

3.2 The New England, Middle, and Southern Colonial Regions

English settlers established colonies in North America for many reasons. Some colonies were set up by groups of businessmen who hoped to profit from resources found in the "New World." Several colonies were settled by people looking for a place to practice their religion freely. One colony was established as a refuge for debtors (people who owe money). The debtors would otherwise have been tossed into prison. The English government supported all these efforts in part because it was competing for land in the New World with such nations as France and Spain.

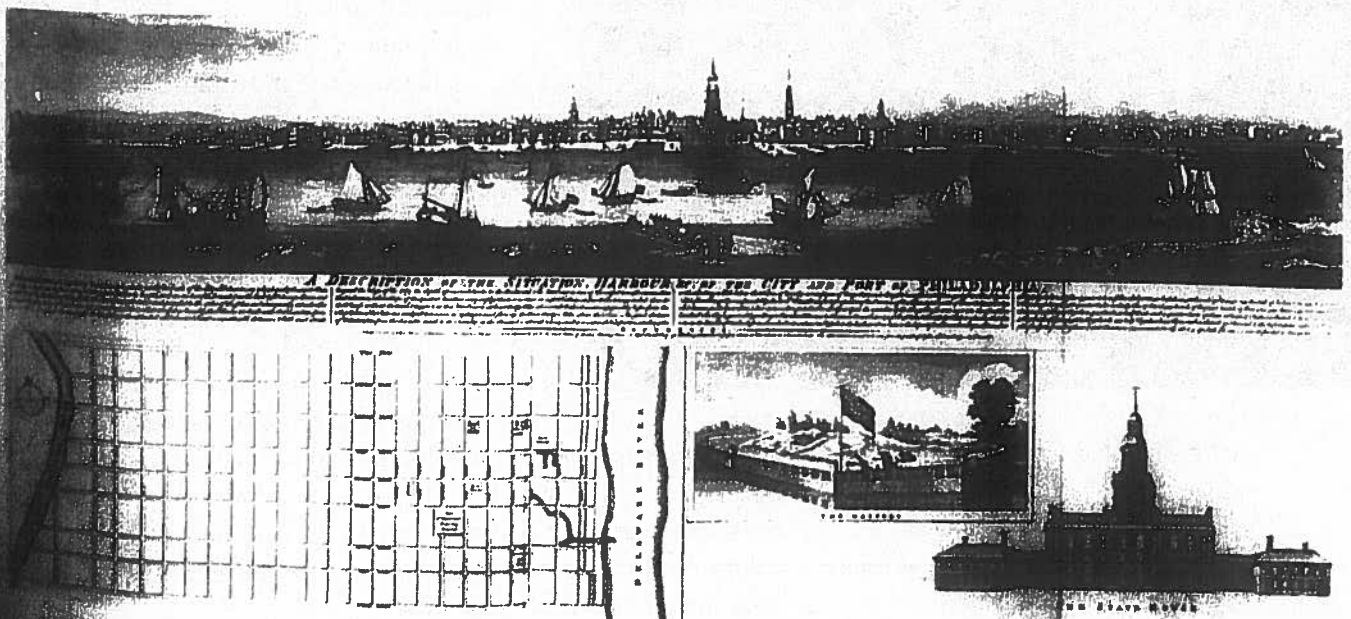
By 1733, there were 13 British colonies strung along the Atlantic coastline. They can be grouped into three distinct regions: the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies. These regions had different climates and resources that encouraged settlers to develop different ways of life.

The New England Colonies The New England region included the colonies of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. As you will read in the next section, the first settlers of these colonies came to America seeking religious freedom.

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 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 wide variety of crops and livestock. Lumbering, shipbuilding, and other occupations added to the variety of opportunities in these colonies.

By the 1700s, Philadelphia, in the Middle Colony of Pennsylvania, had become a bustling trading center and one of the most important cities in the English colonies. It was the first city in America to establish a public school or a newspaper. It was also the first to use a grid or checkerboard pattern to set up its streets.



cash crops crops, such as tobacco, sugar, and cotton, raised in large quantities in order to be sold for profit

assembly an elected group of lawmakers

democratic Ruled by the people. In a democracy, citizens elect representatives to make and carry out laws.

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. Others seeking religious freedom soon followed. Settlements of French, Dutch, Germans, Swedes, Danes, Finns, Scots, Irish, and English 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. Here, the soil and the hot, 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.

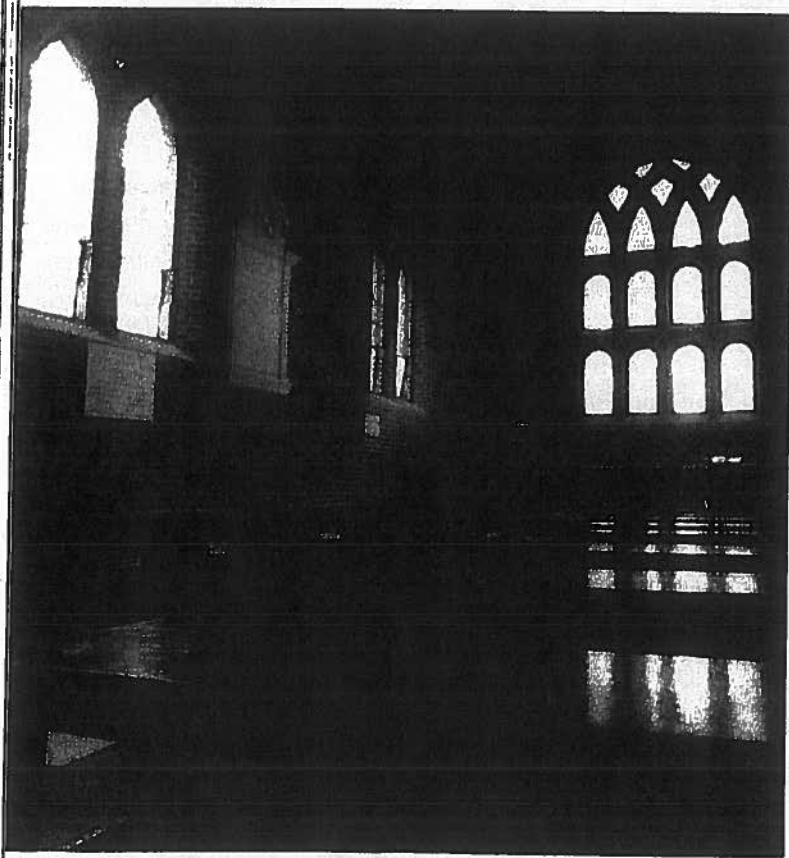
Because the colonies were so far away from England, however, they needed to be able to make their own laws and keep peace and order.

The colonies developed different forms of government, depending on the purpose of the settlement. Most of the colonies were self-governing. 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, groups of men who represented the English businessmen involved in starting the colony.

In Massachusetts, religious-minded colonists established a theocracy, a government whose leaders ruled in the name of God. In time, however, a system of town meetings evolved 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, land-owning 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.



In New England, the church was at the center of both religious and political life. This church's pews could be removed to make room for tables used in town meetings.