

Plymouth Colony Absorbed Into Province of Massachusetts Bay

Massachusetts takes its name from the Massachusett tribe of Native Americans, who lived in the Great Blue Hill region, south of Boston. The Indian term is roughly translated as “at or about the Great Hill”.

There are, however, a number of interpretations of the exact meaning of the word. The Jesuit missionary Father Rasles thought that it came from the word Messatosec, “Great-Hills-Mouth”: “mess” (mass) meaning “great”; “atsco” (as chu or wad chu) meaning “hill”; and sec (sac or saco) meaning “mouth”.

The Reverend John Cotton used another variation: “mos” and “wetuset”, meaning “Indian arrowhead”, descriptive of the Native Americans’ hill home. Another explanation is that the word comes from “massa” meaning “great” and “wachusett”, “mountain-place”. (Secretary of the Commonwealth)

Massachusetts Bay Colony

While it is well known that the Massachusetts Bay Company, under the leadership of John Winthrop, ultimately settled Massachusetts Bay in 1630, it is less well understood that the Massachusetts Bay Company’s claim on New England was preceded by those of two other joint stock companies.

The first of these belonged to an association of “Adventurers” known as the Dorchester Company, organized by the Anglican minister John White. Although it succeeded in launching a settlement on Cape Ann in 1623, the Dorchester Company went out of existence in 1626.

In 1627, the Council for New England issued a land grant to a new group of investors, including a few from the Dorchester Company, to establish a for-profit enterprise, “The New England Company for a Plantation in Massachusetts Bay” (better known as the New England Company), led by John Endecott.

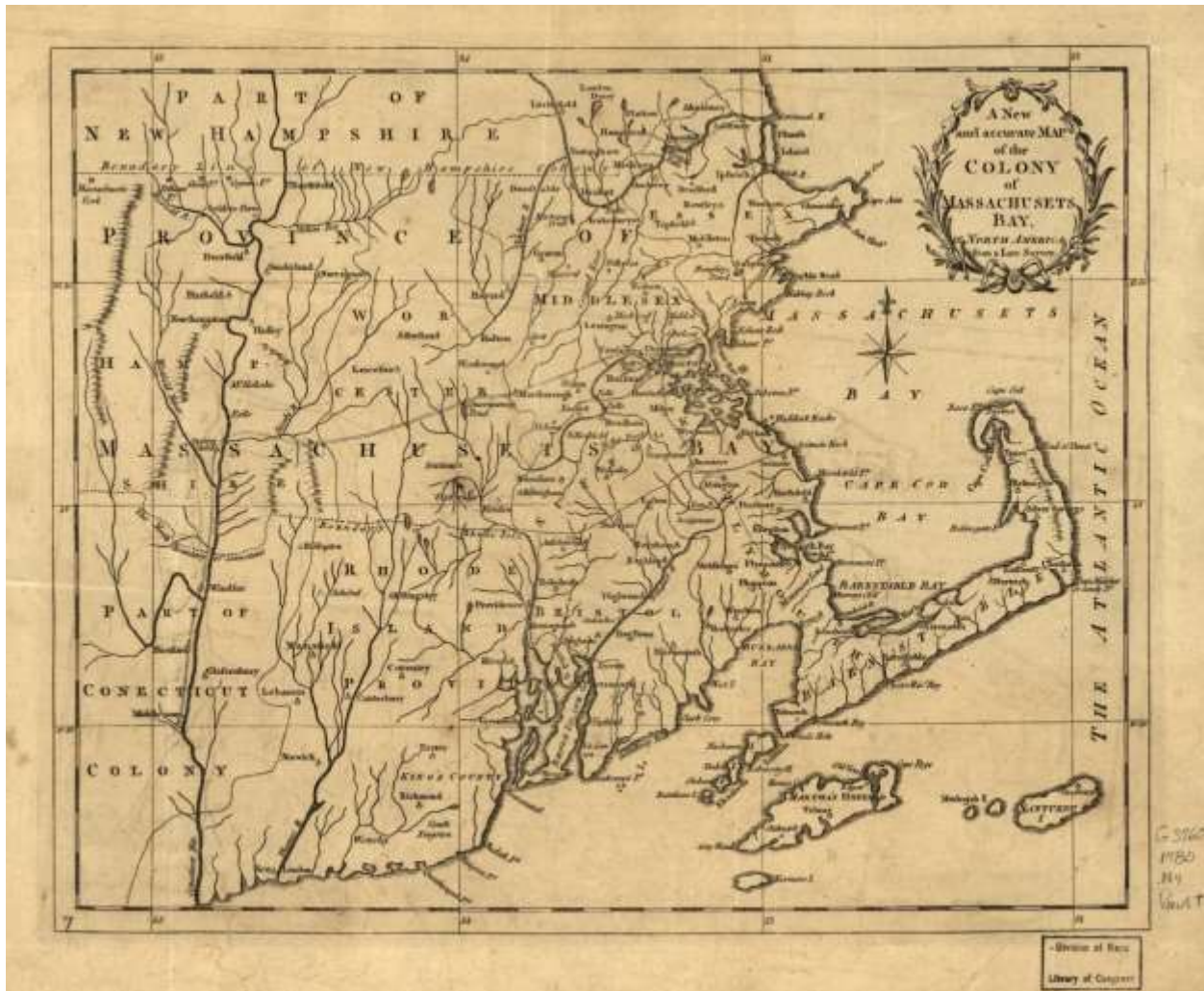
Endecott would ultimately found the town of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1628. Endecott’s shares and those of fifty-six other New England Company investors would ultimately be absorbed into those of the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1629. (Genealogical-com)

