

# The Middle Colonies

America was always a diverse continent. No-where was that diversity more obvious in the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. The English, Swedes, Dutch, Germans, Scots-Irish and French lived close together which resulted in many tense situations. The religion of the Middle Colonies, as one would expect, was diverse. Quakers, Mennonites, Lutherans, Dutch Calvinists, and Presbyterians were all represented, which made it impossible for one religion to dominate and gave a greater freedom of religion than any of the New England Colonies, with exception to Rhode Island.

Due to their central location the Middle Colonies were able to be a place of important distribution to the colonies. It was the connector colonies that connected the New England Colonies with the Southern Colonies. This would cause New York and Pennsylvania to grow rapidly. Another reason the Middle Colonies grew quickly was because of the fertile land and industry. The Middle Colonies shared the fertile land of the Southern Colonies and many large fields of wheat could be found and they shared the industry of timber and fishing. This coupled with religious freedom gave more options to immigrants who were migrating from Europe.

Many great men would come from the Middle Colonies. Such men as Benjamin Franklin, John Dickinson, General Horatio Gates, Benjamin Rush, Caesar Rodney, John Witherspoon and William Floyd.

A Mix of People in the 1600s, the Middle Colonies accepted people of different religions and cultures and religions. Some were Catholic or Jewish. Proprietors allowed them to practice different religions. Proprietors (The people that set up the colonies) allowed this religious tolerance for two reasons. They just wanted colonists to buy or rent land. Making a Living Many families in the Middle Colonies were farmers. Men, women, and children all worked long hours in the fields and in the home. Boys helped plant and harvest crops. Girls did housework, cooking, and sewing. The climate and soil of the Middle Colonies were very good for farming. Many farmers grew more than they needed for their families. They sold extra grain and livestock in the cities. Farmers used the long, wide rivers to ship their goods to Philadelphia and New York. Merchants there sold the farmers' goods to other cities and nations. As in the other English colonies, the Middle Colonies had a free market economy. Proprietors did not tell the colonists what to do. Colonists could make what they thought would earn them the most money. This is called free enterprise. Philadelphia and New York became busy ports and trade centers. Many artisans and laborers found work in these cities. Some of the laborers were enslaved Africans. Boys learned things like shoemaking and printing. Girls learned to spin thread and weave cloth.

## New York

This colony was founded by the Dutch and called New Netherland. Eventually, the English acquired it, and the colony was given by King Charles I to his brother, the Duke of York. The Duke of York kept a large portion of this land, and renamed it New York. New York was divided into sections on which colonists could start farms. He chose governors. These governors chose a council to help with decisions. This allowed colonists to elect representatives to an assembly. These representatives did contribute to lawmaking, but were not very powerful.

## New Jersey

The Duke of York gave some of his land to his friends, George Carteret and John Berkeley. This land was split into two portions, East and West Jersey. Eventually, these parts were united into New Jersey. Since George Carteret and John Berkeley lived in England, they needed governors to control their land. As it was the case with New York, governors picked a council to make decisions. Like New York, the delegates did not have very much power.

## Pennsylvania

William Penn was a Quaker. Quakers were another group from England who were persecuted for their

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beliefs. The King of England owed Penn's family a lot of money, but instead, he gave Penn land in the New World. This colony was Pennsylvania. People from many different countries moved to the Pennsylvania, because of the tolerance found there. Pennsylvania citizens were allowed to vote for representatives. However these representatives had more power; they could approve of or reject laws. The Native Americans were treated fairly. Penn made treaties with them when buying their land.

### Delaware

The Duke of York also gave Penn some more land. At first this land was part of Pennsylvania, but after a while, it became the colony of Delaware.