

Early British colonies in America

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Woman in Puritan attire seated at spinning wheel by fireplace. This photo is a recreation of what Puritan life looked like in the 1600s, and was taken in 1906. Photo is courtesy of the Library of Congress.

In the early 1600s, many Europeans sailed across the Atlantic to America. At the time, America was known as the New World.

In 1607, English settlers built the first European settlement in America. It was in Jamestown, Virginia. Soon, that settlement grew into a colony.

The English eventually had 13 colonies in America. They were divided into three groups. There were the New England colonies, the middle colonies and the Southern colonies. All 13 later became states.

New England Colonies

There were four New England colonies. These were Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

The settlers who founded the New England colonies did not come to America in search of riches. They came because they did not like the Church of England. They wanted to follow God in their own way. America seemed like the perfect place for a new start.

Pilgrims And Puritans

There were two groups of early settlers in New England. They were known as the Pilgrims and the Puritans. Both groups had been treated very badly in England because of their religion.

By the early 1600s, both groups felt England was no place for them. They decided to set out for the New World.

In 1620, a group of Pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts. They landed at Plymouth and founded a settlement. That settlement was the very beginning of New England.

Middle Colonies

There were four middle colonies. These were Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Delaware.

New England was mostly settled by people from England. The middle colonies were different. The settlers came from all over Europe. People from England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and France lived side by side.

Soon, there were many farms in the middle colonies. They grew wheat and corn. These farms helped feed all the American colonies.

Southern Colonies

There were five Southern colonies. These were Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

The Southern colonies grew cash crops. These are crops grown so they can be sold. The two most important were tobacco and cotton.

Economy Based On Forced Labor

Growing tobacco and cotton was hard work. Enslaved people were forced to do it. Enslaved people did not have many rights. Often, they were treated badly by their enslavers.

Wealthy white landowners had all the power. They enslaved others for their labor.

Many rich Southerners built huge, fancy houses for themselves. These mansions were like the homes of lords and ladies in England.