

Today in Our History

The First Earth Shattering Event for the Pilgrims

June 1, 1638

As a young man of eighteen, Peregrine White would not have expected the earth to move. It may have sounded similar to a rolling thunder, but this was a beautiful day for the first of June. He surely he had not seen grown men unable to walk without falling to the ground. Never had he seen plates fly from shelves or heard loud creaks coming from the walls. On this day, three hundred seventy-nine years ago, the animals were even frightened.



Peregrine was experiencing an earthquake, a sizeable earthquake. A single word could not describe it; there was no name for what was happening. When the earth shook in 1638, Peregrine was living in Marshfield, a settlement north of Plymouth. The family estate was named *Careswell*.

Being the born on the anchored *Mayflower* in December 1620, Peregrine had the distinction of being the first Pilgrim colonist to be born in America. His father, William White, died only a few months after his birth. His mother, Susanna, married Edward Winslow, also a *Mayflower* passenger, whose wife had also died during that hard first winter. The 1621 spring wedding was the first marriage ceremony performed in Plymouth Colony. Peregrine learned farming at *Careswell* and he remained a farmer as an adult.

Peregrine had also been serving in the militia for a couple of years, yet, understandably, he was frightened by the rumbling of the earth and cries of family members. His brother, Resolved was about twenty-three at the time and the two children born to Susanna White Winslow and Edward Winslow, Josias and Elizabeth, were about eight and nine years old at the time of the quake.

This was the first earthquake for the Peregrine and other colonists. It was later calculated to have lasted about four minutes, and if measured today, it would have been one of the strongest earthquakes in New England, measuring 6.5 to 7 on the Richter Magnitude Scale. After shocks continued to shake the country side for many miles into the wilderness.

William Bradford, author of a journal of the Pilgrims, a beloved collection of historical stories which later became the book, *Of Plimouth Plantation*, describes what Peregrine learned first-hand:

...it was in this place heard before it was felt. It came with a rumbling noise or low murmur like unto remote thunder, it came from the northward & passed southward. As the noise approached nearer, the earth began to shake and came at length with that violence as caused platters, dishes & such like things as stood upon shelves to clatter & fall down. Yea, persons were afraid of the houses themselves...it was very terrible for the time and as the men were set talking in the house, some women & others were without the doors and the earth shook with violence as they could not stand without catching hold of the posts & pails that stood next them but the violence lasted not long.

http://pilgrimhallmuseum.org/peregrine_white.htm

<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/kids/>

<https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:101221/datastream/PDF/view>