

IV/ 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.

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.

Jamestown

The first of the British colonies to take hold in North America was Jamestown. On the basis of a charter which King James I granted to the Virginia (or London) Company, a group of about 100 men set out for the Chesapeake Bay in 1607. Seeking to avoid conflict with the Spanish, they chose a site about 60 kilometers up the James River from the bay.

Made up of townsmen and adventurers more interested in finding gold than farming, the group was not ready for a completely new life in the wilderness. Among them, Captain John Smith was the dominant figure. Despite conflicts, starvation and Indian attacks, he was able to enforce discipline which held the little colony together through its first year.

In 1609 Smith returned to England, and in his absence, the colony descended into anarchy. During the winter of 1609-1610, the majority of the colonists succumbed to disease. Only 60 of the original 300 settlers were still alive by May 1610.

However, a development occurred and revolutionized Virginia's economy. In 1612 John Rolfe produced a new variety of tobacco that was pleasing to European taste. The first shipment of this tobacco reached London in 1614. Within a decade it had become Virginia's chief source of money.

Prosperity did not come quickly, however, and the death rate from disease and Indian attacks remained extraordinarily high. Between 1607 and 1624 approximately 14,000 people migrated to the colony, yet only 1,132 were living there in 1624. On recommendation of a royal commission, the king dissolved the Virginia Company, and made it a royal colony that year.

Massachusetts

During the religious upheavals of the 16th century, a body of men and women called Puritans sought to reform the Established Church of England from within. They demanded that Roman Catholicism be replaced

by simpler Protestant forms of faith and worship. Their reformist ideas, by destroying the unity of the state church, threatened to divide the people and to undermine royal authority.

In 1607 a small group of Puritans who did not believe the Established Church could ever be reformed – departed for Holland, where the Dutch granted them asylum. However, the Dutch restricted them mainly to low-paid laboring jobs. Some members of the congregation grew dissatisfied with this discrimination and decided to emigrate to the New World. So, In 1620 they secured a land patent from the Virginia Company, and a group of 101 men, women and children set out for Virginia on board the *Mayflower*. A storm sent them far north and they landed in New England on Cape Cod. Believing themselves outside the rule of any organized government, the men wrote a formal agreement to abide by "just and equal laws", this was the Mayflower Compact.

The Pilgrims began to build their settlement during the winter. Nearly half the colonists died of hunger and disease, but neighboring Indians showed them: how to grow maize. By the next fall, the Pilgrims had a plentiful crop of corn, and a growing trade based on furs and lumber.

A new wave of immigrants arrived on the shores of Massachusetts Bay in 1630 bearing a grant from King Charles I to establish a colony. Many of them were Puritans whose religious practices were also prohibited in England. Their leader, John Winthrop decided to create a "city upon a hill" in the New World. By this he meant a place where Puritans would live in strict accordance with their religious beliefs.

Massachusetts was to play a significant role in the development of the entire New England region, in part because Winthrop and his Puritan colleagues were able to bring their charter with them. Thus, the authority for the colony's government resided in Massachusetts, not in England.

Under the charter's provisions, power was given to the General Court, which was made up of members of the Puritan Church. This meant that the Puritans would be the dominant political as well as religious force in the colony. It was the General Court which elected the governor. For most of the next generation, this would be John Winthrop.

The rigid orthodoxy of the Puritan rule was not liked by everyone in the colony. One of the first to challenge the General Court openly was a young clergyman named Roger Williams. Banished from Massachusetts Bay, he purchased land from the Indians in what is now Providence, Rhode Island, in 1636. There he set up the first American colony where complete separation of church and state as well as freedom of religion was practiced.

Williams was not the only one who left Massachusetts. Puritans, seeking better lands and opportunities, soon began leaving Massachusetts Bay Colony. News of the fertility of the Connecticut River Valley, for instance, attracted the interest of farmers having difficulties with poor land. By the early 1630s, these new communities often eliminated church membership as a condition for voting, thereby extending the right to vote to larger numbers of men. At the same time, other settlements were established along the New Hampshire and Maine coasts, as more and more immigrants sought the land and liberty the New World seemed to offer.

