

Plymouth Colony Gov. William Bradford

Composed by D. A. Sharpe

William Bradford, whose fame came as being Governor of Plymouth Colony during its early decades, is my [seventh great grandfather](#) on my father's side of the family.

William's birthday is reported March 19, 1590, though other dates have been cited.

William Bradford's father died in 1591 when the son was only a year old. William then went to live with his grandfather, William Bradford, until the grandfather died in 1596. Then, young William went to live with his Uncle

Robert Bradford, who resided in the little village of Scrooby, a place five miles from Austerfield, near the estate of the Brewsters, in Nottinghamshire. He joined the church where Rev. Richard Clifton and [Rev. John Robinson](#) preached, and was soon numbered among the "[Separatists](#)," becoming a leader among them.

His educational opportunities were meager, but he applied self-learning, eventually becoming proficient in Dutch, Latin, French and Greek, along with some study of Hebrew, as he had a curiosity to read the Holy Scripture in its original languages. Obviously, his first language was English. Having workable knowledge of six languages in that day was quite an accomplishment.

William Bradford



A conjectural image of Bradford, produced as a postcard in 1904 by A.S. Burbank of Plymouth.^[1]



William Bradford lived in a turbulent time for England. A Church of England, broken away from Rome, but, headed by the likes of [King James I](#), was not what many Christians wanted, and there arose two groups of objectors known as Puritans and as Separatists. Puritans sought to "purify" the [Church of England](#), so they were not openly "rebellious" to the Church. On the other hand, the Separatists thought the Church of England beyond reform, and thus advocated a "separate" church.

The Rev. John Robinson at [Scrooby in Nottinghamshire](#) led this Separatist congregation. The congregation was formed in 1602. They met in the manor home of [Postmaster William Brewster](#). They sought only to worship in their own way. They were peaceful and not confrontational to the Church of England authorities.

The believers in Scrooby were called [Brownists](#), a derisive term in the minds of Church of England leaders, named after Robert Brown, a graduate of [Cambridge University](#) who was a catalyst for Protestant dissent in England in the late 1500's. Robinson was likened to Brown in his views. The Puritans were viewed as less threatening, as they had church buildings and could be found, if authorities wished to arrest them. The Separatists or Brownists met in homes and, therefore, had no church buildings.

A Scrooby resident, though not a Brownists congregation member, was our William Bradford. He, being destined to become the governor of Plymouth Colony, wrote of the Brownists's oppressive situation...

"They were both scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude ... and the poor people were so vexed with apparitors, and pusrants and commissarie counts, as truly their affliction was not small."

He also wrote some opposition to the positions taken by the Brownists. Bradford was not only a gifted writer, publishing his





★ famous and moving diary, "A History of Plymouth Plantation," he would also become one of the heroic pioneers of Western history, laying the cornerstones that made possible the building of the American Republic.

★ However, in Scrooby, William Bradford was just another Christian Citizen. He was a mere teenager when he arrived at Scrooby, son of a farmer. But his potential to be a leader was great, a Governor and a writer. His writings are credited with coining the term of "Pilgrims" to apply to these Christians who fared the Atlantic winter waters to seek freedom of worship and of pursuing life, unfettered by the shackles seen in the structures prevailing in England.

★ The Separatists came under persecution by the English government, since it was the Church of England, government-owned and sponsored, from which the group wanted separation. King James viewed them as rebels. In 1607, the people comprising the church at Scrooby made the decision to relocate to [Amsterdam](#), a place where much religious tolerance was practiced. However, the harassment from the English government, including imprisonment of some of the members, including William Brester, delayed them in completing the move till 1608. This was a time when the Netherlands was enjoying its height of commercial shipping success around the then known world, and Amsterdam was considered probably the commercial capital of the world.

★ There were many Protestant churches in Amsterdam, due to the tolerance, but there was a lot of wrangling amongst themselves, and so the group from Scrooby relocated shortly to [Leiden](#), a little south, along the coast, toward [The Hague](#). In Leiden, they settled down to their various occupations. William Brewster became a publisher of books. Rev. John Robinson taught at the university. Many of these Christians worked in the clothing trades. Isaac Allerton was a tailor. William Bradford and William Pontus were fustian makers. Fustian was a coarse, heavy cloth made of cotton and flax, and it was used for clothing in Europe



through the Middle Ages. Its thickness was similar to corduroy or velveteen. It is twilled and has a short pile or nap. So, our William Bradford was a man of the cloth, but he was not a Man of the Cloth, in the senses of the ordained ministry!

