

Our Pilgrim Connection

- (1) **Francis COOKE (MAYFLOWER Passenger)** ~ Hester MAHIEU
- (2) Jane COOKE ~ Experience MITCHELL
- (3) Elizabeth MITCHELL ~ John WASHBURN
- (4) Joseph WASHBURN ~ Hannah LATHAM
- (5) Joseph WASHBURN ~ Hannah JOHNSON
- (6) Seth WASHBURN ~ Mary HARWOOD
- (7) Asa WASHBURN ~ Sally UPHAM
- (8) Asa WASHBURN ~ Eunice WELLINGTON (1st Wife)
- (9) Mary Jane WASHBURN ~ John Martin COVINGTON
- (10) Elizabeth COVINGTON ~ William Eli SIMMONS
- (11) Nellie Mae SIMMONS ~ Ferman Esco FORTENBERRY
- (12) Adrian Woodrow FORTENBERRY ~ Wanda Maria WERBICKI



As everyone knows, Plymouth Colony was settled by a group of people seeking religious freedom. After the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther in the mid 1500s and the establishment of new religious sects, discord between groups grew intense. The Pilgrims, as they later became known, were separatists that believed that their differences with the Church of England were irreconcilable and that their worship should be organized independently

of the traditions and organization of a central church (regardless of which one). Their group was led by William Brewster (leading lay minister), John Robinson (religious leader), and William Bradford (later governor of the colony).

Time line:

1577 or 1583 – Our Pilgrim ancestor, **Francis Cooke** was born in England. The actual year is still being debated.

1603, July 20 – **Francis Cooke** married Hester le Mahieu in Leiden, Holland. Hester was a French Walloon (French speaking Separatist group living in the Netherlands).

1607 – While the original group (Brewster and his followers) was still living in England, the homes of some of the leaders were raided and several members taken to prison.

1607, between January and March – Francis and Hester's first child, John, was baptized at the French church in Leiden. At that time, Cooke is listed as a woolcomber.

1609 – The congregation fled to the Netherlands and ended up settling in Leiden. Over the next few years, the members began to feel uncomfortable with the Dutch influence on their children. Though they wanted religious separation, they still wanted to retain their "English" identity.

1611 – Jane Cooke, our direct ancestor, was born. She came to Plymouth with her mother, Hester, on the ship *Anne* in 1623.



1618 – The English authorities, on the request of the King of England, went to Leiden to attempt to arrest William Brewster for publishing information negative to the King of England. He was returned to England, questioned, not arrested but went into hiding until boarding the *Mayflower* for America.

1619, July 19 – The group received a patent through the London Virginia Company to move to North America. This charter was granted with the King's condition that the religion practiced by the group from Leiden would not be officially recognized. Preparations began in earnest, but after many problems it would take a year to be ready. In addition to the charter granted for the land, they had to find financial backing, which the London Virginia Company also provided. The Pilgrims were the victims of a lot of dishonest people, which is a whole story itself!

1620, August 15 – The group in Leiden was scheduled to take the ship *Speedwell* (purchased by the Pilgrims) from the Netherlands to England and once there, to meet up with the larger ship *Mayflower* that had additional colonists hired by the investors of the London Virginia Company. After a delay of thirteen months, they departed. The *Mayflower* had 90 passengers, and the *Speedwell* had 30. Among the passengers on the *Speedwell* were Francis Cooke and his oldest son, John. Hester and their other children remained in the Netherlands.

Not far from port, the *Speedwell* sprung a leak and both ships returned to make the repairs. A second attempt also failed, and they made port in Plymouth, England. At this point, the decision was made to transfer as many passengers as possible to the *Mayflower* and continue without the *Speedwell*. Francis and his son were among those few passengers

transferred to the *Mayflower* group. Later it was determined that the crew of the *Speedwell* probably sabotaged the ship to keep from having to make the voyage.

1620, September 6 – The two month voyage began with a total of 103 passengers. Quite a few storms were encountered on their way. Due to all the delays, they ran out of firewood



and were down to the slimy bottoms of the water barrels.

1620, November 9 – Land (Cape Cod) was sighted. The currents around their location near Pollack Rip were extremely dangerous, so the decision was made to move further north since that was the way the wind was pushing them.

1620, November 10 – Late in the day, it was obvious to the Pilgrims that they would not be settling in the area designated by their patent

(Hudson River). Very little food remained, shelters had to be built, and tensions were high. Because of the need to pull together to be successful, an agreement had to be made. Both groups, the “Strangers” (as the Pilgrims called them) and the Pilgrims had to establish a political hierarchy. Thus, the Mayflower Compact came into being.

