

FRANCIS EATON OF THE *MAYFLOWER*

Among those on board the ship *Mayflower* when it finally reached New England in November, 1620 was a man named Francis Eaton with his wife Sarah and their infant son.

This voyage from Holland to England to America had been planned by a small group of religious people called Separatists. They had to leave their English homes because of their illegal religious practices. Because of the threat of fines and imprisonment, they fled to Holland where religious differences were tolerated. But after about 10 years they found that jobs were difficult to find, and they were very poor. Though they enjoyed their worship and appreciated the teachings of their Pastor John Robinson, they did not approve of the Dutch customs nor did they want their children mixing with the Dutch children. They wanted to keep their English way of life and their English customs.

After financial and political difficulties, the decision was finally made to cross the Atlantic Ocean to the New World in search of religious freedom. Francis Eaton does not appear to be a member of this Leyden, Holland religious group, but perhaps he was part of the group that came from London. Two ships were obtained: the *Speedwell* (which leaked and could not make the journey) and the *Mayflower*. Problem after problem delayed their departure, and they had to cross the stormy North Atlantic at a bad time of the year. The little ship was packed with 102 passengers who endured a miserable voyage of 66 days.

They dropped anchor at what is now Provincetown on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Francis Eaton was one of the 41 men who signed the Mayflower Compact on board the ship before they landed at Plymouth. This famous historic document was our country's first form of democratic government. Today we call this little group of people who settled Plymouth Colony the Pilgrims. Francis Eaton's skill as a carpenter surely was a great help in the construction of shelter for this cold and hungry and sick group of people.

Francis Eaton and his son survived that first terrible winter, but wife Sarah died during the unidentified epidemic as did half of those who had just arrived. Eaton soon married a second time, but she soon died without leaving a known child. Eaton then was married in Plymouth in 1624 or 1625 to Christian Penn, who had arrived at Plymouth on the ship *Anne* in 1623. After her husband Francis Eaton's death during another epidemic in 1633, she was married again in 1634 to Pilgrim John Billington of the *Mayflower*.

Child of Francis and Sarah (-----) Eaton:

1. SAMUEL married ELIZABETH ----- and MARTHA BILLINGTON (his stepmother's daughter by her second marriage). He had six children.

Children of Francis and Christian (Penn) Eaton:

2. RACHEL married JOSEPH RAMSDELL (or RAMSDEN) by whom she had one child.
3. BENJAMIN married SARAH HOSKINS and had four children.
4. CHILD about whom nothing is known was living in 1651.

Which child of Pilgrim Francis Eaton is your Mayflower ancestor?

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