



Plimoth Plantation: Living Breathing History. Plimoth Plantation.

Reviewed by John J. Navin
Published on H-Survey (May, 2004)

Plimoth Colony Revisited

Plimoth Plantation is one of America's premier open-air museums. In 2003 it enabled over 366,000 visitors to experience the "Pilgrim" settlement (or a portion thereof) as it may have appeared in 1627. In order to bring history to life, interpreters dressed in period attire go about the seasonal routines of Plimoth's settlers, staying in role as they respond to visitors' questions. Other exhibits include an authentic seventeenth-century Wampanoag homesite, a crafts center, a barn with historically appropriate livestock, and a Welcome Center that features multi-media exhibits on historical themes. Three miles north of the Plantation, visitors can board an authentic reproduction of the Mayflower and view Plymouth Rock. <p> In late 2003 Plimoth Plantation staffers upgraded their website, a significant undertaking considering the diverse audiences it serves. The website is geared to the informational needs of (1) intended visitors, (2) K-12 students, (3) K-12 educators, (4) inquisitive adults, and (5) on-line shoppers. College faculty and students will find the site interesting and informative, though certain other websites devoted to Plymouth are better suited for serious research. For history majors preparing to teach in the K-12 arena, the site should be considered required viewing. <p> Plimoth Plantation's new home page invites viewers to "visit," "learn," "shop," or "participate." Alternatively, four photos with rollover captions take viewers to pages devoted to the 1627 Pilgrim Village, Hobbamock's Homesite, Mayflower II, or the Plantation's newest exhibit, "Thanksgiving: Memory, Myth & Meaning." The home page also includes postings under "News & Events" and three "General Information" sub-headings, the last of which is "Online Learning Center"—the link to a well-constructed series of exercises under

the rubric, "You Are the Historian." <p> Clicking "visit" on the home page brings up a map of Plimoth Plantation with seven highlighted areas. A mouse click on any of the seven brings details on that specific attraction and furnishes information on "What to Expect, How to Prepare," "Frequently Asked Historical Questions," and topics specific to that attraction such as "Questions about Role Playing." College educators might find information presented in the "Frequently Asked Historical Questions" category useful for a general survey class. They include queries such as: "How long were the English colonists aboard the Mayflower?" "Did the colonists describe themselves as either 'Puritans' or 'Separatists'?" "What does the word 'Wampanoag' mean?" and "How did the colonists pay for manufactured goods?" However, the responses tend to be so terse that one might simply review them for lecture tidbits rather than direct students to the website's "visit" section in which they are housed. <p> To its developers' credit, the website reflects the Plantation staff's ongoing effort to dispel myths about the 1621 harvest celebration (the "first Thanksgiving"). The site also demonstrates genuine appreciation for Wampanoag culture, traditions, and history, devoting a separate page to "Cultural Sensitivity" and offering potential visitors advice on how to interact with Native American staffers at Hobbamock's Wampanoag Homesite—e.g., "personal questions such as 'What is your Native name?' and 'Are you a real Indian?' are not appropriate to ask." <p> The "visit" page provides information on rates, parking, lodging, etc., as well as a calendar of events. It also links to a virtual tour that will probably stimulate interest among those who have never visited the plantation, but disappoint those who

have done so. The virtual tour (which requires a plug-in that is available at the site) enables viewers to select one of five areas: Hobbamock's homesite, the village interior, village exterior, Mayflower II, and the Welcome Center function hall. The tour enables viewers to scan 360 degrees from a fixed point: interesting, yet frustrating in its limitations since the village and the Mayflower cannot be properly studied or appreciated from one vantage point. Insofar as it inclines viewers to visit, the virtual tour succeeds; as a means of showing far-flung students these treasures of historical reproduction, the tour falls short. <p> Clicking "learn" on the home page brings viewers to a page with links to "historical background," "online activities," and "educational programs." The "historical background" section features articles by the Plantation's in-house scholars; the articles fall into six categories: the Wampanoag (3 articles), the English colonists (1), Plymouth colony (2), Thanksgiving (4), myth and reality (2), and behind the scenes (4). It represents an eclectic collection, ranging from the anonymously penned "No Popcorn: The Question of Popcorn at the First Thanksgiving" to the insightful but unannotated "Stitches in Time: Archaeology, Women's Technology, and Traditional Wampanoag Sewing" by Karin Goldstein, Curator of Original Collections, and the more substantial and fully documented "Fast and Thanksgiving Days of Plymouth Colony" by Carolyn Freeman Travers, Research Manager. The Plymouth Colony category includes a useful, seven-page 1620-1692 timeline and the settlement's 1627 roster of inhabitants based on the division of cattle that occurred that year. Most interesting, perhaps, are the articles in the Behind the Scenes section, which include "Firing up the Kiln," "Ordinarie Technology," "Archaeology at Plimoth Plantation: Key to the Past," and a most interesting article entitled "Notes on a Shallop" by Peter Arenstam, Manager, Maritime Artisans, who in the spring of 2000 was charged with building a replica of the decked vessel that colonist John Howland sailed to the trading post in Maine. The glossary that accompanies the articles is of limited usefulness, offering definitions of a mere twenty-five terms, including the words "history" and "historian." Overall, the "historical background" section is edifying but sparse, cramped by the website developers' decision to exclude articles by researchers not directly affiliated with Plimoth Plantation. <p> The "online activities" link that appears on the "learn" page brings viewers to "You Are the Historian: Investigating the First Thanksgiving," an elegant examination of materials (both primary and secondary) and artifacts that enable students to "use the skills of historians to peel away the layers of myth and misconception

