

Descendants give thanks for the Pilgrims

They set out from Southampton, England, in two ships that soon became one as the *Speedwell* began to spring leaks and its passengers had to be transferred to the other vessel. The *Mayflower* then continued on to the New World with its 102 passengers, landing 65 days later in what is now known as Cape Cod, Mass. The area was not hospitable for farming, and so the pilgrims would soon make their way to the place that would become their home, present-day Plymouth, Mass.

Nearly 400 years later, their struggles to escape religious intolerance and create their own colony are being kept alive by a group of people who couldn't be prouder of these adventurous souls, about half of whom died in the first year. They are descendants of the travelers, a fact proven through painstaking documentation and final approval by the historian general of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants — based in Plymouth, Mass.

While Erica Hahn is quite enthusiastic about her lineage now, her genealogical journey got off to a slow start. Hahn is the governor of the Orange County Mayflower Colony, which was founded in 1974 as part of the 108-year-old California Society of Mayflower Descendants. The local group has 300 members, though only a few dozen are active participants. "I think I was about 12 at the time and living in Cincinnati, Ohio, and used to go to my grandmother's and had been assigned to read 'The Courtship of Miles Standish,'" she said, referring to the narrative poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. "And I am finding this so ridiculous that I said I don't believe that these people even existed. And grandma looked down her aquiline nose at me and said, 'Not only was Miles Standish real, he was your direct ancestor.'"

In her search, Hahn originally "piggybacked" onto the 1913 membership of her grandfather's mother, Clara Cole, who was a descendant of Mayflower passenger Richard Warren. That application was full of affidavits, including one written in 1892 by Clara's uncle based on a letter he had from his 85-year-old aunt describing the 1832 wedding of his parents. No other record of this wedding exists anywhere, Hahn said.

Early New England is easy to research, Hahn said, because the towns "dutifully kept records of births, deaths, marriages." But, she added, by the 19th century, records are sparse, and most Mayflower applications are pieced together with a variety of documents, such as the affidavits in Clara's case.

It turns out that Hahn's maternal grandmother, Helen Holmes, was also a Mayflower descendant through Helen's great grandfather Southworth Holmes, who was born in Barnstable, Mass., in 1799 but immigrated to Cincinnati and is buried at Spring Grove Cemetery. Spring Grove put all of its burial records online several years ago, allowing Hahn to trace her grandmother to Southworth and bridge the 19th century.

To establish Southworth's parentage, she was aided by a CD of vital records in Barnstable from the New England Historic Genealogical Society. His baptismal record and the Barnstable vital records confirmed that both of his parents were descended from the Mayflower.

In particular, his mother, Martha Samson, was listed in Barnstable vital records as the daughter of Southworth Samson and Jedida Paine, both of whom are in the society's "silver books," which represent the first five generations descended from the Mayflower.

"Once you get your line into a silver book, you are home free," said Hahn, 69, who after spending a cou-

ple years on research was allowed to join the society in 2004.

Early New England is easy to research because, she said, all of the towns "dutifully kept records of births, deaths, marriages," including affidavits — one written in 1892 quoting from a letter written to Southworth Holmes in 1892 by his 85-year-old aunt, who had been an eyewitness to the 1832 marriage of his parents. No other record of this marriage exists anywhere, she said. But by about 1750 to 1775 that ease comes to an end, she said.

Through her work she found that she was also descended from Mayflower passenger Richard Warren. Multiple connections are not uncommon.

June Brainard Lazich, a society member who lives in Mission Viejo, said she has verified links to nine people who were on the historic vessel.

Tale of 'strangers' and 'saints'

Aboard the Mayflower were two groups — the strangers and the saints, also known as separatists. The separatists had spent 11 years in Holland, where they fled first after illegally breaking from the Church of England. The blending with the strangers occurred when additional passengers were added in England by London investors for financial reasons.

The strangers may not have been motivated, as the separatists were, by religious freedom, but they wanted a better life just the same. If the colony was to survive, everyone would need to work together. So before anyone aboard the Pilgrim departed the ship in Plymouth, it was decided that a governing document would be written.

On Nov. 11, 1620, the Mayflower Compact was signed. Many people believe it formed the basis for the U.S. Constitution.

What connects many members of the Orange County Mayflower Colony is their pride in what the pilgrims did to set the country on its path.

"These people are fundamental to who we are as Americans," Hahn said.

June Brainard Lazich likes to educate people who talk with particular reverence of Jamestown — America's first permanent English colony, established 13 years before the pilgrims arrived.

