

The Pilgrims and Beer

If The Mayflower Had Been Carrying More Beer, It Might Never Have Landed At Plymouth Rock.

When the Pilgrims sailed for America, they hoped to find a place to settle where the farmland would be rich and the climate congenial. Instead, they found themselves struggling with the stony soil and harsh winters of New England. And all because of a shortage of beer.

An entry in the diary of a Mayflower passenger explains the unplanned landing at Plymouth Rock: "We could not now take time for further search...our victuals being much spent, especially our beer..."

That may have been the last time America's settlers ran short of beer. They soon learned from their Indian neighbors how to make beer from maize. Local breweries sprouted up throughout the colonies, and experienced brew-masters were eagerly recruited from London. By 1770 the American brewing industry was so well established that George Washington, Patrick Henry, and other patriots argued for a boycott of English beer imports. The Boston Tea Party almost became the Boston Beer Party.



William Penn wrote that the beer in his colony was made of "Molasses...well boyled, with Sassafras or Pine infused into it." The taste of such a concoction must have been interesting, especially from the popular drinking vessel of the period: a waxed leather tankard known as a "black jack."



In 1637, the legislature of the Massachusetts Bay Colony met to fix the price of beer. After lengthy deliberation, the new price was announced: "not more than one penny a quart at the most."

All that, of course, is history. But the enjoyment of beer remains as important to Americans today as it was to our colonial forebears. And America's brewers are proud to contribute to that enjoyment. The next time you're enjoying a beer, you might think about the poor Pilgrims who had to settle for the bitter conditions in New England when they might have sailed on to Miami Beach. The moral is clear: always make sure you have enough beer on hand.

By law, beer in Colonial America had to be served in standard half-pint, pint or quart vessels. When tin could no longer be imported from England, American pewter production stopped. It then became fashionable to melt down and recast old pewter mugs from England.

While beer has been made from many different grains through the ages, barley has proven to be the world's most valued brewing ingredient. In fact, the word beer itself probably comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word baere, meaning barley.