

# The *Real* First Thanksgiving



# Thanksgiving

- What do you know?
  - Mayflower?
  - Who helped the Pilgrims?
  - Who's Squanto?
  - Feast?

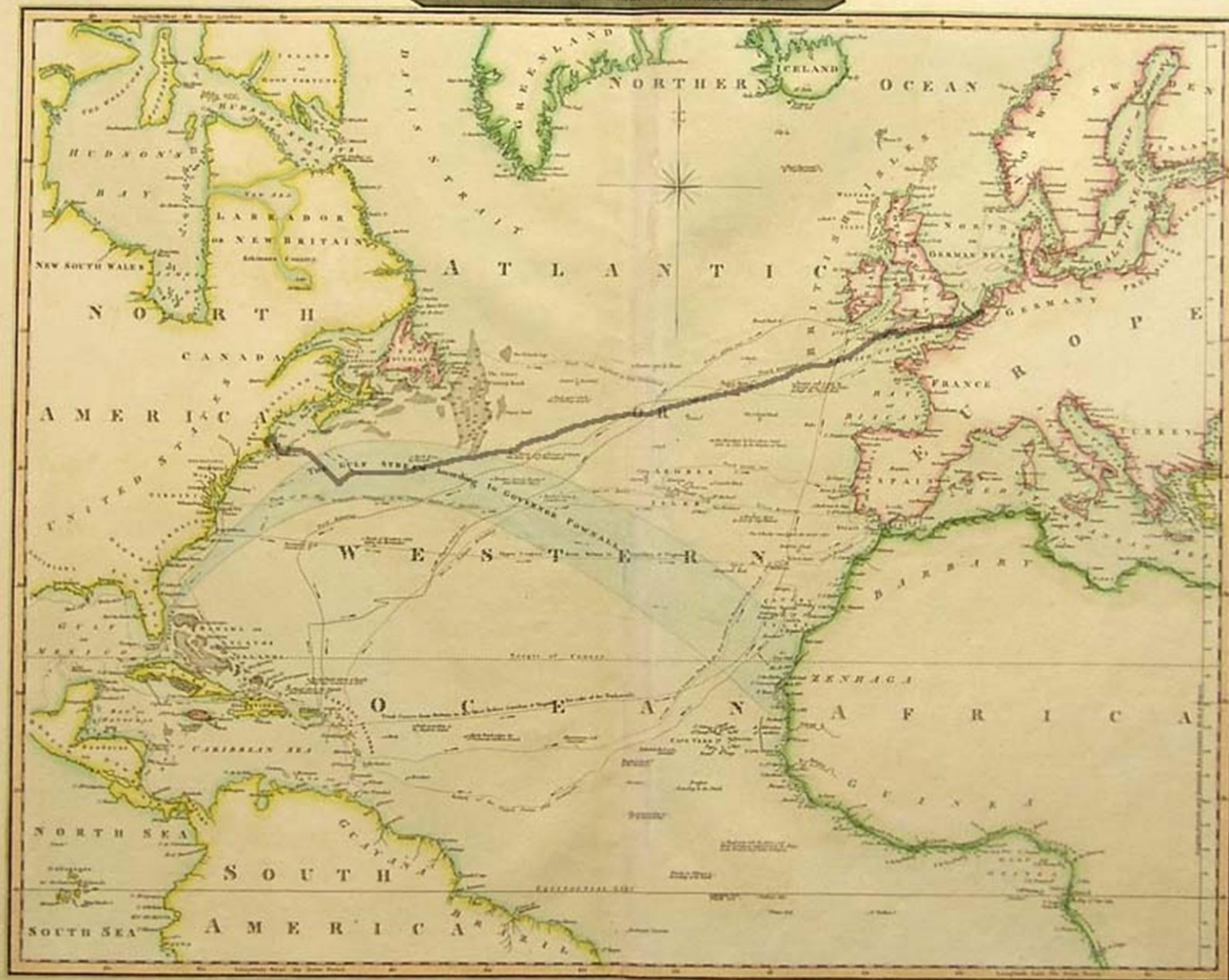
# Mayflower

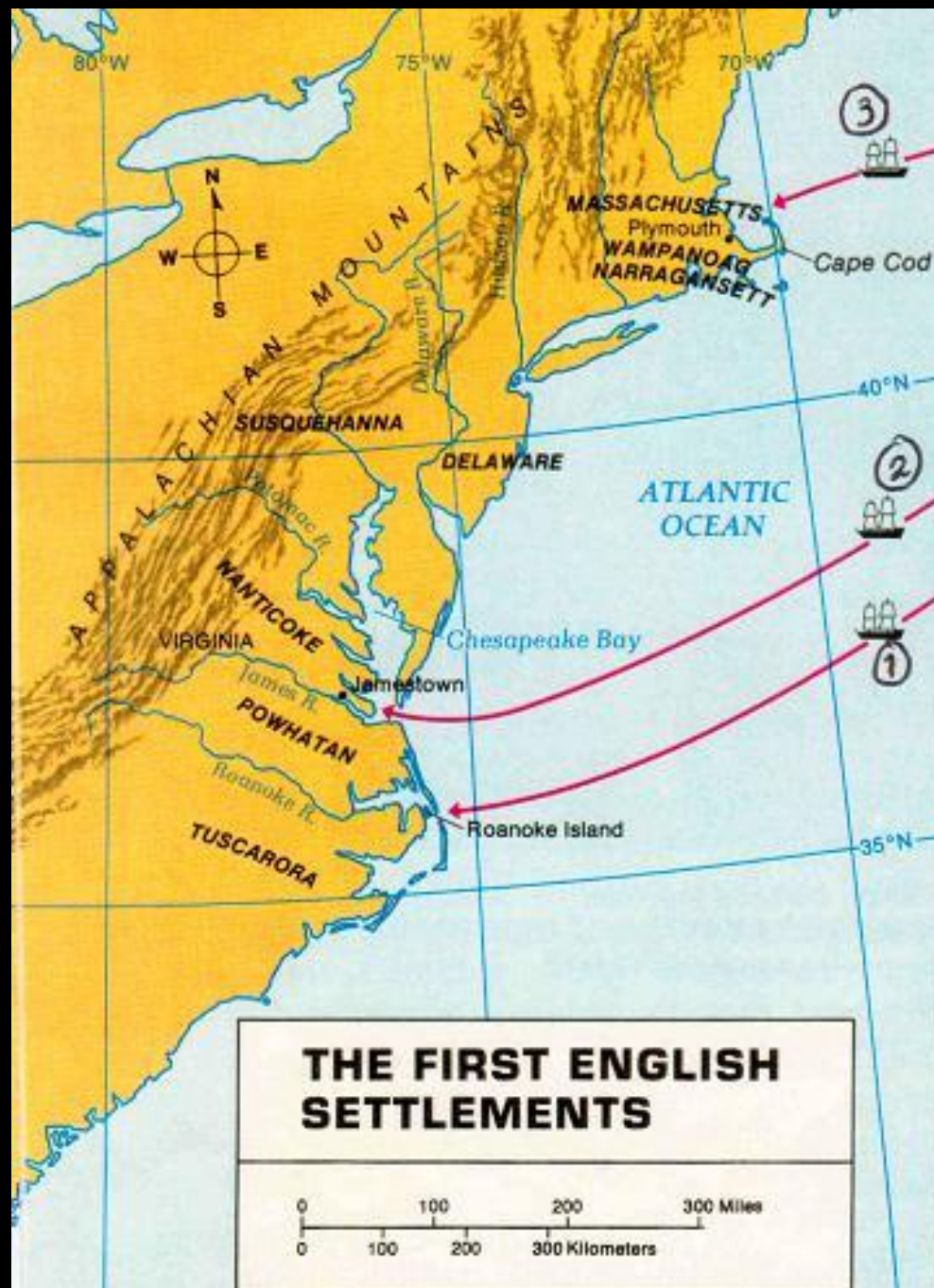
- Popular culture:
  - The Pilgrims were blown North and accidentally settled in Plymouth, Massachusetts
- Historical Reality:
  - The first land they saw was in Cape Cod and with winter fast approaching they decided to drop anchor.
  - Problem with this theory: Why not sail south where winter would be much milder?
    - Spent a whole SIX WEEKS scouting Cape Cod looking for the best spot....

SO WHY DIDN'T THEY JUST SPEND THAT TIME SAILING SOUTH TO WARMER WEATHER!!!???

# CHART OF NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

WITH TRACKS OF SHIPING & WEST INDIA TRADE





## THE FIRST ENGLISH SETTLEMENTS

0 100 200 300 Miles  
0 100 200 300 Kilometers

# Mayflower (CONT.)

- Popular culture:
  - Blown north because of an “error” in navigation.
- Historically:
  - Pilgrims only numbered 35 out of 102 settlers.
  - The rest were ordinary citizens looking for fortune specifically in Virginia.
  - Most likely:

Why did the Pilgrims originally want to leave England?

- Why would they settle in Virginia at a ENGLISH colony if they had just left England TO GET AWAY FROM ANGLICAN CONTROL?!!!

# Mayflower (one last thought)

- Fine let's give "popular history" one more chance.
  - If they were blown off course because of "navigation error" or "storms" then when the weather cleared they should have been able to turn southward
  - Also, at this time sailors were extremely skilled at using the navigation instruments that showed them the latitude of their location or the distance they were north or south of the equator.
  - Therefore, highly unlikely "navigation error" or a "storm" was to blame.



