

English Immigration to Massachusetts Bay, 1629-1640 *

The great migration was a flight from conditions that had grown intolerable at home. It had its roots embedded in the Renaissance period. It is essential for the understanding of the events leading to the colonization of New England to have an understanding of the terms and philosophies used in their description. During the 15th century, a great change began to take place in the life of England. This change had begun about a century before in Italy and had swept over the whole of civilized Europe. People found the world more beautiful and life richer in joy than ever before. They reached out in all directions for new experiences and new knowledge. So complete and profound was this change from the medieval to the modern world that the new awakening is called the Renaissance [new birth]. The gradual broadening of human knowledge during the Renaissance is often referred to as the Revival of Learning.

In England the Renaissance includes roughly the years from 1400 until the death of Shakespeare, in 1616. The latter half of the 16th century and the early part of the 17th century are especially important in the history of English Renaissance, because during these years the great Queen Elizabeth occupied the English throne (1558-1603) and Shakespeare (1564-1616) composed his immortal dramas.

The newly discovered areas of the world were fascinating to the English, especially America. They looked upon America as a land of marvels and of untold possibilities. The idea of America as a land of freedom, plenty and opportunity began to take shape during the Renaissance.

Puritanism may be described as a great moral and political reform that swept over Great Britain at the close of the Renaissance. Even during the Elizabethan period many people felt that an unrestrained enjoyment of the world, and the Renaissance desire to drink every cup of pleasure to the last drop, was morally wrong and should be frowned upon. Moreover, soon after the Reformation a new interpretation of the relation of the individual Christian to the Church and to God], there arose in the Church of England a movement for greater strictness of life and simplicity of church organization and worship. This movement was called Puritanism. It led eventually to the formation of a large number of sects, each of which claimed to hold the only correct views on religion and government. Though belonging to various religious groups, the Puritans had this in common: they were all determined to resist tyranny in Church and State, and were filled with a passion for liberty and righteousness such as the world had never known.

Milton's pen and Cromwell's sword were the two most powerful weapons of the Puritan party in its struggle against the Royalists, or Cavaliers. [Cavalier – one of the court party in the time of Charles I. The Cavaliers were opposed to the adherents of Parliament, including the Puritans. The Cavaliers were often referred to as Royalists. The Cavalier Poets were 17th century English poets whose works reflect the gay and frivolous life of Charles' court.]

When Milton was about 40 years old and had been studying and writing pamphlets in behalf of the Commonwealth for almost 10 years, his sight began to fail. He was warned to stop using his eyes or he would go blind. Because, however, of his devotion to what he felt was his duty, he not only refused to stop but worked harder and harder over his books and manuscripts. The result was that in 1652, when he was in his 45th year, he went totally blind, and his "one talent" (the ability to write) was 'lodged

useless' with him. How he felt over his sad affliction is told in this famous sonnet, considered to be one of the finest ever written in English literature:

ON HIS BLINDNESS

*When I consider how my light is
spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and
wide,
And that one talent which is death to
hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul
more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and
present
My true account, lest he returning
chide;
“Doth God exact day-labour, light
denied?”
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth
not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts.
Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.
His state
Is kindly; thousands at his bidding
speed,
And post o’er land and ocean without
rest
They also serve who only stand and
Wait.”*

As an aside: three words may need clarification. In the line reading “I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent”, the word “fondly” means foolishly; the word “prevent” means anticipate. Later on, the word “thousands” means angels.

To return to the Puritan immigration:

It is precisely the eleven-year period referred to as the “eleven years tyranny” by Whig historians when Charles I attempted to rule England without a Parliament and Archbishop Wm. Laud purged the Anglican church of its Puritan members. These eleven years were also an era of economic depression and epidemic disease.

The many sufferings seemed to John Winthrop as if the land had grown “weary of her inhabitants so men which is most precious of all the creatures, is here more vile and base than the earth they tread upon.”

The 17 vessels that sailed to Massachusetts Bay in 1630 were the vanguard for 198 ships total, each carrying about 100. One colony leader estimated that there were about 21,000 emigrants in all.

The ship "*Mary and John*" sailed March 20, 1630 from Plymouth, Devon, arrived in Massachusetts Bay in the bounds of the territory of the company headed by Winthrop. The colonists settled on Dorchester Neck.

Here is a partial list of passengers; mostly those who ultimately removed to Windsor, Connecticut, and subsequently became deeply involved in the early development of Colebrook. The name of the head of household will be followed by a number representing the number of people in his party, then his county of origin in England.

Clapp, Roger (1), Devon. He was made a freeman in 1634.

Drake, John (6), Devon.

Gaylord, Wm. (4), Somerset. He was a deacon.

Gillett, Jonathan (1), Somerset.

Hoskins, John (4), origin unknown. Made a freeman in 1631.

Moore, John (1), origin unknown.

Phelps, George (1), Dorset. Made a freeman in 1635.

Phelps, Wm. (6), Dorset. Made a freeman in 1631.

Pinney, Humphrey (2), Somerset. Made a freeman in 1634.

Pomeroy, -- Came from Somerset.

Rockwell, Wm. (4), Somerset. He was a deacon.

