

1610–1620 (New Country Narrative) — *From One Ship to a Circuit*

The Wider World

Joint-stock colonization takes firmer shape in the 1610s. The English **Virginia Company** doubles down on its Chesapeake venture after nearly losing Jamestown in 1610 ¹. The Dutch, through private merchants and then a short-term **New Netherland Company**, begin seasonal fur-trading voyages to the Hudson River ². France stabilizes a tiny foothold at **Quebec**, which remains little more than a trading post. Spain keeps a tenuous but enduring hold on **St. Augustine** in Florida, supported by a string of missionary outposts. None of these European projects are populous. Indigenous nations still overwhelmingly dominate the continent in population – for example, about 15,000 **Powhatan** people in coastal Virginia dwarfed the English colony's roughly 1,200 inhabitants by 1620 ³ ⁴.

Who is Actually on the Ground (1610s)

Virginia (Jamestown and environs): After the starving winter of 1609–1610, only ~60 colonists survived to see spring. In June 1610 they abandoned Jamestown, only to be turned back by the timely arrival of Lord De La Warr with new supplies and settlers ¹. Under successive governors in 1611–1614, the English imposed harsh discipline and built new forts upriver (e.g. Henrico and Bermuda Hundred). Tobacco cultivation, pioneered by John Rolfe's experiments in 1612, began yielding a profitable export crop ⁵. By the late 1610s, new recruits arrived nearly every year; the European population climbed from a few dozen to many hundreds, edging toward the low thousands by decade's end ⁴. Pivotal changes came in 1619: the first colonial **General Assembly** convened, the Company's "headright" system offered land incentives for immigrants ⁶, the first recorded Africans in English America were brought to Point Comfort as enslaved laborers ⁷, and English women began arriving in greater numbers (about 90 arrived in 1620) to balance the sex ratio ⁸. Jamestown was slowly starting to look less like a transient garrison and more like a settler society. Throughout this period, the **Powhatan Confederacy** of 30+ Algonquian communities remained an order of magnitude larger than the colony, even after the 1614 marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe brought a few years of uneasy peace ⁹.

Hudson River (New Netherland region): No Dutch towns existed yet in the Hudson Valley during the 1610s. Instead, one or two trading ships each year would arrive and trade with Native peoples. In 1613, Adriaen **Block's** ship *Tyger* accidentally burned near Manhattan, forcing him to winter with his crew; with assistance from the Lenape, they built a new ship, the *Orrust*, and charted the coastal waterways. By 1614, a group of Amsterdam merchants obtained a temporary trade monopoly from the Dutch government and established a small fortified trading post, **Fort Nassau**, near present-day Albany ¹⁰. This outpost – a mere dozen men living on an island prone to flooding – was abandoned by 1618 ¹¹. Dutch traders continued to make seasonal circuits to the Hudson to collect furs, but there was still no permanent Dutch population. Along the lower Hudson and adjacent rivers, Indigenous villages of the Lenape, Wappinger, and Mahican peoples numbered in the thousands, whereas Europeans were present only as transient crews or a handful of traders at any one time ¹².

Quebec (St. Lawrence Valley): The French maintained a tenuous settlement at Quebec, founded in 1608, but it remained extremely small throughout the 1610s. Often only a few dozen French were on site, and during some winters Quebec was nearly deserted ¹³. The colony survived by allying with local First Nations (Wendat (Huron), Algonquin, Innu, and others) who dictated the fur trade's terms; French influence depended on Indigenous partnership rather than force. Militarily, the French presence was negligible – a tiny garrison at a storehouse on a cliff – but as cultural brokers the French found a role among Native trade networks.

Spanish Florida: Spain's lone toehold in the future U.S. was **St. Augustine**, a small town and military garrison in Florida. In the 1610s St. Augustine's population likely numbered only in the low hundreds (it was still only about 500–600 by the mid-1600s) ¹⁴. The Spanish crown's strategy in Florida relied less on sending settlers and more on missionary work to bring nearby Indigenous groups into its orbit. A chain of Catholic missions extended from St. Augustine north into Guale territory (coastal Georgia) and west to Apalachee (Florida panhandle). Spanish soldiers and friars thus maintained influence over a broad area despite the tiny Spanish population and limited resources.

