

## Chapter 13

# The Pilgrims of Plymouth



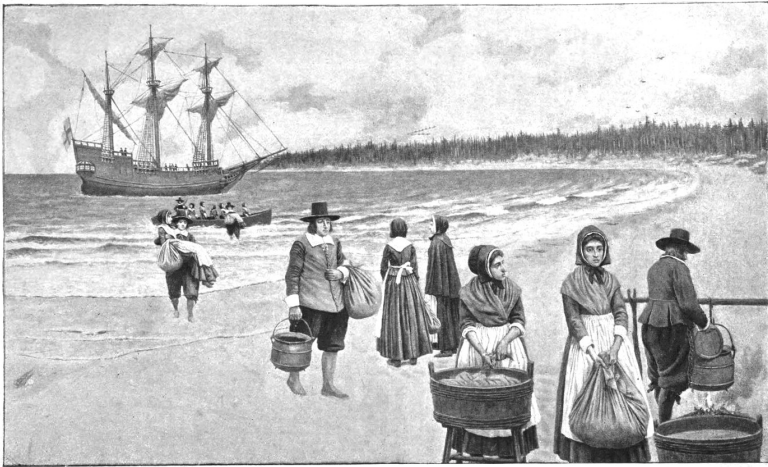
CAPTAIN Myles Standish was an English soldier who, in his wanderings, came across the Pilgrim settlement in Holland. This soldier was not a Separatist. Like John Smith, he loved adventure, and so sincerely did he admire the pluck and perseverance of the Pilgrims that he volunteered to go with them to America and help them.

The trip across the ocean was long and tiresome. Storms came up, and the poor people had to remain below deck most of the time. The winds and waves so tossed the frail vessel that it seemed as if they would never see land again.

At last, after many weary weeks, they saw the American coast stretched out before them; and on a bleak, wintry day, they rounded the end of Cape Cod and sailed into Provincetown Harbor. They gazed at the snow-laden trees, the bare coasts, and the dark skies above with a mixture of fear and hope.

While the *Mayflower* was lying at anchor in this bay, the Pilgrims drew up a written agreement in the cabin of the ship. In this agreement, it was stated that all were to have equal rights and that they would live in peace and help and defend one another in time of need. They elected John Carver governor and agreed to obey such laws as should seem necessary later on.

For a month, they sailed along the coast of Massachusetts Bay, trying to find a suitable place to land. Often parties explored the shore in a shallop or small boat which they had brought in the *Mayflower*. But Myles Standish, who usually had charge of these



*First morning ashore in the New World*

expeditions, preferred traveling inland to see what kind of land this bleak country was.

On more than one occasion, he and his men saw Indians. One day they discovered a mound freshly covered over with sand. They removed the sand and found several baskets of corn with yellow, blue, and red kernels. They were overjoyed and took the corn back with them to the ship. Later, when the Pilgrims found to whom this corn belonged, they paid the Indians for it.

During these days, Myles Standish proved a very useful friend to the Pilgrims, and it was he who finally chose the spot for the colonists to settle upon. On December 21, when the ground was knee-deep with snow and the weather biting cold, the Pilgrims left the *Mayflower* to make their new home in this place called Plymouth. A large log house was hastily constructed, in which they all could live until they were able to build separate homes for each family.

As the winter advanced, the Pilgrims suffered great hardships. Food was getting scarce. They had used up most of the provisions brought from England. The men were nearly worn out by the heavy work they were doing. Large trees had to be hewn down and dragged to the spot where they were used in building. Then

came the work of cutting them into the proper size and shape, and all this in bitterly cold weather.

No wonder that with all these hardships, so many became ill and died. Those who remained well and strong—and there were only a few of them—brought the wood, made the fires, cooked all the food, nursed the sick, and even washed the clothes for the entire colony. The large log house was turned into a hospital. When spring came, only fifty were left of the one hundred two who had sailed from England.

So that the Indians might not know to what a small number they had been reduced, the settlers buried their dead at night and leveled the ground so that they would not be noticed.

