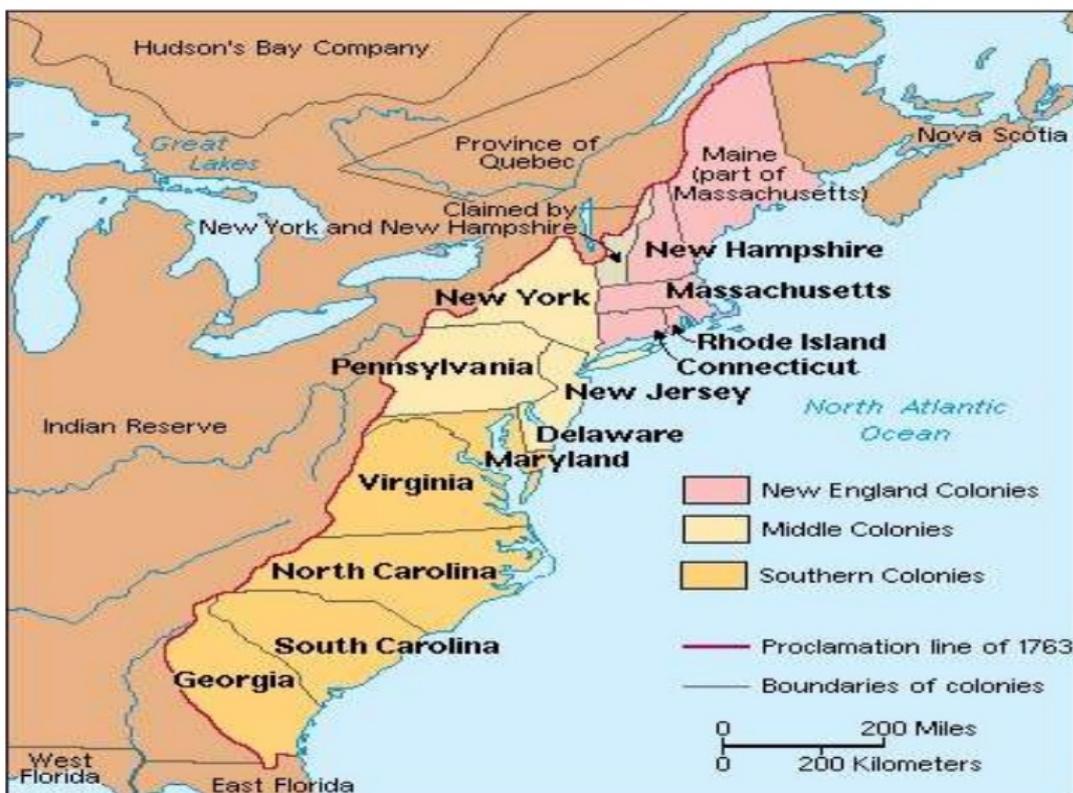




Colonial Life in America

By the year 1733 the English owned thirteen separate colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America. The colonies stretched from New Hampshire in the north to Georgia in the south. Most people divided them into three main groups. Each group had its own way of life and character.



