

The English Colonies in North America

What were the similarities and differences among the colonies in North America?

In the mid-1700s, a German schoolteacher named Gottlieb Mittelberger boarded a ship bound for the colony of Pennsylvania in far-off North America. He had borrowed the cost of his passage by signing on as an **indentured servant**, which means that he would have to settle his debt by working for the master who bought his services.

The voyage across the Atlantic was horrible. “The people are packed densely,” Mittelberger wrote, “like herrings so to say, in the large sea vessels. One person receives a place of scarcely 2 feet width and 6 feet length. There is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of seasickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouthrot, and the like, all of which come from old

and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water.”

When the nightmarish voyage ended, Mittelberger had to stay on board until his services were purchased. Most indentured servants had to work for their masters for three to six years, but commitments varied according to the servants' ages and strength. As Mittelberger noted, “young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.”

Why were people willing to go through such hardships to come to the colonies? Many colonists came to North America for the chance to own land and start a new life while others were seeking freedom to practice their religion without fear of **persecution. There were also some who did not have a choice. In addition to a number of convicts (people in jail) who were forced to go to North America to work off their debts as indentured servants, millions of Africans were kidnapped from their homelands and brought to the colonies as slaves.**

In this lesson, you will learn about the people who settled the English colonies. You will read in detail about the similarities and differences between 8 of the 13 colonies.



The New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies

English settlers established colonies in North America for several reasons. Some colonies were created by groups of businesspeople who hoped to profit from resources found in the Americas. Other colonies were settled by people looking for a place to practice their religion without fear of persecution. One colony was even established as a **refuge** for **debtors** (people who owe money), who would otherwise have been tossed into prison.

The English government supported all these efforts in part because it was competing for land in the Americas with other nations like France and Spain. England had another reason for establishing colonies: it was also competing for wealth. Like most western European nations in the late 1600s, England followed an economic policy called **mercantilism**. Under this policy, nations attempted to gain wealth by controlling trade and establishing colonies. The colonies made money for

England by supplying raw materials to its industries.

England turned these raw materials into goods that could then be sold to other nations and to its own colonies.

By 1733, there were 13 British colonies along the Atlantic coastline. They can be grouped into three distinct regions: the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies. These regions had different climates and resources that attracted settlers and encouraged the development of different ways of life.

The New England Colonies

The New England region included the colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. The first settlers of these colonies came to America seeking freedom from the religious persecution that they faced in England.

In New England, farming was difficult because of the long, cold winters and the region's rocky, hilly wilderness. But the forests and the sea provided useful resources and ways to make a living. New Englanders built their

economy on small farms, lumbering, fishing, shipbuilding, and trade.

The Middle Colonies

The four Middle Colonies were New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. The first settlers to these colonies came from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The landscape of this region ranged from the rich soil of coastal New Jersey and Delaware to the valleys and wooded mountains of New York and Pennsylvania. Farmers in the Middle Colonies raised a variety of crops and livestock. Lumbering, shipbuilding, and other occupations added to the many opportunities here.

The people who settled the Middle Colonies represented many cultures and religions. One important group, the Quakers, started the colony of Pennsylvania. Like the early settlers of New England, the Quakers were looking for freedom to practice their religion without fear of persecution. Other groups seeking religious freedom soon followed, and settlements of French, Dutch,

Germans, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Scots, Irish, and English began to spread throughout the Middle Colonies.

The Southern Colonies

The five Southern Colonies were Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. This region featured broad rivers and vast wetlands that gradually merged with the sea. The soil and the hot and wet climate were ideal for growing tobacco, rice, and other cash crops.

Wealthy colonists took advantage of these conditions by establishing large farms called **plantations. Plantation owners relied on indentured servants and enslaved Africans to sow and harvest their fields. After being **harvested**, the crops could be brought by river to the coast and loaded on ships for transport to other colonies and to Europe.**

Government in the Colonies

All the colonies were settled with the permission of the king of England. For each colony, the king issued a

charter, a formal document that outlined the colony's geographic boundaries and specified how it would be governed. Because the colonies were so far from England, however, they needed to be able to make their own laws and keep peace and order.

Most of the colonies developed different forms of government depending on the settlement's purpose. Within most of these colonies, colonists elected members of their community to a general assembly, which made their laws.

