

Travelers today can't even guess what people once went through to reach America's shores. The best of crossings took months. And even the finest ships offered almost no comforts.

At Plymouth, Massachusetts, stands a copy of the *Mayflower*. Those who see it may get some idea what the Pilgrims suffered. There were 130 or more people on that tiny ship. In rough weather—often for days on end—they were jammed belowdecks. It was dark and the air was dead. There was no such thing as running water. No one could keep clean.

There was seldom enough to eat or drink. On top of that, cooking was not allowed in bad weather. For safety's sake, no fires could be lit. And so, on good days a lot of food was passed out. The passengers cooked it and saved it to eat cold during storms.

To add to all this, much of the food spoiled during the trip. Those who ate it got sick. By the time the ship reached Plymouth, two people had died. Many more had upset stomachs.

Still others had scurvy. This sickness is caused by lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. There were a few lemons and limes aboard. But most of the fruit was dried.

The grim reaper had a full harvest from the *Mayflower*. Many died even after it arrived. Ongoing vessels improved quite a bit in the years that followed. By the 1800s there were some good quarters—for those who could afford the high fares. Most could not. For that was the time of the immigrants. People

from all over Europe were flocking to America. And most of them were poor.

The story of one bad trip was recorded by the Reverend J. V. J. Gray.

He and his wife sailed from Ireland in October 1820. Their ship was the *Halifax Packet*. Its cargo was salt, potatoes, and whiskey.

Less than a month after setting out, the vessel began to leak. It had to be pumped out four times an hour. The crew was too small to do the job. So passengers were pressed into service. They also had to stand watch. And then the drinking water ran low. Each person was allowed only a quart a day. Anyone who refused to stand a watch got *no* water the next day.

At the start there was enough food. But by February all hands were eating potatoes from the cargo. From time to time they killed a dolphin for meat. Passing ships gave them food and water. But there was never quite enough.

At last the ship reached America. But even then its troubles were not over. One bad storm after another kept it from landing. Next, barnacles formed on the bottom of the ship. They slowed its speed to five knots.

At long last the *Halifax* limped into Bermuda. The trip had taken 145 days. It was one of the longest Atlantic crossings on record.

In spite of such hardships, the immigrants kept flooding the New World. And perhaps their rough journey was a blessing in disguise. It certainly prepared them for the rugged life of the wilderness.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. In rough weather the Pilgrims had to
 - A take to lifeboats
 - B camp on deck
 - C go belowdecks
2. Living there was
 - A lonely
 - B dirty
 - C comfortable
3. In bad weather they were not allowed to
 - A cook
 - B sleep
 - C eat
4. The story suggests that the two persons who died had
 - A fallen over the side
 - B eaten spoiled food
 - C caught bad colds
5. Scurvy is caused by lack of fresh
 - A air and sunshine
 - B fruits and vegetables
 - C clothing and bedding
6. In the story, “the grim reaper” is
 - A time
 - B space
 - C death
7. The immigrants mentioned in the story were people who
 - A were going to America
 - B could afford good quarters
 - C improved sailing vessels
8. On the *Halifax* the passengers did not have to
 - A pump out the ship
 - B steer the ship
 - C stand watch
9. By February the passengers had to
 - A drink salt water
 - B do without meat
 - C eat part of the cargo
10. Near America the *Halifax* was slowed because of
 - A barnacles on her bottom
 - B lack of good winds
 - C sickness among the crew