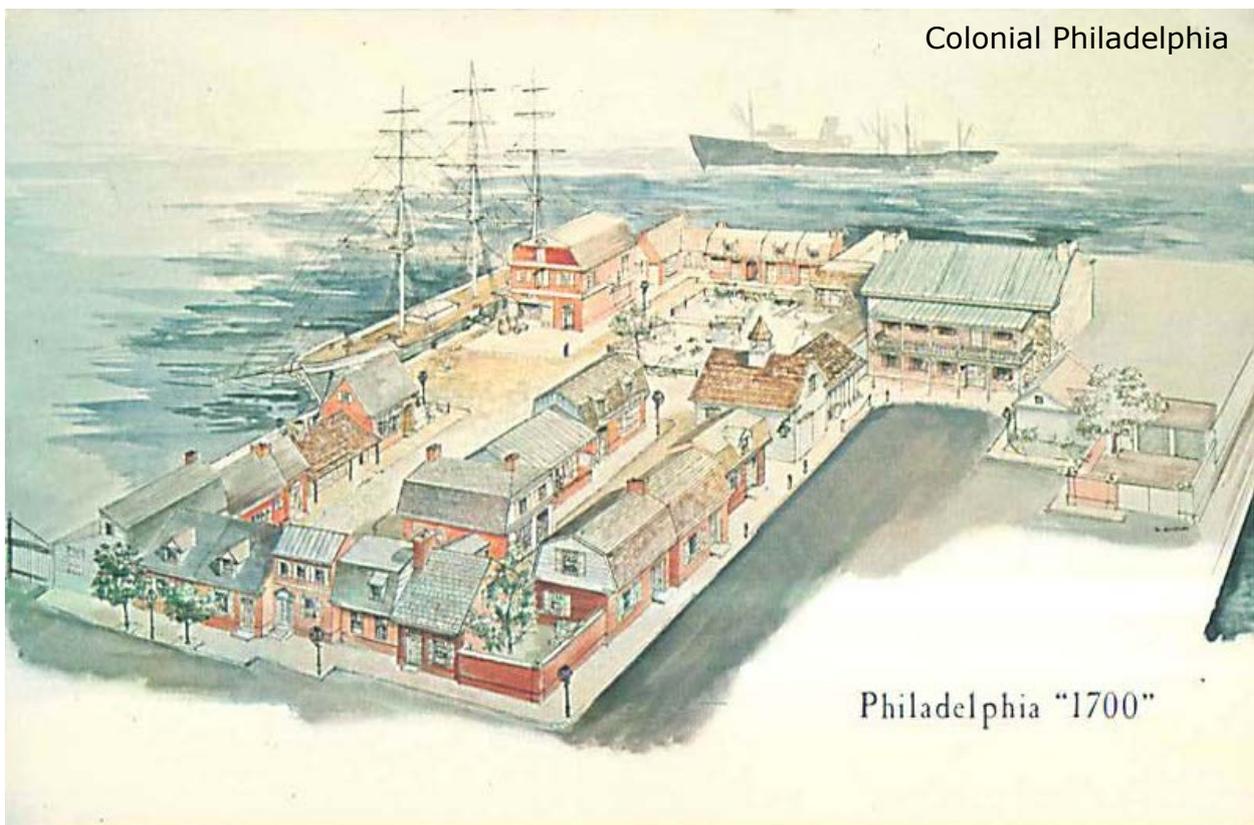
In the far north was the New England group, centered on Massachusetts. Since the time of the Pilgrims the people of New England had spread inland and along the coast. Most were small farmers or craftsmen, working the stony soil and governing themselves in small towns and villages.

Other New Englanders depended on the sea for a living. They felled the trees of the region's forests to build ships. In these they sailed to catch cod or to trade with England and the West Indies. Boston and other coastal towns grew into busy ports. Their prosperity depended on trade.

The nearest colonies to the south of New England were called the Middle Colonies. The biggest were New York and Pennsylvania. As in New England, most of their people lived by farming. But in the cities of New York and Philadelphia there were growing numbers of craftsmen and merchants. Philadelphia was the capital of Pennsylvania. By 1770 it was the largest city in America, with 28,000 inhabitants.



Colonial Boston

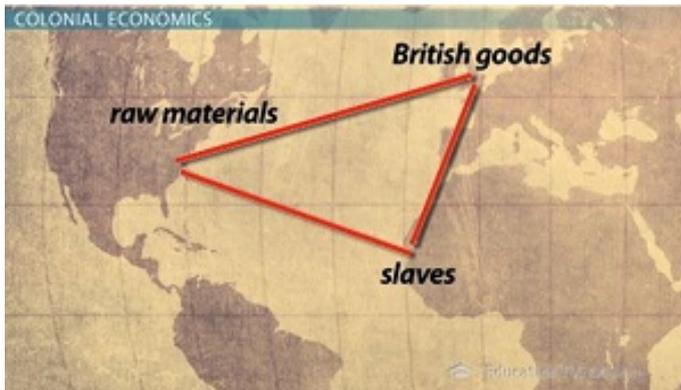


Colonial Philadelphia

Philadelphia "1700"

The people of the Middle Colonies were usually more tolerant of religious and other differences than the New Englanders. Many of them also had German, Dutch or Swedish ancestors rather than English ones.

The Southern Colonies of Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia formed the third group. In their hot and fertile river valleys wealthy landowners farmed large plantations. They lived in fine houses, with wide, cool verandahs from which they could look out over their fields of tobacco or cotton. Most of the work in the fields was done by black slaves. Slavery was



rare in the other American colonies. But the prosperity of the plantation-owning southerners was already beginning to depend upon it.

The houses of the southern plantation owners had expensive furniture, much of it imported from Europe. Close by stood groups of smaller, more simple buildings — stables, washhouses,

blacksmiths' shops and the little huts in which the black slaves lived. And almost always a river flowed nearby, with a wharf where sea-going ships could be loaded to carry the plantation's crops to England.

