

COLONIAL PERIOD

By the year 1733, the English owned *thirteen separate colonies* stretched from *New Hampshire* in the North to *Georgia* in the South. Most people divided them into three main groups; each group had its own way of life and character.

In the far North was the *New England* group, centered in *Massachusetts*, since the time of the *pilgrims* the people of New England had spread inland and along the coast, most were small farmers or craftsmen, working the stony soil and governing themselves in small towns and villages. Other *New Englanders* depended on the sea for a living, they felled the trees of the region's forests to build ships, in these they sailed to catch *Cod* or trade with England and the *West Indies*. *Boston* and other coastal towns grew into busy ports, their prosperity depended on trade.

The nearest Colonies to the South of New England were called the *Middle Colonies*; the biggest were *New York* and *Pennsylvania*. As in New England most of their people lived by farming, *Philadelphia* was the capital of *Pennsylvania*. By 1770 it was the largest city in America, with 28000 inhabitants.

The people of the *Middle Colonies* were usually more tolerant of religions and other differences than the *New Englanders*; many of them also had *German, Dutch* or *Swedish* ancestors rather than *English* ones.

The Southern Colonies of *Virginia*, the *Carolina's* and *Georgia* formed the third group. In their hot and fertile river valleys wealthy landowners formed large plantations, they lived in fine houses, with wide cool verandahs from which they could look out over their fields of tobacco or cotton, most of the work in the fields was done by *black slaves, slavery*

was rare in the other American colonies, but the prosperity of the plantation-owning Southerners was already beginning to depend on it.

The houses of the Southern plantation owners had expensive furniture, much of it imported from Europe, close by stood groups of smaller, simpler buildings, stables, wash-houses, blacksmiths shops and the little huts in which the **black slaves** lived and almost always a river flowed nearby, with a wharf where sea-going ships could be loaded to carry the plantation's crops to England.

In all three groups of colonies most people still lived less than fifty miles from the coast, this was called the "**tidewater**" period of settlement. Those people furthest inland had traveled up **tidal rivers** like the **James** and the **Hudson**, clearing the trees and setting up farms along their banks.

During the fifty years after 1733 settlers moved deeper into the continent. They traveled west into central **Pennsylvania**, cutting down forests of **oak** trees to make hilly farm. They spread westward along the river valleys in **Virginia**, the **Carolina's** and **Georgia**, they moved north along the fertile valley of the **Mohawk River** of **New York**.

Making a new settlement always began in the same way; the settlers cleared the land of trees, and then cut the trees into logs and planks. They used these to build houses and barns, they then ploughed between the tree stumps, sowed their seeds, and four months later harvested the crops of corn. If their soil was fertile the settlers lived well. But if the soil was rocky, or poor in plant foods, life could be hard and disappointing; settlers with poor soil often left their farms and moved westward, to try again on more fertile land. As they traveled inland they passed fewer and fewer farms and villages. At last there were none at all. This area

where European settlements came to an end, and the forest homelands of the **Amerindians** began, was called the **FRONTIER**.

Fresh waves of settlers pushed the **Frontier** steadily westwards in their search for fertile soil. They would often pass by land that seemed unsuitable for farming, because of this, Frontier farms and villages were often separated by miles of unsettled lands. A family might be day's journey from its nearest neighbors. For such reasons the people of **Frontier communities** had to rely upon themselves for almost everything they needed. They grew their own food and built their own houses. They made the clothing they wore and the tools they used. They developed their own kinds of music, entertainment, art and forms of religious worship.

A **special spirit**, or **attitude**, grew out of this **Frontier way of life**, people needed to work together, helping each other with tasks as clearing land and building houses and barns. The contribution of these two ideas; a strong belief that individuals had to help themselves and a need for them to cooperate with one another **strengthened** the feeling that **people were equal** and that nobody should have special rights and privileges.

The Frontier way of life helped Democratic ideas to flourish in America. Today's Americans like to think that many of the best values and attitudes of the modern United States can be traced back to the Frontier experiences of their pioneer ancestors.