

The New England Colonies



By 1636 four New England Colonies were founded: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The region is bordered on the west by New York State, on the north by Canada, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, and the south by Long Island Sound; the land rises in the north and west to the New England system of the Appalachian Mountains. The coast is the most important commercial area, although during the 20th century industry and tourism have largely overrun the traditionally important activities of fishing and shipbuilding. Many of the major events of America's colonial period, including the start of the Revolution, took place in New England. New England colonists faced very cold winters and mild summers in a very rocky area which was not very good for farming. Because of this, their homes were smaller to help keep it warm. They were also closer together in small villages with small farms on each families land.

During the 17th century, New England became a religious refuge for Protestant followers of John Calvin, whose beliefs differed from those of the Church of England. One such group, the Pilgrims, established the Plymouth Colony in 1620 to escape persecution in England. The Puritans, another Calvinist sect, arrived nine years later in Massachusetts. The Puritans wanted to "purify" the Church of England. They simply wanted to change some of it ways as opposed to the Pilgrims who wanted to move away from the church. The Puritans were treated badly in England because of their beliefs. The Puritans eventually absorbed the Pilgrims and spread into Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, upstate New York, and eastern Ohio. The church was the social center where everyone could go for town meetings and celebrations. Sometimes school was actually held in the same place as church.

Other New England merchants exploited the rich fishing areas along the northeastern coast of North America, financing a large fishing fleet and transporting its catch of mackerel and cod to markets in southern Europe and the West Indies. Still other entrepreneurs took advantage of the abundant supplies of timber along the coasts and rivers of northern New England. They financed sawmills that provided low-cost wood for houses and shipbuilding. Hundreds of New England shipbuilders, sail makers, blacksmiths and other skilled craftsmen built oceangoing ships, which they sold to British and American merchants. They also carried on much of the slave trade which made New Englanders a lot of money.