

Settling the Middle Colonies

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

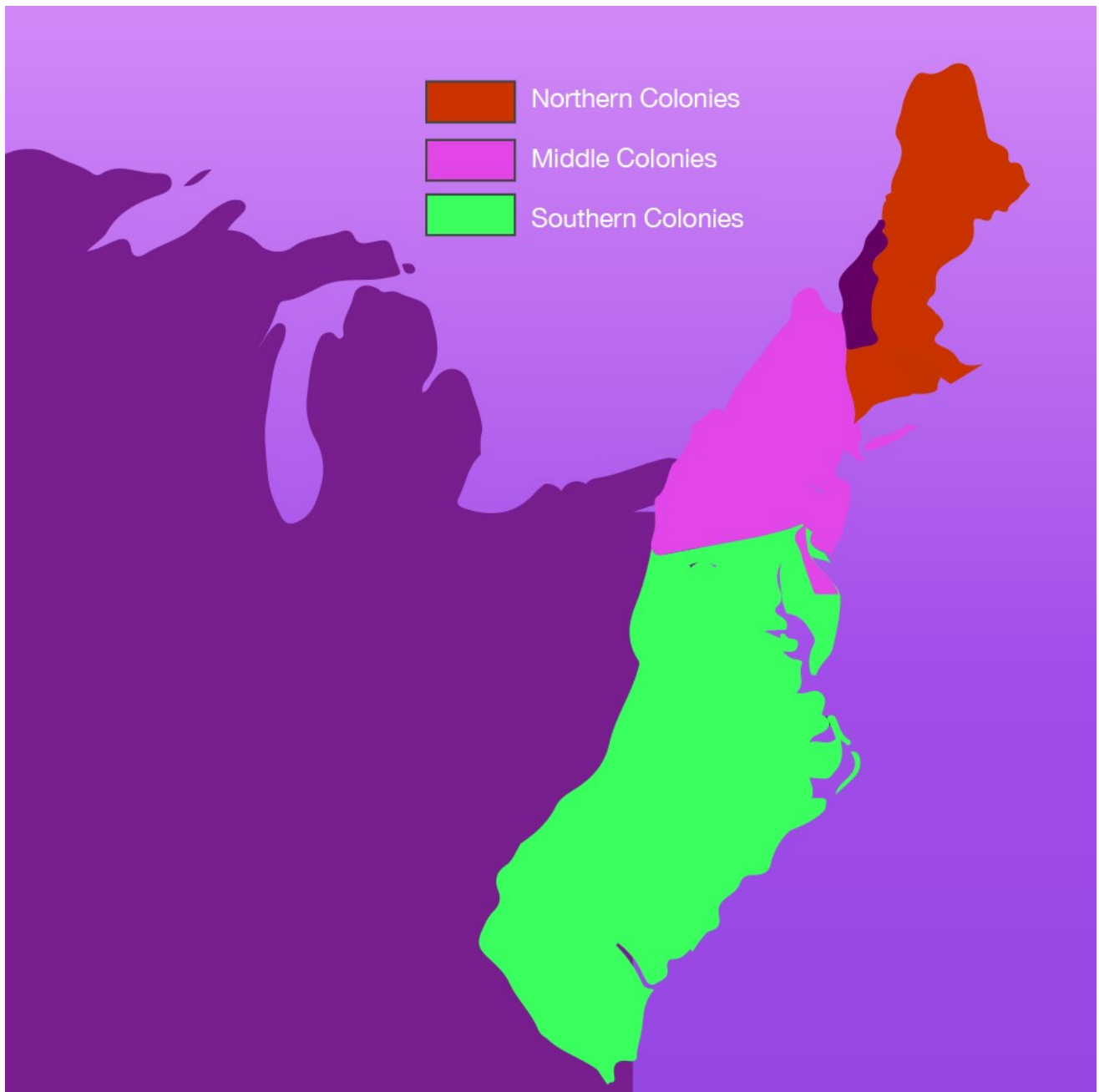
This tutorial covers the founding of the Middle Colonies in English North America, most notably New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Under the authority of the English Crown, these former colonies of the Dutch empire retained much of their character: a diversified economy that combined rural agriculture with port-city production, general religious tolerance, and immigrant communities from around Europe and the Americas.

Our discussion looks at these histories and the ways that the Middle Colonies began to embody a place of culture, labor, and identity that often differed from that of the North and South.

