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The *Mayflower* encountered bad weather during the 1620 transatlantic crossing, especially during the month of October. Mike Haywood envisions how such a storm could have appeared. Copyright, Mike Haywood, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with [Haywood's work](#).

Why start an [Atlantic crossing](#) when most fishermen were already seeking safe harbor for the winter? The Pilgrims' money was running out; English authorities were still searching for [William Brewster](#) (who was hiding [aboard ship](#)); and Christopher Jones (the ship's master) knew how to handle a vessel in stormy conditions. His skill was needed. According to William Bradford's [account](#) of the crossing:

After they had enjoyed fair winds and weather for a season, they were encountered many times with cross winds and met with many fierce storms with which the ship was shroudly shaken, and her upper works made very leaky; and one of the main beams in the midships was bowed and cracked, which put them in some fear that the ship could not be able to perform the voyage. (Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647, page 66.)

Repairing the main beam, in the middle of the ocean, wasn't easy. The crew used something the Pilgrims had purchased in The Netherlands:

But in examining of all opinions, the master and others affirmed they knew the ship to be strong and firm under water; and for the buckling of the main beam, there was a giant iron screw the passengers brought out of Holland, which would raise the beam into his place; the which being done, the carpenter and master affirmed that with a post put under it, set firm in the lower deck and otherways bound, he would make it sufficient. (Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647, page 67.)

What about the rest of the ship? Would it be able to hold together during a bad storm?

And as for the decks and upper works, they could caulk them as well as they could, and though with the working of the ship they would not long keep staunch, yet there would otherwise be no great danger, if they did not overpress her with sails. So they committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed.

During one particularly vicious storm, John Howland fell into the sea. Bradford continues:

In sundry of these storms the winds were so fierce and the seas so high, as they could not bear a knot of sail, but were forced to hull for divers days together. And in one of them, as they lay thus at hull in a mighty storm, a lusty young man called John Howland, coming upon some occasion above the gratings was, with a roll of the ship, thrown into the sea; but it pleased God that he caught hold of the topsail halyards which hung overboard and ran out at length. Yet he held his hold (though he was sundry fathoms under water) till he was hauled up by the same rope to the brim of the water, and then with a boat hook and other means got into the ship. (Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647, page 67.)

Given the lack of modern sanitary conditions aboard ship, it is remarkable that only one of the Pilgrims (plus a crewman) died of illness during the crossing. Some scholars attribute this, at least in part, to the *Mayflower* herself.

Used in the wine trade since about 1616, years of leaking wine in the hold helped to neutralize garbage and other filthy items which sailors stored onboard. Disease, aboard this "sweet ship," was not a perilous factor

during the journey.

After sixty-six days, the Mayflower was in sight of land. But the Pilgrims had reached Cape Cod instead of Virginia (which, at that time, extended to present-day New York City) where they had permission to settle.

Turning south, likely to reach their intended destination, the colonists encountered shoals. They would need to change their plans.

Before they anchored, a near-mutiny developed.

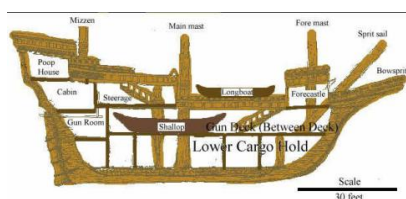
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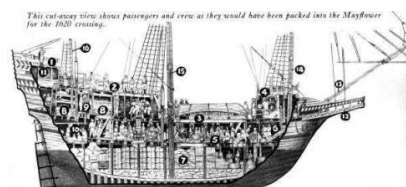


At Sea - Mayflower Drawing

Drawing, courtesy Cushman & Allerton Genealogy.

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Aboard Ship - Pilgrims on the Mayflower

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- KEY TO DRAWING
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| 1. Poop deck. | 6. Crew's quarters. | 11. Captain's cabin. |
| 2. Half deck. | 7. Large hold. | 12. Beak. |
| 3. Upper deck. | 8. Special cabins. | 13. Bowprit. |
| 4. Forecastle. | 9. Helmsman with whipstaff controlling the tiller. | 14. Foremast. |
| 5. Main deck where most of the Pilgrims were housed. | 10. Tiller room. | 15. Mainmast. |
| | | 16. Mizzen mast. |

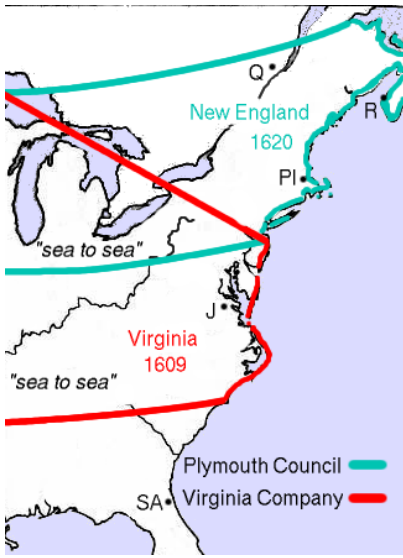


Cape Cod - Pilgrims Sight Land

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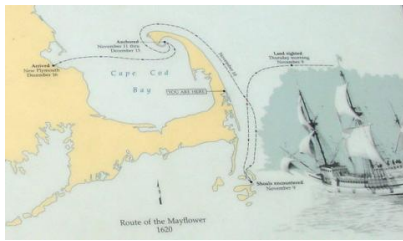
Virginia - Territory of Early Settlement

Map depicting extent of Virginia territory, courtesy of Matthew Trump.

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Pilgrims at Cape Cod - Voyage Route

Map, courtesy National Park Service.

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STORMS AT SEA

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