

THE MAYFLOWER PILGRIMS  
& the Founding of America

Margot Morrell

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For my lifelong friend, Mimi Noering Wicker,  
with gratitude for all the fun and 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 15<sup>th</sup> century

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Many years after the *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth, passenger William Bradford recalled 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."



The Pilgrims' lonely voyage was triggered 100 years earlier, when Martin Luther posted *Ninety-five Theses* on his community's bulletin board – the church doors in Wittenberg, Germany – and sparked 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 initiated proceedings to annul his 20+ year marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

When the Pope refused the king's request, Henry forced Parliament to pass THE ACT OF SUPREMACY declaring the monarch head of the Church of England and severing ties with 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 their communities were "dissolved." Taxes, formerly paid to Rome, were redirected to the Crown.



In 1553, when Catherine of Aragon's daughter assumed the throne on the death of her half-brother, Edward VI, the Bishops of Worcester and London and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had helped Henry attain his annulment, were burned at the stake in the middle of Oxford.

*Mayflower* pilgrim William Bradford said "... many indured sundrie kinds of tormente, often rackings, & dismembering of their joynts." Bradford described Mary's tumultuous six-year reign as "kindling 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 religious 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 became 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.



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 in those days 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 yet were not suffered to goe.”



Around 1606, under tremendous pressure, John Robinson drafted the Scrooby Covenant. Congregation members agreed to walk together in God's ways "whatsoever it should cost them." Robinson's Covenant laid the foundation for an innovative form of self-government.



The Scrooby congregation "resolved to goe into [the] Low-Countries, wher they heard was freedome of Religion for all men."

Not permitted to use the ports, they were forced to hire a ship at great expense. When their ship belatedly showed up, the captain had betrayed them.



Even the women were rifled, ransacked and robbed. For months, William Brewster and six others were jailed in cells so narrow they could stretch out their arms and touch both walls.



After the men boarded their hired ship on their next attempt to flee to Holland the women and children were left behind when the captain, seeing armed authorities rushing towards them, panicked and ordered the ship to sail.

With nowhere to go, the women and children were “turmolyed a good while and conveyed from one constable to another” who “were glad to be ridd of them in the end upon any termes.”

The Separatist women became “famous” for the graceful way they dealt with their ordeal.

Eventually, everyone got to Amsterdam.



Aware that learning a new language and new trades would be difficult, some considered the “adventure almost desperate, a case intolerable, & a miserie worse than death.”