What It Felt Like to Be There

Jamestown in the 1610s: The colony no longer feels like a single fort of doomed men. Tobacco farming has changed daily rhythms: colonists are clearing fields, planting and curing leaves, guarding crops and shipments. New little hamlets upstream (like Henrico) pull people away from the old James Fort. By the end of the decade you can hear English babies crying – a sign of families beginning – even as you still hear Powhatan scouts moving through the woods, bearing messages of concern over encroaching English farms and ferries. The English foothold remains fragile and small, but for the first time it is growing faster than it dies out.

Hudson River (Native perspective): You are a Lenape or Mahican resident along the tidal Hudson around 1615–1618. From your vantage, canoes still set the rhythm of travel and trade on these waters. The occasional European ship is a novelty – one year a Dutch crew winters on Manhattan, another year strangers build a small house upriver and then abandon it – but these outsiders come and go, useful as trading partners for metal tools or cloth, yet also troublesome with their muskets and liquor. By 1618 the tiny Dutch post upriver is known but not important; it washes away in a flood and proves temporary. Your people still number in the thousands across the region, and your villages vastly outweigh the dozen or so Dutch traders ever present at one time ¹².

Quebec (French perspective): For a French colonist at Quebec in the late 1610s, life is defined by dependence – both on supply ships from France and on the goodwill of Indigenous allies. The “Habitation” at Quebec is basically a warehouse and a handful of wooden buildings on a cliff, guarded by a few cannons. With only a few dozen compatriots around, you know you could never hold out by force if relations turned hostile. Instead, you survive by fitting into the existing trade alliances among the Wendat, Algonquins, and Innu. You learn Native languages, live on Native terms, and act as brokers in the vast exchange of furs for European goods. Quebec is less a conquered colony than a tolerated trading post, one small French node in a vastly larger Indigenous world.

The Decade as Lived: Timeline 1610–1620

- **1610–1611 (Virginia):** Jamestown is resupplied and rebuilt. After the horrific “Starving Time” winter, the 60 survivors had decided to evacuate in June 1610, but Governor De La Warr’s fleet arrived in the nick of time and ordered them back to rebuild the fort ¹. De La Warr and Sir Thomas Gates impose a strict military regime. New outposts are established further up the James River in 1611. The English tenuously secure their foothold in Tsenacommacah (the Powhatans’ land) under martial law.
- **1612–1614 (Virginia):** John Rolfe exports Virginia’s first tobacco crop in 1612, proving that a lucrative cash crop can be grown and shipped ⁵. Tobacco quickly becomes the economic lifeline of the colony. Relations with the Powhatan Indians reach a truce in 1614 when Rolfe marries Pocahontas, daughter of Powhatan. This “Peace of Pocahontas” halts open hostilities for several years ⁹. By 1614, a few hundred English colonists live in scattered riverfront plantations.
- **1613–1614 (Hudson River):** Following Henry Hudson’s voyage in 1609, Dutch traders return to the Hudson. In late 1613, Adriaen Block’s ship is destroyed by fire at Manhattan, prompting him to spend the winter building the *Onrust* and mapping Long Island Sound. In 1614, Dutch merchants in Amsterdam form the New Netherland Company and sponsor the construction of Fort Nassau, a small trading fort at Castle Island (Albany) staffed by a rotating crew of several men ¹⁰. This marks the first semi-permanent European presence in the Hudson Valley.
- **1616–1618 (Hudson River):** Dutch fur trading in the Northeast becomes routine. Each year one or two ships sail to the Hudson to trade, then depart; no true colony is founded yet. The New Netherland Company’s trade monopoly expires in 1618 ¹⁵, opening the area to competition. Fort Nassau is abandoned around 1617–1618 due to flooding ¹¹. Dutch traders nonetheless continue to visit the region seasonally, establishing a pattern of regular exchange with Mahican and Mohawk middlemen bringing fur pelts down to the river.
- **1618–1619 (Virginia):** Big changes in the English colony. In 1618 the Virginia Company (now under Sir Edwin Sandys’s reformist faction) issues the “Great Charter,” ending martial law and introducing a representative assembly for the colonists ⁶ ¹⁶. The headright system is formalized, granting 50 acres per immigrant to incentivize settlement. In mid-1619 the first **General Assembly** meets at Jamestown, the first example of self-government in English America ¹⁶. A few weeks later, in August 1619, a Dutch privateer sells 20-some captive Angolans to Virginia’s governor – the first Africans known to set foot in the colony ⁷. That autumn, the Company also arranges for the recruitment of about 100 unmarried English women to sail to Virginia to become wives for the male planters. By the end of 1619, the English population of Virginia has surpassed 1,000 settlers for the first time ⁴.
- **1620 (Milestones):** In the spring of 1620, a census finds 1,194 European colonists and 32 Africans living in Virginia ⁴. By May 1620, ninety marriageable women arrive in Virginia to further bolster the colony ⁸. And in December 1620, a group of English religious separatists – the **Pilgrims** – establish a new colony at Plymouth in Massachusetts. The 1610s thus conclude with three nascent European footholds on the northeastern coast: English Jamestown and Plymouth, and a seasonal Dutch trading presence on the Hudson. European ships can now sail a triangular circuit between London, Amsterdam, and these small New World outposts, all still surrounded by vast and powerful Native American territories.

