

## **Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims**

**Twain, Mark, pseud.; Samuel Langhorne Clemens**

*Published: 1881*

**NEW ENGLAND'S SONS.  
FIRST FESTIVAL OF PENNSYLVANIA'S  
PILGRIM DESCENDENTS  
A Notable Dinner at the Continental Hotel --  
Addresses by President Rollins, Senator Frye,  
Gov. Hoyt, President Hopkins, and Mark Twain.  
from the Philadelphia Press,  
23 December 1881**

The main dining-room of the Continental Hotel presented a beautiful and picturesque scene last night on the occasion of the First Annual Festival of the New England Society of Pennsylvania. The society was formed a few weeks since by residents of this city who are natives of or descendants from good old Puritan stock. The object of the association is good-fellowship and the honoring of a worthy ancestry, of which all the sons of New England are justly proud. The day fixed for the annual festival, the 22nd of December, is "Forefathers' Day," the anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers. The society determined to make their first festival a notable one, and to that end invited many notable descendants of the Eastern States, who showed their appreciation by attending in person. The dinner hour was fixed last evening at six o'clock, and notwithstanding the stormy weather, the members and guests began to arrive promptly on time. They were ushered into Parlor C, where the president of the society, E.A. Rollins, and Gov. Hoyt, a vice-president, held an informal reception. Never was there seen a more solid and respectable gathering of business men, leaders of the bench and bar, newspaper editors and proprietors, clergymen and college professors, all gathered to do honor to their native section of country. The tall form of President Hopkins, of Williams College, was seen in the throng as he conversed with Admiral George H. Preble. Senator Frye, of Maine, stood chatting with Governor Hoyt. Mark Twain stood in one corner uttering drolleries which caused his auditors to guffaw in a manner highly reprehensible in staid and sober citizens. John Welsh conversed with Frederick Fraley, and Rev. H. Clay Trumbull, secretary of the society, darted hither and thither, arranging things generally for the event.

### **THE GENTLEMEN PRESENT.**

At seven o'clock the line was formed, and headed by President E.A. Rollins and Professor Hopkins, of Williams College, the members and guests proceeded to the dining-room. President Rollins took his seat at the centre of the north table. On his right were Professor Hopkins, Professor Daniel E. Goodwin, D.D., LL. D., one of the society's vice-

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presidents; John Welsh, Rear-Admiral Geo. H. Preble, Frederick Fraley, Henry Winsor, Clayton McMichael, James L. Claghorn, Calvin Wells, of Pittsburg; Charles Emory Smith, of THE PRESS, and Rev. H. Clay Trumbull, secretary. On his left were Senator W.P. Frye, of Maine; Governor Hoyt, Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain), Lieutenant Thackara, U.S.N.; Rev. W.N. McVickar, Judge Allison, Rev. George Dana, Boardman Chaplain, and Clarence H. Clark, treasurer of the society.

Among the other prominent persons seated at the tables were E. Dunbar Lockwood, who talked reform with Amos R. Little. H.W. Pitkin and other members of the Committee of One Hundred; Rev. Charles G. Amos, the noted Unitarian clergyman; Francis D. Lewis, A.G. Heaton. The Reading Railroad was represented by President Frank S. Bond, Secretary Kinsley, Receiver Stephen A. Caldwell, directors George F. Tyler, E.W. Clark, and the company attorneys, Samuel Dickson, Judge Asbhel Green, of New Jersey, the McCalmont brothers' counsel also chatted with the party. Some of the others were: A.C. Hetherington, General McCartney, E.P. Borda, George Russell, H.W. Bartol, B.H. Atwood, N.P. Storey, Joseph P. Mumford, Dr. H.M. Howe, John P. Thayer, Sidney Tyler, Dr. Forrest, E.W. Clark and B.B. Comegys, the bankers, Chas. M. Jackson, C.A. Kingsbury, J.C. Collins, T.B. Merrick, Frank O. Allen, G.A. Bigelow, C.E. Morgan, Jr., Walter McMichael, Nelson F. Evans, C.F. Richardson, G. Cornish, John Welsh Dulles, C.H. Brush, Robert N. Wilson, Walter H. Tilden, Charles P. Turner, Dr. J.F. Stone, and J.E. Graff. Altogether one hundred and fifty gentleman sat down.