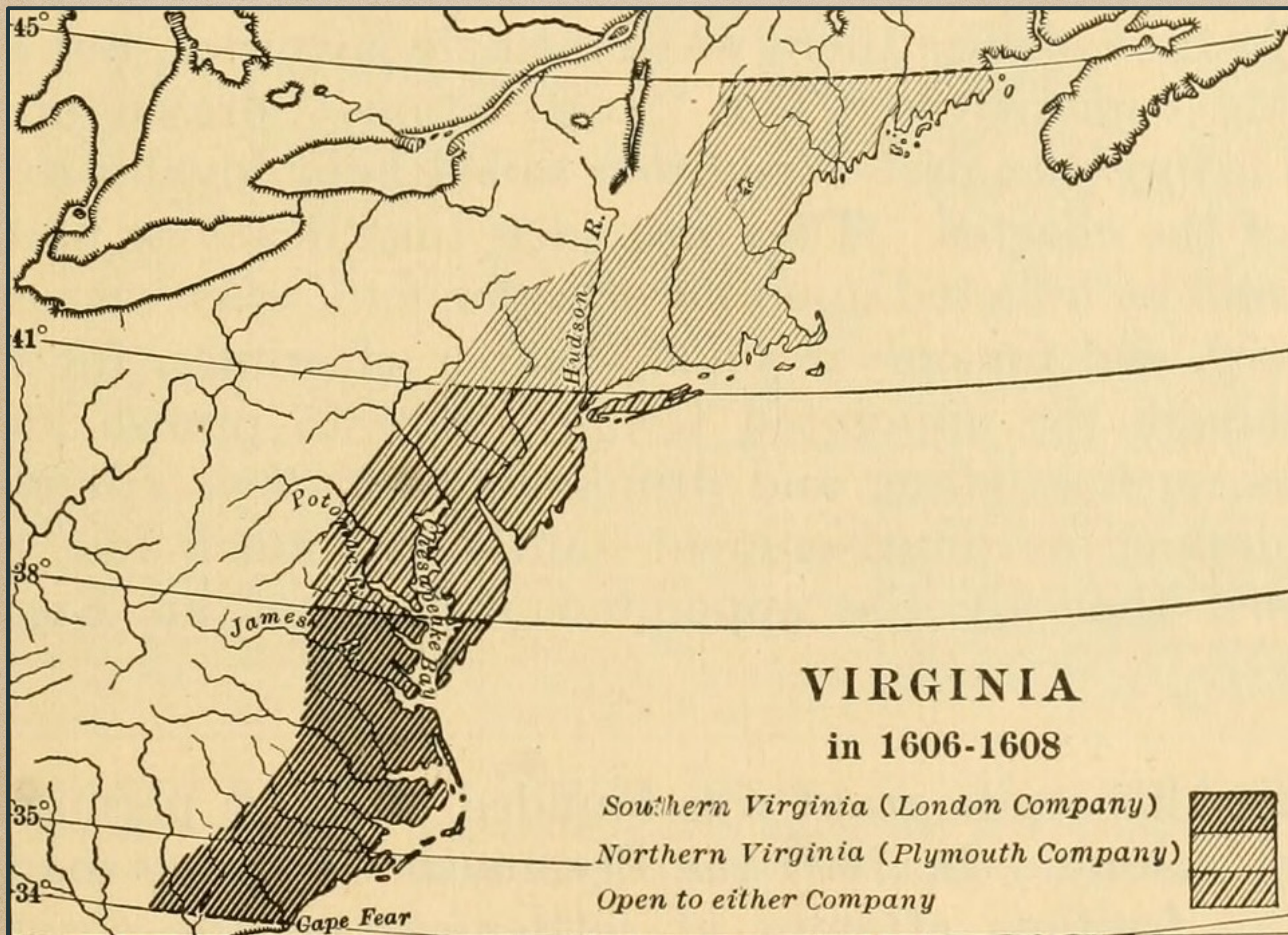


In Amsterdam, they were surrounded by a contentious community of Separatists. So in the spring of 1609 most of the Scrooby congregation moved to the peaceful university town of Leiden. There it proved difficult to find work.



The congregation blossomed to more than 300 over the next 10 years. But by 1617 the Separatists were low on funds, concerned about their children and still treasured a hope of “advancing the gospel of Christ in remote parts of the world.”

After much consideration, they applied to King James for a patent for religious liberty in Virginia. Their request was denied. Two years later, their second application was enthusiastically granted.



England's long-neglected 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 set up two subsidiaries - the Virginia Company of London and the Virginia Company of Plymouth - to colonize land between 34° and 45° north latitude. In other words, from what is now North Carolina to Maine.

The Separatists, intending to settle near the recently discovered Hudson River, worked with the London Company.



From Leiden, John Robinson and William Brewster wrote to Sir Edwin Sandys who Brewster knew through Scrooby connections.

An esteemed member of Parliament, Sandys was a son of the Archbishop of York and a founder and treasurer of the Virginia Company. He was sympathetic to the Separatists.


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."



Church deacons John Carver and Robert Cushman were appointed, funded, and sent to London by the congregation to negotiate the complicated arrangements with a group of “Merchant Adventurers” made up of about 70 London investors headed by ironmonger Thomas Weston.

Cushman worked on the complex contract in London. Carver moved to Southampton to arrange the supplies that would be needed on the voyage and to establish a colony in the wilderness.

