

The Pilgrim Story

The Pilgrims lived in England where there was much religious persecution. King James would not allow them to attend the church of their choice. The Pilgrims decided to leave England to find a place where they could worship God in their own way. The Pilgrims set sail for Amsterdam and finally settled in Leiden, Holland in 1609. They were welcomed in Holland but soon realized they could not stay in Holland unless they were willing to give up their English customs and language. They decided to set sail for North America where they could establish their own community and keep the English language.

After much difficulty, they financed two small ships; the Speedwell and the Mayflower. They began their journey across the Atlantic Ocean. The Speedwell developed a leak and both ships had to return to port. On September 6, 1620, the Mayflower set sail alone with 102 people aboard.

It was a difficult voyage for the Pilgrims. Food was scarce and consisted mostly of salted meat and dry biscuits. They could not build fires for cooking or heat because the ship might burn.

The ship was only 90 feet long. People were very crowded. Many became ill due to poor conditions. One happy event did take place during the voyage. A baby was born to the Hopkins family and named Oceanus. Land was sighted on November 11. Almost three weeks later they dropped anchor and began building a settlement near what is now Provincetown, Massachusetts. Before leaving the ship, all of the men signed the Mayflower Compact which was an agreement to the fact that they were still loyal to the king of England, but would set their own laws to provide for their general good and welfare.

The first winter was difficult. There was little food, and shelters provided little protection from the cold. The Pilgrims made friends with the Native Americans who taught them to build stronger houses and how to hunt for food. When spring arrived, the Pilgrims began plowing the land and planting seeds which they carried from England. A Native American, named Squanto, became a very good friend who taught them new ways of planting and gathering food.

When the harvest came, there was plenty of food to store for the next winter. The Pilgrims were so thankful that they decided to invite their Native American friends for a feast of thanksgiving.

On the day of the feast, the Pilgrims covered the tables with food. The Native Americans brought wild turkeys, game, and shellfish. This first Thanksgiving was a joyful occasion of sharing. It was a time of games and eating that lasted three days.

Today, Thanksgiving is a legal holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November.

