

**GREAT MIGRATION TOUR TO ENGLAND
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WINTHROP FLEET**

TOUR TALK

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THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY COMPANY

In three previous issues of *Tour Talk*, we described three stages of corporate activity which led up to the organization of the Massachusetts Bay Company. For the Winthrop Fleet volume, which is now in the final stages of production, we composed a fifty-page interpretive essay which briefly characterizes the structure of immigration in the entire Great Migration period, from 1620 to 1640, and then discusses the circumstances surrounding the migration to New England in 1629 and 1630 as conducted by the Massachusetts Bay Company. We present here a selection from that essay.

Having taken control of the New England Company and worked toward furthering its goals during 1628, the London merchants [interested in the settlement of New England] also began the process of obtaining a charter directly from the crown. This goal was achieved on 4 March 1628/9, when the royal charter for the Massachusetts Bay Company passed the great seals.¹

The charter named twenty-six patentees, the first six of whom were the same as the patentees of the New England Company from a year before. Among the twenty new patentees, the first two were “Sir Richard Saltonstall, knight,” and “Isaack Johnson,” who had in May 1628 made the largest investments in the New England Company and who were of higher social status than the remainder of the new patentees. Other important additions to the list of patentees were Matthew Cradock, Increase Nowell, Richard Bellingham, Theophilus Eaton, William Vassall and William Pynchon.

These men had already been at work for some months preparing to send six ships with passengers and provisions to New England to augment the [1628] settlement at Salem. The acquisition of the charter is not reflected in the ongoing records of the Company, as the leaders continued their preparations and dispatched the *George Bonaventure*, *Talbot* and *Lyon’s Whelp* in late April, and the *Mayflower*, *Four Sisters* and *Pilgrim* not long after.

The patent decreed that there should be “one Governor, one Deputy Governor, and eighteen Assistants of the same Company, to be ... chosen out of the freemen of the said Company,” and named Matthew Cradock as Governor, Thomas Goffe as Deputy Governor, and eighteen of the remaining twenty-four patentees as Assistants, including three of the six who had been carried over from the patent of the New England Company (John Humfrey, John Endicott and Simon Whetcombe).²

¹ MBCR 1:3-20.

² MBCR 1:10-11.

On 6 April 1629, a committee was appointed “for making orders and power for meet government of New England, to write letters to Captain Endicott, to order divisions of land and whatsoever may concern the Company’s affairs.” Eleven men were chosen for this committee, including two ministers, John Davenport and Francis Higginson.³

On 30 April 1629, presumably pursuant to a report of this committee, “Mr. John Endecott and Mr. Samuell Sharpe being both put to election for Governor of the Plantation in the Mattachusetts Bay, Captain John Endecott was chosen by a full and free election for the year following to be Governor.” At the same meeting, “Mr. Francis Higgenon, Mr. Samuel Skelton, Mr. Francis Bright, Mr. John Browne, Mr. Samuel Browne, Mr. Thomas Graves, Mr. Samuell Sharpe, these by free erection of hands were chosen to be of the council of the Mattachusetts Bay for the year ensuing . . . , to assist the Governor, Captain John Endecott.” The Company immediately drafted a letter to Endicott containing this information and arranged for it to be carried to New England by the ships then departing. From this point until Winthrop landed in New England the following year, the Massachusetts Bay Company had two men designated as Governor: Cradock (and then Winthrop) in London, and Endicott in Salem, each with his own set of duties.⁴

The patent further ordered that the Governor, Deputy Governor and Assistants were to be chosen “yearly once in the year for ever hereafter, namely, the last Wednesday in Easter term yearly.”⁵ Accordingly, the Company met on 13 May 1629 and re-elected Cradock as Governor and Goffe as Deputy. Of the eighteen Assistants named in the patent, sixteen were re-elected; “Mr. Jno. Endecott & Mr. John Browne being out of the land . . . , to make up the number of 18, Mr. John Pocock & Mr. Chr[istopher] Cowlson were chosen Assistants.”⁶

