



0. THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT - Story Preface

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**10. THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT**

Michele Felice Cornè created this painting, "Landing of the Pilgrims," based on an engraving by Sam Hill. From *Art in the White House*, by William Kloss, *et al*, we learn more: "The storm-tossed refugees are greeted by a number of incurious Indians rather than the desolate shore that actually awaited them. The Indians, decidedly not dressed for the winter season, stand on different levels of a high rocky bank that replaces the marshes of reality. Otherwise, the topography is generally correct, with Clark's Island in the distance, and Plymouth Rock in the foreground of the painting." (See Kloss, at page 53.)

The Pilgrims originally anchored at the northern end of Cape Cod (thus named by Bartholomew Gosnold, commander of the first landing of Englishmen in the "new world") near the area we know as Provincetown.

To survive, the small group would have to work together. To prevent continued "mutinous speeches," the men would have to agree to some form of law and authority. (Women, in the 17th century, were not part of such discussions.)

Following the guidance of John Robinson (the Separatists' pastor who had remained in Holland but whose farewell letter - in the sixth paragraph - suggests democratic government), the men essentially signed a contract based on English common law.

The ship's log states that on November 11th (on the Julian Calendar which is November 21st on the "New Style," Gregorian, calendar), before anyone left the Mayflower to find a suitable landing place, the men agreed how they would govern themselves:

*Meeting in main cabin of all adult male passengers except their two hired seamen, Trevore and Ely, and those too ill-to make and sign a mutual "Compact" to regulate their civil government. This done, they confirmed Master [John] Carver their "governour" in the ship on the voyage, their "governour" for the year.*

Forty-one men signed an agreement by which they would govern themselves. Their words tell us that these early colonists believed government is a covenant which derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed.

Known today as the *Mayflower Compact*, this first document of American democracy may have been drafted by William Brewster, the only university-educated Pilgrim. It would ultimately serve as the colony's governmental framework for more than 70 years. (In 1621, it was supplemented by the Pierce Patent which formally authorized the Pilgrims to live in New England [instead of Virginia] and to govern themselves there.)

After signing the agreement, Bradford, Standish and others searched for a suitable harbor and permanent landing spot, ultimately deciding on a place they called Plymouth (in honor of their last port of call) and which Captain John Smith had earlier named "Plimouth" (see the lower left side of Smith's map). Mrs. Bradford, however, never stepped foot on Plymouth Rock.

While her husband was looking for a good place to establish their new home, Dorothy Bradford (who, with the others, was still on board the *Mayflower*), accidentally died. The ship's log for December 17 (New Style):

*At anchor in Cape Cod harbor. This day Mistress Dorothy Bradford, wife of Master Bradford, who is away with the exploring party to the westward, fell over board and was drowned.*

William learned about his wife's death five days later, when "the exploration party returned to the ship."

Although illness, resulting in death, was surprisingly low during the crossing, such was not the case when the Pilgrims reached their new home. During the first harsh winter, they lost half their number.

Edward Winslow was the only Pilgrim besides Bradford to write about life in the "Plimoth Plantation." His account, *Good Newes from New England*, was first published in 1624.

The *Mayflower* returned to England in the spring of 1621. Her master died the following year and, by 1624, the *Mayflower* itself (which was made of wood) was rotting in the Thames. (A 1624 record, written in Latin from the High Court of Admiralty [HCA 3/30, folio 227], describes it "in ruins.")

A probate inventory, the last-known record of the ship, leads scholars to conclude she was likely broken up and sold as scrap. At the time, when English wood was in short supply, no one realized what an important role the old ship had played in the settlement of the new world.

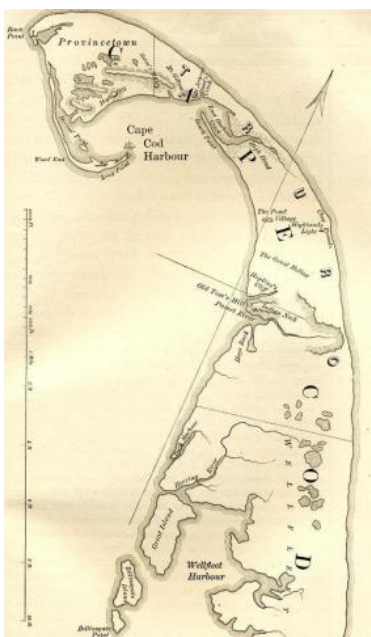
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-MAYFLOWER-COMPACT-Pilgrims-to-America-A-Pictorial-History>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-MAYFLOWER-COMPACT-Pilgrims-to-America-A-Pictorial-History>

## Media Stream



### Pilgrims - Cape Cod Harbor

Map, and quoted ship-log entry, from *The Mayflower and Her Log, Complete, July 15, 1620—May 6, 1621, Chiefly from Original Sources* (by Azel Ames, published 1907).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-Cape-Cod-Harbor>



### New England - Map of East Coast

Image online, courtesy the University of Texas, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/New-England-Map-of-East-Coast>



## Pilgrims - First Landing on Cape Cod

Painting by Dr. Mike Haywood.

