

JAMES CHILTON OF THE *MAYFLOWER*

Among those on board the ship *Mayflower* when it finally arrived in New England in November, 1620 was a man almost 60 years of age named James Chilton. He was born and raised in Canterbury in County Kent, England. His occupation was a tailor, one who made clothes. He married but the name of his wife is not known. By 1600 he had moved to Sandwich in Kent.

The religious revolt in England was causing problems for those who did not wish to follow the English religious requirements. There were fines and the threat of imprisonment for that group called Separatists. Mrs. Chilton was excommunicated from the church in Sandwich in 1609, perhaps the first lady to be prosecuted for her religious activities. To escape punishment many of the Separatists fled to Holland, where religious differences were accepted and tolerated.

Perhaps as early as 1610 James Chilton with his wife and some of his children had gone to Leyden, Holland. In 1619 there was a riot, and James Chilton and his daughter Isabella were in the wrong place at the wrong time. James was hit in the head with a brick, and Town Surgeon Jacob Hey attended to his wound.

Though they were able to hold their own religious services in their own way under Pastor John Robinson, the group became unhappy and dissatisfied with their situation. After 10 years of difficulty finding suitable work, they were poor and led rather miserable lives. They did not approve of the Dutch ways and customs, and they did not approve of their children playing with the Dutch children. The Separatists wanted to keep their own English way of life and their own customs. It was decided that a better life could be theirs in the New World.

After many financial and political problems, plans were finally made to cross the Atlantic Ocean on two ships – the *Speedwell* (which leaked and eventually could not make the trip) and the *Mayflower*. One problem after another caused a delayed departure. This meant that they had to cross the stormy Atlantic at a bad time of the year. It took 66 days with 102 passengers and 30 crew members packed into the small ship before finally arriving at what is now Provincetown on Cape Cod. Today we call this group who settled Plymouth Colony the Pilgrims.

James Chilton was one of the 41 men who signed the Mayflower Compact on board the *Mayflower* in Provincetown Harbor before they finally landed at what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. This famous historic document was our country's first example of democratic government. Chilton had been a passenger on the *Mayflower* with his wife and his daughter Mary. Unfortunately, Chilton died December 8, 1620 in Cape Cod Harbor while still on board the ship. Daughter Mary, according to legend, was the first female to step on Plymouth Rock.

Mrs. Chilton was among those who died that first terrible winter in Plymouth Colony. Half of those who had just arrived perished from some unidentified epidemic. Thus 13-year-old Mary Chilton lost both of her parents and became an orphan. She was probably cared for in another family that had survived the sickness. Sister Isabella, who had stayed in Leyden, came over later.

The Chiltons had at least 10 children born in Kent and Sandwich in England, but only the two daughters are known to have descendants in America:

1. ISABELLA married in Leyden ROGER CHANDLER and had two children.
2. MARY married in Plymouth JOHN WINSLOW, brother of Pilgrim Edward Winslow of the *Mayflower*, and had 10 children.

Which daughter of Pilgrim James Chilton is your Mayflower ancestor?