1620, November 11 – The Mayflower Compact was signed by 41 of the men on board. The only nine men that did not sign were either very sick or crew members that were planning to return to England with the ship. **Francis Cooke** was the 17th person to sign the document.



1620, December 16 – After many attempts to find an appropriate place for the colony, one was finally chosen on the western side of Cape Cod Bay; and on this date, they dropped anchor in what would become Plymouth Harbor. This defensible location had the great advantages of being relative high compared to the surrounding shore and having already been cleared for farming by the Native Americans. There was no evidence of current occupation though there was lots of evidence of sudden deaths. As it turned out, the area was devoid of Native Americans due to an epidemic of some type of plague.

1621, February 16 – The settlers knew that the Native Americans were watching them, but the Pilgrims had not seen actually seen them. The following information was written about the first indirect contact with Native Americans:

"Friday, the 16th was a fair day; but the northly wind continued, which continued the frost. This day, after noon, one of our people being a fowling, and having taken a stand by a creek side in the reeds, about a mile and a half from our plantation, there by him twelve Indians, marching towards our plantation, and in the woods he heard the noise of many more. He lay close till they passed, and then with what speed he could he went home and gave the alarm. So the people abroad in the woods returned and armed themselves, but saw none of them; only, toward the evening, they made a great fire about the place where they were first discovered. Captain Miles Standish and **Francis Cooke** being at work in the woods, coming home left their tools behind them; but before they returned, their tools were taken away by the savages. This coming of the savages gave us occasion to keep more strict watch, and to make our pieces and furniture ready, which by moisture and rain were out of temper."

1621, March 16 – To the surprise of the colonists, a Native American named Samoset walked into the small settlement and said "Welcome Englishmen!" He and several others in the area had been taken captive and taken to Europe several years before but had escaped. He knew of another Native American he brought back to help translate. This man, Squanto, was also abducted year before. On his return to America, all his tribe had died of disease, and he was taken in by the Wampanoag tribe and was friends with their chief Massasoit. After exchanging gifts, a treaty was negotiated. To the right is a 1911 depiction of Squanto teaching the Pilgrims to plant corn.



1621, Spring through fall – By the time spring came, 50% of the settlers were dead, mostly from scurvy and malnutrition. With the help of the Native Americans, the settlers learned to plant crops native to the environment, such as maize (corn), beans, squash, and pumpkins. Though their own crops from Europe did not thrive, the local ones provided an abundant harvest. It was only with the help of Massasoit's people, especially Squanto that the colonists made it through the first year. The remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast. The original festival we celebrate as Thanksgiving was actually a "harvest celebration" and was likely held in early October, 1621. In attendance were 53 surviving settlers and 91 Native Americans. Of the 53 Pilgrims, only four were women. Of the 18 women that landed at Plymouth, 13 died the first winter and another in May. It was very fortunate that **Francis Cooke** and his wife made the decision that she remain in the Netherlands and come with his other children on a later ship.



This pot is at the Pilgrim Hall Museum and is thought to have been brought to the colony by Miles Standish and his wife. It was probably used during the first harvest festival.

1623, June/July – The rest of **Francis Cooke's** family arrived on the ship Anne. They included his wife, Hester, along with children Jane, Jacob, and daughter Hester. Also on the ship was **Experience Mitchell**, future husband of **Jane Cooke**.

The life of Francis Cooke

Francis Cooke was a prominent member of the colony but not as well known as some. He helped with many of the tasks required to run the political part of the colony. These tasks included surveying land for roads, settling disputes, and serving many years as a juror. There are abundant records for him. He lived a very long life and died April 7, 1663 and was thought to be 80 years old. Hester lived several more years and died about 1666.

According to the websites that track genealogy, Francis Cooke has quite a few famous descendants including: the artist Grandma Moses, Orson Welles, George Bush, Richard Gere, the Wilson brothers of the Beach Boys, Dick Van Dyke, and Senator William D Washburn.

There is even a Francis Cooke Society that does research and compiles information about him. It can be found at <http://www.franciscookesociety.org/>

How many grandparents do you have that were contemporaries of Francis Cooke?

If you are Adrian and Wanda's children you actually have 4,096 ancestors that were the same generation as Francis Cooke. If you are Adrian's grandchild, that number becomes 8,192 ancestors from this time! If you are Adrian's great grandchild, you have an astounding 16,384 ancestors that were contemporaries of Francis Cooke! I wish I could tell you about them all!

