

The Voyage of the Eagle Wing



Painting by Dan Parsons <http://www.paperbarkshop.etsy.com/>

Why did the Eagle Wing set sail?

As a result of the Hamilton / Montgomery settlement in 1606 and the Plantation of Ulster, many Scottish people of the Presbyterian faith settled in the north of Ireland, especially in counties Down and Antrim. The Presbyterian ministers who accompanied the settlers were not welcomed by the Church of Ireland and often the bishops forbade them from holding services of worship.

One of these Presbyterian ministers was Rev John Livingston who lived in Killinchy, county Down from 1630.

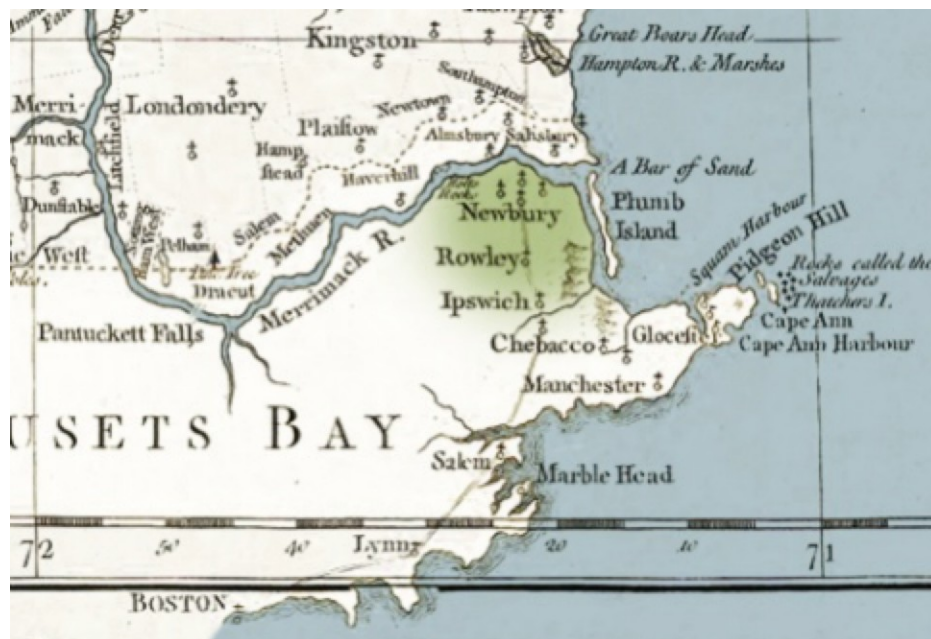


Portrait of Rev John Livingston by Frans Hals

(Painted 1663-1666) Courtesy of the Livingston family, New York, USA

The Massachusetts Bay Colony, had been established by the English Puritans who had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in 1620 in the Mayflower so that they would be free to practice their religion.

Rev John Livingston wrote to Governor of the colony, to ask if a Presbyterian church would be welcome in the colony. The Presbyterians were encouraged to travel to New England and, in 1634, an area of some 30,000 acres was set aside for them between the Merrimack and Ipswich rivers (area shaded green on map).



Why was the ship called *Eagle Wing*?

The ship's name refers to the Book of Exodus Chapter 19, Verse 4:

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.”

What size was the *Eagle Wing*?

The Eagle Wing may have been built in Groomspoint, probably with wood taken from the Dufferin Estates. Records show that the ship had a carrying capacity (burden) of 150 tons and was rigged with fore and main masts, a mizzen at the stern and a bowsprit. The sails would have been made of hand-sewn flax canvas and the rigging (probably about 8 tons of it!) would have consisted of around 350 hemp ropes. There would probably have been a crew of between 20 and 35 men.

As a ship of 150 tons, probably had the following dimensions:

Length: 70 feet (21.4m)

Breadth: 21 feet (6.4m)

Depth: 10 feet (3.0m)

Who travelled on the *Eagle Wing*?

The party of 140 passengers was lead by four Presbyterian ministers:

Rev John Livingston of Killinchy;

Rev Robert Blair of Bangor;

Rev James Hamilton of Ballywalter; and

Rev John McClelland of Newtownards.

The families included those with the names Stuart, Agnew, Campbell, Summervil, and Brown. One elderly man died during the voyage and the wife of Michael Calvert, of Killinchy parish, gave birth to a son during the voyage. He was called Seaborn.

What was it like on board the *Eagle Wing*?

Life for those who sailed on the *Eagle Wing*'s first voyage would have been rather unpleasant – cold, damp, cramped and smelly. The 140 passengers, up to 35 crew, their stores of food and livestock were packed into a ship that was only 70 feet (21.4m) long.

- There was no heat
- There was no water for washing
- There were buckets for toilets
- The deck leaked, soaking the passengers
- Drinking water was strictly rationed
- Food was mostly biscuits and salted beef and pork
- There were cooking facilities for the passengers to make their own meals
- Below desks there was probably only 5 feet (1.5 metres) of headroom
- The ship's hold carried food for 2 years on land
- The deck was cluttered with livestock pens

What happened at sea?

The *Eagle Wing* left Groomsport on 9th September 1636– very late in the year to travel nearly 3000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Before they got very far, they had to stop in Loch Ryan in Scotland to repair leaks in the ship.

When the ship was probably nearer Newfoundland than Ireland, in the words of Rev John Livingston:

[W]e met with a mighty heavy rain from the northwest, which did break our rudder...and tore our foresail, five or six of our champlets, and a great beam under the gunner's room door broke. Seas came in over the round house, and broke a plank or two on the deck, and wet all that were between the decks. We sprung a leak...[T]he master and company

came one morning and told us that it was impossible to hold out any longer, and although we beat out that storm, we might be sure in that season of the year, we would foregather with one or two more of that sort before we could reach New England.

(Quoted in Presbyterian Magazine, Volume 8, pages 558-561)

After prayer, and long and anxious consultation, the storm was seen as a signal that God did not want them to complete their journey to America. The next morning as soon as the day dawned, the ship was turned, and they made for Ireland. On 3rd November, 1636 they arrived back in Lough Fergus (Belfast Lough), the place of their departure, after an absence of about eight weeks.

What happened when the *Eagle Wing* returned?

The passengers had difficulty settling back in Ireland because they had sold all of their possessions to undertake the journey.

The next year (1637), fearing arrest, the four ministers who had sailed on the *Eagle Wing* moved to Scotland:

Rev John Livingston settled in Stranraer;

Rev Robert Blair settled in Ayr;

Rev James Hamilton settled in Dumfries; and

Rev John McClelland settled in Kirkcudbright.

The Scotch-Irish in the America

Although it was unsuccessful, the voyage of the *Eagle Wing* was the first attempt by Ulster Scots people to emigrate to America. The first successful organised migration took place in 1718 and it is thought that a total of some 250,000 people settled in the American colonies in the following century. In USA, these people, and their descendants, are called "Scotch-Irish".

Down the centuries, Scotch-Irish people provided leadership in politics, the military, churches and business. 17 of the 44 Presidents of the United States of America have had Scotch-Irish ancestors.

Peter Gibson
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