### **THE BANQUETTING ROOM.**

The room was elegantly and most appropriately decorated. The chandeliers were festooned with smilax. Hanging-baskets were suspended along the walls and before the windows. At the eastern end of the room were stately palms, graceful camelias and rare plants perfuming the air with fragrance. A magnificent design composed of immortelles in red, yellow and purple, was prominent at this end of the hall. It bore in large letters the inscription:

December 22,  
1620-1881

Along the north end of the hall a long table was ranged, at which the officers and distinguished guests were seated as given above. Extending transversely from this were several other long tables, around which were placed the members.

Beside each plate lay a toast list, printed on hand-made paper of the style of two centuries ago. There was also a menu of the most artistic and original design. It was printed in chocolate-colored ink, and bore on the first page a representation of the Mayflower making her perilous voyage, with the Pilgrim Fathers on board. On the last page was a portrait of John Alden's Priscilla, one of whose descendants was present at the festival. The bill of fare was printed in antique type, and was as follows:

THE FIRST ANNUAL FESTIVAL  
-- OF --  
THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY  
-- OF --  
PENNSILVANIA,

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Thursday Evening, December 22, 1881.  
YE LISTE OF DISHES FOR YE FESTIVAL.  
Oysters from Chasepack Bay in their Shells.  
Green Turtle Soupe.  
Boyled Salmon with Sauce of Shrimps.  
Cucumbers.  
\*Pates a la Reine.  
Fillet of Beef Garnyshed with Mushrooms.  
Roaste Turkey from Cape Cod, with Cranberries.  
Potatoes. Strynge Beans. Pease.  
Pork and Beans. Stewed Terrapin.  
1620 1881  
Sherbot. Cigarettes.  
Canvas-back Duck. Partridge.  
Lettuce Salading Dressed in Oyle.  
Puddings with Plumbs.  
Mince Pie. Pumpkin Pie.  
Frozen Sweete Thynges, also Jellies and Cakes.  
Several Sorts of Nuts and Fruits.  
Coffee.

\*Lyttle Pies such as the Queen of France doth love.

### **PRESIDENT ROLLINGS' ADDRESS.**

As soon as the members and guests reached their places President Rollins requested Rev. W. Nelson McVikar to offer up prayer, which he did in an impressive manner. The dinner was then served and full justice done to it. After an unlucky member had been threatened with expulsion because he preferred stewed terrapin to pork and beans President Rollins arose to welcome those present. He stood in an easy, graceful attitude, and spoke without using notes. His neat, humorous remarks were frequently interrupted by loud laughter and his patriotic sentiments were heartily applauded. He spoke as follows:

Fathers, brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins, as descendants of New England, we are all relatives. I congratulate you heartily upon the comfortable landing we have made here this evening. Upon my honor I do half believe, that if the Pilgrim Fathers had known of this good hostelry with its canvas back and terrapin, they would themselves have landed here. But I will not do them this rank injustice -- never were men lured less by love of pleasure or constrained by higher motives.

We here in Philadelphia, in connection with local politics, have heard much of a Committee of a Hundred, but that Committee of a Hundred men, women and children which sailed from Plymouth, in September, 1620, and which in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of their own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in weariness and painfulness in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, gave its politics to this North American

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continent, and for all time and through their descendants, largely to that of South America as well, was the grandest committee of which history has made record.

On the 22d of November, in the harbor of Provincetown, in the cabin of the Mayflower, they adopted their form of Government -- signed their compact, and chose John Carver Governor. At that election every man who was authorized to do so cast his ballot I believe -- cast it once and had it counted. That was the New England "idea" and it remains so unto this day.

On Monday, the 22d of December, 261 years ago, when the sun had just entered its winter solstice and the days were the shortest and the nights the longest and the cold the bitterest of all the year, having rested Sunday that they might not desecrate it but keep it holy unto the Lord, the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock, placed for their feet, apparently, by the hand of God himself, for their was not another like it -- not of the same material even, for miles and miles -- a stone of only a few tons weight -- a few feet only this was, and this a stepping-stone -- but not the philosopher's stone -- nor the Moabite stone -- nor Jacob's stone in the chapel of Ednam, the confessor in Westminster Abbey, on which the Kings of Scotland and afterwards the United Kingdom, have received their crowns for a thousand years, nor that wondrous stone, which travelers kiss, high up in Blarney Castle -- not one or all of them together, have enriched this world so much as Plymouth Rock.

### THE COMPACT OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.

The compact which the Pilgrims signed, and with which they landed and under which they lived, and which they have transmitted to their children and their children's children, was that of self-government, the government of the people by the people for the people. Out of that grand principle the Constitution of the United States was builded and when in after years the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house -- it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. My friends, here is a piece of Plymouth Rock, which was kindly given to me by an old resident of Plymouth, and now a member of this society and present with us, Mr. T.E. Cornish. For three and a half months from that landing and during all the perils and horrors of that awful winter the Mayflower rocked at anchor in the harbor, and when, on the 5th of April following, she

"Took the wind upon her quarter, and stood for the open Atlantic,"  
not one of the 100 pilgrims returned in her.

