

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 the fledgling American colonies.

In part to provide for the defense measures England was neglecting, the Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven colonies formed the New England Confederation in 1643. It was the European colonists' first attempt at regional unity.

The early history of the British settlers reveals a good deal of contention -- religious and political -- as groups vied for power and position among themselves and their neighbors. Maryland, in particular, suffered from the bitter religious rivalries which afflicted England during the era of Oliver Cromwell. One of the casualties was the state's Toleration Act, which was revoked in the 1650s. It was soon reinstated, however, along with the religious freedom it guaranteed.

In 1675 Bacon's Rebellion, the first significant revolt against royal authority, broke out in the colonies. The original spark was a clash between Virginia frontiersmen and the Susquehannock Indians, but it soon pitted the common farmer against the wealth and privilege of the large planters and Virginia's governor, William Berkeley.

The small farmers, embittered by low tobacco prices and hard living conditions, rallied around Nathaniel Bacon, a recent arrival from England. Berkeley refused to grant Bacon a commission to conduct Indian raids, but he did agree to call new elections to the House of Burgesses, which had remained unchanged since 1661.

Defying Berkeley's orders, Bacon led an attack against the friendly Ocaneechee tribe, nearly wiping them out. Returning to Jamestown in September 1676, he burned it, forcing Berkeley to flee. Most of the state was now under Bacon's control. His victory was short lived, however; he died of a fever the following month. Without Bacon, the rebellion soon lost its vitality. Berkeley re-established his authority and hanged 23 of Bacon's followers.

With the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the British once again turned their attentions to North America. Within a brief span, the first European settlements were established in the Carolinas and the Dutch driven out of New Netherland. New proprietary colonies were established in New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania.

The Dutch settlements had, as a general matter, been ruled by autocratic governors appointed in Europe. Over the years, the local population had become estranged from them. As a result, when the British colonists began encroaching on Dutch lands in Long Island and Manhattan, the unpopular governor was unable to rally the population to their defense. New Netherland fell in 1664. The terms of the capitulation, however, were mild: the Dutch settlers were able to retain their property and worship as they pleased.

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. The first proprietary governor

arrived in 1664. A remote area even today, Ablemarle's first town was not established until the arrival of a group of French Huguenots in 1704.

In 1670 the first settlers, drawn from New England and the Caribbean island of Barbados, arrived in what is now Charleston, South Carolina. An elaborate system of government, to which the British philosopher John Locke contributed, was prepared for the new colony. One of its prominent features was a failed attempt to create a hereditary nobility. 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.

Massachusetts Bay was not the only colony driven by religious motives. 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, Mennonites, Amish, Moravians 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 was motivated by 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, if not actually inside the boundaries of Spanish Florida, the region was viewed as a buffer against Spanish incursion. But it had another unique 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.

Source: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Country Studies/Area Handbook Series sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Army between 1986 and 1998.

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