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# The Middle Colonies

## SETTING THE SCENE

### Read to Learn . . .

- ★ why the Middle Colonies were known as breadbasket colonies.
- ★ which groups of people settled in the Middle Colonies.
- ★ what life was like on the frontier.

### Places to Locate

- ★ Philadelphia
- ★ New York City
- ★ Delaware River
- ★ Baltimore
- ★ Appalachian Mountains

### Terms to Know

- ★ cash crop
- ★ Conestoga wagon
- ★ patroon
- ★ apprentice
- ★ frontier



◀ PINE TREE SHILLING, 1652

Sailing into New York Harbor in the early 1700s made most sea captains smile. They could see a bustling harbor, a growing community, and profits to be made. Growth and prosperity were evident throughout the Middle Colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Here the land was gentler, and the people were more varied in background than in New England.

### ★ The Breadbasket Colonies

For farmers, the Middle Colonies had many advantages—rich soil, a generally mild climate, and a long growing season.

The region also included several long, deep rivers that made it easy to transport produce from inland farms to the sea.

### Crops for Sale

Because of the good climate and soil, farmers in the Middle Colonies could produce more food—especially meat and grains—than they needed to feed themselves. People in other colonies, in the West Indies, and in Europe were eager to buy the wheat and other grains they grew. These became **cash crops**, food crops grown to be sold. Beef and pork were also exported.

The Middle Colonies produced so much grain that they became known as the “breadbasket colonies.” Millers ground the grain into flour and the corn into meal.



From this, colonists baked wheat or rye bread or made cornmeal puddings. European settlers introduced new foods—Dutch cooks baked waffles, while the Germans made pretzels and noodles.

### Taking Farm Goods to Market

Most farmers in the Middle Colonies shipped their grain through two port cities—**Philadelphia** and **New York City**. They loaded barrels of grain and flour and shipped them by boat along the **Delaware River** to Philadelphia and along the **Hudson River** to New York City. Farmers in central Pennsylvania shipped their products along the **Susquehanna River** to the **Chesapeake Bay**. All three rivers flowed through the rich farmlands of the Middle Colonies.

Many Pennsylvania Dutch farmers had settled farther west, away from these rivers. To get their crops to market by road, they developed a new vehicle named the **Conestoga wagon** after a nearby valley. The Conestoga wagon