Why?

Possibly John Alden staid because of his Priscilla -- mayhap also on her account. Miles Standish also and Priscilla may have stayed for both. In saying this I trust that our member, Mr. Watters, would remember that I would not speak lightly of his country. Probably, however, few were sea-sick coming over, and so wisely enough determined to make the rest of their earthly pilgrimage by land. But making due allowance for all this, when we remember that of the one hundred who were living in December almost one-half, from exposure and disease, were dead; that all the living who had strength enough gathered on the bluff and saw the little ship go back without one thought of going back themselves; that food, strength, health, life itself gave out, but courage, heroism, devotion to their great cause, never -- we remember that not at Thermopylae, nor Marathon, nor

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Bannochburn, nor Marston Moor, nor any other battlefield, has the world witnessed such a marvelous exhibition of the grandeur of human nature as on that day at Plymouth.

### THE MARCH OF PIE.

Only six months and a little more and after that the Plymouth Colonists celebrate their first Thanksgiving. I don't know what pies they had nor what pork and beans on that occasion, but these things and Thanksgiving Day itself are the gift of the Pilgrims, and through their descendants they have spread all over the land. I think it was Mark Twain, and if it were not I hope nobody will correct me, who first called the attention of the moral and hygienic world to the great pie zone which then extended from about where we sit due west to the Pacific. North of it was one vast sea of pie. South of it there was not one sporadic pie, but the zone moved on and Sherman's triumphant march to the sea was not more certain and inevitable than the march of pie and beans from the Canadas to the Gulf. The Pilgrims' Thanksgiving has become the National festival of the mightiest, freest, and, thanking God, I believe most united people the sun shines on.

The hundred Pilgrims headed the procession of 20,000 English men and English women who came to New England in the next twenty years, and before the meeting of the Long Parliament, and there were only about a thousand afterwards for nearly one hundred and fifty years, nor until the Revolutionary War. Those 20,000 made New England what she was and largely what she is. As late as 1858 Dr. Palfrey in a carefully prepared statement in his first volume of the History of New England, in speaking of New Englanders and their modes says: "There is probably not a county in England occupied by a population of purer English blood than theirs, and I presume there is one-third of the people of these United States, wheresoever now residing, who could peruse this volume without reading the history of his own progenitors."

The sons of New England are scattered throughout our wide domain and everywhere they are at home: for over the home of every man in this broad land, seen or unseen, floats the dear old flag of his childhood. They have carried with them not alone a love for their peculiar food, and of their honored feast-day, but as well their enterprise, their courage and power of endurance, their school system and their high estimate of education, their conscience and their freedom to worship God according to its dictates, and their worship of Him also, and to-day the people of every State and territory, and every town and hamlet in these United States are a better people, and their Government is a better Government, because of the Pilgrim Fathers. To the casual observer it might seem that in something I have said, I have trenched somewhat upon the first subject in our intellectual menu, which is, "The Pilgrims and Their Creation, New England," but I haven't, for the subject is as inexhaustible as filial affection, and its aspects are as various and numberless as the leaves of an autumnal forest in the good old State of Maine.

*[Between Rollins' address and MT's there were six toasts, mostly quoted in full:  
"New England," given by Senator Frye;  
"Pennsylvania," Governor Hoyt;  
"The Army and Navy of the United States," Rear-Admiral George Henry Peble;  
"New England and Education," Rev. Mark Hopkins;  
"The Mission of New England," Rev. George Dana Boardman;*

*"The Press of New England," Charles Emory Smith.*

*There were humorous moments in all these toasts, though the dominant tone was sanctimonious. The account concluded with MT's address, introduced in this way:]*

**MARK TWAIN'S SPEECH.**

Mr. Rollins said that the next speaker, while not born in New England, had done the best he could, for he had his children born there and thus had made himself a New England ancestor. He thus introduced Mark Twain, who sat to the left of Governor Hoyt. Mr. Clemens rose and in a peculiar, sleepy manner began his remarks by thanking the company for the deserved compliment to himself and to his posterity. "I shall continue to do my best," drawled out the speaker, who continued as follows:

