

PROVINCETOWN

C A P E C O D

PILGRIMS IN PROVINCETOWN

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The Pilgrims' Historic Landing in Provincetown Began a Lifetime of Exciting Discoveries for our European Ancestors

PROVINCETOWN, MA – As the *Mayflower* safely anchored in Provincetown waters on November 11, 1620, the Pilgrims got their first glimpse of the New World. And the sight was a spectacular one, filled with miles of pristine beaches, rolling sand dunes and lush vegetation surrounding a snug, deep water harbor.

The one hundred passengers and 48 crew members including William Brewster, William Bradford, John Carver, Captain Miles Standish, Priscilla Mullins, John Alden and doctors Samuel Fuller and Giles Neale were eager to go ashore after their grueling 67-day sea voyage.

Some of the more dissident on board, however, had their own ideas about freedom and rights in the new land. After all, this was not Jamestown, Virginia, their original destination.

A general meeting in the cabin of the *Mayflower* was called, and the Pilgrims formulated an agreement which was signed by 41 adult males. In this document, called the Mayflower Compact, the Pilgrims agreed to organize a Democratic government. Immediately following the signing, John Carver was elected their first Governor for a tenure of one year.

Historians debate whether the Mayflower Compact can be considered the cornerstone of

on foot with 16 men, to explore the area more extensively. They headed south to find a river. While the group was away, Susannah White had the first European baby born in New England, a boy named Peregrine.

Tuesday, November 28 to Thursday, November 30, 1620, 30 men departed in the newly repaired shallop for a second exploration led by the anxious Captain Jones. Winter weather and bitter cold set in and it snowed six inches. During their extensive search of the shore, the Pilgrims discovered two furnished Nauset wigwams, a burial ground, a bottle of oil, tools and cooking utensils, but no Native Americans. They took away ten bushels of seed corn, a store of wheat ears and a bag of beans. Plenty of game was found in the woods including deer, geese, ducks and partridge. Whales were seen in the bay, but the Pilgrims had no means of hunting them.

Captain Jones was pushing for the *Mayflower* to return to England, so it became critical for the Pilgrims to decide where to settle. As they saw it, three options existed: they could build on the Pamet River in Truro (which had been discovered during explorations); they could travel North (to the vicinity of today's Cape Ann); or they could cross Cape Cod Bay to where *Mayflower* Pilot Robert Coppin had been before, and which was called Plymouth Harbor on Captain John Smith's map dated 1614.

Wednesday, December 6, 1620, a third exploration party consisting of 20 men led by Governor John Carver, set out to explore Cape Cod Bay in the shallop. Traveling in the bitter cold and on turbulent seas, they spotted Wellfleet Bay and headed to land. Upon their approach, they noticed a group of Native Americans on the beach carving blackfish. The Pilgrims landed several miles down the coastline in Eastham and set up camp.

In the morning, the Governor divided the group into two parties. One was to explore by land and the other was to explore by water. Both parties determined this area unsuitable, most importantly because the ground was too sandy to cultivate.



The search for a safe harbor intensified and the group headed out in bad weather, to find Plymouth Harbor. They were blinded by a blizzard of snow and gale forces broke the shallop's rudder and mast. If not for Coppin's expert seamanship and rowing experience, the party would surely have been lost. Instead, they landed on the island of Saquish Head.

Saturday, December 9, 1620, as the weather cleared, the exploration party discovered they were on an island. Since it was not on Smith's map, and the pilot had never been there before, they named the place Clark's Island after the *Mayflower* sailor who first stepped ashore. They rested, dried their clothes and repaired the shallop. On Sunday they prayed.

Monday, December 11, 1620, with prevailing good weather the party rowed the shallop into a sheltered harbor which was large enough to accommodate the *Mayflower* and a whole fleet of ships. They landed, between what is now called Captain's Hill and Plymouth Rock, and discovered many freshwater streams, cultivated cornfields, plenty of open land and timber for building. Having made their decision to settle here, the group headed back to the *Mayflower*.

When the shallop party returned to Provincetown, they learned that Dorothy Bradford had died, apparently by falling overboard and drowning.

Friday, December 15, 1620, the *Mayflower* set sail for Plymouth Harbor, but experienced fierce head winds and was forced to spend the night out in the open Cape Cod Bay. The anchor was dropped in the harbor on Saturday, December 16, 1620. The *Mayflower* would spend the winter here and the Pilgrims would begin a new life.

Provincetown became important to the Pilgrims again during the mid-1600's when they negotiated to purchase the area from Native Americans to use as a "fishery reserve." Fish was one of the few commodities from the New World valued in England. In an effort to pay back the great debt they had incurred for their voyage here, the Pilgrims began fishing for cod,

mackerel, tuna and whales from the fertile waters off the shores of Provincetown. They came into the Harbor and onto the beach to salt, dry and cure the fresh catch before sending it to England. Hence Provincetown became the birthplace of commercial fishing in the United States and by the mid-19th century had become one of the busiest and wealthiest seaports in the country.

For more information about lodging in Provincetown or celebrations for the 375th Anniversary of the Pilgrims' landing, please call the *Chamber of Commerce* at (508) 487-3424, or the *Provincetown Business Guild* at (800) 637-8696.

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