The Massachusetts Bay Colony was a colony located near modern-day Boston and Salem Massachusetts. It was the first English chartered colony whose board of governors does not reside in England, thus paving the way for permanent settlement. (Native Philanthropy)

The Puritans used the royal charter establishing the Massachusetts Bay Company to create a government in which “freemen” - white males who owned property and paid taxes and thus could take on the responsibility of governing - elected a governor and a single legislative body called the Great and General Court, made up of assistants and deputies.

In April of 1630, the Puritans, led by one of the company’s stockholders, John Winthrop, left their homes in Boston, England and gathered at a dock in Southampton to set sail for the New World.

At the dock, the Puritans listened to Reverend John Cotton preach his now famous sermon, titled “God’s Promise to His Plantation.” Cotton informed the Puritans that they were on a holy mission and urged them to convert the Native American population in the New World to Christianity. Winthrop tried to persuade Cotton to come with them to the New World but Cotton declined and returned to his church, St. Botolph’s in Lincolnshire.



The fleet of 11 ships, now known as the Winthrop fleet, set sail and finally reached the shores of Massachusetts on June 12 and landed at Salem.

A large-scale Puritan migration began in 1630 with the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and that spawned the settlement of other New England colonies. It was quickly taken over by a group of Puritans, under the leadership of John Winthrop, who wished to establish a religious community in the New World.

They hoped to purify the Church of England, and then return to Europe with a new and improved religion. The Puritans had left England because they didn't agree with the Church of England and they wanted to practice their own faith.

Puritans, then, were distinguished for being “more intensely protestant than their protestant neighbors or even the Church of England”. As a term of abuse, Puritan was not used by Puritans themselves. Those labeled Puritan called themselves terms such as “the godly”, “saints”, “professors”, or “God's children”.

The Puritans established a theocratic government with the franchise limited to church members. Winthrop, Dudley, the Rev. John Cotton, and other leaders zealously sought to prevent any independence

of religious views, and many with differing religious beliefs - including Roger Williams of Salem and Anne Hutchinson of Boston, as well as other non-Puritans like Quakers, Catholics (Papists) and others were banished from Boston and surrounding regions. Anyone who did not agree with or follow the Puritan lifestyle, be it religious or political, was driven out, often violently.

The Puritan leaders had carried the company's charter with them to New England; this action enabled them to govern themselves and meant that they would not be controlled by governors and stockholders in England. Bending the charter to their own purposes, the Puritans transformed the company into a religious commonwealth.

Their ambition had been to establish an ideal Christian community — a “city on a hill,” as Winthrop called it — with the eyes of England and the entire world on it. Winthrop was reelected governor, and a theocracy was in fact established.

In May 1631 the Puritan leaders agreed to recognize only church members as freemen (those entitled to vote and hold office). The company's officers became the colony's magistrates. The ministers of the church defined orthodoxy, and the colony's magistrates enforced it. Dissenters were suppressed or banished.

Conflicts arose over the arbitrariness of the assistants, and in 1641 the legislature created the Body of Liberties. This document was a statement of principles for governance that protected individual liberties and was the basis for the guarantees later expressed in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

Early challenges to the charter were averted by the outbreak of the English Civil War in the 1640s; for about 50 years, with little interference from England, the Massachusetts Bay Colony developed into a Puritan commonwealth.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony flourished with literacy, schools, town meetings, longer lives, clean drinking water, a cool climate, and a variety of crops. Though the Puritan faith eventually waned, the Massachusetts Bay Colony thrived and was a strong start for the New World.

