

Document 1: The Mayflower Compact

The Mayflower Compact was an agreement that joined the settlers onboard the Mayflower – the ship that carried the Pilgrims and other colonists to Plymouth, Massachusetts – into a single self-governing community. Signed on November 21, 1620, it's viewed as one of the key documents laying the groundwork for self-government in the Thirteen Colonies and later, the United States of America.

The settlers onboard the Mayflower adopted the Compact as a way to overcome the unexpected circumstances in which they found themselves when they arrived in the New World. Difficult weather had blown them off-course during their transatlantic voyage. Anchored off what is now Cape Cod, they were thousands of miles from England, and hundreds of miles from their intended destination near New York Harbor. The problem was that they had no authorization from the Crown or the Virginia Company to settle so far north, but they found it too dangerous to attempt the voyage south along the coast to where they had permission to build.

The compact served the immediate purpose of uniting the signatories in recognition of the legal and civil authority of the government that the colonists would choose. The signatories were 41 of the 50 adult males onboard, most of whom were members of the Separatist community that became known to history as the Pilgrims. The ship carried 102 people, about a third of whom were children. The signers agreed that they:

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are under-written, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

(Signatures)

*John Carver
William Brewster
John Alden
William Mullins
John Craxton
John Howland
John Tilly
Thomas Tinker
John Turner
Digery Priest
Edmond Margeson
Richard Clark
Thomas English
John Goodman*

*William Bradford
Isaac Allerton
Samuel Fuller
William White
John Billington
Steven Hopkins
Francis Cook
John Ridgdale
Francis Eaton
Thomas Williams
Peter Brown
Richard Gardiner
Edward Doten
George Soule*

*Edward Winslow
Miles Standish
Christopher Martin
James Chilton
Richard Warren
Edward Tilly
Thomas Rogers
Edward Fuller
Moses Fletcher
Gilbert Winslow
Richard Bitteridge
John Allerton
Edward Liester*

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the eleventh of November [New Style, November 21], in the year of the reign of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Dom. 1620.

Adapted From: <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2020/11/the-400th-anniversary-of-the-mayflower-compact/> and https://www.pilgrimhall.org/ap_mayflower_compact.htm