End-of-Decade Population Snapshot (c. 1620)

- **Powhatan Confederacy (Virginia Tidewater):** Many thousands of Native inhabitants in over 30 allied tribes ³. (By contrast, the English Virginians numbered just over 1,200 in 1620 ⁴.)
- **English Virginia:** Approximately 1,200 European colonists by 1620, scattered in small settlements along the James and York rivers ⁴. (About 700 colonists had arrived by 1619, and incoming fleets in 1620 pushed the population above one thousand.)
- **Lower Hudson (Lenape, Wappinger) and Upper Hudson (Mahican, Mohawk):** Several thousand Indigenous people in the Hudson Valley and adjacent coastal regions. European presence: no true colonies yet, only transient traders and a tiny garrison at Fort Nassau (perhaps 10–12 Dutch men at a time) ¹⁰.
- **New France (Quebec & allies):** Roughly 50–60 French inhabitants at Quebec in 1620 (and often far fewer) alongside tens of thousands of Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples in the St. Lawrence basin ¹³. French colonists remain vastly outnumbered by their native trading partners.
- **Spanish Florida:** On the order of a few hundred Spaniards at St. Augustine and scattered mission outposts. (St. Augustine had only about 500 residents as of the 1650s ¹⁴, so it was even smaller in 1620.) The Indigenous population under Spanish influence in Florida and coastal Georgia – through mission congregations – numbered in the several thousands.

1610–1620 (Old Country Narrative) — *From Truce to Turmoil*

In Europe, the second decade of the 17th century started in relative calm but ended in widespread conflict and transformation. The **Twelve Years' Truce** between Spain and the Dutch (1609–1621) meant most of Western Europe was at peace in the early 1610s ¹⁷. This respite allowed commerce, colonization schemes, and migrations to proceed. England and France were not engaged in major wars for much of the decade. However, underlying religious and political tensions remained. In 1618, the uneasy peace was shattered by the **Defenestration of Prague** in Bohemia, which sparked the **Thirty Years' War** across central Europe. That conflict would become one of the most destructive in European history, killing an estimated 4–8 million people and devastating whole regions (some German lands lost over 50% of their population) ¹⁸ ¹⁹. Thus, 1610–1620 in the Old World saw the seeds of mass migration being planted: religious dissenters seeking refuge, colonizing ventures recruiting settlers, and populations displaced by war or persecution.

England and the Puritans

Under King **James I** (who ruled England and Scotland from 1603), the 1610s saw growing friction with Puritans and Separatists – Protestant groups who wanted reforms in the Church of England. James tolerated no challenge to the Anglican hierarchy (famously declaring “no bishop, no king”), prompting some separatists to leave England entirely. One such group, later known as the **Pilgrims**, fled persecution in

1607–1608 and found sanctuary in the Dutch Netherlands ²⁰ . There they enjoyed freedom of worship in the city of Leiden for over a decade. By the late 1610s, however, these English exiles had become disillusioned and impoverished. They labored long hours for low wages in Leiden's textile industry and watched their children begin to adopt Dutch language and customs ²¹ . Economic hardships – worsened by a collapse in the wool market – and fears of losing their English identity (as well as the looming end of the truce, which meant Spain might attack the Netherlands) convinced the Pilgrims to seek a new life elsewhere ²² . In 1619–1620 they secured backing from English investors and arranged passage to North America, eventually establishing Plymouth Colony in late 1620.