New Netherland and Maryland

Hired by a Dutch company, Henry Hudson in 1609 explored the area around what is now New York City and the river that bears his name, to a point probably north of Albany, New York. Subsequent Dutch voyages laid the basis for their claims and early settlements in the area. The first interest of the Dutch was the fur trade. So, the Dutch cultivated good relations with the Iroquois who were the key to the heartland from which the furs came.

Settlement on the island of Manhattan began in the early 1620s. In 1624, the island was purchased from local Indians for the reported price of \$24. It was promptly renamed New Amsterdam. In order to attract settlers to the Hudson River region, the Dutch encouraged a type of feudal aristocracy, known as the "patroon" system.

Under the patroon system, any stockholder, or patroon, who could bring 50 adults to his estate over a four-year period was given a 25-kilometer river-front plot, exclusive fishing and hunting rights, 20

and civil and criminal jurisdiction over his lands. In turn, he provided livestock, tools and buildings. The tenants paid the patroon rent and gave him first option on surplus crops.

In 1632 the Calvert family obtained a charter for land north of the Potomac River from King Charles I in what became known as Maryland. As the charter did not prohibit the establishment of non-Protestant churches, the family encouraged fellow Catholics to settle there. Maryland's first town, St. Mary's, was established in 1634 the Potomac River.

Second Generation of British Colonies

The religious and civil conflict in England in the mid-17th century limited immigration, as well as the attention the mother country paid to the American colonies. However, with the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the British once again turned their attentions to North America. Within a brief span, new proprietary colonies were established in New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

As early as the 1650s, the Ablemarle Sound region off the coast of what is now northern North Carolina was inhabited by settlers trickling down from Virginia. In 1670 the first settlers, drawn from New England and the Caribbean island of Barbados, arrived in what is now Charleston, South Carolina. One of the colony's least appealing aspects was the early trade in Indian slaves. Within time, however, timber, rice and indigo gave the colony a worthier economic base.

In 1681 William Penn, a wealthy Quaker and friend of Charles II, received a large tract of land west of the Delaware River, which became known as Pennsylvania. To help populate it, Penn actively recruited a host of religious dissenters from England and the continent -- Quakers, Amish, and Baptists. When Penn arrived the following year, there were already Dutch, Swedish and English settlers living along the Delaware River. It was there he founded Philadelphia, the "City of Brotherly Love."

In keeping with his faith, Penn showed a sense of equality not often found in other American colonies at the time. Thus, women in Pennsylvania had rights long before they did in other parts of America. Penn and his deputies also paid considerable attention to the colony's relations with the Delaware Indians, ensuring that they were paid for any land the Europeans settled on.

Georgia was settled in 1732, the last of the 13 colonies to be established. Lying close to the boundaries of Spanish Florida, the region was viewed as a buffer against Spanish incursion. But it had another quality: the man charged with Georgia's fortifications, General James Oglethorpe, was a reformer who deliberately set out to create a refuge where the poor and former prisoners would be given new opportunities.

Settlers, Slaves and Servants

Men and women with little interest in a new life in America were often induced to make the move to the New World by the skillful persuasion of promoters. Every method from giving ships' captains large rewards from the sale of service contracts for poor migrants, called indentured servants, to actual kidnapping was used to take on as many passengers as their vessels could hold.

In other cases, the expenses of transportation and maintenance were paid by colonizing agencies like the Virginia or Massachusetts Bay Companies. In return, indentured servants agreed to work for the agencies as contract laborers, usually for four to seven years. Free at the end of this term, they would be given a small tract of land.

It has been estimated that half the settlers living in the colonies south of New England came to America under this system. Although most of them fulfilled their obligations, some ran away from their employers. Nevertheless, many of them were eventually able to secure land and set up homesteads, either in the colonies in which they had originally settled or in neighboring ones.

There was one very important exception to this pattern: African slaves. The first blacks were brought to Virginia in 1619, just 12 years after the founding of Jamestown. Initially, many were regarded as indentured servants who could earn their freedom. By the 1660s, however, as the demand for plantation labor in the Southern colonies grew, the institution of slavery began to harden around them, and Africans were brought to America in shackles for a lifetime of involuntary servitude.