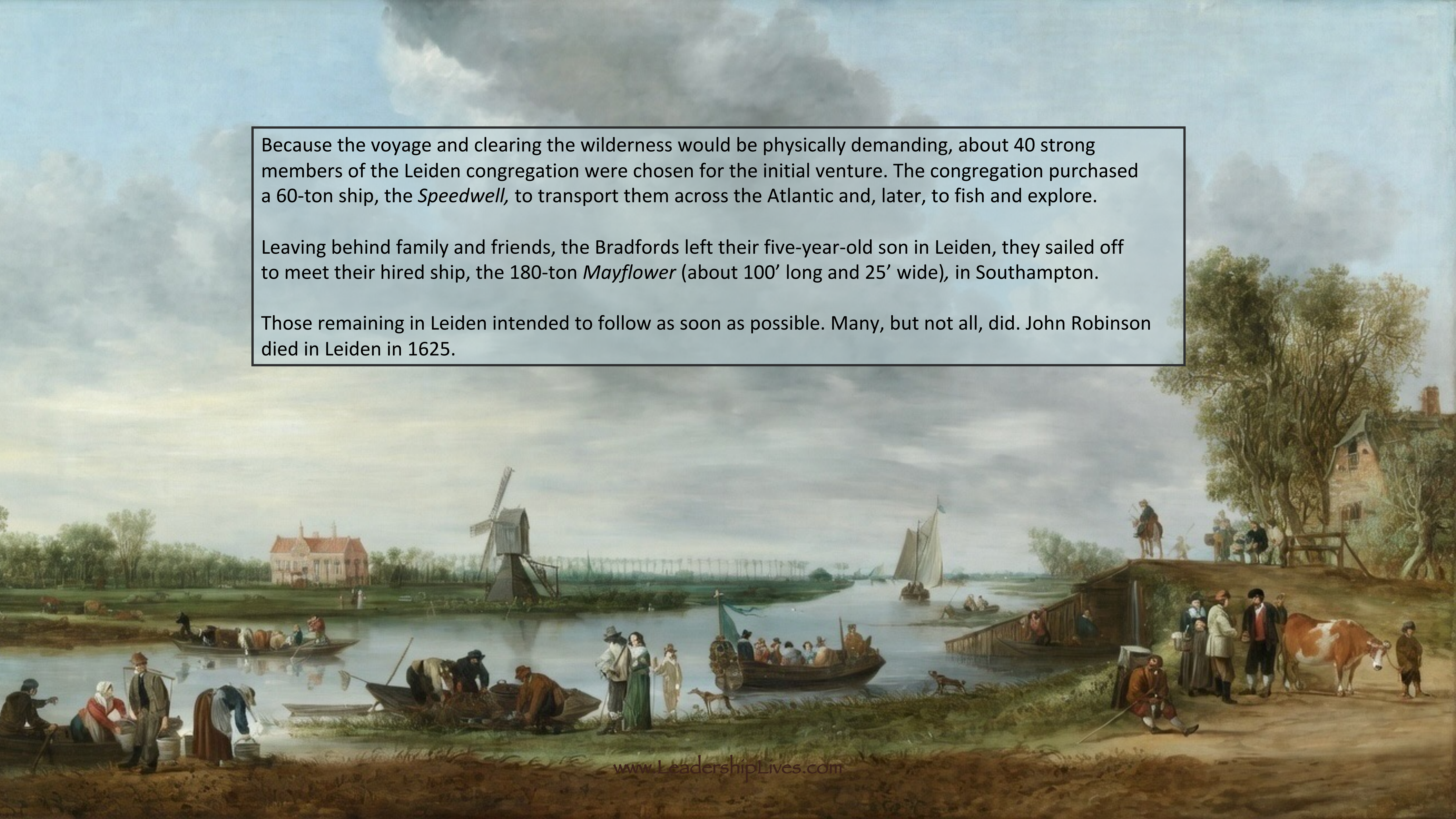
A scene from a historical drama showing three men in 17th-century clothing. The man on the left has a beard and is looking towards the center. The man in the middle has long dark hair and a beard, holding a piece of paper. The man on the right is looking at the paper. They are in a room with bookshelves, a window with curtains, and a painting on the wall.

