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PILGRIMS AND SETTLERS



The Mayflower Compact, sometimes called the first American constitution, was the handiwork of "Separatists," a small group of religious extremists who had separated from the Church of England because they did not think it was "pure" enough in its religious observances. Like all Puritans ("purifiers"), the Separatists disliked the elaborate ceremonies of the Church of England, which smacked of vanity and superstition; they favored plain and simple church services centered on preaching and the Bible. They also rejected the hierarchical structure of the Church of England, with its archbishops and bishops, which seemed to block the relation between the individual and the Lord and therefore true faith and piety. For them the congregation, organized by devout people who had experienced conversion and with the power to choose its own ministers and deacons and adopt rules for governing the church, was the center of religious authority. Regarded with hostility by the British government and with suspicion by their neighbors, the Separatists left England in 1608 and formed a "community of saints" in Holland. But they did not feel at home among the Dutch, and so decided to move to the American wilderness.

In September 1620, thirty-five "Pilgrims" (called that because of their wanderings in search of a place to live) sailed for the New World on the *Mayflower*. They had received a grant from the Virginia Company, a joint-stock corporation of British investors, to establish a settlement in "northern Virginia" and financial aid from some London merchants. Sixty-seven additional emigrants, not all of them Puritans, were aboard the *Mayflower* to help make the colony profitable for the London investors. Arriving off Cape Cod in November, before landing, the Pilgrim leaders sought to retain their authority over the settlers and unify them for the difficult tasks lying ahead by drawing up the Mayflower Compact.

Although the compact professed allegiance to the king of England, it was actually an extension of the Separatists' church covenant to matters of civil government. Since the Pilgrims who settled at Plymouth never managed to obtain a royal charter for their colony, the Mayflower

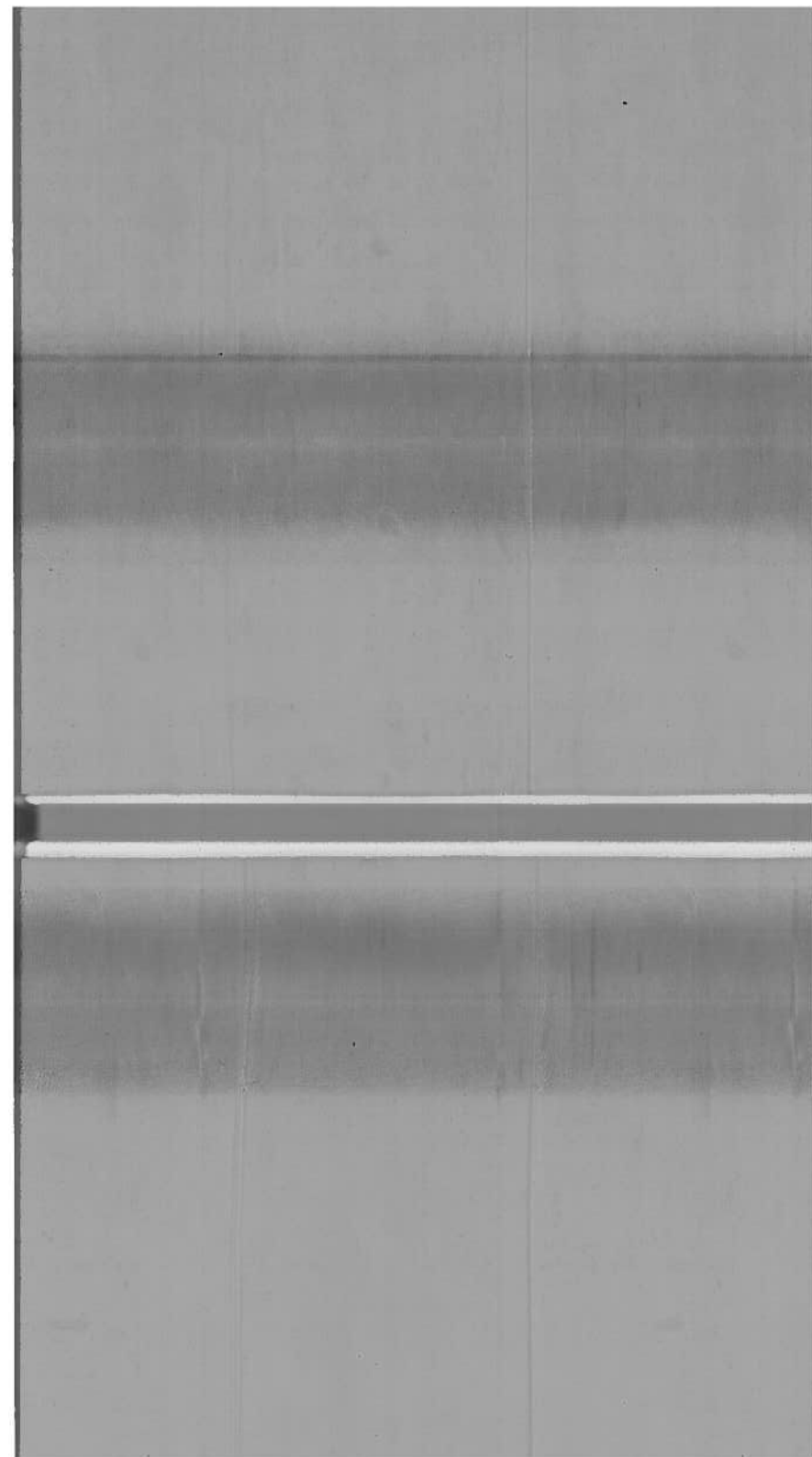
Compact itself served as their constitution until Plymouth was absorbed by Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1691.

