

THE MAYFLOWER PILGRIMS & the Founding of America

Part I - YA edition

Margot Morrell

LeadershipLives



For my lifelong friends, Catherine Hagan and Mimi Noering Wicker,
with gratitude for all the fun and all the laughter.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Prov. 27:17

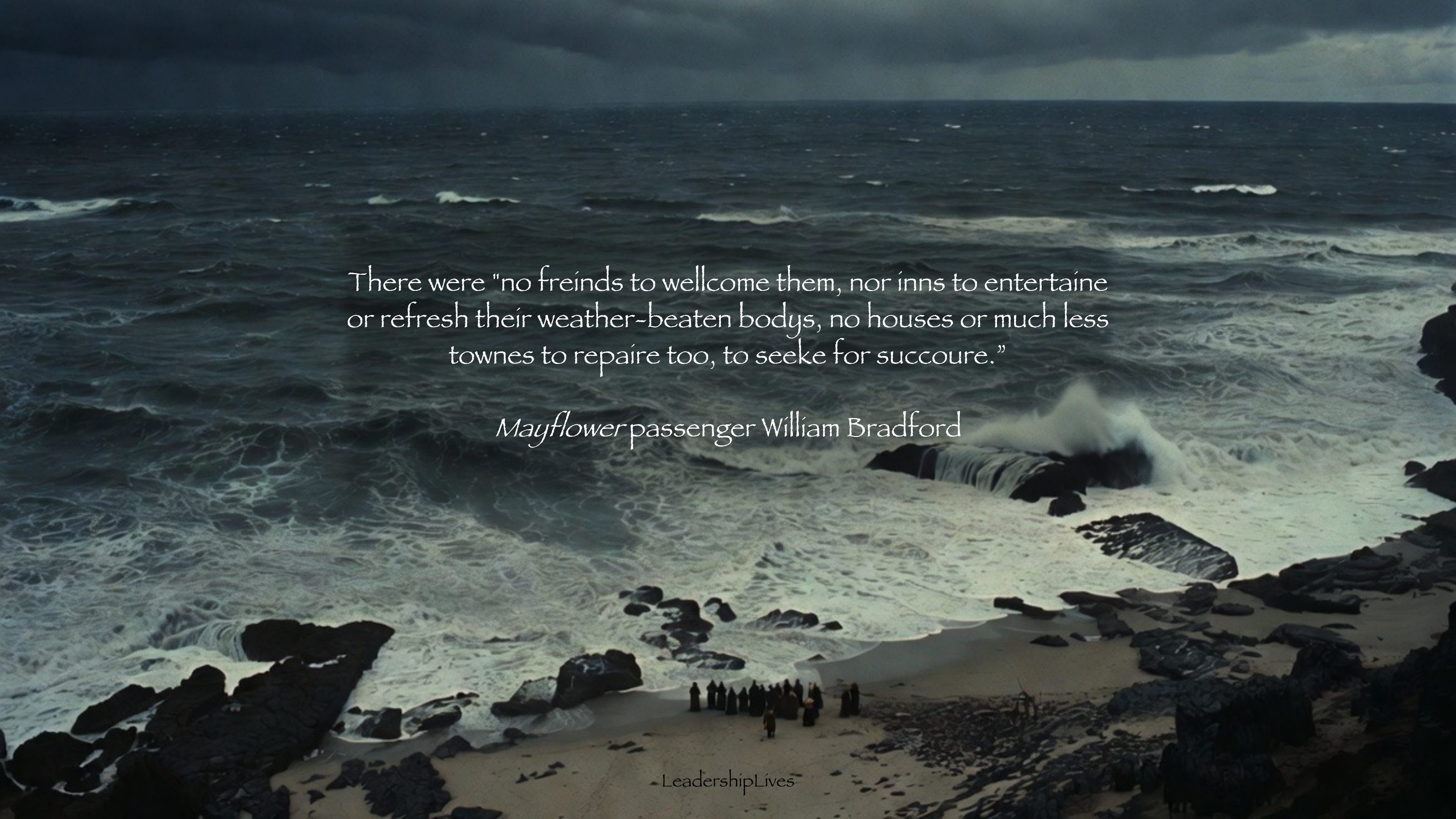
“...who would remove, and settle in so remote and uncultivated
a part of the globe, if he could live tolerably at home?”

Thomas Hutchinson

Descendant of early settlers, historian,
last Royal Governor of Massachusetts, 1771 – 1774.

“Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side.”

Anonymous, Late 15th century

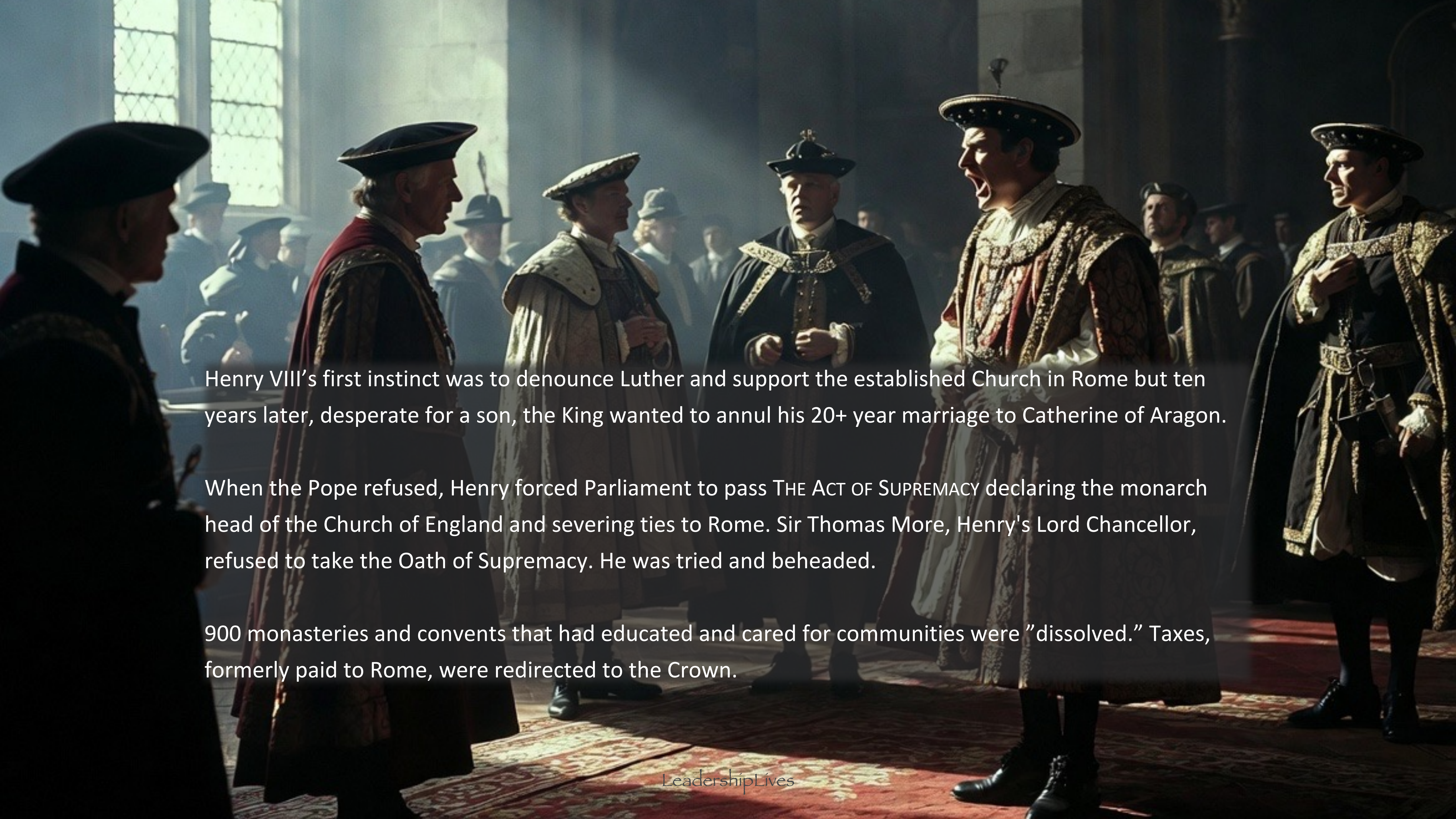


There were "no freinds to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine
or refresh their weather-beaten bodys, no houses or much less
townes to repaire too, to seeke for succoure."

