

# The Founding of America

Commissioned by Spain to find a direct sea route to the Far East, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus embarked on a voyage that he hoped would lead him to the exotic lands of Asia. However, on October 12, 1492, after nearly four months at sea, two worlds unknown to each other met for the first time on a small island in the Caribbean Sea. Columbus' arrival in America had a profound impact on the world. His explorations led directly to the opening of the western hemisphere to European colonization.



Christopher Columbus, Sebastian del Piombo, Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Columbus taking possession of the new country, L. Prang & Co. (1893), Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Over a century after Columbus' arrival, the first permanent European settlement in America was established near the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. In 1607, English colonizers belonging to the Virginia Company of London erected *Jamestown* as a charter from the King of England. Unfortunately, the settlers could not adapt to frontier conditions and support themselves from the land. Although most of the early inhabitants perished from disease or starvation, the colony somehow survived.



The Mayflower, N.C. Wyeth (1927), Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The foundation of *New Plymouth Colony* was one of the most significant events in the early history of the American colonies. In 1620, one of the sects of Puritans known as Brownists separated

from the Protestant Church of England, and after much persecution, decided to immigrate to the "new world." The journey aboard the *Mayflower* was treacherous and grueling. For the pilgrims on the ship, America's shores offered freedom of worship and protection from tyranny. To ensure that individual rights would not be violated as they had been in England, the settlers signed a general agreement called the *Mayflower Compact*. This document created the first legal framework for enacting and enforcing laws for the general good and benefit of the colony.

