

Mayflower Compact (1620)

The following is a very careful letter-for-letter and line-by-line transcription made by me of the Mayflower Compact, as it is found in the original page of William Bradford's *History Of Plymouth Plantation*. Spelling and punctuation have not been modernized. The original from which this transcription was made can be seen in the graphic at the bottom of this page.

In y^e name of God Amen· We whose names are vnderwritten, the loyall subjects of our dread soueraigne Lord King James by y^e grace of God, of great Britaine, franc, & Ireland king, defender of y^e faith, &c

Haueing vndertaken, for y^e glorie of God, and aduancemente of y^e christian ^{faith} and honour of our king & countrie, a voyage to plant y^e first colonie in y^e Northerne parts of Virginia· doe by these presents solemnly & mutualy in y^e presence of God, and one of another, couenant, & combine our selues together into a ciuill body politick; for y^e our better ordering, & preseruacion & furtherance of y^e ends aforesaid; and by vertue hearof, to enacte, constitute, and frame such just & equall lawes, ordinances, Acts, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete & conuenient for y^e generall good of y^e colonie: vnto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witnes wherof we haue herevnder subscribed our names at Cap=Codd y^e ·11· of Nouember, in y^e year of y^e raigne of our soueraigne Lord king James of England, france, & Ireland y^e eighteenth and of Scotland y^e fiftie fourth. An^o: Dom ·1620·|

History behind the Mayflower Compact

The Mayflower Compact was signed on 11 November 1620 on board the *Mayflower*, which was at anchor in Provincetown Harbor. The document was drawn up in response to "mutinous speeches" that had come about because the Pilgrims had intended to settle in Northern Virginia, but the decision was made after arrival to instead settle in New England. Since there was no government in place, some felt they had no legal obligation to remain within the colony and supply their labor. The Mayflower Compact attempted to temporarily establish that government until a more official one could be drawn up in England that would give them the right to self-govern themselves in New England.

In a way, this was the first American Constitution, though the Compact in practical terms had little influence on subsequent American documents. John Quincy Adams, a descendant of *Mayflower* passenger John Alden, does call the Mayflower Compact the foundation of the U.S. Constitution in a speech given in 1802, but this was in principle more than in substance. In reality, the Mayflower Compact was superseded in authority by the 1621 Peirce Patent, which not only gave the Pilgrims the right to self-government at Plymouth, but had the significant advantage of being authorized by the King of England.

The Mayflower Compact was first published in 1622. William Bradford wrote a copy of the Mayflower Compact down in his *History Of Plymouth Plantation* which he wrote from 1630-1654, and that is the version given above. Neither version gave the names of the signers. Nathaniel Morton in his *New England's Memorial*, published in 1669, was the first to record and publish the names of the signers, and Thomas Prince in his *Chronological History of New England in the form of Annals* (1736) recorded the signers names as well, as did Thomas Hutchinson in 1767. It is unknown whether the later two authors had access to the original document, or whether they were simply copying Nathaniel Morton's list of signers.

The original Mayflower Compact has never been found, and is assumed destroyed. Thomas Prince may have had access to the original in 1736, and possibly Thomas Hutchinson did in 1767. If it indeed survived, it was likely a victim of Revolutionary War looting, along with other such Pilgrim valuables as Bradford's now lost *Register of Births and Deaths*, his partially recovered *Letterbook*, and his entirely recovered *History Of Plymouth Plantation*.

The term "Mayflower Compact" was not assigned to this document until 1793, when for the first time it is called the Compact in Alden Bradford's *A Topographical Description of Duxborough, in the County of Plymouth*. Previously it had been called "an association and agreement" (William Bradford), "combination" (Plymouth Colony Records), "solemn contract" (Thomas Prince, 1738), and "the covenant" (Rev. Charles Turner, 1774).