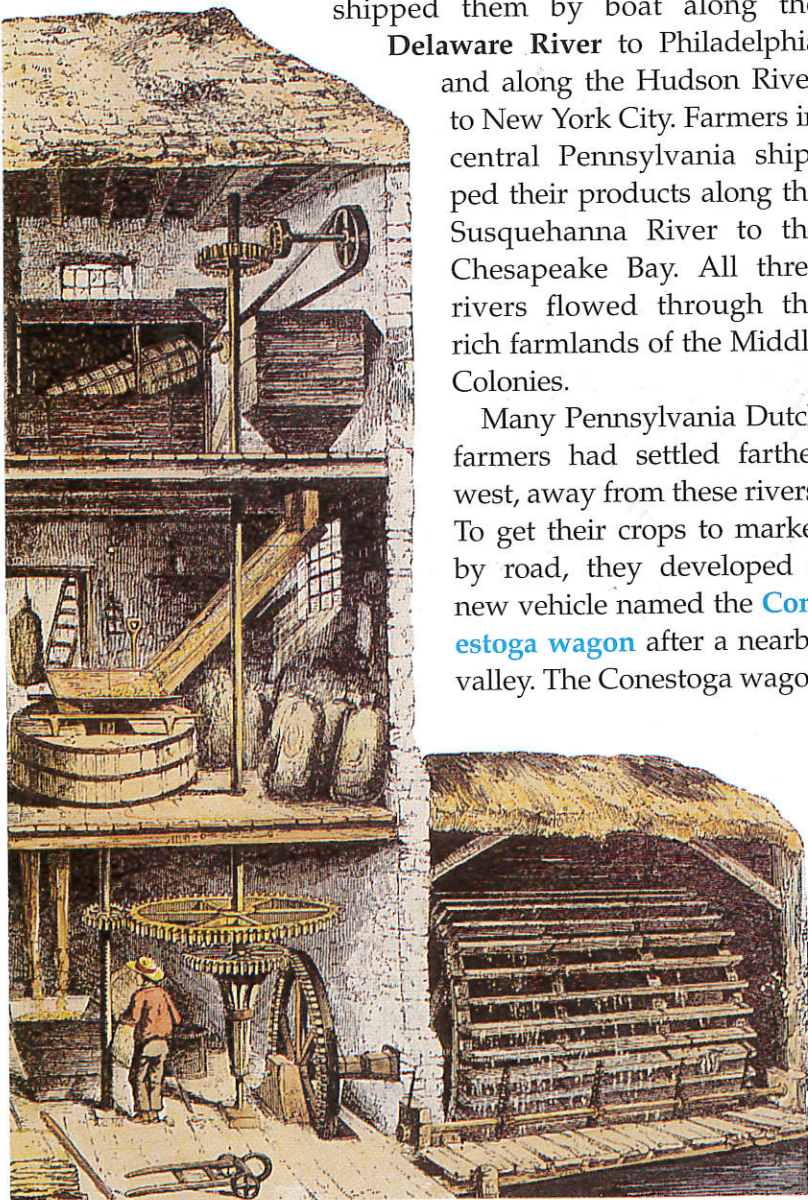
▼ CONESTOGA WAGON

was large and very sturdy, more than 20 feet (6 m) long with a curved, boat-shaped body. Above the wagon bed, a homespun cloth cover was stretched over an arched framework. Because its wheels did not easily sink into mud, it was well suited to the poor roads.

A team of four to six horses pulled a single Conestoga wagon, which could hold a ton or more of farm produce. A traveler through Pennsylvania noted, "In the months of September and October, it is no uncommon thing, on the Lancaster and Reading roads, to meet in one day from fifty to one hundred of these wagons. . . ." In later years, pioneers would use a wagon similar to the Conestoga wagon to travel west.

### New York Farms

Owning their own land was important to colonists. In parts of New York State, however, the old Dutch patroon system of land ownership continued. Five wealthy families ran their huge estates like small kingdoms. The Van Rensselaer family manor—owned into the 1700s—covered nearly 2 million acres (810,000 ha). Its thousands of farmer tenants had to pay rent to the **patroon**, or owner family. Unhappy tenants rebelled several times but failed to change the system.



Picturing  
History

▲ **FLOUR MILL** Farmers from the surrounding area brought their wheat to be ground at this water-powered mill. **What other farm crop was usually ground into meal?**



## ★ Business, Trade, and Cities

Besides the farmers themselves, other people in the Middle Colonies prospered from agriculture. Millers ground grain, and many people worked on ships or built ships that transported farm goods. An upper class of wealthy merchant families grew up in New York and Philadelphia.

Other businesses and small crafts industries developed too. Many families in the 1700s spun thread, wove linen, or knit wool at home. Artisans, such as iron-makers, tailors, glassblowers, and silver-smiths, had workshops attached to their homes.

In cities, small shops sold goods such as hats, books, and tea brought by ship from England. In smaller towns, a general store sold everything that people did not make for themselves. At sawmills workers cut wooden boards and lumber. Using local clay, brickmakers baked bricks for building houses or paving streets.

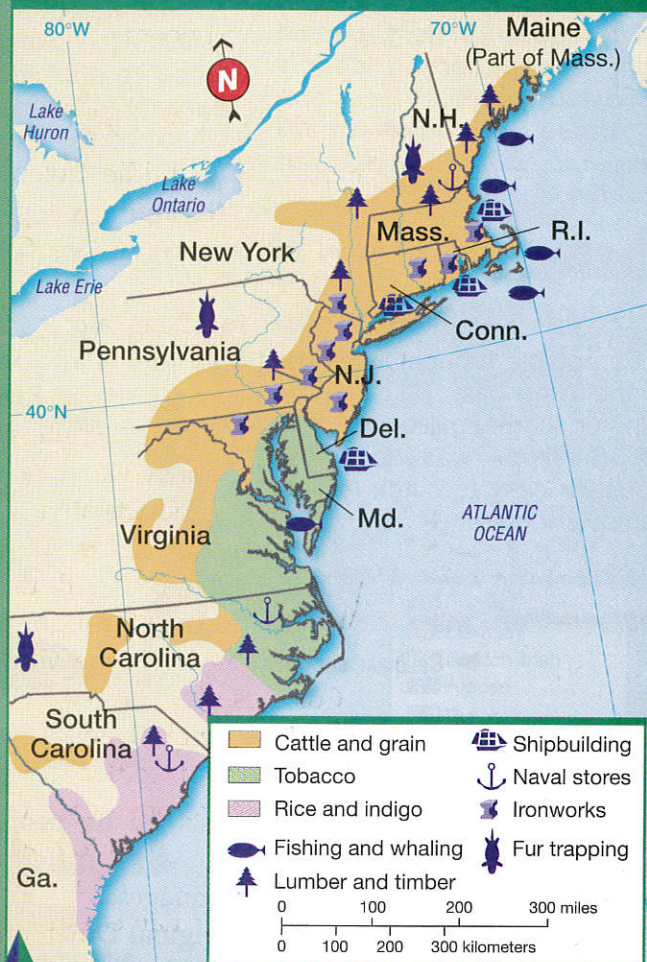
### Cities Grow Quickly

By the mid-1700s Philadelphia and New York had passed Boston as the largest cities in the colonies. Philadelphia, with more than 23,000 people in 1760, was bigger than most cities in Great Britain. It was a major center for shipping exports. The city of **Baltimore** also grew quickly.

