



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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This month the Face of Fillmore celebrates the 400th anniversary of an historical event in our nation's history – the landing of the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock.

In September 1620, a group of Separatists, as well as their crew, left England to come to the New World searching for a location where they could practice their own religious ideas. Two months later they arrived and established the first permanent settlement in New England. A group of them wrote and signed the Mayflower Compact, which created a government in their new home with just and equal laws. The document became the forerunner of democracy in the United States.

As we commemorate this event, one question is being asked over and over: Did you have any ancestors aboard the Mayflower?

It is estimated that there are over 35 million descendants of the 53 passengers aboard the Mayflower who survived the first winter, as well as descendants from those who died in those first few months.



Copy of an 1882 painting by William Halsall titled
Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor

In the *Church News*, the week of October 4, 2020, we are told that in conjunction with this event, FamilySearch, AmericanAncestors.org, and the General Society of Mayflower Descendants have collaborated to form a Mayflower Database, which contains more than one million images and more will be added by the end of the year.

Finding out if you are on that list is an interesting adventure and can be done in more than one way.

According to the *Church News*, one method is to look through one's family tree and see if there are several people who lived in New England. Then search the Database to see if that line has been previously verified through one of the member applications. It goes further to say that if you are successful in this, you should type the name of an ancestor born before 1910 into the Database. From there the names goes to the genealogy chart that goes back to the Mayflower. (For more accurate details, read the *Church News*.)

Another way is to go to RelativeFinder.org, sign in and find the “Mayflower” group. Possible relationships may be displayed.

For some, a relative may have already been collecting information, sometimes, even in the form of a family book, which would be a great way to find out.

Now, I needed to know. It was obvious that none of my ancestors were Pilgrims since all of my grandparents became citizens within the last century.

My husband’s ancestors have been in America much longer and because of the book “The Reverend John Perry of London”, it was easy to find his Mayflower ancestor.

Among those onboard the ship *Mayflower* when it reached New England in November, 1620, was a man named Degory Priest, my husband’s 11th great grandfather. He had been married in Leiden, Holland on November 4, 1611 to Sarah Allerton, the widow of John Vincent and sister of Pilgrim Isaac Allerton. Degory left Sarah and their two daughters Mary and Sarah behind in Holland and planned to send for them later when a colony was established.

After several financial and political problems, two ships were obtained. The *Speedwell* (which leaked and could not make the trip) sailed from Leiden, Holland with the Separatists. The *Mayflower* sailed from Southampton, England with the London and English group in September 1620. One problem after another had delayed their departure until they had to cross the stormy North Atlantic Ocean during a bad time of the year. The small, 100-foot ship had 102 passengers and a crew of about 30 in extremely cramped conditions. By the second month out, the ship was being buffeted by strong westerly gales, causing the ship’s timbers to be badly shaken with caulking failing to keep out sea water, and with passengers, even in their berths, lying wet and ill. This, combined with a lack of proper rations and unsanitary conditions for several months, contributed to illness that would be fatal for many, especially the majority of women and children. On the way there were two deaths, a crew member and a passenger.

On November 19, 1620, after 66 miserable days at sea, they spotted land, which was the Cape Cod Hook, now called [Provincetown Harbor](#). After several days of trying to get south to their planned destination of the [Colony of Virginia](#), strong winter seas forced them to return to the harbor at Cape Cod Hook, where they finally anchored.

Priest died early in the first winter, on January 1, 1621 within two months of their arrival of the "general sickness", as did half of those who had just arrived. He was about 42 years. He was buried likely sometime in January, 1621 in Coles Hill Burial Ground in Plymouth, most likely in an unmarked grave, as was the custom that first winter. Along with many others who died in the winter of 1620-1621, his name is memorialized on the Pilgrim Memorial Tomb, located on [Coles Hill](#) in Plymouth. This was the scene of secret night burials of those who died during the settlement's first bitter winter. Corn was planted over their unmarked graves so that the Native Americans could not know how many had perished there.

Sarah Priest married her second husband in Leiden on or shortly after November 13, 1621. He was Godbert Godbertson, whose name was also written as Cuthbert Cuthbertson. They came to Plymouth on the ship *Anne* in 1623 with their son Samuel and her two daughters. Both Sarah and her second husband died in 1633 in the epidemic that was rampant at that time. Their burial places are unknown.

As Thanksgiving rolls around, we will feel a strong bond with the Pilgrims who first celebrated this holiday because of our Mayflower ancestor.