

A PEOPLE WHO MEAN TO BE THEIR OWN GOVERNORS MUST  
ARM THEMSEVES WITH THE POWER WHICH KNOWLEDGE GIVES



THE MAYFLOWER  
COMPACT

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# THE MAYFLOW COMPACT



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# The Mayflower Compact

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## The Mayflower Compact

The Mayflower Compact was signed on November 11, 1620, (O.S.) in what is now Provincetown Harbor near Cape Cod. The Pilgrim Fathers used the Julian Calendar which, at that time, was ten days behind the Gregorian Calendar, signing the covenant "ye .11. of November" (literal).

Having landed at Plymouth (so named by Captain John Smith earlier), many of the Pilgrims aboard realized that they were in land uncharted by the London Company. For this reason the Mayflower Compact was written and adopted, based simultaneously upon a majoritarian model and the settlers' allegiance to the king.

The Mayflower carried 102 passengers. Of these, 41 were Pilgrims seeking a new environment where they could practice their religion in the manner they chose. The remainder of the passengers, called "Strangers" by the Pilgrims, included merchants, craftsmen, skilled workers and indentured servants, and several young orphans.

William Brewster and other Pilgrim leaders organized the voyage and gathered these "strangers" to increase the chances of the colony's success. The voyage lasted more than two months. When they finally sighted land the captain of the *Mayflower* knew right away that they were far north of their destination so headed southward. This proved too dangerous and they were forced to turn back and drop anchor in a harbor at the tip of Cape Cod.

Unrest started immediately. William Bradford later wrote that several "strangers" made "discontented and mutinous speeches." Bradford went on to explain that the "Strangers" did not want to follow rules because "none had power to command them."

The Pilgrim leaders, with staunch determination to establish a colony amidst the brewing rebellion, knew they needed a temporary government authority. In England, such authority came from the king but in remote America it could only come from the colonists themselves. While still aboard the *Mayflower*, the Pilgrims and "Strangers" made a written agreement or compact among themselves.

It is assumed that William Brewster, who had a university education, wrote the Mayflower Compact. The pattern of church self-government used by the Pilgrims to establish their Separatist churches in England and Holland served as a model for political self-government in the Mayflower Compact. Almost all the adult male colonists, including two of the indentured servants, signed the document.

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By signing the Mayflower Compact, the colonists in no way intended to declare their independence from England. The opening line of the Compact refers to both Pilgrims and "Strangers" as "loyal subjects" of King James. The document is very short. It simply united the signers into a "Civil Body Politic" for the purpose of passing "just and equal Laws...for the general good of the Colony." However, those few words conveyed the idea of self-government for the first time in the New World.

From its crude beginning in Plymouth, the idea of self-government in New England evolved into town meetings and gradually spread into larger local governments in colonial America. The Mayflower Compact was all but forgotten by the time of the Constitutional Convention, but the idea of self-government was still powerful. Therefore, even though the Mayflower Compact was quickly written out of necessity, it set a historic precedent toward the creation of a new democratic nation.

The original document was lost, but the transcriptions in Mourt's Relation and William Bradford's journal *Of Plymouth Plantation* are in agreement and accepted as accurate. Bradford's hand written manuscript is kept in a special vault at the State Library of Massachusetts. Bradford's transcription is as follows:

In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britaine, France, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc., having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honour of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northerne parts of Virginia, doe, by these presents, solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enacte, constitute, and frame such just and equall laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete and convenient for the generall good of the Colonie unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cap-Codd the 11. of November, in the year of the raigne of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fiftie-fourth. Anno. Dom. 1620.

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The list of 41 male passengers who signed was supplied by Bradford's nephew Nathaniel Morton in his 1669 *New England's Memorial*. There are no surviving first-hand accounts of this information.

<i>John Carver</i>	<i>Edward Tilley</i>	<i>Digery Priest</i>
<i>William Bradford</i>	<i>John Tilley</i>	<i>Thomas Williams</i>
<i>Edward Winslow</i>	<i>Francis Cooke</i>	<i>Gilbert Winslow</i>
<i>William Brewster</i>	<i>Thomas Rogers</i>	<i>Edmund Margeson</i>
<i>Isaac Allerton</i>	<i>Thomas Tinker</i>	<i>Peter Browne</i>
<i>Miles Standish</i>	<i>John Ridgdale</i>	<i>Richard Britteridge</i>
<i>John Alden</i>	<i>Edward Fuller</i>	<i>George Soule</i>
<i>Samuel Fuller</i>	<i>John Turner</i>	<i>Richard Clarke</i>
<i>Christopher Martin</i>	<i>Francis Eaton</i>	<i>Richard Gardiner</i>
<i>William Mullins</i>	<i>James Chilton</i>	<i>John Allerton</i>
<i>William White</i>	<i>John Crackstone</i>	<i>Thomas English</i>
<i>Richard Warren</i>	<i>John Billington</i>	<i>Edward Doty</i>
<i>John Howland</i>	<i>Moses Fletcher</i>	<i>Edward Leister</i>
<i>Stephen Hopkins</i>	<i>John Goodman</i>	

The original document does not survive. It first appeared in *Mourt's Relation*, a pamphlet about the first year of settlement at Plymouth. In 1669 Plymouth's town historian, Nathaniel Morton, reprinted the agreement in his book, *New England's Memorial*. Interestingly, he included a possible list of the men who signed it, even though these men's names were not included in earlier copies of the *Mayflower Compact*. According to Morton, the document was signed by 41 of the male passengers – all but one of the freemen, three of the five hired men, and two of the nine servants.

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When creating the Mayflower Compact, the signers believed that covenants were not only to be honored between God and man, but also between each other. They had always honored covenants as part of their righteous integrity and agreed to be bound by this same principle with the Compact. John Adams and many historians have referred to the Mayflower Compact as the foundation of the U.S. Constitution written more than 150 years later.

America was indeed begun by men who honored God and set their founding principles by the words of the Bible. They lived their lives with honesty, reliability, and fairness toward establishing this country “for the sake of its survival.” A great many of America’s Founding Fathers have been quoted in regard to living by Biblical values.

**NOTES**