

The Middle Colonies

Colonial America Articles

Article 5

1626-1682

The middle colonies were made up of the colonies of New York, Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

Geography and Climate

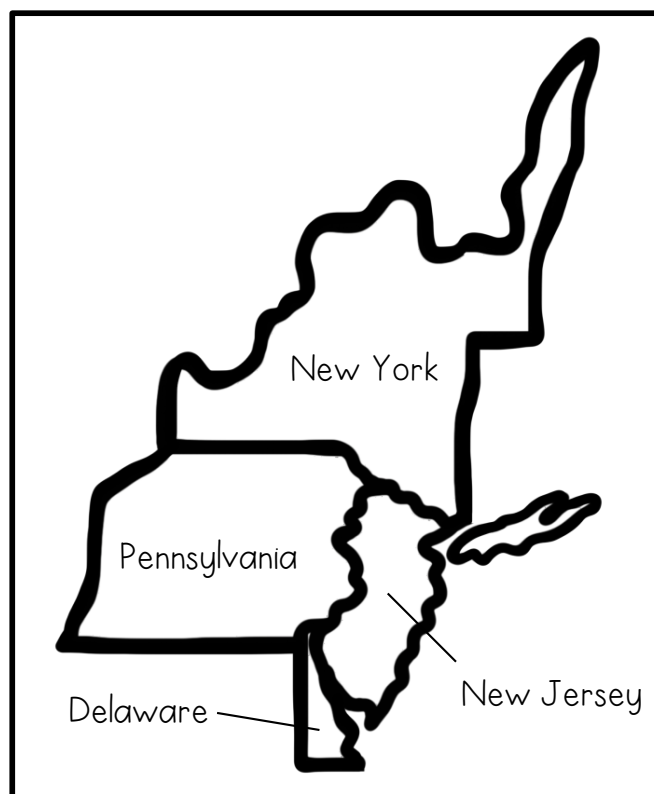
The middle colonies had deep, rich soil. The fertile soil was good for farming. These colonies had mild winters and warm summers. The growing season was longer than in New England because there was more sun and lots of rain. There were many long, wide rivers that were used to ship goods to other colonies. Two of the main rivers were the Hudson River and the Delaware River. This area also had good coastal harbors for shipping. The land ranged from coastal plains, **piedmont** (rolling hills), and mountains further inland.

Economy

Because the soil was so rich and fertile, many middle colonists farmed. They farmed more than they could eat, so many used the rivers to export their extra crops to the cities. They would sell their goods in cities like Philadelphia and New York. Merchants in these cities would then sell the goods to other cities and countries. Many farmers built flour mills where they ground wheat into flour and then could ship it to England. Besides wheat, farmers harvested rye and corn, earning them the nickname "The Breadbasket Colonies." Farmers also raised livestock, including pigs and cows. There were also many **artisans**, people who were good at making products by hand, in the middle colonies. Some artisans included blacksmiths (who made products from iron), coopers (who made barrels from wood), and cobblers (who made shoes). Children and young men became **apprentices** and worked alongside master artisans, learning the trade from them in hopes that they could one day earn a living by this trade.

The Great Melting Pot

The people who lived in the middle colonies were from many different areas of Europe. They were a **diverse** population and took part in different religions. The colonists that were living here were very tolerant of one another. This was different from the New England colonies, who expected those who settled there to also be Puritans. If they weren't Puritans, they had to move and begin new colonies of their own, often in the region of the middle colonies. A Frenchman visiting the middle colonies called it a great "melting pot" because of the great diversity of the people living in this area.



New York and New Jersey

The Dutch West India Company sent settlers to the New World to begin a colony. They sailed up the Hudson River and settled in an area they called New Netherlands in 1624. England felt that they had claim to this land and sent a fleet to conquer New Netherlands and reclaim the land in 1664. King Charles II then gave the colony to his brother, the Duke of York. He kept some of the land for himself, renaming it New York, and then gave the rest of the land to two of his friends. The friends divided the land and called it East and West Jersey. Both areas combined and became New Jersey in 1702. New York City became a major port and **immigrants** (people who move to another country) of different religions and nationalities would enter the country here. People seeking religious freedom settled in New Jersey. The **proprietors** (people who owned and controlled the land in the colony) did not mind that there was such religious diversity because they wanted settlers to buy the land.

Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the Quakers

During the time that the colonies were being established, the official religion of England was The Church of England. However, there were people who wanted to join other Christian churches, such as the Puritans and the Quakers. If they did join a different church, they were persecuted and punished by being put in jail.

William Penn was a famous Quaker. He became a Quaker in his twenties and went to jail several times for going to Quaker meetings and writing religious letters. His father was a wealthy landowner and admiral in the English navy. He did not agree, at first, with William's choice of religion, but later, when he became ill, he respected William's courage and left him a fortune when he died.

Because the situation for the Quakers was becoming more difficult in England, Penn came up with a plan for the Quakers. He went to King Charles II and asked to create a colony in North America where the Quakers would go. King Charles owed Penn's father a large amount of money, and Penn stated that the land would be the repayment of this debt. King Charles II liked his idea and gave Penn a charter for a large area of land that would be called Pennsylvania, "sylvania" meaning "woods" (so Penn's woods).

Once Penn got to North America, he asked the Duke of York to lease him some land so that Pennsylvania was not landlocked and would have an outlet to the sea. The Duke agreed and gave him more land that later became Delaware. Penn also planned Pennsylvania's first city, Philadelphia. This city was on a harbor and became a trade center with many ships from other colonies and Europe porting there.

The Quakers believed in religious freedom and did not believe in religious rituals or ceremonies. They were very peaceful and did not fight in wars or believe in slavery. Penn wanted to create a colony that was not just for Quakers, but was free for all who chose to live there. He wanted to live in peace with the Native Americans and bought land from the Lenni Lenape Indians that lived there. He wanted everyone to live fairly and peacefully, no matter what church they attended.



Portrait of William Penn