

Plymouth Rock and the Beginning of the New England Colonies¹

Settling New England	Vocabulary
The settlement at Jamestown (and the southern colonies more generally) were largely founded for economic reasons. In contrast, the New England colonies were founded for religious reasons. The early colonists in New England meant to build religious sanctuaries for people escaping persecution in England. The Pilgrims were the first religious group to come to New England, arriving in 1620 and the years after that. They meant to build a society that could worship in the way they believed was correct. The Puritans arrived in 1630 hoping to create a model Christian society, or in their words “a city on a hill.” Both groups had struggled with laws in England that required them to be members of the Church of England. The first permanent settlement in New England was Plymouth. The Pilgrims were people who wanted to separate from the Church of England because they disagreed with some of its policies and practices. In September 1620, about one hundred men, women, and children crammed aboard a ship named Mayflower. After two months at sea, they landed off the coast of Cape Cod, just south of what would become Boston, Massachusetts. On the ship, the Pilgrims had written and signed the Mayflower Compact. This document was an agreement that stated that they would form a government and agree to follow its laws in their new homeland. The Plymouth colonists settled in an abandoned Wampanoag (/wham*puh*nahg/) Indian village that had been deserted, likely due to smallpox. The Pilgrims named their hillside colony Plymouth after the Englishtown their ship had sailed from. The first house the Pilgrims built was called the common house. At first, it was used as a shelter and a place to store tools. Later, it was used as a place of worship and became the center of the village. However, as in Jamestown, the colonists in Plymouth experienced great hardships when they first arrived. Many were weakened by the journey and the freezing temperatures. The winter of 1620–1621 was long, cold, and harsh. Half of the group died during the first year of the colony, including thirteen of the eighteen married women. The luck of the colony changed. With the approaching spring, the weather grew warmer, and a visitor arrived in the settlement, a Native American man named Samoset. Surprisingly, Samoset had learned a little of the Pilgrims’ language from English fishermen who had ventured to this land before the colonists. Samoset spoke to John Carver, the first governor of Plymouth. He told the governor that the sachem, or leader, of the Wampanoag would like to meet the Pilgrims.	“A city on a hill”: common house:

¹ Adapted from, [Core Knowledge](#)

Samoset told the Pilgrims about the Native Americans who used to live in the place where the Pilgrims had built their settlement. These Native Americans had cleared the fields around Plymouth. A few years before, Samoset told the Pilgrims, a strange sickness had killed every member of that nation. The only person left was a man named Squanto, who had been taken to England by fishermen before the strange sickness broke out. When Squanto returned, he was the only one of his people still alive. A few days later, Samoset brought Massasoit (/ma*suh*soit/), the sachem of the Wampanoag, to Plymouth colony. With him were several other men, including Squanto. The Pilgrims and the Native Americans exchanged gifts, and then they ate and drank together.

Afterward, Governor Carver and Massasoit made a peace treaty that would last fifty-four years. The chief and the other Native Americans left, but Squanto stayed behind with the Pilgrims. He showed the Pilgrims where to fish and pointed out which nuts and berries were safe to eat. He helped them survive. Then, in the late spring, Governor Carver died, and the Pilgrims chose William Bradford as their new governor. Bradford was governor of Plymouth for the next thirty-five years. In the fall, Governor Bradford gathered all the Pilgrims together. He told them that they had many things to be thankful for. Among them they had finally found a place to worship God in their own way. To celebrate, Governor Bradford sent men out to hunt birds so that the colonists could have a feast and offer prayers of thanksgiving. The Wampanoag came to feast with them and brought five deer to share. That feast was a Thanksgiving celebration that has become an American tradition.

Massachusetts Bay Colony

The Massachusetts Bay colony began ten years later than Plymouth colony, but from the very start it overshadowed the older colony to its south. This colony was led by another religious group, who called themselves **Puritans** because they wanted to purify the Church of England. John Winthrop was its first governor and wrote a set of rules he thought the colonists should live under in America. The rules were written in a pamphlet called *A Modell of Christian Charity*. The rules stressed hard work, clean living, and belief in God in order to be successful. Winthrop warned that if colonists did not follow these rules, their colony would fail. The Puritans held a strong belief in teaching everyone, boys and girls alike, to read and write. This was very unusual at the time. The Puritans supported this idea because they thought it was important that people should be able to read the Bible for themselves.

The Puritans established the first schools for children in America. They also wrote the first schoolbook for children in America, called *The New England Primer*. It contained rhymes that taught the alphabet and spelling words. The primer also had many prayers, poems, and questions about the Bible. Students were expected to answer the questions and recite their lessons perfectly, or they

risked punishment. Puritans believed so strongly in education that they even established the first college in America. That college, Harvard, was founded in 1636 as a school to train ministers. The Puritans might have left England because they disagreed with the king over religious matters, but that did not mean they allowed anyone to disagree with their beliefs in their New England colony. Instead of showing religious tolerance, people who had other religious beliefs were punished, imprisoned, banished, or even executed. One of the most famous people the Puritans punished for speaking out against their religious beliefs was a woman named Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson was the intelligent wife of a prominent merchant who had raised thirteen children. She hosted Bible studies in her home, where she met with men and women to discuss sermons. The New England Primer had rhymes that taught the alphabet and spelling words. The primer also had many prayers, poems, and questions about the Bible.

This was shocking to Puritan leaders as they did not encourage women to be leaders. Hutchinson's meetings grew large, as did her reputation as a strong authority on religious topics. This made her a dangerous woman in the eyes of Puritan leaders because she undermined their authority. In 1638, colony leaders banished Hutchinson from the Massachusetts Bay Colony