

Pilgrim Village Families Sketch: Edward Ashley

By Robert Charles Anderson

Birth: He was probably born after 1600. A 1629 letter by James Shirley in William Bradford's history described him as "an understanding young man" and Bradford described him as "a profane yonge man."

Death: He died on his way home from Russia sometime after 1632.

Ship: Unknown, 1628; *Lyon*, 1630

Life in England: The only clue to Edward Ashley's background come from James Sherley's March 19, 1629/30, letter to William Bradford. Written from Bristol, the letter referred to some able men of [Ashley's] own kindred who were willing to invest financially in his New England venture, so he may have had Bristol connections. At Isaac Allerton's instigation, two of the colony's English investors, James Sherley and Timothy Hatherly, chose Ashley to manage a new trading post at Penobscot, Maine. They also strongly requested that the Plymouth colonists support him in this venture, supplying him with trading goods, etc. This effort set him in direct competition with their trading post.

Life in New England: Edward Ashley first came to New England about 1628. In William Bradford's words, "He had for some time lived among the Indians as a savage and went naked amongst them and used their manners, in which time he got their language." He may have had contact with the Plymouth colonists at that time. After 16 months, he returned to England for five months. He sailed from Bristol in March, 1629/30, aboard the *Lyon*, in company with Isaac Allerton, arriving in New England in May. Plymouth officials reluctantly supplied him with trade goods. Mistrusting him the officials also sent another new arrival, Thomas Willet, with him as a partner. Ashley continued working at Penobscot until October 1631. At that time he was found trading guns, powder and ammunition to the Natives in direct violation of both his agreement with Plymouth and the King's proclamation. He was arrested and returned to England. After a short stay in the Fleet prison, Ashley was released after February 17, 1631/2, but warned never to trade weapons, etc. again. Instead of returning to New England as planned, he was sent by some merchants to Russia, mostly likely for the fur trade. He was cast away at sea on the return voyage.

Family: No wife or children of Edward Ashley have been identified.