

Life in the 13 British colonies varied greatly by region and from one colony to another. They were varied in their climate and geography, commerce and production and culture. Learn more about each colony below.

THE NEW ENGLAND COLONIES

The New England colonies included Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island. They were the northern-most colonies.

Massachusetts

Founded: 1628

Climate and Geography: Long, cold winters, moderate summers, plentiful forests and rocky soil.

Commerce and Production: Production was centered around mostly family and subsistence farms. Fishing, whaling, logging, shipbuilding and rum-distilling were important industries. They were part of the "triangular trade" with Africa and the West Indies. Family labor was supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: As a royal colony, major government officials were selected by the king. Puritan religious beliefs left little toleration of religious dissent. Town meetings were an early example of direct democracy in the Americas.

New Hampshire

Founded: 1629

Climate and Geography: Long, very cold winters, moderate summers, rocky soil, steep hills and mountains and dense forests.

Commerce and Production: Mostly family subsistence farms. Important industries were fishing, whaling, logging, shipbuilding and rum-distilling, which were part of the triangular trade. Family labor was supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: As a royal colony, major government officials were selected by the king. Puritan religious beliefs left little toleration of religious dissent. Town meetings were an early example of direct democracy in the Americas.

Rhode Island

Founded: 1636

Climate and Geography: Long, cold winters, moderate summers, plentiful forests and rocky soil.

Commerce and Production: Mostly family subsistence farms. Important industries were fishing, whaling, logging, shipbuilding and rum-distilling, which were part of the triangular trade.

Family labor was supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: A charter colony, Rhode Island's major government officials were selected by the people. It was founded by Roger Williams with religious freedom for all residents. Town meetings were an example of direct democracy.

Connecticut

Founded: 1636

Climate and Geography: Long, cold winters, moderate summers, plentiful forests and rocky soil.

Commerce and Production: Mostly family subsistence farms. Important industries were fishing, whaling, logging, shipbuilding and rum-distilling, which were part of the triangular trade.

Family labor was supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: Charter colony: major government officials selected by the people. Founded by Thomas Hooker with religious freedom for all residents. The "Fundamental Orders of Connecticut" (1639) is often considered the first written constitution in America.

THE MIDDLE COLONIES

The middle colonies included New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

New York

Founded: 1626

Climate and Geography: Moderate, temperate climate with sufficient rainfall and fertile soil; many lakes, rivers and good harbors.

Commerce and Production: The "Breadbasket" of colonial America: surplus corn and wheat grown on large farms were sent to Europe and the West Indies. Small manufacturing businesses in textiles and iron, raising livestock, fur trading with Indian tribes. Family labor supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: Royal colony: major government officials selected by the king. Religion: primarily the Anglican Church once England took over, with some Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian, and smaller congregations of other religions, including Methodists, Baptists and Jews. Class distinctions developed between government officials, large landowners and prosperous merchants vs. small farmers, craftsmen, laborers and shopkeepers.

New Jersey

Founded: 1664

Climate and Geography: Moderate, temperate climate with sufficient rainfall and fertile soil; many lakes, rivers and good harbors.

Commerce and Production: The "Breadbasket" of colonial America: surplus corn and wheat grown on large farms were sent to Europe and the West Indies. Small manufacturing businesses in textiles and iron, raising livestock, fur trading with Indian tribes. Family labor supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: Royal colony: major government officials selected by the king. Religious freedom for all residents. Simple living in self-built wooden homes and homemade furnishings, tools and utensils.

Delaware

Founded: 1664

Climate and Geography: Moderate, temperate climate with sufficient rainfall and fertile soil; many lakes, rivers and good harbors.

Commerce and Production: The "Breadbasket" of colonial America: surplus corn and wheat grown on large farms were sent to Europe and the West Indies. Small manufacturing businesses in textiles and iron, raising livestock, fur trading with Indian tribes. Family labor supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: Proprietary colony: major government officials selected by the proprietor. Settlers of all religious faiths welcomed, no "established" church. Many diverse European immigrants (Dutch, Swedes, Finns, French, Scots and British) settled in the colony as farmers, craftsmen, laborers, merchants and shopkeepers.

Pennsylvania

Founded: 1682

Climate and Geography: Moderate, temperate climate with sufficient rainfall and fertile soil; many lakes, rivers and good harbors.

Commerce and Production: The "Breadbasket" of colonial America: surplus corn and wheat grown on large farms were sent to Europe and the West Indies. Small manufacturing businesses in textiles and iron, raising livestock, fur trading with Indian tribes. Family labor supplemented by paid labor, indentured servants, and some African and Indian slaves.

Culture: Proprietary colony: major government officials selected by the proprietor. Founding proprietor William Penn sought religious haven for Quakers, religious freedom for all residents.

THE SOUTHERN COLONIES

Virginia

Founded: 1607

Climate and Geography: Warm climate with sufficient rainfall, long growing season and fertile soil. The Appalachian Mountains were a natural barrier between the English and French colonies in North America.

Commerce and Production: Rivers, lakes and good harbors for commerce and transportation. Tobacco as a cash crop and a farming economy based on large plantations. Labor: indentured servants from Europe, and forced migration and enslavement of Africans.

Culture: Royal colony: major government officials selected by the king. Anglican Church became the "established" church of the colony, supported by taxes. Class distinctions developed between government officials, large landowners and prosperous merchants vs. small farmers, craftsmen, laborers and shopkeepers.

Maryland

Founded: 1632

Climate and Geography: Warm climate with sufficient rainfall and fertile soil; longer growing seasons and extensive river systems.

