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It was a historic day in September, 1620, for the group of people called the separatists who were setting sail for the New World from the southwest coast of England as they were hopefully going to be free to practice their religion as they wanted. The separatists viewed themselves separate from the church of England and did not agree with its teachings. Calling themselves the “saints,” this group intended to form a new church in the New World. However, the 102 passengers on the *Mayflower*, included another group known as the strangers. This group was called the strangers as the saints called anyone outside their group “strangers.” The strangers were comparatively secular and consisted of skilled tradesmen, merchants, indentured servants and orphans.

The separatists had planned the journey to the New World but financing it was another matter. This was made possible when they obtained a land patent through the London Company of Virginia. This allowed them to settle near the Hudson River. They also obtained a loan through the Merchant Adventurers, who were a group of businessmen wanting to make a profit in the New World. The Merchant Adventurers had recruited the strangers to help in the governance and running of the colony. Myles Standish, a well known individual from among the strangers, became the colony’s military leader. Other famous strangers were Christopher Martin, designated by the Merchant Adventurers to act as a governor for the duration of the trip, and Stephen Hopkins, the only passenger with prior New World experience, including surviving a shipwreck in Bermuda.

One of the most important roles the strangers may have played, although unwittingly, was their role in the signing of the Mayflower Compact. The *Mayflower* had landed at Cape Cod instead of Virginia, which was their originally planned destination. Once landed, the strangers argued that the rules of the London Virginia Company did not apply in Cape Cod. As this was resulting in discord, the Mayflower Compact was signed to create a set of temporary laws for ruling the pilgrims. The Mayflower Compact, though theocratic at that time, is seen as an early attempt at democracy and for future colonists to gain independence from the British. As both the parties were kept equal, this could be seen as the birth of the concept of “American Freedom.” Also, the unity of the strangers and the separatists was crucial for surviving their first unfamiliar New England winter.

The strangers played other important roles part during the voyage and the Plymouth Colony. The stranger Stephen Hopkins proved to be quite useful to the pilgrims once they had landed as he was well versed in hunting techniques and also knew about the lifestyle of the native

people. His assistance to the pilgrim leadership was invaluable as he knew the local languages, and the first meeting with the native people was held at his house. He was also called upon to participate in early meetings with the natives' leader, Massasoit. Myles Standish, though portrayed as an aggressive individual, played a leading role in the defense and administration of the Plymouth Colony.

John Alden, who was a carpenter, repaired the mainmast of the *Mayflower* that was damaged due to storms so the journey could be continued. Due to the danger of fire, food had to be eaten cold and it was his responsibility as barrel maker to keep it edible. Once in Plymouth, Alden served on various committees as the colony treasurer. Most of his public service duties were unpaid. Henry Samson sailed on the *Mayflower* with his aunt and uncle, Edward and Ann Tilley. He served on a large number of juries and was appointed as a surveyor on a few occasions. He and other colonists including Myles Standish founded the town of Duxbury.

Although the separatists planned the voyage to the New World, the strangers helped shape the colony. It is notable that both parties had different perspectives for the New World but learned to coexist to work towards common goals and helped shaped the United States to be the democracy that it is today.

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