Our discussion will break down like this:

1. Proprietary Colonies: The English Context

England's colonies in America slowly expanded throughout the 17th century. Despite being subjects of the same Crown, the colonial settlements began to develop along different economic, social, and political trajectories.



Map Depicting Regions Claimed by the Northern, Middle, and Southern Colonies in the 17th Century

Unlike the Southern and Northern Colonies, which were often formed by joint-stock companies or by religious dissidents, the Middle Colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania were tied directly to the monarchy of Charles II and to events known as the English Civil War (1642–1649) and the Restoration (1660).

The rise of Charles II and the completion of the English empire in North America began with Charles's father, Charles I. Charles I ascended the English throne in 1625 and soon married a French Catholic princess, Henrietta Maria, who was not well-liked by English Protestants, because she openly practiced Catholicism during her husband's reign. In addition to religious tensions, Charles I came into conflict with England's legislative body, Parliament. When Parliament tried to contest the king's edicts, which included an effort to impose taxes without Parliament's consent, Charles I suspended Parliament in 1629 and ruled without one for the next 11 years.

The ensuing struggle between Charles I and Parliament led to the outbreak of war. The English Civil War lasted from 1642 to 1649 and pitted the king and his Royalist supporters against Oliver Cromwell and his

Parliamentary forces. After years of fighting, the Parliamentary forces gained the upper hand, and in 1649, they charged Charles I with treason and beheaded him. The monarchy was dissolved, and England became a republic: a state without a king. Oliver Cromwell headed a new English Commonwealth, and the period known as the English interregnum, or the time between kings, began.

Though Cromwell enjoyed widespread popularity at first, over time he appeared to assume powers associated with a military dictator, and dissatisfaction grew. When Cromwell died in 1658, the majority of the English people opposed the passage of power to Cromwell's son, Richard, and requested Charles II to assume the throne and end the interregnum. The rise of Charles II to the throne restored the English monarchy. For this reason, the return of Charles II is known as the Restoration.



Charles II of England in 1661

Upon assuming the throne, Charles II dealt with a fractured nation. In particular, he continued to confront politically influential groups who had ties to Cromwell or other previous regimes. England also experienced rivalries with other nations, particularly the Netherlands (Dutch), which was situated across the North Sea. Charles and his supporters recognized that one thing could unify the royal family and other influential groups across the spectrum in England: economic and military warfare against the Netherlands.

Indeed, the scramble to seize trade, wealth, and colonies from the Dutch in the Atlantic World was perhaps the

only unifying political issue in England during this period for a few reasons. First, Charles II recognized that the redirection of Dutch capital into English coffers would strengthen the Crown's economic and political position. Individual members of the royal family could become personally involved in trading companies, which, in turn, granted the Crown privileged access to trade relationships across the Atlantic. A number of English merchants were also eager to jump on board with this program because they hoped to gain benefits and privileges of their own. Finally, Anglican Royalists (members of the Church of England who had supported the Crown during the English Civil War) disliked the Netherlands, because it adhered to a different Protestant denomination (Calvinism) and featured a republic rather than a monarchy.

Thus, the remainder of England's North American empire was not built from scratch. Rather, in addition to England's original holdings in the Southern and Northern Colonies (Virginia and New England, for example), the Middle Colonies—especially New York and New Jersey—were taken from the Netherlands. These colonies, in addition to Pennsylvania, were known as **proprietary colonies**. In each case, Charles II granted land to a key individual, family, or group, who or which, in turn, administered the colony on his behalf.



TERM TO KNOW

Proprietary Colonies

Land in North America granted to key individuals, families, or groups, who or which, in turn, administered a colony on behalf of the English Crown.

2. The Conquest of New Netherland

The English conquered New Netherland and established these proprietary colonies after a series of conflicts with the Dutch during the 1660s and 1670s. During the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1664–1667), the English captured most of the Dutch trading posts in West Africa, thus usurping the Netherlands as the leader in the Atlantic trade of enslaved people. In addition, English forces (with assistance from some colonial militia) gained control of New Netherland.

Charles II gave New Netherland to his brother James, Duke of York (later James II). In his honor, the colony was renamed New York, and the city of New Amsterdam became New York City. Fort Orange, a vital fur trading post on the Hudson River, became Albany. The Duke of York then granted the land between the Hudson and Delaware Rivers to two men who had remained loyal to him during the English Civil War. These land grants went on to form the colony of New Jersey.



