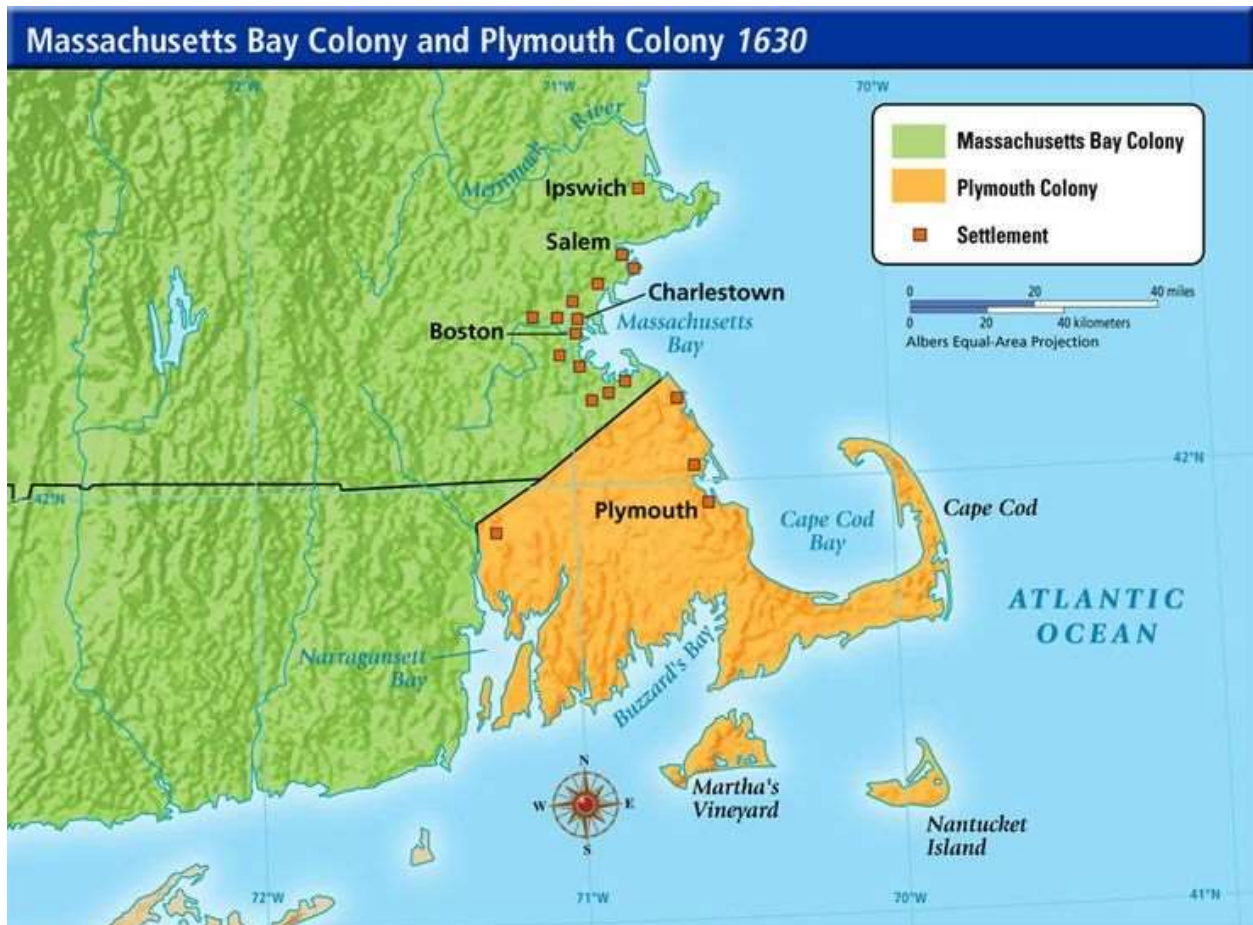


Pilgrim versus Puritan, Is there a Difference?

Who were the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony and the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony?



To understand the biggest differences between the Pilgrims and the Puritans, one has to go back to the Reformation.

Some suggest that it started on October 31, 1517, when an obscure German professor of theology named Martin Luther purportedly launched an attack on the Roman Catholic Church by nailing his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church. (Washington Post)

"The drama of Luther walking through Wittenberg with his hammer and his nails is very, very unlikely to have happened," says Professor Andrew Pettegree, an expert on the Reformation from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

"The castle church door was the normal noticeboard of the university. This was not an act of defiance on Luther's part, it was simply what you did to make a formal publication. It would probably have been pasted to the door rather than nailed up."