**PLYMOUTH ROCK AND THE PILGRIMS  
ADDRESS AT THE FIRST ANNUAL DINNER, N. E. SOCIETY  
PHILADELPHIA, DECEMBER 22, 1881**

*On calling upon Mr. Clemens to make response, President Rollins said:*

*"This sentiment has been assigned to one who was never exactly born in New England, nor, perhaps, were any of his ancestors. He is not technically, therefore, of New England descent. Under the painful circumstances in which he has found himself, however, he has done the best he could -- he has had all his children born there, and has made of himself a New England ancestor. He is a self-made man. More than this, and better even, in cheerful, hopeful, helpful literature he is of New England ascent. To ascend there in anything that's reasonable is difficult, for -- confidentially, with the door shut -- we all know that they are the brightest, ablest sons of that goodly land who never leave it, and it is among and above them that Mr. Twain has made his brilliant and permanent ascent -- become a man of mark."*

I RISE to protest. I have kept still for years, but really I think there is no sufficient justification for this sort of thing. What do you want to celebrate those people for? -- those ancestors of yours of 1620 -- the *Mayflower* tribe, I mean. What do you want to celebrate *them* for? Your pardon: the gentleman at my left assures me that you are not celebrating the Pilgrims themselves, but the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock on the 22d of December. So you are celebrating their landing. Why, the other pretext was thin enough, but this is thinner than ever; the other was tissue, tinfoil, fish-bladder, but this is gold-leaf. Celebrating their landing! What was there remarkable about it, I would like to know? What can you be thinking of? Why, those Pilgrims had been at sea three or four months. It was the very middle of winter: it was as cold as death off Cape Cod there. Why shouldn't they come ashore? If they *hadn't* landed there would be some reason for celebrating the fact. It would have been a case of monumental leatherheadedness which the world would not willingly let die. If it had been *you*, gentlemen, you probably wouldn't have landed, but you have no shadow of right to be celebrating, in your ancestors, gifts which they did not exercise, but only transmitted. Why, to be celebrating the mere landing of the Pilgrims -- to be trying to make out that this most natural and simple and customary procedure was an extraordinary circumstance -- a circumstance to be amazed at, and admired, aggrandized and glorified, at orgies like this for two hundred and sixty years -- hang it, a horse would have known enough to land; a horse -- Pardon again; the gentleman on my

right assures me that it was not merely the landing of the Pilgrims that we are celebrating, but the Pilgrims themselves. So we have struck an inconsistency here one says it was the landing, the other says it was the Pilgrims. It is an inconsistency characteristic of your intractable and disputatious tribe, for you never agree about anything but Boston. Well, then, what do you want to celebrate those Pilgrims for? They were a mighty hard lot -- you know it. I grant you, without the slightest unwillingness, that they were a deal more gentle and merciful and just than were the people of Europe of that day; I grant you that they are better than their predecessors. But what of that? -- that is nothing. People always progress. You are better than your fathers and grandfathers were (this is the first time I have ever aimed a measureless slander at the departed, for I consider such things improper). Yes, those among you who have not been in the penitentiary, if such there be, are better than your fathers and grandfathers were; but is that any sufficient reason for getting up annual dinners and celebrating you? No, by no means -- by no means. Well, I repeat, those Pilgrims were a hard lot. They took good care of themselves, but they abolished everybody else's ancestors. I am a border-ruffian from the State of Missouri. I am a Connecticut Yankee by adoption. In me, you have Missouri morals, Connecticut culture; this, gentlemen, is the combination which makes the perfect man. But where are my ancestors? Whom shall I celebrate? Where shall I find the raw material?

My first American ancestor, gentlemen, was an Indian -- an early Indian. Your ancestors skinned him alive, and I am an orphan. Not one drop of my blood flows in that Indian's veins today. I stand here, lone and forlorn, without an ancestor. They skinned him! I do not object to that, if they needed his fur; but alive, gentlemen -- alive! They skinned him alive -- and before company! That is what rankles. Think how he must have felt; for he was a sensitive person and easily embarrassed. If he had been a bird, it would have been all right, and no violence done to his feelings, because he would have been considered "dressed." But he was not a bird, gentlemen, he was a man, and probably one of the most undressed men that ever was. I ask you to put yourselves in his place. I ask it as a favor; I ask it as a tardy act of justice; I ask it in the interest of fidelity to the traditions of your ancestors; I ask it that the world may contemplate, with vision unobstructed by disguising swallow-tails and white cravats, the spectacle which the true New England Society ought to present. Cease to come to these annual orgies in this hollow modern mockery -- the surplusage of raiment. Come in character; come in the summer grace, come in the unadorned simplicity, come in the free and joyous costume which your sainted ancestors provided for mine.

