

Girls on the *Mayflower*

<http://members.aol.com/calebj/girls.html> (out of circulation; see:

<https://www.prettytough.com/girls-on-the-mayflower/>

<http://mayflowerhistory.com/girls>

<https://itchyfish.com/oceanus-hopkins-the-child-born-aboard-the-mayflower/>)

While much attention is focused on the men who came on the *Mayflower*, few people realize and take note that there were eleven girls on board, ranging in ages from less than a year old up to about sixteen or seventeen.

William Bradford wrote that one of the Pilgrim's primary concerns was that the "weak bodies" of the women and girls would not be able to handle such a long voyage at sea, and the harsh life involved in establishing a new colony. For this reason, many girls were left behind, to be sent for later after the Colony had been established. Some of the daughters left behind include Fear Brewster (age 14), Mary Warren (10), Anna Warren (8), Sarah Warren (6), Elizabeth Warren (4), Abigail Warren (2), Jane Cooke (8), Hester Cooke (1), Mary Priest (7), Sarah Priest (5), and Elizabeth and Margaret Rogers.

As it would turn out however, the girls had the strongest bodies of them all.

No girls died on the *Mayflower's* voyage, but one man and one boy did. And the terrible first winter, twenty-five men (50%) and eight boys (36%) got sick and died, compared to only two girls (16%).

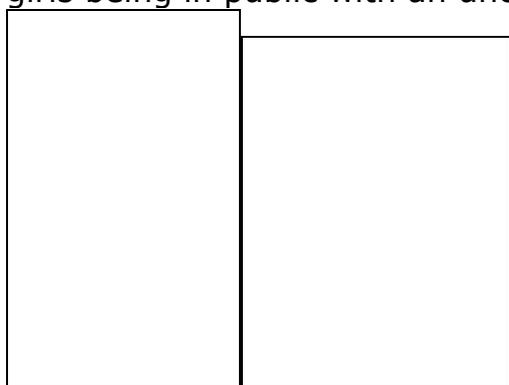
So who were these girls? One of them was under the age of one, named Humility Cooper. Her father had died, and her mother was unable to support her; so she was sent with her aunt and uncle on the *Mayflower*. The other young girl, who was aged two, was Damaris Hopkins. She came with her parents Stephen and Elizabeth Hopkins, and step-brother and step-sister Giles and Constance.

Isaac and Mary Allerton brought their two daughters with them. Their youngest was Mary Allerton, at the age of four, and their oldest was Remember Allerton, at the age of six. Mary and Remember Allerton may have found playmates in Mary More, aged four, and Ellen More aged eight.

Mary and Ellen's story is a little more tragic than most girls on the *Mayflower*. Their parents Samuel and Katherine More were from a fairly wealthy family in Shropshire, England, and went through a most bitter separation and divorce. Realizing his children would be in social disgrace because of the divorce, and wanting to punish his wife for her extramarital affair with Jacob Blakeway (who Samuel found out was the biological father of "his" children), Samuel paid to have her children sent away on the *Mayflower*. It does not seem too surprising to learn that the abandoned

Mary and Ellen More were the two girls that died the first winter, despite being adopted into respectable families among the Pilgrims.

It will amuse most girls to learn that up until about the age of eight, boys wore the same thing they did--linen or wool dresses. Boys' and girls' dresses consisted of two parts which were sewn together: a bodice, which had long sleeves and round neck; and a full-length skirt. The dress laced up in the back. Blue was a very common color for young girls to wear, with russet (red-brown), olive green, and light yellow popular as well. Under their full-length dresses, girls and boys both wore stockings and leather shoes. Girls' hair was long, pulled tightly back, and always worn up under a bonnet or hat. Social and religious custom did not approve of women or girls being in public with an uncovered head.



As for the older girls on the *Mayflower*: Mary Chilton, Constance Hopkins, and Elizabeth Tilley were all aged thirteen; and no doubt became good friends with one another on the two month voyage of the *Mayflower*. By the age of thirteen, these girls would have helped their mothers with the cooking, sewing and laundering--but there really was little "women's work" to do on the *Mayflower* and much of the day was spent simply trying to pass time. The voyage was long--sixty six days--and there were many storms which shook the ship violently and forced everyone to stay below deck in cramped quarters; sea sickness was a continuous problem, and would have affected many of the girls.

Mary, Constance and Elizabeth probably spent some of their time trying to avoid the hyper, aggressive and bullying Francis Billington, the 14-year-old boy who could not stay out of trouble on the *Mayflower*. Once, Francis even got a hold of his father's gun and shot it off inside the *Mayflower*, sending sparks flying everywhere and starting a fire. Francis' family was no role-model either, as his father would later be hanged for murder, and his older brother would run away into the woods and be captured by the Nauset Indians. Boys John Hooke, Samuel Fuller, and John Cooke were also about their ages, and they probably knew each other fairly well.

On November 13, 1620, just four days after the *Mayflower* sighted land, the women were allowed on shore for the first time, to do the much-needed laundry. Mary, Constance, and Elizabeth would have come ashore near the tip of Cape Cod and helped their mothers do the wash. They were probably the first European females to set foot in New England since Freydis, the sister of Leif Ericsson. (Freydis was in America from about 1002 to 1006 AD, on an expedition from Greenland that she herself organized and financed--nearly 500 years before Christopher Columbus!)

Finally, two long months later, on December 12, 1620, the exploring party of men had found a suitable place to build their colony; and they sent for the *Mayflower*, which sailed over to Plymouth Harbor on the 15th. Legend has it that the first female ashore at Plymouth was Mary Chilton.

The oldest girls on the *Mayflower* were fifteen, and sixteen or seventeen years old, named Desire Minter and Priscilla Mullins. Desire's father William Minter had recently died, and her mother could no longer care for her daughter financially. The Minters belonged to the Pilgrims church in Leyden, so Desire came on the *Mayflower* with people she had known and grown up with her entire life--but her mother stayed behind in Leyden.

Desire apparently caught the eye of a young man John Howland during the voyage. He was twenty at the time, and in a couple years they would both be at marrying age; but their relationship would not go very far, because Desire decided she didn't care much for America, got sick frequently, and returned to England within a few years. John Howland later married Elizabeth Tilley, mentioned above, and named his first daughter Desire.

Priscilla, the eldest girl on the *Mayflower*, came with her brother Joseph, and parents William and Alice. Priscilla had one little problem--she was the only girl approaching marriageable age on a ship with well over fifty young and single men--passengers and seamen alike. The *Mayflower's* cooper (barrel-maker), named John Alden, apparently won over Priscilla's heart--for he decided to stay in America rather than return home to England on the *Mayflower*. They were married a couple years later--a marriage which inspired the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem, *The Courtship of Myles Standish*.