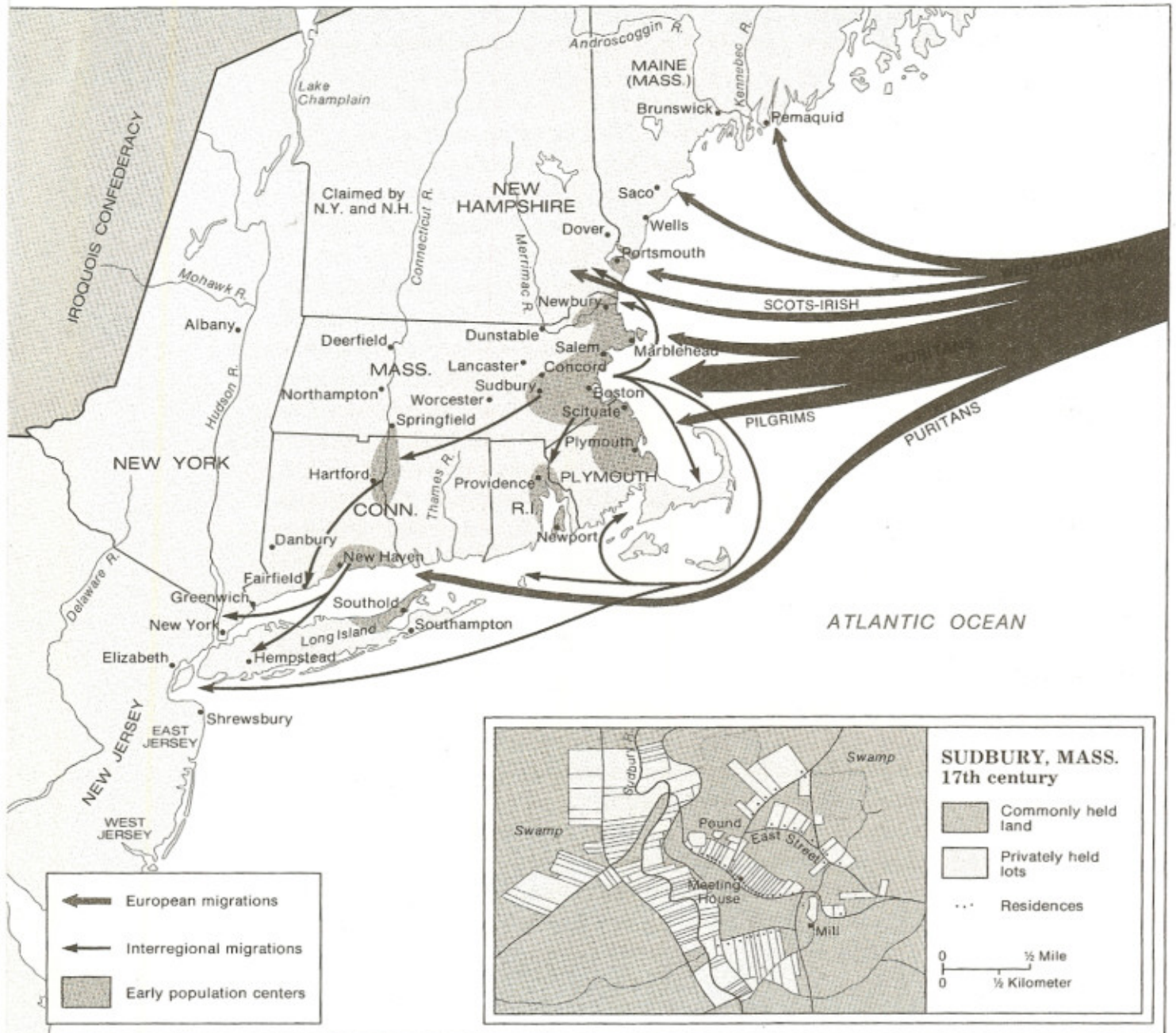


The refusal of English monarchs to take stronger measures to reform church and society turned the Puritans into their outspoken critics. Elizabeth I had tolerated this opposition, but James I would not endure it and intended to rid England of these malcontents. With some of the Puritans, known as the Separatists, he seemed to succeed.

