

This Day in History... September 16, 1620

The *Mayflower* Departs England for America

On September 16, 1620, the *Mayflower* left England. The Pilgrims braved rough seas and a harsh winter in search of religious freedom and founded the settlement of Plymouth.

The Pilgrims chartering the *Mayflower* were devout Christians who felt that only by breaking all ties with the Church of England could they retain their integrity before God. They sailed to Holland first, but after no improvement, they set sail for America.



Stamp pictures the Mayflower



The Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact aboard the ship on November 11, 1620.

The *Mayflower* first began its trip from London that July with about 65 passengers aboard, including hired hands, servants, and farmers. The 100-foot ship met up with the *Speedwell*, which had come from Holland with Pilgrims fleeing religious persecution. It soon became apparent the *Speedwell* was not seaworthy, and the ships had to turn back twice for repairs.

After a delay of more than a month, the *Mayflower* finally set sail alone on September 16. There were now 102 passengers, including some from the *Speedwell*, and a crew of 25-30. This was a particularly dangerous time to sail. It was known to be the season for strong western gales in the North Atlantic. Stormy seas slowed the voyage and the ship and its occupants didn't reach the waters of Massachusetts until November 11. Aboard their ship, 41 of the men signed the *Mayflower* Compact – an agreement to abide by the rules of the majority “for the good of the colony.”



After signing the Mayflower Compact the Pilgrims briefly went ashore at Cape Cod.



In December, the Pilgrims sailed across Cape Cod Bay to Plymouth.

The crew tried to sail down the coast to the Virginia Colony, their original destination, but the winter seas wouldn't allow it. The Pilgrims spent about a month collecting firewood and scouting for a place to build a settlement. Around December 10 they found a spot they liked and returned to the *Mayflower*. The Pilgrims then sailed the ship to Plymouth Harbor and came ashore on December 21, a date observed in Massachusetts as Forefathers' Day.

The Pilgrims immediately began building up their settlement, completing the first house by January 19. All single men were instructed to join families so they could limit the number of houses they needed to build. The first completed house became the hospital and the settlement was nearly complete by early February. However, the harsh winter and disease had taken a toll on the colonists, only 47 people remained.

In April 1621, Christopher Jones, captain of the *Mayflower* and his remaining crew returned to England, traveling over milder seas than on the first voyage. The final fate of the famous ship is unknown, but some historians claim the beams were used to construct a barn known as the “Mayflower Barn,” located in England. Today, tourists come from around the world to visit the location.



Stamp issued for the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower departing England.

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