

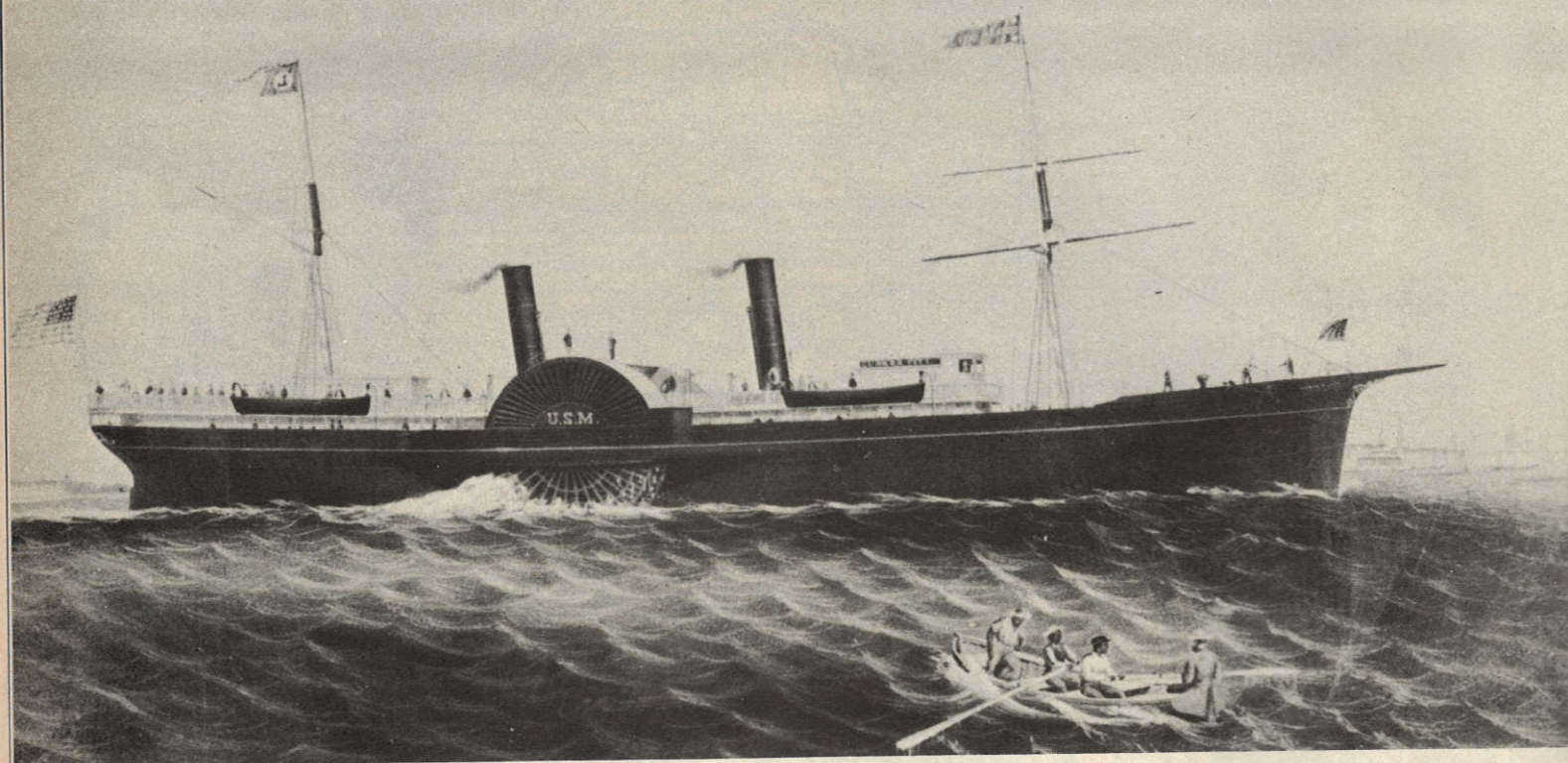
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Maine Ski and Snowmobile Directories





Maine's Holy Land Colonists

By David E. Shaw

ON October 1st, 1867, the American excursion steamer, *Quaker City*, with writer Mark Twain aboard, rescued a group of destitute Maine pilgrims from their colony at Jaffa, Syria, near present-day Tel Aviv. Twain described the incident in a letter to the *New York Tribune* the following day.

