



Duxbury's "First" Mother

Archly the maiden smiled, and, with eyes over-running with laughter, Said, in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*

Priscilla Mullins was a young woman of 18 when she boarded the *Mayflower* in 1620 along with her family – parents, brother and servant - none of whom survived the first winter. By spring 1621 only 21 of the original 53 men *Mayflower* passengers were alive, and only 6 of the 20 women, including Priscilla.

Priscilla married John Alden sometime around 1623. Likely, they were the third couple in the Colony to be married and they first settled in Plymouth. Priscilla was a mother with eldest daughter Elizabeth and son John by the time the family moved to Duxbury. Over the next 20 to 25 years there were another 8 children born to Priscilla and John. Their land and homestead remain in the Alden

family today through the Alden Kindred of America and is the oldest continuous land holding of a single family in the United States.

For the Plymouth 400 commemoration, twelve local historians have brought to light new interpretations of the Duxbury Pilgrim legacy story in an essay collection titled "*Duxbury – Our Pilgrim Story – A 2020 Perspective*". Alicia Crane Williams, genealogist, tells the story of "*Priscilla and Her Children*" in the publication. Richly illustrated and thoroughly researched, the essay collection is available in the Alden Online Store and certain to become a favorite in your personal history library.

In local records, Priscilla's name appears only three times - on William Bradford's list of *Mayflower* passengers, in her father's will written on the day he died in 1621, and on the 1627 Cattle Division. Priscilla was born in Surrey, England in the year 1602. Her father William Mullins was a shoemaker-merchant in the village of Dorking. He sold all his holdings to establish a business in the New World.

John and Priscilla's courtship story was immortalized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who was a poet laureate, Harvard professor and Alden descendant through his mother's line. When Longfellow used his family's story for the "*Courtship of Miles Standish*" he was already a popular American poet, famous for such works as "*Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*" and "*The Song of Hiawatha*". Within two months of "*Courtship's*" being published in 1858, 25,000 copies sold worldwide and 10,000 copies in 1 day in London alone.

Priscilla became an international, 19th-century romantic heroine. Artist George Henry Boughton who was known for painting Pilgrim events painted idealistic portraits from which thousands of prints were sold to adorn New England dining room walls as well as postcards and commercial advertising products.