

## Massachusetts Bay Colony 1630

The Winthrop Fleet, 11 ships led by John Winthrop, funded by the Massachusetts Bay Company, and carrying between 700 and 1000 Puritans, plus livestock and provisions, sailed from a variety of southern English ports to Massachusetts during the summer of 1630. Many, but not all, of the emigrants were from East Anglia, Kent, and the English West Country counties of Dorset, Somerset, and Devon.

They were not the first Puritans to come, but they were the first to come in such numbers. They initiated what became known as the Great Migration, which lasted until the English Civil War effectively put a stop to emigration in 1642. Between 1630 and 1640, over 13,000 men, women and children emigrated to Massachusetts Bay. Put in perspective, during the 17<sup>th</sup> century an estimated 200,000 English emigrated to Ireland, 250,000 to the Caribbean, and 100,000 to the Southern colonies in America. What the Massachusetts emigrants lacked in numbers they made up for in determination, a God-fearing sense of mission and hard work, as well as a healthy climate that enabled them to thrive and multiply.

Who were these Puritans? They were not separatists like the Pilgrims (See 1620 Plymouth Colony article), but congregation- oriented Protestants, who wanted to reform the Anglican church, and went on to establish the reformed Congregational church. Except perhaps in matters of education, they demographically "more closely resembled the English population as a whole than did any other group of emigrants leaving for any other part of the New World."<sup>1i</sup>

The emigrants mainly traveled as families, with as many as 90 percent traveling in family groups, often bringing servants with them. Many of the heads of household were skilled craftsmen or artisans as opposed to farmers. They also were on the older side, with the average age of husbands being 37, which was about mid-career in a 17<sup>th</sup> century lifetime. They were mostly literate and included up to five times the ratio of university graduates as the general British population of the time. Over 200 ministers, who were university graduates, took part in the Great Migration. These demographics contrasted sharply with that of the young single males who emigrated to the Caribbean and Southern colonies.

Moreover, they were not poor. Most were from the middle ranks of English society. The costs of passage to America (5 Pounds) and of setting up a household (20+ Pounds) during that time were beyond the reach of the lowest classes. In some instances, the emigrants themselves had ownership shares in the ships that transported them.

As Governor John Winthrop stated in his famous 1630 sermon: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us." Indeed, they did become that 'City on a hill' when they founded Boston, which became the largest city in British North America until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. They went on to foster intellectual pursuits by establishing the first college in America (Harvard 1636) and flourished by farming, craftsmanship, fishing, sea faring, and trade. As they increased in numbers, they expanded outward from Boston to establish their own colonies in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Rhode, and elsewhere. Given these expansionist tendencies, their relations with Native American tribes in New England were complex and often contentious, resulting in two major wars that involved all the New England colonies (the Pequot War of 1636-38 and King Philip's War of 1675- 78). Their religious doctrines would also prove contentious, especially in relation to the Quakers.

Nonetheless, Massachusetts Bay grew into a prosperous and populous British colony; the eyes of all people would indeed be upon them as they developed their own foreign policy, militia, nascent navy, legislature and legal institutions, and sense of Divine purpose. They became a putative mini- nation state that was a force to be reckoned with throughout all the colonies and, ultimately, the Mother Country. As John Adams, a Massachusetts Bay leader and future President, confided in his diary in 1775: "The morals of our people are much better" than those of the people in the other 12 colonies. "Their [the colonists in the South and mid-Atlantic] manners are more polite and agreeable-they are purer English. Our language is better, our persons are handsomer, our spirit is greater, our laws are wiser, our religion is superior, our education is better."

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's Generation* (Cambridge University Press 1991) p.19 .