

Pilgrims begin the Plymouth Colony

Plymouth Colony and the Pilgrim's New Beginnings

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The origins of the Plymouth colony began when a group of separatists left England for religious purposes and landed off the coast of Massachusetts instead of landing near Virginia where their charter intended for them to land.

It was December 16, 1620 when the travelers, after sailing the Atlantic Ocean for months, arrived in Plymouth Harbor. With hunger, malnutrition, illness, and death running amuck, the travelers made the decision to explore the area for a place to dock the ship – the Mayflower – and start a settlement.

For weeks, exploration parties travelled from the ship to land via a fishing boat known as a shallop seeking an area of land that would be suitable for erecting buildings, farming, and that had a source of fresh drinking water.

During their search, the explorers spotted Native Americans doing something at the beach. They could not tell what the natives were doing at that time but later discovered they had slaughtered and dissected a whale.

Unable to get back to the ship after initially spotting native hunters, the explorers built a barricade to shield themselves from the native's view. Building the barricade proved crucial because the land was very flat and there was no other way to hide themselves.

The following day the explorers again sought a place to begin

their settlement. During this search, they came across native huts in which they found corn and beans amongst other survival items. They took the corn and beans because the people aboard the Mayflower needed food.

Once again, the settlers had to spend a night away from the ship. Therefore, once again they barricaded themselves from the natives view. Although they built a bigger barricade this time, they awoke next morning to a surprise attack by the natives. Arrows flew about the explorers. Two explorers fired their muskets. The natives, save one, ran for safety. The last continued his attack shortly before running off to rejoin his tribe.

The exploring pilgrims hightailed back to their boat, got in it, and fled back to the ship. En route, they spotted an area that looked sufficient to meet their emigrant needs. The area they spotted was an abandoned Wampanoag Patuxet Indian camp. The pilgrims did not know it at that time but the camp was empty because the natives who lived there had died from a plague brought to America by Europeans. One of the 2,000 members, Squanto, had not died. He was enslaved in England when his tribe vanished.

Cornfields that could easily grow more corn, fresh drinking water, and the fact that its location stood a distance from where the explorers spotted natives made the camp a likely choice to settle. The harbor was suitable for landing the Mayflower. The unoccupied camp even had a hill the pilgrims could use for a fort.

The explorers reported their find to their congregation. The pilgrim leaders agreed the location could accommodate their party. People were already surviving there proved it was viable. The leaders further agreed they would land the boat and start building their colony. The area, located near Cape Cod, known as Provincetown Harbor, was under control of the Plymouth Company.

A large granite rock that has become larger than life, at least in its name "Plymouth Rock", sat "near" the location the pilgrims trampled when they left the Mayflower and walked upon the shore. The colony named their settlement Plymouth Colony, after the rock.