In 1684, however, the government of Charles II revoked the company's charter. The colony was merged briefly into the extensive but short-lived (1686–88) Dominion of New England, which included New Hampshire and New Jersey and the colonies lying between them. (Oscar Zeichner)

Plymouth Colony

On September 6, 1620 (Old Style; September 16, New Style), the Mayflower departed from Plymouth, England, and headed for America.

After 65 days at sea, the Mayflower dropped anchor near present-day Provincetown on November 11 (OS; November, 21, 1620, NS), and 41 male passengers signed the Mayflower Compact, an agreement to enact “just and equal laws for the general good of the colony.”

The colonists who traveled to the New World on the Mayflower were a small group of Separatists who had fled to Holland from England to practice their religion without official interference. Economic hardship and a desire to establish an identity free of Dutch influence prompted them to seek out America. Most of the Separatists had been living in exile in Holland for ten years before sailing for America, and the rest of the passengers were drawn from the greater London area.

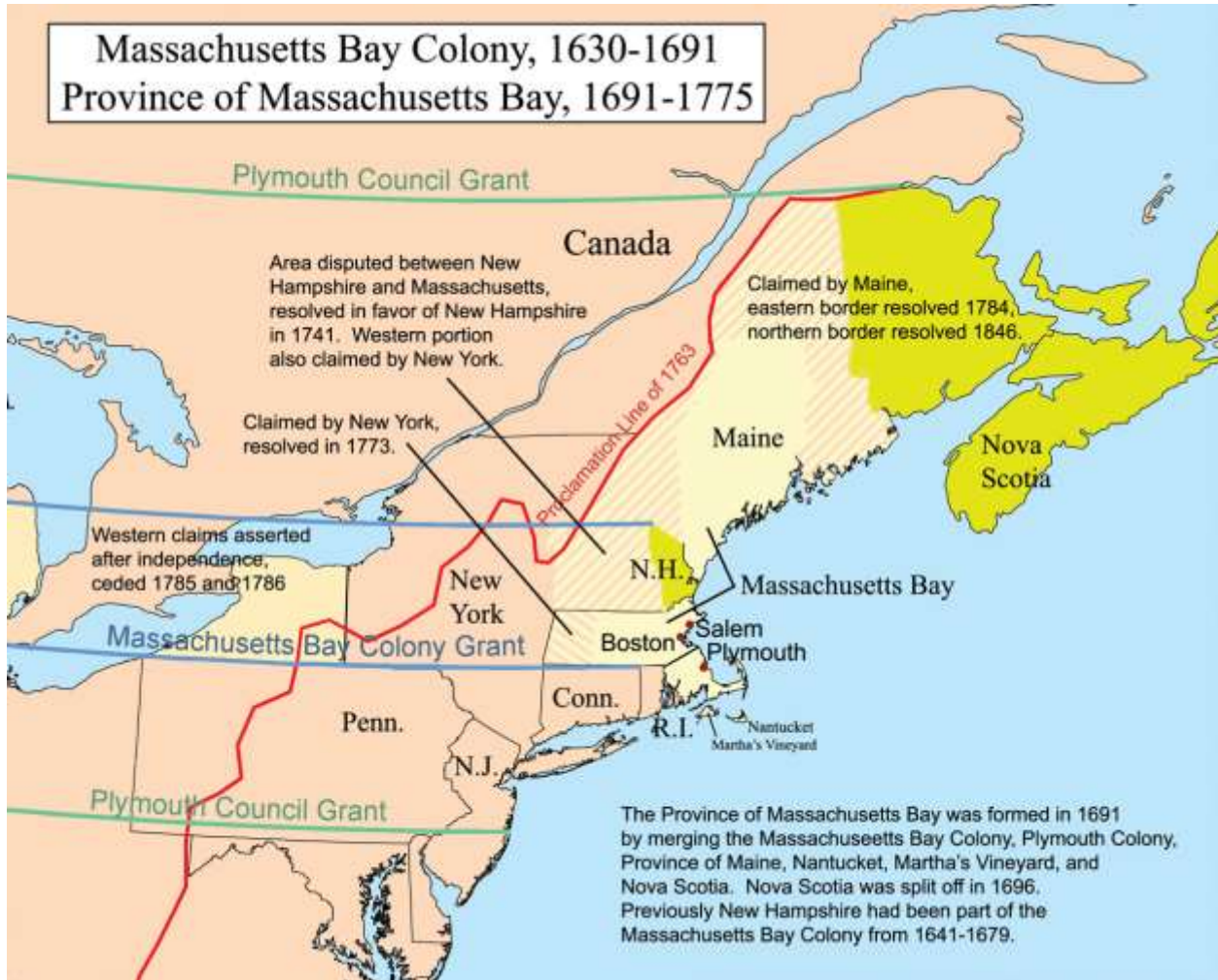


Between 1620 and 1635, economic difficulties swept England. Many people could not find work. Even skilled artisans could earn little more than a bare living. Poor crop yields added to the distress. In addition, the Industrial Revolution had created a burgeoning textile industry, which demanded an ever-increasing supply of wool to keep the looms running.

Landlords enclosed farmlands and evicted the peasants in favor of sheep cultivation. Colonial expansion became an outlet for this displaced peasant population.

The area around Plymouth and Cape Cod, settled by the Pilgrims, was known as Plymouth colony, or the Old Colony. By the mid-1640s its population numbered about 3,000 people.

The Pilgrims were never granted a royal charter; their government was based on the Mayflower Compact. The compact was hardly democratic, since it called for rule by the elite, but it established an elective system and a basis for limited consent of the governed as the source of authority. The Old Colony was rapidly overshadowed by its Puritan neighbor to the north, the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



Massachusetts Becomes a Royal Province in 1691

After losing its charter in 1684, Massachusetts continued to oppose the will of the Crown. The Puritan government often operated as an independent state, to the point of minting its own money and even conducting its own foreign affairs.

In 1686, the British king canceled the Massachusetts charter that made it an independent colony.

When James II fled in 1688, the Puritans failed in their attempt to revive the Massachusetts Bay Company, and Massachusetts, in 1691, became a Royal Province under a Governor appointed by the Crown. The Charter of Massachusetts Bay, under the authority of,

“William & Mary by the grace of God King and Queene of England Scotland France and Ireland Defenders of the Faith &c To all to whome these presents shall come”...