Even though freedom was good in Leiden, compared to England, being there was hard. They were not citizens, and so their employment opportunities were bottom-of-the barrel quality. They had jobs where work hours were very long and lowly paid. In addition, their youth seemed overly influenced by the great licentiousness of the youth native to that country, representing manifold temptations and much that was considered evil. So, after some 11 or 12 years in Leiden, the group decided to seek another place to live. They checked into the situation in England in 1620 to seek a solution.

John Smith



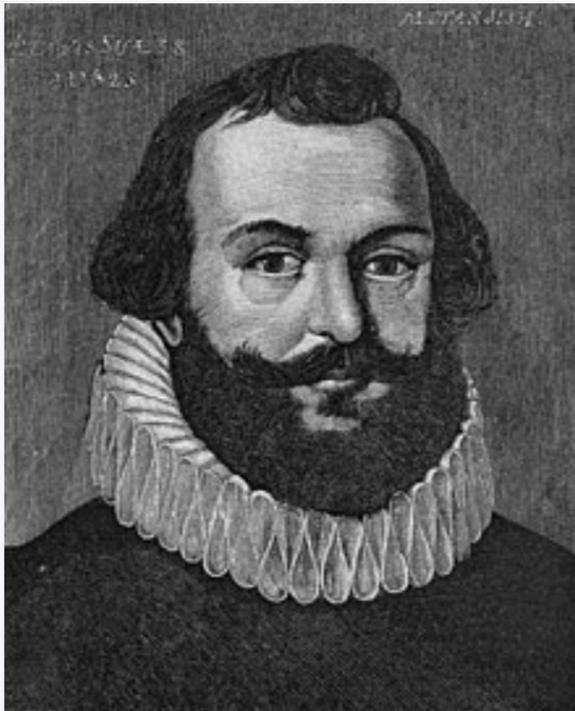
Captain John Smith (1624)

Englishmen had begun to poke around the new world in the early 1600's. Our friends in Leiden followed the news about these developments with increasing interest. In 1607, Jamestown had become the first permanent English settlement. It's ironic that it is proclaimed in history as the first permanent English settlement, because it dissipated into nothingness by shortly after 1700, due to its impractical and inhospitable conditions. Williamsburg and other places flourished later. However, [Capt. John Smith](#), who was a leader with the Jamestown settlement, explored further north

and made a detailed map in 1616 all the way up to what became

known as New England. It was probably due to Smith's writings that the Leiden Separatists knew of the area and it is quite probable that they had copies of his maps when they made the trip to sail to the New World.

Myles Standish



This portrait, first published in 1885, was alleged to be a 1625 likeness of Standish, although its authenticity has never been proven.^[1]

It is recorded that Capt. Smith had offered his services to captain a ship for the Leiden group to the New World, but they declined his offer, allegedly because he was highly priced. They chose an English soldier who'd been living in Holland, named [Myles Standish](#). The English Separatists were cautious of Smith's reputation as a swashbuckling braggadocio, which is probably the reason

why they declined his services, but he wrote that they turned him down because of his cost.

Not all the Separatists in Leiden came in 1620. In fact, a majority of them remained in Leiden, some coming in a year or two later, others coming several years later, and some stayed, including their pastor, Rev. John Robinson, who stayed till his death March 1, 1624.



The group set sail August 5, 1620, from Delfshaven, South Holland, on the Speedwell with about 120 passengers, but that ship's springing a leak and other forms of inadequacy forced a return, putting in at nearby Plymouth, England. They reloaded onto the Mayflower for their effective launch to the New World. They continued with only 102 passengers, as some chose to stay in England, foregoing the challenge and the fear of the unknown, settling for the known, displeasing as it was. On November 22, they sighted land, what we later know as Cape Cod. "They had begun their long journey on the dock at Delfshaven to ask God's blessing; they ended it on the sands of Cape Cod, kneeling to thank Him for that blessing."



Signing the Mayflower Compact 1620, a painting by [Jean Leon Gerome Ferris](#) 1899

The Mayflower Compact, was written November 22, 1620 [This was November 11, old style calendar] off the Coast of what was to become Massachusetts. This is the first written agreement for self-government in America. It was signed on the Mayflower, before landing at what became Plymouth Colony. There were 41 adult males who signed the

document. Of the 102 passengers, 37 were members of the "Separatists" who were fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Half the colony failed to survive the first winter, but the remainder lived on and prospered. One of the signers was William Bradford, whom some historians have called the Father of American History. He basically was self-educated.