In 1630 a much larger group of Puritan settlers arrived from England, with greater financial backing and full leeway to dispose of the lands they were claiming for themselves. Land distribution was in fact the major task of the magistrates of the General Court, the central legislative body of this new Massachusetts Bay Colony, together with adjudicating land disputes and bitter Indian warfare that necessarily followed the process of granting and settling land.

In the summer of 1636 some 30 families petitioned for lands to found the town of Dedham, in the immediate vicinity of the colonial capital, Boston. They began, as most Puritan communities did, with a "covenant" setting out the basic principles that would govern their lives together. The Dedham covenant is significant not because Dedham became especially important in Massachusetts Bay history, but because it illustrates both the pattern of covenanting and petitioning that would shape New England for the next century and the complicated mix of idealism and self-interest that characterized early Puritanism.

Questions to Consider. What objectives other than religious ones did the Pilgrims set forth in the Mayflower Compact? Examine the list of people who signed it. What does this list reveal about the representation of the 102 settlers, their status, and their view of women? What does the Compact tell you about the Pilgrims' belief in self-government? Why do you think the Pilgrims had not bothered to prepare some plan of governance long before their arrival or even before leaving Europe?

In the case of Dedham, to what extent did the settlers' covenant seem to focus on community goals as opposed to individual goals? Did the founders appear to welcome new settlers? If so, what kind? Did this covenant provide for direct democracy or representative government? Did it seem to assume that the town would control its own affairs? According to the Dedham covenant, what was the ultimate purpose of the founding of the new town?



