

# 1 The English Colonies



**T**hirteen in All The United States began as a group of 13 English colonies. These 13 colonies did not start up all at once. It took a long time for the colonies to be settled. The first colony was begun in 1607, and the last started in 1733.

The first settlers came here from England. All that the colonists had was what they had brought with them. When they arrived, they had no family or friends to greet them. There were no houses to live in and no towns or cities. Sometimes the Native Americans welcomed the settlers. But often the Indians weren't glad to see newcomers arrive, and certainly they weren't happy to have newcomers take their land.

The first settlers lived in tents. Some even lived in caves. Their living conditions were very harsh, especially during the winter. Many of them died of hunger, cold, or disease.

Even though life in the new colonies could be very hard, most of the colonists did not return to England. They started a new life here. Why did they stay?

## Why the Colonists Stayed

Early settlers had different reasons for coming to America and staying here.

Some stayed because they had been very poor in their homeland. In England and other countries, there were often not enough jobs. The new colonies needed plenty of workers, and there was enough land for everyone who wanted to stay.

Some colonists stayed because they thought they could get rich in America.

*The first English settlers were brave people who hoped to find a new life in the colonies.*



Some hoped to find gold and silver in the ground. Some hoped that farming would make them rich.

Other colonists stayed because in England they had not been allowed to worship God as they thought they should. For these colonists, living in a land where they could have religious freedom was important.

Not everyone who crossed the Atlantic Ocean found opportunity and freedom. Some people were forced to come. They would never become free.

These people were from Africa. They did not choose to come to America. They had never heard of America. They had been kidnapped from their homes and brought to the Americas as slaves.

### The New England Colonies

Look at the map of “The Thirteen Colonies.” Do you see that the colonies are divided into three groups? These three groups are called **regions**.

First, let’s look at the colonies in the northern region. They are the New England colonies. These colonies are Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. (Once, there was also a New England colony called Plymouth, which you will read about, but it later became part of Massachusetts.)

In New England, the winters are long and cold.

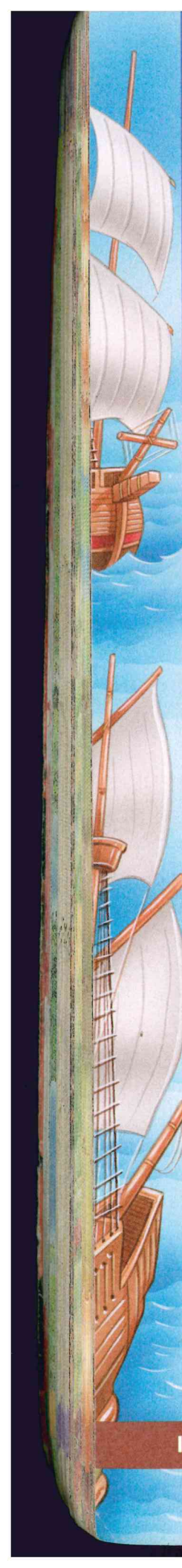
**vocabulary**  
**region** an area whose landscape, climate, soil, and way of life make it different from other areas



*The English colonies were divided into three regions.*

The soil is rocky. It was hard for colonists to grow crops there because the season for growing crops is so short and the soil so poor.

Usually New England settlers could grow only enough vegetables and grains to feed their own families. They could not grow extra food to sell to other people.



The New England region has a long coastline with many natural

**harbors.** There were many forests in the region when the colonists arrived. Fish were plentiful in the rivers and the coastal waters.

Before long, the settlers were cutting down trees for timber. They used the timber to build ships, houses, and other buildings, as well as for firewood. As the colonies grew, trading ships sailed in and out of busy New England harbors carrying timber and fish to faraway places.

### **The Middle Colonies**

Now look at the middle of the map. The colonies in this region are called the middle colonies. They are New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

Winters in the middle colonies are not as long and cold as winters in the New England colonies. Warm and rainy summers and fertile soil helped these colonists' crops grow well. Settlers in the middle colonies could grow enough food to feed themselves and have crops left over to sell.

The middle colonies were nicknamed "the bread colonies." Can you tell why? It was because a lot of wheat was grown there, and wheat is used to make bread.

Not only did the settlers in the middle colonies have good land for farming. They also had a good coastline for fishing and good ports for ships.

### **vocabulary**

**harbor** a place where ships can land easily and safely

### **The Southern Colonies**

Finally, let's move down to the southern region. The colonies here were Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

The southern colonies were perfect for farming because of their mild winters and fertile soil. Crops grew so well that some colonists built large farms called plantations. Many plantations grew large amounts of a single crop, and grew the crop only to sell.

### **Port Cities**

As more people from England and other countries in Europe came to America, the colonists built towns. Little by little, the towns grew into cities. Have you heard of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston?

These cities became known as port cities because they were built along waterways or at a harbor on the coast. The colonists used waterways for transportation. Boston was built on a bay in the Atlantic Ocean that provides a good harbor. New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were all built on rivers flowing into the Atlantic. Let's look at these four cities on the map of "The Thirteen Colonies."

First, find Boston in the New England colony of Massachusetts. Boston lies on land that is surrounded on three sides by water. This makes Boston a big seaport. Ships sailed to England and the West Indies in the Caribbean Sea.

Next, find New York City on the map. It is in the middle colony of New York.

The rivers surrounding New York form a natural harbor protected by land. The harbor keeps ships safe from storms.

### **Centers of Trade**

All these port cities became centers for trade. They also became centers for new ideas. Ships traveling between the port cities kept the colonies in touch with one another and with the rest of the world.

New ideas spread from the port cities throughout the colonies. One of the ideas was that the colonies could govern themselves. When you learn about the American Revolution, you will read about how the colonists broke away from England and its king.

Now find Philadelphia, which was also built along a river. Look at the map of "The Thirteen Colonies." What river is Philadelphia on? If you say the Delaware River, you are right.

Trace the Delaware River with your finger. Do you see how the river flows into the Atlantic Ocean? A ship could sail from Philadelphia down the Delaware River and across the Atlantic Ocean to England.

Philadelphia became the busiest port city in the American colonies. It also became the largest and wealthiest city in the colonies.

Finally, find Charleston on the map. It is in the southern colony of South Carolina. It is also a place where several rivers flow into the sea and where ships can safely land. Charleston was the only big city in the southern colonies.

*Boston was a busy port city as many ships sailed into Boston Harbor.*

