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The Merchant Adventurers of London were a group of English investors who funded the *Mayflower's* voyage to the New World in 1620. The hope of these men was to draw a profit from the Pilgrims once they had reached their new home. Through fur trading, fishing, and usage of natural resources like lumber, the merchant adventurers planned to make their fortune.

The passengers on this voyage, the Pilgrims, were a group of separatist Puritans seeking religious freedom from England. They first attempted to move to the Netherlands in 1607 but were betrayed by their ship captain. Eventually some did make it there. However, life was hard under Dutch rule. There weren't clear ways to support themselves and they feared they would lose their English identities in Dutch culture. The New World seemed to offer the opportunities that the Pilgrims needed, but they wouldn't be able to afford the trip. That is where the merchant adventurers of London came in.

A joint-stock company was formed between the colonists and the 50 or so investors who would fund their trip. These investors would put in around 7000 pounds for the Pilgrims. An agreement was made where the colonists would work for seven years and share any and all profit they made with their investors. Soon a patent was issued by another merchant adventurer company, the Virginia Company of London. A patent allowed the Pilgrims to settle in the territory that the company owned. Everything was set and, in 1620, the *Mayflower* took off for Virginia territory.

Soon the Pilgrims arrived at the New World, landing at Cape Cod. However, this was north of their intended destination of Virginia Company territory, and another patent would be required. After obtaining another patent for the territory they landed in and establishing themselves as a legitimate colony with the Mayflower Compact, the Pilgrims set to the task of surviving in their new country. Unfortunately for the investors, and even more unfortunate for the Pilgrims, surviving was not such an easy task. The "Great Sickness" had set itself upon the colonists, killing many of them. Scurvy and pneumonia would run rampant in the New World. Survival was all they could focus on and nothing else. When the *Mayflower* returned to England in 1621, the investors were disappointed to see that there was no cargo. This stroke of bad luck would soon prove to be the norm for the investors.

When the Pilgrims finally began to adapt to their new home, with much help from the local Wampanoag Indians, they attempted their first payment. The ship *Fortune*, loaded with furs and timber, was sent towards London. Before arriving, the ship was caught by French raiders and stripped of all cargo, leaving the investors empty handed again. A second attempt to send payment was also ruined. The *Little James*, loaded with cargo, was caught in a storm on its way to the Merchant Adventurers. If that wasn't bad enough, it was then captured by Barbary Coast pirates. Suffice it to say, relations between the colonists and investors were not the best.

By 1626, the Pilgrims were deep in debt, having not been able to send any large payment to the Merchant Adventurers for six years. Many of the investors had already bowed out at this point, convinced they would never make money back on their investment. In an attempt to get at least some money back, a negotiation was set up. The Merchant Adventurers sold their shares to the Pilgrims for 1,800 pounds, a significant loss for the investors.

The Merchant Adventurers of London were just normal people. They funded the voyage to the New World because they thought they would make their money back several times over, not because

they wanted to help form a better nation. While they most certainly did not reach their goals, they started something significant. Their funding helped establish one of the first colonies in the New World. While they would never live to see it, these colonists' descendants would go on to form the greatest country on earth, the United States of America.

### **Bibliography**

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