Wolcott, Henry (8), Somerset. Made a freeman in 1634.

Of the 40 heads of families coming over on this ship, 13 remained in Dorchester, 23 went to Windsor with Warham in the migration of 1635-36 and 4 settled elsewhere in Massachusetts.

This ship, the "*Mary and John*", was also one of two ships that brought colonists to the Sagadahoc Colony [mouth of the Kennebec River] in 1607. It and the "*Gift of God*" were chartered by the Plymouth Company and left for Maine on June 1st of that year. The "*Mary and John*", was commanded by Raleigh Gilbert, the "*Gift of God*" by George Popham.

They disembarked on August 8 and built a fort, which they named Fort St. George. George Popham served as first president of the colony's governing council. Popham died in February 1608, and was succeeded by Raleigh Gilbert. Sagadahoc was evacuated late the following summer.

Returning to the events of 1630, and the circumstances surrounding the Puritan emigration, we see that the Reverend John White, Vicar of Dorchester, England, the sponsor of the earliest Massachusetts settlement (except Plymouth), was the inspiration of a movement that culminated in the gathering of nearly 150 persons in the counties of Dorset, Somerset and Devon and their agreement to emigrate in a body to Massachusetts, where he had sent other groups in the previous six years. White was a conforming Puritan who believed that the religious unrest of the period could be better composed by a liberal attitude of all factors within the Established Church. He was strongly against separation and the creation of independent religious bodies and severely condemned the subsequent action of Winthrop and Cotton, who were promoting religious intolerance in Massachusetts.

His influence in the West Country was widespread and in this, his latest effort to encourage colonization in New England, he not only secured recruits in his own city and

county, but in the adjacent counties of Devon and the remote parts of Somerset. In describing this company, he said that scarcely a half-dozen of them were personally known to each other prior to their assembling at the place of embarkation in Plymouth. There they first came to a personal acquaintance with those who were to be their companions on the voyage, and neighbors in the New World during the rest of their days. It may be assumed that these people, from many parishes over three counties, were moved by the same urge to emigrate that motivated those of the Winthrop fleet, but it is safe to say that the tale of “religious persecution” of these people was not a factor in their pilgrimage. The West Country was free from it.

With this group went two clergymen; Reverend John Maverick, 58 years old, whose son Samuel had been a resident of Massachusetts for 7 years, and was living in what is today Chelsea. The other was 48-year-old Reverend John Warham.

The passage fee on this ship was 5 pounds, or approximately \$25.00, a figure that substantially increased as time went on.

Another ship that arrived in 1630 was the “*Arbella*”, containing two ancestors of Colebrook residents. One was Bigod Eggleston, who settled first in Dorchester, Massachusetts, having come from Settrington, York County, England. The other was Roger Clapp, originally from London, who first settled in Salem. He was witness to a bazaar event soon after arriving in New England. A servant of a mister Cradock had his ears cut off for “malicious speeches against the government”, and sent back to England.

After 1640, New England’s great migration ended as abruptly as it had begun. Actually, migration did not resume again on a large scale until the Irish Catholics nearly 200 years later.

The vast majority of immigrants were from the English middle class – yeomen, husbandmen, artisans, craftsmen, merchants and traders. Less than 25% were servants (75% in Virginia). Three quarters of adult Massachusetts immigrants paid their own passage. The cost of outfitting and moving a family of 6 across the Atlantic was reckoned at 50 pounds for the cheapest. A typical English yeoman had an annual income of perhaps 40-60 pounds. A husbandman would have been lucky to earn a gross income of 20 pounds per year, of which he was left with about 3 or 4 pounds after expenses.

Three quarters of male immigrants could sign their names; the average at the time in England was 33%.

50-60 % were engaged in some skilled craft or trade before leaving England. Less than one third were directly employed in agriculture.

Washing was uncommon amongst these people. Charles Francis Adams (1807-1886), son of John Quincy Adams, recalled that there were no baths in the town of Quincy for two hundred years. However, much use was made of scented powders and leaves. Houses were hung with bouquets of herbs. Perfumed leaves were heated over the fire to mask the aroma of the inhabitants.

The town of Rowley, just south of Newburyport, Massachusetts, was founded by an untypical group of English Puritans who came from the East Riding of Yorkshire, and had been drawn into the great migration by the charisma of their East Anglican minister. Their home in the north of England had been a center for the manufacture of course linen and hemp textiles by a work force that consisted largely of children. The new settlement of Rowley, Massachusetts rapidly developed the same sort of industry that had existed in Rowley, Yorkshire. John Winthrop noted in 1643 that the American community’s

production of hemp and flax “exceeded all other towns” in New England. It was written of the Rowley colonists that they “were the first people that set upon the making of cloth in this western world, for which end they built a fulling mill (which chemically altered the fibers, causing them to shrink and acquire the ability of holding the dye colors better) and caused their little ones to be very diligent in spinning cotton wool, many of them having been clothiers in England.” About the year 1660, Samuel Maverick, who established the first settlement in what was to become the town of Chelsea, Massachusetts, described the inhabitants of Rowley as a “very laborious people...making cloth and rugs of cotton wool and also sheep’s wool.”