surrounding 'The First Thanksgiving' and discover what might really have happened during the fall of 1621." Although the module is geared to students in the early and middle grades, many college students would profit from the knowledge it imparts. The module (which requires Macromedia Flash Player 6 or comparable software that can be downloaded free at the site) engages viewers with a series of multiple-choice questions. Subsequent screens allow students to explore the 1621 harvest celebration and related events from the perspectives of both the Wampanoag and the English colonists. Where else can one get a virtual tour or the interior of the Allerton household (with rollover highlights for more information on individual items) or listen to Edward Winslow's account narrated in 17th century dialect? <p> Though unsuited to the needs of college faculty, one of the great strengths of the "You Are the Historian" module is the extensive teacher's guide, geared to the curricula planning and reporting requirements of early- and middle-grade teachers. The guide features segments on Understanding Goals, Introductory Performances, Guided Inquiry Performances, and Culminating Performances, all with corresponding online activities, as well as a Historian's Log, Educational Standards, and Teaching for Understanding segment. The teacher's guide also has a Resources section that includes John Smith's 1613 map of New England, a contemporary map of Wampagoag Country in 1600, and a timeline. The guide includes an annotated bibliography with a very comprehensive listing of resources for elementary students. The listing of primary sources and secondary sources for use by educators is functional but far from exhaustive. The secondary sources include better-known works on Plymouth by Demos, Langdon, McIntyre, and Stratton, but lesser-known works and recent publications such as James and Patricia Scott Deetz's <cite>The Times of Their Lives</cite> are noticeably absent, as are virtually all articles.[1] Even so, the "You Are the Historian" module is most impressive and represents a real asset to teachers of early- and middle-grade students. The developers, who worked closely with the Wampanoag community, teachers, and historians, also produced a corresponding exhibition at Plimoth Plantation, "Thanksgiving: Memory, Myth, and Meaning," and two children's books on the same theme. <p> The third link on the "learning" page brings viewers to the "educational programs" page. Following a succinct statement of purpose—"we strive to engage people in three different levels of learning: information, critical examination, and personal change"—the page serves as a gateway to information on various programs and field trips for youth and adults. In keeping with Plimoth Planta-

tion's user- and patron-friendly approach, on-line forms simplify the reservation process. The educational programs page links to the Curriculum Frameworks section, a helpful feature for K-12 educators who have to address the core curriculum frameworks requirements for Massachusetts and compatible states. It identifies concepts, skills, and learning standards in detail for grades 1-5, and to a lesser degree for grades 6-12. The educational page also links to a page on "Teaching with Respect and Sensitivity," to aforementioned resources such as bibliographies, maps, and timeline, and to the mail order department's "Educator Resource Packs." The latter are geared toward lessons on the Pilgrims, the Native Americans, and the voyage of the Mayflower. There is also a Primary Source Pack, a Thanksgiving Pack, and a Scholastic Pack that contains Plimoth Plantation-inspired children's books such as *Sarah Morton's Day*, *Tapenum's Day*, and *Giving Thanks: The 1621 Harvest Feast*. The "learning" header page also connects to a "helpful links" page; with only thirteen links, it needs to be expanded significantly to accommodate the needs of educators and older students. However, elementary school students will enjoy the "just for kids" page in the learning section; there they can click on "object of the month," "homework help," "make it at home," or "talk like a pilgrim," or get recipes, coloring pictures, stories, and riddles - a nice potpourri for a youngster on a rainy day. The information on the Mayflower in the "homework help" section includes a fine cross section of the ship, with captions. The other two links on Plimoth Plantation's home page are "shop" and "participate." The on-line shopping page includes nine categories: gifts, crafts, children's shop, books, native shop, Mayflower II, gourmet shop, teachers' shop, and horticulture shop. The bookshop is robust; it includes sixteen categories of books, videotapes, and educational toys. You will find a nice selection of primary and secondary sources covering religion, genealogy, native studies, historic trades and crafts, foodways, horticulture, music, marine topics, archaeology, and more. Moreover, if you are in the market for a poppet, clay marbles, tabletop game of

nine pins, or facsimiles of historical documents, this website ends your search. The "participate" section invites viewers to join, contribute, volunteer, or find out more about internships at Plimoth Plantation. Overall, the Plimoth Plantation website is a wonderful tool that serves a variety of audiences. College students and their professors were not the primary targets of the website developers, so any shortcomings in regard to their needs are, though unfortunate, understandable. Although the website does offer information and features that may prove helpful when developing lectures or for students doing research for lower-level classes, other sites are far better suited to these tasks, most notably the University of Virginia's Plymouth Colony Archive Project at <http://etext.virginia.edu/users/deetz/> and Caleb Johnson's Mayflower History website at <http://www.mayflowerhistory.com/>. The Internet notwithstanding, Plimoth Plantation remains an excellent destination for educational outings at all levels and its speaker's bureau does cater to college and university audiences. With additional time and funding, Plimoth Plantation's administrators may decide to enhance their website to address the specific needs of students and educators beyond the K-12 level. As stated earlier, students in MAT programs or who are otherwise preparing to teach at the K-12 level should definitely become acquainted with the site for they are likely to make use of it in the years ahead. Note [1]. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); George D. Langdon, Jr., *Pilgrim Colony: A History of New Plymouth, 1620-1691* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Ruth McIntyre, *Debts Hopeful and Desperate: Financing Plymouth Colony* (Plymouth: Plimoth Plantation, 1963); Eugene Aubrey Stratton, *Plymouth Colony: Its History and People, 1620-1691* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Publishing, 1986); James Deetz and Patricia Scott Deetz., *The Times of Their Lives: Life, Love, and Death in Plymouth Colony* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 2000).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-survey>

Citation: John J. Navin. Review of , *Plimoth Plantation: Living Breathing History*. H-Survey, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=15423>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.