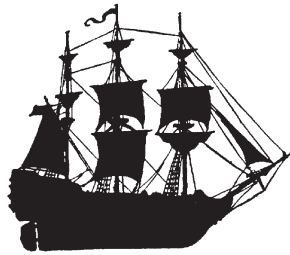


PLANTING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

*Historians know very little about the **Mayflower**, the ship that carried the Pilgrims to their new home at Plymouth in 1620. But there are good records of that settlement and others that followed. The accounts below are condensed, and in some cases the text has been slightly modernized.*

The Pilgrims’ “Starving Time”

*Delays in leaving England and poor navigation put the **Mayflower** in the Cape Cod area in the late fall. The result was described in an account by William Bradford, who served as governor for many years.*



But that which was most sad and lamentable was that in two or three months time half of their company died, especially in January and February, being depth of winter, and wanting [lacking] houses and other comforts. Also, they were infected with the scurvy and other diseases which this long voyage and their poor conditions had brought upon them.

There died sometimes two or three a day in those months, so that of one hundred and odd persons, scarce fifty remained.

And of these in the time of most distress, there were but six or seven healthy persons. These spared no pains night or day, but with abundance of toil [work] and hazard of their own health fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed [prepared] them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them.

In a word, they did all the homely and necessary things for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; and all this willingly and cheerfully,

without any grudging in the least, showing their true love for their friends and brethren.

Help From The Indians

With the arrival of spring, the surviving Pilgrims were helped by the Wampanoag Indians, including one named Squanto. Bradford’s account continues:

Afterward they (as many as were able) began to plant their corn, in which service Squanto stood them in great stead, showing them both the manner how to set it and after how to dress and tend it; also he told them, unless they got fish and set it with it in these old grounds, it would come to nothing.

All of which they found true by trial and experience. Some English seed they sowed, as wheat and peas, but it came not to good, either by badness of the seed or lateness of the season or both, or some other defect.

The Land And Property Question

At first the Pilgrims shared the work and chores together as a community, and the harvest of crops was shared equally. But there were soon many complaints:

This was found to breed much confusion and discontent. For the young men that were most able and fit for labor and service did complain that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men’s wives and children, without any extra payment.

The strong had no more in division of victuals [food] and clothes than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could; this was thought injustice. And for men’s wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, wash-

ing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery. Neither could many husbands well brook it [accept it].

Within a few years, the colonists gave up the idea of sharing the work and harvest equally. Instead, a new plan gave each of the families a specific piece of land near the settlement and the ownership of whatever they could grow on it.

This had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been. The women now went willingly into the field and took their little ones with them to set corn, which before would allege [claim] weakness and inability.

The Puritan Ideal Of Community

The failure of the Pilgrim experiment of shared work and shared property showed that there was a practical limit to the power of community spirit. But the Pilgrims and Puritans never gave up the high value they placed on the shared sense of community in their towns and villages.

The lines below are condensed from a famous sermon by the Puritan religious leader John Winthrop. He spoke to his followers on a ship headed to Boston in 1630.

It is by a mutual consent, for the work we have in hand, to seek out a place to live under a form of government both civil and religious. In such cases as this, the care of the public must be counted above all private interests.

Whatsoever we did or ought to have done when we lived in England, the same must we do, and more also, where we go.

We must love one another fervently. We

must bear one another's burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren [neighbors].



Thus stands the cause between God and us. We have entered into a covenant [a sacred agreement] with Him for this work.

We must delight in each other, make other's conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and by-word through the world.

Group Discussion:

- 1. As they began their settlement in 1620, how did the Pilgrims live up to their belief in sharing and placing the needs of the community first?*
- 2. Within a few years, there was grumbling about the plan of sharing the work and harvest equally in the Pilgrim settlement. Explain what happened. Why did the new plan produce larger crops?*
- 3. What values did John Winthrop tell his followers they should practice as they started their settlement in Boston? What do you think he is saying in the last paragraph?*