Cities and trade

In 1760 most Americans were farmers. But important towns had grown up whose people earned their living by trade and manufacturing. Philadelphia, with its 28,000 inhabitants, was the largest. An English visitor marveled at the speed with which it had grown. "It is not a hundred years since the first tree was cut where the city now stands," he wrote, "and now it has more than three thousand six hundred houses."

The size of Philadelphia was not the only thing that impressed visitors. Long before most English cities, its streets were paved with brick and street lamps were lit every night. The only exception to this was when the moon was shining, for the citizens of Philadelphia did not believe in wasting money!

The next biggest cities after Philadelphia were New York and Boston, with about 25,000 people each. All three towns owed much of their prosperity to the profits of the transatlantic trade that they carried on with England. Their ships exported furs, timber, tobacco, and cotton, and brought back fashionable clothes, fine furniture, and other manufactured goods. Their merchants also traded with one another.

This inter-American trade helped to produce a feeling between the cities that they all belonged to the same American nation.

In all three groups of colonies most people still lived less than fifty miles from the coast. This was called “the tidewater” period of settlement. Those people furthest inland had traveled up tidal rivers like the James and the Hudson, clearing the trees and setting up farms along their banks.

During the fifty years after 1733 settlers moved deeper into the continent. They traveled west into central Pennsylvania, cutting down forests of oak trees to make hilly farms. They spread westward along the river valleys in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. They moved north along the fertile valley of the Mohawk River of New York.



Making a new settlement always began in the same way. The settlers

cleared the land of trees, then cut the trees into logs and planks. They used these to build a house and a barn. They then ploughed between the tree stumps, sowed their seeds, and four months later harvested the crops of corn and wheat. If their soil was fertile the settlers lived well. But if the soil was rocky, or poor in plant foods, life could be hard and disappointing. Settlers with poor soil often left their farms and moved westward, to try again on more fertile land. As they traveled inland they passed fewer and fewer farms and villages. At last there were none at all. This area, where European settlement came to an end and the forest homelands of the Amerindians began, was called the frontier.

Fresh waves of settlers pushed the frontier steadily westwards in their search for fertile soil. They would often pass by land that seemed unsuitable for farming. Because of this, frontier farms and villages were often separated by miles of unsettled land. A family might be a day’s journey from its nearest neighbors. For such reasons the people of frontier communities had to rely upon themselves for almost everything they needed. They grew their own food and built their own houses. They made the clothing they wore and the tools they used. They developed their own kinds of music, entertainment, art and forms of religious worship.

A special spirit, or attitude, grew out of this frontier way of life. People needed to be tough, independent and self-reliant. Yet they also needed to work together, helping each other with such tasks as clearing land and building houses and barns. The combination of these two ideas — a strong belief that individuals had to help themselves and a need for them to cooperate with one another — strengthened the feeling that people were equal and that nobody should have special rights and privileges.

The frontier way of life helped democratic ideas to flourish in America. Today's Americans like to think that many of the best values and attitudes of the modern United States can be traced back to the frontier experiences of their pioneer ancestors.



Daniel Boone

Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road

In the 1760s land-hungry American settlers moving westwards were stopped by a major obstacle, the Appalachian Mountains. This thickly forested mountain range runs roughly parallel to the Atlantic coast of North America and stretches for hundreds of miles.

When settlers reached the foothills of the Appalachians they found waterfalls and rapids blocking the rivers they had been following westwards. In 1775 a hunter and explorer named Daniel Boone led a party of settlers into the mountains. Boone is said to have claimed that he had

been “ordained by God to settle the wilderness.” With a party of thirty axmen he cut a track called the Wilderness Road through the forested Cumberland Gap, a natural pass in the Appalachians.

Beyond the Cumberland Gap lay rich, rolling grasslands. In the years which followed, Boone's Wilderness Road enabled thousands of settlers to move with horses, wagons, and cattle into these fertile lands. They now make up the American states of Kentucky and Tennessee.

Governors and assemblies

All the English colonies in America shared a tradition of representative government. This means that in all of them people had a say in how they were governed. Each colony had its own government. At the head of this government was a governor, chosen in most cases by the English king. To rule effectively, these governors depended upon the cooperation of assemblies elected by the colonists.

In most of the colonies all white males who owned some land had the right to vote. Since so many colonists owned land, this meant that far more people had the vote in America than in England itself — or in any other European country at this time.

*Source of the text: An Illustrated History Of The USA (Bryn O'Callaghan)
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