The people of Jamestown had come to the New World seeking riches, while the founders of Plymouth had sought freedom from religious persecution and had intended to stay, not simply make their fortunes and leave.

"They came here to find gold," Brainard Lazich said of the Jamestown founders. "The Mayflower came here to establish a place to live. That is a big difference. They started this country, so we are very proud to be in the Mayflower Society because of that."

For member Marcia Maloney, the pilgrims played a key role in U.S. history.

"It was the starting of this country, the very beginning, and to think of the hardships they suffered to get here," said Maloney, of Laguna Woods. "How scary is that? You want religious tolerance so much that you leave the security of the family nest and embark in this voyage to who knows where."

Echoes of the first Thanksgiving

The pilgrims soon ran short of fresh food on their voyage, leading to cases of scurvy. But within a year after their landing, they would be celebrating what is thought of as the nation's first Thanksgiving. Having developed a relationship with the Wampanoag Indians, who taught the newcomers how to plant corn, the pilgrims joined the native people in a days-long feast of, say historians, fowl, fish, corn and venison.

This past Saturday, the Orange County colony was to have held its annual Compact Day celebration, with the more lavish traditional turkey dinner of today. Its setting was also an upgrade from the first Thanksgiv-

ing — the Courtyard by Marriott in Santa Ana.

While its gatherings offer camaraderie and guests who might speak about relevant topics like colonial history or genealogy, the society is primarily interested in promoting education.

"One of my passions is how do we get young people involved, interested in history," said Scott Miller, a Westminster resident who, at 52, is among the youngest of the society members, locally and nationally. "Frankly, Massachusetts is far away, like "Star Wars," a galaxy far, far away. So how do you make them interested? Because history is taught almost as dates and places, but it is about people."

Walter Powell, the executive director of the national General Society of Mayflower Descendants, shares the same concern. It can be hard to get the younger generations interested in heritage, he said. The national group was founded in 1897 and has 52 member societies — in 50 states as well as the District of Columbia and Canada. All are independent with their own officers.

Arlene Leedy, 78, of Dana Point, says part of the fun of being a member is going to schools and sharing with students "exactly what a pilgrim is, what it means."

"It's not just a celebration with the Indians," said Leedy, who heads the group's scholarship committee.

June Brainard Lazich, 84, also liked to visit schools — dressed up as Priscilla Mullens, who married fellow colonist John Alden in Plymouth in 1621.

"Kids would say, 'Here's the pilgrim lady,'" she recalled.

This article was written by Debbie Zucco of the Orange County Edition of the Los Angeles Times and appeared in the Weekend Section on November 22, 2015



From left to right, Orange County Mayflower Colony members Dotty Wilson, Erica Hahn, Marcia Maloney at the Southern California Genealogical Society conference in Burbank four years ago.

The Mayflower Compact

In ye name of God Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyall subjects of our dread soveraigne Lord King James, by ye grace of God, of Great Britaine, ffraunce, & Ireland king, defender of ye faith, &c.

Haveing undertaken, for ye glorie of God, and advancemente of ye Christian faith and honour of our king & countrie, a voyage to plant ye first colonie in ye Northerne parts of Virginia, doe by these presents solemnly & mutually in ye presence of God, and one of another, covenant, & combine ourselves togeather into a Civill body politick; for our better ordering, & preservation & furtherance of ye ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte, constitute and frame such just & equall Lawes, ordinances, Acts, constitutions & offices from time to time, as shall be thought most meete & convenient for ye generall good of ye colonie: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witnes whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Capz-Codd ye -11- of November, in ye year of ye raigne of our soveraigne Lord King James of England, ffraunce & Ireland ye eighteenth, and of Scotland ye fiftie fourth. Ano Dom. 1620.

John Carver

William Bradford

Edward Winslow

William Brewster

Isaac Allerton

Myles Standish

John Alden

Samuel Fuller

Christopher Martin

William Mullins

William White

Richard Warren

John Howland

Stephen Hopkins

Edmund Tilley

John Tilley

Francis Cooke

Thomas Rogers

Thomas Tinker

John Bigdale

Edward Fuller

John Turner

Francis Eaton

John Chilton

John Crasbeton

John Billington

Thomas Fletcher

John Brookman

Regny Priest

Thomas Williams

Gilbert Winslow

Edmond Margeson

Peter Browne

Richard Buttrick

George Luke

Richard Clark

Richard Gardiner

John Allerton

Thom Engle

Edward Doty

Edward Lister

This "Mayflower Compact" is a piece of calligraphy done by Orange County Mayflower Colony Member Jim Blauer of Costa Mesa. The signatures were recreated by other society members to make the document look authentic.