

What was it like to travel to America in the 1600's?

Source: Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony By George Francis Dow

The vessels which carried the great emigration to New England between 1630 and 1640 were of small tonnage and the passenger accommodations on board were limited in space and barren of creature comforts. Small wonder that the health of many of the first settlers, shaken by the passage at sea, paid toll to the severity of the New England climate—the biting cold of the winter and the heat of the summer days to which they were unaccustomed.

“It was not because the Country was unhealthful, but because their bodies were corrupted with sea-diet, which was naught, their Beeffe and Porke being tainted, their Butter and Cheese corrupted, their Fish rotten, and voyage long, by reason of crosse Windes, so that winter approaching before they could get warme houses, and the searching sharpnes of that purer Climate, creeping in at the crannies of their crazed bodies, caused death and sickness.”*

The ship *Talbot*, on which Mr. Higginson sailed, brought over one hundred passengers and thirty seamen. She measured nearly eighty-six feet in length and had a depth of hold of eleven feet. By present-day measurement she was about two hundred tons burden. The space between decks, where the passengers slept and spent much time during the dreary voyage, was so low that a tall man could not stand erect, and whenever a severe storm arose, so that the ports and hatches must be kept closed, the air below deck in time must have become intolerable. Such a storm arose when the *Talbot* was thirty-three days out and “ye wind blew mightily, ye sea roared and ye waves tossed us horribly; besides it was fearfull darke and ye mariners made us afraid with their running here and there and lowd crying one to another to pull at this and yt rope.”

These small emigrant ships of the seventeenth century, besides men, women and children, brought over much livestock housed in temporary pens and shelters built amidships. The long boat or pinnace was also carried on board, all of which left little room for movement about the deck. But these three hundred tons ships were traveling palaces when compared with some of the smaller craft that boldly ventured across the Atlantic. Barks, ketches, pinks and other small vessels of less than fifty tons burden were common.