Top of Form

***Of Plymouth Plantation***



The front page of the Bradford journal

Written over a period of years by the leader of the [Plymouth Colony](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth_Colony) in [Massachusetts](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts), [William Bradford](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Bradford_%281590-1657%29), ***of Plymouth Plantation*** is the single most complete authority for the story of the [Pilgrims](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrim_%28Plymouth_Colony%29) and the early years of the Colony they founded. Written between 1630 and 1651, the journal describes the story of the Pilgrims from 1608, when they settled in the [Dutch Republic](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_Republic) through the 1620 [*Mayflower*](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayflower) voyage, until the year 1647. The book ends with a list, written in 1651, of *Mayflower* passengers and what happened to them.

**Naming** The document has carried many names. At the top of the original text is "Of Plimoth Plantation [sic]", but newer prints of the text utilize the modern spelling, "*Plymouth."* The text of Bradford's journal is often referred to as "History of Plymouth Plantation." In Wilberforce's text it is cited as "History of the Plantation of Plymouth".[[1]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-1) It is also sometimes referred to as "William Bradford's Journal". A version published by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (after the return of the manuscript from England in 1897) is titled 'Bradford's History "Of Plimoth Plantation"' while labeled "The Bradford History" on the spine.[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2) It has also been called "The Mayflower" although it is not a ship's log and was written after the events.[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2)

**Bradford's material** Bradford, along with [Edward Winslow](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Winslow) and others, contributed material to George Morton, who merged everything into a letter published in [London](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/London) in 1622, [*Mourt's Relation*](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mourt%27s_Relation),[[3]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-3) which was primarily a journal of the colonist's first years at Plymouth.

Bradford’s history is a blend of fact and interpretation. The Bradford journal records not only the events of the first 30 years but also the reactions of the colonists. The Bradford journal is regarded by historians as the preeminent work of 17th century America. It is Bradford’s simple yet vivid story, as told in his journal, that has made the Pilgrims the much-loved "spiritual ancestors of all Americans" (Samuel Eliot Morison).

Bradford apparently never made an effort to publish the manuscript during his lifetime. He did intend for it to be preserved and read by others, writing at the end of chapter 6:

I have been the larger in these things, and so shall crave leave in some like passages following, (though in other things I shall labour to be more contract) that their children may see with what difficulties their fathers wrestled in going through these things in their first beginnings, and how God brought them along notwithstanding all their weaknesses and infirmities. As also that some use may be made hereof in after times by others in such like weighty employments; and herewith I will end this chapter.[[4]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-4)

Bradford, like all writers of his time, uses a variety of spelling. A rule code for spelling was unknown then and dictionaries uncommon. Consistency in spelling was not a virtue, even important state papers might reflect regional speech. In addition, there were a number of particular customs used, as for example the [f-shaped s](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_s) which was used when the letter s was doubled or used initially. Bradford also uses common abbreviations such as wt for with, and yt for that.

It should also be noted that the "y" was not the *y* as used in present English, but instead was a [thorn](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thorn_%28letter%29) or *thet*[[*citation needed*](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)], pronounced as *th* is today. The word *ye* was not pronounced as *yee* but rather was pronounced as *the* is today.

**History of the manuscript** After Prince's death, the manuscript was left in the tower of the [Old South Meeting House](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_South_Meeting_House) in Boston. During the [Revolutionary War](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War), [British troops](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_army) occupied the church and the manuscript was lost for another century. After quotes from the missing book appeared in [Samuel Wilberforce](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Wilberforce)'s *A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America*, in the 1850s it was discovered in the [Bishop of London's](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_of_London) library at [Fulham Palace](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fulham_Palace),[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2) and was published in print in 1856. Formal proposals to return the manuscript were not successful until the 1897 initiative of the Hon. [George Hoar](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Hoar), [United States Senator](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Senator) from Massachusetts, supported by the [Pilgrim Society](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrim_Society), the [American Antiquarian Society](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Antiquarian_Society), and the [New England Society of New York](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_England_Society_of_New_York).

When Bishop of London [Frederick Temple](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Temple) learned of the importance of the book, he thought it should be returned. But because the book was being held by the Church of England, approval from the [Archbishop of Canterbury](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbishop_of_Canterbury) was needed in order to return it. By the time the formal request from Hoar's group reached England, the Archbishop was Frederick Temple. The bishop's [Consistorial and Episcopal Court of London](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consistory_court) observed that although how the book got there was not known, the marriage and birth registry in the back of the book should have been deposited with the Church, that this library was the proper place for it, thus the book was a church document and the Diocese of London had proper control of it. The court went on to observe that when the Colony declared independence in 1776, the Diocese of London was no longer the proper place because London's registry was no longer the proper repository for such a registry. The bishop's court ordered that a photographic copy of the document be made for the court, and the original be delivered to the Governor of Massachusetts.[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2)

The Bradford journal was presented to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during a joint session of the legislature on May 26, 1897. It is on deposit in the [State Library of Massachusetts](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Library_of_Massachusetts) in the State House in Boston.[[5]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-5) In June 1897 the state legislature ordered publication of the history with copies of the documents associated with the return.[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2) In 1912, the Massachusetts Historical Society published a "final" authorized version of the text.

Early in the 16th century, rag-based paper replaced parchment book pages. Both parchment and rag paper are very durable. Documents from the 17th century usually outlast those written on the highly acidic 19th and 20th century wood pulp-based paper. William Bradford's manuscript journal is a vellum-bound volume measuring 11½" by 7¾." There are 270 pages, numbered (sometimes inaccurately) by Bradford himself. The ink is slightly faded and has turned brown with age, but it is still completely legible. The pages are somewhat [foxed](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxing) but otherwise the almost 400-year-old document is in remarkably good condition.

Page 243 is missing, with a note from Thomas Prince that it was missing when he got the document.[[2]](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Of_Plymouth_Plantation#cite_note-Bradford1900-2)

**From the journal** (Describing the Pilgrims' safe arrival at Cape Cod aboard the Mayflower)Being thus arived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees & blessed ye God of heaven, who had brought them over ye vast & furious ocean, and delivered them from all ye periles & miseries therof, againe to set their feete on ye firme and stable earth, their proper elemente. And no marvell if they were thus joyefull, seeing wise [Seneca](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seneca_the_Younger) was so affected with sailing a few miles on ye coast of his owne [Italy](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy); as he affirmed, that he had rather remaine twentie years on his way by land, then pass by sea to any place in a short time; so tedious & dreadfull was ye same unto him.
But hear I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amased at this poore peoples presente condition; and so I thinke will the reader too, when he well considers ye same. Being thus passed ye vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation (as may be remembered by yt which wente before), they had now no friends to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repaire too, to seeke for succoure…
Let it also be considered what weake hopes of supply & succoure they left behinde them, yt might bear up their minds in this sade condition and trialls they were under; and they could not but be very smale. It is true, indeed, ye affections & love of their brethren at [Leyden](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leyden) was cordiall & entire towards them, but they had little power to help them, or them selves; and how ye case stode betweene them & ye marchants at their coming away, hath already been declared. What could not sustaine them but ye spirite of God & his grace? May not & ought not the children of these fathers rightly say : *Our faithers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this willdernes; but they cried unto ye Lord, and he heard their voyce, and looked on their adversitie, &c. Let them therfore praise ye Lord, because he is good, & his mercies endure for ever***.**