Alexandria, Egypt Oct. 2, 1867
The Quaker City brings about 30 or 40 of Old Adams's American Colony dupes. Others have deserted before, and 17 have died since the foolish expedition landed in Palestine a year ago. Fifteen still remain outside the walls of Jaffa, with Adams, the prophet. These 15 are all that are left of the original 160 that sailed from Maine 12 months ago, to found a new colony and a new religion in Syria, and wait for the second coming of Christ. The colonists have been sadly disappointed. The colony was a failure, and Christ did not come. The colony failed on account of heavy taxes and poor crops. A discrepancy between the almanac and the Book of Revelations interfered with the Second Advent. Adams, the Prophet of God, got drunk in September, 1866, and remains so to this day. It is hoped that he will see the error of his ways when he gets sober.

This bizarre pilgrimage of 160 Mainers to the Holy Land more than 100 years ago was the subject of national attention and ridicule in its day, and is one of the most extraordinary religious undertakings in the history of New England.

The chief proponent and "prophet" of the pilgrimage was George J. Adams, an ex-itinerant actor-

Left — The steamer Quaker City which, with Mark Twain aboard, rescued some of the Maine pilgrims. Photo courtesy of the Mark Twain Memorial, Hartford, Connecticut.

turned-messiah, who arrived in Maine's Washington County in 1862. Adams had achieved notoriety as a fiery preacher and Elder in the Mormon church following the death of leader Joseph Smith, and as an actor in Boston theatres where his acting was said to be "about as bad as a superlatively good-natured audience could possibly endure." He apparently chose to settle in Washington County because his past was beginning to catch up with him, and he was clever enough to realize that in that isolated area he would escape detection for a time.

Upon arriving in the town of Jonesport, Adams proclaimed himself to be a true descendant of Ephraim of the Kingdom of Israel, and began to organize a new church which he called the Church of the Messiah. Funds were raised to publish a monthly religious journal called *The Sword of Truth, and Harbinger of Peace* which became the official organ of the new church. Carrying the motto, "Truth crushed to the earth will rise again," the journal predicted Christ's imminent return to earth and the subsequent rewarding of the righteous. It also took a firm stand against slavery and decried the evils of liquor, preaching that "man should taste not strong drink which has ruined many a happy family."

The Church of the Messiah grew rapidly due to Adams's considerable organizational talents and his rare ability to electrify and sway audiences. He staged frequent plays, conducted elocution classes, and often had to preach three sermons on Sundays in order to accommodate all who wished to hear him.

Eventually his parish work came to demand so much of his time that he sold half of his ownership in *The Sword of Truth* to Abraham MacKenzie, a well-respected businessman from nearby Indian River. This partnership further cemented Adams's position within the community and encouraged the conversion of many skeptics to the new church.