The Colonial Period

Most settlers who came to America in the 17th century were English, but there were also Dutch, Swedes and Germans in the middle region, a few French in South Carolina and elsewhere, slaves from Africa, primarily in the South, and a scattering of Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese throughout the colonies.

After 1680 England ceased to be the chief source of immigration. Thousands of refugees fled continental Europe to escape the path of war. Many left their homelands to avoid the poverty induced by government oppression. By 1690 the American population had risen to a quarter of a million. From then on, it doubled every 25 years until, in 1775, it numbered more than 2.5 million.

Although a family could move from Massachusetts to Virginia or from South Carolina to Pennsylvania, without major readjustment, distinctions between individual colonies were marked. They were even more so between the three regional groupings of colonies.

New England

New England in the northeast has generally thin, stony soil, and long winters, making it difficult to make a living from farming. Turning to other pursuits, the New Englanders harnessed water power and established grain mills and sawmills. Good stands of timber encouraged shipbuilding. Excellent harbors promoted trade, and the sea became a source of great wealth.

With the bulk of the early settlers living in villages and towns around the harbors, many New Englanders carried on some kind of trade or business. Compactness made possible the village school, the village church and the village or town hall, where citizens met to discuss matters of common interest.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony continued to expand its commerce. From the middle of the 17th century onward it grew prosperous, and Boston became one of America's greatest ports. Building their own vessels and sailing them to ports all over the world, the shipmasters of Massachusetts Bay laid the foundation for a trade that was to grow steadily in importance. By the end of the colonial period, one-third of all vessels under the British flag were built in New England.

New England shippers soon discovered, too, that rum and slaves were profitable commodities. One of the most enterprising trading practices of the time was the so-called "triangular trade." Merchants and shippers would purchase slaves off the coast of Africa for New England rum, then sell the slaves in the West Indies where they would buy molasses to bring home for sale to the local rum producers.

The Middle Colonies

Society in the middle colonies was far more varied, cosmopolitan and tolerant than in New England. In many ways, Pennsylvania and Delaware owed their success to William Penn. Under his guidance, Pennsylvania grew rapidly. The heart of the colony was Philadelphia. By the end of the colonial period, nearly a century later, 30,000 people lived there, representing many languages, creeds and trades. Their talent for successful business made the city one of the most important centers of colonial America.

Though the Quakers dominated in Philadelphia, elsewhere in Pennsylvania others were well represented. Germans became the colony's most skillful farmers. Important, too, were cottage industries such as weaving, shoemaking and other crafts.

Pennsylvania was also the principal gateway into the New World for the Scots-Irish, who moved into the colony in the early 18th century. "Bold and indigent strangers," as one Pennsylvania official called them, they hated the English and were suspicious of all government. The Scots-Irish tended to settle in the back country, where they cleared land and lived by hunting and subsistence farming.

As mixed as the people were in Pennsylvania, New York best illustrated the polyglot nature of America. By 1646 the population along the Hudson River included Dutch, French, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, English, Scots, Irish, Germans, Poles, Bohemians, Portuguese and Italians.

The Dutch continued to exercise an important social and economic influence on the New York region. their merchants gave Manhattan much of its original bustling, commercial atmosphere.

The Southern Colonies

In contrast to New England and the middle colonies were the predominantly rural southern settlements: Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. By the late 17th century, Virginia's and

Maryland's economic and social structure rested on the great planters and the yeoman farmers. The planters of the tidewater region, supported by slave labor, held most of the political power and the best land. They built great houses, adopted an aristocratic way of life and kept in touch as best they could with the world of culture overseas.

Charleston, South Carolina, became the leading port and trading center of the South. There the settlers quickly learned to combine agriculture and commerce, and the marketplace became a major source of prosperity. Not bound to a single crop as was Virginia, North and South Carolina also produced and exported rice and indigo, a blue dye obtained from native plants, which was used in coloring fabric. By 1750 more than 100,000 people lived in the two colonies of North and South Carolina.