

Eliot Barnes, *Maplewood*

The Plymouth colony in Massachusetts, a community of initially 102 pilgrims that had emigrated from England in hopes of religious freedom and financial opportunity, saw various changes following its establishment in December of 1620. Due to meager provisions, lack of shelter, and the spread of diseases such as scurvy, nearly half of the pilgrims died within the colony's first few months, but under the governorship of John Carver, Plymouth's settlers pushed through the first winter and developed a society based around agriculture and exportation. During its fledgling years, three ships: the *Fortune*, the *Anne*, and the *Little John* (commonly referred to as the *Little James*), financed by London investors, were paramount in growing and subsidizing the Plymouth colony.



With a volume of only fifty-five tons, carrying thirty-five passengers and almost no supplies, the *Fortune* was the second ship sent to Plymouth funded by a merchant named Thomas Weston who was working with the Leiden Separatists at the time. The ship arrived in November of 1621, and the predominantly young male passengers brought with them “not so much as biscuit cake” according to William Bradford who had become governor following Carver's death earlier that year. It's also worth mentioning that the ship's arrival was delayed by roughly two months, as Weston had struggled to obtain the necessary funds after the *Mayflower* had proven to be a financial disaster. Though the Plymouth plantation benefited from the varied skills and strengths of this new labor force, the lack of provisions and general low class of the passengers disappointed the colony and left them still in a weakened state. In dire need of supplies from London, Bradford made sure that the *Fortune* was sent back laden with beaver pelts and other trading goods, but when the ship was captured by a French vessel and her cargo seized, Weston gave up on the Plymouth colony and left the business, despite his promises of further backing. Thus, the arrival of passengers from the *Fortune* led to widespread disarray and desperation, as famine set in and continued shipment of provisions was left in the air.

In July of 1623, two ships financed by the same Merchant Adventurers, now under the direction of investor James Sherley, arrived at the Plymouth colony with a combined sixty-odd passengers: the *Anne* and the *Little James*. The *Anne* was the larger of the two ships with roughly 140 tons displacement, though, like its predecessor, it was notably lacking in provisions. The *Little James*, a pinnacle of only forty-four tons, arrived around two weeks after the *Anne* and contained primarily cargo, though not nearly enough to aid the pilgrims in their enfeebled state. As opposed to the *Fortune* which brought over mostly men, the *Anne* and the *Little James* carried many women and children, as well as a mixture of faiths. As with the *Fortune*, various passengers wept and wished to return to England upon seeing the harsh conditions present in the Plymouth colony; they had very little to offer the pilgrims in terms of food and cloth. Needless to say, residents of the colony became concerned with both the distribution of their harvest and the general conduct of the newcomers, as they now had significantly more mouths to feed and little energy to deal with unruliness. Knowing that the provisions brought by the newcomers would give out before the year

concluded the original settlers approached the governor and begged him to reconsider how the limited food was allocated. They were successful – Bradford granted their request, allowing pilgrims to make use of their own corn which they had sowed themselves and passengers to enjoy their own provisions without the fear of desperate settlers eating them up. This change, in addition to the sending back of unruly settlers to England, helped the colony reach some degree of stability. A bountiful harvest that year certainly contributed towards Plymouth's recoument, but one could argue that it was the dire straits brought on by the influx of settlers from the *Anne* and the *Little James* that forced the colony to reevaluate its systems and find a new model that reflected the dispositions of the population better.

Strictly speaking, the *Fortune*, *Anne*, and *Little James* supported the emergent Plymouth colony the most by simply replacing those who succumbed to sickness and famine. While the arrival of passengers from these three ships proved to be largely problematic, it did, however, lead to systemic change that might not have occurred had provisions been plentiful.

References

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