Mayflower passenger William Bradford



The Mayflower Pilgrims lonely journey was triggered in 1517 when German monk, Martin Luther, posted Ninety-five Theses on his community's bulletin board – the church doors in Wittenberg, Germany – and set off a century of turmoil, violence and bloodshed.



Henry VIII's first instinct was to denounce Luther and support the established Church in Rome but ten years later, desperate for a son, the King wanted to annul his 20+ year marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

When the Pope refused, Henry forced Parliament to pass THE ACT OF SUPREMACY declaring the monarch head of the Church of England and severing ties to Rome. Sir Thomas More, Henry's Lord Chancellor, refused to take the Oath of Supremacy. He was tried and beheaded.

900 monasteries and convents that had educated and cared for communities were "dissolved." Taxes, formerly paid to Rome, were redirected to the Crown.

In July 1553, Catherine of Aragon's daughter, Mary, assumed the throne on the death of her half-brother, Edward VI. She ordered the Bishops of Worcester and London, leaders of the Protestant Reformation, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had helped Henry attain his annulment, to be burned at the stake in the center of Oxford.





Recalling those days many years later, Mayflower pilgrim William Bradford wrote “... many indured sundrie kinds of tormente, often rackings, & dismembering of their joynts.” According to Bradford, Mary’s turbulent six-year reign kindled “the flames of contention and sowing the seeds of discorde & bitter enmitie.”

Waves of people began to leave England in search of religious freedom in Holland, Germany and Switzerland.



When Elizabeth I became Queen in 1558, the persecutions continued.

There were now four distinct groups in England:

- Roman Catholics
- Church of England
- Puritans – part of the Church of England
- Separatists – the *Mayflower* Pilgrims



During Elizabeth's reign, a handful of congregations – mostly farmers and their families - sprang up in Nottinghamshire near the borders of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

These believers wanted to study the Bible and worship God “according to the simplicitie of the gospell.” They called themselves Separatists or Dissenters. Today they would be called Christians.



A congregation in the tiny hamlet of Scrooby was nurtured by two Cambridge-educated men, Pastor John Robinson and Elder William Brewster, a one-time diplomat and post-master, who funded the movement's early years. A Mayflower passenger, Brewster was the “backbone” of the Pilgrims in America.



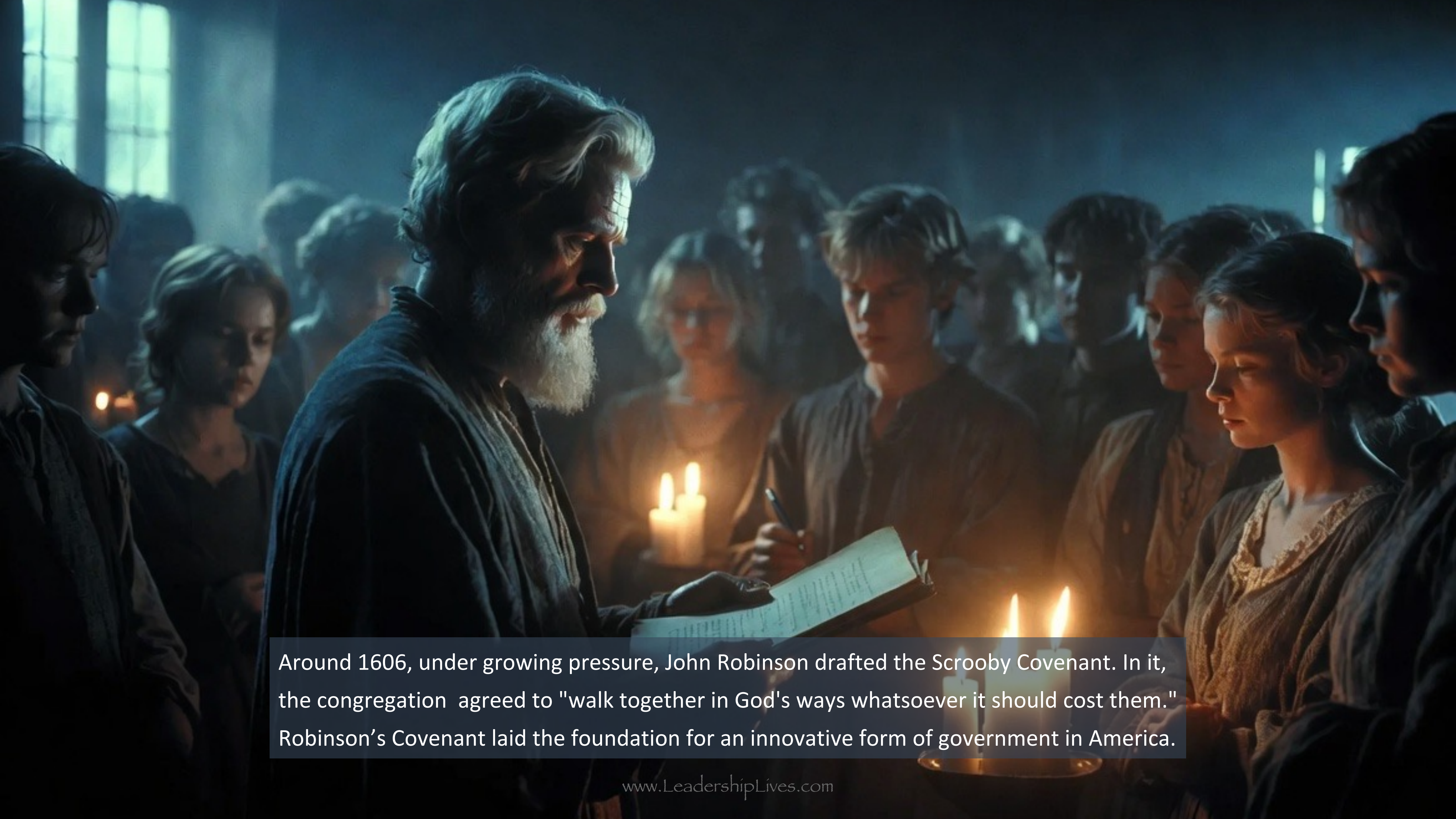
The Pilgrims' historian and long-serving governor, William Bradford was born in 1589 in “open, pleasant, breezy” Austerfield a few miles north of Scrooby. Orphaned at seven and raised by two uncles, when Bradford was twelve a “long illness” prompted him to start reading the Bible and attending Separatist services despite the exasperation of his uncles and neighbors.

