

A Brief History of the Orange County Colony of the California Society of Mayflower Descendants

The Orange County Colony of Mayflower Descendants in the State of California is part of a nationwide organization that brings together known descendants of the Mayflower Pilgrims who survived that first, harsh winter, who had descendants. If you think you may be a descendant of a Mayflower Pilgrim, we encourage you to pursue your genealogical search to prove your line of descent. Once proven, you, too, can join us as we celebrate and continue our Pilgrim heritage. Before we begin with the specific history of the OC Mayflower Colony, it is important to discuss how our mother organization was established and what the primary impetus was that started a concerted interest in the Mayflower Pilgrims and the Plymouth Colony at the turn of the 20th Century:

Believe it or not, there was a time when the Pilgrims of Plymouth became virtually forgotten to history. As the Massachusetts Bay Colony became established in Boston and grew in prominence, Plymouth and the Pilgrims became a relic of the bygone past. The memory of them was revived during the Revolutionary War, when their intrepid spirit was sought after to encourage the flagging morale during the most bitter periods of the War. The great orator, Daniel Webster, gave a famous speech for the 200th Anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims in 1820. But, soon following, they faded back into obscurity. So what caused the nation to suddenly remember the Pilgrims of Plymouth and to make sure their foundational contribution to our nation's history would never again be forgotten?

The General Society of Mayflower Descendants, located in Plymouth, Massachusetts, was established just before the turn of the 20th Century, in 1897. It was at this time that a renewed interest in the Pilgrims of Plymouth had taken the country by storm. This fervor was kindled by the return of what has been called "the single most important book written in American History" to Massachusetts and the American people. After a near 50-year struggle to repatriate it, finally in May 1897, the "Bradford Journal" had been returned to the American shores, following a 130-year absence. As it turned out, it had been locked away at the Fulham Palace of the Archbishop of the Episcopal Church in England much of that time.

William Bradford, was the second Governor of the Plymouth Colony, who served almost continuously from 1621 to 1657, with only a scant 5-year respite. He decided about midway through his tenure to write an account of how the colony was formed after years of seeking a place where the Separatists of England could worship freely. The journal, known today as, "Of Plimoth Plantation", was the only complete account of the establishment of the colony. The journal had been on loan to the historical library located in the tower of the "Old South Church" in Boston from the Bradford family, with the full expectation that it would be returned to the family. However, it had been taken to England during the American Revolutionary War in the late 1770's.

No one really knows how it was taken out of the library of the "Old South Church". During the War, the British used the church as a stable for their horses. It has been hypothesized that either a British soldier or even the former British Governor of the Massachusetts Colony discovered it in the church's library and took it as "booty" back to England. Following the War, when an inventory of the library was made, the Bradford Journal and many related documents were missing and thought destroyed. The new nation had permanently lost the only complete history of the Pilgrims that landed on the shores of Cape Cod and the settlement of the new Colony at Plymouth in 1620...or so it was thought.

The journal was rediscovered by accident in 1855, when a historian from the Massachusetts Historical Society picked up a book from a bookstore in Boston called "A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America", written by Samuel, Lord Bishop of Oxford. The volume was written in 1846. What was significant about this book was that it contained quotes that could only have come from William Bradford's Journal. Since the Journal had not been seen in America since the last known quoting of it in 1767, it was quite a surprise that direct quotes from Bradford's Journal should appear nearly 80 years later in this volume. The only problem was that it was locked away in the Fulham Palace in England and the leaders of the Episcopal Church were not willing to part with what they called "The Log of the Mayflower".

This discovery led to a nearly 50-year odyssey that involved many actors of no less than a couple US Presidents, several Ambassadors to the United Kingdom, the blessings of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Episcopal Court, an act of Parliament and the approval of Queen Victoria before it would be relinquished to a specially chosen emissary to personally carry it across the Atlantic to be repatriated to the Statehouse in Boston Massachusetts in 1897. What all of the British officials wanted to make sure was understood by all of America was that the return of the Bradford Journal was purely an act of "good will" on their part.

It was during this time, when the anticipation of the return of the Bradford Journal was at its zenith, that prominent US citizens, who had been able to trace their family history directly to the Pilgrims formed the "General Society of Mayflower Descendants". Once the General Society was formed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1897, proven descendants from around the country chartered State Societies throughout the subsequent years.

The "California Society of Mayflower Descendants" was chartered not long afterward, in 1907. Here is a quote from the California Society Website: "On October 17, 1907, eleven years after the General Society of Mayflower Descendants formed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, thirteen Californians gathered at the Century Club in San Francisco to establish what is now known as the California Society of Mayflower Descendants." Over the years, the California Society has spawned 13 "Regional Colonies" around the State. These were formed to enable local groups of Pilgrim descendants to gather together on a periodic basis, without having to travel all the way to the San Francisco Bay Area every time meetings were to take place. Every Colony sends representatives to attend as "Board of Assistants" to the California State Society. Today, the California Society of Mayflower Descendants, with its associated Colonies, is the second largest organization in the US; second only to the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants in Boston, Mass.