Many colonies also had a governor appointed by the king. As the king's representative, the governor could overrule the elected assembly. Some colonies also had councils, or groups of men who represented the English businessmen whose money helped to fund the colony's creation.

In Massachusetts, religious colonists established a theocracy, a government based upon religious principles and whose leaders rule in the name of God. In time,

however, a system of town meetings emerged in which colonists voted for representatives to govern them.

In many ways, the colonies were more **democratic than England. Still, not all colonists had a voice in the government. Usually, only free, white, landowning men were allowed to vote. In some colonies, voters also had to belong to the preferred church. Other colonists—including women, servants, slaves, and skilled tradesmen who were not landowners—had no voting rights.**







Massachusetts: A New England Colony

In the early 1600s, religion was important in England. The king presided over the Church of England, also called the Anglican Church. However, not everyone agreed with the church's practices.

One group, who would later be called **Puritans**, wanted to “purify” the Anglican Church by making services simpler and doing away with ranks of authority. A radical faction among Puritans, called **Separatists**, wanted to be completely separate from the English church and have the ability to form their own congregations. When the king began jailing Separatists for not attending Anglican services, some of them moved to Holland, where they could practice their religion freely.

But Holland wasn't home, and the Separatists wanted their children to grow up in an English culture. In 1620, about 102 Separatists set sail for America aboard the **Mayflower**. The Separatists, called Pilgrims because they traveled for religious reasons, hoped to build their idea of a perfect society in America. During their voyage, they signed an agreement called the **Mayflower Compact** that described the way they would govern themselves in the Americas.

After a long and grueling journey across the Atlantic, the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, near Cape Cod. When

the Pilgrims landed, they were welcomed by the local American Indian tribe, the Wampanoag (WAWM-pah-NAW-ahg), who taught them how to plant crops, trap animals, and catch fish. Without the help of these American Indians, the Pilgrims might not have survived their first winter. In 1621, the Pilgrims invited the Wampanoag to share their first harvest in a three-day feast of thanksgiving. Today, Americans still celebrate this holiday.

Ten years later, a large group of Puritans decided to follow the Pilgrims to America. The king was relieved to see them go and sent them off with a charter for the colony of Massachusetts Bay. The charter said that the Massachusetts colonists would govern themselves. The Puritans were pleased with the charter because they wanted to build a community governed by the rules of the Bible. They hoped to set an example for the rest of the world. Their governor, John Winthrop, said, “We must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.”

Massachusetts New England Colony

- **Founders** Pilgrims led by William Bradford (1620) and Puritans led by John Winthrop (1630)
- **Settlers** Puritans escaping religious persecution
- **Climate** Harsh winters, warm summers
- **Geography** Sandy coast with good ports, rich pastures, forests
- **Economy/Occupations** Crop and livestock farming, lumbering, shops, shipping
- **Religion** Puritan
- **Government** Self-governing, with strong religious influence



Rhode Island: A New England Colony

The Puritans of Massachusetts gained the freedom to practice their religion without being persecuted. However, instead of granting similar freedom to others, they created a government that required everyone in the colony to worship the same way as they did.

When a young minister named Roger Williams began preaching different ideas, the Puritans put him on trial. Williams believed that all people should be able to

worship in any way they chose. “Forced worship,” he declared, “stinks in God's nostrils.”

Although the Puritans ordered Williams to be sent back to England, on a cold winter day in 1636, he left his wife and children and escaped to the south. After trudging through snow for days, he met a group of American Indians near Narragansett Bay who cared for him until spring. When his family and a few followers joined him, Williams bought land from the American Indians for a settlement. He called it Providence, a word meaning “the guidance and care of God.”

Williams welcomed people with different religious beliefs to Providence. Two years after he and his followers settled Providence, a colonist named Anne Hutchinson was forced to leave Massachusetts for preaching against the Puritans. She followed Williams, and together they established a settlement called Portsmouth. In 1647, these and other settlements united to become the colony of Rhode Island. In 1663, Rhode Island elected an assembly to govern the colony.