The document was an expression of all the group. However, most likely, it was primarily composed by one writer who, no doubt, received editorial suggestions prior to the mass signing. The composer is never identified, but William Bradford's seemingly being the most literate man among the signers, was most likely the composer. Another reason giving credibility that Bradford composed the Mayflower Compact is that no copy of the original document survives. The only reason we have the words of the Mayflower Compact is that Bradford quoted the document in its entirety in his historical writing of the times. His ability to recollect the complete words gives credence to the idea that he originated the document for the most part.

Listen to the stirring words of this compact:



★ The Mayflower Compact

★ "In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are
★ underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread
★ Sovereign Lord, King James, by the Grace of God, of
★ England, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the
★ Faith.

★ "Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and
★ Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour
★ of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first
★ colony in the northern parts of Virginia; do by these
★ presents, solemnly and mutually in the Presence of
★ God and one of another, covenant and combine
★ ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our
★ better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of
★ the Ends aforesaid; And by Virtue hereof to enact,
★ constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws,
★ Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time
★ to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient
★ for the General good of the Colony; unto which we
★ promise all due submission and obedience.

★ "In Witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our
★ names at Cape Cod the eleventh of November, in the
★ Reign of our Sovereign Lord, King James of England,
★ France and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland
★ the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini, 1620."



★ Are not these words compelling as to Christian
★ purpose? Although no one is quite sure what
★ happened to the original copy of the Mayflower
★ Compact, the world is fortunate enough to know
★ what it said, because of the prudent gesture of
★ Governor William Bradford to make a handwritten
★ copy. Here is an image of his hand-written
★ record:



54
set by them done (this their condition considered) might
be as firme as any patent; and in some respects more firm.
The forme was as followeth.

In the name of god Amen. We whose names are underwritten
the loyal subjects of our deere sovereign Lord King James
by the grace of god, of great britaine, france, & Ireland King,
Defender of the faith, &c.

Having undertaken, for the glory of god, and advancement
of christianity, and honour of our King & Country, a voyage to
plant the first Colonie in the Northern parts of Virginia. God
by these presents solemnly & mutually in the presence of god, and
one of another, covenant, & combine our selves together into a
civill body politick; for the better ordering, & preservation & fur-
therance of the ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte,
constitute, and frame such just & equall Lawes, Ordinances,
statutes, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be thought
most meete & convenient for the general good of the Colonie: unto
which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness
whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape
Codde the 11 of November in the year of the reign of our sovereign
Lord King James of England, France, & Ireland the eighth,
and of Scotland the fifth fourth part Dom. 1620.

After this they chose, or rather confirmed in John Carver (a man
godly & well approved amongst them) their Governour for that
year. And after they had provided a place for their habitation, or
common store, (which was long in building for want of tools,
sawes of the winter weather, and sickness of sickness) and began
some small cottages for their habitation, as time would admit
they made and consulted of Lawes, & orders, both for their
civill & military government, as the necessities of their condi-
tion did require, still adding therunto as urgent occasion
in severall times, and places did require.

In these hard & difficult beginnings they found some discontent
& murmurings amongst some, and mutinous speeches & carriage
in other; but they were soon quelled, & overcome, by the
kind patience, and just & equall carriage of things, by the god
and better part with cleave faithfull cooperation in the maine:
but that which was most sadde & lamentable, was, that in 2
or 3. months time parts of their company dyed, especially
in Jan. & February, being the depth of winter, and wanting
houses & other comforts; being assaulted with the severest &

Bradford's transcription of the
compact





Early tragedy hit on December 9, 1620 when Bradford's wife, Dorteia May Bradford, drowned overboard before the band of Pilgrims had embarked upon the land. It was early in the dawn hours, and no one witnessed the fall. The cause of the fall was never determined.



There were only 23 family units to survive that cold winter after arriving November 21, 1620 in what is now [Provincetown Harbor](#). It was not until December 26 that they selected Plymouth on [Cape Cod](#) to establish their living quarters. That was less than 50 people by then. However, in 2018, it can be estimated that some 25+ million of our country's estimated 325 million population probably are descended from that original group of 102 Englishers. Most of them were members of the Separatists religious movement in England, which objected to the Roman Catholic likeness of the Church of England.