## How did the Pilgrims survive?

1. Land just before winter.
2. No homes.
3. No food.
4. No tools or utensils.



# Why Cape Cod?

- “The wonderful plague”
  - Offered an unusual opportunity

*“A few years before the arrival of the Plymouth settlers, a mortal sickness raged with great violence among the Indians inhabiting the eastern parts of New England. “Whole towns were depopulated. The living were not able to bury the dead; and their bodies were found lying above ground, many years after. The Massachusetts Indians are said to have been reduced from 30,000 to 300 fighting men. In 1633, the small pox swept off great numbers”*

# Disease

- Pilgrims never “started from scratch” or “had to battle the wilderness”
- Years before the Pilgrims landed disease had swept through the entire Eastern seaboard.
- Was not uncommon to find entire villages completely deserted and littered with the bones of thousands of people.
- Pilgrims would simply take over the land that had fields that had been cleared years and years before by the Indians.

Explains why so many towns throughout the New England region are named *Marshfield*, *Springfield*, *Deerfield*.

## First “assistance” Pilgrims received from the Indians

- On the second day, Pilgrims came upon abandoned houses.

*“Having their guns and hearing nobody, they entered the houses and found the people were gone. The sailors took some things but didn’t dare stay... We had meant to have left some beads and other things in the houses as a sign of peace and to show that we meant to trade with them. But we didn’t do it because we left in such haste But as soon as we can meet with the Indians, we will pay them well for what we took.”*

# It wasn't only houses they robbed....

*“ We marched to the place we called Cornhill, where we had found the corn before. At another place we had seen before, we dug and found some more corn, two or three baskets full, and a bag of beans..... It was with God's help that we found this corn, for how else could we have done it, without meeting some Indians who might trouble us.”*

- From the start, Pilgrims thanked God, NOT the Indians setting the pattern for later Thanksgivings.....

*“The next morning, we found a place like a grave. We decided to dig it up. We first found a mat, and under that a fine bow... We also found bowls, trays, dishes, and things like that. We took several of the prettiest things to carry away with us, and covered the body up again.”*

GRAVE ROBBING!??? SERIOUSLY!?? COM'N. I MEAN, REALLY!!?

# Meanwhile back in Virginia....

- Jamestown is viewed as this historic and proud settlement.

From a settler in Virginia.

*“The chief Design of all Parties concerned was to fetch away the Treasure from thence, aiming more at sudden gain, then to form any regular colony.”*

- Remember, why were the settlers in Virginia in the first place?
  - For religion? Spreading Christianity?
  - No.
  - For wealth and gold.

What lengths were they willing to go to attain this wealth?

# Meanwhile back in Virginia.... (cont.)

- First use of chemical warfare in the colonies...

*“when negotiating a treaty with tribes near the Potomac River, head by Chiskiack. The English offered a toast “symbolizing eternal friendship,” whereupon the chief, his family, advisors, and two hundred followers dropped dead from poison.”*

- Some cases of early Virginians engaging in cannibalism. They spent their early days in search of gold, not food. Digging random holes in the ground.

*“Soon starving, they began digging up putrid Native corpses to eat and renting themselves out to Indians as servants- hardly the heroic founders” that we so proudly write and speak about.*

# Squanto

- What do you know about him?

How he is portrayed in classrooms....

*“Squanto had learned their language, he explained, from English fishermen who ventured into the New England waters each summer. Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn, squash, and pumpkins. Would the small band of settlers have survived without Squanto’s help? We cannot say. But by the fall of 1621, colonists and Indians could sit down to several days of feast and thanksgiving to God.”*

# Squanto's real life

- First, how did he learn English?
  - *According to Fernando Gorges:*
    - *In 1605 an English captain stole Squanto, who was a boy along with four Penobscots and took them to England. There he spent nine years in the employ of Gorges. Later the Gorges eventually paid for Squanto's passage back to Massachusetts.*
    - *In 1614, a slave raider kidnapped Squanto and two- dozen indians and sold them into slavery in Spain.*
    - *Squanto then escapes slavery, then escapes BACK to Spain, making his way to England.*
    - *Then getting a trip to Newfoundland, in 1619 he makes it back home to Cape Cod.*
- Squanto makes it home to Patuxet only to find out he is the only surviving member of his tribe. Everyone else had died from disease two years earlier.

No wonder he wanted to help the Pilgrims! He was ALONE.



## Squanto's real life

- Plymouth? Where the Pilgrims landed....
- Was non other than Squanto's deserted village of Patuxet.
- Why do the backbreaking work of clearing the land of trees and rock when you can just take over the crops, field, and towns of those who have died?



# Feast

- Popular culture and Disney version of History:

*“They served pumpkins and turkeys and corn and quash. The Indians had never seen such a feast!!!”*

AND

*“We invited the Indians to come and share our food!”*

UMMMM. NO.

## Feast (cont.)

- Elementary and Disney version....

*“The Indians had never seen such a feast before!!!”*

NO.

- The **‘PILGRIMS’** had literally never seen such a feast before since all of the foods provided were only indigenous to the Americas and all of the food had actually been provided with the aid of the local tribe.

# How thanksgiving came to be

- Pilgrims did not introduce this custom
- East Indians did to observe and celebrate their autumnal harvest.

## U.S. Culture

- Date only back to 1863
- During the civil war, the Union needed all the patriotism they could get, so Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday.
- Pilgrims had nothing to do with it until the 1890s.