

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910963967803321
Titolo	Colonial origins of the American Constitution : a documentary history / / edited and with an introductory essay by Donald S. Lutz
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Indianapolis, IN, : Liberty Fund, c1998
ISBN	1-61487-826-9
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (441 p.)
Altri autori (Persone)	LutzDonald S
Disciplina	342.73/029
Soggetti	Constitutional history - United States Constitutional history - United States - States
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. 395-396).
Nota di contenuto	""Title Page ""; ""Copyright Details ""; ""Table of Contents, p. v ""; ""Preface, p. xv ""; ""Introductory Essay, p. xx ""; ""Colonial Origins of the American Constitution ""; ""1. [Agreement of the Settlers at Exeter in New Hampshire], p. 3 ""; ""2. General Laws and Liberties of New Hampshire, p. 5 ""; ""3. [Agreement Between the Settlers at New Plymouth] (The Mayflower Compact), p. 31 ""; ""4. [Plymouth Oath of Allegiance and Fidelity], p. 33 ""; ""5. [The Salem Covenant of 1629], p. 35 ""; ""6. [Agreement of the Massachusetts Bay Company at Cambridge, England], p. 36 "" ""7. [The Watertown Covenant of July 30, 1960], p. 38 """"8. [Massachusetts Election Agreement], p. 40 ""; ""9. The Oath of a Freeman, or of a Man to Be Made Free, p. 41 ""; ""10. [The Massachusetts Agreement on the Legislature], p. 43 ""; ""11. [Cambridge Agreement], p. 45 ""; ""12. [Dorchester Agreement], p. 46 ""; ""13. [Cambridge Agreement on a Town Council], p. 48 ""; ""14. [Massachusetts Agreement on the Legislature], p. 50 ""; ""15. The Oath of a Freeman, p. 52 ""; ""16. [Salem Oath for Residents], p. 54 ""; ""17. [Watertown Agreement on Civil Officers], p. 56 "" ""18. [The Enlarged Salem Covenant of 1636], p. 57 """"19. [Plymouth Agreement], p. 60 ""; ""20. [Pilgrim Code of Law], p. 61 ""; ""21. [Dedham Covenant], p. 68 ""; ""22. [The Massachusetts Body of Liberties], p. 70 ""; ""23. [The Combination of the Inhabitants upon the Piscataqua River for Government], p. 88 ""; ""24. [Massachusetts

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Sommario/riassunto

"Local government in colonial America was the seedbed of American constitutionalism." So begins the introductory essay to this landmark collection of eighty documents created by the American colonists--and not English officials--that are the genesis of American fundamental law and constitutionalism. Most of these documents, commencing with the Agreement of the Settlers at Exeter in New Hampshire, July 5, 1639, and concluding with Joseph Galloway's Plan of Union, 1774--"the immediate precursor to the Articles of Confederation"--have never before been accessible to the general reader or available in a single volume. As Professor Lutz points out, the documents are chosen to make possible "a careful examination of the American] people's attempt at self-interpretation." All of the principal colonial documents are included, as are all documents attempting to unite the colonies, beginning with the New England Confederation of 1643. Bicameralism, popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, checks and balances, limited government, and religious freedom--in sum, the hallmarks of American constitutionalism--were first presented to the world in these writings. Donald S. Lutz is Professor of Political Science at the University of Houston.