Bradford's
Plymouth
Plantations



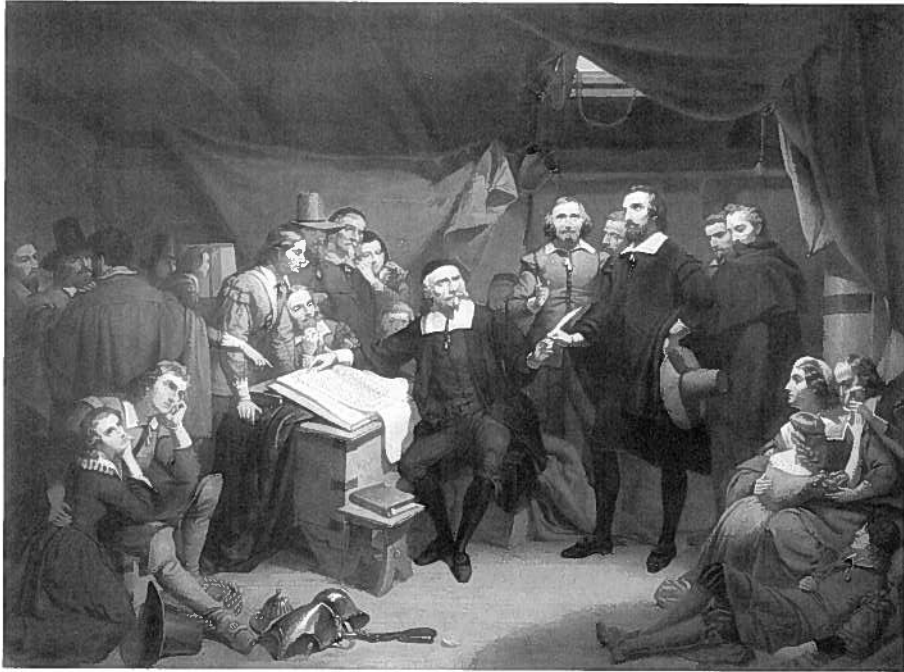
The Mayflower Compact (1620)

King James Version

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 Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c.* Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour 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 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 do 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 hereunto subscribed our names at *Cape Cod* the eleventh of *November*, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King *James* of *England, France, and Ireland*, the eighteenth and of *Scotland*, the fifty-fourth. *Anno Domini, 1620.*

Mr. John Carver
Mr. William Bradford
Mr. Edward Winslow
Mr. William Brewster
Isaac Allerton
Miles Standish
John Alden
John Turner
Francis Eaton
James Chilton
John Craxton
John Billington
Josias Fletcher
John Goodman
Mr. Samuel Fuller
Mr. Christopher Martin
Mr. William Mullins
Mr. William White
Mr. Richard Warren
John Howland

Mr. Stephen Hopkins
Digery Priest
Thomas Williams
Gilbert Winslow
Edmund Margesson
Peter Brown
Richard Bitteridge
George Soule
Edward Tilly
John Tilly
Francis Cooke
Thomas Rogers
Thomas Tinker
John Ridgate
Edward Fuller
Richard Clark
Richard Gardiner
Mr. John Allerton
Thomas English
Edward Doten
Edward Liester



Signing the Mayflower Compact. This nineteenth-century painting depicts the signing of the famous Compact as a solemn moment with light, presumably from God, flowing into the *Mayflower* just prior to landing. William Bradford offers the quill to other members of the voyage. The interior of the little ship and the passengers' raiment look neat and clean, which would hardly have been the case after so long and grueling a voyage. The dark edges of the picture highlight the lighting from above to give the central drama a feeling similar to the works of Rembrandt and other Dutch painters who inspired this picture. (Private Collection)



A Massachusetts Town Covenant (1636)

One: We whose names are hereunto subscribed do, in the fear and reverence of our Almighty God, mutually and severally promise amongst ourselves and to each other to profess and practice one truth according to that most perfect rule, the foundation whereof is everlasting love.

Two: That we shall by all means labor to keep off from us all such as are contrary minded, and receive only such unto us as may be probably of one heart with us, as that we either know or may well and truly be informed to

walk in a peaceable conversation with all meekness of spirit, for the edification of each other in the knowledge and faith of the Lord Jesus, and the mutual encouragement unto all temporal comforts in all things, seeking the good of each other, out of which may be derived true peace.

Three: That if at any time differences shall rise between parties of our said town, that then such party or parties shall presently refer all such differences unto some one, two, or three others of our said society, to be fully accorded and determined without any further delay, if it possibly may be.

Four: That every man that now, or at any time hereafter, shall have lots in our said town shall pay his share in all such rates money and charges as shall be imposed on him rateably in proportion with other men, as also become freely subject unto all such orders and constitutions as shall be necessarily had or made, now or at any time hereafter from this day forward, as well for loving and comfortable society in our said town as also for the prosperous and thriving condition of our said fellowship, especially respecting the fear of God, in which we desire to begin and continue whatsoever we shall by His loving favor take into hand. . . .