By the time of this election, the process of provisioning and lading the vessels sailing for New England was complete and the six vessels were on their way. The Company then turned its attention to the larger migration planned for 1630. Much of their work was devoted to raising further funds to advance their colonization efforts.⁷

An important new item of business was the purchase of a ship which would lead the Winthrop Fleet. On 28 July 1629, it was “moved by Mr. Governor, that a ship of 400 ton & of good force being now to be sold, should be bought for the Company’s use, upon their general stock.” Ten men, including Cradock, pledged to purchase either one-eighth or one-sixteenth shares in this ship, with the Company itself taking up one-eighth.⁸ After further discussion, the purchase was authorized on 20 October 1629. The vessel was named the *Eagle*: in honor of Isaac Johnson’s wife, the ship was renamed the *Arbella*.⁹

On 26 July, the same day that he suggested purchasing the *Eagle*, Cradock introduced another new and even more momentous issue. “Mr. Governor read certain propositions conceived by himself, viz: that for the advancement of the plantation, the inducing & encouraging persons of worth & quality [blank] transplant themselves & families thither,

³ MBCR 1:37e.

⁴ MBCR 1:37j-39, 361-63.

⁵ MBCR 1:12.

⁶ MBCR 1:40. In 1629 Easter fell on 5 April, so 13 May was the end of Easter term, on the eve of Ascension.

⁷ MBCR 1:37b-c, 45, 46, 49, 53, 54, 60, 62.

⁸ MBCR 1:48.

⁹ MBCR 1:53, 57, 58.

& for other weighty reasons therein contained, to transfer the government of the plantation to those that shall inhabit there, and not to continue the same in subordination to the Company here, as now it is.”¹⁰ After some debate, a final resolution of this question was deferred to a later meeting.

Even as this consequential question was being debated, a man not yet heard of in the records of the Massachusetts Bay Company was debating whether he should join the migration to New England. On 8 July 1629, Isaac Johnson wrote to Emanuel Downing, asking when he might expect Downing and “Mr. Winthorpe” to arrive at Johnson’s home in Sempringham, Lincolnshire, for discussions about the migration project.¹¹

On 28 July, just two days after the Company meeting at which the idea of transferring the government to New England was broached, John Winthrop, Downing’s brother-in-law, wrote in his spiritual diary that “my brother Downing and myself riding into Lincolnshire by Ely, my horse fell under me in a bog in the fens, so as I was almost to the waist in water; but the Lord preserved me from further danger.”¹² Winthrop eventually arrived safely, and he met not only with Johnson but with John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Roger Williams and undoubtedly others associated with the Massachusetts Bay Company.

The conference at Sempringham led directly to Winthrop’s decision to join the migration to New England in 1630.¹³ Within a month, on 26 August, Winthrop travelled to Cambridge where he joined eleven other men to compose and sign the Cambridge Agreement. In this document, upon “due consideration of the state of the plantation now in hand for New England, wherein we (whose names are hereunto subscribed) have engaged ourselves,” Winthrop and the other eleven committed themselves to “embark for the said plantation by the first of March next ... provided always that before the last of September next the whole government together with the patent for the said plantation be first by an order of Court legally transferred and established to remain with us and others which shall inhabit upon the said plantation.”¹⁴ In the end, only ten of the twelve would sail for New England the following spring. At the head of the list were, as usual, Sir Richard Saltonstall and Isaac Johnson.

Just two days later, on 28 August, a General Court was convened, for the “special cause of ... [giving] answer to diverse gentlemen, intending to go into New England, whether or no the chief government of the plantation, together with the patent, should be settled in New England, or here.” At this point the Company adopted an interesting procedure, which they would use on other occasions during the remainder of the year. A sort of *ad hoc* debating society was created, in which two groups of men, one opposed to

¹⁰ MBCR 1:49.

¹¹ Various editors, *Winthrop Papers*, 6 volumes (Boston 1925-1992), 2:102-3, cited hereafter as WP.

