

## The Southern Colonies

In contrast to New England and the middle colonies were the predominantly rural southern settlements: Virginia, Maryland, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.

By the late 17th century, Virginia's and Maryland's economic and social structure rested on the great planters and the yeoman farmers. The planters of the tidewater region, supported by slave labor, held most of the political power and the best land. They built great houses, adopted an aristocratic way of life and kept in touch as best they could with the world of culture overseas.

At the same time, yeoman farmers, who worked smaller tracts of land, sat in popular assemblies and found their way into political office. Their outspoken independence was a constant warning to the oligarchy of planters not to encroach too far upon the rights of free men.

Charleston, South Carolina, became the leading port and trading center of the South. There the settlers quickly learned to combine agriculture and commerce, and the marketplace became a major source of prosperity. Dense forests also brought revenue: lumber, tar and resin from the longleaf pine provided some of the best shipbuilding materials in the world. Not bound to a single crop as was Virginia, North and South Carolina also produced and exported rice and indigo, a blue dye obtained from native plants, which was used in coloring fabric. By 1750 more than 100,000 people lived in the two colonies of North and South Carolina.

In the southern-most colonies, as everywhere else, population growth in the back country had special significance. German immigrants and Scots-Irish, unwilling to live in the original tidewater settlements where English influence was strong, pushed inland. Those who could not secure fertile land along the coast, or who had exhausted the lands they held, found the hills farther west a bountiful refuge. Although their hardships were enormous, restless settlers kept coming, and by the 1730s they were pouring into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Soon the interior was dotted with farms.

Living on the edge of the Indian country, frontier families built cabins, cleared tracts in the wilderness and cultivated maize and wheat. The men wore leather made from the skin of deer or sheep, known as buckskin; the women wore garments of cloth they spun at home. Their food consisted of venison, wild turkey and fish. They had their own amusements -- great barbecues, dances,

housewarmings for newly married couples, shooting matches and contests for making quilted blankets. Quilts remain an American tradition today.

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.

<http://countrystudies.us/united-states/history-15.htm>