Later ancestors of mine were the Quakers William Robinson, Marmaduke Stevenson, et al. Your tribe chased them out of the country for their religion's sake; promised them death if they came back; for your ancestors had forsaken the homes they loved, and braved the perils of the sea, the implacable climate, and the savage wilderness, to acquire that highest and most precious of boons, freedom for every man on this broad continent to worship according to the dictates of his own conscience -- and they were not going to allow a lot of pestiferous Quakers to interfere with it. Your ancestors broke forever the chains of political slavery, and gave the vote to every man in this wide land, excluding none! -- none except those who did not belong to the orthodox church. Your ancestors -- yes, they were a hard lot; but, nevertheless, they gave us religious liberty to worship as they required us to worship, and political liberty to vote as the church required;

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and so I the bereft one, I the forlorn one, am here to do my best to help you celebrate them right.

The Quaker woman Elizabeth Hooton was an ancestress of mine. Your people were pretty severe with her -- you will confess that. But, poor thing! I believe they changed her opinions before she died, and took her into their fold; and so we have every reason to presume that when she died she went to the same place which your ancestors went to. It is a great pity, for she was a good woman. Roger Williams was an ancestor of mine. I don't really remember what your people did with him. But they banished him to Rhode Island, anyway. And then, I believe, recognizing that this was really carrying harshness to an unjustifiable extreme, they took pity on him and burned him. They were a hard lot! All those Salem witches were ancestors of mine! Your people made it tropical for them. Yes they did; by pressure and the gallows they made such a clean deal with them that there hasn't been a witch and hardly a halter in our family from that day to this, and that is one hundred and eighty-nine years. The first slave brought into New England out of Africa by your progenitors was an ancestor of mine -- for I am of a mixed breed, an infinitely shaded and exquisite Mongrel. I'm not one of your sham meerschaums that you can color in a week. No, my complexion is the patient art of eight generations. Well, in my own time, I had acquired a lot of my kin -- by purchase, and swapping around, and one way and another -- and was getting along very well. Then, with the inborn perversity of your lineage, you got up a war, and took them all away from me. And so, again am I bereft, again am I forlorn; no drop of my blood flows in the veins of any living being who is marketable.

O my friends, hear me and reform! I seek your good, not mine. You have heard the speeches. Disband these New England societies -- nurseries of a system of steadily augmenting laudation and hosannaing, which, if persisted in uncurbed, may some day in the remote future beguile you into prevaricating and bragging. Oh, stop, stop, while you are still temperate in your appreciation of your ancestors! Hear me, I beseech you; get up an auction and sell Plymouth Rock! The Pilgrims were a simple and ignorant race. They never had seen any good rocks before, or at least any that were not watched, and so they were excusable for hopping ashore in frantic delight and clapping an iron fence around this one. But you, gentlemen, are educated; you are enlightened; you know that in the rich land of your nativity, opulent New England, overflowing with rocks, this one isn't worth, at the outside, more than thirty-five cents. Therefore, sell it, before it is injured by exposure, or at least throw it open to the patent-medicine advertisements, and let it earn its taxes.

Yes, hear your true friend -- your only true friend -- list to his voice. Disband these societies, hotbeds of vice, of moral decay -- perpetuators of ancestral superstition. Here on this board I see water, I see milk, I see the wild and deadly lemonade. These are but steps upon the downward path. Next we shall see tea, then chocolate, then coffee-hotel coffee. A few more years -- all too few, I fear -- mark my words, we shall have cider! Gentlemen, pause ere it be too late. You are on the broad road which leads to dissipation, physical ruin, moral decay, gory crime and the gallows! I beseech you, I implore you, in the name of your anxious friends, in the name of your suffering families, in the name of your impending widows and orphans, stop ere it be too late. Disband these New England societies, renounce these soul-blistering saturnalia, cease from varnishing the rusty reputations of your long-vanished ancestors -- the super-high-moral old iron-

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clads of Cape Cod, the pious buccaneers of Plymouth Rock-go home, and try to learn to behave! However, chaff and nonsense aside, I think I honor and appreciate your Pilgrim stock as much as you do yourselves, perhaps; and I endorse and adopt a sentiment uttered by a grandfather of mine once -- a man of sturdy opinions, of sincere make of mind, and not given to flattery. He said: "People may talk as they like about that Pilgrim stock, but, after all's said and done, it would be pretty hard to improve on those people; and, as for me, I don't mind coming out flatfooted and saying there ain't any way to improve on them -- except having them born in Missouri!"