A group of people, including men and women, are gathered in a dimly lit room with a vaulted ceiling. The room is illuminated by several lit candles, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere. The people are dressed in simple, historical-style clothing. Some are seated at a table in the foreground, while others stand in the background. The scene suggests a historical or religious gathering.

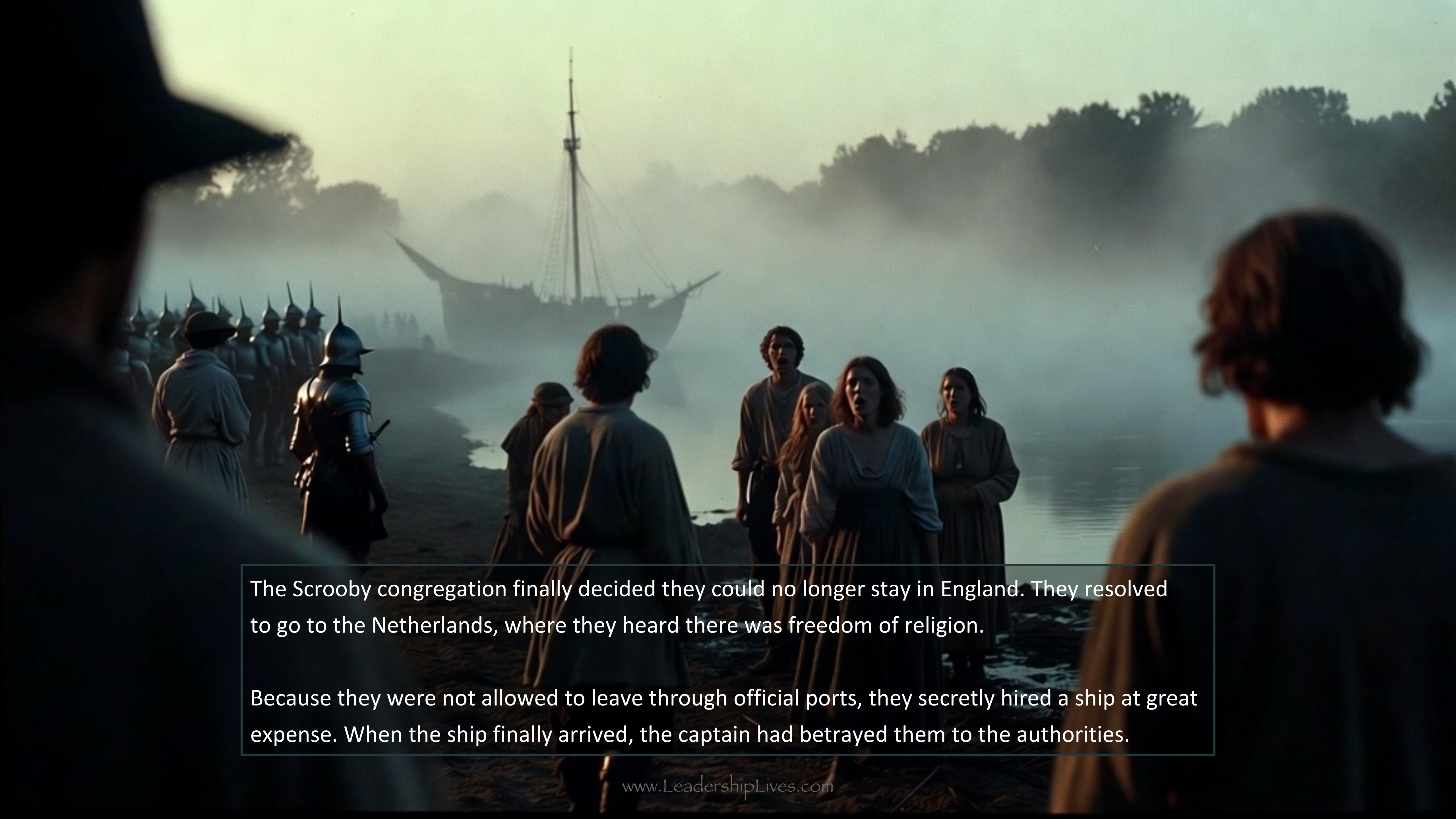
Inspired by the Apostle Paul's references to "house churches" in his letters to Romans and Colossians, the Separatists often gathered at Brewster's home.



Bradford recalled that Separatists were “hunted and persecuted on every side... some were taken & clapt up in prison, others had their houses besett & watcht night and day.” They could not stay but were not allowed to go.



Around 1606, under growing pressure, John Robinson drafted the Scrooby Covenant. In it, the congregation agreed to "walk together in God's ways whatsoever it should cost them." Robinson's Covenant laid the foundation for an innovative form of government in America.

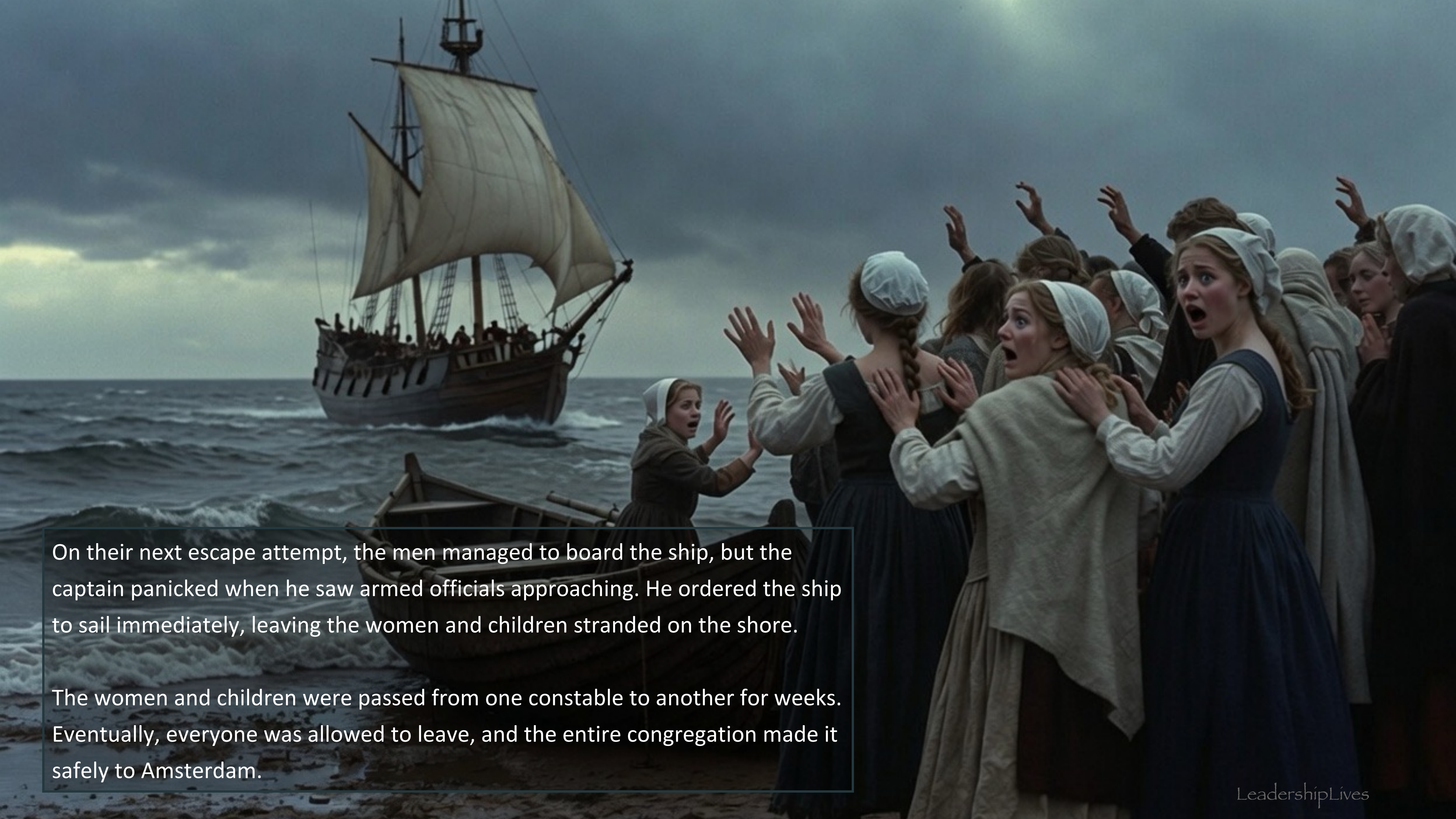
A historical scene depicting a ship's arrival at a beach. In the background, a large sailing ship is anchored in the water. On the left, a line of soldiers in armor stands at attention. In the center and right, a group of people, including men and women in period clothing, are gathered on the shore, looking towards the ship. The scene is set during a hazy or misty day, with a soft, golden light suggesting dawn or dusk. The overall atmosphere is one of anticipation and historical significance.

