

Farmers and planters

The village became an important part of the New England farm system. After a plot of ground had been set aside for a village green (later used for the church and school), a certain home lot was given to each settler. There he built his house and barn, planted his small vegetable garden, and fenced in a yard for his cows. Beyond the village the land was laid out in small, scattered fields.

This scheme of dividing land gave each farmer his fair share of both good and poor land, but he wasted much time in getting from one field to another. So this system was gradually given up and each farmer traded and bought land until he had all his holdings in one place. Besides the plots owned by individual farmers, pastures were set aside for the use of all the villagers.

Each farmer grew vegetables, barley, rye and corn. He usually planted an orchard and raised apples, peaches, and pears. These his wife canned and dried for winter use. His livestock usually included a cow or two, a pair of oxen for plowing and drawing his clumsy homemade cart, a few sheep, and as many pigs as he could afford.

The men and boys worked from sunrise to sunset, plowing, planting, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and making tools and implements. The women and girls cooked the meals, preserved foods, churned butter, cared for the house, tended the small children, made clothes for the entire household, and made soaps and candles as they were needed. Families were usually large, and every boy and girl was put to work at an early age.

The soil of the middle colonies was more fertile, the land was less hilly and rocky, and the climate was somewhat milder than in New England. Farmers here raised the same products as in New England, but wheat was their chief crop. The middle colonies produced larger surpluses than the northern colonies, however. This was because conditions were more favourable and the colonists, especially the Germans in Pennsylvania, knew more about fertilizing their soil and getting better yields.



1. Colonial Cape Cod house.

1. READING / WRITING

Read the text about the early colonists and underline the words referring to their activities. Then make notes on life in northern, middle, and southern colonies pointing out similarities and differences.

The surplus crops were sold to the colonists farther south or were exported to the West Indies. Livestock was well cared for in the middle colonies. Hired hands were needed now and then, but such workers were scarce and their wages high.



2. Edward Hicks, *The Residence of David Twining* 1787. Painted about 1846. (Folk Art Center, Williamsburgh, Virginia)

Using black slaves was unsatisfactory because the tasks for the small-scale farm with its many kinds of crops were too difficult for them.

For years tobacco was the chief product of the **South**. The demand for tobacco, particularly by the English, made the southern plantation possible.

Large owners forced the small tenant farmers to give up their land and move westward. As plantation developed, black slaves were employed more and more.

By 1860 there were as many black slaves as white indentured servants. After that, they steadily increased in numbers and were doing all the heavy labor. The southern planter did none of the actual labor. He lived leisurely, working only at planning, hiring overseers, buying

and trading slaves, selling his crops to the London merchants, and purchasing imported goods. He lived like an English gentleman and spent his spare time in reading or amusement. Nevertheless he was usually clever, eager to get ahead, energetic and capable.

Herds of a thousand cattle or more were common in the southern colonies. So were large numbers of sheep and hogs. The weather was mild all year round, and the cattle needed no shelter.

In many of the colonies, religion was the most important influence in the lives of the settlers, and affected all their actions. In New England, for example, the Sabbath began at three o'clock Saturday afternoon and lasted until sundown Sunday. During this period, everyone was expected to

spend as much time as he could alone and devote himself to thoughts of God, and prayer. Traveling, cutting hair, shaving, making beds, and cooking were forbidden.

Nearly all the colonists were superstitious, and put much faith in signs, charms, and omens. They believed that the Devil walked the earth and could bewitch men, women, and children. Scolding women were said to be possessed by evil spirits and were accused of bewitching or bringing misfortune to others. In 1692 a witchcraft scare resulted in a number of deaths in Salem.

Colonial Houses

The colonists built houses like those they had known in Europe. Each section of the country developed a particular type of architecture, because each group carried with it the building style of the mother country and adapted it to the materials and conditions of the new land.

The early English settlers in the northern colonies found plenty of wood. They made extensive use of it in their houses.

