

# Plymouth Colony

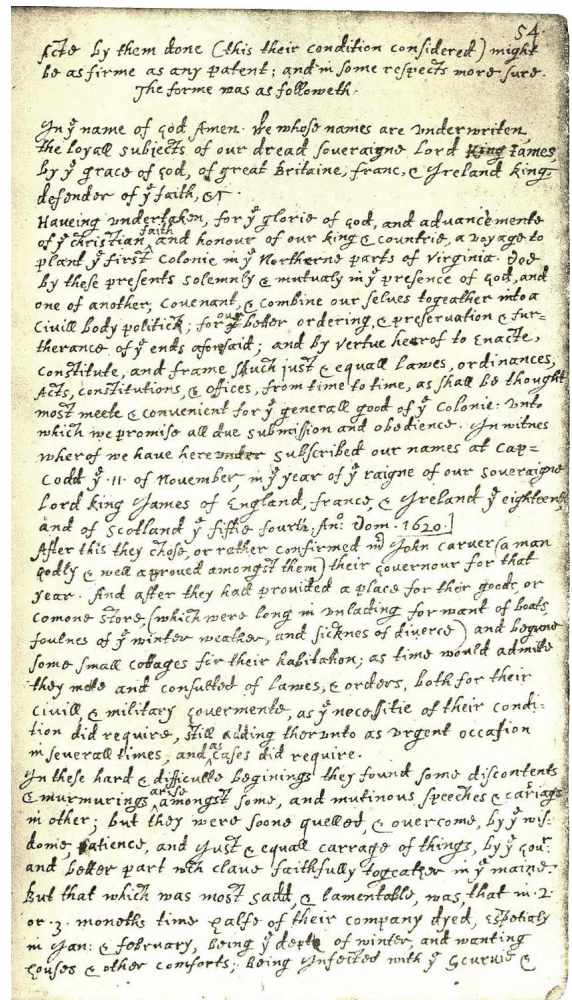
**B**y March 1621, the Pilgrims had settled into life in the New World. Despite the fact that they had come to this new land with no money and few possessions, they had started a successful town, which they called Plymouth Colony.

Before they left, the Pilgrims – called ‘Separatists’ at the time – had signed a contract with a company called the London Company. The contract said that they would settle in an area near the Hudson River, which is in present-day New York City. However, bad weather forced them to sail in a different direction, and they ended up landing in what’s now Massachusetts in November of 1620. Because the contract they had signed with the London Company only applied to the land around the Hudson River that they had meant to settle in, they were on their own! Since they had no government in their new settlement, they wrote the Mayflower Compact. The Mayflower Compact listed the rules that would be obeyed in the colony. This is one of the first known examples of a group of citizens working together to write their own laws.

However, Plymouth wasn’t an overnight success. They had arrived in the middle of winter, and the weather made it hard for them to start growing food or building houses. Most of the settlers continued to live on their ship until houses could be built. By spring, about half of the original settlers had died due to poor nutrition and lack of shelter.

Though Native Americans lived in the area, most of the Native Americans had died the year before the Pilgrims arrived after an illness swept through the region. In March of 1621, the settlers were surprised to meet Samoset, a local Native American. They were even more surprised to learn that he spoke English – he had learned it from fur traders that had passed through the region. Shortly after they met Massasoit, the leader of the local Wampanoag tribe, and also Squanto, who helped them plant crops and catch fish, and helped them communicate and make peace with the Wampanoag.

As families grew and more and more people began to join them in the New World, smaller communities began to pop up around the outskirts of the colony. Plymouth Colony remained independent for over 70 years before it became part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



Original Mayflower Compact



The Landing of the Pilgrims  
by Henry A. Bacon – 1877

# Write Your Own Compact!

In the Pilgrims' time, *compact* was another word for *contract*, which is a written agreement between people. Pick a group of friends or classmates and write up a list of rules you can all agree on. They don't have to be serious – you can agree to always show each other respect, or you can agree to always eat pizza together on Fridays! List the rules for you and your friends and have everyone sign it below.

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*Signatures*

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