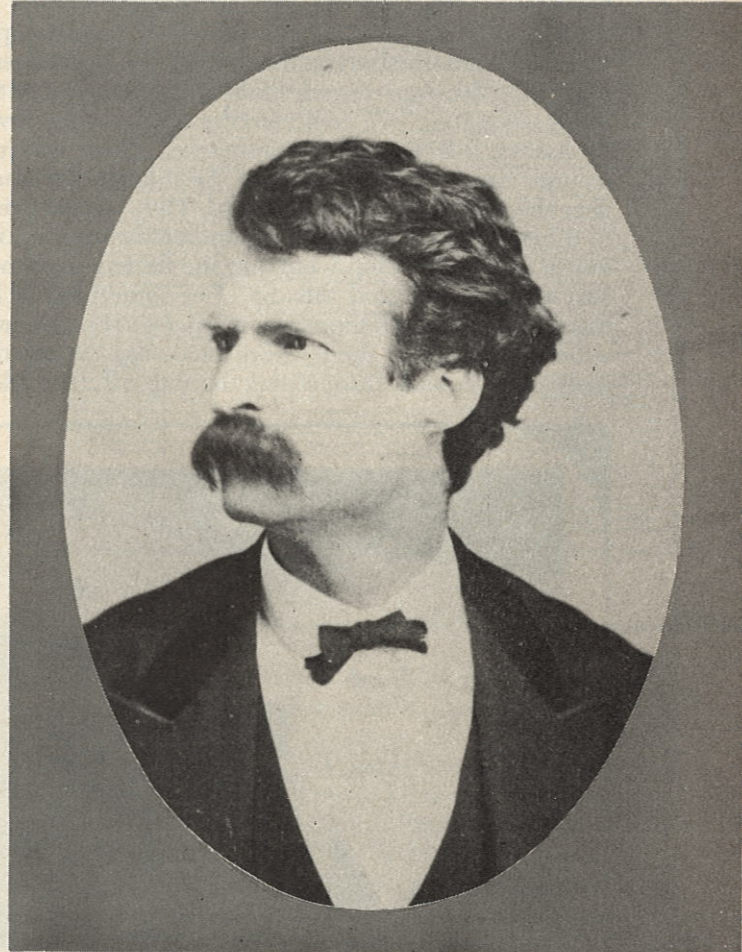
Having gained the confidence and respect of a large number of followers, Adams now proposed his grandiose scheme for founding a colony in the Holy Land. His plan appealed to a diversity of interests. Farmers were swayed by the promise of rich soil and bumper crops. Businessmen were influenced by the prospect of easy profits from commercial ventures including real estate speculation. The more devout followers were persuaded to join the pilgrimage in order to be eye-witnesses to the second coming of the Messiah.

The Palestine Immigration Society was formed with Adams as its president, and funds were solicited for an exploratory trip abroad by Adams and MacKenzie. The two left Jonesport in the spring of 1865, shortly after Lee's surrender to Grant, and were gone about three months. Although a diary of the trip may be found at the Maine Historical Society, many

descendants of colonists doubt that the pair really traveled much farther than New York City.

In *The Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain's description of Palestine is extremely uninviting:

Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. The valleys are unsightly deserts fringed with feeble



Writer Mark Twain, who filed scathing newspaper accounts of the ill-fated colony in Palestine. Photo courtesy Mark Twain Memorial, Hartford, Conn.

vegetation that has an expression about it of being sorrowful and despondent. The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee sleep in the midst of a vast stretch of hill and plain wherein the eye rests upon no pleasant tint, no striking object . . . Every outline is harsh, every feature is distinct, there is no perspective — distance works no enchantment here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land.

In contrast, Adams's description of the area must have been very attractive, for upon his return to

Jonesport nearly the entire community became infatuated with the prospect of the pilgrimage. Church members were encouraged to sell all their property and pledge the proceeds to Adams in order to finance the trip. According to some reports, a number of members even borrowed money to help the cause.