Quoted passage, from Caleb Johnson.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-First-Landing-on-Cape-Cod>

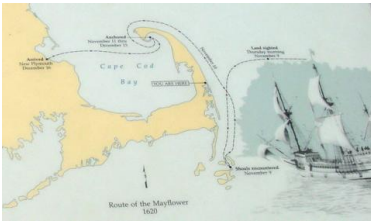


## Pilgrims - General Area of First Anchorage

Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-General-Area-of-First-Anchorage>



## Pilgrims - First Anchorage, Cape Cod

Image online, courtesy Northern Arizona University, Department of Geography, Planning and Recreation website.

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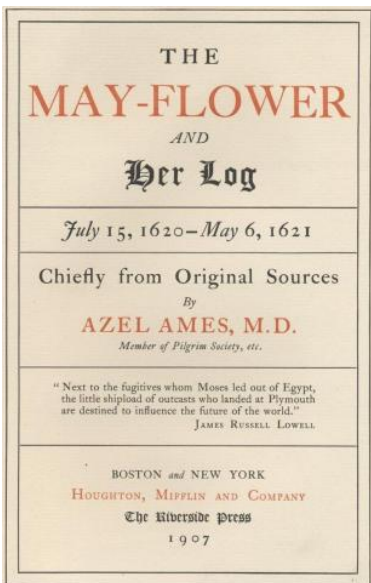


## Pilgrims - First Anchorage, Aerial View

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-First-Anchorage-Aerial-View>



## Mayflower - Ship's Log

Book-cover image online, courtesy Project Gutenberg.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mayflower-Ship-s-Log>



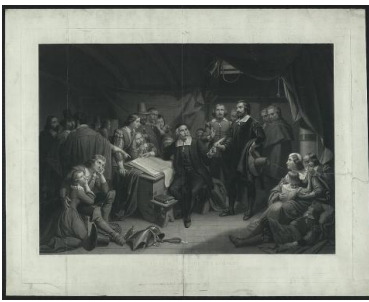
## Mayflower - Drawing of Pilgrim Ship

Illustration is from *The Mayflower and Her Log, Complete, July 15, 1620—May 6, 1621, Chiefly from Original Sources* (compiled by Azel Ames, published 1907).

Online, courtesy Project Gutenberg.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mayflower-Drawing-of-Pilgrim-Ship>

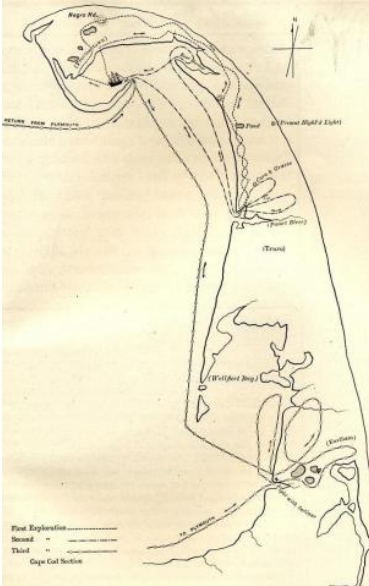


## Mayflower Compact - Signing the Document

Courtesy, Library of Congress. Image LC-USZ61-206.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Mayflower-Compact-Signing-the-Document>

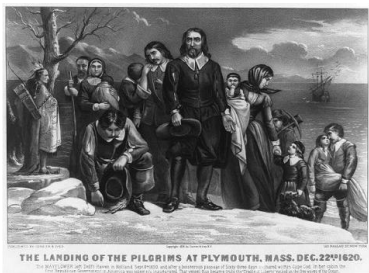


## Pilgrims - Searching for a Landing Place

Illustration from *The Mayflower and Her Log, Complete, July 15, 1620—May 6, 1621, Chiefly from Original Sources* (by Azel Ames, published 1907).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-Searching-for-a-Landing-Place>



## Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock - An Interpretation

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

Title: *The landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, Mass. Dec. 22nd 1620*, by Currier & Ives. LC-USZ62-3461.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pilgrims-at-Plymouth-Rock-An-Interpretation>

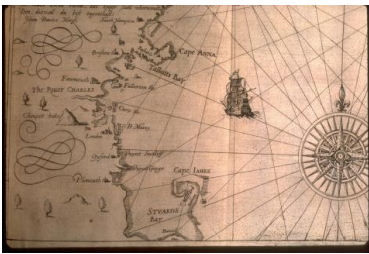


## Pilgrims in the Winter - John and Priscilla Alden

Courtesy, Library of Congress.

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## Plymouth - On John Smith's Map

U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plymouth-On-John-Smith-s-Map>



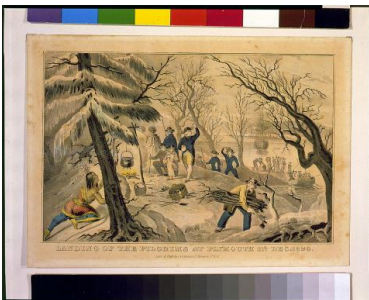
## Plymouth - Landing in America

Lithograph by Sarony & Major. "The landing of the Pilgrims, on Plymouth Rock, Dec. 11th 1620." c 1846.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

View this asset at:

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## Plymouth - Pilgrims Clearing Land

*Landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, 11th Dec. 1620.*

Lithograph by N. Currier.

Library of Congress, image LC-USZC4-3305.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plymouth-Pilgrims-Clearing-Land>



## Plymouth Rock - Today

Image depicting Plymouth Rock, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plymouth-Rock-Today>



## THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT

View this asset at:

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