Yet, despite the hard winter, when the *Mayflower* returned to England in the spring, not one person chose to go back. Liberty, with all its hardships, was sweeter than life in their old home.

One day an Indian came into the village of Plymouth and called to the people in English, “Welcome!” His name was Samoset, and he had learned a little English from fishermen on the Maine coast. He stayed overnight and left the next morning.

Shortly afterward, Samoset returned with another Indian named Squanto. Years before, Squanto had been stolen by some Englishmen and had been taken to England where he learned the English language and English ways. After many adventures, he had managed to return to his home in America. He told the Pilgrims that the chief of his tribe, Massasoit, was coming to visit them.

In an hour’s time, Massasoit came with sixty followers. The Pilgrims received him with grand ceremony. They marched to meet him, carrying their guns and beating all the drums they could muster. After holding council, Massasoit and the Pilgrims drew up a peace compact. This peace was kept for over fifty years between the Wampanoag and the English.

Squanto afterward came and lived in Plymouth and proved an invaluable friend. He taught the Pilgrims how to catch fish and how to tread eels out of the mud. He told them to plant corn when the oak leaf was as big as a mouse's ear and to drop a dead herring in each hill for fertilizer. He acted as an interpreter between them and the neighboring tribes in their fur trading.



*Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to fertilize corn*

When spring came, the Pilgrims grew more hopeful. They had twenty acres of corn and six of barley and peas planted, which promised a good harvest. With the autumn, the promise was fulfilled. When they had gathered in their first harvest, the Pilgrims found themselves well supplied with grain for the coming winter.

They did not forget who the Giver of all this bounty was, so they set aside a day to thank God for the harvest. Then, thinking the best way to show their gratitude was to give pleasure to others, they invited Massasoit and ninety of his tribe to join them in a celebration. Massasoit brought five deer for the feast. The Pilgrims had sent men out to shoot wild turkey. For three days, these friendly neighbors passed the time in feasting and outdoor games. From this beginning has grown our national custom of observing Thanksgiving Day in the fall each year.

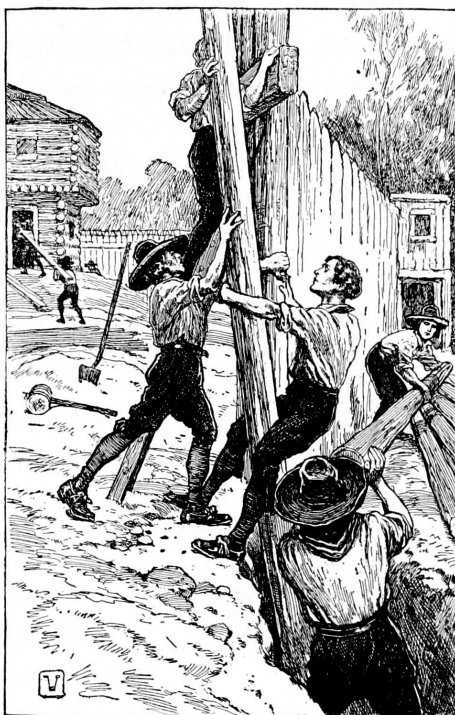
Not all Indians, however, were as friendly to the Pilgrims as were Massasoit and his tribe. One day Canonicus, the chief of the Narragansett, sent a bundle of arrows wrapped in a snake-skin to the colony. This was a sign of war. Myles Standish was a brave man and did not fear the threat. He kept the arrows and,



*The first Thanksgiving*

filling the snakeskin with gunpowder, returned it to Canonicus. This was enough. Canonicus thought it best to leave the English alone.

These hostile neighbors made the settlers more careful. Directed by Captain Standish, they built a strong palisade around their town, with gates in it which were shut and guarded at night. Standish formed a militia and trained them how to defend their little colony from attack.



*Building a palisade*

Leaders like Captain Standish, who inspired hope and courage among the colonists, and allies like Massasoit and Squanto, who offered friendship and wisdom, helped to secure peace and prosperity for Plymouth. As Plymouth flourished, more and more settlers came to America to found new towns. This was the beginning of the Massachusetts Colony.