

Settlements in the New World

Overview of Early Settlements:

The early 1600s saw the beginning of a great tide of emigration from Europe to North America. Spanning more than three centuries, this movement grew from a few hundred English colonists to a flood of millions of newcomers. Led by powerful and diverse motivations, **they built a new civilization on the northern part of the continent.**

The first English immigrants to what is now the United States crossed the Atlantic long after Spanish colonies had been established in Mexico, the West Indies and South America. **Like all early travelers to the New World, they came in small, overcrowded ships.** During their six- to 12-week voyages, many died of disease or hunger; ships were often battered by storms and some were lost at sea.

The Reason for Settlements to the New World:

Most European emigrants left their homelands to escape political oppression, to seek the freedom to practice their religion, or for adventure and opportunities denied them at home. Between 1620 and 1635, economic difficulties swept England. Many people could not find work. Poor crop yields added to the distress. The first settlers who arrived to the dense woods of the new land might not have survived without the help of friendly Indians, who taught them how to grow native plants -- pumpkin, squash, beans and corn. In addition, the vast, virgin forests, extending nearly 2,100 kilometers along the Eastern seaboard provided abundant raw materials used to build houses, furniture, ships and profitable cargoes for export and import. For the first hundred years the colonists built their settlements compactly along the coast. **Political considerations influenced many people to move to America.** In the 1630s, arbitrary rule by England's **Charles I** gave reason to the migration to the New World. In the German-speaking regions of Europe, the oppressive policies of various princes -- particularly with regard to religion -- and the devastation caused by the long wars helped swell the movement to America in the late 17th and 18th centuries.

The coming of colonists in the 17th century required careful planning and management, as well as considerable expense and risk. Settlers had to be transported nearly 5,000 kilometers across the sea. They needed clothing, seed, tools, building materials, livestock, arms and ammunition. In contrast to the colonization policies of other countries and other periods, the emigration from England was not directly sponsored by the government but by private groups of individuals whose chief motive was profit.

The Founders:

The people who established the colonies are considered founders rather than immigrants because they created the customs, laws and institutions to which later arrivals (the first immigrants) had to adjust. The Spanish occupied coastal Florida, the south-west and California in the 1500s and 1600s. After trying to enslave the natives, they worked to convert them to Christianity, farming and sheep-herding. Because many natives rejected this way of life, the Spanish colonies faced border attacks for over 200 years.



The English established their first permanent settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Their monarch had no desire to rule distant colonies, so instead the Crown legalized companies that undertook the colonization of America as private commercial enterprises. Virginia's early residents were so preoccupied with a vain search for gold and a sea passage to Asian markets that the colony floundered until tobacco provided a profitable export. Because of the scarcity of plantation labor, in 1619 the first African laborers were imported as indentured

servants (free people who contracted for 5 to 7 years of servitude). Supported by tobacco profits, however, Virginia imported 1,500 free laborers a year by the 1680s and had a population of 75,000 white Americans and 10,000 African in hereditary slavery by 1700.

In the 1630s, **Lord Baltimore established Maryland as a haven for Catholics**, England's most persecuted minority. Maryland's leadership remained Catholics for some time, but its economy and population soon resembled Virginia's. In the 1660s, other English aristocrats financed Georgia and the Carolinas as commercial investments and experiments in social organization. Within a generation, these colonies too resembled Virginia, but their cash crops were rice and indigo. The southern settlers warred with the natives within a few years of their arrival and by the 1830s drove the Native Americans from today's South.

To escape the religious oppression in England, the Pilgrims, a small group of radical separatists from the Church of England, founded the first of the northern colonies in 1620 at Plymouth, Massachusetts. The Puritans, who established the much larger Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630s, wanted to purify the Church of England, not separate from it. **Mostly well-educated middle-class people in America believed they could create a 'city on a hill' to show how English society could be reformed.** To that end, over 20,000 emigrated in around ten years. By the latter 1600s, the bay colony had expanded to the coast of present-day Maine, swallowed up Plymouth, and spawned the colony of Connecticut. Flourishing through agriculture and forestry, the New England colonies also became the shippers and merchants for all British America. Because of their intolerance towards dissenters, the Puritans' New England became the most homogeneous region in the colonies.

The founding of the middle colonies (New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) was different. The earliest European communities here were Dutch and Swedish outposts of the fur trade that almost accidentally grew into colonies. New Netherlands, along the Hudson River and New York Bay, and New Sweden, along the Delaware River, recruited soldiers, farmers, craftsmen, clergymen and their families to meet the need of the fur traders who bought pelts from the natives. New Sweden lasted only from 1638 to 1655, when the Dutch annexed it. New Netherlands itself fell to the English fleet in 1664. The Dutch maintained their culture in rural New York and New Jersey for over 200 years. They also set the precedent of tolerant for many ethnic, racial and religious groups in New Amsterdam. **Before it became New York, the city had white, red, brown, and black inhabitants, institutions for Catholics, Jews and Protestants, and a diversity that resulted in eighteen different languages being spoken.** Although the dominant culture in colonial New York and New Jersey became English by the end of the 1600s, the English authorities continued the tolerant traditions of the Dutch in the city.

Pennsylvania's founders were Quakers who flocked to the colony after Charles II granted the area to William Penn in 1681 as a religious refuge. As with the Pilgrims and Puritans, official English tolerance took the form of allowing persecuted minorities to emigrate. Penn's publicizing of cheap land and religious freedom brought some 12,000 people to the colony before 1690. His toleration attracted a population whose diversity was watched only by New York's.



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References:

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