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The relationship between the *Mayflower* Passengers and Massasoit was vital to the survival of both groups. The agreement of cooperation gave the Wampanoag and *Mayflower* Passengers a better chance to overcome past hardships.

On September 6, 1620, the *Mayflower* set sail to escape the religious controversies and economic problems in England by emigrating to America. Following an arduous 66-day journey, the passengers reached Cape Cod, and eventually settled at Plymouth. Although the *Mayflower* passengers had completed their time at sea, more struggles were ahead in an unfamiliar land. Of the 102 passengers, nearly half died the first winter due to malnutrition-related illnesses. Those who survived were considered Pilgrims, regardless of their purpose for coming to the New World.

Unbeknownst to the Pilgrims, the neighboring Wampanoag tribe had already faced a devastating tragedy of their own. Massasoit, intertribal sachem (leader) of the Wampanoag people, had already witnessed the devastation of his tribe due to a smallpox epidemic. Of the approximately 8,000 Wampanoags living near Plymouth in 1600, fewer than 2,000 remained in 1620. The tribe's power in the region was greatly weakened, and they had become vulnerable to enemy attacks.

The Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe had one thing in common; they needed help to survive. The Pilgrims, unfamiliar with the terrain, needed to be taught how to live off the land. The Wampanoag needed allies. Massasoit recognized that the Pilgrims would be valuable trade partners, which would benefit his tribe.

In the spring of 1621, first contact between the Natives and Pilgrims was made by Squanto. A member of the Wampanoag confederation, Squanto served as an interpreter for Massasoit. After an exchange of gifts, Massasoit and the Pilgrims began their negotiations. Miles Standish and Massasoit went to William Bradford's house, where they discussed terms of the agreement. They wanted to insure the safety of their people. It was determined that if other tribes declared war against Massasoit, the Pilgrims would come to his aid. In exchange for their protection, the Natives would show the Pilgrims how to farm, hunt and fish. The Treaty of Massasoit was signed on April 1, 1621, to ultimately secure the well-being of both groups. This was the first treaty between European colonists and Native Americans. As a result the Pilgrims were able to grow crops like maize, beans and squash in Plymouth.

In November 1621, the first celebration of the year's harvest was held between the Native Americans and the Pilgrims. The feast included a bounty of vegetables, fish and wild game which were proof that the Pilgrims now had the ability to survive off the land. The first Thanksgiving is an important part of American history. This November, four hundred years later, we will once again celebrate the relationship between Massasoit and the *Mayflower* passengers.

Without Massasoit and the Wampanoag tribe, American History would be very different. Roughly thirty-five million people world-wide can now trace their ancestry to a *Mayflower* Passenger. The impact of the alliance between Massasoit and the Mayflower Passengers continues to influence us to this day.

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