Ironically, Luther would likely have hated to be seen as the calculating revolutionary who overthrew the old order, and most historians agree he wasn't looking to start a "Reformation" in 1517. "Luther always thought of himself as a good Catholic," Pettegree insists. (Time)

Anyway, we are talking about actions that took place 500-years ago.

However it started, the Protestant Reformation was the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that splintered Catholic Europe and set in place the structures and beliefs that would define the continent in the modern era.

In northern and central Europe, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Henry VIII challenged papal authority and questioned the Catholic Church's ability to define Christian practice. They argued for a religious and political redistribution of power into the hands of Bible- and pamphlet-reading pastors and princes. (History-com)

The Reformation was slower to arrive to the British Isles. In England, the Reformation began with Henry VIII's quest for a male heir, when Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon so he could remarry.

In 1534, Henry VIII created the Church of England (the Anglican Church) which was similar to Catholicism, except instead of the Pope carrying divine authority, it was the British Crown. (Roos)

Henry dissolved England's monasteries to confiscate their wealth and worked to place the Bible in the hands of the people. Beginning in 1536, every parish was required to have a copy.

After Henry's death, England tilted toward Calvinist-infused Protestantism during Edward VI's six-year reign and then endured five years of reactionary Catholicism under Mary I.

In 1559 Elizabeth I took the throne and, during her 44-year reign, cast the Church of England as a "middle way" between Calvinism and Catholicism, with vernacular worship and a revised Book of Common Prayer.

America Became a Religious Refuge

The Pilgrims and the Puritans were two groups of English religious dissenters, influenced by the Reformation, in particular Calvinism, who turned away not only from the Catholic but also from the Anglican Church and sought to establish a new 'Holy Commonwealth' in North America. (Paul)

In history and scholarship, the terms 'Pilgrims' and 'Puritans' are sometimes used synonymously, indicating that the two groups had many things in common. For reasons of historical accuracy, however, we should be precise about the terminology:

The Pilgrims were religious separatists who reached America in 1620 on board the Mayflower with William Bradford (1590-1657); they had been granted land and support by the Virginia Company. Within a few years, the colony had 2,500 inhabitants and maintained quite a rigorous community life.

The Puritans – they did not refer to themselves as such – arrived in 1630 on board the Arbella and several other ships under the guidance of John Winthrop (1588-1649) after they had been granted the right to settle a new colony by Charles I, and founded the city of Boston, which for a long time remained the center of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. (Paul)

Pilgrims

Pilgrim separatists rejected the Church of England and the remnants of Catholicism that the Church of England represented.

From my years young in days of youth,
God did make known to me his truth,
And call'd me from my native place
For to enjoy the means of grace.
In wilderness he did me guide,
And in strange lands for me provide.
In fears and wants, through weal and woe,
A pilgrim, past I to and fro.

-William Bradford

The Pilgrims arrived and established Plymouth Colony in 1620 in hopes of making a better life for themselves and their children while being able to worship freely and in peace. Their perseverance laid the cornerstone of a new Nation. (plimoth-org)

In describing the emotional worship service before the Pilgrim church's departure from Holland, Governor William Bradford wrote that Reverend John Robinson:

...spent a good part of the day very profitably and suitable to their present occasion; the rest of the time was spent pouring out prayers to the Lord with great fervency, mixed with abundance of tears.

And the time being come that they must depart, they were accompanied with most of their brethren out of the city, unto a town sundry miles off called Delftshaven, where the ship lay ready to receive them.

So they left that goodly and pleasant city which had been their resting place near twelve years; but they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits. (Bradford)



John Robinson

Many of the Pilgrims were members of a sect known as the Separatists. They believed that membership in the Church of England violated the biblical precepts for true Christians, and that they had to break away and form independent congregations that adhered more strictly to divine requirements.

A passage from the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians gave urgency to their actions. The Geneva translation for Second Corinthians 6: 16-18 reads:

(16) And what agreement hathe the Temple of God with idoles? for ye are the Temple of the living God: as God hathe said, I wil dwell among them, and walke there; and I wil be their God, and shalbe my people.

(17) Wherefore come out from among them, and separate your selves, faith the Lord: and touche none uncleane thing, & I wil receive you.

(18) And I wil be a Father unto you, and ye shalbe my sonnes and daughters, saith the Lord almightie.

At a time when Church and State were one, such an act was treasonous and the Separatists had to flee their mother country. Other Pilgrims remained loyal to the national Church but came to America because of economic opportunity. They all shared a fervent and pervasive Protestant faith that touched all areas of their lives.

