

The Middle Colonies

BUILDING BACKGROUND The middle section of the Atlantic coast offered good land and a moderate climate. Several prominent English people established colonies that promised religious freedom.

New York and New Jersey



The Dutch founded [New Netherland](#) in 1613 as a trading post for exchanging furs with the Iroquois. The center of the fur trade in New Netherlands was the town of New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. Generous land grants to patroons, or lords, and religious tolerance soon brought Jews, French Huguenots, Puritans, and others to the colony. Director General Peter Stuyvesant (STY-vuh-suhnt) led the colony beginning in 1647.

Soon after the English conquest in 1664, the Duke of York made Sir George Carteret and Lord John Berkeley proprietors of New Jersey. This colony occupied lands between the Hudson and Delaware rivers. It had a diverse population, including Dutch, Swedes, Finns, and Scots. The fur trade was important to the economies of New York and New Jersey through the end of the 1600s.

In 1664 an English fleet captured the undefended colony of New Amsterdam without firing a single shot. New Netherland was renamed New York, and New Amsterdam became New York City.

Penn's Colony

The Society of Friends, or the Quakers, made up one of the largest religious groups in New Jersey. Quakers did not follow formal religious practices and dressed plainly. They believed in the equality of men and women before God. They also supported nonviolence and religious tolerance for all people. At the time, many Quaker beliefs and practices



shocked most Christians. As a result, Quakers were persecuted in both England and America.

One proprietor of the New Jersey colony was a Quaker named William Penn. Penn wished to found a larger colony under his own control that would provide a safe home for Quakers. In 1681 King Charles II agreed to grant Penn a charter to begin a colony west of New Jersey.

Penn's colony, known as Pennsylvania, grew rapidly. Penn limited his own power and established an elected assembly. He also promised religious freedom to all Christians. His work made Pennsylvania an important example of representative self-government—a government that reflects its citizens' will—in the colonies.

Penn named the capital of his colony Philadelphia, which means "the city of brotherly love." In 1682 the Duke of York sold Penn a region to the south of Pennsylvania. This area, called Delaware, remained part of Pennsylvania until 1776.

Economy of the Middle Colonies

The middle colonies combined characteristics of the New England and southern colonies. With a good climate and rich land, farmers there could grow large amounts of staple crops—crops that are always needed. These crops included wheat, barley, and oats. Farmers also raised livestock.

Slaves were somewhat more important to the middle colonies than they were to New England. They worked in cities as skilled laborers, such as blacksmiths and carpenters. Other slaves worked on farms, onboard ships, and in the growing shipbuilding industry. However, indentured servants largely filled the middle colonies' growing labor needs. Between 1700 and 1775 about 135,000 indentured servants came to the middle colonies. About half of them moved to Pennsylvania. By 1760 Philadelphia had become the largest British colonial city. Other cities in the middle colonies, such as New York City, also grew quickly.

Trade was important to the economy of the middle colonies. Merchants in Philadelphia and New York City exported colonial goods to markets in Britain and the West Indies. These products included wheat from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

Throughout the colonies, women made important contributions to the economy. They ran farms and businesses such as clothing and grocery stores, bakeries, and drugstores. Some women also practiced

Holt Social Studies: United States History (Beginnings to 1914)

Chapter 3: The English Colonies

Section 2: The Middle Colonies

medicine and worked as nurses and midwives. However, colonial laws and customs limited women's economic opportunities.

Most colonial women worked primarily in the home. Married women managed households and raised children. Sometimes they earned money for their families by selling products like butter. They also made money through services such as washing clothes.

Reference:

Holt Social Studies United States History. 30 September 2007

<<http://my.hrw.com/tabnav/controller.jsp?isbn=0030431638>>.