



Early New England

Who were the Settlers?

Before we examine the homes of the early settlers we should examine the settlers themselves. Some of the settlers had previously moved from England to Holland these were Puritans, not Pilgrims. We use terms improperly quite often and in many instances the errors occur in the history books we had in school. They may have migrated to Holland for 'Religious Freedom' but it was partly of the reason it was also because of persecution and partly an attempt to have their own identity. While in Holland they found 'Religious Freedom' and there was no persecution, that did not satisfy them so they returned to England. The two major groups making the Atlantic crossing were the Puritans and the Pilgrims.

Sixty plus of the passengers were Puritans which first arrive in 1621 but thousands more arrived over the next decade forming other Colonies along the New England Coast. Some came in servitude but many were merchants or from wealthy families. Plimoth Colonial may have been the first in New England but the Massachusetts Bay Colonial became the larger settlement. Most settlements were formed around religious denominations. Plimoth was Puritan and Pilgrim with the Massachusetts Bay Colony were predominately Puritans, Quakers and Anabaptists were not accepted in any of the major settlements and were forced to create their own villages separate from Plimoth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Unlike our historical chronicles and documents which continually state the religious freedom in the New World it did not exist, there was no religious freedom. Even in Plimoth the Saints and Strangers presented toleration of each other rather than a friendship. Now that we know the people we are better able to understand the architecture as it's evolved in the various areas.

Plymouth, MA

You will notice the different spellings for Plymouth, the reason being was that there was no correct or incorrect spelling for most words; it is safe to assume that most settlers were illiterate and most of those which were not, possessed only minimal skills. Plimoth and Plymouth were the two most common ways for spelling the name of the colony.



Just what is an Early New England Home? Define one? Early New England Homes were dwellings based on homes occupied by the early settlers which through a process of evolution took on an identity and character of their own. Their design is a feeling and a lifestyle. It is a dream that brings the hopes and desires of a family together. These are the homes you see on Christmas Cards and Calendars, a picture of beauty, peace and relaxation. In the proper setting these homes provides an image which conveyed a simple design surrounded by nature or other simple homes or both. They are a history of architecture but they are also a history of the New World and the people which settled here bringing with them a vast array of reasons for leaving their homes and making the perilous voyage across the North Atlantic.



December being the month they landed at the rock it is easy to understand the urgency of erecting structures as quickly as possible; occupying them for such an extended period is beyond comprehension. *(The photograph is courtesy of Plimoth Plantation showing what the village appeared in 1627. If you haven't visited it plan to do so.)* Plimoth was settled by building temporary structures not much better than we would refer to as huts or hovels. They were poorly built and were not much more than walls, small door, a small window or two and a roof. The dwellings used stick chimneys which indicates that a fireplace may not have existed in all homes. A fire pit would be the most logical item to provide a location for heat and cooking. The windows were either oiled paper or animal skin which could be opened in mild and hot days with interior shutters of some sort that could be closed on colder days. Drafty and wet these homes did provide some shelter from the elements. These were the homes of the Plimoth settlers for almost a decade. An answer may be found in the fact that most of the settlers were to complete seven years of servitude before being given their own parcel of land on which to build a home and farm. That seven year period provided little incentive to put work into better homes. Those of them that did not require the seven years built Jacobean Style homes, I'm sure the financial differences had much to do with that.

Between 1620 and 1629 there were several more groups of Puritans that emigrated from England to New England but there numbers were small and had little effect on the growth of the area.

The first of the permanent homes were loose copied of the Jacobean style with changes instituted slowly until we arrived at the style we now call the Colonial. The Colonial Style Home being rectangular in plan, a symmetrical fascia and simple design made for a home that was both attractive and easily built. The Early Homes used casement windows having diamond paned leaded windows. At some point double hung windows replaced the diamond paned casements and the pitch of the roof was reduced as the wood shingles did not require the steep pitch of the thatched roofs. Siding was clapboards which were left unfinished as was the minimal trim used on the early homes; latter Colonial homes were sided with shingles as well as being fitted with sidelights on the front door and plank doors being upgraded to panel. These updates also introduced paint being applied to the trim and shutters.

Colonial Style homes were constructed in two forms:

The Full House which was a two story home one room deep, a tiny center entry and two windows on each side of the door. Each room on the first floor had a massive fireplace; of the two rooms on the second floor it was common for only one to have a fireplace. The second floor fascia contained either four or five windows. A plank front door and diamond pained casement may have been used on the earlier homes but double hung windows soon became standard.

The Half House was essentially a full house with everything on one side of the entry missing making it a two story, two room home. The first addition to a Half House was usually to add the missing side making it into a Full House but this was not a set rule for the evolution of this style. In some instances the addition of the missing side was larger or smaller than the original making it noticeable unsymmetrical.



Massachusetts Bay Colony,

In 1628 the first group of approximately one hundred settlers arrived to carry out the preliminary work of building a Colony in Salem, led by John Endicott. In June of 1629 two hundred additional settlers arrived, bringing horses, sheep, goats and other necessities. Not being too pleased with conditions in Salem moved south to what we now know as Charlestown. In 1630 brought the arrival of John Winthrop with one thousand Puritans to Salem, MA and over the next ten years an additional twenty thousand arrived. This was the last major group to arrive in New England until after the Revolution. Of the first major group in 1630 two hundred died the first winter and in the spring two hundred returned to England. Upon arriving most moved to the area around Boston Harbor. The initial housing was not as good as those existing in Plimoth being described as:

“Few of the houses which had been erected were comfortable, and the most of them were miserable coverings. Unused to such severities of climate, the poor people suffered severely from the cold. Many were frozen to death. The inconveniences of their accommodations increased the diseases which continued to prevail among them.” <http://www.celebrateboston.com/index.htm>

The Massachusetts Bay Colony extended to the north about 3 miles past the Merrimack River and to the south three miles past the Charles River. The east and west boundaries were the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

1635 was another year of turmoil with Roger Williams being banished from the Colony for his views, which he expressed whenever possible. Roger Williams traveled to Rhode Island and started a settlement with indications that fewer problems were experienced. After 1640 others made their way to New England even with a decree from England which disallowed people from coming here. It was permissible to immigrate to Virginia and some said they were going to Virginia but came ashore a few hundred miles further north. Boston, Dorchester, Dedham, Roxbury and Watertown were the next settlements to spring up after Charlestown and shortly after them Concord and Lexington.

We have now reached the period of the Colonial Style home and with that; the Saltbox followed by the Cape Cod. Many fine Jacobean homes were built during this period and for decades after, built by people of wealth with about sixty of them still in existence.

Interesting reading comes from the tolerance and intolerance of the Puritans and Pilgrims with much available online. These sources were extremely useful for names and dates.