The Scrooby congregation finally decided they could no longer stay in England. They resolved to go to the Netherlands, where they heard there was freedom of religion.

Because they were not allowed to leave through official ports, they secretly hired a ship at great expense. When the ship finally arrived, the captain had betrayed them to the authorities.



The betrayal was brutal. Even the women were searched and robbed. William Brewster and six other men were thrown into prison. Their cells were so narrow they could touch both walls at the same time if they stretched out their arms.



On their next escape attempt, the men managed to board the ship, but the captain panicked when he saw armed officials approaching. He ordered the ship to sail immediately, leaving the women and children stranded on the shore.

The women and children were passed from one constable to another for weeks. Eventually, everyone was allowed to leave, and the entire congregation made it safely to Amsterdam.

A historical scene depicting a group of people, likely the Pilgrims, walking along a narrow stone path in Amsterdam. The path is flanked by tall, multi-story brick and stone buildings. To the right, a canal with several ducks is visible. The people are dressed in 17th-century clothing, including long coats, hats, and dresses. The scene is set in a bright, sunny environment with long shadows cast on the path.

Life in Amsterdam was not easy. The Separatists had to learn a new language and find new ways to make a living. Some began to wonder if the whole journey had been a mistake. Bradford later wrote that the adventure seemed “almost desperate, a case intolerable, and a misery worse than death.”

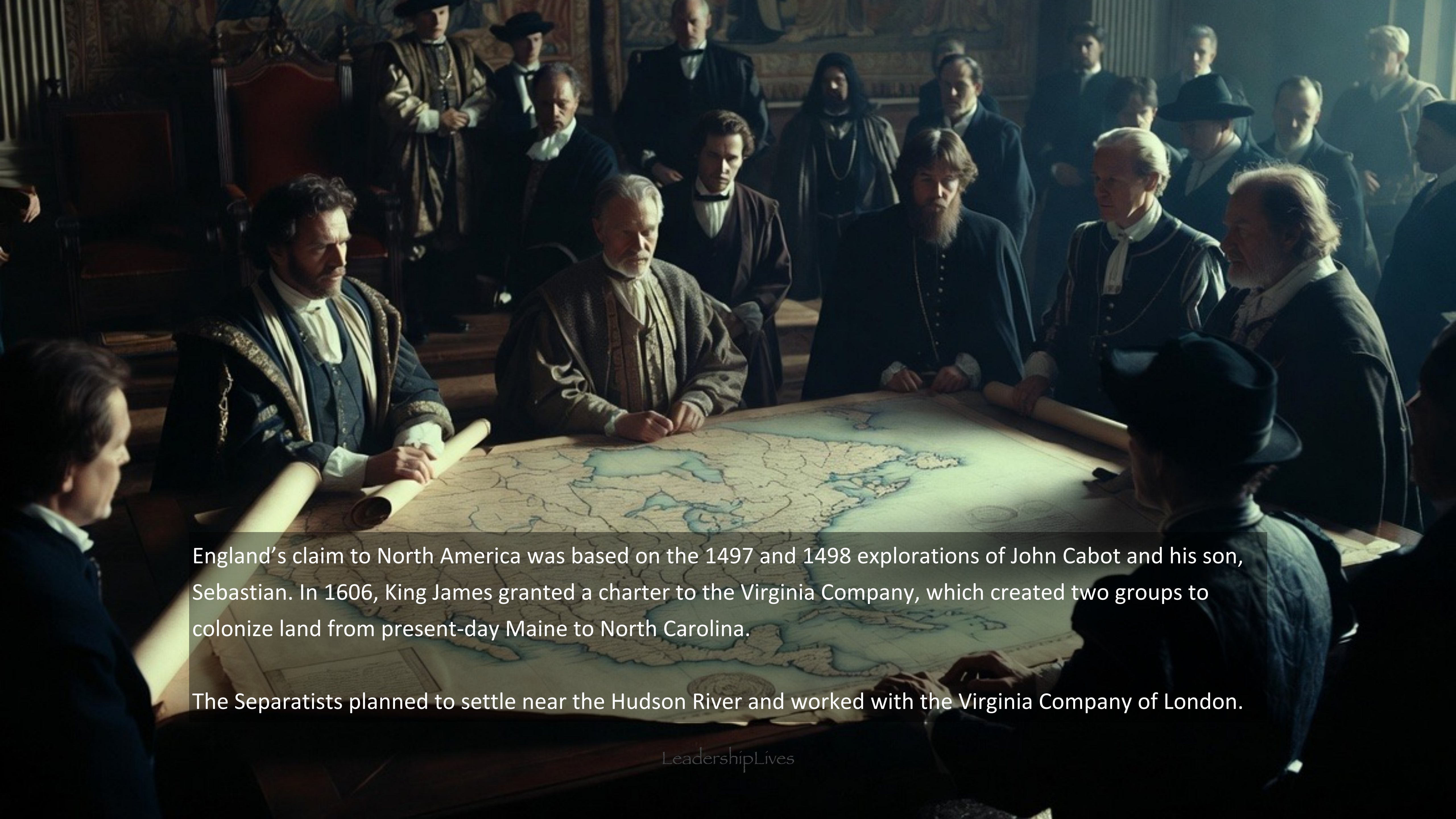


After a difficult year in Amsterdam, most of the Scrooby group moved to the quieter university town of Leiden in 1609. Though Leiden was more peaceful, finding steady work was still hard.

An aerial photograph of a Dutch canal town, likely Amsterdam. The image shows a narrow canal running through the center, flanked by rows of brick buildings with gabled roofs. A church tower with a blue roof is prominent on the left. Several boats are visible in the canal, and a small bridge crosses it in the foreground. The scene is captured from a high angle, looking down the canal towards the horizon.