[establish] the said Collony of the Massachusetts Bay Our Royall Charter with reasonable Powers and Priviledges will much tend not only to the safety but to the Flourishing estate of Our Subjects in the said parts of New England

and alsoe to the advanceing of the ends for which the said Plantancons were at first encouraged of Our especiall Grace certaine knowledge and meer Mocon have willed and ordeyned and Wee doe by these presents for Vs Our Heires and Successors Will and Ordeyne

Chat the Territories and Collnyes camonly called or known by the Names of the Collony of the Massachusetts Bay and Collony of New Plymouth the Province of Main the Territorie called Accadia or Nova Scotia and all that Tract of Land lying betweene the said Territorities of Nova Scotia and the said Province of Main

be Erected ignited and Incorporated And Wee doe by these presents Vnite Erect and Incorporate the same into one reall Province by the Name of Our Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England”

To let more control over trade with the colonies, the King combined British colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth and Maine and the islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard into a single territory governed from England in 1691. The religious laws instituted by the Massachusetts Bay Company were largely repealed.

In this new Massachusetts, the franchise was given only to those who owned property or paid taxes. Continued lack of interference from Great Britain allowed the colonists to gain a tradition of self-reliance and self-government. (Maine remained a part of Massachusetts until 1820, when it was established as a separate state.)

The Massachusetts Charter of 1691 was a charter that formally established the Province of Massachusetts Bay. The charter provided for the Governor's appointment by the Crown rather than local election, and at the same time broadened the Governor's powers.

Two legislative houses were permitted, however, and the requirement that every voter must be a church member was abolished.

The new restrictions incidental to the status of a Royal Province, applied in Massachusetts and elsewhere, provoked the series of controversies that culminated in the Revolutionary War. During the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, Massachusetts grew in population and in maritime trade.

These were the years of the so-called Second Hundred Years’ War between France and England. In these wars, 1688-1760, Massachusetts played an important part. Its crowning feat was the capture in 1745 of the fortress of Louisburg on Cape Breton Island (NS), a fortress so strong it was known as the Gibraltar of America. At the same time, Massachusetts’ maritime trade, especially with Caribbean ports, rose to the point that Boston was known as “The Mart (or market town) of the West Indies”. (Mass Facts, Secretary of the Commonwealth)



Information here is from Oscar Zeichner; Britannica; Robert Charles Anderson; Native Philanthropy; Massachusetts Secretary of the Commonwealth

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