The first major colony to form in Southern California was the Los Angeles Colony. It was formed in 1916 to much fanfare by the elite of the day. Desiring to create a more local colony in Orange County, several OC residents set out to form a purely Orange County Colony. Today, we currently share members with the Los Angeles and San Diego Colonies. The first known gathering of the potential "Orange County Colony of Mayflower Descendants in the State of California" occurred on April 27, 1974. With no more than a dozen people present, the meeting was brought to order. On May 9, 1974, less than two weeks later, P. Glenn Smith, the State Governor of the Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of California, opened a meeting held in the Board Room of the State Mutual Savings in Tustin, California. After Governor Smith offered a prayer and the Pledge to the flag was recited, the meeting was turned over to Mrs. Vincent (Laurie) Musso, Chairman of the Organizing Committee. The By-Laws were read and accepted. Once the charter was accepted by the

California State Society, Mrs. Musso was elected and installed the first Governor of the Orange County Colony of Mayflower Descendants on June 22, 1974.

The first meeting of the newly chartered Orange County Colony of Mayflower Descendants in the State of California was called to order by Governor Laurie Musso on September 28, 1974. They met at the Revere House in Tustin. The new colony was off and running. Since the colony was chartered in 1974, the Colony has elected some 20 Governors and corresponding Board Members. Initially, the Governors and Board Members served only 1-year terms. However, beginning in 1980 the terms were lengthened to 2-year terms. They can now serve up to two consecutive 2-year terms. The list of Past and Current OC Colony Governors is located below.

In fulfillment of its charter as an "Educational Organization", through the years, the Orange County Colony has participated in many educational functions at local schools, with the OC Genealogical Society and other societies in the Greater Los Angeles area. Our Education Committee regularly makes donations of Mayflower and Pilgrim historical materials to schools in the Orange County area. Several present these materials in their Pilgrim dresses and suits to the classrooms and libraries. During these events, they tell stories about their particular ancestor(s) who they personally descend from. At our meetings we also present many educational programs that highlight topics in Genealogical Research, Pilgrim Heritage, American History and our continued honoring of the Pilgrims' relationship with the Native Americans around Plymouth.

Further, our Society has donated sets of the "Silver Books" to several historical and genealogical societies for their research libraries. The "Silver Books" were produced by the General Society for each of the Pilgrims who survived to have descendants. They are a comprehensive compilation of the first five generations of each of the Pilgrim's progeny. These books are a critical resource to help potential members in their search of suspected lines of descent to Mayflower Pilgrims.

Several members of the OC Colony have written genealogical books and pamphlets that have been published and used by the California State and General Societies, as well as other genealogical societies in Southern California. For instance, the Colony's first Governor, Laurie Musso (1974-1975), wrote a three volume set, called "Tales of Mother Earth and Her Children", which were stories told to her by her grandmother. Later, Governor Gene Nelson (1984-1986), wrote a booklet called, "Women of the Mayflower", which has been widely used by other Mayflower Societies and Southern California genealogical societies. Colony Governor, Ralph Cangson (1992-1994), wrote a definitive volume of all approved lines for Orange County descendants in 1989 called, "Mayflower Pilgrims and Their Descendants". Member, Lois Plowman, launched our newsletter, "The Scuttlebutt" in 1982 and served as editor for the first 5 years following.

In the intervening years, the Orange County Colony has seen many members join and become active in the Colony proceedings. Several have even been elected to California State and General Society positions in Massachusetts. All of our members are encouraged to participate in various elected and appointed positions that the Colony offers. Should you join our Colony, we encourage you to join in all of the activities we have and participate to the fullest extent.

Now, looking ahead, we are preparing for the 400th Anniversary of the Landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 2020. Of all of the times to join the Mayflower Society, now may be the most exciting and enriching. It can honestly be said, "Now's the best time to "Find the Pilgrim in YOU!"

Many of the facts regarding the return of the Bradford Journal were found in the book: "The Hand of God in the Return of the Bradford Manuscript to America," compiled by Verna M. Hall and Rosalie J. Slater; Foundation for American Christian Education, San Francisco, CA - 1971.

Special thanks belongs to James Freeman Blauer, our resident Colony Historian and Gift Table Manager, for much of the Colony's history through the years. He has served in many capacities since he became a member in the early 1980's and was the Colony Governor from 1998 - 2000.

Past and Current OC Colony Governors

1974 – 1975	Mrs. Laurie E. Musso
1975 – 1976	Hon. Don Earl Smith
1976 – 1977	Mr. E. Day Carmen
1977 – 1978	Mrs. Norma Northcross
1978 – 1980	Mrs. Irene Jordan
1980 – 1982	Mr. Lester L. Humphrey
1982 – 1984	Mrs. Louise K. Thompson
1984 – 1986	Mrs. Gene Nelson
1986 – 1988	Mr. Edward Lewis Erickson
1988 – 1990	Mr. Robert Wilson Wadleigh
1990 – 1992	Mr. James Lindley Emerson
1992 – 1994	YNC (SS) Ralph Allen Cangson USN (ret.)
1994 – 1996	Mrs. Donna Bennett Cole
1996 – 1998	Mrs. Judith Haddock Swan
1998 – 2000	Mr. James Freeman Blauer
2000 – 2004	Mrs. June Brainard Lazich
2004 – 2008	Mrs. Marcia Huntley Maloney
2008 – 2012	Mr. Carlton V. Phillips, Jr.
2012 – 2016	Ms. Erica Lis Hahn
2016 - Present	Mrs. Susan Garrett Astarita