Busy port cities were a contrast to the quiet countryside. City streets were paved with bricks or cobblestones and lined with shops and inns. There was the noise and clatter of horses' hooves and cartwheels. Crowds of people spoke many languages.

Many settlers in the Middle Colonies built houses like those they had known in Europe. Dutch influence, for instance, was strong in New York. Neat Dutch houses were built of red brick, usually 1½ stories high, with steep roofs. Each had a

## Making a Living in the British Colonies, 1730



### Map Study

**Human/Environment Interaction** British colonists produced goods to sell in the colonies and to export to Britain. **Which colonies grew rice and indigo?**

Dutch door divided into upper and lower sections. The upper part could be opened to see visitors, while the lower was closed to keep out animals.

## ★ A Different Kind of Community

The people of the Middle Colonies were different than their northern New England neighbors who were mostly English. The



# Linking Past and Present

## The Fear of Smallpox

*Throughout history, people have feared certain deadly diseases. Today, at least one of those diseases—smallpox—has been wiped out worldwide.*

## Then

### A Dreaded Disease

Europeans brought smallpox to the Americas. This disease killed or scarred millions of people. Smallpox was as contagious, or easy to catch, as the common cold. If a victim

coughed the virus into the air, anyone nearby might catch it. Native Americans had no resistance to the virus and easily became infected. Whole populations died.

## Now

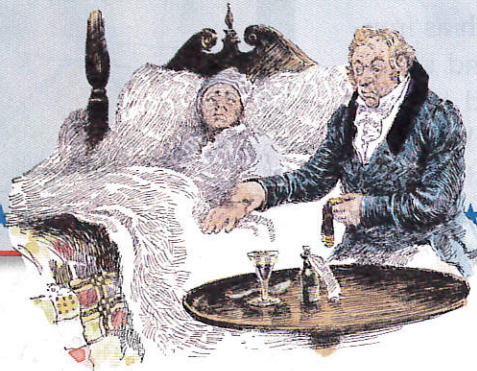
### A Dead Disease

In 1796 English doctor Edward Jenner introduced a



▲ A MODERN VACCINATION

vaccine that prevented smallpox. By the 1940s, smallpox had been wiped out in Europe and North America. By 1980 smallpox was officially declared dead throughout the world.



► COLONIAL DOCTOR

Middle Colonies were settled by people from many countries, with different beliefs, customs, and languages.

Descendants of the original Dutch and Swedish settlers lived in New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. Other large groups who came from Europe by the 1700s were the Germans and the French. Many also came from England and other parts of the British Isles. Some were Scotch-Irish, Welsh, or Scottish.

## Many Religions

Unlike the New England Colonies, the Middle Colonies did not have a single religion that was more powerful than any other. People who came from one country usually shared the same religious beliefs. Most belonged to one of several Protestant denominations, or groups, that had faced persecution in Europe. A minority of the people were Roman Catholics or Jews.

Many Germans followed the Lutheran religion, as did the Swedes. Others belonged to smaller groups with distinctive beliefs, such as the Amish and the Mennonites. One Mennonite leader who came to Pennsylvania in 1683 described his trip as traveling on a "Noah's Ark" of religious faiths. He arrived with Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Quakers, and Calvinists as well as his own group of German Mennonites.

Quakers came to the Middle Colonies from England, while the Scots and Scotch-Irish were mostly Presbyterian. Most French settlers were *Huguenots*, a term for French Protestants. The Dutch were mainly Dutch Reformed, another Protestant group. The Jews in New York, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania came from Spain and Portugal.

## Country Customs and Fun

As soon as Pennsylvania was founded in 1681, groups of immigrants poured into



its Delaware River valley. Newcomers worked together to clear land and establish communities. One German custom that soon spread throughout the region was barn raising. Neighbors gathered to help raise the frame of the barn, then relaxed with a huge outdoor feast with music and dancing. Sheepshearing, cornhusking, and butchering were other chores that settlers often shared. Any community gathering might end with footraces and jumping contests. Women also gathered in one another's farmhouses to spin or make quilts together.

## ★ Education and Training

While many colonists respected education, the Middle Colonies did not set up public schools. Children were taught by private tutors or in church or private schools. Merchants in some cities funded charity schools for those who could not afford private school fees.

Not all young people continued their schooling. Any ambitious 12- or 13-year-old could learn a craft by becoming an **apprentice**, or trainee, to a master craft worker. The apprentice would work without wages for several years while learning the craft. Everything from shoeing horses to making wigs was taught in this way.

