



Contact: Sarah Macdonald
(508) 746-1622 x8206
smacdonald@plimoth.org

Mayflower II **Backgrounder 2013**

Over fifty years ago the idea of building a *Mayflower II* became a reality when a consortium of individuals decided to achieve multiple goals through the ship's creation. Not only would building *Mayflower II* stimulate interest in the *Mayflower* story, but would also reinvigorate Anglo-American cultural relations after World War II and push limits in the emerging field of experimental archaeology.

In 1955 Plimoth Plantation and an English organization known as Project *Mayflower*, Ltd. negotiated the idea of building a reproduction of the famed 17th-century merchant ship known as *Mayflower*. The ship would be built in England and then sailed to America before being exhibited in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Through the mid-1950's, crews on both sides of the Atlantic were drawn into the massive endeavor to design, build, fund and promote this unprecedented project. International interest was piqued by press coverage of the preparations for the journey and the voyage itself in 1957.

Now sailing only occasionally, *Mayflower II* spends a majority of her time docked at the State Pier in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where she plays host to hundreds of thousands of guests annually. In a self-guided but highly interactive program, costumed role-players tell the story of the passengers and crew of the 1620 *Mayflower* voyage from a 17th-century English perspective. They address diverse topics like Colonial politics and gossip, reasons for immigration as well as shipboard food and health. Additional guides fill in the narrative from a contemporary perspective, discussing the ramifications of the European colonization of Native lands, the fate of Plimoth Colony, the building and sailing of *Mayflower II* and historic sailing and navigation technologies. Often on hand are Plimoth Plantation's skilled maritime artisans who must carry out continual restoration efforts on the ship's antique hull, spars and rigging. This challenging work connects *Mayflower II* to New England's centuries-old maritime tradition.

Dockside exhibits for the 2013 season include a commemoration of *Mayflower II*'s fifty years at Plimoth Plantation. In addition, the ship features a variety of special events and activities that take place in the exhibit space throughout the season. Special event information can be found online at our website, www.plimoth.org.

About the 1620 Colonial Pilgrims

Mayflower II is a re-creation of the famous ship *Mayflower* that in 1620 brought colonists to what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. Compared to other European sea-faring nations, England had been sluggish about establishing or even investing in colonies in the Americas at the beginning of the 17th century. By the time *Mayflower* sailed to New England, Spain, Portugal and France had decades of experience exploring the "New World." In fact, some of their colonial efforts were a century old by the time the English colony at Jamestown, Virginia got its tenuous start in 1607.

New England was not the first stop for the Pilgrims. Around the same time the Virginia Company was

organizing its initial voyage to establish Jamestown, the group that would eventually depart on the *Mayflower* was first stirring up trouble in Scrooby, England. This small group of religious dissidents treasonously gathered together to establish their own church separate from the national Church of England. These Separatists, often referred to today as the Pilgrims, chose to leave England in 1607 to seek refuge under the more tolerant government of the Netherlands.

Life in Holland was a struggle for the Pilgrims, and they foresaw with dread that their children were becoming assimilated into the Dutch culture while their English community was declining into utter poverty. After twelve years in exile, a faction sought to move once again, gaining financial backing from London speculators to set up a new colony in America. With permission from King James I, the Virginia Company granted them a charter to establish a fishing colony near the mouth of the Hudson River.

The London investors recruited other potential colonists, acquired transportation and provisioned the voyage. After many troubles and delays, *Mayflower* departed Plymouth, England on September 6, 1620. A stormy passage was concluded when Cape Cod was sighted on November 9, and two days later *Mayflower* anchored at what is now known as Provincetown Harbor, marking the end of their sixty-six day journey. An attempt to sail around Cape Cod to head for the Hudson River was rebuffed by the dangerous sailing conditions. With winter encroaching it was decided to settle locally, even though it went against their charter. This conclusion was not without controversy among the Pilgrims. Following some "mutinous speeches" the Mayflower Compact was developed, a politically binding document that was signed by all men aboard the ship to quell any talk of mutiny. Groups of men were then sent out on foot and by boat to explore the region for a safe haven. Eventually the Pilgrims selected the vacant site of the Wampanoag town of Patuxet as their settlement, and construction began on New Plymouth on December 25, 1620. *Mayflower* remained anchored in Plymouth Bay throughout that terrible winter, and half the passengers and crew died of sickness. This winter also marked when the Wampanoag leader Massasoit, whose people had recently been decimated by disease, established contact with Plymouth through intermediaries. *Mayflower* departed for her return voyage to England on April 5, 1621.

What is Known of the Original Vessel

William Bradford does not spend much time on *Mayflower* and her passage in his journal account, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, but the glimpses he gives are vital to understanding the layout of the ship. He states that *Mayflower* "was hired at London, of burthen about nine scoure," meaning her hold was large enough to carry 180 tuns. Tuns were a 17th-century standard of measurement referring to a tun barrel, which can hold approximately 252 gallons of liquid. Bradford recorded several events that happened during their voyage, reporting that one passenger who fell overboard during a storm managed to catch hold of a topsail halyard before floating away. This confirms that *Mayflower* was rigged with topsails and also indicates that passengers did not spend the entire voyage in the hold of the ship. Another section that describes a boy's mischief with gunpowder in his family's "cabin" reveals that partitions were made below decks to house the groups of passengers.

