

THE LEIDEN CONNECTION

Mayflower Roots in Leiden

A Starter Guide for Descendants

Six families. One city. The Leiden years before the Mayflower voyage.

mayflower.timus.nl

Welcome

If you believe — or already know — that your family line leads back to a Mayflower passenger, this guide is for you. Before the Pilgrims ever boarded a ship, many of them spent more than a decade living in Leiden, the Netherlands. That chapter of the story is often the hardest to trace, and the most rewarding once you do.

This guide gives you a starting point: why the Pilgrims came to Leiden, who the six documented Leiden-Mayflower families were, how to check your own possible connection, and what to see if you ever visit the city yourself.

“Step into your family's Leiden story. Discover households, relationships, and the records they left behind.”
— The Leiden Connection

Why Leiden?

In the early 1600s, a congregation of English Separatists — people who wanted to worship outside the Church of England — left England in search of religious freedom. They settled in Leiden, a city known for its university, its textile industry, and its relative tolerance.

For more than ten years, this community lived, worked, married, and raised children in Leiden before a group of them decided to sail for the New World in 1620. Many stayed behind. Some died in the city. Others emigrated later. The households, apprenticeships, and church records they left behind are still preserved in Dutch archives today — and they are the foundation of everything documented on The Leiden Connection.

The Six Leiden-Mayflower Families

These six names come up again and again in Mayflower genealogy — and all of them have a documented Leiden chapter. A short introduction to each is below; full profiles, original records, and locations are available on the website.

Brewster

Printer and elder of the congregation

William Brewster ran a printing press in Leiden producing religious texts, work that eventually drew the attention of English authorities. As an elder of the Leiden Separatist congregation, he was one of the most influential figures behind the decision to sail.

Robinson

Pastor who stayed behind in Leiden

John Robinson never boarded the Mayflower. He remained in Leiden as pastor to the congregation until his death in 1625 — but his household and his decisions shaped who eventually left for Plymouth.

Chilton

A father's testimony after an attack

In 1619, James Chilton gave sworn evidence describing an assault outside his own door in Leiden — the notary even named the city surgeon who treated his wound. That first-hand record, and the family's other Leiden entries, follow James, his wife and daughter Angel up to the Mayflower voyage.

Cooke & Mahieu

A household between two congregations

Francis Cooke, an English wool comber, married Hester Mahieu in Leiden's Walloon (French-speaking) church in 1603. Marriage, baptism and burial records trace the family between Leiden's English and French-speaking communities in the years before Francis sailed on the Mayflower alone, with Hester and their children following later.

Bradford & May

A weaver's house on the Achtergracht

Before William Bradford became Plymouth Colony's long-serving governor and chronicler, he and Dorothy May were recorded in Leiden's housing market and citizenship register — including the 1612 purchase of a house on the Achtergracht.

Fuller & Lee

Deacon and healer of the congregation

Samuel Fuller served as deacon and the congregation's healer during the Leiden years — a role that carried directly into the early hardships of Plymouth Colony. Marriage and burial registers document his household and, from 1617, his marriage to Bridget Lee.

How to Find Out If You're Connected

There is no single shortcut, but there is a sensible order to work in:

- Start with what you know. Write down the earliest American ancestor in your line, and any family stories about a Mayflower or Pilgrim connection.
- Take the family quiz on mayflower.timus.nl. It's a quick way to see which of the six Leiden families your story might align with.
- Browse the matching family page. Compare names, dates, and locations against what's documented.
- Check existing genealogy databases (Ancestry, MyHeritage, FamilySearch) for the American side of your line, to firm up the generations closer to you.
- If it still looks promising, get in touch. Email info@timus.nl with what you've found so far, and a researcher can advise on the archival next steps for confirming your line against the original Leiden records.

A family story being unproven doesn't mean it's untrue — Dutch archive records are detailed but not always complete, and some connections take real research to confirm.

Visiting Leiden

If your research ever brings you to the Netherlands in person, Leiden makes the Pilgrim story tangible in a way records alone can't.

- Leiden American Pilgrim Museum — a small, dedicated museum on the Pilgrim years in Leiden.
- The Pilgrim walking route (via VisitLeiden) — a self-guided route past the key addresses and landmarks.
- Pieterskerk — the church at the heart of the Separatist congregation's life in Leiden.
- Kloksteeg and the surrounding streets — where several families lived and worked.

Many of these locations have their own page on mayflower.timus.nl with historical detail and original records.

Next Steps

- Explore the full family catalogue at mayflower.timus.nl
- Take the quiz to find your likely family match
- Listen to the Stories from the Past podcast for more on the Pilgrims' Leiden years
- Email info@timus.nl for a personal look at your own family line

Thank you for reading — we hope this guide brings you one step closer to your own Leiden story.

The Leiden Connection is a project by Timus, a Dutch genealogy and DNA research practice. mayflower.timus.nl · info@timus.nl