

## JOHN BILLINGTON OF THE *MAYFLOWER*

Among those on board the *Mayflower* when it finally arrived in New England in November, 1620 was John Billington, aged about 40. He was born in England and had married a lady named Ellinor. They brought their two mischievous little boys with them on the voyage that lasted 66 days.

The voyage from Holland to America had been planned by a religious group called Separatists. They had been punished in their home country of England for their religious beliefs and practices. Many of them went to Holland, where there was greater acceptance of religious differences. John Billington was not a part of this religious group, but today we call all of those in this little group that settled Plymouth Colony the Pilgrims.

John Billington was one of the signers of the Mayflower Compact. This now famous historic document was signed on board the *Mayflower* in Provincetown Harbor before they landed at Plymouth Rock. It framed what could be called our first democratic government. The necessity to write this document was the result of considerable grumbling and complaints aboard the *Mayflower*, almost to the point of mutiny. Learning about John Billington's character and personality from Governor Bradford's writings, Billington was surely among those complainers.

The whole Billington family survived the first terrible winter in Plymouth. Half of the group who had just arrived died from some unidentified epidemic.

John Billington died by hanging in Plymouth Colony in September, 1630, after he was convicted of murdering John Newcomen. This was the only hanging in the early history of the Colony. Usually the penalty was confinement to the stocks, a structure which locked the hands and head in an uncomfortable position in public view. Wife Ellinor slandered a Plymouth man, and she was sentenced to sit in the stocks and be whipped.

While they were crossing the Atlantic Ocean, son Francis Billington got into some gun powder and shot off a gun in his father's cabin. It started a fire. No one was hurt though he could have blown up the ship. Supposedly, Francis climbed a tree and saw a body of water. It is called Billington Sea to this day.

And son John probably did his share of mischief. In 1621 he wandered off and got lost for five days. Some Indians found him, and the Pilgrims went to save the boy. But he was returned without any threat of war or attack by the Indians. This adventure could have had a much worse ending for the infant Colony.

Widow Ellinor Billington was married a second time in 1638 to Gregory Armstrong, who died in Plymouth in 1650. No children of this marriage have been found.

Children of John and Ellinor (-----) Billington:

1. JOHN born about 1604 and died between 1627 and 1630. 2. FRANCIS born about 1606 to 1609; married CHRISTIAN (PENN) EATON, widow of Pilgrim Francis Eaton of the *Mayflower*. They had nine children.

Which child of Pilgrim Francis Billington is your Mayflower ancestor?

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