
Boston

As they prepared to leave England, the company Davenport and Eaton had gathered faced a number of obstacles. In December 1635 the Commission of Foreign Plantations, headed by William Laud, had issued orders to the officers of the port of London that they were “not to suffer any person, being a subsidyman [meaning a taxpayer], to embark himself . . . without license from us, his Majesty’s commissioners, nor any person under the degree of a subsidyman without an attestation from two Justices of the Peace . . . that he hath taken the oath of supremacy and allegiance, and the like testimony from the minister of the parish of his conversation and conformity to the orders and discipline of the Church of England.”¹ Eaton and many of the other passengers were subsidymen, yet they somehow managed to have their departure approved. Davenport, like others who evaded the king’s agents, was likely smuggled on board in disguise.²

This was not the only challenge they faced. The aspiring colonists had hired the ship *Hector*, only to have the vessel subsequently impressed for the service of the crown.³ In January the ship’s owners petitioned the crown, explaining that the vessel had been “contracted for a voyage to New England for a plantation there.” They explained that “most of the passengers had engaged their whole estates, and all was ready for the voyage, when the ship was pressed for the King’s service.”⁴ This was followed by another petition from the ship’s master in February.⁵ Finally, the *Hector* was released and the voyage to America began.

Crossing the ocean was a difficult, often dangerous journey at this time. For all but the most fortunate passengers, most of the voyage was spent belowdecks, in crowded quarters with hammocks and sleeping mats shoved into every nook and cranny and little or no privacy. There was little ventila-