The master was required to provide the apprentice with food, board, and clothing. Sometimes the master also gave instruction in religion and basic reading and writing. At the end of training, an apprentice might become a paid assistant in the same shop or go to work for another artisan.

## ★ The Frontier

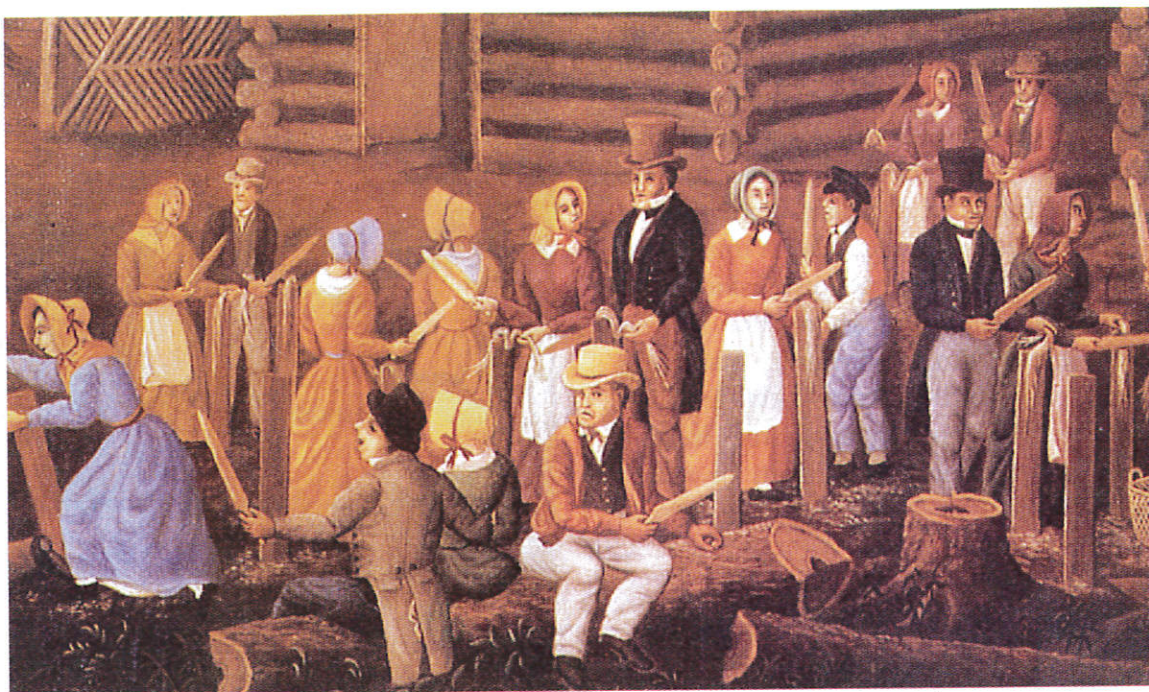
Early colonists settled in a band along the Atlantic coast and the banks of a few large rivers. As more and more people



arrived, some moved farther inland to the **frontier**, a thinly settled area on the outer limits of the colonies. In the 1600s, the frontier of the Middle Colonies was the eastern foothills of the **Appalachian Mountains**. By the 1700s the frontier extended west into the Ohio Valley.

The frontier drew an assortment of people. Many—including young married couples, recent immigrants, and former indentured servants—wanted cheap land and a new start in life. Some young single men wanted adventure and freedom from





▲ **COLONISTS GATHER TO WORK** Settlers used wooden paddles to separate fibers from the flax plant. The fibers were then spun into cloth. **What area was called the frontier in the 1600s?**

the laws and restrictions in the settled colonies.

In addition to the everyday chores of farming and housekeeping, men and women on the frontier had to do many other jobs. They cut trees to build their homes—usually one-room cabins. They made their own furniture, wagons, candles, soap, and shoes. There were few schools, so children received little formal education.

Because frontier families all faced the same dangers and hardships, they developed a spirit of independence and equality. Women worked alongside men and carried equal responsibility for the well-being of the frontier family. People of different culture groups shared and mixed their traditions and beliefs. Few of the social class distinctions were common in these settled regions far from cities.

## ★ SECTION 2 REVIEW ★

### Checking for Understanding

1. **Identify** Philadelphia, New York City, Delaware River, Baltimore, Appalachian Mountains.
2. **Define** cash crop, Conestoga wagon, patroon, apprentice, frontier.
3. **Why** were the Middle Colonies called the breadbasket colonies?
4. **What** groups of people settled in the Middle Colonies?

### Critical Thinking

5. **Predicting Consequences** How do you think the Native Americans who lived on the frontier would have reacted to the movement of settlers into the area?

### ACTIVITY

6. Illustrate a colonial street scene in New York or Philadelphia. Label shops and buildings.