The climate was severe. They built their houses compactly with small windows and fairly small rooms so that they could warm them easily. The out-buildings were often connected with the dwelling, for ease in taking care of the stock in winter.

The architecture of the middle colonies was affected by Dutch and Swedish influences as well as by English. The Dutch built

many brick houses in the town of New York. But in the country both wood and rough stone were used. The houses had one or two stories and were usually rectangular.

The English settlers in the southern colonies modeled their plantation houses after the great manor houses of England. Some houses were built with brick, but wood was the common material.

The rooms of southern houses were much larger than those in the houses farther north. Later, these southern houses usually had generous porches to allow outdoor living and to keep the sun off the windows. Many of them had columns across the front. These were often two storeys high [...].

The homes of the wealthy planters were usually built on a hill overlooking a river, and were surrounded by large lawns, trees,



3. The house of Rebecca Nurse, who was executed in the Salem Witch Trials. Houses in New England were simple and made of wood. The sides were covered with clapboards (horizontal planking). They often had a shingled roof and brick chimneys.

box edges, and flower gardens, many of which were formal and carefully planned. Sometimes the bedrooms were downstairs and the upper floor was given over to a large ballroom, dining room, and nursery. Behind the house itself was a group of separate buildings – a kitchen, a row of small wooden huts for the slaves, a smoke house for curing meat, a carriage house, a tool shed, and the stables and barns [...].

In later colonial days, many of the planters lived in handsome, Georgian dwellings, richly furnished with articles brought from England.

All the texts are adapted from *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, by Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, Chicago, Ill., 1963.



4. In the 18th century, until the American Revolution in 1776, both public and private buildings were built in the Georgian style which was popular in England. A typical Georgian house was a two-storey brick house often covered with clapboards. It had gabled roofs, broad chimneys and often a front porch with columns. Inside there was a central hall and a staircase leading upstairs. Along the coast many houses had a balustrade on the roof from which to watch the ships arriving and setting sail. It was called the 'widow's walk'.

2. READING / SPEAKING

Read the text above and the captions and prepare 10 questions to ask your partner. Then in turns answer each other's questions.

Society in Colonial America

During the colonial period, there were distinct classes in the Old World. But in colonial America a poor person of (1) ... and energy could achieve the highest social rank. Throughout the colonies, social rank was soon based on office-holding and wealth rather than on family. In the south, the aristocracy was made up of large rice and tobacco (2) ...; in New York, it was the landed patrons*; in New England, the office-holders and rich merchants in the coastal towns were social leaders. Social classes developed early and were rather well defined. Few of the settlers had been (3) ... in Europe, but as they gained (4) ..., they tried to imitate the aristocracy of the old countries. This group was small in (5) ... but enjoyed great power. It usually controlled the colonial governments and courts and the (6) ... in dress, architecture, and manners. It was chiefly the aristocrats who were interested in higher (7) ... and the arts.

The (8) ... of the colonial population was made up of **free-holders**, or middle-class freemen who owned property. These were small (9) ... and the lesser (10) ... of the towns. This group owned property and, therefore, had the (11) ... to vote. The freeholders usually controlled the lower houses of the colonial legislatures, and constantly (12) ... with the aristocrats for (13) ... of the government. The middle

classes copied the style and (14) ... of the aristocrats and yearned for enough money to rank with them socially. Below the freeholders were the **tenant farmers** and **wage earners** in the towns. Most of them were struggling to get together enough money to (15) ... land and gain the right to vote.

The **indentured servants** were still (16) ... in the social scale. These men and women had signed an agreement to work without (17) ... for a number of years (usually five to seven) for the person or company which (18) ... their passage to America. At the end of his term of service, the indentured servant was given (19) ... by the colonial government and he became a middle-class freeman with the right to take part in the government and activities of the colonies.

The persons in the lowest position in colonial society were the **black slaves**, mostly brought from Africa against their (20) In the 1660s, the slave system became legally recognized in the colonies. But it did not become important until after 1680, when black slaves began to take the place of white indentured servants on the southern plantations.

