

Transcript: Part One, Episode One- Leaving England

I'm Matthew, I'm Mike. Welcome to Part One, Episode One of Keep Liberty Alive. In part one, we will discuss the circumstances that led American Colonists to find a new way of life and freedom in the New World. This episode is titled "Leaving England"

Our story begins in jolly old England in the Year of Our Lord 1534. Cheerio, pip pip,hello governa. King Henry VIII failed to get permission from Pope Clement VII to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, because she had not borne him a son "and he was somewhat smitten by Anne Boleyn." So in order to grant himself a divorce, good ol' Henry decided, in his infinite wisdom, to cut ties with the Catholic Church and declare himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. That title was last held by his daughter, Mary I, until it was abolished in 1555, when she briefly reunited the Church of England with the Catholic Church. That reunion didn't last long because in 1558 the separation was renewed and made permanent. The reigning monarch at the time, Queen Elizabeth I, named herself Supreme Governor of the Church of England, aka the Anglican Church. That title has been held by every reigning English monarch since, and currently held by King Charles III. This meant the government was in charge of the church and that really didn't sit well with some people. This created a conflict between the Anglican Church and people who didn't agree with how it was being run. Some wanted to worship in their own way and others wanted to disavow all practices of the Catholic Church in order to purify the Church of England. These people became known as Puritans, and they created what was known as the Separatist Church. James I made it against the law to not attend Anglican church services and there were fines for not doing so. Some people, after deciding to have their own services, were imprisoned and even executed for treason. This caused the Puritans to decide to leave England and go to Amsterdam in the Netherlands, in order to seek religious freedom. Finding Amsterdam to be too secular (even back then) and worried that it would affect their young people, they decided to move to the small town of Leiden in the Dutch Republic. There, they encountered economic hardships due to a lack of work. Because of that economic hardship, and not being able to return to England where they were basically criminals, the decision was made to move to the New World, Called New England, between 1629 and 1640 both for religious and economic reasons. Approximately 21,000 people settled in the Massachusetts Bay Area and other northern colonial areas. The best known of these Puritan groups, whom we call the Pilgrims, came to the New World aboard the Mayflower.

According to the passenger list, there were 102 people on the voyage of the Mayflower (plus two born on the ship during the voyage, of those approximately 54 were men, women and children who were part of the English Separatist Church led by William Bradford. There were also 11 servants of the various families who were mostly younger boys and approximately 35 tradesmen and those called "strangers," as they were not part of the Separatist Church. Included in these was Myles Standish, an English Officer hired by the Pilgrims as a military advisor for security purposes. Many of the church members themselves were experienced in various trades. The pilgrims sailed from the Netherlands to Southampton, England on a ship called Speedwell, intending to meet up with the Mayflower and make the voyage on two ships, but during the voyage from the Netherlands, Speedwell sprang a leak and was taking on water. So, repairs were made to the Speedwell to stop the leak. After repair, Speedwell and Mayflower set sail on August 21, 1620. After about 300 miles the Speedwell was taking on water again, so they returned to Plymouth, England and transferred all of the cargo and most of the passengers to the Mayflower, leaving the Speedwell behind. Some of the exhausted passengers quit and went home.

The Mayflower, chartered by wealthy passenger John Carver and mastered by Christopher Jones with his crew of up to 30, finally departed Plymouth, England on Sept. 6, 1620. The Mayflower was a fairly small vessel, being approx. 100 ft. long and 25 ft wide. The pilgrims were berthed on the middle deck, in an area approximately 80 by 20 feet with 5 foot ceilings. Imagine having 100 people living in these conditions for two months! And a total of 130 plus people, supplies and livestock for this small ship. After a voyage of 66 days in these cramped conditions, Cape Cod was sighted on Nov. 9, 1620.

The original intention had been to land near the Hudson River Area, but having missed by just a few degrees, the Mayflower ended up a bit north, at Cape Cod. They decided to head south to the Hudson area, but bad weather kept them from continuing, so they returned and stayed in Cape Cod. After exploring for a month and a half, they settled in a place they called Plymouth, named for the English town from which they departed and began construction on their settlement.

Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, the Jamestown colony was created by the London company, aka the Virginia Company of London, after receiving a royal charter from James 1. It started out as James Fort on May 4, 1607, and was the first permanent English settlement in the Americas. Before Jamestown there were two failed attempts to establish settlements called Roanoke and Popham. The London Company's purpose was to establish colonial settlements in North America and create products for trade. Jamestown was the first colonial capital, from 1616 until 1699, when the capital was moved to Williamsburg, VA, and Jamestown basically ceased to exist.

Jamestown settlers settled on an island in the James River about 40 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. Unfortunately, they arrived too late in the season to plant crops and during the worst drought in hundreds of years. The land was very swampy, and the water was very briny from mixing with ocean water. So basically, they had no food or water. The island was uninhabited because even the native tribes didn't want it. It wasn't long before 80 percent of them had died. Originally the native tribes welcomed the new settlers, but possibly due to more exploration and the addition of more settlers, hostilities soon arose between the settlers and the tribes. One of the leaders of Jamestown Colony was John Smith. He became president of the colony in September 1608. He traded for corn with the native tribes and created a policy with the colonists that if you don't work you don't eat. While Smith led the colony, there was very little death among the colonists, unlike before and after his presidency. The year before he became president of the colony, he and his party were ambushed by the Powhatan, and he was taken prisoner. He was going to be put to death but was saved by the chief's daughter, Pocahontas, who refused to let them kill Smith. He was injured in a gunpowder explosion and went back to England in 1609 for treatment, not ever returning to Virginia. Smith was also a cartographer and made very accurate maps of the Virginia area when he returned to North America. Smith sailed to the area he called New England and mapped out the coast from what is now Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine. Eventually, he was captured by pirates near the Azores and after escaping he made his way back to England, where he died on June 16, 1631. Meanwhile, Jamestown Colony was not faring well without him. In his absence, more settlers arrived, and more settlers starved. In 1619, a ship called the White Lion had captured 20 African slaves from a Portuguese ship and then sailed to Virginia in order to sell the slaves as indentured servants. This was basically the beginning of slavery in North America. It is important to note that slavery was a common occurrence in the world at the time as it was throughout the history of mankind. Slavery still exists in the world today. It is not our objective to condone or condemn these practices, but to just tell history the way it occurred.