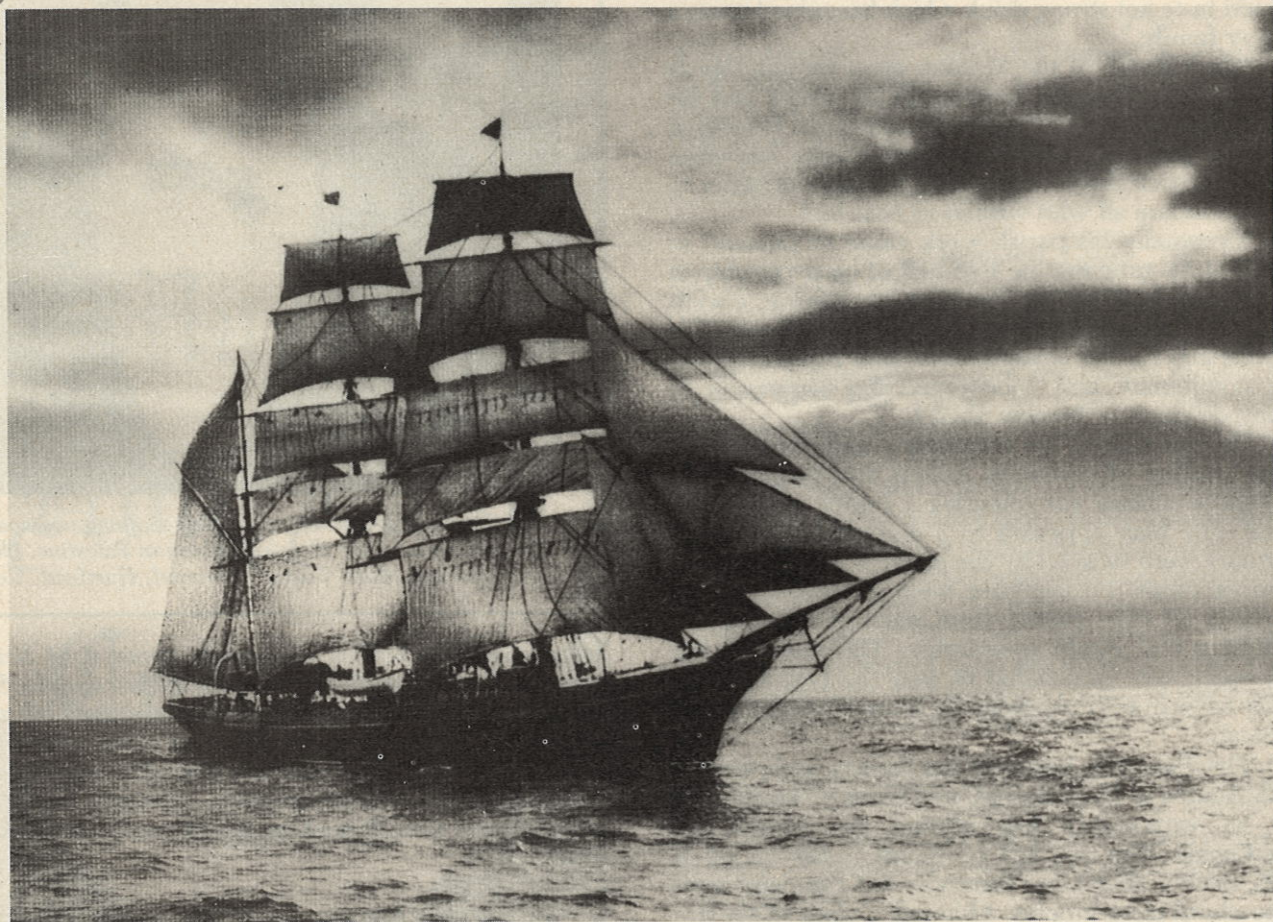
On August 11, 1866, after taking aboard enough lumber to build 20 houses, a schoolhouse, and a small chapel, the new three-masted bark, *Nellie Chapin*, left Jonesport wharf carrying the 160 members of the Palestine Immigration Society — but not Abe MacKenzie who had decided at the last minute to remain in Jonesport. A large crowd of townspeople watched from the shore as the ship set sail. Years later a witness to the departure described the scene in a letter to her daughter: "We could see the ship moving down Moosabec Reach. It was a pretty day. There was just enough breeze to move her. In the stillness we could hear them singing hymns on board. They were waving to those on shore. My mother stood on the steps of our house, and as the ship went out, she folded her hands and said, 'Praise God this day. I've something to be thankful for. I've a father and a mother and brother and sister, and none of them are on that ship.' When the people came back from seeing the ship off, they filed

home like a funeral procession. The ship went out to sea from Jonesport between Mark Island and Black Head. That night at midnight, they took sight of the North Star and set her course for the Holy Land."