The congregation blossomed to more than 300 members over the next 10 years but by 1617, many families were struggling financially. They worried about their children growing up in a foreign country and losing their English identity. At the same time, they dreamed of spreading the gospel in “remote parts of the world.”

They applied to King James for permission to settle in Virginia. Their request was denied. Two years later, their second application was approved.



England's claim to North America was based on the 1497 and 1498 explorations of John Cabot and his son, Sebastian. In 1606, King James granted a charter to the Virginia Company, which created two groups to colonize land from present-day Maine to North Carolina.

The Separatists planned to settle near the Hudson River and worked with the Virginia Company of London.

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark coat and a white lace cravat, is seated at a wooden desk in a library. He is holding a quill pen and writing on a piece of paper. The desk is cluttered with various papers, including one with a map. To his right, a lit candle in a brass holder provides light. In the background, tall bookshelves filled with books line the walls, and a large window with multiple panes allows natural light to enter the room.

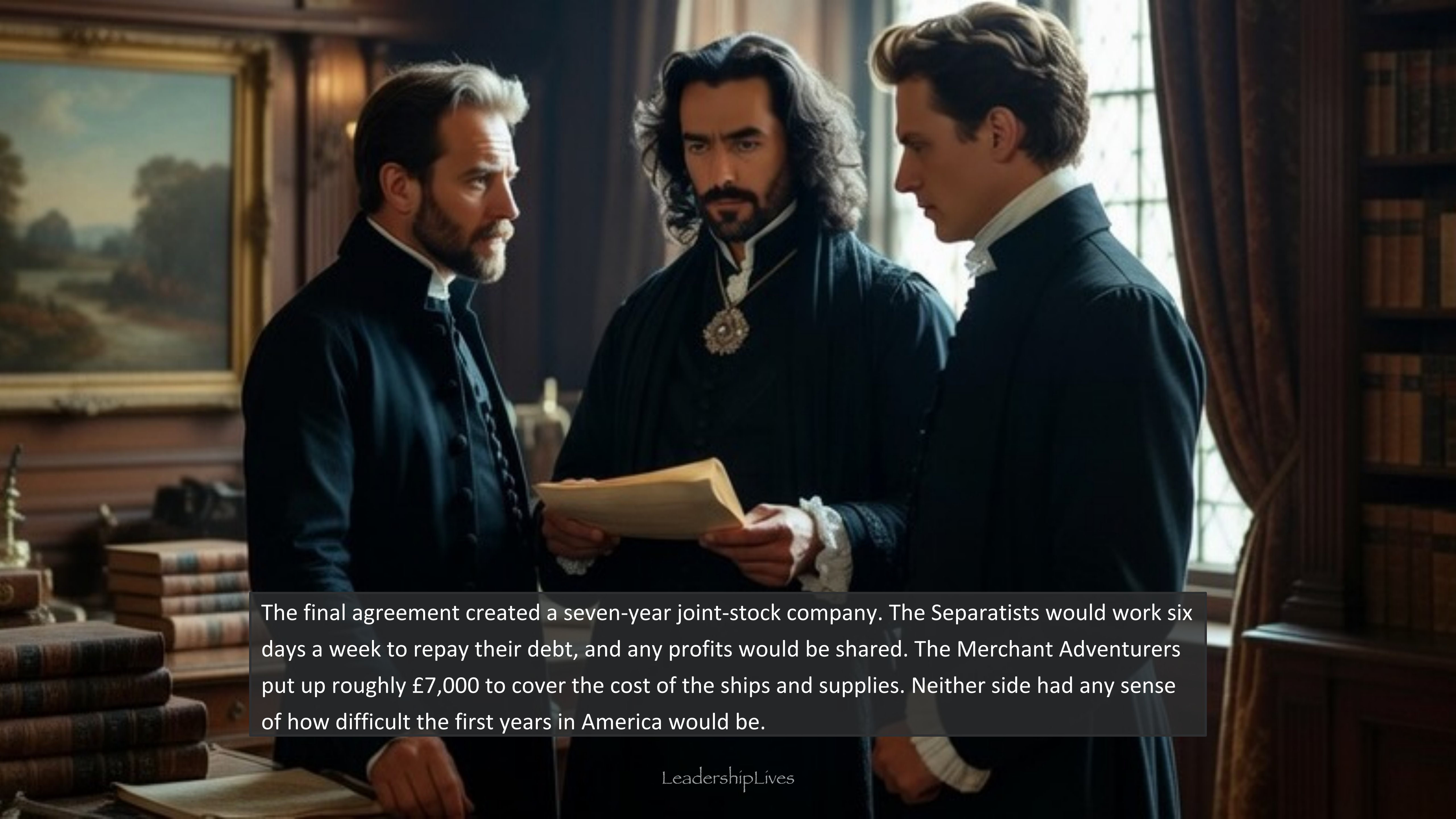
From Leiden, John Robinson and William Brewster wrote to Sir Edwin Sandys, a powerful member of Parliament and one of the leaders of the Virginia Company. Sandys was sympathetic to their cause.

In his reply Sandys wrote, *"And so I betake you with this design, (which I hope verily is the work of God) to the gracious protection and blessing of the Highest."*

He signed the letter, "Your very loving friend, Edwin Sandys."



Two trusted members of the congregation, John Carver and Robert Cushman, were sent to London to negotiate with a group of about seventy investors known as the Merchant Adventurers. These businessmen agreed to fund the voyage in exchange for a share of future profits from furs, lumber, and fish.

