

Freedom & Empire: The Young Republic and the Founding of Pilgrim Hall Museum

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The 1820s was a period of growth and expansion for America. As the young nation grew, it looked backward to its past for direction and inspiration. Pilgrim Hall was founded in 1824 as a monument to, and celebration of, part of this unique American past.

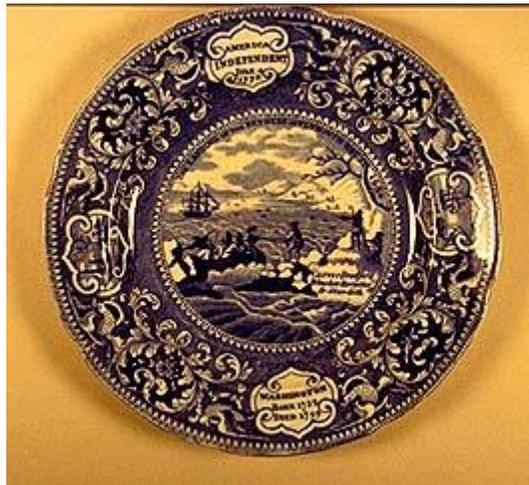


Plate by Enoch Wood, Burlsem, England, 1819, showing the Landing of the Pilgrims. Imported by Plymouth merchant William Davis and used for the Pilgrim Society's first 1820 Forefathers Day dinner.

It's the 1820s! Do YOU know where America was?

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1803 | Louisiana Purchase |
| 1812-1815 | War of 1812
Capitol burned down in war
Embargo encouraged domestic business |

- 1820** Monroe reelected President
200th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims
Pilgrim Society founded!
- 1823** Monroe Doctrine **1824**
John Quincy Adams elected President America had 24 states
Construction began on the new Capitol
Revolutionary War hero Lafayette visited America
Textile mills at Lowell, Mass., established
Plymouth Cordage Company founded
Construction of Bunker Hill Monument began
Pilgrim Hall Museum built and opened!
- 1825** Erie Canal completed
- 1828-1838** Pilgrim theme chosen to illustrate the Capitol

Nostalgia and the American Revolution

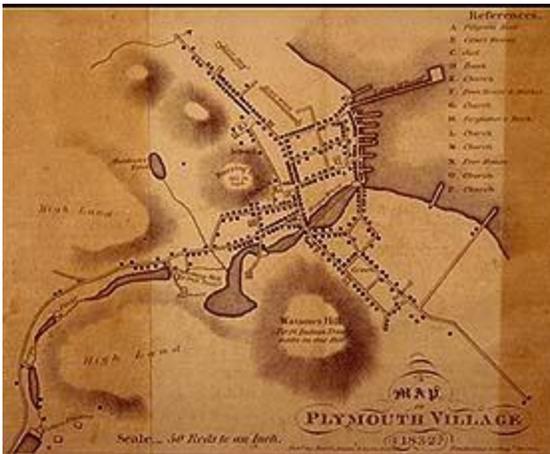
America was a young country with diverse histories. The American Revolution was one history held in common. The 1820s marked the 50th anniversary of the war, and newspapers nationwide were full of reminiscences of old soldiers. In 1824, the French Revolutionary War hero the Marquis de Lafayette visited America, and construction began on the Bunker Hill Monument.



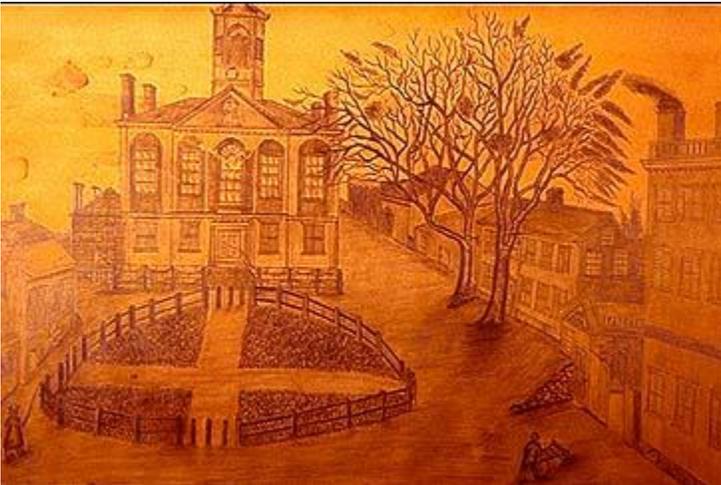
**Creamware jug, Staffordshire or Liverpool, ca. 1810
Patriotic theme, decorated in "memory of Washington"
and showing portraits of Adams and Hancock.**

The atmosphere of nostalgia is evident in the wording of Pilgrim Hall's cornerstone: "...in grateful memory of our Ancestors who Exiled themselves from their native country, for the Sake of Religion; and here successfully laid the foundation of Freedom and Empire."

The 1820's -- Local Civic & Industrial Growth



The 1820s was a time of expansion. Business was beginning to recover from the hard times of the War of 1812. New technologies helped American industry compete with Europe. Plymouth was a busy harbor town with an expanding waterfront and many wharves. There were new businesses, including the Whaling Company (1823) and the Plymouth Cordage Company (1824).



The climate of expansion saw the erection of new civic buildings in Plymouth, such as the new courthouse shown above in an 1830 pencil sketch. James Thacher wrote that the new courthouse was "an elegant edifice of brick... in perfect keeping with the best models of modern architecture."

The 1820's: National Growth and Tension

America had 24 states in 1824. The country was beginning to divide along regional lines -- north versus south, seaboard versus interior states, established families versus pioneers. This tension was evident in the 1824 election, when urbane New Englander John Quincy Adams narrowly defeated rough and ready pioneer Andrew Jackson.

That same year, 1824, construction began on a new U.S. Capitol. To set the tone for the future, the Rotunda was to be illustrated with scenes from America's past. Debates ranged in Congress over which scenes were to be used.



Robert Weir's *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*

By the late 1820s, Robert Weir was chosen to illustrate the *Embarkation of the Pilgrims*, representing an important scene in the history of New England. Thus the Pilgrims and their story became linked with America's national identity.