

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 advancements of the Christian faith, and the honor 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 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, 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 hereunto 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, 1620.

BRADFORD: Having tried what Bradford called the “common course and condition”—the communal stewardship of the land demanded of them by their investors—Bradford reports that the community was afflicted by an unwillingness to work, by confusion and discontent, by a loss of mutual respect, and by a prevailing sense of slavery and injustice. And this among “godly and sober men.” In short, the experiment was a failure that was endangering the health of the colony.

At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number.

So the land they worked was converted into private property, which brought “very good success.” The colonists immediately became responsible for their own actions (and those of their immediate families), not for the actions of the whole community. Bradford also suggests in his history that more than land was privatized.