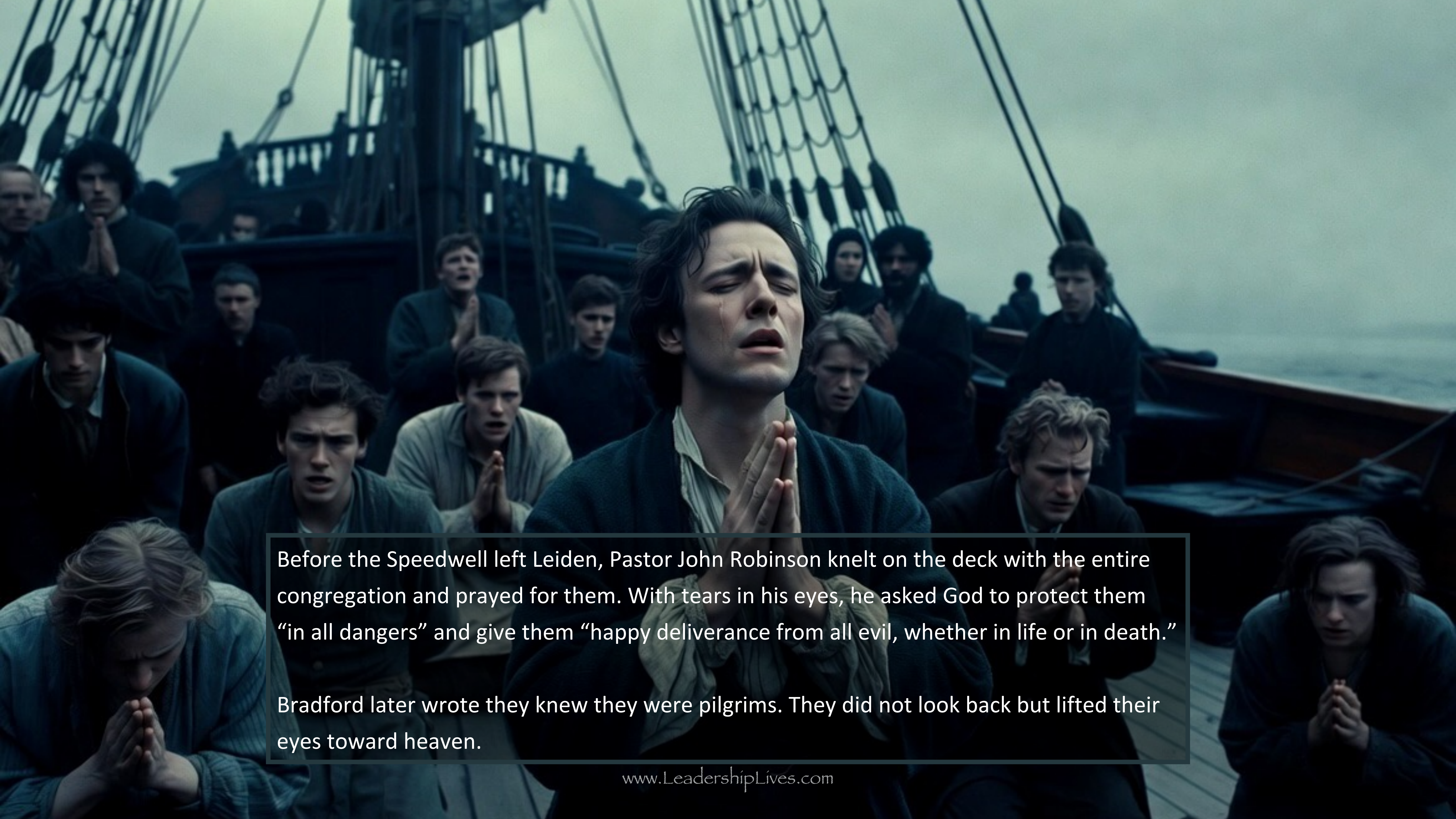


The final agreement created a seven-year joint-stock company. The Separatists would work six days a week to repay their debt, and any profits would be shared. The Merchant Adventurers put up roughly £7,000 to cover the cost of the ships and supplies. Neither side had any sense of how difficult the first years in America would be.



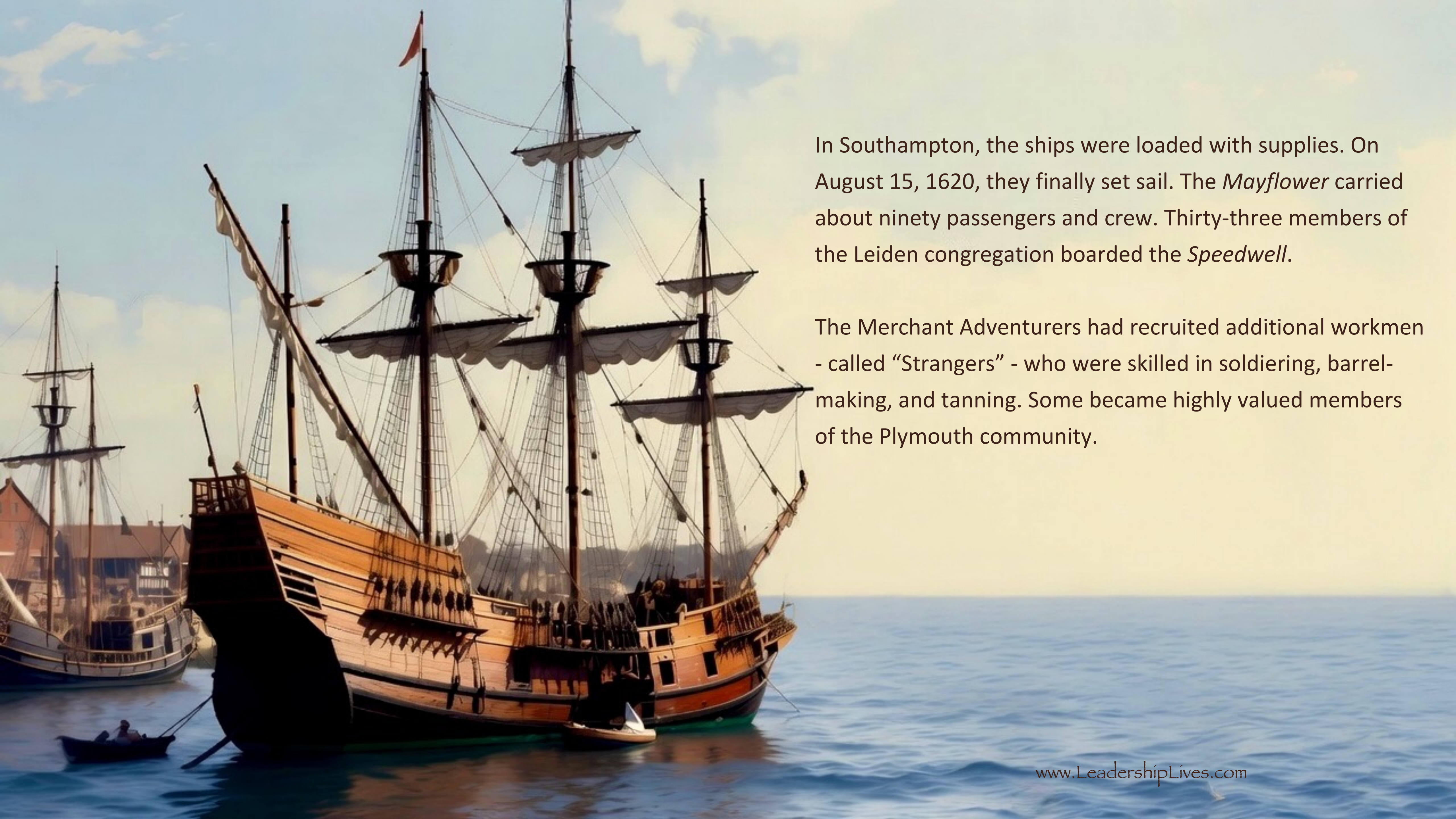
Because the work of building a colony would be extremely hard, the congregation chose about forty of their strongest members for the first voyage. They bought a small ship called the *Speedwell* to carry them across the Atlantic and later they to use for fishing and exploration.

William and Dorothy Bradford left behind their five-year-old son with his grandparents. They planned to send for him later. They sailed to Southampton to meet their larger hired ship — the *Mayflower*.



Before the Speedwell left Leiden, Pastor John Robinson knelt on the deck with the entire congregation and prayed for them. With tears in his eyes, he asked God to protect them “in all dangers” and give them “happy deliverance from all evil, whether in life or in death.”

Bradford later wrote they knew they were pilgrims. They did not look back but lifted their eyes toward heaven.



In Southampton, the ships were loaded with supplies. On August 15, 1620, they finally set sail. The *Mayflower* carried about ninety passengers and crew. Thirty-three members of the Leiden congregation boarded the *Speedwell*.

The Merchant Adventurers had recruited additional workmen - called “Strangers” - who were skilled in soldiering, barrel-making, and tanning. Some became highly valued members of the Plymouth community.



TIMELINE

ALL DATES "NEW STYLE" BASED ON THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR

1607 – Attempt to flee to Amsterdam from Boston, England.

March 1608 – Women & children left behind at Hull when ship with husbands and fathers onboard sails for Amsterdam.