Commerce and Production: Shipbuilding, ironworks and local textile manufacturing. Good harbors for fishing and commerce. Tobacco as a cash crop and a farming economy based on large plantations. Labor: indentured servants from Europe, and forced migration and enslavement of Africans.

Culture: Proprietary colony: major government officials selected by the Proprietor. Founding proprietor Lord Baltimore (George Calvert) sought a religious haven for Catholics. Religious freedom for all residents.

North Carolina

Founded: 1653

Climate and Geography: Warm climate with a long growing season; coastal plains, mountain ranges and plateaus.

Commerce and Production: Surplus food crops sold to other colonies; cash crops of tobacco, cotton, indigo, rice, sugar, etc., sent to Europe. Good harbors for fishing and commerce. Labor: indentured servants from Europe, and forced migration and enslavement of Africans.

Culture: Royal colony: major government officials selected by the king. Settlers of all religious faiths were welcomed; no "established" church. Class distinctions developed between government officials, large landowners and prosperous merchants vs. small farmers, craftsmen, laborers and shopkeepers. High incidence of mosquito-related diseases and mortality rates.

South Carolina

Founded: 1663

Climate and Geography: Warm climate and a long growing season.

Commerce and Production: Good harbors for fishing and commerce. Cash crops included tobacco, cotton, indigo, rice and sugar. A farming economy based on large plantations. Labor: primarily forced migration and enslavement of Africans, some indentured servants from Europe.

Culture: Royal colony: major government officials selected by the king. Settlers of all religious faiths welcomed; no "established" church. Class distinctions between government officials, large landowners and prosperous merchants vs. small farmers, craftsmen, laborers and shopkeepers.

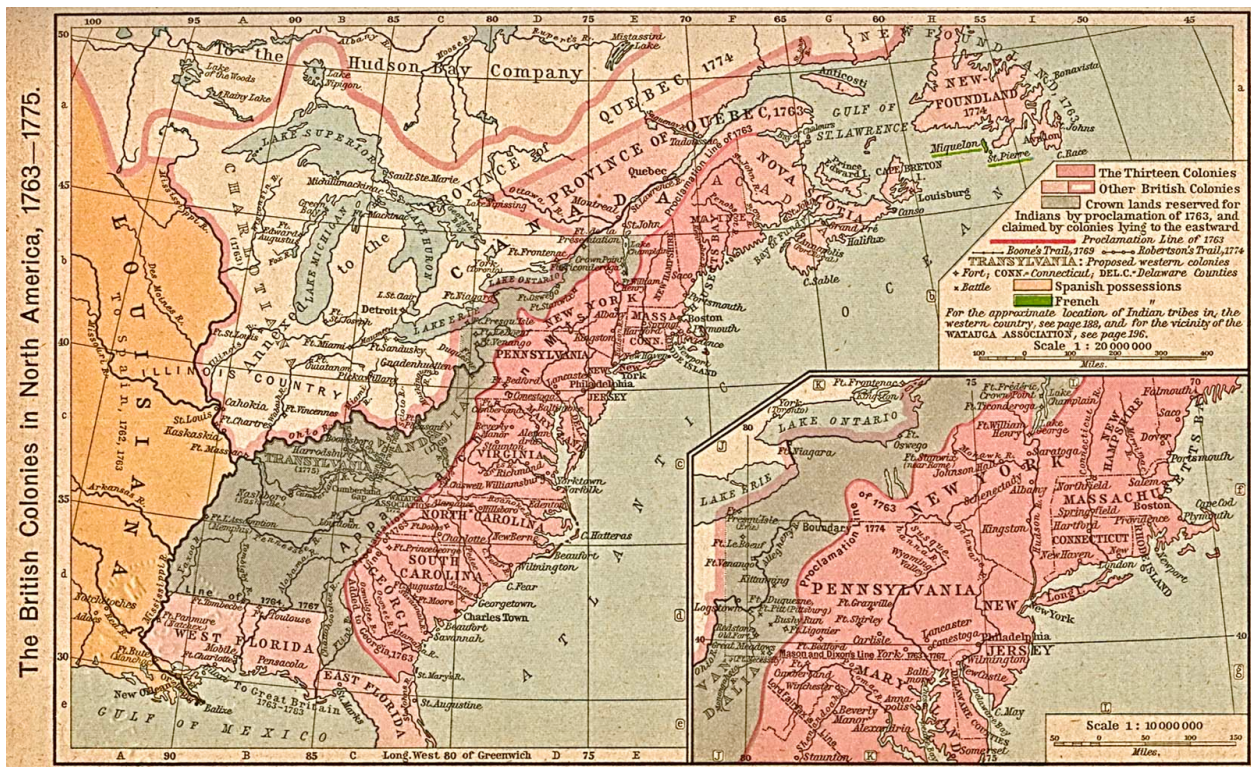
Georgia

Founded: 1732

Climate and Geography: Warm climate provided a long growing season; hilly coastal plains, plentiful forests.

Commerce and Production: Good harbors for fishing and commerce. Cash crops included tobacco, cotton, indigo, rice and sugar; a farming economy based on large plantations. Labor: indentured servants from Europe, and forced migration and enslavement of Africans.

Culture: Founded to create a buffer of protection between South Carolina and the Spaniards in Florida and the French in Louisiana. Refuge for persecuted English Protestants, and impoverished and indebted people. Royal charter: governed by 20 trustees, who enacted all laws, taxes and land grants (a 500-acre limit). "Melting pot" of Protestant sects, including Anglicans, Lutherans, Puritans, Quakers, etc. No "established" church in the colony.



Zoom out

Another map that shows what land the British controlled between 1763-1776, showing that the borders were not exactly what we know today. It was created in 1911 by William Robert Shepherd.