

FRANCIS COOKE OF THE *MAYFLOWER*

Among those on board the ship *Mayflower* when it finally reached New England in November, 1620 were Francis Cooke and his son John. His wife Esther and children Jane and Jacob came over later on the ship *Anne* in 1623.

Francis Cooke was born in England about 1582 and was married in Leyden, Holland in 1603 to Hester Mahieu. At the time of his marriage Francis Cooke was listed as a woolcomber (involved in the making of cloth). Hester (also called Esther) was a Walloon, those Protestants who were persecuted by the Catholics in France. She may have been born in Canterbury, England.

There was a Protestant revolt in England, and the group called Separatists were forced to flee the country to Holland to escape fines and legal punishments for their illegal religious practices. Cooke was already in Holland before these people arrived. The group stayed about 10 years enjoying Holland's acceptance of different religious practices, but they had difficulty finding jobs. They were poor and led miserable lives. And they did not approve of the Dutch customs, nor did they approve of their children playing with Dutch children. They wanted to keep their English customs and their own Separatist religion.

After financial and political difficulties, the decision was finally made to cross the Atlantic Ocean to the New World in search of religious freedom. Two ships were obtained: the *Speedwell* (which leaked and could not make the journey) and the *Mayflower*. Problem after problem delayed their departure, and they had to cross the stormy North Atlantic at a bad time. It was a miserable voyage that took 66 days with 102 people packed on board that little ship.

While the *Mayflower* was still anchored in Provincetown Harbor, 41 men (including Francis Cooke) signed the Mayflower Compact. This famous historic document was our country's first form of democratic government. A site for settlement was finally chosen near the Plymouth Rock that we can visit today in Plymouth, Massachusetts. These people who settled Plymouth Colony are called the Pilgrims.

Francis Cooke and his son survived that first terrible winter though half of those who had just arrived died from some unidentified epidemic. Francis Cooke became an upstanding member of the community, serving in public office and various committees. He died at Plymouth on April 7, 1662 over 80 years of age. Wife Hester was about 82 years old in 1666, and she probably died soon after that time.

Children of Francis and Hester (Mahieu) Cooke known to have married:

1. HESTER married RICHARD WRIGHT.
2. JACOB married DAMARIS, daughter of Pilgrim Stephen Hopins of the *Mayflower*, and ELIZABETH (LETTICE) SHURTLEFF).
3. JANE married EXPERIENCE MITCHELL.
4. JOHN married SARAH WARREN, daughter of Pilgrim Richard Warren of the *Mayflower*.
5. MARY married JOHN TOMSON.

Which child of Pilgrim Francis Cooke is your Mayflower ancestor?