As English people, the Pilgrims also shared a vital secular culture both learned and traditional. They lived in a time that accepted fairies and witches, astrological influences, seasonal festivals and folklore as real parts of their lives.

They looked at the world they lived in not as we do today - through the eyes of quantum physics and psychology - but through the folklore of the countryside and academic traditions that stretched back to antiquity. (plimoth-org)

The Separatists believed that the worship of God must progress from the individual directly to God, and that "set" forms, like the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer, interfered with that progression by directing one's thoughts down to the book and inward to one's self.

In Plymouth Colony, according to the famous passage from Isaack de Rasiere's 1627 letter:

They assemble by the beat of drum, each with his musket or firelock, in front of the captain's door; they have their cloaks on, and place themselves in order three abreast, and are led by a sergeant without beat of drum.

Behind comes the Governor, in a long robe, beside him on the right hand comes the preacher with his cloak on and on the left hand, the captain with his sidearms and his cloak on, and with a small cane in his hand; and so they march in good order, and each sets his arms down near him. (Plimoth-org)

Puritans

Puritan non-separatists, while equally fervent in their religious convictions, were committed to reformation of the Church of England and restoration of early Christian society. (NY Times)

Although they were victims of religious persecution in Europe, the Puritans supported the Old World theory that sanctioned it, the need for uniformity of religion in the state. (LOC)

The Puritans left England because they didn't agree with the Church of England and they wanted to practice their own faith.

They had originally intended to come to America so they could practice their own religion, purify the Church of England, and then return to Europe with this new and improved religion.

However, they just ended up settling in America. The Massachusetts Bay Puritans were immediately more successful than other fledgling colonies. They brought enough supplies. They would bring enough to get them there and have enough supplies so that they had a good store of supplies for once they landed.

They arrived in the spring time. They timed their arrival so they could arrive in the spring time. Then, they had time to plant crops and they had food in the fall to harvest and food to help them survive throughout the winter. Other colonists were arriving in the fall and winter when it was too late to do any planting of crops.

They had good leadership, including John Winthrop. With a strong leader, they were going to be more successful. (Mometrix-com)

Winthrop stated in "The City Upon A Hill," written in 1630 while the first group of Puritan emigrants was still onboard their ship, the Arbella, waiting to disembark and create their first settlement in what would become New England.



John Winthrop

"For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge our selves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities.

We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality.

We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body.

So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as His own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with." (Winthrop)

Among the many reasons the Puritans did not want to settle in Virginia was to avoid contamination with Jamestown's perpetual bad luck (which the Puritans put down in large part to the colony's lack of a commission from God).

Even Plimoth Plantation, founded by Separatists just 10 years earlier, wasn't exactly thriving. The Puritans settled far from the Pilgrims. So there was evidence, to Winthrop, that God had already withdrawn his support from all previous English settlements. The stakes were high. (TheHistoricPresent-com)

"Therefore let us choose life, that we, and our Seed, may live; by obeying his voice, and cleaving to him, for he is our life, and our prosperity". (Winthrop)

This sermon must have truly inspired the Puritans who heard it, in part because it did not confirm their virtue but challenged it. It is an exhortation to do better than they normally would, to try harder, to aim higher. (TheHistoricPresent-com)

The "business" of the first settlers, a Puritan minister recalled in 1681, "was not Toleration, but [they] were professed enemies of it."

Puritans expelled dissenters from their colonies, a fate that in 1636 befell Roger Williams and in 1638 Anne Hutchinson, America's first major female religious leader. Those who defied the Puritans by persistently returning to their jurisdictions risked capital punishment, a penalty imposed on four Quakers between 1659 and 1661.

Reflecting on the seventeenth century's intolerance, Thomas Jefferson was unwilling to concede to Virginians any moral superiority to the Puritans. Beginning in 1659 Virginia enacted anti-Quaker laws, including the death penalty for refractory Quakers. Jefferson surmised that "if no capital execution took place here, as did in New England, it was not owing to the moderation of the church, or the spirit of the legislature." (LOC)

The Great Migration (1630-40) brought many newcomers from England to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which soon outnumbered Bradford's Plymouth Colony by far. By 1640, there were about 10,000 settlers.

Three generations later, in 1691, English colonial politics eventually merged the two colonies into the so-called Province of Massachusetts Bay. Up until then, the inhabitants of both colonies had made formative experiences which have left, as many scholars argue, "a permanent mark upon American history." (Paul)

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young