While the people of Rhode Island sought freedom to follow their own beliefs, this ideal did not extend to enslaved Africans. Sea merchants soon discovered the riches that could be made in the slave trade. As a result, Rhode Island became one of the largest slave-trading centers in the world. Some of the wealthiest families in New England made their fortunes from slave trading. At the same time, the isolated coves along the Rhode Island coast provided perfect refuges for pirates and smugglers. Puritans in other colonies were disgusted by the slavery, pirating, and smuggling taking place in Rhode Island. Reverend Cotton Mather of Boston called Rhode Island “the sewer of New England.” The actions of slave traders in Rhode Island led many Puritans to believe that rejecting these people and their ideas was justified. Using a word that implied “criminals,” they invented their own name for the colony: “Rogues' Island.”

Rhode Island New England Colony

- **Founders** Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson
- **Settlers** People seeking religious freedom
- **Climate** Hot, humid summers; cold, snowy winters
- **Geography** Coastal lowlands; flat, rocky woodlands
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (large cattle and dairy farms, small independent farms), lumbering, shipbuilding, fishing, whaling, trade
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing



Connecticut: A New England Colony

Even amongst the Puritans who stayed in Massachusetts, not all of them shared exactly the same ideas. Thomas Hooker was a Puritan clergyman who lived in New Towne, a fast-growing community next to Boston. Hooker didn't always agree with the laws and leadership in Massachusetts. When he heard about a fertile valley along a river to the west, he convinced his

family and about 100 other people to move there with him.

It took Hooker and his followers two weeks to travel to the Connecticut Valley with their animals and belongings. There they established a settlement on the site of an old Dutch fort, where an earlier group of English colonists had settled. Hooker and his followers called their new community Hartford. In 1639, Hartford joined with two other settlements to form the colony of Connecticut.

Hooker believed that government should be based on “the free consent of the people,” to whom belongs “the choice of public [officials] by God's own allowance.” He helped draw up the first written plan of government for any of the colonies, and which was called the Fundamental Orders. The Fundamental Orders guaranteed the right to vote to all men who were members of the Puritan church.

Meanwhile, other Puritans formed a separate colony nearby called New Haven. The Puritans of New Haven

agreed to live by the “word of God,” so their laws were stricter than those in Hooker's Connecticut colony.

Neither of these colonies, however, was legally **authorized** by the king. Then, in 1662, King Charles II granted a charter for a new Connecticut colony that included New Haven. The charter gave Connecticut colonists more rights than those enjoyed by any other colonists except Rhode Island's. A popular legend states that when King James II sent Governor Andros to Hartford 15 years later to take back the colonists' charter, someone stole it and hid it in the trunk of a huge white oak tree. The “Charter Oak” became a symbol of Connecticut's freedom.

Connecticut New England Colony

- **Founder** Thomas Hooker
- **Settlers** Puritans seeking a new settlement
- **Climate** Cold winters, mild summers
- **Geography** Forested hills, seacoast
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (crops and livestock), shipbuilding, fishing, whaling
- **Religion** Puritan
- **Government** Written constitution (Fundamental Orders), self-governing



New York: A Middle Colony

The English took control of the settlement of New Netherland in 1664. The English renamed the colony New York in honor of its new proprietor (owner), James, the Duke of York. The duke gave huge chunks of his colony to two friends, Sir George Carteret and Lord John

Berkeley, who then established the colony of New Jersey to the south of New York.

The duke also awarded large estates along the Hudson River to wealthy Englishmen. The new landowners charged high rents to farmers working their land. However, this practice created a great difference in wealth between the landowners and their poor tenants, and it discouraged people from settling in New York.

The Duke of York expected his colony to be a money-making business. As its owner, he appointed people to run the colony. He also issued his own laws and decided what New Yorkers should pay in taxes.

Although New York's rich landlords approved of the duke's approach to governing his colony, farmers, fishers, and tradespeople did not. They demanded the right to elect an assembly to make laws for New York. The duke refused, saying that elected **assemblies had a habit of disturbing the “peace of the government.”**

After years of protest, the duke finally allowed New Yorkers to elect an assembly in 1683. This first assembly

passed 15 laws, the most important of which was a charter listing a number of rights that most colonists believed they deserved as English citizens. Among them were the right to elect their own lawmakers, the right to trial by jury, and the right to worship as they pleased.