Working with Weston, Cushman hammered out an agreement for the risky venture by creating a seven-year joint-stock partnership that would generate profits by trading in furs, lumber, and fish. The contract required the Separatists to work six days a week to fund their share of the venture and reap potential profits. The Merchant Adventurers financed the upfront costs of about £7000. Neither party foresaw problems with the ships or the number of deaths that occurred in the early days at Plymouth. The partnership was renegotiated in 1626 – 1627 and fully resolved in the 1640s.

Because the voyage and clearing the wilderness would be physically demanding, about 40 strong members of the Leiden congregation were chosen for the initial venture. The congregation purchased a 60-ton ship, the *Speedwell*, to transport them across the Atlantic and, later, to fish and explore.

Leaving behind family and friends, the Bradfords left their five-year-old son in Leiden, they sailed off to meet their hired ship, the 180-ton *Mayflower* (about 100' long and 25' wide), in Southampton.

Those remaining in Leiden intended to follow as soon as possible. Many, but not all, did. John Robinson died in Leiden in 1625.





Knowing he would never see his friends again, John Robinson dropped to his knees on the deck of the *Speedwell* "and they all with him." As tears ran down his face, Robinson prayed that "great shall be His security and peace in all dangers, sweet His comforts in all distresses, with happy deliverance from all evil, whether in life or in death."

"So they left the goodly and pleasante cities, which had been their resting place near 12 years; but they knew they were pilgrimes, and looked not much on those things, but lift up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest countrie, and quieted their spirits."



At Southampton, the ships were loaded with supplies for the journey.

On August 15, 1620 the ships sailed with ninety passengers and crew on the *Mayflower* and thirty-three members of the Leiden congregation on the *Speedwell*.

The London Merchant Adventurers supplemented the congregations' numbers with "Strangers" who were recruited for their skills – military, tanning, barrel-making, etc. The "Strangers" were subject to the same contractual arrangements as the Separatists.

Some of the "Strangers" became highly valued members of the Plymouth community.

Loading the *Mayflower* and the *Speedwell* at Southampton.


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## 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.



At sea, the *Speedwell* developed leaks and both ships docked at Dartmouth for eight to ten days of repairs.

On their next attempt, 300 miles west of Lands End, the captain decided the *Speedwell* wasn't fit enough for the voyage. The ships returned to Plymouth.



“Having been kindly entertained” in Plymouth, the over-loaded *Mayflower* finally sailed into the stormy north Atlantic sea on September 16, 1620.



Built to ferry wine and cargo between France and England, the *Mayflower* was not meant to carry passengers or for long ocean voyages. Passengers lived in a space about 20' by 80' with a ceiling about 5' high. Each family had a space of 6' by 3'. It was damp all the time.

They ran into "stormes" with "windes... so fierce and the seas so high" they were forced to lower the sails while the ship was "tossed too and fro" all night. During one violent gale, teenager John Howland was swept into the sea. He grabbed a rope and was hauled back on board.



66 days into their journey, at daybreak on November 19<sup>th</sup>, the Pilgrims spotted land.



Far off their intended course, south of Cape Cod, they ran into “deangerous shoulds and roring breakers” so instead of continuing to “Hudsons river” they turned north in search of safety and shelter.

End of Part 1

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**Slide 15:** Jailer at the Guildhall, Boston, Lincolnshire. From *Homes and Haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers* (1920). Enhanced by Grok.

**Slide 16:** Separatist women and children on the beach at Hull, ca. 1620. Created with Grok. Image of the town of Hull. Created with Grok.

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**Slide 18:** View of Leiden. Enhanced by Grok.

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**Slide 32:** Henry Oliver Walker, *The Pilgrims Sighting the Highlands of Cape Cod* (Massachusetts State House mural). Enhanced by Grok

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