¹² WP 2:103.

¹³ As was typical of the Winthrops, the documentation surrounding John Winthrop’s decision-making process is voluminous. Two excellent treatments of the evidence and the process are Darrett B. Rutman, *John Winthrop’s Decision for America: 1629* (Philadelphia 1975), and Francis J. Bremer, *John Winthrop: America’s Forgotten Founding Father* (Oxford 2003), Chapter 8, “The Decision to Migrate.” Bremer also covers Winthrop’s part in outfitting and provisioning the Winthrop Fleet and in recruiting passengers for the voyage.

¹⁴ WP 2:151-52.

the transfer of government and one in favor, would prepare arguments on either side and present them to the Company on the following day.¹⁵

On the following day, “the committees which were appointed to meet yesterday in the afternoon to consider of arguments pro & contra touching the settling of the government of the Company’s plantation in New England” presented and debated their arguments. The Governor then called for a vote, “where, by the erection of hands, it appeared by the general consent of the Company, that the government & patent should be settled in New England.”¹⁶

John Winthrop does not appear in the lists of those attending these two critical meetings. He is first seen in the Company records on 19 September, where he must have been included in the unnamed “others” recorded as in attendance, during which meeting he was assigned to a committee representing the Company’s side in the dispute with John and Samuel Brown.¹⁷

On 29 September, the General Court met and began to consider the details of implementing their decision of the month before. One of the issues to be settled was “by what way or means the same may be done, to correspond with, and not to prejudice the government here.”¹⁸ In this spirit, beginning with the next meeting of the General Court, on 16 October, the Company began a long series of debates “to resolve of the settling the trade in New England ... for the encouragement as well of the adventurers in the joint stock here, as of those who already are, & of others who intend to go over in person to be planters there.”¹⁹

Again, a two-part committee was appointed to develop the arguments for the two sides, those remaining in London and those bound for New England, and to draft a document on the continuation of the Company’s trading activities. On 16 October, the committees reported, upon which the Company concluded that “it was thought fit & natural that the government of persons be held the[re,] the government of trade & merchandises to be here.”²⁰

The stage was now set for the transfer of power to the emigrants. At a General Court on 20 October 1629, a special election was held. Four men were nominated for Governor: Winthrop, Saltonstall, Johnson and Humfrey. The latter three men needed no introduction, but the records explicitly record the “extraordinary great commendations of Mr. John Wynthrop, both for his integrity & sufficiency, as being one very well fitted & accomplished for the place of Governor.” Winthrop was elected Governor, after which John Humfrey was elected Deputy Governor, and, in obedience to the patent, eighteen men as Assistants.²¹

The newly elected officers devoted themselves to the business of completing preparations for the sailing of the Winthrop Fleet in the following spring. Even so, much of the recorded business of the Company revolved around the ongoing concerns over the continuation of the trade and the management of the joint stock.²²

¹⁵ MBCR 1:49-50.

¹⁶ MBCR 1:50-51.

¹⁷ MBCR 1:51. See the sketch for JOHN BROWN.

¹⁸ MBCR 1:52.

¹⁹ MBCR 1:55.

²⁰ MBCR 1:56.

²¹ MBCR 1:58-60.

²² MBCR 1:62-63, 63-65, 67, 68.

The final meeting of the Massachusetts Bay Company held in London was on 10 February 1629/30. By 18 March, Winthrop and the other officers about to sail for New England were with the gathering fleet at Southampton, where three meetings of the Court of Assistants were held, the last on board the *Arbella* on 23 March. The business recorded at these meetings was limited to readjustments of some of the offices, as John Humfrey chose not to sail at that time and was replaced by Thomas Dudley, and a few other changes were made among the Assistants.²³

When the Winthrop Fleet sailed, Winthrop took with him not only the patent but the written records of the Massachusetts Bay Company. The transition from joint-stock trading company to self-governing colony was well underway and would be complete within a few years after 1630. Despite all the debate over dividing the government of the Company, with “persons” being ruled “there” and “trade & merchandises” being ruled “here,” few indications survive regarding continued organized activity on the part of the London merchants, several of whom were soon complaining of being “undone by their trade.” The influence of those members of the Massachusetts Bay Company who remained in England gradually faded away.

