

Mayflower and the Mayflower Compact

The Journey

Would you have liked to travel on a small ship with more than 100 other people, all of their belongings, and possibly some farm animals – for 66 days? That’s what the Pilgrims did in the year 1620, on a ship called *Mayflower*.



Mayflower set sail from England in July 1620, but it had to turn back twice because *Speedwell*, the ship it was traveling with, leaked. After deciding to leave the leaky *Speedwell* behind, *Mayflower* finally got underway on September 6, 1620.

In the 1600s, the ocean was full of dangers. Ships could be attacked and taken over by pirates. Many ships in the 1600s were damaged or shipwrecked by storms. Passengers sometimes fell overboard and drowned or got sick and died.

Although *Mayflower* did not sink, a few of these things actually did happen! *Mayflower* wasn't taken over by pirates -- the ship sailed on a northern path across the Atlantic to avoid them -- but she *was* damaged by a bad storm halfway to America. The storm cracked one of the massive wooden beams supporting the frame of the ship. Fortunately, the passengers had brought along a “great iron screw,” which helped raise the beam back into place so the ship could continue. In another storm, a young passenger, John Howland, was swept off the deck of the ship and into the ocean! He was saved because he grabbed onto one of the ship’s ropes (or lines) and was pulled back onto the deck.

Although many people were seasick on the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, only one person died. He was a sailor who had been very mean to the passengers and taunted them about their seasickness. The colonists believed he died because God was punishing him for being cruel.

One baby was born during the journey. Elizabeth Hopkins gave birth to her first son, appropriately named Oceanus, on *Mayflower*. Another baby boy, Peregrine White, was born to Susanna White after *Mayflower* arrived in New England. It must have been very challenging to give birth on a moving ship, with so many people and so much seasickness around.

After more than two months (66 days) at sea, the Pilgrims finally arrived at Cape Cod on November 11, 1620. A few weeks later, they sailed up the coast to Plymouth and started to build their town where a group of Wampanoag People had lived before (a sickness had killed most of them). The Pilgrims lived on the ship for a few more months, rowing ashore to build houses during the day, and returning to the ship at night. Many people began to get sick from the cold and the wet; after all, it was December! About half the people on *Mayflower* died that first winter from what they described as a “general sickness” of colds, coughs and fevers.

Finally, in March 1621, there were enough houses that everyone could live on land. After a long, hard voyage, and an even harder winter, *Mayflower* left Plymouth to return to England on April 5, 1621.

Mayflower Compact

The 1620 agreement (first called the *Mayflower Compact* in 1793) was a legal instrument that bound the Pilgrims together when they arrived in New England. The core members of the Pilgrims' immigrant group were Separatists, members of a Puritan sect that had split from the Church of England, the only legal church in England at that time. Others in the group, however, had remained part of the Church of England, so not all of the Pilgrims shared the same religion.

When the Pilgrims left England, they obtained permission from the King of England to settle on land further to the south near the mouth of the Hudson River (in present-day New York). Because they chose to remain where they landed in New England, they needed a new permission (called a patent) to settle there. On November 11, 1620, needing to maintain order and establish a civil society while they waited for this new patent, the male passengers signed the *Mayflower Compact*.



In 1802, John Quincy Adams described the agreement as “the only instance in human history of that positive, original, social compact” and it is popularly believed to have influenced the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

The text of the *Mayflower Compact*:

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 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 of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together in 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 11th of November, 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 Domini 1620.

John Carver
William Bradford
Edward Winslow
William Brewster
Isaac Allerton
Miles Standish
John Alden
Samuel Fuller
Christopher Martin
William Mullins

Edward Tilly
John Tilly
Francis Cooke
Thomas Rogers
Thomas Tinker
John Rigdale
Edward Fuller
John Turner
Francis Eaton
James Chilton

Digery Priest
Thomas Williams
Gilbert Winslow
Edmund Margeson
Peter Brown
Richard Bitteridge
George Soule
Richard Clark
Richard Gardiner
John Allerton