* Patrons: members of the Dutch West India Company who brought over to New Netherland (now the State of New York) 50 families of settlers at their own expense becoming a kind of feudal lords.



5. Mrs Elisabeth Freake and baby Mary. About 1671 and 1674. Anonymus painter.

3. READING

Read the text on the left and fill in the blanks with the missing words.

ability • aristocrats • control • education • farmers • land • lower • majority • manners • merchants number • paid • pay • planters • purchase • right • struggled • styles • wealth • will

4. READING

Read the text again and take notes of the differences between the American colonies and Europe.



6. The Old Plantation, 1780- 1800. Anonymous painter. (Williamsburg, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center)

Education in the colonies

The colonists established some public schools but most children from poor families were taught by their parents at home. In New England the Puritans valued education, because they believed that Satan was keeping those who couldn't read the scriptures. Many young Puritans, primarily boys aged six to eight, learned reading, spelling, and prayers at a "dame school". These were private schools held by women, often widows, in their own homes. Later, either the boys went on to a grammar school to prepare for college or they trained in a trade.

In the middle colonies, the decision whether to educate children was left to individual families until 1683, when a law was passed in Pennsylvania, requiring that all children be taught to read and write. Most schools were run by local religious groups. All boys learned a skill or trade. Depending on their social class, they might also complete their high education. As in the northern colonies, girls usually continued their education in household and social skills at home.

It was well after the Civil War that the South legislated for state supported schools. This occurred for several different reasons. First, Southerners believed that education was a private matter and not a concern of the state. They believed that the most

important training a child received was in the home where he/she was taught the values of the society he/she was about to enter.

Another reason was the social-class structure which existed in the South, with two main classes: the planters (who could afford to pay for their children's education) and the slaves (who were cut off from education). In fact, as education means power and the Southerners did not want this power for the slaves, laws were passed to make it a crime to teach slaves to read and write.



7. A New England Dame school in old colonial times, 1713. Engraving. (Bettman Archive)

Early American quilts

In American colonial times, quilting was an important functional activity for women. During the long wearisome journeys to the west, not only were quilts needed for bedding and comfort, but, when winds blew across the dusty plains, they were used to cover the cracks that let the choking dust into the wagon. In some cases they became targets for arrows when they were hung on the exposed side of the wagons for protection during Indian attacks.

Once a pioneer family reached their destination, quilts and blankets were still needed for uses beyond bed coverings. They covered windows and doors of log cabins. Sometimes they were used to partition off a room. And more than that, putting a favorite quilt on the bed gave a woman a sense of connection with her former way of life.

Occasionally pioneer women, who mostly lived in isolated regions, were able to organize quilting gatherings. It was a way to get together and socialize which helped them overcome their

loneliness. Women could share family news, exchange recipes, give child-rearing tips and generally support each other.

It was in the mid 1800s, with the development of the textile industry that made fabric available to most families, that quilting became a widespread activity and new styles became popular. Only then did quilting become a common way for American women to express their creativity.

During the 20th century, art quilts became popular for their aesthetic and artistic qualities rather than for functionality (they are displayed on a wall or table rather than spread on a bed).



8. A modern quilt from The Santa Clara Valley Quilt Association. A quilt is a type of blanket made with a thick padded fabric, often with decorative designs. Quilting is a sewing method done to join two or more layers of material together to make a thicker padded material.



9. *The Quilting Party*, 1854–1875. Anonymous painter. A "quilting bee" is a gathering of friends and neighbors who come together to work on creating a quilt. It was an important means of socializing for colonial and pioneer women. On the day of the quilting bee, the quilters would arrive early and begin marking the quilt top which had been put into the quilt frame by the hostess. Then the women would quilt all day, while exchanging conversation, perhaps taking turns around the frame while others cooked up the evening meal. The quilt had to be finished before the men showed up in the late afternoon when dinner was served to all. After dinner, there was very often a square dance or country dance with fiddles accompanying the dancers. (Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia)