

Packing for America: the Prized and the Practical

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Immigration is a heritage which most Americans share. Since the 1600s, immigrants (both willing and unwilling) have come to this country to start new lives. Some come for better opportunities and some come as refugees. Whether arriving on board the *Mayflower* with chests of tools to transplant their culture or flying on an airplane with just a suitcase, immigrants bring a mixture of things both practical and prized to start their new lives.



Maria Rosa Marcella emigrated to Plymouth in 1918. Among her prized possessions were embroidered linens for her trousseau, and majolica ware from her homeland, Portugal.

We invite you to enjoy this exhibition of immigration to the Plymouth area, from the Pilgrims to the present.

Since 1620, immigrants have come to the Plymouth area, seeking a better life for themselves and their families. What did they bring with them to get started in their new homes?

17th-century Immigration

The Pilgrims were the leading edge of the Great Migration. Tens of thousands of people left England in the second and third quarters of the 17th century. England was facing a population explosion and jobs were scarce. In order to live as English people, the colonists had to establish a European settlement in this Native American homeland. The colonists brought religious books as well as tools, supplies and livestock along with them. They relied on advice books and provisions lists.

What did the Pilgrims and other 17th century English settlers bring with them? Click here for a description of [Mayflower artifacts at Pilgrim Hall](#), as well as for [Pilgrim Edward Winslow's 1622 advice](#) on "Packing for America," a [1630 provisions list](#), a [1639 description of suggested provisions](#), and a [1675 provisions list](#) with prices! (Most of the early settlers of Plymouth were from England. A few settlers originated in other European countries or were of African origin.)

Some early English immigrants brought prized possessions, as well as practical items. One such family treasure is the carved "Allerton-Cushman cup." Made in England, it is dated 1608.



After its original 17th century journey across the Atlantic, the cup traveled even farther afield. It moved westward after the Civil War, first to Illinois and then to Texas, before returning to Plymouth as a donation to Pilgrim Hall Museum in 1998. For more information about the Allerton-Cushman Cup, click [HERE](#).

A few new settlers arrived in Plymouth in the 18th century, but immigration didn't really boom until the 1840s.

Immigration 1840-1880

During the 1840s, both Ireland and Germany suffered crop damage and famines, leading to large scale emigration. By the 1850s, shipping companies had established passenger lines to transport immigrants, generally single people. Those early immigrants fleeing desperate poverty could bring very few material things with them.

Many Scandinavians also came to America in the period between 1840 and 1880.



A Swedish woman, Hilda Wilhelmina Carlson, brought with her a cherished blue glass bud vase when she arrived in New York in 1878.

A Flood of Immigrants

The 1880s through 1920s was an era of massive immigration, as people fled economic depression. Europeans including Northern Italians, Alsatians, Bavarians, Azorean and mainland Portuguese, as well as French Canadians, came to the Plymouth area, many to work in the Cordage Company and other mills. Cape Verdeans came from islands off the coast of Africa to work in the fishing and cranberry industries.



Maria Rosa Marcella packed her belongings in this basket, when she emigrated to Plymouth from Portugal in 1918. Many immigrants carried their belongings to America in baskets.



Stamped metal trunk brought from Lancashire, England, by the Preston family ca. 1887.



Margherita Vergnani shipped her trunk via Genoa when she emigrated to America in 1904. Vergnani was from the small northern Italian town of Saint Agostine.

These immigrants were coming to established towns, so they did not have to bring as much as the early colonists. They brought the clothes they wore, essential cooking and craft tools, and religious items. Maria Rosa Marcella brought her embroidered trousseau linens, Margherita Vergnani her treasured pasta roller.

Some immigrants between 1880 and 1920 came as families and some came individually, following the path of family or villagers. It was not uncommon for people to return to their native land many times.



Ellen Olsson's passport ca. 1926 and a copper kettle brought by Elna Pearsan, both immigrants to Plymouth from the same area of Sweden.



Copper pot brought to America by the Shriber family ca. 1890. Brought from Odessa, Russia, the pot was carefully packed in pillowcases for safekeeping on the journey.

By the early 1900s, most European immigrants came from four European ports : Liverpool, Naples, Hamburg and Bremen. While many immigrant ships sailed into Boston or New Bedford, by the early 1900s many steerage passengers sailed to Ellis Island in New York

Late 20th-century Immigration

More recently, from about 1965 to the present, many immigrants including Azoreans, Cape Verdeans and English have emigrated to the Plymouth area, along with Viet Nameese, Cambodians and Laotians. Many of them traveled with suitcases full of practical items like clothing and a few cherished possessions, often religious in nature.



A late 20th century fabric suitcase, brought to Plymouth by Manny Rosa when he emigrated from Cape Verde in 1965.

Other families were able to pack a crate with their furniture and other possessions. Some have actually recycled the packing crates into furniture. Today immigrants from South and Central America, particularly Brazil and Mexico, are settling in the Plymouth area.

And so the cycle continues...