The Pilgrim's *Mayflower*, whose master was Christopher Jones, was identified in Port of London records as *Mayflower* of Harwich. Notations in the Port Books give some information about *Mayflower*'s career before 1620. Thanks to these records, we know that she went on at least one voyage to Norway, carrying hats, hemp, Spanish salt, hops, vinegar and Gascon wine before returning to London with tar, pine planks and herring. More frequently, she carried cloth to Rochelle, France and returned with wine.

After *Mayflower's* return to England in May of 1621, she was once again involved in trade between London and France. The last mention of her in the Port Books occurs on October 31, 1621 and

Christopher Jones is known to have died in early 1622. On May 26, 1624 an application by the remaining owners of *Mayflower* declared the ship to be “in ruins” and requested an appraisal. *Mayflower* was valued and sold at 128 English pounds, 8 shillings and 4 pence, the price of scrap. This was the last recorded reference of the famed ship.

A Re-Creation: The History of *Mayflower II*

In 1951 Plimoth Plantation commissioned plans for *Mayflower II* from naval architect William A. Baker of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When Baker’s plans were completed and a waterline model of the hull was built, an English organization called Project *Mayflower* contacted Plimoth Plantation with a proposal. By the spring of 1955 the two organizations agreed to a mutually advantageous agreement. In exchange for the use of Baker's design and advice as well as a guarantee that Plimoth Plantation would permanently maintain and exhibit the vessel, Project *Mayflower* agreed to build *Mayflower II*, sail it across the Atlantic and turn the ship over to the Museum.

Construction of *Mayflower II* was undertaken at Upham shipyard in Brixham, Devonshire, England. Her keel was laid on July 27, 1955 and Baker was sent by Plimoth Plantation to consult with the builders and observe the progress of the ship’s construction. Under the direction of Stuart Upham, West-Country ship carpenters employed their skills to build a vessel that would reflect Baker's thorough research and was capable of undergoing the same journey as the original ship. Great pains were taken to make *Mayflower II* as accurate as possible, and the ship was constructed from carefully selected English oak timbers, hand-sewn linen canvas sails, hemp cordage, hand-forged nails and Stockholm tar, all of the sort used on 17th-century ships.

The hull of *Mayflower II* was launched on September 22, 1956, and the finished ship departed Plymouth, England on April 20, 1957. Under the experienced command of Captain Alan Villiers, *Mayflower II* made her transatlantic crossing unescorted and entirely through wind power. In the interest of time and safety, Captain Villiers chose to take a more southerly route than that of the 1620 voyage, and in compliance with regulations he added a modern wheel, binnacle, generator and radio to the ship.

Well-documented in both *National Geographic* and *Life* magazines, *Mayflower II*'s voyage was quite eventful. Not only was she becalmed in the lower latitudes, but she also weathered a violent storm off of Bermuda. The ship sailed safely by Nantucket Lightship on June 11, and arrived at Provincetown, Massachusetts the following day. *Mayflower II* finally arrived at Plymouth Harbor before noon the morning of June 13 to the excitement of a crowd of eager spectators, signaling the end of her fifty-five day voyage.

Mayflower II has sailed on the open water twelve times since 1957. Since 1990 Plimoth Plantation placed an emphasis on *Mayflower II* as an active sailing vessel, developing an ongoing restoration plan for the ship and training volunteers in sailing and other maritime projects. In July of 2007 *Mayflower II* celebrated her 50th anniversary in a sail to Cape Cod Bay. Seven members of the original 1957 crew were on board during this voyage, including the now grown cabin boy, Joe Meaney.

S.O.S. -- Save Our Ship

The magnitude of *Mayflower II*'s transatlantic voyage, national recognition and place in Plymouth’s community ensures that her upkeep is one of the Museum’s top priorities. Over the next several years, Plimoth Plantation will work fervently to restore *Mayflower II* to its utmost glory for the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrim’s voyage. To this end, Plimoth is seeking funding and rallying community

support by sending out an S.O.S. -- "Save Our Ship." The ship that has given the world so much needs gifts of support now more than ever, and every little bit counts.

Currently, *Mayflower II* has left her customary position on State Pier in Plymouth and is in dry dock at Fairhaven, Massachusetts. There Museum Maritime Artisans have been working diligently alongside the Fairhaven Shipyard crew to repair her extensively damaged hull. The ship's return to Plymouth has been postponed as staff and the shipyard search for additional sources of white oak, the primary building material of the ship necessary to maintain her historical accuracy. White oak of a specific length and width (scarce when the ship was built in 1955, and extremely difficult to locate now in 2013) is needed not only to finish the repairs this season, but to store for upcoming restoration work over the next several years.

Several generous donations of wood, notably a large white oak tree from Framingham State University, have helped this process immensely, and the Museum is grateful to everyone who has supported this project to date. Work on *Mayflower II* is progressing steadily, and Plimoth Plantation looks forward to welcoming her back to Plymouth Harbor this summer.

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www.plimoth.org

P.O. Box 1620
Plymouth, MA 02362

tel. 508 -746 -1622
fax. 508-830-6024