

The Mayflower

Journey

Would you have liked to travel on a small ship with more than 100 other people, all of their belongings, and possibly some farm animals - for 66 days? That's what the Pilgrims did in the year 1620, on a ship called the Mayflower.

Mayflower set sail from England in July 1620, but it had to turn back twice because Speedwell, the ship it was traveling with leaked. After deciding to leave the leaky Speedwell behind, Mayflower finally got underway on September 6, 1620.

In the 1600s, the ocean was full of dangers. Ships could be attacked and taken over by pirates. Many ships in the 1600s were damaged or shipwrecked by storms. Passengers sometimes fell overboard and drowned or got sick and died.

Although Mayflower did not sink, a few of these things actually did happen! Mayflower wasn't taken over by pirates -- the ship sailed on a northern path across the Atlantic to avoid them -- but she was damaged by a bad storm halfway to America. The storm cracked one of the massive wooden beams supporting the frame of the ship. Fortunately, the passengers had brought along a "great iron screw," which helped raise the beam back into place so the ship could continue. In another storm, a young passenger, John Howland was swept off the deck of the ship and into the ocean! He was saved because he grabbed onto the one of the ship's ropes (or lines) and was pulled back onto the deck.

Although many people were seasick on the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, only one person died. He was a sailor who had been very mean to the passengers and taunted them about the seasickness. The colonists believed he died because God was punishing him for being cruel.

One baby was born during the journey. Elizabeth Hopkins gave birth to her first son, appropriately named Oceanus, on Mayflower. Another baby boy, Peregrine White, was born to Susanna White after Mayflower arrived in New England.

After more than two months (66 days) at sea, the Pilgrims finally arrived at Cape Cod on November 11, 1620. A few weeks later, they sailed up the coast to Plymouth and started to build their town where a group of Wampanoag People had lived before (a sickness had killed most of them). The Pilgrims lived on the ship for a few more months, rowing ashore to build houses during the day and returning to the ship at night. Many people began to get sick from the cold and the wet; after all, it was December! About half the people on the Mayflower died that first winter from what they described as a "general sickness" of colds, coughs, and fevers.

Finally in March 1621, there were enough houses that everyone could live on land. After a long, hard voyage, and an even harder winter Mayflower left Plymouth to return to England on April 5, 1621.

The Ship and Its People

Traveling on the ocean 400 years ago was a very different experience than it is today. Mayflower didn't have private cabins with windows and beds for each person. there were no computers, televisions, air conditioners, fancy meals or swimming pools. In the 1600s most ships were merchant ships. They were made for carrying cargo, like barrels of food or cloth, large pieces of wood, and casks of wine from one place to another to be sold. Before the Mayflower sailed to New England, it had been sailing around Europe carrying wine and cloth. This cargo was probably stored in the lower decks of the ship in one large, open storage area. There were no windows on the deck because windows might let in seawater that would ruin the cargo. A little water would leak in anyway, though so this area was always cold, damp, and dark.

The storage decks had very low ceilings. They didn't need to make the decks very high because barrels and boxes weren't very tall. The ship had low-ceilinged decks to make it safer and to save space for the decks where the sailors lived. A ship that was too tall might tip over or sink. The crew (sailors and officers of the ship) lived in the upper decks. In 1620, there were about 20-30 crewmembers on the Mayflower. The Master, in charge of sailing the ship was Christopher Jones. We could call him a "captain" today. He probably had his quarters, or living space, at the stern (back) of the ship. This was the driest and most comfortable area on the ship.

The common sailors, or regular workers, had their quarters at the front of the ship, or bow, in a room called the forecabin. The forecabin, or fo'c'sle, was not a pleasant place to sleep or eat. It was in a part of the the ship constantly hit by waves, so it was always wet and cold. The sailors would have to get used to the swaying and pitching of the ship because it was at its strongest here. Also, most of the men would be going to the bathroom at the head, which was at the very tip of the bow, so the forecabin wasn't very clean.

There were also officers on the Mayflower. They were responsible for sailing and navigating the ship. They probably lived in the space between the Master and the common sailors. Their quarters weren't as spacious or comfortable as the Master's but they weren't as awful as the space for the common sailors.

Where did the passengers live on the Mayflower? The ship carried 102 men, women, and children passengers on its only trip to New England. The passengers were the cargo, so they had to live in the dark, cold cargo decks below the crew's quarters.

*Source: <http://www.plimoth.org/learn/just-kids/homework-help/mayflower-and-mayflower-compact>

The crew and passengers of the Mayflower experienced many challenges. What were the greatest challenges faced by the crew and passengers of the Mayflower? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.