JOHN WINTHROP AND THE POETRY OF CHARLES OLSON

For the last fifty years I have spent many pleasant days and weeks in Gloucester, Massachusetts, and for most of that time have been well aware of Charles Olson (1910-1970), a poet who lived for much of his life in that city. For all that, I had not read a word of his poetry until quite recently. In the December 2011 issue of *The New England Quarterly*, Gary Grieve-Carlson, a professor of English, published a lengthy article titled “John Winthrop in *The Maximus Poems*” [NEQ 84 (2011):655-95].

The Maximus Poems, published by Olson in three parts in 1960, 1968 and 1975, roam back and forth over the history of Gloucester and Cape Ann. A major theme for Olson is the settlement of Gloucester by Roger Conant, the move to Salem, the replacement of Conant by Endicott in 1628, and then the replacement of Endicott by Winthrop in 1630.

Grieve-Carlson digs into the papers left by Olson and shows that the poet’s work was firmly grounded in contemporary sources. For example, Olson owned a copy of Savage’s 1853 edition of Winthrop’s journal. Grieve-Carlson shows that Olson’s understanding of Winthrop was highly nuanced, and took into account the changes in Winthrop’s outlook during his time in New England.

Learning about Winthrop from *The Maximus Poems* will be different from reading Frank Bremer’s biography, but you will certainly see the man in a new light. Olson’s work is not easy to find in stores, but copies are available from Amazon.

²³ MBCR 1:67-70.

NEW ENGLANDERS BACK IN OLD ENGLAND

William Jennison first appeared in New England in 1630, as a resident of Charlestown, and so he has been included as a member of the Winthrop Fleet. He was, however, different in several ways from many of the others who came with Winthrop in that year, and we cannot in fact be certain that he was an integral part of the Winthrop migration.

Prior to his appearance in New England, Jennison, who was a ship's captain, had apparently lived for some time in Bermuda. During the few years of his residence at Charlestown, he did not live in the main settlement, but off in a corner of the town, with three other men who were not closely associated with Winthrop: Edward Gibbons, Walter Norton and Alexander Wignall. Yet we know from later events in Jennison's life that he was a committed Puritan.

By 1634 Jennison had moved the few miles to Watertown, where he resided until about 1650, at which time he returned permanently to England. From 1654 (and perhaps earlier) until his death in 1667, he resided at Colchester in Essex. In his will he left a bequest to "Mr. John Knowles of London, clerk, sometimes lecturer at Colchester." John Knowles had come to New England in 1639 and in the following year was ordained pastor at Watertown church. Knowles also returned to England, in 1651, but for the decade of the 1640s Knowles and Jennison were neighbors in Watertown.

Jennison went on to name as the supervisors or overseers of his will "my two loving friends Herbert Pelham Esq. of Bewers & Mr. Bezaleell Anger the elder of Dedham." Herbert Pelham was elder brother of William Pelham, who was in Massachusetts Bay briefly in 1630, went back to England almost immediately, but returned to New England by 1645, and perhaps as early as 1639, when Herbert Pelham himself crossed the Atlantic to settle at Cambridge for seven years. In 1646 Herbert went back to old England and lived at Bures ["Bewers"], Essex, just a few miles from Colchester.

Bezaleel Angier was brother of Edmund Angier, one of many immigrants to New England from Dedham, Essex. Edmund arrived in 1636, and, like Pelham, settled at Cambridge. Another brother was John Angier, who married a daughter of William Aspinwall. The Angiers were related to the Shermans and Sparrowhawks, among other Dedham families who came to the New World.

These four men, Jennison, Knowles, Pelham and Angier, with their many connections with and intimate experience of New England, continued to associate closely for the rest of their lives, even after they had returned to old England.

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