

Building the English Colonies

This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

In the 1500s, Spain conquered Mexico and Central and South America. The Spanish accumulated a great fortune in gold and silver from their American colonies. Indeed, the main purpose of many Spanish colonies was to find gold and silver and send these precious metals back to Spain.

The English were also interested in acquiring wealth, but preferred to do so by setting up permanent settlements. They wanted colonies where people would farm, fish, cut timber, and harvest the other resources of the region.

Building colonial settlements was expensive. The English kings and queens did not want to spend the money. Instead, they gave grants of land to well-to-do people or businesses, called joint-stock companies, to build the colonies.

In 1585, Sir Walter Raleigh established the first English colony in North America. Raleigh sent a group of men to Roanoke Island, off the coast of modern-day North Carolina. Unfortunately, Raleigh's colonists grew discouraged and they returned to England.

In 1587, Raleigh sent a second group to the island. This time, women and children traveled with the men. He hoped that a community of families would stay there.



The colony got off to a good start. A baby girl, Virginia Dare, was the first English child born in the land that would become the United States. But in 1590, a supply ship reached the colony and found that everyone had disappeared without a trace. All that was left was one word carved on a tree. The colony that Raleigh founded is remembered as the "Lost Colony."

In 1607, a joint-stock company called the London

Company started a colony at Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown was the first permanent English

The settlers in the first English colony in North America disappeared without a trace.

settlement in North America. At first, the colony struggled. Then the Powhatan Confederacy, Native Americans indigenous to the area, came to the

colony's rescue. The Confederacy was made up of about thirty Native American groups that shared the

same language, called Algonquian. It was named for the chief who governed it. Members of the Powhatan

Confederacy taught the colonists how to grow tobacco, a crop that was native to North America and unknown in Europe. Growing tobacco was a big success. Tobacco quickly became a cash crop for the colonists.

Then in 1620, the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth. These colonists wanted religious freedom. Ten years later, the Puritans formed the Massachusetts Bay Company and settled in Boston.

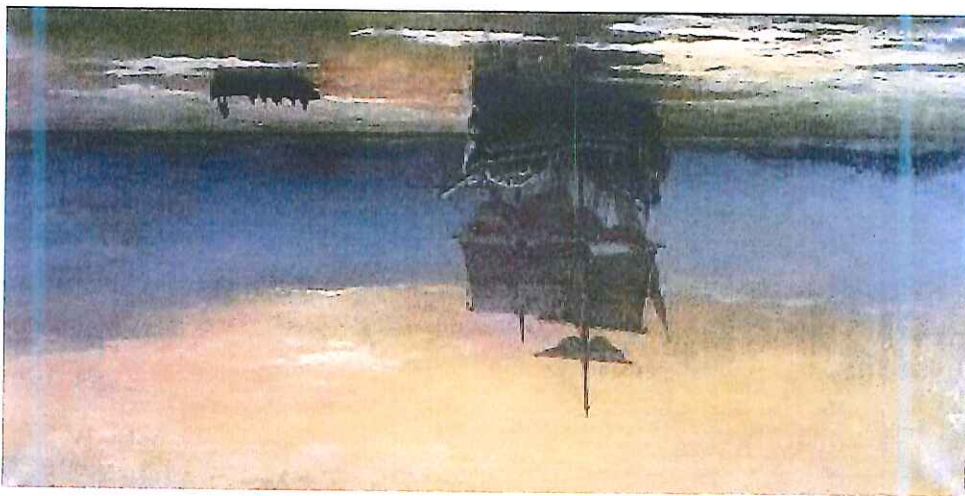
During the 1600s, the English settled on land along most of the Atlantic coast. This land belonged to various Native American groups, who were often forced to find new places to live. The English also built colonies on islands in the West Indies in the Caribbean Sea.

These English colonies survived and prospered. By 1700, English colonies stretched from the fisheries of Newfoundland to the sugar plantations of the Caribbean.

These colonies were built on strong trade connections. They became home to people who were looking for wealth, religious freedom, and unlimited opportunities for themselves and their children.

Journey of the Pilgrims

by ReadWorks



"Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor" by William Halsall, painted in 1882

Today, the Pilgrims are known as a group of about 100 colonists who settled in North America in 1620. About one-third of these colonists were Separatists. The separatists were people who wanted to separate from the Church of England and create their own church. They first had left England to settle in the Netherlands. After living there for years, they were scared of losing their heritage. They felt they would become more Dutch and lose their English roots. So the Separatists decided to go to North America. They set off in 1620 aboard the Mayflower with other colonists.

The Separatists and the other colonists planned to settle near the Hudson River in North America. Instead of landing there, they arrived in Cape Cod, in present-day Massachusetts. Before landing, there was a disagreement on board the Mayflower. Some of the colonists wanted to end the disagreement and unite everyone, so they wrote an agreement now known as the Mayflower Compact. Because of the agreement, most of the people on the ship joined together in a common union once they arrived on land. The Mayflower Compact ultimately became the basis of the Plymouth colony's government.



Illustration of the Pilgrims signing the Mayflower Compact

Pilgrims and Puritans - Who Were the Pilgrims?

by ReadWorks



The Mayflower Compact, 1620

In 1620, a new group of English settlers arrived in New England. Today, they are known as the Pilgrims.