The *Machias Union* carried an account of the departure, and reflecting much public sentiment of the day, predicted that "Of all the practical illustrations of delusion, we think this will rank with the greatest of modern times."

AFTER six weeks at sea the *Nellie Chapin* dropped anchor in the Mediterranean just off the shore of Jaffa, Syria. Supplies were unloaded, and under the blazing Syrian sun, construction of the settlements was begun. Before long, serious problems and disappointments began to arise, and by Christmas most of the Colonists felt thoroughly disillusioned. Requests for the purchase of lands having been refused by the Turkish government, the colonists were forced to live in tents and makeshift shelters for several months. Unsanitary conditions caused widespread disease and a number of colonists died. When they were eventually

Below — Bark similar to the Nellie Chapin which carried the pilgrims from Jonesport, Maine to Jaffa, Syria in 1866.



Right — The religious journal published monthly by George Adams and Abraham MacKenzie of the Church of the Messiah. By permission, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

able to lease land for farming, the results, according to Twain, did little to relieve their misery:

Many of the colonists brought horses, and all manner of farming implements, and all seem to have started with a fair amount of money. Adams became custodian of all the funds. They could not have selected a better — he has got them yet. He had no money when he started out as a prophet, but now he is in reasonably comfortable circumstances, and his colonists are reduced to poverty. The first crop of the colonists did not return them even the seed they put in the ground. This year they raised what is considered in Syria a very good crop — seven bushels of wheat to the acre — but they had sowed two bushels of seed to the acre; they had to save two bushels out for next year's planting, rents and taxes took rather more than the balance, and so no fortunes were made . . . Foreigners must rent land; they cannot own it. The colonist who raised the best crop this year lost \$500 on it. He thinks if he had raised a better one it would have beggared him. Irrigation would make the rich plain of Jaffa yield astonishing crops of wheat, but at the same time it would make it yield still more astonishing crops of thorns and thistles seven feet high; and, therefore, it would be unwise to irrigate, even if one had the facilities for it.

A single experiment with Maine potatoes was attempted, but this failed due to irrigation problems. Pickaxes had to be used to pry walnut-sized potatoes from the sunbaked soil.

The most bitter disappointment of all was Adams — now reviled by most of the colonists as a religious imposter and drunkard. During the passage from Maine to Jaffa the first indications of his true character had appeared. More than twenty empty liquor bottles were found in his quarters, explaining his unruly behavior in plays that he staged with the help of a woman introduced as his wife. After arriving in Syria, Adams was twice arrested for drunkenness and for attempting to put himself beyond American consular powers by taking Turkish citizenship. Under the impact of betrayal by their leader, the prophet-treasurer Adams, religious motivations behind the pilgrimage died away completely.

By the summer of 1867 the destitute condition of the colony had become alarming. Reports of the pilgrims' wretched poverty and semi-slavery conditions circulated throughout the civilized world. Relief efforts were instigated by the American consulate in Beirut and a rescue fund was established in Boston, although only one dollar was ever subscribed. The appearance of the American steamer *Quaker City* in the port of Jaffa came as almost a miracle to the unfortunate few still stranded with Adams. The generosity of several of Mark Twain's fellow

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Lecture.

On the New Heaven and the New Earth. By President Adams.