When the duke saw what the assembly had done, he abolished it. New Yorkers did not get a new assembly until, under the leadership of Jacob Leisler (LIES-ler), they rebelled in 1689. Leisler was elected commander in chief of a democratic council that governed until 1691. That year, New York was finally granted the right to elect an assembly with the power to pass laws and set taxes for the colony.

New York Middle Colony

- **Founders** Dutch West India Company (1624); James Duke of York (1664)
- **Settlers** Dutch and English seeking new lives
- **Climate** Cold, snowy winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Wetlands along the coast and Hudson River, forested mountains to the North
- **Economy/Occupations** Fur-trapping, lumbering, shipping, slave trade, merchants and tradesmen, farming, iron mining
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** British-appointed governor and council alternating with elected assembly



Pennsylvania: A Middle Colony

When William Penn asked King Charles II to let him establish a colony in America, the king had two reasons for granting Penn's request. First, he could repay a large debt that he owed to Penn's father, Admiral Penn. Second, he could get rid of William, who had been a thorn in the king's side for several years.

William Penn was a member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. The Quakers believed in a simple lifestyle and in treating all people equally. They refused to bow before the king, fight in wars, or pay taxes to the Church of England.

In 1668, the king incarcerated Penn, hoping to stop him from preaching the Quakers' ideas. To the king's dismay, Penn continued preaching after his release.

With the Quakers unwelcome in England, Penn sought to establish a colony in America where they would be free to practice their own beliefs. In 1681, the king granted Penn a huge area of land between the Puritan colonies of New England and the Anglican colonies of the South. In honor of Penn's father, the colony was called Pennsylvania.

Penn advertised his colony all over Europe. Many were drawn to Pennsylvania by his Great Law of 1682, which guaranteed that people of all faiths would be treated equally.

Penn's appeal attracted settlers from several countries. An early colonist in Pennsylvania marveled at the prosperity and peace in the colony. He wrote, "Poor people (both Men and Women) of all kinds, can here get three times the Wages for their Labour they can in England or Wales . . . Here are no Beggars to be seen . . . Jealousy among Men is here very rare . . . nor are old Maids to be met with; for all commonly Marry before they are Twenty Years of Age."

Penn named his capital city Philadelphia, which is Greek for "City of Brotherly Love." From there, he wrote important government documents that made Pennsylvania the first democracy in America.

Pennsylvania Middle Colony

- **Founder** William Penn
- **Settlers** English Quakers and other Europeans seeking freedom and equality
- **Climate** Cold winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Rolling hills, trees, and fertile soil
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (crops and dairy) merchants and tradesman, lumbering, shipbuilding
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing



Maryland: A Southern Colony

The founding of Maryland was a family enterprise. Sir George Calvert, named Lord Baltimore by King James I, was an English gentleman who became a Roman Catholic. In England, with its official Anglican Church, Catholics were treated harshly. Calvert wanted to start a colony “founded on religious freedom where there would not only be a good life, but also a prosperous one for those bold enough to take the risk.” As a businessman, he also hoped the colony would make his own family more prosperous, or wealthy.

Unfortunately, Calvert died while he was still bargaining with the king. The new king, King Charles I, granted a charter for the colony to Calvert's son Cecil, the new Lord Baltimore. The charter gave the Calverts complete control of the colony, which was called Maryland.

Armed with these powers, Cecil named his brother Leonard as governor. To make money from the colony,

Cecil needed to attract both Protestant and Catholic settlers. He told Leonard to be “very careful to preserve unity and peace . . . and treat the Protestants with as much mildness and favor as justice will permit.”

Leonard's expedition arrived in Maryland in 1634. There he and his followers built St. Mary's City on a high, dry bluff they purchased from an American Indian tribe. The following year, Leonard agreed to let Maryland elect an assembly to govern the colony.

As more and more settlers arrived, Leonard could see that Catholics would always be outnumbered in the colony. To protect their rights, in 1649 he helped pass America's first law guaranteeing religious liberty, the Act Concerning Religion. This law, however, applied only to Christians. Atheists (people who do not believe in the existence of God) and Jews were not included.

