

## Colonist John Pond Writes to His Mother and Father for Help (1631)

*New England, then called the North Part of Virginia, became attractive to European colonizers when a new kind of colony was planned—transfers of entire communities of English men and women who sought an environment in which they could thrive and worship God as they saw fit. Plymouth on Cape Cod was settled in 1620 by a small group of Puritan Separatists who viewed the Church of England as so corrupt that they had separated themselves entirely from it. Then in 1630 a huge exodus of Puritans founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These emigrants, in contrast to the Separatists, considered themselves still loyal members of the church, who merely wished to reform it by example. Thousands left England in the 1630s, partly because of the same economic distress that fed migration to the Chesapeake but also because Charles I and his archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, increasingly were pushing the church in directions the Puritans abhorred, and requiring conformity.*

*The Puritans chose New England because its environment was conducive to small family farms rather than great plantations; its lack of rich crops would keep out those who might seek to pervert their godly experiment. They found the land depleted of its native population by a disastrous plague that had struck shortly before Plymouth's founding; a second wave of European disease devastated the Indians in the early 1630s. Some Puritans, whose providential outlook disposed them to look for God's will in all events, saw this as divine intervention on their behalf, clearing the land for their habitation. In the letter below, written on March 15, 1631, John Pond, a member of the Arbella, the first ship that carried Puritans to the New World, wrote to his mother and father for help.*

To my loving father William Pond, at Etherston in Suffolk give this.

MOST LOVING & KIND FATHER & MOTHER,

My humble duty remembered unto you, trusting in God you are in good health, & I pray remember my love unto my brother Joseph & thank him for his kindness that I found at his hand at London, . . . I know, loving father, & do confess that I was an undutiful child unto you when I lived with you & by you, for the which I am much sorrowful & grieved for it, trusting in God that he will guide me that I will never offend you so any more & I trust in God that you will forgive me for it. My writing unto you is to let you understand what a country this New England is where we live.

Here are but few eingeines [Indians], a great part of them died this winter, it was thought it was of the plague. They are a crafty people & they will cozen & cheat, & they are a subtle people, & whereas we did expect great store of beaver here is little or none to be had, and their Sackemor John weigheth it, and many of us truck with them and it layeth us many times in eight shillings a pound. They are proper men & clean-jointed men, many of them go naked with a skin about their loins, but now sum of them get Englishmen's apparel.

And the country is very rocky and hilly & some champion [open] ground & the soil is very [fruitful], & here is some good ground and marsh ground, but here is no Michaelmas [autumnal] spring. Cattle thrive well here, but they give small store of milk. The best cattle for profit is swines & a good swine is her at £5 price, and a goose worth £2 a good one got. Here is timber good store & acorns good store, and here is good store of fish, if we had boats to go eight or ten leagues to sea to fish in. Here are good store of wild fowl, but they are hard to come by. It is harder to get a shot than it is in ould eingland. And people here are subject to diseases, for here have died of the scurvy & of the burning fever nigh too hundred & odd; beside as many layeth lame & all Sudberey men are dead but three & three women & some children, & provisions are here at a wonderful rate. Wheat meal is fourteen shillings and eindey seid [Indian seed] wheat fifteen shillings and their other wheat is ten shillings, butter twelve pence a pound, and cheese is eight pence a pound, and all kinds of spices very dear and almost none to be got, and if this ship had not come when it did, we had been put to a wonderful straight, but thanks be to God for sending of it in. I received from the ship a hogshead of meal, & the Governor telleth me of a hundred weight of cheese the which I have received part of it. I humbly thank you for it. I did expect two cows, the which I had none, nor I do not earnestly desire that you should send me any, because the country is not so as we did expect it. Therefore, loving father, I would entreat you that you would send me a ferckeine [firkin] of butter & a hogshead of malt unground, for we drink nothing but water, & a coarse clothe of four pound price so it be thick. For the freight, if you of your love will send them I will pay the freight, for here is nothing to be got without we had commodities to go up to the East parts amongst the Indians to truck, for here where we live is no beaver. Here is no cloth to be had to make no apparel, & shoes are a 5s a pair for me, & that cloth that is worth 2s 8d is worth here 5s. So I pray, father, send me four or five yards of cloth to make some apparel, & loving father, though I be far distant from you yet I pray you remember me as your child, & we do not know how long we may subsist, for we can not live here without provisions from ould eingland. Therefore, I pray do not put away your shop stuff, for I think that in the end, if I live, it must be my living, for we do not know how long this plantation will stand, for some of the magnates that did uphold it have turned off their men & have given it over. Besides, God hath taken away the chiefest stud in the land, Mr. Johnson & the lady Arabella his wife, which was the chiefest man of estate in the land & one that would have done most good.

Here came over 25 passengers & their came back again four score & odd persons, & as many more would a come if they had wherewithal to bring them home, for are many that came over the last year which was worth two hundred pounds afore they came ought of old England that between this & Micahelmas will be hardly worth £30. So here we may live if we have supplies every year from ould eingland, otherwise we can not subsist. I may, as I will, work hard, set an acre of [English] wheat, & if we do not set it with fish & that will cost 20 s., if we set it without fish they shall have but a poor crop.

So father, I pray, consider of my cause, for here will be but a very poor being, no being without loving father, your help with provisions from old England. I had thought to come home in this ship, for my provisions were almost all spent, but that I humbly thank you for your great love & kindness in sending me some provisions or else I should & mine a been half famished, but now I will, if it please God that I have my health, I will plant what corn I can, & if provisions be not cheaper between this & Michaelmas & that I do not hear from you what I was best to do, I purpose to some home at Michaelmas.

My wife remembers her humble duty unto you & to my mother, & my love to brother Joseph & to Sarey Myler. Thus I leave you to the protection of Almighty God.

from Waltur Toune (Watertown), in new eingland [no signature]

**Source:** For ease of reading, the original, seventeenth century spelling of some words has been modernized. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed., *Major Problems in American Colonial History: Documents and Essays* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1993), 117-118; 126-128.