

The Mayflower Compact

The voyagers on the Mayflower were carried by wind and wave to a point — within the curve of the present Cape Cod — that was north of the Virginia Company's jurisdiction. Finding themselves thus outside the authority of their original patent, and hoping to arrest mutinous talk among some of the passengers, a compact was drawn up and signed by forty-one men aboard the ship, on November 11, 1620. By the terms of this, the so-called Mayflower Compact, the Pilgrims agreed to govern themselves until they could arrange for a charter of their own; they were never able to arrange for such a charter, and the Compact remained in force until their colony at Plymouth was absorbed in that of Massachusetts Bay in 1691. In fact, however, the Virginia Charter had been amended earlier in 1620 so as to allow for greater local autonomy, and had the Pilgrims landed at their original destination, they could still have formed their own government, as long as it was consonant with the laws of England. The original Compact has been lost, and historians are forced to rely for its wording on Mourt's Relation (1622), which is the earliest source of the text reprinted here. Source: The Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in New England, in 1620, etc., etc., George B. Cheever, ed., 2nd edition, New York, 1849, pp. 30-31.

This day, before we came to harbor, observing some not well affected to unity and concord, but gave some appearance of faction, it was thought good there should be an association and agreement that we should combine together in one body, and to submit to such government and governors as we should by common consent agree to make and choose, and set our hands to this that follows word for word.

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, etc.

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 present solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves 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, 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, Cape Cod, 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland 18, and of Scotland 54. Anno Domini 1620.