These Pilgrims had a serious and purposeful dedication to following the ways of God... it is even viewed by some writers that the Pilgrims believed they were establishing the closest thing to God's Kingdom on earth as may be possible. After such was their thirst for advancement and establishment.



These Pilgrims were a mere handful of Light-bearers, on the edge of a vast and Dark Continent. But the Light of Jesus Christ was penetrating further into the heart of America. William Bradford would write with remarkable discernment. "As one small candle may light a thousand, so the light kindled here has shown unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation . . . We have noted these things so that you might see their worth and not negligently lose what your fathers have obtained with so much hardship."





"Interview of Samoset with the Pilgrims", book engraving, 1853

In the first few days ashore, they were approached by a native American who greeted them with "Welcome Englishmen."

This was quite a surprise to them. However, this Indian native, [Samoset](#) by name, had been captured by earlier voyagers and taken to show off in Spain and England for a couple of years, thus his learning English. He'd been returned to his homeland, as probably thought hopelessly untrainable for

living in European culture. However, Samoset became a significant communication asset for the Pilgrims.

In April 1621, Bradford succeeded Governor John Carver, who died, as chief executive of Plymouth Colony. Except for five years, Bradford served as governor almost continuously from 1621 through 1656, having been reelected in 30 of the annual election times. In 1621, he negotiated a treaty with [Massasoit, the chief](#) of the [Wampanoag Indians](#). Under the treaty, which was vital to the maintenance and growth of the colony, Massasoit disavowed Indian claims to the Plymouth area and pledged peace with the colonists.

Massasoit's problem was that his tribe had been about 30,000, but a pestilence had reduced their number to about 300. He feared being taken over by another Indian tribe. He wisely realized that developing the friendship with the Pilgrims, who had muskets and some military expertise, would be an ally to protect his tribe. That proved correct, and there never was any Indian conflicts during



★ Bradford's life time, except for a few attacks by Captain Miles Standish that were punishment to some Indians who were competitors to Massascoit's tribe.

★ Bradford was a delegate on four occasions to the [New England Confederation](#), of which he was twice elected president. His History of Plymouth Plantation (1656) is the primary source of information about the pilgrims.

★ It was the fall of 1621 when this vigorous band of survivors from that first terrible fatal winter first celebrated what we have come to know as a festival of Thanksgiving. Gov. Bradford called for the occasion, and the only two sets of recorded words do we have describing the first Plymouth Thanksgiving come from Edward Winslow and Gov. Bradford:

★ "Our harvest being gottin in, our Governour sent foure men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner rejoyce together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labours; they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little helpe beside, served the Company almost a weeke, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Armes, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest King Massasoyt, with some nintie men, whom for three dayes we entertained and feasted, and they went out and filled five Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governour, and upon the Captaine, and others. And although it be not alwayes so plentifull, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodnesse of God, we are so farre from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plentie." (W. De D. Love, "Fast & Thanksgiving Days in New England, " Winslow's words, 1895).

★ and

★ "They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well





An aside note is appropriate at this point, to recognize that this Thanksgiving celebration possibly was not the first Thanksgiving celebration to take place on ground that ultimately became the United States. The first one supposedly happened on April 28, 1598, twenty-two years earlier than the Plymouth Colony celebration.

That first Thanksgiving was a group of Spaniards, led by the Spanish explorer, [Juan de Onate](#), that feasted on the river banks of the Rio Grande after arriving near what now is El Paso, Texas. They had just made it through a 350-mile trek from Santa Barbara, Mexico, across the [Chihuahuan Desert](#), so they had plenty to celebrate. In 1990, the Texas Legislature passed a resolution recognizing [San Elizario, Texas](#), on the outskirts of [El Paso](#), as the site of the first true Thanksgiving. It is also of interest to note that my great uncle, [Alfred \(Fred\) Lansing Sharpe](#), established a ranch close to San Elizario about 1899, and he was elected a Texas Representative from that area in 1904. Records do not survive today at that county courthouse to determine property locations of ranches, but possibly my great uncle's ranch land was land on which this first Thanksgiving took place.

Source: "Texas Curiosities" by John Kelso, The Globe Pequot Press, Bulford, Connecticut, 2000, page 160.

A study of Bradford's writings and other research into the operation of the Plymouth Colony emphasizes that community's commitment was to Christian ideals in service and in work ethic. They not only propagated with many children per household, but they propagated their religious and work ethic in ways which resulted in Plymouth's prosperity and vigor. And even though today's Plymouth is mostly a thriving tourist town, it does anchor the culture and the being of the New World by those who would choose to come as God's children and for His honor and Glory.