Religious pressures were mounting within England as well. Although James I largely maintained peace between Protestants and Catholics after 1605, Puritan reformers grew frustrated by the pace of change in the Church. Many Puritans bided their time within the system, but a minority prepared to leave England if conditions worsened. Meanwhile, the Virginia Company's success in Virginia offered a possible outlet: plans were floated to create a Puritan settlement in North America under company auspices (one such plan materialized later in Massachusetts Bay in the 1630s). In addition to religious motives, England also faced social and economic pressures that spurred migration. The population of England rose from about 3 million in 1500 to over 5 million by 1650, straining resources and leaving a large underclass of urban poor and landless laborers ²³ . Crime and vagrancy swelled. In 1615, King James authorized a policy of **transporting convicts** to the colonies as a form of punishment and relief for crowded jails ²⁴ ²⁵ . A trickle of English prisoners, orphans, and impoverished people began to be sent to Virginia during the late 1610s as indentured servants or laborers ²⁶ . This practice of "transportation" would expand greatly in the following decades. By 1620, Virginia's recruiters were advertising opportunities for farmers and craftsmen, and arranging passage for willing settlers in exchange for servitude contracts. The groundwork was thus laid for larger-scale English migration in the 1620s and 1630s.

The Dutch Republic and Religious Conflict

The **Dutch Republic** (United Provinces) in the 1610s was in a golden age of prosperity and intellectual life, but it too experienced internal tensions. The Twelve Years' Truce with Spain not only paused the Eighty Years' War for independence, it also enabled the Dutch to expand their global trade empire. Amsterdam in this period became a refuge for various religious minorities – French Huguenots, Iberian Jews, English Separatists – thanks to the republic's relative religious tolerance. The Pilgrims in Leiden, for instance, benefited from this climate of freedom ²⁰ . Dutch merchants, flush with success in the East Indies, also sponsored new ventures in the Americas (Henry Hudson's 1609 voyage and the subsequent fur trade). However, by the late 1610s the Dutch Republic was split by a theological-political feud: the **Remonstrant** controversy. Followers of Jacobus Arminius (the Remonstrants) argued for more liberal Calvinist doctrine, while orthodox Calvinists (Contra-Remonstrants) led by Prince Maurice staunchly opposed them. This conflict culminated in the **Synod of Dort** (1618–1619), where the Contra-Remonstrants prevailed; the Remonstrants were condemned as heretics, their leader Johan van Oldenbarnevelt was executed in 1619, and others were exiled. Even as the Dutch prepared to resume war with Spain when the truce expired in 1621, they were also gearing up for colonial expansion. In 1621 the Dutch chartered the **West India Company** to coordinate trade and settlement in the Americas. Among the populations poised to migrate were French-speaking **Walloon**s from the Spanish Netherlands (modern Belgium): many Protestant Walloon families had already relocated to Holland to escape Habsburg rule, and in 1624 a number of them would volunteer as the first settlers of New Netherland. Thus, the Dutch in 1610–1620 created both the ideological resolve and the institutional means (through the WIC) to plant colonies, setting the stage for New Amsterdam's founding in 1625.