Despite the Calverts' efforts, Protestants and Catholics remained suspicious of one another and waged a tug-of-war in Maryland for more than a century. During this time, the colony's founding family lost and regained

power several times. Still, George Calvert's dream was fulfilled. Catholics in Maryland worshiped freely and took part in the colony's government alongside Protestants.

Maryland Southern Colony

- **Founder** Cecil Calvert (Lord Baltimore)
- **Settlers** Catholics and Protestants seeking religious and political freedom
- **Climate** Cold, rainy winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Low, fertile land surrounding Chesapeake Bay
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming and ranching (crops, beef, dairy), lumbering, shipping, fishing, iron mining
- **Religion** Various faiths, particularly Catholic
- **Government** Self-governing



Virginia: A Southern Colony

Jamestown, Virginia, was the first successful English settlement in America. After a shaky start, Virginia began to grow and prosper. By 1700, the descendants of those early settlers had become wealthy landowners and the most important people in Virginia.

The economy of Virginia was based on tobacco. Tobacco planters needed vast areas of land to be successful. They also needed a large number of laborers to grow their crops.

At first, planters tried putting the surrounding American Indian tribes to work. But the tribes in this area were not used to farming. Worse, many of them died of diseases they caught from the colonists. The others faded into the forests and disappeared.

Next, tobacco planters tried bringing the **poverty-stricken from England to work their land. In exchange for free passage to Virginia, the workers agreed to become indentured servants for a period of five to seven years. Many men, women, and children came to**

Virginia as indentured servants. After completing their service, they were given their freedom along with a small plot of land, some clothing, tools, and seeds.

The first Africans brought to Virginia were also treated as indentured servants. At first, they had the same rights and freedoms as white servants. Once their service ended, they could buy land and servants of their own.

Gradually, however, planters turned to slaves to solve their labor problem. Slaves brought from Africa cost twice as much as servants, but because they were considered to be property, slaves were not released from service like indentured servants.

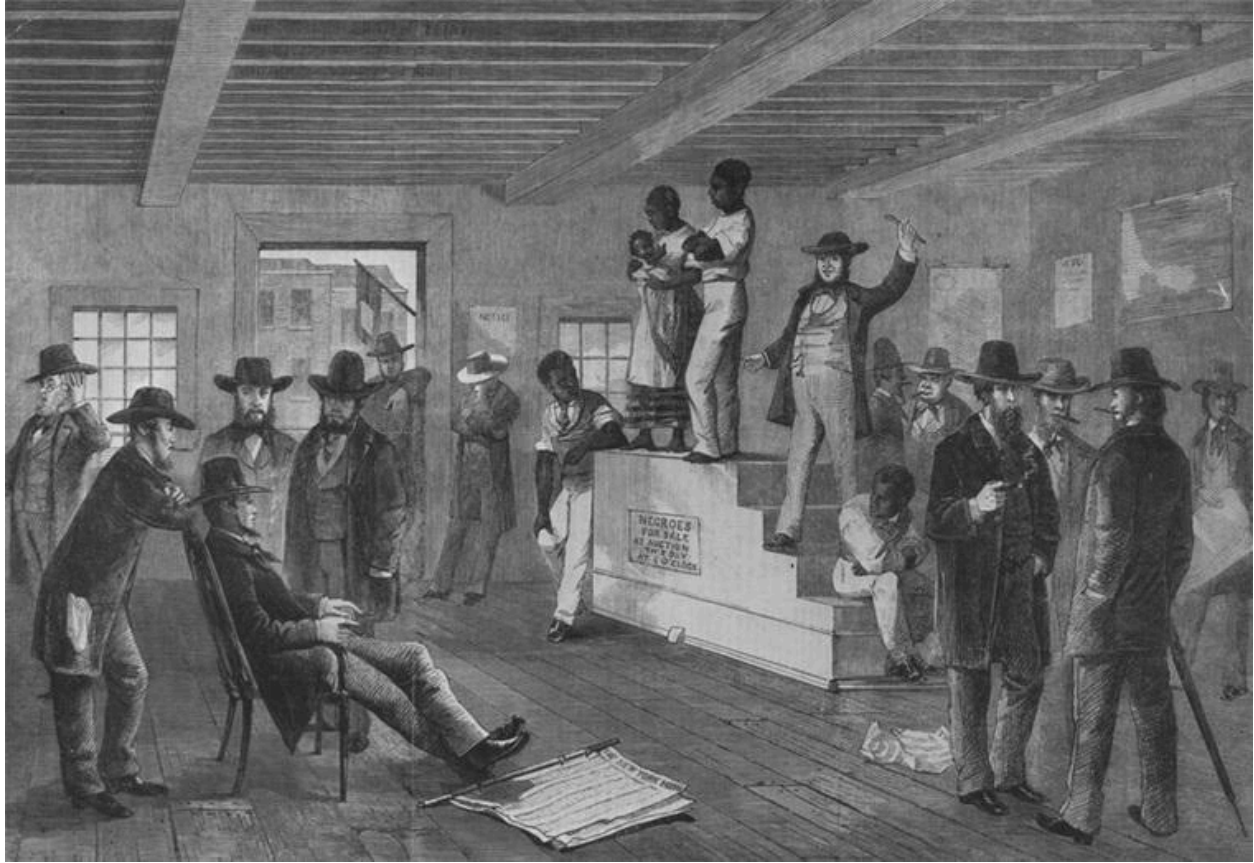
For the planters, enslaving Africans had other advantages as well. Most enslaved Africans were already familiar with different methods of farming. In addition, because of their dark skin, it was hard for them to escape from their owners and blend into the rest of the population.

