

Today in Our History - Setting Sail September 6, 1620



Photo courtesy of the Internet

What must it have been like on the *Mayflower* after having been aboard this cargo ship since early August and making three failed attempts to sail to America? On this small wooden ship were Separatists, strangers, the ship's crew, children, four of which were traveling alone, two dogs and a few small farm animals. The 102 passengers were packed onto the *Mayflower* like the barrels which the ship normally transported.



The Pilgrims lived for several months "tween deck", packed like the barrels that the ship normally transported. Internet photo

The Separatists (Pilgrims) and their families were finally leaving King James I's sudden changes in England's religion. The Separatists were determined to worship in the same manner they had worshiped for fifty years prior; they were "separating" from the church. Many of the strangers aboard the *Mayflower* were recruited for work or for the contributions that they would later make when arriving at their planned destination across the Atlantic Ocean. The destination was patented (permitted by the English government) for a Virginia colony.

The long voyage actually began on August 5, 1620, and the plan was to sail across the Atlantic Ocean on two ships, a small ship *Speedwell* and a slightly larger ship, *Mayflower*. In July, the *Speedwell* had made a successful voyage from Delftshaven, Holland, to Southampton, England, with about 35 English Separatists. They had left England twelve years earlier to live in Holland in an effort to escape religious persecution in their own country.

August 5 must have been an exciting day for everyone, especially the enthusiastic children, as they looked forward to this adventure. The *Speedwell* and *Mayflower* left Southampton, England, but soon after setting sail, *Speedwell* developed a leak. The detour for repairs at the port in Dartmouth delayed the dual Atlantic voyage nearly 25 extra days.



The Mayflower and Speedwell in Dartmouth Harbor by self-taught artist Leslie Wilcox (1902-1984)

After repairs were made to the leaking ship, the two ships set sail once more for their future colony in America. The first 300 miles were likely a huge relief and a time of giving thanks. Unfortunately, the captain of the not-so-*“Speed-well”*, claimed that the ship was leaking ... again. The two ships circled back toward England, stopping this time at the port of Plymouth (England). William Bradford had his doubts about the “leak” aboard the *Speedwell*, when he later wrote in his journal, *“...no special leak could be found, but it was judged to be the general weakness of the ship, and that she would not prove sufficient for the voyage...the leakiness of this ship was partly by being over-masted and too much pressed with sails; for after she was sold and put into her old trim, she made many voyages and performed her services.”*

Passengers and crew of the two ships were understandably upset at the many excuses and waste of time. Seasoned seamen knew that the most challenging weather over the Atlantic Ocean was now something that they would have to face.

Most of the Pilgrims, strangers, crew, animals and cargo transferred onto the remaining ship, the *Mayflower*, while others decided to stay in England, at least for the time being.

On **September 6, 1620**, 396 years ago today, *Mayflower* set sail from Plymouth, England, with many of the 102 passengers praying for safe passage across the Atlantic Ocean in route to their new colony in America. William Bradford wrote of the September 6 departure, *“These troubles being blown over, and now all being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind...”*

To the very young passengers who later became ancestors to many, their “adventure” began in July of 1620 and ended in the spring of 1621, while living aboard the *Mayflower*.

<http://www.plimoth.org/learn/just-kids/homework-help/who-were-pilgrims>

<https://worldhistoryproject.org/1620/9/16/the-mayflower-departs-from-southampton-england>

<http://mayflowerhistory.com/voyage>

Of Plimoth Plantation, 1620-1647 by William Bradford, pages 47-58