Legend has it that the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. While we do not know if this is true, we do know that they landed on the tip of Cape Cod in present-day Massachusetts. There, they started Plymouth Colony. They wanted Plymouth Colony to be a place where they could practice their beliefs freely.

The Pilgrims had not been free to practice their own beliefs in England. In England, the Pilgrims were known as Separatists. This is because they wanted to separate from England's official church. However, the English king did not allow groups to separate from the Church of England.

So the Pilgrims moved to the Netherlands in 1607. Then, a few years later, they decided to go to America. In September 1620, the Pilgrims set sail for America from Plymouth, England. They traveled on a ship called the *Mayflower*. After 66 days and two deaths, these brave travelers arrived on the shores of Cape Cod. They decided to make Plymouth their new home.

Plymouth Colony and the Local Wampanoag People

by ReadWorks



"The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth" by Jennie A. Brownscombe, painted in 1914

The colonists of the Plymouth colony were people who settled at Cape Cod, in North America. These colonists are known today as the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims came from England in 1620. Over half of them died during their first winter in North America. They suffered from harsh weather and poor food. They eventually received help from a Native American man named Squanto. Squanto was able to help the Pilgrims because he spoke English. He taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn. He also showed them where they could fish and hunt beaver.

The Pilgrims built a relationship with the local Wampanoag people soon after Squanto began helping them. By fall of 1621, the Pilgrims were able to harvest a successful corn crop. To celebrate their success, the Pilgrims organized a harvest feast.

About 90 Wampanoag people attended, too. The feast lasted for three days, and it was a combination of prayer and celebration. The Wampanoag offered five deer to the feast. The Pilgrims and the Wampanoag also ate bread or porridge made of corn. Wildfowl was a part of the feast, too. Historians think that the wildfowl was most likely duck or goose, but they say it could have been turkey. No one knows exactly what else the Pilgrims and Wampanoag ate at the feast. However, this harvest feast became the basis for the Thanksgiving holiday in the United States.

Illustration of Squanto



The Growth of Slavery in the North American Colonies

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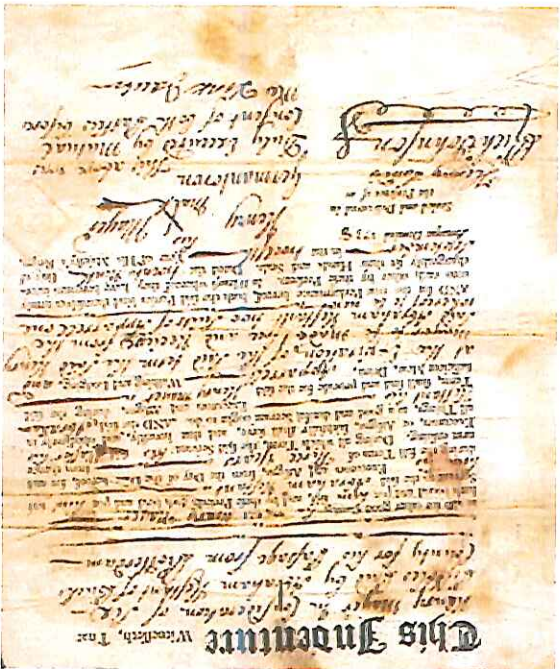
During the 1500s and 1600s, Europeans were establishing colonies throughout the Americas. As sugar plantations began to thrive there as a way for European colonists to make money, the demand for enslaved labor grew. Many Europeans filled this demand with enslaved people from Africa through the slave trade.

In the colonies of North America, the demand for enslaved people came later in the slave trade. The Pilgrims and Puritans settled the colonies in the Northeast where the soil was not very good and the winters were cold. These conditions were not ideal for growing cash crops, so there was no need for a large labor force. Even so, slavery did exist on a small scale in these northern colonies.

In the South, the situation was different. Plantation owners who lived in the southern colonies grew tobacco to export to Europe. They needed many workers to run these plantations. To find a supply of workers, plantation owners began paying for indentured servants to come to the colonies from Europe. In return, the servants agreed to work for a certain number of years. At the end of a certain amount of time, they were granted their freedom. A steady supply of workers could be brought from the home country, but it didn't work out very well. It was hard to keep the workers alive. The hot weather, high humidity, and swampy water were perfect conditions for breeding disease. Even those indentured servants who became accustomed to the new climate did not live very long. The work was very hard, and the conditions were very bad. Many servants did not survive long enough to fulfill their contracts. It was necessary to keep paying for servants to cross the ocean.

Despite these problems, when the plantations first got started, the owners were glad to pay

indentured servant certificate



for indentured servants instead of enslaved people.

In time, the use of indentured servants became less attractive to the plantation owners. Little by little, the plantations moved away from the coast, where disease had been a big problem. Servants were living longer. They ate better and could avoid bad drinking water. Healthy servants started living long enough to fulfill their contracts. Plantation owners started having to pay out more in "freedom dues."

Freedom dues were what a servant received for completing his or her contract. According to the contract, an indentured servant was given food, clothing, money, and some livestock. Those who were given land could finish their contracts and start farming next door.

Before long, buying an enslaved workforce from Africa became more profitable and efficient than hiring indentured servants. Slavery spread in the 1700s. Millions of acres were planted with tobacco. Planters also introduced a new cash crop, rice, which needed lots of labor to plant and harvest. In the late 1700s and 1800s, cotton became a third cash crop grown in the American South. Indigo and cotton cultivation also relied on the labor of enslaved people.