Virginia elected an assembly, called the House of Burgesses, in 1619. In 1661, the House of Burgesses

passed a law that made African workers slaves for life. By 1700, Virginia had more than 16,000 enslaved Africans—more than one-fourth of the colony's population. For Virginia, slavery had become a way of life.

Virginia Southern Colony

- **Founders** Sir Walter Raleigh and the Virginia Company
- **Settlers** English landowners, skilled laborers (shoemakers, bricklayers, tailors), people seeking profit
- **Climate** Mild winters; hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Coastal lowlands, wooded mountains
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (plantations and small independent farms)
- **Religion** Church of England
- **Government** Self-governing, with elected assembly (House of Burgesses)



Georgia: A Southern Colony

Georgia, the 13th and last colony, was founded by a group of Englishmen whose business plan was based on a grand and noble idea. They wanted to help poor people in England stay out of debtors' prison. In England, at this time, people who couldn't pay their bills went to jail. James Oglethorpe inspired wealthy Englishmen to give

money to help establish a colony where the poor could build better lives instead of going to jail.

King George II and his government liked this plan because the Georgia colony would help keep the Spanish from moving north out of Florida. Georgia would stand between Spanish Florida and the rest of the British colonies to the north.

However, the Englishmen's plan depended on getting the cooperation of settlers. Unfortunately, there weren't many poor debtors who wanted to start new lives in the wilderness of North America. Some thought prison would be a safer place.

Instead of an army of debtors, the colonists who went with Oglethorpe to Georgia in 1732 were adventurers much like the settlers in the other colonies. In addition, many Protestants, Catholics, and Jews came to Georgia in search of religious freedom.

As many had feared, life was difficult in Georgia. The Spaniards in Florida wanted to control Georgia, and they continually attacked the new settlements. The Georgians

fought them off without any help from the other British colonies. To make matters worse, Oglethorpe had specific ideas about how the colonists should live. Oglethorpe envisioned that his new colony would be a perfect society, and he established laws against drinking alcohol and owning slaves to fulfill this vision. He also believed that the settlers should live on small farms and learn to farm their land themselves.

Unhappy about Oglethorpe's rules, the settlers weren't about to go along with his strict views on society. They wanted to farm large plantations and own slaves like the wealthy planters in neighboring colonies. They disliked Oglethorpe's other rules as well.

After 12 years of governing the colony, Oglethorpe returned to England. In 1752, the people of Georgia elected an assembly.



Georgia Southern Colony

- **Founders** George II and James Edward Oglethorpe
- **Settlers** Debtors from English prisons, Europeans seeking religious freedom and cheap land
- **Climate** Short, mild winters; long, hot, humid summers
- **Geography** Wetlands and red-clay plains; forested mountains
- **Economy/Occupations** Farming (plantations and independent farms), trade, skilled labor
- **Religion** Various faiths
- **Government** Self-governing