DID YOU KNOW

The Dutch in New York originally chafed under English rule. In 1673, during the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–1674), the Dutch actually recaptured the colony. However, at the end of the conflict, the English regained control.

The Duke of York had no desire to govern locally or listen to the wishes of local colonists. It wasn't until 1683, therefore, almost 20 years after the English took control of the colony, that colonists in New York were able to convene a local representative legislature. The assembly's 1683 Charter of Liberties and Privileges set out the traditional rights of Englishmen, such as the right to trial by jury and the right to representative government.

The enactment of these measures restricted the rights of others, however. Under English law, married women could no longer conduct business under their own name (which was customary under Dutch tradition). The rights of free Black people in New York City became increasingly limited as the English expelled them from many skilled jobs. The city also became a center for the Atlantic slave trade and, by 1680, New York had the

largest enslaved population per capita in English North America.

The English continued the Dutch patroonship system by granting large estates to certain families and other favorites or political allies. The largest of these estates, at 160,000 acres, was given to Robert Livingston in 1686. By 1700, nearly 2 million acres of land in New York was owned by the Livingstons and four other families. These families would form a formidable political and economic force in the Middle Colonies. Meanwhile, New York City continued to contain a variety of people and religions—in addition to the Dutch and English people, it held French Protestants (Huguenots), Jews, Puritans, Quakers, Anglicans, and a large population of enslaved people.



“View of New Amsterdam” (ca. 1665), a watercolor by Johannes Vingboons, was painted during the Anglo-Dutch wars of the 1660s and 1670s. New Amsterdam was officially reincorporated as New York City in 1664 but alternated under Dutch and English rule until 1674.

3. Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania, which became the geographic center of English North America, was created in 1681 when Charles II bestowed a proprietary colony to William Penn. The land grant settled a large debt that the English monarch owed the Penn family. William Penn’s father, Admiral William Penn, had served the English Crown by helping take Jamaica from the Spanish in 1655. The king personally owed the Admiral money as well.



DID YOU KNOW

Pennsylvania means “Penn’s Woods” in Latin. Similar to early settlers of the Northern Colonies, Pennsylvania’s first colonists migrated mostly for religious reasons. **William Penn** himself was a **Quaker**, a member of a new Protestant denomination called the Society of Friends. George Fox had founded the Society of Friends in England in the late 1640s, having grown dissatisfied with Puritanism and the idea of predestination. Rather, Fox and his followers stressed that everyone had an “inner light” inside him or her, a spark of divinity. They gained the name Quakers because they were said to quake when the inner light moved them.



PEOPLE TO KNOW

William Penn

Quaker founder of the English colony of Pennsylvania.



TERM TO KNOW

Quaker

Member of the Society of Friends; devoted to principles of peace and the doctrine of the “Inner Light.”

Quakers also rejected traditional European ideas of worldly rank and hierarchy, believing instead in a new and radical form of social equality. Their speech reflected this belief in that they addressed all others as equals, using “thee” and “thou” rather than terms such as “your lordship” or “my lady” that were customary for privileged individuals of the hereditary elite.

The English Crown persecuted Quakers in England, and colonial governments were equally harsh. Massachusetts even executed several early Quakers who had gone to proselytize there. To avoid such persecution, Quakers and their families at first created a community on the sugar island of Barbados. Soon after its founding, however, Pennsylvania became the destination of choice.

Quakers flocked to Pennsylvania as well as New Jersey, where they could preach and practice their religion in peace. Unlike New England, whose official religion was Puritanism, Pennsylvania did not establish an official church. Indeed, the colony allowed a degree of religious tolerance found nowhere else in English America.

To help encourage immigration to his colony, Penn promised fifty acres of land to people who agreed to come to Pennsylvania and completed their term of service. Not surprisingly, those seeking a better life came in large numbers, so much so that Pennsylvania relied on indentured servants more than any other English colony in North America.