Spring 1609 – Relocate to Leiden.

1617 – Decide to move to America.

July 1619 – Receive grant to settle in America.

August 1, 1620 - *Speedwell* sails from Delft Haven.

August 5, 1620 - *Speedwell* meets *Mayflower* at Southampton.

August 15, 1620 – *Speedwell* & *Mayflower* sail from Southampton.

August 23, 1620 - Dock at Dartmouth for repairs to *Speedwell*.

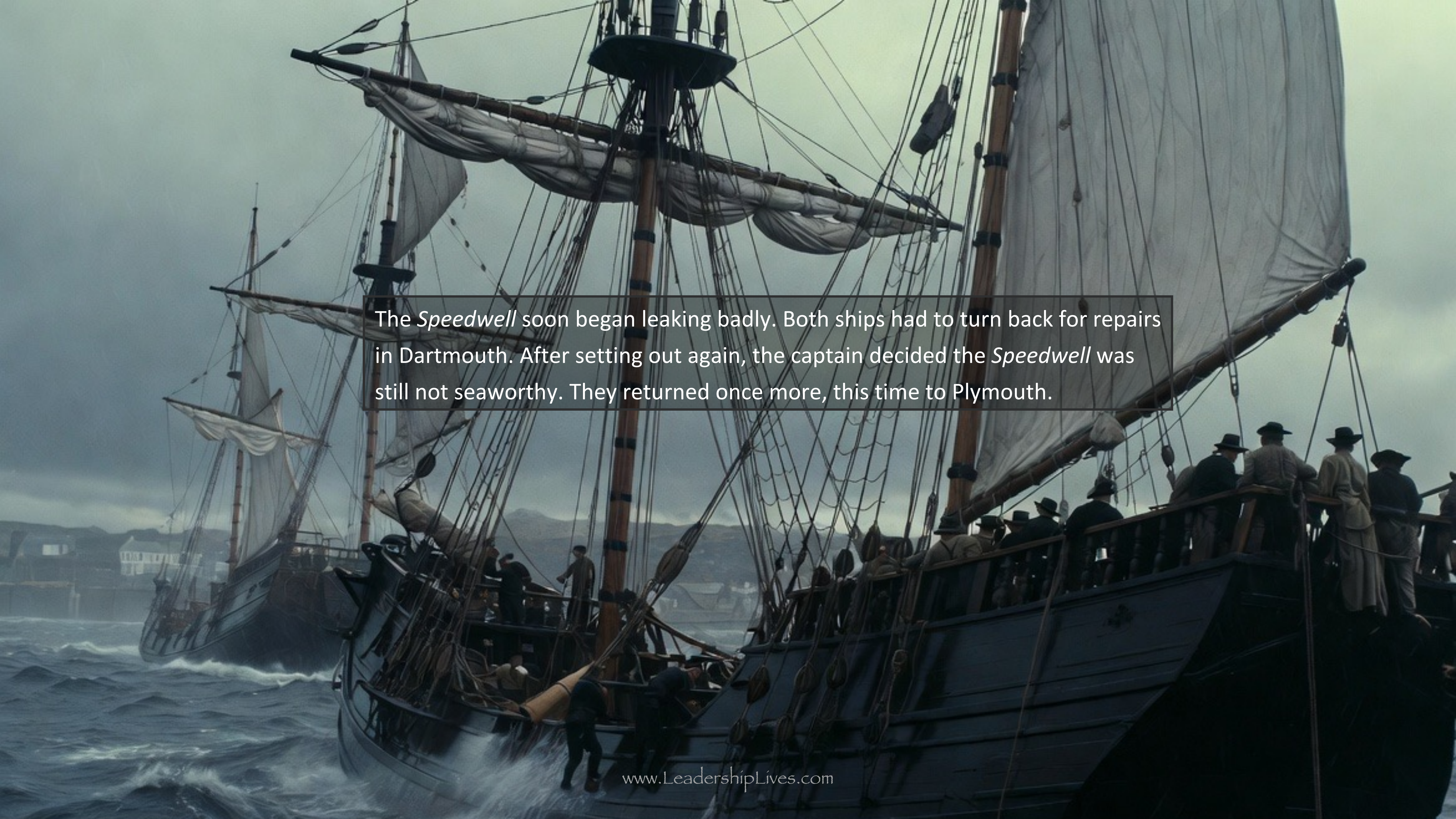
About September 2, 1620 – the ships sail from Dartmouth.

September 6, 1620 – Ships return to Plymouth, transfer people and supplies to *Mayflower*. About 20 members of the Leiden congregation remain behind due to over-crowding on the *Mayflower*.

Sept. 16, 1620 - *Mayflower* sails with 102 passengers onboard.



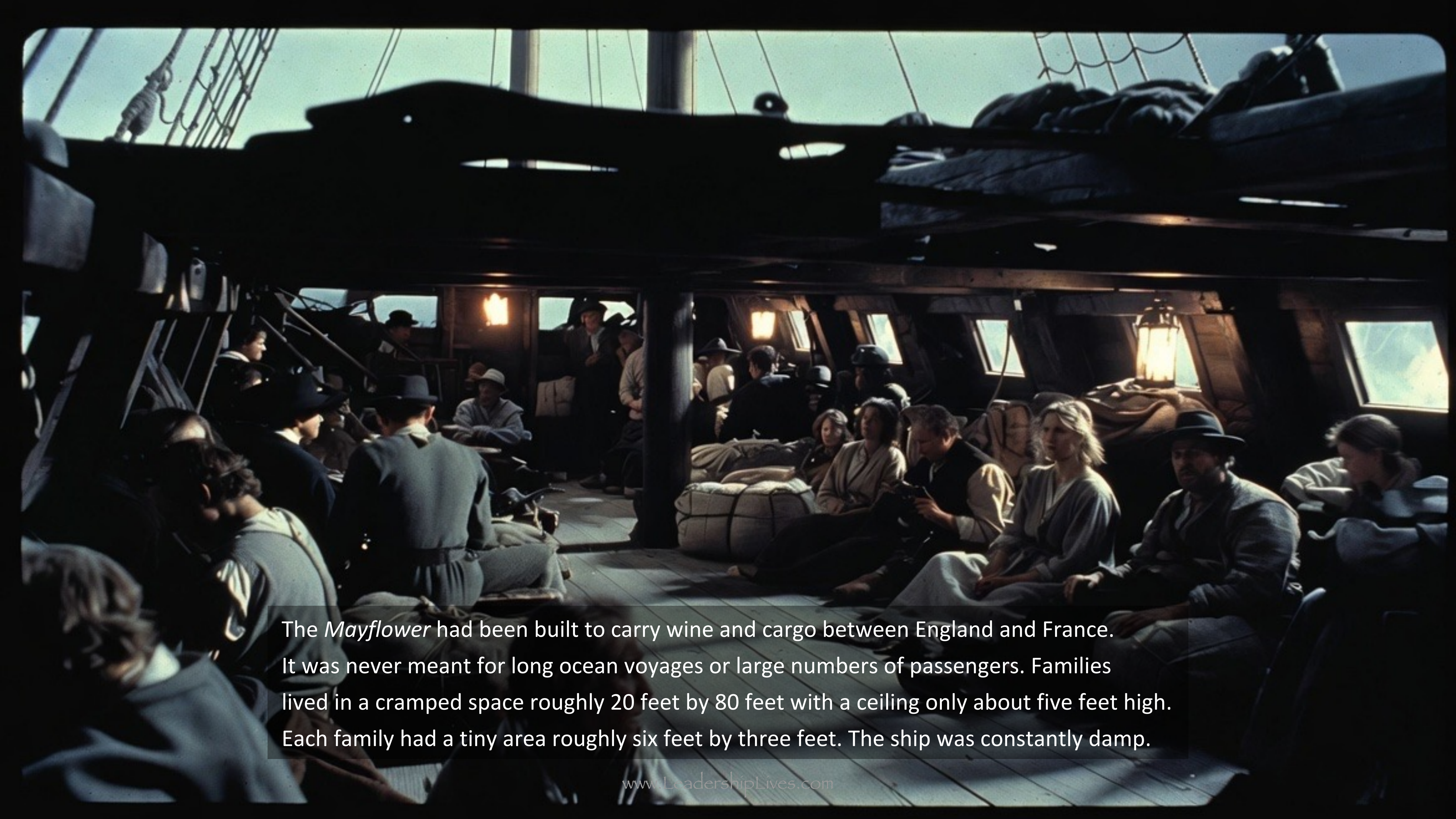
This cross-section provides a rough idea of what the *Mayflower* looked like with everything and everyone onboard.



