

John Josselyn 1675

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John Josselyn (1608-1675) was born in Essex, England to a well-off family. While little is known of his personal life, he had enough money to indulge his interest in medicine and botany. He sailed twice to New England—first in 1638, for a few months, and later in 1663, he stayed for eight years. Both times, Josselyn visited his brother in Maine, an influential man in the colonial government. Josselyn’s account of his time in New England concentrates on the flora and fauna of Maine and Massachusetts, but he also critically describes the culture of the Puritan society he observed in the Bay Colony. While in New England, he travelled widely, from the villages around Boston, to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and areas around Black Point, Maine, where he stayed with his brother.

Josselyn published his *Account of Two Voyages* after his return to England in 1674 as an elaboration of his well-received *New England Rarities*, which appeared in 1672. His second work, however, was not as popular with the Royal Society, to which it was dedicated, perhaps because of his irreverent views of Puritan New England. Josselyn died shortly after the work was published, although the exact date is unknown.

#### Voyages to New England, 1638 and 1663-1671

We do not know exactly why Josselyn decided to go to New England. His interest in botany and medicine combined with a brother with an important post in the colony created an opportunity that made it possible for Josselyn to explore and document the little-known flora, fauna, and medicinal cures of the area.

#### Document Note

Josselyn provides us with the most complete natural history of New England during the early years of the English settlement, as well as acute observations on the impact of settlement on both Indian society and American flora and fauna. His interest in science led him to investigate the folk medicine of both local Indian tribes and the European settlers in the area and document supposed cures from everything from toothache to gallstones. Part travel-guide, part natural history, Josselyn also provided detailed recommendations of the provisions settlers might need to start a new life in New England and descriptions of the principle settlements around Boston. His vivid writing style and wonder at the wealth of American riches influenced Henry David Thoreau who cites Josselyn’s work in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).

#### Other Internet and Reference Sources

The Scarborough Land Conservation Trust maintains a reference site with an essay on Josselyn’s work as a herbalist. That essay can be found at <http://www.scarboroughmaine.com/slct/referen/a01/rp1001.html>.

For more information, see Plymouth State College’s information on explorers and settlers of North America at <http://oz.plymouth.edu/~lts/wilderness/explorers.html>.



**NEW ENGLAND  
1652**



SETTLEMENTS TO 1652

Longitude West from Greenwich