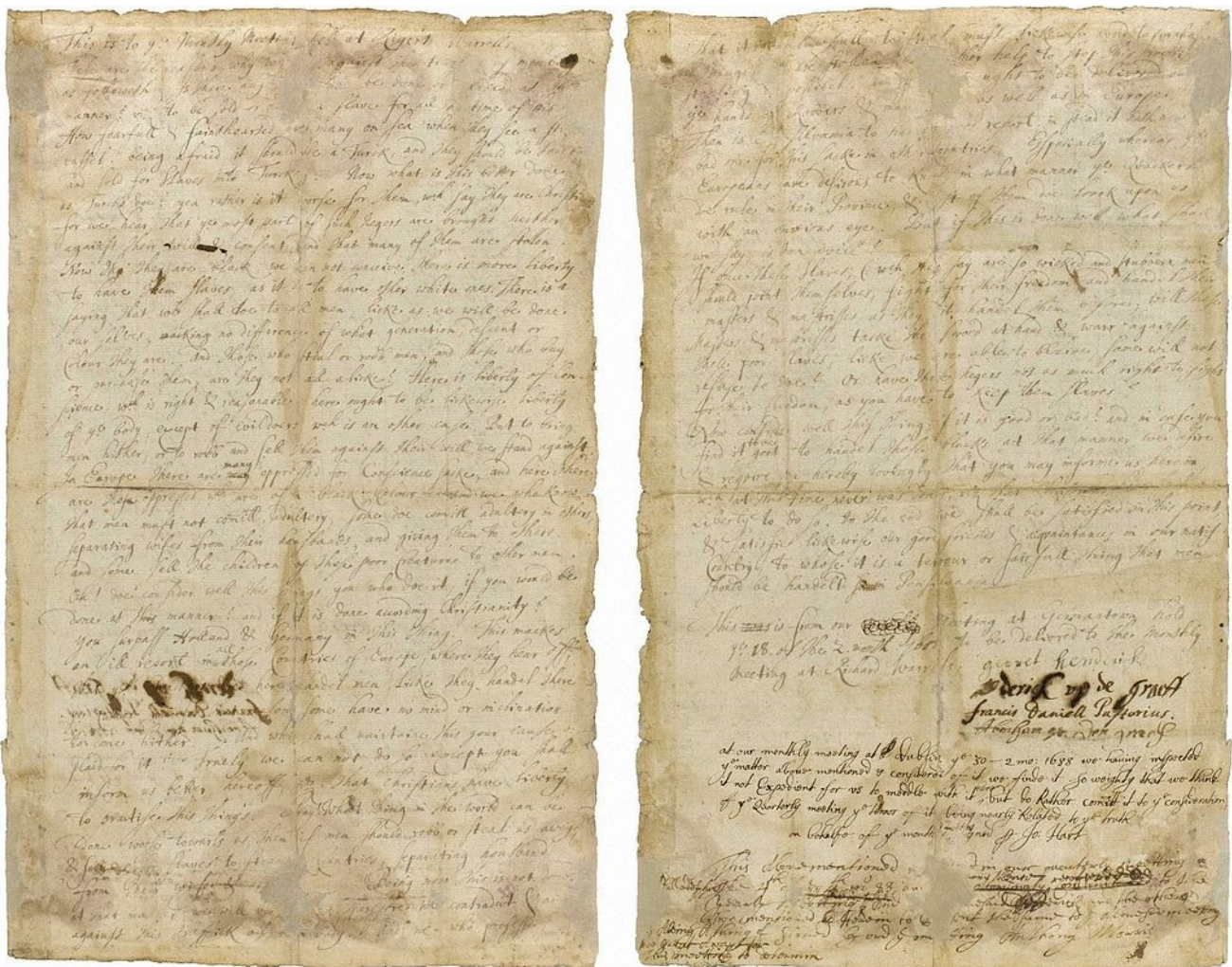
Indeed, all of Pennsylvania appeared to be the best country for poor men and women, many of whom arrived as servants and dreamed of owning land. Very few, such as the fortunate Benjamin Franklin, a runaway from Puritan Boston, did extraordinarily well. Other immigrant groups in the colony, most notably Germans and Scotch-Irish (families from Scotland and England who had first lived in Ireland before moving to British America), greatly improved their lot in Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’s most important port city, grew rapidly during the colonial period. The city acted as a magnet for immigrants, who came not only from England but from all over Europe by the hundreds of thousands. The city also expanded because of its participation in the Atlantic slave trade. Quaker merchants in the city established contacts throughout the Atlantic World, and they took part in the thriving trade.

