

Early New Plymouth and Plimoth Plantation™

Growth of New Plymouth 1620-1627

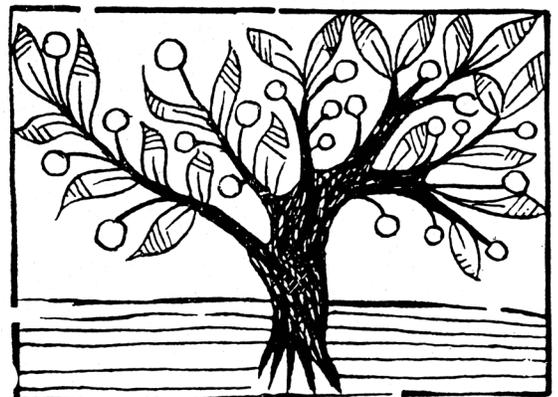
In September 1620, a group of 102 English men, women and children left England aboard the *Mayflower* to found a colony in America. The ship made landfall off what is now Provincetown, MA on November 9th. Shortly thereafter, some of the men began exploring the area, looking for a suitable place to live. After weeks of searching, the *Mayflower* passengers chose Patuxet as the site on which to build their town. This Wampanoag village had been abandoned after European disease, probably plague, had wiped out or scattered the population.

Patuxet had many advantages. It was close to a sheltered bay. The previous inhabitants had cleared substantial land already. It was high ground, containing a hill on which the colonists could place cannon for their defense, and see as far as Cape Cod. Below the hill was a “very sweet brook,” providing a harbor for their boats, and fish in season. There were also numerous springs “of as good water as can be drunk.” The only drawback was the distance they would have to travel to get wood.

On December 23, 1620 the colonists began building, as many as could went ashore to fell trees and carry timber to the site of their new home. Work continued over the winter, hampered by the weather and severe illness, which resulted in the death of half their number. By the fall of 1621, they had built seven homes, four storehouses and a cannon platform on the hill. They had planted and harvested twenty acres of Indian corn [maize], and six acres of barley and peas.

In February 1622, the colonists built a palisade [high timber fence] around their village. That summer they built a fort which also served as their meetinghouse. Ships arrived bringing additional colonists: the *Fortune* in November 1621 with 35, mostly men; and the *Anne* and *Little James* in the summer of 1623 with about 100, many of them the wives and children of residents. About then, they assigned land for planting, an acre per colonist. Emmanuel Altham, a visitor to New Plymouth, wrote in September 1623 that there were about 20 houses, “four or five of which [were] very fair and pleasant.” A fire that November destroyed several homes and forced an unknown number, who had lost all their belongings, to return to England.

The English explorer, Captain John Smith, wrote a description of New Plymouth in 1624, and said that the population was approximately 180 persons, with 32 dwelling houses of which seven had burnt the last winter. Dissention erupted in the colony that year, at which point close to 40 people left. There were a few deaths, but also children born. By 1627, the last year before the colonists began moving beyond the immediate area, the colony again held approximately 180 people. There were about thirty houses, but possibly as many as fifty.



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PLYMOUTH ANCESTORS

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Plimoth Plantation, Inc.

Plimoth Plantation, Inc. was founded in 1947 for the “creation, construction and maintenance of a Pilgrim Village as a Memorial to the Pilgrim Fathers.” Besides the Village, plans also included an “Indian Village,” a “trading post” for information, admissions and gift shop, a “Village Green” for historic buildings threatened by demolition, and an amphitheater for summer pageants. They also planned to build a full-size replica of the *Mayflower*. Plans changed over the years, and today Plimoth Plantation includes the 1627 English Village, Wampanoag Homesite, Crafts Center, Henry Hornblower II Visitor Center and *Mayflower II*.

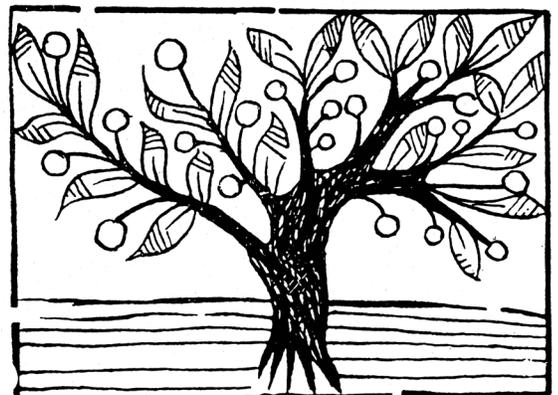
Thanks to the generosity of the Hornblower family, the museum acquired approximately 100 acres of land by Eel River in south Plymouth in 1956. The property was similar to the original site in three important ways. It was close to the ocean and next to a river. There was a hill, although not as steep as the original, overlooking the bay. In addition, the proposed locations for the historic sites were fairly free from modern intrusions, enabling visitors to better immerse themselves in their surroundings.

1627 English Village

Overall, the 1627 English Village is smaller than the original town of New Plymouth – probably about 1/3 the size. The distance from the top of the hill to the bottom of the street is shorter, and there are about a dozen homes represented. The fields under cultivation are a fraction of the acres farmed by the colonists in 1627. Trees grow very close to the village to screen out modern intrusions. All in all, however, Plimoth Plantation has been fortunate in acquiring a site that so closely resembled the original.

Modern-day Plymouth Center

To make your own comparison, please visit Leyden Street in the center of downtown Plymouth. In the cemetery above the Unitarian church, a stone tablet marks the location of the first Plymouth fort. From the church, Leyden Street, the first street laid out, runs east down to Plymouth Harbor. Main Street, to the north, originally stopped at Leyden Street. [Main Street extension was built circa 1914.] The land fell away sharply to the brook on the southern side of the street. Further up the hill, what is now Market Street provided access to the south. The mouth of Town Brook was wider in the 17th century, allowing boats a safe anchorage. While centuries of building obscure the original contours of the land, the view from Burial Hill across to Cape Cod, one of the reasons the colonists chose the site, has remained and can still be enjoyed today.



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