

**Plymouth's Early Arrivals: More Problematic Than Beneficial**

Anuj Khemka

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

As one of the most noteworthy colonial establishments in North America, the Plymouth colony thrived for 70 years after its founding in 1620. This was in part sparked by the constant influx of new arrivals to the colony from England. From 1630 to 1690, in fact, Plymouth's plantation exploded from around 300 people to 3,050 people (Deetz & Deetz, 2000). In its earlier years, though, Plymouth's arrivals proved to be far more problematic than helpful to the colony. From 1621 to 1625, arrivals to Plymouth created food shortages, impaired trade relations, and caused disruptions within the colony — among other detrimental outcomes. Despite Plymouth's later success, it is clear that many of its earliest settlers dragged down the colony rather than lifting it up.

One of the first ships to come to the Plymouth Colony after *The Mayflower* was the *Fortune*, which arrived with 37 passengers in November of 1621 (Bradford, 1981). As told in Bradford's manuscript *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the ship's passengers brought no supplies with them and thus were a strain on the resources of the colony. Because the *Fortune* came with little notice for the Pilgrims, the colonists were unprepared to support the 37 newcomers (Philbrick, 2007). With Plymouth already experiencing a food shortage, the arrivals exacerbated starvation. According to Bradford, the addition of 37 new settlers meant that the entire colony had to subsist on half their daily rations. Though the winter of 1621 was not quite as severe as the last one — in which half the colony perished — death due to starvation was nonetheless common. Accommodations within Plymouth also became more crowded. As a result of the new settlers, Bradford was forced to stuff passengers of the *Fortune* into already congested houses and public buildings.

In late 1622, the colony would welcome another three ships called *the Sparrow*, *The Charity*, and *The Swan* (Deetz and Deetz, 2000). The arrivals temporarily stayed with the

Pilgrims for three weeks — during which they strained Plymouth's resources — before departing to form their own colony in Wessagusset (Philbrick, 2007). While Plymouth existed primarily for religious reasons, Wessagusset had been established with the main goal of making a profit. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, the founding of Wessagusset would have devastating implications for the Pilgrims. Almost immediately following the colony's founding, natives accused Wessagusset's colonists of stealing from them (Arber, 1897). One man was later hung as punishment for taking from the natives. The situation continued to escalate during the winter when members of the new colony noticed that the natives had moved their huts to a swamp near Wessagusset. To the colonists, this meant that the natives were planning a siege on them. Given Plymouth's proximity to Wessagusset and their existing trade relations, Bradford chose to step in. After consulting with military advisor Myles Standish, the Governor agreed that a pre-emptive strike on the natives was necessary to save the colonists. Resultantly, Standish called the Chiefs and other Native-American leaders into a hut, where he and fellow colonists launched an attack and killed them (Adams, 1905). Following the brutal attack, the area's tribes chose to cut off trade relations with Plymouth for several years. This exacerbated the colony's already-severe scarcity of resources and put colonists' lives at risk. Given the fallout, the incident serves as clearcut evidence that new arrivals were of greater harm than help to the Plymouth colony. While Bradford was complicit in the attack on the tribes — and later wrote that he regretted the damage done — the situation was no doubt instigated by the colonists who arrived on the *Swan*, *Charity*, and *Sparrow* (Bradford, 1981). Without Wessagusset's presence, no pre-emptive attack would have been necessary in the first place.

Arrivals in Plymouth would continue to cause the Pilgrims issues. In 1623, lead investor Thomas Weston — described by Bradford as a bitter enemy of Plymouth — came to the colony

(Bradford, 1981). Washed and weary following an attack on him by the Native Americans, Weston arrived on the colony in need of clothing, food, shelter, and supplies. The Pilgrims, as a show of pity, gave him food and skins while Weston promised that a ship with supplies as repayment would be coming imminently. In the latest case of new arrivals burdening Plymouth, however, Weston failed to repay the colonists for their hospitality as the promised supplies never reached the Pilgrims. Weston's failure to follow through with his promise was emblematic of the dynamic between new arrivals and the already-settled Pilgrims up to that point. Though the Pilgrims continued to accommodate new settlers with food, supplies, and shelter, they received little in return.

In the summer of 1623, three more ships landed at Plymouth. As with previous arrivals, neither one of the newly-arrived ships had a positive impact on the colony. First, a ship sent by the crown of England came to enforce new fishing regulations and to punish anyone who was fishing without a license (Bradford, 1981). In the end, because so many fishermen in Plymouth were already operating without a license, the authorities abandoned their quest. Given Plymouth's already-existing shortages in food, the regulation would have made it more difficult for the Pilgrims to survive. Shortly after, the ships *Anne* and *Little James* arrived at Plymouth. Between the two boats, there were about 90 new settlers along with salt, fishing gear, and other supplies (Banks, 2001). Still, investor Robert Cushman's lack of funds meant that the quantity and quality of supplies onboard left much to be desired. Cushman himself sent a letter to Bradford and the colonists apologizing for the lackluster shipment (Bradford, 1981). The passengers that arrived with the ships were also lacking in their commitment to the colony. Many of the arrivals on the *Anne*, for example, were extremely distraught at the prospect of being in

Plymouth. According to Bradford, they were overcome by sadness and wished to be back in England rather than hard at work with the Pilgrims.

In 1624, Plymouth welcomed another band of settlers to the colony from the ship called *The Charity* (Bradford, 1981). Once more, Plymouth's newest arrivals would have an adverse effect on the colony. At first, given that the ship carried a boatmaker and saltmaker on board, it appeared as if *The Charity* would be beneficial for the colony. However, the boatmaker quickly succumbed to illness and passed away. While the saltmaker remained alive, he was of practically no help, as all he knew how to do was boil salt. Also on board *The Charity* was John Lyford, who was one of Plymouth's greatest foes during its early years. According to Bradford's novel, Lyford was found to be plotting to be against the colony. From reading Lyford's letters, Bradford discovered that the recently-arrived colonist had been planning to bring anti-Pilgrim factions to Plymouth so that the Pilgrims would become a minority. As punishment for his actions, Lyford was banished from Plymouth.

Clearly, new arrivals in the early years of Plymouth were more problematic than beneficial for the colony. While later additions to the colony helped Plymouth thrive, arrivals between 1621 and 1625 served mainly to cause disruptions. By straining resources, derailing the colonists' livelihoods, and threatening to overthrow the colony the way Lyford did, new settlers in the early years of Plymouth made survival more difficult for the Pilgrims.

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