Nevertheless, some Quakers were deeply troubled by racial slavery in English North America. Quakers believed that liberty was universal rather than the possession of a distinct class or race of people. For this reason, Quakers were the first White people in North America to reject racial slavery and engage in efforts to abolish it altogether.

For example, in April 1688, a group of Quakers met in Germantown, Pennsylvania. During their meeting, they penned an official protest against slavery, the first of its kind in the English colonies. The document read:

Image of William Penn: Charles II granted Penn the land that eventually became the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to settle a debt the English Crown owed to Penn’s father.



Germantown Quakers' Official Protest of Slavery

"This is to ye monthly meeting hold at Rigert Warrells. These are the reasons why we are against the traffick of men-body, as followeth: Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner? viz., to be sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? How fearful & fainthearted are many on sea when they see a strange vessel. being afraid it should be a Turk, and they should be taken, and sold for slaves into Turkey. Now what is this better done, as Turks doe? yea, rather is it worse for them wch say they are Christians, for we hear that ye most part of such negers are brought hither against their will & consent and that many of them are stolen. Now tho they are black, we can not conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones. There is a saying that we shall doe to all men like as we will be done ourselves; making no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are. and those who steal or robb men, and those who buy or purchase them, are they not all alike? Here is liberty of conscience wch. is right and reasonable; here ought to be likewise liberty of ye body, except of evildoers, wch is an other case. But to bring men hither, or to robb and sell them against their will, we stand against. In Europe there are many oppressed wch are of a Black Colour. and we who know that men must not commit adultery, some doe comitt adultery in others, separating wives from their husbands, and giving them to others. and some sell the children of those poor Creatures to other men. Ah! doe consider well this things, you who doe it, if you would be done at this manner? and if it is done according Christianity? You surpass Holland and Germany in this thing. This makes an ill report in all those Countries of Europe, where they hear off, that ye Quakers doe here handel men like they

handel there ye Cattle. and for that reason some have no mind or inclination to come hither. And who shall maintain this your cause, or plaid for it? Truly we can not do so, except you shall inform us better hereof, viz: that christians have liberty to practise this things. Pray, what thing in the world can be done worse towards us, then if men should rob or steal us away, & sell us for slaves to strange Countries, separating husbands from their wife and children. Being now this is not done at that manner we will be done at, therefore we contradict & are against this traffic of men body. And we who profess”



THINK ABOUT IT

- What was the nature of their complaints?
- What did this group of Quakers see wrong with slavery in the colonies?
- How might tobacco planters in the Chesapeake region have reacted to such a document?



DID YOU KNOW

Even though it's considered one of the original 13 British colonies in North America, Delaware never legally became a separate colony in its own right. It was originally founded as a Swedish colony and the area traded hands between the Dutch, the Danes, and the English until 1664. After that time, Delaware shared a governor with Pennsylvania until the Revolutionary War.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, we examined the founding of the Middle Colonies. When New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania became colonies under the English Crown, they represented both a literal and characteristic set of Middle colonies, wedged between those in the North and the South. They were unique from the Northern and Southern Colonies in certain respects and similar to them in others. We examined aspects of the colonies, such as economy, agriculture, trade, and religion. The Quaker religion was one aspect of the Middle Colonies that was unique. Religious tolerance led to the inclusion of Quaker communities in Pennsylvania at a time when this religion experienced persecution elsewhere, including in the Northern Colonies.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Proprietary Colonies

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Quaker

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PEOPLE TO KNOW

William Penn

Quaker founder of the English colony of Pennsylvania.



DATES TO KNOW

1625–1642

King Charles I reigns for 24 years.

1629

King Charles I suspends Parliament for 11 years.

1640

George Fox founds the Society of Friends, aka Quakers.

1642–1649

The English Civil War pits the supporters of the monarchy against those of Parliament.

1649

King Charles I is beheaded, and England temporarily becomes a republic under Oliver Cromwell.

1660

The English Restoration brings King Charles II to the throne.

1664–1667

England seizes the Dutch colony of New Netherland and Dutch trading posts in Africa in the Second Anglo-Dutch War.

1664

King Charles II grants New Netherland to his brother, James, the Duke of York.

1680

New York has the largest population of enslaved people per capita in English North America.

1681

King Charles II bestows a proprietary colony on William Penn.

1683

New York's representative assembly issues the Charter of Liberties and Privileges.

1688

Quakers in Pennsylvania issue a protest against slavery.