★ One quotation of Bradford is cited in his "History of Plymouth Planation" (Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1856, page 24):

★ *"Lastly (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeal the (the Pilgrims) had of laying some good foundations (or at least to make some way thereunto) for the propagating and advancing of the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world, yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others fort the performing of so great a work."*

★ But, what about the Protestant spirit of capitalism? Benjamin Hart in his book said that the Puritan's contribution to America's political institutions (included): written constitutions, separation of powers, regular elections, the secret ballot, the federalist principle, religious toleration and separation of church and state. But there is also a strong connection between the rise of Puritanism and the emergence of capitalism.

★ To appreciate fully that fact, it is worth reflecting briefly on conditions in Europe prior to the economic revolution, which began to take place following the [Protestant Reformation](#). Living standards for most people in medieval Europe were poor. About 90% of the people spent their waking hours working in agriculture, trying to acquire food. Whether or not one could eat on a particular day was a major source in insecurity. Poor weather often meant going to bed hungry... and extended poor weather could mean starvation ...

★ The [Protestant Work Ethic](#) created reliable patterns of behavior, which were so important for the development of a market system Capitalism and Puritanism fed off each other. Both developments placed responsibility on individual initiative; and both involved a clean break from the paternalistic and static feudal order of England. Both were highly destructive of hierarchy and empowered the individual to determine his own fate.





It certainly can be propositioned that these are the reasons the Plymouth Colony was so successful in enduring long term, versus the poor quality spiritual and civic values at the foundations of the ill-fated Jamestown Colony, a colony established in 1607, but which could not survive past the early 1700's. It is of interest that this writer wrote and made a presentation to this effect to a [Dallas, Texas chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution](#) in 1997, and it subsequently was proclaimed the best program of the year among the DAR chapters in Texas that year.

These are the events and influences of our famous William Bradford, man of God, leader of the pilgrims. He is hailed by some historians as the Father of American History, due to his extensive and complete written journals of the life of the pilgrims in much of the 1600's. These writings are the most extensive of the relative few writings which exist today from that era of our history.

"It was not until 1793 that the name 'Pilgrims' was applied to them in general. In that year, on the celebration of 'Forefathers Day' at Plymouth, the [Reverend Chandler Robbins](#), who preached the sermon, used the term. He had gone through the church records and had found a copy of William Bradford's description of the departure from Leiden. Bradford told of the reluctance of 'the saints' to leave the city and then said, 'but they knew they were pilgrims and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.' In his sermon Robbins applied the name Pilgrims to the Forefathers and the name thus gained currency".(--Collier's Enclopedia.)

Source: <http://www.avbtab.org/rc/pilgrims.htm>

On November 16, 1621, The Papal Chancery first adopted January 1st as the beginning of the calendar year. Previously, March was the first month, which explains why our modern names for the 9th_12th months begin instead with prefixes meaning "7" (Sept_), "8" (Oct_) "9" (Nov_)and "10" (Dec_).





The first income tax in American history was imposed in 1643 by the colonists of New Plymouth, Massachusetts. That was in the administration of Governor William Bradford. So, we must claim or admit that our ancestor initiated income tax in this new land.



Source: Richard Skenkman & Kurt Reiger, "One-Night Stands with American History," Perennial - Harper Collins Publishers, 2003, 10 East 53th Street, New York NY 10022, page 1.



Most people believe that Plymouth Colony was named by the Mayflower Pilgrims, because they had set sail from Plymouth, England. Such is not accurate. In 1614, Captain John Smith sailed from Jamestown, Virginia, on his first exploring mission to the northeast. He returned with a map cluttered with "barbarous" names representing Indian villages. Smith showed the map to Prince Charles and asked His Royal Highness to provide good English names in place of the Indian ones. Prince Charles obliged, and changed the Indian name of "Accomack" to "Plymouth," years before any white man settled there as a colony.



Source: "All the People Some of the Time" (Ann Arbor, Michigan, William L. Clements Library, 1941, page 8.



Governor William Bradford represents one of the most significant historical figures in American history. He was a man used by God in establishing a society that was based upon God-fearing ideals. The honor is high for our family to have a direct lineal relationship with this outstanding man of history.





Research compiled by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D.A. Sharpe'.

Dwight Albert (D. A.) Sharpe,
Bradford's 7th great grandson

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