to supportive noblemen.

Dutch and Swedish trading companies also joined the colonial scramble. The Dutch West India Company, started in 1621, established Fort Orange (present-day Albany) on the Hudson River in 1623. It then purchased Manhattan from the native Canarsees for 40 guilders in 1626. Farther south, the Swedish West Indian Company set up New Sweden on the Delaware in 1638. The Dutch ended Swedish rule in 1655, but were then conquered by the British in 1664. English rule thus stretched the length of the east coast, from New England in the north to the Carolinas and, in 1724, Georgia in the south.

Labor and work

The English saw their colonies as “transplantations” of English society to a “New World”—the word “plantation” was used to describe both Jamestown and Plymouth—and made no attempt to meet their neighbors. The English colonists preferred to create closed, self-sufficient communities. When their efforts failed, as they often did, the settlers seldom conciliated the natives, but instead tried to defeat, destroy, or drive them away. To the English, the native American was an obstacle to be overcome, not a valuable resource to be exploited.

This proved a problem as the colonies grew in strength. Those in the north became successful merchant communities, where farming was for food, not export, and so had little need for local labor. Those in the south, however, required workers. The growing of tobacco and other export crops led to the development of large farming estates. These were worked first by white indentured servants from England, but then increasingly by African slaves (see pp.280–81), the first 20 of whom arrived on a Dutch ship in Jamestown in 1619.



Pilgrim housing

This reconstruction of the Plymouth settlement shows how the settlers built their homes: a simple wooden frame covered with wood slats and roofed with thatch kept out the worst of the elements.



Inside a Pilgrim house

The furniture was made from local wood, the curtains and bedding spun from homegrown flax or wool. There were no luxuries—anything that the settlers could not make, they did without.



Colonial North America

This map from 1721 shows the extent of British rule (shown in yellow) along the Atlantic coast. Spain (blue) ruled what is now Florida, while France (pink) controlled much of Canada. The blue area in the north of Canada had both French and British settlements.



hilt made of horn; decorated with cartridge butts

steel blade

animal skin sheath decorated with porcupine quillwork

Native trapping

Colonists traded blades, often imported from Sheffield, England, with American Indian nations in return for furs from animals trapped and killed by the Indians.

AFTER

Settlers started to object to being ruled from overseas without having any rights.



COLONY ASSEMBLY MEETING HOUSE

COLONIAL RULE

By 1750 most of the 13 colonies were governed in much the same way. Each had a local assembly—Rhode Island’s met in the Meeting House in Newport (above right)—and a governor appointed or approved by the monarch. Each colony made its own laws and was **internally self-governing**. They were therefore relatively independent, with political and social institutions that differed quite markedly from those in Britain.

IMPERIAL RULE

Colonies were **subject to the British parliament and government**, which regulated their trade and currency to prevent them from competing with British industries. When in 1765 the British government began to levy direct taxes on the colonies to pay for its recent colonial wars, the colonists strongly objected to paying without having proper representation in the British Parliament. This was one of the **major causes of the American Revolution 298–99** >>