

Hard Times in Massachusetts Bay, 1630

*A Settler Recalls Lean Years in Massachusetts Bay*

In our beginning many were in great straits [dire hardship] for want [lack] of provision for themselves and their little ones. Oh the hunger that many suffered, and saw no hope in an eye of reason to be supplied, only by clams and mussels and fish. We did quickly build boats, and some went a fishing. But bread was with many a very scarce thing, and flesh [animal meat] of all kind as scarce....to the praise of God's glory, that he sent not only poor ravenous Indians, which came with their baskets of corn on their backs to trade with us (which was a good supply unto many) but also sent ships from Holland and from Ireland with provisions, and Indian corn from Virginia...when a ship came laden with provisions, they did order that the whole cargo should be bought for a general stock; and so accordingly it was, and distribution was made to every town, and to every person in each town, as every man had need. Thus God was pleased to care for his people in times of straits, and to fill his servants with food

**Surviving the First Winter of the Plymouth Colony, 1620-1621 William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, 1656**

In two or three months' time half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting [lacking] houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases...so as there died sometimes two or three of a day...of one hundred and odd persons, scarce fifty remained. And of these in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound [healthy] persons...

the disease began to fall amongst them also, so as almost half of their company died before they went away, and many of their officers and lustiest [hardest] men, as the boatson, gunner, quartermasters, the cook, and others....the passengers began now to desert one another in this calamity...Another lay cursing his wife, saying if it had not been for her he had never come this unlucky voyage,

**The Mayflower Compact, 1621**

*On their voyage to the New World, the Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower created and signed an agreement known as the Mayflower Compact. They agreed to form a civil body and follow "just and equal laws" that would be passed.*

Whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign lord, King James by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland King, Defender of the faith, etc., having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, *covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic*, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof, to enact, constitute, and frame such *just and equal laws* ordinances, Acts, *constitutions*, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought and most *meet and convenient for the general good* of the colony; *unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.*

**John Winthrop, “Model of Christian Charity,” 1630**

*John Winthrop (1588–1649), lawyer and leader of the 1630 migration of English Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony, delivered this famous sermon aboard the Arbella to settlers traveling to New England*

“The only way to provide for our posterity [children] is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We must be knit together in this work as one man; we must take care of each other with brotherly affection. We shall be united in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, so that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth. We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall [behave badly] and cause God to withdraw his help from us, we shall [invite] the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us. Therefore let us choose life, that we, and our [children], may live; by obeying his voice, for he is our life, and our prosperity.”

**‘The Divine Right to Occupy the Land’ John Cotton, 1630**

*Puritan leader John Cotton gave the following sermon to members of his congregation who were immigrating to America in 1630. Cotton became a respected and influential clergyman in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*

The Bible says: “I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more.” The settling of a people in this or that country is the Lord’s decision. Now, God makes room for a people in three ways: First, He drives out the heathens before them by waging war on the inhabitants. Second, He gives a foreign people favor in the eyes of any native people to come and sit down with them. Third, He makes a country empty of inhabitants where the people will live. Where there is an empty place, the sons of Adam and Noah are free to come and live there, and they neither need to buy it nor ask permission.

**“Molasses to Rum,” a song written about New England’s profitable trade, 1730s**

Molasses to rum to slaves, oh what a beautiful waltz  
You dance with us, we dance with you  
Molasses and rum and slaves  
Who sails the ships out of Boston  
Loaded with bibles and rum?  
Who drinks a toast to the Ivory Coast?  
Hail Africa, the slavers have come  
New England with bibles and rum  
And it’s off with the rum and the bibles  
Take on the slaves, clink, clink  
Hail and farewell to the smell  
Of the African coast  
Molasses to rum to slaves

'Tisn't morals, 'tis money that saves  
Shall we dance to the sound of the profitable pound  
In molasses and rum and slaves  
Who sails the ships out of Guinea  
Loaded with bibles and slaves?  
Boston can boast to the West Indies coast  
Jamaica, we brought what you craves  
Antigua, Barbados, we brought bibles and slaves!  
Molasses to rum to slaves  
Who sail the ships back to Boston  
Loaded with gold, see it gleam  
Whose fortunes are made in the triangle trade

**Letter Home from a New England Colonist, 1640**

When we arrived, we found all our friends who had come before us to be in good health. The Indians who live around us are peaceable and friendly. The climate here is mild and good for planting. There are many fruits that grow here naturally. Trees like those in England cover the land. The forests are full of animals of all sorts. There are great flocks of wild turkeys, quails, pigeons and partridges. There are many great lakes filled with fish, water birds, beavers, and otters. The sea provides us with plenty of all kinds of excellent fish. We all own land here. Most of the settlers here are very religious and honest people. We have church services every Sunday. We have everything a person needs to be happy here. Please send my wife and children to be with me here.

***Sarah Kemble Knight, Journal on her Travels through Connecticut, 1704***

There are everywhere in the Towns as I passed a Number of Indians, the Natives of the Country, and are the most savage of all the savages of that kind that I had ever Seen: little or no care taken (as I heard upon enquiry) to make them otherwise. They have in some places Lands of their own, and Govern'd by Laws of their own making; they marry many wives...There are great plenty of Oysters all along by the seaside, as far as I Rode in the Colony, and those very good. And they Generally lived very well and comfortably in their families. But too Indulgent [kind] (especially the farmers) to their slaves: permitting them to sit at Table and eat with them....There are everywhere in the Towns as I passed a Number of Indians...the most savage of all the savages of that kind that I had ever Seen: little or no care taken (as I heard upon enquiry) to make them otherwise. They have in some places Lands of their own, and Govern'd by Laws of their own making; they marry many wives...

**Daniel Neal, History of New England, London, 1720**

*Neal, an English historian, remarks on Boston after a visit.*

The Bay of Boston is spacious enough to contain in a manner the Navy of England. The Masts of Ships here, and at proper Seasons of the year, make a kind of Wood of Trees like that we see upon the River of Thames about [near] Wapping and Limehouse, which may easily be imagined when we consider that, by Computation given in to the Collectors of his Majesty's Customs . . . it appeared that there was 24,000 Ton of Shipping sent annually.

There are five Printing-Presses in Boston, which are generally full of Work, by which it appears that Humanity and the Knowledge of Letters [humanities] flourish more here than in all the other English Plantations [colonies] put together...

The people of this Province [colony] chiefly follow farming and merchandise. Their staples are shipping, lumber, and fish. The Government is so far democratic as that the election of the Governour's Council and the great officers is made by the members of the Lower House, or Representatives of the people.