The Pilgrim Settlement at Plymouth Colony

The Separatists were Puritans who concluded that the Church of England was too corrupt to be reformed from within. They abandoned Anglican worship and met secretly in small congregations of like-minded men and women. From their first appearance in England during the 1570s, the Separatists suffered persecution from the government—fines, imprisonment, and in a few cases, execution. Always a tiny minority within the Puritan movement, the Separatists were pious people from humble backgrounds, craftworkers and farmers without the resources or the numbers or the inclination to challenge the state. By 1608 one Separatist congregation, a group at Scrooby, had become so dismayed by the depravity of Stuart England that they migrated to Holland.

The move to Holland proved to be just the first of their trials. Although the Dutch government permitted complete freedom of religion, the Separatists were disappointed by low-paying jobs, alarmed when their children adopted Dutch customs, and distressed by desertions from their own ranks to other religions.



EARLY NEW ENGLAND

Despite some variety among emigrants to New England, the region remained relatively homogenous and stable, with everyday life centered in small towns like Sudbury (located to the west of Boston). Most families lived close to one another in houses clustered around the meetinghouse, in contrast to the decentralized plantations of the South. The privately held farm lots were mixed together as well, so that neighbors worked and lived in close contact with each other.

They wanted a place where their pure churches and communities could flourish, free of hardship, corruption, distraction, and competition. Some decided to move to Virginia.

What fate would have greeted the gentle, unworldly Separatists of Holland if they had actually settled in the Chesapeake during the decade of the tobacco boom can only be imagined. But a series of mistakes—including an error in chart-

ing the course of their ship, the *Mayflower*—landed the little band in New England instead. In November 1620, some 88 Separatist “Pilgrims,” sick with scurvy, weakened by malnutrition, and shaken by a shipboard mutiny, disembarked at a place that they called Plymouth on the coast of present-day southeastern Massachusetts. Neither the site nor the season seemed auspicious, as one of their leaders, William Bradford, later remembered:

For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets represented a savage hue. If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world.

For some, the shock was too great. Dorothy Bradford, William’s wife, is said to have fallen overboard from the *Mayflower* as it lay anchored off Plymouth. It is more likely that she jumped to her death.

Few Pilgrims could have foreseen founding the first permanent white settlement in New England, and many did not live long enough to enjoy the distinction. The season was far too late to plant crops, and the colonists had failed to bring an adequate supply of food with them. By the spring of 1621, half of the immigrants had died. Plans for attaining self-sufficiency through hunting and fishing proved impractical too, for the Separatists knew little of firearms and even less about fish. Their efforts to establish a summer fishery on Cape Ann ended in an inglorious retreat after a company of English fishermen laid claim to the same spot with muskets leveled. English merchants who had financed the *Mayflower* voyage failed to send supplies to the struggling colony.

Plymouth might have become another doomed colony if the Pilgrims had not received better treatment from native inhabitants than they did from their English backers. Samoset and Squanto, two Indians who had learned to speak English from visiting fishermen, introduced the settlers to native strains of corn and arranged a treaty between the Pilgrims and the region’s main tribe, the Wampanoags, who sought the English as allies against their enemies, the Narragansetts. Peace with them prevailed for 50 years, enabling the white settlers of Plymouth to survive.

The Pilgrims also set up a government for their colony, the basis of which was the Mayflower Compact. That agreement provided for a governor and several assistants to advise him, all to be elected annually by Plymouth’s adult males. The Plymouth settlers had no clear legal sanction for their claim to land or their government, for they had neither a royal charter nor approval from the Crown. But English authorities, distracted by more pressing problems, left the tiny colony of farmers alone.