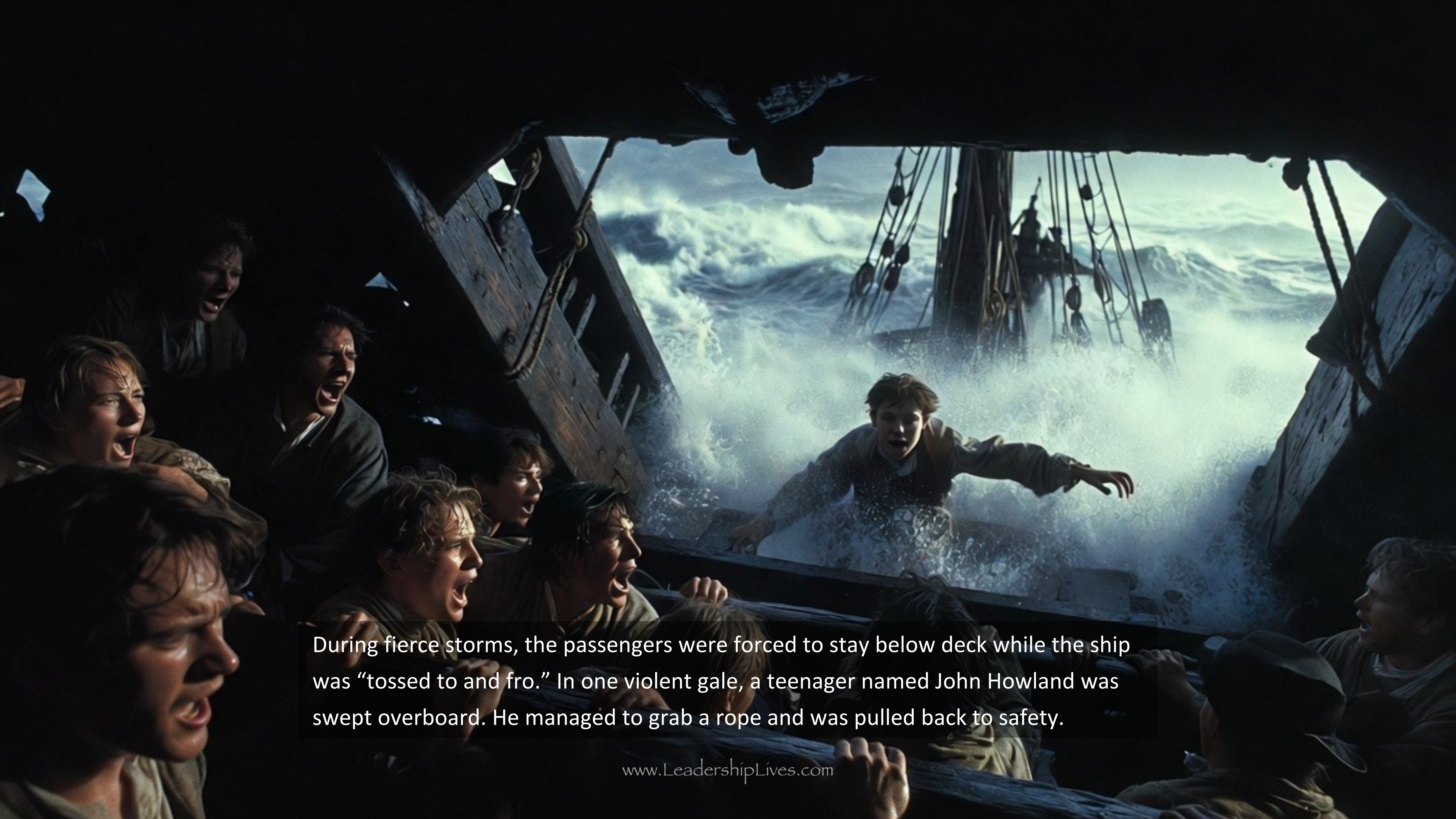
The *Speedwell* soon began leaking badly. Both ships had to turn back for repairs in Dartmouth. After setting out again, the captain decided the *Speedwell* was still not seaworthy. They returned once more, this time to Plymouth.



On September 16, 1620, the overloaded *Mayflower* finally sailed alone into the stormy Atlantic with 102 passengers and crew.

A historical color photograph showing the interior of the Mayflower ship. The space is cramped, with a low ceiling and wooden walls. Numerous passengers, including men, women, and children, are seated or standing throughout the cabin. Some are looking towards the camera, while others are engaged in conversation or looking away. The lighting is dim, with light coming from small windows and a lantern hanging on the right. The overall atmosphere is one of a confined, historical space.

The *Mayflower* had been built to carry wine and cargo between England and France. It was never meant for long ocean voyages or large numbers of passengers. Families lived in a cramped space roughly 20 feet by 80 feet with a ceiling only about five feet high. Each family had a tiny area roughly six feet by three feet. The ship was constantly damp.



During fierce storms, the passengers were forced to stay below deck while the ship was “tossed to and fro.” In one violent gale, a teenager named John Howland was swept overboard. He managed to grab a rope and was pulled back to safety.



After sixty-six difficult days at sea, the Pilgrims finally spotted land at daybreak on November 19, 1620.



They were seventy miles north of their intended course. Off Cape Cod they ran into "dangerous shoals and roaring breakers" so instead of continuing to the Hudson River, they turned north in search of safety and shelter.

End of Part 1

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IMAGE CREDITS

Slide 2: *Mayflower* at Sea. From John T. Wheelwright, *The Mayflower Pilgrims* (1920). Enhanced by Grok.

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Slide 19: View of Leiden. Enhanced by Grok.

Slide 20 – 27 Created by Grok (xAI):

Slide 28: Route from Delft Haven to Plymouth, England. From Bradford, *History of Plymouth* (1890).

Slide 29: Cross-section of the *Mayflower*. Created with Grok.

Slide 30 – 33: Created by Grok (xAI)

Slide 34: Henry Oliver Walker, *The Pilgrims Sighting the Highlands of Cape Cod*. (Massachusetts State House mural). Enhanced by Grok

Slide 35: Created by Grok (xAI)