War and Upheaval in Central Europe

The outbreak of the **Thirty Years' War** in 1618 was a turning point that would eventually affect migration patterns. The war began in the Holy Roman Empire as a rebellion of Protestant nobles in Bohemia against the Catholic Habsburgs, but it quickly drew in many other states and became an enormous religious and political conflagration ²⁷. Over the next few decades, large parts of Germany were ravaged by armies, famine, and plague. While this did not immediately send Germans to America (emigration from German states would come later, in the 1700s), the war created a legacy of impoverishment and displacement. Some Protestant refugees fled west to the Netherlands or England. Notably, the Rhineland **Palatinate** was invaded by Catholic forces in the early 1620s, forcing its ruler (the Calvinist Frederick V, briefly the "Winter King" of Bohemia) into exile; the destruction of the Palatinate's towns and farms would, decades later, contribute to waves of Palatine German emigration to Pennsylvania and other colonies. The immediate impact in the 1610s was more intellectual: news of Catholic atrocities and Protestant defeats in Europe heightened millennial zeal among English Puritans and Dutch Calvinists, reinforcing their desire to establish godly communities abroad. The war also preoccupied Europe's great powers (Spain, Austria, France, Sweden), often diverting resources away from colonial endeavors during the 1620s. This gave breathing room for the smaller English and Dutch colonies to survive and grow.

Scotland, Ireland and the Plantation of Ulster

In the British Isles, Scotland and Ireland experienced a significant population movement during the 1610s through the **Plantation of Ulster**. After the suppression of a major Irish rebellion (the Nine Years' War ended 1603) and the flight of Ireland's Gaelic earls in 1607, King James I undertook to colonize Ulster (northern Ireland) with loyal Protestant settlers. Starting officially in 1609, land confiscated from Irish Catholic chiefs in six counties of Ulster was granted to British "undertakers" who agreed to establish Protestant communities there ²⁸ ²⁹. Thousands of **Lowland Scots** (mostly Presbyterian) and English migrated across the Irish Sea to Ulster during the 1610s, founding towns, farms, and churches on Irish soil. James I deliberately encouraged Scottish lairds and English gentlemen to invest in Ulster as a civilizing and anglicizing mission. By the 1630s, the settler population in Ulster may have reached 80,000 (around 20,000 adult male colonists) ³⁰. The newcomers clashed at times with the native Irish, and sectarian divisions hardened. While this was a migration within the British Isles, it set the stage for a later migration to America: generations later, descendants of these Ulster Scots – the **Scots-Irish** – would become a major immigrant group to the American colonies (especially in the 1700s). The Ulster Plantation thus represents a stepping stone in the broader narrative of British Atlantic migration.

Catholic Europe and Colonial Ambitions

Elsewhere in Europe, Catholic powers were also making decisions that shaped migration. **Spain**, under King Philip III and later Philip IV, entered a period of economic strain and internal consolidation. In 1609–1614, Spain expelled its remaining **Moriscos** (Muslims who had converted to Christianity) – an abrupt forced migration of some 300,000 people to North Africa and elsewhere. This did not directly lead to American migration, but it exemplified the era's religious intolerance and large-scale demographic shifts. Spain's focus in the 1610s remained on defending its existing empire. In 1610, the Spanish founded **Santa Fe** in New Mexico, extending their colonial reach in the Americas. They also reinforced Florida's mission provinces after 1610. However, Spain sent few new settlers to the New World in this decade, instead relying on existing Creole (American-born Spanish) populations and missionary efforts. **France** in the 1610s, after the

assassination of Henri IV in 1610, saw a regency under Marie de' Medici and rising tensions with Huguenot (Protestant) nobles. Though the Edict of Nantes (1598) still guaranteed Huguenot rights, sporadic conflicts loomed (open Huguenot rebellion would erupt in the 1620s). Some French Protestants considered emigration – Champlain in 1618 even advocated for more French investment in Canada, partly to provide a refuge for *ressentis* (reformed believers) – but large Huguenot migrations did not occur yet (not until the late 17th century). For the time being, French energies were directed toward North American outposts like Quebec and **Acadia** (Nova Scotia), and establishing the fur trade via alliances with Indigenous nations.

Finally, the year 1620 closed with a symbolic moment connecting Old World and New: in November 1620, the **Mayflower Compact** was signed aboard the *Mayflower* off Cape Cod, establishing self-governance for the Plymouth settlers. Many of those Pilgrims had been part of the European story – English people living in exile in Holland – before becoming American colonists. Their journey encapsulated the decade's dynamic: persecuted or impoverished Europeans partnering with merchant adventurers, crossing the Atlantic, and laying down new roots. By 1620, the Old World's religious strife, political maneuvers, and economic enterprise had given birth to fledgling New World societies, setting the stage for much larger waves of migration in the years to come.

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