We have long contemplated writing a lecture on "The New Heaven and the New Earth" in which we propose to show clearly the difference between the restored earth as it will exist during the great age of peace, and the new or redeemed earth, as it will exist after the losing of Satan at the end of the millennial age and after the destruction of death and hell. And here we may say that the rock on which all men who have written by human wisdom have made shipwreck. Yes, here is where they have always gone into confusion by trying to identify the two events, and make them one and the same. For he clearly understood they are separate and distinct events; the new age, or the kingdom of God, or the age of peace on earth and good will to men, will be preceded by the gathering of God's people, and the most desperate wars that this world has ever witnessed; and also by the personal appearance of the Lord's Messiah, who will take his seat on the throne of David, and issue a law from Mount Zion, which will govern all nations. This new age will also be preceded by the first resurrection, and the total destruction of all the Gentile powers of the earth, churches and States, and also by the binding of Satan. On the other hand the new heaven and the new earth will be preceded by the unbinding of Satan, by the last great rebellion at the end of the age of peace, when fire will come down from heaven, burn up the wicked, burn and purify the earth, after which Christ will destroy death, sin and the curse, and then will come the second resurrection, the new heavens, the new earth and the new Jerusalem, when death and hell will forever have passed away. May the Lord help me to write the truth in these matters, clearly and according to the oracles of God. First then, let us show the scriptural facts in relation to the earth during the age of peace, or the time that the Messiah will occupy the throne of David and reign over all the nations of the earth. During that age we will plough, and sow, and plant, and build houses, and eat, and drink and enjoy ourselves in peace and plenty throughout the earth. Let us now have the evidence from the scriptures that such will be the fact. Let us quote from Isaiah, chapter 11, in which we find the following thrilling language:

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, and he shall be full of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord;

And shall make him quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not

judge after the sight of his eyes, neither receive after the hearing of his ears;

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and remove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the falling together; and a little child shall lead them.

And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den.

And they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

And it shall be that day there shall be a root out of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."

We have here given this quotation at length, as we know it has often been applied to events that took place at Messiah's first coming, but we challenge the entire religious world, to show that any such events as are here named took place at that time, or in that age, or, in any age since that time.

Did Christ rise at the end of that age? No. Did the wolf and the lamb dwell together in that age? No. Did the little child play on the hole of the asp? No, verily, no. Was the earth full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the deep, in that age? Truth, crime, history answer, no; for even the Jews, knew not their Messiah, such was their ignorance, blindness and stupidity. Let us ask: On shame, where is thy blush, to apply such scriptures as the foregoing, to the apostolic age; yes, or to any age since; for since that time our world has been full of violence, crime and blood, and no man can or dare deny it. But let us quote the chapter further.

From this same prophet, in his 65th chapter, read as follows:

"That he who bleaseth himself in the earth, shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes."

And it will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more tears as infants of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days; for the child shall die an hundred years

old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat; for the days of a tree are the days of my people, and they shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

In the foregoing quotations we have clearly established the situation of the earth during the millennial age, or the reign of the Messiah on the throne of David. But let us quote further on this great age of peace from the 102d Psalm, as follows:

"When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer."

The Lord will be written on the generation to come; and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.

For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth;

To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death; to declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem:

When the people are gathered together, the kingdom, to serve the Lord. No man on earth can doubt the meaning of this passage, it is clear and conclusive, that it refers to events that will take place on earth during the great age of peace. But let us quote from the prophecy of Jeremiah, 23d chapter.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTOUSNESS."

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

But, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries

passengers, particularly Moses Beach of the *New York Sun*, helped to return these pilgrims to the United States.

As for Adams, now the subject of worldwide ridicule, he remained for a time in Jaffa with a handful of devoted followers, insisting that the colony's prospects for the future were truly glorious. Of those who left he wrote, "We are glad to get clear of them; they were utterly unfit even to assist in such a great work as the restoration of Palestine. They were men of corrupt minds — impure in their motives — and their places will soon be filled by better and nobler men." Before long the prophet-entrepreneur himself deserted the celebrated colony to return to acting and preaching, and eventually opened a five-cent savings bank in California.

Few of the colonists ever returned to Maine. Several continued to live in Syria, operating a very successful stage line between Jaffa and Jerusalem. Most, however, returned to America to lead quiet lives away from their downbeat homeland. The utter foolishness and miserable failure of the pilgrimage continued to be a popular tale throughout the 19th century and is testimony to the remarkable human susceptibility to even the wildest and most fraudulent of schemes. □